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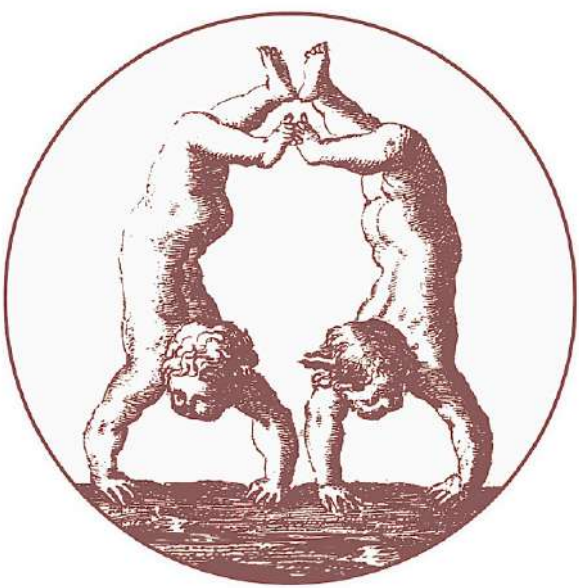
A Feast of Strange Opinions: Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes on the English Renaissance Stage

Edited by Marco Duranti and Emanuel Stelzer



Edizioni ETS

CEMP • 1.2

Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes in England

Skenè Texts DA - CEMP

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General Editor Silvia Bigliazzi

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S K E N È Theatre and Drama Studies

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CEMP - Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes in England

The series of CEMP volumes offers studies and fully annotated scholarly editions related to the CEMP open-access digital archive. This archive includes texts pertaining to the genres of the paradox, of the paradoxical fiction, and of the problem, which were published in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and which are currently unavailable online and/or not open access (https://dh.dlls.univr.it/bib-arc/cemp). Our digital archive features diplomatic, semidiplomatic, and modernised editions of selected works, furnished with critical apparatuses and editorial notes, alongside related documentary materials, which, in turn, are relevant to poetic and dramatic texts of the English Renaissance. These texts provide fundamental testimony of the early modern episteme, functioning as a hinge joining widespread forms of the paradoxical discourse in different genres and texts and within the development of sceptical thinking.

The project is part of the Skenè Centre as well as of the Project of Excellence Digital humanities applied to foreign languages and literatures (2018-2022) Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at the University of Verona (https://dh.dlls.univr.it/en/).

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Contributors

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Rocco Coronato teaches English Literature at the University of Padua. He specialises in early modernity between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. He has been a visiting scholar at Harvard, the Warburg Institute, Brown University, Chicago, Amsterdam, and has presented his works at numerous international conferences. He is the author of several essays and monographs published in international venues, including *Shakespeare, Caravaggio, and the Indistinct Regard* (Routledge 2017). He has also written some guides for Carocci (*Leggere Shakespeare*, 2017; *Guida ad Amleto*, 2022; *Guida alla Tempesta*, 2022). He has translated *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* (Rizzoli, 2022), and his university textbook *Letteratura inglese. Da Beowulf a Brexit* has just been released (Le Monnier-Mondadori Education).

Bryan Crockett, PhD, is an Emeritus Professor in the Department of English at Baltimore's Loyola University Maryland. There he specialised in early modern literature, particularly English Renaissance drama. In addition, he frequently taught courses in modern drama as well as ancient Greek philosophy. His 1995 book *The Play of Paradox* (University of Pennsylvania Press) is a wide-ranging study of paradox in early modern literature, philosophy, religion, and drama. *Love's Alchemy* (Five Star), his literary novel about John Donne, was published in 2015.

Francesco Dall'Olio obtained his MA in Philology and History of Antiquity from the University of Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore, in 2013, and in 2014 the Scuola Normale's diploma. In 2019, he received his PhD in Philology, Literature and Linguistics from the University of Verona. Twice a visiting research fellow at the Gallatin School for Individualized Studies (NYU) as part of his PhD programme, and as

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Marco Duranti holds a PhD in Greek literature from the Universities of Verona and Freiburg i. Br. (2017). As a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Verona, he has worked on the reception of ancient Greek literature in early modern England. He has published articles and book chapters on Aristophanes' dramaturgy, Euripides' tragedies, with a focus on *Iphigenia Taurica*, as well as on the reception of Greek theatre in early modern continental Europe and England. He is the author of *"Ecclesiae et Rei Publicae": Greek Drama and the Education of the Ruling Class in Elizabethan England* (Skenè Texts and Studies, 2022). Together with Emanuel Stelzer he has edited *A Feast of Strange Opinions: Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes on the English Renaissance Stage* (CEMP 1.1, Skenè Texts and Studies, 2022). He has contributed to the digital project CEMP (Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes in England), of which he has coordinated the classical section.

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Beatrice Righetti is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Aosta Valley and a former doctoral student in Linguistics, Philology and Literature at the University of Padua. Her doctoral project deals with the reception of paradoxical writing and the *querelle des femmes* as regards the literary figure of the talkative woman in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and Italy. Her main case study is the literary and theatrical character of the English shrew and the Shakespearean shrew in particular. She has published on Renaissance women writers and Shakespeare's plays, mostly *The Taming of the Shrew*, focusing on both the use of paradoxes and the relationship between metamorphosis, gender-based violence and power relations. She contributes to two digital projects directed by Silvia Bigliazzi ("Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and their European Dissemination", SENS; and CEMP) and to "From Paradise to Padua" directed by Alessandra Petrina.

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Reading from the First Folio to the Web (ETS 2022). She has lately co-edited the special issue *Experiencing Shakespeare in Digital Environments* for the journal *Lingue e Linguaggi* (2021) and the volumes *Culture and the Legacy of Anthropology* (Peter Lang 2020) and *Portraits of Merchants. Multifocal Approaches to Money, Credit and the Market* (Pensa Mulimedia 2022), which explores forms of intersection between economics and the humanities.

Alessandro Stavru teaches Ancient Philosophy at the University of Verona. His areas of interest include Socrates, the Socratics and the Socratic literature, Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism, ancient aesthetics, and the history of classical scholarship (especially Walter F. Otto). He is an officer of the International Society for Socratic Studies and has helped in organising the international Socratica-colloquiums (2005, 2008, 2012 of which he edited the proceedings).

Emanuel Stelzer is a researcher at the University of Verona. He is the author of *Portraits in Early Modern English Drama: Visual Culture, Play-Texts, and Performances* (Routledge, 2019) and of *Shakespeare Among Italian Criminologists and Psychiatrists, 1870s-1920s* (Skenè Texts and Studies, 2021). Together with Silvia Bigliazzi, he has edited the volume *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean: Romeo and Juliet* (Skenè Texts and Studies, 2022), and, with Marco Duranti, *A Feast of Strange Opinions: Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes on the English Renaissance Stage* (CEMP 1.1, Skenè Texts and Studies, 2022). His articles have appeared in journals including *Critical Survey*, *Early Theatre*, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, *English Studies*, and *The Huntington Library Quarterly*. His main interests are early modern English literature and drama, textual studies, and theatre history. He has contributed to the digital projects SENS (Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and their European Dissemination) and CEMP (Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes in England), of which he has coordinated the early modern section. He has also translated into Italian John Milton's *Comus* (ETS, 2020). He is managing editor of *Skenè: Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies*.

Robert Wardy was Reader in Ancient Philosophy at The University of Cambridge and a Fellow of St Catharine's College for many years, where he taught Western and Chinese Philosophy and Classics. His research encompasses ancient Greek natural philosophy, the history and theory of rhetoric, the theory and practice of translation, Taoism and seventeenth-century interchange between China and the West, and Plato's *Symposium*. He is also working on two large projects devoted to the history of thought experiments and paradoxes. He is currently Professor of Philosophy at The University of Arizona.

Introduction

Marco Duranti and Emanuel Stelzer[1]

1.

In his *Apology for Poetry* (published posthumously in 1595), Sir Philip Sidney defended poetry from the imputation that it is "the mother of lies" (a Platonically-inflected view of considerable force among Puritan preachers) with these words: "I answer paradoxically, but truly, I think truly, that of all writers under the sun the poet is the least liar", because a poet "nothing affirms, and therefore never lies" (1975, 123). Poetry makes its own reality and thus makes no truth claims: "the truest poetry is the most feigning", as Touchstone puts it in *As You Like It*, 3.3.13,[2] where feigning may be reminiscent of its Latin etymological meaning (*fingere*), 'to mould', 'to create'. Feigning liberates the poet from being "captived to the truth of a foolish world", as Sidney had written (1975, 111), but what Shakespeare, through Touchstone, stresses is that "if the truest poetry is genuinely the most feigning, true poetry is not an outpouring of emotion, but the exercise of skill in simulating (feigning) that emotion" (Belsey 2007, 38). And theatre is the site where this paradoxical feigning is embodied. As Patrick Cheney suggests: "The word 'feigning' can mean both *imaginative* and *deceptive*; Touchstone means the former . . . but his author also evokes the latter. Shakespeare does so not to agree with Plato, but to draw attention to the *theatricality* of poetry: the truest poetry is the most theatrical" (2008, 106).

Similar explanations of the disassociation of poetry (which could be synonymous with fiction in the early modern period, see *OED*

1 Section 1 was written by Emanuel Stelzer, and Section 2 by Marco Duranti.

2 All quotations from Shakespeare, unless otherwise stated, refer to Shakespeare 2016.

"poetry", n., 1) from truth claims can be puzzling and have often been criticised: "an assertion that affirms nothing sounds like a variant on the Liar's Paradox and no less confusing or contradictory" (McCoy 2013, 65). One of the foremost literary scholars of the past century, René Wellek, declared himself "content to understand fictionality in the broad sense of 'semblance', *Schein*, illusion (which is not deception), as a man-made, intentional world which draws on the real world and sends us back to it" (2018, 22). Mimetic, illusory "semblance" was understood as a precondition of fiction in the early modern period, too, although an oft-repeated tenet was that the didactic purpose of mimesis should be distinguished from another type of semblances, that of artificial embellishments. As Henry Reynolds put it in his *Mythomystes* (1632), truth remains "plain and simple", although clothed in "silken and thin paradoxical semblances" (A3*r* – 'paradoxical' meaning here contrary to common opinion) lest a poet should produce "mere embroideries upon cobwebs" (E*r*).[3] Reynolds is following Sidney in this statement, who had advocated as follows:

> I speak to show that it is not rhyming and versing that makes a poet, no more than a long gown makes an advocate who though he pleaded in armour should be an advocate and no soldier. But it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by. (Sidney 1975, 103)

But the Elizabethans had a place in which costumes, whether gowns, armours, etc., could actually transform their wearer: the playhouses. Theatre is built on the constitutional condition of make-believe, where "the doubleness of fact and fiction . . . is incarnated in the actor's own body" (Wilson 2004, 147). The problem is that, whereas for some, "theatre elicits . . . complicity rather than belief" (Greenblatt 1988, 119), in certain cultures, such as the early modern one, "complicity and belief are", paradoxically, "inextricably intertwined and involve each other" (Anthony Dawson, qtd in Lesser 1997, 195). And dramatists could foreground these issues, as discussed by William O. Scott:

3 I have modernised the spelling.

> . . . one could say that theatrical performance is broadly similar in its very nature to the liar paradox. Umberto Eco . . . considers that the mere presence of an actor on stage implies the assertion, 'I am acting'; thus 'By this implicit statement the acter tells the truth since he announces that *from that moment on* he will lie'. This situation is not quite a paradox if the distinction between true moments and the ensuing false moments can be held; but it often does not hold, as in the many performances where the aim is precisely to demolish the boundaries between the performance and its context. The lie may be announced by nothing other than a lysing show with which we the audience already play at collusion. (1990, 74)

We believe that drama uses paradoxes in a special way and the resonances of those uses can affect the communication among the *dramatis personae* on stage and between the stage and the spectators, because "paradoxical discourse, in whichever rhetorical, veridical, falsidical or aporetic forms it manifests itself, endows the speaker with agency in the pragmatic context of drama" (Bigliazzi 2022, 73).[4] Early modern English drama inevitably made much of paradox, as has been established by Rosalie L. Colie (1966) and Peter G. Platt (2016): the English plays of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were created and recreated a culture of paradox that was ubiquitously to be found, from art to science, from the engagement with the classics to religious discourse.

In the early 1590s, Henry Percy, the Ninth Earl of Northumberland, nicknamed 'The Wizard Earl' for his love of experimenting in alchemy and mathematics, and a patron of various dramatists, including George Peele, and, perhaps, Christopher Marlowe, commissioned Nicholas Hilliard to paint a cabinet miniature of himself[5] larger

4 In Duranti and Stelzer 2022, we classified paradox into these three categories: a) statements which contradict the doxa, or common opinion; b) figures which are intrinsically contradictory while being commonly accepted (e.g. the oxymoron); c) logical paradoxes, either veridical or falsidical, which flaunt the principle of non-contradiction. See the Introduction to CEMP 1.1.

5 Sir Roy Strong's attribution of the subject of this cabinet miniature (now at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) to Henry Percy has recently been questioned by Cathy J. Reed (2015), who seeks to identify the sitter with Robert Devereux, the 2nd Earl of Essex, instead. Hower, this new ascription

than usual portrait miniatures. The picture (which can be seen on the back cover of this volume) shows a fashionably melancholy gentleman lying in a "geometrically ordered but optically tilted garden" (Elam 2017, 237). He is dressed in black, has discarded his book, hat, and gloves, and pensively gazes on the onlooker. Above him there hovers an enigmatic inscription, "TANTI" (Italian for "so many" – or alternatively, a spelling variation of TANT'È, "so much for that!"; Latin for "worth as much"), below a scale, hanging from a tree, which paradoxically balances in a state of perfect equipoise a quill and a spherical object that has variously been interpreted as a globe or a cannonball.

Keir Elam labels the portrait as "a possibly alchemical imagetext" filled with secret and ambiguous references: for instance, "the abandoned book can be read, as it were, as both cause and symptom of the Earl's elevated folly" (239), connecting this iconography with Hamlet. And what about the paradox represented by the scales? Is the fact that the quill is shown as heavy as the other object, as Graham Reynolds suggests, "a tribute to the power of the pen against the world" (1964, 283)? Had the Earl heard of Galileo's legendary experiments involving throwing different weights from the Leaning Tower of Pisa? Certainly, there is a general atmosphere of meditation concerning arcane mysteries, philosophical and/or mathematical. Roy Strong goes so far as to interpret the *impresa* as an "illustration of the Archimedian proposition that 'unequal weights will balance at unequal distances, the greater weight being at the lesser distance'" (2019, 151). Or is "TANTI" an expression of elitism as conveyed by Gaveston at the beginning of Marlowe's *Edward II*?

> As for the multitude, that are but sparks
> Raked up in embers of their poverty,
> Tanti! I'll fan first on the wind
> That glanceth at my lips and flies away.
> (1.1.20-3)[6]

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has been contested in turn, see Cachaud 2016.

6 A connection between this miniature and Marlowe's play has been discussed by Kuriyama 2010, 94-5, and Sivefors 2018, 46-7.

What interests us is that the spectator is faced with a theatrically staged paradox which performs the function that the sitter of the miniature has carefully commissioned. It is not just a riddle which presupposes one correct answer only. "Paradoxes remain open-ended, problematic, challenging. But performative presentations of such contradictions hold out the possibility of an experiential resolution, however partial or fleeting" (Crockett 1995, 28). In a similar way, the essays included in this volume are devoted to showing how paradox in early modern drama can address epistemic crises and interrogate naturalised assumptions.

This book originates as a continuation of Volume 1.1 in the CEMP (Classical and Early Modern Paradoxes in England) series. Like the previous volume, it is interested in discussing the functions and uses of paradoxes in early modern English drama by investigating how classical paradoxes were received and mediated in the English Renaissance and by considering the dramatists' purposes in choosing to explore the questions broached by such paradoxes.

2.

The essays included in this volume are articulated into three sections. The first, "Paradoxical Culture and Drama", is devoted to an investigation of classical definitions and theories of paradox and the dramatic uses of paradox in ancient Greek drama which formed the breeding ground for the development of paradox in the Renaissance. In this volume we do not look for specific iterations of a given paradoxical motif, but we are interested in showing how the culture of paradox, also in drama, was born in antiquity and was then developed in the early modern context. The second section, entitled "Paradoxes in/of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama" looks at the functions and uses of paradox in the play-texts of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Finally, the essays in "Paradoxes in Drama and the Digital" examine how the Digital Humanities can enrich our knowledge of paradoxes in classical and early modern drama.

The first essay deals with the contest between the Stronger Speech and the Weaker Speech in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (889-1114)

in relation to the new education propounded by Socrates. The final victory of the Weaker Speech has been considered paradoxical since antiquity. Alessandro Stavru shows that Socratic education blends the two models of the Stronger and the Weaker Speeches. On the one hand, it is the evolution of the traditional educational system and its temperance (*sophrosyne*) with respect to bodily pleasures. On the other hand, the Socratic education entails the skillful use of rhetoric and eristic which is typical of the Weaker Speech. Paradoxically enough, this mastery of rhetoric allows the Socratic pupils to argue in favour of the satisfaction of all pleasures, thus destroying that same temperance they were proud of.

In the second essay, "Paradoxical Agathon and His Brethren", Robert Wardy reappraises the cultural significance of a dramatist only a few fragments of whose works still survive: Agathon. After discussing the contents and style of these fragments, as well as the ancient testimonies on his life and works (mainly Plato), Wardy extrapolates from the historical and the Platonic Agathon a speculative taxonomy of paradoxes in Greek philosophy. His hypothesis is that the Greek paradoxical culture reveals two lineages: on the one hand the austerely serious paradoxes, on the other, the anarchically seriocomic ones. Wardy fits Parmenides, Zeno, and Plato into the first lineage; Gorgias and Agathon into the second. Thus, Wardy's article aims to pave the way for a more systematic taxonomy of paradox in ancient Greek culture.

The second section, "Paradoxes in/of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama", is opened by Beatrice Righetti's article on Shakespeare's comedies. Righetti detects a causal relation between the character's gender and his/her argumentative strategies whereby female characters tend to prefer commonly accepted ideas and values (what Aristotle would call *endoxa*), whereas male characters employ paradoxes with confidence. This may be traced back to Shakespeare's – possibly unconscious – assimilation of contemporary rhetorical practices. Comparisons between early modern male and female writers show that women usually avoided paradoxical expressions, since they probably perceived the dangers of arguing against common opinion or the rules of logic. As they were struggling to be acknowledged as equal interlocutors in a male-dominated intellectual world, they felt that the use of paradoxes would have

been perceived as outrageous, thus providing male readers with the excuse to avoid addressing the content of female writings.

Rocco Coronato's article focuses instead on Shakespeare's tragic paradoxes, and with a particular attention to *Othello*. Firstly, he points out how the traditional norms of sincerity – as codified in the Western tradition since Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* – are challenged in the paradoxes uttered by Othello and Iago. Whereas Aristotle had praised honesty as a virtue that consists of mediocrity, in *Othello* this virtue clashes with its extreme violations: boasting (Othello) and dissembling (Iago). Dissimulation serves the purpose of concealing the self by creating a free, autonomous space, which Montaigne would call the *arrière boutique*, the backshop. Secondly, Coronato examines the role of defamation in *Othello*, showing that slander gets paradoxically more rampant after the slandered character's death: for instance, Othello's accusations against Desdemona become explicit after he has killed her. Eventually, Othello resorts to self-slandering through boastful exaggeration, talking of himself as if he were already dead. The architect of all this, Iago, a true manipulator of reality thus creates the ultimate undecidable paradox: how to transform non-being into being.

Next comes Bryan Crockett's chapter "Paradox in Performance", which applies to early modern cultural plays, especially Shakespeare's, the notions developed by the mid-twentieth century anthropologist Victor Turner. According to Crockett, the early modern theatre became the site of what Turner called a social drama: a series of different stages beginning with a breach of societal norms and ending with a reintegration into society. Such social drama found expression in the language of paradox. In Turner's view, any culture has its central or 'root' paradigms, which are intrinsically paradoxical, "a coincidence of opposites, a semantic structure in tension between opposite poles of meaning" (1975, 88-9). Turner believed that the root paradigm of early modern European culture was essentially sacrificial, involving the individual's rejection of selfhood as a response to Christ's martyrdom. Crockett builds on Turner's theory and identifies Shakespeare's age as a period of crisis, when the paradoxical status of root paradigms was reinforced, and performative negotiations of the crisis tended towards either a conscious embracing of the paradox in all its contradictoriness or a

resolution of the paradox into one of its contrary principles. Within this theoretical frame, Crockett examines some Shakespearean paradoxes involving oxymora.

In the following essay ("The Digges' Family and the Art of War"), Andrew Hadfield examines Leonard Digges' posthumously published *Four Paradoxes, or Politique Discourses Concerning Military Discipline* (1604), and focuses especially on the fourth paradox in this collection entitled: "That warre sometimes lesse hurtfull, and more to be wisht in a well governed State than peace". Hadfield places this paradox in the context of the early modern discourse on war, contrasting it with Erasmus' famous and much cited maxim "Dulce Bellum Inexpertis", comparing it to George Gascoigne's poem *Dulce Bellum Inexpertis*, and reading a few early modern plays through this perspective. Hadfield's conclusion is that, in the early modern times, the paradox according to which preparing for war was the best way to keep peace was more familiar and accepted by the readers than Erasmus' plea for peace.

In the last essay of this section, entitled "'Indiscreet chroniclers and witty play-makers': William Cornwallis and the Fiction of Richard III", Francesco Dall'Olio sets William Cornwallis' paradoxical *Praise of King Richard the Third* (printed in 1616) against the backdrop of the English Renaissance literary tradition on Richard III. Moreover, he illustrates the points of contact between this paradoxical encomium and Girolamo Cardano's "Neronis Encomium", inspired by Machiavelli's political theories. Dall'Olio points out how Corwallis' work reversed the traditional negative judgment about this king, thus laying the ground for his revaluation in later historical works. On a more general level, Cornwallis questions the foundations of Elizabethan historical writing both on the conception of how to write history and in the idea of what makes a good king, while at the same time taking up and developing ambiguous traits present in that same tradition which included Shakespeare's history plays, as well as Thomas Legge's *Richardus Tertius* (acted in 1579) and the anonymous *The True Tragedy of Richard III* (printed in 1594).

The first chapter of the third and final section, "Searching for Ritual Paradoxes in Annotated Ancient Greek Tragedies", shows how digital resources and computational instruments can

effectively help researchers analyse recurring themes and motifs in ancient Greek tragedies. As Gloria Mugelli and Federico Boschetti point out, this analysis can be applied to ritual paradoxes staged in ancient Greek tragedies, based on the contrast between the tragic events and the ritual context of the festival in honour of Dionysus in which the plays were staged. Mugelli and Boschetti then present the annotation system Euporia, created thanks to the collaboration between the Institute for Computational Linguistics "A. Zampolli" (CNR-ILC), and the Anthropology of the Ancient World Lab (LAMA) at the University of Pisa. By applying this system to the analysis of a selected corpus of Greek tragedies, they point out how the mournful tone of tragic rituals was at odds with the festive celebration of Dionysus, thus defining tragedy's paradoxical extraneousness to its ritual context.

In the following chapter ("'It Is a Happiness to Be in Debt'. Digital Approaches to the Culture of Paradox in Early Modern Drama"), Alessandra Squeo moves to early modern English culture, aiming to show how an open-access archive of machine-readable versions of paradoxes like CEMP may be used to gain deeper insights into Shakespeare's drama in relation to the early modern episteme. Squeo focuses on the notion of debt as a rich source of paradoxes, and analyses debt-related discourses in Shakespeare's plays, and especially in *The Merchant of Venice*. Her analysis makes clear that Shakespeare employs debt paradoxes in order to problematise established assumptions related to the value of money in a rising capitalist society.

The last chapter of our book, Michael Best's "'Do you see this?'. Ambiguity and Paradox in *King Lear*", illustrates possible strategies for enhancing the readers' visualisation of paradoxes, thanks to the wide range of presentations and interactions allowed by digital media. For instance, the informatic tools can enable the reader to juxtapose the two variant endings of *King Lear*. Critical readings of the play usually comment that its finale entails a complex paradox, but this view is based on the Folio's more extensive ending. If we read this scene in the Quarto edition, substantial variants appear and the paradox loses its force. Thus, in cases like *King Lear*'s final scene, the juxtaposition of variant versions of the text prompts the reader to evaluate the specific effects of using paradoxes in drama.

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1. Ancient Paradoxical Culture and Drama

1

The Paradox of 'Making the Weaker Speech the Stronger': on Aristophanes' *Clouds*, 889-1114

Alessandro Stavru

Abstract

In this paper, I deal with a much-discussed passage of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, namely the contest between two *dramatis personae* of the play – the *Stronger Speech* and the *Weaker Speech* (889-1114). This part of the play contains paradoxical features since the aim of both contestants is to overturn the arguments of the other. The contest ends with the paradoxical triumph of the Weaker Speech and the defeat of the Stronger Speech: the Stronger Speech surrenders and switches over to the other side, that is, to the Weaker Speech. This switching over, or change in identity, has been perceived as paradoxical ever since antiquity: in his *Apology*, written decades after Aristophanes' *Clouds*, Plato recalls this play as the comedy in which Socrates "made the worse argument the stronger" (*Ap.* 18a-c). Kenneth Dover demonstrated that the contest between the two speeches deals with two opposing models of education that are themselves paradoxical: old vs new education. Old education propounds the age-old value of temperance (*sophrosyne*), but its obsession with homosexual voyeurism makes it incapable of upholding this value. New education, on the other hand, differs strikingly from the ascetic education taught within Socrates' school as it pleads for an unbridled life of pleasure. My essay attempts at making sense of the paradoxical features of the passage. I claim that the two speeches stand for different stages of Socratic education. Both represent ideas of education that are characteristic of fifth-century Athens. Whilst Socratic education is, on the one hand, the evolution of the educational system propounded by the Stronger Speech (i.e. the age-old education of the 'Heroes of Marathon'), on the other, it forms the bedrock of the new education peculiar to the Weaker Speech (i.e. the education of the younger generation, such as that of Socrates' most renowned pupil, Alcibiades).

Keywords: Aristophanes; *Clouds*; Socrates; education; *sophrosyne*; *euryproktosyne*

1. The Stronger and the Weaker Speech

In this essay, I deal with a much-discussed passage of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, namely the contest between two *dramatis personae* of the play: the *Stronger Speech* and the *Weaker Speech* (889-1114).[1] Ancient sources suggest that this section of *Clouds* did not belong to the original version of the play, which was performed in 423 BC.[2] According to an ancient *hypothesis*, the contest of the two speeches that came down to us was added some years later (somewhere between 420 and 417), together with the parabasis of the chorus (518-562) and the burning of Socrates' school at the end of the play (1483-1511).[3] Although the two speeches are also mentioned in parts of the comedy that likely belonged to the first version of the play (see 112-6, 243-4, 657, 886, 1336-7, 1444-5, 1451-2), it seems probable that the contest between them did not appear in the first version.[4]

1 It should be noted that most ancient sources (the *dramatis personae*, the *scholia*, the *hypotheseis*, the *sigla* etc.) distinguish between a *just* (*dikaios*) and an *unjust* (*adikos*) speech. It is likely, however, that just and unjust are the result of late corrections (see Del Corno 1996, 293-4), and that the original names were *stronger* and *weaker* since these terms are used at 112-3, 893-4 and 1337-8, as well as in the scholia to RVE at 889 and 891. For a discussion on the passage, see Erbse 1954, 391-402; Strauss 1966, 29-39; Dover 1968, 209-30, lvii-lxvi, xc-xciii; Curiazi 1978, Stone 1980, Nussbaum 1980, 50-67; O'Regan, 89-105; Newiger 2000, 134-55; Casanova 2006, 165-9; Casanova 2007, 84-95; Cerri 2012, 171-4; Quinalha 2012, 99-102; Corradi 2013, 72-5 and 2018, 86-7; and Rossetti 2023, 13-14.

2 For hypotheses on the plot of the first version of *Clouds*, see Heidhues 1897, 14-25; Gelzer 1956, 138-40; Dover 1968, lxxx-xcviii; Hubbard 1986; and Tarrant 1991.

3 See Hypothesis 1 Dover (Dover 1968, 1; lxxx-xcviii = Hypothesis 5 Wilson = Hypothesis 7 Coulon).

4 I depart here from Dover, who thinks that the first version of *Clouds* also featured a contest between the two speeches. According to Dover these were not, however, personified as *human* characters (as in *Clouds* 2), but "brought on [stage] as fighting-cocks" (Dover 1968, xc; see also xci-xciii). If Dover is right, and the contest did feature, then it must have differed greatly from the one that eventually came down to us, which centres on the sexual features of the two speeches. It is obvious that these features only apply to humans, and not to cocks (cf. esp. 973-8; for more on these verses, see below). To my mind, the reconstruction by Russo 1962 is more

As Dover has shown, "the contest is focused on education", and "we should probably believe that in the 420's an old system of education [personified by the Stronger Speech] was yielding to a new system [personified by the Weaker Speech]" (see Dover 1968, lviii). It is important to pinpoint that the two educational systems in question are connected: the Stronger Speech is *old* because it precedes and, in some way, lays the foundation for the *new* Weaker Speech. The two speeches are both personified as male characters: the education systems these male *personae* represent are not, therefore, abstract ideas of *paideia*, but instead refer to Greek tradition, that is, to how all young male citizens should be brought up. According to these ideas, the education system relates to the relationship between an older male (the lover/teacher) and a younger male (the beloved/pupil – see esp. Dover 1989 and Percy 1996), as also seems to be implied in the contest between the two speeches: the two speeches have specific sexual needs and appear to deal with them in specific ways. Indeed, the two systems have characteristics that at first sight seem to be at odds:

1) The Stronger Speech derives his name from the physical hardiness, the training, the health and the strength he stands for (984-99). He personifies traditional values such as respect for parents and elders, justice and chastity, and temperance (981-3).

> κἀπιστήσει μισεῖν ἀγορὰν καὶ βαλανείων ἀπέχεσθαι,
> καὶ τοῖς αἰσχροῖς αἰσχύνεσθαι κἂν σκώπτῃ τίς σε φλέγεσθαι,
> καὶ τῶν θάκων τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις ὑπανίστασθαι προσιοῦσιν,

convincing: he believes that the first version of *Clouds* featured a dialogue between Chaerephon and Pheidippides rather than the contest between the two speeches. This reconstruction makes sense since such a dialogue must have existed somewhere in *Clouds* 1 (even Dover 1968, xcv-xcvi, must admit that "neither in 104 nor in 1465 does the prominence given to Chaerephon serve by itself any discernible humorous or dramatic purpose; rather, this prominence takes for granted the existence in the play of a scene or scenes which do not in fact exist elsewhere"). At 1465, Strepsiades calls Chaerephon "abominable" (μιαρός), which does not make sense if we look at the plot of the actual comedy (i.e., Chaerephon never behaves in a way to justify such an accusation). On the contrary, the accusation perfectly fits if we surmise that in *Clouds* 1 Chaerephon took charge of educating Pheidippides.

> καὶ μὴ περὶ τοὺς σαυτοῦ γονέας σκαιουργεῖν, ἄλλο τε μηδὲν αἰσχρὸν ποιεῖν ὅτι τῆς Αἰδοῦς μέλλεις τἄγαλμ' ἀναπλήσειν·
>
> [You will know how to hate the Agora and shun the bathhouses, to be ashamed of what is shameful, and to give up your seats to your elders when they approach, and not to act rudely towards your own parents, nor to do anything else disgraceful that would defile the Statue of Respect. (990-5, trans. Sommerstein, adapted)]

The Stronger Speech pursues the ideal of age-old education going back to the "Heroes of Marathon" (986). He identifies with traditional music and poetry (966-72), but he has no rhetorical capabilities (esp. 1088 and 1102). Thus, a paradoxical feature of the Stronger Speech now arises: although he respects the law, rules and moral conventions, and openly pursues the enforcements of the prohibitions linked to them, at the end of the contest he ends up being chastised because of his own behaviours since he is unable to defend himself against the accusations being levelled against him (1083-4). Indeed, it soon turns out that the Stronger Speech's praise of temperance (*sophrosyne*, at 962 and 1006; see also 1027, 1060, 1067, and 1071)[5] is unsubstantiated. Whilst defending traditional values, he desperately longs for sexual pleasure. He is sexually repressed since his ideology impedes him from satisfying his sexual appetite. But, as we will see, this only applies to male homosexuality (961-1023).[6] In the heterosexual sphere (1063-82), the values the Stronger Speech stands for are ineffective: he is unable to restrain himself, and his adulterous behaviour incurs violent punishment (1083-4).[7]

5 *Sophrosune* is a key virtue in male homosexual relationships between young boys and adult men (as in the case of the contest between the Weaker and the Stronger Speeches). Young boys should be modest, coy and shy towards elder men; the latter should, on the other hand, be chaste towards the younger and avoid sexual intercourse with them. On the conventions of male homosexuality, see Bethe 1907, Kroll 1921, Dover 1964 and 1973, Devereux 1968, Reynan 1967, Eyben 1972, Henderson 1991, 204-209.

6 As Henderson notes, male homosexuality was common in Doric Greece. In Attica, its social status was far less popular. In Old Comedy, there is no sympathy for homosexual behaviour: in Aristophanes and other comic playwrights, the normal sexual state is considered to be heterosexuality (Henderson 1991, 208-9).

7 It is interesting to note that the Stronger Speech *persona* first distances

2) The Weaker Speech stands for the neglect of physical condition and the lack of physical exercise. He praises physical enfeeblement, warm baths and warm clothing. He has no respect for parents or elders. He systematically violates the age-old rules of morality, and stands, therefore, for *physis* (nature) against *nomos* (law).[8] He also stands for sexual promiscuity, namely for the satisfaction of the unbridled "necessities of nature" (*tas tes physeos anankas*, at 1075). These should always be pursued – even unlawfully – and achieved through tactics of persuasion. Contrary to the Stronger Speech's praise of sexual restraint, the Weaker Speech overtly boasts about his unbridled sex drive: his virtue consists not in *sophrosyne* (temperance), as we will see, but in *euryproktosyne* ("having a wide ass", at 1085-1100). Thanks to his mastery of sophistic speech, he is able to prove his innocence even when found guilty. Therefore, the Weaker Speech's name derives from his ability to subvert established truths and values, to take on lost cases and successfully defend them:

> ἐγὼ γὰρ ἥττων μὲν λόγος δι' αὐτὸ τοῦτ' ἐκλήθην
> ἐν τοῖσι φροντισταῖσιν, ὅτι πρώτιστος ἐπενόησα
> τοῖσιν νόμοις καὶ ταῖς δίκαις τἀναντί' ἀντιλέξαι.
> καὶ τοῦτο πλεῖν ἢ μυρίων ἔστ' ἄξιον στατήρων,
> αἱρούμενον τοὺς ἥττονας λόγους ἔπειτα νικᾶν.
>
> [For it was just for this reason that I got the name of Weaker Speech among men of thought, because I was the first who conceived the notion of arguing in contradiction to established values and justified pleas. And that is worth more than ten thousand staters? To be able to choose the inferior case and yet win. (1039-43; trans. Sommerstein adapted)]

himself from heterosexual sex (996-7), but then, tempted by adultery, is incapable of refraining from it (1080-2). This alone makes it clear that the Stronger Speech is far from strong; his *sophrosyne* is too weak to withstand the temptation of pleasure.

8 This matches with what we know about two major sophists, namely Callicles and Antiphon: both of them propound *physis* against *nomos* (for Callicles, *physis* corresponds to the right of the stronger; for Antiphon, to self-interest). For an overview, see Guthrie 1971, 101-16.

An important feature the two speeches have in common is that they both long for pleasure (*hedone*). The Weaker Speech overtly does so by pursuing the "necessities of nature", i.e. hedonism of the most basic sort. The Stronger Speech, on the contrary, praises temperance (*sophrosyne*) at first. When confronted with good-looking, well-trained young boys, however, his obsession with sex shows.[9] As Dover claims, the Stronger Speech points out virtuous behaviour by dreamily dwelling on the young boys' genitals (989, 1014):

> ἐν παιδοτρίβου δὲ καθίζοντας τὸν μηρὸν ἔδει προβαλέσθαι
> τοὺς παῖδας, ὅπως τοῖς ἔξωθεν μηδὲν δείξειαν ἀπηνές·
> εἶτ' αὖ πάλιν αὖθις ἀνιστάμενον συμψῆσαι καὶ προνοεῖσθαι
> εἴδωλον τοῖσιν ἐρασταῖσιν τῆς ἥβης μὴ καταλείπειν.
> ἠλείψατο δ' ἂν τοὐμφαλοῦ οὐδεὶς παῖς ὑπένερθεν τότ' ἄν,
> ὥστε τοῖς αἰδοίοισι δρόσος καὶ χνοῦς ὥσπερ μήλοισιν ἐπήνθει.
>
> [When the boys sat down in the gymnastic, they had to cover themselves with their thighs so as not to expose anything to the onlookers that would be "cruel" (*apenes*); and then, when they stood up again, they had to smooth off the sand, and take care not to leave behind for their lovers the impress (*eidolon*) of their manhood. Also, in those days, no boy would anoint himself below the navel, and so on their *pudenda* (*tois aidoioisi*) the dew and the fluff were blooming like on fruits. (973-8, trans. Sommerstein, adapted)]

The boys should cover their genitals whilst sitting, since the direct sight of them would be "cruel" for the onlookers. But even the indirect sight of them is a potential danger. When they stand up, the boys should carefully erase any impression of their genitals on the ground, so as to avoid tormenting those who might spot them.[10] Last but not least, the Stronger Speech dwells on the liquid and the soft pubic hair (*drosos kai khnous*)[11] on the

9 See Dover 1968, lxv, and Del Corno 1996, 301-3.

10 It has been noted that this passage resembles a Pythagorean *akousma*, according to which the shape of the body impressed upon linens should be erased when one gets up from the bed in the morning: see Hewitt 1935.

11 The paederotic context of the expression δρόσος καὶ χνοῦς is patent. According to Dover, δρόσος may refer here to Cowper's secretion, i.e. the liquid "that is emitted when the penis is erect" (Dover 1968, 217). This reading does not fit with 1012-15, where the Stronger Speech describes the physical

genitals themselves, comparing them to glowing apples. Here the description imperceptibly moves from the visual to the tactile sphere, since the dewy and soft genitals of the young boys can not only be seen, but also be touched. This is at odds with what we are told in the previous verses: if the sight of the genitals is "cruel" and should therefore be avoided, why does the Stronger Speech dwell on details that, from his viewpoint, should be even more cruel? It seems clear that Aristophanes is outlining, in a joking manner, the Stronger Speech's weakness: although he praises self-control in matters of sex and does not want to see the young boys' genitals, he ends up visualising details that imply not only touching, but also, quite possibly, caressing them. His sexual repression is, therefore, complete: both on the visual and on the tactile level, he dreams a desire he cannot satisfy.

The Stronger Speech follows the conventional rules of traditional male *paideia*, which hinder him from openly pursuing his desires. As Dover poignantly observes, he is a "homosexual voyerist"[12], who

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features of the young boys who spend their time in palaestras: "[you will have] a shining breast, a bright skin, big shoulders, a minute tongue, a big ass and a small prick (κωλῆν μικράν)" (trans. Sommerstein, adapted). Here it is evident that the young boys praised by the Stronger Speech have small (i.e. non-erect) genitals because they are busy practicing gymnastics. This also seems to be the case at 977, where the reference to the "anointment" (ἠλείψατο) of the young boys also points to an athletic, and not to an erotic, context. Jeffrey Henderson provides a more likely explanation of these verses. He claims that "dewiness is frequently associated by the Greeks with freshness and innocence, which are clearly wanted in our passage". Henderson believes that the expression δρόσος καὶ χνοῦς should be taken as a hendiadys referring to the fact that "the pubic down of boys is not artificially oiled but naturally dewy, like the surface of fruits (μήλοισιν), because of the boys' athletic sweat" (Henderson, 145n194).

12 See Dover 1968, lxv. The Stronger Speech's (homo-)sexual voyeurism is also evident at 964-6 ("the boys of the neighbourhood . . . wore no cloaks, even if it was snowing as thick as barley groats. Then again, the music teacher would teach them . . . not to keep their thighs together"), 988-9 ("the pupils of the Weaker Speech make me [i.e. the Stronger Speech] choke with rage, when they dance at the Panathenaea, and one of them holds his shield in front of his ham, caring nothing for Tritogeneia"), 1014-18 ([the Stronger Speech on those who follow his advice] "[you'll have] a small tongue, a big rump, a small prick" . . . [and on those who do not follow his advice] "[you'll

is unable to satisfy his erotic needs. Indeed, the Stronger Speech values *hedone* as the Weaker Speech does, but is unfit to pursue it because of the restrictions imposed by moral conventions. The two speeches have different ethical stances: the Stronger Speech values *nomos* over *physis*, while the Weaker Speech values *physis* over *nomos*. Both long for *hedone*: the Stronger Speech craves *hedone* but is unable to obtain it in the homosexual sphere because of the restrictions imposed by *nomos* (and/or his inability to circumvent them); the Weaker Speech also longs for *hedone* and has unlimited access to it due to his ability to circumvent all rules and conventions imposed by *nomos*.

