The Routledge Companion to
Shakespeare and Philosophy

Edited by Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne

THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO SHAKESPEARE AND PHILOSOPHY

Iago's 'I am not what I am' epitomises how Shakespeare's work is rich in philosophy, from issues of deception and moral deviance to those concerning the complex nature of the self, the notions of being and identity and the possibility or impossibility of self-knowledge and knowledge of others. Shakespeare's plays and poems address subjects including ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and social and political philosophy. They also raise major philosophical questions about the nature of theatre, literature, tragedy, representation and fiction.

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Craig Bourne is Reader in Philosophy at the University of Hertfordshire, UK. He works mainly on metaphysics, philosophy of language and aesthetics. His books include *A Future for Presentism* (2006) and *Time in Fiction* (co-authored with Emily Caddick Bourne, 2016).

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Edited by
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For Ajay, the _∧~~Bard~~ **Bart** of Ely

CONTENTS

Part III
The ethical and the political

Part IV
Epistemology and scepticism

Derek Matravers

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PREFACE

Many of the chapters in this collection originated at two conferences which we organized at the University of Hertfordshire on *Shakespeare: The Philosopher* (in 2014 and in 2016). The first was sponsored by the British Society of Aesthetics, with additional funds from the Mind Association.

At the 2016 conference, we had the great pleasure of meeting Géza Kállay (1959–2017). His conviviality really helped to create a friendly atmosphere, particularly his positive responses to all the other papers at the conference. We know that he was proud to contribute to this collection and we are proud to have him as a contributor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION AND PROLEGOMENON TO SOME FUTURE RESEARCH PROGRAMME FOR SHAKESPEARE AND PHILOSOPHY

Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne

Shakespeare is for everyone. This is the sort of thing you say as part of an outreach campaign, but it is also good advice for philosophers. Unlike many Companions, this book does not start from the position of taking in, surveying and providing a map of a large existing body of work. 'Shakespeare and Philosophy' is an emerging and comparatively small field, and, as editors, we have been guided by what people in our own position – philosophers working in philosophy departments – would, in our experience, find interesting and relevant. This leads to some chapters which take a philosophical approach to Shakespeare as received by, say, a literary scholar, and some which take a philosophical approach to Shakespeare as received by, say, an everyday audience. Whether they respond to the literary scholars' Shakespeare or the layperson's Shakespeare, the point, for us, is that the chapters should do some *philosophical* scholarship with what they receive.

Of course, this is not the only way of dealing with an area which is interdisciplinary and methodologically diverse, and there is no claim here that making philosophical issues themselves the chief priority in a philosophically informed approach to Shakespeare is better by some independent standard than making, say, cultural, political or historical issues the chief priority in a philosophically informed approach to Shakespeare. Different collections could (and do) approach the area from these different angles – for instance, see Bates and Wilson's (2014), Bristol's (2010a) and Joughin's (2000).

Shakespeare is not the only writer whose work can be used to generate philosophical discussion – far from it – but the range of areas of philosophy which can fruitfully be brought into contact with his work is broad, incorporating metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, social and political philosophy, aesthetics and more. As works that are both much read and much performed, Shakespeare's plays also resonate with the current growth of performance philosophy and philosophy of theatre within philosophical aesthetics, and with the fact that both texts and performances raise their own distinct philosophical questions.

We are both philosophers (rather than literary theorists) and both trained within the so-called 'analytic' tradition. Readers may be aware of the reported dichotomy between this and the so-called 'continental' approach within Western philosophy. This is certainly felt within philosophical approaches to Shakespeare: philosophies and philosophers typically situated within the continental tradition have been brought into contact with Shakespeare far more than those in the analytic tradition. Our own background and outlook, sensitive to debates and arguments within the analytic tradition, has influenced how we have put together the collection and particularly the content of our introduction. Of course, this does not mean the spirit of the volume is predominantly analytic: we hope the reader will find a variety of approaches, interests and methodologies represented. But we also hope that the volume goes some way towards redressing an imbalance in philosophical approaches to Shakespeare, by demonstrating that there are gains to be made by attending carefully to Shakespeare from an analytic point of view.

There are sometimes misconceptions about analytic philosophy within discussions of Shakespeare and philosophy. For example, it may be characterized over-simplistically, as venerating logical positivism (e.g., Wilson (2014: 2)), when in fact this is just one aspect of its history; or over-vaguely, as defined by 'its ideals of truth and logic' (2014: 3), when in fact the nature and import of truth, and the scope, structure and function of logic, are widely disputed within the analytic tradition. But there is no denying that something about the analytic tradition has meant it tends not to engage in detail with Shakespeare. Our diagnosis – for what it's worth (and its worth is something we wouldn't go to the stake for) – is that analytic philosophers have traditionally worked at a particular level of abstraction, formulating general answers to fundamental questions, meaning arguments may often not attend to the particular features of an exchange between a few individuals – and especially, given that the generalizations analytic philosophers want concern the actual world, not to fictional exchanges. But analytic philosophers are, increasingly, turning their attention to the particulars themselves. With this, the role of

Shakespeare's works and the works of others is expanding beyond the provision of diluted examples in illustration of some general point, and analytic philosophers are bringing their own skills and interests to approaching Shakespeare. Shakespeare's works and worlds are things on which philosophers working in different traditions have something to say, and may say something which interests those working in another. It is striking that this is an area where people working with very different methodologies, both within and across disciplines, can talk to each other – an area where there can be genuine cross-disciplinary engagement.

In our introduction, we do not aim to survey previous philosophical works on Shakespeare; many of these are discussed in the individual chapters, and amongst the further reading suggestions. Our aim is to give the reader a flavour of the essays in the book and to use them as a springboard for introducing not only some of what is discussed in wider work on Shakespeare and philosophy but also a variety of further issues debated in philosophy, which, we believe, could fruitfully be pursued with special attention to Shakespeare. Sometimes the connections we make are explored in some detail, whereas sometimes they are left as suggestions. In some cases, this means raising the philosophical issue and indicating its pertinence to engagement with Shakespeare without unpacking Shakespearean moments in detail. We are not suggesting that the way to pursue these particular connections would be for philosophy to treat Shakespeare as a mere illustration of independent ideas (a methodology discussed further below). Our brevity in these cases has less to do with the nature of philosophy or the nature of literature and theatre, and more to do with the nature of long books.

Part I: Situating Shakespeare

Philip Smallwood on Shakespeare and Montaigne

One way of approaching the field of 'Shakespeare and Philosophy' is to try to situate Shakespeare relative to philosophers, or situate aspects of Shakespeare's artistic representations relative to philosophical theories, ideas or concepts. But the *results* of such an attempt are not all that is philosophically interesting about the idea of 'situating Shakespeare'. Reflecting *on* the attempt raises question about the nature of thoughts, what it means to communicate them and how this is inflected by their medium (e.g., academic essay, dramatic work). Philip Smallwood, discussing Shakespeare's philosophical relationship to Montaigne, argues that one tempting mistake is to apply the wrong categories when trying to understand what it would *be* for the two to express some of the same philosophical thoughts. Rather than looking simply for common *cognitive content* – hypotheses or statements of a philosophical idea – we should pay attention to how thought is *enacted* in Shakespeare's works and Montaigne's essays. Once we do this, Smallwood proposes, the comparison with Montaigne illuminates the way in which Shakespearean drama foregrounds a *process* of thinking.

As Smallwood says, it does not follow that abstracting cognitive content from Shakespeare is an inappropriate or non-valuable aspect of critical engagement. What would be a mistake, though, is to think that just because the thought we are interested in is *philosophical*, extracting it should proceed by this sort of abstraction. The fact that philosophical thought is often 'abstract' in the topics it concerns – the nature of things in themselves – does not mean that philosophical ideas are essentially distinct from the way they are enacted in a particular mode of expression.

Smallwood also cautions against treating the question of how Shakespeare's thought relates to Montaigne's as a question of whether and how Shakespeare *read* Montaigne – of what causal-historical relations can be traced between works. Relationships between philosophical ideas, he argues, are to be located in a more permissive, multifaceted exploration: 'speculation about Shakespeare in company with the *Essais/Essayes*'. Speculation is here opposed to proof: 'what cannot be proved', Smallwood argues, 'may still be significant philosophically'. In particular, he argues that we can legitimately attend to connections (between Shakespeare and Montaigne) 'that ought to exist but can't be proved'. When we look to a Shakespeare play (or poem) with something else in mind (whether some other type of work, somebody else's ideas or a specific set of interests), it affects what we take from the play, and sometimes in a way that gives us a sense of fit persuasive enough that it is as if a connection 'ought to exist'. This is a process of *making sense*, and it remains a process of making sense regardless of its interplay with other ends, such as historical discovery about the work in question. Achieving the sense of fit is one of the things philosophical approaches to Shakespeare can help us pursue. Smallwood's essay also reminds us that philosophical ideas in Shakespeare are not inert. As aspects of a theatrical (and/or literary) work, they are constituted partly by the audience's imaginative construction of them as part of the 'experience of "thinking" philosophically' that the work inspires.

Identifying philosophical ideas in Shakespeare

Note that this also allows for a *demonstrative* identification of some aspects of (what everyday engagement might dub) 'what the play is about'. Sometimes we attribute a set of thoughts to the work on the basis of *having* them ourselves – without actively paraphrasing our thoughts, we might treat the play as expressing *those* ideas (these ones we are having). Clearly, this demonstrative identification of aspects of 'what the play is about' differs significantly from receiving a statement of what the play is about, and does not proceed by trying to extract a neutral thesis which can be specified independently of experience of the play. Misunderstanding, caricaturing or simply overlooking these nuanced points about the nature of theatrical and literary arts, and of philosophy, can lead to overblown conclusions about the accessibility of Shakespeare's work to philosophy or vice versa. Hopefully, we can now see, for example, that approaching Shakespeare philosophically need not involve an attempt to derive a static system of propositions from a living artistic work.

A point of Smallwood's about the philosophical thoughts of Shakespeare's characters offers another springboard for reflection on the relationship between philosophy and Shakespeare. When an idea is communicated by a character, our reception of the idea is infused by our reception of the character; we receive it not as an abstract idea that *happens* to be communicated by that character but as *their* idea, and 'we see and hear the thinking as we judge the thinker and the thinker's plight'. Perhaps it is fair to say that part of the popular image of philosophy, or at least of analytic philosophy, is that it is prone to abstract a content from a thought as if it does not matter that *this* is the thinker who has entertained it. This is probably part of the reason why continental philosophy is sometimes thought to offer a deeper, better relationship with Shakespeare than does analytic philosophy, with its perceived disconnect from lived situations. True, analytic philosophy is sometimes interested in thoughts as *contents* and/or in ideas as propositions which are thought. But for all this, it is, of course, aware that thoughts as *events* can be of philosophical interest in their own right. Thus, one corrective to being over-reductive in a philosophical approach to Shakespeare is simply to remain aware that philosophical *drama* is comparatively likely to offer (or attempt to offer) scenarios where it is not merely the idea which is of philosophical interest but the event of that character's having it.

Of course, the fact that it is a *character's* thinking we are engaging with, not an actual person's, must not fall out of view. The warning not to conflate the putative thoughts of Shakespeare's characters with the thoughts of Shakespeare is familiar, but a further warning is merited too. Engaging with processes of thinking a *character* is represented as undergoing may be significantly different from engaging with processes of thinking undergone by another actual human. Maybe how we understand and evaluate thoughts when engaging with Othello's process of thinking about jealousy is very different from how we should understand and evaluate the process of thinking about jealousy which an actual person would be going through, if they behaved like Othello. Potential differences across engagement with fictional others and actual others include how high the stakes are, how our attention is managed and whether the employment of empathy is of instrumental value or a goal in its own right. (See Currie (2016) for critical discussion of the idea that engagement with fiction deploys or trains the same responses called for in actual life.) What it is to 'judge the thinker and the thinker's plight', to borrow Smallwood's phrase, may be different in the case of fiction, and because of this, what it is to 'see and hear the thinking' may differ too. Thus, one question about philosophical engagement with Shakespeare which is itself philosophically interesting is whether reception of ideas as *that character's* thoughts is unlike, even incommensurable with, reception of ideas as *that actual person's* thoughts, or as *my own* thoughts. Whether or not we take this meta-philosophical step, though, philosophical engagement with Shakespeare is something worth doing.

Géza Kállay on metaphysical readings of Shakespeare

It is a difficult task to say what is distinctive of a philosophical approach to Shakespeare. As Géza Kállay points out, in his overview of and reflection on 'metaphysical' approaches to Shakespeare, naming the subject matter a philosophical approach attends to is not enough, since various schools of criticism will attend to how a play deals with, for example, agency, time, identity or knowledge. 'Metaphysical' approaches, as Kállay understands them, frame this subject matter in a particular way. They come to Shakespeare with an eye particularly on – or ready to be drawn to – questions about human life which are fundamental, which somehow inform or affect our sense of our own being. Moreover, the interpretative questions of at least some varieties of metaphysical approach have a form, Kállay suggests, which has both an 'onset' and a 'coda'. The 'onset' consists in interrogating a concept, rather than taking it for granted: considering, for example, what is a possible, legitimate and meaningful use of the word 'time'. We must attend to what we take time to be like, what its distinctive features are. This involves examining what it means to use the word as it is used in a play – Kállay takes

Macbeth – and examining how this reflects back on our uses of the term 'time' outside that context. The 'coda' consists in drawing a meaning out of this investigation. This meaning is not necessarily a metaphysical lesson – the objective of a metaphysical reading of *Macbeth* is not necessarily to help determine what theory of time is correct – but what Kállay calls a *personal meaning*, where drawing a personal meaning from an artwork involves approaching it through a process in which there is an interplay between the individual and the universal. We construct a dual awareness: aware of individuals (both characters and ourselves) as particular persons but also aware of something that transcends the particular and allows us to apply the play to ourselves as representatives of general human nature.

The aims of philosophical approaches

What other hallmarks might characterize philosophical approaches to Shakespeare? As the chapters in this collection evidence, the strategy varies hugely. Some approaches apply a resource or framework developed within philosophy. Some pursue a philosophical question in which the play or poem is clearly already embroiled. Some consider what happens to our engagement if we foreground a philosophical question when appreciating the work. Some see what happens if we assume the characters to be aware of a philosophical issue concerning their behaviour. Some construct explanations or interpretations of events or their expression which draw on philosophical concepts, arguments or analyses. Some view Shakespeare through his reception by a particular philosopher. Some engage with philosophical debates about theatre, literature or performance. Looking for a set of conditions which will capture *all* philosophical approaches would probably be misguided – apart from to say that anything which has a claim to be a 'philosophical approach' to Shakespeare ought to have something about it which engages us in doing, or reflecting on, some philosophy.

   Looking for a distinctive set of critical aims which define philosophical approaches is another wild goose chase. But what can be said confidently is that simply using Shakespeare *illustratively* is not sufficient. There is nothing wrong with using Shakespeare in this way for other purposes. Illustrative uses of artworks in philosophy are sometimes criticized for the fact that they are illustrative, rather than engaging deeply with the work. This is unfair; illustrative uses are legitimate ways of articulating or exemplifying independent philosophical ideas. Even when they represent crass analyses of Shakespeare, this need not impugn them; being subtle about Shakespeare is not an objective of every intellectual activity in life. A more reasonable point to make is that illustrative approaches are limited so far as genuine engagement with Shakespeare goes – as their authors probably know. When philosophers use Shakespeare this way, they are unlikely to think that the play or poem is itself their object of study. These are uses of Shakespeare elsewhere in philosophy; they are not supposed to be philosophical approaches *to Shakespeare*.

   When we turn to approaches which try to say something of philosophical interest with Shakespeare's works as a primary *subject matter*, we do not find a unified critical school. Much can vary from one philosophically inclined scholar, reader or audience to another: what the approach hopes to achieve; to which critical paradigms it is sympathetic; how much or how little it cares to know about authorial intentions; which contexts it thinks it appropriate to place the work within; whether it invokes these contexts as hypotheses about the work's actual history or as imaginative experiments which take the work out of its supposed actual contexts; and so on. Because a philosophical approach as we understand it aims, to some degree, to be philosophically rewarding, what we are likely to find in many such approaches is that the aims of philosophy come to infuse the aims of Shakespeare criticism. And here, we should be wary of another misconception about philosophy.

   One marker of an individual philosopher finding an account *good* and *plausible* may be the sense of satisfaction they take in it. But what *makes* it satisfying is – as in the case of scientific explanations, and explanations more broadly – a significant question in its own right and not one with an obvious answer. Factors which might impact include, to name a few, how *much* the account *explains*, how *economically* it uses its explanatory resources, whether it avoids *counterexamples*, whether and where it relies on acceptance of certain notions as *primitive* and how *tractable* these primitives are. There may be a tendency to oversimplify this, by overrating one particular attribute of some theories, namely *unification* of phenomena, and supposing that the satisfaction a philosopher takes in their preferred account is always the satisfaction of subsuming particulars under general principles. Realizing that this is an oversimplification of philosophical methodology undercuts another reason sometimes voiced for doubting philosophy's – especially, again, 'analytic' philosophy's – worth to Shakespeare appreciation: that Shakespeare was *not interested in system-building*. No doubt it can be both satisfying and productive to extract, from a body of works, a system of thought which unifies aspects of the world or experience under a limited number of principles and posits, when the works lend themselves to this. But, as we hope this collection illustrates, the satisfaction that can be derived from a philosophical point of view

by engaging with Shakespeare has much more varied roots than this and typically does not even require that it be possible.

Daryl Kaytor on Shakespeare and Plato

Daryl Kaytor takes up some of the issues surrounding the idea of finding philosophical 'systems' in Shakespeare in his chapter navigating the relationship between Shakespeare and Plato. Seeing Platonic ideas within drama, literature or poetry can provoke a sense of irony because the *Republic* (*Book 10*) famously presents certain arguments against the representational arts; for example, that they are dangerous because we are apt to take them as getting closer to truth than they really do, and that they are inimical to reason insofar as they encourage audiences to evaluate the scenarios portrayed through non-rational responses the works provoke. Plato's Socrates perceives a tension between poetry and (moral and political) philosophy. With a focus particularly on how each of Shakespeare and Plato handles this tension, Kaytor surveys and compares various ways to understand the relationship between Platonic thought and Shakespeare's work, from critical strategies which, he argues, place interpretations of Plato directly into Shakespeare, fashioning 'a Shakespeare who looks and sounds remarkably the same as their Socrates', to a different approach (Kaytor's preferred strategy), influenced by T.S. Eliot, which treats Shakespeare's thought as elusive. This approach holds that the exploration of human life and value in Shakespeare's works has divergent and esoteric elements which can easily be missed if we read Shakespeare by *anticipating* a system for thoughts and observations to fall within. And, indeed, it says something similar about Plato's philosophy.

Relationships between philosophical methodology and artistic expression

Kaytor argues that Shakespeare and Plato differ on whether poetic expression has a place *within* rationality, with Shakespeare giving it a greater role than Plato. Which stance, if any, should a contemporary writer attempting a philosophical approach to Shakespeare take, or can we leave the issue unresolved? This question takes us to another reason why philosophy and Shakespeare have not always seemed natural bedfellows: the suspicion that philosophy gives a role to reason that jars with the communicative and expressive resources of the arts. An example from Kaytor is helpful: 'The dark terror of Macbeth's soul is not calculated or reasoned to by the audience, it is felt. "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow" is not strictly rational speech, although it may admit rational inquiry that can clarify the emotional experience of the words themselves.'

Whilst we could debate which forms of understanding come within the remit of 'rationality', the key point this raises for relating Shakespeare to philosophy is that an understanding of an artwork, such as a play, is gained, at least in part, by experience. And experience, arguably, eludes paraphrase. Is this an objection to philosophical approaches to Shakespeare, which would attempt to render a play's philosophical significance in the words of an academic essay? Where such an objection has some bite is against two assumptions: first, that a non-theatrical philosophical method is straightforwardly a means of *direct access* to philosophical meanings in Shakespeare's works; second, that it distils something to which a play's non-propositional aspects of expression are superfluous. But we need not make these problematic assumptions. What the objection shows is not that a philosophical approach is misplaced but that the assumptions mischaracterize what a philosophical approach does.

If the aim of a philosophical approach were to reproduce the insights or suggestions of the work, then we would have a problem. If *what* we understand from a viewing or reading of a play is essentially bound up with the *experience* of engaging with it and the *process* of interpreting it, then a philosophical approach cannot distil the very same understanding, because it does not reproduce the process. But if this were an objection, it would prove far too much. *No* non-artistic response will reproduce the process involved in engagement with an artistic work. So, if that process inflects the understanding gained from the work, the aim of the critical response cannot be to encapsulate in sentences what the artwork conveys through audience experience – else most critical responses would be in serious trouble. Even responses which adopt a 'poetic' way of writing would not create the *same* experiences as the work they focus on. (And just as well! If critical responses aimed to facilitate the *same* experiences plays do, there would be little difference between giving somebody an essay and giving them a ticket.) It would be uncharitable to ascribe to philosophical approaches the unreasonable and fruitless aim of distilling in sentences the very same thoughts articulated in experience when we engage with an artwork, when our attitude to other critical approaches shows that we allow academic responses a more plausible and productive use than this.

In all cases of academic essays on artistic works, the interesting question is about the nature of the *relationship* between understanding *one* thing (a piece of critical engagement) and understanding *another* (the work it is about). No particular answer to the question is needed for reading this *Companion*. Different philosophers, different Shakespeare scholars and different contributors to this volume would no doubt be inclined in different directions. What is important is to locate the issue correctly and avoid the mistake of thinking that philosophy would be unsuited to Shakespeare insofar as it tends to express more by communicating propositions and less by providing experiences.

For what it is worth, though, here is one way we could go in answering the question. We could extend to this case a treatment of other cases of arguably non-paraphrasable forms of expression, such as metaphor. Davidson's (1978) account of how the communicative potential of metaphor relates to the statement of propositions perhaps sheds light on the disparity we may find between the communicative methods of Shakespeare's theatre and poetry and the communicative methods of philosophy. Davidson writes that 'Joke or dream or metaphor can, like a picture or a bump on the head, make us appreciate some fact – but not by standing for, or expressing, the fact' (1978: 46). The function of metaphor, according to Davidson, is to make us notice things, to call them to our attention, to make us *see* things differently. What we grasp in grasping a metaphor is not semantic content. Moreover, 'there is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention, and much of what we are caused to notice is not propositional in character' (1978: 46).

Now, does this mean that any discussion of what the metaphor conveys amounts to a fruitless attempt to paraphrase the unparaphrasable, or state the ineffable? Hardly. If to understand a metaphor is, partly, to go through a process of seeing things in a certain way, then we can productively talk *about* that process *without* expecting, erroneously, that our description would distil some propositional content. Indeed, a critical discussion can make us pay attention to certain aspects of our experience of a metaphor – to notice what we are noticing. Or it can affect what kind of experience we have. Elucidating a metaphor is not a misguided project: I may not see something until I get the information that equips me to see it.

With this framework in mind, a sensible thing to say in the case of metaphor and other forms of non-paraphrasable poetic expression is that the expression and the critical commentary on it are non-identical but have a considerable amount of traction on one another. However a piece of criticism of an artwork functions – whether it states propositions or itself employs other forms of expression – the fact that understanding it has an effect on *us* is enough to show that it can affect how *we* experience, and thus how we understand, the work. Whether two forms of understanding are irreducible to one another is an entirely different matter from whether they are productively related.

Any number of forms of thought and understanding can change the ways in which a metaphor or other poetic expression makes us attend to the world. Having another experience in mind might (re)direct our attention in a more or less productive way; likewise, having a philosophical argument in mind can influence the direction of our attention. For the same reasons, that *Shakespeare* is poetic shows nothing about whether the most illuminating critical approaches will be. This offsets a suspicion we have sometimes heard, that some styles of philosophical writing are too 'cold', or 'soulless', to deal with Shakespeare. How (some part of) philosophy tends to express its ideas has, in and of itself, nothing to do with whether understanding Shakespeare and understanding philosophy are susceptible to each other.

Part II: Philosophy of language

Given that Shakespeare's works are celebrated for having a deep and creative relationship with language, perhaps it is not surprising that one view to which they particularly lend themselves is that language is partly *constitutive* of non-linguistic facts rather than simply a passive reporter of them. Several chapters in Part II adopt versions of that view.

The point is not simply that many types of utterance are to be understood in terms of their (intended) effects – although that is important. Promises, threats, insults, orders and apologies, to take a few examples, must be understood partly in terms of the behavioural commitments the utterer (e.g., a speaker) takes on and/or demands from their audience (e.g., a hearer). Even declarative sentences, which have the role of reporting information (e.g., 'Mildred is eight years old'), might be understood in terms of a difference they aim to make to the world (e.g., causing the hearer to believe that Mildred is eight years old). This is one way in which being causally active is built into the nature of language. Another way is that some uses of language change things for the audience by requiring them to engage in a process of interpretation in order to make sense of the utterer's choices. For example, on Davidson's account of metaphor, sketched briefly above, metaphor is defined partly by

the achievement of a particular kind of cognitive effect, and a metaphor prompts the audience to *do* something; for example, 'Juliet is the sun' invites us to attend to features of Juliet in light of features of the sun in order to see Juliet differently. To understand the choice of metaphor is to ascertain why comparison between the two is illuminating, and we ascertain this by actually engaging in the process of comparison. Another way in which language engages audiences in interpretation is in the generation of conversational implicatures. In implicature, a speaker says one thing (e.g., 'It's getting late') in order to communicate another (e.g., that you should leave). The hearer is to reflect on the context and on what has been said in order to understand what more was meant by saying it.

But there are also more general features of linguistic communication in virtue of which language-use impacts upon persons and their worlds, something which is brought out by Shakespeare's characters. Language-use deploys persons' abilities to *express* themselves to one another, to *understand* or *misunderstand* each other, to grasp what mutual *expectations* govern communication and to detect, in what someone says, their *reasons* for speaking. Even seemingly pedestrian utterances invoke this machinery – and with it, they invoke conditions of trust. Persons enter communication trusting not just that they will try to tell each other the truth, but, more fundamentally, that they will want to make themselves comprehensible to each other, that speakers do have reasons for their choices of words and that these reasons will be, if not always transparent, at least accessible to some extent. Choosing to conform to or disrupt these expectations, or unknowingly failing to meet them, can arguably have a deep impact on the normative significance of someone's speech and, with this, on who they are and what their relations to others consist in.

Garry Hagberg on language and moral selfhood

For Garry Hagberg, an example of this is Lear, whose moral selfhood is constituted partly by his uses and misuses of language. Hagberg argues that Lear fails as a hearer. He is not proficient in seeing what someone is communicating of their character through the meanings of their communicative acts (including, significantly in this play, their silences). Lear has, Hagberg says, a 'constrained moral vocabulary'. What this means is not that he lacks a reasonable range of moral concepts (although that may be true), but that he does a poor job when it comes to detecting the moral value carried by communicative acts. It is Lear's detection of reasons that is impaired. Moreover, Lear is irresponsible as a speaker, having too little regard for the inferences which can be drawn from what he says. In his anger and impatience, he loses interest in which inferences he would wish to endorse and which not, and he thus loses ownership of them, making no attempt to set a boundary delineating what he takes his own speech to commit to. For Hagberg, the play offers a view on which this is not simply a *reflection* of Lear's moral (in)competence but *part of* it; Lear's communicative deficiencies are part of his moral character.

Scott F. Crider on the ethics of figuration

For Scott F. Crider, too, language has constitutive power for Shakespeare's characters: 'rhetorical figuration is not merely accidental clothing to naked thought. . . rhetorical figuration is constitutive of personhood and sociality. We become what we say'. Situating *Macbeth* against an explanation of Ciceronian ethics and its influence in early modern England, Crider presents a view on which a natural bond of shared human nature underlies the value of eloquent speech. A character's figures of speech manifest, shape and influence their ethical understanding of their relation to others. Macbeth's circumlocution, for example, is a form of ethical evasiveness – or if the linguistic and ethical traits are not identical, they are at least interdependent, with each both cause and consequence of the other. Furthermore, Crider argues, Macbeth's ethical stance on the act he is to commit is defined partly by the imagery he introduces in his employments of devices such as metaphor, personification and simile.

Imagination in ethics

In passing, Crider relates his argument to a point about *Macbeth* from Cummings: 'The borderline between imagining terrible things. . . and doing them is the great ethical and political crux of the play' (Cummings (2007: 232)). This suggests there may be value in bringing together two issues – the ethics of imagination compared to action, and the ethics of language-use – both of which have received philosophical attention in their own right, and thinking about how they may be intertwined, in *Macbeth* and beyond. Crider notes how Lady Macbeth moves abruptly from evasive speech to an extremely direct description of what she would do to a feeding infant for the

sake of having made a commitment to do so: 'I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums / And dashed his brains out'. As Crider says, there is 'nothing periphrastic about that'; Lady Macbeth seems able to confront a representation of such a scenario without evasion. In that case, perhaps it is significant that this imaginative exercise is also divorced from action; Lady Macbeth has in fact made no such commitment, plus her nursing of infants is, we assume, past. Perhaps the psychological landscape of *Macbeth* is not one where all deeds are equally imaginable, with the ethical and practical question always concerning whether to translate them into action. Perhaps it is one where the possibility or impossibility of acting feeds back into what is imaginable for characters. And perhaps it is also interesting to reflect on how this compares to the actual world.

Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne on conversational perversion

Our own chapter, on *Othello*, argues that Iago's linguistic behaviour in *Othello* is *conversationally perverted*. We argue that there are particular distortions and exploitations of the mutual expectations involved in co-operative conversation which have close structural similarities to the dynamics of sexual perversions. Iago is adept at conversational behaviours which qualify as sadistic and those which exhibit a perverted form of coyness.

Language and injustice in Shakespeare

Although perverted acts need not always be immoral, there are two overlaps between conversational perversion and the ethics of communication which might offer further avenues of enquiry. One is how perversion intersects with the dynamics of silencing and related forms of communicative injustice, where some potential speakers or hearers are excluded from the communicative entitlements or benefits others enjoy. As an illustration, consider a type of *testimonial injustice* which involves assuming credibility more readily when dealing with speakers with one characteristic – for example, being employed – than when dealing with speakers with another characteristic – for example, being unemployed – in situations where the characteristic is irrelevant to whether the speaker can meet ordinary conversational expectations, such as being truthful and informed. Since related issues of epistemic injustice (which concerns how we treat each other as knowers, prospective informants, etc.) are increasingly being brought to Shakespeare (see, e.g., Metzger (2016)) but are not discussed in depth elsewhere in this collection, let us say a little more here about how the dynamics of information exchanges in Shakespeare can reveal ways in which, for example, one conversation partner might exclude another from contributing.

Although generalizations which link communicative injustice to perversion – for example, 'silencing is a form of sadism' – are unlikely to hold up, a more promising thought is that individual conversationally perverted acts play a role in individual instances of implementing or combating exclusion. For instance, conversational perversion is prominent in this exchange between Katherine and Petruchio, a communicative battle in which the stakes for authority and self-governance are high (4.5.1–9):

Petruchio: Come on, i' God's name, once more towards our father's.

             Good Lord, how bright and goodly shines the moon!

Katherine: The moon? The sun! It is not moonlight now.

Petruchio: I say it is the moon that shines so bright.

Katherine: I know it is the sun that shines so bright.

Petruchio: Now, by my mother's son, and that's myself,

             It shall be moon, or star, or what I list,

             Or e'er I journey to your father's house.[1]

Petruchio effectively insists that if Katherine is to converse with him, adherence to conversational norms of quality – roughly, to say what you believe to be true and/or evidenced – is to be abandoned in favour of agreement with any opinion he chooses to advance. His deliberate utterance of a blatant falsehood serves no conversationally merited purpose – for example, he does not use it to convey any useful information – and thus he appears to be disabling Katherine from conversing meaningfully in favour of her conversing obediently. The situation becomes more interesting when Katherine appears to acquiesce (4.5.14–25):

Katherine: Forward, I pray, since we have come so far,

And be it moon, or sun, or what you please.

And if you please to call it a rush candle,

Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me.

Petruchio: I say it is the moon.

Katherine: I know it is the moon.

Petruchio: Nay, then you lie. It is the blessèd sun.

Katherine: Then God be blest, it is the blessèd sun.

But sun it is not, when you say it is not,

And the moon changes even as your mind.

What you will have it named, even that it is,

And so it shall be so for Katherine.

There is a good case for treating Petruchio's contributions as sadistic. The way he 'moves the goalposts' by flailing between contradictory assertions is arguably designed to disempower the hearer in her attempt to attribute coherent intentions to him, the speaker, concerning what she, as a hearer, is to believe on the basis of his utterances. But Katherine's response is significant. Her apparent succumbing continues when Petruchio greets Vincentio as 'gentle mistress' and gives a transparently false description (4.5.32–8):

Petruchio: Tell me, sweet Kate, and tell me truly, too,

Hast thou beheld a fresher gentlewoman?

Such war of white and red within her cheeks!

What stars do spangle heaven with such beauty

As those two eyes become that heavenly face? –

Fair lovely maid, once more good day to thee. –

Sweet Kate, embrace her for her beauty's sake.

Katherine once again obliges (41):

Katherine: Young budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet

And Petruchio performs the same conversational move as he did with the moon and the sun (46–52):

Petruchio: Why, how now, Kate? I hope thou art not mad!

This is a man – old, wrinkled, faded, withered –

And not a maiden, as thou sayst he is.

Katherine: Pardon, old father, my mistaking eyes…

Now I perceive thou art a reverend father.

What does it mean for Katherine to comply with Petruchio's sadistic conversational contributions? In embracing Petruchio's behaviour, she treats his contributions as what they are: oppositional rather than informative, having no standard conversational point. Katherine adopts a position where she cannot formulate any expectations of her partner's contributions other than that they will say whatever amounts to a denial of the appropriateness of her last contribution. This compliance might qualify as a form of conversational masochism. But we should resist concluding that Katherine thereby submits to Petruchio in any straightforward way. In terms of their attitude to norms of co-operative communication, their relationship is now symmetrical. Each has their contributions guided by a single attitude to the other's contributions, and an attitude falling outside any standard norms of conversation (truthfulness, informativeness, relevance, etc.). In Petruchio's case, the attitude is default

opposition, in Katherine's, default agreement, but each is as disruptive of ordinary conversational expectations as the other. The original asymmetry, where Katherine had ordinary conversational expectations and Petruchio aimed to frustrate them, has dissolved: there are now no such expectations for Petruchio to frustrate. He is no more able to rely on her adherence to communicative norms than she on his. How exactly this conversational dynamic plays into the broader ethical dynamics in the play, and what kind of social victory it is (if any) for Katherine, is something we shan't resolve here, but whatever the answer, it is interesting that Katherine's conversational masochism effectively turns Petruchio's conversational sadism back against him.

Moral luck

Another route of enquiry is suggested by the idea, raised in various chapters so far, that communicative conduct can partly constitute moral character. This concerns 'moral luck'. For our purposes here, the idea is that factors outside an agent's control can play a *legitimate* part in ethical evaluation of that agent. (See Williams (1976) and Nagel (1976) for an agenda-setting discussion.) Iago is a useful case to consider. For all the play shows us, his implementation of his 'plan' is highly opportunistic. He is lucky that Othello has such low resistance to poor judgement. (See Veli Mitova's chapter (19) for discussion of Othello's epistemic errors.) Indeed, the element of luck is arguably part of what makes Iago's plan satisfying to him; he enjoys the fact that others bring about their own downfall by making errors without which he would not have succeeded. Iago is also lucky that events happen to occur which he can utilize – Desdemona need not have dropped her handkerchief. Third, Iago is lucky that conversational situations arise where he is able to say the things that confuse and deceive Othello. If it is partly by communication that persons constitute their moral character well or badly, then the fact that our conversational opportunities are not entirely within our control may underpin a variety of moral luck. It is not entirely up to us what others say, or what conversational situations we find ourselves in, and thus not entirely up to us what conversational responsibilities we are positioned to discharge or to shirk.

Williams (1976) argues that harmful aspects of our deeds which rest on luck elicit an appropriate response of 'agent regret', even though they cannot be traced back to matters we control. But, of course, Iago wants to do damage. The sense of responsibility he adopts for the uncontrolled harmful aspects of his deeds is more like 'agent pride', and this response is one of the things for which he is ethically condemnable. (Iago's *desire* to be immoral is both intriguing and alienating. In Chapter 13, Matthew Kramer discusses this trait in both Iago and *Titus Andronicus*'s Aaron.) But other characters, who do not want to be bad people – Hagberg's Lear, Othello himself, perhaps Crider's Macbeth and Lady Macbeth – might exhibit agent regret over unlucky aspects of their immoral linguistic conduct.

Such considerations are given another dimension by a potential connection between moral luck and tragedy. Nussbaum (2001), for example, discusses this connection in an investigation concentrating on Greek tragedy. Thus, if there is a constitutive connection in Shakespeare's worlds between communicative behaviour and ethical character, pinpointing instances of *conversational* luck may eventually enhance an account of *tragic* luck in Shakespeare.

Borut Trpin on conditionals

We now move on to consider a particular form of utterance in Shakespeare. '[W]hen I break that oath', says Celia in *As You Like It* (1.2.20–1), 'let me turn monster'. This is an *imperative conditional*. Imperative conditionals have the form *if this, then that*, but the *that* expresses a command, order, request, instruction, plea and so on – in other words, something befitting the imperative mood. Imperative conditionals can thus be distinguished from indicative conditionals (*if this is the case, that is the case*) and subjunctive conditionals (*if this were the case, that would be the case*). Borut Trpin's chapter considers the semantics and pragmatics of imperative conditionals with attention to their use in *Richard II*.

One important aspect of this is the way imperative conditionals can generate implicatures. To illustrate, let us supplement Trpin's cases with an example from another play. Compare these two imperative conditionals, which Brabantio utters in the same speech in *Othello*:

1 'If he do resist, / Subdue him at his peril' (1.2.99–100)
2 'Judge me the world, if 'tis not gross in sense / That thou hast practiced on her with foul charms' (1.2.91–2).

The purpose of the first is to influence how the officers act and under what conditions. In the second, Brabantio's objective in choosing the conditional form is presumably not, or not straightforwardly, to bring it

about that the world will comply with the instruction 'Judge me' if the relevant conditions obtain. His aim is to give his opinion of Othello and to do so in a forceful way – a little like saying '*Obviously*, thou hast practiced on her with foul charms. (Hastn't thou? Come on.)'. Brabantio implicates that he is so confident that the conditions which govern the command do not hold, it would be a serious mistake indeed if he turned out to be wrong. And perhaps, also, that the charge levelled against Othello is of such gravity that to issue it mistakenly would merit the judgement of the whole world. Thus, his choice of an imperative conditional facilitates his informing his audience that he is extremely confident that there is transparent evidence for Othello having done something very bad. Likewise, Celia's choice of 'let me turn monster', an instruction that cannot plausibly be complied with, implicates that the conditions specified for its implementation (breaking the oath) will not obtain. (Perhaps Celia's choice of words also succeeds in presenting breaking the oath as something that is monstrous to her, but whether that constitutes an *implicature* or some other aspect of the utterance's pragmatics is up for debate.)

In these cases, the implicature concerns the (hypothetical) factual circumstances which the conditional's antecedent specifies. Trpin argues that there are also Shakespearean imperative conditionals which are used to implicate something about the consequent instruction. His explanations of how imperative conditionals generate implicatures in *Richard II* dovetails, he argues, with Parsons's (2013) 'imperoassertive' account of the semantics of imperative conditionals. Thus, the play sheds light on a debate in philosophy of language as well as vice versa.

Other types of conditional in Shakespeare

Further aspects of the philosophical debate about conditionals may bear on Shakespeare. Consider again Celia's conditional. We can read 'When I do break that oath…' as '*If* I do break that oath…', but the association in natural language between the future tense and the subjunctive also allows for reading it as 'If I *were to* break that oath…'. Thus, Shakespearean examples may be fruitful when extending accounts of imperative conditionals to incorporate those with subjunctive rather than indicative antecedents. Shakespeare also offers other interesting breeds of conditional. When the father comforts his daughter in *The Lover's Complaint*, he is said to give her an assurance that we might describe as a *conditional promise* (69–70):

> If that from him there may be aught applied
> Which may her suffering ecstasy assuage,
> 'Tis promised in the charity of age.

The two most natural (at first glance) accounts of conditional promises are, first, that they are promises that conditionals are true ('I hereby promise that if there is something I can do to help, I will do it') and, second, that they are promises offered with the condition that they come into force only under specific conditions ('If there is something I can do to help, then I hereby promise to do it'). Either way, they raise interesting questions concerning the preconditions of successful promising. For example, this conditional promiser knows little about what he is committing to – identifying it only as 'aught' that might help. There is extensive debate in philosophy concerning the fact that the classical logic of conditionals makes conditionals with false antecedents come out true (see Trpin's chapter for discussion). What does this show about attempts to promise with a conditional one knows to have a false antecedent – for example, if the father suspects that there is nothing he can do to help but says it to be kind? And how, in general, should the semantics of conditionals explain the possibility of their incorporating performatives?

It could be that some such philosophically interesting conditionals in Shakespeare turn out to have, as Trpin puts it, 'nothing special or specifically Shakespearean' about their use other than their poetic style. Philosophical reflection on them will not necessarily have the double pay-off of rewarding our engagement with Shakespeare in addition to rewarding our understanding of the semantics and pragmatics of conditionals. But if we are lucky, we may find some in which diagnosable semantic or pragmatic features help to explain why that particular utterance is well equipped to advance themes or characterization, as Trpin argues happens with many of the imperative conditionals in *Richard II*.

Maximilian de Gaynesford on speech acts and attunement

This takes us back to a recurring theme: the relationship between philosophy and Shakespeare criticism in philosophical approaches to Shakespeare. Maximilian de Gaynesford argues that one such relationship is what he calls the *attunement* of philosophy and poetry. An attuned approach is a way of noticing things as a reader who is both critic and philosopher. De Gaynesford argues for a revised vision of what a speech act approach to the

Sonnets (pioneered by Vendler (1997) and Schalkwyk (2002)) should look like. He develops his proposal for attuned reading by focusing on an aspect of the *Sonnets* in which, he argues, philosophy and literary criticism each rely on the other in order to deal with what matters to them. The focus is phrases where the speaker says of themselves, in the first person, that they are performing an act which they actually *do* perform *by* making the utterance. Successful uses of 'I promise…' would qualify, for example. In the *Sonnets*, examples include 'I prognosticate', 'I do vow' and 'I grant'. De Gaynesford discusses the *Sonnets*' reflection on poetry as action in light of an understanding of these utterances as speech acts. His discussion of Sonnet 85 is both an explanation of specific points about the sonnet that are both philosophical and literary-critical, and a *demonstration* of his philosophical point about methodology, since it puts the idea of attunement into action.

One thing de Gaynesford aims to bring out is how the Shakespearean relationship between language and thought is neither transparent nor univocal: neither to audiences, nor to the characters who behave as if they are speaking their thoughts. For de Gaynesford, both the *Sonnets* and Shakespearean soliloquy play with speakers' uncertainty about what they are doing with their words. Though they may be using words which *could* express certain thoughts and perform certain acts, it cannot always be determined whether they have the appropriate psychological attitudes and contextual situation to *actually* have deployed them in that way.

Michael Troy Shell on quoting Shakespeare

The next chapter considers a form of engagement with Shakespeare's language which stands in stark contrast to an attuned reading, since it is often entirely divorced from poetic experience. Michael Troy Shell discusses appropriation of Shakespeare in contexts (such as a public speech) where speakers wish to communicate, or simply to have the air of communicating, deep or important truths.

The question of what makes for appropriate appropriation has both aesthetic and ethical aspects. Shell focuses particularly on what makes for *authentic engagement* with Shakespeare's original works in contexts where quotations are borrowed. Drawing on a distinction from Umberto Eco between 'open' and 'closed' works, Shell contends that the nature of Shakespeare's works, including their exploration of philosophical themes, situates them firmly as open works. This provides a theoretical framework to explain an intuitively correct judgement: that fidelity in quoting Shakespeare requires active engagement with the work itself.

Bad taste and aesthetics

Shell's discussion raises the idea that misuse of Shakespeare can be an instance of bad taste. The kind of bad taste he has in mind can be both an ethical and an aesthetic flaw. The ethical aspects arise from deployment of Shakespeare which prioritizes one's own objectives at the expense of engagement with the work, and might include both insult to the original artist and the co-opting of perceived authority for objectives where the reasons for attributing authority are not also reasons for endorsing the objective. The first concerns the speaker's responsibilities to Shakespeare, the second the speaker's responsibilities to any of their contemporaries who stand to be affected by potential manipulation of Shakespeare's 'cultural capital'. The aesthetic aspects include the cheapening of excerpts of artworks that would otherwise have artistic value, plus the potential flaw of poor understanding of a work if a speaker's appropriation betrays unsubtle interpretation. Some relations between the two types of flaw are apparent. It is because of the first aesthetic flaw (cheapening) that the first ethical flaw (insult to the artist) arises. But how exactly aesthetic and ethical value interact in this case merits further investigation within broader debates in philosophy of art, concerning relationships between aesthetic and ethical value (see, e.g., Kieran (2006) for a useful introduction).

Other issues of potential 'bad taste' that require probing the relationship between the ethical and the aesthetic include the question of whether there is a legitimate aesthetics of 'shock value'. This may be part of what Gracyk has in mind when he claims that 'Admiring *Titus Andronicus* suggests a failure of taste, yet someone with good taste might sit through a performance owing to an interest in Shakespeare, or because it is required in a college course' (1990: 117–8). As *Titus* fans, we'd hope to disagree with Gracyk's verdict here, but the primary point to make is about what connections an aesthetics of violence and depravity requires between aesthetic and ethical value. Arguably, making the case that there is, or is not, aesthetic value in a particular rendering of Lavinia's rape requires attending to whether that rendering has been respectful or disrespectful, responsible or irresponsible, in its treatment of rape. This is not to say morally better renderings must be aesthetically better; whatever conclusion we reach about *how* the two dimensions of value interact, there is reason to suppose they *do* interact some way or another. Now, presumably there will be important differences between this type of case and the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in appropriating quotes. Nevertheless, even just cataloguing the

different species of case where interplay of the two types of value arises, in order to provide a fuller roster of cases to consider, can further enrich the debate on what 'bad taste' is. And Shakespeare's ready quotability and visceral representation of violence make his works unusually well placed for extending the range in two ways.

Wolfgang Huemer on Shakespeare and Wittgenstein

One thing Wittgenstein and Shakespeare share is that they have accrued enough of a reputation to be seen as paradigmatic of a whole activity (playwriting, philosophy). Both are often thought to offer an extraordinary level and variety of insight, and because of this, both have devotees. (There is probably a Wittgensteinian analogue of Bardolatry.) But, as Wolfgang Huemer's discussion of Wittgenstein's remarks on Shakespeare shows, Shakespeare's canonicity is something with which Wittgenstein is intellectually uncomfortable. This is not to say Wittgenstein finds Shakespeare's reputation undeserved, but he seems doubtful of whether Shakespeare is always admired according to his desert rather than 'as a matter of convention' 'for specious reasons'.

Whilst saying that Shakespeare 'stands alone', Wittgenstein also apparently holds that whatever is special about Shakespeare's work, it is not a straightforward form of aesthetic superiority – for it is something he recognizes whilst being left cold: 'I understand how someone may admire this & call it *supreme* art, but I don't like it'. Huemer discusses various scholarly attempts to cash out Wittgenstein's stance on Shakespeare. In the course of this, he suggests a view where one purpose of Wittgenstein's remarks is to contribute to demonstrating, to the reader, what his (Wittgenstein's) own cultural perspective is and how it is distinct from the standpoint taken as representative of the tradition of a particular country or place. This view offers a way of reading Wittgenstein's sentences where they are not designed to give the reader *reasons* to share his judgement of Shakespeare but to enable the reader to know something of the position from which he is speaking.

The pragmatics of evaluations in Shakespeare

This might prompt us to think about the conversational burdens one incurs by making an evaluation. When somebody expresses, say, an aesthetic or moral opinion, it is often appropriate to expect them to be able to provide reasons for it – perhaps reasons why we should come to share it. Given that, as Huemer says, Wittgenstein 'hardly ever elaborates, justifies, or substantiates his claims' about poets, artists and composers, he appears to be flouting this burden. So perhaps his claims should not be taken in the way aesthetic evaluations are taken in discussions whose objective is to discuss artists' works – where providing reasons would be a reasonable conversational move. If, instead, their function is partly to demonstrate that the speaker is someone who makes those evaluations, then the object the discussion is illuminating is more the speaker's standpoint than whatever it is a standpoint on. In some cases of expressing a judgement, we background the speaker's usual responsibility to be able to provide reasons, because we are more interested in achieving an accurate understanding of them than of the phenomenon they are judging. Two further applications of this idea to Shakespeare come to mind.

First, some interactions between Shakespeare's characters could be understood in those terms. Exchanges involving pretentious characters, such as Polonius or Malvolio, come halfway to what we are looking for, if these characters sometimes make judgements they know they lack informed reasons for. But in pretentious judgement, the burden of being able to provide reasons (if requested) is not suspended; rather, the speaker wants to be understood as having incurred that burden but hopes not to have to discharge it (similarly for other varieties of bullshitting).

The case of Hamlet in his put-on 'antic disposition' also comes close. He intends his utterances to be taken as revelations of a viewpoint – the viewpoint of an insane person – rather than as revelations of reasons to make the judgements he does. But in this case, the intention is covert. Are there any cases where a character intends more *openly* that their evaluations be taken as communicating something about the evaluator rather than the situation evaluated?

Perhaps. Coriolanus's ethical judgements are a potential case. During his troubled stint as tribune, Coriolanus makes a number of evaluations of the conduct of the citizens, the senators and the court. We might take these to be offered in the spirit of communicating that there is some reason for his judgements that ought to be compelling to his audience: in other words, he is trying to reason with those who are being unreasonable from his point of view. But, alternatively, we could hold that Coriolanus *knows* that his judgements are unfit to persuade his audience, and so the conversational purpose he gives them – particularly as somebody who is proud and self-conscious – is more to demonstrate his own situation as incommensurable with theirs. Perhaps the purpose of

expressing the evaluations he does is precisely to reveal that his ethical attitudes are attuned not to the cultural context of the city but to the battlefield environment he shares with Aufidius.

Audience engagement, as 'hearers' of Shakespeare's characters, may also be illuminated by the observation that one atypical conversational role of an evaluation is to display the speaker's situation rather than (as is more typical) to tacitly pledge that the matter evaluated is such that the hearer should have reasons to agree with the judgement. From an audience's point of view, is the purpose of a character expressing a judgement of their situation to enable us to reflect productively on the type of situation they are in? Or is it to enable us to reflect productively on that character and how they see their position in their world? Of course, it is possible to have both, but the two can also come apart. Recognizing a point about language – that evaluations can advertise the speaker's situation as well as the availability of reasons – helps to show why this is so.

Even when our interest *is* in a character's reasons for their judgement, often we value these reasons not necessarily for their ability to persuade us but for their ability to reveal to us more of the character's thinking. It does not devalue Othello's dialogue that his judgements are completely unreasonable from our point of view. Thus, we can say that Othello's evaluations fall short as contributions to conversation with *Desdemona*, because he cannot provide reasons that ought to be persuasive to her, but do not fall short as contributions to the *play*, since they meet the objectives a character's utterances must meet when their hearers are the playgoers. Thus, the possibility of taking a speaker's evaluation as demonstrating their situation, rather than pledging a justification which ought equally to count as justification for the hearer, might offer a neat way of articulating one difference between the status of a character's utterances *within* fiction (from the point of view of the characters) and the status of a character's utterances *as* fiction (from the point of view of, e.g., writer and audience).

All this may also help explain what is reasonable in being cynical about extrapolating from Shakespeare's characters' utterances philosophical lessons about whatever aspects of the world they are making utterances about. We have now articulated why it is a misconstrual of theatrical dialogue to uncritically assume that it is there to characterize not the speaker but the matter they are speaking about. But let's not overrate this. It is sometimes perfectly possible and reasonable for an audience *also* to be interested in, and convinced by, an account of a phenomenon as elucidated by a particular character. There is no in-principle block to a character's utterance characterizing both the speaker and what they speak about, so the fact that characters' judgements of their world are precisely that – characters' judgements – does not automatically forbid extrapolation.

The idea that characters' judgements function (for audiences) to display the nature of the judge also helps explain why we might think it is sometimes misguided to approach a character's judgements by subsuming them under general moral principles that will declare them correct or incorrect. In Chapter 5, Crider makes reference to Strier's (2007) suggestion that the framework of Shakespeare's works is one in which moral value is 'trumped' by personality. Crider argues for giving ethical value a more substantial role in understanding the conduct of Shakespeare's characters, but perhaps a point of agreement between the two is that *moral generalizations* are not of paramount salience – what really matters is attending to the particular acts of particular characters in particular situations. Even if we deny that Shakespeare pits personality against *values*, we might agree that Shakespeare pits personality against certain types of evaluative *generalization*. We take this up, amongst other considerations, as we move on to consider ethical and political philosophy.

Part III: The ethical and the political

Smallwood comments that Pope 'saw Shakespeare as a storehouse of moral thought' (2012: 339). The metaphor of a storehouse usefully prompts some of the questions that arise when we think about Shakespeare's treatment of ethics and political philosophy. *What is stored?* (Which ethical and political ideas can we find in Shakespeare?) *How is it organized?* (What are the recurring moral and political interests? Are there any overarching ethical principles that 'shelve' some of Shakespeare's characters' predicaments alongside each other?) *Who did the goods come from and who are they being kept for?* (What might the philosophical influences on the works be? What can the audience take home from their 'visit'?) *Does the owner of the storehouse own the goods or are they acting as a host who helps to move them on?* (Is it ever helpful to treat Shakespeare as endorsing particular moral or political ideas, or should we always take him simply to be circulating them? If the latter, why? Because they are interesting? Because they are popular with consumers? Because it is intellectually or practically valuable for audiences to consider how they dovetail or conflict?)

Christopher Crosbie on intention and reconciliation

In Chapter 11, Christopher Crosbie discusses the role played in Shakespeare by the fact that another agent's intentions cannot always be known and certainly not accessed directly. Whilst this allows for negative instances of deception and dissembling, Crosbie is interested in how it also facilitates reconciliation between ethical agents – and, in particular, in 'the surprising concessions even dubious exculpatory appeals seem to elicit'. As his discussion brings out, philosophical complexities arise at the intersection of epistemology and ethics when we turn our attention to those hypotheses about others, the self and the world which are bound up with ethical aims and preferences. On Crosbie's account, Shakespeare's characters (or some of them) deploy doubt as an ethically relevant epistemological state. Where one agent has acted injuriously and another seeks a reconciliatory outcome, an inability to rule out that the agent acted involuntarily and not from malign intentions becomes a valuable ethical resource.

Thus, the ethical relevance of doubt is not simply to recommend suspicion. We might initially suppose that in cases of doubt, ethical evaluation of a person and their behaviour requires either overcoming the irresolution by finding out more (e.g., attempting to discover what intentions they had) or, if this is not possible, suspending judgement. Crosbie's picture of reconciliation effectively recasts this irresolution as resolution by showing that doubt can sometimes be an *endpoint* of ethical evaluation of another's act rather than an obstacle on the route. Doubt does not simply obscure or render unattainable the ethical facts. In some cases, it is *itself* the important constituent of an appropriate evaluation of another agent; it is precisely in being uncertain that we have reached the information we need to make our ethical judgements of them.

The metaphysics of intention

Does this view of ethical judgement favour a particular picture of the mind? Intuitively, it fits, as Crosbie says, with an image of intention where, although Shakespeare's characters sometimes experience it as belonging firmly within an individual, intention also 'extends outward' in social interactions. Related questions about thought and experience in Shakespeare are explored further in Chapters 28 (Kevin Curran), 29 (Miranda Anderson) and 30 (Colin McGinn). But we might ask, here, something specific about *doubt* and intention. Does the argument that doubt is sometimes constructive (rather than obstructive) for intention-ascription befit a specific metaphysics of intention?

We might be tempted towards a view where intention can be fundamentally indeterminate. In developing a particular type of anti-realist theory of truth, Dummett (1959: 157–9) gives an argument against taking there to be truths about unmanifested character traits. His example is bravery. Suppose Jones had never been put in a situation where he had the opportunity to be brave or fail to be brave. Then, Dummett argues, there is no fact about Jones's nature which goes beyond everything he did and establishes him as brave or not brave. Perhaps we can adapt this to a point about Shakespearean intention. If the facts about the *manifestation* of intention are compatible with two competing hypotheses about what the agent intended, perhaps we should say that this exhausts all the facts there are about what the agent's intentions were. Such a view is one way of giving embodied action a role in intention which avoids treating intentions as, as Crosbie puts it, 'originating forces' of acts. Still, we can and should be sensitive to a distinction between scenarios of reconciliation where there really is no fact of the matter about the agent having malign intentions or not, and scenarios of reconciliation where facts are purposefully ignored, or parties choose not to seek them, even though they are there. For example, in some reconciliatory processes it may be valuable for parties to *act* as if it is not a fact that the agent had unsavoury intentions, though really they did. But where exactly the line is drawn depends on what manifest facts we take to be constitutive of the facts about intention, and this depends partly on how specifically *ethical* interactions might shape what the manifest facts are.

Ethical evaluation and audience engagement

Someone who does not wish to draw conclusions about the metaphysics of intention, and holds instead that the ethical importance Crosbie highlights of being able to introduce doubt need not propel us to a conclusion about the nature of intention itself, might instead read the relevant interactions between characters as illustrating the limits of tying ethics to intention. From this angle, one conclusion to draw might be that though there *is* some fact about the agent that determines what would be the correct resolution of doubt, such facts do not always determine how they should be evaluated ethically, for sometimes the appropriate ethical evaluation retains doubt. Here, a philosophical issue arises concerning audience perspective on characters' interactions. Reconciliation is a form of ethical evaluation embedded, and embodied, in social conduct – to reconcile with somebody is, typically, to manage one's relationship with them in a particular way. We might try to capture this by saying that

reconciliation is a 'lived' ethical evaluation rather than one made 'in the abstract'. Thus, acceptance of exculpation should be different from the point of view of characters and of the audience. Audiences are not *living* Shakespeare's characters' disputes and interactions. We do not even occupy a bystander position. Another character who judges the agent's potential transgression from outside the situation still has a potential relationship with that person, which is subject to ethical management. The isolation between characters and audiences is more extreme. The fact that we are socially irrelevant to fictional characters might change what it is for us to judge them ethically. Audiences' ethical engagement with fiction may involve doing some informal normative ethics, but, unlike the characters' judgements of each other, it is not applied or practical ethics.

Or not obviously so, anyway. If imaginative engagement with fictions involves imagining ourselves to be located within the scenarios, perhaps this can ground making judgements from the point of view of practical ethics. There is debate over whether and to what extent imaginative engagement with fiction involves imaginings about oneself and/or a first-person point of view (see, e.g., Currie (1995, chapters 5 and 6); Smith (1997); Alward (2006); Bruun Vaage (2009)). Of course, the picture is further complicated by characters who address the audience and those who play a chorus role, as well as by the question of when such practices facilitate imaginative location in the fictional world and when they serve to disrupt it by calling attention to the audience's position as audience. Our purpose here is just to note that what constitutes appropriate ethical engagement with fiction from the audience standpoint is affected by the relationship between the ethical and the social which may be inherent in navigating Shakespearean fictional events from a character standpoint. This also has implications for the role of empathy in ethical evaluation and for related debates over the cognitive value of fiction – for example, whether we can enhance our moral understanding by engaging with fiction (see, e.g., Sirridge (1975); León (2016)).

An important theme for thinking about ethical and political philosophy in Shakespeare is brought out by Crosbie's point that vernacular ethical discussion in the Renaissance makes prominent a 'non-systematic ethical deliberation' which accords with an aspect of Shakespeare's representation of ethical agents. Shakespeare's works seemingly do not represent worlds where, in the words of Bristol (2010b: 4), 'a set of robust character traits determines behavior in any sort of predictable way'. The thought that the behaviour of Shakespeare's characters is not to be understood by applying an overarching set of ethical principles is an important one, and it is worth distinguishing two slightly different philosophical claims which are relevant to the thought that Shakespearean ethics prioritizes individual situations over systematic moral generalizations. One concerns ethical character, the other ethical value. The point about ethical *character* is that the pattern of an agent's traits, preferences, judgements and conduct in Shakespeare is (often) non-systematic. This shows something about moral psychology in Shakespeare's works and perhaps also about the changeability of the self, something which receives further attention in Part VI. The point about ethical *value* is that ethical norms are not themselves systematic – for example, that imposing generalities onto particular scenarios misleads as to what is the appropriate ethical judgement to make of them. These two claims may end up being related, but they are distinct ideas. Moreover, how they are related will depend partly on the relationship between ethical character and ethical value in general, a question which reverberates through both ethics and meta-ethics. Mapping out exactly what it means to say that Shakespeare's works foreground particulars over moral generalities proves to be an expansive and complex project. The same goes for making that claim about literature and the arts in general. For more on the affinities between ethical engagement with literature and 'particularist' and 'anti-theory' approaches in philosophical ethics, see, for example, Hämäläinen (2015).

Let us mention, though, one specific aspect of attending to particular scenarios through engaging with Shakespeare. Such engagement sometimes foregrounds 'thick' ethical concepts – a term introduced by Williams (1985), who is known for his development of ethical 'anti-theory'. Thick concepts combine a normative evaluation with a factual description of a kind of behaviour. Concepts such as 'good', 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong' are 'thin' because they tell us little about what the behaviour is, only evaluate it. Thick concepts, such as 'brave', 'reckless' and 'honourable', also import information about *what kind of conduct earns* the positive or negative evaluation made. Attending to thick concepts is often associated with attending to lived situations over abstract generalizations. One reason for this is that the information a thick concept conveys may be culturally specific – for example, with the concept of honour. Another reason is that in theories which do frame general principles of ethics, those principles are often amenable to thin terminology (e.g. 'good', 'right').

Sophie Emma Battell on Timon's hospitality

The situations of Shakespeare's characters furnish much material for reflection on thick ethical concepts, and one of these is the concept of being *hospitable*. Sophie Emma Battell's chapter discusses how *Timon of Athens*, a

play driven by giving and owing, can be illuminated by using Derrida's work on hospitality to show how the sense of the economic in the play goes beyond money changing hands. Battell argues that Timon supposes his gifts to be given more unconditionally then they in fact are. Although he does not set out conditions of repayment, he assumes that his generosity buys him the ability to rely on his friends to recompense him for his gift if he comes to need help, which casts his 'giving' as an exploitation of relations of debt and owing rather than as true generosity. A dynamic of implicit demands lies not only beneath Timon's acts of generosity, Battell suggests, but also beneath displays of emotion in the play, with Timon's tears creating a burden on others to behave as their host would like. On the other hand, what initially looks like a case of inhospitality – Timon's attempt to disallow mourners at his burial place – can, Battell argues, be understood as incorporating generosity (although, again, not straightforwardly so). The surface trajectory of Timon's character – from decadent entertainer to misanthrope – thus belies a surprisingly complex picture of hospitality.

The ethics of excess: martyrdom, supererogation and unconditional love

Battell argues that in *Timon*, notions of calculation and economy extend beyond the realm of finance and into the ethics of hospitality and mourning. This suggests that we might profitably explore a similar extension to the notion of excess. Whilst *Timon* is clearly concerned with unthrifty spending, are there corresponding notions of ethical excess which would be relevant? Battell quotes Lupton's point that 'Timon aspires to a kind of economic martyrdom' (Lupton (2011: 146)). Might martyrdom be an illuminating concept to apply to the ethical as well as the economic in the play?

In a paper aiming to identify conceptual features that characterize the concept of martyrdom across different contexts, Verbin (2012) argues that martyrdom can be understood as involving extraordinary *devotion* only if it involves losing something which the martyr values significantly enough that its loss testifies to their devotion. Suffering is not in itself an act of devotion (though it may still be significant in other ways) if whatever supposed happiness is lost is not of great value to the martyr, nor, Verbin argues, if it is something they would seek out – for example, for masochistic reasons. Moreover, Verbin argues, even desiring, choosing or accepting the loss *as* a sacrifice is a barrier to making the most extreme sacrifice: the dissolution of the self. Drawing on the work of Weil (e.g. (1987)), Verbin argues that this is what gives love the opportunity to 'overcome the greatest possible distance', and that it cannot be attained when martyrdom is 'actively pursued', for 'the most valuable "gift", the "gift" of self, cannot be given away, given up or given, but rather, has to be taken away' (Verbin (2012: 86)).

Verbin's focus is on the religious significance of martyrdom, but we could apply certain aspects of her framework to Timon's apparent attempt at social martyrdom. When Timon splashes the cash, he actively pursues a demonstration of devotion to his friends, and, arguably, he wants to conceive of himself as making a sacrifice. The problem with achieving this is, arguably, his failure to take himself and his goods seriously enough to show that what he is giving is of significant value to him. In giving more and more of goods of which he is neglectful, Timon only makes more noise around the performance of a gesture that lacks depth of meaning. Indeed, since giving so much *constitutes* neglect, Timon's gestures are somewhat self-defeating if they are an attempt to express devotion to his friends. It is hard to show that you *value* money and fine living without attempting to retain at least some of it for yourself. Arguably, Timon does eventually experience the extreme loss of the dissolution of the self, and of alienation from those he has sought to relate to; but, arguably, this arises as a spin-off of the failure of his ill-conceived pursuit of martyrdom, and the great distance he is left with turns out to be one neither he nor love is positioned to overcome.

Another useful concept from the domain of ethics is that of supererogation. Although definitions vary, a working sense of what a supererogatory act is, which will do for our purposes here, is that it is a good act that is not obligatory and is done voluntarily. It is characteristic of Timon's early acts that he visibly goes 'beyond the call of duty' in what he offers his friends and acquaintances. This becomes particularly interesting once combined with the idea that Timon *does* expect something back, and a recent debate in ethics is relevant here.

It has been argued that one cannot promise to do a supererogatory act. This is either because one would thus incur an obligation to do it, and a supererogatory act cannot be one which fulfils an obligation (Kawall (2005)), or because fulfilment of the promise requires *no less* than the supererogatory act, whereas fulfilling an obligation through an act that is also supererogatory always requires that there is some other, *less* demanding way of fulfilling the obligation that one has gone above and beyond (Benn (2014)).

A similar argument could be made against the possibility of owing a supererogatory act in exchange for supererogatory favours you have received, and *Timon* provides a pertinent case. Timon is not obliged to give Ventidius five talents. Since he *does* give it and specifies that it is not a loan, Ventidius is not obliged to give Timon five talents back. The act Timon performs and the act he requests of Ventidius are both supererogatory. If

Timon thinks he is *owed* Ventidius's supererogatory act in exchange for his, then arguably he makes a mistake in (informal) deontic logic (the logic of obligation and permissibility). He thinks that he has put Ventidius under an obligation to perform an act which goes beyond obligation.

Yet seeing Timon as mistaken does not dissolve the sense that he is *justly* hurt when his friends refuse to help. 'You owe me a favour', if strictly speaking a misconceived demand, is nevertheless sometimes a legitimate way to feel about someone. Perhaps it helps to recognize that when something is offered with 'no strings attached', there is a question about whether 'no strings' means no *conditions* or no *expectations*. Timon's behaviour is problematic insofar as his assumed generosity obscures tacit *conditions*. Perhaps we can still sympathize with his *expectations* that others will give non-obligatory help to him since he has done so for them. But what could be a legitimate ground for an expectation of mutuality in supererogatory action? Perhaps the reciprocity of friendship (if that can be articulated otherwise than in terms of reciprocal duties).

Does Timon's hope of being spared the consequences of his own excess overreach the bounds of the mutuality of friendship? Unsurprisingly, Shakespeare's works offer no straightforward answer to the question of which expectations are legitimate when, nor do they offer a clear demarcation between cases of illegitimate imposition of conditions in acts advertised as unconditional and cases of legitimate imposition of expectations on those we have acted unconditionally towards. Battell, discussing connections in *Timon* between hospitality and images of liquids (e.g., crying, or pouring wine), notes the 'inscrutable liquidity' of a drink and the 'mysterious opacity' of tears. As with Crosbie's discussion of the attribution of intention, Battell's reading of *Timon* concerns, in part, the limits on 'seeing through' human acts to supposed truths about reasons. Perhaps this is one reason why the thin line between an expectation and a condition – between the mutual expectation of shared humanity or shared friendship and the economy of loan and debt – cannot always be drawn. *Timon* presents a world where people are, as Battell says, 'held in thrall to one another', but their behaviour often leaves open significantly different hypotheses about *how* exactly they are bound and why.

Matthew Kramer on Aaron and Iago, and Rafe McGregor on Richard III

Timon is not the only play to consider the ethical significance of extremity. Matthew Kramer's chapter explores Iago's and Aaron's extreme evil. This is the first of two papers dealing with characters who knowingly and deliberately choose immorality or amorality, with Rafe McGregor focusing on *Richard III*, another play whose presentation of evil is, as McGregor puts it, 'splendid in its excess'.

Kramer argues that a certain argument for treating ethical judgements as conative rather than cognitive is undermined once we consider the anomalous nature of Iago and Aaron's motivations. These characters perform terrible acts partly *because* they judge those acts to be terrible. McGregor brings together the work of two other philosophers: Tzachi Zamir's account of the relationship between (Shakespearean) literature and moral knowledge is combined with Anne Eaton's analysis of the 'rough hero' in McGregor's own account of how engagement with the character of Richard allows audiences to gain knowledge.

Both chapters show why it can be philosophically relevant that a character is richly drawn rather than flat. For Kramer, Iago and Aaron are salient examples for the meta-ethical debate because they are *plausible* as instances of human judgement. For McGregor, Richard's complexity is part of what facilitates engaging with him as a rough hero – it precludes, for instance, engaging with Richard simply as an archetype of evil.

Enjoying what is bad

Does Shakespeare's interest in characters who pursue objectives for the very reason that they evaluate them negatively extend from the moral case to other types of value, such as aesthetic or artistic value? Certainly, Shakespeare is aware that one can enjoy something one deems aesthetically inferior. This is exactly what the audience watching the rude mechanicals' play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* do. This is quite easy to explain, though, if we take the positive response to actually have a positive target: maybe the performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* has negative aesthetic value, but its failure has positive comic value and the performers' seriousness and effort is charming, so in fact there is nothing deviant about the audience's positive responses. The harder case would be one where we take someone to respond positively not because perceived negative value generates perceived positive value but simply because of the negative value in and of itself. In the aesthetic case, one way of putting this is that it seems paradoxical for a person to delight in ugliness.

Sonnet 130 offers one of Shakespeare's most famous discussions of ugliness, with the speaker saying of his mistress, 'If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head' (5) and 'in some perfumes is there more delight / Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks' (7–8). Of course, 130's ironic deployment of poetic conventions

is not purely insulting. Nobody's breath is *supposed* to be as delightful as all perfumes, and of *course* if hairs were wires, her hairs would be wires, so the point is about ways of failing to capture bodily beauty. But the same point is made in the poems about the speaker's other lover, the young man, and part of what makes the two presentations interestingly *different* is that in the case of his female lover, the speaker gives us some sense that he finds the object of his attraction repulsive.

There are a number of ethical questions about allowing oneself to think of another person's body in this way, but our concern here is what structure this apparently dissonant set of judgements and responses could have and how the case of dissonant aesthetic judgement compares to the case of dissonant moral judgement. A complication is that Sonnet 130 intertwines aesthetic judgement of physical appearance and moral judgement of character, but having divergent aesthetic responses to the same object is certainly one element of the scenario presented.

The speaker of the *Sonnets* sometimes says it is his perceptions that present his mistress to him as aesthetically deficient. In Sonnet 141, his eyes 'in thee a thousand errors note' (2), he loves her 'in despite of view' (4) and his ears, taste, feeling and smell are all discouraged from making a 'sensual feast' of her (8). In this respect, the disparity is not between how the speaker's dispositions track evaluative properties and how they know others are disposed, but is an *internal* dissonance. This makes the speaker's aesthetic deviance unlike the moral deviance of Iago and Aaron as Kramer presents it. But the similarity is that, as in the case of pursuing the morally bad for its own sake, the *Sonnets*' speaker has positive attitudes towards his mistress *because* of what he deems (aesthetically) negative. 'Who taught thee how to make me love thee more, / The more I hear and see just cause of hate?', he asks in Sonnet 150 (9–10). It is *in* those features that present themselves to him as aesthetically unappealing that he finds aesthetic appeal.

Sonnet 141 presents, whether sincerely or not, an attempt at resolution: attribute the responses to different faculties, with romantic attraction coming from the 'heart' and negative evaluation from 'my five wits' and 'five senses'. How does this compare to contemporary accounts of (apparent) tension between aesthetic responses? Though it does not make a distinction between heart, wits and senses, Feagin's (1983) proposed resolution of the so-called 'paradox of tragedy' offers one model of aesthetic dissonance which distinguishes between types of response. The 'paradox' concerns how tragedy invites pleasure taken in unpleasant events. Feagin distinguishes a first-order response of sympathy – which treats tragic events as negative – from a second-order (or 'meta-') response of satisfaction – which treats *our first-order response of sympathy* as positive. She also suggests that the same distinction can capture 'guilty pleasures': these involve a negative meta-response to a positive first-order response. 'Guilty pleasures' are pertinent here because some of the examples philosophers of art discuss are of things pursued *for* properties which are perceived as deficiencies. For example, somebody might appreciate an artwork as kitsch precisely in virtue of its sentimentality, its garishness or its labouring of an already obvious point which is forced on the audience. Another response to 'guilty pleasures' is to posit a state of 'aesthetic akrasia' (see Silvers (1972) and Herzog (2000), as well as discussion of this notion by Thériault (2017)). Extending the concept of akratic weakness of will from ethics to the philosophy of art, this proposal suggests a form of weakness in aesthetic judgement which involves a person liking a work they know they *ought not* to like.

These apparent 'paradoxes' of aesthetic pleasure are typically considered in the context of attitudes to artworks. One reason why the case in the *Sonnets* is philosophically interesting is that it invites us to see what can be transferred to the case of aesthetic engagement with embodied persons. One useful move here may be to bring treatments of dissonant aesthetic judgement into contact with work on the aesthetics of 'grotesque' bodies or on what it is to perceive certain bodies as grotesque, such as Hobson's (2003) discussion of grotesque derrières and black feminist aesthetics, and Meagher's (2003) discussion of size, shape and disgust.

The aesthetic case may shed further light back onto the moral case. If we think back to those of Shakespeare's characters who pursue the morally bad for its badness, do we find that their attitudes mirror those of someone who enjoys a 'guilty pleasure'? Although Aaron, Iago and Richard all arguably derive satisfaction from the very badness of their deeds, they might not replicate the tension some aesthetic cases arguably present: that of attributing to one thing contradictory values *along the same dimension*. The speaker of the *Sonnets* apparently finds *beauty* in (supposed) ugliness, and the lover of garish tat apparently treats kitsch as an *aesthetic* achievement. To mirror this, Shakespeare's villains would seemingly have to experience the moral depravity of certain acts as something which generates, albeit in a non-standard way, the attraction that honourable acts have in virtue of being honourable – and it is not clear that they are doing this, or even what it would be to do this. Perhaps one difference between aesthetic and moral value here is that the specific tension that amounts to the frisson of bad taste is easier to envisage in the aesthetic than the moral case.

Jan Blits on Stoicism in Hamlet

Jan Blits's chapter examines how Horatio's behaviour and dramaturgical positioning express Stoic commitments concerning both the nature of material reality and the roles of reason and providence in happiness and in valuable interpersonal relationships. In the latter case, Blits considers both Horatio's friendship with Hamlet and his attitudes to family. Whilst Shakespeare does present a 'great mutual affection and high regard' between Horatio and Hamlet, Blits suggests, 'he also makes us wonder whether Horatio would have tried to see Hamlet had the ghost not appeared'.

Woulda, coulda, shoulda

We note that this point is philosophically interesting not only for what it says about the nature of friendship but also for its methodology of interpretation. Khan has recently argued that one aspect of an illuminating methodology for engagement with Shakespearean tragedies is 'to dissociate oneself from what one knows is indubitably going to happen by imagining counterfactuals, or "what if" questions' (Khan (2015: 29)). Khan's focus here is on the cognitive and affective appreciation of tragedies and the role of hindsight in this, but it is reasonable to think this will ramify for ethical evaluation of characters.

    Counterfactuals about characters' behaviour also reintroduce the matter of 'moral luck'. There is no doubt that aspects of Horatio's relationship with Hamlet are praiseworthy. The relationship, as it actually progresses in the story, involves trust, the rewarding of trust with loyalty and the excluding of others' interests for the sake of one's friend's, all of which are to some extent admirable from the point of view of friendship. Suppose we now speculate that Horatio would not have resumed relations with Hamlet were it not for the ghost. In that case, it is thanks to an external factor – the ghost's arrival – that Horatio is afforded the opportunity to be a good friend.

Stella Achilleos on Hobbes and King Lear

Blits also considers Horatio's attitude to family and particularly to biological parenthood. This theme is also explored by Stella Achilleos, whose chapter argues that Cordelia understands her relationship with her father in terms that are contractarian but which incorporate a picture of the relationship between reason and affect which makes Cordelia's model different from Thomas Hobbes's idea of contract. Bonds of allegiance beyond the family in *King Lear* are also, Achilleos suggests, non-Hobbesian, sometimes overriding the guidance of the right to self-preservation, which would make allegiance the appropriate response to power which is sufficient to dominate.

Serviceable disservice

In the course of her discussion, Achilleos raises the case of Cornwall's servant, who implores his master not to poke out Gloucester's eyes. What makes this case interesting is that it is an act of allegiance *in* being an act of rebellion. As Achilleos says, 'his active resistance to his master is simultaneously an ultimate act of good service'. The servant says of his resistance that it will be an exemplary deed in his long career of service.

    This is not the only case in Shakespeare which raises the possibility of doing good service rebelliously. Pisanio in *Cymbeline* is determined to prove loyal to Posthumus Leonatus – 'But when to my good lord I prove untrue, / I'll choke myself' (1.5.99–100) – but when commanded to murder Imogen, pledges that 'If it be so to do good service, never / Let me be counted serviceable' (3.2.14–15). Clearly, he does protect Posthumus's interests when he refuses to act on his command. Pisanio, arguably, offers a reconciliation which undercuts the apparent tension between loyalty and disloyalty when, suspecting that Posthumus is deceived, he plans to 'win time / To lose so bad employment' (3.4.121–2): he maintains both his obedience to command and his resistance to performing the murder by extending Posthumus's opportunity to alter the commands he makes, which Pisanio believes he would do if better informed. Cornwall's servant, on the other hand, arguably expects no such alteration of judgement; he respects the commands his master *should* make rather than those his master *would* make in ideal epistemic circumstances. Thus, Shakespeare offers at least two different models for how there could be an act of ultimately serviceable disservice. A more general point to note is that we may here have a further aspect of Shakespeare's interest in deeds and attitudes which have an air of the contradictory about them. In that respect, being loyal through disloyalty might be situated alongside cases discussed earlier, such as desiring something one deems undesirable.

Tzachi Zamir on mercy and justice

Tzachi Zamir's chapter focuses on mercy and justice in *Measure for Measure*. Zamir's argument reveals in the play two sorts of distance between *theorizing* ethical principles and dealing ethically in *practice*. First, both Isabella and Angelo develop lofty and reasoned moral principles, but both characters' conduct sometimes exhibits a significant failure to live up to principles. Second, high-minded laws created in court for the edification of the people are, *contra* the hopes of those who dispute and design them, simply endured by a populace indifferent to the supposed moral wisdom behind them. Moral theory does not penetrate life in *Measure for Measure*, Zamir suggests. But what Shakespeare's characters *are* directly sensitive to is the possibility of suffering injustice, being harmed or wronged. Shakespeare's recognition of the fundamentality of human awareness of the potential to harm each other, Zamir suggests, is key in what is sometimes called Shakespeare's 'humanism'.

Human nature in ethics

The variety of particular scenarios in Shakespeare's works supports the popular thought that any ethics they attempt to portray must primarily be an ethics of human nature. Of course, it would be a serious exaggeration to think that Shakespeare's characters' scenarios stand for a representative range of human experience; his works represent a range of individual personalities and interactions, but clearly this range is no match for the diversity in humanity. Our focus here, though, will not be on what would be required to formulate an ethics based in human nature, but on some second-order discussions of whether an appeal to an idea of human nature could ground normative concepts. For example, if recognition of harm plays, in Shakespeare's work, the role Zamir suggests, then a comparison might be made with Williams's (1973) account of 'common humanity' as the foundation of equality. For Williams, the capacity to suffer – incorporating both the possibility of experiencing pain and the consequences of the possibility of experiencing affection, including frustration and loss – is part of human nature, and it grounds respect by creating a burden to empathize and to see each other as having a point of view.

We could also connect discussion of a Shakespearean view of the ethical structure of human nature with contemporary debates about the roles of partiality and impartiality in ethics. One intuitive way of characterizing justice and mercy, as competing ethical pulls, gives them an overlap with concepts of impartiality and partiality: justice is essentially impartial, whereas mercy has links to partiality insofar as it looks at the subject as a particular human individual rather than in terms of deeds which are supposed to merit punishment in themselves, regardless of who did them.

This does not mean mercy and partiality are the same thing. Partiality has to do with special relationships underpinning an individual's preference for some people over others, whereas mercy is applied based not on the subject's special relationship to the judge but on something else, such as the judge's recognition of the connection between the subject's humanity and their fallibility. However, that there may be some relationship between mercy and partiality is significant for *Measure for Measure*, because Isabella petitions for her *brother*, not for any other fornicator. The play might prompt us to ask whether the way we view a person when partial to them is similar or explanatorily linked to the view we invite someone to adopt when we ask them to be merciful; if so, this may explain why a plea for mercy would arise specifically from a perspective of partiality. Williams's framework might again be relevant here, insofar as we see Isabella's plea as opposed to resolving Claudio's case through the application of moral theory. Williams famously argues that the propriety of ethical responses which show partiality shows the limits of moral theory – for example, when he claims, against consequentialism, that an ethical agent would have 'one thought too many' if they determined whether to help their loved ones based on calculations of overall utility (see, e.g., Williams (1981)).

Another example of relevant work on partiality is Molefe's (2017) recent characterization of a form of agent-centred partiality, which roughly means partiality rooted in the agent's preference to advance the commitments that define them personally. Molefe argues that one such commitment can be the achievement of personhood, understood in part as involving occupying a social position by fulfilling other-directed duties. Although his argument focuses on African communitarian settings and we would miss much if we tried simply to transfer the framework to the Vienna of *Measure for Measure*, its ideas can illuminate relevant questions about how perceptions of others' humanity underpin aspects of societal ethics. For example, the fact that Molefe's account relates partiality to rules or norms governing the behaviour of specific, non-global communities alerts us to something about the task Angelo is charged with, namely the achievement of social stability through the enforcement of rules. It shows that such rules are not, of necessity, *founded* in impartiality. Whilst this certainly does not rule out impartiality as the proper guide for their *enforcement*, it at least adds nuance to the picture of governance as impartial. Attending to Molefe's use of Wiredu's (e.g., 1992) concept of 'sympathetic

impartiality' also draws attention to a contrast within *Measure for Measure*. Molefe presents empathy, or putting oneself in another's position, as applicable to all: a means of understanding 'the welfare of [any] human… without making distinctions' (Molefe (2017: 478)). It is interesting to note, then, that Isabella calls for empathy from Angelo (for Claudio) in the context of his role as an *impartial* judge. We might contrast this with Claudio's call for empathy when he implores 'hear me, Isabel' (3.1.165) but does so explicitly within the context of a personal relationship, claiming that nature looks kindly on deeds done 'to save a brother's life' (150).

Jennifer Bates on Kant and The Taming of the Shrew

The final chapter of Part III is Jennifer Bates's reading of *The Taming of Shrew*, and an idea from Zamir's chapter provides a useful bridge. Philosophy is, in large part, a matter of making arguments, holding others to the demand of being responsive to reasons and being prepared to give up a position in the force of strong enough reasons to the contrary. So a philosopher turning to Shakespeare might well be interested in the extent to which Shakespeare's characters engage in this activity. Discussing the power of women in Shakespeare to persuade, Zamir suggests that Isabella is the character most able to persuade through argument. Let us see how this compares to a few other female characters. Desdemona, whilst she might be more than capable of constructing arguments, is not in a position to offer any to Othello. This is because she is always waiting for Othello's reasons; until he provides an argument for her infidelity, she has nothing to counter with reasons and can use only pledges and insistence. Marina in *Pericles* successfully persuades clients at the brothel not to use her as a prostitute, although Zamir suggests that rather than persuading through argument, she persuades by revealing her humanity. Then there is the case Bates considers: Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Many readers find Kate's speech in Act 5 Scene 2, apparently endorsing wifely obedience and indebtedness, bizarre from a character who has apparently resisted 'taming'. It certainly strikes us this way, and perhaps one reason why (in our case) is that the suddenness of the speech induces uncertainty over whether Kate does have reasons, or arguments, behind her apparent conversion, and if so, what they could be.

Bates examines the play in partnership with a reading of the structure of Kant's view of rationality and suggests a number of parallels, in particular concerning how something set out as revolutionary is interrupted by a perspective which seems to transgress that revolutionary project: in the case of the play, Kate's apparent voicing of the propriety of making her reason obedient to her husband's; in the case of Kant, the imposition of a misogynistic favouring of a male perspective onto an account of reason which purports to be about humans in general. Just as Kate's performance of being tamed seems to reverse the play's theme, so it is the particular way in which Kant performs his enlightenment revolution that reverses something of its theme concerning human reason.

This can help us to find one answer to the question of how to understand Kate. As Bates sums it up, Kate's final speech is 'about female submission to male reason being the essence of her subjectivity'. Bates uses Kant's notion of a paralogism to diagnose what is strange in the play. Roughly, attempting to import something from the realm of experience into what looks like an *a priori* generalization about things in themselves is paralogistic. Bates argues that Kant himself commits the error when importing inductive inferences about gender into an account of the rational subject and arriving at a position where rationality is male. The position is conceptually distorted by a *misapplication* of inductive generalizations (note, then, that the problem goes beyond the error of the generalizations being ill grounded as a matter of fact). Arguing that we should understand Kate's statement of a woman's place along similar lines, Bates suggests that the salient difference is that Shakespeare – and Kate – are conscious of the element of paralogism. They acknowledge that judgements, as performed by individuals, *cannot* be detached from the norms surrounding the performance.

Obedience and choice

As Bates puts it at one stage of her argument, Kate's 'tamed self… appears to swallow the "whole" theme [of the play] by speaking for women's essence'. There is something else about Kate's speech, additional to its apparent essentializing, which generates a philosophical puzzle: it could be read as raising an apparent paradox concerning the possibility of *choosing obedience*. One way of posing the question is in terms of autonomy: could a form of behaviour in which one's autonomy in action and opinion is limited itself be chosen in a way which is an exercise of the subject's autonomy?

If so, there would be something subversive in Kate's behaviour; if those around her expect to see the shrew tamed, she instead gives them something like The Elective Compliance of the Shrew, of Her Own Volition, with the Viewpoint of the Would-be Tamer. But would this be a vindication or a quashing of autonomy?

Recent philosophical discussion of Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (Mahmood (2005)) considers a structurally similar question in a different context. Mahmood articulates how her ethnographic focus, the women's piety movement in Cairo, poses a problem for feminists. Its participants exercise agency in choosing to study and teach Islam together, and they effect a change to previously male-defined spaces (e.g., the mosques they meet in) and activities (e.g., pedagogy). Yet what they practice in doing so involves embracing female modesty, humility and subordination to the authority of doctrine and to whoever doctrine might place in a position of authority. Mahmood's response to the puzzle is that notions of agency and self-realization should be detached from notions of resistance and from a liberal understanding of the value of individual freedom. Viewing agency as necessarily bound to autonomy (or the desire for autonomy), she argues, obscures the possibility of agency being exercised through *inhabiting* norms rather than resisting them.

What happens if we take Kate's speech as a serious expression of her opinions and try to apply a similar theory of agency? We might adjust the understanding of 'taming' so that it is compatible with the cultivation of agency so long as the tamed person relates to the norm in the appropriate way. Alternatively, we may find that we have here a scenario where resistance turns out to be implicated after all; maybe what Kate is resisting is a kind of meta-norm, captured in the idea of 'taming', that her compliance with norms should come in the form of passive capitulation. Again, it is important here that we do not know how Kate has been persuaded, or persuaded herself, of her position. With such scant sense of her reasons, interpretations are left in flux. But the reader may find models of possible ways of thinking, which can perhaps be adapted and read into *The Taming of the Shrew*, in further philosophical discussion of the puzzle about agency and autonomy as it is posed by Mahmood's discussion; see, for example, Weir (2013), who argues that a conception of freedom can be given which reconciles freedom with agency.

Part IV: Epistemology and scepticism

The relationship between scepticism and doubt

Work by philosophers and Shakespeareans, especially Cavell (e.g. 2003), has established scepticism as a key theme for philosophical investigation of Shakespeare (and, indeed, it features in various chapters beyond this section). 'Scepticism' is a term of art and can mean different things in different philosophical discussions (see, e.g., Carson (2006)). There is one distinction we want particularly to mention here. One sense of 'scepticism' links it intimately to doubting certain beliefs – for instance, in Anita Gilman Sherman's chapter in Part IV, Horatio is a sceptic about the supernatural to the extent that he is disinclined to believe in supernatural phenomena – or to being uncertain of what to believe. As Sherman goes on to emphasize, the focus here is on the nature and dynamics of the agent's beliefs. A different sense of 'scepticism' concerns what, if anything, qualifies some beliefs and not others as knowledge. A sceptic in this sense is somebody who holds, of a significant set of beliefs which are unified in some way (perceptual beliefs, beliefs about other minds, beliefs about the external world, beliefs about moral values), that they fail to meet the conditions for being knowledge – regardless of how confident we are in them. It is this sense of scepticism that is present in, for example, the debate in epistemology concerning whether knowledge is justified true belief.

Scepticism in this latter sense could lead to doubt – by reflecting on whether our beliefs meet the conditions for knowledge, we might, in principle, lose confidence in them – and doubt could lead to this kind of scepticism: by questioning our beliefs and taking seriously the possibility that they are false, we might see that they do not meet certain conditions for knowledge. This is because of something that is in common between doubt and scepticism in the sense of denial of knowledge: both can proceed by considering what justification or warrant is available for our beliefs. But despite this commonality, there is still a key difference between a doubter who questions the truth of what they are inclined or invited to believe and a sceptic who denies the possibility of knowledge. I could be that sort of sceptic without doubting my beliefs. This is roughly because, for this sort of sceptic, the standards a hypothesis has to meet in order to undermine a belief's status as knowledge are different from the standards the hypothesis has to meet in order to be taken seriously as an option for how things actually are. For example, I might deny that perceptual experience constitutes knowledge on the basis that nothing in perceptual experience *rules out* the hypothesis that it is really a vivid hallucination, without ever thinking that perhaps I really am hallucinating. Or I might have plenty of very confident beliefs about the minds of others, whilst still maintaining that these beliefs could not constitute knowledge because they rest on something that will always have the status of an assumption: that others have first-person experience at all. I might even hold that I am *incapable* of *doubting* that there are other minds but still maintain that my beliefs about other minds

are not knowledge. Thinking 'for all I know, other minds might not exist' can be very different from thinking 'other minds might not exist'. For our purposes, an important difference is that there are ways for the first thought to be innocuous from the point of view of agency. It is when we have the second that our attitude to the existence of other minds stands to become an element of our interactions with the world, inflecting what we see to be possible and legitimate ways of conducting ourselves.

This is what happens in cases of 'scepticism' in the first sense we considered, the sense of practical uncertainty, and it is this sense that is often foregrounded in discussion of Shakespeare. Scepticism in this sense is a kind of *lived* scepticism, relating to an agent's drive to decide what they have reasons to believe, to formulate an accurate account of themselves and their environment, and to come to possess properly supported beliefs (and other attitudes) which constitute a worldview with which they are comfortable. We might feel that knowledge is still an important concept for articulating this type of scepticism, and that is true, but in this case the point is that the agent feels that their *pursuit* of knowledge in their engaged life is disrupted or derailed. Because this understanding of scepticism connects it to confidence and certainty, it concerns the possibilities of forming, holding, retaining or acting on the relevant attitudes, whereas scepticism in the other sense can operate by stepping outside this situation and asking whether those attitudes, even when formed, retained and acted on without discomfort or hesitation, would meet certain conditions used to evaluate whether or not they are knowledge.

Articulating the difference between types of scepticism is important not only for avoiding the risk of running together different senses of scepticism but also to give a clear account of the relationships between knowledge and agency. There is a real possibility of error in taking the kind of scepticism which asks, impersonally, whether beliefs formed in particular ways or about certain subjects meet the conditions for knowledge and attempting to make it relevant to engaged life in cases where it is not. Suppose we hold that the practice of induction lacks a justificatory foundation, for a reason advanced by David Hume (see, e.g., 1999: 108–18): that there is nothing in what has already been experienced which says that what has not yet been experienced is alike to it, unless we add a principle that nature is uniform, which begs the question and, for the same reason, cannot be justified by our observations that nature has so far been uniform. The argument may be reasonable, but to respond to it by suspending inductive practices is not, as can be illustrated by Hume's jokes on the topic – for example, when Cleanthes in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* teases the sceptical Philo by saying 'We shall then see, whether you go out at the door or the window; and whether you really doubt, if your body has gravity, or can be injured by its fall' (Hume (1993: 34)). Whilst we might take the point to be that someone who uses induction cannot deny that it is justifiable, on pain of hypocrisy, a subtler understanding is that it can sometimes be a mistake to treat a good argument that a form of reasoning is ungrounded as a reason to *act* with uncertainty or doubt. The mistake involves something along the lines of co-opting an impersonal fact (or alleged fact) about the relations between justification and knowledge as something personal: a modifier of one's own engaged epistemic conduct.

Perhaps this error is attributable to some of Shakespeare's characters. In that case, it would allow us to say something interesting about them: about their own misconceptions of their agency. To move towards what is plausibly a borderline case of the error from a Shakespeare character, consider a paraphrase from Bruns of Cavell's treatment of Othello. Bruns says Othello's doubt is 'made of the stuff of' scepticism, and goes on to summarize:

> What Othello wants to possess, and can never have (cannot in the nature of the case, because he is human) is Desdemona's own self-certainty of her fidelity, that is, her own self-experience of her love for him – a self-certainty or self-experience that has at least the philosophical force or foundational strength of the cogito.

> (Bruns (1990: 614))

A complication here is that whilst certainty, self-certainty and self-experience are agentially relevant epistemic states – they impact on what decisions we make and how – the sceptical problem to which Descartes' *cogito, ergo sum* is meant to provide a solution is, arguably, more theoretical than practical, aiming to establish how it is that anything can be known about the world rather than whether and how we can navigate the world with confidence. This can be obscured by the fact that Descartes' sceptical argument is forged partly through reference to what is often called a 'method of doubt'. In such a method, we imagine ourselves in conditions where doubting our judgement would be apt – that is, conditions where our beliefs are false but we still have them. The aim of such a method need not be to induce doubt, though. The fact that no reader of Descartes takes the story of the 'evil demon' (in which our experiences are the constructs of a powerful, deceptive, experience-generating creature with too much time on his hands) remotely seriously as a hypothesis about where their

experiences actually come from would be irrelevant to the success of the argument. The point we need to grasp is only that the truth of such a hypothesis is *compatible* with experience. The task presented by the *Meditations* is not to recover confidence in the face of this (since it is unlikely to have made any serious dent in our confidence in the first place) but to introduce an extra tenet with which the truth of the hypothesis is *incompatible*, in order to explain how we can know about the actual origins of experience on the basis of experience. Thus, the 'foundational strength' of the *cogito* is not to be measured by whether it *enables responses*, such as certainty and confidence about the nature of the external world, but in terms of what it allows us to say about the status of the responses we have always had when we form beliefs about the external world. The pairing of self-certainty with the *cogito* in the treatment of Othello is incongruous. But let's run with that, reading the incongruity into Othello's own judgements of his situation.

Othello has a source of information about how things are: Desdemona's testimony. What he does not have is a way of confirming that he is not in circumstances which would undermine the worth of that testimony, namely disguised unfaithfulness. That is because such confirmation is not available from the third-person point of view. This mirrors the sort of scenarios which are constructed in generating scepticism as a theoretical issue about knowledge (rather than a practical issue about epistemic conduct). The structure of these arguments is, precisely, to construct an alternative explanation for why we get the information we do, where the alternative explanation would be invisible to the means by which we get the information. Descartes' evil demon, for example, would explain our perceptual experiences whilst being invisible to the methods of sensory perception. Just as Descartes' scenario gives us no practical reason to wonder whether an evil demon really does generate our perceptions, perhaps Othello ought equally to recognize that the fact that Desdemona's testimony could be explained by an attempt to disguise infidelity provides no practical reason to wonder whether Desdemona is unfaithful. So, setting aside the dynamics of Othello's manipulation by Iago and concentrating only on how his doubt is 'made of the stuff of' scepticism, it may be correct to say that Othello makes a philosophical error here. He illegitimately co-opts as an issue for his own epistemic agency what is really an issue about whether the attitudes formed in the exercise of epistemic agency in processing testimony can constitute knowledge of other minds. Of course, the reason he does this is because the hypothesis which generates the sceptical scenario happens to be one in which he is personally very interested, but that does not make it any less of a mistake to transmute a problem about the nature of knowledge into a case of agentially relevant doubt.

On the other hand, there is an aspect of Othello's problem which can be articulated purely in terms appropriate for the level of practical life, focusing on norms of epistemic agency surrounding trust. Othello attempts to make an extra demand concerning his trust of his wife – a demand for the person whose testimony is trusted not just to *merit* that trust but to *evidence that* they merit it, and even to do so in a way that goes *beyond* evidencing the particular pieces of testimony they provide. There may be moral considerations against this demand (e.g., that what partners owe each other as an act of love is to make a 'leap of faith' in trusting each other). There are, arguably, epistemic and more broadly rational ones too (e.g., that it undermines the very nature of trust to always need more than the testimony itself, or that it constitutes a kind of hysteria of judgement). And, indeed, the demand may simply be incoherent because unsatisfiable.

Our impression is that the way Othello brings the 'stuff of scepticism' into an engaged life of practical judgements lies on the borderline between an erroneous agential appropriation of the nature of knowledge and a rare situation where it *is* appropriate to take the nature of knowledge to have some personal relevance. A theoretical point about the (un)knowability of other minds here plays a role in defeating a specific, personal, agentially relevant expectation that Othello has, albeit unreasonably, about the nature of trust in interpersonal relationships.

Othello is a play in which epistemological issues are embedded in rich, complex and varied ways. Some more of these ways are explored in further depth in the first two chapters in this part.

Veli Mitova on the duty to seek evidence, and Dianne Rothleder on deception

Veli Mitova argues that *Othello* supports an uncommon view: that believers sometimes have an *epistemic* duty (and not just a moral or prudential duty) to seek more evidence than they currently have. The epistemic significance of Othello's jealousy is precisely that it prevents him carrying out this duty of inquiry. Next, Dianne Rothleder, discussing how Iago's methods of deception differ from lying, argues that Iago reinforces subjects' participation in private experiences, making it take precedence over their participation in an interpersonal community where acts can be given shared meanings. Whilst Iago presents himself to Othello as an apparent external reference point to consult, he in fact facilitates reinforcement of Othello's private image of the world.

Both papers highlight the epistemological importance of Emilia. For Mitova, Emilia articulates a demand on Othello to inquire, and, for Rothleder, she marks a move back to a communal reality which allows the characters to get back in touch with truth. As well as similarities, there are differences between Mitova's and Rothleder's arguments which can enhance philosophical engagement for a reader of *Othello*. Whilst Rothleder focuses on the ways in which Othello's evidence is insubstantial, Mitova emphasizes the point that, cumulatively, it is enough to justify his belief. These points are not necessarily incompatible: Iago may exploit Rothleder's individual 'nothings', or pieces of 'mere probability of the lowest sort', in constructing for Othello a set of evidence that is, as Mitova says, comprised of both testimonial and observational elements which together have 'overwhelming cumulative force' (given that Othello does not have any competing evidence for thinking Iago untrustworthy).

Language and epistemology in Othello: echoing and aestheticization

Rothleder identifies Iago's propensity for echoing what Othello has said as an aspect of language-use in *Othello* which restricts Othello's epistemic access to a shared world. One philosophically interesting aspect of echoing is its (contested) relationship to quotation. Thinking about the relationship between echoing someone's words and quoting them may help illuminate how Iago's echoing enables elusiveness over what he is testifying to. If Iago is effectively *quoting* his interlocutors, then the echo ought to function to draw their attention to their *own* utterances and, thus, their own beliefs. In addition to Rothleder's point that it serves to reinforce the private over the social, such a move would reinforce a particular mode of inquiry. For if Iago is effectively quoting, then an essential part of accessing any information he is offering his interlocutor is for them to turn their attention back to whatever might have been the evidence for the comment being quoted, without bringing anything new to bear against which it can meaningfully be reconsidered. Thus, Iago's echoing may play a role in stifling Othello's duty of inquiry. Othello's attempts to know more and to gather more information (curtailed in any case by being aimed so squarely on what Iago can provide) are further curtailed when the responses serve to point him back to thinking about whatever evidence he already thinks he has. In addition, perhaps it is feasible to interpret Iago as employing a particular variety of quoting by offering his echoes within scare quotes (these may be tacit, or even explicit – in performance, Iago could presumably make scare-quotes with his fingers). For an argument that scare-quoting involves distancing oneself from the content of the words, see, for example, Capellen & Lepore (2003), and for an argument that it indicates that there is something peculiar or notable about the expression quoted, see Predelli (2003). In the first case, scare-quoting might help Iago to divert Othello's attention back to harmful ideas whilst absconding from responsibility and, in the second, perhaps to present them simultaneously as dubious (allowing Iago to disclaim them) and as weighty (allowing Othello to dwell on them). Bertucelli Papi (1996) makes complementary, though non-identical, points in her analysis of insinuation in *Othello*, arguing that Iago's echoing focuses Othello on what his (Othello's) own attitudes are.

Another element of language-use which may be of epistemological import in *Othello* is the theatrical nature of Othello's talk. Mitova describes Othello as giving a 'self-eulogy' in Act 5 Scene 2. Let us reflect briefly on what makes this an apt description. Othello's talk is eulogistic in summarizing important events of his (recent) life but also in the aesthetic element of its construction: it represents his life in a way that has some elegance and literary value, and it selects the right words to move the audience and convey the gravity of the act (5.2.403–17):

> Then must you speak
> Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;
> Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
> Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
> Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued
>   eyes,
> Albeit unused to the melting mood,
> Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
> Their medicinable gum. Set you down this.
> And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turbanned Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by th' throat the circumcisèd dog
> And smote him, thus.

The poetic beauty of Othello's language is used by Walton as an example in his discussion of 'silly questions' (1990: 175–83). Walton raises a question of a passage in Act 2 Scene 2: 'How did Othello, a Moorish general and hardly an intellectual, manage to come up with such superb verse on the spur of the moment, and when immensely distraught?' This question, says Walton, is a silly one which misses the point. It does not need to be answered in order to appreciate the play. (Walton's overarching point is that an account of truth in fiction must respect that fact.) The reason the question does not need an answer is, roughly, that the poetic style is part of Shakespeare's *way* of representing, not part of the representational content of the fiction. We are not supposed to take the poetic construction to tell us anything about Othello's linguistic achievement as opposed to Shakespeare's. Walton deems silly questions 'pointless, inappropriate… irrelevant to appreciation and criticism… distracting and destructive' (1990: 176).

But perhaps the question of how Othello came up with his superb poetic language is not always silly. Markowitz argues that we sometimes aestheticize our moral responses, contemplating them for their own sake in a way that isolates the moral response 'from what we might call its complete moral context – including a steady understanding of the social world as it is and ought to be' (1992: 314). If she is right, then perhaps Othello can be understood as diminishing his moral responses to his murder of Desdemona in this way (perhaps understandably – maybe his situation is so dire and his response so horrified that it is hard to see anything he can profitably do with it *but* aestheticize it). Then, even if it remains silly to ask *how* Othello came to be such a good poet, it is no longer silly to wonder *why* he speaks so poetically. (Markowitz's argument could also be brought into discussion of the seemingly aestheticized responses to Lavinia's rape in *Titus Andronicus*, which are considered in Adele-France Jourdan's chapter in)

From an epistemological point of view, what is interesting here is not just the way in which aestheticizing a response may truncate someone's judgement (e.g., preventing them from attending to which actions the response actually merits) but also the possibility of extending Markowitz's claim from moral responses to epistemic responses. Considering Othello's self-reproach 'O fool! fool! fool!' (Act 5 Scene 2), Mitova observes that it 'dramatises a central feature of his epistemic situation'. Similarly to how we have just taken there to be a point in crediting the beauty of Othello's language to Othello, we might apply this point about dramatization not just to Shakespeare's situating of Othello's epistemic discovery in a drama but also to Othello's own decision about how to present his discovery. Perhaps it is possible to make one's own epistemic states aesthetic items, by regarding them more as objects of contemplation than reasons for actions or choices, and/or by dwelling on *the fact* that they provide reasons rather than actually *responding* to those reasons. Othello, again, might be excused for doing this. By this point in the play, he has already destroyed all sensible ways of responding to the information he gets. The total benefit of his discovery of his short-sightedness is only to be able to accurately condemn himself, so why not aestheticize his realization? There is not much else he can do with it.

The idea that in aestheticizing a first-order response the agent diminishes it by occupying themselves in second-order responses to the extent that first-order responses become detached from their ordinary relationships to the agent, such as their motivating force, may well remind readers of one way of viewing Hamlet: as undergoing some conflict between contemplating his beliefs and enacting them. Perhaps this is not *itself* a case of aestheticization, but then there is interest in what distinguishes aestheticizing a first-order response from alternative second-order attitudes to that response, and the possibility of incorporating these distinctions into discussions of belief and agency in Shakespeare. Here we would like to offer the (speculative) beginnings of one account of Hamlet's epistemology that combines an appeal to second-order attitudes with an appeal to Hamlet's awareness that the first-order attitudes on which they are directed are epistemic. It draws on a discussion concerning the epistemology of religious belief.

Bishop and Aijaz (2004) discuss a hypothetical person who has Christian beliefs but asks herself, of those beliefs, whether it is epistemically responsible to retain them given the evidence. That sort of second-order attitude is common. Whenever we take measures to reinforce or assess our current beliefs, or to get the information needed to form beliefs, we are having thoughts about what our thoughts are or should be. But what makes this particular scenario particularly interesting for comparison with Shakespeare is its connections with agency. First, Bishop and Aijaz hold that the *existential* question for the Christian believer concerns whether to continue '*taking* her Christian belief true in her *actions and way of life*' (2004: 111, our italics) – something she could cease to do, if she came to judge that her beliefs were ones she was not entitled to, given the evidence. Second, Bishop and Aijaz's response to the question makes use of the idea of *doxastic venture* – the epistemic move of *venturing beyond* the available evidence. Bishop and Aijaz propose that the key to addressing the believer's *practical* question of how to *proceed* with their beliefs lies in whether the believer has license to make a doxastic venture. They appeal to William James's idea that it is sometimes legitimate for belief to be motivated by the agent's *desire* to believe (or their evaluation of the worth of having that belief, or the existential

import to them of believing it). Related ideas are picked up in Anita Gilman Sherman's application of H.H. Price to Shakespeare in her chapter later in this part.

Bishop and Aijaz ask:

> if a person does respond to the preaching of the Gospel with a passional inclination to believe it true… does it not tell in favour of the epistemic propriety of his letting himself make the doxastic venture to which he is inclined that if the Gospel is indeed true, the only way he can grasp that truth would be through such a venture?

(2004: 125)

Their conclusion is ambivalent: whilst they feel the pull of assigning 'epistemic worth' to 'a policy that is prepared to take the risk of falling into error for the sake of grasping a truth that could be appropriated only through doxastic venture' (2004: 125), they also feel the pull of the retort that 'it is epistemically irresponsible to risk an error that could not be corrected' (2004: 126).

What is interesting for our purposes is how this dilemma may parallel aspects of Hamlet's situation. Hamlet is faced with precisely the question of whether a 'passional inclination' – a desire, or even a sense of moral duty, to believe the testimony of his father's ghost – justifies him in accepting the ghost's testimony. He is arguably conflicted over whether the correct response is to attempt to find evidence (such as Claudius's reaction to the play within a play) to supplant the need for doxastic venture, or to make the venture and concentrate on clarifying to himself what it means to live his life in accordance with a belief acquired in that way – how, to borrow Bishop and Aijaz's words, to 'take it true in his actions and way of life'. And he also, arguably, experiences the potentially intense *pressure* of being invited to make a doxastic venture based on one's passions. Not only is the epistemic dilemma is difficult to resolve, but deciding to regulate one's epistemic commitments in accordance with other commitments and preferences is a matter of existential import, not only because it speaks to the importance of those commitments and preferences to one's sense of self, but because it may have major behavioural implications. It is no wonder if Hamlet has to stop and think about his agency, since different epistemic choices will mean ownership of different behavioural deeds.

Julia Reinhard Lupton on trust

In at least some cases, the decision to trust another person is another in which we might choose to take our beliefs and expectations beyond the evidence. Julia Reinhard Lupton's paper approaches *Macbeth* by paying attention to the idea of an ecological *climate* of trust. One instance Lupton discusses is the inappropriate state of 'absolute trust' which Duncan adopts. For Lupton, Duncan's supposed 'absolute trust' resists an acknowledgment of uncertainty about the future which genuine trust would have to include. In claiming his trust to be 'absolute', Duncan denies certain important interpersonal and political conditions which are necessary for trust, including his own vulnerability and the freedom of those he claims to trust.

Trust, reasons and epistemic labour

Pettit states:

> Trust materializes reliably among people to the extent that they have beliefs about one another that make trust a sensible attitude to adopt. And trust reliably survives among people to the extent that those beliefs prove to be correct. Trustors identify reasons to trust others and trustees show that those reasons are good reasons: the trust which they support is generally not disappointed.

(1995: 202)

Perhaps the importance of reasons to trust is something else that is elided by Duncan's 'absolute trust'. We may suspect that calling trust 'absolute' ignores the fact that it is premised on particular reasons; or, at least, that it shows that Duncan prefers to sidestep the essential matter of what the foundations of his trust are. After all, his saying of the Thane of Cawdor that 'He was a gentleman on whom I built / An absolute trust' (1.4.15–16) makes the basis of trust simply the *person* rather than any more specific belief Duncan has about him. Absolute trust thus might turn out to be a 'trust' that is not sufficiently invested in the trustor's own beliefs about the trustee. More subtly, Duncan's talk of his trust as 'absolute' might stifle the trustee's role of showing that any reasons which are in place for trusting them are *good* reasons. As Lupton's argument brings out, 'absolute' trust leaves

out uncertainty. Part of this uncertainty is, arguably, an element of hesitation that is normally left to be (partially) alleviated to the extent that the reasons *turn out* to be good, as manifested by the trustee's behaviour.

What of the relationship of trust to knowledge? Hardwig says that often 'epistemologists have not noticed the climate of trust that is required… to support much of our knowledge' (1991: 693). Because trust is 'blind' in a way knowledge is supposedly not, 'trust and knowing are [thought to be] deeply antithetical' (1991: 693), leading epistemology to sometimes pay too little attention to the fact that 'the trustworthiness of members of epistemic communities is the ultimate foundation for much of our knowledge' (1991: 694) – that is, the evidence on which we base our beliefs is often acquired through others and thus premised on our trusting them. Trust is crucial to knowledge because it is a way of dividing epistemic labour.

Lupton's argument pinpoints something else which is made possible by this division of labour – the option of knowing *less* when it is convenient to do so. When Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth to 'be innocent of the knowledge', Lupton says, he protects her from knowing too much, thereby making deniability an option. Lupton also points out how trust between the characters is part of what enables them to avoid speaking openly to each other of certain plans and deeds, such as the murder of Banquo. The reader might relate this back to Scott Crider's discussion of circumlocution and evasion in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's dialogue (Chapter 5). These ideas point towards the complex epistemology of complicity. Being complicit in something can proceed both by knowing and by not knowing.

Anita Gilman Sherman on partial belief

Anita Gilman Sherman considers how the stance of 'believing partly' is adopted by some characters in Shakespeare – for instance, when Horatio transitions, arguably, from disbelief in the supernatural to partial belief. Sherman extends her analysis from characters' partial belief in states of affairs to characters' partial belief in persons, using H.H. Price to understand the 'habit' of 'seeming trust' discussed in Sonnet 138, and what Falstaff *cannot afford* to believe concerning his relationship with Hal after his ascension to the throne in *Henry IV, Part 2*.

Sherman draws a contrast between Horatio and *Julius Caesar*'s Cassius, who also shifts towards giving credence to the supernatural, notably omens. Cassius's transition, says Sherman, is less well managed: where Horatio tries out a new openness to the previously unknown, Cassius becomes 'susceptible to his own melancholy imaginings' and gives up his disposition to be doubtful of superstition 'just when that cognitive attitude is most needed', ending up misjudging events in the Battle of Philippi. Sherman points out that Messala presents Cassius's mistakes as if responsibility for them lies outside Cassius, attributing them to 'hateful Error, Melancholy's child' (Act 5 Scene 3). One way of taking Messala's claim is that Cassius's bad judgement is partly a case of bad epistemic luck. Being subject to Melancholy is not something over which he has rational control; neither, then, are the errors in judgement to which it guides him. (For more on epistemic luck, see, e.g., Pritchard (2005).)

Sherman suggests that Messala is 'whitewashing Cassius's reputation for rashness and choler by turning him into a victim of melancholy depression'. One account we might give of this is that Messala envisages his explanation changing *which* epistemic error can be attributed to Cassius – rashness is one unreliable epistemic trait, melancholy thought another. Other characters may be similarly subject to alternative descriptions. For example, think again of the idea that Iago's echoing forces Othello's attention back onto his own thoughts and the evidence he already has. One epistemic strategy that Iago thereby stokes in Othello is rumination. That strategy is, at least in these circumstances, epistemically irresponsible; nevertheless, it may make a difference to our precise evaluation of Othello if we count rumination amongst his epistemic flaws as opposed to thinking they are only such things as over-suspicion, laziness, or bias in where he will seek testimony.

Epistemology and the self

In closing, let us say something about a general question, concerning the relationship between epistemic attitudes and selfhood. Some philosophical approaches to Shakespeare utilize the idea that human action is related to constructing a narrative of the self (see, e.g., Bristol (2010b) and Engle (2012: 87–8)). Meanwhile, philosophers have explored connections between narrative and epistemology – for example, by debating the role of narrative in self-knowledge and in self-deception (see, e.g., Harrelson (2016) for one recent discussion and Schechtman (2011) for an overview of work on the narrative self). Recently, it has been argued that epistemological strategies that are somehow erroneous can nevertheless be 'epistemologically innocent' in certain circumstances where they contribute to constructing narrative identity or generating coherent self-narratives (see, e.g., Antrobus and Bortolotti (2016) and Bortolotti (2018)). Without suggesting that we will find

exact parallels, these discussions might prompt us to investigate how Shakespeare's characters' epistemic virtues and vices contribute to their self-narratives.

There is a potential intersection here with issues of luck in Shakespeare. Take Timon's naïvety and his disposition to avoid receiving unwelcome information (e.g., his unwillingness to hear bad financial news from his servant Flavius). As it is, this epistemic flaw leads him to disappointment and disillusion. But suppose Timon had not faced the financial trouble he did (maybe Flavius had managed to impose some kind of management on the household finances behind the scenes, despite Timon's unreadiness to listen, so that Timon's relationships never needed to be tested). Or suppose Ventidius really would have willingly given Timon back his five talents had he still had that amount available, and then imagine a situation where he does, and imagine that this is enough for Timon to get himself back out of trouble. In these situations, the riskiness of Timon's epistemic dispositions might never have materialized. The optimistic predictions which these dispositions led him to make of the world and his future would have turned out – by sheer good luck – accurate. In that situation, Timon's naïvety may well have had an epistemic benefit in contributing to a coherent self-narrative. The radical nature of Timon's alienation is, after all, a demonstration of how difficult it is for him to reconcile the loss of that naïvety with his sense of where he fits into the world. As things stand, of course, Timon's naïvety is not at all epistemically innocent. But it may be partly a matter of bad luck that he is so epistemically guilty.

Engle argues that the moral agency exhibited by some Shakespeare characters is that of being 'committed to a set of self-devised imperatives. They follow strong preferred narratives of selfhood that do not seem dependent on what is right or wrong for everyone' (2012: 88). What is significant for our purposes is to highlight that such agency has epistemic aspects. Kietzman's (1999) discussion of the differences between Tarquin's deliberation and Lucrece's complaint, in *The Rape of Lucrece*, is a good illustration. For Kietzman, the reason Tarquin's act of rape damages his own selfhood has partly to do with the fact that he does not take time to attend to what is required for him to have the values that he has, and that he artificially introduces reasons for resolving his deliberation about whether to rape Lucrece. By contrast, the epistemic strategies employed in complaint which prolong deliberation, such as 'doubt' and 'delay' (Kietzman (1999): 29), allow characters to affirm or strengthen their attachments to particular values, thus constructing or contributing to selfhood. In engaging in complaint, Lucrece 'does not evade her emotions', which ultimately enables her to formulate her own reasons for her choice to respond with suicide rather than 'appropriating a culturally dictated course of action' (1999: 34). If Kietzman is right about the agency Lucrece forges through her complaint, then the relevant difference between Lucrece and Tarquin is not simply that Lucrece is more emotional but (although Kietzman does not herself talk in these terms) that Lucrece is more epistemically responsible in the way she manages her deliberation.

Epistemic considerations are thus important for illuminating the ethical advantages and disadvantages of delay. From *Hamlet*'s exploration of the relation between action and decision, to the sense of action rushing beyond itself created by the 'double time' of *Othello* (discussed in Rothleder's chapter), to the indefinite substitution of reflection for action self-imposed by Timon's hermitage, to Paulina's withholding of the revelation of Hermione's statue, and her instruction to Leontes to remain in a state of mourning and self-reflection in *The Winter's Tale*, delay is clearly an important theme in Shakespeare's works. When Macbeth considers his assault on Macduff's family, he initially presents external circumstances as that which prevents agents making their wills effective (4.1.164–6):

> Time, thou anticipat'st my dread exploits.
> The flighty purpose never is o'ertook
> Unless the deed go with it.

But a few lines later, his focus is on something more internal: he is racing to act whilst committed to it, before reflection drives his preferences elsewhere: 'No boasting like a fool; / This deed I'll do before this purpose cool' (174–5). One philosophically interesting aspect of delay is how it can arise either from an epistemic virtue, of confronting difficult information that is hard to navigate, or from its opposite vice, evasion. Given general considerations about the inscrutability of Shakespearean minds, this might lead to scenarios where representations of delay make subjects' degrees of epistemic responsibility inscrutable (and perhaps also, given recent arguments, their degrees of authentic selfhood). Is somebody who delays in a situation of perplexing conflict of values responding responsibly to the risk of making the wrong endorsement, by prolonging reflection? Or are they attempting to avoid reaching the point where they must identify themselves with some values over others? This may not always be obvious even from a first-person point of view, let alone a third-person perspective or an audience perspective on characters.

Part V: The existential

The chapters in Part V concentrate on reading Shakespeare with an understanding of existentialist approaches to human life. Some of the ideas associated with existentialism which will be particularly helpful for navigating the issues that arise in this part are:

• that the existence, or being, of humans is a philosophical problem in its own right;
• that there are aspects of what it is to exist as a human being that cannot be understood through an attempt to uncover or impose universal laws of nature or universal moral laws;
• that conformity with such laws is not the answer to the question of how it is (if it ever can be) that an individual's life is meaningful;
• that a reflective human life must confront life's potential absurdity;
• that death, the finitude of life and the contingency of one's existence play important parts in the conditions of human being;
• that a concept of authenticity is needed in order to understand the human condition;
• that understanding human being requires understanding the human significance of suffering.

The claim is not that the ideas listed above exhaust existentialist concerns, nor that the term 'existentialist' can be usefully applied only to philosophical positions with all of these features. Rather, these are some of the ideas that will be useful for thinking about Shakespeare in Part V of this book.

Katarzyna Burzyńska on existentialism and King Lear, and Jessica Chiba on nothings

Several such ideas are discussed in Katarzyna Burzyńska's chapter on *King Lear*. Burzyńska connects the predicament of human existence to the indeterminateness of the self, contrasting the apparent determinateness of character imposed by seeing oneself through an external, societal role and the perplexing and contradictory nature of the less artificial, but stranger 'me' that is left for Cordelia and for Lear when they attempt to shed that role from their conceptions of themselves. She also notes the importance of the word 'nothing' in *King Lear*. Next, Jessica Chiba takes up this topic, focusing particularly on what *being* nothing means in Shakespeare. Chiba argues that it lies between being and non-being, with nothingness not a lack of being but a state in which one is either present, but in a non-meaningful way, or not present, but where the lack of presence is meaningful.

One point Chiba considers is the difficulty, at least in the case of death, of imagining one's own non-being from the first-person perspective. There is no inside perspective on death; as Chiba says of Hamlet, 'the threshold between life and death cannot be crossed in his mind, because the moment when he might understand non-being is the moment when he would cease to be able to understand anything'. The case of death is a particularly stark illustration of how there can be facts about a person which their own perspective blocks them from accessing. If these facts can impinge on the meaningfulness of an individual's life, then persons are sometimes in the strange situation where they have meaning that means nothing *to them*. For example, Chiba says that 'for those who are left behind by the dead, there is still a sort of being in death'. Death can be a meaningful lack of presence, but the person to whom its meaningfulness is most starkly unavailable is the person who is absent.

What about characters who are 'nothing' in the sense of being present, but having lives which lack meaning – can this nothingness go unacknowledged from the first-person point of view? Amongst characters who declare themselves nothings, Chiba considers Richard II, Edgar, and *Cymbeline*'s Imogen, but she also mentions cases where a character is deemed nothing from the outside – for example, the Duke's saying to Mariana, in Act 5 Scene 1 of *Measure for Measure*, 'you are nothing'. The question of whether one can be nothing without knowing it draws on the question of whether one's life can be meaningless though one perceives it as meaningful. Here there is disagreement amongst philosophers, as we shall now discuss.

Subjective and objective meaning

Taylor (1970: chapter 18) argues that Sisyphus's fruitless rolling of the rock up the mountain contributes meaning to his life so long as he has a particular attitude towards it, and that any meaning of life worth having does not come from any external point to what we do but, rather, consists in harmony between our wills and our activities. Wolf (2010) disagrees, arguing that an activity which fails by objective standards of meaningfulness thereby lacks something important regardless of the agent's attitude.

This also bears on situations where characters re-evaluate their preferences in a way that takes an external perspective on a point of view they once held. Hal's speech when he rejects Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part 2* is not explicitly a consideration of nothingness, but Hal does attempt a reflective standpoint on his own being when he says, 'Presume not that I am the thing I was' (5.5.56) and 'I have turned away my former self' (58). The speech leaves Hal's position on the subjectivity of the meaning of life – that is, whether meaningfulness arises from the independent worth of the individual's activities or from a harmonious relation between the activities and the individual's attitudes to them – underdetermined, but it is suggestive. Hal thinks it legitimate to reject a past life as lacking meaning despite his former endorsement of it, relegating *both* his activities *and* his favourable attitudes to being part of the content of a 'dream' which, 'having awaked', he does now 'despise' (51). Thus, Hal seemingly thinks that to engage in that lifestyle is a mistake not only for his *current* self, but also that his *past* self was missing some meaning by doing so. On this view, meaning cannot be a matter *entirely* of harmony between the agent's projects and their attitudes to them, since an individual can be *mistaken* in regarding certain things as valuable components of their life. On the other hand, Hal notes that were he to revert to a positive attitude to those collaborative projects with Falstaff he currently deems wasteful and pathetic, he would countenance the presence of such things in his life: 'When thou dost hear I am as I have been, / Approach me, and thou shalt be as thou wast, / The tutor and the feeder of my riots' (5.5.60–2). One way of reading this is as Hal saying that were he to value such things, their presence in his life would thereby be of value. This cannot be taken for granted, however, since another way of reading the lines is as Hal saying that were he to value such things, their meaningless presence in his life would be no better than he deserves.

Raymond Angelo Belliotti on Macbeth, Lear and meaning

Raymond Angelo Belliotti's paper on Shakespearean treatments of the meaning of life focuses on themes of absurdity and nihilism. Using Macbeth and Lear as examples, Belliotti argues that neither has an absurd life, although both evaluate their lives in terms which have affinities with later conceptions of absurdity. Belliotti presents an account of absurdity on which absurd events must disappoint some reasonable expectation. He shares with Nagel (1971) the thought that absurdity involves an incongruity between the ordinary perspective from which one takes one's projects seriously as a matter of weight and a reflective perspective from which they can be regarded as arbitrary and/or ultimately without value. Where Nagel takes the appropriate response to the incongruity to be an attitude of irony, Belliotti sees the experience of absurdity as an opportunity to refine and reinvigorate one's projects on return to the ordinary perspective. There is a degree of structural similarity here with Chiba's proposal about nothingness: where Chiba sees characters' experiences of being nothing forcing them back into being something, Belliotti sees viewing one's activities as absurd as something that can feed back into taking them seriously.

Hopelessness

At one point, Belliotti draws a contrast between Macbeth and Lear: '[u]nlike Macbeth, whose dire soliloquy suffocates all salutary possibilities, Lear's final words express hope even as the hapless monarch dies'. This suggests that philosophical work on hope and hopelessness may illuminate some Shakespearean scenarios. Ratcliffe (2013) argues that loss of *hopes* directed on some specific content (e.g., I hope *that my brother will pass his exams* or I hope *to recover from this illness*) should be distinguished from the loss of *hope itself* that we often associate with despair. Considering a common philosophical dichotomy between *intentional* states – those directed on something particular, such as the hopes just mentioned – and *non-intentional* states, Ratcliffe argues for supplementing it with the concept of *pre-intentional* states, which contribute to 'an experiential backdrop that determines which kinds of intentional state are intelligible possibilities for a person' (2013: 600). In addition to losing hopes with particular content, a person can lose, retain, or undergo changes in the *possibility* of forming these contentful attitudes of hope. *Radical* hope, according to Ratcliffe, is

> not an intentional state with some specifiable content but, instead, a kind of general orientation or sense of how things are with the world… a sense of [the] future as offering certain kinds of possibility, principally some vague sense of the good that attitudes including intentional hope depend upon… a general sense that things might turn out for the good.

(2013: 603–4)

Macbeth's hopelessness could be understood within Ratcliffe's framework. For example, one way in which Ratcliffe says hope can be truncated is when a person lacks *aspirational* hope, recognizing the possibility of 'transient pleasures and distractions' but not that of 'being able to surpass one's current predicament, to improve oneself or one's situation' (2013: 609). Perhaps Macbeth lacks aspirational hope where his own morality is concerned. Arguably, Macbeth regrets what he has become, but in coming to understand his future as the future of a murderer, he sees no possibility of bettering himself morally; after his treachery, he sees himself as irredeemable. Such a lack of hope regarding one's own moral improvement is perhaps expressed by Macbeth's suggestion that in having 'murdered sleep' (2.2.55), he has effected a violent transformation to future possibilities, rendering unavailable the 'Balm of hurt minds' and 'Chief nourisher in life's feast' (51–2), and experiencing a new-found physical incapability to say 'Amen', the word which is 'Stuck in my throat' (44).

Considering the 'Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow' speech in Act 5 Scene 5, Belliotti says that 'Macbeth voices his beautifully-crafted lyric at a moment of personal calamity. Unlike Camus or Nagel, reflectively and coolly analyzing a paramount philosophical question under favourable conditions, Macbeth is striking back at catastrophic events beyond his control'. Ratcliffe's conception of hope might offer one way of shedding light on the relationship between absurdity as a realization about human life and despair as a restrictive or transformative component of a life. A perception of the world as *indifferent* is often taken to be a constituent of perceiving life as absurd. But indifference ought not, by itself, to undermine radical hope of the kind Ratcliffe discusses, since that hope requires only the *possibility* of outcomes one values positively, and the indifference of the universe does not undermine that. But this may change if radical hope involves viewing the universe as quasi-agential. An orientation towards the world as offering good things may, for some, be a sense of the world as itself normatively loaded – *friendly*, or *favourable*, or in some way *concerned* with what is good for me as an inhabitant of it. If our hopeful orientation towards the world is of this type, then a perception of the world as indifferent may be enough to disrupt it by removing, if not the possibility of good outcomes, at least the possibility of outcomes arising *because* they are good.

There are certainly ways of understanding Macbeth as someone who animates the world as a quasi-agential thing with normative interests. His 'If it were done when 'tis done' speech (1.7.1–28) could be read as suggesting an inherent opposition of nature to evil, if 'even-handed justice' (10) is not just the justice humans mete out to each other but is suggestive of cosmic justice, and if the conception of foresight he develops in response to his meeting with the weird sisters construes fate as a normatively sensitive form of design. If we are tempted by this line of thought about Macbeth's attitudes, then we might add that his loss of hope is mediated by an emotional process which reinforces his treatment of the world as normative. When responding to Lady Macbeth's suicide with his 'Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow' speech, he is, arguably, angry (and could certainly be played that way). Anger may sometimes involve lowered expectations – even if only temporarily, one sees the person one is angry with as *the sort of person who will let one down*. Macbeth's anger at the unravelling of his situation, similarly, brings with it lowered expectations of his world and, thus, a disruption to his sense of whether the world provides the conditions wherein it is possible and reasonable to hope for things.

Katie Brennan on Nietzsche and Hamlet

Katie Brennan puts forward an account of the significance of a brief and apparently incongruous mention of *Hamlet* in Nietzsche's discussion of the Greek tragic chorus. How is it to be situated within Nietzsche's account of tragedy as achieving its effects on the audience through an interplay of Apollonian and Dionysiac elements? Brennan suggests that Hamlet exemplifies the reaction of 'revulsion' that occurs when one turns back to daily reality following an experience of Dionysiac insight and acknowledges its interminable suffering. Hamlet functions, Brennan argues, as an illustration of what tragedy would do to its audience were it not also capable of offering a certain kind of solace. Brennan further argues that the plot of *Hamlet* can itself be read as including an instance of Nietzschean life affirmation facilitated by art. Through a piece of art, the play within a play, Hamlet is able (temporarily) to reinstate life as an undeniable force.

The Nietzschean structure Brennan discusses, of revulsion followed by affirmation, is similar to the structure outlined by Chiba concerning nothingness and the return to being, and by Belliotti concerning the perception of absurdity and the subsequent revision or reinvigoration of life projects. Brennan's example of Hamlet is a useful reminder that being in some way forced back into living does not mean a person has arrived at a permanent state of resolution. Hamlet, Brennan says, 'reverts to a state of revulsion'. Thus, when it comes to somebody reconciling their reflection on the nature of life with their actual living of it, what looks like resolution may be less a resting place, more a temporary stage of a self in flux.

Models of philosophical interpretation

Nietzsche's idea that from art we can derive the solace that life is 'indestructibly powerful and pleasurable' (2000: 45) might seem to find a different kind of manifestation, a particularly literal one, in *The Winter's Tale*, where an artwork, Paulina's statue of Hermione, becomes (ostensibly) a resurrection. Paulina's role in the narrative allows us to trace a philosophical pattern in events. Following Hermione's death, Paulina's list of tortures expresses the unpalatability not just of Leontes's acts but of the state of a world in which they happen: 'What studied torments, tyrant, hast for me? / What wheels, racks, fires? What flaying? Boiling / In leads or oils?' (3.2.194–6). She then prescribes a withdrawal from life, telling Leontes to 'betake thee / To nothing but despair' (3.2.230–1). And she effects a re-entry to life when she commands the statue to 'be stone no more' and the family to continue life with one another: 'Go together, / You precious winners all' (5.3.164–5).

There are elements to this course of events which might make us think of Nietzsche: not just the general association between art and the affirmation of life but also the fact that the redemptive moment combines Apollonian elements (the statue is a piece of representational visual art) and Dionysian (Paulina requests music). This does not, of course, show that importing a Nietzschean framework into *The Winter's Tale* will impose revealing *explanations* on the events of the story or provide an account of what the characters are doing that makes sense of them. Here it is useful to draw attention to a distinction between two of the ways of bringing philosophical considerations to the interpretation of Shakespeare. One is to interpret events of the drama, or the attitudes of its characters, as *instantiations* of some philosophical issue – for example, modelling the contrast between enchanted and unenchanted love in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* using Frankfurt's (1971) account of freedom and second-order desires, diagnosing Desdemona as suffering an epistemic injustice(s), or proposing that some of Hamlet's troubles could be avoided if he adopted such-and-such a conception of self-determination. Another is to deploy the work and the philosophical theory as something like metaphors or allegories for each other, viewing one through consideration of how it resembles or differs from the other. The pattern of events in *The Winter's Tale* might thus be *compared* to a particular pattern of philosophical experiences and reflections even if we do not read these *into* the play in the sense of taking them to account for why (fictionally) things develop as they do. Why do this? It could be to change what the fictional events mean to us, but it could also be to access the philosophical issue in an illuminating way, via a new 'partner' in comparison.

That is not to say Nietzsche sees the relationship between philosophy and Shakespeare that way. In his comments 'In praise of Shakespeare' (section 98 of *The Gay Science*), Nietzsche lauds Brutus for his commitment to 'independence of soul' (Nietzsche (2001: 93)), saying that Brutus appreciates a type of 'lofty morality' in which 'one has to be capable of sacrificing one's dearest friend, even if he should be the most marvellous human being, the ornament of the world' (2001: 94), if he endangers your freedom. Nietzsche here speculates over whether Shakespeare feels an affinity with Brutus because of 'first-hand experience', some 'adventure from the poet's own soul about which he wanted to speak only in signs', with Brutus's political freedom functioning as 'symbolism for something inexpressible' (2001: 94). It is unclear, however, to what extent he thinks we have to entertain these thoughts about the poet's meaning in order to make interpretative use, in thinking about *Julius Caesar*, of the philosophical proposal about freedom and morality.

James A. Knapp on Cymbeline

Departing from a view which reads *Cymbeline* as Christian allegory, Knapp argues that the redemptive shape of the play has to do with the characters' own ethical engagement rather than the intervention of an external power. Knapp employs Levinas's conception of time, and the relationships it forges between the nature of the future and the nature of 'the other' (the human individual distinct from oneself), to discuss the characters' experiences of death, including both confronting the (sometimes misattributed) deaths of others and the unimaginability of one's own death.

Knapp discusses Posthumus's desire not to commit suicide but to die as a kind of recompense: 'For Imogen's dear life take mine', he requests of they who 'coined it' (Act 5 Scene 5). We could make comparison here with Chiba's discussion of Cleopatra, who, Chiba argues, recognizes (unlike Antony) that suicide is not mastery of death. In resolving to 'make death proud to take us' (*Antony and Cleopatra*, Act 4 Scene 15), Cleopatra is aware, Chiba argues, that though one might act to take one's own life, crossing the threshold to death is not itself an action, since it amounts to the dissolution of the agent and the ability to act. By contrast, Posthumus's request that his life be taken is still, Knapp argues, made in the spirit of one who 'seeks to control… his own death', not recognizing that death's ungraspable nature makes it impossible to master.

Knapp's essay also draws our attention to another instance of the structure we have found recurring in various Shakespeare works as they are understood by the authors in Part V. Discussing Posthumus's strange and

serendipitous discovery of an artefact which seems to chronicle his own life, Knapp suggests that 'It is in the prophecy's mysteriousness that Posthumus finds the way to move forward in time, to return to "the action" of his life'. So here is another instance of a return to the practice of living from a point of existential crisis. Whether there are theatrical or artistic reasons for Shakespeare's plays to particularly favour this motif of the 'return to engagement' when they deal with the topic of an individual's reflection on their own life and existence is a question for another time.

Part VI: Self, mind and identity

Kevin Curran and Miranda Anderson on dynamic, distributed Shakespearean selves

Kevin Curran's chapter begins with an argument that when Shylock asks us to acknowledge his personhood, we are supposed to be compelled by recognition not of something inner and immaterial but of physical, sensory, vegetative aspects of his 'creaturely life'. Curran argues that Shakespeare presents a view of the self as process-like and as emerging from a dynamic, interdependent, relational world. Combining ideas of cognition as distributed through action and interaction, and of the relationship between idea and object which constitutes intentionality ('aboutness', or the directedness of thoughts onto objects), Curran also argues that this view of the self has an ethical aspect, forming, for Shakespeare, a foundation for acknowledging the social importance of shared experience and interpersonal recognition.

Contemporary philosophy of mind sometimes refers to '4E' models of cognition. This category encompasses a variety of approaches which have a spirit in common, a spirit which resonates with presentations of the mind in Shakespeare. Although there is some variation in which four Es are adduced (e.g., Hutto (2018) uses embodied, ecologically situated, extended and enculturated), a representative view that will do for our purposes takes them to summarize a conception of thought as: *embodied* (roughly, bodily behaviour is not simply a distinct cause, effect, or expression of thought, but partly constitutes thought, and this involvement of the body in thought is not limited to the brain); *enactive* (roughly, actions and interactions are an inherent part of thinking rather than an application, result, or manifestation of a distinct mental process); *extended* (roughly, cognitive processes are supported not just by what is 'in the head' but by much wider aspects of the environment, including those outside the body); and *embedded* (roughly, the deployment of things in the person's environment is indispensable to thought, and/or the relation between thoughts and worldly objects is something other than correspondence between two distinct entities one of which has, in itself, the capacity to represent the other).

Miranda Anderson's chapter fleshes out such a picture by discussing ways in which an understanding of cognition as *distributed* through the human body and its environment influences Shakespeare studies and how it resonates with Renaissance theories of mind and with particular moments in the plays. Thus, we would be wrong to assume that these ideas about mind, in being a focus of much contemporary attention, are a 'new thing'; there are precedents in Shakespeare's climate.

Scepticism about other minds revisited

Consider what might happen to scepticism about the contents of other minds when the Shakespearean self is understood as distributed and/or enactive. The pull of scepticism is felt most readily when intentions, desires and other psychological attitudes of a person are conceived of as something internal to that person, where another individual's attempt to access or to attribute such attitudes would take a third-person point of view. Putting it another way, scepticism grips firmest when there is a clear way of making sense of the idea of the *privacy* of thought, and a natural way to do this is to regard privacy as arising from the 'containment' of thoughts within the individual. Models of the mind as enactive or distributed may weaken the prioritization of third-person over second-person perspectives in the interpretation of others and/or give mileage to ideas of social meaning or to the view that thought is sometimes realized only in interaction (Gallagher (2007), De Jaegher & Di Paolo (2007) and van Grunsven (2018) are relevant discussions, though they do not all argue for the same position). Thus, regarding Shakespeare as dramatizing minds as extended or distributed might lessen the vividness of the image of thought and intention as internal and as always presenting others with a gap over which access would need to stretch.

Colin McGinn on Macbeth's self

In order to understand the philosophical significance of treating cognitive activity as distributed, we must see how it rejects an alternative (and deep-seated) conception of the self or mind. Two theories often taken as hallmarks of a supposed separation between the self and the rest of the world are the Platonic view of the soul as immaterial and Descartes' view of the individual as a thinking thing distinct even from the body it happens to have. Colin McGinn's chapter argues for seeing *Macbeth* as a repudiation of the various elements of a picture of the self as a transcendent, immaterial, unified centre of reason which is separate from the body, identical over time and transparent, in the sense of being available to be known to itself.

One aspect of this is McGinn's characterization of Macbeth as a 'slave to his overactive imagination'. Categorizing experiences such as that of the floating dagger and Banquo's ghost as instances of imagination, McGinn points out that not only does imagination drown out reason for Macbeth: it also makes him opaque to himself, baffled by what mechanism underlies his mind's confusing and untrustworthy activity.

Transparency, introspection and externality

As McGinn's discussion illustrates, the epistemic and experiential possibilities associated with mental illness have constituted one challenge for the idea that it is an essential feature of mind that its contents are knowable. The challenge does not necessarily rule out transparency *tout court*: one view, for instance, is to see transparency as something that can be *disrupted* by mental illness rather than taking the profile of certain mental illnesses to illustrate that it is not possible to *establish* transparency as a mark of human mental life (see O'Shaugnessy (1972) for one relevant discussion). However, the challenge at least makes it harder to take transparency as an *essential* feature of human mindedness.

One relevant question here is *what* we are supposed to be able to see transparently, in conceptions of the mind as transparent to itself. Transparency might mean that we can identify our mental states, or that we can explain how we come to have them, or something else. (For readers looking for more on transparency of mind and early modern philosophy, see, e.g., Hatfield (2011), and for a general introduction to transparency of mind, see Paul (2014).)

In addition to its relevance for Shakespearean scepticism in general, the transparency or opacity of the self or mind bears particularly on the consideration of the representational functions of different modes of discourse – for example, soliloquy and its contrast with dialogue. Our concern here is not so much whether soliloquy (for instance) makes a character's mind transparent to the *audience*, but whether it can be taken as a realization of a fictional person's experience of their *own* mind. One aspect of this question is what it would mean for the *external* behaviours which are necessary for audiences to 'witness' characters' explorations of their own minds to be representations of *introspection*. For self-exploration to be externalized in this way certainly encourages us to resist a conception where introspection is a private availability of the mind to itself which does not essentially rely on engaging with the external world (e.g., in action or by producing speech).

It is worth noting explicitly that the medium of theatre makes it very difficult for Shakespeare to *avoid* encouraging such a view. There are (at least) two very different ways of taking this point. One is to say that the externalization of introspection is simply a necessary dramatic device and as such carries no suggestion about the nature of mind and its separateness or not from the rest of the world. Another is to say that the choice to render introspection theatrically is, of itself, a philosophically loaded decision with anti-Cartesian implications.

The divided self: conflicts in ethical value in Shakespeare

Before moving from questions about the metaphysics and epistemology of the self to questions about the metaphysics of identity, it is worth interjecting some consideration of selfhood as an ethical issue concerning how a person's self-identification reflects or, indeed, determines, their values. There are numerous occasions in Shakespeare where characters must choose which of their values to identify themselves with. Sometimes, this is because of conflict between the social roles the person occupies. Hal's rejection of Falstaff is in part a decision about what to do with values some of which stem from his role as king, others of which stem from his role as friend. In other cases, the different values do not correspond so clearly to different roles.

Villainy is often enabled in Shakespeare precisely because situations arise in which values come into conflict. Recalling topics discussed by Kramer and by McGregor, we might say that one reason Iago and Aaron are striking is because it is especially *difficult* to explain their propulsion towards immoral acts in terms of a forced choice between values which, in themselves, may all have some legitimacy. This makes them unlike Macbeth, for example. Valuing one's license to pursue one's perceived future entitlements and valuing having shared

objectives with one's spouse are not in themselves illegitimate things to do, even though Macbeth commits illegitimate acts as a result of choosing these values over his other commitments.

We might distinguish genuine conflict of values from conflict between desires (where a person wants incompatible things). Marino puts this by saying that in conflicts of value, a person is 'not divided merely about what he wants, but about what he feels is worth wanting' (2011: 41). One relevant question for approaching Shakespeare's scenarios is how well defined the line is between conflict of desires and conflict of values.

There are certainly ways of *articulating* the distinction clearly. One is to make a distinction between first-order and second-order desires and wants, as does Frankfurt (1971). Someone might have the first-order desire to stick out their foot and trip up their irritating neighbour, whilst lacking the second-order desire *that this first-order desire motivates them to action*. Much as they desire to do it, they do not want to be somebody who is motivated by such desires. Conflict of second-order desires would arise when a person sees the value in pursuing each of two first-order desires, but where pursuing one would be incompatible with pursuing the other. This is one of the ways (perhaps not the only way) in which somebody might be conflicted over what they feel is *worth* wanting.

But having a framework which enables us to distinguish orders of desire does not necessitate that we can situate all desires within it in practice. Macbeth's situation *can* be construed as a conflict of second-order desires, where he is conflicted about what first-order desires should drive him: he *wants to want* not to harm Duncan, and he *wants to want* to not sacrifice his own good when it is presented to him as a possibility. However, it can also be construed as a conflict of first-order desires: he wants to be king, and he wants to be a good subject. Or it can be construed as a tension between a first-order desire and a second-order desire to be motivated by a *different* first-order desire: he wants to advantage himself by regicide, but he wants to be somebody who is motivated by a desire not to murder. And we might think that part of Macbeth's confusion and distress amounts precisely to not being able to distinguish, from the inside, which of these ways of categorizing his attitudes is correct. We might approach this as an illustration of how there could be genuine indeterminacies in what kind of conflict a subject undergoes. Or perhaps, particularly if we are less sympathetic to Macbeth, we will treat it as a case of self-deception. After all, a person might lessen their revulsion at their weakness if they present a first-order desire which threatens to motivate them as something which they can endorse, but where this conflicts with other endorsements, more than if they acknowledge it as unworthy of endorsement.

A further question is whether some conflicts – or some resolutions to them – are, quite literally, *self*-destructive (see, e.g., Moland's (2008) discussion of the divided self and its relationship to possible disintegration of the self). Something like this is certainly suggested at points in Shakespeare's works. Take the proposal in *The Rape of Lucrece* (148–9) that 'in vent'ring ill we leave to be / The things we are for that which we expect' (which could plausibly be applied to Macbeth as well as to Tarquin).

The later argument that 'for himself himself he [Tarquin] must forsake' (157) suggests an abandonment of the self from the inside, constituted by reneging on the commitments that defined one as an agent. (For discussion of 'divided selves' in Shakespeare, including the representation of Tarquin, see, e.g., Milowicki & Wilson (1995).) The point we would like to draw attention to here is that, as in the picture of cognition presented by the chapters in Part VI so far, the image of Tarquin's self apparently resists characterizing it as an entity that can be conceived of in isolation from its environment. Consider the fuller description (155–60):

> Such hazard now must doting Tarquin make,
> Pawning his honour to obtain his lust;
> And for himself himself he must forsake:
> Then where is truth, if there be no self-trust?
> When shall he think to find a stranger just
> When he himself himself confounds

Having given up a set of personal values as those on which he will rely, Tarquin-after-the-rape is no longer able to assume anybody to be answerable to anything; thus, he is unable to navigate and belong within a social environment that presumes some degree of consistency and commitment from its members. But the question is whether what follows the colon expresses a *consequence* of self-forsaking or an *argument* for why *this would be* a case of self-forsaking. Rather than an explanation of how Tarquin's dislocation from the environment would *proceed* from the disintegration of his self, we might read the lines as indicating that the giving up of social situatedness is *of a piece* with the giving up of the self. Putting it (very) roughly, this would be a conception where selves *are*, in part, relations to other selves rather than distinct objects between which relations hold. (See the related discussion of Kietzman (1999) on page 43.)

Andrew Cutrofello and Robin Le Poidevin on identity, reference and love

Regardless of whether we should reject the conception of individual selves or minds as self-contained entities, which interact with their environment but do so whilst remaining distinct from it, ordinary discourse and thought clearly allow us to do something which counts as discriminating individuals from their environments and from each other. And – luckily for Shakespeare's comedies – they allow for *misidentification* of individuals to happen, in various ways. The final papers of Part VI concern identity of individuals from a third-person point of view. Andrew Cutrofello applies Kripke's (1980) notion of 'rigid designation' to *Love's Labour's Lost*. Rigid designation is a way of picking out an object which contrasts with designating it by description. When we pick someone out descriptively, as *the thing which has such-and-such properties* – for example, as 'the person in the corner wearing the blue coat' – we pick them out 'non-rigidly', because the expression is not able to identify them across all possible circumstances (e.g., it would not identify them if they wore a red coat and stood in the middle of the room). If we designate someone *rigidly*, we pick them out in a way that does not cease to apply in alternative circumstances in the way descriptions do. We might want to say that rigid designation picks the object out as *it* rather than as *something which* has such-and-such attributes. Cutrofello proposes using the idea of rigid designation to understand the play's treatments of love and of the memorialization of the dead.

Looking within this volume, the reader might explore ways of connecting Cutrofello's account of the worthies (the famous figures who various characters of *Love's Labour's Lost* attempt, comically, to perform in Act 5 Scene 3) to Chiba's account of nothings, in which 'those who are no longer alive but are remembered have a sort of being involved in memory, even if they do not have corporeal existence: they are a meaningful lack of presence'. Looking beyond this volume, Cutrofello's discussion might find some companion pieces in the philosophy of love. Kraut (1986) and Grau (2010) have argued for an analogy between love and rigid designation. (Indeed, Grau & Pury (2014) have recently tried investigating for empirical connections between judgements about the nature of reference and judgements about the irreplaceability of loved ones.)

Those who draw a parallel with rigid designation hope to account for the way in which love 'sticks' to the beloved person. As Nozick puts it, love 'is not transferrable to someone else with the same characteristics, even to one who "scores" higher for these characteristics' (1974: 168). The key here is to see that Kripke's view about reference rejects the idea that the meaning and application conditions of a name are given by a set of *properties* which the speaker attributes to the named object (a central representative of such a view being Russell's description theory of names (Russell 1905)).

There are a couple of things to be wary of when navigating the proposal, in the philosophy of love literature, that love is analogous to rigid designation (especially as the depth and scope of the analogy varies, and there is also some variation in how exactly the term 'rigid' is interpreted when applied to love). One point sometimes made is that both love and (Kripkean) reference have a *historical* element. Kraut (1986: 427) says that what makes somebody's love a love of, say, Lisa is that it does not get directed towards any object whose history and origin differs from Lisa's. But this may show simply that in the case of love, historical properties matter. What is important in the case of rigid designation is that *acts of designating* the object play a role within the causal history: the point is that the way in which later uses of the name depend causally on earlier ones plays a role in securing their co-reference with the earlier uses, even if users associate entirely different descriptions with the name. (So, to draw a real parallel with love in *this* respect, we would need to argue along these lines: the object I love is whatever object was picked out as the beloved by earlier acts or attitudes of loving to which my current act or attitude is appropriately causally historically related.)

Another note of caution is that if trying to conceptualize love as rigid, the reader should avoid focusing *just* on the idea that people do *not* automatically 'transfer' love to other things which satisfy the description they have of their beloved. The issue is, rather, what such a 'transfer' would *amount to* if we construe love as akin to rigid designation. To see this, note that the central point to draw from Kripke is not simply that we *don't* rename Jane as 'Julia' if we find out that Jane is at least as good as Julia at satisfying the list of properties we take Julia to have. If names do designate rigidly, we are not thereby *forbidden* from starting to call Jane 'Julia'. Here it is important that for Kripke, reference is intimately connected with identity. Rigid designation is not incompatible with 'transferring' a name on the basis of properties in the sense of introducing a *homonym*, but it is incompatible with 'transferring' the name on the basis of properties in the sense of *synonymity*. To think that Jane, in virtue of her properties, earns a name *synonymous* with 'Julia' is no more appropriate than thinking that Jane, in virtue of her properties, is *identical* with Julia; and this, Kripke thinks, a description theory of names fails to respect. Likewise (the argument would go), if love is 'rigid' in the sense of rigid designation, this does not *forbid* us from starting to love someone else in virtue of them having properties we attributed to our old beloved. The point is that this would not be a continuation of a single romantic project but an entrance into a new

relation of loving. Supposing love does not select its object as 'whatever person has properties P, Q, R…', the selection mechanism involved when we love our new beloved is not the same selection mechanism that was involved when we love(d) our old one.

And supposing it does? This brings us to Robin Le Poidevin's chapter on *Twelfth Night*, which takes as its starting point the comic ease with which Olivia is able to substitute Sebastian for Cesario/Viola as her beloved when she finds out that Sebastian has properties she attributed to Cesario. Understanding Le Poidevin's chapter does not rely on understanding the idea of rigid designation specifically, but what is helpful to bear in mind is a more general contrast that links Cutrofello's and Le Poidevin's chapters. This contrast is between picking something out *de dicto* and picking it out *de re*.

Consider the sentence 'Someday my prince will come'. If Snow White says this just dreaming of having a lover, having not yet found anyone suitable, then 'my prince' is *de dicto* and means something a bit like 'somebody to love'. Her expression 'my prince' is eligible to be satisfied by anybody good enough who turns up. But if Snow White is remembering an experience of a particular man, Charming, and dreaming that *he* will return, 'my prince' is *de re*. Such a distinction can be applied to thought as well as language: there is a difference between Snow White thinking about meeting a good lover and thinking about meeting Charming in particular, even if the properties she takes a good lover to have are the same as the properties she takes Charming to have. The latter type of thought, directed on a specific object, is often called *singular* thought.

We might think of love as selecting the beloved in this way. But an alternative conception, which Le Poidevin sets out, treats the thought as descriptive and the beloved as becoming the object of the thought by satisfying the description, not by being picked out *de re*. Sebastian, by his qualities, becomes the object of Olivia's love, because Olivia's love centres not on the object which is Cesario/Viola but on a set of qualities, which Sebastian turns out to possess.

Part VII: Art and the aesthetic

'The aesthetic', since it has to do with beauty, is typically associated with responses to art or nature which are positive – for example, delight, admiration or pleasure. But some of the responses which are of most interest for considering Shakespeare come from the grislier side of aesthetic experience – horror, disgust, the perception of something as ugly or as monstrous – or, as in the case of the grotesque or the uncanny, from somewhere at the intersection between engagement with the wonderful and engagement with the awful. The first two chapters of Part VII take us to this terrain by addressing *Titus Andronicus*, a play which stands out for its presentation of extreme and horrendous events. As Joel Elliot Slotkin puts it in his chapter, 'the primary effect of the play's exploration of the depths of blood and horror is to aestheticize violence and to articulate and develop a connoisseurship of pain'.

Saito (2015), discussing a contemporary increase in attention to aesthetic aspects of everyday life in certain traditions of philosophical aesthetics, notes that negative aesthetic qualities earn more attention in their own right when considering aesthetics of the everyday than they do when philosophical aesthetics focuses attention squarely on the arts and nature. For example, when artworks are the focus, she argues, often 'negative qualities become justified as a necessary means to facilitating an ultimately positive aesthetic experience', such as when 'a disgusting content of art [is] necessary for conveying an overall message, such as an exposé and critique of social ills' (Saito 2015: §4). One reason a play like *Titus Andronicus* should be of interest for contemporary aesthetics, then, is that it offers a good opportunity for considering negative aesthetic value in reference to artworks, but without subordinating it to positive aesthetic value.

Joel Elliot Slotkin on negative aesthetic pleasure

Slotkin explains how early modern theorists, despite often retaining a conception of positive qualities as inherently appealing and negative ones as inherently unappealing, nevertheless also, at times, take audiences to be capable of counter-normative responses. Slotkin calls these *moral perversity* – where audiences celebrate wickedness and wrongdoing for its own sake – and *aesthetic perversity* – where 'audiences might deliberately take pleasure in ugliness and reject socially accepted standards of beauty'.

Slotkin's chapter traces these competing tendencies, and the shifting relations posited between moral and aesthetic value, in the work of antitheatrical writer Stephen Gosson. Slotkin then discusses how to understand *Titus Andronicus* as receptive to the surrounding divergent and inconsistent theories of the ethical and aesthetic experience of violence. Building on his work on 'sinister aesthetics' in the literature of early modern England

(Slotkin (2017)), Slotkin argues that the play offers audiences characters who 'model aesthetic sensibilities, including sinister ones, for the audience to evaluate and potentially adopt or reject'.

Disgust, fascination and aesthetic experience

Slotkin argues that *Titus* illustrates the possibility of audiences 'finding aesthetic pleasure in the consumption of dead bodies'. We might supplement this discussion with consideration of a general debate in philosophical aesthetics over whether disgust is compatible with aesthetic pleasure. Amongst those who hold that it is, there is debate as to what extent disgust can be a *constituent* of aesthetic pleasure and to what extent the attitudes can merely be held *alongside* one another. For one example of recent philosophical work within this debate, see Korsmeyer (2011), who takes disgust to be capable of playing an intimate role in the emotional response involved in aesthetic appreciation.

Also relevant are philosophical discussions of the role of *fascination* in engagement with artworks. One area of research in philosophical aesthetics that bears on this concerns the relationship between wonder and horror. In analytic philosophy of art, this topic is probably most prominent in discussions of Carroll's (1990) concept of 'art-horror'. Carroll makes a fairly firm distinction between fascination, which he sees as being, in itself, a valuable and rewarding response to have, and negative responses which have something more like instrumental value as routes to, or tolerable side effects of, this valuable response. In responses to horror-film monsters, he argues, 'The disgust that we feel – which is an uncomfortable affect – is more than compensated for by the pleasurable fascination that we take' (Carroll (1992: 85)). So we might ask of *Titus* whether disgust for the sake of fascination captures our aesthetic engagement, or whether the play invites a more subversive response, a kind of 'counter-aesthetic' engagement in which negative aesthetic experiences are pursued for their own sake. We might ask the same question of the apparently paradoxical response, discussed above, which the speaker of the *Sonnets* is presenting himself as having if he can be said to characterize his experience with his mistress as one of aesthetic attraction to a person who aesthetically repulses him.

Tullman (2016) also explores the notion of fascination in a proposed resolution of a puzzle concerning how one can have positive attitudes towards fictional characters one deems unlikeable (one version of this is the puzzle of 'rough heroes' discussed by McGregor (Chapter 14)). Tullman argues that when we are fascinated by something, we perceive it as curious, attractive, and interesting insofar as we believe that finding out *more* about it will pay off, giving us some kind of new understanding of the world. Tullman proposes that sympathy for immoral characters is an instance of *fascinated attention*, where the narrative trains our attention on things that make the character an object of fascination, lessening our attention to their immorality per se.

Some of Tullman's ideas might apply to the aesthetic pleasure an audience could take in the bloodshed in *Titus*. Slotkin discusses the sophistication with which Aaron curates and designs subtle aspects of his abuses of others. This 'connoisseurship of pain', to use Slotkin's term, may indicate a potential cognitive pay-off from investing interest in the character, which could make Aaron an object of fascination (and, depending on how the play directs our thoughts about him, of fascinated attention).

On the other hand, perhaps there is an additional puzzle inherent in cases such as *Titus*. Attraction is part of fascination as Tullman understands it, but in *Titus* disgust is particularly prominent. Aaron's descriptions of, say, carving messages into the skin of the exhumed dead bind his inventiveness very closely to images of him in highly *un*attractive situations. Is this in fact a case where it is *repulsion* rather than attraction that draws us in? Whichever way we go, considering philosophical accounts of fascination such as Tullman's alongside discussions of *Titus* is a promising project. (For those interested in exploring other philosophical uses of the term 'fascination', see Degen (2012).)

Adele-France Jourdan on humour, laughter and the grotesque

The extreme violence of *Titus Andronicus* is also the topic of Adele-France Jourdan's chapter. Slotkin and Jourdan both bring out how *Titus* deploys the idea that dreadful things can be executed in such a way that they are either aesthetically or artistically valuable. Slotkin's idea of the 'connoisseurship of pain' pinpoints how someone might perform morally awful or sensually repulsive acts in a way guided by aims and norms we might expect to guide a case of artistic creation: delicacy and subtlety, wit, sustained effort, careful construction, anticipation and shaping of audience responses, and pride taken in one's work. Compare Jourdan's argument that Titus chooses a path where 'if we are doomed to live in a world of pointless violence and suffering, it might as well be artistically and wittily executed'.

Jourdan's argument introduces consideration of a particular kind of aesthetic response: laughter and amusement. Philosophical theories of humour are often divided into three rough groups. In superiority theories, laughter is (roughly) the result of the good feeling involved in elevating oneself above others. In relief theories, laugher (roughly) releases tension – for example, that involved in the experience of suspense or of certain emotional states. In incongruity theories, laughter is (roughly) a response to disappointed expectations or to the perception of elements of a scenario not fitting together in the proper way (see Morreall (1987) for a useful collection on philosophical theories of humour and laughter).

Jourdan stresses aspects of incongruity in *Titus* but seeks to attend particularly to something she argues is often overlooked in philosophical approaches: the 'tragic undertones of laughter'. For Jourdan, the laughter *Titus* provokes is a response to the play's evocation of the breakdown of meaning that can be imposed by trauma. Jourdan suggests seeing the play as reacting against the conception of revenge as restorative, instead construing revenge as destructive of any sense that things are in accord, or as they should be (and, perhaps, more extremely, destructive of any sense that there even *is* such a thing as 'how it should be'; the play's events may leave the characters in a world perceived as inherently nonsensical).

Humour, the absurd and the sublime

Readers who want to pursue humour as a philosophical topic might compare Jourdan's approach with others which see humour as a response to the giving way of apparent meaning to meaninglessness. Nagel's suggestion (1971) that the proper response to absurdity is irony could perhaps be placed in this group. Wahman, discussing George Santayana's approach to humour, describes it as one in which humour 'corrects our illusions while respecting our reliance on them, and this absurd combination keeps us sane' (2005: 75). (Whether or not such accounts should then all be placed under the umbrella of incongruity theories, since they concern something fundamentally incongruous in human life, is an interesting further issue, but one we shall not try to resolve here.)

There are important differences in emphasis between the position Wahman discusses and Jourdan's. For example, Jourdan's argument concerns primarily the special significance of laughter at moments of crisis and excess which disrupt the subject's currently adopted systems of meaning, rather than the idea that humour stabilizes life in response to a general problem of absurdity. But Jourdan's suggestion that, insofar as Shakespeare is interested in the human experience, Titus's situation is also employed to illuminate 'the more abstract instability of our systems of meaning and order in general' suggests some common ground, too. And there is also a point worth considering about the way in which humour *articulates* something about its subject matter to the amused person. Drawing on Wilson (1973), Wahman proposes *King Lear*'s Fool as an apt illustration of the idea that humorous, playful folly can constitute wisdom where the vanity of humans and the absurdity of life is concerned. In the course of this, Wahman also suggests that humour has a special communicative potential: getting somebody to laugh at something is a way of getting them to recognize it. Someone's acknowledgment of the absurdity of certain assumptions underlying their behaviour may take the form precisely of discovering that behaviour to be humorous (or laughable) rather than recognizing some further fact about it. Indeed, directing someone to regard something humorously might be a much more effective way of revealing its inherent absurdity than offering them a statement and explanation of why there is something absurd about it. And this may marry well with Titus's situation as Jourdan presents it. For Jourdan, Titus's 'Ha, ha, ha!' in Act 3 Scene 1 moves him from a position where his practices of endowing events with meaning have collapsed in the face of extreme violence back to a position where he can make choices between possibilities (and chooses vengeance). How can it be that somebody could *identify* the option of 'a world of new possibilities', as Jourdan puts it, from a state 'where systems of representation and meaning are suspended'? One answer might be that responding to something with humour allows us to detect something about us and our world in a way that is *non*-representational. This would allow Titus a position where, even though the resources of verbal *representation* have been lost, some truths about his situation remain cognitively accessible through whatever kind of evaluation is implicit in finding the situation laughable.

Jourdan's point that *Titus* is a play of 'excess' also suggests that the category of the sublime may be relevant to the play. The sublime is typically taken to involve such things as overwhelming magnitude, uncontrollable disorder and threat. Though the sublime is most often associated with nature and works of art rather than human actions (such as the acts of vengeance in *Titus*), such an extension may be possible. Neculau (2008), in a paper aimed at making sense of Kant's view of the French Revolution, proposes an interpretation wherein the Revolution is, from the disinterested spectator's standpoint, an instance of Kant's dynamical sublime (roughly speaking, for Kant the experience of the 'mathematical sublime' is aroused by things of too great a magnitude for our imagination to comprehend them, and the experience of the 'dynamical sublime' is aroused by the power

of nature in action). Neculau writes that 'The revolution, as Kant appears to have imagined it... could be described as a short-lived natural event, a spontaneous mass-act similar to natural disasters' (2008: 37). Could an application of the Kantian sublime, so understood, similarly characterize audience response to violence in *Titus* (or the response of onlooking characters)? We shall not try to establish an answer here, but hopefully this is a clear illustration of why one place where philosophy and Shakespeare studies can work together well is in unpacking the thought that some version of the sublime is a component of some aesthetic experiences of horrific things.

A philosophical exploration of what Shakespeare shows about the relationship between violence and the sublime should reflect on why it matters that the violence is *staged*. Is it important to our experience of the violence that we acknowledge ourselves as being in the audience position? If so, then an appeal to the sublime may be fitting, since the sublime is often taken to require some kind of distance between the observer and the thing found sublime. For Edmund Burke, for example, 'When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful' (1990: 36–7). However, construing the audience position as a kind of 'distance' is complicated by a comment Burke makes on tragedy: 'the further it removes us from all idea of fiction, the more perfect is its power' (1990: 43). Is this reason to predict that the various metatheatrical and metafictional aspects of *Titus* (see Slotkin's chapter for some details) are ultimately in tension with the sublimity of the violence? Is such a prediction borne out, or can awareness of fictionality be, perhaps against Burke, conducive to sublimity? Pursuing these questions would also help to forge links between discussion of the potential sublimity of Shakespearean horror and discussions of the ethics of spectatorship in the case of fiction, since many ethically interesting cases of spectating fictional violence trade on fiction's ability to make an audience acknowledge that they are responding to representations of violence from the audience position (see, e.g., Wheatley (2009) on Michael Haneke's films).

Peter Lamarque on time and beauty

Burke's aesthetic theory is famous for contrasting the sublime and the beautiful. Very roughly, the sublime is to astonishment as the beautiful is to love. For an agent immersed in contemplation of how a beautiful thing excites an experience of love, we can turn to the speaker of the *Sonnets*. Peter Lamarque's chapter discusses what it could mean for the poems to be capable, as they seemingly profess themselves to be, of immortalizing or preserving the 'Young Man' as part of their content. Lamarque addresses, from a philosophical point of view, how the *Sonnets*' intertwining of reflections on the Young Man and reflections on poetry relates to their intertwining of two implied audiences: the beloved (actual or fictional), whom the reader is to understand as a personal recipient of the poems, and the wider readership to which we ourselves belong. Lamarque uses R.G. Collingwood's theory of the artistic expression of emotion to cash out a conception of love which allows the *Sonnets* to embody love. For Collingwood, expression is not something done with an independently existing emotion but a process through which the emotion acquires its form and shape. Similarly, the speaker's love is, Lamarque argues, 'not in any metaphysical sense independent of the sonnets but is rather substantiated in them'. Because the emotion is both reliant on the poems and constitutive of their nature, we can make sense of the *Sonnets*' claims to preserve the beloved. Indeed, as Lamarque puts it, 'it is not a mere contingency – a matter of hope or aspiration – that the love will survive as long as the sonnets survive. It is now shown to be a *necessary truth*'. This also bears on the dichotomy the *Sonnets* set up concerning the experience of beauty and the *description* of beauty (which the speaker frequently accuses of failing to penetrate to the truth of the matter). For, in Lamarque's words, 'It is the poetic distillation of the young man's beauty – not any explicit description of it – that makes a claim to eternity. This after all is not something that Time can destroy. … A poem, whatever else it might be, is not identical to any physical inscription of it'.

Beauty and acquaintance

We might distinguish (at least) two issues which are dramatized by the point of view of the speaker of the *Sonnets*. One is whether a poetic attempt to convey the experience of an aesthetically valuable object will always leave some residue inaccessible, by not being able to put the audience in touch with the object itself. Another concerns whether the attempt can present the poet's experience in a way that the poet themselves recognizes as adequate, or whether it reveals a gap between the object as experienced and the best articulation of the experience. Lamarque's appeal to Collingwood offers a solution to the latter, by undercutting the assumption of independence of experience from articulation which leads to the impression that a gap is possible (or inevitable).

This might also assist with the former, depending on whether the audience can be as equipped to grasp the articulation as the poet is. (For one introduction to Collingwood's view of the relationship between artist and audience, see Kemp (2016: §7).)

But there may be further ways to resolve the first puzzle *even if* we accept the idea of a gap between the poet's experience of aesthetic value and their attempt to articulate it. For instance, one alternative line of thought could pick up Lamarque's suggestion that by speaking the poems themselves, readers imagine themselves in the role of the poet. Even if, from the poet's point of view, the attempt to articulate the nature of love and beauty *fails* to reach across the gap to lived experience, nevertheless, if a reader can recreate this flawed attempt from the inside point of view, they might thereby appreciate some aspect of the lived experience itself, namely that *this* is what it would be like to attempt, albeit unsuccessfully, to articulate it (perhaps this would involve, amongst other things, imaginatively recreating the experiences of frustration, partial satisfaction, excitement and disappointment involved in the poet's attempt to render their experience in words). This shows that scepticism about the possibility of *articulating* experience, poetically or otherwise, does not straightforwardly entail scepticism about shared or communal understanding.

Consideration of what it could mean to capture a beloved's beauty in poetry might overlap with discussion of the 'Acquaintance Principle' in aesthetics and philosophy of art, which, as defined by Wollheim, says that 'judgements of aesthetic value… must be based on first-hand experience of their objects and are not, except within very narrow limits, transmissible from one person to another' (1980: 233). For one who accepts this principle, the question is whether a poem can ever evoke the object of the aesthetic judgements it expresses in such a way that the reader's experience (e.g., an imaginative experience) can count as *first-hand* experience of that object, or whether the poem can only let the reader know what the speaker's aesthetic judgements are, rather than giving them the resources to share those judgements.

Even if we reject the Acquaintance Principle as a general principle about aesthetic judgement, there may be roles for versions of it in capturing certain types of aesthetic appreciation. Acquaintance is arguably crucial to appreciation of *genuineness*, which Korsmeyer (2012) argues is an aesthetic property, one we seek out when we wish to be in the proximity of *original* objects. For Korsmeyer, the sense of proximity is an aspect of *touch*. She quotes Russell's claim that the sense of touch gives us 'our sense of "reality"' and grounds 'our whole conception of what exists outside us' (1925: 10). Russell alludes to Macbeth's dagger to illustrate this, but perhaps we can relate his point to Shakespeare in a way that runs deeper than mere illustration: without proximity, what sense of the reality of the object of the *Sonnets* does a reader acquire? (Incidentally, this question does not presume an actual Young Man; the point applies even if this is a fiction in which a poet tries to give readers some means of access to an actual, historical person.) This lends us an additional way of characterizing the speaker's anxieties about preserving the beloved. Whatever written poetry can do, ownership of a copy of the poem can never put the reader in the position we probably imagine the speaker to have occupied, of being literally in 'touching distance' of the beloved. Whether a poem can offer any *surrogate* for the experience of spatial proximity is another question. (Readers interested in questions about touch, genuineness and aesthetic value may also wish to pursue discussions on related themes, such as Karim-Cooper's (2014) reflections on touch and genuineness, where early modern texts *themselves* are the object of experience, and Smith's (2010) discussion of phenomenal and embodied experience in engagement with Shakespeare.)

Patrick Gray on catharsis

In discussing the different ways in which Aristotle's understanding of tragedy – as engaging audience emotions of pity and fear in a way that achieves *catharsis* – has been interpreted by different commentators and in different historical periods, Patrick Gray considers what to make of the fact that Shakespeare's characters' downfalls often do not involve any clear-sighted realization of how they went wrong in adjudicating their values (Burzyńska's chapter in Part V further brings out the idea of something incurable in the Shakespearean tragic hero's descent into suffering). Gray's argument complements aspects of the earlier discussion about divided selves and competing values; Gray presents decisions as (often temporary) resolutions of dissonance by hierarchically organizing one's values and value systems. Gray argues that Shakespeare is particularly concerned with exploring, dramatically, various ways of responding to a particular moral error, which Gray situates as a precursor to Romantic ideals of the artistic subject as self-authoring and world-authoring. He goes on to propose that Shakespeare undermines the impression that a character such as Cleopatra is heroic in her attempt to 'transmute the lead of the world into the gold of her own fantasy'.

Part VIII: Performance and engagement

The final part of this book considers philosophical issues concerning performance and theatre. As others have observed, theatre often receives much less attention in the philosophy of art than, for instance, literature and painting. Recently, however, increased work in the field of 'performance philosophy' (an area which concentrates philosophical attention on practices in which performance is essential – e.g., theatre, dance, music and performance art – as well as forging methodological connections between philosophy and performance) as well as philosophical publications on theatre and acting (e.g. Hamilton (2007), Stern (2014), Zamir (2014) and a collection edited by Stern (2017)) have increased the profile of philosophical questions centred on theatre.

D.H. Mellor and E.M. Dadlez on acting and characters

We begin Part VIII with two chapters on the relationship between actors and characters. D.H. Mellor approaches the topic through the idea of 'role-playing' and the observation that this term can be applied both to playing a character on stage and to fulfilling a role one is given in life. Mellor sets out and differentiates some aspects of the presentation of one person (a character) by another (an actor) and argues that together they explain what it is for an actor to *embody* a character and how we can appreciate significantly different embodiments of the same character even across productions that offer similar settings and actors that offer similar interpretations of their character.

E.M. Dadlez considers the relationship between performance and fictional truth in order to frame and address some philosophical questions about actors' interpretation of texts in performance. Dadlez argues for understanding actors' varying successful presentations of a character as different instantiations of one 'person-kind', in order to develop an account of character realization in which performance is comparable to reading: the development of a character beyond the text by a performance is similar in kind to the filling out of a fictional world beyond what is prescribed in the text by an individual reader.

Generating fictional truths about characters

Discussing some of the differences between depicting and describing, Mellor notes the fact that some features of depicters (e.g., of actors) are attributed to what is depicted (e.g., to characters) whereas others are not. This chimes with the question informing Dadlez's discussion: how is fictional truth determined? A large aspect of that question concerns how we 'fill out' the content of a fiction beyond what is made explicit. Some hold that certain principles play a primary role: for example, that we fill it out by importing facts from the actual world or by importing information from the stock of commonly held beliefs of a given community, perhaps one the author belongs to (see, e.g., Lewis (1978) for an influential articulation of these two principles). Or perhaps the means by which we detect what we should take a fictional world to be like are too diverse and unsystematic, as Walton argues (1990: chapter 4), to be encapsulated by principles, or at least by a relatively small set of principles with well-defined conditions of application. We might similarly ask to what extent the way audiences read properties of actors into characters can be captured by general principles.

Walton's (1990) influential philosophical framework for understanding representation and fiction introduces a theoretical notion of 'props'. A prop is any aspect of the actual world which prescribes that the audience imagines some specific thing. For instance, the sentences of a novel are props prescribing that the audience imagines the fictional world to be a certain way, and an actor's behaviour may be a prop prescribing that the audience imagines that a character behaves in a certain way. The fictional truths are whatever we are prescribed to imagine when we play the game of make-believe.

Certain properties of actors seem to be highly relevant to generating fictional truths – for example, an actor's movements are generally taken to represent their character's movements, and an actor's speech is generally taken to make it 'fictionally true' that their character says those things. Others seem clearly irrelevant – for example, the fact that it is the actor's birthday does not make it fictional that it is the character's birthday, and seeing a bruise on the actor's arm does not necessarily mean we should imagine that the character is injured. Cases which are hard to place in either category are philosophically interesting for that reason.

For instance, is there anything systematic to be said about when the gender of an actor is a prop for imagining the gender of their character and when it is not? Considering potential cases where audiences do not read aspects of actors into characters, Mellor mentions the role of costumes and the ways in which actions are performed in allowing actors to play characters who do not share the actor's gender. This points towards a couple of interesting lines of potential future enquiry for theories of fictional truth. Giving greater philosophical attention to how

audience assumptions or expectations concerning what counts as typical behaviour for persons with a particular characteristic mediate in the generation of fictional truths would add a new dimension to reflection on the mechanics and candidate principles of fictional truth, especially as such reflection could in principle be combined with philosophical analyses of the distinction between generalizations which count as stereotypes and those which do not (see, e.g., Blum (2004) and Beeghly (2015)). Moreover, it may be that such enquiries disrupt a tendency to take the mechanics by which fictional truths are generated as static, passive and neutral. For example, the principle that fictional worlds should be 'filled out' by importing facts from the actual world is typically evaluated according to whether it serves its purpose as an explanatory unifying summary of facts about engagement, rather than as a creative, artistic, ethical or political resource which one could choose to deploy or resist. Reflecting on how different results are delivered (concerning the relationship between characters' identities and actors' identities) by various practices of 'filling out' the fictional world may give us reason to adjust this conception of fictional truth. Shakespeare may provide the perfect ground for such a move, since the relative familiarity of many of the plays, and the diversity and number of productions and adaptations, offers fertile ground for reflecting on how different 'prescriptions to imagine' are generated.

Bringing contemporary philosophy of fiction into contact with work in Shakespeare studies (and elsewhere) on casting and colour also helps to identify philosophical questions about actors and their properties as 'props' generating fictional truths. One of Mellor's examples is of how, in a performance by Adrian Lester as Henry V, Lester's skin colour is not read into his character, whereas when the same actor plays Othello, his skin colour is read in. Thompson, contrasting Royal Shakespeare Company productions of *The Winter's Tale* and *Pericles* from the 2006–7 season, says that 'In the former, the audience was asked not to see or notice blackness… In the latter… the audience was asked to see and notice blackness' (2009: 4). Those sympathetic to Walton's philosophical framework might develop the account of 'props' to distinguish various ways in which a property of an actor can be 'seen'. There is a way something is 'seen' which is implicit in its use as a prop: a prop can only function if it is *recognized* as suitable for generating particular fictional truths. Then there is the way something is 'seen' when recognizing the fictional truths it generates is important to understanding the production. (For example, in the adaptation of *Pericles* Thompson discusses, in which an African setting is an important element of the production, the thematic coherence of the adaptation would be significantly altered or undermined if, for instance, it were instead fictional that the characters were white.) In some cases, we might recognize an actor's colour as a prop – it establishes a character as fictionally being a particular colour – but where the character's colour is not relevant to interpretation of this version of the story; the fictional truths about colour are not important along any dimension which the audience takes to matter to their understanding of the performance and the play. Building on this, there are cases where we might be tempted to describe colour as *both* 'seen' and 'unseen' – for example, where the interpretative irrelevance of fictional truths about colour is *itself* something we ought to notice. Sometimes, noticing that a character is black (for example) and that this does *not* affect understanding of their actions is an important feature of appreciation because it provides a *corrective* to any previous difficulty audience members may have had in envisaging the events of the story as ones that could have a black hero.

