EVIDENCE AND EPISTEMOLOGY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Evidence and Epistemology in Early Modern English Drama focuses on ways of knowing in a period before the disciplinary paradigms that we use today crystallized. Operating in a period of epistemological flux, writers in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England were faced with two competing knowledge systems: late Renaissance humanism from their schooling and early empiricism emerging in the works of Francis Bacon and others. Throughout their writing, commercial playwrights—Shakespeare, Jonson, and Middleton among them—attempted to work through these competing knowledge structures and presented spectacles using methods from both paradigms. These dramatists, I argue, adapt strategies of mixed method verification and use their dramatic art as the overarching mediating mode to unite oftentimes competing modes of knowledge.

I first examine oral reporting in *Hamlet* as a dramatic tool that conveys information not only about the plot, but also the speaker's ethos and reliability. I argue that Shakespeare exploits the convention of the anonymous messenger-character (or *nuntius*) to create a skeptical space wherein the murderer Claudius is ironically the most reliable reporter. Next, I contrast "ocular proof" in *Othello* with Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*. In *Othello*, the visual is made verbal through ekphrastic and logical proofs as Iago offers rhetorical evidence of Desdemona's infidelity that Othello internalizes as concrete. In *The Changeling*, the verbal becomes visual as Beatrice-Joanna embodies the expectations of virginity both in her speech and in fabricating the

results of the virginity-revealing potions. Then, I posit that in *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson

uses Justice Overdo as a negative exemplum of the poor interpretative practices

criticized in the play's Induction. Blending the sensory, rhetorical, and historical modes

of inquiry, I finally explore how Shakespeare translates methods of knowing the past

into dramatic tools that present history as a dynamic continuum that simultaneously

touches the past, present, future, and imaginative spaces in-between in *1-3 Henry VI* and

Richard III. Ultimately, this dissertation clarifies the historical context needed for

comprehending how playgoers may have understood the transition between humanism

and empiricism, and illustrates the methods playwrights used to negotiate this

understanding.

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NOMENCLATURE

1H6	*1 Henry VI*
2H6	*2 Henry VI*
3H6	*3 Henry VI*
R3	*Richard III*

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the 1623 First Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays, compilers and fellow actors John Heminge and Henry Condell included, among several noteworthy paratexts, a dedicatory epistle/advertisement famously directed to "The Great Variety of Readers." In this letter, Heminge and Condell address readers of varying abilities, ranging "from the most able, to him that can but spell," and calls for the aforementioned readers to purchase the giant tome.[1]

Critics and enthusiasts alike draw two compatible takeaways from this letter. The more overtly critical in the academy tend to focus on Heminge and Condell's admonitions to "buy it first," seeing this letter as a tool of persuasion that appeals to Shakespeare's fame, the "legitimacy" of the collected texts in this collection as opposed to corrupt quarto editions that were already in the market, and the reader's delight in critique. Appealing to a wide variety of readers too is an economic strategy. In direct contrast to other prefaces which lament the ineffectual reader such as Ben Jonson's "To my Bookseller" in his *Workes* (1616) or Henry Fitzgeffrey's "Post-script" to *Satyres and Satyrical Epigrams* (1617) which seek to limit readership to those with a certain level of experiences, Heidi Brayman Hackel contends that by "urging the reader to 'buy…what

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[1] John Heminge and Henrie Condell, "To the Great Variety of Readers," in *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies. Published according to the True Originall Copies* (London, 1623), reprinted in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 63.

euer you do, Buy,' Heminge and Condell show little of the concern expressed in

contemporary prefaces about the worthiness of prospective readers."[2] This opening

epistle therefore represents the unique nature of the Folio's marketing and the shifts in

reading habits that were well underway due to the (much) earlier invention of the

printing press and increased amounts of popular texts including drama and broadsides

intended for wider consumption.[3]

Another less economically or rhetorically-driven, but nevertheless immensely

popular take on these lines are the claims that Shakespeare, as Heminge and Condell

present him, is meant for all. Teachers especially are fond of this reading as it positively

frames Shakespeare as not only accessible to but belonging to all. This reading is

especially clear in the final sentences of the epistle:

> But it is not our province, who onely gather his works, and give them you, to
>
> praise him. It is yours that reade him. And there we hope, to your divers

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[2] Heidi Brayman Hackel, "The 'Great Variety' of Readers and Early Modern Reading Practices," in *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 139-140.

[3] For more on literacy in the early modern period, see David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). For responses to Cressy that call for an expanding of his more narrow definition of literacy, see the more recent: Brayman Hackel, "The 'Great Variety' of Readers," and *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Margaret W. Ferguson and Mihoko Suzuki, "Women's Literacies and Social Hierarchy in Early Modern England," *Literature Compass* 12, no. 11 (2015): 575-590; Elizabeth Rivlin, "Theatrical Literacy in *The Comedy of Errors* and the *Gesta Grayorum*," *Critical Survey* 14, no. 1 (2002): 64-78; and Eve Rachele Sanders and Margaret W. Ferguson, "Literacies in Early Modern England," *Critical Survey* 14, no.1 (2002): 1-8; and Akihiro Yamada, *Experiencing Drama in the English Renaissance: Readers and Audiences* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

capacities, you will finde enough, both to draw, and hold you: for his wit can no more lie hid, then it could be lost. Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe: And if then you doe not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to understand him.[4]

The language here does not undermine the rhetorical strategies of selling—if anything, the appeal is even stronger as it places agency on the reader, even if it does potentially insult the reader's intelligence by implying that only someone who does not understand what they have read could find fault with Shakespeare's verses and prose. There is also a subtle move away from the opening lines which state that readers will both read and "censure" whereas at the end, Heminge and Condell move from censuring to "praise."

But what I see in this letter are not only the above readings but a description of a knowledge practice that by now is perhaps so commonplace that we miss it. Throughout the epistle, Heminge and Condell repeat "read" in a variety of grammatical guises, with the final verbal form being the command to "Read him, therefore; and againe, and againe." The writers here link this act of repetitive reading with a reader's delight—"you will finde enough, both to draw, and hold you"—along with asserting Shakespeare's prowess as a writer. This type of reading was also common to the previous generation of readers educated in the humanist English school system. In order to "know" Shakespeare, to censure him, praise him, and even to own him, Heminge and Condell make clear, one must not only provide the one-time purchase price, but read repeatedly.

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[4] Heminge and Condell, "To the Great Variety of Readers," 63.

This form of knowledge acquisition is but one of many lurking in plain sight within the texts of the period.

Epistemology "in plain sight" occurs not only in epistles comprising the front matter of printed books—if we know to look, we may see several other ways of knowing in Shakespeare's plays as well as the plays of his contemporaries. In an early scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, the Nurse gives a rambling monologue on Juliet's age and key developments as a small child about to be married that is subsequently silenced by her listeners, Juliet and Lady Capulet. In these lines, the Nurse highlights several knowledge practices that distinctively correspond to her physical identity as a mother, revealing both an internalized, almost occult knowledge of breastfeeding and childcare alongside the methods for how she understands local history:

<div align="center">I remember it well.</div>

'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years,

And she was weaned—I never shall forget it—

Of all the days of the year upon that day;

For I had then laid wormwood to my dug,

Sitting in the sun under the dovehouse wall—

My lord and you were then at Mantua—

Nay, I do bear a brain—but, as I said,

When it did taste the wormwood on the nipple

Of my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool—

To see it tetchy, and fall out with the dug!

"Shake," quoth the dovehouse; 'twas no need , I trow,

To bid me trudge.

And since that time it is eleven years.[5]

The Nurse's knowledge of how to wean a child by applying the bitter-tasting wormwood to her breasts is never explained in the text, but it does not need to be. The Nurse simply possesses a distinctly feminine and maternal knowledge gained presumably through other breastfeeding women in her life as well as any variety of midwifery manuals. Where her knowledge comes from is hidden—what is important is that the knowledge is accurate, for once Juliet tastes the wormwood, she "fall[s] out with the dug," or refuses the breast. Surrounding this embedded womanly knowledge is another epistemology that the Nurse actually explains: how to count or reckon years in terms of important life events. She links the weaning of a three-year-old Juliet with two events: the earthquake and the absence of the Capulets during the event. The Nurse also situates her knowledge in a specific place—outside the dovehouse—to ground what she knows. These multiple acts of remembering by linking significant personal events to larger, shared phenomena are then obscured by Lady Capulet and Juliet who demand the Nurse's silence: "hold thy peace" (1.3.51) and "And stint thou too, I pray thee, Nurse" (1.3.60). Nevertheless, while the knowledge she espouses is not privileged whether being in the mouth of the comic character or by being actively ignored by her on-stage listeners, the types of things she

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[5] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Gordon McMullan, 3rd. ed. (New York: Norton 2016), 1.3.24-37. All subsequent references parenthetical.

knows and how she knows them remain as part of the play, in plain sight (or hearing) of the audience.

The above are but two of many examples. In this dissertation, I explore multiple types of evidence and knowledge practices in English commercial drama ranging from the 1590s to the 1620s. My reasoning for selecting drama as opposed to metaphysical poetry or the prose of writers such as Francis Bacon who explicitly engage with ways of knowing comes down to two major factors. The first in drama's widespread appeal and audience. Commercial drama allows for us to see popular conceptions of science and learning that were available to a wider audience than what was available for printed or manuscript documents. With the Globe and other commercial theaters boasting estimated capacity of 3000 spectators per play,[6] commercial plays offered mass entertainment that goes across social strata.

The second factor relates to drama as form. English drama itself was a form of poetry in its own right. The classical model of poetry drawn predominately from Aristotle's Poetics after all situates tragedy and comedy in the midst of other mimetic works. Major English works of poetics, including George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesy* and William Scott's recently rediscovered *The Model of English Poesy*, confirm this separation.[7] Moreover, if that were not enough, several early modern plays

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[6] Ann Jennalie Cook, "Audiences: Investigation, Interpretation, Invention," in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 314.
[7] George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy, A Critical Edition*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); William Scott, *The Model of Poesy*, ed. Gavin Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

are composed in part if not entirely in verse. This identification as poetry allows for drama to use the same techniques as poesy for making meaning. Yet drama is also distinct from poetry in this period due to its performed nature. Acting verse or prose adds visual and kinesthetic modes of knowing, allowing for multiple, potentially competing epistemologies.

While this project is certainly inspired by the work of historians of science, what I am doing is not specifically history of science per se. In his foundational work, Thomas Kuhn offers an alternative to teleological progress in the form of successive "revolutions." But what he also does is illustrate a theme crucial not only to his own intervention in the history of science, but to my work in thinking about his argument's effects in the early modern period. He notes that "effective research scarcely begins before a scientific community thinks it has acquired firm answers to questions" about the composition of the universe and how we may study and interact with that matter.[8] Kuhn explains that "At least in the mature sciences, answers (or full substitutes for answers) to questions like these are firmly embedded in the educational initiation that prepares and licenses the student for professional practice. Because that education is both rigorous and rigid, these answers come to exert a deep hold on the scientific mind."[9] Kuhn's statements here are intended to reflect the state of scientific inquiry in his own time, but what he says, I contend, holds true for the early modern period as well. Even in the face

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[8] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4-5.
[9] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 5.

of change or emerging possibilities, the early modern thinker relies heavily on knowledge gained through the educational system as the primary framework for interpreting the world around them.

But most importantly, for the early modern period, what we understand today as "science" as a category or genre did not exist. Drawing from its Latin root, *scientia*, for the early moderns, science is literally "knowledge," and was thus conceived more broadly as a knowledge practice, or a way of knowing rather than a specific set of disciplinary practices. A brief examination of the term "science" in printed books of the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century reveals that earlier uses tend to present "science" as a synonym for knowing, whereas later usage pairs "science" with a particular practice like astronomy or music.[10] However, this earlier usage—"science as knowing"—still remains even as late as 1640 in a masque by William Davenant, *Salmacida Spolia*.[11] In an early song between two characters, Concord and the Good Genius of Great Britain, the allegorical Genius beseeches Concord to remain in Britain, if only for the sake of wise Philogenes. Concord concedes before lamenting:

> And much I grieve, that though the best
>
> Of Kingly science, harbours in his brest,
>
> Yet tis his fate, to rule in adverse times,

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[10] See, for example: Anthony Askham, *A treatyse of the state and disposition of the worlde* (London: Wyliyam Powell, 1550). ; Thomas Becon, *The iewell of ioye*. (London: J. Daye and W. Seres, 1550).

[11] 1640 refers to the publication date of *Salmacida Spolia*'s quarto. The actual performance date was 21 January 1639.

When wisedome must awhile give place to crimes.[12]

"Science" here broaches the two meanings in order to reveal that little actual slippage in the term's use from the 1550s to the 1640s. "Kingly science" works simply as "Kingly knowledge" with the term serving as a synonym, but it also works to identify a specific kind of knowledge on par with other types of learning.

This is not to say that practices that would come to be associated with the physical and social sciences were not available during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Far from it. Related to "science-as-category," the disciplinary identities codified in the university system that we necessarily lean on for validation and, indeed, survival, also did not exist as we now know them. Once again, the practices themselves are still there: the early modern English are still using mathematics, reading books, and learning through trial and error that certain things that they ingest may cause or relieve pain. A select few even attended university, and a good many men and some women received education according to a standardized curriculum. Overall, looking for "science" as we understand it proves to be anachronistic as even the processes that would become associated with science had not been fully codified yet as "scientific." The early modern world is, therefore, a place that is simultaneously familiar and foreign.

My aim, therefore, is not to "find" science or early science practices in literature, nor is it to state that works of Renaissance natural philosophy are literary. Like Stanley

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[12] William Davenant. *Salmacida spolia A masque. Presented by the King and Queenes Majesties, at White-Hall, on Tuesday the 21. Day of Ianuary 1639*. (London: Printed by Thomas Harper for Thomas Walkley, 1640), C1r.

Cavell who reiterates that "the burden of my story in spinning the interplay of philosophy with literature is not that of applying philosophy to literature, where so-called literary works would become kinds of illustrations of matters already independently known,"[13] this dissertation illustrates the imbrication of different strands of knowledge that appeared within the some of the period's most popular drama. My project therefore is less about the "history of science" and more aligned with its sibling, the "history of ideas" and the scholars that blend historical and literary inquiry more commonly. The scholars that I am particularly indebted to—Katherine Eggert and Elizabeth Spiller—speak to challenges of responding to epistemological flux, each arguing in her own way that in order to understand the rising emphasis on empirical practices that would become science and the overabundance of information, early modern writers used ways of knowing from their past education and practical, lived experiences.

Throughout her work, Spiller contends that "art"—specifically, human practices associated with making—served as a mediating influence between medieval scholasticism and early empiricism, and indeed, was an accepted epistemological mode itself. During the early modern period, modes of making and human creation were previously categorized under Aristotle as "*praxis* (prudential decision-making)" and "*poesis* (mechanical construction, craft" as opposed to "*scientia* (certain knowledge of

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[13] Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, Updated Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 179. This particular idea comes from Cavell's discussion of *Hamlet*, though he repeats this concern throughout the book.

the teleological purposes of things."[14] In the early modern period, this distinction

collapses, creating "a distinctively early modern model of knowledge…a belief that

knowledge is constructed, made, or created through acts of human invention, rather than

found or discovered."[15] Though Spiller does not discuss it at length—her focus is on the

oft-neglected craft knowledges of metal workers, cobblers, and other makers—this

epistemology is the same as the one espoused by the rhetorically-driven humanists who

saw the world as contingent upon humans to make even natural knowledge legible. From

Spiller, I consider how dramatic art and artifice work to shape how knowledge is

presented and complicated before an audience as part of larger process of negotiating the

many competing forms of knowledge in the European ether.

As Spiller argues that early moderns used practical knowledge at their disposal in

order to explore and transition into new epistemologies, Eggert likewise suggests that the

educated turned to other prior knowledge to make sense of their changing world. In her

recent and foundational work on knowledge practices, Eggert explains that, at the turn of

the sixteenth century, the humanist educational system that focused on knowledge and

forms from rediscovered ancients was insufficient in achieving its goals to produce

good, moral citizens. She says: "In this long interval of time England saw humanism,

with its faith in how classical letters could shape moral and civic virtue, becoming less

and less credible. But despite calls by the likes of Francis Bacon to sweep aside

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[14] Elizabeth Spiller, "Shakespeare and the Making of Early Modern Science: Resituating Prospero's Art," *South Central Review* 26, nos. 1/2 (2009): 27.
[15] Spiller, "Shakespeare and the Making of Early Modern Science," 29.

antiquated learning and start fresh, there was nothing to replace humanism—not yet."[16]

Eggert goes onto argue that the practices associated with alchemy were used as a

mediating tool for this transition. In essence, early modern English men and women

looked to a past that had the hybridity of mysticism, symbolic literature, and the

practical skills of early chemistry to understand the ever-changing world around them.

Underlying much of early modern thought (certainly in England and across the

continent) was the Renaissance-humanism-inflected school system. Sixteenth-century

schools emphasized a curriculum based on the classics with the ultimate goal of

imitating them in manner and in content. As Peter Mack explains, the grammar school

curriculum was centered upon learning Latin, which was supported by rote

memorization and linguistic play, reading Latin literature, and composing short texts in

Latin that imitated select authors who were assumed to be the epitome of their genre.[17] It

is perhaps unsurprising for the scholar of early modern literature to learn that these

authors included Terence, Virgil, Cicero, Horace, and Ovid: even Shakespeare, who had

"little Latin and less Greek" not only deployed allusions to these schoolboy samples, but

also outright rewrote well-known classical and contemporary stories and myths. As a

result of their shared education, creativity for writers of the era came not so much from

original ideas and stories (as we have come to expect from the Romantics), but rather

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[16] Katherine Eggert, *Disknowledge: Literature, Alchemy, and the End of Humanism in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 2.
[17] Peter Mack, "Humanism, Rhetoric, Education," in *A Concise Companion to Renaissance Literature*, ed. Donna B. Hamilton (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 96.

from the skill of deconstructing the several rhetorical, poetic, and conceptual parts of one text and transform them into another.

Drawing from both Spiller's and Eggert's major premises and the claims that early moderns reached elsewhere for methods of understanding newer methods and an abundance of information, I question what methods beyond mysticism and artisanal practices were used in thinking through a period of epistemological uncertainty. For playwrights, the answers lie predominately in their rhetoric gained from a shared humanist education and their craft as dramatic poets. For the most part, the knowledge practices that playwrights exhibit in their plays appear quite familiar. The actual acts of acquiring information, whether that be from reading a book, observing an action, hearing a report from a credible source, or performing a controlled experiment, are really not that different from what we would experience today. Indeed, of the types of evidence that I discuss in this dissertation, only divine-knowledge where knowledge is simply implanted in the mind of an individual through a divine or even demonic presence—whether it was one or the other was not always easy to tell in the early modern period, hence the danger of such knowledge—may strike some as unfamiliar.

Early modern playwrights, I argue, adapt strategies of mixed method verification and use their dramatic art as the overarching structural component as a way to unite oftentimes competing modes of knowledge. Across all the plays I discuss, epistemologically speaking, playwrights are not concerned with any particular method's validity; rather, they are obsessed with human error and intervention. Ultimately, this dissertation illustrates that Renaissance humanism, coupled with the additional major

changes such as the advent of Protestantism, affected everything, and its death throes were marked by emerging disciplinarity or modes of thinking that re-categorized and re-emphasized methods of fact-finding, truth-telling, and creation. This process was slow, recursive, and not entirely deliberate. Each chapter examines the myriad ways playwrights represent knowledge within dramatic literature. Because of its dual lives as lived, present performance and readable material, drama is particularly capable of toying with epistemologies, mixing not just genres (as Philip Sidney complained of in his *Defense of Poetry*) but also empirical and humanist methods of learning, creating, and sharing knowledge.

The plays that I discuss in this dissertation tend to rely heavily on embedded knowledge, most notably trusting the audience to remember who knows what at any given time for maximum dramatic irony. The major idea that I continually return to throughout this dissertation is the concept of "verification" and the overwhelming desire for early modern plays to provide evidence that supports (or contradicts, depending) what the audience witnesses. This dissertation first investigates sensory knowledge (hearing in Chapter 2; seeing in Chapter 3; both seeing and hearing in Chapter 4) before turning to divine and historical knowledge in Chapter 5.

In my chapter, "'That which you hear you'll swear you see': Reporting and Doubt in *Hamlet*," I analyze the use of multiple verbal reports and testimony as methods of verification and skepticism in Hamlet. In early modern drama, a report, unless coming from a source that openly declares to the audience that they are not to be trusted (say Iago or Richard III, for example) is considered to be a fairly stable source of dramatic

truth. Reports, by dramatic nature, are reliable evidence that the audience may use to ground themselves in the action. However, as I argue, Shakespeare exploits this expectation throughout his plays, establishing the report not solely as a method of truth-telling but a method of doubt. In *Hamlet*, he uses reports to establish not Hamlet as a reliable source of information, but the murderer Claudius.

My next chapter compares two seemingly unrelated plays—Shakespeare's *Othello* and Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*—and their relationship to ocular proof. The term "ocular proof" evokes for most early modern scholars a scene from *Othello* where the eponymous Moor, distraught at his ensign Iago's insinuation that his (Othello's) bride Desdemona has been unfaithful, insists that Iago provide visible evidence of her infidelity. However, given the nature of infidelity and the fact that Desdemona is innocent, conclusive visual evidence is hard to come by. Othello's desire for ocular proof is only met through ekphrastic descriptions and symbolic meaning. Ekphrasis, alongside other humanistic modes like the syllogism, combine with empirical notions of establishing truth through probability and visual, replicable evidence. Through this clashing of intellectual methods, Shakespeare reveals how his contemporaries wrestled with an emerging empirical analysis, ultimately revealing that while a rational, inductive approach may be desirable for determining truth, humanist habits of mind and the absence of conclusive proof render that approach untenable.

In contrast, *The Changeling* stages an abundance of sensory proofs, with the audience hearing or seeing the nearly all the same actions that the characters do. Middleton and Rowley's play provides an explicit moral on the dangers of relying

uncritically on first sight. They put their protagonist, Beatrice-Joanna to the test, quite literally, by incorporating a quasi-scientific experiment where she must take a potion in front of her husband to prove her virginity. Beatrice-Joanna becomes the early empiricist by mixing several modes of knowledge—a priori, reading, experimentation, and performance—in order to fool Alsemero. Both plays stage the dangers of ocular proof, albeit in two strikingly different ways. Whereas in *Othello*, ocular proof is desired but not physically obtained, in *The Changeling*, multiple ocular proofs are provided, but the evidence being offered has been tampered with.

In my fourth chapter, I turn to Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* to discuss proper methods of knowledge acquisition, at least according to Jonson himself who has more than a little invested in what audience members say and do about his plays. During the play's induction, Jonson's mouthpiece, a Scrivener standing-in for the playwright, identifies several rules as part of a contract between the playwright and the audience dictating what the audience can or cannot do when responding to the play. These rules called the "Articles of Agreement" include remaining for the play's duration, basing one's interpretation on the evidence before them rather than relying on what other's around them say, and refusing to read the play allegorically. The stipulations, of course, mirror quite clearly Jonson's professional life as a writer of satirical plays.

I argue, in this chapter, that Jonson draws on his humanist education to present Justice Overdo as a negative exemplum of uncritical interpretive practices, both as a reader and as a viewer of plays. In rapid succession, Overdo, who is in disguise in order to discover "enormities" at the local fair, violates all of the Articles of Agreement and is

promptly punished by the playwright by being beaten, arrested, and cuckholded. Overdo fails as an interpreter, continually getting not only his readings of Horace wrong, but the visual and aural evidence he sees before him.

My fifth chapter turns from sensory knowledge of hearing and seeing to divine and historical knowing in Shakespeare's chronicle history plays. Specifically focusing on the first tetralogy (that is, *1-3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*), this chapter explores the many mantic references in the plays and their relationship to a larger project of historical knowing evidenced in their chronicle sources. These references, including prophecies, auspicious dreams, curses, and oaths, all work together to create spaces of temporal disjunction and unity. Through consistent appeals to the future alongside the audience's prior (historical) knowledge and the action occurring in a real-time present before them, Shakespeare creates thick temporal spaces where the audience is invited to verify and question the work before them.

CHAPTER II

"THAT WHICH YOU HEAR YOU'LL SWEAR YOU'LL SEE":

REPORTING AND DOUBT IN *HAMLET*

To say that *Hamlet* is a play about knowledge and its many attendant problems is stating the obvious.[18] Yet what *Hamlet* has to say about knowledge more often reflects the reader's personal relationship to thinking in their own time rather than necessarily what Shakespeare would have thought. Scholars have long noted Hamlet's obsession with knowing and in turn have propagated their own claims about kinds of knowledge and its uses in both the play and the early modern period.[19] For many of these researchers, the intellectual crux of the play—what Stanley Cavell dubs "Hamlet's burden of proof"—is Hamlet's testing of Claudius through the play-within-a-play. This point, while certainly important in considering how Shakespeare uses information,

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[18] All parenthetical citations to *Hamlet* refer to Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds., *Hamlet*, The Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Arden Shakespeare—Bloomsbury, 2006), unless otherwise noted.

[19] See, for instance: Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, Updated Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); James Hirsch, "*Hamlet* and Empiricism," *Shakespeare Survey* 66 (2013): 330-43; Steve Roth, "Who Knows Who Knows Who's There? An Epistemology of *Hamlet* (Or, What Happens in the Mousetrap)," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 10, no. 2 (2004); Eric P. Levy, Hamlet *and the Rethinking of Man* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008); and "'Things standing thus unknown': The Epistemology of Ignorance in *Hamlet*," *Studies in Philology* 97 (2000): 192-209; and Douglas L. Peterson, "Shakespeare and 'the new philosophy': Theatrical Illusion and Epistemological Crisis," *Centennial Review* 39 (1995): 97-108.

evidence, and irony in the play, obscures other types of knowledge acquisition that introduce similar kinds of skepticism, if only we know to pay attention.

While not the first to discuss the connection between Hamlet's knowing and knowing writ large, T. S. Eliot's "Hamlet and His Problems," is perhaps the most famous to engage with this issue from a literary critic's standpoint.[20] Called "the *Mona Lisa* of criticism" by Howard Marchitello,[21] Eliot's essay endeavors to tie the "objective correlative" (which Hamlet lacks) with the emotional impact of the text. For Eliot, emotion requires an exigence rooted in discrete sensory experiences. Such sensory experiences are but one way of knowing and of learning, but such is the mode that Eliot homes in upon. Yet this primary mode of knowledge-acquisition is problematic, as both Don Parry Norford and Marchitello elaborate in two very different discussions. For Norford, the issue at stake is not that Hamlet lacks the so-called "objective correlative," but that certain kinds of sensory knowledge are more reliable than others and in turn, have interior and exterior correspondences. Indeed, "Hamlet," Norford writes, "is fascinated by the stage because this disjunction between inner and outer, reality and appearance, is most perplexing there…: here the shapes of grief are genuine, yet correspond to no true inward reality."[22] There is insubstantiality here, albeit located within the play world.

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[20] T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems," in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company,1932), 121-126.
[21] Howard Marchitello, *The Machine in the Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 51.
[22] Don Parry Norford, "'Very Like a Whale': The Problem of Knowledge in *Hamlet*," *English Literary History* 45, no. 4 (1979): 562.

Visual appearances play a significant role in *Hamlet* and its abundant criticism. This tendency is not surprising given the prevalence of seeing as a primary source of knowledge throughout the play. [23] In the play itself, for instance, in *The Mousetrap* scene, Hamlet announces that he will *observe* Claudius's reaction to the dumb show. Bernardo, Marchellus, Horatio, and Hamlet *watch* for the Ghost of Old Hamlet. Once Hamlet dismisses her to the nunnery, Ophelia laments, "O woe is me / T'have *seen* what I have *seen*, *see* what I *see*" (3.1.159-160). Hamlet demands that Gertrude "*look* here upon this picture, and on this" (3.4.51) of her husbands. With so many examples of seeing, it is unsurprising that questions of sight, its reliability, and its relationship to knowledge formation have intrigued critics.

A key issue that underlies much of these discussions of knowledge and where information comes from is the question of Hamlet's reliability as an active protagonist, particularly in regards to his infamous indecision in seeking vengeance on his father's murderer.[24] Knowledge studies seems to be yet another way to answer that question. What might it mean then to investigate knowledge in *Hamlet* by considering the overall ethos of the deliverer of evidence? Put another way, is it possible to use the ambiguity

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[23] For more on visual imagery in *Hamlet*, see Richard Meek, *Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), especially 81-116; Misako Matsuda, "Devotional Emblems and Protestant Meditation in *Hamlet*," *English Studies* 98 (2016): 562-584; Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially 132-135.
[24] See: Harden Craig, "Hamlet as a Man of Action," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1964): 229-37; Vivaswan Soni, "Believing in Ghosts, in Part: Judgment and Indecision in *Hamlet*," in *Shakespeare and Judgment*, ed. Kevin Curran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 45-70; and Bernard J. Paris, "Hamlet and His Problems: A Horneyan Analysis," *The Centennial Review* 21, no. 1 (1977): 36-66.

surrounding Hamlet-the-character's mental states in order to illuminate how reporting works in an early modern context?

Drawing from Michel de Montaigne who locates the failure of sensory knowledge within the tool itself—that is, the sensing body—Marchitello instead turns to the developing popularity of experimental practices. He argues that "Hamlet stages the collision of two narratives[:]…the collapse of the perceptual body and its resulting disqualification as a means to knowledge [and]…the emergence of the practices of experimental science deployed in order to recuperate sense perception and re-establish the very possibility of both experience and knowledge."[25] Ultimately, he suggests that experimental science practices recover Montaigne's failures of the perceiving body. Moreover, Marchitello makes explicit that, at this point in late sixteenth-century England, thought processes that were previously thoroughly intertwined were beginning to unravel and become more distinct as the disciplinary practices we are familiar with today.

While epistemologies of experimentation and visual knowledge are particularly useful for interrogating *Hamlet*, the play is certainly not limited to just those two. In the following chapter, I turn my attention to another kind of knowledge: that of reporting and its relationship to other forms of knowledge acquisition. Reporting throughout both *Hamlet* and Shakespeare's larger corpus not only provides the extremely practical function of revealing crucial information to the audience or reader, but also serves as the

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[25] Marchitello, *The Machine in the Text*, 56.

means, when placed in conjunction with other knowledge-making acts like experiments, actions, dialogues, and even other reports, to reveal the ultimate reliability of a character. In *Hamlet*, I argue, the content of the report, alongside the level of interpretation provided by the reporter, reveals a continuum of the speakers' reliability; this reliability does not necessarily correspond with their morality. Moreover, in addition to working as an ethical barometer, acts of reporting themselves blur the distinctions between the wholly aural and the wholly visual to suggest that the reliability of the report as a method is only as good as its fellow epistemological methods of visual acquisition, experimentation, and interpretation.

If we consider reporting a more purely rhetorical form of knowledge that relies just as much on the audience and its deliverer as its actual content, we might move one step closer to understanding the imbricated forms of early modern knowledge as well as reveal a kind "rhetoric in practice" that was not necessarily theorized at its initial use, but still informs much of how early moderns came to know through a variety of competing techniques, evidence, and stimuli. A play like *Hamlet* is therefore particularly well-suited to this extended investigation as it contains an "all of the above" scenario while being firmly situated in its genre as a revenge tragedy and work of (potentially) historical fiction cum murder mystery. By examining acts of reporting in *Hamlet* in conjunction with other epistemological acts like seeing, I suggest that we may better understand and articulate how early modern thinkers comprehend knowledge.

Reporting in Shakespeare & His Contemporaries

       As we should suspect, reporting serves a practical purpose in any play. Shakespeare, along with his contemporaries, dramatizes reportage throughout his works.[26] Particularly in opening scenes where the plot and background must be quickly established, early information is often provided by a less-important character and is directed either to a crowd (that includes the audience as a whole) or the protagonist, who is meant to stand in for the audience. In *Titus Andronicus*, for instance, Marcus's opening speech identifies several key plot elements needed for comprehending the fast-paced scene to come. Directing his address to both the crowd and to the audience, he states:

> Know that the people of Rome, for whom we stand
>
> A special party, have by common voice
>
> In election for the Roman empery
>
> Chosen Andronicus, surnamed Pius
>
> For many good and great deserts to Rome.
>
> ....
>
> Ten years are spent since first he undertook
>
> This cause of Rome and chastised with arms

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[26] While my focus is on Shakespeare's dramatic output, reporting also serves a clear and significant function in his poetry, particularly the longer poems like *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*.

> Our enemies' pride; five times he hath returned
>
> Bleeding to Rome, bearing his valiant sons
>
> In coffins from the field.[27]

That Marcus delivers all this information aurally works on a practical level—there simply isn't time to dramatize Titus's five campaigns. What we (the audience) need to know is placed upfront and is then reinforced as needed in subsequent lines and actions. This information, while crucial to the audience, is not the same as what the actual crowd of Romans would need to know. Given that Marcus's opening speech covers the last decade of Titus's career with remarkable alacrity and efficiency, his referencing serves a highly practical purpose. Audiences and readers need this level of knowledge of Titus's devotion to Rome and the death of his sons on the battlefield in order to understand his quick decisions to ignore Tamora's pleading to spare her elder sons from the sacrificial pyre. Reporting, therefore, efficiently allows the audience access to necessary knowledge that places them on par with the characters.

Another example of reporting that is popular to early modern drama is the Chorus. Spoken by a character specifically identified as a Chorus, Prologue, or something similar, the Chorus often provides background information crucial to the narrative in addition to providing a brief summary of the plot. The Prologue in *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, offers only a small amount of actual background reporting,

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[27] William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus* in *The Norton Shakespeare, Essential Plays. The Sonnets,* ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 2016), 1.1.20-24, 31-35.

namely, "two households, both alike in dignity / in fair Verona, where we lay our scene"

(Prologue 1-2). In contrast, Rumor's Induction in *2 Henry IV* is almost exclusively

located in the past as he reports the events of *1 Henry IV*. This choice makes a fair bit of

sense as Rumor is not precisely a Prologue (the character or the event), he is closer to an

embodied spirit who practically links the first part of *Henry IV* to the second in order to

remind the audience of what they had already seen and to get the newcomers up to speed

on what's at stake in the sequel.

       As with any dramatic or fictional construct, we should consider the veracity of

the prologue and its constituents. Some critics hold that the prologue is intended to be

something we can take at face value—that the prologue is ultimately a reliable source of

information. Richard Levin, for instance, offers a continuum of reliability, placing

speakers with indisputable reliability on one end (such as prologues, epilogues, and the

chorus) and completely untrustworthy speakers at the other. Of the former, he explains:

> We regard [them], not as individuals, but as spokespersons for the
>
> playwright…They are therefore authoritative in both senses, which means that
>
> we assume that the speakers have no personalities or motives of their own, and
>
> that their only purpose is to give us the information that the author wants us to
>
> have about the preceding or following action and, sometimes, to indicate how we
>
> should fully react to it. It follows, then, that the audiences were expected to rely
>
> on them completely.[28]

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[28] Richard Levin, "Gertrude's Elusive Libido and Shakespeare's Unreliable Narrators," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 48, no. 2 (2008): 314.

But can audiences rely on these initial speakers completely, as Levin suggests? As Rumor from *2 Henry IV* and the Chorus from *Henry V* indicate, these seemingly reliable sources are not always trustworthy. Rumor is the more overt example not simply by being rumors but by explicitly acknowledging its falsehood: "From Rumor's tongues / They bring smooth comforts false, worse than wrongs" (Induction 39-40). What this tells us is that while we may assume that on some level, unless the falsehood is explicitly acknowledged, there is an unspoken agreement between the audience and paratextual speakers who comment on the play but do not participate in it.

These examples are but some of many, suggesting that all drama welcomes introductory reporting regardless of dramatic genre (tragedy, history, or comedy). While there are counterexamples throughout Shakespeare's plays of the thing preceding information about the thing (*The Taming of the Shrew* comes to mind—we actually do encounter Katherine before any report of her is given), the prevalence of an early report does crucial work for the dramatic medium that has limited time and practical means for performance. A certain amount of backstory is not only expected, but required in order for the audience to situate themselves in the ongoing plot.

Characters themselves also participate in reporting. Certain scenes were incapable or impractical to be produced on the early modern stage whether at the Globe or an indoor theater like the Blackfriars. Several of these scenes, unsurprisingly, are battle scenes. While death was not taboo onstage (a revenge tragedy that lacked a proliferation of bodies at its conclusion is not a real revenge tragedy), whole armies of death are outright impractical or grotesquely comic. Case in point comes from *Hamlet*'s

precursor, *The Spanish Tragedy*. Attributed to Thomas Kyd, this play relies heavily on reporting from the deceased Don Andrea who narrates backstory, his death, and his passage into a pagan afterlife to several testimonies from an unnamed General to Villuppo to the lying Viceroy who relates the true (to someone) events of the pre-play battle that haunts the remainder of the narrative. Standing in contrast to *Hamlet*'s soliloquies and reports—which tend to be interrupted by questions or additional commentary—many of the major reports in *The Spanish Tragedy* are lengthy, standalone pieces that provide extensive detail that are later verified by other reports. Clara Calvo and Jesús Tronch note that "the highly descriptive report of battle," like the General's lengthy speech describing an offstage battle, "is a conventional set piece in Elizabethan drama; this long and declamatory Senecan narrative is crammed with detailed facts."[29] Reporting, therefore, is a standard and expected practice, particularly for plays with heavy classical influences.

Occasionally, reporting happens in early modern drama for thematic reasons rather than pure practicality or to provide background information. *The Winter's Tale* provides a particularly pertinent example of this type of reporting near the end of the play where the long-lost Perdita is reunited with her father, Leontes. But rather than actually stage the event, Shakespeare goes out of his way to have three separate characters report the reunion: a Gentleman, Rogero, and Paulina's Steward. All three present different levels of evidence with the Gentlemen highlighting what he has seen

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[29] Clara Calvo and Jesús Tronch, eds., *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd, Arden Early Modern Drama (London: Arden Shakespeare-Bloomsbury, 2013), 130, note 22-84.

and heard, Rogero providing third-hand knowledge of the bonfires that proclaim that the

prophecy has been fulfilled, and the Steward who references all sorts of visual evidence

of Perdita's parentage including:

> the mantle of Queen Hermione's; her jewel about the neck of it; the letters of
>
> Antigonus found with it, which they know to be his character; the majesty of the
>
> creature, in resemblance of the mother; the affection of nobleness which nature
>
> shows above her breeding, and many other evidences. (5.2.32-7)

Given these multiple layers of evidence, we may wonder why the reunion and the

verification of Perdita's lineage is not actually staged. Why report it? As the Steward

remarks, perhaps coyly, when Rogero admits he did not actually see the reunion: "Then

you have lost a sight which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of" (5.2.41-2). Of course,

the joke is that the scene was spoken of, that is, reported.

Although the final reported scene is most well-known, several other scenes from

The Winter's Tale are also only spoken about rather than actually staged.[30] That

Shakespeare opts for dialogue representing the event here strikes me as deliberate.

Several scholars ranging from David Bevington to the nineteenth-century critic William

Harness have attempted explain Shakespeare's choice to employ narration in the scene

as a way to better emphasize the spectacle of the final transformation scene of Hermione

from statue to woman. Holger Syme explains this line of thought: "critics have

frequently argued that the true explanation for the apparent cop-out is to be sought in

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[30] For more specifically on reporting and *The Winter's Tale*, see Meek, *Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare*, 147-80.

Shakespeare's playwrighting savvy: he fails to stage Leontes' and Perdita's recognition scene, the argument goes, in order to avoid upstaging the play's true theatrical coup, the resurrection of Hermione."[31] The visual is allowed to predominate in a way that the verbal is not. This general argument works as one of the many practical reasons for reporting. In pitting the verbal against the visual, different layers of knowledge can be presented and privileged.

The structure of this scene may also be informed by classical convention of the messenger-character that were inherited by the early modern theater. Levin points to the classical dramatic convention of the *nuntius*, or a messenger, a stock character whose sole purpose is to deliver information directly to the audience. The nuntius-character allows for scenes that cannot be staged such as events in the past or violence that exists outside of the capacities of performers. Moreover, the character is trustworthy as Levin explains: "The sole purpose of a *nuntius* is to inform the other characters and hence the audience about events that took place off stage. We therefore regard him as a reliable narrator, since he cannot have some personal motive…to mislead his onstage auditors by falsifying his report."[32] Therefore, those who function as nuntii, whether they actually turn out to be reliable or not, are initially shielded from scrutiny that is not normally afforded to other characters.

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[31] Holger Schott Syme, *Theatre and Testimony in Shakespeare's England: A Culture of Mediation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 206.
[32] Levin, "Gertrude's Elusive Libido," 314. Italics in the original.

As a rule, messengers perform a significant function throughout Shakespeare's works. Gary J. Scrimgeour identifies no less than seventy-five messengers in the plays of Shakespeare's first and second periods, with the majority in the histories and tragedies as opposed to the comedies.[33] Many of these envoys function similar to the classical form that Levin discusses: anonymous, one-off characters that are known solely by the title of "messenger." Yet, as Scrimgeour is careful to note, Shakespeare deploys the messenger-trope in named characters like the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* or the Bastard in *King John*. Scrimgeour confidently concludes:

> In Shakespeare's hands, the messengers are the most versatile of dramatic devices, and the range of difficulty in the problems they solve is correspondingly wide…utterly passive and neutral in their own natures, they offer no resistance to the audience's perceptions or the dramatists desires, and Shakespeare knows how to use them either as instruments or as weapons, to hold them in close restraint or to exploit their every quality in the solution of almost any problem in dramatic communication.[34]

While the final statement of the messenger's "passive and neutral" nature seems to not hold when messenger functions are attributed to characters beyond the classical nuntius, Scrimgeour's assertions confirm Levin's earlier argument that these characters are

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[33] Gary J. Scrimgeour, "The Messenger as a Dramatic Device in Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1968): 41.
[34] Scrimgeour, "The Messenger as Dramatic Device in Shakespeare," 54.

imbued, at least classically, with an aura of trustworthiness that the apt dramatist can exploit.