2. Socratic Education and the Power of *Logos*

Both speeches stand for values and behaviours that at first sight appear to be at odds with what Aristophanes presents as 'Socratic education'. Such education has ascetic traits that do not match with either the repressive longing for pleasure of the Stronger Speech or the unbridled satisfaction of pleasure of the Weaker Speech. In *Clouds*, Socrates' new pupil Strepsiades must endure cold and hunger as well as refrain from pleasure:

> τὸ ταλαίπωρον ἔνεστιν
> ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ καὶ μὴ κάμνεις μήθ' ἑστὼς μήτε βαδίζων
> μήτε ῥιγῶν ἄχθει λίαν μήτ' ἀριστᾶν ἐπιθυμεῖς
> οἴνου τ' ἀπέχει καὶ γυμνασίων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀνοήτων
>
> [If there is endurance in your soul, if neither standing nor walking tires you, if you are not too put out by being cold or yearn for your breakfast, if you abstain from wine and physical exercise and all other follies . . . (414-17, trans. Sommerstein)]

Strepsiades is willing to suffer all possible physical pain. His hope is that the discipline he is going to acquire in the *phrontisterion* will provide him with the eristic skills that will enable him to ward off the creditors that haunt him:

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have] a big tongue, a small rump, a big ham").

> τουτὶ τό γ' ἐμὸν σῶμ' αὐτοῖσιν
> παρέχω τύπτειν, πεινῆν, διψῆν,
> αὐχμεῖν, ῥιγῶν, ἀσκὸν δείρειν,
> εἴπερ τὰ χρέα διαφευξοῦμαι
>
> [So now I unconditionally deliver to them this body of mine to be beaten, to hunger, to thirst, to be dirty, to freeze, to be flayed with a wineskin, if only I can escape my debts . . . (439-43, trans. Sommerstein)]

The ascetic features outlined in *Clouds* fit with what we see in *Birds*, a comedy staged nine years later. Here Socratic education is characterised as a *mania*, a "craze" for Spartan ways (*lakonomania*):

> Πρὶν μὲν γὰρ οἰκίσαι σε τήνδε τὴν πόλιν, ἐλακωνομάνουν ἅπαντες ἄνθρωποι τότε, ἐκόμων, ἐπείνων, ἐρρύπων, ἐσωκράτων, σκυτάλι' ἐφόρουν
>
> [Some time ago . . . all humans had a craze for Spartan ways – long hair, starvation, no washing, they behaved like Socrates, carrying round those curious message-sticks. (1280-3; trans. Halliwell adapted)]

We know from fourth-century sources that the ethical values advocated by Socrates and his entourage do in fact match with those of Spartan asceticism. Antisthenes, Xenophon and other Socratics deal at length with Socrates' ascetic features, especially with strength (*iskhys*), endurance (*karteria*) and self-control (*enkrateia*). These values prove to be *stronger* than *hedone*.[13] They are, therefore,

13 *Iskhys* is a typical Socratic virtue according to Antisthenes. A much-discussed fragment states that "virtue is self-sufficient for happiness, needing nothing in addition except for Socratic strength" (*SSR* 5 A 134, 2-5 = DL 6.10-11 = Prince 2015, 388-94). According to Plato, *iskhys* is a quality of an episteme which is stronger that *hedone* (Pl. *Prt.* 352b). Chantraine (1990, 578-9) conjectures that both *karteria* and *enkrateia* could be etymologically related to the name *Sokrates*. In fact, fourth-century sources clearly show that both qualities are related to Socrates. Their difference lies in the fact that *karteria* enables the endurance of potentially harmful external agents (such as heat, cold, fatigue etc.), whereas *enkrateia* provides resistance against the temptations of sex, sleep, food and drink (see Pl. *Smp.* 216c-221b; Xenoph. *Mem.* 1.2.1-5, 1.6.6-8, 2.1.18-20, 2.6.22, 4.5.8-9, *Smp.* 8.8, *Ap.* 25, Oec. 5.4). The main texts dealing with this topic have been gathered together in Boys-

a step beyond the temperance (*sophrosyne*) praised by the Stronger Speech, which is *too weak* to withstand the temptations of *hedone*.

The most evident example of Socratic asceticism is Chaerephon, one of Socrates' most intimate associates according to Aristophanes.[14] In *Clouds*, Chaerephon is depicted as being very close to Socrates. He assists Socrates in performing various duties within his school. He is "half-dead" (*hemithnes*, at 504), a definition which hints at the radical asceticism practiced within the *phrontisterion*. Aristophanes lampoons Socrates' "care of the soul" (*epimeleia tes psyches*) as a dieting regime that aims to transform Socrates' pupils into Homeric ghosts of the dead (*psychai*).[15] In fact, Aristophanes ridicules the school of Socrates as "the thinkery of wise ghosts" (*psychon sophon . . . phrontisterion*, at 94). In *Birds*, Chaerephon is a *nykteris*, an infernal bat that "arises from below" (*anelthe katothen*, at 1563) and goes "after blood" (*pros to laima*, at 1564) – exactly like the underworldly *psychai* featured in the *Odyssey*.[16] He is not really alive, but not even dead: he resembles, but is not altogether, an underworldly ghost (*psyche*).[17] Thanks to Socrates' necromantic ability (*psychagogein*, at 1555), he is capable of dwelling in both the underworld and the upperworld: hence his hybrid status.

The failure of the Stronger Speech, who is unable to uphold the virtue he claims to pursue, is the failure of a whole generation. As we have seen, the Stronger Speech celebrates the age-old values of

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Stones & Rowe 2013, 66, 72-5 and 105-10.

14 It should be noted that Chaerephon is the only follower of Socrates to be named. This entails that he was a known figure in Athens when he was put on stage, i.e. in *Clouds* (423), *Wasps* (434), and *Birds* (414). Even in Plato, Chaerephon is depicted as a close associate of Socrates. In *Apology*, he consults the oracle about Socrates' wisdom: see 21a-b. Chaerephon is also a character in Plato's *Gorgias*. See Moore 2013, 284-5 and 296; Brisson 1996, 304-5; and Nails 2002, 86-7.

15 Havelock 1972, 15-16, shows that the *psychai* of Socrates and the Socratics in *Clouds* should be identified with the ghosts of the underworld featured in the *Odyssey* (cf. Sarri 1975, 115-6).

16 See *Od.* 11.43-51, cfr. 24.6-8.

17 When *Birds* was performed in 414, Chaerephon was still alive: see Plat. *Ap.* 21a, according to which Chaerephon was exiled in 404 by the Thirty Tyrants together with other democrats. He came back to Athens in 403. On Chaerephon, see n4.

the generation of the 'Heroes of Marathon'. All these values, namely respecting parents and elders, justice and chastity, are encompassed by the virtue of *sophrosyne*. The contest between the two speeches shows that *sophrosyne*, and all values connected with it, are old-fashioned and out-dated because they are incapable of providing a reliable guide in situations in which *hedone* is strong and tempting. This matches with what we see in Socratic literature, where the Marathon Heroes Themistocles and Miltiades are criticised for the ineffectiveness of their virtues as well as for their inability to account for them.[18]

The Weaker Speech, on the contrary, does not care about virtue. He is free from the constraints induced by a traditional understanding of moral turpitude (*aiskhron*, 1078). The education he propounds aims at developing, through exercise (*askein*, 1059), specific rhetorical skills that enable him to get away with unlawful behaviours. Thanks to his eristic ability, he is able to circumvent the established social rules and thus lead a life of unlimited licentiousness (*hybris*, 1068) and pleasure (*hedy*, 1069).

Aristophanes' paradoxical exaggeration is of great interest since it highlights a crucial difference between the traditional *paideia* defended by the Stronger Speech and the new education propounded by the Weaker Speech. Traditional *paideia* centres on rules and ethical conventions, while the new education system aims at circumventing and breaking these very rules. Traditional *paideia* defends *gymnastike*, a physical training that aims to attain the aristocratic values of *kalokagathia*; the new education system, on the contrary, negates *gymnastike* and praises asceticism instead. Such asceticism also involves training, but of an intellectual kind: its aim is not *kalokagathia*, but to acquire an eristic ability that enables the pursuit of unlawful *hedone* with impunity.[19]

18 For Themistocles, see Ehlers 1966, 14-20; Humbert 1967, 225 and Plácido 2010, 122. For Miltiades, see esp. the fragments and testimonies of Aeschines of Sphettus' dialogue *Miltiades*: Pentassuglio 2017, 116-23 (see the commentary in Pentassuglio 2017, 184-205). Plato criticises Themistocles and Miltiades (together with Pericles) at *Grg*. 503c f.

19 As I claim in another paper (Stavru 2023, 29-32), a paradoxical feature of the Weaker Speech is his eristic *discipline* (*askesis*). The paradox outlined by Aristophanes lies in the fact that eristic discipline enables one to *satisfy*

It appears that Socratic education is not counterposed to the values and behaviours propounded by the Stronger and the Weaker Speeches. On the contrary, the two speeches stand for different stages of Socratic education. Both represent notions of education that are characteristic of fifth century Athens. On the one hand, Socratic education is the evolution of the educational system propounded by the Stronger Speech (i.e. the age-old education of the 'Heroes of Marathon'); on the other, it is the bedrock of a new education specific to the Weaker Speech (i.e. the education of the younger generation, such as that of Socrates' most renowned pupil Alcibiades). It is important to pinpoint that the two educational systems being addressed in this section of *Clouds* are connected: the Stronger Speech is *old* because it precedes, but in some way it lays the foundation for the *new* Weaker Speech.

The contest between the two speeches is evidence of the rapid evolution of Athenian *paideia* in the second half of the fifth century. This evolution relates to the power of *logos*: thanks to elenchus and dialectics, Socrates and the Sophists are able to refute and eventually to overthrow the conventional values of the Athenian past. Socrates' most talented and daring pupils, one of whom is Alcibiades (others include some of the most unprejudiced Sophists, such as Thrasymachus and Callicles),[20] go even further: their ability to establish a new ethics based on the law of the strongest goes hand in hand with the ability to pursue unlimited *hedone* and material goods – if necessary, even by violating the rules and laws of the city.

Both ancient and modern scholars have pointed out that the contest of the two speeches should be understood as a parody of a Protagorean doctrine, as well as an attempt to attribute to Socrates

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the "needs of nature", but, by doing so, it rules out the traditional idea of discipline (i.e. *sophrosyne*) – which on the contrary *tames and inhibits* these very "needs of nature". Thus, within the logic of the Weaker Speech, sophistic *askesis* and *hedone*, far from being counterposed, are reciprocally linked – while for the Stronger Speech *sophrosyne* and *hedone* are poles apart.

20 Alcibiades and Thrasymachus are mentioned in connection to Socratic education in another Aristophanic comedy, namely *Daitaleis* (performed four years before *Clouds*, in 427): see 205 KA. On *Daitaleis*, see Cassio 1977; Segoloni 1994, 111-93; MacDowell 1995, 27-9; Papageorgiou 2004; Rusten 2011, 301-7.

a typical sophistic method.[21] According to the *scholia recentiora* to *Clouds* (at 112b), the contest of the two speeches features a Protagorean doctrine that Aristophanes relates to Socrates.[22] In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle attributes to Protagoras the claim of "making the weaker argument stronger" (1402a24-8 = DK 80 A 21).[23] This fits with Protagoras' idea, according to which reality is contradictory. Eudoxus explicitly connects the doctrine of the weaker speech with the possibility of developing two opposite speeches about the same subject (Stephanus Byzantius *Ethnica* s.v. *Abdera* 1.18.13-4 Billerbeck = DK 80 A 21). Thus contradiction is unavoidable: "on every matter there are two counterposed speeches" (DL 9.51 = DK 80 A 1).[24] Eristics consists in the ability to argue for either one of them alternatively, and to make the *weaker* speech prevail. This ability can also be traced back to another major sophist, namely Gorgias (DK 82 B 11-11a). In fact, it should be noted that in the second half of the fifth century BC "antilogies" (i.e. opposing speeches on the same subject), were employed not only by sophists such as Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus and Antiphon, but also by playwrights such as Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes, and even by historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides.[25]

21 For allusions to Protagoras and other sophists in *Clouds*, see Navia 1993, 21-57; Schiappa 2003, 110-13; and Konstan 2011.

22 Cp. *Scholia in Aristophanem* 1.3.2, 224 Koster.

23 The link to Protagoras is attested also in later authors. For Cicero, defending the weaker cause was a typical feature of Protagoras, as well as of other sophists such as Gorgias, Thrasymachus, Prodicus, and Hippias (*Brut.* 8.30-1). According to Seneca, Protagoras claimed that it is possible to argue about the same subject in opposite ways (*Ep.* 88.43 = DK 80 A 20). Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 6.8.65.1 = DK 80 A 20) and Diogenes Laertius (DL 9.51 = DK 80 B 6a) both point out that the idea according to which there are two opposing speeches about every possible topic goes back to Protagoras. The two books of *Antilogies* Diogenes Laertius attributes to Protagoras fit into this picture (DL 9.55 = DK 80 A 1), as well as the anonymous *Dissoi logoi* (DK 83).

24 On the Protagorean technique of the opposing arguments (esp. DK 80 A 1 and A 4), see Radermacher 1951, 39-40; de Romilly 1992, 75-81; and Schiappa 2003, 89-102.

25 For a survey on the antilogies in the fifth century BC, see Rossetti 2023, who discusses the evidence of some 30 different antilogies going back to these authors.

Several fourth-century authors also deal with eristics. In Plato's *Gorgias* (456c), oratory is defined as a competitive skill, thanks to which persuasiveness prevails over competence.[26] According to Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (11.25), making the Weaker Speech stronger consists in providing an appearance of truth in what is false. In Isocrates' *Antidosis*, lies can prevail over truth by making weaker arguments stronger (15-16). These examples show that the empowerment provided through sophistic *logos* consists in the ability to transform a weak argument into a strong one through eristics, as Aristophanes points out in the contest between the two speeches.

3. The Stronger Speech's Lack of *Logos* and his Surrender to the Weaker Speech

It soon turns out that the Stronger Speech lacks any argument able to defend the values he propounds. He praises virtue by recalling an example of ancient myth. Peleus, a mortal, managed to marry a beautiful goddess, Thetis, just because of his *sophrosyne*. The Weaker Speech refutes the Stronger Speech by pointing out that Thetis left Peleus exactly because of *sophrosyne* – since, from Thetis' point of view, this virtue was nothing but a lack of sex drive, i.e. Peleus had been unable to satisfy her. This refutation leads to a role swap between the two speeches: the Weaker Speech starts lecturing the Stronger Speech. The Weaker Speech moves on to the next argument: what would the Stronger do in the case that "necessities of nature" move him to commit adultery? How would he deal with the situation should he be caught?

26 In *Apology* (at 18a-c) Plato recalls the idea of "making the Weaker speech the stronger" by referring it to Aristophanes' *Clouds*. It appears that Plato (and, after him, other ancient authors) is pointing here at the contest between the two speeches – that is, to *Clouds* 2 and not to *Clouds* 1, which did not feature that contest (as argued above, n. 4). Since we know that Plato had at his disposal both versions of *Clouds* (see Dover 1968, lxxxv), we must surmise that for some reason he picked the text of *Clouds* 2 instead of that of *Clouds* 1 – although (at 19c2) he seems to refer to the version staged in 423 (on the possible reasons for Plato's preference for *Clouds* 2, see Segoloni 1994, 56-8).

πάρειμ' ἐντεῦθεν εἰς τὰς τῆς φύσεως ἀνάγκας.
ἥμαρτες, ἠράσθης, ἐμοίχευσάς τι, κᾆτ' ἐλήφθης.
ἀπόλωλας· ἀδύνατος γὰρ εἶ λέγειν.

[(The Weaker Speech to the Stronger Speech) I will move on to the necessities of nature. You've erred, you've fallen in love, you've had a bit of an affair, and then you've been caught. You're done for because you're not able to argue. (1075-7, trans. Sommerstein adapted)]

The Weaker Speech claims that the Stronger Speech, though sticking to *sophrosyne*, is unable to tame the "necessities of nature" – probably for the reason we saw before, i.e. because he is sexually repressed. Sooner or later, he ends up committing adultery: it is only a matter of time. Once caught guilty, he is unable to defend himself because of his lack of rhetorical prowess. This inability leads him to admit defeat. Eventually, the Stronger Speech surrenders to the Weaker Speech because he lacks *logos*, i.e., the rhetorical prowess that is necessary to live a life of *hedone*. Since the Stronger Speech is unable to argue, he must learn rhetorical abilities from the Weaker Speech. Only by doing so, he will be able to confront the offended husband:

ἐμοὶ δ' ὁμιλῶν
χρῶ τῇ φύσει, σκίρτα, γέλα, νόμιζε μηδὲν αἰσχρόν.
μοιχὸς γὰρ ἢν τύχῃς ἁλούς, τάδ' ἀντερεῖς πρὸς αὐτόν,
ὡς οὐδὲν ἠδίκηκας· εἶτ' εἰς τὸν Δί' ἐπανενεγκεῖν,
κἀκεῖνος ὡς ἥττων ἔρωτός ἐστι καὶ γυναικῶν·
καίτοι σὺ θνητὸς ὢν θεοῦ πῶς μεῖζον ἂν δύναιο;

[If you become my pupil, you can indulge in nature, leap and laugh, not consider anything shameful. If by chance you give in to adultery, this is what you will reply to the husband: that you have done nothing wrong. Then transfer the responsibility to Zeus, saying that even he is weaker (*hetton*) than love and women, and how can you, a mortal, be stronger (*meizon dynaio*) than a god? (1077-81, trans. Sommerstein adapted)]

The Weaker Speech invites the Stronger Speech to become his pupil. This will enable him to overcome the traditional notion of shamefulness (*aiskhron*) so as to be free to embrace a life of pleasure – and thus satisfy the aforementioned necessities of

nature. Then, the Weaker Speech puts his rhetorical ability on display. He demonstrates to the Stronger Speech how to get away with adultery. The argument goes that the mightiest of all gods, Zeus, is weaker than his love for women. Therefore, why should a mortal be stronger than Zeus, and thus be able to resist the temptation of pleasure? (1080-2) The Stronger Speech admits his weakness: on the one hand, the pleasures he feels are stronger than his chastity and his virtue; on the other, he is unable to deal with the consequences deriving from his inability to tame them. In fact, the Stronger Speech surrenders not only to pleasure, but also to the Weaker Speech, who proves to be more skilled than him in getting away with unlawful sexual behaviour. But the Stronger Speech still has doubts: will the rhetorical ability he is going to acquire suffice to avoid public punishment? By no means: he will incur the typical punishment for adultery: his pubic hair will be plucked out with the help of hot ash and a radish will be thrust up his ass (1083-4).[27] The Stronger speech regards this treatment as the worst possible evil. The Weaker Speech shows him that such punishment is not an evil but, on the contrary, the mark of sexual unbridledness. The most distinguished Athenians – lawyers, tragedians and politicians – are all "wide-assed" (1088-93), providing proof of the fact that they all live a life devoted to pleasure. The Weaker speech then also points out that *the great majority* of the public is "wide-assed" (1098-100: *poly pleionas . . . tous euryproktous*).

This entails that most Athenians pursue unlawful *hedone*, without caring about the consequences. In the light of this, the Stronger Speech switches sides: at the end of the contest, he takes off his cloak[28] and goes over to the side of the Weaker Speech (1102-4).

27 Aristophanes hints here at the practice of *raphanidosis*, a typical punishment for adulterers: see Dover 1968, 227; Del Corno 1996, 314-15 (for further details, see Kilmer 1982, 106-7).

28 The Stronger speech pulls off his cloak as Socrates' pupils do when entering the *phrontisterion*: see 177-9 (where the sudden absence of a pupil's *himation* implies not only that Socrates has stolen it – possibly in order to get something for himself and his associates to eat – but also that the naked youth has become his follower; for more on the cloak theft, see Gelzer 1956, 68-9 and Meynersen 1993); 497-501 (Socrates asks Strepsiades to take off his cloak in order to become his pupil); 856-7 (Strepsiades tells Pheidippides that

Conclusion

The Stronger Speech undergoes a transformation. At the beginning of the contest, he claims to be virtuous and chaste. At the end, he is naked and ready for pleasure. Since he is unable to tame his sexual desire, his stance is paradoxical: he pretends to be *strong* even if he is *weaker* than the pleasure he claims to control. At the end of the contest, this paradox becomes even more evident. It turns out that the majority of Athenians – including the most distinguished of them – do not even *claim* to be *stronger* than pleasure. On the contrary, they openly declare their *weakness*, i.e. their sexual debauchery (*euryproktosyne*). Therefore, the Stronger Speech is also *weak* for political reasons: only a minority of old outcasts share his view. Last but not least, the Stronger Speech's *weakness* is also evident from the ethical viewpoint since he stands for a *sophrosyne* that is unable to deal with *hedone*, making it useless and outdated. Thus, the Stronger Speech turns out not to be the *stronger* side, but it is actually the *weaker*.

We have also seen that the triumph of unlawful hedonism celebrated by the Weaker Speech does not match Socratic education but should instead be understood as an evolution of it. Whilst the Stronger Speech's claims about virtue and chastity appear to be groundless when he is confronted with *hedone*, the eristic power of rhetoric provided by the *askesis* of the Weaker Speech allows the unlimited satisfaction of all possible temptations. Aristophanes conceives the *rule of the strongest* propounded by the most radical of Socrates' students (such as Alcibiades), as well as by some of the Sophists (such as Thrasymachus), as the full accomplishment of Socratic ethics. He therefore criticizes Socratic education as a whole: by pointing out the weakness of the Stronger Speech on the one hand, and the strength of the Weaker Speech on the other, he shows the paradoxical features of such education at all its stages.

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his cloak has become thought); and 1498 (Socrates' pupils recall the theft of Strepsiades' cloak).

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2

Paradoxical Agathon and His Brethren

Robert Wardy

Abstract

This essay engages with the history of paradox in ancient Greek philosophy. It starts with the historical figure of Agathon, the triumphant Athenian playwright of the fifth century BCE, and reviews some of the fragments of and reports on his rhetorical drama, inspired by the paradoxical Gorgias. It goes on to analyse both the speech in praise of *Erōs* Plato's character Agathon delivers in the *Symposium* and Socrates' critical reaction. The final part of the essay extrapolates from the historical Agathon and the Platonic Agathon to a speculative taxonomy of paradoxes in Greek philosophy. Its major hypothesis is that both the two original, major lineages, serious and seriocomic, survive, and that reflection on the nature of paradox in these terms promises to enrich our understanding of philosophy.

Keywords: Agathon; Gorgias; Plato; *Symposium*; paradox; philosophy

Who was Agathon? He lived in the fifth century BCE (*c.*445-*c.*400), and was initially regarded as one of the leading lights of Athenian culture at a time when Athens was the glorious epicentre of ancient Greek drama, music, literature, mathematics, science and last but not least, philosophy. Yet despite his true stature, not many years after Agathon died his reputation was reduced to that of a tedious, decadent show-off.

Agathon is hardly a name to conjure with, outside the circle of learned Classicists. There are two reasons for his general anonymity. First, as with so many of the great thinkers of antiquity, all that is preserved to us are a few tantalising fragments and some telegraphic reports. Second, as a rule the little that is left of Agathon is unthinkingly dismissed because people evaluate the remains having *already* decided he is poor stuff. And why is that? Plato's

hatchet job, executed in the *Symposium*, proved lethal. I hope to make out a persuasive case that to the contrary, Agathon is in fact of huge and abiding cultural significance.

The Platonic corpus positively teems with paradoxes. Some are explicit and substantive: for example, the 'Socratic paradox' that no one knowingly does wrong. Others are tacit: for example, the irony that Alcibiades in the *Symposium* unknowingly assimilates Socrates to Socratic *Erōs* personified. Others are, if you like, engineered and 'situational': for example, again in the *Symposium*, the both conventionally ugly and unconventionally beautiful Socrates' placement between the two conventional beauties, Agathon and Alcibiades. The dialogues warn us that rhetorical theorists – Gorgias above all – exert a malign influence on all manner of people: but rhetoric is the foil Plato employs to define philosophy itself. Perhaps we can think of this as a 'paradox of assimilation'.[1] Agathon is a Gorgianic artist *extraordinaire*, and I mean to demonstrate that he too is peculiarly important to Plato. Agathon's paradoxology will serve as our springboard into this essay's final section, which enhances our general understanding of paradoxical thought in ancient Greece.

Next we turn to the pitifully exiguous remains of and reports on the *real* Agathon, in preparation for our experience of the paradoxical *character* Agathon as he appears in the *Symposium*. As Agathon puts it, "if I tell the truth, I'm not going to please you; but if I please you at all, I won't be telling the truth" (κατὰ τὸν Ἀγάθωνα εἰ μὲν φράσω τἀληθές, οὐχί σ' εὐφρανῶ· / εἰ δ' εὐφρανῶ τί σ', οὐχὶ τἀληθὲς φράσω, fr. 12).[2] Confirmation, surely, of a Socratic's darkest suspicions – were it not that the provocation comes from a lost, anonymous tragedy, speaker and context unknown. "Judgement is stronger than the hands' strength" (γνώμη δὲ κρεῖσσόν ἐστιν ἢ ῥώμη χερῶν, fr. 27). If this is *sound* judgement, the line merely preserves an unobjectionably pious sentiment; but if it is saying that a mind amorally empowered by intelligence can defeat

1 Another possible instance: the materialist Democritus is the great *bête noire*, so much so that Plato never mentions him by name, but nevertheless in the *Timaeus* an atomism subservient to cosmic providence is rehabilitated.

2 Citations are from Pierre Lévêque's collection of fragments and testimonia.

physical force, then it might be coordinated with the omnipotence of *logos* as proclaimed by Gorgias in his *Encomium of Helen* (more on this anon). I leave "*logos*" untranslated, since in Greek it is remarkably polyvalent, perhaps approximated by "discourse" (which I avoid on account of its theoretical connotations in some circles). Testimony that Gorgianic *stylistics* pervaded Agathon's compositions is plentiful: for example, "Agathon . . . in his iambics frequently expresses himself in the manner of Gorgias" (καὶ Ἀγάθων . . . πολλαχοῦ τῶν ἰαμβείων γοργιάζει, Philostratus, *de vit. Soph.* I). What should catch our notice is how appropriation of Gorgias seems to have been a package deal, including a taste for both the assertion of self-reflexive linguistic paradox and a highly-wrought, obtrusively artificial language for its expression – as if such language should be the medium for messages mysterious, and perhaps indecipherable.[3]

The claim that Agathon was an innovator in both plot and style recurs. Such reports can be neutral, or even admiring: Aristotle says "in this play [the reference is to the *Anthos* = *Flower*] he created both the subject-matter and the phrasing, but pleases none the less" (*Poetics* 9, 1451b21-3).[4] Agathon is unusual because unlike his Classical predecessors who adapted Homeric material or other preexisting mythology, for *The Flower* he invented his own plot.

But Agathon does not uniformly win Aristotle's approval. He upbraids him for introducing disconnected, "intercalary" choral interludes, so-called ἐμβόλιμα (*Poetics* 18, 1456a29-32), merely ornamental passages lacking any organic connection to the play. I think this criticism is noteworthy on two counts. First, there is a connection with Euripides, whose choruses likewise have been

3 I like Pierre Lévêque's nice conclusion: "le mérite d'Agathon fut sans doute . . . d'introduire dans l'art dramatique la réforme que Gorgias venait d'opérer dans l'éloquence, c'est-á-dire de fonder *la tragédie oratoire*" (1995, 130, emphasis added; "Without doubt Agathon's achievement was to introduce into drama the innovation that Gorgias had recently made in rhetoric, which is to say that Agathon created *rhetorical tragedy*").

4 "Pleases" translates "εὐφραίνει", Agathon's own word in fr. 12 ("if I *please* you at all, I won't be telling the truth"): mere coincidence, or might this hedonistic term have had a programmatic role for the playwright?

excoriated as functionless, decadent embellishments.[5] Second, readers of Plato who heartily dislike Agathon in the *Symposium* disparage his performance as only a semblance of connected-up thought. For them, its climax is an aria-like outpouring which sacrifices sense to sound. The nineteenth-century scholar Hug suggested that the aria is a Platonic pastiche of Agathon's trashy choruses.[6] Here is the damning verdict of the Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge, Richard Hunter: "in the closing section of the speech, an almost untranslatable incantation of rhythmical phrases, *a beautiful sound signifying nothing*, brings Greek prose as close to metrical poetry as it ever got" (2004, 73, emphasis added).[7]

The richest pickings are to be gleaned from Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*. In this play Euripides is beside himself with worry that the women of Athens will assassinate him in vengeance for his misogynistic portrayal of female characters. Intent on infiltrating the female-only festival of the *Thesmophoria*, he sends an aged relative to attempt to persuade Agathon to act as his spy. The effeminate Agathon, reclining and surrounded by toiletries, is wheeled out on the *ekkuklēma*, the staging machine used to bring a domestic interior out onto the stage. Thus Agathon emerges from within his own house, the private space which is the setting for the party of the *Symposium*, and which Aristophanes attends. Agathon is already in drag, the better to penetrate female characters. "I wear my clothes along with my mentality. A man who is a poet must adopt habits that match the plays he's committed to composing.

5 Such was Goethe's view (*Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter*, Letter 29).

6 "Durch den Stil der Rede, in welchem der musikalische Klang alles überwuchert, der ganze Vorrat Gorgianischer Figuren gleichsam ausgeschüttet ist, eine Menge von Versen und Halbversen beigezogen sind, bis schließlich der zweite Hauptteil in eine förmliche Monodie ausartet, welche den ἐμβόλιμα in den Tragödien Agathons ähnlich sein mag, hat Platon an einem anschaulichen Beispiele zeigen wollen, zu welch *unwürdigem Phrasengeklingel eine Poesie und eine Beredsamkeit herabsinke, welcher Spiel und Klang alles, die Wahrheit nichts ist*" (Hug 1884, liv, emphasis added).

7 One might be forgiven for scenting a whiff of paradox in Hunter's lambasting Agathon without acknowledging what would seem to be a bravura performance by Hunter's own lights.

For example, if one is writing plays about women, one's body must participate in their habits . . . If you're writing about men, your body has what it takes already; but when it's a question of something we don't possess, then it must be captured by imitation" (148-56).[8] Euripides' stunned relative, not knowing what to make of Agathon's confusion of properties marked feminine with masculine ones, wonders "what has the sword to do with the looking-glass?" (τίς δαὶ κατόπτρου καὶ ξίφους κοινωνία; 140)]. Agathon is lost in narcissistic contemplation of his most beautiful, feminised self. Much of this carries over to *The Symposium*, where the effeminate Agathon basks in his guests' erotic idolatry. And the brazen effeminacy was itself *socially* paradoxical. Convention dictated that pederastic couples consisted of a mature man, 'the lover', and an adolescent, 'the beloved'. So a strictly transitory relationship. But Agathon's erotic relationship with Pausanias, also a speaker in *The Symposium*, survived the years, as Agathon continued to play the role of the no longer adolescent but effeminate partner (*Symposium* 193b). Agathon the person is a *social* paradox. His transgressive sexuality is mirrored in an excessive use of paradox.[9]

And now let us turn directly to the paradoxical Agathon of *The Symposium*. "Symposium" literally means "drinking together", but there could be much more to an ancient Greek symposium than a

8 In Sommerstein's fine translation. Duncan 2001 mounts the case that Agathon's self-presentation is at once "constructionist" and "essentialist". I am not persuaded. She believes that while the tenor of lines 148-56 is "constructionist", a later passage is on the contrary "essentialist": the poet Phrynichus "was himself beautiful and garbed himself beautifully, and that is why his plays too were beautiful. For it is necessary that one compose poetry in accordance with one's nature" (165-7, my translation). Her interpretation relies on the supposition that the attractiveness of Phrynichus' body and clothing was straightforwardly masculine, while the likely implication of the earlier passage is that on the contrary his beauty delivers mixed signals. She nevertheless makes some nice points.

9 Despite the danger of extreme anachronism, I am tempted to characterise Agathon's self-presentation as camp. There is of course something amusingly *paradoxical* about camp when it works, since effective camp is performed with a straight face, pretending to be straightforwardly conventional when of course it is anything but.

modern-day convivial gathering fueled by alcohol.[10] Symposia were private affairs, and as such could nurture hidden thoughts – political intrigue, perhaps. They were suffused by eroticism. There is a genre of archaic Greek lyric poetry in the form of educational reflections addressed by a mature man to an adolescent boy (the best-known exemplar is Theognis) that reveals how the symposium could function as an erotic *rite de passage*. The dramatic occasion of Plato's *Symposium* is the celebration of the young Agathon's first victory in Athens' tragic competitions. But it is a most unusual affair. Many of those in attendance are badly hungover from the festivities of the day before, and agree to forgo deep drinking. That is paradoxical. Some clichés are clichés because they embody prevailing truths. A good example is the opinion that the ancient Greeks were extremely competitive people. A run-of-the-mill symposium might involve bibulous competition with riddles or simple drinking games. But this, after all, is Plato. Agathon's party is not only a relatively sober affair; it also has another odd feature, namely that the flute girl is dismissed. Flute girls were hired performers more likely than not to end up copulating with the guests. But although this potential, subordinate sexual partner is sent away (and hands are kept off the slaves, who also at a regular party would have been fair game), the participants agree to engage in a competitive erotic exercise: they are to deliver a sequence of speeches in praise of divine *Erōs*. The explicit focus of the competition is our triumphant host, the playwright Agathon, pitted against the philosopher Socrates. Agathon's contribution is through-and-through Gorgias.

First, its style.[11] This is extremely difficult, indeed verging on impossible, to convey in translation. Greek syntax readily lends itself to expression in measured phrases captured in contrastive structures which can be combined into more and more complex

10 The informative essays in Murray and Tecusan 1995 provide a comprehensive introduction to the workings of ancient symposia.

11 Norden 1898, 15-25 and 63-78 remains the classic treatment. The damning verdict of a great expert on the history of Greek prose style: "in the case of Gorgias the influence [on Greek prose style] was, I believe, *wholly bad*. What he did was, in fact, to take certain qualities inherent in Greek expression, balance and antithesis, and exaggerate them to the point of absurdity" (Denniston 2002, 10, emphasis added).

inclusive patterns. The linguistic kernels are statements organised on the pattern of we can do no better than to woodenly translate as "on the one hand . . . and on the other". A speech by Gorgias is as it were a fractal enlargement of such patterning. Another salient feature of Gorgianic style is deliberate redundancy. For example, ancient Greek grammar permits use of the so-called "internal accusative": one can say things like "I see a sight". Gorgianic compositions are replete with such unnecessary expansions. "Unnecessary" with regard to the strict sense of the message: however necessary to the rhythm and other auditory qualities of the piece. Agathon's speech is a pure, very extreme exemplification of all aspects of Gorgianic stylistics.

Second, its explicit methodology and meticulous plan. A very important feature of Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* is that it articulates criteria for successful persuasion to which it claims to adhere. Likewise Agathon. He begins with a criticism he levels at all the previous speakers: that they praised *Erōs* for what he *does*, rather than what he *is*. Agathon declares he will put that right not only by first praising *Erōs* for what he is and only then for what he does, but also by showing how the good he does us flows from what he is (194e-195a); and for sure he does go on to rigorously execute this plan. The formal development of Agathon's speech could not be more perspicuous. (1) The opening salvo of the methodological critique; (2) the grand thesis, that *Erōs* is happiest because most beautiful and best; (3) proof of "most beautiful": (3a) youngest, (3b) softest and most delicate, (3c) supple (with a flowery appendix (perhaps an allusion to his play *Anthos* = *Flower*?)); (4) proof of "best": (4a) justice, (4b) moderation, (4c) courage, (4d) wisdom; (5) concluding hymn; (6) Gorgianic cap. But despite this formal perspicuity, its appreciation confronts a hermeneutic challenge springing from quality (3c) adduced to prove that *Erōs* is supremely beautiful, that the god is "supple of form":[12] that Agathon's complementary, liquidly elusive thought is not to be pinned down. In the reading, this cleanly articulated structure feels something like an exoskeleton *containing* the speech, without *imposing* an

12 ὑγρὸς τὸ εἶδος (196a2). Kenneth Dover helpfully glosses ὑγρός as "'moist', i.e. 'supple', 'pliable'" (Dover 1980, 126). And R. G. Bury: "another sense of ὑγρός, in erotic terminology, is 'melting', 'languishing'" (Bury 1932, 75).

intrinsic form on the lyrical flow; the musical movement cannot be apprehended by anatomical study.

Third, its paradoxicality. A couple of examples. The first example is Agathon's purported demonstration that *Erōs* possesses the virtue of justice, since he neither wrongs anyone nor suffers any wrong. The establishment of erotic justice is signalised as "*most* important" (4a: 196b6): why? Because on the ordinary view of things, the injustice of *Erōs* bulks most inconveniently large. Of course in ancient Greek culture the most notorious case was Helen's unjust abandonment of her husband Menelaus when she succumbed to the immoral blandishments of Paris. How on earth can she be exculpated? Well, in his *The Encomium of Helen* Gorgias had boggled generic expectations by transforming the anticipated apology or defense of her actions into positive praise; or rather had conjoined an apology for her unresisting, impotent soul, impotent to withstand seductive rhetoric, with praise for potent *logos*, which is to say praise for Gorgias' *own* verbal mastery.[13] Hence Agathon's underlining of justice is the apt pupil's genuflection towards his teacher's example of paradoxical juggling with opposites. Implication: we are all Helens, eager to be found soft enough for an invited erotic touch which cannot do us wrong. *Encomium of Helen*/*logos*/*erōs*/Agathon/*logos*/*erōs*, in an indefinitely replicated rhetorical cycle.

This passage is maximally saturated by the provision of grammatical complements "unnecessary" to the sense, as Agathon runs through all possible permutations and combinations.[14] As I have explained, the stock explanation of this verbal saturation from those with no taste for such rhetoric is that here we have a tedious example of fulsome Gorgianic inanity, a childish obsession with mechanically generated sonorities. But maybe a reaction of sophisticated tolerance

13 My *The Birth of Rhetoric* (Wardy 1998) discusses how seduction broadly conceived lies at the heart of the vexed relationship between philosophy and rhetoric at the inception of their self-reflexive projects. That book takes only fleeting account of the *Phaedrus*. Future analysis of the *Phaedrus*' paradoxical speech attributed to Lysias pleading that a boy should grant his favours to a non-lover rather than a lover and Socrates', which only pretends to urge the same case (230e-241d), will take the discussion further.

14 Ἔρως *οὔτ'* **ἀδικεῖ** *οὔτ'* **ἀδικεῖται** *οὔτε ὑπὸ* **θεοῦ** οὔτε **θεόν**, *οὔτε ὑπ'* **ἀνθρώπου** *οὔτε* **ἄνθρωπον** (196b6-7), etc.

is in order: perhaps such exhaustive enumeration can playfully work to keep all options whatsoever — including previously neglected, or even formerly unimaginable ones — on the table. Agathon's "unnecessary" sonic grammaticalisation can captivate the generous auditor.

Our second example of paradox: moderation or self-control. (4b) "Moderation is, by definitional agreement, the mastery of pleasures and desires; since no pleasure is stronger than *Erōs*, he masters them all, and so is superlatively moderate". Sophistry, we are firmly assured by serious, sober philosophers, is a prevaricating counterfeit of philosophy, the most disreputable business of reasoning fallaciously to hoodwink us into the concession of dubious propositions, all for the sake of personal aggrandisement. The Plato who wrote Agathon into the *Symposium* is not so minded, for whatever else Agathon might be, he is no sophist. One could, of course, disassemble his "argument", as if it were a logical trap set by a wicked sophist, and shake one's head over the invalidity — but what would be the fun in that? Agathon's fallacies are not *real* — which is to say would-be deceptive — paralogisms because there is no intention to deceive: who, after all, is so stupidly innocent as to be taken in by them? Only a quibbling logic-chopper senses any intellectual danger here. Again for sure Gorgias is there before us: he says that in some cases of beguilement, "the deceiver is more just than one who does not deceive, and the one deceived wiser than one who is not; the deceiver is more just, because he has done what he undertook, and the one deceived is wiser, because not being insensitive is a matter of susceptibility to the pleasure of speeches".[15] Since the original context (Plutarch, *De gloria Atheniensium* 5) brings in the Gorgias to illustrate the heyday of Athenian tragedy, it is possible that Gorgias himself so argued specifically to illuminate the paradoxical character of theatrical illusion. The communal delight with Agathon's speech would not have suffered eclipse, had some vigilant logician pronounced "fallacy of equivocation", for his guests

15 ὅ τ' ***ἀπατήσας δικαιότερος*** *τοῦ μὴ* ***ἀπατήσαντος***, καὶ ὁ ***ἀπατηθεὶς σοφώτερος*** *τοῦ μὴ* ***ἀπατηθέντος***. *ὁ μὲν* γὰρ ***ἀπατήσας δικαιότερος***, ὅτι τοῦθ' ὑποσχόμενος πεποίηκεν· *ὁ δ'* ***ἀπατηθεὶς σοφώτερος***· εὐάλωτον γὰρ ὑφ' ἡδονῆς λόγων τὸ μὴ ἀναίσθητον (fr. 23).

connive in the make-believe argument, as if for all the world *Erōs* might be trapped by analytical definition.