Exploring such options from a philosophical point of view might provide a fruitful new direction for debates about fictional truth. It also allows for specifically philosophical reflection on casting practices, something that is currently not a dominant topic in mainstream philosophy of art. Readers interested in pursuing this could see, for example, House (2010), who implicitly introduces several of the questions about 'inclusive', 'non-traditional', 'colour-blind' and 'cross-cultural' casting and the differences between these categorizations which are particularly relevant to philosophical frameworks for thinking about fiction; Choi (2012), who considers aesthetic and epistemic consequences of cases of multinational casting in pan-Asian cinema from a philosophical point of view; and Bloodsworth-Lugo & Flory's (2013) edited collection. Taylor's (2016) recent book on black aesthetics and its relations to racialized perception demonstrates how a philosophical approach can illuminate ideas of 'seeing' and of visibility (see chapter 2 in particular for a discussion of casting).

James Hamilton on openings and the dynamics of attention

In the next chapter, James Hamilton considers how the idea of a play's 'opening' can be understood in terms of mechanisms of attention and expectation in audiences. Central to Hamilton's approach is the thought that to understand the plays in terms of performance, we must recognize that Shakespeare's rhetorical strategies can be understood as literary devices or in terms of *actions*. Accordingly, Hamilton distinguishes two categories of audience engagement: as 'readers and listeners' or as 'listeners and observers'. He discusses the role played in

the structure of the drama by the *updating* audiences can do to their judgements about the characters and their world, and the conditions under which updating is prompted.

Action, performance and interpretation

Hamilton's distinctions do not force us to countenance a firm separation between theatre and literature, and we might consider the status of performances in which visual observation of action does not play a significant role, but properties of a performance do guide the way in which we construct a fictional character or world from the audience point of view. A reading (aloud) of the *Sonnets* might be one such case. We can get a particularly vivid sense of this by thinking of interpretations of the *Sonnets* which advocate prioritizing the idea of action, such as Vendler's (1997) and Schalkwyk's (2002). Vendler's (1997: 487–93) proposal that Sonnet 116 be taken as a retort to the Young Man is a well-known example of how it is interpretatively revealing to take some of the poems as performances of speech acts taking place within interactions between the poet and the Young Man.

It is important to notice that construing a reading-aloud of the *Sonnets* as a dramatic or quasi-dramatic performance does not necessitate the theory that the *Sonnets* represent speech acts taking place. But the theory offers a particularly clear and useful illustration of the point, because we can see that the content of the words does not in itself represent a particular speech act; that representation relies on (actual or potential) delivery, and the speaker's delivery could be imagined on the basis of a performer's delivery, making aspects of performance indispensable to characterizing the fictional world. A pursuit of the status of these kinds of performances, and of the (perhaps flexible) borderline between theatre and literature, could also take into account the case of radio plays (see, e.g., Cazeaux (2005)). On the surface, these approach the same borderline from different directions, with reading-aloud of poetry investing some action into literature, and radio plays subtracting some action from (a typical case of) theatre.

A different question which is also of philosophical interest concerns the relationship between what an action means to the audience and what it means to the characters in a fictional world. We can take a pointer here from within some of the debates on casting mentioned earlier. Carroll's (2014) discussion of two television adaptations of *Oliver Twist* and *Little Dorrit*, whose casts respectively include Sophie Okonedo and Freema Agyeman, highlights the complex relationship between audience 'seeing' and acts of 'seeing' within the fictional world. Carroll writes:

> Okonedo and Agyeman are cast in roles which are not racially marked within the dramatic action of the adapted screenplay; the characters within this fictionalized world are not depicted as 'seeing and noticing' the racial identity of Nancy and Tattycoram and the production arguably invites the viewing audience to follow their lead.

(2014: 26)

Thus, fictional reception of properties of characters can be a guide to audience reception. However, Carroll goes on to argue, features available to the audience which are not replicated in the fictional world nevertheless affect our reception of what it means for these characters to be black, since

> while these productions do not explicitly address the experience of black British subjects in the dramatic action (including the experience of racism), they nevertheless cast non-white actors in roles which a mainstream white audience might find historically plausible: that is, as figures on the margins of legitimate society.

(2014: 26)

In this case, audiences arguably 'see' the characters' racial identity in a way their fictional worldmates do not. Might such points extend to the perception of action in theatre?

There are some general reasons to expect so. One is the perspective the audience is afforded on the fictional world; for example, the information they gain comes in a particular order and maybe over a compact duration, things that are not always replicated by any fictional perspective. Another reason is that, as in the case discussed by Carroll, audiences are positioned to see production choices which a character participating in the fictional action does not (fictionally) see. Blackwell's discussion of Josie Rourke's 2013 Donmar Warehouse production of *Coriolanus*, with Tom Hiddleston as Coriolanus, offers another relevant example. Blackwell argues that 'the scenes in Rourke's production which demonstrate Hiddleston's muscularity… gain further valence within the play as a whole through an awareness of the wider cultural context of his blockbuster work' (2014: 347).

Audiences are, Blackwell argues, 'invited to view the character through the body-conscious aesthetic of the action genre; a mode which is integral to Hiddleston's star persona' (2014: 350). Thus, Blackwell argues, an actor's public persona (and their familiarity from specific aspects of popular culture) can be deployed to affect how we view an element of the play which is key to its plot: Coriolanus's body and its wounds. And this arguably extends to what we see characters as *doing*. For example, in Blackwell's discussion of Aufidius's killing of Coriolanus, which is realized brutally in Rourke's production, Aufidius's deeds are seen as an act of *disrespecting* Coriolanus's body partly because of the significance bodies acquire in this production through intertextual relations which are available specifically to *spectators*. Generalizing the point, there is a question of how distinctively spectatorial contexts inflect action-attribution, and it can be enhanced by consideration of both philosophy of action and philosophy of theatre. And perhaps the prospects for this question are especially rich when it comes to Shakespeare, given the huge variety of productions and adaptations his works generate.

Donovan Sherman on Stoicism

The next chapter continues the theme of the importance of embodied action to interpretation of plays, with Donovan Sherman discussing Stoicism as an essentially embodied philosophy and its realization in Shakespearean drama. This also sets within the framework of early modern Stoicism the persistent issue of uncertainty in the interpretation of sensory experience. Stoic conduct and self-education has a theatrical dimension, but how to distinguish genuine Stoic 'performance' from imitative performance? Sherman discusses how Shakespeare dramatizes this as a question both about the staging of emotion in plays and the performance of public roles.

   One of Sherman's arguments concerns the possibility of performing the act of *listening*. Discussing *Much Ado About Nothing*'s Hero's openness to her environment, Sherman says that 'Hero can only be a Stoic in this way, though, if she is in a work of theatre' (as opposed to a work of literature). The action of listening is evoked by Hero's 'lingering physical presence' on stage and would be 'invisible in most poetic forms'. If we were tempted to generalize from Sherman's point, we might wonder whether reinforcing readers' sense of characters as embodied presences is especially important when it comes to encouraging audiences to see as actions those behaviours that can easily be viewed as passive. But whatever the answer, we can at least say that the representation of Hero's listening is a useful case for philosophical approaches to the theatre/literature distinction to consider.

Derek Matravers on the history plays

We close Part VIII, and the book, by turning away from the relationship between theatre and literature and towards the relationship between fiction and history. Discussing the philosophical arguments bearing on whether the history plays should be placed in the category of fiction or non-fiction, Derek Matravers focuses particularly on how, if at all, making either categorization should affect norms of engagement. Part of Matravers' argument is that 'We can divide the properties of a representation into those that are simply part of what it is to be a representation of that sort and those that are part of the content of what is represented'. For example, Matravers proposes that Shakespeare might give words to a historical figure where there is no evidence that the actual figure said such a thing (or, indeed, where we know they *didn't* say it) not as an attempt to represent the historical figure as saying precisely those things, but because it is part of Shakespearean drama that the characters have to say *something*. We can make the same distinction for works focusing on what we might call 'purely' fictional characters (those that do not correspond to any actual historical figure). A version of it helps to frame the idea of 'silly questions' discussed earlier (pages 38–9), since some of them may be thought to arise in part because of taking what is really just a feature of the work to be a feature of the world it represents.

Suspense

Of importance in dealing with the question of how to understand the nature of history plays, Matravers argues, is attending to the reasons for telling stories, and one such reason, he says, is to capture and hold a listener's (or reader's or audience's) attention. So it might be appropriate, here, to mention another question about how stories hold attention, which could be brought to bear on Shakespeare (and which is additional to those about the dynamics of attention that have already arisen in Hamilton's chapter). What is sometimes called the 'paradox of suspense' concerns experiencing suspense in response to narratives whose development one already knows – as might happen in re-reading, in seeing two productions of the same play or, in some cases, in engaging with an

adaptation. The fame of some of Shakespeare's narratives, and the numerousness of their playings-out in the theatre, on film and in literary adaptations, makes them apt illustrations of how a narrative can remain suspenseful whilst being familiar. Aspects of experiencing suspense 'second time around' (or beyond) which receive attention in philosophy include what the re-experience of suspense shows about suspense's location in a theory of emotion, desire, belief and imagination (see Smuts (2009) for an overview) as well as whether suspense makes the same contribution to aesthetic or artistic value on repeat engagement with a narrative (see, e.g., Bacon (2007)). The latter question intersects in places with consideration of the aesthetics of, for instance, dramatic irony. For an example of this related specifically to Shakespeare, see McEachern (2014).

So what's past is prologue, and we shouldn't keep our readers in suspense for any longer. Nevertheless, we hope we have given some indication of what form at least some future philosophical approaches to Shakespeare might take and why it would be worthwhile to have them.

Note

1 All citations we introduce ourselves are from Shakespeare (n.d.), with the exception of those from *A Lover's Complaint* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, which are from Shakespeare (1966). When we discuss a contributor's citation of a particular passage, the passage is as cited by the contributor in their chapter.

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Part I

Situating Shakespeare

1

SHAKESPEARE, MONTAIGNE, AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANTI-PHILOSOPHY

Philip Smallwood

Cognitive content and enacted thought

Shakespeare, according to Friedrich Nietzsche, was Michel de Montaigne's 'best reader', and 'from his earliest notes on Shakespeare', as Alan D. Schrift has observed, 'Nietzsche shows himself to be interested not simply in Shakespeare's evocative power as a dramatist but in his specifically philosophical insights too. … [H]e makes his dramas correspondingly thought-provoking, "full of ideas"' (Schrift (2000: 46)). This conception of Shakespeare as 'full of ideas' brings the study of the plays and the work of philosophy into the orbit of Shakespeare's relationship with Montaigne. Literature has a place in philosophical understanding and the proposition invites us to think of Montaigne's responsibility for helping Shakespeare become a 'thought-provoking' dramatist of ideas and a contributor to intellectual life. From the time that Edward Capell first suggested a Montaignian source for Shakespeare in the second volume of his editorial *Notes and Various Readings* (1779–80), studies of a Montaignian background to the plays have mounted in number – the online 'Montaigne Studies' lists around a dozen discussions dating from the later years of the nineteenth century to the last few decades. Terence Cave, whose critical scholarship on Montaigne is among the most perceptive to date, can in consequence write world-wearily of 'the eternal question of whether and how far Shakespeare was familiar with the *Essais*' (Cave (2007: 117)).[1] If, however, Shakespeare's familiarity with

Montaigne is a question destined to remain unanswered, little will be settled on the matter of 'whether and how far' Montaigne made Shakespeare 'full of ideas'. But equally at issue is whether 'ideas' per se constitute the philosophical signature of either writer, or if they do not, what philosophical justification, if any, brings them together? As Raimond Gaita has observed, philosophers have always acknowledged that literature can provide food for the thought of philosophers, 'but only', he warns, 'when what is nourishing to thought – genuinely cognitive content – can be abstracted from literary style' (Gaita (2004: xxxv)).

In this essay I suggest that the perspectives of Shakespeare and Montaigne are fundamentally discontinuous with some of the categories of philosophical disquisition commonly applied to their comparison, and that in order to distinguish the sense of enacted 'thought' from the 'cognitive content' of philosophy held within the Shakespearean embrace as 'ideas', we should place more value on the probings or soundings into the nature of things implicit in the term *essai* – in the French sense of 'trial' or 'attempt'. Statements having intellectual content abound in both Shakespeare and Montaigne, as do hypotheses for philosophical examination; but we do not always apprehend the philosophical value of Shakespeare and Montaigne in this sense. Montaigne's 'thought' we construe through a compound of anecdote, self-analysis, reflections on ways of living and dying, classical quotations, stories from the past and the present, autobiographical wanderings and unchecked digressions, complaints about excruciating stones in the kidneys, or extensive disquisition on the reason and unreason of natural religion. The monologue of the *Essais* presents an extended sequence of thoughts, gestures, and observations unshaped by philosophy's latter-day disciplinary conventions. Their effect, in William D. Hamlin's formulation (marking Montaigne's artistic bond with Shakespeare), is 'dramatic in feeling if not in form' (Hamlin (2013: 38)).[2] Correspondingly the experience of 'thinking' philosophically inspired in the reader or spectator by powerful Shakespearean drama includes, in Hannah Arendt's characterization of the Socratic mode, 'pondering reflection [that] does not produce definitions and is… entirely without results' (Arendt (1971: 413)). This quality in Shakespeare derives from having statement, action, poetical language, and the psychology of character plumb the abyss of a

real not necessarily reasonable world outside the familiarly lived. In neither case is the thought of the writer explicable as a body of doctrine.

Modern philosophers on Shakespeare and Montaigne

If Shakespeare is not the most conspicuous example in literature of a writer committed to intellectual discourse, Montaigne's apparent inescapability as a source of thematic or theoretical content congenial to Shakespeare pervades key studies by professional philosophers. 'It is as if', writes A.D. Nuttall of Montaigne in his *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 'the intense religious experiences of [Shakespeare's] early years were gradually cocooned in a benign Montaignian skepticism' (Nuttall (2007: 18)). In *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* Stanley Cavell likewise implies Shakespeare's links with the same overarching system. He finds 'skepticism… in various Shakespeare plays'. Of *Othello* he observes that 'the philosophy or moral seems all but contained in the essay Montaigne entitles "On Some Verses of Virgil"', and he cites Montaigne writing in misanthropic mode: 'What a monstrous animal [is Man] to be a horror to himself, to be burdened by his pleasures, to regard himself as a misfortune!' From the Shakespeare 'all but contained in' Montaigne, Cavell reads a Montaignian *Othello* on topical-thematic grounds:

> The essay concerns the compatibility of sex with marriage, of sex with age; it remarks upon, and upon the relations among, jealousy, chastity, imagination, doubts about virginity; upon the strength of language and the honesty of language; and includes mention of a Turk and of certain instances of necrophilia. One just about runs through the topics of *Othello* if to this essay one adds Montaigne's early essay 'Of the Power of Imagination,' which contains a Moor and speaks of a king of Egypt who, finding himself impotent with his bride, threatened to kill her, thinking it was some sort of sorcery.

> (Cavell (2003: 3, 139))

The 'topics of *Othello*' found in Montaigne here arise as categories of philosophical disquisition. Such perspectives are valuable to literary criticism of Shakespeare because they balance developments that emphasize stage rather than page – the enthusiasm for 'Stratford Shakespeare', the creative prestige accorded to directing and design when ascertaining the ultimate experience of Shakespeare, and the place in this experience given to the privileged authority of thespian witness. Against this background the philosopher Colin McGinn can draw attention in *Shakespeare's Philosophy* to core intellectual and psychological insights available independently of theatrical presentation – Montaigne's philosophical thinking on (say) the nature of dreams bringing out the underlying theory of Shakespeare's *Dream*. Many individual arguments, 'topics', and 'ideas', as Nuttall, Cavell and McGinn have shown, are capable of being read across the space between their respective texts.

This fact may reasonably invite the suggestion that Shakespeare *must have known* Montaigne, and forms the background to the recent gathering of anglicized passages from the French by Stephen Greenblatt and Peter G. Platt under the rubric of *Shakespeare's Montaigne* (Greenblatt & Platt 2014). But while the editors of this volume can appeal to a traditionally classical topos to underpin Shakespearean arguments against the fear of death, they maintain that the contemporary translation by John Florio is the Montaigne that Shakespeare actually read. There is the suggestion that reflections from 'That to Philosophize Is to Learn How to Die' (I.19),[3] Montaigne's great essay reasoning in company with the latter part of the third book of Lucretius's epic poem *De rerum natura*, came specifically to mind in the famous consolatory address to the condemned Claudio by the Duke in *Measure for Measure* (performed in 1604):

> Be absolute for death: either death or life
> Shall thereby be the sweeter. Reason thus with life:
> If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing
> That none but fools would keep.…
> … Thy best of rest is sleep.

> (III.i. 5–17)[4]

The 'Shakespearean' passages printed by Greenblatt and Platt support the selection of fully nineteen texts from Florio's translation. But they also

express a tension between the scholarly demand for proof that Shakespeare actually cast his eyes on the pages of Montaigne before writing his plays (or some of them) and the broad critical productiveness of speculation about Shakespeare in company with the *Essais/Essayes*.

Speculation versus proof: the case of *Hamlet*

The Tragedy of Hamlet, the play perhaps most often invoked by philosophers and literary critics alike to suggest how Montaigne might generate philosophical echoes in Shakespeare, illustrates this tension. Matthew Arnold suggests that *Hamlet* calls strikingly to mind Montaigne's plasticity of intelligence, his fluid demeanour, and undogmatic humanity:

> Shakespeare conceived this play with his mind running on Montaigne, and placed its action and its hero in Montaigne's atmosphere and world. What is this world? It is the world of man viewed as a being *ondoyant et divers*, balancing and indeterminate, the plaything of cross motives and shifting impulses, swayed by a thousand subtle influences, physiological and pathological.[5]

'If there is a single book', writes Jonathan Bate, 'that brings us close to the mind of Hamlet, it is Montaigne's *Essays*' (Bate (2008: 420)). William M. Hamlin, in *Montaigne's English Journey*, a comprehensive study of Florio's English reputation and impact, cites approvingly the work of Lars Engle and Peter Mack to endorse an approach whereby, quoting Mack, we 'think about the revealingly different ways the two authors treat the same issue' (Hamlin (2013: 110)), and he gives the example of 'conscience': 'Like the essays of Montaigne, the plays of Shakespeare abound with explorations of human conscience, one of the primary instances being that of Claudius in *Hamlet*'. With respect to Montaigne's 'Of Conscience', he goes on to note that: 'The play-within-the-play is… imagined to function in a manner quite structurally similar to that of judicial torture in Montaigne's account' (Hamlin (2013: 114–15)). McGinn, in his turn, writes of 'the philosophical ideas embedded in Shakespeare's text' (McGinn (2006: viii)) – an insight he illustrates by passages from Montaigne suggestive of moments in *Hamlet*:

Montaigne has some interesting remarks in this connection… In another passage Montaigne could almost be speaking of Hamlet. … I like to think that the work Hamlet is perusing when Polonius confronts him is Montaigne's *Essays*.

(50–1, 58)

'Could almost be speaking of…'; 'I like to think that…': such formulations register both the explanatory pleasure of the thought that Shakespeare could compose the play with Montaigne in mind and a reluctance to sound categorical, and therefore open to challenge, on the possibility of Shakespeare's access to Montaignian texts. Other philosophical topics on which McGinn links Shakespeare and Montaigne introduce further thematic overlaps: they include cruelty, nothingness, grief, imagination, other minds, and the nature of the self. In this way the drama is nourished by philosophical thought. Certainly *Hamlet* contains speeches appearing as 'embedded' chunks of quasi-philosophical deliberation: 'To be, or not to be' (III.i. 55).

How far these are the best terms in which to foster philosophical comparisons, I suggest, is open to doubt, while the suggestion that Montaigne is a frequent 'source' of the plays has proved difficult to establish. The exception is I.31 of the *Essais*, 'Des cannibales' ('Of the Caniballes'), first identified by Capell (I.30 (Florio (1603), 'The First Book', Ch. 30: 258–9)). Though there are different views on whether Shakespeare was following the original or Florio's translation, Montaigne is here an indisputable, undisputed, source, and his title most likely contributes anagrammatically to the figure of Caliban. The text in question is the address by the old counsellor Gonzalo in *The Tempest* (possibly written 1610–11) – speaking as if with the voice of Montaigne. The passage, adapted as a speech by Shakespeare, defines how the ideal commonwealth might sustain life innocently lived according to the principles of nature:

> I'th' commonwealth I would, by contraries,
> Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
> Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
> Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
> And use of service, none; contract, succession,

Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation, all men idle, all;
And women too, but innocent and pure;
No sovereignty –

(II.i. 148–57; Capell (1779–80, 2: 63[6]))

– an exalted notion immediately undercut by Sebastian's sarcastically deflating remark on Gonzalo's rhapsody of ungoverned perfection:

Yet he would be king on't.

(II.i. 58)

While other echoes of Montaigne in Shakespeare are by contrast uncertain, many allusions and lines of plot confirm Shakespeare's textual knowledge of Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* (first edition 1579, based on the French translation of Jacques Amyot of 1559). A sense of dramatic narrative and rhetorical form (as manifest in the 'Roman' plays and particularly *Coriolanus*) here demonstrates that Shakespeare had indeed read the Plutarchian text. But if we seek empirical evidence of Shakespeare as Nietzsche's 'best' – or in any sense – 'reader' of Montaigne, we find that the chronological order of texts and the conditions of Shakespearean publication rule out or make it very difficult to establish the philosophical role of Montaigne.

Thus Florio's Montaigne was published in 1603, and as Greenblatt notes, this is 'at least three years after the probable composition and performance of *Hamlet*'. (The play was entered in the Stationer's Register in 1602.) Greenblatt speculates (he gives no evidence) that 'Shakespeare could have seen a manuscript of Florio's translation which… was evidently in circulation well before the first printing' (xxxi–ii).[7] 'Could have…', certainly, as Shakespeare 'could have' encountered Montaigne in the original French, as Capell had once concluded. The final version (the 'C text') of the *Essais* and the basis of Florio's version had been published posthumously in 1595 and contained Montaigne's own last additions before his death in 1592. While it may be one of the most philosophically suggestive works of the Shakespearean oeuvre, *Hamlet* raises complex

editorial problems making it difficult to fix (in any current sense) a 'publication date' and it will always prove hard to disentangle the exact degree of Shakespeare's responsibility when the hand of the author is typically corrupted by scribal interventions, genuine and would-be corrections, or the transcription errors identified, proposed, imagined, or confuted in the combination of 'good' or 'bad' Quartos and the posthumous 1623 Folio of Heming and Condell.[8] Such perplexities are addressed by the great traditions of Shakespearean editorial scholarship that began in the eighteenth century and are a minefield of controversy even today.[9] The textual instability marks the difficulties of demonstrating beyond reasonable doubt the relationship between an old 'riffe-raffe' play-text and the prestigiously printed essays of the celebrated foreigner.

That the difficulties are often overlooked, as cautioned by Stuart Gillespie in *Shakespeare's Books*, is because much that seems like evidence of Montaigne's influence on Shakespeare consists of moral-philosophical '*loci communes*'. Accidental similarities cannot be ruled out; nor can common cultural roots, and while Gillespie allows that there is 'scope for further investigation', he concludes that, with the exception of *The Tempest*, there is nothing to confirm that Shakespeare was following Montaigne in any line, character, speech, scene, or play (Gillespie (2004: 347)). As Hamlin observes, putative instances of Montaignian influence upon Shakespeare are usually 'quite speculative' (Hamlin (2013: 10)). And yet what cannot be proved may still be significant philosophically. To satisfy this need to account for connections that ought to exist but can't be proved, Terence Cave has constructed 'a quasi-allegorical counter-factual story in which Montaigne, as the representative of a particular kind of discursive thought (essaying, trial-thinking), encounters and virtually changes places with Shakespeare, the thinking dramatist and poet' (Cave (2007: 117–19)). Cave imagines Montaigne travelling to England in the company of his *fille d'alliance* Marie de Gournay, learning English from Florio, attending the theatre, and actually meeting Shakespeare. Such blatant fancifulness is a wry rebuke to an empiricist appropriation of the problem so that while Shakespeare never alludes by name to Montaigne the inference to be drawn from the literary-historical fairy tale is suggestive. We tune in instinctively to a newly fashionable text, and it seems possible – probable even – that Montaigne was a subject of discussion in Shakespearean circles.

(Shakespeare's friend and fellow playwright Ben Jonson is said to have owned a copy of Florio, whose original had appeared at a point where Shakespeare's career had begun to realize its full potential.[10])

Granted, the connections identified by philosophers suggest allusion to whole philosophical doctrines (such as scepticism), and they recall topics or themes from the *Essayes*. But because the thought must often appear in dramatic form, we see and hear the thinking as we judge the thinker and the thinker's plight. 'Always interested in ideas', writes Charles Martindale in 'Shakespeare Philosophus', '[Shakespeare] is always also attentive to the questions of who uses them, in what circumstances, to what ends, and with what degree of conviction' (Martindale (2007: 46–7)). In a recent essay for the *Cambridge Quarterly* Fred Parker has evinced a sense of Shakespeare's 'argument' with Montaigne on terms which recognize this complication (subsumed in Sebastian's counter to Gonzalo), and he suggests that the evidence 'makes it tenable, perhaps plausible, to suppose that Shakespeare was reading Montaigne with close attention in the 1600s' (Parker (1999: 2)).[11] The note of caution (and the non-particular dating – 'the 1600s') may be needed; but the verdict enables a move from the concept of 'embedded' ideas to a more active textual relationship. In his 'dialogue' with Montaigne Shakespeare manifests 'thought', according to Parker, even as he thinks in drama.

Drama, process, and major form

Such evidence of Cave's 'instruments of dramatic thought' will include questions alongside propositions, theories, or stated, pre-existent ideas 'contained' in the plays and excerptible from them for separate philosophical contemplation or comparative treatment under the aspect of themes. Can sexual jealousy combined with credulity really lead to these unspeakable events? Would you really commit bloody murder with the dagger you will soon see before you to enjoy the power and influence of a king, forgetting you would have to live with your conscience thereafter? Yes, apparently, on both counts. Shakespeare suggests the value of the clear thinking esteemed by philosophers when he furnishes such ample case studies of what confused or insane thinking sounds like as speech – as when we encounter Lear on the heath with blasted mind (played alongside

the nonsensical Fool who both needles and consoles him) or the perverted reason of Othello as he warms to the idiotic act of domestic violence that puts an end to his wife. Like Montaigne, Shakespeare is perpetually curious about the perplexing logic of situations. Why, for example, should Hamlet resent his mother's complicity in the murder of his father by his uncle if his mother did not know that Claudius had any such role and there is no evidence that she suspected? Is it Hamlet's searing visualization of her having sex with Claudius that condemns her, or does the speed of her marriage suggest a prior infidelity that he cannot countenance? Such questions may be raised but are not always answered by any explicit formulations – by 'ideas' or 'thought' capable of standing independent of the unfathomed situations that produce them.

Samuel Johnson is good on the many things in *Hamlet* that do not make sense, or are not explained, and which leave us perplexed:

> 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.

> (Johnson (1968, 8: 1011))

Johnson can suggest an unphilosophical negligence of narrative and moral logic characteristic of Shakespeare. But this propensity to not-making-sense describes the chaotic world of nature and of mind that Shakespeare and Montaigne knew well. For Montaigne, as McGinn has observed, the self is in a state of constant flux and internal differentiation: 'We are entirely made up of bits and pieces', he quotes Montaigne as saying, 'woven together so shapelessly that each of them pulls its own way at every moment. And there is as much difference between us and ourselves as there is between us and other people' (McGinn (2006: 38))[12] – hence the 'philosophical' observation tendered by Jaques from the famous speech in *As You Like It* (II.vii. 142) that 'one man in his time plays many parts'. The dialogue between 'us and ourselves', that of a mind divided in

two, appears again in the dramatic eruptions of conscience, or consciousness, of Richard III:

> What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.
> Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I.
> Is there a murtherer here? No. Yes, I am.
> Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why –
> Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?
> Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good
> That I myself have done myself?
> O no! Alas, I rather hate myself
> For hateful deeds committed by myself.
> I am a villain; yet I lie, I am not.
> Fool, of thyself speak well; fool, do not flatter.

(Richard III, V.iii. 182–92)

Neither here nor elsewhere may there exist satisfactory proof of philosophical 'influence' or 'debt', but such psychological fissures also draw attention to the relations between Montaigne's sense of a mind in conflict with itself and the personality transformations of *Hamlet*. They produce their effect, as Johnson has described, in the shifting inconsequentialities of the whole play but are equally reflected in the internally self-dividing nature of dramatic form, where range and differentiation of characters are famous Shakespearean traits.

Montaigne's '*ondoyant et divers*' personality finds its dramatic analogy in a Shakespearean authorial self comprising variously imagined autonomous individuals whose philosophies are Shakespeare's in one sense and not in another. Though their 'character' may be developed to varying degrees, their thoughts are no one's but Shakespeare's; yet they cannot be attributed to him to the extent that we could hold him *personally* to account for them. Examples include the political philosophy of Ulysses on degree in *Troilus and Cressida* (I.iii. 75–137), Cleopatra's sublimating valediction as she receives the poison fangs of an asp (V.ii. 280–313), or portentous, possibly vacuous truths that have the ring of sage philosophical absolutes such as 'Ripeness is all', 'Kingdoms are clay', or 'Nothing is but what is not' (*King Lear*, V.ii. 11; *Antony and Cleopatra*, I.i. 35; *Macbeth*, I.iii. 141–2). While Montaigne's 'thought' is more than the

sum of his statements, we seem to know, because Montaigne tells us so, what Montaigne thinks. But we can be under no illusion that the words spoken by his characters are – or are necessarily – what Shakespeare thinks. We follow the thinking that Shakespeare could think by hearing what he makes such characters say; but they are not advocates of his convictions. These, such as he held them, have gone with him to the grave.

There may be many acknowledged 'topicks of human disquisition' (Johnson: (1968), 7: 87) that Shakespeare shares with Montaigne (jealousy, conscience, filial sympathy, etc.), and this has ensured that the two writers can be compared under the aspect of philosophy. We can never know with certainty how far Shakespeare and Montaigne ever thought the same thing. They are divided by what Tzachi Zamir calls the 'issues at stake' in the 'two distinct outlooks of philosophy and literature' (Zamir (2007: xv)); yet many commentators can't help but experience Shakespeare re-playing Montaigne philosophically. 'Is there a philosopher here?', writes Colin Burrow in his 'Why Shakespeare Is Not Michelangelo': 'There is certainly something productive of thinking, and produced by thinking: but it is thinking as a process rather than as a result' (Burrow (2007: 20)). If Shakespeare is not Michelangelo, or not like him, the experience of process nevertheless suggests how Shakespeare resembles Montaigne in a dramatic sense of the philosophical.

There is nothing new about this understanding of Shakespeare's power nor the independence of his moral and philosophical effects from the force of statement. 'Every man', Samuel Johnson wrote in 1765, 'finds his mind more strongly seized by the tragedies of Shakespeare than of any other writer; others please us by particular speeches, but he always makes us anxious for the event' (Johnson (1968), 7: 83)). In the Preface to his edition, Johnson's predecessor Alexander Pope had acknowledged the link between Shakespeare's philosophic skill and the insights that are owing to his unfettered creativity:

> Nor does he only excel in the Passions: In the coolness of Reflection and Reasoning he is full as admirable. His *Sentiments* are not only in general the most pertinent and judicious upon every subject; but by a talent very peculiar, something between Penetration and Felicity, he hits upon that particular point on which the bent of each argument turns, or the force of each motive depends. … he seems to have

known the word by Intuition, to have look'd thro' humane nature at one glance, and to be the only Author that gives ground for a very new opinion, That the Philosopher and even the Man of the world, may be Born, as well as the Poet. … When he treats of Ethic or Politic, we may constantly observe a wonderful justness of distinction as well as extent of comprehension.

<div align="right">(Pope (1986 [1725], 2: 14, 18))</div>

This is a powerful recognition of Shakespeare's philosophical astuteness, achieved by 'a talent very peculiar' and by his capacity to 'hit […] upon' the logical turning point of an argument. Shakespeare is no 'penseur'. Indeed, as intimated by Pope, his philosophical effects may sometimes seem without pre-meditated intellectual involvement, as inspired and *unthinking* acts of genius in which he does not know, or need to know, what he is doing, any more than some of the characters he portrays. Montaigne for his part (as in his 'Apology for Raimond de Sebonde') turns against the philosophical platitudes of his generation and can famously announce that 'je ne suis pas philosophe'.[13] Neither address what they have to say to an audience exclusively made up of fellow intellectuals. 'There is more willfulnesse and wrangling among them, than pertains to a sacred profession', writes Montaigne of philosophers in 'That to Philosophize Is to Learn How to Die' (Florio (1603), 'The First Booke', Ch. 19: 73).

We have seen that Shakespeare and Montaigne serve a mutually explanatory role, and that the study of their relations is rich in intriguing possibilities and speculative life; the possibilities are sometimes the more intriguing as they depend on inconclusive evidence. Thus Montaigne's scepticism, stoicism, Epicureanism, and the frozen fragments of these '-isms' can be seen to unfreeze as themes, statements, speeches, hypotheses, or situations in such dramatic forms as *Hamlet*, just as Jonathan Bate, in order to weight the philosophical credentials of his analysis, asks us to think about Shakespeare's Enobarbus in Epicurean terms (Bate (2008: 423)). The generic difference between the two writers does not eliminate the invitation to make comparisons on grounds of 'cognitive content'; likewise the echoes of Montaigne's 'content' heard in Shakespeare are usually unconvincing as 'sources'. These echoes are not simply imagined; but I conclude that the content of philosophical interest shared with Montaigne does too little – at the right level – to explain how

Shakespeare's plays are both dramatic experiences and 'full of ideas'. I suggest rather that the elements conducive to Shakespeare's 'instruments of thought' are best appreciated within the spirit of Montaigne's assault on the hard boundaries of philosophy's definitions and results. This spirit marks the last essay in his series, 'De l'Experience', and the philosophic comparability with Shakespeare I favour derives from both writers' tendency to withhold the conceptual consequence of thinking to foreground the experience that brings concepts into being.

Related topics

See Chapters 3, 8, 40

Notes

1 I have in my turn attempted to draw attention to the literary resonance of Montaigne's reflective practice in the very period of English literary history – the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – when Shakespeare was canonized. This is not least through the demonstrable influence of Montaigne on the writings of both Dryden and Pope and their heirs and successors at a time when his *Essais* was a banned book in France. The fact that Montaigne could have such a rich and pervasive influence within the literary life of Samuel Johnson's Augustan milieu assists our sense of a convergence with the human meaning of Shakespeare that the eighteenth century brought out. (Smallwood (2015: 55–76)).
2 Hamlin argues that Florio succeeded in bringing the text of the *Essais* closer to the theatrical tastes of an English audience.
3 'Que Philosopher C'Est Apprendre à Mourir' is Chapitre 20 in the original.
4 Shakespeare (1997: 599). All subsequent quotations from Shakespeare in this chapter are taken from this edition.
5 Arnold (1964: 170). See also Feis (1970).

6 Capell observes that the Gonzalo speech 'prove[s] the writer's acquaintance with one he has not been trac'd in by any, annotator or editor; for thus old Montaigne, speaking of the Indian discovery and of the new people's manners, – C'est une Nation, diray-je a Platon, en laquelle il n'y a *aucune esperance de trafiq, nul cognoissance de Lettres,* nulle science de nombres, *nul nom de Magistrat*, ny de superiorité politique, *nul usage de service, de richesse, ou de pauvreté, nulls contracts, nulls successions, nulls partages, nulls occupations qu'oysives,* nul respect de parenté que commun, nulls vestements, *nulle agriculture, nul metal, nul usage de vin ou de bled. Les paroles mesmes, qui signifient* le mensonge, *la trahison,* la dissimulation, l'avarice, l'envie, la detraction, le pardon, *inouyes.* Combien trouveroit il la Republique qu'il a imaginée, loin de cette perfection?' (*Essais de* Montaigne, 3. *Vol.* 12°. 1659. Bruxelles, *Vol.* Ist. p. 270.) The person who shall compare this passage with the translations of it that were extant in Shakespeare's time, will see reason to think he read it in French'.

7 Florio's translation was entered in the Stationer's Register in 1600.

8 'The history of the text of *Hamlet* is very complex. Techniques of scholarly inquiry grow more subtle, but as yet they have achieved no certainty on some issues crucial to the task of editing *Hamlet*' (Shakespeare (1997: 1184)).

9 On this history, see Jarvis (1995).

10 The copy of the Florio translation reputedly owned by Ben Jonson is in the British Library.

11 The point is also made by McGinn: 'Was [Shakespeare] perhaps quoting a favorite author precisely to show his disagreement with him on a particular point?' (McGinn (2006: 148)).

12 McGinn quotes from Montaigne (1991: 380).

13 Livre 3, Chapitre 9, 'De la Vanité', 950 ('C' text).

Further reading

Langer, U., ed. 2005. *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.The Companion is an informed and learned selection of essays on aspects of

Montaigne, his thought, life, themes, intellectual and cultural context, and reputation by prominent specialists in the field of Montaigne studies and the European Renaissance.

Bakewell, S., 2010. *How to Live: A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer*. London: Vintage.This is a superbly readable, while still scholarly, account of the enduring humanistic significance and vitality of Montaigne by an accomplished biographer.

Mack, P., 2010. *Reading and Rhetoric in Montaigne and Shakespeare*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.This excellent investigation of the subject offers comparative readings of passages from Montaigne and Shakespeare.

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2

THE (NEW AND OLD) METAPHYSICAL READING OF SHAKESPEARE

Géza Kállay

What is a metaphysical reading?

By the (new) 'metaphysical reading of Shakespeare' I mean reading his texts asking how he may inform our lives when we expect to find in his dramas and poems presentations of human problems which we consider to be deep and fundamental.[1] I take those problems to be 'deep' and 'fundamental' which may – directly or indirectly – have an effect on our very being. A main characteristic of such profound questions is that they do not disappear even if we gain new empirical evidence or information about them, information or evidence that can be evaluated with our five senses (i.e. these questions are not eliminable through empiricist means). Whether old Hamlet's Ghost is standing in front of the door can be empirically resolved: I open the door and have a look. Whether it is possible that old Hamlet's Ghost appear at all, which logically implies asking whether ghosts are possible, cannot be: there is no straightforward empirical answer to these questions (although of course empirical considerations may play some role in deciding them). Such 'deep' and 'fundamental' questions also include first and foremost what it means to be human; how we are related to our language and our other modes of representation – in what portrayals, visuals, pictures, images, symbols, sentences, modal attitudes we relate to the world and how we see the world related to us; on what we put the burden of meaning (what we appoint as responsible for being and remaining meaningful). Is it the external world? Is it truth and falsity? Our concepts? Our intentions? The web of language itself? Our actions and practices? Our metaphysical concerns may also include what constitutes our actions and the events befalling us; what level of certainty we can attain and which sceptical scenarios are relevant to undermine (or precisely to build) knowledge;[2] how 'make-believe' ('art', 'fiction', i.e. 'willed non-reality') relates to what for better or worse we call 'reality'; how we shape time and how time shapes us, since we are temporal beings with a beginning (birth) and an end (death), who are aware of, and can reflect on, this; how we relate to powers greater than us, be these social-historical and/or transcendental/supernatural (or both); how much of our selves, including our gender roles, we can identify as 'typical human nature', which part of our nature may be called 'unique', and how much of both of these is constructed by

external forces and in what way; how we can enter into meaningful personal human relationships, including those between parents and children, adults and youth, between siblings, partners, friends, rivals, enemies – 'decisive questions of life' all of us have to face sometimes, certainly in moments of crisis.

My insistence that such queries should be called *metaphysical* comes from the prompt that questions of the above kind occur in books on metaphysics, from introductory works to ones discussing very subtle, technical issues, although they surely do not exhaust the whole range of possible metaphysical issues.[3] In contemporary philosophy, both in the long Continental tradition of metaphysics that – since the Kantian turn – has grown out of history and phenomenology as well as in the resurgence, from around the 1970s, of analytical metaphysics, emerging from logic and the analysis of language, 'metaphysical study' includes the investigation of reality (realism, anti-realism, foundationalism, anti-foundationalism, fictionalism, etc.), universals and particulars, (self)-identity, truth and falsity, space and time, causation, agents and events, free will, necessity, possibility, B/being (ontology), and, for some, even *nothingness*, anxiety (*Angst*), some ontologically relevant moral questions,[4] race, supernatural intelligence, and God. This is not a complete inventory, but these reoccur, I have found, most frequently. What distinguishes the questions I raised at the beginning of my chapter from problems treated in books on metaphysics proper is that in the latter there is far more rigour, (logical) argumentation, systematization, and, in the analytic tradition, formalization. But a question is not metaphysical with respect to the method we adopt to treat it; it is metaphysical by virtue of its subject matter.

Macbeth

Thus, by metaphysical investigation I mean – quoting Thomas Hofweber – the study of 'what reality is like in general', its central part being 'what kind of things make up reality' (Hofweber (2016: 1)). Or, to follow Kit Fine, an eminent analytical metaphysician, metaphysics is an enquiry into the *nature*[5] of these phenomena (being, representation, language, agency, action, event, knowledge, reality, non-reality, time, self, identity, the Other). Then, in turn, we may ask what these problems consist of in the light of Shakespearean texts. Yet, clearly, several, perhaps all, of these questions have been asked in various ways in the various approaches to Shakespeare in the past 400 years. For example, it would be wrong to suppose that the dominating paradigm of today, New Historicism and/or Cultural Materialism,[6] would not be interested in the nature of *time* when studying Shakespeare texts in the social-political-cultural milieu of Early Modern England. Where I would like to see a metaphysical reading differing from other approaches to Shakespeare is in the question regarding, for example, 'time' having, if we put it metaphysically, an *onset* and a *coda* (or an upbeat and an aftermath). The *onset* concerns the conditions that make the emergence of a certain attitude to time and the use of the word 'time' in a certain context possible. Rather than taking *time* to be a self-evident concept, we ask where and how the word obtains its 'licence', its credit, the

authorization to be used in a particular text and *con*text. The context here will be Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Macbeth, after having met the witches for the second time, i.e. after the cauldron scene, says: 'Time, thou anticipat'st my dread exploits, / The flighty purpose never is o'ertook / unless the deed go with it' (4.1.143–5).[7] This is a reaction to the piece of news given by Lennox that Macduff has fled to England. The paraphrase could be something like this: 'Time, you deal with my most feared deeds beforehand (earlier than I can)', where the word 'exploits' suggests deeds from which somebody has profit; one could say: *exploits* are 'invested deeds'. It seems that what Macbeth here calls time is – simply – what is going on 'in general': that people come and go – for example, Macduff has fled to England and joined the enemy, most probably Malcolm (like the previous Thane of Cawdor joined forces with Norway to attack King Duncan). Yet this *time* – personified and addressed in intimate terms: 'thou' – is 'knowledgeable', 'keen' time, who is well informed and has intelligence before Macbeth could carry out lucrative deeds, which, in turn, are dreaded, perhaps feared even by him, too. That Macbeth's own (future) deeds might fill even him with awe is suggested to me by a sentence in his first monologue: 'Present fears / Are less than horrible imaginings' (1.3.139–40). Thus, the point concerning time with respect to Macduff's departure seems to be that it is not Macbeth who is reading time but time who is reading Macbeth, which sounds fearful in itself. Some 'agent' knows more about Macbeth than he does; he is constituted not totally in himself but somewhere else, too, and here this external force is presented as *time*. Then an inference follows, which sounds like a general principle or maxim: 'The flighty purpose never is o'ertook / Unless the deed go with it'. We should notice the present subjunctive: *deed go with it*, suggesting that the deed *should* go with something. Here this 'something' is *flighty*, i.e. 'swift', perhaps 'unstable', 'volatile', *purpose.* Then the sentence means something like this: 'Only if the deed immediately fulfils the purpose, shall what we do catch up with what we want', i.e. deed and purpose, act and goal should coincide; when the purpose is born, the act should instantly achieve it. The editors of the most recent Arden *Macbeth*, Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason, remark in their interpretative footnote: 'in this case *purpose* is not (and cannot logically be) overtaken by *deed*' (Clark & Mason (2015: 246)). To me, the point of Macbeth's sentence precisely seems to be that *unless ordinary logic*, i.e. unless the logic that reflects the ontological state of affairs as we are used to it, *is upset*, goals will never be reached. The upset to ordinary logic might be, for example, that the deed is simultaneous with forming the purpose of doing it, or that the deed precedes the purpose. Here is another instance in the play when *time* is represented both as a (knowledgeable, well-informed) process (knowing its own 'future', including what Macbeth would like to see accomplished in this future) and as an instant, a moment that flares up, this moment here embodied in the *deed* (one of the key words of the play). Another instance is when Lady Macbeth says to her husband arriving from the battlefield: 'Thy letters have transported me beyond / This ignorant present, and I feel now / The future in the instant' (1.5.56–8). Here Clark's and Mason's paraphrase is very helpful: '[I feel here and now] the future, as if it were happening now' (Clark & Mason (2015: 158)). We should also note that here *time* is, once again, seen in epistemological categories: the *present* is *presented* to us as something

which is precisely *ignorant* – 'unknowing, uninformed' (158) – suggesting, again, that the future, turning into the present here and now, will instruct it.[8] It is also significant that here it is Lady Macbeth who seems to be reading time and not the other way around. Even one of the many possible interpretations of the famous closing line of Macbeth's first monologue: 'And nothing is, but what is not' (1.3.144) may be that the present has become a vacuum and what is not yet here but what is in the future may be able to fill this emptiness (Kállay (MS)).

These I take to be some (of course by far not all) of the conditions of the uses of *time* in *Macbeth*, whereby we can provide a sketch of the nature of time (what time is) in the play. Or, in line with metaphysician Frank Jackson, I would like to propose that the first step taken by an inquiry into the metaphysics of time in *Macbeth* is 'addressing the question of what to say about matters described in one set of terms *given* a story about matters in another set of terms' (Jackson (1998: 44)), i.e. how *time,* as, for example, we ordinarily use the word, looks in terms of the uses to which it is put in the text of *Macbeth.*

Onset, *coda*, and 'metaphysics' in Shakespeare

Thus, the *onset* of the serious and deep human question is paying close attention to what uses of a word (an expression, a sentence) are possible in particular contexts, what the limits of applying the word meaningfully to situations seem to be, and how we usually and generally provide meaning for a word so that it makes sense rather than nonsense, i.e. how words function in the system of language and our communal language-games. The answers will not so much tell us what exists and what does not but what a phenomenon consists *in*, *how* it happens to exist. Since what I have been doing above comes, I guess, close to what is traditionally labelled as good old 'exegesis', or 'close reading', or what Marjorie Garber has recently called 'reading in slow motion',[9] I conclude that as far as method is concerned, a metaphysical reading starts with, is 'engendered in', close reading.

Let us see how Shakespearean texts are related to the very word *metaphysics*. This word occurs once in his plays: in *The Taming of the Shrew,* Tranio, Lucentio's servant, presents a catalogue of courses his master may attend at the University of Padua and advises him that 'The mathematics and the metaphysics, / Fall to them as you find your stomach serves you' (1.1.331–2) (Shakespeare (2010)), i.e. he should 'eat' from them only if he can digest them. Here *metaphysics* most probably refers to Aristotle's famous book – in a way, to 'Metaphysics proper', the work of the founding father of this line of enquiry – and what is implied is no more than the insight that metaphysics – akin to mathematics – is difficult. More interesting is the occurrence of the word *metaphysical* (also a *hapax legomenon* in the oeuvre) – in *Macbeth.* Lady Macbeth, upon reading her husband's letter, ends her first monologue in the conviction that Macbeth seems to have already been 'crowned' by 'fate' and some 'metaphysical aid' (1.5.17, 28–30) – here *metaphysical* means 'supernatural' (Clark & Mason (2015: 155); Braunmuller (2008: 140)), suggesting that the metaphysical has some 'other worldly', 'transcendental'

dimensions. Thus, as opposed to *time*, Shakespeare's uses of *metaphysics* do not go beyond ordinary uses of the word in Early Modern England. This – even the absence of further occurrences – is of course informative too, yet it does not colour the metaphysical interpretation of Shakespeare considerably.

So much about the *onset*, but what is the *coda* to the question asked metaphysically, here concerning the nature of time? The *coda* is asking how we find ourselves after we have perhaps understood something from the nature of time in *Macbeth*. We may ask how Shakespeare may inform our everyday lives and whether we have gained some *personal meaning* from having been exposed to an encounter with the text. By 'personal meaning' I do not suggest that, into our interpretation, we should directly insert some private past episodes of our lives or any kind of confessional 'self-exposure', or that we should draw some moralizing 'lessons'. Hamlet's optimism when planning 'The Murder of Gonzago' in front of Claudius is indeed far-fetched (although it is not impossible that at least for some the theatre works this way, and that we would be in a better world if it did for many of us): 'Hum – 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 proclaim'd their malefaction.' (2.2.584–8). As regards personal meaning, we may remain satisfied with 'being struck to the soul'; public 'proclamations' embarrass both speakers and listeners.

Stanley Cavell's metaphysics and 'becoming transcendental'

My idea of personal meaning is based on the philosophical-literary standpoint of Stanley Cavell (especially Cavell (1987)), working in a basically Wittgensteinean framework.[10] I would like to insist that the *coda* (or aftermath) of the metaphysical questions should be the reflection on the realm of our personal meanings, because I am convinced that what we read on the page or see on the stage can become *lived experience* (in the phenomenological sense: *Erlebnis*) only this way; we can thus contribute to what Cavell calls 'animating' our dead concepts (Cavell (1987: 7)). From early on, and precisely through reading Shakespeare (especially *King Lear* and *Othello* but also of course Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*), Cavell noticed a gap which separates us, in spite of all efforts to understand one another, from the written or spoken texts of everyone. This gap I am inclined to call metaphysical; it is there because we are separated from one another both physically and mentally (spiritually). It is in this – existential, ontological – separatedness that our scepticism grows, which is not just disbelieving or not believing in this or that but an overall, overarching scepticism we cast upon the whole world and everybody, with the force of a certain kind of 'universal quantification', an existential crisis which is also the root – one of the roots – of our human tragedies.

Separatedness is eminently a metaphysical problem because it is one of the best examples where more (empirical) evidence will never convince the sceptic. The sceptic does not lack information; on the contrary, she may have more information than she really needs. Yet she sees all evidence from a perspective which will always already

arrange the scenario in a way that justifies and confirms her very perspective, methodically eradicating (or simply remaining ignorant of) anything to the contrary. If I go to the dentist and he keeps saying he does not acknowledge that I have a toothache, I might be wriggling on the floor with pain and he can still say that I'm a very good actor. If I confess my love to someone and she stubbornly does not believe me, is there anything I can do? All the criteria of someone (me) being in pain or love are *there*; what is at stake is nothing factual. It is my sincerity, honesty, my *meaning* what I say, which is either acknowledged by the Other or not.

For Cavell, Othello's jealousy can be seen as an extreme form of scepticism which is metaphysical in the sense I am using *metaphysical* here: it cuts to the core of the Moor's being; it – as Macbeth would put it – 'shakes so [his] single state of man' (*Macbeth*, 1.3.142) that – as Othello himself gives voice to it – 'Chaos is come again' (*Othello*, 3.3.92) (Shakespeare (1997)). And further: 'But there where I have garnered up my heart, / Where I either must live or bear no life, / The fountain from which my current runs / Or dries up – to be discarded thence!' (4.2.58–61). It has been extremely useful to evaluate Othello in racial and gender terms, to situate the play in the light of Early Modern English marriages, to point out the common subordination of women to men in Shakespeare's time,[11] but – and precisely because the historical facts New Historicism has provided us with are true and valuable – there is, in comparison with, and emerging from, historical reality, the everyday drama: how Othello and Desdemona take what they are going through, what his blackness means for Othello personally, how they see their differences in terms of possibilities of partnership, of love, of disappointment, of family, of (family) violence, of revenge at all. The personal, residing in the individual, is inseparable from the communal; nobody exists in a vacuum. But the communal, as a 'common denominator' of shared values, forms of life, regulating institutions is dead without individuals, and it is precisely because of one of our institutional language-games that, for example, we usually presuppose the free will of individuals, otherwise we could not hold them responsible for their deeds.

Thus, what New Historicism has so helpfully accumulated should be dipped in and measured up by our personal meanings. One of the connections between characters on the page or stage and me may be that as a reader and a member of the audience, I can leave my particularity behind, and, while retaining my uniqueness, I can also become an example of the human (like a figure in a novel or drama can). My particularity includes, for example, which country I was born into, who my parents were, how old I happen to be now, and so on, i.e. conditions I cannot change, or which are hard to change after a while – for example, the profession I have chosen. My uniqueness contains my features that, at least in *this* combination, can hardly ever be reproduced and which distinguish me from everybody else; these are my characteristics for which, for example, others like or dislike me, or find 'typically me', etc. Becoming 'examples of the human' involves some degree of abstraction and generalization.

When we abstract and generalize, without which no thinking is possible, and we leave particular historical reality and the special case of Othello and Desdemona behind in order to typify it and apply it to our cases, we rely on that characteristic of the work of art which was identified by Immanuel Kant as one of the most important traits of the

aesthetic itself. Put simply, according to Kant, in judging something, for example, beautiful, I also judge that others should find it beautiful.[12] In a parallel fashion, a particular story with particular people may lay claim to be examples of transcendental, universal validity: the story may become a work of art. So the transcendental-universal movement is to be seen as an *aesthetic* one as well. Art is a special realm where existential quantification may immediately imply universal quantification. Personal meaning is neither the particular nor the transcendental; it rather emerges in witnessing the *process* of going from the particular to the universal and the transcendental (and, inevitably, as I will claim, back). *Transcendental* here does not mean some obscure, other-worldly, supernatural territory; it means that we are thought of in terms of the typical, 'idealized', 'reified' features of a 'human being', as we, for example, talk about the traits of an 'expert medical doctor', an 'accomplished actor', an 'exemplary teacher', a 'backsliding criminal', a 'cautious driver', etc. (e.g. a textbook for medical students will try to do its best to collect the criteria of the 'expert physician'). However, the universal and the transcendental remain firmly riveted to the particular; the particular functions as the permanent resource, as – in Merleau-Ponty's terms – the 'wild region' of sense-making.[13] This relationship is somewhat akin to the literal-metaphorical (of course far from simple) dependency: metaphorical meanings 'build on' the 'ruins' of the literal meaning, but they always reach back to more and more components of the literal, while the literal also gets reinterpreted in the light of the metaphorical meanings.

The transcendental will take its energy from the (often metonymically exploited) 'down-to-earth', concrete, (quasi-)physical, material particular. For example, Macbeth the murderer becomes the 'typical' tragic hero through seeing the blood of Duncan – like Lady Macbeth in the famous sleep-walking scene – as a permanent, everlasting stain on his hand: 'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash the blood / Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas incarindate, / Making the green, one red' (2.2.61–4). The concreteness of 'this my hand' functions like the trees of Birnam Wood, evoked by 'The Third Apparition': 'Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until / Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him' (4.1.91–3). Literally, Macbeth is right in claiming that 'That will never be', since it is indeed impossible that 'the tree / Unfix his earth-bound root' (4.1.994–5). Still, the Weïrd Sisters did 'lie like truth' (5.5.43), because in a metonymical-metaphorical sense, the trees did go up to Dunsinane: Duncan's son Malcolm wishes to hide the size of his army attacking Macbeth, ordering every solider to 'hew him down a bough / And bear't before him' (5.4.4–5). In *Macbeth* – and in lots of other works of art – parts of the body (the hand, the eye), 'instruments' of a soldier (the dagger, the sword), etc. stand for wholes, and the metonymical relations enter another, metaphorical level of meaning, giving rise to such transcendental senses as 'the villain, the criminal as tragic hero', 'deception through equivocation', 'violating the order of being', and the like. Other instances of this process abound.

The goal of a metaphysical reading, as I would like to interpret it, is precisely not to find 'shared' 'universal' or 'transcendental' values in Shakespeare. The universal and the transcendental are just necessary thoroughfares to the personal, to our uniqueness. The main point is that the *metaphysical gap* between me and the Other (be this a person or a

text) Cavell has identified can only be bridged by *me* – more precisely, by the personal in me: in my growing intimacy with, and my acknowledgement of, the territory the Other wishes to occupy. Nobody and nothing else but I can bridge this gap – no further 'theory', no further 'historical knowledge', no 'new information'. We should not turn 'a metaphysical finitude', a gap, 'into an intellectual', epistemological 'lack' (Cavell (1987: 138)).

'Old' metaphysics

The idea that the reading I am proposing here might be called 'metaphysical' first occurred to me when coming across an essay by a New Historicist, Jonathan Crewe. In a heated debate, the details of which are irrelevant here, Crewe remarks: 'his [Cavell's] performance belongs to a traditional and even metaphysical mode that can hardly be pronounced bankrupt while it produces the results Cavell can get out of it' (Crewe (1991: 613)), and further: 'Cavell's repeatedly foregrounded and distinctly modernist preoccupation with the "problem of scepticism" – his recapitulation of Wittgenstein's big problem of language – needs to be read in conjunction with, or even as contained within, a traditional metaphysic' (614). In a footnote, Crewe also gives the names of some thinkers who might be recognized as 'metaphysical predecessors': 'It has quite often been said, not unintelligibly, that Cavell alone in our time has lived up to the grand tradition of the "Shakespeare critic" established by such luminaries as Coleridge, Bradley, and Wilson Knight' (615).

A paper on the metaphysical reading of Shakespeare should indeed include the predecessors; of course I can only provide a brief sketch. Looking back on the tradition will also properly demonstrate how many meanings the word *metaphysical* may have. I think that the metaphysical reading of Shakespeare started in Romanticism, more precisely in its 'linguistic turn'. This 'turn' occurred as a reaction to Kant's famous synthesis, which was a blend of enlightened classicism and critically evaluated traditional (Cartesian, nominalist) metaphysics. In the work of Hamann, Herder, Humboldt, Schelling, Hölderlin, the Schlegel brothers, Schleiermacher, Novalis, and even Hegel, the problem of language had become a central concern.[14] Thus, the function of literature changed considerably as well: poetry ceased to be the imitation of Nature following classical, well-defined genres and the rewriting of great works. Poetry (one type of poetry) 'ran wild': it became the self-expression of the 'genius' who re-animates the world and can probe into the essences of phenomena; and although formal requirements of poetry were still observed, the poet wished to be no less than the Creator's co-author, who in his poetic language intimates that kind of knowledge which no ordinary or scientific undertaking could ever communicate. The Romantic attitude to language had, once again, something Socrates–Plato feared in the *Republic:* it had a very unique epistemological claim, a claim to 'real' knowledge, the knowledge of 'essences', to 'the Truth', which, as for Plato, was the same as Beauty and the Good. And Shakespeare, in Romanticism, was identified as the one – for many, the *only* one – who was able to bring his claim to effect in the most perfect way.

For example, F. W. Schelling in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* insists that 'it is art alone which can succeed in objectifying with universal validity what the philosopher is able to present in a merely subjective fashion' (Schelling (1978: 232)). Among the arts, as Schelling later argues in his lectures on *The Philosophy of Art*, it is language-based 'poesy' which has the most power of objectification, and the artistic genre 'that should be the final synthesis of all poesy is [...] drama' (Schelling (1989: 250)). Since, as Schelling claims, the supreme form of drama is tragedy and the best master of tragedy, combining it with comic elements, is Shakespeare, it is Shakespearean tragedy and, it seems, for Schelling, it is *Macbeth* (269–71) that is able to show the absolute truth of human essence (existence) best. Shakespearean tragedy is not just 'drama', or a 'genre', or 'a play in the theatre': it is the highest possible form of understanding Nature, the world, and our place in it.

Schelling's avid English reader, S. T. Coleridge (who of course studied several other German thinkers) also hoped to find, somehow, somewhere inside the text, the transcendental nature of reality in Shakespeare's dramas and poems. As Reginald Foakes aptly points out, Coleridge studied especially *The Tempest* with the intention of getting to the bottom of 'dramatic illusion' (Foakes (2013: 135–7)), the 'secret of art' which uses (as we would say today) *fiction* precisely not to lead us away from but to reveal new aspects of 'reality'. 'The sound *sun*, or the figures *s*, *u*, *n*, are purely arbitrary modes of recalling the object' – Coleridge writes in his notes and lectures on Shakespeare –

> and for visual mere objects they are not only sufficient, but have infinite advantages from their very nothingness *per se*. But the language of nature is a subordinate *Logos* that was in the beginning, and was with the thing it represented, and was the thing it represented.
>
> (Coleridge (1884: 39–40))

Coleridge seems to claim that besides the arbitrary, 'nominal' meanings set by social convention, Shakespeare's sentences are simultaneously 'padded' from the inside with 'essential' meanings that are anchored in the very nature of the human universe; Shakespeare's language is 'itself a part of that which it manifests' (40). Alfred Harbage rightfully observes that 'Coleridge's is the criticism with immediacy, the power to evoke the works criticized; when he speaks Shakespeare is there' (Harbage (1969: 25–6)).

A. C. Bradley in his not so much epoch-making as epoch-closing 'landmark' of (nineteenth-century) Shakespeare criticism, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, says that '*Macbeth* was not written for students of metaphysics or theology, but for people at large' (Bradley (1904: 346)). However, at this crux he starts to philosophize on Macbeth's loss of freedom and later on human free will in general. Bradley should be included in the series of metaphysical readers because one of the main ambitions of his book is to stake out proportions of human character (the 'inside'), as opposed to forces external to our being (the 'outside'), which can be held responsible for the loss of the Good in a moral order. For Bradley, the four great tragedies, *Hamlet, Othello, King Lear* and *Macbeth* create a new mythology, in the sense that these dramas may help us rethink the origins of some basic human skills: our ability to speak, act, think, feel, and will. Some scenes of

Shakespeare – for example, the scene where Lear wants Cordelia to speak and she says 'Nothing' (1.1.86) – can be read as a re-enactment of how one learns to speak (Bradley (1904: 24–39)).

'We are in a metaphysical universe' – so G. Wilson Knight declares in his famous *The Wheel of Fire* (Wilson Knight (2001: 51)). In this book, the words *metaphysic(s)* and *metaphysical* occur very – perhaps even too – frequently. There is a whole chapter devoted to 'The Shakespearean Metaphysic'; still, it is not easy to circumscribe what the author means by a reading concentrating on that. It is certainly not an 'ethical' approach (10), and it concentrates neither on dramatic character nor on the plays' historical context but, first and foremost, on the serious, deep poetic language: on 'each play as a visionary whole, close-knit in personification, atmospheric suggestion, and direct poetic symbolism' (11). Knight also tends to regard the aesthetic medium of the poetic text as an epistemological device, reviving the Coleridgean tradition.

'New' metaphysics

Among the more recent metaphysical approaches to Shakespeare, mention should be made of Michael Witmore's brilliant readings of *Twelfth Night*, *King Lear* and *The Tempest* in *Shakespearean Metaphysics*, interpreting these plays from the perspective of three major metaphysicians: Alfred North Whitehead, Henri Bergson, and Baruch Spinoza respectively. What I find most engaging in this book is that Shakespeare is taken as a well-accomplished metaphysician who is a worthy competitor of all three philosophers; he can instruct, just as much as a philosopher may. Witmore's main and convincing thesis is that the way Shakespeare structures these plays indicates an immanent rather than a punctualist thinker. '[A]n immanent reality' – Witmore writes –

> is one in which, the actual world always carries the burden of its own transformations, often through a dynamic process of change whose origins cannot be pinpointed in a single place or time. A metaphysics of immanence thus implies a certain scepticism about our ability to locate punctually all the powers of an individual body or actor within the actor, as if they were a sort of metaphysical luggage that could be carried from one place to the next.

> (Witmore (2008: 12–13))

I have been trying to do something similar, producing parallel readings of Descartes and *Hamlet*, Heidegger and *Othello,* and Lévinas and *Macbeth*.[15]

Tzachi Zamir's (2007) concentrates on the epistemic and the ethical in *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*, yet since he is chiefly engaged with the *possibilities* of knowledge, thoughts, and deeds, perhaps he would not object to being included in the group of metaphysical readers. Besides refreshingly original readings of these tragedies[16] (and one only regrets that comedies have not been included) there is also a very powerful plea for what Zamir calls 'philosophical criticism', i.e. an approach that 'chisels out general meanings from their

material, ideological, or historical context' (Zamir (2007: xiii)). One of his arguments is especially compelling: when answering the charge that philosophical readings bring back old-fashioned character criticism, he remarks:

> the very point of political readings is to give voice to those individuals who suffer, and suffer personally, from cultural hegemonies that repeatedly efface the contingency of the structures they impose. And since suffering determines so much of personal experience, the idea that character analysis is politically defective must be abandoned.

(54)

For Zamir, a major flaw of 'political' (New Historical, Cultural Materialist) criticism is that although it is regularly concerned with moral hierarchies, 'it usually avoids articulating the conceptual stance that justifies them' (54–5). I understand 'articulating the conceptual stance' as the systematic survey of what makes the emergence of certain meanings possible, belonging, as I tried to argue, to the *onset* of metaphysical questions. Or, as Charles Altieri puts it,

> we engage not only in the text but also this sense of who we become by virtue of the qualities of our attention to the text and to what the text mediates as possible worlds. Valuing is a mode of focusing on how the self can attune to what is at stake in imagined situations.

(Altieri (2015: 118))

Or, even further, as Paul A. Kottmann, after a brilliant interpretation of *The Tempest*, says: 'we are no longer acquitted from the obligation to intervene', we are no longer asked to 'represent ourselves' but 'to become ourselves' (Kottmann (2014: 35)).

Conclusion

It is my firm conviction that contemporary Shakespeare studies – more and more concerned, for example, with downright epistemological questions, as Péter Dávidházi has recently pointed out (Dávidházi (2013)) – could benefit immensely from what the metaphysical tradition, both in continental and analytic thought, has treasured up. The method I have tried to outline – a serious, 'big' question, with a close-reading, linguistic *onset*, and a *coda* made up of personal meaning – is of course only one possibility, as, for example, Witmore's approach demonstrates. I have offered a Wittgensteinean perspective, as he is interpreted by Cavell. In my eyes, Cavell is one of the most inspiring Shakespeare readers I have ever encountered. My metaphysical reading – also wishing to be informed by the long tradition of metaphysical interpretations of Shakespeare – does not aspire to 'replace' other schools of reading Shakespeare – for example, New Historicism. On the contrary, it is looking for common ground with them.[17]

Related topics

Notes

1 Thus, the metaphysical reading of Shakespeare belongs of course to the vast 'literature and philosophy' problematic. For a brief but up-to-date survey on the specifically 'Shakespeare and philosophy' topic, see Wilson (2014).

2 This looks like an epistemological question, but it is not entirely that: since certainty is tied to the reality (the existence) of the phenomena that are knowable, most epistemological questions are anchored in metaphysical ones as well, at least indirectly.

3 See, for example, Loux (2002), Nay (2014), and Le Poidevin et al. (2012).

4 Therefore, some ethical readings of Shakespeare share significant interfaces with certain metaphysical approaches – see, for example, Bristol (2000), Eldridge (2016), Gash (2016), Grady (2009), Hagberg (2016), Joughin (2000), and Pierce (2016).

5 'I happen to believe that metaphysics in general is concerned with the nature of things and that questions of reality, in particular, will turn – or turn in part – on the nature of what is taken to be real' (Fine (2016: 3)).

6 See, for example, Veeser (1989) and Sinfield (2006).

7 I am quoting the play according to the most recent Arden edition: Clark & Mason (2015).

8 A parallel can also be drawn between 'flighty purpose' and the 'letters' 'transporting' Lady Macbeth.

9 Garber (2010).

10 Using Wittgenstein for metaphysical purposes could be objected to on the grounds that, as opposed to the approach adopted in the *Tractatus*, he took an anti-metaphysical stance in *Philosophical Investigations*. The sentence usually quoted to substantiate this is: 'What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use' (§ 116) (Wittgenstein (2001: 41)). However, Wittgenstein put this down in a cultural-philosophical milieu where 'metaphysics' – especially under the influence of the Vienna Circle – meant 'obscure, nonsensical, bad philosophy', such as, in their eyes, the philosophy of Heidegger or Hegel. Secondly, strictly speaking, the sentence does not say that metaphysics is to be discarded altogether (and, even further, an anti-metaphysical stance is also, in a sense, 'metaphysical'). The first step may be bringing words back from their *standard* metaphysical use to their everyday use, to see what they mean in our ordinary lives, outside of 'professional' philosophy. Then there might still be a chance to construct, precisely starting with the everyday, a metaphysics; I think this is exactly what Stanley Cavell is doing (Cavell (1987)).

11 For an exemplary New Historicist reading of *Othello*, see, for example, Jardine (1996).

12   The particular determination of the universality of an aesthetic judgement that can be found in a judgement of taste is something remarkable, not indeed for the logician, but certainly for the transcendental philosopher […] through the judgement of taste (on the beautiful) one ascribes the satisfaction in an object **to everyone**, yet without grounding it on a concept (for then it would be the good), and that this claim to universal validity so essentially belongs to a judgement by which we declare something to be **beautiful** that without thinking this it would never occur to anyone to use this expression.

<div align="right">(Kant (2001: 99), emphasis original, and see further 99–120)</div>

13 For Merleau-Ponty, the 'wild region' of language is 'in the living or nascent state, with all its references, those behind it, which connects it to the mute things it interpellates, and those it sends before itself and which make up the world of things said' (Merleau-Ponty (1969: 125)); see also Tengelyi (2004).

14 On this the best guide I know is Bowie (2003); see especially 41–56.

15 Kállay (1996, 1997, 2016).

16 *Richard III* was put among the 'histories' ('history plays') as early as Shakespeare's First Folio, compiled by Heminges and Condell, but the genre separation of tragedy and history was not strict in Early Modern England, and even today Gloucester's story is often interpreted as a tragedy.

17 I wish to thank my American master, Professor Stanley Cavell, for opening my eyes to a way of reading Shakespeare which is inimitable but has been my example for 30 years, as well as my Hungarian master, the late Professor István Geher, who first taught me that everyone is entitled to a Shakespeare of his own. I am also heavily indebted, for long and highly enjoyable discussions on philosophy, literature, and related matters to my friend Brett Bourbon and to my friend and patron Péter Dávidházi. I am also grateful to the editors of this volume, Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne, for their invitation to the *Shakespeare: The Philosopher II* conference in 2016, for their unfailing support, their trust in me, and their wonderful editorial work. But, as usual, I owe most to my family: my wife, Katalin Kállay, and to my three daughters, Zsuzska, Eszter, and Maria, and their families for an intellectual atmosphere which is full of humour, serious reflection, and wit.

Further reading

Cavell, S., 2003. *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays by Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.An enlarged edition of Cavell (1987), this book contains interpretations of *King Lear, Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus,* and *The Winter's Tale,* and these essays best represent what I mean by the (new) metaphysical reading of Shakespeare. Anyone interested in the topic should start with this book.

Hawkes, T., ed., 1969. *Coleridge on Shakespeare: A Selection of the Essays and Lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge on the Poems and Plays of Shakespeare*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.'Coleridge on Shakespeare' has several editions; this is a very reliable one with an excellent introduction. The philosopher-poet's highly original (although not always systematic) readings of almost the 'complete Shakespeare' exemplify best what I mean by the 'old' metaphysical approach to the Bard.

Witmore, M., 2008. *Shakespearean Metaphysics*. Shakespeare Now! London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.Reading this book is a wonderful exercise to prepare the mind for metaphysical approaches to Shakespeare. Pairing *Twelfth Night* with Whitehead, *King Lear* with Bergson, and *The Tempest* with Spinoza, this book shows how deep and serious human questions may gain new meanings in the light of the Shakespearean text.

Joughin, J. J., ed., 2000. *Philosophical Shakespeares*. London and New York: Routledge.Although not all the essays in this volume are 'metaphysical' in the sense I use the term, this book, with a Foreword by Stanley Cavell, is one of the first highly successful attempts at putting Shakespeare into a philosophical perspective in (post)modern criticism. Readers are advised to start with the essays of John Joughin, Michael Bristol, Hugh Grady, and Howard Caygill.

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3

ON THE KINSHIP OF SHAKESPEARE AND PLATO

Daryl Kaytor

The ancillary benefit of any truly good party inevitably includes the joyous, if partial, recollection of the night's activity in the days, weeks, months, and years that follow it. Such is the case with the conclusion of the *Symposium* – where all we know is constituted by a few fleeting lines of text written by Plato about a second-hand account of a retelling of a party that occurred many years previous. So it goes. We know that the end of the night saw Socrates drinking generously from a large goblet and explaining to the half-asleep Aristophanes and Agathon that a true poet ought to identify the genius of comedy and tragedy to be one and the same. He ought to be master of both. Only down this road can we understand the true nature of man. We hear very little more on the matter from Socrates, Aristophanes, Agathon, Plato, or any scholar since.

As we grapple with the long and divergent tracks of Shakespeare's philosophic interests, all roads of true understanding inevitably lead back to Plato. Let us begin by asking the question directly – what if Shakespeare is that very poet? Would Socrates approve? Would Shakespeare? Reflecting on his teacher Leo Strauss, Harry Jaffa remarked that 'Only Strauss could have led me to see that Shakespeare's inner and ultimate motivation was Platonic'.[1] Jaffa never took the opportunity to fully explain what he meant by this remark, and we don't get to hear him discuss it at length elsewhere. What I have aimed to do here and elsewhere is begin to take some foundational steps towards constructing an argument for understanding Shakespeare and Plato alongside one another and get to the core of what Jaffa means when he says the writings of a brilliant poet like Shakespeare can be accounted for by a 'Platonic' motivation. What the Strauss-inspired authors have managed to do is make the case for a renewed enthusiasm for deep investigation into Shakespearean texts in a philosophic way; where most have failed is in insisting on doing so on the basis of a purely naïve or original reading. The Straussian position hinges on a desire to reorient the modern 'academic Shakespeare' into an ally of classical political philosophy and the desire to educate the young in the study of the liberal arts. In doing so, however, Shakespeare ends up becoming exactly like Plato.

What I have sought to show here is that while Shakespeare is best understood philosophically through the method of close reading, we should not ignore other like-minded methodologies that exist, nor should we overlook the extent to which Shakespeare often speaks about political subjects in a way that cannot be accounted for in a single text. Shakespeare can be reoriented towards supporting arguments about healthy political cities and human beings without entirely discarding 400 years of academic treatment. Scholars can, after all, be selective. In this selective vein, we should strive to pay less attention to those critics who emphasize individual plays or even individual speakers as the complete answer to Shakespeare's view on any given topic. As T.S. Eliot noted, this is a great error in scholarship, as we should also pay attention to Shakespeare's ability to peer through the dramatic actions of individual characters into a spiritual action that transcends them.[2] Where elsewhere I have tried to demonstrate how a very close reading of a single text of Shakespeare can lead us directly to philosophic motivation in Plato, I have also showed how expanding that horizon to many or multiple texts can help to uncover a political meaning that may be impossible to uncover through the analysis of one work alone.[3] What I endeavour to do here is bridge that gap by providing some context to recent Straussian investigations of Shakespeare with an emphasis on better understanding how Shakespeare's 'Platonic motivation' can be understood in light of Socrates' request for a synthesis of comedy and tragedy.

Although I ultimately see the true road to 'understanding' in these philosophic matters leading back to Plato, an honest journey through Shakespeare's genius also must include the innumerable volumes of commentary, interpretation, historical investigations, philosophical diatribes, and criticism literature that constitute what is commonly referred to as his 'academic treatment'. These too are important. Although I cannot constitute a full discussion of how Shakespeare has been academically dissected through the ages, I can fruitfully discuss the issue under debate here, that being his relationship or non-relationship with Platonic political philosophy. With

the upsurge of Straussian writing in the last few decades, attempts have been made to move Shakespearean analysis away from a literary focus on 'criticism' towards something that more closely resembles how Strauss analysed the Platonic dialogues.[4] Through an attention to the dramatic and poetic form of the dialogues themselves, Strauss and others revealed a way of reading works closely – in fact, very closely – in order to draw out subtleties and variances of meaning between different layers of the text. By drawing attention to the authors who have come before me here, my own emphasis will become increasingly clear.

As early as 1857, a book by Bacon and Hawthorne called *The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakespeare Unfolded* suggested something similar.[5] Bacon and Hawthorne make the argument Shakespeare had to conceal his views about political life because it was not acceptable to fully represent them on stage. This argument goes a long way towards supporting the intricate richness of Shakespearean metaphor as well as the different experiences one encounters in watching a Shakespeare play performed as opposed to carefully reading its text. While the experience of viewing a play more vividly evokes the emotion and passions of Shakespeare's work, only an in-depth textual analysis can uncover the subtleties of his philosophic sympathies. The book suggests a consistent philosophy persists, 'underlying the superficial' text of the plays that no professor could have 'ventured to openly teach in the days of Elizabeth and James'.[6]

That philosophy, Bacon and Hawthorne suggest, held the potential for a novel and rather wide-reaching power of universal enlightenment. The secrets of that philosophy, once they unveiled them, would be akin to a 'new cave of Apollo, where the handwriting on the wall spells anew the old Delphic motto, and publishes the word that "unties the spell"'.[7] Bacon and Hawthorne attempt to synthesize Biblical and Neo-Platonic teachings consistent with what they were finding in Shakespeare's texts to argue that by resolving Shakespeare's mysterious writing into bare reason, the quarrels of political life could be solved and a new political science of peace and justice established upon its principles. What they found in untying the spell, however, was something like the natural philosophy of Francis Bacon. While we have plenty of evidence to argue for the very real political consequences of publishing anything critical of Elizabethan government, I argue we should depart sharply from the suggestion that Shakespeare sought to teach anything like the virtues of the modern science of Francis Bacon or anyone else. By seeking to completely illuminate the darkness of the cave, early modern philosophy believed it could eliminate the tension between philosophy and poetry, as Hawthorne and Bacon believe Shakespeare had done. This work, however, seeks to show rather the opposite sort of Shakespeare, one whose poetic genius seriously rivals that of Plato and thereby reinvigorates this ancient quarrel. The ancient quarrel is possible because of a fundamental agreement about the make-up of the human soul, and it continues to rage over what activity or quality best completes it. Neither Shakespeare nor Plato sought to eliminate this tension completely, and we have no evidence either believed they had solved the problems of political life. What we do know is that they both rather brilliantly illuminated the issues of political life in a way that still has a sharply magnetic power on the minds of the young.

We must note, at this point, that Francis Bacon's friend Thomas Hobbes was amongst the first to believe he had done away with the problematic tension between philosophy, poetry, and politics. In *Leviathan,* although his doctrine is wholly different from ancient political philosophy, Hobbes sometimes worries that his philosophic labour will be 'as useless as the commonwealth of Plato'. [8] When he considers the problem again, however, he sees that the 'science of natural justice' is all that is necessary for modern statecraft to permanently solve the problems of civil unrest. Hobbes claims Plato got it wrong because he required too much of men and too much of philosophy. What was needed was a science that could do more than contemplate the moral and political problems of man; modern philosophy needed to be in accord with natural science by proving all the theorems of moral doctrine so that citizens would know definitively how to 'govern and how to obey'. If philosophers become scientists whose work becomes concerned only with proving the moral doctrines of the sovereign, ancient philosophy will no longer be required. In the same vein, revelatory faith and poetics must be turned wholly towards subservience to an earthly rather than heavenly or spiritual sovereign. Hobbes encapsulates his repossession of ancient philosophy and religion by reminding modern man, 'Seeing therefore miracles now cease, we have no sign left whereby to acknowledge the pretended revelations or inspirations of any private man'.[9]

Part of Shakespeare's brilliance lies in the fact that he is able to articulate the modern position while juxtaposing it with the ancient. Shakespeare keeps the quarrel between philosophy, poetry, and politics alive by showing us the possible repercussions of a complete turn to materialism and Hobbes' science of natural justice. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Lafew says, 'they say miracles are past; and we have our philosophical persons, to make modern and familiar, things supernatural and causeless. Hence it is that we make trifles of terrors'.[10] I argue that Lafew's commentary here is very clearly Hobbesian in nature. This passage demonstrates an

understanding in Shakespeare that modern philosophy's complete dismissal of the supernatural makes way for a modern subject that is afraid only of the sovereign, having conquered the ancient moderating fears of man through a science that simply explains them away. For Lafew, and perhaps also Shakespeare, the most damning consequence of this turn to modern philosophy is the new-found possibility to be 'relinquished of the artists'.[11] It is unthinkable for this author that the same Shakespeare who understands the science of modern philosophy to culminate in an irrelevance of poetry is himself a secret adherent of an approach that could render useless his own profession. Whereas Plato allows in the *Republic* for the possibility that artistry could be reformed in an attempt to make men more reflective towards the good, Hobbes' reformation of the 'good' into the 'obedient' means the purview of artistry will be similarly narrowed, if not altogether destroyed. Whatever the results of the conflict between philosophy and poetry in the ancient world, Shakespeare seems to be lamenting the fact that the vibrancy of this conflict is seriously threatened by becoming the handmaidens of the modern political project.

If we are to study Shakespeare not as a proponent of the modern political project, then what is he? Shakespeare defies the usual trappings of any 'systemic' philosophy; he elevates and denigrates poetry, philosophy, and political life in various ways throughout his presentation of the history of our world and those of his own imagining. He is a genuine thinker in the sense that he understood and brought to life the timeless conflicts of political thought as only Plato had done before or since. Allan Bloom's book *Shakespeare's Politics* is largely responsible for the reinvigoration of the study of Shakespeare from this political perspective. Bloom uses the introductory essay of his book to launch a largely polemical assault against modern Shakespearean criticism, taking issue with the 'New Critics', who, Bloom argues, weaken great literature's ability to speak to the 'situation of the modern young'.[12] Bloom refers often, but vaguely, to existing Shakespearean criticism as being guided by an understanding of poetry and aesthetics that came well after the time in which Shakespeare was writing.

The modern aesthetic movement considers it a defilement of art qua art to believe that an artistic work might reflect nature or that its author may have been trying to teach us something. For Bloom, Shakespeare needs to be re-situated in the context of the meaning of art and drama in Elizabethan times, not our own. To understand an author as he understood himself means first to suppose that the author is wiser than we are and that he or she might have something important to teach us about moral and political problems. Bloom's book is most successful at showing how an awareness of the perennial problems in political philosophy make clearer the themes Shakespeare himself addresses in his plays, especially in the case of *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, and *Merchant of Venice*.

Bloom ties the plays to issues in political philosophy by showing how the cities themselves are important constitutive elements of the characters and themes he presents. Bloom draws out the relationships between the characters in *Merchant of Venice* as though he personally knows them, which depends equally upon a close reading of the text and an openness to interpret Shakespearean characters as possessing internally profound religious views:

> Shylock and Antonio are Jew and Christian and they are at war as a result of their difference in faith. It is not that they misunderstand each other because of a long history of prejudice and that enlightenment could correct their hostility; rather, their real views of the world, their understanding of what is most important in life, are so opposed they could never agree. To do away with their hostility, the core beliefs of each man would have to be done away with – those beliefs which go from the very depths to the height of their souls.[13]

In this way, Bloom moves from the particular conflict of Antonio and Shylock to the general conflict of religion and values per se. Bloom treats them as opposed based on the difference between the letter and the spirit of the law, meaning Shakespeare presents not only a vivid conflict taking place in a particular historical context but also one that partakes of perhaps the most intense theological conflict of the New Testament. Just as Socrates opposed the sophists in the very manner of their education, Bloom is able to bring to light Shakespeare's understanding of the irreconcilable values that underlie his story's dramatic narratives. The conflict in Venice is not far from Jerusalem, or Athens. That Venice must ultimately choose to uphold the claims of one way of life over another hearkens back to the Socratic claim that philosophy is in conflict with the city because it holds the philosophic and not the political way of life as best. We marvel when Socrates lays down his life for the principle of philosophy but are strangely aghast when Shylock is coerced into converting to Christianity. Might Shakespeare be inserting himself not only into matters of philosophic and theological conflict but also the political questions of assimilation and Zionism? Bloom invites these kinds of question and more.

What thoughtful readers must ultimately consider, however, is how much of this is Shakespeare and how much of this is Bloom? It is clear from Bloom's analysis of the text that he is thinking about theological political conflicts larger than those we can explicitly account for in the actions of the play. Bloom, the political philosopher, means to draw out these themes and shed light on their meaning and importance in the world today. Bloom enlivens the plays by surrounding the issues with political subtext and religious conflict, allowing Shakespeare to live again for the situation of the modern young.

Bloom's book is largely responsible for inspiring Jan Blits' thoughtful work which looks to interpret *Julius Caesar* through a political discussion of manliness, friendship, Caesarism, the ethics of intention, and the dichotomy between republican and autocratic government.[14] The considerable merits of both Bloom and Blits' work are tempered, however, by a rather flimsy attempt to situate their political readings within a coherent theoretical framework. The primary oversight of these kinds of readings of Shakespeare is their over-emphasis on purely rhetorical reasons for a 'naïve' reading of the plays; they dismiss vast volumes of academic treatment simply because they do not care for them. Bloom and his pupils are quite eloquent in describing how the post-Derrida literary world has failed to inspire the young to care for the real world, but they do not show us precisely how such readings are theoretically flawed. Indeed, that Bloom's book came under fire in, amongst other places, the *American Political Science Review* for claims that he had wilfully ignored a vast amount of existing Shakespearean criticism seems in this specific sense justified.[15] We must read Shakespeare closely – in fact, very closely – but we should welcome the overwhelming majority of traditional academic contributions to Shakespeare as an aid to our own philosophic understanding.

Like Bloom and others, Leon Craig has 'old fashioned views about literature', but he also makes some attempt to argue for the superiority of Shakespeare on a Platonic basis.[16] Craig believes Shakespeare to be a philosophic-poet who (probably) consulted Plato's *Republic* and was moved by the accounts therein of the 'relationship between philosophy and political power'.[17] Craig grounds this contention on an all too brief examination of what the *Republic* teaches about poetry and concludes only with a series of enigmatic statements on the matter. He claims, for example, that the true concern of Socrates in relation to poetry is that it will depict an untold number of 'ugly truths about human nature'.[18] In this reading, Socrates was not really concerned that Homer and Hesiod's poetry was false but that it was too true to reveal to society at large. In this way, Craig seems to be part of a broader scholarly effort to link Nietzsche and Plato as though the ultimate motivations of their philosophic thinking were the same.[19]

Craig does not provide any textual evidence as to how we may deduce Socrates believed in these dark truths about human nature, nor why, if Shakespeare is such a good Socratic philosopher, he apparently believed he could break with Plato by exploring these terrible depths of human nature in terrifically gory detail on stage and in text for the entire world to see. Craig argues that it is necessary to conflate the nature of poets and philosophers as an avenue into better understanding Shakespeare's work.

While Craig produces tremendously valuable insight into *Macbeth* and *King Lear*'s ability to produce an entryway into a kind of philosophic thinking reminiscent of Plato, he does not link Shakespeare with the Socratic dialogues in any meaningful way, nor does he believe the two could in any way have been at odds. If Shakespeare is simply another political philosopher, why does he not more vigorously promote it as the best way of life? Thus Craig, as Hobbes had done, dissolves the tension between poetry and philosophy by making the former the simple handmaiden of the latter. While the present author agrees with the notion that Plato would have come to appreciate Shakespeare's poetry, it is not because the two are both simply 'philosophic-poets' but rather because Shakespeare was able to produce an apology for poetry that demonstrates its continuing utility in a responsible and virtuous regime. Shakespeare takes Plato's complaints about the poets very seriously, while Craig claims they are simply ironic misdirection given that Plato himself produced poetry. Shakespeare, however, gives no account that philosophy and poetry are in perfect accord and often goes out of his way (as in *Midsummer Night's Dream*) to show precisely the opposite.[20]

Indeed, Craig does not discuss the particular, and quite specific, complaints Socrates poses to the poets and especially Homer, dismissing vast sections of the *Republic* on account of their irony. Because Plato the educator is much closer to Homer the educator than Socrates would dare admit, Craig says, we cannot take the Socratic claims against the poets seriously.[21] What links the poets and Plato lies under the surface of the *Republic* and is not spoken, for Socrates leaves out the most important attribute of imitative poetry, its necessary use of 'logos', or rational speech. Since rational speech must be understood, by which Craig seems to mean interpreted, the first appeal of all poets is necessarily to the rational part of one's soul, and thus poetry shares an intimate parallel with Platonic writing. Craig includes amongst those elements which speak primarily to the rational part of the soul, 'cursing and blaming, praying and pleading, apologizing and forgiving' alongside conversing, arguing, and

explaining one's actions. And it is here that we must stop Craig, as he stops his Socrates, and wonder whether the actions from the former list truly correspond with the latter in terms of appeal to the rational part of the soul.

Craig says it is only after the rational part of the soul understands what is being spoken or explained that our feelings get involved and we thus form judgements about the characters or actions depicted.[22] Such an argument is akin to saying an audience member feels no dread whatsoever at the beginning of *Macbeth* until the witches are finished explaining to us how 'Fair is foul and foul is fair'. How far can we really take Craig's argument given the fact the first words of the play are actually stage directions for thunder and lightning – which common sense dictates are placed there in order to induce fear and dread prior to anything 'being spoken'. Such a thesis not only deflates the entire basis of the Socratic critique of poetry, and thus denies the 'ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry', but also denies the claims the poets themselves make about the impact of their poetry. As has been noted elsewhere:

> What we can say is that Craig urges us to think of Shakespeare as somehow engaged in a dialogue with Plato – exactly how is an issue not entirely resolved in Craig's book… Craig notes that Homer was the educator Socrates denied him to have been, but he also admits that Plato found it necessary to replace Achilles with his own reinvented Socrates. Supposing Shakespeare the wisest of human beings who took pen to paper, must we conclude that for him dramatic poetry ministers to the aims of philosophy?… May we treat as secondary the dramatic consequences that would have resulted had Lear completed the path to philosophy before he reached Dover? Or be sure that philosophy can dispel the terror invoked in and by Macbeth?[23]

Such hesitation about Shakespeare's 'unwavering support' of philosophy is central to my work. In my view, Socrates' obsessive concern with the dangers of poetry is not simply ironic or an esoteric method of demonstrating the true kinship between the two arts but rather a genuine engagement with a conflict over the soul of man. When one hears Timon wailing incessantly about the various ailments of the human condition in Athens, we are emotionally moved not by a rational understanding of his anti-human position, but because his words stir us to feel before we understand. This is Shakespeare's power of poetics that Socrates did not truly possess.

The dark terror of Macbeth's soul is not calculated or reasoned by the audience: it is felt. 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow' is not strictly rational speech, although it may admit rational inquiry that can clarify the emotional experience of the words themselves. Aside from Craig's confusion of the emotive and rational parts of the soul, the review above raises a more fundamental question still. Does Shakespeare really elevate philosophy to such a position that it can dispel the terror of Macbeth? Or even of treachery and usurpation as such? Are we really to conclude from an overview of the totality of the Shakespearean corpus that a Prospero who discards his magic staff into the sea would still prevail over a killer like Macbeth? The liberal arts are strong but not that strong. While there is no denying Shakespeare has moments that demonstrate the sheer power of a command of human philosophy, isn't he like Plato in *his* emphasis on its limits?

That Plato is somehow poetic is the very reason why such a comparison with Shakespeare is warranted, but we must persist and seek to discover precisely *how* they are related. While I argue Plato and Shakespeare understand the relationship between reason and poetry in more or less the same way, it is in their emphasis on the possibilities and consequences for both personal and political liberation that I believe they differ. It is entirely possible, and I think probable, that Shakespeare shared the same understanding of the healthy political soul as Plato, without believing philosophy in and of itself is the highest form of life. If we consider Bloom on the question of Plato's poetics, for example, we must note that while he acknowledges the relationship in the dialogues between poetry and reason, he does not simply equate them nor disregard claims about the ancient quarrel:

> The elusive texture of Platonic thought-so different from our own-can, I believe, only be approached when one becomes aware of its peculiar combination of what we take to be poetry and philosophy. Or, put otherwise, Platonic philosophy is poetic, not merely stylistically but at its intellectual core, not because Plato is not fully dedicated to reason, but because poetry points to problems for reason that unpoetic earlier and later philosophy do not see and because poetic imagination properly understood is part of reason.[24]

We see in Bloom a much more nuanced view of the relationship between poetry and philosophy. Poetry works by revealing 'problems' for reason that are neither illuminated by Homer nor subsequent moral philosophies. Only the genius who combines some measure of philosophy and poetry can properly see the problems one presents for

the other, never mind the particular solutions prescribed by each dominant part. Poetic imagination is part of reason not because, as Craig would have it, all communication necessarily begins with rational understanding, but because poetic imagination, *properly understood*, considers itself an indispensable component of a properly functioning rationality as such. In the case of the witches and *Macbeth*, poetic imagination is what prepares the ground inside oneself for a rational grasp of the issues at hand. A rationality that does not feel the fear induced in the opening scenes of *Macbeth* is, in fact, not rational at all. It is a cold, unfeeling stoicism that both Shakespeare and Plato were quick to dismiss as an incomplete philosophic system.

There is a sense in which the Straussian readings of Shakespeare, although containing considerable insight and textual precision, appear reluctant to deal with Shakespeare's presentation of religious and spiritual inspiration as belying a fundamental reality about the human experience that is at least partly distinct from reason itself. They are very good, especially Bloom, at noting how Shakespeare deeply understood the importance of the interplay between religion and politics, but they are not so good at telling us what this interplay means. If the crux of the theological-political problem asks whether religion should rule politics, or politics rule religion, then should we not, if Shakespeare is such a philosopher-poet, expect him to give some kind of answer?[25]

The suggestion by Socrates that concludes the *Symposium* is unique in that it does not allude to an answer provided elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, nor, as I argue, does it receive its due until the arrival of Shakespeare. Only he can fuse the comic and tragic components of the human soul in such a way as to make a case for the re-emergence of the poets into the city of the *Republic*, and it is plain to see that none have had an impact greater than Shakespeare's on the western World's understanding of itself. The idea, then, that men may receive understanding and laughter at the same time is a common goal of both Shakespeare and Plato. Strauss understands *The Republic* to have both tragic and comic consequences inherent in its travel 'down' to the Piraeus. So long as the discussion in Plato's dialogue occurs within the boundaries of the utopian 'city in speech', the more outlandish statements Socrates makes about absolute equality have a pleasing comic effect. The closer we come to the realities of political and social life, however, the closer we come to tragedy. The implementation of the Socratic ideas that appear to be comic may in fact be necessary for establishment of absolute equality. Such implementation is, inevitably, tragic in the political sphere. Shakespeare requires both the comic and the tragic in order to show us this naked truth.

Lest we commit, however, the same mistakes as the most famous Straussian interpreters, by insisting on a Shakespeare who looks and sounds remarkably the same as their Socrates, I argue another excellent avenue to 'finding' Plato in Shakespeare is that of other great thinkers. One such is T.S. Eliot. For Eliot, Shakespeare's genius is a kind of 'rag-bag philosophy' that pales in comparison to the 'serious philosophy' of Dante, albeit for a very good reason. The pattern of human experience Shakespeare sought to elucidate was 'more complex, and his problem more difficult' than Dante ever conceived of.[26] Because Shakespeare has no immediately discernible philosophic system, and thus no imminent design upon our moral behaviour, we must collect a variety of 'esoteric hints' to our conduct that may in time reveal a philosophic pattern but only one situated delicately between other religious and philosophic systems. Shakespeare's genius takes on the quality of, 'a vision of human nature greater than our own' precisely because it is not straightforward or patently orthodox. For this reason, which Eliot endorses, it must be pursued by a willingness of our 'passive voice' to discover Shakespeare, rather than a critical voice which too often serves to obfuscate his elusive nature.[27]

Eliot is famous for having outlined what he called the 'Senecan attitude' in many of Shakespeare's plays. He says, for example, that Othello's 'have done the state some service' (V.II) speech is an absolute masterpiece because it shows how easily pride can assist man in deceiving himself. Likewise, Eliot was clear in his denunciation of Shakespearean interpreters that result in a Bard that holds political and philosophic positions remarkably similar to his interpreters. He disliked what he saw as the onslaught of liberal, Tory and socialist Shakespeares, crawling out of the woodwork.[28] Although Shakespeare's understanding of the Senecan attitude and even stoicism itself could have been derived from any number of literary sources, it is clear he makes a firm demand on his audience to realize Othello's self-deception for themselves without being explicitly told it exists. While Eliot is right in pointing to this as an element of Shakespeare's unique artistic power, it also calls into question Shakespeare's view of his audience. If we couple the demand on the reader to realize Othello's self-deception for themselves with the necessity of understanding how Shakespeare's characters utilize a 'doubleness of speech', we arrive at a position where Shakespeare has rather cleverly assigned the audience of his plays a role very similar to that Socrates does in Plato's dialogues. For Socrates, doubleness of speech was his ability to speak differently to different kinds of people, with a second layer of meaning underlying his words. Some would understand this layered irony that often accompanied his speech, while others would not. Because Shakespeare exposes a 'universal human weakness' that is only revealed through an awareness of Othello's doubleness of

speech, we as the audience are compelled to spontaneously enact an investigation into Othello's values and motivations. This acts to heighten the effect of the poetry precisely because we want above all else to interject ourselves into Othello's life and help him see the error of his ways, precisely as Socrates might have done.

It is through Eliot, therefore, that my Platonic hypothesis acquires considerably more weight in any careful consideration of the Bard's corpus. Shakespeare does not stop merely at the demand for genuine reflection upon the motivations of his characters in relation to the Socratic demand to 'know thyself': he also presents vivid philosophic characterizations of Montaigne, Machiavelli, and Bacon such that it is extremely problematic to claim Shakespeare sides with any of them on the essential questions of man.[29] Eliot himself was opposed to modern interpretations that identify Shakespeare as a mere mouthpiece of Montaigne, Machiavelli, or Bacon. While we know, more or less, where Machiavelli and Bacon prefer to situate the problems and solutions of human nature, we are less sure about where Shakespeare himself sits. This enigmatic quality of Shakespeare brings us around again to Plato, whose 'positions' on the essential questions of humanity are amongst the most hotly disputed of any thinker. No one doubts the strength of Platonic philosophy because of its inability to be decisively pinned down, and I argue Shakespeare crafts his poetry with precisely the same intent.

For Eliot, there is clear support for a separation of philosophy and poetry. He achieves this separation by insisting on showing that one cannot learn everything about Catholic theology from Dante, because the poet himself points towards Aquinas.[30] Dante begins from the middle and Aquinas from the beginning. But where does our Shakespeare hypothesis fit in this regard? To whom does he point? Although I claim Shakespeare points towards the Platonic dialogues, even they are not quite enough to fully appreciate the allusions to Christ, never mind the references to modern science or the Tudor dynasty. What Plato does provide is an avenue into understanding the political implications of Shakespeare's poetry qua poetry. In doing so, the goal is not merely to understand Shakespeare from a Platonic reference point but to demonstrate that he understood *himself* in just this way. Not only did Shakespeare understand the political dimension of his poetry, but he was willing to push his art to the very heights of human possibility in order to interrogate, as it were, the Socratic arguments about poetry we find in the *Republic*. Plato is not the end all of interpreting Shakespeare; I argue rather that he is the starting point and foundation.

As far as the *Republic* goes, the common view that Plato wishes to censor all genuine poetics and create dogmatic boors does not consider the context in which Socrates is purposely crafting the impossible city, nor does it fully account for the fact that Socrates himself appears to be telling rather tall tales. The common view disregards the fact that the 'ring of Gyges' discussion in the *Republic* reads rather remarkably like the outline of a play. Glaucon gives a vividly detailed characterization of the main players and even dramatizes scenes regarding the invisibility process. Glaucon says that once the unjust man realizes he can operate outside of traditional morality, he 'committed adultery with the king's wife and, along with her, set upon the king and killed him. And so he took over the rule' (*Republic*, 360a). Glaucon's tale has all the elements of high tragedy. In fact, the synopsis Glaucon provides is remarkably like the plot of *Hamlet*. Claudius gains the trust of the monarch and moves, silent and unseen, to murder the king, steal his wife, and take over the rule of Denmark.

Sticking with Hamlet, Socrates also suggests in the *Republic* that the highest possible imitation of things would be akin to holding a 'mirror up to nature', capturing the sun, the heavens, the earth, animals, plants, and human beings so that they look as close as possible to what they are without actually *being* those things (*Republic*, 596e). The best possible poet would have to be aware of his own limitations as an artist. He would have to reflect on the reality of the poetic arts and see that its highest manifestation is but the holding of a mirror up to nature. For Socrates, the self-conscious poet could never laud poetry as the highest possible human pursuit but would necessarily point to the deeds of actual political men and women as somehow being higher. Invoking Socrates and the *Republic* directly, Hamlet claims (III.II) the true aim of art is, and has always been, to 'hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure'.[31]

Othello too mirrors a Glaucon-like plot in so far as a woman of perfect virtue acquires a reputation for dishonour she has not earned. Socrates is asked, with a multitude of variously complex stipulations, to show how these plots may be resolved such that we see what justice and injustice 'each in itself does to the man who has it' and for the resolution to demonstrate the superior happiness of the life of the just. In modern terms, Socrates is asked to show the interior character of just and unjust men and women who have acquired reputations they do not deserve. Interiority, or monologue, becomes the most crucial part of art. Before Socrates has even brought up the moral and pedagogical implications of poetry on the young, he has given his explicit approval to a rather intricate and ingenious poetic structure, yet to exist in his time and that he himself calls a wondrous work of art.

It is in this context that we must understand the Socratic critique of poetry. Socrates has not only remarked on the ability of Glaucon's plots to create room for 'judgement' amongst those present in Cephalus' house but also that such judgments can be made under conditions that produce 'delight'. Delight, after all, draws the audience in – similar to the way ridicule does in a comedy. Delight is essential for the production of philosophic understanding. It is only Socrates' confidence in his ability to show the triumph of justice in the individual soul as well as the city itself that allows him to experience delight in such rigorous arguments for the merits of injustice. To kill a king and take his wife and crown are acceptable images, so long as one also has the skill and foresight to thoughtfully connect such images with the misery that will likely result from such wrongdoing. The challenge given by Glaucon and Adeimantus is for Socrates to show that the poets are wrong when:

> They all chant that moderation and justice are fair, but hard and full of drudgery, while intemperance and injustice are sweet and easy to acquire, and shameful only by opinion and law. They say that the unjust is for the most part more profitable than the just… They say that the gods, after all, allot misfortune and a bad life to many good men too, and an opposite fate to opposite men.

<div align="right">(Republic, 364a–c)</div>

These and many more claims the poets make are not censored whatsoever by Socrates, because we have not yet entered the 'city in speech'. In Athens, amongst those in attendance at Cephalus' house in the Piraeus, we are permitted to think and speak about such actions openly and honestly. Glaucon and Adeimantus create the plot and the challenges that the 'hero' of the dialogue, Socrates, must overcome. This procedure and the guidelines Socrates suggests are quite similar to the way Shakespeare often uses his plots to quickly set up particular problems for his characters to play out, with the problems of succession, tyrannical ambition, and forbidden love in *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet* being amongst the most obvious examples. The explorations of the human soul that occur parallel to these plot devices are what make Shakespeare such a genius, bringing to theatrical delight the Platonic drama of the soul.

If we are to meaningfully connect Shakespeare and Plato for the modern world, I believe we should work towards answering Allan Bloom's rhetorical question from the *Closing of the American Mind*: what does Shakespeare have to do with solving our problems?[32] While I can't do so fully here, I want to emphasize how important it is to exhaust every effort to read Shakespeare the way he wanted to be read, to understand him the way he understood himself, and to read him as closely and as open-mindedly as we would Plato. The method of close reading can and must pass both common-sense and methodological tests. There is no reason a fruitful engagement with Shakespeare cannot include both naïve and thoroughly researched components. The method of close reading, in contradistinction to the claims of most Straussians, can, in fact, be enriched by engaging with existing literary and critical interpretations to 'turn around' the conversation towards the author's original intention.

In my view, it is not enough to merely reject modern scholarship outright: we should be able to 'speak the language of the modern young' in doing so, lest we risk further decay of what is called traditional political philosophy. We can easily avoid the cynical approach of an Apemantus in our philosophic presentation of Shakespeare, but to persuade the young as successfully as Socrates takes considerable skill. The modern young are interested, perhaps more than ever, in questions of God and politics, but the veritable collection of personal baggage that accompanies that conversation is also larger than ever. Condensing Shakespeare to merely a mouthpiece for Platonic political philosophy is neither as exciting nor truthful as an interpretive approach that shows both the kinship inherent in their goals as well as the importance of the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry. Plato's reformation of the Homeric gods is a reasonable starting place for understanding his views on how to create a religion that honours a God or gods in line with his understanding of the healthy tripartite soul. Everything in Plato comes back to the healthy political soul – and this is the true secret of the kinship he shares with Shakespeare.

The particular differences inherent in the demonstration of political, religious, poetic, and philosophic lives of Plato and Shakespeare's characters are of considerably less concern once the standard of the healthy soul is accounted for and agreed upon. The discussion of these particularities, and the valuation of their ultimate place in the grand scheme of the world, is what constitutes meaningful philosophic dialogue, but always with the caveat that Shakespeare's genius never succumbs to the temptation of explaining or reducing itself to first principles. Shakespeare begins in the middle, as a poet might, whereas Plato prefers to start from the beginning. Plato's reduction of all things to first principles only takes the conversations in the *Republic* so far into the middle; we never quite get to see how the principles of political life he constructs will play themselves out in the world we know. Shakespeare begins from the middle, allowing himself only fleeting moments of poetic

reflection on the beginning and the end. We see how the world plays out but not necessarily why. We know, like Plato, that he believes the rational part of the soul should lead.[33] Unlike Plato, it is evident that Shakespeare's understanding of the healthy rational soul has a much larger place reserved for a range of poetic expression.

The intersections of Plato and Shakespeare that occur in the middle, in Shakespeare's presentation of the history of the world, are positively invigorating to uncover and can be used as the basis upon which to excite the situation of the modern young. The sex, murder, betrayal, and honour we see in the plays can themselves be grounded in the philosophy of Plato to the mutual benefit of both. Plato allows us to speak, even minimally, about Shakespeare's philosophy. T.S. Eliot clearly desired to raise the bar of Shakespearean criticism and begin again the project of connecting the dots between the plays to make statements about Shakespeare's vision of the whole, or what we may call Shakespearean wisdom. In my work, I believe I have made strides in doing so, albeit with the important caveat that ultimately Shakespeare remains more enigmatic in this regard than even Plato. What is evident is that Shakespeare very clearly sees the unity of comedy and tragedy as an essential element in the truth about man and his place in the universe. Tragedy exists throughout political life and in the lives of human beings everywhere, but there is always some faculty of human affairs, some misaligned element of the human soul, that is to blame. Such misalignments are worthy of ridicule and shared investigation by society, for we need not succumb to a tragic view of all things. This is both in line with what Socrates requests in the *Symposium* and, more importantly, a significant statement that tends towards a philosophic insight in its own right. If Shakespeare could speak on this, might he have suggested the marriage of Sophocles and Aristophanes as his ultimate secret?[34] What Plato suggests but cannot demonstrate, Shakespeare demonstrates but does not suggest. Perhaps this is *his* genius?

In speaking of the failure to address the situation of the modern young, Bloom wonders why the humanities no longer seek to support the 'kinds of questions children ask: Is there a God? Is there freedom? Is there punishment for evil deeds? Is there certain knowledge? What is a good society?'[35] These are questions I believe we should take seriously, and in saying that Shakespeare has answers to these questions I am saying he partakes in something like political philosophy. As I have shown, his plays strongly indicate different answers to these questions, albeit answers that stop short of sweeping universal statements. The unity of comedy and tragedy, it would seem, does not lead us to the kind of philosophy that makes these sorts of sweeping universal statements. It prefers to stick to the conduct of men and women, to the city, and to the soul.

Related topics

See Chapters 1, 16, 17, 35

Notes

1 Jaffa (2003).
2 Warren (1987: 99).
3 For context on my other works please see Kaytor (2012, 2015).
4 In addition to those I have cited in this paper, see also Tovey (1983, 1996); Alvis (1990); Parker (2004); Rowe (2010); Cantor (2004). The most important contributor to begin with in terms of directly linking Shakespeare with Plato is Platt (1979), who demonstrated the direct textual linkages between Socrates and Falstaff's death scenes.
5 Bacon and Hawthorne (1857).
6 Bacon and Hawthorne (1857: Preface viii–ix).
7 Bacon and Hawthorne (1857: Preface xii). The book argues the system of Shakespeare's philosophy is consistent with the modern science of Francis Bacon (and others), but these sections of the book are severely lacking in sustained evidence. The notion that philosophers and Shakespeare often needed to conceal their teaching for political reasons, which Delia Bacon, Hawthorne, Strauss, and others have suggested, is in the opinion of this author made in sound judgement and with plenty of supplemental evidence.
8 Hobbes (1994: 243).
9 Hobbes (1994: 249).
10 Consider that Francis Bacon, Hobbes' mentor, proponent of modernity, and contemporary of Shakespeare, used this expression as well (Bacon (1854: 184)).

11 Shakespeare (2005: II.III. 5–10).
12 Bloom (1964: 1).
13 Bloom (1964: 17).
14 Blits (1982).
15 Burckhardt (1960).
16 Craig (2001: 11).
17 Craig (2001:251).
18 Craig (2001: 254).
19 This argument hinges on whether or not Plato was attempting to esoterically promote the 'way of Thrasymachus' as the author's true intent. The equation of Thrasymachus and Nietzsche, as well as a more fulsome discussion of the Straussian divide on these issues, can be found in Lampert (1996, 2013).
20 See, for example, *Midsummer Night's Dream*: V.I.
21 Craig (2001: 257, 260–6).
22 Craig (2001: 264).
23 Craig (2001); Mathie (2003).
24 Bloom (1977).
25 Smith (1997: 2).
26 Wilson Knight (1998: Preface xxi).
27 Wilson Knight (1998: 3).
28 Murphy (2007: 370).
29 Hartford (1990).
30 Eliot and Dickey (2015: 717).
31 Shakespeare would have had direct access to these dialogues through the Latin editions of Ficino (1484) and Serranus (1578) and may have felt compelled, as Rowe argues, to compete with Ben Jonson's intellectualism. Jonson himself owned the Serranus edition. See also Rowe (2010).
32 Bloom (1987: 353).
33 In this sense, the article is in alignment with the thinking of the Straussian interpretations of Shakespeare. The rational (*nous*) element of the soul should lead, supported by a healthy dichotomy between spirited (*thumos*) and appetitive (*epithumia*) components. Shakespeare's best political leaders (consider Henry V and Prospero) are good examples of the healthy political soul in this regard. Macbeth and Falstaff are excellent examples of political men whose spirit and appetite respectively take over with tragic consequences.
34 Although I cannot fully flesh here out the relationship between comedy and tragedy as Strauss sees it, I hope this work introduces the question of the mastery of comedy and tragedy in the Shakespearean corpus as one worth investigating. While the full understanding of Shakespeare's understanding would necessarily require a view of the whole of his work, a comment may be helpful. Shakespeare demonstrates an ability to present vivid portraits of tragic political communities like Sophocles but never submits to a simply tragic view about the nature of the universe or man as such. There is almost always some comically absurd sense in which the characters have contributed to their own downfall, and they are never simply fated as such from the outset. In almost all cases, the tragic characters are worthy of ridicule. Shakespeare, like Aristophanes, does not appear to suggest the proper correction to an improperly balanced political soul requires a Socratic political philosopher. Falstaff and Apemantus (two comic Socratic characters) do not make their cities better – in fact, they do quite the opposite despite the best of intentions. The secret, for Shakespeare, is in demonstrating the accuracy of the Socratic account of the healthy political soul, while showing those teachings can only be implemented by figures who understand how to live and rule in modern political communities. They must master a new kind of *political* philosophy. Failure to implement these teachings in a political manner leads to tragedy. Consider that the comic presentation of Socrates in the *Clouds* is necessarily ridiculous but not necessarily untruthful. Socrates appears rather like a clown to the average member of the polis, and the great tragedy of politics shared by both Plato and Shakespeare is that the clowns are right about the city and the soul of men, but they will never be listened to. For more on comedy and tragedy see Strauss (1966).
35 Bloom (1987: 372).

Further reading

Strauss, L., 1957. What is Political Philosophy? *The Journal of Politics* 19(3): 343–368. The quintessential introduction to political philosophy, properly understood. Moving past the idea that the term refers simply to the thoughtful study of politics, this essay demonstrates how we must

situate ourselves as academics, in one way or another, within an understanding of the good life.

Bloom, A., 1987. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster. This book challenged me as a young undergraduate, and I hope it might do the same for you wherever you are in your life. The idea that not all forms of modern education might actually be serving the best interests of students or education as such is rather a revelation. The book is largely polemical – and accepting it for what it is, and what it is not, will be helpful.

Bloom, A. and Jaffa, H., 1996. *Shakespeare's Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. This volume is an essential guide to understanding the intersection between Shakespeare and political philosophy. Here Bloom begins the argument for reading Shakespeare differently than is common in most schools, and Jaffa's take on *King Lear* turns the play on its head.

Strauss, L., 1981. Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization. *Modern Judaism* 1(1): 17–45. This is a more difficult Straussian text, which helps situate the conflict between reason and revelation. The idea of progress is challenged in this text, and, for the careful reader, so too is the possibility of return. In the conflict, however, there can be a kind of dynamic vibrancy Strauss argues is healthy for society. Refer to George Grant for a more complete picture of how these ideas relate to Christianity rather than Judaism.

Wilson Knight, G., 1947. *The Crown of Life*. London: Methuen and Co Ltd. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else, is it made clear that the consideration of single speeches, characters, or even plays in the consideration of Shakespeare's ultimate intention is academic ground ripe for folly. Shakespearean academic literature still has much work to do in order to connect the pieces across the oeuvre. This book is also extremely entertaining.

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Part II

Philosophy of language

4

LEAR AS A TRAGEDY OF ERRORS

'He hath ever but slenderly known himself'

Garry L. Hagberg

To require love is the surest way not to get it. To not know that is itself tragic. What I will suggest here is that the profound lack of knowledge from which the King suffers, and because of which so many others suffer, is at a foundational level linguistic. He does not truly understand the words of others, and – more importantly for present considerations – he does not possess the words that would both enhance and deepen his awareness of others and (inseparably interwoven with this) his knowledge of himself. With these issues to the fore, the play reveals itself as an exacting study of the centrally significant contribution language makes to the constitution of moral selfhood.

The theme of language misunderstood and the characterological deficiency that promotes such misunderstanding is prominent from the start:[1] the manipulative and insincere responses of both Goneril and Regan are judged by Lear to answer his demands well, while that of the truly honest, loving, and sincere Cordelia yield only a threat ('Nothing will come of nothing'). What we call mere words, or empty words, are flying; in this verbal context Cordelia's silence says far more than anyone else speaking. But Lear is deaf to this potentially life-saving silence, just as he is deaf to sincerity and humane depth in an utterance.[2] One might say: he is incapable of seeing that the form of a statement or remark can be delivered without its content. Or worse: for him, empty unto himself, the form is all there is.[3] Shakespeare has anticipated this moral theme in the

very precondition of the opening of the play: Lear's purpose as he enters is to divide his kingdom between his daughters and sons-in-law in order to retain the authority, the respect, the high station, of a King (the 'form'), while casting off the duties, responsibilities, and multiple engagements required of a true King (the 'content') that taken together justify and genuinely substantiate – or earn – the authority, respect, and station.

The contrasts between the sensibilities of characters with which Shakespeare surrounds or relationally situates Lear are invariably instructive. As we proceed I will consider a number of these, but one of the contrasts that is most revelatory of inner content or its absence is the response of France to the fact that Lear has just deprived Cordelia of the very substantial dowry that (had the silence not just occurred) she would have brought to her marriage. France sees true content beneath mere form, true substance, true character, and it is precisely in Cordelia's silence and her resolute and character-affirming stance concerning the truth in relation to her father that he, France, sees a life companion. Lear, shouting out abusive descriptions of the now disowned Cordelia, expresses only his incomprehension that anyone would want a now dowry-vacated wife. With a sole measure of outward gain, he cannot comprehend the words of France any more than he has understood Cordelia's genuine and truth-respecting reticence. And another contrast, that of Kent, is revelatory in a different way: Shakespeare, ingeniously, places Kent in the position of disguising himself (as 'Caius') so that he can continue to serve and assist Lear after Lear, in another explosive fit of anger, has banished him; what Shakespeare is showing is that he, Kent, finds a way to continue the truth – the reality of his devotion to his King – beneath the appearance of Caius, so that Lear receives the benefit of Kent's service but in a way Lear does not recognize. In action, this is precisely like Lear's relation to Cordelia's words. But with these themes identified, we should look more closely both at the words as they work within the lives of the characters and as they work for Shakespeare as philosopher behind and beneath those characters' words. (One might say: in this sense, the philosophy is itself 'content' beneath the 'form' of the play, and without an attunement to it we as readers ourselves become 'Lears' to the 'Cordelia' of the play. But that consideration stands at a 'meta' level from the issue I wish to explore here.)

From the very inception the question of the knowledge of another is in play, and it is as quickly answered in terms of inward content that makes such knowledge worthy of the effort of its gaining. Kent, on meeting Edmund, opens the space for further human understanding ('I must love you and sue to know you better', meaning that he hereby resolves to work his way into a fuller comprehension of Edmund as a person), and this is met by Edmund's 'Sir, I shall study deserving', or that he will further strive to improve himself thus to warrant Kent's imaginative effort. With Shakespeare already sharply delineating the content of character, this entire genre of exchange is lost to Lear's constrained moral vocabulary. And it is in this first scene of the first act that Cordelia, initiating the knowledge-to-ignorance relation to her father, says (to herself, i.e. to a recipient of these words capable of comprehending them), 'What shall Cordelia speak?' She answers with what can be heard as an active verb describing inward reality: 'Love'. To which she adds, having just audited the exaggerated and hollow speeches of her sisters, 'and be silent'. But, given Cordelia's sensitivity to language, one can well imagine that she knows that 'love' can also be heard as a noun, so that the action she prescribes for herself is not to love but, indeed, to speak love. In this case, what Cordelia sees within her fleeting private reflections is that being silent is itself the act of speaking love. Lear, as we shall shortly see, repeatedly fails to 'hear' – to comprehend – silence, to understand Cordelia's silence as itself a chosen verbal action, and thus to see what stands so meaningfully before him, i.e. a 'speaking' of love, which is the actual present content of the 'silent sentence' he uncomprehendingly believes to be absent and that he demands to (literally, expressly) hear.

Shakespeare definitively answers the question concerning the investigation into language being undertaken here by moving directly to Cordelia expressing her own suspicion of manipulative rhetoric, where she measures words against far greater true love: 'I am sure my love's more ponderous than my tongue'. She herself is devoted to showing rather than saying. And Kent, finding Lear's intemperance aimed at him, warns the King about the grave dangers of a king succumbing to rhetorical manipulation ('When power to flattery bows…') and, exemplifying what he is describing (by saying what he is saying forcefully and directly), says that honour, or truthfulness, or sincerity, are wedded to plain speech: 'To plainness honour's bound'. To be whom and what he is, both within

himself and for his King, he here must speak a certain way. 'When majesty falls to folly', the duty then falls to him to set the King and the King's circumstances aright by speaking aright. And seeing so clearly what Lear does not, he begins his performance of this duty by saying, dangerously, 'See better, Lear'.

With a cultivated moral imagination, and the correlated ability to hear, such an admonition would occasion reflection – perhaps deep and sustained reflection – in a person. In Lear, it occasions rage, threats, and Kent's banishment. Lear's first (catastrophe-generating) error was to not hear Cordelia's silence; his second is to fail to hear, to contemplate, and to take seriously acting upon Kent's call. On (apparently) departing to his banishment, Kent, seeing significance in Lear's words beyond his (Kent's) personal case, says to Lear that in speaking the words of banishment Lear also banishes freedom itself; he says to Regan and Goneril that he hopes their 'large speeches' may find deeds that genuinely exemplify them; and to Cordelia he remarks that she has thought well, spoken well and honestly, and done so (and in this context uniquely) in a way that truthfully and thus precisely aligns sincere thought with earnest words (may gods take under their shelter she who 'justly think'st and hast most rightly said'). She is the standard against which the words of others are measured. Or: (a) Lear's words are out of control, running now far beyond what he realizes or comprehends (in a way that recklessly severs intended utterance from that utterance's range of implications); (b) the sisters' words, their speeches, are out of proportion to anything remotely like what they will actually do; and (c) Cordelia, in her words and in her silence, stands alone. That solitary ground, as the honourable Kent sees, is powerfully held with only a few real words fighting a great swell of prismatic verbiage. As a gauge of the extent to which these sets of words (apart from Cordelia's) are running amok, one might consider the extent to which we commonly expect speakers to have and maintain a grasp of the implications, or the entailments, of what they say: it would show either a blindness to or a disregard of meaning as conveyed in language for a speaker to not realize, in expressly saying one thing, that what I have just called a range of 'owned' implications extend from what is expressly said. Ordinarily, intention, utterance, and implication are understood as intricately intertwined, so that a speaker is expected to accept unstated implications, or reformulations, that variously highlight one aspect or

another of what was expressly said – as we say, 'what they meant'. Similarly, we expect speakers to draw boundaries on those entailment extensions and implications as they arise, rejecting misleading or 'unowned' entailment expressions. Lear's words forcefully fly around the room with no grasp of this or of the practical fallouts of his utterances (e.g. Cordelia leaving or the new distribution of power, really a seismic event between himself, Goneril, and Regan).

What Shakespeare next has France say is instructive, functioning as what Wittgenstein called a 'reminder': France expresses his sense of disorientation at the words he is hearing from Lear. What he, like us, expects is that a person's words will exemplify a morally constitutive coherence across time.[4] And a close reading of France's words to the King reveals that for him such coherence is not only the measure of, but in a real sense the content of, character.[5] What France says here is subtle: he can only make sense of Lear's dramatic reversal of feeling for Cordelia (from his 'most dearest' to her being disowned in a single linguistic test) if she has been seen to 'commit a thing so monstrous to dismantle so many folds of favour'. But now the subtlety, said of Cordelia but aimed at Lear: his faith in the character of Cordelia is so unwavering, so unquestioningly strong, that he says only a miracle could plant in his mind the belief that she had actually done any such thing ('which to believe of her must be a faith that reason without miracle could never plant in me'). It is also in this exchange that Burgundy is placed in sharp contrast to France, thus casting France's virtue in suddenly higher relief and showing his fittingness for Cordelia: Burgundy says to Lear that if he receives the initially discussed dowry he will marry Cordelia, where France is saying that 'love's not love' when it is mingled with practical concerns.[6] Shakespeare, showing that France comprehends the consistency of Cordelia's verbal actions (of course, including the choice of silence) – he knows deeply who and what she is by truly fathoming her words – compresses the point into what in this context is nothing short of a perfect sentence: 'She is herself a dowry'. The remark instantaneously reduces Burgundy to a low moral station while (here again) surpassing the comprehension of the impatient Lear. Separating one kind of value from another and seeing their polarities, France, in saying to Cordelia that she is now (characterologically and morally) richer upon being suddenly made (materially) poor, declares that his love for her has blossomed even more

now that she is despised. And on saying goodbye to her sisters, Cordelia says that she now knows what they are – where this knowledge is the fruit of her having measured the content and function of their words. Cordelia, tearful, and with France, sees into persons because she sees into their utterances. It is shortly after this that Regan says of her father, with a dismissive, pragmatic harshness, that his worsening condition is in part a function of his age, but adds a second, not unintelligent observation: 'Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself'. That is, even to her it is evident that Lear is a person who, as we colloquially say, speaks before he thinks, or, more precisely, is a person from whom utterances and declarations and pronouncements and judgments erupt without there being a sense of inner composure, inner reserve, and reflective life behind them. That missing composure and reserve (the Fool says to him, 'Speak less than you know'), that conspicuously absent measured, thoughtful, confidence-inspiring sensitivity, would be the natural correlate of a heightened sensitivity to language. Lear is a man who tragically does not listen to others and, because he does not listen to them, does not know how to reflectively listen to himself. Slenderly, indeed.

When Kent appears to Lear in disguise and is asked by Lear who he is, Kent replies that he is what he seems (a trustworthy servant of the King). It is, again, Kent adopting a disguise in order precisely to be what he actually is, and it is at this point that this circumstance is intertwined with the Fool telling Lear that he (Lear) is a fool (having given away his inherited royal position, the Fool says, on being challenged by Lear, that 'fool' is in fact the only title left). This is supposed to be a joke, but like the disguised appearance carrying within it the reality of Kent, the Fool's words are, as we say, a little too true. Kent notes precisely this: 'This is not altogether fool, my lord' – that is, pay heed that this is not entirely a joke. And at the close of the exchange, the Fool expresses a wish for a teacher who can teach him to lie ('Prithee, nuncle [he repeatedly calls Lear 'uncle'], keep a schoolmaster that can teach thy fool to lie. I would fain learn to lie'). Shakespeare is showing that truth in actual language is not reducible to nor containable within explicitly asserted propositional content. Like Kent in disguise to deliver his true self to his King, the Fool, in speaking a fool's nonsense, speaks the truth. Kent is a truthful false actor; the Fool is a truthful liar. And knowing himself, he describes himself to the King as needing to learn to lie. That is, the Fool, in

presenting what he says as jokes, is lying; they are factual descriptions of Lear's condition and situation, and so he finds himself always speaking the truth (thus in this sense needing to learn to lie). And his awareness not only of this layered truth–falsity relation but also that he serves at the pleasure of the King, and that he can be permanently cast out in a single phrase and so walks a very fine line, displays a capacity for self-reflection or self-knowledge that outstrips Lear in every exchange. To compress the point: he knows that his very title is a lie. It is as if Lear, by instructive contrast with Cordelia, with Kent, and now with the Fool, is living in a narrow linguistic world in which assertions such as 'snow is white' or 'the cat is on the mat' are about as complex as things get. The unquestioned presumption of linguistic simplicity is, in intricate contexts of human complexity, a tragic error.

But I should note: although I am casting the problem from which Lear suffers – and because of which so many others in his world suffer, in terms of a blunt focus on only the most literal propositional content – the problem actually fans out from this base. For example, Kent sees the content within the Fool's joke that Lear does not, which is not strictly speaking a matter of seeing beyond propositional content. It is, rather, that Kent recognizes (non-reductively to explicitly asserted singular content) that an utterance can be two types of speech act at once (e.g. a joke and a warning); Lear sees, understands, and in a very limited way listens only mono-dimensionally. Similarly, Lear's failures to hear, his inability to truly listen, his insensitivity to others' subtle and layered reasons and complex intentions, and his resultant anaemic capacity for genuine and sympathetic communication all also reach beyond the fairly contained issue of seeing only explicit propositional content or overrating the role direct propositions play in meaning. So my characterization of the problem here is meant to be broad and inclusive of the web of linguistically generated problems one would encounter who started with a demand for simple declarative statements and believed them to be foundational to all meaning.

There is an exchange with Goneril that is precisely in these terms laced with philosophical significance. In response to her having criticized Lear's knights, Lear calls her a liar for having spoken against his unexamined presuppositions, but then, importantly, speaks to *himself*, calling his name in frustration ('O Lear, Lear, Lear!'). What he says speaks volumes

beyond his immediate intentions: striking his own head repeatedly, he exclaims 'Beat at this gate that let thy folly in and thy dear judgment out!' What he means, narrowly, is that his head has served as the perceptual portal through which the folly that supplanted his good sense gained entry. But what this shows is that, in separating himself from the contents of his own mind, he does not stand in an intimate and self-defining relation to his own speech, his own words.[7] He sees himself as separate from those and is now sitting in judgment of that verbal part of himself that he disavows, that he does not see as his own in the right way – he sees his speech as his but not *of* him. For him, foolishness was *let in*, and on arrival it established a ventriloquist-like relation to what he said, and because words are deeds, it established a puppeteer-like relation to what he did. Instantiating one variety of self-deception, he attempts to stand apart from his own language as a mechanism for preserving a false self-image. 'Slenderly' is the right word, and Shakespeare is steadily disclosing its deeper meaning.

Act II begins with a remarkable further commentary on language: Shakespeare has Cornwall disrupt any lingering presumption that straight speech, the direct utterance, is somehow more immune to dissimulation than a more artful phrase. The oversimplified picture is: if we reduce, or 'translate', the more embellished, poetic, literary, or sensitive usages of language to what are pictured as their blunt, directly assertive counterparts, we will reduce impurity and thereby maximize the prospects for truth. Cornwall identifies Kent as one who has been 'praised for bluntness' and of whom it is thought that because of 'an honest mind and plain, he must speak truth'. But he as quickly adds: 'These kind of knaves I know, which in this plainness harbour more craft and more corrupter ends'. This in turn is followed immediately by Kent performing a linguistic act that advances the theme concerning what France saw in Lear's words concerning Cordelia: Kent adopts an idiom completely foreign to him ('sir, in good faith, or in sincere verity, under th' allowance of your great aspect, whose influence, like the wreath of radiant fire on flickering Phoebus' front'). He gets precisely that far when Cornwall interrupts to pointedly ask him what on earth he is talking about and why he is speaking like this ('What mean'st by this?'). Kent's answer is: 'To go out of my dialect, which you discommend so much'. Shakespeare is thus intertwining his exposure of the oversimplifying myth of a tighter

connection between simplicity and truth with the theme of recognizing a person in, and by, their words. Kent, in these words, is to Cornwall fleetingly in disguise; against Lear's self-deceptive linguistic disavowal, language is in fact inseparable from identity.

Nor is language an arbitrary affair. Lear may have been, and may still think of himself, as an autocratic power; what he says, is. But he does not have this power over language, over meaning. In an exchange with Goneril leading to further emotional severance concluding in irreparable alienation, Goneril says, against his words, 'All's not offense that indiscretion finds and dotage terms so'. He can rename, redefine, as he likes – but words will not obey him. At this point in the play his losing his grip on this fact serves as a measure of his mental dissolution, but Shakespeare does much more. Lear's incomprehension of the concept 'love' is, as I said at the outset, tragic. Shakespeare brings this to the surface precisely here, with Lear – having already claimed, against everything that France sees, that Cordelia could not be of any value because she has no material value – now calculating the relative loves of Goneril and Regan by asserting that, since Goneril will leave him 50 knights and Regan only 25, that Goneril thus loves him twice as much. This is an unwitting but still cruel mockery of human understanding. One could express this as: does he have *any* comprehension whatsoever of the meaning of the word 'love' or its reach, its character, its depth?

It is near the opening of Act IV that Gloucester is employed to draw another telling contrast to Lear: recently blinded, for him inner vision is separate from, and not dependent upon, outward or actual vision. Announcing that he did not always see clearly when he still possessed sight, he thereby demarcates the imaginative space of insight. This is the essence of what is required to truly understand the words of others – and it is precisely what Lear lacks. When Kent asks the Gentleman about Cordelia's reactions to the letters, he speaks beautifully of Cordelia maintaining an outward composure while still betraying inner delicate emotional experience that was growing to the point of overwhelming her: she was, on reading the letters in his presence, 'a queen over her passions', with her subtle tears like 'sunshine and rain at once'. The composed and controlled smile was one thing, the tears another: 'Those happy smilets that played on her ripe lip seemed not to know what guests were in her eyes, which parted thence as pearls from diamonds dropped'. And he sees,

and then captures perfectly, the beauty in this quiet romantic sorrow as Cordelia's inner emotional crescendo gently manifests itself: 'Sorrow would be a rarity most beloved if all could so become it', if all could make delicate sorrow such a rare thing of beauty. This is not to see a person; it is to see into a person. Gloucester describes this kind of human understanding and in his words opens conceptual space for it; the Gentleman exemplifies it and in his words articulates it; and Lear, in his arrogance and his impatience, has inwardly blinded himself to it. He sees – outwardly.

And, still another error but even worse: he hears in the same way, believing himself to be missing nothing. When Edgar presents himself to the blinded Gloucester as another person, Gloucester immediately perceives the difference in language as indicating a difference of person: he says 'Methinks thy voice is altered, and thou speak'st in better phrase and matter than thou didst'. Edgar insists that only his garments have changed, but Gloucester sees, through language he can hear, that something is wrong: 'Methinks you're better spoken'. I mentioned the indissoluble relation between language and identity. One could put Shakespeare's philosophical point here in this way: language is a fingerprint. But as with a trained and cultivated musical ear, one has to have ears to comprehend its subtle content, to discern the identity-revealing minute parts. And much of that training in discernment, Shakespeare knows, will be painful experience: Edgar refers to himself as one 'who by the art of known and feeling sorrows am pregnant to good pity'. His sympathetic imagination is cultivated by sorrow; he has suffered into knowledge (he alludes to, without recounting, a difficult past), and that knowledge takes form as compassionate comprehension. Beyond Gloucester's perceiving a difference of person in Edgar's language (although that is something), it is Edgar's sensitive and able ear conjoined to his equally sensitive and able tongue that together serve as the conduits of his deep humanity. In him, suffering begets a form of moral beauty. Lear, by contrast, just suffers.

There is a point late in the play where Shakespeare provides a perfect analogy for the kind of meaning words can accrue and how they can present links to the past. Referring to ragged clothes as 'weeds', Cordelia says, 'Be better suited. These weeds are memories of those worser hours. I prithee, put them off'. Like the garments in this context, a recalled phrase

can be one that awakens either a small set, or a stream, or a flood, of memories and attendant images, of emotions remembered. The sensitive Cordelia sees such connections right and left; as if illustrating what Wittgenstein[8] was to observe at profound philosophical depth, her life in words reaches far beyond what we think of as words themselves. She lives her life in words; Lear, by contrast imperious, impatient, one who 'talks over' others and who demands others speak in voices he wants to hear, with his simplified thought, his blunt words, and his peremptory deeds, only repudiates that life. It is thus fitting to his moral psychology that at the end of the play he actually *wants* to retreat to prison with Cordelia – where he imagines they together will sing like birds in a cage, hear and discuss courtly gossip, and live in protection from the ups and downs of power and its unpredictable vicissitudes. And then he says: when she asks for his blessing, he will kneel down and ask her forgiveness. This is suddenly new: it is a glimmer of realization of who he is and what he has done. But – his final tragic error – this is too little, too late. Perhaps he senses that he could learn real language from Cordelia; perhaps he gains a first glimpse of how they could then actually talk to each other (he imagines that they will contemplate the mysteries of the universe together). But for him – and this is all too of the man – this seems possible only away from his life, only beyond the bounds of who he is, only in imprisoned retreat. What he does not see is that the retreat to prison would only be a literalization of the verbal prison in which he has lived all along.

In Stanley Cavell's classic essay 'Must We Mean What We Say', he writes

> It sometimes happens that we know everything there is to know about a situation – what all of the words in question mean, what all the relevant facts are; and everything is in front of our eyes. And yet we feel we don't know something, don't understand something.[9]

Lear never had a problem, narrowly speaking, of word-meaning.[10] Yet he missed volumes. Confidently striding through the worlds of Kent, of Edgar, of the Fool (who repeatedly functions as Lear's personal Greek chorus, with that chorus commenting both on the limits of his language and on his words themselves pulling him ever further into madness on the heath), and of Cordelia, his ear had no acuity; if in his plea to Cordelia to

retreat with him he sensed something, it was, as Cavell puts it, that despite his being right there all the time, there was something he did not know, did not understand. Cavell here appeals to Socrates, who said that in such circumstances what we need is to be reminded of something. And Wittgenstein had spoken of assembling reminders for a particular philosophical purpose. Lear has not seen into what he knows, and he has not organized what he does know in the right, i.e. light-casting, sense-making, way.[11] Were he able to look back over his exchanges with his daughters and with all those around him, were he able to see emergent patterns of his too quick and invariably unconsidered responses, and were he able to cultivate within himself the ability to hear the nuances of the words of others by analogy with a trained musical ear and to see that *how* they say is as important as *what*, in a reductive sense, they say, he could have lived in a world, waiting just beyond the reach of his comprehension, of enriched and humanized linguistic interaction. Tragically, he missed it.

Cavell writes, 'When [a philosopher's] recommendations come too fast, with too little attention to the particular problem for which we have gone to him, we feel that instead of thoughtful advice we have been handed a form letter'.[12] The fact that everyone knows the feeling of receiving a form letter in response to a heartfelt effort shows that we know the difference between the basic meaning of which Lear was aware and the kinds of meaning to which he was deafened, to which he was meaning-blind. This is just as we know the feeling of being given a stock phrase in response to an expression of suffering or a quiet call for help in a situation of emotional intricacy – precisely Lear's insufficient responses to Cordelia.[13] The kind of attention required is special, and, as Cavell continues the above passage, 'Attention to the details of cases as they arise may not provide a quick path to an all-embracing system; but at least it promises genuine instead of spurious clarity'. The all-embracing system for Lear is: he is King; he has three daughters; he will divide his kingdom among them; they must compete in statements of love (that he is king is just about the full content of his self-definition, hence 'slenderly' once again). His system leaves him bereft of real understanding and bereft of genuine clarity.

Philosophy as system-building can (it need not, but it can) to varying degrees and in varying ways make Lears of us, and in our impatience we deafen our ears to precisely the kind of nuance (often shown in literature

more than in philosophy) that the tradition of Wittgenstein, Wisdom, Austin, Rhees, Cavell, Diamond, and others have developed. In an examination of the intertwined issues of word-meaning and of what thinking is, Wittgenstein wrote:

> These are, of course, not empirical problems; but they are solved through an insight into the workings of our language, and that in such a way that these workings are recognized – *despite* an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with. Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by the resources of our language.[14]

The want of insight into the workings of our language; the sustained urge to misunderstand; the failure to assemble what lies before us; the costly bewitchment of understanding: these phrases capture the condition of Lear.

Yet one should not embrace a generic claim concerning the connection between any generalizing philosophical methodology and Lear's condition: rather, one could learn from Lear to preserve an Austinian, or closely attentive, ear and the philosophical space for it, or to remain vigilant about the potential significance for philosophical understanding of seemingly small linguistic detail. This is easily said and difficult to accomplish, and again literature is a form of art that can deliver a great deal of illuminating content of this kind. Questions of meaning, of interpersonal understanding, of nuanced intention, of sophisticated interpretation, of implication and entailment, and how words are deeds are explored with microscopic acuity in literature, and it can be in the too quick, or philosophically impatient, approach to such content that we risk becoming in small ways Lears. Here one can, indeed, consider the very idea of an example: if we see a literary text as reducible to an illustration of a briefly propositionally encapsulated philosophical thesis, we fail to attend to it for its more intricate significance and fail to discern the rich contribution this form of art can make to philosophy (e.g. where the thesis is 'There can be meaningful silences' and the example is 'Cordelia'). But like Shakespeare showing ever more deeply the meaning of 'slenderly' as it functions within this play, we can grasp more deeply the meaning of 'meaningful silence' by looking more closely, more exactingly. This does

not itself argue against methodological generality, but it does argue for particularity and that interpretative patience can alter or inflect the general claims at which we ultimately arrive and the words in which they are stated.

Cavell writes, 'Euthyphro does not need to learn any new facts, yet he needs to learn something: you can say either that in the *Euthyphro* Socrates was finding out what "piety" means or finding out what piety is'.[15] Lear needed to become the person who could hear his daughter: he could have found out what her words mean as the finding out of who and what she actually is. And he would thus have been in a position to deserve love and not merely to demand its thin simulacrum. Shakespeare's *King Lear* is, of course, a play in language, but, so much more deeply, it is a tragedy about language.

Related topics

Notes

1 Herder wrote, 'the first scene already carries within it the seeds of his later fate'; one way to say what Herder sees in this scene is the range of implications Lear's words open. See Herder (2008), this line p. 34.
2 The difference in play here is well examined in the writings of Rush Rhees. See Rhees (2006), especially chapter XIII, 'Philosophy, Life, and Language', pp. 243–56.
3 Sarah Beckwith, in her incisive and insightful *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (2011), captures the linguistic condition of Lear's court perfectly:

At the beginning of *King Lear* a daughter finds that she has nothing to say. Words of truth and of love are alike impossible at Lear's court.

> The play will show relentlessly, remorselessly, what a culture comes to look like when the paths to truthful expression are lost.
>
> <div align="right">(89)</div>

4 I offer a discussion of this expectation and its significance for the understanding of meaning in Hagberg (2015).

5 I pursue this link between language and consistency in character in Hagberg (2016).

6 There is an obvious resonance here with Sonnet 116 ('love is not love Which alters when it alterations finds'). France's remark, like the sonnet, could be reasonably taken as a claim concerning who does and does not understand the meaning of the word 'love'. Note, however, that Helen Vendler, in exactingly drawing out the layered and nuanced meaning of the sonnet, regards it not as an autonomous statement or definition of love but rather as a reply, and, indeed, a stern repudiation of an imagined interlocutor who has, just previous to the first line of the sonnet, used some of the words in the sonnet that indicate what she perfectly calls a 'sordid algebraic diction of proportional alteration'. We will see Lear employ precisely such 'sordid algebraic' calculations below, thus in a sense needing the very dialogical refutation of a quantified debasement of the concept of love that she sees the sonnet as. It is also remarkable how much more subtlety of the sonnet comes to the surface when seen as dialogically engaged language rather than as independently asserted propositional content. See Helen Vendler (1997: 487–93), this passage p. 492.

7 There is another way of describing the ethical significance of the words in play here. In a conversation about Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, Wittgenstein observed, as reported by O.K. Bouwsma, that 'there might be a way of saying what is true truly and a way of saying what is true falsely' (the example at hand concerned the underground man asserting 'I am a spiteful person' but doing so in a crafted fashion that put on display a certain attitude toward his self-description and so, as Wittgenstein is here reported to have said, 'posing' while telling the truth). See O.K. Bouwsma (1986: 69–71). Lear, while telling the truth here, is speaking to himself in the third person, addressing himself by his surname and thus in a 'posing' sense

taking responsibility only at a distance. It is the truth said in a false way, with a distanced relation to one's own words.

8 Wittgenstein (2009), see especially 'Philosophy of Psychology: A Fragment' (formerly part II), section xi, where the kinds of connections I am referring to here are examined at length in their connection with word-meaning.

9 Cavell (1976: 1–43), this passage p. 20.

10 In this connection consider T. S. Eliot's remark (in the course of an essay on Yeats):

What is necessary is a beauty which shall not be in the line or this isolable passage, but woven into the dramatic texture itself; so that you can hardly say whether the lines give grandeur to the drama, or whether it is the drama which turns the words into poetry. (One of the most thrilling lines in *King Lear* is the simple: '*Never, never, never, never, never*', but, apart from a knowledge of the context, how can you say that it is poetry, or even competent verse?).

(Eliot (1975: 255))

11 Helen Vendler neatly articulates the kind of self-reflective process I am referring to here (and in doing so shows the connection between understanding a literary work and understanding a life); she writes of a poet at work:

A poet's compositional thinking becomes increasingly complicated when the experience and imaginative discoveries of past decades have to be folded into the work of the present. In writing *A Vision*, Yeats reflected on how the salient events in one's life might retrospectively be given intellectual order, imagining an afterlife in which one would construct difference schemes or arrangement of those events. One might relive one's life purely chronologically, reviewing it in the form of images unscrolling themselves in their original sequence. Or one might scroll those images backwards, finally understanding the earlier events (as one could not at the time) as foretastes and causes of later ones. Or one might order the significant events and images of one's life in a hierarchy, with the most emotionally decisive ones at the top, and so on down the ladder. In writing his late retrospective poetry, Yeats plays in comparable

ways with the ordering of images; and once he has found and settled on a plan of arrangement for his significant images, the poem 'clicks' into place.

(Vendler (2004: 92))

This is the kind of imaginative process that coalesces into an encompassing understanding of a text, of a person, and of a person's words as they operate within their larger frame. Cordelia's, Kent's, Edgar's, and the Fool's (in his witty and clever self-references) exude this sense of connectedness and intertwining self-awareness; with the exception of the glimmer at the end, Lear's, loudly and harshly, do not.

12 Cavell (1976: 41).
13 Shakespeare, in giving the final words of the play to Edgar, underscores the importance of the difference between genuine and formulaic speech. Looking back over what has transpired, and with a deceased King and daughter before him, he speaks of the respect language must show, and the depth it must find, to fit the circumstances it recounts. Edgar says, 'The weight of this sad time we must obey. Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say'.
14 Wittgenstein (2009), section 109.
15 Cavell (1976: 21).

Further reading

Beckwith, S., 2011. *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.Absorbing study of the change of meaning across time of theologically and ethically significant words, of Shakespeare's awareness of and sensitivity to this fact of language, and of the ways in which he shows this within selected plays.

Cavell, S., 2003. *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.Deeply insightful investigation of the philosophical significance of selected Shakespeare plays, focusing on the issue of scepticism.

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5

FIGURES UNETHICAL

Circumlocution and evasion in Act 1 of *Macbeth*

Scott F. Crider

'A wholsome tongue is as a tre of life: but the frowardnes thereof is the breaking of the minde': I begin with Proverbs 15.4 from *The Geneva Bible* (1560)[1] since it distils my understanding of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, without my presuming the play is reducible to a piece of proverbial wisdom or a morality play. The proverb's first clause includes synecdoche within simile – 'A wholsome *tongue* is *as* a tree of life' – which figures the flourishing that can result from good speech. The proverb's second clause – 'the frowardness thereof is the breaking of the mind' – is a not inadequate description of the plot of our play, which represents the tragic consequences of the Macbeths' increasingly habitual speech acts of unethical figuration, 'froward' acts which lead them to murder, broken minds, and death. The shared figuration within a marriage is an ethical concern. To Shakespeare, marriage is, in great part, a rhetorical enterprise, especially the associative deliberation that defines so much of that marital life. The rhetorical genre of deliberation informs much marital discourse as spouses decide what to do. That deliberation's figuration is both solitary (in aside and soliloquy) and associative (in dialogue). For Shakespeare, rhetorical figuration is not merely accidental clothing to naked thought, although that particular figure of speech is common enough in the rhetorical tradition; instead, rhetorical figuration is constitutive of personhood and sociality. We become what we say.

Throughout his canon, Shakespeare tends to represent courtship more than marriage, but the Macbeths are, disturbingly, one of his few functional marriages. Say what you will, they finish their chores. That those chores are evil can mislead us to see the Macbeths as mere villains, but Shakespeare represents them, instead, as tragic. That is, they are otherwise admirable people who err in deliberation, choice, and action, then suffer and die as a result.[2] My contribution to the discussion of the play will be to show that their tragic error is the result, in part, of rhetorical figuration. The Macbeths become figures unethical by practising unethical figures. When Richard Strier argues that Shakespeare is 'against morality' since 'personality includes and trumps all other values, including moral ones', he is both revealing something grand about Shakespearean character, and obscuring the costs of such grandness, costs Shakespeare is sometimes, if not always, willing to explore.[3] However, even the plays Strier is most interested in – like *Henry 4.1–2* and *Antony and Cleopatra* – do not neglect the moral or ethical in their representations of grand personality. Falstaff and our old lovers are indeed grand 'personalities', but their ethical defects are hardly 'trumped' by their vitality. And while the Macbeths are attractive personalities, they also become immoral, an immorality the play acknowledges.[4] Before examining the ethics of Macbeths' rhetorical figuration, allow me to discuss Cicero's *De Officiis* (*On Duties*) and its influence in early modern English education and Shakespeare's understanding, since Shakespeare's ethics of style is Ciceronian.

At the King's New School, Shakespeare would have studied Cicero's *De Officiis*, an important part of its curriculum, according to T.W. Baldwin.[5] There was, as well, a very popular English translation available to him: *Marcus Tullius Ciceroes thre bokes of duties, to Marcus his sonne, turned oute of latine into English by Nicolas Grimalde*.[6] Baldwin is clear: 'In Shakespeare's day… *De Officiis* was the pinnacle of moral philosophy' (1944: 590). Stuart Gillespie is persuasive: 'Because Cicero's were for the Renaissance the archetypal formulations of many principles of ethical and intellectual conduct, it is unsurprising that the behaviour of Shakespeare's characters sometimes reflects them closely'.[7] Cicero's moral philosophy is founded on duties made evident by the bond shared by human beings as such, the recognition of which activates virtue. Cicero's conception of the natural ethical law of the bond is hardly the only ethics available to Shakespeare, and I have no doubt that Shakespeare's understanding of ethics resulted, at least in part, from his encounter with Biblical and liturgical Christianity; even so, the language of the plays is Ciceronian.[8]

Cicero was probably the most important philosopher for the Renaissance, and Ciceronian humanism may very well be the defining characteristic of the period.[9] If we know much about Cicero, we probably think of him as an orator in the Roman Republic, which indeed he was, but he was also a philosopher of some influence, especially in the area of ethics. In his dedicatory letter to his translation, Grimalde calls him 'divine orator and worthy philosopher' (Cicero 1990: 51). One of the great ethical problems that Cicero identified and explored is the apparent tension between the ethical and the advantageous – what he calls the 'honest' (*honestas*) and the 'useful' (*utilitas*). *De Officiis* is divided into three parts: the first book concerns the ethical, a treatment of the cardinal virtues; the second, the advantages of the good life, properly understood; and the third, the reconciliation of the apparent tension between virtue and advantage. Cicero will argue that there is no real tension, and that anything truly advantageous will also be honourable. He spends the better part of a third of the treatise defending just that argument. And his foundation for this belief is a principle of human society, a principle which takes precedence over any advantages apparently adverse to that society, a principle of the human bond between people, a bond necessitating obligations to one another in association – or what Grimalde translates as 'fellowship':

> And as swarms of bees do cluster together, not to this end, to make combs, but being swarming by kind, they work their combs; so men much more than they by their nature do use their conning of doing and devising. Therefore unless that same virtue, which consisteth in defending men – that is to say, the fellowship of mankind – doth meet with the knowledge of things, it may be very bare, and alone-wondering knowledge. And, likewise, greatness of courage, severed from common fellowship and neighborhood of men must needs be a certain savageness and beastly cruelty.
>
> (Cicero (1990: 1.157, 109))

For Cicero, human beings in society share a bond or conjunction: it is strongest within the family, then the polity, yet it extends to all human beings as such. Human justice – the greatest of the shared goods – begins in our shared human nature. All ethical duties are, for Cicero, then, evaluated by their effect upon that social bond or conjunction, without which we become savage, especially if animated by courage.[10]

An added point for rhetorically poetic drama is this: that bond ought to guide one's speech. As Cicero argues, '[E]loquence gets within her reach those with whom we are joined in common fellowship' (1990: 1.156, 109). After all, Shakespearean drama represents human action in the family and the city by giving its characters dialogue – rhetorically poetic speech within, between, and among those characters who are so very like human beings. Cicero argues in his works on rhetoric that it is speech which makes possible human sociality itself, as one sees in his myth of the origin of civilization, a myth Cicero likes so much he repeats it: its first formulation is in his youthful *De*

Inventione, the second in his mature *De Oratore*. It would have been best known during the early modern period in the former:

> For there was a time when men wandered at large in the fields like animals and lived on wild fare; they did nothing by the guidance of reason, but relied chiefly on physical strength; there was no ordered system of religious worship or nor of social duties; no one had seen legitimate marriage nor had anyone looked upon children whom he knew to be his own; nor had they learned the advantages of an equitable code of law. And so through their ignorance and error blind and unreasoning passion satisfied itself by misuse of bodily strength, which is a very dangerous servant. At this juncture a man – great and wise I am sure – became aware of the power latent in man and the wide field offered by his mind for great achievements if one could develop this power and improve it by instruction. Men were scattered in the fields and hidden in sylvan retreats when he assembled and gathered them in accordance with a plan; he introduced them to every useful and honorable occupation, though they cried out against it at first because of its novelty; and then through reason and eloquence they had listened with greater attention, he transformed them from wild savages into a kind and gentle folk.
>
> (Cicero (1993))

The eloquence of the art of rhetoric both arises from and helps support the social order that makes possible human flourishing.[11]

Before taking up *Macbeth*, I should point out that, as Heinrich Plett and Quintin Skinner have cautioned, the art of rhetoric is not reducible to figures of speech.[12] Figures of speech are but one feature of style, and style is but one of the five parts of the full art of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery.[13] Although the focus here will be upon the ethics of rhetorical figuration, such an art of figuration is a sub-sub art within the full Ciceronian art of rhetoric Shakespeare learned at the King's New School while he was learning, as well, Ciceronian moral philosophy. The end of eloquence is persuasion per se, then, only as a proximate end; for a remote end, Shakespeare looked to the fellowship of the human bond, a remote end or purpose which can serve as a measure – a human made-stop – for evaluating the ethics of any rhetorical action.[14]

Shakespeare's ethics of style is Ciceronian in precisely this way: during ethical deliberation, a character's understanding of the social bond with other characters will influence his or her figuration, and his or her figuration will influence that understanding. Starting with either thought without style or style without thought would be distinctly un-Ciceronian. As Cicero has a privileged speaker, Crassus, put it in *De Oratore*, 'Every speech consists of matter [*res*] and words [*verba*], and the words cannot fall into place if you remove the matter, nor can the matter have clarity if you withdraw the words'.[15] There is no matter without words, no words without matter, and both involve sociality, so their complex can be examined ethically. Figures of speech which recognize and take their bearings from an honourably pragmatic grasp of the human bond are ethical; those which do not are unethical. Macbeth is distinctly interesting, since his figuration, while ultimately unethical, shows early indications of ethical character. Macbeth is no Iago. He is an otherwise good man whose unethical figuration leads him to the murder of children – a paradigm for complete depravity.

As Cicero would have it, 'greatness of courage', which Macbeth certainly has, when 'severed from common fellowship and neighbourhood of men must needs be a certain savageness and beastly cruelty'. At important moments, Macbeth's verbal deliberations with himself are just such a severing. In Shakespearean drama, the aside to oneself and the soliloquy are genres for representing deliberation: Shakespeare represents his characters in the act of thinking by representing them in that of speaking about the future.[16] We should remember that deliberation is a particular genre of rhetoric.[17] As the *Ad Herennium* puts it, 'Deliberative speeches are either of the kind in which the question concerns a choice between two courses of action, or of the kind in which a choice among

several is considered' ((pseudo-)Cicero 1989: 3.2), and its end defines the ethics involved: 'The orator who gives counsel will throughout his speech properly set up advantage as his aim, so that the complete economy of his entire speech may be directed toward it' (1989: 3.3). Yet, according to Cicero, advantage requires virtue, and it is interesting that, even in this work, the discussion of *honestas* occurs in the section on the genre of deliberative rhetoric and sounds like a précis of *De Officiis*:

> The honorable is divided into the right and the praiseworthy. The right is that which is done in accord with virtue and duty. Subheads under the right are wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance. Wisdom is intelligence capable, by a certain judicious method, of distinguishing good and bad.… Justice is equity, giving to each thing what it is entitled to in proportion to its worth. Courage is the reaching for great things and contempt for what is mean.… Temperance is self-control that moderates our desires.
>
> (1989: 3.2.3)

The Macbeths desire an apparent advantage whose courage overcomes their 'honesty' – in the ample, Ciceronian sense of virtue fulfilling duty. Their figuration is cause and consequence of that self-overcoming.[18] I wish I could examine all of their asides, soliloquys, and exchanges, but there is not space here to do so. I will limit myself to Macbeth's own private deliberation as a prolegomenon to a reading of the whole play.[19]

Our first moment is an aside once Macbeth learns that he is now Thane of Cawdor, having vanquished the latest, rebellious holder of that title. He and Banquo have already encountered the three witches and been given their 'fates'. While Banquo speaks with Ross and Angus, Macbeth reflects on his situation:

> This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
> Why hath it given me earnest of success,
> Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor.
> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings:
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man that function
> Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is
> But what is not.[20]

Macbeth chooses the figure of paradox to represent his situation: his encounter with the witches can be neither ill nor good. He then develops each option through antithesis, providing the 'if-ill/if-good' structure of lines 132–8: the encounter cannot be ill since they spoke the truth; it cannot be good because it encourages him to 'yield' to a 'horrid image'. Notice that, for now, the audience does not know what the horrid image is an image *of*, so it functions as a kind of circumlocution: we learn that it is an image of 'murder', but four lines later. The *Ad Herennium* defines periphrasis as 'a manner of speech used to express a simple idea by means of a circumlocution' (4.32.43). George Puttenham defines periphrasis, 'the Figure of Ambage', thus:

> Then ye have the figure of *periphrasis*, holding somewhat of the dissembler by reason of a secret intent not appearing by the words, as when we go about the bush and will not in one or a

few words express that thing which we desire to have known, but do so choose rather to do it by many words.

<div align="right">(Puttenham (2007: 277–8))</div>

Preferring the Latin form, Thomas Wilson defines 'circumlocution' as 'a large description either to set forth a thing more gorgeously or else to hide it if the ears cannot bear the open speaking'.[21]

The thought being figured by Macbeth – that he will have to murder the King to acquire the office – is still only 'fantastical', then becomes, as does his situation, according to him, paradoxical: '[N]othing is / But what is not'. So, for now, he chooses not to act: 'If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, / Without my stir' (144–5). Because he realizes his deliberations are agitating him ethically, he hopes the office of King of Scotland will come to him as easily as that of Thane of Cawdor – without his 'stir[ring]' to do anything about it. The figure of paradox informs the entire play, but Macbeth's periphrasis here indicates someone who is not yet able to look immediately upon his own design. He talks around it first, his intent 'secret' in 'not appearing by words', in Puttenham's phrase; in Wilson's, his own ears are unable 'to bear the open speaking'. Circumlocution can be a figure of wit or discretion with others, but here it is one of ethical evasiveness with oneself.

Shakespeare gives that verbal distancing to Macbeth again when he learns that the crown will not come to him by chance as Duncan announces that his son Malcolm will inherit the crown:

> The Prince of Cumberland: that is a step
> On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
> For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires,
> Let not light see my black and deep desires,
> The eye wink at the hand – yet let that be
> Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.

<div align="right">(1.4.49–54)</div>

Macbeth's metaphor for Malcolm – he is 'a step' to be over-leaped – allows him to refer to him, not as 'he' but as an 'it'. Metaphor may animate and humanize one's sense of another person, but this one objectifies the other person: Malcolm is an 'it'.[22] After another periphrastic evasion – '[B]lack and deep desires' for what? – Macbeth invents a startling instance of metaphor and metonymy: he hopes the 'eye' will wink at the 'hand'. Sight is often a metaphor for understanding and hand a metonym for whatever act is committed. Notice that Macbeth is thematizing his own ethical evasiveness: he does not want to know what it is he is deliberating about doing until it is done; this is why he calls upon the stars to hide their light – to make it impossible to see what he is thinking about doing. This is ethically suspect; even so, the fact that he must be verbally and psychologically evasive – consequently employing figures which often obscure his exact object of deliberation – indicates that he still has a conscience – what his wife will term, in the very next scene in response to his letter, 'the milk of human kindness' (1.5.16) – a conscience that functions as late as 1.7 – 'We will proceed no further in *this business*' (31, my emphasis to indicate another instance of circumlocution) – when he is persuaded to ignore his conscience by his wife, not that he is that hard to convince. This periphrastic evasiveness shows up later, as well, in both Macbeths' deliberations – alone and together – often followed by startlingly direct and savage language. In their exchange in 1.7, Lady Macbeth, for example, moves from, if not a periphrastic, then an abstract, indirect description of Macbeth's situation – 'Nor time nor place / Did then adhere, and yet you would make both – / They have made themselves, and that their fitness now / Does unmake you' (1.7.51–4) – to a brutal fantasy:

> I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,

Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed his brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this.

(55–9)

There is nothing periphrastic about that.

   Macbeth's next soliloquy indicates his desire to do quickly what he knows he should not do at all. Macbeth repeats 'done' three times in under two lines in his hypothetical sentence: 'If it were *done* when 'tis *done*, then 'twere well / It were *done* quickly' (1.7.1–2, my emphases):

[I]f th' assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success, that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all – here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come.

(3–8)

The repeated anaphora here – 'if… if' (cf. 1.3.131–43 above) – signals that Macbeth continues hypothesizing an assassination (at first obscured by a vague pronoun reference ['it']), an assassination which does not create any other effects than his own 'success'. The metaphor here relies upon 'to trammel up', meaning 'to net-up' fish or birds: Macbeth figures the murder as a hunt whose consequences end with the hunt itself, allowing him to 'jump the life to come', the afterlife (one assumes), in which he would be judged for the assassination. Macbeth's imagination is enamoured with leaping and jumping over eternal consequence. Even if he could, he would still, as he acknowledges, be unable to jump worldly ones:

But in these cases
We still have judgment here, that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th'inventor. This even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice
To our own lips.

(8–13)

   Notice that the periphrasis of 'the life to come' obscures judgment there, but once Macbeth thinks in more secular terms, he recognizes that he will be unable to escape judgment 'here'.

   This leads to his most vivid metaphor – perhaps an instance of catachresis since the field of metaphoric identification keeps shifting so quickly – a metaphor, even if mixed, so compelling it comes close to being an allegory.[23] Justice is even-handed, so the poisoned chalice he prepares for Duncan will be prepared for him. The hypollage here – the chalice is not literally poisoned; it contains poison – discloses understanding since his desire for the chalice of the office is a poison to him. Justice – *the* Ciceronian virtue, remember – reminds Macbeth that his bond or fellowship with Duncan has a number of bases – the family bond, the political bond, and the guest–host bond:

He's here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself.

Macbeth will shortly bear that knife – first in hallucination, then in fact. But he is not done realizing just how unjust an act it would be. He would be committing a crime against not only his bond with Duncan but also his obligation to a just ruler:

> Besides, this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off;
> And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye
> That tears shall drown the wind.

Since Duncan has been a good ruler, Macbeth uses simile to liken his virtues to angels who will trumpet the injustice of the assassination. Macbeth earlier suppressed fear of damnation, but it returns: the murder, or 'taking-off', will bring a deep damnation. He uses a simile to liken the pity others will experience for Duncan to a single cherubim. The simile here extends to personification, again perhaps allegory, and pity is transformed into a wrathful announcer of injustice. Macbeth's conclusion indicates an ethical honesty that keeps him from being a mere villain:

> I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
> And falls on the other.

Shakespeare gives Macbeth the habitual figure of 'leaping' he has been using to persuade himself to do what he should not at this very moment, when he recognizes that he has no motive but 'ambition', here seen through metaphor as the overleaping of a horse, landing not in the saddle but on the ground on the other side. Macbeth's figuration is here ethical since it recognizes and strengthens his bond with Duncan: his personification of his ambition as 'vaulting' signifies a recognition that his design is ethically suspect. When Lady Macbeth enters, he informs her of his change of mind – 'We will proceed no further in this business' (31) – but she persuades him otherwise. Macbeth, although influenced by his wife and the weird sisters, is himself the origin of the murderous action; it is a voluntary act which results from unethical figuration, figuration which receives external encouragement from human and supernatural powers but which originates with, and is cultivated by, him and his linguistic acts of unethical figuration.[24]

   I must forsake examining the actual murder (2.2), his plot against Banquo (3.1.34–65), and the consequent hallucinations of his ghost's visitation (3.4.76–84), as well as his assault upon Macduff's family (4.1.159–70). In brief, I would argue that they replicate his plot against Duncan, with this one major difference: he no longer struggles with his conscience. What began in tragedy ensues with dark farce. Instead, I would like to examine his last soliloquy, one in which his powers of figuring the human bond and its violation are fast dying as he becomes a man with a broken mind. When he receives the news of his wife's suicide from Seyton, his response in soliloquy enacts a complete isolation yielding to futility, all figures unbound from person and affect:

She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(5.5.17–28)

Having violated the most significant human bonds – in thought, speech, and action – Macbeth decides that life's finitude, figured as a 'brief candle' (23), necessitates its nothingness. Macbeth imagines the indictment general, but he unknowingly diagnoses only himself. His life has been 'a walking shadow' of life since what would have given it substance would have been figures to enhance the bond with others, thus augmenting him and them. That is, he might have been just. His has been 'a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing' (26–8). An 'idiot' is, literally, a wholly isolated human being, the one who has here signified nothing by figuring others, then himself, into nothingness. Given just how fully he has defiled his mind, I presume it a consolation to Macbeth to be decapitated.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* represents unethical figuration during deliberation – alone and together in marriage. He did not begin as a child-murderer without a conscience, a morally evacuated tyrant both feared and despised by those he would incarnadine. Lady Macbeth had genuine concern for her husband's wellbeing, even if her perception of that wellbeing was distorted. Even the ethically perceptive person can yield to the unethical figurations he or she invents to deliberate upon the future, even when one is deliberating with another person within the rhetorical economy of marital deliberation. Figures unethical, the Macbeths failed each other through unethical figures. The bond they shared is broken when they violate the bond shared with others. Her sensitivity is so maddened that she commits suicide without speaking to him at all about her suffering; his is so dulled that he hears of her death with indifference. Unethical deliberative figuration breaks their minds, their marriage, and their social ties until they are alone, then gone. Why? Because it is a short step from *verba* to *res*, a mere o'erleap from unethical figuration to unethical actions. In the ethical person's life, one must attend not only to what one does but also to how one figures what one is thinking of doing, if one hopes to become more than a 'dead butcher' (5.7.99), as Malcolm describes Macbeth in the play's closing lines. They were more than that at the beginning of the play, but not at the end: their unethical figures had *dis*figured them into figures unethical.[25]

Related topics

Notes

1 See Berry (2007).

2 My understanding for that sequence of actions arises from Aristotle's *Poetics*. For a defence of employing it in Shakespeare Studies, see Crider (2009), esp. 9–33. See Stephen Booth's (2001), esp. 87–98, for a caution about doing so.

3 Strier (2007: 206–25, 216). I will not here belabour distinctions between the moral and the ethical. For questions of Shakespeare and ethics, again see my (2009), esp. 9–33; for a treatment of the return to ethics in Shakespeare Studies, see Cox & Gray (2014), esp. 1–34. Where my earlier treatment of Shakespearean ethics is Aristotelian, this one is Ciceronian.

4 On morality in *Macbeth*, see Jorgensen (1971) (hereafter, cited internally).

5 See Ch. XLVIII on 'Shakespere's Training in Moral Philosophy' in volume 2 of his *William Shakespere's Small Latine & Lesse Greek* (578–616), esp. 581–99 on *De Officiis*.

6 Cicero (1990). All English translations are from this edition, followed by reference to Cicero (2005).

7 Gillespie (2016: 88). Miola (2000) mentions Cicero (165 and 166) but without further discussion. Burrow (2013) mentions Cicero more often, on 'Ciceronianism' as a style in detail (40–1).

8 Doing justice to the relationship of the two ethics would require examining the Christian, as well, and then their relationship, but for the purposes of focus, I will attend to the one alone, giving my conclusions a partial character that must be acknowledged. This work might supplement Jorgensen's discussion of the Macbeths' evil and their language, informed throughout by his deft citation of the English Bible and early modern biblical commentaries.

9 On Cicero in the early modern period, see Seigel (1968); for English Ciceronianism, see Jones (1998) and Vos (1979).

10 It should be pointed out that Grimalde's 'greatness of courage' translates *magnitude animi* not *fortitude*, since Cicero is clear that there is no true courage without justice (1.64). I owe this reminder to Gerard Wegemer and Jonathan Sanford.

11 As Mann (2012: 203) puts it, 'In the power it ascribes to the eloquent individual man, this myth of the orator provided one of the enabling fictions not just of Renaissance humanism but also of the particular form of vernacular humanism articulated by sixteenth-century English writers'. For a more sceptical view of the myth, see Rebhorn (1995), esp. 23–79.

12 Plett (2004); Skinner (2014). Plett uses all five sub-arts to organize his treatment of rhetorical poetics (2004: 85–293), and Skinner is explicit: '[I]n the literature on Shakespeare's rhetoric there has been a tendency to concentrate almost exclusively on *elocutio*, the study of rhetorical 'exornation', especially in the form of the figures and tropes of speech' (2014: 4).

13 See (pseudo-)Cicero (1989: 1.2.3).

14 For a defence of such made-stops along Aristotelian lines, see Crider (2009), esp. 12–18.

15 Cicero (1998), 3.19. For a discussion of this very topic, see DiLorenzo (1978).

16 McAlindon puts this well: 'Ambition is a perpetual dream of the future' (1991: 215). I am indebted to his whole chapter on the play (197–219).

17 Skinner argues that Shakespeare 'concentrates on the *genus iudiciale*' more than any other (2014: 49), though I would suggest that he, in fact, draws upon all three: the deliberative, the forensic, and the epideictic.

18 For the figures of speech, see Crider (2016) and its bibliography. One especially important addition to make to it is Mack (2011).

19 I have found the following two treatments of the play's figuration extremely fruitful: McDonald (2006), esp. 43–52, where he explicates the verbal repetitions of the play, and Cummings (2007). My argument provides a Ciceronian context to Cummings' observation: 'The borderline between imagining terrible things… and doing them is the great ethical and political crux of the play' (Cumming 2007: 232). And the case is anticipated by Jergensen on the Macbeths' 'linguistic reticence' (47–51), as revealed in Act 1 (52–7).

20 1.3.131–43. All citations are from Shakespeare (1994) (hereafter, cited internally).

21 Wilson (1994: 201).

22 Bourne and Caddick Bourne have pointed out to me an alternative reading of the antecedent to 'that': not Malcolm, but Duncan's decision to make Malcolm 'The Prince of Cumberland'.

23 Here, Cumming's identification of metalepsis as *the* figure of the play in his chapter in *Renaissance Figures of Speech* is compelling.

24 In 1.5, it is Macbeth who appears to suggest the action to his wife, and in 1.3, First Witch is clear that their powers are limited: 'Though his bark cannot be lost / Yet it shall be tempest-tossed' (24–5). I think Jorgensen goes too far in arguing that Macbeth is possessed; after all, the deliberation is clearly undertaken freely.

25 I delivered drafts of this chapter to two public audiences – one at Wyoming Catholic College in February 2012 for the Sharing the Wisdom Distinguished Lecture Series and one at Thomas Aquinas College April 2013 for the St Vincent de Paul Lecture Series – and found the questions and responses at both schools helpful in revision for publication. I presented another version at the American Shakespeare Center Blackfriars Conference in October 2013. Sean Lewis, Michael Augros, and Cass Morris organized those respective occasions and offered astute comments. Jonathan Sanford and Gerard Wegemer read a draft of the chapter and improved it through their timely, clarifying questions. Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne offered careful, gracious revision suggestions on an earlier draft. I would like to dedicate this essay to Philipp Rosemann, my colleague and my friend.

Further reading

Adamson, S., Alexander, G., and Ettenhuber, K., eds. 2007. *Renaissance Figures of Speech*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. A collection of essays on figures of speech in early modern English culture, both theory and practice, which is full of brilliant readings.

McDonald, R., 2006. *Shakespeare's Late Style*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. A study of Shakespeare's style, including its figurative language, whose detailed readings of the Romances are especially elegant.

Mann, J., 2012. *Outlaw Rhetoric: Figuring Vernacular Eloquence in Shakespeare's England*. Ithaca and London: University of Cornell Press. A study of figuration and the vernacular in English literature which is especially astute on what happens to figures of speech when they are learned in Latin then employed in English.

Plett, H., 2004. *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter. A magnum opus on the complete art and vision of the rhetorical tradition in European culture, whose chapters on Shakespeare are superb.

Skinner, Q., 2014. *Forensic Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. A deeply informed study of a select group of Shakespeare's plays by means of the forms of rhetorical discourse that make up forensic or legal rhetoric.

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6

CONVERSATIONAL PERVERSIONS, IMPLICATURE AND SHAM CANCELLING IN *OTHELLO*

Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne

Overview

Othello demonstrates what we call 'conversational perversions'. This is a technical term which we introduce to identify conversational behaviours which are designed to block the possibility of mutual understanding that characterises successful communication. We believe that our notion of a conversational perversion can be put to work to illuminate conversational encounters in general, but here our task is to show, in particular, how *Othello* furnishes examples of conversational perversions and, in turn, how the notion of a conversational perversion can be used to articulate a major driver of the play's narrative: Iago's manipulation of Othello.

   In order to reach the pay-off of the idea of conversational perversion for the study of Shakespeare, we need to present the notions which underpin it. First, we explain the background communicative framework, and then the notion of a perversion. We illustrate our preferred account of perversion using the examples of sexual sadism and sexual coyness. We explain how to extend this account of perversion to cover conversational coyness and sadism. Finally, we identify how Iago's (and Othello's) ways of communicating exemplify these conversational perversions. In the course of this, we argue that Iago can be seen as making use of a perverted treatment of conversational implicatures, which we call 'sham cancelling'.

The communicative framework

In communication, one of the things we aim for is a reciprocal relationship between speaker and hearer. In successful communication, speaker and hearer are *each* aware of certain psychological states *in the other*:

a   the hearer is aware of some of the speaker's psychological states – and of how the speaker means to affect some of the hearer's own psychological states;
b   the speaker is aware of how to get the hearer to recognise some of the speaker's own psychological states, and of how this is likely to affect some of the hearer's psychological states.

According to Paul Grice (1957), the relevant psychological states are beliefs and intentions. What a speaker does, in order to communicate, is to exercise intentions to influence the hearer's beliefs in a particular way, as captured by what we shall call the 'basic Gricean mechanism':

> **Basic Gricean mechanism**: A intends that B acquire a belief that *p* on the basis of B recognising A's intention that B acquire a belief that *p*.

The core idea of this account of communication is that interpreting a speaker – that is, working out what they mean – involves assuming that they satisfy the basic Gricean mechanism. The hearer interprets the speaker by working out what intentions the speaker is trying to get the hearer to recognise. This can be straightforward to do, or it can be complex.

When a hearer interprets a speaker, they have a default expectation that the speaker adheres to certain standards which govern our communicative exchanges in general (Grice (1975)). Those involved in conversation should engage in the appropriate way to meet the demands of the exchange. Grice calls this the **Co-operative Principle**. He proposes that four categories of maxims for rational co-operation fall within this general principle:

• maxims of **quantity**: provide the right amount of information (e.g. do not say too much; do not say too little);

- maxims of **quality**: give the hearer information in a reliable and trustworthy way (e.g. do not say what you know to be false; do not say that for which you have no evidence);
- maxims of **relation**: respect the focus of the conversation (e.g. make your contributions relevant);
- maxims of **manner**: construct your conversational contribution appropriately (e.g. avoid obscurity, prolixity and ambiguity; be orderly in your delivery of information).

When one party is seemingly not being co-operative, and is doing so openly, then they should be interpreted as communicating something without actually saying it. This, according to Grice, explains why there can be conversational contributions that are not strictly *said* but are 'implicated'. What a speaker 'implicates' in such cases is whatever is needed in order to reconcile the apparently uncooperative contribution with the Co-operative Principle.

The notion of implicature can be illustrated using Grice's famous example of a referee who writes, in a reference for an academic position, that the candidate 'has very neat handwriting'. This is all that is said about the candidate. The reference is supposed to focus on academic expertise, so this seems to be an irrelevant contribution, which also provides too little information. To reconcile the statement with the maxims of relation and quantity, we have to assume that the referee is being as relevant and as informative as it is possible to be within the remit of the referee's task, which is to say positive things about the candidate. So the referee has used her utterance of 'He has very neat handwriting' to implicate that the candidate is not suitable for the position.

This suffices to introduce the communicative framework we will be employing to articulate the notion of conversational perversion. The next step is to outline the account of perversion we will employ.

Perversion

In Thomas Nagel's (1969) account, sexual perversion is given a psychological basis (rather than e.g. a physiological basis). He suggests understanding sexual perversion as something which thwarts the

reciprocal awareness and recognition involved in what he calls a 'complete' sexual encounter. In the course of expounding his view of sexual perversion, Nagel makes the following observation:

> reflexive mutual recognition is to be found in the phenomenon of meaning, which appears to involve an intention to produce a belief or other effect in another by bringing about his recognition of one's intention to produce that effect. (That result is due to H. P. Grice, whose position I shall not attempt to reproduce in detail.) Sex has a related structure: it involves a desire that one's partner be aroused by the recognition of one's desire that he or she be aroused.

> (Nagel (1969: 12))

Nagel's observation is made in passing, and he does not explore the ramifications of the idea that the two structures are related, but we think it is key to articulating the possibility of perversion in the sexual as well as the conversational case. The structure Nagel identifies is a sexual analogue of the basic Gricean mechanism. We shall refer to it as the 'basic Nagelian mechanism':

> **Basic Nagelian mechanism**: A desires that B become aroused on the basis of B recognising A's desire that B become aroused.

This gives rise to a definition of perversion where a sexual act is perverted if, by its very nature, it does not allow for the instantiation of the basic Nagelian mechanism. For instance, an act that involves selecting a sexual partner that one thinks is incapable of recognising one's desire – such as bestiality – is perverted for that reason.[1]

Nagel sometimes deviates from this definition in his discussion of various perversions – for instance, sometimes invoking a slightly different concept of 'naturalness' – and he develops a particular understanding of recognition which is not essential to the mechanism. Our own view is that by abstracting the basic Nagelian mechanism from other elements of Nagel's framework, a unified and comprehensive account of sexual perversion can be given. The full argument for this cannot be given here, but we will concentrate on how to apply the basic Nagelian mechanism to

articulate two perversions that are of particular interest for the case of *Othello*: sadism and coyness.

Sadism as a perversion

When person A satisfies the basic Nagelian mechanism, A desires that A's sexual partner be aroused on the basis of recognising A's desire that he or she be aroused. We propose that the way to pinpoint the source of the perversion in sadism is to focus on what is needed in order for a person to recognise a desire that they be aroused: this desire must be *demonstrated* to them.

Sadistic actions do not *demonstrate* a desire that the other person be aroused. Instead, they demonstrate a desire that the partner suffer or that they be hurt or humiliated (for example), rather than that they be aroused. By not *demonstrating* the desire that the other person be aroused, the sadist blocks the other person from recognising that desire in them.

Thus in choosing sadistic acts, a person does not desire that they demonstrate, to their partner, the desire that the partner be aroused, and so does not desire that the partner *recognise* a desire that they be aroused. The desire that the partner be aroused on the basis of recognising the desire that they be aroused is therefore missing, and the basic Nagelian mechanism is not instantiated.

Coyness as a perversion

Coyness seems to involve a deliberate departure from the basic Nagelian mechanism. In acts of coyness, the desire to arouse is disguised, so that the sexual behaviour seems innocent. Not all coyness constitutes sexual perversion, however. Take flirtatious coyness. Suppose John is aware that Lewis is being coy, and Lewis is aware that John is aware that Lewis is being coy. Lewis's attempt to disguise his desire to arouse John is in fact a complex way of *indicating* his desire to arouse John. Since Lewis does desire that John recognise Lewis's desire that John be aroused, and that he become aroused on this basis, this flirtatious case of coyness does not count as a perversion on our model.