Reporting also tends to work in tandem with other forms of knowledge that, ultimately, do not always reinforce the expected hierarchy of reliability with seen, primary experience at the top and further-removed representations of experience at the bottom. Responding to David Bevington's, Meek asserts, "While Shakespeare's works often seem to imply the immediacy of the visual, they also point to the ways in which seeing itself can be ambiguous, contested or deceptive…Shakespeare carefully draws our attention to the potential deceptiveness of appearances, and even suggests that what we see can be reliant upon narrative."[35] Specifically discussing *Hamlet*'s opening scene above, Meek's argument illustrates the complete inversion of what we may expect with what we see with our eyes may not be as reliable as what we hear told from other sources. In other cases, the hierarchy is, if not collapsed, then flattened. In *The Winter's Tale*, Schott Syme argues, "what's at stake…is the relative authority of the visual and the verbal, presence and representation, and the body and the word….the play does not conclusively resolve any of these apparent binaries but maintains a fine balance, portraying each pair of terms as mutually supplementary to each other.[36]

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[35] Meek, *Narrating the Visual*, 88.
[36] Schott Syme, *Theatre and Testimony*, 209.

The Internal and External Ethos: Early Play Reports, Horatio, Claudius, and Hamlet

Acts of onstage reporting are thus imbued with a sense of trustworthiness that is derived from centuries of dramatic tradition as well as dramatic necessity. A nuntius, a messenger, or Gentleman 1 often is a one-off character who appears in his or her scene and then leaves once the report is concluded. However, what happens when the reporter is not only named but present in multiple scenes throughout the play? What happens if information provided by the reporter is somehow contradicted or called into question? Below, I explore the answers to both these questions in the first several scenes of Hamlet where Shakespeare uses reporting not only to establish the proper background and context for his audience, but also to introduce skepticism on the reliability of the protagonist, the Ghost, and the murderer. Ultimately, the more anonymous the source of the report, the more reliable the report tends to be as we have no reason to see the speaker a s a character so much as a mouthpiece. a report's—and the reporter's— reliability come into the question the further we get from anonymity and the more information provided to verify or refute the report itself.

In *Hamlet*, the nuntius-function and first report manifests in Horatio's discussion with the guards Barnardo and Marcellus where, upon seeing the Ghost of Old Hamlet, Horatio relates the relevant background material detailing Old Hamlet's conflict with Old Fortinbras of Norway (both of whom are now deceased) and setting up a potential rivalry between their sons. Horatio explains while making direct allusion to the guards'

prior knowledge, "Our last King, /…was *as you know* by Fortinbras of Norway /…dared to the combat, in which our valiant Hamlet /…Did slay this Fortinbras" (1.1.79, 81, 83, 85, italics added for emphasis). This act of reporting does next to nothing for Barnardo and Marcellus; Horatio even acknowledges that the guards are more than aware of the current situation by stating "as you know." The benefit of such a speech is exclusively for the play's audience, highlighting the necessity of acts of reporting as a tool for conveying information, even if that information as we shall see later, is up for additional scrutiny. At this point early on in the play, all is well. Horatio is functioning as one might expect a character to function in a play's initial scenes by providing background. His speech, as far as we can tell, is reliable both in terms of his rhetorical agility and his dramatic role. Lacking all other knowledge, the audience must trust Horatio at this point and Shakespeare certainly gives us no reason not to.

As we may expect, Horatio's introductory report is confirmed by Claudius shortly after. In his lengthy speech, Claudius confirms some of the information that Horatio has provided in an earlier scene, namely that Old Hamlet is indeed dead— "Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death / The memory be green" (1.2.1-2)—and that some sort of negotiations is underway with Norway and Fortinbras— "we have here writ / To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras — / Who…scarcely hears / Of this his nephew's purpose" (1.2.28-30). These brief confirmations assure the audience that the events reported on Scene 1 have indeed transpired and establish Horatio (retroactively) Claudius (currently) as credible sources of information. Such initial credibility allows for us to absorb the new information that Claudius provides in the speech for the listening

audience, information that is a bit more local and relevant to understanding the play's psychological exploration of Hamlet and the role knowledge acquisition plays throughout.

The placement of old information following new information rather than vice versa confirms the information itself as well as provides credibility to the previous speakers. Moreover, the variety of presentation gives the audience a better chance to absorb the information and see its larger imbricated connections. Claudius's speech confirms Horatio's report on the dealings with Old Fortinbras and Old Hamlet. But he does not confirm this immediately. Rather, the potential invasion is only mentioned after Claudius explains that Old Hamlet is indeed dead (which we know from not only Horatio's speech, but also from Marcellus and Barnardo's dialogue), and that Gertrude, the once and future queen, has married her former brother-in-law. That Claudius confirms Horatio slightly later and not immediately (in contrast to Gertrude's report on Ophelia's death being questioned shortly after by the Gravediggers, as we shall see further) can be explained by a variety of factors. On a practical level, Claudius exhibits a fairly common transitional strategy. He provides new information before linking back explicitly to old information in order to illustrate their relationship. This move more fully integrates information and more smoothly allows for the audience to catch up on all the important material that they need to understand in order to make sense of Hamlet's melancholy, the Ghost's testimony, and the experiments put forth by not only Hamlet but Claudius and Polonius as well. Moreover, on a less practical level, the space between repetition of the information provided by Horatio works to support each man's ethos.

Such initial credibility allows for the audience to absorb the new information that he provides in the speech for the listening audience, information that is a bit more local and relevant to understanding the play's psychological exploration of Hamlet and the role knowledge acquisition plays in his story. He remarks on Hamlet's grieving, publicly enjoining him to lighten up and join the party, as it were. Such a speech opens up an ongoing plot point of Claudius and Polonius's general ignorance about just what is bothering Hamlet. Their lack of knowing and, indeed, a general play-wide lack of knowing serves as a major crux of the play, as Steve Roth elaborates:

> Unlike all previous revenge tragedies (Elizabethan and classical)…in *Hamlet* nobody even knows that the primal murder has occurred. Claudius knows, of course. Hamlet knows (sort of). And Horatio knows (even more sort of). But no other character knows that King Hamlet was murdered—even (especially) at the end of the play…In all those [other] plays, the characters' knowledge of the murder is the driving force of the drama. In *Hamlet* it is exactly the opposite.[37]

This lack of knowing stands at odds with the knowledge available to the audience. Of course, this technique is nothing more unique than dramatic irony, but in *Hamlet* the distinction seems to be all the more important. To return to Claudius's initial report, we will eventually come to know what's eating at Hamlet, whereas Claudius and Polonius are unable to uncover any truth through their experimental and speculative means.[38]

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[37] Roth, "An Epistemology of *Hamlet*," para 1.

[38] Astute readers will note that Gertrude accurately ascertains what's bothering her son: "his father's death and our [Gertrude and Claudius's] (o'erhasty) marriage" (2.2.60) and tells Claudius her suspicions. Claudius agrees that her claim is worth investigating, but

At the end of the first act, Claudius's reliability as a speaker has not yet come under question for the audience. The Ghost has not formally accused him yet, nor has Hamlet verbally suggested any wrongdoing outside of an understandable hostility towards his uncle for marrying his mother. Hamlet himself does not say anything until about thirty lines after Claudius makes his report. As with later reporters, Claudius begins his time with the audience as a neutral party: We have no reason to doubt his report on previous events or his descriptions of the perennially mopey Hamlet. Indeed, given that much of his information is later confirmed by other means (including Hamlet's own soliloquies and Horatio's observations), Claudius's intrinsic ethos at the play's outset *is* reliable.

This reliability may be somewhat surprising given that audience members then and now readers, already know that Claudius is guilty of regicide. Due to the play's canonicity and sheer popularity, a twenty-first century reader is more than likely to know all the "spoilers," but this bit of knowledge is available to us outside of the confines of the play's temporal trajectory. Shakespeare plays with similar concepts in his history plays where his audience knows the major story beats already. We know because we already know what is going to happen, and this foreknowledge is often taken for granted. But Shakespeare himself does not reveal this information until much later with Claudius's actual admission of guilt.

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by the end of the scene, both Claudius and Gertrude have bought into the possibility of Polonius's suggestion of why Hamlet is not acting like himself: he's mad with love for Ophelia.

At this point, we should wonder what an early modern audience may know about the plot of *Hamlet*, and whether or not they came with the same foreknowledge that Claudius murdered the previous king. *Hamlet* scholarship appears to be in agreement that Shakespeare drew from the original Danish *Amleth* through an intermediary, most likely Thomas Kyd's *Ur-Hamlet*.[39] But how much of these preceding sources could an early modern audience know or remember? William Witherle Lawrence contends that:

> The Elizabethan audience were not as familiar with the plot of 'Hamlet' as we
>
> are today, if indeed most of them knew it at all. The story had been earlier
>
> dramatized by Kyd, and some of Shakspere's auditors may have seen the older
>
> play, but Shakspere can hardly have assumed such acquaintance with the plot. He
>
> wrote for people who were seeing an absorbing story developing before their
>
> eyes, and who were not sure what turn events would take next.[40]

Even if we do not take Lawrence's word, the early modern audience for *Hamlet* was wide and varied. While some theatergoers may have indeed seen the *Ur-Hamlet* or might have been familiar with Saxo Grammaticus's *Historia Danica* or its French translation, *Histoires tragiques*, by Belleforest,[41] it doesn't seem like familiarity with the plot and with Claudius's guilt were remotely as common as it is with readers and viewers today.

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[39] Thompson and Taylor, Introduction, 66-70.

[40] William Witherle Lawrence, "The Play Scene in *Hamlet*," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 18, no. 1 (1919): 13.

[41] An English translation of the Belleforest by Thomas Pavier was published but not until 1608, well after the composition and early performances of *Hamlet*.

Nevertheless, whether an audience may not have foreknowledge of a character's motivations or actions, a playwright like Shakespeare can manipulate these expectations through language. The links between a character's reliability as a speaker and their reported speeches deserve some more theorized consideration here, both in terms of rhetoric and in terms of knowledge-making. As an epistemological practice, reporting most heavily draws on conventional rhetoric as a means to produce knowledge. This reliance on rhetoric stands in some contrast to other modes of knowledge acquisition not because other modes like experimentation lack their own rhetorics, but that the rhetoric involved in reporting so clearly maps onto an Aristotelian model as a communicative act between two parties. It is worth unpacking these rhetorical situations and examining the status of the senders and receivers in addition to the content as we have already been doing.

At its core, rhetoric relies on five major components in order to achieve meaning. These include the message itself (identified most with *logos*), the deliver or speaker of the message (*ethos*), the receiver(s) of the message (*pathos*), the surrounding context (*kairos*), and the intention or purpose of the message (*telos*). While the audience (whether in the pit, onstage, or reading), message, and situation are certainly important when considering acts of reporting in *Hamlet*, the ultimate determiner of whether a report may be reliable or not is the deliverer. This emphasis on the deliverer may strike current rhetoricians as odd as twenty-first century rhetoric relies far more heavily on either the power of the audience or the prevalence of context as the driving force behind rhetorical movement. Nevertheless, trust in the speaker is all an audience has to go on in

a work of dramatic fiction. Drawing from a history of rhetoric, modern rhetorical theory

holds that the rhetorical situation consists of multiple elements, each of which is

privileged in turn depending on the rhetorician performing the analysis.

Aristotle's rhetorical situation is not as fully enmeshed in exigence (or purpose

and motivating context) as the modern rhetoricians like Lloyd Bitzer.[42] It wouldn't be—

exigence, time, and place were more the domain of the Sophists, a group of rhetoricians

that, at least while under Plato's tutelage, Aristotle would not have openly agreed with.[43]

Rather, Aristotle is far more concerned with the means by which a speaker may achieve

persuasion through the now-famous Rhetoric 101 appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos.

Ethos, or the appeal to character is the most important here. In the second chapter of *On

Rhetoric*, Aristotle explains ethos in the following manner:

> Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so
>
> spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and
>
> more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and
>
> absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. This
>
> kind of persuasion…should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what

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[42] Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1, no. 1 (1968): 1-14.

[43] For more on the distinction between Aristotle's understanding of rhetoric and the speaker versus the Sophist view on rhetoric, see Eugene Garver, "Deception in Aristotle's Rhetoric: How to Tell the Rhetorician from the Sophist, and Which One to Bet On," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 24, nos. 1/2 (1994): 75-94. For an example of how the distinction between Aristotle and the Sophists was not as clear cut as it may seem, see Bernard E. Jacob, "What if Aristotle Took Sophists Seriously? New Readings in Aristotle's Rhetoric," *Rhetoric Review* 14, no. 2 (1996): 237-252.

people think of his character before he begins to speak. It is not true…that the

personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of

persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective

means of persuasion he possesses.[44]

Here, Aristotle describes the concept of an ethos isolated in a moment in time: an

intrinsic ethos that is generated through the rhetor's speech. Moreover, that "we believe

good men more fully and more readily" is a commonplace. *Hamlet* grapples with these

points: the connection between a rhetoric of reporting and an ethical imperative and

complicating it through the introduction of the speaker's unreliability *post* the initial

delivery.

Claudius is a particularly apt example for exploring the connections between

ethos and trustworthiness due in no small part to the outside knowledge that modern

audiences and critics bring to a play like *Hamlet*. Claudius's ethos is a difficult one to

articulate because, insofar as these initial speeches are concerned, he has done nothing

truly objectionable, so far as the audience yet knows. Sure, he and Gertrude could have

perhaps waited a little longer to wed, but even with Hamlet's bile, Shakespeare does not

portray Claudius in these earliest scenes as a particularly evil or even really

untrustworthy. He openly admits to marrying Gertrude (we do not learn this information

solely from Hamlet) in the wake of Old Hamlet's death, even remarking that "The

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[44] Aristotle. *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts and ed. Friedrich Solmsen in *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 1.2.1356a.

memory be green, and that it us befitted / To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom / To be contracted in one brow of woe" (1.2.1-3). Even if there is an internal part of Claudius that does not openly grieve for his brother, his actual words reflect the appropriate, kingly response to Old Hamlet's death. To search for interiority on the basis of Claudius's words alone in this scene is beside the point. While an actor and director may have Claudius reflect some interior feeling: genuine grief, solemn stoicism, or even a lasciviousness directed at Gertrude, these choices only come into being after the play has been read and interpreted. That is to say, an actor or director makes these decisions after already knowing about Claudius's confession and his actions by the end of the play. If we focus simply on the text at hand, without the interpretative guidance of the actor or director, there is nothing to indicate that Claudius cannot be acting as a reliable source of information. While all this becomes complicated later, that we start at this unassuming space makes sense as it offers some genuine surprised at Claudius's revelation.

What follows after Claudius, Gertrude, and the peripheral characters exit is yet another report, but this time from the Danish prince himself. Discussing the two months following his father's death, Hamlet, like Claudius, builds upon the two previous reports, simultaneously confirming bits of previous information and providing additional evidence and interpretations of events that the audience is now already aware of. Hamlet's counter (or perhaps parallel) narrative, set in juxtaposition with Claudius's report, provides us with background, yes, but the possibility of multiple reports and narratives as well as the potential of competing evidence.

Hamlet's speech continues to build on the previous information, but instead of focusing on the threat of Fortinbras as Horatio and Claudius do, he instead turns his attentions to more interior concerns: his mother's "hasty marriage" to his uncle and how he feels about it. Hamlet's report is far less "report-like" than other reports in the play so far: while he does confirm the prior knowledge given to us by Claudius, he spends far more time interpreting the facts of the report. Indeed, if we take Hamlet's initial thirty-line speech and cut his commentary out of the scene, we are left with four full lines and seven half lines that repeat the same point:

That it should come thus:

But two months dead—nay not so much, not two—

So excellent a king…

………………………………………………..

And yet within a month

………………………………………………..

A little month, or e'er those shoes were old

With which she followed my poor father's body,

Like Niobe, all tears. Why, she—

…………………………………………………

         —married with my uncle,

My father's brother…

…   Within a month,

…………………………………………………

…………………………………………………

She married. (1.2. 137-143, 145-156)

From Hamlet, we learn that Gertrude, previously married to Hamlet's father, has married Hamlet's uncle in quick succession after her husband's death, and Hamlet is not happy about it. As Claudius confirms Horatio's earlier report so does Hamlet confirm Claudius albeit in understandably more petulant terms. Yet in contrast with both Claudius and Horatio, Hamlet's reporting takes a backseat to his commentary on the matter at hand. Though he ostensibly reports, the report itself is limited to repetition of words relating to the time elapsed since his father's death and mother's remarriage.

If we look a bit closer even at this abridged speech, we see that while Hamlet is repeating the same key word "month," the implied timeline changes noticeably with each iteration. Initially, Hamlet explains that his father is "but two months dead" before immediately correcting himself to "nay not so much, not two." This subtle shift is not too big of an issue. It does still confirm what Claudius states at the beginning of his speech that "the memory be green" of Old Hamlet's death, after all. Hamlet keeps distorting the time frame between the death and marriage. He moves from "two months" to "within a month…a little month, or e'er those shoes were old" (1.2.145, 147) within a short frame as he presents his memory of the events in question. What does this tell us? At one level Hamlet may just be "being Hamlet." He exaggerates to make a point or perhaps just makes a mistake in remembering. Yet I would argue that Hamlet's temporal slippage is an indicator of potential unreliability. At this point in the play, this unreliability is not confirmed, and left on its own, Hamlet's slippery speech is not a

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major concern. As the play progresses, more evidence of an unreliable Hamlet comes to the fore while, in contrast, more evidence of a reliable Claudius appears.

We receive additional evidence of Hamlet's reliability (or lack thereof) just prior to the dumb show. Hamlet—pretending to be mad—still cannot let go of the brief amount of time between his mourning and marriage to Claudius. He remarks to Ophelia, "For look you how cheerfully my mother looks, / and my father died within's two hours" (3.2.119-20). Ophelia corrects him, "Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord" (3.2.121). Hamlet's initial remark can easily be attributed to him engaging in hyperbole. It fits within his character, regardless of whether or not he is supposed to be mad in this scene. Ophelia's response, however, opens up some additional interpretative possibilities regarding not just the time frame of Old Hamlet's death and Claudius and Gertrude's hasty marriage. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor take Ophelia and Hamlet at their words, suggesting that at this point in the play two months have passed since Hamlet's initial complaint.[45] While there is precedent for this (Shakespeare does jump through time and acknowledges his jumps in time throughout his corpus), I find that Ophelia's correction does more than suggest that two months have passed between Acts 1 and 3. I contend that Ophelia's line here functions just as the previous examples of reporting do: as additional evidence that alludes more to the credibility of previous speakers rather than the actual passage of time. Astute readers and audience members will take Ophelia's correction as further evidence of Hamlet's untrustworthiness.

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[45] Thompson and Taylor, eds., *Hamlet*, 305, notes 120-21.

What we see in the above examples above is that *Hamlet* is concerned with the process of verification through multiple modes of evidence. An event (Old Hamlet is murdered; Hamlet pretends to be crazy and frightens Ophelia; Ophelia drowns; Fortinbras plots offstage to invade Denmark) is reported on by one or several characters and that event is subsequently either verified or modified by future conversations or actions. This process stands in contrast to what Amir Khan calls "necessity." He explains the difference:

> Verification occurs within the unfolding of the play. Necessity, on the other hand, occurs outside or beyond the play and is established by acts of criticism after the fact. Only we as readers require necessity; Hamlet has not the luxury of demanding it. He merely requires that the Ghost's testimony be verified, and we are happy to go along with him as he seeks verification. However, we (and in hindsight) additionally require that the delay *make sense*—that it attest to something, either thematic about *Hamlet* or about the character Hamlet that is necessary.[46]

Khan makes the distinction that two different processes occur whether an individual is in the moment, ideally viewing the play, or whether the individual is able to contemplate the internal logic of the play and to look beyond its textual boundaries. While it is possible for an individual to experience *Hamlet* the play in the initial manner by simply

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[46] Amir Khan, "My Kingdom for a Ghost: Counterfactual Thinking and *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 66.1 (2015): 31.

relying on what is written, that experience is simply not available to those who have any familiarity with the western literary canon.

While Khan does not explicitly deal with this issue—he is more concerned with parsing the what the audience knows and Hamlet's infamous delaying—his points about verification and necessity force us to consider the myriad ways narrative testimony or reporting work in this play. The challenge is that we, through centuries of criticism and culture, have absorbed *Hamlet* as an entity unto itself. We *know* Claudius is guilty. We *know* Ophelia goes crazy. We *know* that Horatio is a good guy. We *know* that Hamlet is the intelligent, brooding hero. Yet what examining reporting does for us is to scrutinize these assumptions and perhaps offer additional interpretations that may be closer to readings that occur before the scrutiny of necessity.

As the above examples illustrate, a character's ethos is generated by both the words that they speak and the level of verification that character receives in support of their speech. At the play's beginning, Shakespeare establishes both Horatio and Claudius as potentially reliable sources of information as their information is verified and presented in a manner (depending on the staging with Claudius in particular) that encourages us to take them at their word. Hamlet, perhaps surprisingly, is established as far more unreliable in contrast. The implications for the rest of the play are fairly clear: we should be wary of whatever Hamlet says, particularly when it stands in contrast to other characters. This is not to say that Hamlet cannot be truthful or that his information cannot be valid; rather, we should be wary of taking Hamlet solely at his word, at least until he is verified otherwise.

Ekphrasis and Verification

All verification is is the reinforcement of some claim that had already been presented prior. A simple way to think about this phenomenon in fiction is in descriptions of characters. For instance, a young woman describes herself as "clumsy" in the first chapter of a young adult novel. Then in the second chapter she accidentally trips and destroys her aunt's priceless breakable object. The action of accidently breaking an object due to some physical instability is therefore verification of our heroine's clumsiness. Of course, verification does not necessarily have to provide evidence for a given claim—it can actually provide counter-evidence just as easily. To return to our heroine, in addition to describing herself as clumsy, she also claims that she is plain and generally unobservable. However, later events in the narrative have multiple characters continually not just noticing her but also remarking on her unique beauty to each other or in compliments to the heroine.

In plays, verification is doubly important as it reinforces the rules that govern the playworld. We may think of the commonplace that successful fiction, particularly performed fiction, feels satisfying to many audiences because of its verisimilitude. We do not have to see every individual detail—and certainly early modern audiences seemed to required far less verification of how an imagined world operates than we do—but we do need enough information to judge the fictional world according to its own internal logic. On a deeper level, specific to *Hamlet*, verbal verification of events that occur prior to the play's opening scenes is crucial to giving the audience enough grounding to

comprehend the sudden appearance of a ghost and why Hamlet is acting sullen at his mom and stepdad's party.

Verification of reports becomes all the more complicated when the level of spoken (or written) detail in the report rivals what we might see onstage. We might think briefly of the earlier examples from *The Winter's Tale* or *The Spanish Tragedy* where key scenes such as the reuniting of Perdita and Leontes and the opening battle where Don Andrea is killed are narrated in stunning and curious detail. *Hamlet* too contains multiple instances of highly visual speeches that are worth additional scrutiny, particularly in the way each speech draws attention to the veracity of the speaker. The overriding technique in these speeches is the rhetorical practice of ekphrasis: detailed verbal description. Below, I detail ekphrasis's role in Gertrude's speech describing Ophelia's death, Ophelia's description of Hamlet entering her closet, and the Ghost's speech recounting his death. All three paint a vivid, affective picture, though the level at which their ekphrasis is truly effective is directly related to their ultimate credibility both within their reports and in the scenes that surround them that serve to verify or deny what they report.

As a literary term, ekphrasis is, as Meeks remarks, "shifting and unstable," particularly how the term would have been understood during Shakespeare's time versus now.[47] Drawing from more modern understandings of the term as defined by Leo Spitzer

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[47] *Meeks, Narrating the Visual*, 5.

when describing Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn,"[48] Catherine Belsey suggests that

"ekphrasis may be defined as the representation in words of a pictorial representation"

though she quickly acknowledges that such a definition may be wanting.[49] Rebecca

Olson uses even fewer words: "the verbal representation of visual art."[50] Yet this

definition, despite its popularity, does not capture the classical or early modern meanings

of the term and how it was understood by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In her

extensive survey on the origins of ekphrasis as a classical term, Ruth Webb offers a

broader meaning that highlights the importance of vivid language and the term's

relationship to general reporting or narration. Webb explains, "What distinguishes

ekphrasis is its quality of vividness, *enargeia*, its impact on the mind's eye of the listener

who must, in Theon's words, be almost made to see the subject…Narration is a simple

account of what happened while an *ekphrasis* includes the details that tell one how it

happened, how it looked (one might add also how it sounded and felt)."[51] Ekphrasis

therefore is a rhetorical tool that is not merely limited to the visual arts, though they are

related, and may instead be understood as subset of the reporting that I have already

been discussing. With this broader (and more ancient) definition, we can better see how

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[48] Leo Spitzer, "'The Ode on a Grecian Urn,' or Content vs. Metagrammar," in *Essays on English and American Literature*, ed. Anna Hatcher (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 72. Spitzer's definition is: "*ekphrasis*, the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art."
[49] Catherine Belsey, "Invocation of the Visual Image: Ekphrasis in *Lucrece* and Beyond," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (2012): 177.
[50] Rebecca Olson, "Before the Arras: Textile Description and Innogen's Translation in *Cymbeline*," *Modern Philology* 108, no. 1 (2010): 45.
[51] Ruth Webb, "*Ekphrasis* Ancient and Modern: The Invention of a Genre," *Word and Image* 15 (1999): 13. Italics original.

ekphrastic passages work throughout *Hamlet* and how they provide additional links to the speaker's ethos.

Shakespeare's knowledge of ekphrasis is often exemplified in his narrative poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, where the titular Lucrece focuses on a painting of Troy, vividly aligning herself with Hecuba and finding visual expression for her own pain and struggle after being assaulted and raped by Tarquin. Hauntingly, Belsey queries, "How else but by describing an imaginary picture could Shakespeare import as visible entities into Lucrece's spotless domesticity the grimy secretions of the Greek troops as they lay mines to bring down the topless towers? How else could he compare the ruin of his Roman heroine with a moment of tragic destruction from an even older antiquity?"[52] How else, indeed. By uniting the visual with the spoken, ekphrasis readily invites layers and multiplicity of meaning. In Lucrece's case, the ekphrasis allies her with Rome's with fraught history, and the level of power this comparison holds depends on the reader's knowledge.

While examples of ekphrasis exist throughout early modern English written literature, particularly in the poetic works of Spenser and Sidney, [53] this particular

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[52] Belsey, "Ekphrasis in *Lucrece* and Beyond," 176.

[53] For more on ekphrasis and Philip Sidney, see Leonard Barkan, "Making Pictures Speak: Renaissance Art, Elizabethan Literature, Modern Scholarship," *Renaissance Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (1995): 326-51; David A. Katz, "Counterfeiting Rhetoric: Poetics, Violence, and Ekphrasis in Sidney's *Arcadia* and the *Defense of Poesy*," *Sidney Journal* 34, no. 2 (2016): 49-70; and Claire Preston, "Ekphrasis: Painting in Words," in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, ed. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 115-32. For ekphrasis and Edmund Spenser, see Rachel Eisendrath, "Art and Objectivity in the House of Busirane," *Spenser Studies* 27 (2012): 133-61; Jane Grogan, "'So Liuely and So Like,

rhetorical device finds a ready home in drama. Due in no small part to drama's simultaneous identification as poetry in the Aristotelian sense and its oral dimension, ekphrasis works as a useful tool that visually illustrates scenes that may not be readily presented on the stage.

Ekphrasis, then, has quite a bit to do with reporting, particularly in Hamlet where several of the actual reports are deeply ekphrastic: working backward, Gertrude's description of Ophelia's death, Ophelia's description of Hamlet's antic disposition, and Old Hamlet's description of his poisoning. In this next section, I analyze more closely the effect of ekphrasis on reporting and the reporter's ethos before later turning to the competing forms of verification that each woman's speech ends up highlighting.

In the "willow speech" (4.7.164-81), Gertrude waxes poetic about Ophelia's death, providing an example of ekphrasis so strong that critics suspect that she must have had a hand in the drowning of her potential daughter-in-law. Emphasizing what some scholars call a voyeuristic gaze on the madwoman, she figuratively paints the scene, describing the brook and its flora before even identifying where Ophelia is:

There is a willow grows askant the brook

That shows his hoary leaves in the glassy stream.

Therewith fantastic garlands did make

Of crowflowers, nettles, daises and long purples,

That Liuing Sence It Fayld': Enargeia and Ekphrasis in *The Faerie Queene*," *Word & Image* 25, no. 2 (2009): 166-77; and Adam McKeown, "Looking at Britomart Looking at Pictures," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 45, no. 1 (2005): 43-63.

That liberal shepherds give a grosser name

But our cold maids do dead men's finger call them.

There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds

Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,

When down her weedy trophies and herself

Fell in the weeping brook. (4.7.164-173)

In the remaining portion of the speech, Gertrude describes how Ophelia's skirts

"mermaid-like awhile…bore her up" (4.7.174) and she sang "snatches of old lauds"

(4.7.175) before her clothes became too heavy and sank her below the water's surface.

The speech is so vividly descriptive that some question how physically close Gertrude

was to Ophelia and why they did not attempt to rescue her as she sank into the water.

Stephen Ratcliffe suggests two possibilities for Gertrude's proximity: "It may be that

Gertrude was told about Ophelia's death by someone who witnessed it, someone whose

words she is now paraphrasing. It may also be that Gertrude herself witnessed Ophelia's

death, and so is now reporting what she saw firsthand, with her own eyes."[54] The play

does not give us an indication either way, though it is curious that Shakespeare gives the

description of the drowning to the named Gertrude as opposed to an unnamed messenger

who could have delivered the same message to Gertrude, Claudius, and Laertes. Had the

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[54] Stephen Ratcliffe, "What Doesn't Happen in *Hamlet*: The Queen's Speech,"
Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies 10, no. 1 (1998):
127.

messenger been anonymous, the questions of the source of testimony and how they acquired such knowledge on Ophelia's death would not be as pressing.

On the other hand, by giving Gertrude the report on Ophelia's death, Shakespeare opens the audience up to skepticism on both women. Gertrude's report on Ophelia's death almost immediately becomes subject to question in the following scene between the two clowns who argue whether or not Ophelia merits a "Christian burial." The two reports, as Hanna Scolnicov elaborates, present a contradiction as Gertrude rules Ophelia's death as an accident due to her madness whereas the gravediggers (and later the priest presiding over Ophelia's burial) contend that her death was a suicide. Scolnicov holds that the gravediggers' take is the correct version of events as she explores how various film adaptations take on the challenge of presenting Gertrude's speech.[55]

In contrast, Ophelia's death and its verification serve as a counterpoint to Old Hamlet's death. We never see Ophelia die—we only receive a rather detailed account by none other than Gertrude. How Gertrude beheld the event in question is not really clear, but her poetic report is nevertheless welcome. Ophelia's death is later verified, if only obliquely by the two grave diggers debating whether her death was a suicide or an accident, both interpretative possibilities of the evidence available to the audience at this point. Gertrude's report, we should note, does not attribute much conscious agency to Ophelia after all. As with Old Hamlet's demise, the circumstances surrounding

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[55] Hanna Scolnicov, "Gertrude's Willow Speech: Word and Film Image," *Literature and Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2000): 101-111.

Ophelia's death are intentionally oblique, calling into question once again the reliability of the reporters. Do we trust Gertrude's poetic elegy or are we to take the grave diggers' interpretations as fact? The play itself, while certainly opening these possibilities (along with those of Old Hamlet's salvation), is less willing to provide a direct answer based on reporting alone.

Scholars have continually expressed doubt regarding the trustworthiness of both the Ghost and Gertrude. This skepticism is due in no small part to the ekphrastic quality of their speeches. Despite (or perhaps because of its deeply visual quality), ekphrasis ultimately warrants this skepticism as Claire Preston explains:

> Ekphrastic description…because it purports not simply to borrow the visual but to be it, deliberately designs and compels scrutiny, carefully directing that attentiveness away from narrative sequence and toward precise interpretative responses to obtruded and ostentatious physical facts which encode abstract meanings. [56]

In order words, ekphrastic description calls attention to itself. Gertrude's decision to wax poetic about Ophelia's death and to provide a level of detail that has inspired several visual representations of the event ends up working against Gertrude's credibility in much of the critical conversation. Her speech becomes the event so much that it replaces the potential event itself. Moreover, the artifice of ekphrastic speech allows for it to encode and represent multiple possibilities rather than be limited to one visual proof.

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[56] Preston, "Ekphrasis," 119.

While it is fairly clear that the ekphrastic elements in Gertrude's report evokes distrust among critics definitely and to a lesser extent to a general audience, what might we make of Ophelia's earlier descriptive testimony to Laertes? Ophelia vividly describes how Hamlet wandered into her private quarters, silently touched her, and wandered off. Yet no one seems to doubt her report. In contrast to the death reports, Ophelia's description follows Hamlet's announced intentions to feign madness whereas Gertrude and the Ghost are the first to announce new evidence. In a curious manner, the initial moment of knowledge acquisition is the one up to most scrutiny, at least after-the-fact.

> My lord, as I was sewing in my closet
>
> Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,
>
> No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
>
> Ungartered and down-gyved to his ankle
>
> Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
>
> And with a look so piteous in purport
>
> As if he had been loosed out of hell
>
> To speak of horrors, he comes before me. (

In the first half of the report, Ophelia provides little overt interpretation in favor of rich description. Citing George Stubbes's 1736 *Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark*, Meek identifies the first part of Ophelia's speech as an example of prosopographia, a type of enargia or rhetorical invention that focuses on describing the

face of a (sometimes imagined) individual.[57] While I suggest the rhetorical move is closer to effictio which encompasses the entire body rather than merely the face, the nature of the description is nevertheless ekphrastic. Ophelia verbally paints the picture to the point that it has become part of the play's visual tapestry. Indeed, Ophelia's encounter with Hamlet, as Thompson and Taylor note, "is described, not staged, in all three texts, but some productions (and films) presented it in dumb-show, and it became a popular subject for illustration."[58] In its earliest forms Shakespeare opts for a report but as with other incredibly vivid reports like the Ghost's description of his death and Gertrude's vivid depiction of Ophelia's drowning, the report itself is imbued with enough visual significance that it easily translates to visual representation whether on stage or in art.

Criticism, particularly feminist criticism, has long considered Ophelia vis-à-vis Hamlet with scholars including Lacan articulating the pair's link and, arguably, Ophelia's subordinate position.[59] Yet as Sandra K. Fischer succinctly states, "Ophelia is actually a muted structural pivot, a Braille rendition of the hero's own progress."[60] Ophelia's structural significance allows us to consider additional ways in which she may reveal epistemologies and practices distinct from Hamlet's. Moreover, these revelations may potentially serve as sites of critique. Whether as a marker of a woman oppressed by

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[57] Meek, *Narrating the Visual*, 90.
[58] Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds., *Hamlet*, 233, notes 74-97.
[59] Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. James Hulbert, *Yale French Studies* nos. 55/56 (1977): 11-52.
[60] Sandra K. Fischer, "Hearing Ophelia: Gender and Tragic Discourse in *Hamlet*," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 14, no. 1 (1990): 2.

the patriarchy or as sign of her "basically weak personality,"[61] as Carroll Camden would have it, Ophelia's propensity to describe what is going around her rather than explicitly interpret it invites us to consider the epistemological value of the report in contrast with the more interpretative heavy-hitters like her (former) boyfriend and (late) father.

At its core, Ophelia's report on Hamlet is reliable because the audience trusts that Ophelia will represent events without molding them into a pre-conceived interpretation as Hamlet and Polonius are wont to do. Moreover, Ophelia's reliability is confirmed in subsequent scenes where the audience witnesses Hamlet acting in a manner consistent with Ophelia's testimony. In addition, Ophelia's report does its own work of confirming Hamlet's earlier comment where he announces his intention to pretend to be mad. Ophelia's testimony is also later verified whereas Gertrude's report is almost immediately undermined by the Gravediggers in the next scene who confirm that while Ophelia is quite dead, her motivations for death were less clear.

Ophelia's report and Gertrude's report, while differing in how their information is later confirmed by other speakers, at their core, are remarkably similar in their deployment of ekphrasis. Their reports center on a figure (Hamlet and Ophelia, respectively) who has been acting strangely, whether intentionally or due to madness, and their inappropriate reactions to a situation. Moreover, Ophelia and Gertrude take multiple lines to describe their subject's clothing, with their descriptions vividly capturing the terror of the scene. Yet, critically speaking, one is given a pass while the

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[61] Carroll Camden, "On Ophelia's Madness," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1964): 253.

other's speech is treated with skepticism. I would contend that this skepticism is more

the result of audience doubt generated from earlier scenes regarding Gertrude rather than

the speech itself. Her descriptions are so vivid and terrifying not because she had a role

in murdering Ophelia or was attempting to rewrite her death as an accident rather than

suicide, but because she is creating an image of death that is intended to affect the

audience beyond the moment she speaks. By using ekphrasis, like Ophelia in generating

terror and tension by describing Hamlet's disheveled clothes and unnerving silence,

Gertrude achieves a level of rhetorical finesse and effect on an event that carries enough

emotional impact on the audience and Laertes to merit space.

Testing the Ghost's Report

While interesting to think about, Ophelia and Gertrude's reliability as reporters

does not drive the plot as much as the Ghost of Old Hamlet. The Ghost, who appears

before Hamlet even knows of his existence, is the first to charge Hamlet to revenge his

death on Claudius. The remainder of the play follows Hamlet attempting to do just that,

but he wants to be absolutely sure that his vengeance is justified and will result in

Claudius receiving the most severe of posthumous punishments. The chain of knowledge

beginning with the Ghost's report of his own death and concluding with Claudius's

confession with a detour in Hamlet's theatrical experiment, *The Mousetrap*, draws our

attention specifically to a reporter who, by all accounts, really should be unreliable.

Despite the Ghost's apparent unreliability, however, he ends up telling the truth

(mostly), but that truth is verified solely for the audience rather than by any measures Hamlet takes to discern it. This strategy works as a kind of "reverse Claudius": Claudius is initially framed as a reliable source of information but ends up being in the moral wrong, whereas the Ghost is immediately distrusted by the characters (with the exception of Hamlet) and is then proven reliable.

At the play's onset the audience—and Hamlet himself—has no idea that Old Hamlet was actually murdered. For certain, we know that he is dead by way of Horatio's reporting of backstory and the fact that Barnardo, Marcellus, Horatio, and, later, Hamlet, all attest that the Ghost wandering about looks an awful lot like the deceased king. The Ghost's true purpose, of course, is not revealed until later when he directly speaks to Hamlet, reporting and revealing his poisoning. Up until this point even the gloomy Hamlet does not verbally articulate any foul play; rather, his report of recent events at Elsinore focuses on his anger at his mother for marrying his uncle so soon after his father's death. Indeed, Miriam Joseph points out that one of the key reasons of the Ghost's "dramatic success" is due to the fact that "he reveals major antecedent events otherwise undiscoverable which become the essential spring of the action."[62] The "major antecedent events" referred to here are, of course, the events surrounding his death. These events are later confirmed beyond a shadow of a doubt for the audience but for the actual cast, less so.

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[62] Miriam Joseph, "Discerning the Ghost in *Hamlet*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association (PMLA)* 76, no. 5 (1961): 495.

The play itself invites early skepticism of the Ghost. As Horatio, Marcellus, and Barnardo whisper in hushed voices, they imply that the Ghost may not be Old Hamlet himself but an apparition that simply looks like the deceased king. Early on, when the Ghost appears, Barnardo states for both the newly arrived Horatio and the audience, "In the same figure like the King that's dead. / …/ Looks 'a not like the King?" (1.1.40, 42). Later, Marcellus repeats this language of figures and liking once again, asking Horatio to confirm, "Is it not like the King?" (1.1.57). While Horatio does quickly confirm Marcellus and Barnardo's suspicions in the immediately following lines, neither guard quite leaves off of referring to the Ghost as anything but an apparition that resembles Old Hamlet. Sarah Outterson-Murphy suggests that "such language emphasizes the Ghost's status as not only potentially a demonic trick but also, inevitably, a theatrical representation. The more lifelike this Ghost looks, the more it must seem both real."[63]

We can see this paradox at play in the interpretations of the Ghost and how he is represented verbally by those who witness him. While Marcellus and Barnardo, as noted above, continue to refer to the Ghost as being "like the King," Hamlet and Horatio, the other two who visibly witness the Ghost, view him as the King.

While Horatio does claim that he believes that the Ghost is the deceased king, he nevertheless warns Hamlet away from following him:

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,

Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff

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[63] Sarah Outterson-Murphy, "'Remember Me': The Ghost and Its Spectators in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 34, no. 2 (2016): 257.

That beetles o'er his base into the sea,

And there assume some other horrible form

Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason

And draw you into madness? (1.4.69-74)

Hamlet, of course, refuses to listen to Horatio and presses onward. This spoken concern signals to the audience that we should be wary of the Ghost. As Stephen Greenblatt notes for modern audiences, while "there are occasional comic ghosts…the predominant theatrical figures of the dead are spirits from the underworld who, like the ghost of Thyestes in Seneca's *Agamemnon*, long to see the stage run with blood."[64] When considering potential, initial reactions to the Ghost, Horatio's warning seems to readily echo contemporary expectations. These expectations shape our understanding of the Ghost's reliability in ways that may be counter to modern perceptions who already know what the Ghost says to be true.

Old Hamlet's testimony allows for the epistemological upheavals just as much as his spectral presence. As Shankar Raman explains, "the revelation of the elder Hamlet's death as 'foul and unnatural murder'…un-fixes the past, undoing what has been assumed to be known—and only thereby does the intervention begin to shape the future (the play's and Hamlet's)."[65] This "un-fixing" that Raman notes corroborates with the instability of different modes of knowledge and evidence in play. There is no

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[64] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 152-53.
[65] Shankar Raman, "Interrupted Games: Pascal, *Hamlet*, Probability," *Shakespeare Studies* 43 (2015): 181.

teleological progression in terms of knowledge gain, much as Hamlet and perhaps we

scholars may wish there to be. If anything, reports like the Ghost's emphasize the

fragility of knowing and its contingency on an array of rhetorical factors.