And the concluding "aria": "every man must follow in his train hymning *Erōs* beautifully, participating in that song with which singing *Erōs* casts a spell on the mind of all gods and human beings" (ᾧ χρὴ ἕπεσθαι πάντα ἄνδρα ἐφυμνοῦντα καλῶς, ᾠδῆς μετέχοντα ἣν ᾄδει θέλγων πάντων θεῶν τε καὶ ἀνθρώπων νόημα, 197e3-5). So as far as Agathon, he who must be obeyed smilingly dictates, the only pious, decent response to the beauty he and *Erōs* share and share out is to take one's place submissively within an emulative chorus, replicating, not analysing, his love song. To rephrase the hermeneutic puzzle. We seem to be faced by a queer dilemma: either to leave the shimmering verbal tissue of the speech inviolate - and so uncritically prostrate ourselves — or to pulverise Agathon's delicate beauty with a dialectical hammer — and so boorishly do intellectual violence to a plaything. The least ambition of an unmesmerised connoisseur is the collection of impressionistic verdicts, at once sympathetically engaged, but not supinely uncritical.

And after all, one might think that our yielding to his rhetorical seduction is something of a foregone conclusion, since we have learnt that submission to *Erōs* is exceptionlessly voluntary and so just. Agathon's elegant way is to assume our cooperation, to take for granted our acquiescence in his lovely conceits. But this tasteful presumption of amused amity is, to a degree, coercive; sophistication, whether achieved or aspirational, had better play along, since the social penalty for recalcitrance is to cut an unrefined figure, not *au fait*, coarsely negligent of the amusing conventions governing this artful transaction.

The brief flourish of the coda economically makes three significant points. (i) The speech is a religious object, a votive offering dedicated to the god *Erōs*. (ii) It shares "partly in play, partly in moderate earnestness" [τὰ μὲν παιδιᾶς, τὰ δὲ σπουδῆς μετρίας (197e7)]. (iii) They are present — or, perhaps, effectively combined? — to the extent of Agathon's capacity. (ii) is a riff on the conclusio — of *The Encomium of Helen*: "I wished to write this *logos* as an encomium *of* Helen, but *my* plaything" (ἐβουλόμην γράψαι τὸν λόγον Ἑλένης μὲν ἐγκώμιον, ἐμὸν δὲ παίγνιον, *Encomium of Helen*, 21); it encapsulates the flirtatious, seriocomic rhetoric of the speech.

The reaction? "*All* present burst into applause" (198a2-3): *everyone* loudly recognises how very well Agathon has done by both himself and the god.

I shall now glance briefly at Socrates' reactions to this paradoxical extravaganza before drawing together some preliminary thoughts about the ancient history of paradox.

What rhetorical competitor, Socrates asks, would not be perturbed on hearing the words of Agathon's beautiful peroration? "And indeed the *logos* put me in mind of Gorgias, so that I suffered just what one reads in Homer: I was frightened lest Agathon in his conclusion would, by sending a frightfully eloquent head of Gorgias in his speech against mine, turn me to unspeaking stone".[16] According to the punning Gorgon trope, what menaces Socrates – or so he says, in effusive relief – is the petrification of speechlessness. But of course what the myth warns us off doing is ever *looking* at the Gorgon. And so Socrates has transposed the visual threat to an auditory one, in keeping with the perceptual, perhaps even synaesthetic, effects in which Gorgianic rhetoric specialises.

Socrates proceeds to break the rhetorical butterfly on philosophy's wheel. This is not the occasion for analysing the critical dialectic Socrates applies to Agathon's speech. But I do need to cast light on the form rather than the substance of the inquisition. The third point of the coda was that Agathon's *logos* combines the playful with the serious – *moderate* seriousness, that is. But Socrates ruthlessly insists on testing for only Agathon's earnest commitments, negating his experiments in tonal hybridisation. An airy disrespect for boundaries as evanescent love slips into and out of lovable souls displayed in infinitely malleable language — philosophy will tolerate none of this. Maybe Socrates assumed the fear of falling mute because philosophy really has nothing to say in its own voice to Agathon and his *Erōs* speaking in theirs; it is the poet who must be stopped in his tracks, petrified, if there is to be discussion with

16 καὶ γάρ με Γοργίου ὁ λόγος ἀνεμίμνῃσκεν, ὥστε ἀτεχνῶς τὸ τοῦ Ὁμήρου ἐπεπόνθη· ἐφοβούμην μή μοι τελευτῶν ὁ Ἀγάθων ***Γοργίου*** *κεφαλὴν* ***δεινοῦ*** ***λέγειν*** *ἐν τῷ* ***λόγῳ*** *ἐπὶ τὸν ἐμὸν* ***λόγον*** πέμψας αὐτόν με λίθον τῇ ἀφωνίᾳ ποιήσειεν (198c1-5). Appropriately, this is a wicked pastiche of Gorgianic diction with all the stops pulled out.

Socrates, within the peremptory normative constraints of dialectical analysis. Paradox.

The technical term for Socrates' testing of the beliefs espoused by his interlocutor is "*elenchus*"; and it is well nigh invariably the case that the test ends in refutation. Agathon does not elude this fate. Those undergoing an *elenchus* elsewhere in Plato are sometimes so dramatically dim-witted, evasive, disingenuous, impatient, sarcastic or furious that describing questioner and respondent as dialectical *partners* is an effortful stretch. Yet if Agathon is nothing but agreeably agreeable, all-yielding, isn't he just too soft to be Socrates' real partner? Socrates compels Agathon to strengthen his relatively noncommittal "likely enough" (ὡς τὸ εἰκός γε, 200a7), the habitually conjectural stance of rhetoric, into admissions of absolute logical necessity.

Anti-platonists for whom dialectic is nothing more than Socrates' unrewarding manipulation of assorted logically naive, emotionally confused gulls and straw men are and always have been thick on the ground. However it might be elsewhere, that charge cannot stick here in the *Symposium*: Plato has gone to considerable lengths to invite us to attend to Agathon's impotence, once he stops singing. I propose that Plato's idea is to make us think hard about the compositional strategies available when the deepest, defining presuppositions of *logoi* are well and truly irreconcilable. With the best will in the world, Agathon cannot remain himself and deal in philosophical *logos* – ironically enough, he is too willing to submit. That in itself is a paradox. But not the only one lurking in the vicinity. For the serious philosopher, the refutation of Agathon is, as it were, business as usual. The thing is that this concise dialectical episode is insulated from not only the non-philosophical matter that precedes, but also the following erotic mysteries expounded by Diotima, high priestess of Platonism. Her hyperbolically paradoxical *esoterica* – that we are all pregnant, some in the *psyche* rather than in the somatic womb, that there is an absolute Beauty transcending space and time, and so forth – are fantastic doctrines she delivers *de haut en bas*: they are innocent of argumentative underpinnings. But nevertheless essential to Platonism, a philosophy that proclaims its absolute commitment to ratiocination. Paradox.

I conclude with my take on the ancient history of paradox: some confident opinions and also some speculative conjectures.

As humanity did not have to wait for Aristotle to think logically, so too we can be sure that people said all manner of very strange things before Greek thinkers designedly formulated paradoxes. But both Aristotelian logic and the ancient paradoxes mark most important intellectual sea changes. Whitehead did not in fact claim that all subsequent philosophy is footnotes to Plato;[17] but the Eleatic Stranger, the anonymous central character of *The Sophist*, does refer to Parmenides as his philosophical father (241d), and it is not outrageous to conjecture that perhaps there is more than a little of Plato himself in the Stranger. And thus it is also not altogether unreasonable to think of Parmenides as the great ancestor of philosophers. And Parmenides propounded a philosophy than which no other *can* be more paradoxical. The first part of his philosophical poem, the oldest piece of extended, would-be rigorous deduction preserved to us and quite possibly the oldest full stop, argues that all there is is a radical, absolutely immutable unity. Which is stranger than odd: with the best will in the world one cannot believe that, since the mutable extension of our beliefs contradicts Parmenides' monistic thesis. And if I am wrong to believe in multiplicity then I am right, since my mistake is necessarily different from Parmenides' supposedly correct belief.[18] The impression one gets from the remains of the poem is of a lofty character, and that certainly is how Plato depicts him in his dialogue the *Parmenides*. Zeno also appears in the dialogue, where he says that he devised his paradoxes to prove that the opinions of Parmenides' pluralist opponents were *no less incredible* than Parmenides' monism.[19] The Eleatic paradoxes are both ontological and epistemological. And finally, Protagoras, greatest of the so-called "sophists", invented a theory of extreme

17 "The safest general characterisation of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato. I do not mean the systematic scheme of thought which scholars have doubtfully extracted from his writings. I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through them" (Whitehead 1978, 39).

18 Parmenides fell prey to an ancestor of the *Cogito* about two and a half millennia before Descartes.

19 Kirk, Raven and Schofield 2007 is a compendious source for both Parmenides (373-407) and Zeno (408-32). Zeno's claim about the pluralists is Text 327.

relativism, according to which what *seems* true to *X* is true *for X* and also what *seems* true to *Y* is true *for Y*, although their beliefs are incompatible. That is an extraordinary epistemological paradox.[20]

I complete my set with Gorgias, who composed a nihilistic work entitled *On What Is Not*, obviously a *riposte* to Parmenides' *On What Is*. Were there a competition for most paradoxical thinker, Gorgias would be a hot contender, since *On What Is Not* argues that there is nothing; that even were there something, it would be unknowable; and that even were there something knowable, it would be incommunicable. But surely this is a mere spoof of *real*, serious philosophy? Why think that? How is it any *more* outrageous than Parmenides' monism? But surely Gorgias is just kidding? Gorgias: "I wished to write this *logos* as an encomium *of* Helen, but *my* plaything"; and Agathon: my speech shares "partly in play, partly in moderate earnestness". Furthermore, we have good if not compelling reasons to suspect that when Gorgias' self-avowed disciple Meno propounds the paradox of enquiry in the eponymous Platonic dialogue – that it is impossible, since the object is either known or unknown, and if known enquiry is forestalled, while one cannot enquire into what is unknown – he is following in the master's footsteps (see Scott 2009, 78). If so, Gorgias also invented a paradox whose philosophical legacy in Platonism and beyond can hardly be exaggerated, connected as it is with innatism. He would have deployed the paradox of enquiry in the anarchic spirit animating *On What is Not*. Gorgias and his followers both set out to undermine generic divisions, and unsettle our confidence in their tone: serious? Comic? Seriocomic? Seriously enigmatic: or should that be amusingly obscure?[21]

Here is my major historical hypothesis. The early history of Greek paradox reveals that from its inception there were austerely serious and anarchically seriocomic lineages. In the first we find Parmenides, Zeno and Plato; in the second, Gorgias and Agathon.

20 Rediscovery of the historical Protagoras is fraught with difficulties. Plato's dialogue the *Theaetetus* is the most formidable reconstruction.

21 My *The Birth of Rhetoric* (Wardy 1998) contains an extensive interpretation of Gorgias. Gorgias systematically erodes antecedent confidence that there is any prospect of a clean demarcation between the serious and the playful, segregating the latter beyond the confines of philosophy proper.

The first lineage is philosophical; the second is… what, exactly? Gorgias was a man of impressively many parts. His first claim to fame was leading a successful embassy from his home city of Leontini to Athens, where he took the Assembly by storm with a speech composed in his ostentatiously overwrought, paradoxical style. Politics. And then as I have argued, Agathon brings Gorgias into the theatre: which is not *not* politics, given the sociopolitical centrality of the theatre to ancient Athens. Nevertheless it's a different kind of politics, and of course also an entirely novel artistic *locus* for Gorgianic expression.

Now one might not unreasonably infer that my hypothesis is that in its early days the Greek paradoxical tradition encompassed both serious and entertaining variants, albeit entertainment that could subserve serious purposes; but then the second variant went extinct, leaving the field free for the serious if very strange work of the philosophers. In the next generation Plato in *The Sophist* creates two series of paradoxes, both of non-being and of being (237a-239a and 243d-250e): they contribute to the ultraserious task of proving the un- or even anti-Eleatic thesis that falsehood is possible. No laughing matter.

One might then think about the Stoic school of the Hellenistic age. Who more paradoxical than a Stoic? Their patron saint was Socrates, and they endorsed paradoxes at least as extreme as those attributed to him. They claim: everyone but the Sage is a downright fool; all fools are insane; that love is a vice; that moral virtue is not only the sole good, but also sufficient for happiness. And to top it off, that the state of affairs in the world is exactly how it should be.[22] Stoic philosophy is exceptionally austere, and hence an excellent example of the surviving lineage.

But although the inference that my hypothesis is that the entertaining variant died out is not unreasonable, it would nevertheless be false. Socrates was not the only ancestor of great importance to the Stoa. There was also Diodorus Cronus, the supreme dialectician of the Hellenistic era. Diodorus invented the Master Argument, a fiendishly difficult piece of reasoning to the

22 See Long and Sedley's section on Stoic ethics (344-437 in vol. 1, 341-431 in vol. 2).

conclusion that what is possible either is or will be (Giannantoni 1990, 428-9). From this definition of possibility it is possible to argue that we are not free moral agents. The Stoics, who were determinists, strove to prove that despite the Master Argument, determinism is compatible with unfettered agency. Serious business, this.

However, the Master Argument is far from all there was to Diodorus. Consider his position that although nothing can move, it can *have* moved (Giannantoni 1990, 420-4).[23] If Diodorus is responding to Zeno the Eleatic's paradoxes purporting to establish that motion is impossible, then we have a nice example of paradoxes not so much dissolved as displaced by others. It is much better that we be justified in maintaining that motion exists than either capitulating to Zeno or clinging to the unjustified belief[24] that things move. Therefore if the cost of justification is acceptance of Diodorus' account, then the rational reaction would be to rest content with his paradoxical theory, rather than seek for its demolition. The moral being that there might be provinces of philosophy in which we are best advised to aim no further than the establishment of relatively tolerable paradox.[25]

23 Consult Denyer 1981 for a fine exposition of Diodorus' reasoning.

24 We are told that Diogenes the Cynic's reaction to the paradox was to silently stand up and walk off (Simplicius, *On Aristotle's Physics* 1012.22). Of course it might be argued that this pragmatic rebuttal of Zeno suffices, so far as it goes; but that does not alter the fact that within the philosophical arena only arguments count.

25 There are other relatively tolerable paradoxes arising within a Zenonian context. If as our standard for sameness of number we adopt the attractive criterion of one-to-one correspondence, we have to countenance different sizes of infinity (e.g. the cardinality of the reals is greater than that of the natural numbers) and parts as big as wholes (e.g. all the natural numbers are equinumerous with all the odd numbers). Apart from their intrinsic interest, these results show us that degree of paradoxicality can be relative to time: when Cantor introduced transfinite mathematics it seemed awfully strange, but we have become inured to what was once very surprising. Sorensen 2003 contends that philosophers also "relativise *paradox* to the best available reasoners. What counts is what stymies those in the best position to answer". As it stands this cannot be right, since there is no *a priori* reason to suppose that philosophers are competent to identify the best reasoners, "available" or not. As philosophers the best we can do is flag up the logical or conceptual conundrums that stymy *us*.

The tangled origins of "technical" grammar – in some respects a sort of precursor of the philosophy of language – lie in Stoic metaphysics. An early task for the grammarians was to build on the insight that not all words are names, so as to divide words into functional classes. Two ancient Greek particles are the words μέν and δέ. We have met them before: "on the one hand" and "on the other". They are fundamental to the language, which delights in generating all kinds of contrastive structures and patterns. According to the grammarians, μέν and δέ do not *name* anything. Diodorus gave a feast and bade his slaves serve food and wine. Their names? Μέν and Δέ, of course! (Giannantoni 1990, 416-17).[26] And here is a lovely irony: μέν/δέ structures are some of the building blocks Gorgias uses to compose his rhetoric. One might protest that so far from supporting my contention that Diodorus is a key player in the Gorgianic lineage, the μέν/δέ paradox is actually evidence that he belongs in the other camp, since it probably figured as part of a serious argument denying lexical ambiguity and claiming that linguistic significance derives exclusively from the speaker's intentions, so-called "speaker's meaning". The objection fails, and for instructive reasons. The ancients did not ever create a theoretical model for the use/mention distinction. However, Chrysippus' thesis of "universal ambiguity" was intended to explain how linguistic items can (also) signify themselves, and thus allow us to talk about them and not what they (also) signify, and doubtless he had predecessors who also appealed to ambiguity to do useful logical work for them (Atherton 1993, 298-310). On my reconstruction Diodorus is confounding such logicians, and early grammarians to boot. Diodorus was a terrific showman of a dialectician and spinner of paradoxes. And I submit that he falls into the anarchic lineage springing from Gorgias, which did in fact survive well past the early history of Greek philosophical paradox. That lineage impedes facile appeal to any easy intuition that paradoxical turns in the ancient dialectical theatre are of an unproblematically serious character.

26 Some of the testimonia have the strengthened form of μέν, ἀλλαμήν, and some say that the name of the other slave was an unspecified connective rather than δέ.

I have as yet to investigate how my hypothesis fares in application to an appropriate, much more extensive sample of Greek paradoxes. To go no further, what to do with Heraclitus? Where to put Protagoras is a pressing question. His epistemological paradox is extremely serious. But on the other hand, consider "the Paradox of the Court" (Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 5.10). Protagoras schooled Euathlus in rhetoric, with payment deferred until after the student's first victory in court. But Euathlus' career ambitions changed and he abandoned the law for politics, whereupon Protagoras sued him for the tuition. Protagoras argued that his suit must succeed: if he wins, he wins; but if Euathlus defeats him the tuition must still be paid, since the student has won his first case! However, the apt pupil had a riposte that elaborated on the paradoxical structure: if he wins, he wins; but if Protagoras defeats him he need not pay, since he would not have won his first case! A superb brace of paradoxes in dramatic combat, and such as to earn Protagoras a place in the ludic lineage.

In the second part of Plato's dialogue the *Parmenides* (137c-166c), the august Parmenides generates a mind-blowing series of antinomies, than which nothing could be more paradoxical. He undertakes to prove that a series of the most basic predicates and their negations (including "is" and "is not") are at once applicable and inapplicable to subjects designated One and Many. The opinion of some readers both ancient and modern is that these antinomies are of profound significance to both Plato and philosophy in general; but the opinion of others is that they are very weird philosophical jokes.[27] Which is their lineage?

And to complicate the picture yet further, there is also, of course, an ancient lineage hostile to paradoxes, whose most prominent representative is Aristotle himself. Although he declares that philosophy begins in wonder (*Metaphysics* 982b), Aristotle's

27 Profoundly significant: e.g. amongst the ancients, the Neoplatonists; see amongst the moderns, Schofield 1977. Weird jokes: "for some of them [the modern adherents of the logical interpretation] the second part of the *Parmenides* is a humorous polemic, designed to reduce the Eleatic doctrine of a One Being to an absurdity, through the mouth of its founder. This theory, originating with Tennemann and elaborated by Apelt, escapes the accusation of anachronism; but in its extreme form it charges the prince of philosophers with the most wearisome joke in all literature" (Cornford 2010, vii).

conservative methodology finds paradox most uncongenial: in his lexicon ἄτοπον, "strange" (literally "out of place") signifies an unacceptable oddity which must be either rejected or shown to be not that odd after all (a particularly clear example is his swift dismantling of the Socratic paradox that no one willingly does wrong, *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.2). The impression that Aristotle speaks for the broad sweep of humanity is reinforced by reflection on semantics. While it is good to have a fishmonger in the vicinity, "paradox-monger" is unfailingly pejorative. We can say that someone "spins" paradoxes without judging the activity either way; but tellingly there is no title of admiration, despite its being evident that e.g. both Cantor and Russell deserve high praise for their paradoxical results in mathematics and philosophy. The sobering truth is that the nature of majoritarian culture is to love *doxa*; no wonder that there is no general positive term for a violator of deeply rooted convictions.[28] In the light of these complexities, how should we best situate the lineages *pro* and *con*?

Agathon deserves a last look. Someone might be prepared to acknowledge the ludic lineage, but only to belittle it on the grounds that its members are lightweights, Agathon himself being no more than a powderpuff. One might parry the criticism by pointing out that it is tantamount to question-begging, since it assumes that what counts is "weight", namely, seriousness. For an alternative response let us return to his "if I tell you the truth, I'm not going to please

28 It is surprising that entire monographs devoted to philosophical paradoxes are thin on the ground. One of the few, Sainsbury's, is excellent, although his attitude is at least slightly ambivalent: on the one hand, "paradoxes are fun"; but on the other, "paradoxes are serious" (Sainsbury 2009, 1). He defines "paradox" as "an apparently unacceptable conclusion derived by apparently acceptable reasoning from apparently acceptable premises" (ibid). Sainsbury's historical component is casual. In contrast, Sorensen 2003 – also excellent – is avowedly historical, taking us from Anaximander to Quine. He rejects Sainsbury's definition on the grounds that "the paradox can be in *how* you prove something rather than in what you prove. This point causes indigestion for those who say that all paradoxes feature unacceptable conclusions. Their accounts are too narrow". Sorensen's alternative definition: "paradoxes are questions (or in some cases, pseudoquestions) that suspend us between *too many* good answers". Adjudicating between their conceptions lies beyond the scope of this essay.

you; but if I please you *at all*, I won't be telling the truth" (emphasis added). The minimum implication of "at all" is that his falsehood is the *only* source of our pleasure; and at a maximum maybe it is saying that *any* admixture of truth would spoil the fun. Perhaps some members of the audience of a tragedy whose plot derived from traditional mythology believed that the events depicted were historical, or at least could have happened. But if the tragedy is one of Agathon's for which he made the plot up from whole cloth, then we have left even potential truth behind. Outside the territory of fiction, we deprecate even trivial falsehoods and deplore major ones. Hence it is something of a paradox that the prospect of experiencing good fiction inverts our everyday preferences. This we might call an 'attitudinal' paradox. If some of the phenomena associated with "the willing suspension of disbelief" are perennially surprising, then one might say that Agathon's epigram entertains by inviting us to step back and enjoyably appreciate the oddity of what we delight in. And since we are amused by a funny fact about ourselves, we might think of Agathon's conceit as a comic version of that most solemn of injunctions, the Delphic "know thyself", a virtuosic ploy that achieves substance without getting heavy.

There are also the non-philosophical but nevertheless related groupings. It is typical of Gorgias that he not only contributes to philosophical paradox, but also is the first ancestor of a rhetorical family tree, in the next generation represented by Isocrates' mock encomia the *Helen* and the *Busiris*. Finally, a comprehensive investigation would venture beyond Western philosophy: to look no further, the paradoxes of Chuang Tzu invite us to expand our field of study to embrace ancient China, especially the ramified Taoist tradition.[29]

Ever so much work remains to be done. In the course of this essay I have mentioned different kinds of paradox. I started with types culled from Plato: substantive paradoxes; explicit paradoxes; implicit paradoxes; situational paradoxes; paradoxes of assimilation; paradoxes of dialectical obligation. Agathon himself is a social

29 My "On the Very Idea of (Philosophical?) Translation" (Wardy 2018) compares and contrasts paradoxes of ineffability in Heraclitus and Chuang Tzu.

paradox, Oscar Wilde's ancestor. We might dub Agathon's, which invite us to collude in acts of make-believe persuasion, paradoxes of complicity and attitudinal paradoxes. Then there are the ontological and epistemological paradoxes of the grandly serious philosophical tradition. And the μέν/δέ paradox of Diodorus Cronus is performative. This is only the rough beginnings of a taxonomy: what about paradoxical sophisms? And I allow myself a joke: it is nothing less than paradoxical that no one has ever attempted to construct a *catalogue raisonné* of paradoxes!

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2. Paradoxes in/of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama

3

The Incidence of the Speakers' Gender on Paradoxes in Shakespeare's Comedies

Beatrice Righetti

Abstract

Stemming from a preliminary analysis on paradoxes in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Much Ado About Nothing* (Righetti 2022), this essay is framed within the broader research field of paradoxical writing in early modern England, which has also focused on the presence and role of paradoxes in Shakespeare's works (Vickers 1968; Platt 2009; Bigliazzi 2011, 2014, 2022; Coronato 2014). The present contribution aims to broaden the corpus of plays of the former study to include all of Shakespeare's comedies and investigate the existence of a specific correlation between Shakespeare's dramatic writing and paradoxical tradition, that is the presence of possible causal relations between the character's gender and the form and function of the paradoxes they use.

Results show that male characters utter paradoxes which follow rhetorical conventions and rely on them irrespective of the dramatic context, either comical or momentarily tragical. Contrariwise, female characters use paradoxes more rarely and turn to *endoxa*, Aristotle's term for common opinion, when confronted with crucial, possibly life-threatening events. This change seems to mirror a rhetorical tendency in the works by early modern male and female writers of the *querelle des femmes* and suggests that this early modern debate on women may have had an indirect impact in Shakespeare's construction of his characters' paradoxical language.

Keywords: William Shakespeare; comedy; paradox; gender; female voice

As generative as the paradox itself,[1] the present study is the result of a precedent analysis on the presence of mock encomia in

[1] The generative power of paradoxes lies in their defiance on *endoxa* and common knowledge as it allows them to "present audiences with new ideas, new ways of thinking above ideas, and new constructs for organizing and solving problems" (Hyde 1979, 218).

Shakespeare's comedies (Righetti 2022). Besides their argument and role, the study dealt only partially with the relationship between paradoxes and their speakers, who were investigated according to their social standing rather than gender. To bridge this gap, the present essay aims to analyse the role of the speaker's gender in the paradoxical expressions in Shakespeare's comedies.

Few scholarly studies have addressed the interactions between the categories of gender and paradox which have been usually analysed on a thematic level only. Instead of referring to gender and paradox as literary/dramatic variables like social status or literary/dramatic genre, they usually rely on paradox as a rhetorical tool which helps navigate early modern gender issues and their layers of complexity. In *Governing Masculinities in the Early Modern Period*, Jacqueline Van Gent relies on paradox to define the gender-based social and psychological mechanisms underlying the instability of early modern patriarchal rule:

> Patriarchy was predicted on an intrinsic paradox. It was a common contemporary view that women were inherently sexually uncontrollable; nonetheless, the patriarch's position was dependent upon his establishment of control over the necessarily subordinate woman, including over this unruly female sexuality. (2011, 144)

Likewise, in "The Woman Writer as Public Paradox: Elizabeth Carter and the Bluestocking Circle", Lisa A. Freeman refers to Puttenham's definition of paradox but does not focus on its logical implications, but on the example of paradoxical thinking the author provides ("that a woman should dominate her husband in the field of wit or intelligence is marked here as a cause for wonder, for it violates a normative gender hierarchy", 2010, 122), which Freeman uses as a starting point for her discussion of rape and its handling in the early modern period. Although having penned an extremely informative – and almost unique – study on Shakespearean paradoxes, Peter G. Platt too explores the possible relationship between gender and paradox as a topical rather than structural issue embodied by the multi-layered figure of the boy actor ("[u]sing these paradoxes, Shakespeare goes to great lengths in this play to foreground the performance of gender by highlighting the material fact that his

theater's women were played by boys . . . the boy actor plays Rosalind; Rosalind becomes a young man, Ganymede; . . . Ganymede becomes 'Rosalind'" 2009, 173).

Unlike these studies, the present essay considers paradoxes as affecting not only the linguistic, but also the contextual and illocutionary codes (see Bigliazzi 2011, 127). As such, paradoxes still respond to their Ciceronian definition ("[*q*]*uae quia sunt admirabilia contraque opinionem omnium*", see Galli 2019) which requires them to counter doxa, that is, common opinion and common sense, as well as show their deeply metalogic nature as they necessarily test and/or reconfigure the dramatic action (Bigliazzi 2011, 127). The paradoxical expressions here addressed are mock encomia, "a species of rhetorical jest or display piece which involves the praise of unworthy, unexpected, or trifling objects" (Knight Miller 1956, 145); oxymora, that is "figures which are intrinsically contradictory while being commonly accepted"; and logical paradoxes, "which flaunt the principle of non-contradiction, according to which a proposition cannot be simultaneously true and false, or deny factual evidence" (Duranti and Stelzer 2022, 23). Although mock encomia and oxymora usually contradict the cultural and linguistic codes respectively and seldom undermine their logical framework, they may acquire a paradoxical value when "combined in complex articulations of thought that not only describe a puzzling sense of the real but in so doing perform actions" (Bigliazzi 2022, 54). On the other hand, logical paradoxes depend on their situational and illocutionary contexts and as such often distort not only their cultural and linguistic, but also logical background. Defined as "metalogisms", logical paradoxes are then considered "especially relevant in drama, where every speech act is tied to its situationality, because metalogisms belong to the ostensive, deictic sphere" (Duranti and Stelzer 2022, 24).

The theatrical dimension is thus the best context where to experience such logical impasses and see how they affect both their onstage and offstage audience and their "ability to measure the gap, as it were, between reference and referent" (Elam 1980, 108). For the sake of brevity and coherence, the corpus of plays here investigated focuses on Shakespearean comedies and includes *The Comedy of Errors* (1589), *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593), *Love's Labour's Lost*

(1594), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595), *The Merchant of Venice* (1596), *Much Ado about Nothing* (1598), *As You Like It* (1599), *All's Well That Ends Well* (1602) and *Measure for Measure* (1604).

The thesis underlying this study is that male characters use paradoxes more frequently and distribute them more evenly throughout the play than female ones, who seldom rely on paradoxical reasoning, especially when confronted with critical situations. In these cases, they prefer *endoxa*, the Aristotelian 'common opinion', that is "the things believed" or "which seem so" (*ta dokounta*) "to everyone or to most people or to the wise – to all of them, or to most, or to the most famous and esteem [of them]" (Aristotle 1997, 100b21-3).[2] The purpose of this distinction is not to diminish the significance of paradoxes in female characters as a means of social critique. Instead, it aims to emphasise the greater frequency and clarity with which this critique is conveyed through the use of *endoxa*. One of the reasons behind this choice may lay in Shakespeare's – possibly unconscious – assimilation of contemporary rhetorical practices. Comparisons between early modern male and female authors seem to suggest that women writers usually favour *endoxa* and avoid paradoxical expressions, which are rather common in their male counterparts' misogynist writing. This rhetorical differentiation may derive from women writers' perception of the dangers deriving from paradoxical reasoning. The diversion of the readers' attention from the content to the peculiar logic and implications of the paradoxical form was unproblematic to male writers, who were defending conventional positions about men's superiority over the female sex, and often relied on paradoxes as rhetorical *divertissement*. Women instead

[2] "[T]hose opinions [which] are 'generally accepted'", "which are accepted by every one or by the majority or by the philosophers – i.e. by all, or by the majority, or by the most notable and illustrious of them" (qtd in Eikeland 2016, 31). Eikeland explains how this approach differs from the paradoxical one in critically developing dialogical or dialectical argumentations: it works from within common practises and relies "on an initial confidence in the experience (empeiría) of everyday practitioners", it "play[s] out, distinguish[es] and explor[es] ambivalences, inner tensions and contradictions . . . prov[es] them right in certain senses but not in others . . . and solve[s] or dissolve[s] paradoxes" (ibid).

were already in a weaker position as they were struggling to be acknowledged as equal interlocutors and intellectually gifted partners. In this light, the use of paradoxes could have easily provided male readers with the perfect excuse to avoid addressing thorny issues by focusing on rhetorical and logical fallacies in their paradoxical form.

1. Paradoxes and Male Characters: Frequency and Conventions

In Shakespeare's comedies, male characters seem at ease in relying on paradoxical thinking given the frequency and range of paradoxical passages that can be found in their lines, irrespectively of the gravity of their content.

Although more thoroughly analysed elsewhere (Righetti 2022), mock encomia are common in Shakespeare's plays, possibly given their comical reach which well fits the genre. In *As You Like It* (Shakespeare 1975), the clown Touchstone addresses cuckoldry, one of the most popular subjects belonging to the so-called *infames materiae*, namely shameful topics or conditions. In dealing with it, writers such as Anton Francesco Doni, Antonfrancesco Grazzini and Tommaso Garzoni in Italy and François Rabelais and Jean Passerat in France (Figorilli 2008, 37-8)[3] usually turn the shameful visibility of the cuckold's horns into a source of pride and admiration, a sign of his abundance for the owner through examples from the animal world, myths and religion ("[o] le sono il bel tropheo; o le sono il bel cimieri; o le son la bella cosa", Doni 1551, Dvi*r*).[4] Likewise, Touchstone associates the cuckold's horns with worldly goods by stating that as "[m]any a man knows no end / of his goods" so "[m] any a man has good horns and knows no end / of them" (3.3.49-50). He expands this notion of pride and wealth by conjuring the image

[3] The works mentioned above are "Al Cornieri da Corneto" by Doni (1551, 42-64), *In lode delle corna* by Grazzini, *Mirabile cornucopia consolatorio* by Garzoni (posthumously published in 1601, but possibly written in 1588-1589), *Tier Livre des faits et dits Héroïques du noble Pantagruel* (1546) by Rabelais and *La Corne d'Abondance* (1606) by Passerat.

[4] "Aren't they a pretty trophy? Aren't they a pretty [helmet's] crest? Aren't they a pretty thing?".

of the "noblest deer" and of "a wall'd town", whose mural defences make it "more worthier than a village", and concludes by stating that "the forehead of a married man [is] more honourable than the bare brow of a bachelor" (3.3.51-7). A similar paradoxical praise of the horns also appears in *All's Well That Ends Well* (Shakespeare 1985), where the Clown explains the perks of being a cuckold by stating that the lover of his wife does him a service by "com[ing] to do that for me which I am aweary of" (1.3.32). Such an inversion of perspective enables the listener to judge a traditionally negative and shameful condition as potentially desirable since it not only frees the husband from his marital duty, but also strengthens the couple's happiness ("he that cherishes my flesh and blood loves my flesh and blood; he that loves my flesh and blood is my friend: ergo, he that kisses my wife is my friend", 34-6).

Besides cuckoldry, *Measure for Measure* (Shakespeare 1991) shows a reversed mock encomium of death whose main logical argumentation consists in finding faults with its opposite ("[in this life] lie hid moe thousand deaths; yet death we fear", 3.1.39-40). This kind of mock praise was very popular in early modern Europe as it allowed to question – though ironically – not only logical structures but also doxastic, religious beliefs otherwise passively taken for granted. Besides contemporary paradoxical praises on the same subject, such as Thomas Becon's *Prayse of Death* (1563) or E.A.'s English translation of Philippe de Mornay's *Excellent discours de la vie et de la mort* (*The Defence of Death*, 1577), Vincentio's reversed mock encomium seems to echo Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, first translated into English in 1534, and *Tusculanae Disputationes*, where death is considered the supreme good since it frees man from the only cause of human suffering, life.

Other conventional mock praises can be found in *Love's Labour's Lost* (Shakespeare 1998), where Biron turns two traditionally unpleasant conditions, such as black beauty and ignorance, into desirable qualities. The praise of black beauty is famously dealt with by Shakespeare himself in his 'Dark Lady Sonnets' and grows even more popular in the seventeenth century, as proved by the anonymous and undated "That a Black-a-moor Woman is the greatest Beauty; in a Letter to a Lady exceeding Fair", Thomas Jordan's *A Paradox on his Mistresse, who is cole Blacke, Blinde, Wrinckled,*

Crooked and Dumbe (1646) and Herbert of Cherbury's posthumous *Sonnet of Black Beauty* (1665). Likewise, Biron's paradoxical praise of ignorance easily recalls one of the best-known mock encomia of ignorance of that time, namely Agrippa's *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* (1524). Both Biron and Agrippa seem to consider knowledge "pernicious" and "destructive to the well-being of Men, or to the Salvation of our Souls" (Agrippa 1684, B1*v*) given the impossibility of fully mastering the range of notions necessary to achieve such a wisdom.[5] Although with little connections to early modern writing, *The Comedy of Errors* (Shakespeare 1962) too shows another instance of mock praise in Dromio of Ephesus' ironical defence of his master's physical violence (4.4.30-40).

Also presenting a mock encomium of male superiority over women, *The Taming of the Shrew* (Shakespeare 2002) is the only comedy to show instances of oxymora which transcend purely linguistic contradictions. Although they cannot be defined as metalogisms since they do not contradict the dramatic action in itself, they differ from mock encomia and semantic oxymora in that they show structural ties with the events onstage. In Kate and Petruchio's wedding scene, Biondello announces the arrival of the bridegroom as follow: "News, and such old news as you never heard of!" (3.2.30). The intention of delivering something unprecedented which is somehow both already known ("old") and unknown ("never heard of") to the listeners/speakers creates a cognitive loop which seems impossible to solve. This degree of paradoxicality is enhanced by the presence of a multi-layered oxymoron which plays on the contrast between "old" and "new" in a twofold way and serves the dramatic action since it anticipates what the actors onstage and the audience are about to see, that is the (un)expected arrival of the groom in weary and torn clothes. First, the plain contradiction between "news" and "old" regards Petruchio's arrival at his wedding: his presence is both "news", and good news for once, since Kate and Baptista were starting to doubt he would show up at all ("Why, is it

[5] "Light seeking light doth light of light beguile" (*LLL*, 1.1.77); "[t]he knowledge of all Sciences is so difficult, if I may not say impossible, that the age of Man will not suffice to learn the perfection of one Art as it ought to be" (Agrippa 1684, B3*v*).

not news to hear of Petruchio's coming?", 34) as well as "old news", since the arrival of the groom at his own wedding is rather obvious. However, this oxymoronic expression concerns not only the fact but also the way Petruchio shows up at his wedding: Biondello's use of "old" to define "news" sounds programmatic since it anticipates Petruchio's inappropriate attire consisting in his "old" clothes and horse ("Why, Petruchio is coming in a new hat and an old jerkin; a pair of old breeches thrice turned . . . his horse hipped – with an old mothy saddle . . . possessed with the glanders and like to mose in the chine" (41-9).

In 4.1, Petruchio provides another example of oxymoron which gains a performative, structural reach: his often-quoted words, "to kill a wife with kindness" (195), which he utters in an aside as he explains his plan to tame his shrewish wife.[6] Being somewhat an exception, this oxymoron cannot be defined paradoxical in its contradiction of doxastic principles. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humanists as well as writers of conduct books and manuals generally supported the use of forceable means other than reasonable conversation to tame curst wives as long as they did not involve overt physical violence (Sharpe 1981; Dwyer Amussen 1988). William Gouge's *Of Domestical Duties* (1622, 397) still stated that "[a wife] may be restrained of liberty, denied such things as she most affecteth, be kept up, as it were, in hold" (Detmer 1997, 279). This bit of advice fits Petruchio's strategy, which disguises thoughtful gestures as subtle means of physical and psychological coercion ("[a]s with the meat, some undeserved fault / I'll find about the making of the bed; . . . and amid this hurly I intend / That all is done in reverend care of her", 186-91). Still, its clear semantical paradoxicality, which describes "kindness" as a result of a violent intention ("kill"), has a fundamental performative role in both legitimising Petruchio's

[6] Farley-Hills (1981) briefly comments on this passage: "[a]dmittedly there is something paradoxical too about Petruchio's 'kindness': it is a kindness that is so concerned that she has fine enough food that she is allowed none and so concerned that she'll have fine linen on her bed that she is allowed to get no sleep: 'I, and amid this hurlie I intend, That all is done in reverend care of her…' (1837-8). The paradox of hurting her with kindness, so that kindness is ultimately done by hurting, is itself an extension of the sexual role of the male, whose love-making is aggression and whose aggression is an act of love" (168).

otherwise unintelligible previous behaviour towards his wife and predicting those to follow. In Scene 3, for instance, Petruchio rips and tears apart the newly fabricated gown and hat which Kate should have worn for her sister's marriage. As anticipated in the previous oxymoronic utterance, these violent actions are disguised as acts of service which Petruchio performs to allegedly spare her any social embarrassment provoked by such inappropriate clothing ("Why, true, he [the tailor] means to make a puppet of thee", 104).