Some cases of coyness, though, do constitute perversions. Suppose Mark is aroused by Spencer and he wants to arouse Spencer. But he wants Spencer not to recognise Mark's desire to arouse him, and he also wants

Spencer to be unaware that he (Mark) is being coy and to interpret his behaviour as innocent. Mark wants to conceal from Spencer any desire that he (Spencer) be aroused; if Spencer were to recognise Mark's desire, it would spoil Mark's enjoyment of the encounter. Mark does not instantiate the basic Nagelian mechanism, because he does not have the desire that Spencer become aroused on the basis of recognising that Mark desires Spencer to be aroused. Mark's coy acts therefore count as perverted.

Relations between coyness and sadism

Both sadism and coyness (of the non-flirtatious kind) involve blocking the possibility of one's partner recognising a desire that they be aroused. But in sadism, this is typically done by demonstrating a different desire – for example, that the partner be hurt – whereas in coyness (of the non-flirtatious kind), this is typically done simply by appearing not to have the desire.

Note that there can be:

a   a sadistic form of coyness: for example, if Mark desires to distress or humiliate Spencer by appearing that he does not want Spencer to be aroused;

b   a coy form of sadism: for example, if somebody engaged in a sadistic act also conceals their desire that their partner suffer;

c   a coy form of the sadistic form of coyness: for example, if Mark has, but conceals, a desire to distress or humiliate Spencer by appearing that he does not want Spencer to be aroused.

We shall see later that some of Iago's conversational contributions combine conversational coyness and conversational sadism in analogous ways.

Conversational perversions

Our proposal is that using the structural similarity between conversational and sexual encounters (i.e. the parallel between the basic Nagelian mechanism and the basic Gricean mechanism), we can define various

conversational perversions corresponding to the taxonomy of sexual perversions. For the purposes of this paper, we are focusing on sadism and coyness. Recall that the basic Gricean mechanism captures a structure in which conversation partners are to interpret each other in terms of recognition of intention: A intends to induce in B a belief that *p* on the basis of B recognising A's intention to induce in B a belief that *p*. The ways in which we attribute intentions to each other in conversation are described by the Co-operative Principle and the maxims of rational co-operation which fall within it.

These conversational standards can be exploited by a speaker in ways which deliberately block or disrupt the ways in which a hearer tries to recognise the speaker's intention to get them to believe that *p*. This we call a 'conversational perversion'. For example, take a speaker who deliberately says things which they know the hearer does not have the expertise to understand – perhaps by choosing obscure specialist terminology. What the speaker chooses to say is selected precisely because the hearer cannot identify what beliefs they should acquire and cannot respond suitably in the conversation. We say this is an instance of 'conversational sadism'. The sadist does not intend that the hearer acquires a belief on the basis of recognising their intention – rather, they intend that the hearer feels they cannot judge what the sadist's intentions are. (Such failure to understand is often humiliating, so we should expect a link between sadism and inflicting humiliation.)

It goes beyond the scope of this paper to show how moods other than the indicative are accommodated within the Gricean account of communication in general, but it is easy to illustrate how conversationally perverted uses of, say, questions are possible. Here is a pertinent case of conversational sadism. In the BBC comedy *The League of Gentlemen*, Pauline is a character whose job is to give training classes to jobseekers to help them find employment. She has contempt for her students and frequently bullies and insults them. In one role-playing exercise, she plays the role of an interviewee, and one of the students – Ross, who knows he is much cleverer than Pauline and is fed up with Pauline's attitude towards her students – takes the role of the interviewer. During the mock interview, Ross asks:

Ross: Would you say you're a fairly egregious person?

Pauline: Wot?
Ross: Are you an *egregious* person? Do you have an *egregious* personality?
Pauline: Um… yeah. Yeah, I do.

Ross has chosen his questions because he knows that Pauline does not know what 'egregious' means. He gives her no resources that might help her guess at an interpretation, especially as Ross introduces misleading elements, such as the idea of being 'fairly' egregious.

Before we consider Iago's conversational perversions in detail, two notes are in order. First, on our account, conversational and sexual perversions are *interpersonal flaws*. Whether they are also moral flaws differs case by case. Clearly, in Iago's case, conversationally perverted behaviours are used to immoral ends, but this immorality is not, in our view, where the perversion *as such* lies. Second, what should be deemed 'perverted' or 'non-perverted' are particular conversational contributions. An extended conversation may well be made up of perverted and non-perverted contributions (just as in the sexual analogue). Indeed, it is probably essential to the success of Iago's destruction of Othello that not all Iago's contributions to conversation with Othello be conversationally perverted, since if Othello were consistently unable to attribute intentions to Iago, he may simply stop engaging in trying to work out what Iago could be telling him.[2]

Iago's conversationally perverted contributions

Conversational coyness in Act 3, Scene 3

Let us see how Iago blocks Othello from successfully attributing communicative intentions to him in the following exchange (3.3.35–41):

Iago: Ha! I like not that.
Othello: What dost thou say?
Iago: Nothing, my lord: or if – I know not what.
Othello: Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?
Iago: Cassio, my lord! No, sure, I cannot think it,

> That he would steal away so guilty-like,
> Seeing you coming.[3]

Iago intends Othello to believe that something is wrong when he hears Iago say 'I like not that'. The way he disguises this intention is to behave – in saying 'Nothing' – as if Othello had not been an intended audience for the original comment at all. Moreover, immediately after claiming he had not been making a conversational contribution ('Nothing'), he nevertheless goes on to encourage Othello to consider what he had meant.

In his next contribution ('Cassio, my lord! No, sure, I cannot think it…'), Iago uses the fact that what he says either entails or presupposes that *someone* is behaving in a guilty way to induce in Othello the belief that Cassio is behaving in a guilty way whilst ostensibly denying that it is Cassio. Here, Iago intends his contribution to give Othello the belief that Cassio is behaving suspiciously, but he intends for Othello to form that belief in a way which denies that this is Iago's intention.

Iago is also able to exploit maxims of co-operative conversation in ways that violate the basic Gricean mechanism. Consider Othello's reasoning (3.3.119–21) that:

> And for I know thou'rt full of love and honesty
> And weigh'st thy words before thou givest them breath,
> Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more

'Weighing' one's words may be taken to concern just judging their probable effects (e.g. how profitable or damaging they will be), but it may also relate to the maxims of quality (e.g. how warranted one is in putting forward the view the words express). Thus, this may be an example of how Iago exploits a maxim of quality: that it is not conversationally responsible to offer an idea when your evidence for it is scant or potentially overrated. Othello, in taking Iago to be co-operative, must infer that the reason for Iago not communicating is that to communicate would violate a maxim. This allows him to draw the conclusion that Iago's suspicion is of such gravity that the level of evidence required for speaking of it is high. Iago intends Othello to draw conclusions from the fact that the maxims are in place, but in a way which demands denying that Iago has communicated those conclusions. In other words, he wants

Othello to draw the conclusion by reasoning that Iago is *thinking* something which he isn't in a position to say. He intends Othello to gain beliefs, but his way of inducing them is designed to make it impossible for Othello to attribute this intention to him, and thus Iago creates a block to Othello basing his belief on recognition of the intention of his partner in conversation.[4]

Another case of Iago exploiting principles of co-operative conversation is found in an earlier exchange. Iago and Othello have been talking about Cassio knowing of Othello's love for Desdemona when Othello was wooing her, and the conversation continues like this (3.3.100–6):

Iago: I did not think he had been acquainted with her.
Othello: O, yes, and went between us very oft.
Iago: Indeed!
Othello: Indeed! ay, indeed: discern'st thou aught in that?
    Is he not honest?

Iago: Honest, my lord?
Othello: Honest! ay, honest.
Iago: My lord, for aught I know.
Othello: What dost thou think?
Iago: Think, my lord!

In general, Iago here prolongs the conversation whilst resisting contributing any substantive information. In continuing to engage Othello communicatively, Iago encourages Othello to take him as being conversationally co-operative; thus, each of Iago's contributions is taken by Othello to have a *point*. Yet Iago's responses fail to reveal any such point. That in itself is obstructive to Othello's efforts to understand Iago, but there is also something subtler in Iago's strategy. Iago does not allow Othello to choose between the various explanations there are of why he would be responding in this way. One option is for Othello to treat Iago as evasive: he is trying to avoid providing information because there is something that he could reveal but doesn't want to. Alternatively, Othello could take responses such as 'Honest, my lord?' and 'Think, my lord!' to express Iago's confusion over what information Othello could be asking for, suggesting that he expects it should already be clear what he means. A

third option is that Iago is perplexed precisely because Othello is supposing him to mean something when he didn't – he should not be taken to have suggested anything, whether by accident or by implicature, beyond what he has said, and the reason he is responding in an unhelpful way is that Othello is searching for information that was never there.

Of course, none of these is the real explanation for why Iago says what he does, since really his utterances are chosen to undermine Othello's confidence in his understanding of his own situation. But the way this is achieved, we suggest, trades on the various alternative explanations that are available from Othello's point of view (assuming that Othello, at this point, has not considered that Iago is deliberately being incomprehensible). Whether we should take these to initially present themselves to Othello as *equally* plausible options will depend on the performance; the text leaves all three explanations, and the weighting between them, open (indeed, this caveat applies to all the examples discussed in this chapter, since conversation is not just a matter of *which* words are spoken but also of *how*). What is important at this point is that because Iago's contributions to the exchange do not allow Othello to readily or definitively choose between these explanations, Othello is not in a position to attribute to Iago intentions corresponding to whatever beliefs about Cassio he might gain from the exchange.

The best Othello can do is to venture a working hypothesis (3.3.106–16):

> Think, my lord!
> By heaven, he echoes me,
> As if there were some monster in his thought
> Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean something:
> I heard thee say but now, thou likedst not that,
> When Cassio left my wife: what didst not like?
> And when I told thee he was of my counsel
> In my whole course of wooing, thou criedst 'Indeed!'
> And didst contract and purse thy brow together,
> As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain
> Some horrible conceit

'As if' is an apt expression here. The explanation Iago's behaviour *appears* to have cannot be conclusively posited. Rather than interpreting Iago with confidence, the most Othello can say is that it is 'as if' Iago should be understood in the way Othello chooses to understand him.[5] The fact that Othello is making a choice of working hypothesis at this point also adds to the kind of manipulation of Othello that Iago undertakes when he later warns him to 'beware, my lord, of jealousy' (3.3.166). Iago explicitly cautions Othello that a jealous mind is prone to make false hypotheses: 'oft my jealousy / Shapes faults that are not' (3.3.148–9). And the interpretative hypothesis Othello has made, in choosing to explain Iago's conversational behaviour in terms of concealed information about some harm done to Othello by those he trusts, is a jealous one, pursuing the option that best confirms his fears. Insofar as Othello is capable of recognising that his interpretation of Iago is influenced by jealousy, he is faced with the fact that Iago has also warned him off making the interpretative hypothesis he does, by cautioning him against the stance that leads to choosing it. By effectively inviting *and* repelling the same interpretation, Iago once again knowingly places Othello in a position of not being able to understand him.

Othello's working hypothesis in fact blends the idea that Iago is concealing something ('Too hideous to be shown') and the idea that he is revealing something ('Thou dost mean something'). 'Thou dost mean something' points towards a conversationally sadistic act on Iago's part. Othello has employed all the interpretative resources a hearer has available in order to try to interpret Iago, and he has arrived at no meaning. Yet he maintains that there was a meaning there. If Iago's meaning lies beyond Othello's interpretation, then it is impossible for Othello successfully to play his conversational role as a hearer. Thus, he experiences himself as being disabled in his conversational role.

This also helps to characterise the nature of Iago's deception of Othello, since it shows something about where Othello's false beliefs come from. It is true that the conversation with Iago is a cause of Othello's beliefs about Desdemona, but the beliefs were not acquired through communication. When understanding what has been communicated becomes impossible, the only recourse Othello has left is to speculation about what information there was for him to gain from the conversation with Iago.

Is Iago's conversational behaviour, in general, characterised more by sadism or by coyness? By concealing his intention that Othello acquire beliefs about Desdemona and Cassio, Iago prevents Othello recognising that intention. This concealing is an instance of conversational coyness.

But it is also plausible that at times Iago wants Othello to wonder whether Iago is concealing an intention – that is, to wonder whether Iago is being coy. He does not, however, want Othello to resolve this to the point where he is able to attribute to Iago intentions to give Othello particular beliefs. Iago may want Othello to be in a state where he believes that *p* but cannot determine whether or not Iago intends him to believe that *p*. This is a particularly sophisticated type of conversational coyness.

The sadistic form of conversational coyness is instantiated when Iago intends for his coy conversational contributions to perplex Othello and leave him disempowered as a hearer – that is, no longer able to interpret his conversation partner. And if Iago also wants Othello to be unable to attribute to him this intention to perplex, then this is an instance of a coy form of the sadistic form of conversational coyness.

Cancelling implicatures in Act 3, Scene 3

Our next proposal is that there is a particular conversationally perverted strategy Iago uses that is of philosophical interest. It trades on the fact that conversational implicatures can be *cancelled*. To see what it is to cancel an implicature, suppose Grice's referee says 'He has very neat handwriting' but goes on to add 'which aids engagement with his important philosophical ideas'. The implicature that the candidate is not very good is cancelled, because an alternative explanation has been offered for the utterance 'He has very neat handwriting'; something has been said about why the handwriting is relevant.[6]

Iago makes use of this conversational resource but in a way that is conversationally perverted. We shall first describe two cases of putative cancelling and then identify what qualifies them as conversationally perverted. The first example involves an implicature about Cassio (3.3.127–30):

Iago: Men should be what they seem;
Or those that be not, would they might seem none!

Othello: Certain, men should be what they seem.
Iago: Why then I think Cassio's an honest man.

An implicature that Cassio may not be what he seems is generated by mentioning people who are not what they seem (whilst discussing Cassio) but is purportedly cancelled by an explicit statement about Cassio in which Iago is apparently content to judge that Cassio is what he seems.

The second example involves an implicature about Desdemona (3.3.229–39):

Iago: Ay, there's the point: as – to be bold with you –
    Not to affect many proposed matches
    Of her own clime, complexion and degree,
    Whereto we see in all things nature tends –
    Foh! one may smell in such, a will most rank,
    Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural.
    But pardon me: I do not in position
    Distinctly speak of her, though I may fear
    Her will, recoiling to her better judgement,
    May fall to match you with her country forms,
    And happily repent.

Here, Iago's 'I do not in position / Distinctly speak of her' purports to cancel an implicature that Desdemona in particular has 'a will most rank', as if to revert instead to a general claim about 'such' people.

With these two examples in mind, we suggest that there are at least three coy aspects to Iago's strategy of setting up and then purportedly cancelling implicatures.

1 *Moving the goalposts*. Iago shifts what Othello is entitled to assume about what Iago meant. Whilst all acts of cancelling involve some such shift, ordinarily the aim is to facilitate pinning down what the speaker's intentions were, whereas in Iago's case, the aim is to obstruct this. This resistance to being 'pinned down' disarms Othello's attempts to attribute intentions to Iago. *How* Iago achieves this is explained by the other two coy aspects of his strategy.

2 *Undermining what seemed to be the point of his earlier utterances*. In the first case, Iago effectively makes his earlier contribution *irrelevant* by

(purportedly) cancelling the implicature which made it relevant. Why consider people who are not what they seem, if they are going to be set aside in drawing a conclusion about Cassio? There was no conversational justification for Iago's comment *other than* to generate the implicature. If the implicature is cancelled, the original statement does not play a proper role in the conversation. By saying something which would seemingly make his earlier conversational contribution pointless, Iago coyly blocks Othello from interpreting his meaning.

The second case is less clear. On one reading, Iago is constructing an argument: choosing outside one's own 'clime, complexion and degree' normally signals psychological and ethical deviance; Desdemona is not psychologically and ethically deviant; therefore, Desdemona will retract her choice. In that case, cancelling the implicature does not make the earlier contribution impotent; rather, it enables it to play its role in the argument. On another reading, Iago's purported cancellation of the implicature serves as an outright rejection of his previous contribution, telling Othello to ignore it altogether; Iago presents himself as having gone too far, perhaps having failed to adhere to maxims of quality. Iago may be taking advantage of Othello's opinion that he is someone who is disposed to 'mince [a] matter, / Making it light to' his friends (2.3.252–3). Thus, in representing himself as softening the original claim, Iago adds plausibility to that claim in Othello's eyes. On this reading, Iago constructs a conversational situation where the contribution retains its force, but he retreats from it: Othello is left thinking that Iago's original contribution *did* adhere to maxims of quality, but that Iago *misjudges* that it did not because Iago's standards are compromised by the unsuitable demands his 'honesty and love' (2.3.252) place on the level of certainty needed to say something which condemns a friend. On a third reading, the ideas about 'Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural' and about Desdemona's 'recoiling to her better judgement' are two distinct insults, and Iago's purported cancellation is bizarre in just the same way as his purported cancellation of the implicature that Cassio is not what he seems. His second point could have been made without the first, so if – as his purported cancellation suggests – it did *not* pertain to Desdemona, then there was nothing conversationally co-operative in saying it. For why consider 'foul disproportion', and so on, if not to apply what is being said to Desdemona?

In the second and third readings of the second case, and the proposed reading of the first case, what is most significant is that a residue of the implicature is left even after it has supposedly been cancelled. Thus, there is a clear *rhetorical* point to what Iago is doing, although it may be achieved by deliberately behaving in a way which seems to rob some of his utterances of their *conversational* point (by the standards of the maxims of co-operative conversation). The aim is to leave Othello unable to *discard* what seemed to be implicated and yet unable convincingly to attribute it to Iago.

This leads us to the third aspect of Iago's strategy of coy cancelling:

3. *Deliberately unconvincing cancelling.* As a further illustration, consider this exchange, from an earlier point in the scene (3.3.94–9):

Iago: My noble lord,–
Othello: What dost thou say, Iago?
Iago: Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady,
　　Know of your love?
Othello: He did, from first to last: why dost thou ask?
Iago: But for a satisfaction of my thought;
　　No further harm.
Othello: Why of thy thought, Iago?

Depending on how the question is delivered in performance, it may carry an implicature that there is something suspicious, or at least significant, about Cassio's situation. To reconcile Iago's utterance with maxims of relation, we must take it that it matters whether Cassio knew, implicating that the knowledge would be of some significance to Cassio, and that the way it is significant also affects Othello.

Iago, however, purports to cancel the (potential) implicature: he provides an explanation of why he said what he did which overrides the explanation which generated the implicature. What is key in understanding the dynamic of the exchange is that Iago does this in a deliberately *unconvincing* way. 'But for a satisfaction of my thought' purports to remove the need for Othello to draw whatever conclusions about Cassio might otherwise have been implicated by Iago's original question. But – as Iago knows – the new explanation he is offering does not explain the original utterance as well as the potential implicatures would, partly

because it simply opens up the question – which Othello immediately goes on to ask – of why he would be thinking about *that* anyway. As such, Iago disclaims the original implicatures but ensures that Othello continues to entertain them (because they remain the best explanation of why Iago said what he did).

Since Iago has not given Othello a good to reason to set aside, for the purposes of interpreting Iago, the thought that there is something suspicious about Cassio, we shouldn't quite say that this implicature has been cancelled, nor even that there has been an attempt to cancel the implicature. Rather, going through the motions of cancelling, whilst offering an explanation too weak to remove from the hearer's beliefs what was implicated, amounts to what we call 'sham cancelling'. Iago exploits the possibility of sham cancelling in order to influence Othello's beliefs in a coy way. He intends for Othello to believe that there is something suspicious about Cassio, but his sham cancellation instructs Othello not to attribute to Iago the intention that Othello have that belief.

Because the explanation offered in a sham cancellation is so weak, Iago allows Othello to go on thinking 'but that *is* what you meant'; but because Iago has gone through the motions of cancelling, Othello is *also* called on to *reject* that interpretation. Once again, creating this perplexity amounts to conversational sadism. Iago puts Othello in either:

a   a state of uncertainty, where he is essentially unresolved about whether to attribute to Iago the intention to get him to believe certain things about Cassio and Desdemona, or:

b   a state where he is *both* conversationally required to think that Iago intends him to believe certain things about Cassio and Desdemona *and* conversationally required not to do this, because Iago eschews the intention. Iago's behaviour suggests: that is what I meant, and it isn't what I meant.

This also raises questions about who has *responsibility* for Othello's beliefs. Implicatures are a good example of how conversational responsibility is shared between the speaker and hearer, as the hearer has to make decisions about what would satisfy the maxims in order to construct the implicature behind what the speaker has said. Sham cancelling creates a peculiar dynamic of responsibility because the

speaker has introduced an idea to the conversation and has then disowned it, but without successfully removing it, thus placing the burden on the hearer to either take it up or find a better explanation for why it should be discarded.[7]

Morals

Iago's use of language to disrupt Othello's peace of mind goes far beyond simply deceiving him or putting him in a state of jealous suspicion. We have argued that Iago epitomises conversationally coy behaviour, and his coyness comes in various forms, including conversationally sadistic forms. Iago does not always straightforwardly disguise his intentions: he sometimes encourages Othello to waver over whether to attribute them, or he speaks in a way which requires Othello to create contradictory interpretations of what Iago means.

We have focused on just two conversational perversions – coyness and sadism – and just a few exchanges from one play. To extend this to more of Shakespeare's works, and a wider variety of conversational perversions, whilst beyond the scope of this essay, is possible. What we hope this chapter demonstrates is how fruitful the idea of conversational perversion can be in understanding not just language but also the dynamics of the drama.

Coda: conversational perversions beyond Iago

To illustrate that conversational perversion is not unique to Iago, let us briefly touch on an exchange where Othello exhibits conversational perversion (4.2.24–33):

Othello: Pray, chuck, come hither
Desdemona: What is your pleasure?
Othello: Let me see your eyes;
   Look in my face.
Desdemona: What horrible fancy's this?
Othello [to *Emilia*]: Some of your function, mistress,

Leave procreants alone and shut the door;
Cough, or cry hem, if any body come:
Your mystery, your mystery: nay, dispatch.
[Exit Emilia]
Desdemona: Upon my knees, what doth your speech import?
I understand a fury in your words,
But not the words.

Othello's exclusion of Desdemona comes not just from silencing her (as a speaker) but from undermining her role as a hearer by making himself unintelligible to her. This is an instance of conversational sadism from Othello.[8]

Related topics

See Chapters 7, 19, 20

Notes

1 An account of what it is to recognise someone's psychological states (such as desires or intentions) is beyond the scope of this paper. Here, we trade on the fact that there is *something* it is for recognition to be achieved, and that there are various ways in which this can fail, some of which are perversions.

2 The term 'perversion' has been used in connection with Iago's language before. Vickers (1993), who also draws on a Gricean framework, writes, for example, that 'Since we alone have known from the beginning that Iago only serves for his own gain, when we see him professing to observe the Cooperative Principle and maxims, we alone know to what degree he is perverting them' and describes Iago as undertaking a 'silent perversion of trust' (1993: 80), as well as arguing that 'The continuum that Iago affirms between thought and speech as an index of love would indeed be a norm for sincerity in communication if he were not … relentlessly perverting it' (1993: 86–

77) and attributing to him a 'sustained perversion of the co-operation basic to all human communication' and a will 'that cannot bear not to fulfil itself in all its perverted energy and resourcefulness' (1993: 91). In this sense of 'perverting', Iago perverts the conditions for communication by sending them awry, distorting them or playing tricks with them. Whilst trickery and distortion may well also be a feature of many conversational behaviours that are 'perverted' in our sense, we propose to take the idea of perversion more literally by identifying a particular structure which links conversational perversion to sexual perversion and which allows for positing specific types of conversational perversion (such as sadism), similarly to in the sexual case. In this way, we make perversion the central *linguistic* concept for understanding the workings of Iago's conversational behaviour. Moreover, though conversational perversion in our sense does sometimes involve a failure to comply with one or more of Grice's four maxims, it can also arise in other ways. Finally, whilst the maxims falling under the Co-operative Principle will play an important role in articulating some of the instances of perversion we discuss, what is crucial to recognising the *structure* of perversion is, we argue, not so much Grice's account of the maxims but the basic Gricean mechanism.

3 Quotations are from Shakespeare (1941).

4 Other papers which discuss *Othello* in relation to Grice's maxims, or to alternative neo-Gricean or non-Gricean accounts of communication within the philosophy of language, include Bertucelli Papi (1996), Kikuchi (1999) and Keller (2010). Although our argument and its aims differ from those at work in these papers, many of the instances analysed of Iago's communication are also focal examples for these other approaches. A reader who is sympathetic both to arguments within one or more of these papers and to our own idea of conversational perversion could use the accounts to complement each other in places.

5 There is an affinity here with the discussion of scepticism concerning the content of others' thoughts (see e.g. Cavell (2003), McGinn (2006)). Of particular significance is the relationship between scepticism and deception. In many cases, deception trades on successful communication, since false beliefs are communicated

(which is not to say they are stated; for further discussion of this in the case of Iago, see Dianne Rothleder's paper in this volume). Our discussion adds a further dimension, however. By employing the notion of a conversational perversion, we see that Iago employs strategies to give Othello false beliefs that work not by successfully communicating those beliefs but, on the contrary, by creating a block to successful communication, leaving Othello in a position where his ability to understand the conversational contributions of the other party is unseated. Note that this counts as a strategy *to deceive* (rather than *only* to confuse or to bemuse) only if Iago believes that Othello is likely to arrive at false beliefs in the process of attempting and failing to interpret his conversations with Iago.

6 For more on Grice's account of cancelling, see his (1975: 39) and (1978: 44–6).

7 Veli Mitova's chapter in this volume focuses on the topic of epistemic responsibility in *Othello* in its own right. Our point here is specifically about how Othello's (unfair) *conversational* responsibilities play into his epistemic responsibilities.

8 We are grateful to David Austin for his perceptive comments on an earlier draft. Thanks also to the editors of this volume for their ingenious suggestions and for spotting some embarrassing blunders; of course, they cannot take responsibility for any errors which remain.

Further reading

Bourne, C. and Caddick Bourne, E., 2016. *Time in Fiction*: chapter 4. We discuss what *Macbeth* represents concerning the metaphysics of the future, including a discussion of Gricean conversational norms and Macbeth and Banquo's decision to treat the weird sisters' utterances as interpretable.

Grice, H.P., 1957. Meaning. *The Philosophical Review* 66: 377–388. Grice gives an account of the distinction between natural and non-natural meaning and the relationship between speaker meaning and sentence meaning. He sets out what we have here called the 'basic Gricean mechanism'.

Grice, H.P., 1975. Logic and Conversation. In: P. Cole and J. Morgan, eds. *Syntax and Semantics* Vol. 3. New York: Academic Press. This is the classic source for Grice's maxims of rational co-operation and the notions of conversational implicature and cancellability.

Nagel, T., 1969. Sexual Perversion. *Journal of Philosophy* 66: 5–17. Nagel gives an account of sexual perversion in terms of behaviours which block the possibility of parties instantiating a

particular structure of interpersonal psychological attitudes. The account of sexual perversion we utilise here is based on elements of this view.

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7

'SEIZE IT, IF THOU DAR'ST'

Three types of imperative conditional in *Richard II*

Borut Trpin

Introduction

At the beginning of the play, the title character of Shakespeare's *Richard II* makes an interesting observation about his vocation: 'We were not born to sue, but to command' (1.1.196). The play, which tracks the fall of Richard II and the rise of Bolingbroke (later Henry IV), however, focuses as much on judgements as it does on commands. Both are joined in imperative conditionals,[1] a class of conditionals that, as it will be claimed, is worthy of consideration.

It may appear surprising that my essay focuses on conditionals in *Richard II*. However, a close inspection reveals that the majority of conditionals in the play belong to a philosophically neglected class of imperative conditionals – that is, a class that denotes conditionals with a consequent[2] in the imperative mood.[3] Further, it is also noteworthy that the majority of these imperative conditionals, at least at first glance, do not express anything conditional. When a speaker utters a standard imperative conditional, the imperative consequent depends on the antecedent in the sense that it is not clear whether the antecedent holds, but if it does, the consequent should be complied with. Many examples in *Richard II*, on the other hand, do not follow this pattern. The speaker utters a given conditional to implicate that the antecedent is false or to implicate that the consequent is to be complied with regardless of the antecedent condition. The speakers are nonetheless uttering meaningful imperative conditionals. Finally, imperative conditionals intertwine judgements and orders, both of which are central themes of the play. *Richard II* thus provides grounds for an interesting case study with implications that extend far beyond the scope of the play itself.

Imperative conditionals as such are problematic for truth-conditional analyses of their meaning because the consequents are in imperative mood, and it seems that

imperatives cannot be true or false. To borrow an example from the beginning of the play, Richard orders Gaunt: 'Tell me' (1.1.8). Is this order true or false? Intuitively, it is neither, but it may or may not be complied with. This suggests that conditionals with imperative consequents constitute a special class because they cannot be grouped with other classes of conditionals for which truth-conditional analyses have been proposed (e.g. indicative conditionals; see Grice (1989); Bennett (2003: 20–44)).

It should be noted that there have been attempts to provide truth-conditional semantics for imperatives based on the idea that their logical form is provided by explicit performatives (e.g. Lewis (1970)). On this view, the imperative 'Tell me' has the logical form of 'I request that you tell me', which is true if and only if Richard requests that Gaunt tells him what he asks. However, this view has been severely criticized because it gives rise to a number of problematic consequences (for a concise overview of objections, see Charlow (2014a: 541–2)).

If imperatives are non-truth-conditional, the question remains as to what determines their meaning and what their logical form is given by. For the present analysis, the most important question relates to the meaning of imperative conditionals that combine a factual antecedent with an imperative consequent. Both the semantics of imperatives and conditionals are notoriously problematic on their own, so it is not hard to see why relatively few semantics for imperative conditionals have been proposed so far (for an overview of proposals that account for imperatives and imperative conditionals, see Charlow (2014b)).

My goal in this essay is not to propose new semantics for imperative conditionals. Instead, I argue that the so-called 'imperassertive account' developed by Parsons (2013) already explains their logical form by combining two dimensions related to their meaning: the truth-conditional and the compliance-conditional dimensions. By doing so, Parsons retains the classical truth-conditional logic and at the same time combines it with the imperative compliance dimension, which allows him to avoid the standard counter-examples to other views on semantics of imperative conditionals. I argue that his account correctly captures the semantics, but it does not explain the pragmatics – that is, the additional meaning imperative conditionals convey in different conversational contexts.

This, however, is not meant as an objection to Parsons' project. What I claim is that the ways imperative conditionals are used in conversation should also be taken into account. Grice (1989), Lewis (1976), and Jackson (1998) defended material conditionals as the logical form of indicative conditionals in a similar manner. My goal is therefore to strengthen Parsons' account of imperative conditionals with pragmatics that guide their use. From this perspective, *Richard II* provides a great starting point because it teems with conditionals that appear in a number of different contexts, some of which cannot be adequately explained by either Parsons' or some other competing accounts.

Richard II and the three types of imperative conditional

On Parsons' imperassertive account (2013),[4] the imperative conditionals behave in a manner that is structurally similar to that of material conditionals in classical logic. That is, the material conditional 'If *P*, then *Q*' (*P⊃Q*) is equivalent to 'Not-*P* or *Q*' (¬*P* ∨ *Q*). On the imperassertive account, the imperative conditional 'If *P*, then do *Q*!' (*P→!Q*) is equivalent to 'Not-*P* or do *Q*!' (¬*P* ∨ !*Q*). The equivalence in the case of material conditionals denotes that the two forms (*P⊃Q* and ¬*P* ∨ *Q*) share the same truth value. The imperative conditionals, however, express conditional commands and as such are not true or false. The equivalence thus denotes that if and only if one form is complied with (or violated), the other is also complied with (or violated).

To illustrate this with an example, consider the conditional command expressed by the imperative conditional 'Hide if the enemy comes' (*enemy→!hide*). It can either be complied with or violated. It cannot be violated if the enemy does not come, in which case it is trivially complied with (¬*enemy*). In case the enemy does come, the imperative conditional is complied with just if the addressee intends to hide (!*hide*). It can now be seen that 'Hide if the enemy comes!' (*enemy→!hide*) is complied with (or violated) exactly when 'The enemy will not come, or hide!' (¬*enemy* ∨ !*hide*) is complied with (or violated) – that is, the two forms are equivalent. The disjunctive form sounds unnatural, but this equivalence explains many aspects of the meaning conveyed by imperative conditionals. However, it gives rise to another concern.

It is well known that a number of apparently paradoxical material conditionals are true, because a material conditional is by definition true when either the antecedent is false or the consequent is true. For example, because the Moon exists, 'If the Moon does not exist, the Earth does not exist either' is, strictly speaking, true if it is interpreted as a material conditional, although no sane person would assert it. Similar apparent paradoxes can be construed for imperative conditionals in line with Parsons' (2013) semantics. For example, 'Look at the Moon if the Moon does not exist!' is always complied with because the Moon exists and the command expressed by the imperative conditional cannot be violated. These problems are typically explained away for assertions by a general principle that a speaker should assert the logically stronger instead of the weaker sentence.[5] The speaker of the above indicative conditional should, for instance, deny the antecedent – that is, she should simply assert that the Moon exists, instead of asserting the strange conditional (e.g. Grice (1989: 61)). The same defence may be extended to imperative conditionals. If the speaker believes the antecedent is false or wants the consequent to be complied with unconditionally, then she should utter just that and not an imperative conditional.

Jackson (1998: 6–10), however, argued that speakers are sometimes in a position to reasonably assert the logically weaker sentences instead of (or besides) their stronger counterparts.[6] I claim that the same holds for imperative conditionals. A speaker may in some cases reasonably utter a logically weaker imperative conditional without falling prey to paradoxical consequences, although she is in position to deny the antecedent or outright demand the consequent. As a matter of fact, the characters in *Richard II* often make utterances of this type without breaking any conversational rules.

Type 1: standard imperative conditionals

Let me first introduce the standard imperative conditionals. These conditionals are standard in the sense that they express conditionality in the most natural way: the speaker is not sure whether the antecedent holds, but in case it does, the consequent should be complied with. I call these conditionals the type 1 imperative conditionals, because they are the most regular and the most common in everyday language.

Interestingly, the type 1 imperative conditionals are relatively rare in *Richard II*. One of the few examples is uttered by the Duchess, the aunt of King Richard and his later opponent Bolingbroke, in a conversation with Bolingbroke's father, Gaunt. Bolingbroke and Mowbray have accused each other of high treason, so Richard has ordered that they settle their accusations in a duel, where the guilty party will (according to the common belief of the time) die. The Duchess is certain that Bolingbroke will win, but she is not sure whether Bolingbroke will kill Mowbray in the first charge, so she utters a type 1 conditional (1.2.49–51):

> Or if misfortune miss the first career,
> Be Mowbray's sins so heavy in his bosom
> That they may break his foaming courser's back

In modern non-poetic English: 'If Bolingbroke does not hit Mowbray in the first charge, then let Mowbray fall off his horse'.[7] The conditional could be equivalently expressed as: 'Bolingbroke will either hit Mowbray in the first charge or make it so that Mowbray falls off his horse'.

The disjunction is structurally analogous to the disjunctive form of material conditionals, although the consequent ('Let Mowbray fall off his horse') is in the imperative mood. This example shows that there is a logical similarity between the type 1 conditionals and material conditionals as Parsons' (2013) semantics suggests, but there is nothing special or specifically Shakespearean about the use of type 1 conditionals besides its poetic style.

I will therefore turn to the more prevalent and more interesting non-standard types of imperative conditional, where it seems that instead of uttering the conditionals the speakers could outright assert that the antecedent is false (type 2) or request that the addressee complies with their consequent command (type 3).

Type 2: imperative conditionals that implicate the falsehood of the antecedent

Does it ever make sense to assert a conditional if the speaker believes the antecedent to be false or probably false? I maintain that it does. Jackson's (1998) robustness criterion for indicative conditionals provides the pragmatic explanation of this phenomenon. He claims that when a speaker utters an indicative conditional 'If P, then Q', she conveys not just the truth conditions of material conditionals but also a conventional implicature (in the sense of Grice (1989: 25))[8] that the conditional is robust with respect to the antecedent. That is, the speaker implicates that should she learn that the antecedent is true, she would still believe the conditional as a whole is also true.[9] In other words, the conditional is robust with respect to the antecedent. A conditional with a false antecedent is thus assertable just when it is robust with respect to its antecedent. This explains the above example with the Moon ('If the Moon does not exist, Earth does not exist either'). If the speaker learned that the Moon, surprisingly, did not exist, she would not conclude that Earth did not exist either. The conditional is, strictly speaking, true, but it is not assertable because it is not robust with respect to the antecedent. A similar conditional with a false antecedent, 'If the Moon does not exist, then Moon landing was a hoax', is, however, assertable because it is robust with respect to the antecedent.

I believe that imperative conditionals behave in a similar manner: if they are imperassertable – that is, if they are accepted as reasonable imperassertions in the context of the conversation – they have to be robust with respect to the antecedent. The type 2 imperative conditionals fit this definition very well: the speakers are confident that the antecedents are false. However, they do not outright assert the negated antecedents, because they want to signal that, in case the antecedent was true, they would want the command to be complied with. Let me illustrate this with some examples. When Bolingbroke and Mowbray accuse each other of high treason, they agree to settle their argument in a duel. Mowbray comments (1.1.82–3):

> And when I mount, alive may I not light,
> If I be traitor or unjustly fight.

Mowbray tries to convey his belief (or at least the pretence) that he is not a traitor and that he will fight fairly. But why would he utter a conditional when he could simply deny the antecedent by saying that he is neither a traitor nor will he fight unjustly? One could claim that he makes this utterance because of literary ornamentation. I argue that this is not the correct explanation because, after all, similar imperassertions are common in everyday language.[10]

Because the conditionals conventionally implicate robustness with respect to the antecedent, Mowbray expresses that he would demand his own death under the assumption that he is a traitor or that he fights unjustly – that is, he agrees with the principle of capital punishment for treason. But because he obviously does not demand his own death, he actually implicates that he is innocent. This latter implicature is also conventional because a consequent that is not complied with entails the falsehood of the antecedent. When the speaker does not want the consequent to be complied with, or when the speaker believes that it will not be complied with, she therefore conventionally implicates that the antecedent is false. It makes perfect sense for Mowbray to utter the imperative conditional because, in addition to implicating the falsehood of the antecedent – that is, claiming that he is innocent – he expresses that he agrees with the capital punishment for treason.

But there is more to this story, and it is here that Shakespeare's ingenuity reveals itself in full. By uttering the above imperative conditional, Mowbray actually targets his opponent Bolingbroke and calls upon his death because he expresses his agreement with the principle that traitors should be killed. Since one of them is guilty, and he implicates his own innocence, his imperative conditional implicitly targets his opponent.

Mowbray later makes this explicit, when the duel is abruptly cancelled and both he and Bolingbroke are banned from England. He utters a type 2 imperative conditional again, when Bolingbroke wants him to finally admit the treason (1.3.201–3):

> No, Bolingbroke, if ever I were traitor,
> My name be blotted from the book of life,
> And I from heaven banished as from hence!

This second conditional is basically a paraphrase of the previous example: if he is or ever was a traitor, he demands his damnation.[11] However, since he obviously does not want to comply with his own demand, he cannot be a traitor. The principle of robustness again signals that he agrees that the traitor should suffer damnation. This time Mowbray immediately continues with an explicit targeting of Bolingbroke (1.3.204–5):

> But what thou art, God, thou, and I do know;
> And all too soon, I fear, the king shall rue.

Mowbray thus draws the following inference:

1 If he is a traitor, he demands his own damnation.
2 Implicated: if someone is a traitor, he wants them to suffer damnation.
3 But (implicated): Bolingbroke is a traitor.
4 Therefore: let Bolingbroke suffer damnation.

The meaning that Mowbray actually conveys is therefore three-fold: he implicates that he is not a traitor, he agrees with the principle that traitors should suffer damnation, and he demands that Bolingbroke suffer damnation. The type 2 conditional thus enables him to convey much more than he would be able to by simply asserting that he is not a traitor.

His opponent Bolingbroke uses type 2 imperative conditionals in a similar manner to both implicate that the antecedent is not true and to target his opponent with the consequent (negative) command. For example, before their duel he utters the following (1.3.59–62):

> O, let no noble eye profane a tear
> For me, if I be gored with Mowbray's spear.
> As confident as is the falcon's flight
> Against a bird do I with Mowbray fight.

In plain English: 'Do not cry for me if I am killed by Mowbray'. His choice of conditional reflects the doctrine that anybody who dies in a duel deserves to die. What Bolingbroke communicates is therefore:

1 If he dies, he does not want the audience to cry for him.
2 Implicated: if someone dies in a duel, he does not want the audience to cry for them (because they deserved to die).
3 But (implicated): Mowbray will die.
4 Therefore: the audience should not cry for Mowbray (because he is guilty).

However, type 2 conditionals are not always used to implicate that the antecedent is false because the imperative consequent counters the speaker's actual desires. Another possibility for type 2 conditionals to come into play is when the speaker is confident the imperative will not be complied with, which implicates that the antecedent is false. This is related to the underlying logical form of imperative conditionals: 'If P, then do $Q!$' is equivalent to 'It is either not the case that P, or do $Q!$'. If the command 'Do $Q!$' is not complied with and the conditional is not disputed, it then follows that 'It is not the case that P'.

Richard utters one interesting example of this sort when Bolingbroke later returns with his supporters and approaches the castle where the king has taken

refuge. Northumberland, at that time still one of Bolingbroke's accomplices, approaches Richard without kneeling in front of him. Richard responds with the following type 2 conditional (3.3.76–80, my italics):

> *If we be not [your king], show us the hand of God*
> *That hath dismissed us from our stewardship,*
> For well we know no hand of blood and bone
> Can gripe the sacred handle of our sceptre
> Unless he do profane, steal or usurp.

Richard believes that the command will not be complied with because no proof that God had deposed him can be provided. He reinstates this by explicitly asserting that any act of deposing him would be illegitimate (an act of profanity or usurpation) and not in line with God's will. Because the consequent will not, and cannot in principle, be complied with, it follows that he is still the king, which is what he implicates by uttering this conditional.

   The mechanism behind the meaning conveyed by Richard's conditional may be sketched in the following tripartite manner:

1 If the consequent command cannot be complied with, then either the antecedent is not true (otherwise the command would be complied with), or the audience did not accept the conditional in the first place.
2 None of the characters dispute the conditional.
3 Therefore: the antecedent is false (Richard is still the king).

Richard's conditional thus conveys more than simply asserting that he is the king. The conditional additionally implicates that, were he not the king, his request for a proof could be complied with, and the burden of (impossible) proof is relayed to the addressee.

   Henry Percy (Northumberland's son) utters similar type 2 imperative conditionals before Richard's deposition. Bolingbroke's supporters accuse Aumerle (Richard's supporter) of involvement in the murder of Gloucester (Bolingbroke and Richard's uncle) and the ordering of Bolingbroke's death. Aumerle denies the accusations, so Percy accuses him of being a liar and invites him to a duel by throwing his gage (4.1.47–9, my italics):

> And that thou art so, there I throw my gage,
> To prove it on thee to th'extremest point
> Of mortal breathing: *seize it, if thou dar'st.*

Percy is confident that Aumerle is guilty and will therefore not enter the duel. However, by uttering the conditional instead of directly stating, for example, 'You

dare not duel with me (because you are guilty)', he gives Aumerle an opportunity to comply with the command ('Seize the gage!') and leaves it to him to demonstrate his own lack of daring, which adds an additional element of humiliation.

This example is both similar and importantly different to Richard's previous conditional. Both conditionals implicate the speaker's conviction that the antecedent is false because the consequent will not be complied with. However, Richard provides argumentation to the point that the consequent is impossible to comply with and thus implicates that the antecedent is false. Percy, in contrast to Richard, does not argue that his command cannot be complied with. He makes a simple command ('Seize the gage!') and leaves it to Aumerle to demonstrate that he will nonetheless not comply with it. His use of the imperative conditional is particularly insulting because the command in the consequent is, as already stated, very simple to comply with.[12]

Aumerle recognizes Percy's intention and does not dispute the conditional (by uttering, e.g., 'I can prove my innocence without a duel'). Instead, he replies with another type 2 imperative conditional (4.1.50–2):

> An if I do not, may my hands rot off
> And never brandish more revengeful steel
> Over the glittering helmet of my foe!

Aumerle calls upon an unwanted consequent demand in a similar way to Bolingbroke and Mowbray in the already mentioned examples, and he thus implicates that he is not afraid of the duel (hence he is innocent) and that he could not live with the accusation that he is afraid of a duel.

There are many more examples of the type 2 imperative conditionals in *Richard II*, and they all behave in a more or less similar manner. But how can they be recognized? As I have shown with the examples, there are roughly two subtypes of type 2 conditional. The imperative conditionals of the first subtype may be recognized by the consequent command that has obviously negative consequences for the speaker. Because the speaker does not actually want to comply with such imperatives, this conventionally implicates that the antecedent is false. Interestingly, Shakespeare's characters often use these conditionals not just to implicate that the antecedent is false and that they agree that the negative consequence should be complied with if the antecedent were true, but also to target the (negative) consequent on another character for whom they believe that the antecedent condition still holds.

The conditionals of the second subtype can be recognized with relative ease because the speaker is confident that the addressee will not comply with the command as it is either not possible or because the speaker thinks it is unlikely they will do so. Such examples, similarly, conventionally implicate that the antecedent is

false because of the underlying logic of imperative conditionals (contrapositivity): if the command is not complied with, the antecedent cannot be true.[13]

Both subtypes thus demonstrate that uttering a type 2 conditional conveys additional implicatures which would be lost if the speaker outright denied the antecedent.

Type 3: imperative conditionals that implicate the consequents are to be complied with

As I noted earlier, an imperative conditional is complied with when either the antecedent is false or the consequent is complied with. This means that, strictly speaking, the speaker may utter the conditional when she wants the addressee to comply with the consequent regardless of whether she thinks the antecedent provides a reason for complying with the consequent. The type 2 imperative conditionals are based on the first disjunct (false antecedent), while the type 3 are based on the second disjunct (a consequent that is to be complied with). However, it should be noted that although any antecedent could be added to the consequent the speaker wants to be complied with, only those type 3 conditionals that are robust with respect to the antecedent are imperassertable. Again, it seems that the speaker could outright utter the consequent imperative, but, as I will try to demonstrate, by uttering the type 3 conditionals instead they convey additional meaning, because they signal that the conditional is robust with respect to the antecedent.

For example, when the Duchess (Richard's aunt) privately complains to Gaunt (her brother-in-law) that Richard murdered her husband, Gaunt agrees with her and implicitly expresses that Richard was in the wrong. However, upon being asked to revenge her husband's death, he nonetheless replies with the type 3 conditional (1.2.37–41, my italics):

> God's is the quarrel, for God's substitute,
> His deputy anointed in his sight,
> Hath caused his death, *the which if wrongfully,*
> *Let heaven revenge*; for I may never lift
> An angry arm against his minister.

Here, Gaunt's intention is to express that Richard can only be punished by God. But why does he conditionalize Richard's responsibility if he obviously believes that Richard was in the wrong? I claim that this is so because he wants to signal that his command is robust with respect to the antecedent (what Richard did was wrong). The conditional thus exposes a background inference: Gaunt believes that Richard was wrong, and because of this, the consequent command has to be and will be

complied with. If he asked God directly to revenge the murder, it would not be obvious that the command will be complied with. At the same time, he also tries to console the Duchess by conveying that God will revenge her husband's death (because the antecedent is obviously true). By asserting the type 3 conditional he thus expresses more than by simply asking for the consequent: he (1) asks God for revenge, (2) justifies the request, and (3) expresses that his request is to be fulfilled (because the antecedent obviously holds).

Bolingbroke utters another example of the type 3 imperative conditional when he returns to England after his father Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, dies (2.3.122–3):

> If that my cousin King be king of England,
> It must be granted I am Duke of Lancaster.

The reader will note that the consequent 'It must be granted I am Duke of Lancaster' is not in the imperative mood, although it expresses a command. The imperative mood is the strongest signal that a given sentence expresses a command. However, some commands are also expressed in the indicative mood by using modals like 'must' in this case.[14] Bolingbroke was banished as the Duke of Hereford, so he now demands that he be reinstated as the successor of his father. As in the previous example, the antecedent (Richard is the king of England) is obviously true, so Bolingbroke could directly demand that his succession as the Duke of Lancaster be granted. However, he utters the conditional to suggest that his request has to be complied with be, in a similar manner to Gaunt, because the antecedent is obviously true.

There are not as many type 3 conditionals present in the play, but although they may initially appear redundant given that the antecedents are obviously true, they serve an inferential role in the sense that they provide an insight into why the consequent has to be complied with. The type 3 conditionals are thus easily recognizable from the obviously true antecedents, which conventionally implicate that the consequent command will be complied with. This also means that not all conditionals based on the speaker's unconditional demand are acceptable. For example, it would be logically permissible for Bolingbroke to utter: 'If my cousin is a peasant, it must be granted I am the Duke of Lancaster!' but it would not be conversationally acceptable, nor would his utterance be a type 3 imperative conditional, because the conditional would not be robust with respect to the antecedent, and the antecedent would therefore not provide the grounds for the consequent. The type 3 conditionals thus express more than outright demanding the imperative consequent.

An intersection of assertions and commands

Shakespeare's intricate use of imperative conditionals illuminates that there are three types of imperative conditional, two of which had previously been largely ignored (the types 2 and 3). It also provides an insight into conversational rules that guide their use. The question that still remains is why Shakespeare used a relatively large number of imperative conditionals in *Richard II*.[15]

I believe that Shakespeare intuitively did this precisely because imperative conditionals combine judgements (in the factual antecedents) and commands (in the imperative consequents), the two central themes of the play. The title character shows poor judgement and makes senseless orders that eventually lead to his deposition, while his opponent Bolingbroke excels in both. This is also reflected in the fact that although Richard does most of the talking in the play, his use of imperative conditionals is very limited in comparison to Bolingbroke. Richard utters many conditionals throughout the play, but only a few of them are imperative, and of these, only a few are actually effective (one such example is the above-mentioned type 2 conditional with an impossible command). Bolingbroke, on the other hand, utters fewer conditionals in total but makes use of some of the most intricate imperative conditionals in the play – for example, the type 2 conditionals where he targets his opponent.

The robustness condition which guides the use of all three types of imperative conditional goes hand in hand with the view that imperative conditionals intertwine judgements and commands: it implies that the speakers have to make their commands in light of their judgements (the factual antecedents). The robustness condition is further stressed in the type 2 and type 3 imperative conditionals. In the former, in addition to expressing that the antecedent is false, the robustness condition ensures that the speaker agrees with the general relation between the factual antecedent and the imperative consequent. Similarly, in the type 3 conditionals, the speakers do not just utter commands and obviously true facts – instead, they imply that the command has to follow in light of the obviously true antecedent. By doing so they stress, not unlike in the case of type 1 and 2 conditionals, that there is a connection between the (obviously true) facts and the action that should take place because of these facts.

However, it should be noted that this is just one aspect of imperative conditionals that is related to their use. Their meaning and the implicatures they convey are deeply rooted in their logical form, which is structurally similar to that of material conditionals (as identified by Parsons (2013)). After all, it is the logical form itself that provides the very grounds for the present tripartite typology. A speaker utters a type 1 conditional because she believes that either the antecedent is false or the consequent should be complied with; the type 2 because she believes the antecedent to be false; and the type 3 because she wants the consequent to be complied with. As I have tried to demonstrate with the examples above, however, this only provides the necessary conditions for the speaker who utters imperative

conditionals. Conditionals that are permissible in the specific context of the conversation also have to be robust with respect to the antecedent.

Although Shakespeare's play provides a complex intertwining of facts and actions (judgements and commands), which give rise to the present general typology of imperative conditionals, it should also be pointed out that the present analysis only addresses *one part* of the meaning conveyed by imperative conditionals and is far from being exhaustive. To name just one limitation, I have not addressed nested imperative conditionals – that is, conditionals where the antecedents or the consequents are conditionals themselves – because the text under investigation does not provide any such examples. However, an objection could still be raised that *should* an imperative conditional have a conditional in the antecedent, one *could not* test its robustness with respect to the antecedent (another conditional), because it is not clear what it means for the speaker to assume that conditional. It would be beyond the scope of this essay to thoroughly address this issue, so let it just be noted that this is a broader problem that pertains to the logic of conditionals as such (see, e.g., Dietz and Douven (2010)). This also does not endanger the present project, for I have only provided a typology of simple imperative conditionals and some of the conventional implicatures that supplement their logical form. I believe that Shakespeare's nuanced examples provided a perfect starting point by demonstrating rather eloquently that the proposed typology has some merit.

Let me, then, conclude with a slight twist on king Richard's paradigmatic assertion that '[w]e were not born to sue, but to command' (1.1.196). The imperative conditionals, on the contrary, suggest that one has to not only command but also judge because factual judgements and commands are intertwined.[16]

Related topics

Notes

1 Imperative conditionals are also referred to, sometimes interchangeably, as conditional imperatives (e.g. Charlow (2014a, 2014b), Schwager & Kaufmann (2011)) and conditional commands (e.g. Parsons (2013)). I follow Parsons (2013) by labelling them as imperative conditionals because I view them as a special class of conditionals that expresses conditional commands.

2 The antecedent denotes the clause in the scope of 'if'; the consequent denotes the remaining clause that can stand by itself. For problems related to providing

a more concrete definition of the two terms, see, for example, Sanford (1989: 1–4).

3   More precisely: the consequent in imperative conditionals expresses a command or a request. It is therefore typically in the imperative mood, but this is not necessary. For example, 'You have to leave now' expresses a command in the indicative mood.

4   Parsons (2013: 81) claims that assertions and imperatives are conjoined in what he calls 'imperassertions'. That is, an imperassertion aims to influence or constrain both the addressee's beliefs and intentions. On this account, simple assertions aim to influence the addressee's beliefs and constrain her intentions only in a trivial way. Simple (unconditional) commands, on the contrary, aim to constrain the addressee's intentions and only trivially influence her beliefs. Imperative conditionals as paradigmatic examples of imperassertions aim both to influence the addressee's beliefs and constrain her intentions.

5   Sentence A is logically stronger than sentence B when A entails B but B does not entail A. For example, 'The streets are wet' is logically stronger than 'It does not rain or the streets are wet'.

6   To use one of Jackson's examples (1998: 8), it is reasonable to assert a logically weaker disjunction 'Either Oswald killed Kennedy or the Warren Commission was incompetent' even if one is highly confident the Warren Commission was not incompetent.

7   This example also demonstrates that imperatives are not always commands; in this case the imperative expresses the speaker's requirement for some course of actions.

8   Grice (1989) introduced the term 'implicature' to denote the meaning that is implied either in the context of a conversation ('conversational implicature') or by the conventional meaning of the linguistic expression ('conventional implicature'). To illustrate the latter with Grice's example (1989: 25): (1) 'He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave' conventionally implicates (2) 'His being brave follows from him being an Englishman' because of the conventional meaning of the word 'therefore'. The speaker of (1) does not say (2), but he conventionally implicates it.

9   Jackson defines robustness with respect to the antecedent in a more formal manner, as high conditional probability of the material conditional given its antecedent. The informal definition suffices for the conditionals in *Richard II*, but it does not include all robust conditionals. Consider, for example, 'If Reagan works for the KGB, I'll never believe it (because if this is the case, then they are able to control the news completely)' (Lewis (1986: 155)). Learning the antecedent of this example would crucially affect the evaluation of the conditional.

10 It is not hard to imagine a dissatisfied restaurant-goer saying 'Shoot me if I ever order this again' instead of 'I will never order this again'.

11 As Dawson and Yachnin note (Shakespeare (2011)), 'the book of life' is a reference to Revelation 3:5, where 'a promise is made to those who are saved that their names will not be blotted out of the book of life. Those whose names are blotted will suffer damnation' (Shakespeare (2011: 159)).

12 It should be noted that, in general, when the antecedent is based on the hearer's daring ('If you dare'), it usually signals that the speaker believes the hearer will not comply with the consequent and leaves the hearer to prove otherwise.

13 These conditionals are based on the presupposition that the audience accepts them in the first place, but at least in the play no character makes any claims to the contrary.

14 The similarity between modals and imperatives gave rise to the modal analysis of imperatives according to which the logical form of sentences in the imperative mood is equivalent to their modal counterparts. That is, the meaning of 'It must be granted I am Duke of Lancaster' is equivalent to the meaning of 'Grant that I am Duke of Lancaster' (see Charlow (2014a: 542–5) for an overview of this approach).

15 Methodological issues aside, a quick word-frequency analysis of Shakespeare's oeuvre reveals that the word 'if' occurs most frequently in *Much Ado About Nothing* (110 occurrences versus 53 in *Richard II*). However, in contrast to *Richard II*, the imperative conditionals (especially of the types 2 and 3) are relatively rare.

16 I am especially thankful to Sebastjan Vörös, Craig Bourne, and Emily Caddick Bourne for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter. I would also like to express my gratitude to Vanesa Matajc and Olga Markič for introducing me to philosophical topics in Shakespeare's work.

Further reading

Bennett, J., 2003. *A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.This book guide provides an extensive overview of philosophical problems related to indicative and subjunctive conditionals. It covers a number of topics related to conditionals, including semantics, pragmatics, metaphysics of possible worlds, vagueness, and probability, in a very clear manner. The author offers his own original views but nonetheless faithfully represents the views of many authors working on topics related to conditionals.

Grice, P., 1989. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.This book is a collection of Grice's essays based on his influential 1967 William James Lectures. The chapters 'Logic and Conversation' and 'Indicative Conditionals' are particularly relevant for the present typology of imperative conditionals. Grice introduces the term 'implicature', one of the central terms of pragmatics, in the former chapter and explains his views on the relation between truth conditions of material conditionals and indicative conditionals in the latter.

Charlow, N., 2014a. The Meaning of Imperatives. *Philosophy Compass* 9(8), 540–555.This article provides a great insight in the current philosophical debates on the meaning of imperatives and imperative conditionals. It critically examines a number of current views on the semantics of imperatives and distinguishes them with respect to their relationship to the truth-conditional paradigm in semantics.

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8

THE SONNETS AND ATTUNEMENT

Maximilian de Gaynesford

1

If a philosophical study of Shakespeare is to 'make any contribution worth caring about', Martha Nussbaum says, it must really do philosophy, it must really do literary criticism and it must explain why philosophers should care (Nussbaum (2008)).[1] I agree, with the non-negligible addition that it must also explain why literary critics should care. (For we cannot expect them to if the philosophising is so stratospheric that it is of no earthly use in confronting an averagely difficult text.)

The span of a single chapter makes it hard to meet all these requirements in one go, so I need to focus.[2] The aim is to show that (1) Shakespeare's use of a particular phrase-type in the Sonnets is something both philosophers and literary critics should care about; (2) what matters to philosophy here cannot be adequately dealt with or even fully appreciated without doing literary criticism of the poetry; and (3) it is equally necessary to do philosophy if what matters to literary criticism is to be properly dealt with and appreciated. To summarise these claims in a slogan, Shakespeare's use of this phrase-type calls for the 'attunement' of philosophy and poetry.

I argue elsewhere that attunement should draw particularly on analytic philosophy.[3] I hope this is no cause for great alarm.[4] More specifically, I argue that attunement requires a speech act approach (de Gaynesford (2017: 97–115)). And since there are two potential causes of confusion here, given that our topic is Shakespeare's Sonnets, it is important to address them both immediately.

Anyone familiar with the pioneering studies of Helen Vendler and David Schalkwyk is likely to have a very specific notion of a 'speech act approach to the Sonnets' (Vendler (1997); Schalkwyk (2002)). For them, it means treating the sequence as 'performative' rather than 'constative', as a series of acts rather than of statements or descriptions (Vendler (1997: 492); Schalkwyk (2002: 10)). The possible cause of confusion here is that I adopt a speech act approach but do not draw this contrast. Indeed, I think an approach that carefully attunes poetry and philosophy will be guided to treat such a contrast as false. My reasons bear directly on claims (1)–(3), and the phrase-type we shall examine provides evidence against Vendler and Schalkwyk, so we shall return to these issues.

The other possible cause of confusion is that 'speech act theory' and 'ordinary language philosophy' are now quite commonly run together (e.g. Hutson (2015: 123)). And given the use made of the latter term by Kenneth Dauber, Walter Jost and others, some literary critics may then expect a continuation of the kinds of investigation fundamentally associated with Stanley Cavell (Dauber & Jost (2003)).[5] So it is important to be clear that what I do is the kind of speech act philosophising actively practised by J. L. Austin and others (like John Searle), and I am hence more interested in close analysis of parts of speech than general literary themes. Not that the approaches need diverge, still less conflict. Indeed, the argument for claims (1)–(3) offers opportunities to build on Cavell's insights into scepticism and Shakespeare. So we shall return to these issues also.

2

Our phrase-type combines the first-person pronoun with a verb in the present indicative active where the verb names the act performed in uttering it. We might call it the 'Chaucer-type' after one of the first poets to employ it effectively in English poetry.[6] Representative instances in Shakespeare's Sonnets include the following (the edition from which I quote throughout is Shakespeare (2002)). Sonnet 14:

Or else of thee this I prognosticate:
Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date.

Sonnet 40:

I do forgive thy robbery, gentle thief,
Although thou steal thee all my poverty:

Sonnet 111:

Pity me then, dear friend, and I assure ye,
Even that your pity is enough to cure me.

Sonnet 123:

This I do vow and this shall ever be;
I will be true despite thy scythe and thee.

Sonnet 124:

To this I witness call the fools of time,
Which die for goodness, who have lived for crime.

and Sonnet 130:

I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.

Shakespeare also uses the Chaucer-type in his plays, and he makes much of its dramatic energy.[7] More rarely, he strings several such uses together so that they fulfil a deeper purpose, a more structural function. Act IV Scene 1 of *The Merchant of Venice* is one example: 'I pray you'; 'I do beseech you'; 'I answer you'; 'I stand for judgement'; 'I swear'; 'I stay here on my bond'; 'I charge you by the law'; 'I protest'; 'I take this offer'; 'I pray you'; 'I pardon thee'. These Chaucer-type utterances – a great gathering of them – enrich and colour each other so that the device carries the governing theme of the play at this point: the re-centring of ordinary relationships around a legalised and legalistic focal point.

If such repeated and systematic deployment of the Chaucer-type is rare in the plays, it is a grounding feature of the Sonnets. Shakespeare gives the type a cardinal role throughout the sequence. This fact, though generally overlooked, is I think at least as important as what is now much explored: that the Sonnets are composed using indexical expressions rather than proper names.[8] The argument is difficult to present because the claim is about aggregative effect, which representative examples can only hint at. But there are thirty-one sonnets in which the Chaucer-type in its purest form plays a significant role. In forty more, slight variants dominate. If we add the contrastive instances against which the phrase-type is intended to play – for example, where exactly the same verbal form is used but the act is not (or not quite) performed, or where the act performed is not (or not quite) named – and include the sonnets with strong thematic or linguistic connections to these instances, we end up with networks of signification that connect up all 154 sonnets many times over. And the effect is also cumulative. Once instances begin to be noticed, the relationships between them start announcing themselves, and it quickly becomes impossible to read the Sonnets without being strongly aware of the Chaucer-type's structural role. This dramatic significance gives reason enough for literary critics to care about Shakespeare's use of the Chaucer-type in the Sonnets.

3

There are good reasons also for philosophers to care. These start with the recognition that phrases of the Chaucer-type continue stubbornly to resist persuasive analysis in the philosophy of language. This is so despite the considerable interest they attract in and around speech act theory. Even fundamental matters remain controversial. Is an utterance using such a phrase either true or false ('truth-evaluable')? Is such an utterance a

statement? J. L. Austin begins by denying both claims (1975: 1–11), while Geoffrey Warnock (1969: 69–89), David Lewis ((1983a: 189–232), (1983b: 233–49)) and Jane Heal (1974: 106–21) affirm both, and others, like John Searle (1989: 74–95), Donald Davidson ((1984a: 93–108), (1984b: 109–21)) and Stephen Schiffer (1972: 107–110) try to find room between these polar positions.

It is a striking fact – and a plausible explanation for the impasse – that those studying the philosophical aspects of the Chaucer-type have restricted themselves to a meagre diet of examples. The diet is meagre in at least four ways: the same examples recur endlessly; they are unhelpfully generic, artificial and contextless; they cover only a very narrow range of speech acts; and the case often chosen as the paradigm, promising, is not typical at all but curious, peculiar, even eccentric.[9] No wonder philosophers have been unable to see how to resolve even the most fundamental matters here. And that gives one reason why philosophers should care about Shakespeare's use of the Chaucer-type in the Sonnets: that he offers the antithesis, in all four respects: a whole wealth of fresh examples, usefully clarifying contexts, a vast range of speech acts and many instances which are indeed representative of the general case.

Another reason is related. Philosophers interested in action are often, and rightly, encouraged to start out by asking what action is *for* (where particular kinds of action are the object of interest, they are to ask what these kinds are *for*). This is at least equally important for philosophers interested in a speech act approach to language, but here in particular this good advice is usually ignored. And the point is that if philosophers *were* to start taking this question seriously, they would see why it was in their interest to care strongly about Shakespeare's uses of the Chaucer-type in the Sonnets, for the resources here are magnificent.

Even a partial list of what Chaucer-type utterances are *for* in the Sonnets is particularly and peculiarly rich. They are for making grand gestures, in public and private; for enacting action in the world at large or for thinking through trains of thought; for breaking trains of thought; for sustaining a gentle self-questioning; for depicting expansive personalities and insulated self-absorption; for achieving comic effects and a simple seriousness; for performing special and ritualised actions in institutional settings; for puzzling over or expressing surprise about the acts which mere uttering can perform; for announcing or reflecting on the anxieties peculiar to poets; for effecting and sustaining ambiguity; for unifying acts via repeated reference to the same person; for strengthening or weakening our sense of that person's unity by such repeated reference; and in almost every case – surprisingly perhaps, until we think beyond the grand gesture – Shakespeare uses the Chaucer-type for securing reflective interest in the form itself and its possibilities.[10]

Pursuing these thoughts, it is not difficult to develop a sense of the further benefits philosophers gain by caring about the Chaucer-type in the Sonnets: not just coming to understand what the Chaucer-type *is*, what its *dimensions* are, but also what is at issue when there is *ambiguity* about whether a phrase is of this type. These are benefits for the philosopher of *language*. We may similarly develop a sense of further benefits for the philosopher of *action*: not just drawing on Shakespeare to understand what *uses* the Chaucer-type has, but also what *effects* it can achieve and *how* it achieves them, what kinds of action it can – and, of at least equal interest, *cannot* – perform.

4

Once we grant that philosophers should care about Shakespeare's use of the Chaucer-type in the Sonnets, it seems a small step to claim (2): that we cannot adequately deal with or fully appreciate what matters to philosophy here without doing literary criticism of the poetry. Getting at what we have just argued is of crucial value to philosophy – a discriminating sense of what is particular and peculiar about the fresh examples we thus have access to, their auxiliary contexts and the range of possible actions they may perform – just *is* a matter of learning from and engaging in literary criticism.

The corresponding case may seem at first quite different. It is not particularly difficult to argue that literary critics should care about Shakespeare's use of the Chaucer-type, given that it demonstrably has such structural significance in the Sonnets. But it seems quite a step beyond this to claim (3): that what matters to literary criticism here cannot be dealt with or properly appreciated without doing philosophy. Why suppose literary criticism is not already admirably equipped to appreciate the structural significance of this literary device?

This is a natural objection, but it misleads about what is at stake. For it makes it look as if claim (3) were denying that literary criticism is already sufficiently equipped. That is not the case. All claim (3) implies is that *if* literary criticism is already sufficiently equipped, it must already be engaged in doing philosophy.

And now the step to claim (3) seems much more reasonable. For literary critics quite often, and quite clearly, *are* already doing philosophy when they examine the Sonnets – for example, Helen Vendler and David

Schalkwyk, who use Austin's distinctions to argue that Shakespeare's Sonnets are performative rather than constative, or John Kerrigan, who uses Austin's insights into speech acts to analyse Shakespeare's use of commitment-language (2016: in particular 35–9; 422–31),[11] or Bruce Smith, who uses philosophy of language to discriminate the uses Shakespeare makes of indexical expressions like 'I' (2000: 411–29). These issues are all essential to appreciating the structural significance of the Chaucer-type, because utterances that employ it are often commitment-apt, always performative and always use the indexical 'I'. So getting at what is of value to literary criticism here is, in part, a matter of learning from and engaging in philosophy.

5

Salient among the Sonnets that call for the attunement of poetry and philosophy are those that are of particular interest to a speech act approach: namely, those that reflect explicitly on poetry as a form of action. These sonnets are to be found throughout the sequence, and in several places (e.g. Sonnets 15–21) form a coherent sub-group. The Chaucer-type and its variants figure prominently on each occasion. We can arrange them, roughly, into four groups.

First are the sonnets that reflect in a particularly positive and open way on poetry as a form of action. These enact the very acts they name and reflect on. They include Sonnet 15 'I engraft you new', Sonnet 19 'But I forbid thee one most heinous crime', Sonnet 37 'I make my love engrafted to this store', Sonnet 49 'Against that time do I ensconce me here' and Sonnet 85 'Hearing you praised, I say "'Tis so, 'tis true"'. Many more sonnets are related to this group even if they do not straightforwardly belong to it. In Sonnet 116, for example, the crucial move – 'If this be error… I never writ' – is embedded in a conditional construction and framed in the negative.

In the second group are the sonnets that reflect in an equally positive way on poetry as a form of action but which are more reserved about their own role. These merely give *hope* of enacting the acts they name and reflect on. They include Sonnet 18 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?', Sonnet 55 'You shall shine more bright in these contents', Sonnet 60 'And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand', Sonnet 81 'You still shall live, such virtue hath my pen' and Sonnet 107 'I'll live in this poor rhyme'. Again, many more sonnets are related to this group, though they do not straightforwardly belong to it. Sonnet 136, for example, is brash but unspecific about the acts it names and hopes to enact: 'Will will fulfil the treasure of thy love'. Poetry itself may be included here.

Third are the sonnets that reflect on poetry as a form of action but in ways that are neither so positive nor so affirming. These name the acts they reflect on and – so they imply – *could* perform, but they do so in order to avoid performing them, or to refuse to perform them, or to deny that the speaker is (though another might be) in a position to perform them. Examples include Sonnet 16 'You must live drawn by your own sweet skill', Sonnet 21 'I will not praise, that purpose not to sell' and Sonnet 79 'Whilst I alone did call upon they aid'.

Finally, there are the sonnets that name and reflect on acts in poetry to raise doubts about whether the speaker *could* perform them, or to *deny* that he could perform them. These include Sonnet 17 'If I could but write', Sonnet 38 'How can my Muse want subject to invent' and Sonnet 103 'And more, much more, than in my verse can sit | Your own glass shows you, when you look in it.'

6

The attempt to survey and categorise reveals how difficult Shakespeare often makes it to determine which first person utterances are of the Chaucer-type and which are not. The Sonnets contain many 'playful' instances, where the form of the phrase-type is present but not quite the effect, or where the effect is present but not quite the form. This playfulness cultivates uncertainty, hesitation, instability. *Is* this an instance of the Chaucer-type or not? *Is* the named act being performed here or not? It is an uncertainty that has deeper roots, in the speaker himself. And here we may spot an analogue of that divergence in dramatic soliloquy on which Shakespeare played so much, between words spoken by a character, expressing their state of mind, and words merely passing through the mind of a character.[12]

Shakespeare often portrays his speaker as plunged into seemingly bottomless uncertainty about whether he is actually performing the acts he appears to be performing. And instead of seeking assurance from others, he confines himself within the flow of self-consciousness – thus anticipating the peculiar character of the Cartesian meditator: trying to provide for the content of thought about himself as a performing agent, a persisting self, from within the first-personal perspective alone, by increasingly frantic reflection on his own reflections.

This raises epistemic issues that pursue and complicate those to which Stanley Cavell draws attention. Cavell famously finds anticipation of Cartesian scepticism in Shakespeare, but in the plays only, and it is a scepticism about the external world and other minds (Cavell (1987: 1–37)). What we find with the Chaucer-type is anticipation of Cartesian scepticism in the Sonnets, and it is a scepticism about the self. It arises when, as Kant memorably put it, one treats reflection on one's own thoughts as the 'sole text from which to develop one's entire wisdom' (Kant 1781; 1787: A243; B401).

T. S. Eliot notices this 'self-consciousness which had not been in the world before' (1993: 261–2). He takes it as evidence of 'a new world coming into existence inside our own mind' and concludes 'The revolution is immense'. Though Eliot professed himself unqualified to 'expose in detail how the change came about', he was prepared to posit that it predated Descartes, an instance of a general claim: 'the state of mind appropriate to the development of a new science comes into existence before the science itself'.[13] And we do indeed find the change predating Descartes: it is vividly present and presented in Shakespeare's Sonnets, through deployment of the Chaucer-type.

7

In reflecting on poetry as a form of action, the Sonnets put us in a good position to address the issue raised by the work of Vendler and Schalkwyk: what a speech act approach to the Sonnets ought to look like.

They both start from a particular philosophical position: that there is an exclusive divide between two uses of language, those in which one states or describes things ('constative') and those in which one performs actions ('performative'). They then seek to apply this position to literary criticism of the Sonnets. Thus Schalkwyk seeks to prove that 'the poems are performative rather than constative' (Schalkwyk (2002: 10)). And, in a similar way, Vendler tries to convert readers who 'think of the Sonnets as discursive propositional statements' so that they recognise them for what she takes them to be, 'situationally motivated speech acts' (Vendler (1997: 492)).[14] So they both combine philosophy and literary criticism to define 'a speech act approach to the Sonnets': it is one that treats the sequence as a series of performative acts rather than of statements or descriptions.

Literary criticism and philosophy are certainly being allowed to shape each other here, but we may wonder whether they are doing so in quite the right way. For the Vendler–Schalkwyk position, stated outright, does not seem plausible. The Sonnets are replete with utterances in constative mode. The very first sentence of the sequence has all the appearance of a statement for example: 'From fairest creatures we desire increase, | That thereby beauty's rose may never die' (Sonnet 1).[15] And the second sentence of the sequence has all the appearance of a description: 'Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament, | And only herald to the gaudy spring' (Sonnet 1).[16] Now appearance may surrender to literary critical interpretation, of course, in this case. But that would require a separate argument for each of the very many constative-appearing utterances in the Sonnets. And before setting out to do that, it would be worth entering again into closer engagement with philosophy. For there is a real issue about the philosophical position from which both Vendler and Schalkwyk start.

When Austin introduces the distinction between performative and constative in the first lecture of *How to Do Things with Words*, he is not making a claim about all uses of language but how we are to analyse certain utterances. And that is a crucial point, one that will enable us to form a more plausible position on the Sonnets.

In recognising the broader category to which Chaucer-types (as we have called them) belong as a sub-group, Austin claims that some utterances are such that they 'can fall into no hitherto recognised grammatical category save that of statement', but they are nevertheless not statements (and not pseudo-statements either). They do not have the 'logical form' of statements, despite their superficial, grammatical appearance. He thinks two pieces of evidence are particularly relevant here: first, that such utterances do not seem to him to be either 'true or false', and, second, that they do not seem to him to 'describe', or 'report', or 'constate' anything at all. Austin puts his point with characteristic facetiousness: when a marrying couple utter the relevant parts of the marriage service, they are not 'reporting' on a marriage, they are 'indulging in it' (Austin (1975: 6; 1–11)).[17] Their utterance is performative rather than constative.

If we combine this view with our own finding – that Chaucer-type utterances play a cardinal role in the Sonnets – we arrive at a modified but still striking version of the Vendler–Schalkwyk position. The Sonnets do indeed contain statements and descriptions, but the utterances that play a deep structural role of accumulating significance in the sequence are of a quite different sort, being performative rather than constative.

More modest as it is, this position is still problematic. It is not reasonable to go on insisting on an exclusive contrast between the performative and the constative. The reasons for this show up whether one approach matters

as a philosopher does or as a literary critic does. Indeed, and rather compellingly, the two perspectives are at this point so very close, it is not easy to distinguish them. The philosopher may insist on the quite general point that stating and describing are among the many things we *do* with words, so that the constative has to be seen as a variety of performative, not in contrast to it. But the literary critic is thinking in essentially the same way when they take up any particular statement or description in the Sonnets (e.g. 'From fairest creatures we desire increase' (Sonnet 1)) and show how it is a speech act no less than all the other speech acts that go under the category of Chaucer-type utterances.

Austin himself quickly recognised this, calling his own attempt to describe and define a dichotomy between the performative and the constative 'hopeless from the start' (Austin (1975: 66)).[18] Stating and describing are among the many things we *do* with words:

> What we need to do for the case of stating, and by the same token describing and reporting, is to take them a bit off their pedestal, to realize that they are speech-acts no less than all these other speech-acts that we have been mentioning and talking about as performative.

> (Austin (1979: 249–50))

Allowing these findings to affect and respond to each other in the single, unified activity of attunement, we are freed from various artificial restrictions and thus see more deeply into the poetry and into the uses it makes of language. Instead of ignoring the great weight of statements and descriptions in the sequence, or setting them aside as beyond the means of a speech act approach, we can focus the considerable resources of such an approach upon them.

8

Attunement of this sort can make a substantial difference. As we have seen, it enables us to revise both our literary criticism and our philosophy. We need to acknowledge that constative utterances count as performative. And we can use attunement to pursue this revisionary treatment further. For if we look more closely at the Chaucer-type utterances that play so significant a role in the Sonnets, at least some of these paradigmatic performative utterances are functioning also in constative mode. If we are persuaded to accept this, it would revise Austin's opening position: that such utterances cannot be statements or descriptions. And it would also revise our literary-critical appreciation of the Sonnets. This may not be so immediately obvious. But the general idea is that it would draw attention to poems in the sequence whose virtues go unnoticed because we do not appreciate what is peculiarly expressive about them: that the speaker is indeed describing the acts being performed in the very act of performing of them, and that this is of pivotal significance to the poem.

Consider Sonnet 85, as an example.[19] Critics tend to be unimpressed by it. Don Paterson summarises the commentaries on which he draws when he describes it as 'patently disingenuous' and 'a little bit dull' (2010: 243–5).[20] It can certainly appear rather glibly paradoxical and disconcertingly repetitive. But attuning poetry and philosophy gives us reason and opportunity to look again:

> My tongue-tied Muse in manners holds her still,
> While comments of your praise, richly compiled,
> Reserve their character with golden quill
> And precious phrase by all the Muses filed.
> I think good thoughts, whilst other write good words,
> And like unlettered clerk still cry 'Amen'
> To every hymn that able spirit affords,
> In polished form of well-refinèd pen.
> Hearing you praised, I say ''Tis so, 'tis true',
> And to the most of praise add something more,
> But that is in my thought, whose love to you
> (Though words come hindmost) holds his rank before.
>   Then others for the breath of words respect;
>   Me for my dumb thoughts, speaking in effect.

There is a paradox here: 'I am tongue-tied, but I make the point by speaking; I am incapable of precious phrase, but in testifying to this I use a precious phrase'. And this paradox can seem overstated, certainly if we suppose that the purpose of each quatrain is to repeat it.

Helen Vendler takes this view. However, she does find more value in the poem than other commentators. This is because she thinks that the lack of subtlety and the repetition are intended. The aim of the sonnet, in her view, is to demonstrate the moral insignificance of the 'golden quill', a metonym for an aureate style. This style 'dwindles with each successive quatrain' and thus 'turns into a linguistic variable before our eyes, dwindling into moral insignificance' (Vendler (1997: 374)). So her interpretation depends on distinguishing the 'thematic constants' of the poem, which do the dwindling, from 'the whole structure with respect to the speaker', which she regards as 'subtly incremental'.

Vendler thinks her interpretation puts the speaker in a better light. He 'rises in our esteem' as his 'aureate diction declines' because managing this decline establishes his credentials as sincere. We may wonder. This strategy seems too artful to be earnest and too familiar to attract much interest. If this *is* his strategy, it makes him seem smug and self-serving. But set this aside. Vendler's aim is to raise the speaker at the expense of the poem – its 'thematic constants' – and we may wonder whether this does the latter justice. Her way with these constants, for example, overlooks features of genuine interest. The collection of metonymical tongues, quills, pens and breath seems too complex and arranged to be merely decorative. The use of m- and p-sounds throughout is subtle: the sharp 'My… Muse… manners' which lengthens into the soothing 'omm' sounds of 'comments' and 'compiled', the light introduction of 'p' halfway through until it takes the weight with 'polished form of well-refinèd pen' and pulses with the emphasis of the repeated word-part 'praise' – 'Hearing you praised', 'most of praise' – whose echo gives emphasis to the earlier 'precious phrase'. Above all, and of particular interest to a speech act approach, there is the final phrase, 'speaking in effect', which the previous lines enrich with a variety of meanings so that we return to the body of the poem to find them all at work: (a) my speaking is marked by its sincerity (what I say is genuine, real, meant); (b) my thoughts really do speak (they are not just breath); (c) my speaking is active, engaged – it brings about effects; (d) my thoughts *as good as* speak, though they do not do so – not *quite*, being in some sense 'dumb'. Helen Vendler notes only sense (a) (1997: 375).[21] Katherine Duncan-Jones acknowledges the possibility of sense (b) and perhaps (c) (2010: 280).[22] But it is sense (d) that is perhaps the most important for understanding the movement of the poem.

We appreciate this as soon as we adopt an attuned approach and attend to the one unambiguously Chaucer-type phrase – 'I say "'Tis so, 'tis true"' – by contrast with its two more shadowy partners, 'I think good thoughts' and 'I… cry "Amen"'.

'I say "'Tis so, 'tis true"' is, and in the plainest sense of the phrase, a 'speaking in effect'. What the speaker says, he does, in the saying of it, and in such a way as to be seen to have done it.

'I think good thoughts', on the other hand, is precisely not a 'speaking in effect'. The speaker's utterance is meant to contrast with what others are able to utter, his 'think' with their 'words', both written ('golden quill', 'well-refinèd pen') and spoken ('the breath of words'). The point is precisely that the speaker does *not* do something in uttering this phrase: he does not utter these thoughts. Enjambment makes the discomfort felt: the slight line-end pause after 'to the most of praise add something more' encourages one to lean in to hear of this 'more', only to be rebuffed, cut out, a witness merely, and to the speaker's withdrawing, to his maintaining of what is both private and privative, with his self-silencing, self-sealing 'But that is in my thought'.

Finally, 'I… cry "Amen"' is the most unsettled of the three phrases. Looked at in one way, it is like 'I say "'Tis so, 'tis true"', an utterance of the Chaucer-type. Looked at in another way, it is like 'I think good thoughts', if not still more removed from the Chaucer-type. For there is no doubt that the verb in the sentential clause ('cry') is a word for what the speaker might do in uttering a sentence. But the syntax ('whilst', 'still') suggests that this is a phrase whose uttering is only being described, as something the speaker tends to do – is in the habit of doing – rather than what is being done. The reconciliation is in the word itself, 'Amen', which is presented here and hereby 'cried', so that if the uttering is being described, it is not *merely* being described; it is being performed as well, and with it the act named by the verb.[23]

So if there is a falling-off in Sonnet 85 – a dwindling – there is also an upsurge and a heightening which more than matches it, a straightforward contrast between the effetely ineffectual and the plainly performed. And the mutually shaping process of attunement is active here: we revise our literary-critical appreciation of the phrase 'speaking in effect' in revising our philosophical position on speaking in effect, and vice versa.[24] Sometimes a Chaucer-type utterance is no less constative than it is performative. This is so in poems like Sonnet 85, where the speaker describes the act being performed in the very act of performing it. And to recognise this is to appreciate

the underlying idea: that Shakespeare's use of the Chaucer-type calls for the attunement of poetry and philosophy.[25]

Related topics

Notes

1 I take Nussbaum to mean literary criticism in its broad sense: what authors and readers/audiences also engage in.
2 For greater depth and more extensive evidence, see my 'attuned' investigation of the Sonnets (de Gaynesford (2017: 173–248)).
3 Because this is what is most satisfying, therapeutic and efficient; see de Gaynesford (2017: 6–31).
4 Simon Blackburn offers an amusing and acute rebuttal of some versions of the analytic philosopher stereotype (Blackburn (2015: 111–26)).
5 Cavell himself may have good reason to avoid this labelling; see Toril Moi (2011: 135).
6 Although this type belongs to the overall class that J.L. Austin and others dub 'explicit performative', it represents its own sub-group, distinct from other members whose verbs are in the second person and/or passive (like 'You are hereby appointed mayor') and third-person and/or plural (like 'The barons hereby promise their allegiance').
7 See for example *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 2.2.110ff, 3.1.172ff, 5.1.341–3; *The Comedy of Errors* 4.4.49–52; *Twelfth Night* 3.4.1–4; *As You Like It* 2.1.157–9, 3.2.270, 5.4.185; *Love's Labour's Lost* 1.2.5, 3.1.53; *Merry Wives of Windsor* 3.3.34; *The Taming of the Shrew* 4.5.2–5; 5.2.131–2.
8 See Schalkwyk (2002: 'Introduction' and Chapter 4).
9 John Searle must bear some of the responsibility for making promising the paradigm; see Searle (1969: 54–71). What makes promising peculiar is evident, from a philosophical angle, in David Owens (2012), and from a literary critical angle, directed precisely at Shakespeare, in John Kerrigan (2016).
10 For the evidence, see de Gaynesford (2017: 173–219).
11 The interdependence of literary criticism and philosophy is evident throughout Kerrigan's analyses of Shakespeare's plays, which are his focus, but also in his commentaries on various Sonnets, such as Sonnet 152, which is replete with oaths, vows, contracts and pledges (Kerrigan (2016: 474–5)). That they are 'speech acts' is 'integral to their status', Kerrigan acknowledges.
12 Hirsch (2003) distinguishes these two varieties from the more familiar third, where the character is fully aware of playgoers and addresses them directly.
13 For a guarded and possibly deflating approach to related themes ('there are as many definitions of solipsism as there are individuals who wish to waste time over a self-inflicted task') see Hill (2008: 407–23, 414).
14 Vendler and Schalkwyk do disagree in important ways but about what the basic position implies rather than about the position itself. Thus Vendler thinks historical research must be of minimal significance if the Sonnets are performative rather than constative (1997: 1–4), whereas Schalkwyk thinks historical research must be of maximal significance if this is so (2002: 13–16).
15 Even speech act philosophers like John Searle would accommodate it. As he defines the act of stating, the speaker appears to be performing a paradigm of that act: 'an intentionally undertaken commitment to the truth of the expressed propositional content' (Searle (1989: 82)).
16 If Vendler and Schalkwyk go wrong by taking Austin's position too far, other literary critics go wrong by not taking it far enough. In trying to apply Austin's insights to Shakespeare, for example, John Kerrigan blunts them considerably by making them figure as components of a highly sophisticated version of a *truth*-orientated approach (Kerrigan (2016: 475)). Austin himself, of course, was explicitly interested in promoting an approach directed ultimately at *action*, at what we *do* with words; see de Gaynesford (2017: 'Introduction' and chapters 5–6)).
17 Austin flirts with what would be an additional proposal, were he to go further than 'what we should feel tempted to say': namely, 'that any utterance which is in fact performative should be reducible, or expandable,

or analysable into a form, or reproducible in a form, with a verb in the first person singular present indicative active (grammatical)' – that is, the form of the Chaucer-type utterance (1975: 61–2).

18 The real task he sets himself is to distinguish kinds of thing done by utterances, hence his subsequent focus on the locutionary–illocutionary–perlocutionary distinction.

19 Another example is Sonnet 49, which I discuss it at length in de Gaynesford (2017: 235–48).

20 Paterson appeals to Helen Vendler (1997: 373–5) and Stephen Booth (1977: 285–8). Paterson also depends on Colin Burrows, the editor of Shakespeare (2002: 550–1).

21 'His thoughts speak *in effect*, in the *ex-facio* of sincerity' (Vendler (1997: 375)).

22 'speak in external action or in truth, rather than in mere breath of words, which is here treated as insubstantial and suspect' (Duncan-Jones (2010: 280)).

23 So if Stephen Booth is right, that the 'topic of pens regularly evokes apparently studied imprecision from Shakespeare' (1977: 286), we need to give due weight to 'studied'; any imprecision here is, certainly, at least that, if not artful.

24 Pursuing this possibility would further enrich, and be enriched by, developments in analytical philosophy. In John Searle's analysis, for example, what we are calling a Chaucer-type utterance does indeed make a statement, though the primary purpose of such an utterance is to perform the act named by the main verb (Searle (1989)). 'Primary' distinguishes Searle's view from those who flatly reject Austin; it implies that the statement is derivative from the act named by the main verb rather than vice versa.

25 I am grateful to audiences at Oxford and Reading, to delegates at the conference on Shakespeare and Philosophy organised at the University of Hertfordshire in 2014 by the editors of this volume, and to Emily and Craig themselves, for critical comment that improved this paper.

Further reading

Austin, J. L., 1975. *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.This book, which comprises a series of lectures and contains several changes of direction, initiated speech act theorising in the analytic-philosophy tradition and remains the classic text.

Gaynesford, M. de., 2017. *The Rift in the Lute: Attuning Poetry and Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.This book offers a full-length examination of the Chaucer-type in Shakespeare's Sonnets embedded within a survey of the philosophical and literary significance of the type from Chaucer to Geoffrey Hill.

Kerrigan, J., 2016. *Shakespeare's Binding Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.This book, which attends mainly to Shakespeare's plays, offers useful insights into his use of a particular group of speech acts, those performed to make oaths, vows, contracts, pledges and other forms of commitment.

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9

'TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE'

Shakespeare, Eco, and the open work

Michael Troy Shell

Introduction

Virtually every formal, civic, and organizational occasion in which a speech is called for, be it graduation, retirement, funeral, or store opening, will find the Bard brought out, dressed in borrowed robes, and invoked to add gravitas to an otherwise mundane and inconsequential speech. This project will attempt to explore the ground between frivolous usages of the words of Shakespeare because they have the ring of what Stephen Colbert calls 'truthiness' (Colbert (2005)) and legitimate appropriation of the philosophical 'truths' explored in the works of Shakespeare and given profound expression in his art. Are there situations in which the words of Shakespeare can be legitimately utilized? Are there limits to the meanings which can be imposed or extracted from a work of fiction? What criteria might be available to aid in these demarcations? If Ludwig Wittgenstein is correct and all communication is word game, then words have no meaning outside the confines of their constructed context (Wittgenstein (2001: 15)). Works of literature can only be about the work itself and what particular words mean within the work. If, on the other hand, readers oversimplify Umberto Eco's assertion of the 'open work', then for each and every one of them the words of Shakespeare may mean what they will. Both propositions seem untenable. It will be the intention of this project to explore some middle way in which the reader is free to find application of

the ideas expressed in the words of Shakespeare with some reasonable and authentic acknowledgement of their context.

To illustrate the pervasiveness of this phenomenon, consider the commencement speech given by Jimmy Iovine at the University of Southern California in 2013. To demonstrate the freshness of his approach and perhaps to play on his street creds he boasted that,

> In closing, because I believe in people doing the unexpected and being innovative, I would like to try something that's never been done at a major graduation ceremony. Rather than quote William Shakespeare or Robert Frost, I close with the words of my favorite poet, R. Kelly, who penned my personal karaoke anthem.

(2013)

Many public speakers do not, apparently, have the nerve of Iovine and find referencing Shakespeare impossible to resist. Consider the following from the 2016 presidential campaign in the United States. President Trump, then Mr Trump, refused to release his US tax documents, despite it being a long-standing practice of presidential candidates. Mr Trump had made widespread use of Twitter to insult his rivals and to make statements without having to deal with the usual press corps. A leading Republican, Mitt Romney, who opposed Mr Trump's candidacy, took to Twitter as well to critique Mr Trump's various arguments as to why he could not or would not release his taxes and, in so doing, with an allusion to *Hamlet,* brought Shakespeare into the fray:

> 'Mitt Romney @MittRomney Feb 25, Methinks the Donald doth protest too much. Show voters your back taxes, @realDonaldTrump. #WhatIsHeHiding'

(2016)

Samantha Power (2015), US ambassador to the United Nations, gave a commencement speech at the University of Pennsylvania. She congratulated the graduates and said they will need to have the wind at their backs as they head into the world because, in the words of this respected diplomat, 'things are really screwed up!' Power went on to list a

wide range of troubles in the world and summed up with a quote from *The Tempest*: 'Hell is empty and all the devils are here' (Act I, Scene 2).

Michael Fertik, writing for the magazine INC's website, provides a list of '10 Shakespeare Quotes Every Entrepreneur Should Read'. Number ten is advice from Macbeth himself: 'It is a tale… full of sound and fury, signifying nothing' (Act V, Scene 5). Fertik suggests that the application of this text is to be aware that every company has 'business boors' who are all 'bluster and boast… who never seem to execute' (2017).

Fertik also references the oft quoted 'How far that little candle throws his beams' from *The Merchant of Venice*. This gem, says Fertik, reminds us to keep the big picture in mind and that 'this excellent expression of optimism reminds us that even small things have a mighty impact' (2016).

These few examples are a very unscientific sample; however, they are illustrative of the countless ways Shakespeare is utilized in public rhetoric.[1] It is the ear, perhaps, that first detects something rotten in the ways in which some of these passages are put to service. Can a criterion be suggested that might provide a guide to understanding how and to what ends Shakespeare is being used and/or abused? Umberto Eco (1989) in his essay 'The Structure of Bad Taste' suggests that the sense that a piece of art is being 'misused' is not the critique of an elite that holds a privileged opinion as to the meaning of a piece of art; rather, it comes from the way the art is handled. This sort of misappropriation is unethical, for it 'suggest[s] that Shakespeare is a signifier that can be seized and deployed' (Huang & Rivlin (2014: 3)). Those who present Shakespeare in bad taste do so because their 'project is not that of involving the reader in an act of discovery but that of forcing him to register a particular effect' (Eco 1989: 185). This is an insult to the artist. Eco says elsewhere: 'It seems that to respect what the author said means to remain faithful to the original text' (2003: 4). 'Fidelity' and 'recognition' is precisely what Christy Desmet calls for in her essay in *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation* (2014). To cite or appropriate a work of art authentically requires 'putting oneself into the presence of others' (2014: 43). She also describes the act of appropriation as being two-fold: it can be a taking or a giving (Desmet 1999). Much of the focus on the appropriation of Shakespeare has been on the ways in which his works have been used as tools of cultural imperialism. However, when considering the 'giving' aspect of appropriation, Desmet is insightful. The misuse, which she calls 'theft and

abduction' (2014: 42), is unethical, but appropriation can also be understood to mean 'reception as well as production' (2014: 43). 'Shakespearean appropriations can flaunt or flout, proclaim or ignore, but ultimately are confronted by, ethical claims upon them' (Huang & Rivlin (2014: 3)). Umberto Eco's semiotics and his conception of the 'open work' provide guidance to ensure that when Shakespeare is invoked it will be in good taste, ethical, and involve an authentic recognition that one has encountered the great philosophical dramatist from Stratford-upon-Avon.

Excursus: Shakespeare among the philosophers

Many no doubt, while having the highest respect for Shakespeare as an artist, would hesitate to place him among the traditional roster of philosophers. Against the objection that Shakespeare is not a philosopher but a playwright, it seems worthy to consider what manner of philosopher Shakespeare is. Perhaps some would exclude him as he does not write exposition in the manner of Kant, Hegel, or Russell. However, the canon of philosophy is replete with works of fiction, starting with *The Dialogues of Plato* and running through *The New Atlantis*, *Candide*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *No Exit*, and *The Fall*, to name just a few. Burton F. Porter in *Philosophy though Fiction and Film* observes the words of Thomas Mann: 'all subject matter is boring unless ideas shine through it' (Mann, cited in Porter (2004: viii)). The dramas of Shakespeare are not only entertaining, engaging, and enlightening but also philosophical because the great perennial human questions get explored and exposed in them. This places Shakespeare in the good company of natural philosophers. Like Confucius, Qoheleth, and Thoreau, Shakespeare 'is a clear-eyed observer and recorder, sensitive to the facts before his eyes, not swayed by dogma or traditions… He is simply saying, this is the ways things are, like it or not' (McGinn (2006:15)). As John Dryden observed, writing about Shakespeare in 1668, and commenting on his lack of formal education but powers of observation, 'He needed not the spectacles of books to read Nature; he looked inward and found her there' (Dryden, cited in Wright (1965: 77)). He was 'A beady-eyed naturalist of raging human interiority and social collision' (McGinn (2006: 16)). When we meet Shakespeare as the natural philosopher we can avoid 'Bardolatry' or treating his words as 'secular

scriptures' by acknowledging that we find in the collected works of Shakespeare truths, not because he said them, but because he said them because they are true.

Having established Shakespeare's bona fide credentials as a philosopher, one is safe in saying his works are worthy not only of artistic recognition, careful reading, and reflection but also application and appropriation. The quotes cited previously, from various public speakers, have a very uneven feel to them. One senses that they have been diminished in some manner; they have gone from linguistic symbols, which invite interpretation, to mere signs, with no real meaning in themselves. However, above and beyond feeling that Shakespeare has been somehow slighted, are there criteria for critiquing 'appropriate/inappropriate' or 'authentic/inauthentic' ways Shakespeare has been invoked? This chapter suggests that Umberto Eco's semiotic theories, his insights into the role of the reader, and his distinction of 'open works' and 'closed works' may provide a framework for such criteria.

Banal Bard

Kate Rumbold (2007, 2015) introduces an apt phrase in her work exploring the frivolous ways in which Shakespeare is peppered in eighteenth-century novels. She refers to 'Banal Shakespeare'. Sadly, much of the use of the works of Shakespeare in public discourse is of this ilk (Rumbold (2015: 115)). Passages are lifted without regard for context within the work or acknowledgement of the significant shifts in the English language over 400 years. The chief distinction here is that the 'quoter', be she speaker or writer, has something that she wishes to express and finds a passage in the words of Shakespeare which will serve her purposes. Here the term 'words' of Shakespeare is used advisedly to distinguish it from the 'works' of Shakespeare. This is to say that Shakespeare is misused as a decoration and not art. He is quoted not because one of his characters speaks to the occasion or has some enlightenment to bestow but because his words 'fit' the bill. This is sad, because as Harold Bloom writes, 'The ultimate use of Shakespeare is to let him teach you to think too well, to whatever truth you can sustain without perishing' (1998: 10). One gets the

distinct impression that most of those who quote Shakespeare in public discourse have not learned some truth from him that they then feel compelled to share, but rather, lacking rhetorical skill or significant gravitas of their own, they cast about for some pretty words to cover their expositional nakedness ('Counterfeit wisdom', as Christy Desmet refers to this intellectual crime (2014: 44)). Banality seems most often to arise as a result of a lack of attention to the context of the play from which the quote is lifted or the failure to realize that the same word or words do not have the same meaning after the passage of centuries. Barry Edelstein, in his wonderful book *Bardisms* illustrates an extreme example of this approach to Shakespeare by suggesting the Bard offered the perfect quote on the occasion of a grandson's Bris: 'This was the most unkindest cut of all' (Edelstein (2009: xii)). Eco suggests that these disembodied fragments reduce the texts to a mere sign, to a cult object. He observes that 'in order to transform a work into a cult object one must be able to break, dislocate, unhinge it so that one can remember only the parts of it, irrespective of their original relationship with the whole' (Eco (1983: 198)). Desmet calls this ventriloquism and verbal hijacking. She warns that mere attention to the words is no guarantee of meaningfulness; in fact, 'the higher the (technical) fidelity, the greater the potential for (emotional, ethical) infidelity to Shakespeare as Bard' (2014: 47).

This practice is explained in *Mouse or Rat: Translation as Negotiation*, where Umberto Eco (2003) explores the tensions that are incumbent on any act of translation. Eco offers the distinction between a 'dictionary' view of translation and an 'encyclopedia' approach. Eco illustrates to rather comedic effect what happens when translation software is used on an artistic text. For example, the mundane expression 'The Works of Shakespeare' translated from English to Italian and back again becomes 'The Plants of Shakespeare'. This completely erroneous translation is the result of the program's reliance on a system of lexicon synonyms – Eco's dictionary approach. The mistake is to assume that if we have a word match then we have synonymous expressions. Eco calls for an encyclopedic approach to interpretation, where 'translation does not only concern words and language in general but also the world, or at least the possible world described by a given text' (2003:16).

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet: Shakespeare and the closed work

Those who might be sceptical about the applicability of the writings of Shakespeare beyond literary criticism might inquiry, 'Is it reasonable, to say nothing of advisable, to seek sage advice on everything from aging to starting a business in the twenty-first century from an Elizabethan playwright?'[2] 'Why are the works of an entertainer 400 years removed being appealed to at all?' This perhaps invites some to move towards Eco's idea of a 'closed work'. A closed work is one that resists interpretation but is studied or revered for its own sake. 'The author presents a finished product with the intention that this particular composition should be appreciated and received in the same form as he devised it' (Eco (1989: 3)), thus one should 'never allow the reader to move outside the strict control of the author' (Eco (1989: 6)). Adelbert F. Caldwell (1916: 122) will bemoan the misquoting of Shakespeare and others because the quotations are not rendered correctly. He cites 'All that glitters is not gold' as the form commonly quoted and ascribed to Shakespeare, when in fact the line on the scroll read by the Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice* is 'All that glisters is not gold'. Obsessions such as these perhaps move beyond banal Shakespeare to the anal Shakespearean. However, the closed work leads us away from 'what does it mean' to merely 'what does it say'. Wittgenstein's observation that 'philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday' (2001: 38) has merit. He holds that communication is really language games, and as such words only have meaning within the context of a given game. A tennis racquet has no meaning at a football game. From the perspective of a closed work, Shakespeare's words have no meaning outside of the text in which they were written. Perhaps the play is the thing. This is not to say that words are without merit, but in a closed work per Eco they have value only as a 'pedagogical vehicle'. From the perspective of the closed work, Shakespeare has given the world amazing plays, beautiful language, and wonderful fictitious characters. To ask for more is to impose onto Shakespeare's works more than was intended. To do so would be committing one of the cardinal sins of informal fallacies, the appeal of unqualified authority. These speculative flights of fancy in trying to apply

Shakespeare's words to modern situations are as pointless as the debates in the middle of the last century as to 'how many children had Lady Macbeth?' (Daiches (1963)).

An improbable fiction: the open work

Sauntering in the sacred wood

The state of affairs described above leaves us unsatisfied. Both the banal use of Shakespeare and approaching his word as a closed text, a mere cultural artefact, must be rejected by the sheer existential fact of the vitality with which the Bard is performed and studied the world over, often with exciting new interpretations. If the works of Shakespeare are closed, the world did not get the memo. The banal quoting of Shakespeare is perhaps a back-handed compliment, acknowledging the Bard's greatness and displaying the speaker's smallness. What is it that Shakespeare has done that not only places his work so securely in the centre of humanistic studies but elevates him to philosopher? Umberto Eco in his *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* likens reading literature to, well, a walk in the woods. He suggests there are two ways to walk: 'the first is to try one or several routes (so as to get out of the woods as soon as possible)'; the other is 'to walk so as to discover what the wood is like and find out why some paths are accessible and others are not' (Eco (1994b: 27)). This is what Henry David Thoreau calls a 'saunter' (Thoreau (2001: 225)). Eco contends that there are fictional woods worth sauntering in because some writers have created 'fictional worlds that are as complex, contradictory, and provocative as the actual one' (Eco (1994b: 117)). He names as examples Nerval, Rabelais, Dante, Joyce, and Shakespeare, who write open works that 'strive to be as ambiguous as life' (Eco (1994b: 117)). This is why Colin McGinn (2006: 1) observes that as we wander the worlds created by Shakespeare we feel 'large themes are at work in the plays, shaping the poetry and the drama'. These themes are not expounded to the reader but are woven into the fabric of compelling literature, for it is the nature of art to creatively order chaos so that truth may be revealed. As Eco writes, 'in order to become a "Sacred Wood", a wood must be tangled and twisted like the forest of the Druids, and not orderly like a French garden' (Eco

(1994b: 128)). It is because Shakespeare does not invite us to promenade in pedantic exposition but on crusade into the tangled jungle of experience to attempt a passage though the uncertainties of 'knowledge and skepticism; the nature of the self; and the character of causality' (McGinn (2006: 3)) to find 'whatever truth you can sustain without perishing' (Bloom (1998: 10)) that places him among the philosophers. Indeed, Terry Eagleton in his work *William Shakespeare* observes that 'it is difficult to read Shakespeare without feeling that he was almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida' (1986: ix–x). Eagleton, of course purposefully, has the analogy backwards. Northrop Frye states it the right way around: 'if we had not Hamlet, we might not have had the Romantic Movement at all, or the works of Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche and Kierkegaard' (Frye (1986: 100)).

Negotiation between cultures

Umberto Eco provides some signposts for making our way into the Shakespearean woods. Eco points to every act of translation as a negotiation: 'A process that takes place between two texts produced as a given historical moment in a given cultural milieu' (Eco (2003: 25–6)). He reminds us that this act of interaction 'does not only concern words and language in general but also the world' (2003: 16). Paul N. Siegel will call this 'Shakespeare's planes of reality' (Siegel, cited in Bethell (1977: 45)), and Frye reminds us that these are not closed works but that 'Shakespeare has two sides to him: one is the historical side, where he's one of a group of dramatists working in Elizabethan London… the other is the poet who speaks to us today with so powerfully contemporary a voice' (Frye (1986: 1)). Bloom, perhaps, makes the negotiation a bit one-sided when he contends that 'you can bring absolutely anything to Shakespeare and the play will lighten it up far more than what you bring will illuminate the plays' (Bloom (1998: 1)). But his point is no less valid, that the encounter with an open work invites the reader to participate in the act of creating meaning. Again, Frye: 'One of the greatest benefits of studying Shakespeare is that he makes us more aware of our assumptions and so less confined by them' (Frye (1986: 4)).

This is the power of an open text, as Eco points out in *The Role of the Reader*: 'An open text is a paramount instance of a syntactic-semantico-

pragmatic device whose foreseen interpretation is a part of its generative process' (Eco (1994a: 3)). Even in its creation the author anticipates and invites interaction. An open work summons collaboration between the reader and the text to create meanings. These meanings will no doubt be various and disparate but they cannot be without limitations. They must fall inside the 'field of possibilities' (Eco (1989: 14)), which is only limited by the encyclopedic competences of the reader of the various cultural milieux involved in the discussion (Eco (2003: 26)).

Equality of effect

Eco cautions that in interpretation and communication some losses are inevitable, lest one imagine that this process could be seamless and result in full and perfect comprehension of one person's act of communication by anyone else. When travelling between the fictional woods and the reality of one's understanding, it is possible that we seek to grasp some understanding only to realize 'you can't get there from here'. Eco give the example of Hamlet in Act III, Scene 4, when he is confronting his mother in her bedchamber and hears someone cry for help behind the curtain. Hamlet says, 'How now! a rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!' Eco confronts the problem that in Italian there is one word used for both 'mouse' and 'rat'. Does Shakespeare intend for the audience to believe that Hamlet is using the pretence of there being a mouse to justify thrusting a sword blindly though a curtain? This would certainly be 'overkill' for a mouse. On the other hand, perhaps the exclamation is designed to label the person behind the curtain. In English, calling someone a rat has a pejorative connotation different from calling someone a mouse. Therefore, in translation, Hamlet's claim 'How now, a contemptible person' is behind this curtain becomes 'How now, a small rodent'. This is what Eco means when he says that sometimes one must accept 'losses'. However, given Eco's sense of playful irony, one might call it a gain that this ambiguity in the word for the rodent adds to the chaos of the text. Hamlet supposes he has killed the king (a rat) but has in fact only succeeded in killing the pesky Polonius (a mouse). Eco might suggest that this would be a gain (Eco (2003: 32–4)) in secondary pleasure, if only to those with rather wide linguistic and cosmopolitan sensibilities, but one clearly not anticipated by Shakespeare.

Eco advises that the translator, and by extension the reader or audience, aim not for exact literal equivalence but 'to create the same effect in the mind of the reader… as the original text wanted to create' (Eco (2003: 56)). This calls for the reader, translator, and even quoter to 'make an interpretive hypothesis about the effect programed by the original text' (Eco (2003: 56)). The most obvious sign that someone quoting Shakespeare has not done due diligence on the milieu of the text is when they begin with 'Shakespeare says…'. It is almost unbelievable but true that William Shakespeare has 'said' almost nothing. Every word, expression, and quotation from Shakespeare comes mediated though the voice of his fictional characters. This is not meant as an aspersion: it places him in good company, with Confucius, Jesus, and Socrates, who left no personal written works behind, the difference being that their disciples recorded what they attest to be the direct address of the master. Shakespeare left some 884,647 words but not one is him speaking as himself. This is a critical point: Shakespeare does not set out to expound a philosophical position but to create an effect as we encounter the world of his texts and sense an equality of effect in the orb of our experiences. Here we can perhaps agree with Hamlet that 'the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature' (Act III, Scene 2). McGinn in his final chapter on 'Shakespeare's Genius' observes that the poet-philosopher of Stratford

> combines the philosophical and the dramatic in a uniquely powerful and compelling way. He takes an abstract theme – the nature of the self, the problem of other minds – and succeeds in embedding it in concrete living creatures, in such a way that the theme is vitalized and the characters are rendered emblematic.
>
> (McGinn (2006: 200))

He goes on to say that 'we see the world in a certain way, and then the genius comes along and imposes his stamp on things; henceforth we see the world through his eyes' (McGinn (2006: 200)). In the case of the genius Shakespeare we see the world from the vantage point of a great philosophical dramatist. This is Harold Bloom's central thesis *in Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, that Shakespeare's great

contribution is that he has 'made us theatrical' (Bloom (1998: 13)). Barry Edelstein (2009) observes that

> one of the ways Shakespeare manages to speak to all occasions is by virtue of having survived long enough to address them. In every new generation and every new cultural circumstance, he slips the surly bond of dramatic context and morphs into new shapes he never could have imagined.
>
> (Edelstein (2009: xxi))

This is appropriate with the caution that 'we have to keep the historical Shakespeare always present in our minds, to prevent us from trying to kidnap him into our own cultural orbit… for we get obsessed by the notion of using words to manipulate people and events' (Frye (1986: 1)). This would be a great waste as it would undermine his particular genius, for 'he did not impose his own vision on reality; he let reality impose itself on his vision. He told us how the world looks from the perspective of itself. And the world never looked the same again' (McGinn (2006: 204)).

To the Bard be true: a case of the commencement address and the open work

Is it reasonable to expect persons who are not Shakespeare scholars to invest the time and effort needed to cite him in context with attention to an encyclopedic application of his words, with attention to the intersections of more than one culture, and reaching to achieve equality of effect? Can this be done? It can and should. Peter Thiel, in a 2016 commencement address at Hamilton College, gives an exciting example of a way the open work approach to Shakespeare can be profoundly applied. In his address he warns students about uncritically accepting common clichés in our culture. He cites 'To thine own self be true' and then explains why this phrase is deceiving by placing the quote in context of the play. He notes that while Shakespeare wrote the words, 'he didn't say it. He put it in the mouth of a character named Polonius, who Hamlet accurately describes as a tedious old fool, even though Polonius was senior counselor to the King of Denmark' (Theil (2016)). Thiel goes on to give two pieces of advice for

the graduates, drawn directly from the text and the overall thrust of the play. Test your assumptions. One is the assumption that the 'self' can be trusted. Does one really know what the self is? Are its motives pure? He advises that 'You need to discipline yourself, to cultivate it and care for it. Not to follow it blindly' (Theil (2016)). This is truly one of the encyclopedic themes of Hamlet. He then goes on to suggest that one would do well to be 'sceptical of advice'. Not in the sense that one disregards all received wisdom, but that one should examine it, take into account personal experiences, and gather evidence. Jeffrey Wilson, in his article on 'What Shakespeare Says about Sending Our Children Off to College', points out that Polonius is being both hypocritical and illogical in his advice to be true to yourself. Polonius shows himself to be of questionable integrity and in giving his son a 'list to live by' and then adding 'be true to yourself' he makes 'an antinomian move that would override the rules just enumerated' (Wilson (2016)). This too is one of the meta themes in the works of Shakespeare as the Renaissance begins to morph into the Enlightenment.

Invocation

Invited as we are to interact with Shakespeare's plays as open works, we can view the whole of the human condition. From the vantage point of Shakespeare's standing as a legitimate philosopher, one is drawn into the depths of his observations on reality and human nature. Only then are we welcomed into the fictional wood to see what truths we might find there. Perhaps armed with Eco's guiding principles, one will be able to quote Shakespeare with confidence and not come to feel 'I am sorry that with better heed and judgment I had not quoted him' (*Hamlet*, II.1.1070). Armed with the open-work perspective, when we share our findings, interpretations, and appropriations of the truths expressed in Shakespeare they will be rooted deeply in the context of his profound plays, complex characters, and beautiful prose. We will not quote Shakespeare merely to borrow the rhetorical authority of this august literary figure, but we will find in the world of his plays and in the words of his characters truths worthy of our own retelling.

Related topics

Notes

1 The uses of Shakespeare considered here are intentional and reference his works. They do not include the words and phrases that have been incorporated into the English language at an unconscious level and which their speaker or writer is not aware are Shakespeare's language. Shakespeare's contributions to the English lexicon are profound, even after recent computer-aided research which has significantly reduced the number of original words attributed to him (see Elliott & Valenza (2011)).

2 One needs only enter Shakespeare and _____ to find a plethora of attempts to assign relevance to the words of Shakespeare. I offer two as examples: Fertik (2017) and Whitbourne (2017).

Further reading

Eco, U., 1997. *Kant and the Platypus*. New York: Harcourt. This book explores the fundamental challenge of language to express ideas and present the world in a meaningful way and the problems that exist when reality does not fit into our conceptual frames.

Eco, U., 2003. *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*. London: Phoenix. This is a delightful read in which Eco with great wit examines the challenge of communication across cultures and languages. He does not stop there: he suggests that these are not concerns of the translator but serve as a metaphor for the limits of minds to know and express reality.

Huang, A. and Rivlin, E., eds. 2014. *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*. New York: Palgrave. This is a collection of wonderful pieces, each of which explores the question of the rightness of various ways in which Shakespeare has been appropriated in a variety of settings (even prison) and as a tool for both cultural imperialism and liberation.

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10

WITTGENSTEIN'S ENIGMATIC REMARKS ON SHAKESPEARE

Wolfgang Huemer

Ludwig Wittgenstein's remarks on William Shakespeare, though small in number, have raised a considerable amount of interest and bewilderment among scholars. The few observations, all of which are contained in posthumously published *Notebooks*, express a distanced attitude not only towards the Bard but also towards the culture to which the latter belongs. Wittgenstein does not, however, embed Shakespeare's work in a larger context, nor does he make any effort to explain or justify his judgment, which might be due to the diaristic character of the notebooks in which they are contained. It should, therefore, not come as a surprise that they have been interpreted in very different and mutually incompatible ways. Some interpreters have suggested that they display a misreading of Shakespeare's work; others have argued that they reveal more about Wittgenstein, his aesthetic judgement, or his philosophical agenda than the significance or the literary quality of Shakespeare's work. In what follows I will first expose Wittgenstein's remarks and then focus on the ambivalent reactions they have evoked among scholars.

Wittgenstein's remarks on Shakespeare

Wittgenstein did not mention Shakespeare in the works he published or prepared for publication during his lifetime. In his entire *Nachlass* we find only seven remarks on the Bard, most of which were composed very late: the earliest one, where Wittgenstein puts down an idea he attributes to his

friend Paul Engelmann (Wittgenstein (1998: 42)), is dated 1939–40; the six others were written between 1946 and 1950. All of them were selected by the editor G.H. von Wright to become part of the posthumously published volume *Culture and Value*.

It might be useful to begin by highlighting some characteristics of Wittgenstein's remarks on Shakespeare. In particular I think the following points are worth noting. (1) One cannot but notice the complete absence of any textual evidence. Wittgenstein did not make the minimal effort to illustrate his points with concrete examples of Shakespeare's works, nor did he discuss, quote, or even mention a single work of Shakespeare. Moreover, (2) when discussing the quality of Shakespeare's work, Wittgenstein almost always did so in the conditional mode and often seemed to take back or relativize what he had said just a sentence earlier, as if he had wanted to avoid taking a stance. He began one remark, for example, with the statement that 'Shakespeare's similes are, *in the ordinary sense*, bad,' and suggested in the very next sentence: 'So if they are nevertheless good – & I don't know whether they are or not – they must be a law to themselves' (Wittgenstein (1998: 56)). Finally, (3) Wittgenstein never contextualized Shakespeare's work, nor did he contrast it with that of other poets. At one point he mentioned Milton, but he did so only to state that he trusts his authority in the assessment of Shakespeare's work (Wittgenstein (1998: 55)). In two passages he compares Shakespeare with Beethoven.

The formal structure of Wittgenstein's observations is quite typical for his later work, which consists of short, sometimes even aphoristic remarks that stand in loose and unsystematic connections to one another. Wittgenstein made no recognizable effort to systematically develop a unifying thought, a distinct hypothesis, or a comprehensive perspective on Shakespeare's work. He clearly did not aim at contributing to Shakespeare scholarship, nor did he aim at proposing a new reading of his work. In most of the remarks he confronted his own reaction to Shakespeare's work with that of others, acknowledging his own inability to open himself to the aesthetic quality or beauty of the work as well as his difficulty to 'read him *with ease*' (Wittgenstein (1998: 56)). He typically went on to examine the motives others might have had to admire Shakespeare's work, focusing on both the psychological and sociological mechanisms that bring people to express their appreciation – and in these contexts Wittgenstein often

voiced his suspicions concerning the sincerity of their judgments – as well as the aesthetic properties of the work that could or, in fact, do justify a positive assessment.

With regard to the former point, we read: 'I am *deeply* suspicious of most of Shakespeare's admirers' (Wittgenstein (1998: 95)), for they seem to be so for the wrong reasons: 'I can never rid myself of a suspicion that praising him has been a matter of convention, even though I have to tell myself that this is not the case'. Only a few lines later we see that this impression is particularly forceful when related to academic circles: 'an enormous amount of praise has been & still is lavished on Shakespeare without understanding & for specious reasons by a thousand professors of literature' (Wittgenstein (1998: 55)).

Since Wittgenstein suggests that this blind admiration of Shakespeare is widely shared, his remarks can be taken to indicate a feeling of estrangement from the culture to which the latter belongs. This impression is confirmed by another of Wittgenstein's remarks on Shakespeare: 'I think that, in order to enjoy a poet, you have to *like* the culture to which he belongs as well. If you are indifferent to this or repelled by it, your admiration cools off' (Wittgenstein (1998: 96)). Given that in other remarks Wittgenstein praises Milton and that he focuses a lot on the reception of Shakespeare among *admirers* and *professors of literature*, I take that 'the culture to which he belongs' does not refer to the culture in which Shakespeare was writing but the cultural tradition of which he is regarded a central figure – that of English literature. Wittgenstein's affirmation, thus, seems to suggest that there is a habit of placing Shakespeare on a pedestal so high that he becomes unapproachable; genuine appreciation risks degenerating into blind veneration – and he makes it quite clear that he does not feel himself to be part of a culture where this sentiment is dominant.

More interesting, in my view, are the passages where Wittgenstein ponders which characteristics of Shakespeare's work could justify his reputation, for they display a distinctive perspective on the poet. Several of these remarks seem to suggest that he regarded Shakespeare as a lonesome genius who played in a league of his own and who could not, in consequence, be captured in the framework of our established categories. 'I think the trouble is that, in western culture at least, he stands alone, & so, one can only place him by placing him wrongly' (Wittgenstein (1998:

95)). In other places he called him a 'phenomenon', 'almost as a spectacle of nature', which one could only 'regard… with amazement' (Wittgenstein (1998: 96)). He noted Shakespeare's 'effortlessness' (Wittgenstein (1998: 56)) and his 'supple hand' (Wittgenstein (1998: 96)), which made his works look like 'enormous *sketches*, not paintings; as though they were *dashed off* by someone who could permit himself *anything*, so to speak' (Wittgenstein (1998: 98)).

> I do not think that Shakespeare can be set alongside any other poet. Was he perhaps a *creator of language* rather than a poet? I could only stare in wonder at Shakespeare; never do anything with him.
>
> (Wittgenstein (1998: 95))

As a consequence, Wittgenstein suggests, Shakespeare's work needs to be judged 'according to a law of its own' (Wittgenstein (1998: 85)). In order to assess the aesthetic quality of Shakespeare's work, thus, one needs to analyse not a single work but the body of works as a whole: 'the style of his whole work, I mean, of his complete works is in this case what is essential, & provides the justification' (Wittgenstein (1998: 56)). Wittgenstein does seem to consider that in this thought he has found a key to understanding the aesthetic quality of Shakespeare's work: 'If Shakespeare is great, then he can be so only in the whole *corpus* of his plays, which create their *own* language & world' (Wittgenstein (1998: 89)).

Wittgenstein, thus, at least considered what could be regarded valuable in Shakespeare's work, but he also made clear that these motives did not convince him. In the sentence that follows he called Shakespeare 'completely unrealistic. (Like a dream)' (Wittgenstein (1998: 89)). In his last remark on Shakespeare – which is the only remark where he expresses a judgment of taste – he was more direct: 'And I understand how someone may admire this & call it *supreme* art, but I don't like it' (Wittgenstein (1998: 98)). Wittgenstein portrayed Shakespeare as cold and distant – this becomes particularly clear in the places where he compared him with Beethoven:

> 'Beethoven's great heart' – no one could say 'Shakespeare's great heart'. 'The supple hand that created new natural forms of language'

would seem to me nearer the mark. The poet cannot really say of himself 'I sing as the bird sings' – but perhaps S. could have said it of himself.

(Wittgenstein (1998: 96))

Finally, Wittgenstein concluded his last remark on Shakespeare with the words: 'someone who admires him as one admires Beethoven, say, seems to me to misunderstand Shakespeare' (Wittgenstein (1998: 98)).

In sum, Wittgenstein used his occasional remarks on Shakespeare to express a clearly distanced stance towards the poet who symbolizes and represents more than anyone else the culture of the country in which he had chosen to live the great part of his mature life. Wittgenstein acknowledged the aesthetic quality of Shakespeare's work but did not keep it a secret that he had not succeeded in opening himself to this dimension. In addition, he hinted that Shakespeare did not exemplify his ideal of a poet. As he did not make any attempt to explain or justify his claims, however, his remarks remained enigmatic and have, in consequence, evoked very different reactions among scholars.

How Wittgenstein's remarks have been read: accusations and exculpations

All of Wittgenstein's remarks on Shakespeare have been included in *Culture and Value*, a posthumous selection of passages from Wittgenstein's notebooks that did not – as the editor, G.H. von Wright, explains in the foreword – 'belong directly with his philosophical works although they are scattered among the philosophical texts' (Wittgenstein (1998: ix)). The volume was first published in 1977, in a period, that is, when Wittgenstein's philosophical works had already aroused a great interest not only among professional philosophers but also a broader audience and in particular among writers and artists (Huemer (2004)). This secured the book a high visibility, in particular because the title of the English translation – unlike the German *Vermischte Bemerkungen* [Miscellaneous Remarks] – promised reflections on questions concerning *culture* and *value*. It seems, however, that the observations contained in the volume, and especially the remarks on Shakespeare, could not live up

to the high expectations of parts of the audience. In fact, most of the interpreters who commented on the latter seemed to struggle with the tone of Wittgenstein's observations. Some accused him outright of having misread Shakespeare (for example, Steiner (1996)), while others tried to interpret Wittgenstein in a more benevolent manner, taking into account his own cultural background (Perloff (2014)) or suggesting that Wittgenstein's remarks are not really about Shakespeare (Huemer (2013); Schulte (2013)). Concerning this latter attempt, Derek McDougall has recently made an interesting observation that applies, I think, to other, less charitable interpretations: in many cases, the motive to comment on Wittgenstein's remarks on Shakespeare can be explained

> almost entirely by the fact that philosophers feel that they must 'come to terms' with remarks that are difficult to reconcile with either an acceptance of Wittgenstein's critical acumen or with a general agreement about the greatness of Shakespeare as a poet.

> (McDougall (2016: 303))

Many interpreters were, it seems, just puzzled by Wittgenstein's remarks on Shakespeare; given his sensitivity to art and his general interest in literature (Bru et al. (2013)), the reserved and unenthusiastic attitude expressed in the remarks did not seem to fit. In addition, there is circumstantial evidence that seems to testify that Wittgenstein had a positive outlook on Shakespeare: M.O'C. Drury, for example, recalls that in 1930 Wittgenstein had seen a performance of Shakespeare's play *King Lear* that he had called a 'most moving experience' (Drury (1981: 133)). Nearly twenty years later, in the fall of 1948, Wittgenstein mentioned that he had considered 'using as a motto for my book a quotation from *King Lear*: "I'll teach you differences"'(Drury (1981: 171)). In several letters to friends Wittgenstein reports having seen performances of Shakespeare's plays: Cyril Barrett (1988: 387) lists Shakespeare among Wittgenstein's favourite authors, and Brian McGuinness (1988: 36) suggests that Wittgenstein was familiar with Shakespeare's work from childhood on.

What, then, explains the distanced and negative tone of Wittgenstein's remarks? Several interpreters have attributed it, on the one hand, to the distance between the culture from which Shakespeare's work has emerged and, on the other, to the one in which Wittgenstein was acculturated. Both

George Steiner and Marjorie Perloff have pointed out that Wittgenstein's ideal of the poet has been formed in a German-speaking country in the late nineteenth century. Steiner suggests that this cultural background led Wittgenstein to hang on to an ideal of the poet as a moral guide – 'a truth-sayer, an explicitly moral agent, a visible teacher to and guardian of the imperilled, bewildered mankind' (Steiner (1996: 123)) – and that Wittgenstein looked out for this ideal in Shakespeare, but what he found was a 'natural phenomenon' who created his own language but did not speak ours. Wittgenstein's critique of Shakespeare might have been influenced by Tolstoy's, as Peter Lewis suggests, and his disappointment might be explained by the perceived 'absence of ethical vision' (Lewis (2005: 252)) in Shakespeare's work. Steiner criticizes Wittgenstein not for holding this ideal of a poet but for not realizing that Shakespeare did, in fact, live up to it. 'At every juncture of generality and detail', Steiner states, 'Wittgenstein's critique and negation can be faulted' (Steiner (1996: 126)). Wittgenstein's critique of Shakespeare is, according to Steiner, based on a misreading that reveals that a 'great logician and epistemologist can be a blind reader of literature' (Steiner (1996: 127)) (for a critical discussion of Steiner's and Lewis's reading of Wittgenstein's remarks on Shakespeare, see Huemer (2012)).

Unlike Steiner, Marjorie Perloff takes note of the fact that Wittgenstein did not aim at giving a new or comprehensive interpretation of Shakespeare's work and acknowledges that his remarks are 'fragmentary and diaristic' (Perloff (2014: 263)). When she alludes to Wittgenstein's cultural background, she does so by shedding light on the formation of his taste and his aesthetic preferences in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Vienna: that is, in a cultural background that brought him to adopt a very particular perspective and raised quite specific expectations for art and literature in him. 'Wittgenstein's mistrust was a function of his peculiar Germanic modernity, his lack of understanding for anything as remote as the English Renaissance, which has taken place four centuries earlier' (Perloff (2014: 264)). Perloff, thus, argues that Wittgenstein's difficulties to open himself to Shakespeare's work and to partake in the activities of those who – in Wittgenstein's eyes uncritically – admire Shakespeare's work is due to his cultural formation.

Perloff's explanation is, in my view, much more plausible than the one offered by Terence Hawkes, who argues on much more generic terms that

Wittgenstein's perception of Shakespeare was determined by the fact that in the UK Wittgenstein must have felt like a cultural outsider. 'No doubt Wittgenstein's alienated position as a German-speaking Viennese Jew living in Britain urged – even required – him (whether or not at a conscious level) to see Shakespeare as he did' (Hawkes (1988: 60)). Wittgenstein had lived in the UK for many years; he went there as a student and returned to live and work – and die – there in his mature years. It is quite plausible to assume that he felt alienated by some aspects of English culture – and we have the testimonies of persons who knew Wittgenstein that he was very critical about it. Norman Malcolm, for example, mentions the 'great distaste he had for English culture and mental habits in general' (Malcolm (1984: 26f.)). It is equally plausible, however, to assume that he would have felt alienated in all other parts of the world as well – and in particular in his home country Austria. Wittgenstein, it seems, felt at home more with persons with whom he could share a certain (cultural) perspective than with places, countries, or cultural traditions. In a remark from 1931 Wittgenstein writes:

> If I say that my book is meant for only a small circle of people (if that can be called a circle) I do not mean to say that this circle is in my view the élite of mankind but it is the circle to which I turn (not because they are better or worse than the others but) because they form my cultural circle, as it were my fellow countrymen in contrast to the others who are *foreign* to me.
>
> (Wittgenstein (1998: 12f.))

Wittgenstein's distance from Shakespeare, thus, is not the result of his feeling foreign to British culture. Rather, his comments on Shakespeare might be an expression of his own cultural standpoint. If we confront Wittgenstein's remarks on Shakespeare with those on other poets, composers, or artists, a striking structural similarity comes to the fore: Wittgenstein often names persons and sketches a certain perspective on them, but he hardly ever elaborates, justifies, or substantiates his claims. One can, therefore, conclude that 'the finely articulated web of the many cultural references' that we find in Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* 'also serves the purpose of letting an elaborate self-portrait emerge, and at the same time, of providing a key for those readers who are able to recognize the

lock' (Huemer (2013: 33)) – that is, those who understand his remarks on composers, poets, and artists not as contributions to discussions of their works but as means to present his own perspective on them.

This short discussion shows, I hope, that there is dispute among scholars on the impact and the exact nature of Wittgenstein's cultural distance from Shakespeare, on the perspective that Wittgenstein tried to adopt towards the Bard, and even on the actual goal Wittgenstein pursued with these remarks. Most commentators do agree, however, that Wittgenstein had a generally negative and distanced outlook on Shakespeare. In several places, as we have seen above, he suggests that Shakespeare is a unique phenomenon, who 'stands alone' and who does not even speak our language but creates his own language and world. In Shakespeare's work, Wittgenstein suggests, everything seems wrong but is 'completely right according to a law of its own' (Wittgenstein (1998: 89)). These affirmations have often been read as a critique and an expression of distance. Peter Hughes, on the other hand, (Hughes (1992), (1988)) has argued that they show Wittgenstein's admiration of the Bard. Wittgenstein has realized, Hughes suggests, that Shakespeare (and Freud) have tried – very much like he had done himself – to create their own language games and to raise them to the status of a new reality. For Wittgenstein, thus,

> Shakespeare, like Freud, is a rival or great opposite. Both of them, in their different ways, have created on a grand scale *Sprachspiele* or language-games that attempt what he wants to attempt – to become another way of representing the world by offering another world as representation.
>
> (Hughes (1992: 78))

Referring to the just quoted remarks, Derek McDougall comes to quite different conclusions. He does acknowledge that 'Wittgenstein intuitively recognized that Shakespeare was a poet of a quite distinct order' (McDougall (2016: 305)), but, unlike Hughes, he does not suggest that this implies a positive stance towards the poet, nor does he take it, as Steiner does, as an expression of a deep misunderstanding of Shakespeare. Rather, he suggests that Wittgenstein sketches a critique that – though not very elaborate – is in line with that of other Shakespeare scholars, in particular with that proposed by John Middleton Murry (1936). Even though

Wittgenstein did not succeed in overcoming his difficulties in opening himself to the aesthetic beauty of Shakespeare's work, McDougall suggests, he does show an understanding of the greatness of Shakespeare and acknowledges the unique significance of his works. In this way, Wittgenstein's remarks not only reveal something about himself and his aesthetic judgment: they 'also reveal an important insight into the kind of poet Shakespeare was, and so into the nature of the works he created' (McDougall (2016: 307)).

The difficulties we might discover in our attempts to interpret Wittgenstein's remarks on Shakespeare might, at least in part, be due to fact that he never compared him to other poets or writers; the only comparison he drew was with Beethoven. It might, therefore, be interesting to note that several scholars have contrasted Wittgenstein's method and his way of writing with that of Shakespeare, but also along these lines we find wide disagreement. When discussing the literary form of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, Cyril Barret, for example, concludes that 'in form it more closely resembles the plays of Shakespeare than the classical forms of Beethoven' (Barrett (1988: 398)). Marjorie Perloff gives more substance to this claim, arguing that the very asymmetries in Shakespeare's work that Wittgenstein criticized 'became a model for Wittgenstein's own writing, showing him the way to conduct his own practice of 'teach[ing] us differences'' (Perloff (2014: 271)). These analyses contrast with those of William Day and Joachim Schulte: while the former sees a fundamental difference in philosophical mentality (Day (2013: 45)), the latter argues that for Wittgenstein Shakespeare personifies 'an example of a writer who is completely different from himself, perhaps even alien to himself' (Schulte (2013: 28)).

Wittgenstein made very few remarks concerning Shakespeare, and none of them were included in any work that he had either published or had prepared for publication. Their enigmatic character has nevertheless stimulated an intense debate focusing not only on the question of whether his judgments were justified but also on what they tell us about the philosopher who formulated them. Shakespeare, it seems to me, was not among the persons who most influenced Wittgenstein. His judgement on the Bard, on the other hand, will continue to spur debate – on Shakespeare's standing, the culture in which he is admired, and on the philosopher who formulated it.

Related topics

See Chapters 4, 26

Further reading

Wittgenstein, L., 1998. *Culture and Value: A Selection from the Posthumous Remains*. Edited by G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman. Translated by Peter Winch. Revised edition. Oxford; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.Collection of posthumously published remarks that are best described as 'miscellaneous observations', as the title to the German version (*Vermischte Bemerkungen*) suggests. The book contains numerous remarks on composers, poets, and artists, including all of Wittgenstein's remarks on Shakespeare.

Steiner, G., 1996. A Reading against Shakespeare. In: *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978–1996*. London: Faber & Faber, 108–128. Steiner criticizes Wittgenstein for misreading Shakespeare, arguing that Wittgenstein's ideal of the poet was shaped by German aesthetics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Wittgenstein's ideal of the poet was that of a moral authority – but he failed to recognize the moral import of Shakespeare's work.

Huemer, W., 2013. 'The Character of a Name': Wittgenstein's Remarks on Shakespeare. In: S. Bru, W. Huemer, and D. Steuer, eds. *Wittgenstein Reading*. Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter. Huemer aims to show that Wittgenstein's remarks on Shakespeare should be read as part of a larger project: Wittgenstein uses references to poets, composers, and artists to locate and, in a way, portray himself.

McDougall, D., 2016. Wittgenstein's Remarks on William Shakespeare. *Philosophy and Literature* 40(1): 297–308. McDougall's perceptive article defends the legitimacy of Wittgenstein's reading of Shakespeare by drawing an analogy with the interpretation of John Middleton Murry.

Perloff, M., 2014. Wittgenstein's Shakespeare. *Wittgenstein-Studien* 5(1): 259–272. Perloff's article gives an illuminating contextualization of the cultural background in which Wittgenstein's perspective on Shakespeare was formed and draws interesting parallels between Wittgenstein's method and that of Shakespeare.

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Part III

The ethical and the political

11

SHAKESPEARE, INTENTION, AND THE ETHICAL FORCE OF THE INVOLUNTARY

Christopher Crosbie

When Duncan, contemplating the recently executed Thane of Cawdor, declares 'There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face' (1.4.11–12),[1] he states the central problem the opacity of other minds poses to those anxious to safeguard against treachery and sedition. As Katharine Eisaman Maus, Steven Mullaney, and others have amply demonstrated, the early modern stage persistently registered this potential for treason to lie hidden just beneath visible surfaces, and the problem of other minds, a pronounced concern across the ideological spectrum in early modern England, prompted considerable discussion over remedies, however inevitably flawed they may be, to the epistemological quandary upon which so much social contentment rested.[2] To this general consternation caused by others' hidden dispositions, the more particular matter of intention posed unique challenges, for, if nothing else, it was capable of being constantly rewritten, recast in post-hoc rationalizations meant to alter perception of an otherwise apparently self-evident utterance or other performed deed. As with Falstaff explaining why he fled at Gad's Hill ('By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye, / Why, hear you, my masters, was it for me to kill the heir-apparent?' (*1HIV*, 2.4.263–6)) or Lucio seeking to justify his mockery of the disguised Vincentio ('Faith, my lord, I spoke it but according to the trick' (*MM* 5.1.501-2)), intention provided a mechanism for potentially transforming transgression into innocence. In the case of equivocation, a mode of discourse made infamous by Father Garnet and well rehearsed in Shakespearean criticism,

'the conscious intentions of the speaker' even allowed for the pre-emptive alteration of an utterance's meaning, fusing deception and piety in such a way as to admit a kind of 'lying like truth' (Mullaney (1995: 124)). An internal disposition only provisionally known by inference, intention proved crucial for understanding an agent's performed acts and yet remained always uncertain, ever susceptible to continued refashioning; it required auditors' close scrutiny, therefore, but also considerable latitude of interpretation.

Without losing sight of the more negative valences unknowable intention carried within early modern culture, this essay will examine instead the ways in which the ambiguous intentions of others could also serve as a vehicle for – or at least present the promise of – reconciliation on the Shakespearean stage. Shakespearean drama, as we will see, frequently stages exculpatory appeals to intention – either on behalf of another or, more commonly, oneself – as a means of obtaining special consideration for one's transgressions. Predicated on the assumption that the distinction between voluntary and involuntary action remains paramount for how a community should evaluate the ethical merits of an action, such appeals subtly but unmistakably rely on the era's prevailing Aristotelianism, which provided a highly refined system for adjudicating such complex matters. Early modern Aristotelianism figured intention as an internal disposition specifically concerned with identifying the proximate end (or 'means') for achieving an identified remote end (or, simply, 'end') in a process of purposive action. Within this schema, a claim that one acted involuntarily (whether in relation to proximate ends, remote ends, or both) depended upon first establishing that one acted either under compulsion or in ignorance. Shakespearean drama frequently stages characters seeking, in varying degrees, absolution on account of the latter, but this exculpatory mode that claims involuntariness due to ignorance also, rather remarkably, tends to coincide with the concomitant implication that agency, or ultimate causality, therefore lay elsewhere. The resultant reduplicated sense of attenuated moral responsibility – as the agent, due to ignorance, becomes in effect merely the proximate end within a larger trajectory of action stemming from a different causal source – emerges only after markedly laboured reasoning, so strained that it has registered to many critics as mere casuistry. So why, it's worth asking, are exculpatory appeals to intention within Shakespearean drama –

troubled as they are by glaring logical inconsistencies and, often, blatant self-interest – so frequently *effective*, even if only in limited or contingent ways, within their fictive worlds? Why, that is, do such questionable and compromised appeals also exert such force that they tend to elicit concessions, however modest, from their auditors on stage?

Exculpatory appeals to intention that avow innocence on the basis of ignorance initiate within an ethically minded auditor an intrinsically complex process of ratiocination since another's ignorance, unlike most forms of compelled behaviour, remains an internal, largely unfalsifiable quantity. The very unknowability of another's intention, an ambiguity that could, in other moments, provoke intense trepidation over the possibility of treacherous design, also inevitably places powerful demands on those seeking to ethically respond to the supplications of others. The epistemological uncertainty surrounding the problem of other minds, that is, cuts both ways. Confronted with the peculiarly fraught nature of attempting to account for, and thus socially accommodate, the unreadable intentions of another, an agent keen on moral rectitude must admit at least the possibility a suppliant lacked malign intent and may have instead acted, for one reason or another, involuntarily. Moreover, if the uncertainty inherent when dealing with other minds opens space for granting concessions, perhaps only halting ones, it also permits one to go further, if so inclined, by providing an opportunity for graciousness. Akin to Touchstone's disquisition on treating disputes conditionally – 'Your If is the only peacemaker: much virtue in If' (*AYLI* 5.4.100–1) – the unknowability of intention provides an avenue for making allowances, for effecting reconciliation, a capacity that may account for the surprising concessions even dubious exculpatory appeals seem to elicit. By opening for fresh scrutiny the connective tissue between intention and performed deed, the Shakespearean stage makes visible the essential, though often not logical or linear, processes requisite for not only requesting but also granting forgiveness and for fostering communal bonds. In this way, Shakespearean drama, participating in a vibrant cultural tradition of doing 'informal philosophy', helps recalibrate Aristotelian assumptions about the ethics of intention by staging dilemmas whereby the accommodation of one's *doubt* while assessing others' intentions takes a central role in shaping the value of one's own ethical system.

1

Analysis centring on the import of *intention* in Shakespearean drama risks appearing aligned with the kind of character criticism initiated in the eighteenth century and since discarded by modern critics as, at best, unfashionable or, at worst, naïve about both aesthetics and the workings of ideology. As Michael Bristol has recently argued rather persuasively, however, we need not presuppose 'vernacular' reactions to the theatre rely upon uncritical understandings of character which, among other faults, may be inclined to assume a genuine interiority inhering within written roles. The tradition of taking 'fictional characters' as 'possible persons carrying out possible actions in a possible world' (Bristol (2010: 2)), after all, has long provided savvy audiences with viable ways of reflecting upon truly rendered, though contingent, ethical dispositions. 'What makes Shakespeare's *dramatis personae* interesting in relations to questions of moral agency', Bristol avers, 'is not that a set of robust character traits determines behavior in any sort of predictable way, but precisely that it doesn't' (Bristol (2010: 4)). This sense of theatre's multiple ethical valences – and their availability to audiences of all kinds – remains true to the phenomenology of performance, but it also accords markedly well with early modern culture's own way of doing vernacular ethical philosophy. As the pioneering work of intellectual historians such as David A. Lines, Jill Kraye, Charles B. Schmitt, and others has shown, the reach of ethical debate extended well beyond the walls of the university, causing what Peter Mack designates 'informal ethical philosophy' to flourish in many venues. Beyond courtesy books, emblems, allegorical paintings, and anthologies of proverbs, Mack adduces poetic endeavours such as Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Wroth's *Urania* as markers of this interest in popularizing different modes of ethical contemplation (Mack (2013: 189–91)). To these we might add the early modern stage, where the commercial theatre's tendency both to present matters *in utramque partem* and to represent 'moral intuition' unfolding within 'the phenomenal world in time' (Knapp (2010: 34)) likewise brought non-systematic ethical deliberation to prominence. This active vernacular tradition of doing ethical philosophy remained an integral component to the work of Renaissance drama, and, in this broader work, intention – as a source of

social disruption or, conversely, surprising mechanism for facilitating reconciliation – plays an important part.

Although the syncretic milieu of early modern England countenanced multiple philosophical traditions, Aristotelianism most fully shaped the era's ethical discourses, and Aristotle's comprehensive study of voluntary and involuntary action, particularly his precise taxonomizing of the latter, provided for Shakespeare's contemporaries the essential framework for understanding intention's role in social exchange. Aside from a brief passage in *Eudemian Ethics* II.6–9 and in *Nicomachean Ethics* V.8, Aristotle's most concentrated treatment of voluntary and involuntary action occurs in *Nicomachean Ethics* III.1 and 5. Here, Aristotle identifies voluntary action (*hekousion*) as that for which 'the origin lies in the agent' and for which the agent 'knows the particular circumstances' of the action (Aristotle (2003: 127)). Conversely, involuntary action (*akousion*) occurs when a person either is under compulsion – that is, when an action's 'origin is from without' and when 'the agent, who is really passive, contributes nothing to it' (2003: 117) – or owes the action to ignorance. Since not all ignorance is the same, however, Aristotle devotes considerable energy to distinguishing between actions done *by reason of ignorance* and those done *in ignorance*.[3] Only actions done *by reason of ignorance* (e.g. setting off a catapult when meaning only to demonstrate how it works, or hurting someone with a spear, thinking a safety feature attached) can properly be called involuntary since, in such cases, the individual had a genuine ignorance of the particulars. Actions done *in ignorance* (such as those characterized by carelessness, drunkenness, or passion) do not count as involuntary since the motivating principle has its origin (*archē*) in the agent who also had, at some stage, access to the requisite knowledge of particulars as well. At the beginning of this section of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle figures such distinctions as 'necessary for the student of ethics' and helpful 'to the legislator in assigning rewards and punishments' (2003: 117). That Aristotle devotes so much time to differentiating between not only the voluntary and involuntary but also the involuntary and that which only *seems* involuntary foregrounds the central, inevitably complex part intention would come to play in not only legal and ecclesiastical debates but also in more quotidian expressions of practical ethics in later eras.

The extensive commentary tradition which developed around Aristotelian ethics in medieval and early modern Europe explicated in even more painstaking detail the various kinds of ignorance relevant to involuntary acts, but it also sought to account for the varying degrees of intention a single agent could hold for a particular deed and its subsequent effects. This quest for precision, for all its scrupulous attention to nuance, tended to make more visible the ambiguity surrounding intention's actual relation to performed deeds. The level of detail wrought by Thomistic commentary alone can seem to endlessly ramify. Within a larger taxonomy of voluntary and involuntary action found in *Summa Theologiae*, for instance, Aquinas distinguishes between forms of ignorance which are either 'antecedent' or 'consequent' to the act of the will. Antecedent ignorance – such as when one shoots an arrow and accidentally hits a passerby, even after taking care to make sure no one is near – signifies a genuine 'lack of knowledge of the circumstances of the act done' (Rayappan (2010: 43)) and results, therefore, in a truly involuntary action. Consequent ignorance, by contrast, describes a state whereby the agent's 'ignorance is the result of a previous act of will', either directly by a kind of 'affected ignorance' or indirectly 'due to negligence' (Rayappan (2010: 43)), and thus renders an action technically performed without awareness of particulars as, in fact, voluntary. In addition to such fine distinctions, Thomism noted the difference between proximate and remote ends, the varying dispositions an agent may hold toward each, and, in a further level of complexity, the fact that 'a single act may have two effects, of which one alone is intended, whilst the other is incidental to that intention' (Aquinas (1964: 41)). Developed most fully into the principle of double effect, this expansion of Aristotelian ethics held that harmful outcomes were permissible so long as they were not intended in themselves nor used as the proximate end for attaining the (positive) remote end. A mode of reasoning that found prominence in debates over self-defence and just-war theory, the principle of double effect helped ratify an intuitive sense that intention, though an internal disposition, remained germane to a host of ethical concerns regarding embodied acts. Even when abstracted from other immediate complications posed by daily life – how, for instance, can we know with any degree of certainty our own intentions, let alone those of another? – such close parsing of the voluntary from involuntary reveals – arguably, even

compounds – the complexities inherent in tracing performed action to an identifiable intention rooted within a given agent.

Although such taxonomies may seem the unnecessarily byzantine product of scholastic excess, early modern authors, heir to this tradition and inclined toward a kind of vernacular, practical ethics, frequently accentuated the relational dimension of intention, its role as a determining component not simply for one's personal virtue but also for a larger ecology of communal ties, and something requiring thereby a coherent hermeneutic for facilitating a measure of social harmony. 'Euerie act is to be measured good or bad by the intent of the actor' avers Thomas Cooper (1580: 166), a formulation familiar to the era and one echoed as late as 1641 when George Hall, citing Aristotle, likewise affirms the 'necessary dependancie of morall acts upon intention' (Hall 1641: B2). Germane for both agent and broader community, the 'quality of… intention' (Lindsay (1619: 4)) could play a decisive role in the evaluation of a host of interactions which, collectively, profoundly shaped communal identity. Deeply personal yet unavoidably social, the practical ethics of intention evinced in early modern discourse mirrors intention's very status as a philosophical category particularly invested in bridging interior and exterior worlds. For the agent, intention inheres within yet also extends outward, only becoming manifest when perfected in instantiated acts. Shakespearean drama lays claim to precisely this sense of purposive action at once rooted within one's own person yet also moving outward to identified ends. Whether Richard III's 'deep intent' (1.1.149) or Helena's 'intents' which 'are fix'd and will not leave' (*AWW* 1.1.229), Shakespearean intention persistently registers as anchored within the individual; at the same time, intention also regularly takes shape as something mobile, actively extending beyond oneself, to find, for good or ill, realization in embodied acts. Thus, Tarquin advances with 'swift intent' to Lucrece (l.46), Richard closes with John Cade to render him a proximate end within a larger design, a mere 'minister of [his] intent' (*2HVI* 3.1.354), and Kent envisages how 'good intent / May carry through itself to… full issue' (*KL* 1.4.2–3). If, for the agent, intention often proves relational in that it inheres yet extends outward until realized in action, for the community, tasked with measuring performed acts by their animating intentions, such a dynamic remains invariably fraught, requiring a backward motion from imperfect marker to otherwise inscrutable

interiority. Complicated, as Luke Wilson has persuasively argued, by the fact that intent could be 'fictionalized' to meet particular exigencies, intention, within both drama and early modern culture more broadly, posed not only an 'epistemological' problem but also an 'ontological and practical' one (2000: 38–9).[4] In this process, the rich Aristotelian tradition, even when only implicitly acknowledged, provided (rather than mere scholastic niceties) a means at once pragmatic and flexible for negotiating the complex social demands such uncertainty could bring.

2

For all the ways malign intent provides immediately arresting material for dramatic action, Shakespearean drama frequently turns its attention to a different register: staging multiple instances where the possibility of the *absence* of malign intent compels ethical reflection and opens the prospect of moderating passion and facilitating a measure of social quiescence. One of the most salient examples of this tendency can be found in the burial of Ophelia, a scene centred on a case of uncertain intention and its ramifications for communal ordering and self-conception. As the gravedigger reflects on the crowner's inquest which 'finds it Christian burial' (5.1.1), his extended rumination on Ophelia's state of mind in the moments immediately preceding her death invokes, even as it radically oversimplifies, the era's extensive ethical and legal discourses on the matter of intention's relevance to violent action. Alluding to both the principle of double effect and the contemporary court case *Hales v. Pettit*, which explicitly adjudicated the question of intention's relation to accomplished action in the case of suicide, the gravedigger marvels, 'How can that be unless she drowned herself in her own defence', before continuing:

> It must be *se offendendo*. It cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act, and an act hath three branches – it is to act, to do, to perform. Argal, she drowned herself wittingly.

> (5.1.6–13)

The gravedigger's speech – full of malapropisms, questionable logic, and garbled Latin, all delivered with satiric verve – resists definitive explication, but, notably, his disquisition here unambiguously privileges intention as the determinative factor in his moral calculus. Suggesting the verdict only squares with the evidence if Ophelia acted 'in her own defence', the gravedigger invokes the principle of double effect which permits lethal force only as an unintended side effect while 'saving one's own life' (Aquinas (1964: 42)). At the same time, in his confused taxonomy of action, which results in a mere catalogue of synonyms – 'it is to act, to do, to perform' – the gravedigger, as many have noted, draws upon yet muddles the *Hales v. Pettit* verdict in which the justices sought to 'anatomiz[e] suicidal action into three logically and sequentially related parts' – namely, 'imagination, reflection, and perfection' (Wilson (2000: 50)). Weighing the questions of *when* an intention may be considered fully realized in an accomplished act and *which* intentions are most relevant to the assessment of a given action, the gravedigger, for all his comically confused speech, reveals the outsized role the unknown intention of another could hold in shaping, in this case, ceremonial rights and, by extension, a community's sense of order and identity.

Though prompted by the suspect motives of royalty and provoking continued disagreement in its own right, the decision to grant Ophelia 'Christian burial' makes visible the ethical demands the uncertain intentions of another places on a broader community, but it also reveals how such intentions may be used as a means for granting allowances and moderating competing claims in a larger process of effecting compromise. To be sure, the 'great command' (5.1.226) determining Ophelia's gravesite may indeed represent a self-serving attempt to counterbalance the scandalous 'hugger-mugger' (4.5.84) interment of Polonius, but even if shaped by quite a bit more than high-minded deliberation alone, the decision nonetheless depends upon an acceptable range of publicly performed ethical behaviour all the same. As the crowner's verdict charts a middle path between the priest's preference that 'she should in ground unsanctified be lodg'd' (5.1.227) and Laertes' that more should be done, the graveyard scene foregrounds how, confronted with Ophelia's 'doubtful' (225) case, the community could countenance a wider range of possible outcomes, and here Gertrude's account of the maid's death becomes paramount. Describing Ophelia as 'one incapable of her own distress'

(4.7.178), Gertrude's testimony suggestively frames Ophelia's death as doubly involuntary, depicting her as both mentally unable to appreciate the danger posed by the water and physically helpless as well. In Aristotelian terms, then, figuring Ophelia as both ignorant and under compulsion, Gertrude's testimony generates a kind of productive doubt surrounding Ophelia's condition. Where the gravedigger's commentary nods to but ultimately sidesteps the ethical quandaries posed by accounting for another's intention – in his telling, the possible range of intents for entering a brook doesn't much matter since 'will he nill he, he goes' (5.1.17–18), a view of intention that, if extended, would collapse the distinction between, say, martyr and felon since, in the end, they both climb a scaffold – those tasked with actually determining the disposition of Ophelia's body must address an inherently more complex range of possibilities. In this, the ambiguity of Ophelia's intentions captured in Gertrude's testimony exerts some ethical force, prompting, amid all the other competing interests and ulterior motives, a measure of social accommodation in the final verdict.

The potential for unknowable intention to serve as a means for effecting reconciliation recurs in Hamlet's apology to Laertes on the cusp of their duel, a fraught appeal to involuntariness that, despite its self-serving character and the resistance remaining in its wake, still elicits publicly performed gestures of rapprochement that, in the end, become the poignant, unrealized possibility of the play. As with Ophelia's burial, the subject's actual intentions remain unverifiable to the auditors, among whom ulterior motives abound. Not surprisingly, both Hamlet's logical inconsistency and Laertes' larger designs on the prince's life can make the measure of effectiveness of this curious apology easy to overlook. Hamlet launches his exculpatory appeal by immediately claiming involuntariness due to madness. Requesting Laertes' 'pardon', Hamlet reasons:

> Was't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.
> If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away
> And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
> Then Hamlet does it not; Hamlet denies it.
> Who does it then? His madness.

(5.2.226, 232–6)

In his most immediate response to the killing ('Nay, I know not. Is it the King?' (3.4.24)) Hamlet had marked his action as one effectively characterized by ignorance, but here, in a manner redolent of Gertrude's dual approach when describing Ophelia, he also posits himself as acting under compulsion. '[P]unish'd with a sore distraction' (228), Hamlet is 'from himself… ta'en away', rendering him an involuntary actor, at least as Hamlet would have it, twice over. Indeed, as he persists in 'disclaiming from a *purpos'd* evil', Hamlet returns once more, contradictorily, to an appeal based on ignorance as he suggests he 'shot [his] arrow o'er the house / And hurt [his] brother' (240, 242–3). Perhaps designed to convey an exculpatory sense of 'antecedent ignorance', the image of firing *over a building* markedly complicates his defence, shifting as it does to a carelessness for which the agent would actually remain culpable, but, more pointedly, if presented as a kind of fallback position – plausible given the request to 'Free me so far in your most generous thoughts' (241) – Hamlet tellingly reveals here that the actual truth of his intention matters less than the very ambiguity (and coincident flexibility) it affords. Alternating between appeals to misguided action freely chosen and a loss of agency altogether, Hamlet remains consistent in his avoidance of full culpability. Remarkably, despite the self-serving reasoning here that attempts to reframe Hamlet as himself subject to external causal factors outside his control, the supplication shows signs of effectiveness, for Laertes concedes he is 'satisfied in nature' and, even as he 'stand[s] aloof', acknowledges the need to consult 'some elder masters of known honour' (243, 246–7) on the matter. Whether a sign of a genuine softening – as his later confession 'yet it is almost against my conscience' (302) may suggest – or merely the hypocrisy that vice pays to virtue, Laertes' public response to Hamlet reveals the demands an exculpatory appeal to intention can place on an auditor seeking to publicly perform an ethical role himself.

Appealing to intention to disclaim against a purposed evil, riddling one's justification with dubious logic, and yet obtaining (amid continuing resistance) a measure of concession nonetheless – such characteristic features of the exculpatory appeal to intention find similar expression in *Henry V*, where Henry, defending his invasion of France from Williams and Bates, appropriates the principle of double effect to his own advantage. Though the soldiers advance multiple lines of critique against

the justness of the war, Williams most succinctly epitomizes their complaints in his declaration 'if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make' (4.1.132–3), a précis that prompts Henry's strained attempt at self-justification. 'So if a son that is by his father sent about merchandise do sinfully miscarry upon the sea', Henry reasons:

> the imputation of his wickedness, by your rule, should be imposed upon his father that sent him… But this is not so: the King is not bound to answer the particular endings of his soldiers, the father of his son… for they purpose not their death when they purpose their services.

(145–56)

Whether Machiavellian schemer or mirror of all Christian kings, Henry delivers here an apologia with undeniable limitations, one frequently faulted as 'unsatisfying, logically evasive, and analogically spurious' (Kezar (2001: 191)). Even in the regular tempo of performance, Henry's defence registers as immediately suspect, as the differences between battle and travel, soldier and merchant prove instantly apparent. But, more precisely and problematically, Henry also appropriates here the principle of double effect – a doctrine primarily concerned, in the context of war, with the involuntary killing of innocent non-combatants – to apply, instead, to his own use of soldiers beholden to him as their king. By acknowledging he 'purpose[s] their services', Henry explicitly identifies the English soldiers as his proximate ends for obtaining France; what's more, he has already asserted that 'never two such kingdoms did contend / Without much fall of blood' (1.2.24–5). Since the soldiers serve as Henry's proximate ends in an effort that will, by its essential nature, require 'much fall of blood', the King's implicit conflation of combatant and innocent non-combatant severely strains his claims to unintentionality. Thus, though Henry immediately follows with what may seem an incidental, perhaps diversionary, addition – 'Besides, there is no king… can try it out with all unspotted soldiers' (4.1.156–9) – his extended reflection on the 'particular endings' of individual soldiers becomes, in fact, integral to this larger exculpatory appeal to intention. For by introducing doubt over which soldiers are 'unspotted' and which are not,

Henry not only shifts the terrain of debate from the undifferentiated mass of contending armies to the more localized matter of the unknowable, private consciences of individual combatants, but also, in doing so, subtly resets the parameters by which his own intentions must be evaluated, as he coincidentally – and, in this narrow sense, plausibly – introduces the notion that he directly intends no particular individual's death.

The categorical shift from general army to specific soldier allows Henry to present the particular endings of specific men as involuntary but also, by extension, as stemming from a different causal source, a move that repositions him as simply a kind of proximate end within a larger design beyond his control and one that, surprisingly, effects a measure of agreement within a markedly volatile moment. Focusing exclusively on soldiers with criminal pasts, Henry avers that 'though they can / outstrip men, they have no wings to fly from God', concluding that 'War is His beadle, war is His vengeance, so that here / men are punished for before-breach of the King's / laws in now the King's quarrel' (165–9). Despite his role as the visible, temporal initiator of the war, this figuration repositions the King as constituent within a larger causal sequence, a kind of proximate end in his own right, as his 'quarrel' becomes simply an instrument of providential design. Since the conflict between Henry and Williams will, just a moment later, flare anew, the curious effectiveness of this logically questionable line of argument is easy to miss, but Williams at least concedes ''Tis certain, every man that dies ill, the ill / upon his own head; the King is not to answer it' (184–5). Whether merely granting a point he considers tangential, abandoning a superfluous argument in light of the approaching dawn's larger problems, or genuinely 'giv[ing] the victory to the King's cause' (Danson 1983: 40) until Henry presses further by arguing the King himself said 'he would not be ransomed' (188), Williams performs here a momentary gesture of agreement, one elicited by Henry's artful rhetoric. More pronouncedly, Bates, who began the conversation wishing Henry either 'in Thames up to the neck' (114) or 'here alone' (119), declares that, for his part, he 'determine[s] to fight lustily for him' (187). As his defence progresses, then, Henry moves – via his initial invocation of the principle of double effect – from a claim of involuntariness tacitly dependent on an appeal to ignorance on his part to an assertion that his action, instrument within a broader design, is compelled by a different causal source altogether.

The tendency to trade on the ambiguity inherent in reading another's intention to garner special consideration appears within Shakespearean drama even in the most unlikely of places, such as the end of *Measure for Measure*, where the villain's malign intent appears decidedly explicit and where the exculpatory appeal, delivered by one of the victims rather than the perpetrator himself, centres largely on an action that did not, strictly speaking, take place. Noting but dismissing the attempted assault on Isabella (5.1.397–400), Duke Vincentio proposes to punish Angelo specifically for the (supposed) execution of Claudio, declaring 'An Angelo for Claudio, death for death', before condemning the deputy 'to the very block / Where Claudio stooped to death' (5.1.406, 411–12). Against this backdrop and at Marianna's instigation, Isabella then pleads for Angelo's life, curiously, by doubly invoking the deputy's intentions as reason for clemency. 'Look, if it please you, on this man condemn'd, / As if my brother lived', Isabella requests of the Duke, continuing:

> I partly think
> A due sincerity govern'd his deeds,
> Till he did look on me: since it is so,
> Let him not die. My brother had but justice,
> In that he did the thing for which he died:
> For Angelo,
> His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,
> And must be buried but as an intent
> That perish'd by the way: thoughts are no subjects;
> Intents but merely thoughts.

(5.1.441–51)

A knotty argument that has registered to many as deeply flawed, Isabella's plea figures intention – whether instantiated or unrealized – as crucial for assessing Angelo's actions. But where other exculpatory appeals tend to marshal the ambiguity of intention to suggest a malign (or questionable) act was in fact involuntary, even to the point of being performed under some form of compulsion, Isabella's appeal exists within a context where such dynamics appear almost completely inverted. To excuse the execution of Claudio (an act both the Duke and audience know never actually occurred) Isabella relies heavily on noting how the assault on her

own person never, in fact, came to full fruition itself, an involuntary miscarriage of malign intent only made possible by the compelling influence of external causal forces. Angelo's execution of Claudio should be forgiven, Isabella's argument runs, in part because the malign intent one might otherwise attach to it 'perish'd by the way', remaining in the end a mere thought. By invoking the failure of a specific malign intent to materialize – involuntarily, at the prompting of other causal forces – in order to excuse the apparent execution of her brother, Isabella is able to trade on a different kind of ambiguity, positing as she does an original, if quite possibly fanciful, benign intent – 'I partly think a due sincerity governed his deeds' – subtending Angelo's initial verdict. This fictionalized intent postulated by Isabella, for all its dubiousness, nonetheless quickly solidifies into established predicate – '*Since it is so*, / Let him not die' – for the ensuing exculpatory appeal, the prospect of the faintest trace of benign intention serving here, even amid a scene where malignity remains uncontested by the villain himself, as a potential means of reconciliation.

By turning so markedly to a virtuous agent's appeal on behalf of an unassimilated villain and to the complex mental calculus – the almost fideistic leap – required for generating reconciliation under such circumstances, *Measure for Measure* nicely encapsulates Shakespearean drama's tendency to stage not only the disruption but also the promise the uncertain intentions of another present to those seeking to maintain social cohesion. As with the other plays briefly surveyed here, *Measure* foregrounds the ethical force even strained appeals to intent could wield for those who themselves wish to respond ethically to others.[5] To be sure, even while representing this more positive valence of intention's ambiguity for social interaction, Shakespearean drama avoids ratifying an easy or unalloyed sense of community, where, despite the travails of plot, civic bonds become realized by a kind of wishful peacemaking that simply imports Touchstone's 'virtues of If', *sans* complication, to the court of Denmark, the encampment at Agincourt, the streets of Vienna, or beyond. Indeed, even Isabella herself confesses earlier that 'it oft falls out / To have what we would have, we speak not what we mean' (2.4.117–18), an exposure of intentions as multilayered, rarely univocal, capable of working at cross purposes. The Duke too, attuned to the legal ramifications of Angelo's perfidy, justifies the bed trick by observing how

it will prohibit the deputy from later re-casting his intentions as noble, from simply claiming that 'he made trial of [Isabella] only' (3.1.195–6), since it will 'crown Angelo's intentions with verifiable action' (Spencer (2012: 174)). The challenges of knowing a character's intention exist not just for us, should we be tempted backward into a reductive form of character criticism, but also, notably, for the 'possible persons' populating Shakespeare's 'possible world' within each given play. Still, the same epistemological uncertainty which could indeed cause considerable social disruption also provides the very mechanisms for potentially enabling comity, since ethical agents, confronted with the prospect that another's transgression occurred in some measure involuntarily, must allow for a range of possible causal factors preceding an event, a process that presents the coincident prospect of making allowances when encountering a request for pardon.

Although the intentions underwriting performed deeds may seem, as an ethical matter, primarily pertinent for agents themselves, the Shakespearean stage repeatedly recalls the central role the uncertain intentions of *others* plays in shaping one's own ethical determinations. Certainly, the relation of an agent's intentions to performed deeds provides instantly compelling dramatic material, whether in instances of tragic or comic miscarriages or in cases where the matter of agency itself, the relative weight given to fate or free will – as exemplified in, say, Macbeth's perfectly counterpoised line 'thou marhall'st me the way that I was going' (2.1.42) – remains in perpetual doubt. To speak of intention is to speak of the originating forces that find expression within instantiated acts, an aspect of embodied behaviour that, in its emphasis on causality, invites one to think across multiple philosophical categories. But as a matter of performed ethics within the unique medium of the early modern stage – a space where virtues and vices resist isolation for bloodless analysis and multilayered moral dilemmas must thus get worked out in real time, collectively rather than strictly individually – the matter of intention also becomes a more broadly communal one, a subject, perhaps unexpectedly, of corporate ethics. In this, the highly refined taxonomies of involuntary action, originating in Aristotle and amplified throughout a copious commentary tradition, provide not a constraining, doctrinaire ethical system but rather a remarkably flexible apparatus for thinking through the endlessly variegated forms of social interaction. By drawing

on this apparatus, the early modern stage contributes to the era's production of multiple *Aristotelianisms*, the 'immense variety within an overall unity' of engagements with Aristotelian ideas (Schmitt 1983: 14). Trading on the ambiguities that attend the process of differentiating between various forms of involuntary acts, the stage marshals the same epistemological doubt regarding intention – that could, in other registers, prove intensely disruptive – to make available possible avenues for fostering communal bonds. Whether accomplished fully, partially, or ultimately not at all, remaining only the tantalizing unrealized possibility of a given play, such appeals hold forth the promise for constructing, in all the fraught and imperfect ways endemic to communities, a measure of reconciliation amid volatile conditions, a representational strategy that, while dramaturgically potent, also contributes in its own way to the era's robust tradition of doing vernacular ethical philosophy.

Related topics

See Chapters 5, 13, 22

Notes

1 All quotations come from Shakespeare (2001).
2 See Maus (1995: 1–34), especially 12–13, and Mullaney (1995: 116–29).
3 By using the designation 'by reason of ignorance' (instead of Rackham's 'through ignorance'), I follow, for clarity, Aristotle (2009).
4 On the fictionalization of intent in early modern England, see Wilson (2000: 38–56).
5 Although the Duke responds by declaring 'Your suit's unprofitable', his own 'ultimate intention of mercy means it was never necessary in the first place' (Leggatt (1988: 348)). The scene instead reveals the force intention exerts on Isabella's own ethical thinking and its assumed utility for a publicly performed appeal based on ethics.

Further reading

Bristol, M.D., ed. 2010. *Shakespeare and Moral Agency*. London: A&C Black Publishers. Written by both literary scholars and philosophers, the thirteen essays of this collection, taken together, sketch a convincing theoretical framework – one attuned to recent debates over individuality, subjectivity, and interiority – for approaching Shakespearean drama through ethics, philosophy of mind, and analytic aesthetics.

Lines, D.A. & Ebbersmeyer, S., eds. 2013. *Rethinking Virtue, Reforming Society: New Directions in Renaissance Ethics, c.1350–c.1650*. Turnhout: Brepols. With a particular interest in vernacular venues for conducting ethical discussion, this collection of essays explores the diverse ethical schools of thought – Christian, Aristotelian, Platonic, Stoic, and Epicurean, among others – at play throughout the early modern period from Petrarch to Descartes.

Rayappan, P., 2010. *Intention in Action: The Philosophy of G. E. M. Anscombe*. New York: Peter Lang. A study of G. E. M. Anscombe's seminal early twentieth-century re-examination of intention as central to ethical inquiry, this book also provides one of the most concise yet thorough introductions available to the subject of Aristotelian and Thomistic notions of voluntary and involuntary action.

Wilson, L., 2000. *Theaters of Intention: Drama and the Law in Early Modern England*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. The most comprehensive study to date of the role of intention in the works of Shakespeare, Jonson, Marlowe, and other Renaissance dramatists, this book examines the influence of legal reasoning and common law in shaping new theatrical techniques for representing premeditated conduct on the early modern stage.

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12

'THOU WEEP'ST TO MAKE THEM DRINK'

Hospitality and mourning in *Timon of Athens*

Sophie Emma Battell

This chapter takes its general direction from Jacques Derrida's observation that there are intriguing connections between hospitality and mourning, but more particularly from the desire to better understand the uncomfortable play *Timon of Athens* and what it has to say about welcoming guests in Shakespeare. Following Leslie Fiedler's influential volume on the stranger in Shakespeare, recent critics, including Julia Lupton, David Goldstein, and Kevin Curran, have done much to broaden our definition of hospitality in relation to Shakespeare studies, moving from table fellowship to more philosophical inquiries into what it truly means to give place to another person.[1] *Timon of Athens* is a play that similarly encourages us to reconsider what hospitality might look like on the early modern stage. While scenes of banqueting and hospitality dominate much of the early part of *Timon of Athens*, in its closing scenes the play also concerns itself with the ethics and rituals of mourning. In what follows I draw on Derrida's writings on the gift and mourning, as well as recent work on the emotions, in order to suggest that the presentation of the hospitality relationship in *Timon of Athens* relies on darker structures of debt and obligation than we might anticipate. In particular, this chapter explores the intersection of hospitality and the mourning process by focusing on the enigmatic symbolism of tears that features throughout the play-text. The recurring image clusters of water, tears, and other libations make Timon appear the embodiment of overflowing generosity. But Timon's giving, while seemingly lavish, is problematised by economic calculation, and, as the drama proceeds, he begins to demand a return from the recipients of his former generosity. The play thus reveals what, for Derrida – in his influential reading of Marcel Mauss's anthropological study of the gift – is the principal contradiction of giving: a gift demands reciprocation and so binds us to a logic of calculation. The preoccupation with money in *Timon of Athens* is a familiar theme.[2] And yet it is crucial to broaden the traditional boundaries of the economic in order to fully appreciate both the nature of Timon's debts as well as his supposed acts of generosity.

In considering *Timon of Athens* as something of a philosophical experiment I am indebted to earlier readers of the play, particularly Ken Jackson, whose pioneering interpretation introduced Derrida's work on religion and the gift. Jackson noted that Timon's 'attempts at "truly" giving or moving outside the circular economy of exchange in the first part of the play are passionately, profoundly religious'.[3] By suggesting that Timon's bounty is motivated by his spirituality, Jackson claimed some affinity with G. Wilson Knight's famous praise for the play in *The Wheel of Fire*, where he described what he saw as 'the intrinsic and absolute blamelessness of Timon's generosity'.[4] Like Jackson, I am also persuaded that Derrida can help to illuminate some of the problems of interpretation posed by *Timon of Athens*, yet where my approach differs is that I do not regard Timon's giving as a religious event. I argue instead that Timon manipulates hospitality's accumulation of debts in a way that undermines his generosity from the very beginning. I demonstrate this by analysing the emblem of tears and weeping in light of Derrida's thinking about the gift. Owing to their opacity, tears prompt questions concerning the insincerity of ritual and encourage a reconsideration of hospitality's limitations as well as raising doubts about the nature of emotional generosity. Timon's death and burial at the end of the play further reveal mourning to be another act of repayment, but one that can never finally be settled. As the play concludes, the living and dead remain bound to one another in the same way as do debtors and creditors or guests and hosts.

*

The banquet scene in Act I of *Timon of Athens* is a chance for the audience to witness Timon's generosity in action. As the play opens, a large crowd of guests is gathering outside Timon's house, leading the Poet to remark on 'this confluence, this great flood of visitors'.[5] In their edition of the play, Anthony Dawson and Gretchen Minton note that 'Such language expresses the fluidity, even the liquidity, of exchange, both monetary and social, that characterises the interaction in the early parts of the play'.[6] In the first few lines, then, Shakespeare initiates the watery imagery that will accompany Timon's hospitality for the remainder of the play, culminating in the mock banquet later in Act III when he furiously turns on his former friends, hurling stones and lukewarm water at them. Meeting one another outside Timon's home, one of the Athenian lords asks another: 'Come, shall we in and taste lord Timon's bounty?' (I.i.281), to which the second lord replies:

> He pours it out; Plutus, the god of gold,
> Is but his steward: no meed but he repays
> Sevenfold above itself, no gift to him
> But breeds the giver a return exceeding
> All use of quittance.

> (I.i.283–6)

The second lord's classical allusion to Plutus as a steward pouring from his cornucopia is one of many mentions in the play of Timon's desire to give not only extravagantly but in excess of all repayment. Timon imagines his own generosity as one-directional, and this is why, when he does receive a gift, he immediately overwhelms the giver by returning a more expensive one. In an essay which compares Timon's giving to archaic potlatching practices, Coppélia Kahn suggests that 'Timon's bounty is magical: in his eyes, it needs no replenishment, it cannot be depleted, it has no limits'.[7]

The overpowering nature of Timon's generosity is emphasised again in the second scene of the play when his guests are seated at the banquet table. The liberal helpings of wine are compared to the ocean tides as Timon passes the cup around his friends:

> *Timon*: My lord, in heart, and let the health go round.
> *2 Lord*: Let it flow this way, my good lord.
> *Apemantus*: Flow this way? A brave fellow! He keeps his tides well; those healths will make thee and thy state look ill, Timon.

> (I.ii.53–7)

It is the sceptical Apemantus, performing a choral role not dissimilar to Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida*, who introduces a note of uneasiness at this immoderate hospitality. Speaking more generally about feasts a few lines before, he had said:

> There's much example for't: the fellow that sits next him, now parts bread with him, pledges the breath of him in a divided draft, is the readiest man to kill him – 't has been proved. If I were a huge man I should fear to drink at meals,
>   Lest they should spy my windpipe's dangerous notes;
>   Great men should drink with harness on their throats.

> (I.ii.46–52)

By drawing our attention to the possible insincerity of hospitality's rituals, Apemantus turns the wateriness of Timon's table fellowship into a cause for alarm. In his anthropological study of the gift, Marcel Mauss explains that for the ancient Germans and Scandinavians, the archetypal gift was pourable. Mauss points out that

> one can see that the uncertainty about the good or bad nature of the presents could have been nowhere greater than in the case of the customs of the kind where the gifts consisted essentially of drinks taken in common, in libations offered or to be rendered.[8]

For Mauss, it is the drink's inscrutable liquidity which encapsulates its potential to be poisonous. In *Timon of Athens*, Apemantus expresses the same idea more violently when he implies that men should be careful of

exposing their windpipes in the act of drinking or they might find their throats being slit. Even at this early stage in the play, then, Apemantus is modelling a far more wary response to the feast.

During the lavish opening banquet, there is a brief moment of pause as Timon makes an emotional toast to his assembled dinner guests. He tells them:

> O, what a precious comfort 'tis to have so many like brothers commanding one another's fortunes. O, joy's e'en made away ere't can be born – mine eyes cannot hold out water, methinks. To forget their faults, I drink to you.
>
> <div align="right">(I.ii.101–6)</div>

Timon's weeping while he drinks in honour of his friends gives his toast an especially wet quality. Later, in 1658, Thomas Hobbes would argue that 'Those that weep the greatest amount and more frequently are those, such as women and children, who have the least hope in themselves and the most in friends'.[9] In *Timon of Athens*, the public display of emotional incontinence on the part of the host is both effeminising and indicative of Timon's trusting nature at this point in the play. His weeping is furthermore an expression of his uneconomical approach. Discussing the 'conceptual linking of body fluids and emotions' in the early modern period, Deborah Lupton notes that, in spite of being 'the most symbolically "clean" of the bodily fluids', tears still 'bespeak a loss of control'.[10] By making his protagonist overly tearful, Shakespeare presents us with a man who has no control over either his spending habits or his body. Later in Act II, for instance, the loyal steward, Flavius,[11] will reprimand his master's spending in the following way:

> So the gods bless me,
> When all our offices have been oppressed
> With riotous feeders, when our vaults have wept
> With drunken spilth of wine, when every room
> Hath blazed with lights and brayed with minstrelsy,
> I have retired me to a wasteful cock
> And set mine eyes at flow.
>
> <div align="right">(II.ii.157–63)</div>

Flavius relates the spilt wine to his own sympathetic weeping in what is a fitting image for the early part of the play, with its emphasis on excessive expenditure.

That the early moderns placed great importance on moderate displays of grief has been shown by Bridget Escolme, who notes that 'For Thomas Playfere in his sermon on *The Mean in Mourning* (1595), crying is compared to the weather: too much weeping is like an economically unproductive, physically destructive storm'.[12] In the sermon Playfere says that

> The water when it is quiet, and calm, bringeth in all manner of merchandise, but when the sea storms, and roars too much, then the very ships do howl and cry. The air looking clearly, and cheerfully refresheth all things, but weeping too much, that is, raining too much, as in Noah's flood, it drowns the whole world.[13]

Intemperate weeping was deemed to be emotionally unthrifty behaviour. Playfere's allusion to the meteorological elements anticipates the reference to shipwreck later in *Timon of Athens* when Timon's cash-flow problems render him homeless alongside his servants, one of whom says:

> We are fellows still,
> Serving alike in sorrow; leaked is our bark,
> And we poor mates stand on the dying deck
> Hearing the surges threat – we must all part
> Into this sea of air.
>
> <div align="right">(IV.ii.18–22)</div>

In the early scenes of the play, Timon seemingly wants to give unreservedly to his friends. And yet the initial representations of hospitality as a rich deluge of tears and other libations pouring outwards from Timon is misleading. Hospitality in *Timon of Athens* is far from being what Derrida describes as pure or unconditional,

since, for Derrida, pure hospitality means demanding nothing from the guest in return for his welcome. It is 'a welcome without reservations or calculation'.[14] But in *Timon of Athens*, although Timon's hospitality might seem overwhelming, it is shown to be based on a principle of calculation that dilutes its effect. Indeed, as Timon's guests soon discover, their host's outwardly limitless bounty comes with a number of stipulations attached.