What many modern readers struggle with in thinking about Claudius is the *a priori* knowledge of the play. Prior to his actual confession, we only have circumstantial

evidence and testimony of Claudius's role in the murder of his brother. Even Hamlet's

(not-so) clever idea of *The Mousetrap* doesn't really work to "catch the nature of the

king." Several critics offer various interpretations of why Claudius rises and leaves. W.

W. Greg suggests that Claudius did murder King Hamlet but not in the manner described

by the ghost.[66] J. Dover Wilson, in response to Greg, argues that Claudius doesn't flee

immediately from the dumb show because he does not realize the significance of the

performance until an actor specifically mentions poison.[67] Stanley Cavell further

suggests that Claudius suppressed his response.[68]

The most convincing interpretation comes from James Hirsch who suggests that

Claudius leaves the performance not because of any underlying guilt but because Hamlet

is being intentionally difficult. Once Claudius neglects to have the appropriate reaction

(flinching) in the face of the on-stage murder, Hamlet attempts to provoke him by

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[66] W. W. Greg, "Hamlet's Hallucination," *The Modern Language Review* 12, no. 4 (1917): 393-421.

[67] J. Dover Wilson, "The Parallel Plots in *Hamlet*: A Reply to Dr. W. W. Greg," *The Modern Language Review* 13, no. 2 (1918): 147-8. For responses to Wilson, see Henry David Gray, "The Dumb-Show in *Hamlet*," *Modern Philology* 17, no. 1 (1919): 51-54; and Lawrence, "The Play Scene in *Hamlet*," 1-22.

[68] Cavell, "*Disowning Knowledge*, 179-92.

interrupting the performance and even identifying Lucianus as the nephew of the Player

King. Hirsch explains:

> This initial premise of Hamlet's experiment is later dramatized as invalid when,
>
> in response to the play-within-the-play, the King does not in fact proclaim his
>
> malefaction. But no sooner had Hamlet articulated his initial experimental
>
> premise in 2.2 than he revised it. Realizing how unlikely it would be that the
>
> King would proclaim his guilt, Hamlet immediately and drastically lowers the
>
> bar of proof.[69]

Yet even Claudius's confession remains in doubt for some scholars like Ratcliffe who

suggests that because Claudius's speech lacks the sensory detail of his brother's

narrative, Claudius's testimony must somehow be false:

> Claudius gives no details that would place him at the scene of the crime that
>
> afternoon—no orchard, no sleeping brother, no poison poured into his brother's
>
> ears. When he seems to place his body at the scene of the crime, he does so in a
>
> syntactic construction whose hypothetical logic casts more shadow of doubt than
>
> light of certainty over what he is actually saying.[70]

Ratcliffe is right to observe that Claudius's confession is indeed spare, particularly in

comparison to some of the more detailed testimonies that we have seen earlier; however,

we should be aware that ekphrastic detail tends to implicate falsehood rather than

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[69] Hirsch, "*Hamlet* and Empiricism, 335.
[70] Ratcliffe, "What Doesn't Happen in *Hamlet*," 135.

alleviate it. Indeed, part of what causes some readers to doubt Gertrude's description of Ophelia's death is her level of too much ekphrastic detail.

Nevertheless, what I suggest isn't that Claudius is attempting to hoodwink the audience by engaging in some complex metatheater, but that the audience may instead feel a sense of surprise that he was indeed the murderer all along. This surprise may be hard to fathom, especially now when even grammar school students know that Claudius is guilty of fratricide before they ever (if ever) read *Hamlet*. But given the three who are most concerned with Old Hamlet's murder—the Ghost, Hamlet, and Claudius—Claudius himself consistently comes across as fairly trustworthy whereas the Ghost and Hamlet are compromised by links to the infernal and to madness. The issue at hand is best summarized by Ann Jennalie Cook: "To scholars, Shakespeare's drama is so familiar that they bring a full knowledge of what happens in the play to each reading or viewing. It becomes harder and harder—perhaps even impossible—not to interpret each successive event in terms of what one knows is yet to come."[71] We can trust Claudius's confession not simply because it agrees with the Ghost's testimony or Hamlet's wishful interpretations of Claudius's response to *The Mousetrap*, but because Claudius has established himself as consistently reliable.

It is Claudius's strong ethos that makes this scene such a shocker for an audience that is unfamiliar with the Hamlet mythos. As with Mercutio's death in *Romeo and Juliet* where the comic plot suddenly turns tragic, Claudius's confession marks a turning point.

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[71] Ann Jennalie Cook, "The Design of Desdemona," *Shakespeare Studies* 13 (1980): 187-196.

What can we do with an ostensibly reliable narrator who is also a confessed murderer? For the time being we must separate the two—Claudius can be morally reprehensible while still being reliable much as how Hamlet can be morally responsible while still being completely unreliable.

At this point we should also consider who actually hears Claudius's confession. As Khan helpfully reminds us, Hamlet never actually hears Claudius admit guilt; only the audience does. Responding specifically to A. C. Bradley's question of Hamlet's inaction, Khan states, "It is perfectly reasonable, upon first reading or viewing, to go along with Hamlet's doubts, to demand as he does verification of the Ghost's testimony, to wonder whether the Ghost is a 'spirit of health or goblin damned.'"[72] Once again, we are invited to consider not simply the content of a speech but the reliability of the speaker and the factors that contribute to whether or not an audience member or reader may trust the speaker at any given time. Although the Ghost ends up being proven "right" in identifying his murderer to Hamlet, the play takes careful steps to ensure that up until the confession itself, his testimony is under scrutiny whereas Claudius faces a comparable lack of ethical scrutiny except from an increasingly unreliable Hamlet.

Relying on the testimony of his father's ghost as well as his own intuition, Hamlet actively orchestrates an elaborate ruse via a staging of *The Mousetrap* performed by a conveniently visiting acting troop. Prior to the performance, Hamlet professes that he will "observe his [Claudius's] looks" (2.2.531) and later enjoins Horatio to also

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[72] Khan, "Counterfactual Thinking and *Hamlet*," 31.

"observe mine uncle…For I mine eyes will rivet to his face / And after we will both our judgements join / In censure of his seeming" (3.2.76, 81-3). At this point in the narrative Hamlet has accepted Old Hamlet's report of his untimely death (the lines that I have omitted above certainly indicate that he fully anticipates that Claudius will react in the appropriate guilty manner), but he still seems to be intent on sensory proofs that are confirmed by an additional observer.

Of course, we would do well to note that Hamlet's reasoning is slightly faulty. Although Claudius does indeed perform in a manner consistent to Hamlet's expectations (that is, he gets uncomfortable and leaves), the play's audience receives confirmation of Claudius's guilt through his own admission via soliloquy in a later scene. In the text itself, Hamlet is not privy to this confession although adaptations and theatrical interpretations may allow for him to be listening in. Nevertheless, some sort of confirmation seems to be required in order to fully validate the initial reports. That validation may come from experimentation as well as further testimony from a particular source suggests that sensory proof may also be of questionable veracity despite its predominance throughout the play.

Regarding *Hamlet*'s predecessor, Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Douglas Green suggests that the final multi-lingual performance of *Soliman and Perseda* provides an additional level of evidence, albeit a literary one. He explains, "The staging of the literary precedent serves, like evidence adduce din the courtroom, to substantiate and publish the guilt we have suspected—or, in this case, known—and to elicit from the

guilty their self-incrimination."[73] Such would seem to apply to Hamlet and his

Mousetrap insofar as we are used to reading this scene. As he attempts to construct his

own experiment to "catch the conscience of the king" and verify the Ghost's earlier

testimony, Hamlet relies on Claudius's affective response to the dumb show and the

play.

        This reading, however, faces one major issue as Green explains for both *The*

Spanish Tragedy and for *Hamlet*. Namely, he elaborates, "We are shown the evidence,

but it does not speak for itself; there is no immanent voice corroborating what we

obviously think we know."[74] This lack of explicit direction for the audience has troubled

scholars particularly as, if we look at the text itself, Claudius's response doesn't seem to

quite fit with Hamlet's expectations. James Hirsch points out the absurdity of Hamlet's

play-experiment:

> This initial premise of Hamlet's experiment is later dramatized as invalid when,
>
> in response to the play-within-the-play, the King does not in fact proclaim his
>
> malefaction. But no sooner had Hamlet articulated his initial experimental
>
> premise in 2.2 than he revised it. Realizing how unlikely it would be that the
>
> King would proclaim his guilt, Hamlet immediately and drastically lowers the
>
> bar of proof.[75]

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[73] Douglas E. Green, "Staging the Evidence: Shakespeare's Theatrical Revengers," *Upstart Crow* 12 (1992): 30.

[74] Green, "Shakespeare's Theatrical Revengers," 30.

[75] Hirsch, "*Hamlet* and Empiricism," 335.

While it is unclear that Hamlet actually expects Claudius (and perhaps Gertrude) to

immediately confess with wailing and gnashing of teeth, he does point to the affective

power of drama. He says to Horatio:

> 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 proclaimed their malefactions. (2.2.523-7)

Hamlet shortly after announces that he will be looking for whether Claudius's face "do

blench" (2.2.532) and asks Horatio to observe with him. As Hirsch indicates, there is a

wide gulf between spontaneous proclamations of guilt (which would seem to be a fairly

clear visual and aural proof of guilt) versus the subtlety of flinching or blanching in the

face of a murder scene, particularly a murder scene of a king. But amusingly enough,

although Claudius may indeed "blench" depending on the production of the play,

Hamlet's running commentary—he's "as good as a chorus" (3.2.238), as Ophelia

observes—gives no indication of such a reaction. He does not specifically remark on

Claudius at all while the performance is underway. Rather, Ophelia is the one who notes

when Claudius rises after Hamlet helpfully explains what is going on and how "You

shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife" (3.2.256-7). Hamlet,

of course, takes Claudius's exit as irrefutable proof of his guilt. An audience not as

familiar with Hamlet's story may instead see Claudius's exit due to discomfort not at

actually being a murderer but by simply being accused of murder by his nephew and heir.

The question is then: what does all this have to do with the Ghost's report and the ethos of the reporter? In *The Mousetrap* scene and in Hamlet's preparation leading up to it, we learn far more about Hamlet's reliability than we do about the actual murder. That actual bit of knowledge only comes later and not as the result of careful experimentation. Such seems to be the challenge of not only Hamlet but of other revengers as well as Green illustrates: "The theatrics of Shakespeare's revengers allude to *truth*, but also reduce the evidence to mere illusion—and expose the very grounds of truth as variously a fabrication, a private fiction, a hidden assumption, and a way of seeing."[76] Evidence which may seem to be reliable is limited not simply by its actual propensity to truth but by the person actively seeking to present that evidence or interpret it.

Conclusions

It is well-known that Shakespeare stages ambiguity. Hamlet is hardly an exception to the rule. But although Shakespeare does give us some closure in having Claudius admit to his murdering of Old Hamlet, this little bit of confirmation is amid a sea of evidence that is not so clearly verified. Reporting therefore serves as a potentially unreliable form of evidence acquisition; however, sometimes this form is the only way

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[76] Green, "Shakespeare's Theatrical Revengers," 37.

to acquire any information, particularly in the speech-heavy medium of theater. In *Hamlet* in particular, evidence frequently first comes in the form of a report and that report is either confirmed, denied, or complicated through additional evidence, sometimes through additional reports, other times through character actions, general dialogue, or acts of audience interpretation.

Much of the rhetorical and epistemological power of the report, as with other kinds of evidence provided throughout the play, rests on this final idea of interpretation. In staging interpretations from potentially (or just patently) unreliable speakers like Claudius, Hamlet, and Polonius, we are asked to be skeptical of those who have not necessarily provided a reason for us to be skeptical. The ethos of the reporter has as much to do with the subsequent evidence of the reporter's credibility as it does with his or her initial report. As we are asked to call previous evidence into question in light of new evidence, we are presented with the very challenge that Hamlet faces throughout the play and that Claudius and Polonius also experience, if to a lesser degree: what is knowable when new knowledge simply introduces more questions?

Ultimately, an investigation of reporting practices in *Hamlet* reveals an intimate connection with other epistemological moves that, rather than consistently providing confirmation of any particular method's validity, instead highlight the uncertainty of knowledge-making methods in general. As Hamlet dies in the final scene, he implores his friend: "Horatio, I am dead. / Thou livest: report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied" (5.2.322-324). Yet the report that Horatio ostensibly provides (that being the play that we have just witnessed or read), is now also under question. Can we rely on

Horatio, the person who has managed to survive *Hamlet*'s unsuccessful interrogation of knowledge and epistemological practices, and who may have been the narrator all along? We should certainly be willing to make the attempt to believe what he—and in the turn the play says—but perhaps with a healthy dose of skepticism.

CHAPTER III

PROBLEMS WITH OCULAR PROOF IN *OTHELLO* AND *THE CHANGELING*

First performed nearly two decades apart, Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello* (1604)

and Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's tragicomedy *The Changeling* (1623),

seem like strange bedfellows.[77] Desdemona's handkerchief did not, as far as we know,

travel between productions; they share neither sources nor a location, though both are set

abroad; and their plot structures are completely different with *Othello* following one

major thread and *The Changeling* having two distinct plots that only briefly intersect.

Despite their overt dissimilarities, these plays demonstrate an obsessive and times

comical desire for visual proof, especially proof of something like virginity or marital

fidelity that cannot be readily staged. They ask the question: how can we know by sight

what cannot be seen?

Knowledge and its shapers fundamentally drive the plots and characters of these

plays, with the villains knowing more than the heroes, and thus actively attempting to

keep the heroes or heroines from learning what they know. All the major characters,

good or bad, operate under the assumption that if one manages to acquire and hold onto

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[77] William Shakespeare, *Othello*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Gordon McMullan, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton 2016), 1296-1370. Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling*, ed. Douglas Bruster, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010), 1637-1678. All references to Othello and *The Changeling* refer to these editions unless otherwise noted. Citations are included parenthetically.

all the required information, they will know the truth. This assumption, which reflects developing empiricist paradigms, ends up being violated in both plays; how and where the violation occurs, however, differs. In *Othello*, several characters remark on the need for overwhelming (ideally visual) proof in order to establish an accurate interpretation of the play's events. Unfortunately for nearly every one of them, these proofs are impossible to come by. Even the infamous handkerchief is not a conclusive piece of evidence. Indeed, the only "real" visual proofs throughout *Othello* are ekphrastic, occurring solely within Iago's speeches. These epistemological glitches—conclusive visual proof only exists verbally through rhetoric or symbolism—stand in contrast to the issues on display in *The Changeling*. In Middleton and Rowley's play, the problem is not so much that the visual evidence is not physically there (if anything, the play has an overabundance of ocular proofs), it is that the evidence is so often fabricated—literally staged—in order to provoke a desired interpretation.

The problem(s) with ocular proof that each play illustrates, I argue, are part of a larger continuum: in *Othello*, visual knowledge is substituted for rhetorical knowledge, and thus is subject to all the critiques of early modern rhetoric whereas in *The Changeling*, the rhetorical lesson is inverted and embodied in performance and in experiments. However, the excessive visual spectacle is no more reliable than the "ocular" proof of *Othello*, as all kinds of evidence are fabricated by human agents.

In this chapter I explore how early empiricist and late humanist paradigms collide in these two plays to illustrate two different yet related ways plays engaged with the challenges of using sensory information, specifically visual information, as a type of

reliable proof, and how these challenges are embedded in the play's poetics and structure. First, I provide an overview of the role of vision in *Othello* and *The Changeling*, noting the overwhelming presence of the language of seeing as well as each play's philosophy of vision and how that relates to its overall purposes. I then transition to the play's opening scenes where I show how Shakespeare, Rowley, and Middleton lay the groundwork for their thesis statements on ocular proof and its affective potential, with Shakespeare substituting visual descriptions and rhetorical moves for absent sensory experiences, and Middleton and Rowley illustrating the overt message to not trust solely in sight as it can overwhelm reason. Next, I focus on the two major epistemological set pieces of each play: Othello's demand for ocular proof (with additional commentary on visual evidence like Desdemona's handkerchief) in Act 3 and the virginity-test potion in Act 4. Finally, I conclude with a discussion on the importance of verification and where it lacks, particularly at the end of each play, where we finally see the murder of Desdemona after having most concrete visual proof withheld from us, but we do not actually see *The Changeling*'s equivalent of Beatrice-Joanna's stabbing and the resolution of the madmen subplot.

Visual Evidence in *Othello* and *The Changeling*

As visual spectacles, plays cannot help but offer ocular proof. For *The Changeling* and *Othello*, this is especially so as these concerns are imbued within the plays' very language (see table 1). Throughout *The Changeling*, vision ultimately

prevails as the primary force with all its attendant uses and dangers.[78] Word-wise, "eyes"

and language of vision and seeing dominate the play's lexicon as characters rely on their

vision to gather evidence and make judgements on the scenes before them, as the chart

below indicates.[79] In the 1653 quarto of Middleton and Rowley's play, "eye" and its

plural 30 times in the play;[80] "see" and its variations appear 66 times; "look" and its

variants 32 times; and "sight" 17 times.[81] Rather than concentrate sight in one section,

the terms are dispersed throughout the play and in both plots. *Othello* offers a similar

snapshot. "See" and its variations including "sees," "seeing," and "see't" appear 56

times in the 1622 quarto edition and 64 times in the 1623 folio. "Eye" and "eyes" appear

a total of 21 times in both editions, "look" and its variants 38 times in Q, 43 in F, and

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[78] For studies that explicitly focus on vision in *The Changeling*, see Huston Diehl, "Bewhored Images and Imagined Whores: Iconophobia and Gynophobia in Stuart Love Tragedies," *English Literary Renaissance* 26, no. 1 (1996): 111-137; Joseph M. Duffy, "Madhouse Optics: *The Changeling*," *Comparative Drama* 8, no. 2 (1974): 184-198; Edward Engelberg, "Tragic Blindness in *The Changeling* and *Women Beware Women*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1962): 20-28; and Andrew Stott, "Tiresias and the Basilisk: Vision and Madness in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*," *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 12 (1999): 165-179. For a compelling reading that challenges this assumption and argues that touch is the dominant sense and successfully draws attention to the many queer potentialities of the play, see Patricia Cahill, "The Play of Skin in *The Changeling*," *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 3, no. 4 (2012): 391-406.
[79] In a lengthy analysis of significant keywords in the play, Christopher Ricks does not mention any variations of sight and seeing, perhaps due in no small part that he is mostly interested in the thematic significance of puns and innuendo. See Christopher Ricks, "The Moral and Poetic Structure of *The Changeling*," *Essays in Criticism* 10 (1961): 290-306.
[80] One related compound, "eyesight" also appears in 2.1.19. In the line, Beatrice is referring specifically to "intellectual eyesight" and links to the "eyes of judgment" (2.1.13) as opposed to physical eye sight.
[81] Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling As it was Acted (with great Applause) at the Privat house in Drury-Lane, and Salisbury Court* (London, 1653).

"sight" only four times in both. The infamous "ocular" appears only once, deployed

purposely by Shakespeare via Othello. As with *The Changeling*, sight-related words

occur throughout the play's five acts and are spoken by a variety of characters, though

unsurprisingly, Othello and Iago are the most concerned with vision-based language.

Word	*The Changeling* 1653	*Othello* 1622 Q	*Othello* 1623 F
See (and variants)	66	56	64
Eye(s)(n)	30	21	21
Look(s)	32	38	43
Sight	17	4	4
Ocular	0	1	1

Table 1: Occurrence of sight-related words in *The Changeling* and *Othello*

   Othello and *The Changeling* offer two very different epistemologies of vision.

While both emphasize the visual as a means of knowledge gathering, the majority of

visual evidence in *Othello* is either only described using ekphrastic details or heavily

imbued with an outside narrative rather than existing on its own merits. In contrast, *The*

Changeling experiments with visual truth with Beatrice-Joanna's testing of the virginity

potion and Isabella's uncovering of her two suitors in disguise. In the case of *Othello*,

Shakespeare introduces continued uncertainty, using Iago to gaslight Othello,

Desdemona, Emilia and the audience as well, and offer a comparatively certain

conclusion, whereas in *The Changeling*, Middleton and Rowley provide the

viewer/reader with all the important information that is often hidden from individual

characters. However, *The Changeling* ends with uncertainty—with more and more important events not being staged, or in the case of Beatrice and De Flores's murderous rendezvous in the closet, deliberately withheld from the audience's gaze.

What complicates this emphasis on seeing and its ultimate relationship to truth is the conscious use of lying and rhetoric on behalf of characters achieving some dubious end. Whereas *Othello*'s Iago points to the real dangers of a rhetoric-based humanist system where words may literally supply and supplant reality, *The Changeling*'s Beatrice, De Flores, Antonio, and Franciscus show that language still retains that ability to shape reality even in a more empirical system. In contrast to what we have seen in previous chapters, the characters in these plays deliberately recreate the world around them through lying and linguistic manipulation, opting to fabricate evidence like the handkerchief and the virginity potion experiment. The physical evidence—the ocular proof—is transformed into a rhetorical performance wherein interpretation is pre-packaged by the rhetorician and then accepted as fact by the observer, despite the objections of other characters and the audience. Where the two diverge is that in *Othello*, all evidence is rhetorical whereas in *The Changeling*, Middleton and Rowley provide several other types of evidence to stand in contrast to the lying and performativity. The effects on the audience are therefore distinct—in *Othello*, the word-based evidence becomes subject to constant speculation and skepticism that is only resolved at the play's climax and denouement whereas in *The Changeling*, the mix of "concrete" visual evidence blended with the deliberate verbal performance gives the audience the feeling of certainty until the play's ending when the visual evidence is denied.

The major difference between the treatment of ocular proof in *Othello* and *The Changeling* is that Shakespeare transforms what should be the ocular into the verbal and rhetorical and that Middleton and Rowley transform what is supposed to be verbal into the visual. In *Othello*, we (that is, Othello himself and the audience) want visual evidence, but what we more often get are rhetorical moves and spoken set pieces that create internal images rather than images on the stage. What is the visual proof that Othello successfully uses to defend himself against charges from Brabantio that he has used witchcraft to seduce Desdemona? The proof is in Othello's speech, both his lengthy narrative of how he won over his bride through stories and how he establishes himself as a warrior rather than a rhetorician. Identities, especially those of Othello, Desdemona, and Iago, are constructed verbally—"honest Iago" resonates throughout the play due in no small part to Iago's own insistence that he is honest. In contrast, *The Changeling* seeks to transform what is said into the visual action of the play. In his commentary on the scene where Beatrice-Joanna ostensibly agrees to pay De Flores's price for his murder of Alonso, Christopher Ricks identifies a provocative question at the center of the play:

> Beatrice sums up the play at an elementary and moralistic level when she says, "Murder I see is follow'd by more sins" (3.4.164). One sin is inextricable from another. But how does Middleton convert his moral commonplace into a drama, into an enactment rather than a *sententia*?[82]

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[82] Ricks, "Moral and Poetic Structure," 290.

Ricks's answer is "puns," specifically double meanings. While I agree with Ricks's answer, this question may also be addressed by how puns and maxims are performed throughout the play in addition to (or instead of) being spoken. Beatrice-Joanna's exclamation, "Murder, I see, is followed by more sins," states exactly what we (and she) will literally see in the coming lines. The sins, which include premarital sex, adultery, arson, and more murder, along with their after-effects and final judgment, are not just things that are spoken of, they are things that happen.

This is not to say that the visual is unimportant in *Othello* or that the verbal is somehow lacking in *The Changeling*—these are still publicly performed plays, after all. Othello's black body is a focal point that the play pivots around, and Desdemona's white body lingers on stage for several lines after her death. The handkerchief prop is another particularly noteworthy image. Likewise, *The Changeling* deploys extensive wordplay and includes descriptions (rather than stagings) of important scenes such as when Jasperino tells Alsemero about De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna copulating in the next room or when Isabella informs her husband Alibius that his madhouse has been infiltrated by two noblemen attempting to seduce her.

Ocular proof, regardless of whether it is verbally constructed or physically before a person, proves to be not just an inert "thing." In keeping with larger early modern medical and performance theories, things seen have an affective power all their own, and this power ultimately pushes the tragic characters to their respective demises. Othello's imagined horror prompts him to completely shift how he categorizes Desdemona and ignites his jealousy. Beatrice-Joanna and Alsemero are the quintessential examples of

"love at first sight," an affective move that causes them not to see the world as it actually is but how they would prefer it to be.

The effects that these two approaches engender allow for two very different audience experiences. In Shakespeare's play, the audience becomes like Othello himself, knowing yet not really knowing everything. In *Othello*, we are looking for evidence of an event that happened in the past, and hence the only evidence we truly have to go by are testimonies from reliable sources or circumstantial evidence like manifestations of guilt through dream confessions, the location of missing cloths, or the accused speaking highly for each other. How can know things that cannot be seen? In *The Changeling*, we are more akin to Beatrice-Joanna (or Isabella in her plot) where we know or think we know all the evidence because we quite literally see it. The difference between Beatrice-Joanna and Isabella in this regard is that Beatrice-Joanna leaps to action based on her emotional states and then has to catch up with the physical consequences whereas Isabella is more controlled, opting not to manipulate the situation until she has acquired all the important evidence and confessions, before reporting her findings to the appropriate patriarchal authority.

The Demand for and Distrust of Ocular Proof

We may be tempted to begin in the middle of things—at the point where Othello demands "ocular proof" of Desdemona's infidelity from Iago and where Beatrice-Joanna fabricates the results of a virginity-testing potion given to her by her fiancé Alsemero.

These two scenes act as synecdoche of the larger issues with vision, evidence, rhetoric, and knowledge that exist occur throughout the play. But though these scenes are the major set pieces, the plays each build to these moments and create worlds that blend visual and rhetorical epistemologies. Where we need to begin is at the plays' openings where Shakespeare, Middleton, and Rowley quite literally set the stage for how knowledge will work and be manipulated for the remainder of the play.

Initially at least, both plays start with shared assumptions of visual proof—that is, evidence that one obtains through looking is reliable, regardless of who is speaking. Yet as the scenes continue, both Alsemero and Iago reveal a less idealized version of this kind of evidence. Although Shakespeare saves the infamous "ocular proof" for later in the play, *Othello* exhibits the desire for visual evidence and its ultimate lack of real-world importance within the first thirty lines. Surprisingly, the speaker who first evokes visual evidence is none other than Iago. Prior to the play's beginning, Othello promoted Michael Cassio to lieutenant, an action that flusters Iago to the point where he seeks revenge. Iago, who presents Cassio as someone who neither "never set a squadron in the field / Nor the division of a battle knows / More than a spinster" (1.1.22-24), juxtaposes the new lieutenant with his (Iago's) own active military service. Yet what is important about this military service is not simply that Iago has practical, real-world experience in comparison to Cassio who has read several books on the subject, it's that Othello has seen Iago in action for himself, as Iago complains: "And I—of whom his eyes had seen the proof, / At Rhodes, at Cypress, and on other grounds, / Christened and heathen— must be beleed, and calm'd" (1.1.28-30). These lines contain the first of many uses of

the term "proof" in the play, and here the proof is declaratively visual. Iago further links visual proof with military action, two items which he claims to value over what others have *said* in books. Othello has obtained visual evidence of Iago's battle prowess, but this is not enough for him to win the promotion.

Middleton and Rowley's opening lines of *The Changeling* are also just as resolutely visual, though the visions it presents differ from Iago's musings. The play begins with Alsmero, a Valencian nobleman, reflecting on the first time he saw the beautiful Beatrice-Joanna at a Spanish temple. He remarks, "'Twas in the temple where I first beheld here, / And now again the same" (1.1.1-2). On the practical level, Alsemero informs the audience of the setting, albeit more subtly than say the Prologue of *Romeo and Juliet* or the Chorus of *Henry V*. He also illustrates immediately how affective a vision can be to the point that it consumes a character's thoughts. Of course, in the lines that follow, Alsemero does not actually describe any of Beatrice-Joanna's beauty and instead treats the location of their meeting as auspicious approval of their mutual affection. Visual proof and its effects are only valid, Alsmero acknowledges, when an outside legitimizing force (such as the Church) approves of it.

Furthermore, Alsemero's reaction to the sight of Beatrice-Joanna proves to be transformative in way that multiple concrete versions were not for Othello. Jasperino, Alsemero's friend, notes this change, remarking that just the previous day he was in his typical haste to leave. He remarks, "I never knew / Your inclinations to travels at a pause / With any cause to hinder it, till now" (1.1.26-28) and that Alsemero's musing in the temple where he found love "'tis but idleness / Compared with your haste yesterday"

(1.1.43-44). These lines quickly reveal information about Alsemero and the affective

power of sight that we do not see with Iago and Othello. In speaking of "yesterday,"

Jasperino orients the audience to understand that Alsemero has not been pining after a

woman he has known for some time—this is a woman that he has only recently met. He

also reveals that sights are powerful and potentially dangerous in their ability to affect

the individual viewer and overwhelm their reason. In this case, Jasperino further reminds

his companion of his prior commitment to ration, stating that "Lover I'm sure you're

none, the stoic / Was found in you long ago" (1.1.36-27). This direct reference to

Stoicism, which as Michael Neill explains, "taught the need to subject all emotions to

the absolute control of reason,"[83] further illustrates that a vision can overwhelm faculties

that, prior to an affective sight, are resolutely rational. The Alsemero we first meet is not

the same Alsemero that his long-time companion knows.

The warning against the dangers of affective visions becomes abundantly clear

later in the scene. Whereas *Othello* tends to show the audience the effects of rhetoric

(especially in the trial scene) and its ability to create an internal visual, *The Changeling*

opts for the more direct stating of the moral. After we see her meet for the first time on

stage with Alsemero, Beatrice-Joanna cautions her new lover not to hold too much stock

in what he sees:

> Our eyes are sentinels unto our judgements,
>
> And should give certain judgement what they see;

---

[83] Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling*, ed. Michael Neill, New Mermaids (New York: Norton, 2006), 7, note 36.

But they are rash sometimes, and tell us wonders

Of common things, which when our judgements find,

They can then check the eyes, and call them blind. (1.1.71-76)

As Beatrice-Joanna notes, vision is the primary way for an individual to intake evidence before making decisions or drawing conclusions. Ideally, eyes serve the superior Reason as part of an inductive, empirical mode of viewing the world. Of course, that is not always the case, for eyes sometimes surpass Reason and judge on their own, often seeing what they want to see or projecting more exciting images than the mundane object in view. Indeed, as Andrew Stott explains, "Vision was a censored sense in the second half of the sixteenth century. Iconoclastic destruction of Catholic church imagery, and Protestantism's privileging of internalized religious meditation, meant that visual sensuality became closely associated with deceit and error."[84] *The Changeling* was composed after the Reformation raised these doubts about visual evidence; Beatrice-Joanna's warning echoes the potential double-edged sword of ocular proof and its dangers.

Beatrice-Joanna's relationship with physical versus intellectual or internal eyesight remains fraught for the remainder of the play, particularly with how she (quite literally) views her romantic suitors. Consistent with her warning to Alsemero to be wary of eyesight, Beatrice-Joanna reinforces the importance of judgment. However, as Alsemero justifies his affections by linking Beatrice-Joanna to holiness, purity, and the

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[84] Stott, "Vision and Madness in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*," 166.

church, Beatrice-Joanna reasons that her affection for Alsemero through other kinds of verification. Most notably, after sending Jasperino off with a message for her new lover (and hearing one line of dialogue from the friendly messenger), Beatrice-Joanna asserts that Alsmero has shown great wisdom in his choice of friends. She concludes, "It is a sign he makes his choice with judgement. / Then I appear in nothing more approved / Than making choice of him" (2.1.7-9). At first glance, her reading of the situation is reasonable enough. Alsemero associates with good people, and thus her choice is justified. Yet as Lois Bueler explains, "Beatrice Joanna's conversation is from first almost to last an alternately self-congratulatory and frantic attempt to apply logic to her situation."[85] The logic that she wants to apply is inductive; in this moment, Beatrice-Joanna attempts to build to a conclusion based her experiences and knowledge. But what she is actually doing is looking for evidence that already fits within her worldview. When she speaks about Alsemero's judgment, she makes it less about his sterling qualities and more about her wisdom in choosing a lover.

Beatrice-Joanna's thinking on matters of intellectual versus sensory seeing is further complicated by her claims that, based upon the evidence that Alsmero has a friend willing to deliver letters between them, she loves with her reason rather than her emotions. She proclaims the superiority of reason and internal judgment over visual evidence while simultaneously making seeing into a metaphor for reason:

Methinks I love now with the eyes of judgement,

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[85] Lois E. Bueler, "The Rhetoric of Change in *The Changeling*," *English Literary Renaissance* 14, no. 1 (1984): 108.

And see the way to merit, clearly see it.

A true deserver like a diamond sparkles—

In darkness you may see him, that's in absence,

Which is the greatest darkness falls on love;

Yet is he best discerned then

With intellectual eyesight. (2.1.13-18)

Despite her earlier admonitions that sight is particularly dangerous, she nevertheless uses metaphors of sight, eyes, and seeing to make her point about how she loves properly. Beatrice-Joanna distinguishes between eyes that conventionally see and eyes that see figuratively. Armed "with the eyes of judgement" (2.1.13) and "with intellectual eyesight" (2.1.18), our heroine claims that her love is more real and serious because it is not based on purely sensory information such as Alsemero's attractiveness or clothing. Yet this reading is undercut by the abundance of additional language that emphasizes seeing even in-between the claims of reasonable eyeballs, as well as her repeated repulsion at De Flores's physical form.

Shakespeare's treatment of ocular proof is less didactic in terms of warning the audience not to trust what they see. Rather, he does not present any particular problem with visual evidence, per se. What he does is transform the visual into the rhetorical and the verbal and how other forms of evidence can tap into the affective power of vision without explicitly being seen by the audience or the characters themselves.

Characters in *Othello* want certainty; they want replicable, visual evidence that supports what they are searching for. However, these same characters are remarkably

humanist in that they quickly push aside these levels of certainty for something that appears the same but ultimately can only support possibility rather than actuality. Indeed, what counts as evidence comes into question early in the play during the scene where the Duke adjudicates between Desdemona's father Brabanzio and her new husband, Othello. We learn two things from this scene regarding the use of evidence that will hold for the remainder of the play: firstly, proof need not fully confirm an explanation, only render it probable; and secondly, rhetorical, particularly narrative or ekphrastic, proof may replace sensory evidence.

As the accuser, Brabanzio speaks first, arguing consistently that Desdemona has acted counter to her timid nature and thus was somehow ensorcelled by her new husband. Brabanzio's narrative, which he repeats with varying levels of specificity three times throughout the trial scene, establishes Desdemona as "never bold, / Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion / Blushed at herself" (1.3.94-96) and "a maid, so tender, fair, and happy, / So opposite to marriage that she shunned / the wealthy curled darling of our nation" (1.3.66-68). Desdemona, as her father paints her, is overtly innocent, meek, and not normally governed by strong passions. Her elopement therefore is an act that is antithetical to her normal behavior and indeed her very nature. Brabanzio attributes her sudden change not to love or that Desdemona is an individual capable of making her own decisions, but to something unnatural or supernatural. This unnatural witchcraft, curiously enough, takes the form of "spells and medicines bought of mountebanks" (1.3.61) or "some mixtures powerful o'er the blood, / Or with some dram conjured to this effect" (1.3.104-105). In both instances, Brabanzio links the magical

hoodwinking not a particular enchantment, demon summoning, or magic associated with Moors but to human-made potions that Othello did not even mix himself.

The audience and the Duke adjudicating the debate between Brabanzio and Othello quickly see that the upset father has made an unconvincing argument. The Duke does not take Brabanzio's accusation as appropriate evidence, stating that the entire accusation is simply improvable in its current state. He remarks, "To vouch this is no proof / Without more wider and more overt text / Than these thin habits and poor likelihoods / Of modern seeming do prefer against him" (1.3.106-9). Here the Duke, and by extension, the play itself acknowledges that not only are there multiple kinds of evidence but also that some evidence types have more weight than other types. Moreover, the Duke is already aware of Othello's character and had summoned him to an *ad hoc* council in the middle of the night not to discuss his elopement or address Brabanzio's accusations, but to deal with a Turkish naval invasion of Cypress. Othello's ethos, established through his "services…done the signory" (1.1.18) and his lineage "from men of royal siege" (1.2.22), is also on the Duke's mind when he hears Brabanzio's complaint. We will see this again later in the play when Iago begins constructing an elaborate narrative for the investigation he and Othello will conduct in order to discover Desdemona's supposed infidelity.

This debate scene demonstrates that we are supposed to understand how certain methods of evidence—in this specific instance, testimony—can be more or less effective. Othello defends himself, using a set of rhetorical techniques that make his defense more probable than Brabanzio's accusation, though his proofs are no less

concrete. Indeed, Othello demonstrates his rhetorical agility before even beginning his

actual testimony. Prior to Brabanzio's testimony, Othello informs his listeners that he is

a man of action and not a man of rhetoric who, until recently, has spent the bulk of his

life on the battle field. "Rude am I in my speech," he insists, "And little blessed with the

soft phrase of peace, / For since these arms of mine had seven years pith, / Till now

some nine moons wasted" (1.3.81-84). Yet in these lines and the monologue that

follows, Othello's speech is not coarse or common at all; in fact, it is downright

eloquent. Several scholars have observed this strange juxtaposition and commented on

what Othello may mean when he claims he is rhetorically inferior, while his actual

speech conveys the opposite.[86] Thomas Docherty remarks that Othello's eloquence is

related to his "directness": "He claims to be untutored, uncivilized, given more to the

directness of physical action and violence that he is to poetic or even duplicitous

language, but his speech undermines such a claim, and does so precisely because of its

directness."[87] Docherty would have us understand that Othello represents the contrast

between words and deeds—Othello, so the logic goes, is all deeds, and his language

reflects that.

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[86] For examples of work on Othello's self-reported lack of rhetorical agility and his actual rhetorical finesse, see Monica Beckner Robison, "The Power of Words: Othello as Storyteller," *Storytelling, Self, Society* 7 (2011): 63-71; James L. Calderwood, "Speech and Self in *Othello*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1987): 293-303; and Catherine Nicholson, "*Othello* and the Geography of Persuasion," *English Literary Renaissance* 40, no.1 (2010): 56-87.

[87] Thomas Docherty, "The Logic of 'But': Quarrels, Literature, and Democracy," *Paragraph* 40, no. 1 (2017): 125.

Except for when it doesn't. Othello's rhetorical move is a classic understatement that exploits his audience's expectations towards him as an outsider and a decorated warrior. Othello continually repeats that his previous actions have already established him as a credible and indispensable source to Venice. In response to Iago's warning that Brabanzio will take him to court to force him to divorce Desdemona, Othello remarks assuredly, "Let him do his spite. / My services which I have done the signory / Shall out-tongue his complaints" (1.2.17-19). Here Othello already anticipates the power of appealing to his deeds, and how those proofs serve as more compelling evidence than a verbal complaint. By aligning himself against ornamentation and professing that he is a less capable rhetorician, Othello exploits the audience's (original and the listeners on-stage) expectations that he is a warrior and a Moor in order to maintain his innocence. He is not the same as Brabanzio or the members of the Senate who use words to defend themselves—at least that is what he claims.

Othello's central challenge in this play is distinguishing particular things (*res*) from the rhetorical structures that define them (*verba*). This issue is not only particular to Othello, it is endemic to the play as a whole and how critics have often judged it. Marion Trousdale explains, "Othello represents in terms of stock, a Moor; in terms of place, the commander of an army for the Venetian state; in terms of figure, one who loved not wisely but too well. These all define him. They define him in terms of verbal categories that are places of invention as well as definition."[88] In his understated appeal, Othello

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[88] Marion Trousdale, *Shakespeare and the Rhetoricians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 12.

manages to lean into not just his on-stage audience, but the real audience as well. At first glance, Othello and his appeal to "rudeness" could easily be accepted by the original audience as a given. But what ends up happening is that the off-stage audience ends up needing to recontextualize what they thought they knew in light of new rhetorical proof.

In addition to his ironic understatement establishing himself as simpler and therefore more honest, Othello relies on further testimony in order to make himself more credible to the Senate. Prior to his official testimony, even before he suggests that his language is somehow lacking, Othello insists that the court interview Desdemona, offering to forfeit his military position if her testimony reveals him to be "foul" (1.3.117). With this choice, Othello martials outside evidence and presents his confidence in his own innocence. It also gives Othello additional evidence to support his case. Whereas Brabanzio could only deploy his own testimony, Othello offers two testimonies along with subtle (yet explicit) control of his ethos.

With all this buildup, Othello's actual speech is a masterclass in storytelling and rhetoric, though its reliability, particularly with the references to cannibals and "men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (1.3.143-44), may strike some modern readers as exaggeration or outright lying. However, that Othello evokes these odd creatures ends up easing his audience's skepticism rather than exacerbating it. There are several reasonable explanations here for why Othello mentions these creatures. The reference may be literal—Othello, in his many journeys, has seen some things. The chest-faces themselves, called *Blemmyae*, have classical connotations and appear in medieval and early modern travel literature, including Sir Walter Ralegh's *The*

Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana (1596) and the popular

fourteenth-century *The Voyages and Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (printed in English

in 1582). While I think the references are intended to be literal and that an early modern

audience would certainly find such creatures strange but not necessarily fabricated, a less

contentious explanation would be that Othello is fabricating for rhetorical effect. Having

seen the effect his stories have on Brabanzio and especially Desdemona, it would make

sense for him to continue embellishing in order to gain her affections.

Despite any modern doubts we might have about the legitimacy of the details, the

core of Othello's narrative—that he won over Desdemona by telling her affective stories

from his youth and travels that generated her sympathy—does not merit much suspicion.

While the particulars of the story are never actually confirmed (Desdemona does not

actually state whether or not she fell in love with Othello by pitying his difficult life

experiences), Desdemona acts as if she is in a consensual partnership. Upon hearing

Othello's explanation, the satisfied Duke tellingly remarks: "I think this [Othello's] tale

would win my daughter, too" (1.3.170). In this moment, the Duke substitutes his

daughter for Desdemona, reckoning them both in the same category as "young,

unmarried women." The Duke uses not his knowledge of Desdemona but that of his

daughter to determine the probability of Othello's claim that he won his bride through

her sympathy for his pains and the quality of his tragic storytelling.

