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Blind Spots of Knowledge in Shakespeare and His World

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Blind Spots of Knowledge in Shakespeare and His World

A Conversation

Edited by
Subha Mukherji

Blind Spots of Knowledge in Shakespeare and His World

A Conversation

STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN CULTURE

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Subha Mukherji

Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Culture LII

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For my parents, Indrani and Asoke Mukherji—
for putting up with my blind spots and diverting me with theirs.

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Introduction¹

Blind Spots of Knowledge in Shakespeare and His World

Subha Mukherji

Blind Spots: A Concept and Its Typology

WHEN, IN *KING LEAR*, the old man refuses to leave Gloucester despite his bidding, because Gloucester “cannot see [his] way,” the blind Gloucester replies, bitterly reflecting on his earlier failure to recognize his sons morally:

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes.
I stumbled when I saw. Full oft ’tis seen,
Our means secure us and our mere defects
Prove our commodities ...

(F, 4.1.18–21).²

What do we see when we cannot see, or see defectively? How do our blind spots prove our commodities? By extension, what happens when seeing and knowing are prised apart? What is the epistemic purchase of unseeing? In the same play, Lear questions the familiar sensory hierarchy of Aristotelian epistemology, where “sight best helps us to know things,” a privileging also familiar from the Platonic tradition where knowing is a kind of seeing.³ Learning the cost of his emotional and ethical misrecognitions with each passing moment, he ironically severs the function of seeing from that of knowing oneself, and even from being known and knowing the other: “Doth any here know me? This is not Lear: / [...] Where are his eyes? / [...] Who is it that can tell me who I am?” (1.4.246–50). As John Berger writes, “it is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world,” but “the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.”⁴ He posits seeing as a more complex, more active, more mobile activity than a purely optical function, “a question of mechanically reacting to stimuli”: “It can only be thought of in this way if one isolates the small part of the process which concerns the eye’s retina.”⁵

Yet even the internal processes of the retina are more dynamic and less “settled” than—literally—meets the eye, which sees more than it sees “through means secure.” The assumed relation in social discourse between ocular vision as vehicle and perception as tenor is unsettlingly reversible. So the optical metaphor remains functional, and has an unexpected synergy with the social,

psychological, and interpretative acts of seeing to which Berger has trained us to be attentive. The “blind spot” is a part of the retina—the optic disc or nerve-head—which lacks photoreceptor cells. Hence, no vision is detectable at this spot in the visual field. But, by a curious process of readjustment, the brain “reads” the blind spot by interpolating it with information from the surrounding field, including the other eye: so the blind spot itself is not visible to the eye to which it belongs. But, because of its invisibility in the “normal” sense, it induces an optically inventive way of seeing, activating tools of perception not ordinarily in use. It is, thus, analogous at once to a particular point in a larger picture that, for different possible reasons, we fail to see and to a mental act of seeing that makes up for what is off-scene by seeing indirectly, inferentially and imaginatively. But there is a further twist in the paradoxical reach of the blind spot as metaphor: in a digital photo of the retina, it looks dazzling. Thus, it is at once blind in that it cannot see, or be visible to vision, and blindingly bright in its dense, nerve-packed opacity when imaged.

It was not till 1660 that the French physicist Edmé Mariotte—sensationally—discovered and documented the blind spot, as noted by Supriya Chaudhuri in this volume. Yet the perceptual implications of the scotoma in any given monocular field of vision were understood, and in productive use, in the cultural imaginary of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries: a contrapuntal strand in the dominant ocularcentrism of its texture. Shakespeare, for one, seems to have “known” the blind spot of the eye and the mind well before it floated within the ken of science. The viewing relations and optical agencies implicated by its “blindness” inform and structure his explorations of the forms, processes, and inter-subjectivity of knowing, our possible engagements with it, and the business of representation—making visible and thereby knowable. The love-juice with which Puck streaks the lovers’ eyes in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, from which the dream of the night arbitrarily ensues, engendering at once “hateful fantasies” and unlikely “[enthralments]” (2.1.258; 3.1.116), makes the Platonic optics of love run helter-skelter—a playful send-up of what George Hakewill (and Stuart Clark, after him) call “the vanity of the eye”: the assumptions of the rationalism and primacy of sight.⁶ But the imperfections of the eye had particular applications in drama, not least because of the ontology of the early modern theatre which relied on activating modes of seeing what could not be shown: routinely asking the audience to see with “parted eye.”⁷ Shakespeare picked up on the theatrical potential of this condition as well as its demands, enjoining his viewers to see Dover cliff while looking at flat ground, or the vasty fields of France within the wooden O of the stage. But he also tuned into the affective, ethical, perceptual, and mimetic scope of blindness, blind-spotting, and indeed blind-spot-spotting,

pushing the implications of seeing what is not visible, and not seeing what is, by deploying his medium. Shakespeare's works are our focus, but not our horizon. This volume, likewise, is an indicative probe rather than an exhaustive exploration. We hope that it will thematize an internally complementary process, between text and hermeneutics, and make it available for a wider range of works in the early modern period.

In common parlance, a blind spot is an obstructed view, or an instance of partial or partisan perception, or even a localized lack of understanding, its meaning sliding from the physical to the cognitive to the epistemological. Integral to Shakespeare's recreation of human reality, both individual and relational, this function determines the first kind of blind spot in his works, which repeatedly stage moments of unmastered and unmasterable knowledge, whether it is because characters cannot or will not "know" it. This can take the form of a perceptual failure or denial within the fiction that can exact a devastating cost, as when Emilia in Shakespeare's *Othello*—and perhaps Gertrude in *Hamlet*, especially the Folio text—resist knowledges about their own agency and their husband's designs that are accessible, but emotionally unaffordable.⁸ Obscured by the psyche, they surface like spectres at key moments of re-cognition—as when Emilia mutters, on learning of Iago's villainy, "I thought so then; I'll kill myself for grief" (*Othello* 5.2.192). As Berger says, "to look is an act of choice"; so is not to look.⁹ Or think of *The Winter's Tale* when Leontes—with doomful shades of Oedipus—not only declares the oracle void of truth, but perversely refuses to see the corrosive damage his jealous fury is wreaking on his loved ones, and interprets Mamillius's reactive sickness in the light of the only knowledge in his sight: "Conceiving the dishonour of his mother! / He straight declin'd, drooped, took it deeply, / [...] / And downright languish'd" (*The Winter's Tale* 2.3.13–17). Looking the obvious in the face, Leontes fails to see it. His vision is so skewed by his "too much [belief]" in his "own suspicion" (3.2.151) that he forgets the sanity of seeing at its simplest, most lucid level as he declares its irrelevance in proving his wife's assumed guilt:

... Camillo's flight,
 Added to their familiarity,
 (Which was as gross as ever touch'd conjecture,
 That lack'd sight only, nought for approbation
 But only seeing ...

(2.1.174–78).

Cognitive blind spots can show us how precariously close suspicion is to conviction, and how hopelessly entangled knowledge is with the force of belief, for better or for worse.¹⁰

But let us take a more layered example—an instance of a blind spot of knowledge which slides from mimetic content to representational concern, operating not only at the threshold between the self and the other, but also between the text and the reader. Significantly, it is a scene of viewing. As the raped Lucrece laments at length before disclosing her plight to her husband in the narrative poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, she comes to face a tapestry (or panel-painting) depicting the siege of Troy. In a crowded canvas, her eyes fasten on one detail, “a face where all distress is stelled” (line 1444): this is “despairing Hecuba” (line 1447), a passive sufferer with whom she can identify. “[Throwing] her eyes about the painting round,” she extends her lament to “who she finds forlorn” (1499–1500), all other figures and themes being (as it were) invisible to her eyes. But then she pauses on “the perjured Sinon” (line 1522)—in her mind, the cause of Hecuba’s grief, having been the direct instrument of the siege of Troy. Indignant that he should have “so fair a form,” “with a mind so ill,” her outrage mounts to destructive rage as she identifies him with her rapist Tarquin who had a similarly deceptive exterior:

Here, all enraged, such passion her assails,
That patience is quite beaten from her breast;
She tears the senseless Sinon with her nails,
Comparing him to that unhappy guest
Whose deed hath made herself herself detest.
(lines 1562–66)

In her fit of passion, she fails to see that the painted Sinon is “senseless” and ends up destroying the artwork. Soon enough, she herself registers the hysteria, indeed almost ridiculousness, of her naïve response as a quieter maturity dawns: “At last she smilingly with this gives o’er: / ‘Fool, fool,’ quoth she, ‘his wounds will not be sore’” (lines 1567–68). In a poem much engaged with the affect and ethics of response, especially to pain, Lucrece’s empathy may seem to qualify her to give the voiceless Hecuba’s grief a tongue, unlike Marcus’s rhetorical, aestheticizing, over-eloquent attempt to speak for the raped, tongueless Lavinia in the other work Shakespeare wrote about rape and representation around the same time as the poem: *Titus Andronicus*. Marcus’s dissonant address feels, even if it is not, emotionally detached from its subject, while Lucrece is not only both reader and writer, but subject as well as object. Yet Lucrece’s extreme identification makes her blind to the fundamental difference between art and life, if only for an extended moment. So here is a blind spot that confronts us, through textual inscription, with our own relation to works of art. Do we need to unsee the affective reality and subjecthood of characters within a

fiction, to be sophisticated consumers of art? What are the limits of empathy in aesthetic response? Can identification—inferring—be the blind spot which, instead of helping, closes the critical distance that empathy actively needs as material for reaching across, as space for bridging? Dipping back, for a moment, from reflexive art into inset life, we might consider how Titus forgets basic distinctions in his ludicrously disproportionate railing against Marcus for killing a fly: “How if that fly had a father and mother?” (*Titus Andronicus* 3.2.60). Pace the blind spot of certain strands of ecocritical readings of a seamless continuum between human and animal life in such moments, the theatre audience invariably laugh and share Marcus’s incomprehension—“Alas, my lord, I have but kill’d a fly”—even while they register the extremity of grief that makes Titus overidentify with any infinitely suffering thing (*Titus* 3.2.59). The tradition of archly witty exercises in the disproportion between a literary genre and its small subjects (and tropes) was established enough to provide a playfully parodic context to the fly-killing scene—from Lucian’s encomium “In Praise of a Fly,” to Spenser’s “Muiopotmos, or the Fate of the Butterflie,” and Donne’s “The Flea.”¹¹ The faintly ironic frames or overtones of these moments in Shakespeare refract our vision. A character’s encounter with a fly, no less than another’s with the painting of an epic war, raises questions about the blind spots of aesthetic encounter. What excesses of its own does tragedy tend not to acknowledge, which outsiders to the high tragic culture—a Moorish Aaron, say, “[prying] ... through the crevice of a wall” at the Roman Titus’s hand being swapped for his sons’ heads—would laugh at till their “eyes were rainy like to his” (*Titus* 5.1.114, 117)? In the 1590s, Shakespeare’s “crannied [holes]” tend to figure apertures through which one genre refracts into another, making us see in a different key. So the comic Bottom “as” the tragic Pyramus pleads to his “lovely wall”: “Show me thy chink, to blink through with mine eyne” (*Dream* 5.1.156; 174).

Another instance of a blind spot presenting itself as an encounter *in* the text that invites a recalibrated encounter *with* the text is the double report of Brutus’s wife Portia’s death in *Julius Caesar*. Anyone who was taught by the late Tony Nuttall will have been faced with this puzzling re-occurrence in the Folio and asked to make sense of it. Is it another textual error or corruption? A repetition that someone—maybe Shakespeare—forgot to take out during some sort of process of revision? There are potential indications in the relevant section—not least in the variety of speech headings for *Cassi/Cas/Cass*, and the unique stage direction of “Boy” to replace Messala—of incomplete revision and interpolations at two stages of composition.¹² Here is the anomaly. Cassius and Brutus have uneasily made up after an angry altercation, but, when Brutus

intimates a hinterland of heart-struck sorrow—"O Cassius, I am sick of many griefs"—Cassius cannot resist a last jab: "Of your philosophy you make no use, / If you give place to accidental evils" (4.1.145–46). This prompts Brutus to reply, slightly defensively, "No man bears sorrow better. Portia is dead" (4.1.147), and leads him to disclose the terrible manner of her suicide. Cassius is suitably mortified, as this is a far stronger justification of Brutus's disturbed state of mind than his own poor excuse of a "rash humour" his mother gave him (4.1.120) for his own ill temper. The impact of the revelation seems about to be helpfully defused by the entrance of Lucius, and then of Messala and Titinius, allowing Brutus to stop Cassius from harping on the unbearable subject: "No more, I pray you" (4.1.166). But Messala leads up, through probing questions, to the subject of Portia's death. Trying and failing to throw him off track, Brutus realizes he has to engage and pretends he has not heard anything: "Now, as you are a Roman, tell me true." Messala comes right back at him on his terms: "Then like a Roman bear the truth I tell, / For certain, she is dead, and by strange manner" (4.1.186, 4.1.187–88). Brutus "reacts" with what, to Cassius, is at once duplicity and an astonishing display of fortitude:

Why, farewell, Portia: we must die, Messala.
With meditating that she must die once
I have the patience to endure it now.
(4.1.190–92)

Messala observes, with hushed admiration, "Even so great men great losses should endure" (4.1.193). Cassius, more knowingly, remarks:

I have as much of this in art as you,
But yet my nature could not bear it so.
(4.1.194–95)

Are we to assume, because it lacks immediate coherence, that the double announcement must be an oversight? Or should we read the duplication as a dramatic shape, inducing us into a way of seeing what cannot be owned within the parameters of the Rome that these characters inhabit: the parallel processes of a keenly felt challenge to Brutus's Roman identity; the inseparability of this identity from the ethic of Stoicism—the "philosophy" Cassius alludes to; the distance between Brutus's private, emotional self and his public, political persona; and the high Stoic manner as the stuff of performance, and the affective repressions and evasions it demands? If we had the second report alone, we might have found Brutus's response almost inhuman—exemplifying the static model of Stoicism as a freedom from emotional disturbance.¹³ If we had the first alone, we would only have seen his fragility. Together, they

show us the dynamic arc from a bleak, all too human bereavement to a formal, willed control of emotions. This is also an insight into the half-lit cognitive crevices and bypaths of the intense relationship between Brutus and Cassius. Nuttall suggests that this textual crux—which has divided editors—invites us to step out of the “customary canons of art” by probing the tautness of the moment in terms of the emotional life of the characters, to read nature into art.¹⁴ This feels right. And such redirection of attention is, typically, a function of our encounters with blind spots in artworks.

The implication of recasting seeing distinguishes a range of Shakespearean blind spots, often combining with other properties. The recalibration that is so central to the optical functions of the blind spot models a hermeneutic encounter where the conventional processing of information is disrupted and diverted. When inscribed in the action, this has the potential to be tragic: think of situations where characters misread from circumstantial evidence, supplementing what is invisible or obscure by bending their gaze, reading inferentially from a semiotic neighborhood. Typically, this variety of oblique reading operates in an evidentiary dramatic structure. When Diana in *All's Well that Ends Well* enargeically presents a ring to incriminate Bertram—“O, behold this ring”—the Countess is convinced that she is his wife and, further, that he has murdered his wife: “That ring’s a thousand proofs” (*All's Well* 5.3.191, 199). Yet, as the plot unravels, it turns out to prove, rather, the manipulative potency of visual tokens presented as synecdochic parts of an invisible scenario. We also see the ironic susceptibility of a defendant to a counter-use of over-freighted signs, as Bertram stakes his honesty on the same object:

If you shall prove
This ring was ever hers, you shall as easy
Prove that I husbanded her bed in Florence ...
(5.3.124–26)

In the event, the ring does prove he had meant to sleep with Diana, but not with any intention to marry her, and that he had in fact slept with his lawfully wedded wife—showing how evidential inference from sensible contiguous signs can be a slippery index to both deed and thought.¹⁵ Emotional situations dominated by sexual jealousy tend to focus such processes with particular imaginative force, for, in the grip of passionate suspicion, we make the world we see, though we take our cues from the visible world around us: Othello “wear[s]” his eyes to watch his wife but images what is not through his mind (3.3.198). *Cymbeline* offers a paradigmatic example in Posthumus’s disastrous mis-seeing of Iachimo’s vividly visual evocation of “corporal [signs]” of his supposed enjoyment of Imogen’s body, backed up with

visible material tokens from the alleged scene of “incontinency” (*Cymbeline* 2.4.119, 127). But the foregrounded and dilatory *jouissance* of Iachimo’s narrative recreation, both when he convinces Posthumus and when he recounts the bedroom scene again by way of confession, manifests Shakespeare’s acute alertness to the potential non-congruence of *enargeia* with evidence: an equation derived from the Latin rhetorical tradition and, more specifically, its translation of *enargeia* as *evidentia*.¹⁶ Their assumed identity is undercut as rhetorical temptation is shown to outstrip legal necessity. So, in the Shakespearean theatre, *enargeia* becomes the blind spot of the judicial imagination, with rhetoric at once shaping, and helping us deconstruct, the temptations and errors of the mind’s eye.

Yet, in an almost chiasmic move, precisely such cognitive diversions can take a productive form when the text demands a reorientation of *our* position as the knowing subject to the object of knowledge. In *Troilus and Cressida*, faced with a Cressida he cannot recognize by his unitary code of human nature—“This is, and is not, Cressid”—Troilus muses on “the spacious breadth of this division” which “admits no orifex for a point as subtle / As Ariachne’s broken woof to enter” (5.2.146; 150–52). There is an obvious wobble in the text here, which the Riverside editors call “Shakespeare’s error for the name of Arachne, who, according to Ovid ... was turned into a spider by Pallas.”¹⁷ But the designation of “error” may be a blind spot refusing to see around this fracture in the text, this visible obscurity, to find the luminousness of Shakespeare’s conflation. For if he is half-remembering Arachne’s spiderweb in talking of Ariadne’s thread, given to Theseus to help him out of the Cretan maze, that would be a glimpse of how the tremor of a single image can capture the closeness between the sinister labyrinth that traps and the clue that guides.

If Shakespeare’s own errors are acts of mingled memory opening up a corridor of knowingness that “correct” rendering—or seeing straight—would have left closed, his characters’ mistaking eyes seem, often, to similarly defer the closure of a text. Sometimes this can take the opposite form to seeing “double” (*Dream* 4.1.190): collapsing persons and identities that should be distinct. Even as he correctly sees Polixenes’s features in his son, Florizel, who presents Perdita as his wife, Leontes fails to recognize his long-lost daughter. The truancy here is deeper and darker than mere sensory failure. When Florizel says that his father, Polixenes, would “grant precious things as trifles” at his old friend Leontes’s bidding, Leontes immediately replies that in that case he would “beg [his] precious mistress / Which he counts but as a trifle.” If this is a joke, its uneasiness is sealed by Paulina’s reprimand: “Sir, my liege, / Your eye hath too much youth in’t,” reminding Leontes of

Hermione's superior mature beauty even at the time of her death. Leontes replies hastily: "I thought of her / Even as these looks I made" (*The Winter's Tale* 5.1.222–27). This moment was bound to call up, in Shakespeare's theatre, the incestuous passion of the father for the daughter in the Shakespeare's source text, Greene's hugely popular prose romance *Pandosto* (1588).¹⁸ Indeed, it anticipates that other glimpse of kink through a literary prehistory—Ovid's Pygmalion and his sex-doll—at the moment when Leontes moves to kiss the supposed statue of Hermione and Paulina restrains him, saying that the paint is still wet. Miscognition in the plot, here, acts as a productive distortion of the intertextual lens, generating new interpretative possibilities. The mischief written into such errant seeing could be seen to work at the expense of the characters' sense of self, but as aesthetic capital, if played with suitable authenticity on stage. Somewhat similarly to *Troilus and Cressida*, blind spots of knowledge at moments such as these could enact the ironic variance between the mimetic reality of the characters' emotional lives and their helplessly pre-scripted status in literary history. Yet, at the same time, blind spots have a way of teetering on the verge between almost alienated subjecthood and subjective emotional lives. For Leontes's encounter with the grown-up Perdita is not just a hint of incestuous attraction drifting in from the genetic past of the text, but also a deep longing for her to *be* Hermione in the living moment, just as that later moment of a near-kiss embodies a heartrending desire for the return of love. These oddly disruptive moments of temporal telescoping are little *puncta* in "the optical unconscious"—to borrow Rosalind Krauss's term—opening not only into corridors of intertextual and psychosexual memory, but also into well-springs of affective fantasies that are unutterable except through indirection because they are so extreme in their improbability.¹⁹ They fray the surface of the text to make us see both beneath, and beyond, what can be shown.

Blind spots such as these are also, potentially, a generic threshold. The glimpse of the buried knowledge of the father–daughter story in *The Winter's Tale* is also the pivot on which genres turn: it contains in a single event the translation of *Pandosto*'s suicidally tragic passion into a tragedy-comedy of restoration, as if allowing desire to transit from repression to wish-fulfilment. "What you know, you know," says Iago, in an ultimate defiance of evidential epistemology and propelling an unbearable tragedy to its unyielding end in *Othello* (5.2.303). But the words his line echoes most closely are from Dromio of Ephesus, in the early comedy *The Comedy of Errors*: "I know what I know" (3.1.11). Are cognitive blind spots—faced or fashioned—generically Janus-faced? Or do they face us with the contrivance of generic structures by pushing the bounds of one genre

towards another? To reclaim a responsible relation with its living material, for example, comedy forges a language that works against the grain of its own conventional underpinnings: witness Hermione's anguished but sharp question to Leontes when he first erupts with jealous fury: "What is this? Sport?" (*The Winter's Tale* 2.1.58); or Beatrice's seemingly disproportionate and generically out-of-place demand of Benedick, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, after his friend emotionally kills hers: "Kill Claudio" (*Much Ado* 4.1.289). In the final moments of the Folio tragedy of *Lear*, on the other hand, Lear's blind spot and ours come together as opposed generic affects brush against each other. With the dead Cordelia in his arms, Lear glides from recognition—"Thou'lt come no more" (5.3.281)—to possible misrecognition, dying on these words: "Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips, / Look there, look there" (5.3.284–85). The range of ways in which directors, actors, editors, and indeed readers want to interpret, and have rendered, these lines mirrors the blind spots in our own imagined vision of tragic ending, tragic magnitude, and tragic knowledge.

The agency of the theatre vis-à-vis textually open and indeterminate moments brings us to the blind spot of embodiment. Shakespeare's "open silences," to borrow Philip Maguire's phrase, become an operative counterpart to what cannot be shown.²⁰ What cannot be heard, no less than the invisible, directs our attention to the ways in which performance can forestall closure. On occasions, like the errors in or of the text, these mark portals into textual prehistories and reach for information in the "backward and abysm of time."²¹ In North's *Plutarch* (1579), Shakespeare's source text for *Coriolanus*, Tacita is the Roman goddess of silence: "[Numa] taught the Romans to reverence one of them above all the rest, who was called *Tacita*, as ye would say *Lady Silence*."²² As with the affective translation of Ovid and Greene in *The Winter's Tale*, so here, the narrative source is made to speak its silence on stage. On the triumphant return of Coriolanus to Rome in Act II, his greeting to his wife Virgilia turns the spotlight on her eloquently speechless presence: "My gracious silence, hail!" (2.1.175). Prefiguration helps cast silence as an island of sacrosanct intimacy and tenderness in a clamorous scene; it also makes Virgilia's inwardness shimmer—intimating its reality but not giving away its substance. The blind spot of the play text, in examples such as this, intimates a model of memory and marks a type of literary interrelation between past and present.

The other kind of non-verbal gap—the one explored by Maguire—consists of features that determine the meanings of speechless moments by drawing on the emotional environment *around* them. The mutilated

Lavinia in *Titus*, speechless from Act 2 scene 4 onwards, in a different context is the most vivid presence on stage; the theatre has to decide how to mediate, or make known, her inner state through action. But, if this is a moment that can draw both horizontally and vertically (so to speak) from the affective neighborhood in the play as well as from its Ovidian past, the silent Isabella facing the duke's uneasy speech at the end of *Measure for Measure* presents a gap in the fabric of the action which can only take shape in performance, out of the extratextual resources of the play itself: I have seen as many interpretations as there are Isabellas on stage. The play text, here, acts as the retinal nerve sheet, where moments of silence are openings for actors and director to fill in, just as the eye—helped by the brain—fills in the cavity where the optic nerve enters with information from the adjoining field. These blind spots, then, create an interface at which choices need to be made. Barthes talks of the distance between crude knowledge and subtle life as one that is “corrected” by literature, just as the brain corrects the visual void of the blind spot.²³ Yet the model is less stable than “correction” when it comes to performance. Such choices in the theatre need to negotiate the mobile boundary between knowledge as lived experience within the fiction and what the text knows, and, in turn, between both of these and what—and how much—the text would have the reader or viewer know. These imbrications create an ecology of knowledges that is never entirely predictable or fixable.

Irreducibility takes several forms. The Other is a foreign country, as so many plays show: witness *Othello* or *The Winter's Tale*, or, in a more metaphysical key, *Troilus*. But sometimes, so is the self. The inevitable partiality of self-knowledge is a trigger for the undoing of Lear, who “hath ever but slenderly known himself” (1.1.292–93); this in turn makes him blind to the difference between rhetoric and intention, between the effusive Regan or Goneril and the reticent Cordelia. But the unknowability of the self can take stranger forms. Early on in *Troilus*, Cressida uses the construct of an unknowable interior as a defence against the threatening ability of a world of men to exhaust her, and her identity, through their desire: “Then though my heart's content firm love doth bear, / Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear” (1.2.254–55). But in a painful twist, when she does perhaps, finally and desperately, want to make herself known in a letter to Troilus, her intentional self is rendered unknowable as the play stops her mouth; Troilus shreds and scatters the letter, unread, declaring, “Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart” (5.3.108). The inexpressible becomes hopelessly entangled with the unknowable in a failed act of communication.

There are cultural contexts in which such irony has particular resonance in the period's literature. Despair at the inability to make one's heart legible becomes the tragedy of the actively repentant conscience in the providentialist play *A Warning or Fair Women*.²⁴ When Anne Sanders, who stooped to folly and sought concealment of her guilt earlier, yearns to make her inward state visible and knowable to the world, the optative mode of her expression inscribes transparency as a fantasy: "... were my breast transparent, / That what is figured there, might be perceiv'd / Now should you see the very image of poore / And totter'd ruines, and a slain conscience ..." (*Warning* 2654–57). In *Troilus*, a play where reading—of others and of texts—is endless and endlessly relativized, the abortion of Cressida's attempt to make and make known her own meaning has a wider philosophical dimension. Part of the play's way of being true to this is to translate the author's (real or feigned) cognitive aversion in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*—"Men seyn, I not, that she yaf him hir herte" (1050)²⁵—to the text's own reticence, which takes over a character's reticence, at once denying her agency in the lived situation and, possibly, preserving the mystery and indeterminacy of her selfhood at the aesthetic level. Even though Cressida cannot speak back and control or correct possible responses to her, Troilus's epistemologically arrogant verdict mediating the unread letter to the audience is bound to be placed in the context of this hyper-mediated play's by-now-irreversible ironizing of mediation. She remains the blind spot in the visual field of the dramatic action that the audience view, but the play itself has turned this field into a treacherous repository of corrective or supplementary information by this time. Blind spots such as these make unknowability unmissable, just as they often represent the limits of representation—as in scenes of sex and/or murder, whether in *Othello* or in *Macbeth*. Consider the optically framed discovery scene in Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, where the defining sight is only evoked by its undemonstrability, as we see the probative husband enter his inner sanctum with a prayer to heaven to "keep [his] eyes," to find his wife and her lover in bed and rush out crying, "O, O."²⁶ The unseen bedchamber is foregrounded as ocular proof, while the "dark lantern" with which he enters is an evocative object as well as a trope for making invisibility glow. The defiant obscurity of the inaudible and invisible textual moments we address incites and lures interpretation by their very conspicuousness. Could we, then, talk of translucency as an emergent representational idiom in these knowing texts, locating opacity between construction and happening?

How, then, are we to know when not to fill in the gaps? What are the limits of translation? Performance can forestall closure, yes; but individual performative events—narrative or theatrical—can also push particular meanings towards preservation. What do the cognitive withholdings of texts and authors tell us about the event of knowledge, or of the motives of knowing informing the hermeneutic act? The ending of Ivan Turgenev's narrative adaptation of Shakespeare's *Lear*, "King Lear of the Steppes," brilliantly plays with the possibilities and mirrors our own desires back to us, along with our disowning of them.²⁷ But the reader's expectation of Turgenev's narrative is also overlaid by recognition—rooted in a knowledge of the Lear story, its unmistakable referent—just as the Folio play of *Lear* itself plays with the audience's knowledge of the sentimental providentialism of the old play, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* (1594). At the end of the tender, quasi-pastoral reunion scene between Lear and Cordelia, Lear pleads with his daughter: "Pray you now, forget and forgive" (4.6.77). This is the same Lear as the one who comes out with the dead Cordelia's body in his arms and declares that he has killed the slave that was "a-hanging" her (F, 5.3.248)—a far cry from the tediously pious Leir. In Turgenev, Harlov—the Lear character—is on top of his own house, which he had unwisely given away to his daughters, destroying it brick by brick and about to collapse with it, when Yvlempia—a complex "Cordelia"—tries to turn the wheel: "Forgive us. Forgive me" (162). In a reworking of the prison scene in *Lear*, she tenderly urges him to come down and live with her "as in Christ's own bosom" and pleads in a "caressing" voice, "forget the past. [...] Now forgive us" (163). But, inexorably, he topples down with the house, his heavy frame crushed by the beam of the roof. As he lies hallucinating, his eyes fix on Yvlempia and "he [utters], barely audibly: 'Well, daughter ... It's you I won't for ...'" His fracture is revealed by his autopsy, but the intended final words remains a mystery. The first-person narrator, a young boy at the time, is haunted by it: "What did he want to say to her as he died? I asked myself the whole way back home on my horse: 'It's you I won't for-get ...' or 'It's you I won't for-give ...'? [...] I decided in the end that he'd wanted to forgive" (266–67). In this wishful rewriting, what stares back at us is the epistemological spuriousness of the closure we want, as well as a human need for it that is both experiential and aesthetic. The strand of primal vengeance that is sporadically visible in Shakespeare's *Lear* forms the texture of the weave in Turgenev's conception of Harlov; the familiar, canonized, and more readily acknowledged dimensions of love, reunion, and forgiveness in the father–daughter plot of *King Lear* are evoked to be relocated,

with wistful gentleness, in fantasy. But while the knowledge we choose (or “decide” on) is fictive, the knowledge the narrative holds back, like Harlov’s feelings—and perhaps unlike Iago’s constructed interior—is “the signature of its plenitude.” Like Barthes’s “classic text,” it remains pensive: “replete with meaning ... it still seems to keep in reserve one last meaning, which it does not express, but whose place it keeps free and signifying. [...] Just as the pensiveness of a face signals that this head is full of language held back ... like the visage, the text becomes expressive ... blessed with interiority.”²⁸ And we, on our blind-spotting tour, are left musing on the relation between the inexpressible and the unexpressed.

Blind-Spot-Spotting: An Adventure

Blind spots in Shakespeare, as we have seen, not only straddle mimesis and *poiesis*, but bring them into dialogue. Focusing on a range of different moments, and levels, of apparent obscurity, this book puts methods, motives, and the ends of knowing in the spotlight—rather than simply the condition of knowledge—and shows how this provocation emerges organically from the matrix of Shakespeare’s works. It is alert both to inscribed acts of blind-sighting within the texts and to the text or action blind-sighting the reader or spectator—and what insights such blindness might offer. Obscurity has a hallowed genealogy in literary traditions, both creative and critical. Narratives hold on to their secrets, luring interpreters to navigate the precarious waters between what Frank Kermode calls the “the latent” and “the manifest” in his provocative essay on hermeneutics: his “interpretation of interpretation.”²⁹ This is a zone that our volume seeks to probe, even if charting it might be a contradiction in terms. The aim is not so much to resolve, or dissolve, the mystery—though unveiling may sometimes be a by-product—as to grasp the process by which literary works invite and induce unsuspected ways of perceiving that go beyond mere seeing. To an extent, this is about finding ways of accessing inaccessibility as a productive textual artifact that trains us to be receptive to more than the primary sense, and opens us up to knowledges that lurk beneath the verisimilar surface, resisting reducibility.

Philip Weinstein, in *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*, offers a brilliant explication of modernism as a reaction against, and undoing of, the epistemic project of realism in post-Enlightenment fiction.³⁰ Focusing on Proust, Kafka, and Faulkner as his indicative examples, Weinstein shows these artists embracing unknowing as a route into a different kind of knowing from the one premised on realist narrative’s denials: its denial of its own emplotments, its disowning of its own manipulation of the unknowable,

and its fabrication of the fantasy of a fit between the knowing subject and the knowable object, whether the latter is the self or the other or the world. Modernist fiction's refusal of such fantasies, Weinstein argues, "releases narrative from the failed project of knowing"; its engagements must be understood not as knowing but as acknowledgment, eschewing epistemological control and commodification (p. 5). Weinstein identifies this liberation as a response to realism inspired by two centuries of Enlightenment and its project of knowing, though he gestures back towards Bacon's observational procedures and Descartes's formulation of the knowing subject as he glances *en passant* at the prehistories of the Enlightenment narrative (p. 3). Yet Bacon, the oft-cited progenitor of the long Enlightenment, understood the limits of knowing: in the context of the knowledge of God, or of excellence, he can only speak of "no knowledge, but wonder, which is nothing else but contemplation broken off, or losing itself."³¹

Many of the textual moves Weinstein locates in modernist prose fiction are noticeable in the early modern period, perhaps most notably in Shakespeare. As Stephen Orgel brilliantly intuited, there is "a poetics of incomprehensibility" written into Shakespeare's drama which we owe it to the works not to reduce "to our own brand of common sense."³² Yet, in the almost three decades since then, criticism has still mostly focused on trying to make sense of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, rather than feeling its way through their non-sense. This book attempts to rectify that blind spot of criticism. What settled hermeneutic positions might such recalcitrance be reacting to? Or are such resistances more embedded in early modern approaches to knowledge, but elude existing paradigms? The formal translations here are distinct, but the probing of unknowing, intimations, obstructed knowledge, or indirection, as conditions of a reoriented and recalibrated attention, is an integral part of Shakespeare's dramatic technique and his vision of how we represent and relate to the world around us. Theseus, the rationalist, mocks "apprehension" and champions "cool reason's comprehension." But, as Hippolyta intuitively, the shared perceptual errors—pertinently, the result of a "hateful imperfection of [the] eye"—that might seem to do anything but bring clear knowledge, "grows to something of great constancy / But, howsoever, strange and admirable" (4.1.63; 5.1.26–27). The double adversative—"but, howsoever"—captures precisely the paradox of distorted vision as a productive artifact. When Posthumus asks, at a critical moment in the final scene of *Cymbeline*, "How come these *staggers* upon me?" (5.2.233; my italics), the sense is one of cognitive tottering and bewilderment, given the context of multiple revelations of misrecognitions—which Belarius names "error" (5.5.260)—and "recognitions" dizzyingly piled on one another; from this excess of "matter" (5.5.243), a distilled

knowledge is gleaned when Posthumus and Imogen embrace in reunion and reify and embody the tree image encoded in the riddle on the tablet Posthumus discovered on his bosom on waking from his dream of Jupiter: "Hang there like fruit, my soul, / Till the tree die" (5.5.263–24). As the soothsayer proceeds, shortly after this moment, to offer his "construction" of the tablet (5.5.434–45), his explication feels redundant, for its truth—at least for the audience—has already been absorbed visibly into felt experience. Posthumus's distinction between "collection" and "construction" at this point (432, 433) is significant, as they gesture towards two modes of knowing, in a play that keeps positing the affective language of the theatre audaciously against interpretation and explication, as a less definable but more vivid and capacious cognitive alternative. It is a mode of knowing that works through staggers, a feeling of *déjà vu*, or a sense of disorientation, through barely grasped but nonetheless felt traces: a dreamlike haunting which is, notwithstanding, "like" "the action of [one's] life" (5.4.149). In a different key, what are the implications of the games of knowledge that Edgar plays with his blind father, or (in a comic context) Lancelot Gobbo with his, and Malcolm with Macduff, setting up false trials of their own? These perplexities in the plot do not fit established epistemic narratives; we do not quite know how to make sense of them. When Polonius talked about how we, in our reach for wisdom, "with windlasses and assays of bias / By indirections find directions out," his immediate context is strategic—imagined as "a bait of falsehood that takes the carp of truth" (2.1.62–63; 60). This pompous old man's own pleonastic circuitousness as he expounds on the acuity of round-about routes to knowing raises a smile. But the image has a wider resonance for Shakespeare's own textual strategies, as he characteristically subjects them to gentle mockery. A windlass is a winch—usually in a ship—which hauls an object or a weight up through cranking, but it is the context suggested by the *OED* which is perhaps more relevant here—its original reference to a maneuver of interruption in a game of hunting. "Assays of bias" are circular moves, curving rather than direct, by which, in a game of bowls, the player brings the ball round through bias rather than trying to aim directly at the Jack.

The essays in this volume are all, in one sense or another, blind-spot-spotters. They make us look hard at the things that go bump in the text or in systems of knowledge: small things that do not fit, are not what they seem, which throw us, but lead us to worlds elsewhere—to what Bottom calls "deep things"—if we know how to outstare them. Such are the seemingly nonsensical linguistic knots in *Twelfth Night* that Adam Zucker points us to: once we are jolted to look differently, they bristle with sense. The "baffles" of this play are apparently obstructive mechanical levers, like Polonius's "assays," making us gaze intensely where our eyes would

normally glaze over. Like the device that acts as a “problem-solving [barrier]” in the making of rockets, these inscribed linguistic obscurities are shown by Adam to be an inset figure and analogue for the hermeneutic challenges produced by the distance of time and cultural context in our encounters with the play(s); they push us to forge new reading strategies in response to the unsettling of assumed knowledges and temporal alienation.

Gil Harris’s essay links up with Adam’s in zooming in on things that seem foreign, literally and epistemologically, and then making wonder seem familiar by showing how they act as a contact zone between worlds divided by time and space. His focus is Shakespeare’s “nuts,” and his hinterland the blind spots in Shakespeare’s own understanding of these threshold spaces. In the process, he provocatively gestures at new, twenty-first-century approaches to Shakespeare, informed by critical positions that accommodate global and multicultural translations. Located in the “edible contact zone,” the nutty protagonist of Gil’s narrative identifies somatic agency as the blind spot of ethnography and cultural criticism.

Cutting right to the heart of the physiological metaphor, Supriya Chaudhuri’s essay offers a perfect example of how blind spots in the text induce a diversion of normal routes of seeing. Through a phenomenologically layered argument, she demonstrates how Othello’s inferential and understood knowledge, derived through mis-seeing what is not there to be seen, is taken by him to be “ocular proof.” The optical process of supplementation from off-scene (or obscene) information is, here, shown to find a catastrophic analogue in a character’s incapacity to see what makes him see.³³ This may prompt the further question of the relative agencies and motives of such circumstantial information-gathering, for, in this analogy, the manipulative Iago is the operative counterpart of the brain’s act of automatic visual compensation, with no human choice involved. What does the crafty epistemic agent in a play do to what Supriya illuminates as the impotency of the audience as knowing subjects? At the heart of her discussion is the overvaluation of a single material sign that the play empties out through its own art of losing—that site of blindness where the forensic process is fated to flounder, but which the theatre can see and show by turning signs into phantasms.³⁴ Through a glance at Jonson’s *Volpone*, she leaves us reflecting on comic under-valuation of such objects as a response to tragic overinvestment.

But the essays are not only united by their interest in the productive paradox of obfuscated or hindered knowledge. They are also engaged with the epistemic and hermeneutic purchase of unknowability. Aavek Sen’s essay brings together two kinds of blind spot: the willed obscurity of disowned knowledges and the indeterminate openness of performative embodiment. It is the former that his reading of *Othello* through the lens of Henry James

sets out to minutely trace, provocatively suggesting that Shakespeare must have known his James.³⁵ But, in the process, it ponders the implications of form in speculating about Emilia as a “probable and possible woman incarnated in the theatre,” pointing us to the “Emilia-shaped hole” in the texture of the “small beer” scene. This gives us a way of seeing many similar blind spots in the play: for instance, in the Desdemona-shaped hole in Emilia’s Folio-unique speech on men at the end of the “willow scene” (4.3.86–103). Imogen Stubbs’s Desdemona hugged and bonded with Zoe Wanamaker’s Emilia through this speech in Trevor Nunn’s 1989 production; in Janet Suzman’s landmark 1987 production, Joanna Weinberg as Desdemona lightly, almost absently, touched Dorothy Goulde/Emilia’s cheek and went off alone in her own direction; other Desdemonas have filled the gap by widening it, inscribing a failure of solidarity and solace. Theatrical interpretation can play with such indeterminacies and inflect the genre of a play. But the play itself can play a game of knowledges against performative intent, defying it with a live, intractable core. Like Cressida who remains the unknown quantity in her play, the residue of the unknowable is shown, ironically, to preserve Emilia’s tragic potential in the midst of her generic degradation through handkerchiefs and whispers—not so much what she un-knew as what we can never know about what she “thought ... then.”

A generic theme runs through several of our essays, whether explicitly or subliminally, and suggests further connections. A single play—*Othello*—undergoes a journey through genres, from Cinthio’s comic novella through Shakespeare’s wrenchingly painful play to Volpone’s comedic slamming of the drama of knowledge, across Supriya and Aveek’s essays; by the time it reaches Henry James in Aveek’s study, its genre is too post-lapsarian to fit into a known typology, whether narrative or dramatic. Stephen Spiess discusses Shakespearean “comic” violence as a site of misrecognition—both in the sense that it is a response to epistemic instability and insecurity, and in its propensity to beget misreadings. Reading *The Comedy of Errors* against the grain of established critical hermeneutics leads to a (mis)reading of such errors which at once reveals their implicit investments and unlocks knowledges that they veil. Putting pressure on violence as a marker at once of obfuscation and authenticity across the divide between subjection and subjecthood, this essay invites us to revisit the generic implications of Adam’s, where linguistic “blind spots” produce hilarious but intimate asymmetries that test the limits of comedy. It also enters into implicit dialogue with Supriya’s by positing a reading strategy that turns the phantasmic *under-freighting* of frivolous violence into a legible but embodied sign. In showing how error and errancy come together in the play’s beatings and blows, it asks whether comedy itself has become a potential blind spot of criticism,

generating a resolute, homogenizing unreading that obscures the distinct ethical and emotional knowledges offered by the very “meaninglessness” of humorous aggression in the plural ecologies of early modern theatres and streets. Tanya Pollard, meanwhile, highlights the generic stakes of knowledge and its gaps, showing how the mis-cognition and mis-re-cognition of kin and kind, gene and genre, in *The Winter’s Tale* bring the blind spots of life and literature into dialogue, and further face us with the implications of the blind spots of generic reception. After all, as Zachary Lesser points out in his response, “mongrel tragicomedy”—like collaborative writing—slipped through the hole in John Heminges and Henry Condell’s retinal map of Shakespeare’s plays: *Shakespeare’s Comedies, Histories and Tragedies*.³⁶ As Tanya provocatively suggests, “bastards baffle recognition” when it comes to literary kind, standing in for unacknowledgable genetic mixtures—like Adam’s baffles, they are noncompliant elements in a generic field that induce radical affective cognition by obstructing received modes of knowing. The blind-spotting of genre inevitably questions the cultural work of reception, whether in the theatre or in criticism and textual scholarship. It also brings up evolving questions about what the cognitive mechanism of data tools can tell us about generic textures and our assumptions about genre, as text analysis of Shakespeare through Docuscope at Carnegie Mellon has done.³⁷

Blind spots in works of art have a way of bringing into play a variety of critical approaches, as our essays show us: the conception of this book partly intuits that. But one would not necessarily have guessed what methodology may have to do with the work we want art to do for us, and how we deal with and wield both available and inaccessible knowledges in our individual and communal lives; let alone when we put the human need to know in the hands of a machine. Michael Witmore and Jonathan Hope’s dialogue on machine learning and Shakespeare is a revealing point of departure as we test *methods* of interrogating literary texts, what they tell us and what they withhold, and what their blind spots tell us about ours. When we put our humanistic questions about, say, attribution, to a neural network—that is, an algorithm trained to home in on patterns—we are entrusting the process of recognition to a system which delivers accuracy but defies explanation or representation. Machines, after all, pick up syntagmatic structures easily, but have little yield on language that has paradigmatic flexibility or polysemic density. For Mike, the refusal of that transparency is the black box that hides the antecedents of the results in our encounter with its meaning-making. But, in the very process, it becomes, for him, a mimetic mirror for a particular epistemic desire and its operative conditions—our desire to apprehend the invisible blind spot “where a literary and linguistic self hides.” But Jonathan turns this very inscrutability into

an invitation to reexamine the blind spots that are embedded in Shakespearean (or poetic) language itself; for him, this impasse does not invalidate but redirects the human reader. His provocation is to posit mechanical mistranslation as the productive blind spot which enables us to see deep patterns of language functioning and the quantitative basis of what we, as literary scholars, are trained to think of as the qualitative essence or distinction of an author or style: polysemy, for instance. Using Google Translate's machine learning algorithm as an example, Jonathan argues that while the model itself defies direct visualization, it almost literally diverts our eye to the neighborhood of a word, selected according to its vector or string of properties: like the surrounding information to which the brain directs the eye to fill in the lacuna of the *punctum caecum*. This makes me recall a little experiment that Mike did for me with a vector space model, mapping early modern words of investigation and inquiry along an axis associated with gender. To my surprise, "discover" seemed to co-occur with words aligned with femininity. On looking harder, we saw that it was in fact the passive form, "discovered," that was feminine, and looking in the lexical neighborhood revealed that "discoveries" was in fact comfortably clustered in the extreme "male" corner with "discerning," "experimental," and "demonstration." In the light of Mike's digital experiment, then, I can understand Jonathan's point about the detection of directionalities: "assays of bias" push us to the thresholds of the linguistic system and show us a kind of cultural calibration occurring around charged terms.

And so a dialogue becomes a conversation, one which Zack joins in, crossing over from a different conversation. For he asks what human mistranslations of some of the most oft-quoted lines from Shakespeare tell us about the blind spots of quotation itself as an act of cultural remembrance. Zack combines statistical analysis and human interpretation to put pressure on the persistent but identical misquotation of a line from Hamlet's soliloquy, by editors, scholars, actors, and random users of the Yahoo Answers website. His findings redirect our attention to a discernible desire for Shakespeare to sound "Shakespearean": that idea of authorial distinction that Mike and Jonathan explore in the context of the mistranslation of machines in attribution studies. It is significant that Zack, like them, alights on "To be or not to be"—perhaps the most "Shakespearean" soliloquy in the cultural imaginary. "Conscience doth make cowards of us all"—through the tiny replacement of "does" with "doth," along with the capitalization of "c" in "Conscience" and the excision of "Thus" to begin with this word—faces us with a collective, unconscious, and historically ongoing but evolving longing for Shakespeare to be marked by elevation, archaism, formality, piety, and proverbial wisdom—suitable for commonplacing. A common misquotation of Gertrude is shown to be driven by similar investments, but

mis correction (or overcorrection) becomes in turn the further blind spot of reception and memory, whether in critical or editorial practice or in the history of reading or spectating—making us rethink the relation between error and misremembering. In the spirit of this volume, a personal anecdote may not be out of place. My Italian friends Nubar and Pallina were travelling in Scotland when they met a couple of Scotsmen with whom they got talking about political theory. These new acquaintances kept asking them eager questions about “Gromsky’s” influence on them. Initially befuddled, Nubar eventually saw beyond what had seemed a mere mistake. These idealistic and somewhat awe-struck leftist young men clearly wanted Gramsci (whom they had distantly heard of) to be a Trotsky (whom they “knew”); the mishearing/misremembering/mistranslating came out of an inarticulate fantasy of a unified—and therefore easily grasped—Great Marxist Tradition, revolutionary and seamless through times and cultures.³⁸ How would Stephen and Adam extend their thoughts on mistaking, after such knowledge?