Lacking such a performative reach, merely semantical oxymora are not considered in the present study given their tendency to only contradict the linguistic code and leave their logical framework unscathed. This is the case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare 1988), where Quince's "lamentable comedy" (1.2.9), Demetrius' "[c]rystal is muddy" (3.2.139) and Hippolyta's "I never heard so musical a discord, such sweet thunder" (4.1.114-5) do not undermine the logic at play. Titania's praise of Bottom's asinine figure too ("[t]hou art as wise as thou art beautiful", 3.1.123) is paradoxical only on a linguistic level since it is the result of a love charm and as such to be considered honest despite its seemingly paradoxical form.[7] The same can be applied to Friar Francis' "[c]ome, lady, die to live" in *Much Ado About Nothing* (Shakespeare 2016, 4.1.253). This line presents no paradoxical aspects from a religious point of view, since it implies the doxastic belief that death leads to eternal life. Likewise, it does not show any degree of paradoxicality from a performative perspective since both the characters onstage and the audience are aware of the logic underneath the priest's words ("[l]et her [Hero] awhile be secretly kept it, / And publish

[7] Another example of this kind of false paradox can be found in *All's Well That Ends Well*. Replying to the King's question about Bertram's alleged affair with the maid Diana, Parolles rather enigmatically states that Bertram "loved her, sir, and loved her not" (5.3.244). Though paradoxical from a linguistic point of view, the sentence retains a veridical value when framed within its dramatic background: Bertram did love a maid who answered to the name of Diana and at the same time he did not truly lay with *her* since the woman he bedded was Helena in disguise. The same reasoning is applied to Diana's comment, "he [Bertram]'s guilty, and he is not guilty" (5.3.279), since he bedded a virgin –his wife – but not herself. A more detailed account of this borderline case is given in Righetti 2022.

it that she is dead indeed . . . this well carried shall on her behalf / Change slander to remorse", 203-11).

Similarly, logical paradoxes which only flaunt the principle of non-contradiction and/or deny factual evidence from a linguistic, imaginative point of view have been excluded. This is the case with Dromio's "[i]f she lives till doomsday, she'll burn a week longer than the whole world" (*The Comedy of Errors*, 3.2.98-100), which recalls very common oxymoronic expressions in Shakespeare's time like Joseph Swetnam's "[to] draw water continually, to fill a bottomlesse tubbe" (1615, B3*v*) to express the uselessness of men's attempts to mend women's crooked nature. Likewise, Touchstone's description of solitary life loses some of its paradoxicality because of its subjectivity. Its contradictory utterance does not extend to the abstract notion of solitary living in general, but it applies to the kind of life he is experiencing in the forest of Arden only ("in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is nought; in respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; . . . but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious", *AYL*, 3.2.13-18).[8]

Rather, proper logical paradoxes usually confirm as well as deny specific characteristics or definitions of one's identity in relation to their role within family or society. In *As You Like It*, Adam talks with Orlando about Oliver, the latter's brother, and defines him as "[y]our brother – no, no brother; yet the son – yet not the son" (2.3.19-20), thus identifying a coexistence of opposites which create a paradoxical loop in his description.[9] In other cases, similar utterances can be

[8] Demetrius' paradoxical description of Helena as a murderer too is partially jeopardised by linguistic ambiguity ("[y]et you, the murderer, look as bright, as clear / As yonder Venus in her *glimmering* sphere", *MND*, 3.2.60-1, emphasis added). The use of "glimmering" conveys uncertainty about the factuality of Helena's evil nature, hinted at by the verb "to look", and suggests a subjective reading of the statement, which then weakens its paradoxical reach.

[9] Likewise, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Salerio's description of Antonio as "[n]ot sick, my lord, unless it be in mind; / Nor well, unless in mind" (3.2.233-5) poses a similar logical paradox since it shows the coexistence of opposite conditions in him: Antonio is both "not sick", thus well, and "not well", thus sick in mind due to the news he received of the shipwreck which destroyed his goods. The same reasoning can be applied to the Clown's portrayal of Helena's mother in *All's Well*: "[s]he is not well; but yet she has her health:

solved as soon as they are framed within a temporal perspective. Hamlet's "[w]as't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet" (5.2.179-80) does not account for a coexistence of opposites in himself but rather clarifies that he has changed after his murder of Polonius (Bigliazzi 2022, 58). In *As You Like It*, time does not apply to Oliver's conduct and as such does not offer a solution to Adam's paradoxical reasoning: Oliver's ruthless behaviour has always been so much at odds with his relatives' that it is hard to think he truly is Orlando's brother and Sir Rowland's son ("no brother", "yet not the son"), although he surely shares their bloodline ("your brother", "yet the son").[10]

Although similar in form, the paradoxical impasse posed by Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing* differs from the previous quoted passage as it stands for more than a logical loop; rather, it clarifies and typifies some of his most characterising traits such as wit and rhetorical mastery. After implying that Hero is everything but the portrayal of the ideal Renaissance woman since she is short, slight and brown, Benedick poses two opposite statements which lead to the same result:

> Benedick Why, i' faith, methinks she's too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise and too little for a great praise: only this commendation I can afford her, that were she other than she is, she were unhandsome; and being no other but as she is, I do not like her (1.1.163-7)

The first proposition argues that if Hero could be different from herself ("were she other than she is") she would be "unhandsome", and thus possibly not pleasant to him. The second proposition confirms that Hero cannot be anything but herself ("and being no

she's very merry; but yet she is not well: but thanks be given, she's very well and wants nothing i', the world; but yet she is not well" (2.4.2-4).

[10] In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio's description of Kate as "plain Kate, and bonny Kate" (2.1.185-6) clashes with her conventional label of "Kate the curst" (2.1.186) and creates a logical paradox more similar to Adam's than Hamlet's. In this case, it is the audience rather than the speaker, who does not acknowledge Kate's two identities as coexisting, to be faced with a difficult choice to make and decide whether Kate is the renowned shrew of Padua or Petruchio's mild and obedient wife-to-be.

other but as she is"), thus handsome, but it suggests that beauty alone does not suffice and Benedick tops his reasoning with a resolute "I don't like her". This conclusion activates the logical paradox as it shows how two opposite conditions, Hero's ugliness and beauty, lead to the same result, Benedick's indifference towards her.

Besides being numerous and rather conventional in form and content, paradoxes uttered by male characters also seem to be evenly distributed throughout the play. They appear in rather passing, unproblematic moments, as happens with Dromio's mock encomium of physical violence in *The Comedy of Errors* ("[w]hen I am cold, he heats me with beating; when I am / warm, he cools me with beating" 4.4.34-5). His paradoxical praise is uttered in one of the most confusing passages of the play, where the endless equivocations and identity exchanges arouse laughter in the audience and lead to the conventional resolution which takes place in the following scene ("I see two husbands, or mine eyes deceive me", 5.1.331).

More interestingly, such expressions, which own a potentially comical reach, also show in more crucial passages where the characters are faced with uncanny, if not altogether tragic, events.[11] In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Biron's revelatory acknowledgment of his feelings towards Rosaline is signalled by a mock encomium of black beauty ("[a] wightly wanton with a velvet brow, / With two pitch-balls stuck in her face for eyes; . . . And I to sigh for her! to watch for her! / To pray for her!", 3.1.191-6). Such feelings resurface in 4.3, where Biron faces the King's shock at his love for such an unconventional beauty ("[b]y heaven, thy love is black as ebony", 4.3.243) with a rhetorical inversion ("[i]s ebony like her? O wood

[11] In *All's Well*, the Clown's contradictory portrayal of Helena's mother ("[s]he is not well; but yet she has her health: she's very merry; but yet she is not well: but thanks be given, she's very well and wants nothing i', the world; but yet she is not well", 2.4.2-4) bridges the gap between male paradoxes uttered in plainly comical/tragical passages since it is placed as a comic pause between two scenes which unfold Helena's unfortunate destiny. The audience is made aware of Bertram's plan of leaving Helena, his bride, and sail to France ("I'll to the wars, she to her single sorrow", 2.3.273), while, later, they witness this plan coming to fruition as Bertram leaves her unawares ("[g]o thou toward home; where I will never come / Whilst I can shake my sword or hear the drum", 2.5.84).

divine! / A wife of such wood were felicity", 244-5) immediately perceived as paradoxical ("[o] paradox!", 250). Similarly, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio's "to kill a wife with kindness" (4.1.195) is uttered in a crucial moment of the play as he explains for the first time to his baffled on and offstage audience the logic behind his uncanny behaviour towards his wife:

> Thus have I politicly begun my reign,
> And 'tis my hope to end successfully.
> My falcon now is sharp and passing empty.
> And till she stoop she must not be full-gorg'd,
> . . .
> This is a way to kill a wife with kindness,
> And thus I'll curb her mad and headstrong humour
> (4.1.175-96)

Paradoxical thinking also characterises Petruchio's last test of Kate's obedience as it marks the utmost degree of logical complexity the conceptual horizon of the play affords. Here, Petruchio relies on logical contraries, that is universal categorical propositions opposed to each other which create dichotomic alternatives out of single elements (A is either B or not B) and lead to paradoxical conclusions if such alternatives are allowed to coexist. Not only does his paradoxical reasoning contradict onstage and offstage reality, but also becomes self-effacing as it forces Kate to counter both truth and her own words:

> Petruchio I say it is the moon.
> Kate I know it is the moon.
> Petruchio Nay, then you lie; it is the blessed sun.
> Kate Then, God be bless'd, it is the blessed sun;
> But sun it is not, when you say it is not;
> And the moon changes even as your mind.
> What you will have it nam'd, even that it is,
> And so it shall be so for Katherine.
> (4.5.16-22)

The presence of paradoxes uttered by male characters also marks life-threatening scenes where they express contrasting passions and unreconcilable thoughts. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the tragical

climax of the play, that is, Claudio's public slandering of Hero at the altar and his consequent rampage, is punctuated by frequent oxymora which voice his difficulty in accepting his fiancée's loose behaviour, which he deems incompatible with her well-known spotless reputation ("[o] Hero! . . . But fare thee well, most foul, most fair. Farewell / Thou pure impiety and impious purity", 4.1.100-4). As it is the case with Shakespeare's tragedies and later comedies, paradoxes adapt to tragical settings too where they convey the contrasts and internal struggles of divided minds and broken hearts rather than linguistic acrobatics of witty minds (see Bigliazzi 2022).

While male characters seem to easily adapt paradoxical reasoning to any context and theme they want to convey, regardless of the gravity of its dramatic setting, female ones tend to avoid paradoxes altogether, especially when addressing serious content. As the following section suggests, this rhetorical tendency may have been unconsciously adapted by Shakespeare in giving voice to his female characters from early modern writing practices by female authors.

2. Endoxa Over Paradoxa in Female Characters' Rhetoric

While male characters utter a wide range of paradoxical expressions, this is not the case with female ones, who seldom rely on this rhetorical trope. Out of the nine plays here considered, only two, namely *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, show instances of mock encomia, oxymora and logical paradoxes uttered by female characters. To these, one may also add *The Taming of the Shrew*, thanks to Kate's final monologue, the only instance of a paradoxical utterance by a female character in the play. As the following analysis shows, such paradoxes are not only fewer in number than those uttered by male characters, but also seldom appear in crucial moments of the play.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia's comments about her loathed suitors are contradictory as well as paradoxical in their resolution. However, they have no structural resonance in the play since they do not affect either her father's will or her decision to respect it. Her description of Monsieur Le Bon as "every man in no man" (Shakespeare 1964, 1.2.57) implies a contradictory as

well as paradoxical conclusion which reverberates in titles of later plays, such as the anonymous *No-body and Some-body* (1606) and Beaumont and Fletcher's *A King and No King* (1619); likewise, her definition of the Duke of Saxony's nephew ("when he is best, he is a little worse than a man, and when he is worst, he is little better than a beast", 82-4) implies that the nobleman impossibly bridges two distinct evolutionary stages, those of the beast and the man, which conventionally share no middle term. While Petruchio's "to kill a wife with kindness" (*The Taming of the Shrew*, 4.1.195) justifies past and future actions as it provides the interpretative key to his behaviour towards Kate, Portia's paradoxical descriptions of her suitors cannot be considered programmatic since they do no explain or affect the unfolding of the plot.

Unlike Portia and Kate, Beatrice shows her mastery of paradoxical rhetoric from the beginning of the play as she conveys sharp critiques of the ruling class misbehaviours and misogynist social paradigms through logically contradicting utterances.[12] Her description of man as "valiant dust" (3.1.54) oxymoronically rewrites a biblical image to question his innate superiority over women. This rhetorical stratagem was common among proto-feminist writers of the time.[13] In *Jane Anger Her Protection for Women* (1589), Anger too relies on the myth of Creation to stress how Adam's base birth mirrors his base nature ("formed *In principio* of drosse and filthy clay [, Adam] did so remaine until God saw that in him his workmanship was good", C1*r*). Unlike him, Anger stresses, Eve was made out of "mans fleshe, that she might bee purer then he, doth evidently showe, how far we women are more excellent then men" (ibid.).[14] Likewise, Beatrice's disdain for marriage and men

[12] Other paradoxical expressions by Beatrice include a logical paradox ("but believe me not; and yet I lie not; I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing", 4.1.271-2) and an oxymoron ("I am gone, though I am here", 293).

[13] "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7, *KJV*).

[14] Maxwell states that Beatrice relies on copiousness as humanist rhetorical principle to defamiliarise and render more humorous this biblical passage adding unexpected synonyms such as "wayward marl" (2008, 67). This argumentative technique can still be found in seventeenth-century women writers, such as Mary Tattle-well ("man was made of pollution, earth,

in general is conveyed through a logical paradox which leaves no suitor standing ("[h]e that hath a beard is more than a youth, and he that hath no beard is less than a man: and he that is more than a youth is not for me, and he that is less than a man, I am not for him", 2.1.30-4).[15] Her reasoning process is duly explained by Hero in the following act as she clarifies how Beatrice maintains the formal convention of the mock encomium genre, thus dealing with one characteristic at a time, only to subtly subvert its final aim. In her paradoxical tirades, Beatrice does not find virtues in unworthy subjects, but rather faults in any man who threatens to jeopardise her singleness ("[i]f fair-faced, she would swear the gentleman should be her sister; if black, why Nature, drawing of an antic, made a foul blot", 3.1.61-4).

Similarly, Kate's only paradoxical remark, that is her conclusive monologue, stands for a witty reversed mock encomium on male authority and supremacy over women. Its ironical, if not parodical reach is given by the presence of linguistic and performative exaggerations (Kingsbury 2004, 77)[16] as well as logical paradoxes which punctuate her reasoning and provide it with a degree of verbal ambiguity sufficient to allow different, at times opposite, interpretations of it. Kate's advice to her female audience to "vail your stomachs, for it is no boot" (5.2.177), for instance, may have a twofold, contradictory reading which, paradoxically, lead to the same result. If the verb "to veil" is considered an alternative spelling for 'to vail', namely "[t]o lower in sign of submission or respect"

& slime; and woman was formed out of that earth when it was first Refin'd", 1640, E12*v*).

[15] Beatrice's logical paradoxes echoes in structure Benedick's: "[w]hy, i' faith, methinks she's too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise and too little for a great praise: only this commendation I can afford her, that were she other than she is, she were unhandsome; and being no other but as she is, I do not like her" (1.1.163-7)

[16] Kate's powerful gesture of submission – i.e. offering to place her hand below Petruchio's foot – is considered an exaggeration pre-reformation wedding rituals. The Salisbury Manual prescribes that brides should "prostrate . . . at the feet of the bridegroom" and "kiss his right foot". However, Kate enhances the performativity of this gesture as she claims to be ready to "place [her] hands below [her] husband's foot", thus risking the pain of having her hands crushed by Petruchio's booted feet.

(*OED* I.1.b),[17] then Kate seemingly suggests other women to bend their will to their husband's. Contrariwise, if 'to veil' is interpreted as "[t]o hide or conceal from the apprehension, knowledge, or perception of others", possibly also as "to treat or deal with in such a way as to disguise or obscure; to hide or mask the true nature or meaning of" (*OED* 4.a.i), then Kate's message gains a subversive tone as she suggests other women to conceal their stomachs – the seat of their passions and emotions – from their husbands in order to play the obedient wife (Kingsbury 2004, 79). This results in a paradoxical conclusion: no matter what they chose, either 'to veil' or 'to vail', women are always forced by social and cultural conventions to show their allegiance to patriarchal power and thus to necessarily submit to it ("[f]or it is no boot / And place your hands below your husband's foot", 177-8) (see Righetti 2022, 17-18).

Despite the social and cultural criticism inherent in such utterances, paradoxes by female characters fail to deeply question and overturn or affect the events of the play. While Petruchio's "kill with kindness" strategy provides the dramatic structure of most of the events in the play, neither Portia's nor Beatrice's comments deeply influence the dramatic action. Kate's monologue may prove the exception to such rule; however, given its conclusive position in the comedy, it is up to the audience to decide whether its implicit irony may lead to a new power struggle within the couple. Also, the few paradoxical expressions by female characters are unevenly distributed throughout the play; in particular, they are consistently absent in crucial situations. While male characters rely on paradoxical expressions independently from the dramatic context and eventually adapt paradoxes to express an either comic ("[n]ews, and such old news as you never heard of!", *The Taming of the Shrew*, 3.2.30) or tragic content ("most foul, most fair", *Much Ado about Nothing*, 4.1.103), female characters seem to prefer *endoxa*, namely

[17] In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature the stomach, as well as the heart, often stood for the inward seat of passion and emotion; see Kingsbury 2004, 78. Here, Kingsbury also recalls Elizabeth I's Tilbury speech, where the queen states "I may have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king", thus assuring that underneath her female physical appearance she owned behavioural traits traditionally identified as male.

common opinion, especially when confronted with life-threatening situations. In this case, they follow Aristotle's suggestion to "mov[e] critically" through complicated, contradictory issues in order to develop dialogical or dialectical argumentations to solve logical impasses and overcome formal, aesthetic and logical complexity, also resulting from the use of paradoxes (Aristotle 1997, 31). If thus analysed, it may seem that female characters' harshest and most serious critiques against contemporary society are conveyed through rational reasoning than paradoxical argumentation.

This strategy is used by Kate in her first attempts to resist Petruchio's paradoxical account of her identity. While he manipulates her name ("Good morrow, Kate, for that's your name, I hear", 2.1.182) and personality traits ("you are call'd plain Kate, and bonny Kate", 185-6), she closely follows *endoxa* about her sense of self and promptly corrects him ("Well have you heard, but something hard of hearing", 183) by repeatedly asserting her shrewish nature and identity ("They call me Katherine", 184). Kate follows analytical reasoning also when faced with Petruchio's cruel and paradoxical plan of depriving her of any comfort. This leads her to first question Petruchio's final aim ("What, did he marry me to famish me?", 4.3.3), break a comparison with common experience ("[Beggars that come unto my father's door / Upon entreaty have a present alms; If not, elsewhere they meet with charity", 4-6) and almost unveil his true intentions ("And that which spites me more than all these wants – / He does it under name of perfect love", 11-12) and their paradoxical quality ("[a]s who should say, if I should sleep or eat, / 'Twere deadly sickness or else present death", 13-14).

Beatrice exploits this strategy when faced with a truly life-threatening situation, Hero's tragedy. When Claudio publicly accuses Hero of loose behaviour, Beatrice momentarily abandons her usual display of paradoxical wit and relies on *endoxa* to save her cousin from the tragic destiny which usually awaits slandered women. In this case, her reliance on *endoxa* or common opinions concerns past actions rather than the present moment, as happens with Kate, and requires an attentive revision of her past habits to prove her cousin's spotless reputation with certainty ("No, truly not; although, until last night, / I have this twelvemonth been her bedfellow", 4.1.148-9). This comment questions the truthfulness of

Claudio's accusations – partially expressed through paradoxes – and reinforces Hero's claims of innocence, thus giving Benedick and Leonato a further reason for listening to the priest's plan to save her.

The lower frequency of paradoxes in female characters' utterances seems to echo a rhetorical practice to be found in early modern female authors' writing. In the European debate on the worth of women, female writers who defended the female sex from misogynist attacks seldom relied on paradoxical thinking. Among the very few paradoxical strategies used by them, the most common one requires the author to first accept her opponents' accusations and then turn them in her favour by manipulating the logic underneath. In *Esther Hath Hang'd Haman* (1617), Esther Sowernam counters the misogynist accusations of her literary opponent, Joseph Swetnam, and transforms them into proofs of women's excellence by means of paradoxical reasoning: if weaker remarks usually regard petty offences and unimportant offenders and harsher ones regard most notable subjects, then men's violent attacks against women prove the relevance of the female sex and, more at large, its more perfect nature ("[i]n no one thing, men doe acknowledge a more excellent perfection in women then in the estimate of the offences which a woman doth commit: the worthinesse of the person doth make the sinne more markeable", D4*v*). Likewise, in *Her Protection of Women* (1589), Jane Anger turns common opinion on conventional female vices and flaws into necessary social qualities to mend men's ill conduct. In this view, female talkativeness becomes the expression of a wife's loving habit of thoughtfully counselling her partner ("[o]ur tongues are light, because earnest in reprooving mens filthy vices, and our good counsel is termed nipping injurie, in that it accordes not with their foolish fancies", B3*v*).[18]

[18] This paradoxical strategy can also be found in contemporary Italian defences of women. In Moderata Fonte's *Il merito delle donne* (1600), Corinna, one of the female protagonists of this Boccaccian dialogue, uses this paradoxical argumentative strategy to reverse the traditional misogynist claim that imputes men's superiority to their physical strength. To her, male strength stands not for a virtue, but rather for their natural status as servants of weaker, though nobler female masters ("For don't we see that men's rightful task is to go out to work and wear themselves out trying to accumulate wealth, as though they were our factors or stewards, so that we can remain

Thus, in dealing with such a sensitive issue as gender balance, women writers joining the debate too preferred *endoxa* and analytical thinking to support their unconventional claims. At times, *endoxa* equal with common opinion as well as common sense. In *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611), Aemilia Lanyer underlines how Adam's guilt must be considered greater than Eve's since he, conventionally more prefect than she, should have resisted temptation and taken her back to the righteous path ("But surely *Adam* can not be excusde, / Her fault though great, yet hee was most too blame; / What Weaknesse offerd, Strength might have refusde", D1*r*).[19] In fact, it is only when Adam eats the apple that the original sin is deemed perfected and humankind condemned. In other cases, *endoxa* is to be considered as the opinion accepted "by the most notable and illustrious of them [men]" (Aristotle 1997, 31). In *A Muzzle for Melastomus* (1617), Rachel Speght appeals to her vast knowledge of the Holy Scriptures to counter Swetnam's use of Saint Paul's claims against marriage. Insisting on the historical circumstances in which the saint wrote, Speght underlines how "[a]s long as the Corinthians were 'persecuted by the enemies of the Church', celibacy was a practical advantage, but only as long as 'these perturbations should continue'" (C4*v*). In Sowernam's pamphlet, *endoxa* surface as both common sense in her sharp insights on Swetnam's poor logical structure ("[n]ow let the Christian Reader please to consider how dishonestly this Authour dealeth, who undertaking a particular, prosecuteth and persecuteth

at home like the lady of the house directing their work and enjoying the profit of their labors? That, if you like, is the reason why men are naturally stronger and more robust than us — they need to be, so they can put up with the hard labor they must endure in our service", Fonte 1997, 60). Contrariwise, conventional female flaws are thus turned into virtues to excuse women from sins and misbehaviours ("[o]h come now, Cornelia dearest," said Lucretia. "You're not trying to tell us that vice is goodness?", 90).

[19] In Italy, Isotta Nogarola weakens Eve's guilt by recalling that she is God's creation and as such all her traits, and her weakness too, are to be attributed to God rather than to herself ("Eve sinned out of ignorance and inconstancy, an hence you contend that she sinned more gravely . . . But Eve's ignorance was implanted by nature, of which nature God himself is the author and founder", 2003, 151).

a generall", B2*v*) as well as authoritative opinion ("Did Woman receive her soule and disposition from the rib; Or as it is said in Genesis, God did breath in them the spirit of life?", B2*r*).

While the comedies so far analysed have shown a rigid differentiation in the rhetorical habits of male and female characters, little has been said about the potential linguistic alterations resulting from characters who cross such gender, and rhetorical, boundaries. *The Merchant of Venice* provides such an exceptional case with Portia as soon as she cross-dresses as Balthasar, a young male 'doctor' in Antonio's trial against Shylock. The following analysis of her linguistic habit as a male figure will show the blurring of gender-based boundaries imply a redefinition of standard rhetorical practices.

3. The Exceptional Status of Portia/Balthasar

Posing as Balthasar, "a young doctor of Rome" (4.1.151-2), Portia thoroughly questions Shylock and Antonio on their life-threatening bond. Like Kate and Beatrice before her, she tries to overcome such a complex issue by means of good rhetoric ("we do pray for mercy, / And that same prayer doth teach us all to render / The deeds of mercy", 196-8) and sheer logic ("[i]s he [Antonio] not able to discharge the money?", 204). Her witty reading of the bond seems to follow *endoxa* as it spots a solution only by way of analytical reasoning: in cutting Antonio's flesh, Shylock must diligently follow the terms of the agreement and thus not spill a single drop of his enemy's blood ("[t]his bond doth give thee here no jot of blood; / The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh'", 302-3) nor cut "less nor more but just a pound of flesh" (321). The impossibility of such a task forces Shylock to withdraw as well as free Antonio from the agreement.

Cross-dressing, however, grants Portia not only the respect and the status that come with being a well-reputed male judge, but also they rely on linguistic attitudes never witnessed before in a female character, such as the use of a logical paradox in a critical situation. Unlike Kate and Beatrice, Portia hides in her witty interpretation of the Venetian law a logical paradox which forces Shylock to renounce to his pound of flesh irrespectively of what he does: if he tries to

collect his debt, he will necessarily cut more or less than one pound of flesh and make Antonio bleed, thus breaking the agreement and being punished for it; likewise, if he decides not to collect his debt, he withdraws from the agreement and is eventually condemned for threatening the life of a Venetian citizen.

In Portia's solution of Antonio's case, *endoxa* and *paradoxa*, that is female and male rhetorical tendencies, seem to be brought together by her gender-fluid status as a woman cross-dressed as a man. This exceptional use of paradoxical reasoning can be witnessed among some women writers joining the debate as well, especially among those whose gender identity is still debated.[20] On one occasion only, both Anger and Sowernam introduce the same kind of logical paradox in their meticulous and fully doxastic analysis of the socio-economic reasons for gender imbalances to show how misogynist thinking cages women in logical impasses which seem impossible to overcome:

> If we wil not suffer them to smell on our smockes, they will snatch at our peticotes: but if our honest natures cannot away with that uncivil kinde of jesting then we are coy: yet if we beare with their rudenes, and be somwhat modestly familiar with them, they will straight make matter of nothing, blazing abroad that they have surfeited with love, and then their wits must be showen in telling the maner how. (*Jane Anger her Protection*, B1*r*-B1*v*)

> [w]e know not how to please them in any degree: For if we goe plaine we are sluts they doe say, They doubt of our honesty if we goe gay; If we be honest and merrie, for giglots they take us, If modest and sober, then proud they doe make us: Be we housewifly quicke, then a shrew he doth keepe, If patient and milde, then he scorneth a sheepe. (*Esther Hath Hang'd Haman*, H1*v*)

[20] Although her *Protection* has been generally accepted as a pioneering pro-feminist defence, there are no irrefutable proofs of Anger's female gender. Likewise, little is known about Ester Sowernam. Her pseudonym plainly refers to the Old Testament figure of Esther, who revealed her husband Haman's treachery and caused him to be hanged. Her fictional surname is clearly in opposition to Swetnam's as she kept the ending of it while playing with the first letters, thus turning Swet-nam ("sweet") to Sower-nam ("sour"), a useful hint at the quality of her writing. For further information, see Malcolmson and Suzuki 2002 and O'Malley 2016.

Framed within a doxastic reasoning, deeply entrenched in *endoxa*, the paradoxicality of such passages highlights one of the key concepts of such writings, that is how the social acceptability of a female behaviour depends exclusively on its male recipient and his interpretation of it.

4. Conclusion

This study has aimed to prove how the use of paradoxical expressions in Shakespeare's comedies varies according to the gender of the speaker. While paradoxes uttered by both male and female characters do not show differences in form as they usually follow early modern conventions, those voiced by male characters have closer ties to the situationality of the dramatic action as they justify, explain or anticipate onstage events. This study has also shown a tendency among female characters to use few paradoxical expressions, which is especially evident in crucial dramatic situations. While in the plays here analysed, male characters use paradoxes in any context, irrespective of its gravity, female ones usually prefer *endoxa* over paradoxical reasoning especially when they feel themselves or the people they love in danger. Usually, these opposite attitudes towards paradoxical rhetoric show no degree of permeability since the character's gender remains well-defined and static throughout the play. The only exception thus permitted lies in characters such as Portia, who, in crossing gender boundaries, overcomes linguistic ones too. Such rhetorical custom, however, seems not to be a sheer creation of Shakespeare's undeniable literary genius as it is echoed in contemporary works by women writers and thus may stand as just another literary cypher of Shakespeare's permeability to contemporary writing practices, which he then adapts to the dramatic dimension of his plays.

Still, it may be argued that the maintenance of this rhetorical differentiation may not only be useful to make the characters' language sound as realistic as possible. It may prove to be a subtle rhetorical tool which effectively shows women's difficulty in dealing with unconventional, thorny topics. Men's point of view was customary and widely accepted; thus, its expression through

paradoxes, which own a potentially ironical reach, did not hinder the strength of the argumentation or the credibility of the speaker. Contrariwise, in such a highly patriarchal context, women had to prove more often and harder than men that their opinions were valuable and their words worthy of attention given that their argumentations were conventionally more thoroughly judged in terms of language and style. In this light, the inclusion of paradoxes in their speeches could prove more harmful than beneficial since the presence of rhetorical expressions which convey a peculiar topic in an elaborated form may have diverted the listener's or reader's attention from content to style and taunted the seriousness of such claims with accusations of logical or formal inaccuracy. Far from establishing any kind of equality among the sexes, *endoxa* stand as the only means women writers had to momentarily reverse this power balance based on rhetoric and create a safe place from which to voice possibly controversial opinions. As Kate and Beatrice in particular show, analytical investigation and confutation of common opinions and facts force the interlocutor's attention on the content, leaving no room for rhetorical manipulation ("[w]ell have you heard, but something hard of hearing . . . they call me Katherine", *The Taming of the Shrew*, 2.1.183-4).

Given the restricted number of plays here analysed, the present contribution acknowledges the limits of such an analysis and for this reason wishes to widen this study to Shakespeare's tragedies and history plays in order to question whether such a relationship between gender and paradoxical expressions is unique to Shakespeare's comedies. Hopefully, this hypothesis could also be tested against a more composite early modern dramatic background to determine the presence or lack of similar writing practices and thus ascertain the popularity of such a rhetorical tendency among early modern authors and dramatists.

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4

The Backshop. Honesty as Paradox in *Othello*

Rocco Coronato

Abstract

This article explores the paradox of honesty in *Othello*, arguing that the most interesting paradoxes are the barely visible ones that challenge not simply general consensus but the norm of sincerity itself. The article also delves into the relationship between lying and intention, with falsehood often being coupled with not-being: lying depends not only on the truth or falsehood of the things that are expressed but on the intention of the mind. While most of Iago's paradoxes are similar to the liar's paradox and therefore antinomies, the article discusses the use of paradoxes focusing especially on the Aristotelian concept of honesty as a virtue that consists of a mediocrity, whose two extreme violations are the boaster (Othello) and the dissembler (Iago). Iago thus creates a space of self-retreat, the *arrière boutique* (the backshop) of inwardness invoked by Montaigne as personal sanctuary and identity. The article also explores the concept of defamation and slander in early modern law and how it related to perjury, investigating the final paradox of (self-)posthumous slander. The article eventually argues that, by way of using the paradox of mediocrity, Iago brings into existence the non-being that was conventionally associated with lying.

Keywords: paradox; *Othello*; mediocrity; inwardness; slander

1. Visible and Invisible Paradoxes

Early modern authors variously defined paradox as an intermingling of extremities, "a maruellous, wonderfull and strange thing to heare" (Florio 1611, 257). This concept, also termed the "Wondrer", portrays the poet as one who "is caried by some occasion to report of a thing that is maruelous, and then he will seeme not speake it simply but with some signe of admiration" (Puttenham 2007, 311). Paradox is

an illustration of how "in things of most difficultie, consisteth most excellencie and admiration" (Guazzo 1925, 1: 91). To this end, it commonly uses the extremity of opposites to challenge orthodoxy: it is "an oblique criticism of absolute judgement or absolute convention" and "contains opposites without necessarily resolving them" (Platt 2001, 123).

However, what happens when the paradox challenges not just the general consensus but the very norm of sincerity – or, to quote the Renaissance keyword with all its vast range of connotations, honesty? Quine categorized paradoxes into three types: the veridical, which eventually resolves into truth; the falsidical, which collapses due to flawed assumptions and logic; and the antinomy, which harbors "a surprise that can be accommodated by nothing less than a repudiation of part of our conceptual heritage" (1962, 88). In the context of *Othello,* the paradox of honesty appears to align more closely with the third type.

This discussion aims to prove that the most interesting paradoxes in *Othello* are those that remain barely visible, hidden in the *arrière boutique* of back-shop, where, as Montaigne observed, the modern self-retreats, seeing there, to quote honest Iago, "[a] mass of things, but nothing distinctly" (2.3.284).

2. The Double Heart: Lying and Intention

Falsehood is often associated with not-being. The Greek term *pseûdos* signifies both error and the deliberate intent to deceive others. Yet, discourse also has its non-being, as Plato's *Socrates* ponders in the *Sophist.* Since non-being "is one of the classes of being, permeating all being", one should inquire "whether it mingles with opinion and speech". If it does not, "all things are true, but if it does, then false opinion and false discourse come into being; for to think or say what is not – that is, I suppose, falsehood arising in mind or in words". If falsehood exists, deceit exists, "and if deceit exists, all things must be, henceforth, full of images and likenesses and fancies" (Plato 1921, 260c).

The modern concept of sincerity, defined by Lionel Trilling (1971, 2), as the "congruence between avowal and actual feeling",

still bore the vestiges of this ancient tradition that equated lying with not-being and championed truth as the mirroring of thought through speech: as Achilles says (*Iliad* 9.312-13), "hateful in my eyes, even as the gates of Hades, is that man that hideth one thing in his mind and sayeth another" (Homer 1924). While the Bible strongly condemned outright lying, particularly when accompanied by the intent to deceive (*voluntas fallendi*), it allowed for white lies in cases where the intention was benign, as exemplified in the episode involving Peter and Barnabas (Gal. 2:11-16). Augustine, in what is arguably the most foundational definition of lying, characterised it as the act of thinking one thing and expressing something different in words or other forms (*De Mendacio* 3.3). While it is impossible to do any good by lying, Augustine contended that lying depends not simply on the truth or falsehood of the statements made, but on the intention of the mind:

> Whoever gives expression to that which he holds either through belief or assumption does not lie even though the statement itself be false . . . He lies . . . who holds one opinion in his mind and who gives expression to another through words or any other outward manifestation. For this reason, the heart of a liar is said to be double, that is, twofold in its thinking: one part consisting of that knowledge which he knows or thinks to be true, yet does not so express it; the other part consisting of that knowledge which he knows or thinks to be false, yet expresses as true. As a result, it happens that a person who is lying may tell what is untrue, if he thinks that things are as he says, even though, in actuality, what he says may not be true. Likewise, it happens that a person who is actually lying may say what is true, if he believes that what he says is false, yet offers it as true, even if the actual truth be just what he says. For, a person is to be judged as lying or not lying according to the intention of his own mind, not according to the truth or falsity of the matter itself. (Augustine 1952, 55)

Augustine introduces a crucial distinction between falsehood and error. For instance, believing in false gods metaphorically signifies living in a falsehood, yet a genuine lie technically involves thinking one thing and saying another. An error is not necessarily always a sin, whereas a lie, even if seemingly harmless, is always considered

a sin (Wilhelm 2018, 10-16; Bettetini 2003, 26). Medieval notions of truth also insisted on this harmony and agreement (*concordia*) between one's mind and intention, between the inner self (*homo interior*) and one's words and actions (Martin 1997, 1327; Williams 2018). In his commentary on Psalm 15, 2, Calvin argues that, just as the Psalmist David sings about his concord and symphony between heart and tongue ("cordis et linguae consensum et symphoniam"), our speech should vividly reflect the lively image of the inward affection ("viva latentis affectus effigies"): "*To speak in the heart* is a strong figurative expression, but it expresses more forcibly David's meaning than if he had said *from the heart.* It denotes such agreement and harmony between the heart and tongue, as that the speech is, as it were, a vivid representation of the hidden affection or feeling within" (Calvin 1845, 206).

Echoing Augustine, Aquinas warns that a moral act's nature is determined by its object and its end. The virtue of truth pertains to a manifestation made through specific signs. When this manifestation is a moral act, it must be voluntary and depend on the intention of the will. Falsehood arises when three elements concur: falsehood of what is said, the will to tell a falsehood, and the intent to deceive. In this case, lying is directly and formally opposed to the virtue of truth, as *mendacium* derives from its opposition to the *mens* (*Summa Theologiae 2a-2ae*, Quaestio 110). Montaigne similarly emphasizes the deliberate intent to deceive. He views truth not only as the outcome of good education but as a own condition that enables the self-education of judgement (Foglia 2010; Mathieu-Castellani 2000). In grammatical terms, *mensonge* is defined as the act of stating something false that one believes to be true, while *mentir*, derived from the Latin *mens*, means to go against one's conscience and pertains to those who say something contrary to what they know (Montaigne 1965, 1.9, 35).

Edward Hoby's 1586 translation of Mathieu Coignet's *Instruction aux princes pour garder la foy promise* (1584) stands perhaps as the only substantial treatise on lying to appear in seventeenth-century England. In this work, truth is conventionally hailed as "the most praise worthie" of virtues. It is described as "an inward integritie, and a rule teaching to liue well according to the holye will of God"; truth "conformeth words, according to the meaning of the hearte"

(Coignet 1586, 4). Rhetoric is also seen as favoured by truth, as it dwells within the speaker much like the soul does within the body. This is expressed through the formal alignment of the inner and outer selves: "Since therefore that speech is but a shadow of deedes, there must be such an vnitie as that there be founde no difference at al, for it is a verie great guile to speak otherwise then the heart indeede thinketh" (12). This unity facilitated by truth allows the speaker to create coherent speech: it "causes vs to speake assuredlie without chaunging of oughte which hath beene, is, or shall bee"; it is a "true signification of the voice" (4). This harmony extends to binding words and subject together: "All discourse consisteth in wordes and the subject: the wordes haue no place at all if you take away the subject, nor the matter of substance hath any shewe without the speech" (8). In contrast, lying involves a "contrary signification(n) vnto the truth whe(n) one speaketh of things vncertain, contrarie to that which one knoweth, making the(m) seeme other then they are". Lying leads to injustice and the ultimate betrayal of trust and faith, "since that speech is giuen vnto vs, to make manifest what we thinke" (127).

However, despite the seemingly stringent requirements for truthful agreement, there were numeous exceptions and nuances – enter dissimulation. In the pre-Kantian early modern world, "lying is not usually discussed in terms of a progress from mendacity to honesty or from childhood to adulthood", but focuses instead on "equivocation, about how to evade the hostile enquiries of curious authorities", that is, on dissimulation (Berensmeyer-Hadfield 2016, 3). Questions also arose about rhetoric and the nature of public speaking. Quintilian, for instance, pondered whether a rhetorician was justified in lying, depending on whether the speaker held false beliefs (thus deceiving themselves) or sought to persuade others (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 1: 385-7). Aquinas introduced more exceptions and qualifications than Augustine, countering the statement that every lie is a mortal sin (Hadfield 2017, 126). Since lying implies the deliberate intent to deceive others, Aquinas (1947) argued that "it is more in opposition to truth, considered as a moral virtue, to tell the truth with the intention of telling a falsehood than to tell a falsehood with the intention of telling the truth" (*Summa Theologiae* 2a-2ae, Quaestio 110).

The first paradox explored in *Othello* revolves around the character of "honest" Iago, a term repeatedly used by Othello. In this context, honesty is likely to be interpreted as a reference also to Iago's rhetoric, in line with Cicero's definition of *honestum* (all that is morally right). Cicero (*De officiis* 1.15.5) described it as stemming from one of four virtues: "the full perception and intelligent development of the true", "the conservation of organized society", "the greatness and strength of a noble and invincible spirit", and especially the last one, "the orderliness and moderation of everything that is said and done, wherein consist temperance and self-control" (Cicero 1913). Honesty also implied rhetorical decency and restraint, qualities that Iago appears to possess and which seem to have been his rhetorical and behavioural trademark in the recent past.