At the start of the play it is clear that Timon dominates financial generosity in Athens, to the extent that he refuses to accept repayment on any money that he formerly loaned to friends. Julia Lupton finds that 'Timon aspires to a kind of economic martyrdom'.[15] In Act I, for example, when his friend Ventidius offers to reimburse the bail money that Timon lent him while he was in prison, Timon declines his offer with the words:

> O, by no means,
> Honest Ventidius, you mistake my love:
> I gave it freely ever, and there's none
> Can truly say he gives if he receives.

> (I.ii.8–11)

Timon insists that the money he gave Ventidius was a gift, not a loan to be repaid. By Act II, however, Timon's economic situation has become desperate: creditors are circling his house like vultures and *now* Timon wants his money back. He sends one of his servants to Ventidius's home with instructions to remind his friend that:

> When he was poor,
> Imprisoned and in scarcity of friends,
> I cleared him with five talents. Greet him from me,
> Bid him suppose some good necessity
> Touches his friend which craves to be remembered
> With those five talents.

> (II.ii.224–9)

By requesting that Ventidius repay his gift, Timon annuls his former promise that it was freely given without hope of future return. It is made increasingly clear that Timon views his friends like an alternate bank account for a rainy day. Even though he might appear generous, Timon is soon discovered to be relying on having made sound financial investments amongst his Athenian friends and neighbours.

Derrida is known for his treatment of the gift as a category of major philosophical inquiry, for showing what is at stake both politically and ethically in the sometimes complex relationships between recipient and benefactor. He argues that calculated displays of generosity, such as those we see performed in *Timon of Athens*, overturn the gift by preventing it from being free. In *Given Time* Derrida suggests that 'The moment the gift, however generous it be, is infected with the slightest hint of calculation, the moment it takes account of knowledge [*connaissance*] or recognition [*reconnaissance*], it falls within the ambit of an economy'.[16] Elaborating on this, Derrida explains that the gift is often undermined through its affinities with financial investment:

> The gift is not a gift, the gift only gives to the extent it *gives time*. The difference between a gift and every other operation of pure and simple exchange is that the gift gives time. *There where there is gift, there is time*. What it gives, the gift, is time, but this gift of time is also a demand of time. The thing must not be restituted *immediately and right away*. There must be time, it must last, there must be waiting – without forgetting [*l'attente – sans oubli*].[17]

In *Timon of Athens*, Timon loans Ventidius borrowed time only and never the pure gift that he imagines. By depicting Timon calling time on his gifts in this way, Shakespeare is revealing the darker side of generosity. If a guest is left bound to his host in such a fashion, then, as Derrida concludes, 'this hospitality of paying up is no longer an absolute hospitality, it is no longer graciously offered beyond debt and economy'.[18] Throughout the play Timon deliberately keeps the notion of repayment alive. Far from making him bountiful, his remembering of gifts shows how attempts at generosity in Athens are curtailed by the economic logic of the marketplace.

Shakespeare's dramatisation of hospitality in *Timon of Athens* is, I suggest, complicated by the accrual of debts and obligations. The host continually makes demands upon his guests in ways that are not always financial. The tearful toast that Timon proposes to his banquet guests in Act I, for instance, perhaps initially resembles a

spontaneous outpouring of emotion as he contemplates being surrounded by so many loyal friends. But on closer inspection, it is implied that Timon expects something back from the visitors in return for the performance. Sure enough, the sight of their host's tears immediately elicits a flood of emulative weeping from the rest of the dinner table:

2 Lord: Joy had the like conception in our eyes
    And at that instant like a babe sprung up.
Apemantus: Ho ho, I laugh to think that babe a bastard.
3 Lord: I promise you, my lord, you moved me much.

(I.ii.108–11)

Feeling compelled to imitate their host's sudden outburst, the guests rush to reassure Timon that they too are overcome with tears of joy. It is Apemantus who again provides us with a satirical commentary on the main action, this time by implying that Timon's false friends are shedding only crocodile tears at this point. Yet Apemantus critiques Timon's tears as well when he says: 'Thou weep'st to make them drink, Timon' (I.ii.107). The disturbing implication is that Timon's own weepiness is pregnant with ulterior motives.

Tears offer a distillation of how a powerful dynamic of coercion is performed at the level of the emotions during *Timon of Athens*'s main hospitality scenes. Emotional weeping has long been intriguingly opaque, and part of the mystery is never knowing for sure whether they are crocodile tears or genuine ones. In a study of tears in the English Renaissance, Marjory Lange points out that 'In their essence, tears, like all expressions of feeling, are ultimately mysterious'.[19] Yet while Charles Darwin wrote in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* that human tears are simply a biological side effect, recent studies have refuted this somewhat.[20] Ad Vingerhoets argues that human tears might have served an important evolutionary purpose by making us appear defenceless and so deterring potential predators. He writes that 'tears generally may induce empathy and positive feelings in others, and stimulate the provision of emotional support, while at the same time inhibiting aggressive impulses'.[21] Human tears are perhaps evolutionarily designed to instil feelings of accountability in spectators. Certainly in *Timon of Athens*, the banquet guests feel obliged to reciprocate Timon's display of sentiment whether they wish to or not. In addition to the plentiful quantities of wine, tears become yet another liquid asset that is exchanged at Timon's banquet table, in the process drawing our attention to the way in which a dependence on ritual leaves hospitality vulnerable to insincerity. In spite of appearances, little in *Timon of Athens* is given freely. Emotional tears become symbolic of the indebted economy of Shakespeare's Athens.

*

In the second half of this chapter I expand on the preceding discussion of tears, debts, and obligations in order to suggest an interpretation of hospitality that includes Timon's strange death and burial in the closing part of the play. With its emphasis on death and mourning culture, this play that begins with lavish depictions of banqueting arrives somewhere unexpected. Throughout *Timon of Athens*, as in so many other plays, Shakespeare interrogates the problem of what binds people to one another or sets them in conflict. The play explores the relations between guests, hosts and parasites, debtors and creditors, and even, in the final scenes, the bond between mourners and the deceased. Discussing mourning, Judith Butler argues that:

> What grief displays […] is the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves that we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control […] Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something.[22]

In *Timon of Athens*, Shakespeare does not offer us a way out of this thraldom. If anything, as the play concludes it seems to imply that being held in thrall to one another is still everything. Nonetheless, the ending gives us a deeper understanding of the debts and obligations which mourning might involve if we are to understand more fully the nature of generosity.

Over the course of the play, the audience witnesses Timon's alteration from sociable host into embittered misanthrope, and this dramatic movement is accompanied by an alteration in his feelings about weeping. Once Timon becomes penniless and the libations at his banquet table run dry, then so do his tears. By the time *Timon of Athens* concludes, the watery hospitality that characterised his giving in the early part of the play has been replaced with peculiarly unemotional mourning rites. Compared to Shakespeare's other great tragic protagonists,

Timon's death is puzzling, since he dies offstage and in unknown circumstances. In his parting words to the senators, Timon tells them:

> Come not to me again, but say to Athens
> Timon hath made his everlasting mansion
> Upon the beached verge of the salt flood,
> Who once a day with his embossed froth
> The turbulent surge shall cover

(V.ii.99–103)

Shortly afterwards, when he delivers the news of his death to Alcibiades, the soldier confirms that Timon's burial spot is right on the edge of the seashore. It is Alcibiades who then reads aloud Timon's epitaph:

> *Here lie I, Timon, who alive all living men did hate,*
> *Pass by and curse thy fill, but pass and stay not here thy gait.*

(V.v.70–1)

In conjunction with the remote location chosen for his burial place, Timon's hostile epitaph is designed to dissuade mourners from lingering to pay their respects. Yet while the protagonist's suspension of his own mourning rites might strike us as inhospitable, Derrida can help us to understand this moment differently as the most generous of parting gifts.

It is here that a comparison between *Timon of Athens* and Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* becomes helpful. A. D. Nuttall has noticed that '*Timon of Athens* has an oddly Greek feel to it', and there are further similarities between the two plays.[23] Both plays culminate in the deserted landscape outside Athens and concern the relationship between hospitality and mourning. In particular, the death of each protagonist is noteworthy for its lack of normal burial customs. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus is laid to rest in an unidentified place and he tells Theseus, ruler of Athens, never to disclose the location to anyone, not even to his family. In the *Of Hospitality* seminars, Derrida shows how this produces mourning for the loss of mourning. Of Oedipus's daughter, Antigone, Derrida notes,

> She complains that her father has died in a foreign land and moreover is buried in a place foreign to any possible localization. She complains of the mourning not allowed, at any rate of a mourning without tears, a mourning deprived of weeping. She weeps at not weeping, she weeps a mourning dedicated to saving tears.[24]

Oedipus's parting gesture might seem needlessly cruel, but he puts things quite differently in the play. Oedipus speaks about his own imminent death as being a generous gift to his adoptive or host city of Athens:

Oedipus: I come with a gift for you,
   my own shattered body… no feast for the eyes,
   but the gains it holds are greater than great beauty.
Theseus: Gains? What do you claim to carry with you?
Oedipus: Soon you will learn it all, not quite yet, I think.
Theseus: And when will the gifts you offer come to light?
Oedipus: When I am dead, and you have put my body in the grave.[25]

Discussing the play, Derrida argues that Oedipus is not only being generous to his Athenian hosts here:

> It is as if he wanted to depart without leaving so much as an address for the mourning of the women who love him. He acts as if he wanted to make their mourning infinitely worse, to weigh it down, even, with the mourning they can no longer do. He is going to deprive them of their mourning, thereby obliging them to go through their mourning of mourning. Do we know of a more generous and poisoned form of the gift?[26]

When Derrida speculates on whether or not we know of 'a more generous and poisoned form' of giving, the question has implications for how we might go about interpreting the strange ending of *Timon of Athens*. Like Oedipus, Timon forgoes all ordinary mourning rites, therefore depriving his friends and loved ones of the opportunity to grieve over his death. In comparison to the outpourings of tears that we witnessed in the opening

part of the play, this dry-eyed mourning is frugal behaviour in the extreme. Timon's legacy is cruel but, at the same time, it is extraordinarily compassionate, for by permitting no mourning tears at his graveside he would appear to be liberating the people of Athens from their work of mourning.

Yet while Timon might give the impression of demanding nothing in return from his mourners, lingering feelings of outstanding debts and obligations continue to problematise the gift economy of Shakespeare's Athens. Thus, Timon's farewell gift leaves his mourners bound to him through this final gesture of unnecessary generosity. As hospitality is repeatedly undermined by the way in which the protagonist keeps a running tally of what he is owed, so Timon's mourning shows a related difficulty in divorcing the gift from an economy dependent on repayment. The visual iconography of balance sheets and account books surrounding representations of death in Western culture has been well documented. Philippe Ariès has demonstrated how depictions of death during the medieval period became increasingly consistent with the idea that 'Each man is to be judged according to the balance sheet of his life. Good and bad deeds are scrupulously separated and placed on the appropriate side of the scales. Moreover, these deeds have been inscribed in a book'.[27] Dying might be the definitive settling of spiritual accounts more often expressed as a worldly reckoning of the financial books. Works of mourning also reveal their own calculations, however, as the bereaved person is left behind to come to terms with dues that will now be forever outstanding.

Mourning cultures can assume their own almost materialistic quality as those left behind struggle to process unresolved debts and grievances. In the *Mourning Diary: October 26 1977 – September 15 1979* begun on his mother's death, for instance, Roland Barthes confesses a 'Difficult feeling (unpleasant, discouraging) of a *lack of generosity*'.[28] In another entry Barthes mentions 'The *measurement* of mourning'.[29] Derrida also discusses the deeply indebted economy of bereavement in *The Work of Mourning*, where he makes the point that 'There come moments when, as *mourning* demands [*deuil oblige*], one feels obligated to declare one's debts. We feel it our duty to say what we owe to the friend'.[30] In a supplementary note he adds that 'death obligates; it would thus be the other original name of absolute obligation'.[31] Derrida admits, however, that the sensation of finality that comes from settling outstanding debts can be dreadful:

> Inadmissible, not because one would have problems recognising one's debts or one's duty as indebted, but simply because in declaring these debts in such a manner, particularly when time is limited, one might seem to be putting an end to them, calculating what they amount to, pretending then to be able to recount them, to measure and thus limit them, or more seriously still, to be able to settle them in the very act of exposing them.[32]

In part, these calculations can feel unbearable because of the fact that we long to be held in arrears to one another even – or perhaps especially – after death.

Mourning obligates the figures on stage in *Timon of Athens* into behaving a certain way. Once he learns of Timon's death and has read out the epitaph, Alcibiades feels compelled to say a few words of remembrance:

> These well express in thee thy latter spirits.
> Though thou abhorred'st in us our human griefs,
> Scorned'st our brains' flow and those our droplets which
> From niggard nature fall, yet rich conceit
> Taught thee to make vast Neptune weep for aye
> On thy low grave, on faults forgiven.

> (V.v.72–7)

In *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Michael Neill suggests that 'Alcibiades is driven, even in the absence of a body, to improvise a funeral rite of sorts to revive the memory of a man he wants to think of as "noble Timon"'.[33] As part of this hastily improvised funeral eulogy, Alcibiades recasts the inhospitable epitaph in more uplifting terms. Timon's disgust at human weeping is transformed into a 'rich conceit' whereby the sea waves crashing over his burial site daily replace traditional mourning customs. In this more comforting vision of ecological weeping, Alcibiades also appears to hint at the deceased's generous forgiveness of past grievances. By restoring Timon's suspended burial rites in this manner, the play attests to the spirit of obligation inscribed in works of mourning.

Timon of Athens makes a number of calculations based on notions of hospitality and mourning. Long recognised for its interest in money, the text clearly raises a number of more ethical equations which Derrida

helps us to understand. Throughout the play, performances that appear emotionally generous are shown to be undermined by a hidden indebtedness which binds the recipient to his benefactor. Even at the end of the play, while pleading for Timon's help, one of the senators says that the city owes him an apology:

> Together with a recompense more fruitful
> Than their offence can weigh down by the dram,
> Ay, even such heaps and sums of love and wealth,
> As shall to thee blot out what wrongs were theirs,
> And write in thee the figures of their love,
> Ever to read them thine.

<div align="right">(V.ii.35–40)</div>

The senators are appealing for forgiveness, in return for which they propose to recompense Timon with money. The financial image clusters reveal that the senators, like the wider civilian population of Athens, understand generosity only as an economic transaction, something to be counted out in tiny units of measurement. It is unsurprising, then, that as John Kerrigan has pointed out recently, 'Timon rejects this calculated excess' as unworthy of the act of giving.[34] In his own writings *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Derrida equally dismisses such strategic negotiating manoeuvres: 'Must one not maintain that an act of forgiveness worthy of its name, if there ever is such a thing, must forgive the unforgiveable, and without condition?'[35] In *Timon of Athens*, the presence of stipulations and conditions radically delimit the scope for generosity, while also demonstrating how death legitimately binds mourners to the dead. The play suggests that it is only in his gift of no mourning that Timon meets the demands Derrida makes of us: to impose no conditions on our death or our hospitality. But even as it does this, the play finds itself compelled to remember and so undo Timon's impossible gift. As *Timon of Athens* concludes, the gift of hospitality again turns out to be far less free than we imagine, and yet it might nonetheless help to blot out what wrongs have passed.[36]

Related topics

See Chapters 16, 17, 34

Notes

1 On hospitality in early modern studies see, for example, Goldstein and Lupton, eds. (2016), Fiedler (1972), Novy (2013), Palmer (1992), Heal (1990), Goldstein (2013), Meads (2001), Curran (2013), Fitzpatrick (2007), Lupton (2013), Kottman (1996), and Wilson (2005).
2 For an introduction to the treatment of debt in the play, see Jowett (2003). On debt in early modern culture see, for example, Leinwand (1999) and Muldrew (1998).
3 Jackson (2001).
4 Wilson Knight (2005: 218).
5 William Shakespeare & Thomas Middleton (2008), I.i.43. Further references to the play are all to this edition.
6 Dawson & Minton (2008: 94).
7 Kahn (1987: 39).
8 Mauss (1997: 30).
9 Thomas Hobbes quoted by Lange (1996: 30). On tears in Shakespeare's plays see, for example, Campana (2017), Kerr (2015), and Steggle (2007).
10 Lupton (1998: 74, 87).
11 For more on Flavius's role in the play see, for instance, Hunt (2001), Maitra (2013), and Daniel (2013). Noschka offers a reading of the play that, as he puts it, 'seeks to shift critical attention away from gift exchange, biblical or otherwise, in order to better attend to hospitality in its vocation as stewardship' (2016: 244).
12 Escolme (2014: xiv).

13 Thomas Playfere quoted by Escolme (2014: xiv).
14 Derrida (2005: 66).
15 Lupton (2011: 146).
16 Derrida (1995: 112).
17 Derrida (1992: 41).
18 Derrida (2000: 83).
19 Lange (1996 :2).
20 Darwin (1998: 164–75).
21 Vingerhoets (2013: 135).
22 Butler (2004: 23).
23 Nuttall (2007: 320).
24 Derrida (2000: 111). Compare Derrida (1994: 9), where Derrida argues that 'Nothing could be worse, for the work of mourning, than confusion or doubt: one *has to know* who is buried where'.
25 Sophocles (1982: l.649–55).
26 Derrida (2000: 93).
27 Ariès (1974: 32).
28 Barthes (2010: 92).
29 Barthes (2010: 19).
30 Derrida (2001b: 223).
31 Derrida (2001b: 223n).
32 Derrida (2001b: 223–4).
33 Neill (1997: 296).
34 Kerrigan (2016: 363).
35 Derrida (2001a: 39). On forgiveness in early modern drama, see Lawrence (2012).
36 I would like to extend my gratitude to Julia Lupton, Kevin Curran, Sean Lawrence, Neil Badmington, and Martin Coyle, who all read and gave generous feedback on earlier drafts of this chapter. I also wish to thank Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne for their helpful comments and suggestions.

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Butler, J., 2004. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London and New York: Verso. In these essays written in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, Butler addresses themes of vulnerability, violence, and mourning on a national scale.

Darwin, C., 1998. *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. London: HarperCollins. While contemporary scientific knowledge has disputed some of its findings, this compelling work remains one of the classic texts on the evolution of human emotion. The book is illustrated with a number of photographs and engravings.

Derrida, J., 2000. *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*. Translated by R. Bowlby. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. The two lectures reproduced here offer a highly accessible introduction to some of Derrida's most influential ideas on the subject of hospitality.

Mauss, M., 1997. Gift, Gift. In: A.D. Schrift, ed. *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*. London and New York: Routledge, 28–33. This classic work of anthropology explores archaic gift-giving practices such as potlatching.

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13

SHAKESPEARE, MORAL JUDGEMENTS, AND MORAL REALISM

Matthew H. Kramer

Among the many areas of scholarship that can be enriched through an engagement with Shakespeare's plays, moral philosophy is a particularly fruitful territory. In the present chapter, I draw on a couple of Shakespearean tragedies to come to grips with a challenge that has sometimes been mounted against moral realism. Moral realism I take to be the thesis that morality (or ethics more broadly) is objective along a number of different ontological, epistemic, and semantic dimensions.[1] Here the challenge to be countered – with assistance from Shakespeare – is focused on the foremost respect in which morality is semantically objective. That is, some opponents of moral realism have sought to deny that moral judgements are ever truth-apt, by contending that such judgements are inherently possessed of motivational force. This chapter will endeavour to show that the reasoning of these anti-realist philosophers, insofar as it is sound, can readily be accommodated by moral realism.

1 A summary of the complaint

As has just been suggested, the efforts of non-cognitivists to cast doubt upon the truth-aptitude of moral assertions are often focused on the proposition that everyone who sincerely affirms a moral judgement is inclined to act in accordance with the tenor of the judgement. Philosophers who endorse that proposition are frequently known as 'motivational

internalists' or 'judgement-internalists'; I shall use the latter label here. What these philosophers maintain is that, whenever anyone genuinely harbours some moral conviction, he or she is disposed to conform his or her conduct to that conviction. If somebody is of the conviction that every act of torturing a baby for pleasure is morally wrong, she is disposed to refrain from performing any such act. Likewise, if she is of the conviction that keeping one's promises made to one's friends is morally obligatory, she is disposed to keep promises which she has made to her friends. Of course, the strength of her disposition to refrain from torturing any babies for pleasure is almost certainly much greater than the strength of her promise-keeping disposition. That latter disposition is susceptible to being overtopped by some of her other ethical dispositions in certain credibly possible circumstances. Nonetheless, if she is not endowed with any inclination at all to keep her promises made to her friends – in other words, if she fails to fulfil her promises to her friends even when there are no significant ethical or prudential considerations that militate against her fulfilling them – then she is not sincerely of the conviction that keeping one's promises made to one's friends is morally obligatory. So these philosophers contend.[2]

Having postulated this conceptual link between moral convictions and motivations, non-cognitivists parlay that link into an attack on the semantic objectivity of moral discourse by trading on a widely accepted view about beliefs (a view usually traced to David Hume). That is, they hold that no belief is ever in itself possessed of any motivational force. Only when a belief is combined with some desire(s) concerning the event or the state of affairs to which it pertains, will a person be motivated to act on the basis of its content. There is never a conceptual connection between someone's harbouring of a belief and her being motivated to behave in some way. Given as much, however, moral convictions cannot be beliefs. No belief is ever linked conceptually to any behavioural dispositions in the way in which every moral conviction is. Accordingly, moral convictions must be non-cognitive. Given that the only real alternative to their being cognitive is their being conative, such convictions are desires or emotional attitudes rather than beliefs; the utterances that express those convictions are not genuinely declarative and truth-apt, even if they appear to be so.

2 The argument's first step

Though the first step of this non-cognitivist argument (which asserts a conceptual tie between moral convictions and motivations) is less dubious than the second step, it is far from unproblematic. As has been conceded by some of the non-cognitivists, the postulation of conceptual ties between moral convictions and motivations is unsustainable if such ties are presumed to align all positive moral verdicts with pro-attitudes and all negative moral verdicts with con-attitudes. There are undoubtedly some people who are altogether amoral – not only those who fail to understand any moral concepts but also and more importantly those who are impervious to being affectively moved by any moral considerations which they nonetheless discern – and the even more striking exceptions to ordinary moral valences are the outlooks of people who derive intense gratification from the knowing perpetration of wickedness as such. These latter people recognize that their acts are heinous, and they are impelled to perform those acts by precisely that recognition. Their awareness of the iniquity of their conduct is what drives them on with special delight. Hence, although there are links between their moral convictions and their motivations, the links are the opposite of what would normally obtain. These people's favourable moral assessments are connected to con-attitudes, while their unfavourable moral assessments are connected to pro-attitudes.

Simon Blackburn offers the example of Satan in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, who proclaims 'Evil be thou my Good' (Blackburn (1998: 61)). Vivid though the example is, it is not maximally illuminating. After all, Satan as a superhuman fallen angel is dauntingly far outside the range of ordinary moral agents. Notwithstanding that Milton portrayed Satan with piquant vitality – as William Blake famously observed, Milton was 'of the Devil's party without knowing it' – readers can easily suspect that the anomalous motivational patterns in Satan's psyche are due to his extraordinary status beyond the confines of humanity. Anybody who harbours such a suspicion will tend to think that Satan's inversion of fundamental moral categories does not enable us to draw any significant inferences about the patterns of motivations that might be exhibited by human beings. What are needed, then, are some examples that are more realistic and thus more informative. Fortunately we can turn to Shakespeare for a pair of such examples, which

are to be found in one of his lesser tragedies (*Titus Andronicus*) and in one of his greatest (*Othello*).[3]

2.1 Aaron in Titus Andronicus

Though Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* can sometimes come across on the page as a thinly one-dimensional evildoer whose love for his son is the only leavening trait of his personality, a high-quality performance of the role can really bring the character to life. (For example, in the BBC's 1985 production of the play, Hugh Quarshie portrays Aaron as a credibly shrewd and witty evildoer – albeit a loathsome and formidably dangerous one.) At several junctures in the play, Aaron gleefully comments on the villainousness of his misdeeds. For example, after being captured by the Goths, Aaron recounts his heinous crimes to their leader Lucius. Aaron gaily remembers how he tricked Lucius's father Titus into cutting off Titus's own arm, and how he then had a servant present Titus with the heads of two of Lucius's brothers (V.i.109–17):

> And what not done, that thou hast cause to rue,
> Wherein I had no stroke of mischief in it?
> I play'd the cheater for thy father's hand,
> And, when I had it, drew myself apart
> And almost broke my heart with extreme laughter:
> I pry'd me through the crevice of a wall
> When, for his hand, he had his two sons' heads;
> Beheld his tears, and laugh'd so heartily,
> That both mine eyes were rainy like to his.

When Lucius asks Aaron whether he is sorry for his atrocities, Aaron replies forthrightly (V.i.124–44):

> Ay, that I had not done a thousand more.
> Even now I curse the day – and yet I think
> Few come within the compass of my curse, –
> Wherein I did not some notorious ill,
> As kill a man, or else devise his death,
> Ravish a maid, or plot the way to do it,
> Accuse some innocent, and forswear myself,

Set deadly enmity between two friends,
Make poor men's cattle break their necks,
Set fire on barns and hay-stacks in the night,
And bid the owners quench them with their tears.
Oft have I digg'd up dead men from their graves,
And set them upright at their dear friends' doors,
Even when their sorrows almost were forgot;
And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,
Have with my knife carved in Roman letters,
'Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead.'
Tut, I have done a thousand dreadful things
As willingly as one would kill a fly,
And nothing grieves me heartily indeed
But that I cannot do ten thousand more.

At the end of *Titus Andronicus*, when Aaron is brought out to be executed, he once again ferociously exults in his evildoing (V.iii.185–90):

I am no baby, I, that with base prayers
I should repent the evils I have done:
Ten thousand worse than ever yet I did
Would I perform, if I might have my will;
If one good deed in all my life I did,
I do repent it from my very soul.

In his unflinching remorselessness, Aaron sets himself apart from some other Shakespearean villains such as Edmund in *King Lear* and Caliban in *The Tempest*.

2.2 Iago in Othello

Let us now turn to Shakespeare's greatest villain. Iago in *Othello* perfectly exemplifies the thirst for wickedness on which we are concentrating, even though he is also a full-blooded character. Capable of convivial discourse with men and women of various ranks, he repeatedly identifies himself with Satan in his soliloquies, and he revels in his awareness of the enormity of his own machinations.

Iago first identifies himself with the satanic at the end of Act I, when he hatches his plot against Othello and Cassio and Desdemona. After ruminating on the general course of his scheme, he expresses to himself his satisfaction with what he has concocted: 'I have't. It is engend'red. Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light' (I.iii.403–4). He returns to this theme after Cassio has fallen into disfavour with Othello. Iago offers Cassio some advice which is superficially very plausible but which is actually designed to bring about the downfall of both Cassio and Othello. When Iago is alone, he entertains himself by musing that nobody could properly accuse him of being a miscreant for providing such sage advice. He then gleefully snorts: 'Divinity of hell! / When devils will the blackest sins put on, / They do suggest at first with heavenly shows, / As I do now' (II.iii.350–3). Later, after Iago has begun to poison Othello's mind with his jealousy-inducing stratagems, he chucklingly compares the effects of those stratagems to the agonies of hell: 'Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons, / Which at the first are scarce found to distaste, / But with a little act upon the blood / Burn like the mines of sulphur' (III.iii.326–9).

The several passages in which Iago delightedly identifies himself with the devil are paralleled by passages where his wife Emilia unknowingly and bitterly makes the same identification. When she pleads with Othello to rid himself of the thought that Desdemona has been unfaithful, she exclaims: 'If any wretch have put this in your head, / Let heaven requite it with the serpent's curse' (IV.ii.15–16). A bit later, while trying to figure out why Othello has become consumed by jealous suspicion, Emilia remarks: 'I will be hang'd if some eternal villain, / Some busy and insinuating rogue, / Some cogging, cozening slave, to get some office, / Have not devis'd this slander' (IV.ii.130–3). Emilia's unwitting comparisons of Iago to Satan are reinforced by Othello at the end of the play, when the scales have finally fallen from his eyes. Having at last grasped how he has been gulled by Iago's terrible chicanery, Othello looks down at Iago's feet to see whether they are cloven. He then lunges at Iago in an attempt to kill him, while remarking: 'If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee' (V.ii.287). Othello manages to wound Iago but does not manage to kill him before others intervene. Picking up on Othello's remark, Iago again gloatingly identifies himself with Satan: 'I bleed sir, but not kill'd' (V.ii.288). Othello once more highlights the demonic

inscrutability of Iago by imploring the Venetians to 'demand that demi-devil / Why he hath thus ensnar'd my soul and body' (V.ii.301–2). To a morally upright person like Othello, the idea of pursuing evil for its own sake is virtually unfathomable.

As is suggested by these passages, a key impetus that drives Iago on to pursue his nefarious ends is his firm sense that they are nefarious.[4] In this respect, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous attribution of 'motiveless malignity' to Iago is apt. To be sure, we should not construe Coleridge's wording as an indication of the complete absence of other motives behind Iago's carrying out of his heinous plot against Othello and Desdemona. On the contrary, Iago suspects that he has been cuckolded by Othello (I.iii.386–90; II.i.295–302); he resents the perceived slight of being passed over for promotion (I.i.8–33); he obviously envies Othello and Cassio (I.iii.392–4; V.i.18–20); and some of his utterances might bespeak a racist animosity toward the Moor (I.i.88–91, 109–13; III.iii.228–38). Nevertheless, what Coleridge's remark correctly signals is that one of the powerful motivating factors spurring Iago on to implement his designs is his sheer delight in evil for evil's sake.[5] When Iago sincerely asserts that his conduct is demonic, he is specifying a feature of the conduct that strongly inclines him to engage in it. He does so, moreover, while remaining a credible and richly drawn character – one of the most fascinating characters in the whole of Western literature.

2.3 *The upshot of the examples*

The outlooks of Aaron and Iago are telling counterexamples to the proposition that every sincerely held moral conviction is marked by a disposition to act in accordance with the terms of that conviction. Aaron's and Iago's sincerely held convictions concerning the turpitude of their own actions are marked by strong dispositions to act athwart the terms of those convictions rather than in conformity thereto. Note, furthermore, that judgement-internalists cannot successfully defend themselves against these counterexamples by maintaining that Aaron's and Iago's apparent moral judgements are mere simulations or recapitulations of ordinary people's moral judgements. Ever since Richard Hare wrote about the ways in which ethical terms can be used in quotation marks or inverted commas (Hare (1952: 124–6, 164–6)), judgement-internalists have been inclined to

dismiss counterexamples to their doctrine by contending that moral judgements not appropriately connected to motivations are simply imitations or representations of veritable moral pronouncements. Those anomalous judgements are said to be similar to the reports of anthropologists (Prinz (2006: 38)). Any such tack in response to the examples of Aaron and Iago would amount to a serious misunderstanding. Aaron and Iago are not seeking to reproduce the moral judgements of ordinary people when they utter their verdicts on the monstrousness of their own actions. When they declare that their contrivances are diabolical, they are exhilaratedly articulating their own views rather than anyone else's view. Consider, for example, how Iago delights himself with the thought that he will 'get [Cassio's] place, and… plume up my will / In double knavery' (I.iii.386–7). For their purposes, Iago and Aaron need to apprehend what is morally right and obligatory; it is not enough for them to apprehend what is thought to be morally right and obligatory. Only by descrying what is actually right and obligatory can each of them fulfil his objective of flouting what is right and obligatory.

In short, if non-cognitivists' claims about the conceptual connections between moral convictions and motivations are construed to mean that every favourable moral assessment is linked to a pro-attitude and that every negative moral assessment is linked to a con-attitude, those claims are unsustainable. Non-cognitivists cannot safely ignore Aaron and Iago. Still, the first premise of their argument can be construed quite differently, in a manner that enables them to come to grips with Aaron and Iago and any other counterexamples to the extreme rendering of their doctrine. What that first premise should be taken to mean is that any sincerely held moral conviction not appropriately connected to a behavioural disposition is parasitic on the myriad moral convictions that are so connected.[6] In other words, had Aaron or Iago not lived in a world where people usually act in accordance with the terms of their moral judgements rather than athwart those terms, he would not have possessed the conceptual resources needed for the formation of his own moral judgements and inclinations. There can never be a world in which all the moral convictions of everyone are not properly connected to motivations, just as there can never be a world in which all the utterances by everyone are mendacious.

Only against a general background of truthful communications do people have opportunities to engage in prevaricative communications,

since in the absence of such a background the people seeking to prevaricate through their communications would not be presented with any established patterns of reference and meaning which they could distort for their own dishonest purposes. In that respect, mendacious utterances are parasitic on honest utterances.[7] Likewise, only against a general background of moral judgements appropriately connected to moral motivations does anyone like Aaron or Iago have opportunities to arrive at moral judgements that are not so connected. In the absence of such a background, Aaron or Iago would not be presented with the moral concepts by reference to which he pursues evil as such. Neither Aaron nor Iago can identify evil as something to be pursued, unless he can differentiate it from moral goodness as something to be pursued and from evil as something to be shunned; and neither man can achieve that differentiation unless the sundry contexts of his life have supplied him with the requisite concepts. In the absence of those contexts, there would be no established patterns of perceived moral goodness (as something to be sought) and perceived moral badness (as something to be eschewed) from which the pursuit of evil as such could be distinguished. Only because there are those established patterns in the world in which Aaron or Iago forms his identity, does he have any point of reference from which he can dissociate his own quest for wickedness. His quest is profoundly reactive. Its momentum is entirely that of a rejection of the regnant moral order. In that respect, the satanic perversity of each of those men is parasitically dependent upon the sway of ordinary motivational patterns among other people. Because a demonic orientation like Aaron's or Iago's is parasitic upon the prevalence of appropriate connections between moral convictions and moral motivations, those connections can aptly be characterized as 'quasi-conceptual'. They are not invariably present, but they are not merely contingent. Without their general presence, moral discourse – including the participation of Aaron or Iago in it – would be impossible. If the first premise of the non-cognitivists' argument is reformulated to refer to quasi-conceptual connections along the lines just recounted, we can and should acquiesce in it.

3 The argument's second step

Let us now ponder the second premise, the Humean thesis, in the non-cognitivists' attack on the semantic objectivity of moral discourse. According to that Humean thesis, no belief by itself can ever be motivationally efficacious. In other words, there are no conceptual bonds between beliefs and motivations. However, given that the revised version of the first premise is not asserting the existence of any conceptual bonds between convictions and motivations, it is uncombinable with the second premise as a basis for the non-cognitivist conclusion that moral convictions cannot be beliefs. That conclusion does not follow from the second premise and the revised version of the first premise; hence, a purported derivation of that conclusion from those two premises would be starkly invalid.

Could the second premise be rendered combinable with the reformulated first premise by being suitably revised in turn? Suppose that the second premise's denial of conceptual connections between beliefs and motivations were altered to the claim that there are neither any conceptual connections nor any quasi-conceptual connections between beliefs and motivations (in the sense of 'quasi-conceptual' specified in Section 2.3). Any such move would pose insuperable difficulties, for a blanket denial of quasi-conceptual ties between beliefs and motivations is clearly false. As has been contended in Section 2.3, there are just such ties between moral beliefs and motivations. Though those ties are not unfailing connections, they are general connections upon which an anomalous orientation such as that of Aaron or Iago is parasitically dependent. More specifically, beliefs about the negative moral bearings of actions or states of affairs are quasi-conceptually bound to con-attitudes concerning those actions or states of affairs, while beliefs about the positive moral bearings of actions or states of affairs are quasi-conceptually bound to pro-attitudes concerning those actions or states of affairs. Not every favourable or unfavourable moral belief is appropriately connected to a corresponding pro-attitude or con-attitude, but most moral beliefs have to be appropriately connected if there is to be any conceptual space for moral beliefs that are not. Hence, any attempt to rescue the validity of the non-cognitivist argument through the reformulation of its second premise in the manner envisaged here will render the argument unsound.

4 The end of the argument

Of course, an unsound argument can happen to be furnished with a true conclusion. We therefore still need to examine directly the conclusion of the non-cognitivist argument: namely, its conclusion that moral judgements are conative rather than cognitive. That non-cognitivist thesis is undermined in two ways by my reflections on Aaron and Iago. First, as has been argued in Section 2.3, the motivational patterns of those two villains reveal that the connections between moral convictions and motivations are quasi-conceptual rather than conceptual. Given as much, the convictions are fundamentally cognitive. Were they instead fundamentally conative, the appropriate connections between those convictions and motivations would always obtain rather than just standardly obtain. After all, conations are invariably motivating in accordance with their contents. Yet claims about unfailingly appropriate connections are exactly what have proved to be untenable in my discussions of *Titus Andronicus* and *Othello*. In the face of counterexamples such as those of Aaron and Iago, assertions of unfailingly appropriate connections between moral judgements and behavioural dispositions do not withstand scrutiny.

   A second reason for rejecting the conclusion of the non-cognitivist argument is that the Humean doctrine about the motivational inefficacy of beliefs is unsustainable when it is invoked in support of such a conclusion. Notwithstanding that the Humean doctrine is unexceptionable in application to beliefs that are devoid of evaluative or normative contents, it is inapposite in application to beliefs with such contents. Of course, many of the proponents of that doctrine deny that there are any beliefs with such contents. However, as was argued in the last paragraph, moral convictions have to be beliefs rather than conations. Given as much, they are beliefs with normative contents. Moreover, those beliefs with normative contents are quasi-conceptually linked to behavioural dispositions. Although those beliefs might of course be accompanied by desires (which, when present, are invariably motivating), their normative contents are themselves sufficient to sustain quasi-conceptual links with corresponding inclinations. Because of the normative orientation of those beliefs, most people who harbour them are disposed to act in accordance with their terms.

This disavowal of the Humean tenet about the motivational inefficacy of beliefs will undoubtedly elicit protests from some of the philosophers who construe the distinction between beliefs and desires as a contrast between mind-to-world and world-to-mind directions of fit. Philosophers have long cashed out the belief/desire distinction as follows: someone who forms beliefs will typically aim to fit them to the world, whereas someone who forms desires will typically aim to fit the world to them.[8] If a belief does not tally with the world, the lack of congruity is a reason for modifying or discarding the belief. Beliefs should be adapted to the world, rather than the other way around. By contrast, until desires are fulfilled, they do not tally with the world – yet the lack of congruity between the content of a desire and the state of the world is scarcely in itself a reason for abandoning the desire. On the contrary, it is a reason for acting to alter the world in order to bring things into conformity with one's desire.

If the direction of fit for beliefs is the opposite of the direction of fit for desires, how can a belief be quasi-conceptually connected to behavioural dispositions? How can it perform a desire-like role? In answer to these questions, two observations are germane. In the first place, the standard distinction between the directions of fit is plainly premised on the assumption that the contents of beliefs are non-normative or at any rate non-moral. Insofar as the possibility of beliefs with moral contents is taken into account, that standard distinction loses its pertinence. A belief with such a content will be characterized by both directions of fit. Let us consider, for example, the belief that the intentional sowing of baseless doubts in a husband's mind about the fidelity of his wife is morally wrong. On the one hand, such a belief aims to fit the world by accurately representing the correct principles of morality. If the intentional sowing of baseless doubts in a husband's mind were somehow not proscribed by those principles, then the belief just mentioned would be false and would thus detract from the cognitive situation of anyone who harbours it. Only because the correct principles of morality indeed proscribe such chicanery, does the belief about its forbiddenness succeed as a cognitive representation. On the other hand, that belief also generally aims to make the world fit with it – not in the sense that it superfluously aims to bring about a moral order wherein the intentional cultivation of baseless doubts in the mind of a husband is morally impermissible, of course, but instead in the sense that it generally aims toward a world wherein the

forbiddenness of such wrongdoing is matched by the non-occurrence thereof. Characterized by this orientation toward the world as it should be, the belief about the wrongness of the intentional cultivation of baseless doubts is performing a desire-like role. Though its desire-like role is different from its role as a representation, the two are fully consistent and intimately connected.

A further observation begins where the preceding paragraph has left off. Although nearly every instance of any moral belief is associated with a desire-like role, such a role is occasionally absent. Moral beliefs are not inherently or unfailingly motivating. Iago can believe that he morally ought not to bring about the deaths of Desdemona and Othello and Roderigo and Emilia – and Aaron can believe that he morally ought not to bring about the deaths of Titus's sons – without having the slightest motivational orientation toward a world in which those deaths do not occur. Instead of being inherently or unfailingly motivating, moral beliefs are *typically* motivating. They are so in a statistical sense but additionally and more importantly in the stronger sense that any instances of moral beliefs not appropriately connected to motivations are parasitically dependent on the prevalence of instances of moral beliefs that are properly connected. Still, although the relationship between favourable moral beliefs and pro-attitudes and between unfavourable moral beliefs and con-attitudes is sufficiently strong to have been designated as 'quasi-conceptual' here and earlier in this chapter, it does not always link those beliefs and those behavioural dispositions appropriately. Accordingly, my apparent repudiation of Humeanism may well be consistent with a moderate version of Humeanism. Michael Smith, who sophisticatedly appeals to the divergent directions of fit in his championing of the Humean position on beliefs, writes as follows:

> [W]hat Humeans must deny and do deny is simply that agents who are in belief-like states and desire-like states are ever in a *single, unitary kind of state*. This is the cash value of the Humean doctrine that belief and desire are distinct existences. And their argument for this claim is really quite simple. It is that it is always at least possible for agents who are in some particular belief-like state not to be in some particular desire-like state; that the two can always be pulled

apart, at least modally. This, according to Humeans, is *why* they are distinct existences.

<div align="right">(Smith (1994: 119, emphases in original))</div>

Smith adds that

> the Humeans' claim must be that it is always at least *possible* for agents who are in a belief-like state to the effect that their φ-ing is right to none the less lack any desire-like state to the effect that they φ that the two can always be pulled apart, at least modally.

<div align="right">(Smith (1994: 119, emphasis in original))</div>

Given the way in which Smith frames the chief point of contention between Humeans and their opponents, my rejection of Humeanism in application to moral beliefs has turned out to be consistent with Humeanism as Smith understands it. Indeed, this chapter has argued that the normal desire-like role of a moral belief can be missing not only as a matter of logical possibility but also as a matter of plausibility. People like Aaron and Iago are credibly possible rather than just barely possible. Hence, the consistency of my position with the Humean position as espoused by Smith is palpable.

The only mildly objectionable feature of these quoted statements by Smith is that they make reference to the 'belief-like' state of someone who harbours a moral conviction. Moral convictions are veritable beliefs and are therefore not merely 'belief-like'. Their normative contents typically endow them with desire-like functions (in the stronger as well as the weaker sense of 'typically'), but their being endowed with those functions is perfectly consistent with their status as full-blown beliefs. We should not make the mistake of thinking that a belief with a moral content or any other normative content is somehow less respectable – less solidly cognitive – than a belief with a non-normative content. Certainly, no considerations centred on directions of fit are any grounds for doubting that beliefs with moral contents are genuine beliefs. Though Smith submits that the two divergent directions of fit always obtain 'with respect to two different contents' (Smith (1994: 118)), the endowment of a moral belief with both directions of fit is due instead to the following two facts: the fact that the belief is a belief, and the fact that its content is moral.

Given the nature of its content, its being endowed with both directions of fit does not warrant any accusations of incoherence or unintelligibility.

5 Conclusion

By presenting us with characters who so vividly and clear-sightedly embrace evil as their good, Shakespeare has helped to shed light on some major issues in contemporary moral philosophy. Although the examples of Aaron and Iago leave room for a scaled-down version of judgement-internalism, that scaled-down version is unsupportive of the proposition that moral convictions are essentially non-cognitive. Rather, it militates against that proposition. At the same time, it supports the ascription of a conative role to moral convictions as a quasi-conceptual matter. There can be negative moral convictions that are not aligned with con-attitudes and positive moral convictions that are not aligned with pro-attitudes, but the fact that such alignments generally (though not invariably) reign is essential for the very intelligibility of moral utterances – including the utterances of Aaron and Iago. Thus, although a cognitivist account of the status of moral judgements and utterances has prevailed in this chapter, the non-cognitivist account has not simply lost. Rather, it has been moderatingly reconceived and has thus been reconciled with a predominantly cognitivist understanding of morality.[9]

Related topics

See Chapters 11, 14, 33

Notes

1 For a full-scale defence of moral realism as a moral doctrine, see Kramer (2009).
2 For a host of citations to many important discussions of judgement-internalism (from sundry perspectives), see Kramer (2009: 276 n8).

For a helpful overview of judgement-internalism as well as reasons-internalism, see Finlay & Schroeder (2017).

3 Some readers may wonder why I have not also selected Richard III for discussion. After all, his vitality as a character is largely attributable to the manifest pleasure which he derives from the knowledge that his actions are evil. However, two considerations militate against placing Richard alongside Aaron and Iago. First, by far the dominant motive that drives Richard's series of murders is his overweening hunger for the power of the English throne. His delight in the iniquity of his actions is a minor factor by comparison. Second, unlike Aaron and Iago, Richard – in the immediate aftermath of his dream – is fleetingly afflicted by pricks of conscience. (Don John in *Much Ado about Nothing* is another villain who might have been covered by this chapter, but the characterization of him in that play is insufficiently rich to enable readers to tell whether he pursues evil partly for its own sake or whether instead he is driven entirely by his resentment toward his brother and by his envy of Claudio.)

4 Whereas the statements by Iago himself are direct evidence for his sense of the objectives which he pursues, the statements by Emilia and Othello are strong indirect evidence. Because Emilia and Othello are so baffled by the gratuitousness of the conduct to which Iago has stooped, they correctly infer that the sheer malignity of that conduct has been a key motivating factor for him. Given that their statements tally with his own statements on that point, we can aptly conclude that their inferences about his evil-for-its-own-sake motivation are well founded.

5 Jonathan Dancy correctly remarks that Satan in *Paradise Lost* is motivated by a lust for dominion over the world, but he incorrectly concludes that Satan is not also motivated by the prospect of evil for evil's sake (Dancy (1993: 6)). When Iago gives voice to his own motives for nefariously manipulating Roderigo, he expressly states that his evil manipulation is both serviceable for his purposes and intrinsically pleasurable: 'For I mine own gained knowledge should profane / If I would time expend with such a snipe / But for my sport and profit' (I.iii.377–9).

6 For a cognate view, see Blackburn (1998: 59–68). A similar view is also fleetingly broached in Harman (1996: 179). Note that, when I

refer to moral convictions as 'appropriately' or 'properly' connected to dispositions, I am not necessarily suggesting that the convictions and dispositions themselves are appropriate. Rather, I am simply indicating that positive moral judgements are linked to pro-attitudes and that negative moral judgements are linked to con-attitudes.

7 For a corresponding observation about simulative statements such as those uttered by actors in plays, see Austin (1975: 21–2).

8 See, for example, Smith (1994: 111–25). For a classic illustration of the divergent directions of fit, see the scenario of the shopping list in Anscombe (1963: 56).

9 I am very grateful to Veli Mitova, Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier, and the editors for their valuable comments that have helped me to improve the original draft of this chapter. The quotations from *Othello* are from Shakespeare (1974). The quotations from *Titus Andronicus* are from Shakespeare (n.d.).

Further reading

Kramer, M., 2011. *The Ethics of Capital Punishment: A Philosophical Investigation of Evil and its Consequences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.Chapter 6 presents an account of the nature of evil, and I discuss Lady Macbeth at some length. (I also touch on a couple of the other plays.)

Kramer, M., 2017. *Liberalism with Excellence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.Chapters 6 and 7 discuss passages from eleven of the Bard's plays, and my principal aim in most of those discussions is to highlight the Stoical outlook that is given expression in them.

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14

BLINDNESS AND DOUBLE VISION IN *RICHARD III*

Zamir on Shakespeare on moral philosophy

Rafe McGregor

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that Tzachi Zamir makes a convincing case for *double vision*, the thesis that there is a reciprocal relation between literature and moral philosophy such that literature facilitates moral understanding and moral understanding enriches the literary experience. In Section 1, I explain double vision in terms of the epistemic value of literature, exemplified by the type of knowledge Zamir refers to as *knowing through*. Section 2 shows why Zamir's interpretation of *Richard III* is significant to double vision and establishes a criterion of success for that interpretation, whether Richard of Gloucester is what A.W. Eaton calls a *rough hero*. I address the objections to Richard as a rough hero in Section 3, concluding that both Zamir's interpretation of the play and the double-vision thesis are convincing.

1 Double vision

Tzachi Zamir's *Double Vision: Moral Philosophy and Shakespearean Drama* argues for a particular relationship between epistemological value and literary value and in doing so establishes a theoretical framework for a reciprocal relationship between moral insight and literary merit. His theory is constructed on the basis of seven literary critical essays, each of

which takes one of Shakespeare's plays as its subject, provides a philosophical interpretation foregrounding that play's contribution to knowledge, and explains the moral insight that the knowledge affords. The relationship Zamir envisages between philosophy and literature is mutually beneficial, such that 'there emerges a kind of thought – a form of double vision – that opens up important modes of understanding' (2007: xv). He situates his approach within the rhetorical tradition of philosophy and draws on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* to propose the *paradeigma* (example) as grounding contingent claims in a rational manner by means of induction from particular to particular (rather than particular to universal) on the basis of a common principle (2007: 146). Zamir is seeking to articulate literature's unique contribution to knowledge, and he employs the Aristotelian idea that 'in some domains, what we take to be a credible source of knowledge is the reapplying of a principle that was successfully applied in another known case' (2007: 7). Literature is precisely one of these domains, in which belief is justified by the combination of non-valid rational reasoning and experience in a literary context.

Zamir accepts the three types of knowledge identified by Dorothy Walsh but claims that they do not exhaust literature's epistemic value. Walsh employed Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* to delineate two distinct types of knowledge: 'There is knowing in the sense of *knowing that* (such and such is so) and there is knowing in the sense of *knowing how* (to perform some act)' (Walsh (1969: 96)). She then differentiated between experience as *awareness of* and experience as *living through* and advanced the latter as a third type of knowledge (1969: 103). Zamir refers to this as *knowing what it is like*, which I shall abbreviate to *knowing what* (Zamir (2007: 149)). In his fourth critical essay, on *Antony and Cleopatra*, Zamir argues for the significance of Shakespeare's conception of the subtleties of mature as opposed to youthful love. His interpretation prompts this observation:

> But thinking of the way by which *Antony and Cleopatra* enlarges our understanding of love invites us to think of a fourth kind of knowledge: knowing the shapes through which things may come. Knowledge is not merely a specification of our true beliefs. Broadly conceived, knowledge is a way by which we connect with the world.

(2007: 149)

He describes this new type of knowledge, which I shall abbreviate to *knowing through*, as follows:

> Yet knowing the shape that things may take is more than an improvement in recognition skills. It is also not merely growth in a body of beliefs. While these additions occur, the knowledge I am tracing primarily pertains to the scope and sensitivity of one's outlook, to the sharpness of one's response to vague and ambivalent inputs. We assess perceived inputs relative to some *background* that has now grown rather than be equipped with more perceptions.
>
> (2007: 150)

Knowing through not only sharpens one's recognition skills and increases one's beliefs but employs an articulation of a concept that expands and elaborates the background in terms of which new information is received and processed.

Knowledge-through is conveyed (rather than described) by literature, and conveyance paradigmatically involves configuring the state of mind of recipients in specific ways by means of reproducing an experiential structure (Zamir (2007: 147)). Shakespeare is exemplary in this respect, reproducing the experience of a character for the audience by structuring the experience so that it is acted by the actors and re-enacted by the audience rather than relying on empathy by the audience. In *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, Romeo's experience of forgetting about Rosaline – with whom he is deeply in love when the play opens – is reproduced in the experience of the audience. Romeo forgets about his lover and the audience forgets about the lover of the protagonist of the play: the play therefore conveys knowledge-through forgetting someone who is important (Zamir (2007: 113–25)). The experience is reproduced rather than replicated because the audience does not forget about their own loved ones, like Romeo, but about his lover. The audience's experiences nonetheless overlap and resemble Romeo's because they both involve forgetting someone that is important (one's own lover for the character and the lover of the protagonist for the audience).[1] In *Romeo and Juliet* this knowledge-through forgetting someone that is important improves the audience's understanding of youthful love as a withdrawal from wisdom (Zamir (2007: 119)). The knowledge conveyed by *knowing through* is both

epistemically distinct from and rationally superior to the knowledge provided by empathy. For Zamir, the formation of empathic beliefs by an audience is an aspect of *knowing what*, and knowledge-what provides knowledge of qualitative uniqueness that is lacking in justification (2007: 6-7). In contrast, the configuration of the state of the mind of the audience by reproduction involved in *knowing through* is subject to rational justification in terms of the induction from particular to particular described above.

Literature's contribution to knowledge is concerned with both the message communicated and the medium by which that message is communicated. In the conveyance of knowledge-through, the message cannot be separated from the medium by which it is communicated, and knowledge-through constitutes a uniquely literary contribution to knowledge, articulating concepts such that they become coordinates for the analysis and evaluation of subsequent knowledge-that, knowledge-how, and knowledge-what. Literature lends substance to beliefs, and, on 'a deeper level, the creating of such experiences is itself a formation of preferences and values, and so one must undergo such experiences rather than hear about them through description or paraphrase' (Zamir (2007: 109)). This is the epistemic value of literature. In cases where the insight afforded by literature belongs to the moral sphere, such as many of the plays of Shakespeare, a relation is established between literary value and moral value – because the moral insight is acquired in virtue of the epistemic value of the literary work. Zamir identifies this relation when he states: 'I also see these epistemological connections as carrying crucial moral implications' (2007: 21).

He has selected Shakespeare for two reasons: first, because Shakespeare is especially and explicitly concerned with questions of morality; and, second, because of Shakespeare's exemplary conveyance of knowledge-through, which is paradigmatic (rather than exhaustive) of literature's contribution to knowledge. The moral value of literature is in '*creating adequate conditions*' for moral judgement rather than ensuring correct action (Zamir (2007: 43)). Watching Shakespeare does not cause one to behave morally, but it does alter the way in which one perceives a particular concept, and this alteration subsequently affects the way in which one assesses new knowledge. Zamir's overall thesis is therefore twofold: that literature can make a unique contribution to knowledge by

conveying knowledge-through – that is, there is a direct relation between epistemic and literary value; and that where the knowledge-through is concerned with morality, there is an indirect but nonetheless significant relation between moral value and literary value. The insight (moral or other) that is conveyed cannot be separated from the (literary) means by which it is conveyed and is consequently a literary merit – that is, epistemic value is (partly) constitutive of literary value. Shakespeare wrote many plays where moral insights are literary merits and he thus exemplifies double vision, where literature facilitates moral understanding and moral insight enriches literature.

2 *Richard III*

Zamir's theory of double vision is based on his critical arguments for the following plays conveying knowledge of the respective parenthetical philosophical propositions: *Richard III* (amoralism is a deficiency in knowing), *Macbeth* (nihilists are necessarily unhappy), *Romeo and Juliet* (youthful love is a withdrawal from wisdom), *Antony and Cleopatra* (mature love is a labour), *Othello* (love is a mode of self-annihilation), *Hamlet* (inaction is resistance to the reduction of one's agency), and *King Lear* (parental disconnection is parental disintegration). These plays have moral value in virtue of the moral insight afforded by the moral implications of the knowledge-through amoralism, nihilism, love, inaction, and parenting conveyed respectively. For Zamir, the moral value of a literary work is supervenient on the epistemic value of that literary work – that is, there can be no change in moral value without a corresponding change in the knowledge conveyed. As such, Zamir's philosophical interpretation of *Richard III* in 'A Case of Unfair Proportions' has special significance for double vision. Zamir argues that *Richard III* conveys knowledge-through *amoralism is a deficiency in knowing* – that is, that amoralism can be an epistemic defect. If the interpretation is correct, the moral insight provided by Shakespeare is that a moral defect is reducible to an epistemic defect: 'In an important way, Shakespeare thus turns him [Richard of Gloucester] and his flashy amoralism into an oversimplification, a deficiency in knowing' (Zamir (2007: 90)). The moral defect of amoralism is reducible to the epistemic

defect of blindness, and a direct relation between moral value and epistemic value is established. Given Zamir's numerous arguments for a direct relation between epistemic and literary value to follow, the establishment of a direct relation between moral and epistemic value establishes an indirect relation between moral value and literary value. This is the sense in which Richard's blindness (his amorality understood as an epistemic defect) is Zamir's double vision (the mutually beneficial relation between literature and moral philosophy).

Zamir's interpretation of *Richard III* is both a microcosm of and foundation for *Double Vision*, which may be why it is presented as the first of the literary critical essays.[2] If Zamir can convince that Shakespeare conveys knowledge-through *amoralism is a deficiency in knowing*, then he offers evidence that a supervenience (or stronger) relation holds between at least one moral and one epistemic defect – that is, that the direct relation between moral and epistemic value upon which the indirect relation between moral and literary value is based exists. The existence of this relation would thus not only provide evidence for double vision but also justify Zamir's philosophical-critical approach to Shakespeare. If Zamir's interpretation of *Richard III* is unconvincing, then his other examples, which do not reduce the moral to the epistemic will be, at best, less plausible – that is, the relation between the moral insight implied by the knowledge-through nihilism, love, inaction, and parenting conveyed and the literary merits of the plays in question is more opaque. One might argue that if the interpretation of *Richard III* is unconvincing, then there is no unequivocal evidence for this relation in the monograph, and that while Zamir establishes a relation between epistemic and literary value, he does not establish a relation between epistemic and moral value such that the proposed relation between literature and moral philosophy fails. On this less charitable reading, the double-vision thesis fails because there is no case for literature's special contribution to moral philosophy, only for literature's more general contribution to knowledge.

Zamir cannot construct a convincing argument for his interpretation by merely mining *Richard III* for evidence in support of the proposition *amoralism is a deficiency in knowing* – and my reduction of his seven interpretations is misleading, if necessary for the purpose of brevity – because double vision is concerned not only with the knowledge conveyed but the way in which it is conveyed. Shakespeare's particular talent for

conveying knowledge-through lies in the way in which he reproduces the experience of a particular character for the audience such that there is a carefully structured overlap in the imagined experience of the character and the real experience of the audience. In order for a clear case for double vision to be made, a relevant aspect of Richard's amoralism would have to be reproduced (but not replicated) in the audience. Zamir provides an implicit indication of this reproduction in establishing the premises of his interpretation. After describing *Richard III* as 'a literary staging of amoral conduct chosen for its own sake' (Zamir (2007: 65)), he states: 'I will allow myself to be taken in by a splendid staging of evil' (2007: 66). Zamir uses *splendid* to describe the way in which Shakespeare invites an empathic understanding of Richard by the audience. He sets his interpretation in the context of the debate about the relation between literary and moral value, specifically the question of whether the literary merits of a representation can undermine the distinction between comprehending evil and defending evil (2007: 66). His statement of intent both reproduces Richard's conscious choice and recommends a mode of audience engagement. In the opening soliloquy of the play, Richard declares:

> And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain
> And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

(I.i.28–30)[3]

Although the third line is ambiguous, Richard appears to be asserting his agency, freely selecting villainy over heroism, hate over love, war over peace. It is on the basis of this conscious choice that Zamir describes the subject of the play as *amoral conduct chosen for its own sake*. He maintains that Richard is unique as a Shakespearean villain because 'unlike Edmond, Iago, or Macbeth, for whom villainy at least appears to start off as a form of revenge or as instrumental for future gain, Richard finds merits and pleasure in the villainous action itself and chooses it as such' (2007: 67).

If Zamir is correct, then Richard's conspicuous disclosure of his decision to revel in amorality constitutes an immediate invitation to the

audience to regard him as what A.W. Eaton calls a 'rough hero' (Eaton (2012: 281)). Her conception takes its name from Hume's mention of the likely lack of sympathy for Homer's 'rough heroes' in eighteenth-century Europe (Hume (1987: 246)). Eaton distinguishes a *rough hero* from an *antihero* by means of five traits. Unlike the antihero, the rough hero is: (1) grievously and (2) intrinsically immoral, (3) remorseless, (4) totally reprehensible, and (5) possessed of no virtue sufficient to redeem his or her vices (Eaton (2012: 284)). Hume's terminology captures the invitation made by authors to their audiences nicely, because the protagonist is both morally hateful (i.e., *rough*) and worthy of empathy (i.e., *heroic*) (Eaton (2012: 285)). Shakespeare's Richard appears to meet all of Eaton's criteria, and his prompt admission of roughness forces the audience to choose between either empathising with a rough hero or withholding empathy from a despicable villain. My claim is that Zamir's interpretation succeeds because *Richard III* conveys knowledge-through *amoralism is a deficiency in knowing* by structuring the dramatic experience so that it is acted by the actor and re-enacted by the audience in the following manner. The members of the audience who accept Shakespeare's invitation to regard Richard as a rough hero make their own amoral choice, selecting the pleasure of the splendid staging of evil over moral concerns about slippage between comprehending and defending evil. The experience is reproduced rather than replicated because the audience does not choose to behave in an amoral manner, like Richard, but to empathise with Richard in spite of his amoral behaviour.[4] The audience's experiences nonetheless overlap and resemble Richard's because they both involve placing pleasure over virtue in their respective choices – the pleasure of villainy for Richard and the pleasure of Shakespearean drama for the audience.

3 Blindness

An obvious objection to my account of the success of Zamir's interpretation is that Richard does not in fact meet the criteria for a rough hero. Eaton provides a helpful taxonomy of rough heroes, divided into the sub-categories of *admirable devil*, *glorified criminal*, *congenial murderer*, *likeable sex criminal*, *sympathetic sadist*, and *appealing mean-spirited person* (2012: 284). Examples are provided for each of these sub-

categories and include: Milton's Satan, Tony Soprano, Hannibal Lecter, Humbert Humbert, Patrick Bateman, and Heathcliff. [5] Neither Richard of Gloucester nor any of Shakespeare's other characters appear, but the list is not intended to be complete. The criteria for being a rough hero are, as noted in Section 2, twofold: a character must be both (1) morally hateful and (2) worthy of empathy. Consequently, my argument for Zamir's interpretation of *Richard III* will fail if Richard is either too agreeable or unworthy of empathy. In the former case, Richard might more accurately be described as belonging to Eaton's antihero category. She offers only one example of an antihero, Don Quixote, but distinguishes the antihero from the rough hero by means of the five traits mentioned in Section 2, the most important of which is that the latter is '*intrinsically* immoral' (2012: 284). This description makes for an almost perfect match with Zamir's description of Richard choosing amoralism for its non-instrumental (intrinsic or, more accurately, *final*) value. Both Richard and Macbeth murder their way to the crown, but murder is a means to an end for Macbeth and an end in itself for Richard. Macbeth belongs to a third category of flawed protagonist, the tragic hero. Tragic heroes typically display a single flaw in an otherwise virtuous character and in paradigmatic examples – such as Macbeth and Othello – this flaw is exploited by a trusted ally. In Richard's case, there is evidence aplenty for the roughness he so readily confesses: he delights in marrying a widow who blames him for her husband's death, then murders her; he murders the young princes, then proposes marriage to their sister; he executes one of his lieutenants, then takes the son of another hostage… this list is far from complete. One of the reasons Shakespeare's staging of evil in *Richard III* is so splendid is its excess, and there is little doubt that Richard meets the roughness criterion for a rough hero.

The second criterion concerns Richard's heroism, understood as his being worthy of the empathy of the audience. Eaton defines a hero (whether rough, anti-, tragic, or otherwise) as 'a sympathetic, likeable, and admirable protagonist' (2012: 285). I employ 'empathy' in its standard denotation of one individual identifying with another individual's thoughts, emotions, or desires. In the context of rough heroes, the audience responds to the author's representation of the rough hero's character, circumstances, or actions in a positive manner, comes to regard him or her as sympathetic, likeable, or admirable, and identifies with his or her

thoughts, emotions, or desires. Richard's immediate disclosure of his freely chosen villainy and his subsequent conduct has prompted suggestions that he is a sophisticated instantiation of the Vice, 'a dramatic exemplification of evil' in Zamir's terms (2007: 75).[6] Zamir rejects this interpretation on the basis that it provides an impoverished account of both the characterisation and plotting of the narrative (2007: 84). Despite his deficiency in knowing, Richard is clearly too complex a character for an archetype, but the question of whether he is worthy of empathy is more opaque. Rough heroes are distinct from both the more agreeable heroes of the anti- and tragic varieties and from villains, with whom one is not invited to empathise, like Iago, Edmund, and Claudius. The question of whether Richard is a villain rather than rough hero presents the greater challenge to my argument, and before I answer I want to return to my quote from his soliloquy in Section 2, specifically the ambiguity in the line *I am determined to prove a villain*. Michael Taylor notes that *determined* is used more frequently in *Richard III* than any of Shakespeare's other plays, and the conflict between human freedom and divine determination is indeed one of its central themes (Taylor (2005: lvi)). The most obvious meaning of Richard's words is his freely made choice of villainy over heroism – less obviously and less plausibly, that Providence has determined his villainy by means of the deformity that causes women, men, and even dogs to shun his company. Richard is thus either affirming his delight in villainy or excusing his villainous conduct as being predetermined by Providence.

Zamir presents a third option, referring to Richard's

> blindness to invitations for meaningful contact and acceptance – his brother, Anne, even Buckingham offer him many kinds of love (familial, marital, friendship) throughout – and he is not merely refusing them but is also unable to register these offerings.
>
> (2007: 89)

Richard does make a free and conscious decision to be a villain, but he does so because he believes that success as a hero will be denied him. He chooses the life of a warrior because he thinks he cannot be a lover and is blind to his success as a lover in, for example, wooing Anne in spite of her hatred for him. Zamir regards Richard's relationship with Anne as

particularly significant and especially indicative of his blindness, noting that 'after she yields to him, he never contemplates the possibility of actually loving her' (2007: 84). With just this one example to mind, Richard's determination to prove a villain is revealed as a supreme moment of dramatic irony: he thinks he is exercising his will, but in fact his decision is determined by his blindness. This blindness and the subtle but nonetheless pervasive suggestion that he is harming himself as well as others constitute the invitation to empathise with Richard.[7] As such, he meets both the rough and the heroic criteria for the rough hero.

I have employed Richard's rough heroism in defence of Zamir's interpretation of the play as conveying knowledge-through *amoralism is a deficiency in knowing*, but Zamir would disagree with my method (if not my conclusion) on the basis that:

> We see a man setting out to be something he dislikes, and achieving this. There is something profoundly tragic in this movement, and taking *The Tragical History of Richard III* to be a tragedy, rather than a history in which we are merely horrified at Richard's climb and satisfied at his fall, permits his many 'tragic mistakes' to emerge.
>
> (2007: 88–89)

Zamir uses the title of Colley Cibber's 1699 adaptation, which replaced four fifths of Shakespeare's text and, according to Gillian Day, caused eighteenth- and nineteenth-century actors to play Richard 'as if he were Macbeth' (Day (2005: lix)). Cibber's revisions aside, there are several similarities between the two plays. In discussing the emergence of Richard's conscience in his sleep, for example, Zamir quotes as follows:

> Only in sleep could such a thought be formulated and voiced. While awake, Richard successfully pacifies his conscience: 'I am in so far in blood,' he says while contemplating the murder of Elizabeth's brothers, 'that sin will pluck on sin. Tear-falling pity dwells not in this eye' (IV.ii.62–5).
>
> (2005: 77)

I am so far in blood that sin will pluck on sin seems to prefigure Macbeth's:

> I am in blood
> Stepped in so far, that should I wade no more,
> Returning were as tedious as go o'er.

<div align="right">(III.iv.135–7)⁸</div>

Zamir identifies the '"if only" effect of a tragic mistake' – *if only* Macbeth hadn't murdered Duncan, Lear hadn't divided his kingdom, Othello hadn't ignored Emilia – and claims it for *Richard III*: if only Richard could see the invitations he receives (2007: 89).

Richard is not a tragic hero, however, and his blindness does not belong to the same category as Macbeth's ambition, Lear's hubris, and Othello's jealousy. Where Macbeth's ambition is a single flaw in an otherwise exemplary character, Richard's blindness is one of many flaws, and in fact one is hard-pressed to find an unequivocal virtue. Courage is perhaps the only one; like Macbeth at Dunsinane Hill, Richard fights to the bitter end at Bosworth Field, albeit that his calling for a horse to rejoin the fray is not quite as heroic as Macbeth's refusal to flee in the face of Macduff. If Richard was a tragic hero, then Shakespeare's staging of evil would not be as splendid as Zamir states; in Eaton's terms, there would be no 'remarkable achievement' in the play as that achievement is based on the audience both condemning *and* empathising with the rough hero (2012: 285). Zamir's interpretation of the play as conveying knowledge-through *amoralism is a deficiency in knowing* would in fact fail because there would be no reproduction of Richard's amoral choice in the audience: the decision to empathise with a tragic hero is not amoral, does not elevate pleasure above virtue in the way that the decision to empathise with a rough hero does. In other words, Zamir overreaches with the argument for tragedy, which undermines the more salient argument for the knowledge conveyed being knowledge-through rather than knowledge-what. If I am right and Richard is a rough hero, then Shakespeare reproduces Richard's amoralism in the audience (who accept the invitation to empathise) and *Richard III* conveys knowledge-through *amoralism is a deficiency in knowing*. And if Zamir's claim that a moral defect can be reduced to an epistemic defect succeeds, then the double-vision thesis is convincing. Zamir's double vision is thus not just constituted by Richard's blindness, but by the combination of his blindness and his roughness.

Related topics

See Chapters

Notes

1 I have previously expressed my scepticism as to whether Zamir's *knowing through* is in fact a fourth type of knowledge or a sub-category of *knowing what*. I classified *knowing what* as *phenomenological knowledge* and *knowing through* as *lucid phenomenological knowledge*. Recently, Kenneth Walden has defended a cognitive value of art very similar to knowledge-through, the potential of works of art to reconfigure the structure of thought. Walden not only envisages a more significant role for this type of knowledge than Zamir but also specifies it as effecting a revolution in the *moral* framework of the person who engages with the artwork. As such, I think the debate is very much open, and I have ignored my critique of Zamir for the purposes of this paper (see McGregor (2016); Walden (2015)).

2 Zamir states that he has begun with 'A Case of Unfair Proportions' because of its investigation of empathy, which is 'the most familiar experiential pattern that figures in the writing on literature and morality', but there is no reason to think the explanation exhaustive (2007: 66).

3 Shakespeare (2005).

4 Note that: (1) Shakespeare is inviting the audience to empathise with an amoral character, not replicate that character's conduct; and (2) the reproduction (knowledge-through) concerns the decision to empathise with a rough hero, not the actual empathy (knowledge-what) itself.

5 I have previously criticised several of Eaton's examples, including Humbert Humbert, but I do not doubt that she has identified an interesting genre of morally problematic narrative art – and that *Richard III* is paradigmatic of this genre (see McGregor (2014: 457–8)).

6 See also Spivack (1958).

7 Queen Elizabeth, for example, demonstrates her perspicacity when she tells him: 'Thyself is self-misused' (IV.iv.375).
8 Shakespeare (1998).

Further reading

Carroll, N., 2013. *Minerva's Night Out: Philosophy, Pop Culture, and Moving Pictures*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. Noël Carroll's most recent contribution to the philosophy of film, in which he discusses both the big and small screen in the context of popular culture.

Kieran, M., 2004. *Revealing Art: Why Art Matters*. Abingdon: Routledge. Matthew Kieran's erudite yet accessible introduction to the major questions concerning the values associated with the institution of art.

McGregor, R., 2016. *The Value of Literature*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International. My theory of the relationships among aesthetic, cognitive, and ethical value in literary representation.

Zamir, T., 2018. *Ascent: Philosophy and Paradise Lost*. New York: Oxford University Press. Tzachi Zamir's most recent monograph, in which he develops his conception of *knowing through* by means of the concept of performative knowledge.

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15

HORATIO'S STOIC PHILOSOPHY

Jan H. Blits

Shakespeare scholars often ignore or belittle Shakespeare's interest in and understanding of philosophy. While many consider him a mere mouthpiece for what they deem the reigning opinions of his day, those who recognize 'philosophic influences' tend to dismiss them as 'only a felicitous but shameless lifting of passages' from various authors, as T.S. Eliot puts it. To take seriously the philosophic knowledge of 'a badly paid playwright, popular entertainer, sometimes actor, and sometimes busy producer, can only confuse us in our study of Shakespeare' (Eliot (1930: xiv)).

Attentive reading of Shakespeare, however, refutes this patronizing, complacent view. It shows that Shakespeare does not merely 'lift passages' but, on the contrary, has a deep and extensive knowledge of the philosophies in question. As we can see with Horatio, Shakespeare firmly grasps specific Stoic philosophic doctrines and, moreover, has a profound understanding of how adherence to those doctrines can shape a person's soul and make him the person he is. What may appear to be inconsistencies or self-contradictions in his presentation of Horatio are, in fact, Shakespeare's thoughtful portrayal in him of some of Stoicism's famous (or infamous) problems and paradoxes.

Wittenberg

Hamlet, set in the early sixteenth century, occurs at a time of intellectual rebirth and religious reformation in Denmark. As Shakespeare emphasizes from the start of the play, Hamlet and Horatio have been studying at Wittenberg. One of only two universities he ever mentions by name,[1] Wittenberg, a prominent centre of liberal learning, was famous for its teaching of humanism and the ongoing rediscovery of classical and neoclassical antiquity (Marlowe's Dr Faustus taught there, Tycho Brahe and Giordano Bruno studied there) and for the reformation of the Christian doctrine of salvation (Martin Luther taught and posted his ninety-five theses there, and William Tyndale and Philip Melanchthon studied there) (Lewkenor (1600: 15–16)).

While Hamlet has been deeply affected by both Christian and Stoic teachings, Horatio has been shaped by Stoicism alone: 'I am more an antique Roman than a Dane', he declares (5.2.346).[2] By 'antique Roman', he means a late-republican or early-imperial Roman, specifically a Roman Stoic. The Rome of Caesar – 'the mightiest Julius', as Horatio calls him (1.1.117) – and his first- and second-century successors, including emperor Claudius, is the Rome of Seneca, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius and other Stoic philosophers.[3]

Hamlet, who conspicuously puns on the Diet of Worms, the imperial council that banned Luther for refusing to repudiate his new doctrine (4.3.19–21), frequently broods over the uncertainty of the hereafter ('The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn / No traveler returns' (3.1.79–80)) and the inscrutability of God's justice ('[H]ow his audit stands who knows save heaven?' (3.3.82)). Horatio never has such thoughts. When Hamlet sees the Ghost, he voices his willingness to risk damnation in speaking to what might be 'a goblin damn'd, / Bring[ing] blasts from hell' (1.4.40–1). But when Hamlet then begins to follow the Ghost to a more remote location, Horatio warns of a different kind of danger to his soul:

> The very place puts toys of desperation,
> Without more motive, into every brain
> That looks so many fathoms to the sea
> And hears it roar beneath.

(1.4.74–8)

The danger is madness, not damnation. The terrifyingly strange in this world can deprive a man of the 'sovereignty of reason / And draw [him] into madness' (1.4.73–4). Except perhaps in his farewell to Hamlet, Horatio never thinks of anything beyond this world. For him, as for Stoicism in general, heaven and earth – the super- and the sublunary world – are a unified, organic whole. There is nothing eternal above the visible world to which man rises.[4]

Stoicism and a drossy age

Stoicism took root in Rome during the decay of the republican regime. By the middle of the first century BC, many Romans who practised it had become well respected by nobles and commoners alike, as we see in *Julius Caesar* (Blits (1993), (2015)). Stoicism, along with Epicureanism, arose two centuries earlier in Athens when Alexander the Great's conquests destroyed classical Greek political life and the Greek polis. With politics having lost its noble lustre (and the study of the subjects of classical philosophy having moved to Alexandria), philosophy in Athens became largely limited to the single-minded concern for finding the reasoning which would remove, or provide refuge from, the pains and hardships of life: 'There is no use in philosophy if it does not expel the suffering of the soul' (Epicurus, *Fragments D* [Bailey]). 'If you attend to [the *logos* of philosophers]… you will live undisturbed and free from everything' (Epictetus, *Discourses*, 3.13.1). Systematic doctrine thus replaced reflective inquiry. No longer the activity of searching inquiry, philosophy became a mode of life based on a fixed creed.

Hamlet's Denmark closely resembles imperial Rome, as the King's name singularly points up.[5] As in imperial Rome, public life offers few noble opportunities. The King's power appears absolute. His subjects depend on his will and act on his command. Laertes may not return to France without Claudius' leave, and the King and Queen may command their subjects' service: 'Both your Majesties / Might, by the sovereign power you have of us, / Put your dread pleasures more into command / Than to entreaty' (2.2.26–9). Of the young men, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Osric seek to advance by the King's favour, Laertes is interested only in purely private goods (pleasure, personal freedom and his own family), and Hamlet and Horatio seek moral refuge by retreating from the world of action. Denmark's 'drossy age' (5.2.186) mirrors the post-political age of Rome and, before it, of Athens. Its political decay makes it ripe for Stoicism.

Horatio's 'philosophy', as Hamlet calls it (1.5.175), radically internalizes the conditions for happiness. It places happiness in virtue and virtue in what a man himself can control. While no one can control the vicissitudes of fortune, a man can control his disposition toward their effects. So long as nothing breaks into his will or affects his judgment, no misfortune can touch his soul or disturb his happiness. His virtue is his invincible fortress. It renders him safe from everything beyond his will. Thus Hamlet says of Horatio, '[T]hou hast been / As one, in suff'ring all, that suffers nothing, / A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards / Hast ta'en with equal thanks' (3.2.65–8). Horatio is always impassive or equanimous. In experiencing everything, he is affected by nothing.[6] Protected behind the secure barrier of his inner life, he depends entirely on his inward state for his happiness. Virtue renders him self-sufficient.[7]

Empiricism, pantheism and materialism

Horatio's Stoicism is by no means confined to his imperturbability. Shakespeare takes pains to show that Horatio has learned and assimilated Stoicism's basic philosophical doctrines and that these tenets fashion his soul and form his character. Virtually everything he says and does reflects his learning.

As early as the opening scene, we see Horatio's Stoic empiricism, pantheism and materialism. According to Stoic doctrine, a person should trust only what his senses tell him directly. 'Zeno [Stoicism's founder]… regarded perception effected by the senses as both true and trustworthy' (Cicero, *Academica*, 1.42). Horatio therefore trusts what he can see for himself rather than the testimony he hears from others. Thus using the technical Stoic term for a figment of the mind, he initially dismisses the sentinels' account of the Ghost's appearance as a 'fantasy' (1.1.26, 57).[8] But, upon seeing the sight first-hand, he cries out, 'Before my God, I might not this believe / Without the sensible and true avouch / Of mine own eyes' (1.1.59–61). The sensory, he swears, affords true assurance. What comes directly through the eyes gives the mind reliable proof of an external object. And when the Ghost vanishes at the crowing of the cock, Horatio says he has 'heard' that erring spirits

return to their confines when the cock awakens 'the god of day', 'and of the truth herein', he says, 'This present object made probation' (1.1.157, 160–1). The sight verifies the story.

Shakespeare links Horatio's Stoic empiricism to his Stoic pantheism. As just noted, Horatio swears 'Before my God' that he trusts what he can see with his own eyes. For a Christian, such an asseveration would seem a self-contradiction. The Christian would be swearing by a God that he cannot see that his true belief rests on what he can see.[9] But Horatio believes in Stoic pantheism, particularly in the divinity of personified natural forces.[10] Just as Stoicism assigns 'the entire realm of the sea… to Neptune' (Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 2.66), Horatio calls the sea 'Neptune's empire' (1.1.122). And just as Stoicism holds that 'the sun is the master and lord of the world' (Cicero, *Academica*, 2.126), Horatio calls it 'the god of day'. When swearing 'Before my God' that sight offers true assurance, he is evidently apostrophizing the 'god of day' – the god which, by illuminating the world, makes Stoic empiricism possible. Although Horatio characteristically speaks in the brief, precise, restrained mode of speech strongly favoured by Stoics,[11] he breaks into an idyllic description of the first sight of dawn: 'But look, the morn in russet mantle clad / Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill' (1.1.171–2). He honours 'the god of day' with a rare lyrical utterance.[12]

When the Ghost begins to depart at the cock's crowing, Horatio orders Marcellus to stop it by striking the apparition with his weapon if it refuses to stay:

Horatio: Stop it, Marcellus.
Marcellus: Shall I strike it with my partisan?
Oratio: Do if it will not stand.

<div align="right">(1.1.142–4)</div>

Out of the mouth of a Stoic, Horatio's command has puzzled readers. George Kittredge, for one, says that 'Horatio forgets his learning in his excitement' (Kittredge (1946: 1024)). But, in fact, Horatio remembers his learning exactly. He considers the Ghost a body because Stoicism teaches that everything that exists is a body: 'Bodies alone exist' (Plutarch, *Against the Stoics*, 30 (1073e)). According to Stoic doctrine, 'Only a body [is] capable of acting or being acted upon' (Cicero, *Academica*, 1.39). Everything that is – including God, the soul, virtue and the good – is therefore a body.[13]

Stoic materialism, however, in contrast to Epicurean and modern materialism, understands body to be living, intelligent body. In keeping with the classical conception of the soul, it maintains that body, by its very nature, combines reason and life. To be body means to be intelligent spirit or 'breath' (*pneuma*).[14] By identifying body and God, Stoic materialism allows for the central Stoic teaching that the universe is both internally complete and divinely ordered. It permits the complete identification of the cosmic and the divine, the world and God. And by allowing the complete identification of body and soul, of the material and the spiritual, it permits the rule of rational divine providence in all that happens in the world:

> [The Stoic Chrysippus] says that divine power resides in reason and in the soul and the mind of the natural world, that the world itself is god, as is its soul which pervades everything… and also the force of fate and the necessity of future events.

<div align="right">(Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 1.39)</div>

Stoic materialism, Stoic rationalism and Stoic providence are one and the same.[15]

Ironically, Marcellus unintentionally echoes the Stoic teaching. Reporting that the Ghost is gone, he declares,

> We do it wrong, being so majestical,
> To offer it the show of violence,
> For it is as the air, invulnerable,
> And our vain blows malicious mockery.

<div align="right">(1.1.148–51)</div>

Marcellus evidently intends to say that the guards' striking is a mere mockery of harm, since the Ghost, being like air, is invulnerable to blows. Yet he inadvertently says something else. His 'For' is causal. It connects what is so majestical and what is air-like. Mimicking the Stoic identification of breath (*pneuma*) and the highest cosmic principle, Marcellus says that the guards wrong the Ghost because it is so majestical, and it is so majestical because it is like the air. In striking at the Ghost, he unwittingly suggests, the guards commit the folly

of those who try to resist or prevail against the inescapable rule of divine providence or fate. Owing to the internal completeness and divine ordering of the world, such resistance is futile and foolish. 'Fate leads the willing, and drags the unwilling' (Seneca, *Letters*, 107.11).

Cosmopolitanism

Although – or because – his virtue is radically internalized, a Stoic is 'a citizen of the world' (Epictetus, *Discourses*, 2.10.3). While living in the particular city in which he finds himself by accident of birth, his true home is the cosmopolitan community of reason of which all men (or at least all wise men) are members.[16] The middle range lying between the inner realm of the mind and the world community – chiefly, one's native country – largely falls away in significance.

Horatio thus has highly equivocal ties to Denmark. He calls Denmark 'our state' and King Hamlet 'our King' and 'our valiant Hamlet', and he and Marcellus announce themselves as 'Friends to this ground' and 'Liegemen to the Dane' (1.1.16, 72, 84, 87, 94). He also seems well acquainted with Danish military and political history, with what is being said at court and to have known the former King well. After Hamlet sails to England, he is at court and in attendance on the Queen, and he is able to gain for the sailors an audience with the King. Yet he nonetheless seems a stranger both to Denmark and to the court. Although a Dane by birth, he needs to be told a Danish custom which Hamlet says is known widely in other nations (1.4.12ff.). As late as Act Five, he will not know Laertes or Osric and will never have heard of Yorick, King Hamlet's jester. When he first enters with Marcellus and Barnardo asks whether he is there, he answers, with a mild joke, 'A piece of him' (1.1.22). Horatio is always partly absent from the world around him.

Even his ties to Hamlet seem equivocal. Despite being back from Wittenberg for a month, he has not yet seen Hamlet, who is surprised to see him and is, strangely, unsure that it is Horatio whom he sees: 'Horatio – or do I forget myself' (1.2.161). Shakespeare shows their great mutual affection and high regard. But he also makes us wonder whether Horatio would have tried to see Hamlet had the Ghost not appeared and had Marcellus and Barnardo not approached him to witness its reappearance.

At the same time, his friendships seem limited to Hamlet. When Hamlet is at sea, a servant reports to Horatio that some seafaring men have a letter for him. Even though the servant does not say who wrote it, Horatio has no doubt. He is certain that it comes from Hamlet: 'I do not know from what part of the world / I should be greeted, if not from Lord Hamlet' (4.6.4–5). Cosmopolitanism serves to isolate him.

Horatio's tenuous ties are dramaturgically reflected in Shakespeare's presentation of him. Horatio appears in nearly half the play's scenes, is Hamlet's only confidant and is the principal speaker at both the beginning and the end of the play. He is the first major character to appear and the only one to survive the final events. Yet he is missing from all of Act Two and, apart from the Mousetrap and Recorder Scene, from all of Act Three. With that exception, he is not seen or heard from the last appearance of the Ghost in Act One to Ophelia's madness in Act Four. And while he speaks more than half the lines in the opening scene and more than half the lines following Hamlet's death, he has only about sixty (including seventeen reading Hamlet's letter) from Ophelia's madness to Hamlet's death even though he remains on stage for nearly two thirds of the time. Stoicism teaches that there are no means between extremes: either a statement or its negation is true, there are no degrees of goodness or of badness, there is nothing between virtue and vice, a stick must be either straight or crooked, things are or are not fated to happen, all but the wise are equally foolish and unjust, and so on. Reflecting Stoicism's exclusion of the middle ground, Horatio is literally missing from the middle.[17]

Reason, fortune and generation

When Hamlet learns that Claudius will attend the *Gonzago* performance, he calls for Horatio, who appears suddenly. Praising him as the most even-tempered man he has ever known, Hamlet emphasizes that he has chosen Horatio as his friend: 'Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice, / And could of men distinguish her election, / Sh'ath seal'd thee for herself' (3.2.63–5). Hamlet singles out Horatio's superiority to 'Fortune's buffets and rewards'. His 'blood and judgment are so well commeddled', he says, 'That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger / To sound what stop she please' (3.2.67, 69–71). Both Hamlet's friendship for Horatio and Horatio himself are free from the rule of fortune. Horatio is master of his soul; Hamlet's soul is mistress of its choice. Since Stoic friendship is friendship in reason, reason rules both Horatio's soul and Hamlet's choosing. Horatio is worthy of Hamlet's choice, because he is ruled by reason: 'Give me that man / That is not passion's

slave, and I will wear him / In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart, / As I do thee' (3.2.71–4).[18] Horatio's superiority to fortune may explain why he appears out of the blue, as soon as Hamlet summons him, after an absence of over one-thousand lines: things happen as reason would have them.

For the same reason, Horatio is anti-generation. He rejects generation, for generation is naturally subject to fortune. As Claudius and old Hamlet conspicuously demonstrate, kin are not always of the same kind: 'My father's brother – but no more like my father / Than I to Hercules' (1.2.152–3). Since the element of fortune in generation frustrates the rule of virtue, Socrates banishes human birth in addition to families from the just city, so that virtue, not fortune, may rule (Plato, *Republic*, 415d8). Horatio, in effect, follows Socrates' lead. Women and generation are almost entirely absent from his life. In a play in which families are central, his is never mentioned. All we know of his personal circumstances are that he is Hamlet's close friend and a scholar who has returned from Wittenberg. Altogether, he speaks but two lines either to or about a woman (4.5.14–15). Just as he thinks that education can supersede birth, he seems to think that only the 'earth' contains a 'womb' (1.1.140).[19]

Not only is his own family missing. Horatio never exchanges a word with Hamlet about Ophelia, not even when he knows of her madness but Hamlet does not. Hamlet has to discover the news of her madness and her death for himself in the graveyard. When Hamlet asks what brought him back from Wittenberg, Horatio self-deprecatingly replies, 'A truant disposition' (1.2.169). Horatio's jest proves true in an unfortunate way. When Ophelia goes mad, Claudius orders him to 'Follow her close; give her good watch' (4.5.74). But Horatio no sooner receives Hamlet's letter than he hurries off to meet his return from sea, and his truancy allows her to die.

Laertes is Horatio's opposite number. Named after Odysseus' father, he is the chief spokesman in *Hamlet* for the duties and privileges of birth. Notwithstanding his father's role in Claudius' election as king, he speaks as though Denmark were a hereditary, not an elective, monarchy. To Laertes, the family means everything. Vowing not to let anything in this world or the next keep him from being thoroughly revenged for his father's death, he pledges to do whatever is necessary, however wicked or impious, 'to show [him]self indeed [his] father's son' (4.7.124). To have but a single calm drop of blood, he declares, would dishonour his birth, his father and his mother. Where Horatio thinks that choice can substitute for birth, Laertes thinks that 'choice [must be] circumscrib'd' by 'birth' (1.3.22, 18). If 'the womb of earth' could be Horatio's motto, 'subject to his birth' (1.3.18) could be Laertes'.

Self-dramatization and death

Self-dramatization is quintessentially Stoic. Stoicism leads men to see themselves as actors on the stage. Fate gives us our duties in life, which we must perform: 'this drama of human life, where in we are assigned the parts which we are to play', Seneca writes, using a common Stoic metaphor (Seneca, *Letters*, 80.7). But while performing the duties which fate has set for him, a Stoic, believing that his happiness is independent of anything outside his mind, performs those actions like an actor playing a role: 'Remember that you are an actor in a play. … [Y]our duty is to act well the part that is given you; the choice of the part is Another's' (Epictetus, *Enchiridion*, 17). At least one step removed from what would affect his happiness, a Stoic's actions are performed as though they were real, as though their outcomes really mattered, while what really matters is how well – how 'stoically', or impassively – he performs them.[20]

Death, to which a Stoic should be serenely resigned,[21] especially lends itself to Stoic self-dramatization. Thus, like Cato and Seneca,[22] Hamlet, who dies as a Stoic,[23] turns his death into a histrionic performance. Announcing his own death ('I am dead, Horatio'), he addresses the court in distinctly theatrical terms:

> You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
> That are but mutes or audience to this act,
> Had I but time – as this fell sergeant, Death
> Is strict in his arrest – O, I could tell you –
> But let it be.

(5.2.338–43)

Alluding to the fear that should be evoked by classical tragedy, Hamlet refers to his death synonymously with the theatrical terms 'this act' and 'this chance',[24] and he designates the spectators of his death as his silent co-actors and theatrical audience. He transforms his own dying 'act' into stage-acting. He enacts the death he is

undergoing. His murder becomes its own dramatization. Even Death itself – 'this fell sergeant, Death' – becomes a stock character in his drama.

Hamlet asks Horatio to do what he cannot do for himself: 'Horatio, I am dead, / Thou livest. Report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied' (5.2.343–5). No one else knows of Claudius' crime and the reason for Hamlet's antic behaviour. Horatio, however, initially refuses. 'Never believe it', he declares, reaching for the drink that poisoned Hamlet. 'I am more an antique Roman than a Dane. / Here's yet some liquor left' (5.2.345–7). Romans kill themselves rather than live unworthy lives. For Stoics, in particular, suicide is an escape from servitude. A man can never be unwillingly enslaved because – to use a favourite Stoic formula – the door to freedom always stands open.[25] Horatio would kill himself, however, not to protect his freedom or his virtue but to avoid outliving his only friend. Just as he could not imagine anyone but Hamlet writing him a letter, he cannot imagine living a worthy life without him. Horatio, paradoxically, is never less a Stoic than when he attempts suicide. His would-be death is a testament of love, not a demonstration of Stoic constancy or freedom.

When Fortinbras, entering, asks to see 'this sight', Horatio, now ready to carry out Hamlet's request, answers, 'What is it you would see? / If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search' (5.2.367–8). Like Hamlet, he describes the sight as a dramatization of Hamlet's death. Closely paraphrasing Aristotle's account of the emotional and intellectual effects of tragedy (Aristotle, 1449b27, 1460a11–12), he echoes Hamlet's description of those who are witnesses or audience to his death ('look pale and tremble at this chance'). He who wishes to see an ancient tragedy need search no further.

Then, ordering that the dead 'bodies / High on a stage be placed to the view' (5.2.382–3), Horatio summarizes the story he will tell:

> So shall you hear
> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause,
> And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
> Fall'n on the inventors' heads.

> (5.2.385–90)

Horatio speaks only in generalities. He describes kinds of acts, not particular acts. He mentions no names, refers to no particular circumstances and uses only generalized plural nouns ('acts', 'judgments', 'slaughters', 'deaths', 'purposes', 'inventors', 'heads'). He de-particularizes and depersonalizes Hamlet's tragic story. Like Stoic reasoning, his resumé is formulaic.[26] It describes categories of actions which are typically depicted in tragedies. Not surprisingly, while corresponding to some events in the play and including the ironic pattern of deeds returning upon those who do them, it omits Ophelia's death. Most significantly, it gives no hint of Hamlet's inner struggle. It treats Hamlet and his tragedy entirely from the outside.

Horatio performs the service of a friend, but we are forced to wonder whether his Stoic empiricism blinds him to Hamlet's inner life: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy' (1.5.174–5). If Stoic empiricism cannot know the Christian God, neither can it read the deepest passions of another man's soul. Horatio, nevertheless, confidently promises, 'All this can I / truly deliver' (5.2.390–1). Never more confident, Horatio promises to live up to his name. 'Horatio', in Latin, means orator. In contrast to the action of his early Roman namesake, who single-handedly staved off an invasion of Rome,[27] this Horatio's most confident action will be to speak. Horatio also puns with another theatrical trope as he promises to 'truly deliver' Hamlet's story. In theatrically delivering Hamlet's story, he will serve as his midwife (cf. 2.2.208–11). His only offspring will be Hamlet's posthumous story. '[I]ncited by texts, [the humanists] gave birth for themselves', Petrarch writes (quoted by Brann (1979: 74)). The Stoic Horatio seems to take Petrarch's phrase literally. As life is seen as though it were a drama on the stage, speech supplants life completely.

*

Shakespeare demonstrates a first-rate knowledge of the philosophies he presents. His philosophical understanding is detailed, far-reaching and deep, and depicted with a subtlety often lost on his readers. ''[T]was caviar to the general' (2.2.432–3). We can see his knowledge clearly in his presentation of Horatio, as well as in that of the Stoic Brutus, the Epicurean Cassius, the Academic Sceptic Cicero in *Julius Caesar*, the Cynic Apemantus in *Timon of Athens* (Blits (1993), (2015), (2016)), and elsewhere, where it is implied if not made explicit. But as Shakespeare's knowledge is thorough, so too must be that of his serious commentators. At the

very least, scholars must be open to the possibility that Shakespeare has an understanding from which they might learn. Receptivity is indispensable. In particular, commentators should avoid foisting any theory onto a play – whether simply presuming the historicist reduction of Shakespeare to the thought of his time or explicitly imposing a currently fashionable hermeneutical theory. Instead, they should seek to get out of the play what Shakespeare deliberately put into it. However, to do so, besides having the necessary learning, scholars must have a certain intellectual modesty and take seriously that the author they are studying may surpass them not only in talent but in philosophical understanding.

Related topics

Notes

1 Oxford is named once (*2 Henry IV*, 3.2.9).
2 All references to *Hamlet* are to the Shakespeare (1995) edition.
3 Although Hamlet, in the context of play-acting, once puns upon Brutus' name without mentioning it (3.2.104), the only republican Roman he or Horatio ever mentions is Roscius, the actor (2.2.386).
4 Diogenes Laertius, (1970), *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, 7.140, 143. Hereafter cited as D.L.
5 Shakespeare chooses Claudius' name. In his sources, Saxo and Belleforest, the king is named Feng or Fengo (Bullough 1973: 60ff.).
6 By combining a stark antithesis with symploce while reversing the meaning of the verb 'suff'ring', Shakespeare draws attention to Stoic virtue and happiness, like so much else in Stoic thought, as essentially double negatives; see Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 5.42–3; D.L., 7.69–73.
7 See, for example, Cicero, *De finibus,* 3.16ff., *Tusculan Disputations*, 5.42–3, *Stoic Paradoxes,* 16-19; Seneca, *Letters*, 9.2–22, 85.37, 92.3–7, *On Providence,* 5.7–6.9, *On the Happy Life;* Epictetus, *Discourses,* 1.1, *Manual,* 8, *Frag.*, 8; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations,* 4.7; D.L., 7.89ff.
8 While a truthful impression (*phantasia*) arises from a real object, a 'fantasy' (*phantasma*) comes from nothing (D.L., 7.50).
9 'No man hath seen God at any time' (John 1.18). 'Now unto the King everlasting, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever' (1 Timothy, 1.17). *The Geneva Bible* (1560), Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969, with modernized spelling.
10 Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 2.60–70; D.L., 7.135–9.
11 Cicero, *De oratore*, 1.230, *Orator*, 113; Quintilian, *Institutes*, 5, pref.1; D.L., 7.59.
12 He speaks this way again only in his farewell to Hamlet (5.2.364–5).
13 Seneca, *Letters,* 106, 117.2; Plutarch, *Against the Stoics*, 45 (1084b–d); Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors*, 8.263. Some Stoics exempt time, place, void and certain logical entities that exist only in thought such as propositions and predicates (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors,* 10.218).
14 Cicero, *Academica,* 1.39, *De officiis,* 1.132, *De natura deorum*, 2.29ff; Seneca, *Letters,* 106.4, 117.2.
15 See, further, Cicero, *De natura deorum,* 1.37, 2.73–153, *On Fate,* 34; Seneca, *Consolation to Helvia,* 8.3; D.L., 7.139, 142–3, 149.
16 Cicero, *De finibus*, 3.64; Seneca, *On Leisure*, 4.1; Marcus Aurelius, 4.4.
17 For Stoicism's excluded middle, see Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 1.14, *Academica*, 2.95, *De finibus*, 3.48, *De fato*, 21; Seneca, *Letters*, 66.10; Plutarch, *Against the Stoics*, 10 (1062e–f); Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 2.156–7, 166–7, 194; D.L., 7.79, 127. Zeno argues that only one side of an argument need be heard, for the first speaker either proves or does not prove his case, making a second speaker unnecessary (Plutarch, *On Stoic Self-Contradictions*, 8 (1034e)).
18 Cicero, *De nature deorum*, 122; D.L., 7.23, 124.
19 This may not be simply a figure of speech. Stoicism maintains that human nature is part of the nature of the whole, and cosmic creation and human procreation are essentially the same. 'Just as [in animal generation] the sperm is enveloped in the seminal fluid, so, [Zeus], who is the seminal reason [*spermatikos logos*] of the

cosmos, stays behind as such in the moisture, making the matter adapted to himself for successive stages of generation; then he gave birth to the four elements first of all – fire, water, air, earth' (D.L., 7.136).

20 See, for example, Cicero, *On Old Age*, 70; Seneca, *Letters*, 7.11–12, 29.12, 74.7, 76.31, 77.20, 80.7, 84.9–10, 108.6–8, 115.14ff, 120.22; Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1.2.16, 29.42, 3.22.26, *Manual*, 17; Marcus Aurelius, 3.8, 10.27, 12.36; D.L., 7.160.

21 'Man, thou hast been a citizen in this great city [the world]; what matters it to thee whether for five years [or a hundred]? … What is the hardship, then… ? [It is] as if a master of the show were to dismiss an actor from the stage. "But I have not played my five acts, but only three." Thou sayst well, but in life the three acts are the whole drama. For he that is the cause yesterday of your composition, and today of your dissolution, determines when it is complete; but thou art the cause of neither' (Marcus Aurelius, 12.36; see also Epictetus, *Discourses*, 3.214.84–5, *Manual*, 5).

22 Seneca, *On Providence*, 2.7–12; Plutarch, *Cato the Younger*, 67–70; Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.62–4.

23 Dying, Hamlet no longer expresses his earlier Christian concerns. He says nothing about the fate of his soul, does not ask for God's forgiveness or utter any other sort of prayer and mentions God only to swear the importance of his good name in this world ('O God, Horatio, what a wounded name…' (5.2.349)). No longer brooding on an afterlife, he now speaks of death as 'felicity' (5.2.352).

24 For 'chance' as both a tragic event and its apparent external cause, see Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452a1–11.

25 See, for example, Seneca, *On Anger,* 3.15.4, *On Providence*, 6.9, *Letters,* 12.10, 26.10, 65.22, 70.5, 14–16, 77.15, 117.21–2; Epictetus, *Discourses,* 1.24.20, *Manual,* 21; Marcus Aurelius, 5.29, 8.47, 10.8; D.L., 7.130.

26 Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 1.14, *Academica*, 2.95; Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors*, 7.19; Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1.25.11–13; D.L., 7.40, 65.

27 Polybius, *Histories*, 6.55.1–4; Livy, *History of Rome*, 2.10. See also the earlier Horatii brothers, Livy 1.24–6.

Further reading

Arnold, E.V., 1911. *Roman Stoicism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. A topically arranged, comprehensive treatment (with notes and quotes) of Greek and Roman Stoic teachings. Although generally sound and helpful, it exaggerates Greek philosophy's debt to eastern thought and, at the other end, Stoicism's influence on Christianity.

Blits, J., 2001. *Deadly Thought: 'Hamlet' and the Human Soul*. Lanham: Lexington Books. A close study of the play, proceeding scene-by-scene, line by line, drawing out the philosophical substance that Shakespeare deliberately put into it.

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Zeller, E., 1870. *The Stoics, Epicurean and Sceptics*. Translated by O.J. Reichel. London: Longman's, Greene and Co. A seminal nineteenth-century explication of basic doctrines, with texts and notes, which, despite its age and strong Hegelian influence, remains useful and impressive.

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16

SOVEREIGNTY, SOCIAL CONTRACT, AND THE STATE OF NATURE IN *KING LEAR*

Stella Achilleos

A number of studies in recent years have shown increasing interest in situating Shakespeare's works within the context of early modern political thought, thereby furthering our understanding of his engagement with politics and political ideas.[1] *King Lear* (1605–6), one of his more overtly political plays, could not but attract considerable attention as it provides one of his most profound interrogations of sovereignty.[2] Recent studies concentrating on the play have often analysed it in relation to the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, especially as Lear's division of the kingdom gives way to an intense moment of political crisis likened by scholars to what Hobbes defines as the 'state of nature'.[3] As I would like to suggest in this chapter – that takes its cue from these studies – while Shakespeare's play may be said to foreshadow a number of the questions that later came under the close scrutiny of Hobbes, more specifically in his *Leviathan* (1651), Shakespeare appears to have been conversant in *King Lear* with a much broader set of ideas, especially those found in the political philosophies of Jean Bodin and Robert Filmer. In making this suggestion, I do not wish to claim that Bodin's writings had any direct impact on Shakespeare or that Shakespeare had any influence on political theorists who came after him, such as Filmer and Hobbes, but to trace Shakespeare's engagement with a shared set of questions: most prominently, questions about the origins and limits of political power and authority.

Sovereignty and Lear's inauthentic gift

Analyses of the concept of sovereignty in *King Lear* have often concentrated on the figure of the titular character and the apparent lack of wisdom he exhibits when he announces his decision to abdicate from the throne and divide his kingdom among his daughters, so as 'To shake all cares and business from our age, / Conferring them on younger strengths, while we / Unburdened crawl toward death' (1.1.38–40).[4] The opening scene in which Lear speaks these words has a distinctly ceremonial character that emphasizes Lear's majesty and sovereign power – an element that is further confirmed by his own use of the royal plural. Yet, ironically, this confirmation of absolute sovereignty marks the moment of its upcoming fracture and division. Indeed, Lear's decision here causes multiple types of rupture to what has come to be known as the 'King's two bodies': the medieval legal theory, extensively explored by Ernst Kantorowicz in his magisterial volume on the subject, that presented the body of the sovereign as a composite figure made up of the immaterial and immortal body politic (i.e. the king's sovereignty) and the material and mortal body natural.[5]

Lear's division of his kingdom significantly challenges the way in which these two bodies were configured in relation to each other: for while the two were seen as indivisible within the body of the sovereign, the body natural was considered to be inferior and always subject to the body politic. For a number of Shakespeare's contemporaries, a king's distribution of his lands amounted to a gross violation of the body politic on his part, an action they deemed illegal. As R. A. Foakes notes, the question concerning the legality of land distribution by kings was raised during the Elizabethan period when the Queen, following her inquiry into the possibility of disposing property, was advised by her counsel that 'any property, whether it came by descent from royal ancestors or from other sources, had to be regarded as part of the royal estate,

and not as owned by the monarch as an individual'. As a means of supporting this view, Queen Elizabeth's counsellors evoked the concept of the king's two bodies, based on which a king

> could not give away lands to a subject in his own person, but only by an open letter of authorization formally conferring the title, written on parchment and with the great seal attached, as the law prescribed: 'the land shall pass by the King's letters patent only by the course of the common law'.[6]

Citing earlier discussions of this issue in such texts as John Fortescue's *Governance of England* (1471), Brian Sheerin has more recently suggested how kings' extravagant bestowal of gifts came to be seen by commentators as a sign of bad governance that practically negated their sovereignty, leading to 'a peculiar kind of kingly self-cancellation'.[7] Such discussions may be read within the context of a larger set of debates concerning the limits of sovereign power and the extent to which it should be limited by law – discussions that marked the development of (proto-) republican discourse in early modern England. Clearly in *King Lear* we have the figure of a king who, far from being preoccupied with the possible illegality of his action, appears to endorse the idea of sovereignty as an absolute type of power that is not in any way limited or compromised. Ironically, little does Lear realize how – far from confirming his absolute sovereignty – his 'radical bestowal' or 'potlatch', the distribution of all of his lands, actually negates his sovereignty, reducing him, as Sheerin argues, to a 'nothing'.[8] He remains equally blind to how the distribution of all of his lands to his children renders him completely vulnerable: the body natural, stripped of the body politic, remains completely powerless, prey to the whims of those newly invested with power.

Yet the question concerning the legality of Lear's action somehow misplaces attention, as a great part of the havoc that follows this is caused not because of the fact that he gives his lands away but because he *divides* the kingdom. In this light, it is perhaps one of the greatest ironies in the play that Lear proclaims his desire to avoid the possibility of conflict as the main purpose behind the division of the kingdom: 'We have this hour a constant will to publish / Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife / May be prevented now' (1.1.42–4). What Lear appears to be strikingly blind to in dividing his lands between his daughters is what Shakespeare's near-contemporary French jurist and political philosopher Jean Bodin described as the indivisibility of sovereign power. First published in French in 1576, Bodin's *Les Six Livres de la République* (*The Six Books of the Republic*) also appeared in 1606 (roughly concurrently with *King Lear*) in an English translation by Richard Knolles that made Bodin's influential analysis of the concept of sovereignty more broadly available to English audiences. In this text, Bodin defined sovereign power not only as absolute and perpetual but also as indivisible. For him, the division of political power meant that power was not properly sovereign, while such division was bound to produce political conflict.[9] This is a point King James I (who ascended the throne in 1603 and probably saw a performance of *King Lear* at court in December of 1606) knew fairly well. This is clear from the advice he provides to his eldest son Henry in *Basilikon Doron* (first published in 1599 and again in 1603):

> And in case it please God to prouide you to all these three Kingdomes, make your eldest son *Isaac*, leauing him all your kingdoms; and prouide the rest with priuate possessions: Otherwayes by deuiding your kingdomes, yee shall leaue the seed of diuision and discord among your posteritie; as befell to this Ile, by the diuision and assignment thereof, to the three sonnes of *Brutus*, *Locrine*, *Albanact*, and *Camber*.[10]

As Andrew Hadfield has argued, *King Lear* may be read within the context of King James's own attempts, following his ascension to the throne in 1603, to unify Britain under a single rule. In this respect, the play 'both reflects and inverts the contemporary political situation of James, representing a king who tears Britain apart in the mistaken belief that he is handing over a secure and well-ordered kingdom to the next generation'.[11]

Lear's division of the kingdom is further complicated by his wish to continue enjoying the authority and prerogatives of kingship even after having given away his lands and power. He makes explicit reference to this in the opening scene of the play when, following Cordelia's banishment, he addresses his two sons-in-law:

> I do invest you jointly with my power,

Pre-eminence and all the large effects
That troop with majesty. Ourself by monthly course,
With reservation on an hundred knights
By you to be sustained, shall our abode
Make with you by due turn; only we shall retain
The name, and all th'addition to a king: the sway,
Revenue, execution of the rest,
Beloved sons, be yours; which to confirm,
This coronet part between you.

(1.1.131–9)

Lear's daughter Regan subsequently draws her father's attention to the untenability of this arrangement: 'How in one house', she asks, 'Should many people, under two commands, / Hold amity? 'Tis hard, almost impossible' (2.2.429–31). Regan's reference to the impossibility of effective house management when the place is under the command of two authorities neither of which is supreme is an apt metaphor for the impossibility of governing a country when sovereignty is divided.

Bodin's discussion of sovereignty is a particularly useful point of reference with regard to Lear's desire to continue enjoying the prerogatives of the sovereign, especially as it sheds light on the irony of Lear's action. For Bodin, the power of a sovereign prince can only be 'absolute' if it carries no limitations, obligations, or conditions. His analysis is based on his understanding of the idea of the 'gift' and his distinction between an authentic and an inauthentic gift. 'A true gift', he argues, 'carries no further conditions, being complete and accomplished all at once, whereas gifts that carry obligations and conditions are not authentic gifts'. On the basis of this, the power of a prince can only be sovereign if given to him as a 'true gift'. If, on the contrary, it is given to him 'subject to obligations and conditions', it 'is properly not sovereignty or absolute power'.[12] In this respect, the power given by Lear to his children is not sovereign: what appears to be a radical act of gift-giving is in fact a non-gift as it carries the old king's own terms and conditions. This multiple fracturing of sovereign power suggests an element of political naïveté, or political schizophrenia, as we could perhaps venture to call it.[13] Indeed, in a certain way, the moment of madness in the text (that has often been discussed as a consequence of the ungrateful treatment Lear subsequently receives from Goneril and Regan) may in fact be located at this earlier stage when Lear decides to divide his kingdom while retaining part of the sovereign's authority himself.[14] Ironically, while Lear may aim to confirm his adherence to absolute sovereignty through this action, his inauthentic gift to his children rather serves to negate it, inevitably producing the demise of sovereign power and plunging the kingdom into political instability.

It is within the context of such instability that Bodin himself formulated his theory on sovereignty. The *République* has been seen by many as his response to the political upheavals that ravaged France for more than three decades in the sixteenth century: the French wars of religion between Catholics and Huguenots that started in 1562 and continued well after the publication of Bodin's text. The conflicts included such violent events as the St Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572. For Bodin, peace could only be reestablished if the sovereign prince came to enjoy full control of the state by being given absolute and indivisible power. Going beyond the immediate occasion, though, it is clear that the experience of this long and intense political crisis provided for Bodin an urgent call for reflection on the ramifications of sovereign power more broadly. Of course, the Greek origin of the word 'crisis' reminds us how political crisis and reflection should come hand in hand: deriving from the verb κρίνω which means to think, judge, and decide, the Greek word κρίσις means judgement as well as crisis.

Indeed, for various others besides Bodin, the experience of political conflict in the early modern period provided an urgent call to reflect and philosophize. An example would be Thomas Hobbes, whose engagement with the question of sovereignty in *Leviathan* may well be read within the context of the political crisis caused by the English civil wars in mid-seventeenth-century England. Published in 1651, Hobbes's book makes a number of explicit references to the collapse of the state in England and the condition the country fell into in the 1640s. For Hobbes, this was nothing short of a collapse into the horrors of what he calls the 'state of nature', a state where there is war of all against all. For him, as well as for Bodin, the only way to escape that condition would be to establish an absolute and indivisible type of sovereignty that he likens in his book to the monstrous figure of the biblical Leviathan.

Rather ironically, in *King Lear* we have a reversal of this process whereby political crisis gives birth to philosophy. Indeed, if in the cases of Bodin and Hobbes, political crisis breeds the philosopher, in Shakespeare's play we have King Lear standing as the figure of the non-philosopher par excellence, the man who lacks good judgement and is no friend of wisdom – the man whose actions thereby generate political crisis. Violating what Bodin as well as Hobbes and other political theorists considered to be indivisible – that is, sovereign power – Lear casts his kingdom into a condition that is reminiscent of the Hobbesian state of nature: a condition where government collapses and power is up for grabs.

Cordelia's contractarianism and the state of nature

Yet while Lear's division of the kingdom triggers this collapse, the process, as other scholars have already suggested, is also marked by that other important moment in the text that follows upon Lear's announcement of the division: namely, his invitation to his three daughters to take part in a contest to express their love for him in public as a means of laying claim to their share of the inheritance. The scene has commonly been read as a confirmation of Lear's lack of wisdom, his reliance on flattery, and his inability to consider the possible use of empty rhetoric by Goneril and Regan or to detect the danger thereof. But scholars, especially in the last few years, have also drawn attention to the ways in which this scene invites us to think of the question of social contract as introduced by Lear's youngest daughter, Cordelia. Refusing to express her love toward her father in the exaggerated and rhetorically inflamed manner employed by her two sisters, Cordelia strikingly declares that she loves her father 'According to my bond; nor more nor less' (1.1.92), adding that 'You have begot me, bred me, loved me; I / Return those duties back as are right fit, / Obey you, love you, and most honor you' (1.1.95–7).

As Alex Schulman notes in his recent discussion of this scene, by providing this response 'Cordelia breaks apart affective-hierarchical bonds by introducing rational-contractarian ones'.[15] Through this scene, Schulman further comments, Shakespeare 'depicts a breaking of hierarchical order by early modern rationalism and egalitarianism similar to that advertised by social contract theorists like Hobbes'.[16] As another scholar has also ventured to suggest, Cordelia is a character who provides 'our first modern person'.[17] Indeed, as I would also like to argue, Cordelia's response invites us to consider the idea of sovereignty from yet another dimension. Yet Cordelia's sense of modernity, her rational search for a radical sense of autonomy, may be found not so much in her purportedly radical formulation of her relationship with her father in terms of a 'bond' but in her critique of her sisters' excessive demonstrations of love for their father while they are married – arguably the place where she sounds most conservative.

As Cordelia says, 'Why have my sisters husbands, if they say / They love you all?' (1.1.98–9), to which she adds: 'Haply, when I shall wed, / That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry / Half my love with him, half my care and duty' (1.1.99–101). In the view of feminist criticism, these words may point to the continued submission of early modern women to patriarchal rule before as well as after marriage, an institution that would merely involve a transition from the rule of the father to that of the husband. However, from a different perspective (going beyond the absurdity of dividing love in equal shares), Cordelia's remark raises a profound question concerning the limits of paternal power, a question that was central in a broader set of texts that addressed the relation between paternal and kingly power (the two being conflated in Shakespeare's play in the figure of King Lear).

Here it is useful to bring *King Lear* into dialogue with Robert Filmer's theory of absolute monarchy in *Patriarcha* (published in 1680). In this text, Filmer (who firmly rejects the idea that political obligation is based on contract and that the authority of parents derives from their children's consent) suggests that the power and authority of kings derives from the natural power and authority of parents and should therefore not be contested. Responding to Aristotle's well-known distinction between the household and the 'polis' in *Politics*,[18] Filmer contends that the two may be different in size but there is no substantial difference between one type of authority and the other. Looking into the origin of political power and authority in an analysis that presents Adam as the first patriarch-king, Filmer then tries to refute the idea that fatherly power is limited over those members of the family that live within the household. As he suggests, the power of the father extends over his children even after they leave his house as they do not thereby cease being part of his family. The family, he argues, is not confined within the spatial boundaries of a house, and for this

reason the Greek word used to refer to it (οἰκογένεια) is not a fitting term as it implies this restriction of the family within the space of the οἶκος, the house. This point, which lies at the heart of Filmer's definition of fatherly/kingly power as a kind of power that is both absolute and perpetual, may implicitly be traced in various other texts that advocated absolute monarchy and the divine right of kingship, with a well-known example found in King James I's *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (published in 1598). In launching her critique of her sisters' proclamations of absolute love to their father, Cordelia shows the urge to interrogate and dismantle the perpetual types of power described in these texts.

This interrogation carries the possibility of a more radical set of political implications than Cordelia's contractarianism as it is expressed in her definition of the relationship between father and child in terms of a 'bond'. Indeed, as I suggest, while that contractarianism may no doubt be said to evoke a type of rationalism akin to the ideas proposed by social-contract theories, as Schulman has argued, it in fact shies away from the radical kind of implications this concept acquires in Hobbes's relevant discussion in *Leviathan*. The latter is found in the section where Hobbes analyses 'Dominion by Generation': here he argues that filial obligation is contractual as the child's duty to obey the parent does not derive from the fact that the parent begat the child but from the fact that the parent provides protection and ensures the child's preservation. Therefore, by implication, on the basis of tacit consent, the child is understood to owe a duty of obedience to whoever provides that protection, irrespective of whether that is the biological parent or not.[19] The political implications are fairly clear considering the parallel between this idea and Hobbes's description of 'Dominion by Conquest': like children, those conquered submit their obedience to the conqueror purely on the basis of the fact that the conqueror is the one in a position to allow the preservation of their lives[20] (thereby, Hobbes's radical interpretation of paternal dominion produces a conservative social-contract theory that legitimates the power of the conqueror).

Yet Cordelia's idea of a 'bond' between father and child is strikingly different: for while Hobbes's contract overrides biological bonds, her own contract very much includes the natural or biological bond between father and child – 'You have begot me', as she says. This understanding of the contract does not involve a complete shattering of affective bonds, as Schulman suggests. In fact, it is Cordelia who provides an affirmation of the significance of affective bonds following the immersion in a 'state of nature' in *King Lear*. As her words in the opening scene of the play also indicate, her clear urge to challenge the limits of paternal power is strikingly balanced against an equal urge to continue loving her father. Her future husband will only take 'Half my love with him, half my care and duty' (1.1.101), implying that the other half will remain firmly with her father. In this respect, the space Cordelia comes to occupy is that of divided allegiances, as her contractarianism is combined with a continued affirmation of affective bonds. This continued, even if uneasy, oscillation between the two is figured spatially following Cordelia's marriage to the King of France in her split between her two countries: her paternal country and that of her new husband. The fact that, despite her cruel and unwarranted banishment by her father, she returns to England from France to help her father reinstate himself is a powerful confirmation of her unfailing adherence to her affective bond with Lear. Ultimately, if Cordelia's subscription to the idea of contract is meant to stand for early modern rationalism, her continued belief in affective bonds signifies her refusal to erase affect from the realm of reason and to firmly separate the two.

Cordelia's logic here – what one might call her 'affective reason' – no doubt challenges the logic of Hobbes's *Leviathan*. But Cordelia is certainly not the only one to pose such a challenge in *King Lear*. Shakespeare's play, very much like Hobbes's *Leviathan*, raises the important political question: who does one show obedience and allegiance to when the established political order collapses and a new form or new forms of power become dominant? As becomes clear from his discussion of 'Dominion by Conquest', Hobbes would firmly suggest showing allegiance to the strongest: his emphasis on the idea of self-preservation – the one and only inalienable 'Right of Nature' – clearly prescribes this course of action. But for certain characters in *King Lear*, the collapse of Lear's old regime produces a situation where political allegiance can be, at best, divided. Gloucester's case is quite telling: his initial sympathy with the new rulers and his promptness to offer his hospitality to them soon wavers as he comes face to face with their cruel treatment of Lear. The cynicism of the new order turns his allegiance firmly back to Lear, despite the awareness of the grave danger involved in this decision. Another example can be found in the character of the servant who tries to prevent his master, Cornwall, from plucking Gloucester's eyes out in Act 3 Scene 7. For the servant, who pays with his life for this, his active resistance to his master is simultaneously an

ultimate act of good service. As he says: 'Hold your hand, my lord. / I have served you ever since I was a child, / But better service have I never done you / Than now to bid you hold' (3.7.71–4).

It is no surprise that the condition of political instability produced here, a condition where power is split and therefore contested, has been likened to what Hobbes describes as a 'state of nature': a state where there is no government, since government as a unified body has collapsed. Going back to the significance of Cordelia's 'affective reason', it is important to note that the 'state of nature' Shakespeare brings before our eyes in *King Lear* does not only involve the collapse of government but also a widespread deterioration of affective bonds between parents and children. Like Cordelia, Edgar continues to sustain the affective bond to his father Gloucester; he is also banished in an unwarranted manner by his father but runs to his rescue as soon as he sees him cast out in hardship, having been blinded. In the cases of Goneril, Regan, and Edmund, though, we have a complete disintegration of this relationship. Goneril and Regan's attempts to curtail their father's prerogatives following his abdication from the throne may perhaps be justified to a certain extent: unlike him, they seem to be more attuned to the difficulties involved in ruling when dual authority is in place and their attempt to establish themselves as new rulers must inevitably involve their confrontation with Lear. However, this confrontation acquires an altogether different dimension when Lear is ruthlessly cast out in the storm and the doors are shut fast behind him: the cynicism of this action also marks the beginning of a course of excessive violence in the text that escalates with Gloucester's blinding and then with Regan's poisoning by Goneril and the latter's suicide. Gloucester's blinding is an event which is partly the result of the cynicism exhibited by Gloucester's son Edmund, who having orchestrated the banishment of his brother Edgar, does not hesitate to give his father away as a traitor.

In both of these instances, we seem to have an absolute literalization of Hobbes's discussion of contract in his analysis of 'Dominion by Generation' since the two sisters as much as Edmund provide examples of children who demonstrate absolutely no regard for natural bonds. Ironically, this is also an image of the Hobbesian 'state of nature' at its most extreme, where 'the war of all against all' is so all-encompassing that it starts within the family itself. For Shakespeare, this provides an opportunity to explore what Hobbes calls 'the natural condition of mankind', and it is no coincidence, in this respect, that in *King Lear* the term 'nature' itself becomes highly contested. For Edmund, whose 'philosopher… is Hobbes', as John Danby has long argued,[21] far from enclosing any ties of affection between parents and children, 'Nature' (as he invokes it in his soliloquy at the beginning of Act 1 Scene 2) is also a condition where positive laws are completely annihilated, everyone is put on an equal footing, and everything (including power, property, and position) is up for grabs by whoever can prevail. The law of nature to which Edmund says 'My services are bound' (1.2.2) is the law of lawlessness as found in Hobbes's 'state of nature'. In that condition, Hobbes suggests, men are naturally equal, for, even though there may be differences in physical strength or in intelligence between one man and another, they are all equal in their capacity to kill each other. Indeed, while strength of body may appear to give one the upper hand, he who is physically weaker still 'has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himselfe'.[22] This is exactly the kind of space Edmund tries to open up for himself in *King Lear*, identifying his brother and father as easy targets: 'A credulous father and a brother noble', he says, 'Whose nature is so far from doing harms / That he suspects none – on whose foolish honesty / My practices ride easy' (1.2.177–80).

Unavoidably perhaps, Shakespeare's exploration of the 'natural condition of mankind' also prompts a question concerning the boundaries between humanity and animality. The text contains a great number of points that invite this question, ranging from Lear's numerous references to Goneril and Regan as savage beasts to his realization after his conflict with both of them that if human nature is not provided with more than animal nature requires, 'Man's life is cheap as beast's' (2.2.456). Having lost his power entirely, Lear practically comes to identify himself with what he calls the 'Unaccommodated man' (3.4.105), 'the thing itself' (3.4.104) that is no more than 'a poor, bare, forked animal' (3.4.105–6).[23] Of course, the comparison between the human and the animal prompts a philosophical question that goes a long way back, perhaps as far back as philosophy itself. In the *Politics*, Aristotle advances his theory on human nature and in particular his idea that man is by nature a political animal ('υύσει πολιτικόν ζῷον') by drawing a distinction between man and bees or other social animals. For him, the question is not whether man is an animal or not, but what kind of an animal he is and the degree to which he differs from other animals. It is clear, he suggests, that 'man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal' – an idea that he

explains on the basis of the fact that only man 'possesses speech' ('λόγον') and can express moral qualities by articulating his perception of good and bad, right and wrong. For, 'it is partnership in these things', as he says, 'that makes a household and a city-state'.[24]

Hobbes in *Leviathan* reacts firmly against this Aristotelian definition of man as a political animal, suggesting that such creatures as bees and ants have a clear advantage over human beings, as the former live in society without the existence of a coercive power that forces them to do so, whereas the latter cannot. Here, he provides a list of points to justify his disagreement with Aristotle. Men, he says, 'are continually in competition for Honour and Dignity, which these creatures are not', and as a consequence they constantly live with envy and hatred for each other and therefore in a constant condition of war. Then he suggests that among creatures like bees and ants the common good is the same as the private good, whereas for human beings it is not. Besides, the use of reason, which is an element which distinguishes man from other creatures, is not necessarily, according to Hobbes, a positive attribute as this ability to judge public administration often leads men to presume that they themselves could govern more efficiently, and the situation is thereby drawn to civil conflict. Likewise, the use of voice ('λόγος'), which is so privileged in Aristotle's discussion, is seen by Hobbes as an attribute which involves not only positive but also negative dimensions: the power of language can be used by man not only to communicate his desires and affections but also to misrepresent and deceive his fellow creatures. As a final point, Hobbes concludes that whereas 'the agreement of these [other] creatures is Naturall; that of men, is by Covenant only, which is Artificiall'.[25] For him, human beings can only behave in a way which benefits the common good if a common power forces them to do so by keeping them in awe and terror.

By interrogating the boundaries between humanity and animality, Shakespeare's *King Lear* powerfully prompts a number of the questions concerning human sociality raised by Aristotle and Hobbes. As has been noted, it may be impossible for us to know with any certainty whether Shakespeare had any direct knowledge of Aristotle and, by extension, whether any of his texts provide any direct response to Aristotelian philosophy.[26] Yet, for my argument here, whether Shakespeare had ever read Aristotle directly or was exposed to Aristotelian ideas through the mediation of other authors – classical, medieval, or (near-)contemporaries – is not so important as the fact that in *King Lear* he shows a profound engagement with and perhaps an attempt to redefine a set of ideas about human nature and human sociality that had been largely shaped by Aristotle and would be later challenged by Hobbes.[27] Notably, though, *King Lear* does not provide any definitive response to the question of human sociality, as the absolute cynicism of characters like Edmund, Goneril, and Regan is balanced against the more positive model of affective reason found in such characters as Cordelia and Edgar. This, of course, points to the actual complexity of the human kind: indeed, Shakespeare's take on human sociality seems to depart from that subsequently provided by Hobbes in the sense that Shakespeare appears to refuse to see human nature in a unified or homogenizing kind of way. His open-endedness on this question is also reflected in the open-endedness with which the text concludes: following the death of Lear and his daughters, Kent and Edgar are left on stage with Albany, who reminds them of the need to turn their attention 'to general woe' (5.3.318). His words insistently pose the need to re-establish sovereignty so as to restore order. However, the invitation he extends to the other two characters 'to rule in this realm and the gored state sustain' (5.3.319) – a possible call for them to share sovereign power with him – ironically serves to regenerate the possibility of political crisis. In this respect, the text regenerates *Leviathan*'s main concern, even while it repudiates the largely homogenizing view of human nature provided by Hobbes: is it possible for human beings to escape the violence of each other without the establishment of a Leviathan-type of sovereignty? And to what extent does Albany's gesture practically re-enact Lear's mistakes in dividing the kingdom?

Related topics

See Chapters 3, 4, 23, 24

Notes

1 See, for instance, Armitage et al. (2009).
2 For some recent discussions, see the chapters engaging with *King Lear* in Moore (2016) and Schulman (2014).
3 See Moore (2016) and Schulman (2014). These studies in many ways develop a line of reading initially introduced by Danby (1949) in his now dated but still influential book.
4 The play is hereafter cited from Shakespeare (1977).
5 Kantorowicz (1957).
6 Foakes, R. A., 'Introduction', in Shakespeare (1977: 17).
7 Sheerin (2013: 793).
8 Sheerin (2013: 790).
9 Bodin (1992) highlights that sovereignty cannot be divided, as that would render the task of giving the law – the first and foremost mark of sovereignty – highly problematic, as, for example, when sovereignty is divided between a prince and his nobles, for 'who will [then] be the subjects and who will obey if they also have the power to make law? And who will be able to make a law if he is himself constrained to receive it from those to whom he gives it?' (1992: 92).
10 Quoted by Foakes, R. A., 'Introduction', in Shakespeare (1977: 15).
11 Hadfield (2003: 578).
12 Bodin (1992: 8).
13 Here I am employing the term 'schizophrenia' to denote the simultaneous existence of contradictory and largely incompatible drives in Lear's grand political action, his division of the kingdom.
14 Rather tellingly, the first reference to madness in the text is made immediately after Lear's announcement of his decision to disown Cordelia and his investiture of power to his two sons-in-law in Act 1 Scene 1 (lines 130–9) – more specifically, by Kent in his attempt to intervene and dissuade Lear from these actions. As he says, 'be Kent unmannerly / When Lear is mad' (1.1.146–7). While at this point the term 'mad' may not necessarily denote mental derangement, it nevertheless points to the political insanity of Lear's actions.
15 Schulman (2014: 104).
16 Schulman (2014: 103).
17 Dumm (2008: 14).
18 See Aristotle (*Politics*: 29).
19 Hobbes (1991: 139–40).
20 Hobbes (1991: 141–42).
21 Danby (1949: 20).
22 Hobbes (1991: 87).
23 For a compelling discussion of Shakespeare's treatment of the relationship between human and animal in *King Lear*, see Shannon (2009). For a broader discussion of the question of the animal in the early modern period (including a version of her essay on *King Lear*), see Shannon (2013).
24 Aristotle (*Politics*: 10–11).
25 Hobbes (1991: 120).
26 Helen Small – who quotes T. W. Baldwin's comment in his classic (Baldwin (1944)) study that 'If Shakespere ever heard of Aristotle, it was the Aristotle of his own age, not that of Greece, still less that of the latest expert' – notes that while this idea has been challenged by some more recent scholarship, 'the standard view among scholars of Shakespeare's classical learning is that he had limited if any first-hand knowledge of Aristotle's works'. See Small (2007: 67–8) and (2007: 307).
27 For a study on the broader transmission of Aristotelian ideas in the Renaissance, see Schmitt (1983).

Further reading

Craig, L.H., 2001. *Of Philosophers and Kings: Political Philosophy in Shakespeare's Macbeth and King Lear*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. This book presents the view that Shakespeare is a political philosopher as well as a poet. Focusing especially on *Macbeth* and *King Lear,* it examines Shakespeare's engagement with the relationship between politics and philosophy but also such issues as the dramatist's exploration of the idea of nature.

Danby, J.F., 1949. *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear*. London: Faber and Faber. Though now dated, this book provides a significant discussion of the two contrasting views of nature in Shakespeare's *King Lear.* It suggests that one of these exemplifies ideas

presented by Francis Bacon and Richard Hooker, while the other prefigures ideas later expressed by Thomas Hobbes.

Moore, A., 2016. *Shakespeare between Machiavelli and Hobbes: Dead Body Politics*. Lanham: Lexington Books. This book examines Shakespeare's engagement with an important set of political questions (such as the origins and limits of political power and authority) by bringing some of his best-known plays in conversation with the works of Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. It includes a chapter on the dramatist's exploration of the state of nature in *King Lear* and *Othello*.

Schulman, A., 2014. *Rethinking Shakespeare's Political Philosophy: From Lear to Leviathan*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. This book explores Shakespeare's engagement with political philosophy. Reading the dramatist side by side with a wide range of political theorists in the Western canon, it suggests how Shakespeare's works portray the emergence of modern secular nationalism. It includes a chapter on *King Lear* and the state of nature.

Shannon, L., 2013. *The Accommodated Animal: Cosmopolity in Shakespearean Locales*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. This book examines the question of the animal in early modern literature and philosophy. It includes a chapter on Shakespeare's exploration of the human/animal divide in *King Lear*.

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17

JUSTICE

Some reflections on *Measure for Measure*

Tzachi Zamir

1

Forget what we know about *Measure for Measure*'s Angelo. Don't have in mind the vile molester, the quintessential abuser of authority, extorting sex from a woman anxious to save her brother's life. Focus, instead, on his character while respecting the order in which he is introduced. Do that, and it will be difficult to deny that Angelo's cold formality induces initial respect. Ordered that he must judge, Angelo will do so impartially and to the dot. Laws will be enforced even if draconian. His task is not to pick and choose among the edicts he imposes – for such sifting is done elsewhere. His role is to detect and punish violations. Appeals to fellow-feeling, to empathy, to what the fools around him call 'mercy', open up a Pandora box. He who understands everything forgives everything, and travelling down that sugary road means that there will remain no punishable act beneath the visiting moon.

The sentimental idiots surrounding him – Escalus, Isabella and her brother, Lucius, the Duke and many a future reader – simply don't get it. They pathologize what they regard as his formulaic coldness, his inability to note exceptions to rules. They are short-sighted and weak. Permitting themselves to be overwhelmed by the plight of the particular person about to be punished, they miss the larger picture. Sure, executions are nasty. Avoiding them is pacifying, and to watch them means being haunted by

the anguish of the condemned. 'Let's have them in principle, but not in practice'. Such is what the fools really wish for. What they then do is cover this sentiment up with the language of the Bible and take the moral high ground: they call the course of action which they advocate 'mercy', quoting the Sermon on the Mount, advising that we judge not lest we be judged.

But all that is rubbish. And it's difficult to know whether to begin with the impiety of the distorted biblical interpretation, or with the dishonesty of covering up one's squeamishness by moral trappings, or with the disastrous consequences of doing so. Christ didn't object to having courts as such, against judging or enforcing laws. If that's what he did in the Sermon on the Mount, all Christian nations would be violating an obvious decree.[1] The social cost of considering the particular person being judged and mitigating his punishment inevitably incurs lessening the deterrence with regard to his offence. And the problem with the particular offence Angelo is dealing with in the play – fornication – is not some prude's hostility to pleasure got outside wedlock. The problem with fornication – and, as an aside, it's always a good idea to remind ourselves that we are not permitted to think contraception here – is with the bastards. Extramarital sex means children disowned by fathers. That leads to mothers who cannot provide for themselves or for these children. Beggars, thieves and future prostitutes are thereby created from fornication. However harshly one chooses to judge the imprudent conduct of their mothers, the sons and daughters abandoned by fathers are victims who didn't choose to be such. To belittle fornication is to underestimate its destructive implications for others. It is hard to accept Raphael Holinshed's data for executions carried out during the first half of the previous century – 72,000 thieves hanged during the reign of Henry VIII.[2] But even so, hangings were an almost daily spectacle in Shakespeare's London (annual execution rates imply a hanging every three days).[3] And to look at a hanged thief at Tyburn is to consider the conditions that got him there. One need not be a Marxist to realize that when children are unprovided for because fathers do not acknowledge them as their own, they are sentenced to abject poverty, hunger and later to crime and its dire consequences.[4] So if you feel that prostitution of the kind you see around you in an early-modern theatre involves unpardonable instrumentalizing of women, don't sit down to write an academic essay about gender and

objectification. Fight the conditions that force women to become prostitutes. This means taking fornication seriously. To pity the unborn victims of irresponsible lust means waging a no-nonsense war on those who wish to go on carelessly using others for their pleasure, to hell with the consequences. The starry-eyed idiots who go about lovingly hugging each other and who urge us to take in the particularity of the condemned (Claudio in our case) believe that justice stands in opposition to mercy, that it has to be tempered by it – as if these are two entities floating about like two differently coloured balloons. But justice is not distinct from mercy. Justice *is* mercy. And once we are clear on that point, Claudio's fate should not raise any real doubts. The fact that he intends to marry Juliet is no mitigating argument: men promise to wed trusting women all the time and later go back on their word. Even Polonius knew this, urging Ophelia to evade Hamlet. Mistress Overdone tells Escalus that she is raising such a bastard in her brothel, Lucio's son, after Lucio had promised to marry Kate Keepdown (III.ii.171–4), and Lucio's telling of the matter to the disguised Duke discloses an alarming indifference:

Lucio: I was once before him [the Duke] for getting a wench with child.
Duke: Did you such a thing?
Lucio: Yes, marry, did I; but I was fain to forswear it, they would else have married me to the rotten medlar.

(IV.iv.158–61)[5]

Such, I take it, is the gist of Angelo's moral being when he is introduced. And while I am not suggesting that one must accept it, I urge us not to underestimate the integrity and force of the position he embodies.

How about Isabella? The rhetorical thunderbolts in her arguments with Angelo turn her into Shakespeare's most eloquent female character. I find it hard to disagree with Chambers who said that she was 'one of the few women in Shakespeare who can persuade'.[7] The Cordelias, Desdemonas, Portias and the rest of them cannot hold a candle to her in that respect. When it comes to arguing, she can wipe the floor with most of Shakespeare's men, too. If you are unmoved by her passionate plea for mercy when she confronts Angelo, you are made of ice. Sure, Angelo's arguments are better, his moral reasoning sounder. Still, Isabella's praise of mercy is irresistible. For her, because we are all painfully imperfect, the

dualisms that underlie judging others are disingenuous. Accordingly, to divide society up into the sinners and the righteous both stems from and reinforces a self-flattering mirage. From a God's-eye view, we are all tainted souls. Our only refuge is, thus, to appeal to God's love, not to our desert. When we exercise such attitude towards each other, we enable God's undiscriminating love to resonate within us. *Agape* is justice. It is love impartially given, overflowing into others regardless of their merits. Put differently, to act justly is to allow others, regardless of who they are, to receive all that one can give. That's why mercy *is* justice. It is impartial. It is fair. It purports to deal with serious moral violations not by the laws and edicts which direct attention to the shortcomings of others (thereby implicitly suggesting the superiority of the judge) but by undercutting the self-commending assumption according to which only some have sinned. As with Angelo's position, here, too, mercy and justice are not opposed entities. Rather, mercy is justice because it's the only attitude that could be fairly and non-hypocritically extended to the failures of others given one's own imperfection.

Philosophically, then, we are being presented with a clash of two reductions: Angelo reduces mercy into justice. Isabella reduces justice into mercy. Both positions are attractive. Angelo's responds to the world not as it is but envisages potential unborn victims of present acts and brings them into its moral horizons. Isabella's appeals to an ideal of humility, in which one's self-critical awareness mitigates how one evaluates the actions of others. Angelo's view will reduce suffering in the long run by broadening the scope of one's accountability. Isabella's will do the same through humbling human beings, by instilling in them an overarching disposition of humility.

A philosopher will examine whether or not these positions are in genuine competition, whether they respond to the same kind of questions, whether they are mutually excluding, internally consistent and the like. But Shakespeare is not interested in abstractions as such but in them being endorsed by particular minds. And here Shakespeare does not help those who wish to decide between these positions by somehow presenting either Angelo or Isabella as compelling. Angelo isn't simply a villain but one who – unlike most of Shakespeare's more charming bad guys – possesses no redeeming features. By the end of the play, we want him punished severely. Isabella too fails to become a darling. She is brutally

unsympathetic to her brother when he begs her to save him, extending none of the compassion which lesser saints than she would show a man understandably mortified by his impending execution. She can surely decline his anguished appeals without sending him to the dogs as she does (and the distaste she evokes during that episode becomes fouler when considering the private nature of the exchange: how her Christ-like self-abnegating rhetoric appears only in public and vanishes when an external audience is missing). But the moments in which she begs the Duke to pardon Angelo are the ones at which Shakespeare's intent to distance us from this woman is most strongly felt. Yes, we are made to admit that she practises what she preaches. But the price of this is showing how unappealing is the virtue for which she stands. To pardon Angelo after all he did to others (in these moments she still believes that he executed her brother) seems inexcusably excessive. It isn't merely a grotesque version of pity but, in presuming to speak on behalf of Angelo's victims, is even angering. If Shakespeare meant for Isabella to be a mouthpiece for a laudable version of the ethos of the Sermon on the Mount, for loving and pitying one's enemy, such didactics fail so miserably that we ought to pause before ascribing him such design. It is more likely that the effect intended is *not* that we merely side with Isabella.

2

Understanding the relationship between justice and mercy is, of course, central to *Measure for Measure*'s criticism, and it is often considered alongside its elaboration in *The Merchant of Venice*. What we can already appreciate, though, is that, unlike *The Merchant of Venice*, a play in which mercy and justice are simply opposed, *Measure for Measure* is much more conceptually ambitious. It offers two rival formulations in which each seemingly competing virtue is transcribed into the vocabulary of the other. Yet instead of merely confronting us with the clash, Shakespeare associates the endorsing of either positions with disagreeable characters. Is Shakespeare implying that both reductions are inadequate? Is he hinting that lofty language masks personal weaknesses? Need we withdraw from any principled position regarding such matters? Can we do so, if we are persuaded that we must?

To assist us in responding to these questions, let us take a closer look at the precise episodes in which these characters fail. Angelo's alarming collapse occurs after his moral exchange with a beautiful nun. The text Shakespeare gives him betrays very little of the deeper currents that simmer and hiss prior to their eruption. The actor tasked with turning this metamorphosis into something thicker than cardboard is not to be envied.

We have no reason to disbelieve Angelo's amazement at his own responses. A comic streak is detected if one manages to somehow suspend one's alarm during the lofty dispute between Angelo and Isabella: whenever Isabella drops a biblical allusion, or lifts her eyes up to God in devotion, Angelo experiences this as another item of clothing seductively removed in a tantalizing striptease. He cannot explain what makes Isabella's goodness and virtue capable of so swiftly amplifying the trickle of his temptation into an unstoppable cataract. He is and always has been insulated from in-your-face sensuality. Courtesans have never quickened his heart, he says. Here, though, he is not only titillated but plummets from being an unsexual, disembodied angel into the sewage of lust at its most degrading, other-annihilating form. He thereby skips the middle steps in this arc, the steps which most mortals inhabit.

Two psychological puzzles surface at this point (which I will note, though not try to solve). The first is what underlies the nun-as-sex-object desire as such. Why is it that Isabella tempts him in this way? The second is the vicious manifestation of Angelo's sexuality. The Duke too is touched by Isabella. Yet his response to this attraction is to propose to her. Why is Angelo not merely overtaken by his desire but driven to act upon it in a way that will also destroy Isabella? Why does the erotic pull remain nothing more than crass sexual desire? Angelo's failure, then, possesses a particular aggressive quality which needs to be accounted for. He is astonished by his initial attraction to Isabella, because he immediately senses that it is unaccompanied by affection or by any wish to bond with Isabella as a person – that is, it is restricted to sex, the kind of sex that her own values (and his own) must condemn. (Disturbingly, the fact that the Duke proposes to Isabella at the end of the play – while expressing a more holistic eroticism – is another destructive motion with regard to what she wished to be: a sister. The play seems intent on not allowing this woman to remain who she is, even when male desire limits itself to socially approved channels.)[6]

That's Angelo's failure. Let us turn to Isabella. Isabella's failure – her unmitigated scorn for her brother when proving unable to extend sympathy for the dire circumstances that led him to ask that she accede to Angelo's sexual extortion – appears to be caused by two features of Claudio's rhetoric. The first is the force of his terrifying description of death and the description's possible effect on her. The second is the manner whereby his words echo Angelo's, sophistically suggesting how sin may become a virtue. You do not need to be an expert in rhetoric to perceive that getting a would-be nun to imagine the state of damned souls and then asking her to sin on your behalf is counterproductive. Yet Isabella could intuit that it is precisely Claudio's impracticality that bespeaks the authenticity of his plea. Recognizing the crippling dread with which he is beset, Isabella – pitiful, merciful Isabella – could have been slightly more understanding in response to what he says. Just say 'no' and that would be it. Something like the line she pursues at the beginning of their exchange – earthly existence is unimportant, whereas damning sins compromise one's everlasting state – would have sufficed. Instead we get this:

> Oh, you beast! Oh faithless coward, oh dishonest wretch! Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice? Is't not a kind of incest to take life from thine own sister's shame? What should I think? Heaven shield my mother played my father fair, for such a warped slip of wilderness Ne'er issued from his blood. Take my defiance, Die, perish. Might but my bending down reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed. I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death, No word to save thee.

> (III.i.137–48)

Brr… *Agape* is thrown out of the window. What we hear from Isabella is thunder – nothing but thunder. Why does she collapse in such a way?

Unlike Angelo's moral breakdown, which consisted in what he chose to *do*, Isabella's refusal to be ravished on her brother's behalf is not immoral (in her terms). There is no problem with the *act* she performs as such. But given the harsh *manner* in which she declines, the episode constitutes an obvious withdrawal from mercy. Me and you may have responded in such ways had we shared Isabella's beliefs regarding earthly existence as a transitory gateway to an eternal afterlife whose quality ought not be diminished by acts committed here. We may have screamed our heads off

at Claudio's selfishness. But one expects more from Isabella, who proves to be unfaithful to mercy, her highest guiding principle.

3

We may toy with explanations for the failures I have been tracing. Angelo is unfortified from a particular manifestation of seduction; Isabella's capacity to avoid hurling a first stone when another's weakness is exposed is undone when the weakness threatens to sully her own purity and endangers her salvation. But I don't wish to offer explanations but to point out a common thread: the rather banal way in which lofty stances implode due to quite ordinary pressures. All it took to defile Angelo is to place him close to a beautiful nun. As for Isabella, once her honour is mildly threatened, her sugary rhetoric declines into something that could have come out of the mouth of a Macbethian witch.

Shakespeare appears to disbelieve characters who commit themselves to lofty values. The bubbles of higher aspirations are bound to be punctured. This bias of his does not appear only in *Measure for Measure*. If challenged to produce morally good characters in Shakespeare, the best we can do is to summon those who simply abide by their familial or social duties. Dutiful wives, faithful friends, hearty subordinates, loving daughters and respectful sons – all seem to exemplify good conduct which stems from an uncompromising attachment to a particular individual. Yet what the Horatios, Kents, Cordelias, Edgars, Orlandos, Desdemonas and the rest all seem to lack is something that elevates them above mere decency, love or friendship. And when characters attempt this in Shakespeare – when, as they do in *Measure for Measure*, they attempt to anchor good conduct in abstract values – they will topple down like Icarus.

It is disquieting to consider why Shakespeare, for all his powers of characterization, could produce no moral counterparts to his villains. His evil creations are highly believable – some could serve as case studies for the criminologist. Why are the good guys missing? Come to think of it, why doesn't Shakespeare offer a single portrait of a truly pious, authentically admirable religious mind instead of all those secretive friars? There is, I admit, something distorted about these questions, because Shakespeare's characterization is not really attuned to positives or

negatives but to vivacity, psychic integration, to voice and to what one perceives or fails to perceive. Still, a bias in Shakespeare's moral rainbow needs to be acknowledged, relate to it as we may.

What is particular to *Measure for Measure*, though, a play whose title declares its preoccupation with justice, is that the manner whereby moral vocabularies are presented as overinflated is brought out not only by causing the wielders of such vocabularies to fall from grace: it proceeds, too, through erecting an impenetrable barrier between the high-minded court and an indifferent populace. The play's darker comedy revolves around the incommensurability of these worlds. The people who run brothels relate to new edicts as if they were natural calamities that need to be negotiated with. Ethical-legal prescriptions are suffered like boils, patiently endured until they pass, not as the moral cleansing being envisaged by the powers that be.

It's the to-and-fro transition between the worlds which I would like to emphasize: the switch from the world of Escalus, Angelo, the Duke and Isabella to the world of Mistress Overdone, Pompey, Elbow and Froth. When Shakespeare utilized this dual-world structure elsewhere – most obviously in *Henry IV, Part 1* – the world of the tavern interlaces in complex ways with the world of the court. Prince Hal occupies both worlds and is somehow attached to the different values for which they stand. But in *Measure for Measure* these domains become oil and water. They comment upon each other repeatedly but without real inner understanding of the other's point of view. The play thereby imparts a disturbing scepticism regarding hopes for moral dissemination: while those who are tasked with outlining a society's moral face fancy that their reasoning percolates down to the lower echelons, such hopes are no more than a myth pumping up their sense of self-importance. Earnest moral disputations are no more than language games played out by an elite circle. Heated controversies regarding the superiority of one language game over another concern, when all is said and done, interchangeable variants. Ultimately, what judges say or do with regard to the vices they wish to remove or gruffly tolerate, bounces off an indifferent wall.

This appears to be the play's sharper critique of judgement. Yes, Shakespeare also disbelieves characters who aspire to manifest just conduct or merciful disposition. Yes, Shakespeare also associates such high-minded commitments with coldness, artificiality and lack of humour.

But this critique of his appears limited to contingencies of particular characters, and we are left wondering whether characters who are more committed to these values may not have failed in such ways. Yet this other critique of his, the lack of contact between value talk and street life, is far bleaker. It undercuts assumptions regarding holistic or organic links between different segments of society. Disconnected fragments – that's all we have.

4

Why, then, does such profound pessimism fail to elicit disheartening hopelessness? The answer, I suggest, relates to the asymmetry between justice and injustice. Yes, the play (and not just this one) is doubtful when justice is presented as more than a self-defining speech act. When competing versions of justice are introduced here or, say, in *The Merchant of Venice*, we are left guessing as to Shakespeare's preference between them. Yet when it comes to *injustice*, the plays don't stammer. Victims of injustice are not merely authentically expressing what they feel but say so in a language that cuts through differences of class, gender and religion. A woman approaches a judge hoping to mitigate the death sentence of her brother. He promises to do so in return for sex. A child would need to know nothing about religion to know that this is wrong. An old king is locked out of shelter and sent off into a life-threatening storm by his children. A peasant who has heard nothing of kings will know that this is wrong. A Jew demands to be treated equally since he has eyes, feels pain and, if mistreated, longs for revenge. A non-Jew would know that to think differently is wrong.

There is something universal and immediate about suffering and being wronged. What is sometimes called Shakespeare's 'humanism' is, I suggest, indebted to this feature of his outlook. It isn't human dignity, or rights, or human potential that is emphasized in his world. We can argue about the precise meaning of such notions till we are blue in the face, he seems to tell us. Instead, what Shakespeare is keenly aware of is the capacity to wound another's dignity, to take away something essential to another or to stifle another's potential. The highs are debatable, vague and enmeshed in galaxies that do not touch each other. But the lows are crystal

clear and obvious to all. The hopefulness of the plays stems from this confidence in a shared understanding regarding what it means to be wronged. And this critique of judgement is nowhere clearer than in *Measure for Measure*. Positive articulations of justice, be they based on reductions of justice into mercy or mercy into justice, are regarded gingerly. 'Use them since we must' is what Shakespeare seems to tell us, 'but don't make too much of them. Injustice, on the other hand, is real; and in order to perceive it when and where it occurs, you don't really need a theory'.

Given the magnitude of the questions from which the play begins – how to deal with fornication on a social scale, how to judge, what the limits of mercy are – such withdrawal from theory seems like a cop out, at least for those of us who are reading Shakespeare (also) for his philosophical insights. Upholding particularity and advocating ad hoc problem solving usually suggests superficial thinking. In Shakespeare, though, there is nothing smug or cynical about the disbelief in the efficacy of principles. The attempt to structure conduct according to prized values is not mocked but candidly undertaken by his heroes. It's just that, at some point, they will fail. So the attempt to theorize or structure and prioritize one's values is desirable. It cannot, however, furnish a completely satisfying response. Nor can the intuitive perception of injustice be the basis of a *comprehensive* answer to the questions above, the kind of answer that can be relied upon to always assist someone who is compelled to judge. We sense this inconclusive perspective in *Measure for Measure*, because behind the play's seemingly happy ending lies a return to the disorganized chaos of its beginning. The Duke's homecoming achieves nothing for Vienna: no purge has been undertaken, no real reform was mounted, no old laws were enforced or eliminated because they were deemed excessive. Vienna's moral and legal confusion is disappointingly reinstated *en bloc* with the reinstated Duke, the man whose eagerness to be loved made it impossible for him to judge.

Related topics

See Chapters 11, 13, 35

Further reading

For more on justice in *Measure for Measure*, see David Bavington, 2013. Equity in *Measure for Measure*. In: B. Cormack, M.C. Nussbaum, and R. Strier, eds. *Shakespeare and the Law: A Conversation among Disciplines and Professions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 164–173. For more on the tension between justice and mercy, see Daniel Statman, 1994. Doing without Mercy. *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 32: 331–354.

For more on the relationship between literature and justice, see Martha Nussbaum, 1997. *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. Boston: Beacon Press.

For more on politics and Shakespeare, see Julia R. Lupton, 2011. *Thinking with Shakespeare: Essays on Politics and Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Notes

1 Only some Anabaptists interpreted the Sermon as implying that laws and punishments somehow contradict Christianity (article 6 of the 1527 Schleitheim Confession asserted that a Christian should not pass a sentence upon a Christian). This was a marginal view: Luther, Calvin and Tyndale all legitimated the legal system. For discussion, see Magedanz (2004).

2 The data comes to Holinshed third-hand: 'It appeareth by Cardane (who writeth it vpon the report of the bishop of Lexouia) in the geniture of king Edward the sixt, how Henrie the eight, executing his laws verie seuerelie against such idle persons, I meane great theeues, pettie théeues and roges, did hang vp thréescore and twelue thousand of them in his time', Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, 1587 edition, Volume 1: 186 (accessed via EEBO).

3 Douglas Hay claims (cautiously) that the annual execution rate between 1607 and 1616 was around 140 (Hay (1975: 22 n3)). Holinshed, in the passage above, claims that there are ordinarily three- to four-hundred executions per year (he does not specify dates for this but is obviously describing England during the second half of the sixteenth century).

4 One such discussion that Shakespeare may have read appears in the opening pages of More's *Utopia* (More (2002: 15–21)). While More does not mention fornication, the argument is that hanging thieves

ought to be abolished because they are often victims of circumstances not of their own making.

5 References are to Shakespeare (1991). *Measure for Measure* includes, too, Angelo's broken promise to marry Mariana. Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* is a prolonged articulation of the grief of the abandoned maid.

6 Chambers (1952: 291). This volume's editors point out *Pericles'* Marina as a possible rival, particularly her encounter with Lysimachus and his praise for her words and their power to change his mind. Readers who wish to insist on Chambers' claim will argue for a difference between, on the one hand, persuading another through arguments and counter claims of the kind we see between Isabella and Angelo and, on the other, the distinct act of exposing one's humanity to another through words, which is what Marina succeeds in doing.

7 The two puzzles are probably related, the second explaining the first. True, any woman would be destroyed by complying with Angelo's sexual blackmail. Yet a would-be nun would also be renouncing her chosen convictions. The violence to her is accordingly, at least potentially, deeper. This harmonizes with a claim familiar within contemporary rape theory, according to which desire is not a cause of rape but a vehicle for rape's true cause: violence. To perceive sexual assault in such terms occurs earlier in Shakespeare, in his *The Rape of Lucrece*. Tarquin seems to decide to rape Lucrece merely after hearing her husband commending her virtues: the need to destroy another's happiness or values triggers desire.

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18

KISS ME, K…

Engendering judgement in Kant's first *Critique* and Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*[1]

Jennifer Ann bates

> *Pet*: Whose tongue.
> *Kate*: Yours if you talke of tales, and so farewell.
> *Pet*: What with my tongue in your taile.

> (*The Taming of the Shrew*, First Folio (1623), Act 2, Scene 1)

In(tro)duction: I am K…: Kant, Kate, kaleidoscope…

In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the structure of engendering judgements brackets metaphysics and within the scope of reason gives order to the manifold of appearances; it abstracts from emotion and makes (a) room (of one's own) for the autonomous enlightenment subject. However, Kant's *Anthropology* puts a male gaze in power. By looking at how Kant en-*genders* judgement, I question whether this structure can be made to tame its own male misogynist hysteria.[2]

Shakespeare's *The Taming of The Shrew* opens with an 'Induction', or frame tale, within which the taming of the shrew is performed as a play. The Induction ostensibly frees the subject of this theatre from its inner performances; at the end of the play within the play, however, that view is determined by male hegemony. Thus while the Induction begins with a woman chasing a man to get what is owed her, by the end, that theme is harnessed by a character in the play within the play, a woman, Kate, whose final speech is about how women owe everything to men.

There is thus a structural parallel between the opening revolutionary stances of Kant and Shakespeare, and then also between the position of Kant's (male) voice in the *Anthropology* and the position of Kate's voice at the end of *The Taming of the Shrew*. (I argue that unlike Kant, Shakespeare was aware of this and that this awareness is inscribed in the play.)

Kant's critical philosophy and Shakespeare's play revolutionize the structure of judgement-formation but problematize that revolution in their performance of it. Kant's and Shakespeare's en-gendering judgement is that of a free self, but it is also an 'I' which speaks through a 'canon', through 'plays' (syntheses of appearances and cultural categories). The self's gender becomes fixed by the funnelling process of its own judgement-formation.

So the problem is that of properly framing the tale, and of asking: whose tongue is in it? What does the tale tell us? What would it take to make this a room 'of my own'? Kiss me, K… whose tongue is in my mouth? Whose tale is it I tell?

I discuss this three times: as theme, as judgements/characters in the Kantian and Shakespearean performances of that theme, and as the totality of theme and judgements/characters. I then offer an epilogue.

This tripartite engendering is an 'adaptation' of Kant's theatre analogy of reason, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, as well as an adaptation of the structure of Kant's texts and of Shakespeare's play. I show that totality is always more than its theme sets out, because the performativity of en-gendering judgements/characters exceeds enlightenment schematization.

The theme: taming the misogynists

The structure of engendering judgements: the play about a play

1 *To funnel* means to concentrate, channel, or focus. Judgement can seem funnel-shaped – plays within plays within plays, universalized particularized singulars, syllogistic enlargements. But like Vesalius' drawing of the female vagina, (phal)logocentric thinking interprets the 'canon' as an inverted phallus. Kant falls into the pit of this inversion; Shakespeare playfully stages it.

Vesalius died the same year Shakespeare was born (1564). Two centuries later, when Kant published the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), the phallocentric view of women had not significantly changed. Many feminists rightly complain that Kantian judgement is *male* reason, in which empirical sensibility and pure ideas are grasped and synthesized into rational claims, at the expense of, among other ethical concerns, embodiment and caring.[3] What is subsequently funnelled through the 'canon' of Western continental philosophy is thus an engendered judgement about the supposed *nature* of reason.

2 Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* presents cognition as a series of facultative plays within plays. The structure is well known: the outer bounds of sense are the forms of intuition (space and time), in which a 'manifold' appears; that manifold is then synthesized by the imagination according to categories of the understanding, unified at the head by the synthetic unity of apperception. That transcendental unity is a self which in its purity is *noumenal*. It knows the synthesized content just mentioned. Since the self does not know things in themselves outside of its syntheses, the self's general *content* can be grasped as form and thus as ideal, a formal general object Kant refers to as 'object = x'. Thus all we know is inside the 'play' (of synthesis).[4]

Just as the ideal 'object = x', the subject 'I' is equally ideal. Therefore let us playfully universalize our 'lead' voices in this paper – Kant and Kate – by referring to them as 'K', so that we say the 'subject = K'.

This K, this place *holder* of experience is, in the particularities of *K*ant's and *K*ate's cases (and in my own as a scholar of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German philosophy), one which according to Kant *ought* to be neutral in its engendering of judgements. But it isn't: in the process of engendering judgements, in the *discipline* of that idealism, as in the *taming* of identity within Shakespeare's play, that pure self becomes patriarchal, its self-knowledge the subject of (and engendered by) a judgement that only a male can make. The fact that 'K' is in some cases a woman (as in Kate, as in myself) complicates this.

By referring to 'K' without gender, I am reminding us of Kant's original intention that both the transcendental object and the transcendental subject unifying it are ideal and thus pure. As *ideal* – each is not known empirically; each is known empirically only secondarily, as phenomenologically determined.

Thus the subject = K is, in its pure, *noumenal* self, unconditioned and un-engendered.

I am repeating this both to show not only Kant's hypocrisy in taking an engendered, empirical determination of x (a male) in place of its subjective ideality (k) but also to challenge this structure of engendering for assuming a merely vertical provenance when it has a horizontal axis of differences as well. I will argue that judgement is always performatively engendered and therefore necessarily trans-gendering.

I begin with the structure at work in Kant and in Shakespeare's play.

3 Kant describes his critical epistemology using the analogy of theatre:

> In all knowledge of an object there is *unity* of concept, which may be entitled *qualitative unity*, so far as we think by it only the unity in the combination of the manifold of our knowledge: as, for example, *the unity of the theme in a play, a speech, or a story*. Secondly, there is *truth*, in respect of its consequences. The greater the number of true consequences that follow from a given concept, the more criteria are there for its objective reality. This might be entitled the *qualitative plurality of the characters*, which belong to a concept as to a common ground (but are not thought in it, as quantity). Thirdly, and lastly, there is *perfection*, which consists in this, that *the plurality together leads back to the unity of the concept, and accords completely with this and no other concept*. This may be entitled the qualitative completeness (totality). (Kant (1983: 118–19) (B114–15), my emphases)

Let us apply this analogy to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as a whole. So, first, the theme: it is a critique of reason.

This theme is announced by Kant in terms of a Copernican revolution in philosophy (Kant (1983: 22, 25a.) The 'sun' is not moving around the earth (as it appears to do in our sensible experience); rather, the sun is

centred as that around which all objects in space and time move. The sun is (male) pure reason, and objects of experience are subject to the 'pull' of reason – the sun. Thus we get an inversion of the realist position: 'The conditions of the possibility of experience in general are likewise conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience' (Kant (1983: 194) (A158/B197)).

But in Kant's anthropology lectures, another inversion happens (the details of which I will discuss later). In this second inversion, Kant's enlightened critical view is held hostage by a character within it – by Kant himself – a character whose judgement about gender takes the place of the sun. His judgement is that his kind of character – his gender – is by nature the only kind that can grasp the theme of the philosophical Copernican revolution: 'he' is therefore the kind of character to whom the theme properly belongs. Kant, a character defined by his historical period, asserts that only men can be enlightened and morally autonomous.[5]

4 *The Taming of the Shrew* is also a funnelling performance of a play within a play. The opening Induction is a 'frame tale' (Howard (1997: 133)). In it, the drunken tinker Sly is being chased by the Hostess to pay his bills; he spurns her and falls drunk asleep. He is found by a Lord, who sets the scene to make Sly believe, when he wakes, that he is a Lord. Thus an imaginative *synthesis* occurs; and within that staging, there is performed for Sly the play of 'The Taming of the Shrew'. The latter is a play about two sisters – Bianca and Katherine – a play in which a woman's view and will is tamed into conformity with her husband's.

We can make a structural analogy of Shakespeare's Induction with Kant's Introduction. The Induction is essential to the play as a whole.[6] Its theme – indeed its role in the play – is revolutionary enlightenment, the making-us-self-conscious-of the performance of the play and the resultant emancipation of women from their gendered characters.

There is evidence within the play that the emancipation of women is the theme – the women are shown to be just as good at witty repartee as the men are, and they use education to their advantage better than the men.[7] But more important is that this revolution is declared by the play's very structuring of engendering plays within plays. I will return to this.

For now, let us note three other structural similarities between Kant and Shakespeare's play: the theme of the play is expressed using the sun; the character K reverses that revolution (a 'taming' of woman); and, as a result, the totality appears contradictory to the theme.

In Kate's speeches, we see both the revolution and then the reversal of it. At first, she announces the evolutionary view that she is free and speaks freely:

> My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,
> Or else my heart concealing it will break,
> And rather than it shall, I will be free
> Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words.

(4.3.74–80)

But later, she replies to Petruccio:

> And be it the moon, or sun, or what you please;
> And if you please to call it a rush-candle,
> Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me
> …
> But sun it is not, when you say it is not,
> And the moon changes even as your mind:
> What you will have it named, even that it is,
> And so it shall be so for Katherine.

(4.6.12–15, 19–23)

In Kate's final speech in the play, her revolution appears to have been completely 'tamed' by patriarchal dogma. I will return to this speech later.

Thus, as in Kant, the expectation established by the theme of Shakespeare's play is that its final totality, the concluding apprehension of the 'whole', will be nothing other than the synthesis organized by the apperception of the theme. As in Kant's 'theatre', the theme of Shakespeare's play is revolution, and its analogy the sun. But, as in Kant, the key player in the performance of the revolutionary view reverses the theme in the performance of it, ostensibly making the upshot of the play – its totality – a theme of taming rather than of autonomy. Thus, as in

Kant, the totality in its determinateness is at odds with its theme of autonomy: it ends up being 'his' sun, 'his' reason.

Let us look at the structure of Kant's and Kate's reversals.

This structure of engendering judgement in Kant and in Shakespeare's play is paralogical

Within Kant's play appears an empirical man *making* this revolution's declaration. He is a singular character within the performance of the universal theme, proclaiming a universal truth about the entire theme. This would be fine if the individual was as 'pure' as the 'self' of which he speaks. But this empirical man (Kant) speaks for the possibility of the theme itself and declares that *by nature* only men have reason.

Likewise, women's emancipation from a witless historically patriarchal tutelage discords with the singular character (Kate) who appears in the end to be speaking for the theme: Kate's final speech is about the submission of women and women's need for tutelage and protection. Her speech subsumes the plays within plays within the opposite theme.

Ironically, the logic of this kind of mistake is provided by Kant. It is the structure of what Kant calls a paralogism of intellectual intuition (Kant (1983: 369ff (B407ff)).[8] According to Kant, the unity of apperception would be paralogistically constituted if we said that the qualitative unity, the 'I think' (of the theme, implied the self as soul (i.e., as known thing in itself) (Kant (1983: 370) (B409)); what is unified in experience does not tell us what the self is – the self must remain a '*focus imaginarius*' (Kant (1983: 533) (B672)). The phenomenological play's the thing wherein we catch the self, but the self we catch can never be (in) the original. What we actually see (empirically), what is *in* play, is the singular individual subject, with all his/her heterogeneous characteristics, proclivities, and normative constraints.

According to Kant, the self of the transcendental unity of apperception is performative – it is a synthesizing, 'pure spontaneity' of the self. But the self – *das Ich* – in that spontaneity is not directly knowable.[9] As Longuenesse asserts, Kant's '*Ich*' is a *conatus* toward judgement.[10] (This has its practical analogue in the gesture of a good will testing its maxim against the Categorical Imperative: the good will is one which, like the unity of apperception, is 'unseen' because *noumenal* and thus never itself an exemplar nor ever exemplified by a dutiful act (Kant (1993: 19)).

So by Kant's own logic, it is *paralogical* to use some thing/character/judgement to define the *a priori* self. The judgement that only males are *a priori* selves is engendered inductively, from cultural observations of eighteenth-century men and women.[11] That kind of judgement presents an example of empirical, mixed universality, not strict universality. It is paralogistic to equate that induced universal with an *a priori* one. There can be no empirical exemplar of an enlightened subject or of a moral agent.

So by his own logic, Kant cannot make 'man' the exemplar of the transcendentally autonomous, free, and speculatively enlightened individual. Kant simply cannot both preserve the transcendental ego as such and assert that *by nature* only a man is such a self.

We see something similar in Shakespeare's play. As is often argued, the logic of the Induction ought to preclude, on penalty of self-contradiction, a serious reading of Kate's final speech.[12] What is important, I argue, is that Kate's speech engenders a paralogical structure when it is taken as a sign of the whole – *regardless* of whether that sign is understood to be farcical or serious.

It must of course be said, too, that her final speech, and the taming methods that lead up to it, are abhorrent. We must criticize them on humanitarian and feminist grounds. The violence cannot be done away with simply by arguing that there is a logical inconsistency in making it stand for the theme of the play. But nor can the violence be undone without understanding the paralogistic structure of these induction-universal hegemonies.

Thus I do not *only* frame Kant's or Kate's tale in feminisms, putting only a feminist tongue in their tales. (In any case, that project has its own multiplicity, for as Jonathan Gil Harris writes, 'Feminism, like Katerina, is broadly concerned with the possibility of female resistance. But what, exactly does feminism resist? And how does it resist?' (Harris (2010b: 106)) The answers are complex.)

Instead, by analysing the paralogism in both Kant and the play, we begin to see why the structure of judgement itself cannot but engender a further, *pluralistic* enlightenment revolution.

We must work with the contradictions until this becomes clear. On the one hand, Kant puts his own tongue in his frame tale, and Shakespeare puts Kate's tongue in his frame tale. But on the other, Kant's explanation of paralogisms and his critical funnel (his 'canon' as he calls it in general (Kant (1983: 59) (B26)) *are salutary* philosophical insights;[13] and Shakespeare's Induction problematizes the structure of gender performance in a way that no totality can recuperate. Shakespeare's play and Kant's securing of the autonomous self have allowed

us to see why it is a problem to employ induction universals as *more* than syntheses of religious, cultural, empirical, or performative engenderings.[14]

Thus in both Kant's and Kate's cases, there is a problem about how to properly think the inner self together with the outer play of its appearance. To collapse our texts in order to articulate the contradiction: the revolutionary role of the In(tro)duction preserves the freedom of the self by allocating the role of induction universals to the 'play' of appearance rather than assertions about things-in-themselves, but that revolution is at odds with 'K's' speech about female submission to male reason being the essence of her subjectivity.

A more complex, dialectical structure is needed to make engendering judgements truly revolutionary and trans-gendering.

Now let us put tongues in these tales.

The characters/judgements

Kaleidoscopic plurality: the effect of the Induction on character(s)

The Induction frames Shakespeare's tale such that the plays within it can be interpreted in many ways. A serious reading usually means that the entire play is about the taming of the shrew. To translate this into Kant-speak, it is about the subsumption of the (shrewishness) of the manifold and the excesses of imagination, under the unity of [masculine] transcendental apperception. Thus Sly's theatrically 'given' performances (and the females in it) are tamed by the normative categories of male apperception.[15]

Some serious readings of the play have justified productions of the Bianca–Katherine play without the Induction.[16] Not every one of them endorses a patriarchal reversal in the Petruccio–Kate dialogue (some, for example, make Kate wink ironically at the audience when she utters her final speech). With or without the Induction, there are comedic and farcical readings of the play (and of the play within the play). The upshot is that the meaning of the play and, importantly, of Kate's final speech are impossible to focus into a single theory.

This proliferation of interpretations about *the Taming of the Shrew* makes the play kaleidoscopic. A scholar observing the history of this play's reception, and at the play itself, is confronted with a 'manifold' that would baffle the Kantian enlightenment subject of the *First Critique*. Like all art, the engendering of the play and our judgements about its meaning are not totalizable. Structure or fix as we will the meaning of Kate's final speech, there is no absolute objectivity.

But Kant would probably agree that, as with all art, we cannot be concerned with a determinate judgement about this play: we ought to engender 'judgements of taste' about it, not determinative judgements. According to his *Third Critique*, judgements of taste exhibit intuitional excess and imaginative play of faculties (the faculties try but fail to bring the aesthetic object under a universal once and for all and this leads to a pleasurable play between the faculties (Kant (1987)).[17] Such would be a Kantian *kaleidoscopic* view of the play, as viewed through his *Critique of Judgement*, a book which is Kant's *kalos* (beauty) + *eidos* (idea) + scope.

But judgement is not just kaleidoscopic in this case

We should enjoy but not stop with a dazzling play of colours; Kant's and Shakespeare's In(tro)ductions invite us to refocus 'universality' and inquire what it means.

I want to show next therefore that Kant's distinction between pure and 'mixed' universals does not hold when we take his anthropological writings into consideration, and that Shakespeare appears the wiser because he *does* keep the tension between these two kinds of universal in his 'frame'.

This will help us see how objectivity is engendered and obscured by the frames/rules of engendering: by 'masculine' rules, by *mes regles* (that body (of knowledge)), and by other facts about us – by what are said to be 'strict' and 'mixed' universals, and the (ostensible) difference between them.

The questionable role of mixed (induction) universals

According to Kant, mixed universals are arrived at through empirical induction. In Shakespeare's play, mixed universals are the 'household stuff' that Sly says the play he is about to see is about. I will discuss Kant's and Shakespeare's uses of these in turn. But let us call these mixed universals 'induction universals', enjoying the homology drawn from Kant's method of induction and the role of universals in Shakespeare's Induction.

When we compare Shakespeare's use of induction universals with Kant's account of what these are supposed to be, we find Kant's distinction between induced and pure universals problematic. For the structure of Shakespeare's play allows us to be conscious of the paralogistic structure of these ostensibly free, yet 'tamed' judgements that express the misogynist hysteria. Kant, when he anthropologizes the 'I' as male, is unconscious of this structure and subsequent hysteria within his corpus. Shakespeare's induction universals thus provide an opening for a critique and trans-formation unconsciously foreclosed by Kant.

In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, induction universals are said to have their place, to 'perform' a role within the larger scope of Kant's *a priori* critical transcendental structure. Recall Kant's theatre analogy. We can say that among the characters (types of judgements) within the theme of the *Critique* are induction universals, judgements made on the stage of our experience and which make up part of our experience.

In both Kant and Shakespeare, the theme of the play, framed in the In(tro)duction, is not just what occurs on stage but the very 'productive/production's' synthesis of the play, which is normally hidden. In both Kant's and Shakespeare's play, this hidden theatricality is made explicit, made part of the play – it is that part within which the empirical plays out. Only Shakespeare makes good on how complex this performance actually is.

To show this, let us look at how Kant defines his induction universals.

Induction universals prop up Kant's misogyny: his judgement of women('s props)

Kant's project in the *First Critique* is to provide an elucidation of the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of experience in order to account for synthetic *a priori* judgements.[18] He is therefore not concerned primarily with induction universals, since those are derived from sensible experience and do not immediately reveal the underlying structure that has enabled them to come about in the first place.

To arrive at a satisfactory explanation of what a synthetic *a priori* judgement is, Kant must nonetheless give an account of how particular objects are synthesized. So among his first distinctions is that between universals that are pure and those that are mixed. Mixed universals are arrived at by induction from particular experiences. An example of a pure universal judgement is 'any of the propositions of mathematics'; his example of a *mixed* universal judgement derived from experience is: 'bodies are heavy' (Kant (1983: 43–4) (B3–4)).

Kant relegates induction universals and judgements based on them to empirical sciences (stipulating, as always, that these are not judgements about objects-in-themselves since they are engendered by the transcendental subject subsuming its manifold under categories of understanding; these judgements are about phenomena).

Induction universals perform a role in the system. Since they are not pure, it is paralogistic for an induction universal to make its way into the centre of the system and speak for the theme of the whole. But we saw that Kant does just that when he makes being male (an impure, induction universal) the *sine qua non* of the transcendental 'I' (a pure universal). He is engendering the mixed judgement 'men (and only men) are rational'. In doing so, he contravenes his commitment to the purity of the *a priori* and en-*genders* judgement-engendering.

Interestingly, as if to provide purity through omission, Kant does this, not by *affirming* maleness but by *excluding* femaleness from this pure 'I'. But, more importantly still, Kant theatricalizes women to do this: he describes 'scenarios' in which women need to have props to appear intelligent, claiming that they are only capable of play-acting intelligence:

> A woman who has a head full of Greek, like Mme Dacier, or carries on fundamental controversies about mechanics, like the Marquise du Châtelet, might as well even have a beard. For perhaps that would express more obviously the mien of profundity for which she strives.

> (Kant (1960: 78), cited in Schott (1997b: 324))[19]

Kant mockingly describes 'the scholarly woman' who 'uses her *books* in the same way as her *watch*, for example, which she carries so that people will see that she has one, though it is usually not running or not set by the sun' (Kant (1974: 171)).[20]

It is ironic that in these little 'plays', Kant portrays women using props (watches or fake beards) to signify their intelligence. In doing so, Kant himself is guilty of using props. That is, according to him, women illegitimately use books or watches as signs of intelligence, but Kant is thereby using 'prop-using-women' as props to signify that the male gender is therefore the only real (non-'performing') pure intelligence. In using women as props, Kant illegitimately secures the induction universal ('women') as what is not able to be a pure universal (the 'I'), but also, by implication, he uses that combined induction universal ('women are irrational')

to imply that only the other kind of induction universal (men) can be that pure universal 'I'. Kant's judgement is illegitimate because the pure 'I' cannot have any mixed universal as its 'prop' or exemplar, but Kant uses women as a 'prop' to implicitly assert the view than only men are intelligent. His judgements here therefore engender the maleness of intelligence, revealing 'his' pure 'I' – 'his' unity of apperception.

As we have seen, this is *paralogical*. Kant ought to have known better. I think Shakespeare did know better.

Induction universals as props in The Taming of the Shrew: 'a history' of 'household stuff'

I take Shakespeare's Induction to be articulating the theme of the play. That theme, rendered in Kantian tongue is: 'experience never confers on its judgements true or strict, but only assumed and comparative *universality*, through [The] induction'. Shakespeare's principle character in the Induction – Sly – tells us the play he will witness presents just 'household stuff' (Shakespeare (1997: Induction 2.133–5)). So the ostensible theme of the Induction is that its play will be about particulars and induction universals based on them, not on the structures that constitute the synthesis at work in the play's production. But because we are explicitly informed of this, we are made aware of that very synthesis at work. Thus the Induction frame tale serves to inform us that while we can induce generalizations as we watch the play, nothing that happens in the Induction or down the levels of its plays within plays holds dogmatically: it is always subject to the theatrical structure of its production (its engendering).

The Induction presents us with a function, a view of the production of the play, of its synthesis, which is akin to Kant's effort to generate the functional *a priori* structures of the mind within which the play of appearance occurs.

We have seen how Kant keeps mixed and pure universals separate but then makes maleness a predicate of the pure universal 'I', thereby inadvertently and unconsciously making the pure universal 'I' into a mixed universal. In a similar but *conscious* way, Shakespeare's Induction both brackets its content as pure 'theatre' (thus freeing the subject from its content) but then buries within that Induction's play the mixed universal dogma that women are *not* rational agents. In other words, Shakespeare's 'Induction' universals (like Kant's induction universals) are supposed to be merely 'assumed and comparative universals' within the structure of pure synthesis (pure theatrical productivity), but inside the performance the universals are treated (as Kant treats the case of maleness) as the truth about the I-in-itself.

Shakespeare's induction universals draw upon patriarchal dogma about women and scholarly history, espousing that women cannot learn on their own and must be tutored. It is these views which eventually seem to hold the entire play hostage and by which any revolutionary excesses appear to be tamed.