Such questions arising, and leaving a space for yet unspoken answers, brings me to the shape of this book.

“The forms of things unknown”³⁹

Tracing the unknowable back into modes of knowing so far unexplored or merely intuited, then, is the main conceptual aim of this book—pitching into a critical terrain which has seen stirrings of interest in alternative epistemes.⁴⁰ But it is not its only aim. We also have a methodological and pedagogic mission, which makes the volume structurally and intellectually innovative. While the essays are thematically connected, the volume is structured as an internal dialogue. Each essay is followed by either one substantial response from another contributor or two shorter responses from two contributors. The impulse behind such a novel format is an urge to capture a vital part of intellectual life within present-day academia. So many conversations we have at seminars and conferences, or indeed more informally over coffee, simply dissolve and scatter. This is an attempt to find a home within academic publishing for such dialogical thinking and “talking.” Some of the essays in this volume come out of a seminar which made us feel the urgency to channel such conversations into a less evanescent form, without losing the openness of address and response.⁴¹ Through its unusual and experimental format, this book seeks to stake out a place, and find a voice, for a particular kind of dialogic and processive intellectual energy, rather than letting it dissipate; to encourage cross-fertilization while thoughts are fresh and explorative; and to translate a sense of intellectual “community” into print. It is also designed to write fun and play back into scholarship. Finally,

it aims to catch the alertness induced and kept alive by interruption and questioning—a synecdochic exercise in dwelling in a state of critical vulnerability, anticipation, and readiness. In that spirit, it is structured to invite stoppages and deviations. Although it is woven out of a shared process of thinking and cross-thinking, it is happy to be a “broken woof.”

The only book in the field of Shakespeare studies—and, to the best of my knowledge, early modern criticism—that has attempted to break the mould in a comparable, though distinct, way is Anthony Dawson and Paul Yachnin’s *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare’s England*. Shaped provocatively as a “collaborative debate,” they foreground “creative disagreement” as a way of reading that does justice to the heterogeneity of the Shakespearean theatre.⁴² Our book shares their anti-totalizing impulse and their sense of co-thinking as a dynamic process; but our conversation is more heteroglossic, and we allow the responses to flow naturally into various forms: demurrals, questioning, expansion, diversion, and extraction. The result is not so much unification as an opening up through crossovers. The dialogic form seems not just pedagogically relevant but methodologically inevitable: textual blind-spotting, no less than blind spots, operates in that Barthesian interspace where the subtle mess of life constantly challenges the “purported clarities” of organized knowledge.⁴³ The centrality of encounter in the textual experience of conspicuous obscurities could not but be built into the structure of a book about blind spots. The constraint of space means that we cannot bring the dialogue round full circle, except perhaps in one inset dialogue (that between Mike and Jonathan, who respond to each other as their topics are specifically interrelated and integral to their ongoing collaborative work). But, in juxtaposing each “speaking out” with a response (or two), we want at least to give form to a mode of critical activity, and to present the initiation of an ongoing to and fro of ideas that shapes some of our liveliest critical thoughts. In the spirit of unfinished exchange, we have deliberately retained a certain informality of presentation. The aim is not only to suggest a new, collaborative model of scholarly conversation and revive the lamentably lost ancient traditions of dialogic pedagogy, but also to encourage younger scholars (and indeed more advanced scholars at a formative and evolving stage of their ideas) to articulate thoughts in progress, in conversation with their peers, and not wait till they feel knowledge has been controlled and chiselled into hermetic, sealed-off articles which are too distant from process for others to easily or actively enter. In tune with how the play texts discussed “know,” the form of the volume tries to be mimetic of an apprehension that preserves the distinction between encounter and knowledge, acknowledgment and mastery.

NOTES

¹ I am grateful to Tania Demetriou for her incisive comments on the first draft of this essay. Thanks also to George Oppitz-Trotman for reading and commenting on the final draft.

² Shakespeare, *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition*, ed. Weis. All references to the play are to this edition.

³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. A, 980a. Cp. Plato, *Republic*, VII, 532a.

⁴ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 7.

⁵ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 8.

⁶ Hakewill, *The Vanitie of the Eye*. See Supriya Chaudhuri's essay in this volume for an illuminating discussion of the complexities of the visual culture of this period, via Hakewill, Clark and Merleau-Ponty. On the precariousness of the visual hegemony in early modern Europe, and the visual crisis that was its other side, see Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*. For a fresh study on the optics and poetics of early modern England, see Partner, *Poetry and Vision in Early Modern England*. On the relation between poetic ingenuity and visual anomaly and anamorphism in the seventeenth century, see Gilman, *The Curious Perspective*.

⁷ *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 4.1.189. All references to Shakespeare's plays and poems are to the Riverside Shakespeare unless otherwise specified.

⁸ On the relative transparency and piety of Gertred in Q1, and the relative inscrutability of Folio and Q2's Gertrude, see Kehler, "The First Quarto of *Hamlet*: Reforming Widow Gertred."

⁹ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 8.

¹⁰ I use the term "cognitive" in a less specialized sense than its technical connotation in cognitive science. But cognitive criticism is a potentially fertile area for the study of blind spots in literary thinking, practice, and criticism. There has been much recent, innovative work on cognition and early modern literature. For the cognitive turn in Shakespeare studies specifically, see Mary Thomas Crane, *Shakespeare's Brain*, to which most subsequent work is indebted. For more recent studies, see, for instance, Raphael Lyne, *Shakespeare, Rhetoric and Cognition*; N. Parvini, *Shakespeare and Cognition*; and Laurie Johnson et al., *Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare's Theatre*.

¹¹ "The Fly," in Lucian, *The Works of Lucian*, 82–83; Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, 289–304; Donne, *The Major Works*, 89. Thanks to Tania Demetriou for introducing me to the Lucian poem in private conversation.

¹² *Julius Caesar*, 4.3.140–93. On stage direction and speech headings in this scene, see Daniell, ed., *Julius Caesar*, 289, n. 155.1, and "Introduction," 137–43, esp. 137. See also Stirling, "Julius Caesar in Revision."

¹³ For a provocative and sensitive, if somewhat schematic, thesis of the static and dynamic models of Stoicism, see A.D. Nuttall, "The Stoic in Love," in Nuttall, *The Stoic in Love*, 56–67.

¹⁴ Nuttall, *A New Mimesis*, 111–13 (112). See also Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 184–85, where he reads the double announcement more explicitly as a critique of Stoicism: “As Brutus is redeemed, Stoicism is damned” (185). For a congruent position, see the introduction to the Arden Shakespeare edition of the play, ed. Daniell, 139–47.

¹⁵ For an extended discussion of the difficulties of proving marital intention, and of sex itself transiting from a deed to an over-freighted sign in *All’s Well* and in Shakespeare’s England, see Mukherji, “Lawfull deede.” For a discussion of the evidentiary overvaluation and generic negotiation of sensible tokens, see Mukherji, “Of Rings, and Things, and Fine Array.”

¹⁶ See Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 8.3.61; see also Eden, *Poetic and Legal Fiction in the Aristotelian Tradition*, esp. 69–75, 86–89, 92–94.

¹⁷ *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 520.

¹⁸ See Aveek Sen’s reponse to Tanya Pollard’s essay in this volume, unerringly tapping into this hinterland of unspeakable loves and half-remembered texts.

¹⁹ Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*.

²⁰ McGuire, *Speechless Dialect*.

²¹ This is Prospero’s phrase in *The Tempest*, 1.2.50. On Shakespeare’s translation of silence from his sources, see Demetriou, “Out of Silence Yet I Picked a Welcome”; her argument is admiringly discussed by Tony Nuttall in his discussion of *Henry VI* and *Richard II* in Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 30–31 and 136–37.

²² North, *Plutarch’s Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, vol. 1, 176.

²³ Barthes, *Leçon*, 18: “La science est grossière, la vie est subtile, et c’est pour corriger cette distance que la littérature nous importe.” Trans. by Richard Howard in Barthes, *A Barthes Reader*, 457–78 (463).

²⁴ Anon., *A Warning for Fair Women*.

²⁵ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, V. 1050.

²⁶ Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, scene xiii, line 41.

²⁷ Turgenev, *First Love and Other Stories*, 203–73.

²⁸ Barthes, “Le texte pensif,” *S/Z*, 204–5 (my translation).

²⁹ Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, esp. chapter 1, “Carnal and Spiritual Senses,” 1–21 (2).

³⁰ Weinstein, *Unknowing*.

³¹ Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 3, 266–67.

³² Orgel, “The Poetics of Incomprehensibility,” 437.

³³ See Hutson, “Law, Probability and Character in Shakespeare,” for suggestive points of contact with this argument. See also her *Circumstantial Shakespeare*.

³⁴ For a reading of the increasing evanescence of material objects in Shakespeare and Jonson, with provocative points of contact with this essay, see Dawson and Yachnin, *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare’s England*, esp. chapter 6, “Props, Pleasure and Idolatry,” 131–58.

³⁵ For a congruent reading of resisted knowledges in Shakespeare's and James's heroines, albeit in a non-optical framework, see Mukherji, "False Trials and the Impulse to Try in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries," 53–54.

³⁶ Shakespeare, *The Works of William Shakespeare*. "Mongrel tragicomedy" is Sidney's term: Sidney, *Sidney's "The Defence of Poesy,"* 46.

³⁷ See also Witmore and Hope, "Shakespeare by the Numbers."

³⁸ I happily acknowledge a delightful conversation with Georgio (Nubar) Gianighian and Pallina Pavanini about this in Venice, September 17, 2017.

³⁹ *Dream*, 5.1.15.

⁴⁰ Early modern "knowledge studies" have become increasingly visible in the last decade in the literary critical domain, going back to field-creating books such as Mary Poovey's *A History of the Modern Fact* and Mary Baine Campbell's *Wonder and Science*. The time may have come for the much-needed turn from the topics of knowledge to themes of ignorance, stupidity, befuddlement, and forms of knowledge refusal. For early indications, see, for example, Adam Zucker's "Twelfth Night and the Philology of Nonsense," Carla Mazzio's *The Inarticulate Renaissance*, or Katherine Eggert's *Disknowledge*.

⁴¹ "The Blind Spots of Knowledge in Shakespeare and His World," convened by Subha Mukherji, at the Shakespeare Association of America's Annual Meeting at St. Louis in 2014.

⁴² Dawson and Yachnin, *The Culture of Playgoing*, 1.

⁴³ Barthes, *Leçon*, 18.

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Essays and Responses

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Chapter 1

Baffling Terms¹

Adam Zucker

It's Not Rocket Science

THOSE OF US WHO study art and aesthetic elements of culture more generally are used to dealing with a bit of ambiguity. It comes with the territory. In some instances, and for some critics, it defines the territory. The unknown—or, more precisely, the likely unknowable—draws our attention to imagined landscapes or unreal visions of life and nature that we find in narrative and performance, form and phrase. Much of our work as scholars and teachers occupies this space of the likely unknowable; our rhetorical performances trace its outlines and fill it in; and our failures or successes (pedagogical, political, intellectual, and otherwise) can sometimes seem to depend on its preservation from one generation of scholars to the next.

Other fields of inquiry are, of course, more reliant on the language of mathematical exactness and the kinds of empirical identification it allows. Take rocket science, a discipline that is, along with “brain surgery,” a colloquial epitome of complex, specialized knowledge. Formulae and precision would seem to make the entire endeavor possible in the first place. Thrust, force, torque, the pull of the Earth upon us all: these are subject to numerical representation and, thus, to the calculating minds of mythical geniuses scribbling on chalkboards and modeling engine performance.

Or, at least, that is how I imagined it, before the Internet showed me otherwise.² Recently, actual rocket scientists were attempting to reverse engineer an actual rocket engine developed in the 1960s for NASA's Saturn program. Saturn engines were individually built (there is no rocket-engine assembly line), and each had individual quirks that needed to be ironed out before it could be used to push human beings to the Moon. One of these quirks, discovered through trial and much error, had to do with the way fuel and oxidizing chemicals rotated as they burned in the engine's combustion chamber, causing vibrations that, in turn, caused unwanted explosions. In the 1960s, engineers ginned up “a

set of stubby barriers” in the combustion chamber of each engine to solve this problem. At the time, nobody knew the optimal arrangement of these barriers. They worked, but as to the mathematically precise details of why, rocket scientists were in the dark.

Why am I bothering to write about this? My rocket-scientist readers have likely already guessed the answer. The mysteriously effective problem-solving barrier was called a “baffle.”

In this context, then, a baffle is both an engineering enigma and a cohesive force for propulsion and lift. It is a materialization of limited ignorance located right in the burning heart of the moon landing, rocketry’s signal achievement. I would like to keep this combination of mystery and effect in mind as I turn to *Twelfth Night*, a play that, like rocket science, makes a space for unquantifiable causes, confusing encounters with objective experience, and, in the end, purposefully limited kinds of knowledge. *Twelfth Night* is not rocket science. But it does, like the Saturn program, depend seriously on baffling elements that work in ways that are often difficult to ascertain.

“Do, or not do?”

Engines were not being baffled in Shakespeare’s day, but people were, and the term comes up twice in Malvolian contexts in *Twelfth Night*. Most importantly, it occupies the place of honor at the center of Olivia’s assessment of all that has been done to her steward. In the play’s final scene, after Malvolio presents his list of grievances and Fabian admits to the outlines of the plot against him, Olivia offers a sliver of sympathy: “Alas, poor fool, how have they baffled thee!” (5.1.363).³ Modern audiences and readers are likely to agree. Malvolio has been entirely overmastered by Maria and her co-plotters: confused, misdirected, and, more directly, cut out of the shared circuit of common knowledge that defines wit and its attendant social dominance in Shakespearean comedy. Olivia, from the audience’s perspective, is right: Malvolio has been baffled.

One of the great pleasures of *Twelfth Night*, in this situation at least, is that we, the audience, have not been baffled: we are in on the baffling processes here. The play shares in the tendency of most Elizabethan comedy to reveal its own mechanisms of intrigue in explicit detail as they occur. Not only are audiences in league with Toby and Maria when it comes to the manipulation of Malvolio, we are also clear from the outset of the action that Cesario is Viola; we quickly learn that Sebastian is alive and slowly making his way through Illyria; we see that Olivia has fallen

for the wrong twin; and, along with all this, we know that somewhere out there is a recognition scene waiting to happen. And, although the rise of tragicomic plotting with its unexpected revelations would eventually bring what we now call “surprise endings” into Shakespeare’s narrative architecture and Jacobean drama more generally, *Twelfth Night* is not really that kind of play. The sense of befuddled wonder at the events of the final scene belongs mainly to the play’s characters. We already know who’s who and what’s what. We do not, at first glance, share in Malvolio’s baffled state.

But, if the narrative course of *Twelfth Night* is somewhat less than baffling to an audience watching it all happen, the language of the play is another story altogether, especially for modern readers and viewers. The rapid, punning jests that color so much of the dialogue in *Twelfth Night* are very difficult to understand, let alone laugh at, in performance or on the page. As Elizabeth Freund has suggested, the play uses Sir Andrew Aguecheek to model a version of this linguistic confusion.⁴ He can be seen as a sympathetic figure for a modern audience’s potentially uncomfortable experience of the play, and his verbal incompetence often mirrors our own, whatever our level of expertise. One of Aguecheek’s more obvious errors is particularly significant for my interests here. During our introduction to him in his first scene with Toby and Maria, he asks what may be the play’s most embarrassing question:

Aguecheek: I’ll ride home tomorrow, Sir Toby.

Toby: *Pourquoi?*

Andrew: What is *pourquoi*? Do or not do? (1.3.86–89)

It is easy enough to laugh at this moment, especially if you have the good fortune to understand more French than Aguecheek does (I do, but only barely). This is a language joke that does a fine job of yoking audience members into the community of knowledgeable jesters organized by Toby and Maria; it is a simple sign of Aguecheek’s ignorance which, like Malvolio’s harsh prudishness, guarantees a kind of social separation of alliances, and puts most audience members on the privileged side of the play’s divide. We know what *pourquoi* means! We like cakes and ale!

But Aguecheek’s confusion with foreign languages is actually a significant directional signpost for *Twelfth Night* and the history of its editorial reception in particular. The play’s idiot, as it turns out, is not alone in his difficulty with romance languages. Just moments before Aguecheek fails his French exam, Toby tests us all with an exclamation to Maria that directs her attention to Aguecheek’s immanent entrance on stage: “What, wench, *Castiliano vulgo*, for here comes Sir Andrew Agueface” (1.3.41–42).⁵

Relatively speaking, there are few editorial problems in *Twelfth Night*, but Toby's outburst is one of them. Nobody, and I mean nobody, has ever been able to figure out precisely what "Castiliano vulgo" means, or even, for that matter, what language Toby is speaking when he says it. Assuming that it is a Latin-Spanish-Italian hybrid, the phrase translates to something like "A Castilian, commonly put," which is odd enough as it is; in its context (i.e., as an exclamation that either hails Sir Andrew or begins to turn Maria's attention to his approach), it is entirely nonsensical. That is not to say that Shakespearean explicators have not done their best to explicate the phrase. Furness's *New Variorum* rehearses, with typical bemusement, the failures of nearly two centuries of guesswork: Hanmer (1743-44) and Warburton (1747) emend "vulgo" to "volto," to turn the phrase into the imperative: "Put on your Castilian face!" Although this idea presented later editors with a site for interpretation (What *is* a Castilian face? Is it serious? Brave? Do other playwrights refer to Spanish faces in some way?), there is no evidence that "Castiliano volto" was a functional idiom in England in any case (as Furness drily points out).⁶ Halliwell (1856) suggests that "Castiliano vulgo" is the correct reading (he thinks Toby might be telling Maria to speak "in common Spanish, that is, in familiar language"), and editors have more or less followed suit since. Keir Elam, in the most recent *Arden*, admits to the ambiguity, putting forth Mahood's theory that the phrase means "Speak of the Devil,"⁷ only to reject it for his own guess that the phrase refers to a variant for the word "castellan" ("castillian"), or castle-dweller, and, thus, to an expression used to greet fellow drinking companions.⁸

In some very simple, ordinary sense, the exact translation of these words is entirely irrelevant for the action of *Twelfth Night*, especially in performance.⁹ They serve their point simply in their explosive, meaningful noise: Sir Toby has a soft spot for romance languages (his probing "pourquoi" confirms it), and he uses them in particular around Aguecheek to draw lines between the two of them, indicating, first, his own sophistication and, second, Aguecheek's lack thereof. It is more than possible to figure out what "Castiliano vulgo" is doing in the play without the guide of a gloss or a teacher: its basic effect (along with a few other instances I will discuss below) is to let audiences know that any relationship to foreign languages—even fake ones—is a marker in the field of cultural competencies that defines and produces the play's imagined Illyrian court.¹⁰

Scholarship, editorial debate, and the teacherly apparatus of historicist philology compose and mark off locations in a cultural field that can look, at times, quite like that court. But, like *Twelfth Night* and the

Saturn rocket engine, literary criticism and dramatic performance are in part propelled by baffling elements that need not be resolved to do their job. My discussion of “Castiliano vulgo” and its investigators is an exaggerated synecdoche for that idea in its broadest expression. We (that is, literally, I, along with the specialist readers of this essay and the many editors, researchers, wonderers, and arguers who have come before us) circle around a term that is clearly in the right place. We attempt to figure out its function, its place in the machinery, and we see if we cannot keep that machine running. But, as we reverse engineer *Twelfth Night*, we might at times feel comfortable, like rocket scientists, celebrating when the thing blasts off without exploding, whatever our position of mastery over the design and meanings of the text. In this regard, Aguecheek’s utterly idiotic question—“Do or not do?”—might be one we ask ourselves every time we dive into the scholarly fray.

A Blind Spot of Knowledge

I hope the very presence of the words you are reading now indicates how I choose to answer that question. (Do!) The way I see it, the embarrassing impossibility of textual mastery that lingers over Sir Toby’s mysterious exclamation clarifies the comic force of *Twelfth Night* and can help us think in valuable ways about the place of ignorance and unknowing in our own work. Again, the editorial response to “Castiliano vulgo” points the way: Furness himself, near the end of his discussion, concludes that we will probably never know what the phrase means, and W. A. Wright goes even further in the first Cambridge edition of the play (1863): “It is probable that these words have as much meaning now as they had in Shakespeare’s time, and that is none at all.”¹¹ At the level of historical and/or literary evidence, these claims are actually much easier to support than any of the other theories put forth over the years. If the phrase is, in fact, a bit of foreign-sounding nonsense, it would take its place alongside the many, many other examples of that mode of speech in early modern English drama. Anyone who has read city comedy has run across inflected gibberish meant to approximate one language or another on the stage.¹² The work of Marjorie Rubright, Nina Levine, Andrew Fleck, and Lloyd Kermode among others has situated the English stage’s cacophony of tongues as a sign or effect of religious, commercial, and, most broadly, transnational mixture in early modern London and its environs.¹³ And, even setting aside this larger corpus of plays, *Twelfth Night* itself has other characters besides Toby who fake it, linguistically. Feste, famously, is the

most active of the bunch. Playing the part of Sir Topas, he greets the imprisoned Malvolio with the play's other Spanish/Latin hybrid phrase, "*Bonos Dies*" (4.2.12). Elam calls this either "bad Latin" or "bad Spanish," but, in either case, it is another loose reference to romance languages that charts modes of courtly knowledge. Aguecheek's remembrance of one of Feste's jokes works in similar ways: "In sooth, thou wast in very gracious fooling last night, when thou spok'st of Pigrogromitus, of the Vapians passing the equinoctial of Queubus" (2.3.20–23; whether Sir Andrew is mangling or accurately repeating Feste's mock lecture is beside the point here). And, of course, Feste himself famously attributes his epigrammatic line—"Better a witty fool than a foolish wit"—to the entirely fictitious (but believably named) "Quinapalus" (1.5.33–34). Although fake names are not quite the same thing as fake words, they function in similar ways when it comes to the social logic of the text and its appeal to audiences. As is the case with "Castiliano vulgo," the sound of "Quinapalus" does more work—both within the imagined world of the play and for the audiences who encounter it—than its infinitely receding literal meaning ever could.

We have reached an odd semantic vanishing point in which Shakespeare's jokes about meaningless foreign words disappear into detailed, entirely useless explanations of these words' meanings. To put it in terms suggested by this collection's editor, we have reached, in "Castiliano vulgo" and its ilk, a blind spot of historical philology. The study of language and culture is often pursued as a process of revelation or explication that presents the authoritative knowledge of the scholar as a light in the darkness. Mysterious knots of hidden content are unraveled in the name of clarification. But nonsense resists this process by worrying the threads of research into ever larger tangles. The blind spot here is neither the missing definition of a word itself, nor a failure of knowledge pertaining to content that might eventually manifest itself, but rather the inability of philologists over time to see when their usual strategies are insufficient. The more we struggle to explicate words such as "Castiliano vulgo," the more brightly and clearly these blind spots reflect our own ignorance back at us.

Of course, a crucial effect of the more obviously ironic nonsense in *Twelfth Night* is to separate social or cultural action out from literal signification, then to make that separation an Erasmian object lesson for the idiot scholars who bluster their way around it.¹⁴ As one of those idiot scholars, this is a markedly troubling situation for me. The more I work on the intricate jokes and linguistic black holes built into *Twelfth Night*, the more I begin to identify with scholars who have spent lifetimes quibbling over words that very likely mean nothing at all. The more I

identify with these scholars, the more *Twelfth Night* insults me, and the more embarrassed I become about my own relationship to the language of the text, foreign or otherwise. This is not, I should say, a terrifically pleasant encounter with comedy. But, before I give up on the utility of that encounter, I will point out that a crucial word in *Twelfth Night* registers my uncomfortable combination of humiliating affect and overmastered effect, even as it provides some thrust for the play's comic arc. Much to no one's surprise (I hope), that word is "baffled."

When Olivia suggests that Malvolio has been "baffled" by Maria and the others, she is not really calling him "out-witted" or "flabbergasted" or "confused." Though the term was just beginning to mean "hoodwinked" or "cheated" by the late sixteenth century, its more dominant uses all constellate around performances meant to disgrace and openly humiliate people, often men of rank. Spenser's knights are occasionally baffled in *The Faerie Queene*, usually by having their shields or images reversed in a public display, meant to punish them for their lack of honor.¹⁵ A more elaborate description of the act appears in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, appended with the marginal note "Baffulling what it is among the Scots": "a man is openlie periured, and then they make of him an image painted, reuersed, with his héeles vpward, with his name, woondering, crieng, and blowing out on him with hornes, in the most despitefull manner they can, in token that he is worthie to be exiled the companie of all good creatures."¹⁶ Thomas Nashe, among others, transposes this formal process of humiliation into joking contexts in *Have With You to Saffron Walden* (1596), where he imagines that people in some distant future "may baffull and infamize my name when I am in heauen, & shall neuer feele it" (sig. E4r).¹⁷ And, most importantly of all, Malvolio himself uses the term in this sense, directly after reading the mash note he assumes is from Olivia: "Daylight and champaign discovers not more. This is open. I will be proud, I will read politic authors, I will baffle Sir Toby, I will wash off gross acquaintance, I will be point-device the very man" (2.5.156–59). In the midst of the play's most pointed joke about misinterpretation and bad performance, it is only fitting that today's audiences misrecognize the premise of Malvolio's plans for Toby. Earlier in the scene, before he reads Maria's letter, the steward spins out his languid fantasy of leaving the Countess to her post-coital nap in order to finger a jewel and chastise Sir Toby for his poor behavior (40–78). Here, that fantasy is enriched by the notion of bafflement, the public disgrace of a knight, permitting Malvolio to grant himself the rank he hopes to achieve. Olivia's use of the term as

she caps Malvolio's humiliation is, therefore, much more caustic than it is ordinarily taken to be. He has been baffled like a knight, but he will never, ever be one.

Are we all Malvolios, as Stephen Booth suggests in a slightly different context?¹⁸ Are we all Aguecheeks, forced by history or basic incompetence into a position in which we do not even know what we do not know? I would not want to overstate the claim. But being baffled is certainly a common outcome of *Twelfth Night* and early English comedy more generally. Our problems comprehending or translating the terms within it—in nonsensical foreign languages or in English itself—can render us similar to the characters on stage. But, whereas those characters get to disappear, we have to decide what to do with ourselves and our various failures. I will conclude simply by suggesting that, if we let ourselves be bullied out of our places as critics, teachers, writers, and thinking audience members, if we storm off stage swearing revenge on the pack of them, we will miss an important chance to reflect on the historical, material contexts of our bafflement. The word “baffle,” after all, has a political history built into it, one shot through with aggressive rituals of disenfranchisement and visual abjection. It is likewise an incorporating force pertaining to and signifying the deepest modes of identification and rejection that performed humor enables. As *Twelfth Night* represents and referentially enacts these processes, it can, I hope, help us think more clearly about our own pedagogical relationships and our own encounters with (or reproductions of) bafflement in our classrooms and around our conference tables. We may be rendered silent, or stupefied, by an unintelligible sense of wonder or confusion built into theatrical or literary experience. We might fail, repeatedly, to explicate the inexplicable word. At the very least, we can provide a sensible context for this inarticulate outcome.

Baffling Comedy, Baffling Ourselves: A Response to Adam Zucker

Stephen Spiess

What claims does the Shakespearean comedy make upon its audiences? Baffling commonplace receptions of nonsensical language, Adam here—with enviable wit, verve, and lucidity—foregrounds the immense cultural energies pulsing through those inexplicable utterances that propel many an early modern comedic dialogue. Gibberish certainly renders hierarchies on stage, but the “burning heart” of this essay transcends such an (important) insight to suggest a far more discomfiting acknowledgment, one rooted in our own “embarrassed” relations to the characters, laughter, and languages of *Twelfth Night*. What, I now find myself wondering, does the play ask of us? What does it reveal about us? How might it incorporate us into its language games?

Such questions may threaten the autonomy of the play’s imagined world, but, as Adam demonstrates, any rigorous division of audience and action proves inimical to *Twelfth Night*’s comedic work. Not only are audiences yoked into the play’s various knowledge communities, as he suggests, but our alliances thereof buttress its comedic architecture: throughout, dramatic irony structures the action and enables the play’s most uproarious conceits. These include, of course, the staging of Malvolio’s embarrassment (II.v), a scene that clearly establishes the play’s investment in the spectator as an essential component of, and active contributor to, comedic representation.

But, in the comedy of (mis)interpretation, do we not also play the fool? Adam suggests as much, and his brilliant insight is to explore how the play’s comedic work continues into the present era. As trivial, asinine phrases such as “Castiliano vulgo” catalyze ongoing interpretive labor, *Twelfth Night*’s most insignificant signifiers emerge as its most productive terms: proliferating an endless joke across the centuries. Quixotic exegetes, myself included, are thus incorporated into Illyria’s language games, struggling to explicate the “unknown knowns” of early modern language.¹⁹ We do not stand outside the joke (historically, linguistically, textually), but rather, like Andrew Aguecheek, sustain it, are a part of it, and are subject to it. Such a baffling kinship suggests the fecundity of linguistic ignorance and unknowing within and beyond the play. It also encourages new understandings of our encounters with this early modern comedy: how we confront, and are confronted by, its affects and effects.

Looking ahead, I wonder how plays like *Twelfth Night* solicit audience “acknowledgment.” I draw this term from Stanley Cavell, whose epistemological readings of Shakespeare call for the type of invigorating, scholarly self-confrontation that Adam here demonstrates.²⁰ This analytic move risks my own embarrassment, given Cavell’s contention that tragedy, not comedy, provides the essential structure for “skeptical doubt” in pre-Cartesian London (128). Comedy, as it were, remains on the epistemological sidelines, ignored and seemingly insignificant. I thus may appear foolish or, worse yet, witless for eschewing the logical points of engagement in favor of a seemingly nonsensical touchstone. If so, I venture forth, as I take Adam and Cavell both to suggest, from exactly the right place.²¹

Cavell’s most provocative contention in *Disowning Knowledge*, for our purposes at least, locates playgoing audiences within the epistemological work of the Shakespearean stage. What does this mean? We might begin by recalling that, for Cavell, the various parables of Lear, Leontes, Othello, et al. pivot on a fundamental “failure of acknowledgment”—a catastrophic refusal to recognize, and reveal oneself to, another human being—that proves world-consuming. They destroy the world, and their loved ones, by refusing to confront their implication in it, and in them. “Acknowledgment” thus signals a revolutionary (if tragically disowned) act of self-reckoning: a radical willingness to place oneself before the other—to recognize them and, in so doing, to reveal one’s own imperfection, unknowing, and blindness. It also, Cavell insists, constitutes the very claim that Shakespearean drama makes on *us*: we must “confront the figures on the stage ... we must put ourselves in their presence, reveal ourselves to them” (102–3). Such a demand is not resolved simply by altering the theater lighting and exposing those playgoers “sitting silently in the dark” to the gaze of onstage players.²² Rather, as Cavell suggests, we risk acknowledgment only by facing our own, impossible knowledge relations to the persons and realities depicted onstage, a dynamic that at once thematizes and “literalize[s] the conditions we exact for existence outside” (104).²³ By failing to do so, by avoiding this summons, we not only replicate but ultimately confirm what Cavell sees as the inherently tragic character of skeptical doubt.

But what of comedy? Is audience acknowledgment elicited only through tragic representation, only through plays that conspicuously engage the skeptical problematic? Although Cavell largely disowns comedy in *Disowning Knowledge*, his earlier study of Depression-era Hollywood films, *Pursuits of Happiness* (1981), suggests that particular comedic genres may work to resolve—under specific historical conditions

of possibility—the epistemological crises of Shakespearean tragedy.²⁴ Moreover, as Adam cogently demonstrates, one need not embrace the full armature of Cavell's skeptical theorem to realize that Shakespeare's comedies exercise their own profound pull upon playgoers. What is the nature of *this* appeal? What kinds of epistemological work do these plays foster, and how might our (failed) recognitions in comedy compare with those that Cavell finds in the tragic canon?

Situating us within the comedic work of *Twelfth Night*, Adam illustrates how confronting the baffling terms of early modern comedy might better inform our thinking about, and encounters with, these plays. I, for one, have found myself lost, confused, excited, and enlightened—both by this essay and in its nonsensical kinship to *Disowning Knowledge*. I now wonder whether comedy might provide an alternative structure for thinking through problems of knowing and ignorance in Shakespeare and his world. Reveling in the play of languages, identities, and bodies, works such as *Twelfth Night* encounter the skeptical dilemma in powerful ways yet to be acknowledged. As they incite unexpected relations and recognitions, do they not leave us as profoundly unmoored, exposed, and revealed as their tragic counterparts? If so, on what terms? Should we continue to baffle Shakespearean comedy, as we must, I sense that we will find ourselves ever more confronted by, and complicit in, the very fictions (of genre and knowledge, at the very least) upon which our scholarship depends. Whether one recognizes this as a fundamentally tragic or comic condition may well depend upon how, and in whom, we see ourselves onstage.

Knowing Games: A Response to Adam Zucker

Subha Mukherji

This agile paper, written with a delightfully light touch, opens our eyes to see in the light of what we cannot know. It focuses on the term “baffle,” and its affect and effect, in *Twelfth Night* to make us look hard at “problem-solving barriers,” like those used in making rockets, but in a literary/textual/dramatic context where they proliferate into other kinds of productive paradox. The phrase that encapsulates this double effect for me is “this combination of mystery and effect.” This cuts to the heart of the ideas and the critical method that this book is wanting to explore, and taps into an ignorance that creates its own epistemes. This is Paul de Mann territory of blindness and insight.

Adam explores this specifically in relation to the linguistic opacity—and dazzling nonsense—of certain words and phrases in *Twelfth Night*, most tellingly in Sir Toby’s “castiliano vulgo,” which tests and befuddles Aguecheek and us alike. What fascinates me is the suggestion that this destabilizes the field of knowledge across the fourth wall—challenging the smug knowingness of the audience of this comedy (and many others), shared by the clever pranksters of the play, and frustrating textual mastery. Here, of course, this is exploited to hilarious effect—an exhilarating “explosive noise.” But, as Adam implies, this is nonetheless part of a subtle tension between our critical, spectatorial, and pedagogic instincts on the one hand and a temptation to surrender to bafflement on the other. Does anything similar happen in that Babel of a comedy, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, itself in a double bind between exhibiting rhetorical mastery and freaking out at its own facility? The social aspect of this “blind spot of historical philology” is something I would love to be led to explore further. It is eye-opening to find out how established the connotation of humiliation was in the period when it came to the term “baffle.” I also wonder if the variant relation between “explosive noise” and meaning maps onto the chiasitic relation between language and narrative that is suggested by the essay, with reference to what baffles the characters vis-à-vis what baffles us. I would love to know how far Adam thinks this can be explored or extended in Shakespeare’s work. Is there a payoff in this critical paradigm that resonates beyond this play?

But I also wonder about how the drama of asymmetrical knowledges plays out in other genres, most notably in tragedies and tragicomedies. Are there affective and ethical implications and, if so, are these genre-specific? When Hermione says to Leontes, “You speak a language I understand not” (III.ii.85), the counters shift, perhaps even too far afield. But the same play, at its end, seems to gesture towards the need for insouciance, to stop at the point beyond which we are not meant to go, as Leontes, whose “face hath felt the winter’s wind,” learns, like Keats’s thrush, when to “fret not after knowledge” (“What the Thrush Said,” lines 1, 9). But I think Adam’s focus on humor is germane. For humor is what brings unequal knowledges into piquant interplay, just as it induces simultaneous identification and rejection. A dramatic episode this essay calls to mind is in the last scene of *Cymbeline*—itself an extended joke on over-explication. I am thinking of the moment when Posthumus strikes Imogen dressed as a page with the words, “There lie thy part” (V.v.267): one that usually triggers smug giggles in the audience who are in on the secret (as they are not in *The Winter’s Tale*—which raises a whole different set of questions). It is a knowing, tragicomic joke that excises the affective reality of the gesture within the dramatic fiction as we savor our privileged knowledge that this is a boy playing the part of a girl playing the part of a boy, and that recognition is what absorbs our wit. But, after another five minutes of playing time, when any sense of the visual abjection of this misrecognition has faded as the scene keeps piling recognition upon recognition, Imogen comes right back at Posthumus and asks: “Why did you throw your wedded lady from you? / Think that you are upon a rock; and now / Throw me again” (309–11). The gutting emotional directness of her question is—is it not?—an instance of bafflement coming back at the enfranchised to radically shift the barrier between “knowing minds” and “ignorant ones,” to use Adam’s terms. This rebuke to the tragicomic habit of dicing with danger—sanctioned by the basis of the form in the idea of *felix culpa* (“happier far by affliction made”; “the danger not the death”; etc.)—raises the question of the affective cost of humor that feeds off such epistemic variance across the fourth wall. The unlevel playing field on Dover cliff in *King Lear*, where the blind Gloucester falls (almost farcically) flat on level ground, stages a comparable interrogation of the ethics of knowing games. Can we ponder such inscriptions of discomfort against the grain of genre to test the remit of blind spots? Do they

go beyond the question of what we do with our failures of understanding, which Adam addresses, to challenge us to find a way of grappling with our failures of relationship? Indeed, do dramatic preservations of bafflement forge their distinct legibility by counterpointing the ecology of the theatrical event (onstage and in the playhouse) with moments of sharply foregrounded interpersonal encounter, fraught with incommensurabilities and, at times, their corrections?

NOTES

¹ Portions of this essay were previously published in an expanded form in “*Twelfth Night* and the Philology of Nonsense” in *Renaissance Studies* 30, 1 (2016): 88–101. Thank you to Jennifer Richards and *Renaissance Studies* for the permission to use that material here, and to Anne Prescott, for being the animating spirit of this piece.

² The information that follows is drawn from Hutchinson, “How NASA Brought the Monstrous F-1 ‘Moon Rocket’ Engine Back to Life.”

³ All citations of *Twelfth Night* are taken from Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare Twelfth Night*.

⁴ Freund, “*Twelfth Night* and the Tyranny of Interpretation,” 480–81: “Although he can cut a caper and has the backtrick as strong as any man in Illyria, in a verbally constituted and language-governed environment Andrew does not shine. Indeed, his incurable logo-deficiency and his repeated victimization by lexis makes him the ultimate underachiever.”

⁵ Though I am not going to quibble about it here, the punctuation in the Folio is very different: “What wench? *Castiliano vulgo*: for here comes Sir *Andrew Agueface*” (1623, sig. Y2v).

⁶ Furness, in Shakespeare, *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*, 38.

⁷ On this reading, see also Killeen, “*Twelfth Night*,” 92–3.

⁸ See Elam, in Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare Twelfth Night*, note to 1.3.41, p. 173. Elam’s suggestion is by far the most convincing of the bunch. I should say also that there are many reasons for an editor to deviate from the spelling of words in languages other than English in the Folio—“Pourquoi,” for example, appears there as “Pur-quoy” (sig. Y2v).

⁹ My ideas here have been shaped by Stephen Orgel’s formidable essay, “The Poetics of Incomprehensibility.” See also Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance*, 1–93.

¹⁰ On the cultural capital that adheres to the study or knowledge of foreign languages in early modern London and its drama, see Nina Levine’s work in the third chapter of *Practicing the City: Early Modern London on Stage*. On the particularly Italian contexts for Illyrian civility, linguistic and otherwise, see Elam’s

introduction in *The Arden Shakespeare Twelfth Night*, 58–67. And for the continental influence on ideas about civility more generally in England (linguistic and otherwise), see Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, esp. 79–106.

¹¹ Cited by Furness, in *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*, 37. See also Lisak, “Domesticating Strangeness in *Twelfth Night*,” 176: “Corruptions such as ‘Castiliano vulgo’ may remain utterly obscure, except to Sir Toby.”

¹² For other examples of putatively “foreign” babble, see the excellent fake French in Haughton’s *Englishmen for My Money*: “why he may speake *flaunte taunte* as well as *French*, for I cannot understand him” (sig. A4v); the remarkable Dutch-ish passage in Middleton’s *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman’s*, which begins “*Quisquinikin Sadlamare*” (3.157–58); and the gulling of Parolles in *All’s Well That Ends Well*.

¹³ Levine, *Practicing the City*; Rubright, *Doppelgänger Dilemmas*, esp. chapter 3, “Double Dutch Tongues: Language Lessons of the Stage,” pp. 89–109; Fleck, “Ick verstaw you niet”; Kermode, *Aliens and Englishness in Elizabethan Drama*. See also Dillon, *Language and Stage in Medieval and Renaissance England*; Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners*; Smith, “‘So much English by the Mother’”; and Clough, “The Broken English of Foreign Characters of the Elizabethan Stage.”

¹⁴ I am far from the first to suggest as much. See, recently, Stephen Booth’s work on the play in *Precious Nonsense*, which directly pertains to my project here.

¹⁵ See the entry on the term by Michael Leslie in Hamilton, *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, 206–7.

¹⁶ Citation from *Holinshed, Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 827.

¹⁷ Cf. “A New Year’s Gift to Master G. R.,” a terrible, terrible poem in Gifford’s *A Posie of Gilliflowers*: “if I flinch, cry on me open shame,/ And where you come, doe bafful my good name” (sig. Q4v).

¹⁸ Booth, *Precious Nonsense*, 149ff.

¹⁹ See Donald Rumsfeld’s productively convoluted formulation: “as we know, there are known knowns ... things we know we know. We also know there are unknown knowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the one’s we don’t know we don’t know,” reprinted in Garber, *Loaded Words*, 118.

²⁰ Cavell, “Knowing and Acknowledging” and *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*.

²¹ On embracing “error” as an applied methodology for illuminating scholarly ideologies and assumptions, particularly about Shakespeare, see Zachary Lesser’s essay in this collection.

²² Strier, “Review, *Disowning Knowledge*,” 127.

²³ On Cavell’s meta-theatrical thinking vis-à-vis acknowledgment, see especially Bruns, “Stanley Cavell’s Shakespeare,” and Dahl, “On Acknowledgement and Cavell’s Unacknowledged Theological Voice.”

²⁴ Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*. My emphasis on historical contingency here signals what I take to be the principal strength and, as pertains to Shakespearean comedy, the determining limitation of Cavell's argument in *Pursuits of Happiness*. In that work, Cavell insists that the "definitive realization of the genre that answered the Shakespearean description" of a "battle between men and women for recognition of one another" could only emerge in a historical and cultural context informed by first-wave feminism, where a rethinking of sexual and gendered difference fostered the "conditions [of] viability" in which such acts of radical "reconciliation" could take place (18–20). Although Cavell positions this twentieth-century film genre as "an inheritor of the preoccupations and discoveries of Shakespeare romantic comedies" (1) and positions *The Winter's Tale* as a proleptic vision of such epistemological resolution in both this work and *Disowning Knowledge*, he fails to provide a corollary historical accounting for the nascent skeptical remedies he locates in Shakespeare's romantic comedies.

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ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

The Oxford Holinshed Project: www.cems.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/

Chapter 2

Shakespeare's Nuts¹: The Blind Spots of the Edible Contact Zone

Jonathan Gil Harris

SHAKESPEARE'S NUTS. WHAT MIGHT my title mean? That I believe Shakespeare is nuts—stark raving mad? That I plan to speak about a part of his anatomy adjacent to his “one Will”? Rest assured: I do not seek to cast any aspersions on Shakespeare's mental health—though I will be arguing here for a mode of Shakespearean thought that I call nutty, and that works less through rational progression and more through counterintuitive long-distance leaps of the imagination. (The minds of the lover, the lunatic, and the poet are compact, after all.) And no, I do not wish to talk about Shakespeare's nuts in the scatological sense—though I must confess that my essay is very interested in male bodies. Instead, I will be thinking about the edible nuts that appear in the writings of Shakespeare and some of his contemporaries. Or rather, I will be thinking about the ways in which these writers think *with* nuts—with walnuts, pignuts, hazelnuts, simple nuts, coconuts.

How much can we fully see a nut? And what does it even mean fully to see a nut? When we absentmindedly reach for peanuts, we rarely look closely at what we are about to shovel into our mouths. But I am not interested in getting us to look more closely at the physical matter of what we eat. Even if we closely inspect the dehiscent shell enclosing its edible kernel,² there is much about the nut that we will remain blind to. Just as the commodity form effaces the labor that has produced it, so too does the nut that we see in the palm of our hand tend to avert our gaze from the realm of work. But I am concerned here less with the labor that produces the nut, distributes it globally, and makes it available to consumers as a snack. Rather, I am interested in the work, physical and imaginative, that the nut does in collaboration with us. And this work is a phenomenon largely concealed by the blind spots that surround our critical as much as our eating habits. For we are heavily conditioned not

to think of objects as active agents. As I will show, however, Shakespeare allows us to see the work that nuts do on us. For most of us, nuts are often next to nothing—metaphors for their own supposed insignificance. But sometimes Shakespeare's nuts unexpectedly become portals into other, imaginatively capacious universes. In these instances, they reveal not only how they work on us, but also how we work with them. Even when we tap into nuts' occasional uncanny power to transport us from absentminded nut-indifference to transformative flights of nut-inspired fantasy, however, we remain susceptible to another blind spot, one we share equally with Shakespeare. This is a blind spot that elides what I call the edible contact zone—the dynamic space of interaction within which people encounter not only other cultures, but also new foodstuffs and other objects that act on their bodies.

Shakespeare's references to plant life have often been understood by critics through a pointedly localizing prism. The gilly-flowers and cow-slips mentioned in *A Winter's Tale* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, are often supposed to bespeak his deep intimacy with the Warwickshire countryside of his youth.³ By contrast, I want to read Shakespeare's nuts for their global valences—or, more specifically, for the way in which they prompt exorbitant, unexpected swerves from the local to the foreign, from the familiar to the alien, from the here and now to alternative universes.

To lend such a power to nuts might at first seem counterintuitive. What could be more familiar and unexotic than the quotidian nut? A walnut is a homely wallflower, not a nutty Clark Kent that, ripping off its outer covering, reveals itself to be an action-hero Superman from a distant planet. The nut's tiny size predisposes us to think of it as meaningless and mundane. Certainly, Shakespeare's nuts can serve as shorthand for the insubstantial and the insignificant: when Mercutio complains that Benvolio will "quarrel with a man for cracking nuts, having no reason but because thou has hazel eyes" (*Romeo and Juliet* 3.1.19–20), he deems the nut next to nothing—and certainly not worth getting all knotted up about.⁴ Similarly, Lafew dismisses Parolles as a lightweight nobody by saying that "there can be no kernel in this light nut" (*All's Well That Ends Well* 2.5.42). And Dromio of Syracuse, believing himself to be a victim of an otherwise inexplicable act of witchcraft, explains that devils use the smallest things for their black magic, such as "the parings of one's nail, a rush, a hair, a drop of blood, a pin, a nut" (*Comedy of Errors* 4.5.69–70).