Brabanzio attempts to follow the construction of the syllogism. This logical form

consists of at least two premises, a major premise that states a general accepted truth and

a minor premise that identifies a specific example of the category that the major premise

is about. The syllogism also contains a conclusion which links the two by using a term from each. The classic example of the syllogism is the following:

All men are mortal.

Socrates is a man.

Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

Following this form, syllogisms may be valid and/or sound. To test for validity (which is required to determine whether or not it is also sound), we must see if the conclusion can be derived solely from the stated premises, regardless of whether the premises are true. The above example is thus valid. If the syllogism is valid, we may test for soundness. To be "sound," the premises of the syllogism must be true. The syllogism above, therefore, is sound.

With this information, let us test Brabanzio's reasoning. His arguments may be summarized as follows:

Desdemona's nature is of a meek, timid, and subservient daughter.

Desdemona married the scary-looking Othello without her father's consent or knowledge.

Therefore, Desdemona acted counter to her nature.

Desdemona acted counter to her nature by marrying Othello.

Therefore, witchcraft.

Let us take the first example. In this form, Brabanzio's argument is neither valid nor sound, though it fails its validity test due to a technicality. Above, the claim about

Desdemona is just that, a claim about Desdemona rather than say, all (or no or some) daughters, Venetian women, or Shakespearean heroines. In each of his three speeches where he argues that Othello bewitched his daughter, Brabanzio continually refers explicitly to her. The argument also contains several premises, which if separated out, somewhat work as direct counters to the major premise on Desdemona's nature. Still, while not a perfect syllogism by any means, Brabanzio attempts to appropriate the form as a way to understand what has just happened to him. The problem becomes when he jumps a few too many steps in determining what caused Desdemona's alleged change of heart. There can be a variety of reasons for why a person may change their mind, even if we buy that anyone's character is consistent to begin with as both Brabanzio and Othello do here and elsewhere in the play.

The Duke's ready acceptance of Othello's testimony may confuse a modern reader—there is not a lot of hard evidence to support Othello or his reluctant father-in-law. However, as both Katharine Eisaman Maus and Barbara Shapiro note in their separate discussions of law in England during the early modern period, these types of proofs were acceptable in jury trials.[89] Eisaman Maus explains the late sixteenth century English attitude toward evidence of crimes in comparison to the rest of Europe:

[89] Katharine Eisaman Maus, "Proof and Consequences: Inwardness and its Exposure in the English Renaissance," *Representations* 34 (1991): 29-52; Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships Between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), especially 163-193; and *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

On the Continent, an elaborate set of rules strictly prescribed the kinds and

amount of evidence necessary for conviction. Two eyewitnesses, or a

confession—which could be obtained under torture—were ordinarily required for

conviction. In England, by contrast, evidentiary rules remained loose, almost

chaotic…English courts made no rules about the admissibility of evidence, no

qualitative distinction among kinds of proof, until well into the seventeenth

century. The power to convince the jury was all that mattered.[90]

While Eisaman Maus is spot-on in her comparison, and I agree with her larger

arguments on how the English system of law impacts *Othello*, the juxtaposition of the

two systems implies that the Europe's judges were operating within a more rigorous and

therefore more just system. England's seemingly haphazard approach makes more sense

as a response to the calculated Continental system. As Shapiro explains, Continental law

was the Roman-canon inquisition process that was run by professional judges rather than

lay people. While the system nobly sought strong proofs and maintained high standards

of proof, "proof" became a heavily quantified system:

Continental procedure was based on rigidly specified rules as to the quality and

quantity of proof. There were rules giving prescribed weight to testimony based

on the number, status, age, and sex of the witnesses…Every evidentiary element

was assigned a set value, which, when added together, either constituted or did

not constitute a full proof. One "unexceptional" witness, for example, constituted

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[90] Eisaman Maus, "Proof and Consequences," 32.

a "half proof"; a doubtful one, less than half. One doubtful and one unexceptional

witness, therefore, added up to something more than a half-proof but not a full

proof.[91]

The English jury system sought to remove this formal accounting aspect of proof and

instead focused other types of evidence that may not have been counted (but probably

should have, given the circumstances). Of course, any system that leans too far one way

by making the process either so mechanical that it's easy to game the system with choice

witnesses or so loose that all evidence becomes equal, will face problems. *Othello*

represents this tension here in the trial scene and elsewhere where the man himself

begins his own pursuit of a higher-ranked form of evidence but must eventually settle for

circumstantial proof that is only proof because someone he trusted said it was strong

enough.

Making the Verbal Visual

In both *Othello* and *The Changeling*, characters seek confirmation, though they

attempt to do so in inverse ways, using deduction and induction, respectively. In the

earlier acts of *Othello*, characters such as Othello and Brabanzio begin with overlying

assumptions and establish mental evidence that supports those assumptions. They

operate more on the probability, the likelihood of something being true rather than

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[91] Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 174.

relying on specific, concrete examples that they can witness. These internal examples are then placed in syllogistic systems that reinforce their power as truth, even when they are demonstrably false. This method is ultimately deductive, that is, Othello and company usually start with the overarching premise and read all subsequent evidence in light of that premise. In contrast, characters in *The Changeling* follow a more inductive mode of operations, relying on individual pieces of evidence to build to an interpretation.

Othello's reliance on the deductive mode, rhetoric, and the mindset of late Renaissance humanism manifests itself most clearly in scenes where Iago presents multiple kinds of circumstantial evidence for Desdemona's supposed infidelity. A common move in Iago's playbook is to ask a question or make a quick comment on a given situation that implies that he knows more than he is letting on, and then immediately dismissing his comment as irrelevant or unimportant. When they happen upon Desdemona speaking with the disgraced Cassio, Othello asks two questions of Iago that he answers in the negative:

> 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 your coming. (3.3.32-38)

Iago simultaneously offers his read on the visual evidence (Cassio's rapid departure after speaking with Desdemona once he sees Othello and Iago) while outwardly denying that he believes what he is implying. He frames himself as if he is either unsure of what he has just witnessed, cannot believe what he has just witnessed, or that he knew all along that Cassio was up to no good, and he's upset that his good friend Othello must witness it. All of these options coexist in the lines where he denies that he understands what is going on, leaving Othello to parse out what he thinks Iago means. Iago's choice to not overtly state what he thinks also works to give Othello the illusion of control; it lets Othello believe that he has drawn the appropriate conclusions himself rather than listened to someone else.

Iago's further reactions to the visual prompt of Desdemona and Cassio's meeting along with his feigned reticence to provide his inner thoughts prove to be effective tools for establishing his credibility as Othello interprets these actions as ones born out of care and fear, and hence more "honest" than had Iago just outright told him that he suspected that Cassio and Desdemona were involved. The initial withholding of evidence also enables Othello to transform thought into something just as physical and visual as what he literally sees:

"Think, my lord?" Alas, thou echo'st me

As if there were some monster in thy thought

Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean something.

I heard thee even now thou "lik'st not that"

When Cassio left my wife. What didst not like?

And when I told thee he was of my counsel,

Of my course of wooing, thou cried'st "Indeed?"

And didst contract and purse thy brow together

As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain

Some horrible conceit. If thou dost love me,

Show me thy thought. (3.3.105-115)

Taking Iago's words as evidence, Othello quotes Iago three times throughout this response, first directly repeating Iago's preceding line (which was also repeating Othello), and then citing Iago's reactions to information. Othello interprets Iago's repetition as reticence to reveal information and his verbal and nonverbal reactions to be spontaneous and more accurate reflections of what Iago thinks. Then, Othello transforms Iago's unspoken thoughts into visual images, describing them as a "monster… / Too hideous to be shown" (3.3.104-105), and asking Iago to literally "show me thy thought" (3.3.115). A person's thoughts, if that person be trustworthy, can be evidence as strong as if one witnessed something with their own eyes. That the image is somehow also unseeable, literally "too hideous to be shown," also adds to its mystique and, for Othello at least, its reliability.

Indeed, what ultimately makes Iago's arguments so convincing for Othello is that he does not start with evidence. Rather, he begins with insinuation and a framework that Othello adopts in examining the actions of Desdemona and Cassio. This insinuation is something always either somewhat true or at least of concern for Othello and thus increases his reliability. Jean Klene notes this irony: "The 'honest' Iago has the Moor so

much in his power…that he really can be honest in stating part of the truth, which causes Othello to trust him even more."[92] As he slowly leads Othello to suspect Desdemona's marital fidelity, Iago is exceedingly careful not to offer any specific proofs and certainly not any concrete visual evidence. Rather, he spends his lines establishing his credibility as a like-minded individual who, while not perfect, only wants what is best for his friend and not to hurt him. He establishes his credibility through a variety of means, first by being resistant to reveal incriminating information, then by ascribing the flaws that he wishes to project on Othello to himself—he calls himself "jealous" and susceptible to dark thoughts in private. Iago also places the burden of proof on Othello, enjoining him to investigate Cassio and Desdemona for himself. Finally, he uses syllogistic reasoning by addressing Desdemona not as a person, but as a Venetian woman.

In his description of Iago's use of reason, Terence Hawkes identifies two major ways of reasoning and knowing for the Elizabethans, divided into *ratio superior* and *ratio inferior*. Of the former, Hawkes explains, there is "no ratiocination is involved in it, and no discursive thought-process is required; all knowledge is infused in a moment, in an intuitive flash, and as a result of literally inspired vision of the Godhead and the life of the spirit is achieved."[93] This type of knowledge is akin to the prophetic knowledge discussed in Chapter 5—it is instantaneous, divinely sanctioned, and wholly unprovable by any other sense. It is simply certain and absolute. Drawing from John

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[92] Jean Klene, "Othello: 'A Fixed Figure for the Time of Scorn,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1975): 142.
[93] Terence Hawkes, "Iago's Use of Reason," *Studies in Philology* 53, no. 2 (1961): 162.

Wilkins, Matthew Hale, Robert Boyle, and John Locke, among others, Shapiro outlines a schema of different kinds of knowledge. At the top is type of God's knowledge and below are "three or four human categories" that included logic, sensory experience, beliefs, and opinions.[94] These sub-categories, particularly those emphasizing logic and discursive reasoning, entail the ratio inferior that Hawkes identifies. This Aristotelian division serves as a distinction between an unchanging divine knowledge and a contingent human knowledge.

In this second sense, Othello is a remarkably rational figure, both in terms of how collected he is at the beginning of the play, especially when dragged out in the middle of the night for a trial, and how he reasons through different events. Yet his reason quickly cracks in the face of any uncertainty or contradiction to his overall perception. And this need for absolute certainty is at odds with the late Renaissance world which noted the discrepancies between appearances and realities, as Susan Schreiner notes, places Othello at risk for Iago's manipulations as "Othello could not endure doubt and skepticism. Othello demanded certainty at all costs."[95] Iago, who thrives at being what he is not has no problem with discrepancies or when lived experience does not match expectation.

Iago exploits Othello's rationality and reliance on logical reasoning to a terrifying degree. He takes the logically tight proof structures of syllogisms and provides

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[94] Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 28-29.
[95] Susan E. Schreiner, "Appearances and Reality in Luther, Montaigne, and Shakespeare," *The Journal of Religion* 83, no. 3 (2003): 371.

a series of circumstantial pieces of evidence that can be read in light of the premises he promotes. Hawkes elaborates on the potential danger of this type of reasoning and how Othello manifests that danger:

> The "lower" [sensory and rational] reason…does little more than place an "explicable" and predictable pattern of its own over certain events (the eavesdropping scene is the climax of this process). The world that such a reason reveals is not the true world, but is a product of the reasoner; it cannot compare with, or explain the whole cosmos that Othello's and Desdemona's love involves in itself. Nevertheless, in the grip of Iago's reasoning, Othello slips into easy categorization; Desdemona becomes for him the familiar "Venetian wife," the "super-subtle Venetian" that Iago had said she was.[96]

In other words, Iago encourages Othello to think in terms of larger premises and uses pieces of explicit evidence (testimonies, staged meetings, and planted evidence) to serve as verification of that premise. Hawkes's above reading of Iago's persuasion matches with other interpretations of Iago's rhetorical finesse. James Hirsh in particular links this type of reasoning to syllogistic logic, identifying "a double syllogism: (1) Venetian women are deceptive; Desdemona is a Venetian woman; therefore, Desdemona is deceptive; (2) Desdemona deceived her father; people are consistent; therefore, Desdemona is deceptive."[97] People are incapable, in Othello's eyes at least, of being

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[96] Hawkes, "Iago's Use of Reason," 168.
[97] James Hirsh, "*Othello* and Perception" in Othello*: New Perspectives*, eds. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Kent Cartwright (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991), 138.

wholly consistent in their appearances and actions. Iago knows this, and uses Othello's unshakable faith in this form of knowing to both persuade Othello of Desdemona's guilt and Iago's honesty.

Proof and what counts as proof continues to be a concern for the remainder of the play, and nowhere is this clearer than when Othello demands that Iago literally bring him visual evidence. Ocular proof of something like infidelity in an age before camera, however, is hard to come by. Othello does not call for explicit proof until after Iago has planted the conclusion into his head, and for a moment, it seems like he may have seen through Iago's scheme:

> Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore;
>
> Be sure of it! Give me the ocular proof
>
> ……………………………………….
>
> Make me to see't, or at the least so prove it
>
> That the probation bear no hinge nor loop
>
> To hang a doubt on, or woe upon thy life! (3.3.356-7, 361-63)

Othello's call for evidence is aggressively visual—he demands "ocular proof" and to "see't"; however, even in these quick lines, Othello considers backtracking from visual evidence and would be content with the removal of any doubt. With this acknowledgement, Othello's epistemological grip starts to slip. The only way for him to know for sure that Desdemona is cuckholding him is to see the action. Proving the negative (that is, that Desdemona and Cassio are not having dalliances) is impossible visually.

As he torments Othello in the third act, Iago articulates this challenge while simultaneously creating ekphrastic images that substitute for visual proof. The image begins with a simple question: "Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on, / Behold her topped?" (3.3.400-401). Othello, realizing that visual evidence of the event would mean actively witnessing his cuckolding, lets out a distressed exclamation as Iago illustrates an even more graphic and less likely scenario likening Desdemona and Cassio to animals and fools:

> It's impossible you should see this,
>
> Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,
>
> As salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross
>
> As ignorance made drunk. (3.3.407-10)

In these lines, Iago simultaneously illustrates the impossibility of seeing the act—Othello would not want to see it, and even if he could; but he also, in good Iagian fashion, gives Othello a rhetorically constructed visual. That is, Iago uses ekphrasis, or the verbal creation of a particularly vivid and affective image as a clever simulacrum for what Othello demands. The image seems to be more than sufficient for Othello to believe Iago though he never literally sees any of the things Iago describes with his physical eyes, though he does seem to have trouble ridding himself of that vision evoked in his mind's eye. We can tell because of the later, less concrete proofs that Iago provides as well as Othello's shift from requiring absolute certainty of Desdemona's infidelity to the more abstract "living reason she's disloyal" (3.3.414). The scene also

pivots on the double meanings of Othello's demand for satisfaction: that is, the satisfaction of knowledge and sexual satisfaction. Marjorie Pryse elaborates:

> Othello feels as if he were beholding Cassio and Desdemona, and thus finds, in his fantasy, the mental satisfaction or "ocular proof" that he demands; at the same time, Iago's mental picture is so vivid that it also cuts Othello completely from sexual satisfaction. Iago turns Othello into his own wife's voyeur.[98]

Pryse's reading further illustrates the challenge of ocular proof and the creative way that Shakespeare incorporates it within the play. The effect of Iago's verbal description reflects the affective potential of the physical sight itself, thus granting Othello the worst of both worlds. He visualizes but does not see; he suffers and it was all description. The result is certainly sad for Othello himself and thought-provoking for an audience who both feels Othello's anguish and may question on the larger level how reliable another person's word is.

As James Knapp suggests, the knowledge practices staged within *Othello* are ultimately rhetorical: "the stories…possess a peculiar emphasis on the visible, a category that is identified (by the characters) with the language of objectivity grounded in a material, empiricist epistemology, but which the play reveals to be a category discursively constructed to suit the narrative logic of the characters."[99] The importance of ocular proof in *Othello* is not that it actually proves anything. Rather, the play

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[98] Marjorie Pryse, "Lust for Audience: An Interpretation of *Othello*," *English Literary History* 43, no. 4 (1976): 471.

[99] James A. Knapp, "'Ocular Proof': Archival Revelations and Aesthetic Response," *Poetics Today* 24, no. 4 (2003): 705.

emphasizes that something that is seemingly concrete and material may nevertheless be adapted and shaped to other uses, depending on the needs, desires, and thoughts of the characters who encounter such materials.

Iago's description of Desdemona and Cassio actively having sex is not his only example of rhetorically-driven sensory proof. Immediately after Othello asks for "a living reason she is disloyal" as opposed to "being made to see't," Iago turns to other proofs that, even if they had been true, are hearsay. Iago reluctantly (but not really) describes a dream that Cassio had when they last shared a bed together:

> 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 grip and wring my hand,
>
> Cry, "O sweet creature!" then kiss me hard
>
> As if he plucked up kisses by the roots
>
> That grew upon my lips; laid his leg o'er my thigh,
>
> And sighed, and kissed, and then cried, "Cursèd fate,
>
> That gave thee to the Moor!" (3.3.410-422)

Iago's description of Cassio's dream and confession serves multiple requirements for proof. Prior to the actual description, Iago reiterates his love for Othello as well as his own honesty, thus allying himself with his listener as he has done elsewhere. He also frames the encounter to subtly pre-dispose Othello to believe that what the imaginary Cassio says is true and the reflection of an inner thought. In a move reminiscent of Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking, Iago's Cassio provides the equivalent of a confession by both naming Desdemona and the crime that Othello most fears: "Let us hide our loves," and concluding with a direct reference to Othello as "the Moor," just to ensure that he was not talking about a different Desdemona. As a confession, there is little one could do to make it clearer other than have Cassio literally remark that he enjoyed the last time they had relations.

Ironically, speaking a scene in the dark makes it far more visual, at least to Othello, than it would have been had he actually been there. Iago achieves this effect through other sensory input, including the imaginary senses of hearing, touch, and, depending on Othello's imagination, taste. Cassio, according to Iago, outright confesses to desiring Desdemona, though he does not explicitly state that they have had sex. The actions that Iago describes, with himself substituting for Desdemona, certainly imply a level of erotic intimacy. Cassio kisses Iago twice, once "hard / As if he plucked up kisses by the roots / that grew upon my lips" (3.3.418-420), and then "laid his leg o'er my thigh" (3.3.420). Michael Shurgot reads this scene as explicitly homoerotic, explaining that "What Iago…narrates is presumably what he desires Cassio would actually say to

him in a situation that Iago wishes would actually occur."[100] Bruce Smith, in contrast,

takes this scene and others where Iago remarks on the sexual form of another man to be

representative of a threat to the homosocial order of which he is part. Smith contends,

"In…the play's verbal images we witness, not Iago's repressed homosexuality, but his

male bondedness. Whatever homoerotic feeling he manifests arises, not out of any

'repressed' desires that set him apart from other men, but out of his self-definition as a

man among men, as a solider among soldiers."[101] Regardless of Iago's sexual attractions

(and how these unrequited attractions affect his character and motivations), this moment

strikes me more as a chance for Iago taunt Othello with the "things" (his is wife and his

subordinate) that Cassio has supposedly usurped from him as opposed to Iago taking a

moment to speak out an inner fantasy. By substituting his body, imagined or otherwise,

with Desdemona's in this narrative, Iago pretends to render himself vulnerable, and this

vulnerability is crucial to the character he has created in order to deceive Othello.

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[100] Michael W. Shurgot, "'I lay with Cassio lately': Iago's Fantasy, the Actor, and Audience," in *Shakespeare's Sense of Character: On the Page and from the Stage*, ed. Yu Jin Ko and Michael W. Shurgot (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 156. For additional readings on Iago's homosexual desire in *Othello*, see Stanley Edgar Hyman, "Iago Psychoanalytically Motivated," *The Centennial Review* 14, no. 4 (1970): 369-384; William Collins Watterson, "'O monstrous world': Shakespeare's Beast with Two Backs," *Upstart Crow* 13 (1993): 79-93, esp. 86-87.
[101] Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 63.

The Overabundance of Ocular Proof

By contrast, in *The Changeling* visual evidence is provided even where it was not expected or even desired. Upon reporting to Beatrice-Joanna that he has murdered Alonso, De Flores proffers Alonso's ring finger and ring to her, an act that surprises her and reveals the material consequences of her demands:

> BEATRICE-JOANNA. Is it done, then?
>
> DE FLORES.   Piracquo is no more.
>
> BEATRICE-JOANNA. My joys start at mine eyes; our sweet'st delights
>
>   Are evermore born weeping.
>
> DE FLORES. I've a token for you.
>
> BEATRICE-JOANNA.   For me?
>
> DE FLORES. But it was sent somewhat unwillingly:
>
>   I could not get the ring without the finger.
>
> BEATRICE-JOANNA. Bless me! What hast thou done? (3.4.24-9)

The questions bookending this passage—"Is it done, then?" and "What hast thou done?"—reveal Beatrice-Joanna's two distinct mindsets. When she first probes De Flores, Beatrice-Joanna indicates to the audience that she truly wanted Alonso dead and that she owned her part in his death. However, once faced with the literal remnants of his corpse, Beatrice-Joanna reacts less with certainty and more with disgust and surprise. In hiring De Flores, she had intended to distance herself from both the physical reality and moral weight of murder, both consequences that De Flores reflects back to her through

the severed ring finger and his demand for her virginity in payment for his services.[102]

Edward Engelberg argues that "the main action of *The Changeling* ensues from

Beatrice's defective sight, her impulsive responses to the world which she can see but

never visualize."[103] While I would disagree that Beatrice-Joanna's sight is "defective"—

if anything it seems to be working a bit too well—Engleberg's point about being able to

see but not visualize holds considerably well for this scene. Although she had fully

intended to have Alonso murdered, she had not thought about the reality of murder.

Moreover, this scene emphasizes the power of visual proof: in theory, De Flores could

have taken Alonso's ring and proffered a finger (Alonso's or another corpse's) and let

Alonso flee—and Beatrice-Joanna still would have believed him.

Alonso's severed finger serves the same affective purpose as Iago's descriptions

of Desdemona's and Cassio's supposed coupling. Though one is literal and visible, and

the other imaginary and visualized the effect is the same. Neither Othello nor Beatrice-

Joanna can bear to witness these sights, literally gasping and turning away. What makes

the sights unbearable has to do with the bodies (or body parts) in question. The abject

horror of the physical body, whether imagined or explicitly seen, works as a particularly

effective piece of evidence that drives Othello and Beatrice-Joanna to more willingly

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[102] Interestingly, while De Flores ultimately convinces Beatrice-Joanna of her responsibility for Alonzo's murder, remarking that in hiring him, she's just as guilty as the actual murderer, De Flores himself seems to also distinguish the degree of sin between the two. He remarks, "I could ha' hired / A journeyman in murder at this rate, / And mine own conscience might have lain at ease, / And have had the work brought home" (3.4.70-73).
[103] Engelberg, "Tragic Blindness *in The Changeling*," 21-22.

accept what they are being told, regardless of whether the claim they were given was true or not.

Alonso's ring finger and Desdemona's handkerchief serve parallel purposes in their plays. Both represent (accurately or not) a reprehensible crime that triggers the downward spiral of several characters, whether innocent or guilty. Where the two differ is the amount of context and knowledge the audience brings when interpreting these props, and how that knowledge compares to what the on-stage interpreters (Othello and Beatrice-Joanna) know. In *The Changeling*, Beatrice-Joanna knows that she has asked De Flores to kill Alonso; indeed, she expects the murder. However, she does not expect to confront that reality until De Flores reveals the severed digit. The audience, in contrast, does not need the body horror to prove that De Flores is a murderer, for they have already seen or read the previous scene where De Flores kills Alonso and cuts off his finger. The prop then serves as a catalyst for Beatrice-Joanna to begin coming to terms with her own role in the murder as well as a practical device for aligning Beatrice-Joanna with the information that audience already knows from seeing the previous scene.

In *Othello,* the handkerchief operates similarly to Alonso's severed finger. The handkerchief means two very different things for the wounded husband and the observing audience. The dramatic irony just happens to be more pronounced, with the horror coming not from dismemberment, but from the audience's growing concern for Desdemona. Several scholars have already explicated the significance this famous prop,

attending both to its symbolic and material circumstances.[104] In a series of escalating

statements, Othello attributes more and more significance to this strawberry-spotted

prop, first claiming that it was his first gift to Desdemona (3.3.441), an enchanted cloth

given by an Egyptian charmer to his mother (3.4.53-58), and finally, after he has

murdered Desdemona, "an antique token" that his father gave to his mother (5.2.223-

24).

However, before he even informs the audience of the handkerchief's

significance, Othello sees the supposedly sacred artifact and tells Desdemona to leave it

on the floor. After confessing to Iago that he does not trust his wife, a distraught Othello

speaks faintly and complains of a headache (induced by his imagining of cuckold's

horns growing on his forehead). Desdemona, suggesting that his man pain comes from

lack of sleep, offers to bind his head, presumably with her handkerchief, though that

direction is not clear to a reader until a few lines later:

> DESDEMONA.   Why do you speak so faintly?
>
>   Are you not well?
>
> OTHELLO. I have a pain upon my head here.
>
> DESDEMONA. Why, that's with watching; twill away again.

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[104] See, for instance, Harry Berger, Jr., "Impertinent Trifling: Desdemona's Handkerchief," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (1996): 235-250; Perry Guevara, "Desdemona's Dildo: Fetish Objects and Transitional Sex in *Othello*," *Early Modern Culture* 11 (2016): 27-45; John A. Hodgson, "Desdemona's Handkerchief as an Emblem of Her Reputation," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 19, no. 3 (1977): 313-322; Dan O'Brien, "Desdemona's Handkerchief, Engineered Knowledge and Justification," *Analysis & Metaphysics* 7 (2008): 97-113, esp. 100-103.

Let me bind it hard, within this hour

It will be well.

OTHELLO. Your napkin is too little.

Let it alone.

[*They drop the handkerchief.*]

Come, I'll go in with you.

DESDEMONA. I am very sorry that you are not well.

Exeunt.

EMILIA. I am very glad I have found this napkin:

This was her first remembrance from the Moor. (3.3.280-289, brackets

original)

Several modern editions, including the two most recent Norton editions and the

Riverside Shakespeare, as well as some earlier eighteenth-century editions insert a stage

direction indicating that the handkerchief falls, placed after Othello's line that

Desdemona's "napkin is too little." How exactly the dropping occurs or who's

responsible varies from edition to edition. The Norton's addition (quoted in full above),

for instance, "*They drop the handkerchief*," keeps the details vague and presumably up

to the director and actors, whereas the Riverside's "He puts the handkerchief from him,

and it drops"[105] calls for Othello to actively resist the handkerchief, either dropping it

himself or pushing it away so that Desdemona drops it. A London edition from 1771

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[105] *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1223.

places all the onus on Desdemona, asserting that "She drops her handkerchief."[106]

Although the stage direction is not include in any of the seventeenth-century editions,

which include the 1623 folio and quartos from 1622, 1630, 1655, 1681, 1687, and 1695.

The lack of stage directions here is not particularly odd, given that Shakespeare's printed

playbooks tended to lack all but the bare minimum of stage directions such as entrances

and exits. Nevertheless, the emendation that editors have made post-1700s makes

absolute sense. The handkerchief must be dropped so that Emilia can immediately pick it

up.

The manner in which the handkerchief is dropped may lead to several

performances, some emphasizing Othello's deliberate rejection and others seeing the

initial loss and incidental to both Desdemona and Othello as they have other things on

their minds. Harry Berger reads Othello's command to "let it alone," that is, leave the

cloth on the floor, as "a double rejection. In his rejection of her offer to soothe him, she

hears the message that she does not deserve and should not have the handkerchief.

Dropping it may be read simultaneously as an act of obedience and as a contestatory

gesture rejecting his rejection—he doesn't deserve the love and fidelity her possession of

the handkerchief symbolizes."[107] However, the actual reasoning for why both

Desdemona and Othello do not really think about the significance of the dropped

handkerchief, I suggest, is far simpler. At the moment the handkerchief drops in the

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[106] William Shakespeare. *Othello, the Moor of Venice. A tragedy. As it is now acted at the Theatres Royal in Drury-Lane and Covent-Garden* (London, 1771), 40.
[107] Harry Berger, Jr., "Impertinent Trifling," 237.

play, the audience does not know its significance. Even Othello doesn't realize its significance, or he really does not care as he is distracted by his growing jealousy. The handkerchief only becomes an object of interest because of Iago's attention to it. It is an object that takes on meaning as the play progresses rather than beginning with any importance beyond personal attachment.

Iago's ocular proof takes the form of two rhetorical constructions: ekphrastic descriptions of sex and setup for future interpretations of visual evidence. The ekphrastic sex includes lines where Iago compares Desdemona and Cassio to goats, monkeys, wolves, and fools whereas his setup includes his narrative surrounding Desdemona's handkerchief and interactions between Desdemona and Cassio that Othello sees but does not hear. These constructions, thoroughly intertwined, operate as functions of each other. In the former, Iago fabricates visual evidence with his words, painting a picture that implants in Othello's mind and refuses to be dislodged for most of the play. In the latter, Iago uses words to provide a framework for upcoming visual evidence, a framework that like the image, Othello cannot or will not look beyond. Both are fundamentally rhetorical, though what makes them so effectively convincing for Othello is their close association with visual evidence. For Othello, seeing is proof, regardless of how the thing seen is created or framed.

Alsemero, on the other hand, operates under different epistemological frameworks than Othello and Iago once he suspects that Beatrice-Joanna may not be entirely virginal. Like Othello, he learns about his bride's infidelity through the insinuations of a trusted subordinate, Jasperino, but this is where the similarities end. For

one, the play gives us no indication that Jasperino should not be trusted; he's not Hamlet whose information gets contradicted or twisted, he's not Justice Overdo who cannot parse a popular Latin tag correctly, nor is he Iago who literally tells the audience that he's up to no good. Secondly, Jasperino reports not just a rumor but what he himself has secretly overheard. He uses a kind auditory ekphrasis, yes, but he does not paint pictures with his words to illustrate sex or misconstrue meaning like Iago does. Combined, these two things lead to Alsemero logically being skeptical of his bride and desirous to use the convenient virginity test he already has prepared. Rather than Othello who asks for ocular proof but accepts ekphrasis and probability of infidelity, Alsemero wants and has the means to obtain ocular proof.

Middleton and Rowley present a convenient, visual way to prove a woman's virginity that reports to be certain, less invasive for the woman, and, at least for the man, potentially less traumatizing than seeing his lover with another. Ocular proof in this play takes many forms, most famously, the virginity potion test. In her new husband's private cabinet, Beatrice-Joanna discovers two potions labeled Vial M and Vial C, which, according to a manuscript book, purport to tell whether a woman is a virgin or pregnant. Vial M, once imbibed, promotes several visual effects, as Alsemero's book describes:

> Give the party you suspect the quantity of a Spoonful of the water in the glass M, which, upon her that Is a maid, makes three several effects: 'twill make her incontinently gape, then fall into a sudden sneezing, last into a Violent laughing, else dull, heavy, and lumpish. (4.1.44-49)

Ultimately, the potion makes something invisible—virginity—visible. Cognizant that the potion is already prepared and in the private possession of her husband who has dog-eared the page, Beatrice immediately decides that she must test the potion for herself to see if it actually works. She takes on the role of the empiricist when she tests the potion on her maid, Diaphanta, whom Beatrice-Joanna suspects is not a virgin—"I fear you may be too quick to be a maid" (citation)—and herself. The test reveals otherwise. Diaphanta does all three things: yawn, sneeze, and laugh whereas, as Beatrice notices, the draught "stirs [her] not a whit" (4.1.111). The potion proves to be revelatory, allowing for each woman's virginity status that was ostensibly invisible to be rendered visible.

The virginity test, as written, also illustrates not just an empiricist paradigm but a rhetorical one. Bueler calls Mizaldus's test "a hypothetical proposition or hypothetical syllogism, the formula of the logic of cause and effect."[108] The same rhetorical quandary that Othello finds himself in (If all Venetian women are unfaithful, and Desdemona is a Venetian woman, then Desdemona is unfaithful) serves as the setup for Alsemero to interpret the potion. To place the situation in syllogistic terms, if a woman drinks the potion and exhibits the stated effects, she is a virgin. Beatrice-Joanna (and Diaphanta in Beatrice-Joanna's earlier experiment) drink the potion and gape, sneeze, and laugh. Therefore, they are virgins. The difference between Othello's syllogism and Alsemero's comes largely down to how the second premise is obtained and interpreted.

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[108] Bueler, "The Rhetoric of Change," 109.

How Alsemero interprets the visual results of the virginity test links to his initial desire to justify strong response to Beatrice-Joanna when he first saw her. He seeks validation of his beliefs through the potion and Mizaldus as an authority. Alsemero's reading on Beatrice-Joanna's chastity, at least midway through the play, is supported not just by the virginity test, but by her very performance of virginity. Indeed, he does not seem to have any distrust of his wife until Jasperino tells him otherwise. Jasperino overheard Beatrice and her lover De Flores together in a private room next to one he was in. Like Othello, Alsemero resolves to obtain his own personal proof by means of Vial M. However, Beatrice who already knows what the potion is supposed to do from her previous tests, fabricates the results, in essence creating a false positive for her virginity.

When considering this infamous virginity test, earlier critics largely felt that the scene was unnecessary and unrealistic.[109] This particular potion, as Tanya Pollard asserts, is "the only one of its kind in the period's drama."[110] Recent years, however, have been kinder to the scene, taking it and many of its antecedents as referencing a contemporary event: Frances Howard's semi-public pelvic examination in order to prove that her marriage to her husband had never been consummated and her later involvement in her (former) husband's murder along with her lover/new husband.[111] Recent readers

[109] N. W. Bawcutt, ed, *The Changeling* by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 69; Samuel Schoenbaum, *Middleton's Tragedies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 145.

[110] Tanya Pollard, "Drugs, Remedies, Poisons, and the Theatre," in *Thomas Middleton in Context*, ed. Suzanne Gossett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 293.

[111] See especially Mara Amster, "Frances Howard and Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*: Trials, Tests, and the Legibility of the Virgin Body," in *The Single Woman in Medieval and Early Modern England: Her Life and Representation*, ed. Laurel

have also further contextualized the scene by considering early modern anatomy theaters and texts including far-fetched tests on making the virgin body legible.[112] Such readings in the distant and closer pasts reveal just as much about the state of literary criticism as they do *The Changeling*. From a structural standpoint, devoid of its seventeenth-century contexts, the scene is a little wacky. Why in the world would Alsemero, a sailor who should be out sailing at this time, randomly have a cabinet filled with ready-made potions tailored explicitly toward reading women's bodies? Why would he have a written text detailing how they work? Moreover, how and why does the potion work? And why is it so easily replicated? From a modern standpoint, it doesn't make much sense at all.

From an early modern (and indeed, narrative) standpoint, however, the scene makes plenty of sense. Bizarre potions with very specific effects occur throughout Renaissance drama, after all. Both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cymbeline* contain sleeping draughts that mimic death,[113] and a description of just such a potion appears in Folger

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Amtower and Dorothea Kehler (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003), 211-232; and Sara D. Luttfring, "Bodily Narratives and the Politics of Virginity in *The Changeling* and the Essex Divorce," *Renaissance Drama* 39 (2011): 97-123.

[112] See Howard Marchitello, *Narrative and Meaning in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially Chapter 1: "Shakespeare's *Othello* and Vesalius's *Fabrica*: Anatomy, Gender and the Narrative Production of Meaning"; and Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

[113] For more on these potions, see Mary Floyd-Wilson, "Potions, Passion, and Fairy Knowledge in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," in *Shakespeare in Our Time: A Shakespeare Association of America Collection,* ed. Dympna Callaghan and Suzanne Gossett (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 184-188; Patricia Parker, "(Peter) Quince: Love Potions, Carpenter's Coins, and Athenian Weddings," *Shakespeare Survey* 56 (2003):

MS X.d. 393, a manuscript miscellany that primarily chronicles major battles during Elizabeth's reign and her death. Toward the end of the manuscript codex, among mathematical calculations and accounts, appears a recipe for "A Dormant drink," which promises to "bereave the sense with colde numbness, et mortify the Patient by an houre, slumbring for 2 daies et by no meanes waking."[114] Whether or not this particular draught was used, the manuscript does not say, but the text implies that the idea of a potion having these seemingly miraculous properties was at least within the realm of possibility in the early seventeenth century. Furthermore, even assuming that the early modern audience either would have been able to suspend disbelief or assume that *The Changeling*'s virginity and pregnant test potions were plausible, we should also be aware of the narrative function of these potions. Dale B.J. Randall reminds us of two things: "[Middleton and Rowley's] time is not ours"[115] and the virginity test must be able to be reproduced on-stage. Several scholars, including Randall, Sara Luttfring, and Mara Amster have uncovered multiple instances of available virginity tests, the majority of which required drinking something and then testing the color and scent of urine while others produce longer effects. These traditional results, regardless of their accuracy (they were not particularly reliable, as even their contemporaries could attest), were not

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39-54; Tanya Pollard, "A Thing Like Death: Sleeping Potions in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Renaissance Drama* 32 (2003): 95-121.

[114] Folger MS X.d. 393, f. 34r. A digital image of the recipe is available via LUNA: https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/5fc2n8

[115] Dale B. J. Randall, "Some Observations on the Theme of Chastity in *The Changeling*," *English Literary Renaissance* 14, no. 3 (1984): 364.

dramaturgically effective for the stage, a medium that needs clear and immediate effects, as Randall explains:

> For the test to be effective onstage it must cause symptoms that members of an audience can readily observe, and it must do so promptly so as to juxtapose unmistakably the drink and its effects, as well as keep the play moving. It cannot call for the player acting Beatrice-Joanna to urinate or fall asleep for twelve hours. And the three required actions in sequence—gaping, sneezing, and laughing—are in aggregate far more convincing than any single one of them would be alone. The test as we have it is very much in touch with tradition but modified to be stageworthy.[116]

Middleton and Rowley therefore invite us to see this scene as an exaggerated pastiche of virginity tests and the anxiety surrounding the determination of female virginity. More importantly, staging the scenes as they do allows for the audience to have concrete access to all available evidence that they do not necessarily have in *Othello*. By literally staging the experiment, Middleton and Rowley ensure that the audience knows how the potion works and that Beatrice-Joanna is fabricating the results when it is used upon her.

The certainty that Middleton and Rowley create in *The Changeling* by choosing to stage the majority of the action or to relay and verify any off-stage events by credible sources, differs considerably from the ambiguity on display in *Othello*. Due in no small

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[116] Randall, "Some Observations on the Theme of Chastity," 360. Randall, along with most textual editors, reads "gaping" as synonymous for laughing. Some performances interpret gaping to also include incontinence and on-stage urination.

part to its emphasis on the more humanist rhetorical mode of knowing, Shakespeare

evokes uncertainty in characters and audiences alike, effectively gaslighting them.[117]

Thomas Moisan attributes the creation of uncertainty to the back-and-forth relationship

between interrogation and repetition of key themes and words, arguing that "the play of

repetition and questioning simultaneously evokes a dissonance that challenges our

understanding of what the play enacts and, more to the point, challenges our ability to

know and make judgment about what we have experienced."[118] I would add that the

deliberate disorientation also comes from the extended meditation on the ubiquity of the

damaging power of rhetoric within the play.

We have seen this kind of uncertainty before in *Hamlet*, where Shakespeare

mirrors Hamlet's uncertainties and hesitancy in the audience. Millicent Bell boldly

asserts that "*Othello*…is the most intellectual of all Shakespeare's tragedies, including

Hamlet."[119] Arguing the "intellectual-ness" of any play strikes me as an unproductive

move, particularly as the qualities associated with that term are always going to be

contingent on the contexts that the play was composed, performed, read, and seen. I

would revise Bell's argument and instead claim that *Othello* is the most classically

rhetorical of the plays. Indeed, Othello is about as active as the Danish Prince, opting

only to kill at the end of the play. Both also pretend to empiricist strategies, calling for

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[117] See Chapter 2 for more on how Shakespeare introduces doubt in a viewing audience.
[118] Thomas Moisan, "Repetition and Interrogation in *Othello*: 'What needs this
Iterance?' or, 'Can anything be made of this?'" in Othello: *New Perspectives*, eds.
Virginia Mason Vaughan and Kent Cartwright (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson
University Press, 1991), 49.
[119] Millicent Bell, "Othello's Jealousy," *The Yale Review* 85, no. 2 (1997): 121-22.

evidence that supports charges of murder and infidelity. The major difference here is that Hamlet does not have an Iago that plays upon his doubts and character flaws—he seems to do that well enough on his own.

We may return for a moment to Amir Khan's question about Claudius's verbal admission of guilt in *Hamlet*: "what if we, as an audience, had not heard Claudius's confession?"[120] Staging that moment of clarity for the audience justifies Hamlet's hitherto unreasonable actions—whether or not Hamlet actually knows Claudius has committed regicide is beside the point. The audience knows, and thus can sympathize with Hamlet's plans. What if we were to apply this same line of thinking on Iago? What if Iago did not overtly state that he "is not who he is?" If we were not aware that Iago was the machiavel working in the shadows the entire time in order undermine Othello, we too may act like Othello does throughout the play—completely trusting and more willing to accept visual proof that is not actually physically present.

Operating as it does in epistemological flux, *Othello* ultimately cannot escape its humanist origins. Evidence in the play is largely rhetorical, whether narrative or ekphrastic, and when evidence is concrete, it is misread. What causes the misreading is not so much a faulty system, but faulty premises. Othello and Iago alike share this type of thinking, as do other characters in the play. When it comes to proof, *Othello* shows us the dangers of relying too fully on essential categories of what is easy to believe or what we already assume. It also displays the dangerous and beautiful power of rhetoric, for

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[120] Amir Khan, "My Kingdom for a Ghost: Counterfactual Thinking and *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2015): 29.

while there is some visible action in the play—the body count alone in the final scene is verification enough for that—much of the erotic content is limited to charged visual descriptions.