However, unlike in Kant's *Anthropology*, in Shakespeare's play these dogmas are presented in a farcical light within the Induction. Thus while Kate's voice will come to take up a problematic position paralleling the tension between Kant's project and the position of his male voice within it, unlike in Kant, Kate's voice will do so in a way that cannot be reduced to the dogmatism it appears to present.

To give all this content, let us look at some of the patriarchal induction universals about women in the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew* and then in the play within the play.

In the first scene of the Induction (Sly's exchange with the Hostess), Sly messes up references to the 'Chronicles', to a Latin phrase, and to a famous name from Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*.[21] Sly is a would-be scholar who is actually a drunk buffoon. Historical and literary education has run amok, but he still wins against the Hostess' justified demands to be paid.

The hostess leaves Sly in order to 'fetch the headborough' (the constable) (Shakespeare (1997: Induction 1.9)). But Sly jests 'Third or fourth or fifth borough, I'll answer him by law. I'll not budge an inch' (9–11). No matter how many levels of heads are engendered, the structure of judgement that Sly embodies is unquestionable. He is the (poorly) educated male and she has no power over him even when she is right. No higher order can dispute the patriarchal view that the man is the head of a woman; he speaks for her no matter how many male headboroughs are above his. And yet audiences today and in Shakespeare's time recognize Sly to be a fool.[22]

In Shakespeare's time, however, aside from the Queen of England, there was no way to put a woman at the head. So if Shakespeare was interested in the education of women and the overturning of the patriarchy, he had to make a disrupting play out of the very structure of engendering judgement. What his intentions are we cannot know, and he tended to reinstate sixteenth-century gendered social order at the end of his plays.[23] But in this play, Shakespeare does offer us a series of embedded performativities.[24] Therefore the play can be (and is) sometimes taken to be about overturning patriarchy through farce.

But I view the play as also being about engendering judgement. What we are supposed to see is not (only) that Kate finds her place (whether ironically and in league with Petruccio or submissively because he tortures her into being tame) but that Kate engenders the judgement of her place *via* her engendering of induction-universal judgements.

The structure of the plays within plays reveals engendering possibilities. Induction universals, like any schema, are synthetic performances and therefore plays. These universals 'at play' are in tension not just with the *a priori* structures of transcendental synthesis but also with the alterities of a manifold of appearances whose limit cannot be drawn purely. (Thus the fact that a plate is also a circle always leaves something of the plate out, and a sensible example of 'circle' is not the universal circle because the sensible is both too much (specificity) and too little (generality) to be pure.[25]) I'll return to this meta-analysis of structure, but let me first complete the way that induction universals are funnelled into the play within the play.

Moving from the frame-tale Induction into the play within the play, we see that the self-conscious send-ups of patriarchal universals about scholarliness, women, history, and the place of women in that history are carried forward into 'the taming of the shrew' play about Bianca–Katherine. That interior play starts with two men (Lucentio and his man Tranio) discussing their happy arrival in Padua where they seek a 'course of learning and ingenious studies'. Lucentio plans to 'study / Virtue and that part of philosophy… that treats of happiness'. Tranio's reply refers to the Stoics, Aristotle, Ovid, rhetoric, music and poetry, mathematics, and metaphysics, and concludes with the view that Lucentio should study what he most enjoys (Shakespeare (1997: 1.1.9ff)). The word 'philosophy' comes up repeatedly in that dialogue and in the play as a whole. Tranio among others frequently resorts to Latin words of wisdom to edify or make a pun.[26]

Both sisters are compared to personages in the history of philosophy. In 1.2, Petruccio announces that 'even if she [Kate] be 'as curst and shrewd / As Socrates' Xanthippe' he will marry her (Shakespeare (1997: 1.2.67)); and Lucentio says of Bianca, 'Hark, Tranio, thou mayst hear Minerva speak' (Minerva was the Roman goddess of wisdom) (Shakespeare (1997: 1.1.84)). And, of course, the ensuing plot concerns the tutelage of the sisters. The play thus goes on to funnel patriarchal induction-universal judgements about history and women, *to* women.

Taming judgement: the tutelage of women

Three different interpretations of tutelage are then staged:

a) A tutelage which fails because (as Kant would later assert) 'mother wit' cannot be taught (Kant (1983: 177) (B172)). Kate shows this during her lute lesson, as well as her first exchange with Petruccio. In those scenes, her wit dominates patriarchy. Her lute instructor recounts Kate's play on the word 'fret':

Hortensio: 'Frets, call you these?' quoth she, 'I'll fume with them,'
    And with that word she struck me on the head,
    And through the instrument my pate made way,
    And there I stood amazed for a while…
    While she did call me rascal, fiddler,
    And twangling jack, with twenty such vile terms,
    As had she studied to misuse me so.

To this Petruccio replies 'Now, by the world, it is a lusty wench! / II love her ten times more than e'er I did' (Shakespeare (1997: 2.1.150ff), my emphasis). Kate's and Petruccio's love of mother wit is important. I return to it below.

b) A tutelage which succeeds because women are teachable to the extent and in the same way as they are woo-able. Bianca performs this – her Latin lessons are wooing sessions. Rather than violent wittiness, Bianca implores Lucentio to translate Latin lines: 'Construe them' (Shakespeare (1997: 3.1.30)). He obliges, translating instead his true identity to her.

c) The third is the one in which Kate is forcibly 'tamed' by Petruccio, who withholds food and sleep from her.

The second and third interpretations of tutelage stage the theme Kant held two centuries later: that women can be tutored but cannot teach or enlighten themselves; they are heteronomous wills, never autonomous, free ones; they can develop civility but are incapable of moral agency. Kant would not have agreed that there could be an

interpretation of the play in which Kate is already a rational and free individual or that she could ever become one.

It is for such reasons that when we first encounter Kate, she is what Virginia Woolf could have recognized as Shakespeare's 'sister', an intelligent woman going mad because the men around her are unable or unwilling to recognize her intelligence.[27] Kate is therefore an outspoken 'shrew', resorting to violent frustration outbursts.

In one way of reading the play, her taming has the effect of giving her some freedom from such frustration by empowering her speech and performance.[28] But her tamed self nonetheless appears to swallow the 'whole' theme by speaking for women's essence. Here is part of her final speech at the dinner table:

> Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
> Thy head, they sovereign, one that cares for thee,
> And for thy maintenance commits his body
> To painful labour both by sea and land…
> And craves no other tribute at thy hands
> But love, fair looks, and true obedience…
> Such duty as the subject owes the prince
> Even such a woman oweth to her husband…
> I am ashamed that women are so simple
> To offer war where they should kneel for peace,
> Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway
> When they are bound to serve, love, and obey…
> But now I see our lances are but straws,
> Our strength as weak, our weakness past compare,
> That seeming to be most which we indeed least are.
> Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot,
> And place your hands below your husband's foot,
> In token of which duty, if he please,
> My hand is ready, may it do him ease.

(5.2.150ff)

Mother wit appears to be no more. In the struggle between the play being *about* dogmas (about the household stuff) and the play's content (the patriarchal household stuff actually presented) the latter 'performance' appears to be the final judgement, the totality, of the play. The excesses of the Induction's inductions have been tamed. Or have they?

Summary of the role of induction universals in the structure of judgement

We see in both Kant and Shakespeare that the theme of revolution is played out in part by the 'critical' positioning of induction universals as judgements which cannot speak for the ideal whole. Neither a 'character' self, nor any induction universals, can take the place of, or articulate the theme of, the pure free self (subject = K) and the ideal shape of its empirical whole (object = x). And yet the empirical characters Kant and Kate nonetheless speak induction universals (about women's essences). Therefore when K speaks as the character (Kant or Kate), he/she performs a paralogism. Kant is unconscious of this self-propping. Kate is conscious of herself as both self and prop, because Shakespeare's play is *about* paralogy.

Totality

Concluding the theme of taming the misogynists

Kant's *Anthropology* de-revolutionizes his *Critique* by engendering a judgement about 'his' self. It is an astonishing subsumption of the enlightened subject into a limited frame story – Kant puts men inside and at the top of the engendering funnel, establishing him as the voice of the canon. He excludes women from enlightenment subjectivity on *natural grounds* and asserts men are included *on natural grounds*, all of which means that enlightened subjectivity is framed by *natural grounds*, grounds Kant denied we could know for sure.

He sees the canon as (belonging to) a male member. 'Hers' is an 'inverted' canon, a play that has props, not the real thing.

Thus his induction universals make the transcendental ideal into an *en-gendered* judgement.

By placing woman within the scope of his critical philosophy, Kant did not realize he was also framing his own subjectivity backwardly – in a kind of counter-Copernican revolution – to natural essentialism, making his own critical tale the subject of feminist projects, into which they would stick their tongues, both seriously and farcically; he did not realize that in productions of his thought, his idea of universality would become kaleidoscopic at best and a set of contradictions at worst.[29]

But nor is a feminist critique the totality. Totality is always more than the theme because of the complexity of the characters in the play. So a feminist critique as totality would be paralogistic as well. To make a gendered character the exemplar and spokesperson for the revolution's new sun would make the same mistake.

And yet we cannot help en-gendering, for, Hegel shows, the singular is also the universal.[30] What Hegel gives us that Kant did not, however, is a way to think this engendered contradiction dialectically, as an inter-determining. This, I think, paved the way for what we might now call trans-gendering.

Let us revisit 'the labyrinth that is a straight line'.[31] If we think only 'straight' we get lost on the way, because the line between subject and object is necessarily and always complicated by the lines between the object and its others. Because of the subject–object access, any complication in the *object* by its others is a complication of the subject, too.[32] The straight 'canon' between subject and object through which inductions are born cannot but be revealed through its differences. Taming misogyny means becoming conscious and performative of – even playful with – paralogisms.

Epilogue: trans-gendering judgements

Kiss me, K…

I have focused on the structure of these plays within plays in order to argue that what is really at play is a structure of en-gendering judgement. I compared Kant's critical analysis of the *a priori* structures of judgement in his *Critique of Pure Reason* and his mixed induction universals with the structure of the Induction and its plays within plays in *The Taming of the Shrew* in order to show the illegitimate and yet all too common paralogism of allowing induction universals to stand for the whole even when the theme of the whole is that *that* cannot happen.

My epilogue may be an effort at totality, but it is equally a new frame and thus a new beginning. K's kiss is phenomenological and existential, a free aperture onto an open future, constrained by the plays at work in *my* time.

Let me therefore make a speech, as a full professor of philosophy in a male-dominated discipline of the history of philosophy: my speciality in nineteenth-century German male thinkers. How should I teach the canon, how funnel philosophy to the next generation?[33] What does it mean for me to have this room of my own, with its aperture onto the twenty-first century? What do I say at the (seminar) table? I answer in two ways.

Tempor

On one level, one does tame one's mind through education as the result of having a room of one's own in which to study and an institution in which to pass along the historical tradition. As Virginia Woolf writes,

> Without… forerunners, Jane Austen and the Brontes and George Eliot could no more have written than Shakespeare could have written without Marlowe, or Marlowe without Chaucer, or Chaucer without those forgotten poets who paved the ways and tamed the natural savagery of the [male] tongue.
>
> (Woolf (1981b: 65), my insert)

But this historical tradition in which we are all schooled (not tutored), is schematic, a temporal synthesis of the imagination. Shakespeare helps philosophers to see our plays within plays. The apparent certainty of induction-universals is put into question by our self-consciousness about how judgement engenders them.

Therefore, I teach the philosophical canon, and how the canon funnels, that sometimes a canon is just a canon, but that often it is a phallus. With regard to the latter, I employ but cannot end with a feminist critique of phallocentrism. For taming misogyny can and should engage mother wit.

Extempor

Kant, in his *Anthropology*, and Kate, in her final speech, perform induction universals and in doing so appear to sidetrack the ideal achievement of their overarching revolutions. That achievement is, ostensibly, the free engendering of judgements, independent of cultural, patriarchal, heteronomous norms. But Shakespeare knows that it is an unachievable ideal to be independent of norms. We are all, inevitably, characters. Thus K's 'final' performances only rob gender of autonomy in so far as their speeches do not express the enlightened theme of self-conscious *intersubjective* engendering (some claim that Kant never reaches intersubjectivity at all[34]).

Judgement has many ways of appearing (just as gender does) – possibly in as many kinds of 'whole' as we have 'I's to see them. Pure ideality never escapes engendering reality.

So my theme, my frame tale, is that performances reveal not just the nature of the theme, but that the theme engenders itself in necessarily multiple ways. One does not do away with conception or educate it (let alone violently tame or tutor it) into another conception: rather, one's freedom is to realize that through multiplicity one is free of each conception's necessary claim to be an absolute totality. In Kant's three-part theatre, the last one – totality – is (as Hegel saw) another immediacy, another dogma, another theme beginning another play.[35]

We cannot escape (and nor should we try) being 'K…', for the free subject is a presumption we must both be and endorse. But the movement of that free subject's funnelling thought, its canon, goes not only outward toward the object = x and inward toward the subject = K; these two directions happen as we frame and are framed in the kaleidoscopic alterity of engendering induction universals and thus of putting tongues in our tales.

Shakespeare's dialectical, dialogical reading of the canon puts its engendering into play both kaleidoscopically for pleasure and determinately for increased awareness of differences.

I argue elsewhere that the best way to navigate reasoning imagination is by means of an educated wit (Bates (2010)). Unlike historical tutelage, which is a canon – a temporal labyrinth between two points – wit is 'extempore', it functions inside of and outside of hegemonic times and places.[36] It dances and jumps across, bends and torques, reflects, refracts, plays. This is another way in which Shakespeare shows that he is conscious of the performativity inherent in judgements.

A case in point is Petruccio's entrance scene. It is a playful miscommunication of his command to 'Knock' (Shakespeare (1997: 1.2.5)). He means 'knock on the door', but Grumio, his man, takes him to mean punch someone. Words in Petruccio's mouth are witty from the start.

The same thing occurs in the first encounter between Kate and Petruccio. Petruccio plays on her name, highlighting its many-ness with alliteration:

> You lie, in faith, for you are called plain Kate,
> And bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the curst,
> But Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom,
> Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate –
> For dainties are all cates, and therefore 'Kate' –
> Take this of me, Kate, of my consolation

(2.1.183)

Kate replies with equal agility in wit, punning with the word 'moveable'. And so it goes, pun after pun:

> *Katherine*: Asses are made to bear, and so are you.
> *Petruccio*: Women are made to bear, and so are you.
> *Petruccio* again: Come, come, you wasp, i'faith you are too angry.
> *Katherine*: If I be waspish, best beware my sting.
> *Petruccio*: My remedy is then to pluck it out.
> *Katherine*: Ay, if the fool could find it where it lies.
> *Petruccio*: Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting? / In his tail.
> *Katherine*: In his tongue.
> *Petruccio*: Whose tongue?
> *Katherine*: Yours, for you talk of tales, and so farewell.
> *Petruccio*: What, with my tongue in your tail? Nay, come again, / Good Kate, I am a gentleman.

(2.1.183ff.)

Despite revolutionary enlightenment, consciousness has a propensity to take induction universals as the truth of things in themselves.[37] We often un*wit*tingly stick our tongue in our tale. The fact is we have many tongues in our tales. This ceases to be only paralogistic when the hegemony of binary logic is overcome. This is not hysterical excess: it is mother wit. Shakespeare's revolutionary theme, in the end, is that we become self-consciously playful with this, that we trans-form ourselves. Educating our wit (via multi-enframed and multi-interpreted canons) brings this to our attention, again and again.

Related topics

Notes

1   I thank my graduate Kant seminar (2016) and participants of the Duquesne Women in Philosophy Conference (2016), especially organizers Sila Ozkara and Boram Jeong.

2   'Given Kant's explicit endorsement of the subordination of wives to their husbands, and the exclusion of women from intellectual or political rights, it is no surprise that many feminists consider Kant to be an exemplar of philosophical sexism' (Schott (1997a: 5)).

3   Many postmodernist feminists reject Kantian subjectivity: 'They argue that this notion of the self masks the historical specificity of the self, its embeddedness and dependence upon social relations, and see in transcendental claims of the self a reflection of the experience of white Western males' (Schott (1997a: 12)).

4   'the synthesis of apprehension which is empirical, must necessarily be in conformity with the synthesis of apperception, which is intellectual and is contained in the category completely *a priori*' (Kant (1983:B162: 171–2n)).

5   Kant (1974), especially pages 166ff. This *Anthropology* manuscript comes from his pre-critical period ('Kant's manuscript was derived from notes for a series of lectures on anthropology he had given since the autumn semester of 1772–3'), but Kant lectured on the material 'twice a year "for some thirty years"'and published it during his critical period (Caygill (1995: 73)). So he did not change it for publication. Mills (2005) makes an argument about Kant which 'attempt[s] to do for race what feminists have so successfully done with gender' (Mills (2005: 169)).

6   There are many conflicting views about the role of the Induction, which I discuss later. For references supporting my view, see note 12.

7   The witty exchanges at table between the men and women toward the end of the play (5.2.1–49) are evidence of the former, and the fact that women end up with men equal to them in learning and wit of the latter. This is a disputed but possible reading.

8   For a discussion of subjectivity and paralogism in Kant, see Thomas Cantone's excellent paper 'The Fate of the Subject' (Cantone (n.d.)). My own chapter is partly inspired by Cantone's analysis.

9   The post-Kantian Fichte explains this by referring to the self as an act rather than a thing-in-itself: in the self's self-positing, the self is only known *after* positing itself, never directly as the act of positing (hence Fichte writes of a primordial act 'Y' as the subject doing the positing (what gets posited is only ever a limited self over a limited not self); we never see the Y except in this empirically 'already posited' limited self) (Fichte (1982: 93–119)). To say that the I is performative means, first, that despite 'performing' the act of positing itself, the self does not know its act directly; it can only see the 'performance' become empirical in the judgement 'I am', a judgement which is always after-the-fact of the positing, not the act of positing. Therefore the freely positing self (the *noumenal* self at the root of Kant's unity of apperception) can only be postulated, not known directly. Given the unproven nature of postulated ideal self (Kant's 'I', Fichte's 'Y'), it is possible that there are only performances expressed and witnessed wholly within and as a part of a social plenum, with no 'I' transcending that and so no way to presume anything normative about that transcendent 'I'. Thus, second, my use of 'performative' here draws on Judith Butler's claim that gender is performative (Butler (1990)). Kant holds a view similar to Fichte's, but I want to push Kant toward something both Fichtean and Butlerian in the sense of making the self a transcendental imaginary but also a social imaginary (and so not just the subject of Fichtean *subjective* idealism); it is a transcendental imaginary because free and

responsible as subject, and it is a social imaginary because also always a social performance and thus self-engendering through alterities.

10 '*There is no* unity of self-consciousness or 'transcendental unity of apperception' apart from this effort, or *conatus* toward judgement, ceaselessly affirmed and ceaselessly threatened with dissolution in the "welter of appearances"'(Longuenesse (1998: 394)).

11 'Women were also excluded from university education in Germany as well (including Königsberg University where Kant studied and taught) during the Enlightenment' (Schott (1997b: 323)). J. G. Harris explains Bertolt Brecht's Marxist literary criticism: 'We might think, for example, of the Induction scenes… [they] employ alienation effects that disclose how both nobility and femininity are not natural identities, but socially scripted roles' (Harris (2010a: 146)).

12 '[T]he Sly framework establishes a self-referential theatricality in which the status of the shrew-play as a play is enforced' (Bate & Rasmussen (2010: 12), cited in 'The Taming of the Shrew' (2017)). The play 'contains a crudely reactionary dogma of masculine supremacy, but it also works on that ideology to force its expression into self-contradiction. The means by which this self-interrogation is accomplished is that complex theatrical device of the Sly-framework […] without the metadramatic potentialities of the Sly-framework, any production of Shrew is thrown much more passively at the mercy of the director's artistic and political ideology' (Holderness (1989: 116), cited in 'The Taming of the Shrew' (2017)); 'The Induction serves to undercut charges of misogyny – the play within the play is a farce, it is not supposed to be taken seriously by the audience, as it is not taken seriously by Sly. As such, questions of the seriousness of what happens within it are rendered irrelevant' (Oliver (1982), as paraphrased in 'The Taming of the Shrew' (2017)).

13 For Kantian feminism, see, for example, Hay (2013a, 2013b) and also several contributors in Schott (1997c).

14 Hegel was right to celebrate Kant for securing the autonomy of the self (but also right to criticize Kant for the empty formalism of his Categorical Imperative (Hegel (1952), 22–3, 28).

15 For example, 'there is the powerful sexual attraction half-hidden in the quarrelling of Petruccio and Kate, but the end of the play goes out of its way to offer two almost equally disagreeable visions of marriage, one in which the couple is constantly quarreling, the other in which the wife's will has be broken' (Greenblatt (2004: 134–5)).

16 For a century, it was not played at all. In its stead there was another play based only on the Petruccio–Katherine exchange: David Garrick's production of *Catherine and Petruchio* (Howard (1997: 134)). Other reasons for not including the Induction have to do with another kind of funneling: television and cinema. According to a BBC producer, it was not possible to stage the Induction for a screen play ('The Taming of the Shrew on Screen' (2017)).

17 Kant would likely claim that we are dealing therefore with reflective judgements about the play's aesthetic and teleological excesses. Regarding reflective *teleological* judgement, Kate would therefore be talking about the essence of woman only 'as if' nature meant for her to be that way – the assumption being that because this is a reflective judgement, we cannot know for sure. There are different kinds of judgement in Kant: reflective vs. determinative, regulative vs. constitutive. Reflective judgements are concerned with aesthetics and teleology and are not able to bring content under universals (the play is aesthetic and sublime and only 'as if' nature were teleological); determinative judgements are scientific judgements, both pure (e.g., maths) and mixed (empirical, by induction); the categories are divided into regulative and constitutive judgements, but both of these are determinative in that what is at stake is knowledge by subsuming particular objects under universals. For helpful references and distinctions, see Caygill (1995).

18 Analytic judgements are ones in which the predicate is contained in the subject; synthetic *a posteriori* judgements are ones in which we put two or more heterogeneous things together in a judgement (for example, the cat is black); synthetic *a priori* judgements are synthetic in that they involve experience and the uniting of heterogeneous material but are also universal and necessary (*a priori*), as, for example, the judgement that all events have a cause. They synthesize sensibility under the universal and necessary categories belonging to the understanding.

19 This is a pre-critical work but still worth citing.

20 'Far from challenging women's exclusion from education on egalitarian grounds, Kant mocks women's attempts at serious philosophical and scientific work. … Because of their natural fear and timidity, Kant views women as unsuited for scholarly work' (Schott (1997b: 323)).

21 The Norton editors clarify that what might be meant here are the 'Histories, especially histories of England such as Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*. Sec. ed. 1587' (Shakespeare (1997: 142)). Sly says 'Richard' when he should have said 'William the Conqueror'.

22 Thus the opening scene of the Induction is a spoof on these dogmatic induction universals – specifically, a spoof on induction universals engendered by patriarchal judgement. That even the educated men in this play are ridiculous is summed up (inside the play within the play) by Kate's father, Gremio, who says limply: 'Oh this learning, what a thing it is!' (1.2.153).

23 Valerie Traub argues that Shakespeare often used disruptions of the social order (including gender) to generate conflict, but that 'The conclusions of the plays, however, tend to restore the social order. And because chaos is often expressed as an inversion of gender hierarchy, the reconstruction of order tends to reinstate masculine authority' (Traub (2002: 132)).

24 I use this term instead of 'performances' in order to invoke Judith Butler's view that gender is essentially performative (Butler (1990)).

25 These problems arise when interpreting Kant's 'Schematism' (in Kant (1983: 180–7) (B177–87)).

26 For example, 1.1.156.

27 Woolf (1981a).

28 Petruccio may give Kate the word, but, really, she already had it; in her final speech, she holds ground for a long time, everyone listening to her as to a learned scholar.

29 As much as he celebrated Kant's securing of autonomy, Hegel would call Kant's moral world view a 'whole nest of thoughtless contradictions' (Hegel (1997: 374)).

30 '[T]he true individuality is at the same time within itself a universality' (Hegel (2004: 12)).

31 Jorge Luis Borges' story 'Death and the Compass' contains a line about a labyrinth which was adopted by Deleuze to describe Kant's philosophy (Deleuze (1996: vii)).

32 For a description of this process see Bates (n.d.).

33 I thank Daniel Smith for his excellent presentation 'Kant, Hegel, Schelling, and the Formation of the Philosophical Canon' (n.d.).

34 'Lucien Goldmann once wrote [of the Kantian subject], "That it could never pass from the *I* to the *we*, that in spite of Kant's genius it always remained within the framework of bourgeois individualist thought"'(cited in Schott (1997b: 331)).

35 Even though Hegel makes similar mistakes in his *Anthropology*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* teaches us a dialectical method that shows the way beyond consciousness's propensity to take a moment as the final picture. In this way, he makes the two ends dialectically related – the social and economic norms underlying the constitution of the subject, and the subject's Kantian critique of the dogmatic reality of those norms.

36 Kant would approve but only if it is an educated wit, for otherwise: 'When [mere] wit draws comparisons, its behavior is like play: judgement's activity is more like business. Wit is more like the bloom of youth, judgement, the ripe fruit of age. … Wit is interested in the *sauce*: judgement, in the *solid food'*. Kant calls someone with educated intelligence and wit 'acute', but, of course, refers only to a man (see Kant's discussion of 'productive wit' in Kant (1974: 90)).

37 Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* can be read as an exercise in overcoming this propensity.

Further reading

Bates, J., 2010. *Hegel and Shakespeare on Moral Imagination*. Albany: State University of New York Press.This book discusses Hegel's works and Shakespeare's dramas together, tracing ethical and moral ideas such as fate, crime, evil, and hypocrisy, as well as wonder, judgement, forgiveness, and justice. Central to the book's conclusion is the role of wit in Hegel and in Shakespeare.

Bates, J. and Wilson, R., eds. 2014. *Shakespeare and Continental Philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.This collection of fifteen essays by authors in Shakespeare studies and in continental philosophy brings the two fields into dialogue with each other. The contributors pair plays with one or more philosophers, drawing from the current continental tradition (e.g., Lacan, Foucault, Derrida), from the nineteenth-century continental tradition (e.g., Hegel, Kierkegaard), and from the early roots of continental tradition (e.g., Aristotle, Ibn Sina).

Butler, J., 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.This famous book criticizes essentialisms of 'female', sex and gender, arguing that gender is social performance.

Kant, I., 1983. *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd.This is Kant's most famous work, in which he explains his philosophical Copernican revolution and develops the Kantian 'critical' philosophical method by investigating the faculties and categories of the mind that allow for the possibility of experience.

Traub, V., 2002. Gender and Sexuality in Shakespeare. In: de Grazia, M. and Wells, S., eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 129–l46.As its title suggests, this article discusses how gender and sexuality appear in Shakespeare's works; it also provides helpful historical facts about gender and sexuality in Shakespeare's time.

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Part IV

Epistemology and scepticism

19

THE DUTY OF INQUIRY, OR WHY OTHELLO WAS A FOOL

Veli Mitova

Appeals to Shakespeare in analytic philosophy tend to suffer from two drawbacks. First, examples from his plays are inevitably used for cosmetic purposes rather than for generating substantive arguments. Second, no attention is paid to the relevant text.[1] The unhappy result is that such appeals are unsatisfying to both the more literary-minded and the hard-nosed philosopher, striking the former as glib and the latter as of marginal philosophical value. In this paper, I show that taking Shakespeare seriously can help us do real philosophical work. I focus on Othello as someone particularly overworked in the cosmetic line (e.g., Russell (1971); Williams (1973)).

Shortly before Othello embarks on his self-eulogy and suicide, he addresses himself as 'O fool! fool! fool!' (5.2.322).[2] I argue here that this exclamation dramatises a central feature of his epistemic situation, which can adjudicate in an important epistemological debate concerning our ethics of belief.

Our ethics of belief specifies the epistemically good ways of forming and revising our beliefs.[3] The godfather of this ethics, W. K. Clifford (1877), thought that its defining norm was the evidence-norm: you should proportion your beliefs to your evidence. But he also thought that complying with this norm sometimes involves the epistemic duty of inquiry – the duty to seek more evidence than one has. Clifford's descendants – 'evidentialists' – keep the evidence-norm but repudiate the duty of inquiry. According to them, if we have such a duty at all, it is always prudential or moral, never epistemic (e.g., Conee & Feldman (2004); Dougherty (2010)).

I argue here that *Othello* shows us that Clifford was right that we have an *epistemic* duty of inquiry. An ethics of belief which doesn't feature this duty fails to accommodate important forms of epistemic appraisal. I first outline the Othello argument (Section 1) and then defend its three premises by appeal to textual evidence (Sections 2–5). I conclude by drawing out the more constructive implications of the argument: *Othello* gives us the beginnings of a positive account of when we have a duty of inquiry (Section 6).

1 The Othello argument

Let me first distinguish the two sides of the debate for ease of reference:

Evidentialism:	The epistemic status of a belief that p at a time is solely fixed by the belief's fit with the believer's evidence concerning p at that time.
Clifford-evidentialism[4]:	The epistemic status of a belief that p at a time is fixed by both

    (1) the belief's fit with the believer's evidence at that time, and

    (2) whether the believer has complied with her duty of inquiry.

The Othello argument aims to show that Clifford-evidentialism gives us a better ethics of belief, in virtue of adding condition (2).

The argument, in outline, is this:

(P1): The following two claims are true:

    JUSTIFIED: Othello's belief that Desdemona is unfaithful is justified by the evidentialist's lights (Section 2).

    BLAME: Othello's 'fool', nonetheless, epistemically censures the belief for the way it was formed (Section 3).

(P2): The evidentialist can't account for BLAME while retaining JUSTIFIED (Section 4).

(P3): The Clifford-evidentialist can account for both JUSTIFIED and BLAME (Section 5).

(C): So, Clifford-evidentialism provides a better ethics of belief.

In what follows, I take it as read that Othello was right to censure himself in the way envisaged by BLAME. The play is a typically Aristotelian tragedy, in which a virtuous person commits an error of judgement due to giving in to passion (e.g., Raffel (2005)). If there were nothing *epistemically* wrong with Othello's belief, then no error of *judgement* would be committed.[5] So, if we think that his fate was tragic in this way, then we think that his epistemic self-censure was correct. Hence, we need the richer ethics of belief that Clifford-evidentialism gives us.

2 (P1): Justified

In this section I argue for the first half of (P1): Othello's belief that Desdemona is unfaithful (henceforth 'BDU') is justified by the evidentialist's lights.

2.1 The evidence for BDU

When Iago first insinuates to Othello his 'doubts' about Desdemona's fidelity, Othello himself raises the question of evidence:

> Be sure thou prove my love a whore –
> Be sure of it. Give me the ocular proof.

<div align="right">(3.3.359–60)</div>

And he presses the request throughout the scene:

> Make me to see't, or at least so prove it
> That the probation bear no hinge nor loop
> To hang a doubt on

<div align="right">(3.3.364–6; see also 3.3.386 and 3.3.410)</div>

Iago obliges Othello with an elaborate seven-stage 'proof':

1   Iago instructs Othello (a foreigner in Venice) in the deceptive and promiscuous ways of Venetian women, in between deftly reminding Othello that Desdemona has already deceived her father (3.3.203–5).

2   Iago plays on Othello's misgivings that he is an 'unnatural' match for Desdemona in virtue of his race, cultural background, and age, in contrast to Cassio, who is of her race, culture, age, and handsome to boot (3.3.229–39).

3   After having engineered Cassio's dismissal from his lieutenancy, Iago urges Othello to delay Cassio's reemployment in order to see how insistently Desdemona entreats for it (3.3.251–3). She does so avidly (3.4.86–96), tragically explaining in Othello's hearing that she is doing so 'for the love I bear to Cassio' (4.1.224).

4   Iago relates in great and steamy detail how Cassio putatively sleep-talked about his affair with Desdemona (3.3.418–24).

5   Iago tells Othello that Cassio has explicitly confessed to intimacy with Desdemona (4.1.30–4).

6   Iago has Othello witness a scene in which Cassio is deriding his affair with Bianca, a courtesan, while Othello thinks (courtesy of Iago) that he is referring to Desdemona (4.1.108–54).

7   Finally, of course, there is the handkerchief. It is Othello's first gift to Desdemona, and he has asked her always to carry it about her (3.3.294). Emilia finds it and gives it to Iago, who plants it in Cassio's lodgings. It thereafter features as evidence in three ways:

  a Iago tells Othello he has seen Cassio wipe his beard with it (3.3.437–9).
  b   Othello sees it in Bianca's hands and hears her say that it clearly belonged to another of Cassio's lovers (4.1.146–8). As Iago helpfully points out to Othello, this means that Desdemona has given the precious handkerchief to Cassio, and 'he hath given it his whore' (4.1.169–70).
  c When Othello asks Desdemona whether she has lost it, she repeatedly lies to him (3.4.81, 83, 84) and refuses his insistent requests to produce it. Her refusals are accompanied by urgent pleas for Cassio's re-employment (3.4.83–6).

These are the pieces of evidence on which Othello's belief is based, as he makes poignantly clear before he literally collapses with jealousy and grief:

> Handkerchief – confessions – handkerchief… It is not words that shake me thus… Confess-handkerchief! O Devil!
> *Othello falls in a trance*

On coming to, he witnesses the conversation between Cassio and Iago (6), sees the handkerchief in Bianca's hands (7b), and BDU is irrevocably cemented.

2.2 BDU is justified by the evidentialist's lights

I think we can all intuitively appreciate the overwhelming cumulative force of these pieces of evidence, though it gets surprisingly often missed. I now argue that BDU is also justified by the evidentialist's lights.

What are these lights? Evidentialism is wedded to the following notion of epistemic justification:

> Doxastic attitude D toward proposition p is epistemically justified for S at t if and only if having D toward p fits the evidence S has at t.
>
> (Conee & Feldman (2004: 83))

This is what has come to be known in the literature as 'synchronic justification': justification is solely a matter of the evidence available to the believer at the time of evaluation. All that is meant by 'evidence' are considerations which speak in favour of the truth of p. Although this formulation is neutral on the ontology of evidence, evidentialists are, as a matter of fact, 'Falsies' (Littlejohn (2013)): they think that a belief or perceptual experience needn't be true to constitute evidence (e.g., Conee & Feldman (2008)). *Available* evidence, according to them, consists of occurrent beliefs and perceptual experiences: 'S has [e] available as evidence at t iff S is currently thinking of [e]' (Conee & Feldman (2008): 232).

I think it pretty obvious that BDU is synchronically justified given this notion of available evidence. To begin with, notice that the evidence for BDU is of two kinds: Iago's allegations against Venetian women (1), his tales about Cassio's dream (4), confession (5), and seeing the handkerchief on Cassio (7a) are pieces of *testimony*. The rest of the evidence is of the 'ocular-proof' kind. Although Iago has largely engineered the latter, Othello still *witnesses* Desdemona's entreaties for Cassio's re-employment (3), Cassio's derision of his affair (6), the handkerchief on Bianca (7b), and Desdemona's repeated lies that she still has it (7c).

Clearly, not all the above pieces of evidence weigh equally. Pieces (1) to (3), by themselves, are insufficient to justify BDU. But they do reinforce the main body of evidence – the handkerchief (7), Cassio's putative derision of Desdemona (6), and his supposed confession (5). The handkerchief is obviously the weightiest piece of evidence. Regarding the others, they would be good evidence provided they are undefeated[6] by indications that the attestant is untrustworthy.

This is precisely Othello's case. He has no evidence against Iago's trustworthiness. Iago is continuously addressed as 'good' and 'honest' by everyone in the play (2.1.96, 97; 2.3.21, 39; 4.2.150). Moreover, Othello and Iago have known each other for a long time and have fought side by side in many battles (1.1.26–9). Iago's testimony, then, is an undefeated source of justification for BDU.

What about other potential defeaters? The only candidates are: Othello's previous trust in Desdemona; Desdemona's own testimony that she is innocent; and Emilia's testimony that Desdemona is innocent.

Othello's trust in Desdemona fails to undercut the synchronic justification of BDU simply because he barely knows her. First, he has just married her (1.1.165–6). Second, he has only known her for nine months (1.3.85). Third, during this time they have mostly met in her father's presence. Indeed, their courtship has needed Cassio as a go-between (3.3.95–102). Finally, during their short-lived marriage, the two have hardly had any time together – so little, in fact, that many critics argue that the play closes with the marriage unconsummated (Bloom (2005: 236)).[7]

Desdemona's own testimony that she is innocent (4.2.34–87 and 5.2.48–76) is equally inauspicious for a defeater. For starters, it is itself defeated in obvious ways once Othello's trust in her is undercut. Moreover, just before he kills her, Othello repeatedly asks her to swear that she is faithful (4.2.35–7), and she doesn't. All she says in reply is 'Heaven doth truly know it' (4.2.38), a phrase that, lofty and dignified as it is, surely sounds evasive and incriminating in this context. Finally, he knows her to have lied both to her father and to himself.

Emilia's testimony fares no better. First, recall that Iago, a trusted informant and Emilia's husband, has warned Othello of the deviousness of Venetian women. Second, Emilia's testimony is negative: she has *not* seen signs of intimacy between Desdemona and Cassio, she avers (4.2.2–10), which is compatible with the existence of such intimacy. By contrast, Iago's testimony and some of the episodes Othello witnesses constitute positive

evidence incompatible with there not being such intimacy. Third, Othello hardly knows Emilia but is convinced that he knows Iago. Finally, (1)–(7) comprise a far more comprehensive body of evidence than Emilia's testimony. They are evidence about *both parties* to the putative affair, and they include 'ocular' bits as well as testimony.

BDU emerges as justified by the evidentialist's lights, then: Iago's testimony is undefeated, Othello has considerable 'ocular' evidence, and the only candidates for defeaters fail to defeat BDU's justification.

3 (P1): Blame

I have so far defended the first half of (P1) of the Othello argument. I now argue for the second half: Othello's 'fool' epistemically censures BDU for the way it was formed (BLAME). This involves showing that 'fool' is epistemic (Section 3.1), normative (Section 3.2), and targets Othello's evidence for BDU (Section 3.3).

3.1 Othello's 'fool' is epistemic

When Othello calls himself a fool, he has some serious non-epistemic concerns – a dead beloved, for example. So, in one way it is quite perverse to suggest that he is fretting about his epistemic hygiene at this point in the play. And, of course, I don't mean to suggest that this is the only thing he is worried about, just that it is one of the things he *is* worried about, and his 'fool' expresses this epistemic concern.

Clearly, 'fool' doesn't express *moral* self-reproach. Moral self-censure – directed at his having committed murder or at having wronged Desdemona – would hardly be an apt explanans of 'fool'. The apt epithet here would be 'monster' or 'villain', not 'fool'. The most plausible self-censuring attitude, if it is to concern Desdemona *and* explain his use of 'fool', would be a negative attitude to his having *believed* that of her.

To labour the obvious, the two primary meanings of 'fool' are consummately epistemic. The first is 'One deficient in judgement or sense, one who acts or behaves stupidly, a silly person, a simpleton'. The second is 'One who is made to appear a fool; one who is imposed on by others; a dupe' (*OED*). And this is how 'fool' and related epithets are used throughout *Othello*. Iago uses 'fool' to describe his other dupes – Roderigo ('Thus do I

ever make my fool my purse', 1.3.356) and Cassio ('this honest fool', 2.3.329). This use is not peculiar to him. For instance, in an interchange of quips, Iago, Emilia, and Desdemona pun on foolishness as an antonym of wit, on the one hand, and as a synonym of credulity, on the other (2.1.143–55).

3.2 Othello's 'fool' is normative

It is pretty obvious that when someone calls himself a fool, he is in the business of self-appraisal, and he is not patting himself on the back, either. This is corroborated by Iago. Throughout the play, he uses a whole range of related epithets to capture the gullibility of his epistemic victims. The epithets are clearly normative. For example, he tells us that he intends to

> Make the Moor thank me, love me and reward me,
> For making him *egregiously* an *ass*.

> (2.1.302–5, my italics)

And a bit earlier, that Othello 'will as tenderly be led by the nose / As asses are' (1.3.393–5). Again, when Othello falls into a fit, Iago kindly comments:

> Thus credulous fools are caught
> And many worthy

> (4.1.44–5)

The derision with which Iago uses synonyms of 'fool', such as 'ass', suggests that he is epistemically condemning his victims. The last cited lines make especially vivid both the normative and distinctly epistemic character of 'fool', by simultaneously reiterating the connection between folly and credulity (44), and dissociating folly from considerations of moral worth (45).[8]

3.3 Othello's 'fool' targets his evidence for BDU

That Othello's 'fool' targets the evidence for BDU becomes obvious when we notice that it is uttered in response to Emilia's and Cassio's disclosures of Iago's fraudulence and of the truth about the handkerchief.

The build-up to the disclosures already makes it plain that BDU and the evidence for it are at issue:

> *Othello*: Thy husband knew it all.
> *Emilia*: My husband?
> *Othello*: Thy husband.
> *Emilia*: That she was false to wedlock?
> *Othello*: Ay, with Cassio…
> *Emilia*: My husband?
> *Othello*: Ay, 'twas he that told me on her first,
>   An honest man he is…
> *Emilia*: My husband?
> *Othello*: What needs this iterance, woman? I say thy husband.
> *Emilia*: … My husband say she was false?
> *Othello*: He, woman.
>   I say thy husband. Dost understand the word?
>   My friend, thy husband, honest, honest Iago.
> *Emilia*: … O gull, O dolt,
>   As ignorant as dirt!

<div align="right">(5.2.138–62)</div>

The first two repetitions of 'My husband?' betoken Emilia's gradual awakening to Iago's true part in the tragedy. The third and fourth repetitions are steeped in ridicule for Othello's trust in Iago. By his second reiteration of his faith in 'honest, honest Iago', Emilia's derision bursts uncontrollably into a barrage of epistemic invectives – gull, dolt, ignorant as dirt – all (stronger) synonyms of 'fool'.

Emilia's revelation of how the handkerchief ended up with Cassio follows (5.2.224–8). By the time Cassio has filled in the last details (5.2.319–22), Othello needs no more external epistemic chastising; he is ready to do it himself. That's when he cries 'O fool! fool! fool!' (5.2.322). These revelations make clear to Othello the worthlessness of all his testimonial evidence for BDU and of the weightiest piece of non-testimonial evidence. What could his self-censure target other than the belief whose credentials have been thus exposed?[9]

4 (P2) The evidentialist can't account for BLAME while retaining JUSTIFIED

This completes my defence of (P1) of the Othello argument:

  JUSTIFIED: BDU is justified by the evidentialist's lights; yet
  BLAME: Othello's 'fool' epistemically censures BDU for the way it
  was formed.

I now argue for (P2): the evidentialist can't make sense of BLAME while retaining JUSTIFIED.

    She obviously can't do so on the basis of the available evidence. If she tries, she will lose her grip on JUSTIFIED: if the available evidence does *not* support BDU, then BDU is not synchronically justified. In that case, the evidentialist cannot account for *both* JUSTIFIED and BLAME. But I have argued that both claims are plausible (Sections 2–3).[10]

    But the evidentialist can't make sense of the claim in terms of any other epistemic notion, either, for evidentialists insist that evaluation in terms of anything other than the available evidence is non-epistemic. Here are Conee and Feldman, evidentialism's most fervent champions:

> You should gather more evidence concerning a proposition only when having a true belief about the subject matter of the proposition makes a moral or prudential difference and gathering more evidence is likely to improve your chances of getting it right.
>
> <div align="right">(Conee & Feldman (2004: 189))</div>

This means that they can't account for BDU's epistemic deficiency in terms of Othello's having violated an *epistemic* duty to go beyond the evidence available to him, since they think that all such duties are moral or prudential.

    But the evidentialist can't account for Othello's censure in terms of *any* more general normative epistemic notion, either. Here, for example, is Dougherty using 'responsibility' as an umbrella term for any such notion that goes beyond synchronic justification:

> Each instance of epistemic irresponsibility is just an instance of purely non-epistemic irresponsibility/irrationality (either moral or

instrumental).

So, according to evidentialism, the *epistemic* status of a belief at a time is solely fixed by the believer's evidence at that time. But then, once a belief is synchronically justified, the evidentialist has no room for acknowledging any *epistemic* (normative) defect in it at that time. Since Othello's belief is synchronically justified, the evidentialist cannot censure it as epistemically deficient. She can thus not accommodate BLAME.

5 (P3) The Clifford-evidentialist can account for both JUSTIFIED and BLAME

But Clifford-evidentialism can. This is the view, recall, that the epistemic status of a belief that p at a time is fixed by both:

1 the belief's fit with the believer's evidence at the time, and
2 whether the believer has complied with her duty of inquiry.

Clifford-evidentialism accounts for JUSTIFIED by appeal to (1), just as the evidentialist did. But Clifford-evidentialism can additionally account for BLAME, by appeal to (2).

By 'inquiry', I simply mean what Clifford did – looking for more evidence for and against the relevant proposition. When do we have an *epistemic* duty to look for more evidence? The answer is fairly straightforward in cases in which we have not yet formed a belief but are inquiring into some topic.

Say that I am researching newts and stumble on a particular aquatic salamander. I have some evidence that the salamander is a newt and some evidence that it is not. Since I want to form a belief either way, I have an epistemic reason to look for more evidence. I could, of course, have pragmatic and moral reasons to inquire, too. Perhaps, unless I found out whether it is a newt, my funding would be stopped, or someone would be tortured to death. But I have, in any case, an *epistemic* reason to inquire if I am researching newts.

The second tenet of Clifford-evidentialism implicitly features this notion of a reason to inquire but with a slight twist: it presupposes that we can have

such a reason for beliefs which we already hold. The evidentialist disputes that there are any *epistemic* reasons of this kind. If we can show that citing these reasons is our only way of making sense of Othello's epistemic situation, we would show the evidentialist misguided.

The best way of getting a handle on such reasons is by distinguishing them from defeaters (if they were merely defeaters, of course, then they would undermine the synchronic justification of the belief). We could then say that while Othello's belief is undefeated and thus synchronically justified, it is nonetheless epistemically deficient because he has violated his duty to inquire when he had reason to inquire.

The Clifford-evidentialist explanation of Othello's 'fool', then, is that Othello is censuring himself for having violated his duty to inquire. It is this that his jealousy prevents him from doing; hence, his error of judgement. And he realises this; hence, his 'fool'.

6 The duty of inquiry

What triggers the duty of inquiry in Othello's case? I suggest that the answer lies in the two most conspicuous features of his epistemic situation, which will give us the resources to start on a positive account of our duty of inquiry.

First, although, as I have argued, Emilia's and Desdemona's testimony are not enough to constitute defeaters to BDU, they do constitute reasons for Othello to inquire. At a minimum, this is because each of them contains an explicit request to perform an easy inquiry.

The 'my husband' quote from Section 3.3 also points in this direction. There, Emilia was asking Othello to reflect on the source of his evidence. Here she is again, urging him to reflect and see that infidelity simply doesn't make sense in light of Desdemona's character (17–19) and to consider BDU's origin (15–16):

> If any wretch have put this in your head,
> Let heaven requite it with the serpent's curse!
> For if she be not honest, chaste, and true,
> There's no man happy. The purest of their wives
> Is foul as slander.

(4.2.15–19)

The simplest thing Othello could have done, then, is to reflect on whether any 'wretch' *has* had a hand in sowing the seed for the belief and in helping sustain it. The briefest reflection would have recalled to him that it was all started by Iago. Indeed, as obvious from the 'my husband' passage cited in Section 3.3, he realises this as soon as he is forced to reflect: 'Ay, 'twas he that told me on her first' (5.2.144).

Desdemona's request to inquire is even more explicit, when Othello charges her with having given Cassio the handkerchief:

> No, by my life and soul!
> Send for the man, and ask him.

> (5.2.48–9)

And when Othello tells her he has seen the handkerchief on Cassio, she warns him:

> He found it then.
> I never gave it him. Send for him hither.
> Let him confess a truth.

> (5.2.66–8)

Crucially, the requests to inquire concern the two main groups of Othello's evidence – Iago's testimony (Emilia's request) and the adventures of the handkerchief (Desdemona's request).

The second feature of Othello's situation is that he was asked to inquire into an epistemically very central belief, a belief which has inferential connections to many of his other beliefs. Othello himself makes BDU's centrality amply clear. The first seeds of doubt planted by Iago, Othello looks at Desdemona and exclaims:

> Perdition catch my soul
> But I do love thee. And when I love thee not,
> Chaos is come again.

> (3.3.91–3)

And a little later:

> If she be false, heaven mocked itself.

> (3.3.278)

These phrases are not merely a tribute to *Desdemona's* centrality to Othello's *life* but to the epistemic centrality of the belief in her fidelity. They indicate BDU's importance for Othello's general self- and world-conception: if it turned out to be false, the passages suggest, then things would not be ordered the way he supposed them to be (first quote), and virtue would not be what he took it to be (second quote). Many of his other beliefs, in other words, would have to be revised. This is corroborated by the passage cited in Section 2.1, where, as Othello forms BDU, he literally collapses into incoherence and a fit, both attesting to the power of BDU to destabilise his whole worldview.

7 Conclusion

Othello was explicitly asked to perform an easy inquiry into an epistemically central belief. That gave him *epistemic* reason to inquire. Jealousy does not prevent him from *going with* the available evidence (as the evidentialist says we should); *that* he does all too willingly, as Iago shrewdly anticipates. It prevents him from heeding his epistemic duty to inquire. In this consists his error of judgement. And it is this that his 'fool' poignantly censures.

This explanation is not available to the evidentialist, I have argued here, because she denies that we have such an epistemic duty. The denial makes her incapable of accounting for Othello's epistemic situation and, hence, makes her ethics of belief an impoverished one. Taking Othello seriously, thus, adjudicates in an important debate in epistemology and advances it by suggesting the direction in which to look for a positive account of our duty of inquiry.[11]

Related topics

See Chapters 4, 6, 20

Notes

1 Stanley Cavell (2003) is a notable exception in both these respects.
2 Unless otherwise indicated, all references to the play are to Shakespeare (2005).
3 The label '*ethics* of belief' is, thus, somewhat of a misnomer, suggesting a concern with how our beliefs fare *morally*. While this is arguably how Clifford used the term, nowadays it more often concerns the *epistemic* quality of our beliefs. This is how I use it throughout, skirting the complex issue of the relationship between the moral and epistemic evaluation of belief.
4 This label is meant as a convenience rather than a faithful reflection of Clifford's view. As far as I am aware, the only modern Clifford-evidentialist is Baehr (2011). The argument I offer here is, like his, a friendly amendment to evidentialism. But, unlike Baehr, I don't think that the virtue-machinery can fix evidentialism (see note 9).
5 Clearly, an error of judgement is a normatively richer notion than a false belief. The evidentialist can point out that Othello's belief is false. But this isn't a blameworthy epistemic defect, so it would not explain Othello's distinctly *normative* self-censure.
6 A defeater is a consideration which undermines the justification of the belief that p, by being either evidence against p itself (a 'rebutting defeater': Pollock (1987: 485)) or evidence that one's evidence for p is not a reliable indication of p's truth (an 'undercutting defeater': Pollock (1987: 485)).
7 Doesn't Othello have a duty to trust Desdemona more, a duty which undermines BDU's justificatory status? (Thanks to Emily Caddick Bourne and Craig Bourne.) Indeed, Othello has such a duty, but it is a distinctively non-epistemic one, since (as I have just argued) there is no *epistemic* reason to trust her more. Moreover, the evidentialist must think it a non-epistemic one (see Section 4). Violations of non-epistemic duties can't undermine justificatory status.
8 I don't wish to make too much of the last point, as it only works for some editions of the play. In others, 'and many worthy' doesn't refer to the fools but introduces a separate clause, 'And many worthy and chaste dames even thus, / All guiltless meet reproach' (Shakespeare (2005: 4.1.55–6)). Thanks to Emily Caddick Bourne and Craig Bourne for alerting me to this.
9 The only contender is a *character* failing. Addressing this option properly would require space that I don't have here, so let me just point

out that Othello is anything but a foolish person generally speaking. On the contrary, he is a universally respected general who has risen to this position precisely because of his tactical wisdom and cool judgement, and whose advice on important state decisions is continuously sought (see, e.g., Ludovico's praise of these qualities (4.1.257–61)).

10 Why can't the evidentialist maintain that Othello is blaming himself for having followed bogus evidence? (Thanks to Emily Caddick Bourne and Craig Bourne for this point.) For two reasons. First, then she loses her grip on JUSTIFIED: if the evidence is bogus, then BDU isn't justified. Second, as mentioned in Section 2.2, the evidentialist is a Falsie, so she can't deny the status of evidence to (1)–(7) on the grounds that most of them are false, since she doesn't think that factivity is a requirement on evidence. This means that *Othello* can be used either against evidentialism or against Falsies. I do the latter in Mitova (2017: section 7.3).

11 Many thanks to Simon Blackburn, Craig Bourne, Emily Caddick Bourne, Edward Craig, Jane Heal, Ward Jones, Martin Kusch, the former Rural Sciences Club at Cambridge, and the former Fight Club at Vienna for feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

Further reading

Cavell, S., 2003. *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*. New York: Cambridge University Press.As far as I am aware, the only epistemology monograph on Shakespeare. It discusses seven of his plays: *King Lear, Othello, Coriolanus, Hamlet, The Winter's Tale*, and *Macbeth*.

Clifford, W. K., 1877. The Ethics of Belief. *Contemporary Review* 29: 289–309.The essay contains the original statement and defence of Clifford-evidentialism.

James, W., 1896. The Will to Believe. *New World* 5, reprinted in Moser, P.K. and vander Nat, A., eds. 1995. *Human Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Approaches*, second edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 203–214.The essay offers the most famous classical critique of Clifford-evidentialism, as well as what is often considered the original statement of epistemic pragmatism.

Conee, E. and Feldman, R., 2004. *Evidentialism*. New York: Oxford University Press.This monograph is the locus classicus of modern evidentialism. It is primarily a statement of the sort of programme evidentialism should be and the challenges that a defence of it would face.

Dougherty, T., ed. 2011. *Evidentialism and Its Discontents*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.This collection contains the most comprehensive critiqiue of evdentialsim. It explores the view in relation to six core topics in epistemology: disagreement, virtue, scepticism, knowledge first, internalism, and evidence. It also contains suggestions for new directions for research, as well as Conee and Feldman's replies to critics.

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20

THE EVIL DECEIVER AND THE EVIL TRUTH-TELLER

Descartes, Iago, and scepticism

Dianne Rothleder

The solution to Cartesian scepticism as it applies to the existence of one's own mind lies in the certitude of the *cogito* and the certitude of mathematical knowledge as the exemplary kind of clear and distinct perception.[1] We arrive at certainty from the light of nature, from the self-evidence of mathematical certainty, and from the logic of thought itself – thought requires a thinker. Cartesian certainty, though, only arises through the methodological and hyperbolic doubt of the First Meditation.[2]

Descartes becomes aware of his being 'most tightly joined, and, so to speak, commingled' (1998: 98) with his body in Meditation Six. The action of *Othello* seems to play out First Meditation scepticism, where one's knowledge of both oneself and one's world are lacking, and not until the very end of the play does something akin to the Sixth Meditation resolution of scepticism about the real existence of the external world appear. Descartes settles on a sense that his mind grants certainty, and his body grants something like reasonable probability. Mind and body, reunited, conjoined, are in a kind of dyadic community with shared meanings. What happens to one affects the other, but they are so tightly commingled that it is unclear to Descartes whether or not there is anything else in the universe, anything to be obligated to, any kind of community. To escape the dyadic, the *Meditations* invokes the figure of God as a third, and outside, being. The *Discourse on Method*, though, seems to take for granted the existence of others and a duty to help them flourish (Descartes (1998)). Scepticism, private meanings, and the problems with dyadic relations are at work as well in *Othello*.[3] Both texts need a third party to allay sceptical doubts about other minds. In *Othello*, the third party is, as it is for Descartes in the *Discourse*, the community of shared meaning and shared purpose. The action of *Othello* takes place largely in private experiences and in dyadic relations that collapse into the isolation of the private. It is not until the end of the play that the community re-emerges as a check on the private and nearly private worlds the characters inhabit.

Descartes is tormented by the image of an evil deceiver he has conjured and with which he lives in a dyadic relation of sorts. Othello is tormented by an evil truth-teller he thinks he knows as a friend.[4] Iago, I will suggest, can be read as not actually lying but rather as using truth-telling in a destructive way.[5] If the deceiver makes Descartes doubt the certainties of mathematical truths, Iago makes Othello doubt the certainties of virtue. Iago states directly,

regarding Desdemona, that he 'will turn her virtue into pitch / and out of her own goodness make the net / That shall enmesh them all' (2.3.355–7). Iago will make Desdemona into what she is not, and he will make virtue into what it is not, and he will make honesty into what it is not. But just as the Cartesian deceiver provides the basis for Cartesian certainty, so Iago, the evil truth-teller, provides the basis for a shared community of meanings that overcomes the problem of wicked virtue.

Coleridge characterizes Iago as engaging in the 'motive hunting of a motiveless malignity', by which he means that Iago seems to have no reason, no motivation, for any of his actions (Coleridge (1989: 113)).[6] Further, Iago is generally taken to be an inveterate liar throughout, though he is called 'honest' repeatedly in the play. Whether or not Iago has a motive, he certainly has a method. Part of Iago's method, as evil truth-teller, is to act as a kind of echo of the people around him, but one who is selective in his echoing. Here, the echo is akin to an aural mirror of sorts, not unlike Ovid's characterization of Echo, whose unrequited love of Narcissus ends in shame and silence.[7] Othello catches on to the echoing when he declares to Iago, 'Think, my lord! By heaven, thou echo'st me / As if there were some monster in thy thought / Too hideous to be shown' (3.3.109–11). Indeed, there is such a monster, and, indeed, Iago does echo.

The method of echoing allows Iago to show potential or hidden characteristics, and it further underscores the collapse of the dyadic relation into the private mind. Desdemona's father has fears of Desdemona's betrayal, and Iago echoes those fears. Othello is potentially jealous and Iago echoes that jealousy. Echoing a narcissist reinforces the narcissism, and Iago's version of echoing, a deliberate and malevolent repeating of the worst fears, undermines any kind of shared and moral world. Iago's complete lack of good will makes his use of the truth of the echo a wicked act. He turns the virtue of truth into wickedness.

Beyond mere repetition of the words and emotions of others, Iago uses pronoun references, prodding techniques, unexpected responses to others, and the probability that his interlocutors assume him to be fully true – his reputation. Iago tells a kind of truth that has a private reference system rather than a shared reference system. Privately, what he says is true, it obtains in his world, the pronouns refer as he intends them. That others misinterpret his references or enact their own fantasies on his language is not indicative of his lying, though it certainly is all made possible by his malevolence.

False honesty, in a shared and moral universe, must have both a practical fall and a logical fall (just as violations of the Kantian categorical imperative have this doubled sense of contradiction built in). Practically, people generally do find out about lies eventually, and liars often get caught. But the stronger claim of the real impossibility of 'false honesty' is what will protect a shared community from a malevolent will. Iago's false honesty, or malevolent will, must fail of its own weight, not merely because he gets caught. The Kantian point that a good will is a necessary adjunct to the goodness of any virtue is well taken here. Iago's is a malevolent will whose method depends fully upon a trust that he violates. Trust is a kind of certainty that comes from a shared community and shared meanings, and as Iago's interlocutors become better arithmeticians, they are destined to calculate probabilities. From Iago's malevolence and instigation of a series of deaths, then, the value of virtue is re-established.[8] The response to Iago must be one that uses scepticism, trust, probability, and shared public meanings as a method of conduct.[9] Each of these, misused or misplaced, causes Othello to be either overly trusting (of Iago because of his reputation as 'honest') or

overly sceptical (of Desdemona, of his own senses), and they are all made worse by Othello's and Iago's outsider status in the play.[10] Neither can be easily brought in to shared meanings.[11]

At the end of the play, when Emilia declares her intention to speak, there is suddenly a move from the various dyadic and private meanings to a communal, shared, public truth. To get to this point, Emilia has declared during the unpinning scene that she would gladly commit a 'small vice' (cuckolding her husband) to gain the whole world because it is a 'great price' (4.3.67). Upon gaining the world, she would simply change the rules of virtue so that her small vice, or sin, is no longer considered a sin. Or, to show her as a doubling of her doubled husband, she would recast this new world without speaking fully the extent to which it rests on her previous sins. To echo an echo is a kind of falsity that is true. To speak properly with a shared moral voice is a fuller truth.[12]

Othello can be improperly certain of Desdemona's infidelity because they are not conjoined or commingled (it has been suggested that they do not consummate the marriage[13]); he can be improperly certain of his senses because he is not an arithmetician, skilled in certainty and probability and their proper domains. The Cartesian problem of error, doubt, and uncertainty, and a return to certainty through the self-evidence of mathematical truths, helps shed light on the text of *Othello*. Othello's engagement with Iago, an echo of Othello, leads him to a range of doubts that he cannot escape without having some kind of underlying reality to grasp. Mathematics provides precisely this grounding for Descartes, and Othello needs something similar.

Othello cannot know absolutely, but he can know with a higher or lower degree of probability. Probabilistic knowledge requires some understanding of what is more or less probable in a community, and this kind of knowledge requires deep familiarity with that community. The outsider status of the characters, especially Othello, means that probabilistic thinking is fraught with the possibility of error. Because Othello is not calculating probabilities,[14] because he is an outsider to the culture, because the metaphors for thought that he works with are related to certainty and impossibility as absolutes rather than to degrees of probability, Othello is unsuited to thinking clearly about the nature of the people around him.

Further, because Othello's eyesight is weak and he is prone to epileptic seizures, he cannot quite sustain the perception of his sensory experience. He is fully trapped, then, in some kind of sceptical Cartesian whirlpool where the only thing to grab on to is Iago, one who may well be an actually existing (for Othello) evil truth-teller.[15]

What almost rescues Othello, and what rescues readers of the play, is the exit from the narcissistic speech-making[16] and deception of the first four acts of the play when Emilia speaks in Act V. She declares, 'I'll speak' (5.2.220). Her speech is the truth, not a narcissistic gazing at herself nor an echo of another. Her speech is a return to the shared perceptual, moral, and social world that she exited in the unpinning scene.

While Emilia manages a reconnection with a shared world, Iago never does. He cues us in to his doubled self early in the play when he declares, 'I am not what I am' (1.1.64). This line sets up Iago as a negation of himself, as an echo would be, as a fully unsettled subject, as one denying a nature and an identity, as one not knowable or known, as a mystery, as inscrutable. He is not being; he is not nothing. He is probabilistic, dependent on reputation, isolated from the shared world, living only in a method, utterly lacking good will. He is an

evil truth-teller. And here we can pause to look at this paradox, for if he is not what he is, and if we settle on a meaning for him, we are instantly thrown off that meaning. That he is evil would suggest a lack of virtue, that he has virtue (truth-telling) should suggest some lack of evil, but he combines both in an unsettled mix such that the virtue of truth-telling is perverted into an evil of truth-telling, and that the evil of a malevolent will is combined with the good of the virtue of truth-telling. His unsettled oscillation between these characteristics marks him throughout the play as both 'Honest Iago' and as a devil figure.

In what follows, we will look at a number of Iago's lines to show the possibility that he does not actually tell any lies. His methods of violating shared communal notions of language and time will be highlighted, and his eventual collapse, as Emilia's final declaration to speak returns us to a shared world in which a malevolent echo loses its voice, will be documented.

Iago claims to Brabantio that Desdemona and Othello have not only eloped but are 'now, even now' engaged in sex (1.1.87). The text does not tell us if they have consummated their marriage, nor does the text seem to grant sufficient time for the elopement and consummation to have happened. Indeed, there are a number of time-related problems in the play that have been commented on almost since its beginnings, under the rubric 'double-time readings'.[17] There are overly rushed events and impossibly timed sequences. This material has been variously explained as a kind of emotional time versus actual time, as a kind of authorial error, and as a kind of theatrical convention we ought not worry about. Othello's doubts about Desdemona indicate that he does not 'know' her, but in a double-time reading of the text, there is an emotional truth to Iago's line. There is enough of a possibility that they are 'now, even now' having sex that Iago cannot be said to be lying. Indeed, the suggestion is that Othello and Desdemona are lying – on each other – a usage that is central to the play.

The sense of honest Iago's relationship to honesty first becomes complicated in the handkerchief scene and then becomes even more complicated when he is talking to Roderigo about the disposition of the jewels, and to Othello about the worth of honesty.

When Roderigo confronts Iago about all the gifts Roderigo has handed over to Iago for the benefit of Desdemona, Roderigo says bluntly, 'You have told me she hath received them, / and returned me expectations and comforts of sudden respect and acquittance, but I find none' (4.2.190–2). Iago replies, 'Well, go to; very well' (4.2.193).

Iago has certainly made it seem that Roderigo's gifts have been handed over to Desdemona, have been appreciated by Desdemona, and have swayed Desdemona's affections for Roderigo. What we cannot say for certain is that Iago said bluntly and clearly that all of this was done. Iago is a master at implicature and indirection, at echoing selectively, and he may well have allowed Roderigo to harbour false beliefs, may well have encouraged such false beliefs, and yet may never have said anything quite false. Again, as echo, Iago speaks what Roderigo wishes to be, what Roderigo is, but what Roderigo would not activate without the words that Iago repeats. Further, in the way that language is used to create worlds, the way that Emilia would be willing to sin to get the world, and then to rewrite the world, as it were, so too does Iago rewrite Roderigo's world such that the meaning of his not passing on the gifts has actually become the proper, truthful, and moral action. The suggestion is that the two have not been in the same moral timescape. Iago has been collecting money, selling jewels, and waiting for Roderigo to become worthy of Desdemona's love. Anything he has said, presumably, is in some kind of anticipation of this new world that soon, very soon,

Roderigo will inhabit. The shift in time, in this case, in the relationship between past, present, and future, keeps Iago 'honest'. By deflecting the discourse from Roderigo's accusations of Iago's dishonesty to an appreciation of Roderigo's audacity and bravery, Iago has changed the meaning of the non-passing on of the gifts from a dishonest act to a preventive act. That is, now, very now, Roderigo has proven his worth and now, very now, has finally earned Desdemona's affections. And now, very now, Roderigo's gifts are properly ready to pass on to Desdemona.

Iago, then, to save himself, improvises a time shift of sorts to go along with possible indirect speech, all to make it seem that though the gifts were, indeed, not passed on, they simply were not ready to be passed on. The time was not ripe. And now, very now, it is. By rewriting the meaning of the present conflict over past conduct, Iago has recast Roderigo's horizons into a new futurity, and with that new futurity, Roderigo now has a new and furious intent to court Desdemona more fully and to support Iago more dearly. Iago has changed the timeframe that Roderigo identifies with such that Roderigo is now, even now, and more than ever, ready to engage, or to be engaged to, Desdemona. The standard double-time reading of the play focuses more on the impossibilities of events happening at the speed they seem to, or with the slowness that they seem to, but this scene indicates that there is another element in the double-time scheme that is related to when words mean what they do.

The cleverness of Iago here, the slipperiness with which he engages time, meaning, and Roderigo's inner psychic make-up is revelatory. We know, suddenly, from this scene that Iago's words can conjure not merely images, events, and spaces, cannot merely raise inner demons and turn men green with envy, but more, even more, can control time, or the time of identification. Roderigo's pain and shame and unrequited love and ungiven gifts are all past-looking, and suddenly Roderigo is a man with a future.

The next problematic scene to deal with is the dream of Cassio that Iago recounts. In describing the dream of Cassio, Iago says,

> I lay with Cassio lately
> And being troubled with a raging tooth
> I could not sleep. There are a kind of men
> So loose of soul that in their sleeps will mutter
> Their affairs – one of this kind is Cassio.
> In sleep I heard him say 'Sweet Desdemona,
> Let us be wary, let us hide our loves,'
> And then, sir, would he gripe and wring my hand,
> Cry 'O sweet creature!' and then kiss me hard
> As if he plucked up kisses by the roots
> That grew upon my lips, lay his leg o'er my thigh,
> And sigh, and kiss, and then cry 'Curse fate
> That gave thee to the Moor!'

(3.3.418–28)

Iago implies that the dream is overheard while Iago and Cassio lay together and Iago was awake with a toothache. But the toothache and Cassio's sleep talk may well be separate incidents. There is a kind of break in continuity between 'I could not sleep' and 'There are a kind of men'. They could easily be separate, and Iago could be telegraphing the separation

as a gesture of honesty, while nonetheless linking them in sequential statements. Because we tend to link sentences that appear in sequence, we are assuming a link out of habit. The line 'In sleep I heard him say' does not indicate whose sleep it is. If 'In sleep I heard him say' is not Cassio's sleep while Iago was awake with a raging toothache, then the meaning of the entire dream is altered. If the sleep is Iago's sleep on another occasion, and Iago has had the dream that he heard Cassio say 'Sweet Desdemona…', then the dream sequence may speak more to Iago's jealousy of some purported affection between Desdemona and Cassio rather than any kind of real relationship. The ambiguities here are sufficient to cast doubt on Iago's lying and to allow, again, for him to be fully honest in a thin sense of the term and playing with grammatical referents. Someone's sleep, someone's dream, someone's utterances, someone's attractions, someone's love, kisses, legs – but we do not know whose, and we do not know how much is a private dream logic that conceals rather than reveals.

Some fifteen lines later, the handkerchief comes up, and with the dream in the background, Iago says that he has today seen 'Cassio wipe his beard with' the handkerchief. Othello has just said that the handkerchief was the first gift he gave to Desdemona, and Iago replies, 'I know not that' (3.3.440). This line, 'I know not that', is perhaps unlikely to be the case. But it actually is possible, with a double-time reading, that Iago has seen Cassio wipe his beard with the handkerchief. However, when Emilia gives the handkerchief to Iago, saying first that she has a thing for Iago, and then saying of the handkerchief, 'Why, that the Moor first gave to Desdemona, / That which so often you did bid me steal' (3.3.311–2), we have some sense that Iago should know the status of this gift from Othello to Desdemona. Emilia has informed Iago that this is the first gift Othello has given, or she has informed him that it is a gift Othello 'first gave to Desdemona' (and then perhaps gave to another, or gave in some other way). The grammatical question here is what does 'first' modify? The declaration is ambiguous, and Iago interprets it as he wishes rather than as it is meant. Without a third figure mediating the dyad, Iago has grammatical space.

Beyond the double-time reading possibly needed for time for the placement of the handkerchief, there may be another level of this interpretive scheme which is that jealousy, obsession, and the trajectory towards murder both rush time and stop time. Time references abound in the play; the timescape looms large in the awareness of many characters. Desdemona is in a rush for Othello to act on Cassio's behalf and then is desperate to stop action to delay her death. Emilia is almost ready to return the handkerchief but then rushes to tell Iago about her 'thing' (3.3.305). Iago presents Othello's and Desdemona's consummation as 'Even now, very now'. Bianca cannot believe that Cassio has been away a whole week (3.4.173). Cassio wants a speedy restoration of his name (3.3.14–18). Impatience is everywhere. And Iago watches the parade, finds his moments, and bides his time. Operating within the double time, then, is a kind of psychological time that accompanies clock time. We are always a little late and a little early and on time. Felt time is as real in the play as real time.[18]

The intrusion of felt time, or of these two timescapes, gives Iago's witnessing of the beard wiping an unknown degree of probability. For Othello, it is immeasurably true because of the world of jealousy he inhabits. For Iago, it may well be true that, in rushed-time fashion, he has actually witnessed the beard wiping. The time shifts point clearly to the unshared, unsynchronized world of private meaning and private experience, where identity, time, and language fail to be communal, and where self-identity fails.

The most insincere and not-himself-self, Iago, says, 'Men should be what they seem, / Or those that be not, would they might seem none' (3.3.129–30). Iago seems to be talking about Cassio's insincerity, but of course it is his own that is the real subject. Iago should be what he seems, or he should simply stop seeming to be. And at the end of the play, his silence will live up to precisely this: he will stop seeming to be because he will stop talking, unlike Echo, whose voice lives on past her body.

As Iago comments on what men should be, what honesty is all about, he is being honest. It is a morally correct statement that one should be what one seems, that inside and outside should match, that hidden motivations and double timing and double meanings should be joined into a singular identity. And clearly Iago should stop being. Again, it is all truthful and all honest. It is the hinting that all of this applies to Cassio that is more problematic. But even here, Cassio is a doubled subject as well. From keeping his relationship with Bianca a secret to his being not what he is when he is drunk suggests that there is a kind of dishonesty in Cassio that must be worked through. And Cassio could, indeed, bear some kind of distant but improper attraction to Desdemona, multiplying both the doubling of Cassio's subjectivity and the truth of Iago's language here.

With Cassio's honesty now a topic for consideration, Iago's soliloquy at the end of the act, right after he receives the handkerchief from Emilia, is worth a look. He declares his intent to put the napkin in Cassio's lodging (3.3.324) and then he says,

> Trifles light as air
> Are to the jealous confirmations strong
> As proofs of holy writ…
> Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons
> Which at the first are scarce found to distastes
> But with a little art upon the blood
> Burn like the mines of sulfur.

(3.3.325–32)

The handkerchief is light as a thought; a thought is light as air. And air is enough to convince a jealous man that he has found the truth. Air, nothing, no-proof, things not what they are, pure negation is enough to poison, enough to burn as hellfire. Conceits, thoughts, gauze, air. These nothings are everything and yet are nothing. And it is the nothing that Iago is expert at exploiting. For no reason. He can echo, he can breathe a name, and Othello will fall.

On the way to Cassio's dream, just before asking for 'ocular proof' (3.3.363), Othello finds himself wishing for nothing, for ignorance (3.3.341–6). He was happy before he knew of Desdemona's infidelity. Of course, he still does not know that Desdemona is unfaithful, because she is not unfaithful. But he does not know that he does not know. He has nothing, he wishes for nothing, and he does not realize just how nothing his seeming knowledge is.[19] And it has all been induced by nothing-dreams, nothing-handkerchiefs, nothing-ocular, from Iago who is not what he is, and who still seems to be what he is not. That is, Iago maintains his claim to consistent negativity, master of a kind of conjuring from nothing, but who still seems to be honest and to be revealing something of substance.

The confusion comes across in the next set of lines. Othello says, 'By the world, I think my wife be honest, and think she is not, / I think that thou art just, and think thou art not. / I'll have some proof' (3.3.386–9).

And the proof is the dream scene. As we have already noted, the dream may well be Iago's dream; it might have happened as recounted. It is a dream. It is there with the gauze and air and conceit. It is as unreal as anything else Iago has come up with to prove that a nothing is a thing, that he has a thing even as Emilia has had a thing. He prefaces the recounting by noting that he has 'imputation and strong circumstances' (3.3.409), and these, of course, are their own kind of nothing as well. They are the stuff of suggestion and circumstantial evidence or coincidence. They are not proof but mere probability of the lowest sort.

Right after the dream is the beard-wiping tale. It is still a handkerchief, still gauze. And somehow, these tales add up to something closer to proof. They may be honest. They may well be events in the world. The text does not tell us that for certain Iago has made up these tales. It may all be improbable, but the improbable is not the impossible or the lie. And so still we cannot quite charge Iago with blatant lying. Though certainly we can charge him with trying to turn a series of nothings into something, and we can charge him with enjoying the mayhem he is occasioning.

The drama in Act IV builds on the world Iago has narrated into Othello's consciousness. Iago has cautioned about jealousy, 'the green-eyed monster, which doth mock / The meat it feeds on' (3.3.168), and in so doing has given Othello precisely the vocabulary he needs to come to terms with his emotions. He can analyse himself as jealous, as a cannibal, as a figure with an inner monster. There is no falsity in the image, and it is Othello's doing to put it into practice in the remainder of the play.

It is in Act IV that indirection and innuendo triumph, and Iago tells not a single lie. He brings up thinking, and the word 'think' (4.1.1) makes Othello think.[20] And the word 'kiss' (4.1.2) makes Othello think about kisses. And the word 'naked' (4.1.5) makes Othello think about naked, unauthorized kisses, in bed, for 'an hour or more' (4.1.4). These images are an echo of the dream scene and a complete conjuration from within Othello's own imagination. Iago claims nothing, asserts as true nothing. He says nothing. And out of the nothing comes the end of Othello.

From thinking and kissing, Iago moves to saying. And from saying, Othello needs to know what has been said. What has been said is 'lie'. 'Lie', of course, is a word with multiple meanings. And what is said is not necessarily what it received, for the receiver has a whole frame to bring to bear on what is said. Iago sends 'lie'. Othello receives 'With her'. Iago sends 'With her, on her, what you will' (4.1.33–5). 'What you will' is a gesture to what Othello hears in the words Iago holds up. It is what Othello wills, not at all what Iago has said.

Othello falls into an epileptic seizure and then Iago manufactures the Bianca/Cassio/hidden Othello scene. Right after they exit, Iago says to Othello, about the handkerchief, 'She gave it him, and he hath given it to his whore' (4.1.173–4). Iago's honesty hangs on the pronouns here. Othello thinks that Iago's use of 'she' refers to Desdemona, and Iago allows this misreading. What Iago is actually describing is Bianca's handing the handkerchief to Cassio, and Cassio's returning it to Bianca. This handing back-and-forth is not seen by Othello. Iago, then, is honest, but his honesty rests on ill-explained pronoun use, on a reputation as 'honest', on private rather than public conversational implicature. Iago violates norms and assumptions of completeness of discourse, keeps private what must be shared, and yet, within his private meanings, he is something like honest, in the thinnest of all possible senses.

Regardless of what happens in the real world now, all Othello can say of the world comes from the language Iago has supplied. Iago has become Othello's entire sensory filter. It is as if Othello's eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin are all Iago's. Anything that comes into Othello comes through Iago. Early on in the play, we are given hints of Othello's limited eyesight, and now we see that it is actually all of his senses that are weak and that end up in tragic dependence on Iago. Iago's honest treachery nears its goal, and he uses Othello's lack of Cartesian scepticism about perception to bring about the end.

In Act V, Emilia cries out to Iago demanding to know if he has deceived Othello. And Iago replies, 'I told him what I thought, and told no more / Than what he found himself was apt and true' (5.2.172–3). Emilia counters, 'But did you ever tell him she was false?' (5.2.174). Iago replies, quite simply, and truthfully, 'I did' (5.2.175). And Emilia cries out, 'You told a lie, an odious, damned lie! / Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie! / She false with Cassio? Did you say with Cassio?' (5.5.176–8). Iago agrees, 'With Cassio, mistress. Go to, charm your tongue' (5.2.177).

We have here a dialogue similar in structure to that between Roderigo and Iago regarding the jewels. Clearly, Iago has suggested and implied what is false, has made a narrative world that does not match up with the real world, has helped shift time perception, meaning, and object, has moved emotion and thought, has framed and spun without regard to conventional notions of the moral universe. But that said, when Iago is confronted, he tells the truth. The confrontation seems to put everyone back in the same timescape and space long enough for language and morality to assert themselves. Further, Iago provides enough weasel space for himself that he manages to escape from out-and-out lies. He told what he thought and no more. Iago's thoughts are the problem. Or we could take 'false with Cassio' to mean that she promised Cassio that she could recover his good name, and this turns out to have been impossible and therefore false. Finally, and perhaps most likely, 'false' and 'with Cassio' are linked in Emilia's language, but they are separated in Iago's language. This odd kind of linking of separated words are a regular feature of Iago's language.

If, though, this moment marks a kind of confession, the question arises whether or not, indeed, Iago has told lies and the reading that he is not a liar but rather an evil truth-teller falls. Given that he is honest when it would most benefit him to lie, right at this moment when the dam is breaking, the climax is nearing, and he has been directly confronted about what he has said in the past – given all of this, he replies honestly. An honest response when it would most benefit him to lie suggests that Iago preserves some odd notion of honesty throughout. He is confronted with his language and he replies. But what he replies with is another twist – he has told only what he has thought. He has thought Desdemona was false, he has dreamt it, he has constructed some kind of private world in which it is the case at some level, just as Emilia has constructed some kind of world in which it is morally acceptable to cuckold her husband to make him a monarch.

Clearly, though, as we reach the final scene of the play, Iago's method is breaking down, and his motivation comes back to the fore. Is he jealous? Does he think Emilia has been unfaithful with Othello? Is he envious? Does he think he deserves the promotion Cassio gets in his place? Is he lower-class and thinks Othello is an undeserving outsider? Is he attracted to Othello? These kinds of speculation are at the heart of Coleridge's declaration that Iago has no motivations at all but is hunting for them.

If Iago is merely an evil will, if he is mere method (using virtue to destroy virtue) without motive, then we are left with the problem of how to manage a world in which someone like

Iago might emerge. We must inoculate ourselves against motiveless malignity, private meanings, and private implicature. And we must make sure that we do not think that the shared world can be privatized and then reconstituted to suit some new purpose.

At the climax of the play, Iago cries out to Emilia, his wife, 'Filth, thou liest!' (5.2.229). These words are Iago's accusation of Emilia's infidelity (she lies – with an other, on an other, what you will…), which Iago soliloquizes about early on in the play, and it could thus be completely true so far as Iago is concerned.[21] He may be, in the end, a thief, a murderer (of both Roderigo and Emilia), and yet an honest man.

Iago's technique of echoing is a seeming dyadic response to a narcissistic concern. It seems to make public what is private but is actually merely the private restated. Private anxieties and private desires, like those of Descartes and those of Ovid's Echo, require a third term, a public and shared set of meanings as a corrective to the merely internal. If Cartesian mind and body are really commingled, if they are one at some important level, they are not mutually corrective, and it takes, again, either God or the world of human concern from the *Discourse* to ameliorate the damage of internality.

The question must be, at the end of both the *Meditations* and *Othello*, what necessarily pulls us out of the dyadic but mirroring or echoing relations? Is there a structure that makes Iago an impossible figure, and is there a structure that Descartes can grasp that is not his own mind and body? Are there other minds? Is the good will constitutive of human community, and do shared meanings necessarily rescue us from the likes of Iago, or is rescue merely contingent upon an Emilia-like figure who will speak?

We have to count on the self-destructive nature of Iago's method. That he uses virtue to destroy virtue means that he is destroying the very underpinnings of his method, and so, in Kantian fashion, he cannot succeed. We can construct a shared world compelling enough that we all willingly join in the sharing of language, reference, meaning, temporality, and kindness. We have to hope for good wills that echo well rather than malevolent wills that echo our internal anxieties. And we have to hope for enough of an understanding of our world that we can calculate with reasonable probability rather than demanding absolute certainty. Cartesian understandings of error and Emilia's final willingness to speak and not echo or mirror Iago are our best hope for avoiding the worst Iago can repeat.[22]

Related topics

Notes

1 See Descartes (1998) for a full account of his scepticism and his methodological doubt.
2 Scepticism as a way to read *Othello* has been developed by Cavell (1979).
3 Cefalu writes of Iago, 'His challenge is the inescapable, generic problem of other minds, a challenge that in the world of the play transmutes into a curse. Iago's outsider status derives from thinking too much about what others are thinking, from never being in the moment' (Cefalu (2013: 269)). Othello too suffers from this problem of other minds.

Indeed, the characters are all outside each other; there is no shared community until Emilia speaks at the end of the play, right before she dies. McGinn as well suggests that 'Othello is predicated on the philosophical problem of other minds, with all its ramifications – moral, personal, and metaphysical' (McGinn (2006: 67)). He also notes, 'This kind of problem is nowhere more pronounced than in the case of our supposed knowledge of other people's minds, the epistemological focus of Othello. It is disarmingly easy – almost second nature – to wonder how we can really know what is going on in someone else's mind' (McGinn (2006: 63)).

4 McGinn suggests a likeness between the Cartesian deceiver and Iago, 'a seemingly all-powerful source of false belief' (McGinn (2006: 82)).

5 Shakespeare's use of 'honesty' and the status of Iago's language are a frequent subject of scholarly debate. See Kikuchi (1999) on Grice's principles of conversational implicature for a fascinating interpretation of Iago's general honesty and simultaneous violation of Grice's maxims. Kikuchi identifies two lies, at 3.3.396–9 and 4.1.85–7. Both of these are focused on Cassio's supposed relations with Desdemona, but perhaps neither one need be a lie. The first is in the form of a question, asking if Othello would like to 'grossly gape on' and 'Behold her topped' (3.3.397–8). And the second is Iago's claim that he will make Cassio say, 'Where, how, how oft, how long ago, and when / He hat and is again to cope your wife' (4.4.86–7). Of course, the real answer here is nowhere, no way, never has Cassio coped Desdemona. Iago insinuates and suggests but does not actually lie. See Kikuchi (1999: 38). See Babcock (1965) for a discussion of the history of the word 'honest' and its application to Iago. See Vincent (1982) for another reading of the play that suggests that Iago tells the truth. Vincent identifies a number of ways to 'lie' without lying, including pretending, acting, making assumptions, speaking indirectly, insinuating, and being reticent. She argues that Iago uses these strategies rather than out-and-out lying. See also Draper (1931) for a discussion of cuckoldry and Iago's motivations.

6 The status of Iago and his motives or lack thereof are debated in the literature. Coleridge famously declares Iago's actions as 'the motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity'. Iago states a number of motives in the text, but there are so many, and they are so thin, that thinking of Iago as free of motive and having only method is tempting (Coleridge (1989: 113)).

Regarding Iago's motivation, again, Altman suggests, 'Iago's motive-hunting, then, is literally his instrument of self-edification, in the service of an unseen, inarticulate, but relentless will' (Altman (2010: 161)). It is worth noting that if Kant suggests that 'There is no possibility of thinking of anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be regarded as good without qualification, except a *good will*', Iago so lacks a good will that whatever he wills must be evil. See Kant (1981: 7).

7 There is a striking parallel between Iago and Othello here and Echo and Narcissus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid, Echo is cursed with ever repeating the last words she has heard from someone. She is not allowed to initiate conversation. She falls in love with Narcissus and echoes his words. Narcissus spurns her, but she is forced to swear devotion in reply. She hides in shame. In time, Narcissus' spurning of others comes back to haunt him. He is made to fall in love with an image of himself in water. Briefly, then, there is an extent to which Othello's narcissism – he can only love himself and his

stories and his mirror image of himself – and Iago's echoing of words others say meet up in the dynamic of the play. Echo is sonic, mirror is visual, both show something seemingly true, but ultimately both are results of a curse that comes from improper love and from an unshared, non-communal, internally driven set of desires. See Book III of Ovid (1993). See also Fawcett (1985) for a different link between Ovid's story and *Othello*.

8 Jorgensen (1950) gives a history of the Elizabethan concern regarding how it is we can tell 'the honest man from the knave'. Jorgensen also notes that Iago is working to unmask Cassio's dishonesty. Othello too, Jorgensen notes, has honesty and dishonesty mixed up.

9 Issues regarding probability and Othello have been raised by Nicholson. Nicholson raises the issue of the importance of 'relatively homogenous discursive community' from Aristotle (Nicholson (2010: 67)). This notion supports the problems that outsiders have when certainty and uncertainty and probability play across communicative situations. See also Altman (2010). Altman writes that, '*Othello* is a tragedy of probability' Altman (2010: 10).

10 McGinn discusses the range of sceptical problems and what Othello has to contend with in his 'epistemological quandary' McGinn (2006: 75).

11 Altman characterizes Othello as an outsider who is 'an ardent assimilationist' Altman (2010: 323). Insider and outsider status play into the scepticism and probability issues. Othello does not know what to expect of the people he is dealing with; he cannot judge the likelihood of reputational claims; he does not know what the women are like or what his particular wife is like. He lacks the understanding of an insider but seems to reject the identity of an outsider and thus does not stand as a good judge of his own judgements. This inability to judge himself and his beliefs and the world into which he has been thrust makes him more likely to be victimized, to be wrong, and to stick to his own judgements as he wishes himself to be one who knows.

12 Note that both texts deal with Christian and outsider themes, the status of God, and what we can know about others within and between differing religious contexts.

13 See Cavell (2003: 131).

14 Iago's insulting characterization of Cassio at the beginning of the play as a 'mere arithmetician' and as a 'counter-caster' suggests that mathematics ability is unnecessary and that battlefield experience matters. Othello has battlefield experience but no sense of probability, so perhaps the mathematics skills Cassio has are more useful than Iago thinks. See Shakespeare (1997: 1.1.18 and 1.1.30).

15 Bell describes Iago as an 'expert in producing an effect of virtual reality in someone else's mind'. See Bell (2002: 81).

16 Othello's speeches in Act 1, scene 3 to the assembled rulers and officers, where he gives his account of his courting Desdemona, and his final speech, where he defends himself as loving 'not wisely but too well' (5.2.342), seem to suggest that he sees himself internally only and wants to project that internal private version of himself. He wants to be remembered as he sees himself, as he seems to himself, and not as he is.

17 Double-time readings of the play have been developed to handle the seeming quickness and slowness of time. See Sohmer (2002). Sohmer posits an explanation based on the Julian and Gregorian calendars. Sohmer also provides a history of the scholarship of this

reading, dating back to a work by Thomas Rymer from 1693 entitled 'A Short View of Tragedy'.

18 Regarding the notion of felt time, it is worth noting that the events of the play may well demand two timescapes to make them all possible (this is the central concern of the double-time readings). But psychological time, or felt time, is a slightly different issue. It is possible that Shakespeare is writing about the nature of time, in which case the time of events, a kind of objective time, and the time of psychology, a kind of subjective time, are both at play. Event time, objective time, must be shared by the end of the play. We must be synchronized. It is an open question about whether or not we must also be on the same psychological time. If the goal of shared community is a kind of recognition of what should be reflected in a proper mirror (full truth with a good will), then we may very well need to be on the same psychological timescape as well as the same objective timescape. Bradley suggests that, of the two major timescapes he notices, 'long time' and 'short time', 'The place where "Long Time" is wanted is not *within* Iago's intrigue. "Long Time" is required simply and solely because the intrigue and its circumstances presuppose a marriage consummated, and an adultery possible, for (let us say) some weeks' (Bradley (2007: 333)). Bradley suggests, then, that the events of the play do better with two timescapes because of the concern over the time it would take for the marriage, consummation (which some scholars debate has actually occurred at all), and the infidelity. Adding to Bradley's account of the range of timescapes and their nee, would be the notion of felt time, the time of jealousy or fear of death, and Iago's uncanny ability to rewrite the past so that it justifies the present and sets the future up. The notions of temporality the play is dealing with are such that there are numerous problems in the way the social system conceptualizes and actualizes timescapes.

19 Bell suggests that we can 'see Othello's fall as a telescoped representation of the mind overtaken by its own distrust of appearances – and the paradoxical reliance only upon appearances' Bell (2002: 85).

20 See Jorgensen (1950) for a treatment of the extent to which thought is central to the play.

21 I am grateful to Megan Cutrofello for pointing out the reading that 'thou liest' could easily refer to an act of infidelity.

22 I am grateful to Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne for an incredibly helpful set of comments on an early draft of this paper. Their close readings and careful questions have helped make this paper significantly stronger. Of course, any faults left are completely my doing.

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21

CLIMATES OF TRUST IN *MACBETH*

Julia reinhard lupton

Trust in philosophy, trust in theatre

In the chapter of the *Leviathan* entitled 'Covenants of Mutuall Trust, When Invalid', Hobbes, the first modern philosopher of trust, writes that promises made in the state of nature have little validity; only when a 'common Power' has been set over them, 'with right and force sufficient to compell performance', can such a covenant be considered binding. Mere trust consists in 'the bonds of words', and these are 'too weak to bridle mens ambitions, avarice, anger, and other Passions, without the feare of some coerceive Power' (Hobbes (1651: chapter XIV)). Hobbes understood that cooperating with and relying on other people was key to extending each individual actor's ability to survive and flourish in the harsh conditions of the state of nature. He posited, moreover, that creating that 'coercive Power' was itself an act of trust, a contractual delegation of one's well-being to the care and protection of another agency. Yet trust in the absence of such a power belies the individual's self-interest and is thus contrary to reason.

Hobbes' account is the starting point for many contemporary philosophers of trust, who accept some part of Hobbes' identification of trust with self-interest but also attempt to go beyond Hobbes' instrumentalism. These contemporary thinkers, including moral philosophers Annette Baier (1986, 1991) and Jay Bernstein (2015), philosopher of management Sverre Raffnsøe (2013), and philosopher of religion Sheela Pawar (2009), argue that trust is a good in itself. Being trustworthy and trusting others means investing in a vision of the social world and its environments as resilient, reliable, and hospitable, created and sustained by a network of goodwill in an ensemble of mutual dependencies that generate a sense of commonality and well-being. Yet these same theorists understand, also with Hobbes, that trust exposes the actor to 'mens ambitions, avarice, [and] anger' as well as to poor design, bad policy, the alibis of expertise, and the abuses bred by inequality. While trust theorists strive to account for trust as a social and moral good, they also analyse its essential ambiguity as a form of 'nonknowing' (Beck (2007: 129)) that is founded on disavowal, open to exploitation, and increasingly politicized in contemporary risk society.

Annette Baier opens her essay 'Trust and Anti-Trust' with a quotation from ethicist Sissela Bok: 'Whatever matters to human beings, trust is the atmosphere in which it thrives' (Baier (1986: 231)). Baier develops Bok's 'atmosphere' into the idea of a

'climate of trust', a generalized 'presumption of a certain trustworthiness' supported by unspoken codes and habits. Climate is meant both metaphorically, to describe trust's fluid, ambient, and networked character, and more literally, insofar as trust can be affected by factors such as time of day, the set-up of a room, unfamiliar sounds or smells, or even the design of an interface (Hindman (2016: 2–7)). Building on Baier, Jay Bernstein describes trust as 'radiat[ing] out from the body as our original vulnerability to others' and tending to 'be implicit, casually spread out (like an atmosphere or mood)' (2015: 226–7). Baier describes the anxiety felt upon walking into an unfamiliar neighbourhood, an example that indicates the design-sensitive dimension of trust as well as the role of social homogeneity in breeding trust. Trust comes easily in traditional settings of belonging but requires the active overcoming of differences (in culture, ethnicity, or class, for example) in settings instinctively perceived as foreign and potentially hostile, or in milieus characterized by pluralism and anonymity, such as cities, large workplaces, and public universities.[1]

Trust is a recurrent theme in organizational studies, political science, and social anthropology, including major works by Niklaus Luhmann (1982), Anthony Giddens (1984), and Ulrich Beck (2007), and has become a significant topic in philosophy but has received minimal attention in literary studies. In recent work, Bernstein builds on Baier, who highlights the vulnerability manifested in our reliance on others: 'Trust is accepted vulnerability to another's power to harm one, a power inseparable from the power to look after some aspect of one's good' (Baier 1991: 113).[2] Because of their affective and fantasmatic dimensions, understanding climates of trust requires recourse to moral psychology, not just moral reason (Bernstein (2015: 3–4)); psychology concerns both the origins of trust in early childhood interactions and the emotional, intuitive, and prejudicial aspects of trust. Building on the work of psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott, Giddens argues that 'basic trust', which he also calls 'ontological security', is founded on 'the emotional acceptance of *absence*' established in early infancy (1991: 38). Trust games like peekaboo enact the child's ability to tolerate the departures and returns of its caregivers, practising the rudiments of substitution replayed in more elaborate acts of cultural and religious sublimation (Kuhn (2013)).

Macbeth is Shakespeare's most systematic analysis of trust in its atmospheric and world-sustaining as well as moral-psychological dimensions. My approach to trust in *Macbeth* is philosophical insofar as I am interested in the enduring dynamics of trust in the dramaturgy of theatre and life, following the lead of Michael Bristol.[3] Taking the betrayal of trust as its primal crime, the Scottish play stages the conditions of that violation in an impossible ideal, Duncan's 'absolute trust' in his lieutenants, a stance that combines the most infantile naïveté with a coercive vision that is ultimately anti-political in its desire to control contingency and thus disavow human freedom and creaturely vulnerability. In the aftermath of the crime against Duncan and the false vision of trust he incarnates, Shakespeare tracks the laborious reconstruction of trust on the part of both the play's most manifestly untrustworthy actors (Macbeth and Lady Macbeth) and the imperfect political agents entrusted with the future of the commonweal (Malcolm and Macduff). The tragedy of *Macbeth* explores the temptation to violence bred by absolute trust and attempts to imagine what trust might look like when it is built around the

mystery of other persons and the mutual stewarding of human infirmity in a shared world. *Macbeth*'s betrayals and reconstitutions of trust take place in thickly atmospheric settings that render tangible the webs of dependency in which human beings variously cooperate with and undermine each other.

    Macbeth as a playtext, moreover, participates in theatre as an art of trust. Giddens enlists Erving Goffman to show how trust inheres in routines of co-presence, especially face-to-face interactions that consist of the continual exchange and monitoring of vocal, expressive, and bodily cues.[4] In modernity, trust always implies a dramaturgy, in the form of the learned habits of encounter and the reflexive refashioning and disclosure of identities no longer grounded in inherited forms of belonging (Giddens (1991: 5)). For Luhmann, too, trust and trustworthiness must be continually performed: 'The question of trust hovers around every interaction, and the way in which the self is presented is the means by which decisions about it are attained' (1982: 36). Theatre depends on the cooperative co-presence of the actors in the specialized environment of the stage, a dynamics tested, expanded, and strengthened through the intimacy of rehearsal, familiar codes and repertoires, the affordances of the physical plant, and the authenticity repeatedly demanded by the *Jetztzeit* of performance (Rokotnitz (2011)). This serious play among the actors and the space they occupy generates the fiction of a world designed and sustained in concert with the audience, who exercise the trust not to be harmed, the trust not to be needlessly deceived, and the trust to be challenged and surprised. Theatre is a form of affective labour that engages the acting ensemble, the audience, and the performance setting in feedback loops of laughter, attention, suspense, and emotional mirroring. These responsive circuits form a transactional gift-exchange in which actors donate their trust along with their more explicit emotional expenditures to each other in order to earn the trust of the audience, whose receipt of these offerings initiates forms of responsiveness with the power to build both persons and communities inside and outside the play world. If 'life is but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage' (V.vii.23–4), a judgement delivered by Macbeth in a world whose trust networks he has systematically devastated, the play's reliance on theatre's premises and promises of trust point to the deeper and more affirming senses in which life and art reveal their affinities in *Macbeth*. Ultimately, trust is not simply a theme for philosophical and literary analysis but also belongs to theatrical work, which actively cultivates the comportment of attunement, the risk of self-disclosure, and the rewards of co-creation. Humanities classrooms participate in these same trust goods by encouraging faith in the goodwill and receptiveness of the assembled interlocutors so that substantial speech can take place and meet with meaningful response.

'Absolute trust': the avoidance of vulnerability and the birth of betrayal

In Act One, Scene Four of *Macbeth*, King Duncan responds to the news that the rebel Thane of Cawdor has been executed:

> There's no art
> To find the mind's construction in the face.
> He was a gentleman on whom I built
> An absolute trust.
>
> (I.iv.11–14)[5]

The phrase 'An absolute trust' is the cue for Macbeth's entry. The ironies abound: the absolute trust that Duncan had conferred on one thane he now transfers to another, who will in turn learn rebellion from the agent whose title he has just inherited. Duncan also notes the relationship between art, mind, and face developed by theatre as the deliberate orchestration of the 'modalities of co-presence' out of which trust is built (Giddens (1984: 287)). An earlier generation of critics saw Duncan as the exponent of a natural kinship order disrupted by Macbeth and restored by the end of the play, a position rejected by Sigurd Burckhardt, who saw this view as negating 'all genuinely human action and deny[ing] the dimension and meaning of time' (Burckhardt (1968: 173, 175), cited by Berger (1980: 3)). To frame Burckhardt's judgement in terms of trust theory: trust is a way of managing the uncertainty posed by human deeds. Even if trust incorporates a disavowal of the risks that attend such delegation (Luhmann (1982: 32)), it is also always a response to them; this registration of potential danger, in the manner of a calculation, a bracketing, and an acceptance of the dangers that accompany any decision to act, is what distinguishes trust from mere familiarity or confidence. Trust can never really be 'absolute', since it emulsifies fear, hope, and disavowal in a fiction of the future. Even trust in God is not absolute but rather founded on a complex translation of early absences into a new and creative kind of distant presence that incorporates a range of existential and affective knowledges concerning guilt, mortality, and sin as well as rebirth and forgiveness within its sheltering promise of acceptance (Pawar (2009)). Faith is peekaboo for grown-ups.

Many critics have noted the psychogenetic language that follows Duncan, who appears as primal father, milky mother, and big baby (Adelman (1992: 132)).[6] Sociologists and philosophers of trust agree that trust is first developed in infancy and early family life (Luhmann (1982: 27); Giddens (1991: 38–41)). Trust has at its heart an interpersonal, indeed face-to-face and body-to-body dimension. Temporally, trust is secured *in the present*, as a way of organizing one's relationship to the future in its frightening uncertainty (Luhmann (1982: 12)). Trust is also founded on the experience of being *in the presence of* other persons, who learn to read cues and test intuitions in the large and small encounters that make up daily life – what Giddens following Goffman calls the 'modalities of co-presence' that constitute quotidian climates of trust (Giddens (1984: 287)). Yet those forms of presence also accommodate and organize the toleration of absence through the cultivation of physical and ideational substitutes: the reliable appearing and disappearing of the breast in a well-managed infancy works in tandem with the introduction of new foods along with security blankets, plush toys, hiding games, rhythmic language, and storytelling. This resonant zone of proximity, disappearance, and substitution composes what Winnicott calls the 'potential space' that forms the substratum of the creative process.[7] Within this sequence, weaning is a kind of micro-

trauma or controlled betrayal that models and enables the infant's birth into personhood; Lady Macbeth's 'I have given suck' speech touches on the bases of trust in infancy along with the scandal of its abruption, whereas other weanings in Shakespeare (*Romeo and Juliet*, *The Winter's Tale*) narrate more flexible and felicitous designs for the curation of infantile potential space. Winnicott's potential space of early play, reenactment, and substitution has been linked by various theorists to the space of the theatre, where objects and persons are tested for their meanings, reliability, and affordances (Pedder (1979); Schechner (1994: 70–2)). The murder of Duncan cocooned in his bed of state, a complex climate or ecology of trust, revisits that scene of primal intimacy in a manner that resonates viscerally for readers and audiences as shaking the very foundations of our capacity for trust.[8]

The infantile character of Duncan's 'absolute trust' feeds images of his simple saintliness but also suggests a more repressive economy that allows no room for dissent or deliberation: the 'absolute' not of the swaddled infant but of the absolute monarch, figures combined in Freud's famous image of His Majesty, The Baby (Freud (1914: 48–9); Schwartz (1989)). Harry Berger Jr has demonstrated the repetitive character of violence in the warrior society depicted in the opening scenes of the play.[9] In such circumstances, trust is exacted from underlings in a manner that robs trust of both its elasticity and its mutuality: this is not trust at all, but fear and coercion. As Baier puts it, 'trust is an alternative to vigilance and reliance on the threat of sanctions; trustworthiness is an alternative to constant watching to see what one can and cannot get away with' (1991: 113). Mafia and drug-war adaptations of *Macbeth*, from *Men of Respect* (1990) to the HBO series *Breaking Bad* and Juan Carillo's Mexican *Mendoza*, develop the coercive role of trust in organizations that depend on secret communications and the spectre of violence for their operations. Moreover, the co-presence upon which trust builds its 'ontological security' is itself oriented towards what is fundamentally *not* present: the unknown future and the opacity and unpredictability of human intention. Uncertainty is managed and trust is built in the potential spaces of reasoning, memory, and imagination, by calculating risk, remembering past instances, and inferring intentions.[10] Building on Baier, Bernstein develops the alliance between trust and vulnerability: 'Trust is trust in others before whom we are unconditionally vulnerable not to take advantage of our vulnerability' (2015: 221). By declaring his trust absolute, Duncan disavows his own vulnerability, and, by denying his Thanes of Cawdor any capacity for deviation, he sets up a standard that breeds betrayal. Duncan's 'absolute trust' is not a moral ideal but a contradiction in terms, imposing an imagined idyll that even in earliest infancy and in the most devout expressions of faith is marked by the rhythm of appearance and withdrawal, in order to repress both his own infirmity and the human plurality and freedom upon which a genuine politics must be based.[11]

'Pity, like a newborn babe': liturgies of trust

In declaring his trust to be absolute, Duncan denies the manifold uncertainties on which trust is predicated, relying on the glamour of his office and the fear of reprisal to protect

him from ambitious incursions. In entering the castle of the Macbeths as a guest, however, Duncan yields to one of humanity's most resonant and powerful trust scenarios: the script of hospitality, the code of conduct designed to instil trust among strangers in settings where the protections and controls of sovereignty are in abeyance. Infinitely sensitive to local customs, environmental affordances, and creaturely wants, hospitality plays host to a range of specialized climates of trust that occasion the nursing and theatrical display of social norms (Kottman (1996); Heffernan (2014); Lupton (2018)). In Luhmann's analysis, 'The truster sees in his own vulnerability the instrument whereby a trust relationship can be created', resulting in 'a surplus performance' that 'causes norms to emerge' (1982: 43–4). Duncan enacts the gift character of trust by placing his safety in the care of the Macbeths, an act that invokes in his host a sense of personal and cosmic accountability so powerful that for a moment it seems he will not commit the deed. On his way to join his royal guest for supper, Macbeth embarks on a soliloquy of intense moral deliberation. He acknowledges that Duncan has arrived 'in double trust: / First as I am his kinsman and his subject, / Strong both against the deed; then as his host, / Who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself' (I.vii.12–16). Trust here appears to be primarily legal but with a strong personal colouration, the affect of obligation produced by traditional bonds. According to the *OED*, the phrase 'in trust' indicates 'the state or condition of having something committed to one's care or safekeeping, or having confidence or faith placed in one' (*OED* 'trust', n., 6a). Trust is double not only because multiple bonds obligate Macbeth to protect his kin, king, and guest, but also because those bonds are redoubled and reflected in trust's status as a comportment and mood, contributing to a climate of trust, an atmospheric and immersive sleeve of care.[12]

Macbeth begins to visualize the climate of trust in his image of the universal pity that will be roused if Duncan is assassinated:

> And pity, like a newborn babe
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
> That tears shall drown the wind.

<div align="right">(I.vii.12–25)</div>

The newborn babe projects both the violated vulnerability of the infantile king and the global outcry that will be triggered by the betrayal of his trust, a response that Macbeth pictures as a climate problem, a tempest of howling winds, blinding dust, and weeping rain. In Macbeth's inchoate image – not 'an idea … as much as … a kind of energy or agitation' (States (1985: 53)) – the newborn babe is both object and subject of pity, which wells up as a response to the anticipated betrayal of trust. In Macbeth's speech, pity and trust participate in an environment or climate of virtues and passions, an affective weather system composed of legal and interpersonal bonds, the habits of reflexive co-presence developed in infancy and engaged in the art of face and mind, and those features of the built and unbuilt environments curated by hospitality as a scenography and liturgy

of trust. Theology fuels the storm system too: as States suggests, 'the winds are the winds of the last day and the horses are four in number' – that is, the horses of the Apocalypse (States (1985: 54); see Waldron (2017)). The mercy implied by pity flips into the justice implied by rage, and both are virtues that Macbeth, made in God's image, is still able to find in himself.

Actors approach an image like this in search of *direction* – that is, orientation in the action-space of the stage. In theatrical work, 'trusting the text' means listening to what is given, even when an image is obscure or difficult, rather than adapting it expediently.[13] This search for orientation out of a comportment of respect for the authority of the author is manifested in the response of actor Simon Russell Beale to Macbeth's newborn babe:

> I have dreams – there's some sort of pathology to this – it's a symptom of something – anyway, in dreams I see things growing – faces, organs, livers, *growing*, monstrous. And this image – it's nightmarish – of a *huge* baby, a fleshy-thighed, fat-armed, round, neutral-faced baby. I find it absolutely horrific. Children and babies in Macbeth: I think they do become nightmares, great big moon-faced monsters, and very accusatory, day-of-judgement type figures, pointing fingers.

> (Rutter (2011: 11))

Beale's reading is, in his own words, pathological, a post-Freudian anamorphosis of Shakespeare's normative emblem that nonetheless responds to the historicity of the figure by linking it to apocalyptic iconography. 'Trusting the text', Beale is able to read the image in a manner that is both ancient and modern, tuning into the play's 'apocalyptic polychrony' (Waldron (2017)). Beale goes on to remark on the theatrical opportunity presented by the image: what's important to him is 'what that image – Macbeth's image of the monster baby – is doing *to me*, Simon, and how I can somehow transform that into something the audience can grasp' (Rutter (2011: 11)). In the image of the pointing finger, what Beale 'grasps' is the striking directionality of the image, the sense of vertiginous and consequential movement into the possible futures that haunt Macbeth on the threshold of his act. Such emergent movement is visualized in its invisibility as 'the *sightless* couriers of the air', sightless because we cannot see air, or intention, or potential, and sightless also because the intending agent, no matter how calculating or deliberative, cannot know the future to which he is giving obscene birth. As Beale explores the directionality of the image, trust describes the potential space occupied and sustained by Shakespeare the playwright, Beale the actor, the audience Beale wants to engage, and the various codes and cues that they share. At once inchoate and captivating, this *potential space* is also what Charles Taylor calls *moral space*, a region fraught with the directionality of the will and landmarks of value (Taylor (1989: 28); Dolven (2017: 6)). What potential space, moral space, and the space of the theatre share is their cultivation of climates of trust, the '*ethical substance of everyday life*' (Bernstein (2015: 17), emphasis his). While the image activated by Beale primarily illuminates the playworld, he is interested in drawing on the audience's own infantile memories and experiences of intentionality in the safe space of the theatre.

Poet-philosopher of moral space, Macbeth slaughters Duncan anyway, and does so in a manner that takes special aim at trust in its most embodied and vulnerable expression, namely as sleep.[14] In *Macbeth*, the climate of trust, projected in atmospheric images such as the martlets' nests on the castle walls (Lupton (2012)), takes its most representative shape in the ecology of sleep, the delicate assemblage of bedtime prayers, soporific drinks, posted guards, soft furnishings, and hospitable routines that allow Duncan to trust his surroundings enough to fall into a slumber. In Winnicott's account of infantile trust, falling asleep is a ritualized and precarious undertaking, secured by the blankies, lullabies, and nightlights designed to ease maternal separation and somatic state change (Winnicott (1975: 5)). On his way back from the murder of sleep – the fatal piercing not only of the person Duncan but of the intricate layers of trust in which the king's sleeping being is swaddled – Macbeth hears two sleepers wake up and exchange a brief blessing. To his horror, he finds himself unable to complete their prayer:

> One cried 'God bless us!', and 'Amen' the other,
> As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
> List'ning their fear, I could not say 'Amen'
> When they did say 'God bless us'.

<div align="right">(II.ii.24–6)</div>

'Amen', the Hebrew word of assent shared in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim prayer practices, has the same Hebrew root as *emunah*, translated as faith or trust, and is also related to *emet*, truth. In the Hebrew Bible, 'amen' occurs in the context of delivering curses and blessings (Deuteronomy 27) as well as in other liturgical settings. 'Amen' affirms the communal and dramaturgical character of prayer, even when said in private.[15] Macbeth's failure to say 'Amen' signals his deportation from the circle of trust assembled by shared benedictions and policed by collective curses. Theologian Douglas Knight locates Biblical oaths in a 'participative ontology', 'a complex social fabric of attachment, connectedness, and contract' (Knight (2006: 56)). 'Amen', a phatic and semantic particle of trust, anoints the commons erected by hospitality, kinship, and feudal obligation and upholstered with the accoutrements of royal sleep and the practices of prayer. In murdering sleep, Macbeth has destroyed trust and prevented prayer, forever disrupting the scenography of everyday belonging.

'Be innocent of the deed, dearest chuck': the theatre of deniability

In the curious exchange before the banquet scene (Act Three, Scene Two), both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth hint at the anticipated murder of Banquo, but neither names it. When she asks him, 'What's to be done?' he replies, 'Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, / Till thou applaud the deed' (III.ii.45–7). He is saying, in effect, 'Trust me', a statement that avoids full disclosure in order to protect the other party from too much knowledge. This is not the close and sticky trust of conspiracy practised earlier by the

couple, but the thinner and more veiled trust of deniability. Ravelled up around their secret sharing, this new form of veiled knowledge initiates their moving apart into neighbouring spheres of anxiety and unrest. The stage doors at either end of the stage participate in an existential dramaturgy. In Act One, these two have as it were entered the play world from opposite doors, he from the battlefield and she from the bleak hold of Inverness, meeting at the middle to compose their crime. The deed committed, they then continue to cross the stage towards their lonely exits. Yet they never betray each other; their trust remains as mutual as any in the play, even when all other affects have been drained from them, leaving them sere and dry.

Macbeth's insinuation of the deed is interlaced with his lyric evocation of the nightscape, alive with cloistered bats and humming beetles (III.ii.43–55). His words are heavy with the promise of the sleep that crime has denied them: 'The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums / Hath run night's yawning peal' (43–4), while 'Light thickens, and the crow / Makes wing to the rooky wood. Good things of day begin to droop and rouse'. Mixing the lilt of lullaby with a menacing menagerie of unlovely fauna, Macbeth's hypnotic nocturne circumlocutes the murder of Banquo that hangs between them, suspended and cocooned in the vibrant web of his lyric language. Macbeth interrupts his pastoral description to call on night to 'cancel and tear to pieces that great bond / Which keeps me pale': the bond in question is Banquo's life but also the Biblical commandment against murder along with the subtler web of bonds that constitute the social order; editor Nicholas Brooke suggests further that the phrase touches 'the whole structure of existence' (Brooke (1990: 51n)). Macbeth knows that his actions create a rip in the fabric of lived reality, yet he withholds the details of Banquo's murder to create a secondary suture, a strange comfort zone ('There's comfort yet') at the crumbling edge of moral catastrophe. The result is the birth of a new, uncanny climate of trust, an atmosphere of soothed nerves knit around a fundamental tear and elaborating a new and more cynical form of non-knowing, but nonetheless transmitting an eerie tenderness.

In the Trevor Nunn video of 1978, Ian McKellen whispers the lines about bat and beetle into the ear of Judi Dench, intoning a little night music that calms only by chilling her. This is the serenade of an insomniac. Conducted in a breathless and secretive intimacy, the whole exchange is a complex dance around what their faces must learn to hide: 'Sleek o'er your rugged looks, be bright and jovial / Among your guests tonight' says stage wife to stage husband (III.ii.29–30); 'Unsafe the while that we / Must lave our honours in these flattering streams / And make our faces visors to our hearts, / Disguising what they are' (III.iii.33–6) replies stage husband to stage wife, revealing the depths of his tremulous existence in his very pledge to dissimulate. They can be honest with each other about being dishonest with everyone else. Responding to each other's agitation in an improvised choreography of cold comfort, they are immersed in the 'reflexive monitoring' of the cues of co-presence that constitute trust in everyday life (Giddens 1984: 286), even while they are explicitly verbalizing the extent to which their actions have destroyed the reliability of such cues in the world rewired by their deeds. Within the ruination of moral space and the contracting of potential space, husband and wife continue to seek the reassurances of trust, incorporating facial cues, phatic speech, childhood rhythms, and the crepuscular sound world into the thin promise of deniability.

Macbeth remains the consummate climatologist of trust, but the materials and topologies that he now wearily manipulates have degraded from the expansive social networks of kinship, friendship, and hospitality to a language retooled for dissimulation and cynically given over to non-knowing.

Deniability has become a touchstone of modern politics, in which subordinate members of a hierarchy wittingly or unwittingly take the fall for those at the top; whistle-blowing and 'leaking' are responses to the fundamental unfairness of such conditions. Considered more positively, deniability can also become a means of extending new freedoms and protections in situations where formal policies have not caught up with lived realities ('Don't ask, don't tell', 'turning a blind eye'). A version of deniability may also play a role in maintaining long-term relationships such as marriage, when complete frankness would undermine fragile settlements (see Sonnet 138, 'When my love swears that she is made of truth / I do believe her, though I know she lies'). In sum, the scene manifests the co-dependency enjoyed by trust and fiction, two partners in a very long union. 'Trust rests on illusion' (Luhmann (1982: 32)): whereas trust and fiction may seem at first glance to exclude each other, in fact trust always incorporates some dimension of disavowal, of a willed non-knowing, into its holding pattern, manifested at different levels of reflexive awareness and tacit recognition depending on the weather conditions (storm of passion? fog of war? dawn of disillusion?) that cloud the climate of trust. In order to act at all, I must accept the limits of my knowledge concerning the intentions of others and the effects of their actions, in effect creating a fictional script that allows me to move forward into the future. Deniability is a late and complex variation on this essential condition.

'Not loud but deep': emergent climates of trust

Meanwhile, there are signs that other parts of the polity are attempting to knit up the ravelled sleeve of trust. In Act Five, Scene Three, Macbeth complains that he has no friends:

> My way of life
> Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf,
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not look to have; but in their stead
> Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath
> Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

<div align="right">(V.iii.24–30)</div>

'Way of life', the only appearance of this phrase in Shakespeare, indicates the king's sense of the philosophical stakes of his transformations, his knowledge that the whole climate of trust, described by the linked goods 'honour, love, obedience, troops of friends', has been destroyed by his actions.[16] The sign of that degradation is once more a

sound effect: the 'curses, not loud but deep' that rumble in the hallways of the hollowed state, announcing his exclusion from familiar forms of social communion.[17] These curses are not the deceptive prophecies of disenfranchised cunning women, or the singular anti-prayers of a hero bent on blunting his own moral capacities, but something closer to communal curses, like the annual recitation of the curses of Leviticus 26:14–43 and Deuteronomy 27:28:15–68, chanted by Jewish congregations in a low voice in respect for their power. The Biblical curses evoke a fragile world that depends on kinship, cooperation, and border patrol in order to bring forth and sustain its precious outcomes. Curses can feel archaic and primitive, implying a wrathful God who will immediately visit his rage on those who break faith with him. Yet the curse can also arrive more indirectly, as what happens when individuals breach trust by breaking contracts, forging weights, or turning away the stranger. The collective curses of the people complement the 'amen' Macbeth was unable to speak on his way back from the murder. This *sotto voce* soundtrack of curses contributes to the play's darkening climate of distrust, but it also weaves a secondary trust among those who, in turning against Macbeth, are turning towards each other in search of new alliances. Their dissensual and creative sonority is 'not loud but deep', a phrase that indicates the scenography of a trust that must be practised in secret in order to build a future.

Another instance of trust under repair occurs in the strange dialogue between Macduff and Malcolm in Act Four, Scene Three. Malcolm pretends to harbour a host of vices. Appalled, Macduff asserts his allegiance not to the man Malcolm but to the ideal of Scotland. Pleased by Macduff's response, Malcolm tells him, in effect, that he was just kidding: 'For even now / I put myself to thy direction, and / Unspeak my own detraction' (IV.iiii.122–3). In the wake of absolute trust, Malcolm and Macduff are experimenting with a highly reflexive trust generated out of role-playing, the reassertion of shared values, and a language that willingly displays its capacity to deceive. The exchange stages the Hobbesian conditions of trust in modernity as described by Barbara Misztal, 'a reflexive project based on the knowledge that the world is not simply given, but is a product of human transforming activity' (1996: 88–9). Malcolm and Macduff use the inherently theatrical resources of dissimulation discussed with such frankness by the Macbeths in the earlier scene, now not in order to hide the truth but in order to research the grounds of a new trust. It is a gambit that risks wearing out credibility and requires a great deal of 'reflexive monitoring' on the part of the characters, who are continually checking each other's responses and adjusting their own, and the actors with their audiences, who must render that reflexive monitoring legible and dramatically satisfying. Whether or not he condones the practice, Shakespeare is interested in what trust might look like in a post-trust environment, and he gives us this theatrical experiment as something to think with.

In these pages, I have explored several climates of trust in *Macbeth*. In early childhood, the mother's breath, breast, smell, skin, milk, and motion compose an initial environment of trust, her presence and absence extended and symbolized by a range of props and theatrical devices. The more elaborate environments of trust erected by hospitality are protected by pity and prayer and outfitted with specialized objects and routines. The gift of deniability is an aberrant form of trust lodged within a tense and

highly monitored environment of deception. Finally, the use of fiction and subterfuge to test trustworthiness in situations of inflationary suspicion indicates some of the dilemmas besetting trust in modernity. These trust scenarios constitute 'climates' in the sense that they enlist bodily, affective, tonal, sonic, designed, and socially scripted components in what Macbeth calls a 'way of life'. A climate of trust is a *potential space* (Winnicott (1975); Giddens (1991)) because trust is the foundation and outcome of human sociality, action, and creativity and because it is always a response to what is not present, certain, or actual. A climate of trust is also a *moral space* (Taylor (1989); Dolven (2017)) in the sense that it pulses with reminders of orientation, direction, and value. Trust not only preserves goods (Hobbes (1651)) but is itself a good (Bernstein (2015)), and promoting a generalized climate of trust is an outcome that transcends individual instances of trust. Finally, a climate of trust is a *theatrical space*, composed out of the reflexive and improvisational art of co-presence (Giddens (1991), enlisting Goffman) and evolving from the trust games of childhood (Rokotnitz (2011)). *Macbeth* is a play about the coercive illusion of absolute trust and the devastations wrought on language and expression by the betrayal of trust. It is also a play about the unbearableness of a trust-free environment and the human capacity to regenerate trust in the most unforgiving circumstances.

Because trust inheres in the ensemble work of theatre, and because aspects of that ensemble work are shared by the humanities classroom, the collective study of *Macbeth* can also become the occasion for building climates of trust. In *Environmental Theater*, Richard Schechner defines an environment as 'participatory and active, a concatenation of living systems', and he defines performance as the enunciation of an 'expectation-obligation network'. Many of Schechner's exercises for actors are trust-building games, since theatrical training 'is the struggle to make places safe, to encourage trust in the middle of a social system that breeds danger and apprehension' (1973: ix, xxii). The same formulation describes the humanities classroom. Trust, with its embodied disposition of relationships in space and time and its psychogenetic link to early experiences of play, contributes to the environment that theatre occupies and offers. Humanistic education in the ways of theatre cannot solve the problems of inequality, injury, resentment, and suspicion that divide polities today, but it can help build the habits of listening and attunement as well as judgement and courage that we so desperately need.[18]

Related topics

Notes

1 'Trust is one of those mental phenomena attention to which shows us the inadequacy of attempting to classify mental phenomena into the "cognitive," the "affective," and

the "conative." Trust, if it is any of these things, is all three. It has its special "feel," most easily acknowledged when it is missed, say, when one moves from a friendly, "safe" neighborhood to a tense, insecure one' (Baier (1991: 11)).

2 Bernstein (2015: 18). Carolyn McLeod's entry on trust in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* links the practice of trust to the fact of vulnerability, the risk of betrayal, and the resources of hope and care (McLeod (2015)).

3 Bristol (2011) takes on the assumption dominant in Shakespeare studies today that '"context" in the sense of specialized content knowledge is a necessary condition for understanding a work of literature' (2011: 641).

4 Giddens (1984: 296).

5 All citations from *Macbeth* are from *Oxford Scholarly Editions Online* (Shakespeare et al. (2016)) unless otherwise noted.

6 Duncan's maternal character is evident in his softness and affective liquidity: for example, 'My plenteous joys, / Wanton in fullness, seek to hide themselves / In drops of sorrow' (I.iv.33–5). Duncan asleep in his bed evokes the trusting character of infants.

7 Giddens (1991: 38) cites Winnicott: 'An awareness of the separate identity of the parenting figure originates in the emotional acceptance of *absence*: the "faith" that the caretaker will return, even though she or he is no longer in the presence of the infant. Basic trust is forged through what Winnicott calls the "potential space" (actually a phenomenon of time-space) which relates, yet distances, infant and prime caretaker'.

8 On sleep ecologies, see Sullivan (2012).

9 'What Cawdor has lost and "noble Macbeth hath won" is a set of possibilities – for treachery as well as valor – built into the very role of Thane' (1980: 13).

10 Thus Luhmann (1982: 28, 39, 48, 56) argues that trust always works by way of an internal representation of the other, not through an immediate relation to the object of trust.

11 On politics and plurality see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. John Dunn makes a similar point from within a Lockean liberal tradition: 'Trust is both a human passion and a modality of human action: a more or less consciously chosen policy for handling the freedom of other human agents or agencies' (1988: 73).

12 Baier (1991: 111).

13 On 'trusting the text' in the context of rhetoric, see Miller (2008).

14 Bristol (2011: 657) attributes Macbeth's decision to *akrasia*, 'acting in contradiction to his own lucid sense of what it would be best for him to do'.

15 *Strong's Biblical Concordance*, 'amen' (n.d.: 543), from 'aman' (n.d.: 39). See Giddens on the exclamation 'Oops' as a participant in the 'very public character of communication'. (1984: 81–3).

16 On philosophy as a 'way of life', see Hadot (1995). On Shakespeare as a way of life, see Kuzner (2016).

17 Lars Engle writes of this passage, 'Macbeth invokes the community of watchers as here offering a meaningful response to his choices: they curse him subvocally while fearing him' (2012: 661).

18 This work came out of an international research group on Trust and Risk in Literature, headed by Joseph Sterrett, University of Aarhus, Denmark. I would like to thank all of the participants in this group, especially Sverre Raffnsøe, for leading me into this new territory.

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22

THE SCEPTIC'S SURRENDER

Believing partly

Anita Gilman Sherman

Sometimes a Shakespearean character, known for philosophy and sceptical sangfroid, experiences an event that changes his mind, but not entirely. His stance of principled doubt seems shaky suddenly, but he is not yet ready to embrace a new state of affairs. This uncomfortable condition, poised between belief and scepticism, often signalled by the word 'partly', sheds light on the way belief admits of degrees in Shakespeare.[1] It also supplements accounts of Shakespeare's scepticism, showing how his sceptics evaluate problems of evidence and surrender their doubts in stages before partial belief takes hold. Over a half-century ago the philosopher H. H. Price argued that belief has both volitional and emotional components, the latter operating on a graduated scale modelled on Locke's degrees of assent (Price (1969: 130 ff)). 'Perhaps the lower half of the scale might be called *opinion* and the upper half *conviction*', Price ventured, 'and the upper limit might be called *absolute conviction*' (1967: 45). The lower limit, he suggested, passes through 'no confidence' to outright 'disbelief' (1967: 47).[2] Shakespeare's exploration of the lower to middle half of Price's scale attests to his abiding fascination with emotional aspects of belief and with the uncertainty built into belief.[3] Like Price, Shakespeare is drawn to the condition of half-belief: an often transient disposition of neither belief nor disbelief, which Price occasionally terms 'suspense of judgement' or 'inert agnosticism' (1969: 155). Like Price, he is also interested in the ways beliefs are acquired,

abandoned, restored, strengthened or weakened. Investigating degrees of belief enables Shakespeare to portray how it feels from the inside to undergo metamorphosis.

My first examples of the transition from disbelief to partial belief concern the supernatural. They involve characters that have philosophical allegiances predisposing them to scepticism about spirits, omens and auguries. As *Hamlet* opens, Horatio approaches the battlements of Elsinore, summoned by soldiers who desire him to confront the ghost they have encountered on previous nights. We will learn later that Horatio has come from Wittenberg, where he most likely read classical philosophy, including Stoicism. In the play's last scene, Horatio refers to himself as 'more an antique Roman than a Dane' when he proposes to drink the remaining poison and die alongside Hamlet (Shakespeare (1997): 5.2.283). Inasmuch as Cato of Utica, the Stoic, is an exemplary Roman suicide, we have some grounds for inferring Horatio's admiration for Stoicism. That he affects philosophy we know because Hamlet famously says, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in our philosophy' (1.5.168–9). Q2 offers a key variant on the line, substituting 'your' for 'our' philosophy. Either way, Hamlet implies that Horatio's philosophy has made him sceptical of an enchanted universe alive with spirits.[4] All this is intimated in the play's first moments when the soldiers chide Horatio for having 'ears / hat are so fortified against our story' (1.1.29–30). One grumbles, 'Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy, / And will not let belief take hold of him' (1.1.21–2). Horatio confirms his reputation for scepticism with a dismissive, 'Tush, tush, 'twill not appear' (1.1.28).

Horatio resists the soldiers' report, but not for long, as the Ghost soon enters. Horatio confesses, 'It harrows me with fear and wonder' (1.1.42). Wonder is a cognitive attitude that has generated much scholarship in recent years partly because it serves literary critics and intellectual historians in a liminal capacity, marking the threshold between pre-modern and modern attitudes to natural phenomena.[5] Janus-faced wonder looks backward and forwards in its attitude to the unknown – on one side, open-mouthed and arrested in reaction to marvels and monsters, on the other, curious and eager for discovery. Peter Platt, for example, writes of a 'wonder shift… from a focus on marvelous effects to marvelous causes' (1997: 63). Francis Bacon embodies this wonder shift, according to Platt, at once dismissing wonder as 'vain admiration' and 'broken knowledge'

but also appreciating its potential to 'redraw the boundaries of the known' (Platt 1997: 57). In my view, wonder overlaps with partial belief because both cognitive attitudes occupy a temporally precarious intermediate zone. Wonder teeters between ignorance and knowledge, tending to be short-lived, while partial belief hovers between uncertainty and conviction, coming and going depending on context. Furthermore, wonder may translate into an 'increasing disinclination to doubt' as new experiences supply new evidence (Price (1967: 57)). Harrowed with fear and wonder, Horatio responds to the Ghost with a tumultuous mix of courage, curiosity and responsibility. He soon realizes he must report this portentous sighting to Prince Hamlet, but for the moment he is paralysed. His companions urge him to address the apparition, but the Ghost 'stalks away', offended, they surmise, causing Horatio to 'tremble and look pale' (1.1.48, 51). 'Is not this something more than fantasy?' the soldier says to Horatio in an 'I told you so' tone.

Horatio spends the rest of the scene trying to process his experience. Having initially scoffed at the soldier's report, he now concedes, 'Before my God, I might not this believe / Without the sensible and true avouch / Of mine own eyes' (1.1.54–6). Devotees of *Othello* and *Much Ado About Nothing* know that ocular proof is problematic. Shakespeare takes a sceptical view of the senses, considering them unreliable avenues to knowledge, and literally recommends 'consensus' among senses and people before acting on a hypothesis. Horatio's eyewitness testimony should therefore seem dubious and insufficient although it is coupled with sound. Horatio may fall into the category of a doubting Thomas – a person of shallow faith who requires tactile evidence before he is willing to believe in the reality of spirits.

Yet Horatio recognizes that what he has seen may be significant, so he entertains possibilities of what the Ghost might mean. Although he concedes that he 'know[s] not' why the Ghost has appeared, he ventures that it 'bodes some strange eruption to our state', ascribing this hypothesis to 'the gross and scope of my opinion' (1.1.66–8). Price deems the act of entertaining propositions a stage preceding the adoption of a belief (1967: 44); alternatives are considered before 'coming down on one side of the fence' (1967: 45). Like a good humanist student, Horatio weighs alternatives, turning to history, both current and ancient, in his effort to understand. His disquisition on Denmark's troubled history with Norway –

extended in Q2 with an account of bloody omens marking the eve of Julius Caesar's assassination – is suddenly interrupted by the Ghost's return. 'Stay, illusion!' Horatio commands (1.1.108). Unsure what this illusion is or means, he implores it more formally this time, using a patterned sequence of 'if' clauses, ending each time with 'speak' or 'speak to me'.

Horatio may be confounded by the ontological status of the illusion, but he is willing to interact with it, as if it were real, on a provisional basis. Price notes that deciding to act as if something were true does not necessarily mean that we believe it nor is it incompatible with disbelief (1967: 47). But when the cock crows and Horatio says of the Ghost, 'it started like a guilty thing / Upon a fearful summons' (1.1.129–30), he has turned a corner. He is beginning to lend credence to folklore about ghosts. 'I have heard', he explains, that at the cock's crowing 'th'extravagant and erring spirit hies / To his confine; and of the truth herein / This present object made probation' (1.1.135–7). Horatio entertains a story of cause and effect, relating the timing of the Ghost's disappearance to his compulsory return to his abode, interpreted as a zone of punishment. The soldier Marcellus gives a Christian colouring to Horatio's hypothesis, adding:

> Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
> Wherein our saviour's birth is celebrated
> The bird of dawning singeth all night long;
> And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad. …
> So hallowed and so gracious is the time.

(1.1.139–45)

Horatio replies, 'So have I heard, and do in part believe it' (1.1.146). This may be a tactful concession to Marcellus's feelings, but it is also sincere. Horatio is rueful, even wistful that faith eludes him. Yet he is not ready to embrace the Christian folklore about the seasonal fluctuation of erring spirits.

Nevertheless, the encounter with the spectre has changed Horatio. He has abandoned his resistance to the idea of ghosts, but he is not prepared to let belief take hold of him. He occupies an epistemologically intermediate condition, neither disbelieving nor believing but suspended in between. Price describes suspending judgement as 'a deliberate and painful effort'

involving the suppression of doubts and questions (1967: 48). He implies that it means shutting down the mind's roving inquiry. But Horatio is receptive to new evidence – up to a point. He may be poised precariously between the entertainment of propositions and assent (1967: 58), but his cognitive condition is open and porous. When believing partly, he is susceptible to the wonder that Platt deems a way station to new knowledge, leading to 'new cognitive possibilities' (1967: 41).

In *Julius Caesar*, Cassius undergoes a similar change of heart, but with an important difference – wonder forms no part of his experience. This has tragic consequences. It means that when Cassius believes only partly, he is less open to the unexpected and more susceptible to his own melancholy imaginings. On the eve of the Battle of Philippi, Cassius confides in his officer Messala that he has changed his mind about his sceptical philosophy: 'You know that I held Epicurus strong, / And his opinion', he reminds him. 'Now I change my mind, / And partly credit things that do presage' (5.1.76–8). Birds trouble him. Two triumphant eagles that had accompanied the troops, perched on their ensigns, have vanished, 'And in their steads do ravens, crows, and kites / Fly o'er our heads and downward look on us, / As we were sickly prey' (5.1.84–6). Those who remember the opening of Stuart Burge's 1970 film will recall the sky-borne vulture wheeling overhead, croaking ominously, before the camera pans on a vast field strewn with corpses – a sequence surely inspired by these lines. Note that although Cassius only partly credits the birds, this half-formed opinion nevertheless changes his mind. The emotional component of his belief produces assent – hence his 'sickly' surrender to predatory omens. 'Believe not so', Messala urges Cassius. 'I but believe it partly', Cassius replies, adding, to reassure his friend, 'For I am fresh of spirit, and resolved / To meet all perils very constantly' (5.1.89–91).

Cassius's new attention to bird omens does not bode well. He is not only failing to think like a winner, but he is also relinquishing his scepticism – his disposition to doubt – just when that cognitive attitude is most needed. The Battle of Philippi is winding down, and its outcome is difficult to gauge, given far-flung actions across a vast terrain. Cassius fears the worst and sends two of his men – his officer Titinius and his bondman Pindarus – to reconnoitre troop movements. 'Go, Pindarus, get higher on that hill', he orders, explaining, 'My sight was ever thick. Regard, Titinius, / And tell me what thou not'st about the field' (5.3.20–2). Shakespeare follows

his source, Thomas North's translation of Plutarch, which reads, 'Cassius himself saw nothing, for his sight was very bad, saving that he saw (and yet with much ado) how the enemies spoiled his camp before his eyes' (Plutarch 1941: 2.1896). While Plutarch's Cassius can see enough with his own two eyes to know things are going badly, Shakespeare's Cassius depends on verbal accounts of what others see. Pindarus's verbal report clinches Cassius's pessimism. After describing what he sees, Pindarus ventures an interpretation, declaring that Titinius is taken (5.3.32). This is wrong; in fact, Titinius is being welcomed like a conquering hero by his fellow horsemen. But Cassius mistakenly believes Pindarus's report of defeat, failing to exercise due sceptical caution, so he asks Pindarus to kill him. Even Cassius's last words imply his surrender to the symmetries of the uncanny: 'Caesar, thou art revenged, / Even with the sword that killed thee' (5.3.44–5).

Titinius will say later, upon discovering Cassius's body, 'Alas, thou hast misconstrued everything' (5.3.83). In his sorrow Messala delivers an allegorical lament over Cassius's corpse: 'O hateful Error, Melancholy's child, / Why dost thou show to the apt thoughts of men / The things that are not?' (5.3.66–8). The humoural allegory has the effect of pathologizing Cassius's mistake, thereby diminishing his responsibility for it. It serves almost as a eulogy, whitewashing Cassius's reputation for rashness and choler by turning him into a victim of melancholy depression. Messala may be remembering the conversation when Cassius disclosed his fears, confessing his turn from Epicurean scepticism to partly believing in signs.

Horatio and Cassius start out like those 'philosophical persons' whom Lord Lafeu dismisses in *All's Well That Ends Well* because they ensconce themselves 'into seeming knowledge' instead of appreciating supernatural mysteries. The full passage bears repeating:

> They say miracles are past, and we have our philosophical persons to make modern and familiar things supernatural and causeless. Hence is it that we make trifles of terrors, ensconcing ourselves into seeming knowledge when we should submit ourselves to an unknown fear.
>
> (2.3.1–5)

Lafeu is commenting on Helena's miracle cure of the king and sneering at the king's other doctors. His speech is confusing because the syntax of the first sentence is reversible; the grammatical object, 'things', can be modified by the adjective pairs on either side of it. Harry Berger, Jr paraphrases the meaning of the two possible resulting sentences: 'Now that miracles are past our philosophical persons (1) make things supernatural and causeless (seem) modern and familiar' or (2) 'make modern and familiar things (seem) supernatural and causeless' (inexplicable or not caused by humans)' (Berger (1997: 455)). Berger prefers the second reading because it 'illustrates the interpretive strategy by which the elders misrecognize what is intimate and proximate and belongs to the household – socially constructed terrors – and displace them to the "great power, great transcendence" of the "hand of heaven"'(1997: 455). I prefer the first reading because it recognizes the disenchanting effects of the new science. Lafeu is grumbling against callow know-it-alls who trivialize life's terrors and search for empirical causes ('seeming knowledge') when instead they should 'submit' themselves 'to an unknown fear'. Lafeu may be a curmudgeon complaining about the demystifying trends of modern times, but he is also being patriarchal (as Berger notes), since he attributes Helena's healing powers to heaven rather than to her skill or knowledge of the medicinal properties of her secret potion. Paroles chimes in, saying ''tis the rarest argument of wonder that hath shot out in our latter times' (2.3.6–7). The king's cure thus captures Platt's wonder shift: Lafeu's religious miracle is Paroles' natural wonder. But what are the terrors and unknown fears that Lafeu insists should inspire more respect? The spirit world? Providential portents? God's mysteries? As a pagan prone to superstition, Cassius surrenders to those unknown fears, although he believes in them only partly, and they contribute to his downfall. Horatio may also experience supernatural fears, but as a Christian man of reason, he resists succumbing to them, submitting himself instead to the limbo of wonder and believing partly.

Horatio and Cassius notwithstanding, in Shakespeare believing partly often has little to do with wonder or the supernatural. It seldom has to do with religious belief per se. Instead, it usually pertains to imperilled intimacy and fears of betrayal. Here Price's investigations into issues of 'esteem or trust or loyalty' related to 'believing in' a friend can illuminate

two of Shakespeare's most intense relationships: the speaker's ongoing love affair with the 'dark lady' in Sonnet 138 and the rupture of Hal's friendship with Falstaff at the close of *Henry IV, Part 2*. Price charts varieties of believing-in, contrasting factual and evaluative senses of belief-in, while granting that belief-in often 'cuts across the boundary sometimes drawn between the cognitive side of human nature, concerned with what is true or false, and the evaluative side, concerned with what is good or evil. Either the boundary vanishes', he concedes, 'or we find ourselves on both sides of it at the same time' (1969: 427).[6] Both Shakespearean examples also illustrate Price's claim that 'there is a connection between evaluative belief and hope' and support his suggestion that hope can factor into half-belief (1969: 445).[7] Price's account of belief-in can therefore help us understand moments of believing partly, especially when these are not cued in Shakespeare's lines.

Sonnet 138 describes an epistemological disposition that counts as partial belief-in. Take the famous opening lines: 'When my love swears that she is made of truth / I do believe her though I know she lies'. The sceptical speaker knows that when his beloved claims to care only for him, she is lying. Nevertheless, he chooses to act as if he believes her words although he does not fully believe in her. He plays along with her lie for reasons he goes on to explain – chiefly to keep up the illusion, flattering to both of them, that he is a young innocent:

> Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
> Although she knows my days are past the best,
> Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue;
> On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed.

> (5–8)

Price might argue that the speaker chooses to believe the dark lady's word as a way of averting his attention from evidence of her infidelity (Price (1954: 18)). But there is no denial, confusion or self-deception here. Both parties lucidly choose to act as if their love were true although each privately suspects it may be false. 'Suspect or surmise', Price notes, 'are the traditional words for the lowest degree of belief' (1969: 268). Whatever doubts the speaker may have, his 'inclinations to disbelieve' the

dark lady are set aside, even as he 'gets himself into the habit' of acting in a trusting manner (1954: 17, 20). As the wise speaker ruefully exclaims, 'O love's best habit is in seeming trust' (11). The couple will go through the motions of a trusting love, one making protestations of fidelity that the other will claim to believe, and so they will carry on. Insofar as the speaker hopes his beloved is loyal and pretends that she is so while averting his gaze from unwelcome evidence, he partly believes in her. After all, Price deems 'make-believe' an example of 'this queer state of half-belief' (1969: 308–9).

A second instance of partial belief concerns Falstaff's reaction to King Harry's banishment of him at the end of *Henry IV, Part 2*. Intercepted on his return from the coronation, the new king addresses his erstwhile companion and delivers a devastating speech, cruel and haughty. 'I know thee not, old man', he begins, 'Fall to thy prayers' (5.5.45). The King acknowledges their past relationship, calling Falstaff 'the tutor and the feeder of my riots' (5.5.60), but claims that he was dreaming. Now 'being awake', he says, 'I do despise my dream' (5.5.49). With a series of imperative verbs, he issues a set of commands, culminating in banishment: 'I banish thee, on pain of death, / … Not to come near our person by ten mile' (5.5.61–3). Falstaff understands the import of King Harry's words but has difficulty believing them.[8] Given his emotional commitment to belief *in* Hal as well as belief *that* Hal is a loyal friend, Falstaff cannot afford to believe that their friendship is over.[9]

To what degree Falstaff is surprised by Hal's edict is a matter of dispute. Berger contends that 'the scenario entitled "The Rejection of Falstaff" is not something dreamed up by Harry on his own and sprung on Falstaff as a surprise. It is a story they have been collaborating on' since the start of *Henry IV, Part 1* (Berger (1997): 144). Their past rehearsals of banishment notwithstanding, I think Falstaff is quite surprised by Harry's coldness – the measure of his surprise registered in his difficulty believing as well as in the actor's physical demeanor.[10] The connection between degrees of surprise and belief is very close, Price observes (1969: 276).[11] To soften the blow or perhaps chastened by his friend's visible grief, the King explains that Falstaff will receive an allowance so 'that lack of means enforce you not to evils' (5.5.65). He adds, just before leaving, 'And as we hear you do reform yourselves, / We will, according to your strengths and qualities, / Give you advancement' (66–8). This nod towards the future

gestures at a prospect of reconciliation. It may be what Falstaff seizes on and chooses to hear.

Yet Falstaff's first reaction, after the King exits, is to turn to Justice Shallow and say, 'I owe you a thousand pound' (5.5.70). This implies (among other things) that he understands he will not be 'fortune's steward' as he had assured Shallow he would be when he borrowed the money (5.3.121). Falstaff recognizes that the friendship he counted on continuing to have with the King is over. But no sooner has he grasped this truth than he begins to retreat from it, saying, 'I shall be sent in private to him. Look you, he must seem thus to the world… I will be the man yet that shall make you great' (5.5.74–6). Falstaff insists that the King will invite him back to his inner circle because, Price might say, he cannot afford not to believe this. He has to assure Shallow (and himself) that the King was merely pretending to reject him. 'This that you heard was but a colour', he says (5.5.80–1). Then he repeats, 'I shall be sent for soon at night' (5.5.84).[12] No sooner has he uttered these words than the Chief Justice has Falstaff arrested and taken to prison. It appears that the King's promises of advancement and allowance were a mere colour.

Not wanting belief in Hal's change to take hold of him, Falstaff surrenders to a messy mix of feelings – injury, pride, need, hope – that mask his recognition of the rupture. Much will depend on the actor's interpretation, but most likely the rhythm of Falstaff's brief exchange with Shallow is rapid. It moves from a flat, disabused appraisal of what has just transpired to a florid but perfunctory denial ('I will be the man yet that shall make you great'); then it grows to something almost sincerely believed ('I shall be sent for soon at night'). Falstaff wants to believe in the King's promises but is too sceptical to allow belief to take hold. Nevertheless, until the officers arrive with orders to arrest him, he wills himself to believe in Hal's promises and leverages this belief to partly believe that he will be sent for sooner rather than later. After all, just hours earlier, Falstaff had declared with conviction, 'I know the young king is sick for me' (5.3.124–5). He now knows that this is not so – the King has turned him off – but this truth is too harsh to countenance. Believing partly shields Falstaff, blocking unwelcome information he has every reason to think is true. Like the speaker of Sonnet 138, Falstaff suspects his belief in a reciprocated love is mistaken but persists in behaving as if it were not. While the speaker of Sonnet 138 can afford to remain sceptical

in his mind if not his actions, given the ongoing status of his relationship, Falstaff, whose relationship is over, clings to a condition of partial belief – ensconcing himself in it, Lafeu might say. In the sonnet's case, partly believing designates a wary disposition informing both actions ('love's habit') and white lies protecting each person's vanity; in Falstaff's case, it designates a refuge from despair.

Believing partly is what, then? As a disposition, it may be a typically Shakespearean response to the problem of fathoming other minds. In its optimistic manifestation, it is a calculated gamble that feels like a leap in the dark: believing what you want to believe about the mental states of friends and lovers despite evidence to the contrary. After all, we should trust those we claim to love, although we may have reasons to doubt them. In its pessimistic manifestation, it can approach paranoia: to wit, Cassius's surrender to partial belief in coded messages and portentous signs. Horatio is wiser because his way of partly believing involves a willingness to change his mind – to put his old beliefs on hold and to entertain new ways of understanding his experience, going so far as to act as if these new ways might be true.[13] These variations notwithstanding, in Shakespeare believing partly is always about uncertainty. Believing partly may be a euphemism for doubt: a way of keeping doubt in play in all its degrees and guises.[14] While Price thinks even half-beliefs provide guidance, helping us traverse 'the shifting sands of doubt and ignorance' (1969: 293), my suspicion is that Shakespeare as a dramatist revels in his characters' uncertainty, enjoying the representation of their 'doubting for doubting's sake' (1969: 278). As Keats famously puts it:

> at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.
>
> (Keats (1958: 1.193–4))

Keats admires the capacity 'of remaining content with half-knowledge' (I.193-94).

What is the relation between half-knowledge and half-belief in Shakespeare? After all, knowledge in Shakespeare, as Stanley Cavell

(2003) and others have shown, also has volitional and emotional components, in addition to admitting of degrees. Consider such lines from *The Winter's Tale* as 'I dare not know, my Lord' (1.2.376), 'Alack for lesser knowledge' (2.1.40) and 'How will this grieve you, / When you shall come to clearer knowledge' (2.1.98–9). Price notes that although knowledge may be hard to come by, the desire for it persists. Belief is 'a partial satisfaction of that desire', he says, 'a second best, but much better than nothing' (1969: 266). So, if belief offers only partial satisfaction of our desire for knowledge, partial belief must offer dubious satisfaction indeed. While comparisons between believing and knowing are beyond the scope of this essay, questions arise. Is there less self-deception in believing than in knowing partly? Less avoidance, in Cavell's terms? More acknowledgement? Or are both conditions equally prone to psychological blindness, displacement and projection? Suffice it for now to say that believing partly is a way for the sceptic to get off his high horse – to surrender his philosophical commitments to programmatic doubt and instead embrace a more emotional kind of doubt, one open to new experiences and susceptible to all manner of desires.[15]

Related topics

Notes

1 In addition to 'partly believe' and 'partly credit' discussed here, see the Shakespearean locutions 'partly think', 'partly perceive' and 'partly know', and occasions when 'partly' contrasts with 'chiefly'.

2 Price describes the 'scale' of belief variously: 'We are not compelled to suppose that the series of degrees is continuous. The degree of felt confidence, and the degree of belief likewise, might rise by finite jerks or jumps as we pass along the series, from suspecting that… at the bottom to conviction at the top' (1969: 283). See also 'The image we

have here is of a graduated scale, where 0 is suspense of judgement and 10 is absolute conviction' (1969: 303).

3 'Belief even at its firmest is never wholly undoubting; we are still aware that, after all, we may be wrong' (Price (1932: 140)).

4 Price imagines a playgoer inferring: 'It looks as if Hamlet had studied metaphysics when he was at the University of Wittemberg' (1969: 311).

5 See, among others, Bishop (1996), Daston and Park (1998), Greenblatt (1991), Holmes (2008) and especially Tartamella (2014: chapter 3, 'The Wonder-Wounded Hearers in *Hamlet*'), in which she distinguishes between the effects of visual and aural wonder.

6 Elsewhere Price says, 'There are two senses of "belief in"; on the one hand, a factual sense where "belief in" *is* reducible to "belief that", and often though not always consists in believing an existential proposition; on the other hand, an evaluative sense, where "believing in" is equivalent to something like esteeming or trusting' (1969: 450).

7 'There is an important difference between the two beliefs which we must have if we are to hope for something. There must be some degree of incertitude in our factual belief, the belief that *x* is going to happen. But in our evaluative belief, the belief that it will be a good thing if *x* does happen, there need be no incertitude at all; and if there is any, it is likely to be slight' (1969: 270). See Price's allusion to William James, linking 'wishful thinking' with 'half-believing' (1954: 1).

8 See Price: 'The interesting thing about this inability or incapacity to believe is that we regard it as the upper limit of a scale of increasing difficulty in believing' (1954: 2); 'There are propositions which a man cannot afford to believe, and therefore will not believe … Why is it that a man cannot afford to believe a proposition p? There are several possible answers. The most obvious answer, and no doubt often the true one, is just that from an emotional point of view he cannot afford it' (1954: 8).

9 See Price, 'Belief "In" and Belief "That"', especially the pages devoted to interested and disinterested evaluative belief-in a friend (1969: 446–52). Price comments, 'Trusting is an essential factor in all evaluative belief-in' (1969: 449), even as he notes that 'beliefs-that… are indeed an essential part of our belief-in attitude' (1969: 452).

10 Price notes that surprise 'has organic repercussions… we may gasp with surprise' (1969: 276). 'Intense surprise', he adds, 'is likely to show itself by publicly-observable bodily symptoms' (1969: 279).

11 'If a person *is* surprised when a proposition *p* is falsified, this is about the strongest evidence we can have that he did, until then, believe the proposition for some period of time; and the degree of his surprise is about the strongest evidence we can have concerning the degree of his belief' (Price (1969: 276)).

12 'It is, however, possible to resist or suppress one's surprise', Price notes, adding, 'This is an excellent way of protecting one's beliefs against empirical refutation' (1969: 277–8).

13 'If we were unable to hold half-beliefs, it would be much more difficult for us to change our convictions. And surely it is sometimes a very good thing to change them. In order to be 'converted' from believing not-*p* to believing *p*, it is almost inevitable for many people that they should first pass through an intermediate stage of half-believing *p*' (1969: 314).

14 Price defines doubt as 'a felt inclination to disbelieve', observing that doubt too admits of degrees (1969: 278, 150, 286).

15 Thanks to Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne for comments on a previous version.

Further reading

Greenblatt, S., 2013. *Hamlet in Purgatory*. 2nd edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press.Taking a 'new' historicist approach, Greenblatt views the Ghost of Hamlet's father in terms of a widespread, affective reaction to the Protestant Reformation's abolition of the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, interpreting varieties of belief as expressions of nostalgia.

Sherman, A.G., 2007. *Skepticism and Memory in Shakespeare and Donne*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.Sherman explores the effects of sceptical doubt on belief in memory, arguing that literary strategies such as mimesis, exemplarity, pastoral and scriptural typology need to be understood as vital responses to philosophical uncertainty.

Snow, E. A., 1980. Loves of Comfort and Despair: A Reading of Shakespeare's Sonnet 138. *English Literary History* 47(3): 462–483.Snow compares the 1599 and 1609 versions of Sonnet 138, arguing in an analysis ranging from *Romeo and Juliet* through *Othello* to *Antony and Cleopatra* that shifts in wording and syntax show Shakespeare's increasing subtlety in parsing the intimacies of mutual love and belief.

Strier, R., 2000. Shakespeare and the Sceptics. *Religion and Literature* 32(2): 171–195.Strier analyses 'scepticism about supernatural intervention and causation' in *The Comedy of Errors, A*

Midsummer Night's Dream and *King Lear,* arguing that the plays secularize theological doctrines of grace and sin in their view of human relationships.

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Part V

The existential

23

'NOTHING WILL COME OUT OF NOTHING'

The existential dimension of interpersonal relationships in *King Lear*

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A.C. Bradley wrote in his classic book *Shakespearean Tragedy* that if human kind were to lose all Shakespeare's dramas but one, most people would opt for keeping *King Lear* (Bradley (1992: 208)). Indeed, *King Lear* is often seen as the most powerful of Shakespeare's tragedies, as it centres around 'a man / more sinned against than sinning' faced with a seemingly godless and hostile Universe that would spare neither the good nor the evil (*Lear*, 3.2.58–9). Henryk Zbierski, a renowned Polish scholar, suggested that after the atrocities of the First and Second World War, it is easier to understand the cruelty in *King Lear* (1988: 427).[1] However, it was Jan Kott, the author of *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, who was the first to underscore the existential absurdity of *King Lear*, comparing the tragedy to Samuel Beckett's plays. Kott claimed that only modern theatre could fully take advantage of the 'philosophical cruelty' that permeates *King Lear* (Kott (1997: 136)). In his view, *King Lear*, a modern grotesque rather than a classic tragedy, ridicules the notion of the Absolute that controls and takes care of humans. Kott's analyses proved that anachronistic rereading of Shakespeare can bring new insights into early modern plays. However, with the rise of cultural materialism and new historicism at the close of the twentieth century, scholars tried to unveil the workings of Renaissance society and the influence of powerful ideologies on the views

held by the early moderns. For some time, Shakespeare had been tied to post-Marxist theories that are, by principle, opposed to essentialism as well as modern subjectivity. Nowadays, some scholars point out numerous limitations of the new historicist and cultural materialist paradigms (Grady (2000: 40)). For instance, Hugh Grady calls for a 'differentiated theory of (early) modern subjectivity' that would attempt to reconcile the investigation of early modern and modern perspectives. It seems that Shakespeare, although being a man of his age, speaks volumes about modern predicaments. Hence, it is not unreasonable to try to investigate the parallels between the insecurities of the Renaissance men and post-war scholars. Such is the purpose of the present chapter; to read *King Lear* through the lens of existentialism, at the same time casting a glance at the original, philosophical background of the play.

King Lear has long been seen as a play permeated by existential doubt and anxiety. Gloucester's words from Act 1 perfectly sum up the atmosphere of doom and gloom:

> These late eclipses of the sun and moon portend no good to us. Though the wisdom of Nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord, in palaces, treason, and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. […] The king falls from bias of nature – there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time. Machinations, hollowness, treachery and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves.
>
> (*Lear*, 1.2.103–14)

The values once taken for granted disintegrate, while the world appears more than inhospitable. It seems Gloucester's worldview reflects the anxieties that might have been felt by Renaissance men of letters. Stephen Greenblatt points out the atmosphere of paranoia in post-Reformation England that made the world 'strange, unsettling, and dangerous' for the generations of Shakespeare's grandparents and parents (Greenblatt (2004: 94)). However, it is equally important to remember that the English Reformation zeal went hand in hand with the development of scepticism or, to be more precise, the rediscovery of ancient sceptics. George T. Buckley, in his book *Atheism in the English Renaissance*, underscores the

influence of ancient sceptics on the birth of early-modern atheist stances. Ancient philosophical ideas that stood in opposition to Christian teachings were condemned and subsequently forgotten (Buckley (1965: 2)). Materialist Epicurus and his Roman follower Lucretius were rediscovered in the Renaissance as subversive vehicles of doubt and scepticism towards Christian orthodoxy. In *King Lear* it is Edmund who heralds himself as the materialist voice of nature. He also becomes a key sceptic in the play as he scoffs at Gloucester's anxiety and dismisses it as pure superstition; 'the excellent foppery of the world' and 'an admirable evasion of the whoremaster man' who can 'lay his goatish disposition on the charge of a star' (*Lear*, 1.2.118, 126–8). In his rampant individualism, Edmund rejects 'spherical predominance', opposing the concept of divine providence and taking his fate in his own hands. Though in his defining soliloquy he cries out 'Now gods, stand up for bastards!', the gods of the play remain as silent to his appeals as to the lamentations of all the other characters (*Lear*, 1.2.22). One may risk a statement that this ominous and persistent silence of the gods in the face of injustice or suffering amounts to a radical questioning of metaphysical reality. In such a word man is utterly alone to face chaos and existential loneliness.

Contrary to the widely-held views, the development of existentialism can be dated back to the Reformation movement. William Barrett suggests that the end of the symbolic Middle Ages brought to light man's solitude and lack of security for the first time, resulting in an encounter with existential nothingness (1990: 27). Late-Renaissance Europe, torn by the religious conflicts of the Reformation, experienced doubt for the first time in its history. The great geographical discoveries widened the horizon but also unveiled fear of the other and the unknown, while the Copernican revolution deprived man of his privileged position as the pinnacle of God's creation. The first half of the seventeenth century is marked by interiority, diverse contradictions and the realization of man's limitedness. Warnke claims that the Baroque is characteristic for its 'widespread tendencies toward pessimism and melancholy – epitomized in the mature tragedies of Shakespeare' (1972: 130). Consequently, one can see existentialism as an ongoing process, beginning in the late Middle Ages and culminating in modern times. So, after all, it is not entirely anachronistic to look for the seeds of existentialism in the works by Renaissance sceptics or Shakespeare.

Walter Kaufmann, acclaimed scholar of existentialism, sees the existential predicament as a property of an individual rather than a historical process. Such an attitude enables him to inscribe Shakespeare in the tradition of great existentialists along with Nietzsche, Sartre or Heidegger. Kaufmann tries to prove, with ardent fervour, that the so called 'godless existentialism' is by no means a contemporary invention (1980: 2). With almost bitter irony, he discards the notion that Shakespeare's writings are Christian. He writes in his famous book *From Shakespeare to Existentialism*:

> [Shakespeare] knew the view that man is thrown into the world, abandoned to a life that ends in death, with nothing after that; but he also knew self-sufficiency. He had the strength to face reality without excuses and illusions and did not even seek comfort in the faith in immortality.

<div align="right">(Kaufmann (1980: 3))</div>

Kaufmann wants to see Shakespeare as a bard of life and its ripeness. Shakespeare emerges as the great advocate of beauty over mediocrity, just like Nietzsche. Hence, despite the fact that there is no cosmic order that would justify man's place in the Universe, there is still the grandeur of single existence. One feels tempted to suggest that *King Lear*, in its overwhelming cruelty, robs man even of that, leaving only the ruins of man in the hostile world. Old Lear is stripped of everything and left at the mercy of wild nature, while the momentary relief brought to him by Cordelia is cancelled by her unexpected death. Lear's helplessness during the storm, Gloucester's defencelessness against brutal blinding or Edgar's cold and naked body all appear to question the self-sufficiency outlined by Kaufmann. So it is indeed hard to talk of beauty or grandeur of single existence with all the excessive suffering thrown onto the characters.

Already at the outset of the play, one is found amidst a world which seems to lack any preordained order or essence. The public love contest demonstrates Lear's obsessive need to validate his patriarchal and 'kingly' personage through the reflection of himself in the mirror of others' eyes, while Cordelia seems to be the only character who refuses to reflect his vision.[2] In Heidegger's view, the basic condition of 'Dasein' is 'being-in-the world', meaning being engaged in a relation with the world and others (Heidegger (2005:78)). One of the types of such a relation is a public

sphere of existence: 'the One'. As Barrett explains: '[t]he one is the impersonal and public creature whom each of us is even before he is an I, a real I. One has such-and-such a position in life, one is expected to behave in such-and-such a manner ' (1990: 220). Lear represents the One, mistaking public flattery for a real engagement with another being. However, as it turns out, the One is an inauthentic state, inferior to the real state of being, in which one cannot realize the full horror of one's existence. The characters, especially the old King, trapped in the world of appearance, are in the state that Heidegger would call 'fallen-ness' (*die Verfallenheit*), as yet unable to reach the true state of being 'the Self'. Cordelia takes the responsibility of going beyond the externalized, public existence. Her small, but fraught with consequences, 'nothing' may be read as a symptomatic expression of the opposition to the safe womb of public existence and, at the same time, her willingness to go beyond it, to reach the self. Although authentic, such a condition brings either suffering or the realization of human homelessness.

It is worth remembering that it is not so much Lear's explosive nature that sets the play in motion but rather Cordelia's unexpected behaviour. She senses 'plighted cunning' in her sisters' profuse love declarations (*Lear*, 1.1.282). In asides, she claims to love and care for her father. Yet, she refuses to take part in the game. Rosenberg refers to a wealth of possible critical interpretations of her behaviour. He aptly points out that 'she moves between extremes, one somewhat short of Bradley's canonization and the other touching the arrogance and ego-aggrandizement of her father' (Rosenberg (1972: 57)). Her decisions have been interpreted both as an expression of selfless love and rampant egoism. Similar ambiguity surrounds Lear's actions. Critics have differently read the motivation behind the love contest. Lear claims he wants 'to shake all cares and business' and 'unburdened crawl toward death' (*Lear*, 1.1.8, 10). Yet his subsequent actions prove his unwillingness to part with kingly authority and power. The ambiguities of human nature are often formulated by early modern sceptics, e.g. Montaigne, the French Renaissance sceptic who is believed to have influenced Shakespeare. In his essay 'Of the inconstancy of our actions', Montaigne writes: '[w]e fluctuate betwixt various inclinations; we will nothing freely, nothing absolutely, nothing constantly' Montaigne (2006). The word 'nothing' echoes throughout the whole play, highlighting the lack of essence that

characterizes both the world and characters in *King Lear*. It is Cordelia that utters the word for the first time when she declines to take part in the contest, while Lear replies: 'nothing will come out of nothing' (*Lear*, 1.1.90). And it is indeed ironic or painfully existential that the two people who believe that they love each other repeat these 'nothings', totally misunderstanding their mutual intentions or needs. Lear and Cordelia speak to each other but their words do not reflect their true intentions. However, Shakespeare's ability to express the failure of human communication, later on dissected in post-war theatre of, e.g. Beckett or Pinter, appears to be an expression of the early modern doubt in human faculties. In the same essay, Montaigne (2006) writes:

> I give to my soul sometimes one face and sometimes another, according to the side I turn her to. If I speak variously of myself, it is because I consider myself variously; all the contrarieties are there to be found in one corner or another; after one fashion or another: bashful, insolent; chaste, lustful; prating, silent; laborious, delicate; ingenious, heavy; melancholic, pleasant; lying, true; knowing, ignorant; liberal, covetous, and prodigal.

Such a subjectivity is characteristic for both Lear and Cordelia. To themselves and to each other they seem to have determinate intentions but the unfolding events shutter the illusion of stable selves. The unexpected circumstances render their intentions obsolete, leading them to question their expectations and needs. To her sisters, Cordelia says: 'I know what you are' but it is debatable whether she truly knows herself and her intentions (*Lear*, 1.1.271). The impossibility of communication between Lear and Cordelia does not stem from the impotence of words but seems to underscore their inability to truly decipher their own intentions and needs. Both Cordelia's and Lear's 'nothings' are fraught with meanings. However, the characters, deprived of any essential core, are in flux, forced to correct their intentions and question their needs as their circumstances change. Shaken out of their previous externalized existences and 'thrown' into a new situation they need to remake themselves anew.

Lear, in his obstinacy to cling to the external manifestations of his power and authority, finds it particularly hard to understand the new conditions of his existence. It seems that he longs for the solidity of the

artificial being that the 'royal personage' epitomizes. The crown or the mystical, impersonal body politic distances him from the responsibility for his personal decisions. Lear's attachment to the crown signals that he himself is a Sartrean being-for-itself.[3] His insistence on the use of 'the royal we' whenever he speaks of himself underscores his confusion and inability to transcend. Barrett writes that 'because we are perpetually flitting beyond our selves, or falling behind our possibilities, we seek to ground our existence, to make it more secure' (1990: 246). Lear is a human being who falls behind in his need to secure his existence, confused in between his political and private self. On this personal level, one feels tempted to compare him to old Krapp from Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*. Krapp, while listening to the old tapes with his recordings, cannot establish a connection with his earlier Self. Lear resembles Krapp in his failure to acknowledge that the Self is really a sequence of the Selves, which fail to communicate with each other. Lear clings hopelessly to the remains of the authority, to his previous, powerful Self as a king but he also, just as Beckett's character, cannot establish this link. When Goneril pleads with him to be wiser, he exclaims:

> Does any here know me? Why, this is not Lear.
> Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?
> Either his notion weakens, or his discernings are
> lethargied – Ha! Sleeping or waking? Sure 'tis not
> so. Who is this that can tell me who I am?

(*Lear*, 1.4.217–21)

Lear fails to connect with his previous Self because he cannot understand that not only did the external situation change radically, but also he is a changed man. When Fool answers him by calling him 'Lear's shadow', he does not only refer to Lear's lost power, but also to a human being reduced and diminished by his humiliation and sense of betrayal (*Lear*, 1.4.222). Lear can only realize his position when faced with a limit situation, to borrow Jaspers' term.[4]

Critics agree that the scene of the storm is a climactic scene, which brings insight to the king. However, it does not only carry the realization of Lear's *hamartia*, but also brings out more of the play's existential load. In his futile combat with the tempest, Lear exclaims:

Blow winds and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!
Your cataracts and hurricanes, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks! …
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world,
Crack nature's moulds

(*Lear*, 3.2.1–8)

Some critics have pointed out that the raging tempest reflects the tumult in Lear's mind (Zbierski (1988: 433)). Nature, at which Lear directs his frustration, remains deaf to his lamentation. Lear's tirade on its rage resembles his own furious attacks on his daughters. He tries to invoke the powers of the Universe but, like in communication with his daughters, language remains impotent. The angry incantation turns into a pitiful plea:

Here I stand your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak and despised old man.
But yet I call you servile ministers
That will with two pernicious daughters join
Your high-endangered battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this. O ho! 'tis foul.

(*Lear*, 3.2.19–24)

A limit situation enables Lear to understand his hopelessness against the hostile Universe but also the failure of human communication and hence ultimate loneliness. The daughters who had thrown him out seem to be one with Nature that is not only deaf but cruel in its treatment. When Lear exclaims: 'O ho! 'tis foul' he seems to choke on his dread (*Lear*, 3.2.24). The existential dread is coupled with the realization of the hostility of the world and the finitude of existence. Lear stands face to face with death, which suddenly becomes an actual possibility. Death is not only a final destination of humans, but also an actual possibility which lies at the centre of Being (Barrett (1990: 226)). In the light of the encounter with Nothingness that struck Lear, a belief in anything stable or solid in the world seems absurd. The realization of absurdity becomes nothing else but madness. Lear's mind finally yields under the weight of this brutal revelation.

Lear's tragic path from comfortable pretence to painful awareness of absurdity runs parallel with the story of yet another existentialist sage: Edgar. It is also through fear and loss that Edgar emerges as the main carrier of existential thought in the play. Stripped of all material assets, he is literally forced to abandon his identity and abolish his previous facticity. As Poor Tom, he is naked, powerless and left at the mercy of hostile nature. Gloucester captures this situation in his words: 'I'the last storm I such a fellow saw, / [w]hich made me think a man a worm' (*Lear*, 4.1.34–5). Lear, already mad, says: '[w]hy, thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? […] [U]naccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art' (*Lear*, 3.4.99–106). Gloucester's and Lear's comments parallel Montaigne's scoffs at human delusions of greatness. Montaigne plainly says: '[o]f all the creatures man is the most miserable and frail' (1990: 28).[5] Edgar feigns madness, but his madman's comments underscore the absurdity of the human condition. Speaking as Poor Tom, he encapsulates the nature of human anxiety, which according to Heidegger is a primal human mood. Angst or anxiety is exactly this 'foul fiend' that haunts people throughout their life (*Lear*, 3.4.50–1). Edgar's nihilation of 'the One', exit from the externalized existence to face Nothingness, puts his life onto a different course. Edgar is aware of the anxiety that permeates the life of a human being when he says: 'O, our lives' sweetness, that we the pain of death would hourly die rather than die at once!' (*Lear*, 5.3.183–5). Death is an actuality, not a remote end of a long journey. Edgar recalls Gloucester's 'bloody proclamation' that had followed him 'so near' when he was on the run (*Lear*, 5.3.182–3). The words on life's sweetness and death as a constant possibility are recalled when he is back again a powerful lord, standing victorious over the body of his traitor half-brother. However, despite his seeming victory the realization of death's actuality seems to have become part of him. The awareness of temporality had helped him back then when he was Poor Tom as it added to the poignancy of life itself. For Edgar, it has become an opening of a new life project, a transformation into an active agent. Edgar seems to accept the shadow of death as a permanent companion and seems to mirror Sartre, who claims: '[d]eath is a pure fact as is birth' (1965: 521). He wisely says that '[m]en must endure their going hence even as

their coming hither. Ripeness is all' (*Lear*, 5.2.9–11). His words ominously prefigure the ending of the play.

The permanent dread of death as a possibility here and now seems to resonate throughout the play. The ever-present fear of death seems to be even more acute as the characters realize their utter loneliness in the world. One could risk a statement that Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God can be painfully felt in the play.[6] As Zbierski claims, *King Lear* presents a pre-Christian reality with indifferent or brutal pagan gods (1988: 445). The Christian God is virtually non-existent in the play. Pagan gods, despite frequent allusions to them, seem to be deaf to prayers. The words of Kent directed to Lear in the first scene seem to set the tone of the play: 'Thou swear'st thy gods in vain' (*Lear*, 1.1.162). The presence (or absence, to be more precise) of gods in the play has always been a contentious issue for critics. Some scholars posit that Shakespeare is reworking the theme of Christian redemption. Rosenberg suggests that some of the utterances in the play show the opposite: questioning dogmas (1972: 68–9). Kott also seems to be in favour of seeing the reality of Lear as godless. He even writes that *King Lear* is a tragic sneer directed at eschatology (1997: 149). As presented, Lear's world is essence-less, while the realization of the absurdity of a godless world is particularly intense. The notion follows that people are born only to die. As Jean-Paul Sartre says in *Being and Nothingness*: '[i]t is absurd that we are born; it is absurd that we die' (Sartre (1965: 526)). His words express a similar conception of life's absurdity as Fool's comments directed to Lear. When Lear asks: 'Dost thou call me fool, boy?', Fool answers emphatically: 'All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with' (*Lear*, 1.4.141–3). Absurdity emerges as a defining feature of existence, as it plagues those who are to blame for their own mistakes, like Lear or Gloucester, but also those who are swept along by waves of chaos, like Edgar or eventually Cordelia.

As Sartre observed, following Heidegger, a human being 'must be an anticipation and a project of its own death' (1965: 509). Hence, a human being can be called 'Sein zum Tode' – a being heading towards death (Sartre (1965: 509)). In the play, Lear's mental disintegration runs hand in hand with Gloucester's physical degradation. One man needs to go mad in order to see life's cruelty. The other is actually blinded in an atrocious act of betrayal. However, his blindness metaphorically saves him from the full

horror of an empty world. This takes place when Edgar stages Gloucester's fake suicide. Kott wants to see this scene as a pantomime in which a madman leads a blind man and in which it is Edgar who builds an eschatological structure to an event that is fake (1997: 146, 149). To follow up on Kott's interpretation one could compare Gloucester's aborted suicide to Kierkegaard's rewriting of Abraham's moral dilemma, when faced with God's command to kill his only son Isaac. Gloucester's fall distantly resembles Kierkegaardian 'leap of faith'. In Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* it becomes a philosophical parable of human life (Miś (2002: 98)). Kott believes that this Shakespearean scene is also a parable, albeit grotesque and cruel (1997: 148, 150). It becomes a mockery of both the divine and the human, a final expression of existential absurdity. According to Kierkegaard, God's command is addressed to Abraham individually. In order to carry out God's will Abraham has to go beyond moral codes. At the same time, there is nothing in the world that can assure him of the rightness of the deed. Hence, Abraham's situation seems to be absurd and the very act of faith must be absurd as well. Kierkegaard stresses the fact that the ordeal through which Abraham goes is 'not just a trial' as most people would suggest (1994: 43). It generates real dread and anxiety. Gloucester decides to make his final step into the abyss because he is overwhelmed by suffering and life's absurdity. He wants to 'shake [his] great affliction off' (*Lear*, 4.6.36). His 'leap of faith', actually, occurs after the fall when he is forced to acknowledge his survival and divine intervention. Gloucester believes in his miraculous survival and vows: 'Henceforth, I'll bear / [a]ffliction till it do cry out itself / "[e]nough, enough" and die' (*Lear*, 4.6.75–7). Gloucester's survival may not be his choice but his determination to carry on is. He steps back into life and acknowledges the existence of a guiding hand. The hand in his case belongs to Edgar, though Gloucester does not seem to realize it. The choice to actively put trust into another being mirrors Kierkegaard's realization of freedom, which is brought about by making a decision to take the leap and trust in God (McDonald (2009)). Kott suggests that in the light of gods' absence, the entire act is pointless (1997: 152). Knowing that Edgar lied to his father, the words become grotesque and absurd. Yet, as Kierkegaard writes: 'the movements of faith must constantly be made by virtue of the absurd' (2013: 79). So one thing that Kott fails to see is that it is this 'absurdity' of faith that actually partly shelters Gloucester

from further suffering. Despite the contingency of human existence, Gloucester finds momentary relief through Poor Tom/Edgar.

It seems that what distressed Gloucester finds in Poor Tom/Edgar, Lear eventually finds in Cordelia. Regardless of the way one understands Lear's original intentions or Cordelia's response during the contest, it is clear that, as the play draws to its tragic end, the two share a moment of intense understanding. The contest, in its astounding ambiguity, may be seen as a clash of indomitable wills: Cordelia's and Lear's fight for self-assertion and self-definition; or a demonstration of inherently existential failure of human communication. Nevertheless, the reconciliation is an authentic moment of closeness for Lear and Cordelia that paradoxically needs no words. To Lear's profuse apologies, Cordelia's answer is as succinct as during the contest. She plainly says: 'No cause, no cause' (*Lear*, 4.7.75). Despite their misunderstandings Cordelia chooses to let go of the past. According to Gabriel Marcel, in the absurd conditions of human existence, if authentic interpersonal relations are possible they must be based on being, participation and commitment[7]. Cordelia understands that when she says: '[f]or thee, oppressed King, I am cast down; [m]yself could else outfrown false fortune's frown' (*Lear*, 5.3.5–6). Her sacrifice corresponds to Marcel's words on active commitment:

> I freely put myself in your hands; the best use I can make of my freedom is to place it in your hands; […] I freely substituted your freedom for my own; or paradoxically, it is by that very substitution that I realize my freedom.
>
> (Marcel (2002: 40))

So, just as Edgar's commitment realizes itself through Poor Tom's leading of blind Gloucester, Cordelia soothes Lear's tumultuous mind through her mere presence. Both Edgar and Cordelia manifest what Marcel calls 'creative fidelity', which is a condition of being 'available' for someone over time that is realized in presence and constancy (2002: 153). Both children sacrifice their 'externalized' existence, subvert social expectations of their roles and finally risk their personal freedoms to grant their parents their presence and commitment. However, the moment of intimacy for both of them is brief and cancelled by Cordelia's sudden and unexpected death. It is her death that brings out the whole horror of *King*

Lear, as well as its full existentialist load. *King Lear* is a tragedy that seems to mock the idea of poetic justice. On hearing of her death, Kent exclaims in shock: 'Is this the promised end?' (*Lear*, 5.3.261). What has so far been expressed in Baroque-styled quips of Edgar and Gloucester finds its dreadful realization in her death, that is neither deserved nor cathartic. As Sartre writes: 'death is never that which gives life its meanings; it is, on the contrary, that which removes all meaning from life' (1965: 515). Her death seems to painfully underscore the existentialist themes that run in the play: fragility and contingency of existence, as well as the indifference of the Universe.

As shown, the tragedy of *King Lear* lends itself to analysis using a twentieth-century set of philosophical ideas found under the umbrella term of existentialism. Yet the purpose of this chapter was not to propose some radical version of proto-existentialism or to force an early modern play into a straitjacket of modern perspectives, alien to an early modern man or woman. Rather, it was meant to build intellectual bridges between those perspectives. The play's pessimism appears to be in line with the existentialist themes of dread, anxiety and temporality. The tragedy speaks volumes of the final absurdity of human existence; death not only as an irking, remote thought but an always present possibility. The radical subjectivity encapsulated in the strong individuals of Lear and Cordelia result in the failure of their communication. This brokenness and fragmentary nature of human relations strike modern audiences as particularly timely. However, one should bear in mind that this subjectivity is an inherent building block of a late Renaissance or Baroque philosophical worldview. The ancient Roman poet Lucretius, rediscovered and celebrated in the Renaissance, rejects the divine underpinning of the world in his poem *Of the Nature of Things*. He boldly claims: '[n]othing from nothing ever yet was born' (2008, loc. 104–5). It is no surprise that one finds incredible affinity between his words and the memorable 'nothings' of Lear and Cordelia.[8]

Related topics

Notes

1 It is a well-known fact that the cruelty of *King Lear* was unpalatable for the Restoration theatre. In Nahum Tate's adaptation from 1681, Lear survives well past old age, while Cordelia marries Edgar. To quote Tate's own words: 'the tale conclude[s] in a success to the innocent distressed persons' (Tate as quoted in: Dickson (2005: 176)). For more details see Dickson (2005). To consult the text of the adaptation see Clark (1997).

2 For a detailed analysis of all the three sisters as well as the social implications of their decisions see Burzyńska (2016).