But this last quote also suggests something uncanny about small, everyday things. In imagination, they can become portals to other, unknown universes beyond the immediately familiar and visible. Margaret Cavendish explores this property of small things in her poem "Of Many Worlds within This World": "What several worlds might in an ear-ring be: / For millions of those atoms may be in / The head of one small, little, single pin. / And if thus small, then ladies may well wear / A world of worlds, as pendants in each ear."⁵ Cavendish writes here under the influence of mid-seventeenth-century atomism, which reworked the classical philosophers Epicurus and Lucretius's conviction that all visible forms are comprised of invisible, irreducible atoms.⁶ But Shakespeare, writing fifty years earlier, does not need a theory of atoms to wonder what several worlds might in a nut be. When Hamlet claims that, "I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space" (*Hamlet* 2.2.260), he hints at the capacious world within its seemingly diminutive shell. Which is to say: for Hamlet, the nut's contents ramify beyond its seemingly small size.

Indeed, Shakespeare's nuts are generally minute portals through which other, larger worlds can be accessed. The self-amplifying power of the minuscule thing finds many suggestive points of departure in Shakespeare's imagined fairy worlds. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* features diminutive creatures with everyday plant names such as Peaseblossom and Mustardseed; they are joined by the fairy Puck who can assume the minute form of a "crab [-apple]" in a "gossip's bowl" (2.1.47–48). Yet these tiny, nut-like characters, named for everyday plants, are also creatures of another, larger demi-monde that, extending from Athens to the perfumed air of India, can "put a girdle around the earth." And nuts themselves feature in the play's economy of amplification: Titania tells Bottom that, "I have a venturous fairy that shall seek / The squirrel's hoard, and fetch thee new nuts" (4.1.34–35). Indeed, the nut is Shakespeare's favored fairy vehicle from the everyday to fantastical worlds. *Romeo and Juliet's* Queen Mab travels in an "empty hazelnut" (1.4.68), leading humans into their dreams. All these tiny fairy-nuts uncannily conflate the local and the exotic, the close-to-hand and the globally imported, the *Heimlich* and the *Unheimlich*. They are objects, but they are also agents, working on and with human bodies to transport them to otherworldly destinations.

The nut's power to prompt imaginative swerves from the minutely local to the capaciously global parallels the complexities of the word "mundane." Something mundane is quotidian, familiar, local. Yet the word derives from the Latin "mundus," meaning world; in other words,

“the mundane” is uncannily haunted by the trace of the French “le monde,” which includes the globally distant and undiscovered. This uncanny convergence of the mundane and the global is also legible in the everyday “walnut,” to which Petruchio disparagingly compares Katherina’s small hat in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Although the walnut grew in England, it was commonly believed to be of Persian origin, and, although the first syllable of the walnut’s name might seem to evoke a mundane “wall,” it derives from the Old English word “wal,” meaning “foreign”—also the etymological root of “Welsh.”⁷

But the play that most sustainedly foregrounds the mundane uncanniness of the nut is *The Tempest*. Again, its nuts are turnstiles between the local and the foreign. It is only appropriate that the vessel transporting the Milanese and Neapolitan nobles from Italy to Africa and beyond is a “ship ... no stronger than a nutshell” (1.1.50). The metaphor is designed to suggest weakness, but it also—within the larger networks of fugitive nut work that I am sketching here—hints at a capacity for abrupt transition from one world to another, for lurching from the still to the violent, for swerving from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

The foreign shore onto which the nutshell ship releases its European passengers is itself nut-ridden. Caliban, who has already acquainted Prospero with “All the qualities o’ th’ isle,” including its “barren place and fertile” (1.2.339, 240), promises to do the same for his new master, the drunken Stephano. He says that “with his long nails,” he will “dig thee pig-nuts” (2.2.168)—a kind of underground chestnut otherwise known as an earthnut and a hawk-nut. And these pignuts are just one item from a menu of island delicacies that also include “clustering filberts” (2.2.171), or hazelnuts. The two nutty items appear together with exotic foods such as “the nimble marmoset” (2.2.170), a South American species of monkey. Yet the island’s nuts would have come across to Shakespeare’s audiences not as exotic but as altogether familiar. The pignut was so called because it was beloved of English pigs, which would snuffle out and root up this palatable snack from the soil of English woods and fields.⁸ And the filbert or hazelnut, although often associated with Turkey and the Levant, grew in southeast England as well.⁹ The nuts of *The Tempest* thus oscillate between the exotic and the English, the *Unheimlich* and the *Heimlich*.

Throughout his work, then, the nut encourages Shakespeare to swerve in imagination between points that are simultaneously adjacent and remote. This habit is what I call nutty thought. Nutty thought fastens onto unexpected, aleatory proximities between seemingly distant phenomena and places. It is nutty, in both senses of the word, to assume such seemingly random points of connection. But, in some ways, nutty thought is of a piece

with Shakespeare's famed penchant for the pun, which seizes on acoustic commonalities between otherwise unrelated concepts. (That is one reason why I have assailed you with so many nutty puns, to note the natty knots knitted by Shakespeare's nuts.) But what is it about the nut that should provoke Shakespeare's uncanny confluences of the local and the global?

Part of it, no doubt, has to do with the way in which, during an age of discovery and globalization, nuts were to Shakespeare and his audiences both familiar fruits of the English landscape and metonymies for unfamiliar parts of the world. Many nuts that we now take for granted and whose origins we have by and large deracinated were, in Shakespeare's time, luxury foreign imports from the Middle East and Asia. The almond was imported from the Levant; the pistachio from Turkic regions of central Asia. Other nuts were shipped from the Americas. Examples include the Brazil nut, cultivated in and imported (obviously) from Brazil; the pecan, which derives from a North American Algonquin word for a nut requiring a stone to crack; and the peanut, first cultivated in what is now Paraguay.¹⁰

Perhaps the most suggestive nutty metonymy for non-European lands was the coconut, native to tropical climates from the Americas and Africa to Asia and the Pacific. It was not known to Shakespeare, as far as we can tell. But news of the coconut commanded at least one English writer's attention. And that was less because of the coconut's exotic origin than because of—to rephrase Hamlet—the infinite space within it. As George Herbert remarked in his poem “On Providence,” “The Indian nut alone / Is clothing, meat and trencher, drink and kan, / Boast, cable, sail and needle, all one.”¹¹ Here we can recognize something close to the uncanny logic of Shakespeare's nuts. For Herbert, the coconut contains within itself “several worlds” that ramify beyond its ostensible size. It both is unfamiliarly “Indian”—a term that can refer indeterminately to Asia and to the Americas¹²—and it supplies all the familiar comforts any English person could wish for: clothes, food, drink, rope, building, and shipping materials.

There is a religious dimension to Herbert's paean to the coconut, of course. Turning the coconut from a minute insignificance into a bottomless font of goodness is the nutty effect of divine providence. Shakespeare may not have known of coconuts. But the providential logic that can convert an alien object into a bringer of familiar comforts is very much part of the universe of *The Tempest*: when Miranda asks Prospero how they arrived on the island, he replied “By Providence divine” (1.2.159). This lubricates a conviction that the island will provide for the needs of its European visitors. And, indeed, the nuts of the island likewise exist only to serve (with the help of Caliban) would-be colonial masters such as Stephano, a little like the riches of the island of Ternate in John Fletcher's 1621 tragicomedy, *The Island Princess*:

We are arrived among the blessed islands
 Where every wind that rises blows perfumes
 And every breath of air is like an incense ...
 Nothing we see, but breeds an admiration.
 The very rivers as we float along,
 Throw up their pearls and curl their heads to
 court us.
 The bowels of the earth swell with the births
 Of thousand unknown gems and thousand riches.
 Nothing that bears a life, but brings a treasure ...¹³

Fletcher does not refer here to nuts. But his vision of the inanimate island landscape willfully yielding its riches to its European visitors is similar to how Caliban imagines his island's nuts for Stephano. The nuts, he suggests, exist simply to serve Stephano's needs.

For a Stephano, it may be a consoling fantasy that the "nutty" swerve from home to New World should bring him face to face with familiar nuts that answer his Old World needs and therefore bring him back to himself (even if they might also serve to make him seem like a pig). But what if the pignuts' radical nuttiness were to be fully realized at the moment of their consumption? What if, upon being eaten, the pignuts did not answer Stephano's immediate need but instead abruptly transported him somewhere else? Does a nut transform the body that eats it? In other words, how much may the nut have an agency of its own?

In my evidently misspent childhood, I used to love a series of Disney comics that gently parodied the Superman story. The series shows how Mickey Mouse's dim-witted friend, Goofy, is transformed into a semi-superhero named Super-Goof when he eats, of all things, a kind of peanut called a "super-goober." He may not morph into a creature from another planet such as Krypton, but he does magically acquire ill-fitting underwear, a badly tied cape, and one puny bicep. Clearly, the super-goober nuts are not just passive objects. When eaten, they are agents of transformation, making Super-Goof less a superhero than a hostage to a new set of bodily imperatives he cannot quite control: he is made to fly, though with a horrifying lack of skill that has him banging into walls and falling into puddles. So, what if the pignuts and filberts that Caliban promises Stephano had a rogue agency like that of the super-goobers? How might the island nuts transform him? We never find out, of course, because we never see Stephano eating them. More broadly, the play is not interested in continuing its nutty voyage to new places, as it is ultimately too invested in going home to Europe.

So, let me stage a nutty intervention of my own—a swerve from the English of *The Tempest* to a scene in another language from another part of the world. This scene is a real-life counter-*Tempest* from Shakespeare's lifetime: its protagonist goes abroad but does not return home, and he encounters nuts in his new location that transform him forever. We will take a sea voyage to an island, with many hardships, magical monsters, and some strange alcoholic brews. But this is not the story of a man named Stefano. It is the story of a man named Stephens: Thomas Stephens, otherwise known as Tomas Estevão and Pâtri Guru.

The name of Thomas Stephens is familiar to scholars of early modern English literature as a passing reference in Ralph Fitch's account of his travels through India and Southeast Asia, the first English travelogue about the subcontinent.¹⁴ In 1583, Fitch and three other Englishmen had journeyed to India to see if they could break into Portugal's lucrative trade with the Orient. On reaching the island of Goa, they were arrested and imprisoned. But Fitch and his companions were freed after the intervention of a mysterious "Father Stephens," a Jesuit refugee from England resident in Goa.¹⁵ Fitch tells us hardly anything about this earlier Englishman. However, there are many more surviving details about Stephens's life story than we would know simply from reading Fitch. Copies survive of two letters that Stephens wrote to England from India—one to his father, and one to his brother—as well as two works that he published in India. And some archival evidence from England, Italy, and Portugal helps us sketch out the details of his life story. It is a story of religious dissidence, exile, linguistic acculturation, and transformation—by a nut.

In certain respects, Stephens's life is a subjunctive version of Shakespeare's.¹⁶ Both were born in rural western England in the mid-1500s—Shakespeare in Warwickshire in 1564, Stephens in Wiltshire in 1550. Both received a good school education that emphasized classical poetry, especially Ovid, in ways that they remembered later in their professional creative lives. Both had literary flair. And both probably came from dissident Catholic families at a time when Protestantism had become the official state religion. The difference is Stephens took his religious faith so seriously that he chose to flee England in 1574, after his close companion Thomas Pounce was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London. In the wake of Pounce's capture, Stephens fled to Rome—we do not know how—and enrolled as a novitiate in the Society of Jesus. Five years later, the Society granted him permission to go to

Goa to aid the Jesuit mission there. Stephens travelled first to Lisbon, from where he set sail with twelve other Jesuit missionaries in a fleet of five ships on April 4, 1579. The fleet voyaged around the Cape of Good Hope and arrived in Goa on October 24.

Seventeen days after Stephens's arrival in India, he wrote a letter to his father describing the long sea journey.¹⁷ It is a fascinating document, not least because it is the only surviving piece of writing by Stephens in his native English. There are occasional mentions of the providence of God with regard to Stephens's health and the good winds that propelled the ship to India. But the letter foregoes any display of missionary zeal and cleaves more closely to another genre: the fabulous travelogue. Stephens offers detailed descriptions of exotic marvels that he saw during his sea voyage around Africa and the Cape of Good Hope—the stuff of John Mandeville's and other medieval travellers' tales. He tells his father about his sightings of a medusa jellyfish, of strange birds with seven-span wings, and of a miraculous fish “which hath wings and flieth.”¹⁸ In all these instances, Stephens effaces himself: invisible in the marvellous scenes he describes, he offers each as an occasion “to glorify Almighty God in His wonderful works and such variety in His creatures.”¹⁹

Yet, even as Stephens steps out of frame throughout this slideshow of exotic marvels, we can see another tendency lurking in the background of his letter. He also observes how the journey to India pathologically transforms the flesh of sea voyagers: Stephens explains, in what seems to be a description of the symptoms of scurvy, that those who undertake such a long journey are likely to “fall into sundry diseases, their gums grow great and swell, and they are fain to cut them away, their legs swell, and all the body becometh sore and so benumbed, that they cannot stir hand or foot, and so they die for weakness.”²⁰ And he talks also of the experience of crossing into the “Burning Zone” near the equator, where sea voyagers suffer “so many inconveniences of heats and lack of winds that they think themselves happy when they have passed it.”²¹ In other words, Stephens had begun to note the transformation of European bodies in foreign environments. He was not simply watching a marvellous spectacle of a brave new world that providentially took care of him: he recognized that this new world was, more accurately, an environment that had permeated his body, in the form of disease and heat.

In a letter he wrote to his brother Richard in 1583, Stephens notes that he was “tried by a serious illness” shortly after he reached India.²² We do not know what illness it was—quite possibly dysentery, the plague of many a new arrival—but it obviously felled him with particular force,

given that he could still recall its gravity four years later. This was but the first of many bodily transformations that he was to undergo in Goa. But his letter to his father, so sparse on detail about his Indian destination, does show that his attention had already been arrested by another form of Indian matter he took into his body—a new fruit he had not seen before: the coconut. He writes at the very end of the letter that “the drink of this country is good water, or wine of the palm tree, or a fruit called cocoas.”²³ Stephens had clearly already sampled coconut water, a powerful antidote to the loss of body salts caused by sweating in India’s extreme heat. As we will see, this was the beginning of a long and profound relationship that transformed his body and its habits.

The Goa in which Stephens landed in 1579 was an increasingly bellicose beacon of Christianity.²⁴ Thanks to St. Francis Xavier’s aggressive work in converting Konkani Brahmins after he came to India in 1542, the Jesuit mission in Goa had become a major force in shaping the culture of the region. Francis Xavier bequeathed to the mission a distinctive legacy of intolerance.²⁵ Horrified by what he regarded as the idolatrousness of Goa’s Hindus, he recommended setting up the Inquisition in Goa. He took little care to study local customs and languages: his aim was to save souls. If Hindu temples needed to be destroyed to bring the word of God to the infidels, that was simply a grim necessity.

Stephens approached his mission rather differently. He took considerable pains to learn local customs and tongues: clearly a gifted linguist—he quickly became fluent in Portuguese—he also acquired Konkani, the local language of both Goa and the northern Malabar coast. In the frontier village of Rachol, where he lived for most of his four decades in India before his death in 1619, speaking Konkani was a necessity. Indeed, he became so fluent that he wrote (under the name of Tomas Estevão) the first Konkani grammar book, the *Arte da lingoa Canarim*.²⁶ We do not know who his teachers were, but he evidently spent considerable time in the company of Konkani speakers. Just as impressively, he devoted himself to learning Marathi, the language of “high” literature among the Brahmins. It was in Marathi, sprinkled with some Konkani, that Stephens composed—under the name of Pâtri Guru—his epic 11,018-line poem about the history of the world from Creation to the coming of Jesus. He called the poem the *Kristapurana*—the Story of Christ. First printed in 1616 on a press at the Rachol seminary, the *Kristapurana* became enormously popular with the local community of Brahmin converts and, subsequently, with Malabari Christians and even Marathi-speaking non-Christians.²⁷

The *Kristapurana* arguably achieved a quasi-colonial end—bringing Christian lore to the locals.²⁸ But Stephens did not simply dress up Jesuit Christian doctrine in workmanlike Marathi. He also demonstrably fell in love with the language, in a way that Indianized not just the Christianity he sought to preach, but also his own body. This much is apparent from the best-known section of the *Kristapurana*, in which Stephens praises the beauty of Marathi:

Zaissy puspā mazi puspa mogary
Qui parimallā mazi casturi
Taissy bhassā mazi saziry
Maratthiya

Paqhiā madhe maïoru
Vruqhiā madhe calpataru
Bhassā madhe manu thoru
Maratthiyessi

[As the *mogra* among flowers
As musk among perfumes
So among languages is the beauty
Of Marathi

As among birds the peacock
As among trees the *kalpataru*
So among languages is
Marathi].²⁹

We might choose to read this passage as a strategic tour de force designed to hook an Indian readership. Stephens had carefully studied not just the medieval Marathi *puranas*—epic stories of creation, gods, and kings—but had also become adept in one of Marathi’s most distinctive poetic forms: the *ovi* stanza, employed to great effect by the Brahmin Marathi poet-saint Eknath (1533–99), a contemporary of Stephens.³⁰

But, in appropriating Eknath’s distinctive style, Stephens was not simply speaking to his readers in the language and the poetic form of the region. He was also lending voice to powerful personal experiences of his attachment to his new home. In his *ovis*, Stephens opened up his body to the touch of a world supposedly separate from him. For the landscape Stephens describes in his praise of Marathi is not designed simply to hook his Indian readers; it also bears the imprint of his own sensuous interactions with it. Here, if briefly, we can glimpse Stephens’s own delighted

body in Goa, smelling *mogra* (jasmine) flowers, hearing the cry of the peacock, gazing upon the *kalpataru* tree. And this body is the missing point of connection between landscape and language, a language that seems to have induced in him a similar delight. Which is to say: speaking Marathi changed Stephens.

Speaking Marathi also changed the Christianity he attempted to bring to his readers. The *Kristapurana* retells stories from the Old and New Testaments. Yet the Christianity he explains is one that has been adapted to Indian, and even Hindu, concepts. He calls Jesus, for example, a *swami*. But the Hinduization of Stephens's Christianity is perhaps most clear from one word choice in the above passage: "*calpataru*," or *kalpataru* tree—understood most often among inhabitants of the Konkan coast as the coconut tree.

Throughout the *Kristapurana*, Stephens invokes the "*calpataru*." Here he adapts a traditional Hindu motif for Christian purposes: the *kalpataru* is, in Sanskrit mythology, a divine tree that has the power to grant all wishes, as a result of which Indra the god-king takes it with him to paradise. Consequently, "*calpataru*" provides Stephens with a powerful translation for the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, which is how he uses the word at the poem's beginning. This typifies how Stephens gravitated toward Hindu concepts. He probably did so less out of a deep sympathy than a pragmatic sense of the main constituency for his poem, Brahmin Hindus who had converted to Catholicism. There was another shrewd calculation behind his adaptation of the *kalpataru*. As his paean to Marathi makes clear, his use of the word also serves to localize the Edenic tree in Goa. Indeed, the *kalpataru* was equated by the inhabitants of the Konkan coast with the coconut tree, because of its ability to provide for a wide spectrum of human needs.

This was a tradition with which Stephens was evidently familiar. In the letter he wrote to his brother, he remarks of the coconut tree that:

It gives oil, liquor (*vinum*), toddy (*lac*), syrup (*mel*) sugar and vinegar. Coir-rope is also made from it to tie with, and its branches are used to protect huts from rain. It gives fruit all the year round, which are rather nuts than dates, resembling a man's head. When the exterior rind has been removed, they rival the size of two fists. Inside, the fruit contains water like light beer and good to quench one's thirst. It is so plentiful that, after drinking from one fruit, you would not look for another. In the interior of the nut is a kernel lining it all over like a covering and forming a prized article of food. The shell furnishes the blacksmith with charcoal. Those that live near the sea not only load their boats with the tree, but also utilise it

for making ropes and sails. You will find hardly any piece of writing except on its leaves. Those that live on land invariably make use of them to shelter themselves from rain.³¹

Here, we can see Stephens the Goan ethnographer not so much describing the *kalpataru* as rehearsing an oft-repeated local narrative about it. Yet it is clear that his relation to the *kalpataru* was embodied as much as it was conceptual. As we have seen, the long letter Stephens wrote to his father in 1579, rich in details about his fantastic sea voyage to Goa, refers to the “drink of this country” derived from palm trees: here, he invokes either coconut water or toddy, the zesty alcoholic brew he mentions in his letter to his brother. Each drink has a significant impact on the body. Coconut water is an excellent guard against dehydration; electrolyte-rich, it has a cooling effect in the heat. And its alcoholic derivative toddy is a fine protector against the cold. It is very difficult to imagine Stephens having done without either drink during his four decades in India. In the last three years of his life, prior to his death in 1619, he struggled to take food because of a chronic stomach problem; it is highly likely that coconut water would have been a regular part of his sickbed diet. It is likewise difficult to imagine Stephens, earlier in his life, avoiding the multiple uses of the coconut in its many other forms: eating the coconut’s white flesh by itself or mixed into tasty dishes such as the *kishmur* fish curry that is so plentiful in the region; using its husk hair as coir for rope; employing it as charcoal for cooking or other fires; sheltering under its leaves in the monsoon; even writing on it as a substitute for paper—indeed, it is tempting to imagine drafts of the *Kristapurana* written on the leaves of *kalpataru*—Stephens must have been familiar with all these.

In other words, Stephens’s “*calpataru*” is not simply a local figure that translates a Christian concept. It is the catalyst for an entirely new ensemble of bodily habits, habits that differ from how Stephens had used his body in England. If Stephens imbues the *kalpataru* with miraculous properties in the *Kristapurana*, it is partly because the coconut also helped transform him from Thomas Stephens the English religious dissident into Pâtri Guru the Marathi poet. The coconut, therefore, was for Stephens the secular version of a consecrated communion wafer: his body was transformed by it, whether through eating its flesh, drinking its water, burning its rind, plaiting its husk hairs into rope, using its bark as a shelter from the rain, or writing upon its leaves.

The coconut may have provided Stephens, as it did George Herbert, with an illustration of the workings of divine providence and the principle

that God makes everything for some use—or, in the case of the *kalpataru*, for potentially infinite use. Yet the coconut does not always function in such straightforwardly theological fashion in the *Kristapurana*. When Stephens invokes it, he does not do so simply to translate key concepts of Christian doctrine for his Marathi-speaking readers. He also localizes those concepts, displacing and transforming them in ways that vividly conjure the details of the Goan landscape. When, for example, Stephens describes the rebuilding of Jerusalem, he writes that:

Draque vely puspa taru bhina zahale
Zuna taddamadda bhumy paddale
Teanche tthai vruqhe vaddhale
Apaïsse

[Grape vines, flowers and trees fell apart
Old high coconut and palm trees fell to the ground
In their place trees grew
Naturally].³²

Here, Stephens imagines a Jerusalem that has fallen from its former glory, a glory associated not just with vines and flowers, but also with the coconut tree. His term for the latter in this passage is not the heavenly *kalpataru* of Sanskrit mythology, however, but “taddamadda”—a local Konkani word that, describing the soaring height of mixed groves of coconut and palmyra trees, helps Stephens reimagine the original Jerusalem as a version of the contemporary Konkani coast. As a result, the paradisaical bliss that Christian doctrine associates with a lost past is subtly outsourced to Stephens’s and his readers’ Indian present.

Describing the animals afflicted by the waters of the Great Flood, Stephens again evokes the local coconut-rich landscape with a word that points to neither Christian doctrine nor Hindu mythology, but an actual experience of a Goan coconut tree. This time the word in question is Marathi:

Veagra bocaddiyā saue pōuaty
Zalli siha sardhalla craddaty
Zallachare manuxanssi mellaty
Nariyelli vari

[The tigers swim with the sheep
In the water the lions play with smaller cats
Those living in the water meet men
Atop the coconut tree].³³

Stephens here describes the devastation wrought by the biblical flood as an inversion of cosmic order: its water levels the hierarchical distinctions between species and between heights, placing mighty and weak animal, treetop and submarine seascape, in unexpected proximity. For modern readers, this might sound less like the flood as conceived in the Bible than a description of the tsunami that crashed into India's coconut-lined Coromandel Coast in 2004. But the stanza has a more specifically Goan resonance. Stephens's concluding line invokes the *Nariyelli*, a commonplace Marathi term for the coconut; the image he conjures with the *Nariyelli*, of men atop the coconut tree, is a powerful one in Goa even today. For the coconut trees of the region are scaled daily by agile men who tap the fruit for water and toddy. Stephens may not have adapted his body to clamber up coconut trees in search of libations. During his forty years in India, however, the *Nariyelli* was the agent of numerous other recalibrations of his body and its flesh.

These recalibrations of the flesh are why we cannot dismiss Stephens as simply an agent of European colonial power. To this day, his name is associated in Goa with the flowering of Konkani as a literary language.³⁴ And Stephens has additionally served as a standard-bearer for Goa's other indigenous languages: in the mid-twentieth century, at the height of the Quit India movement, his praise of Marathi from the *Kristapurana* was posted widely in non-Christian venues throughout Goa, such as the Saraswat Brahman Samaj's library in Margão.³⁵ Stephens did not just convert Brahmins to Christianity. He and his Christianity were also transformed by the Goan ecosystem, including the coconuts he encountered there.

In light of Stephens's coconut, then, we can revisit Stephano's pignut. When we read the two nuts contrapuntally, we might see Stephens's Marathi poem as a counter-*Tempest*, and Shakespeare's English play as a counter-*Kristapurana*.³⁶ Written unbeknownst to each other in the early 1610s, they constitute a conflicting canon of early modern nutty writing. They also represent sharply different ways of thinking about the experiences of migrant bodies and the agency of food in the contact zone.

The phrase "contact zone" is, of course, Mary Louise Pratt's. She uses it to refer to "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today."³⁷ Pratt's definition of the contact zone is curiously disembodied: it rightly thinks about cultural encounters

and power relations, but it finesses the ways in which these encounters and relations are mediated by, and imprinted on, bodies. The documents of early modern literary nut-writing allow us to put not just human but also non-human bodies back into what we might call the edible contact zone.

The Tempest's pignuts are never allowed to be anything other than fodder that serves the European migrant's need to continue functioning as himself. As we have seen, the play's nuts are simply inert commodities accumulated through indentured native labor for consumption by European masters. The nuts exist only to maintain European health and to safeguard a political economy in which European supremacy is assumed. By contrast, the *Kristapurana*, and indeed the life story of Stephens in Goa, suggest that nuts are not simply consumable goods. They are also actors that transform migrant bodies. In Shakespeare's plays, the nut has an uncanny power to swerve from the familiar to the strange. But that power is somehow diminished as soon as the nut becomes food; then it is simply a means by which a European can remain a European. What I have called Shakespeare's capacity for nutty thought, then, is nonetheless blind to an embodied power that Stephens more fully recognizes—that the nut not only comes from a brave new world, but can also open up a new world within the body of the person who eats it. This opening up is equally an adaptation to a larger ecology—an edible contact zone—within which nuts and humans meet, become bonded as fellow actors, and with transformative effect.

No matter how much the nut may transform settler bodies within the edible contact zone, however, we must still attend to the shaping political economy within which the nut is made available to its foreign eater. The mere fact of transformation by a nut does not mean that larger colonialist social relations and forms of labor must be likewise transformed. If Stephens did not himself clamber up coconut trees to retrieve coconuts, who did? Which Calibans cracked his coconuts for him? Which Calibans labored to safeguard his health? In telling the story of the miraculous powers of the coconut in Goa, it is perhaps too easy to forget the stubborn power of an economy in which labor was divided in entirely colonialist ways. Stephens was doubtless the beneficiary of an early version of this economy—which is to say, he must have assumed the privileges of a *gora sahib* (white master) served by Indian peons.

Yet there were other economies at work in Stephens's career, economies in which power was not organized in quite so predictable a fashion. From whom did he learn local languages, including vernacular Konkani and high Marathi? From whom did he learn the complexities of the

ovi form? From whom did he learn about Eknath? Stephens immersed himself in the local literary tradition in a way that few other early European settlers did and, as a result, mastered Konkani, Marathi, and their poetic forms. But his education would have demanded that he submit to other local masters. How much did he have to submit, not just intellectually, but also physically, to his Indian gurus? How, for example, did he sit during his Marathi lessons? How did he turn the pages of Marathi Puranas—perhaps inscribed on coconut leaves—such as Eknath’s? How, in short, might his body have adapted not only to the plant life, but also to the classrooms of the Konkani coast? How did his body change in ways that not only served the ends of the Portuguese colonial state but also traced the outlines of rather different modes of contact between foreigner and local?

In the edible contact zone of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Goa, then, the asymmetry of power relations in favor of European colonialist hegemony cannot always be presumed in advance. The coconut was, in Stephens’s case, a node within a complex, dynamic network of social relations that entailed considerable fluctuations of power, identity, and bodily habits. Within and without its nutshell, we find infinite space, at least in terms of lifeworlds that exceed the standard narratives of colonial history and European imperialism, including *The Tempest*. And that is why, in my nutty reworking of *The Tempest* prompted by Thomas Stephens’s *Kristapurana*, Stephano will not only eat the nuts Caliban gives him: he will also learn the language of Caliban and Sycorax, write an ode to Setebos, and train his fingers to dig banquets of pignuts under the bewitching influence of fenny—that is, cashew-nut liqueur. In my *Tempest*, then, Stephano—like his near-namesake Stephens—will go nuts.

Flying Blind, Going Nuts: A Response to Jonathan Gil Harris

Subha Mukherji

This delightful tour de force of nutty thought does not only give us a tantalizing route into nuts and people, colonialism and consumption, Prospero's isle and the island of Goa, *The Tempest* and the Kristapurana, Stephano and Stephens. It also opens casements onto the power of small things to act as unsuspected portals for worlds of possibility, realized or longed for, the capacity of passive objects to function as active agents of epistemic swerves into worlds elsewhere—in life and in fiction, for actors, authors, and readers alike. It draws us into the blind spots that we need to outstare for such insights. Methodologically, then, it goes to the heart of the idea behind this book. The diminutiveness of such *puncta*—needle-like wounds and apertures that lead us into woody places in the text that are hidden from the light of common day and common sense—makes it particularly delicious that the tiny fairy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the one whose ad/venture it is to fetch new nuts for the character who is most “translated” by a physical change. And it is a translation that registers in literal-minded Bully Bottom's language, which smacks more numinously but less literally of nuts than Thomas Stephens's: the weaver weaves himself into sense as he tries to grasp the texture of his dream, which feels—well, a bit like having gone blissfully nuts. For the lovers too, who feel something similar at the end of that play, it happens through a substance infiltrating the body (the love-juice). A larger point arising is that of somatic agency in knowledge. For all the fashion of body criticism, have we asked the right questions about embodiment and epistemology?

Interesting, too, is the transition from spectator to inter-actor. The flying fish and obscure birds of Stephens's epistolary report of his long sea voyage give way to the coconut that becomes “incorporate” in the porous colonial body (as the Gothic queen Tamora becomes incorporate in Rome) and cross-cultural poetry. What knowledges do such osmoses as these instill in the human agent who is also inscribed by the non-human object, which takes on agency as it transforms him? Is the coconut like Bottom's ass's head, a physical object—a prop—that transforms being without usurping it quite? What complicates the structural symmetry of transactions is that one of the agents is an inanimate fruit.

Is its surprising agency constituted or undermined by the knowingness of the person ingesting or absorbing it, unlike the passivity of the human agent when Puck squeezes love-juice into Titania's eye? Can the metonymic object be a stage prop too? How conscious is Thomas "Stephano" of the cultural capital to be drawn from the edible contact zone of a foreign environment where he not only wants but needs to be accepted? How easily can this relation be destabilized, and does that require the agency of the colonized? Even when the "other" is a nut rather than a manipulative foreign queen, how reversible is the agent-object relation in this exchange?

The other factor I wonder about, in the specific context of the *nariyel*, is that of labor. Does it matter that it probably was not Patri Guru Stephens who climbed the tall tree, as Gil says, but an agile, "wondrous necessary" native, quite possibly someone in a servant capacity, aiding colonial provision in unfamiliar heat (not to speak of the cultivation of the trees)?³⁸ Does the prehistory of the coconut getting into the body of the missionary foreigner change the counters in this act of transformation? A story I grew up hearing comes back to haunt me. My friend Santanu's family, from our South Calcutta neighborhood, had a trusty servant, "Ramani," who had served a British family home in the city before Independence.³⁹ He was a great raconteur. One of his stories was how his British masters would call out for him—the "khansama" or "Johnny"—and offer him a penny if he could crack open a coconut: "Johnny Johnny, one penny" was the refrain. When the water was extracted, the "shaheb" would drink it and say "good water, good water." Ramani-da also recalled how the British played football with "narkols" (and Americans "soccer," when they visited briefly to drop a bomb on the Howrah Bridge). So the coconut in this second scenario was not just an agent in the labile contact zone but functional in homosocial bonding and phenomenological change through an act of colonial bricolage in the world of Western sports: reinvented as a ball, it impinged on the white male body and its practices, not just as taste and texture but as exertion, not as pulp but as play—to be chased, dribbled, exchanged on the plains of Bengal; entering the zone of competitive contact (who gets "passed" the coconut-ball), and then to be prised open to be savored, all filtered through the memory of Ramani the manservant (*ban-ban* Ca-Caliban) who was called upon to serve it and paid in small change for his small labor. In his later post-independence days, the subaltern spoke, to his new (Bengali) masters,

their children and their friends—like Iachimo in captivity, repossessing the scene with performance. The nut can be a prop for the native too! But then again, *did* he have the last word? The memory trace is cathected through these middle-class children, now academics in the West. The point is that these relations are often uncanny “*walnuts*” themselves—I love the way Gil touches on the etymology of the word, suggesting both quotidian wall and threatening foreignness. It reminds me of what Derrida calls the paradoxical affiliation of *hostis*—etymologically evoking both host and guest, for between host and hostage is one small step, as Lear knew when he was turned out “at gates,” his own gates, by his daughter and son-in-law.

And yet, even as I raise these questions, I am moved by the sense of joy and indeed of “love,” as Gil puts it, that comes across in the *ovi* stanzas of Stephens’s Marathi poetry. Through all the social constructivism we may be legitimately tempted to test the thesis against, there is a certain irreducibility of affect that can only be conveyed elusively in the feel of the poetry and—perhaps in a segue into self—in Gil’s delightful narrative (i.e., it *takes* delight in capturing this), even while he acknowledges shrewd calculation, strategy, and pragmatism underlying some of Thomas Stephens’s moves. This interests me not only personally and biographically, but also critically. Is affect one of the blind spots in the necessarily politicized field of contact zone studies? Have we found a way of fully incorporating it yet in the knowledges we seek through our obstinate questionings and disciplinary rigors? What I find missing in a lot of the relevant critical writing is *play*—which this essay is quick with. And this in turn makes me wonder if the edible, audible, and olfactory contact zones are not potentially also zones of a *peripateia* in the migratory, especially colonial, plot? That something can in fact reverse at these thresholds, and a transition can be effected from one stage to another? Perhaps Stephano fails to enter the proffered dream because in this, Shakespeare’s most compact and Aristotelian play, the encounter has to be momentuous rather than processive; the shift from object to agent does not get fully triggered (unlike, perhaps, in *The Winter’s Tale*)—though I wonder where Puck stands in this spectrum. Stephano is not made of words either, in the way that so many of our Shakey characters are. And language, as Barthes knew, is a skin—another surface of contact. Gil’s reading of the language of Stephens’s poetry (and letters) opens up the possibility of tracing bodily knowledge through linguistic texture—from one form to another is a fluid passage.

Yet the boundary of potential passage remains fugitive and precarious, which is why I wonder if desire needs to be brought into the equation for a full understanding of such encounters. I would love to hear what place it has in Gil's larger narrative and project. At the cost of risking a relapse into the conceptual from the embodied, I want to put some pressure on the *kalpataru* as a generic metaphor, rather than, straightforwardly, a coconut tree. In different parts of India, the name is given to different trees: the famous *kalpataru* in Badrinath, for example, is a mulberry tree; the one I knew in our village home in Birbhum was a banyan. Also called the *kalpavriksha*, the *kalpataru* is, after all, etymologically and semantically, as well as in Hindu myth and Sanskrit literature, the "wish-fulfilling tree"—*kalpa* is a derivative of the Sanskrit *kalpana*, meaning imagination, fantasy. It evokes the fantasy and desire of the white body to not just claim, but belong to, a paradise of osmosis that might replace, even displace, or transform, an anti-paradise of possession, conversion, and conquest of a non-white, largely non-Christian people. In Agamben's terms, the end sometimes wants to forget its beginning. Perhaps the haunting, namaaj-like chants of the Kristapurana in present-day Goa, distantly resonant in Cambridge and Delhi on YouTube, are a token of that forgetting—which is also an alternative form of memory; a re-membering at once assimilative and recuperative. The precise impossibility of this, in Stephens's case, makes poignant his poetics and somatics of desire, and makes his literary use of the coconut "lawful as eating," if only in a lived romance.⁴⁰ The body is not elided, but both sensed and emplotted. Might one go as far as to say that embodiment and narrative are woven together, just as doctrine dissolves into affect, as Stephens gives Christian concepts a local habitation and a name?

Even if Shakespeare's Stephano failed to either feel or recognize the transformative potential of the merely edible nut, Shakespeare knew about the potency of nutty thought—not just in relation to small objects or infiltrating substances, but liminal moments, spaces, even creatures—for example, dreams as a threshold state of heightened perception. What Gil's argument draws in is the sense of an active transaction. The point about the multiform, polyvalent nut is that it is, and is not, a nut. It is an operative counterpart for that dimension of the theatre that trains us to see double, with parted eyes. As a point of entry, it tempts me into my own nutty swerve, and makes me introduce a point of exit into a world apart: "Exit, pursued by a bear" (*The Winter's Tale* 3.3.58). Theseus and common sense tell us that a bush is a bush and a bear is a bear, but

the play shows us that a man can turn into an ass! So the bear in *The Winter's Tale* is both material and metonymic, and, through the terrible sportiveness of its own act of eating (and the clown's recounting of it), it somehow makes lawful the transition between winter and spring, cruelty and joy, death and life, loss and restoration, the "familiar" Sicily and the "strange" Bohemia; indeed, between tragedy and comedy. Perhaps it also has something to do with the fluidity of bears—the polar bears brought into England and put on show by Henslowe et al., and their possible interchangeability in the theatre with bears of fantasy presented by a big bouncy person in bearskin. The edible contact zone where Antigonus becomes mere food but Perdita is rescued into life is also the eldritch space of tragicomic reversal and formal experiment, and a surrender to a world elsewhere. Is there a generic story that I am trying to get at? Should I be? Or have I eaten too many nuts?

Infinite riches in a little nut! But remember, ceci n'est pas une noix ...

NOTES

¹ A version of this essay appears in the *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, vol. 153 (2017).

² "nut, n. 1 and adj. 2," I.i. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, consulted December 2, 2016.

³ See, for example, Kerr, *Shakespeare's Flowers*, 3: "the flowers Shakespeare loved best were the flowers of his childhood and his home. These were the ones he chose 'to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature.'" Thomas and Faircloth assert that, "the language of plants, a commonplace of the rural world, was augmented in Shakespeare's London by 'green desire,' a new-found passion for plants and gardens" (*Shakespeare's Plants and Gardens*, 1), but they also note, in ways that resonate with my argument in this essay, that Shakespeare's references to plants are prompted by a fascination with exotic flora and fauna.

⁴ All references to Shakespeare's plays will be to *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, edited by Proudfoot, Thompson, and Kastan.

⁵ Cavendish, "Of Many Worlds in This World," line 12. In Cavendish, *Poems and Fancies*, 45.

⁶ On the history of Lucretian thought in early modern England, see Stones, "The Atomic View of Matter in the XVth, XVIth, and XVIIth Centuries"; Kargon, *Atomism in England from Hariot to Newton*; Lezra, *Unspeakable Subjects*; and Harris, "Atomic Shakespeare." For a fuller account of Cavendish's own somewhat ambiguous engagement with atomism, see Goldberg, "Margaret Cavendish, Scribe"; and Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare*, 160–61.

⁷ "The first element is Germanic *wal [...] 'Welshman,' i.e. Celtic or Roman foreigner," "walnut, n.1," *Oxford English Dictionary*, online.

⁸ See Culpeper, *Complete Herbal, and English Physician*, 37, for a description of the “Sussex pignut” (which he includes under the heading of “Earth Chesnut”).

⁹ The etymology of “filbert” is Norman French: Saint Philbert’s feast day is on August 20, and the plant was most likely renamed for him because the nuts matured on or around this day. See “filbert, n. and adj.,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, online.

¹⁰ An extensive natural and cultural history of nuts is, to the best of my knowledge, yet to be written. But the budding nuxologist may wish to make a pilgrimage to the Leavenworth Nutcracker Museum in Leavenworth, Washington State: it is a startlingly capacious archive of all things nut-related, including nutcrackers. Its website offers a brief but useful account of the global history and geography of nuts: www.nutcrackermuseum.com/history_nuts.htm (accessed October 22, 2018).

¹¹ Herbert, “Providence,” lines 130–32, in *The English Poems of George Herbert*, p. 109.

¹² See Harris, *Indography*, esp. 1–22.

¹³ Fletcher, *The Island Princess*, 1.3.16–18, 26–31.

¹⁴ Fitch, “The Voyage of M. Ralph Fitch,” 465–504.

¹⁵ In his travel narrative, Fitch mentions only that Stephens was “an English Jesuit”; in a private letter written from Goa in January 1584, he says that Stephens and Marco “did sue for us unto the Viceroy and other officers,” And, “if they had not stuck to us, if we had escaped with our lives yet we had long imprisonment.” Fitch’s letter is also reproduced in Locke, *The First Englishmen in India*, 89.

¹⁶ My biographical information about Stephens derives from the following sources: Saldanha, *The Christian Puranna of Father Thomas Stephens of the Society of Jesus*; Schurhammer, “Thomas Stephens 1549–1619”; Singh, “The First Englishman in India”; and Southwood, “Thomas Stephens.” See also Harris, *The First Firangis*, 47–70.

¹⁷ Stephens’s letter to his father is reproduced in Saldanha, *The Christian Puranna*, xxvi–xxx.

¹⁸ Saldana, *The Christian Puranna*, xxvi, xxvii.

¹⁹ Saldana, *The Christian Puranna*, xxviii.

²⁰ Saldana, *The Christian Puranna*, xxviii.

²¹ Saldana, *The Christian Puranna*, xxvii.

²² Stephens’s Latin letter to his brother Richard is also reproduced in Saldanha, *The Christian Puranna*, xxx–xiv

²³ Quoted in Saldanha, *The Christian Puranna*, xxx.

²⁴ My discussion of pre-Portuguese and early colonial Goa is indebted to de Souza, *Goa Through the Ages*; Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 381–91; and Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia 1500–1700*, 80–85.

²⁵ For an extensive if somewhat reverential biography of Francis Xavier, see Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*.

²⁶ My discussion of Konkani is indebted to Ivo Coelho's introduction to the facsimile edition of Stephens, *Arte de Lingoa Canarim*.

²⁷ Original editions of the *Kristapurana* do not survive, so I have worked with Saldanha's 1907 Marathi edition. The Marathi of this edition is rendered in Roman rather than Devanagari script. All English translations are mine, with considerable help from Vibha Kamat and Suresh Walawalikar.

²⁸ It is important to remember that, even if the Jesuits initially worked with the sanction of the Portuguese colonial state, they were not identical to it. Although King João III had appointed Francis Xavier as his Apostolic Nuncio in Portuguese India, the Jesuits did not operate straightforwardly within the machinery of colonialism and empire. Stephens's mission to translate the Word of God into local vernaculars may have not fallen foul of state law in his lifetime, but it did later, as, indeed, did the Jesuit order in general. After several years of sustained pressure, the colonial authorities banned the use of vernacular languages in 1684 and declared Portuguese the sole official language. Stephens's *Kristapurana* suddenly became a problematic text. The poem went even further underground with the (temporary) suspension of the Jesuit order in 1773, as a result of which many texts associated with the Society of Jesus were destroyed. This might be the reason why not a single copy of the first three editions of the *Kristapurana* survives today. But, in the wake of the vernacular language ban and the suspension of the Jesuits, the *Kristapurana* survived in largely secretive, oral form among Goan and Malabari Christians. In the process, it became a powerful rallying point for anti-colonial sentiment; it was still recited with pride by Marathi-speaking Indian freedom fighters at the height of Gandhi's Quit India Movement in the 1940s.

²⁹ Saldanha, *The Christian Puranna* (Awasuari 1, *ovis* 123–24).

³⁰ Stephens's debts to Eknath, as well as to earlier practitioners of the *ovi* tradition such as Dnyaneshwar, are discussed by Staffner, "Fr. Stephens' *Christa Puranna*," and Silva, "Thomas Stephens, S. J."

³¹ Quoted in Saldanha, *The Christian Puranna*, xxxii–xxxiii.

³² Quoted in Saldanha, *The Christian Puranna*, 179 (Awasuari 33, *ovi* 16).

³³ Quoted in Saldanha, *The Christian Puranna*, 42 (Awasuari 7, *ovi* 77).

³⁴ The association of Stephens's name with the flowering of Konkani as a literary language is in no small part due to the Thomas Stephens Konknni Kendr in the Goan parish of Bardez, which houses an extraordinary archive of Konkani texts by Stephens and other non-Portuguese Goan writers of the past four centuries. Stephens has also recently become a figurehead for the indigenous Romi Konknni Movement, whose objective is to have Roman-script Konkani declared one of the official languages of Goa.

³⁵ This story comes from Vibha Kamat.

³⁶ The practice of reading "contrapuntally" means reading a text from the double perspective of imperialist ideology and the means of production or forms of resistance that it might efface, "with an understanding of what is involved when

an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 66).

³⁷ Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," 34.

³⁸ A phrase used by Beatrice-Joanna to describe Deflores, the charismatic court servant who at once repels and fascinates her and who both serves and dominates her through erotic complicity, in Middleton and Rowley, *The Changeling*, 5.1.92.

³⁹ Delighted thanks go to Santanu Das, the source of this story, himself a raconteur par excellence.

⁴⁰ Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 5.3.111, in *The Arden Shakespeare*.

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Chapter 3

Eyes Wide Shut: Seeing and Knowing in *Othello*

Supriya Chaudhuri

"Give me the ocular proof."