    The Changeling uses a different framework in relation to the audience. Whereas *Othello* (and indeed, many of Shakespeare's plays) treat the audience almost like they're a character, embedded in the plot and the action, Middleton and Rowley treat the audience as a spectator observing a theatrical experiment. Until the play's final scenes, the audience has witnessed everything—Alsemero's and De Flores's attraction toward Beatrice-Joanna, Beatrice-Joanna-Joanna's plots to do away with her fiancé and to swap her virgin maid Diaphanta for herself on her wedding night with Alsemero, De Flores's murder of Alonzo, Tomazo's cries for revenge for his brother, the disguises of the two noblemen in the madhouse, Isabella's awareness of their plot. The audience, seeing both plots, knows more than any individual character. While *The Changeling* opts to let its audience in on most of its secrets, the play takes a deliberate turn for the uncertain at its conclusion, where scenes that would have been staged at earlier moments are kept hidden from the audience. There are four key moments where things are not staged that are worth considering: Jasperino's revelation that he overheard Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores having sex, the bed trick with Diaphanta and Alsemero, Isabella's revelation to her husband that there are two noblemen pretending to be mad, and Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores's entrapment in Alsemero's closet, which I will take in turn.

    The first instance of where Middleton and Rowley opt not to stage and instead rely on report occurs when Jasperino informs Alsemero of Beatrice-Joanna's infidelity.

The choice to not visually portray Jasperino overhearing Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores in bed serves a few ends. For one, the audience already knows that Beatrice-Joanna has agreed to copulate with her late fiancé's murderer as payment for his services. We don't need the additional ocular proof that they are literally in bed together to make that clear, especially as Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores both confirm it in speech.

Similarly, the bed trick of Act 5 is also not explicitly staged—Diaphanta and Alsemero are copulating either off-stage or obscured from the audience's view behind an on-stage door or barrier—while Beatrice-Joanna frets.[121] Early modern plays do not tend to stage intercourse, though they certainly allude to it. What is more important here is that for both these scenes is that who is sleeping with whom is already known to the audience before the scene even happens—what the audience needs to know in these scenes is how Alsemero and Beatrice-Joanna react to their partners coupling with another person. In other words, Middleton and Rowley are judicious with their evidence and typically opt to focus the visual scene on having the audience acquire new evidence rather than confirm what they already know. Confirmation, in *The Changeling*, is relegated to verbal evidence referencing events going on off-stage.

The third important instance where events off-stage are told rather than shown occurs in the play's denouement, when Isabella reveals the resolution of the parallel story in Alibius's madhouse and the exposure of the two noblemen in disguise. Aside from the moment where both plots converge at the end of the play, the characters from

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[121] For more on beds that are explicitly included on stage, see Leslie Thomson, "Beds on the Early Modern Stage," *Early Theatre* 19, no. 2 (2016): 31-58.

the madhouse plot do not appear in the final act. That Isabella, Alibius, Lollio, Antonio, and Franciscus appear at that exact moment is not particularly noteworthy. After all, the two plots should ideally interact at some point. What is noteworthy, however, is that between the moment where we last see them at the end of Act 4 and when they appear in Act 5, Isabella reveals what she knows about Antonio's and Franciscus's disguises to her husband. Somewhere on the road to Vermandero's castle, she tells Alibius everything. We the audience are not privy to it. The party's encounter with Vermandero is also not staged.

Why would Middleton and Rowley not include this information? From a practical standpoint, providing an interlude where the audience witnesses Isabella telling her husband about the errant madmen, and in turn, everyone informing Vermandero, who then assumes that Antonio and Franciscus are behind Alonso's murder would only interrupt the bed trick action and Alsemero's tragic realization. The audience is given the same amount of information in a few short lines as it would in a lengthy scene. Or, perhaps this scene was written at some point, but was cut due to length and lost before it ever had the chance to be printed.

The third example of Rowley and Middleton deliberately opting not to stage anything also occurs at the end of the play: Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores's entrapment in Alsemero's closet. This is not an event that can be immediately explained by *posthoc* reporting; rather, not showing precisely what happens in the closet is a deliberate obfuscation on the part of the playwrights. This choice offers several thematic options depending on how a director, an actor, or a reader characterizes the lovers' tempestuous

relationship. Are they having sex? Is the sex rape? Is Beatrice-Joanna's stabbing a

murder or a suicide? All these options work. If De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna are having

sex in the closet (coerced or otherwise), not staging the scene would follow the

precedent set by the previous two lovemaking scenes not being staged. More

importantly, not visually showing the audience what is occurring inside the closet forces

us to use other interpretive modes to figure out what happened. Throughout the play, the

audience may act like an impartial observer, watching and collecting evidence. In the

other instances of references to events that occurred off-stage, the audience knew full

well what was going on. But here, there is no actual agreement, no confirmation other

than that Beatrice-Joanna has been fatally stabbed.

Conclusions

Ultimately, *The Changeling* and *Othello* present two very different yet still

related takes on the adaptation of ocular proof in dramatic structure. For *Othello*, the

ocular proof is always provided after-the-fact, when other types of proofs have been

introduced and a framework has been established. The only way for ocular proof to skip

this constraint is if the visual becomes verbal through a particularly vivid or ekphrastic

description. Although those descriptions may not be in any way true or accurate, they

nevertheless are imbued with the same affective power that causes Othello and the

audience to feel moved to great emotional heights. Indeed, the audience itself joins

Othello in his questioning, despite that we know that Iago is a self-proclaimed liar and

that Desdemona's interactions with Cassio are entirely innocent. Even what should be concrete visual evidence is ultimately subject to rhetoric and the rhetorician in *Othello*.

At the other end of the spectrum, The *Changeling* offers an abundance of visual evidence for its characters and for its audience. With the exception of a few key scenes which I have discussed, the play stages most of its evidence, allowing the audience to "play the empiricist" and take in the sensory proof. However, by the play's end, the audience and the tragic characters, do not actually know everything, introducing ambiguity to a space where we thought there was none. The play's larger moral on the dangers of sensory proof acts as a sententia made manifest, as like Overdo in *Bartholomew Fair*, the characters become different exempla of the larger theme. Beatrice-Joanna and Alsemero especially embody the dangers of uncritical trust of the visual, whether in their presentation or interpretation of visual evidence.

In both plays, the problem with ocular proof comes down to problems with people—and, problems with sights possessing their own affective power that can manifest in actual sensory experiences or in imagined ones. The dangers of rhetoric that Shakespeare explores in *Othello* are ultimately the same dangers of empiricism that Middleton and Rowley stage in *The Changeling*. Whether through outright lying, performing, or fabricating the results of an experiment, the human source of evidence undermines the success of the intellectual endeavor, regardless of the methods the gatherer may use. Beyond that, these playwrights adapt the method into their poetics and staging, creating spaces of critique that invite the audience not simply to watch or listen to the play, but to become participants in the rhetorical and proto-scientific inquiry. We

follow along with the uncertainty of Othello, seeing what he sees precisely because it's described to us, and only reach a conclusion in death. Likewise, we follow Beatrice-Joanna's certainty until it is obscured for the audience at the play's conclusion. In both cases, the playwrights provide a mixture of methods embedded in the plot and structure of the dramatic text, ultimately revealing that while a rational, inductive approach may be desirable for determining truth, humanist habits of mind and the absence of conclusive proof render that approach untenable.

CHAPTER IV

EVIDENCE OF ENORMITY AND THE EXAMPLE OF OVERDO

IN JONSON'S *BARTHOLOMEW FAIR*

At first glance, Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* does not seem like the kind of play that engages with epistemological debates on methods of early modern knowledge making.[122] The cast contains several Poloniuses where we would expect a Hamlet. Moreover, as the Scrivener describes in the play's Induction, the play was "made to delight all, and to offend none—provided they have either the wit or the honesty to think well of themselves" (Ind 74-77), signaling that *Bartholomew Fair* is intended to be popular fare rather than something more intellectually challenging like Jonson's substantially more academic *Sejanus*. Given this stated popular audience along with its several foolish characters and hijinks that occur throughout the play—including a puppet show debate where the puppet reveals its (lack of) sex organs—criticism has focused its attention on what the play can tells us about contemporary London politics and living, including its sights, sounds, and commercial ventures. Nevertheless, Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* also engages explicitly with epistemological concerns: the playwright offers instruction on the precise ways to interpret his play and a warning of what happens when an errant spectator or hearer fails to follow the rules.

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[122] Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, ed. John Creaser in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 961-1065. All quotations and line numbers are from this edition. Subsequent references are included parenthetically.

Scholarship on Jonson's poetics ranging from earlier structural analyses of the consistent form of his plays to more recent considerations of how *Timber* or the *Discoveries* comfortably conclude that Jonson has a humanist-inspired view of poetry and the poet who makes it.[123] At the core of this philosophy is the Horatian dictum: the aim of the poet is to teach and entertain. Although Philip Sidney further popularized the Horatian ideals in *The Defense of Poetry*, they were already well-known and understood by the classically-educated Jonson who likened himself to Horace in *Poetaster*.[124] This blending of instruction and delight directly relates not only to Jonson's views of poetry but to larger, ongoing shifts in privileged modes of thought in the seventeenth century. Certainly, Jonson's biography suggests a personal reason why he would explicitly direct the interpretative strategies of his audience. Even more interesting and more relevant for the period, however, are the ways that Jonson adapts methods of Renaissance humanism, instilled in him and his contemporaries, alongside with the methods of what would become to be known as empiricism. In blending these competing modes of thinking

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[123] For classic examples of Jonson's play structures, see Edgar C. Knowlton, "The Plots of Ben Jonson," *Modern Language Notes* 44, no. 2 (1929): 77-86; Richard Levin, "The Structure of *Bartholomew Fair*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America (PMLA)* 80, no. 3 (1965): 172-179; L. A. Beaurline, "Ben Jonson and the Illusion of Completeness," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America PMLA* 84, no. 1 (1969): 51-59; Lawrence L. Levin, "Replication as Dramatic Strategy in the Comedies of Ben Jonson," *Renaissance Drama* 5 (1972): 37-74. For more recent discussions dealing with Jonson's poetics and classical influence, see Isaac Hui, "Translation in Ben Jonson: Towards a Definition of Imitation," *Ben Jonson Journal* 20, no. 2 (2013): 223-40; Brian Vickers, "Ben Jonson's Classicism Revisited," *Ben Jonson Journal* 21, no. 2 (2014): 153-202.
[124] Julian Koslow, "Humanist Schooling and Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*," *English Literary History* 73, no. 1 (2006): 120.

(humanism and empiricism), Jonson reveals the productive, if uneasy ways these two intellectual movements cohabited the same public and dramatic spheres.[125] In attempting to call for more personal, empirical evidence, Jonson evokes past genres and past modes of reading and interpreting in order to make his point.

Jonson negotiates web of Renaissance humanism and empiricism by simultaneously encouraging the power of sensory proof, exhorting his audience to judge for themselves the quality of his play, and staging an exemplum of what happens when an individual fails to exercise their judgment appropriately or carefully, thus drawing from popular earlier examples of other exempla like Plutarch's *Lives* or *The Mirror for Magistrates* or even Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. He achieves this aim through a combination of explicit instruction in the play's Induction and his characterization of Justice Adam Overdo, on his own and in contrast with his many foils. These multiple methods, as I will show, exist in an uneasy tension brought on by both epistemological uncertainty endemic to the period as well as Jonson's tumultuous relationship between his audience, his ideas of literature, and his conception of what it means to be an author. I argue that Jonson uses Overdo as an exemplum of the uncritical interpretative practices that Jonson criticizes in the play's Induction, ultimately revealing that misinterpretation

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[125] For more on the web of early modern science and literature, see especially: *The Palgrave Handbook of Early Modern Literature and Science*, ed. by Howard Marchitello and Valerie Tribb (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Eggert, *Disknowledge*: Marchitello, *The Machine in the Text*; Carla Mazzio, ed. "Shakespeare and Science," special issue, *South Central Review* 26, nos. 1 and 2 (2009); Elizabeth Spiller, *Science Reading and Renaissance Literature: The Art of Making Knowledge, 1580-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

lies not within a faulty practice like sensory acquisition but with the fickle individual who does not take the time to critically pursue any given line of inquiry.

To illustrate how Jonson accomplishes the task of blending Renaissance humanism and empiricism, I first define what humanism and empiricism were at the beginning of the seventeenth century, including their methods and how they coexisted. Then, I turn to *Bartholomew Fair* and analyze the lengthy legal-sounding contract put forth in the Induction called the "Articles of Agreement." Afterwards, I follow Adam Overdo, a justice of the peace who spends the majority of the play in disguise as a beggar in order to infiltrate the titular fair and discover "enormities," or crimes usually associated with dishonesty. Though the two are not explicitly connected—although "justice" is mentioned once in passing by the Scrivener—the Induction shapes our expectations and strategies for interpreting the characters similar to the ways a print paratext like a dedicatory epistle or poem deliberately shapes our reading of the printed text it is affixed to. As I will later discuss in detail, the Articles of Agreement provide multiple stipulations on what the audience may or may not do as they watch and judge the play. The Articles, in effect, presume to govern the audience using comic yet seemingly earnest language. Overdo, the major representative of (ineffective) law in the play at-large, stands as the ideal character to analyze according to the rules that the Articles of Agreement set forth.

The Blending of Late Humanism and Early Empiricism

As Isabel Rivers succinctly explains, "A humanist was a classical scholar with two complementary aims: to recover the moral values of classical life, and to imitate the langue and style of the classics as a means to that end. He hoped to unite wisdom (*sapientia*) and eloquence (*eloquentia*)."[126] By Jonson's schooldays, Renaissance humanism had been well-absorbed into English schools at all levels. The curriculum, developed by Erasmus, had begun to be accepted in English schools as early as the 1520s. On a practical level, the early modern English schoolhouse taught children through exempla of moral, civic, literary, or grammatical virtue. Texts, language, and rhetoric thus played crucial roles in shaping generations' understanding of the world around them. Peter Mack describes the rhetorical skills that grammar school students were intended to develop: "School pupils were trained to extract moral sentences from their reading and use them in their writing, to analyse and compose moral narratives, to collect historical examples illustrating ethical principles, to compose letters and themes, to amplify and to recognise and use various figures of rhetoric."[127] Successful students learned not simply to read and write but were indoctrinated into becoming state-approved moral citizens.

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[126] Isabel Rivers, *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry: A Student's Guide*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 125.
[127] Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 2.

Working in response to medieval scholasticism, which emphasized less the original text and more what accepted thinkers (typically Church fathers like Augustine and Jerome) said *about* a given passage, the English grammar school curriculum represented a call for individuals to "return to the text," and to use commentary as a supplement or paratext.[128] Moreover, humanist epistemologies emphasized the learning of an individual, which contributed to the reading and interpreting practices that developed on the Continent and later in England.[129] Due in no small part to religious concerns, the modes of thought adapted in Northern Europe are termed "Christian humanism" with Erasmus as one of its great thinkers. This term, while used predominately in theological discussions of humanism and the important developments in religious thinking of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, is not commonly used to describe related modes of thought in early modern science and literature.[130] Modern scholars focused on content not explicitly tied to religion tend to use the more secular "Renaissance humanism." I have opted to do to the same for this essay.

As Renaissance humanism responded to scholasticism, so too did empiricism respond to humanism. Empiricists valued knowledge based not on written texts but on

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[128] See Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) for more on the complicated relationship between humanism and scholasticism.

[129] For detailed discussions of strategies of humanist reading and interpreting, see Daniel Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading, and English Literature, 1430-*1530 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Eggert, *Disknowledge*, especially 14-54.

[130] For more nuanced distinctions between different kinds of humanism in Europe during the early modern period, see Rummel, *The Confessionalization of Humanism in Reformation Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially page 57 for her distinction in calling Erasmus's humanism explicitly *Christian* humanism.

replicable, sensory evidence. As with humanism, "empiricism" as a descriptor occurred

after the fact, but I have opted to keep these anachronistic terms because they are

understood in today's scholarship and offer a clear terminology. While empiricism and

its methods would be developed more in the later seventeenth centuries, particularly with

philosophers like Thomas Hobbes and the members of the Royal Society, early forms of

an early modern empiricism can be found in Francis Bacon.[131] At its core, empiricism is

an inductive method of reasoning, meaning that one must build a conception of the

universe through individual, discrete experiences. This approach stood in direct contrast

with the deductive methods of late humanism, which derived truth and meaning from a

written source and retrofitted the universe around that base.

Another key component in the transition between humanist and empiricist

schools of thought was the changes in the conception of rhetoric, which was

foundational to the Renaissance humanists' intellectual project.[132] Due to various

influences (most notably Peter Ramus's), rhetoric, which consisted originally of five

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[131] For a history of the development of early empiricism in England and its relationship to Francis Bacon, see Deborah E. Harkness, *The Jewel House: Elizabethan London and the Scientific Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), especially 211-253; Sophie Weeks, "Francis Bacon and the Art-Nature Distinction," *Ambix* 54, no. 2 (2007): 117-145; and Stephen Gaukroger, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[132] For more on the development of rhetoric and its relationship to humanism, see Hanna H. Gray, "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24, no. 4 (1953): 497-514; Wilbur Samuel Howell, "Ramus and English Rhetoric: 1574-1681," *Quarterly Journal of Speech 37*, no. 3 (1951): 299-310; Peter Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric, 1380-1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially 136-163; and Quentin Skinner, *From Humanism to Hobbes: Studies in Rhetoric and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

distinct canons or processes related to the generation of ideas for argument, their

organization, and finally their delivery, were separated into two distinct categories called

logic and dialectic. Logic was comprised of the two processes used for the creation and

organization of thought (*inventio*, literally "finding" of the argument and evidence;

dispositio, or the organization/arrangement of the things discovered in the first stage for

greatest effect). In contrast, the three remaining canons focusing on the actual verbal-

visual presentation of the ideas and arguments (*elocutio*, *memoria*, and *pronuntiatio*)

became the base for dialectic. Dividing the canons into an internal, more "intellectual"

track and the performance-based track resulted in the same effects we may see in our

profession with practitioner/researcher divides, with solitary, intellectual labor receiving

more credence than social, performed labor. Of course, the divide also reinforced the

conception that finding and organizing information is more objective and less affected

by the subjectivity of language whereas the dialectic relies heavily on language and its

manipulation in order to achieve its desired effects. The malleability of language leads it

to be capable of untruth and subject to if not outright distrust, at least concerned

skepticism.

At its core, Renaissance humanism was about classical knowledge. Responding

to the very real terror that ancient knowledge was lost (and not always acknowledging

their debts to the Islamic intellectual world for safeguarding much of the surviving

knowledge), the early humanist sought to secure and maintain as much classical

knowledge as possible. Unfortunately (for humanism at least), its strengths would prove

to be its slow undoing. With wider access to classical texts through print and language

fluency, scholars who initially had to rely on what others had said could begin to judge for themselves the accuracy of the claims of the ancient world and their applicability to (early) modern life.

As intellectual movements, early sixteenth-century Renaissance humanism and seventeenth-century empiricism could not be any more different in their priorities and methods of establishing knowledge. On the surface, at least. Though it is easier to conceive of these two worldviews as completely distinct from each other like teleological stepping stones, the fact that remains that as humanism fell out of favor, it took considerable time before empiricism became the preferred intellectual mode. This conflation of methods, as Katherine Eggert argues, is common to early seventeenth-century England. While *Bartholomew Fair* does not immediately conflate literary methods with methods from other fields, Jonson's other comedies like *The Alchemist* (1610), which uses alchemical processes and materials as the base of his plots, and *The Magnetic Lady* (1632), which uses the occult properties of magnetism, do. *Bartholomew Fair* nevertheless engages in the larger epistemological debates for a desire for more concrete, replicable proof while acknowledging that acquiring that proof has its own challenges.

All of this is to say that the humanist-educated Jonson was an active participant in this fluctuating world where the text-based, rhetorically-driven knowledge system was struggling in response to real challenges. Furthermore, as Julian Koslow explains, "The pedagogy through which Jonson was taught, deriving as it did from the rhetorical pedagogy of ancient Rome, already tended to treat texts as if they were exemplary

bodies, exerting a charismatic hold over readers and serving as models for a pedagogy of imitation which was often imagined in terms that were as much those of ethical demeanor as of literary style."[133] How does one reconcile the epistemological problem where two different points-of-authority (a classical text versus a sensory experience) contradict? Eventually, seventeenth-century intellectuals would overcorrect in their response, privileging modes of thinking and learning that would become associated with science, and devaluing epistemological modes that would become associated with the arts, including rhetoric; still later thinkers and creators would continue to see-saw. These questions, as we will see, were not simply the purview of intellectuals writing for other intellectuals. Jonson and his contemporary poets and playwrights would weigh in on this confusing transition, albeit not necessarily providing definitive answers.

Sensory Experience and *Bartholomew Fair*

As a form, drama is particularly worthwhile for analyzing the transition between empiricism and humanism because it relies so heavily on both methods. Theater is, above all else, both a sensory experience and a rhetorical one. Although an audience member may have some familiarity with a play's narrative, whether through knowing a source text or seeing the play performed before, the early modern audience member tends to experience drama through all their senses. And *Bartholomew Fair* is full of

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[133] Koslow, "Humanist Schooling in Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*," 125.

sensory experience as it creates not only a visual and aural spectacle but a spectacle reliant on scent and taste.

First performed in 1614 at The Hope Theater in London and again the next evening at court,[134] but not published until the 1640 edition of Jonson's *Workes*, *Bartholomew Fair* has received considerable attention, especially in terms of the sounds and smells of the city, whether Smithfield as referenced in the Induction or to London in general. In his extensive study on sensory experience and Jacobean city comedies, Hristomir A. Stanev demonstrates that dramatists like Jonson were significantly interested in using the senses on stage, due in no small part to vast political, social, and material changes at the turn of the century:

> A considerable demographic and material flux, endemic to the late Tudor and
> Stuart period of London's development, was beginning to alter the experiential
> dynamic of the urban terrain and was affecting the sensibilities of the inhabitants,
> who…registered change perceptible through a number of daily routines that
> "every man doth behold."[135]

Coupled with the "demographic and material" shifts that Stanev identifies, we may also include the nascent development of scientific inquiry, insofar as it is beginning to be codified. The shift in how an early modern person, particularly a Londoner, experienced

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[134] For more on the site-specific connections between the Hope and *Bartholomew Fair*, see Tom Harrison, "Taking Liberties: The Influence of the Architectural and Ideological Space of the Hope Theatre on Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*," *Ben Jonson Journal* 24, no. 1 (2017): 73-95.

[135] Hristomir A. Stanev, *Sensory Experience and the Metropolis on the Jacobean Stage (1603-1625)* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014): 16.

the world, was, according to Stanev, readily apparent in day-to-day-living. This change then was ripe for exploration for an incredibly topical genre like the Jacobean London city comedy, of which *Bartholomew Fair* is a part.

Scholars have also been interested in the sensory experience of sound throughout the play, especially in relationship to language. James E. Robinson, one of the many to analyze the urbane language of Jonson's city comedies, helpfully describes the comedy's rhetoric as "a composite of a brass-tongued justice of the peace, the rant of a hypocritical Puritan, the roar of a noisy horse-trader, and assorted idioms as those of a Middlesex moron, a Northern clothier, and an Irish bawd."[136] These several voices made by several characters all on stage at once, particularly in the concluding scenes of each act, create at best, confused, lifelike noise, and at worst, indiscernible cacophony. Yet the majority of scholars contend that this noise is thematically significant. R. B. Parker explains, "This nuisance value of noise, of words divorced from meaning…suggests that one of [Jonson's] basic concerns was to expose and explode aggression, the atavistic readiness of adrenalin which is no longer useful in a settled society."[137] Noise also works to establish a more realistic environment of a local street fair, even if, as the Stage-Keeper informs the audience in the Induction that the play-scene is not an exact replica of the actual Fair.

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[136] James E. Robinson, "*Bartholomew Fair*: Comedy of Vapors," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 1, no. 2 (1961): 65.

[137] R. B. Parker, "The Themes and Staging of *Bartholomew Fair*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1970): 298.

Sensory observation also finds its way into discussions about the law and evidence in the play. This connection makes all the more sense if we consider the development of the jury trial and the methods used by judges and juries to ascertain guilt or innocence.[138] These methods include testimonies under oath and confessions. *Bartholomew Fair* becomes the space where the audience may both bear witness to various events and judge them, morally and aesthetically, for their enjoyment. Indeed, Andrew Brown argues that "the choreographed staging of the play establishes a richly visual arena in which various methods of seeing and knowing, from the strictly legal to the broadly social, are put to the test…*Bartholomew Fair* works to create a distinctively spatialized forum of participatory inquiry and response."[139] Thus, acts inherent to theatrical performances like staging and stage design work to create this space of judgment for the spectators.

While *Bartholomew Fair* has long proved fertile ground for gaging sensory experience, it is less apparent how the blending of real-time sensory experience works in conjunction with Jonson's poetic aims. Koslow argues that Jonson's earlier play *Poetaster* (performed 1601) "demonstrates [his] appreciation for the way that the theater, by virtue of its ability to give his texts a physical—visual, aural, gestural, embodied—life, could help him manifest the pedagogical power promised to poets by humanism."[140]

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[138] For more on the development of law in England during the early modern period, see Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact England,* especially 8-33.

[139] Andrew Brown, "Theatre of Judgment: Space, Spectators, and the Epistemologies of Law in *Bartholomew Fair*," *Early Theatre* 15, no. 2 (2012): 154.

[140] Koslow, "Humanist Schooling and Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*," 119.

Something very similar, I argue, occurs in *Bartholomew Fair*, wherein Jonson uses

theater to visualize an amusing lesson in interpretation. He completes this objective by

staging the lesson but not before explicitly outlining the moral in the play's Induction.

The moral ultimately allies with privileging empiricist methods of knowing (that is,

relying on one's sensory evidence to inductively develop a reading of the play) but by

using traditionally humanist methods in order to instruct the audience how to use their

sensory knowledge appropriately.

As I explore in more detail below, the stipulations presented in the Induction

establish a key theme of individual reliance on sensory experience which then serves as

a major argument that is explored in the play's scenes. This approach, as Lawrence

Levin explains, is typical of Jonson, who "uses the repetition of one or two basic

concepts in a theme-and-variations technique. Rather than include diverse, contradictory,

and qualifying shades of perspective, Jonson states an initial thesis and reinforces it

through varied repetition."[141] Jonson's thesis, or admonition to trust in the actual

experience in front of you rather than rely on one's predisposed prejudices or the

interpretations of those around you, is echoed to humorous effect for the remainder of

the play.[142]

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[141] Lawrence Levin, "Replication as Dramatic Strategy in the Comedies of Ben Jonson,"
39.
[142] For additional reading on Jonson's use of replication specifically in *Bartholomew Fair*, see Guy Hamel, "Order and Judgement in *Bartholomew Fair*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1973): 48-67.

The Articles of Agreement, or, Jonson's Guide to Proper Dramatic Interpretation

Prior to the play's first scene, Jonson stages a brief Induction featuring a stage-keeper, a book-seller, and a scrivener who briefly allude to future plot points and set forth a set of rules governing how the audience may properly react to the play. These rules, called the Articles of Agreement, contain five major stipulations governing not so much the viewing audience's enjoyment of the play but rather their reactions to it. In exchange for Jonson's play, "merry and as full of noise as sport, made to delight all and to offend none—provided they have either the wit or the honesty to think well of themselves," (Ind. Ind. 61-62) the Scrivener announces that the audience (1) agrees to stay and watch the play for its duration, (2) critique according to the amount they paid for admission, (3) judge the play for themselves rather than rely on the assertions of those sitting nearby, (4) not expect a literal representation of Smithfield (the real-world setting of the very real Bartholomew Fair), and (5) not read into what individual characters, items, or events "represent" in the real world.

As part of establishing the primacy of wit, the Articles home in on the importance of personal judgment informed by primary evidence. The first article, we should note, insists that the audience "agree to remain in the places their money or friends have put them in, with patience, for the space of two hours and an half and somewhat more" (58-60). Traditionally (and understandably so), scholars have focused on the length of time Jonson proposes for his play, seeing this statement as affirmation of the amount of time a play lasts before usually acknowledging that *Bartholomew Fair*,

the longest commercial play at 4344 prose lines, could not have been performed in 150 minutes. Richard Dutton estimates that "even if we believe that Early Modern actors may have spoken faster than they do today—[the play] could hardly be performed in less than four hours and might well take five."[143] These points are relevant for dramatic criticism as a whole, but as far as the play itself is concerned, the actual duration is not important. In the first covenant, Jonson establishes the importance of primary evidence when passing judgment. Requiring the audience to remain in the same space for the entire play ensures that, at minimum, people who are inclined to censure or pass judgment on *Bartholomew Fair*, at least encounter the entirety of the performed text themselves.

The second article, which limits the strength of an audience member's censure by what they actually paid in order to see the play, reads to me as a prickled playwright responding to overblown critiques by individuals who did not lose much, economically speaking, by watching a play. Indeed, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White comment, "the juxtaposition of judgement and money is curious, though, a reminder that the author, for all his contempt, is a bought man, depend for his success upon the applause of conflicting social groups."[144] In contrast, Robert N. Watson writes that "before the play really even begins, it invites us to question whether the authority of money is legitimate, through a contract the stage-keeper offers the audience allowing them to

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[143] Richard Dutton, "Jonson and Shakespeare: Oedipal Revenge," *Ben Jonson Journal* 23, no. 1 (2016): 28.
[144] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University press, 1986): 70.

judge the play proportionately to how much they paid for their tickets."[145] This reading, however, seems to miss the overall point of the Induction, which is to critique the viewing audience members themselves, particularly those who would be censorious of Jonson's dramatic material. The joke is on individuals who complain about their entertainment without actually paying for it. The passage in question reads as follows:

> It shall be lawful for any man to judge his six penn'orth, his twelve penn'orth, so to his eighteen pence, two shillings, half a crown, to the value of his place-- provided always his place get not above his wit. And if he pay for half a dozen, he may censure for all them too, so that he will undertake that they shall be silent. He shall put in for censures here as they do for lots at the lottery; marry, if he drop but sixpence at the door, and will censure a crown's worth, it is thought there is no conscience or justice in that. (77-87)

Watson's reading that the Stage-Keeper allows the audience to "judge the play proportionately to how much they paid for their tickets" certainly fits here, but his conclusion that this passage reflects on whether or not money is a legitimate authority seems to ignore to the rest of the Induction, let alone Jonson's oeuvre. Rather, I would suggest that this stipulation is a comment on Jonson's experiences as a popular writer being critiqued, unfairly or otherwise.

Of course, it is not enough for an audience member to be physically present at the play and pay the price of admission before they may comment on it. They must also

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[145] Robert N. Watson, introduction to *Ben Jonson: Four Plays* (London: Methuen Drama, 2014): xx.

be capable of making their own judgments without undue outside influence. After insisting that no man complain unless he actually paid for the privilege of watching, the Scrivener provides the third contractual stipulation: "It is also agreed that every man here exercise his own judgement, and not censure by contagion or upon trust from another's voice or face that sits by him, be he never so first in the Commission of Wit" (73-5). This statement privileges the interpretation of an individual, based on personal observations rather than relying on someone else's claim; "censure by contagion" also suggests disdain for this kind of critique, likening it to a plague or obscuring miasma. Moreover, the Scrivener distinguishes between visual and aural evidence: "another's voice or face" similar to how he contractually addresses the audience as "Spectators and Hearers." Taken altogether, this stipulation most explicitly identifies Jonson's recommended interpretative method. The importance of personal interpretation, based on sensory evidence rather than hearsay or evidence mediated through another person, is a major issue that Jonson will explore throughout the remainder of the play in various ways, most clearly through the exemplum of Overdo, which I will discuss in the next section.

This item of the Articles of Agreement also critiques the fickle audience member whose opinion changes daily. Using direct references to *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*, the Scrivener assures the audience that

> He that will swear *Jeronimo* or *Andronicus* are the best plays yet shall pass
> unexcepted at here, as a man whose judgement shows it is constant and hath
> stood still these five and twenty or thirty years. Though it be an ignorance, it is a

virtuous and stayed ignorance, and, next to truth, a confirmed error does well.

(Ind. 79-82)

While Jonson cannot resist a jab at his predecessors, this additional clarification for "every man here [to] exercise his own judgement" reminds the audience if they cannot be correct, then they should at least be consistent in their dramatic assessments. Moreover, as Jonathan Hart elaborates:

Constancy, truth, ignorance, and error become themes here in the differences in taste between author and audience. Kyd's and Shakespeare's revenge plays…become touchstones for old tastes. The implication is that to stick to these old Senecan tragedies of bloody revenge is ignorance with staying power and a confirmed error.[146]

Taste then becomes part of the conversation. Jonson acknowledges (or at least, attempts to acknowledge) that individual playgoers do have preferences that differ from his own. Yet even as he allows for dissenting tastes, he still judges old-fashioned tastes as wanting. Nevertheless, "a confirmed error," or a consistent misjudgment, is certainly preferable to the alternatives of fickleness whether due to personal tastes or the influence of other playgoers.

Once Jonson has stipulated that an audience member must actually watch the play and judge for themselves, he discusses two related points: the audience must not expect a perfectly mimetic Smithfield (the play's fictional and Bartholomew Fair's real-

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[146] Jonathan Hart, *Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (New York: Palgrave, 2011): 60.

world setting), and the audience must not read the play allegorically. Near the end of the Induction, the Scrivener announces one final item requesting that the audience not assume the play's characters have an intended offstage counterpart. The audience must not, the Scrivener asserts,

> search out, who was meant by ginger-bread-woman, who by the Hobby-horse-man, who by the Costard-monger, nay, who by their Wares. Or that will pretend to affirm (on his own inspired Ignorance) what Mirror of Magistrates is meant by the Justice, what great Lady by the Pig-woman, what conceal'd States man, by the Seller of Mouse-traps, and so of the rest. (104-8)

This comical list references several characters that appear in play (Trash the Gingerbread Woman, Leatherhead the Hobby-horse-man, Justice Overdo, and Ursula the Pig-woman) and a handful that do not (the Costard-monger and the Seller of Mouse-traps). It is clear from the quotation that Jonson does not hold this type of interpreter in high regard—the Scrivener both states that this person is "presenting" to know based "on his own inspired ignorance, "after all. Who would be so arrogant to presume, for instance, "what Mirror of Magistrates is meant by the Justice?"

I want to deliberately go against the Scrivener's express wishes in order to discern exactly what the justice means in his reference to the *Mirror of/for Magistrates*, or even which *Mirror* he means. The Induction does not specifically identify the "justice" in question as Overdo, though by the end of the play he is the individual who references the *Mirror* in the play's final act, so it is reasonably safe to assume that the

reference is intended to be to him.[147] While I am certainly not the first to ignore Jonson's

insistence on to not read into a reference too much, I want to consider less of who is

being satirized for which text is specifically being referenced and more of how a text like

the *Mirror* may reflect the play at large.

Despite Jonson's insistence to the contrary, scholars agree that there is most

certainly topical satire in *Bartholomew Fair*, with Justice Overdo having a real-world

counterpart. C. S. Auden, in the 1904 Yale edition, identifies Overdo as the Lord Mayor

of London who was in office while the play was first staged, Sir Thomas Hayes.[148]

However, as David McPherson astutely points out, Hayes had only taken office two days

prior to the staging of the play, and instead identifies the satirized party as Hayes

predecessor, Sir Thomas Middleton "(no kin to the dramatist)."[149] Citing McPherson,

both Creaser and Hibbard concur that Middleton is the intended counterpart to Overdo.

More broadly speaking, the satire expands to specific groups. Overdo, along with two of

his irascible and outspoken foils, Zeal-of-the-Land Busy and Humphrey Wasp, who are

placed in the stocks during the third act, emphasize the warping of a basic value like law,

religion, and learning, respectively. G. M. Pinciss further suggests that the three also

represent different religious factions in England, with Overdo as the stand-in for the

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[147] "Look upon me, O London, and see me, O Smithfield! The example of justice and
Mirror of Magistrates, the true top of formality and scourge of enormity!" (5.6.35-8)
[148] Jonson, Benjamin, *Bartholomew Fair*, ed. by Carroll Storrs Alden, Yale Studies in
English 25 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1904), 163, note 31. 24 ff.
[149] David McPherson, "The Origins of Overdo: A Study in Jonsonian Invention,"
Modern Language Quarterly 37, no. 3 (1976): 224.

Church of England, Busy "for the arch-Puritan faction," and Wasp for Catholics.[150] Such

scholarship suggests that perhaps the Scrivener (and Jonson) doth protest too much.

When modern editors comment on the Scrivener's mention of *The Mirror for*

Magistrates,[151] they assert that the reference in the Induction refers "not to the tragic

monologues in verse collected under that title by William Baldwin and others (1559 and

following), where 'mirror' means warning, but to George Whetstone's *A Mirror for*

Magistrates of Cities (1584), where 'mirror' means model of excellence or paragon."[152]

G. R. Hibbard, editor of the New Mermaids edition of the play, offers a similar gloss:

"The phrase probably has a double meaning: (i) paragon of magistrates (ii) in allusion to

George Whetstone's *A Mirour for Magestrates of Cyties* (1584), in which it is argued

that good magistrate should find out the truth for himself by visiting places of

entertainment in disguise."[153] This philosophy of infiltrating potentially villainous places

in disguise appears explicitly in Overdo's introduction, thus confirming that it is more

likely Whetstone that Jonson had in mind. David Bevington does not identify which of

the two texts (or even that there were multiple contenders in his note) and glosses the

reference as "what a paragon of a magistrate. Named after an enduringly popular

sixteenth-century lesson book for those in power, filled with object lessons about the

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[150] G. M. Pinciss, "*Bartholomew Fair* and Jonsonian Tolerance," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 35, no. 2 (1995): 347.

[151] I have modernized the title of both the Baldwin and Whetstone's texts. Quotations that contain original spellings have been retained.

[152] Creaser, 422, note. 106-7.

[153] G. R. Hibbard, ed., *Bartholomew Fair by Ben Jonson* in *Ben Jonson: Four Plays*, ed. Robert N Watson, New Mermaids, (London: Bloomsbury-Metheun Drama, 2014), 525, note 128.

abuse of authority."[154] The description suggests he is referencing the earlier Baldwin text

as the *Mirror* focuses specifically on English royalty and nobility, including favorites

like Richard III and, in later editions, the Duchess of Gloucester. Bevington's gloss

reflects his editorial decision to only capitalize the "Mirror of Magistrates" rather than

provide italics (as in the original printing) or quotation marks (as in the Cambridge

edition). Bevington's choice emphasizes that the reference is an allusion and not a direct

quotation.

  Nevertheless, although it seems clear that Jonson is explicitly evoking the

Whetstone text, I would suggest we can nevertheless think about the effect of having

both texts in the same ether as *Bartholomew Fair*. That is, in focusing on the Whetstone,

we are invited to think about the exemplum solely as an ideal phenomenon, and then

Overdo's characterization becomes an ironic one. This reading works—much of the

play's humor comes from its ironies—but when we think about the purpose of the

Baldwin et al *Mirror*, we realize that the exemplum does not have to be a morally

upright one in order to function as an exemplum. Negative exempla may also instruct

and entertain.

  While I have been focusing on the Articles of Agreement as Jonson's primary

mode of instruction in the Induction, Jonson also uses the textual and theatrical space to

physically present the lesson he wishes to teach. In the Induction, Jonson provides his

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[154] David Bevington, ed., *Bartholomew Fair* by Ben Jonson in *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, eds. David M. Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Eric Rasmussen (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 973, note 1.

audience with the visual and aural evidence to make judgments on the reliability of any given character. Although the Scrivener's Articles provide the most overt warning against trusting the judgments of the uninformed, the lesson itself is underway before he and the Book-Holder even show up. For over thirty lines, the raucous Stage-Keeper gives his opinion on the forthcoming play against the wishes of "the poet…or his man, Master Brome, behind the arras" (6), and goes on to suggest that the show would be much improved the presence of prostitutes and the celebrated clown Richard Tarleton. All this works humorously enough, but it is not until the Scrivener and Book-Holder show up that we are able to understand the Induction's ethical purpose. Upon being asked what he's doing, the Stage Keeper insists that "the understanding gentlemen o'the ground here asked my judgement" (36-7). The Book-Holder responds incredulously, scoffing that, "It's come to a fine degree in these spectacles when such a youth as you pretend to a judgement" (39-41). The key words here are "judgement," "spectacles," and "pretend." By drawing attention to the spectacle of the play proper and the Stage-Keeper's performance, we are meant to understand the presence of sensory evidence and that same evidence may be misinterpreted, or misjudged, by an individual who pretends to know what he's doing. The Stage-Keeper provides an interpretation of the events that are about to happen, and had he not been interrupted, ejected, and corrected, to what extent would we have believed him?

Ultimately, as Leo Salingar suggests, "the Prologue and Induction to *Bartholomew Fair* propose as the solid ground for 'censure' of the play, favorable or

not, is personal 'judgement' stemming from and confirming self-knowledge."[155] The knowledge as evinced in the Induction is not intended to be the knowledge of the self, but rather evidence that is collected by the individual using all the epistemological tools at a given audience member's dispersal. Therefore, the Induction establishes not just a set of articles that audience members are encouraged to follow but a set of practices that will inform the actions of major characters.