3 According to Sartre, Being can have two modes: being-for-itself (*pour-soi*) and being-in-itself (*en-soi*). Being-in-itself is a solid, self-contained being of an object, 'which is what it is' (1965: 535). But being-for-itself emerges in the process of a conscious transcendence. A human being lacks the self-containment of a being-in-itself. As Sartre writes: 'The For-itself, in fact, is nothing but pure nihilation of the In-itself; it is like a hole of being at the heart of Being' (1965: 535).

4 Limit situations or 'Grenzsituationen' require decision and re-evaluation of one's life. These are the moments when a human being realizes the full horror of one's condition (Thornhill (2009)).

5 Montaigne's scepticism can also be found in Hamlet's famous words starting with 'What piece of work is a man – how noble in reason; how infinite in faculties […]; the paragon of all animals' and finishing with 'And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.269–74).

6 In *The Gay Science*, in the 'Madman' parable (Nietzsche (2007: 119–20; 194–5)), 'the death of God' is equalled with madness as it brings a radical devaluation of human life and loss of all meaning (Kaufmann (1974: 101)).

7 Gabriel Marcel, French philosopher linked to existentialism, discusses the nature of interpersonal relations and man's relation to his being in a series of lectures entitled *Creative Fidelity*. In order to talk of relations among human beings Gabriel Marcel introduces terms 'disponibilité' and 'indisponibilité'. These terms from French can be translated as 'availability' and 'unavailability' or as 'disposability' and 'non-disposibility' (Treanor (2009)).

Further reading

Crowell, S., 2016. Existentialism. In: E.N. Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/existentialism/. (accessed 6 May 2017). This chapter is a comprehensive but accessible introduction to existentialism. It outlines main tenets of the movement as well as presents its main thinkers in a historical perspective.

Joughin, J.J., 2000. Philosophical Shakespeares: an Introduction. In: J.J. Joughin, ed. *Philosophical Shakespeares*. London: Routledge, 1–18. This chapter provides a theoretical introduction to intersections between Shakespeare studies and philosophy. It uses examples from numerous philosophers throughout history, who commented on Shakespeare's works. It also analyses the role of Shakespeare in modern philosophy.

Kaufmann, W., 1966. *Existentialism – from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books. This book is an anthology of texts categorized as existentialist. The texts may be read separately or in chronological order. Together they present a comprehensive introduction to the philosophy of existentialism.

Kaufmann, W., 1980. Shakespeare: Between Socrates and Existentialism. In: W. Kaufmann, *From Shakespeare to Existentialism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1–25. This chapter presents Shakespeare as the first existentialist. It analyses selected plays in the context of key existentialist ideas.

Warner, M., 2010. Philosophy and literature; yesterday, today and tomorrow. In: S. Schroeder, ed. *Philosophy of Literature*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 112–34. This chapter is an analytical introduction to ways in which philosophy can be used in the study of literature. The chapter outlines methodological considerations concerning literature and philosophy.

References

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24

'AND NOTHING BRINGS ME ALL THINGS'

Shakespeare's philosophy of nothing

The word 'nothing' recurs throughout Shakespeare's writing, from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, where Launce asks, 'Can nothing speak?' in response to Valentine's claim that he is 'Nothing' (Shakespeare et al. (2016): III.i.198), to Alonso's castigation of Gonzalo, 'Thou dost talk nothing to me' (II.i.166) in *The Tempest*. But the meaning of 'nothing' in the plays is far from self-evident. Coriolanus's aversion to having his 'nothings monstered' (II.ii.74) is very different from Hamlet's metatheatrical astonishment at the way an actor can display so much emotion 'for nothing! / For Hecuba!' (II.ii.476–7). What is nothing? Doesn't talking about it make it something? Is it nothing in the sense that it is not a thing, or is it the lack of any kind of existence at all? If it is the latter, does it even make sense to ask what it *is*? David Levin (2009: 143) claims that 'one word covered the entire negative spectrum, from the great void to mere nothing' in early modern English, but what exactly is 'mere nothing'? A plethora of meanings is associated with the word 'nothing' in Shakespeare's works: material, fictional, sexual, political, mathematical, theological, and philosophical. In what follows, I will trace some of the philosophical implications of Shakespeare's use of 'nothing'.

In his article surveying the meaning of 'nothing' in Shakespeare, R.S. White (2013: 232; 237–8) points out that Shakespeare was 'clearly intrigued by the teasing philosophical implications of "nothing" when it came to refer not only to "nothing" (an absence) but to a "nothing" (an existence called nothing) named zero', and that 'the evidence suggests that Shakespeare's interest in "nothing" and "ciphers" often includes mathematical connotations but mostly with reference also to metaphorical and philosophical implications'. However, while White does touch on the philosophical nature of Shakespeare's nothing, he mostly focuses on the

mathematical sense. Indeed, aside from the Aristotelian notion of nothingness as the primal material nothingness from which the world was created, and the early modern theological interpretation of the Platonic idea that nothingness is the negation of being, there has been very little written on philosophical nothingness in Shakespeare's works.

One philosophical definition of nothing is that which treats the discussion of nothing as nonsense, a mistake in language, because it is contentless. Wittgenstein (1929: 48), for instance, suggests that talking about being or nothing in general is a misuse of language: 'it is nonsense to say that I wonder at the existence of the world, because I cannot imagine it not existing'. Talking about nothing is illogical, nonsense, and cannot lead to knowledge. It is not that the subject is without value, it is simply that it does not make sense from a logical standpoint. Carnap (1932) argues similarly that the use of 'nothing' as a noun is simply bad logic. Any sentence that relies on 'nothing' in this sense is deprived of meaning: it is a pseudo-statement that has no theoretical content, and cannot have anything to do with knowledge. This does not necessarily mean that questions about the existence of things are worthless; for Carnap (1932: 78), metaphysical thinking is closer to art than to science, it is art that mistakes itself for knowledge, an 'expression of an attitude toward life'. If Shakespeare's use of 'nothing' is nonsense, it leaves little to talk about. But as Shakespeare does use 'nothing' as a noun, and in a meaningful way, 'nothing' as nonsense is irrelevant to Shakespeare's philosophy of nothing. Nevertheless, if Carnap is right, then metaphysical philosophy may still have something meaningful to say about the question of nothing.

Howard Caygill is one of the few critics who have analysed 'nothing' in Shakespeare from a philosophical standpoint. Giving a brief interpretation of what Hegel and Heidegger mean by the term, Caygill (2000: 109) argues that 'Shakespeare's monster of nothing pits equivocation against the unequivocal categories of philosophical ontology, showing how the experience of not-nothing … cannot be reduced to unequivocal states of being'. This is quite an assertion. While it is true that Shakespeare uses 'nothing' in a particularly nuanced and complicated way, Caygill downplays the complexities of ontology and philosophical nothingness. For one thing, the categories of philosophical ontology are not 'unequivocal', and Caygill's (2000: 108) contention that 'the role played

by nothing in Shakespeare's dramas is far more equivocal than anything dreamt of in philosophy' is a grand claim to make based on an extremely brief explanation of the philosophy of nothing. According to Caygill (2000: 107), 'For philosophers, *ex nihilo, nihil fit* marks the beginning of a philosophical drama in which the equivocal character of nothing is neutralised by the negation of nothing becoming the affirmation of being'. However, while this applies to Hegel, it is not univocally the case for all philosophy. Both Schelling (1834) and Heidegger (1929) take Hegel to task for presupposing the primacy of being over nothing, and many accounts of nothing do not just affirm being through nothing. For instance, Adorno's (1966) negative dialectics is concerned with what remains after determinate negation, and rejects the idea that nothing can ever be fully incorporated into being. For Merleau-Ponty (1964: 52), the thinking self is not being but 'the "nothing", the "void", which has the capacity for receiving the plenitude of the world'. Nothing is not negated by the world; it never becomes being, although it may appear to. Heidegger uses 'nothing' to refer to several distinct ideas at different points in his career, but his primary contention about nothing is that humans have a fundamental and constant idea of nothing. Contra Hegel, Heidegger (1929: 86) argues that, without a basic understanding of nothing, we would not be able to negate anything, since the power to negate things must come from a prior understanding of nothingness: 'the nothing is more originary than the "not" and negation … negation as an act of the intellect, and thereby the intellect itself, are somehow dependent upon the nothing'. For Heidegger (1935: 32–3), nothing is that which we require to understand that things exist, it is not the negation of being, but a constant counterpart to being, and cannot ever be part of being: 'Insofar as beings stand up against the extreme possibility of not-Being, they themselves stand in Being, and yet they have never thereby overtaken and overcome the possibility of not-Being'. Thus nothing can never be negated; it remains in the background of our understanding, and can be experienced only in exceptional circumstances.

It is only possible to compare Shakespeare's treatment of nothing with philosophical nothing if the two are dealing with the same kind of nothingness, that is, nothing as the lack of all being. It is therefore important to establish what Shakespeare means by 'nothing', or, more specifically, what he means by *being* nothing when he writes lines such as

'I am nothing', 'You are nothing', 'I was nothing', or 'I must nothing be'. Variations of these lines recur in many plays, spoken by characters who are experiencing moments of severe crisis. Being nothing is evidently different from being king, or being a tree; it is a form of existence, but one which has no predicates which would give it value. If one can *be* nothing, then Shakespeare's 'nothing' must be different from the philosophical accounts of nothingness such as Hegel's, where nothing is the negation of being. Saying that Shakespeare creates a 'condition of not-nothing, a state that is neither being nor nothing' (Caygill (2000: 107)), ignores how Shakespeare uses the word 'nothing'. To respect Shakespeare's treatment of nothing, it is better to make a distinction between being, nothing, and *non-being*, where non-being is the lack of any being at all. But if nothing is not the lack of being, what is it? This is an ontological question: what is nothing in Shakespeare's works? How does it differ from being, or non-being? The threshold moments between being and non-being – and especially the moments when a character contemplates or consciously makes the transition between life and death – are the moments that help to reveal where nothing lies in the ontological spectrum of Shakespeare's plays.

With life and death, the threshold is both physical and metaphysical. 'I know when one is dead and when one lives' (V.iii.234), Lear declares when Cordelia dies: it is obvious when somebody is dead physically. But partly because he is not quite in his right mind, Lear is certain and yet uncertain, checking for signs of life in Cordelia over and over again, saying, 'If that her breath will mist or stain the stone, / Why, then, she lives' (V.iii.236–7), and again, 'This feather stirs. She lives!' (V.iii.239). She might be on the threshold of death, or she might have crossed it. Although we know when someone is dead physically, it is hard to judge when the value of that life changes. When does someone cease to be what makes them what they are? This threshold between life and death is made painfully clear in Anthony's failed suicide in *Anthony and Cleopatra*: 'How, Not dead? Not dead? / The guard, ho! O, dispatch me!' (IV.xv.103–4). Although Anthony can bring himself to the threshold where his state will change from alive to dead, death is not ultimately his, or anyone's, to command. He can start to cross that threshold of his own volition, but he cannot choose the point at which he actually dies. Suicide may seem like one of the ultimate acts in which one takes charge of one's own life,

dignity, and destiny, but it relies on something that is not within one's control. At some point on the threshold between life and death one stops being an agent of one's actions. As Brian Cummings (2013: 272) points out, 'We reach unto death, but death in the end comes in its own time. We can want it, but we cannot make it happen. Death meets us halfway, even in the action of suicide'. Anthony apparently thinks otherwise. Before his failed suicide, he says 'I will be / A bridegroom in my death and run into't / As to a lover's bed' (IV.xiv.99–101). In this image, the volition is entirely on his side; death is something passive, like a sexually compliant bride, something he runs to embrace. Even after he fails to kill himself immediately, Anthony's idea of himself does not change. He claims, 'Not Caesar's valor hath ov'rthrown Anthony, / But Anthony's hath triumphed on itself' (IV.xv.15–16), and he again refers to himself as 'a Roman, by a Roman / Valiantly vanquished' (IV.xv.59–60). Of course, Anthony is responsible for his own death: he dies of the wound that he inflicted on himself, and nobody helps to kill him despite his pleas. But the play shows him less in control of his death than he might like to believe. Death, like Cleopatra, is not going to lie there patiently and receive Anthony in his passion. He may wish to think of himself as running over the threshold into death, but he is pulled over slowly instead. In contrast, Cleopatra proclaims her suicide by saying, 'what's brave, what's noble, / Let's do't after the high Roman fashion / And make death proud to take us' (IV.xv.91–2). She does not directly state that she is going to kill herself; she is going to *let* death take her. She will take herself to the threshold, and allow death to take her over it. Cleopatra's desire for death is always framed in this way: 'Where art thou, death? / Come hither, come! Come, come, and take a queen / Worth many babes and beggars!' (V.ii.45–7). As she says in Act V, suicide is 'that thing that ends all other deeds' (V.ii.5). It is the moment when one gives up the ability to act. It is only an action up to the point where it ceases to be an action taken *by* someone, because that someone ceases to be.

The uncontrollable nature of the transition from life to death is one of the things that haunts Hamlet's soliloquy beginning 'To be or not to be'. Hamlet can only think about what it means 'not to be' as a negation of what 'is'. 'Not to be' is 'to take arms against a sea of troubles / And by opposing end them' (III.i.58). It is the act of ending his troubles, the destruction of existing pain. But while Hamlet can imagine the attempt to

end what 'is', he cannot go beyond it into what 'is not'; it is a threshold that he cannot cross in his mind. Endeavouring to describe what happens at the end of existence, Hamlet equates 'to die' with 'to sleep – / No more' (III.i.59–60; my punctuation). Trying to cross the threshold between life and death in his imagination, he ends up drawing for comparisons on familiar states of being – in this case sleep. As in Horatio's last words to Hamlet, 'Goodnight, sweet prince, / And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest' (V.ii.337–8), Hamlet's is a description of death from the outside: it is to the living onlooker that the dead look as though they are asleep, and thinking about sleep is the closest Hamlet can get to imagining himself in that state. He goes on, 'To die, to sleep; / To sleep, perchance to dream' (III.i.63–4); his imagination stretches to the afterlife, to being after death. As Cummings (2013: 199) argues, 'It is the continuation of existence after death that is the most frightening possibility. Non-existence is the release, the dissolution, of the body from its torments of being'. Hamlet cannot escape from existence and all it entails even in his conception of death, for if death is sleep, there will be dreams. Ultimately, Hamlet cannot imagine himself in a state of non-being; the threshold between life and death cannot be crossed in his mind, because the moment when he might understand non-being is the moment when he would cease to be able to understand anything.

But life and death are rather narrow conceptions of being and non-being. From the perspective of the one dying, death is the end of being, the transition from being to non-being, but for those who are left behind by the dead, there is still a sort of being in death. For Lear, Cordelia's dead body is still Cordelia. She has not suddenly stopped existing, yet she is not exactly what she was. Death is the moment when something ceases to be what makes it what it is. The dead Cordelia exists in some form, but she is not meaningful as everything that made her Cordelia. This is especially noticeable in the case of plays like *Romeo and Juliet* or *Cymbeline*, where a character is temporarily perceived as dead. Even though neither Juliet and Innogen are actually dead, these situations reveal how the interpersonal meaning of someone's life changes with death. Indeed, considering that the plot progression depends on the change in significance of the 'dead' person, death is anything but lacking in meaning. The significance of the living person comes into perspective most of all when they have died, because the moment they lose the

meaning they had is the moment their significance becomes most apparent.

If death changes the significance of someone's being, but does not dispose of their being entirely, then being is something like meaningful presence, and non-being is the lack of any kind of manifestation, the lack of presence. Non-being is similar to but not the same as death; it is more akin to not having been born. 'Nothing' as Shakespeare uses the term, is neither being nor non-being; it serves as a threshold between the two that is distinctly closer to being than it is to non-being. If being is meaningful presence, and non-being is the lack of presence, then nothing applies to two states: non-meaningful presence, or meaningful lack of presence. Thus, the dead Cordelia is a sort of nothing; she has some form of being even after death, since her body still has physical presence, but she is not meaningful in the way she was when alive. A similar definition applies to whatever lacks material presence, that is, whatever is no-thing, but retains a meaning. For instance, those who are no longer alive but are remembered have a sort of being involved in memory, even if they do not have corporeal existence: they are a meaningful lack of presence. In the same way, fictional characters are nothing, inasmuch as they are meaningful, but not present. In mathematical terms, nothing is like the zero, which denotes nothingness, but exists insofar as it is a manipulable symbol rather than inexpressible non-being. As the fool says to King Lear, 'thou art an O without a figure. I am better than thou art now: I am a fool, thou art nothing' (I.iv.161–2). The cipher, the zero, is nothing, a symbol that represents the threshold between being and non-being, and a sign denoting the lack of value.

Cummings (2013: 203) claims that when Hamlet says death is 'a consummation / Devoutly to be wished' (III.i.63–4), 'he is thinking of what Richard II is thinking of in his final soliloquy, "being nothing"'. But while there may be a hint of mortality in the line, Richard's 'being nothing' does not necessarily mean death. When Lysander says 'he is dead; he is nothing' (V.i.297–8) in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he obviously means 'nothing' as in death. But this is a rare case. Most of the time, 'nothing' is used of characters who are still clearly alive. When the fool says 'thou art nothing' to Lear, he certainly does not mean that Lear has no being or that Lear is dead. The same goes for Edgar's declaration 'Edgar I nothing am' (*King Lear*, II.iii.21), or Richard II's 'Ay, no; no, ay –

for I must nothing be' (IV.i.194), and the end of *Coriolanus* when Cominius gives an account of his parley with Coriolanus:

> Coriolanus
> He would not answer to; forbade all names.
> He was a kind of nothing, titleless,
> Till he had forged himself a name o'th' fire
> Of burning Rome.
>
> (V.i.11–15)

In these instances, 'nothing' is not death; it is more like a state of meaninglessness: presence without significance. It is not philosophical non-being, but a state of heightened awareness of philosophical non-being, an experience akin to the state Heidegger (1929: 90) calls anxiety:

> In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings – and not nothing. But this 'and not nothing' we add in our talk is not some kind of appended clarification. Rather, it makes possible in advance the manifestness of beings in general. The essence of the originally nihilating nothing lies in this, that it brings Da-sein for the first time before beings as such.

For Heidegger, non-being is 'the originally nihilating nothing' which gives us the power of negation: it is because we have an instinctual understanding of non-being that we can negate things. Nothingness relies on the negating power of non-being, but insofar as we can never completely not be, being nothing is the closest experience to non-being we can have. Because it removes one from full being, when one is nothing one becomes aware of what it means to be. It is like being a zero, not a proper number but still not entirely non-existent. The state of nothingness provides a mid-point between being and non-being that shows us that we are not non-being but that full being is more than mere existence. In the nothingness that happens when ordinary life is suspended, the beings that we are and the beings we live alongside – things that we normally take for granted – are revealed. Thus, the characters that say 'I am nothing' are those whose ordinary lives have been drained of meaning: Innogen, who thinks that Posthumous is dead; Edgar, who is being hunted down for allegedly plotting patricide; Richard II, who has been deposed and lacks

any way of understanding himself that would make his existence meaningful again; and Lear, who has given everything away and can no longer recognise what he is. These characters are present, they have being, but they have ceased to be what made them what they were. They are nothing, because it was their meaning that made them what they were. A telling moment is at the end of *Measure for Measure*, when the Duke says to Mariana, 'you are nothing then: neither maid, widow, nor wife' (V.i.182); if Mariana does not have a social identity, a discernible meaning, then she is nothing.

Being is always being something, so to be nothing appears to contradict existence. But by using 'nothing' to mean something other than the utter lack of being, Shakespeare reveals something fundamental about what humans are and how we are able to understand that we exist. What he reveals is the nothingness of human being, that is, the nothingness we must be in order to be and to understand being. This chimes with Merleau-Ponty's (1964: 52) theory that

> From the moment that I conceive of myself as negativity and the world as positivity, there is no longer any interaction. I go with my whole self to meet a massive world; between it and myself there is neither any point of encounter nor point of reflection, since it is Being and I am nothing.

Being can make sense only in relation with nothing, that is, in a state in which the negating power of non-being is felt. Nothingness thus has a twofold function: human beings must be nothing in order to be capable of being something, and must therefore *experience* being nothing in order to *understand* being. To clarify, being is the state of meaningfulness we have by existing within a meaningful world. A human being can thus exist without fully being, in the state of nothingness when this meaningful world withdraws and ceases to define us. We are ordinarily filled with the positivity of the world and that we do not notice the negativity of our existence, but in moments when the world that defines us recedes we are left bare, and able to see the meaningfulness of that which defined us. By navigating this threshold space between being and non-being, Shakespeare exposes what it means to be something, to make sense. Thus, when Richard II says,

Nor I nor any man that but man is
With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased
With being nothing.

(V.v.39–41)

he shows that being *something* is the proper state of things, but that this fact is only noticeable when one is nothing. Richard took his kingship for granted, failed to see that it was not an inherent part of him, but has come to realise his nothingness by the end. It takes the suspension of meaning for him to understand that meaning was there in the first place. This is why Richard feels he needs to be 'eased / With being nothing'. Meaning becomes more meaningful in light of nothingness.

Shakespeare's 'nothing' is not nihilism, because in his plays being 'nothing' reveals that the world *is* something, that it *does* have meaning, not that it is meaningless. It shows that what we are, what we do, and what we understand is imbued with meaning. This does not mean that nothing is significant only as an affirmation of being. Being nothing reveals one's incorrect understanding of being. In Richard's case, being nothing shows him that his understanding of being was flawed to begin with: he was not a divine king. And if he cannot return to what he thought he was, it is because the world has changed, or because it was never what it was perceived to be in the first place. The fact that we can be nothing reveals that being something is dependent on our existence within a world. By exposing what is, nothing shows what is not, and what could be. However, the lack of an essential self does not mean that we are radically free to be what we wish to be, since we are powerless to decide what sort of world we are born into. The way the world happens to be meaningful is not entirely within one's control. It is not possible to live in a constant state of nothingness, because the very moment everything is drained of meaning, the meaningfulness of the world becomes apparent. The retreat into nothing itself propels one into being again because it forces one to understand the value of the world and the fact that any suspension of this meaning can only be temporary: nothingness forces one to see oneself as existing in a meaningful world that makes one be something in relation to it. This is why Innogen says 'I am nothing; or if not, / Nothing to be were better' (IV.ii.367–8): she does not dwell on nothing as Richard does; she realises at once that to be nothing is still a form of being, that she is not

non-existent. Innogen's reiteration of 'nothing' in 'nothing to be were better' shows that, while she wishes she could stay in a state of nothingness, she realises that that her very ability to explain herself requires a meaningful understanding of herself as existing within a world, making her not-nothing. Unlike Richard's indulgence in the state of nothingness, Innogen's realisation that her woes do not make her meaningless is inherently redemptive. In just two lines, Shakespeare shows absolute despair reducing someone to nothingness, and that nothingness nudging her back into meaningful being again, even if that meaningful being is not necessarily one she desires.

Shakespeare continually plays with the many meanings of 'nothing', from the social to the sexual, but there is a peculiarly philosophical dimension reinforcing the idea of 'being nothing' in his plays. A philosophical examination of these moments makes it apparent that Shakespeare's nothing discloses a threshold between being and non-being that evokes a sense of non-being, and reveals what being is without affirming it at the expense of nothing. It is clear that Shakespeare's conception of existence is not limited to life and death, but deals with the importance of nothingness in our understanding of subtler and more complicated states of being, and in our understanding of being more generally. Shakespeare's philosophical use of 'nothing' creates an awareness not only of what we are and that we are, but also of what we are not and what we could be. Through 'nothing' Shakespeare shows that existence is filled with meaning and presence, and that what is could be otherwise.[1]

Related topics

See Chapters 23, 25, 27

Note

Further reading

Elton, W.R., 1988. *King Lear and the Gods*. Kentucky, KY: The University Press of Kentucky. This classic study of whether there is a theological dimension to *King Lear* contains a section on theological nothingness and how God created the world from nothing (*ex nihilo*), providing an introduction to a key early modern conception of nothingness.

Grazia, M. de, 1996. The Ideology of Superfluous Things: *King Lear* as Period Piece. In: M. de Grazia, M. Quilligan and P. Stallybrass, eds. *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 17–42. This chapter is a study of early modern subjectivity from a materialist perspective. Drawing on historical studies and the idea that nothing is an absence of matter, Margreta de Grazia argues that, in the early modern period, *having* nothing and *being* nothing amount to the same thing.

Rotman, B., 1987. *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. This book on the history of mathematics includes a section on Shakespeare, and points out that zero, or the cipher, was a relatively new concept in England, arriving sometime in the thirteenth century, but only gaining wide acceptance in Shakespeare's lifetime as Roman numerals were displaced by Arabic numerals.

Sheerin, B., 2013. Making Use of Nothing: The Sovereignties of King Lear. *Studies in Philology*, 110(4): 789–811. Brian Sheerin's political reading of 'nothing' in Shakespeare draws on Agamben's theory of 'bare life' and early modern historical tracts to argue that *King Lear* shows that the ideal sovereign is a sort of nothingness, a 'present absence' transparently moving according to the will of the people.

Willbern, D., 1980. Shakespeare's Nothing. In: M.M. Schwartz and C. Kahn, eds. *Representing Shakespeare*. London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 244–63. David Willbern's study is an example of a psychoanalytic approach to the question of 'nothing' in Shakespeare. Taking the early modern slang use of 'nothing' for female genitalia as a starting point, Willbern's paper associates 'nothing' in the general sense with 'nothing' in the genital and reproductive sense to argue for a generative concept of nothing.

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25

SHAKESPEARE AND THE ABSURD

One of the more devastating human experiences is the acute visceral recognition that we are not merely conflicted about what ends, desires, and purposes we should pursue, but whether the seriousness and effort we invest in our everyday lives is nothing more than worthless pretension masquerading as meaning and significance. Such episodes ratchet up the existential stakes. We traverse a frightening maze, riddled with paradoxes and enigmas, that resides within each of us. As such, we confront the most powerful resistance we must overcome in our quest for meaning, value, and purpose – the obstacles lurking within our own psyches. We have entered the zone of The Absurd.

What is The Absurd?

The two prominent accounts of absurdity as an inherent aspect of the human condition are *relational* and *internal*. Albert Camus explicitly invokes the notion of relational absurdity. Consider the following renderings:

- 'The mind's deepest desire, even in its most elaborate operations, parallels man's unconscious feeling in the face of his universe: it is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity … That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama' (Camus (1991: 17)).
- 'I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it' (Camus (1991: 51)).
- 'At this point of his effort man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is

born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world' (Camus (1991: 28)).

So what, exactly, is the 'absurd', according to Camus? First, it arises from a relationship, or more precisely a confrontation, between (a) common human yearnings for clarity, happiness, rationality, and unity and (b) a benignly indifferent universe, whose inherent nature and silence strike human beings as 'unreasonable' given their profoundest longings. Second, the silence of the universe arises either from its inherent meaninglessness or the impossibility of human beings accessing whatever inherent meaning the universe embodies. Accordingly, Camus either rejects or is highly suspicious of the efficacy of all theisms.

Bernard Williams succinctly explains this existential conundrum:

> We know that the world was not made for us, or we for the world, that our history tells us no purposive story, and that there is no position outside the world or outside history from which we can hope to authenticate our activities.

(Williams (2008: 166))

Thomas Nagel explains the archetype of internal human absurdity: while engaged in our projects, we journey through life with grave seriousness, yet are always capable of expanding our perspective and regarding our projects as arbitrary. We thus experience internal conflict as our ability to transcend ourselves and deflate the significance of our most cherished activities and commitments collides with the vitality we exude while undertaking them (Nagel (1971: 716–27)).

Accordingly, some philosophers conclude that human life is, among other things, inherently absurd: part of our objective human context incorporates an unwelcome incongruity, either relational or internal or both, that often results in disagreeable experiences such as unease, alienation, and even hopelessness.

However, we should examine thoroughly the meaning of 'absurdity' and unpack the implications, if any, of depicting human life as 'absurd'. What does it mean to describe activities, events, and entire lives as 'absurd'? Do accurate attributions of 'absurdity' automatically highlight shortcomings of their referents? If so, are these shortcomings serious and debilitating, at least when they pertain to the possibilities of crafting a robustly worthwhile life?

Consider an example from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975): while travelling through a forest, King Arthur and Patsy, his valet, encounter a bridge (actually a plank of wood) over a small stream where a Black Knight and a Green Knight engage in a sword fight. The Black Knight dispatches his opponent by casting his sword through the eye slot of the Green Knight's armour. Impressed by the victor's skill and aplomb, Arthur offers the Black Knight a place in his court at the Round Table. The Black Knight is unmoved and when Arthur and Patsy proceed toward the plank-bridge, he firmly asserts that 'None shall pass'. As King of the Britons, Arthur declares his right to pass, but the haughty Black Knight insists, 'I move for no man!'. Rarely has such an amplified, unyielding commitment to duty been met with the ensuing disaster endured by the Knight. Arthur unsheathes his sword and promptly severs the intractable Knight's left arm. As blood flows profusely, the Knight dryly observes, ''Tis but a scratch'.

Arthur proceeds to sever the Knight's remaining arm, but the Knight remains unpliable. As Arthur, assuming victory, kneels to offer a prayer of gratitude to the divine, the Knight kicks him in the side of the head and spews insults at the King. When Arthur suggests further combat is pointless, the Black Knight insists that his injuries are only 'flesh wounds'. Arthur cuts off the loquacious Knight's right leg. The Knight responds by vowing vengeance. Hopping on his one remaining limb, he tries to crash into Arthur's torso. Annoyed and stunned by the Knight's bizarre demeanour, Arthur wonders whether his adversary's strategy is to bleed all over him. The Knight assures Arthur that he is invincible and retains maximum fight. Arthur concludes that the Knight is crazy, severs his boisterous adversary's left leg, and sheathes his sword.

The limbless, bleeding torso that now constitutes the Black Knight concedes that Arthur has secured a 'draw'. Arthur and Patsy travel over the plank-bridge. Patsy simulates the sound of hoofbeats by smashing coconut shells together. Regaining full brio, the (presumably dying) Black Knight yells threats in the background, accusing the duo of cowardice, of feckless retreat, and warning them that should they return he will 'bite their legs off'.

The scene reeks with absurdity: throughout the encounter, the attitude of the Knight varies wildly from reasonable expectations. His assessment of

the situation grows continually more bizarre. The Knight's actions are often pointless, counterproductive, and irrational.

The vignette of the Black Knight suggests a working definition of 'absurdity'. An event, activity, experience, or even an entire life is absurd if and only if:

1 based on past experience and rational calculations, standard observers under typical conditions have reasonable expectations that E (a specific rendering or a range of plausible renderings of an event, activity, experience, or an entire life) will occur;
2 but E does not occur. Instead, a ridiculous, seemingly unreasonable incongruity between our rational expectations and reality arises;
3 an account can be given as to the nature of this ridiculous, seemingly unreasonable incongruity between reasonable expectations and reality; and
4 this account will often be grounded in the purposelessness, pointlessness, or futility of the ensuing reality, or in the significant gap between the efforts required to create the reality and the results thereby produced.

Philosophers have offered numerous hypothetical examples of absurd behaviour in everyday life. For example, Nagel offers the following:

> Someone gives a complicated speech in support of a motion that has already been passed; a notorious criminal is made president of a major philanthropic foundation; you declare your love over the telephone to a recorded announcement; as you are being knighted your pants fall down.
>
> (Nagel (1971: 718))

Nagel's understanding of 'absurdity' is simpler than mine: 'a conspicuous discrepancy between pretension or aspiration and reality' (Nagel (1971: 718)). Thus, his speaker offers a 'complicated' speech that is pointless, trivial, futile, and inherently worthless. Although, the speech may be subjectively meaningful to its utterer, who presumably is unaware that the motion at issue has already passed, the speaker's aspiration that their oration will have the desired effect is wildly misplaced. But does it matter

that the speech is complex? Perhaps this feature underscores the extent of the discrepancy between aspiration and reality, thereby increasing the degree of absurdity, but would not a less complicated but fervent speech still qualify as absurd? And does not the 'conspicuous discrepancy between aspiration and reality' rest at least partially on our antecedent, reasonable conviction that such speeches will not be offered? For example, if for some odd set of circumstances such presentations became more and more common – thereby extinguishing our reasonable expectation that they will not occur – would that make them less absurd or not absurd at all? Even if they occurred, say, 50% of the time after a motion had passed, they would remain pointless, trivial, futile, and inherently worthless. But would they still strike us as absurd? I submit that frequency of occurrence would soften assessments that such acts are absurd, while leaving judgements about pointlessness, triviality, and the rest intact.

Nagel's second example also merits scrutiny. Some 'notorious criminals' have been philanthropic voluntarily. For example, Al Capone was perceived by many as a great benefactor of the common people of Chicago during the depression era for his funding of various soup kitchens and for other charitable donations. That a person who murdered many of his criminal competitors and who made his living peddling illegal products could be generous to others, whether to boost his public image or out of sincere concern for the underclasses, is not absurd on its face. But the core of Nagel's example is the appointment of such a person by an external foundation. Why would an independent charitable organization hire a notorious criminal as its front person? Such an endorsement undermines the foundation's expressed purpose and is counterproductive to its aspirations. Even if the criminal had exceptional distribution networks and kept his vow not to raid the endowment or misdirect its proceeds, his mere presence as president soils the foundation's image. The self-defeating feature of such an appointment supports the conclusion that a conspicuous gap between aspiration and reality is in play. Here the action is not automatically pointless, trivial, or futile, but it is inherently worthless given the purposes of the foundation.

Nagel's third example is perhaps his clearest case. Unless one is oddly practising for a future, purposeful proclamation, declaring one's love to a recorded announcement is seemingly absurdity on stilts. The declaration is pointless, trivial, futile, inherently worthless, and it is difficult to grasp

precisely what aspiration it expresses. Still, if such declarations were more common, conclusions that they were absurd might well dissipate as our antecedent expectations change. Much would turn on the circumstances generating the increase of these messages.

The final example is grounded in the juxtaposition between the solemnity of the ceremony for knighting and the silliness of trousers slipping down. But is that really necessary to establish absurdity? Suppose your pants fell down while a cashier was scanning your groceries at the supermarket. Would that not also be absurd? Even though having one's purchases scanned at checkout is bereft of serious ritual and inflated aspiration, we presume reasonably that our pants will not fall down during the process. Now suppose that for some bizarre set of circumstances, say, 50% of men having their purchases scanned experienced the embarrassment of their pants falling down. Besides the obvious ensuing change in male dress – more men would take greater care selecting undergarments – would we still consider these events absurd given their frequency? Our reasonable expectation that pants would not fall down would now be misplaced. Again, is not infrequency of occurrence a necessary condition of a persuasive analysis of 'absurdity?'.

My point here is that the concept of 'absurdity' may well be contestable. At least three issues have emerged. First, is, as I have claimed, the dashing of our reasonable expectations a necessary condition for behaviour, events, or an entire life to qualify as absurd? Second, is, as Nagel has claimed, the presence of a conspicuous discrepancy between pretension and reality a necessary (and sufficient?) condition for absurd behaviour or events? Third, is infrequency of occurrence a necessary condition for absurd behaviour and events? The answers to such questions distinguish competing visions – especially those of Camus, Nagel, and me – of what 'absurdity' is.

Ronald Dworkin's distinction between *fixed* concepts and *interpretive* concepts may help. Fixed concepts embody common understandings of their referents. Dictionary definitions can readily establish these referents. In contrast, an interpretive concept is such that 'people who use the concept do not agree precisely what it means: when they use it they are taking a stand about what it *should* mean' (Dworkin (2013: 7)). Often this includes a normative dimension as some interpretive concepts help us decide what is important to value (Dworkin (2013: 108–9)). The 'absurd'

is an interpretive concept. Thus, whether human life is inevitably 'absurd' may well turn on the definition of that term we invoke.

The dictionary definition of 'absurd' is 'ridiculously incongruous or unreasonable' (Morris (1979: 6)). But 'ridiculously' can connote either 'comically' or 'vastly' or both. However, not all absurdity is amusing. Some cases are gravely tragic. For example, existential writers have forged careers out of creating or reporting the absurdity of life, yet no one has ever accused, say, Franz Kafka of being a barrel of laughs (Kafka (2005)). So it is probably better to understand the dictionary definition as connoting events or behaviours that are 'vastly incongruous or unreasonable' in some fashion.

Richard Taylor provides an example of pointless, absurd activity that is reminiscent of Dante Alighieri's portrayal of punishments in his *Inferno* (Alighieri (1984: 129–3), Belliotti (2011: 27)):

> Two groups of prisoners, one of them engaged in digging a prodigious hole in the ground that is no sooner finished than it is filled in again by the other group, the latter then digging a new hole that is at once filled in by the first group and so on endlessly.

(Taylor (1970: 258))

Of course, from the standpoint of the prisoners the ongoing activity may well seem absurd because nothing is accomplished overtly. But from the perspective of the warden or prison guards the point is the presumed remedial effects of the punishment. Unless the allocation of duties is purely random and arbitrary, a reason grounds the prisoners' duties: they have violated a prison regulation and they must now discharge their punishment. The salutary effects of the seemingly pointless activity arise from either deterrence of future transgressions or an adjustment of the prisoners' attitude. The ongoing digging and filling of holes in the ground are seemingly pointless, absurd acts as such, but may take on meaning given the context that spawns them. Even the prisoners assigned these tasks should intuit the point of their efforts; that is, the reasons that engendered the assignment. Moreover, even if the prisoners were selected randomly and arbitrarily – and not because they transgressed regulations – the seemingly pointless, ongoing activity may still have a meaning, such as a discharge of prison authorities' sadism or an exercise designed to amuse the guards as they demonstrate their power over the inmates.

The point of the activity, then, need not reside in the digging of or filling in of a hole for some direct purpose. It may arise from the cause of the assignment or the effects of the activity on the initiators, agents, or participants. Furthermore, the prisoners may be able to bestow meaning on their inherently pointless assignment by dint of their attitude and approach. Camus in fact counsels Sisyphus to assume such an approach either through scornful rebellion or casting himself completely into the immediacy of his task (Camus (1991: 123), Belliotti (2001: 51–4)).

William Shakespeare anticipated the notions of relational and internal absurdity later described by Camus and Nagel. He conjures two unforgettable monarchs to illustrate confrontations with the absurd in tragic contexts.

Nihilism subpoenas two kings of literature

English armed forces, energized by the vengeful designs of Malcolm and Macduff, are approaching his castle at Dunsinane. A woman's cry pierces the air. Then Seyton, his chief servant, informs him that his wife is dead. Macbeth is a man under siege, literally and figuratively.

Shakespeare does not invoke the term 'absurd' but the speech he assigns to his character Macbeth astutely captures and anticipates the concept of absurdity, both internal and relational, that arises in the twentieth century. Macbeth sadly assesses the nature of human life as he processes his wife's self-inflicted demise.

> Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

(*Macbeth*, 5.5.19–28)[1]

This brilliantly crafted soliloquy, typically delivered in muted tones and world-weary cadence, expresses several common evaluations of those struggling with personal crisis and bordering on despair.

• An uneasy relationship with time: in such contexts time seems to slow down as each succeeding moment repetitiously underscores the lack of reasonable hope and the deepening of despondency.
• The unbearable commonness of life: Macbeth stresses how being immersed in the habit and routine of daily living deadens the spirit.
• The accidental, minor context of human beings: he is overwhelmed by the utter contingency and fragility of human life.
• Our impermanence: Macbeth confronts the fact of mortality and how death extinguishes our being and nullifies our deeds.
• The clash of human pretension and our objective insignificance: he importantly grasps the theatrical element of human life – how we bestow great significance on our activities and projects; how we inflate our days with pretension and seriousness; and how we bray loudly, gesticulate wildly, and project our energies and enthusiasms into the world with comical panache. Human beings are flawed thespians who too often confuse their prompts. Macbeth suggests that all such efforts lack genuine importance and purpose. At bottom, human beings are fools whose efforts and vanities amount to nothing more than unrequited illusions. In fact, we are all drearily marching to meaningless extinction. As such, the story of human life is a feckless play that ends inevitably and badly: brief, tedious, futile, meaningless, pointless, and absurd.

Macbeth's soliloquy neatly anticipates Camus' rendition of relational absurdity: the confrontation between natural human aspirations and the silence of an inherently indifferent universe. His meditation also prefigures Nagel's understanding of internal absurdity: the clash between the ostentation with which we approach our daily lives and their utter insignificance when judged from a wider vantage point. After completing his speech, Macbeth exemplifies a further aspect of internal absurdity: a messenger enters and Macbeth, having just reflected on the insignificance and inflated pretension of life, orders the messenger to bring him up to speed on happenings in the world. He, as do virtually all human beings,

returns to the realm of 'sound and fury' and prepares for action directly after mocking the seriousness of his and perhaps all life.

A cynical interpreter might argue that Macbeth's dreary assessment of life bears a self-serving agenda: if all human activity is ultimately meaningless and pointless then Macbeth's string of treacheries is itself merely 'sound and fury signifying nothing'. Macbeth's evil, then, registers as nothing more than another series of scenes in a pointless play. Thus, Macbeth has extirpated his guilt by deflating the importance of the misery he occasioned (Kott (1964: 85)). On this reading, Macbeth's soliloquy expresses not a genuine experience of absurdity, but a desperate rationalization designed to assuage his guilt.

Such an analysis, in my view, is flimsy. First, it faces the problem of self-reference: if everything is unimportant then so too should be Macbeth's need to purge his guilt. Second, if Macbeth satisfies his presumed design – he now recognizes his malefactions as unworthy of serious disapprobation – he purchases absolution at a stiff cost: explicit confirmation that all human life and the universe itself is utterly and irremediably meaningless. Moral innocence thus procured implies psychic suicide.

Does Macbeth's despondency illustrate a subjective experience that all reflective human beings encounter to one degree or another? Or does it highlight an experience of absurdity that only a segment of human beings undergo because of the particular tribulations they happen to confront? In the case of Macbeth, surely at least the latter is in play: galvanized by augury from three witches, emboldened by his wife's resolve, and propelled by luxuriant ambition, he assassinates Duncan, the king of Scotland. To describe Macbeth as internally conflicted is understatement. Initially, he is not firmly committed to seizing the throne, but soon learns that actions entered into ambivalently often require further resolve to conceal their malevolence or carry out their long-range design: evil perpetrated equivocally may well spawn villainy hitherto uncontemplated.

In that vein, his subsequent efforts to incriminate the monarch's guards by planting evidence and slaying them prior to a full investigation are ineffectual. Later, Macbeth, upon assuming the throne, recalls that the witches identified Banquo, an army general, as the sire of a future monarchic line. He orders the murder of Banquo. After the executors later inform Macbeth of their success, the bloodied ghost of his victim twice

appears to Macbeth at a banquet. Macbeth's guilt and trepidation that his treacheries will be revealed deepen. He then meets again the trio of witches, who summon three daunting apparitions who inform Macbeth that he should fear Macduff, a nobleman of high moral rectitude; that no human being born of a woman can injure him; and 'Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until / Great Birnam, wood to high Dunsinane hill / Shall come against him' (4.1.92–4).

Macbeth departs, but soon learns that Macduff has been spurring Malcolm, Duncan's son, to regain his rightful throne. Macbeth orders the murders of Macduff's wife and son. Macduff retaliates by forming an army to attack Macbeth. Meanwhile the formerly ruthless, intransigent Lady Macbeth is tormented. Wracked by guilt, plagued by gory hallucinations, Macbeth's spouse commits suicide.

Surprisingly, Macbeth does not ruminate on the history of his marriage or direct his grief specifically to his wife's demise. Instead, his monologue may exude broader, philosophical messages. The major issue: Is Macbeth remaining in the particular (addressing only the existence and fate of him and his spouse) or is he drawing a universal conclusion about the nature of human life? Several possible interpretations arise:

- Triggered by his wife's suicide, has Macbeth recognized, finally and firmly, that human life *in general* is inherently and irredeemably meaningless? If so, Macbeth concludes that, independently of our subjective response and experiences, the objective answer to the fundamental question of life is that it is meaningless and absurd. On this account, Macbeth has assuredly perceived reality and gained tragic insight. End of story (The Apparent Truth of Cosmic and Human Meaninglessness).
- Or has his wife's death only depleted his own sense of meaning? If so, Macbeth is committed only to the conclusion that *his life* is now meaningless and absurd. Plus, he cannot conjure a meaningful path forward. On this interpretation, he takes no stance on wider questions of meaning. Here Macbeth's musings are compatible with the possibility that some human beings can create meaningful lives, but at least for the time being events preclude his access (Individual Despondency).
- Perhaps, Macbeth now understands that the treacheries he and his wife conspired to enact have met their proper response. Those who rush down

the road of self-aggrandizement without sufficient regard for the well-being of others must reap what they have sown: horrifying, arrogant actions springing from excessive, unwarranted self-regard must terminate in nihilism that extinguishes all value. In a sense, natural justice has prevailed after all (Just Retribution).

In my judgement, Macbeth is at least expressing Individual Despondency and may be shading toward The Apparent Truth of Cosmic and Human Meaninglessness. That he now recognizes the force of Just Retribution is not credible because that presupposes a purposive natural response that belies the underlying theme of Macbeth's message.

A complicating factor in arriving at an appropriate interpretation is that Macbeth voices his beautifully-crafted lyric at a moment of personal calamity. Unlike Camus or Nagel, reflectively and coolly analyzing a paramount philosophical question under favourable conditions, Macbeth is striking back at catastrophic events beyond his control: his wife has committed suicide and his own destiny seems far from glowing. His subjective context at the moment may prejudice his judgements about human life in general and his evaluations of his own condition.

Of course, matters for Macbeth worsen. His enemies camouflage their approach by using branches of trees from Birnam Wood; Macduff informs Macbeth that he was the product of a caesarean birth; he slays Macbeth in combat; and Malcolm claims the throne. In this fashion, prior to expiring, Macbeth learns a classic lesson of literary interpretation: Omens, oracles, and divinations proclaimed by occultists reward only strict scrutiny. Careless understandings trigger unpleasant consequences.

Given the style and trajectory of the entire play, is Macbeth's haunting soliloquy merely a predictable summary of its underlying theme? If so, might The Apparent Truth of Cosmic and Human Meaninglessness be an accurate depiction of the play's overriding message beyond the events that occasioned Macbeth's ambiguous expression? (Bloom (1998: 528), Craig (2001: 59)).

Macbeth's experience of the absurd and commentary on the hollowness of human life are conspicuously dramatic. The majority of human beings do not encounter triggering circumstances as challenging as those confronting Shakespeare's tragic hero. Thus, whether we might persuasively interpret his analysis, in addition to expressing Individual

Despondency, as also suggestive of The Apparent Truth of Cosmic and Human Meaninglessness under which we must all strut and fret our hour upon the stage must remain an open question.

In another Shakespearean tragedy, King Lear's final speech prior to dying offers a somewhat different capstone on absurdity:

> And my poor fool [Cordelia] is hang'd! No, no, no life!
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
> And thou no breath at all? Thou' it come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never!
> Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir.
> Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips.
> Look there, look there!

(*King Lear*, 5.3.305–11)

Stubborn, obtuse, and oblivious, Lear hatches a preposterous scheme.[2] He will resign from the monarchy and allot his holdings to his three daughters in proportion to the depth of their love for him. But what test might reveal the intensity of their respective affection? An oratorical contest; in effect, daughters, daughters under my supervision, who can fawn over me, more and more? Lear's shameful neediness and susceptibility to flattery generate horrifying results. He is initially defrauded by the fables of endearment concocted by his disreputable offspring, Goneril and Regan. He repudiates his virtuous daughter, Cordelia, when she perspicaciously refuses to enter her father's ill-conceived competition. A host of plots and reversals ensue: Lear suffers much, relinquishes his sanity, but gains insight viscerally prior to his death. Cordelia loves her father throughout because her unconditional commitment is not grounded in reciprocal benefit, assignment of familial duties, or hope for material reward.

Along the way, Lear expresses the encumbrance of Camus' relational absurdity (Bevington (1973: 979, 982)): 'Thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? … unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare forked animal as thou art (3.4.105–12); 'When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools. This a good block' (4.6.186–7). Gloucester, another aging, egotistical patriarch, bemoans divine malevolence: 'As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods / They kill us

for their sport' (4.1.37–8). Edgar, Gloucester's loyal son, muses on human mortality: 'Men must endure / Their going hence, even as their coming hither; / Ripeness is all' (5.2.9–11).

Interestingly, Lear's despair does not obliterate, but instead highlights, differences between good and evil (Kott (1964: 109, 110)). His surface nihilism may obscure a more profound message. When Lear utters at his end, 'Look her lips, / Look there, look there!', he surely errs in believing that Cordelia has not yet expired, but his misplaced aspiration that justice and meaning might still be possible endures. Unlike Macbeth, whose dire soliloquy suffocates all salutary possibilities, Lear's final words express hope even as the hapless monarch dies. Perhaps, the spectre of nihilism, absurdity, and cosmic meaninglessness is daunting, but it need not be an omnipotent tyrant ruling over the human spirit (Belliotti (2015: 121–61)).

Or is Lear's final expression better rendered as a caution to the audience? On this rendering, the injustice of Cordelia's death is only a token of a more general truth: human mortality, our lack of permanence, is the ultimate injustice we cannot remedy. Desperate, fanciful yearnings cannot remedy our fate.[3] If the virtuous Cordelia must perish meaninglessly, absurdly, and inevitably, what realizable hope is there for any of us?

Thus, G. Wilson Knight remarks:

> The core of [*King Lear*] is an absurdity, an indignity, an incongruity. In no tragedy of Shakespeare does incident and dialogue so recklessly and miraculously walk the tight-rope of our pity over the depths of bathos and absurdity … This recurring and vivid stress on the incongruous and the fantastic is not a subsidiary element … it is the very heart of the play.
>
> (Knight (1930: 168, 173))

Harold Bloom adds:

> Perpetually outraged, except for the brief idyll of his reconciliation with Cordelia, Lear appeals primordially to the universal outrage of all those acutely conscious of their own mortality … We enter crying at our birth, knowing with Lear that creation and fall are simultaneous.
>
> (Bloom (1998: 510, 515))

In any event, that both Macbeth and Lear pronounce their evaluations under extraordinarily stressful circumstances invites special scrutiny of their conclusions. Moreover, Shakespeare does not neatly distinguish the critical concepts in play: absurdity, meaninglessness, nihilism, and the rest. Under conditions more conducive to rational analysis, what might we say about the relationship between absurdity and meaninglessness? Even if Macbeth and Lear did exemplify relational absurdity or internal absurdity or both, as analyzed by Camus and Nagel, must we conclude that their lives were genuinely absurd or meaningless or both?

If human life is absurd must it be meaningless?

Simone de Beauvoir argues that a conviction that life is absurd implies the impossibility of creating meaningful human lives: 'To declare that existence is absurd is to deny it can ever be given meaning … to say that [human existence] is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won' (de Beauvoir (1949: 129)). Her rendering of the difference between viewing human lives as absurd and perceiving them as ambiguous is itself ambiguous. If she suggests that we cannot *simultaneously* insist that external objective validity is necessary for meaning while recognizing that the cosmos lacks such warrant and that condition defines our absurdity then she reiterates only a possible but not inevitable human predicament. For example, Camus highlights the presumed incongruity of human life but does not insist that living a meaningful human life is thereby impossible. Camus offers at least two responses to cosmic meaninglessness that even Sisyphus might find meaningful (Camus (1991: 123), Belliotti (2001: 51–4)). He would undoubtedly agree with de Beauvoir that the absence of fixed, objective standards implies that we cannot invoke certain epistemological or normative justifications for our deliberations, choices, and deeds. But the impossibility of creating human meaning does not follow. We can reasonably derive only the conclusion that our deliberations, choices, and deeds are conducted and executed under conditions of radical uncertainty and, perhaps, that living robustly requires vibrant faith (understood as conviction and action forged without ultimate external justifications). If this is the case, meaning in human life is not automatically incompatible

with a conviction that human life is absurd or even that it is ultimately futile given the spectre of impermanence.

In fairness, judgements about absurdity remain relevant when human beings calculate how we could and should plan our lives. How we understand 'absurdity'; what we conclude about its possibilities, foreclosures, and presence; and how we relate to its inevitability or to its restructuring may well influence how we lead our lives. Typically, we can expect that if human life is absurd then that poses at least yet another existential hurdle that we must overcome to create a meaningful existence; if human life is not absurd that softens our burden, even if a host of other daunting challenges persist.

Why human life is not inherently absurd

For Nagel, any activity, however passionately undertaken and successfully completed, can be judged arbitrary and insignificant when its agent adopts an expanded perspective. Yet we typically return to serious pursuit of our interests and projects, and usually are aware of such even when reflecting from within an expanded perspective. For Nagel, this is the crux of internal absurdity. Macbeth's spirited romance with his malevolent commitments and projects; his subsequent cheerless allocution, which evaluates life so morosely; followed directly by his encounter with the messenger tolls the cycle: engaging in life vigorously; calling the significance of one's (perhaps anyone's) deeds into question; then reengaging with the tasks at hand. Lear's final scene precludes reengagement, but only because the monarch dies.

In my view, Nagel's recognition of temporal sequence bears deeper lessons than those he advances. Human beings do not typically (or ever?) *simultaneously* exude sound and fury as they strut and fret upon their stage while regarding their theatrics as merely an insignificant story uttered by the *ignoranti*. Surely reflection *after the fact* can and in my mind should interrogate the underlying value of our choices and deeds; the resulting analyses may well produce healthy, realistic evaluations. However, while we are vigorously engaged in projects, purposes, and commitments we rarely if ever transcend to a wider perspective to highlight their insignificance: 'Lebron James motors toward the hoop in the final ten

seconds. Wait! He stops and asks "Does basketball really matter? If we win or if we lose this game does the universe genuinely care? After all, this too shall pass". James is scratching his head, now stroking his chin … oh, doctor, the buzzer has sounded. James inexplicably remains at mid-court … is there a metaphysician in the house?'.

Herein lies opportunity. We can transform the supposed terrors of the wider, reflective perspective advantageously (Belliotti (2012: 114–20)). Recognizing that when we ascend to that vantage point we must still import human values to arrive at normative evaluations, we can deflate our exaggerated pretensions and mollify our trajectory toward self-congratulatory egotism. For example, ascending to the wider perspective can awaken us from our solipsistic slumbers and promote a robust sense of community. Given the fine line that distinguishes a merited sense of self-worth (pride) from a debilitating, unworthy arrogance, assessment from a wider perspective often offers succour. Again, when we invoke such a perspective we do not access an independent, objective adjudicator. We reside temporarily only at a wider vantage point from which we can put events and ourselves 'in proper perspective', should we so choose. Thus, we have opportunities to enhance, not automatically diminish, human well-being.

For Nagel, even particular projects that fall within our reasonable expectations can be viewed as arbitrary and insignificant when its agent reflects from an expanded perspective. Nagel takes this to be a crucial element of inevitable absurdity, whereas I take it as a healthy possibility. For me, that we, as did Macbeth, can transverse the cycle of passionate engagement in a personal perspective, followed by deflating evaluation from within an expanded perspective, then vigorous reengagement is not absurd because human beings have no reasonable expectation that life should be different. That is, the cycle, taken as a whole, which Nagel concludes constitutes our absurd context, I judge as glad tidings. If employed wisely, the cycle can energize, and not diminish our lives. Accordingly, no human life is inherently absurd. Nagel and I agree on the presence of the cycle, but disagree on how to describe it and how to respond to it. Unlike Nagel, reacting to what he takes to be internal absurdity with wry amusement or irony strikes me as bland resignation.

To stigmatize convincingly a life as absurd, we require at least a legitimate point of comparison. All of the earlier examples of absurdity I

have cited earn that designation because we can reasonably expect different reactions or activity in those respective contexts. That is, we have a point of comparison between absurd and non-absurd behaviour, actions, and events. Regarding human life, no such comparison – at least one grounded reasonably – is apparent. This point pertains to both Nagel's internal and Camus' relational absurdity.

Neither Macbeth's life nor Lear's life was absurd or meaningless. Throughout their journey, they each conjured a network of interests, projects, purposes, and commitments that arose from or were freely adopted freely by them; these interests, projects, purposes, and commitments fuelled their connection to, zest for, and faith in life (vigorous, active engagement); these interests, projects, purposes, and commitments blocked claims that their lives were not worth living – that their lives were less than fully human; and these interests, projects, purposes, and commitments were not based on radically false beliefs or utterly indefensible delusions – they were connected to reality, even if often morally deficient or grandiose in scope. Thus, neither Macbeth nor Lear led a meaningless life.

Moreover, as I have argued, no human life is inherently absurd. Human beings have no reasonable expectation that their living condition and context will be or should be anything other than what it is. That is, we have nothing to contrast independently with our reality. Yes, we may have yearnings and profound desires for a rational and just universe, an ultimate culmination, a way to connect with enduring value, a robust personal immortality, and the like. But the mere existence of hankerings that are likely to be frustrated does not amount to a reasonable expectation, grounded in experience and cognition. I may have a longstanding ambition to date Sophia Loren – some passions persist even in dotage – but the fact that I have and will never realize that hope does not imply that my existence in that respect is absurd: most dreams do not materialize. Given I have no reasonable expectation that Sophia Loren will date or even meet me, my failure to attain my ambition cannot be accurately described as 'absurd'. If the situation exudes any absurdity that is due to my continued desire for an event I admit rationally is unattainable, not from the ongoing frustration of my initial desire. Accordingly, under my rendering of absurdity, neither Macbeth's nor Lear's life was genuinely absurd, even if

illustrative of the versions of internal or relational 'absurdity' advanced by Nagel and Camus, respectively.

But Camus might point out that the fact that human beings naturally and typically harbour profound yearnings that cannot be fulfilled (assuming the falsity of theisms) is the core of the absurd. Why should so many of us long so deeply for 'clarity' 'rationality', 'unity', and the like, given our existence within a benignly indifferent universe? The mere presence of such fundamental, profound desires in an environment that cannot fulfil them might well be taken as absurd. While my idiosyncratic yearning to date Sophia Loren is not part of the human condition, those cravings that Camus highlights are widespread and perhaps indelible. The thwarting of my obsession to romance Sophia does not call into question the meaning, value, and justification of my existence, whereas the frustration of the general human longings for a rational and just universe, an opportunity to connect to enduring value, and an ultimate culmination directly connect to wider inquiries about the meaning, if any, of human life.

Lacking an alternate, viable notion of what human life might be, we can fantasize about what human life might have been and be resentful of being deprived, rather than thankful for who and what we are: radically contingent, impermanent beings who each occupy the worldly stage for a brief period. If preoccupied by the gap between our genuine human condition and our fantasized existence, we are likely to blame the imagined discrepancy on natural forces that seem responsible. In this fashion, the unsettling confrontation between human aspiration and the benign silence of the universe materializes.

Perhaps. But are the stipulated human cravings for a rational and just universe, an ultimate culmination to our lives, and an opportunity to connect to enduring value indefeasible? If we firmly reject all theisms cannot we mollify or even extinguish the absurd by relinquishing our false hopes? Suppose my romantic obsession with Sophia Loren was causing me severe existential anxiety that intruded on my capability of living my life robustly. Suppose my recognition that Sophia and I will never meet engenders debilitating conclusions about the meaning of my life or deep depression or even suicidal thoughts. Should I just chalk this up to inevitable 'absurdity?'. Or should I soften or yield my frustrated, irrational aspiration?

My point here is that whether Camus has identified an inevitable feature of the human condition depends on the notion of 'absurdity' we embrace and on the possibility of mollifying or even relinquishing the human aspirations that ignite the confrontation with the universe that he describes. Moreover, even if I am wrong and human beings must consider our condition absurd, Camus offers avenues permitting us to construct fragile meaning, value, and justification despite our existential context: through our exertion of agency and will we can bestow purpose on an inherently meaningless, absurd task (Belliotti (2012: 114–20)). We can add to Camus' catalogue.

At the least, then, whether the human condition is inevitably absurd remains an open question. Perhaps some version of theism is true and our unsettling confrontation with an indifferent cosmos need not take place. Furthermore, even if all theisms are false and human beings must experience or acknowledge the impossibility of fulfilling their deepest natural yearnings, perhaps we can, like the Stoics, soften the allure or even relinquish those desires in accord with reality. Finally, even if all theisms are false and we cannot loosen the hold our fundamental desires have on us, the presence of Camus' version of absurdity does not rule out the possibility of creating (fragile) human meaning, value, and justification from the materials at hand. Accordingly, even if absurdity, in either its relational or internal manifestation, is an inevitable aspect of the human condition, we can still lead robustly meaningful lives in spite or perhaps even because of it (Belliotti (2015: 121–50)).

Related topics

See Chapters 24, 30, 34

Notes

1 I derive citations from Bevington and Craig, eds. (1973). The format is standard. For example, 1.1.161 = Act 1, Scene 1, line 161. Special thanks to Malcolm Nelson, SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor of

English Emeritus, for his gracious assistance in pointing me in the proper direction after I informed him of my task.

2 Unless Lear's test of love plays only a minor role in his overall plan and can be viewed reasonably as an effort to maintain the rule of law (Yoshino (2011: 110–13)).

3 My Panglossian inclinations combine both interpretations: finitude is our necessary, unalterable, disagreeable context, but our lives may nevertheless aspire to and attain robust meaning, significance, and value (Belliotti (2015: 121–61)).

Further reading

McGinn, C., 2006. *Shakespeare's Philosophy*. New York: HarperCollins. This work lucidly examines a host of Shakespeare's plays, connecting their themes to wider concerns such as gender, psychology, ethics, tragedy, meaning, and the nature of genius.

Nuttall, A.D., 2007. *Shakespeare the Thinker*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. The author provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of Shakespeare's thinking as he confronted questions of enduring concern.

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26

NIETZSCHE'S *HAMLET* PUZZLE

Life affirmation in *The Birth of Tragedy*

This essay seeks to explore one of Nietzsche's lesser-known interests: the tragedies of William Shakespeare. Nietzsche may not offer a detailed or lengthy discussion of Shakespeare in any of his writings, but it is clear that the Elizabethan playwright was on Nietzsche's mind. Within Nietzsche's publications, notes, and letters, he mentions almost half of Shakespeare's plays and a number of the sonnets.[1] For the purposes of this essay, I focus on a passage from *The Birth of Tragedy* in which Nietzsche briefly touches on *Hamlet*.[2] This passage is interesting because of its apparent lack of fit within its context. *Hamlet*, an Elizabethan, English play, without a chorus appears during Nietzsche's discussion of ancient Greek tragedy, its chorus, and its effect on its audience. In this essay I explore the puzzling nature of this passage, review a popular misreading, and suggest a new approach that illustrates how this *Hamlet* passage can illuminate Nietzsche's notion of life affirmation in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

   It might be possible to write off Nietzsche's use of *Hamlet* as a conventional and convenient appeal to authority – Shakespeare was looked to as a source of great art. Schopenhauer, who is generally considered to be one of Nietzsche's greatest influences,[3] uses Shakespeare as a way of buttressing his arguments.[4] However, Nietzsche's notebooks, written prior to the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, reveal that Shakespeare plays a much more important role for Nietzsche than a mere appeal to authority. Instead, Nietzsche's notebooks make it clear that he intended to include an entire chapter on Shakespeare in *The Birth of Tragedy*, but ultimately chose to leave it out.[5] Nietzsche's interest in Shakespeare makes an investigation of his reference to *Hamlet*, in a passage that appears out of fit with his overall argument, yet is included nonetheless, important for our interpretation of Nietzsche's project in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

1

Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* tells the story of the birth, death, and subsequent re-birth of tragedy, which he views through the lens of two different drives, the Apolline and the Dionysian. For Nietzsche, the Apolline represents the drive towards beauty, dream, individuality, distinction, and order, while the Dionysian represents liberation from individuality, intoxication, joy, and the forgetting of the self.[6] For Nietzsche, the Dionysian is a collective, an unindividuated unity representative of a state of nature that lacks the individualizing forces that Nietzsche characterizes as Apolline. Tragedy is born of the interplay of these forces and is perfected when they are combined in a harmonious union – for Nietzsche, this harmonious union can be found in ancient Greek tragedy. While tragedy is marked by their interplay, the Apolline and Dionysian are each representative of their own forms of art. Sculpture and epic poetry (like that of Homer) are the purest forms of Apolline art. Music is the purest form of Dionysian art.[7] For Nietzsche, the chorus is typically responsible for presenting the Dionysian aspects of the tragedy, the words and characters present the Apolline.[8]

   Nietzsche's allusion to *Hamlet* appears during his discussion of the origins of the tragic chorus. According to Nietzsche, 'tragedy arose from the tragic chorus and was originally chorus and nothing but chorus' (BT §7). For Nietzsche, the chorus is important not only because it marks the beginning of tragedy, but also because it is what allows the audience of tragedy to affirm life – to find life worth living in the face of the horrors depicted in tragedy. Precisely how the chorus is able to do this, however,

is difficult to grasp. Nietzsche elusively claims that the tragic chorus provides the audience with 'metaphysical solace … the solace that in the ground of things, and despite all changing appearances, life is indestructibly mighty and pleasurable' (BT §7).

In the context of this discussion, with its focus on ancient tragedy, Nietzsche's example of *Hamlet* seems to come out of nowhere, making his claims about the tragic chorus' ability to affirm life even more elusive:[9]

> In this sense Dionysiac man is similar to Hamlet: both have gazed into the true essence of things, they have *acquired knowledge* and they find action repulsive, for their actions can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things; they regard it as laughable or shameful that they should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion – this is the lesson of Hamlet, not a cheap wisdom about Jack the Dreamer who does not get around to acting because he reflects too much, out of an excess of possibilities, as it were. No, it is not reflection, it is true knowledge, insight into a terrible truth, which outweighs every motive for action, both in the case of Hamlet and in that of Dionysiac man.
>
> (BT §7)

In the midst of his discussion of the origins of tragedy via the chorus in ancient Greece, Nietzsche offers an allusion to an Elizabethan play that contains no chorus. However, as I argue in Section 2, Nietzsche's allusion to *Hamlet* substantially illuminates how the tragic chorus can provide its audience with metaphysical solace.

2

There is an overall lack of consensus in the literature about the meaning of the *Hamlet* passage in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In most cases, these readings refer to the *Hamlet* passage in passing and do not pause to ask about its fit within Nietzsche's text. Some commentators – including Bernard Reginster and Julian Young – see the passage as expressing a form of Schopenhauerian pessimism.[10] Reginster argues that 'this short summary [the *Hamlet* passage] alludes to Schopenhauer's view that suffering is an essential, and therefore a necessary, feature of life'.[11] For Reginster, the lethargy experienced by Dionysian man, which makes him similar to Hamlet, is the result of suffering, which, for Schopenhauer 'is the experience of resistance to the satisfaction of our desires'.[12] Reginster continues: 'his [Schopenhauer's] demonstration of its [suffering's] inevitability implies the impossibility of fulfillment, a condition in which nothing is left to be desired. This, in turn, accounts for the inhibition of action'.[13]

Reginster's reading only tells one side of the story. In order to get a more complete picture we can turn to Alexander Nehamas who argues that, throughout the entirety of his corpus, Nietzsche is interested in 'self-reflexive situations', 'mechanisms that promote what they deny'.[14] Nehamas uses Nietzsche's allusion to *Hamlet* as an example of one of these mechanisms. For Nehamas, the functioning of tragedy is itself a self-reflexive mechanism: 'Too much ("Dionysian") insight into the reality of life leads to despair and inaction: "Knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion: that is the doctrine of Hamlet" (BT §7)'.[15] Nehamas, though, carries on: 'juxtaposed with this most powerful representation of the vanity of all effort is the tragic chorus', which assures its spectators with 'the realization that one is a part of everything that lives makes life "indestructibly powerful and pleasurable" and therefore worth living after all'.[16] In short, 'Tragedy apparently discourages all effort, but actually promotes it'.[17] In his passing reference to *Hamlet* and *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nehamas makes an important point: we should not understand the *Hamlet* passage merely as evidence of Nietzsche's adoption of Schopenhauer's pessimism. Instead, we must view it as tied up with Nietzsche's puzzling account of life affirmation through tragedy; while tragedy would seem to do the opposite, it allows us to affirm life. In the remainder of this section, I build on Nehamas' insight by providing an account of how this mechanism works and why the *Hamlet* passage is a key example for understanding it.

When taken out of context, the *Hamlet* passage may merely seem to be, as Reginster suggests, an expression of the view that suffering is an essential and necessary part of life. However, if we look at what comes just prior to the *Hamlet* example, we can see that Nietzsche is making a more complicated point – one that is of relevance to our understanding of the tragic audience and the tragic chorus:

> The Hellene, by nature profound and uniquely capable of the most exquisite and most severe suffering, comforts himself with this chorus, for he has gazed with keen eye into the midst of the fearful, destructive havoc of so-called world history, and has seen the cruelty of nature, and is in danger of longing to deny the will as the Buddhist does. Art saves him, and through art life saves him – for itself.
>
> The reason for this is that the ecstasy of the Dionysiac state, in which the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed, contains, for as long as it lasts, a *lethargic* element in which all personal experiences from the past are submerged. This gulf of oblivion separates the worlds of everyday life and Dionysiac experience. But as soon as daily reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such with a sense of revulsion

(BT §7)

The *Hamlet* passage may express the insight that life is inevitably filled with suffering, but this suffering is not the primary cause of the Dionysian man's inaction. Instead, his inaction is a complex reaction to the ecstasy of the Dionysian state. Understanding this complex reaction is important because Nietzsche uses Hamlet as an analogue for the experience of the tragic audience. According to Nietzsche, the first effect of Dionysian tragedy is that 'state and society, indeed all divisions between one human being and another, give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity which leads men back to the heart of nature' (BT §7). The lethargy of the Dionysian man, and by extension an audience who experiences this first effect of tragedy, is a reaction to the difference between the everyday world, which is filled with suffering, and the Dionysian, which is filled with an ecstatic unity. Our everyday world pales in comparison to the joy of the Dionysian state – knowing that such a state exists causes lethargy because it makes us realize that there is something better than the world we endure every day. Once we leave the Dionysian state, we are met with a sense of revulsion. This revulsion is why, like Hamlet, the Dionysian man finds action repulsive. His Dionysian experience puts into relief the fact that the world is arbitrary and cruel, rife with suffering. As Nietzsche says:

> Once truth has been seen, the consciousness of it prompts man to see only what is terrible or absurd in existence wherever he looks; now he understands the symbolism of Ophelia's fate, now he grasps the wisdom of the wood-god Silenus: he feels revulsion.

(BT §7)[18]

Essential for Nietzsche's view, however, is that tragedy does not leave its audience in a state of revulsion or life denial. Instead, the audience also experiences tragedy's life-affirming effects – of being able to see life as worth living in spite of its inevitable suffering. In the *Hamlet* passage, Nietzsche is providing a hypothetical example of this first effect of Dionysian tragedy, of what it would be like if tragedy did not ultimately provide us with an affirmation and thereby also a justification of life. Hamlet, as the Dionysian man, is an analogy for a tragic audience who has experienced only the first effect of tragedy, and thus been left in a state of revulsion, without affirmation.

One way of reading *The Birth of Tragedy* is to see the Apolline as responsible for the life-affirming effects of tragedy. On this view, the Apolline is able to restore 'the almost shattered individual' through 'the healing balm of blissful deception' (BT §21). Indeed, there are many passages in the book that support this reading.[19] In many places, Nietzsche describes the Apolline as a 'veiling' that 'deceives' us about the Dionysian effects of tragedy.[20] If we only focus on these types of passages, it might appear that the veiling of the Apolline is what allows for affirmation, which takes the form of an evasion or covering over. However, a close reading of the *Hamlet* passage and its immediate context make it clear that this is not the case. As Christopher Janaway rightly points out:

Apollonian art protected its adherents from nausea at the truth because it prevented them from properly coming to know it: but what about those who have become properly acquainted with that truth so that it sticks resolutely in their consciousness and nauseates? It is the Dionysian element in tragedy that Nietzsche leans on at the end of this passage: 'The satyr chorus of the dithyramb is the salvation of Greek art'.[21]

The protection provided by the Apolline is only useful to those who do not know the full extent of suffering inherent in existence. Thus, it thus cannot help the Dionysian man, who is plagued with revulsion at the realization that his everyday world is arbitrary and cruel. Instead, the Dionysian man – and by analogy the ancient Greek audience who has experienced only this first effect of tragedy – must justify life in a different way. According to Nietzsche, the way that the tragic audience does this is through the chorus. In Nietzsche's words:

> [T]he metaphysical solace which, I wish to suggest, we derive from every true tragedy, the solace that in the ground of things, and despite all changing appearances, life is indestructibly mighty and pleasurable, this solace appears with palpable clarity in the chorus.

(BT §7)

For Nietzsche, the dithyramb's chorus of satyrs is what he calls 'the saving act of Greek art' (BT §7).

Despite Nietzsche's assertions that the chorus saves the tragic audience from revulsion against life, it is not entirely clear how, exactly, it is able to do this. I want to suggest an interpretation that makes clear how the Dionysian chorus can, as Nehamas' insight suggests, alleviate the suffering of the spectator, while seeming to be the very thing that produces the suffering in the first place. Key to understanding this is Nietzsche's statement that 'Art alone can re-direct those repulsive thoughts about the terrible or absurd nature of existence into *representations* (*Vorstellungen*) with which man can live' (BT §7, my emphasis). The tragic spectator would remain in a state of revulsion if it weren't for the artistic rendering of the Dionysian experience in the chorus. The artistic re-creation of the Dionysian justifies life for the spectator because it allows him to see that aspects of this Dionysian experience – a breaking down of all divisions between human beings and an overwhelming feeling of unity with nature – can exist in his everyday world. The tragic chorus, which is comprised of a homogeneous, non-individualized group of performers, uses dance and song as symbols for the audiences' unity with nature:

> The essence of nature is bent on expressing itself; a new world of symbols is required, firstly the symbolism of the entire body, not just of the mouth, the face, the word, but the full gesture of dance with its rhythmical movement of every limb'.

(BT §2)

Through the chorus, the tragic audience experiences 'the destruction of the veil of maya, one-ness as the genius of humankind, indeed of nature itself' (BT §2). Thus, for Nietzsche, the tragic chorus is responsible for providing both a Hamlet-like revulsion against action – by putting into relief the full extent of suffering in our everyday lives, and for affirming life in the face of this revulsion – by showing that, through art, we can participate in the ecstasy of Dionysian unity. The chorus allows, in a mechanism that promotes what it denies, the audience a glimpse of the Dionysian, while at the same time soothing over the lethargy and life denial that would typically result from such a glimpse.

This however, leaves us with the question of the role that the Apolline plays in the process of life affirmation. If the chorus provides the audience with life affirmation, then it is unclear why the Apolline is necessary, and Nietzsche insists it is. However, Nietzsche provides us with an answer to this question. The Apolline is, following Nehamas, another instance of a mechanism that promotes what it denies. The Apolline, which Nietzsche claims is presented by the dialogue and characters of the tragedy, depicts the horrible fate of the tragic hero. This hero appears to its audience as beautiful: 'Everything that rises to the surface in dialogue, the Apolline part of Greek tragedy, appears simple, transparent, beautiful' (BT §9). However, Nietzsche also claims that 'all the famous figures of the Greek stage, Prometheus, Oedipus etc., are merely masks of that original hero, Dionysos' (BT §10). Thus, the Apolline, which

appears as beautiful, also presents to the audience a representation of Dionysus, 'the god who experiences the sufferings of individuation in his own person, of whom wonderful myths recount that he was torn to pieces by the Titans when he was a boy and is now venerated in this condition as Zagreus' (BT §10). Thus, while the chorus is responsible for providing the audience with metaphysical solace, the Apolline is charged with veiling the sufferings of the tragic hero who is actually just an individuated, artistic rendering of Dionysos.

It is outside of the scope of this essay to give a complete sketch of the interplay between the Apolline and Dionysian. However, it is clear that these two mechanisms use each other to transform the other. As Nietzsche says:

> [W]e recognize in tragedy a pervasive stylistic opposition: language, colour, mobility, dynamics, all of these diverge into distinct, entirely separated spheres of expression, into the Dionysiac lyric of the chorus on the one hand and the Apolline dream-world of the stage on the other.

(BT §8)

However, the distinction between these two realms soon becomes blurred – the two forces begin to merge together: 'now the clarity and firmness of the epic shaping speak to him from the stage, now Dionysos no longer speaks in the form of energies but rather as an epic hero, almost in the language of Homer' (BT §8). The Apolline and the Dionysian merge, and, in doing so, lose their own identities. The Apolline becomes Dionysian and the Dionysian become Apolline. For a magical artistic moment, the two become one to form a tragedy.[22]

Despite seeming to present a puzzle – that the *Hamlet* passage only tells one side of the story, that of life denial, not life affirmation – Nietzsche's *Hamlet* example is actually an instance of a type of mechanism that promotes what it denies. Nietzsche's allusion to *Hamlet* is not merely an example of Schopenhauerian pessimism, but is a key example for understanding life affirmation as it appears in *The Birth of Tragedy*. While the *Hamlet* passage may seem puzzling because, at first, it may appear to be asserting that the effects of tragedy are to leave us in a state like that of Hamlet, one of lethargy and inaction, a closer reading reveals that Nietzsche's *Hamlet* example is merely a *hypothetical* account of what *would* happen if the tragic chorus did not provide its audience with metaphysical solace through the power of art. By paying attention to the context in which Nietzsche discusses the *Hamlet* passage, we thus see that it is, ultimately, an account of the first effect of tragedy, which is always accompanied by its later, life-affirming effect.

Conclusion

In concluding, I want to suggest a further reason for viewing Nietzsche's *Hamlet* example as helpful for understanding life affirmation in *The Birth of Tragedy*. While Nietzsche's *Hamlet* example seems to provide us with only one side of the story – of how Hamlet fails to act, of lethargy, of the Dionysian without the saving graces of art – I want to suggest that that we can understand Nietzsche's notion of life affirmation by looking closely at the plot of *Hamlet* itself. The play within a play in Act 3, Scene 2 is a concrete example of how art allows Hamlet to finally act and, in a way, affirm his own life. For Nietzsche, we are able to affirm life through art: 'for only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*' (BT §5). On Nietzsche's account, tragedy allows the ancient Greek a transformative form of insight into the nature of the world, which also dredges up feelings of revulsion and inaction. But art can save us from these feelings of revulsion. And in the case of *Hamlet*, it literally does.

In the beginning of the play, Hamlet is plagued with inaction. After being visited by what appears to be the ghost of his father and learning of his father's death at the hands of his uncle, and now stepfather, Claudius, Hamlet struggles with the ghost's command to take revenge. It is only as an *artist* that Hamlet comes to act. His first action in avenging his father is to stage a play, which reenacts his father's death as explained by the ghost, as a test for his uncle Claudius. In this play, Hamlet takes on the role of a

dramaturge. He not only composes, but also directs the speech of the players and their movements, instructing them to 'Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue'[23] and to 'suit the action to the word, the word to the action'.[24] It is only through an act of artistic creation that Hamlet can begin to avenge his father. By putting his knowledge of what the ghost told him into an actual, artistic form, Hamlet is able to detach himself from his lethargic disposition.

In this sense, Hamlet finds himself in a position that seems quite different from a spectator of ancient Greek tragedy. He is both the creator and spectator of his play. And in a sense he is also an actor. During the play, Hamlet interjects so much that Ophelia comments 'You are as good as a chorus, my Lord'.[25] On a Nietzschean reading, Hamlet is a Dionysian man not just when he is in a lethargic state, finding it laughable that he should 'be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint' (BT §7), but also when he comes to act as an artist. Hamlet, then, demonstrates both action and inaction, he is the chorus and the audience, the director and the actor, the subject and the object. He has become what Nietzsche calls a genius, a true artist, who, during an act of artistic creation, temporarily merges with the 'original artist of the world' and 'in this condition he resembles, miraculously, that uncanny image of fairy-tale which can turn its eyes around and look at itself; now he is at one and the same time subject and object, simultaneously poet, actor, and spectator' (BT §5). In his act of artistic creation Hamlet is able to fully become a Dionysian man. While at first he is mired in revulsion, through art he becomes one with 'the essential being which gives itself eternal pleasure as the creator and spectator of that comedy of art' (BT §5). As a dramaturge, Hamlet becomes one with the world's original artist, the force that shapes the world, which Nietzsche compares to a 'playing child who sets down stones here, there, and the next place, and who builds up piles of sand only to knock them down again' (BT §24).

However, the state of artistic creator does not last for Hamlet. After the play within the play, Hamlet reverts to a state of revulsion. Despite having a clear opportunity, he decides not to kill Claudius as he is praying since that might send him to heaven. He attempts to kill Claudius in his mother's bedchamber, but unwittingly kills Polonius instead. Indeed, Hamlet's action at the end of the play, where he finally manages to kill Claudius, is not initiated by him, but is the result of Claudius and Laertes' scheme to kill him. Thus, on a Nietzschean reading, Hamlet's only true action is as an artist.

Hamlet is a character who embodies both life denial and life affirmation, providing a rich analogue for understanding the effects that tragedy has on its audience. For Nietzsche, the audience of an ancient Greek tragedy is transformed by the chorus such that they feel at one with the Dionysian and are able to feel as if they are the artists of the very tragedy they are viewing. As Nietzsche says: 'Dionysiac excitement is able to transmit to an entire mass of people this *artistic gift* of seeing themselves surrounded by just such a crowd of spirits with which they know themselves to be inwardly at one' (BT §8, emphasis added). Thus, Hamlet is a keen metaphor for understanding the experience of the tragic audience. He not only experiences lethargy and revulsion, but also, as an artist, the joy of Dionysian creation.[26]

Related topics

See Chapters 23, 24, 27

Notes

1 Large (2000: 45) offers an excellent overview of Nietzsche's interest in Shakespeare.
2 See Nietzsche (1999: §7). All subsequent references to *The Birth of Tragedy* will appear as BT followed by section number.
3 There is a healthy and ongoing debate over the extent to which Schopenhauer actually influenced Nietzsche's metaphysics in *The Birth of Tragedy*. See Young (1992), Han-Pile (2006), Staten (1990),

Ridley (2007), Nussbaum (1998), and more recently, Gemes and Sykes (2014).

4 For an account of Schopenhauer's interest in Shakespeare see Stern (2014). As Stern points out: 'A frequent occurrence in Schopenhauer's prose is the use of Shakespeare as an authority figure, who prefigures, in various quotations, thoughts to which Schopenhauer's philosophy gave a clear expression, a conceptual formulation and a metaphysical underpinning' (57).

5 See Nietzsche (2009: 51).

6 Nietzsche describes the difference between the Dionysian and the Apolline as follows: 'In order to gain a closer understanding of these two drives, let us think of them in the first place as separate art-worlds of dream and intoxication. Between these two physiological phenomena an opposition can be observed which corresponds to that between the Apolline and the Dionysiac' (BT §1).

7 In the very beginning of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche describes the Dionysian as 'the imageless art of music, which is that of Dionysos' (BT §14).

8 Nietzsche associates the chorus with the Dionysian and the Apolline with the dialogue of tragedy: 'This insight leads us to understand Greek tragedy as a Dionysian chorus which discharges itself over and over again in an Apolline world of images. Thus the choral passages which are interwoven with the tragedy are, to a certain extent, the womb of the entire so-called dialogue, i.e. of the whole world on stage, the drama proper' (BT §44).

9 Nietzsche's reference to *Hamlet* is puzzling particularly if one lacks knowledge of the discussion about Shakespeare at the time. However, knowledge about the reception of Shakespeare in Germany makes Nietzsche's allusion to *Hamlet* much less surprising. Just prior to Nietzsche's reference to *Hamlet*, Nietzsche is discussing A.W. Schlegel's notion of the ideal spectator. Schlegel's translation of Shakespeare's works was and still is considered a standard translation. Shakespeare was often a topic of discussion in Schlegel's own essays. For an account of A.W. Schlegel's relationship with Shakespeare see Roger and Paulin (2010).

10 See Reginster (2014: 15) and Young (1992: 42).

11 Reginster (2014: 15).

12 Reginster (2014: 15).

13 Reginster (2014: 15).

14 Nehamas (1985: 119). Nehamas claims that Nietzsche was always interested in the paradox that is posed by (seemingly) anti-natural phenomena, i.e. practices, norms, values, etc. that seem to contradict the purposes of nature. In the *Genealogy*, it is asceticism, while in *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is tragedy.

15 Nehamas (1985: 119).

16 Nehamas (1985: 119).

17 Nehamas (1985: 119).

18 In section 3 of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche introduces the myth of Silenus, a companion of Dionysius. As his captor, King Midas asks Silenus 'what is the best and most excellent thing for human beings'. Silenus responds 'Wretched, ephemeral race, children of chance and tribulation, why do you force me to tell you the very thing which it would be most profitable for you *not* to hear? The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. However, the second best thing for your is: to die soon'.

19 Nietzsche describes the Apolline in this way in many places throughout *The Birth of Tragedy*: 'Their Apolline consciousness only hid this Dionysiac world from them like a veil' (BT §2); 'With the enormous force of image, concept, ethical doctrine and sympathetic excitement, the Apolline wrenches man out of his orgiastic self-destruction, deceives him about the generality of the Dionysiac event' (BT §21).

20 'Apolline deception is revealed for what it is: a persistent veiling, for the duration of the tragedy, of the true Dionysiac effect' (BT §21).

21 Janaway (2014: 45).

22 According to Nietzsche, ancient Greek tragedy is the product of a historical development. In the history of ancient Greece, the Apolline and Dionysian were dominant in different time periods, until

they became unified harmoniously in tragedy. Nietzsche's account of the historical development of tragedy in ancient Greece is a topic for elsewhere.

23 Shakespeare (2016), 3.2.1–2.
24 Shakespeare (2016), 3.2.18–19.
25 Shakespeare (2016), 3.2.269.
26 I would like to thank Kristin Gjesdal, Susan Feagin and Tom Hanauer for immensely helpful comments on this chapter.

Further reading

Holbrook, P., 2014. Nietzsche's Shakespeare. In: J.A. Bates and R. Wilson., eds. *Shakespeare and Continental Philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 76–93. Holbrook's article tracks the way that Nietzsche engages with Shakespeare, using this lens on Nietzsche's work to argue that he wanted us to think about the world dramatically, not morally.

Large, D., 2000. Nietzsche's Shakespearean Figures. In: A.D. Schrift., ed. *Why Nietzsche Still?* Berkeley: University of California Press, 45–65, here 47–51. Large provides a thorough overview of Nietzsche's thoughts about Shakespeare, taking a full assessment of Nietzsche's letters, notebooks, and published works.

Silk, M.S. and Stern, J.P., 1981. *Nietzsche on Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Silk and Stern's important volume offers a detailed examination of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, including important biographical background, an analysis of the text, a reception history, and an account of earlier German theories of tragedy.

Wilson, S., 2000. Reading Shakespeare with Intensity: A Commentary on Some Lines from Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*. In: J.J. Joughin., ed. *Philosophical Shakespeares*. London: Routledge, 86–104. Wilson examines the relationship between Nietzsche and Shakespeare by closely analyzing a fragment from Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, highlighting the complex and contradictory nature of Nietzsche's relationship with the author.

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Young, J., 1992. *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

27

TIME AND THE OTHER IN *CYMBELINE*

James A. Knapp

Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* opens with a story of birth from death. Through a conversation between two courtly gentlemen, we learn that our hero, Posthumus, whose very name suggests existence after death, was born just after his father 'quit being', unable to bear the deaths of his two other sons in battle.[1] Almost simultaneously, we learn, Posthumus's mother 'deceased / As he was born' (1.1.39–40). Cymbeline, then, 'takes the babe / To his protection, calls him Posthumus Leonatus' (1.1.40–1). Cymbeline's act of naming is a figurative act of resurrection, bringing Leonatus back to life after death, after he has 'quit being'. This is an empathic gesture, as Leonatus died of heartache at the loss of his sons, a heartache we will soon learn that Cymbeline shares in the play's present, having lost his sons, stolen from their nursery some twenty years earlier. Cymbeline's naming and care for Posthumus serves as compensation for Sicilius Leonatus's loss, his recognition of the impossibility of his sons' return that leads to his own death. Cymbeline's act constitutes a figurative overcoming of death: our hero will be Leontatus after death, an impossibility.

Immediately following this conversation we witness a scene of forced separation that is explicitly identified with the loss of the other to death. Cymbeline has rejected the recent marriage of Posthumus and Imogen, and, seeing no chance of a future together, Imogen urges Posthumus to find a new life 'to woo another wife / when Imogen is dead' (1.1.113–14). Posthumus interrupts this repetition of life born of death by rejecting the request, wishing instead for his own death as prevention from another match: 'You gentle gods, give me but this I have, / And cere up my embracements from a next / With bonds of death!' (1.1.115–17). As elsewhere in Shakespeare's late plays – replete with scenes of rebirth and resurrection – the movement from death to life and life to death suggests a

complex temporality: the instants of birth and death simultaneously and paradoxically suspended in their singularity and dynamic interrelation. We are confronted in this opening scene with a static present that nonetheless hovers between a complex and fully articulated past and an uncertain and unknown future. Imogen describes her condition in this instant as 'Past hope and in despair; that way, past grace' (1.1.137).

The emphasis on Posthumus's heritage, as son of Sicilius Leonatus, the surname earned through fierce and loyal service to Cymbeline's father Tenantius, suggests that the play's conflict has its source in the past, perhaps in Cymbeline's forgetfulness. Cymbeline appears to have forgotten the past, that he chose to name Posthumus in recognition of his father's sacrifice, and that it was he who ordered that Posthumus be raised at court 'Which rare it is to do' (1.1.47). In the present of the play's opening scene the King has lost touch with his reason for taking such care, seeing him now only as an unworthy suitor, the 'basest thing', 'poison to [his] blood' (1.1.125, 128). In fact we begin the play at the moment when Cymbeline threatens to abandon the past entirely in favour of a future projected (diabolically) by his new and nameless Queen. Though Cymbeline is the play's title character, drawn from Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Shakespeare immediately disconnects him from his past, defined in the play entirely by loss. In addition to the story of Posthumus's birth at the death of his parents and brothers, the conversation between the two gentlemen details the death of Cymbeline's first queen and wife, mother to his two lost sons, also presumed dead.[2] If that were not enough, in his very first lines the king banishes his surrogate son Posthumus with threat of death: 'Thou basest thing avoid hence, from my sight! / If after this command thou freight the court / With thy unworthiness, thou diest' (1.1.125–7). The utter annihilation of anything from his past extends to Imogen, his sole heir and daughter: if she will not renounce her love for Posthumus, he rages, 'let her languish / A drop of blood a day, and, being aged, / Die of this folly!' (1.1.156–8).

While the king is clearly manipulated by his evil queen, his strong response to the marriage suggests that his relationship with his own past haunts his present. Though all at court put on the appearance of disapproval, we are told that Cymbeline in particular is 'touched at very heart' (1.1.10). Unlike Cloten and the Queen, whose interest in the match is strategic, that is, directed toward the future, the thought of losing

Imogen to Posthumus apparently reminds Cymbeline of his past losses. That Posthumus's presence disrupts the proper movement of time is evident in Cymbeline's complaint to Imogen: 'O disloyal thing, / That shouldst repair my youth, thou heap'st / A year's age on me' (1.1.131–3). The king's desire for the child to reverse time – to serve as an antidote to ageing – underscores the play's opening emphasis on rebirth. Conversely, Imogen's recalcitrance in choosing Posthumus denies him this satisfaction, highlighting instead his own movement toward death. The result of this opening scene is to introduce a complex temporality: a seemingly frozen present that gestures toward a past that it simultaneously effaces, denying any foresight into the future (Imogen's condition as 'Past hope and in despair; that way, past grace' [1.1.137]).

The key to introducing this complex temporality is Posthumus, who, his name suggests, follows his own death, is at once present and prior. In succeeding death and simultaneously representing the hope of succession, Posthumus represents the mystery of the future, its impossibility in the present (the future is always the future, or 'Death is never now' (Levinas (1987/1947a: 74)). The connection here to resurrection is overt and fitting for a play named for Cymbeline, the monarch of legend who ruled Britain at the birth of Christ.[3] And it is tempting to read the play's thematic repetition of death and rebirth, as many critics have done, as Christian allegory (Jones (1971)). But the play's exploration of the dynamic construction of life from death, or perhaps the persistence of death in life (as the living Posthumus would more accurately signify), suggests that redemption requires an ethical responsibility that lacks access to divine grace. Rather than view the play's engagement with redemption as evidence of its Christian allegory – in which redemption requires external intervention – I suggest that the play's resolution is a product of its exploration of ethics and time. To do so, I will draw on the phenomenology of time developed by Emmanuel Levinas early in his career, a theory of time as fundamentally intersubjective.[4]

In *Time and the Other*, Levinas famously muses, 'it sometimes seems to me that the whole of philosophy is only a meditation on Shakespeare' (Levinas (1987/1947a: 72)). In particular, Shakespeare provided Levinas with an opportunity to rethink the long tradition of ontology in Western philosophy, culminating in Hegel and Heidegger. According to Howard Caygill, Levinas felt that '[t]he philosophically underwritten opposition of

being and nothingness would permit both the mastery over and the finality of death, my own suicide and that of the other in murder'. But Shakespeare, especially in the tragedies of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, 'undoes this certainty and opens a space for a rethinking of being, nothingness and death perhaps not even dreamt of by philosophy' (Caygill (2014: 149)). While Caygill believes that in constructing his ethics as first philosophy Levinas moved beyond his early critique of ontology occasioned by Shakespeare, I see in Shakespeare's late plays affinities in the way the two writers conceive of the role of time in human experience, each suggesting that time and being exceed experience, even as they are constituted in it. This is a direct challenge to Heidegger, and ontology generally, as Levinas prioritizes the dynamic claim of the other over the self as autonomous subject.

Levinas's early departure from Heidegger in *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other* is especially interesting for a consideration of temporality and sociality in *Cymbeline*. At first glance, the play appears to dramatize Heidegger's ontology, rejecting the inwardness of the Cartesian subject in favour of the struggle of being-in-the-world that defines Heideggerian *Dasein*. The characters in *Cymbeline* are particularly resistant to an analysis of inwardness. As Cynthia Marshall notes, following Harley Granville-Barker, the play is 'not introspective'; 'the play's soliloquies, of which there are many, tend to report feelings and responses rather than explore them' (Marshall (2003: 294)). In its resistance to inward reflection, and focus on the characters' struggle with the world, *Cymbeline* could be read as a dramatization of Heidegger's concept of 'thrownness'. Yet, I want to suggest that Shakespeare, like Levinas, goes beyond Heidegger's critique of inwardness to an affirmation of being as a product of the intersubjectivity of time. While Heidegger's sense of tragedy as the dramatization of the authentic subject's emergence in recognition of being-towards-death, might seem to apply to *Cymbeline*, I suggest that the play is more closely attuned to Levinas's account of death as the ungraspable limit of the subject's power. According to Levinas: 'Death in Heidegger is an event of freedom, whereas for me the subject seems to reach the limit of the possible in suffering' (Levinas (1987/1947a: 70–1)). For Heidegger, as *Dasein's* 'ownmost', death would seem to represent the singularity of the individual as against the social world of others. As Yael Lin puts it, 'According to Heidegger, the

authentic self is constituted through its separation and differentiation from the they' (Lin (2013: 40)). Lin points to Heidegger's claim in *Being and Time* that '*Dasein* can exist as itself. Understanding is either authentic, originating from its own self as such, or else inauthentic' (Heidegger (1996: 137)).

There is, nevertheless, a social aspect to Heidegger's ontology. Authentic *Dasein* emerges from a confrontation with destiny as the shared history of a people, rather than the fate of an individual: 'The fateful destiny of *Dasein* in and with its "generation" constitutes the complete, authentic occurrence of *Dasein*' (Heidegger (1996: 352)). In Lin's account, 'Through the reinterpretation and reappropriation of its heritage, *Dasein* determines its own fate and becomes authentic' (Lin (2013: 43)). The emphasis in Heidegger's analysis appears to be on a communal heritage (or destiny) distinct from individual fate, and thus a proper subject of a form of tragedy that sublates individual suffering to an experience of communal temporality. Following the communal strain of Heidegger's thought, we might read Posthumus's suffering as the key to the redemption of the British (here perhaps the equivalent of Heidegger's *volk*), figured as Posthumus's felt experience of reinterpreting and reappropriating his heritage. As such the structure appears to be social.

Yet Levinas argues that despite appearing to account for others and the world, Heidegger's ontological analysis always begins with the individual, with Dasein, thus remaining an egocentric model for the exploration of Being. For Levinas, individual beings (existents) do not come to recognize their Being (existence) through emersion in an already extant and temporally articulated world. Rather, it is in the experience of the other that both time and Being become available. Heidegger's emphasis on being-towards-death, the recognition of one's own finitude as one's own, is impossible in Levinas's formulation, as Being is only available through the experience of the other. One's own death is always ungraspable, beyond in the same way that the other, as Other, is ungraspable. This is why the face of the other would become so central to Levinas's later thought, as the encounter with the face of the other in its immediacy frees one from the stasis of self-identity, the egocentric project of ontological becoming, always doomed to repetition and failure.

In *Time and the Other*, Levinas lays out his critique of being-towards-death. Against Heidegger, he stresses the ungraspable nature of death:

> Death is never a present…. The fact that it deserts every present is not due to an evasion of death and to an unpardonable diversion at the supreme hour, but to the fact that death is ungraspable, that it marks the end of the subject's virility and heroism. The now is the fact that I am master, master of the possible, master of grasping the possible. Death is never now.
>
> (Levinas (1987/1947a: 71–2))

Time does not exist as a ground onto which we are thrown, or in which we carry out our reflections on being; time is constituted in the event of the encounter with the other. The impossibility of grasping one's own death is analogous to the impossibility of grasping the other as other:

> But it is possible to infer from this situation of death, where the subject no longer has any possibility of grasping, another characteristic of existence with the other. The future is what is in no way grasped. The exteriority of the future is totally different from spatial exteriority precisely through the fact that the future is absolutely surprising. Anticipation of the future and projection of the future, sanctioned as essential to time by all theories from Bergson to Sartre, are but the present of the future and not the authentic future; the future is what is not grasped, what befalls us and lays hold of us. The other is the future. The very relationship with the other is the relationship with the future. It seems impossible to me to speak of time in a subject alone, or to speak of a purely personal duration.
>
> (Levinas (1987/1947a: 76–7))

The tragicomic structure of *Cymbeline* provides a compelling illustration of Levinas's account of the intersubjectivity of time. In the play's tragic portions, we are confronted with a series of egocentric questers seeking to enact their self-identities through an engagement with their inherited world. In this context, Posthumus has no identity apart from his past – defined by his father's heroics, loyalty, and love of family (Sicilius died of a broken heart brought on by the deaths of his sons) – and his imputed future: the greatness imagined by the courtiers in describing his character in the opening scene (1.1.1–70) and repeated in the conversation of Philario's guests in Rome (1.4.1–22). His past is lost and his future is

hypothetical – a projection – apparently leaving only his present, the temporal category Levinas identifies with solitude and a stultifying stasis as is clear in his analysis of indolence, which

> is prior to a beginning of an action…. It is not a thought about the future, followed by a holding back from action. It is, in its concrete fullness, a holding back from the future…. It perhaps indicates that the future, a virginal instant, is impossible in a solitary subject.

> (Levinas (2001/1947b: 17))

Imogen is similarly defined by her past and future, the disappearance of her brothers constituting her status as heir to Cymbeline's throne and her purity of character guiding all speculation about her future chaste behaviour. In particular, her inheritance governs the Queen and Cloten's plans, and her imputed purity drives Posthumus to accept the wager and Pisanio to reject the order to kill her.

The present, considered as a static interval, is the starting point of the play's action. If one were to describe this moment frozen in time, it would look like this: pure Imogen imprisoned, valiant Posthumus banished, true Beliarius banished, the rightful heirs ignorant of their heritage, the Queen and Cloten prepared to overthrow Cymbeline, and Cymbeline faced with the loss of Britain to Rome. But this account would call for an emphasis on a public, practical notion of time, what Bergson calls 'spatial time', a version of which Levinas calls 'economic time'.[5] This is the time of clocks and instants in succession that Levinas (following Bergson) sought to overcome with the notion of the 'duration' (Levinas (2001/1947b: 74), Bergson (1944)). Following Levinas's understanding of time constituted in the intersubjective relation, what is at stake is all to come, signified in the overlapping of the French *à venir* and *avenir* (that which is 'about to come' and that which is the 'future' categorically speaking). The notion of static time allows for the illusion of grasping the future moment, however unknowable, of one's death. For Levinas this fixity is replaced by a radical alterity – that one's death is precisely what one cannot imagine. What the play offers, then, is a collection of encounters, events of the experience of the other, in which the characters are called upon to relinquish their will to know and accept that what they face is in essence unknowable.

Among the first such encounters staged in the play is that between Iachimo and Imogen. In urging Iachimo to be more straightforward with her, Imogen offers an account of doubt and certainty that foreshadows the play's phenomenology of time:

You do seem to know

Something of me, or what concerns me. Pray you,
Since doubting things go ill often hurts more
Than to be sure they do – for certainties
Either are past remedies, or, timely knowing,
The remedy then born – discover to me
What both you spur and stop.

(1.6.92–8)

Imogen's apprehension about the future is a product of its ungraspable nature; it would be better to know that things will go wrong than to worry that they will. The key here is in Imogen's musing on the nature of 'certainties': she notes that they, 'Either are past remedies, or, timely knowing, the remedy then born'. In other words, certainty is a product of time, but only time that is past or present: something known to have happened in the past or something witnessed in the present, literally at the moment of coming into knowledge ('the remedy then born'). Her unease betrays a fallacy in her logic: one can never be certain about the future. The idea that it is comforting to know even negative future outcomes (being 'sure' that 'things go ill') is about the present, not the future. Imogen's unease is prompted by Iachimo's treachery, what he 'both spur[s] and stop[s]' is Imogen's present doubts about Posthumus's fidelity. Any comfort she might take from even the worst news is about her relationship to the future: erasing the hope of a future with Posthumus is to accept a life of despair, one she described in the opening scene as 'past grace'. But grace is always to come. When she begs Iachimo to release her from doubt, the future is utterly unknown to her; separated from Posthumus, she has no access to the certainty she desires. Her pain exists in the duration of time: 'doubting things go ill … hurts more' than even the illusion of knowing. Death is the one future certainty, the fact that leads Heidegger to

his formulation of being-towards-death as freedom. For Levinas, this is an illusion that distracts one from the relation to the other.

The scene of Iachimo's intrusion into her bedchamber begins with a question, 'Who's there' (reminiscent of the opening line of the Folio/Q2 *Hamlet*), aimed at Imogen's lady, but foreshadowing the ominous presence of Iachimo, concealed in the trunk. The dialog in the scene centres on time. Imogen's second question, 'What hour is it?' references clock time (spatial time); it is 'Almost midnight', and the princess has read 'three hours' (2.2.1–5). But Imogen invokes another kind of time, the time reserved for 'tempters of the night' (2.2.9). Similarly, Iachimo's opening and closing lines refer to spatial time: 'The crickets sing, and man's o'erlabored sense / Repairs itself by rest' (2.2.11–12)[6] and 'One, two, three: time, time' (2.2.51). Though the scene references spatial time, economic time, it ushers in a new set of possibilities. Mirroring Iachimo's horrible intrusion into Imogen's chamber, his exit is signalled by his exclamation 'Hell is here'. The line is prompted by his recognition of the contrast between himself and the sleeping Imogen. What is hell? Where is here? And for whom does it exist?

'Hell is here' is clearly not a descriptive statement, but a predictive one. Iachimo's presence in Imogen's chamber is the prerequisite for his future damnation as well as her future suffering at the hands of the jealous, enraged Posthumus. Imogen's death would complete Iachimo's vision of hell and his rightful place in it. And indeed, her death is desired soon after by Posthumus, given in his command to Pisanio, and embraced by Imogen herself:

> I draw the sword myself. Take it, and hit
> The innocent mansion of my love, my heart.
> Fear not; 'tis empty of all things but grief.
> My master is not there, who was indeed
> The riches of it. Do his bidding. Strike.

> (3.4.66–70)

Faced with the command to murder Imogen, confronted with the death of the other, Pisanio cannot sleep: 'Since I received command to do this business / I have not slept one wink' (3.4.99–100). To her response 'Do't, and to bed', Pisanio vows 'I'll wake mine eyeballs blind first' (3.4.100–1).

Here we have an explicit example of the request for death denied in the face to face encounter.

In response to Pisanio's refusal to kill her, Imogen is confused:

> Wherefore then
> Didst undertake it? Why hast thou abused
> So many miles with a pretense? This place?
> Mine action and thine own? Our horses' labor?
> The time inviting thee?

<div align="right">(3.4.101–5)</div>

His explanation is essentially that he is stalling for time: he has gone to all the trouble of seemingly going along with the plot to kill her 'But to win time / To lose so bad employment, in the which / I have considered of a course' (3.4.109–11). Pisanio's response 'But to win time' (109), paradoxically represents both his inactivity and the constitution of time, the initiation of time through the relation with the other. 'Here me with patience' (112), he asks, leading to an exchange between the two in dialogue. Though claiming that her 'ear' can 'take no greater wound' (113–14) than the slander she has already endured in being accused of being a strumpet, Imogen nonetheless fully participates in this conversation with her would-be assassin. She interjects at every turn, rejecting what seems to be Pisanio's plan. The plan is apparently to send word to Posthumus of Imogen's death in an attempt to draw him back to England. Realizing the shortcomings of the plan, Imogen asks 'What shall I do the while? Where bide? How live?' (128).

These are good questions, and it is unclear whether Pisanio has considered them. He begins to suggest the court, 'If you'll back to th' court—' only to be cut off by Imogen 'No court' (130–1). The truncated line makes it unclear whether he considered the court an option or was about to warn her to stay away. While it could be either, her interruption allows him to change course, urge her to pair up with Lucius at Milford Haven, and thereby be in proximity to her beloved Posthumus. The conversation between Pisanio and Imogen is remarkable, as together they resist arriving at conclusions that much of the evidence suggests in favour of awaiting confirmation in a time to come. Pisanio's claim that 'Some villain, / Ay and singular in his art, hath done you both / This cursed

injury', though right, is only an intuition, while Imogen's guess at the villain's identity 'A Roman courtesan', is wrong, and quickly countered by Pisanio 'No, on my life' (3.4.120–3). Upon agreeing to Pisanio's plan, Imogen, intones 'There's more to be considered, but we'll even / All that good time will give us' (3.4.181–2), suggesting that the unknowability of the future is a condition of the inescapability of temporal existence.

In his solitude, having succumbed to Iachimo's deception Posthumus condemns Imogen in terms derived from his own experience not with Imogen, but the other flawed characters that populate the play. Where earlier he had conceived of her as absolutely chaste and thus unlike any of the women described in Rome (the conception that allowed him to provoke Iachimo's wager), he now substitutes his previous view with a misogynist stereotype attributing all vice to women (2.5.20–35). It is important for my argument that this comes at a moment when the two are separated, specifically when he is alone in his solitude. That he fails to see her as an other is clear from the fact that all the vices he attributes to women are vices he has recognized through past experience (deception, ambition, flattering, and so on), but that she explicitly lacks. His misogynist rant relies on a certainty that he will have to abandon as the play moves toward resolution, a movement that begins to emerge as he confronts Imogen's death, but will only culminate in their reunion.

When Imogen and Posthumus are seemingly forced to confront the death of the other in what appears to be its visceral material presence (the decapitated Cloten and the bloody cloth supplied by Pisanio as proof of Imogen's death), their experience underscores the impossibility of their encounter with their own deaths. Imogen confronts Posthumus' death in the headless body of Cloten, and immediately generalizes it: 'These flowers are like the pleasures of the world, / This bloody man the care on't' (4.2.295–6). She hopes the corpse is a dream and not material reality, wishing instead for the reality of her time with Arviragus, Guiderius, and Belarius: 'But 'tis not so. / 'Twas but a bolt of nothing, shot of nothing, / Which the brain makes of fumes. Our very eyes / Are sometimes like our judgments, blind' (4.2.298–301). Returning to the body, she realizes that 'The dream's still here. Even when I wake, it is / Without me, as within me; not imagined, felt' (4.2.305–6). Her recognition of the body as Posthumus is not, of course, the result of a face to face encounter in Levinas's sense, a point underscored symbolically by the fact that he has

no head and thus no face to face. Nevertheless, the result of the encounter is horror, leading Imogen to sink into despair, believing all is come to nothing. When asked by Lucius 'What art thou?' she responds 'I am nothing; or if not, / Nothing to be were better' (4.2.366–7). Her words recall Richard II's lament in prison that he 'with nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased / With being nothing' (5.5.40–1). Imogen captures Levinas's sense of suffering:

> In suffering there is an absence of all refuge. It is the fact of being directly exposed to being. It is made up of the impossibility of fleeing or retreating. The whole acuity of suffering lies in this impossibility of retreat. It is the fact of being backed up against life and being. In this sense suffering is the impossibility of nothingness.

> (Levinas (1987/1947a: 69))

Posthumus's confrontation with Imogen's death is also explicitly not a face to face encounter, as it is in fact mediated by an object, the 'bloody cloth', which he vows to keep, 'for I wished / Thou shouldst be colored thus' (5.1.1–2). His experience with her death leads him to dedicate himself 'to the face of peril' (5.1.28), to hold his life cheap:

> so I'll die
>
> For thee, O Imogen, even for whom my life
> Is every breath a death; and thus, unknown,
> Pitied nor hated, to the face of peril
> Myself I'll dedicate.

> (5.1.25–9)

But if Imogen and Posthumus imagine their experiences with the other's death to leave them with nothing, and nothing to lose, they are far from coming to realize their own being-towards-death. Rather, their experience illustrates for them the impossibility of imagining their own non-existence, that their own deaths are ungraspable. They can only conceive of death as death for the other: each has nothing to live for without the other.

In addition to her inability to die on Pisanio's sword in the wilderness near Milford Haven, Imogen appears to rise from the dead, repeatedly.

Upon discovering Imogen disguised as Fidele asleep on the body of the beheaded Cloten, Lucius presumes her dead – 'For nature doth abhor to make his bed / With the defunct, or sleep upon the dead' (4.2.356–7) – only to find her alive after asking to 'see the boy's face' (368). In the final series of revelations in Act 5, she appears to rise from the dead twice. When Arviragus, Guiderius, and Belarius recognize her as the dead Fidele, Belarius asks the princes, 'Is not this boy revived from death?' (5.5.119–20). This is followed by a remarkable exchange:

Arviragus:	One sand another
	Not more resembles that sweet rosy lad
	Who died, and was Fidele. What think you?
Guiderius:	The same dead thing alive.
Belarius:	Peace, peace, see further. He eyes us not. Forbear.
	Creatures may be alike. Were't he, I am sure
	He would have spoke to us.
Guiderius:	But we see him dead.

(5.5.120–6)

Though editors often gloss 'see' as 'saw', Guiderius's description of Imogen as 'the same dead thing alive', establishes the wonderment of witnessing a resurrection that will be repeated as Fidele reveals her true identity to the others present. As the scene unfolds, it is further revealed that she herself is among those who presumed her dead; relating that she had taken Cornelius's potion, she says 'It poisoned me', 'for I was dead' (5.5.242, 259).[7] Rather than poison her, Cornelius's potion actually serves as the preservative that Pisanio presented it to be, but that preservation led her directly to the confrontation with what she presumed to be the decapitated Posthumus, to the third moment in the play in which she calls for her own death: 'Nothing to be were better' (4.2.367).[8] Imogen had

originally taken the drug to ease her heart-sickness (4.2.38), to escape from a world that is defined by her suffering, only to find that such an escape proves impossible.[9]

While Imogen is resigned to death, her respect for the prohibition against suicide keeps her in the world of the living despite the horrors of the world. Others openly seek death to no avail. Posthumus, in particular, fails to find death no matter how hard he looks: 'I, in mine own woe charmed, / Could not find death where I did hear him groan' (5.3.68–9). Nevertheless he is resolved: 'For me my ransom's death. / On either side I come to spend my breath, / Which neither here I'll keep nor bear again, / But end it by some means for Imogen' (5.3.80–3). While Posthumus's desire to 'end it by some means' constitutes a death wish, he stops short of choosing suicide, displaying a restraint that aligns him with Imogen, who earlier baulks at taking her own life, opining that 'Against self-slaughter / There is a prohibition so divine / That cravens my weak hand' (3.4.75–7). Suicide is a cowardly, self-directed act that differs from the death Posthumus desires to give 'for Imogen'. Bound in gyves, after giving himself up by posing as a Roman, Posthumus reaffirms his commitment to the exchange of his life for hers, elaborating on the economic metaphor:

To satisfy,

If of my freedom 'tis the main part, take
No stricter render of me than my all.
I know you are more clement than the vile men
Who of their broken debtors take a third,
A sixth, a tenth, letting them thrive again
On their abatement. That's not my desire.
For Imogen's dear life take mine, and though
'Tis not so dear, yet 'tis a life. You coined it.
'Tween man and man they weigh not every stamp;
Though light, take pieces for the figure's sake;
You rather mine, being yours. And so, great powers,
If you will make this audit, take this life,
And cancel these cold bonds.

(5.4.15–28)

Although couched in the language of exchange, Posthumus insists that he wants nothing in return for his death, suggesting that his desire for death is not self-directed. Nevertheless, he still seeks to control his future, his own death.

But rather than getting what he wants, dying at the hands of his captors, Posthumus is instead confronted with a mysterious prophecy: 'a speaking / such as sense cannot untie. Be what it is / The action of my life is like it, which / I'll keep if but for sympathy' (5.4.117–20). It is in the prophecy's mysteriousness that Posthumus finds the way to move forward in time, to return to 'the action' of his life. Though the prophecy holds the key to his earthly salvation, only to be realized in the play's final scene, Posthumus keeps it not because it explains his future but because its opacity reminds him of his own experience with life, that his expectations and understanding are repeatedly frustrated.

In the lines that follow Jupiter's visitation, Posthumus and the Jailor discuss his impending death, the Jailor offering comfort in the escape from the economy of temporal life: 'O the charity of a penny chord! It sums up thousands in a trice. You have no true debtor and creditor but it: of what's past, is, and to come the discharge' (5.4.135–8). The Jailor's emphasis on the escape that death brings from the suffering of the world recalls the comforting song that Arviragus and Guiderius speak at the 'death' of Fidele: 'Fear no more the heat of the sun / Nor the furious winter's rages / Thou thy worldly task hast done, / Home art gone and ta'en thy wages' (4.2.259–62). An allusion to Romans 6:23, 'For the wages of sin is death', the comfort here requires a leap of faith, of accepting what one cannot know, e.g. the second half of the verse from Romans: 'but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord'. The Jailor's offer of comfort is sardonic. Though Posthumus quips, 'I am merrier to die than you are to live' (5.4.140), the Jailor mocks his naïve willingness to die:

> Your death has eyes in's head then. I have not seen him so pictured. You must either be directed by some that take upon them to know, or take upon yourself that which I am sure you do not know, or jump the after-enquiry on your own peril; and how you shall speed in your journey's end I think you'll never return to tell on.

> (5.4.146–51)

The Jailor acknowledges the ungraspable nature of one's own death and mocks Posthumus for failing to recognize this. While the scene depicts

Posthumus's belief in death as 'an event of freedom'[10] in the Heideggerian sense, the play will reveal that he is mistaken. The resolution of the play dramatizes something like Levinas's view of death as the 'limit of idealism', the 'end of the subject's virility and heroism' (Levinas (1987/1947a: 71–2)). Posthumus's insistence on his willingness to die belies his egoism, manifested throughout as a desire for mastery, the failure of which is highlighted here in his inability to master his own death.

Following Levinas, Posthumus's inability to master death is a result of the alterity of death, its absolutely ungraspable nature, but his experience in the final scene also suggests what Levinas calls 'victory over death'. What the play provides as an alternative to death is equally unknowable, but it is an unknowability that is productive rather than destructive. Opposed to the alterity of death is, for Levinas, the alterity of the feminine in eros, 'where the alterity of the other appears in its purity' (Levinas (1987/1947a: 85)).[11] It is in the relation with the alterity of the other that Levinas discovers a positivity that he calls 'fecundity'. Rather than consist in a fusion of two subjects – two existents – in love:

> The pathos of love … consists in an insurmountable duality of beings. It is a relationship with what always slips away. The relationship does not *ipso facto* neutralize alterity but preserves it. The pathos of voluptuousness lies in the fact of being two. The other as other is not here an object that becomes ours or becomes us; to the contrary, it withdraws into its mystery.

(Levinas (1987/1947a: 86))[12]

Levinas goes on to assert that in affirming 'voluptuousness as the very event of the future … the very mystery of the future' it is possible to seek a relationship with the other that is not a fusion (a mastery of the other by the self). Rather, '[t]he relationship with the Other is the absence of the other; not absence pure and simple, not the absence of pure nothingness, but absence in a horizon of the future, an absence that is time' (Levinas (1987/1947a: 90)).

In *Cymbeline*'s famous final scene of reconciliation, Shakespeare provides a series of remarkable revelations. Perhaps most strikingly, when Posthumus casts his beloved Imogen away, mistaking her for an intrusive page, she challenges him to see her: 'Why did you throw your wedded /

lady from you? / Think that you are upon a rock, and now / Throw me again' (5.5.260–2).[13] Like Paulina's warning to Leontes at the end of *The Winter's Tale*, 'do not shun her, / Until you see her die again, for then you kill her double' (5.3.105–7), Imogen calls Posthumus to the face to face encounter. Here, on Imogen's rock, the embrace is not one of stasis and assimilation, but futurity: in answering the call, Posthumus explicitly invokes a future marked by Levinasian fecundity: 'Hang there like fruit, my soul, / Till the tree die!' (5.5.262–3). His is an acceptance of the productive desire (a proximity that simultaneously preserves distance) that also marks the changed Cymbeline, whose exclamations on recovering his children underscore the point. Finally face to face with Imogen, he asks: 'How now, my flesh, my child…Wilt thou speak to me?' (5.5.263–5) and then, after the revelation that Arviragus and Guiderius live, 'O what am I? / A mother to the birth of three?' (5.5.367–8). Unlike the Jailor who imagines a fusion of subjectivity when musing on Posthumus's impending death, 'I would we were of one mind, and one mind good' (5.4.169–70), Cymbeline emphasizes what Levinas might call 'a collectivity that is not a communion' (Levinas (1987/1947a: 94)):

See

Posthumus anchors upon Imogen.
And she, like harmless lightning, throws her eye
On him, her brothers, me, her master, hitting
Each object with a joy. The counterchange
Is severally in all.

(5.5.391–6)

Related topics

Notes

1 *Cymbeline*, 1.1.38, quoted from Shakespeare (2016). All references to Shakespeare are from this edition and given in the text. I retain the Folio's 'Iachimo', against the Norton's modernization.

2 The First Gentleman remarks that the sons were 'stol'n, and to this hour, no guess in knowledge / Which way they went' (1.1.60–1). Though the ambiguity here allows for the resolution in their return to court, their absence for twenty years, and Cymbeline's line 'I lost my children' (5.5.353), suggests that they are presumed dead.

3 This fact is noted by Holinshed: 'Little other mention is made of his doings, except that during his reigne, the Sauior of the world our Lord Jesus Christ the onelie sonne of God was borne of a virgine, about the 23 yeare of the reigne of this Kymbeline' (Holinshed (1807/1587: v.1: 479)).

4 Levinas's analysis of time begins in *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*, but continues to be central to his thought most fully articulated in *Totality and Infinity* (1969/1961) and *Otherwise than Being* (1991/1974). This concept is explored in Lin (2013), *The Intersubjectivity of Time: Levinas and Infinite Responsibility*.

5 On spatial time see Levinas (2001/1947b: 74).

6 Iachimo's reference to the crickets' song as a prompt for rest indicates a notion of time structured by ordered, daily human activity (labour and repair).

7 Benson (2009: 122–3) notes that while critics have identified 'no less than four resurrections in Cymbeline…. Unfortunately … not all such reunions constitute resurrections'. Benson points out that Guiderius and Arviragus, for example, were stolen and not dead (though his claim that they were not presumed dead is difficult to support considering the Queen's plan to put Cloten on the throne). Technically, none of the play's resurrections are actually resurrections, as none of the 'reborn' characters actually die. Yet, there is a metatheatrical element to this, as no one ever dies in theatre, though many appear to die.

8 The first time is in parting with Posthumus in 1.1, and the second is in her welcoming of Pisanio's sword in 3.4.

9 For a similar meditation on the Levinasian relation to death in Shakespearean tragedy, see Lawrence (2005).

10 When called to the King, Posthumus responds, 'Thou bring'st good news, I am called to be made free' (5.4.160–1).

11 Levinas's use of the feminine is controversial and its reception complicated. For the present purpose, the term is useful for its evocation of a structural phenomenological relation that Levinas uses as a starting point from which to move beyond phenomenology. I thank Bruce Young for useful comments on the feminine in Levinas at the Shakespeare 450 conference, Paris, April, 2014.

12 Levinas is careful to include the caveat that this idea of the feminine as mystery does not 'refer to any romantic notions of the mysterious, unknown, or misunderstood woman' (1987/1947a: 86).

13 Some editors amend 'rock' to 'lock' on the basis of the term 'throw', associating it with wrestling. As my reading suggests, 'rock' points to a ground distinct from Posthumus's own position, constituting a reversal of the first parting scene when all emanates from his desire for control ('cere up my embracements', 'I'll place it / on this fairest prisoner', etc.).

Further reading

Goldstein, D.B., 2015. Facing *King Lear*. In: J.A. Knapp, ed. *Shakespeare and the Power of the Face*. Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 75–91. This essay explores Shakespeare's meditation on hospitality in *King Lear*, considering the ways in which Levinas's concept of the face to face encounter is enacted in the play.

Lawrence, S., 2012. *Forgiving the Gift: The Philosophy of Generosity in Shakespeare and Marlowe*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press. This book explores the ways that Levinas's ethical philosophy illuminates the works of Shakespeare and Marlowe. Primary focus is given to the concept of ethics as a radically asymmetrical relation between self and other.

Lehnhof, K. 2014. Relation and Responsibility: A Levinasian Reading of King Lear. *Modern Philology* 111(3): 485–509. The focus of this essay is the relation of self and other in *King Lear*. For Levinas, the self-other relation is the foundation of ethics, insofar as this relation can be reoriented toward the other and away from the self.

Tambling, J. 2004. Levinas and *Macbeth*'s 'Strange Images of Death'. *Essays in Criticism* 54(4): 351–72. Levinas's notion of the *il y a* (the 'there is') is applied to the horror of *Macbeth* in this essay. Tambling emphasizes how Levinas's early philosophy can make sense of the terrifying unknown that drives Macbeth's tragic decline.

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Part VI

Self, mind and identity

28

SHAKESPEARE AND SELFHOOD

Shakespeare never wrote a treatise on selfhood, but if he had, I think it might sound something like this:

> Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, heal'd by the same means, warm'd and cool'd by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?

$$(3.1.59–67)[1]$$

What makes Shylock's speech so arresting is the way it achieves depth through surface. On one hand, the speech is an affirmation of legal personhood issued through an appeal to basic equality and reciprocal rights. On the other, it's an act of moral agency that manifests Shylock as a self worthy of empathy. Importantly, though, Shylock's selfhood is rooted exclusively in outer life: hands, senses, food, germs, temperature, tickling, violence, social practices. It's not something unique about Shylock's mental or spiritual core that endows him with the complexity and emotional range prerequisite to selfhood. Rather, it's his invocation of a common stratum of creaturely life in which he partakes: his physical and formal presence, his vegetative need for sustenance, his sensory responses to outer stimuli. Shylock creates for playgoers a theater of recognition grounded in the physical: acknowledge my eyes, my hands, my form, all the manifestations of my creatureliness. It's a singular moment of appearing and we know, unmistakably, that we're supposed to care.[2]

In what follows, I will show how Shylock's speech is emblematic of what we might think of as 'Shakespearean selfhood' more generally. Rather than being a fixed and bounded entity, the self in Shakespeare's plays and poems emerges from a vital and interdependent world of things. It's a *dynamic process* involving an assortment of human and non-human agents in environments of exchange.[3] The twentieth-century philosopher A.N. Whitehead would have called Shakespearean selfhood an 'actual entity'. He used the term to describe the way seemingly discreet people and things are in fact in states of constant interaction and change. Whitehead explains, 'An actual entity is a process, and is not describable in terms of the morphology of a stuff'.[4] This idea of dynamic process – of a gathering of different, relationally evolving agents – is important because whether it takes the form of social (human-human) or material (human-environment) relationality, it entails a way of thinking about non-individual selfhood that is distinct from the more rigidly object-oriented materialism that emerged in Renaissance studies in the 1990s. Work by scholars such as Patricia Fumerton, Margreta de Grazia, Ann Rosalind Jones, and Peter Stallybrass, as well as slightly later studies by Natasha Korda and Julian Yates, critiqued the Burckhardtian commitment to interiority and emergent individualism that characterized the field. Instead, they argued that selfhood inheres entirely in things, 'in bric-a-brac worlds of decorations, gifts, foodstuffs, small entertainments, and other particles of cultural wealth and show', to borrow Fumerton's words.[5] For these object-oriented materialists, selfhood is, contra Whitehead, precisely 'describable in terms of the morphology of a stuff'. I think that Shakespeare shows us a different way out of individualism, one that includes objects but which ultimately embraces a much broader and more eclectic world of relational life.

In this, Shakespeare's writing shares something with the rich body of materialist philosophy that has in various ways tried to describe the embedded and transactional aspects of human being. The political theorist Jane Bennett, for example, has argued that acknowledging 'interconnectedness' is necessary if we want to change public policy on issues like the environment, farming, and stem-cell research. The goal, according to her, is to recognize 'a political ecology of things' existing on a horizontal, rather than a vertical and hierarchical, plane.[6] Bennett's project, as she points out, draws on an established philosophical history of vibrant matter that includes the writings of Spinoza, Nietzsche, Thoreau, Darwin, Adorno, Bergson, Whitehead, and Deleuze. However, in thinking about the way vibrant matter forms an *ecology* of association and exchange, she is responding even more specifically to John Dewey, who was interested in the 'dependence of the self for wholeness upon its surrounding', and Bruno Latour, who pushed Dewey's ideas in a more assuredly materialist direction.[7] Bennett's notion of 'political ecologies' might even be seen as a synthesis of Dewey's idea of 'conjoint action' – the distributive, cooperative agency necessary to generate a public sphere – and Latour's rejection of the exclusive

categories of 'nature' and 'culture' in favour of the 'collective'. As Latour explains in *Pandora's Hope*, 'Humans, for millions of years, have extended their social relations to other actants with which, with whom, they have swapped many properties, and with which, with whom, they form collectives'.[8] These collectives, or ecologies, are not simply the contexts in which a person exists. They need to be understood as a model for existence as such. 'Who can say', asks Henri Bergson in *Creative Evolution*, another important contribution to this strand of thought,

> where individuality begins and ends, whether the living being is one or many, whether it is the cells which associate themselves into the organism or the organism which disassociates itself into cells? In vain we force the living into this or that one of our molds. All the molds crack. They are too narrow, above all too rigid, for what we try to put into them.[9]

Where does individuality begin and where does it end? Is the living being one or many? These are questions that Shakespeare poses, too, and he does so through the uniquely speculative languages of theatre and poetry. Bottom's hybridity and Caliban's creatureliness ask us to reflect on the physical limits of the human; Othello's handkerchief and Macbeth's dagger stage the materiality of thinking. Selfhood for Shakespeare is an open, inclusive, and heterogeneous system, one marked by a variety of exchanges between body and environment, human and non-human.

Of course, the philosophical context I have been sketching out so far consists entirely of modern philosophers. What about the intellectual culture of Shakespeare's own time? Depending on the perspective you take, Shakespearean selfhood can be seen as either moving with or working against the intellectual currents of the Renaissance. This is because there was no single, uniformly accepted way of understanding the self in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Sweeping histories of selfhood from antiquity to modernity by scholars like Charles Taylor, Timothy J. Reiss, and Jerrold Seigel offer linear narratives that trace how one version of selfhood gradually evolved, or was cataclysmically transformed, into another, with the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods generally identified as key rupture points when communal forms of identity gave way to increasingly rational, interiorized, and individual ideas of selfhood.[10] But this is only partially accurate. On one hand, the notion that people possessed unique inner lives was widely available in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as studies by Katharine Eisaman Maus and Elizabeth Hanson have shown.[11] René Descartes provides the exemplary philosophical expression of this idea. In part 4 of *Discourse on the Method* (1637), Descartes famously writes, '*I think, therefore I am*', describing 'this truth' as 'the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking'. He continues:

> Then, examining with attention what I was, and seeing that I could pretend I had no body and that there was no world nor any place where I was, I could not pretend, on that account, that I did not exist at all, and that, on the contrary, from the fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed very evidently and very certainly that I existed; whereas, on the other hand, had I simply stopped thinking, even if all the rest of what I had imagined had been true, I would have had no reason to believe that I had existed. From this I knew that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which is simply to think, and which, in order to exist, has no need of any place nor depends on material things. Thus this 'I', that is to say, the soul through which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body and is even easier to know than the body, and even if there were no body at all, it would not cease to be all that it is.[12]

This is the opposite of distributed selfhood. For Descartes, the self 'has no need of any place nor depends on material things'. Dislocated and disembodied, this is an 'I' that exists in entirely self-referential terms. A vast and unbridgeable epistemological chasm yawns between the Cartesian 'I' and the ultimately unknowable outer world of people and things. Milton's Lucifer said memorably, 'The mind is its own place' (1.254).[13] For Descartes, the self is its own place.

Perhaps because of the power and precision of his theory, Descartes is routinely either blamed for or credited with the next three to four hundred years of individualism and scientific scepticism. Yet for all its influence, Descartes's philosophy can hardly be taken as emblematic of Renaissance notions of the self. Richard Strier has even argued that the hermetic model of selfhood, based entirely on inner life and available in other forms in writings by Augustine, Martin Luther, and Montaigne, was exceptional rather than dominant.[14] It was at any rate only part of the total picture. Humoral theory, for example, described both physical and mental experience as dictated by the balance of four substances, or 'humors', common to all people. These are black bile, linked to the qualities of dry and cold and prominent in those with a melancholic temperament; phlegm, linked to the qualities of wet and cold and prominent in those with a phlegmatic temperament; blood, linked to the qualities of hot and

wet and prominent in those with a sanguine temperament; and yellow bile, linked to the qualities of dry and hot and prominent in those with a choleric temperament. Keeping the humors in balance depended on how one managed six external factors known as the 'non-naturals': air, food and drink, exertion and rest, sleeping and waking, retentions and evacuations, and emotions (or 'passions').[15] Humoral theory was systematized by the Roman physician Galen and became deeply entrenched in both high and vernacular intellectual cultures in Renaissance Europe. One study estimates that between 1500 and 1700 there were approximately 590 different editions of the works of Galen published.[16] In stark contrast to Descartes, humoral theory is remarkable for the way it relates the body to the mind, and both to the environment. The inner world of emotions and thought, what we would call psychological states, are understood in material terms, as substances or fluids, in humoral theory.[17] And the dependence of those humors on external elements like food and drink, and activities like eating, excreting, and sweating, which cross the boundary between inner and outer, knit the self into a physical scene that extends beyond the threshold of the body and certainly beyond the threshold of the mind.[18] This is a form of selfhood that *does* 'have need of … place' and certainly 'depends on material things'.

Humoral theory was just one of the languages available for thinking about selfhood in non-proprietary terms. The Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza, for instance, argued vigorously that the world, its inhabitants, and even the thoughts generated by those inhabitants were formed of a single substance. This idea is the foundation of his seminal work, *The Ethics* (1677), and he devotes the first fifteen propositions of part I to proving it. Spinoza positioned himself against Descartes and the medieval-Platonic tradition from which Descartes's dualism derived. The notion that one could separate the body from the mind, one person from another, humans from animals, and anything from the larger natural environment was, as far as Spinoza was concerned, a metaphysical illusion. Thoughts, bodies, people, animals, plants, and rocks were, according to him, merely different *modes* of the same infinitely variable substance. He writes, 'We are a part of Nature which cannot be conceived independently of other parts'. This means, in the first place, that we are not autonomous. Instead, our actions, thoughts, and emotions need to be understood as the result of a collaborative form of agency that involves multiple minds, multiple bodies, and the whole of the material environment. 'The force whereby a man persists in existing', Spinoza writes, 'is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes'.[19] Selfhood in this account is a finite mode of a larger vital ecology.

Spinoza formulated this argument at a level of detail and with a degree of moral rigour that made *The Ethics* unique. But his basic ideas about the relationship between individual selves and the larger material world were not entirely new. Diverse examples of distributed selfhood could be found in Renaissance literature, for example. A poem like Henry Vaughan's 'The Morning Watch', which opens, 'O joys! Infinite sweetness! with what flowers, / And shoots of glory, my soul breaks, and / buds' (1–3), articulates a vitalism that is at once violent and exhilarating. The poet-speaker's soul, that immaterial entity 'through which', in Descartes's *Discourse*, 'I am what I am', is here shot through with roots and flowers and gloriously disfigured by buds. There is no hierarchy of substance in these lines and no privileged inner world; everything is democratically enmeshed in what Vaughan describes later in the poem as 'the quick world' (10).[20] Another alternative to hermetic selfhood is found in the conventional Renaissance trope of two bodies – typically the bodies of two lovers – sharing one soul. I quote here from John Donne's 'The Ecstasy':

> But as these several souls contain
> Mixture of things, they know not what,
> Love, these mixed souls doth mix again,
> And makes both one, each this and that.

(33–6)[21]

These lines are interesting because they describe how love makes the souls of the man and woman 'one' while also presenting the more challenging idea that each soul remains itself at the same time as it becomes something entirely distinct from itself (i.e. another soul): 'Each' is 'this *and* that'. There is a kind of monism at work here, but one that preserves, even highlights, the paradox of being both one thing and another thing. This is a kind of playfulness that programmatic philosophy like Spinoza's *Ethics* cannot afford to indulge in, but which poetry certainly can. The verb Donne coins slightly later in the poem, 'interanimates', indicates more precisely the way the lovers' merged souls are to be imagined as forming a co-dependent life-world rather than simply a single substance.[22]

The trope of the merged souls, or merged selves, is one that Shakespeare is particularly fond of. In *The Comedy of Errors*, for example, Adriana says to Antipholus of Syracuse,

O, how comes it,
That thou art then estranged from thyself?
Thyself I call it, being strange to me,
That, undividable incorporate,
Am better than thy dear self's better part.
Ah, do not tear away thyself from me;
For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall
A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
And take unmingled thence that drop again,
Without addition or diminishing,
As take from me thyself and not me too.

(2.2.119–29)

The idea that one can be estranged from oneself might sound rather mundane to us, living as we do in a culture where people regularly profess not to be themselves, or insist on the need to pull themselves together or spend more time with themselves. Yet common as they may be, these expressions correlate to a way of thinking about selfhood that is scattered, mobile, and permeable.[23] So too does Adriana's concern about self-estrangement – the idea of somehow *being* apart from one's *self* – and her subsequent image of her metaphysical relationship to Antipholus of Syracuse as being like a drop of water in a 'breaking gulf'. This is a distributed and pointedly non-individual version of selfhood; 'a kind of self resides with you', as Cressida puts it in *Troilus and Cressida* (3.2.148).

We find other versions of these ideas in Shakespeare's sonnets, where selfhood is frequently built from the outside in, rather than from the inside out. Hannah Arendt describes how the Romans used the terms for *being alive* and *being among men* interchangeably, recalling for us a way of thinking about sentience as collective experience.[24] A similar current of thought runs throughout the sonnets. Consider sonnet 138, which reimagines truth – typically conceived of as absolute, transcendent, and singular – as something *made* collaboratively in the world of action and decision. As long as there is agreement among the parties involved, truth can be assembled from anything – even lies. The opening lines declare:

When my love swears that she is made of truth,
I do believe her though I know she lies,
That she might think me some untutored youth,
Unlearnèd in the world's false subtleties.

(1–4)[25]

Truth (the woman is faithful, the man is young) is not keyed to what the individual knows, but instead to what the social unit actively chooses to believe. Collective participation is the substance of truth and its necessary condition. Is there a cynical streak in Shakespeare's presentation of this idea? Perhaps. But there's also optimism, even delight, in the notion that truth can be a matter of social contract. Sonnet 138 invites us, briefly, into a scene where the content of each individual's claims – the question of whether they are correct or not – is less important than the conditions of mutual recognition under which those claims are made. Truth, the sonnet proposes, is not a thing in itself; it's an effect of shared discourse and common acknowledgment, a matter of form not of substance.

Other thematizations of sociality can be found in sonnets 1–17, the 'procreation group'. This sequence advances multiple versions of the same basic argument: the young man is too beautiful not to have children; if he does not produce 'another self' (10.13) to preserve his beauty, he is committing a crime against 'the world' (1.13). The key to this argument is the belief that beauty belongs not to the individual fortunate enough to possess it, but rather to the larger public world that desires to experience it. Beauty is 'the world's due' (1.14), a common resource loaned by Nature to particular men and women who then bear the responsibility of distributing and maintaining it: 'Nature's bequest gives nothing, but doth lend, / And being frank she lends to those are free' (4.3–4). The young man's failure to live up to his social responsibility is castigated in a variety of ways. He is presented as 'glutton[ous]' (1.13), 'Unthrifty' (4.1), and 'self-willed' (6.13). Even more sensationally, he is described as 'possessed with murd'rous hate' (10.5). The speaker of sonnet 9 avers: 'No love toward others in that bosom sits / That on himself such murd'rous shame commits' (13–14). Murder is the most profoundly anti-social behaviour. The logic of its inclusion in these sonnets has to do with two assumptions the procreation group

makes about selfhood: first, that a self is not reducible to a single person, but is constituted instead by an inter-generational network of family members who share the same core attributes. Second, and in a very similar spirit, that you do not belong to you. You belong to the commons, to society. So, when a beautiful person fails to have children, they not only fail to complete themselves, they also deprive society of what is rightfully theirs. It's a form of self-murder and an affront to the community. Sonnet 13 addresses these matters explicitly:

> O that you were yourself; but, love, you are
> No longer yours than you yourself here live.
> Against this coming end you should prepare,
> And your sweet semblance to some other give.
> So should that beauty which you hold in lease
> Find no determination; then you were
> Yourself again after your self's decease

(1–7)

The argument here is not simply: you will die someday, so have a child and triumph over death. The idea, more precisely, is that living in a singular sense – living exclusively as and for the self – is not really living at all. Life becomes meaningful, and ethical, when conceived of in terms of others. This can be 'the world', whose demand for recognition is heard so often in the procreation group, or it can be the inter-generational community of parents and progeny. 'You had a father', sonnet 13 concludes, 'let your son say so' (14).

I want to offer one final example of distributed selfhood in Shakespeare, and in doing so return to the theatre. In *Macbeth*, towards the end of Act 2.1, we find the title-character alone on stage. His servant has gone to bed; so has Banquo. Left by himself to ponder for a moment the crime he is about to commit, Macbeth stares intently into empty space and says the following:

> Is this a dagger which I see before me,
> The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch
>   thee:
> I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
> Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
> To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
> A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
> Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
> I see thee yet, in form as palpable
> As this which now I draw.

(2.1.33–41)

There has been a tendency in criticism devoted to *Macbeth* to view this speech as a moment during which some form of interiority is disclosed: 'the growth of evil in the mind', 'the divided soul', or 'the functioning of conscience', to give a few examples.[26] But this is only part of the picture. If we focus too narrowly on the idea of interiority we risk obviating what, in my view, makes the speech unique and intellectually potent: its complex marshalling of mind and matter. Rather than simply staging interiority, the dagger scene treats the process of becoming criminal in a way that makes physical sensation integral to mental conception. The initial question that Macbeth poses – 'Is this a dagger which I see before me, / The handle toward my hand?' – has to do not only with *what* at that moment Macbeth knows, but also, as we quickly discover, with *how* he knows it: through vision ('see') and through touch ('Come, let me clutch thee'). These lines describe knowledge and thought as part of a larger sensual experience that extends beyond the mental or spiritual into a real, material world of things and actions. This is not to say that Macbeth does not *think* himself into the criminal event, but rather that the thinking he does he does at least in part with his body. Knowledge requires a physical extension outward, which means the kernel of thought is not mental activity *per se* but the objects and environments that generate that mental activity when perceived by the senses. Thinking exceeds the boundaries of the purely physical or purely mental since it entails an act of quasi-physical mental acquisition, one which in this soliloquy is literalized when Macbeth reaches out for the mental dagger, eventually replacing it with his own real dagger.

What we see in the dagger scene, then, is not so much criminal *intent* as it is something we might call criminal *intentionality*. Criminal intent – the premeditation of a murder, for example – refers to something mental. And

though it also presupposes a will towards an action in the objective world outside, it still designates the mental inception of that act as chronologically prior to its materialized performance and, to that extent, as separate from it. As Jonathan Gil Harris reminds us, chronological thinking is 'a practice [that] works to separate time into a linear series of units … each of which is partitioned from what precedes and follows it'.[27] Intentionality, on the other hand, is a phenomenological concept that models mind-body relations in a rather different way. In Edmund Husserl's formulation, the doctrine of intentionality states that every act of consciousness, every thought, is directed towards an object of some sort. That is to say, consciousness is always consciousness *of* something: the thought and the thing are never readily separable.[28] Indeed, the *thing* – what Husserl would call an 'intentional object', or *noema*[29] – creates the thought, creates the very conditions of sentience; not the other way around. In Macbeth's soliloquy, the dagger takes on the role of the intentional object. It catalyses Macbeth's consciousness of his own criminality and at the same time teeters playfully on the frontier between idea and object. Treason is not anchored to a founding moment of *cogito* in this scene. Instead, it should be viewed as evolving out of something Tim Bayne calls 'agentive experience', a distributed and dynamic process involving both thinking and feeling, imagination and action.[30]

So far, this essay has devoted itself to *describing* Shakepearean selfhood, both its conceptual structure and its historical coordinates. The question that might remain for some readers is why such an undertaking matters. Does an understanding of the self in Shakespeare's plays and poems get us any closer to a broader sense of why those works matter? I think it does, and I'll explain why by returning to the speech with which I opened. At the end of that brief discussion, I noted that audiences experiencing Shylock's words know unmistakably that they're supposed to care. Why is that? Why do we tend to feel that a recognition of Shylock on the terms he's established matter? The reason, I think, is quite simple and it forms the basis of what I have described elsewhere as Shakespeare's 'ethics of exteriority'. It matters because acts of collective recognition are socially affirming; they ground us in an environment of shared experience and common imagination and establish, therefore, the only possible conditions for responsible world-making.[31]

Shakespeare's ethics of exteriority accrue from scenes of collective thought, interpersonal experience, and material embeddedness of the sort discussed in this essay. They come most fully into view when we start posing fundamental questions about distributed selfhood: what does it mean to imagine alternatives to interiority? What are the implications of looking outward instead of inward? Modern philosophers have offered their own answers to these questions. For Emmanuel Levinas, for example, exteriority is a force that pushes back against humanity's deeply entrenched egotism. Disasters like the Holocaust, he argued, were always, at their root, the result of a simple yet catastrophic failure to recognize the other. Exteriority becomes a crucial concept for him precisely because it describes a way of living that is keyed to the ethical demand of the not-you.[32] Charles Taylor makes a similar point when he asserts that 'a self only exists in … "webs of interlocution"'.[33] He writes:

> I define who I am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation within which my most important defining relations are lived out.[34]

Building on Charles Taylor's arguments, Paul Ricoeur points out that a disregard for these 'webs of interlocution' has led to the deeply entrenched, liberal legal fiction of a 'subject of law, constituted prior to any societal bond'. To recognize the role of otherness in the formation of selfhood, he explains, is to strike at the root of this fiction and to create the conditions whereby individuals 'participate in the burdens related to perfecting the social bond'.[35] Hannah Arendt addressed the idea of exteriority, too, though she used a different term: 'conditional existence'. In *The Human Condition*, she writes:

> Whatever touches or enters into a sustained relationship with human life immediately assumes the character of a condition of human existence. This is why men, no matter what they do, are always conditioned beings. Whatever enters the human world of its own accord or is drawn into it by human effort becomes part of the human condition. The impact of the world's reality upon human existence is felt and received as a conditioning force. The objectivity of the world – its object- or thing-character – and the human condition supplement each other; because human existence is conditional existence, it would be impossible without things, and things would be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence.[36]

Arendt's notion of conditionality comes close to the idea of exteriority. Both terms denote a way of understanding human existence as a product of the social and material *world out there*, in all of its plurality. In

Arendt's view, this insight has important implications for how we understand politics. In order for political action to be human, which is to say *humane*, it must first be conceived as something contingent upon the needs of other stakeholders. Like Levinas, Arendt felt that the alternative, an egotistical view of politics centred on individual *making*, led eventually to totalitarian disasters like Stalinism and Nazism. In *The Human Condition*, therefore, Arendt lays the philosophical groundwork for a political practice based on collaboration, acknowledgement, and responsibility. Shakespeare's ethics of exteriority lack, as they should, the programmatic specificity of philosophical argument, but the plays and sonnets I've explored in this essay nevertheless diagram a situated, relational, and distributed form of selfhood that Levinas, Taylor, Ricoeur, and Arendt all take as prerequisite to responsible living.

Related topics

See Chapters 1, 4, 5, 29, 30

Notes

1 References to Shakespeare's plays are from Blakemore Evans (1997).
2 This commentary on Shylock's speech is drawn from a larger discussion in my *Shakespeare's Legal Ecologies* (2017).
3 See further, Witmore (2008). Witmore asserts that 'finding our way to a truly Shakespearean metaphysics … should not be an exercise in transcendence, but an attempt to unearth a new and different kind of materialism, one that is grounded in bodies but emphatic in asserting the reality of their dynamic interrelations' (3).
4 Whitehead (1978: 41).
5 Fumerton (1991: 1). See also, de Grazia et al. (1996: 3), Jones and Stallybrass (2000: 14); Korda (2002: 8), Yates (2002: 1).
6 Bennett (2010). For a similar argument, see Latour (2004: 237).
7 Dewey (1927) and (1934), Latour (1999) and (2004).
8 Latour (1999: 198).
9 Bergson (2005: xx). See also Michel Serres (1995) who I think is particularly eloquent on the relationship between the one and the many. He states, 'We've never hit upon truly atomic, ultimate, indivisible terms that were not themselves, once again, composite. Not in the pure sciences and not in the worldly ones. The bottom always falls out of the quest for the elementary. The irreducibly individual recedes like the horizon, as our analysis advances' (3).
10 Taylor (1989), Reiss (2003), Seigel (2005).
11 Maus (1995), Hanson (1998).
12 Descartes (1998: 18–19).
13 Milton (1998).
14 Richard Strier (2011: 207–47). See also Weintraub (1978).
15 Cook (1986: 423).
16 Wear (1995: 253).
17 Schoenfeldt (1999).
18 Paster (2004) and Floyd-Wilson and Sullivan, eds. (2007), as well as Floyd-Wilson (2003), Paster et al. (2004), and Kahn et al. (2006).
19 Spinoza (1992).
20 Vaughan (1995).
21 Donne (1977).
22 See Selleck (2008).
23 See Lakoff and Johnson (1999), especially 267–89. Kuzner (2011) coins the useful term 'open subjects' in reference to similar ideas in seventeenth-century writing that engages with republicanism.
24 Arendt (1998: 7–8).
25 References to the sonnets are from Shakespeare (2002).
26 Wells Slights (1981: 111), Wilks (1990: 130), Stoll (2008: 132–50).

27 Harris (2009: 2).

28 Husserl dealt with these ideas throughout his career, but the foundational texts are his (2000) and (1983).

29 Husserl (1983: 211-–325).

30 Bayne (2008).

31 Curran (2017). See also Kuzner (2016), another study that resists the view of Shakespeare's works as harbingers of liberal subjectivity.

32 See especially, Levinas (1969).

33 Taylor (1989: 36).

34 Taylor (1989: 35).

35 Ricoeur (1992: 181).

36 Arendt (1998: 9).

Further reading

Altman, J.B., 2010. *The Improbability of Othello: Rhetorical Anthropology and Shakespearean Selfhood*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Focusing on Shakespeare's *Othello*, this book explores the rhetorical underpinnings of theatrical selfhood.

Curran, K., 2017. *Shakespeare's Legal Ecologies: Law and Distributed Selfhood*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. This book considers the relationship between law and selfhood in Shakespeare's language and dramaturgy.

Holbrook, P., 2010. *Shakespeare's Individualism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This book gives a detailed account of how Shakespearean drama contributes to modern philosophies of the individual.

Kuzner, J., 2016. *Shakespeare as a Way of Life: Skeptical Practice and the Politics of Weakness*. New York: Fordham University Press. This book presents a Shakespeare who is skeptical of autonomy, revealing instead an ethics of sociality at the centre of his work.

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29

SHAKESPEARE AND THE MIND

Miranda Anderson

The opening to *Henry V*, calls on the audience to supplement the shortcomings of the players and the bare Elizabethan stage with their imaginations: 'Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts … For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings' (Shakespeare (1997): 1.1.23, 1.1.28). The spectators are called on to actively extend their minds into the creation of the world-in-the-play. In the Globe (a name that deliberately evokes theatre, world and mind simultaneously) attention was particularly on language, gestures, action and incidental music; there was no scenery, just a few props and costumes, and the 'shared light' along with the proximity of the actors to the audience, reinforced the intimacy and strength of the feedback loop from stage to audience and audience to stage as they collaboratively brought forth the meaning of a play. This essay, will explore a range of examples from Shakespeare's works, that together help to piece out his notion of the mind, through examining its resonances with recent theories.

What is the mind? Often nowadays the mind and the brain are presented as identical. Distributed cognition is one term for the idea that cognition is not merely brain-based, but instead is distributed across brain, body and world. Over the last three decades cognitive scientific and philosophical research has emerged, with overlapping and sometimes competing theories emphasising different aspects of the ways in which cognitive processes can be distributed. Embodied cognition emphasises the cognitive roles of bodily perceptions, reflexes and responses. Enactivism emphasises the continuity of mind and life, defining cognition as 'sense-making', with organisms striving to maintain integrity while making use of environmental affordances. Embedded cognition makes the weak claim that external resources enable cognition, while the Extended Mind hypothesis argues that such resources themselves constitute cognition and

emphasises the potential parity of non-biological and biological resources. In general, distributed cognitive theories expansively include as mental a wide array of processes, including: rational and abstract thought, imagination, emotions, and certain kinds of somatic, social, technological or environmental processes. Distributed or 4E cognition (embodied, enacted, embedded, extended) provides new perspectives from which to explore the history of notions of the mind and to reconsider the nature of our experiences of literary works.

Shakespeare's depiction of the mind can occasionally seem to suggest that it is identical to the brain. For instance, in *The Tempest* Prospero complains 'My old brain is troubled', and then continues 'A turn or two I'll walk / To still my beating mind' (4.1.159). Yet, even here where a tautology is suggested between mind and brain a physiological response is proffered: putting the body in motion will still the brain. Meanwhile the verb 'beating' simultaneously evokes physiological beliefs that the brain beats like a heart, the waves and winds of the opening tempest, and the language's rhythm, in a way that suggests the intermingled nature of the physical, environmental and linguistic elements. This may seem just poetic license, however, alongside recent research on the mind, this essay will look at further examples that reveal that Shakespeare's works often show cognition to be distributed across brain, body and world. Moreover, distributed cognition is of significance not only to grasping Shakespeare's notions of the constraints and capacities of human minds, but also to more fully understanding what is going on when we become immersed in one of his works, as he himself makes evident in that opening quote. In turn, Shakespeare's works contribute to the evidence that distributed cognition is an abiding epistemological and ontological paradigm, which is historically situated and culturally inflected in relation to the broader cognitive niche in which it is expressed.

As described above, one way in which cognition is argued to be distributed is through its being embodied. In 1980, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* made the claim that even everyday language is metaphorical and grounded in physical experience. For instance, that the description of a person as 'warm' is positive relates to our physiological preference for this temperature range. Our evolutionary and developmental characteristics inform our conceptual schema. Initially cognitive linguistic theories tended to be overly universalising and

homogenising, in such a way that they clashed with the relativistic extremism of postmodernism. But more attention is now being given to the differences that may arise from physical, linguistic and sociocultural variations. For example, Daniel Casasanto's (2009) research reveals that right-handed people unknowingly tend to draw animals given a positive valence, such as kittens, on the right side of a page, and those which have a negative valence, such as spiders on the left, and vice versa for left-handers: valence attribution reflects physiological characteristics and are projected onto the surrounding spatial domain. But put an oven glove on the right hand of the right-hander, temporarily making their left hand dominate, and their moral preference swiftly switches to the left. Thus, the specific body we are in influences our attribution of positive or negative valence, with such attributions highly susceptible to ongoing bodily changes. Such experiments in the fields of cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics are fleshing out the ways in which even seemingly abstract concepts, such as the attribution of value and moral nature, are influenced by a complex combination of both general and specific physical, linguistic and sociocultural factors.

In literary studies from around the 1990s, first wave cognitive literary scholars began adopting early cognitive linguistics models, along with evolutionary psychological models, which similarly define human nature in terms of universal characteristics. Although such methods remained peripheral there are various examples to be found in Shakespeare studies (see Carroll (2010) for an overview). These clashed with the widespread postmodern and social constructivist trends in literary and cultural studies (notably, in new historicism, cultural materialism, feminism, queer and globalisation studies) that present physical bodies and the material world as merely sociocultural constructs. Second wave cognitive literary approaches are a more diverse field, offering a wider range of empirical and theoretical approaches, with many implicitly or explicitly adopting some form of distributed cognitive approach. Distributed cognition allows for both continuity and difference across persons and periods: there are general human cognitive constraints and capacities that are shared across persons, but there are also considerable differences that result from our physiological variations and our diverse natural and sociocultural niches. Distributed cognition suggests a perspective, that can incorporate the insights, while yet interrogating the extremes of the oppositional

paradigms of universalism or relativism, through taking account of bodily, environmental, sociocultural and technological resources *as together* constraining and enabling human cognitive capacities.

Just as the body effects language, language effects the body in constitutive ways. If we take the mirror neuron system, for example, it is activated not only when we observe the action of another, or when we observe basic emotions, such as fear, but also when we just hear or read kinesic language, so that we mentally simulate that which is enacted or described (Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia (2008)); Bolens (2008/2012)). Bodies are caught up in words. Shakespeare embeds directions to the actors in the text, since there is not a substantial framework of stage directions (Stern (2009)), which further provides hearers or readers with richly detailed mental imagery that can trigger sensorimotor simulations. For example, at the climax of Henry V's famous battle cry to his soldiers he describes: 'I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips, / Straining upon the start' (3.1). Harry describes *and* models an ideal pre-battle stance for his soldiers, provides instructions for the players, and mental imagery for the audience to supplement what they see on stage, or the reader what they read on the page. The rich language of literary texts itself often has us straining after its meaning, as it sends up an array of associations, with this striving itself laying down new cognitive pathways and connections. Philip Davis (2007) has carried out neuroscientific experiments on functional shift which are plentiful in Renaissance literary works and especially so in Shakespeare, for example, with nouns turned verbs as in '[He] godded me' (*Coriolanus* 5.3.11). These experiments show that innovative language extends processing duration. Of additional note is that such word-class shifts often choose a substitute which adds to the sensory and kinesic qualities of the depiction, as in 'a hand that kings / Have lipped' (*Antony and Cleopatra* 2.5.28–9), which evokes a sensorimotor image and a visceral sound of the pucker and smack of kiss on hand. In these cases, literary language leads to lengthier timescales in terms of inferential procedures and duration of effects, as readers or spectators update their hypotheses of the words' associative range with an invigorated, deepened and widened conceptual grasp.

Notably though, the intensity of the simulation is dependent on our own prior cognitive repertoire (Calvo-Merino et al. (2005)). Experiences in a theatre or of a book, like our subjective experiences of the world, are made

up of a rich mix of sharing and differences (Anderson (2015b)). The audience's and troupe's collective dynamic emerges from the amalgam of the specific characteristics of each spectator and actor, along with the play script, the on-stage and theatre setting and the wider historical and cultural environment: all these kinds of phenomena interactively operate and bring forth the meaning of a play, a book, the world. The limits on our cognitive fusions with others' perspectives, need not be seen as negative but is a valuable capacity, which enables the persistence of diversity of perspectives that enriches the human species and our collective cognitive capacity.

As well as being grounded in his physiological experience, Shakespeare's understanding of the mind was inflected by the cultural belief system of his time. The mind was understood to be embodied and extended into the world on account of the soul, which was thought to be diffused throughout the body as God was throughout creation. Unlike some post-Cartesian versions it had not been reduced to just the human rational soul, but encompassed the sensitive soul that was associated with the passions and instincts and was shared with animals, and the basic life force and drives of the vegetative soul that was shared with animals and plants. As with current enactivist theories, there is belief in a continuity between life and mind, with the more complex kinds of minds emerging in the more complex kind of life forms: 'life and mind share a set of basic organisational principles, and the organisational properties distinctive of mind are an enriched version of those fundamental to life' (Thompson (2010: 128)). In the Renaissance, the spirits, engendered of air and blood, were on a continuum with the most airy, animal spirits resident in the brain, with the brain thought to be pliable, impressionable and leaky like a sieve, while the vital were based in the heart and the natural in the liver. The spirits transported the faculties of the soul around the body, but could also flow with the air in and out from one porous body to another, so infecting other people with one's states and emotions; royal physician, Helkiah Crooke describes bodies as: 'Transpirable and Transfluxible' (1615: 175). The cognitive faculties were understood to operate in relation to their embodiment and through dynamic interactions with their environment (Anderson (2015a), Floyd-Wilson & Sullivan (2007), Paster et al. (2004)). As with current enactivists, who have adopted J.J. Gibson's term 'affordances' to describe the interactions that an environment offers

(or affords) an animal, there was belief in 'the complementarity of the animal and the environment' (1979/1986:127).

Another important theory that attempted to grasp, and encouraged belief in, distributed cognition was humoral embodiment. Dating back to ancient Greece and prevalent in the Renaissance, the belief was that the four humours defined a person's physical and mental disposition, and were composed of the same four properties as the four elements of which the world was composed, with one's humoral balance constantly altered through engagement in the world. Jaques in *As You Like It* describes his own particular case of the fashionable humour melancholy:

> it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of my travels, which, by often rumination, wraps me in a most humorous sadness.

(4.1.10–18)

Jaques claims for himself a melancholy distinctively composed from the combination of his embodiment, environment and prior experiences, which then in turn fashions his current phenomenological experience, mediating his self-knowledge and his knowledge of the world in a two-way feedback loop. Again, this resonates with enactivist notions that our bodies and the ways in which they can interact with the environment, produce the ways in which we perceive significance in the world. Our cognitive pathways, formed over our developmental and evolutionary histories, ignite experiences and our perception of objects, giving them salience. Together these properties (the humours, spirits, and faculties of the soul) were the mechanisms that Renaissance thinkers conceived as explaining humans' connection to all levels of created life and as the reason they were poised and needed to dynamically engage with the world.

While enactivists argue that emotions are part of the cognitive processes through which we enact the world and bring its meaning into being (see in particular Colombetti (2014)), in a more constrained way the role of the emotions and the body in cognitive processes has been argued for by neuroscientist Antonio Damasio and his colleagues. The 'somatic marker hypothesis' is Damasio's term for the link between the ventromedial prefrontal cortex and body states, through which emotional memories of sensed body states resurface to guide later actions. The

markers link 'the facts that compose a given situation, and the emotion previously paired with it in an individual's contingent experience'. The somatic markers may arise in the body, via a 'body loop', or just in the brain's representation of it, which he calls an '*as if*' body loop ((Damasio et al. 1996: 1413–20), (Damasio 1994/2006: 184)). Whilst Damasio's 'as if' loop emulates body states, a variety of other 'as if' loops emulate body actions, visual imagery, and perception. Rick Grush explains that 'the brain constructs neural circuits that act as predictive models'. These predictive models are then updated via virtual and actual feedback from the body and the environment and this modifies the current action and future predictions (2004: 377). Andy Clark points out that in addition to 'head-bound emulatory strategies', humans frequently employ the world around them (instead of a mental representation), or where this is unavailable, say in the case of designing a new building, employ a drawn plan as a surrogate model (2008: 152–6).

Since then, influential distributed cognitive theorists of all affiliations, have adopted the notion of predictive processing to explain the means whereby distributed cognition operates (Hohwy (2013); Clark (2016); Gallagher & Allen (2018)). Like notions of the soul, with its hierarchy of enmeshed cognitive levels, predictive processing describes a hierarchy of processing levels: prior evolutionary and developmental experiences create top-down hypotheses about the world which are cascaded through the system. As with Jaques, whose priors have been shaped by and then go on to shape much of what he perceives about the nature of the world. Priors are constantly being updated via incoming information, with errors in the hypotheses recalibrating the priors, though they are up or down weighted depending on estimates of their reliability. Yet whether predictive processing models can best explain all forms of mental instrumentality and intentionality requires further investigation.

Literary works also operate as surrogate models, contributing to our creation and revision of more complex and nuanced hypotheses about the world, by supplementing our experience while we remain in the comfortable safety of our armchair or theatre seat (Anderson (2015a)). Literature, in all its multifarious forms, is the most highly developed cognitive affordance developed by humans. Ben Jonson describes the capacity of the poet to cognitively transform the reader or spectator into the form of the work in which he is immersed: 'How he doth reign in

men's affections; how invade, and break in upon them; and makes their mind like the thing he writes' (1996: 398). *Henry V's* appeal to the audience to flesh out the dramatic spectacle does not seem strange to us since though it is not always made explicit, any literary work requires of readers and spectators an intertwining of their minds with the matter before them. Literature overcomes the relative paucity of much mental imagery through providing readers with rich and detailed instructions that help us to form more vivid, concrete and dynamic images (Scarry (1999)). The mind of the reader brings the work forth and the work brings the mind of the reader forth. Literature and art provide surrogates for an aspect or aspects of the world, constituting our experience of the work though drawing on our specific perceptual, motor and mnemonic repertoire, recalibrating them through this engagement in a way that consequently recalibrates our experience of the world. There is remarkable iconicity across visually presented objects and the topography of neural activation in the visual cortex and there are also startling similarities in neural activation between visually presented objects and verbally prompted imagery (Kosslyn et al. (2006), Reddy et al. (2010)). Yet there is a discrepancy between early brain regions activated by perception and mental imagery, except where mental imagery is sufficiently rich and detailed, as in these cases even early regions of activation are triggered as they would be by actual perception (Cui et al. (2007)). The capacity to experience vivid mental imagery itself varies between individuals, with a few people reporting that they experience none, but it is an ability that can be enhanced through teaching methods and is linked to greater narrative comprehension (Denis (1982), Center et al. (1999)).

Notably, people with damage to the hippocampus, which is associated with episodic memory, not only suffer the loss of subjective memories and the capacity to predict future scenarios by reapplying past experiences, but also the capacity to visualise counterfactual scenarios, such as 'imagine that you're standing by a stream in a wood', with the extent of damage to the hippocampus reflected in the paucity of the scene imagined: such scene construction, whether future or fictional, are dependent on autobiographical memories to flesh them out (Mullally et al. (2012a), Mullally et al. (2012b)), Hassabis et al. (2007)). The grounding in prior memories of our capacity to imagine other worlds, both future and literary ones, indicates further means whereby literary works dynamically fuse

with and transform our minds. Prior experiential associations are elicited and extended by the types of consciously-crafted imagery that distinguishes literary texts, through our immersive blending of real and fictional worlds. The use of some of the same cognitive mechanisms to perceive and act in the world and to imagine perceiving and acting in the world, suggests why literary works consciously-crafted, vivid and kinesic imagery provide especially catalytic scaffolding for perceptual flights into and beyond the usual constraints of our own imaginations.

Memory problems are explored in Andy Clark and David Chalmers seminal paper 'The Extended Mind'. Clark and Chalmers suggest the hypothetical comparison of Inga using her biological memory and the memory-impaired Otto using his notebook in order to recall how to find the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art. Clark and Chalmers argue that the role the retrieved information plays guiding beliefs and behaviour has 'sufficient functional similarity' to warrant treating both Inga's biological memory and Otto's notebook as cognitive processes (Clark & Chalmers (1998)). External resources need not be identical with internal ones: while a laptop or mobile device does not store or compute information in the same way as the brain, it can for that very reason be useful in supplementing neural capacities (Clark (1997: 222)). Through differences, as well as similarities, representational, computational and mnemonic resources, can supplement biological ones. The cognitive anthropologist Ed Hutchins in his study of ship navigation, *Cognition in the Wild* (1995), makes a similar case to Clark and Chalmers for cognitive systems as distributed through equipment, that incorporate within them aspects of necessary expertise, and through other social agents, as the navigation team operate collectively as a computational system.

Humans use and need of cognitive supplementation was explained in the Renaissance as arising from fallen humans' flaws and mutability. Montaigne describes that for lack of memory he makes one of paper (2003: 1021), while Francis Bacon advises that: 'Neither the bare hand nor the unaided intellect has much power; the work is done by tools and assistance, and the intellect needs them as much as the hand' (2000: 33). In the 'young man' sequence of Shakespeare's sonnets the benefits and downfalls of a biological versus a literary copy of the young man are weighed against each other from diverse perspectives, with fragmentary solutions overturned or undermined by persistent recalibrations in an

individual sonnet or the elsewhere in the sequence. Describing perception, Alva Noë points out: 'We continuously move about and squint and adjust ourselves to … bring and maintain the world in focus' (2015: 9), while Clark declares that language is akin to learning a new perceptual modality (2001: 144–5). Language equips us with concepts, labels, and representational systems, enabling a soaring upwards from the concrete to the abstract. George Puttenham's *Art of Rhetoric* similarly describes rhetoric as 'spectacles' for the mind (1589: 256): it is a prosthetic device that enhances and supplements the perceptual range of our mind's eye. Similarly, one way in which the sonnets extend our cognitive capacity is by taking us through a fertile spectrum of variously overlapping and competing perspectives.

Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 77' anticipates Clark and Chalmers later hypothetical example of Otto and Inga. The narrator instructs the beloved young man to supplement his biological memory by using a book:

> Look what thy memory cannot contain
> Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find
> Those children nursed, delivered from thy brain,
> To take a new acquaintance of thy mind.
> These offices so oft as thou wilt look
> Shall profit thee and much enrich thy book.

(9–14)

This depiction of the book is linked to the Renaissance notion of the mind as impregnable like a mother's womb. At issue is not only the self-creation, the textual autopoiesis, offered by the book, which develop the young man's conceptions into full-grown children, but its complementary stability, in contrast to the limited and leaky biological memory: 'Look what thy memory cannot contain' (9). The close relationship between being physically and mentally 'pregnant' or 'conceiving' and then producing biological or cognitive offspring is again evident in *Troilus and Cressida*. Ulysses appeals to Nestor: 'I have a young / Conception in my brain; be you my time / To bring it to some shape' (1.3.307–9). The idea of bringing the conception 'to some shape' echoes Renaissance language used to describe the transition of the foetus from matter to form (Gowing

(2003: 121)). It also suggests a notion of social intercourse as operative in producing thoughts.

The capacity of other people to supplement our onboard cognitive capacities, Stephen Kosslyn describes as our 'social prosthetic systems' (SPSs). SPSs are other people whom we 'rely on to extend our reasoning abilities and to help us regulate and constructively employ our emotions'. He explains that another person who becomes your SPS, 'literally lends you part of their brain', so that 'other people's brains come to serve as extensions of your own brain' (Kosslyn (2005), (Kosslyn (2006)). The prevalence of such notions in the Renaissance is evident in Shakespeare's works. In *Henry VI, Part 1*, for example, we find the Duke of Gloucester describing himself as having acted as a prosthetic to the king in his role as Lord Protector: 'Ah! thus King Henry throws away his crutch, / Before his legs be firm to bear his body' (3.1.1470–1). Or more explicitly in *Troilus and Cressida*, where Ulysses argues that self-knowledge and self-worth operate via an extended reflexivity:

> That no man is the lord of anything,
> Though in him there be much consisting,
> Till he communicate his parts to others
> Nor doth he of himself know them for aught
> Till he behold them formed in th'applause
> Where they're extended – who, like an arch reverb'rate
> The voice again; or like a gate of steel
> Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
> His figure and his heat.

(3.3.110–18)

The psychological inability of the self to apprehend its own qualities without a form of socially extended reflexivity is evoked through a depiction of the limits of physical perception, the face and the eyes inability to see themselves other than through the process of reflection. Renaissance beliefs in our cognitive mutability require that inferences be made about the internal as well as the external world. Self-sufficiency is brought into question, but this apparent championing of social prosthetic systems is undermined by the context of manipulation within which this statement is framed: Ulysses is attempting to rouse Achilles to battle. In

Shakespeare neither a first-person nor a third-person perspective is shown as inherently reliable.

Art, Noë argues, reveals the ways in which we are already being organised by structures in the world (2015). With fictional literature, the fact that it is an imagined situation and yet draws on real world cognitive processes means that we can passionately and intellectually engage, without the same danger that real world scenarios can present: with the suicidal Gloucester we experience a leap over a cliff without physical harm. Edgar, the conjuror of the cliff-face which threatens a linguistically created vertigo, in an aside to the audience explains: 'Why I do trifle thus with his despair is done to cure it' (4.5.34). In this way, Shakespeare simultaneously exposes the literary techniques that enable the audience to piece out a bare stage with their thoughts and him to move them to fear and pity, and he indicates his own rationale in creating his tragedy. This Aristotelian cathartic intention significantly marks both the continuity and distinction between real-life and literary experience. The rationale of emotional release and sense-making, more abstracted forms of that which occurs in child play, may be extended to other genres of literature.

Yet how may there be benefit if there is not also the possibility of harm through experiencing literature? In the Renaissance both anti- and pro-theatricalists' claims rest on the ability of drama to morally capture the heart and mind of actors and spectators. Thomas White asserts that 'the cause of plagues is sinne, if you looke to it well: and the cause of sinne are playes: therefore the cause of plagues are playes' (1578: 47). While Thomas Heywood describes how theatre 'hath power to new mold the harts of the spectators and fashion them to the shape of any noble and notable attempt' (1612: sig. B4r). Either way, viewing theatrical spectacles is understood in terms of an activity that like Otto's notebook alters beliefs and guides behaviour. The answer to my question is that while on the one hand literature is a mind tool, and so like any tool may be put to what are perceived as ethical or unethical ends, the means by which it operates remain necessarily beneficial to an extent, because it operates through dynamically recalibrating our cognitive processing, widening our conceptual array and giving us insights into the workings of other minds.

Hamlet's direction to the players of *The Mousetrap*, describes the purpose of the play to be: 'to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and

body of the time his form and pressure' (3.2.14–22). The significant difference in Shakespeare's use of the play-as-mirror-motif is its use here not as an objective prologue as was conventional, but in Hamlet's instructions to the players for the play-within-the-play, which is written in part by the melancholic Hamlet. Hamlet practically applies Renaissance belief that a play provokes the passions, enables the mind to make imaginative leaps, and exposes the viewer to his own nature and moral bearing. On a metadramatic level, what Shakespeare shows is that this happens both despite and because of the subjective nature of its creator and partaker – for the king's conscience is caught if not reformed by the play.

The recurrence of mirror and book motifs to figure the mind partly reflects the fact that these were technologies that had recently undergone transformative improvements, where now a computer or mobile are often used as examples. Shakespeare's general preference for the word glass, both to refer to mirrors and transparent glass, allows for slippage between highlighting reflecting back and penetrating beyond. Mirrors, as Vivian Mizrahi describes, are perceptual media, which enable us to view perspectives that the naked eye cannot, and yet what is seen in the mirror remains linked to our position and movements in relation to the mirror (Mizrahi (2018)). Literature similarly remains linked to our shifting perspective points and yet allows us to view beyond our usual cognitive range, with each work, each author, each genre providing distinct forms of cognitive mediation.

The capacity to be both in the world-in-the play and in the theatre at the same time was also a feature of the Renaissance stage. *Midsummer Night's Dream* particularly revels in metadramatic references: remember the rude mechanicals, the amateur actors in the play, being parodied by professional actors in the world of the performance – the mechanicals, having just gathered together in the forest to rehearse, Quince announces: 'This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn-brake our tiring house' (3.1). So like the audience in *Henry V* his fellows on the stage are asked to simulate a world, with the comedy here being that rather than attempting to piece out the world of the play-within-the-play, as the actors and the audience attempt to constitute the world of *Henry V*, or here as the audience are attempting to constitute the world of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the mechanicals instead expend their cognitive energies in

attempting to imagine themselves as on a stage. The comedy is further added to as while gesturing to the imaginary green plot and hawthorn brake of the world-in-the-play, Quince would instead be gesturing to the real stage and tiring house of the world of the performance, such as that they are supposedly trying to imagine in the play-within-the-play. But rather than seeing these dizzy-making layers as distancing devices, as is often the way these are interpreted, perhaps what is suggested, is the blurred line between performance on the stage and performance in the world. Literature works through a combination of immersion and distancing as in life itself we move between immersion in a task and a more reflective perspective. The situating of an audience in both a *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hamlet* watching a play-within-the-play being watched by an audience on the stage further creates a self-reflective dynamic for the audience whereby they may view and realise that they themselves are playing roles in the real globe. Alva Noë (2015) describes choreography as putting on display the fact that we are organised by dancing and storytelling that we are organised by the general human capacity to tell stories: art he argues operates by similar principles to philosophy. As with philosophy, literature puts on display, and calls into question, the ways in which we are organised by language, stories and other sociocultural, physical and environmental practises.

In *The Predictive Mind*, Jakob Hohwy comments that 'a counterfactual hypothesis induces a prediction error causing us to change our relation to the world' (2013: 198). Counterfactual hypotheses imagine things that are not the case or that that have not happened, for example, in *Henry V* we are asked to imagine that the stage encompasses 'the vasty fields of France' (1.1.12). More generally, literary works invite us to take the perspective of counterfactual hypotheses, so increasing our experiential range via the scaffolding they provide for imaginary play, thereby making our future hypotheses more complex and nuanced, and changing our relation to the fictive and to the real world. Merleau-Ponty describes how 'it is less the case that the sense of a literary work is built from the common meanings of the words than that the literary work contributes to modifying that common meaning' (2012: 185). This revitalising of our mental panorama, which was discussed earlier, highlights literary representations' capacity to elicit a richness and range to the hypotheses whereby we orient ourselves in a literary work and in the world.

In closing, the chapter considers in more detail how a similarly recalibrative dynamic plays out in *Julius Caesar*, using the prop of a bistable figure here to illustrate the shifts that occur in perspective-taking in the play and in its audience. If you look at Figure 29.1, what can you see?
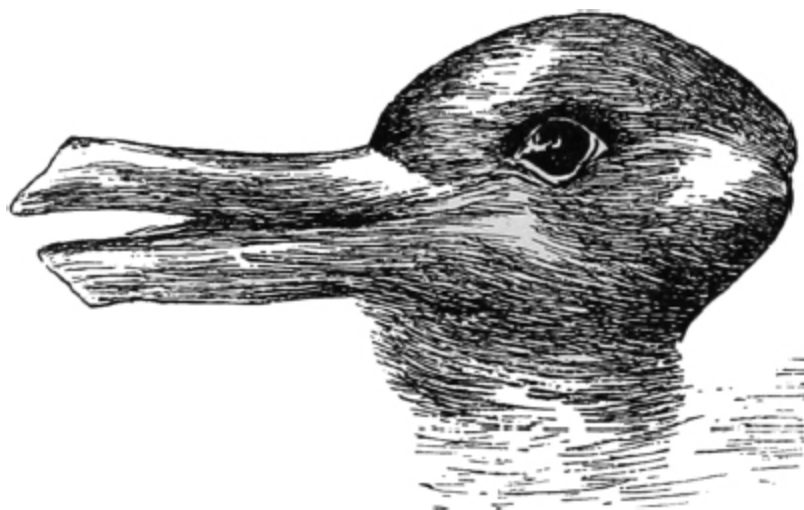
Figure 29.1 A duck–rabbit.

You'll have seen either a duck or a rabbit, more likely a duck, and you can consciously switch what you perceive by fixating on a certain point – so if you fixate on the beak the duck appears whereas if you fixate on the other side the rabbit emerges. What happens if you look at a pair of them, as in Figure 29.2?
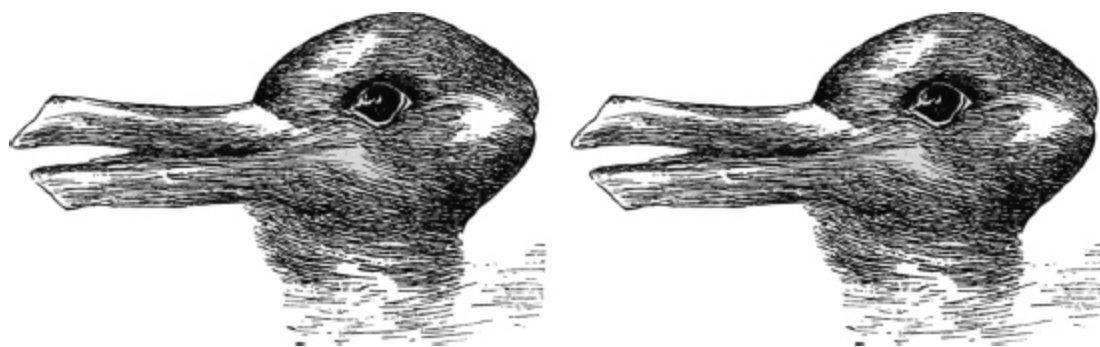
Figure 29.2 A pair of duck–rabbits.

Source: Wikimedia Commons. Jastrow, J. (1899). The mind's eye. *Popular Science Monthly*, **54**, 299–312.

They seem to shift in tandem, you can see either two rabbits or two ducks. Now what happens if you are given a narrative about the situation? 'The hungry duck is about to eat the frightened rabbit'. Some of you should be able to stop the tandem alternation and see both a duck and a rabbit at the same time (Jensen & Mathewson (2011)). Discussion of this experiment by Jensen and Mathewson is taken up by Jacob Hohwy, who pioneered predictive coding models, but from an internalist stance on cognition. He explains that with bistable figures we can see that the narrative alters our top-down models and that these then infiltrate our perception of visual phenomena (Hohwy (2013: 129–31)).