(*Othello*, 3.3.363)¹

IF KNOWLEDGE, LIKE VISION, has its blind spot or *punctum caecum*, the analogy with the faculty of sight would suggest that it is a not-knowing at the very core of knowing, one for which knowledge seeks incessantly to compensate. The point is relevant to *Othello*, a play obsessed with seeing, yet one that repeatedly falls back upon imagined spectacles as substitutes for visual evidence. "Give me the ocular proof," says Othello to Iago: "Make me to see't." To this Iago replies, "Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on? / Behold her topped? ... It is impossible you should see this" (3.3.363–64, 398–99; 405). The exchange has been much commented on in a number of contexts, from Shakespeare's literal dependence upon Cinthio for the phrase "ocular proof," to the links between spying, sexual jealousy, and theatrical spectatorship.² Nevertheless, it retains its power to trouble us, constituting *the* paradox at the heart of the play's visual dynamic. The impossibility of Othello's actually *seeing* the act of adultery that Iago attributes to Desdemona is almost physically tied in to the assumed primacy of sight in their relationship: on her part, the fact that "she had eyes, and chose me" (3.3.192), and, on his, the call to witness: "Look where she comes / If she be false, O then heaven mocks itself / I'll not believe't" (3.3.281–83). Yet that very reliance on the evidence of the eyes, signaled more than once in this play, is betrayed by the fluency with which seeing becomes a metaphor or a mental act, from Desdemona's seeing "Othello's visage in his mind" (1.3.253) to Othello's frantic probing of the "monster" in Iago's thought, "too hideous to be shown" (3.3.110–11). So too, as Iago calmly assures him, where knowledge cannot be based upon

sense perception, it must be derived from “imputation and strong circumstances” (3.3.409): that is, from inference and background information. There is a curious link here to the psychophysiology of the blind spot in the human eye.

Anatomically, the *punctum caecum*, first detected by the French physicist Edmé Mariotte in 1668, is the small area in the retina where the optic nerves pass through the optic disc, thus making vision possible. Lacking photoreceptors entirely, the junction forms a blind spot, or stain (Mariotte named it *la tache aveugle*) in the field of sight. This hole—a *punctum*, or puncture at the heart of seeing—is filled in by the physiology of binocular vision, the other eye supplying what one does not see, repairing the neural gap by a visual overlap, and restoring “wholeness” to sight. But, even when the blind spot is isolated—if one sees with a single eye—the brain’s psychological mechanisms work to “paper over” the neural gap with information from the background, so that there is no perceptible empty space or stain in the field of vision. The place of the spot we do not see is filled in by what is adjacent to it in the visual field. The phenomenological analogy, with consciousness and the cognitive process, was not far to seek. In May 1960, Maurice Merleau-Ponty began a section of his “Working Notes” for the unfinished manuscript of *The Visible and the Invisible* with the following statements:

Blindness (*punctum caecum*) of the “consciousness.”

What it does not see it does not see for reasons of principle, it is because it is consciousness that it does not see. *What* it does not see is what in it prepares the vision of the rest (as the retina is blind at the point where the fibers that will permit the vision spread out into it). *What* it does not see is what makes it see.³

“*What* it does not see is what makes it see.” Inevitably, Merleau-Ponty is fascinated by this blindness at the origin of sight, by the fact that the seeing eye is occluded at the very point where vision becomes possible. For him this *constitutive* incapacity of sight is key to the complex psychophysical relation between body and world, visible and invisible, touchable and non-touchable: like Shakespeare, he uses the analogy of the glove to speak of the reversibility of inside and outside.⁴ Jacques Lacan refers to these passages repeatedly in Seminar XI to work through his idea of the inside-out structure of the gaze (*le regard*), and the notion of “scotoma” (blind spot) or “scotomization,” a metaphor for *méconnaissance* (misrecognition) in his celebrated analysis of Holbein’s “The Ambassadors.”⁵

For Merleau-Ponty, the “blind spot” of consciousness is what we cannot even acknowledge as a lack because consciousness works to conceal it. Othello’s blind spots are very much a phenomenon of this kind: the point is not that he fails to see but that his imagination persuades him he is seeing what is not there to be seen.

In *Vanities of the Eye*, the historian Stuart Clark argued that the “ocularcentrism” of the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, associated with “the rationalization of sight,” perspectival naturalism in painting, and major advances in optics, in fact generated a profound visual crisis.⁶ Taking his title from the Oxford scholar George Hakewill’s *The Vanitie of the Eye* (1608), a scathing attack on the faculty of sight, Clark suggests that early modern visual regimes were, despite their power, subject to deep internal uncertainty: “John Berger once wrote: ‘The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled’; my argument will be that this relation was particularly unsettled in late Renaissance Europe. In one context after another, vision came to be characterized by uncertainty and unreliability, such that access to visual reality could no longer be normally guaranteed. It is as though European intellectuals lost their optical nerve.”⁷

Right from antiquity to the seventeenth century, the relations between the three elements of the Aristotelian chain of cognition, perceiver, medium, and perceived object, were being renegotiated. Medieval optics, divided between conflicting theories of vision and cognition in Greek science, was signally advanced by Arab philosophers such as Al-kindi and Alhazen, but the question of how visible *species*, or “likenesses” of objects in the visual field, were propagated by the eye to the brain and received by internal senses such as imagination continued to be problematic.⁸ Even after Johannes Kepler’s discovery of the inverted retinal image (*pictura*) produced through intromitted rays received by the crystalline lens (thus explicitly distinguishing the physical optics of image formation from the psychological optics of vision), the problems were by no means solved. Clark concludes that the 250 years between the early fifteenth and late seventeenth centuries ended in a “collapse of the ‘representational’ model of vision based on *species*,” while “visual anomalies and paradoxes multiplied to such a degree that they overwhelmed the cognitive theory that permitted them to occur.”⁹ In consequence, it is the very primacy accorded to sight in most accounts of the senses and of the cognitive process that allows Hakewill to prove, “That the eies serue not only as treacherous porters, and false intelligencers in naturall and artificiall things, but also as secret intelligencers, for discovering the passions of the minde and diseases of the body.”¹⁰

Yet, as Clark acknowledges, the period is also characterized by intense visual hunger, not unrelated to the Augustinian “lust of the eyes” behind Othello’s demand for ocular proof, and the sexual innuendo on “satisfaction” with which Iago responds (3.3.397).¹¹ What is rendered obscene and “hideous”—or, by a folk etymology discussed by Michael Neill, *hidden*—in *Othello* is the sexual act itself, which Stanley Cavell, in an influential reading of the play, makes equivalent to murder: “My guiding hypothesis about the structure of the play is that the thing *denied our sight* throughout the opening scene—the thing, the scene, that Iago takes Othello back to again and again, retouching it for Othello’s enclafed imagination—is what we are shown in the final scene, the scene of murder. This becomes our ocular proof of Othello’s understanding of his two nights of married love.”¹²

At the very start of the play, Brabantio is roused from his dream by Iago and Roderigo’s crying the news of his daughter’s sexual truancy aloud: “Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe!” (1.1.87–88). Shouted into the darkness of the night, Iago’s lewd visualization of the carnal act corresponds, Brabantio confesses, to the substance of his dream: “This accident is not unlike my dream / Belief of it oppresses me already” (1.1.140–41). What Brabantio *does not see* is what he has already seen in his dream, and therefore already “knows.” For him, the transition from the “eye of the mind” to the bodily eye—Aristotle had declared in his *De Anima* that “visual images appear even to those whose eyes are closed”—is superseded by what we might call a preemptive leap of cognition.¹³ Yet what father dreams of his daughter so engaged? If we recall Prospero’s “take my daughter” injunction to Ferdinand in *The Tempest* (4.1.13–23), we must say: *every Father*, which, in a Lacanian sense or under the sign of patriarchy, includes husbands and brothers. There is a running parallel between Brabantio and Othello through the play, especially in the insistence on Desdemona’s obedience, filial or marital (1.3.179–80, 4.1.255–56, and 3.3.89). That Desdemona, in a response worthy of Cordelia herself, has carefully divided her duty and obedience between father and husband is irrelevant in this proprietary context. Once married, Desdemona has no wish to put her father “in impatient thoughts / By being in his eye” (1.3.243–44). Brabantio’s impatience, like Othello’s, is surely less anger than a form of sexual jealousy fixed on the object “in his eye,” but not in his possession: an object towards which, in a crucial aspect, he has been blind.

For a play so obsessed with the faculty of sight, *Othello* records a persistent anxiety about actual seeing. When Desdemona declares that

she “saw Othello’s visage in his mind,” she refuses the conventional receiving of visual images, or *species*, in *her* mind, instead replacing Othello’s physical “visage” by a composite of his mental qualities, which become the imaginary object of her “seeing.” How, Brabantio asks, could a girl brought up so modestly as Desdemona “fall in love with what she feared to look on?” (1.3.99). The answer that both Othello and Desdemona give to this question has more to do with the faculty of hearing than that of sight, with the “greedy ear” Desdemona opened to “devour” Othello’s discourse, urging him to “dilate” his adventures (1.3.150, 154). At one level, this love seems exemplary, a product of what the senator calls “such fair question / As soul to soul affordeth” (1.3.114–15), rather than the charms and poisons of which Othello stands accused. At another level, however, there appears to be something missing. The Neoplatonic “soul to soul” communion of Donne’s “The Extasie” or “The Good-Morrow” is founded on the exchange of looks between the full, dilated eyes of the lovers as they gaze at each other (“My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,” “The Good-Morrow,” 15).¹⁴ Though the terms “dilate” and “dilation” in *Othello*, brilliantly linked by Patricia Parker both to narrative elaboration and anatomical scrutiny, suggest the opening up of hidden sights or secrets (as in Iago’s “close dilations,” 3.3.126), the plighting of troth between Othello and Desdemona is explicitly linked to the opening of the ear that receives the “dilations” of rhetoric, rather than to the opening of the eyes—“secret intelligencers for discovering the passions of the minde,” as Hakewill called them.¹⁵

If Othello has charmed Desdemona through her ear, Iago too resolves, “I’ll pour this pestilence into his ear” (2.3.351). Iago is convinced that Desdemona’s love, its violence founded on no more than Othello’s “bragging and telling her fantastical lies,” will not survive, as “her eye must be fed” (2.1.221, 223). Are the lovers’ eyes wide open or wide shut? The dilation of the pupil of the eye, commented on as early as the tenth century by the Baghdad physician al-Razi, known in the west as Rhazes, was traditionally held to indicate sexual arousal, so that women in Renaissance Italy used drops of poisonous belladonna or deadly nightshade to enlarge and brighten their eyes.¹⁶ Whether or not Desdemona followed this practice, Iago deliberately comments on the sexual provocation of her gaze (“What an eye she has! Methinks it sounds a parley to provocation”), to which Cassio responds rather feebly: “An inviting eye, and yet methinks right modest” (2.3.21–22, 23). The Italian name *belladonna*, alluding to the plant’s use as a beauty aid, was applied by John Gerard in his *Herball* (1597) to *solanum lethale*, deadly nightshade or, as Gerard called it, sleepy

nightshade, closely related to the equally deadly mandragora or mandrake: "This kind of Nightshade causeth sleepe, troubleth the mind, bringeth madnesse if a few of the berries be inwardly taken, but if moe be giuen they also kill and bring present death. *Theophrastus* in his sixth booke doth likewise write of Mandrake in this manner, Mandrake causeth sleepe and if also much of it be taken it bringeth death."¹⁷

"Nor poppy nor mandragora," says Iago of Othello, "Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world / Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep / Which thou owedst yesterday" (3.3.333–36). Mandrake was also believed to be an aphrodisiac, so Othello may stand to lose more than just sleep. But what he has already lost—in some sense, appears never to have enjoyed—is the full reciprocity of the dilated gaze, the "look" that he fears to meet in death: "How dost thou look now? / ... This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven / And fiends will snatch at it" (5.2.270, 272–73). Like Desdemona's dead father, whom the sight would have driven to a "desperate turn," Othello cannot endure "possession of this heavenly sight" (5.2.205, 276). Even more than the lust of the eyes, it is the impossibility of fully returning the gaze of the other that constitutes the core of the *Othello* plot. Cavell and Neill are surely right in reading "the tragic loading of this bed"—the "object" that Lodovico commands Iago to "look on," before it is hidden from us ("The object poisons sight. / Let it be hid," 5.2.361–63)—as the very thing "denied our sight" through the play's course.¹⁸ Yet the obscenity of this sight indicates more than a transgression of sexual and racial boundaries: it points to a failure of the sight, even a poisoning of it, echoing the play's obsession with charms, drugs, and poisons such as belladonna or mandragora, which could also cause blindness and death. The lovers' inability to use their eyes, whether as secret intelligencers (with Hakewill) or true witnesses, like Donne's lovers, whose "true plain hearts do in the faces rest," suggests that Othello's blind spot is Desdemona, or something in her; hers is Othello, or something in him. By the time Othello demands of Desdemona, "Let me see your eyes. / Look in my face" (4.2.25–26), he can no longer recognize her, nor she him. As Desdemona kneels and Othello commands Emilia to shut the door, he sees only the product of his and Iago's imagination: "I took you for the cunning whore of Venice / That married with Othello" (4.2.91–92).

Philosophically understood, this failure of sight is inevitable at the point of what Merleau-Ponty would call the intertwining or *chiasm* of the seer with the seen: reversibly, *being seen*, a point of overlap that never entirely matches. His phrase, "reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other," powerfully recalls another of Donne's images of visual

exchange: "Our eye-beames twisted, and did thred / Our eyes, upon one double string" ("The Extasie," 7–8).¹⁹ Reading this section, Lacan comments on how "consciousness, in its illusion of seeing itself seeing itself, finds its basis in the inside out structure of the gaze."²⁰ In another of his working notes from May 1960, Merleau-Ponty wrote: "When I say then that every visible is invisible, that perception is imperception, that consciousness has a '*punctum caecum*,' that to see is always to see more than one sees—this must not be understood in the sense of a *contradiction*."²¹

The blind spot in Othello's consciousness is located where he sees himself being seen, misapprehending both himself and the other whose gaze is intertwined with his own. In consequence, the forensic process of probation is bound to fail, because the place of what he cannot actually see in the play is taken up by a superfluity of visual signs and material tokens that are either misrecognized or overvalued, creating a false compound of perception and inference.²² Even what should lie at the core of belief, the truth of reciprocated love between himself and Desdemona, becomes an object of slanderous reportage as his blackness converts him to a specular self he must explain or defend. As audience, as spectators, we are drawn, as Neill suggests, into a prurient and overwhelmingly *visual* curiosity about the hidden marriage bed and the actual or deferred scene of physical consummation, ending in Cavell's monstrous question, "Well, were the sheets stained or not? Was she a virgin or not?"²³

The stain in sight (*la tache aveugle*) is precisely what we cannot see. Cavell's impossible query is central to his reading of the tragedy "as a kind of epistemological problem, or as the outcome of the problem of knowledge."²⁴ Sexuality, the marker of human separateness, is at the heart of this skeptical crisis. For Othello to accept his own sexual knowledge of Desdemona is to recognize her as *other* to himself: faced with the impossibility of that recognition, he chooses rather to degrade and destroy her. Impressive as this reading is, it proceeds, as Howard Marchitello observes, "upon a series of assumptions on Cavell's part—assumptions about sexuality, Othello and Desdemona's wedding night, and about narrative and ocularity—, assumptions, in fact, that are very nearly identical to Othello's."²⁵ That Marchitello then proceeds to compare Othello's "anatomization" of Desdemona with Vesalius's cutting open of the bodies of pregnant women suggests that Cavell's reading has more of a hold on him than he is willing to admit.²⁶ Unquestionably, the play's central problem is that of knowledge, including sexual knowledge, but there is a kind of misogynist reduction here. The tragedy does not proceed from Othello's epistemological crisis alone: the problem of knowledge afflicts

everyone in the play, and we share in it as “knowing” spectators in a catastrophe we are powerless to prevent. Othello is, to an extent unparalleled elsewhere in Shakespeare, the object of our gaze: his blackness, his military judgment, his sexual prowess, his vulnerability, his jealous folly, are on display, made into a spectacle by Iago’s relentless, malicious, possibly erotic obsession with him. The principal *external* mark set on him is that of his race, his visible difference from others. Black actors in particular have had difficulties with this overdetermined, *in-your-face* stage presence: Adrian Lester is on record as having tried to deal with it by including more actors of color in the cast.²⁷ Nevertheless, the visual overrepresentation or theatrical excess that singles Othello out remains a major obstacle to our understanding him.

Seeing Othello involves a kind of blindness, manifested in the phobic responses of Brabantio and Iago to Othello’s color, but most in his own self-doubts: “Haply, for I am black . . . or for I am declined / Into the vale of years—yet that’s not much— / She’s gone, I am abused” (3.3.267, 269–71). But other sights and things in the play are also infected, like the “infected house” (4.1.21) of Othello’s memory, by this disease of sight. Objects, gestures, and actions receive the full weight of a predisposition to overvalue the visual sign while persistently mis-seeing it or seeing it only in the imagination. In fact, ocular evidence is largely misleading and almost wholly manipulated in the play. Both Brabantio and Iago accuse Desdemona of deceitful appearances, and Iago constructs an entire chain of false inference from Cassio’s visible behavior, first for Roderigo in Act 2, then for Othello in Act 4. Most weight, in this play of insistent verbal and visual repetitions, falls upon a single material object, the handkerchief, seen where it should not be, imagined where it is not. “I saw the handkerchief” (5.2.66), says Othello. For him, this seeing converts a murder to a sacrifice, and Desdemona’s denial “stones” his heart and makes him a murderer: surely Yeats had this in mind when he observed that too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart?²⁸ Othello’s handkerchief, spotted with strawberries, dyed in mummy from maidens’ hearts, a gift (of confused provenance) from Othello’s mother, dropped, picked up, planted, employed as exemplum, is a site of fetish-desire as well as a visual signal. In the rich and intricate corpus of commentary that has grown up around it, from Lynda Boose on its spots to Ian Smith on its dye, the handkerchief has been shown to function as a metatextual placeholder for the play’s governing obsessions: virginity, blackness, wedding sheets and shrouds, ocular proof, blind spots, delusion, folly.²⁹ It is so clearly a displaced representation of Othello and Desdemona’s wedding sheets, spotted with hymeneal

blood, that its loss and errancy, to the extent that its embroidered design is sought to be taken out (*copied*, but also perhaps *removed*?), set in motion a kind of cognitive truancy that ends in Desdemona's commanding Emilia to lay out her wedding sheets on what is to be her deathbed. Inevitably, we do not see the handkerchief again after Act 4, when Bianca declares to Cassio that, "I'll take out no work on't" (4.1.154), as what we see is the wedding bed, repository of Desdemona's faith and love, but converted, in Othello's chilling (and more than faintly absurd) doggerel, to the unchaste site where her impure blood must fall: "Forth of my heart those charms, thine eyes, are blotted, / Thy bed, lust-stained, shall with lust's blood be spotted" (5.1.35–36). Powerfully, bathetically, the couplet plots together the play's preoccupation with love, charms, eyes, blots, bed, lust, blood, and spots. In fact, Othello does not shed Desdemona's blood, leaving the wedding sheets to bear chaste witness to his folly and her love. If Cavell's question remains unanswered, the handkerchief is a material, visible surrogate, though it can scarcely be prominent on stage, justifying Boose's and Smith's focus on attributes (spots, color) that might actually serve as visual signs.³⁰ But it is also a Lacanian *objet petit a*, carrying an enormous cognitive overload as fetish-thing and love-token. We know more about it than we see, through Othello's mesmeric account of its weaving by a 200-year-old Sibyl from hallowed silk, its dyeing in mummy from virgins' hearts, its use as a love-charm, and his injunction to Desdemona to "Make it a darling, like your precious eye!" (3.4.68). Given this magical aura, Desdemona's loss of what should have been the apple of her eye is like losing the eye of the Gorgon that could turn men into stone, a story explained by Hakewill as an allegory of "the suddaine astonishment of men at the raies of her rare beauty."³¹ At the same time, there is a bathetic disjunction, as Rymer noted, between "so remote a trifle" as a handkerchief, and the "passion and repetition" the object attracts in the play.³²

If the handkerchief is a visible, risible token of Othello's cognitive confusions, causing the blinding physiological reaction of an epileptic fit (4.1.35–43), its immaterial counterpart is that "cunning whore of Venice" whom Othello identifies in Desdemona, and whom Iago projects as a cultural stereotype of Venetian women. This imaginary being is directly invoked by Iago in the temptation scene and rapidly takes shape as a complex of sensuality, sophistication, immorality, and cunning, about whom Iago professes an extreme and worldly *knowingness*, which he seeks to communicate to Othello. Knowingness, as a substitute for knowledge, is precisely the mode of cognition that fosters *méconnaissance*. It is founded in the background of preconceptions from which information can be

drawn to supply the cognitive map, even where perceptual knowledge is lacking. When Thomas Coryate came to report his travels into France and Italy in 1608, he was already well informed about the famous Venetian courtesans, seeking only to validate what he already knew.³³ But Iago affects a much greater degree of knowingness than the relatively naïve Odcombian traveller, offering his worldly wisdom about the conduct of Venetian wives as a substitute for anything that Othello can validate from his own experience. In consequence, what Othello sees as a forensic, probative process—"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" (3.3.367–69)—is fatally corrupted by Iago's interposing local knowledge before proof: "I speak not yet of proof ... I know our country disposition well" (3.3.199, 294). It is this kind of knowingness that supplies the deficit of the perceptual blind spot, and it may be worth suggesting that both spotted handkerchief and lustful whore are blind spots of knowledge perceptually overlaid by information derived from assumption and conjecture.

In conclusion, I will offer some comments on the theatrical fate, post-*Othello*, of these two signs: material and immaterial, the handkerchief and the whore. Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, written around 1605–6, reworks several plot elements from Shakespeare's *Othello*, performed at court on November 1, 1604 and written by mid-1602. Influence is usually understood as a linear, temporal sequence, but, if we recall Jonathan Gil Harris's brilliant exposition of time in *Othello*, we might reflect how questions of influence too can be illuminated by Michel Serres's celebrated use of the "handkerchief" analogy to explain collapsed or "crumpled time."³⁴ Serres uses two metaphors to explain temporal relations: first, the idea of percolation or filtering, observing that "Time doesn't flow: it percolates"; and second, the handkerchief that can be crumpled to make spatially distinct points contiguous, and torn apart to separate what was proximate.³⁵ The uncanny relevance to *Othello* of an analogy involving a handkerchief—a temporally confused object in the play if ever there was one, given its crucial position in the "double time" of the last three acts—naturally does not escape Harris's attention. But additionally, influence requires us to use the notions of percolation on the one hand and collapsing on the other. It asks us to attend, as Serres does, to the idea of temporal succession *as well as* the fact of an experiential, pleated time where objects and events are in surprising conjunction. Unsurprisingly, then, *Othello* and *Volpone* are related not only by parody but also by prolepsis, and similar relations can be found to obtain between many of the plays produced around the turn of the century. In particular,

it is impossible to miss the generic mixtures and textual echoes that link Shakespeare's tragedies from this period with Jonson's "comical satyres" that (mostly) precede them, a point made by the late Russ McDonald.³⁶ The repetitive combination of sexual obsession, misogyny, fetishism, and the psychopathology of violence pushes us towards discarding notions of influence for something closer to an ecology, a sort of moral climate.

Both *Othello* and *Volpone* may be classed as plays about knowledge. In both, the engine of plot is driven by a "knowing" knave who exploits the ignorance, folly, or self-deception of those around him. Both *make play* with the unreliable relation of seeing to knowing, and with blind spots of knowledge that function like unseen stains in the cognitive field. Parallels and links between the two plays are numerous: I will focus here on two, the handkerchief and the whore.³⁷ In *Volpone*, these signs appear initially to be replete with meaning, as they are in *Othello*, but they turn out in fact to be empty, denied functional privilege, forgotten or discarded in the course of the play. When Brabantio accuses Othello of stealing Desdemona from him "by spells and medicines bought of mountebanks" (1.3.62), he anticipates Volpone's disguising himself as a mountebank, Scoto of Mantua, in which role he induces Corvino's wife Celia to drop him her handkerchief in payment for a cosmetic powder wrapped in a paper (*Volpone*, 2.2).³⁸ Celia is accused by the jealous Corvino of playing "an actor with your handkerchief," though he is less like Othello than like Jonson's own earlier creation, Thorello, in *Every Man In His Humour* (a play in which Shakespeare acted when it was performed in 1598).³⁹ Corvino charges Celia with having made an assignation with the mountebank through the exchange of handkerchief and paper, and we are treated to a truly spectacular display of jealous rage and sadism. Subsequently, however, these objects disappear entirely from the plot and from everyone's minds. The handkerchief is a real, material object, but, like all such objects of everyday life that we constantly misplace or lose, it is lost somewhere midway through the play. On the other hand, Mosca attempts to get rid of Lady Politic by inventing a Venetian courtesan with whom, he says, he has seen her husband riding in a gondola. Once introduced, the figure proves surprisingly hard to dismiss, being identified first with Peregrine, then with Celia in the first trial scene, and finally with Lady Politic herself, but, in that bathetic conclusion, she fades before the comic menace of Mosca's threats (5.3.40–45). The courtesan, so central to all cultural typologies of Venice, floats through the play as a signifier that, like all stereotypes, has no materiality at all. The figure introduced by Mosca is a travelling, phantom appearance, settling now

on one character, now on another. In fact, the immateriality of this figure oddly replicates the insubstantiality of Iago's talk about super-subtle, promiscuous Venetian wives (also a cultural stereotype), who are no more in evidence in *Othello* than the courtesan is in *Volpone*.

If sexual knowledge constitutes a blind spot in *Othello*, money is the blind spot in *Volpone*, a play addressing what Karl Marx described as "the fetishism of commodities and the secret thereof."⁴⁰ Volpone explicitly dissociates himself from labor or industry, but is obsessed with the fetish-value of gold, which he hoards in a site of primitive accumulation, his treasure chamber. Unwilling to put his financial capital into circulation, he falls prey instead to the delusion that human beings, in a capitalist economy, can become fluid and current, like money: that he can freely employ a succession of "character-masks" (again, Marx's term) to mediate social relations and maximize profits from each interaction. Volpone's role-playing, like that of Mosca and the *captatores*, is directly related to the commodity-value—that is, the fetish-value—of the objects he pursues, especially Celia, described by Mosca as "Bright as your gold, and lovely as your gold!" (*Volpone*, I.1.575). The problem here is that, as Marx puts it in a passage that appears to have a direct bearing on the notion of the blind spot, the qualities of commodities are at once "perceptible and imperceptible by the senses":

In the same way the light from an object is perceived by us not as the subjective excitation of our optic nerve, but as the objective form of something outside the eye itself. But in the act of seeing, there is at all events, an actual passage of light from one thing to another, from the external object to the eye. There is a physical relation between physical things. But it is different with commodities. There, the existence of the things *quâ* commodities, and the value relation between the products of labor which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.⁴¹

In comedy, a form of imposture that Jonson seems to have regarded with distrust, laughter is itself a commodity, one that Volpone actively pursues in the second trial scene, pretending to be dead so as to witness his clients' discomfiture when they learn that Mosca is his heir.⁴² What he fails to see is that, once set in motion—even through the archaic mechanism of inheritance rather than in the market—his own wealth,

so much the object of universal desire, will act, as Marx foretold, as “a born leveller and cynic ... ready to exchange not only soul, but body, with any and every other commodity.”⁴³ Volpone’s unmasking is therefore symbolic on many levels: at the most basic, it strips both master and slave, Volpone and Mosca, of the status that accrues to them as owners of commodities that they have neither made nor used, that exist for them only as an inventory of fetishized objects.

Given that the thrust of Jonson’s plot is towards a relentless demystification of commodity capitalism and its sustaining illusions, it is scarcely surprising that he should extend this uncompromising critique to the fetish-object as such. What interests me about Jonson’s reusing of devices that are markedly overdetermined in the tragic plot of *Othello* is the way in which he subjects them to a radical *undervaluation*: that is, he robs them of both significance and function. At one level, *Volpone* is a reductive reading of *Othello*, ironing out the “crumpled handkerchief” of the tragic plot and reassigning relatively minor and transitory places—in the clear, harsh light of comedy—to exactly those elements of fetish-obsession and sexual delirium that drive its protagonist to disaster. At another, it magnifies enormously the imbalance instituted in the *Othello* plot between what the audience knows and what the play’s characters know. It seizes upon this imbalance—historically attested as one of the reasons why the play is so painful to watch—as a critical component of its comic plot, making us complicit in Volpone and Mosca’s defrauding of the *captatores*, and later in Mosca’s attempt to outwit his master. Like Iago, Volpone and Mosca take pleasure in co-opting us into a guileful malignity which is, if not entirely motiveless, certainly far in excess of what a simple profit motive might demand. *Esse est interesse*: being is being in, as we realize to our cost, for the play is made by us as much as by anyone in it. This complicity, which is as much a source of discomfort in *Volpone* as our ineffective knowledge is in *Othello*, suggests that Jonson is exploring, with *Othello* perhaps somewhere in his mind, the limitations of the drama of knowledge.

For fictional knowledge too has its blind spots: “*what it does not see is what makes it see.*”⁴⁴ As it is as much an invention as the fictional content it claims to read, it fails to recognize its own limitation and powerlessness. Othello’s blindness to the delusions of sight and mind practiced upon him by Iago, his inability to understand that his view is compromised by its origin at a point of non-reciprocity, is matched by our own inability, as audience, to intervene in a spectacle that is enacted for us, but does not return our gaze. We are “knowing” spectators, but cannot

intervene in the action. Cavell uses the word “impotence” in reference to Othello, and he is not referring to sexual impotence per se.⁴⁵ Knowledge, the kind of knowledge that is produced by fictions—lies, Plato would call them—is not power but powerlessness. Is this because fiction, by demanding our acquiescence, robs us of agency? I think that Jonson is deeply worried about this problem, just as Shakespeare was in *Othello*, and as he was to be again in *The Winter’s Tale*, a play of knowing but powerless agents if ever there was one.

Seeing Blindness: A Response to Supriya Chaudhuri

Jonathan Gil Harris

Supriya offers a brilliant unveiling of how *Othello*, in the words of Stuart Clark, loses its optic nerve. What her essay allows us to see is the blindness at the center of the play's fantasies of seeing—or, rather, how blindness is the basis of sight. This *punctum caecum* comes into shimmering focus through a variety of interpretive strategies: rigorous historicization (Stuart Clark's account of the seventeenth century's crisis of sight), deft theoretical exfoliation (Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of mis-cognition, Lacan's *méconnaissance*), suggestive critical contextualization (Michael Neill's reading of the spectacle of Desdemona's marriage/death bed, Stanley Cavell's speculation about the "ocular proof" of sexuality), and artful comparative reading (Jonson's *Volpone* and its revisualization of *Othello*'s handkerchief). In other words, Supriya makes the play's blindness visible through a panoply of artful critical interventions.

This panoply uncannily mirrors the diversity of what the play's characters blindly do to the handkerchief. They "persistently mis-see"—which, as Supriya's Lacanian phrasing insists, *is* equally to "see"—the handkerchief through many different strategies of reading it. Desdemona first produces it as a remedy for Othello's headache; Emilia then transforms it into a gift to win the affection of her husband, Othello into a matrilineal heirloom from an Egyptian sibyl and a token of fidelity gifted by his father, Cassio into a fashionable item stitched with impressive "work," Bianca into a proof of infidelity, Iago into a "medicine" that induces epilepsy. The handkerchief is, like the problematic of seeing in Supriya's essay, multiply historicized, theorized, contextualized, compared.

The insubstantial shred of "linen" so reviled by Thomas Rymer is "persistently mis-seen" not just by the play's characters, but also by its audiences, thanks to the multiple stains of narrative it acquires. As Supriya remarks, in an elegant pun that suggests not only the French term for blind spot and Othello and Desdemona's imagined spotted nuptial sheets, but also the stains of a crumpled and pocketed handkerchief, "The stain in sight (*la tache aveugle*) is precisely what we cannot see." Yet it is the "stain in sight"—blind spot and imaginary projection alike—that also allows us to see. In the case of *Othello*, multiple "stains in sight" prompt us not only to see the otherwise unseeable handkerchief, but also to visualize, through the handkerchief, what we are otherwise blind to (sex, Egyptian magic, artisanal labor, the act of interpretation itself).

As a result, Supriya's multifaceted reading strategy might seem less an unveiling than a repetition of the play. We should then feel compelled to ask: what is the blind spot behind her compulsion to see blindness in *Othello*? And here a potentially infinite regression suggests itself: what is the blind spot behind *my* compulsion to see the blind spot behind Supriya's compulsion to see blindness?

Of course, and this is the beauty of Supriya's essay, she is aware of this regression and how it ensnares *Othello*'s spectators. It is one of the reasons she claims, toward the end of the essay, that: "We are 'knowing' spectators, but cannot intervene in the action. Cavell uses the word 'impotence' in reference to Othello, and he is not referring to sexual impotence per se. Knowledge, the kind of knowledge that is produced by fictions—lies, Plato would call them—is not power but powerlessness." Precisely. And this is what makes *Othello* so painful for many of its viewers: we know what the characters do not, yet we are helpless to "intervene."

But, in seeing the characters' blindness, to what extent do we also mis-see our own blindness, both in the obvious sense of *denying* it and in the Lacanian sense of *misrecognizing* an image? How does this misrecognition subtly transpose what Cavell sees as the spectator's "impotence" into a perverse agency, albeit an agency that we disavow? How do we blindly intervene in the play, even as we think we are just watching it?

To answer these questions, we might take a detour through another of Shakespeare's plays equally obsessed with the blindness of seeing: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As Helena notes, in what might serve as a summary of the play, "*Love* looks not with the eyes but with the mind. / And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind" (1.1.234–35). Helena describes the blinded sight not just of the lover, unseeing "things base and vile" and "transposing" them "into dignity" (1.1.232, 233), but also of the theatrical spectator. To see Pyramus and Thisbe, we also have to actively unsee Bottom and Flute; to see Helena, we have to actively unsee the boy actor playing her. These unseeings exemplify what James Calderwood has called the anamorphism of the play. Seeing blindness in *Othello* may provoke anxiety and a sense of impotence, but, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the blindness that subtends anamorphic sight becomes the enabling condition of a delighted poesis or creative remaking. When Theseus says that he does not believe in antique fables and complains that, in imagination, "how easily is a bush supposed a bear" (5.1.22), we laugh, knowing of course that he is a character from an antique fable, a fabulous bush who imagines himself a realist bear. But the pleasure we might take in Theseus's self-blindness is also potentially a narcissistic pleasure, not only in knowing "Theseus"

better than Theseus does, but also in our studied blindness to the fact that this fabled character who does not believe in fables is really an actor playing a fabled character, transposed by our own as much as the actor's imaginative art into a superhero. Theseus "himself" notes this transposition when he tells Hippolyta to cope with the rude mechanicals' performance by cultivating a strategic blindness to its dreadfulness: "the worst are no worse if imagination amend them" (5.1.209–10).

A Midsummer Night's Dream, then, reminds us of our own art in seeing (through) blindness. We *want* our blind spots even as we crave full vision, because "full" vision is always the product of blindness. And this, paradoxically, is the blind spot we most unsee—that is, we unsee our own artful labor in "amending" the object even as we think we see the object itself. Supriya's essay is an anamorphic illustration of this artfulness, even as it seems to cast light primarily on *Othello* "itself." I would add that her essay also performs an elegant counterpoint to my own contribution to this volume. If, as I argue, we easily unsee the agency of visible objects upon us, Supriya reminds us of how we equally unsee our own agency as viewing subjects of those objects. Either way, we both argue for seeing blindness.

Towards an Epistemology of the Stage? A Response to Supriya Chaudhuri

Stephen Spiess

What does the theater know? At the conclusion of this remarkable essay, we find ourselves looking at Jonson and Shakespeare looking at audiences, at their own craft, perhaps even at us, across their respective fictions. Behind them, one glimpses the specter of Plato, that detractor of mimesis and derogator of theatrical knowing, ever-haunting discussions of the “kind[s] of knowledge” produced onstage. He is a phantom, a fleeting presence, a wound: he is, I want to suggest, the *punctum* of this essay.

I draw here not from Mariotte, Merleau-Ponty, or Lacan, but rather from Roland Barthes, for whom *punctum* connotes that “off-center detail,” that minor element or feature that “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.”⁴⁶ For me, the scene is imagined rather than represented: a fiction of my mind’s eye as opposed to a photograph or daguerreotype. As I scan the page, those five letters (P-l-a-t-o) perform a type of work similar to the Barthesian *punctum*, expanding beyond the frame, threatening to circumscribe the possibilities for theatrical knowing. Can we envision theater without Plato? How has the Platonic injunction blinded us to what theater might know or render knowable? What is concealed or misrecognized in a Western philosophical tradition that rejects the “kind of knowledge that is produced by fictions?”

The central irony of this dismissal is etymological rather than visual. As with its cognates “theorem,” “theory,” and “theorist,” the English “theater” derives from a constellation of Greek terms (*theatron*, *thea*, *theastia*) that join sight to speculation, view to thought, observation to contemplation.⁴⁷ A site for thinking through seeing, theater nevertheless remains a blind spot in Western epistemology, even as contemporary knowledge regimes, governed by a commitment to empirical observation, increasingly link sight with knowledge.⁴⁸

Yet theater is also, as Supriya aptly demonstrates, a site for querying relations of thinking *to* seeing, including how human consciousness might interact with and inform what one sees (and vice versa). Here, the London stage emerges as a powerful medium through which writers and dramatists could think through their period’s “intense visual hunger,” including the various anxieties that accompanied such “ocularcentrism.”

These recursive dynamics imbue plays such as *Othello* and *Volpone* with affective force, as audiences can observe how the plays' various fictional personae see, feel, think, and "know" in relation to information that they do—and, crucially, do not—possess. Concurrently, playgoers can scrutinize how the Moscas, Volpones, and Iagos of the world attempt to shape such "knowing" through particular conceptual frameworks or categories of thought. Attending to these latter practices, I submit, can help us envision the epistemological dimensions of theatrical thinking.

I take my cue here from Supriya, whose reading of Brabantio highlights the relations *between* this patriarch's "preemptive leap of cognition" and those infamous, pornographic promptings of Iago and Roderigo. However unsavory, it is clear that the latter duo's rhetorical constructions do not, ipso facto, persuade Brabantio of his daughter's "treason" (1.1.167). Rather, what this opening scene dramatizes is precisely how such lascivious images come into alignment with, and become significant in light of, a preexisting conceptual template encoded within a father's dream vision. Iago, in other words, is not the progenitor of (the idea of) Desdemona's "sexual truancy," but rather its midwife: his lewd inferences provide an interpretive framework—the wayward daughter—that helps to determine how this convoluted *mise-en-scène* signifies to Brabantio. As the exchange progresses, playgoers watch this grid of intelligibility fall into place: Desdemona's domestic absence is immediately accepted as proof of paternal deception, a sign that confirms Brabantio's (preexisting) "belief" in his daughter's duplicity (1.1.141).

When Brabantio later insists upon the veracity of his perceptions, testifying before the Venetian council in the third scene, he sutures signification—fatally, one might argue⁴⁹—to knowledge: what he "knows" (or accepts as knowledge) about his daughter's contested meanings is definitively linked to how the words, actions, and dreams of the preceding scene have been rendered intelligible to him. Brabantio may never witness Desdemona's supposed transgression, but he does not have to: Iago summons a powerful interpretive framework that allows, indeed encourages, him to see it everywhere.

These vexed relations of sight and signification, conceptual categories and knowledge claims, are further queried in the play's fourth act, where audiences watch Othello watching Iago "question Cassio of Bianca" (4.1.94). As with other meta-theatrical representations, this exchange is fueled by differing knowledge bases: those of the characters onstage, but also between these characters and spectators. The latter

are aware of four crucial facts: first, that Othello has demanded “ocular proof” of Desdemona’s deception; second, that Iago, by way of response, has encouraged him to envision her liaison(s) with Cassio, and thus to “think” her a “whore”;⁵⁰ third, that Iago frames his staged conversation with Cassio as addressing this adulterous relationship; and fourth, that the general is unaware that his subordinates are really discussing Bianca, not Desdemona. Lacking such basic information, Othello tragically misreads the lieutenant’s “smiles, gestures and light behavior” as evidence of his wife’s infidelity (4.1.103). In so doing, he demonstrates how easily signifiers can be transferred from one field of meaning—Cassio’s relationship with Bianca—to another and accepted as truth. In the hands of Shakespeare (and Jonson), dramatic irony becomes a vehicle for epistemological inquiry: configuring an asymmetrical knowledge relation between playgoers and characters, this dramaturgical device invites scrutiny of how duplicitous yarn spinners structure their counterparts’ seeing and knowing practices.

Thinking in such terms illuminates the particularized functions of “handkerchief” and “whore” in these dramas of sexual knowing. On the one hand, both appear to operate as necessary supplements to problems of sexual knowledge: entities that emerge in place of, and substitute for, a particularly “recalcitrant” object of social and critical inquiry.⁵¹ I am persuaded furthermore that the handkerchief operates as a type of epistemological fetish: a desired object that promises a certain type of knowing. But the “Cunning Whore of Venice” might best be conceived as a conceptual framework rather than a spectral fiction: a field of intelligibility that allows opaque events, dreams, and objects to signify in recognizable—we might even say predictable—ways. How Iago, Mosca, and Volpone *weaponize* this framework informs their respective knowledge games and each play’s affective work.

Looking back at Shakespeare and Jonson, I imagine these two actor-playwrights casting a critical, knowing eye back towards the ghost of Plato. What, they seem to ask, is his blind spot? In *Ion*, one of the philosopher’s lesser-known dialogues, we find Socrates mercilessly dismantling the knowledge claims of an Athenian rhapsodist. As with all “reciters and actors,” this figure, Socrates insists, possesses no knowledge of his own: he simply represents the experience and insights attained by others—the charioteer, the carpenter, the fisherman, the wool-spinner, and so on. In contrast to the imitator, these latter figures, Socrates suggests, accrue a certain specialized knowledge, one forged

through their unique relations to, and laborious experiences with, particular objects, bodies, and events.⁵² Similar knowledge(s), Pamela H. Smith has argued, circulate in the early modern period, underpinning what she calls “artisanal epistemologies”: frameworks for understanding the world informed by the artisan’s ability to imitate the “creative power of nature itself.”⁵³

Although Smith does not address theater practitioners, her argument urges reconsideration of the various knowledges that actors and dramatists possess about the world, their craft, and the “fictions” they produce onstage. Given their relationship to the human body, the arts of representation, the nature of language, and the contexts of performance, what might the actor-playwright tell us about seeing and knowing, cognition and categories of thought, theater and epistemology? How do they perceive or understand the spectator’s role in *producing* what is known or knowable onstage? I am not thinking here of that famed “Southern yokel,” so memorably described by Stanley Cavell, “who rushes to the stage to save Desdemona from the black man.”⁵⁴ Rather, as my opening comments suggest, I wonder how such plays *pierce* us: bringing own beliefs, biases, and conceptual categories into question. If such frameworks emerge from the social, how do we distinguish between the fictional and real? Can our present work—this probing of blind spots, these excavations of early modern (un)knowability—offer new ways of seeing such relations? Can Shakespeare and Jonson help us (re)think an epistemology of the stage?

NOTES

¹ Citations from *Othello* are from *The Arden Shakespeare*.

² See Adams, “Ocular Proof,” for the verbal link to Cinthio’s *De gli Hecatommithi*; Parker, “*Othello* and *Hamlet*,” and Maus, “Horns of Dilemma,” for the links to spying, lust, jealousy, and spectatorship.

³ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 248.

⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 263.

⁵ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 82–114.

⁶ Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 1–2, referring to Ivins, *On the Rationalization of Sight*.

⁷ Clark, *Vanities*, 2, referring to Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 7.

⁸ See accounts in Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham*; Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages*; Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from al-Kindi to Kepler*; and Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil*.

⁹ Clark, *Vanities*, 20.

- ¹⁰ Hakewill, *The Vanitie of the Eye*, 89.
- ¹¹ For the "lust of the eyes," see St. Augustine, *Confessions*, X.35, 211.
- ¹² Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, 132. On "hid-cous" as *hidden* or *off-stage*, see Neill, "Unproper Beds," 394–95.
- ¹³ Aristotle, *De Anima* 428a, 15–16.
- ¹⁴ Donne, *The Major Works*, 90.
- ¹⁵ Hakewill, *The Vanitie of the Eye*; and see Parker, "Othello and Hamlet," 63–67.
- ¹⁶ See Daunay et al., "Iconography and History of Solanaceae," 18.
- ¹⁷ Gerard, *The Herball*, 2.56, 341.
- ¹⁸ See note 11 *supra*.
- ¹⁹ Donne, *The Major Works*, 121. See Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 138.
- ²⁰ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 82, and Irigaray, "The Invisible of the Flesh," 154–84.
- ²¹ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 247.
- ²² Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare*, 136–41.
- ²³ Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 135; Neill, "Othello's Black Handkerchief," 395–403.
- ²⁴ Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 126.
- ²⁵ Marchitello, "Vesalius' 'Fabrica' and Shakespeare's 'Othello,'" 530.
- ²⁶ Marchitello, "Vesalius' 'Fabrica,'" 532–36.
- ²⁷ See Ayanna Thompson's introduction, *Othello*, 90.
- ²⁸ W. B. Yeats, "Easter 1916," 57–58.
- ²⁹ Boose, "Othello's Handkerchief"; Smith, "Othello's Black Handkerchief."
- ³⁰ Neill, "Othello's Black Handkerchief," argues that the handkerchief might have been dark not black.
- ³¹ Hakewill, *The Vanitie of the Eye*, 34–35.
- ³² Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy*, 160.
- ³³ Coryate, *Coryats Crudities, Hastily Gobled up in Five Moneths Trauels*, 261–271.
- ³⁴ Harris, "Crumpled Handkerchiefs," 169–87.
- ³⁵ Serres, with Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time*, 58–60.
- ³⁶ McDonald, "Othello, Thorello, and the problem of the foolish hero," 51–67.
- ³⁷ For relations between the two plays, see Tyson, "Ben Jonson's Black Comedy"; Tulip, "The Intertextualities of Ben Jonson's *Volpone*"; Marchitell, "Desire and Domination in *Volpone*"; and Dutton, "Jonson and Shakespeare."
- ³⁸ Citations from, Jonson, *The Alchemist and Other Plays*.
- ³⁹ McDonald, "Othello," 56.
- ⁴⁰ *Capital* 1.1, Sec.4: Marx, 1. 47.
- ⁴¹ *Capital* 1.1, Sec.4: Marx, 1. 48.
- ⁴² Chaudhuri, "Jonson's Fox," 188–89.
- ⁴³ *Capital*, I.1.2: Marx 1. 60.

⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 248.

⁴⁵ Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 136.

⁴⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51, 26.

⁴⁷ Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 337. See also Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare*, 6.

⁴⁸ Conquergood, "Performance Studies." For notable exception to this trend, see West, *Theatres and Encyclopedias*.

⁴⁹ In the denouement, Graziano connects Brabantio's death, previously unmentioned, to Desdemona's "match" with Othello: "thy match was mortal to him, and pure grief / Shore his old thread in twain" (5.2.211–2).

⁵⁰ Encircling Othello's famous warning to Iago, "Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore, / Be sure of it, give me the ocular proof" (3.3.363–5), versions of "think" are uttered nineteen times in the scene (F1).

⁵¹ On sex as a "recalcitrant" object of inquiry, see Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*.

⁵² Plato, *Ion*, 17.

⁵³ Smith, *The Body of the Artisan*, 54.

⁵⁴ Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 98.