However, the term "honest" underwent a shift at the turn of the sixteenth century. It transformed from indicating a plain-speaking critic to someone who affected this kind of humour and disguised a villainous nature (Jorgensen 1973, 376). Amidst the tension between the apparent requirement to harmonise one's heart and speech and the numerous loopholes discretion offered to cautious speakers who preferred not to reveal their inner thoughts (not wanting to wear their hearts on the sleeve for daws to peck at, as Iago says, *Othello* 1.1.64), Iago's usage of paradoxes often appears unfathomable. His veridical paradoxes appear to comply with the primary tenet of lying as "a false significatio(n) of speech, with a wil to deceiue" (Coignet 1586, 128). These paradoxes maliciously deceive the other characters, especially Roderigo and Othello, leading them into contradictory actions. Furthermore, they prompt the jealousy-consumed Othello to resort to paradoxes himself.

Iago's honesty, or rather, his half-honesty or half-dishonesty, is evident in many of his arguments. They often rest on contemporary stereotypes about Moors, women, Venetians, yet they are uttered with the intent to deceive. For example, he is honest when he confesses to Roderigo that he hates the Moor and uses dissimulation to advance himself, concealing his true motive of sexual jealousy (1.3.385-7). Iago frequently shares conventional truths of Renaissance discretion, including the need to dissemble

his intentions: "In following him I follow but myself" (1.1.57).[1] A bit like the infamous "beast with two backs" (1.1.115), this kind of dissimulation involves openly reporting one thing while secretly practicing something else at the listener's expense. In this skewed sense, Iago is also honest when he reports to both Roderigo and Brabantio the racist slurs against Othello (1.1.109-12, 1.3.347-50). He is unapologetically true to a blend of mysoginistic and ethnic stereotypes about Venetian women when he claims that "they do let God see the pranks / They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience / Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown" (3.3.205-7). His honesty extends to trading sexist slurs against women with Desdemona in the harbour scene (2.1.109-60), which she astutely perceives as "old fond paradoxes to make fools laugh i'th' alehouse" (2.1.138-9). *Honestas* implied such an ideal theatricality beneath the very social skills and practices exemplified by Iago in this witty flirt (Whittington 2013, 530). His jests generate mutual laughter while concealing his misogynistic tendencies and seemingly upholding public ideals of honesty in a witty construction of laughable deformity (Derrin 2016, 367). Iago's brand of honesty, therefore, ovelaps with truth, in the sense of decorum and self-restraint. It involves participating in society, engaging in civil conversation, humouring others, and tolerating their discordant points of view (Richards 2003, 26; cf. Matz 1999, 267; Wood 2009).

Iago's manipulative tactics in Othello extend to causing other characters to become increasingly paradoxical in their expressions. For instance, Desdemona playfully teases him by pretending to be someone different from herself – essentially being dishonest in jest: "I do beguile / The thing I am by seeming otherwise" (2.1.122-3). Alongside stoking jealousy in Othello, Iago's intent appears to lead him to adopt formal paradoxes based on mock encomium, such as the idea that a cuckold "lives in bliss" and is therefore preferable to one who "dotes yet doubts, suspects yet strongly loves" (3.3.169, 172). In this process, the student surpasses the master: Othello denounces the curse of calling "these delicate creatures ours / And not their appetites", and paradoxically claims that it is better to be a

[1] All quotations are from Shakespeare 2007 and are parenthetically inserted in the text.

toad and "live upon the vapour of a dungeon / Than keep a corner in the thing I love / For others' use" (3.3.273-4, 74-7). Another mock encomium involves the desire for the "general camp" to taste her body, "[s]o I had nothing known" (3.3.348, 350). Cefalu (2013, 266-7) observes a contrast between Othello's mindblindness and Iago's "robust theory of mind", which however turns into an "obsessive tracking of other minds". It marks, in fact, an absolute defeat of Othello's mind, signaled by yet another formal paradox: "'tis better to be much abused / Than but to know't a little" (3.3.339-40).

Adding to the confusion, Iago interweaves his statements with moral remarks that were indeed supported by conventional consensus, especially given the early modern reception of Stoicism. Thus, he argues that "'tis in ourselves that we are thus, or thus" (1.3.320), that "the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills" (1.3.326-7), that "[w]e have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts" (1.3.330-2). With the same dubious mix of absolute moral truth (the vagaries of reputation) and his dissembled intent to deceive, he warns that "reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit and lost without deserving" (2.3.264-6), and that Desdemona's "honour is an essence that's not seen, / They have it very oft that have it not" (4.1.16-17). In a logical self-contradiction that Othello, almost unconsciously eavesdropping the scene, will later adapt to his own process of self-recognition as an imperfect thinker, Iago recalls that Othello's free and open nature "thinks men honest that but seem to be so" (1.3.399).

Most of Iago's paradoxes resemble the liar's paradox, and they consequently form an antinomy. Their truth or falseness depends on the context rather than the content of what is being said. The concealed intent to deceive prevails on the alogical absurdity of what is said, making them a significant variation on the early modern paradox. Hovering above Iago's art of the hidden paradox, there seems to lurk a more general paradox that may have escaped our ears but was universally recognized by early modern thinkers, not secondarily because it drew its momentum from the authority of Aristotle: honesty as mediocrity.

3. The Paradox of Honesty as Mediocrity

If honesty is a virtue, it should consist not of extremities, but of a mediocrity, argues Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* 4.13.1127a-b, Aristotle 1934). Both the boaster and the dissembler are liars. Aristotle insists on falsehood when confronting these two figures, who both engage in dishonesty but in different ways: "the boaster is a man who pretends to creditable qualities that he does not possess, or possesses in a lesser degree than he makes out, while conversely the self-depreciator disclaims or disparages good qualities that he does possess" (3). The good mean between them is "the straightforward sort of man who is sincere both in behavior and in speech, and admits the truth about his own qualifications without either exaggeration or understatement" (4). The sincere person, situated between the two extremes, is deserving of praise. Conversely, those who engage in insincere behaviour of both kinds (especially the boaster) are to be blamed. The sincere man "will diverge from the truth, if at all, in the direction of understatement rather than exaggeration" (8). The liar who tells lies "for no ulterior object seems . . . to be a person of inferior character, since otherwise he would not take pleasure in falsehood, . . . he appears to be more foolish than vicious" (10). Liars are divided "into those who like lying for its own sake and those who lie to get reputation or profit" (12). Again, it is the intent to deceive that introduces a distinction between folly and vice.

Aristotle's notion of honesty as mediocrity is faithfully reported by Coignet:

> Since that this trueth is approued to be a virtue, she ought to hold a mediocritie, & to be set between two vitious extremities of either too little, or too much, as it is saide of the rest of the vertues; which make them selues more apparaunt in gaining vnto themselues by those actions which consist in the middest of two contrarie vices, as doeth the true tune among discords. The excesse and ouerplus shal proceede of arrogancie, pride, vaunting, disdain, & insolencie. The defect in dissembling, when one speaketh lesse then in deede is, & so wandreth from the trueth, which reckoneth things such as they are in deede, without causing any variance between the heart and the tongue, as if one should fit himself with a garment which is neither bigger, nor lesse then it ought to be. (1586, 8)

The true man thus holds "a middle place between the presu(m)ptuous & the dissembler" (175). The two extremes go from the too much of the boaster, so typical also in (self)praises, which are "portractures ill proportioned" (74), to the "[o]uerlitle extremitie" (8) of the dissembler. Both varieties of lying are coupled with non-being: "it is called fayning to make that to be which is not, or that which is, not to bee, or to be greater than in deede it is. And it is dissembling, to make that which is not to bee, or lesse then it is" (11). Being a good Christian means shunning "the two extremities of too much or too little, and followe the meane which is to do well, and speake accordingly, vsinge our wordes, as garments well befitting the bodie" (13).

The Aristotelian distinction between the two liars, the boaster and the dissembler, or the "too much" versus the "too little", sheds an intriguing light on Iago and Othello. Iago initially presents himself with understatement and self-diminution, suggesting that that Othello's eyes had seen "the proof" of him (1.1.27). In contrast, Othello engages with "bombast circumstance" (1.1.12) in hyperbolic exaggeration when boasting about Cassio "loving his own pride" (11), a behaviour that diverges from the mediocrity proposed by Iago's "mediators": "I know my price, I am worth no worse a place (10). During the temptation scene, Iago employs a manifold paradox to make Othello believe that he is dissimulating something (which is lying), while doing exactly so by dissimulating his observational skills as "[o]ne that so imperfectly conceits" with "scattering and unsure observance" (3.3.152-3).

The status of dissimulation was a moot question. It was especially focused on the false and pretended conformity used as a response to religious or political persection, especially if the alternative was injury or death (Zagorin 1996, 866-9). Many turned to biblical passages, such as the story of Namaan (2 Kings 5:17-19, 4 Kings 5:17-19 in the Vulgate), to find evidence of virtuous dissimulation. Gregory the Great's *Moralia* (1844-185, vol. 76, col. 357) provided an influential distinction between what human ears and diviene ears might respectively hear (the passage was known as *Humanae aures*): "The ears of men judge our words as they sound outwardly, but the divine judgement hears the words they are uttered from within. Among men the heart is judged by the words; with God the words are judged by the heart".

Yet, few shared Machiavelli's enthusiasm when he argued that rulers should be great simulators and dissimulators (*The Prince*, chapter 18; *Discourses* 2.13; see Zerba 2004). Dissimulation played a vital role in establishing the early modern culture of secrecy, driven by the growth in the size and complexity of states and societies (Snyder 4). However, even Machiavelli used the word "secret" sparingly, as secrecy seemed more related to a mode of action than thought (Senellart 1997). Aquinas recommended prudence rather than outright trickery for those who needed to conceal themselves (*Summa Theologiae* 2ae 2ae, qq. 68, 89, 110, 111). Bacon saw dissimulation as "but a faint kind of policy or wisdom", practiced by "the weaker sort of politiques" (Bacon 1996, 349).

The question of dissimulation was topical in England after the Protestant Reformation, particularly through equivocation (ambiguity of language) and mental reservation (*mentalis restrictio,* uttering a false statement that was completed in the mind to make it true). Dr Navarrus (Martin Azpilcueta) claimed that the usage of amphibology was permissible for the sake of safety of soul, body, honour, yet the lie consisted not in a false attement with the intention to deceive, but in the contrariety to the speaker's mind. Lawful dissimulations were theoretically possible, if sparingly, for the Jesuit Henry Garnet (*A Treatise of Equivocation*, 1593), in the absence of any obligation to reveal the truth and as a protection against self-accusation under questioning. Equivocation was practiced by another Jesuit, Robert Southwell, perhaps prompting his chief judge to recall Gregory's *humanae aures*: "for we are men, and no Gods, and can judge but according to [men's] outward actions and speeches, and not according to their secrete and inward intentions" (Janelle 1935, 291; see Wilson 1997).

Othello, who also indulges in dissimulation by using false modesty, false pretenses, self serving lies, and self-contradiction (Roebuck 2008, 190-5), appears to reference mental reservation at the beginning of the temptation scene. He asks Iago to reveal his thoughts, the missing pieces that would make his statements whole and true. In response, Iago employs the false ethos of honesty, confessing that he does not like having to disclose what he knows (Beier 2014, 43). In reality, this dissimulation seems to be another facet of Iago's technique, one aimed at making Othello imagine

what may be undecidable to argue. Othello contemplates the missing information that Iago keeps hidden in his mind, while Iago uses this implication to sow doubt in Othello's mind. This doubt is then applied to Desdemona. Shakespeare plays with dissimulation as a deceptive explanation for Iago's reticence, thereby setting the stage for further situational paradoxes.

Othello, in contrast to Aristotle's middle ground, tends to err on the side of excess, which he often poorly dissembles. Initially, he claims that he is not going to boast about his past services for the Senate, unless "I know that boasting is an honour" (1.2.19). According to Aristotle, boasting is acceptable if used to gain glory or honour (*Nicomachean Ethics* 4.13.1127a-b 11). However, Othello displays excessive confidence when he boasts that "[m]y parts, my title and my perfect soul / Shall manifest me rightly" (1.2.31-2). Othello commits both truth violations: he says too little with the apparent diminution (*tapinosis*) of his "round unvarnished tale" (1.3.91), based on the unwarranted claim to be "rude" in his speech "[a]nd little blest with the soft phrase of peace (1.3.82, 83). And he engages in deceptive self-diminution: "little shall I grace my cause / In speaking for myself" (1.3.89-90). Othello also resorts to the too much. His pursuit of Desdemona was based on what honest Iago, perhaps not mistakenly, later calls "bragging and telling her fantastical lies" (2.1.221). In a dubious scene of shared persuasion where the intent to deceive, if for amorous ends, is evident, Othello observed Desdemona and caused her to ask him to "dilate" his pilgrimage (1.3.154). Furthermore, his tales to Brabantio and Desdemona, including accounts of cannibals and other outlandish fictions, resemble the typical traveller's fibs that especially thanks to the enduring popularity of Mandeville's *Travels* had created a genre explicitly based on lying for wonder's sake (Hadfield 2017, 286-89).

When viewed from this hidden Aristotelian perspective, Othello appears as much of a liar as Iago. It can also be noted that well before the temptation scene Othello typically expresses himself using paradoxes. For example, he boasts about his stoic resistance to the joys and perils of love, claiming that he will not let the "light-wing'd toys/ Of feathered Cupid . . . seal with wanton dullness / My speculative and officed instruments" (1.3.269-71). This assertion of well-rounded Stoicism is quickly contradicted when he succumbs to

anger, with his "best judgement collied" (2.3.202), during the brawl scene in Cyprus. Paradoxes are also evident when Othello suggests with the boaster's typical hyperbolic exaggeration that dying after the end of danger would make death preferable:

> If after every tempest come such calms
> May the winds blow till they have waken'd death!
> And let the labouring bark climb hills of seas
> Olympus-high and duck again as low
> As hell's from heaven. If it were now to die
> 'Twere now to be most happy
> (2.1.183-8)

In the throes of jealousy, Othello vents his sense of violated honour and identity through boastful paradoxes of exaggeration. He states that he would embrace all kinds of affliction save this discovery of inwardness, "the fountain from which my current runs" (4.2.60). A similar image of violated inwardness devours Iago from the inside: "the thought whereof / Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw my inwards" (2.1.294-5). In both cases, paradoxes lead the two characters to discover an inner, hidden place, where notions of honour and honesty are turned into their paradoxical opposites, an "index and obscure prologue" (2.1.255-6) that foreshadows "th'incorporate conclusion" (2.1.360-1).

4. In the Backshop

Amidst his frequent contemplations on truth and lying, Montaigne (1965, 2.12, 561, 601) half-despairingly notes that, since we have no real communication with being ("aucune communication à l'etre"), truth is engulfed in such deep abysses that human sight cannot penetrate ("la verité est engouffrée dans des profonds abimes où la vue humaine ne peut pénétrer"). In modern terms, the dichotomy between truth and lying is no longer binary but complex and multifaceted. The (unattainable) truth has only one face, while lying can have one hundred thousand faces, being an indistinct field: "Si, comme la vérité, le mensonge n'avait qu'un visage, nous serions en meilleurs termes. Car nous prendrions pour certain

l'opposé de ce qui dirait le menteur. Mais le revers de la verité a cent mille figures et un champ indéfini" (1.9, 37). While lying is an indistinct field ("champ indéfini"), truth also exhibits its own indistinct nature, with various forms of constraint, incommodity, incompatibility with us. We often have to deceive ourselves in order not to be deceived, and blind our eyesight and silence our ears to impose order and correction upon their faculties: "Il nous faut souvent tromper afin que nous ne nous trompons, et siller notre vue, étourdir notre entendement pour les dresser et amender" (3.10, 1006). Dissimulation serves the purpose of concealing the self within a necessary free, autonomous space – the *arrière boutique,* or backshop – all our own, entirely free, where we can exercise genuine liberty and find refuge and solitude. Coignet also cautions against the risks of excessive candour and suggests that some forms of deceptive caution can be used; as Iago implies, it is unwise to speak one's mind openly in the challenging arena of Renaissance public discourse and action:

> It is not meant for al that, that euerie one, nor at al times, nor of euerie matter, should speake what he thinketh. For it is wisedom not to discouer, but for some good respect, what we would not haue knowen; as if a man would preach all the giftes hee hath receiued from God, or the vice or fault which by infirmitie hee is fallen vnto, or discouer to euerie one the secrete of his minde, he should be counted but a dizard. Euereie counterfeiting done to the ende to deceiue an other is reprooued; but if it be to conceale a good counsel, fearing least it might bee preuented, then is it not to bee blamed, neither is it always requisite to make manifest what wee doe conceaue . . . hee who cannot dissemble, shall neuer raigne prosperously – whatsoeuer is in the heart of a sober man, is founde in the tongue of a drunkard (Coignet 1586, 11)

Iago explicitly acknowledges the concept of an interior reserve, or 'backshop', when speaking with Roderigo and Othello. In his conversation with Roderigo, he argues that dissimulation primarily arises out of the necessity for self-defense, which is essentially a form or an outward convention: "Yet for necessity of present life / I must show out a flag and sign of love, / Which is indeed but sign" (1.1.153-5). From an early modern perspective, hypocrisy

often emerges in relationships of dependence among people with conflicting interests (Grant 1997). Iago intensifies this conflict to the point of internal deflagration: interiority becomes darkly visible, or at least guessable, precisely because of this grey area of indistinction. For Iago, not-being does not equate to lying but rather refers to his inner self when it becomes exposed:

> . . . when my outward action doth demonstrate
> The native act and figure of my heart
> In complement extern, 'tis not long after
> But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
> For daws to peck at: I am not what I am.
> (1.1.60-4)

As usual, the paradox lies in the situation itself: Iago tells Roderigo that he employs dissimulation and conceales his true intentions to elicit Roderigo's own intentions, thereby never practicing such dissimulation himself. He is honest in acknowledging he must be dishonest to maintain his honesty. A similar pragmatical nature of paradoxes can be found in *Hamlet*, where "it is the pragmatics of the exchange, the intention of the speaker and the nature of the context and the situation which define the quality of the agency inherent in contradictions. Provoking nothing may in fact be exactly what the paradox wants to *do*" (Bigliazzi 2022, 43).

Iago denies Othello any insight into what, to borrow Coignet's words (1586, 11), he would not otherwise have known, "the secrete of his minde"; this leads Othello to believe that he is rightly concealing "a good counsel, fearing least it might be preuented". As Iago correctly states, "[t]o be direct and honest is not safe" (3.3.381), a claim that would have sounded both honest and prudent. In a technical and paradoxical sense, Iago is being honest when emphasising the necessity for such inner retreat (Montaigne's backshop) itself, regardless of the actual nature of the truths concealed within, which are multiple and potentially false:

> Though I am bound to every act of duty
> I am not bound to that all slaves are free to —
> Utter my thoughts? Why, say they are vile and false?
> As where's that palace whereinto foul things

> Sometimes intrude not? who has a breast so pure
> But some uncleanly apprehensions
> Keep leets and law-days and in session sit
> With meditations lawful?
> (3.3.137-44)

By pretending to be honestly and correctly hiding secrets which an honest man is supposed to virtuously conceal in his inner self, Iago persuades Othello about the importance and sanctity of that backshop full of "[c]lose delations, working from the heart" (3.3.126). Iago earns recognition for his honesty by prompting Othello to imagine the unimagineable, "some monster in thy thought / Too hideous to be shown" (3.3.110-11). Yet another paradox: monstrosity implies demonstration, and a monster becomes hideous only when it is revealed rather than simply surmised. Even more paradoxical, in the sense of being impossible and contrary to truth, is Othello' absolute demand for agreement between heart and speech: "Show me thy thought" (3.3.119).

Iago's paradoxes neither contradict common opinion (he often uses it) nor offer mock praise (those are instead favoured by the enraged Othello). They revolve around the indistinction of all statements and, ultimately, of hidden truths – if any truth can be found down there at all. Iago draws paradoxes out of Othello, especially antinomies that declare how the boundary between truth and lying has become blurred:

> I think my wife be honest, and think she is not,
> I think that thou art just, and think thou art not.
> (3.3.387-8)

Arguably, the most divinely embedded paradox of the play is not a union of extremes or a mock encomium, but a hard-earned truth about unconscious lying, presented in a perfect, never-ending antinomy:

> Men should be what they seem,
> Or those that be not, would they might seem none.
> (3.3.129-30)

In this mind-boggling interplay of reflections, an imperfect liar (Iago) tells a perfect liar (Othello) that truth should be unmistakable

from its appearances, or at the very least, those who are not honest should not seem so, which brings us back endlessly to the first clause. A sincere liar suggests that truth and lying are so indistinguishable that one probably ends up with a proposition about the decidability of truth and lying, which is itself undecideable.

Even more undecidable is the ultimate hidden paradox in *Othello*: how to slander somebody (including oneself) after death.

5. Posthumous (Self-)Denigration

In early modern law, perjury was often linked to slander, which included defamation and libel in spoken form. Being an act that could damage one's reputation, especially a woman's, slander was heavily punished. Slander often revolved around rhetoric ability "to divorce thinking and speaking", exploiting the gap between heart and tongue: "Slander insinuates itself into the gap between words and things which enables the flexibility of translated speech with its corresponding tropes and figures" (Habermann 2003, 23, 25; cf. Kreps 2015, Navitsky 2012). The English legal system aimed to make, by way of punishment, the criminal infamous "as a type of institutionalized slander, in both the punishment and the indictment of criminals"; this was particularly true because distinguishing between a valid accusation and defamation was challenging without an impartial judicial procedure to initiate criminal proceedings (Kaplan 1990, 25).

As social networks abundantly show today, defamation results in character assassination, "the deliberate destruction of a person's reputation or credibility", which is all based on perception (Shiraev-Keohane-Icks-Samoilenko 2021, 11): "the goal of the attacker is to influence the way others see a particular persona", distinguishing between horizontal attacks (attacks between people with approximately the same status) and vertical attacks (with different levels of power). In tort law, where someone sues another person over an injury, individuals can be held legally liable even "when they neither intended harm nor were negligent"; blaming someone means identifying "a counterfactual that she should have pursued and that would have prevented your injury" (Herzog 2017, 40, 35). Ironically,

Othello demonstrates various forms of denigration: the concern "with blacking faces" in the play can also be seen as a "direct extension of the play's concern with blackening names" (Gross 2001, 105).

But can one actually denigrate the deceased? Defamation typically concerns living individuals, while defaming the dead is "contrived to say that living agents intend not to be defamed after their deaths" (Herzog 2017, 61). A long tradition disapproved of speaking ill of the dead (*de mortuis nihil nisi bonum*). One ought to attack only those who could defense themselves: as a 1611 divine wrote, "[c]alumny should ende with the carkasse of her subject, and not haunt the graue till the last bone be consumed" (Stafford 1611, 137). These defamers are "*Cannibals* . . . delight[ing] to feed on dead mans flesh, by tearing of their Fame" (Basire 1673, 32-3). Yet, the oblivion thesis as an application of the *supersedeas* (the cessation of the legal duty to pursue an accusation) was often seen as a limitation of the deterring power of the earnest discussion of the dead. The point was hotly debated after the death of Charles I:

> I am not ignorant what senslesse maxims and ridiculous principles have gotten credit in the World . . . as that *de mortuis nil nisi bona*, but by no means to tread on the sacred Urne of Princes, though living never so vicious and exorbitant, as if death had bequeathed unto them a supersedeas for the covering over their faults and licencious reignes, and to close them up in the Coffin of Oblivion. (An. 1651, Preface, sig. A4*r*).

Defamation could occur not only through openly blaming others but also by impersonating them: "Libels are of several kinds; either by scoffing at the person of another in rhyme or prose, or by personating him, thereby to make him ridiculous" (Hudson 2008, 2.200).

In *Othello*, slander is indeed present, but it is voiced rather subtly. Iago never explicitly slanders Desdemona in public; instead, he cautiously relies on general stereotypes about Venetian women and fabricates circumstantial evidence when speaking to Othello. Slander is more prevalent in Othello's words; coming from a husband, they would have been interpreted as accusations rather than defamation. Moreover, slander entails knowingly spreading falsehoods, while Othello genuinely believes that Desdemona has been unfaithful.

The ultimate paradox in *Othello* is that slander gets more

rampant after death. Othello's accusations become explicit after he kills Desdemona, a "whore" (5.2.130), "[f]alse as water" (132), who committed "the act of shame" a thousand times (209). He sincerely believes that Desdemona was dishonest because she attempted to exculpate him after apparently dying: "She's like a liar gone to burning hell" (127). In contrast, after Desdemona's death, Iago claims to have been honest, both in expressing his thoughts to Othello (which he had paradoxically denied doing earlier), and in adhering to the Aristotelian laws of probability and likelihood: "I told him what I thought, and told no more / Than what he found himself was apt and true" (172-3).

Iago's final vindication of honesty pushes Othello further into another paradox. He begins to slander himself as if he were already dead, using the exaggerated imagery of the dishonest boaster in depicting his otherworldly encounter with the defamed Desdemona:

> When we shall meet at compt
> This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven
> And fiends will snatch at it.
> . . .
> Whip me, ye devils,
> From the possession of this heavenly sight!
> Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur,
> Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!
> O Desdemon! dead, Desdemon! Dead! O, O!
> (5.2.271-3, 275-9)

Othello engages in the paradoxical act of dishonestly slandering himself through boastful exaggeration, as if he were already dead. He brings his dying moment into alignment with a past act of stabbing, effectively turning himself into an enemy of the state. Characteristically, Othello still boastfully asks for an unmitigated portrayal, in a final display of mediocrity: "Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate, / Nor set down aught in malice" (5.2.340-1).

In *Othello*, paradox is notably the art of revealing and creating the invisible, bringing it into existence. Augustine argued that we cannot truly love something entirely unknown to us (*De trinitate* 10.1). Perhaps – but Iago argues that we can learn to hate something we know nothing about. By leading Othello to argue for the

existence of the non-existent and then posthumously living within that falsehood through self-slander, Iago has created the ultimate undecidable paradox: how to transform non-being into being.

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5

Paradox in Performance

Bryan Crockett

Abstract

Principles developed by the mid-twentieth century anthropologist Victor Turner can be applied to some early modern plays, most notably Shakespeare's. Some of these plays achieve their effects by involving the audience in a unifying, sympathetic, communal response that effaces cultural distinctions. Such performances employ a rhetoric of communitas. Other plays tacitly invite members of the audience to choose a side, to argue about the play after the production, to defend one understanding of the play over another. Such is the rhetoric of structure.

According to Turner (1975, 34), the central or "root" paradigm of European culture in Shakespeare's day was essentially sacrificial, involving the individual's rejection of selfhood as a response to Christ's martyrdom. Turner argues that social dramas in the Western tradition tend to evoke the sacrificial paradigm, even if obliquely, using its energies to resolve crises. One of the most striking aspects of a culture's root paradigms is that any focal symbol growing out of a paradigm is "numinous" because it is paradoxical, "a coincidence of opposites, a semantic structure in tension between opposite poles of meaning" (88-9). The Eucharist, for example, embodies both death and life for the believer, who vicariously participates in Christ's death and resurrection every time the elements are received. In periods of crisis, according to Turner, the paradoxical status of root paradigms is reinforced and heightened. As a result, performative negotiations of the crisis tend toward either a conscious embracing of the paradox in all its contradictoriness or a resolution of the paradox into one of its contrary principles. That process helps explain the relentlessly militant tone of a great deal of early modern discourse.

Keywords: structure; communitas; sacrifice; root paradigm; social drama; Shakespeare; paradox

At a crucial moment in the last act of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the imprisoned king provides a brief anatomy of a paradox as he muses on the thoughts that inhabit the little world of his cell. "The better sort," he tells himself,

> As thoughts of things divine, are intermixed
> With scruples, and do set the word itself
> Against the word, as thus: "Come, little ones",
> And then again,
> "It is as hard to come as for a camel
> To thread the postern of a small needle's eye".
> (5.5.11-16)[1]

The closer one comes to a crucial truth, King Richard at last understands, the more one is constrained to use the opposing terms of the paradox in order to express that truth.

The dual construct of the paradox – a term or idea set against an opposing one in a way that evokes some hitherto occult truth that casts light on both terms or ideas – is instantiated in the very nature of acting, of role-playing. The person on a theatrical stage is simultaneously an actor and a character. Members of the audience watch and listen as the character gives voice to an idea conceived by the playwright, while the idea's mode of expression is determined by the actor. The audience experiences a complex interplay involving playwright, character, and actor. Such multiplicity of perspectives lends itself to paradoxical thought.

Particularly in early modernity, the stage became the site of not only of what we usually understand as enacted conflict and resolution of a dramatic presentation, a self-contained story, but also of what Turner called a social drama: a real-world series of stages beginning with a breach of societal norms and ending with the instigator's reintegration into society. Such dramas, whether in the real world or the imagined one created by a playwright, typically find expression in the language of paradox.

Central to Turner's understanding of cultural performances, whether played out in real-world ritualistic conflict and resolution or in the fictive world of a staged presentation, is the idea that the

[1] All quotations from Shakespeare's plays refer to Shakespeare 1997.

rhetoric arising out of a breach of social relations tends toward either "structure" or "communitas". Turner explains the difference:

> The bonds of communitas are anti-structural in that they are undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, non-rational (though not *ir*rational), I-Thou or Essential We relationships, in Martin Buber's sense. Structure is all that holds people apart, defines their differences, and constrains their actions. (1974, 46-7)

The same rhetorical forces apply to most staged drama, including Shakespeare's; some plays achieve their effect by involving the audience in a unifying, sympathetic, communal response that effaces cultural distinctions. Such plays employ a rhetoric of communitas. Other plays tacitly invite members of the audience to choose a side, to argue about the play after the production, to defend one understanding of the play over another. Such is the rhetoric of structure.

Early modern European paradoxes achieve their force in part through their restatement of central Christian mysteries, whether Catholic or Protestant. The language of Christian thought is insistently paradoxical, from the sayings of Jesus to the epistles of Paul to the creeds developed in the ecumenical councils of the early church to the meditations of medieval mystics to the *coincidentia oppositorum* of Renaissance Platonists to the language of Protestant reformers. Heir to all these sources and attuned to the power of literary paradox, William Shakespeare incorporated it, in his poems as well as his plays, to singular effect.

At the start of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, for example, the title character enters alone – a stage direction in the earliest printed editions makes that clear – and delivers a speech that seems anything but a private meditation spoken aloud. It is a speech made for an audience, a speech meant to be shared. And, of course, everyone in the theatre audience is there to share it, to hear Richard say, "Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this son of York" (1.1.1-2). This son of York is Richard's older brother, the king: Edward IV, whose emblem was three shining suns. And so, Richard seems to say, his brother the king, the son, s-o-n of the house of York, is like the sun, s-u-n, effulgent, shimmering with light. It is a compliment fit for a king. But again, the king is not there to hear

the compliment; Richard is alone on the stage. As often with drama, Shakespearean and otherwise, a soliloquy affords the opportunity to bring the audience into the speaker's imagined world – in this case, a world offering only resentment to the younger brother. It seems that Richard is laying bare his heart to the theatre audience, especially when he says:

> But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
> Nor made to court an amorous looking glass;
> I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
> Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
> Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
> Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
> And that so lamely and unfashionable
> That dogs bark at me as I halt by them —
> Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
> Have no delight to pass away the time,
> Unless to see my shadow in the sun
> And descant on mine own deformity.
> (1.1.14-25)

Then, after revealing his unwilling humiliation, he lets the audience in on his plan. He says,

> And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain,
> And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
> (1.1.28-31)

"I am determined". Do those three words mean that he has decided, has made up his own mind, has willed himself, has *determined* to be a villain, or does it mean that he *has been* destined, *pre*determined to be a villain? Both interpretations are plausible now, just as they were when Shakespeare wrote the play. That humble word *am* ("I *am* determined to prove a villain") can mean one or the other. Shakespeare has given us a fine paradox: Richard seems to be somehow both fated and free. Imagining that at least for Richard such a thing can be possible is the challenge Shakespeare lays before his audience. And is it going too far to include every audience in the same situation –

trembling between the mighty opposites of fate and freedom? Or can one somehow be both fated *and* free? A fine paradox. A good actor can sustain the ambiguity, can leave the audience wavering between two apparently irreconcilable possibilities. In effect Richard says, "I am the embodiment of a paradox".

In England the use of the literary paradox reached its apex in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries: the time of Shakespeare and his fellow poet John Donne, whose nineteenth sonnet, for example, begins with the line "Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one" (Donne 1998, 207). Vexing or not, an experiential if not a logical exposure to the apparently irreconcilable terms of a paradox speaks to a whole range of troubling events.

One example: in 1561, three years before Shakespeare was born, it seemed that God had raised his hand against his own house in London, causing lightning to strike and burn the steeple of St Paul's Cathedral. Clearly, it seemed, God was sending a message. But what message? The Church of England bishop James Pilkington revealed his answer in a sermon at London's Paul's Cross, the high-profile outdoor venue in the shadow of the cathedral, where thousands of Londoners – as many as 6,000, we are told – typically flocked to the churchyard on Sundays to hear Paul's Cross sermons. The reason for the lightning strike, Pilkington told the congregation, was the people's residual, popish superstition and ignorance. With that bolt of lightning, Pilkington proclaimed from Paul's Cross, God was sending a clear message: the people were to give up their popish ways, fully embracing the doctrines of the protestant Church of England.

This was too much for the staunch Catholic John Morwen. He wrote and published a pamphlet (Morwen 1563) explaining that obviously, God sent the bolt of lightning as a call for all of England to return to the old faith.

Who is entitled to read the book of the world? The answer is not always clear, but the process of developing that answer can be worked out in what the mid-twentieth century anthropologist Victor Turner calls social dramas. The rhetoric of some of these social enactments, according to Turner, tends toward *structure*, whereby social distinctions and conventions are heightened and reinforced, while the rhetoric of other enactments tends toward what Turner calls *communitas*, whereby conventional distinctions are softened

and inclusive (1974, 34-5). Satiric comedies, for example, usually tend toward structure, while romantic comedies usually tend toward *communitas*.

According to Turner, the central or 'root' paradigm of European culture in Shakespeare's day was essentially sacrificial, involving the individual's rejection of selfhood as a response to Christ's martyrdom. Turner argues that social dramas in the Western tradition tend to evoke the sacrificial paradigm, even if obliquely, using its energies to resolve crises (1974, 34). One of the most striking aspects of a culture's root paradigms is that any focal symbol growing out of a paradigm is "numinous" because it is paradoxical, "a coincidence of opposites, a semantic structure in tension between opposite poles of meaning" (1974, 88-9). The Eucharist, for example, embodies both death and life for the believer, who vicariously participates in Christ's death and resurrection every time the elements are received.

In periods of crisis, according to Turner, the paradoxical status of root paradigms is reinforced and heightened. As a result, performative negotiations of the crisis tend toward *either* a conscious embracing of the paradox in all its contradictoriness or a resolution of the paradox into one of its contrary principles. That process, it seems to me, helps explain the relentlessly militant tone of a great deal of early modern discourse.

It was largely Turner's work, followed by that of Erving Goffman and systematized by Richard Schechner (see Schechner 2020), that led to the 'performative turn' that soon gained prominence in the social sciences. In anthropological thought, performance is not limited to self-consciously staged presentations; it assumes that all human activities, whether presented with a public audience in mind or not, are performances, and that spoken words constitute meaningful 'speech-acts'.

Debora Shuger has argued that the general shift from premodern to modern thought involves what she calls a "thickening" of boundaries, an increasing tendency to think in rigidly exclusive categories. She says:

> The sacramental/analogical character of *pre*-modern thought tends to deny rigid boundaries; nothing is simply itself, but things are signs of other things and one thing may be inside another, as Christ

> is *in* the heart, or turn into something else, as the substance of the eucharistic bread turns into the body of Christ. With the advent of modernity the borders between both conceptual *and national* territories were redrawn as solid rather than dotted lines. (Shuger 1990, 11)

Stephen Greenblatt calls attention to the early modern fascination with what he calls "the occult relation between opposites" (1991, 72). This fascination, of course, was hardly new; its roots are ancient in the East as well as the West, where those roots go back at least to Empedocles. It is evident in Shakespeare's sonnets and narrative poems as well as his plays. In *Macbeth*, to cite just one example, we have the riddling of the three weird sisters with their "fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.12), which leads Macbeth to spin a riddle of his own: "This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good" (1.3.129-30). Of course, he is only half right, which means his thinking has gone *very* wrong. His tragedy is that he does not know the difference between a riddle and a paradox.

It is worthwhile to pause here to take a quick look at that difference. An eight-year-old of my acquaintance recently stumped me with this riddle; I could not come up with an answer. "What is greater than God, more evil than the devil; the poor have it, the rich need it, and if you eat it, you die?". The answer? *Nothing*. Nothing is greater than God; nothing is more evil than the devil; the poor have nothing; the rich need nothing; and if you eat nothing, you die.

My point here is that unlike its cousin the riddle, paradox retains the puzzling tension that makes it hover just beyond definitive resolution. With a riddle, though, the tension of irresolution is forever slackened once you know the answer. It would be pointless for me to pose that same riddle a second time.

Paradox is different. While it can come to seem hackneyed if overused, its energy is, potentially, at least, never truly slackened. For example, a well-worn paradox like "to find your life you must lose it" is, for one who chooses to embrace it, always urgent, there to be remembered, its compelling energies to be renewed again and again.

The tolerability of paradox is, for some, a matter of taste. To my ear, it is still refreshing to hear Stephen Gosson's riddling inquiry in his sermon *The Trumpet of Warre*: "what is that, that is the highest

the lowest, the fairest the foulest, the strongest the weakest, the richest the porest, the happiest the vnhappiest, the safest and the most in danger of any thing in the world?" (Gosson 1598, sig. F5*v*-F6*r*) The answer? The good Christian. And a reading the rest of the sermon explains in a more prosaic way just how that string of paradoxes makes sense.

In some situations paradox arguably holds up better than its near neighbor, the oxymoron. Romeo, for example, speaks in oxymora befitting the besotted young lover that he is, still infatuated with Rosaline. In the play's first scene, he comes upon signs of the recent brawl between the hot-headed young men of both houses, the Montagues and the Capulets. Romeo says,

> O me! What fray was here?
> Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all.
> Here's much to do with hate, but more with love.
> Why, then, O brawling love, O loving hate,
> O anything of nothing first create,
> O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
> Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,
> Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,
> Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!
> This love feel I, that feel no love in this.
> (1.171-80)

Compare these overblown oxymora to what Romeo says when he first lays eyes on Juliet in the speech that begins:

> O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
> It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
> As a rich jewel . . .
> Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
> (1.5.45-8)

Clearly, Romeo has moved beyond the exorbitant comparisons he lavished on Rosaline.

When Romeo meets Juliet, the two are so enamored of each other, so clearly meant for one another, that their first exchange of words constitutes a sonnet that intertwines love and religion. Romeo raises his palm and begins the exchange:

> If I profane with my unworthiest hand
> This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:
> My lips, two blushing pilgrims ready stand
> To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.
> (1.5.94-7)

We have there a quatrain: a four-line verse of a sonnet in the English format, steeped in the religious imagery of pilgrims traveling to a shrine. Juliet replies with a quatrain of her own:

> Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
> Which mannerly devotion shows in this:
> For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
> And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.
> (1.5.98-101)

Juliet, playfully aware of Romeo's comparison of her to a shrine, shows that she too can play such a game. In her quatrain to him, she says, in effect, "You're a pilgrim going to a shrine? Well, how do the palmers on the pilgrimage show their devotion? Palm to palm". Her use of the word *mannerly* suggests good manners with a nice pun on the *mano*. Now, as a further sign that the young lovers are meant for one another, they share a quatrain. Thinking he can outwit her, Romeo says, "Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?" (1.5.102). She replies, "Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in *prayer*" (103). Not kissing; praying, beseeching. Now Romeo thinks he has found the words to win the verbal skirmish. He says, "O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do; / They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair" (104-5). In other words he says to her, you're not going to let me *despair*, lose all hope of getting that kiss, are, you? With her reply, "Saints do not move, but grant for prayers' sake" (106), Juliet offers him a chance, saying, in effect, I'm a saint? Well, the enshrined saint does not *move*, does not initiate the action, but the saint might grant the wish for which the palmer prays. Romeo sees his chance. The sonnet needs just one more line, and he supplies it: "Thus from my lips, by yours, my sin is purged" (107). And he kisses her. Sadly, this mutually constructed sonnet marks the high point of their love.

It is worth noting that Romeo, advocate of using lips instead of hands, dies by taking poison through the lips. Juliet, who prefers the touching of hands to the touching of lips, dies at her own hand, with a dagger. The implicit foreshadowing is a reminder that we have been told in the play's prologue that the young lovers are star-crossed, fated by the heavens to come to a tragic end.