Justice Overdo as Counter-Exemplum

After establishing his expectations for the audience in the Induction, Jonson proceeds to introduce his exemplum for precisely how *not* to read and interpret dramatic evidence in Justice Adam Overdo. Though mentioned earlier in the play, the first time that the audience sees and hears the man himself is at the beginning of the second act. In his first soliloquy, Overdo reveals both an overarching concern for obtaining reliable knowledge and that his current methods for acquiring evidence have proven ineffective—even dangerously so. As a justice, Overdo's job is to judge and sentence the local ne'er do wells, and he hopes that his sentencing is based on appropriate sources. Unfortunately, as Overdo points out, his current method of relying on the sensory experiences (specifically sight and sound) of others has not worked, largely due to the unreliability not of the evidence but by those providing it. "A foolish constable or a

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[155] Leo Salingar, "Crowd and Public in *Bartholomew Fair*," *Renaissance Drama*, New Series 10 (1979): 155.

sleepy watchman is all our information," Overdo bemoans, "He slanders a gentleman by the virtue of his place (as he calls it) and we by the vice of ours must believe him" (2.1.23-5). In these lines that ask what he, as a justice, could possibly know, Overdo simultaneously performs his concern for reliable knowledge with which to make honorable, just decisions as well distances his own agency for any mistakes in judgment he has made in the past.

To solve the problem of corrupt officers and over-reliance on the testimony of historically unreliable informants, Overdo boldly announces that he will take to the streets himself to spot crimes: "I, Adam Overdo, am resolved…to spare spy-money hereafter, and make mine own discoveries" (2.1.30-31). Referencing Whetstone's *The Mirror of Magistrates* that encourages the would-be magistrate to investigate local criminal activity, the irony in Overdo's declaration is that he seeks to discover examples of falsehood by presenting a false front himself. After all, Overdo does not start his soliloquy with the larger epistemological query. Rather, he begins by justifying he decision to disguise himself as Mad Arthur of Bradley in order to infiltrate the Fair.[156] This disguise, Overdo himself remarks proudly, is thoroughly convincing: "Fain would I meet the Lynceus now, that eagle's eye, that piercing Epidaurian serpent (as my Quint. Horace calls him) that could discover a justice of peace—and lately of the Quorum— under this covering" (2.1.3-5). Referencing Lynceus, an Argonaut known for his vision,

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[156] For more on how Jonson draws on the Arthur of Bradley ballad character in order to characterize Overdo, see Paul L. Faber, "Overdo's Mad Moniker: 'Arthur of Bradley' in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*," *Ben Jonson Journal* 20, no. 1 (2013): 126-35.

and a line from Horace's *Satires* that includes the similarly sharp-eyed eagle and serpent,

Overdo's intended message is clear: not even the best seer could penetrate his

disguise.[157] Though he will later justify his decision to resort to subterfuge, Overdo

nevertheless emphasizes his own visual deception.

Although not immediately apparent, Overdo takes the reference to the eagle's

eye and the Epidaurian serpent out of context, thus signaling that his readings of a given

situation are based off of accurate yet limited information. Horace's original passage

from the Satires reads thus:

> *cum tua pervideas oculis mala lippus inunctis,*
>
> *cur in amicorum vitiis tam cernis acutum*
>
> *quam aut aquila aut serpens Epidaurius? at tibi contra*
>
> *evenit, inquirant vitia ut tua rursus et illi.*[158]

> Before examining your own faults you smear ointment
>
> on your bloodshot eyes, but when it comes to your friends' foibles
>
> your sight is as sharp as an eagle's or the Epidaurian snake's.
>
> Unfortunately they in their turn scrutinize *your* deficiencies. [159]

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[157] Horace in particular uses Lynceus as shorthand for having good vision. See his *Epistles* 1.1.28: *non possis oculo quantum contendere Lynceus*; and *Satires* 1.2.90-91: *ne corporis optima Lyncei / contemplere oculis*.

[158] Horace, *The Works of Horace*, ed. C. Smart (Philadelphia: Joseph Whetham, 1836), *Satires* 1.3.25-28

[159] Horace, *Horace: Satires and Epistles; Persius: Satires*, trans. Niall Rudd (New York: Penguin, 2005), 1.3.25-28.

In the lines above, Horace uses *aquila* (eagle) and *serpens Epidaurius* (Epidaurian snake), two creatures renowned for their sight, to illustrate the level of detail in which an individual scrutinizes another. This scrutiny stands in contrast, Horace argues, with its utter lack of focus that an individual uses for identifying their own faults. By directly referencing this passage, Jonson simultaneously reveals that Overdo cannot accurately interpret a fairly straightforward text and reminds the reader/listener of the warnings given in the Induction. As to the former, the issue is not that Overdo does not have access to evidence—he directly (and correctly) cites Horace as his source—it is that he takes the line *quam aut aquila aut serpens Epidaurius* out of its original context. What is intended to be a simile used to describe the focus in which an individual judges the faults of others (rather than himself) is instead taken as an epithet of praise for someone who is already sharp-sighted. But once context is introduced, Lynceus is not simply someone with far-ranging sight, he instead becomes a relentlessly critical spotter of faults.

This detailed context, and whether or not an audience member catches that Overdo is using his classical sources speciously, fits into the play's larger epistemological concerns of negotiating interpretative strategies associated with humanism and empiricism. Overdo, a justice, is thoroughly embedded in the humanist system, thus granting him access to knowing classical texts like those of his "Quint. Horace," but he is also part of an ever-evolving justice system that calls for personal, sensory evidence. Instead of separating the two, Overdo, as a synecdoche for the play at large, attempts to combine the methods of interpretative reading and sensory acquisition, using one to justify the other.

Overdo is completely aware of the irony of deliberately deceiving the populace in an attempt to root out corruption and enormity, that is using sensory obfuscation to gain sensory knowledge. He justifies his disguise by explaining the previous flaws in knowledge acquisition to the audience. Previously, he relied heavily on the testimony of a group of patently unreliable subordinates. Overdo's deception and the levels he goes to maintain his disguise in front of the fairgoers is a deliberate façade made in order to better discover other deception. He insists that his deception is necessary and cites precedent for its existence: "Thus must we do, though, that wake for the public good, and thus the wise magistrate done in all ages. There is a doing of right out of wrong, if the way be found" (2.1.7-9). The ends (locating enormity) justify the means (donning a disguise), as it were, especially if the doer is "the wise magistrate" or some other individual in power.

To the careful reader, spectator, and hearer, Overdo's soliloquy introduces a character who outwardly attempts to follow many of the stipulations of the Articles of Agreement and who anticipates future challenges with judging and interpreting. He announces his intentions to remain at the Fair for its duration, enabling him (in theory) to make judgements for himself. Specifically, as Salingar observes, his soliloquy, similar to the other act's opening speeches, "harks back to the idea of 'judgement,' which had been the key word in the Induction—either judgment in 'conceit' or judgment by law."[160] He also reveals that in the past he had relied too heavily on the testimony of his subordinates

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[160] Salingar, "Crowd and Public in *Bartholomew Fair*," 144-5.

who misled him due to negligence and malice, and that he will rectify his error by cutting out the middle man and infiltrating the Fair in disguise so as better to spot enormities. This overreliance on unreliable sources returns with a vengeance when Overdo relies on single, reported sources of information during his investigations.

To the even more careful and learned reader and listener, Overdo reveals that while his intentions can be construed as noble if a bit authoritarian, he is hardly no more reliable than his misleading subordinates. In addition to the visual cue of the disguise which he continually draws attention to, Overdo's classical references are either complete misrepresentations or allusions to the exact opposite of a wise and benevolent critical judge. Jonson successfully here provides audiences with differing levels of focus and (humanist) education with bits of evidence of Overdo's unreliability as a source, suggesting that his future findings in the play may not be wholly accurate.

Overdo, as we see, is neither a careful reader nor listener. As a rule, Jonson views the poet and his intention as paramount; misinterpretation occurs once someone else reads the text. Jonson's disdain for those who misread is well-documented by none other than the poet himself. In his epigram, "To Groom Idiot," Jonson chastises the vocal performance of the Groom Idiot who read Jonson's poetry aloud, despite the poet's pleas not to.

Idiot, last night I prayed thee but forbear

To read my verses; now I must to hear:

For offering, with thy smiles, my wit to grace,

Thy ignorance still laughs in the wrong place.

And so my sharpness thou, no less disjoints,

Than thou didst late my sense, losing my points.

So have I seen at Christmas sports one lost,

And, hood-winked, for a man, embrace a post.

Lamenting that Groom Idiot gets the jokes wrong and completely mangles the meaning, Jonson makes his attitude toward to mis-readers abundantly clear. He has no patience for them. Yet he also acknowledges the importance of performance in terms of conveying the original message properly, lest it confuse the listeners so much that they mistake one thing for another. In "To Groom Idiot," the source of misreading lies not with a particular foolish listener, but rather with an actor who, by name, literally cannot read properly.

Critiques of inept readers appear throughout Jonson's considerable corpus. Though speaking on Jonson's ideal reader as opposed to the ideal audience member that Bartholomew Fair seems to be attempting to construct, George Rowe's explanation of how Jonson's fashioned his audience strikes me as particularly apt here:

Many of the poems in the 1616 Folio deal with interpretive problems and faulty readers, and Jonson's preference for the preposition to rather than on in the titles of his poems is an indication of the weight he gave to readers: the preposition calls our attention not to content but to audience by establishing a particular reader or type of reader as the primary receiver of the utterance, and encouraging us (as we overhear) to laugh at that reader—if the poem is satiric and its

addressee foolish—or to concur with that reader's presumed response—if the

audience is idealized.[161]

Rowe's description of Jonson's fashioning is surprisingly dramatic, emphasizing how

the reader is a kind of a voyeur, looking/listening in on the either inept reader or offering

a safe distance for the reader we agree with who may face negative consequences.

Something similar is being done with Overdo, though through the intentionally

dramatic medium that is performed rather than predominately read. Despite (and because

of) his disguise, Overdo's quest for enormity is initially met with success. However,

while he is successful at locating potential mercantile crimes, he quickly undermines his

own credibility as an interpreter by getting distracted by flattery and other potential

enormities as the street/stage becomes more populated. Shortly after announcing to the

audience—and perhaps himself—his intentions to disguise himself and mark the crimes

of the playgoers in his little black book, Overdo comes upon two street-peddlers,

Leatherhead and Joan Trash insulting each other's wares. "Ay! Have I met with

enormity so soon?" wonders Overdo as he overhears Leatherhead accuse Trash's

gingerbread of being composed of "stale bread, rotten eggs, musty ginger, and dead

honey" (2.2.7-9). As he watches the quarreling pair from the side of the stage, he

delights in hearing his name invoked by both parties. Leatherhead threatens to take

Trash "afore Justice Overdo" in order to have her arrested, to which she replies that she

is willing to meet Overdo with him, as "though I be a little crooked o'my body, I'll be

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[161] George E. Rowe, Jr., "Ben Jonson's Quarrel with Audience and Its Renaissance," *Studies in Philology* 81, no. 4 (1984): 447.

found as upright in my dealing as any woman in Smithfield" (2.2.17-21). At this point, Overdo comments no longer on the pair's suspected enormity but on his personal effect on Smithfield's citizens, remarking, "I am glad to hear my name is their terror yet: this is doing of justice" (2.2.22-23). Here Overdo assumes that his name is enough to maintain order, and he does not pursue any further investigations against Trash or her accuser.

Inadvertently, Overdo violates the first Article of Agreement mentioned in the Induction: he does not remain for the entire exchange in order to verify whether or not Trash is selling faulty goods. After announcing that his name is accomplishing justice's work, Overdo never returns to the question of Trash's wares. His lack of interrogation or attempts to verify the information stand in contrast to two other investigations he conducts in the remainder of the act where, even if he is wrong, he seeks out confirmation of what he overhears and over-sees.

In Overdo's defense, he is distracted in his first discovery not just by his own name but also a much larger (in stature and kind) second enormity: Ursula, the pig woman. While sitting disguised in her pig tent that serves as a hub for several shady deals among the fairgoers and vendors, Overdo overhears Ursula coaching her servant boy, Mooncalf, how to cheat customers when serving alcohol and tobacco. She supplements a half-pound of tobacco with a quarter pound of coltsfoot, thus creating the illusion of more tobacco. Her guidelines for cheating customers out of beer money are considerably more detailed. Ursula instructs Mooncalf to serve glasses with more froth than liquid, suggests he gets drunk to feel less guilty when he calculates the tab incorrectly, and instructs him to covertly remove unfinished beverages. At this moment,

for all his many faults, Overdo uses his personal sensory experience to inform his judgement. This is important because, if only for the moment, Overdo's judgement is accurate because he followed an appropriate method without getting distracted or clouded with other outside opinion.

Of course, the comic Overdo does not remain accurate for very long. He begins to display judgmental fickleness with his third discovery of enormity: the vapors-loving, horse courser Jordan Knockem. As with Ursula, all evidence suggests that Knockem is most certainly up to no good, and initially, Overdo successfully interprets the evidence. For instance, when Knockem first enters the scene to joke with Ursula, Overdo immediately observes his dress, remarking, "Another special enormity: a cutpurse of the sword, the boot, and the feather! Those are his marks" (2.3.9-10). Knockem's flamboyant clothing serves as visual evidence for his professional identity, an identity that Overdo successfully deciphers. If his outfit were not enough, Knockem's speech and Ursula's chiding of him further suggest that he is a cutpurse. Ursula even submits that he may be imprisoned and hanged for his petty thievery (2.3.3-7) and accuses him of spreading rumors that she died "of a surfeit of bottle-ale and tripes!" (2.3.11-12). Overdo, who feels fairly confident that Knockem is not to be trusted based on what he has both seen and heard, turns to Ursula's serving boy, Mooncalf, and requests his testimony confirming that Knockem is a thief. Mooncalf vehemently denies such a claim, suggesting that Ursula's accusations are not to be taken seriously. Upon receiving Mooncalf's testimony, Overdo immediately flips on his interpretation of Knockem. This moment should remind us of the warnings from the Induction, especially the concern

that the Scrivener raises for the individual audience member not to rely overmuch on the testimony of others.

In the first three examples of potential enormity, Overdo attempts to use his investigational practices in order to determine if Trash, Ursula, and Knockem are indeed guilty of any crimes. From a distance, he watches and listens to the characters' conversations, taking in their appearance and what is said *about* them. In Trash's case, Overdo is less interested in what Trash has to say to defend herself from Leatherhead's accusations and more on what Leatherhead accuses her of, and even later, what both have to say about the justice himself. He does not offer any specific judgment on Trash before moving to Ursula, opting more to consider his role as Justice the concept. In contrast to Trash and later, Knockem and Edgworth, Overdo only uses his interpretation of the evidence he's gathered while sitting the pig-tent as well as his personal experience with Ursula in order to pass his judgment on her. The connecting factor between Overdo's successful initial reading of the first three enormities is his dedication to locate the evidence for himself. What causes that judgment to change or falter is when Overdo begins to rely on secondary information like testimonies or accusations rather than visual evidence or confessions.

Overdo's greatest misinterpretation occurs when he fails to begin with any sort of investigation and instead relies solely on testimony in order to judge a character. The character in question is Edgworth, the play's resident pickpocket who steals onstage twice. Relying on Mooncalf, whom he trusts implicitly from providing testimony on Knockem, Overdo inquires after Edgworth:

OVERDO.　　　[Aside to Mooncalf] Child o'the bottles, what's he, what's he?

MOONCALF.　　A civil young gentleman, Master Arthur, that keeps company with

The roarers, and he disburses all still. He has ever money in his purse; he pays

For them, and they roar for him: one does good offices for another. They call

Him 'the secretary', but he serves nobody. A great friend of the ballad man's:

They are never asunder.

OVERDO.　　　What pity 'tis, so civil a young man should haunt this debauched

company! (2.4.21-8)

The jokes are many. Although Overdo takes Mooncalf's description of Edgworth to be

verification of Edgworth as "a civil young man," Mooncalf's actual words suggest that

Edgworth is anything put. In addition to associating with the irreputable "roarers" and

Nightingale the ballad-seller, Mooncalf provides a pun on "disburses" (de-purses) as

well as indicating that he always has money. Nevertheless, as with Knockem, Mooncalf

does not reveal Edgworth's profession by name, thus protecting both men from the

justice's investigations.

While Overdo too quickly jumps to testimony in order to create his impression of

Edgworth, he misses actual verification of serious enormity. While Overdo is onstage

and in the same room as the others, Edgworth, in the presence of Ursula and Knockem,

tells Nightingale, the ballad-seller: "All the purses I give you today by conveyance, bring

hither to Urs'la's presently. Here we will meet at night in her lodge, and share" (2.4.32-

4). The audience, who at this point has been following Overdo's investigations, now has

acquired their own indisputable evidence that confirms that Edgworth is not the honest

clerk that Overdo assumes he has. With Edgworth's announcement of his criminal ties and intent, Jonson displays the danger of relying overmuch on another's testimony, particularly when one does not interrogate the primary evidence for themselves in the first place.

While Overdo-as-exemplum is at its clearest in the play's second act, Jonson maintains the moral lesson throughout the play. To illustrate that Overdo's example is not what a viewer should aspire to, Jonson sets Overdo and his constant, comical misinterpretations in contrast to the skeptical commentary of Quarlous and Winwife. Whereas Overdo locates enormity only where he expects it based on his assumptions or reliability on less-than-reputable sources, both Quarlous and Winwife rely on visual evidence and their own interpretations of the evidence.

Like the justice, the two friendly rivals exist outside the intermingling groups of characters, only intermingling when necessary, opting instead to view and assess the situations in front of them until they too become swept up in the play's action by the final act. Richard Levin describes the pair as "stand[ing] apart from and above the rest by reason of their social status and, more important, their insight. They become the 'wits' of the play, not primarily by tricking the 'gulls'…but by understanding and judging them."[162] A clear example of Quarlous and Winwife's judgment occurs when they observe Overdo during his second soliloquy after having been beaten by Humphrey Wasp, who assumes that the disguised justice stole his master' purse. Winwife remarks

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[162] Richard Levin, "The Structure of *Bartholomew Fair*," 175.

166

to his companion, "What does he talk to himself, and act so seriously? Poor fool!" (3.3.38).

This deceptively brief comment indicates a few key things. First, the actual viewing audience at the Hope, at Court, or wherever the play may be currently staged is simultaneously reminded that they are watching a play. Early modern and twenty-first-century viewers alike know that characters will occasionally speak to themselves and to the audience whether as soliloquies or asides. Prior to Winwife's observation, an audience member could reasonably assume that when Overdo is talking alone, he is simply acting like a character in a play. By drawing attention to how foolish one would look narrating events, Jonson reminds us of a play's artifice, and obliquely, its duty to both entertainment and instruct.

Secondly, by signaling that Overdo is literally talking to himself, Winwife also motions to the possibility that Overdo has been addressing an imaginary audience the entire time he has been on stage. Salingar reminds us, "All the visitors, and the Fair people themselves, are alternatively observers of a sort and impulsive actors, and sometimes both together."[163] No one embodies this statement quite like Overdo, who acts as if he were in a play. After all, this speech is not the first time Overdo has utilized the theatrical conventions of a soliloquy and asides. Prior to Winwife's comment, we are encouraged to think of Overdo's comments as internal because of theatrical conventions. Yet this convention is an artifice, and one that stands out "in the real world." To what

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[163] Salingar, "Crowd and Public in *Bartholomew Fair*," 146.

extent then is Overdo aware of his vocal performances? And who exactly is he performing to or for?

We may find further evidence that Overdo styles himself as a character in a play by yet another theatrical trope: a wise figure in disguise. As many scholars have noted, Overdo's disguise as Mad Arthur is an inversion of the "disguised duke" trope that was popular in other plays including *Measure for Measure* and *Rollo Duke of Normandy*.[164] Like his incognito dramatic counterparts, Overdo pursues information that he can only gain while in disguise. Yet, unlike other disguised rulers, Overdo anticipates the moment where the duke reveals his disguise. The justice wants to be discovered so that he may dispense his knowledge (and judgment).

Whether Overdo is aware that he is in a play or he just opts to act like he is one, Overdo nevertheless has a desire to be seen and heard. At the beginning of each of his soliloquies, he draws attention to acts of seeing and hearing. To recall, in his opening speech, Overdo wishes that he would encounter the eagle-eyed Lynceus so that he may be seen and not recognized due to his disguise. In the speech that Quarlous and Winwife overhear, he ironically announces, "I will make no more orations" in favor of elaborating on what will happen when he is later recognized by his family and friends (3.3.1). Overdo's theatrics are premeditated on the assumption that he will reveal his disguise and will be recognized for his feats of "justice."

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[164] See Brian Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Methuen, 1980), especially 179-91; and McPherson, "The Origins of Overdo," 221-33.

Whereas Overdo functions as a negative exemplum, his major detractors—

Quarlou and Winwife—function as the positive exemplum. Winwife's brief observation

of Overdo (and Quarlous's immediate dismissal of him) illustrates hierarchies of

interpretation. Upon hearing Winwife point out that Overdo is talking to himself and

acting strangely, Quarlous responds that they simply ignore him and look at something

more interesting: the next scene of the Cokes/Overdo/Wasp/Grace party being

panhandled by the various fair vendors. "No matter what," Quarlous brushes off

Overdo's thirty-plus line prose speech, "Here's fresher argument, intend that" (3.3.39).

The juxtaposition of Overdo's speech length and overwrought style—complete with first

person narration and Latin phrases—with Quarlous and Winwife's two short lines forces

to us to consider how much weight we should give to an Overdo when making our own

judgments.

In contrast to the near-constant misinterpretation of the disguised justice, the

example of Quarlous and Winwife provides the audience the appropriate way to view

and incorporate evidence through personal experience. Though not perfect themselves,

Jonson grants his authorial blessing upon both characters by the end of the play by

granting them the final words against Overdo and Busy as well as the prize of two

desirable brides, a rich widow for Quarlous and a young (also rich) heiress for Winwife.

Despite reputation for exerting control over nearly aspect of his texts, including

production and interpretation, Jonson's ultimate solution to the problems of

interpretation lies in a middling way where an interpreter relies on sensory evidence and

their own personal examination of the evidence; however, getting the audience to this

point relies on methods that are closer kin to humanism, specifically rhetorical manipulation and storytelling.

At its core, *Bartholomew Fair* is a play about interpretation, that is, the proper way to interpret and the dangers when the interpretation goes awry. Overall, while Overdo's quest to discover the many enormities concludes without any arrests or long-lasting consequences for any of those he had determined guilty of enormity, Overdo's investigational practices serve as an example for a viewing or reading audience of the dangers of imposing judgments without sufficient evidence or based solely on another's taste. Throughout *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson both anticipates coming plot revelations and throws back to previous moments, reinforcing a cyclical plot structure that is meant to reinforce major themes and provide continual nuance with subsequent re-readings and re-viewings. In Overdo's case specifically, the justice becomes the very model of what not to do as he goes against the Articles of Agreement first with Knockem and again with Edgworth. Moreover, Jonson uses Overdo to illustrate the artifice of drama, thus linking different modes of inquiry (humanistic and empiricist) together. In linking the rhetorical and poetic power of drama with the concrete and inductive allure of sensory personal investigation, Jonson highlights uncertainty of even the most objective forms of evidence, as in order for the evidence to be understood, it must first be performed.

CHAPTER V

HISTORICAL KNOWING, DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE, AND

TEMPORAL DISJUNCTION IN *1-3 HENRY VI* AND *RICHARD III*

This chapter detours from the challenge of visual versus spoken evidence to consider time and historical epistemologies, how they interweave and collapse in drama, and how they relate to the preceding discussions on humanist and empiricist ways of knowing. To achieve this aim, I examine Shakespeare's first tetralogy: the three *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*, with specific attention on how Shakespeare and his collaborators utilize time as an epistemological and dramatic tool. In these four texts, dramatic experimentation with time manifests as mantic utterances (including prophecy, auspicious dreams, and curses), as historiography, and as grammar, with all three elements being interrelated and part of the larger tapestry of shifting knowledge paradigms that we have seen in earlier chapters.[165]

When considering the transition of late humanism and early empiricism, history as a productive knowledge paradigm is often forgotten. This is not to say that historians

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[165] References to *1 Henry VI*, *2 Henry VI*, *3 Henry VI*, and *Richard III* are given parenthetically and refer to the following editions, unless otherwise noted: William Shakespeare, *King Henry VI Part 1*, ed. Edward Burns, (London: Bloomsbury, 2000); *King Henry VI, Part 2*, ed. Ronald Knowles, (London: Bloomsbury, 1999); *King Henry VI, Part 3*, ed. John D. Cox and Eric Rasmussen (London: Bloomsbury, 2001); and *The Tragedy of Richard the Third* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Gordon McMullan, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton 2016), 640-721.

have not been discussing the development and history of their field, especially in relation to other fields such as science and literature—far from it. It seems to me that once we introduce science as a modern concept and framework, we tend to only look for methods that are associated with empirical inquiry and discovery. Early modern historiography is therefore bracketed off as a distinct category and not part of the larger conversation. In this chapter, I consider historiography as a methodology and see how its developments affected and echoed the epistemological shifts of the period.

In thinking through ways of knowing the past, and by extension, knowing temporally, I examine how these more occult and hidden methods of knowing impact historical drama, especially when mixed with the humanist education of the playwright. Through playing with tense, mood (both grammatical and dramatic), and audience knowledge, I argue that Shakespeare takes various methods of knowing the past and translates them into dramatic tools that present history as a dynamic continuum that simultaneously touches the past, the present, the future, and the imaginative spaces in-between.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of English historical chronicles with particular emphasis on two of Shakespeare's major sources, Edward Hall's The *Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York* (1548) and the second edition of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1587) and their relationship to the genre of English chronicle history. I then turn to *1 Henry VI* itself where I focus on the many elements in dialogue, character, and presentation that create thick temporal spaces where contradictions are not simply present, they are

normal. I examine the relationship of temporal disjunction to Shakespeare's presentation of prophecy in the second tetralogy, explicitly juxtaposing Joan Purcel's prophecies with Henry VI's. Finally, I look widely at other forms of divination-as-knowledge throughout the entire tetralogy and how they manifest as part of a larger, if disjointed, set.

English Historical Chronicles and the Early Modern Understanding of History

In this section, I discuss how history and historiography was understood during the early modern period, particularly in the written chronicles, to set the stage for how Shakespeare and his contemporaries understood historical information in relation to truth and narrative. The transition from how history, particularly chronicled history, was understood during the medieval period versus how it would be understood as part of the adaptive process of the early modern English history plays is noteworthy in its conception of time. In his preface, F. J. Levy describes the mindset surrounding compilers and authors of medieval chronicles:

> The late medieval chronicle may be seen as a compilation, loosely organized, whose author had no firm grasp of the essential differences between past and present, who thought of the events of a hundred years before his own time as occurring in a context identical to the world in which he himself lived. Because history writing had to be didactic, and because the lessons were those of personal morality and the workings of Providence, it was difficult to decide what was relevant and what was not, and the result was that most medieval chronicles

173

worked on the principle of including as much as possible. Nor did these didactic

motives encourage either accuracy or the criticism of sources. What mattered

was whether the lesson was clear.[166]

Levy's lengthy description reveals several key themes that Renaissance playwrights,

such as Shakespeare, adapt from the medieval chroniclers. For one, there was not a clear

division between the past and the present at least in terms of context. The medieval

chronicler, according to Levy, did not view the world of the past as fundamentally

different from their own. As Phyllis Rackin elaborates, for these compilers, "The first

cause of all things was the will of God, the alpha and omega who contained past,

present, and future in one eternal, unchanging presence."[167] This lack of contextualizing

makes sense given a providential view of history—if all is ordained and the purpose is to

find the moral from swaths of evidence, the context is not as important. Moreover,

histories in general, to evoke Philip Sidney among others, were intended to teach. This

purpose and mindset combined created documents with large amounts of information,

portions of which that were not expected to be relevant until the appropriate present and

future events had passed, giving them significance beyond a recording of past times.[168]

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[166] F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1967): ix.

[167] Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 6.

[168] For more on medieval chronicles, see Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2004).

In contrast to medieval chroniclers who more or less copied down important secular events in chronological order without comment, the many sixteenth-century English chroniclers focused their attention on non-religious events and sought to place them in some sort of causal order. This search for causes and order, as Rackin explains, takes on a more human dimension than the divine and moral one of the writers' predecessors:

> The new "politic historians" of the Renaissance still made reference to the will of God as the first cause behind historical change; but, impelled by a new concern with the life of this world, they described historical causation primarily in terms of 'second causes,' that is, of human actions and their consequences; and they evaluated actions more in terms of their expediency, less in terms of their morality.[169]

In short, the chronicles of the English Renaissance narrativized the historical events and reasoned why things happened the way they did beyond simply ascribing all events to an inscrutable divine will. An example of this structuring may be found in Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia*, as Levy explains: "Edward IV forswore himself before the gates of York; God saw to it that the sin was punished by destroying Edward's young sons. Thus, history remained a moral subject in that it enshrined the woes that came to the sinner, but it left the roots of actions entirely in the hands of man."[170] Moreover, chronicles began to be organized by individual monarch's reigns, and as chronicles

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[169] Rackin, *Stages of History*, 6-7.
[170] Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought*, 171.

continued to be produced, compilers tended to equate the persona of the monarch with the events occurring during their reign.

Earlier literary historians including Rackin and Daniel Woolf described sixteenth-century chronicles as "univocal," meaning that while they were more often than not composed and compiled by multiple authors, the overarching messages were consistent and evocative of dominant power structures. More recently, this assumption has been challenged by scholars including Peter C. Herman, Annabel Patterson, and many of the contributors of *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's "Chronicles."*[171] Patterson's work has been especially influential in this regard.

The development of early modern historiography echoes epistemological developments from medieval scholasticism to Renaissance humanism to early empiricism. We have seen two of the three major changes above: "a new interest in causation" and "a recognition of anachronism." A third, "a questioning of textual authority,"[172] or as Peter Burke describes it, "the awareness of evidence,"[173] also emerged during the latter part of the 1500s. These changes occurred in tandem with the English adoption of a humanistic education system, a system that emphasized personal, text-based learning and memorization of rediscovered and now more widely available

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[171] Peter C. Herman, "Henrician Historiography and the Voice of the People: The Cases of More and Hall," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 39, no. 3 (1997): 259-283; Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's "Chronicles"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's "Chronicles,"* eds. Paulina Kewes, Ian W. Archer, and Felicity Heal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

[172] Rackin, *Stages of History*, 5.

[173] Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), 1.

classical writing.[174] Newfound secular knowledge in the form of education as well as printed books allowed for people to begin thinking about their world in "knowable" human terms as opposed to "unknowable" divine ones. As humanism pushed towards its logical conclusion of individuals reading and mimicking classical texts, thinkers were able to both see the distinctions between a distant past and present as well as the amount of knowledge necessary to know when something reported in another source did not "fit" within the previous mind frame. This related knowledge further compounded the problem of reliability of historical sources—how could one really know if they were true?

Also enmeshed in the larger epistemological trends of Renaissance humanism and empiricism, many historians moved from verbal and written testimonies and documents to material remains such as coins or buildings. The historian thus transformed into an antiquarian. "Unlike earlier humanists," Rackin explains, "who looked to the past for moral and political guidance in the conduct of present life, the antiquarians, replacing rhetoric with archaeology, were motivated by a curiosity about the actual details of past life rather than by a desire to discover large, significant patterns."[175] This description of

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[174] For more on the rise of humanist education and its practices in England, see Anna V. Danushevskaya, "The Formation of a Renaissance Nobleman: William Cecil, 2nd Early of Salisbury 1591-1668," *History of Education* 31, no. 6 (2002): 505-520; Edward Erdmann, "Imitation Pedagogy and Ethical Indoctrination," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1993): 1-11; Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); and Aysha Pollnitz, *Princely Education in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[175] Rackin, *Stages of History*, 14.

"new history" parallels with the emergence of early empiricism which emphasizes the search of individual pieces of evidence that can be acquired through the senses rather than through text.

Generic Instability, Historic Instability, and the English History Play

The plays that developed out of an English chronicle tradition were in vogue during a fairly short time in English literary history. In his discussion on the serial nature of Shakespeare's two major tetralogies, Nicholas Grene states, "There hardly was any such thing as an English history play in the professional theatre before 1590; there was a marked falling off in the genre after the turn of the century." Using Felix Schilling's counts in his 1902 *The English Chronicle Play*, Grene notes that over half (80) of the estimated number of English plays focused on English history (150) were from the 1590s.[176] Shakespeare's publication record echoes this trend as well, with all but one play identified as "Histories" in the First Folio (*Henry VIII*) produced during this same decade. *Henry VIII* is an anomaly among the Shakespeare histories, with the influential if oft-criticized E.M.W. Tillyard neglecting to include it in his monograph on Shakespeare's history plays (but including discussions of *King John* and *Macbeth*). The only history play produced after Elizabeth's death, *Henry VIII* reads less like the other

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[176] Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7.

history plays and more akin to "problem plays" associated with Shakespeare's later work.

Curiously, other plays that use history as their primary source are not always called "histories." Case in point are Shakespeare's plays dealing with Britain's (rather than England's) distant past such as *Macbeth* and *Cymbeline* and plays focused on Roman history such as *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Timon of Athens*. The First Folio identifies all these plays as tragedies, raising the question: what are the generic markers of a history play for an early modern reader?

Despite the ambiguity of the boundaries of history and literature, Shakespeare's contemporaries displayed that there were indeed distinctions between the two. Edmund Spenser and Philip Sidney offer two of the more famous takes on this debate. In his letter to Ralegh that precedes *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser distinguishes the difference between the historian/historiographer and the historical poet: "An Historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions, but a Poet thrusteth into the middest, euen where it most concerneth him, and there recoursing to the things forepaste, and diuining of things to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of it all."[177] Spenser's description evokes the classical epic—the poet beginning *in medias res*—and thus simultaneously establishes himself as an English epic poet as well as explaining that the organization of historical events is key in determining

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[177] Edmund Spenser, "Letter to Raleigh," in *Edmund Spenser: The Faerie Qveene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, rev. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 716-717.

whether something is history or a literary adaptation based on historical sources. Furthermore, Spenser contends that by collapsing the "forepast" and the "things to come," the poet creates a more entertaining understanding for their readers and listeners.

In *An Apology for Poetry*, Sidney argues for the superiority of poetry over historical writing because poets may fabricate the ideal exempla for a given lesson whereas historians are limited to real people. "The historian," he explains, "is so tied, not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things, that his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine."[178] Underlying these claims is the assumption that history in Sidney, Shakespeare, and Spenser's time was understood to be a true account of what had occurred in the past. What is more important for Sidney and for the literary author in general is how effective moral instruction is in terms of examples and of entertainment. Following the Horatian dictum for poetry to both delight and instruct to an extreme degree, Sidney divides the historical poet from the historian by the historical poet's willingness to equally emphasize delight with instruction.

For his part, Shakespeare lives up to Spenser and Sidney's descriptions of the historical poet, playing particularly fast and loose with chronology and historical accuracy. Several sources, both print and digital, compare the distinctions between the two, all supporting this conclusion.[179] Indeed, as Jean E. Howard remarks, "He

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[178] Philip Sidney, "The Defense of Poesy," in *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 221, lines 395-398.
[179] For Shakespeare's history plays specifically, see W. G. Boswell-Stone, *Shakespeare's Holinshed: The Chronicle and the Historical Plays Compared* (London,

notoriously alters and adds to his sources, compresses into a single year events that took decades, and frequently assigns speeches to characters that are entirely the creation of his own brain and not of any historical record."[180] Shakespeare's choice to do so, moreover, does not seem to have excited any comment from his contemporaries. Regarding the history plays themselves, David Riggs reminds us that the early modern audience was far more concerned with rhetoric and spectacle than it necessarily was with faithful accuracy or even the "moral" of an historical anecdote, explaining: "Where modern scholarship looks for an allusive, didactic commentary on Renaissance politics and the ways of Providence, Shakespeare's contemporaries were more likely to begin by expressing their enthusiasm for a visual and rhetorical display of heroic deeds."[181] In so many ways, the early modern audience is little different form a popular modern audience, who enjoy spectacles of books adapted in film and artistic representations of favorite characters in fan communities. Ultimately, we need to be careful in over-focusing and fretting over concerns that, for the original audience, were not large concerns at all.

1896; repr., New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966); Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957-1975); E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962); Paulina Kewes, Ian Archer, Felicity Heal, and Henry Summerson, *The Holinshed Project* (website), 2013, www.cems.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/; and W. Gordon Zeeveld, "The Influence of Hall on Shakespeare's English Historical Plays," *English Literary History* 3, no. 4 (1936): 317-53.

[180] Jean E. Howard, "Shakespearean History," in *The Norton Shakespeare, Essential Plays. The Sonnets,* ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 2016), 620.

[181] David Riggs, *Shakespeare's Heroical Histories:* Henry VI *and Its Literary Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971): 7.

Rackin contends that there are three distinct "temporal perspectives" at work in the history plays: the chronological, the achronic, and the anachronistic.[182] The chronological perspective refers to the actual past that the play is set in as well as the division between the viewing audience and the performing actors. To perform chronological time is to acknowledge a past and the space between the then and the now. In contrast, the achronic perspective immerses the audience and places them not as distant spectators but spectators in the historical moment that the play stages. Rackin offers the example of Richard's deposition in *Richard II* as a key scene where Shakespeare (and Richard) implicates the audience in his removal from power.

The final perspective that Rackin identifies, the anachronistic, is her major contribution to how time works within the history play. Anachronisms abound throughout early modern plays based on historical events from the inclusion of technology that had not yet been invented like clocks and firearms to the aging up or down of individual characters, like Hotspur turning into Hal's contemporary in *1 Henry IV* or Margaret living well into the events of *Richard III* though her historical counterpart died years later to the ascribing of (early) modern feelings and priorities to decidedly medieval persons. Rackin contends that these anachronisms offer a distinct perspective on the play that is altogether metatheatrical and deliberate. Operating in

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[182] Rackin, *Stages of History*, 119-20.

contrast to and in-between chronological and achronic temporalities, the anachronistic perspective:

> separates the audience from the historical action represented on stage by reminding them that they are, after all, simply an audience in a theater. Exploiting the instability of dramatic illusion, which can at any moment be taken for truth or falsehood, this final perspective directs an audience's attention to the difference between past and present, stage and audience, that are obscured by the other two.[183]

In other words, the anachronism is a literary method available to a hybrid genre that is simultaneously history and dramatic poetry. Temporally speaking, an anachronism is an insertion that highlights the challenges of representation of things that we could not possibly know (having no direct sources to tell us exactly what happened in an event like Richard's deposition or Henry V's funeral or Joan's winning over of the Dolphin) and the freedom that imaginative literature allows to create these very images and scenes.

The connections among the distant past, nearer pasts, the present, and the future flood typical history plays—indeed, it is a strong thematic thread that connects and defines them as a genre. Philip Lorenz remarks that history in Shakespeare specifically "is a history obsessed with the problem of time, indeed 'mortified' [specifically, as Walter Benjamin sense] by it."[184] In his work to identify just what a history play *is*,

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[183] Rackin, *Stages of History*, 120.
[184] Philip Lorenz, "'In the Course and Process of Time': Rupture, Reflection, and Repetition in *Henry VIII*," in *Temporality, Genre, and Experience in the Age of*

Andrew Griffin considers the specific ways history plays deal with presenting the past:

"If early modern history plays emphasized connections between the diegetic past and the

theatrical present, they did so in part by incorporating subsequent history into the play's

diegetic reality. This incorporation of action subsequent to the staged action is clearest

when the historical content's significance is determined by subsequent action, or when

the play points conspicuously to future action."[185] That is, early modern history plays

focused not just on the historical event itself, but also linked the past to the present by

referencing subsequent events that are in the play's chronological future, but also still in

the audience's chronological past.

Time becomes even messier when we consider the many points-of-contact an

early modern audience member or reader would have encountered the history

surrounding the War of the Roses, especially in relation to the entries in Shakespeare's

first historical sequence which follows the reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV, Edward V,

and Richard III. Famously, the tetralogies were not composed in order of their historic

chronology. The first tetralogy was first written and performed not with *1 Henry VI*, but

with *2 Henry VI*, followed by Part 3, and then Part 1, with the First Part operating as a

kind of prequel in our contemporary understanding.[186] The *Henry VI* plays are then

Shakespeare: Forms of Time, ed. Lauren Shohet (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2018), 63.

[185] Andrew Griffin, "Is *Henry V* Still a History Play?" in *Temporality, Genre, and Experience in the Age of Shakespeare: Forms of Time*, ed. Lauren Shohet (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2018), 86.

[186] The dating of the three plays, of course, is more complicated than I am making it seem. Several major contemporary editors, including Edward Burns and Ronald Knowles from the Arden Shakespeare 3rd series and Randall Martin and Michael Taylor

concluded with *Richard III* and the crowning of Elizabeth I's grandfather, Henry VII (who, incidentally, does not get his own play). Then, sometime after completing the first set of four interconnected plays, Shakespeare produced what becomes known as the second tetralogy, or the Henriad. This set of plays, *Richard II*, *1 and 2 Henry IV*, and *Henry V*, while composed and performed after the *Henry VI* plays, examine characters and events that precede Henry VI's reign.

　　If we were to map out the earliest theatrical productions of the two tetralogies, we would most certainly not have a straight line nicely moving from king to king in succession, as it was presented in the various chronicles—but this is not to suggest that there is not any linearity. This bumpy chronology neither implies that Shakespeare was somehow lazy or careless in his composition, nor that he had a secret motivation for writing any of his plays in the order that he did. David Scott Kastan explains that "at least two models of historical time existed for Shakespeare's age…: one, providential and fundamentally linear, derived from patristic and medieval historical writings; and one, exemplary and essentially cyclical, derived from the traditions of late classical historiography."[187] Once completed, the compositional and original performance order allows for the *Henry IV*, *V*, and *VI* plays (as well as *Richard*s *II* and *III*), to be both linear and cyclical. The plays are linear in that, individually, they follow a progressive

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of Oxford editions, contend that *1 Henry VI* was preceded, at minimum, by *2 Henry VI*. Other scholars, however, including Michael Hattaway and Roger Warren contend that *1 Henry VI* was written first.

[187] David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1982): 13.

timeline, and as a grouping of plays, their sources follow a progressive timeline beginning with Richard II and ending with Henry VII. The plays are cyclical on the practical level by being re-performed over and over in multiple orders, and on an abstract level by simultaneously alluding to contemporary events and concerns while still presenting the past.