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Chapter 4

What Emilia Knew: Shakespeare Reads James

Aveek Sen

FRANCIS FORD WONDERS IN *The Merry Wives of Windsor* if “experience” might be “a jewel—that I have purchas’d at an infinite rate” (2.2.194–95).¹ I believe that a critical approach to Shakespeare’s plays and poems has to engage with their truth to ordinary as well as extraordinary human experience. This is not a repudiation of historicism, but an acknowledgment of how we create, encounter, live, understand, and become history. Our reading of Shakespeare is nourished by our perceptions of, and curiosity about, other people, other lives and relationships, and by the books we read, the pictures we like to look at, the films and music we cannot forget—Keats’s “world of Circumstances.”² It is the world that holds the canon, the non-canon, and the archive, and enriches, complicates, distracts, and even frustrates teaching and scholarship.

The renewal of my interest in *Othello* is linked to a few everyday events: teaching Shakespeare to a group of high-school students; conversations with an undergraduate anxious about her theatrical debut as Emilia; listening again to Tullio Serafin’s 1960 version of Verdi’s operatic version; and finally—hence the title of my essay—an abiding, and often harrowed, fascination with the relentless difficulties of Henry James’s late fiction, especially *The Golden Bowl*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and *The Sacred Fount*. Having freed myself professionally from having to “apply” theory as a tool kit for “unpacking” texts, I have at last begun to take pleasure in theory—a pleasure that is not essentially different from the pleasures of art, literature, and conversation. Instead of placing both Shakespeare and Henry James on the literature side of the theory–literature divide, my reading of *Othello* will use James to read Shakespeare. The fact that James knew his Shakespeare is of less interest to me than my conviction that Shakespeare knew his James. In any case, two frightfully intelligent people are perfectly capable of reversing the direction of conventional literary history.

In its Jamesian reading of Shakespeare, this essay is an attempt to translate the Emilia-marks on the Shakespearean page into a probable and possible woman incarnated in the theatre. Emilia—and perhaps Gertrude and Portia—are very much in the same league as James’s Maggie Verver and Milly Theale. I find both Maggie and Milly, the princess and the dove, profoundly sinister creatures—in the depths of their half-willed capacity for denied and resisted knowledge, for seeing what they want to see and believing what it suits them to believe, for their skillfully averted recognitions, and then for using these evasions and denials to arrange people into situations—pathetically, yet magnificently, “with a high headshake” as James would say. They are, in the language of this book, consummate “blindspotters.” The fullest account of this is given in Kate Croy’s description of Milly Theale to Merton Densher in *The Wings of the Dove*: “She never wanted the truth ... She wanted *you*. She would have taken from you what you could give her and been glad of it, even if she had known it false. You might have lied to her from pity, and she have seen you and felt you lie, and yet ... she would have thanked you and blessed you and clung to you but the more. For that was your strength, my dear man—that she loves you with passion.”³

There is nothing squeamish or sentimental in the way James confronts sordidly tragic human arrangements. But this hard, unflinching gaze—chillingly captured in John Singer Sargent’s portrait of the writer—also belongs to the “master of nuance and scruple” that Auden had written about in his poem, “At the Grave of Henry James” (line 55).⁴ It is the James for whom a high reticence, a fastidious disdain for providing “weak specifications,” became an imperative of good taste.⁵ This called for a narrative method of fathomless suggestion, of being able to intimate just about everything without saying very much, forcing the reader to bring to the text a whole universe of observation, interpretation, suspicion, surmise, and inference. James’s account of how such “utmost conceivability” works within the story—as suggested in the preface to *The Turn of the Screw*—could well be a description of how the Iago–Emilia marriage works on the reader, spectator, actor, or director: “Only make the reader’s general vision of evil intense enough ... and his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy ... and horror ... will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. Make him *think* the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications” (*Turn of the Screw* liv–lv).

It is no coincidence that those words—observation, suspicion, surmise, inference—are keywords in the Iago-language, particularly in the quasi-legal and empiricist language that Iago refines for Othello in Act III,

scene iii, Shakespeare's great suggestion scene. To "suggest" had a corrupting, evil frisson in Shakespeare's English, lost in modern usage: "Two loves I have, of comfort and despair, / Which, like two spirits do *suggest* me still" (Sonnet 144, lines 1–2).⁶ This Jamesian and Shakespearean art of suggestion is a way of representing reality—not always, or not simply, a world of fact, but a world of the probable and the possible, which often demands from us a corresponding act of what A. D. Nuttall called "humane inference," "a willingness to enter the proffered dream."⁷ By looking at Emilia alongside some of James's characters, we begin to see the remarkable scope of Shakespeare's mimesis as one of the founts, perhaps even the sacred one, from which James drew the resources for his art.

In *Othello*, Shakespeare interlaces a tragic opera with a domestic novel. The play's mimetic registers cover the entire range from Verdi to something like Ingmar Bergman's six-part television serial of the 1970s, *Scenes from a Marriage*—a series of episodes with titles such as "The Art of Sweeping Things under the Carpet" and "In the Middle of the Night in a Dark House Somewhere in the World." When Shakespeare took the story from Giraldo Cinthio's collection, the *Hecatommithi*, published a year after Shakespeare was born, he made a few startling changes that define Emilia's role in the play. First, Cinthio's Iago was driven by his unreciprocated lust for Desdemona, whereas Shakespeare's Iago remains sexually uninterested in her. He would have been less monstrous if he had, indeed, fallen in love, or lust, with Desdemona. He mentions, almost unmindfully, that Othello may have slept with Emilia and coolly considers the possibility of deciding to resent this, but only to give a salutary edge to his professional rancour. At every other level, and most of all at the sexual level, Iago does not care if his wife, Emilia, is being unfaithful to him. His principal motive, declared in no uncertain terms, is professional envy. In fact, although Iago is the prime and inexhaustible source of the play's sexual imaginings, he remains the only person unmoved by lust, focused single-mindedly on his own sense of professional deprivation.

This is the sort of person Emilia has been married to for a few years. In Cinthio, they have a three-year-old daughter. In Shakespeare, they appear to be childless. In Cinthio, both the couples were married for a while—and Othello and Desdemona very happily married—before things start going terribly wrong. In Shakespeare, the "long time" of the Iago–Emilia marriage is juxtaposed with Othello and Desdemona's "short time," with the latter's conjugal *in*experience. Iago's scheme operates in this "long time," giving to the play its notorious double time scheme. This lends to the operatic intensity of Othello and Desdemona's soaring passion a more

mundane and novelistic dimension of “slow time.” Unlike Othello and Desdemona, who come too soon to the iron gates of life, Iago and Emilia have had world enough and time in which to turn over the many accretions of a “long” marriage.

The mid-eighteenth-century English translation of Cinthio, obviously influenced by Shakespeare, describes Emilia as “fair and honest.”⁸ Desdemona spends a lot of time with her at Iago’s house, and, during one of these visits, it is Iago who uses his infant daughter to filch the handkerchief from her. But, although Cinthio deprives Emilia of *agency* in the handkerchief plot, he gives her full *knowledge* of the matter: “The Ensign’s wife, who knew everything (for her husband had wished to use her as an instrument in causing the Lady’s death, but she had never been willing to consent), did not dare, for fear of her husband, to tell [Desdemona] anything” (389). Then she disappears altogether from Cinthio’s narrative as Iago’s plot unfolds. Desdemona is clobbered to death by Iago with a stocking filled with sand, Othello is slain by Desdemona’s relatives, and Iago dies miserably at home after being severely tortured. Unspecified periods of time pass between these events. Emilia, however, reappears at the very end of Cinthio’s story as the sole survivor and repository of the facts of the case. “All these events were told after his death by the Ensign’s wife, who knew the facts as I have told them to you,” says Cinthio’s narrator (395).

What Shakespeare does with this is extraordinary, and wonderfully Jamesian. He exactly reverses Cinthio’s use of Emilia, which gives her knowledge but no agency. Shakespeare’s Emilia is persistently associated with the handkerchief-stealing, the lowest plot element in the play. He gives her full agency at this level. But simultaneously, the question of her knowledge—and, equally important, her motive—is kept unclear to the very end and grows tantalizingly opaque. Agency, consciousness and motivation, doing and knowing, are therefore finely and inscrutably wedged apart. The “register” of Emilia’s consciousness remains obscured by what James calls, in *The Golden Bowl*, “a great white curtain.”⁹ James also declares in his preface to *The Golden Bowl* that the “essence of any representational work is of course to bristle with immediate images” (23). But this bristling “representative surface” and “the play of representational values” (both 35) in no way detract from the “appeal to incalculability” (21). By making Emilia embody the incalculable, while associating her with the vicious triviality of the handkerchief plot, Shakespeare places her across an entire range of “representational values,” from low intrigue to high tragedy, although visually she is always kept in the margins of the action, in the penumbra of the *Othello* darkness. In *The Golden Bowl*, as

the tragedy of Charlotte and Amerigo's entrapment in adultery moves into the sublime, the sordidness and horror of the situation begin to be felt more and more relentlessly in Maggie's own curtained consciousness. This counterpointing of an ascent into tragic sublimity with an inexorable descent into quotidian horror is exactly paralleled in the interlacing of the Othello–Desdemona love duet with the Iago–Emilia marriage.

Emilia's first appearance in the play is in a scene that "bristles" unyieldingly. This is the opening scene of the second act in Cyprus—a long scene of desultory conversation among the Venetians, as they wait on the headland for Othello's arrival. Desdemona is anxious and restive, and her companions—Emilia and Iago, together with the worshipping Cassio and the inflamed Roderigo—try to help her while away the time. The texture of this scene brilliantly captures the drift of polite social talk, what Iago calls "chronic[ling] small beer" (2.1.160). But there is an Emilia-shaped hole in this texture, very similar to those astutely choreographed scenes in Jane Austen—usually at balls, private theatricals, or in the Upper Rooms in Bath—where her mousy, silent heroines are silhouetted against a background of chatter. This is how we initially get to know Catherine Moreland in *Northanger Abbey* or Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*.

As Emilia joins this little gathering, Cassio greets her with a kiss, assuring her husband that it is merely a "show"—although somewhat "bold"—of "courtesy" (2.1.99). Iago immediately absorbs Cassio's courtesy into his own brand of bawdy: "Sir, would she give you so much of her lips / As of her tongue she oft bestows on me / You'd have enough" (2.1.100–102). To this Desdemona interjects, "Alas! She has no speech" (2.1.103). Iago disagrees, for Emilia talks so much in bed that he cannot go to sleep—"In faith, too much; / I find it still, when I have list to sleep" (2.1.103–4)—but allows that perhaps, in front of Desdemona, Emilia "puts her tongue a little in her heart, / And chides with thinking" (2.1.106–7). Then, and only then, Emilia answers him: "You have little cause to say so" (2.1.108). The impeccable playfulness that Cassio and Desdemona have kept up so effortlessly between them has therefore been broken into twice: once by Iago's gratuitous and suggestive disclosures regarding Emilia's bedroom habits, and then by Emilia's words, "You have little cause to say so." She is the first to use the play's most famous word, "cause," and her smouldering quietness immediately strikes a contrary note. She directly and exclusively addresses her husband in a conversation that has so far been strenuously public. What do her words imply?

She could be saying, "You are misrepresenting me to these people because, actually, I hardly speak at all," thereby endorsing Desdemona's "Alas! She has no speech." Or, she could be picking up Iago's intriguing "she ... chides with thinking" in order to say, "You can't say this because you have no idea of what I think." Either reading immediately opens up an area of darkness that is always present at the heart of the play: the realm of what another person could be thinking. It is an inwardness that is imponderable, cannot be possessed, and is therefore obscurely threatening; it later becomes Iago's trump card and Othello's greatest fear. Later in this scene, Iago's mock-misogynist badinage with Desdemona imagines a woman who "could think, and ne'er disclose her mind" (2.1.156). And, after Iago has successfully aroused in Othello the desire for "ocular proof" (3.3.363), he describes Desdemona's "honour" as "an essence that's not seen" (4.1.16). But it is Emilia who first begins to embody this essence, this baffling and maddening reticence that resists the will to intimate knowledge. And her identification with this quality happens in the midst of social chatter.

Desdemona salvages this potentially embarrassing moment between husband and wife by starting to flirt with the husband. Her flirtatiousness in this scene is also a part of her innate graciousness: her good breeding makes her unwilling to impose her own impatience and nervousness upon others. Emilia again refuses to join the little game of fishing for compliments being played by Iago and Desdemona, and again there is a quietly dissonant moment between husband and wife, a vicious little aside. "You shall not write my praise," says Emilia. "No, let me not," answers Iago (2.1.116). Is this playful, or nasty?

Throughout the scene, Iago skates smoothly between badinage and concern. He plays along with Desdemona, yet also lets her know, with just the right degree of unobtrusiveness, that he is alert to her restlessness, while understanding and respecting her good manners in concealing it in public. His hasty aside with Emilia contrasts with his brief exchange with Desdemona, who asks, *sotto voce*, in the middle of all this talk, "There's one gone to the harbour?" (2.1.120). "Ay madam" (2.1.121), Iago immediately assures her, before resuming, in a different voice, the public façade of playful unconcern. Emilia is throughout a spectator to her husband's canny and customized attentiveness. As he keeps it up with Desdemona, Emilia is expected to keep it up with him—not out of a natural and mutual conjugal rhythm, but out of a tight, furtive pressure put on her by her husband, an occasional twitch of what James calls the "silken noose" (*The Golden Bowl* 553), a pressure that it is up to Emilia to keep out of the public eye. What builds up in this scene, in a kind of tedious "long time," is the sense of a wordlessly resentful fear confronting this wordless pressure,

a slow arm-twisting that achieves an unsavory, precarious, but continually resisted complicity between husband and wife. Shakespeare creates a space for this little portrait of a marriage between two “high-wrought” moments, between Cassio’s vaulting praise of the “divine Desdemona” (2.1.73) and the fine rapture of her reunion with Othello: “O my fair warrior! ... My dear Othello!” (2.1.180) The beautiful music of the “enchaféd flood” (2.1.17) introduces and concludes this quotidian interlude of tense small talk, for which Verdi could not have made room in his opera.

Emilia, however, is not allowed to remain just a passive looker-on. And, in drawing her into the action, Shakespeare blurs, again in a very Jamesian manner, the line between active and passive. Profound and unsparing questions of volition and responsibility are raised by both artists. In the preface to *The Golden Bowl*, James writes about “the religion of doing”: “the whole conduct of life consists of things done, which do other things in their turn, just so our behaviour and its fruits are essentially one and continuous and persistent and unquenchable, so that the act has its way of abiding and showing and testifying, and so, among our innumerable acts, are no arbitrary, no senseless separations ... We recognize betimes that to ‘put’ things is very exactly and responsibly and interminably to do them” (36).

Neither Emilia nor Maggie ever quite faces the fact that even victimhood does not absolve them from this “religion of doing.” Emilia’s ineffectuality and submissiveness within her own marriage inevitably and actively begin to determine the brutalization of Desdemona’s. What we see her doing in the face of this unavoidable fact is choose between her loyalty to Desdemona and her own stakes in the situation. What does she want to keep, to have and to hold? Up to what point can she risk these investments so that she could stay on Desdemona’s side? And where does she draw the line in this matter? Shakespeare’s gaze on Emilia as she confronts or evades these questions and decisions is minute and unflinching. He makes her steal and lie—acts that lead up to the violence at the end. Similarly, in *The Wings of the Dove*, James does not hesitate to present Milly Theale’s apparently selfless generosity as also a way of “promoting her [own] illusion,” her spectral millions ruining other relationships, creating “communities of doom” (6, 8).

Iago’s evil is sub-tragic, and its ability to trivialize tragic gravitas finds its best symbol in the play’s legendary handkerchief. Compared with the slow

unfolding of the suggestion scene between Othello and Iago, the moment when Emilia picks up the handkerchief is teasingly brief. It reminds me of the Ancient Mariner shooting down the albatross, inexplicably, in an instant, and of the absolute externality of that single, momentous act in Coleridge's otherwise nightmarishly inward poem: "with my cross-bow / I shot the ALBATROSS."¹⁰ Shakespeare's depiction of Emilia's act is also strangely shallow, lacking any obvious psychological depth, thus giving it a brief, fleeting quality. Paradoxically, Emilia speaks a soliloquy at this point, which is more self-addressing than taking the audience into confidence (as her husband frequently does). "My wayward husband hath a hundred times / Wooed me to steal it," she tells herself (3.3.296–97). This then is in "long time." "Steal" betrays an awareness of wrongdoing, which is fudged by "wayward," investing Iago with a self-willed perversity that somehow absolves *Emilia* from being clear-headed about what *she* is up to. "It's just one of his weird obsessions," she tries to convince herself. And then comes the *locus classicus* of willed evasion: "what he will do with it / Heaven knows, not I, / I nothing, but to please his fantasy" (3.3.301–3). The sequence of words, "not I, / I nothing," is a tantalizing chiasmus linking disavowal of knowledge with female self-effacement, although the repeated "I"s inscribe the self as a repressed moral agent. The "I" can also be heard as "Ay" (as in "Ay, my lord"), and the sounds form a "no–yes–yes–no" sequence (not–ay–ay–nothing).

Emilia's subjectivity here attempts to shrink to a "nothing," to disappear altogether into a state of complete moral inaction. However, another level of mysteriousness is negatively invoked by her words—a realm of imputed or transferred agency that is linked, not to a rational motive, but to "fantasy," something subjective, arbitrary, ungovernable, and unknowable. In this connection, even "Heaven knows" suggests much more than a mere colloquialism, invoking a sphere of inscrutable operation that indulgently encompasses human action. The dialogue between Emilia and Iago, which follows this soliloquy, places the handkerchief within a different nexus. The handkerchief moves out of the Othello–Desdemona marriage and becomes a counter in the play of control and appeasement between the other couple. We are given the first stark glimpse of Emilia's tensely resentful, yet helpless, investment in Iago when he reduces her to a cussedly teasing, ineffectual juvenility, snuffing out her token resistance. She tries again to fudge the issue of stealing, devising an elaborate way around Iago's brutal question, "Hast stolen it from her?" (3.3.314). Iago denies her any moral high ground with a vengeance, as if pointing

up her own hypocrisy in pretending not to know why he wants the handkerchief. The shallow compassion of Emilia's "Poor lady, she'll run mad / When she shall lack it" (3.3.321–22) suddenly reveals a heartlessness in Emilia that tries desperately to match Iago's.

This brief dialogue is discomfiting because it depicts something that absorbed both Shakespeare and James. In *The Wings of the Dove*, James calls it "the inevitabilities of the abjection of love" (296). The writer of the sonnets and creator of Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* knew abjection very well, and his exploration of it in these texts and in *Othello* hinges around the word, "use." Emilia and Desdemona play with the word at the end of the willow scene: "let them use us well" (4.3.101). "The only horror is not to be used," says Patroclus in Marguerite Yourcenar's *Fires*.¹¹

But perhaps Emilia shoots her albatross, not when she picks up the handkerchief, but when she lies to Desdemona about it. This lie is truly *her* act, and it will come back to haunt her later. The clown who heralds this scene quibbles continuously on lying. This transition from stealing to lying in Emilia's moral unfolding takes place alongside Othello's now inexorable movement towards what Iago calls "the door of truth" (3.3.410), a phrase that suggests an inaccessibly private realm that shuts Othello out. Again, Emilia's lie constitutes the briefest moment: "Where should I lose that handkerchief, Emilia?" / "I know not, madam" (3.4.23–24). It is the simplest disavowal of knowledge. She quickly changes the topic to Othello's jealousy, and then Othello enters: "Look where he comes" (3.4.31). It is Emilia who announces, almost furtively but with a rising alertness, the entry of both their husbands, quickly adapting her tone. This creates a peculiarly unsettling atmosphere of female complicity—a complicity that Desdemona begins to rely on, but we cannot trust, for we know Emilia better. She witnesses Othello's anger over the lost handkerchief, and after he leaves Desdemona again expresses her puzzlement over losing it. Emilia changes the topic again, but this time her evasion is more complex. She gets into her railing-against-men mode with a little outburst beginning, "'Tis not a year or two shows us a man" (3.4.104–7). Like the other long speech in the willow scene (4.3.85–102), it sharpens the sense of her ineffectuality within the situation. She seems to have drawn the line with her lie. She would defend Desdemona's honor valiantly to Othello, as she does a little later. But that is all. And this withdrawal on her part contributes to the growing sense of Desdemona's vulnerability, in the play. Emilia's occasional

bouts of eloquence suggest genuine and complex personal resonances, but most of them are strategically timed to prevent other conversations. Her eloquence can actually “do” nothing to help Desdemona.

This is why a sentimental reading of the willow scene overlooks the nature of Shakespeare’s theatrical and mimetic achievement in it. Emilia is “with” Desdemona in this scene, but they talk across the abyss of Emilia’s accumulated lies and silences and of her by-now-quite-settled sense of what she cannot, and will not, do for Desdemona. They are together on the other, intimate, side of the “door of truth,” but it still remains half open for Emilia to leave—and she knows this. She must, and will, leave at the end of the scene. This too, like the small beer scene, is a scene of desultory conversation. But there is an ineffable inner-chamber whimsy in Desdemona, in spite of the abiding pensiveness. Woven into this pensiveness is an obscure sense of foreboding, of a suspended brutality that dimly gathers around Emilia’s ministering, but strangely detached, presence. When Desdemona asks Emilia if the itching in her eyes “bode[s] weeping,” Emilia answers, “’Tis neither here nor there” (4.3.57–58). It is a peculiarly reflective scene in which the two women’s, especially Desdemona’s, inchoate forebodings are not left behind, but suddenly appear so surreally incomprehensible that they produce a lightheadedness which can be kept up only for a while, and only in the still center of a storm.

Towards the end of the scene, Desdemona initiates an important conversation about unfaithful wives, which gets Emilia going until she takes over entirely with her last impassioned oration on wives having “sense” (4.3.93). In the course of this conversation, the two women move further and further apart in their moral stance regarding sex outside marriage. Emilia comes out a materialist and a pragmatist, Desdemona an idealist. Emilia thinks, “The world’s a huge thing: it is a great price / For a small vice” (4.3.68–69). It is clear from what follows that by “price” she does not mean “the price to be paid”; her “price” is a variant spelling of “prize.” She will risk her fidelity if the world is her reward. She also thinks that such a deed can be undone, the wrong quickly made right if only it is done “well i’ th’ dark” (4.3.66), whereas Desdemona would rather not do it at all “by this heavenly light” (4.3.64). Emilia and Desdemona inhabit disparate visions of marriage and separate moral universes, and there is, in Emilia’s “religion of doing,” room for a lie or two, as long as she is not asked to kill.

But, in a few moments, Emilia is made to move on from stealing and lying to greater vices. Shakespeare compresses what, in Cinthio, is like a slow

draining away of life through a long series of just but brutal punishments. Completely reworking Cinthio's ending, he pitches Emilia into quite another mode than what she was created for. After learning of Roderigo's death and Cassio's wounding, Emilia reenters the "door of truth" as the ghostly echo of Desdemona's smothered voice. It is as if she has suddenly discovered center-stage histrionics, till the final exit. Shakespeare is interlacing again, and at more than one level. First, the double *anagnorisis*: Othello and Emilia both face the truth of their respective marriages and of their purblind conduct in this sphere. Neither survives this—Othello kills himself, and Emilia is killed by Iago. More interestingly, Emilia's assumption into high tragedy does not quite free her from remaining implicated in lying. Her extreme vocal presence in the last scene is nuanced to the end with a wealth of Shakespearean mischief, similar to what James keeps up with his dying dove, Milly, till the very moment of her death, and after. For both Othello and Emilia, facing the truths they either had no access to or had deliberately kept at bay means losing everything, everything they had staked. In the case of Emilia—who dies on another woman's marriage bed—what she lets go of is the idea of "home." As in his earlier "Speak within doors" (4.2.146), Iago charges her now to "get you home," and she replies, "Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home" (5.2.191, 193–94). So, Emilia's generic elevation from novella through domestic tragedy to high tragedy becomes a measure of what she loses.

But James wrote of higher, more resilient, loyalties than Emilia's in his shorter fiction. His 1887 story, "The Liar," is narrated by a painter who had been rejected by a woman twelve years before he meets her again; she is now married to the "raconteur," Colonel Clement Capadose.¹² This colonel is known to be "a thumping liar" (273), modeled on a gentleman, "the most unbridled colloquial romancer," James once met at a dinner party in London.¹³ The morbidly jealous painter contrives to paint Colonel Capadose in such a way as to expose his pathological lying, in order to "execute a masterpiece of ... legitimate treachery" (283). The once-rejected painter wants to draw out a confession from the woman who had rejected him, now a liar-colonel's wife, that her life "would have been finer" with the painter (286). Although the cruel accuracy of the painter's portrait breaks her down for a while, it is eventually destroyed, and she remains loyal to her husband. James describes the painter's attempted exposé as an "ineffectual experiment" Writing to his friend, Theodora Sedgwick, James mentions some of his female readers who "declare it is monstrous to have represented [the liar's wife] as *not* taking the artist into confidence—& as

sticking to her husband.” “We move, my dear Theodora,” James adds, “in dim & tortuous labyrinths & we sit in eternal darkness.”¹⁴ This is the sort of terrain in which Emilia “moves” with Iago.

There is a fine irony working upon Emilia at the end of Shakespeare’s play. Desdemona dies lying in order to protect her husband: “She’s like a liar gone to burning hell” (5.2.127). But Emilia is denied the moral satisfaction of exposing Othello, for which stern task she was raring herself up with every moral absolute she could invoke. But Othello confesses immediately, and then Emilia is faced with the truth about *her* husband. She repeatedly reduces Iago’s evil to compulsive lying, lacerating herself with the word “lie”: “You told a lie, an odious, damned lie! / Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie!” (5.2.176–77) But, in speaking “as liberal as the north,” she suppresses her own lie to Desdemona and tells a half-truth about her agency in stealing the handkerchief (5.2.218). Iago points this out: “Filth, thou liest” (5.2.229). But Desdemona, the only witness to Emilia’s error of commission, is now dead. There is something excessive about Emilia’s dying moments, which speaks of a torment different from that of being married to an evil man. (James speaks of “the beautiful little eloquence involved in Milly’s avoidances” (299)). I cannot help finding Emilia’s final moments slightly comic. But her last words are significant: “So *speaking* as I *think*, alas, I die” (5.2.249). In drawing attention to her final integrity of speech, these words remain opaquely self-reflexive. They fold in upon themselves, without actually letting on what she thinks. Cinthio’s Emilia knows and tells all at the end. But, in Shakespeare, between Iago and Emilia, the circle of lies and silences remains closed. Emilia dies full of words, but never really managing to sound her silences. Bleeding but not killed, Iago becomes an embodiment of the ultimate silence, opting for an infernal reticence that will give out nothing: “Demand me nothing. What you know, you know. / From this time forth I never will speak word” (5.2.300–301).

The maddening circularity of Iago’s black hole of a sentence—“What you know, you know”—reminds me of the experience of reading *The Sacred Fount*. It is James’s sublime joke, largely at his own expense, teased out into a novel. At the end of this impossible work, the beautiful Grace Brissenden, driven to the last exasperation by James’s pathologically Jamesian narrator, asks the narrator, “Then what on earth *do* you think?” But soon giving up on a clear answer, she says, simply, “My poor dear, you *are* crazy, and I bid you good-night!” (218).

Minding Shakespeare's Gaps: A Response to Aveek Sen

Tanya Pollard

In a *New Yorker* essay titled "On Omission," the writer John McPhee suggests that writing depends crucially on the art of choosing what to leave out. "The creative writer leaves white space between chapters or segments of chapters," he explains. "The creative reader silently articulates the unwritten thought that is present in the white space. Let the reader have the experience. Leave judgment in the eye of the beholder."¹⁵ McPhee notes in passing—or rather, cites Harold Bloom as observing—that Shakespeare exemplifies the power of omission: "what he leaves out becomes much more important than what he puts in" (48). McPhee's essay offers a useful frame for Aveek's haunting account of Emilia's silences and the blank spaces that they invite or challenge us to fill. Aveek calls our attention to disturbing gaps that both become stories in themselves and prompt further possible stories.

Shakespeare's omissions have shaped those of others, and Aveek points out that Henry James cultivated the art of the gap in ways that can sharpen our understanding of its earlier versions. In particular, James's acute readings of Shakespeare offer lenses through which we can reread Shakespeare's earlier absences. If we view Shakespeare through James-tinted glasses, what might we be newly enabled to see? Aveek makes a persuasive case that attending to the willed evasiveness of James's female figures illuminates uncomfortable underpinnings behind Emilia's apparent support for Desdemona. We associate the play's drama of knowledge especially with Othello's insistent demands for it, but Emilia's insistent denials of knowledge can slip between the gaps of our attention. Similarly, many associate the play's drama of intimacy primarily with the doomed marriage between Othello and Desdemona, and secondarily with the pact between Othello and Iago, but the complex ties between Desdemona and Emilia are as central to the play as they are under-examined.

Although she speaks little, and conveys almost nothing of her thoughts, motives, marriage, or history, Emilia's impact is enormous. Without her conveyance of the handkerchief to Iago, and her ongoing concealment of this maneuver, Othello would never encounter the so-called ocular proof that catalyzes and crystallizes his faith in Iago's stories.

Without her status as trusted confidante, moreover, Desdemona would lack the intimate interpersonal spaces in which she is moved to reflect on love, loyalty, willows, and weeping, communicating and heightening grief in ways that sharply escalate audiences' affective stakes. If Emilia is to Desdemona as Iago is to Othello—a dangerous interlocutor, whose intimate access and ability to inspire trust bring about the play's terrible denouement—we would do well to pay more attention to the crucial silences that create this uneasy power.

Emilia is far from consistently silent. Her conversation with Desdemona is breezy and bawdy, and she speaks sharply to her husband. She almost speaks sharply to herself; in an unguarded moment, she comes close to acknowledging the cruelty of her actions. As Aveek observes, she anticipates the impact of the handkerchief's disappearance: "Poor lady, she'll run mad / When she shall lack it" (3.3.321–22). Yet she both occludes her role in this theft and commits herself to concealing it, answering Desdemona's queries with a direct lie: "I know not, madam" (3.4.24). She goes on to hide the truth further by omission, standing by silently while Othello interrogates and berates Desdemona on the handkerchief's disappearance, without ever intervening, explaining, or distracting. Nor does she offer help when Desdemona laments to her, "Sure, there's some wonder in this handkerchief: / I am most unhappy in the loss of it" (3.4.90–91). Actively eliding her privileged knowledge and complicity, she presents herself as aligned with Desdemona in perplexity and victimhood. The two of them, she suggests, are both women beleaguered by male aggression: "They are all but stomachs, and we all but food" (3.4.105). She speculates sympathetically on the possible causes of Othello's jealousy as if she had no insiderly access. When she tells Othello, "I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest," she offers to "Lay down my soul at stake" (4.2.12–13), but she will not go so far as to lay down her secret. Othello, wrongly—or perhaps rightly—observes of her non-confession, "She says enough" (4.2.20). Emilia says little, but what she says, combined with what she does not say, is enough to convict.

Attending to Emilia's silences makes for uneasy reading of her final scenes, when she rants indignantly, and with apparent incomprehension, about the injustice of Othello's suspicions. "A halter pardon him," she curses, "and hell gnaw his bones! / Why should he call her whore?" (4.2.138–39). Has she forgotten her theft, Desdemona's anxious queries, and her own dismissive evasions? Or is she obstructed by a blind spot large

enough to block the link between the handkerchief's disappearance and Othello's jealousy, despite her intimate access to direct conversations on this topic? Emilia's silences conceal multitudes and complicate our understanding of the play's terrible end. By doing so, they also prompt, invite, and even require our own further stories—including stories that some (maybe Henry James) might formalize. Shakespeare's gaps prove fertile, if dangerous, sites. We ignore them at our peril.

Darkness Visible: A Response to Aveek Sen

Subha Mukherji

What Aveek uses James to anatomize brilliantly is the way Shakespeare shows us *how* we do not know and how we arrange not to see, and sometimes intimates why, though motives and impulses can glimmer beyond such intimations, perhaps even intentions: who knows what William, or Henry, knew—except perhaps Michael Wood!¹⁶ Should we even ask?

The one thing William did know, though—as this essay makes us see—is the charge of Emilia’s journey from the woman in Cinthio who “knew everything” to the enigma in *Othello* who “[knows] not,” yet “thought so then” (3.4.24; 5.2.191). Aveek sees this as a journey that puts agency and knowledge at variance. Yet silence or passivity can be an exercise of choice, and I wonder whether Shakespeare’s play does not suggest an alternative model of agency, rather than “wedging apart” knowing and doing. For the dimension of knowledge at play in Emilia’s “curtained consciousness,” no less than Maggie’s, is knowingness—hovering in a shadowland between complicity and resistance. From which side are we looking at the curtain? And who draws it? Correspondingly, it is a kind of obscurity that both baffles and invites reading, teetering between absence and mystery, cat and cavity, as it does between comic triviality and tragic recess. In representational terms, the analogy is exact. After all, in *The Golden Bowl*, the source of the phrase Aveek quotes, Maggie shares her curtain with Amerigo’s “new friends,” including Mrs. Assingham, whose “state of mind [...] had resemblances to a great white curtain,” in turn compared to “white air that was like a dazzling curtain of light, concealing as darkness conceals, yet the colour of milk or snow.”¹⁷ Like a blind spot on an image of the retina, dazzlingly dense? The direction of invisibility—as of obscuration—is dizzyingly reversible when it comes to the diaphanous texture of Shakespeare’s or James’s characters. No less gauzy is the range of elusive paradigms that the essay draws out: whimsy, fantasy, and fancies as varieties of ungovernable, irrational, arbitrary states that can feel like knowledge to the subject (though like a nightmare to the object, as with Hermione, confronted by Leontes’s visceral conviction, which is also the basis of her legal conviction in his court). They are also, of course, possible forms of unknowing. But gossamer to ghost is one small step.

Desdemona, Toni Morrison’s lyrical, multimedia adaptation of (mainly) the “willow scene” in Shakespeare’s *Othello*—performed at the Barbican in summer 2012—is shaped around three posthumous meetings *Desdemona* has.¹⁸ The main encounter is that between *Desdemona* and her

mother's maid Barbary, in Morrison's vision the second African character imagined but absent in *Othello*, who died singing the song of lost love that "will not go from [Desdemona's] mind" (4.3.29); for "Barbary is what you call Africa," as she says to Desdemona (p. 45), evoking the "Barbary" courtiers who arrived and fascinated London in 1600, as well as the Barbary corsairs (or North African pirates) who had started raiding British shores and ships at the time when *Othello* was first performed. This exchange happens in an Africa which, in Shakespeare, could only be displaced onto Othello's mind: remember Desdemona's tellingly ambiguous phrasing, "I saw Othello's visage in his mind," almost as if she had to bypass his skin—turn it into a blind spot of sorts—to see the real, fair Othello (1.3.248). That is in a scene where she expresses, with touching frankness, her desire to accompany her newly wed husband to the wars "for the rites for which [she loves] him" (1.3.253). It is also the moment when the new bridegroom Othello declares, with strange defensiveness about the sexual chemistry between them, that he is kind of past it, and wants Desdemona with him in Cyprus to enjoy mental affinity alone:

I therefore beg it not
To please the palate of my appetite,
Nor to comply with heat the young affects
In my defunct and proper satisfaction,
But to be free and bounteous to her mind.
(Folio, 1.3.257–61)

Famously, this passage has been a blind spot of textual scholarship, itself refusing to read the blind spot of Shakespeare's Venice which, in turn, has been internalized by its alien military hero. Editors (such as Norman Sanders in the New Cambridge edition) have often tended to follow Lewis Theobald's emendation to "distinct" to skirt round the apparent misfit of "defunct" with the context; others—following Edmond Malone—have gone with Q1's "disjunct," which neither sees nor unsees—"neither here, nor there," as Emilia would say (4.3.58). Yet other scholars, such as Hulme and Salgado, have resorted to more tortuous ways of getting round the embarrassment caused by this textual "baffle"—to adapt Adam Zucker's term in this volume—by reading "defunct" to mean "discharged," by a dysfunctional (in the English syntactical context) analogy with the Latin form, which demands an ablative to make sense as "discharged from."¹⁹ Some (such as Peter Alexander) have suggested that a minor emendation of "my" (Q1 and F) to "me" would help make grammatical sense of the lines if conjoined with "defunct": "the young affects / In me defunct" in a parenthesis, taking the cue from Q1's comma after "heat," absent in F: "Nor to comply with heat, the young affects in my defunct, and proper

satisfaction.” But even this emendation seems unnecessary, given the non-congruence of early modern punctuation with ours. A. D. Nuttall, a consummate reader of eloquent textual wobbles, favors this emendation, but also thinks, surely rightly, that the syntactic awkwardness is a case of “naturalistic confusion” in a character who is anxious to obscure the sexual implications of his race in a society where he is a prized general but becomes an “old black ram” tugging their white ewe the moment he becomes Desdemona’s lover.²⁰ For me, the balancing of “my ... satisfactions” and “her mind” makes syntactic sense. It is the deeper affective indecorum masked by social decorum that gives me pause, as well as a way of seeing. On hearing Othello out, the duke declares to Brabantio that his son-in-law is “more fair than black” (286). In the very way blackness becomes white to the eye, its dense refusal to reflect light in the alleys of “Venice” trips us up and makes us look harder. The Malian singer Rokia Traoré, as Barbary, sang the willow song hauntingly as a blues number in *Desdemona*. Is it not strangely apposite that Morrison’s Africa becomes a photographic “negative” of the original’s location? A place where all things that could not be looked in the face in Venice are translated into face-to-face encounter? But her mimetic aim is in sync with Shakespeare’s: making darkness visible. And so, in this work, when Desdemona confronts Emilia with accusations, Emilia responds with sharp defensiveness, lacking shades where she can hide from what she “knew,” where knowing can take cover from doing.²¹ In the afterlife of characters, in the afterlife of the play, Africa surfaces and claims the conscious mind and its merciless clarities, along with all the specific affective knowledges available but resisted. Desdemona accosts Emilia here: “Didn’t you acquiesce to all of Iago’s demands, even the most vile, corrupt ones? [...] Your dangerous, murderous silence led to my death,” and mocks her “survival strategies” (42–43). In Emilia’s reply, the tone of resigned, lonely insouciance carries over from the older play: “Life is what it is. [...] To own my life, I had to forge a secret path” (42–43). But she also confronts Desdemona and her class for “[taking] devotion for granted,” and challenges her privileged and sentimental knowledge claims: “I am glad you never knew how desperate life is for the truly orphaned” (44). After such knowledge, what forgiveness? “I know not, madam,” Shakespeare’s Emilia might say. “All is known here,” Morrison’s Desdemona might answer, as she does when Emilia protests to her: “Did you know I was the first to lay dying next to you?” (42).

So, though Cinthio did not quite know his Shakespeare, did Shakespeare know his Morrison, as he “knew his James”? How does

James's knowing feel for the pulse of unknowing relate to such resurrections as Morrison's? his representation of what is unrepresentable not only between self and Other, but to the self itself? Is there a risk of homogenizing acts of ambiguous knowing? How are we to orchestrate, in composition or in reception, distinct if related disavowals of knowledge? And what is the role of a gap of time in filling what Tanya Pollard (in her response), after John McPhee, calls the "white space[s]" in Shakespeare's own texts, as sequels step into the breach of his open endings? Do the unknowings of Emilia, and indeed of Desdemona and Othello, invariably belong with the reticence of willed resistance, as Aveek suggests, as opposed to the after-world of *Desdemona* where they are brought into light? Or are they to Morrison's retrospective vision what Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" is to Nina Simone's? Holiday's 1939 rendering is fragile, uncomprehending, and ballad-like, as it comes out of the heart of a reality it is trying to bear, and make sense of; an as-yet barely grappled cognitive dissonance around racial lynching translating into a strange, dislocated pathos. In Simone's, recorded in 1965, there is articulate rage—stylized, shaped, and dramatized as distance alone can make possible. But, of course, the alertness to the raw, unprocessed, experiential texture of half-knowing and apprehension can itself be a defiantly ethical mimetic position in relation to the matter of life: a refusal of formal solace and its comprehensions.

Where, in this spectrum, do James's precise tracings of disavowed, untold, and rearranged knowledges dwell? Whereas, in Morrison, the encounters lead to a possibility of redemption and understanding, no matter how uneasy, James's more implicit reinvention of Shakespearean elisions preempts, as this essay shows, any transcendent or feel-good move to truth and reconciliation. How, then, does he manage—as I think he does—to write in the profound loneliness and vulnerability underlying such retellings and evasions? What is the relation between high reticence as an aesthetic mode or a function of taste, as Aveek posits, and reticence as an experiential position, a function of human choice or, indeed, impotence? James and Iago and Shakespeare are all artificers; Emilia, Portia, Gertrude, and Helena are arguably both subject and agent, as are Maggie Verver and Milly Theale. How is the space between the art of suggestion and the lived moment of withholding knowledge negotiated by different media—drama or narrative? Shakespeare's silences offer lacunae that embodied action on stage can fill in—but are they coterminous with the characters' silences? What choices and risks does a director face in trying to make the "pensive text" speak?²²

NOTES

¹ All references to Shakespeare's plays, except *Othello*, are to the *Arden Complete Works*. References to *Othello* are to the Arden edition, ed. Honigmann.

² Keats uses the phrase in a letter of April 21, 1819. See Atkins, *On Keats's Practice and Poetics of Responsibility*, 9.

³ James, *The Wings of the Dove*, 477. All quotations are from this edition.

⁴ Auden, *Collected Poems*, 312.

⁵ James, *The Turn of the Screw*, lv. All quotations are from this edition.

⁶ Shakespeare, *Sonnets*, 405.

⁷ Nuttall, *A New Mimesis*, 82, 81.

⁸ Cinthio, trans., quoted in Honigmann's *Othello*, 381. All quotations are from this edition.

⁹ James, *The Golden Bowl*, ed. Crick, 56. All quotations are from this edition.

¹⁰ Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," lines 79–80, in Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 55.

¹¹ Yourcenar, *Fires*, 33.

¹² James, *The Liar*, 270. All quotations are from this edition.

¹³ Preface to *The Aspern Papers*, in James, *The Art of Criticism*, 344.

¹⁴ James, *James: A Life in Letters*, 204–5.

¹⁵ McPhee, "On Omission," 46.

¹⁶ See Michael Wood's brilliantly provocative essay, "What Henry Knew," 13–26, unerringly alighting on Henry James as the gatekeeper to "the question of literature and knowledge" (13).

¹⁷ James, *The Golden Bowl* (1995 ed.), chapter 1, p. 12.

¹⁸ Morrison, *Desdemona*.

¹⁹ Hulme, *Explorations in Shakespeare's Language*, 153–54; Salgado, ed., *Othello*, New Swan edition, 30.

²⁰ Nuttall, *A New Mimesis*, 139.

²¹ Morrison, *Desdemona*, Sec. 8, 42–44.

²² Barthes, *S/Z*, 17.

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Chapter 5

Knowing Kin and Kind in *The Winter's Tale*

Tanya Pollard

"I would most gladly know the issue of it."¹

EARLY IN *THE WINTER'S Tale*, Paulina presents Leontes with what she identifies as inarguable proof of his paternity, and accordingly of his wife's fidelity. Hermione's newborn infant, she explains, is "So like you, 'tis the worse." Turning to onlookers for corroboration, she continues, "Behold, my lords, / Although the print be little, the whole matter / And copy of the father" (2.3.98–100). The baby, according to Paulina, is easy to read, a miniature reprint of Leontes's features. Leontes, however, draws the opposite conclusion: "This brat is none of mine. / It is the issue of Polixenes" (2.3.93–94). Any knowledge we can glean from the baby's matter and copy, he suggests, will direct us towards a different original imprint.

Leontes's error suggests a variation on a standard pattern. Throughout Shakespeare's plays, characters routinely fail to recognize members of their family. Rosalind evades Duke Senior by wearing a cap; Sebastian is stymied by Viola's male apparel; Cymbeline has no idea that the young men who save his kingdom are his sons; and the Ephesian Antipholus shares a city with his long-lost mother for years without knowing that she is even alive, much less his neighbor. As Launcelot Gobbo observes after his father attributes his non-recognition to blindness, "Nay, indeed, if you had your eyes you might fail of the knowing me. It is a wise father that knows his own child" (*Merchant of Venice* 2.2.65–66). Among these many familial misrecognitions, however, Leontes's response to Perdita stands out, not only because of the impressive number of failed familial recognitions that surround it, but also for its self-conscious alignment of kin with literary kind. As Aaron Kitch has argued, the play's repeated use of the vocabulary of print to illustrate paternity implicitly links the fear of illegitimate birth with concerns about unauthorized printing practices and uncertain

genres, such as its own mongrel tragicomedy.² Throughout the play, its shape-shifting dramatic form proves as hard to identify as family members, suggesting that the challenges of knowing kin and knowing literary kind create similar sorts of blind spots.

Failure to know kin precipitates the central crisis of *The Winter's Tale*, when Leontes stakes his kingdom on misreading his family: his failure to recognize Perdita as his daughter rests on his similar failure to recognize Hermione as his faithful wife, which also raises questions over whether Mamilius is his son.³ Projecting his errors onto others, he accuses Camillo and others of blindness to Polixenes's guilt and insists that Hermione has failed to distinguish him from his figurative brother: "You have mistook, my lady— / Polixenes for Leontes" (2.1.83–84). And, although the play suggests that these particular accusations are mistaken, Leontes's pattern of familial misrecognition extends contagiously to others: Polixenes lacks knowledge of his son's familial intentions, Florizel fails to recognize his disguised father through an extended and increasingly intimate conversation, and the shifting disguises of Autolycus defy recognition by Perdita's Bohemian family. Even the play's external family of readers and audiences find their illusion of privileged knowledge shattered—at least in their first encounter with the play—when Paulina reveals an apparent statue to be the still-living Hermione.

Fittingly, the play develops its preoccupations with knowing kin through the intermingling of two lexical families. The play is densely populated with forms of the word "know," some conspicuous and some more easily missed. From the Old English *cñawan* and Old High German *-knāen*, "know" shares Indo-European roots both with Latin *gnō-*, *gnōscere*, the roots of cognition, recognition, ignore, and acquaint (from *accognitus*), and with the earlier Greek *γνω-*, *γινώσκειν*, the roots of prognosis and diagnosis.⁴ Direct forms of "know" (including knowledge, acknowledge, known, unknown, and knowing) occur ninety-four times in *The Winter's Tale*, placing it at the upper end of Shakespeare's most knowledge-fixated plays (exceeded only by *All's Well That Ends Well* with 124, *King Lear* with 112, and *Othello* with 97).⁵ These words, rooted in English from its earliest Anglo-Saxon origins, also mingle in the play with later-arriving lexical cousins, including five instances of "ignorant," three of "acquaint," and one of "prognosticate": all linguistic immigrants that entered English with the Norman invasion, and all of which appear in the play in relation to the problems of knowing family.