As for Romeo's oxymora before laying eyes on Juliet, with all his hypertrophic talk of "bright smoke, cold fire, sick health" and so on, the difference between the rhetorical force of his wordplay regarding Rosaline and his paradoxical exchange with Juliet is clear. As Shakespeare very well knew, the oxymoron had become so overused by English poets of his day, especially in sonnets, that he felt constrained to write a love sonnet of his own, the 130th, demonstrating the overuse of the oxymoron and the extravagant simile:

> My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
> Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
> If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
> If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
> I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
> But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
> And in some perfumes is there more delight
> Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
> I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
> That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
> I grant I never saw a goddess go;
> My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
> And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
> As any she belied with false compare.

In Shakespeare's hands, what begins as a deflation of overblown oxymora and similes in love poems ends as a heartfelt compliment to the speaker's lover.

I do not want to end before touching on a paradox that has been so woven into humanity's rituals, Eastern and Western, that we do not often recognize its paradoxical status. It has to do with sacrifice. The paradox evokes the ancient idea that in order for good to come, a sacrifice, often a bloody one, must be made. Whether it

flows through the veins of a hapless Aztec or a blameless Nazarene, someone's blood must be spilled if the gods are to be appeased.

The one-man Chorus who begins *Romeo and Juliet* speaks in the language of sacrifice, suggesting that the young lovers' deaths are necessary to set things right in Verona. Naught but the children's end, says the Chorus, could bring peace to the city. The paradox is that for the good to prevail, the good must die.

Soon after Shakespeare's time, when fascination with paradox was everywhere on display, a very different kind of thinking emerged. In retrospect it seems striking that Thomas Hobbes, that prophet of the Enlightenment, was just a generation younger than Shakespeare. Yet in sensibility he was worlds away. Unlike Shakespeare and a whole constellation of the other bright lights of early modernity, Hobbes was no friend of the paradox, and certainly no spokesman for *eros* as understood by Plato and as embodied in Shakespearean drama. It was Hobbes who said in his enormously influential *Leviathan*, "That which taketh away the reputation of wisdom . . . is the enjoining of a belief of contradictories" (2017, 12.25).

Unlike the world of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the new order heralded by Hobbes would usher in a systematic, non-paradoxical taxonomy. Whether the gains accorded by modern thought were worth the cost of leaving the world of paradox behind continues to tease the mind.

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6

The Digges' Family and the Art of War

Andrew Hadfield

Abstract

Leonard Digges' fourth paradox in his posthumously published work, *Four Paradoxes, or Politique Discourses Concerning Military Discipline* (1604), is surely his most provocative: "That warre sometimes lesse hurtfull, and more to be wisht in a well governed State than peace". In making this claim, Digges is consciously opposing Erasmus's famous and much cited maxim, "Dulce Bellum Inexpertis" (war is sweet to the ignorant), as is suggested by his own Latin tag, "Et multis vtile bellum". Erasmus's adage had already been challenged by the English poet, George Gascoigne, in his poem, *Dulce Bellum Inexpertis*. Gascoigne, a soldier who had witnessed the terrifying siege of Antwerp, known as "The Spanish Fury", robustly defended his profession in consciously adapting Erasmus's meditation on the horrors of war, arguing that war was worst when not carried out by the professionals who knew how to do it and left to fanatics and the untrained. In this essay I will explore the relationship between Digges' paradoxes and earlier debates on war and peace, showing how importantly different positions were outlined in attempts to think through the interrelated paradoxes that war was most enthusiastically supported by those who knew nothing about it, and the way to ensure lasting peace was to wage effective war.

Keywords: paradox; Thomas Digges; Dudley Digges; war; Erasmus; George Gascoigne

It is hard to imagine the early modern period without its love of paradoxes. From the shock and surprise of four and twenty blackbirds emerging from a pie crust to satirical treatises on fleas, ants, the pox, bastardy and baldness; from the inversion of the established order on days of carnival to discussions of the Cretan liar paradox and Zeno's arrow, early modern Europeans loved to be startled by a challenging paradox. As Rosalie Colie pointed out in what is still one

of the most significant discussions of the phenomenon, paradoxes were everywhere and they could be divided – more or less – into two types. Both were designed to generate surprise, followed by reflected pleasure on the striking nature of that startled reaction. On the one hand there were paradoxes that could be "said to reside in extraordinary consistency of decorum (tautology)', or, probably more frequently, those that depended on 'the incongruous mixture of paradox with a normally unparadoxical form (contradiction)" (1966, 36).[1] Accordingly, paradoxes expose a ludicrous fallacy that is hidden in plain sight, either one that seems like a substantial idea but is actually pointless and groundless, or one that, once it is revealed, makes no sense.

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), probably the most influential European man of letters in the sixteenth century, frequently resorted to the paradox as a means of demonstrating the strange nature of the world and the need to exercise our wit as strenuously as possible in order to understand its complicated and curiously challenging design, producing *The Praise of Folly*, and the vast collections of *Adages* and *Colloquies*, which are stuffed with paradoxical examples of surprising wisdom (see Geraldine 1964). The adage, *Summum jus, summa injuria* (extreme justice is extreme injustice), for example, expresses the paradox that the more one adheres to the letter of the law, to administer justice as a written code, the more unjust one is likely to be, neglecting the spirit of the law – and therefore, justice – in attempting to apply it too rigidly (Mynors 1989, 244). One adage, in particular, seems to express Erasmus's belief in the foolishness of mankind and expose the vast effort that has gone into describing and analysing something that is not simply pointless but positively harmful: *Dulce Bellum Inexpertis*, war is sweet to the ignorant. This adage would seem to be an example of Colie's type one, the surprise of the reader generated by the extraordinary consistency of the idea, one that strikes the reader as something they should have realised all along but somehow failed to observe. To take a section almost – almost – at random:

[1] See also Knight Miller 1956. I am grateful to Fabio Ciambella who read the essay in draft and made a number of very helpful suggestions.

> There is nothing at all in all his members that may seem to be ordained to war, or to any violence . . . Nature hath given unto man a countenance not terrible and loathly, as unto other brute beasts; but meek and demure, representing the very tokens of love and benevolence. She hath given him amiable eyes, and in them assured marks of the inward mind. She hath ordained him arms to clip and embrace. She hath given him the wit and understanding to kiss: whereby the very minds and hearts of men should be coupled together, even as though they touched each other. Unto man alone she hath given laughing, a token of good cheer and gladness. To man alone she hath given weeping tears, as it were a pledge or token of meekness and mercy. Yea, and she hath given him a voice not threatening and horrible, as unto other brute beasts, but amiable and pleasant. Nature not yet content with all this, she hath given unto man alone the commodity of speech and reasoning: the which things verily may specially both get and nourish benevolence, so that nothing at all should be done among men by violence. (Erasmus 2023, 226)[2]

Natural and divine forces have created man as beautiful and reasonable with none of the instruments of violence that other creatures possess: teeth, claws, roaring voices, spikes, poisonous fangs, brute strength, and so on. Men and women can laugh and be ironic so, Erasmus implies, will understand that violent conflict is essentially ridiculous. Even so, with all these marvellous attributes and a sophisticated ability to appreciate and understand the world God made, mankind dedicates much of its time to thinking about violence and warfare and justifying these invariably harmful practices, that is, when not actually at war.

Erasmus concludes his extended adage, by far the longest he wrote, by contrasting the bellicose Pope Julius II, whose papacy (1503-1513) was largely concerned with the Papal Wars, with what he hopes will be the pacific rule of his successor, Leo X (1513-1521), who he anticipates will inaugurate a new era of peace exposing the destructive violence fostered and supported by the recently deceased pontiff:

[2] I have retained original spelling for quotations, while regularising f/s, i/j, and u/v.

> Leo himself, having alway a sober and a gentle wit, giving himself from his tender youth to good letters of humanity, was ever brought up, as it were, in the lap of the Muses, among men most highly learned. He so faultless led his life, that even in the city of Rome, where is most liberty of vice, was of him no evil rumour, and so governing himself came to the dignity to be bishop there, which dignity he never coveted, but was chosen thereto when he least thought thereon, by the provision of God to help to redress things in great decay by long wars. Let Julius the bishop have his glory of war, victories, and of his great triumphs, the which how evil they beseem a Christian bishop, it is not for such a one as I am to declare. I will this say, his glory, whatsoever it be, was mixed with the great destruction and grievous sorrow of many a creature. But by peace restored now to the world, Leo shall get more true glory than Julius won by so many wars that he either boldly begun, or prosperously fought and achieved. (Erasmus 1534, sig. E8*r-v*)[3]

Such a pious hope proved unfounded, as Leo was not the force for peace that Erasmus hoped he would be, even as he sought to limit his predecessor's commitment to conflict as a means of resolution. The man of letters proved no more effective at governing than the ruthless pragmatist, despite the support of Erasmus, a fellow intellectual. Yet, the point of the adage stands – in fact, Leo's reluctant pursuit of the War of Urbino in 1517 which hindered plans for a Crusade, might be seen to have actually supported Erasmus's argument, one war preventing another that was thought to be just (Erasmus, like the Popes, was never an absolute pacifist and believed in holy war against the infidel; see Barlett 2013, 249).[4] As Erasmus argues, men only see the gains of war and not its cost and so enthusiastically support conflict when they would be better served in their lifetimes, and in later memory, cultivating the arts of peace.

In many ways, Erasmus's words were too pithy and witty for their own good. The English soldier-poet, George Gascoigne (1534-5?-1577), adopted the Latin phrase for a long poem on the nature of the soldier. Unlike Erasmus, however, Gascoigne was not interested in stopping war between Christian states and saving military action

[3] On Julius II and Leo X see the entries in Kelly and Walsh 2015.

[4] On Erasmus and war, see Dallmayr 2006.

for anti-Islamic crusades – which Erasmus did support. His long poem was written after he had served with Arthur, Lord Grey de Wilton (1536-1593) in the Netherlands (1572-1574).[5] Gascoigne turns Erasmus's argument around through his own witty paradoxical application of the adage: if war is sweet to those who know nothing about it then they should not get involved in or write about warfare but leave it to those who do know what they are doing, i.e., the professionals. In Gascoigne's hands Erasmus's argument against war becomes one in favour of a trained military force taking responsibility for organised violence.

The poem opens:

> To write of Warre and wote not what it is,
> Nor ever yet could march where War was made,
> May well be thought a worke begonne amis,
> A rash attempt, in woorthlesse verse to wade,
> To tell the triall, knowing not the trade:
> Yet such a vaine even nowe doth feede my Muse,
> That in this theame I must some labor use.
> (Gascoigne 2000, 1.7)

Gascoigne uses his long poem – just under 1500 lines – to argue that war, however brutal it might be, has its place in the divinely overseen universe and war is the legitimate instrument of God's will when all other avenues have been exhausted:

> Then what is warre? define it right at last,
> And let vs set all olde sayde sawes aside,
> Let Poets lie, let Painters faigne as fast,
> Astronomers let marke how starres do glide,
> And let these Travellers tell wonders wide:
> But let vs tell by trustie proufe of truth,
> What thing is warre which raiseth all this ruth.
>
> And for my parte my fansie for to wright,
> I say that warre is even the scourge of God,
> Tormenting such as dwell in princelie plight,

[5] On Gascoigne's life see the *ODNB* entry by G. W. Pigman III; on Arthur, fourteenth baron Grey of Wilton see the *ODNB* entry by Julian Lock.

Yet not regarde the reaching of his rodde,
Whose deedes and dueties often times are odde,
Who raunge at randon jesting at the just,
As though they raignde to do even what they lust.

Whome neyther plague can pull into remorse,
Nor dearth can drawe to mende that is amisse,
Within whose hearts no pitie findeth force,
Nor right can rule to judge what reason is.
Whome sicknesse salveth not, nor bale brings blisse:
Yet can high Jove by waste of bloudie warre,
Sende scholemaisters to teach them what they are.
(71-91)

Accordingly, *Dulce Bellum Inexpertis*, can be read within the tradition of 'mirrors for princes' literature, instructing rulers how they should behave; or, more significantly, the tradition of mirrors for magistrates, whereby appointed justices and officials – here, soldiers – can teach princes how they should behave and punish them if they transgress or fail to live up to the agreed standards (for a recent discussion, see Archer and Hadfield 2016). In making his case Gascoigne would seem to be asserting the rights of the soldier to make informed decisions and not simply casting the military as the stern arm of the secular or religious authorities. The concluding metaphor of soldiers as schoolmasters sent by Jove to mete out justice would seem to be a witty – and paradoxical – inversion of the Erasmian tradition in which learning and scholarship demonstrate that there is rarely a purpose to war and that the military need to be controlled by the scholars. While Erasmus would have supported Clemenceau's famous statement that 'War is too serious a matter to leave to soldiers', Gascoigne argues the contrary case, that war is too serious a matter to leave to all those intellectuals, painters, poets and travellers, who thought that they knew about it – but did not (see de Meneses 1998). C.S. Lewis once argued that "rhetoric is the greatest barrier between us and our ancestors", making a plausible enough case (qtd in Miller 2004, 27). However, we might also argue, perhaps even more persuasively, that it is really a faith in war that divides us. Roger Manning has demonstrated that war dominated life in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, "ordained by

Divine Providence because of man's sinfulness". Not only were kings who were successful in battle more highly regarded than those who worked for peace, but war was often a more powerful instrument than monarchy and it was common practice "to settle disputes between monarchs and republics by resort to arms" (2020, 134-5). We may well admire the wit of Erasmus but Gascoigne's paradoxical thinking is surely the more authentic voice of early modern Europe, anticipating Sir Philip Sidney's figure of the soldier-poet (see below).

While Gascoigne was developing his soldier-poet persona the generations of the Digges family were also outlining their thinking about the arts of war and military matters. Although there has been a reasonable amount of work on the Digges family, they are still relatively under-known and their significance not fully appreciated, in part because their intellectual achievements seem miscellaneous to us today. To start with the most celebrated example, Shakespeare clearly knew a number of the Digges' family works, making use of their thoughts on tactics and strategy in *Henry V* and *Coriolanus*, and some have argued that it was a Digges' connection to the Virginia Company that helped Shakespeare get hold of the Strachey letter for *The Tempest*. Perhaps we should not be surprised as there are clear biographical links: Thomas Digges' widow married Thomas Russell, an overseer of Shakespeare's will, and the younger Leonard Digges wrote commendatory verses prefacing the First Folio. [6]

The Digges were an affluent gentry family living in the south – mainly the south-east – of England who collectively wrote a number of important works on mathematics, geometry, astronomy, astrology, Latin poetry and military strategy. Leonard Digges (c.1515-1559) was the grandfather of this intriguing dynasty of gentry intellectuals. He oversaw the defences of the south Kent coast during Henry VII's reign, was nearly executed for his part in Wyatt's Rebellion (1554), wrote a prognostication that contained a great deal of information about astronomy and mathematics. He was especially interested in artillery and ballistics. After his death his son Thomas (c.1546-1595), who clearly shared his father's interests, produced a number of works based on his father's manuscripts, which included more work on mathematics and geometry and the treatise, *Stratioticos* (1579), which attempts to

[6] See Jorgensen 1953, Freehafer 1970, and Hadfield 2020.

apply the science of geometry to the art of war, the first two books being Leonard's work, the last two, by Thomas. Thomas's knowledge saw him appointed as the muster master for Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester in the mid-1580s, although his drive to root out corruption in the office brought him into conflict with the professional soldiers. Thomas had two sons, Leonard (1588-1635), a scholar of languages and poetry, who had a particular interest in Spanish literature, and Dudley (1582/3-1639), who was more intimately concerned with his father's military interests. Dudley was an ambassador to Russia, was prominent in the East India and Virginia Companies, and in 1604 produced another family treatise on war, *Foure Paradoxes, or Politique Discourses, Concerning Militarie Discipline*.[7] The first two of these paradoxes were written by Dudley's father, Thomas, and concerned the nature of warfare; the last two, written by Dudley, were a spirited defence of the military profession, very much in the vein of Gascoigne's poem, the fourth paradox situated within the tradition of 'just war' thought through the use of a quotation from Lucan's *Pharsalia*.[8]

In obvious ways *Foure Paradoxes* was a development of a stall set out in the earlier treatise, *Stratioticos*. In the 'Preface to the Reader' to that work Thomas argues that the fruits of his learning leads in one direction:

> The whole course of these histories with the rising and falling also of the *Assirian*, *Persian*, and *Macedonian Monarchies*, did plainely demonstrate unto mee, that the well and evill of this Militarie Discipline among all natural causes was the greatest, or rather the onely occasion, of the advancing, establishing, or raising and defacing of all *Monarchies*, *Empires*, *Kingdomes*, & *Common Weales*. (Digges 1579, A3*v*-A4*r*)

The way to secure peace is to understand the nature of war, so that one can never be complacent: "our Nation in thys happy peace maye not rest altogether carlesse of Warres" (ibid., A1*v*). Accordingly,

[7] For further details see Ciambella 2022.

[8] For biographical details see the *ODNB* entries: 'Digges, Leonard (c.1515-c.1559')' by Stephen Johnston; 'Digges, Thomas (c.1546-1595' by Stephen Johnston; 'Digges, Sir Dudley (1582/3-1639)' by Sean Kelsey; 'Digges, Leonard (1588-1635)' by Sidney Lee, revised Elizabeth Haresnape; on the Lucan quotation see Ciambella 2022, 170.

Stratioticos, a learned and innovative treatise on algebra, shows how the art of numbers is a branch of learning that a soldier must master, especially those in positions of power and authority, from the muster master in charge of supplies to the general overseeing strategy, and, in particular, the key figure of the master of ordinance, responsible for artillery, who needs to be properly learned in the science of mathematics.

Four Paradoxes is a natural development of this earlier family treatise, Dudley supplementing his father's ideas just as Thomas had expanded those of his father, Leonard, Dudley's grandfather. Together these works served to establish the Digges family as among the most significant thinkers on science and warfare in sixteenth-century England, adept strategists able to combine the new with the old, and to show how important it was to think through the paradox, that the best way to secure the peace was to understand how to win the war. Dudley laments the lack of material on warfare produced in England early in James' reign, in what looks like an assault on James' self-styled representation as the 'Rex Pacificus', the heir of Augustus, and support for the more militaristic policy of his son, Prince Henry and his circle.[9] As Fulke Greville was to do a few years later (1610-1614), Dudley cites Sir Philip Sidney as his ideal, lamenting that his predecessor used his "much better witte" to praise poetry when he would have best served his nation by producing an "Apologie for Souldiers" (Digges 1604, 74).[10] In doing so Dudley may well be recalling that Sir Philip began his treatise on poetry with a discussion of John Pietro Pugliano, the stable master at the court of Emperor Maximillian II, reflecting on horsemanship and soldiering: "He said soldiers were the noblest estate of mankind, and horsemen the noblest of soldiers" (Sidney 2022, 81). Just as the arts of peace and war are intimately intertwined, so are discussions of literature and warfare.

[9] The most extensive study of James as 'Rex Pacificus' is Patterson 1998. It is also worth noting that Charles I's combative approach to politics and diplomacy has earned him the title of 'Rex Bellicosus': see Young 1997, 17. I owe this reference to Fabio Ciambella.

[10] Greville celebrates Sidney as the ideal Protestant courtier/soldier in *The Life of the Renowned Sir Philip Sidney* (1651).

The first two Paradoxes by Thomas Digges are robust defences of the military profession, arguing that soldiers need to be supported by rulers. Paradox One, 'That no prince, or state doth gain, or save by giving too small entertainment unto soldiers, officers, or commanders martial', is only a paradox if the reader thinks that money spent on defence and warfare is wasted and needs to be persuaded otherwise. The Second Paradox argues that the ancient Greeks and Romans were far more sophisticated and adept at warfare than their modern English counterparts, and, so military spending needs to be increased in order to preserve the honour of the modern nation, hardly an unexpected conclusion and only a paradox if you assume that the moderns are better at everything than the ancients (see Ciambella 2022, 76 and 113).

It can also be said that the Third Paradox, "That the sometimes neglected profession deserves much commendation, and best becomes a Gentleman, that desires to live virtuously, or die Honourably", is only really a paradox if you think in an Erasmian way and are hostile to the defence of warfare – perhaps that is the point and maybe Erasmus, in Dudley's eyes, had started to dominate a complacent England (there is surely an element of special pleading here as the Treaty of Mellifont, proclaiming victory over the Catholic forces in Ireland was only a year old; see Silke 2000). Dudley, who, unlike his father, has an idealistic vision of warfare and the military profession, fulminates against mercenaries, as is appropriate given his high sense of the military calling (Digges 1604, 87).[11] He berates gentlemen for the vice of idleness and excoriates the vanity of fashion and what he sees as the dangerous notion that a man is worth no more than the clothes he wears. He condemns "bawdiehouse captains" and "lehouse soldiers", because in the end true values dictate that he "cannot chuse but attribute great honour to the warre, that is of power to make both old and young so honourable" (87). Dudley continues

[11] Thomas, unlike Dudley, had actually served in the army, acting as muster-master and trench-master in the earl of Leicester's campaign in the Low Countries in 1585, which might account for his more disillusioned evaluation of the army. I owe this point to Fabio Ciambella.

> The benefit of power, skill and practice in the warre is such that by it the poore have growne rich, the weake strong, and those that were reputed vile have got an honourable reputation, since all sorts of men are either through feare earnest or through love willing to entertaine friendly amitie with those especially that are renowned for it, since last a Commonwealth through it may growe from small beginnings to unlookt for height as that of *Rome* . . . by daring and doing rose from nothing to be Masters of the world. (91)

Warfare has become a universal panacea, curing all social ills, raising the poor upwards towards riches, fostering friendship, and encouraging laudable national pride and ambition.

The fourth paradox is more radical and provocative still, engaging with the long tradition of 'just war' theory.[12] It makes the case "That warre [is] sometimes lesse hurtfull, and more to be wisht in aswell governed State than peace" (Digges 1604, 96). Dudley uses the conflict between the Romans and the Volsces in the fifth century BCE to make his case, what we might call, following Margareta de Grazia (2007), *Coriolanus* without Coriolanus. Here, in a much clearer form than we witness in Shakespeare's play, *Coriolanus*, written three years later, we learn that war is the means of securing domestic peace and uniting factions.[13] It is the Senate's plan that war with the Volsces could well be a cure for domestic strife, a logical solution that is then undermined by politicians who have no understanding of how states should operate:

> Then they resolved on a warre with the Volsces to ease their City of that dearth, by diminishing their number, and appease those tumultuous broyles, by drawing poore with rich, and the meane sort with the Nobilitie, into one campe, one service, and one selfesame daunger: sure meanes to procure sure love and quietnesse in a contentious Commonwealth, as that of Rome was at that time. (104-5)

There is a strange ambiguity here in 'their number', as the reader cannot be sure whether Dudley means the Romans or the Volsces who are to be reduced, or, possibly, both warring factions. Yet, however the passage is read the implication is clearly drawn: war

[12] On 'just war' theory see Russell 1977 and Pugliatti 2010.

[13] For analysis see Hadfield 2004, 170-7.

works to unite internal factions and so unify the city, state or nation that wages war, obliterating, at least temporarily, internal divisions between classes and factions. Dudley draws on the familiar image of the body politic treated by a skillful doctor to counter the unwelcome interference and opposition to war of the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius, for whom Dudley has particular contempt:

> Yet even then there wanted not home tarrying housdoues, two peacebred tribanes Sicimus and Brutus, hindred that resolution calling it crueltie, and it may be some now will condemne this course, as changing for the worse: some that wil much mislike a body breaking-out should take receipts of quick-silver or mercurie, that may endanger life: yet they cannot but knowe even those poysons outwardly applied are sovereigne medicines to purge and clense, and therefore having a good Physition, I must professe, I thinke it much better to take yeerely Physicke, when the signe is good and circumstaances are correspondent, that may worke with some litle trouble, our health and safetie, than through sordide sparing, or cowardly feare of paine, to omitte happy opportunities of remedy, & so suffer our bodies perhaps crasie alreadie, so to sincke that death followes or at least some grievious sickenesse, asking farre deeper charge, bringing farre greater torment, especially since the sickenesse of a state, were it as great as a palsie may by a skilfull Physition be purged and evacuated at an issue in some remote part. (105)

War is elaborately cast here in the famous image of the *pharmakon*, a poison that also acts as a cure if applied properly (Cohen 1994, 79). To the uninitiated the cure seems dangerous and foolhardy but those with proper knowledge understand that it is, paradoxically, the best means of securing health. There will be casualties, of course, collateral damage, but a healthy society needs to purge itself through warfare. If the state does not flush away harmful elements, like a body it will grow unhealthy, plagued by alehouse soldiers and bawdyhouse captains, as well as the ludicrously fashionable courtiers who care more about their clothes than the iron discipline of war, which guarantees that a nation will flourish. The well-run and properly ordered society will not shrink from taking its required nasty medicine, understanding the paradox that what looks bitter or evil is, in fact, good. Dudley draws attention to the

paradoxical language, exhorting his readers to avoid the prospect of "sordide sparing" alongside the more obvious "cowardly fear of pain". Short to medium-term suffering will ward off catastrophic long-term agony.

There is a satisfying coherence to Dudley's account, whereby the senate acts to alleviate the problems caused by scarcity at home and develops a plausible and persuasive solution, to renew a war. In Shakespeare's play, we are never clear how the war and the food riots are related, nor, really how Coriolanus's actions fit in, so violent and irrational is his hatred of the people, and so ingrained Roman military culture in his psyche, he can only see the disturbance at home in terms of the war that it impedes (see Jorgensen 1973, 292-313). Shakespeare's play is built on paradoxes, something he may have taken from Dudley's account: Dudley's analysis of the war between the Romans and the Volsces uses that conflict to illustrate the paradox that war must be embraced as its absence leads to more problems than its repeated presence in peoples' lives, yearly physic being the ideal. Put another way, Shakespeare's play is replete with dramatic paradoxes, while Dudley's treatise is centred on a specific paradox. Behind talk of peace Dudley sees weakness, opportunism, double-dealing and hypocrisy. Either quarrels will never go away until one side has emerged victorious, like the global conflict between Christians and Ottomans, or they take place

> between Christans, with such inveterate malice and irreconcileable wrongs for titles so intricate, as in mans witte is to be feared will never be appeased, satisfied, decided, seeing that many of the Princes of this world, though they talk of peace and amitie to winne time, til their projectes come to full ripenesse, serving their turnes with that sweete name which they know is likely to blindfolde ease-affecting people, yet in their hearts desire nothing lesse: when as some of them weakened with the violent courses of their hereditary ambition, that can never be tamed, seeke peace as a breathing only to recover strength: others warely repecting our encreased greatnesse, and their owne unsetled state make faire shewes now, but are like enough here after upon aduantage to prove false hearted: others having gotten much wealth, gayned much reputation, encreased their power, and maintayned their libertie by the sworde, will never endure the losse of these by hearkning to

> peace, since last there never wanted coulorable pretences to breake those truces. (109-10)

Advocates of peace are actually endangering long-term peace and security. Paradoxically, it is those who recognise, in Chris Hedges' words (2002), that war is a force that gives us meaning, who truly understand that preparation for war is the best way to maintain the peace . Stable states need enemies, as, according to Dudley, the avoidance of war at all costs is the greatest danger a society can face.

How should we read *Four Paradoxes*? Perhaps we need to acknowledge that it is an interesting and cleverly provocative argument, as befits a work of paradox, but probably not a subtle or profoundly challenging work of analysis, its argument traditional, familiar and deeply ingrained in the psyche of a continent that believed that disputes could and should be settled by violence and military conflict. The Digges family are surely most significant because of their introduction of advanced mathematical principles to a wide audience in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not because they believed that war was a useful social and political tool. The notion that preparing for war is the best way to keep the peace is a familiar Renaissance paradox to be read alongside such apparent truths as women are only constant in their inconstancy, only the wise are rich, and that misery is true happiness (see Malloch 1956 and Vickers 1968). What we might want to note is that, in a time when war was the most obvious means of resolving quarrels between states, Dudley's paradox, and its implied criticism of *Dulce Bellum Inexpertis*, was probably more readily accepted by readers than Erasmus's.

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7

"Indiscreet chroniclers and witty play-makers": William Cornwallis and the Fiction of Richard III

Francesco Dall'Olio

Abstract

This essay explores the relationship between William Cornwallis' paradoxical "Praise of King Richard the Third" (printed 1616) and the English Renaissance literary tradition on Richard III. It underlines how Cornwallis' text stands out as part of the development of such a tradition, and, in particular, how its reversal of the traditional negative judgment about this figure represented a pivotal point in the evolution of historical thinking about King Richard. In particular, it will be demonstrated that by comparing Cornwallis' paradox, on the one hand, to Thomas More's *History of Richard III*, and on the other, to William Shakespeare's *Henry VI Part 3* and *Richard III*, it is possible to trace an evolution of Renaissance literary tradition about Richard III that, starting from the officially negative portrait of his figure offered by More, and passing through the more complex depiction presented by Shakespeare, comes to a breaking point in Cornwallis' paradox. In that text the author for the first time openly declares that what previous historical tradition had presented as 'history' actually was a very prejudicial, if not ideological, 'fiction', reflecting more the habits and views of his readers than the truth of historical events. In this way, Cornwallis' paradox laid the ground for the subsequent historical revaluations of King Richard III.

Keywords: William Cornwallis; Thomas More; *Richard III*; tyranny; historiography

1. Premise

First printed in 1616, in the collection *Of Certain Paradoxes*, but probably written in the 1590s,[1] William Cornwallis the Younger's

1 There are ten extant manuscripts of the text, some written by the author himself: see Medori in Cornwallis 2018-2019, 9.

"Praise of King Richard the Third" is the first attempt to rehabilitate the most eminent tyrant figure in medieval English history. As the title of the collection in which it appears suggests, it is not a genuine work of historical revision aimed at restoring the truth of the sovereign's action, but rather an ironic inversion of the assessment of his reign, based on the mechanism of reversal of opinion typical of the literary genre of paradoxes. Cornwallis himself concluded the piece with the notation "Yet for all this know, I hold this but a paradox" (Cornwallis 2018-2019, 66), as if to invite the reader to consider his work as a mere literary game. Given the subsequent history of the reception of the text, one could say that Cornwallis succeeded beyond his wildest expectations: the "Praise" was largely ignored by scholars until 1977, the date of its first modern edition edited by Arthur Kincaid, and even then it received a harsh welcome. Alison Hanham, reviewing Kincaid's edition, dismissed the "Praise" as a text of little literary merit, the work of an author who "wrote for effect, not out of concern for historical fact or justice" (Hanham 1978, 26). This view was recently reiterated by Lesley Boatwright on a page of the *Richard III Society* website. "With Cornwallis as advocate, we might think, who needs a prosecution?", Boatwright wonders, expressing outrage at the way in which Cornwallis, instead of proving that Richard III did not commit the crimes of which he was accused, merely maintains that these crimes were in fact committed for the good of the country. Such a unanimously negative critical view has nipped in the bud any deeper investigation of the relationship between Cornwallis' paradox and the English Renaissance literary tradition on Richard III.

This essay is a first attempt to bridge that gap. In order to do so, it is good, in my opinion, to start at the beginning, with the text that laid the ground for the birth of this same tradition, Sir Thomas More's *History of Richard III*. In the first part of the essay, I offer a (necessarily brief) analysis of this text, underlining the reasons why More's description of Richard encountered such immediate and wide success among contemporary readers, and showing which features of his work ended up laying the foundations for the subsequent literary depiction of Richard as a tyrant. I will also show, however, how More's text also presents a more ambiguous side in his depiction of Richard, one that went largely unnoticed

by Renaissance readers, but that has been identified and studied by recent scholarship. In particular, I highlight how More's seemingly positive assessment of other historical figures such as Edward IV is not as positive as it seems, and how the way he handles some of the most traditional features of Humanist historiography (the genre to which the *History* belongs) seems to reveal a pessimistic vision of politics and history as conceived in Humanist traditional thinking. More's *History* will thus be shown as a complex text which presents at the same time the nuclei for the traditional negative depiction and those for questioning this same tradition. Part 2 of the essay will be devoted to the second most prominent text of the time regarding Richard III, William Shakespeare's play of the same name (first printed in 1597), as well as *Henry VI Part 3* (first printed in 1595).[2] In this section, I shall argue that the consistent differences between Richard's characterisation in Shakespeare's history plays and that of earlier plays on the sovereign (Thomas Legge's *Richardus Tertius* and the anonymous *True Tragedy of King Richard the Third*) present a more nuanced and intricate exploration of the traditional narrative about the sovereign, which exploits some of More's previously mentioned ambiguities and in some ways anticipates Cornwallis' critique. In particular, I suggest that the emphasis Shakespeare puts, on the one hand, on the relationship between Richard's usurpation and the War of the Roses, and, on the other, on the 'theatricality' of Richard III's crimes (even going so far as to depict Richard as a sort of Vice-like figure, capable of talking directly to the audience), can be seen as a conscious attempt to show how 'fictional' the traditional representation of King Richard actually was, how it was based on an assumption that what it was told about him was true. In this sense, it could be said that Shakespeare's plays represent a sort of 'middle phase' in the history of King Richard's depiction, one that still retains the framework established by More, while at the same time exploiting its ambiguities, thus anticipating some

2 I give here the dates of the first printings of both texts: an octavo edition of *Henry VI Part 3* (entitled *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*) and a quarto edition (Q1) of *Richard III*. Both works were later reprinted several times separately before being included in the 1623 First Folio. For a comparison of these texts, see Shakespeare 2009, 417-60 and Shakespeare 2019, 148-76. My quotations from Shakespeare refer to these editions.

notable aspects of Cornwallis' paradox. In Part 3, I finally address that text, clarifying its connection to More and Shakespeare, as well as showing how Cornwallis' paradoxical re-evaluation echoes more general cultural changes in European Humanism involving the writing of history and the description of the good king. My aim will be to show how Cornwallis' text, despite his openly paradoxical nature, lays the ground for subsequent historical revaluations of King Richard's figure by being the first text denouncing the 'fictitiousness' of previous historical tradition about him, i.e. denouncing how it was the result of a reliance on a prejudicial view of him by his contemporaries as well as founded on (according to Cornwallis) mistaken ideological assumptions about the nature of good kingship. I will also show how, in doing so, Cornwallis reprises and expands on aspects of the traditional depiction of Richard which were left unsaid, or implicitly present, in More and Shakespeare. As a result, the "Praise of King Richard the Third" will emerge as a text testifying to a period of transition in the history of Richard III, one that deserves more attention and consideration.

2. Crafting the Fiction: Thomas More

Probably written between 1513 and 1516 in two versions, English and Latin, and left unfinished, Thomas More's *History of Richard III* was never published during the author's lifetime.[3] After extensive manuscript circulation, it was first printed in English in 1543, as an addition to a reprint of John Hardyng's fifteenth-century chronicle (ending with the reign of Edward IV). In 1557, it received its first official printing as part of the general edition of More's English corpus, edited by his nephew, the publisher William Rastell (the Latin text would be first printed in 1565, in the first comprehensive edition of More's Latin corpus, also edited by Rastell). However, in 1548, the *History* had already been entirely incorporated into Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York*, in a version heavily edited by the editor of that text, Richard

3 I take the chronological data on the writing and publication of More's work from John M. Logan's introduction in More 2005, xxi-xxiii, liii-xlv. All my quotations from More's text refer to this edition.

Grafton (see Womersley 1993). The same thing would happen in 1587, when More's text would once again be included in another historical work, Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicle*. This incorporation of the text in some of the most important early modern English historical works, even before its first official printing, is a testament to its immediate success among early modern English readers, also proved by the eighteen reprinted editions of the work in the last half of the sixteenth century (which make the *History of King Richard III* emerge as the most reprinted historical work of the time).

The reasons for this success are several, and not all as obvious as they might seem. The first, and most evident, is the combination of the high intellectual prestige of the author himself and the uniqueness of the work. As John M. Logan noted (More 2005, xlv), throughout the sixteenth century, the *History* remained one of the two notable English Renaissance historical texts written in the style and form of Humanist historiography (the other being Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia*, first printed in Basel in 1534), and by far the most admired of the two, well before its publication, as evidenced by the prefatory letter to Roger Ascham's *Report of Affairs and State of Germany* (1553). After providing a description of the ideal historian, Ascham states that the only English author who comes close to this ideal is "Sir Thomas More, in that pamphlet of Richard the Third", who "doth in most part . . . of all these points so content all men, as, if the rest of our story of England were so done, we might well compare with France, Italy, or Germany on that behalf" (Ascham 1965, 6). With early modern English historiography still being written according to the patterns and forms of the medieval chronicle throughout the century, More's *History* stood as a one-of-a-kind exemplar of an 'alternative' type of historical literature, more akin to the cultural aspirations and tastes of the Elizabethan intellectual elite, educated according to Humanist values and fashions.[4]

4 The next early modern English historical text written in a different style from that of the medieval chronicles would be Francis Bacon's *History of the Reign of King Henry the Seventh* (1622). Ironically, it is a work that can be seen in some ways as a continuation of More's *History*, not only because it tells the story of Richard III's successor, but because More himself hints in the *History* at his intention to write a similar work: "we shall . . . heareafter . . . write the time of the late noble prince . . . King Henry the Seventh" (More 2005, 97).

As Hanan Yoran (2001, 524-5) recalls, in the Humanist conception of history, what mattered was not just the accurate recounting of events per se, but their rhetorical reinvention, the purpose of which was to explain "the actions of historical figures through credible psychological descriptions of their personalities and . . . the causal relationship between events and their possible implications" (524). More's work is a perfect realisation of this ideal. The story begins with the famous psycho-physical description of Richard not only as hunchbacked and crooked, but also, and more importantly, as "close and secret, a deep dissimuler . . . outwardly comparable where he inwardly hated . . . dispiteous and cruel, not for evil will alway, but often for ambition" (More 2005, 10-12). The subsequent detailed account of the intrigues by which Richard and his accomplices (especially the Duke of Buckingham) succeed in placing him on the throne is thus interpreted as demonstrating the 'truth' of such a character, through the use of many typical narrative patterns and scenes involving tyrants and bad sovereigns. This also includes numerous imitations of passages from classical authors (also a typical feature of Humanist historiography), especially Sallust and Tacitus (on whom cf. Logan in More 2005, xxxiv-xl),[5] which were for his early readers an additional motive for admiration. As Logan points out, both More and his readers "uninhibitedly embraced the rhetorical doctrine of imitation, which decreed that assiduous imitation of the best literary models was . . . if done properly, a principal distinction of the accomplished writer" (More 2005, xxxiiii). More had recounted a capital event in English history according to the lofty model of the ancient writers, thereby creating a narrative that was both compelling as a work of literature and credible as an account of historical events.

A peculiar aspect of More's work should be highlighted: the absence of any citation of written sources, and in contrast the oft-stated reliance on eyewitnesses. We see here a felicitous coincidence between fact and literary convention. It is highly unlikely that More was aware of the other written sources of the time relating

5 Even Richard's description as a dissembler is heavily influenced by Tacitus' description of Tiberius: see Logan in More 2005, 90-4, 125-6; Siemon in Shakespeare 2009, 54-5.

to Richard's usurpation, such as Friar Domenico Mancini's account *De Occupatione Regni Anglie per Riccardum Tercium* (1485), or the so-called Second Continuation of the Crowland Abbey Chronicle. Neither text enjoyed a wide circulation in sixteenth-century England (their first printed edition dates to the twentieth century), and one of them (Mancini's text) was eventually lost to be rediscovered only in 1934 at the Municipal Library of Lille, in France.[6] Nor has it been possible to conclusively trace passages where More's text directly mirrors official documents relating to Richard's accession to the throne.[7] Even if he consulted such texts, however, quoting written sources (unless they were famous authors) was not part of the literary conventions of Humanist historiography. Consequently, the main authority on which More based his account of King Richard's crimes are unnamed witnesses, if not actual rumours. "Some wise men" claim that he plotted against his brother George, Duke of Clarence (More 2005, 12), just as "men say all the time" that he murdered Henry VI in the Tower. Similarly, the story of the murder of the princes in the Tower is told "after [the] way that [More] . . . heard by such men and by such means as methinketh it were hard, but it should be true" (97). At the heart of his *History* is the implicit assumption that what is reported in the work is a faithful reworking of what Richard III's contemporaries thought of him. As people who personally witnessed his usurpation, it is suggested, they are the best witnesses to the truth of that king's person and actions.[8]

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6 It is all the more interesting and significant then that More's account and that of these two sources are substantially similar: see Hanham 1975 for a more detailed analysis.

7 The only partial exception is a speech by the Duke of Buckingham, recalling a petition presented to Richard in 1483 inviting him to ascend the throne: see Hanham 1975, 45-8; Logan in More 80-90, 129-31.