The link that joins the first and second tetralogy, according to Rackin, is the body (both his historical persona and the actor's physical self) of Henry V. She remarks, "For the plot of Shakespeare's historical reconstruction bends the teleological, chronological line of his historiographic sources into a circle, beginning and ending with the death of Henry V….It replaces the purposeful, linear progress of history with the endless work of historiography and the endless repetition of theatrical performance, obsessively moving about a lost center they can never recover."[188] Although chronologically Rackin's argument strikes me as true—Henry V reigns in the middle of the middle of the named monarchs (and he shares the spot with Henry VI if we include Edward IV in the mix)— her assertion does not consider how early audiences would have encountered the plays. While Henry V serves as a significant through line through all eight plays (even in *Richard II*, where he is foreshadowed though he never officially appears onstage), the plays themselves do not join neatly in the middle due to the order of their composition. Or perhaps, the two sets of plays do unite in the figure of Henry V, but they only do so retrospectively once placed in the larger, printed canon.

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[188] Rackin, *Stages of History*, 84.

Thick Time and Subjunctive Spaces

The challenge with history plays in general is determining if it is even possible to extract temporal threads and categorize them into past, present, and future. *1 Henry VI* begins with such a temporal blend, presenting the funeral procession of the late Henry V with a series of ill omens. The interplay of past and future is already on full display at the very beginning of the play. Specifically, the Duke of Bedford remarks on the state of the sky and its relationship to the young king's recent demise:

> Hung be the heavens with black. Yield day to night.
>
> Comets, importing change of times and states,
>
> Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky
>
> And with them scourge the bad revolting stars
>
> That have consented unto Henry's death. (1.1.1-5)

These five lines, along with the subsequent clarifications on Henry V's battle prowess spoken by Gloucester, operate on several important levels. For one, Bedford and Gloucester provide the opening backstory that grounds the viewer/listener or reader in the setting. On a fully lit stage in the afternoon, Bedford's lines illustrate to the audience that the atmosphere is meant to be (literally) dark and uncertain. In his work on Shakespeare's use of astrology, Moriz Sondheim cites these lines as the representative example of astrological references "used as rhetorical ornaments or to express mood or

atmosphere."[189] Moreover, as Edward Burns offers, the first line "hung be the heavens with black" may also be a direct reference to the dark fabric canopy that covered the stage to signal a tragedy. He elaborates that in this moment, "the English lords may wish to create a sense of tragedy, but the line is ambiguous as to whether Bedford is describing a black-hung stage or demanding one."[190] In either case, Bedford draws deliberate attention to the different temporal relationships that Rackin identified with Shakespeare's later histories. Bedford's lines are chronological in that they highlight a historical past through Henry V's death, they are achronic in that they draws attention to the artifice of the stage and thus being a past event occurring in the present, and they are anachronistic both by virtue of being imagined words and by providing a celestial pathetic fallacy that lacks any historical referent.

Throughout the scene, past and future remain in tension as the speakers remember their king while adding in allusions to the future. Winchester, for instance, references the end of the world and the Book of Revelations, invoking "King of Kings" (1.1.28) as the epithet of choice for God and likening Henry himself to "Judgment Day" for the French (1.1.29). Likewise, he calls back to the Old Testament (and the distant past) by naming God as "Lord of Hosts." These callbacks and allusions invite several readings. For one, they place Henry and his English followers in the moral right as warriors blessed and chosen by their deity to eliminate the wicked French who, by

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[189] Moriz Sondheim, "Shakespeare and the Astrology of His Time," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2, no. 3 (1939): 251.
[190] Edward Burns, ed., *King Henry VI Part I*, (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2000), 115, note 1.

linking their fate to a final judgment, deserve their bloody end. The specific references to

Judgment Day and the violence of the Old Testament also evoke a merciless blood bath,

perhaps subtly reminding us that, deity-approved or not, war is violent and, for many,

final. Moreover, the reference to Henry's French Judgment Day places the audience in

the hypothetical space of a future that is both certain yet indeterminate.

As Winchester's references look forward, they also look back. The Bible and its

promises and prophecies of Judgment were from the past, and the past is more distant

than the reigns of Henry V and Henry VI. Ironically, although the events, composition,

and messages from the Bible occurred chronologically further back, they directly

affected the everyday existence of the early modern playgoer.

This scene evokes two key concepts: Walter Benjamin's dialectical image and

the palimpsest. My understanding of the dialectical image draws on from Philip Lorenz's

application of the concept in *Henry VIII*.[191] Describing the moment between *das*

Gewesene ("Then") and *das Jetzt* ("Now"), Benjamin argues that when the past is

spoken of, it does not progress in a linear fashion—it merely appears: "For while the

relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of

what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly

emergent."[192] The image itself is what Bedford has created with his words—the scene of

Henry V conquering France like a just (if grim) harbinger of judgment and apocalypse,

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[191] Lorenz, "'Rupture, Reflection, and Repetition in *Henry VIII*," 63.

[192] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 462.

occurs in a flash for the audience. Simultaneously, while the audience can see Henry in their mind's eye, they are also literally seeing either an actor, speaking their lines in real-time, the words on a page, or whatever is before their eyes if they are listening to an audio recording. The first scenario wherein the audience is both seeing and hearing the play ends up presenting the most complexity as it simultaneously offers competing images and temporalities. This is not to say reading and listening to a recording do not offer the dialectical image, but what that reader/listener actually sees is much easier to partition off and ignore as superfluous.

This leads me to the second concept that this scene evokes: the palimpsest. Simply defined, a palimpsest refers to a document that contained some form of writing that was then covered or removed in order to accommodate new writing. The palimpsest itself is the image of both the previous recordings and the new text. As plays that rely on historical events as the source of its action as well as an audience's awareness, the *Henry VI* plays are, by nature, "palimpsestuous." This is both expected and part of the appeal, as Paulina Kewes explains: "Any dramatization of the past evokes memories of what had come before and foreshadows what was to come later. It therefore established a broad frame of reference, encouraging the audience to situate the events represented in the context of what they know (or are told) actually happened."[193] Playgoers, especially early modern playgoers, are able to adapt the play's actions to their larger frameworks,

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[193] Paulina Kewes, "The Elizabethan History Play: A True Genre?" in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard, vol. 2, *The Histories* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 182.

seeing one super-imposed upon the other. To continue the metaphor, the older (prior knowledge of history) may be faint or obscured given the new sensory imprint.

The first scene provides an excellent microcosm of the various timelines running through the play at large and their repeated imbrication with the theatrical, the literary, and even the cosmological. Even in the first lines, Bedford, Gloucester, Exeter, and Winchester manage to evoke the past (Henry V's death and the history of English kingship), the present (the heavens' reaction to Henry's death), and the future (Judgment Day and plans for dealing with a French threat). While the scene moves in a somewhat teleological progression (it begins roughly with the past and concludes with the characters dispersing and announcing what they *will* be doing, the temporal state of the scene is less clear. On the one hand, several characters are conversing in real-time in front of a real audience, setting them all firmly within the present. Yet intermixed with this metadramatic present are the tenses the characters use to reflect on past, present, and future events, sometimes in the same speech.

We can see the clearest juxtaposition of past, present, and future with the Messengers and the reactions of the nobles, especially the eager Bedford. All three Messengers bring with them reports of various length, the first announcing that several territories "are all quite lost" (1.1.61), the second delivering letters revealing that "the Dolphin Charles is crowned king in Reims" (1.1.92), and the third offering a lengthy narrative detailing Talbot's capture. These messengers, to recall Chapter 2, are anonymous nuntii who only appear in this scene and thus, by convention, are considered to be reliable sources of information. In each report, regardless of its length, form, and

deliverer, the Messenger speaks in the present tense, though all are discussing events that already passed. From a dramatic standpoint, the present tense highlights the immediacy of the information and serves to juxtapose the excitement and the stakes with the melancholy bickering of the nobles. It also contrasts heavily with the nobles' reactions. After hearing about Talbot's capture, Bedford immediately swears that he will do everything he can:

> His ransom there is none but I *shall* pay.
>
> *I'll* hale the Dolphin headlong from his throne;
>
> His crown *shall be* the ransom of my friend.
>
> Four of their lords *I'll* change for one of ours.
>
> Farewell, my masters. To my task *will I*.
>
> Bonfires in France *forthwith I am to make*,
>
> To keep our great Saint George's feast withal.
>
> Ten thousand soldiers with me *I will* take,
>
> Whose bloody deeds *shall* make all Europe quake. (*1H6* 1.1.148-56, emphasis added)

In nearly every line, Bedford speak in the future tense, peppering his speech with *will*s and *shall*s and the appropriate contractions. The surrounding dialogue from the Third Messenger and Exeter's subsequent lines, in contrast, all remain in the present tense. For instance, Exeter commands Bedford and the others: "Remember, lords, your oaths to Henry sworn" (*1H6* 1.1.162). He speaks in the present tense while simultaneously reminding the lords and the audience of the recent past.

Though he uses modals for the future, I would suggest that Bedford here (and elsewhere) operates in the subjunctive. Although nowhere near as common as in Old English and Middle English, or other languages with inflected endings like French and Latin, the early modern subjunctive mood plays a key role in *1 Henry VI* especially.[194] Being a mood, the subjunctive is not a tense, like past or present; it is also not a category of nouns or a declension; nor is it a conjugation. Most English is written in the indicative (descriptive) mood, with easily identifiable interrogative (questions) or imperative (commands) moods interspersed. Among its many other uses, the subjunctive mood places sentences in an imaginative state or describes events that have not yet taken place (and can change how a verb is conjugated).

Bedford prefers to view the world in, if not the future, a potential alternate world where he has already completed previous acts. As the three Messengers enter in succession, Bedford's speech relies more and more on the future. In response to Gloucester's doubts of Bedford's lack of battle prowess, he responses indignantly: "An army have I mustered in my thoughts. / Wherewith already France is overrun" (*1H6* 1.1.101-102.) Even when he speaks in the past tense, Bedford is thinking in alternative times. In Bedford's mind, before he learns about Talbot's capture, the English have already won.

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[194] For more on this topic, see Lynne Magnusson, "'What may be and should be': Grammar Moods and the Invention of History in *1 Henry VI*," in *Shakespeare's World of Words*, ed. Paul Yachnin (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015), 147-170.

Shakespeare's subjunctive further reiterates the both careful and lopsided balance of literary technique and historical thought common to his historical sources like Holinshed and Stow and to his actual plays. When we look at a line like "An army have I mustered in my thoughts / Wherewith already France is overrun" alludes to a future event that has, in Bedford's mind, already happened. The play itself ends up being a subjunctive space where real-world time still flows linearly for a viewing or reading audience, but through the power of rhetoric, performance, and historical thought, the audience and the players can experience multiple and contradictory times.

Ultimately, this first scene from *1 Henry VI* adapts the epistemology of time from the chronicle histories and transforms it using dramatic and poetic technique in a manner that exacerbates the goals of history that both Levy and Rackin have identified. In this play Shakespeare collapses entire decades in order to have his major characters—Joan, Talbot, and Henry himself—of age (or even just alive) interact. But it is not enough to pull characters or ideas from different points in the historical record—Shakespeare transforms a prose history into a completely new genre where not just temporal events are collapsed but the language itself.

Prophetic Knowledge and Dramatic Historiography

Shakespeare's play with time and subjunctive possibility extend throughout the tetralogy. Outside of the opening scenes where he situates the audience into both the historical timeline and the timeline of the play, Shakespeare also offers several

prominent examples of mantic (that is, prophetic or related to divination) speech that extend often extend across scenes, acts, and whole plays. In these moments, Shakespeare uses knowledge that is simultaneously future (for the characters), past (for the audience), and present (in being found, spoken, and performed) not only to create dramatic tension, but also to illustrate the multivocal nature of history that was being attempted in his chronicle sources.

I suggest that a prophetic or mantic statement may take on one of three major forms throughout the second tetralogy. These forms range from utterances that are textually signaled as prophetic to those that are implied to be prophetic. The first is the conventional prophecy, signaled by the speaker announcing that she or he is actively prophesying. We see this explicit type of prophecy throughout the tetralogy, with the majority of prophecies stated by King Henry himself in *2 and 3 Henry VI*, or in deliberate contrast, Joan in *1 Henry VI* or the summoned demon Asnath in *2 Henry VI*. A variation on this form is the reported prophecy wherein a speaker relates an explicit prophecy given by another character sometime in the play's past. The second form is curses, with the most famous examples coming from the women in *Richard III*— Margaret's curse in particular—and other curses such as those uttered by Suffolk in *2 Henry VI*. The third major form is auspicious dreaming, as in Clarence's, Richard's, and Richmond's prophetic dreams in *Richard III* or Cardinal Beaufort's claim of a dream where Gloucester dies in *2 Henry VI*. In the case of dreams, the dreamer seems to be aware that their dream may be auspicious, but when the dream promises grisly ends,

they struggle to come to terms with whether it is a genuine foreshadowing or the results of a worried mind.

Below, I discuss examples of all three mantic utterances—prophecies, curses, and auspicious dreams—and their relationship to the larger historical knowledge project that Shakespeare experiments with in the first tetralogy. A play's prophetic statement, regardless of its form, mixes knowledge across multiple categories: supernatural, human, and poetic. In all three types of mantic utterance, the future predicted is deemed to be entirely certain just as the completed past was reportedly supposed to be. This blending of epistemological and temporal structures, opens up a space for skeptical inquiry and multiple interpretation on a seemingly closed structure of time and plot.

Prophecies

The first manifestation of divination, prophecies themselves, are packets of knowledge that are transmitted from a supernatural power (usually a divine or demonic being) to a human. For early moderns, as well as their classic and medieval predecessors, the challenge of the prophecy was that humans cannot always understand divine knowledge and must spend time deciphering the message to understand its larger meaning and significance. As any Greek tragedy will tell you, attempts to decipher and thwart fate do not end so well. The traditional prophecy as transferred knowledge is thus particularly well suited as a dramatic device where a playwright may give information to

an audience without having to rely on other, more conventional techniques like anonymous reporting and visually performing the scene on stage.

Prophecies are ubiquitous in the early modern period and remain so well past the traditional periodization boundaries. In a late seventeenth-century pamphlet, *Catastrophe Mundi: Or, Merlin Reviv'd* (1683), an anonymous "learned pen" responds to the "scandalous" accusations "that Englishmen always carry an old Prophecy in their Pockets" by assuring the reader that "we are no more Addicted to those Curiosities than our Neighbours."[195] The author goes on to link different nations with their preferred prophet—such as France with Nostradamus, a Catholic cardinal with an astrologer on retainer—before asserting that while there are bad prophets and prophesies, prophecy itself, when performed properly and by the proper people, is a good thing. Simultaneously humorous and enlightening, this indignant response reveals the ambivalent status of prophecy even well after the Restoration and the creation of the Royal Society. The author illustrates that individuals across Europe gain something from prophecy, whether that be comfort or entertainment. Yet the anonymous author also indicates that an over-reliance on prophecy, as shown by their insistence that *not all (English)men* carry pocket-book prophecies and poking fun at their Continental rivals France and Rome as actually being the ones guilty of over-reliance, is worthy of scorn.

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[195] *Catastrophe Mundi: Or, Merlin Reviv'd, In a Discourse of Prophecies & Predictions, And their Remarkable Accomplishment. With Mr. Lilly's Hieroglyphicks Exactly Cut; And Notes and Observations thereon. As Also a Collection Of all the Antient (Reputed) Prophecies That are Extant, Touching the Grand Revolutions like to happen in these Later Ages*. London: Printed and to be sold by John How, 1683. Wing L2214-1529. A2r.

Shakespeare and his contemporaries' primary sources for their history plays—the

English chronicles of Holinshed, Stow, Hall, and others—contain their own share of

prophecies. In the 1577 and 1578 editions of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, the compilers pair

a prophecy with its fulfillment. The most famous and elaborate example of this

immediate linkage between prophecy and fruition occurs in the story of Macbeth's and

Banquo's encounter with the witches. This meeting, which follows the same trajectory

as Shakespeare's play, begins with the three "women in straunge & ferly apparell,

resembling creatures of an elder worlde" greeting Macbeth by successive titles before

vanishing.[196] We know what happens next: after becoming the Thane of Cawdor,

Macbeth and his wife hasten the fulfillment of the remainder of the prophecy by

murdering the current king, and in the process, teach the reader a very important lesson

about trusting otherworldly women with the ability to see the future.

Holinshed notes two different interpretations of Macbeth's encounter. One

interpretation holds that Macbeth and Banquo had imagined the encounter that evolved

into an in-joke between the two. The other takes the prophecy and the story surrounding

it at face value, holding that the three women were very real and very otherworldly,

though it is unclear which otherworld they are a part of:

This was reputed at the first but some vayne fantasticall illusion by Makbeth and

Banquho, in so muche that Banquho woulde call Makbeth in ieste kyng of

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[196] Raphael Holinshed, Vol. I: *The Historie of Scotland 1577*, 243-4. Accessed from *The Holinshed Project*, http://www.cems.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/extracts2.shtml; http://english.nsms.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/texts.php?text1=1587_1262

Scotland, and Makbeth againe would call him in sporte likewise, the father of

many kings. But afterwards the common opinion was that these women were

eyther the weird sisters, that is (as ye would say y^e Goddesses of destinie, or els

some Nimphes or Feiries, endewed with knowledge of prophesie by their

Nicromanticall science, bicause every thing came to passe as they had spoken.

[no closing bracket][197]

As the *modus operandi* of most sixteenth-century chronicles, the appearance of multiple

interpretations of a given event of story does not warrant comment. What does merit

attention, however, is how the chronicler frames both interpretations in terms of time and

importance. In terms of the temporal divide, where (logically) the first interpretation

goes first in the chronicle, placing the doubtful interpretation earlier allows for the

second reading to seem verified by the passage of time, something that is always

required for the fulfillment of prophecies.

Prophecies proper abound throughout the three *Henry VI* plays. Unlike general

auspicious utterances where a character will assert that something is about to happen or

illustrate discomfort at unfortunate events, the prophecies that I speak of are explicitly

marked in the playtext or a source as prophecies. Normally, these prophecies either have

the prophesier themselves announce that they are prophesying or another character will

do it for them, though infrequently, a prophecy may be identified as such in Hall or

Holinshed.

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[197] Holinshed, *The Historie of Scotland 1577*, 243-4.

As a knowledge practice, prophecies are significant because they represent a mode of knowledge acquisition entirely different from the traditional sensory or rhetorical methods that we have seen elsewhere in this dissertation. Unlike ocular proof or testimony, the content of a prophecy was thought to come straight from the divine or demonic force, bypassing all human modes of inquiry and simply imprint itself on the prophet's mind and tongue.

A prophecy may be granted by one of two supernatural forces: God or Satan and his devils. With the exception of Joan in her earliest appearances in *1 Henry VI*, which category a prophecy falls in is fairly easy to spot. Whether or not a prophecy is demonic or divine also seems to be linked to the gender, whether of the prophet or the commissioner of prophecies. The divine prophecies in the tetralogy are all ascribed to highborn men whereas demonic prophecies are linked to women who also are either lowborn or employing individuals of a lower class.

The most complicated example of gendered demonic prophecy occurs in *2 Henry VI*, where Eleanor the Duchess of Gloucester commissions a conjurer, a witch, and two priests to summon "a spirit, raised from depth of underground" (*2H6* 1.2.79) who will answer any of her prepared questions. As the wife of "Good Duke Humphrey," the Lord Protector who has a claim to the tenuous English throne, Eleanor's brief appearance in the play is marked by her ambition. After being chastised by her husband for dreaming of taking the throne over Henry and Margaret, she decides to take matters into her own hands to advance the Gloucesters' state, remarking:

Were I a man, a duke and next of blood,

> I would remove these tedious stumbling-blocks
>
> And smooth my way upon their headless necks.
>
> And, being woman, will not be slack
>
> To play my part in Fortune's pageant. (*2H6* 1.2.63-67)

Shakespeare anticipates Lady Macbeth here, highlighting Eleanor's comparative powerlessness as a woman to the power afforded to her husband as both a man and a duke while simultaneously granting her personal agency in attempting to achieve her goals. This agency, as we see shortly after this speech, includes secretly employing the corrupt clerk John Hume to solicit Margery Jourdain the witch, and Roger Bolingbroke, the conjuror. The form of Eleanor's agency, as she herself notes, is stereotypically feminine—she cannot simply chop off heads, but she can work discretely to locate otherwise unknowable information.

Where the gendered link to demonic prophecy becomes complicated in the scene that follows is that the majority of the actual conjuring of (and most of the conversation with) the summoned demon is completed by men. Eleanor herself watches the conjuring from above, and Margery Jourdain only speaks briefly. Yet while Eleanor is not part of the summoning per se, and while she herself does not ask any questions, Bolingbroke's inquiries are still Eleanor's that she had written down (or someone had copied) for the conjurers.

Jourdain's brief lines further illustrate the complexity of learning needed to acquire the information they have been requested to locate. Before Bolingbroke takes

over and reads Eleanor's questions, Jourdain commands the spirit by name and invokes God in order to control it:

> Asnath,
>
> By the eternal God whose name and power
>
> Thou tremblest at, answer that I shall ask;
>
> For till thou speak thou shalt not pass from hence. (*2H6* 1.4.24-27)

In so many lines, Jourdain confirms the adage that names have power, and that (the Christian) God supersedes all other powerful creatures. Asnath's name, as Ronald Knowles suggests, may be "an anagram for 'Satan', or 'Sathan'…Other editors have suggested that 'Asmath' [as it appears in F] is a corruption of or derivation from Asmenoth, Astmeroth, Asteroth, and Asmodeus."[198] Regardless of who the demon is actually supposed to be, all of the suggestions indicate that Asnath is demonic. By knowing this particular spirit's name, and using it, Jourdain and her fellow conjurers are able to control the demon. In addition to illustrating the conjurer's book knowledge, Jourdain's lines not only complicate the gender divide but also the demonic/divine divide common in certain types of early modern and medieval spirit summoning. In the lines above, Jourdain explicitly names God and uses the spirit's fear of the deity's "name and power" (*2H6* 1.4.25) to control them. But she is also still summoning a demon if not Satan himself.

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[198] Knowles, ed., *King Henry VI, Part 2*, 190, note 24.

Added to this confusion of who is permitted to acquire and access the demon's knowledge is the mixed company of listeners and readers. Eleanor faces the brunt of punishment for summoning and consulting Asnath whereas the summoners themselves are released. York and Buckingham who arrest the errant Duchess, while they are not on stage to witness the actual giving of the prophecies, read the report of them and faces no dire consequences. In a soliloquy, one of the summoning squad, John Hume, informs the audience that the summoning is a set up. He has been hired by the Cardinal and Suffolk "to undermine the Duchess / And buzz these conjurations in her brain" (1.2.98-99) in order to orchestrate her husband's fall from grace. York and Buckingham, and by extension Suffolk and Beaufort, do not seem to really care one way or another that the Duchess is anachronistically violating laws or moral dictums. What they care about is that her consultation with witches, priests, and devils would offend both the pious Henry and the common people who otherwise adore Gloucester, thus undermining their influence and proximity to the English throne.

1 Henry VI too offers several examples of prophecies that also capture the complexities of access to and sanctity of knowledge granted wholesale through outside intervention as opposed to investigation or study. As a rule, whether or not a prophecy is acceptable is based not on whether the prophecy itself comes to fruition (though all "good" prophecies do come true in some form by the end of the tetralogy), but rather on *who* is giving the prophecy. Similar to his stance on any number of issues, Shakespeare's personal take on prophecy is obscure, open to interpretation by whoever is performing, directing, or reading the text. Within the play, prophecies and prophetic utterances are

made by a variety of characters—male and female, English and French, high-class and low-born. It is not coincidence I think that these binaries are largely consistent in *1 Henry VI*, though *Parts 2 and 3* allow for some collapse.

This collapse of time and genre, as Alice Dailey argues, is part of the history play, as she explains: "Disruptions to the binary distinction between history and performance…are embedded in the history play itself, a form that exposes the cooperation of archival and performative evidence to construct the past in the dramatic present."[199] Dailey is careful to position her argument within performance studies specifically here, drawing attention to the human bodies an audience sees in performance as well as the remains of dead bodies from the past, an issue which becomes all the more complicated when dead bodies or separate body parts appear on stage. For the history play, all of these things—embodiment, time, memory, historical knowledge, and dramatic practices—are imbricated within each other.

While the major prophets of the first tetralogy are women, prophecy is hardly an exclusive feminine domain. Men throughout the plays prophesize or work with prophecy, though they tend to do so as intermediaries rather than as prophets themselves. For certain, male soothsayers do exist in Shakespeare's corpus, most notably in plays emphasizing Roman history like *Julius Caesar* and *Cymbeline*, but they seem to be a rare breed here. In the history plays, particularly *1-3 Henry VI*, are male prophets that also just happen to be kings with a direct divine connection as I detail below.

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[199] Alice Dailey, "The Talbot Remains: Historical Drama and the Performative Archive," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 35, no. 3 (2017): 376.

In *1 Henry VI*, the first inkling of prophecy comes not from Joan but from Bedford. As the play's first speaker, Bedford immediately signals to the audience that the events of the play are set within a specific cosmological framework where the events on the earth are echoed in the heavens, and in turn, heavenly bodies effect mundane control. As part of a prayer where he calls to the recently deceased Henry V to offer succor, Bedford first predicts:

> Posterity, await for wretched years
>
> When at their mothers' moistened eyes babes shall suck,
>
> Our isle be made a nourish of salt tears,
>
> And none but women left to wail the dead. (1.1.48-51)

The prediction itself is short and, and when placed in comparison to the larger point that Bedford is making (the invocation), it is easy to miss.

In addition to Bedford's propensity to dwell in a future perfect tense, Exeter references two prophecies that he knows from varying sources. The first prophecy plays with the expectations of an audience that understands not just the story of Henry VI's reign but the origins of the reign of his father. As the English nobles prepare to set off for France, Exeter remains alone onstage to bewail the growing civil tensions and what that means for future England.

> And now I hear that fatal prophecy,
>
> Which in the time of Henry, named the Fifth,
>
> Was in the mouth of every sucking babe—
>
> That Henry born at Monmouth should win all,

And Henry born at Windsor lose all. (3.1.197-201)

Exeter attributes this strange prophecy not to a particular character or figure but to nursing children, thus providing a divine cause for the prophecy. If babies cannot lie (and cannot speak in two complete lines of iambic pentameter), the prophecy obtains more credibility as a divine act rather than a demonic one. The suckling babes are also verified by way of Exeter who concludes that the events unfolding around him are "so plain that Exeter doth wish / His days may finish ere that hapless time" (3.1.202-3). That is, Exeter has seen the writing on the wall, and it is obvious what is happening.

Another surprising character who prophesizes is the deceased Henry V himself. Exeter, attributes a posthumous prophecy to the king, viewing Winchester's upgrade from bishop to cardinal as confirmation of his utterance. He says to Henry VI, who promptly ignores him to receive Winchester and the rest of the Roman ambassadors: "Henry the Fifth did sometime prophesy: / 'If once he come to be a cardinal / He'll make his cap co-equal with the crown'" (5.1.31-4). In his discussion on curses and prophecies in the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*, Nicholas Grene takes great care to note that line does correspond to a similar statement made by Henry in Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke*. The comment in question refers to a comment that Henry reportedly made, prohibiting Winchester from becoming a cardinal due to his ambitious nature: "kynge Henry the fith knowing the haute corage, and the ambicious mynde of the man, prohibited hym on his allegeaunce once, either to sue for or to take, meaning the Cardinalles Hattes should not presume to bee egall with

Princes."[200] Grene explains, "In the sources this is not a prophecy at all, merely a proscription on the part of the king…With the King dead, the political savvy of Henry V is turned into vatic foresight."[201] By attributing the prophecy to the previous king, Exeter grants the prophecy considerable weight as Henry V was linked with prosperity and divinity. That Henry VI chooses to ignore Exeter's words, of course, contributes to his inevitable downfall.

Standing in opposition to these divinely inspired male prophets is the demonically-empowered Joan Purcel. The fictional Joan, based on the real-life Joan of Arc, is the first in 1 Henry VI to give an explicit prophecy rather than reference one. As a prophet, she simultaneously uses the methods of reporting that we have seen earlier in this dissertation alongside historical knowledge available to the audience and supernatural knowledge that has been given to her, presumably by the demons that appear in the play's final acts. Joan's prophecy displays the intimate connection of England's glorious past and dismal future clearly. After being accepted by the Dolphin as a legitimate prophetess, she asserts:

> Assigned am I to be the English scourge.
>
> This night the siege assuredly I'll raise.
>
> Expect Saint Martin's summer, halcyons' days,
>
> Since I have entered into these wars. (*1H6* 1.2.129-32)

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[200] Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke 1548* in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough, 3rd. vol. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), 51-2.
[201] Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, 136.

Joan's opening lines constitute the prophecy proper. (Self)-assured of her identity as a divine warrior for France, Joan promises unexpected success of the "Saint Martin's summer," which refers not to summer itself, as Edward Burns notes, but to an unseasonably warm autumn as Saint Martin's feast day is in November.[202] Her word choice points to an expectation of French losses, particularly when in combat with the English. This use of prophecy is fairly straightforward—Joan claims that she will do a thing due to her chosen status as "English scourge."

Joan's prophecy, however, does not end there. As she continues her speech, she seeks to connect her future success with the past success of the English Henry V, whose demise removes not just him but his glories. Building upon the reference to Alycone from "halcyons' days," Joan visualizes the spread of glory as "a circle in the water / Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself / Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought" (*1H6* 1.2.133-5). This utterance also proves to prophetic but for Joan herself and the French army in addition to the deceased king. By the play's end, Joan's watery circle also disperses as she magnifies her attempts to win multiple battles against the English invaders. Joan's gradual bids for martial advantage start conventionally enough—she bests the Dolphin in hand-to-hand combat and through rhetoric and guile, she manages to inspire the French troops and even persuade Burgundy to defect—but they take an immediate turn for the strange and occult in the final act when she summons literal demons to assist her. This major scene encapsulates the point where Joan's ripple of

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[202] Burns, 139, note 131

glory breaks. Here, when initially summoning the spirits, Joan reveals that her prophetic power is apparently genuine but demonic. After demanding "signs of future accidents" (*1H6* 5.3.25), Joan assures the audience that she has been communing with spirits for some time and that their "speedy and quick appearance argues proof / Of your accustomed diligence to me" (*1H6* 5.3.29-30).

The play itself offers multiple possibilities as to the source of Joan's abilities to prophesize, see through disguise, and defeat armed men in combat. For an individual not familiar with the mythology surrounding Joan of Arc, the playtext (spoken by Joan herself) claims that her strength and knowledge come from the Virgin Mary, as opposed to from God. This claim aligns with the historical Joan's affinity with the Virgin and also reinforces the Catholic/Protestant and Woman/Man binaries that informs the play and places Joan firmly on the "wrong side" with her French compatriots. Prior to defeating the Dolphin in individual combat, she describes her vision of Mary:

> God's mother deigned to appear to me
>
> And, in a vision full of majesty,
>
> Willed me to leave my base vocation
>
> And free my country from calamity:
>
> Her aid she promised and assured success.
>
> In complete glory she revealed herself. (*1H6* 1.2.78-83)

The revelation is sparsely detailed, as Joan opts to focus not on painting the picture of the event itself but rather summarizing the vision's message. Plotwise, this choice makes the most sense. What's important is not what Mary looks like but what either Joan sees

as her ordained mission or the rhetorical move that will most convince the French

leaders. However, the lack of details of the vision stands in direct contrast to other

reports in the play such as the messengers' descriptions of the battles and Talbot's

capture as well as Joan's deliberate decision to explain how the vision transformed her

from a "black and swart" shepherd's daughter (*1H6* 1.2.84) to a great beauty.

Whether a person's report or prophecy needs to be verified by other means varies

based first on their dramatic role, and then their intrinsic ethos, or the words and actions

of a character to add to their reliability as opposed to any audience foreknowledge.

Messengers, if we recall from Chapter 1, are generally imbued with a sense of

trustworthiness. While other plays certainly toy with this convention and have

messengers provide false or misleading information, the words of the unnamed

messengers in *1 Henry VI* may be taken at face value as the main points of their reports

are later validated. With Joan, however, the verification is much more complicated. We

do not receive the thick description that would add credence to her report of a holy

vision entrusting her with the fate of France, but we do receive some initial evidence that

could potentially support her claim that she has been imbued with divine power when

she defeats the Dolphin in combat.

In the early acts of the play, Joan's claims are seemingly validated with the

option for comic subversion depending on the staging. Upon hearing her description of

her vision, an amazed Dolphin offers a trial by combat to verify what she has said, a

trial, as Edward Burns suggests, that is the fabrication of the playwright.[203] The Dolphin

states: "Only this proof I'll of thy valour make--/ In single combat thou shalt buckle with

me, / And, if thou vanquishest, thy words are true" (*1H6* 1.2.94-6). And vanquish him

she does, thus providing enough evidence for the Dolphin that she is who she says she is.

The text itself, however, offers additional possibilities. On one level, an audience

member may take Joan's overcoming of the Dolphin as a divine act. This move is no

different than the medieval trial by combat—God favors the winner. An audience may

perfectly buy that she has some form of Virginal aid. On the other hand, the playtext

offers several lines that strongly imply a sexual overthrow that perhaps "unmans" the

Dolphin to make him more aligned with the play's already established binaries. Prior to

the combat, Joan informs the Dolphin that "thou shalt be fortunate, / If thou receive me

for thy warlike mate" (*1H6* 1.2.91-92). The choice of "mate" here is interesting as it

offers the possibility of Joan as a combative bedfellow or wartime ally or both. The

sexual innuendo continues for the remainder of the scene as Joan defeats the Dolphin by

knocking him down either physically or, at minimum, metaphorically, rendering him her

"prostrate thrall" (*1H6* 1.2.117). Moreover, the play may be staged so that the Dolphin

remains physically on the ground while Joan forcibly keeps him down by standing or

sitting on him, thus emphasizing the bawdy nature of their interaction.

Shakespeare's presentation of multiple possibilities for Joan's motivations stages

what English chronicles show. That is, frequently in the chronicles, writers will

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[203] Burns, 135, note 89.

incorporate multiple sources that do not always agree. Given the medium of drama,

Shakespeare's actors cannot simply repeat the same scene from a different perspective,

but they can evoke skepticism in an audience through juxtaposing a known quantity such

as Joan (whom the audience at the very least knows is a woman, French, and Catholic)

with her early heroic actions or speeches.

In addition to these comic possibilities, the play keeps the source of Joan's power

an enigma throughout until the final act where it is revealed that she had demonic rather

than divine aid. Interestingly, this sudden twist is not the first time that Joan is associated

with witchcraft in the play. Talbot drops several hints to the audience that Joan (and by

extension the French) are associating with some sort of illicit magic. Talbot, during their

first encounter, associates her with the devil:

> Here, here she comes. I'll have a bout with thee—
>
> Devil, or devil's dam, I'll conjure thee.
>
> Blood will I draw on thee—thou art a witch—
>
> And straightway give thy soul to him thou serv'st. (1.5.4-7)

Despite these blunt accusations, Joan does not directly respond to them, opting instead to

return a quick challenge and attack. They engage for two bouts, with Joan seemingly the

victor of the first and retreating after the second. Once she retreats, she informs Talbot

that his "hour is not yet come" (*1H6* 1.5.13), though it is unclear if she actually has

access to foreknowledge regarding Talbot's death or if she's goading him. If we read this

moment as Joan having foreknowledge, we may link it either to her claim in the earlier

scenes that she is divinely inspired by Mary or to Talbot's more recent accusation that

she is a witch. Joan's lack of response to Talbot's accusation seems to be key here, as she does not remind the audience by contradicting Talbot that she is assisted by the Virgin Mary, which she later does when attributing her victory over the Dolphin.

As the play continues, Talbot seems thoroughly convinced that Joan is dealing with supernatural forces. In the second act where he speaks with Bedford and Burgundy about the cross-dressed warrior maid, he dismisses Joan and the French: "Well, let them practice and converse with spirits. / God is our fortress" (2.1.25-6). On one hand, it is clear that Talbot has plenty of reasons to despise his previous captors as well as the woman who bested him in battle. Yet, on the other hand, the specific evocation of communing with spirits and placing it in juxtaposition with God makes it abundantly clear that Talbot is still associating Joan (and the French) with Satan and the English with God.

Upon an initial read, Joan's demonic connection comes out of left field, as Patrick Ryan asserts: "But Shakespeare, despite the Tudor chroniclers' expressed condemnations, gives no conclusive dramatic evidence through most of *1 Henry 6* that Joan receives power from Satan, not, as she claims, from God."[204] At first glance, Ryan's reading of the revelation of Joan's power source makes sense. When Joan communes with demons at the play's eleventh hour—or the fifth act—she has to explain to the audience that the fiends immediate response to her call "argues proof / Of [their] accustomed diligence to [her]" (5.2.29-30). These two lines hint at the artifice of

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[204] Patrick Ryan, "Shakespeare's Joan and the Great Whore of Babylon," *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 28, no.4 (2004): 60.

theatricality by justifying the sudden the demons' sudden appearance, but they also suggest that the playwright knows full well that he hasn't provided any ocular proof of Joan's black magic before this late point. Nevertheless, despite an initial feeling of whiplash, if we re-examine the play at length, we can see that Shakespeare, primarily using Talbot as a mouthpiece, makes it perfectly clear that Joan Purcel was always a witch, at least insofar as *1 Henry VI* is concerned.

Indeed, summarizing feminist dismay at Joan's reduction from complex character who is simultaneously comic and threatening while also being androgynous, clever, and charismatic to consorting with demons, Burns admits that the scene "can seem disappointing to a modern audience in its apparent reductiveness, by suggesting that Talbot was right all along."[205] But that is exactly the point. Of course Talbot was right all along—he's one of the few central characters who is always presented as having a trustworthy and honorable ethos. What troubles many modern readers about Joan's seeming turn to the dark side is a set of expectations that are not immediately mappable to the original viewing and reading audience. When we read Shakespeare, we want and expect to see nuanced central characters who are imperfect yet charismatic people that we may empathize with. For many, Joan certainly starts out that way, especially in comparison to her foil Talbot. Yet while modern readers may see more of a hero in Joan who lives by her wit and rhetoric (coupled with a few fight scenes where she emerges the victor), the early modern reader is always going to be Team Talbot.

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[205] Burns, Introduction to *King Henry VI, Part I*, 33.

What we know about Talbot's fame comes from Thomas Nashe's 1592 *Pierce Penilesse, His Supplication to the Divell*. In his brief defense of plays, contending that they are "a rare exercise of vertue," Nashe directly references a play where Talbot features as a central character:

> How would it havu ioyed brave Talbot (the terror of the French) to thinke that after he had lyne two hundred yearrs in his Tombe, hee should triumphe againe on the Stage, and haue his bones newe embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least (at severall times) who in the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding. [206]

This oft-quoted section alerts us to several issues that Shakespeare addresses predominately in *1 Henry VI*. First, Talbot is set in juxtaposition not with Joan or the Dauphin or any particular rival but the French as a collective unit. Nashe presents Talbot as an idolized hero whose death excited the emotions of the audience, an audience were so moved to tears that they "embalmed" the real Talbot's bones. Moreover, Nashe's claim illustrates the popularity of *1 Henry VI* and its hero, quantifying that Talbot's tragic death moved a minimum of "ten thousand spectators" across multiple performances, as shown by the parenthetical "many times." This claim is given further credence by "Henslowe's records, which" as John D. Cox and Eric Rasmussen report, "show fourteen more performances over the next twenty-two months."[207]

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[206] Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse, His Supplication to the Divell* (London, 1592), F3r.
[207] Cox and Eric Rasmussen, Introduction to *King Henry VI, Part 3*, 6.

Ultimately, the hero-worship of Talbot that Nashe expresses and Shakespeare's presentation of him, particularly in contrast with another, more irascible character, strikes me as similar to what he will do with Hal and Hotspur in *1 Henry IV*. Joan, like Hotspur, ultimately loses to her noble rival due in no small part to their hotheaded natures. However, while these two are ostensibly the historical "losers" in the ongoing drama of succession, Shakespeare frames them with characteristics that make them if not likable then interesting, with motivations that resonate perhaps even stronger now than then. Following Rackin, Richard Hardin illustrates the many ways Joan contradicts the privileged social mores of gender, religion, and class:

> A renegade daughter, Joan violates the cherished patriarchalism of the age. She also offends prejudice in adopting a male role, in pretending to the virginity so prized in a male-dominated culture, and in being a Catholic at a time when Catholics were associated with outrages like the Inquisition and the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre…Finally, Joan offends in being a low-born person pretending to aristocratic rank and modeling with the aristocracy's mysteries of love, honour, and war.[208]

By framing her in this manner, as a character that's on the wrong side of every traditional power boundary, Joan becomes a character that excites both fascination and discomfort. She represents everything Talbot is not, but she also exudes charisma and competency in battle, traits which make her a worthy rival as well as interesting foil.

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[208] Richard F. Hardin, "Chronicles and Mythmaking in Shakespeare's Joan of Arc," *Shakespeare Survey* 42 (1990): 33

Joan ultimately epitomizes the temporal disjunction and epistemological confusion that the audience experiences throughout the play. Even if we do not immediately trust Talbot's take on the situation, Joan's multiple characterizations as prophet, warrior, and witch are all verified in the text. Her prophecies do come true, she does physically fight, on stage, with both Talbot and the Dolphin, and she casts spells and summons demons in audience view. In her work on Joan's several identities Gabriele Bernhard Jackson explains that "the changing presentation allows Joan to perform in one play inconsistent ideological functions that go much beyond discrediting the French cause or setting off by contrast the glories of English chivalry in its dying moments."[209] By her costuming and rhetoric, Joan is visibly and aurally identified as stock female characters such as the Amazon. By presenting Joan as an Amazon or *virago* in armor, Joan is able to evoke all the positive literary associations of the Amazon, including their link to Elizabeth. The image, however, also evokes the threat of femininity and the Other. Of this multi-nature, Bernhard Jackson concludes: "Joan in armor is as fair and foul as the traditional double-potentialed Amazon, and that what she says or does is as likely to undercut 'the glorious deeds of the English in France' as to set off their splendor. She is a powerful warrior and a powerful enemy, but also an inverted image of both."[210] Moreover, Joan is not only an Amazon, she is explicitly a witch, two figures that while feminine, are at odds. In terms of age and humors, the

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[209] Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, "Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare's Joan of Arc," *English Literary Renaissance* 18, no. 1 (1988): 44.
[210] Bernhard Jackson, "Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare's Joan of Arc," 56.