Alongside this preoccupation with the language of knowledge, the play similarly showcases the thematic ties between kin and kind, gene and

genre, with one hundred instances of words from these terms' overlapping family trees. "Kin" and its suffixed cognate "kind" are Germanic words, rooted in Old English *cyn(n)* and its continental forebears.⁶ This word, in turn, is part of a larger lexical family rooted in the Aryan *gen-*, *gon-*, *gn-*, "to produce, engender, beget," and accordingly shares lineage with Greek *γένος*, *γόνος*, and *γίγνομαι*, as well as the related Latin *genus* and *gignere*.⁷ These terms form the roots not only of genre but also of gender, generation, genesis, genitals, genes, genetics, genealogy, and related familial vocabulary. Just as literary kinds represent a thinly veiled familial metaphor, then, genres have the same genealogical roots, and *The Winter's Tale* actively explores their interwoven threads. Versions of the word kin (including kindred, kinsman, kind, kindness, and mankind), occur seventeen times in the play, but its most extensive investment in this lexical family appears in its eighty-three uses of genealogical words—generation, gentry, and especially gentle.⁸ Versions of "gentle," in particular, occur sixty-seven times in the play, becoming at times the object of an almost farcical obsession.⁹

Although these two linguistic bodies are not directly related, the roots of familial begetting in *cin*, *kin*, *gen*, and *gn-* suggest an uncanny proximity with the roots of knowledge in *knāen*, *ken*, *γνω*, *gno*, and *gn*. The close, if apparently superficial, resemblance between these two lexical families suggestively calls to mind the sense of "know" as "to be sexually intimate with; *esp.* to have sexual intercourse with." Do knowing and engendering go hand in hand? Can we have one without the other? I suggest that, in *The Winter's Tale*, blindness to family brings about both literal and literary barrenness, whereas acts of recognition, culminating in the final scene, restore the play to both literal and literary fertility.

Amid the dense linguistic underbrush of knowledge, kin, and kind, the play's denizens have trouble seeing the forest for the trees. Critics of Leontes's errors typically focus on his blindness to Hermione, but his responses to Perdita—his own progeny—offer an especially rich site for tracing the play's reflections on the challenges of knowing kin. When Paulina makes her case that the child's features recreate "the whole matter / And copy of the father," Leontes threatens to destroy the evidence. After telling Paulina, "I'll ha' thee burnt" (2.3.114), he goes on to redirect the threat of fire towards the baby: "My child? Away with't! Even thou, that hast / A heart so tender o'er it, take it hence / And see it instantly consumed with fire" (2.3.132–34). Otherwise, he explains, "The bastard brains with these my proper hands / Shall I dash out" (2.3.140–41).

In turning to the epithet “bastard” to distance himself from his putative kin, Leontes seizes on a term that becomes a recurring touchpoint for him, and for the play. “Give her the bastard,” he instructs Antigonus when Paulina sets down the baby; “Thou dotard! thou art woman-tired, unroosted / By thy dame Partlet here. Take up the bastard, / Take’t up, I say” (2.3.74–77). Shortly after, he asks in dismay, “Shall I live on, to see this bastard kneel / And call me father?” (2.3.155–56). He goes on to taunt Antigonus for his eagerness “To save this bastard’s life,—for ’tis a bastard, / So sure as this beard’s grey” (2.3.161–62) and instructs him to “carry / This female bastard hence” (2.3.174–75). Not only does the apparent familial resemblance elude him, then, but he finds the opposite certainty blindingly clear. After harping on the term seven times in this one scene, he returns to it as his verdict at Hermione’s trial, where he confidently pronounces, “You had a bastard by Polixenes” (3.2.81).

The word “bastard” appears ten times in *The Winter’s Tale*, more frequently than in any other Shakespeare play besides *King John* and *1 Henry 6* (both of which use the term primarily in stage directions referring to characters titled bastard), although several other plays, such as *Much Ado*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and most famously *King Lear*, feature actual bastards. This frequency accords the play a privileged position in the period’s already extensive theatrical engagement with bastardy; as Alison Findlay and Michael Neill have pointed out, bastards are surprisingly prominent in the period’s plays and feature disproportionately in plays by Shakespeare.¹⁰ I suggest that the word’s pervasiveness in *The Winter’s Tale*, which lacks literal bastards, points not only to Leontes’s trouble with knowing kin, but also to the word’s unusually lonely lexical status. The word “bastard” is itself an orphan of sorts, the rare French word that lacks a classical Latin parent. A medieval invention putatively formed from *filz de bast*, “pack-saddle child,” the word apparently links the Old French *bast* (pack-saddle, used as a bed by muleteers in the inns) with the pejorative “-ard” suffix, though a link with *bas*, low, has also been speculated, in keeping with connotations of base-born.¹¹ The term’s primary meaning is “One begotten and born out of wedlock; an illegitimate or natural child,” but by Shakespeare’s time it also could mean “A mongrel, an animal of inferior breed” and, as an adjective, “Illegitimate, unrecognized, unauthorized.”¹² The word’s own lack of parental authorization, then, neatly mirrors its definitions.

At first glance, Leontes appears to be the character most intimately linked with the word “bastard.” He pronounces the word in eight of its ten appearances in the play, and his status as the source of paternal recognition

(or lack thereof) gives him a privileged authority for defining legitimacy. Yet Perdita, the unauthorized apparent orphan, offers a more consistent link to each of the play's instances of bastardy. She is the only character termed a bastard in the play, the second person beyond her father to use the word, and the addressee of its final instance, spoken by Polixenes in an echo of her usage. Although Perdita uses the term to denigrate a flower rather than a person, like Leontes she pronounces it in the context of a failed recognition between parent and child. Despite apparent oppositions between these two bastard-infused scenes of failed recognition—the first takes place in Sicilia, in the play's so-called tragic half, and the second in Bohemia in the so-called comic half—their shared pairing of unacknowledged kin with the language of bastardy produces curious symmetries. Both scenes are fraught with generic precariousness, marking moments when a choice between knowing and not knowing kin creates consequences for the play's generic identity.

Perdita's apparent illegitimacy follows her to Bohemia, where her appearance prompts reflections on illicit procreation. "[S]ure some scape," the shepherd reflects upon seeing her abandoned in a basket. "Though I am not bookish, yet I can read 'waiting-gentlewoman' in the scape. This has been some stair-work, some trunk-work, some behind-door-work. They were warmer that got this than the poor thing is here" (3.3.69–72). Despite his certainty about her misbegotten origins, however, he avoids the stigmatizing term *bastard*. By offering pity rather than distaste for the baby's circumstances, he signals the familial kindness in which she will grow and flourish. It is sixteen years later when we see the language of bastardy resurface, when Perdita appears to be not only at risk of mongrelizing Bohemia's royal bloodline, but also such a distraction to Prince Florizel that he fails to notice the emergence of his own father into his sightlines. Just as Perdita is both object and subject of the term *bastard*, she is similarly both the object of non-recognition and the cause of non-recognition in others.

Polixenes seeks out the shepherd's home to see his son, but, before interrogating Florizel, he first turns his attention to Perdita, the child previously misidentified as his bastard by his one-time best friend. In response to his questions about her garden's winter flowers, she refers to the "carnations and streaked gillyvors, / Which some call nature's bastards," pointing out, "of that kind / Our rustic garden's barren, and I care not / To get slips of them" (4.4.82–85). In echoing her diction, Polixenes imitates and escalates her reproductive vocabulary. "You see, sweet maid," he explains,

we marry
 A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
 And make conceive a bark of baser kind
 By bud of nobler race. This is an art
 Which does mend nature—change it rather; but
 The art itself is nature.

(4.4.92–97)

Polixenes's analogy of botanical cultivation to category-crossing art has attracted considerable discussion of the play's challenges to codified systems of literary genre; the play self-consciously marries the wild stock of comedy to the gentler scion of tragedy, in the process arriving at a hybrid or bastard genre akin to Perdita's gillyvors.¹³ According to this analogy, art offers both an opposition to nature—a word rooted in the Latin *nascor*, *nasci*, *natus*, to give birth—and an alternative form of reproduction. In the context of his opposition to his son's looming inter-class marriage, Polixenes's recommendation that Perdita should embrace the plants' prolific hybrid fertility—"make your garden rich in gillyvors, / And do not call them bastards" (4.4.98–99)—is of course saturated in irony. Perdita, for her part, insists that she will not countenance this generative mixing of kinds in her garden, although she is apparently willing to do so in her marriage.

If Perdita's reluctance to breed bastard flowers suggests apprehensions towards the social mixing she enters, Florizel for his part is eager to deny the claims of kin and kind. Challenged by his father on his intentions towards his mistress—"Let me hear / What you profess" (4.4.354–55)—Florizel presses his unrecognized father into service. "Do," he bids, "and be witness to 't" (4.4.355). He will marry Perdita, he insists, despite his blood:

were I crowned the most imperial monarch,
 Thereof most worthy, were I the fairest youth
 That ever made eye swerve, had force and knowledge
 More than was ever man's, I would not prize them
 Without her love; for her employ them all,
 Commend them and condemn them to her service
 Or to their own perdition.

(4.4.358–64)

Florizel not only prizes Perdita over both kin and knowledge, but punningly relegates these realms—and everything else—to perdition if they fail to serve her. When she accepts his impromptu proposal, her adoptive father exhorts them to make their vows then and there. "And, friends unknown, you shall bear witness to 't," he addresses Polixenes and Camillo; "I give my daughter to him, and will make / Her portion equal

his" (4.4.370–72). Florizel assents eagerly: "But, come on, / Contract us fore these witnesses" (4.4.375–76). As one of the "friends unknown" who will "bear witness," Polixenes raises the question of the absence of friends known, or rather parents. "Soft, swain, awhile, beseech you," he addresses Florizel; "Have you a father?" (4.4.377–78). To his reply—"I have. But what of him?"—Polixenes asks, "Knows he of this?" and is told "He neither does nor shall" (4.4.379–81).

Florizel's insistence that his father not know his most intimate life plans spurs outrage from his disguised parent. "Methinks a father / Is at the nuptial of his son a guest / That best becomes the table," Polixenes insists. "Pray you once more," he continues,

Is not your father grown incapable
Of reasonable affairs? Is he not stupid
With age and alt'ring rheums? Can he speak, hear,
Know man from man?

(4.4.382–87)

This quarrel hinges on questions of familial knowledge: who knows what, who is capable of knowing what, and who is deserving of knowing what. Polixenes invokes sensory numbing—the stupefied incapacity to speak, hear, or know—as the only possibility that would justify a man's not meriting knowledge of his son. In the absence of this stupefaction, he insists, "You offer him, if this be so, a wrong / Something unfilial" (4.4.393–94). Florizel grants this, but maintains that withholding this knowledge is justified. "But for some other reasons, my grave sir," he explains, "Which 'tis not fit you know, I not acquaint / My father of this business." A knowledge tug of war ensues: "Let him know't"—"He shall not." "Prithee let him."—"No, he must not." According to the shepherd, "he shall not need to grieve / At knowing of thy choice" (4.4.399–404). Knowing this choice, however, leads not only to grief but to fury. At Florizel's "Come, come, he must not. / Mark our contract," Polixenes explodes. "Mark your divorce, young sir," he retorts while uncovering himself: "Whom son I dare not call. Thou art too base / To be acknowledged. Thou a sceptre's heir, / That thus affects a sheep-hook?" (4.4.404–8). In lowering his affections from a scepter to a sheep's hook, Florizel loses the name of son, becoming too base for familial status. Denied the knowledge that is the privilege of blood, Polixenes in turn denies acknowledgment of filial status. "[W]e'll bar thee from succession," he continues; "Not hold thee of our blood, no, not our kin" (4.4.418). If Florizel, as it seems, is the king's only heir, his disinheritance leaves Bohemia, like Sicilia, issueless. No knowledge, no kindness; no kin, no kingdom.

Why is it so hard to know, or acknowledge, kin? Leontes's non-recognition of his daughter and Florizel's non-recognition of his father are not the only moments of familial blindness in the play, but they offer paired fulcrum points for the play's own generic instability. When Leontes denies his daughter, he seems also to deny the possibility of comic fertility for Sicilia, moving in the opposite direction from Benedick's blithe subordination of cuckoldry fears with the imperative that "The world must be peopled" (*Much Ado* 2.3.213–14). And, although Perdita's flourishing in Bohemia's lush gardens suggests a triumph over Leontes's drive towards the tragic, the play's second familial denial rewrites Bohemia in Sicilia's image, challenging the possibility of generic recuperation. As the primary sites for the play's odd invocations of bastards, moreover, these scenes raise questions about the relationship between bastards, recognition, kin, and genre. Do bastards baffle recognition? If they represent not the opposite of kin but an uneasy and unrecognized cousin to it, do they similarly undermine the straightforward classifications of literary kind? Do bastards mongrelize their plays, turning them into hybrid, half-breed, bastard genres?

If the base status of bastard represents the most extreme form of familial non-recognition, its opposite might be the lofty and acknowledged status of gentility, the aristocratic realm to which Leontes and Polixenes attempt to deny their children access. Despite the prevailing current associations of "gentle" with refinement and delicacy, its usage in Shakespeare's time continued to reflect its etymological origins, which refer explicitly to birth. The word comes from the Old French *gentil*, high-born, noble, which in turn stemmed from Latin *gentilis*, from *genti-*, *gens*, race, family. It shares parents, that is, with the words gender, genre, genealogy, as well as sharing grandparents with kin and kind.

Claims to gentility acquire a vexed status in *The Winter's Tale*, in which Leontes's suspicions of his wife's pregnancy come to color all forms of birth. The word's first instances appear in conjunction with Mamilius, whose birth Leontes also begins to question in the light of his later suspicions. "You have an unspeakable comfort of your young prince Mamillius," Archidamus tells Camillo in the exchange of courtly compliments that opens the play's first scene; "it is a gentleman of the greatest promise that ever came into my note" (1.1.30–31). If Mamilius's gentle status is an unspeakable comfort, it may also be simply unspeakable, or at least unknowable, as Leontes increasingly broods on his son's adherence to familial resemblance. "How like, methought, I then was to this kernel," he declares of Mamilius in the next scene: "This squash, this gentleman" (1.2.161–62). Just as Mamilius's gentility hinges on his nascent status as kernel, squash, seed, and egg, the opposing "ungentle business" (3.3.33) of Perdita's denial and

deportation hinges on her father's non-recognition of her birth, and, when the play pauses to announce its passage through a generic rebirth, its chorus directs the language of gentility to those watching the play. Addressed as "Gentle spectators" (4.1.20), the audience is invited into the play's extended acknowledged family.

The play concentrates its lexicon of gentility, however, in its last acts, with their dawning recognitions of kin. As the world of the court invades the pastoral realm of the shepherd's home and fields, so too does its vocabulary. "Be merry, gentle," the prince Florizel counsels the apparently ungente shepherd's daughter, and his disguised father similarly addresses her as "gentle maiden" (4.4.46, 85). When Polixenes and Camillo draw the shepherd into conversation, their social status attracts attention; the shepherd's son tells Mopsa and Dorcas, "my father and the gentlemen are in sad talk" (4.4.296–97). Speaking of Florizel, Camillo tells Autolycus to "change garments with this gentleman" (4.4.619–20) and soon after urges "Nay, prithee, dispatch: the gentleman is half flayed already" (4.4.624–25). Autolycus himself, meanwhile, offers the clown and shepherd a liaison with nobility: asking them to take him to the king, he explains, "being something gently considered, I'll bring you where he is aboard" (4.4.768–69).

This lexicon of gentility escalates and arguably explodes, however, back in the Sicilian court, which finds its members unexpectedly expanded not only by the belated recognition of Perdita, but also and especially by a new recognition of her extended kin. Even before the unveiling of Hermione's statue, which simultaneously reveals kin and kind, generation and genre, the play unveils a similarly strange forging of new kinship bonds. Upon their miraculous adoption into the king's family, the shepherd and his son learn not only that they have been socially elevated, but that their births have been accordingly rewritten. "Come, boy," the shepherd tells his son; "I am past more children, but thy sons and daughters will be all gentlemen born" (5.2.113–14). Developing this point, his son accosts Autolycus with his failure to recognize his gentility. "You denied to fight with me this other day," he complains,

because I was no gentleman born. See you these clothes? Say you see them not, and think me still no gentleman born. You were best say these robes are not gentlemen born. Give me the lie, do, and try whether I am not now a gentleman born

(5.2.115–20)

Like the play, the shepherd's son—along with his clothes—is born again, under newly gentle conditions. And under these conditions, he is newly recognized. "I know you are now, sir," Autolycus acknowledges,

“a gentleman born” (5.2.121). “Ay,” the clown reiterates for emphasis, “and have been so any time these four hours.”

Through his belated new birth, the shepherd’s son’s also acquires a paradoxical new precedence over his father. When the shepherd echoes that he, too, has now been gentleman born—“And so have I, boy”—the son offers a correction of sorts, by way of clarification. “So you have,” he agrees,

but I was a gentleman born before my father, for the King’s son took me by the hand and called me brother; and then the two kings called my father brother; and then the Prince my brother and the Princess my sister called my father father; and so we wept; and there was the first gentleman-like tears that ever we shed

(5.2.123–29)

The new recognition of gentility not only rewrites birth but reverses its order, elevating first the adopted/illegitimate daughter, and then the legitimate son, before finally lifting the father. And, as the shepherd points out, their newborn gentle status has behavioral as well as social implications. When Autolycus asks to be forgiven for his previous failure to recognize their gentility, the shepherd seconds his urging. “Prithee, son, do,” he insists; “for we must be gentle now we are gentlemen” (5.2.136–37).

In keeping with his new gentility, the shepherd’s son accepts Autolycus’s apology and includes him in the Sicilian court’s expanded family outing to admire Hermione’s statue. “Hark,” he tells him; “the kings and the princes, our kindred, are going to see the Queen’s picture. Come, follow us” (5.2.156–57). This extended gentle family—“our kindred”—will crucially form part of the larger audience to the play’s final revelations of kin and kind. As Perdita recognizes her mother, and Leontes recognizes his wife, audiences can finally recognize the play’s evolving form as tragicomic, ending finally with the renewed fertility of comedy despite its seasons in the dark underworld of the tragic. Knowing kin proves prerequisite not only to continuing kingdoms, but to knowing—and acknowledging—the fertile, mongrel literary kind that the play embodies.

Unknowing Kind: A Response to Tanya Pollard

Zachary Lesser

Tanya's excellent essay on knowing, and not knowing, in *The Winter's Tale* draws attention to the intertwined philological histories of words such as *kin* and *kind*, *gens* and *gentle* and *genre*, words that classify and create groupings based on family, race, class, and literary form. In the Renaissance, tragicomedy was the privileged dramatic form for thinking about such questions, and it insistently posed difficult questions about kinship. In his *Compendio della poesia tragicomica* (1601), the Ferrarese professor and poet Battista Guarini theorized this modern genre, significantly unmentioned by Aristotle, through repeated comparisons to the kinds of mongrel or "bastard" mixture that Tanya traces through *The Winter's Tale*. But he gives these mixed forms a positive valence: "Aren't the horse and the donkey two distinct species? Of course. And yet from both springs a third species, the mule, which is neither one nor the other. The same can be said of the wolfdog [*licisca*] born of the wolf and the dog, which is neither wolf nor dog."¹⁴

For Guarini, what is crucial about tragicomedy is that the two parts that make up the generic "third species," comedy and tragedy, cannot be separated, just as the mule cannot be turned back into a horse and a donkey. This is "the difference between a *mixed* being and a *composite* being. In the former, the parts lose their form, and form a third thing quite different," whereas anything that is merely *composed* is simply a conjoining of the two in which each part can still be distinctly perceived. Again invoking the gendered and sexualized aspects of this mixing that Pollard highlights in *The Winter's Tale*, Guarini writes: "The first can be compared to the fabled Hermaphrodite ... The second is like a man who hugs a woman, and thus after their embraces they each return to their own form."¹⁵

Do Shakespeare's late plays conform to Guarini's fully theorized understanding of tragicomedy? To me, they seem closer to John Fletcher's more humble remarks to the reader of *The Faithful Shepherdess*: "A tragicomedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing but in respect it wants deaths, which is inough to make it no tragedie, yet brings some neere it, which is inough to make it no comedie: which must be a representation of familiar people, with such kinde of trouble as no life be questiond, so that a God is as lawfull in this as in a tragedie, and meane people as in a comedie." Fletcher knew Guarini's treatise, and he likewise

stressed the *mixed* nature of tragicomedy against the merely *composite* nature of a play that simply alternates between scenes of “mirth and killing” or features characters “sometimes laughing together, and sometimes killing one another.”¹⁶ We do not know if Shakespeare read Guarini, but plays such as *The Winter’s Tale*, *Pericles*, and *The Tempest*—as well as *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure* earlier—are largely in accord with Fletcher’s simple definition of the genre, if not always with Guarini’s more classicized strictures. But Shakespeare does not quite conform even to Fletcher: poor Mamilus is brought near death, and then he actually dies.¹⁷ And to the extent that we can speak, as Pollard does, of the two “halves” of *The Winter’s Tale*—the tragic half in Sicilia and the comic half in Bohemia—then the play certainly fails Guarini’s test, looking more like the man and woman embracing than the fabled hermaphrodite.

We still have a blind spot for tragicomedy in Shakespeare’s work, I think. Since Edward Dowden popularized the term “romance” for these plays, we have, often grudgingly, used this categorization, which emerges out of a biographical framework that sees Shakespeare mellowing in old age after the harshness of his great tragic period. Dowden is an easy target for critique, although our own evaluations of Shakespeare’s plays often depend just as much, if in a more submerged way, on the chronology of their writing, with its inevitable link to biography.¹⁸ The “word which interprets Shakespeare’s latest plays,” for Dowden, is “reconciliation.”¹⁹ Pollard’s essay draws our attention to the less resolved aspects of these plays—the failure to recognize kinship in *gens* and genre, the “mongrel literary kind that the play embodies.” What of our own mistaking of kind? What do we miss when we think of Shakespeare’s plays as somehow of a different kind than other Jacobean tragicomedies?

Part of what we miss, I think, is just the kind of promiscuous mixture that, as Pollard shows, was at the heart of the genre of tragicomedy, and that (not coincidentally) provided Guarini with many of his key metaphors. The mixture here is of Shakespeare with his theatrical world, a world in which tragicomedy was the coming genre, in which playwrights such as George Wilkins and John Fletcher were establishing themselves on the scene (the latter with more success than the former), and in which collaborative playwriting was normal. Of the great collaborators Beaumont and Fletcher, Aubrey famously wrote that they “lived together ... lay together ... had one wench in the house between them, which they did so admire; the same cloathes and cloake, &c., between them.” Here too a gendered and sexualized mixing stands in for the mixing of literary kind, the “wonderfull consimilitude of phansey” that Aubrey saw in the playwriting

couple.²⁰ Rather than imagining a serene Shakespeare who, “whatever his trials and sorrows and errors might have been ... had come forth from them wise, large-hearted, calm-souled,” we might imagine him reenergized by new collaborations and new genres.²¹ Shakespeare the tragicomedian is a playwright who seeks out younger men to whom he can apprentice himself, seeing in Wilkins an up-and-comer with a good tale in *Pericles*, and learning from Fletcher, already emerging as the master of the genre, in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. This is a Shakespeare who—at what would turn out to be the end of his career (whether or not he knew it at the time)—finds a rejuvenated creativity in mixed authorship, mixed forms, mixed genres.

The First Folio’s “Catalogue of the seuerall Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies contained in this Volume”—already an antiquated generic taxonomy—cannot (or refuses to) account for this creative mixing, dispersing *The Winter’s Tale*, *The Tempest*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Merchant of Venice* in the comedies and *Cymbeline* in the tragedies, and omitting entirely *Pericles* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*. The mixtures of genre and of collaborative authorship are a blind spot in Heminges and Condell’s vision of Shakespeare, a foundational unknowing of kin and kind that persists in often submerged ways in our own work. Did they simply not recognize these plays as tragicomedies, or Shakespeare as a tragicomedian, blinded as they may have been by the brilliant work in this genre of their current in-house dramatist Fletcher? Did they already view Shakespeare as belonging to an earlier era of theater, one significantly different from the 1620s when tragicomedy as practiced by Fletcher and Massinger and others was well established on the English stage?²² Or did they instead think that the modern mixed genre was not sufficiently serious and elevated to justify inclusion in this monumental volume of their beloved (and best-selling) author? Whatever the reason for the exclusion of tragicomedy from the First Folio, it has helped to ensure that the recognition scene that Pollard sees at the end of *The Winter’s Tale*—not the recognition of kin that takes place onstage but the recognition by the audience of the play’s mixed genre—is one that we need to continually restage.

Difficult Loves: A Response to Tanya Pollard

Aveek Sen

Tanya's fine piece on "parental misrecognition" in *The Winter's Tale* made me reread the play and its source text, Greene's *Pandosto*, after a long time. But, more importantly, before going back to the books, I closed my eyes for a while and thought about my *memory* of the play across a "wide gap of time." I remembered how moved I was every time I studied the play more than three decades ago, and what a high I got during my student years while watching it on stage, or even fragmentarily on television. In an obvious way, the statue scene—with its transcendent trickery—dominates those memories. But I also recalled another reaction—a very particular kind of disappointment—that I would feel, inevitably, at another much-anticipated moment in the play. It was a romantic, almost Elian, sense of anticlimax when no theatrical realization quite matched up to the fleeting yet bottomless complexity of what reading never failed to conjure up. This is when Florizel presents Leontes with Perdita in Act 5 as the girl Florizel loves but cannot marry, because she appears to be a shepherd's daughter. Leontes, of course, does not yet know that Perdita is his daughter, although he knows, and recognizes, Florizel as Polixenes's son because the young man so closely resembles his father. It is all happening in the presence of Paulina, in whose gaze the full range of the drama of this cognitive error is being played out.

Even as Leontes finds Polixenes in Florizel's every feature, thus legitimizing Florizel's birth and rectifying his own earlier error of parental misrecognition, Shakespeare weaves into these moments a parallel story of potentially errant *precognition* in Leontes's response to Perdita's beauty. Paulina is quick to point out that the older man seems to be getting improperly aroused by the sight of the girl. "Sir, my liege, / Your eye hath too much youth in't," Paulina tells Leontes, "Not a month / Fore your queen died, she was more worth such gazes / Than what you look on now" (5.1.224–27). Leontes is duly chastised by Paulina's sharper-than-playful reprimand. "I thought of her / Even in these looks I made," he admits to Paulina (5.1.227–28).

So many, too many, things are going on here, telescoped within a few seconds of playing—though not reading, remembering, and imagining—time. A kind of paternal blindness is getting unwittingly corrected into the fleeting risk of another, more terrible, filial mistaking. And for the

audience or reader who knows Greene's *Pandosto*, the memory of how Greene's narrative ends with incestuous lust and suicide, "clos[ing] up the comedy with a tragical stratagem," opens up a corridor of allusive time that is both literary-historical and psychosexually mischievous. Earlier, Leontes had described Paulina as the keeper of "the memory of Hermione" (5.1.59). So, even before bringing Hermione back for Leontes, Paulina skirts the edges of the perverse by presenting Perdita as a visual pre-echo of her mother, the effect of which on Leontes she firmly tries to, yet cannot fully, regulate. Although Greene's ending is invoked and averted, something unspeakable, but not entirely unspoken, has been planted in our imagination and in the play's textual unconscious. So, later when we hear from the Third Gentleman about Leontes "worr[ying] his daughter with clipping her," exclaiming "O thy mother, thy mother" in his unhinged joy-mixed-with-grief (5.2.57, 55), some primary innocence of feeling and action seems to have become irremediably complicated. Nothing can be quite as simple or "lawful as eating" any more (5.3.147).

This took me back to another strange, and easy to miss, father-daughter moment in *Othello*—the tragedy that *The Winter's Tale* revisits as tragicomedy. Desdemona's father, Brabantio, has been roused from sleep and pulled out of bed by Iago to be told that "your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs" (1.1.114–15). And the outraged Brabantio declares, "This accident is not unlike my dream, / Belief of it oppresses me already / Light, I say, light!" (1.1.140–41).²³ What has Brabantio been dreaming of before he awakes to find it true? His language here takes me to Hermione's words to Leontes during her trial: "You speak a language that I understand not. / My life stands in the level of your dreams, / Which I'll lay down" (3.2.81–82) "Your actions are my dreams," Leontes answers (3.2.82). A few lines later, Hermione puts herself again at the heart of a conjugal nightmare that plays itself out somewhere between sleep and waking: "if I shall be condemned, / Upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else / But what your jealousies awake, I tell you / 'Tis rigour and not law" (3.2.111–14).

At these moments, Shakespeare is opening up a space, at once terrifyingly inward and helplessly public, that is, quite literally, dreamlike in its power to distort and determine forms of consciousness, expression, and action. It is a space of fantasy that is at once real in its oppressiveness, yet difficult to translate into the language of theatrical representation or neutralize through the rational operations of justice. Hence, these moments happen more successfully in our imagination as we read the plays, but elude a satisfactory realization on stage, or feel overstated when described in

pieces of interpretive writing. We have to allow ourselves to be slightly sick in our heads and hearts to grasp what Shakespeare is saying, or not saying, about the murkiness of “natural” human relationships at such moments, making it impossible to keep ourselves apart, imaginatively and therefore morally, from the “sickness” of a Leontes, a Brabantio, or an Othello.

Shakespeare, like Leontes at the end of the play, was almost fifty when he wrote *The Winter’s Tale*. Thomas Mann—whose notebooks scrupulously record the amoral, desiring gaze he focused upon his own growing boys—gave himself a fiftieth-birthday present, in 1925, in the form of a story called “Disorder and Early Sorrow.” It is about the disconcertingly “conservative” and possessive tenderness that a forty-seven-year-old professor of history finds himself feeling for his infant daughter, “his little Eve,” as she falls into a sort of infantile infatuation for her much older sibling’s male friend: “This [i.e., the professor’s love for his daughter] was love at first sight, love everlasting: a feeling unknown, unhopèd for, unexpected—in so far as it could be a matter of conscious awareness.” “But he understood more,” Mann continues:

He knows ... that there is something not quite right about this feeling, so unaware, so undreamed of, so involuntary ... There is something ulterior about it, in the nature of it; that something is hostility, hostility against the history of today, which is still in the making and thus not history at all, on behalf of the genuine history that has already happened—that is to say, death. ... His devotion to this priceless little morsel of life and new growth has something to do with death, it clings to death as against life; and that is neither right nor beautiful—in a sense.²⁴

Is not Shakespeare’s death-and-time-haunted family romance poised on the threshold of a similar consciousness? It is an emotion that Leontes could never articulate to himself in the way Mann’s professor of history would, and must therefore be left for us, today’s hapless historicists, to feel and try *not* to put in so many words in what we then go on to write about these beautiful plays, these difficult loves.

NOTES

¹ *The Winter’s Tale*, 5.2.7. All references to Shakespeare’s plays, unless otherwise stated, will be to the *Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. Evans.

² See Kitch, “Bastards and Broad-sides in *The Winter’s Tale*”; on this trope more broadly, see Brooks, *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England*.

³ On problems of knowledge in the play, see especially Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*.

⁴ See the *Oxford English Dictionary*, online, “know,” viewed February 28, 2017.

⁵ I base my word counts on MIT’s online Shakespeare.

⁶ Germanic cousins include Old Frisian *kin*, *ken*, *kon*, Old Saxon *kunni*, Middle Dutch *kunne*, *konne*, Dutch *kunne*, Old High German *chunni*, Middle High German *künne*, *kunne*, Old Norse *kyn*, Danish, Swedish *kön*, and Gothic *kuni*; see *Oxford English Dictionary*, online, “kin”.

⁷ The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s etymological entry for “kin” notes that, “In the Germanic word, as in Latin *genus* and Greek *γένος*, three main senses appear, (1) race or stock, (2) class or kind, (3) gender or sex; the last, found in Old English and early Middle English, but not later, is the only sense in modern Dutch, Danish, and Swedish.” English kin and kind, that is, have developed different aspects of this linguistic family than have some of their Germanic cousins.

⁸ This number includes references to gentlemen in speech prefixes and stage directions.

⁹ This is a Shakespearean record; runners-up include *The Taming of the Shrew*, with 55 instances of gentle, and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, with 54.

¹⁰ See Findlay, *Illegitimate Power*, and Neill, “In Everything Illegitimate.”

¹¹ On the word’s development, see the *Oxford English Dictionary*, online, and McDougall, *Royal Bastards*, esp. 44–48. As McDougall discusses, the notion of bastards as base-born is complicated by the surprisingly extensive history of bastards who attained royalty, most notably William the Conqueror, regularly dubbed “bastardus.”

¹² Later lexical developments have added to these meanings. Definitions in the *Urban Dictionary* include “child born out of wedlock” but focus primarily on the broader derogatory sense of “A person that is irritating or annoying” and heavily feature “A person that has killed Kenny in South Park” (41; also see 2, 6, 20, 25, 28, 37, and sample sentence: “You killed Kenny, You Bastard!!!,” 25).

¹³ See, for example, Wilson, “Nature and Art’ in *Winter’s Tale*.” On the play’s interweaving of botany, fertility, and female bodies, see Tigner, “*The Winter’s Tale*.”

¹⁴ I quote from the edition bound with (but bibliographically independent from) Guarini, *Il Pastore Fido*, sig. A4v: “non sono elleno due distinte spezie quella del Cauallo, & quella dell’animal indiscreto? Certo si: Et pure d’ambidue loro se ne fa la terza del Mulo, che non è ne l’uno, nè l’altro. Il medesimo si può dire della Licisca, di Lupo nata & di cane, che non è ne lupo, ne Cane.”

¹⁵ Guarini, *Il Pastore Fido*, sig. A3v: “la differenza dell’esser misto, all’esser composto. ... Il primo si può paragonare al fauoloso Ermafrodito. ... Il secondo è simile ad huomo, che s’abbracci con Donna, sì che dopo gli abbracciamenti, ciascuno torni nell’esser suo.”

¹⁶ Fletcher, *The Faithfull Shepheardesse*, sig. ¶2v. Compare Guarini's comment that tragicomedy takes from tragedy "il pericolo, non la morte" (*Compendio*, sig. A6v).

¹⁷ On Fletcher's definition in relation to Shakespeare's plays, see Zucker, "Late Shakespeare," 352–70, 354–55.

¹⁸ See McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing*, esp. 54: "despite the various critiques that have been offered of it, Dowden's basic understanding of the late plays has continued to underscore readings of those plays right up to the present"; on the importance of establishing the chronology of the works, see de Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim*.

¹⁹ Dowden, *Shakspeare*, 361.

²⁰ Aubrey, *Brief Lives, chiefly of Contemporaries*, 1. 95–96; see Masten, *Textual Intercourse*.

²¹ Dowden, *Shakspeare*, quoted in McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing*, 53.

²² For the idea of Shakespeare (and other turn-of-the-century dramatists) as embodying a "golden age" or earlier moment in theatrical history, see Farmer and Lesser, "Canons and Classics."

²³ Whereas all references to *The Winter's Tale*, as in Tanya Pollard's essay, are to the *Riverside Shakespeare*, all references to *Othello* are to the Arden edition, ed. Honigsmann (2016), in line with other references to that play in this volume.

²⁴ Mann, "Disorder and Early Sorrow," 574–75.

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ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

MIT Online Shakespeare. <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/index.html>

The Oxford English Dictionary. www.oed.com

Urban Dictionary. www.urbandictionary.com/

Chapter 6

The Epistemology of Violence in *The Comedie of Errors*

Stephen Spiess

E. Dro: Say what you wil sir, but I know what I know,
That you beat me at the Mart I haue your hand to show;
If y^e skin were parchment, & y^e blows you gaue were ink,
Your owne hand-writing would tell you what I thinke.¹

LET US BEGIN IN language, bracketing, however momentarily, Shakespeare's rich and allusive dialogue from its contexts in performance. Indeed, when the Ephesian Dromio reunites with his master at the outset of Act III, he distinguishes the aural signifier from the imprinted sign, suggesting that this owner's "hand-writing"—those incessant "blows" inked upon his "skin"—exceeds all speech, providing the truest register, the authentic record, of this slave's reality at the "hand[s]" of a sadistic superior. It is not the first time that he construes their lingua franca in such terms: speaking with Adriana in an earlier exchange, Dromio cites violence as Antipholus's preferred language, a mode of communication that both conveys and confuses "meaning":

- Adr:* Say, is your tardie master now at hand?
E. Dro: Nay, hee's at too hands with mee, and that my two eares
can witnesse.
Adr: Say, didst thou speake with him? knowst thou his minde?
E. Dro: I, I, he told his minde vpon mine eare,
Beshrew his hand, I scarce could vnderstand it.
Luc: Spake hee so doubtfully, thou couldst not feele
his meaning.
E. Dro: Nay, hee strooke so plainly, I could too well feele his
blowes; and withall so doubtfully, that I could scarce
vnderstand them. (TLN 319–30)

As literal and metaphorical significations collide, this master's "blowes" express/impress such potent meanings that his slave can barely "vnderstand them": not only comprehend them, that is, but withstand or stand under their affective force. By the start of the third act, Ephesian Dromio apparently has given up trying to "know" his owner's "minde," and instead confirms his own reality, as felt and experienced, through a moving assertion of what we might now call standpoint epistemology: "I know what I know ... the wrongs I suffer, and the blowes I beare" (TLN 629–35).² How we interpret such knowledge claims—how we entertain, disown, and/or laugh at them—informs the play's comedic and cultural work.³

Dromio of Ephesus's dignified avowal, however subtle, proves especially poignant as a precursor to the scene's famed lock-out exchange, arguably the play's preeminent depiction of urban disorder.⁴ Here, elite masculine rage again emerges as a putatively humorous response to problems of signification. Barred entry to his house, Ephesian Antipholus first slanders and threatens his kitchen maid, then pledges to "break ope the gate" that impedes his progress (TLN 729).⁵ As scholars have long argued, this *mise-en-scène* conjoins spatial dynamics to sexual symbolism: locked out of his house and his wife's company, Antipholus fears that he has lost control of Adriana's enclosed body.⁶ While Balthasar calls for "patience" and prudence (TLN 746–49), Antipholus immediately rejects such counsel, suggesting that his dwelling has become a brothel,⁷ his wife a whore. He then threatens to destroy the former and, in a later scene, to disfigure the latter: "Dissembling harlot ... with these nailes, Ile plucke out these false eyes, / That would behold in me this shameful sport" (TLN 1389–93). It is a visceral, horrifying charge, perhaps all the more unsettling to playgoers who know that the play's manifold misrecognitions, doublings, substitutions, debts, and "blowes" are, of course, *erroneous*: not only mistaken, that is, but *wandering*—moving beyond the mark to encompass alternative bodies and unintended meanings.⁸ When Adriana adopts this hostile idiom moments later, castigating Dromio as a "prating peasant" and "slauce," then pledging to "breake thy pate a-crosse" (TLN 354–57), audiences are reminded not only that the languages of Ephesian violence incorporate a range of speakers and addressees, but comprise a plethora of diverse marks, utterances, and actions including, but not limited to, the application of physical force.⁹ How such violence signifies, to whom, and in what contexts, is what interests me here. While scholars have long insisted that such aggressions not only are funny, but must be so, I adopt an alternative standpoint, one that reads the play's aggressions not simply as a mark of dramatic farce, but also as a trace of, and

expected reply to, problems of signification and sexual knowing in the age of Shakespeare. Pursuing such an inquiry will take us from the houses of Ephesus and pages of scholarly criticism to the streets and brothels of early modern London and back again. What, I ask, are the relations of violence, signification, and (un)knowability in *The Comedie of Errors*? What is at stake in preserving or confronting the insignificance of the play's manifold "blowes"? What does such violence render legible when allowed to signify as aggression or suffering? What might it suppress or conceal?

For some scholars, to begin in this manner signals my own erroneous misrecognitions, an absurd misreading of genre and performance history. *The Comedie of Errors* is, for Russ McDonald, "a superlative example of dramatic farce, a simple form of comedy designed chiefly to make an audience laugh."¹⁰ Its "laughter," Harold Bloom contends, "is always benign,"¹¹ and to "misread [the play's] genre," for John Creaser, "is to misread the work completely."¹² I thus risk appearing foolish—"analyz[ing] delicate sentiments while the characters knock heads"¹³—or worse yet, puritanical, in pursuing this line of inquiry: "the principle vice" within a farcical universe, Creaser argues, "is to lack a robust sense of humor" and forget that these "simplified characters are *scarcely touched* by moral or even physical pain" (83, emphasis added). To know and understand this particular play, therefore, seems to require a willing suspension of horror, if not also an affective break between playgoers and players: one must not identify with the stricken Dromios, the threatened Adriana, or the beaten maids (TLN 1643).¹⁴ One must look past the violence: see it as insignificant, meaningless, or, at best, as meaning something other than the type of felt, injurious "hand-writing" that Ephesian Dromio so vividly describes.

Such displacements extend to scholarly accounts that purport to take the play's violence seriously. While Douglas Lanier reads *The Comedie of Errors*'s many "marks and rituals—faces, clothing, beatings, warts and moles, meals, rings and gold chains" as troubling contemporary ideologies of essentialist or authentic identity,¹⁵ his insights nevertheless conflate the material gift with the delivered blow, evacuating the corporeal consequences of "breaking" into another's body or domestic space (TLN 730)¹⁶: wounds or fractures emerge as simply one of many means through which various characters materialize their socioeconomic statuses and relations. Working in another hermeneutic tradition, Barbara Freedman insists that the play's "aggressive impulses" are central to its "characteristic humor," contending that "the key to farce ... is that we laugh at violence."¹⁷ Yet Freedman's psychoanalytic approach likewise displaces attention from the violence staged, locating its meanings in alternative bodies and identities.

The play's manifold beatings, she argues, function as a type of screen fantasy that cloaks the true object of aggression: Egeon, that wandering father whose primal transgression (failure to fulfill his marital debt) is denied in the drama's manifest content and paid out in "random acts of punishment" bestowed upon other heads and bodies.¹⁸

This inexorable movement away from the play's onstage aggressions permeates even performance studies, where scholars have long recognized, and productively troubled, the hostilities and coercions staged in other early modern comedies, most notably *The Taming of the Shrew*.¹⁹ But critics who foreground such "serious" concerns in *The Comedie of Errors*, according to Robert S. Miola, "ever run the risk of overreading and of wandering far from the theatrical experience of this bright and lively play."²⁰ Allowing certain meanings to signify in this play, we are told, not only threatens theatrical pleasure but incurs unnecessary interpretive labor: the over-reading scholar as comedic trope. At the same time, however, such prescriptions both assume a unified audience "experience" of, and response to, onstage confrontation,²¹ and elide the critical maneuvering necessary to bypass or explain away their unpredictable resonance(s). Thus, where McDonald insists that "meaning comes about in farce ... [through] what an audience sees and hears in the main action,"²² his farcical reading of the lock-out episode circumvents bodies and actions staged to secure meaning by way of the scene's rhetorical structure: the episode "depends for its hilarity on the stichomythic exchanges between those outside ... and those inside" the enclosed house (86). Along with an antanaclastic exchange between Adriana and the Syracusan Dromio, such linguistic play, McDonald argues, supersedes embodied action as guarantor of its farcical tone. Why does language supplant the signifying body *here*? And in what ways? While privileging the dialogue's formal structure, that is, McDonald concomitantly overlooks its content, including dialogue that, we shall see later in this essay, discloses alternative understandings of what such confrontations might signify or render visible.

My purpose here is not to dismiss some of the play's most influential studies, but rather to consider how an epistemology of violence understands *The Comedie of Errors*, including its significance within the scholarly tradition. As I have begun to suggest, such an epistemology (what is known or knowable about its violence, how this knowledge is produced, through what categories, and by whom it is accepted) is ineluctably linked to those material processes through which early modern meanings are made to signify (and not signify) in particular discursive contexts. Such processes, Valerie Traub reminds us, encompass our own hermeneutic practices and

decisions, as do assumptions regarding what can be known or discerned through that which appears insignificant, absent, or unknowable in early modern England.²³ Farce and psychoanalysis, for example, offer particularized signifying frameworks that structure what can or cannot be detected within, and known through, the mistaken blows of *The Comedie of Errors*. But violence, as Dromio of Ephesus reminds us, possesses many marks and connotations, dependent in part upon one's own situated experiences and subjectivities. With what remains, therefore, I trace out one such experience, encoded within the lock-out exchange, that encourages consideration of how violence connects to problems of sexual knowing on the streets and stages of early modern London. My intention here is neither to privilege the contextual above the theatrical, nor to elevate a materialist approach over other methodological investments; rather, I hope to suggest how thinking of humorous violence as a problem of, *and as a response to problems of*, signification and knowability might reframe what can be seen, heard, known about, and known through this early modern play. I thus ask not whether the play is funny, but what kind of cultural and epistemological work is performed by violence that audiences are encouraged to see as ordinary, insignificant, and indeed laughable.

For all its apparent excesses, farce has long been associated with those most basic, recognizable, and even banal aspects of everyday life. Far from the exceptional or extraordinary worlds of Shakespearean tragedy, for example, comedies such as *Errors*, according to Harry Levin, derive much of their energy from the productive proximity of the ordinary to the absurd. Revisiting Philip Sidney's famous contention that comedy provides "an imitation of the common errors of our life," Levin suggests that hilarity originates in our partial recognition of onstage error: our sense that "all this has happened before, and may happen again ... [for] patterns of behaviour are predictable."²⁴ We laugh, he intimates, because staged mishaps so closely parallel those confusions common to everyday life. If farce amplifies such uncanny play,²⁵ its meanings nonetheless depend, potentially all the more so, on the representation of familiar routines and rituals: dining with one's spouse, purchasing gifts, paying debts, fretting over misplaced affections or infidelities, speaking with family members, dealing with jealousies both petty and profound, serving one's social superiors, and beating one's subordinates.²⁶ Roman New Comedy, moreover, provided a basic urban and spatial template for these anamorphic renderings of daily life, situating a range of familiar social types (*senex amans*, *adulescens*, *virgo*, *matrona*, *meretrix*)

within a typical municipal setting.²⁷ Framed by an often rudimentary *scaena* (two or three doorways associated with purportedly distinct social spaces, such as a citizen's house, priory, and brothel), city figures would navigate their identities and relations partly by way of their spatial practices or transgressions.²⁸ Whether in Plautine Rome or on the Elizabethan stage, theatrical meanings thus depended partly on playgoers' ability to recognize the presumed social and symbolic import—the “proper” significations—of such stock components, so as to fully appreciate their subsequent distortions, misrecognitions, or resignifications. What might early moderns have seen or heard in the spaces, rituals, and misunderstandings of Shakespeare's Ephesus? How did these scenes signify, to whom, and in relation to what problems of knowledge or knowability?

If we cannot account for all playgoing perspectives, we do know, at very least, how Dromio of Syracuse recognizes disorder at the gate. When his Ephesian counterparts, twin and master alike, threaten to “beat the doore down” of their newly inaccessible domicile,²⁹ this substitute servant is charged by Adriana to identify “who ... keeps all this noise?” By way of response, he declares her “towne is troubled with vnruely boies” (TLN 703–9). Misreading Ephesian Antipholus, that citizen, husband, and master of the house, as an “vnruely” adolescent, Syracusan Dromio's short rejoinder provides a comedic frame for the confrontation in progress. But this response likewise encodes more troubling connotations, accessing a long-standing cultural practice fueled by precisely the spatial, sexual, and gendered anxieties on display in Antipholus's confused fury.