8 And to be fair, there is some truth to be found in this statement. More was born in 1478, five years before King Richard's ascension, and seven before his death at the battle of Bosworth, and it is far from unlikely that he is reporting opinions and rumours he personally heard. In fact, it has been suggested that among the unnamed oral sources he quotes are his father, John More, and the Bishop of Ely, John Morton, in whose house More served in his youth: see More 2005, xxiv-v.

It is therefore significant that, as Kincaid (1972, 237-41) notes, from about halfway through the text (starting with the plot against Hastings) More insists that Richard's dissimulations actually fooled no one. Even the members of the Privy Council, when they see Richard accuse Hastings of plotting to kill him with magic, bringing as evidence his arm that had supposedly been shrunk by an evil spell, "well perceiv[ed] that this matter was but a quarrel . . . no one was present, but well knew that his arm had always been so from birth" (More 2005, 56). Later, the people of London notice that there is something strange about the proclamation regarding Hastings' hasty execution: it was "so curiously indited, and so fair written in parchment in so well set hand . . . that any child might well perceive that it had been prepared before" (63). From this moment on, every one of Richard's deceptions, devised to lend a veneer of legitimacy to his accession, fails to convince those present. Dr Shaa's speech, which is supposed to lead to a popular acclamation in favour of Richard, falls on deaf ears, as does Buckingham's subsequent speech to the Mayor of London. Finally, Buckingham and Richard's charade, where the former apparently persuades him to accept the throne against his will for the good of the country, is immediately perceived as such: "there was not a man so dull that heard them, but he perceived well enough that all the matter was made between them" (94). Richard's 'play' deceives neither his contemporaries nor More's readers, who, through the story he tells, are able to see the reality of things: the great simulating tyrant is thus condemned, even before his actual punishment, by the very fact that his deceptions have been revealed and consigned to history (cf. Kincaid 1972, 230-1).[9]

This aspect of the work is directly related to another one, equally important. While it was typical of the Humanist conception of history that historical works should serve an educational purpose

9 This tension between Richard's plots and their unmasking is only one aspect of the 'theatrical' nature of More's *History*, as explained by Kincaid: "On one level, the reader is the audience, viewing the 'story' of the tyrant . . . from the standpoint of the *contemptus mundi* tradition . . . On the other level, Richard is an actor being watched by an audience within the play in which he is the leading actor . . . The subtle shifts in the audience's attitude towards Richard determine his gradual decline" (1972, 231-2).

(providing great examples of virtues to be imitated or vices to be avoided), it was far less common for such works to take an overtly moralistic tone. The *History* is one of the few exceptions. From the outset, More declares his intention to condemn, through the account of King Richard's rise and fall, the "vile desire of sovereignty" (8), the "pestilential . . . ambition and desire of vanity and sovereignty" (16). It is this unnatural lust for power, according to More, that drove Richard to usurp the throne of his nephews and manipulate his subjects. In this regard, Richard III was the antithesis of the 'good sovereign' Edward IV,[10] who was instead "so kind, courteous and familiar" (7) that he invited the Lord Mayor of London and his aldermen to dine and hunt with him simply for the pleasure of their company. In contrast to this paradigm of harmonious relations between the Crown and its subjects, the condemnation of those who, like King Richard, voluntarily choose to evade it, is even more striking. His end was him falling prey to his own troubled conscience: "After this abominable deed [the murder of the princes in the Tower] he never had peace of mind, he never thought himself safe . . . He did not rest well at night, lay long awake and pondering . . . slumbering rather than sleeping, troubled with fearful dreams" (102).[11]

This moral message at the heart of More's *History* had a particular appeal for the readers of the first edition of the text (1557). One year earlier, Mary Tudor's death marked not only the end of the persecutions against the Protestants, but also the apparent end of a period in the cultural history of the English Renaissance marked by the contrast between the authoritarian tendencies of the monarchs (who sought to keep the political discussion of the country under

10 More's text is not the only one of the time to offer a good representation of Edward; on the contrary, as evidenced by Edward Whittle (2017), Edward IV was a highly respected and admired figure at the time. As we shall see below, however, More's attitude towards him is not as positive as his description at the beginning of the *History* would make us think.

11 We find here a typical feature of the Renaissance literary and political description of the tyrant: having alienated himself from his subjects, he lives as a prey to fear and anxiety, as well as to the ghosts of his conscience. For a more detailed account, see the essays collected in the special issue of *Comparative Drama* (Bigliazzi 2017-2018) dedicated to this particular aspect of the figure of the tyrant in both antiquity and the Renaissance.

their control by suppressing any dissent) and the increasingly sophisticated political consciousness of the new political elite, educated according to the Humanist model. The peak of the clash was represented by the texts of the so-called 'resistance literature', written by Protestant authors exiled during Mary's reign (John Ponet, Christopher Goodman, John Knox), which were published in the same years as the *History* (1556-1558). These texts explicitly stated for the first time in English political thinking that the true source of the sovereign's power is the will of the community, and if the sovereign abuses his or her power, then either the people themselves or their representatives have the right/duty to remove them. The same idea, although expressed in less overtly rebellious tones, is at the centre of the political reflection of the first Protestant intellectual circle in early modern England, which gathered at the University of Cambridge.[12] The ideals of this movement found full expression a few years after the printing of the *History*, in the treatise *De Republica Anglorum* by Sir Thomas Smith (published posthumously in 1583 but written in 1562-1565). This work opens by postulating a distinction between the good sovereign and the tyrant, where the former is identified by his adherence to the established law, and the latter by its breaking:

> Where one person beareth the rule they define that to be the estate of a king, who by succession or election commeth with the good will of the people to that gouernement, and doth administer the common wealth by the lawes of the same and by equitie, and doth seeke the profit of the people as much as his owne. A tyraunt they name him, who by force commeth to the Monarchy against the will of the people, breaketh lawes alreadie made at his pleasure, maketh others without the aduise and consent of the people, and regardeth not the wealth of his communes but the aduancement of him selfe, his faction, & kindred. (Smith 1583, 6)

More's *History*, with its condemnation of an ambitious tyrant who seized a power to which he had no right, was a text that the people developing this political doctrine (which was going to become

12 For a more in-depth presentation of this circle (of which Roger Ascham was a member), see McDiarmid 2007.

the official ideology of the Elizabethan political elite during the following years) would undoubtedly find appealing.[13]

To sum up, the success of Thomas More's *History of King Richard the Third* can be attributed (aside from its high literary quality) to three significant factors: its unique literary status as the the most famous Humanist historical work of the English Renaissance; the truthfulness of its account of the events involving Richard as based on the opinions of direct witnesses; the moralistic interpretation of these events, leading to the condemnation of the tyrannical sovereign who disregards the laws of the country and imposes his will on the subjects out of personal ambition.[14] It is then not surprising that such success led to the creation of the traditional figure of Richard III which ended up overshadowing the presence of some ambiguous aspects in More's text as regards both Richard's portrayal and More's handling of Humanist conceptions of history. These aspects have recently been recognised and deserve to

13 It also did not hurt that More was an intellectual executed by another 'tyrant', Henry VIII, for daring speak against his intention to break the laws of his country.

14 Some would add a fourth factor, the proximity of the *History* to the so-called 'Tudor myth', i.e. the view of late medieval English history which saw the deposition of Henry VI by Edward IV, resulting from the War of the Roses, as the delayed punishment for the deposition of Richard II by Henry IV of Lancaster (Henry VI's grandfather). In turn, Richard III's usurpation was seen as the punishment for the House of York, marking the culmination of this story of punishments and revenge, ultimately concluding with the ascent to the throne of Henry VII Tudor, legitimate heir to both houses and therefore the man chosen by God as the new rightful ruler. This interpretation was first proposed within Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia*, and would go on to become dominant during the reign of the subsequent Tudor sovereigns, up to Elizabeth. We do have evidence that More's work was being used to sustain this ideological construction: as David Womersley has shown, Richard Grafton, the editor who incorporated More's work into his 1548 edition of Edward Hall's *Union* (see above), did change the texts in a few places in order to underline both Richard's evil nature and the 'providentiality' of Tudor government (see Womersley 1993, 280-8). However, recent scholarship tends to distance More's *History* from the 'Tudor myth': More's disdain for Henry VII is well-known (see Logan in More 2005, xxi, 96-7) and the *History* cannot be appreciated as a vehicle of propaganda: see Siemon in Shakespeare 2009, 53.

be briefly mentioned, if only because some of them will later be reprised by both Shakespeare and Cornwallis.

We can begin by focusing on an already mentioned important point of More's text: the reaction of the people of London to Buckingham 'convincing' Richard to accept the throne. While the deception is immediately recognised as such, not only does this recognition not undermine the success of the plan, but, on the contrary, some of the people see nothing wrong in what happened:

> Some excused that again, and said all must be done in good order, though. And men must sometimes for the manner sake not be aknowen what they know. For at the consecration of a bishop, every man wotteth well, by the paying for his bulls, that he purposeth to be one, and though he pay for nothing else. And yet must he be twice asked whether he will be bishop or not, and he must twice say nay, and at the third take it as compelled thereunto by his own will. And in a stage play all the people know right well that he that playeth the sowdaine is percause a sowter. Yet if one should can so little good to show out of season what acquaintance he hath with him, and call him by his own name while he standeth in his majesty, one of his tormentors might hap to break his head, and worthy, for marring the play. And so they said that these matters be kings" games, as it were stage plays, and for the more part played upon scaffolds. In which poor men be but the lookers-on. And they that wise be, will meddle no farther. For they that sometimes step up and play with them, when they cannot play their parts, they disorder the play, and do themself no good. (More 2005, 94-5)

The use of the theatrical metaphor (much loved by More)[15] here is ambiguous. The comparison that the people make between the deception by which Richard obtains the crown, the normal

15 Suffice it to mention its use in *Utopia*, where More uses it to reproach Raphael Hythlodaeus for his refusal to advise a sovereign. There, More states that all that is needed to give good advice to the sovereign is the counsellor's ability (and willingness) to play his part well according to the interlocutor's mood: "Quaecumque fabula in manu est, eam age quam potes optime, neque ideo totam perturbes quod tibi in mentem venit alterius quae sit lepidior" ("Go through with the drama in hand as best as you can, and don't spoil it all just because you happen to think of a play by someone else that might be more elegant"). I quote the text and translation from More 1995, 96-7.

ritual for the election of a bishop, and a theatrical performance suggests a perception of the whole of political life as "essentially theatrical, in the sense that there is no other 'objective' reality beyond or beneath the social conventions and fictions" (Yoran 2001, 529). Such a conclusion radically challenges a cornerstone of Humanist historiography, namely the historian's ability to arrive at the 'truth' by reinventing events so as to reveal the 'reality' of the characters. Through the commentary of the people of London, More shows how such a hope could well prove to be just a delusion: the only conclusion the people of London draw from observing and understanding Richard's 'performance' is that any political ceremony is inherently false, and that it is better not to meddle in matters that do not concern them, because true knowledge in such matters is impossible to achieve. The Humanist faith in history's ability to recognise an order behind the facts of history is thus radically challenged.

It is then probably no coincidence that, in the *History*, the reinvention of reality through rhetoric is presented as a tool for deception (cf. Yoran 2001, 530-4). Richard, Buckingham and their accomplices are shown as able to formulate excellent speeches, which succeed perfectly in their purpose (be it to deny the young Duke of York, Richard, the right of sanctuary, to kill Hastings on charges of treason or to have Richard declared king). The fact that the truth of their hidden intentions remains clear ends up underlining even more how easily these individuals were able to exploit the fragilities of a system whose conception of political activity was "inherently interpretive and performative" (Yoran 2001, 530). Nor is this condemnation reserved only for Richard; on the contrary, at times More seems implicitly to suggest that all the characters in his history are as guilty as he is of ambition and desire for power (see Yoran 2001, 519-22). Perhaps the most glaring example is the 'good king' Edward IV, whose presentation becomes increasingly ambiguous as the narrative progresses. Already his initial description contains ironic traits, such as the emphasis on his love for the pleasures of the table ("in his latter days with over-liberal diet somewhat corpulent and burly", More 2005, 5) and sex ("he was . . . greatly given to flesh wantonness"); in the latter case More, in order not to incur the reader's moral condemnation, even

has to specify that Edward satisfied himself "without violence", and that in any case he "in his latter days lessed and well left" this "fault". Edward's two subsequent appearances only further diminish his initial 'ideal' description. First, when More recounts how Richard, Duke of York, claimed the crown, his three sons – Edward, George and Richard – are all described, indistinctly, as "greedy and ambitious of authority" (9), without the 'virtuous' Edward being in any way separated from his brothers. Finally, during the great sequence of Edward IV's courtship of young widow Elizabeth Woodville (later his Queen, and mother of the princes Richard kills), on the one hand More suggests that the woman manipulated Edward's desire to exploit his favours ("she . . . denied him . . . so wisely, and with such good manner, and words so well set, that she rather kindled his desire", 71), and on the other hand Edward is shown to impose his own decision on the kingdom without caring about the good of the state, nor the counsel of friends ("he . . . asked the counsel of his other friends . . . in such manner as they might eath perceive it booted not greatly to say nay", 72). The ideal king of the beginning emerges here as a character in fact rather similar to his 'tyrannical' brother: both are ambitious, both desire power, both are ready to simulate and pretend in order to get what they want. These aspects undermine the apparent almost schematic simplicity of More's narrative, eventually suggesting that, however morally condemnable Richard may be, nevertheless his action "was in large part a product of a badly flawed system" (Breen 2010, 486; cf. Siemon in Shakespeare 2009, 57).

In this sense, More's text emerges (and has been recognised) as a complex work. While we do not need to think that More is lying about his or his contemporaries' opinion of Richard III, his awareness of the 'theatricality' of politics ultimately leads him to present an ultimately pessimistic picture of politics (and perhaps of history) as a den of ambition, falsehood and hypocrisy, where perhaps no real moral distinction can be traced among its participants.[16] In

16 So much so that, as Dan Breen (2010) notes, it is only when someone comes out of it that they become credible as a positive character. This is what happens to Edward IV who, on his deathbed, denounces the "pestilent serpent [of] ambition and desire of vainglory and sovereignty" (More 2005, 16) as the

this sense, we could say that *The History of King Richard the Third* contains within itself the awareness of its own 'fiction', that is, of being a relation of precise historical events whose truth, however, is perhaps not as certain as it would seem at first sight, and whose evaluation, though grounded on universal moral rules, still does not cover the whole story. The same ambiguity, forty years later, is at the heart of William Shakespeare's theatrical depiction of the sovereign in *Henry VI Part 3* and *Richard III*.[17]

3. Showing the Fiction: William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare's history play was the third theatrical adaptation of Richard III in Elizabethan England, following Thomas Legge's Latin tragedy *Richard Tertius* and the anonymous *The True Tragedy of Richard III*. These three theatrical adaptations of Richard's history have often been compared to one another many times in several studies, for the most part with the purpose to ascertain whether an influence from Legge and *The True Tragedy* can be recognised in Shakespeare's depiction of Richard. I do not have here the space to offer, in the following pages, a detailed comparison of the three plays and their characterisation of the sovereign (for which I refer to Majumder 2019, 139-56). What I will do it is to point out, in what shall be a necessarily brief survey, the main differences of Shakespeare's characterisation of Richard in comparison to the two previous texts, which gives his treatment of the character and his 'fiction' a quite peculiar flair. It is my opinion that those differences do represent a development of the Renaissance literary

cause of the ruin of states (the moral of More's text). "The tragedy of the *History* is that Edward can learn this only after he has begun the transformation from earthly king to divine subject, and his courtiers, stuck in the moral mire of royal politics, cannot but ignore his advice" (Breen 2010, 491-2).

17 An influence of More on Shakespeare's Richard III has often been suggested. According to Logan, "[Shakespeare's] is the Richard of More's *History* . . . Shakespeare took the wit and caustic irony of More's narrator and transferred them to Richard' (More 2005, xlvii-viii). James Siemon is less sure but acknowledges that "the effect of More's entertaining verbal insinuations constitutes a rough analogue for the effect of Shakespeare's master of ceremonies" (Shakespeare 2009, 60).

and historical consideration of Richard III that stands as a sort of 'middle ground' between More and Cornwallis, one where the negative interpretation of the character is still in place, but it is possible to see the first cracks opening. In order to do so, however, I do have to start with a brief description of the two plays preceding Shakespeare's, starting with Legge's *Richardus Tertius.*

Performed at St John's College, Cambridge around 1579,[18] and never printed during Shakespeare's time (in fact, not until the nineteenth century), the work enjoyed nonetheless a widespread circulation in manuscript form. Undoubtedly, this was due to the high prestige of his author, one of the first eminent tragedians of Elizabethan theatre, so renowned that, twenty years later, Francis Meres still cited him in his *Palladis Tamia* (1598), among the great tragic authors of English theatre. Rather than a single play, the work consists of three plays in five acts concerning three different phases of the story of Richard III, rewritten and reworked through the use of a linguistic style and dramatic patterns inspired by the tragedies of Seneca.[19] As for the actual plot, Legge follows quite closely, for the most part, the accounts given by Thomas More (in regard to the usurpation) and Edward Hall (for the part about Richard's death) (cf. Lordi in Legge 1979, vii). There are some exceptions and one is rather interesting. Part III of *Richardus Tertius* features a scene where Richard woos Princess Elizabeth, Edward IV's daughter, in order to persuade her to become his wife, thus strengthening his right to the crown. Robert Joseph Lordi noted that this scene presents similar aspects to the famous scene in Shakespeare's play showing Richard wooing Lady Anne (cf. Lordi in Legge 1979, 22-3). This is not the only similarity between Legge and Shakespeare's tragedies; on the contrary, as Siemon notes, "Legge and Shakespeare emphasize female roles and provide two major wooing scenes unparalleled in *True Tragedy*" (Shakespeare 2009, 75).

However, this is where their similarities end. In all other aspects,

18 I take information on the staging of the text from Legge 1979, v-vi, to which I also refer for my quotations of the Latin text and its parallel English translation.

19 "Bloody tyrant, stichomythic dialogue, choric observers, *nuntius* figures and animating supernatural spirits", as Siemon summarises them (Shakespeare 2019, 76).

as the majority of the scholars have noticed, the two plays could not be more different. This is especially true when it comes to Legge's depiction of Richard, who, in some ways, could be seen as the stark opposite of Shakespeare's. While the Shakespearean tyrant is a magnetic figure, a histrionic and entertaining performer by whom the audience is captivated and whose will, in a sense, shapes the play he is in, Legge's figure emerges as a complex figure who is only a part of a much larger political landscape. Instead of focusing on Richard's evil nature, Legge, especially in the first two parts of his tragedy, gives greater prominence to Richard's accomplices, who occasionally emerge as the real force behind Richard's plot for usurpation.[20] Legge also diminishes some of the more 'demonic' traits of Richard's traditional depiction. His deformity is never mentioned, while some space is given to some more 'tender' sides of Richard's character usually ignored by Elizabethan writers, such as the grief his son's death – the sentiment he expresses at the start of his first soliloquy in the play (3.3.1). However, as Dojeeta Majumder has shown (2019, 142-8), this does not mean that this Richard is not also a dissembler; on the contrary, throughout all the play, Richard's actions can be interpreted as a successful deception of his own accomplices, "manipulate[d] . . . into articulating the plan that he would never bring himself to speak" (144-5). The same soliloquy which opens with the expression of grief over his son ends up with him affirming that he will now pretend to have all the virtues of a sovereign in order for the people to love him ("Jam mitis, humanus, pius / et liberalis civibus meis ero", 3.3.1.66-7;" I will now become mild, humane, pious and liberal to my citizens"). Such a choice depicts Richard as a cunning, strategic dissembler, capable of manipulating people around him and aware of the way one has to behave in order to rule successfully and in peace. In this sense, we can say that Legge represents the most accurate theatrical rendition of the Ricardian 'legend' in its original features, the one devised

20 This is true especially for the character of Catesby, who is depicted as being more ruthless than Richard himself: he persuades Buckingham to help Richard (*Richard Tertius* 2.5.1), devises the plan to disgrace and kill Hastings, exploiting his relationship with Jane Shore (2.5.4), and convinces Richard then to woo Elizabeth, in an attempt to disrupt her proposed marriage with the Earl of Richmond (3.3.4).

by Thomas More: like him, Legge depicts the events surrounding Richard's usurpation as a game of "countless manipulations" (Majumder 2019, 143), and Richard himself as a sophisticated and consummate dissembler, even able to pass for innocent.

Things are much different in the second Elizabethan adaptation of Richard's 'legend', the anonymous *The True Tragedy of King Richard the Third.* Printed in 1594 in a quarto edition, the text represents the first adaptation we know of Richard III's story for the Elizabethan audience of the playhouses and the public theatre. On the title page, the tragedy is said to have been "playd by the Queenes Maiesties Players",[21] the main theatrical company of the time, and one which had already successfully staged some dramatic renditions of English history.[22] As several studies have stated (see McMillin-Maclean 1998 16, 28; Majumder 2019, 146), the company's relationship with the Queen made them vehicles of Tudor propaganda on the stage. It should then not come as a surprise that the depiction of Richard in this place is heavily influenced by the so-called 'Tudor-myth' (see above, n14), whose original purpose was to justify Henry VII's right to the crown. As a result, the tragedy not only follows closely the plot of More's *History*, but also changes it in order to highlight Richard's role as the villain. His deformity, ignored by Legge, is pointed out by the allegorical character of Truth at the beginning of the play ("A man ill shaped, crooked backed, lame armed", 1.57). Then, in his first soliloquy, Richard openly utters his desire to be king against all odds: "To be baser than a King I disdain . . . / No death nor hell shall not withhold me, but as I rule I will reign" (4.353, 374).[23] His actions are in stark contrast with that of Edward IV, whose last attempt to reconcile his warring nobles in order to secure a future for his sons opens the play. *The True Tragedy* thus re-proposes the contrast between the good king and the tyrant

21 My quotations from this text refer to An. 2005.

22 In the 1580s, the company had staged for example *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (first printed in 1598). See Walsh 2010, 57-67 for more details.

23 He has already started on his path to the crown, by "remov[ing] such logs . . . as my brother Clarence / And King Henry the Sixth" (369-70). This is a notable change from previous versions of the story, including that of More, which only stated that there were rumours that that Richard had committed those crimes.

which opened More's *History*, albeit in a version which takes away any ambiguity. The play then proceeds by readapting many of the major scenes in More's *History* (the plot against the Queen's family, Lord Hastings' demise, Richard's ascension to the throne, the killing of the princes and his fall into fear and confusion after that murder: "My conscience, witness of the blood I spilt, / Accuseth me as guilty", 14.1409-10) albeit in a way that exalts Richard's evil while downplaying that of his accomplices, such as Buckingham and Catesby, reduced to mere satellites of his will. Richard emerges here as someone endowed with "vehement single-mindedness, directness, and enthusiastic – if crude – agency" (Majumder 2019, 143) at the centre of the entire action of the play.

In regard to its form and style, *The True Tragedy* presents several features connecting it to the morality plays. The play starts with a dialogue between two allegorical characters, Poetry and Truth, who form a temporary alliance in order to tell the audience the 'true' story of Richard's usurpation.[24] Prominent among the characters is a Page of Richard, who, during the first half of the play, acts in a way similar to that of the Vice of early modern morality plays: like him, he talks to the audience commenting on Richard's actions (4.475-89, 10.893-917), while also actively helping carry them out. Most notably, it is he who, after leading Richard to admit he wishes for the death of his nephews ("I would have my two nephews . . . secretly murdered. Zounds, villain, 'tis out!", 10.992-4), finds the man to do it, James Tyrell. The Page's loyalty extends even after Richard's death. In the final scene of the play, as he recounts what happened at Bosworth to Report (another allegorical character), he keeps describing his master as "worthy Richard" (18.2028), exalting his valour even when his ultimate fate allows the other characters of the play to condemn his memory as that of a tyrant.[25] The play then ends with a celebration of the entire Tudor dynasty up to Elizabeth, where any negative aspects of sovereigns such as Mary

24 I refer to Walsh 2010, 76-84, for a more detailed analysis of this scene and the way it introduces into the play a topic regarding the relationship between fiction and truth in a history play.

25 Cfr. Walsh 2010, 88-9, for what this means in regard to the aforementioned theme of the relationship between fiction and truth in *The True Tragedy*.

Tudor or even Henry VIII are conveniently forgotten in order to convey the final message of a restoration of order after Richard's tyranny (cf. Walsh 2010, 99-100). Such an ending, which recalls the ending of many early modern English interludes or morality plays, which often featured a homage to particular patrons and a prayer for the Queen, confirms the status of *The True Tragedy* as the most overtly propagandistic amongst the three theatrical adaptations of Richard III's story.

In a sense, Shakespeare's rewriting of the Richard III 'legend' in his plays could be seen as a mixture between the two approaches of the previous plays. Like the plot of *The True Tragedy*, that of *Richard III* revolves around Richard's action as an evil, ambitious character ready to do anything to ascend to the throne. Some of the scenes in the central part of *Richard III* are even written by Shakespeare in a way that seems reminiscent of the earlier play,[26] including the finale, which also ends with a long celebratory speech by Henry VII on the prosperous future awaiting England. Both plays also present a character breaking the fourth wall and speaking to the audience, commenting on the action of the play (Richard's Page and Richard himself respectively). At the same time, Shakespeare's *Richard III* shares with Legge's *Richardus Tertius* the tendency to put Richard's action in context, by setting it up into a larger political horizon. While Richard is without question the villain, the play takes nonetheless great pains to highlight how he acts and talks in the context of a deeply fractured Court. In the first scene of *Richard III*, Clarence and Hastings both agree with Richard that Clarence's disgrace is to be blamed on the Queen's kinsmen (1.1.71-5, 126-33). And if for

26 As is the case of Richard's plot to murder his nephews. In both *Richard III* and *The True Tragedy*, the plan is hatched in a scene where Richard first hints at his intention while speaking with his primary accomplice (Buckingham and the Page respectively), then openly declaring it as they either do not understand him or pretend not to: "Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead, / And I would have suddenly performed it" (4.2.17-8; see above for the correspondent line in *The True Tragedy*). Immediately after, in Shakespeare, a Page of Richard mentions Tyrell to him and introduces him to the king, just like his counterpart in *The True Tragedy*. It would not be implausible to regard this scene as Shakespeare reprising and expanding a scene from that earlier play.

Clarence it could be said that this is due to Richard lying about it to cover his own tracks (he did admit, in his previous soliloquy, to have laid plots "to set . . . Clarence and the King / In deadly hate", 34-5), no such excuse stands for Hastings, whom Richard is never shown deceiving, and who shall later reiterate his hatred for the Queen's kinsmen, as he is informed they are to be beheaded ("I am no mourner for that news, / Because they still have been my adversaries", 3.2.50-1). A similar reasoning can be made about Buckingham: since there is not a scene in *Richard III* where we see Richard persuading him to aid him, we are left to conclude that he too is helping Richard out of his own interest (indeed, he is the real mastermind behind the demise of the Queen's kinsmen: "I'll sort occasion . . . / To part the Queen's proud kindred from the Prince", 2.2.148, 150). We can then conclude that Shakespeare's plays combine a wider political horizon similar to that of Legge's play with the depiction of Richard as a damnable, ambitious villain reminiscent of the character's portrayal in *The True Tragedy*.

In both cases, Shakespeare puts his own spin on both features, expanding what his predecessors did in a way that ends up adding new aspects to the 'legend' of Richard III. This is also due to the fact that, unlike the two previous texts, *Richard III* is not a separate work, but the fourth part of a historical tetralogy staging the whole War of the Roses.[27] This fact immediately changes Richard's story, giving it a meaning that it did not have in any of the previous texts, including More's *History*: that of the last act of a social and political crisis involving the entire kingdom. This link is reinforced within the text by the numerous cross-references to the events of the previous play in the cycle, *Henry VI Part 3*, which closely link the events of the two works in a way that is at the same time historical (it highlights how Richard's usurpation is the last act of the civil war) and theatrical (it relies on the audience's memory of the previous play; cf. Walsh 2010, 145-8). These references are both scenic (such as the body of Henry VI on stage during the scene

27 As Mary Thomas Crane (1985) pointed out, this dramatic construction is unique in its period: although Elizabethan audiences were used to seeing dramas divided into several parts, we have no other examples of 'tetralogies' of dramas, historical or otherwise.

of Richard's courtship of Lady Anne which bleeds in the presence of his murderer: 1.2.55-63; the murder had been staged in *Henry VI Part 3* 5.6) and verbal, like Queen Margaret's curses on the members of the York family (1.3.195-213, 299-300) as punishment either for the usurpation of the throne or for the murder of her son, Prince Edward (staged in *Henry VI Part 3* 5.5.38-40),[28] or Clarence's dream before being killed, when he sees Warwick and Edward of Lancaster reminding him of his betrayal (1.4.48-57).[29] This continual evocation of previous events suggests that Richard's usurpation is hardly the isolated action of a particularly ambitious and evil man leading a peaceful kingdom to ruin to satisfy his own ambition. On the contrary, it represents the continuation of a cycle of death and revenge engulfing the late medieval history of the English kingdom as depicted in the three parts of *Henry VI*. This also helps explaining some notable choices made by Shakespeare in regard to which events to stage in *Richard III*. Neither Legge nor the author of *True Tragedy* included Clarence's death or Richard's marriage to Lady Anne in their play, and Shakespeare only briefly mentions Jane Shore and discards the complex deception against the Queen's kinsmen present in both his predecessors, only having a Messenger saying to Elizabeth that they were arrested off-scene (2.4.43-9). The impression is that Shakespeare intends to focus more on characters who can be linked to previous events, rather than giving space to those whose fate is solely concerned with Richard.

The constant cross-references serve the purpose to emphasise that, as cruel, ambitious and deceitful as Richard is, his victims, before they become such, were no better. Margaret's curses against those who wronged her remind the audience of the cruel acts of violence perpetrated by the Yorkists, as well of the fact that Edward IV's power derives from usurpation and deceit. Clarence's dream highlights his previous betrayals of both his brother and his father-in-law, motivated by nothing but ambition. And, as already

28 Her words will be then recalled by most of the people she had addressed when they are fulfilled: see 3.3.14-6 (for the Queen's kinsmen); 3.4.92-3 (Hastings); 4.1.44-6 and 4.4.79-81 (Queen Elizabeth); 5.1.25-9 (Buckingham).

29 In the same scene, the murderers sent by Richard recall the same betrayal as a justification for rejecting his pleas to be spared: 1.4.202-9.

mentioned, Shakespeare depicts Edward's court as fractured in factions fighting for power independently from Richard's action. This last point could also be seen as a continuation of a discourse begun in *Henry VI Part 3*. In that play, there was virtually no difference between Richard and the other characters: they were all shown by Shakespeare as driven by ambition, desire for revenge and cruelty, embedded in a cycle of vendettas and counter-vendettas eventually resulting in the dissolution of every social and familiar bond (cf. Hattaway in Shakespeare 2009, 10; Heavey 2016). Richard's bombastic outbursts about the hardness of his heart in the first two acts of the play ("I cannot weep, for all my body's moisture / Scarce serves sto quench my furnace-burning heart", 2.1.79-80) were not enough to make him stand out, since similar expressions could be found in the mouths of other characters. Even after Richard declared, in his first soliloquy (3.2.124-95), his decision to become king, it was only at the end of the play, with his killing of Henry VI, that he had started to act autonomously. One wonders at this point whether the famous antithesis presented by Richard in his soliloquy at the start of *Richard III* between the "glorious summer" created by the "son of York" (1.1.2) and his condition as a hunchback, which makes it impossible for him to enjoy it ("I cannot prove a lover / To entertain these fair well-spoken days") and therefore induces him "to prove a villain" (28-9), should not be read as Richard's decision to remain tied to the atmosphere of the previous trilogy, and in doing so forcing the other characters as well as the audience to come to terms with the hidden truth of Edward's apparently 'peaceful' victory. This is reminiscent of Legge's treatment of Richard's action, in *Richardus Tertius*, as the focal point of a complex power game where Richard was far from being the only one guilty of dissimulation. This time, however, the historical and theatrical horizon has been expanded to include events prior to the 'legend', thus showing how that peaceful kingdom apparently postulated by More at the beginning of the *History* never existed in the first place: instead of being the monster ruining everything out of personal desire, Richard is but the last link of a blood-stained chain of events.

And speaking of Richard's villainy, there are two noticeable features about the way Shakespeare depicts it. Once again, we are talking about traits which could already be traced in *True*

Tragedy but which Shakespeare develops in a significantly different way. The first is the well-known, marked insistence on Richard's 'theatricality', on his abilities as a 'performer', about which the character proudly boasts already in his first soliloquy:

> Why, I can smile, and murder while I smile,
> And cry "Content!" to that which grieves my heart,
> And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
> And frame my face to all occasions.
> I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall,
> I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk,
> I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
> Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could,
> And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.
> I can add colours to the chameleon,
> Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
> And set the murderous Machiavel to school.
> (*Henry VI Part* 3 3.2.181-95)

The evocation of various literary, mythological and even 'contemporary' (Machiavellian – albeit in a way that is more reminiscent of the stage figure of the 'Machiavellian' than the actual political theories of the Florentine thinker)[30] models of different figures of deceivers (or at least orators, as in the case of Nestor) underlines Richard's capacity for 'metamorphosis', his ability to wear various masks like a consummate actor. It is the beginning of a

30 Much has been written about the relationship of Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard in connection with either Machiavelli's thought, or the stage character of the 'Machiavellian' as conceived and performed on Elizabethan stage (see Siemon in Shakespeare 2009, 8-10). It should be noted that, even if officially Elizabethan culture condemned Machiavelli as a damnable teacher of iniquity, his works were translated and read in England (see Petrina 2009), and influenced the work of other contemporary dramatists such as Christopher Marlowe (see Ribner 1954, 354-6). Anne McGrail has particularly studied the relationship between *Richard III* and Machiavelli's political theories, suggesting that the play represent "a Shakespearean comment on whether it is possible for a man to be completely evil to further his own ends" (2001, 49). She highlights how Richard's final failure to shut down his remorse declares him as an imperfect student of Machiavelli's theories (2001, 57-60).

leitmotif that continues in the character's subsequent appearances. At the end of *Henry VI Part 3*, the titular character asks Richard who has come to kill him: "What scene of death hath Roscius now to act?" (5.6.10), comparing him to the celebrated Roman actor. *Richard III* opens with the aforementioned decision of Richard, in his opening soliloquy, to play the 'role' of the villain, and it then presents a series of scenes where Richard shows his ability to play different roles according to the different situations he is in: a lover in the courtship scene of Lady Anne (1.2), a righteous courtier offended in his honour in front of the Queen's kinsmen (1.3, 2.1), a devoted uncle to the young King Edward V (3.1). The sequence reaches its climax in the central scenes of the play, where, as Richard and Buckingham manipulate the citizens of London into proclaiming Richard king, the metaphor of the theatre reappears in full force. "I can counterfeit the deep tragedian", says Buckingham (3.5.5) as he and Richard, dressed in old armour, prepare to deceive the mayor about the truth of Hastings' death (an episode that Shakespeare takes directly from More). Two scenes later, Buckingham suggests that Richard "play the maid's part: still answer nay, and take it" (3.7.50) as the two stage the final deception whereby Richard obtains the throne. In addition to this insistent use of a theatrical imagery to indicate the action of the usurper, Richard often delivers soliloquies, in which he informs the audience of his plans and comments on his actions. This is a stylistic feature that, as noted in many studies on the character, connects Shakespeare's character to the Vice of the morality plays,[31] in a way that recalls what the author of *The True Tragedy* had already done with the character of Richard's Page. Once again, however, Shakespeare's reprisal of this feature shows a wider, deeper use of it. In *The True Tragedy*, the Page was an accomplice of Richard, a secondary character involved in the action, but not its main focus. The Page became thus a sort of chorus figure commenting on an action developing in front of his eyes as well as those of the audience. In Shakespeare, this convention is applied to Richard himself, thus

31 See Spivack (1958) on the influence of the Vice on a specific type of Shakespearean villain: besides Richard III, also Iago and Don Juan in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Richard himself remarks: "Like the formal Vice, Iniquity, / I moralize two meanings in one world" (3.1.81-2).

strengthening the impression of a play dominated by the will of his main character, depicted as a consummate actor putting on a show the audience is called to witness.

The closeness that is thus created between Richard and the audience could be a dangerous one, as part of the audience in Shakespeare's time knew well. We know from Alan Somerset (1997-1998) that some churchmen ended up protesting and criticising the success the Vices had on the audience of morality plays: their gags and their speeches obscured the moral intent of the play, creating in the audience a dangerous sense of sympathy and admiration for what technically was the incarnation of evil in the play. The same has been said about Shakespeare's Richard III's effect on audiences of any time, even modern ones, as proven by the multiple attempts to 'humanise' him, to go beyond the monster and find a more complex character behind it (see Siemon in Shakespeare 2009, 79-123, for a detailed history). By fascinating the audience to assist to and enjoy the 'play' of his own evil, Richard strikes a pact of complicity with the audience, which is based on a particular 'perversion' of the implicit pact between audience and actors at the heart of theatre of any time – that of accepting as truthful what is shown on stage. Except, in this case, this pact also highlights how 'fictional' Richard's depravity is. From *Henry VI Part 3* we know that the world in which Richard operates is not as black-and-white as Richard would have us believe: Edward is far from being "as true and just / As [Richard is] subtle, false and treacherous" (1.1.36-7); Clarence was an ambitious backstabber; Hastings lies to his king as he swears to abandon his hatred for the Queen's kinsmen; all of the members of York family were once bloody murderers and accomplices in the deposition of Henry VI and the extermination of his family. Richard may pretend to be a devil, but it is only a pose; in reality, his evil is really nothing new.

This is highlighted by the way Shakespeare insists on the presumed relationship between Richard's wickedness and his deformity. This traditional datum, virtually absent in Legge and only mentioned in *The True Tragedy*, is ubiquitous in Shakespeare's texts, especially in the character's first three soliloquies. Richard draws a cause-and-effect connection between his physical deformity and his choice for evil:

> Then, since this earth affords no joy to me
> But to command, to check, to o'erbear such
> As are of better person than myself,
> I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown
> And, whiles I live t'account this world but hell,
> Until my misshaped trunk that bears this head
> Be round impaled with a glorious crown.
> (*Henry VI Part* 3 3.2.165-71)

> For I have often heard my mother say
> I came into the world with my legs forward.
> Had I not reason, think ye, to make haste,
> And seek their ruin that usurped our right?
> The midwife wondered and the women cried,
> 'O, Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth!'
> And so I was, which plainly signified
> That I should snarl, and bite and play the dog.
> (5.6.70-7)

> I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
> Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
> I, that am rudely stamped, and want love's majesty
> To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
> I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
> Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature,
> Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
> Into this breathing world . . .
> I am determined to prove a villain.
> (*Richard III* 1.1.14-21, 30).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, passages like these led Sigmund Freud to use Richard III as an exemplary manifestation of the psychoanalytic typology of the 'exception', that is, of the sick man who believes to be beyond the law because of his atypical traits. As is well known, many studies took up Freud's suggestion and directly applied it to Shakespeare's Richard (see Siemon in Shakespeare 2009, 5; Cox and Rasmussen in Shakespeare 2019, 75-81). I would like to suggest another interpretation; one that, in my opinion, fits more into the original literary tradition about Richard.

We could say that here Richard is repeating, in the intimacy of his conscience, that path from physical deformity to moral deformity that, years earlier, had opened More's *History*. In that text, the description of Richard's deformity acted as a prelude to that of his usurpation; now, this mechanism is taken up and reinterpreted as an internal movement within the character's psychology. The assumption of the villain's 'role' is presented as the result of a process of observation and interpretation of certain facts about him – almost as if Richard had decided to write his own history, reinterpreting his entire past in order to justify his present choices.

And yet, this connection between deformity and wickedness established by Richard has no objective counterpart. In *Henry VI Part 3*, it is only members of the Lancastrian faction that harp upon Richard's deformity in terms of scorn, such as Margaret (1.4.75-7) or Clifford (2.2.96). No member of the Yorkist faction even slightly notices it or comment upon it. In *Richard III*, it is only after Richard's usurpation of the throne that other characters begin to make the connection between Richard's villainy and his deformity, retroactively interpreting it as an early sign of his brutal nature (such as the Duchess of York, his mother, at 4.4.166-70).[32] Before that, even those who suspect that Richard hates them, like Elizabeth, never seem to make that connection. The final impression is that the relationship of cause-and-effect between Richard's body and his mind is actually the result of a collectively accepted fiction, which, however, is not based on concrete evidence. Significant, from this point of view, is a passage noted by Brian Walsh (2010, 148-9), where the young Duke of York recalls that Richard was born with teeth (one of the traditional omens around Richard's birth, present in More and already mentioned by Richard himself in his second and last soliloquy in *Henry VI Part 3*; see above). When asked who told him this, York replies that it was Richard's nurse; however, his grandmother (the Duchess of York) replies that this is impossible: the woman died before the duke was born. "I cannot tell who told me" (2.4.34), admits then the young man. In this passage, knowledge derived only from an oral account, from a rumour (the

32 The only exception is Margaret, who, however, as the widow of Henry VI, is of the Lancastrian faction.

basis of More's *History*), is indicated as potentially false.[33] In this way, Shakespeare manages to undermine the same 'fiction' he is staging without breaking it: while Richard is evil, the assumption that his wickedness is 'natural' (i.e. declared even by his birth) is shown to be a retroactive interpretation of events not based on the reality of what we see on scene.