Amazon woman is like her young male counterpart: hot-blooded and wet whereas the witch is a crone, overly dry and cold. The pair are also opposed in how they threaten established power structures, as Diane Purkiss observes: "In terms of nationhood, witchcraft and Amazonian invasion are opposite threats; one is invisible, the other visible."[211] Joan is a contradiction who somehow manages to exist as multiple ciphers and types within one coded body. This ideological functions dovetails into her epistemological function as prophetic packet of knowledge that needs to be interpreted.

As *1 Henry VI*'s grammar and images that simultaneously evoke past, present, and future, so too the figure of Joan illustrates a complex multiplicity that is only somewhat contained within the larger, forward-marching narratively. Bernhard Jackson argues, "whereas the play's structure points in the direction of synthesis, of the synchronic or temporally transcendent reading, the *exempla* point towards differentiation, the temporally disjunctive reading."[212] That is, while the play moves forward in time like the chronicles, guided both by Providence and the audience knowledge that these events have already occurred, more or less, specific characters and their allusions disrupt that flow. Character-wise Joan is the clearest example of this phenomenon in *1 Henry VI* due in no small part to her identity as other in literally every sense. She simultaneously claims virginity and pregnancy (both claims though not

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[211] Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 191.
[212] Bernhard Jackson, "Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare's Joan of Arc," 49.

explicitly verified are strongly suggested to be false), she is woman and a warrior, and she is connected rhetorically to the divine and the demonic.

Epistemologically speaking, Joan functions a bodily manifestation of prophecies, a combination of human and divine knowledge that is made resolutely physical through her presence on the battlefield and her self-reflexive femininity. The same as her fellow characters, Joan is both a historical figure and a fictional construct; yet whereas her counterpart Talbot represents a comfortable, heroic historical narrative of English superiority over the French, Joan is less easy to pin down. Like the play and the prophecies she gives, she is ultimately contained within a set of closed boundaries, but within those boundaries, she is in creative flux.

Counter to Joan is Henry VI himself, although he prophesizes in *3 Henry VI* rather than in direct real-time proximity to her character. Henry VI offers two prophecies that the audience know will come true: the claiming of Richmond as his heir in Act 4 and his scathing prophecy that all will come to hate Gloucester, the once and future Richard III. Theatrically, they also function as moments of respite and heightened anxiety respectively. His prophecies are always marked not as simply predictions but rather as explicit prophecies, either by calling them a "prophecy" or by appealing to Christian divinity. This deliberate choice, coupled with the historical knowledge surrounding Henry VI as a pious king, allows the prophecies to not just be accurate—the audience already knows that—but sanctioned within the worlds of the play and the past.

The first prophecy that Henry VI gives combines visual and the verbal modes in order to distinguish itself and grant itself legitimacy. Whereas Joan relies on trial by

combat in order to verify her prophetic status and Bedford repeats the words of the

previous King Henry V (thus adopting Henry's ethos in place of his own), Henry VI

mixes his own internal and external ethos with historical knowledge and the visual prop

of Richmond in order to make his prophecy all the more real:

> Come hither, England's hope
>
> (Lays his hand on his head)
>
>   If secret powers
>
> Suggest but truth to my diving thoughts,
>
> This pretty lad will prove our country's bliss.
>
> His looks are full of peaceful majesty,
>
> His head by nature framed to wear a crown,
>
> His hand to wield a scepter, and himself
>
> Likely in time to bless a regal throne. (*3HVI*, 4.6.68-74)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Henry's prophecy is not explicitly verified within the context of

3 Henry VI, though it does come to fruition at the very end of *Richard III* when Henry

VII takes the throne. The proof of prophecy comes not from outward verification but

rather from audience knowledge and Henry's association with the divine.

After he becomes King Richard III in the final installment of the series, Richard

himself remarks on Henry's selection of Richmond, identifying the moment explicitly as

a prophecy and Henry as a prophet. Upon hearing the news that Richmond has fled,

Richard begins to obsess over the young man and completely ignores Buckingham's

reminders that Richard has promised him an earldom for his service in making him king.

KING RICHARD. As I remember, Henry the Sixth

  Did prophesy that Richmond should be king

  When Richmond was a little peevish boy.

  A king: perhaps, perhaps—

BUCKINGHAM.   My lord.

KING RICHARD. How chance the prophet could not at that time

  Have told me, I being by, that I should kill him?

BUCKINGHAM. My lord, your promise for the earldom.

KING RICHARD. Richmond! When last I was at Exeter,

  The mayor in courtesy showed me the castle

  And called it Rougemont, at which name I started,

  Becaue a bard of Ireland told me once

  I should not live longafter I saw Richmond.

BUCKINGHAM. My lord!

  KING RICHARD. Ay, what's o'clock? (*R3* 4.2.94-107)

Shakespeare uses prophecy in this scene to link *Richard III* and *3 Henry VI* together.

How Richard frames the conversation does not require an audience member to have seen

the preceding play in order for the scene's mantic (and manic) tone to work, but it is a

convenient callback for those who have either seen the previous play or know their Hall.

Though likely not intended to make a larger comment on the often disjointed nature of

history and competing voices that attempt to be heard but are overrun by larger forces

such as a cult of personality or divine will, Buckingham's constant interjections nevertheless echo the multiple voices that appear in sixteenth-century chronicles.

Richard's musings about the prophecy of Richmond becoming Henry VII through the sanctioning of the notably pious Henry VI echo the the Tudor Myth, at least certainly on the surface. As Tillyard explains, the "Tudor Myth" was a framework encouraged by Tudor monarchs that situated the incoming royal family as not only the union of two competing lines of Lancaster and York which had splintered from the sons and grandchildren of Edward III through Elizabeth of York and Henry Tudor (aka Richmond above), but also through his ancestor Owen Tudor the last of the British kings before the Norman Conquest and, by extension the mythical King Arthur.[213] This framing situated the Tudor rule and Elizabeth's rule in particular as a return to the a "golden age," regardless of whether there really were any substantial improvements. Based on historical documents and the need for yet another incoming dynasty to justify its claims, this framing of history as providential makes sense as a strategy for the Tudors and their supporters. Shakespeare could have chosen not to include the prophecy at all in either play, but he opts to double down. As a literary technique, this makes sense as the repeating of a prophecy and its fruition across plays as opposed to across scenes or even acts allows for pleasure and for a convenient thread to keep the larger plot in tact. Shakespeare is also able to draw on audience expectations. If he holds the party line—

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[213] Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, 25.

that the Tudors are the culmination of a divine plan—he can create a satisfying narrative that creates comfort in the world the playgoers inhabit.

Of course, both history and Shakespeare are never that simple. In his study on divine providence and the chronicles, Henry Ansgar Kelly confirms that the establishment of similar patterns of divine justification not just for the Tudors but for the Lancatrian and York monarch in historical chronicles that precede the sixteenth century and these "providential patterns tended to repeat themsleves in accordance with the the political alignment of the authors."[214] Yet in the later chronicles such as Hall, this narrative, providential, and even vocal consistency is not as common. Of Hall specifically, Kelly explains:

> In the case of an historian like Hall, who records his own views as well as those he finds or invents for his characters, it might be thought a good rule to assume that he agrees with the providential sentiments of the characters he treats sympathetically. But a rule like this is dangerous, and implies a consistency and depth of thought that is not evident in Hall. Much of his characterization is not his own work, and much that is his own is influenced by consederations which have nothing to do with his main theme of the divison and union of York and Lancaster. The speeches he gives his charcters seem to be constructed primarily

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[214] Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 85.

with a view to their rhetorical effectiveness, than from any consideration of their

place in a coherent thematic structure.[215]

Hall's method follows less the medieval thought-structures the sought to offer a closed

system that, while perhaps unknowable to humans, was known and guided by a divine

plan, and more the humanist tendency to emphasize rhetoric and context. However, this

is not to say that Hall completely throws God and determinism completely out the

window when compiling and composing the chronicles. Structures of thought, especially

when they are so imbricated within the socio-cultural consciousness do not suddenly

disappear when other modes of thought become popular.

Throughout his histories, Shakespeare seems to be doing something similar to the

historiographers in the English chronicles. He uses prophecies and other divinely

sanctioned knowledge to give order and structure to the play, but he himself does not

seem to articulate a specific "canon" interpretation that wholeheartedly supports or

denies any of the myths. We can see an example of this in Henry's second major

prophecy. As Gloucester prepares to murder him (after confessing/bragging that he also

had murdered Henry's son), Henry predicts that all will turn on Gloucester and regret

that he was ever born:

And thus I prophesy, that many a thousand,

…………………………………………….

[215] Kelly, *Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories*, 112.

Shall rue the hour that ever thou wast born.

The owl shriek'd at thy birth,--an evil sign;

The night-crow cried, aboding luckless time;

Dogs howl'd, and hideous tempest shook down trees;

The raven rook'd her on the chimney's top,

And chattering pies in dismal discords sung.

Thy mother felt more than a mother's pain,

And, yet brought forth less than a mother's hope,

To wit, an indigested and deformed lump,

Not like the fruit of such a goodly tree.

Teeth hadst thou in thy head when thou wast born,

To signify thou camest to bite the world:

And, if the rest be true which I have heard,

Thou camest— (*3H6* 5.6.37, 43-56)

This passage stands in fascinating contrast to other examples of prophecy that we have seen in *1 and 2 Henry VI*. Similar to Joan in *Part 1*, Henry VI is specifically marked as a prophet—Gloucester calls him thus as he stabs him—and he announces that his speech is an act of prophesy. Yet while the prophesy begins by looking to the future, Henry VI focuses over half of his attention on auspices of the past. At his birth (which Henry, we should note, was not present for), the king claims that animals—predominately birds—made a commotion, thus signaling a disturbance in the natural order. Moreover, Richard was born "an indigested and deformed lump" who had already cut teeth.

In the passage above, Henry combines the actual act of prophesying that the plays typically associate with women characters and the act of reporting on past prophecies and auspices more common to the male characters. His actual act of prophesy, we should note, is not a particularly challenging interpretation or unlikely—Gloucester is in fact, committing regicide after all. But he calls it a prophecy, thus attempting to imbue it with a divine sanction for how else can Henry, one of the few genuinely religious and scholarly characters portrayed in these plays know the future?

Prophecy as a knowledge-making act breaks down at three points: the prophet is a woman or Other by race or class, the prophecy is given in real-time (rather than the past and recorded or repeated by the speaker), and the prophecy comes not from God but from devils, demons, or some other non-God supernatural source. We have seen variations of some of these breaking points in the preceding chapters. Going by their base definition, prophecies are translations of knowledge given to the prophet by some outside source—they are, in effect, reports. As reports, prophecies rely just as much of the ethos of the prophet in order to attain credibility as they do content or their source. It is telling that even though men do prophesy during the *Henry VI* plays (most notably Henry VI himself when he is about to be murdered by Gloucester in the Third Part), their prophetic acts remain distinct from the women who take on the bulk of foreseeing the future.

Prophecies further collapse as reliable knowledge practices when we consider the source of the extra-temporal knowledge. This point is particularly important with Joan who begins the play claiming that she has been given her knowledge (along with her

beauty, clear skin, and battle prowess) by the Virgin Mary. This association with Mary certainly aligns Joan with medieval mystics and several modern readers would come into the play knowing that the historical Joan of Arc was canonized as a Catholic saint in 1920, well after Shakespeare's play. Yet for an early modern audience, I would suggest her avowed connection to Mary could be interpreted as a red flag, suggesting to the audience that this armor-wearing woman is particularly Catholic and thus potentially unreliable in a way that her English counterparts like Talbot and later Henry VI are not.

Auspicious Dreams

The second type of mantic utterance which I call "auspicious dreams" are related to the prophecy proper by accurately foretelling information that a character would have had no other way of knowing. Also like prophecies, dreams are given by an outside source to the dreamer—presumably a deity but the plays themselves do not mention the source—but they are only shared through reporting. In the reporting, the information often becomes jumbled and confused as the dreamer simultaneously attempts to present their experience and interpret what its symbolism may mean. These highly visual and metaphorical descriptions introduce the audience to the life-or-death stakes of the near-future and collapse the distinction between the real and imaginary. As part of a knowledge project, prophetic dreams blend multiple types of knowledge as well as their presentation.

Dramatically speaking, on their basic level, auspicious dreams function as foreshadowing and generating audience terror and dread. In *2 Henry VI*, Gloucester and Eleanor, as they exchange descriptions of dreams from the previous night and morning, respectively, emphasize these trends. Gloucester explains his auspicious dream first:

Methought this staff, mine office-badge in court,

Was broke in twain; by whom I have forgot

But, as I think, it was by th' Cardinal;

And on the pieces of the broken wand

Were placed the heads of Edmund, Duke of Somerset,

And William de la Pole, first Duke of Suffolk.

This was my dream; what it doth bode, God knows. (*2H6* 1.2.25-31)

Even those who do not know their history can likely guess what is coming. Gloucester, whose death is stated in the play's title as it appears in the 1594 quarto, relates an only slightly cryptic dream where he sees his role as Lord Protector removed from him by the treacherous Cardinal Beaufort, who also happens to be his uncle. He also sees the admittedly gruesome image of the severed heads of Somerset and Suffolk as if on pikes, though in his dream they are on the broken halves of his staff.

Eleanor's assuring response to her husband's dream and her subsequent telling of her own "morning" dream ironically work to reinforce the terror Gloucester's dream engenders rather than soothe it. Assuring Gloucester that his dream is a grisly warning to anyone who would dare "break a stick of Gloucester's grove" or affront his position would be severely punished, Eleanor catches the warning of the dream if not it's actual

meaning. Levin reads similar situations of comfort as akin to "the moment in the horror movie when…one [character] assures the other that, despite one's premonition of danger, it is perfectly safe to walk through the graveyard or to explore the haunted house. Such refusal to acknowledge the ability of dreams to foretell the future usually portends that the dream's validity will prove true all-too-soon."[216] An audience member may indulge in some skepticism here, perhaps allowing themselves to believe (if shortly) that everything will work out for good Duke Humphrey. Yet what is more likely given audience foreknowledge of the War of the Roses as well as dramatic foreshadowing, Eleanor's words serve only to confirm the worst.

Eleanor's dream, while as vivid (if not as violent) as Gloucester's, reveals her own preoccupations that are perhaps less prophetic and based on personal ambition and desire. She elaborates:

Methought I sat in seat of majesty

In the cathedral church of Westminster,

And in that chair where kings and queens are crowned,

Where Henry and Dame Margaret kneeled to me,

And on my head did set the diadem. (1.2.36-40)

Robert K. Presson contends that her dream is a prime example of the *somnium animale*, or a dream that results from one's emotions or desires. In this case, Eleanor's dream is a manifestation of her ambition and, though Presson does not go this far, her noted, mutual

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[216] Carole Levin, *Dreaming the English Renaissance: Politics and Desire in Court and Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 2.

distaste for Queen Margaret. By viewing this dream as a *somnium animale*, Presson explains that the dream "connects a present state of mind with an expected future happening, and thereby a causal relationship between events in the drama is established."[217] In so many words, a prophetic dream must come from outside the dreamer through some exterior connection. Another explanation for why Eleanor's dream is not auspicious while Gloucester's is may have to do with whether the dream was actually a dream or a daydream. Eleanor specifically identifies her dream as her "morning's dream" (1.2.24) in contrast to Gloucester's "troublous dreams this night" (1.2.22). In the Arden 3 edition, Knowles repeats H. C. Hart's note from the first edition on Eleanor's lines, asserting that "Dreams in the morning are said to tell the truth."[218] This timing-specific element, as Carol Schreir Rupprecht elaborates, is confirmed by ancient and medieval dream treatises. The physiological reason, she explains, is as follows:

> The early morning, pre-dawn dreams are regarded as more reliably prophetic and meaningful since they are less somatically involved. The digestive process having been completed in the first hours of sleep, physiological activity related to the body and to waking life is over with and thus the faculties (of soul) become

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[217] Robert K. Presson, "Two Types of Dreams in the Elizabethan Drama, and Their Heritage: Somnium Animale and the Price-of-Conscience," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 7, no. 2 (1967): 249.
[218] Knowles, ed., *King Henry VI, Part Two*, 167, n.24.

more refined as the night passes and the dreamer thus gains access to the divine.[219]

Eleanor's identification of her dream as somehow more auspicious leads to a subversion of audience expectations when her prophecy does not come true but Gloucester's does. Another, related reading situates Eleanor as lying that she had a dream at all and is instead sousing out Gloucester's attitude toward her royal aspirations. Scheir Rupprecht takes this interpretation as a definite possibility by explaining how Eleanor's report compares to Gloucester's less certain description where he identifies metaphors and must attempt to remember what had happened: "Her reported dream…is so directly correlated with her expressed hopes for advancement, and so little altered through the usually selective process of dream formation, that it rings false."[220] As the above examples and their later verifications display, when dreams are truly prophetic in Shakespeare's plays, as with other types of mantic utterances, they require the possibility of interpretation and multiplicity of meaning.

The other major examples of auspicious dreams occur in *Richard III* where Clarence relates his dream about his impending murder and the ghosts of Richard's murdered victims appear to Richard and Richmond as they dream before meeting on the battlefield. Clarence's dream echoes Gloucester's, foreshadowing a dark future that comes to fruition before the scene even ends. Richard's and Richmond's shared dream

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[219] Carol Schreir Rupprecht, "The Drama of History and Prophecy: Shakespeare's Use of Dream in *2 Henry VI*," *Dreaming* 3, no. 3 (1993): 216.
[220] Schreir Rupprecht, "The Drama of History and Prophecy," 215.

are no less auspicious, but the question of whether they are dreaming or actually being visited by apparitions is less clear.

Clarence's dream language echoes that of Humphrey and Eleanor, though his description is considerably longer and focused upon his own death and afterlife. The keyword that Clarence repeats is "methought," typically at the beginning of a line or phrase, as a signal that what he reports to Brakenbury is a vision in his mind rather than a literal thing that happened. The same "methought" we saw prior with both Eleanor's and Humphrey's descriptions. With Clarence, the dream takes on additional sensory dimensions, especially when he describes his death by drowning:

Lord, Lord, methought what pain it was to drown;

What dreadful noise of waters in my ears;

What ugly sights of death within my eye.

Methought I saw a thousand wrecks…

…the envious flood

Kept in my soul, and would not let if forth

To seek the empty, vast, and wandering air,

But smothered it within my panting bulk,

Which almost burst to belch it in the sea. (*R3* 1.4.20-23, 34-39)

The descriptions here are as vivid as any we have seen or heard before in previous chapters. As he relates his terror, Clarence appeals to a general terror of drowning and captures it by capturing the agony of suffocating of the waves pressing down on him and his soul (figured as the pneuma or a breath of life) threatening to explode from him as

well as visions of death under the sea and the hollow rushing of water that is simultaneously a sound but not a sound at all. His dream, after promptly terrifying himself, Brakenbury, and likely audience, sets up several expectations for murder.

Clarence's dream maps especially to Humphrey's dream as well as to prophecies in general for its combination of ekphrastic specificity and its opacity of meaning. The two differ in how they subvert audience expectations. In Humphrey's case, Shakespeare uses Eleanor to introduce the smallest bit of skepticism that Humphrey and the people he identifies as threats or in danger, will reach their appropriate ends. With Clarence, once we actually see the murders, we are given the expectation that his death will be either by literal drowning or suffocation. This expectation, coupled with the comic banter that Clarence exchanges with murderers, messes with audience foreknowledge and permits us the fiction that, at least at this point, Clarence may just make it out alive. His vivid dream will not come to fruition so soon after he has it.

But of course, Clarence is murdered, and his dreams of a long-term drowning are fulfilled in a rather unexpected manner. First, the First Executioner stabs him as Clarence pleads for the Second Executioner to take pity on him. Then, in accordance to their plan, Clarence's dismembered remains are place "in the malmsey butt in the next room" (*R3* 1.4.244). Clarence's body is indeed submerged in liquid, albeit not quite the same as the waters between England and Burgundy, and his dream comes true even more quickly Humphrey's and Eleanor's dreams which take a whole act to come to fruition.

Shakespeare further plays with the conventions of dreams in the final act of Richard III where he stages the ghosts visiting Richard and Richmond the night before their final battle. This scene differs significantly from the previous examples as those dreams were given exclusively as reports from the dreamers. We do not know exactly where their dreams came from or if they were true or if they were the imaginings of stressed or ambitious mines, but we do know that they are either confirmed or denied within a short amount of time. For Richard and Richmond, however, the audience literally sees and hears the ghosts of Richard's many murder victims as they curse their murderer and heap praise and support on the future king. But all the other textual markers indicate that both Richard and Richmond have been dreaming. In one of the few stage directions that is not an entrance or an exit, the 1623 folio edition of play states that "Richard starts out of his dreame,"[221] and the two commanders separately relate that they had been dreaming. Richard's "Soft, I did but dream" (*R3* 5.3.176) as he sits up alone is echoed and juxtaposed by Richmond's proclamation that he has had "the sweetest sleep and fairest-boding dreams / that ever entered in a drowsy head" (*R3* 5.3.225-226). They also use the parallel language of "methought" to summarize what they state to have seen in their mind:

> KING RICHARD. Methought the souls of all that I had murdered
>
> Came to my tend, and every one did threat
>
> Tomorrow's vengeance on the head of Richard. (*R3* 5.3.202-204)

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[221] William Shakespeare, *The Life and Death of Richard the Third* in *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London, 1623), t1ᵛ.

RICHMOND. Methought their souls whose bodies Richard murdered

Came to my tent and cried on victory. (*R3* 5.3.229-230)

The proximity and parallels of these lines emphasize the question of whether the dream

is actually a mantic dream, a shared vision, the actual appearance of ghosts, or just a

coincidence. Richard III allows for all these possibilities, but regardless of how this

scene is staged, Shakespeare uses the expectations for dreams that he established earlier

in *Richard III* and *3 Henry VI* to established dramatic tension and link to the historical

events he has decided to stage. That the question of whether the ghosts are actual ghosts

or the manifestations of the mind is decidedly unclear because ghosts, dreams, and other

forms of prophetic utterance all fall under a general supernatural category that lacks

stable boundaries to classify them.

Curses

To elaborate on the porousness of divination and the supernatural, I will now turn

to curses. Closely related to prophecies proper, the many curses of the first tetralogy

dramatically function similar to prophecies, but they are powered by very different

sources. The power behind the curse lies both in the speaker's language and their

corresponding suffering as opposed to an outside, supernatural power. Margaret, the

ultimate curse-giver in *Richard III*, is perhaps the best example of the exchange of

suffering, but she herself is unable to make her plot-driving curse until she has lost

everything. If we compare her to her *2 Henry VI* counterpart, we see that her curses are less specific and less dire than in *Richard III*. After her lover, Suffolk, is banished for assisting in the murder of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, she angrily calls after the exiting lords and her husband:

> Mischance and sorrow go along with you!
>
> Heart's discontent and sour affliction
>
> Be playfellows to keep you company!
>
> There's two of you, the devil make a third,
>
> And threefold vengeance tend upon your steps. (*2H6* 3.2.300-304)

At this point, Margaret's curse is not quite a curse as she does not explicitly mark her speech as a curse, though the first and last lines of this short speech certainly do convey a curse. Margaret's anger here manifests in a call for "mischance," "sorrow," and "vengeance."

In order for a curse to work, it must be fueled by the speaker's experience. If the speaker lacks the equivalent experience, the curse itself ends up rebounding and taking the speaker down with it. After being goaded by Margaret into cursing, Suffolk first questions why he should even bother cursing the enemies who called for his banishment:

> Wherefore should I curse them?
>
> Could curses kill, as doth the mandrake's groan,
>
> I would invent as bitter searching terms,
>
> As curst, as harsh and horrible to hear,
>
> Delivered strongly through my fixed teeth. (*2H6* 3.2.309-313)

236

Suffolk's initial response to Margaret's question as to whether he lacks "spirit to curse thine enemies" (*2H6* 3.2.308) reflects that he does not really believe that his curse will do anything. Why should he waste his time? If his curse were able to kill, he would provide the most scathing of curses that emerge not just from his tongue but also from his very body. In his description of how he would curse, Suffolk ends up convincing himself that he must curse his enemies. And once he begins cursing, he finds that he cannot stop:

> And even now my burdened heart would break
>
> Should I not curse them. Poison be their drink!
>
> Gall, worse than gall, the daintiest that they taste!
>
> Their sweetest shade a grove of cypress trees;
>
> Their chiefest prospect murdering basilisks;
>
> Their softest touch has smart as lizards' stings;
>
> Their music frightful as the serpent's hiss,
>
> And boding screech-owls make the consort full!
>
> All the foul terrors in dark-seated hell— (*2H6* 3.2.320-328)

Until he invokes hell, Suffolk's curse specifically calls for his enemies to be poisoned. He links this poisoning to the natural world, invoking multiple flora and fauna as well as specific senses. For taste, Suffolk invokes "gall," specifically the yellow bile or choler from the gallbladder which was notoriously bitter. In addition to bodily bitterness, a gall could also be a growth or swelling such as those found on oak trees. Until the nineteenth century, oak goals were common sources of ink. For sight, Suffolk highlights the

basilisk, a mythological creature that turned whomever met its gaze into stone.

Moreover, as Knowles explains, a basilisk is also a large cannon, thus "possibly

evok[ing] his besieged enemies staring into the mouth of a cannon."[222] Touch manifests

in "lizards' stings" and potentially the cool of the shade of cypress trees, which are of

course, metaphors for death and funerals. Finally, Suffolk links sound to the sibilant

hissing of serpents and the sharp calls of screech owls.

While certainly not nice things to wish upon one's enemies, Suffolk's early

curses do not excite comment from Margaret until he specifically invokes hell. As soon

as he moves from natural curses to demonic ones, Margaret interrupts him, halting his

cursing and informing him that he has gone too far:

> Enough, sweet Suffolk; thou tormenst'st thyself,
>
> And these dread curses, like the sun 'gainst glass,
>
> Or like an overcharged gun, recoil
>
> And turns the force of them upon thyself. (*2H6* 3.2.329-333)

Margaret's interruption indicates considerable social awareness as well as knowledge of

how to curse, knowledge that she will dangle from Queen Elizabeth later in Richard III.

Here however, Margaret reveals that too much cursing may lead to the curse rebounding

on its giver, especially if the curse is not in proportion to what the curse-giver has

suffered. Moreover, as Shakespeare takes care to illustrate, for all his faults, King Henry

VI is incredibly pious. To damn him to hell, even Margaret realizes, goes too far, both in

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[222] Knowles, *King Henry VI*, *Part 2,* 275, note 324.

terms of how appropriate the curse is in response to actions and the divine protection that Henry enjoys.

The relationship between curses and prophecies is a curious one. The curse fuels itself by the emotions and experiences of the curse-giver. When a curse works, it draws from past suffering and emotions in order to effect a change in the future. There is a kind of willful, human energy that forces the events into being that contrasts with the prophecy. Prophecies proper, as Shakespeare presents them, do not rely on previous events so much as divine or demonic inspiration. Rather, they rely on human emotion and suffering, as Margaret informs Elizabeth when she asks the former queen how to make her own curses:

> Forbear to sleep the nights, and fast the days.
>
> Compare dead happiness with living woe.
>
> Think that thy babes were fairer than they were,
>
> And he that slew them fouler than he is.
>
> Bett'ring thy loss makes the bad causer worse.
>
> Revolving this will teach thee how to curse. (*R3* 4.4.112-117)

In terms of tense, the curse must be based on events of the past that are continually relived in the present in order to make an avoidable change to the future. The knowledge that comes from the curse is not handed to the curser, but rather the one who curses fabricates the knowledge (say of a loved one's murder) by continually repeating it, and imbuing it with even more horror. Margaret is the master of re-emphasizing her own pain and declaring it superior to everyone else's throughout her appearances in the plays,

whether that be when she tries to one-up her sorrow over her husband's in *2 Henry VI* when Suffolk is banished and later murdered, or in conversation with the other mothers in *Richard III*, where she insists that her grief is the most intense as she has dealt with her pain the longest.

Fueled by strong, genuine emotion the curses of the first tetralogy are put to their most effective use as devices for revenge and retributive justice. This tit-for-tat logic that the curse follows is ultimately why Suffolk's curse implodes and why Margaret's later curse largely succeeds. A person may overextend themselves, as Suffolk does, when he goes beyond his experiences and decides to call for damnation of his enemies instead of a painful, poisonous death. This overextension is due in no small part to King Henry himself who is established as particularly pious. Damning him to hell is too strong because Suffolk has not faced an equivalent act.

Margaret's curse that drives *Richard III*, however, does consistently emphasize justice, employing the logic of "an eye for an eye" in the curse itself and her later explanations of it to Elizabeth and the Duchess of York. Prior to cursing Richard exclusively, Margaret turns her attention to the current ruling Yorks and Greys:

If not by war, by surfeit die your king,

As ours by murder to make him a king.

Edward thy son, which now is Prince of Wales,

For Edward my son, was Prince of Wales,

Die in his youth by like untimely violence.

Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen,

Outlive thy glory, like my wretched self.

Long mayst thou live to wail thy children's loss,

And see another, as I see thee now,

Decked in thy rights, as thou art stalled in mine.

Long die thy happy days before thy death,

And, after many lengthened hours of grief,

Die neither mother, wife, nor England's queen.

Rivers and Dorset, you were standers by,

And so wast thou, Lord Hastings, when my son

Was stabbed with bloody daggers. God, I pray Him,

That none of you may live your natural age

But by some unlooked accident cut off. (*R3* 1.3.193-208)

Each curse here has a corresponding crime or event that, in Margaret's logic, will even out once the appropriate person either dies or suffers appropriately. She matches the royal Yorks with a corresponding Plantagenet: King Edward for King Henry, Prince Edward for Prince Edward, and Queen Elizabeth for Queen Margaret. Notably, Margaret does not curse Elizabeth to death; instead, she offers something arguably worse: living after nearly her entire family has been killed. Elizabeth's brother (Rivers) and son from a previous marriage (Dorset) along with the Lord Chamberlain Hastings also get caught up in Margaret's cursing. Her rage at them is due to their inaction rather than anything they consciously did. As she is not armed with any more family members herself, she instead invokes God to off them before their time.

The grammar of the curse and its relationship to a Renaissance humanist education are also worth discussing here. Magnusson convincingly links the curses, and more specifically, the speech of women to Latin grammar practices performed by boys in early modern English schoolrooms. Specifically, these grammar practices include the playing with forms and the use of the optative mood. The optative mood, which did not exist *per se* in Latin—wishes are expressed using the same endings as the subjunctive— was either mistranslated or characterized as its own mood in the common textbook, Lily's *Grammar*. In his English translations of common lists of wishes in their various moods and tenses from Latin, Lily continually uses an invocation to God to indicate a particular wish, usually "God grant," "Would God," or "I pray God." Margaret, and by turns Anne and even Richard uses these phrases in their curses, offering an additional link to the thought structures common to an individual educated in the sixteenth-century schoolroom. The invocation of a wish made English by giving it a divine agency, as Magnusson concludes, "substitutes for the ineffectual or nonexistent agency, however passionate, of wishing subjects a subject's paradoxically potent passion—if it can awaken God's agency on its behalf, if it can make it happen that…the 'curses…are fall'n upon thee, / And God…hath plagued thy bloody deed" (1.3.176–78)."[223] With this connection to an English understanding of wishes, the curse's power becomes tied with the power sources of the prophecy and the auspicious dream.

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[223] Lynne Magnusson, "Grammatical Theatricality in *Richard III*: Schoolroom Queens and Godly Optatives," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (2013): 42.

Conclusions

"It is not hard to foretell the future when it is already in the past," remarks Grene in his discussion of the role of curses and prophecies in the first tetralogy.[224] He's right, of course, but this truism oversimplifies the delicate balance of tense and time within those plays, especially *1 Henry VI*. Through present in his other histories, Shakespeare presents a particularly thick swarth of time, weaving the historiographical methods of his sources with poetics. What results are not simply temporally thick scenes where the past, present, and future coexist, but temporally thick images, characters, and individual lines. While Shakespeare concludes the play by containing the French and feminine threat of Joan, the container is hardly stable, for while Joan the prophetess and demon summoner is no longer a challenge, the French threat embodied by Margaret who appears at the end of the play and throughout the entire first tetralogy remains.

Ultimately, Shakespeare creates a space of dramatic knowledge that presents the illusion of stability and potentiality, albeit situated in an imagined past. He succeeds in this goal by combining historiographic methods that were already at play in the early English chronicles with dramatic techniques, specifically using tools that emphasize not a completed past, but a future that is always *in potentia*. One of his many techniques is within the language itself. He relies on the subjunctive case to create tension and possibility in play bound by temporal constraints and audience foreknowledge.

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[224] Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, 133.

Furthermore, he uses multiple types of mantic utterances—prophecies, auspicious dreams, and curses—that implicitly acknowledge what the audience already knows to create thick temporal spaces. In these spaces, the audience experiences temporal disjunction as they attempt to negotiate not only the past, present, and future, but also several pasts within pasts, futures within presents, and presents within pasts and futures. This disjunction creates an epistemological space of skepticism where the audience is aware of how much they both do and do not know, and potentially allows for the narrative of the play to become the narrative of history.

What I have hoped to show in this chapter is yet another way to view competing knowledge practices in the wake of epistemological transition. The development of historical methods and historiography, especially when running alongside and within the shift from late humanism to early empiricism, is a space that is just as fraught and complicated. Yet here, and as we have seen elsewhere in this dissertation, Shakespeare deals with multiple, oftentimes competing methods that he uses to present information, verify it, and complicate it. This time, in *1-3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*, the knowledge practices that he experiments with come from popular knowledge of history acquired through reading and hearing about the chronicles as opposed to his schoolboy sources. The methods, by being associated with a developing field of history, take on a more explicit temporal mode that Shakespeare attempts to wrangle and understand through the lens that he understands most: drama. As a playwright, Shakespeare, like the historian, must create the narrative that makes the most sense; however, within that narrative there are always variations, sometimes actively contradicting each other in the same passage.

With his poetic techniques, Shakespeare manages to emphasize historiographic methods

as a mode that welcomes skepticism and doubt in order to educate and delight.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this dissertation, I have aimed not simply to point out that different types of knowledge practices exist in the plays, but to argue how dramatists use these epistemologies to larger dramatic effect. From this dissertation, I offer the following conclusions regarding popular conceptions of early modern evidence and how that evidence may be interpreted:

- The disciplinary frameworks that we use to codify our knowledge today were not available to early moderns; however, the majority of methods that make up these frameworks were available.

- Early modern playwrights draw on multiple knowledge types and methods, providing a "mixed methods" approach to epistemology in their plays.

- Even when they find more empirical methods appealing or acceptable, playwrights overwhelmingly use humanist modes of inquiry as the default paradigm when presenting and evaluating evidence. In addition to "humanist"-identified methods, playwrights often adapt different methods into a specifically dramatic epistemology.

- Playwrights do not interrogate the reliability of the method itself, regardless of its association with empiricism or humanism. Rather, the critique is always on the humans who perform the method.

These conclusions ultimately reveal that while early modern playwrights were not specifically interrogating "What is knowledge?" in a broad, abstract sense, they were nevertheless reflecting popular concerns of what could be knowable and verifiable during a period where inherited knowledge was under scrutiny. I will briefly discuss each of these conclusions below before turning to ideas for future research.

Moving from more concrete, sensory evidence to more abstract, *a priori* knowledge, this dissertation displays the interconnectivity of epistemologies in a manner conducive to thinking about knowledge organization prior to the construction of modern academic disciplines. In the twenty-first century university, one of the central ways that knowledge and knowledge practices are codified is through the many academic disciplines. To be in a discipline as such means to be legitimate and to have a set of methods that define inquiry and the types of information of interest to the discipline. There's also a very real hierarchy, with certain disciplines be subsumed under larger, "umbrella" categories that, in theory, share a theoretical framework or set of methods. Across the board, these disciplinary identities serve as convenient markers of what a member of that discipline is interested in, the types of texts or data she uses, and the methods she uses to analyze them. If you were to meet one your colleagues from math or history or psychology out in the wild, and they introduced themselves as a member of that department, you would have a rough idea of what they do, the types of things that they are interested in and the type of work they produce. Disciplinary identities are crucial not just to liberal arts education, but to our educational system in general.

This structure stands in contrast to the early modern period which, as I have shown, possesses its own hierarchical structure and categories of knowledge. When we look at a pre-disciplinary period that is in transition from one major epistemology to another, as my project does, we can see examples of how to approach a sense of inter-or pan-disciplinarity as a model for education.

I have argued that early modern dramatists utilize a mixed methods approach for presenting and critiquing both types of knowledge and knowledge practices. By necessity, the "mixed methods" are not what we understand today—playwrights are not combining qualitative interviews with quantitative data analysis. But what they are doing is taking methods that are commonly allied with two knowledge systems associated with their education and worldview. Due to the nature of their work as playwrights, Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and Rowley all default to the primacy of humanist methods that place the spoken word and artistic creation. On the surface, this is not terribly surprising. Plays are made of words, after all, and playwrights are poets who use craft and poetics to make meaning. However, while a play may be composed of words and poetic devices, the primary way that an early modern audience would have experienced the play would be through their senses. They would hear the dialogue and the reactions of their fellow playgoers, they would see the actor on the stage (hopefully) "suit[ing] the action to the word, the word to the action" (*Hamlet* 3.2.17-18), they would smell gunpowder, sweat, food (rotten and otherwise), and they would feel the bodies of spectators next to them. The early modern play, and specifically the popular, commercial

early modern English play, thus serves as an experimental space where competing methods were inherently present.

While playwrights do indeed blend multiple epistemologies by both necessity and general interest, they also overwhelmingly rely on humanist methods as the dominant force in the plays. We primarily see this phenomenon on the structural level as opposed to the detailed level of individual knowledge practices. This discrepancy is largely due to the nature of the practices being staged. Humanism, relying predominately on deductive reasoning—that is, starting from the premise and deriving the examples— requires a structure set in place for it to really work. Plays, as poetic works, require the same. Meaning is made just as much through the form of a play as it is its individual words and movements. Moreover, empiricism-as-method was still in the process of being understood as a framework, and as Eggert and Spiller have argued, early moderns understood empiricism through their prior experiences.

In many of the plays I have discussed, the playwright offers a critique related to the knowledge practice, but the critique itself is never on the actual method. Indeed, the critique is always on the presenter of the information. Two more obvert examples of this critique are Jonson's use of the exempla in *Bartholomew Fair* and Middleton and Rowley's warning to not wholly trust one's "first sight" when making decisions in *The Changeling*. For Jonson, the concern rests in an individual's (incorrect) interpretation and the skills, prior knowledge, and care that the interpreter needs in order to correctly understand and apply the text. For Middleton and Rowley (and Shakespeare in *Othello*), the concern is no less human, but the fault lies less in the interpreter and more within the

unreliability of human subjects in general. Beatrice Joanna and Iago fabricate their realities through their own rhetorical savvy and ability to exploit the expectations of their listeners. Their ethos, and indeed anyone's ethos, is a performance that is not always entirely honest. We saw this especially at play with the different rhetorical constructions of Hamlet's and Claudius's ethea in *Hamlet*, as well as with Joan and Talbot in *1 Henry IV*. For Hamlet, Shakespeare further reveals the discrepancy between the rhetorical construction of an individual versus their actual moral responsibility. In an ideal world, the two should be one and the same, but for early modern playwrights, this confluence rarely seems to be the case. For *1 Henry IV* (and the history plays in general with their balance between history and storytelling, an already blended set in the early modern period), the extrinsic ethos, that is the ethos constructed through outside knowledge about a character, takes on a more noticeable role. Audiences are able to bring in additional, frequently detailed expectations regarding a character.

Though I have opted to look at canonical authors in this dissertation, the methods that I have described are applicable to other types of early modern drama and other authors. One under-studied area, the plays of the so-called University Wits, is a particularly fruitful place to see the interplay of late Renaissance humanism and early empiricism. Thomas Tomkis's *Lingua: Or the Combat of the Tongue and the Five Senses for Superiority (*1606), for instance, allegorizes all five of the sentences, along with two different types of memory, common sense, and the tongue (featuring as the only female character who appears onstage), and stages two debates to assert which of the senses is the best and whether Lingua herself could be considered a sense. This play

serves as an obvious blend of humanist education in the form of the debate, the rhetorical finesse, and the classical allusions with the rise in popularity of the senses as primary and preferred means of knowledge acquisition. By examining plays like *Lingua*, we would be able to expand how the debates that we have seen in commercial drama were playing out in a highly educated sphere.

Another area worth exploring further are the Stuart court masques. Having seen a resurgence in popularity in the past ten years, masque studies already attend to the multi-modality of the court spectacle. Through the survival of Inigo Jones's sketches for set pieces and costumes, several scholars have been able to articulate the connections between the philosophy of Renaissance art and the court masque, particularly with the concept of "perspective." This overt blending of visual, poetic, musical, and kinesthetic performances strikes me as yet another space to see competing knowledge practices at work, though with the majority of practices associated with what we understand as "the arts."

By examining knowledge practices and their corresponding early modern categories, I ultimately suggest that we may better understand how early modern playwrights and their audiences were negotiating the messy knot that was the transition between late humanism and early empiricism. As the plays in my dissertation display, playwrights conceived their world according to their formative knowledge systems available in their schooling and in popular conventions of history and poetry. Even in the face of evidence that the prior methods were not as reliable as the humanists would have hoped due to that very real possibility of human error and human deception, playwrights

gave their audiences a framework that was familiar enough to latch onto. Similarly, when interpreting literature through the lens of our own experience and theories, which even when we attempt to be attuned to context, we cannot always escape from. My project therefore adds to clarifying that historical context as well as reminding us that reading through what know is really not all that different from Shakespeare and his contemporaries who, epistemologically, did much the same.

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