Among the many ritual disorders of England's festive calendar, perhaps none proved as dangerous and potentially destructive as London's so-called “apprentice misrule”: urban disturbances that “occurred,” according to Paul S. Seaver, “almost as regularly as the seasons.”³⁰ Roger Manning, for example, posits “at least 96 insurrections, riots, and unlawful assemblies [occurring] in London between 1517 and 1640,” with 35 such “outbreaks of disorder” taking place in the final two decades of Elizabeth's reign.³¹ Although the most notorious of these revolts took place in 1517 and 1617, such uprisings were especially prevalent in the early 1590s, including skirmishes significant enough to draw the Lord Mayor's attention in 1590, 1592, 1593, and 1595.³² Social and gender historians have long debated the causes, aims, and demographics of these insurrections, but it is clear that such rioters, overwhelmingly male, predominantly *vented* their ire upon persons (aliens, foreigners, servingmen, pages, women, prostitutes, and actors) and spaces (brothels and theaters) that threatened social distinction.³³

These practices extended to university and college towns, including Cambridge, where a small but, for our purposes, salient confrontation took place in 1594, sometime before the first known performance of *The Comedie of Errors* at Gray's Inn, London, on December 28 of that year.³⁴ In that case, a group of young gentlemen—"a motley crew of students and marginal inhabitants of the town"—were accused of despoiling and flogging an unnamed woman, whom they had encountered at night, alone, and "hiding under a hedge."³⁵ Suspecting the woman was a prostitute, the men escorted her to Smoke Alley, a disreputable part of town, in an apparent effort to verify her illicit sexual status. Failing to secure any such confirmation, they then dragged her into a nearby field, debated her punishment, concluded that "shee should be whipt," tore her clothes, flogged her with a belt, and besmirched her with dirt—perhaps even feces. Recounting this episode in her study of early modern masculinity, Alexandra Shepard focuses on the men's assumption of extra-judicial power: the manner in which they appropriated "the regulative stance of those in authority" and "mimicked [authorized] forms of judicial punishment designed to shame and humiliate disreputable women" (98). Although I concur with this reading, I am more interested here in the episode's epistemological, rather than socio-symbolic, inflections: in the men's (failed) attempt to ratify their counterpart's sexual status prior to exacting "popular justice." Why the detour to Smoke Alley? What, precisely, did the men hope to secure there? Would the episode have turned out differently, had they elicited that desired speech act—that evasive locution, which haunts the court record as an (absent) guarantor of the woman's socio-sexual identity? Perhaps not, but in this remarkable account, one point appears indisputable: the men's violent attack upon, and degradation of, this unknown woman is inextricably linked to their desire—and failure—to resolve her sexual status.

Such links between masculine violence and sexual unknowing proved all the more conspicuous by the turn of the seventeenth century, when London apprentices began ritualistically attacking the (supposedly unmarked) houses of prostitution they patronized.³⁶ Traditionally occurring on Shrove Tuesday, and thus directly preceding the onset of Lenten temperance, these "brothel house riots" often mixed symbolic renunciation with "ritualized yet very real violence," as "windows were smashed, houses were invaded, and their occupants assaulted."³⁷ Civil authorities, who had long overlooked this "ancient administration of [popular] justice on Shrove Tuesday," were thus forced to prosecute what traditionally had been accepted as licensed expressions of festive abuse.³⁸

Given their powerful spatial, gendered, sexual, and moral connotations, these practices captured the imagination of a range of early modern writers, including Thomas Dekker,³⁹ John Webster (with Dekker),⁴⁰ Sir Thomas Overbury,⁴¹ Thomas Middleton,⁴² Ben Jonson,⁴³ Shackerly Marmion,⁴⁴ and Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, who explicitly linked the destruction of “houses of iniquitie” to the “boies [of] merry London.”⁴⁵ John Taylor, for example, paints a frightening panorama of unruly violence in *Iack-a-Lent*, an early seventeenth-century pamphlet that describes “youths arm’d with cudgels, stones, hammers, rules, trowels, and hand-sawes,” who “put Play-houses to the sacke, and Bawdy-houses to the spoyle, in the quarrell breaking a thousand quarrels (of glasse I meane) making ambitious brickbats breake their neckes, tumbling from the tops of lofty chimnies, terribly vntying houses, [and] ripping vp the bowels of feather-beds.”⁴⁶ Although Taylor is perhaps best known as a satirist, his description largely parallels that offered by Edward Sherburne, who, in recounting the infamous 1617 riot—which included an attack on the newly assembled Cockpit playhouse (theaters were another favored target of the rioters)—noted:

The Prentizes on Shrove Tewsday last, to the number of 3. or 4000 committed extreame insolencies; part of this number, taking their course for Wapping, did there pull downe to the grownd 4 houses, spoiled all the good therein, defaced many others, & a Justice of the Peace coming to appease them, while he was reading a Proclamacion, had his head broken with a brick batt. Th’ other part, making for Drury Lane, where lately a newe playhouse is erected, they beset the house round, broke in, wounded divers of the players, brokes open their trunckes, & whatt apparell, bookes, or other things they found, they burnt & cut in peeces; & not content herewith, got on top of the house, & untiled it, & had not the Justices of the Peace & Sherife levied an aide, & hindred their purpose, they would have laid that house likewise weven with the grownd. In this skyrmishe one prentise was slaine, being shott through the head with a pistoll, & many other of their fellowes were sore hurt, & such of them as are taken his Majestie hath commaunded shal be executed for example sake.⁴⁷

Whether instances of festive abuse, subcultural rites of passage, or, later in the century, concentrated expressions of political discontent,⁴⁸ such riots were undeniably hazardous; as social historians have long acknowledged, the symbolic dimensions of any such ritual, even when framed within the temporal bounds of festivity, did not preclude “real and sometimes

irreparable damage.”⁴⁹ Symbolic violence, furthermore, enacts a form of social discipline, even and perhaps especially when construed as frivolous or insignificant. As Keith Thomas notes, although licensed misrule offered “a safety-valve for the release of accumulated tensions,” it also operated as a mechanism for reasserting traditional hierarchies through focused expressions of violence against particular subjects.⁵⁰

Did such violence also serve to navigate, if not resolve, unsettling knowledge relations in the era? Following the suppression of legal prostitution in London by royal proclamation in 1546, such a ritual demarcation of illicit sexual identities and spaces encourages consideration of how acts of physical, emotional, and symbolic violence emerge to mediate problems of sexual knowing.⁵¹ Whereas the conspicuous visibility of the Bankside brothels enabled a sense of social and geographic containment, however illusory, prior to suppression, the Henrician proclamation altered the material and linguistic signs by which London prostitution had been and could be known. Beforehand, “allowed stew-houses had signs on their fronts, towards the Thames, not hanged out, but painted on the walls.” What happened when these signs were painted over and “this row of stews in Southwark was put down by the king’s commandment”?⁵² As I argue elsewhere, without the clear signs and white walls of Southwark, all London buildings became potential sites of sexual commerce, including the Royal Exchange, Westminster, and St. Paul’s Cathedral.⁵³ The violent marking of illicit spaces and personae, therefore, may have emerged as a mechanism for addressing, if not resolving, the epistemological quandaries of early modern whoredom: how does one know a whore is a whore? That one’s wife is not whore, nor their house a brothel? Thus, while London’s brothel house riots arguably post-date *The Comedie of Errors*,⁵⁴ the play can be seen as participating in a larger history of (in)significant English violence, even anticipating how such riotous discontent would morph and evolve into the type of focused, domestic assaults that would come to characterize seventeenth-century apprentice misrule. As historical analogues, furthermore, the anxieties and practices mapped above assume heightened significance in the contexts of a Shakespearean play permeated by the languages of “harlotry,”⁵⁵ and one that derives much of its dramatic energy from the incessant unsettling of conventional identities, boundaries, and spaces.

Ephesian Antipholus encounters precisely such a crisis of signification when he returns home to find another man in his stead. Calling for “an iron Crow” at the frenetic apex of the lock-out exchange (TLN 745), he presumably intends to use this crowbar to “break ope” his door, not

his wife—but the object of this warring blow remains unstated in the dialogue. Although the dynamics of the scene urge us to move on, to look past the unsettling possibilities at play here, we might benefit precisely by resisting that call. What kinds of knowing and unknowing, we must ask, are necessary for this scene to work? What kinds of knowledge did the various wives, servants, husbands, apprentices, and harlots in attendance bring to such an exchange? What did they know about insignificant violence—domestic and theatrical, sexual and spatial—and how did the relations between such knowledges inform their affective responses to these staged confrontations? Playgoers have already heard Adriana declare that, should her husband “but *heare* I were licencious,” he would “spit at me, and spurne at me, / And hurle the name of husband in my face, / And teare the stain’d skin of my Harlot brow” (TLN 526–31, emphasis added). When he threatens to blind his wife, moreover, audiences are reminded that Antipholus of Ephesus certainly is capable of such brutality, however displaced onto other bodies or objects: revisiting their earlier lock-out, Ephesian Dromio recalls that his “bones” bore “witness” to, and “felt the vigor of,” his master’s subsequent “rage” (TLN 1364–65). *If* early moderns laughed here, what might such affective responses signify?⁵⁶ What would they render knowable or unknowable? What kind of cultural work would they perform?

My intention here is not to resolve the epistemology of violence in *The Comedie of Errors*, but rather to offer a preliminary sketch that might prompt discussion of how such an epistemology operates within and beyond this particular early modern play. What, the play urges us to ask, are the relations of unknowing and humorous violence? What is our role, as present-day critics, in accounting for the cultural work of these (im)material blows? What might we learn by (mis)recognizing their theatrical significance? That audiences are encouraged to laugh at violence in *The Comedie of Errors*, indeed that we likely to do so, I want to suggest, is neither erroneous nor insignificant; rather, the sights and sounds and furies of humorous violence may prove all the more meaningful because they seem to insist, indeed to depend, upon their own meaninglessness.

What Does the Slave Know? A Response to Stephen Spiess

Supriya Chaudhuri

At virtually any time in *The Comedy of Errors*, a slave is being beaten. Violence is a language, written on the victim's body, and, through this urgent and moving set of reflections, Stephen prompts us to think again, and differently, about the play. "I know what I know," says Ephesian Dromio: "That you beat me at the Mart I haue your hand to show; / If y^e skin were parchment, & y^e blows you gaue were ink, / Your owne hand-writing would tell you what I thinke" (TLN 629–32).⁵⁷ Despite Dromio's "spelling out" of the metaphor of beating as writing, the assertion is full of difficulties, and I take my cue from Stephen in pausing for a moment to consider them. The slave's knowledge of his master's abusive violence is absolute, and implicitly subjective and inalienable: "I know what I know." Philosophically, we might describe such knowledge as rooted in *qualia*, the phenomenal properties of pain. But Dromio is not willing to hold this knowledge as private and nonrepresentational. Rather, he sees it as expressed in visible inscriptions, readable by others. If the marks left on his body by Antipholus's beatings had been a text bearing a distinctive signature, his master would have recognized his own hand, and—by an epistemological leap—learned what is in the slave's mind, *what he thinks*. How could the master's handwriting "tell" him this? Dromio stops short of saying that Antipholus would have shared the knowledge he claims for himself as the prerogative of the beaten slave, but he does assert that the author of the text grasps its meaning for the recipient. Does this follow? Only if—and this would be an argument rooted in the epistemology of violence—we claimed that to know what the slave thinks is *no more than to know that he suffers*. The abuser recognizes his hand by its inscription but also by its effect: what the abused body *thinks* is the pain it feels.

But, in another sense, Dromio knows "wrongly," as the handwriting on his body is not that of his master Antipholus of Ephesus, but that of Antipholus of Syracuse. Does violence have a signature? Although Ephesian Dromio is regularly beaten ("I haue serued him from the houre of my Natiuitie to this instant, and haue nothing at his hands for my seruice but blowes"; 1311–13), he is hard put to understand the blows he has just received. For his master "strooke so plainly, I could too well feele his blowes; and withall so doubtfully, that I could scarce vnderstand them" (328–30; also meaning that he was nearly knocked over).

This failure of understanding afflicts Syracusan Dromio as well. When asked whether he knows why he is beaten, he responds “Nothing sir, but that I am beaten” (436). As Elaine Scarry argues, intense bodily pain has the power to obliterate all other feelings and sensations: it presents the here-and-now of existence in the body, requiring the minute-by-minute acknowledgment that “I am in pain *now*.” But this acknowledgment is not a statement or representation, as such pain involves, so Scarry argues, a “shattering” of language: it cannot be expressed except in inarticulate cries.⁵⁸ Even Wittgenstein, who is the author of a considerable excursus on pain, and whether we can experience the pain of others, says in the *Blue Book*: “The difference between the propositions ‘I have pain’ and ‘he has pain’ is not that of ‘L. W. has pain’ and ‘Smith has pain.’ Rather, it corresponds to the difference between moaning and saying that someone moans.”⁵⁹ What then do the Dromios know? What kind of knowledge is proposed through the use of that subjunctive construction (“if/then”), with its jumps and elisions? If violence were *writing*, the author would be a *reader*: does it follow, then, that he could read not just the body but the mind of the slave? For the writing is his, not the slave’s: what does it tell him?

I found this problem so compelling that I could scarcely tear myself away from it. I recalled, too, that in “A Writing Lesson,” Lévi-Strauss had read writing as a form of violence, a tool of forced enslavement—an argument elegantly countered by Jacques Derrida, more or less to the effect that violence was already a kind of writing.⁶⁰ But the point at issue here is surely not this metaphysical coincidence. Rather, as Stephen brilliantly urges, the point is an epistemological one. The question of what the slave knows is necessarily succeeded by: *what do we know*? In a play about error, we constantly run the risk of knowing wrongly: specifically, of reading violence wrongly. The standard interpretation reads it as laughable, comic violence, its excess and unreason generically linked to farce, and specifically to the Plautine source. In fact the beaten slave is more a feature of the *Amphitruo* than of the *Menaechmi*: we might recall the wordplay on “verbero” (I beat) when Mercury threatens to beat Sosia, and Sosia takes the word as a substantive meaning “a whipped slave, a scoundrel.”⁶¹ If Mercury’s violence is commonly read as an instance of robust Plautine humor, so too, as Stephen documents, we are repeatedly told by editors and commentators that to identify with “the stricken Dromios, the threatened Adriana, or the beaten maids” would be to misread *Errors* completely, by missing its humor and “wandering far from the theatrical experience of this bright and lively play.”⁶²

Is the play's violence then only a violence of the letter? Displaced onto language, violence becomes no more than a rhetorical effect, a gesture towards genre. Both Dromios, skilled punsters and quibblers, appear to be fully conscious of the extent to which language can absorb the physical energies of an exchange, often deflecting their masters from the physical realm to the verbal, from the application of the hand to the use of the tongue. Unfortunately, the reverse holds true as well, especially in a play where the main characters are prone to using their hands before they use their heads. There is desperation in Dromio of Syracuse's efforts to jest his way out of trouble after having been beaten by his master for jesting out of turn: "Thinkst y^e I iest? hold, take thou that, & that" (418). Dromio of Ephesus, beaten by the wrong Antipholus and threatened by his mistress at home, also bears witness to this usurpation of the tongue's function by the hand: "so that my arrant due vnto my tongue, I thank him, I bare home vpon my shoulders" (348–50).

Stephen suggests that we are encouraged to laugh at these critical moments of miscommunication by the play's own investment in the epistemic work done by violence in early modern England, from brothel house riots to everyday domestic abuse. Violence signifies by forcibly putting its signature on what cannot be known, but is simultaneously unauthorized and disowned. Still, it leaves its marks behind, as, however much we might try to dematerialize it, to convert it into language, it remains stubbornly material. This led me back to that initial problem of knowledge: who knows what the slave knows? The "readability" of texts turns out to be betrayed, not just by the prevalence of error, but by the fact that language does not do the work it promises. At the heart of *The Comedy of Errors* is a dense unknowability: violence inscribes its marks everywhere, but leads us astray, or misses its object. Laughter is an uncertain, "unsettling" reaction to the fact that the other cannot be understood.

Narrating Violence: A Response to Stephen Spiess

Adam Zucker

It might be useful to see violence as an epistemological black hole: a powerful point in space and time that organizes vast clouds of matter and energy around it. The closer you get to the black hole of violence, the more the fabric of your own experience shifts or is warped by it. Touching it might destroy you entirely. But, like the swirling arms of a galaxy, productive and sometimes beautiful reaches of time and space extend outward from a violent act. We do our best to ignore that distant, dark singularity at the center of the Milky Way, and we can easily believe ourselves to be untouched or unaffected by it. But rest assured: everything we currently know will vanish into a black hole, eventually. The beatings doled out in farce and life will capture us all. A great deal of believable comedy rests in the error of imagining otherwise.

The older critics Stephen (gently) takes to task in his essay for ignoring the darker ramifications of the beatings in *The Comedy of Errors* would disagree with me. Farce, they would claim (begging the question of the play's genre), demands a kind of lighthearted acceptance of abusive acts. And, I confess, there are times that I see things their way, especially when it comes to the comedy of my contemporaries. I have laughed at *South Park*, *Archer*, and many, many other comic depictions of things that, if they were really happening, would be appalling. But I think Stephen is absolutely right in this case to draw our attention to the empty places of meaning that violence fills up, but never explains, in Shakespeare's play. The beatings in *The Comedy of Errors* (both threatened and delivered) have always horrified me. They carry a pathetic excess or difficulty of signification along with them that can be hard to sort through, especially at our historical remove. As Stephen's work on the resonance of apprentice attacks on brothels in Tudor and Stuart London demonstrates, one way to solve this problem is to tell our own stories about the kinds of violence we know occurred in Shakespeare's home. Narrative—on stage, in criticism, in the classroom—might help us decide how we ourselves want to make meaning out of an unknowable force.

With that in mind, I want to turn briefly to an easily accessible archive of violent narratives from Shakespeare's London, the Middlesex Sessions records, which can be found either in print or online, where

they are keyword searchable.⁶³ A cursory, fairly haphazard glance at one sliver of them reveals the ubiquity of criminalized and juridical violence: in a fortnight, between April 19 and May 3, 1613, the court handled actions pertaining to three stabbings, a shooting, two physical assaults upon constables, and, perhaps most pertinently for Stephen's work (to say nothing of the Allwits in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*), the carting and whipping of William and Thomasine Barnewell, a husband and wife team accused of running a clandestine brothel out of their own home in the parish of St.-Giles-in-the-Fields.⁶⁴

Fair enough. But, if beatings (major and minor), riots (small and large), and corporal punishments (fatal and non-) were clearly a part of ordinary life in the London of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, their emplacement in entertainment, that is, in ostensibly pleasurable texts and performances, shades into the difficult workings of ideology and human sociability. Telling stories, even funny stories, to one another about violent acts creates the cosmic lightshow around the hurt and anger of a lashing or a stabbing. Levin, McDonald, and others who rely on the genre of *The Comedy of Errors* as they make sense of its rough play do not want to peer past the glowing plasma, as, they believe, it is the entire point of the thing. But, to understand how violence works at the center of drama and history, we should, I think, ask ourselves questions about the interplay between its performance and its surrounding, defining narratives. What is the process through which fights or whippings turn into and color entertainment?

One way to work through this problem is to be as explicit as possible about what we are doing when we transform the bare-bones facts of historical violence into our own critical narratives. Stephen's essay, for example, made me want to know more about the intimacies shaped by early modern sexual commerce and community policing, especially in the context of a play that works so hard to disrupt and recompose fraught familial bonds. *The Comedy of Errors* is a play about brothers who are not quite brothers beating each other up in ways that are not quite fraternal. Antipholus and Dromio (both the Ephesian and the Syracusan pairs) grew up together from infancy. Lacking their twins, they had each other. Their simmering frustrations and sudden outbursts will be familiar to anyone who grew up with a sibling close in age, though the distributions of power often shaped by birth order are transformed (both by Plautus and by Shakespeare) into the master-servant pairings of New Comic slavery.

What does all this have to do with the whipping of bawds and whores and the destruction of whorehouses? Inspired by Stephen, I have used the term “intimacy,” above, to help clarify my own sense of the epistemological difficulties. It could serve as a keyword in a discussion of the propensity for violence to cause instructive problems of meaning for those who experience it. What, for example, would it feel like to be William and Thomasine Barnewell, who, the Sessions Records Calendar reports, were “to be openly whipped at a cart’s tail from the prison to their own house in the parish of St. Giles’ aforesaid, and there remain for some space to the end the inhabitants may take notice of them, and from thence to the prison again”?⁶⁵ What would it feel like to be their neighbors, taking notice of the couple being whipped together in front of their house?

I have neither the space nor the imaginative capacity to answer those questions in useful ways, but I would love to read the work of someone who does. Critics of sloppy historicism have, for years now, complained about its tendency to move too quickly in an argument from the details of a local experience to the broadest conclusions about historical process. But the anecdotal narrative of the classic New Historicist might usefully be understood as formally analogous to the comic or farcical dramatic script. It works on us for a reason. What if we see the archive, as Ellen MacKay has recently suggested, as a performance enacted by our encounter with it?⁶⁶ Instead of asking whether or not the violence in *The Comedy of Errors* is meaningful in a serious way (it is!), what if we brought the fact of its creation to bear on the stories we still tell about violence?

NOTES

¹ *The Comedie of Errors*, TLN 629–32. All citations drawn from Shakespeare, *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*, and refer to that edition’s through-line numbering (e.g., TLN 222). In using the Folio, I aim to supplement and, to a limited degree, illustrate and perform this essay’s governing argument regarding the epistemological and affective dimensions of early modern signification, both in that era and our own. Put differently, I hope that readers will consider their own affective responses to these potentially confusing, alienating, and/or estranging formulations, as well as to the desires—for stability, clarity, legibility, and “correction”—that such affects may foster. An exception has been made for the long and short “s,” which are translated in modern type. My thinking in this regard is especially indebted to Masten, *Queer Philologies*.

² Developed primarily by feminist philosophers in the social sciences, standpoint epistemology examines how one's epistemic perspective (what one knows, how one knows it, what one accepts as knowledge, one's access to knowledge, one's ability to advance truth claims, etc.) relates to, and is informed by, one's particular experience as a sexed, gendered, classed, and racialized subject. For a useful overview, see Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology." See also Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 201–38.

³ On the interrelations of violence, epistemology, signification, and embodiment in *The Comedie of Errors*, see also Akhimie, "Bruised with Adversity." While our analyses share much in common, Akhimie demonstrates how the play's various somatic "marks" can be read to illuminate the "physical and epistemological violence that racial ideology effects" (187), while I connect them to problems of sexual knowing and unknowing. These perspectives, I submit, are not incommensurate; rather, and in conjunction, they urge attention to the complex cultural work performed by comedic violence, both in this particular play and early modern England more generally. Furthermore, both essays suggest that the experiences, meanings, and (in)significances of early modern violence were informed by multiple axes of identity, including but not limited to those of race, class, age, gender, and sexual practice.

⁴ On the lock-out scene as apogee of the play's subversive energies, see Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 128–29; Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy*, 19–38.

⁵ Citing Nell/Luce as a "minion" and "baggage," terms that suggest her subordinate and potentially illicit sexual status, Ephesian Antipholus promises "You'll crie for this," e.g., for failing to let him inside (TLN 691–702).

⁶ Candido, "Dining Out in Ephesus"; Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy*, 29–30. On conceptual homologies between women's chastity and domestic enclosure in early modern England, see Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories"; Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*; Boose, "The Taming of the Shrew." As Traub notes, although the "body enclosed" aptly "encapsulates the prescriptive power of patriarchal doctrine" in early modern England, it nonetheless "fails to capture the ways that women asserted their desires and will—their agency—within such ideological constraints" ("Gender and Sexuality in Shakespeare," 131).

⁷ Speaking with the Duke in the denouement, Ephesian Antipholus laments "This day (great Duke) she shut the doores vpon me, / While she with Harlots feasted in my house" (TLN 1680–83).

⁸ On error and *errare* in the play, see Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy*, 19–35.

⁹ On violence as a "pervasive means of wielding power, preserving order, controlling behavior, and resolving conflicts" that included, but was not restricted to, acts of physical aggression in the period, see especially Dolan,

"Household Chastisements," citation 204. See also Boose, "Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds" and "*The Taming of the Shrew*"; and Detmer, "Civilizing Subordination."

¹⁰ McDonald, "Fear of Farce," 80.

¹¹ Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, 26.

¹² Creaser, "Forms of Confusion," 93. See also Coleridge's famous contention that "farces commence in a postulate, which must be granted" (*Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, 99). On *The Comedie of Errors* as a merger of the "seemingly incompatible genres" of romance and farce (48), and how this intersection informs the play's representation of subjectivity, see van Elk, "This sympathized one day's error."

¹³ McDonald, "Fear of Farce," 80.

¹⁴ Cf. Detmer, "Civilizing Subordination," 274, who argues that plays such as *The Taming of the Shrew* encourage, perhaps even coerce, viewers to identify with onstage aggressors: "to enjoy the comedy of the play, readers and viewers must work to see domestic violence from the point of view of an abuser—that is, they must minimize the violence and, at the same time, justify its use."

¹⁵ Lanier, "Stigmatical in Making," 306.

¹⁶ Variations of "break" appear nineteen times in the First Folio, producing a powerful verbal echo that further reinforces the play's emphases on fracture and dislocation.

¹⁷ Freedman, "Errors in Comedy," 238, 236. See also Freedman, "Egeon's Debt" and *Staging the Gaze*.

¹⁸ Freedman, *Staging the Gaze*, 104. My thinking here aligns with Parker (*Shakespeare from the Margins*, 80), who "concur[s] with readings of the play that, like Freedman's, emphasize fragmentation and multiplicity rather than wholeness or mastery," yet "contend[s] that we need to read this fragmentation and disjunction more concretely and historically in relation to its contemporary contexts, rather than as a transhistorical lesson in the pitfalls of reading for mastery or a panhistorical experience of Lacanian *méconnaissance*."

¹⁹ In addition to works previously cited, see Hodgdon, "Katherina Bound" and Dolan's Bedford/St. Martin's edition, Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*.

²⁰ Miola, "The Play and the Critics," 13.

²¹ Dugan ("Aping Rape," 216) reminds us that even the play's most "sinister" inferences, including allusions to cross-species rape, may have offered erotic pleasure to early modern playgoers.

²² McDonald, "Fear of Farce," 81.

²³ Traub, *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*. On the hermeneutics of insignificance, see also Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, 158–87.

²⁴ Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors," 113–14.

²⁵ For alternative accounts of the play's uncanny elements, see Freedman, "Egeon's Debt" and *Staging the Gaze*, and Creaser, "Forms of Confusion."

²⁶ Although domestic violence, especially wife-beating, was subject to increased scrutiny during the period, the beating of servants and children remained a largely accepted, if not entirely unquestioned, practice in both contemporary prescriptive literature and stage drama. In addition to Dolan, "Household Chastisements" and Detmer, "Civilizing Subordination," see Amussen, "'Being Stirred to Much Unquietness.'"

²⁷ On the reception of Roman New Comedy in early modern England, see Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy*, and Salkeld, *Shakespeare Among the Courtesans*, 13–16.

²⁸ Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy*; Womack, "The Comical Scene."

²⁹ As social and gender historians have long noted, doorways and doorsteps "carried considerable symbolic weight" in early modern England, particularly as metaphors for women's sexual (in)continence. See Gowing, "Freedom of the Streets," 137; Walker, "Rereading Rape"; Orlin, "Women on the Threshold."

³⁰ Seaver, "Apprentice Riots," 32. As historians have long argued, the designation "apprentice" likely masked a far broader field of participants. See especially Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*.

³¹ Manning, *Village Revolts*, 187.

³² Seaver, "Apprentice Riots"; Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, esp. 1–22.

³³ Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability*; Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*; Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World*; Lindley, "Riot Prevention and Control in Early Stuart London"; Manning, *Village Revolts*; Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*; Seaver, "Apprentice Riots"; Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*; Thomas, *Rule and Misrule in the Schools of Early Modern England*.

³⁴ Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, 115–17.

³⁵ Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 98–99. The participation of university students in this encounter reflects not only the capacious parameters of early modern "apprentice misrule," but also, and following Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom*, encourages further consideration of how lived experiences of (in)significant violence in one institutional and discursive context—the English grammar school—may beget and inform related practices in other spatial, temporal, gendered, and epistemological contexts.

³⁶ Although early modern writers incessantly link such disturbances to apprentice misrule, Griffiths (*Youth and Authority*) argues that such evidence may reflect an ideological consensus, rather than an established truth, that masks a far more diverse field of participants.

³⁷ Lindley, "Riot Prevention," 109–10. See also Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, and Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World*, 96–103.

³⁸ Thomas, *Rule and Misrule*, 32–33.

³⁹ Dekker, *The Seuen deadly Sinnes of London*: "they presently (like Prentises upon *Shrove-tuesday*) take the lawe into their owne hands, and doe what they list." See also *A Tragi-comedy: Called, Match mee in London* (1631), where Bilbo, on Malevento's behalf, promises to visit Gazetto and "beat downe the doore; and put

him in mind of a Shroue-tuesday, the fatall day for doores to be broken open." For a broader analysis of Shrove Tuesday allusions in another Dekker work, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, see Strazinsky, "The End(s) of Discord."

⁴⁰ Dekker and Webster, *North-vvard Hoe* (1607): *Baud*: "the prentises made a riot vpon my glasse-windowes the Shroue-tuesday following and I miscaried."

⁴¹ Overbury, *Sir Thomas Ouerburie His Wife* (1616). See entries for *A Roaring Boy* ("Hee is a *Supervisor* to Brothels, & in them a more vnlawfull reformer of vice, then Prentises on Shroue-tuesday") and *A Maquerela, in plain English, a Bawd* ("Nothing ... daunts her so much as the approach of Shroue-tuesday").

⁴² Middleton, *The Owles Almanacke* (1618): "Shroue-tuesday falls on that day, on which the Prentices pluck'd downe the cock-pit, and on which they did alwaies vse to rifle Madam *Leakes* house at the vpper end of *Shoreditch*." See also the first antimasque of Middleton's *The Inner-Temple Masque* (1619), where Doctor Almanac calls "forth *Shrovetuesday*, one 'a the silenc'st Bricke-Layers," and declares "Tis in your charge to pull downe Bawdyhouses, / To set your Tribe aworke, cause spoyle in *Shorditch*, / And make a Dangerous Leake there, deface Turnbul, / And tickle Codpiece Rowe, ruin the Cockpit, the / Poore Players ne're thriud in't, a ma Cōscience some Queane pist on vpon the first Bricke."

⁴³ Jonson refers to the Shrove Tuesday in several of his works, including *Epicoene* (1620), where Clerimont notes that Morose "would haue hang'd a Pewterers' prentice once on a Shroue-tuesdaies Ryot, for being o' that Trade, when the rest were quit." See also Mrs. Otter's exchange with her husband at the start of Act III: "Neuer a time, that the Courtiers, or Collegiates come to the Houfe, but you make it a *Shrouetuesday*!" During the antimasque in *Time Vindicated to Himselfe* (1623), Fame notes that "lawlesse prentices, on a Shrouetuesday ... compell the Time to serue their riots: / From drunken Wakes, and strutting Beare-baytings, That fauor only of their owne abuses," while, in *Bartholmew Fayre* (1631), Lanthorn Leatherhead connects "the rising o' the prentises" to the "pulling downe the bawdy houses there, vpon *Shroue-Tuesday*."

⁴⁴ Marmion, *Hollands Leagver* (1632): *Trim*. "Good sir, let's thinke on some reuenge, call vp / The Gentlemen prentises, and make a Shrouetuesday."

⁴⁵ Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Knight of the Burning Pefile* (1613): *Raph*: "Fare-well all you boies in merry *London*, / Nere shall we more vpon Shroue-tuesday meete / And plucke downe houses of iniquitie." On Beaumont as one of the play's "parents," see Masten, *Textual Intercourse*, 20–27.

⁴⁶ Taylor, *Iack a Lent* (1620). See also Taylor's *A BAVVD* (1635): "On former Shrove-Tuesdaies, when the unruly Rabble did falsely take vpon them the name of *London* Prentices, then two or three thousand of those boot-haling pillaging Rascalls, vvould march madly to the habitations of the most famous *Bavvds*, where they would robustiously venter [*sic*], breaking open Doores, battring downe

Wals, tearing downe tyles, pulling downe windowes, rending Trunkes, Chestes, Cupboords, Tables, and Bedsteads in pieces; ripping and emboweling Bolsters and Featherbeds, ravishing her mayds or stale virgins, spoyling all they stole not, and steeling what they liked, beating the grave *Bavvd* and all her female vermine, most unmanly and vnmannerly.”

⁴⁷ Further evidence is provided by John Chamberlain, who, in a letter to Sir Dudley Carleton, notes that the apprentices “entered the [playhouse] and defaced yt, cutting the players apparel all in pieces, and all other theyre furniture and burnt theyre play bookes and did what other mischiefe they could.” Both letters are reprinted in Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 54–55. On the historiographic challenges of reconstructing these riots, particularly regarding participants and their motives, see Collins, “Repertory and Riot.”

⁴⁸ Harris, “The Bawdy House Riots of 1688.”

⁴⁹ Bristol, *Carnival and Theater*, 33.

⁵⁰ Thomas, *Rule and Misrule*, 32–33.

⁵¹ On early modern sex as a knowledge relation, see Traub, “Gender and Sexuality in Shakespeare.”

⁵² Stow, *A Survey of London*, 371.

⁵³ Spiess, “The Measure of Sexual Memory.”

⁵⁴ Although riots specifically aimed London’s brothel houses are absent from judicial records predating 1598, Archer (*The Pursuit of Stability*: 3) contends that this “lack of references” should not be taken to indicate a “lack of such disturbances.” Rather, he argues, such *aporia* may suggest that popular modes of justice were implicitly tolerated as long as they were not perceived to represent “a serious threat to authority.” Archer goes on to note that the “discovery of many more riots during the seventeenth century reflects not increasing disorder but increasing documentation.”

⁵⁵ Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins*, esp. 65–68.

⁵⁶ The most famous early modern account of the play appears in the *Gesta Grayorum* (1594), which describes a performance at Gray’s Inn on December 28, 1594: “after such Sports, a Comedy of Errors (like to *Plautus* his *Menechmus*) was played by the Players. So that Night was begun, and continued to the end, in nothing but Confusion and Errors: whereupon, it was ever afterwards called, *The Night of Errors*.” Reprinted in Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, 115–17. To my knowledge, there exists no record from the early modern period that connects audience laughter to specific scenes in the play.

⁵⁷ I follow Spiess in citing *The Norton Facsimile [of] The First Folio of Shakespeare*, ed. Hinman, and its through-line numbering (TLN).

⁵⁸ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 4–5.

⁵⁹ Wittgenstein, *The Blue Book*, 68.

⁶⁰ Levi-Strauss, “A Writing Lesson,” 385–99. Derrida, “The Violence of the Letter,” 128–48.

⁶¹ Plautus, *Amphitruo*, 1.1.180, 89.

⁶² Miola, "The Play and the Critics," 13, cited in Spiess, this volume, 146.

⁶³ See either Jeaffreson, www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/middx-county-records (accessed June 16, 2015), or the more compressed Le Hardy, www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-sessions/vol1 (accessed June 16, 2015). Citations are from the latter.

⁶⁴ These records can be found in print in Le Hardy, *Calendar To the Sessions Records*, 87–116, or online at www.british-history.ac.uk/middx-sessions/vol1/pp87-116

⁶⁵ Le Hardy, *Calendar To the Sessions Records*, 116.

⁶⁶ Mackay, "Feeling Unhistorical," 40–53.

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Chapter 7

Broken English: A Dialogue

Michael Witmore and Jonathan Hope

“To sleep, maybe to dream” and Other Encounters with a Trained Machine

Michael Witmore

Shakespeare's plays and poems have been translated into numerous languages, including Klingon. In the middlebrow world of *Star Trek*, Shakespeare survives far into the future as an exemplar of high culture. A made-up language, sprung from the corner of a twentieth-century television series, becomes yet another conduit for Shakespeare's words—one fiction finding its future in another. Perhaps it is equally impressive that a machine can now “translate” *Hamlet* into and from any of more than one hundred languages. The popular online translation utility Google Translate will take any text—including lines from Shakespeare—and put them into any number of natural human languages. Now one can claim to find Shakespeare better in Finnish, even if there are more than enough Finns who can read *Hamlet* in the original.

Machine translation, which is what Google offers to millions of users a day, has come a long way in the last two years. In late 2016, the *New York Times* reported that Google Translate had made a sudden and unprecedented leap in ability.¹ The jump was due to Google's implementation of a neural network—a branch of artificial intelligence that trains a computer to recognize patterns without supplying the machine with a symbolic “map” of how those languages work (grammars, dictionaries). The *Times* story, which aimed to present artificial intelligence, or in this case “machine learning,” to a popular audience, describes how a native Japanese speaker achieved surprisingly good results when he fed his own Japanese translation of several sentences from Hemingway into the utility and found they could be serviceably translated back into English. Reading the article several months ago, I couldn't help but wonder: Would it work on Shakespeare?

Whenever someone creates a new media form or communications technology, chances are someone will try it on Shakespeare. Although Klingon is not an option on Google Translate (yet), I was intrigued enough with the reports to try the utility out for myself. I pasted the “To be, or not to be” speech into the input window and indicated that I wanted to see it rendered in German. The machine returned the following:

Sein oder Nichtsein—das ist die Frage:
Ob es adliger in den Geist zu leiden
Die Schlingen und Pfeile des unverschämten Reichtums,

Oder Waffen gegen ein Meer von Schwierigkeiten zu
 nehmen
 Und indem ihr euch widersetzt, beendet sie. Zu
 sterben, zu schlafen—
 Nicht mehr—und schlafen gehen wir zu Ende
 Die Kummer und die tausend natürlichen Schocks
 Dieses Fleisch ist Erbe—es ist eine Vollendung
 Devoutly zu wünschen. Zu sterben, zu schlafen –
 Zu schlafen, vielleicht zu träumen. Ay, es gibt die
 reiben,
 Denn in diesem Schlaf des Todes können Träume
 kommen,
 Wenn wir diese sterbliche Spule abgeschliffen haben,
 Muß uns Pause geben.

My German is passable enough to know that the translation is very uneven. “Tausend natürlichen Schocks / Dieses Fleisch ist Erbe” is laughably bad. And what about “Devoutly”? The great Romantic philologist Schlegel added a crucial contrastive particle in his translation of the second clause, “das ist hier die Frage,” and this too is missing. Out of a perverse desire to see how these differences might be compounded, I fed this first effort back into the machine to have it rendered back into English:

To be or not to be—is the question:
 Whether it is more noble to suffer in the mind
 The snares and arrows of the insolent wealth,
 Or take weapons against a sea of difficulties
 And by opposing you, she ends. To die, to sleep—
 No more—and we go to sleep
 The grief and the thousand natural shocks
 This meat is inheritance—it is a consummation
 Devoutly wish. To die, to sleep—
 To sleep, maybe to dream. Ay, there is the rub,
 For in this sleep of death dreams can come,
 If we have abraded this mortal coil,
 Must give us a break.

Weirdly echoing the now absent original, this double translation shows an algorithm struggling with everything from basic syntax to idiom. There is a big difference between “give us pause” and “give us a break.” One would have to look to Breton for something like “This meat is inheritance.” And what about the flatness of, “To sleep, maybe to dream.”

An intriguing feature of the new machine learning techniques is that no one, not an English professor at Princeton nor a Stanford artificial intelligence (AI) researcher, can peer directly into the black box that produces the nifty results. Because neural networks simulate the accumulation of synaptic links occurring in our brains from childhood, an engineer from Google can only point to the gigabytes of “training” data that were used to train the network if he or she wants to explain the results. The so-called “hidden layers” in the system that translate stimuli into responses—here, virtual arrays of neurons that can be trained to “fire” in response to different inputs—are unavailable for inspection in any human-readable form. This is often the case with the work of algorithms: their results can be judged good or bad by a human. The mechanism itself, however, defies representation or narrative. All one can do is recite the recipe itself (the code) and the data on which the network or model was trained.

When we try to understand algorithms, it is easy to be disappointed with explanations of how they work. Critics of machine learning point out that there is a “something for nothing” quality to the way the new neural networks work. Boosted by faster processing and more training data, a trained network can intuit features that can be used to classify images, texts, sounds—anything that contains a pattern. Computer scientists debate the scientific and practical value of the new techniques, although the tide seems to be turning in the direction of “unintelligent” neural networks that train on lots of data when it comes to translation and speech/image recognition. Machine learning techniques work well in situations where there is a lot of variety in the input, where a finite set of rules fails to map the things that need to be discriminated. Why create a dictionary of images, why simulate a natural grammar, if an algorithm can produce reasonable results without one?

Although the efficiencies are impressive, they are in some sense beside the point when it comes to our curiosity about how language works and the ways in which it can be used. We may want to use such networks to classify certain texts, showing for instance that Shakespeare is a more likely author of a given piece of writing than some other early modern author. But the techniques being tried now raise questions that go beyond those of how to reliably divide texts into recognizable classes. If machine learning works well for certain tasks such as translation—works without our knowing why—we glimpse some of what is behind our persistent desire to understand the power of language and the distinct things that it can do. A literary critic may look at this situation and, ignoring the

questions of accuracy, say, “What I want is a *representation* of what the code does with the data, not a recipe for how it was done.”

All of this raises interesting questions about how we might be “flying blind” in the brave new world of machine learning and how, more specifically, some of the human behaviors that we associate with our greatest freedoms and creativity are predicted or modeled by a machine. Consider yet another Shakespearean example. Prior to the moment when Shakespeare wrote his “To be, or not to be” speech (around 1600), it is highly unlikely that anyone—given only that famous phrase—could accurately predict what words would follow. Give a researcher a time machine, endless computing power, and a complete corpus of written and spoken English prior to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and she would find this a challenge. The difficulty is that the training data are insufficient for such a predictive task. What comes next after “To be, or not to be?” Should it be the phrase “That is the question,” or “Ay, that’s the point,” which is the way the speech reads in the earlier quarto edition of Shakespeare’s play? To say what Shakespeare is going to do, you need to have a lot of examples of Shakespeare using words in a Shakespearean way. And, prior to *Hamlet*, there are not enough examples.

But consider now what kind of evidence or training data is available to the Google team and other researchers. As Shakespeare becomes the national poet of England, and as his phrases are repeated thousands, then millions, of times, it becomes almost impossible to hear “To be, or not to be?” and not find “That is the question” nearby.² This particular sequence has been repeated, not only in English, but in the other languages into which Shakespeare has been translated. Translators, in fact, have been attracted to this speech as a crown jewel of Western introspection. Wilhelm Schlegel’s “Sein oder Nichtsein; das ist hier die Frage” is repeated many times as his translation of *Hamlet* enters the canon of German Shakespeare. An algorithm trained on the post-1600 corpus gets to train on better data, both in English and other natural languages. Who knows, perhaps Google Translate will at some point add Schlegel’s “hier” in “das ist hier die Frage,” even if it is blind to the contrastive emphasis of the additional word.

If you are training a translator with a neural network, the slow accumulation of such parallel instances is crucial, which is why it is not surprising that, when one feeds “To be, or not to be” into Google’s tool and double translates it back into English, the opening lines of Hamlet’s soliloquy are almost always right. Here are some examples of the results in several languages:

English–Javanese–Javanese–English:

To be or not to be, that is the question > *Dadi utawa
ora dadi, sing pitakonan*
Dadi utawa ora dadi, sing pitakonan > To be or not to
be, that is the question

English–Arabic–Arabic–English:

To be or not to be, that is the question >
أن تكون أو لا تكون، هذا هو السؤال
To be or not to be, that is the >
أن تكون أو لا تكون، هذا هو السؤال
question

English–Finnish–Finnish–English:

To be or not to be, that is the question > *Ollako vai
eikö olla, että on kysymys*
Ollako vai eikö olla, että on kysymys > To be or not to
be, that is the question

Now look at a few double translations of less famous parts of that speech:

English–German–German–English:

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune > *Die
Pfeile und Schleudern des wütenden Geschicks*
Die Pfeile und Schleudern des wütenden Geschicks >
The arrows and slings of furious fate

English–German–German–English:

The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to >
Die Kummer und die tausend natürlichen Schocks
Dieses Fleisch ist Erbe
Die Kummer und die tausend natürlichen Schocks
Dieses Fleisch ist Erbe >
The grief and the thousand natural shocks
This meat is inheritance

The initial translation task, starting with “To be, or not to be,” is less likely to be garbled. This is a very famous line (quoted frequently in the corpus) and is relatively straightforward syntactically, lacking figurative substitutions. But the phrase “That flesh is heir to” is a very unusual formulation

which few machines can handle. I doubt even an inept human translator, supplied with a profusion of dictionaries, could come up with “This meat is inheritance.”

Google Translate stumbles on Shakespeare, who might be taken as an exemplar of poetic unpredictability. (How could a person this creative be predictable?) There is nevertheless something impressive about the results here. The Googlers have found an interesting way of formulating the problem of predictability and, indirectly, the question of what makes different types of language (or language use) distinctive. The team first approached the problem by thinking about recognizing entities in images—things such as cats or faces. Quoc Le, a member of the team, asked, If I throw away a portion of an image and ask a machine to reconstruct the original only from what is retained, how long will it take that system to learn what the best (most predictive) elements of images are that lead to good reconstructions?³ How, without being told in advance, can a machine select the features of an image that recur? As results of every reconstruction effort can be compared for similarity to the original image, which is retained, there is an inbuilt way of experimenting or cycling through random “subtractions” in order to learn which are most predictive. This approach is representative of the so-called anti-symbolic school of AI: the machine is not looking to build a map of the things it encounters so that it can navigate the world as we navigate using the symbolic contents of our knowledge. It simply looks to predict what will happen based on what it has already “seen.”

One can think of this same process, which the Google team applied to images and languages, being applied to Shakespeare. Given the complete works of one of the most creative individuals ever to have used the language, what words, phrases, or sentences could be used to reconstruct the text if others went missing? A deep-learning algorithm begins to recognize a cat in millions of YouTube videos because it sees cats often. The evidence of thousands of images helps the machine guess which features—eyes, mouth, tail—and in what configuration tend to get repeated and, crucially, form together into a distinct and repeatable whole. So, if Shakespeare writes, “to sleep, perhaps to dream,” the full corpus of English print might help the machine to guess, “Aye, there’s the rub,” even if it has no idea what those words mean.

These techniques are making their way into literary studies. Some of the same thinking that informed the translation and image recognition work at Google led to the creation of the “word embeddings” algorithm known as Word2Vec.⁴ Word2Vec grabs short sequences of words from

collections of texts and, using machine learning to train a model, maps how collocates (words that appear near each other) are distributed in the corpus. The technique builds on an idea made memorable by John Firth, who said that “you shall know a word’s meaning by the company it keeps.”⁵ What is particularly interesting about Word2Vec is that a model trained with this algorithm seems to encode cultural bias or directionality. Every word is represented by a vector or string of properties that locates it in a finite number of dimensions. The vector can be described, geometrically, as an arrow leaving the origin in a three-dimensional space and pointing to a particular word. Other words sit nearby and can themselves be identified by their own respective vector arrows. The number of dimensions in which words are “arrayed” here tends to be much greater than three, which means that the model itself cannot be visualized directly. But there are ways of looking at neighborhoods of words that result, and, within these neighborhoods, there appear to be directionalities: some parts of the cluster will “lean” male, others female. Animals might have associations with particular religions or geographies. There can be obvious moral or gendered directionalities attaching to clusters of words associated with traits or behaviors.