Julius Caesar, the duck–rabbit in this case, is initially presented as gloriously assassinated by the conspirators, as immediately after his on-stage murder they anticipate its later theatrical performance:

> *Cassius*: How many ages hence
>
> Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
>
> In states unborn and accents yet unknown!
>
> *Brutus*: How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport,
>
> That now on Pompey's basis lies along
>
> No worthier than the dust!
>
> *Cassius*: So oft as that shall be,
>
> So often shall the knot of us be called
>
> The men that gave their country liberty.

<div align="right">(3.1.111–18)</div>

The characters shift into an external view of their actions that takes the position of and frames the audience's reaction, as we are seemingly sucked back in time to become witnesses to the aftermath of the original scene, such that their sense of triumph and liberation may infect the audience as it has the faction. Yet this is then juxtaposed with Antony's narrative, which directs attention instead to the bloody nature of the murder from which he predicts the future destructive sequence of events that will ensue:

> O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,
> That I am meek and gentle with these butchers! …
> Over thy wounds now do I prophesy,

(Which, like dumb mouths, do ope their ruby lips,
To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue)
A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;
Domestic fury and fierce civil strife
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy

<div align="right">(3.1.254–64)</div>

The shift in our fixation, through the directed narrative, causes a shift in our perception: the rapacious duck becomes a slaughtered bloody rabbit. Later when presented with the duck/rabbit of Caesar's corpse the gathered citizens of Rome demand, 'We will be satisfied; let us be satisfied'. Yet they are soon placated by Brutus's account of the political need for Caesar's murder:

> Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men? …Who is here so base that would be a bondman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any, speak; for him have I offended.

<div align="right">(3.221–32)</div>

Brutus's spare and restrained rhetoric sets before them a vision of Rome, which appeals to abstract virtues and civic ideals. The citizens easily swayed mob mentality (Anderson (2015b) discusses the play's notions of the mind as socially extended at much more length) accordingly frames their moral perspective of characters and events in Brutus's terms:

All: Live, Brutus! live, live!

First Citizen: Bring him with triumph home unto his house.

Second Citizen: Give him a statue with his ancestors.

Third Citizen: Let him be Caesar.

Fourth Citizen: Caesar's better parts

Shall be crowned in Brutus.

<div align="right">(3.2.48–52)</div>

Indeed, the citizens are so appeased that Brutus has to persuade them to stay and hear Antony's speech, by which they are then gradually roused into a greater uproar than before:

> If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.
> You all do know this mantle: I remember
> The first time ever Caesar put it on;
> 'Twas on a summer's evening, in his tent,
> That day he overcame the Nervii:
> Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through:
> See what a rent the envious Casca made:
> Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabbed…
> For when the noble Caesar saw him stab,
> Ingratitude, more strong than traitor's arms,
> Quite vanquished him: then burst his mighty heart;
> And, in his mantle muffling up his face,
> Even at the base of Pompey's statua,
> Which all the while ran blood, great Caesar fell.
> O, what a fall was there, my countrymen!
> Then I, and you, and all of us fell down,
> Whilst bloody treason flourished over us.

(3.2.167–74, 3.2.182–90)

Antony presents his tale as one that would move any who have a capacity for fellow-feeling. He sows pity and admiration in order to greater enrage, pointedly juxtaposing one of Caesar's martial triumphs with his stabbing by his supposed friends. He further amplifies their empathy, by depicting the fall as not of Caesar alone, but of them all jointly at the conspirators' hands, superimposing physical and figural meanings. This is a further reverberation of the staged assassination and the earlier replay that shifted our perspective. Antony places the crowd at the scene in the same way the audience in the theatre were by Cassius's and Brutus's speech, taking it further, as here the onstage audience, the crowd, become the falling Caesar. Antony supplements the verbal with the visual, first fixing the audience's attention on the once glorious and now bloodied and pierced mantle, as representation of Caesar's public role, and then depicting in detail the stabbing of his body which one imagines from the flood of

action verbs, that he also reenacts: ran though, stabbed, stab, burst; then in a later climax he horrifically reveals the still bleeding body itself. In Antony's narrative, the scene is figured forth though visceral and kinesic language that climaxes with the material bodying forth of the assassinated corpse; as theatre itself figures forth the meaning of the play both through the supplements of language and body. Antony evokes immediacy and bloodiness in a materially mediated way that appeals more forcefully to the motivations of the mob than Brutus's abstract ideal world:

First Citizen:	O piteous spectacle!
Second Citizen:	O noble Caesar!
Third Citizen:	O woeful day!
Fourth Citizen:	O traitors, villains!
First Citizen:	O most bloody sight!
Second Citizen:	We will be revenged.
All:	Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! Slay! Let not a traitor live!

(3.2.196–9)

As previously the offstage audience were swayed from a sense of triumph to pity, the citizens have been swayed from approval as to the necessity of the murder, conversely to pity for Caesar and so to rage at the faction which descends into a single-minded series of single words in an incantatory chant. As discussed earlier, vivid storytelling does not necessarily tend to an end that is good. However, on a metadramatic level, from the viewpoint of the audience or reader, we have been subjected to a moral lesson in human susceptibility. Our perspective is depicted as problematically shifting according to the narrative we are told. We witness a murder/assassination and then a series of reflections on it: initially by the self-justifying doers of the deed and by the outraged Antony, *and* then

later this switch in perspective is replayed again refracted by the reactions of the citizen audience onstage. This invites the theatre audience's critical self-reflexivity regarding their own cognitive susceptibility to narratively produced perceptions: how easily one may be caused to see a duck or a rabbit. Yet that the more powerful narrative is that which makes use of the more kinesic and visceral language, reflects the powerful role that embodiment plays in language and mediates the otherwise top-down role that narrative may seem to play in our immersive experiences.

Shakespeare here makes explicit what literary works more generally do. Literary works are both anchored in and provide a reflective and disruptive counterpoint to immersion in our everyday world by immersing us in themselves, in the same way that we have seen that literary language is anchored in and yet provides a reflective and disruptive counterpoint to everyday language. Literature exploits, exposes and extends the capacity that language has to mediate our perceptions and cognitive range. My intention has been to demonstrate a few of the ways in which scientific and philosophical research on the nature of the mind can illuminate our understanding of what happens when we read or see Shakespeare performed and also to show that notions of the mind as distributed across brain, body and world are also evident in other periods because they reflect an abiding aspect of being human. The reapplication of this research to literary analysis as a means to illuminate how literary distributed cognition operates, is not an invitation for it to dominate literature, since one of literature's values, as I have shown, lies in its capacity to playfully exploit and creatively disrupt through its use of consciously-crafted narratives that imaginatively deploy language anchored in our embodied experiences in the world.

Through writing we can mark features of salience in the world and in ourselves, as through reading, we can shift our perception of salience and of the affordances the world offers. In writing this, I have myself experienced how the mind through being produced on the written page produces the mind which in turn produces the finished piece of writing. And in telling you about these ideas I hope you too may perhaps have a new perspective on Shakespeare and the Mind.

Related topics

Further reading

Anderson, M., 2015. *The Renaissance Extended Mind*. New Directions in Philosophy and Cognitive Science Series. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. This book provides an overview of definitions and debates about the mind as extended across brain, body and world in current cognitive science and philosophy of mind and examines their resonances with notions of the mind in Renaissance cultural, scientific and philosophical works. The closing chapters focus on the ways in which Shakespeare's works illuminate, interrogate and transform contemporary notions of the mind.

Anderson, M., and Wheeler, M., eds. 2018. *Distributed Cognition in Medieval and Renaissance Culture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. This edited collection brings together 15 essays which explore the various ways in which cognition is explicitly or implicitly conceived of as distributed across brain, body and world in Medieval and Renaissance science, medicine, technology, philosophy, religion, art, music literature and drama.

Clark, A., 2008. *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. As with many of Clark's earlier works, this book makes a compelling case for the idea that the mind extends across brain, body and world, by drawing on a wide range of recent research in fields such as neuroscience, psychology, linguistics, artificial intelligence and robotics. In addition, it responds to objections and criticisms, which makes this work more challenging but also more comprehensive than his earlier works.

Gallagher, S., 2005. *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This is a wide-ranging and persuasive work, which draws on a wide range of recent research, particularly from areas such as neuroscience and experimental and developmental psychology. Gallagher explores evidence of the many ways in which the body contributes to cognitive processes and the issue of how one's own body structures phenomenal experience.

Tribble, E.B., 2011. *Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare's Theatre*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. This ground-breaking book demonstrates that methods of distributed cognition were used in Renaissance theatre by the players in order to meet the demands of early modern playing companies.

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30

MACBETH AND THE SELF

Colin McGinn

Macbeth is one of those plays of Shakespeare's that has the name of its central character as the title, as opposed to something more descriptive (such as *When Done 'Tis Done* or *The Murderer and His Wife*). This suggests that the focus will be on a single self – a particular psychological subject – as if the title could be expanded to *The Self of Macbeth* (though of course other selves will come into play). No doubt that self will not be presented as absolutely unique, but as representing something more general about human beings – a psychological type, perhaps. In any case, it is a self that will be scrutinized and revealed, or left hidden (think of *Hamlet*). And possibly Shakespeare will be trying to convey something about the human self as such, as manifest in a single instance. He may even be operating with a distinctive conception of the self, as opposed to rival conceptions, traditional and contemporary. He might have an actual philosophy of the self – as he might have a philosophy of love or government or history or human motivation.[1]

What philosophy of the self might have been familiar to Shakespeare? What ideas of the self might be in the intellectual air he breathed? It seems likely that the Platonic conception, as enshrined in Christian doctrine, might be the view to which he had been exposed. Let me summarize this view in broad brushstrokes, not worrying too much about exactly what Plato held and how Christian theologians (such as St Augustine) interpreted him. Plato maintains that the human psyche has three parts – the logical, spirited, and appetitive.[2] We need not be concerned about the last two, except to note that the logical part of the psyche (the soul, reason) has the function of controlling and regulating the appetites. Plato compares it to a charioteer with the horses as appetites. This part of the psyche – its most valuable and elevated part – is governed

by logic, i.e. rules of correct reasoning. It is what enables us to deliberate, weigh consequences, take everything into account, restrain ourselves from rash acts, and counter weakness of will. It is what we centrally *are*. In addition to this feature of the soul we have a number of other features: the soul is held to be immaterial, transparent to knowledge, unified, identical over time, separate from the body, and imbued with the capacity to *think*. It is the part of us that brings us closest to God (or the gods). It is also supposed to be equipped with a rich supply of innate ideas and the ability to connect us to the world of Forms (though these features will not figure in what follows).

It is this general conception that formed the background to Descartes' view of the soul or mind as a substance without extension whose essence is thought. Thus we have dualism, the *Cogito*, and the idea of the self as indivisible, rational, and transparently known. In the case of Plato the model might be his beloved Forms, those perfect otherworldly beings; in the case of Descartes the model might be the atom, though now rendered immaterial. The mind exists as something apart from action and the body; it works by logical principles; and it is fully present at every moment of its existence. It is a self-enclosed entity that occupies time somewhat as a physical thing occupies time: it exists fully and completely at each moment of its existence. The body does not create the mind and in its essence it owes nothing to physical events in time. The image is that of a well-defined unitary entity whose nature is to think logically: it is a kind of metaphysical abstraction, rarefied and removed. My question is whether such a conception of the self finds any resonance in *Macbeth*, and my suggestion is that the play is an implicit rebuke to the Platonic-Cartesian view. The self of Macbeth is not a transcendent immaterial logical entity but something much more embodied, and much more unruly. In no particular order, then, I will list the respects in which the play implicitly repudiates the traditional picture of the self.

The first point is that action and the awareness of action play a constitutive role in fixing Macbeth's character. The action of killing King Duncan catastrophically alters Macbeth's character and personality. Or better: his awareness of his action causes his character to change dramatically. He goes from being a valiant defender of the king – brave, loyal, and dutiful – to being a cowardly murderer and liar. He becomes a new kind of person in virtue of his wicked acts. The same goes for the

other murders and plots in which he connives. It is not that action springs from a preformed character but that character springs from action. In the beginning was the deed. Character is not the basis of action; it is the upshot of action, created by action. Macbeth is goaded into killing Duncan by his wife, and the witches had already put the idea into his head – only then does he act. It is not that he was all along a treacherous murderer – on the contrary. But once the deed is done (the word 'done' recurs repeatedly in the play) a new character comes into existence. Macbeth chooses his character by choosing his actions: he is what he does. His doing is his being. He first conceives an action (or an action is suggested to him by someone else) and then he carries it out. Both stages involve action, prospective and performative, and both shape his character – though the actions actually performed, as opposed to merely contemplated, have the more decisive effect. Killing Duncan changes Macbeth more than the idea of killing him. It is what *is* done that matters, not what *might* be done.

This perspective has consequences for the nature of the self. Most obviously, the mind or soul cannot be as removed from the material world as the Platonic picture would suggest, since actions *are* material events – events of the material body. So the inner configuration of the mind is being fixed by material events; it does not float magnificently above them. The mind is what it is in *virtue* of happenings in the material world – the world of bodies in space. The charioteer is formed by his horses (if we think of them as actions not appetites); he is not made of other stuff entirely. The charioteer has horse blood in his veins. This is not the aloof Cartesian self. At a deeper level, the self can no longer be conceived as fully present at any given moment of its existence: Macbeth's self is a result of actions that are spread out in time. He is a kind of temporal composite. His self is distributed over time, not present at a time. He is more like an event than a substance, more like a battle than a battleship. Descartes held that the essence of the mind is thought not extension in space, but *Macbeth* is telling us that the self is essentially extended in time. It is the sum of temporally separated actions. If existence precedes essence, as the existentialists maintained, then that existence is a temporal existence, because actions are events in time. Macbeth is a piece of history – a work in progress, a continuing story.

The second point is that Macbeth's mind does not fit the Cartesian notion of a *res cogitans*: to call his mind a 'thinking thing' is way off the

mark. Macbeth is by no means a well-oiled epistemic engine. He can hardly be said to *reason* at all. He is puppet to his passions and impulses, not master of them. One would never say of the Thane of Cawdor that he is a rational man. He is superstitious, easily influenced by others, impulsive, a creature of whim and fantasy. Most conspicuously, he is a slave to his overactive imagination – hence the hallucinated dagger and the fancied ghost of Banquo (Lady Macbeth remarks, 'My Lord is often thus, and hath been from his youth' (3.4), as Macbeth speaks to the ghost). He cannot tell illusion from reality. In him reason is pitted against imagination, and imagination wins every time. Macbeth is not a 'thinking thing' but an 'imagining thing'; and imagination is hooked up to such phenomena as desire, dream, and insanity (he is surely half mad, especially as time goes on). This is not Plato's idealized picture of the controlling charioteer, fully in charge of his horses, logical to his marrow. Macbeth is like a charioteer who has completely lost control of his horses, being dragged hither and thither (Plato's idea of the lost soul or deranged psyche). He doesn't know *what* the hell is going on, as his imagination subjects him to shock and horror. Reason doesn't stand a chance in the Macbeth cranium. A better model would be a drunken charioteer hanging on for dear life. At one point, trying to explain why he killed the king's two bodyguards as they slept, Macbeth remarks: 'Th'expedition of my violent love outran the pauser, reason' (2.3). That could be said of many or most of Macbeth's acts – they outrun the pauser, reason. Reason is what gives us pause, but Macbeth knows nothing of pausing, so he is deaf to reason. Rational deliberation is alien to his nature; heated imagination is natural. He simply acts; he doesn't *think* about his acts. Plato and Descartes might regard him as not properly human because of his lack of rationality – more like an animal perhaps – just as they regard madness as a loss of human essence (i.e. reason). But Shakespeare might reasonably retort that he is all *too* human. Real humans are not much like the idealized self of the ratiocinative philosopher.

The third respect in which Macbeth fails to fit the traditional model of the self lies in his changeability. He has no fixed identity over time; the idea of personal identity gets no purchase on him. He is not the same from day to day, year to year. And not only does he change dramatically; he changes abruptly, literally overnight. I am thinking of that transformative night on which he murders Duncan: the next day he is a totally changed

man, a man who has undergone metamorphosis. He has taken on the role of murderer and it has transformed him into someone else entirely. The contrast could hardly be greater: one day he is the brave defender of his king, the next he is his foul murderer. He is a butterfly that turns into a worm, or a snake. He pivots sharply from one identity to another in the space of a mere twenty-four hours. And he never reverts: he occupies his new identity from that day till the day he dies, only deepening the divergence from what he had once been. There is no fixed individual essence here extending over a lifetime, no persisting kernel of selfhood; there is only fluidity, mutation, and transformation. He is not identical over time but variable over time – nothing like a Cartesian atom or a Platonic form. He becomes unrecognizable.

The Cartesian self is conceived as transparent to itself: its nature is revealed to itself. Thus we know with certainty that we are thinking things, according to Descartes. We are conscious that we are conscious and what we are conscious of. An extreme version of the transparency doctrine would be that nothing about the mind escapes its attention: the mind is an open book. But Macbeth is baffled by himself – notably by his wayward imagination. He doesn't understand what is happening to him. Why is his mind playing tricks on him? How does it play these tricks? The dagger appears, accusingly, and Banquo stalks him after death, afflicting his troubled consciousness. His mind is evidently up to strange things, but the reasons and the mechanisms are unknown to him. His mind refuses to enlighten him about itself. This is not the transparent Cartesian ego laying itself bare to introspection, hiding nothing; it is the mind as mysterious, unruly, and subterranean. It is also the mind as *diseased* – which is itself hard to explain on traditional models (since the mind is the divine part of us and hence incapable of disease). The disease has symptoms in Macbeth's mind, as physical diseases have symptoms in the body, but the underlying cause of the pathology is hidden. Macbeth cannot diagnose himself and so finds his symptoms puzzling (it would be wrong to diagnose him as suffering from schizophrenia or bipolar disorder or any other recognized psychiatric condition – perhaps we can say that he has 'hallucinatory murderer syndrome'). He knows something is terribly wrong with him mentally, but he cannot discern the underlying etiology – except to the extent of knowing that it has to do with murdering innocent people and having a lively imagination. It is interesting that Lady Macbeth

shows similar (but not identical) symptoms in her sleepwalking and hallucinating of bloody spots on her hands; so there is some sort of psychological law that covers both of them, relating to conscience, fear of detection, and disturbances of the imaginative faculty. But beyond that psychiatric knowledge does not extend.

The traditional view is that the self is unified or indivisible (as Descartes says). While it is not clear exactly what this means (is the body unified?) we perhaps have enough of a grasp of the idea to make some observations. R.D. Laing wrote a famous psychiatric text entitled *The Divided Self* (1960) and people have some idea of what he means by that phrase: the normal self is not divided but in abnormal cases the self can become divided. People have a sense of themselves as unified, not at odds with themselves, not split down the middle, but that sense can be disrupted, as in schizophrenia. In the case of Macbeth (and perhaps also his wife) the sense of unity has gone, to be replaced by a sense of self-shattering. This is manifested in his flights of hallucination: these seem to stem from another agency within him, with its own agenda. His conscience has morphed into a full-blown agent, contriving accusatory images to unnerve and unman him. It is acting alone, without his consent. But it is really just another part of him that has become split off by his heinous acts – as if it cannot bear to have anything more to do with the Macbeth he has become. It is the superego as internal avenger. Isn't the ghost of Banquo just a figment of Macbeth's persecuting imagination, a personalized expression of the murderer's conscience? The ghost is an agent occupying Macbeth's fevered consciousness, a symbol of his division. Maybe it indicates that there is as yet something good left in him (toward the end of the play, when his descent into evil is complete, no such imaginary sightings are reported). One reads of prison guards in Nazi concentration camps who go home to their wives and families after a hard day's work and behave like decent human beings: perhaps they too experience a division within themselves, with psychological symptoms to indicate the strain. In any case, Macbeth is a man divided against himself, blown apart psychologically (he is not at all like Iago, whose internal economy is all evil unity). As Macbeth has murdered multiple others, so he has become multiple, haunted by shards of his former self.

The final point I want to make about Macbeth and the self is that Macbeth is not in control of his appetites – he is no strong-willed

charioteer. He obviously cannot control his ambitions, but there is also the question of his relationship with his wife. She clearly has a powerful hold over him and one senses a strong sexual bond between them. Is it too much to speculate that he fears she might withhold sexual attention from him if he declines to accede to her murderous plans? Is he afraid to lose her love and respect? Does he kill Duncan partly from a desire to keep things sweet with his wife? If so, he is letting his appetites dictate to his reason (as well as his moral sense). The horse of desire has the upper hand. Maybe he judges that all things considered he should *not* murder Duncan, but then the urgings of sexual desire (combined with ambition) interfere with that judgement and he goes ahead and does it. His will is weak; he is unable to control his horses. And that is just the way he is made – he has no pauser, reason. His essence is to yield to passion not to tame it. The charioteer has handed the reins to the horses.

In all these ways Macbeth's self distinguishes itself from the self as classically conceived. I am not saying that all this was explicitly running through Shakespeare's head as he composed *Macbeth*; it is more that he is reacting to a conception that would have been in the air – though he might well have actually read classic texts that embody the conception. As a final indication of the presence of such theoretical concerns, let me return to the question of mental illness. A 'Doctor of Physic' who is attending Lady Macbeth says the following:

> Foul whisp'rings are abroad. Unnatural deeds
> Do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds
> To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.
> More needs she the divine than the physician.

(5.1)

The part of this that I want to focus on is the last line: the doctor thinks that Lady Macbeth's mental troubles need not his help but help from a priest or possibly even from God himself. This encapsulates an old debate, alive in Shakespeare's time, between medical approaches to mental illness and religious approaches: is it a matter of diseased brains or diseased souls?[3] A little later Macbeth himself steps into the debate:

> Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,

Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the fraught bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?

(5.3)

Here Macbeth veers from mind to brain to heart, with each as the possible locus of mental disturbance: what exactly is it that is 'troubled'? According to how we answer that question we will call upon the priest or the doctor. It is a question of psychology, philosophy, and theology – a theoretical question. After asking the question, Macbeth gives his own verdict: 'Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it' (5.3). Here he takes a theoretical stand on the subject of mental illness: he has contemplated the human mind, especially in his own case, and has come to a conclusion. He seems to be suggesting that science is not the answer to mental illness, and we can suppose he is speaking from experience. He doesn't think that science has anything much to offer, theoretically or practically; and it must be said that psychiatry today is not all that much further along than it was in Shakespeare's day. Mental illness is still largely a mystery, and treatments are crude and ineffective. Macbeth is uncharacteristically reflective in these remarks and I can't help thinking that Shakespeare is peeking through his character here, acknowledging the theoretical questions that lie behind the action of the play. He seems to be asking: 'What are we to make of the human mind, the human self, the human heart, the human brain?' He doesn't have the answer, but he thinks that ancient wisdom about the self is not the place to find the truth. It is just so much whistling in the dark.[4]

Related topics

See Chapters 5, 21, 28, 29

Notes

1 The subject taken up here is touched upon in my (2006: chapter 5). I thank the editors of the present volume for helpful comments.
2 Plato discusses his tripartite theory of the soul in the *Republic* (Book IV) and the *Phaedrus* (sections 246a to 254a).
3 For an historical treatment of the subject see Makari (2015).
4 *Macbeth* is often staged in dark interiors: this aids the theme of evil, but it is also apt for conveying an epistemological point, namely that when it comes to knowing the mind we are groping in the dark. Shakespeare is alert to mystery.

Further reading

McGinn, C., 2006. *Shakespeare's Philosophy*. New York: HarperCollins. This book discusses a number of Shakespeare's plays from a philosophical perspective, especially in relation to the psychology of the characters.
Makari, G., 2015. *Soul Machine: The Invention of the Modern Mind*. New York: Norton. This book traces conceptions of the mind over history with a focus on psychiatric issues.

References

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Plato, Phaedrus. Translated by B. Jowett. In: B. Jowett, ed. 1892a. *The Dialogues of Plato*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
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31

'HIT IT, HIT IT, HIT IT'

Rigid designation in *Love's Labour's Lost*

Andrew Cutrofello

> To loue, to wealth, to pompe, I pine and die,
> With all these liuing in Philosophie…
> Thou canst not hit it, hit it, hit it,
> Thou canst not hit it my good man.

<div align="right">

(Love's Labour's Lost, First Folio (1623), TLN 35–6, 1114–15)[1]

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Love's Labour's Lost is a play about language. Since it doesn't have a complicated plot that needs to be moved along, it can revel in uses of language that have to do with language use itself. But language use is not just a diversion: it is the play's principal theme. As B.I. Evans observes in *The Language of Shakespeare's Plays*, *Love's Labour's Lost* 'is concerned almost wholly with words' (2005 [1952]: 1). Similarly, Frank Kermode refers to the play's 'witty, teasing investigation of language' (2000: 64), while William Matthews, noting that a thematic concern with language pervades Shakespeare's entire corpus, argues that 'it is in *Love's Labour's Lost* that his linguisticism is perhaps most apparent' (1987: 499). Anne Barton, observing that earlier critics, such as Johnson and Hazlitt, dismissed the play as 'a piece of linguistic self-indulgence', defends its subtle treatment of '[t]he problem of how to create a truly meaningful language of love' (Barton (1974: 174; 177)). For A.D. Nuttall, the play's 'complex intersection of linguistic pattern and social (erotic) life' lays 'the groundwork' for 'a complex philosophy of language' (2007: 99).

As these critical remarks indicate, assessments of *Love's Labour's Lost* have ranged from disdain for the frivolity of its wordplay to the discernment of a sophisticated picture of the nature of language. Though diametrically opposed, both critical tendencies make sense insofar as the play examines various ways in which words can fail to refer. When words fail to refer to their intended objects, or fail to refer to them in the right way, they can have serious, tragic consequences. When they fail to refer altogether, they become potentially comic objects in their own right, allowing us to delight, as the play does, in their sheer silliness. Shakespeare's depiction of varieties of referential failure – and success – makes for a play that is at turns funny, cryptic, sombre, and thought-provoking.

In this chapter I wish to explore one particular thought that it provokes, namely, that lovers who profess love for a unique beloved must demonstrate the 'rigidity' of their love. That is, they must demonstrate that their love is metaphysically grounded not in contingent properties that the beloved would lack in other possible worlds, but rather in an individuating property

that she would uniquely have in every possible world in which she exists or has 'counterparts'. Let us call this 'the rigidity requirement'. Lovers who fail to meet love's rigidity requirement are shown to be susceptible to ridiculousness, infidelity, and forgetfulness, character flaws that the play scrutinizes in a manner at once serious and lighthearted.

1

The term 'rigid designator' was first introduced by the philosopher Saul Kripke (1980 [1972]). For Kripke, a rigid designator is a linguistic item that refers to one and only one actual object in such a way that it has the same referent in any possible world in which that object exists, and which doesn't refer to anything else in those possible worlds in which that object doesn't exist. A singular designator is non-rigid if it refers to just one actual object but fails to uniquely track that object in other possible worlds. If the name 'William Shakespeare' is a rigid designator, then it designates Shakespeare in every possible world in which Shakespeare exists (ignoring complications having to do with the fact that more than one person in the actual world might be assigned the name 'William Shakespeare'). By contrast, 'the author of *Love's Labour's Lost*' singularly refers to Shakespeare but in a non-rigid manner since there are possible worlds in which someone other than Shakespeare wrote *Love's Labour's Lost*.

For Kripke, the paradigmatic act of rigid designation is the bestowal of a name on an individual. In general, names are rigid designators, while descriptive phrases are not. Kripke allows, however, that in some cases a descriptive phrase can 'stick' to an individual in the manner of a name and thus come to function as a rigid designator (we can imagine the name 'Dull' as having such a history in the world of *Love's Labour's Lost*). What determines whether a particular referring expression is or is not rigid is the causal history of its use. That history need not be epistemically available to those who use the expression. Thus we may not be in a position to know whether a particular term already in general circulation is a rigid designator. The status of such a term can even be a matter of dispute, though on Kripke's account the resolution of such a dispute is not, at least in the first instance, dependent on the minds of the disputants.[2] Those who take 'William Shakespeare' to mean 'the author of the plays collected in the First Folio' – but question who exactly that person was – treat this apparent name as a disguised definite description that refers non-rigidly to whoever wrote the plays, but they may be right or wrong about this.

Unlike Kripke, Bertrand Russell held at one point that most of the terms we call names are disguised definite descriptions (1956 [1905]). Only someone directly acquainted with an individual can bestow a genuine name on that individual or use an already bestowed name *as a* name.[3] Although Russell doesn't speak of rigid designators, he can be taken to hold that direct acquaintance with an object is a precondition for being able to use a term as a rigid designator of it. In other cases, the ability to track an individual in counterfactual situations can be met through the use of definite descriptions that are not rigid designators. For example, even if our contemporary use of 'William Shakespeare' refers non-rigidly (but uniquely) to the author of the plays collected in the First Folio, we can still theoretically track *that individual* in worlds in which he didn't write the plays.

Kripke's conception of a rigid designator is designed to fit a particular conception of possible worlds, but the rigidity requirement can be met regardless of whether we take the trackability of an individual across possible worlds to involve 'transworld identity' (the position favoured by Kripke) or 'counterpart relations' (the position favoured by David Lewis (1986)). Roughly

speaking, transworld identity implies that when we consider an actual object's counterfactual possibilities we are tracking *that object* in other so-called 'worlds'. By contrast, counterpart theory holds that what it means to consider an object's counterfactual possibilities is to consult some class of possible worlds in which the object in question has 'counterparts' – not indiscernible duplicates, but objects that have relevantly similar features. Which features count as relevantly similar depends on the explanatory context. For this reason, and since counterpart theory rejects transworld identity, the very concept of rigidity – and thus the concept of a rigidity requirement – might seem to be inapplicable to this framework. But a term could be characterized as *counterpart-rigid* if it refers to a singular object in such a way that it refers to all of that object's (relevant) counterparts in worlds in which it has (relevant) counterparts, and doesn't refer to anything else in worlds in which it doesn't have (relevant) counterparts.[4] The rigidity requirement can be spelled out in an analogous way, as we will see in a minute.

In general, then, to profess to being in love with a unique individual carries with it the burden of proving that one's love for that individual extends to all those worlds in which that individual exists or has counterparts, and doesn't extend to worlds in which that individual doesn't exist or doesn't have counterparts. This counterfactual requirement is related to the familiar temporal requirement that to profess to love someone who is now young and beautiful commits one to loving that person in the future when they will be old and wrinkled. Shakespeare develops this idea in Sonnet 116 ('Let me not to the marriage of true minds'). There we are told that love is 'an ever-fixed mark', and that 'Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds'. These lines describe love's *temporal* rigidity – 'Love's not Time's fool' – but the idea that love 'bears it out even to the edge of doom' suggests that it can be extended to counterfactual contexts. Some counterfactual contexts may be excluded – as at the end of *Twelfth Night* Orsino's love for Viola is apparently restricted to 'worlds' in which Viola is female, and Olivia's love for Cesario is restricted to 'worlds' in which he is male – so the scope of the rigidity requirement may be more or less narrow.[5] At one extreme would be professions of love that claim unrestricted rigidity; at the other those claiming no degree of rigidity whatsoever (perhaps not even temporal). Touchstone's love for Audrey in *As You Like It* is somewhere near the latter end of the spectrum ('not being well married, it will be a good excuse for me hereafter to leave my wife' (3.3.92–4)). In *Love's Labour's Lost*, all of the male lovers – including the commoner Armado – aspire to the higher end of the spectrum, an aspiration that is put to the test by their respectively professed beloveds.

From the standpoint of counterpart theory, to fall in love rigidly could mean one of two things. It could mean that a 'world-bound' lover comes to love a unique 'worldmate' in such a way that the lover's love extends to all of that worldmate's counterparts in those possible worlds in which the beloved has counterparts (whether or not the lover has counterparts in those worlds). Alternatively, to fall in love rigidly could mean that a world-bound lover comes to love a unique worldmate in such a way that in all those worlds in which they have pairwise counterparts, each counterpart of the lover loves the corresponding counterpart of the beloved.

Then what of those worlds in which their counterparts never meet? Perhaps a further restriction is needed, but counterpart theory can be flexible about such matters without making the very concept of counterpart-rigidity otiose. In the first case, the lover's love for the beloved would be metaphysically contingent, since the lover has counterparts who don't fall in love with counterparts of the beloved. In the second case, the lover's love for the beloved would be metaphysically necessary, for there is no world in which they have pairwise counterparts (who meet the relevant conditions) and in which the lover's counterpart doesn't love the beloved's counterpart. It is tempting to suggest that in *Romeo and Juliet* the mutual love of Romeo and

Juliet is a metaphysically necessary feature of the relation between them. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, however, the first model seems more pertinent. When Berowne refers to Cupid's 'almighty dreadful little might' (3.1.203) he suggests that the fact that he has fallen in love with Rosaline is metaphysically contingent: there are worlds in which his counterparts aren't 'hit' by 'Cupid's butt-shaft' and so don't fall in love with her counterparts or with anyone else (1.2.175–6; cf. *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.4.13–16). In addition to professing to have been metaphorically hit by Cupid's butt-shaft, Berowne professes to have been literally hit by Rosaline's eyes. Exactly how is something of a metaphysical mystery. Berowne characterizes the fascinating power of 'women's eyes' as 'the right Promethean fire', the object most deserving of the men's study (4.3.347–8).

Each of the lords is hit by the eyes of a woman, designated (whether rigidly or not) as a designator (i.e., professed lover) of *his* designator. When they resolve to 'woo' and 'win' 'these girls of France' (4.3.368–9) they represent their endeavour not as a hunt (it is the women who hunt) but as a military campaign ('and, soldiers, to the field!'; 'Advance your standards' (4.3.363–4)). Their aim is to get the women to reciprocate their professions of love. Unbeknownst to them, the hearts and tongues of the women have already professed their love for the men. After Maria, Katherine, and Rosaline have named and described 'this Longaville' (2.1.43), '[t]he young Dumaine' (2.1.56), and the one 'they call' 'Berowne' (2.1.66), the Princess (whose pairing with the King is suggested in other ways) asks, 'are they all in love, / That every one her own hath garnished / With such bedecking ornaments of praise?' (2.1.77–9).

This question is symbolically answered in the affirmative by the entrance of Boyet, the Pander-like character whom Maria and Katherine call an 'old love-monger' and 'Cupid's grandfather' (2.1.254–5). He is the one whom this Longaville, the young Dumaine, and the one they call Berowne approach to learn the identities of the women who have identified them. Each of the men designates his designator in a subtly different way. Dumaine evidently points, using a demonstrative expression: 'What lady is that same?' (2.1.194). Following a convention introduced by David Kaplan (1989 [1977]), we could rewrite Dumaine's question using the rigidifying operator 'dthat': 'Who is dthat [the lady I see now]?'. However, it isn't clear that Dumaine's actual question – 'What lady is that same?' – functions in this rigidifying manner. He could be using 'that same [lady]' in a non-rigid manner, relying on qualitative features of Katherine's visual appearance to non-rigidly fix the reference of his indexical. If so, his profession of love would be referentially precarious from the get-go, setting the stage for the manner in which he is later tricked by Katherine into professing love for the wrong woman. For now, Boyet responds to his question by providing him with both a definite description and a rigid designator: 'The heir of Alanson, Katherine her name' (2.1.195).

Longaville's question is less direct. Instead of using a demonstrative expression to refer to the woman whose name he would like to know, he uses a descriptive phrase: 'What is she in the white?' (2.1.197). 'She in the white' is not rigid, even if Maria happens to be the only person present wearing white. Boyet's evasive response is therefore appropriate: 'A woman sometimes, and you saw her in the light' (2.1.198). Since many women can (and do) wear white, Boyet has given Longaville the generic answer his question deserves. In doing so he calls attention to the referential unreliability of eyes, sense organs that identify objects on the basis of appearances. His perfectly true but non-specifying identification of Maria as '*a* woman…and [or 'an' in the sense of 'if'] you saw her in the light' foreshadows, by revealing the epistemic basis for, Longaville's later mistaking of Katherine for Maria after the two women have exchanged the love tokens that he and Dumaine have sent them. Unsatisfied with Boyet's response, Longaville rephrases his question as a statement: 'I desire her name'

(2.1.199). This statement, taken literally, implies that it is not Maria but only her name that he desires, which is precisely how Boyet pretends to take it: 'She hath but one for herself, to desire that were a shame' (2.1.200). After one more round of thrust and parry ('Pray you, sir, whose daughter?' 'Her mother's, I have heard' (2.1.201–2)), Boyet relents and identifies Maria as 'an heir of Falconbridge' (1.2.205). This answer satisfies Longaville even though it is less informative than the one Boyet gave Dumaine: first, because it is an *in*definite description rather than a definite description ('an heir' as opposed to 'the heir'); second, because it isn't accompanied with the *name* Longaville said he desired. (In Act 4 Longaville exclaims, 'O sweet Maria, empress of my love' (4.3.54), indicating that somewhere along the way he has received additional information.)

Berowne also identifies his beloved by a distinctive feature of her attire: 'What's her name in the cap?' (2.1.209). Boyet's direct, rhyming response – 'Rosaline, by good hap' (2.1.210) – omits the unnecessary supplement of a descriptive phrase. Instead, the phrase 'by good hap' alludes to the contingency of the fact that Rosaline is called 'Rosaline' rather than some other name.[6] Like the other lords and the King, Berowne will later be tricked into professing love for the wrong woman after Rosaline and the Princess exchange their favours. As he later explains, each of the men errs in wooing not 'she' but 'the sign of she' (5.2.469) – in his case, the 'jewel on [the Princess's] sleeve' (5.2.455). Yet despite the fact that he is just as susceptible as the other men to visual deception, there is some suggestion that Berowne's profession of love for Rosaline has a different basis than Dumaine's for Katherine and Longaville's for Maria.[7] This is suggested in two related ways in Act 4, scene 3. First, Berowne professes to love Rosaline despite the fact that her dark visual appearance runs counter to conventional aesthetic preferences. His insistence that black is the new fair (4.3.246–9) can be taken to rest not simply on his unmediated appreciation of her unconventional visual beauty but rather on something about her that compels him to construe her visual appearance *as* beautiful. That something is her eyes. The fact that they have 'hit' him – designated him as her designator – suggests that it is not their visual appearance that has captivated him but their gaze. Her gaze has dazzled his. Second, despite the fact that he purports to have recognized Rosaline by the jewel on 'her' sleeve, he is arguably taken in less by the jewel than by the Princess's capacity for verbal repartee: it is her ability to mimic Rosaline's *tongue* that deceives him, making *his* tongue profess his love for the wrong woman.

Like the French princess in *Henry V*, the one in this play knows that 'the tongues of *men* are full of deceits' (5.2.117–18, emphasis added). Deceit in this sense has to do with flouting the rigidity burden that professions of love carry with them. As we have seen, this burden is not just temporal but counterfactual. The lover must demonstrate that his love for the beloved refers to her as the unique individual she is rather than as the bearer (or wearer) of contingent properties such as love tokens. This burden cannot be discharged in the instant it is taken on. Rather, to profess one's love for a unique individual is to commit to acting in such a way that one's future actions will establish a causal history that will retroactively confirm that the initial commitment did in fact have the character of an act of rigid designation.[8] Berowne must prove to Rosaline over time that he loves Rosaline qua Rosaline – that is, Rosaline insofar as she is the unique individual she is – rather than Rosaline insofar as she has a jewel on 'her' sleeve, speaks wittily, occasionally wears a cap, or is called 'Rosaline'.[9] The mock devised by the Princess underscores the fact that none of these properties is essential to Rosaline's identity. In matters of love, rigidity begins in the heart rather than in the eye or tongue.[10]

Or perhaps rigidity could *begin* in the eye provided it doesn't end there: it must end in securing reference to the beloved by virtue of a metaphysical feature that is unique to that

individual. This point is nicely brought out by Rosalind in *As You Like It*. When she is disguised as Ganymed pretending to be Rosalind, she tells Orlando that she will 'have' (i.e., love) not only him but 'twenty such' (4.1.118–19). When Orlando reacts with surprise, she asks him if he is good; and when he says, 'I hope so', she replies, 'Why then, can one desire too much of a good thing?' (4.1.122–4). The fact that this joke is a joke rests upon the way in which love has to satisfy its rigidity requirement. Even if Orlando had twenty metaphysical doubles (not counterparts, but indiscernible duplicates), Rosalind could only love *Orlando* if she somehow prefers him to any of them. The problem, of course, is that there cannot be a sufficient reason for such a preference: this is why Leibniz precludes indiscernibles from his ontology. If Rosalind uniquely loves Orlando, she must do so without a sufficient reason, which is to say not simply because he has such-and-such set of properties, whether or not they are essential to his identity. The point here is not simply that amorous love ought to be monogamous rather than polygamous (though this cultural expectation is clearly another part of what makes Rosalind's joke a joke): it is that even a polygamist's love for each of his or her beloveds would have the burden of functioning like a rigid designator rather than like a definite description.[11] As Slavoj Žižek (1991: 103) points out, it is as impossible to give a completely adequate answer to the question 'Why do you love me?' as it is to the question of why someone has the name that they have (as Boyet hints to Berowne). Like acts of naming, professions of love single out the unique *bearer* of a set of properties. This bearer may be figuratively identified as the other's heart, so that in a sense what (or who) one loves in loving someone *is* their heart. Alternatively, love could be said to single out an individual essence or haecceity – the unique property that an individual has of being that individual – provided that an individual essence or haecceity cannot be shared by metaphysical doubles.[12]

Obviously there must be *something* about a particular individual that causes or occasions the love of the lover.[13] If this 'something' cannot be identified with, or completely reduced to, a qualitative property or feature (whether essential or non-essential), it might nevertheless be *indicated* by such a property or feature. Berowne suggests that the feature in question is the beloved's eyes.[14] What a professing lover 'sees' in the eyes of his beloved eludes the order of visibility. This is why Berowne calls it the right or true Promethean fire. Like the Sun or Platonic Good, the eyes of the beloved are the *source* of the light through which her entire being is illuminated. (Compare Romeo's 'It is the east, and Juliet is the sun' (2.2.3).) The eyes of the beloved are 'beyond being' – transcending their qualitative features – and yet, they are *her* eyes. Such, at any rate, is the metaphysical wager of whoever professes love for a unique beloved.[15] It is the wager that an act of rigid designation has already taken place even though the causal history of the lover's future acts has not yet retroactively confirmed it as such.

2

So far we have focused exclusively on nominal and amorous relations among the play's main couples. Other questions about the nature of reference – and about love's rigidity requirement – arise in connection with the play's comical characters, especially Armado and Holofernes.

The pedant Holofernes relishes the figure of *synonymia*, the rhetorical use of synonyms. Conversationally appropriate when addressing an audience with diverse verbal skills, *synonymia* can reinforce one's effort to ostend, *videlicet*, show, reveal, disclose, point, refer. But overindulging in it – as I have just done – can backfire, as it frequently does for Holofernes. By smoothly sliding from one redundant word to another, he undermines his own effort to say

something about something. Instead, he sounds like a walking dictionary or thesaurus.[16] When he first appears, in 4.2, he says to Sir Nathaniel, 'The deer was (as you know) *sanguis*, in blood, ripe as the poemwater, who now hangeth like a jewel in the ear of *caelo*, the sky, the welkin, the heaven, and anon falleth like a crab on the face of *terra*, the soil, the land, the earth' (4.2.3–7). He is speaking about the deer that the Princess has killed. In this respect, he too is 'hunting the deer' (4.3.1). He begins in a referentially promising manner, relying on context to enable 'the deer' to function as a definite description. He even manages to predicate something of it: 'The deer was (as you know) *sanguis*, in blood'. We are not necessarily thrown off the scent by the redundancy '*sanguis*, in blood', which serves the pedantic function of a language lesson.[17] Potentially more distracting, but initially apt and even poignant, is the beginning of his comparison of the old-enough-to-die deer to a ripe fruit ready to fall (a conceit condensed in Edgar's words to Gloucester in *King Lear*: 'Ripeness is all' (5.2.11)). The problem arises when Holofernes introduces the conversationally irrelevant proliferation of terms for the sky *from* which, and the earth *to* which, the imagined poemwater falls ('*caelo*, the sky, the welkin, the heaven … *terra*, the soil, the land, the earth'). We sense that he is more interested in words than in the world. Nevertheless, he succeeds in talking about the deer, and in this respect he too has 'hit it'. So has Sir Nathaniel, whose contextual use of the pronoun 'it' ('it was a buck of the first head') inherits the referential force of 'the deer'.

After praising Holofernes's use of *synonymia* ('the epithites are sweetly varied' (4.2.8–9)), Sir Nathaniel contests the pedant's estimation of the deer's age ('but, sir, I assure ye it was a buck of the first head') (4.2.9–10). Holofernes denies this, showing that his attention remains focused on the matter at hand. Instead of sweetly varying a few more epithets, he registers his disagreement in Latin: 'Sir Nathaniel, *haud credo*' (4.2.11). Then the constable Dull, either misconstruing or mishearing '*haud credo*' ('I don't believe it') replies that 'the deer was not a "auld grey doe", 'twas a pricket' (1990: 152 (4.2.12)). (Evidently the Seven Ages of Deer are fawn, pricket, sorrell, soare, buck of the first head, full-grown buck ['in blood'], and 'old grey doe'.) Once again Holofernes defends his original claim, though 'to humor the ignorant' he agrees to '*call* … the deer the Princess kill'd a pricket' in the 'extemporal epitaph' that he goes on to compose (4.2.50–2, emphasis added). He now indulges not in *synonymia* but in *paroemion*, or alliteration ('The preyful Princess pierc'd and prick'd a pretty pleasing pricket…' (4.2.56)). Once again, he is drawing attention away from the thing about which he is ostensibly speaking, this time in the direction of the play of signifiers in which he is indulging.

Similar referential distractions arise when Holofernes refers to the moon by the obscure mythological name 'Dictynna' (4.2.36), and when he substitutes ('exchange[s]' (4.2.41)) the name of Adam for that of Cain in his reformulation of Dull's riddle.[18] Once again, however, he never fully loses contact with the world of the play. This down-to-earth side of his personality (as opposed to the down-to-*terra*-the-soil-the-land-the-earth side) is indicated in his ready (if linguistically obscure) solution to Dull's riddle about the thing (the moon) whose age is initially more puzzling than that of the deer. While the three men cannot all be right about whether the deer was in blood, a buck of the first head, or a pricket, they all appear to be talking about the same object (though the text of the play doesn't rule out the possibility that they are actually speaking about three distinct deer, a directorial option with comic possibilities). Perhaps Shakespeare is suggesting that even when a speaker's words threaten to become completely self-referential (and thus not genuinely referential at all) they nevertheless maintain some contact with the world. From this point of view, sheer nonsense (or utter non-reference) would be a limit that actual language use typically never reaches. Something like this seems to be suggested in Shakespeare's depiction of the oddly pertinent speech of characters deemed

mad, including Ophelia, Lear, and the Jailor's Daughter in *Two Noble Kinsmen*. Holofernes is more dotty than mad, but he and the other secondary characters regularly confuse us with their referential roundaboutness, as in Armado, Moth, and Costard's conversational digression about the 'envoy' (envois) and the goose, which eventually circles back to being about the injury to Costard's shin (3.1).

Issues pertaining not just to reference but to rigid designation recur when these characters set out to 'present' to the Princess 'the Nine Worthies' (5.1.123). Each of the Nine Worthies is either dead or fictional (assuming that the Worthies who are fictional in our world are fictional in the world of the play). Because they don't presently or actually exist they cannot be indicated through the use of demonstrative expressions or literally brought on stage.[19] Theoretically, this shouldn't matter. Actors – including those playing Holofernes, Armado, and the other characters in the play – routinely 'present' characters who aren't really present or actual.[20] If their performances aren't convincing, however, they will fail in this endeavour. Before the presentation of the Worthies, Armado hands the King a paper indicating which Worthy will be presented by which performer. The King is sceptically amused: 'Here is like to be a good presence of Worthies' (5.2.533–4). Evidently he shares Sir Nathaniel's fear that the actors purporting to present the Worthies are not 'worthy' of doing so (5.1.124–5). There is a general expectation that a referentially effective presenter must share some notable trait – some describable property – with the Worthy he presents. Thus Costard can present Pompey the Great because, like Pompey, he is 'of … great limb or joint' (5.1.127–8), while Moth can play Hercules only 'in minority' (5.1.134) because no one can discern any non-trivial trait that Moth and the adult Hercules have in common. In the event, such minimal similarities don't prevent the lords from mocking the presenters for not sufficiently resembling the Worthies they purport to present.

In the Prologue to *Henry V*, Shakespeare forestalls such mockery by having the Chorus bid his audience – proleptically and / or flatteringly called 'gentles' – to 'pardon … The flat unraised spirits that have dar'd / On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth / So great an object' (Prologue, 8–11). With these words, the Chorus invites us to distinguish two different types of dramatic presentation: one that relies on qualitative similarities – the dramatic equivalent of descriptive phrases – and another analogous to rigid designation without any qualitative similarity. We can think of this difference as a continuum with indiscernibility at one extreme and pure nomination on the other. In some cases, there may be no reason to prefer either extreme – just as there often isn't a reason to prefer reference through rigid designation over reference through definite description. As we have seen, however, in matters of love there is a reason not just to prefer but to require rigid designation. A similar requirement may extend to certain types of acting. Just as lovers must convince their beloveds of the rigidity of their professions of love, so actors purporting to 'bring forth' the dead must prove by their performances that they are rigidly designating those whose names they evoke when they say things like 'I Pompey am' (5.2.547).

Much of the mirth in the presentation scene takes the form of sheer derision at the actors' inability to meet this performative demand. In fact, they can't even get the names of the Worthies right. Thus Costard botches the name of Pompey the Great ('Pompey surnam'd the Big' (5.2.549–50; cf. *Henry V*, 4.7.13)), while Moth fails to say anything that would confirm Holofernes's announcement that he is supposed to be presenting 'Great Hercules' (5.2.588). Holofernes's own desire to present no fewer than three of the Nine Worthies is as referentially distracting as is his proliferation of synonyms, while his ambiguous self-identification as 'Judas' (5.2.595) invites the scorn it receives. Nevertheless, he is right to be taken aback by the

fact that the gentles don't use him gently (5.2.629). As Theseus says to Hippolyta before the performance of the Rude Mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it is a mark of 'noble respect' (5.1.91) – gentility or generosity – to treat inept but well-intended performances as successful. These words are echoed by the Princess, who remarks before the presentation begins, 'That sport best pleases that doth least know how' (5.2.516). She and the ladies are kinder than the lords, who have themselves just been mocked for their poor personification of 'Muscovites or Russians' (5.2.121).

Holofernes's indignation may be due to his sense of the solemnity of the occasion. After all, he and the other presenters are memorializing the dead, as he did when he eulogized the slain deer (as Jaques does another slain deer in *As You Like It*). If so, he would be reproving the lords not (only) for failing to treat *him* gently, but for failing to treat *Judas Maccabeus* gently. From their point of view, it is the other way around: they are mocking Holofernes for failing to conjure (the memory of) Judas Maccabeus. The idea that each of the dead Worthies is worthy of respectful memory is made explicit by Armado when he presents Hector of Troy. Despite the shortcomings of his performance – whether these are taken to consist in a failure of resemblance and/or a failure of rigid designation – he is right to say, in the play's most unexpectedly moving lines, 'sweet chucks, beat not the bones of the buried. When he breathed, he was a man' (5.2.661–2). This admonition foreshadows Marcadé's unexpected entrance and presentation – or, rather, *representation*[21] – to the Princess of a 'tenth' Worthy: 'The King your father –'. 'Dead, for my life!' (5.2.719–20).

We never learn the French king's name. The two referring expressions Marcadé uses in speaking to the Princess (now Queen) – *the* King (of France) and *your* father – are definite descriptions rather than rigid designators. Nevertheless, they succeed in referring to that unique individual whom she can recall through the use of a rigid designator. She commits to a period of mourning during which time she will remember the unique individual who was (and still is) her beloved father. One way of construing the necessity of a period of mourning is that it provides the time necessary for the cumulative force of acts of memorialization to ensure the rigidity of the name of the dead. Conceived in this way, the requirement is to confirm not just temporal rigidity but counterfactual rigidity. The grieving daughter must confirm that in giving 'half her love' to the King of Navarre she won't be ceasing to love the former King of France. She places an analogous tracking requirement on the King of Navarre: he must remember (his professed love for) her for a year and a day if he wishes to marry her then.

At the beginning of the play, Berowne glancingly referred to the Princess's 'decrepit, sick, and bedred father' (1.1.138), words whose casualness concealed their callousness (cf. *Hamlet*, 1.2.29). Rosaline is right to set him the task of 'convers[ing] / With groaning wretches' (5.2.851–2) in an effort to make them smile. Only in this way will he learn genuine gentility. He must renounce or reform his 'gibing spirit' (5.2.858), which – like the frivolous 'gift' that Holofernes attributes to himself (4.2.65) – is a 'fault' (5.2.866) more than a blessing, a narcissistic way of pleasing himself at the expense of those he mocks. He has already acknowledged that to confirm the rigidity of his profession of love for Rosaline he must renounce 'Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise, / Three-pil'd hyperboles, spruce affection, [and] / Figures pedantical' (5.2.406–8), rhetorical phrases that play no essential role in securing reference, whether rigidly or non-rigidly.

If issues pertaining to the representation of the dead seem to have taken us far away from our original topic of rigid designation in language, the opposite is in fact the case. As Kripke observes in *Naming and Necessity*, Russell believed that the fact that people can refer to dead Worthies ('famous figures of the past') whom no one living ever met showed that their names

must function, for the living, as disguised definite descriptions rather than as rigid designators. Kripke uses the same premise to draw the opposite conclusion, namely, that the names in question must have acquired their status as rigid designators through an 'initial baptism' in which they were so assigned, and then through their subsequent use (1980 [1972]: 96 n.42). Does *Love's Labour's Lost* shed light on this debate? At the beginning of the play, Berowne makes fun of the study of philosophy, suggesting that in seeking light in books it seeks light in the wrong place: 'Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile' (1.1.77). He also chides those who seek to *name* lights: 'These earthly godfathers of heaven's lights, / That give a name to every fixed star, / Have no more profit of their shining nights / Than those that walk and wot not what they are' (1.1.88–91). Naming in the manner of initially baptizing is a barren activity ('And every godfather can give a name' (1.1.93)). By contrast, falling in love is a non-barren form of rigid designation. Whether or not Kripke is right about the nature of naming, *Love's Labour's Lost* suggests that it is our experience of love that reveals to us the true significance of rigid designation. Learning what it means to love someone living turns out to be related to learning how to remember someone dead and comfort someone dying. It also bears on how we confront our own deaths. The play began with the King of Navarre's proleptic eulogy of himself and his fellow scholars: 'Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives, / Live regist'red upon our brazen tombs, / And then grace us in the disgrace of death' (1.1.1–3). Though their original plan to study academic philosophy has misfired, it has culminated in another way of thinking about their mortality and the nature of fame. In this sense they have not so much abandoned philosophy – love of wisdom – as they have come to reconceive it as the wisdom of love.

In light of all this, what should we make of the name and fame of William Shakespeare? Robert Stalnaker observes that 'If "Shakespeare" were an abbreviation for a definite description as Russell argued, then the statement that Shakespeare might not have written plays, and its paraphrase, that there is a possible world in which Shakespeare did not write plays, would both be ambiguous' (Stalnaker (2003: 182)). They would be ambiguous because they could be taken to mean that the person who wrote the plays collected in the First Folio did not write the plays collected in the First Folio. Clearly, such a claim would do little to resolve the so-called authorship controversy, the debate over whether the person baptized 'William Shakespeare' in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564 wrote (significant parts of) the plays we attribute to him. For many Shakespeare scholars this debate is pointless since there's no good reason to think that anyone other than the person baptized in Stratford-upon-Avon wrote the plays, but Berowne suggests that it's pointless for another reason, namely, that naming lights for the sake of naming lights is inherently pointless (or 'barren'). What isn't pointless is to remember the worthy dead, including the author of *Love's Labour's Lost*. We remember that person by continuing to read and perform and write about the plays he wrote. Maybe we thereby succeed in 'presenting' him or in rigidly designating him in some other way. Then again, maybe not. Maybe, as Russell thought, it has become impossible for anyone today to truly name the person who wrote *Love's Labour's Lost*. Maybe this is what the play's final words convey – the unbridgeable divide between the still-nameable living and the no-longer-nameable dead: 'The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo. You that way; we this way' (5.2.930–1).[22]

Related topics

Notes

1 Unless otherwise noted, all further references to Shakespeare's works will be to Shakespeare (1974).

2 It might be in the second instance in the sense that we could change our future uses of the term.

3 Russell eventually came to think that the only things we could be directly acquainted with were private sense-data rather than publicly accessible objects of perception.

4 An object that is singular in our world may have multiple counterparts in another world. But this no more threatens a counterpart-theoretic conception of rigidity than a world containing indiscernible duplicates of an actual individual does a model based on transworld identity.

5 This depends on whether Viola's being female and Cesario's being male are essential to their identities. If they are, then the love of Orsino and Olivia could turn out to be unrestrictedly rigid.

6 The paradoxical difficulty of separating oneself from one's name despite its contingency is a prominent theme in *Romeo and Juliet*. Note the use/mention ambiguity in 'O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?' (2.2.33) and the suggestion that names stick deeper than mere tags in 'O, tell me, friar, tell me, / In what vile part of this anatomy / Doth my name lodge?' (3.3.105–6).

7 The same could be said of the King's profession of love for the Princess. Their respective titles seem to play a kind of predestining role, as Boyet hints in lines 2.1.1–8.

8 This suggests that Phebe in *As You Like It* is mistaken when she rhetorically asks, 'Who ever lov'd that lov'd not at first sight?' (3.5.82). She is mistaken because 'at first sight' it is too soon to tell if a profession of love will be confirmed later. Her own profession to have fallen in love with Ganymed at first sight is contradicted when she learns that 'Ganymed' is actually Rosaline. Consider, by way of contrast, the case of Prince Lewis and the Lady Blanch in *King John*. They too profess something like love at first sight, though for all we can tell their professions of love are based not on their eyes but on considerations of political expediency (by marrying each other they will establish an alliance between England and France and so avert a war). Their professions of love may seem cynical, but once again the test of their respective professions of love lies not (entirely) in their present feelings for each other but in their future actions.

9 In the surviving Quarto version of the play, the speech prefixes for Rosaline and Katherine are regularly confused. Various explanations have been proposed as to how this came about. To the list of plausible hypotheses (that Shakespeare couldn't make up his mind, that the compositor was working with different drafts, etc.) it is tempting to add the fanciful speculation that Shakespeare wanted to represent the play from the standpoints of two distinct but largely overlapping possible worlds – one in which Rosaline is called 'Rosaline' and one in which she isn't.

10 Compare Friar Laurence's chiding of Romeo after his affection shifts from *his* Rosaline to Juliet: 'Is Rosaline, that thou didst love so dear, / So soon forsaken? Young men's love then lies / Not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes' (2.3.66–8).

11 Likewise, Cordelia makes a perfectly valid point when she tells her father that, when she weds, 'That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry / Half my love with him' (1.1.101–2). This does not imply a betrayal of Lear, or of her future husband.

12　In the case of metaphysically necessary love, we may need to factor in two haecceities – that of the beloved and that of the lover. If A's falling in love with B is an essential relation between them, then the fact that A loves B can be explained by saying that A is A and B is B (e.g., Romeo is Romeo and Juliet is Juliet), and that they share a world.

13　As Paul Kottman points out, 'we cannot discern other people – let alone love one another – without relying on describable characteristics', even though 'who people really are simply cannot be adequately accounted for through observation and description alone' (2017: 24).

14　Perhaps in this sense, Berowne can only ever woo 'the sign of' Rosaline. But her eyes would be a different kind of sign than a jewel on her sleeve.

15　Presumably, it needn't be the beloved's eyes that occasion or cause the lover's love. A voice or characteristic gesture could play the role of pointing (or seeming to point) to something beyond these manifest features.

16　One of the possible models for Holofernes was John Florio, the compiler of an Italian/English dictionary that appeared several years after *Love's Labour's Lost* was first performed. See Yates (2013 [1936]).

17　Albeit one that smells of false Latin. As the editors observe, it is unclear whether the error should be attributed to Holofernes or to the compositor.

18　Whether these terms ('Dictynna', 'Adam') function as rigid designators would be another question to consider.

19　Characters in *Love's Labour's Lost* have been taken to be modelled on then living individuals such as John Florio, Thomas Nashe, and Sir Walter Raleigh. It would be interesting to compare Yates's account of the way such 'allusions' operate (2013 [1936]: 26) to Carl Schmitt's account of the historical 'intrusions' that he discerns in *Hamlet* (Schmitt (2009 [1956])). The possibility of a completely non-descriptive mode of presentation is humorously indicated by Algernon Swinburne:

> Romeo was obviously designed as a satire on Lord Burghley. The first and perhaps strongest evidence in favour of this proposition was the extreme difficulty, he might almost say the utter impossibility, of discovering a single point of likeness between the two characters. This would naturally be the first precaution taken by a poor player who designed to attack an all-powerful Minister.

(1880: 277; cited in Bevington (1968: 1))

20　We may wonder whether the presentation relation should be regarded as transitive. When an actor presents Costard presenting Pompey, is the actor presenting Pompey? Relatedly, in what way does a male actor playing Viola disguised as Cesario present a male character?

21　Marcadé doesn't say '*I* the King of France *am*', nor does he purport to imitate the King.

22　I am grateful to Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne for extensive comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Further reading

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32

LOVE, IDENTITY AND THE WAY OF IDEAS IN *TWELFTH NIGHT*

Robin Le Poidevin

The problem: Olivia–Sebastian wedding shock

It is the fifth and final act of *Twelfth Night*, and at last, all the confusions, deceptions and illusions of the previous scenes are resolved and dispersed, and at the centre of the denouement is the joyful reunion of the twins, Viola and Sebastian, each until now thinking the other to have perished in the shipwreck that first separated them. Olivia realises that she has in fact married Sebastian and not, as she had thought, Cesario (that is, Viola in male disguise). At the same time, Orsino realises that 'Cesario', his servant but also adored companion, is not a boy but a woman, and so a prospective spouse. Our happiness is complete, and only slightly marred by the disabusing of the cruelly humiliated Malvolio, and the disillusionment of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, who not only sees his hopes of winning Olivia's hand finally dashed, but who is even thrown off by his former co-reveller Sir Toby Belch. And now the festivities and revels really are over, and the heightened emotional temperature of the last hour or so is cooled by Feste's final, and characteristically melancholy song, 'For the rain it raineth every day'.

All of which, we, the audience, find a profoundly satisfying conclusion to the play. Or do we? There is a niggling puzzle, perhaps first expressed (in print, at least) by Samuel Johnson:

> The marriage of Olivia, and the succeeding perplexity, though well enough contrived to divert on the stage, wants credibility, and fails to produce the proper instruction required in the drama, as it exhibits no just picture of life.

The 'succeeding perplexity' is Olivia's bafflement when Viola (still in the guise of Cesario) denies the marriage that took place just two hours before. But we are surely happy to allow, for the sake of the fiction, that Olivia really could be duped into taking Sebastian for Viola, and vice versa. The thing that is hard to swallow, even making these allowances, is what happens *after* Olivia realises her mistake. The man she is now married to is not the 'man' she fell in love with. And, after the initial astonishment, she is apparently quite happy to accept the outcome – to take Sebastian, someone with whom she has barely exchanged a few conversations that cannot surely have reached the heights of Viola's own accomplished and affecting wooing on behalf of her master. We are far less offended by Orsino's transfer of affections from Olivia to Viola: we never really took his attachment to Olivia seriously in the first place; whereas his exchanges with Viola were both intimate and honest. His genuine love for Cesario/Viola has been growing for some time before he makes his proposal (one he evidently trusts will be accepted). No, it is Olivia's behaviour which 'fails to produce the proper instruction'. How shallow can you get?

This is, of course, a comedy, and one expects a certain absurdity in the characters. Their personalities do not transcend the role they are obliged to occupy in the complex confusions of the piece. 'We may', says E.M. Forster, in *Aspects of the Novel*, 'divide characters into flat and round' (1927: 73). Flat characters are defined by one or two key properties, and their behaviour is almost entirely an expression of those qualities. Round characters, in contrast, are less predictable. They appear to have lives that transcend the particular scenes they are involved in, and we naturally care about them more. The novels of Dickens, explains Forster, are, despite their greatness, full of flat characters. Whether we are dealing with comedies or tragedies, the role of flat characters is simply to contribute some specific element to the circumstances which generate the comedy/tragedy. We do not have to inquire about the motives of a flat character: they will be constrained by whatever that character's defining quality is. So, we might silence any disquiet we feel about Olivia's abrupt transfer of affections to a virtual stranger by classing her as a flat character. What does she represent? The inconstancy of feeling, perhaps.

We are first introduced to her (before she actually appears) as someone who has vowed to mourn her dead brother for seven years, hiding her face behind a veil, and refusing to have anything to do with suitors. Yet, within minutes of Viola's first entrance into her house, she is throwing up her veil and confessing (though at this stage, only to herself) that she is attracted to the bold youth, all grief apparently forgotten. Her role is to provide an (inaccessible) object of love for Orsino, and a troublesome object for his vicarious wooing, putting emotional pressure on Viola's pretence. The real focus is Viola, who is a genuinely round character, and Olivia merely the means by which Viola's character and wit are revealed.

But this is really rather unfair on Olivia, who (at least some of the time) shows a self-awareness generally denied to flat characters – and an awareness of others' flaws and virtues. She is reluctantly drawn out of her mourning by her 'allowed fool' Feste, but appreciates the attempt. She scolds Malvolio for his self-love, but expresses sincere sorrow at his humiliation. She describes her attraction for Cesario in terms of catching the plague (a sombre analogy at a time when plague was a real danger in England), and makes an (unsuccessful) effort to discipline herself when she is bursting to tell Cesario of her love:

> The clock upbraids me with the waste of time.
> Be not afraid, good youth; I will not have you

(3.1.115–16)[1]

Olivia is no mere prop in this comedy, and though her volatile emotions are a source of humour, her acceptance of the substitution of Sebastian for Cesario is not really part of the joke, even if her marrying Sebastian, thinking of him as Cesario, is.

A second explanation takes a moral line (Smith (2001: 69)). Olivia is indeed fickle: she lets her infatuation for a boy eclipse her grief, and cause her to break her (admittedly absurd) vow to remain in mourning for seven years. That her marriage should be revealed to have been based (on her part) on a mistaken identity is her just punishment, and she must meekly accept the consequence – as, with some grace, she does. But again, this does not really seem all that plausible. Her brother's death is merely mentioned, as an explanation for her refusing to meet any suitor, and it is

soon eclipsed. It is nothing more than a plot device, and is simply not substantial enough to be the basis of a moral tale.

No doubt there are many other possible interpretations, but I will attempt here to relate the narrative of the play, and certain of its characters' utterances, to the philosophical problem of how thought represents the world, and more specifically to an approach to that problem which was to run through early modern philosophy. That *Twelfth Night*, as many other comedies before and after Shakespeare, portrays mistaken identities, and so presents us with the gap between appearance and reality, is obvious. What is less obvious is what it might tell us about the true objects of our thought. Emma Smith has remarked that the language of *Twelfth Night* 'approaches a philosophical interest in the relation between things and their names and the difficulty of language being truly referential' (2001: 84). What follows is a development of that suggestion.

Fictional objects of love and the 'way of ideas'

There are no less than seven attempted or projected couplings during the course of the play: (i) Orsino and Olivia; (ii) Orsino and Viola; (iii) Olivia and Viola/Cesario; (iv) Malvolio and Olivia; (v) Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Olivia; (vi) Olivia and Sebastian; (vii) Sir Toby Belch and Maria. (We might even include an eighth: Antonio and Sebastian. But this last is perhaps controversial. Antonio certainly professes love for Sebastian, but whether as a friend or something more is, perhaps deliberately, unclear.) Three of these lead to marriage: between, respectively, Orsino and Viola, Sebastian and Olivia, and Sir Toby Belch and Maria. The others are doomed from the start. What is striking is that, in at least six of these cases (and, with some wrangling, perhaps also the seventh) the interactions between the couples is mediated by a fiction, to the extent that it is appropriate, for most of them, to describe the fiction as the immediate object of love.

Orsino loves Olivia, professedly. But, rather than directly woo her, he sends Cesario in his place. It seems Orsino is so intent on cultivating his own emotional response that he prefers to contemplate an image of Olivia in his mind, describing her in clearly exaggerated terms:

O when mine eyes did see Olivia first,

Methought she purged the air of pestilence;

(1.1.19–20)

Between Orsino and Viola is the fiction of Cesario, Viola's assumed identity. It is striking how, even when the truth is revealed, and just before he offers her his hand, Orsino still addresses her as 'Boy' (5.1.251). Viola, of course, is subject to no such deception in her growing feelings for Orsino, but she still has to see through his assumed persona of the ideal lover. And it is as Cesario that she shifts him from his glib assumptions about women's love, for which purpose she creates another fiction: her sister, pining in unspoken love, who 'sat like Patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief'. Through this fiction, she is able, for the benefit of the unsuspecting Orsino, to describe herself (2.4.110–11).

Olivia, of course, falls in love with the fictional Cesario. Malvolio's true object of love is not Olivia herself, but – as she clearly perceives – himself, elevated from the position of Steward to that of Master of the household ('To be Count Malvolio!' (2.5.30)). Quite what the object of Sir Andrew Aguecheek's love is, if anything, is uncertain. The object of his suit is, of course, Olivia, but there is no declaration of affection, merely a sense of slight that she pays no attention to him, and does 'more favours to the count's servingman than ever she bestowed upon me' (2.2.4–5). He does, however, clearly entertain illusions about himself – his skill in dancing, and his ferocity as a duellist (though he never mistakes himself for a wit, having, as he concedes, eaten too much beef).

Maria, like Viola, is unusual in not only clearly seeing the object of love for what he is (in her case, the pleasure-loving Sir Toby), but also in winning him. The precise nature of Toby's feelings for Maria are uncertain (though he clearly admires her, and is happy to note her feelings for him), but it is nevertheless evident that he is engaged for most of the play in an extended exercise in self-deceit: that revels will never cease, and that he will always be able to take part in them, an illusion Feste mercilessly explodes:

Feste: [*Sings*] His eyes do show his days are almost done.

Malvolio: Is't even so?

Sir Toby: [*Sings*] But I will never die.

Feste: [*Sings*] Sir Toby, there you lie.

It is perhaps in the spirit of an attempt to sustain this illusion of endless youth and revelry that he enters into union with Maria, perhaps explaining Fabian's rather odd announcement, as he explains the forged letter which brought about Malvolio's downfall: 'Maria writ the letter / At Sir Toby's great importance / In recompense whereof he hath married her.' (5.1.341–2).

Sebastian is so bewildered by Olivia's approaches (and the behaviour of most of the people he meets at her court) that he is half-inclined to think that he has entered a fictional world:

> For though my soul disputes well with my sense
> That this may be some error, but no madness,
> Yet doth this accident and flood of fortune
> So far exceed all instance, all discourse,
> That I am ready to distrust mine eyes

And we might add to this list the clearest example of enmity in the play: between Malvolio and Feste, Olivia's fool. Feste creates the character of Sir Topas the priest to further torment Malvolio, imprisoned for lunacy. In these multiple couplings, then, fictions and fictional objects abound.

What we have here is a theatrical illustration of what an early commentator on Locke's *Essay* (1689) called 'the way of ideas'.[2] One of the characteristic features of early modern philosophical thought is a concern with *ideas*, in the sense of mental representations directly apprehended by the mind. They are prominent in Descartes, whose first *Meditation* confronts us with the possibility that we live in a world of ideas that do not correspond to any external reality. And it is by reflecting on what the idea of God could tell us about its causes that he is able (employing a curious version of a Scholastic Principle) to construct a proof of God's existence. When we come to Locke, we find the principle that all perception, thought and knowledge is mediated by ideas.[3] By 'idea' here is meant, not a mental state, but rather its content, what it represents. The state is the *vehicle* of representation, the means by which a

thought is conveyed. The vehicle is a real thing, locatable in time, and perhaps space too. In contrast, the representational *content*, to use modern terminology, is a 'purely intentional' object: it has no independent existence. The way of ideas we find in Locke is not just the platitude that thought represents objects, but rather that thought about things in the world is *indirect*: we apprehend external things only by contemplating the images we have of them in our mind, much as one might direct one's thought onto a person by looking at a portrait of them. (It is perhaps because Presocratic thinkers did not have a developed concept of mental representation that they were so exercised by the 'problem of non-being': our ability, that is, to talk meaningfully about something that does not exist. Parmenides famously denied the phenomenon altogether.) Locke could be understood as implying that the immediate object of thought is purely intentional: it captures, not the object as it is in itself, but rather how it appears to us. Our ideas of things can be acquired only through sensory experience, and experience only acquaints us with the effects things have on us, not the causes of those effects. We may theorise about those causes, but get things wrong in the process. Our thought about an individual person, for example, may be mediated by all kinds of fictions about them. We perceive them through a filter of hypotheses, images and inventions. We stand to them, in fact, much as the characters of *Twelfth Night* stand to each other.

Misidentifications, duplicates and singular thought

If thought about external objects is mediated by ideas, what is it that enables just *this* external object to be picked out in thought rather than *that* one? What, in other words, explains singular thought? The simplest answer would be in terms of resemblance: the external object of thought is the one which mostly closely resembles, by its intrinsic qualities, the ideas in our mind. A somewhat more sophisticated account appeals to causality: the object of thought is the one whose qualities give rise to those ideas.[4] Whether we choose the simpler or more sophisticated one, there is plenty of room for things to go wrong.

If it is the ideas in our minds which determine the indirect object of thought, by corresponding to the qualities of particular things, then the failure of those ideas, taken as a whole, to correspond to anything (either by resemblance or causation) would seem to imply that the only object of thought is the purely intentional one. In the exchanges between Viola and Olivia, the notion of thoughts failing to hit their mark is a recurring theme. Take their initial encounter, when Viola is not yet certain of Olivia's identity:

> *Viola*:   The honourable lady of the house, which is she?
>
> *Olivia*: Speak to me; I shall answer for her.

(1.5.140)

Olivia's evasive answer suggests that she is not Olivia. Viola, however, persists:

> *Viola*: Are you the lady of the house?
> *Olivia*: If I do not usurp myself, I am.

(1.5.153–4)

How can one usurp oneself? Usurping takes two: the usurper and the usurped, which makes one wonder about the reference of 'I' and 'myself' in Olivia's reply. As for Viola, she announces (perhaps *sotto voce*) her own double identity: 'I am not that I play' (1.5.153). That has a non-paradoxical sense: that she is simply assuming a role. But in their next, highly charged, conversation, she expresses the thought in more problematic terms, in a rapid exchange whose theme could be the problematic nature of identity and reference:

> *Olivia*: Stay!
>
>   I prithee tell me what thou think'st of me.
>
> *Viola*:   That you do think you are not what you are.
>
> *Olivia*: If I think so, I think the same of you.
>
> *Viola*:   Then think you right. I am not what I am.

(3.1.121–6)

If the reference of the 'you's and 'I's is mediated by ideas, then it is indeed problematic, as there are four sets of ideas in the background here, capturing, respectively, Olivia as she is represented by Viola (available for courtship and marriage), Olivia as she imagines herself to be (not so available), Viola as she thinks of herself (a free woman), and Viola as she presents herself (a man in service to the Duke).[5]

And things could go wrong in another way: a given set of ideas could correspond to more than one object. And that, of course, is precisely Olivia's situation. She has images in her mind which correspond not only to Viola (as Cesario), but also to Sebastian.[6] So of whom is she thinking? It could be a thought experiment devised precisely to test theories of singular thought. For Shakespeare is at some pains to draw attention to the fact that Viola and Sebastian are duplicates. There is even the suggestion that in contemplating herself in the mirror, Viola can think of Sebastian: 'I my brother know / Yet living in my glass' (3.4.330–1). The point is driven home by the reactions when Sebastian and Viola finally occupy the stage together:

Orsino: One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons –

A natural perspective, that is and is not!

Sebastian: Antonio! O my dear Antonio,

How have the hours racked and tortured me,

Since I have lost thee!

Antonio: Sebastian, art thou?

Sebastian: Fear'st thou that, Antonio?

Antonio: How have you made division of yourself?

An apple cleft in two is no more twin

Than these two creatures. Which is Sebastian?

Olivia: Most wonderful!

Sebastian: Do I stand there? I never had a brother;

Nor can there be that deity in my nature

Of here and everywhere.

(5.1.200–22)

Orsino and Antonio, in effect, pose a problem for the way of ideas. If ideas are what allow us to refer to and think about individuals in the world, then what happens when one idea corresponds to two individuals? As their paradoxical expressions above show, there seem to be intellectual struggles here over the very concept of duplicates. If we individuate people by their properties, how can two individuals have the same properties?[7] Sebastian's mention of divine omniscience may put us in mind of the problematic three-in-oneness of the Trinity, suggestive of a metaphysical difficulty, and not just a referential one.

Viola now faces the task of establishing her own identity. She begins by enumerating qualities that she shares with Sebastian (her place of birth, her parentage, her age when her father died), leaving the problem of individuation unresolved. But then she alludes to what really would individuate her, namely the particular episodes of her life:

> Do not embrace me, till each circumstance,
> Of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump
> That I am Viola

(5.1.235–7)

Once the full story is in place, we can see that, of course, Viola and Sebastian are not perfect duplicates after all. A suitably detailed list of qualities will individuate them. But this is deferred until after the action of the play is concluded. The other characters do not yet have access to those truly individuating qualities. Or if they have access to some of them, the collection of ideas in the minds of Olivia, Orsino and the rest, correspond in part to Viola and in part to Sebastian. And so we are still faced with the conundrum: who is Olivia in love with?

Who is Olivia's true love?

So let us return to the problem with which we began: the apparent failure of the play to be true to life, in Olivia's readiness to accept the substitution of Sebastian for Viola/Cesario. Her situation has interesting parallels with that of a character from Greek mythology, Alcmene.

Alcmene was the wife of Amphitryon. Zeus, conceiving a passion for her, came to her one night disguised as Amphitryon, and slept with her, a union which resulted in the conception of Heracles. She was, we must imagine, unaware that the man she had slept with was Zeus, otherwise the point of the disguise in the narrative is lost. She is, then, free from blame. But when she learns the truth, what should her reaction be? Ronald de Sousa uses the case to raise what he calls a 'logicomoral problem':

> When Alcmene finds out, ought she to mind? The man she loved that night was, by hypothesis, qualitatively the same as her husband, though not the same numerically. But wasn't it for his qualities that she loved her husband? … This apparently implies that her desire to be faithful, under the circumstances (or her regret that she wasn't, if she finds out the truth later), is only compatible with a love that is literally completely irrational.

> (1987: 8–9)

Alcmene thus faces a dilemma: either she admits that she cannot rationalise her desire to remain faithful to her husband, or she rationalises it by reference to his qualities, in which case she cannot regret the deception, since Zeus, in disguise, has just those qualities.[8] There is no place for the particular in rational love. We might, on Alcmene's behalf, prefer the first horn. That is, we should support her right to be indignant, even at the price of making her reaction irrational. But that presupposes the possibility of singular thought.

Olivia's position is structurally similar to Alcmene's. She marries Sebastian, under the impression that he is Cesario. She loves Cesario, and does so because of Cesario's qualities. But Sebastian (according to the narrative) has precisely those qualities. So, taking the second horn of the dilemma, her rational response is to accept the substitution of Sebastian, when it becomes apparent. And that is precisely what she does!

De Sousa is concerned with rationality. Our concern has been with the conditions for singular thought. Any judgement that Alcmene is right to feel regret, if she does, and Olivia wrong to be content, as she appears to be, presupposes that love is a form of singular thought: it is directed at a unique individual. But, according to the way of ideas, the direct object of thought is constituted by ideas of qualities. And, as the language of *Twelfth Night* reminds us, there is a serious problem in moving from those ideas to

particular objects in the external world. The immediate object of love (as with all thought) is a collection of ideas of qualities. If that immediate object does not discriminate between, as in this case, Viola and Sebastian, then we have no basis for saying that it is Viola, and only Viola, whom Olivia loves.

Does Olivia see all this? Is she a closet philosopher? Does she, in the seconds following the extraordinary sight of Viola and Sebastian together, engage in some swift reflections on the relation between thought and reality, and conclude that she has absolutely no grounds for feeling aggrieved? Well, as her exchanges with Viola show, she is not short of wit. But instead of getting inside Olivia's mind, as it were, we could instead see Olivia's predicament as a metafictional device: Olivia becomes a dramatic representation of the logical consequences of this way of thinking of thought and reference. How can we insist on the moral principle of fidelity to the particular in love if the conditions for genuinely singular thought about things without the mind are absent (as they are, perhaps not just in this case, but in many, and perhaps all cases)?

To conclude, Shakespeare, whether wittingly or unwittingly (though for my money, wittingly) dramatizes the way of ideas in a narrative of mistaken and fictional identities. Those same problems of identity also present a challenge to that understanding of the relation between thought and reality. As for Olivia, we can either see her as pointing to the true object of love (a purely intentional object), or as a moral *reductio* of this theory of representation. Could *Twelfth Night* be Shakespeare's anticipation of Locke and his critics, or is this just another importing of anachronistic ideas into a text whose original layers of meaning lie at a distance of four centuries from us? What you will, to quote the play's alternative title. But that's all one, our play is done.[9]

Related topics

See Chapters

Notes

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1 Textual references are to the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition (Donno (2004)).

2 The expression appears in John Sergeant's *Transnatural Philosophy*, published in 1700 (see Yolton (1956)). It was also taken up by Thomas Reid, who subjected the view of thought it named to extensive criticism in such works as *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764).

3 In Locke's own words, the key tenets of his view of the relation between thought and reality can be summarised as follows: 'Whatsoever the Mind perceives in it self, or is the immediate object of Perception, Thought, or Understanding, that I call *Ideas*; and the Power to produce any *Idea* in our mind, I call *Quality* of the Subject wherein that power is' (II.viii.§8). ''Tis evident, the Mind knows not Things immediately, but only by the intervention of the Ideas it has of them' (IV.iv.§3). '[S]imple ideas, the Materials of all our Knowledge, are suggested and furnished to the Mind, only by … Sensation and Reflection' (II.ii.§2). 'Words, as they are used by Men, can properly and immediately signify nothing but the Ideas, that are in the Mind of the Speaker; yet they in their Thoughts give them a secret reference to two other things. First … the Ideas *in the Minds also of other Men, with whom they communicate*…. Secondly,….Things as they really are' (III.ii.§§4–5).

4 Locke has much more to say about general ideas or terms ('whiteness', 'solidarity', 'substance') than particular ones, but it is not unreasonable to infer that he takes both to be captured by the same kind of account. The fact that our ideas of secondary qualities of colour, sound and heat are held by him *not* to resemble qualities in the objects themselves (II.viii.§15) suggests that causality rather than resemblance is key for him.

5 Philosophers will, of course, sidestep the difficulty here by pointing out that stable reference is secured by the conventions governing indexical terms: a given use of 'I', for example, picks out the user. But those conventions will not secure reference for the many non-indexical namings ('Cesario') of other people by various characters.

6 Again, in both senses of 'correspond': by resemblance and causality. Olivia's image of Cesario resembles both Viola and Sebastian, and the causal chains linking her thoughts to each have by the end of the play

become hopelessly entangled (as, indeed, they have for Antonio, Toby and Andrew – and perhaps even for Feste).

7 Frank Kermode draws attention to a parallel theme in a Shakespeare poem which is closely contemporaneous with *Twelfth Night*, 'The Phoenix and the Turtle', in which the following two couplets appear: 'Two distincts, division none / Number there in love was slain'. 'Property was thus appalled, / That the self was not the same'. As Kermode explains, '"Property" translates *proprium*, meaning the quality (here personified) that distinguishes a person. Property, the principle of a single person, is appalled because of the conundrum presented by distinct yet undivided persons' (2000: 70).

8 For this to be the thought experiment de Sousa intends, we have to suppose that Zeus is, for the time in question, the duplicate of Amphitryon psychologically, as well as physically.

9 My thanks to Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

Further reading

de Sousa, R., 1987. *The Rationality of Emotion*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. A lively exploration of the various problems emotions, including love, throw up for our understanding of rationality.

Smith, E., 2001. *Twelfth Night*. York Notes Advanced Series. London: York Press. A very accessible introduction and analysis of the play, offering useful context, and drawing attention to the problems of reference it raises.

Yolton, John W., 1956. *John Locke and the Way of Ideas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. A detailed account of one of the most important Early Modern treatments of the ways in which thought succeeds (or does not succeed) in tracking external objects.

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Part VII

Art and the aesthetic

33

A TASTE FOR SLAUGHTER

Stephen Gosson, *Titus Andronicus*, and the appeal of evil

Introduction

One of the most significant contradictions between early modern English literary theory and practice had to do with how representations of evil should be treated. During the Renaissance, discussions of the purpose of literature routinely insisted that it must morally improve readers and render vice hateful. At the same time, early modern writers produced some of the most compelling representations of evil in the history of Western literature. This violation of contemporary theoretical norms was particularly acute on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, where witty and engaging villains upstaged virtuous characters and indulged in baroque acts of sadism and depravity.

   Renaissance theorists demonstrate only a tentative and fitful understanding of the competing aesthetic systems in play in the literature and drama of the period. Their treatment of the relationship between aesthetics and morality in literature derived from their readings of classical philosophers, especially Plato, Aristotle, and Horace. They approached this material with a reverence for the authority of ancient writers and, by and large, a commitment to some degree of Christian moralism. In attempting to combine the work of classical authors who did not necessarily agree, early modern discussions of literature inevitably folded in contradictory accounts of the relationship between poetic pleasure and ethical instruction, the twin goals of literature posited by Horace.[1] This strategy led to inconsistent explanations for the appeal of literary representations of evil. In order to more effectively analyse these attractive representations of evil, I have elsewhere developed the concept of *sinister aesthetics*: poetic conventions that generate pleasure by representing things we are supposed to dislike, including deception and cruelty, filth and disease, deformity and monstrosity, destruction and punishment, and the demonic and infernal.[2] In contrast, standards of beauty that are considered laudable and appropriate within the relevant cultural context I refer to as *normative aesthetics*.

For English writers, particularly the more committed Protestant reformers, works of literature had to demonstrate a moral benefit in order to justify their existence, and pleasure was inherently suspicious – the possibility of pleasure in artistic representations of evil doubly so. Sir Philip Sidney's *The Defence of Poesy* (written *c*. 1580, published 1595), one of the most important works of English Renaissance literary theory, provides only the barest hints that representations of evil might appeal to readers for any reason other than authorial deception or their own perversity. Antitheatrical writers offered a simple solution to the discrepancy between theories about how drama should work and what was actually happening in theatres: ban stage plays entirely. But their explanations of how plays led audiences into evil reflected philosophical models – and problems – that they shared with defenders of literature and drama like Sidney.

In this brief discussion, I will focus on one of the period's most prominent antitheatrical writers, Stephen Gosson (1554–1624), and on one of Shakespeare's earliest and most notorious tragedies: *Titus Andronicus* (*c*. 1592). Although Gosson may not be the most open-minded or philosophically rigorous thinker the period has to offer, the fissures and contradictions in his account of how literature or drama appeals to audiences and moves them to morally significant action are widely shared by his contemporaries. Early modern writers routinely conflate the moral and aesthetic. They oscillate between characterizing the moral instruction that literature should provide as being naturally sweet and describing it as a bitter pill in need of a sugar coating. And they have difficulty explaining the appeal of many early modern representations of evil that appear to violate both aesthetic and moral standards.

Titus Andronicus, written perhaps a decade after the publication of Gosson's last major antitheatrical work, employs aesthetics of violence to the fullest imaginable extent. The baroque, gory tortures inflicted and endured by its characters seem calculated to outrage contemporary moralists, although the play also arguably defends its atrocities by methodically grounding them in classical literary precedent, with an explicitness of allusion that modern scholars have found as striking as the explicitness of its violence. Regardless, the primary effect of the play's exploration of the depths of blood and horror is to aestheticize violence and to articulate and develop a connoisseurship of pain. Characters within the play who are able to do so become more morally compromised but also more dramatically impressive.

Flowers and cowshards: aesthetic perversity in Stephen Gosson

Whether they are declaring poetry to be the most exalted of human arts or castigating it as a tool of Satan, early modern theorists more often than not assume that beauty and virtue are naturally appealing, and their opposites correspondingly repugnant. Thus, an early modern stage villain, for example, would have to engage audiences by

cloaking himself deceptively in a beautiful and/or benevolent appearance or by possessing some admirable, virtuous qualities. On the other hand, early modern theorists at times suggest that audiences might demonstrate what I call *moral perversity*: knowingly embracing wickedness for the sake of wickedness and rejecting virtue. Even more counter-intuitively, audiences might deliberately take pleasure in ugliness and reject socially accepted standards of beauty, thereby exhibiting *aesthetic perversity*. To further complicate the matter, early modern theorists tend to conflate the aesthetic and the moral both rhetorically and philosophically. They routinely use the language of beauty and ugliness to talk about morality, and although much of this language is figurative, Renaissance forms of Platonism assert a deep metaphysical connection between beauty and goodness.

Gosson's work demonstrates these conflicting tendencies. In *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), which may have helped inspire Sidney's *The Defence of Poesy*, Gosson repeatedly asserts that plays lead their audiences into evil by deceptively concealing it behind something more appropriately desirable.[3] Poets and dramatists are like 'The deceitfull Phisition' who 'giueth sweete Syrropes to make his poyson goe downe the smoother', but 'pul off the visard that Poets maske in, you shall disclose their reproch, bewray their vanitie, loth their wantonnesse, lament their follie, and perceiue their sharpe sayings to be placed as Pearles in Dunghils' (Kinney (1974: 77)).[4] In this simile, Gosson uses something aesthetically unpleasant to represent an immoral quality, a technique that is ubiquitous in early modern theoretical discussions of literature and that ends up having significant philosophical consequences. Evil here is like dung, something that people would naturally avoid were it not masked in sweetness and seasoned with wit.

When attributing the appeal of plays to some deceitful additive, Gosson shifts between treating this additive as an aesthetic element and a moral one. The 'visard' suggests a deceptive external appearance, perhaps the superficial beauty of dramatic writing and spectacle. But the reference to 'sharpe sayings' – i.e. wise and/or witty ones – like pearls dotting a pile of excrement suggests rather a handful of *sententiae*, aesthetically desirable and potentially morally productive if not surrounded and overwhelmed by immoral content.

Gosson's later work, *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions* (1582), similarly conflates the aesthetic and moral. At times, sweetness is a figure for goodness:

> as no man, which desireth to giue you a/deadly poyson will temper the same with gaull, and *Elleborus*, or any thing that is bitter, and vnpleasaunt; but with sweete & holsome confectiōs: So the Deuill, at Playes, wil bring the comfortable worde of God, which, because it norisheth of nature is very conuenient to carry the poyson into our vaines.

(169)

Here, the moral truths of the Bible are described not only as healthful and nourishing, but also as 'sweet'. Even fragments of scripture are so naturally attractive and

pleasurable that they can be used to enthrall playgoing audiences. This optimistic view of moral instruction suggests a deep connection between the moral and the aesthetic, which derives ultimately from Plato.[5] The sweetness of scripture would lead us instinctively to goodness if it were not placed into a morally destructive context.

A few pages later, though, the perilous sweetness of drama is once again an aesthetic pleasure that contrasts with its true, immoral nature: 'Because the sweete numbers of *Poetrie* flowing in verse, do wōderfully tickle the hearers eares, the deuill hath tyed this to most of our playes, that whatsoeuer he would haue sticke fast to our soules, might slippe downe in suger by this intisement' (172). In this image, the sensual beauties of poetic verse (not virtuous Christian teachings) are the sugar that coats the poison of Satanic instruction. Beauty thus leads to sin rather than virtue – although the metaphor of a sugar-coated drug was also used by classical and Renaissance writers to describe how poetry could convey morally beneficial teachings when such teachings were not regarded as inherently delicious.[6]

The School of Abuse develops the idea that aesthetic pleasure is a gateway to immoral behaviour by suggesting that the sweetness itself is the poison. Gosson opposes 'bringing sweete consortes into Theaters, which rather effeminate the minde, as pricks vnto vice, then procure amendement of manners, as spurres to vertue' (85– 6). Pleasure is no longer merely a sugar coating on a harmful substance; now it is the drug that weakens the mind and leads it into evil.

Gosson's entire critique suggests a close linkage between pleasure and vice, although the precise nature of the linkage varies. Consequently, his work raises the possibility that evil might be appealing in itself and not merely because it is coated with something sweet. Immediately before Gosson compares the evils of plays to dung and argues that they could not possibly attract audiences without added sweeteners, he actually makes the case that excrement is inherently more delicious than sweet things:

> The *Scarabe* flies ouer many a sweete flower, & lightes in a cowshard: It is the custome of the flye to leaue the sound places of the Horse, and suck at the Botch: The nature of *Colloquintida*, to draw the worst humours too it selfe: The maner of swine, to forsake the fayre fieldes, and wallow in the myre: And the whole practise of Poets, eyther with fables to shew theyre abuses, or with plaine tearmes to vnfold theyr mischief, discouer theyr shame, discredit themselues, and disperse their poyson through all the worlde.
>
> (*School* 76)

Although elsewhere, Gosson had claimed that it would be foolish to feed anyone poison without hiding it in something sweet, here he posits a natural preference for dung over sweet flowers. Similarly, in *Playes Confuted*, he explains that 'beecause we loue our deformities wee defend them, and had rather excuse them, / then shake them off' (174). Later, he claims that taking pleasure in plays reflects 'our sicke

stomacke' that 'cannot iudge; as to eat chalke in the greene sicknes; in an ague pilchers; or as they that in some kinde of leprosie drinke poyson' (184). This sickness is not restricted to a perverted few, but is rather a general condition of humanity that requires effort to overcome.

Of course, Gosson is speaking figuratively in all of these cases: the 'deformities' are actually vices, and the scarab's aesthetically perverse love of dung is a metaphor for the playgoer's morally perverse love of sin. As he notes in *Playes Confuted*, when a play mingles good and evil, 'the hereditary corruptiō of our nature taketh ý worst and leaueth the best' (162). In other words, original sin causes us to instinctively prefer evil and seek out sin. This idea was widespread in early modern Christian thought, although higher degrees of pessimism about human moral agency were associated with Protestant reformers such as Luther and Calvin. In any case, Gosson and other early modern moralists so frequently conflate the moral and aesthetic that it can become hard to distinguish between this commonplace theological claim and aesthetically subversive claims about taking pleasure in things that are supposed to be unpleasant by their very nature.

This latter concern is particularly acute in the case of tragedy. Comedies 'make vs louers of laughter, and pleasure', that is, they lead us to sin by inflaming our desire for things that are naturally pleasant to begin with. Such impulses may be deplorable, but they are readily explicable within the theoretical framework Gosson is using. On the other hand, people flock to see tragedies even though 'The argumēt of Tragedies is wrath, crueltie, incest, iniurie, murther eyther violent by sworde, or voluntary by poyson' (*Playes* 160). As Gosson explains, 'The beholding of troubles and miserable slaughters that are in Tragedies, driue vs to immoderate sorrow, heauines, woma—/nish weeping and mourning, whereby we become louers of dumpes, and lamentatiō, both enemies to fortitude' (*Playes* 161). The catalog of crimes and the phrase 'miserable slaughters' suggest actions that are evil in nature and ugly in their physical representation on stage. Moreover, these dramatic representations produce emotions that should not be sought out as pleasant and that (in Gosson's misogynistic formulation) undermine manly virtue.[7] Tragedies thus encourage a kind of perversity that takes pleasure in the experience of sadness and gory, destructive violence, which we ought to repudiate on both moral and aesthetic grounds. Seen through this lens, the apparent ugliness and evil of tragedies makes their appeal difficult to explain, much less justify.

Titus Andronicus and the connoisseurship of violence

The hostility of antitheatrical writers such as Gosson to the treatment of evil on the early modern stage highlights what was at stake for dramatists such as Shakespeare in choosing to stage spectacles of violence and cruelty. *Titus Andronicus*, possibly Shakespeare's first tragedy and almost certainly his most notorious, offers its

audience virtually all of the horrors that these writers accused tragedies of purveying. The play seems to have been popular in Shakespeare's time, so audiences presumably enjoyed its catalog of 'troubles and miserable slaughters'. But how, and to what effect? In writing it, Shakespeare risked giving more ammunition to antitheatrical critics while still early in his career as an author – in part, presumably, because he knew it would sell tickets, but also, as I will demonstrate, to explore and comment on this appetite for violence. In service of both these goals, the play offers many characters who demonstrate a taste for slaughter. These characters model aesthetic sensibilities, including sinister ones, for the audience to evaluate and potentially adopt or reject. In examining them, we can see how the inconsistent theories of Gosson and others about the aesthetic appeal of plays work out in a dramatic context.

The most consistent lover of violence and human misery in *Titus Andronicus* is Aaron the Moor. Like Shakespeare's Richard III, Aaron is a descendant of the medieval Vice archetype who explicitly and gleefully embraces what he recognizes to be evil. As he declares when captured and confronted by Lucius, 'Even now I curse the day, and yet I think / Few come within the compass of my curse, / Wherein I did not some notorious ill' (5.1.125–7).[8] These lines display moral perversity, the knowing choice of evil over good as a matter of principle. Aaron similarly describes Tamora as 'To villainy and vengeance consecrate', in other words, dedicated not only to revenge but also to evil qua evil (2.1.121).

But Aaron also shows signs of aesthetic perversity, taking pleasure in the hideous and cruel sensual and emotional details of the crimes he commits, like Gosson's manure-loving scarab. Immediately after his statement of principle to Lucius in 5.1, Aaron launches into a vivid catalogue of the myriad evils he has perpetrated. He begins with those that are most serious, from a moral or legal perspective – murder and rape – but passes over them relatively quickly before proceeding to what might seem like lesser sins, such as destroying property and livestock. As the seriousness of these infractions decreases, the vividness of the details he provides and the intensity of the pleasure he shows at recounting them increase, building to his final example:

> Oft have I digged up dead men from their graves,
> And set them upright at their dear friends' door,
> Even when their sorrows almost was forgot,
> And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,
> Have with my knife carvèd in Roman letters
> 'Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead'.

> (5.1.135–40)

By what scale might we consider this the climax of a list that begins with rape and murder? Certainly, the proper treatment of dead bodies is important in Shakespeare's culture and in the Roman world of the play (whose action is framed at both ends by concerns about the appropriate disposition and/or desecration of various corpses).

But considering its movement from homicide to vandalism to the exhuming of dead bodies, Aaron's catalogue does not lend itself to strict ordering by some abstract moral calculus. Rather, Aaron's rhetoric reveals that his love of evil is animated by a connoisseurship of pain. He enjoys killing cattle because of the lingering misery it will bring to the struggling farmers, and he saves his final example for last because it represents his most exquisitely subtle evocation of human suffering.

This framework of judgement is more aesthetic than moral, but it is not an aesthetic that conforms to accepted notions of beauty or sensual pleasure. Earlier in Aaron's conversation with Lucius, he similarly aestheticizes Lavinia's rape and mutilation by Chiron and Demetrius: 'They cut thy sister's tongue and ravished her, / And cut her hands, and trimmed her as thou sawest' (5.1.92–3). The two most relevant meanings of 'trim' here are 'To array … to make comely, adorn, dress up' (*OED* (2018): verb II.7) and, with a more specific eye to Lavinia's severed hands and tongue, 'To cut off the excrescences or irregularities of; to reduce to a regular shape by doing this' (II.11.a). In other words, Aaron presents Lavinia's rape and mutilation as pleasing because it brings her into conformity with an aesthetic ideal that is radically different from the one her beauty embodied. Accordingly, Albert Tricomi refers to Aaron's description as turning Lavinia into a 'disgustingly prettified figure' and rightly notes that 'the purpose of the tragedy is not to dilute but to highlight the nightmare that befalls the Andronici' (1974: 13). However, Tricomi argues that Aaron's word choice euphemistically reduces the horror of her rape, which is only re-exposed by Lucius's outraged rejection of the word 'trimmed': 'O detestable villain! call'st thou that trimming?' (5.1.94), a reading that I think misjudges the rhetorical and dramatic effects of the scene.

Looking at the conversation as a whole, Lucius functions as a straight man, adopting a morally correct but simplistic attitude that is expressed more through brief expostulations of outrage than compelling, eloquent, or cogent speeches. He thus throws into starker relief Aaron's much more articulate connoisseurship of evil, which in aestheticizing what has been done to Lavinia renders its horror more exquisitely vivid, not less.[9] Indeed, Aaron responds to Lucius's objection by insisting on the deliciousness of Lavinia's predicament: 'Why, she was washed and cut and trimmed, and 'twas / Trim sport for them which had the doing of it' (5.1.95–6). Lucius has no reply other than to call them all 'barbarous beastly villains', a comparatively lame rejoinder (5.1.97). Both he and the Goth soldier cannot seem to comprehend Aaron's evil (5.1.121, 123). In the end, Lucius is forced to gag Aaron physically (5.1.151), since he cannot compete with him rhetorically or dispel the idea that Aaron's hideous crimes might have some kind of aesthetic appeal.[10]

Aaron makes it clear that his dedication to evil is about pleasure and appetite. Early in the play, he tells Tamora that 'Blood and revenge are hammering in my head', not because he has been terribly wronged, but because it is his nature: 'though Venus govern your desires, / Saturn is dominator over mine' (2.3.39, 30–1). He also

highlights the connection between moral and aesthetic perversity in one of his many declarations of evil intent:

> O, how this villainy
> Doth fat me with the very thoughts of it!
> Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace,
> Aaron will have his soul black like his face.
>
> (3.1.202–5)

He takes pleasure in wickedness for its own sake, but also because he wants to create the kind of moral-aesthetic correspondence beloved of early modern writers. Since his face is black, which Renaissance culture defines as ugly and a conventional symbol of evil, his behaviour creates a kind of decorum between appearances and reality. Aaron's statement is morally perverse in that it involves wilfully choosing evil over good. But approving of his own blackness and wanting his soul to figuratively echo that blackness involves aesthetic judgement. The aesthetic sensibility necessary to appreciate such a correspondence is antithetical to socially acceptable notions of beauty, as Bassianus's critique of Aaron makes clear. Like Aaron, Bassianus links a dark complexion to evil, when he says that Aaron's body and Tamora's sinful adultery with Aaron are equally 'Spotted, detested, and abominable' (2.3.74). Bassianus represents the normative moral and aesthetic position here: adultery is evil and Aaron's face should be disgusting. By this standard, Tamora demonstrates aesthetic perversity when she finds Aaron 'lovely' (2.3.190). It is a 'foul desire' according to Bassianus, in that she is drawn to something for which she should feel aversion (2.3.79).

Lucius, like Bassianus, is one of the few characters in the play who appears at least intermittently to possess a moral compass and a normative aesthetic sensibility, but even he partakes in the play's pervasive aestheticization of dismemberment. Despite Lucius's outrage when Aaron describes Lavinia's injuries as trimming, as if she were a piece of meat being prepared for a banquet, his own request to sacrifice Alarbus displays a similar attitude. Lucius asks to 'hew his limbs' in order to trim or dress him as an appropriate sacrifice to the gods (1.1.100). He reports on the successful conclusion of the rites with an emphasis on how aesthetically pleasing it was to kill, dismember, and burn Alarbus: 'Alarbus' limbs are lopped / And entrails feed the sacrificing fire, / Whose smoke like incense doth perfume the sky' (1.1.146–8). Alarbus becomes nourishing food (as his brothers will later on), and the smell of his burning flesh is like a sacred perfume. The play concludes with Lucius neatly tying up loose ends, in accordance with the demands of the tragic genre, by performing acts indistinguishable from the atrocities that demanded resolution in the first place: he has Aaron tortured to death by starvation and Tamora's corpse left out to be devoured by animals. These actions represent further variations on the grotesque idea of trimming developed earlier in the play, but offering them as dramatic closure

instead of as crimes or tragic errors, appears to further validate the aesthetic governing the treatment of these bodies.

Perhaps the most disconcerting example of this aestheticization of violence is Marcus's lengthy visual and rhetorical survey of Lavinia's body after she has been raped and had her tongue and hands cut off by Chiron and Demetrius. Like Lucius, Marcus is one of the more morally grounded characters in *Titus Andronicus*, which makes his fascination with Lavinia's mutilation all the more significant. It is also one of the scenes where a character's aesthetic response to something horrible seems to overlap most demonstrably with what the play offers its audience. Marcus's speech fuses Petrarchan eroticism with an aesthetics of mutilation to render Lavinia as an object of ambivalent fascination. Marcus does not turn away from Lavinia in disgust or horror, nor does he make any immediate move to help her. He just keeps gazing at her. And therefore so must anyone attending to the play, since there is nothing else for them to look at but her ravaged body, nothing else for them to listen to but Marcus's detailed description of it. The speech follows the pattern of a Petrarchan blazon, or antiblazon (the distinction between the two, often tenuous, becomes even more so here), cataloguing Lavinia's present and absent limbs in lush poetic detail:

> Speak, gentle niece, what stern ungentle hands
> Have lopped and hewed and made thy body bare
> Of her two branches, those sweet ornaments
> Whose circling shadows kings have sought to sleep in,
> And might not gain so great a happiness
> As half thy love? Why dost not speak to me?
> Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,
> Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind,
> Doth rise and fall between thy rosèd lips,
> Coming and going with thy honey breath.

<div align="right">(2.4.16–25)</div>

At first glance, the eroticism of the speech appears to be rhetorically framed as a kind of nostalgia: Lavinia used to be sexually attractive, and now she is hideous, which is a lamentable loss to the men who desired or might have desired her sexually.[11] It is Petrarchan not only because of its catalogue of body parts with their accompanying metaphors and similes, but also because it treats Lavinia as an aesthetic object (not a person with feelings) and as a pretext for Marcus to ruminate on his own feelings and those of other men. Although this kind of objectification was a staple of Renaissance poetry and therefore potentially unremarkable to early modern audiences, the context emphasizes the inappropriateness of Marcus's focus on her sexual desirability: she has just been sexually assaulted, she is bleeding to death, and he is her uncle.

Marcus's treatment of Lavinia as a poetic object adds insult to the injury of her rape, but the kind of poetic object that Marcus makes her into is centrally revealing of the play's sinister aesthetics. The last four lines of the passage quoted above describe Lavinia's mouth overflowing with blood from her severed tongue. As she tries to exhale through the blood, it forms bubbles that burst on her lips, stain them red, and give her breath a cloying scent. This process is described through figurative language that invokes highly conventional images of beauty like the gently bubbling fountain, and in particular some of the most common clichés of Petrarchan love poetry: lips the colour of roses, breath as sweet as honey. The result is not a contrast between Lavinia's former beauty and her present state, but an eroticization of the mutilation itself. Her lips are seductively red and her breath richly scented not in spite of her bleeding but because of it. The beauty and the hideousness of this passage are inextricable from each other and represent a distinct aesthetic, which the play offers to the audience for their potential appreciation. To make this point clear, Marcus expresses his admiration for the rapists' ingenuity in shaping Lavinia's body into the aesthetic object that fascinates him: 'A craftier Tereus, cousin, hast thou met, / And he hath cut those pretty fingers off / That could have better sewed than Philomel' (2.4.41–3). And as Tricomi observes, 'That "craftier Tereus" Marcus speaks of is really Will Shakespeare laying claim to having out-witted the Roman poet in the telling of a tale' (1974: 16); in other words, Shakespeare proudly offers these same pleasures to the audience.

The metafictional implications of Marcus's compliment are supported and developed by the rest of the play, which explicitly engages with Ovid's account of Philomela, Tereus, and Procne in a number of ways, perhaps most notably when Lavinia tries to explain herself by grabbing an actual copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and opening it to 'the tragic tale of Philomel' (4.1.47). *Titus Andronicus*'s relationship to Ovid has been a major focus of modern scholarship on the play – and rightly so, although such an approach risks sublimating the play's exuberantly cruel and gory violence into a more decorous discussion of neoclassical allusions.[12] Tricomi, for example, does not pursue the moral or aesthetic implications of his comparison of Shakespeare to the sadistic rapist Tereus. He focuses instead on Shakespeare's 'witty competition with Ovid and Seneca', praising Shakespeare for a generic sort of literary cleverness rather than taking full account of the cruelty that infuses, flavours, and ultimately defines this wit (1974: 16). I want to look at how the play's metafictional references to Ovid and other metatheatrical moments in the play address whether, how, and why audiences might enjoy dramatizations of violence and cruelty. On the most basic level, the play's continual classical allusions remind the audience that stories of rape and mutilation have been popular for a long time. By linking *Titus* so explicitly and repeatedly to respected authors such as Ovid and Seneca, Shakespeare may be trying to inoculate the play against the kinds of attacks made by Gosson and other antitheatrical writers, who frequently show deference to classical authors.

But the play also takes seriously the potential moral and aesthetic problems with an appetite for violence. As Titus gropes for a proper response to his family's sufferings, he uses metatheatrical language that suggests the appeal of such suffering:

> Or shall we cut away our hands like thine?
> Or shall we bite our tongues, and in dumb shows
> Pass the remainder of our hateful days?
> What shall we do? let us that have our tongues
> Plot some device of further misery,
> To make us wondered at in time to come.

> (3.1.130–5)

The reference to 'dumb shows' explicitly evokes early modern theatrical performances. The idea of plotting a 'device of further misery' suggests the kind of imaginative effort required to write a play such as *Titus Andronicus* and offers a characterization of such narratives that is not unlike Gosson's, which also refers to them as 'miserable'.[13] The last line indicates that such narratives will attract an audience who will experience a (presumably desirable if not conventionally pleasurable) sense of wonder at contemplating them. Thus, the passage asserts that Titus's fantasy of pointlessly destructive self-mutilation would produce a story that audiences would find fascinating. In the next act, Marcus, hearing the place of Lavinia's rape described, asks 'O, why should nature build so foul a den, / Unless the gods delight in tragedies?' (4.1.59–60). He thereby raises questions about the appropriateness of an appetite for tragedies. On the one hand, the rhetorical question suggests that it would be outrageous (unjust and nonsensical) for the gods to take pleasure in human suffering. Thus, perhaps is it similarly unnatural for humans to enjoy theatrical spectacles of suffering and violence. On the other hand, the lines would remind Shakespeare's audience that tragedies are a demonstrably popular genre in early modern London and that they are watching one. In one of the play's more explicitly metatheatrical scenes, Tamora stages a kind of allegorical performance for Titus, in which she personifies Revenge and her sons play the roles of Rape and Murder.[14] The theatricality of the scene is emphasized by Tamora's references to wearing a costume (5.2.1), which Titus admires (5.2.86). Tamora also instructs Chiron and Demetrius on how to perform their parts (5.2.71–2). Tamora describes herself as a horrifying figure 'sent from th'infernal kingdom' who takes an enthusiastic delight in 'murder and … death' (5.2.30, 34) and seeks to exploit a similar appetite in Titus.

Titus, however, turns the tables on Tamora with the play's climactic act of violent revenge – baking Chiron and Demetrius into a pie – and thereby reconfigures and crystallizes the play's exploration of the appetite for horrors. The pie is a figure for the play itself: a bloody confection of severed body parts that appears sloppy and

utterly disgusting by normative standards but is nonetheless carefully constructed and designed to be consumed. Although Titus does not go so far as to call his pie delicious, he clearly takes pride in the artistry of its construction, which he makes a point of explaining in some detail to the pie's main ingredients:

> Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to dust,
> And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,
> And of the paste a coffin I will rear,
> And make two pasties of your shameful heads,

<div align="right">(5.2.186–9)</div>

When serving the pie, he makes a quasi-dramatic spectacle of its presentation and demonstrates a similar interest in making sure his audience appreciates it. He even costumes himself in a cook's outfit 'Because I would be sure to have all well / To entertain' Saturninus and Tamora (5.3.31–2). The script is somewhat unclear on whether, when, and how Tamora eats the pie, and Titus (or Shakespeare) does not give Tamora an opportunity to comment on its flavour. However, when Titus reveals the pie's ingredients, he claims that 'their mother daintily hath fed' on it (5.3.61). The word 'daintily' can suggest 'with delicate attention to the palate' (*OED* 2); in other words, Titus describes her as enjoying the pie with the aesthetic sensibilities of a gourmet or connoisseur.

Conclusion

Titus Andronicus partakes of the widespread early modern tendency to conflate moral and aesthetic categories, and early modern and modern critics have found it troublesome for both aesthetic and moral reasons. The play provides numerous examples of the aesthetic perversity that Gosson compares to a bug preferring faeces to flowers. Indeed, finding aesthetic pleasure in the consumption of dead bodies is ultimately what the play's audience has to be doing if we are to regard *Titus* and many other early modern tragedies as entertainment that playgoers would voluntarily pay money to watch and not as some kind of psychological torture.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle says tragedy inspires 'pity and fear', both of which involve an identification with the tragic hero as victim, and he calls 'suffering' an essential element of tragic plots (c. 335 BC: 1449b, 1452b).[15] *Titus* does encourage identification with suffering victims, and more specifically it models the kind of melancholy lamentation that Gosson misogynistically derides as effeminate moping (see for example most of *Titus* 3.1). The play also provides characters who, at least some of the time, reflect and model the kind of normative moral outrage that both modern and early modern critics might expect or hope for from the play's audience.

But virtually all of these characters become morally compromised at some point, none more spectacularly than the outraged and suffering father, Titus himself.

Above all, more than either morally beneficial social commentary or the gloomy pleasures of 'dumpes, and lamentatiō', the play gives audiences the opportunity to identify with the perpetrators of 'miserable slaughters' and with the range of emotions that might inspire such violence, from bloodthirsty rage to a finely honed taste for cruelty. Lucius's horror at Aaron's Vice-like manifesto of evil is certainly one subject position the play makes available to its audience. But the connoisseurship Aaron describes and embodies also bears inescapable similarities to the aesthetic sensibilities of an avid tragedy fan. Both enjoy the emotional pathos that results from baroquely constructed theatres of pain. This taste has been denied or morally condemned – and often both – by Gosson and other early modern moralists. Modern critics, too, have difficulty acknowledging it without resorting to oxymorons such as Tricomi's 'disgustingly prettified', which mystify as much as they explain. Identifying this sensibility as a type of sinister aesthetic makes it more susceptible to analysis.

But the question remains: does the play share or otherwise validate Gosson's pessimism about the harmful effects of early modern English tragedy on audiences? *Titus* suggests the dangers of aestheticizing violence but does not provide a clear and powerful alternative. The play ends as it begins, proposing that Romans and London audiences alike derive satisfaction from the spectacle of torturing enemies while they live and humiliating their bodies after death. In the final lines, Lucius mocks the possibility of pitying the pitiless Tamora and leaves her body to be devoured by wild animals, while Aaron is half-buried and starved to death, and anyone who 'pities him' is to be killed (5.3.181). This violent and contemptuous repudiation of pity is quite different from the salubrious purgation of pity and fear recommended by early modern readings of Aristotle, and Shakespeare emphasizes it by deliberately placing it after the displays of pity for Titus (5.3.149–75).[16]

In a sense, then, *Titus* appears to validate Gosson's critique by making it hard to extract a morally redemptive message or an affectively beneficial catharsis that is not fundamentally undermined or tainted. And Shakespeare never again wrote a play quite like *Titus Andronicus* in its unremitting commitment to sadistic violence without a solid moral counterbalance. On the other hand, the play and its success with Elizabethan audiences and readers cannot be understood without recognizing that one of its central goals is cultivating and satisfying an appreciation for the exuberant excess of its horrors. The sinister sensibility that is fully unleashed in *Titus Andronicus* finds its way into many later works of Shakespeare, including *Richard III*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*. In general, these plays place their sinister elements into a significantly stronger moral context, but the dark appeal of violence and cruelty still animates – and in some cases, dominates – these works.[17]

Related topics

See Chapters 13, 14, 34

Notes

1 See Horace's *Ars Poetica*: 'Poets aim either to benefit [*prodesse*], or to amuse [*delectare*], or to utter words at once both pleasing and helpful [*iucunda et idonea*] to life.… He has won every vote who has blended profit and pleasure [*miscuit utile dulci*], at once delighting and instructing the reader' (c. 19 BC: pages 478–9, lines 333–4, 343–4).

2 See my *Sinister Aesthetics* (Slotkin (2017)), which contains revised material from two earlier articles.

3 On the possibility that Sidney was at least partially responding to Gosson, see Sidney (1595: 371 n212).

4 Hereafter, passages from Gosson's antitheatrical works are cited simply by their page numbers in Kinney (1974).

5 See Diotima's description of love in Plato's *Symposium* (385–70 BC, esp. Stephanus numbers 210a–212a). In the Renaissance, Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (1528), translated into English by Sir Thomas Hoby as *The Courtyer* (1561), was one of the most influential articulations of the idea that beauty is a natural emanation of goodness (see book 4, signature Tt.4v, *Early English Books Online* image 180).

6 The classical source is Lucretius's comparison of poetry to a honeyed glass of medicine in *De Rerum Naturae* (c. 50 BC: book 4, lines 11–22). See Sidney (1595: 227) for one of countless Renaissance examples.

7 These concerns about tragedy echo Plato's *Republic* (c. 380 BC: book 10, 605c–e). For an early Christian formulation, see Augustine's *Confessions* (c. 400: 3.2.2).

8 Shakespeare (c. 1592). For Shakespeare's use of the Vice archetype, see Spivack (1958).

9 Reese (1970) seeks to rescue the play from accusations that it is an 'immature exercise in sensationalism' by arguing for 'certain highly formal elements in the play which subdue (or "abstract") the horror' (78). Like many other critics, he assumes that to aestheticize horror means to push it in the direction of the conventionally beautiful, to sanitize it. The paradigm of sinister aesthetics, by contrast, allows for literary representations of evil to become more intensely and distinctively horrific as more artistic care is lavished upon them.

10 Smith (1996), albeit in the service of a different argument, also makes the case that Lucius is 'naive' with respect to Aaron and 'underestimates Aaron's intelligence' (322).

11 From Marcus's patriarchal perspective, this loss is not only an erotic one; it also represents the destruction of Lavinia's marriageability and therefore her political and economic usefulness to the Andronici as a means of cementing alliances, such as the failed one with Saturninus in the play's first scene. Titus is so invested in this union that he not only goes against Lavinia's wishes but also kills his own son, Mutius, for trying to prevent it.

12 For studies that foreground neoclassical allusions in *Titus*, see Bate (1993), Dickson (2009), Miola (1992), Tricomi (1974), and Weber (2015).

13 Later, Titus sequesters himself 'To ruminate strange plots of dire revenge' and to write them out as if they were a script for performance: 'what I mean to do / See here in bloody lines I have set down; / And what is written shall be executed' (5.2.6, 13–15). *OED* cites evidence that the verb 'plot' was used to refer to writing the storyline of a play as early as 1596 (v.[1], 3.a), so it is possible this meaning was available to Shakespeare when he wrote *Titus*.

14 This performance recalls the allegorical figures from medieval morality plays as well as Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (*c.* 1587), in which a bloodthirsty personification of Revenge comments on the main action of the play. Many other elements of Titus are inspired by *The Spanish Tragedy*, and both plays draw on the conventions of Senecan tragedy, which typically features gory acts of revenge.

15 Aristotle is also important for early modern theories about the appeal of supposedly unappealing objects because of his influential claim that 'we enjoy contemplating the most precise images of things whose actual sight is painful to us, such as the forms of the vilest animals and of corpses' (c. 335 BC: 1448b).

16 In contrast, Lugo (2007) seeks to defend the play from Bloom's (1998) charge of 'sadomasochism' by arguing that the deaths of Chiron, Demetrius, and 'the remaining cast' are a successful 'metaphorical exorcism' that produces 'a perfectly classical catharsis' (2007: 415).

17 In the spring of 2017, I presented portions of this paper at a Shakespeare Association of America seminar on 'Negative Affects in Shakespeare'. I want to thank the seminar leader, Drew Daniel, and the other participants for serving as preliminary readers.

Further reading

Dickson, L., 2008. 'High' Art and 'Low' Blows: *Titus Andronicus* and the Critical Language of Pain. *Shakespeare Bulletin* 26(1): 1–22. This article offers a searching examination of modern responses to the horror and violence of *Titus* and the often problematic moral and aesthetic standards they imply. Dickson considers 'what makes violence "gratuitous"'(2) by way of 'Judith Butler's model of subject construction based on abjection' (3). In contrast to the argument of this chapter, she suggests that the death of Lavinia and the final speeches of Lucius and Marcus successfully create a redemptive ending for the play (10).

Margolis, J., 1980. *Art and Philosophy*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press. This book argues that 'works of art exist only in cultural contexts' and posits a mutually constitutive relationship between the work's 'rule-governed order' and culturally specific 'appreciative traditions' (49). Margolis's theory allows for 'divergent appreciative systems' within a single culture, suggesting that we can apply different aesthetic criteria in different contexts (227).

Reynolds, B., 1997. The Devil's House, 'or worse': Transversal Power and Antitheatrical Discourse in Early Modern England. *Theatre Journal* 49(2): 142–167. This article analyses the 'sociopolitical role of the theatre … by evaluating responses to it in the period's high-profile antitheatrical debate' (144). Reynolds introduces the concept of the 'transversal' to examine 'the transgression of the conceptual boundaries and, usually by extension, the emotional boundaries of subjective territory' (149) – and more concretely, early modern theatre's engagement with 'bacchanalia, criminality, the Devil, the unspeakable, [and] the unthinkable' (151).

Starks, L.S., 2002. Cinema of Cruelty: Powers of Horror in Julie Taymor's *Titus*. In: L.S. Starks and C. Lehmann, eds. *The Reel Shakespeare: Alternative Cinema and Theory*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 121–42. This essay uses the concept of the abject, from Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1980, Éditions du Seuil), to theorize audiences' ambivalent fascination with the hideous elements in *Titus Andronicus* and in modern horror films.

Weinberg, B., 1961. *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*. Vol. 2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. This comprehensive survey of Italian Renaissance literary criticism is useful for understanding early modern theoretical and philosophical arguments about the relationship between morality and aesthetics in literature.

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34

GROTESQUE LAUGHTER AS A COPING MECHANISM IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

Adele-France Jourdan

Ostensibly Shakespeare's bloodiest and most gruesome work, *Titus Andronicus* has been harshly criticized by both its contemporary audience and later critics as a subpar play. As Cecil Wilson (in Dickson (2008: 1)) argues of its depiction of monstrous suffering and grotesque mutilation, *Titus Andronicus* is 'not so much a play as a dramatized abbatoir: an orgy of horror for horror's sake' that stages 'an almost farcical excess of agony and villainy'.[1] While *Titus* defenders might try to make what Benedict Nightingale (2003: 19) calls 'moral excuses' for its morbid brutality, such attempts are ultimately in vain: for many, its unseemly juxtaposition of trite badinage alongside horrendous violence – 'O handle not the theme, to talk of hands, / Lest we remember still that we have none' (III.ii.29–30)[2] – is at best laughable in only a crude way. However, myopically focusing on the play's 'slasheresque' quality alone puts interpretative blinders up against the more subtle ways in which Shakespeare uses such hyperbolic carnage to question the permeability of the distinction between tragedy and comedy and explore the nature of revenge, grief, and human agency. While not all find *Titus* and its overwrought nigh parodic bloodshed the least risible but reject its indefensible laughter as an inexcusably crass response to its tragic action, there is overwhelming historical and textual support that suggests that humour, black or otherwise, plays an indispensable role in Shakespeare's revenge tragedy and its metaphysics of violence.[3] With that said, the following seeks to shed light on *Titus'* menacing laughter by first considering its literary import as rhetorical trope and then situating it within a more abstract analysis of why we sometimes laugh at that which is otherwise tragically violent.

Historical background: Revenge tragedy or parody?

In order to provide a critically responsible reading of the comic potential of *Titus* and its grisly landscape, it is important to situate the play within its historical and cultural context. In a period of social turmoil, where questions of punitive justice were matters of pressing concern, revenge emerged as a dominant theme in Elizabethan tragedy: while such plays could only have so much political influence, they provided demoralized audiences with an emotional outlet for their frustration with the rampant ineffectiveness of a corrupt judicial system. As Robert Watson (2002: 160) remarks of the genre's affective pull, with 'so many criminals immune to punishment, and so many outrages (against women, the poor, and ethnic and religious minorities) not even considered crimes, it is hardly surprising that the public developed an appetite for revenge stories'. In addition to its cathartic appeal, English Renaissance revenge tragedy captured and engaged audiences' attention with comically lurid and extravagant depictions of sex and violence, features that *Titus* bears all too much witness to with its incongruous witticisms and panoply of mutilated, tortured, and dismembered bodies littering its stage. Thus in answer to the question, why does the play's flagrant butchery elicit such discordant laughter: Shakespeare made it so. But to what effect? While the first revenge tragedies shocked and entertained their audience by turning conventional moral and social dictates on their head and thwarting emotional 'stock responses' (Hirsh (1988: 60)), as the genre grew in popularity, such dramatic devices became sources of parody. And, though not all parody need be critical of that at which it impishly pokes fun, the way in which such devices are made ironic and self-conscious use of by Shakespeare in this bloody work seems more indicative of sober critique than puckish parody. With that being the case, one wonders to which camp *Titus* belongs: is Shakespeare's ultimate aim here to use the genre against itself and thereby illustrate the inherent folly of its erroneous precepts? Let's ask Titus.

In his dark revenge tragedy, Shakespeare employs many of the genre's structural motifs, such as the drama's foreign setting, the revenger's (feigned) madness, and the repetitive, parallel, or symmetrical structure of the characters' actions. The play is set in ancient Rome, Titus feigns

madness to lure Tamora and her sons into a false sense of security before pouncing on the latter and feeding them to the former, and the action is certainly symmetrical: Titus and Tamora feature as uncanny doppelgangers[4], exchanging dead offspring for dead offspring, while the opening and concluding scenes both feature a mass of corpses as background to the election of a new Roman emperor. Of most importance, however, is the play's idiosyncratically 'over-the-top' character[5] and comic incongruity. While its humour ranges from witty word play to vulgar innuendo, the operative strategy here is a characteristic disconnect between abject loss and the characters' both verbally and emotionally malapropos reaction to and representation of such violent excess.[6] The play's villains – to use a fairly ambiguous term, given that the evil behaviour of the bad guys, i.e. the Goths, is almost outstripped by that of the apparently not-so-good good guys, i.e. the Romans – respond to the all too real pain and suffering they have created with malicious levity. And it is precisely this conflation of utter misery with mocking derision that comprises the cornerstone of the text's unsettlingly comic effect.

One instance of such sardonic and normatively disruptive treatment of profound anguish is the way in which Aaron, the Moor, responds to Lavinia's brutal rape, an act of violence that he himself has orchestrated: 'Why, she was wash'd, and cut, and trimm'd, and 'twas / Trim sport for them which had the doing of it' (V.i.95–6). Turning our attention to the actual perpetrators of said crime, consider the way in which Chiron and Demetrius add insult to Lavinia's substantial injury when, having just raped her and cut off her hands and tongue, they cruelly mock the loss of agency they have just inflicted.

Chiron: Go home, call for sweet water, wash thy hands.

Demetrius: She hath no tongue to call, nor hands to wash,

And so let's leave her to her silent walks.

Chiron: And 'twere my cause, I should go hang myself.

Demetrius: If thou hadst hands to help thee knit the cord.

(II.iv.6–10)

Even if we shift our focus to those from whom we would expect nurturing words of care and comfort, do we still find examples of linguistic

dissonance. Consider the grandiose and lofty tenor of Marcus' response to finding his battered niece (II.iv.11–57). While there are no puns in sight in Marcus' eloquent speech, his poetic[7] monologue on Lavinia's violation is wildly, if not grotesquely, inconsistent with the visceral nature of her brute pain.

Such gross incongruity between dramatic action and affective response is perhaps most poignantly exemplified in the play's crowning machination of revenge, Titus' 'Last Supper'. Consider the following lines wherein the distraught tears of a father who has just lost his daughter (albeit by killing her himself) are replaced with the polite behaviour of a proper host, who encourages his guests to eat: 'Will't please you eat? will't please your Highness feed' (V.iii.54). A couple of lines later Titus responds to Saturninus' request to fetch Chiron and Demetrius with this callous ditty: 'Why, there they are, both baked in this pie; / Whereof their mother daintily hath fed, / Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred' (V.iii.60–2). In its sing-songy inflection, the rhymed conflation of Tamora's 'dainty' table manners with her cannibalistic ingestion of the very offspring she once held within her in gestation bespeaks a violent incongruity[8] that lends the all too real horror of the scene a surreal tone. While certainly not 'laugh out loud funny', the above incongruities nevertheless underscore the play's undeniable though macabre sense of humour.

Whether we laugh with *Titus* or snicker at its 'comic grotesquerie' (Brucher (1979: 89)) in savvy appreciation of Shakespeare's satirical parody of contemporary revenge tragedies, its harrowing drama elicits yet another, more subtle, laughter, one that laughs in distress, desperate for affirmation that what we see is – indeed must be! – an illustration of intentionally gratuitous *non*sense. Such laughter strives to, as Richard Brucher (1979: 89) argues, 'reach an equilibrium, to put the bizarre action in perspective' – in a word to dispel the unsettling prospect that the excessive pitch of the play's violence is no mere capitulation to the demands of any revenge tragedy worth its salt but exposes the fragility of our systems of meaning and reveals the anarchic nonsense of a world impervious to the constricted strictures of a law and order thrust upon it by man. Here, the awkward exhortation of laughter erupts as a coping mechanism employed to make sense of such bizarre action and to, by

belittling, distil the ominous significance of its fearsome representations in the hope that it will soon be over and all will be as it should again.

At stake in *Titus*' grotesque cachinnation is not the response to violence itself but to what its pointless excess reveals: more important than the physically butchered casualties of the play's terrific barbarity is its more abstract victim, namely, the breakdown of worldly meaning and purpose that is at stake in profound examples of trauma – as Titus attests in his insightful rejoinder to Marcus' behest that he 'not break into these deep extremes' (III.i.215) but 'let reason govern thy lament' (III.i.218), reason is an alien other to the boundless sorrow of traumatic loss: 'If there were reason for these miseries, / Then into limits could I bind my woes' (III.i.219–20). No mere parody or traditional revenge tragedy, *Titus Andronicus* uses the tools of the genre to explore the perniciously destructive nature of revenge itself and criticize the early modern stipulation that only vengeance can restore victims to psychic health and equilibrium. Pushed to the extremes of sorrow, Titus asks

> which way shall I find Revenge's cave?
> For these two heads [Martius and Quintus'] do seem to speak to me,
> And threat me I shall never come to bliss
> Till all these mischiefs be return'd again,
> Even in their throats that hath committed them.

> (III.i.270–4)

While Titus banks on the healing power of vengeful requital to treat or curb his untenable grief, by pushing the tropes of revenge tragedy to their extreme and cluttering his stage with the cadaverous tokens of such ultimately inane butchery, Shakespeare illustrates the way in which revenge is ultimately ineffective at best and ridiculous at worst. Some experiences inflict irrevocable psychological or emotional wounds that simply cannot be 'undone' by revenge (Willis (2002: 52)).

In addition to exposing the futility of vengeance, the excess violence of *Titus* also testifies to the epistemic and ontological frailty of representation. While Marcus' speech already motions to the way in which language proves impotent before the ineffable depth of Lavinia's anguish, such linguistic inadequacy is even more acute when, duped by Aaron into sacrificing his hand for his sons' lives, Titus instead receives both his

hand and their heads in a basket. Unlike the earlier instances of dramatic incongruity, which paint a linguistic picture of reality that stands in stark contrast to the bloodbath before us, here, Titus' language is not incongruous but altogether absent. Faced with such unbounded sorrow, Titus falls silent, a reaction that absolutely baffles Marcus, who seeks to stir his verbally bereft brother from his 'fearful slumber' (III.i.252) and rally his vengeful spirits. While he has thus far advised Titus against such rash and bloodthirsty action, he now enumerates Titus' losses – the death of two sons, the banishment of another, the rape and mutilation of a daughter, and the dismemberment of his own hand – and exclaims: 'Ah, now no more will I control thy griefs. […] / Now is a time to storm' (III.i.259–63). However, to Marcus' surprise, Titus receives such combative words with silence.

From Titus' uncharacteristic reticence[9] though erupts the most crucial laugh of the entire play. In answer to Marcus' question, 'why art thou still' (III.i.263), Titus emerges from his plaintive silence into laughter – 'Ha, ha, ha!' (III.i.264). Again, justifiably taken aback by Titus' uncanny response, Marcus asks 'Why dost thou laugh? It fits not with this hour' (III.i.265), to which Titus retorts 'Why? I have not another tear to shed. / Besides, this sorrow is an enemy, / And would usurp upon my wat'ry eyes, / And make them blind with tributary tears' (III.i.266–9). While the foregoing allusion to the futility of sacrificing one more salty oblation to the unquenchable thirst of sorrow's greed already suggests Titus' incipient resistance to the unyielding clutches of paralytic grief, what follows these defiant lines, however, is of particular interest. Titus makes a startlingly sudden recovery, coming back to life and calling for revenge. Throwing himself into battle, he asserts 'Come let me see what task I have to do' (III.i.275), orders Marcus to 'take a head' (III.i.279) and Lavinia to bear his hand between her teeth (III.i.282) – lines that are reminiscent of comic tropes discussed earlier – directs the exiled Lucius to depart from Rome, 'Hie to the Goths and raise an army there' (III.i.285), and sends everyone about their business with the following words: 'if ye love me, as I think you do, / Let's kiss and part, for we have much to do' (III.i.286–7). Thus, while temporarily stricken silent by an excess of sorrow, Titus breaks out of his dumbfounded state into a jolting laughter from which follows his decisive march into vengeful action.

The transition from silence to laughter to action in the above scene deserves further examination, especially insofar as it raises a critical question: how can it be that excessive sorrow erupts in laughter? While this reference to sorrow, and the preceding discussion of Titus' grief, seem to lead us astray from the titular concern of this paper – grotesque laughter as a coping mechanism of unconscionable violence – the respective laughter elicited by extreme misery and brutality shares the same object: an excess that escapes, or threatens, the bounds of reason and violently 'shatters the subject's "assumptive world"' (Willis (2002: 27)). What we truly respond to when we laugh in the face of tragic violence is not its physical trophies but the breakdown of meaning that can only be responded to emotively. To decipher the mechanism at work in what Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen (1987: 745) calls 'this banal oddity', namely the inappropriate laughter that, at times, accompanies painful, death dealing, and annihilating trauma, a more profound understanding of the varied and nuanced roles and eruptions of laughter is first necessary.

Laughter: crass embarrassment or existential coping mechanism

While one would expect laughter, with its complex and 'funny' intricacies, to feature prominently within philosophical analysis, this is surprisingly not so. Considered to be a waste of wisdom, according to Plato (Book V; the *Laws*), and a 'distortion of the countenance' that is a sign of a 'passion that hath no name', according to Hobbes (1840: vol. IV, chap. IX, par. 13), laughter has historically been 'swept under the rug' by Western philosophy and thought (Fletchall & McHugh (2012: 387)), which has, at best, diminished its value, repressing or even dismissing it as mere frivolity, and, at worst, treated it with mistrust, suspicion and derision. While there are notable exceptions to the philosophical marginalization of laughter[10], such examples still fail to touch upon the tragic undertones of laughter or, inversely, the comic undertones of tragedy. By limiting the value of laughter to what is strictly speaking humorous, scholars have to a large extent overlooked some of its nuanced and intriguing meaning. That being said, insofar as scholars have received laughter with mistrust as a mischievously puckish phenomenon that disrupts, or ruptures, rules of

decorum and reason, they are on the right track. However, rather than being turned away from in mistrust, this disruptive phenomenon craves further attention, attention which philosopher of excess Georges Bataille provides in ample, though elusive and ambiguous, measure: those looking for a clear, coherent and singular definition of laughter in Bataille will only be disappointed. As a sovereign and heterogeneous phenomenon, which plays by no rules but its own, laughter is an 'impossible' phenomenon that exceeds the bounds of articulation, slipping through our fingers and thwarting the grasp of 'reflection and reason' (Fletchall & McHugh (2012: 388)). In 'La Valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade', Bataille (1970) elaborates on the heterogeneous nature of laughter qua 'excrement' of reason or 'buccal anality', a picture of inconsumable waste that refuses to be made sense or use of by rational digestion.

For Bataille, insofar as laughter flouts the symbolic authority of such meaningful digestion, not only does its derisive intractability present an indecorous threat to our social strictures and a rebellious one to our political ones – consider the insubordinate tone of satirical laughter and its defiant insurrection against, say, the oppressive regime of a stringent sociopolitical order – but its mischievous outburst belies a challenge to reason itself. As Bataille (1986: 90) writes, if laughter laughs when we joltingly smack our heads against an epistemic wall, it seems that '[t]hat which is laughable may simply be the *unknowable*"'or, as he words the sentiment even more strongly, the '*unknown makes us laugh*'. Far from serving any edifying or normative purpose – like that of Henri Bergson's[11] myopic laughter, for instance, which upholds the rules and regulations of bourgeois society by derisively mocking, and thereby rectifying the behaviour of, those who fail to live up to its decorous expectations[12] – Bataillean laughter erupts when 'all ontology [has been] thrown overboard' (Borch-Jacobsen (1987: 744)). Perhaps Hobbes was in retrospect onto something in his statement that laughter is the sign of a passion with no name: arguing that comedy is essentially structured around a certain incomprehensibility, Lisa Trahair (2001: 165) insists that it is the surprisingly fuzzy overlap between reason and unreason that 'constitutes the comic'. By threatening the parameters of what we may know, laughter shakes some of the fundamental means by which our very autonomous and rational subjectivity has traditionally been defined and ultimately leads not only to the breakdown of meaning and representation

into nothingness but also to the death of the subject, who literally 'cracks up' in laughter.

Echoing Kant's argument that laughter erupts when our expectations end in nothing (1790: par. 54), Bataille (1991: 439, 207) argues that the 'object of laughter […] is always NOTHING, substituted for the anticipation of a given object', or that laughter breaks out '*when anticipation dissolves into NOTHING*'. The nature of this expectation can be more or less substantive. However, if one blows the picture up to refer to our expectation that, as discussed above, the world is a 'meaningful and comprehensible place' and that the self has a meaningful and comprehensible place within that world (Willis (2002: 27)), we home in on an analysis of why excess sorrow or violence – the dissolution of such expectation – erupts in laughter. It should be noted that it is not the case that we laugh in the face of the meaningless as such: rather, we laugh at what is 'rendered' or 'revealed as' meaningless. As Borch-Jacobsen (1987: 738) suggests regarding the daunting prospect that one's life may be an inane surd that serves no purpose and lacks both direction and significance, 'if my existence is nothing more than an unspeakable farce, an improbable gag lost in the immensity of the universe, why not laugh at it'.

To return to the play, it is in Titus' crucial laugh of Act V that Shakespeare considers the affective response to the revealed instability, or, worse, meaninglessness, of the cohesive picture of subjective agency and a world filled with meaningful purpose. In this scene, Shakespeare illustrates how the unconscionable experience of excess can overwhelm language, leading to, what is in Titus' case, a 'crisis of representation' (Willis (2002: 46)) that, when he does choose to break his silence and express himself, comes out in laughter. Fundamentally shaken by his traumatic experience, Titus has no words. However, permanently receding into an inner world of silence is an ultimately ill-advised solution that mirrors the quiet sleep of death, which brings us to Titus' laughter. As suggested earlier, laughter erupts in response to nothingness, to the dissolution of our expectations of meaning in the world. However, this overwhelming 'comic' breakdown of meaning into 'senseless' laughter can, and must, only be temporary: lest we wish to succumb to the mad antics of hysteria, laughter cannot be sustained. We must ultimately come to our senses: the weight of the world must ultimately prevail, which returns us to the most infamous laugh of the play, one that follows the

collapse of representation into silence and immediately precedes Titus' decisive transition into vengeful action.

Unlike the silent paralysis that takes Titus hostage, dragging him into a state of numb withdrawal from a world revealed to be meaningless, his infamous guffaw signals a resilience of spirit that refuses the shackles of such stifling reticence. While it is not laughter itself that facilitates Titus' decisive transition into action, in its 'willful affirmation of nothing' (Fletchall & McHugh (2012: 390)), such laughter suggests an active recognition of rather than passive submission to said meaningless. That being said, however, one must again seek elsewhere if one wishes to locate the catalyst that moves Titus to act – and here I suggest we turn to his maker, Shakespeare. Titus' transition from passive silence to active laughter to vengeful action is rooted in the strength of character with which Shakespeare endows him. Were said Roman hero to succumb to the impassivity of silent resignation or the hysteria of a laughter mired in nothingness, Shakespeare's famed revenge tragedy would be a picture of failed heroism and anticlimactic denouement.

Such reasoning aside, however, one could argue that Titus' catalyst is actually the very collapse of his symbolic world, for it is precisely in these vital moments of excess, where systems of representation and meaning are suspended, that a world of new possibilities is opened to the subject. It is significant that it is only after his silence, and ensuing laughter, that Titus chooses for vengeance. Having fallen silent when faced with the collapse and futility of the meaningful law and order that has hitherto seemed to structure his world, when asked to articulate his silence, Titus has no choice but to laugh, or cry, as words no longer make sense. Unable to shed more tears, an emotive phenomenon that would almost bear too much meaning within the pointless violence of the play, Titus responds to the violent disruption or dissolution of his meaningful world in kind with meaningless laughter. But Titus' reaction is more than an affective response to the revealed almost cringingly laughable futility of such meaning. His laughter signals his painful recognition of the 'total collapse of any reliable forms of behaviour' (Brooke (1966: 95)). Rather than succumbing to the drawn out throes of a mad laughter, however, he opts for expatriation to a grotesque wonderland of, to borrow a term from Brucher, 'aesthetic disorder', wherein, if we are doomed to live in a world of pointless violence and suffering, it might as well be artistically and

wittily executed. With all moral order dissolved, '[o]rder now resides in aesthetics, not ethics, and survival becomes a grotesque battle of wits' (Brucher (1979: 85)). Titus' pained, tragic and perhaps pathological laughter erupts, thus, in recognition of the feebleness, or absence, of worldly law and order, which trembles at the onslaught of worldly excess.

The last laugh

In the introduction, I asked why we laugh at the violence of *Titus* and have thus far led us down a rabbit hole of related, but nevertheless tangential questions, focusing a good deal of attention on the laughter of a character – whose laughter is accountable for by turning to Shakespeare and asking: why did you make Titus laugh? But there is a method behind such a mad detour. The object of the audience's grotesque laughter is very similar to that of Titus'. Faced with the dizzying brutality of violence that is staged before our eyes, we must cope with the implicit breakdown of meaning that such pointless and excessive violence insinuates and, like Titus, bereft of words (loquacious critics aside), we laugh, either in defense from, or acknowledgement of, the play's unsavoury truth.

In *Titus*, Shakespeare makes use of black humour and grotesque laughter to illustrate a very human response to the futility of both social and more abstract structures of 'law and order' that are destabilized by inane processes of circular excess: excessive violence leads to excessive revenge, which leads to excessive sorrow, which, in turn, circles back to excessive violence and revenge. Shakespeare in part writes such violence into *Titus Andronicus* to criticize contemporary practices of brutality and the insufficiency of law and order in Elizabethan England; however, as a philosopher of the human experience, he employs these dramatic tropes to shed light on the more abstract instability of our systems of meaning and order in general. While the laughter of and at the play is of diverse ilk, and one can never be sure why audiences laugh – if at all – Titus' laughter signals his tacit recognition that any semblance of order is transient and fleeting; it is, in a word, an affective response to 'nothing': aware of his inability to beat such mad disorder, Titus first laughs and then carries on, trudging ahead in an aesthetic wonderland of his own making.

Some might object to this line of interpretation, arguing that Titus' revenge scheme is filled to the brim with meaning: he is driven by the desire to both avenge the cruel mutilation and murder of those near and dear to him and recuperate that piece of himself that dies alongside them. And perhaps this is exactly the point. The violence of *Titus Andronicus* is simultaneously meaningless and overly meaningful: it is meaningful in the sense that it is executed according to an honour system whereby the avengers desperately strive to render the senseless loss of a beloved one meaningful again through the act of vengeance. It is meaningless in the sense that the escalating and grotesquely violent one-upmanship that characterizes such revenge patterns results in a senseless exhibitionism of unconscionable violence. While Titus and Tamora's respective actions are overly meaningful – they burst with the cultural and emotional meaning associated with losing a loved offspring – they result in gross, monstrous and perverse violence that surpasses reason. And it is the coming face to face with this grotesque breakdown that evokes the awkward exhalation of laughter in audiences.

The dramatic nature of *Titus Andronicus* is neither affirmative nor farcical. It is neither a traditional revenge tragedy, whereby the cathartic purpose of the genre ultimately offers the audience member a symbolic 'undo' button that restores meaning and purpose to the world, the whole nightmarish episode having indeed been a product of fearful slumber. Nor is the play a mere parody whereby the audience is let off the hook and justified in simply writing off such devastating violence as a gruesome joke. While Shakespeare uses the tropes of revenge tragedies, the 'flurry of severed body parts' (Pollard (2010: 66)) with which the audience is bombarded borders on the (blackly) humorous and makes it hard to imagine that *Titus* should be read as a straightforward example of Elizabethan, cathartic revenge tragedy. In this sense, parody must have played a part in Shakespeare's play after all. However, the way in which he uses comedy to grapple with more substantive themes, such as mortality, human frailty, and the 'futility of human endeavours' (Pollard (2010: 66)), gives the play greater weight than straightforward parody would otherwise carry. But, unable to bear the weight of the all-too-human struggle to cope in what can be a hostile and meaningless world, we sometimes break down in laughter. As François Roustang (1987: 710) argues, laughter provides brief respite 'not from suffering as a fleeting feeling', but from the heavy

suffering that comprises the 'very substance of humanity'. Thus, in answer to why we *can* and *do* laugh at instances of awesome sorrow or brutal violence that break down our systems of meaning and representation into nothingness: it is because it is the only sweet respite we have.

Related topics

See Chapters 24, 25, 33

Notes

1 John Dover Wilson (2009: xii) seconds that *Titus* is like a 'cart, laden with bleeding corpses from an Elizabethan scaffold, and driven by an executioner from Bedlam dressed in cap and bells'.
2 All Shakespeare quotations are from Shakespeare (1996).
3 By metaphysics of violence, I mean the way in which the representation of violence in *Titus Andronicus* sheds light on the machinations and meanings of violence in both its socio-cultural and -psychological capacity. With *Titus* as his medium and the human condition as his muse, Shakespeare comments on the birth, grotesque folly and idiotic gravity of violence and its place within the web of human being.
4 The uncanniness of such inauspicious twinship is twofold: not only does its mirror imagery of parental grief unearth the unsettling interchangeability of noble Roman and beastly Goth – the heroic Titus proves equally malicious in his vengeance as the wicked Tamora – but their shared cycle of loss and vengeful retaliation, which repeats itself almost as if by necessity, evokes an unsettling feeling of déjà vu, a catalytic staple of the uncanny.
5 It should be noted that the excessive character of the play's action depends on the audience and its contemporary mores. Elizabethan audiences, for instance, were not only more used to but may even have come to expect and enjoy the revenge tragedy tropes of onstage mutilation and macabre playfulness (Brucher (1979: 89)), while

modern, more sensitive, audiences are embarrassed by such violence, using laughter as a strategic mechanism to keep the disturbing representation of slaughter, gore and torture at arm's length – in addition to such 'modern' squeamishness, I will later argue that, as with Titus, the eruption of laughter sounds as an affective recognition of the collapse of meaning and senselessness of the futile and excessive violence elicited by revenge and its tempting lure.

6   Though *Titus* is certainly not bereft of the speechless grief, melancholic anger and inconsolable tears that comprise a more typically natural response to such loss, as the following examples bear witness to, its cast – both victims and villains alike – also gives voice to reactions that are either horribly callous or curiously out of place in both language and sentiment. While one might imagine the glib caricature of the quintessential malefactor or aloof philosopher utter unfitting words of heartless derision or lofty pontification, short of such caricatured hyperbole, one can imagine that Shakespeare penned these words precisely with the intention that they be received as strikingly inconsonant with the action at hand.

7   Even though modern audiences have accepted the staging of Lavinia's rape, they nevertheless maintain that it is unspeakable: as Bate (2002: 59) asks in respect to the incongruity of Marcus' verbosity, 'what place has such poetry in the face of such a sight of horror?' While one would be hard-pressed to prescribe or dictate what an appropriate reaction to such horrific butchery would look like – should Marcus succumb to desolate silence, cry out in rage, respect the ineffable depth of the suffering before him and capitulate to the senseless howling of hysteria – the oratorical nature of his speech bespeaks an incongruous abstraction of intellect from his niece's individual and intimate pain: as literarily apt as the reference to the myth of Philomela and Tereus may be, for instance, it seems more rhetorical device than expression of consolation and feels amiss in an uncle's tragic discovery of what has befallen his beloved niece.

8   It should be noted that, even were Titus' response here absent or phrased more 'congruously' with the scene before us – a prospect that begs the question of what such congruity would even look like – the very juxtaposition between Tamora's cannibalistic fare and the elegant accoutrement of a formal dinner is itself certainly incongruous.

9 His silent response here is unique: when previously faced with sorrow, as in the following scene wherein he discovers his daughter's rape, he responds with words of action: 'shall we cut away our hands like thine? / Or shall we bite our tongues, and in dumb shows / Pass the remainder of our hateful days? / *What shall we do?* Let us that have our tongues / Plot some device of further misery, / To make us wonder'd at in time to come' (Shakespeare (1996: III.i.130–5; italics mine)).

10 See, for example, Berger (2014); Buckley (2003); Carroll (2013); Critchley (2002); and Morreall (1987).

11 See Bergson (1911).

12 In his essay on Bataille, 'The Laughter of Being', Borch-Jacobsen (1987) castigates Bergson as a 'prudent little man' whose sweet dismissal of laughter as a 'little problem' or 'little mystery' overlooks its more nuanced and complex potential. While the foregoing nomenclature indicates a vague awareness of laughter's elusive inscrutability, by stripping it of its, in Bataille's words, sovereign richness and rendering it an *object* of study, Bergson overlooks its gravity, namely that, more than any social tool, laughter bespeaks our epistemic finitude before a world rich in insurmountable and ineffable mystery – or, as Borch-Jacobsen (1987: 741) puts it, within laughter lies the '*final enigma of being*'.

Further reading

Berger, P.L., 2014. *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience*. Berlin: de Gruyter. In this comprehensive exploration of comedy's various faces, sociologist Peter L. Berger provides an in-depth analysis of humour's philosophy, physiology, and psychology, situating its significance in relation to a diverse spectrum of other human experiences.

Buckley, F.H., 2003. *The Morality of Laughter: A Serious Look at the Meaning of Laughter*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press. This book is an entertaining and informative analysis of laughter's both historical and contemporary interpretation and moral reception. It is moreover a critical attempt to reassert the import of laughter in a period that seems to have lost its sense of humour.

Morreall, J., ed. 1987. *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. The contributions to this anthology of laughter together comprise an exhaustive presentation of the three main theories by which laughter has historically been treated. The collection also considers the role of humour in aesthetics, drama and literature.

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35

SEDUCED BY ROMANTICISM

Re-imagining Shakespearean catharsis

Patrick Gray

What did Aristotle mean by *katharsis*? What little evidence we have is notoriously difficult to interpret. Cicero claims that if Plato's prose is silver, Aristotle's is a 'river of gold' (*Acad. Pr.* 38.119): an encomium anyone who has struggled through some of Aristotle's more esoteric treatises may find baffling. Cicero's sense of Aristotle's style does not arise from the canon familiar today, however, but instead from his engagement with the many dialogues Aristotle wrote for popular consumption. These more polished affairs are now unfortunately lost. What we have, by contrast, seem to be notes: perhaps his own; perhaps those of his students. Whatever their provenance, the texts associated with Aristotle that survived the Dark Ages are at best unadorned and direct; at worst, cramped, elliptical, and enigmatic.

A.D. Nuttall (1996: 5) gives a useful rendition of Aristotle's key reference to catharsis in the *Poetics*, in which he tries to capture what he describes as 'the "first-time", "hewn from the rock" feeling of the Greek'.

> Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action which is serious and (as having magnitude) complete, in sweetened language, each kind of sweetening being introduced separately in the parts of the work, of persons performing actions and not through report, through pity and fear accomplishing the *catharsis* of such emotions (*pathēmata* in the Greek).

> (Arist. (*Poet.* 1449b 24–8), cited in Nuttall (1996: 5))

As Nuttall's final parenthesis concedes (1996: 5), even translating the passage 'as literally as possible' turns out to require interpolation. *Pathēmata* can mean 'emotions', 'feelings'; even 'symptoms', in the medical sense. But it can also mean 'incidents' or 'events'. In the *Republic,* for example, Plato refers off-handedly to Homer's epics as his 'narration of the things that happened (*pathēmatōn*) in Ilium and Ithaca and the entire *Odyssey*' (Plat. *Rep.* 3.393b).

More specifically, *pathēmata* are misfortunes: undesirable events or conditions which one suffers passively and unwillingly rather than performs actively or deliberately chooses. *Pathēmata* are the opposite of *poiēmata*, literally 'deeds', 'acts'; by extension, 'poems'. What are the *pathēmata,* then, which Aristotle sees as undergoing catharsis in this case? What is it that the pity and fear prompted by tragedy submit to catharsis? Emotions? Or the events which prompt those emotions? Either interpretation of the textual crux is conceivable.

Adding to the confusion, *katharsis* in Greek has a wide range of applications. In ordinary language, *kathairein* is to clean up; to make *katharos* ('free and clear', we might say). *Katharsis* could be as simple as straightening up a room or washing dishes after dinner. Other forms of *katharsis*, in this mundane sense, include pruning trees, winnowing grain, and clearing land. In his dialogues, Plato adopts the concept as a metaphor: philosophy allows us to free ourselves from the muck of matter. As Nussbaum explains (1986: 389), '*katharos* cognition is what we have when the soul is not impeded by bodily obstacles (esp. *Rep.* 508c, *Phd.* 69c)'. *Katharsis* is 'the clearing up of the vision of the soul by the removal of these obstacles'. By the time of Aristotle, 'this epistemological use of *catharsis* and *katharos*' had become 'easy and natural'. 'Xenophon speaks of a *katharos nous*, meaning one that cognizes clearly and truly' (*Cyr.* 8.7.30; cited in Nussbaum (1986: 389)). Epicurus describes his letter to Pythocles as a '*katharsis phusikōn problematōn*, a "clarification of the difficult issues of natural philosophy"' (*Ep. Pyth.* 10.86; cited in Nussbaum (1986: 389)).

As Nussbaum (1986: 389) points out, 'these uses have nothing to do either with purification or with purgation'. Nevertheless, it is these more specialized senses of the term which have dominated speculation about its application in Aristotle's *Poetics.* Broadly speaking, it is possible to distinguish four schools of thought about the meaning Aristotle assigns to

katharsis: moral purification, medical purgation, emotional moderation, and intellectual clarification. As we see in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, as well as Sophocles' Theban plays, ancient Greek religious practice gave great importance to concepts of moral pollution and purification. Early Greek medicine, meanwhile, emphasized analogous forms of purgation such as bloodletting and enemas. As a result, the most extensive use of *catharsis* and related terms can be found in the Hippocratic Corpus. So it is perhaps not surprising commentators have gravitated to morality and medicine. Aristotle himself, unfortunately, gives little hint elsewhere in his *Poetics* what exactly he might mean. As Corneille complains (1660: 52), 'of all the conditions that he uses in his definition [of tragedy], it is the only one he does not clarify at all'.

Renaissance criticism tended towards a moralistic reading. In keeping with contemporary interest in Senecan tragedy, Neo-Stoics of the seventeenth century focused on the 'fear' in Aristotle's formulation, 'pity and fear'. By revealing the disastrous effects of indulging our passions, tragedies scare us into adopting a more prudent Stoicism. Corneille's *Discourse on Tragedy* was especially influential. 'The pity that we feel when we see someone like ourselves fall into misfortune', Corneille writes (1660: 53),

> leads us to fear that something similar might happen to us; this fear, to the desire to avoid it; and this desire, to purge, moderate, rectify, and even uproot in ourselves the passion which before our very eyes plunges these characters whom we pity into such unhappiness.

Sentimentalists of the eighteenth century emphasized pity instead. By illustrating the limits of our shared human nature, tragedies exercise and foster our susceptibility to compassion. Steele writes in *The Tatler*, for example (1709, no. 82),

> The contemplation of distresses of this sort softens the mind, and makes the heart better. It extinguishes the seed of envy and ill-will towards mankind, corrects the pride of prosperity, and beats down all that fierceness and insolence which are apt to get into the minds of the daring and fortunate.

Addison writes in *The Spectator* (1711, no. 39),

> Diversions of this kind wear out of our thoughts everything that is mean and little. They cherish and cultivate that humanity which is the ornament of our nature. They soften insolence, soothe affliction, and subdue the mind to the dispensations of providence.

In the nineteenth century, however, led by Jacob Bernays, a revisionist reading of catharsis began to emerge which rejected any connection to moral improvement. Bernays (1857: 325) ruthlessly dismisses 'the thought of previous centuries', which, he claims, 'sought to make the theater into a rival and subsidiary institution of the church, a sanitorium of ethical improvement'. Aristotle's response to Plato's moralizing is not purely 'hedonistic', however. Instead, Bernays argues that Aristotle presents theatre as therapeutic. Tragedies allow amoral, pleasurable discharge of 'pathological' excesses of emotion: a 'purgation' more akin to the physical relief enabled by a laxative or emetic than to any kind of religious ritual. As Nuttall (1996: 6) puts it, channelling Bernays, 'the philosopher's thoughts lie more in the direction of castor oil than holy water'.

'Let no-one in overhasty squeamishness turn up his nose at a supposed sidetracking of aesthetics into a medical field', Bernays (1857: 328) maintains, citing Aristotle's training in medicine. Nevertheless, his quasi-materialist reading of catharsis is not without its detractors. Halliwell (1986: 198) objects to what he sees as a false dichotomy between purification and purgation: 'the assumption that we are faced with a mutually exclusive choice between positing a process of outlet and evacuation or one of refinement'. Medicine and religion were not as separable or conceptually distinct for the ancient Greeks, Halliwell (1986: 199) argues, as this critical divide implies.

> The perspective is itself an alien one, involving … a mixture of ideas from magic and medicine, a tradition of concepts and claims which shift between the literal and the metaphorical, and more than one source of esoteric beliefs about the powers of language and music over the soul.

Drawing on earlier critics such as Bernay's most immediate opponent, Lessing, Halliwell (1986: 199) advances a compromise position. Tragedy is a homeopathic process leading to emotional moderation. 'Aristotle's notion of psychological *katharsis* combines an element of release with a sense of the improved or refined state of what remains'. As a precedent for this interpretation, Halliwell cites Milton's preface to *Samson Agonistes* (Milton (1671: 461), cited in Halliwell (1986: 192–4)):

> Tragedy hath been ever 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, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated.

In his notes to himself in the margins of Aristotle's *Poetics*, Racine (1951: 11–12) advances a similar interpretation. 'In moving these passions [*sc.* 'pity and fear']', tragedy 'removes whatever they may have of the excessive and the vicious and brings them back to a moderate state in keeping with reason'.

In a slew of articles and books appearing over the course of the twentieth century, Golden proposes a very different alternative, breaking almost entirely with previous criticism. Catharsis, he (1992: 24–6) insists, 'means *intellectual clarification*, not moral purification or medical purgation'. 'Tragic *mimesis* leads us from an encounter with some particular pitiable or fearful event to the philosophical comprehension of the universal nature of pity and fear in human existence'. Catharsis in this account is essentially rational, rather than physical, emotional, or ethical: 'a process generating learning, insight, and enlightenment'; 'a learning experience about the cause, nature, and effect of pity and fear'.

Martha Nussbaum finds Golden's contrarian interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics* appealing and more plausible than it might at first appear, given Plato's use of *katharsis* as a metaphor for intellectual detachment, as well as the use of *katharsis* more generally in contemporary Greek philosophy as a synonym for explanation. Citing Golden, she (1986: 388–9) agrees that in Plato's 'epistemological vocabulary', *katharsis* and related words 'have a strong connection with learning: namely, they occur in connection

with the unimpeded or "clear" rational state of the soul when it is freed from the troubling influences of sense and emotion'. Nevertheless, Nussbaum (1986: 390), like Halliwell, questions Golden's reading of catharsis as 'a purely intellectual matter'. What Golden misses, she argues, is the depth of Aristotle's anti-Platonism.

As Halliwell (1986: 355) points out, Golden's interpretation 'leaves Aristotle without a response to Plato's charges against the emotional irresponsibility of poetry'. 'To a middle-period Platonist', Nussbaum (1986: 388–90) explains, 'it would be profoundly shocking to read of cognitive clarification produced by the influence of pity and fear: first, because the Platonic soul gets to clarity only when no emotions disturb it; second, because these emotions are especially irrational'. 'Aristotle', however, Nussbaum notes, 'is fond of delivering such shocks'. 'For Aristotle's opponents, pity and fear can never be better than sources of delusion and obfuscation'. For Aristotle himself, by contrast, pity and fear are 'sources of illumination'. 'As we watch a tragic character, it is frequently not thought but the emotional response itself that leads us to understand what our values are'. Emotions 'give us access to a truer and deeper level of ourselves, to values and commitments that have been concealed beneath defensive ambition or rationalization'.

Siding with Bernays, Nuttall (1996: 12) professes himself 'unpersuaded' by Nussbaum's reading of *katharsis*. For Aristotle, he maintains, 'the emotions are not the instruments of cleansing but the impurity which must be removed'. 'I wish Aristotle had not chosen "purgation"', he (1996: 75–6) confesses, 'but that, I fear, is what he did'. Despite these objections, however, Nuttall (1996: 78) finds the kind of model Nussbaum ascribes to Aristotle deeply attractive. 'Is there a way of reconstruing – or reconstructing – Aristotle's theory in such a way as to give some weight to human substance [i.e. 'human nature' as embodied and emotional]? I would suggest that for *catharsis*, 'purgation', we substitute 'exercise'. *Catharsis* implies a passive experience, a mere loss of dangerous emotion; 'exercise' implies an active use of emotion'. '"Use of emotion"', Nuttall concedes, 'is more than a little reminiscent of Martha Nussbaum's interpretation of the *Poetics*'. Nevertheless, Nuttall pushes the concept further. Perhaps in tragedy, he proposes, 'we are able to practice for crises'. 'We send our hypotheses ahead, an expendable army, and watch them fall'. Tragedy is an 'exercise' of our 'human capacity to

think provisionally, to do thought-experiments'; a 'death-game' in which 'the muscles of psychic response, fear and pity, are exercised and made ready, through a facing of the worst, which is not yet the real worst'.

Does this understanding of tragedy work for all tragedians? Nuttall (1996: 79) quickly sees how it might fit Sophocles. 'The spectator achieves a moment of recognition, faces a truth known to be necessary for all. Meanwhile, within the fiction the protagonist is commonly brought to a point of crucial recognition and insight'. Our recognition of who Oedipus is coincides with Oedipus' own. Shakespeare, however, Nuttall (1996: 102–3) observes, 'offers no such clinching, final insight'. 'In Sophocles the learning of the audience is conclusively and majestically enforced by its echo in the *anagnorisis* of the protagonist'. Shakespeare, by contrast, 'teaches a harder lesson: that sufferers may die without knowing why they have suffered'.

Taking up this problem, Bromwich (2010: 147) sees 'something disquieting in the idea that the heroes of tragedies do not learn what they seem on the brink of learning; that they persist in their errors even as they come close to death; that they are unshakeable, incorrigible'. Nonetheless, as regards Shakespearean tragedy, Bromwich agrees with Nuttall: even as Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet, and Lear 'use the language of self-knowledge', they 'continue to deepen the tracks of self-deception that have marked them from the first'. 'If there is a drive toward self-knowledge or toward psychological recognition in Shakespeare's tragedies', he concludes, 'it is in the mind of the reader or viewer that the work is performed and its discoveries are made'.

As I argue elsewhere (Gray (2018)), the tragedies Bromwich examines, *Othello, Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*, each hinge upon a Hobson's choice or *dilemme cornélien*: the conflict between rival, incompatible value-systems Hegel sees at the heart of tragedy. The tragic protagonist finds himself obliged to choose between opposing moral goods; usually, between 'pity' and 'ambition'. He chooses incorrectly, and we learn from his mistakes, even if he does not; the central character remains to the end to some degree self-deceived. Where does Shakespeare himself stand in relation to this trajectory of gradually unfolding, ironic revelation?

One problem is the quality Keats (1817: 60) describes as '*Negative Capability*', praising Shakespeare as 'capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'. In

his *Preface to Shakespeare,* Dr Johnson (1765: para. 33) observes with dismay that Shakespeare is 'so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose'. Voltaire, Tolstoy, and George Bernard Shaw echo this complaint (Sullivan (2007)). Critics towards the middle of the twentieth century sought to align Shakespeare with a Kantian ideal of disinterestedness, presaging the later claims of Deconstruction that all literature is fundamentally 'undecideable'. Rossiter (1961) praises Shakespeare's 'ambivalence'. Rabkin (1981) emphasizes his plays' 'complementarity'. Despite the subsequent 'historical turn' and the still-more-recent 'religious turn', this sense of Shakespeare as somehow outside and above the ideological controversies of his age has proved tenacious. Shakespeare appears in this light as Epicurus in his garden; Montaigne in his tower; a neutral Switzerland in the midst of a world of seething, violent conflict. He floats above the fray, unruffled, like a sage atop a mountain. His plays are like Zen koans, laughing at intellectual faction. He is a fantasy self, a Buddha figure.

The myth is appealing. As a description of an actual human being, however, this version of Shakespeare is implausible. As Shakespeare shows in his characters' soliloquies, our desires are not entirely compatible with each other. When someone makes a decision, whether it be to take some violent action, like Shakespeare's tragic protagonists, or to write a line of poetry, like Shakespeare himself, he is in effect committing himself, even if only temporarily, to a hierarchical organization of his values. And this prioritizing of one value-system over another entails a choice, howsoever dimly-recognized, between rival visions of reality: a de facto arbitration of competing truth-claims. Life itself, in this sense, including writing plays, is inevitably a form of implicit philosophizing. *Hamlet* in particular shows that no matter how desperately we may want to avoid committing ourselves to any fixed principle, the imperative of action forces us sooner or later to draw some sort of conclusions; to construct some sort of provisional operating system. Even inaction is a kind of action: an implicit decision. Pilate washes his hands; Hamlet hesitates; yet their squeamishness does not absolve them, in the end, from some measure of responsibility. To say that Shakespeare as a playwright somehow eludes this aspect of the human condition, when his own characters so conspicuously do not, seems to me a dubious evasion.

Shakespeare does have definite, discernible opinions about morality. How could he not? To believe in some sort of moral right and wrong is part of what it means to be human. For example, I am inclined to agree with Gardner (1959: 60) that compassion is, for Shakespeare, the *summum bonum*. 'Pity is to Shakespeare the strongest and profoundest of human emotions, the distinctively human emotion. It rises above and masters indignation'. Nonetheless, there is considerable merit to the conventional wisdom that Shakespeare tends not to be didactic or judgemental. It is possible to believe someone is making a mistake without therefore holding him in contempt; this distinction lies at the heart of the Christian doctrine of forgiveness. As C.S. Lewis (1952: 117), explains, 'Christianity does not want us to reduce by one atom the hatred we feel for cruelty and treachery'. But it wants us to hate such acts 'in the same way in which we hate things in ourselves: being sorry that the man should have done such things, and hoping, if it is anyway possible, that somehow, sometime, somewhere he can be cured'.

Milton serves here as an illuminating foil. Like Shakespeare, Milton wrestles with private misgivings. As is notorious, William Blake went so far as to describe him as 'of the Devil's party without knowing it' (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, c.* 1790–93). Unlike Shakespeare, however, Milton often does come across as sermonizing. The failings of his reader seem to be his focus, rather than his own. In this sense, he seems more like one of Shakespeare's characters than Shakespeare himself: Angelo, perhaps, in *Measure for Measure*, or more charitably, the grandiloquent Othello, if Othello had the intelligence of Iago. In his influential study of *Paradise Lost, Surprised by Sin*, Fish (1998) argues that what looks like contradiction in the poem is in fact the carefully-controlled expression of a coherent point of view. Milton lures us into agreeing with Satan in order to convict us of our own sinfulness before disabusing us of our errors. As in Shakespeare's *Henry V,* as described by Greenblatt (1988), subversion, so to speak, is always contained. 'By attributing the poem's every effect to an overarching authorial intention', Fish (1998: xi–xii) explains, 'I posit a closed system of control in which an authoritative centre merely allows, and is always reining in, meanings and gestures that seem – but only for a fleeting and self-delusive moment – to be in opposition to it'. We, the readers, are 'surprised by sin'; Milton himself is not.

Fish does capture a distinctive and, to speak plainly, sometimes irritating quality of Milton's poetry, in comparison to Shakespeare's plays. As Keats (1818: 86–7) writes, 'We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us'. Even so, and without disputing Milton's towering genius, I for one find it difficult to believe that he was as entirely self-aware as Fish makes him out to be. Milton may have flattered himself that he was the master of his own 'dark materials' (*Paradise Lost*, 2.916). But that does not mean he was. Fish's term, 'intention', implies conscious, sustained, deliberate choice, unimpaired by reluctance or ambivalence. As a description of the relation of an author's work to his own psyche, I would be more comfortable, by contrast, with words such as 'expression', 'manifestation', or 'reflection'. These alternatives allow for a more layered understanding of the complexities of human motivation, encompassing less-conscious, less-resolved conflicts between one desire and another.

'Didactic poetry is my abhorrence', Shelley (1820: 232) proclaims. 'A Poet … would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetical creations, which participate in neither' (Shelley 1821: 682). The stance is winsome, but more than a little hypocritical; Shelley, too, aims to educate and improve, albeit in the service of a progressive rather than a conservative moral paradigm. In the words of Solve (1927: 2), 'those who have accepted at face value Shelley's statement that didactic poetry was his "abhorrence" have been very easily misled'. Even opposition to the very concept of ethics is itself a kind of ethical position: examples might include American pragmatism and Restoration libertinism, as well as Shelley's own Romanticism. As Knapp and Michaels (1982: 741) explain in their essay, 'Against Theory', 'the truth about belief is that you can't go outside it'.

What we really dislike, I would say, is not much for a story to have a moral, which is inevitable, as it is for the presentation of that moral to come across as self-righteous, which, by contrast, can be avoided. As Shakespeare shows, it is possible to be didactic, in the sense of instructive, even about ethics, without of necessity also adopting a tone of condescension. Shakespeare is very far from this kind of patronizing self-aggrandizement. Instead, Shakespeare's audience is first and foremost himself. He is trying to figure out for himself which of the various ethical

options available to him corresponds most closely to his own lived experience of our shared human nature. What is our *telos*, and what are our limits? What do we tend to be in fact, and what should we strive to be instead? Shakespeare is not trying to manipulate us like some sort of master puppeteer. Any lessons we may learn are secondary; perhaps even incidental. Shakespeare's more immediate purpose is to adjudicate his own personal inquests. Which school of thought about morality most accurately discerns and describes our human condition, in all its complexity and apparent contradiction? Shakespeare wants to find some relief from his own private cognitive dissonance; we as audience are passengers along for the ride. We are observers, bystanders, looking in on someone else's thought-experiments.

To some extent the same could be said of any author. The difference between literature and propaganda, however, of which Shakespeare is indeed exemplary, is the depth and sincerity of an author's willingness to consider the opposite of his own beliefs. Propagandists simplify their own doubts into the proverbial 'straw man'. Shakespeare in contrast fortifies them; gives them as much weight and respect as he can. His works are an exercise in 'steelmanning', as the slang term is. Nuanced resolutions of knotty problems of moral philosophy can be discerned in the final acts of Shakespeare's plays; compromise solutions sometimes distasteful to a present-day, progressive sensibility. But Shakespeare leaves those conclusions latent, implicit, rather than spelled out. His method is as if a geometer were to work through the first several steps of a proof, then leave the last one or two unstated, as evident. He answers the questions that he asks to his own satisfaction, rather than to ours.

What is the temptation, then, that Shakespeare was grappling with in such deadly earnest? What is his great ideological foe, the Moriarty to his Sherlock Holmes? The moral error Shakespeare seems to find the most beguiling is a kind of self-absorption: the 'transvaluation of all values' that would eventually develop into what we now know as Romanticism. Shakespeare's canonization was assured in the eighteenth century, when he became a darling of German precursors of Romanticism such as Lessing and Herder, as well as Schiller and the *Sturm und Drang* movement. Goethe called him *unser Shakespeare* ('our Shakespeare'). Romantic rhapsodizing about Shakespeare, however, tends to misinterpret the movement of his mind. Like Blake, placing Milton on the side of Satan,

Romantic critics too readily identify Shakespeare himself with characters such as Richard II, Falstaff, and Cleopatra whom he goes out of his way to undermine. They read him, in effect, as if he were a photo-negative of himself.

In *The Roots of Romanticism,* Berlin (1965) acknowledges the difficulty inherent in separating the substance of the movement from its accidents. Nevertheless, he (1965: 20) maintains, 'There *was* a romantic movement; it did have something which was central to it; it did create a great revolution in consciousness; and it is important to discover what this is'. 'The general proposition of the eighteenth century', Berlin (1965: 114) explains, 'indeed of all previous centuries', is 'that there is a nature of things, there is a *rerum natura*, there is a structure of things'. For the Romantics, by contrast, 'there is no structure of things. There is no pattern to which you must adapt yourself' (119). 'You create values, you create goals, you create ends, and in the end you create your own vision of the universe, exactly as artists create works of art'. 'The universe is as you choose to make it, to some degree at any rate'.

In Romantic literature, the result is 'admiration of wild genius, outlaws, heroes, aestheticism, self-destruction' (Berlin (1965: 14)). 'Rules must be blown up as such' (117). Probably the best example is Schiller's *Robbers* (1782), a play Nietzsche admired. Centre stage now belongs to the glamorous outlaw, the Byronic antihero. Among philosophers, Berlin (1965: 88–9) finds in Fichte the most thoroughgoing Romantic. At the core of Fichte's thought, he explains, is an 'important proposition': 'things are as they are, not because they are so independent of me, but because I make them so; things depend upon the way I treat them, what I need them for'. The only teleology that matters, that exists, is the one that we ourselves invent and impose upon the malleable, meaningless, mutable world. 'I am not determined by ends', Fichte ((1845–46: vol. 2, 264–5); cited in Berlin (1965: 89)) proclaims; 'ends are determined by me'.

Hegel tries to define Romantic art as art that begins to move beyond the limitations of art altogether, towards philosophy. 'In this its highest phase', Hegel (1835: 96) claims, 'art ends by transcending itself, inasmuch as it abandons the medium of a harmonious embodiment of mind in sensuous form and passes from the poetry of imagination into the prose of thought'. In keeping with Hegel's contemporary, Friedrich von Schlegel, however, I am more inclined to align Romantic art with the alternative

Hegel dismisses as 'ironic art'. According to Schlegel (1800: 100), the defining feature of 'romantic poetry' is a variation on the kind of '*Negative Capability*' Keats attributes to Shakespeare: 'artfully ordered confusion'; 'charming symmetry of contradictions'; 'wonderfully perennial alternation of enthusiasm and irony'. 'Irony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming chaos'. Where Schlegel (1800: 102) sees 'the infinite play of the universe', however, Hegel (1835: 70–1) sees 'sophistry', 'hypocrisy', and 'insincerity'. 'This idea had its deeper root', Hegel argues, 'in Fichte's philosophy, insofar as the principles of his philosophy were applied to art'. The problem, he maintains, is that 'Fichte establishes the I as the absolute principle of all knowledge, of all reason and cognition'. 'Nothing has value in its real and absolute nature, and regarded in itself, but only as produced by the subjectivity of the I'.

In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant (2007 [1790]: 137) introduces the claim that 'fine art is only possible as a product of genius'. Building on this argument, Jena Romantics Ludwig Tieck, Novalis, and the brothers Schlegel began to champion originality and creative autonomy as aesthetic ideals. Enlisting Shakespeare as a paradigmatic example, they elevated the artistic genius to a figure worthy of cult-like reverence. Such admiration did not stop at Shakespeare, but over time began to extend to certain characters of Shakespeare's, as well. Their defiance of the givenness of reality, what Berlin calls 'the structure of things', could be seen in the same light. Fernie (2013: 7) describes this quality as 'the demonic', the insistence that 'I am not what I am'. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Satan flatters himself and the other rebel angels that they are 'self-begot, self-raised' by their 'own quickening power' (5.860–1). The claim recalls Shakespeare's Coriolanus, when he assures the Volscians that he will not prove susceptible to the supplications of his friends and family. 'I'll never / Be such a gosling to obey instinct', he insists, 'but stand, / As if a man were author of himself / And knew no other kin' (5.3.35–7).

Coriolanus' aversion to introspection and abrasive rejection of democracy prevented him from becoming a darling of Romantic authors such as Hazlitt. Critics sympathetic to Romanticism heap praise, however, upon other, analogous antiheroes: Richard II, Falstaff, and Cleopatra, as well as Hamlet. For Bradley (1917: 299), for example, 'Cleopatra stands in a group with Hamlet and Falstaff. We might join with them Iago if he were

not decidedly their inferior in one particular quality'. Shakespeare has endowed these characters with 'his own originality, his genius'. 'They are inexhaustible. You feel that, if they were alive and you spent your whole life with them, their infinite variety could never be staled by custom; they would continue every day to surprise, perplex, and delight you'.

In his review of F.R. Benson's performance as Richard II. Montague (1899: 366) begins by asking, 'What is an artist; what, exactly, is it in a man that makes an artist of him?'.

> Well, first a proneness in his mind to revel and bask in its own sense of fact; not in the use of fact – that is for the men of affairs, the Bolingbrokes; nor in the explanation of fact – that is for the men of science; but simply in his own quick and glowing apprehension of what is about him… To shun the dry light, to drench all he sees with himself, his own temperament, the humours of his own moods – this is not his dread but his wish, as well as his bent.… This heightened and delighted personal sense of fact, a knack of seeing visions at the instance of seen things, is the basis of art.