One can sample millions of ten-word sequences of text in the full corpus of EEBO-TCP and create a model that captures dynamics that we would recognize as gender, social class, and geography. No one tells the algorithm to look for those things, but the “space” in which words get arranged in the model—a model no one can inspect—cannot help but register the biases and “predictabilities” that the historic use of our language encodes. If you are talking about a “king,” you are also likely talking about a “male.” By a trick of something called “vector addition and subtraction,” you can traverse the direction from “male” to “female” and then backtrack (or subtract) the arrow you first traversed from “king,” and you will arrive at “female.” The names of literary characters, some with names often repeated in this corpus, will also acquire neighboring associations. If you use the word “Iago,” you are likely talking about someone who is “evil”: they are neighbors. And, if the word “evil” is often used around the word “subtle” in early modern English—as it is—Shakespeare’s formulation, “subtle Iago,” may be more predictable than we might think hundreds of years later.

I do not want to dwell here on how machine learning finds predictability in different domains. To the extent that anything has features that co-occur—semantic patterns in sentences or cat eyes in video frames—there are ways a machine can learn to isolate and predict those features.

When the techniques are applied to a training corpus of translations, a machine can recognize the language in which a text is written, even if it has never seen that text. Similarly, a machine can guess which cognate words, phrases, or sentences in a target language correspond to those found in the initial text. Set aside for the moment the fact that these “translations” are often infelicitous or plain wrong. They are significantly better than random guesses, to the point where millions of human beings rely on Google Translate every day. The fact that this tool has become indispensable does not mean that literary language, or literary translation, is about to be sidelined. From the standpoint of a reader, I see no substitute for a good translation by someone who is also a compelling stylist in the target language. If I want an English translation of *Anna Karenina*, I will still reach for that of Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky.⁶ But, if I am translating a Russian news source, I might be willing to start with a machine.

Machine learning may tell us very little about the complexities we prize in literary language of the sort we associate with Shakespeare. But what if we turn our attention to a more personal case? Suppose an algorithm inspects every sentence I have written over the course of my adult life; it takes these “training data” and compares them with another corpus of sentences written by every other English speaker. All of my telegraphic text messages (“K, see you soon”) are included. So too are my notes to self (“Examine title page of F2 for Thursday”) and all of the sentences in the books I have written. On the basis of these labeled data, a machine might learn to guess correctly whether a new sample of text originates with me. Indeed, some future version of Google Translate might be able to take any sentence written by someone else and rewrite it in my own style, as if my style were another one of Google Translate’s “target languages.” What would my *Hamlet* look like? What would I want to know about any machine that could produce this result?

I would want to know, first and foremost, what a machine had to learn in order to sound like me. I would want to discover something about myself—via my style—that I could never intuit or predict, precisely because I cannot know all of the features that make my writing my own. I doubt that an algorithm could produce a satisfying *Hamlet* in my own voice, and I recoil at the idea of reading it. I doubt, too, if that translation would teach me what I want to know. For, if one opens up the black box of the algorithm and inspects the training data, one would find only a recitation of every datum the algorithm encountered and the iterative re-weighting of the neurons that those encounters produced. There is a great difference between seeing what a machine did and saying what all of that means.

To get at the latter, I need a representation of the process—something more than a digest—that exemplifies the blindingly fast sequence of events that I do not yet understand. But here, precisely because I have entrusted the process to a machine whose operations defy symbolic representation, I come up empty handed. Machine translation becomes practical when it avoids the symbolic representation of language, for example by abandoning the creation of a grammar or master set of dictionaries. Leave behind symbolic representation, and you get functionality, perhaps even precision. But I am looking for something else. Would it not be easier to give a sample of my writing to a stranger and ask, What do you notice about this person's writing?

The thought experiment points to an unintended effect of our desire to know what we are giving away of ourselves when we speak or use language. That desire is a desire to grasp what we know but cannot describe about our distinctive uses of language; the desire aims at the blind spot where a literary or linguistic self hides. Faced with a machine that has become the perfect mimic, we would find little to satisfy what you might call the humanistic drive. Correctly identifying a set of instances of this or that class of symbol use—personal style, genre, register, language—only deepens our curiosity about what makes any such class distinctive. When I ask what makes a given language behavior recognizable, I want an answer that is *itself* symbolic, a description that references some picture of the world. The prize here is a map of the territory and the writer's place within it. I might indeed learn "something new" from machine learning and the weird mirror it holds up to life. That mirror is not so much a reflection of "what I actually do" when speaking or writing, but a reflection of what I want from any description that makes those actions intelligible to me or others. Understanding that desire and the conditions under which it might be satisfied is itself a worthy task, even if machine translation remains an amusing goad to literary life.

The Inheritance of Meat

Jonathan Hope

We are not looking at ourselves when we try to understand how we use language. We want to understand more of “what is really there” when someone uses language, and there are many sources of insight into that problem. The fact that sometimes a machine can help does not change the nature of the insight.

In the series of experiments above, Mike argues that just because machines can become good at picking out and so translating words from one language to another does not mean they understand what makes those words distinctive. When we look at the points at which machine translation breaks down—insolent wealth, or the inheritance of meat—maybe we become aware of what “distinctive” might mean in relation to language. It strikes me that the point, however, is that we are the ones who have to say that this or that set of features contributes to the distinctiveness of a text, and the fact that a machine helps does not invalidate the result. There are some things that, once seen, can then be described, and this represents an advance in knowledge—even an expression of what Mike calls the “humanistic drive.”

Consider the situations in which scholars try to identify the features that make Shakespeare’s texts “distinctive.” This might be literary scholars seeking to describe his characteristic use of images or experiments with genre, or it might be attribution scholars seeking “tells” which allow us to identify the author of a text. These are not really different activities, as they each posit a “distinctive” Shakespeare which can be isolated from a context: despite the hostility that has often existed between “traditional” and “attribution” literary studies, they are in fact both solidly Romantic in their attachment to the unique, identifiable author, using language in a way qualitatively different from “the rest.” Only Shakespeare would use metaphor this way, only Shakespeare uses these n-grams. Only Shakespeare.

Yet this focus on qualitative difference, instantiated as it is in school and university curricula where Shakespeare—only Shakespeare—is typically studied in isolation, and conferences and subject organizations where “Shakespeareans” meet to talk to other “Shakespeareans,” is not only a false representation of how literature works: it also misunderstands language. The inheritance of meat is the point where we see the system of language functioning: synonyms, polysemy, which makes alternates available on the

paradigmatic axis, but also context, the syntagmatic, which makes some of the choices impossible, or unlikely. Because the real, the interesting distinctiveness about Shakespeare is not qualitative: it is quantitative. He is distinct not by kind, but by degree.

In our work together, Mike and I collaborated with a computer scientist who used machine learning techniques to identify the words that best distinguish Shakespeare from his peer playwrights. The starting question was not, “Which words make Shakespeare special?” It was, “Which words, if I find them present or absent from a text, give me the best indication that that text is by Shakespeare?” The results were interesting. If a play is written by Shakespeare, it will, in comparison with those of any of his peers, contain *relatively more* of the words “say,” “speak,” “go,” and “did.” Conversely, a play by Shakespeare will use *relatively fewer* of the words “can,” “only,” “hope,” “may,” “sure,” “first,” “all,” “must,” “yes,” “yet.” A machine learning technique created a classifier for Shakespeare—essentially, a weighting of certain words (in abundance or deficit) that predicts whether or not Shakespeare wrote a particular text. We could ride “shotgun” alongside the algorithm to see how the many different scenarios or weightings it had to consider before arriving at this high-performing set of feature weights. Why would we want to, though? The point of the exercise is not that we can say what the algorithm means, but to justify its findings based on its known successes in other contexts. Once that is done, we can contextualize the results in whatever more or less humanistic way we want. There are two ways we can go with this: we can speculate on why Shakespeare is, *relatively*, more fond of imperatives than his peers; and/or we can think about the fact that the thing that is distinctive about Shakespeare is a set of *relative* shifts in the frequencies with which he uses a common set of words.

These are both interesting things to think about: maybe the first is the beginning of an explanation for why so many people (us included) are convinced that Shakespeare is “better” than any of his contemporaries—and “better” by some considerable margin. Maybe the second thought, though, is more important in its implications: whatever the margins of “better,” Shakespeare is using the same language—because language is very exactly a shared system, not a set of unique practices found in one user. To take a slight tangent for a moment, the Romantic, qualitatively distinctive account of Shakespeare has delivered us into the hands of the “Shakespeare as word-coiner” myth, which takes first citations in the *OED* as evidence of first use and holds Shakespeare up as world-champion inventor of words. The deep desire here is for Shakespeare to be free of the system of

language—so free he creates his own words. Of course, this is to ignore the fact that word-coining obeys systemic laws of morphology, never mind the fact that almost all of the words claimed for Shakespeare can be found in writings earlier than his. Fundamentally, the attraction of this myth is the way it sets Shakespeare apart: qualitatively different from the drones who just use the words he mints. He produces value; we circulate it.

A Marxist critique of this “economy” of new words would point out that in fact Shakespeare simply “owns” the means of distribution. He is not a champion producer of words, but a very efficient circulator of them—taking the products of the system and boosting their visibility. Turning a profit. What we want to be a qualitative difference is in fact a quantitative one.

I have my own history with *do*. In my first book, *The Authorship of Shakespeare's Plays*, I used this feature and others to identify Shakespeare as the author of certain portions of *Pericles* (and his contemporary John Wilkins as the author of others). Because Shakespeare learned English in the 1560s and 1570s, he favored a certain set of uses of *do* as an auxiliary verb. For example, he, relatively, is more likely to produce sentences such as “I do believe” or “I did say” than those born later in the century (or us today). In modern English, we no longer use this construction, preferring “I believe” or “I said.” When I see that a new machine learning classifier identifies a feature—“did”—as a predictor of Shakespeare, I can confirm from my own experience that this is an important insight. I had to discover Shakespeare’s distinctive use of this feature the hard way, counting all instances of auxiliary *do* in Shakespeare’s plays by hand. Based on that confidence, I am more receptive to the other findings: that Shakespeare favors words such as “say,” “speak,” and “go” in a similar way. And because I came to this historical difference through the theories of historical sociolinguistics, I was interested in it as a quantitative difference expressed across the linguistic system, rather than as a qualitative difference expressing Shakespeare’s distinctiveness.

With that fuller picture in place, I can begin to think about the distinctive scenarios in Shakespeare’s plays that may require a character to speak these words, or to leave out others. Why does Shakespeare fail, relative to others, to use the words “can,” “only,” “hope,” “may,” “sure,” “first,” “all,” “must,” “yes,” and “yet” as frequently? We can say that, at the level of the 500+ plays we have studied as representative of the early modern dramatic corpus, the differences we observe are “because” the text is by Shakespeare—and we can hypothesize that the systemic differences are produced by the context: Shakespeare’s place of birth, his gender, his age,

all features which affected the precise version of English he acquired as a child. But, of course, the systemic “explanation” does not explain everything. It sets up the parameters within which Shakespeare works—and, yes, limits him in as much as it sets some things beyond his “natural” language and places other things inside it. We are all “prisoners” of the linguistic system, though most of the time we are unaware of the boundaries, as it is a large prison, and the walls tend to be transparent. When we come up against something like the “the meat is inheritance,” we suddenly see that there is a wall where we had not previously thought of walking—and the wall might tell us something about the structural principles of the enclosure itself.

NOTES

¹ Lewis-Kraus, “The Great A.I. Awakening,” n.p.

² On variants of “To be, or not to be” in early printed editions of *Hamlet*, see Shore, “Shakespeare’s Constructicon,” in reference to Peter Stallybrass.

³ Lewis-Kraus, “The Great A.I. Awakening,” n.p.

⁴ On word embedding models and the implementation of Word2Vec, see Schmidt, “Vector Space Models for the Digital Humanities.” For the origins of the technique, see Mikolov et al., “Distributed Representations of Words and Phrases and Their Compositionality.”

⁵ Firth, “A Synopsis of Linguistic Theory 1930–1955,” 11.

⁶ Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*.

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Chapter 8

Conscience Doth Make Errors: The Blind Spot of Shakespearean Quotation

Zachary Lesser

ON THE WEBSITE “YAHOO! Answers,” people can post questions about anything and receive answers from anyone. Some questions are about Shakespeare, and not surprisingly some are riddled with errors, such as the one from “Michaela” shown in Figure 8.1.

Here, both Michaela and “ConcernedCitizen” get quite a bit wrong.¹ Michaela claims that the quotation “is from Macbeth,” and Concerned Citizen agrees with her. At a deeper level, many scholars have insisted (although we may not agree with them) that “conscience” in this line does not have the familiar moral-religious meanings that ConcernedCitizen assumes it has, but rather means, in the words of E. K. Chambers, “the exercise of conscious thought, speculation on the future.”²

But Michaela makes another mistake, one that is more interesting to me because it occupies a scholarly blind spot: she misquotes Hamlet’s

The screenshot shows a Yahoo! Answers page. At the top, there are two tabs: "Education & Reference" and "Words & Wordplay". The question is titled "What does 'Conscience doth make cowards of us all' mean?" and is asked by a user named Michaela. The question text is: "I'm doing a mini report and I don't really understand what this means. It is from Macbeth." Below the question, there are options to "Follow" and "3 answers". The "Answers" section shows a "Best Answer" by a user named ConcernedCitizen, who states: "There are a lot of things people might be tempted to do to get ahead, but they don't do them because their consciences prevent them from crossing the line between right and wrong. It's actually a good thing because it keeps our society from deteriorating into anarchy, but Lady MacBeth saw it as a weakness." The answer has 2 thumbs up and 1 thumbs down. There are also 2 comments on the answer.

Education & Reference Words & Wordplay

What does "Conscience doth make cowards of us all" mean?

I'm doing a mini report and I don't really understand what this means. It is from Macbeth.

☆ Follow 3 answers

Answers Relevance ▾

Best Answer: There are a lot of things people might be tempted to do to get ahead, but they don't do them because their consciences prevent them from crossing the line between right and wrong. It's actually a good thing because it keeps our society from deteriorating into anarchy, but Lady MacBeth saw it as a weakness.

ConcernedCitizen · 8 years ago

2 1

2 comments

Figure 8.1 A question and “best answer” from a Yahoo website.
<https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20110306135138AAf7vmH>, accessed 11 January 2019.

line, substituting *doth* for *does*. Perhaps you knew this immediately, perhaps you did not. It is in the nature of blind spots, after all, that they are perspectival: if you drive my car, your blind spot will differ from mine, as your height, your angle of vision, and your positioning of the mirrors differ. I suspect, however, that many readers will not have spotted Michaela's error, because great Shakespeareans have not always remembered the line any better than she has. We typically imagine quotation and misquotation as opposed poles, but in fact we misquote far more often than we realize. And when we correct others' misquotation, we often create further problems, as I hope to show here with an examination of two common (mis)quotations from *Hamlet*. Misquotation is a scholarly blind spot for another reason: once we have unmasked it as error, we tend to look no further. In doing so, however, we fail to see what misquotation can show us; in our eagerness to demonstrate others' errors and our own correctness, we often misrepresent the nature of Shakespearean textuality.

To return to Michaela: she is clearly a novice Shakespearean, but Figure 8.2 shows Samuel Johnson, perhaps the most acute reader of Shakespeare of the eighteenth century, making the same error in his 1765 edition:

PRINCE OF DENMARK. 209

The pang of despis'd love, the law's delay,
 The insolence of office, and the spurns
 That patient merit of th' unworthy takes;
 When he himself might his *Quietus* make
 With a bare bodkin? Who would fardles bear,
 * To groan and sweat under a weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,
 That undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will;
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
 Than fly to others that we know not of?
 Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all,
 And thus the native hue of resolution
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;
 And enterprises of great pith and moment,
 With this regard their currents turn awry,
 And lose the name of action——Soft you; now!
 [*Seeing Ophelia with a book.*]

Figure 8.2 Samuel Johnson, ed., *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (London: J. and R. Tonson et al., 1765), 7.209.

And Figure 8.3 shows how the most influential early editor of Shakespeare, Edmond Malone, quoted the line in his landmark 1790 edition. At least Malone did get the line right in his edition of the play itself, unlike Johnson. But his error in the apparatus here shows that, in a more offhand moment, when he was likely recalling the line from memory, Malone instinctively thought it read “doth” instead of “does.” When he was quoting rather than editing, we might say, Malone was misquoting.

Malone and Johnson are not alone. Laurence Olivier can be clearly heard saying *doth* in his 1948 film; so can Kenneth Branagh in 1996. Other legendary Shakespearean actors such as John Gielgud and Richard Burton have done the same, as have notable academics from John Crowe Ransom to Judith Butler.³ And more broadly, since 1800, the misquotation rivals the correct quotation in appearances in the Google Books corpus, as shown in the graph in Figure 8.4, where the line that is initially higher represents the correct *does*, and the initially lower line the incorrect *doth*.⁴ Here we can see that, especially in the late nineteenth century

Again, in *Hamlet*, 4to. 1604:
 “Thus conscience doth make cowards.”
 the words of *us all* being omitted.
 Again, *ibidem*:
 “Seeming to feel this blow,” &c.
 instead of
 “——— Then senseless Ilium
 “Seeming to feel this blow.”
 See also Vol. IX. p. 341, n. 1. MALONE.

Figure 8.3 Edmond Malone, ed., *The Plays and Poems of William Shakspeare*, 10 vols. (London: J. Rivington and Sons et al., 1790), 10.669.

Figure 8.4 Graph of correct and incorrect quotation of the line, created through Google Books.

and the first half of the twentieth, the line was being misquoted almost as often as it was being quoted correctly.

Another way to visualize the evidence is to graph the proportion of all quotations of the line that are erroneous (see Figure 8.5).⁵ We can now readily see that the error consistently composes about a third and often close to half of all the quotations of Hamlet's line in Google Books.

It is difficult to perceive any trends here: the proportion remains relatively constant. On both graphs, the error seems to be diminishing (because of the ready availability of e-texts of *Hamlet*, making it easier to check?), but we cannot really tell yet; the apparent downward trend may soon be reversed, as has happened in the past. In the larger perspective, the most salient fact about the error is its persistence. It seems clear that this is one of the more frequently misquoted Shakespearean lines.⁶ Both graphs yield important information. The second shows that the error has been made consistently and frequently over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while the first helps us to isolate a particular period—the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—when the error appears to have been significantly on the rise.

Why do so many people get this line wrong? The error crosses the divides between professional Shakespeareans and lay readers (and quoters); between the nineteenth century and the twentieth; between text and performance, print and digital.⁷ One explanation has to do with the history of the third-person singular verb ending. In the early modern period, both

Figure 8.5 Percentage of instances of the line in the Google Books corpus that are erroneous.

the -s form (*does, goes, says*, etc.) and -th form (*doth, goeth, sayeth*, etc.) were available. According to Merja Kytö, “the -S ending remains very rare until 1590. In the 1590s, the -TH and -S endings co-occur in a number of texts, but after 1600 the regular ending tends to be -S.” By the end of the seventeenth century, “the receding variant form -TH was used only in biblical, liturgical, and other highly formal contexts.”⁸ The verbs *have* and *do* “tended to retain the -TH ending long after other verbs had adopted -S,” however, probably owing to their frequent use.⁹ Shakespeare himself used the -th ending more frequently than most of his contemporaries, especially in *hath* and *doth*, because of his age and because of the language patterns of his native Warwickshire. The difference is pronounced enough that, according to Cyrus Hoy, it is “the most effective linguistic evidence for distinguishing the work of Shakespeare and Fletcher” in their collaborations; MacDonald P. Jackson agrees.¹⁰

What can we learn if we explore this misquotation rather than simply correct the error and look away? What we can see at work here, I think, is an unconscious desire for a Shakespeare who sounds appropriately “Shakespearean.” Substituting *doth* for *does* in this line makes Hamlet speak not only in a more “old-fashioned” manner, but also in a more formal, elevated register. And it makes Shakespeare appear, in the paradoxical phrase used to describe “the warlike Harry,” more “like himself” (*Henry V*, Pro. 5), as it forces him to use the -th form that he used with a frequency exceptional among contemporary dramatists—but not, in fact, in this particular line.

This desire for a “Shakespearean Shakespeare” can already be seen in Johnson’s 1765 edition, indicating that even by the middle of the eighteenth century *doth* had become somewhat antiquated.¹¹ This archaic quality of *doth*, and its association with “biblical, liturgical, and other highly formal contexts”—and perhaps, in particular, with the King James Bible—seems likely to have driven the late nineteenth-century rise in the misquotation. In this period, a minor publishing industry developed in what we might call “Shakespearean piety,” books that packaged bits of Shakespearean verse alongside other uplifting and spiritual quotations to impart religious lessons. As the pastor of the Methodist Episcopal church in Kansas City, Missouri, wrote in “The Cowardice of a Guilty Conscience” (1910): “We have all had on our lips at one time or another those words of Hamlet in which he declares that ‘Conscience doth make cowards of us all.’”¹² And the line does indeed appear in the works of numerous ministers: for instance, the fourth volume of *The Homiletic Quarterly* (1880), a crib book for preachers, treated conscience in its section on “Rough

Materials: or, Texts and Topics”; after giving the etymology of the word, it gave definitions from well-known theologians, relevant biblical passages, and a few literary quotations, including “Conscience doth make cowards of us all.”¹³ The Religious Tract Society’s *Sunday at Home Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading* offered “Proverb Lore” compiled by “the Rev. T. F. Thiselton Dyer, M.A.” among its poems, biblical extracts, and instructive stories; Dyer told readers, “How many are the advantages and blessings which belong to a good man,” but “How different is it with the person who has an evil conscience, for when that is so, ‘Conscience doth make cowards of us all.’”¹⁴

There is a clue here that we can trace in the large data set offered by Google Books. In each of these cases, the line is extracted beginning with *Conscience* rather than quoted in full. If we examine *only* those instances in the Google Books corpus in which *Conscience* is capitalized, the erroneous quotation outpaces the correct one for much of the period, again with a sharp rise in the late nineteenth century.¹⁵

As you will recall, in the early texts of *Hamlet*, the word *conscience* does not begin the line. Q2 has “Thus conscience dooes make cowards” (sig. G2v), and the Folio reads, “Thus Conscience does make Cowards of vs all” (sig. 2o5r). The Folio capitalization is part of its broader project of capitalizing certain abstract nouns, according to emergent fashion in 1623. But the vast majority of quotations in the Google Books corpus are not following Folio capitalization; they are undoubtedly quoting either from a contemporary edition of *Hamlet*, from memory, or from

Figure 8.6 Graph of correct and incorrect quotation of the line, with initial capitalization, in Google Books.

a compendium of memorable quotations. In other words, it is exceedingly unlikely that the Folio typography is influencing the capitalization of these quotations, whether erroneous or correct.

What is influencing that capitalization, I think, is the extraction of only part of the line as a proverb to be compiled in collections of quotations. In these commonplace compendia, as in the examples above, the initial *Thus* of Q2 and F's line is omitted as part of the process of removing the line from its original context (where *Thus* refers to the preceding portion of Hamlet's speech) for suitable reuse in new contexts. The capitalization of *Conscience*, in other words, is a marker of commonplacing and thus a marker of exactly what Malone was doing when he got the line wrong in his apparatus: quoting from memory and from a storehouse of proverbial wisdom and Shakespearean "beauties." In the late nineteenth century, this commonplacing was part of the broader impulse to make Shakespeare teach religious and moral lessons, to make the national poet accord with the Bible. In recalling the line with *doth* instead of *does*, these writers align Shakespeare with the Bible not only spiritually, but also linguistically, in the usage of the third-person singular verb ending.

As with the play as a whole, Q1 offers an intriguing counterpoint to this line.¹⁶ Although Q1 has generally been imagined as more antiquated than the modern philosophical version of the play embodied by Q2 and F, in this line the first quarto is decidedly more modern: "O this conscience makes cowardes of vs all" (sig. E1r).¹⁷ The line sounds more contemporary because it lacks the now-archaic "unregulated auxiliary 'do,'" a construction that Jonathan Hope has shown is a favorite of Shakespeare's.¹⁸ Modern usage prefers auxiliary *do* only in interrogatives ("Does conscience make cowardes?"), emphatic statements ("Yes, conscience *does* make cowardes"), and negatives ("No, conscience does not make cowardes"). Linguists call these usages "regulated," whereas non-standard forms are "unregulated": the use of *do* in positive statements ("Conscience does make cowardes"), and the lack of it in negatives ("Conscience makes not cowardes") or interrogatives ("Makes conscience cowardes?"). Already in the 1750s, Samuel Johnson disparaged "unregulated" auxiliary *do* in positive statements: "*Do* is sometimes used superfluously, as, *I do love, I did love*; simply for *I love, or I loved*; but this is considered as a vitious mode of speech."¹⁹ Perhaps precisely because he considered unregulated auxiliary *do* as an outmoded and superfluous construction, Johnson unconsciously associated it with another archaic linguistic form, printing *doth* instead of *does* in this line.

By attending to this misquotation rather than dismissing it, we can see how it is informed both by the growing canonization of Shakespeare as

a writer of quasi-sacred texts and by the increasing sense that the language of those texts was archaic. Indeed, as the parallel with the King James Bible reveals, the two trends are intertwined. Furthermore, this misquotation draws our attention to Shakespeare's texts in their multiplicity: it is not quite right to say that the "correct" reading is "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all."²⁰ Although it is true that, allowing for modernization of spelling, this is the reading in the Folio, Q2 omits "of us all," and Q1 has another variation altogether. Editors have not always agreed on which version of the line is the one that Shakespeare "actually" wrote. Correction in this case involves oversimplification of the textual situation.

To explore more fully the relationship between popular misquotation, scholarly correction, textual variation, and Shakespearean editing, I want to look at another, better-known misquotation from *Hamlet*: "Methinks the lady doth protest too much." Although this misquotation seems no less widespread than *Conscience doth make cowards*, it does not, to my knowledge, appear in any scholarly editions of Shakespeare. Whereas Hamlet's line about conscience clearly crosses the divide between professional and amateur Shakespearean, Gertrude's line has been far more perceptible as a "popular" error. Perhaps for this reason, it has gained far more currency *as* a misquotation, one that people on the Internet take special pleasure in correcting. Gertrude's "methinks" appears on Wikiquote's "List of misquotations," a page dedicated to "things that many people think are correct quotations but are actually incorrect," and numerous other sites such as "Top 10 Shakespeare Misquotes."²¹ The latter site informs us that, "This is probably one of the most commonly heard misquotes of Shakespeare" and gives us the "Actual Quote: 'The lady doth protest too much, methinks.'" Wikiquote gives the same line as the "Correct quote."

But in fact both "Top 10 Shakespeare Misquotes" and Wikiquote are miscorrecting: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks" is not "actual" or "correct" according to any of the three early texts of *Hamlet*. Q2 comes the closest with "The Lady doth protest too much mee thinks" (sig. H2v), but note that it treats *me thinks* as two words. Meanwhile, the Folio has "The Lady protests to much me thinks" (sig. 2o6v), and Q1 prints even more simply: "The Lady protests too much" (sig. F3v). The focus on misquotation creates a blind spot about the text itself.

The Folio and Q1 versions of this line again raise the question of the use of the unregulated auxiliary *do*. Both of these texts sound more modern than Q2 in omitting the auxiliary, and Q1 goes even further in modernizing by omitting "methinks." This now-archaic form was still widely in

use in the early seventeenth century but may already have become somewhat obscure in its syntax, in which *me* functions as an indirect object of the impersonal (*it*) *thinks* in rough parallel with the still-current phrase “it seems to me.” The transformation of *me thinks*, as Q2 reads, to the single word *methinks*, as we find in all modern editions and in the Internet versions of the “actual” and “correct” quotation, itself testifies to the archaization of this syntactical form. As can be seen in the graphs from the EEBO-TCP Ngram Browser in Figures 8.7 and 8.8, the single-word form became more common in the latter half of the seventeenth century, as the two-word form began to fade from use.²²

Although modern editions almost always favor the Q2 version of the line, with *doth protest* instead of *protest*, this was not always the case. In the early twentieth century, the New Bibliographers revolutionized the editing of *Hamlet* by arguing persuasively that the copy underlying Q2 was Shakespeare’s authorial manuscript, leading most subsequent editors to base their text on that edition. (The Oxford Shakespeare, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, was a notable exception, as it broadly preferred Folio readings in its effort to reconstruct the texts of the plays as they were performed.) But most of the major eighteenth-century editors preferred the Folio reading, including Rowe, Pope, Theobald, Hanmer, Warburton, Johnson, and Capell. Malone’s emphasis in his 1790 edition on returning to the early quartos led him to print *doth protest*, and a number of nineteenth-century editors followed him, but by no means all.

Figure 8.7 Occurrence of *methinks* as a single word in the EEBO-TCP corpus.

Figure 8.8 Occurrence of *me thinks* as two words in the EEBO-TCP corpus.

As late as 1877, the Variorum *Hamlet* edited by Horace Howard Furness printed the Folio version as its base text. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rationale for choosing *protests* over *doth protest* was not merely a general preference for the Folio over Q2, however. The only commentary note that Furness provides for this line is Hiram Corson's remark: "The familiar 'protests' is better here than 'doth protest.'" ²³ This comment epitomizes the kind of "eclectic" editing that the New Bibliographers would soon condemn as mere belletrism: the editor simply chooses the variant that seems "better" according to his personal aesthetic taste. The New Bibliographic movement led to the adoption of the principle of copy text, to the idea that individual choices of variants should be guided by a broader understanding of the nature of the copy underlying the multiple editions of Shakespeare's plays, and in this case to the choice of Q2's *doth protest* as part of a larger preference for Q2 as closer to Shakespeare's hand. But, as numerous critiques of the New Bibliography have pointed out, in practice there was still a great deal of aesthetic preference at work in twentieth-century editing. In his landmark New Bibliographic edition of *Hamlet* for the Arden Shakespeare, for example, Harold Jenkins repeatedly prefers "an obviously superior F reading," even though he follows Q2 as his copy text, because the word "is in Shakespeare's finest manner, both inventive and exact." ²⁴

If Corson argued for *protests* over *doth protest* because it was "better" (more "familiar," more direct and immediate), and if Jenkins chose

F's "fretfull" rather than Q2's "fearefull" porpentine because it was "obviously superior," how different is this scholarly editorial practice from the misquotation of Gertrude as saying, "Methinks the lady doth protest too much," or of Hamlet as saying, "Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all"?

This is not to say that there is in fact no difference between misquotation and editorial emendation—far from it. Bibliographic analysis can indeed teach us a great deal about the printing and publication of Shakespeare's plays, literary and stylometric analysis can illuminate Shakespeare's (and other dramatists') habits, and that knowledge can and should influence our attempts to reconstruct the texts of those plays from their extant witnesses. But this evidence is not generally as straightforward as we might wish. We could note, for instance, that Q2's version of Gertrude's line is a perfect iambic pentameter, whereas F's "The Lady protests to much me thinks" is half a foot short and metrically awkward. (Q1's version appears not to be in verse.) By contrast, with Hamlet's line about conscience, it is F's version that is metrically perfect, whereas Q2 is a short line as it lacks "of us all," and I find Q1's "O this conscience makes cowardes of vs all" extremely hard to scan. In each case, the syntactically more "modern" version, without auxiliary *do*, makes the line metrically difficult and seems therefore somewhat less likely to be Shakespearean, but the two lines point to different texts, Q2 in one case and F in the other. Metrical analysis is thus not particularly helpful here, and larger stylometric studies, by their very nature, will not be able to resolve such fine-grained questions as which variant to choose in each of these cases. We could fall back on the New Bibliographic principle of choosing a copy-text based on a broader understanding of the nature of the texts and sticking with it in ambiguous cases, but most editors will want to choose F's "Thus Conscience does make Cowards of vs all" alongside Q2's "The Lady doth protest too much mee thinks." If we resolve the problem by arguing that Q2 omits "of us all" owing to a compositor's error (which I happen to think likely), are we actually answering the question here, or are we simply begging it? Shakespeare certainly wrote plenty of metrically short lines for dramatic emphasis, after all, and one could argue that "Thus conscience dooes make cowards" is one of them, that it is more "familiar" and hence "better," as Corson would say, just like F's metrically deficient "The Lady protests to much me thinks."

In these two cases, we see a similar pattern. The misquotation (whether "popular" or "scholarly") favors the "old-fashioned" form, preferring a Shakespeare who sounds quaintly archaic, like the mock-Tudor

houses that can be seen throughout Stratford-upon-Avon. Pushing “methinks” to the initial position emphasizes that distinctly early modern word, adding to the “Shakespeareanism” of the line; the choice of “doth protest” over “protests” or “conscience doth” over “conscience does” works along the same lines. Meanwhile, in each case, the correction over-corrects and misrepresents the textual variation around each line. And, if both of these misquotations reveal an unconscious expectation for how Shakespeare “should” sound—a desire for an “old-timey” Shakespeare that is easy enough to ridicule—editors and critics have probably been too complacent about our own investments in, and dependence on, similar expectations that Shakespeare must have sounded “like himself.” Recent work in stylometrics has shown that individual authors have distinctive stylistic “signatures,” certainly, but these typically operate below the level of conscious thought, in deeply engrained syntactical habits rather than in particular vocabulary or turns of phrase. In other words, Shakespeare probably had no idea what he sounded like, on this level, and we are probably less able to hear that distinctive style than we think. If we approach editorial decisions with the idea that Shakespeare should sound “like himself,” we need to do so with an awareness of our blind spot around (mis)quotation, or we may run into the same kinds of error as Samuel Johnson, Edmond Malone, and Michaela.

On Not Knowing Shakespeare: A Response to Zachary Lesser

Tanya Pollard

"Brush up your Shakespeare," Cole Porter promises us, "and they'll all kow-tow."²⁵ Mysteriously, and disappointingly, this does not always prove true in practice, but many of us continue to identify Shakespearean knowledge with at least some degree of authority. It is both disconcerting and intriguing, then, to learn from Zack's wonderful and wide-ranging research not only that most of us could do with more brushing up, but that even those steeped in an awful lot of Shakespeare have recurring blind spots.

The impressively persistent tradition of quoting "Conscience doth make cowards of us all" highlights the power of authoritative misreadings to perpetuate themselves. When a phrase is endorsed by the likes of Johnson, Malone, Olivier, Gielgud, and Branagh, it takes on a familiarity that many will accept unquestioningly, despite its departure from Shakespeare's original texts. As Zack shows, though, the recurring persistence of "doth" suggests investments beyond the simple tendency to repeat the words of apparent experts. Even for readers and audiences oblivious to scholarship on Shakespeare's habitual linguistic patterns, the plays themselves can instill an instinctive preference for the characteristic "doth." The word's regular Shakespearean appearances prompt, as Zack points out, "an unconscious desire for a Shakespeare who sounds appropriately 'Shakespearean.'" If Shakespeare's authority rests in significant part on his plays' perceived status as archaic, quasi-sacred texts, there are cultural stakes in maintaining a Shakespeare who uses "doth" as an auxiliary verb, and maybe even a certain felt virtue in correcting him when he fails to do so consistently.

Patterns of misquotation, though, raise questions and problems beyond wanting Shakespeare to sound "like himself." As Zack also points out, other recurring misquotations, such as "The lady doth protest too much, methinks," respond at least in part to textual indeterminacy. If three "original" Shakespeare texts offer three different versions of this line, how do we decide what Shakespeare sounds like? The problems of locating Shakespearean authority—and with it, of establishing Shakespearean knowledge—multiply with recent arguments for expanding the canon of Shakespeare's collaboratively written plays. If plays that we have understood as Shakespeare's turn out to include contributions from others—and, by the same token, if plays that we have attributed to others turn out to

include contributions from Shakespeare—we find other, larger challenges to identifying a consistent Shakespearean voice. When we explore Shakespeare's habits of imitating and quoting other writers, moreover, as well as the ways that others were moved to imitate and quote him, the possibility of distilling stylistic purity recedes even further from our grasp.

Recognizing Shakespeare's responsiveness to his immediate theatrical milieu similarly raises the specter of more expansive and indirect forms of extratextual influence. If the improvisations of Shakespeare's clowns and/or the distinctive forms of charisma associated with his better-known actors made their way into Shakespeare's lines, either directly or through permeating his imagination, do the resulting inflections represent Shakespeare, or someone else? And, if attending to these likely direct and indirect debts suggests that Shakespeare's plays have always been at some level collectively constructed, are modern alterations—by editors, directors, actors, and/or the memory-challenged among us—intrinsically less valid than those that might have taken place more than 400 years ago?

As Zack points out, it is not intellectually useful to lump together different approaches to reworking Shakespeare: misquotations reflect very different kinds of principle from those involved in editorial or directorial decisions, and some Shakespeares are demonstrably more authentic than others. The persistence of blind spots that recur across these categories, though, underscores the degree to which we all rely on our instincts about what is authentically Shakespearean. Probing these instincts, similarly, reminds us that, however well informed they may be, they are all bounded by the limits of what we know, and what we can know, about a writer whose words reach us filtered through the distorting media of time, variant texts, and uncountable losses. In "On Not Knowing Greek," Virginia Woolf—whose Greek was very good—wrote that "it is vain and foolish to talk of knowing Greek," but that the idea persists regardless. "All the more strange, then," she observed, "is it that we should wish to know Greek, try to know Greek, feel for ever drawn back to Greek, and be for ever making up some notion of the meaning of Greek, though from what incongruous odds and ends, with what slight resemblance to the real meaning of Greek, who shall say?"²⁶ Happily, we are on firmer territory in knowing Shakespeare than antiquity—we have the benefits of more linguistic and chronological proximity and a sturdier paper trail—but the difference is of degree rather than kind. Zack's essay, like Woolf's, reminds us to be cautious about assuming our familiarity with the foreign country that is the literary past, and prods us in particular to keep an eye on what we can learn from our own blind spots.

The Food of Points: A Response to Zachary Lesser

Adam Zucker

Given this collection's interest in discussing unknown or unknowable subjects in Shakespeare studies, I may as well begin this response with a quick story about my long-standing friendship with Zack, which began during our first year as undergraduates. He and I shared serious and probably predictable academic interests and advisors at the time, but, more importantly for this story, we also both loved pinball. We would spend hours crammed into the small game room of our university's student center, too clueless at age nineteen to realize that the plexiglass window that put our pinball obsession on display day after day to the many other students walking past might damage our chances at winning the kinds of game that were being played out in the hall and elsewhere on campus. On this particular day, I was killing it, again, on the *Star Trek* machine, while Zack waited patiently for my turn to end and his to begin. The machine chittered and blooped in its song of a billion warp-speed points, and Zack, already proficient in the ways of Shakespeare, was ready with a quotation. "If music be the food of points," he said, "Play on."

I had no idea what he was talking about, and I told him so. I was impressed when he told me it was the first line of *Twelfth Night*, not least of all because Shakespeare seemed to be weirdly tuned in to pinball aesthetics of the early 1990s. For all time, indeed. It was not until I read the play several months later that I learned that Zack had misquoted the line. For a measurable chunk of my undergraduate career, I thought Shakespeare's music was the food of points.

I am writing this twenty-five years later, but I am still learning about misquoting Shakespeare from Zack. And, although the situation in the game room differs greatly from the scenario he has shown us in his essay here, the central premises of both are similar. Given the right authorities, the difference between "wrong" Shakespeare and "right" Shakespeare is very difficult to discern. And perhaps more to the point, the text we see before us in our minds when we imagine a "correct" Shakespearean script can be shaped by influencing authorities we will never entirely recognize, even as we pronounce some of the most famous lines in the plays.

Those authorities are not always pinball-playing friends with a better grip on the canon than oneself. I freely confess that "Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all" sounded absolutely right to me before I read

this essay. More strangely, even now that I know it is wrong, it *still* sounds entirely right to me. The authority of presumptively archaic Shakespearean style, an authority that has overwhelmed the memories of Malone, Olivier, and Branagh among others, plays a role in my own mind-edited text of *Hamlet*. There is no single work of criticism or scholarship that has made me feel this way. Some internal instinct, an instinct upon which I rely too, too frequently to respond to questions posed by text, is completely misinforming me. I have never noticed its presence before.

The blind spot of knowledge explored by Zack, then, might best be understood as a space of unanalyzed influence not just on “Shakespeare,” but on the performance of the Shakespearean text in editorial scholarship, on stage, and in classrooms. The force of this influence can move along many different vectors laid out by the histories of textual performers themselves. Was Shakespeare, for a hypothetical speaker, teacher, or editor, a naturalized, ever-present companion in educational contexts, as he often is or has been in the UK? Was Shakespeare a facet of an occupying power building school curricula or bringing its foreign culture to bear in a colonial administration, as he once was in India and throughout the British Empire? Was Shakespeare, as he was for me, a compelling poet who gave an independent voice to the son of an aspiring, heavily-accented immigrant? These kinds of frame for the feeling of the Shakespearean could be multiplied many, many times over, each one of them potentially nudging text into different configurations. The pathways that lead Shakespeare to “sound like himself,” as Zack puts it, sometimes turn back in on themselves, and they sometimes span the globe.

I am not sure we can ever perfectly identify the forces that lead groups of knowledgeable people to make the same mistake over and over again. The panoramic perspective I have hinted at above would encompass an infinity of unseen forces, and, although Zack’s survey of nineteenth-century moralizing Shakespeare quotation collections gives us one potential method for locating cultural momentum, the blind spot here is perhaps too protean to be clarified entirely. But we can always be aware of the diversity of formal or structural authorities underpinning any given Shakespearean line. Editorial glosses and emendations, to name the most obvious, are influential simply because we have gotten very used to granting the editor her in-text power. The sound of an actor’s voice in a canonical performance will easily make us believe in an extra “doth” or two. And even here, in a collection of essays and responses, the form of print and scholarly affiliation can make incorrect things seem to be authentic. Take

this short essay, for example. I confess, here at its conclusion: Zack never said that thing to me in the game room at university. We did play quite a bit of pinball, but I made up the entire story simply to make a point about the formal contexts for authority. Did the framing of this book and the trust you have been trained to place in it make the Zuckerman anecdote ring true? Did you suspect from the outset (maybe because you have met me) that it was complete bunk?

We should always try to discern the force of authority in textual matters and otherwise. When we lose track of it entirely, it doth make cowards of us all.

NOTES

¹<https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20110306135138AAf7vmH>.

²Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, edited by Chambers, 183. As I show in *Hamlet After Q1: An Uncanny History of the Shakespearean Text*, ch. 4, Chambers was the first major editor to gloss the word in this way, but it soon became dominant; but perhaps ConcernedCitizen is right?

³Gielgud in an audio recording of three of Hamlet's soliloquies: www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCyJXJ9oogg (no longer available); Burton in the famous 1964 Broadway simulcast in theaters, directed by Gielgud: www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsrOXAY1arg. See also Christopher Plummer in a version for the BBC: www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ay2I7py3Og. Among recent productions, Mel Gibson, Ethan Hawke, and David Tennant all speak the line correctly with *does*. See Ransom's "Communications: On Shakespeare's Language" and the title of Butler's "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All."

⁴For ease, I have removed the labels on the Y-axis, which run from 0.0% to 0.00000240% of the GB corpus. The graph is case-*insensitive* and so will capture any form of the text string.

⁵To do this, we graph instances of "conscience doth make cowards" as a percentage of instances of *either* "conscience doth make cowards" *or* "conscience does make cowards," with the formula *conscience doth make cowards* / (*conscience doth make cowards* + *conscience does make cowards*). Unfortunately, Google Ngrams cannot combine formulae like this one with case-insensitive searching. The graph for *Conscience* with a capital C in each case results in a somewhat higher error rate. Owing to OCR problems, however, the actual results include numerous examples of the lower-case *conscience* as well. Running the search with "Thus conscience" at the start—to capture the entire line as it appears in most modern editions—results in a somewhat lower error rate, perhaps because the line is being quoted in full and more attentively. But nonetheless, the misquotation generally makes up between 20% and 30% of all instances.

⁶ There is an important discrepancy between the two graphs. The first shows that, in the late nineteenth century, *conscience doth* was rising significantly relative to *conscience does*, but the second does not show a concomitant rise in the *percentage* of all quotations of the line that are erroneous. This is mathematically impossible and probably points to a problem with the use of OCR in Google Books. As noted above, the second graph is necessarily case-sensitive, whereas the first was case-insensitive; the discrepancy between the two ways of visualizing the data likely derives from difficulties with the OCR recognition of the phrase when it is variously capitalized. There is clearly a problem with case-sensitivity in Google Ngrams and Google Books, one that is currently impossible to diagnose clearly, let alone correct. To make matters more complex, apparently Google Books and Google Ngrams have different ways of handling case-sensitivity in searches and may return slightly different results. At the large scale of the arguments in this paper, however, this should not matter much.

⁷ An odd digital example: typing Schlegel's German translation of the line ("So macht Gewissen Feige aus uns allen") into Google Translate yields a retranslation into English as "Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all." As the algorithms underlying Google Translate do not use the archaic *doth*, this line must have been coded as a unit into Translate by a human, probably using the "Suggest an edit" function.

⁸ Kytö, "Third-Person Present Singular Verb Inflection in Early British and American English," 115.

⁹ Kytö, "Third-Person Present," 121.

¹⁰ Hoy, "The Shares of Fletcher and his Collaborators," 74; see Jackson, "Looking for Shakespeare in *Double Falsehood*," 140.

¹¹ Lucy Munro traces the related process of self-consciously archaizing language in *Archaic Style in English Literature, 1590–1674*.

¹² Banks, "The Cowardice of a Guilty Conscience," 302.

¹³ *The Homiletic Quarterly* 4, 556.

¹⁴ *The Sunday at Home Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading* 1487, 683.

¹⁵ The differences here seem stark enough that they are unlikely to be accounted for by OCR problems with capitalization.

¹⁶ On the ways in which the discovery of Q1 in 1823 has influenced our understanding of the play and of Shakespeare more broadly, see my *Hamlet After Q1*.

¹⁷ On constructions of Q1 as antiquated, "barbaric," and retrograde, see *Hamlet After Q1*.

¹⁸ See Hope, *The Authorship of Shakespeare's Plays*, and Munro's analysis of Fletcher's use of archaic style in *The Faithful Shepherdess* (Munro, *Archaic Style*, 175–77).

¹⁹ Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, via Eighteenth Century Collections Online, image 46, accessed July 27, 2016.

²⁰The only scholar I have found who (briefly) draws attention to this misquotation is Callaghan, *Hamlet*, 32. Callaghan smartly locates the misquotation in the context of the three texts of the play.

²¹ https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/List_of_misquotations; <http://listverse.com/2008/09/15/top-10-shakespeare-misquotes>

²² EEBO N-gram Browser, developed by Anupam Basu, <http://earlyprint.wustl.edu/eebotcpngrambrowser.html>, accessed July 21, 2016. I use the regularized spelling function.

²³ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, edited by Furness, 254.

²⁴ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, edited by Jenkins, 59–60.

²⁵ Cole Porter, “Brush up your Shakespeare,” *Kiss Me Kate* (1948).

²⁶ Woolf, “On Not Knowing Greek,” 23.

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ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

EEBO N-gram browser: <http://earlyprint.wustl.edu/eebotcpngrambrowser.html>
 Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale, University of Pennsylvania Library,
 Google Translate: <https://translate.google.com>
 Wikiquote: www.wikiquote.org
 Yahoo Answers: www.answers.yahoo.com
 YouTube: www.youtube.com

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