Montague admires Benson for his ground-breaking portrayal of Richard II as an 'artist', departing from a long tradition of unsympathetic assessments of his moral weakness. Yeats (1901: 375) rails against such Victorian criticism for its 'hatred of all that was abundant, extravagant, exuberant, of all that sets sail for shipwreck'. Like Walter Pater, as well as Montague, Yeats, by contrast, praises Richard II for his 'capricious fancy' and 'dreamy dignity'.

Langbaum (1957: 66) sees in Falstaff an analogous example of what Shelley calls 'the generous error': 'the error of those who try to live life by a vision of it, thus transforming the world about them and impressing upon it their own character'. 'His vision of life takes over whenever he is on the stage'. Given his enthusiasm for Shelley's poetry, as well as his propensity for hyperbole, it is perhaps not surprising, then, that in his *Invention of the Human*, Bloom (1998) presents a near-apotheosis of this character in particular. 'Defier of time, law, order, and the state', Falstaff is for Bloom (1998: 305) a 'persuasive image' of 'human freedom' and 'authentic vitalism' (314), teaching us 'the perfection and virtual divinity of knowing how to enjoy our being rightfully' (293). 'Those who do not care for Falstaff are in love with time, death, the state, and the censor.

They have their reward' (288). 'For Falstaff', by contrast, 'the self is everything' (5).

As Quint (2006: 20) suggests, 'the campy Cleopatra is the closest that Shakespeare came to a rewriting of Falstaff'. Cleopatra strives not only to weave but also to inhabit an alternative, imaginary world of her own creation, one in which she is always all-powerful, like a god; the centre of attention; the *fons et origo* of inexhaustible, irresistible agency. The 'moral truth' that Hugo (1868: 9) sees as emerging from the play could be drawn straight out of Fichte: 'The intensity of passion is its legitimacy'. And Romantic critics such as Swinburne, as well as Hugo, fall completely under her spell. Cleopatra is 'the greatest triumph of feminine magic', Hugo (1868: 10) writes. 'Human fantasy could not dream of anything more marvelous'. Cleopatra as artist, staging her own demise, opting without qualification for 'fancy' over 'nature', is for such critics an ethical *exemplum.* Her effort to transmute the lead of the world into the gold of her own fantasy is not quixotic, but heroic. They admire her for apparently escaping into a 'dream' entirely of her own creation.

But does Cleopatra in fact manage to break out of the prison-house of fact? Does she really in the end triumph over 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune', the disappointment with the nature of things Virgil describes as *lacrimae rerum* (*Aen.* 1.462)? In my book on *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic* (Gray (2018a)), I propose that Shakespeare himself does not share Cleopatra's point of view. As Hamlin (2013) points out, allusions to Scripture scattered throughout the play reveal the unforeseen, off-stage ending, 'the undiscovered country' Cleopatra does not know she will encounter. She and Antony imagine that they will end up in Elysium, upstaging Dido and Aeneas. Alluding here to Virgil, Shakespeare reveals their ignorance. Dido and Aeneas do not end up together in death; when Aeneas visits the underworld, Dido refuses to speak to him. In killing herself, Cleopatra hopes to escape the possibility of seeing herself represented by a boy actor and laughed-at on stage. The same is happening, however, even as she tries to preempt it. Antony's suicide is a bungled, drawn-out mess. Cleopatra's, too, is marred by a lewd, wise-cracking peasant. Imaginary omnipotence is not a viable, long-term alternative to engagement with reality. Instead, as in the case of Richard II,

delusions of god-like grandeur are defeated, in the end, by the inexorable limitations of the human condition.

As Berlin (1965: 139) suggests, 'the great achievement of romanticism' was that 'it succeeded in transforming certain of our values to a very profound degree'. An anti-Romantic interpretation of *Antony and Cleopatra* has come to feel heretical, inconceivable. Even if it means deceiving ourselves about the text in question, ignoring inconvenient details, we today tend to want the antinomians to win; to retain their dignity. Berlin (1965: 123) cites as an example the production history of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The opera does not end with Don Giovanni being 'swallowed up by the forces of Hell', although that scene is perhaps the most memorable. Instead, 'after the smoke on stage has cleared, the remaining characters sing a pretty little sextet about how splendid it is that Don Giovanni has been destroyed, while they are alive and happy, and propose to seek a perfectly peaceful and contented and ordinary life'. In the nineteenth century, Berlin observes, under the influence of Romanticism, this 'perfectly harmless sextet', 'one of the most charming of Mozart's pieces', was 'regarded by the public as blasphemous, and was therefore never performed'. Overlooking Shakespeare's hints about the Christian afterlife in *Antony and Cleopatra* is a similar mistake. The play only seems to end with Cleopatra's death; its final conclusion, even if only foreshadowed, is Judgment Day. To overlook this pervasive dramatic irony, refusing to draw inferences from Shakespeare's pointed allusions, is to indulge a wilful ignorance akin to Cleopatra's own.

That is to say, to read Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* from the point of view of Cleopatra is like reading *The Sorrows of Young Werther* from the perspective of Werther. In his conversations with his friend Johann Peter Eckermann (1836: 167) later in life, Goethe explained that writing *The Sorrows of Young Werther* 'freed' him from a 'stormy element', including a temptation to commit suicide, much as Werther does at the end of the novel. 'I felt, as if after a general confession, once more happy and free, and justified in beginning a new life'. To Goethe's horror, however, the book was misunderstood, prompting a wave of copy-cat suicides. 'While I felt relieved and enlightened by having turned reality into poetry, my friends were led astray by my work', Goethe (Eckermann (1836: 170–1)) recalls.

For they thought that poetry ought to be turned into reality, that such a moral was to be imitated, and that, at any rate, one ought to shoot oneself. What had first happened here among a few, afterwards took place among the larger public.

That is not to say, however, that Romantic criticism of Shakespeare's plays is entirely misguided. As I (Gray (2007)) argue elsewhere, in relation to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, human beings are by nature double-minded, torn between faith and doubt. In his interpretation of *Paradise Lost*, Stanley Fish emphasizes how we, as readers, are 'surprised by sin'. I, by contrast, would prefer to emphasize how Shakespeare himself, like Milton, finds himself seduced by Romanticism. Authors write texts, not merely as a form of propaganda or manipulation, a means to persuade others of their own settled opinions, but also as a form of catharsis, airing and exorcising their misgivings about their own assumptions. The doubt that shadows their beliefs haunts them, irritates them, and finally, drives them to create works of art, much as a grain of sand in an oyster spurs it to form a pearl. It makes sense, moreover, that the great temptation for a playwright would be the fantasy that the world is like a play; that other people are like characters; that the control that he enjoys in the privacy of his imagination, the 'infinite space' of artistic possibility, might also be available somehow outside what Hamlet calls the 'nutshell' of the mind. Shakespeare as an artist anticipates Romanticism because 'the whole movement', as Berlin (1965: 145) observes, is 'an attempt to impose an aesthetic model upon reality, to say that everything should obey the rules of art'.

In keeping with Nussbaum's interpretation of Aristotle's use of the term *katharsis*, literature can be understood as a written record of authors' thought-experiments, designed to purge themselves, insofar as possible, of emotional temptation, as well as cognitive error. Authors play upon our sympathies because they are trying to retrain their own, as well as ours. Milton paints Satan at first as an epic hero, an Achilles, a Greek god. In Paradise, however, he becomes a toad. By the end of the poem, he is writhing on his belly, a snake to be crushed under the heel of mankind. Like a medieval playwright, representing Vice or, as Prince Hal says, another such 'villainous abominable misleader of youth' (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4.456), Shakespeare lets us befriend Falstaff, 'a goodly portly man',

'sweet Jack Falstaff', 'of a cheerful look' (*1 Henry IV,* 2.4.416–17) before gradually reintroducing him in a different light: 'a fool and a jester', 'surfeit-swelled' (*2 Henry IV,* 5.5.48, 50).

It is no coincidence that the second part of *Henry IV* is not as popular as the first; it is hard to maintain our affection for Falstaff when we see how he treats Mistress Quickly, as well as the soldiers under his command. It is like turning over an apple and discovering a worm. By thinking through costs and consequences of Falstaff's antinomian way of life, Shakespeare is trying to teach himself, as well as us, his audience, a lesson that we do not want to learn, and perhaps he does not, either. His initial resistance to his own conclusion is the reason why he writes the play. In this sense, critics such as Holbrook (2010), as well as Strier (2011), are right to draw our attention to Shakespeare's fascination with the moral paradigm we now associate with Romanticism. It calls to him like the Sirens to Odysseus. Falstaff, in particular, is by no means Shakespeare's hero, despite the unqualified praise he continues to receive from Bloom (2017); to read the second tetralogy of English history plays as if Falstaff were a moral exemplar is like reading Nabokov's *Lolita* from the point of view of Humbert Humbert. But Falstaff is indeed the demon that Shakespeare is trying to exorcise; the side of himself Shakespeare knows he should probably not indulge. He is what Jung would call his 'shadow'.

Bradley (1917: 259–60) argues that in Henry V's rejection of Falstaff, Shakespeare as dramatist 'has missed what he aimed at'. 'The moment comes when we are to look at Falstaff in a serious light, and the comic hero is to figure as a baffled schemer; but we cannot make the required change, either in our attitude or in our sympathies'. 'We wish Henry a glorious reign', but 'our hearts go with Falstaff to the Fleet, or, if necessary, to Arthur's bosom or wheresoever he is'. Bradley is surely right to see our sympathies in this scene as divided. I am reluctant, however, to see that tension as a result of an artistic failure. Instead, it strikes me as a paradigmatic example of the difference between literature and propaganda.

Unlike propagandists, great authors such as Shakespeare are willing to concede that doubt can never be entirely overcome. Temptation cannot be completely purged from our lived experience. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for example, ends with Satan still at large, still a threat, like Archimago in Spenser's *Faerie Queene.* Shakespeare's Henry V banishes Falstaff, but his

exile is neither absolute nor especially arduous. As Prince John explains, he and the former Prince Hal's other 'wonted followers / Shall all be very well provided for' (*2 Henry IV,* 5.5.99–100). They are banished only 'till their conversations / Appear more wise and modest to the world' (5.5.101–2). Nor is he sent off to the ends of the earth, like Mowbray in *Richard II*. Henry V banishes Falstaff, but not very far; 'ten mile' (5.5.65); close enough to come back for a sequel.

The existence of doubt, haunting the exercise of faith, is a necessary component of human agency. That is to say, cognitive dissonance, although distressing, is also the ground of our freedom as individuals. If we did not doubt our own closely-held beliefs, how could we ever change them? Doubts are the guarantors of our freedom, limiting attempts to interpellate individuals within any given ideology or discourse. No belief can wholly dominate the mind, because its own opposite is always already there, to some degree, whispering; soliciting attention; exerting a contrarian cognitive pressure. Great literature acknowledges this fundamental human ambivalence. No official dogma can wholly overwhelm us, because its opposite, a counterpoint of dissidence or heresy, is always there as well, waiting to be chosen in its place. Propaganda attempts to deceive its own author, as well as its audience, in presenting this possibility as foreclosed. Literature, by contrast, accepts the impossibility of its own set task; the persistence, if diminished, of the doubt it sets out to dispel. Catharsis eases cognitive dissonance, but it does not and cannot eliminate temptation altogether.

Related topics

Further reading

Fernie, E., 2017. *Shakespeare for Freedom: Why the Plays Matter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Fernie argues that Shakespeare's characters possess the same kind of freedom to be 'free *artists* of their own selves' that I attribute to Shakespeare as author and indeed all human beings here, 'because for all the self-realizing power they derive from their own rich

natures, they are equally possessed of an opposite, "inventive power" which releases them from that nature' (59).

Nuttall, A.D., 2007. *Shakespeare the Thinker*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Nuttall explains the emergence of what appears to be Romanticism *avant la lettre* in Shakespeare's plays as Shakespeare's critique of the inward, therapeutic turn characteristic of Hellenistic schools of thought about ethics such as Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Scepticism which were being rediscovered and received with new enthusiasm at the time that he was writing *Hamlet*. '"Can Stoicism, the anti-passion philosophy, be turning into, of all things, Romanticism?" That is exactly what is happening' (193).

Reid, J., 2014. *The Anti-Romantic: Hegel Against Ironic Romanticism*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic. Reid explains Hegel's criticism of early German Romanticism, namely, the Jena Romantics Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, and Schleiermacher. 'Hegel's deep intuition, which underlies his entire critique of Romanticism, is that ironic subjectivity posits a world that excludes any possibility of objective truth, in order to then escape or reject this world, either in pleasure-seeking, through inner feeling, or in death' (2).

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36

BEAUTY AND TIME IN THE SONNETS

Peter Lamarque

A central theme in the sonnets is the conflict between beauty and time. A related, equally important, theme is the intervention – or mediation – of poetry in this conflict. Crudely put, poetry, the sonnets seem to propose, can save beauty from time. Or at least it can in one case: the case of the sonnets themselves. It is intriguing to delve a bit deeper into these themes as all is not quite as it seems. Underlying it are ideas about the value, endurance and truthfulness of poetry, the much vaunted timelessness of art, and, not least, the complex and conflicting aims of the sonnet sequence itself.

1

Time in the sonnets is most often personified and given the role of the stock villain familiar from the sonnet and classical poetic tradition:[1] 'Time's scythe' (12), 'bloody tyrant, Time' (16), 'devouring Time' (19), 'sluttish time' (55), 'Time's injurious hand' (63), 'Time's tyranny' (115), 'Time's fickle glass' (126). Interestingly time doesn't figure at all in the final twenty-eight, so-called Dark Lady, sonnets. Time is an issue only with the beautiful and youthful young man, not with the (supposedly) devious, promiscuous mistress. Also, curiously, the poet twice describes himself as a 'tyrant' (120, 149), although only in the first instance (120) is there any connection with time ('you've passed a hell of time').

Time's threat to beauty is evident in many places, e.g. in sonnet 65:

> Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
> But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
> How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
> Whose action is no stronger than a flower?

Note the emphasis on the fragility of beauty in itself. A general claim is being made, any beauty is subject to this 'rage', not just that of the young man. Time with its minion mortality is indiscriminate: brass, stone, earth and boundless sea will all succumb. So what response is possible? For the specific case in hand, the sonnets famously propose two defences of beauty against 'devouring' time: procreation and poetry.

The first seventeen sonnets forcefully commend procreation: the young man must procreate so that his beauty will be passed down to his children and future generations. The very first lines of the first sonnet introduce the theme:

> From fairest creatures we desire increase,
> That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
> But as the riper should by time decease,
> His tender heir might bear his memory

> (1)

These sonnets cajole, threaten, mock, even bully the young man in trying to get him to marry and have children. Indeed those who believe that the young man was William Herbert (Mr W.H. of the dedication), later the Earl of Pembroke, have suggested that Shakespeare was actually commissioned to write these sonnets by Lady Pembroke, the young man's mother, and sister of Sir Philip Sidney, also a writer of sonnets and *The Defence of Poesie*. With this family connection she might have thought that poetry was a good means of persuasion and it is probable that Shakespeare visited her house, Wilton, in Salisbury, and indeed that his play *As You Like It* had been performed there. It is also clear that William Herbert had exasperated his parents by continually turning down prospective wives. That said, something similar is true of the other main contender, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare had dedicated both *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. He too it seems had been reluctant to marry. (See Dover Wilson (1964: 59–74), for a spirited defence of Pembroke over Southampton.) But we should not be distracted by this famous riddle of identity – indeed the lack of any

determinate identity for the addressee is integral to the puzzle about immortality, a theme to which we shall return in Section 2.

Meanwhile, the poet tries every strategy towards persuading the young man to marry, including questioning his motives for staying single:

> Is it for fear to wet a widow's eye,
> That thou consum'st thy self in single life?
> Ah! if thou issueless shalt hap to die,
> The world will wail thee like a makeless wife;
> The world will be thy widow and still weep
> That thou no form of thee hast left behind
>
> (9)

By having children he would pass on his 'form', in this case his beauty, which would thereby be preserved. 'Form' is an interesting word because it applies also to poetry and there might be a hint here of the claims to come that the young man's human form can be captured and immortalised in poetic form.

The poet doesn't hold back on how threatened this beauty is as the young man grows old:

> When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
> And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
> Thy youth's proud livery so gazed on now,
> Will be a totter'd weed of small worth held
>
> (2)

The message is that the young man's beauty is under attack from Time come what may; but if he has offspring then something of the beauty he now possesses can be passed on and thus saved. The poet even suggests that *only* by procreating can his beauty be defended:

> And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence
> Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.
>
> (12)

But the hint of an alternative defence against time is introduced towards the end of this early sequence and then begins to take hold:

> And all in war with Time for love of you,
> As he takes from you, I engraft you new.

(15)

This is the first suggestion that preserving the inestimable beauty of the youth is no longer something that only 'you' can do, but now 'I', the poet, can help: I can defend your beauty too by 'engrafting' you, or making a new growth, merely by writing about you in the sonnets. The hint is still tentative and in the next sonnet (16) the poet worries about its efficacy: you must

> fortify your self in your decay
> With means more blessed than my barren rhyme

(16)

'Barren' of course picks up the procreation theme. In the pivotal sonnet 17, the last of the procreation sonnets and indeed the last mention of this idea, both procreation and poetry are brought together, even if still with the suggestion that procreation is the better alternative. The fear is that if the poet writes too effusively about the young man's beauty then no-one will believe him. It will just seem like hyperbole:

> Who will believe my verse in time to come,
> If it were filled with your most high deserts?
> Though yet heaven knows it is but as a tomb
> Which hides your life, and shows not half your parts.
> If I could write the beauty of your eyes,
> And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
> The age to come would say 'This poet lies;
> Such heavenly touches ne'er touched earthly faces.'
> So should my papers, yellowed with their age,
> Be scorned, like old men of less truth than tongue,
> And your true rights be termed a poet's rage
> And stretched metre of an antique song:
>   But were some child of yours alive that time,

> You should live twice, in it, and in my rhyme.
>
> (17)

This anxiety about the poetry and its adequacy in the task of defending the young man's beauty, offering him and it a kind of immortality, runs through the sequence up to sonnet 126. Sonnet 17 is an early indication of how precarious is the project of preserving the youth's beauty merely by listing all his beautiful qualities (the poet just won't be believed). So a slightly different project for the poet is needed – as we shall see, relying more on performance than description – and this begins to emerge as the sequence proceeds. The suggestion will be taken up later. After sonnet 17 the procreation theme is not mentioned again and sonnet 18 ('Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?') seems to be a new beginning: the beginning of a narrative that both presents and, arguably, enacts the intense love between the poet and the young man, a narrative notable, however, as much for its pain as its joy, full of jealousy, recrimination, infidelity, proffered forgiveness, rivalry, desertion, deception, and self-hatred, hardly a 'marriage of true minds' without 'impediments' (116).

But the possibility of poetry immortalising the beautiful young man and thus defeating time threads its way through the narrative. In sonnet 19 we are again reminded of the threat of 'devouring Time' to the young man's beauty. Addressing Time itself the poet writes:

> But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:
> O! carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,
> Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen
>
> (19)

The pun on 'lines', both the lines of age and lines of poetry, suggests a rivalry between the poet and Time's own malignant efforts as a poet of destruction. But now the real poet's challenge is more assured:

> Yet, do thy worst old Time: despite thy wrong,
> My love shall in my verse ever live young.
>
> (19)

In the preceding sonnet, 18, the confidence that poetry can sustain an 'eternal summer' is clear and unqualified:

> But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
> Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
> Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
> When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,
>   So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
>   So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

<div align="right">(18)</div>

'This' refers to the sonnet itself. The repetition of 'eternal' ('eternal summer', 'eternal lines') reinforces the power of the sonnet over Time. The idea of eternity is already prefigured in the dedication of the sonnets:

> TO.THE.ONLIE.BEGETTER.OF.
> THESE.INSVING.SONNETS.
> M^r.W. H. ALL.HAPPINESSE.
> AND.THAT.ETERNITIE.
> PROMISED.
> BY.
> OVR.EVER-LIVING.POET.

Yet it might be thought that sonnet 18 in fact offers something short of true eternity, making the 'promised' eternity merely coincident with continued human life: 'So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see'. Perhaps that is eternity enough if it is assumed that the end of (all) human life could only come at the end of the world (and of time). But the implication still persists that human readers (present or future) are needed to substantiate the eternal life-and-beauty-sustaining efficacy of the lines. Such a thought is evident also in sonnet 81:

> Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
> Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read;
> And tongues-to-be your being shall rehearse,
> When all the breathers of this world are dead;
>   You still shall live, such virtue hath my pen

The term 'immortal' in fact only appears once in the sonnets, indeed in 81 ('Your name from hence immortal life shall have'), and it is far from clear what kind of immortality, if any, is on offer.

> Against confounding age's cruel knife,
> That he shall never cut from memory
> My sweet love's beauty, though my lover's life:
>   His beauty shall in these black lines be seen,
>   And they shall live, and he in them, still green.

(63)

> Or who his [i.e. Time's] spoil of beauty can forbid?
>   O! none, unless this miracle have might,
>   That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

(65)

The young man's beauty and the poet's love might last as long as do the 'black lines' and 'black ink'. But how long is that? And if the requirement is that the 'beauty shall in these black lines be *seen*' (63, italics added) then the survival of the lines alone is not sufficient without a reader to engage with them.

2

So what is going on here? It should be noted that the idea that poetry can confer a kind of immortality either on the addressee or the actual poet is not original to Shakespeare, any more than is the trope of a devouring Time destroying beauty. Such ideas are anticipated in Pindar, Horace and Ovid and appear, for example, in sonnets by Shakespeare's contemporary William Drayton (see Leishman (1961), which studies the history of just these themes). But it is striking how many of Shakespeare's sonnets speak one way or another about poetry itself, that is, *this* poetry, its powers and limitations. We have already seen the initial lack of confidence early in the sequence that the sonnets could have efficacy in sustaining, far less immortalising, the young man's beauty (16, 17), even if those doubts weaken. But significantly it is when the theme of love takes hold that the

doubts begin to dissipate, even if never quite going away. At least part of what the sonnets claim to immortalise is the love of which they speak. But what exactly is this claim?

In fact different sonnets offer different accounts of just what is being bestowed with immortality or eternity. Sometimes it is 'my love': 'My love shall in my verse ever live young' (19), 'in black ink my love may still shine bright' (65). Admittedly there is an ambiguity in the phrase 'my love': 'the person I love' and 'the love itself'. Sometimes the claim is directed explicitly to the addressee himself, 'you':

> Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
> Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
> But you shall shine more bright in these contents
> Than unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time.

(55)

In the couplet to 55 it is again 'you': 'You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes' (55). At other times it is the young man's beauty that is the object of the claim: 'My sweet love's beauty … shall in these black lines be seen' (63). Even the poet himself earns some degree of survival from the poems: 'Since, spite of him [i.e. Death], I'll live in this poor rhyme' (107). And:

> My life hath in this line some interest,
> Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.
> When thou reviewest this, thou dost review
> The very part was consecrate to thee

(74)

It is important to register the fact that in all cases what becomes immortalised in the poems is something particular, not general. There is no suggestion that just any beauty could be preserved by just any poetry, even any poetry that happens to be about something beautiful. It is only *this* beauty, *this* person, *this* love, that can be saved by *these* sonnets, 'these black lines' (63).

This emphasis on particularity is especially puzzling given the notorious lack of specificity about the addressee of the poems, the young man. One of the more ironic lines in the sequence (containing, as we saw,

the only mention of 'immortal') is 'Your name from hence immortal life shall have' (81), given the extraordinary amount of largely futile effort by subsequent readers to recover the name of the addressee. His name of course is not given in the sonnets (at least not non-cryptically). But it is not just his name that is missing: so are nearly all the details that might enable us to conjure him in our minds, or indeed picture his beauty. We are told he is 'fair' and 'beautiful' but in sonnet 127, the first of the Dark Lady sonnets, we are told that traditionally being 'fair' more or less meant being 'beautiful', 'every tongue says beauty should look so' (127), which forces the poet to argue the, by implication controversial, case that being black can be beautiful as well. In sonnet 20 there is a suggestion that the young man has an effeminate look – 'A woman's face with nature's own hand painted' (20) – and also 'A woman's gentle heart' (20). But other aspects of his appearance are unspecified. There is a hint of his noble birth (or at least a contrast in social status between him and the poet) but little else about him, even what he really feels about the poet.

The evolving drama in their relationship is merely hinted at in a one-sided way, leaving the reader struggling to reconstruct unspecified details: that the young man has had an affair with the poet's mistress, that he feels remorse for this, that the poet offers forgiveness, that a rival poet is also singing his praises, that quite long periods pass without the poet seeing him, and so on. The hints come not from a description of the events themselves but only from the poet's reactions to them: 'Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief; / Though thou repent, yet I have still the loss (34); 'No more be grieved at that which thou hast done' (35); 'Take all my loves, my love, yea take them all' (40);

> Those pretty wrongs that liberty commits,
> When I am sometime absent from thy heart,
> Thy beauty, and thy years full well befits,
> For still temptation follows where thou art.

<div align="right">(41)</div>

Of the supposed rival poet we read:

> O! how I faint when I of you do write,
> Knowing a better spirit doth use your name,

> And in the praise thereof spends all his might,
> To make me tongue-tied speaking of your fame.

(80)

Recriminations grow, often wrapped in metaphor:

> For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
> Lilies that fester, smell far worse than weeds.

(94)

And so it goes on. How could all of this, so vaguely sketched, merely hinted at, and lacking detail, possibly serve to immortalise either a love or a lover or a young man's beauty?

At one level the lack of detail both about the young man's physical appearance and about the trials and tribulations in their relationship is easily explained. If detailed descriptions were offered it would weaken the conceit that this is an intimate exchange between two people, the poet and the young man. Why describe the young man's appearance or the events they are living through if the poems are written directly for him? I say this is a conceit of the sonnets not to cast doubt on the biographical reality of the personae and events – there is little evidence one way or the other on that – but because it is clear that the poet has two sets of readers in mind: the young man, of course, but as importantly a wider audience who will continue reading these sonnets long after the poet and young man are dead. The 'promise' of eternity, as we saw, relies on the existence of this second readership. And it makes Shakespeare's task all the more difficult. The intimacy is intense and sometimes agonisingly frank but the poet is ever-present *as a poet*. The poetic design is rich and self-conscious. Whatever the poet's protestations, the artistry of the poetry is always foremost.

We must think of at least some of the ruminations on poetry in the sonnets as addressed as much to the wider readership as to the young man. They provide hints not only to how we should read or understand the verse but also how we should judge it. One simple thought is this: don't expect fancy poetic hyperbole, familiar from the poetic tradition, in describing the young man. His beauty needs no ornament to bolster it as it is both the inspiration for the poet's verse and somehow informs the verse without the need for extra artifice. Thus: 'The ornament of beauty is suspect, / A crow

that flies in heaven's sweetest air' (70). Excessive ornament is ugly and false. The poetry should be left to present the beauty truthfully and unadorned:

> I never saw that you did painting need,
> And therefore to your fair no painting set;
> I found, or thought I found, you did exceed
> The barren tender of a poet's debt

(83)

The enemy here is cliché and hyperbole. With beauty of this nature they are not needed. In two of the most well-known sonnets the poet rejects tired comparisons that the poetic tradition unthinkingly falls back on. 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?' (18) to which the answer is in effect, No, you are better than that. Or later, 'My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun' (130), where he lists and rejects all such poetic clichés: 'I have seen roses damasked, red and white, / But no such roses see I in her cheeks' (130), and so on. Such clichés rest on 'false compare' (130). Traditional eulogies to beauty might anticipate something like the beauty that the young man possesses, reaching out, as it were, to that paradigmatic sublime that he exemplifies, but these ancient poets lacked the requisite first-hand experience to render the living reality of the beauty the poet knows (106).

A dilemma seems to arise for the poet: present the beauty in its full glory and risk not being believed ('The age to come would say "This poet lies; / Such heavenly touches ne'er touched earthly faces"' [17]) or fall into boring repetition, a fear he spells out at length:

> Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
> So far from variation or quick change?
> Why with the time do I not glance aside
> To new-found methods, and to compounds strange?
> Why write I still all one, ever the same,
> And keep invention in a noted weed,
> That every word doth almost tell my name,
> Showing their birth, and where they did proceed?
> O! know sweet love I always write of you,

And you and love are still my argument;
So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again what is already spent:
  For as the sun is daily new and old,
  So is my love still telling what is told.

(76)

The point is that the subject matter, 'my love', is unchanging (unlike, of course, the object of that love who is both succumbing to the ravages of Time and is fickle in behaviour) so it is no surprise that the verse is going to continue in much the same vein and in the same style.

So what is the poet's answer to the dilemma? How can his lover's beauty be presented so that it does not rely on 'false compare' yet can be preserved for eternity? Part of the answer lies in poetic truth or truthfulness. The Rival Poet sonnets serve as a vehicle for contrasting excessive ornament with truth:

yet when they [i.e. the rival poets] have devised,
What strained touches rhetoric can lend,
Thou, truly fair, wert truly sympathized
In true plain words, by thy true-telling friend;
  And their gross painting might be better used
  Where cheeks need blood; in thee it is abused.

(82)

The repetition of 'truly' and 'true' might seem heavy-handed but note that in each use something different is being qualified as true: 'truly fair' (the young man), 'truly sympathized' (some kind of representation of him), 'true plain words' (the words in the sonnets), and 'true-telling friend' (the poet himself). The phrase 'truly sympathized' is an unusual usage, where 'sympathized' means 'represented' with the suggestion, perhaps, of a 'correspondence between an emotion or object and its representation' (Burrow (2002: 544)).[2] If this is right then 'truly sympathized' means more than just 'truly described' but connotes a closer ('sympathetic') correspondence between the representation itself and the beauty represented. Again this idea – that the sonnets offer more than mere

description of beauty and love – will need more working out, as will follow.

Meanwhile, the message of sonnet 82 is clear: keep the 'gross painting' or ornamentation for where it's needed (where 'cheeks need blood'): it is abused, and false, when applied to you. As the poet says 'Truth needs no colour' (101). In sonnet 21, where he rejects poetic cliché ('April's first-born flowers' and so on) he writes: 'let me, true in love, but truly write'. Truth itself is a kind of ornament, albeit lacking any 'false compare' (130):

> O! how much more doth beauty beauteous seem
> By that sweet ornament which truth doth give.
>
> (54)

At the end of sonnet 54 we find: 'my verse distills your truth' (54) developing an analogy with the perfume distilled from a rose. What is this distilled truth? Perhaps this:

> Fair, kind, and true, is all my argument,
> Fair, kind, and true, varying to other words;
> And in this change is my invention spent,
> Three themes in one, which wondrous scope affords.
>   Fair, kind, and true, have often lived alone,
>   Which three till now, never kept seat in one.
>
> (105)

This sounds like a version of the Trinity, here denoting the Beautiful, the Good and the True (see Paterson (2010: 303–4)). Is the bringing together of these three themes the distilled truth of the sonnets? Partly, yes, but I suggest something even more interesting is going on.

What is the role of 'my love' in all of this? 'Both truth and beauty on my love depends' (101). Isn't this a suggestion, then, that 'my love' is even more fundamental than beauty and truth?

> If thou survive my well-contented day,
> When that churl Death my bones with dust shall cover
> And shalt by fortune once more re-survey

These poor rude lines of thy deceased lover,
Compare them with the bett'ring of the time,
And though they be outstripped by every pen,
Reserve them for my love, not for their rhyme

(32)

When the young man returns to the poet's 'poor rude lines', he must
reflect not on their rhyme, their poetic features, but only on the love they
express. He can read other poems for their 'style' but should read 'his for
his love' (32). There are frequent reminders that the sonnets (at least up to
126) owe their inspiration to the love of which they speak:

How can my muse want subject to invent,
While thou dost breathe, that pour'st into my verse
Thine own sweet argument

(38)

Yet be most proud of that which I compile,
Whose influence is thine, and born of thee

(78)

Where art thou Muse that thou forget'st so long,
To speak of that which gives thee all thy might?

(100)

A crucial phrase, from sonnet 78, is 'thou art all my art'. The love is not
just the inspiration for the sonnets but somehow becomes identical with
them: 'Thine own sweet argument' (38), 'born of thee' (78), 'give [the
Muse] all thy might' (100). How could that be?

Here is a suggestion: that the love that inspires the sonnets is not in any
metaphysical sense independent of the sonnets but is rather substantiated
in them. The sonnets, we might say, are *an act of love*. The love of which
they speak is *constituted* by the sonnets, not merely externally described.
The sonnets not only express the love, they enact it and thereby also bring
it into existence. *This* love, specified precisely in *this* way, is a creature of
the sonnets themselves. This is not to deny any external causal factors that

might have led to the writing of the sonnets. But the emotions characterised are artefacts of the writing. We do not look through the writing, as if through plain glass, to emotions beyond, we view, and perhaps experience, the emotions in the writing itself.

If this is right a remarkable conclusion emerges: it is not a mere contingency – a matter of hope or aspiration – that the love will survive as long as the sonnets survive. It is now shown to be a *necessary truth*. The sonnets and the love they express are inseparable. If the one survives so must the other.

The notion is not unduly counterintuitive, indeed it falls in line with a familiar, if not entirely uncontroversial, view of artistic expression, that of R.G. Collingwood. Collingwood famously stated that

> [u]ntil a man has expressed his emotion, he does not yet know what emotion it is. The act of expressing it is therefore an exploration of his own emotions. He is trying to find out what these emotions are. There is certainly here a directed process: an effort, that is, directed upon a certain end; but the end is not something foreseen or preconceived, to which appropriate means can be thought out in the light of our knowledge of its special character. Expression is an activity of which there can be no technique.

> (Collingwood (1938: 111))

The picture Collingwood rejects is this: I have a clear conception of this emotion in my mind – after all, my experience gives me special access to it – and now I need to find the best practical means, the best technique, to describe it accurately. For Collingwood, any clarity in the emotion, if such exists, comes through and in the expression, it is not a precondition of the expression.

I suggest that the Collingwoodian notion of expression fits well with the sonnets. We should not be misled by Shakespeare's use of the causal language of inspiration, 'influence', 'born of thee' (78), etc. into supposing that only an external connection to the addressee is at issue. It is in the nature of love that it is directed, it has an object; love is always *of* someone or something. There would not be love without an (intentional) object of love. But to say that the sonnets are an act of love is not to deny love's directedness or its causal origins. It is to say that the sonnets are a performance of some kind, enacting and creating a complex but specific

nexus of emotions, directed or intentional of course, whose very existence and character are grounded in the words that we read. If the actual young man, supposing he exists, read these same words he too would learn what the emotions are that are seemingly addressed to him and inspired by him. A causal connection between a real person and the writing of the sonnets is quite compatible with the Collingwoodian thought that the emotions in the sonnets acquire their clarity and identity only in the poetic expression itself.

Colin Burrow seems to be making a not unrelated point, questioning any 'external source of value' in the following:

> The changeful process of rereading and reimagining the perfection of the young man, of thinking and rethinking the relationship between time and beauty, gives the effect that the sequence is building not on an external source of value, nor, finally, on the external beauty of the friend. The sequence seems rather to be sourced in itself and to be made up of readings and rereadings of its own poems.

(Burrow (2002: 116))

Burrow doesn't explain what being 'sourced in itself' might mean but the suggestion that the sonnets constitute an act or performance of some kind that expresses the love the sonnets purport to describe might help to flesh out the idea.

3

Burrow's reference to the 'external beauty of the friend' (2002: 116) returns us to our central theme of beauty and time and the thought that in 'these black lines' (63) the beauty can attain a kind of eternity. Burrow writes:

> The question of whether words in themselves can create an archetype and permanent source of beauty is in one respect the subject of the whole sequence up to 126: the young man will not breed, and so will change and decay; the source of the poems' value will erode; the poet's love, which is the precondition of his desire to praise and see the young man as a source of beauty, may fade if the friend is fickle.

… [The] Sonnets do not provide either a strongly positive or a firmly negative answer to this question.

(Burrow (2002: 115))

The poet's uncertainty about his project surfaces on several occasions. Here, for example, he worries about being mocked after his death:

> O! if, I say, you look upon this verse,
> When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
> Do not so much as my poor name rehearse;
> But let your love even with my life decay;
>   Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
>   And mock you with me after I am gone.

(71)

Being mocked recalls the worry from sonnet 17 that his poetry will be 'scorned' for its exaggeration. But surely the greatest uncertainty that the young man's beauty will survive for eternity is the lack of detail offered by the sonnets. It is all very well explaining this, as I did earlier, in terms of the conceit that the sonnets are an intimate reflection from one lover to another. But the promise of eternity rests on the responses of future readers admiring the beauty portrayed. And it is essential they do this as the living beauty is already decaying under the hand of Time. The tyranny of Time is the unpitying and unrelenting onset of change and decline. Some of the most searing passages in the sonnets recount the horrors of ageing:

> In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
> That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
> As the death-bed, whereon it must expire

(73)

So what is it that will sustain the beauty of the young man? The answer of course is the beauty of the poetry that he inspires, a beauty that is itself unchanging and timeless.

   It is only a short step to the thought that the beauty of the young man, that aspect of it that will survive, just is the beauty of the verse. This, to

use a term we noticed earlier, is the 'form' that will live forever. Again, as with the love that is enacted in the poetry, it is not the 'external beauty of the friend' (Burrow (2002: 116) that drives its eternal endurance but the poetic beauty which embodies it. So our earlier conclusion applies here too: just so long as the poetry survives (subject of course to its readability) so will the beauty survive.

The poet, we recall, claims 'my verse distills your truth' (54). It is the poetic distillation of the young man's beauty – not any explicit description of it – that makes a claim to eternity. This after all is not something that Time can destroy. Time attacks material things – brass, stone, earth, and 'monuments' (55) – but it cannot attack poetry in its essence. No doubt 'black lines' can fade and be lost but a poem itself is something more enduring than any physical thing. How can that be? A poem, whatever else it might be, is not identical to any physical inscription of it. Maybe it is an abstract linguistic structure of some kind – the ontology is debatable. But its existence is not merely reducible to particular black lines that happen to present it.

Of course it could be argued that a poem, even as an abstract entity, is subject to time in others ways. Poems can become 'dated', their value might be ephemeral, they might not pass the 'test of time'. What is thought beautiful in poetry in one era is dismissed in another. All that might be true and no doubt the actual endurance of individual poems across time, where matters of value and reception are concerned, is an empirical matter. But the poet's claim is only that it is at least *possible*, even likely, that his verse embodying the beauty of his lover will endure across time, while it is indisputably *impossible* that the young man's actual physical beauty will endure. Its decline is already evident. This then – apart from procreation – is the best chance his beauty has got.

4

But how realistic is the hope that the beauty will endure? Why should readers keep coming back to the sonnets? There are some mundane answers. The sonnets after all are by Shakespeare, 'our ever-living poet'. What's more they feed a prurient interest in the private life of the great man, even if we learn little about him. Also obvious is the fact that some –

certainly not all – of the poetry is sublime and memorable. What is not obvious and almost certainly not true is that a majority of readers are enraptured by, or have any interest in, the beauty of the addressee. Any 'external' beauty that might have inspired the sonnets is long lost and any interest in it has died. The beauty that survives is, as remarked, poetic beauty and it seems pretty clear that Shakespeare knew that would be the case.

It is hardly surprising that the lasting pleasures that the sonnets afford, focus attention inward to the poems themselves. The sonnets are self-reflexive through and through. They explore the limits of what poetry can achieve (striving towards timelessness and a perfection of beauty) as well as the pitfalls it confronts (hyperbole, lack of truthfulness, 'false compare' (130)). They show how emotion enacted can be more powerful than emotion merely described and how beauty exemplified is more lasting than any actual beauty merely catalogued.

A related reason for the continued appeal of the sonnets goes back to the thought of their being an act or performance of some kind. Readers who value the sonnets often do so for the pleasure of reciting them as if in their own voice and from their own point of view. The sonnets about age or disappointment or jealousy or indeed about love or beauty acquire something of their timeless quality in lending themselves to a kind of benign appropriation. By speaking the poems readers can dramatise and thus imagine themselves in just this role. They inhabit the poems and the poet's voice becomes their voice. This is a general and notable feature of the lyric, as observed by Jonathan Culler (2015: 37), who characterises what he calls a 'ritualistic dimension' of the lyric – texts, he says, 'composed for *re*performance':

> For many of these lyrics it seems important that the reader be not just a listener or audience but also a performer of the lines – that he or she come to occupy, at least temporarily, the position of speaker and audibly or inaudibly voice the language of the poem, which can expand the possibilities of his or her discourse.

If this appropriation affords its own species of timelessness, it is a kind familiar in great art. Whatever the specifics of a work's origin – and works always bear that origin with them – if they survive the test of time they continue to be admired even when the historical origins seem to matter less and less. When sonnet 116, 'Let me not to the marriage of true minds

/ Admit impediments. Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds', is recited at weddings it no longer matters that the sonnet initially represents one man addressing another man whom he loved, a love seemingly in constant turmoil, and where marriage was impossible. The lines adapt to a more timeless application.

Finally, the lovely line 'But thy eternal summer shall not fade' (18) reminds us of yet another kind of timelessness, that of being frozen in time. Here I am thinking of Keats' Grecian Urn, where the lovers depicted are forever young even if never able to consummate their love:

> Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
> Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve;
> She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
> For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!
>
> [from John Keats 'Ode on a Grecian Urn']

Do not the sonnets similarly freeze in time, for eternity, the love enacted as well as the beauty of the youth? And as in the sonnets, what Keats' poem shows is how little we need to know about the truths depicted:

> What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
> What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
> What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Happiness is epitomised in the images on the urn even if viewed from a position of ignorance. But, as Keats noticed, if not Shakespeare, there is a down side. Summer might be eternal and we glory in its endless charm. But never moving on to winter, never acting or changing, never bringing love to fruition, is itself a loss. Time might be the enemy but we miss it when it stops.[3]

Related topics

See Chapters 8, 27, 28

Notes

1 In what follows, after each quotation from the sonnets the number of the sonnet will be given in parentheses. Quotations from the sonnets throughout this chapter are from Shakespeare (1885).
2 Colin Burrow adduces another usage, in *Richard II* 5.1.46–7: 'the senseless brands will sympathize / The heavy accent of thy moving tongue / And in compassion weep the fire out' (2002: 544).
3 I am extremely grateful to Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne for their detailed and pressing comments on an earlier version of this paper.

Further reading

Rudenstine, N.L., 2014. *Ideas of Order: A Close Reading of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. An accessible introductory guide to the sonnets giving particular attention to the sequence as a whole.
Vendler, H., 1997. *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Now established as a modern classic commentary. Meticulous, fine-grained analyses emphasising the artistry of Shakespeare's writing.

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Part VIII

Performance and engagement

37

ROLE-PLAYING ON STAGE

D.H. Mellor

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women, meerely Players;
They haue their Exits and their Entrances,
And one man in his time playes many parts

<div align="right">Jaques, As You Like It, First Folio (1623), Act 2 Scene 7</div>

Role-playing in real life

Shakespeare's Jaques is not alone in using role-playing on stage to explain role-playing in real life. Erving Goffman, in the Preface to his *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), says:

> The perspective employed in this report is that of the theatrical performance … I shall consider the way in which the individual in society presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them.

Raymond Williams too, in his *Drama in a Dramatised Society* (1975: 14), says that

> like many actors, people find roles growing on them: they come to fit the part, as he who would play the King. What is new, really, is not in them but in us.

Much of what Jaques, Goffman and Williams say about real-life roles is true. When Presidents act or speak in public *as* Presidents they are indeed

playing that role, which in private they are not doing: nothing they do or say then commits their Presidential selves to anything. It is in this sense that Presidents 'have their exits and their entrances', as we all do in our various roles – as friends, partners, parents, neighbours, employees, employers – from Jaques' 'whining schoolboy' to his 'lean and slippered pantaloon' (2.7). In real life each of us does, as Jaques says, play many parts.

But this real-life role-playing is quite different from role-playing on stage. When Laurence Olivier played Shakespeare's Richard III, his on-stage role was nothing like Richard's off-stage one. Richard's role was that of a real King, when he became one; Olivier's that of an actor playing him, a role that neither exemplifies nor illuminates the real Richard's role as King. The way real monarchs play their role must of course inform the way actors play monarchs on stage, but that tells us nothing about what on-stage role-playing is.

Make-believe, pretence, imitation and presentation

How then does role-playing on stage differ from role-playing in real life? First, a caveat. What I say will not apply to all on-stage role-playing: for a start, it will not apply to ballet, mime or other kinds of wordless role-playing. Nor will it apply to wholly improvised performances, or to performers appearing as themselves, as in stand-up comedy. What it will apply to are performances in which actors portray a play's characters on stage or screen, using speeches largely written in advance by playwrights or screenwriters, in productions largely controlled by directors. That covers most productions of plays by Shakespeare, and many other playwrights, and is what from now on I shall mean by 'on-stage role-playing'.

Goffman, like many others, takes the difference between role-playing on and off stage to be that the former involves *make-believe* in a way the latter does not. 'The stage', he says in his Preface, 'presents things that are make-believe', whereas 'life presents things that are real and sometimes not well rehearsed'. Not so. Olivier's on-stage performances of Richard III were real enough and, while no doubt well rehearsed in general, were almost certainly not well rehearsed in all the details that varied from one

performance to another. The only make-believe involved was that Olivier *was* Richard III, i.e. that Richard himself was on stage, and Olivier's audiences never believed that.[1] Hence the idea that theatre-going requires what Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), called a 'willing suspension of disbelief', in this case the disbelief that Richard III was on stage. But that's wrong too: audiences watching *Richard III* never 'suspended their disbelief' that the person on stage was Richard; because, as Dr Johnson says in his *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765):

> The truth is that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players.

Nor is on-stage role-playing *pretence*, as is also said. Olivier never pretended to be Richard III, and the pretence would not have worked if he had, since his audiences knew perfectly well that Richard was long dead. Actors are not trying to fool their audiences into thinking they *are* the characters they play – as is especially obvious when their characters are fictional. Hamlet, for example, being fictional, is not just dead but was never alive, at least not in the world we live in, and so *could* not be on stage. The fact is, as Bertrand Russell said of Hamlet in his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (1919), that in our world

> only the thoughts, feelings, etc., in Shakespeare and his readers [and actors and audiences] are real … If no one thought about Hamlet, there would be nothing left of him; if no one had thought about Napoleon, he would soon have seen to it that some one did.

(169–70)

Another thing the unreality of fictional characters like Hamlet shows is that actors need not *imitate* the people they play, since no one can imitate someone who does not exist. Actors may of course imitate real people, like Winston Churchill, or even perhaps Richard III, if they think that will help to remind audiences who their character is. But imitation, even when possible, is only relevant if a play calls for it: on-stage performances are of people characterised in the play, not in real life. Olivier's Richard III was a hunchback because Shakespeare's plays say he is, not because, as we now know, the real Richard had scoliosis; just as the speeches Olivier

spoke while playing Richard were those Shakespeare gives him, not those of the real Richard.

Moreover, even when imitation *is* possible, and an important part of an on-stage performance, it is never the point of it. In the 2014 film *The Theory of Everything*, Eddie Redmayne imitates Stephen Hawking in order to show how Hawking's growing paralysis affected and eventually ended his marriage. The imitation was a means to that end, not the name of the game.

Nor is imitation needed to distinguish playing real people like Hawking and Richard III from playing fictional ones like Hamlet. As Derek Matravers argues in his *Fiction and Narrative* (2014), we understand books and films in the same way whether we think they are fact or fiction, and the same goes for how theatre-goers understand plays. The fact that *Richard III*, unlike *Hamlet*, has a protagonist with a real history does not require us to assess its historical accuracy in order to follow the play; nor, if we do assess it, need our assessment depend on how accurately we think the actor playing Richard imitates him.

The best way to see how on-stage role-playing differs from its real-life counterpart, if not by requiring imitation, pretence, or the suspension of an audience's disbelief, is to see that, and how, it differs from Goffman's 'presentation of the *self*'. Goffman means by this the ways people present themselves to others by what they do and say. But actors in a play showing audiences what their characters do and say, are presenting those *characters*, not themselves, not even when they happen to *be* the characters they are playing. For example, when Coral Browne played her younger self in Alan Bennett's 1983 television film *An Englishman Abroad*, while she alone could accept her 1984 BAFTA best-actress award for doing so, other actors could easily have played Coral Browne in the film: that she played that part herself is just a curious coincidence.

The fact that actors on stage are presenting their characters rather than themselves matters here for a more important reason. This is that since audiences need not be the people to whom their characters present themselves, actors can present characters who are *not* role-playing, e.g. when they are thinking or talking to themselves, as Hamlet is doing when he wonders

[w]hether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them.

(3.1)

And as in scenes like this, where the actor is role-playing but his character is not, so in general: even when actors present characters playing roles, as Olivier did when presenting Richard III playing his real-life role as a King, what makes their characters' roles differ from theirs (the actors') is that they, unlike their characters, are not presenting *themselves*.[2]

Describing and depicting

If the fact that actors present their characters rather than themselves is what distinguishes on-stage from off-stage role-playing, it is not what distinguishes acting from other ways of presenting characters – such as histories, biographies and novels. The difference here is that while books present characters by *describing* them, actors do it by *depicting* them. This is why, whereas stories designed to be read contain far more than dialogue in order to tell us not only what their characters say but where, when, to whom and how (and often why) they say it, the texts of plays designed to be performed do not. Instead of telling us such details, performances of plays use sets, costumes, lighting, sound, music, choreography and, above all, actors, to reveal them to us. In short, most of what written stories describe, performances of plays depict.

The distinction between description and depiction must not be overdrawn. First, characters can be presented in either way, as shown in our ability to stage and film books. Second, neither kind of presentation is ever complete: plays and films can no more show us everything about a character than can a book. Nor do they try to: they will tell or show us only what matters to the story. It is because nothing in Shakespeare's *Richard III* turns on the colour of Richard's eyes that it never tells us what colour they were, which is why actors of any eye-colour can play Richard: the fact that in the best-known portraits of him his eyes are painted grey is irrelevant.

And as for real characters, so for fictional ones. Conan Doyle tells us in the first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, that Holmes's eyes are 'sharp and piercing', remarking only much later (in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*) that they are also grey, a fact far less expressive of Holmes's character. That is why Sidney Paget's illustrations of the original stories lost nothing by being in black and white and, while the eyes of actors playing Holmes should look 'sharp and piercing', their colour is as irrelevant as it is when they play Richard III.

The third and most important reason for not overdrawing the description–depiction distinction is that many presentations of real and fictional characters rely on both, as they do in illustrated books. The presentation of Sherlock Holmes in Conan Doyle's stories, for example, owes much to Sidney Paget's original drawings, just as that of A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* characters does to E.H. Shepard's, and that of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* characters does to John Tenniel's.

The same applies to performances of plays, only more so. For while unillustrated books can present their characters purely by description, few if any characters are presented in plays solely by depiction. Nearly all on-stage role-playing also relies on two kinds of description that we need to distinguish in order to understand how it works. First, there are descriptions of scenes. What scenes a production of a play can depict will vary with the resources available, which were far fewer in Shakespeare's open-air Globe Theatre, with its exiguous sets and no stage lighting, than in today's indoor theatres. That is why, when his company could not depict scenes, Shakespeare made his characters describe them – as Enobarbus does in *Antony and Cleopatra*, when he says that Cleopatra's barge,

> like a burnish'd throne,
> Burn'd on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
> Purple the sails, and so perfumèd that
> The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster.

> (2.2)

Similarly, after the Chorus, at the start of *Henry V*, invites the audience to

> Suppose within the girdle of these walls
> Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
> Whose high uprearèd and abutting fronts
> The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.

– he immediately asks them, apologetically, to

> Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts. …
> Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
> Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth.

These scene-setting speeches exploit our ability to imagine things we cannot see, just as written stories do. And they do it so well Shakespeare's plays are readily performed, not only without the scenery their original productions inevitably lacked, but on radio, with no visible scenery at all.

The second kind of descriptions Shakespeare's characters give us are of their own experiences, feelings, thoughts and intentions, which they can describe in far more detail than any wordless mime, dance or music could depict. They may describe them to other characters, as Caesar does in *Julius Caesar* when he says to the crowd

> I hear a tongue shriller than all the music
> Cry 'Caesar!'. Speak. Caesar is turn'd to hear.

(1.2)

Or they may describe them in an aside to the audience, as in *Richard III*, where Richard says of the lady he's just seduced over the coffin of the husband she knows he killed:

> I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.

(1.2)

Or they may speak to themselves, as Hamlet does in his soliloquies, as when he says:

> How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!

(1.2)

These speeches, unlike scene-setting ones, are *not* meant to replace depictions. On the contrary, what they describe is precisely what the actors who speak them, and the actors whose characters hear them, must then depict: by how and to whom the speeches are said, and by how those who hear them react to hearing them. Some speeches, of course, make this task simpler, if not easier, than others. Soliloquies and asides to the audience, for example, unlike speeches to other characters, tell us simply and directly what they express. When the future Richard III tells us he'll have the lady he's just seduced but won't keep her long, we know he means it; when he tells his fellow nobles

> 'Tis death to me to be at enmity;
> I hate it, and desire all good men's love,

$$(2.1)$$

we know he doesn't. So the way actors say those lines must show us Richard's persuasive insincerity, and the other actors' reactions must show us whether their characters are fooled by it.

Actors and animations

The fact that actors, like books, rely on descriptions to present their characters does not impugn the distinction between them: for a start, printed books are static, as are their illustrations, which acting is not. Actors depict and describe their characters dynamically, by what audiences see them do and hear them say. But then so do puppets, models and computer-generated images on cinema, television or computer screens: how then do their depictions of people differ from those of actors?

One difference is that most non-human depicters are less easily mistaken for the people they depict. This is shown by the fact that viewers of films which combine the two, like the 1988 *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and the 1992 *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, respond in the same way to both. The reason they do so is of course that, being as able as Dr Johnson's spectators were to distinguish the characters being depicted from who or what is depicting them, they are responding to the former rather than the latter. This is also why film-goers are not fazed by unclarity about where

human depiction stops and animation starts, as in the 2001–3 *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, where the motion-capture animation of the actor Andy Serkis, depicting Gollum, combines quite naturally with the human depicters of Frodo and Sam.

We might expect this sort of combination of human and animated depiction to work best on screen, where no actors are present and all viewers see are images. In fact it can work equally well in live theatre, as in the National Theatre's 2007 staging of Michael Morpurgo's book *War Horse*. The way that production used actors to depict human characters, and life-sized puppets to depict the horses they interact with, is an instructive case-study in what determines which features of depicters audiences attribute to what they depict.

In *War Horse*, the puppets look and move sufficiently like horses to make audiences respond to the activities, reactions and emotions of the horses they depict, because those matter to the play. While their structure and surfaces differ sufficiently to stop them depicting the horses' coats, musculature, or visual opacity, this is as irrelevant to this play as the colour of Richard III's eyes are to that play. In this respect *War Horse*'s puppets resemble animated cartoons, which can also make clear in advance what they will depict and what they won't, as indeed can certain kinds of film: silent films will not depict their characters' voices; black-and-white ones will not depict the colours of their costumes and surroundings; and so on.

When human actors play human characters, the line between what is and what is not being depicted is less clear. It may be clear enough in the staging: no audience watching Shakespeare's *Henry V* in the Globe Theatre ever took the size and shape of 'this wooden O', as the Chorus calls it, to be a credible depiction of 'the vasty fields of France', which is why the Chorus asks audiences to imagine those fields. But when actors depict people, audiences can read almost anything they see and hear of them into the characters they play: what they look and sound like, what they do and say, and how they do and say it. To see or hear an actor playing Henry V or Hamlet do or say something is by default to see or hear that character doing or saying the same thing in much the same way.

These default readings of actors' traits into their characters can of course be overridden, precisely because, as Dr Johnson said, audiences know 'the players are only players', not the characters they play. But how

do actors stop audiences reading some of their traits into their characters? Costumes are one way: Maxine Peake's 2014 Hamlet at Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre was a man because Peake dressed and moved like one, just as Mark Rylance's Olivia in the Globe Theatre's 2002 and 2012 all-male productions of *Twelfth Night* was a woman because Rylance dressed and moved like one. And as in these cases, so in general. The reason actors play Richard III with a hump whether they have one or not, Shylock as a Jew whether they are Jewish or not, and Othello as black whether they are black or not, is that Shakespeare's plays require them to do so. That is why, when Adrian Lester played Othello at the National Theatre in 2013, audiences read his colour into his character. It is also why, when he played Henry V there in 2003, they did *not* read his colour into his character: they ignored it, because Henry's colour is irrelevant to the play.

Interpretations

If Adrian Lester's colour was irrelevant to his 2003 portrayal of Henry V, so too, if less obviously, was that production's modern setting. All that its modern setting required was for Lester's costumes and weapons to differ from those of Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh in their period films of *Henry V*: it did not require Lester's Henry to differ in character from theirs. After all, it is only because in resetting the plays the nature of the characters need not change that we can set Shakespeare's history plays in our own time – as he did in his. The characters, if not their historical settings, can be our contemporaries.

If different settings do not require actors to play their characters differently, different readings of their characters do. Take the 'all the world's a stage' speech from *As You Like It* that I quoted at the start of this chapter. The speech is Jaques' reply to Duke Senior's remark that

> This wide and universal theater
> Presents more woeful pageants than the scene
> Wherein we play in.

(2.7)

How Jaques replies to this remark depends on how he is interpreted. Interpreted as a misanthropic know-all, his reply may be a piece of showing-off: interpreted as an interested observer, presented with an analogy new to him, he may do what James Garnon made him do in the Globe Theatre's 2015 *As You Like It*. There, Garnon's Jaques, after expressing intrigued surprise with his first two lines –

> All the world's a stage
> And all the men and women merely players [?]

– accepted the analogy and used the rest of the speech –

> They have their exits and their entrances,
> And one man in his time plays many parts
> His acts being seven ages

to develop it in enthusiastic detail. That way of playing his speech both expressed and contributed to Garnon's unusual but entirely credible reading of Jaques' character.

Another example is Clare Higgins's Gertrude in Nicholas Hytner's 2010 National Theatre *Hamlet*. In this production, set in a modern surveillance state, Gertrude's complicity in her first husband's murder[3] makes her deny, in her closet scene with Hamlet, that she can see his father's ghost when the audience can see that she does see him. Later in the production, Ophelia's being dragged off to be killed by Claudius's thugs (for fear of what she might tell Laertes) lets Gertrude turn her oddly lyrical description of Ophelia's death –

> There is a willow grows aslant a brook…
> There, on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds
> Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;
> When down her weedy trophies and herself
> Fell in the weeping brook. …
>   … But long it could not be
> Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
> Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
> To muddy death.

(4.7)

– into a sentimental lie designed to conceal from Laertes how his sister really died.

Readings of Shakespeare's characters can also affect and be affected by how his plays are cut. In Olivier's 1944 film of *Henry V*, his Henry speaks only the first two lines of his forty-three line ultimatum demanding the surrender of Harfleur –

> How yet resolves the governor of the town?
> This is the latest parle we will admit.

(3.3)

– before the Governor capitulates, saying

> Our expectation hath this day an end:
> The Dauphin, whom of succors we entreated,
> Returns us that his powers are yet not ready
> To raise so great a siege. Therefore, great king,
> We yield our town and lives to thy soft mercy.

Cutting the rest of Henry's speech, including the threat that unless the Governor surrenders he must

> in a moment look to see
> The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand
> Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;
> Your fathers taken by the silver beards,
> And their most reverend heads dash'd to the walls,
> Your naked infants spitted upon pikes

– allowed Olivier to make his Henry the untainted hero that his patriotic film, made during World War II, required him to be. Keeping those lines, as Kenneth Branagh did in his 1989 film, would have made Olivier's Henry the more morally complex character that Branagh's and Lester's Henrys were.

The ability of many of Shakespeare's major characters to sustain a remarkably wide range of readings undoubtedly contributes to their endless appeal to directors, actors and audiences. Hamlet and King Lear, for example, can be interpreted in far more varied ways than can, say, Ben

Jonson's Volpone, Ibsen's Hedda Gabler or Chekhov's Uncle Vanya. Not all Shakespeare's major characters are equally protean, of course: the characters of Macbeth, Cleopatra and Falstaff are less easily varied than Hamlet's is, although it can be done. Roger Allam's Falstaff, in the Globe Theatre's 2010 *Henry IV*, for instance, was not just the usual gregarious self-serving self-deluded tippler: he was a gentleman fallen on hard times coping as best he could with age and relative penury. This made his rejection by Prince Hal at the end of *Part 2*, when Hal becomes King –

> I know thee not, old man: fall to thy prayers;
> How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!

(5.5)

– which destroyed Falstaff's dreams of renewed wealth and status, even more moving than it normally is.

Characters and their actors

That different interpretations require actors to play their characters differently is obvious. But actors can play characters differently even when they interpret them in much the same way and in the same setting. Take Benedict Cumberbatch and Jonny Lee Miller alternating Frankenstein and his Creature in the National Theatre's 2011 staging of Mary Shelley's novel. Despite using the same speeches, costume, make-up and moves, and in the same setting, to give the same basic reading of the two characters, their performances were remarkably different. So it cannot be just different settings or interpretations that different actors depict characters differently. Other actors could interpret Jaques as Garnon did, or Gertrude as Higgins did, or use Olivier's or Branagh's screenplays to interpret Henry V as they did: their portrayals of Jaques, Gertrude and Henry would still differ from Garnon's, Higgins's, Olivier's and Branagh's; and the better their portrayals, the more interestingly different they would probably be. How so?

The answer lies in four features of on-stage presentations of human characters by human actors which together, I have argued, distinguish them from all other kinds of presentation:

1. actors, unlike writers, depict their characters;
2. actors, unlike animations, are as human as the characters they depict; and
3. real people are depicted in the same way as fictional ones, because
4. it is the play, not real life, that determines what its characters do and say.

This is why, as I noted in the previous section, actors playing real characters need only resemble them in ways called for by the play. It is also why Russell's contrast, quoted earlier, between Hamlet and Napoleon –

> If no one thought about Hamlet, there would be nothing left of him; if no one had thought about Napoleon, he would soon have seen to it that some one did.
>
> (169–70)

– does not apply to plays about them. There Napoleon and Hamlet are on a par: in the scripts of a play there is no more to any of its characters, real or fictional, than the lines and stage directions the playwright gives them. Only when a play is staged is there anything more to its characters than that: namely, the performances of the actors playing them. And then, the fact that these actors are the people whom an audience sees and hears doing and saying what the play says its characters do and say, makes them, for that audience, the *embodiments* of those characters.

This I think is what actors mean when they say they try to 'become' their characters. They cannot mean this literally, since it implies both that Richard III, say, is actually on stage wherever and whenever he is being played, and therefore that he could only ever be played by one person, namely himself, which is absurd. What is not absurd, but true, is that audiences who take actors to embody their characters will (subject to the conventions of the production) take whatever the actors do and say, and however they do and say it, to be what their characters do and say, and how they do and say it. That is why actors try to make everything their audience might see and hear of them (within their production's conventions) credible attributes of their characters, and why I think this is what actors mean by 'becoming their characters'.

It is also what enables different actors to play the same characters, similarly interpreted, quite differently. The reason is that just as no two people will do or say the same thing in quite the same way in real life,[4] so no two actors will play the same part in quite the same way. And it is our ability to use these differences in appearance and behaviour to distinguish people in real life that we also use to distinguish embodiments of the same character. For however well actors adapt their appearance and behaviour to fit a playwright's description, and a director's interpretation, of a complex character, these will still differ in ways that audiences can use to differentiate them, as they did with Cumberbatch's and Miller's Frankensteins. This is what, settings and interpretations aside, made Olivier's Henry V differ from Branagh's and Lester's: they were very different embodiments of that character. Similarly, Helen Mirren (in a 1982 RSC production) and Eve Best (in a 2015 Globe Theatre production) presented different embodiments of Cleopatra. It is also what makes us want to see our best and most versatile actors play a wide range of major roles: we expect their embodiments of them to be not only good but enlighteningly distinctive.

Cumberbatch's and Miller's Frankensteins illustrate another way in which their embodiments of their characters differed: the way their Frankensteins and Creatures interacted. For just as our real-life reactions to other people depend on them as well as us, so too do those of characters in plays. Cumberbatch's Frankenstein differed from Miller's partly because, since Miller's Creature differed from his, he did not react to it as he would have done to his own Creature.

And as with Frankenstein and his Creature, so in Shakespeare with Antony and Cleopatra. Those characters interact so much that how each is played inevitably affects how the other is played. Helen Mirren's 1982 Cleopatra, for example, differed from her 1998 National Theatre Cleopatra partly because her 1982 Antony, Michael Gambon, differed greatly from her 1998 Antony, Alan Rickman. Similarly, to a greater or lesser extent, with all interacting characters: how each is played almost always affects how the others are played. And these effects are cumulative: Gambon's and Mirren's portrayals of Antony and Cleopatra emerged from their exchanges in successive scenes, with each scene building on what has gone before, rather like a painted portrait emerging from a succession of brush strokes.

This incidentally is why actors can know a part without being able to recite it all offstage, just as you can know how to drive somewhere without being able to describe the whole route in advance. For just as drivers need only recognise the right way to go at each junction, so actors need only recognise and produce the right response to each cue when they get it. The analogy is not perfect, of course, since the right way to go at each junction is the same for all drivers on the same route, which is not true of the cues, verbal and visual, given by actors to other actors: both they and the responses to them can vary widely with different actors, and with how those actors gave and responded to earlier cues. Hence the amount of rehearsal time devoted to working on a play's major characters and their interactions – first to develop them into a coherent whole, and then, in run-throughs, to get them into the actors' mental and physical 'muscle memories' – so they can rely on each other in performance. Not that this process is meant to make all performances of a production indistinguishable. On the contrary, the better a play's actors, the more they can develop and vary their characters in detail during a run in response to each other and, especially perhaps in preview performances, to audiences, whose reactions can show whether and how characters' depictions may need to be changed to get them across.

That only human actors can do all this is obvious, and I think is what gives live performances of plays like Shakespeare's their appeal: an appeal we can only understand if we recognise what actors on stage are and are not doing. What they are *not* doing, I have argued, is imitating their characters, or pretending to be them. Imitation is at most an incidental aid to portrayals of real people, and impossible in portrayals of fictional ones; while pretending to be a character would, even if it worked (which with sane adults it wouldn't), be identity theft and the work not of actors but of conmen.

What actors on stage *are* doing, while not literally becoming their characters, is embodying them for their audiences in the sense outlined above – a sense that explains how different actors can present a character equally well but very differently. With characters as amenable to diverse embodiment as many of Shakespeare's are, that is a large part of his plays' enduring appeal. More generally, it is what makes theatre at its best the most vivid way of portraying real and fictional people.[5]

Related topics

See Chapters 38, 40, 41

Notes

1 Screenings of Olivier's film of *Richard III* involve the further 'make-believe' that *Olivier* is present in the cinema, which again no one watching the film believes. But as the same is true of television news – no one thinks that what is shown, as opposed to the showing of it, is happening in their living room – we can ignore this extra layer of make-believe, which sheds no new light on the on-stage/off-stage distinction.

2 This two-fold distinction still applies and suffices when actors play actors acting, as in *The Mousetrap* (the play-within-a-play in *Hamlet*), which shows us three 'presentations': the real actor presenting the Player King; the Player King presenting the King in *The Mousetrap*; and that King presenting himself to his Queen as her husband. Only the last of these is an off-stage role, since the *Mousetrap* King is presenting himself. The others are on-stage roles, as they will be however many there are. Whenever actors play actors playing actors playing … only the last role is an off-stage one: all the others are on-stage roles.

3 Nicholas Hytner made this back story explicit in a discussion of his National Theatre Shakespeare productions held in the NT's Lyttelton Theatre on 22 April 2016.

4 except perhaps similarly reared identical twins …

5 Early drafts of this paper were discussed on 10 September 2015 at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study, and on 16 March 2016 at one of the British Society of Aesthetics Cambridge Lectures, discussions to which this final version owes much. Besides the works referred to in the text, I am also much indebted to Tom Stern's 2013 *Philosophy and Theatre*. But my greatest debt is to those with whom, over many years, I have acted in plays, an experience as satisfying as it has been enlightening about what acting is.

Further reading

Stern, T. 2013. *Philosophy and Theatre*. London: Routledge. Chapter 1, 'What Is Theatre? discusses many more kinds of theatrical performance than I deal with in this chapter. The book as a whole provides a historical introduction to the philosophy of theatre.

Matravers, D. 2014. *Fiction and Narrative*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 6, 'Engaging With Narratives', argues that we understand non-fiction and fiction in the same way. Chapter 10, 'Coda: Film', applies this thesis to film, as I do to the stage.

References

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38

BUILDING CHARACTER

Shakespearean characters and their instantiations in the worlds of performances

E.M. Dadlez

This is largely a chapter about the differences between characters as they appear in scripts, that is, in the world conceived by the playwright, and characters as they are fully realized in performances. In particular, it is about what actors do to flesh out the sketch provided by the script, to fill in the lacunae that any script must leave. Shakespearean characters are of particular interest because many have for centuries taken on lives of their own apart from the works that they inhabit. We know who Falstaff is and know what he is like without having read or seen either of the *Henry IV* plays, or *Henry V*, or *Merry Wives*. So Shakespearean characters, in being more independent of the page than most, probably prove one of the greatest challenges to actors (and nowadays, to directors) who want to provide more than a kind of mechanical mimetic reproduction of a persona made familiar by canonical performances. Consider Patrick Stewart, reflecting on a role he undertook:

> 'Shylock, in *The Merchant of Venice*, can be played as a wolfish villain, sadistically lusting for the blood of a Christian he hates. Or, he can be interpreted as a dignified symbol of an oppressed people intellectually and morally superior to the Christians who taunt and abuse him.' So began one review of … *The Merchant of Venice* …. At

the time, the depressing narrowness of this critic's view of the role appalled me.[1]

As Stewart discovered, there were more options open to him than these. The position advocated here expands the application of Louise Rosenblatt's compelling analogy between aesthetic reading and musical performance.[2] Just as there can be many performances of a Mozart concerto, some halting, some sentimental, some exalted, so there may be many readings of a work, each bringing to the text experiences, awarenesses and personal histories that complete the work in different ways. I will argue that actors can realize characters in much the same way that musicians realize works or that readers make texts their own (in particular, the latter) by drawing on the reservoir of their own history, past experience, concerns and convictions, all of which inform their reading and their representation of the character. Just as the reader may evoke a world from a text, funded in part by his own imagination, so an actor can evoke a person from a script, by attempting to embody the traits and quirks and dispositions his imagination and critical faculties dictate while working in concert.

Let us first consider the relationship between the worlds of works and the worlds constructed by readers of those works. As we read, we infer and extrapolate, building on what is explicitly indicated in the fiction. Of course, many things are never explicitly indicated, yet are assumed by all readers to be so: that gravity obtains, that air is breathed, that people have hearts and lungs and kidneys. These are either entailed by what is true in the world of the work, or taken as true given assumptions about genre and general conventions uniformly adopted in our approach to works of fiction. All can be taken to belong to the world of the work proper, rather than to a particular reading. Other inferences are not as inevitable, and will depend on the individual. Consider the following one-sentence story:

> 'Wrong number', said a familiar voice.[3]

There are dozens of ways to fill out the story, each consistent with the minimalist fictional world the text presents, a world in which someone tries to reach another and fails (though it is never made clear what kind of a failure it is). Depending on the reader and her extrapolations, the story imagined could be about a failed love affair (in which the lover refuses to

acknowledge the caller), a broken friendship, a creepy presence in an unexpected place, a business that has unexpectedly folded. None of these options is inconsistent with the states of affairs indicated, and none is required. Fictions are usually not so open-ended, of course, but they always leave some room for extrapolation, which allows space for alternative interpretations.

Even complete texts with complete stories leave room for alternative interpretations, when different inferences are drawn from a text and different extrapolations are made. Consider Katharina's last speech in *The Taming of the Shrew*, one that can be particularly offputting to contemporary feminist audiences, since it appears irredeemably submissive in the worst possible way. Kate appears to be counselling her feminine compatriots that it is their duty to become doormats:

> Fie, fie! unknit that threatening unkind brow,
> And dart not scornful glances from those eyes,
> To wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor:
> It blots thy beauty as frosts do bite the meads,
> Confounds thy fame as whirlwinds shake fair buds,
> And in no sense is meet or amiable.
> A woman moved is like a fountain troubled,
> Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty;
> And while it is so, none so dry or thirsty
> Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it.
> Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
> Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,
> And for thy maintenance commits his body
> To painful labour both by sea and land…
> Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot,
> And place your hands below your husband's foot:
> In token of which duty, if he please,
> My hand is ready; may it do him ease.

(V.ii)

The constant and repetitive drumbeat of the proper ways to characterize a husband's role – 'thy lord, thy king, thy governor', 'thy lord, thy life, thy keeper', and 'thy head, thy sovereign, one that cares for thee' sounds

positively Aquinean in its import. What possible rendition of those words, and especially of those emphatic repetitive delineations of the relation of husband to wife, could issue in anything other than an endorsement of something approximating gender apartheid?

   Here is one way that such an endorsement has been averted, by means of the collusion of two very inventive actors. Earlier in the play, just before Kate is forced into marriage with Petruchio, he gives this speech, while in the process of preventing Kate's departure:

> But for my bonny Kate, she must with me.
> Nay, look not big, nor stamp, nor stare, nor fret;
> I will be master of what is mine own:
> She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,
> My household stuff, my field, my barn,
> My horse, my ox, my ass, my any thing;
> And here she stands, touch her whoever dare;
> I'll bring mine action on the proudest he
> That stops my way in Padua.

(III.ii)

Notice that there is a foreshadowing of Kate's later speech about the role of husbands. First, is the reference to anger and angry facial expressions, and then to stamping one's feet as opposed to placing one's hand beneath one's husband's foot. Most important is the list of wifely roles (in contrast to Kate's eventual list of husbandly roles) and the reinforcement of the wife's status as possession. We hear that Kate is 'my goods, my chattels… my house', and 'my household stuff, my field, my barn' and finally 'my horse, my ox, my ass, my any thing', and we hear it presented with the same rhythmic and emphatic repetition that reappears in Kate's peroration. This would appear simply to reinforce the sexist slant of the whole, but that is not necessarily the case. A lot depends on what actors *do* when uttering those lines, and how it is they utter them. Some decades ago, I attended a production of *The Taming of the Shrew* put on by the SUNY Oswego Theatre Department. The performance used the similarities and repetitive lists in the two passages to defuse the sexist import of Kate's final injunction. Recollect that Shakespeare's comedies in general and this play especially all involve a lot of physical humor and slapstick. As

Petruchio launches into 'she is my goods, my chattels' he begins to spin Kate around. 'My house' is accompanied by his steepling her arms over her head in the shape of a peaked roof, 'my field' is accompanied by his stretching Kate's arms wide, 'my ass' involves spinning her around so that her back faces the audience. That is, Petruchio treats Kate's body as if it were merely a puppet, making it assume the pose that fits the role he is describing. But then Katharina does the same to Petruchio during the final speech. With 'thy lord', she spins him around and steeples his arms over his head. The entire puppet-master routine is replayed throughout the speech, with each iteration of the husband's formal role, culminating with Kate yanking Petruchio's leg up when announcing that 'it is no boot' and tipping him over entirely, making it no hardship whatsoever to place her hand beneath her husband's foot (which is waving in the air when the injunction is uttered). All of this, I should add, was done in the most good-humoured way, as if both characters were kidding around and having fun. The result was a radically different *Shrew* from that which is typically seen and also a Kate who was the furthest thing possible from a doormat at the end of the play.

So, directors permitting (and we should keep in mind that there were no directors in Shakespeare's day, so interpretive decisions were largely up to actors), what actors do can have a profound interpretive effect on the character they play and on the world that is presented to an audience in a particular performance. This is not at all a matter of changing what is there in the script. It is a matter of making reasonable inferences on the basis of what is already there. I have obviously presented a borderline case in my example of *The Taming of the Shrew*, in that it involves a somewhat atypical interpretation of the text, suggesting there is irony in certain passages that are not normally taken to be ironic. But the shift I have shown is a shift in tone, not in the play as written. Nothing says that Kate must, in the end, utter her speech with passionate and doormat-like sincerity. She can, instead, simply be taken to continue the game and the joke that Petruchio began, each playing a role and holding forth about the role of the other without, on that account, being fully invested in them. The entire theme of role playing is aided considerably by the play-within-a-play aspect of *The Taming of the Shrew*. The production of which I am thinking retained Shakespeare's oft-elided original conceit of Christopher Sly the drunken tinker being treated to a play about Kate and Petruchio,

and included riotously funny moments when cues were missed because of an exciting bout of dicing backstage. None of the additions I have noted constitute an outright inconsistency with the states of affairs in the world of the work; they just represent eventualities that are less likely to be inferred from the text than others, or that might be thought less probable (given the fictional states of affairs) given the time period in which the play was written.

Typically, extrapolation on the basis of fictional states of affairs involves assumptions about what would be the case were the fictional states of affairs to obtain. Alternatively, in the case of a devotion to authorial intention and historicity, we might consider what the author assumed his intended audience believed would obtain were the states of affairs outlined in the work to obtain. Both David Lewis and Nicholas Wolterstorff have gone to some lengths to describe how it is we may determine what propositions are true within a fictional world or what states of affairs obtain within it, from both historical and ahistorical perspectives.[4] The fictional world is taken to consist of the states of affairs delineated in the text, the states of affairs entailed by them, and the states of affairs that can be inferred on the basis of these. Some inferences can be ruled out as illegitimate, of course, as when they are inconsistent with what is true in the world of the work. And some inferences, though not outright entailments, seem invariably to belong to the world of the work rather than to individual interpretations (such as the assumption that people possess lungs and hearts and kidneys). However, there can be many extrapolations that are entirely consistent with the world of the work, but inconsistent with each other. These kinds of imaginative elaborations are, for all intents and purposes, interpretations. To my mind, that is just what interpretations are.

Historical and ahistorical extrapolations could conflict, given suppositions on the part of the former about what the author assumed his audience might believe would occur, were the delineated events to occur. Hamlet's distress and melancholy could be understood in terms of the theory of humors as being due to an excess of bile, in terms of a Freudian approach as being due to an Oedipal complex, and in terms of a more contemporary approach as being due to Borderline Personality Disorder. The single causal inference could easily result in radically different Hamlets, mitigating responsibility in the first case, adumbrating neuroses

in the second, and adding assumptions about unavoidably unstable relationships in the third. Note that ahistorical extrapolations offer a limitless array of prospects vis-à-vis character analysis, since the assumption that one psychological hypothesis is true rather than another, taken in conjunction with propositions that are true in the world of the work, will yield a wide variety of incompatible explanations for and interpretations of character behaviour. Indeed, Nicol Williamson's frantic, nervous Hamlet, in the 1969 production at London's Roundhouse Theatre, suggests the possible assumption that Hamlet is bipolar.

Even works like *Huckleberry Finn* are liable to give rise to completely incompatible interpretations (of both work and characters). Leslie Fiedler inferred a homoerotic relationship between Huck and Jim on the basis of the descriptions of affectionate behaviour in the book, in the unforgettably titled 'Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!'.[5] Mark Twain pretty clearly did not intend such inferences to be made, more likely intending to depict a close friendship that existed despite racial difference. But Fiedler's assumption is not inconsistent with what is delineated in the work. Books can never delineate the entirety of a character's action, though they might stipulate that some never took place (which, to be fair, *Huckleberry Finn* never does). Thus, many more inferences are possible than might be standardly assumed.

But let us focus even more specifically on individual characters rather than the performance worlds of entire works. First, just as a distinction must be made between a work and the world with which it (or a performance of it) presents us in imagination, so a distinction must be made between characters as entities of literary criticism about whose construction we can theorize and characters as people, with whom we may empathize and to whose plights we can react. Peter van Inwagen and Nicholas Wolterstorff have both written of fictional characters in such a way as to account for the distinctions that all of us make between characters as the creations of authors on the one hand, and as imaginary people with specific personalities and behavioural dispositions on the other. Van Inwagen considers those properties a character like Falstaff can be said to possess: having been created by Shakespeare, or being in several plays written by that author. He distinguishes between these and properties ascribed to the character in *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2:* being fat, being fond of drink, being a friend of Hal.[6] Nicholas Wolterstorff makes more or less

the same point by distinguishing between properties possessed by and properties essential within person-kinds or universals.[7] That is, characters are conceived as universal person types, the properties essential within which would be those specified by the relevant work, such as being fat, or being a roisterer. Properties possessed by the character Falstaff are, as with van Inwagen, properties like that of being in a play or having been created by Shakespeare. The idea of a character as a universal gains plausibility insofar as characters, like fictional worlds, are not maximally comprehensive. As Wolterstorff puts it, no fictional world is such that any given proposition must be true or false within it,[8] something that would in fact be true of any possible world (such as the actual world). It is neither true nor false that Lady Macbeth had exactly one child, for instance, or that Falstaff preferred the colour blue to the colour red.

Consider Shakespeare's Othello, a complex and difficult character to portray, not least because he undergoes an enormous change in personality though the course of the play. It is in many respects easy to think of Othello in the light of one of Wolterstorff's person-kinds, that unique confluence of traits and dispositions giving the character a certain independence of the play and making possible a variety of different instantiations that are nonetheless entirely unmistakable and recognizable *as* instantiations of that character and none other. Andrew Davies' contemporary adaptation of *Othello* would seem at first glance to be an entirely distinct work featuring entirely distinct people.[9] It is in modern English, a racially charged tale about London's Metropolitan police force, with only the connections among Othello, Iago, and Desdemona held completely constant. But those three characters and the relations among them are sufficient for replicating the heart of the tragedy. Eamonn Walker's Othello is riveting, especially because he plays Othello's descent into jealousy as a gradual erosion of identity that transforms someone admirable and honourable into a repulsive morass of rage, resentment and self-pity. This Othello is a classic domestic abuser, the performance building on and reinforced by contemporary awareness of domestic violence. While the kind of sickening deterioration into emotional abuse and intimate partner violence does not represent a standard portrayal of Othello, the instantiation of the person-kind associated with the character could occur in any of several ways. This particular way shows us how we would feel about Othello, were he a state representative or the newly

appointed Dean or the fellow who lived across the road. Walker's Othello is insecure in his recent elevation and such insecurities are expertly exacerbated by Iago's (Christoper Eccleston) manipulation, until Othello's very sense of self is undermined and he becomes a parody of who he was, seeing rejection and betrayal everywhere, at the same time convinced he isn't worthy of what he has and unable to tolerate the idea that he isn't. Other performances can differ greatly and still present us with Othello. They might (upsettingly enough) present Othello's killing of Desdemona as a traditional honour killing – the only way to rectify the stain made upon Othello's honour by Desdemona's alleged infidelity. Still others might make Othello overly credulous in being taken in by Iago, or overly trusting and over-invested in their friendship. And all of these differences lead to different reasons for killing Desdemona on account of the assumed infidelity: she may be killed because she is thought not to want Othello as much as he wants her, because she must be punished for a crime, because she is thought to be guilty of an unforgiveable personal betrayal, because it serves her right. Several different extrapolations could be made on the basis of what is indicated in the text and the traits and predispositions ascribed to the character within it. All are Othello, but each performance shows us another way it could be to be Othello.

Consider Ben Kingsley's performance, and consider it especially in light of what Rosenblatt has said about the way we inform and understand texts partly through our own past histories and experiences and concerns. Even though not of a jealous disposition himself, Kingsley observes that we must nonetheless bring private knowledge to a public role:

> My father was born in East Africa – the son of Gujerat parents. He spent his childhood in an Islamic community born of the ancient Arab trade routes. My father came to England in 1927 at the age of fourteen and valiantly matured at an English public school, university, Guy's hospital and then as a general practitioner in the north of England. He returned neither to East Africa nor to Gujerat (India); to the landscapes that had nourished his pride, his myths, and his morality, to the home of his revered father, a king amongst men. I think this bred in him a sense of displacement. His beautiful English bride, a fashion model and an actress, was his perfect Desdemona, and I hasten to add no one conspired to destroy them. But I know the chaos that could rise up in his throat when our English landscape

became too alien. I could see the cry behind his eyes when our world baffled his ancient soul. 'I want to go home' they used to say; and 'I want to go home' went into the crucible to be coined night after night during Othello's disintegration.[10]

Othello's alienation and the way that alienation battens on his jealousy and uncertainty is central to this particular realization. Othello is, famously, an outsider in Venice, both culturally and in terms of race. Kingsley's Othello realized this exotic quality, up to and including a fabulous braided wig made to replicate a head of hair that he had encountered in Morocco, with red, black, gold and white braids falling to his shoulders.[11] Each instantiation of the role in the person of a particular actor is unique, yet each is irrevocably Othello and none other.

One trait common to all instantiations is jealousy, and this is the principal trait that Iago and Othello share (these being an ineradicable feature of the world of the work). David Suchet, who played the Iago to Kingsley's Othello, maintains that 'Iago *represents* Jealousy, *is* Jealousy'. Like Patrick Stewart's concerns about Shylock, Suchet's intention was to avoid interpretations that amounted to a series of labels, and to focus instead on 'one main ingredient – Jealousy' and its effects and motivational triggers. Iago has plenty of grounds for jealousy. Othello has not only made Cassio his lieutenant instead of Iago (I.i), he has also married. 'For Iago, Othello's marrying means that their friendship … will never be the same again. It's only because of the wedding that Othello needs the unpractised 'bookish theoretic' – the Sandhurst type – to be his lieutenant as a status symbol:'[12]

> Preferment goes by letter and affection,
> Not by the old gradation, where each second
> Stood heir to th' first.

(*Othello* I.i)

Whether there is a homoerotic subtext or not, and performances have varied widely in that respect, it is clear that Othello's connection with Desdemona is seen by Iago as something that deprives him of a connection with Othello, that interferes with a relationship he has established. Indeed, it is Iago, whose expertise clearly arises from personal experience, who

outlines the condition from which he himself suffers and which he hopes will afflict Othello:

> O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;
> It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
> The meat it feeds on; that cuckold lives in bliss
> Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;
> But, O, what damned minutes tells he o'er
> Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves!

<div align="right">(Othello III.iii)</div>

Unlike envy, which is usually taken to refer to discontent aroused by another's good fortune (something that presumably brings one's own lack of similar fortune forcibly to mind), jealousy appears to involve the understanding that one is deprived of something to which one feels entitled just on account of someone else's having laid claim to or otherwise acquired the desideratum. Such an emotion, when subjected to conceptual analysis, is often thought to arise in a three-party relation or context.[13] It makes sense to think of jealousy as species of three-party relation among characters. The jealous individual is bothered or distressed by not being favoured by one individual who, instead, favours another. So Iago feels entitled to Othello's attention and favour. Both Cassio and Desdemona, in different respects, co-opt Othello's attention and favour, thereby depriving Iago of a variety of things: the preferment, Othello's time, Othello's company. Similarly, Othello is brought by Iago to believe that Cassio is favoured by Desdemona in a way to which Othello ought by rights to be exclusively entitled. Jealousy is such a toxic emotion because it has the dual features of thwarted entitlement (thereby prompting rage at the thwarter) on the one hand, and self-pity and grievance on account of the thwarting on the other. Whoever it is who is jealous is situated so as to feel entitled to press grievances against both other parties, for the first has unfairly deprived him of the time or attention or preferment or (in this case, exclusive) favour to which he feels himself to be entitled, while the second is held to have barged in and stolen that time, attention, favour or preferment, despite the fact that they were not entitled to it. It is called a triangle for a reason, and is instantiated in several ways in this particular play, by more than one set of characters. Participation in such triangles is

also a constant for Othello, Iago and Desdemona conceived as characters, constituting a crucial portion of the universal that Wolterstorff would associate with each. That universal aspect of both Othello and Iago is always present in but differently realized in each performance of each role, being a core part of the world of that work.[14]

The way in which an actor realizes a given character is, of course, dictated by any number of additional factors that have not yet been addressed. In contemporary theatre, it would in any case be more realistic to speak of a combined vision of the actor and director as being captured by that realization. Thus far, the concern has been to show how inferences made on the basis of fictional states of affairs can rest at the basis of such realizations. Which inferences (of a wide possible variety) will be made could depend on the actor's (and director's) personal history and experience and political investment, of course. A feminist director or actress might be more likely to realize the role of Kate in *Taming of the Shrew* in the playful, distinctly unsubmissive way that was described earlier, for instance. Ben Kingsley's recollection of his father's experience placed a sense of alienation and isolation at the heart of his Othello. Philip Brockbank reports that 'Tony Church, playing Polonius over a span of decades, finds the role changing as he returns to it with different preoccupations, domestic and political'.[15]

But naturally, many other factors will affect the actor's realization. Settings, sets and costumes can have enormous effects. Setting Othello in the present day and making him a police commissioner brought current concerns with race and police violence and domestic abuse to the fore in a way they could not have been emphasized in a period production. Even the physical limitations imposed by sets can have an impact on characterization. Russell Jackson, for instance, observes that 'The steep hillside and uneven downstage floor in Caird's *Twelfth Night* meant than no one could make a running entrance or exit. Was this a subtle, directorial decision about the pace of life in Illyria or an accident unforeseen by the designer? All behaviour on stage is inescapably endowed with meaning'.[16] Precarious ledges and swaying surfaces can affect how an actor holds him- or herself and thereby the perceived security, confidence and carriage of the character. That is, such a sense of instability or insecurity could be co-opted into a character interpretation, and not always deliberately. I admit to performing Hecate in a production of *Macbeth* atop a (for me) initially

terrifying high metal platform which had to be ascended by means of a steep ladder, backstage, in the dark. My natural inclination to seize the metal crossbars on the platform and grip them until my fingers cramped somehow contributed to the portrayal of a grasping, clutching character, obsessed with controlling the actions of all around her. This is not an unusual interpretation in any case, but may well have been intensified by my reaction to the precarious perch. Similarly, costumes can have effects on carriage and bearing (think how one must hold oneself when wearing a corset, for instance) and in general reinforce the realization of a character, as with Kingsley's fabulous braided wig, which reinforced his conception of Othello's otherness. All such things ultimately contribute to the actor's realization. But at the core of that realization is the set of inferences and extrapolations an actor makes (sometimes in concert with a director), using the script as a starting point.

Related topics

See Chapters 37, 39, 40

Notes

1 Stewart (1985: 11).
2 Rosenblatt (1978: 140–2).
3 There are several internet sites featuring one-sentence stories. This one was accessed on 16/5/16: www.scoopwhoop.com/inothernews/one-line-stories/
4 Lewis (1978), Wolterstorff (1980).
5 Fiedler (2008).
6 van Inwagen (1977).
7 Wolterstorff (1980: 144–9).
8 Wolterstorff (1980: 131–2).
9 *Othello* (2001) (dir: Geoffrey Sax; screenplay: Andrew Davies). Accessed 19/5/16: www.imdb.com/title/tt0275577/ See complete film : www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIcCE3s_rFc

10 Kingsley (1988: 171).
11 Kingsley (1988: 174).
12 Suchet (1988: 183, 199).
13 Farrell (1980: 527–59).
14 I can only mention in passing that the interpretations of theatre and film critics will differ from those of actors, because the former are extrapolating on the basis of the world of a *performance* (in which, say, Othello looks like Ben Kingsley and behaves in a particular way) rather than the world of a text. That is, critics typically extrapolate on the basis of a different set of states of affairs than actors do.
15 See Brockbank (1985: 2).
16 See Jackson and Smallwood (1988: 4).

Further reading

van Inwagen, P.,1977. Creatures of Fiction. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14(4): 299–308.
Kripke, S., 2013. *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures* 1973. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 40–2, 60–78. Both of the above explore that to which our language and discourse about characters commits us.
Lewis., D., 1978. Truth in Fiction. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15(1): 37–46.
Nicholas Wolterstorff, 1980. *Works and Worlds of Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Both of the above attempt to discover what it is we can take to be true in a fictional world, and the degree to which personal history and background can inform a reading.
Players of Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *Players of Shakespeare* is a series in several volumes with several editors, each containing a collection of essays by actors about their interpretation and execution of different Shakespearean roles.

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39

SHAKESPEARE'S THEATRICAL OPENINGS

James R. Hamilton

In 2005, Evelyn Tribble argued that 'our understanding of the playing system, particularly of the mnemonic demands that the repertory system made on its participants, has been consistently distorted by a tendency to view cognition as individual rather than social, which has caused us to imagine the workings of complex group structures in mechanistic terms'.[1] The system that Tribble went on to describe was aimed at allowing for the enormous 'mnemonic demands' placed upon Shakespeare's actors to be tractable. The goal of her paper was to explain 'how actors in Shakespeare's time may have approached their roles',[2] especially that aspect of their roles that is most salient given the facts that each actor had to have something like 70-odd roles under his command, that of those often 50 or so of them were newly learned, that no actor had the full script of the play, that there were very few rehearsals (as we know them), and that of those few, most were either the first night's performance itself or were for those bits of a play that could not be learned alone.[3]

I am not going to dwell on Tribble's main point, namely, that the use of the physical environment is a way of offloading mental tasks.[4] I do however, rely on some of her evidence to stress the points that Shakespeare's plays, like those of his competitors, were designed *primarily* to entertain and that they used various techniques that made that possible.

Tribble begins her development of the system of production by calling attention to 'several tools, artifacts, and practices of the early modern theater in order to show how they form elements of a cognitive structure that, in constraining and limiting, also enables an extraordinary level of achievement. These elements include the playhouse, the plots, actors' roles, the plays' verbal structures, and the apprentice system and the organizational practices of the companies'.[5] One example is found in Tribble's discussion of 'plots'.

> These are 'playhouse documents … which constitute central cognitive artifacts of early modern theater. These folio-sized sheets of paper contain scene-by-scene accounts of entrances and, sometimes, exits; necessary properties; casting; and sound and music cues. Some extant plots appear to have a hole at the top, presumably for hanging on a wall.[6]

Tribble insists that although

> the plots are often maddeningly incomplete […] this is the inevitable result of their being meant not to solve problems for scholars four hundred years hence but to help an Elizabethan company put on a play … A plot functioned as a two-dimensional map of the play designed to be grafted onto the three-dimensional space of the stage and to be used in conjunction with the parts. Since players did not have the full text, this document allowed them to see and to chart the play, particularly to understand the rhythm of the scenes.[7]

As should be clear by now, the framework in this chapter is Shakespeare's theatre understood as consisting of theatrical performances, rather than as play-texts that get performed. Of course it is a truism that many play-texts – including Shakespeare's – are useful for guiding performances and also that they have been used to guide performances. It is also true of some other play-texts that they never were used in that way. Neither of these facts explains the further fact that most of the analysis of Shakespeare's plays has been undertaken as though it is only a matter of chance that there were performances of them. The result of such analyses has been, among other things, that scholarly focus has been on the meanings of words rather than on actions. Another result is that scholars and critics have assumed that when the plays were performed they were naturalistic.[8] A third result is that they have assumed that Shakespearean performances, when they took place at any time, were *primarily* aimed at communicating ideas rather than being entertainments. This is, to be sure, a matter of emphasis, since on principle there is no conflict between a performance communicating ideas and one that is entertaining. Yet another result – that has been rife in Shakespeare studies – has been that most scholarship has rested on the assumption that, when there are scholarly difficulties with the play*texts*, those are some sort of errors rather than

'components integral to [a play's] dramaturgy'.[9] But the aesthetic features of most plays, when they are considered as theatrical performances rather than as performances of what is in the text, are rather different. One difference, at the heart of the present chapter, is that we need to analyse how a play 'opens'.

This fact helps us to be clear about both the kind of philosophical investigation on which I wish you to embark when engaging this chapter as well as my ambition in it. As Darren Hick and others have shown, determining when a work of art is finished is an *ontological question* about artwork identity; for, in asking what it means for a work of art to be finished and to determine 'the implications of such a state', Hick suggests we might begin by assuming 'we have at hand some finished work of art'. And then he writes,

> Given that the work is finished [*ex hypothesi*], if the artist now goes back and makes changes to it, we can say one of three things: either (1) the work was not finished in the first place, so the result will be the same work, only altered; (2) the work was finished, but the artist is able to override this by changing the work, so the result will again be the same work, only altered; or (3) the work was in fact finished, and the artist is *not* able to override this, so the result will be *a new work* – that is, a work that is numerically distinguishable from the previous work and, in many cases, will supplant or displace it.[10]

In contrast, asking what is going on when a performance 'opens' is an *epistemological question*, a question about how spectators discern what is going on in the opening moments of a performance *and* about how they are guided by what they attend to in those moments to 'expectations about the ensuing action', at least in a narrative theatrical production.[11] And it is to this pair of questions that this chapter is addressed. The openings of plays involve the direction and use of attention mechanisms. Analysis of attention mechanisms and their uptake is, therefore, of utmost importance to our grasp of how spectators come to understand a performance.

Rhetoric and action

Most of the studies of attention control that have been conducted to date regarding Shakespeare's theatrical entertainments have been guided by rhetorical concerns. This is both apt in general and quite specifically apt to Shakespearean performance practice. In general it is apt for the reasons just cited. Performances are not merely illustrations of play-texts nor representations of what lies dormant in play-texts.[12]

In the case of specifically Shakespearean performance practice, the use of rhetorical structures to understand those practices is underwritten by two historical facts: the fact that Shakespeare was in competition with other popular entertainments and sought to find ways to gain and keep his audiences;[13] and the fact that two texts in rhetoric were published, widely read, understood, and followed by other poets and speakers during the century in which he composed most of his plays.[14] These facts suggest, but of course do not prove, that using rhetorical categories to understand what he was doing might be useful.

One thing is clear, however. The devices used by most of Shakespeare's contemporary playwrights already had become the standard rhetorical devices taught in the schools. And, even though most of his audience would not have been schooled, they were familiar to their audiences even when they were not always understood because they were rarely accessed consciously. The uses of rhetoric in theatrical productions would have been part of the expectations of an Elizabethan audience even if they were not familiar with such terms as '*prooimion*', 'prologue', 'framing dialogue', or 'induction'. It would have been as much a part of their awareness of their world as the devices employed by many Hollywood film-makers are among us. Most of us do not know what 'variable framing' is, at least in the sense that we could not offer an explanation of it (even if we *have* heard of it). But we do react to it, and we also do react to changes that depart from its use.[15]

What is an opening?

Consider the first line of *Hamlet*: 'Who goes there?'. We should not regard that line as the 'opening' of *Hamlet*, even though it does *begin* most performances of the play.[16] Here is one reason why: the line is not the first line a spectator hears in dreamthinkspeak's production that amounted to a re-telling of pretty much exactly the same story, at least as far as the familial relationships in the story are concerned.[17] The openings of Shakespeare's and dreamthinkspeak's plays, in contrast to the words at the beginning of Shakespeare's text, are crucially similar and they lead their audiences to construct roughly the same subsequent sequences and, hence, to recount roughly the same story in discussion of the performances.[18] So, whatever an opening is, it is unlikely to consist of a common *verbal* beginning.

Shakespeare and other playwrights of his period, had access to a number of standard texts of rhetoric most of which spent a fair amount of time explaining such rhetorical devices as the *prooimion* – the lines or words that get readers and spectators involved in the subsequent narrative. In contrast, Joel Benabu suggests this:

> A Shakespearean opening can be best compared, perhaps, with what is clearly defined as an overture in opera, an introduction that hints at themes that are elaborated in subsequent movements. The spectator, of course, remains unaware of the process by which immersion occurs, but for the playwright constructing an opening, and as for the critic analyzing it, this notion of an opening is helpful because it combines a number of strategies for seizing attention and channeling response in the direction in which the action unfolds – strategies that have involved recognizable forms such as a prologue, a framing dialogue, and an induction.[19]

Here is one place at which the fact we are thinking of the aesthetic effects of theatrical performances rather than of works of literature has considerable purchase.[20]

Actions and 'strands of action'

Benabu has made a singularly striking contribution to this discussion by noticing that the rhetorical strategies available to Shakespeare and other playwrights can be understood both as literary devices and as bits of entertainment analysable by thinking of them as *actions*. In the first case, they appeal to readers and listeners by connecting to their capacities for verbal comprehension. In the second case, they appeal to listeners and observers by connecting to their capacities for comprehending actions and courses of actions. In particular, William Shakespeare made use of what Benabu calls 'strands of action'; and understanding them and how they work are the key to understanding spectatorship. A *strand* of action, Benabu writes, is

> a theatrical sequence of action as opposed to a textual divider, such as, for example, a scene division. The strands of an opening sometimes correspond to scene division but not always. They may be introduced in succession, as in *Twelfth Night*, or as in the case of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, a strand may be postponed by the introduction of another strand and developed further when it is taken up again. Strands usually contain the same core of characters and often share tenuous links, or points of contact, such as an allusion to a character or to an event … a strand contains action by which the playwright supplies expository material to the unfolding of the play as a whole, but which must remain unresolved or suspended. By 'unresolved' or 'suspended' I mean that the strand comprises action that is presented and then postponed. The opening sequence of a play is not complete, therefore, until the strands are no longer suspended and the action develops consistently.[21]

There are two moves here. First, Shakespeare's use of 'strands of *action*' was the means by which he sought to engage and capture spectator attention. Second, Shakespeare's use of *multiple* strands of action was a means not only of attention-capture but also of delay and enrichment of presented narratives. An example of the latter is to be found in the opening of *Macbeth*, wherein

> the spectator passes sequentially from the scene with the Witches on the heath, to the battlefield where the bleeding Captain presents an account of Macbeth's courage as a warrior, and then back again to the Witches. These [actions] are shaped by the playwright so that the spectator, experiencing the action as it unfolds, will piece them together in time to perceive the logic of the play. The play, then, forms an inner pattern that can be appreciated cumulatively even though the spectator at the opening cannot fathom the pattern.[22]

Crucially, according to Benabu, most of a spectator's grasp of an action or strand of action, as well as the suspension of an action or strand, happens below the level of a spectator's consciousness.[23]

For philosophers this should indicate there is a particular *epistemic* aspect to the rhetorical analysis of a performance, where the rhetorical devices employed are understood as actions that function to initiate comprehension – focusing first on their role in managing perceptual attention – that is absent if not irrelevant, for the most part, in literary analyses.[24] Philosophers of performance who are interested in this epistemic aspect need to engage the rhetorical literature on performances. And this means we need to understand how perceptual attention is managed in theatrical performances, how perceptual attention can be manipulated in different ways in theatrical performances, and how perceptual attention leads spectators to make the inferences that the acting company intended.[25]

Benabu suggests that a comprehensive account of the rhetoric of openings requires accounts of two different phenomena: understanding the reception of rhetorically structured performances and understanding their construction by actors. The first account is to be couched in terms of spectators' initial experiences of what is structured, their gradual recognition of what is happening and how that recognition is controlled or managed by the rhetorical structure. The second account requires we – and the actors and playwrights who prepare the structure – see how the openings play out (often by looking at the last moments of a play and working backwards).[26]

There is much that is right in this suggestion, but it implies something that is false, namely that spectators only ever gradually recognize what is happening. This happens of course. But sometimes spectators actually change not only to new sets of expectations but also, and often without awareness, change their credences regarding their own prior assessments of what they should expect. That is, a crucial feature of the inference-making involved in spectating is the fact that spectators reassess *and change* their accounts of what their earlier expectations were in a way that does not seem to be the expression of so-called 'hindsight bias'.

Hindsight bias is alleged to occur when one assumes – as one commonly does – that the beliefs one currently has are the beliefs one always has had. This assumption is often false. And, when it is, the common assumption is irrational. But, when it comes to spectatorship, this behaviour looks completely rational.[27]

What needs explaining in theatrical performances are (a) attention-capture and attention-management as oriented towards actions and (b) the guidance that attention to actions provides towards relevant spectator inference-making in time. I will propose that a roughly Bayesian account of inference appears to be the most promising line of explanation for both these items, and that it also allows for an account of the rational reassessments that spectators engage in.

Philosophical analysis

As I will now show, this modified rhetorical perspective has support from philosophical analysis and empirical research on attention. Also, while I believe this perspective is substantially correct, I believe it could also use some refinement. So, I intend here to sketch out how this might go.

'How do people perceive routine events, such as making a bed, as these events unfold in time?'. Thus begins a well-known article by Jeffrey Zacks, Barbara Tversky, and Gowri Iyer.[28] But, of course, it is our question too. For it would be quite surprising if, in observing a narrative theatrical performance, we would use a different set of mental mechanisms than we do when we understand what is going on in the making of a bed. Both involve human intentional (that is, goal-directed) action – the actions of characters in a performed narrative and the actions of one's child, perhaps – and the actions have to be grasped by us (we who are observing them). Both involve time: despite the implication of some of the language critics use, we rarely assume they think they have grasped a whole performance at once. We recognize it took them some time; at least the time it took to present the sequence of actions that comprised the play. Also, of course, making a bed takes time. And we have to take time to perceive and understand what is going on when our children make their beds.

So, we can begin with a general model of spectating. Models are useful because they 'make testable predictions that can be explored by experimentalists as well as theoreticians'. They are also useful because they 'have practical and technological applications of interest to the applied science and engineering communities'.[29] I will not offer a computational model in this essay; but I will sketch the kind of structure it should have as well as some of the details that such a structure might be expected to contain.[30]

The structure of an appropriate model will involve two accounts. First there will be an account of the generation of 'data streams' that will describe both the kinds of things spectators attend to and the mechanisms by which spectators attend to them. Second, there will be an account of the inferential processes spectators employ that tells us how spectators update their expectations over the time of the performance, and possibly after.[31]

Data-streams, attention, and perceived actions

The 'data streams', as I shall call them, will be generated by spectators' attention to the features of characters. In particular, it will be mostly those features that inform spectators of the nature of the actions they are encountering. Attention to features of agents acting is, therefore, key to this process.

Actions are a kind of movement. It is well known that human infants process movements as actions, attributing to the movements that they see – even to the movements of 'sprites', non-human and generally

created figures – goals of action and agency on the part of the objects that are acting.[32] It has also been shown that affect, as well as goals, is perceived in some human movements.[33] This would appear to be because, from early infancy, human beings take a 'teleological stance' that guides perception, based on principles rather than on the saliency of low-level features.[34]

But what kind of movements are involved in a typical theatrical performance? The relevant kinds of action (the data) will surely include all three of the basic movement types: object-oriented (or 'instrumental') movements; 'movements for their own sake' which look like object-oriented movements but are made in the absence of objects; and representational movements, 'movements whose power resides in their ability to represent actions, objects, or ideas'.[35] Of these, perhaps the third category of actions will be most important because of the fact that representational movements include gestures. And gestures, especially when linked with speech, enhance both the recognition and memory of meanings and the tendency of observers to draw inferences from the recognized movement.[36]

Similarities to this empirical work are to be found in philosophy and theatre studies. Mime is a theatrical form built entirely of gestures, and the further from explicit words the gestures are, the more likely it is to play across nationalities and languages.[37] Acting, as a species of theatrical performance that focuses primarily on narrative performances, essentially involves representational movements. And as such they are movements that allow for the question to arise whether they are accurate or inaccurate depictions of that which they purport to represent.[38] Display behaviour – which may or may not be gestural (representational) – is likely to provide a wider and more inclusive set of behaviours towards which attention is directed in theatrical performances. And acting, again as the presentation of narratives in performance, is a species of display behaviour. It is clear that, even in this wider sense, the relevant behaviours are actions. These are primarily the sorts of things to which spectator attention is directed. Moreover, as is described in much of the empirical literature on attention *guidance*, the kind of behaviour spectators are expecting is locatable in particular spaces within the performance environment.[39]

Inferences as updating conditional on data

In what follows, I shall focus on what may be the most telling phenomena of how spectators update, conditional on the data with which they are presented and to which their attention is drawn. The first is the peculiar nature of the reassessments spectators make of their previous judgements about a performance. The second concerns what drives both attention and, above all, the pattern of inference-making in light of the data.

When a spectator has changed her mind about what sort of thing she is witnessing, and what produces her experiences, she not only changes her expectations about what is about to happen, but also, most frequently unconsciously, changes her assessment of what has gone before. For example, many spectators of a standard contemporary production employing Shakespeare's script of *Richard II* undergo a shift in their assessments of Richard's character given the rather different kinds of things he says in Acts I and II, the Queen's comments about him in Act II, and then later upon hearing and seeing him in Acts III and V.[40]

If a spectator thought of him as a brash but clear-eyed and greedy cynic, upon hearing and watching his discourse with his inner circle in Act I and at the outset of Act II, she would not be out of line with most other spectators. Or, had she only encountered the Queen's description of Richard in Act II, she would not be out of line with most others in thinking of Richard as a beloved king who has been much put upon. The scenes in I and II in which Richard displays a brutal kind of cynicism are very striking, and would have been so especially for Shakespeare's contemporary audience, to whom Bolingbroke (the future Henry IV) and Gaunt were something of national heroes.[41] The conspicuous nature of Richard's behaviour could also readily lend itself to what cognitive psychologists now call 'anchoring' – a well-known cognitive bias in assessment and decision-making that involves the tendency to rely too heavily on one piece of information, which is often the first piece that is offered.[42] A spectator might think the Queen deceived or that she is overly concerned with her own situation. Nevertheless, however she takes in the Queen's words and behaviour, a spectator will be pushed to reassess her judgement of Richard.

In contrast, had she only encountered Richard's behaviour in Act III, a spectator might easily conclude, as many critical commentators have, that Richard seems to swing erratically and surprisingly or, as theatre theorist William B. Toole puts it, to 'oscillate' between 'arrogant confidence and the depths of despair'.[43] Any spectator will have to resolve how this is consistent with either of her previous experiences of Richard.[44] Or, if all that the spectator saw and heard of Richard were his movement towards an epiphany of sorts at the end of Act V, she would not be mistaken were she to describe him as alternating between anger and self-pity.

Of course, most spectators do not experience *only* what is presented in Acts I and II, or III, or V. A production presenting only Act V, for example, is likely to be pretty rare. Nor do most spectators assess Richard's words and behaviour by reference to what they experienced in *only* one of those Acts. Therefore many spectators *are* likely to re-assess. And the interesting question at this point is this: what does a spectator think, reflecting back, of what was seen and heard in Acts I and II?[45]

Here is one way to understand how to go about answering this question. Suppose we know there are several events that could be causally related: the fact it rains, the fact that the sprinkler is sometimes on, and the fact that the grass is wet or dry. Suppose then that we *now* observe that the sprinkler is on and that the grass is wet. Of course, the other reason the grass is wet could be that it has been raining; and at some point earlier it may well have been. Had we made our observation shortly after that event, we are likely to have hypothesized that the rain caused the grass to be wet. But once we *now* observe the sprinkler is on, then even often without our earlier hypothesis coming into conscious consideration, we tend to disbelieve it had been raining. We simultaneously rate one hypothesis higher than others and lower our expectation that others are true, even without considering the others in the present observed circumstances.

This example exhibits interesting features that are related to what cognitive psychologists call 'backwards blocking' and 'explaining away'.[46] In backwards blocking, for example, one need not be thinking at all of what one had thought before. It is not as though we always say to ourselves something like, 'Oh, I was wrong before; what was actually happening was X, when I thought it was Y'. Instead, we frequently pursue only our new expectations, looking forward to the next thing we anticipate. It is only when we are asked *now* what had happened *before* that we would say it was X, whereas had we been asked *before* we would have said it was Y. And this could be what is going on when, in the midst of figuring out the whole of *Richard II*, a spectator attempts to understand Richard during Act V. This just reminds us that access to the evidence for the spectator's prior assessments of Richard's behaviour and his demeanour in the earlier acts can be blocked.

Bayesian learning theory provides a compelling model of the processes we have been describing.[47] Bayesian learning theory provides a way of tracking the probability estimates an agent makes under conditions of uncertainty and, especially, offers an analysis of what goes on when an agent updates those expectations in light of new experiences. An important feature of the Bayesian story is that it explains both backwards and forwards estimations. That means it explains changes from one's previous estimations even when one is not actively considering the values for those elements or hypotheses at the current moment. This is because, on this model, learners update probabilities for all values of all the relevant variables. A way of making the same point more generally is to say that Bayesian learning theory explains why increasing the believability of some hypothesis necessarily decreases the believability of others.

If spectators consider competing hypotheses about what is generating the data presented to them over the course of a performance, then at any particular moment they will have different expectations regarding the likelihood that different data will appear. This helps explain why they may favour simpler or at least 'smaller' and more precise hypotheses over larger and vaguer ones. As the data increase, it becomes increasingly unlikely that there will be outlier data. This conceptual point has empirical support as well. The pressure for smaller and more precise hypotheses mounts very quickly. For example, if all you observe is a Pekingese, the hypothesis that the collection you are dealing with is composed of animals is all well and good. If the second one you observe is also a Pekingese, however, the probability they are all dogs is raised. And if the third is also a Pekingese, the probability of the much narrower hypothesis that they are all Pekingese dogs is now quite high. A nice side-benefit of this analysis for students of cognitive development and of theatre theory is that the same so-called 'size principle' is useful for thinking about why we can form largely correct and fairly precise hypotheses on very little data.[48]

Another important feature of Bayesian learning theory is that the theory does not depend upon a learner's being aware of the backwards, or retrospective, re-assessments that she makes. This renders it attractive for application to analyzing theatrical spectating because many instances of spectator re-assessments do not happen consciously.

As indicated above, the second phenomenon I wish to focus upon concerns what drives both attention and, above all, the pattern of inference-making in light of the data. A plausible story about the kind of guidance a spectator needs for a narrative theatrical performance is suggested by David Z. Saltz.[49] A case that Saltz asks us to consider goes like this:

> Imagine a character, let's call her Jane, needs to get across a river, and must coax a man with a boat, let's call him Jake, to get her across. The river is represented by a strip of cloth on the stage; the boat is a piece of cardboard that Jake holds. Jane's desire to get to the other side of the stage (that is, 'across the river'),

and her failure, given that desire, simply to walk over the cloth to get there, will both be unintelligible to us if we do not understand the fictional context that structures the rules of the game.[50]

Leave aside the reference to a fictional structure – for not all narrative theatrical performances requiring acting are fictional, in any straightforward sense – the suggestion made here is that a spectator's inferences, given the actions she has attended to, are guided by a narrative structure. This 'schema that structures the performance event' he calls the 'infiction', and 'the narrative content we extract from the performance event' he calls the 'outfiction'.[51]

From a Bayesian perspective, the 'infictions' form top-down guides that shape both the directions of a spectator's attention and her inference-making which produces the 'outfictions'. A bit more precisely, infictions are what Bayesian's call 'informative priors', prior subjective degrees of belief, or credences, that are based on a spectator's previous experiences and are about the hypotheses a spectator is likely to suppose will be true of the data that she is about to encounter. A spectator's 'outfictions', however, are the next priors she adopts. So, what counts as an 'infiction' is relative to the time of her inference-making.[52]

Shakespeare's theatrical openings

The foregoing has provided us with a richer notion of what attention is directed towards and how it is managed. Attention is, just as Benabu suggests, directed towards strands of actions. It is managed by providing opportunities for spectators to engage in attention enhancement, determining what a given spectator's next expectations should be. But Benabu appears to think this is all bottom-up, at least from the point of view of the spectator. It is only top-down from the point of view of the actors preparing the performance, according to the script provided by the playwright. We have seen however, that some narrative structure must also be grasped by spectators in order for their attention to get the guidance it requires. Not only that, but some features of that narrative structure may get rationally, but not necessarily consciously, reassessed by spectators given the actual content of their experiences. This may be planned by the actors or the playwright, but it must be achieved, and achievable by the spectators without benefit of previous knowledge that it is about to happen.

So, the data set that Benabu presents to us gets enriched in the way it needs. It does consist of 'strands of action', reprised as attention-capture and attention-management devices, and also as providing data for spectators inferences. But the inferences themselves get guided by structures of narration of which spectators are, as Benabu notes, not necessarily aware before making the relevant inferences.

Another key feature that Benabu's rhetorical analysis gets right, especially about the openings of some of Shakespeare's plays, is the effect of multiple strands of action. An important empirical study in this regard suggests part of the mechanism for these effects is that, by introducing a new strand of action before a previous one has been resolved, a spectator is in fact made uncertain even of things of which she had previously been certain. And this generation of uncertainty is part of what allows her to feel suspense in the performance.[53] As Benabu notes, 'Suspension … [of a strand of action] is what principally arouses audience curiosity'. And it does so by tightening the suspense.

By presenting multiple strands of action, with each strand suspended and unresolved until the opening of the play is finished – which as Benabu notes might take the full length of the play – Shakespeare afforded to his audiences an entertaining spectacle grounded in suspense and generating high levels of curiosity.[54] Benabu holds that 'strands of action' are not the only devices Shakespeare employs in his openings.[55] But they do provide a clear and precise way to discuss the role that attention to actions plays in theatrical performances generally and in Shakespeare's openings in particular.

Related topics

See Chapters 38, 40, 41

Notes

1 Tribble (2005: 135).
2 Tribble (2005: 148).
3 Here Tribble references both Bernard Beckerman (1962) and Stern (2000). Each provides some of the evidence for the existence of the conditions that raise the problem Tribble addresses. It is worth noting that Tribble disagrees with Stern's analysis of the system that makes successful performance possible under those conditions.
4 She endorses Andy Clark's 'extended mind' hypothesis. (Tribble (2005: 143)). But this plays no role in the present discussion.
5 Tribble (2005: 143).
6 Tribble (2005: 144).
7 Tribble (2005: 146).
8 As Stacie Friend has remarked, the default assumption when reading a piece of fiction – as well as a piece of non-fiction – is that the characters are going to act as we do. And this, despite whatever cultural differences may exist in the idea of an agent acting 'as *we* do' – is what accounts for the fact that the treatment of plays as primarily a matter of their readability leads to a presumption they will be staged using naturalistic acting. See Friend (2007).
9 Benabu (2015b: 180).
10 Hick (2008: 70).
11 Benabu (2015a: 65). The qualifier in the final clause is intended to note that the sequences of non-narrative performances may be guided by genre expectations that are quite different. Nevertheless, the attention mechanisms involved in the opening of a non-narrative performance are essentially the same as those involved in narrative performances: what changes is what guides the subsequent inferences that spectators make.
12 'Performing reconstitutes the text: it does not echo, give voice to, or translate the text' (Worthen (1998: 1097)). (See also 1100–4 and Worthen (1996).)
13 Wells and Refskou (2014), Wells (2015), Tribble (2005: 135–6), Beckerman (1962: 9).
14 Struever (1988).
15 I owe this observation about the everydayness of these rhetorical devices to Douglas Dow, with whom I have had a number of conversations about the contents of this essay.
16 Nutall (1991).
17 And, of course, it is entirely possible that the absence of the larger political story – the Fortinbras framing device in Shakespeare's play – explains why dreamthinkspeak's production was called '*The Rest is Silence*' rather than '*Hamlet*'.
18 See Billington (2012).
19 Benabu (2013a: 39).
20 To be sure, this may not be confined to theatrical performances alone; and it may be extended to the aesthetic effects attending *encounters* with literary works. See, for example, Pradl (1987). The key thing is this: to gain insight into the aesthetic responses possible, we need in part to study how the audience for a form first encounters it. First encounters are frequent in theatre and poetry, but that may just be an accident of our current history. What is important in the present context is what a standard, knowledgeable audience for the work would have noticed and what effects would impinge upon them in that first encounter.
21 Benabu (2013a: 39). This is in contrast to traditional results in rhetoric studies that do focus *exclusively* on verbal structures, even in such recent work as the comparatively new theory proposed by Mann and Thompson (1988).
22 Benabu (2012).
23 Benabu (2013a: 39).
24 Thus, for example, it is not my intention to investigate the central *themes* of any particular play, including *Hamlet*. That is, even though its first line has been used to investigate the themes not only of that particular play but also indeed of all theatrical performances, for example, by Blau (1990), I will eschew this largely literary project.
25 My use of the noun-phrase 'acting company' should not be taken as an endorsement of a rather modern means of theatrical production. As I use it, the phrase is neutral across production techniques that involve directors, playwrights, or actors' collectives, and so on. I am only interested here in how what is put on stage captures and manages spectators' attention, not in who decides such matters or how that has been decided.
26 Benabu (2013b: 209–11).
27 Toole (1978: 166–7), McConachie (2014).

28 Zacks et al. (2001).

29 Itti and Borji (2015). See also Baker et al. (2009), Ajzen and Fishbein (1975).

30 A reasonably detailed computational model is offered in Baker et al. (2009).

31 Two questions naturally arise. What is a 'model'? And what should *this* model do? The answer to the second will also, for our purposes answer the first of these questions.

    a This model should enable us to understand how different strands of action capture attention, enable us to understand how spectators select the relevant information, and how they are led to inferences by which the attended information changes their expectations.

    b Any model should also be predictive of what people actually do; and this one should be tested for predictive adequacy as to what spectators actually conclude.

32 Schlottmann and Surian (1999), Scholl and Tremoulet (2000).

33 Pollick et al. (2001).

34 Gergely (2003),

    Gergely and Csibra (2003).

35 For a discussion of movements for their own sake, see Schachner and Carey (2013). For a discussion of gestures as representational movements, see Novack and Goldin-Meadow (2016).

36 Gestures are representational actions, and any movement detection or attention that picks them out will be guided not only to the expectation of further gestures but also to expectations regarding what they represent: Novack and Goldin-Meadow (2016: 3–6).

37 Shepard (1971).

38 Hertzberg (1994/1981). For more on the notion of 'representation', *per se*, see Hopkins (2009: 505–8).

39 Hamilton (2013). For the fact that theatre companies must work hard to direct spectator attention to particular locations, see Chaikin (1972/1991). For the importance of spatial location to attention guidance, see Itti and Borji (2015: 1, 3, 7).

40 For the sake of the argument, I have assumed a 'standard production' is one that adheres to some historically determined practices of faithfulness both to text and to performance histories. Of course, what counts, indeed what should count, as a standard production is hotly debated. But the points I am making do not turn on taking a position on that issue. The reader may take any production she feels tempted to call standard and see whether this works out.

41 Toole (1978: 166–7).

42 Tversky and Kahneman (1974: 1128–30).

43 Toole (1978: 167–8).

44 Richard's behaviour in Act III will surely have to be folded into, if not contrasted with, the first nearly indelible impression of Richard as a world-wise and crassly cynical despot. This will surely be a strong modifier, if not a defeater, of the spectator's initial assessment even if that assessment is, as seems likely, strongly anchored.

45 A similar case is to be found in McConachie (2014).

46 Sobel et al. (2004), Jakobs and Kruschke (2011).

47 Sources for a good introduction to Bayesian learning theory are found in Gopnik and Tenenbaum (2007), and Perfors et al. (2011).

48 Perfors et al. (2011: 305–7).

49 Saltz (2006).

50 Saltz (2006: 212–13).

51 Saltz (2006: 214).

52 As *Wikipedia* (2017) puts it, 'an example would be a prior distribution for the temperature at noon tomorrow. A reasonable approach is to make the prior a normal distribution with expected value equal to today's noontime temperature, with variance equal to the day-to-day variance of atmospheric temperature, or a distribution of the temperature for that day of the year.

    'This example has a property in common with many priors, namely, that the posterior from one problem (today's temperature) becomes the prior for another problem (tomorrow's temperature); pre-existing evidence which has already been taken into account is part of the prior and, as more evidence accumulates,

the posterior is determined largely by the evidence rather than any original assumption, provided that the original assumption admitted the possibility of what the evidence is suggesting'.

53 Gerrig (1989).

54 No doubt Shakespeare would have been quite taken aback by suggestions that the amount of suspense, curiosity, and surprise might be measured. But, on reflection, he may not have been taken aback by the thought that 'the amount of surprise in the data for a given observer can be measured by looking at the changes that take place in going from the prior to the posterior distributions' (see Baldi & Itti, (2010)). And a computational model O'Neill and Riedl invent for the making of suspenseful computer games consists in part of 'a plan to avert [a] negative outcome [for a character], where the perceived likelihood of success for that plan is correlated with the level of suspense' (see O'Neill & Riedl (2014)).

55 Personal communication to the author.

Further reading

Benabu, J., 2015. On Shakespeare's Playwriting: Opening Strategies. *The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 30(1): 65–75. This essay can introduce readers to the current state of the discussion of Shakespeare's theatre in rhetorical studies. It also stresses the importance for such studies of the openings of performances of Shakespeare's plays.

Jakobs, R.A. and Kruschke, J.K., 2011. Bayesian Learning Theory Applied to Human Cognition. *WIREs Cognitive Science* 2: 8–21. This essay provides a basic tutorial, of sorts, on Bayesian learning theory and the importance of modelling human cognition in its terms. Insofar as learning a play takes place in time, some model of updating is necessary. This essay provides a model of updating in time for any form of human cognition/learning.

McConachie, B., 2014. All in the Timing: The Meanings of *Streetcar* in 1947 and 1951. In: Brenda Murphy, ed. *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama. This essay illustrates an important kind of shift in an audience's understanding a performance, given different ways in which a performance might be opened and re-opened following an intermission.

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40

SHAKESPEARE'S EMBODIED STOICISM

Donovan Sherman

In Shakespeare's time, humanist scholars translated classical philosophy into works that melded ancient ideas with contemporary political and religious tenets. This essay focuses on one such philosophy, Stoicism, a school of thought that became popular in the Renaissance for its pedagogical potential. Institutions like the Inns of Courts, a collection of legal societies in London, adapted Stoic tenets into articulations of political ideals, and the 'education of a prince' genre of political training found in Stoicism a helpful set of practices for burgeoning heads of state.[1] While Stoicism infiltrated these civic areas, it also entered dramatic works, albeit in a strikingly different way: the stock figure of the Stoic represented, for Shakespeare and his peers, a stodgy, unfeeling misanthrope. This character, usually notable for not doing anything, is the kind chastised by Leonato, in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, after his brother has attempted to comfort him:

> I pray thee peace; I will be flesh and blood.
> For there was never yet philosopher
> That could endure the toothache patiently,
> However they have writ the style of gods
> And make a push at chance and sufferance.

(5.1: 34–8)[2]

Philosophy, for Leonato, is the opposite of feeling – no careful words can heal the affective immediacy of his pain. This speech marks the moment in which he abandons the apparently withdrawn comforts of Stoicism and instead admits to his full-blooded passions and, it follows, becomes more human as a result. This kind of fulcrum moment of leaping into action

from the recesses of thought is a popular dramaturgical device, found elsewhere in the work of Ben Jonson, John Marston, and others.[3]

I would like to explore how both of these understandings of Stoicism – as powerful model of proper action and rejected exemplar of inefficacious stasis – can coexist, and how Shakespeare's work delineates them with care. According to its source texts, Stoicism was not, *pace* Leonato, a way of not feeling, but instead a way of registering and accommodating emotion. My contention is that a closer look at the Stoic philosophy in circulation reveals an admission to bodily engagement that resembles traditionally understood notions of performance while suggesting a subtler process than straightforward imitation or representation. This subtlety, in turn, causes a potential crisis in understanding how Stoic practice can be articulated in the body – and from this crisis was born, defencively, the stereotypical Stoic figure to which Leonato gestures. Shakespeare's plays, in particular *Hamlet* and *Much Ado About Nothing,* give us a powerful guide for this examination by tracing multiple ways that corporeal practice can interact with, or even model, philosophy.

In the preface to his 1581 translation of ten tragedies of Seneca, Thomas Newton stresses that the ensuing plays have 'unskilfully dropped out of myne owne penne' and, compared to other writers, his effort is merely 'an unfledge nestling, an unnatural abortion, and an unperfect Embroyon'. This cascade of startling analogies quickly resolves into a more traditional literary apologia:

> Yet this dare I saye, that I have delivered myne Authors meaning with as much perspicuity, as so meane a Scholler, out of so meane a stoare, in so smal a time, and upon so short a warning was well able to performe.

> (Newton (1927: 4))

Newton's confession is surely a deft, if lurid, deployment of a common Renaissance rhetorical topos: the confession of the author's own insufficiency as a means of venerating its subject matter. The subject in question here is 'myne Authors meaning', which Newton states he has preserved to the best of his ability despite his lack of skill.[4] He goes on to explain that some 'squeamish Areopagites' might protest his efforts as a result of believing that the plays, filled as they are with cruelty and tyranny, 'cannot be digested without great danger of infection'. Newton

reassures the reader that Seneca is careful to place his potentially harmful 'sentences' – that is, his *sententiae,* or moral aphorisms – in situations so as to distance himself: 'it might please them with no forestalled judgment, to mark and consider the circumstances, why, where, and by what manner of persons such sentences are pronounced' (Newton (1927: 5)). In other words, lest we be tempted by Atreus to butcher and cook children, we should note the wider context in which that action takes place – Seneca means to condemn such behaviour, not encourage its reproduction.

The two claims I am highlighting here are in slight opposition. First, Newton tacitly argues for the possibility of an uninfected (and uninflected) translation – 'myne Authors meaning' – that presumably still communicates itself through the humble vessel of translation. Second, he admits that meaning gains contingency when words are situated as utterances. Yet Newton stops short of reminding us of an obvious fact of the text's own circumstance: that it too was performed, as theatre, rather than read, and thus its context extends beyond the speakers of aphorisms and into the bodies and voices of the actors declaiming these words. If he were to allow this sense of flexibility, his belief in absolute translation would no doubt become further complicated as the promise of an author's 'meaning' would alter according to its embodiment. The strategic elision of this fact speaks to a larger ambivalence in Seneca's cultural adoption as both textual and performative, a duality gestured to by T.S. Eliot in his own introduction to Newton's translation. For Eliot, the distinction between Seneca and Greek drama lies in the presence of actions 'behind' words:

> Behind the dialogue of Greek drama we are always conscious of a concrete visual actuality, and behind that of a specific emotional actuality. Behind the drama of words is the drama of action, the timbre of voice and voice, the uplifted hand or tense muscle, and the particular emotion … In the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it.
>
> (1927: viii–ix)

Here, too, Seneca's words become flattened, shaped into self-evident semantic messengers rather than limber utterances that locate themselves not only on the page but in the bodies of their audiences.[5] And yet here, too, the door remains open to the possibility of words gaining a kind of

action when performed – a muscle, newly tensed, that could accompany and thus change the words as spoken.

Stoicism, the philosophical school that Seneca emblematizes, anxiously welds together the two ideas that Newton and Eliot attempt to keep separate: the horizon of pure textual truth and the acknowledgement of its embodiment. Stoic translation was not simply an academic exercise; it was a physical one. And it operated as a nexus among many cultural discourses, including the ongoing project of England's nationalist self-definition. When Newton's peers in Stoic translation stressed, just as he did, the potential dangers of reading pre-Christian writers, their prefatory writings often underline the benefits of relocating their words in specifically English contexts. James Sanford explains, in his translation of Epictetus's *Manual,* that 'The Authoure whereof although he were an Ethnicke, yet he wrote very godly & christianly, and as he speaketh in other tongs, so nowe he shall speake in the Englishe language' (1567: sig. A3v). Sanford's language is telling: he admits to the wisdom found in the ancients while proudly English-ing the subject who can now speak that wisdom. In a similarly evocative gesture, George Turberfille explains that his translations attempt to create 'a Roman born to speak with English jaws' (qtd. in Winston (2016: 121)), a chimerical endeavour that Jessica Winston glosses as 'outfitting a Roman body with English parts, an idea in line with other contemporary images of translation as a way of re-'dressing' others' (2016: 121). Such an effort, Winston explains, is part of the larger story in the Renaissance's 'domestication of tragedy as a genre for cultivating political consciousness in Elizabethan England' (2016: 170).

This process of domestication was a profoundly embodied one, as hinted at by the language Turberfille uses – the English *jaws* belying an admission of language's reliance on corporeality to function. This is the same admission that lurks in Newton's explanation of language's fluidity – the reminder that words ultimately ground themselves in utterances.[6] And it is also the realization foregrounded by the Stoic philosophers themselves. As John Sellars pithily puts it, in contrasting Stoicism to more cerebral Socratic traditions, Stoicism 'must in some sense be corporeal' (2003: 82). Anthony Caputi, in his study of Renaissance Stoicism, suggests that this Stoic corporeality exists in moments of reception as well as expression. The method by which one attempts to perfect their lives,

Caputi explains, 'begins with the ability to receive impressions (*phantasiae*) rightly, to order the external world in terms of its relevance to perfection' (1961: 55). The proper Stoic engages in corporeal training not only to communicate themselves but also to absorb external signals.

Caputi's observation is exemplified in an episode captured in *Attic Nights*, a commonplace book of classical philosophy by Audus Gellius, wherein a passage by Epictetus surfaces as an explanation of precisely the kind of behaviour that the stereotypical Stoic would have forsaken. Gellius relates that, while on board a ship during a vicious storm, he saw a Stoic philosopher become 'frightened and ghastly pale' with a 'loss of colour and distracted expression'. Later, Gellius asks him why he had acted so scared – weren't Stoics supposed to be restrained and without emotion? The Stoic shares a section of his book of Epictetus that makes a crucial distinction between impression and interpretation:

> The mental visions, which the philosophers call φαντασίαι or 'phantasies', by which the mind of man on the very first appearance of an object is impelled to the perception of the object, are neither voluntary nor controlled by the will, but through a certain power of their own they force their recognition upon men; but the expressions of assent, which they call συγκαταθέσεις, by which these visions are recognized, are voluntary and subject to man's will.

(cited (1927: 351))

It is natural to feel terrified at a storm because it is out of our control. What is *in* our control is whether we assent to those feelings of terror. These secondary effects are capable of our apprehension; the key aphorism here is Epictetus's famous dictum that 'The things do not trouble men, but the opinions whiche they concerne of them' (1567: sig. B3r). This understanding of Stoicism focuses on flesh and blood: the body, after all, was the instrument that registered impressions, like patterns on sand blown by the wind. Stoics could feel the toothache and still philosophized. In fact, feeling the toothache *was* the philosophy.

The philosopher Pierre Hadot, in a careful reading of Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* – a text that, like Epictetus's *Manual,* flourished in various incarnations during the Renaissance – echoes Gellius's notion that, in order to train a Stoic body, one must cultivate the inner discourses prompted by the impressions of the world and their inner image-making. And so, for Aurelius, one must constantly partake in what he calls

'demonstrations'. 'With the aid of these demonstrations', Hadot writes, 'the dogmas imposed themselves upon Marcus with absolute certainty, and he usually restricts himself to formulating them in the form of a simple proposition' (1998: 37).[7] Thus the form of the *Meditations*, with its aphoristic sparsity, is a reflection of the propositions that arise from reflection on the absorption of the *phantasiae* of the world. The book, then, *is* a demonstration when read, as it was in the act of writing it. Hadot elaborates:

> As he wrote the Meditations, Marcus was thus practicing Stoic spiritual exercises. He was using writing as a technique or procedure in order to influence himself, and to transform his inner discourse by meditating on the Stoic dogmas and rules of life. This was an exercise of writing day by day, ever-renewed, always taken up again and always needing to be taken up again, since the true philosopher is he who is conscious of not yet having attained wisdom.

(1998: 51)

For Aurelius, as for his Stoic mentors, writing and reading were first and foremost acts, technical exercises to train inner discourses and, as a result, lend integrity and purpose to outward motion. The body takes in images and disciplines itself into withholding from pernicious judgement, instead questioning its wider placement. Every ensuing action, for Aurelius, prompts a consideration of its situation. As the *Meditations* ask:

> Am I accomplishing some action? I accomplish it, relating it to the well-being of mankind. Is something happening to me? I greet it, relating what happens to me to the gods and to the source of all things, whence is formed the framework of events.

(cited in Hadot (1998: 45–6))

The Stoics, in a manoeuvre surely appreciated by the humanists who translated them, found that a focus inward – within the body's natural responsiveness to its environment – leads ineluctably to a focus outward, to the environment in which one's body resides.

The Stoics were thus not against action per se but against its mercurial deployment. If one did not consider what preceded and followed every movement, one would become disconnected from the carefully maintained connections between the world and the self. Epictetus makes this point in

his *Manual* with an extended and at times convoluted exhortation. He first asks the reader, 'Wilt thou conquere at ye playes Olimpia?'. Will you, in other words, partake in the competitions of the ancient Olympic Games? While Epictetus grants that it is 'a verie honourable thing', he asks, like Aurelius, that you 'consider wel the beginning, and the sequel and then take the matter in hande'. He goes on to distinguish carefully between two modes of desire that could motivate one's participation. If you have properly considered the effects of your action, then 'go and fight', but if you do not, 'thou wilt be like the little boyes which are now wrestlers, nowe swordplayers, nowe trumpeters, forthwith players in tragedies. So thou also now a fighter, now a swordplayer, afterward an Oratour, at length a Philosopher: but thoroughly nothing at al'. To attempt to do everything renders one as 'nothing'; worse still, Epictetus argues, you become a mere counterfeiter: 'as an Ape thou doest counterfait and resemble al things, and nowe one thing shall lyke thee, now an other: for thou hast not done thy enterprise advisedly, in foreseeing the circumstances, but adventurouslie following a lighte and colde desire' (1567: sig. D3v-D4r). You become, in other words, an *actor*.

The Stoic body, rather than being mimetic, is thus a cipher of sorts that lets in the sensations of the world and reaches out with an embrace of its surroundings. One ironic byproduct of this process is a curious sense of theatricality. This kind of theatre is not a traditionally imitative one, though. Nor does it rely on a clean separation of performer and audience. Rather, the goal is to become both actor *and* witness by opening up the body to take in the world's impressions, train inner discourse to parse out natural affection from judgement, and as a result act with purpose. By collapsing the distinction between onlooker and performer, this training furthermore invites an internalized sense of spectacle. The Stoic pupil would always be instructed to look inward and outward, to imagine or stage different situations and study the inner reactions that followed so as to gauge appropriate comportment. The body itself becomes the *theatron.* Justus Lipsius, the influential Neo-Stoic who wrote *De Constantia,* a popular synthesis of Stoicism and contemporary Christian thought, ends that work – structured loosely as a dialogue – with a long speech by the wise Langius, who has been patiently instructing his charge, the impetuous Lipsius. Langius's monologue is a catalogue of horrors, a 'deep sea of examples' that, a marginal note informs us, is culled 'from Josephus' –

specifically, from his *The War of the Jews* – with a body count appending each entry: 'At Caesara by the inhabitants there, for hatred of their nation and their religion, at once. 2000. At Scithopilis a towne of Siria. 13000. At Ascelon in Palestina, of the inhabitants there. 2500', and so on (Lipsius (1595: 112–13)). The implication is that one must imagine, over and over, scenes of destruction, and in order to do so one must first render them aesthetic so as to bear inward witness. Similarly, in 'On Providence' Seneca suggests that some struggles have a salutary power to educate the spectator. He is careful to separate such properly pedagogical sights from the cheap thrills of ephemeral violence. 'Sometimes it delighteth us', he proclaims,

> if we behold a yong man of a constant resolution, that encountereth a wilde beast with his hunting-staffe, that dreadlesse withstandeth he incursion of a Lion, and the more pleasing is the spectacle unto us, the more valiantly he behaveth himself.

But he warns us that these

> are not those things that may convert the face of the gods towards us, but childish pastimes of humane levitie. But wilt thou see a spectacle that meriteth, that God should intentively behold the worke, fix thine eye upon it, behold a couple of combatants worthy the presence of God? That is to say, a generous man planted before adverse Fortune, challenging her hand to hand.

(*Seneca* (1614: 500))

Seneca doubles the inner theatre of the Stoic's self-assessment by adding God as another potential spectator. Just as we are to be a critical audience to the internal processing of appropriate phenomena, we are to evaluate the integrity of external actions by imagining that God was watching.

As rigorous trainer of the body and critical witness to spectacle – both within and without the self – the Stoic enters a form of performative behaviour. And yet when this mode of theatricality appears in the Renaissance, it meets, headlong, a complex cultural ambivalence surrounding the theatre that wrestled with its theological and political implications, its twinned potentials to signify both idolatry and power. The crisis that results is one of proper discernment: what is the difference between the haphazard actions of the apish gadabout and the thoughtful

actions of the wise Stoic? How, in other words, could you indicate to onlookers that their bodies had been made appropriately intentional, open, and communal? You would have to demonstrate a clarity of purpose, rather than a pursuit of desire, and an investment in others, rather than hermetic withdrawal. One stab at codifying this into a set of precepts would look something like this:

> Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone or come tardy off, though it makes the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others.

(*Hamlet*, 3.2: 16–28)[8]

Hamlet's famous advice to the players lays bare the contact point of actorly technique and Providential, corporeal self-placement. (A far shorter encapsulation of this principle emerges later in the play when Hamlet instructs Horatio, simply, to 'Let be' [5.2: 220].) He is talking explicitly about the theatre and yet he might just as well be Langius comforting a coltish Lipsius. Actions must be suited to words – Aurelius would specify that these words must not only be those spoken but those internalized as discursive sculptors of affective impressions – and words, coupled with actions, should be timed perfectly, in concordance with nature. Simply substitute 'God' for the audience and we have a thoroughly Stoic regimen. In suggesting that Hamlet's advice could double as a mode of Stoic bodily refinement, I take slight issue with Paul Menzer's important work on Renaissance actor training, which stresses that the 'distinction between stoicism and stillness is an important one, for bodily control can signify not the absence of passion but its mastery' (2006: 96).[9] Menzer, reading uncomplicatedly the anti-Stoic rhetoric of the era, does not allow for the nuances of Stoicism's translation and circulation. The Renaissance actor surely had to signal the suppression of passions, but the Stoic, far from simply negating those passions, had to contain their

impressions within as a way of maintaining the body's connections without.

But this does not mean Stoicism can neatly be discerned from imitation. *Hamlet*, as with much of Shakespeare's work, stages this precise conflict – and does so with clear acknowledgement of Stoic principles, as when Hamlet references Epictetus's separation of thing and opinion ('There is nothing good nor bad but thinking makes it so' [2.2: 249–50]). The prince famously obsesses over his ability to mourn, to express his inner self. He contrasts himself with the players' showiness even though he urges them to remain clear-headed. 'Is it not monstrous', he asks, after hearing a virtuosic speech,

> that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all his visage was wan'd,
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing!

> (2.2: 545–51)

Was the player properly absorbing emotions, or mimicking them with the same deceitful ability of Claudius? These are old questions to ask of this speech, but seen in light of Stoicism's infiltration in Renaissance culture, they gain new resonance. If we cannot tell true emotion from its counterfeit, and if we react the same to both, then how can we tell the Stoic from the performer?

Hamlet's confusion helps explain, I believe, the recurring stock Stoic character – a necessarily overdrawn stereotype that maintains a fiction of difference between proper and improper modes of behaviour. The same anxiety that produced this figure also staged itself in spaces offstage where the theatre still flourished. As Shehzana Mamujee explains,

> Performance was also at the heart of humanist pedagogy, which regarded plays as a way of instructing schoolboys in the art of rhetoric. Drama was used as a means to equip youths with the essential skills of clear and precise diction, good stature and apposite

body language, thought to be integral to successful, persuasive speaking in public life.

(2014: 723)

A concern over the performative nature of learning also scaffolds Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors*, a source for Hamlet's advice to the players. A few lines before the borrowed passage, Heywood, while reminiscing on his time at Cambridge, recalls the powerful effect that drama had on the pupils who witnessed it. The plays were poised 'to arme them with audacity, against they come to bee imployed in any publicke exercise, as in the reading of the Dialecticke, Rhetoricke, Ethicke, Mathematicke, the Physicke, or Metaphysicke Lectures' (1612: sig. C3v). Heywood's educated pupil, here, seems dangerously close to Epictetus's unlearned ape. The tissue-thin proximity of the two modes demanded a clear enunciation of difference. The stakes for this enunciation extend beyond debates about the theatre itself and into the roles that theatre trains one to take on. These roles, Heywood stresses, are not simply theatrical – they are *public*.

What happens, then, when Hamlet's private confusion over passion's control of the body becomes a public analysis of one's emotional reliability? Shakespeare invests his drama with this question as well, as in *The Winter's Tale* where Leontes attempts to find Hermione guilty of an affair that took place only in his dreams (3.2: 80).[10] That challenge, too, is public, but Leontes' charge is shared by himself alone, even when refuted by the Oracle. I want to turn, instead, to *Much Ado About Nothing*, which also stages a hasty public interpretation of bodily signs during the aborted wedding scene of Claudio and Hero. Here, though, bodily indeterminacy infects others, not just the accuser, and that indeterminacy, as expressed by Claudio, founds itself paradoxically in an expression of certainty:

> Behold how like a maid she blushes here!
> O, what authority and show of truth
> Can cunning sin cover itself withal!
> Comes not that blood as modest evidence
> To witness simple virtue? Would you not swear,
> All you that see her, that she were a maid,
> By these exterior shows? But she is none;

> She knows the heat of a luxurious bed.
> Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty.

(4.1: 32–40)

Making his case before an improvised jury of wedding guests, Claudio points to expressions of innocence as markers of the kind of histrionic mastery envied and feared in equal measure by Hamlet. Hero is not, of course, a trained actor, which makes her effortless performance of shame all the more stunning. This scene can, like the advice to the players, be read along the familiar vectors of Puritan panic over performance. But it also shows Hero's ability to absorb fully and reflect her emotions, like the Stoic in the storm. Her subsequent interjections are not uncontrolled outbursts but instead clear-minded attempts to puzzle out his behaviour and, by extension, her own reactions: 'And seemed I ever otherwise to you?'; 'Is my lord well that he doth speak so wide?'; 'What kind of catechizing call you this?' (4.1: 54, 61, 78).

Hero is, in other words, a model philosopher – not the caricature scoffed at by Leonato, but someone who is vulnerable and open to her communal space, and who allows her body to reflect that space as a spectacle while filtering her passions through the sieve of her consciousness. Often painted as passive victim or sphinxlike mystery, Hero in fact exemplifies Stoicism's corporeal habitus in contrast to the excessive displays of *sprezzatura* by Benedick and Beatrice that clamour for our attention.[11] Harry Berger, Jr intuits this reading in his acutely observed, if patronizing, comment that Hero 'not only reflects the limitations of her culture but also betrays a dim awareness of them' (1982: 305). Her awareness of the vagaries of the universe – figured by Shakespeare as the violent patriarchal whims of the friar, her father, and her betrothed – realizes the Stoic's need to absorb and evaluate carefully the signals of the universe alongside her own emotions.

Hero can only be a Stoic in this way, though, if she is in a work of theatre. Unlike her poetic namesake, Marlowe's Hero, her silence is not total – as a character in a play, she remains on stage, a lingering physical presence like Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* or Antonio in *Twelfth Night*. This corporeal grammar supersedes her spoken words by manifesting a figure of listening, an action integral to the Stoic but invisible in most poetic forms. And she offers us a way to view *Much Ado About Nothing* as a powerful exercise of discernment: would we be fooled,

like Claudio? He does not, after all, seem to learn his lesson, mistaking Hero's return for the appearance of her perfect clone: 'Another Hero!' (5.4: 62). She affirms this, the Langius to his Lipsius, forcing him to imagine her death and surrogation as steps in a practice of ascesis and self-knowledge: 'Nothing certainer. / One Hero died defiled, but I do live, / And surely as I live, I am a maid' (5.4: 62–4).

Imagine Hamlet's assessment of Hero: would he envy her passions? Or find in her accommodation, rather than manufacture, of emotions a solution to his panic, one that avoids both the excesses of theatrical fakery and the solitude of withdrawn suppression? By opening up this possibility, this essay has aimed to consider another way of thinking through early modern performance beyond the much-discussed senses of antitheatricality – the worries of those squeamish Areopagites – and courtly theatricality, and in terms instead of a deeper division between performance itself and what we might call *experience*. One is an imitation, the other an open embrace. But both occurred on and in the body, and thus – to the horror of Newton and other idealistic translators – both modes risked seeping into the other. As Hero shows us, Stoicism, as an embodied way of being that resisted mimicry, reveals this division but rather than offer a simple solution instead viscerally reframes the question, thus forcing us, the audience, to decide for ourselves which is which.

Related topics

Notes

1 For a preeminent model of the princely manual, see Erasmus (1995); see also King James (1599). The *locus classicus* is, of course, Niccolò Machiavelli's 1532 *The Prince* (Machiavelli (2016)).
2 Shakespeare (2005).
3 See, respectively, *Bartholomew Fair* (Jonson (2000)) and *Antonio's Revenge* (Marston (1999)).

4 The notion that a literal translation is preferable, much less possible, was a dominant idea of the Reformation, when Biblical texts were translated into English and Reformists sought justification. The work of William Tyndale (2000) is exemplary here.

5 Lest we start to think of Eliot as a proto-performance theorist, we should remember that his seminal work (1920) that links actions to words not as an admission of their embodiment so much as an association, true to his New Critical principles, of words carrying with them fixed correlatives of actions.

6 This realization is a foundational one to many schools of thought, such as ordinary language philosophy (and its predecessor in Wittgenstein) and performance studies, which began in part influenced by the work of J.L. Austin (1975).

7 Hadot was a friend of and influence on Michel Foucault, whose late turn to the Stoics (Foucault (2005)) was crucial in developing his own influential idea of 'biopolitics'.

8 Shakespeare (1997).

9 Studies on Renaissance acting technique are by nature speculative affairs, though Menzer's essay brilliants collects and synthesizes much of the literature. See also Lois Potter (2015) who offers a brief but evocative reading of a passage in a commonplace book (Gainsford (1616)) of anti-theatrical rhetoric that inadvertently praises the actor's multiplicity of skills.

10 Shakespeare (1998).

11 For an example of a cogent feminist analysis of Hero that allows for her agency while critiquing her diminished social status in the male-dominated world of the play, see Claire McEachern (1988). For the definitive Renaissance text on the courtly arts portrayed and parodied by Benedick and Beatrice, see Baldassare Castiglione's massively influential manual *The Book of the Courtier* (Castiglione (2002)).

Further reading

Braden, G., 1985. *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. This influential book traces the Renaissance appropriation of

Stoicism via Seneca's drama and philosophy, with careful attention as to how each of these distinct facets were alternately opposed and capable of synthesis.

Campana, J., 2014. *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity*. New York: Fordham University Press. Campana reads Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* as a powerful meditation on vulnerability – specifically masculine vulnerability. Much as the Stoic opened themselves up to the world via the body, Campana's paradigm of the 'open' body is not merely traumatized by violence but vulnerable as a result.

Kuzner, J., 2016. *Shakespeare as a Way of Life: Skeptical Practice and the Politics of Weakness*. New York: Fordham University Press. Like Campana, Kuzner focuses on the salutary effects of what sounds like a negative attribute – in this case, weakness. Kuzner engages productively with Hadot and other thinkers who find virtue in porosity, rather than boundedness.

Sellars, J., 2006. *Stoicism*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. Sellars's account offers a useful and limpid account of the philosophy that is so often maligned.

Shifflett, A., 1998. *Stoicism, Politics, and Literature in the Age of Milton: War and Peace Reconciled*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Shifflett seeks to rehabilitate the image of the Stoic as unfeeling by focusing on Stoicism's impact on publishing and writing in the seventeenth century.

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41

THE HISTORY PLAYS

Fiction or non-fiction?

Derek Matravers

When we go to the theatre, does it make a difference whether we are watching a history play or whether we are watching one of the tragedies, comedies, or romances? That is, should the way we engage with the history plays differ from the way we engage with the others? What should we make of the fact that, in some of his plays, Shakespeare laboured under the self-imposed duty to be faithful to events as they actually happened? Of course, this is an overstatement: Shakespeare makes up the dialogue, alters chronology, conflates various historical personages, and invents characters and incidents. Much of what Shakespeare writes of Harry Hotspur is factually correct: he was the scion of the Percy family, he did help put Henry IV on the throne, he did help defeat the Scots at Humbledon Hill, he did join the rebels, and he was killed at the Battle of Shrewsbury. However, there is no evidence that he was killed by Prince Hal. Such deviations from historical fact do not immediately make the issue disappear. The problem is not so much why Shakespeare did not adhere absolutely to what David Davies has called 'the fidelity constraint',[1] but what we are to make of the fact that he adhered to it at all.

1

One reason for thinking that the way in which we engage with the history plays *should not* differ from the way in which we engage with the other plays is that they are all equally fictional. Let us consider two arguments to that effect. The first is that the history plays are in the same genre as novels such as Georgette Heyer's *Regency Buck* (that is historical novels) and are, therefore, unproblematically fictional. This argument fails, it seems to me, as there are differences here that are worth preserving. A historical novel certainly draws heavily on a particular historical period, including the events that happened and the persons who were alive during that period. However, it does so as a means to creating a story, which is the principal focus of the narrative, which does not obey the fidelity constraint (Stern (2012: 290)). This is a little vague: what, for example, counts as 'drawing heavily' or being 'the principal focus'? This reflects the nature of genres; their boundaries *are* vague. There is no sharp boundary that marks historical novels from the rest – as I shall argue in greater detail below. The history plays, I take it, are not like this. The story that is the principal focus of the narrative of *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2* was (broadly) produced in adherence to the fidelity constraint. Of course, there is a story (that of Falstaff) that was not produced in adherence to the fidelity constraint, but that story is not the principal focus of the narrative. Hence, our problems cannot be solved simply by subsuming the history plays into the genre of historical fictions.

The second argument concerns the extension of the term 'fiction'. I agree with Kendall Walton that, as reflected in current use, concepts such as 'fiction', 'non-fiction', and 'representation' are a mess and in need of revision (1990: 3). The question here is more than terminological. The claim is that miscegenated genres, such as docudramas and biopics, cannot possibly be non-fictions and hence the history plays cannot possibly be non-fictions. To explore this, I shall focus on three examples (none of which are Shakespeare plays, to avoid begging any questions): a radio play in which actors recreate a conference in the Oval Office regarding the Cuban missile crisis using all and only the words spoken at the time (the transcripts are extant); a TV programme on the Battle of the Somme that mixes historical account with dramatic reconstruction aiming to present what they would have filmed had they been there to film at the time; and a standard biopic – say, of Elizabeth I.

According to Walton's account, all three of these are fiction as all three require an exercise of imagination (in his sense) which is sufficient for them to count as such (1990: 72).[2] I shall put this to one side for the moment as it seems too big a bullet to bite to say that all audible or visual representations are fictional simply in virtue of being audible or visual representations (I shall return to this below). Looking at the way in which 'the folk' would classify our examples will not be decisive, as linguistic intuition on this seems to differ. So let us get philosophical. I argued above that it is a necessary condition of being a non-fictional narrative that anybody who constructed the narrative obeyed the fidelity constraint. Arguably, the radio play meets this condition at least in terms of *what* is said, although, as the medium is sound, one might quibble as to whether it meets the condition in terms of *how* it was said (the tone of the voice, the pauses between words, and so on). Docudramas and biopics also seem not to be produced in adherence to the fidelity constraint. They represent people as saying things that we could not possibly know that they said. For example, a soldier in the Somme docudrama might say 'That really is the giddy limit' and we cannot possibly know that that soldier, on that occasion, actually did utter those words. If Elizabeth is represented as passing a hostile remark to the Duke of Norfolk, we cannot know that she did pass exactly that remark to the Duke on exactly that occasion. It seems, then, that the writers are not adhering to the fidelity constraint, which is sufficient to make a narrative fictional. By parity of reasoning, the history plays are fictional and thus our engagement with them need not differ from our engagement with the tragedies, comedies, and romances.

This is the view of many in contemporary philosophy of fiction, but I confess that I find the conclusion absurd. It means that *any* film, whether the most scrupulously observed recreation of an historical event or the most outlandish science fiction movie, are alike in being fictional. *Mandela* is level pegging, in terms of being a fiction, with *Transformers 4*. Anybody who holds this view cannot account for the debates that occasionally break out as to whether a film (say, *Braveheart*) is fiction or non-fiction.[3] The error here is similar to the error some make in taking all representations to be fictional in virtue of being selective. In writing the history of (say) the French Revolution, a historian will need to be selective; to include this speech and not that, to mention one person rather than another. That is, they will need to choose, from a range of actual

events, to represent some events rather than others. Pace Hayden White, this does not make all history fictional.[4]

Consider a black and white photograph. The colours of the representation are restricted to black, white, and shades of grey. The colours of what is represented are (usually) not so restricted. Thus, not all the properties of the scene are carried over to the properties of the representation. This does not make the representation fictional. We can divide the properties of a representation into those that are simply part of what it is to be a representation of that sort and those that are part of the content of what is represented. Whether any particular narrative is fiction or non-fiction is sorted out by considering the latter: that is (roughly) is the content of what is represented accurate? The fact that the image is black and white, or that selection has taken place, is a matter of the former: that is, a matter of what it is to be a representation of that sort.

The issue then is whether recreated speech is simply part of what it is to be a representation (or rather, this sort of representation) or evaluable as part of the content of what is represented. The argument that it is part of the former (and thus independent of the issue as to whether the representation is fiction or non-fiction) is that, like selection, we simply would not have a representation unless we made this move. The point is something like this: given that we do not know what these characters actually said, and given that they have to say something in order for there to be a representation at all, we have to operate under the constraint of putting words into their mouths. That is just the nature of the representation; it does not automatically make the representation fictional.

Given that there is no possibility of securing a word-for-word match, and hence that no attempt is made to do so, the failure to secure such a match does not reflect a failure to adhere to the fidelity constraint. Instead, the writer will be guided, in part, by the standard properties of the genre. Thus, in a Shakespeare play the historical character might speak in verse; in non-fictional opera a historical character might sing.[5] However, once all these allowances have been made, the writer *will* adhere to the fidelity constraint. What the characters say needs to be the kind of thing that the historical character would have said in that situation; anachronisms will be counted as a fault. Thus, the fact that Shakespeare puts words into the mouths of his characters is insufficient to make the history plays fictional.

Docudramas and biopics are not fictional for this reason, and thus the history plays are not fictional for this reason.

Let us try the alternative. What arguments can be brought forward for the claim that the way in which we engage with the history plays *should* differ from the way in which we engage with the other plays? The argument here is simple. The history plays are non-fictions, and the way in which we engage with non-fictions should differ from the way in which we engage with fictions. John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, is reported to have said that he knew no English history but what he had learned from Shakespeare. Many of *us* will have acquired as least some of our beliefs concerning England from the reign of King John to that of Henry VI from the plays. The argument is too simple, however. In laying out the fidelity constraint David Davies stresses that '*all* the events making up the narrative [be] constrained by the desire, on the narrators part, to be faithful to the manner in which actual events transpired' (the italics are in the original) (2007: 46). If one reads *Henry IV, Part 1* as non-fiction, one will end up believing that Prince Hal killed Harry Hotspur, and there is no historical evidence that this is the case.

2

We might, at this juncture, turn to contemporary accounts of fiction to see if they can illuminate the issue. I shall consider three. I mentioned Kendall Walton's view above. More formally, his view, is that something is a fiction if its role is to mandate acts of imagination (Walton (1990)). If something, say a canvas, mandates that we imagine something (that our act of looking at the canvas is an act of looking at, for example, the city of Delft), then that picture is a fiction. Any play is such that we are mandated to imagine of a particular actor that he or she is a particular character. This applies equally to imagining of David Tennant that he is Richard II, or imagining of Adrian Lester that he is Othello. By this account, all of Shakespeare's plays, indeed all plays (films, and pictures) are fictional. I said above that this was too big a bullet to bite, but it is important not to misunderstand Walton here. His project is theory-building rather than conceptual analysis; he is not trying to map our intuitive extension of 'fiction', but rather sharpen the concept and put it in good order. If it turns

out that, for Walton, all visual representations are fictions than that is his prerogative.

However, in testing a theory – particularly a theory that asks that we make certain conceptual revisions – we need to balance what is gained against what is lost. In this case, we lose the ability to distinguish the history plays from the other plays in terms of fictionality (Walton could still, of course, make the distinction in other ways). That seems to me a loss; there are differences between the history plays and the other plays, and the obvious place to look for these differences is around the distinction between non-fiction and fiction. For all its massive wattage in illuminating other areas in the philosophy of representation, by automatically classifying all plays as fictions, Walton's account is singularly unhelpful on the point at issue.

The other luminary in this field is Gregory Currie. His account of fictionality is in terms of an author's Gricean intention: 'The author intends that we make-believe the text (or rather its constituent propositions) and he intends to get us to do this by means of our recognition of that very intention' (Currie (1990: 30)). Currie adds one further proviso: namely, that the propositions are 'at most accidentally true' (1990: 46). I have issues with Currie's account that I have spelled out at length elsewhere (Matravers (2014)), but here I want to focus on the point that, even if true, it is unhelpful in illuminating the difference between the history plays and other plays. The problem is that Currie's theory is an account of what it is for a *proposition* to be fictional, not what it is for a *work* to be fictional.[6] This is what he says about the relation between the two.

> Is a work fictional if even one of its statements is fictional in this sense? Must the greater proportion of the whole be fictional? These are bad questions. One might as well ask how many grains of sand make a heap. If we wanted to, we could define a numerical degree of fictionality, but it would be artificial and unilluminating. What is illuminating is a precise account of the fictionality of statements.

(Currie (1990: 49))

Every work of fiction will be (to use Currie's term) a 'patchwork' of fictional propositions and non-fictional propositions (in Currie's sense). Following Currie's lead that any attempt at an algorithm will be fruitless, his theory will not enable us to distinguish between the fictionality of

works. It is open to Currie to argue that we should treat the history plays as a patchwork of propositions, some fictional and some non-fictional. However, all narratives are a patchwork of propositions, some fictional and non-fictional: after all, it is essential to the plot of *Othello* that alcohol makes one drunk and asphyxiation is dangerous. Hence, Currie's view, even if correct, does not illuminate the difference (if any) between the history plays and the other plays.

Kathleen Stock's view, by contrast, appears tailor-made to sort our problem out. Her concern is not so much with fictional propositions, but with fictional works (2011: 145–6). Her definition of a fictional work is a conjunction of two claims:

> NIP: Necessarily, a fictive utterance prescribes imagining.

(146)

> Connect 2: Necessarily, where a thinker T imagines that p at time t, either T does not believe that p *or* T is disposed to connect her thought that p is the case to some further proposition(s) about what is the case, whose content is not replicated by any belief of hers at t.

(153)

Stock takes this to be a definition (she describes Connect 2 as a 'necessary metaphysical feature of imagining' (153)) and hence as giving necessary and sufficient conditions for imagining (at least, that sense of 'imagining' she takes to be relevant). Let us work through an example. In reading *Henry IV, Part 2* I encounter the following proposition:

> p: Hotspur has been killed on the field of Shrewsbury.

Let us assume we believe p. The question then is whether we are disposed to connect this thought to some further proposition that we do not believe. If we are, then we not only believe p we also imagine it (and thus p is fictional). Note that it is not Stock's view that p is connected to the body of further propositions *that constitute the narrative* of which it is part. On the plausible assumption that almost every narrative will contain some proposition we do not believe, almost every narrative will be fictional (Friend (2011: 172)). Rather, the question is whether we are *disposed to connect* the thought that p to some other proposition about what is the case that we do not believe.

The view suffers from two problems. The first is that there is surely no fact of the matter as to the further propositions a reader is disposed to connect to her thought that p. This is what Stock says:

> By 'connect' I mean attempt to conjoin, or otherwise treat as premises in the same argument; to think of as true with respect to the same world.… Propositional imagining is never only the act of engaging with a single proposition. One is always at least *disposed* to be engaged with further propositional thoughts, within the same mental episode (to think of further things as also being the case): thoughts whose contents are entailed by what is initially imagined, or otherwise made appropriate by it. For instance, were there a thinker who, in 'imagining' that *there is a fox in the garden*, was not disposed to *any* further thoughts – to do with what sort of thing a fox, or a garden is, or what sorts of scenarios might develop from this initial statement – then it is hard to know in what sense she has an imagining with that content at all.

(2011: 152)

This seems false to me; it seems possible, even usual, to have thoughts not accompanied by other thoughts ('There is a bird'). However, that is not the main issue. Rather, given that non-occurrent beliefs are not particularly denumerable, there will be no fact of the matter as to what (if any) further thoughts a person is disposed to have given their thinking any particular thought (particularly given having the disposition is sufficient for Stock; the disposition need not be actualised). Thus there is no fact of the matter as to whether that collection of thoughts does or does not contain a belief. The question 'What thoughts are we disposed to have given that we have p' does not seem to me a sensible question. Hence, Stock's account will, once more, throw no particular light on what does or does not distinguish the history plays from Shakespeare's other plays.

My own view rejects the claim that is the cornerstone of the consensus view: that we process fiction in a different way to that in which we process non-fiction (Matravers (2014)). Instead, I propose a two part account. First, in engaging with a representation (any representation) we construct a mental model of its content and are (to use the standard metaphor) 'transported to a world'. Second, there is some traffic between that mental model and our pre-existing structures of belief. These two stages are the same whether we are reading non-fiction or fiction. It is true that, if we are

reading something we believe to be non-fiction, we would be likely to export more of the propositions from the mental model to our structures of belief than we would if we were reading something we believed to be fiction. One might be tempted to think that this could ground some difference between engaging with non-fiction and engaging with fiction. Such a thought should be resisted on two grounds. First, there is uncertainty as to what counts as the content of a narrative. Let us take a rough-and-ready intuitive thought, at least for realistic narratives: their content is what is true in the closest possible world where they are told as known fact (Lewis (1978)). If anything like this holds, the vast majority of propositions in the content of any realistic fiction will be propositions we believe, as the relevant possible world will overlap significantly with the actual world (we saw, above, that the effects of alcohol and the dangers of asphyxiation are part of the content of *Othello*). Hence, the mapping between the content of our mental model and our structures of belief will not differ much between non-fiction and fiction (Friend (2017)). Second, even if it were true that we are likely to export more of the propositions from the mental model to our structures of belief if we are reading something we believe to be non-fiction than we would if we were reading something we believe to be fiction, this is neither necessary nor particularly systematic. There will be some non-fictions where few propositions are exported – for example, we could be reading a non-fiction by an unreliable author (such as Roy Campbell's autobiographical *Light on a Dark Horse*). There will be some fictions where many propositions are exported – we could be reading a fiction more than usually grounded in the actual world (such as Graham Swift's *Waterland*). Nothing in this account commits one to any differences, or absence of differences, between the way we engage with fiction and the way we engage with non-fiction. Once again, this view has nothing to tell us about what differences, if any, there are between engaging with the history plays, as opposed to the other plays.

3

The key to making progress, I think, is a perceptive remark by Peter Goldie; that telling a story (or thinking through a story) is an *action* done for a *reason* (2012: 150). Prima facie, this does not seem to advance

matters much, as neither of the two options given to us (that the history plays are non-fiction or that they are fiction) come with reasons that throw light on the problem. What would be the reason for telling them as non-fiction? If one attends to some of those who write on this topic, one gets the impression that the reason for telling any non-fictional story is to get listeners to form beliefs about the world. This is a natural bedfellow of the consensus view that sees the contrast between non-fiction and fiction as the contrast between instruction and enjoyment. Here is a succinct statement of the view from Peter Lamarque: 'Like all fact-stating discourse, biographies aim to transmit information and are primarily constrained by "getting it right"' (2007: 78). If this is right, then, as spectators of the history plays we are left in a frustrating position. If we take them to be constrained by 'getting it right' we will, on the basis of this, form beliefs. However, as we have seen, Shakespeare is not reliable; hence, we do not know if he has 'got it right', and we do not know what beliefs to form. What would be the reason for telling them as fiction? Here one might just say enjoyment (without implying a narrow hedonistic reading of that term). This simply prompts the familiar question as to why, if that is the reason, Shakespeare wrote under constraints that appear to militate against that aim.

There is, however, no need for us to end up in this impasse. People tell stories, and engage with stories, for many different reasons. The consensus view distorts matters with its claim that what defines the practice of telling non-fictional stories is the motivation to transmit beliefs about the world. Of course, that sometimes is the motivation (I will return to that below) but we get a clearer view if we return to the practice of telling stories – any stories. There is a motivation internal to this practice (by which I mean something weaker than it is true of each and every instance of a story being told): the desire to be entertaining, or at least interesting. This comes down to two related claims; the first being more central that the second. The first claim is that the practice of story-telling only makes sense if it is generally true that people are motivated to engage with the story until the end. A necessary condition for story-telling – any story-telling – is to capture attention; people need to be motivated to continue listening. The second claim is empirical but, I think, true: dominant among the reasons why people engage with narratives is the desire to be

entertained. The consensus view grants this of fictional narratives; I claim that it is also true of non-fictional narratives.

Such a claim cannot be proved a priori. However, there are things that can be said in its support. First, I can report my own experience. If I want to kill time on a long journey, I reach for a book on my shelf and I am largely indifferent as to whether it is non-fiction or fiction. There are some ways in which my engagement with the former differs from my engagement with the latter, but what they both satisfy is the desire to be entertained; to be transported to another world.[7] Second, consider the endorsements that one finds on the back of works of non-fiction. Pulling one off my shelf at random (it is Colin Clifford's *The Asquiths*) we have the following:

> 'Far more gripping than fiction.' – Jane Ridley, *The Spectator*.
> 'Immensely readable … compelling' – Victoria Schofield, *Financial Times*.
> 'A magnificent saga of public and private lives, politics and society, peace and war…I was captivated from beginning to end.' – Charlotte Mosley.
> 'Colin Clifford has woven their complex story together with great skill and judgment.' – Artemis Cooper, *Daily Mail*.
> 'Full of quirky detail … tolerant of the central figures and steeped in the forgotten atmosphere of their time, its customs and ethos, its language, habits and heroes.' – Isabel Quigly, *The Oldie*.

The quotations suggest that the primary reason why anyone should read this book is that it is thoroughly entertaining. The biographer, Michael Holroyd, sums this up in the Preface to his biography of Augustus John:

> Biography is no longer simply an instrument of information retrieval, though historical and cultural information that is retrieved from these expeditions is a bonus. The biographer's prime purpose is to recreate a world into which readers may enter, and where, interpreting messages from the past, they may experience feelings and thoughts that remain with them after the book is closed.
>
> (2011: xxxiii)

The two aims (to entertain and to instruct) are not exclusive: a narrative can do both. However, this (to say the least) does not fit the consensus view easily, which has as its central claim that our engagement with fiction (entertainment) is to be defined *in contrast* to our engagement with non-fiction (instruction). It is open to someone who holds my view to go for an easy pluralism: we go to the history plays to be entertained, and any beliefs we might acquire would be (as Holroyd says) 'a bonus'. Problem solved.

However tempting, I do not think this is where we should leave matters. The problem is not solved. The suggestion is that there are two motivations for Shakespeare producing the history plays: primarily entertainment, but conveying beliefs about the Wars of the Roses as a bonus. However, if the motivation is primarily entertainment this should trump factual accuracy whenever there is a conflict. Shakespeare is certainly sometimes willing to play this card: as stated above, when he needs to, he alters chronology, conflates various historical personages, and invents characters and incidents. The question then is why be constrained by factual accuracy at all? If entertainment is the goal, why not make it all up?

To add to our woes, what we have arrived at is a neat reversal of how matters are usually seen. The consensus view claims that we engage with non-fictions so as to form beliefs about the world; non-fictions need to be reliable which explains the fidelity constraint. Hence, if there is a problem, it is explaining why we engage with fiction. The answer to this (broadly) is for the sake of being entertained ('transported to another world'). The view above is that we engage with narratives (any narratives) for the sake of being entertained. Hence, if there is a problem, it is explaining why we engage with non-fiction. What is the point of history? Why would we mix up being entertained with compiling our laundry lists of facts?[8]

This is all the more puzzling given the extremely demanding nature of the fidelity constraint. Davies says that, to be non-fiction, '*all* the events making up the narrative [be] constrained by the desire, on the narrator's part, to be faithful to the manner in which actual events transpired' (2007: 46). I have heard that Richard Ellman, the biographer of James Joyce and Oscar Wilde, lamented the unfair asymmetry in a biographer's relation to trivial facts. The biographer can invest vast amounts of time and effort to

discover some relatively trivial truth. If he or she gets it right, nobody notices; if he or she gets it wrong, everybody comments. Historical narratives are such that *any* false claim is a ground for criticism. Why does anyone, who wants at least to entertain, labour under such a demanding constraint?

What is the answer to the puzzle? There might be a practice (in fact, I am sure there is), call it 'dry history', where reader's primary motivation is to receive true beliefs about the world. Why do those of us who are not dry historians engage with non-fictional narratives? The solution to the puzzle is, I think, that adherence to the fidelity constraint has both an epistemic and a non-epistemic function. Historical narrative should exhibit fidelity to the facts and doing this is part of the explanation of why we find this genre of writing entertaining. Peter Lamarque makes the point but for a very different purpose:

> In some genres – historical fiction, science fiction of certain kinds, even political satire – departures from fact based on mistakes can seriously affect the overall achievement. Perhaps the best way to treat these cases is as breaches of genre conventions, rather than as general failures of literary truth.

(2010: 131)

That is, adherence to the fidelity constraint is not there only to ensure that the narrative contains all and only true propositions, but it also adds to our enjoyment (or the enjoyment of those who enjoy engaging with stories in that genre). One reason for this might be that one enjoys acquiring beliefs. However, that is not the only reason. One might simply enjoy the thought that these things actually happened without caring whether or not one retains (or even acquires) the belief. One might take vicarious pleasure in putting oneself in the characters' shoes; this might be more satisfying if done with actual people rather than with fictional people. It might be that non-fiction is, in part, 'higher gossip', and gossip is only really satisfying when it is true. One might not trust fiction; one might be reluctant to make the imaginative leap into exploring fictional psychologies and rest content with exploring (the historians' view of) actual psychologies. One might have little regard for contemporary fiction-writers, and prefer stories whose constraints are more comprehensible (although, if this is one's reason, one will miss out on much good non-fiction as well as fiction). Going beyond Lamarque, history is a genre of writing that aims to

entertain, where the convention is to tell the truth. Telling the truth makes it more entertaining, and, conversely, being more entertaining makes it a more effective vehicle for telling the truth.

This view gets further support from the fact of the contingency of contemporary historical practice. As Stacie Friend has pointed out for some time now, the ground rules for writing history are anything but immutable.[9]

> Tacitus's *Annals* and *Histories* are replete with vivid battles and strikingly eloquent speeches, the content of which readers were not supposed to believe. In addition Tacitus tells us what historical figures were thinking, including their dreams … It was only in the late sixteenth century that historians began to eschew the representations of inner thoughts, invented speeches or battles and the depiction of legendary heroes and fabulous events that had no basis in evidence.

> (Friend (2012: 185))

As Friend says, 'the conventions of writing non-fiction history have changed over time' (2012: 185). We have a certain baseline account of our engaging with narratives (all narratives, whether fictional or non-fictional). These narratives come in different genres which operate according to different conventions: science fiction, historical fiction, kitchen-sink realist fiction, biography, historical non-fiction, contemporary non-fiction. In addition, there is a further function of narratives (which is more important in some of these genres than in others) which is to be true to the way the world is (or was).

I am not saying that the history plays would have been standard instances of the genre of history, even for Shakespeare. What we call 'history' will be towards one end of the spectrum; the end of that spectrum being full adherence to the fidelity constraint. We have already seen that there are nearby genres where there is still a role for the fidelity constraint, short of full adherence. Earlier, I claimed that historical fiction draws heavily on a particular historical period, including the events that happened and the persons who were alive during that period, as a means to creating a story, which is the principal focus of the narrative, which does not obey the fidelity constraint. Unlike its epistemic role, the non-epistemic roles of the fidelity constraint do not require a narrative fully to adhere to it. An author can trade full adherence to the fidelity constraint

for other treasures available when he or she simply makes things up. That adherence to the fidelity constraint is on a spectrum does not entail that either the epistemic or non-epistemic role of the fidelity constraint is also on a spectrum; it is not, either role moves in discontinuous jumps (the first obviously so and the second less obviously so). To examine fully these roles in each of the genres would be lengthy and detailed work; not work that I can undertake here.

In my end is my beginning: having cleared the philosophical decks, we are now in a position to consider the question as to whether the history plays are fiction or non-fiction. It is the wrong question; there is no good argument for assigning them into either of these two categories and no good argument for thinking this matters. The question of whether the way in which we engage with the history plays differs (or should differ) from the way in which we engage with the other plays will be answered by deciding the genre in which we are reading it, and sorting out the way in which we ought to engage with works in that genre. What is the genre? Rather boringly, the genre is history plays; a sub-genre of historical writing that is somewhere between history and the historical novel.[10]

Related topics

Notes

1 'To read a narrative as non-fiction is to assume that the selection and temporal ordering of all the events making up the narrative was constrained by a desire, on the narrator's part, to be faithful to the manner in which actual events transpired'. (Davies (2007: 46))
2 Walton (2015) now takes there being a mandate to imagine something as necessary but not sufficient for fiction. I shall ignore this development, and focus on the theory as presented in Walton (1990).
3 There was even a television programme, presented by Tony Robinson, entitled: 'Braveheart: Fact or Fiction?'.

4 See the essays in White (1987). For decisive criticism, see Carroll (1990).

5 I find no problem in the notion of non-fictional opera. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same applies to ballet: thus an historical character might express themselves through the medium of dance.

6 This also true of Walton, which is an additional reason not to appeal to his view to help us out here (Walton (1990: 36)).

7 I have stuck with the standard locution despite the fact that, in most cases, a narrative will describe events in the actual world.

8 As so often happens, I find myself following in Walton's footsteps: 'Why are we interested in history, in the truth about past occurrences? Events of the remote past, especially, rarely impinge upon lives directly' (1990: 96)).

9 Walton agrees. In comments made on Matravers (2014) at a conference in Uppsala in November 2015, he said that 'the concepts of fiction and non-fiction, having evolved over the ages in often accidental ways, apply to a diverse hodge-podge of entities'.

10 I would like to thank the audience of the *Shakespeare: The Philosopher* conference at the University of Hertfordshire in September 2014; in particular, Emily Caddick Bourne and Tzachi Zamir. I am also very grateful for comments from the editors (including, once again, Emily) and Hugh Mellor. They were detailed and insightful, and greatly improved the chapter. Remaining errors and lacunae are, of course, my responsibility.

Further reading

Currie, G., 1990. *The Nature of Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This is the classic statement of the view that the philosophical approach to fiction should differ, in important respects, from the philosophical approach to non-fiction.

Hattaway, M., 2002. The Shakespearian History Play. In: M. Hattaway, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3–24. This provides an overview of the history plays from a literary perspective, including discussions of some of the issues raised here.

Matravers, D., 2014. *Fiction and Narrative*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This argues for a skepticism as to the post-Waltonian consensus on the philosophical approach to fiction.

Stern, T., 2012. History Plays as History. *Philosophy and Literature* 36(2), 285–300. A philosophical discussion of the history plays that explores broader issues in aesthetics and in

the Philosophy of History.

Walton, K., 1990. *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press. This is the classic account of the philosophy of fiction – although by 'fiction' Walton arguably means 'representation'.

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INDEX

Figures are indicated in *italics*; 'n' refers to notes.