In my opinion, this balance between the respect of Richard's 'fiction' and its questioning is at the heart of Shakespeare's depiction of the character. Shakespeare put together all the basic elements of the story of Richard as presented by his predecessors, from More's description of Richard as a dissembler, to Legge's political context, to the reprise of some stylistic features inspired to the morality plays already present in the *True Tragedy*.[34] In doing so, he also rewrote them, in a way that ends up showing the fundamental contradiction at the heart of Richard III's 'fiction'. The continuous evocation of the War of the Roses diminishes the distance between Richard and his supposed victims, reminding the audience that the very people killed and deceived by the tyrant were, one time, just as ambitious and cruel as he was. His much-boasted choice of playing the 'villain', highlighted by Shakespeare's decision to apply to Richard some features typical of the Vice figure ends up highlighting by contrast how much this stance of his is merely a role, a fiction Richard shares with a 'complicit' audience. The emphasis he puts on his deformity as evidence of his evil nature is also proved to be a retroactive interpretation of events, based on rumours and conventions rather than on a documented 'truth'. As a result, Shakespeare foregrounds and expands on the ambiguity that was lurking underneath More's *History*. In his hands, the 'legend' of

33 In this, perhaps, Shakespeare is following the anonymous author of *The True Tragedy*. As Walsh points out, the relationship between historical data and their interpretation is central to that tragedy, an aspect that is foregrounded both at the beginning of the play (which begins with a dialogue between Poetry and Truth, which ends up emphasising how history is, in itself, fiction) and at the end (where Richard's Page refuses to lend himself to denigrating his fallen master at Bosworth): see Walsh 2010, 76-81, 88-94.

34 In doing so, Shakespeare also manages to craft the work which is the fullest account of this same literary tradition, whose continuous success will keep it alive even beyond his original literary and cultural context.

Richard III is shown to be an ideological construct, a 'fiction' whose relationship with reality and history is at the most a simplification of historical events that were actually much more complex and that would require a more attentive look to be thoroughly, rightly understood – which is exactly what, a few years later, William Cornwallis would write in his paradox.

4. Dispersing the Fiction: William Cornwallis

Little is known about William Cornwallis the Younger, but the scant information we have enables us to place him in a precise social, cultural and political environment. Born in 1576, William was the scion of an important family. His father, Sir Charles Cornwallis, was a well-known diplomat at the court of James I: he was the English ambassador to Spain in 1604-1607, and then treasurer to Henry, Prince of Wales, from 1610 to 1612. His uncle, William Cornwallis the Elder, was related by marriage to the Cecil family, and enjoyed the support and protection of Robert Cecil himself, even though this support did not help him establish a career at court (on the contrary, he had to withdraw twice to avoid the wrath of Elizabeth, possibly because of his alleged Catholicism). William Cornwallis the Younger received an excellent education, possibly at Oxford, and was knighted during the Earl of Essex's expedition to Ireland in 1599. He evidently tried to imitate his father and uncle in pursuing a political career by occupying some government posts (he was also a Member of Parliament twice). However, these attempts do not seem to have been successful. On the contrary, William seems to have been best known for his large extravagant expenses, which he could only afford thanks to the financial help (not always given heartily) of his father and uncle. This help was, however, lacking in the latter part of his life, so much so that William died almost destitute in 1614. However, he seemed to enjoy some fame as a literary author. Some of his paradoxes and essays were published already during his lifetime (*Essayes Part I*, 1600; *Part II*, 1601), while others (including the "Praise of King Richard the Third"), which found their way to publication after his death, enjoyed a wide circulation in manuscript. In more than a few respects, Cornwallis'

biography seemingly retraces some steps as that of the other great English paradoxical author of these years, John Donne (and he and Cornwallis were friends). Like him, Cornwallis descended from a wealthy recusant family, tried to secure this position in various ways, such as a military career first and a literary career later, and would go on to become an admired model for later English literature (in this case, for paradoxes). His surviving literary works shows an undeniable display of a great literary culture, which is even more evident if we consider that it proves to have not a few links with some of the most advanced peaks of literary and political culture on the European continent.

The "Praise of King Richard the Third", in this respect, is probably Cornwallis' masterpiece. Its model and inspiration is probably the "Neronis Encomium" by the Milanese philosopher and mathematician Girolamo Cardano (written in Latin and first published in Basel in 1562, together with other works of the same author), directly quoted in the "Praise": "*Culpatur factum, non ob aliud, quam exitum*: they approve, or disprove all things by the event" (Cornwallis 2018-2019, 38). Even without postulating a direct influence, however, it is impossible not to notice that the two texts share many points of contact.[35] Both texts are encomiums of two of the most eminent tyrant figures of European/English culture, aimed at showing that they were, in fact, good rulers. Both emphasise how historical sources regarding the figure of reference are unreliable, as they are prejudiced against those sovereigns. Both offer a provocative reinterpretation of the ideal of the good ruler, inspired by Machiavelli's political theories, in order to prove that the actions of their tyrant were actually those of a truly good ruler according to the 'reality' of sovereignty (in doing so, they also accuse the traditional model of good sovereign to be either faulty or downright false).[36] Finally, both affirm the importance, for the reader, of not judging the character's actions by themselves, but contextualising

35 I repeat here, in a shorter form, what I have already said at greater length in Dall'Olio 2022, 238-43, on the main features of Cardano's text and its similarities to Cornwallis'.

36 See Di Branco in Cardano 2005, 19-25 for a closer consideration of Machiavelli's influence on Cardano's political thought.

them in the historical and political setting of their time. The most relevant difference between the two texts lies, perhaps, in the fact that while the "Neronis Encomium" seems to have the ambition to stand as a critique of the entire Humanist political culture (so much so that Cardano does not invite readers to see his text as a pure literary game, unlike Cornwallis), the "Praise of King Richard the Third" limits itself to a simpler discussion of a specific case of the literary and political tradition. In doing so, however, Cornwallis nonetheless emerges as a careful reader of this same tradition, capable of overturning point by point all the basic data that had been established since the writing of Thomas More's *History*,[37] and seemingly reaffirmed in Shakespeare's plays.

First of all, Cornwallis demolishes More's reliance on the opinion and/or hearsay of the author's contemporaries. He retorts that these testimonies cannot be trusted: the people of that era were "so light-headed, so foolish, so irreligious, as their opinion . . . made them break their oath to their Prince [Henry VI] . . . only because he was too good" (Cornwallis 2018-2019, 24). Further on, Cornwallis directly attacks the folly of relying on the authors of the chronicles of the time, "whose greatest authorities . . . are built upon the notable foundation of hear-say" (34); shortly afterwards, he addresses the same criticism to his own contemporaries, who prefer to believe "the partial writings of indiscreet chroniclers and witty play-makers, than his laws and actions" (40). We find here the same insistence on historical context that, in Shakespeare's plays, already undermined the presentation of Richard's victims as innocent. This time, however, Cornwallis takes the argument to its logical conclusion: by explicitly stating that Richard's action took place in a historical context marked by the conclusion of a civil war, Cornwallis is basically denying that his action displayed any evident differences from that of other historical characters of that period. To that, Cornwallis adds that, aside from his usurpation, no other news of Richard's negative traits as a character

37 On this point, it worth noticing that Cornwallis structures his text in a way that recalls More's *History*: he begins with a physical description of the character, then moves on to an account of how his father and brother obtained the crown, before providing an account of Richard's usurpation of the throne up until his death; see Medori in Cornwallis 2018-2019, 22n2.

has survived, unlike with Edward IV. Of him, Cornwallis said that he "obtained the crown . . . rather fortunately then wisely, were not all wisdom thought folly, to which Fortune lends not success" (24-5)[38], and immediately afterwards jeopardised his conquests with a marriage (with Elizabeth Woodville) born of purely carnal desire.[39] On the contrary, Richard "was neither luxurious, nor an *epicure* [sic], not given to any riot, nor to excess, neither in apparel, nor play: for had he been touched with any of these vices, doubtless they which object to lesser crimes would not have omitted these" (37). We have here a complete reversal of More's comparison of Richard and Edward as emblems of bad and good sovereignty: this time, it is Richard that emerges as the king respecting his subjects, and Edward as the one abusing of his power.

This detail opens up one of the most important elements of Cornwallis' defence of Richard, namely the absence in his behaviour of any action typical of a tyrant according to the morals of the time. This point is further expanded through reference to the laws enacted by Richard, defined by Cornwallis as "the most innocent and impartial witnesses" (40) of the sovereign's actions. This insistence on written laws reflects the profound change in the very conception of history that occurred in the second half of the sixteenth century. It began with the work of authors such as François Baudouin (*De institutione historiae universae*, 1561) and Jean Bodin (*Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem*, 1566), whose texts (which transferred to the field of history methods and perspectives that had originated in the field of law) proposed a new model of historiographical writing based upon the critical reading of sources in their original context in order to better understand their meaning (cf. Grafton 2007, 68-9). The typically Humanist focus on the rhetorical reworking of historical events as a narrative is thus discarded in favour of a more 'accurate' reconstruction, which restricts the field of historical narrative to the mere exposition of the factual 'reality' traceable from the comparison

38 Ironically, this is a conclusion that would have pleased More, whose appreciation of irony and love for paradoxes was well-known, as well as his vision of the world based on the *contemptus mundi* tradition.

39 These words could aptly describe Shakespeare's depiction of Edward IV in *Henry VI Part 3* as a hot-headed, impulsive, luxurious character: see Whittle 2017, 245-56.

of materials. This also means that, during the second half of the sixteenth century, "the value of written documents as the evidentiary basis of knowledge about past events grew . . . Indeed, critical judgment denigrating the value of oral histories began to be expressed" (Walsh 2010, 141).[40] The criticism that Cornwallis (whose text presents no trace of either speeches or 'dramatic' reconstructions of historical facts) makes of the political and literary tradition on Richard easily falls within this theoretical framework. He uses references to the laws published under Richard's reign to prove that nothing there denounces the presence of a tyrannical attitude in his actions: "he was no taxer of the people, nor oppressor of the commons . . . no suppressor of his subjects, to satisfy either licentious humours, or to enrich light-headed flatterers" (37, 39). In other words, nothing in Richard's actions outside the literary tradition about his name (based on hearsay and rumour, not on concrete evidence) shows that he ever behaved like a tyrant, i.e. as a bad ruler who governs for himself by oppressing his own people and enriching himself by trampling on the rights of his subjects.[41] The only basis on which the traditional accusation of tyranny rests are his crimes to obtain the crown; and even these, Cornwallis argues, need to be properly understood and put into context.

Here we enter the most openly paradoxical part of Cornwallis' text, the one where he, rather than simply denying that Richard committed the crimes attributed to him,[42] takes pains to show how these were either necessary actions for his personal safety, or deeds he committed for the good of the country. This logic does not even

40 Walsh suggests that this change in cultural tradition about history is reflected also in Act 3 of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, where, however, Shakespeare seemingly criticises both sides of the question by showing how both oral witnesses and written documents can be manipulated: see Walsh 2010, 141-3.

41 Cornwallis was not the first one to make this point. As Boatwright (2023) notes, in 1523, the Mayor of London appealed to a law published by Richard to oppose an attempt of Wolsey to impose a tax on the city; in doing so, he declared that, although Richard was a tyrant, that was a good law.

42 However, Cornwallis, like More, does not hesitate to acknowledge that for some of these crimes, such as the murder of Henry VI or the complicity of Richard in the fall of Clarence, there is no concrete evidence.

spare the assassination of the Princes, openly praised as a work of policy typical of princes of all times and countries: "in policy, Princes never account competitors . . . innocent, since the least colour of right provokes innovating humours to stir up sedition" (44). The mention of the word 'policy', traditionally linked in Elizabethan political parlance to Machiavelli's political theories (cf. Bawcutt 1971), allows us to recognise the influence of a pivotal principle of that thought: the "crudelitas opportuna" (as Cardano defines it; cf. Dall'Olio 2020, 239-40), i.e. the crimes a prince commits to better ensure his power. Those crimes, Machiavelli said in the famous Chapter 15 of *The Prince*, were something a prince had to do out of necessity, and should be kept distinct from those he may commit out of pure cruelty, which, according to Machiavelli, should be absolutely avoided. In fact, Machiavelli openly invited the prince not to indulge in any vices that could endanger his relationship with the subjects and thus make them question his power over them. Moving from that principle, Cardano had already proved in the "Neronis Encomium" that every crime Nero committed could be interpreted along those lines: he either killed people that were threatening his life, or people whose existence was dangerous to the peace of the kingdom. Cornwallis (in this showing a knowledge of Machiavelli's thought that goes beyond the literary stereotypes of the time, present in Shakespeare) repeats the same pattern with Richard, insisting that his actions may have been unethical, but they were nevertheless appropriate for a ruler. As such, it cannot be regarded as cruelty, i.e. as an act of excessive violence performed without reason (typical of the Renaissance tyrant), but as a political choice, which every sovereign implements to solidify his power, and which in this case even benefited the country. He even expands on this idea in another passage of the text, where he affirms that "what is meet, expedient in a Prince, in a lower fortune is utterly unmeet, unexpedient" (46). That is, sovereigns move in a particular zone of human existence, different from that of their subjects, and their actions cannot be judged by the same standards as those of ordinary men.

This is also why, says Cornwallis, subjects should not rush to judge the actions of sovereigns: "our knowledge extends to things equal or inferior . . . in terrene matters (surpassing our estates) they are only snatched at by supposition" (47). Two different cultural

traditions come together here: on the one hand, the aforementioned influence of Machiavellian thought and its consideration of politics as a particular field of human experience endowed with its own rules; on the other, the conception of sovereignty proposed by the official Elizabethan ideology as that of a sacred institution, whose value surpasses the character of the person who embodies it.[43] However, a third element can also be identified, which links Cornwallis' text to More's *History*. We have seen how, in that text, the comment of the London people on the 'theatricality' of Richard's politics and actions concluded with the affirmation of the futility for the people to stand in judgement of the actions of sovereigns. It is not impossible to hypothesise that here Cornwallis is deliberately taking up and extending the ambiguity of More's passage, thus making explicit the subtext on the impossibility of true reliability of historical narratives. Indeed, Cornwallis seems to suggest that, due to the subjects' 'ignorance' of what a king's status really entailed, any judgement on a sovereign's activities that is not based on an observation of impartial testimonies (such as his laws) is fundamentally flawed. The Humanist faith in the ability of the rhetorical reinvention of history to explain the course of events through a credible reconstruction of the psychology of characters (of which More was somewhat sceptical, and which Shakespeare, in a sense, already questioned in his historical plays precisely by highlighting how 'fictional' the traditional character of Richard III was) is here openly denied by Cornwallis. Subjects, he says, do not really know what it means to be a king: their knowledge is imperfect and therefore cannot be taken as a reliable source of historical judgment.

Moving towards the conclusion, it only remains to consider what is perhaps Cornwallis' most direct and explicit attack on the tradition of Richard III: his reassessment of ambition, the human vice whose condemnation was at the heart of More's text, as well as a cornerstone of the traditional negativity of the 'legend' about the king. Cornwallis' paradox opens with a veritable reversal of this position, presenting ambition as a quality proper to kings: "princes

43 That is, the famous "two-body" theory of the king, transferred by English jurists from the ecclesiastical to the political sphere.

are naturally ambitious . . . ambition makes them to effect their desires . . . princes err against nature, if they aspire not" (21). Later, Cornwallis reiterates this point by stating that Richard "was not ambitious enough" (40), since he did not wage any wars and merely governed his kingdom in peace. The vice so heavily condemned by More, the tyrant's most grievous fault according to Elizabethan political doctrine (that of desiring more than he was entitled to), is here changed into a positive quality. Far from causing the ruin of a kingdom, it drives a king to do good for his people, to seek glory and valour, to enrich himself and his land so as to display his magnificence. In this exaltation, Cornwallis' paradox presents a significant point of contact with another 'heretical' text from the 1590s, Christopher Marlowe's tragedy *Tamburlaine* (1587-1588), whose main character (the first real tyrant of the Elizabethan tragic theatre) was delineated as an alternative figure of a good ruler. During the events of that tragedy, Tamburlaine is shown successfully building an empire through a calculated alternation of virtues typical of the good ruler (sincere friendship towards his vassals, love for his bride Zenocrates) and some of the crimes usually attributed to the tyrant (cruelty).[44] In this way, Tamburlaine managed to overcome the obstacle of his own low-class birth ("I am a lord, for so my deeds shall prove, / And yet a shepherd by my parentage", *Tamb.* 1.2.34-5)[45] and to prove that he was indeed worthy of the throne he so openly wishes for. For him, ambition is not shown as a condemnable quality, but rather as a positive desire for glory and fame, leading him not only to desire kingship, but also to the desire of being worthy of it. This is proved by the end of Part One, where he, in his only soliloquy in the entire play (5.2.72-127), decides to listen to Zenocrates' pleas and spare her father's life, deciding it is proper for a warrior and a king to be conquered by love (see Rhodes 2013, 209-10; Dall'Olio 2022, 235). With this decision, Tamburlaine does indeed show that his desire for glory is sincere, and that he is indeed, in spite of his cruelties, an honourable man, worthy of a throne 'because' he has the right qualities for it. Cornwallis in his paradox affirms that the same positive quality

44 On this interpretation of Tamburlaine, see Dall'Olio 2022, 232-8; 246-7.
45 I quote the text from Marlowe 2011.

has to be assigned to Richard, whose choice to usurp the throne is motivated with a love of glory, typical of "a true heroic spirit, whose affect is aspiring" (30).

On that note, Cornwallis' words can remind us of a passage in Shakespeare. At the beginning of *Henry VI Part 3*, as he encourages his father (Richard of York) to once again revolt against Henry VI and occupy the throne, Richard reminds him "how sweet a thing it is to wear a crown, / Within those circuits is Elysium / And all that poets feign of bliss and joy" (1.2.28-30). Those words are an echo of Marlowe's Tamburlaine, who in *Tamburlaine Part 1* does indeed define "the sweet fruition of an earthly crown" as "the ripest fruit of all . . . / That perfect bliss and sole felicity" (2.7.28-9), as he prepares to make the first steps to obtain it. This verbal repetition has two results. On the one hand, it implicitly equates Richard and Tamburlaine as two characters driven by ambition, thus anticipating the later decision by Richard to pursue a crown for himself (and he too, like Tamburlaine, sees power as the happiest state of bliss he can obtain). From that point of view, it is telling that several studies have noticed how Shakespeare's depiction of Richard echoes Marlovian characters such as Tamburlaine and Barabas, the protagonist of *The Jew of Malta*: dissemblers and manipulators, ready to commit any crimes to satisfy their desires.[46] On the other, though, it is also telling that, in that scene, Richard is not talking to himself, but to his father, and that the opinion he is expressing is not just his own, but that of his brother Edward (the future Edward IV). Once again, Richard is shown to be just one of many ambitious and power-hungry characters, for whom the pursuit of a crown is seen as a worthy reward of personal value in spite of established laws and norms. The logic they operate upon is the same one as that of Cornwallis as he justifies Richard's crimes as the fruit of a desire for glory and power which, according to him, is the mark of the true greatness of a prince – albeit with the important difference

46 The comparison is explicitly striking with Barabas. Like Richard, he too speaks to the audience about the evil plans he is going to commit and affirms to be inspired by Machiavelli's teachings; they also both displays traces of religious hypocrisy, while also revealing faults in other characters through their action (see Siemon in Shakespeare 2009, 10).

that Shakespeare, unlike Cornwallis, also highlights how this same logic leads eventually to the ruin of an entire kingdom (but then again, Shakespeare is not writing a paradox).

To sum up, the "Praise of King Richard the Third" represents a complex text whose link with the Elizabethan literary tradition on Richard is both oppositional and continuous. On the one hand, Cornwallis openly questions the foundations of this tradition in the name of a profound change both in the conception of historical writing (with the increasingly greater importance attributed to critical analysis of written sources over reliance on oral tradition) and in that of what constitutes a good king, who is recognised (in the wake of Machiavelli) as having the right/duty to assume 'tyrannical' traits in order to make his own governmental action successful. On the other, this same critique takes up and develops ambiguous traits present in that same tradition, already present in More's *History* and Shakespeare's plays, so that we could say that, in a sense, Cornwallis is destroying the literary tradition about Richard from within. The result is that, through the instruments of paradox, Cornwallis ends up denouncing the traditional image of Richard for what it is: a literary and political fiction, ideologically determined and linked to the culture of a precise historical period. This is a fundamental operation, which is a prelude to the real historical rehabilitation of the character which shall begin only three years after the publication of Cornwallis' paradox with the publication of George Buck's *History of King Richard III* (1619). It is at least debatable, however, whether this rehabilitation would have even begun if Cornwallis had not laid the ground for it by saying for the first time, out loud, what everyone (including More and Shakespeare) either knew or suspected – that the traditional image of Richard III, while not strictly false, was not precisely the truth.

5. Conclusion

Modern defenders of Richard should be more grateful to Cornwallis. True, we may say that he did not really try to defend Richard against the charges of tyranny, and he only intended to write a paradox in which he had fun reversing the traditional negative

assessment of this figure, with no pretence of actually changing the way in which he was seen by his contemporaries. And yet, with his "Praise" the author performed an important, I would say fundamental, operation, that would prepare and anticipate a more open historical rehabilitation of the character. Cornwallis' text re-examines the basis on which the traditional image of the character had been formed starting with Thomas More's *History of King Richard the Third* before reaching his fullest and most famous literary adaptation in Shakespeare's *Henry VI Part 3* and *Richard III*. Cornwallis underlines how groundless and unreliable this tradition actually was. The word of Richard's contemporaries (More's only declared source, and the basis for the 'reality' of his account) is pointed out as prejudicial and insufficient; the political background of the War of the Roses, unobserved by More, is highlighted again in order to show how Richard was in a sense 'forced' to act as he did; the ideal of a good sovereign underlying Richard's condemnation is revealed as an erroneous notion and revised in the light of a new political theory influenced by Machiavelli's thought. As a result, Cornwallis' "Praise" can be seen as the first explicit declaration of the historical invalidity of the traditional image of the character, the first text to emphasise how the description of Richard III is the result of a particular interpretation of historical facts, ideologically determined according to the values of a definite historical and literary context. Cornwallis' "Praise" thus performs the preliminary action to a 'serious' historical re-evaluation of Richard, the refutation of the traditional image.

This essay has also showed how, in doing so, Cornwallis exploited an ambiguity that had always lurked, in a sense, underneath the literary tradition of Richard III. In spite of its apparently simple moral, Thomas More already hinted at a less black-and-white interpretation of Richard's history, based on a more pessimistic view of politics as a parade of lies and deceit. Later Shakespeare, while on the surface respecting the traditional interpretation of the sources, adapted Richard's story in a way that emphasised some of its more problematic sides. On the one hand, he showed how his story was only a part of a much larger political crisis, dominated by several figures of power-hungry and ambitious people, not so different from Richard himself. On the other, Shakespeare also

highlighted how Richard's traditional villainy was an eminently literary construction by having him behave and act in a way reminiscent of the Vice of early English theatre, as well as by having Richard represent the traditional connection between his physical deformity and his evil nature in a way that, however, does not seem to be really supported by the dramatic action. Richard may say that his deformity demonstrates that he was born evil, but no other character in the play makes that connection until the end of *Richard III*, and in a couple of scenes this traditional datum is even questioned. In this way, Shakespeare exploits the traditional literary imagery of Richard to emphasise his 'fictitiousness'. Cornwallis' paradox reprises this ambiguity and makes it the cornerstone for a reversal of the tradition of Richard, dissolving the ambiguity and affirming, once and for all, that that tradition had been unfounded all along. In this sense, Cornwallis' text is both a continuation of the English Renaissance historical depiction of Richard III while also being a prelude to more serious historical revaluations of the character that followed a few years later. For this reason, it occupies an important place in the history of the reception of Richard III's figure and deserves to be better known.

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3. Paradoxes in Drama and the Digital

8

Searching for Ritual Paradoxes in Annotated Ancient Greek Tragedies

Gloria Mugelli and Federico Boschetti[1]

Abstract

In the corpus of the extant Attic tragedies, rituals and religious events are widely represented: the characters and the chorus very often discuss religion, and the dramatic plots often include actual ritual scenes, in some cases performed directly on stage. Considering that ancient tragedies took place during the religious festival in honour of Dionysus, the playwrights often constructed enthralling ritual paradoxes based on the contrast between the tragic events staged in the theatre and the festive context of the city. The characters often claim the incompatibility between the rituals performed on stage, such as supplications, or off stage, such as gory sacrifices, and the religious festival. The study of the ritual and religious elements in tragedy requires an accurate analysis of themes and motifs within the entire corpus, facilitated by digital resources and computational instruments. EuporiaRAGT is a digital annotation and retrieval system for ancient Greek tragic texts, designed according to the Euporia method which allows domain experts to build their own annotation system, following their specific research needs. In this essay we show how the EuporiaRAGT system was designed to carry out research on ritual dynamics inside and outside the tragic scene: the research focuses on the irregularity of tragic rites, and on the contrast between the ritual practices represented in tragedy, and the ordinary ritual practice that took place in the Athenian dramatic festivals. After illustrating the research objective, our essay discusses the principles with which the EuporiaRAGT system was designed. We then show how the EuporiaRAGT retrieval system, exploiting an ontology for query expansion, can be used to search for interesting phenomena in the dramatic texts of the tragedy such as paradoxical clusters of different and mutually incompatible rituals.

Keywords: ancient Greek tragedy; digital humanities; textual annotation; ontology; ancient Greek religion

[1] Gloria Mugelli authored sections 1, 4 and 5, whereas Federico Boschetti authored sections 2 and 3.

1. Introduction: Ancient Greek Tragedy and Ritual Norm

Greek tragedy is permeated by rituals and religion, at all levels: in a theatre that was part of a sanctuary, the actors and the chorus (one of the many ritual choruses composed by citizens) staged plots rich in religious facts, in front of an audience taking part to a festival at the very moment of the dramatic performance.[2] Reading the texts of the extant tragedies, we are confronted with different scenes having to do with ritual and religion: characters often comment or discuss religious facts, and various rituals are performed on and off stage. These scenes cannot be considered as evidence of ancient rite, nor as fragments of a hypothetical manual of the ritual practices of the ancient Greeks: we are rather faced with variations and deviations from a hypothetical ritual norm (Di Donato 2010).[3] Moreover, we have a substantial difference in knowledge from the audience for which ancient Greek tragedies were written and performed: first of all, the citizens of fifth-century Athens had a ritual know-how, derived from having participated in various religious rites and celebrations.[4] Secondly, while attending the dramatic performances the audience was having a ritual experience, since the dramatic contest took place during a festival in honour of the god Dionysus (Mugelli 2020), one of the various religious festivities the citizens attended every year. The Athenian sacred calendar and the sacred calendars of the demes included several public festivals in which a large number of rituals were performed. Athenian citizens would attend all the public religious festivals and daily performed various domestic rituals.[5]

In many cases, tragedians exploited the ritual knowledge of the spectators as a means of constructing ritual paradoxes, based on

[2] On the role of religion in Greek tragedy see Sourvinou-Inwood 2003. Calame 2017 focuses on the dynamics of the tragic choral performance as a ritual performance. The reference study on the festive context in which dramatic performances took place is Pickard-Cambridge 1968.

[3] The very concept of ritual norm can be questioned with regard to Greek religion: see Brulé 2009; Chaniotis 2009.

[4] On the concept of the ritual experience of the spectators, see the studies on the festivals in tragedy collected by Taddei 2020.

[5] On the notions of 'public' and 'private' religion in ancient Greece, see Dasen and Piérart 2013.

the contrast between the tragic events staged in the theatre and the festival for Dionysus during which the dramatic contests took part. The characters often point out, for example, that what is happening in the drama is absolutely not suitable for a religious festival. These claims of ritual incompatibility are particularly frequent in reference to the rituals performed on stage.

The rituals which, in the dramatic action, take place off the tragic scene (i.e. the cases in which characters are said to be absent because they are carrying out a ritual) can be part of the ordinary "festival rituals": off-stage, the characters can perform animal sacrifices, offerings, feasts, oracle consultations, although not always with positive results.[6] On the other hand, if ritual speech acts are excluded (such as omens, maledictions and prayers),[7] two types of rituals are mainly represented onstage: ritual supplications and rituals related to death, such as lamentations, funerary rites and those performed for the cult of the dead.

These two types of rituals are profoundly incompatible with religious festivals and normal ritual activities, performed both publicly and privately. Ritual supplication involves the 'invasion' of a sacred space by the suppliants (Giordano 1999; Naden 2013). Being in contact with the sacred space, the suppliants are protected by Zeus, and their presence is binding for whoever is in the sacred space: rejecting the suppliants, or worse, removing them by force and causing them harm while they are in the sacred space could cause contamination.[8] For this reason, the major Greek sanctuaries took measures to prevent supplications from being made on the occasion of the great festivals (Sinn 1993).

[6] The mechanism of the so-called "corrupted ritual", as studied by Zeitlin 1965, is well known: in many cases, ordinary rituals such as sacrifices are not carried out correctly, but are actually used as a backdrop for violent actions. On the concept of perverted ritual in general cf. Henrichs 2004.

[7] On the problem of ritual speech acts in tragedy, particularly when performed by the chorus, see Taddei 2016.

[8] Due to this characteristic of a ritual with a high risk of failure, which at the same time provides for a verbal confrontation in which the advisability of welcoming the suppliant is judged, the supplication is a very effective dramatic tool (Kopperschmidt 1971).

Funerals, funerary rituals, and the expression of mourning in general were heavily regulated in fifth-century Athens (Frisone 2000; Blok 2006).[9] The state of mourning obviously precluded entry into the sanctuaries and participation in the great religious festivals (Gherchanoc 2011; 2012).

The presence onstage of suppliants and mourners generates an interference with the ordinary ritual activity. As we shall see in the examples discussed later, the characters point out that the ritual action on stage is absolutely not a festive action and that supplications and funerary rituals often interrupt and disturb the ordinary ritual activity that they would intend to perform.

Highlighting this interference could have a double effect: whithin the storyline it accentuated the tragic nature of the events represented, while in the context of the tragic performance considered in its entirety as an experience this interference directly affected the spectators, who attend the performance and are simultaneously taking part in a religious festival. Read through this mechanism of *mise en abyme*, the clusters of incompatible rituals sound paradoxical and they may enlighten us on the ritual function of the dramatic representations in the festival of Dionysus.

The method applied for the recognition and description of rites in ancient Greek tragedy can be traced back to the analysis of specific themes (rites and their scenic or extra-scenic contexts) and motifs (ritual elements). Promoted by Positivism and Structuralism, thematic analysis has been attacked by Deconstructionism, which detected a dogmatic association between interpretations (passed off as factual phenomena) and the object of study. In the last decades thematic criticism is experiencing a revival (Pellini 2008; Ciotti 2014) also for the study of the classics.[10] But the identification of themes and motifs must be just a starting point for the philologist. Indeed, it is functional to retrieve *loci paralleli* based on the similarity of meaning instead of verbatim repetitions.

[9] Also see Shapiro 1991 and Pedrina 2001 on the iconography of mourning in Greek pottery.

[10] The Memorata Poetis Project (http://www.memoratapoetis.it) provides a large thematic analysis for Ancient Greek, Latin, Italian, English and Arabic collections of short poems.

The research conducted on the surviving tragic texts is based on the overlapping of themes and motifs belonging to different and incompatible ritual fields, and which for this reason have a paradoxical outcome. This type of research can be supported by a digital annotation system, designed for mark-up and retrieval of those themes and motifs, which can be used as a hermeneutical tool[11] as well as a means of organising knowledge.

This essay illustrates the development of EuporiaRAGT, an annotation system for Greek tragic texts originally designed as support for doctoral research; the design process of EuporiaRAGT followed the various stages of reading the *corpus* of ancient Greek tragedy, marking relevant *phenomena* and retrieving series of significant passages.

After discussing the criteria used to design the system, and after briefly describing the annotation process and the process of structuring the tag in an ontology, we will focus on the retrieval system, which exploits the ontology for query expansion.

In the second part of the essay, we will see the system in action, discussing some examples of ritual clusters retrieved through the search engine. Focusing on the results of different types of queries we will see how the system can be used to experiment with associations of different concepts and phenomena, such as the problematic overlapping of ordinary and festive rituals with rituals inappropriate to the context of the festival. In the combination of tags there is obviously a subjective component, dictated by the specific needs of the research; at the same time the annotation is not interpretive in itself, and can be adapted to answer different research questions.

2. Annotating Literary Texts by Euporia

Accurate textual annotation is a crucial activity in digital philology, because the automated analyses applied to texts by computational linguists (Mitkov 2022; Ježek-Sprugnoli 2023) are currently

[11] The term "hermeneutical tool" is used in the sense introduced by Rockwell-Sinclair 2022 to define the Voyant Tools for investigations in literary corpora.

satisfactory for distant reading (Glaubitz 2018) on large corpora as a whole, but less than acceptable for close reading applied to literary works on which a large number of critical studies and scientific literature exist.

Annotation is defined by the World-Wide Web Consortium (https://www.w3.org) within the Web Annotation Data Model as a relation among textual or multimedia resources: zero or one body resource is linked by reference to one or more target resources (https://www.w3.org/TR/annotation-model/#terminology). The annotation can be inline, if it is intermixed to the target text, or stand-off, if it refers to the target text in a separate document. The former is suitable to describe the physical structure of documents, such as the division into in pages, columns, lines, or to describe the logical structure of works, such as the division into acts, scenes, speeches and verses. The latter is suitable to associate linguistic, stylistic, metric or rhetoric analyses and in general any kind of extrinsic information or interpretation. The annotation can concern any aspect of textual studies, both on the level of expression and on the level of content. On the level of expression, some examples are the annotation of variant readings, of morpho-syntactic features or of metric analysis. On the level of content, some examples are the annotation of named entities, of metaphors or of themes and motifs.

Since 2015, members of the Collaborative and Cooperative Philology Lab (CoPhiLab) of the Institute for Computational Linguistics "A. Zampolli" (CNR-ILC), and members of the Anthropology of the Ancient World Lab (LAMA) of the University of Pisa, have been collaborating to create and maintain an annotation system called Euporia (from εὐπορία, which means "easiness").

3. Methodology

The pillars of Euporia are: a) stand-off annotation through Domain-Specific Languages (Parr 2018) (DSLs); b) use of close vocabularies to represent textual facts (such as variant readings) and use of open vocabularies to express interpretations (such as themes and motifs); c) review cycles to assess the open vocabularies and consistency

check on the annotations; d) organisation of controlled vocabularies into top ontologies and domain ontologies; e) output in XML-TEI or other standard formats; f) embedding of the application inside an XML native database management system, such as eXist-db (http://exist-db.org), in order to exploit a ready-made environment for searching and visualising results.

In the field of Digital Humanities and in particular in the subfield of digital philology, texts and annotations are mainly encoded in XML-TEI (https://tei-c.org), which allows to structure the information according to the Ordered Hierarchy of Content Objects (OHCO) model, with a controlled vocabulary of domain terms reflected by the TEI tag set, possibly abridged. For instance, speeches are contained by <sp>...</sp> or paragraphs are contained by ... . But even if digital philologists are used to XML, the mark-up is verbose and complex annotations rapidly lose readability. On the other hand, the use of graphic interfaces to insert data that are automatically transformed in XML-TEI requires software developers and slows down the annotation process. Euporia suggests an alternative solution through DSLs. Domain-Specific Languages are formal languages optimised for a particular domain of application or domain of knowledge. DSLs are concise and familiar to the domain expert, because they are based on their common practices and formalisms, but in addition they are machine-actionable. DSLs are defined by a formal grammar (usually a context-free grammar) that determines both syntax and the lexicon of the language. A traditional critical apparatus can be transformed into a DSLs, if a formal grammar defines unambiguously that the apparatus is made by a sequence of variant readings, and that variant reading is made by a reference to the text, one or more words, and the *sigla* of manuscripts.

Whereas a critical apparatus encodes a limited number of textual operations (such as interpolations, omissions, substitutions or transpositions), an index of themes and motifs requires a large number of descriptors. Due to the well-known issues posed by the hermeneutic circle, it is impossible to know the whole without knowing (at least a sample of) the parts but it is impossible to know the parts without knowing (at least blurrily) the whole. Translated in our domain, it is impossible to know a corpus (under

a specific aspect, such as the ritual inside or outside the stage) without knowing in depth the single tragedies, but it is impossible to describe in depth the ritual aspects of the single tragedies without knowing, at least vaguely, the patterns repeated inside the whole corpus. Similarly to CATMA (Computer Assisted Text Markup and Analysis, https://catma.de), Euporia promotes the creation of new descriptors (Mugelli et al. 2016) during the process of annotation: an open vocabulary that evolves until the complete analysis of the corpus.

The evolution of the descriptors that identify themes and motifs (or any other kind of analysis) is monitored during the review cycles, which constitute the milestones of a project based on Euporia (usually after one quarter, half, three quarters, and completion of the process of annotation). During the review, keywords in context and their frequencies are evaluated. The productivity of each descriptor is assessed: descriptors with few occurrences can be subsumed by more productive descriptors (e.g. #*cruor* ⟶ #*sanguis*) or can be split into a couple of descriptors.

When the set of descriptors is stable (usually by approaching the end of the annotation process), the descriptors are organised within a domain ontology (Mugelli et al. 2021; 2017), in order to identify the relations among them. Relations may be taxonomic (e.g. #*equus* –*est*⟶ #animal) or transversal (e.g. #*deus_recipiens* –*recipit*⟶ #*sacrificia*). The creation of ontological relations among the original descriptors enhances the search engine, because implicit information (e.g. the fact that a horse is an animal) do not need to be encoded many times during the annotation process, but only within the ontology. The search engine can expand a query by exploiting the ontological relations in order to retrieve, for instance, all the specific animals (#*capra*, #*columba*, etc.), which are involved in #*sacrificia*.

A Domain-Specific Language is interpreted by a parser, which transforms the original annotation in an Abstract Syntax Tree (AST), according to the (context-free) grammar that defines the language. The tree structure of an AST can be easily serialised in XML and, through XSLT stylesheets, transformed in XML-TEI (Bambaci et al. 2018) or other standard formats, such as XML-OWL. The possibility to export a DSLs in standard formats or import standard formats in

our DSLs is crucial to grant data interchange among applications and promote the interoperability.[12]

Finally, Euporia is not a stand-alone application, but it is a methodology and a prototype[13] to create apps inside eXist-db (http://exist-db.org), which is a native XML database. The advantage of this solution is that the app shares the secured access with the other apps inside the platform and the annotations created through Euporia and saved as XML documents, can be elaborated through xquery, which is a query language integrated into eXist-db, and the results can be visualised in HTML with a few lines of xquery code.

Due to the flexibility of Euporia, since 2015 many projects of students and scholars have been developed, among others: EuporiaQohelet, to study multilingual variants of *Qohelet*; EuporiaRhetorica, to study the Latin rhetorical lexicon; EuporiaEco, to study variants between the first and the second edition of *Il Nome della Rosa* by Umberto Eco; EuporiaEdu, to allow students to annotate linguistic and stylistic aspects of ancient Greek and Latin literary texts.[14]

4. Euporia in Action: Annotating Retrieving Paradoxes

In this section we will see the retrieval system into action, discussing some examples of queries returning clusters of incompatible rituals.

The examples follow this pattern: we start with a specific research question, which arises from the reading of the tragic texts. In any case, the question is related to the original research domain (the tragic ritual dynamics), but the phenomenon was not directly marked in the text (i.e. there is no specific keyword marking these phenomena). The research question is then translated into a

[12] Interoperability is one of the four pillars of FAIR data (http://bit.ly/3ZzSv4w), which must be Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable.

[13] The prototype can be downloaded from https://github.com/CoPhi/euporia.

[14] Projects based on Euporia have been presented during a cycle of webinars in 2021 and the recordings are available at https://cophilab.ilc.cnr.it/euporia-2021 (Accessed 7 November 2023).

query, which combines some keywords from the tagset and uses the ontology for query expansion. We will then discuss the more relevant tragic passages resulting from the research.

The search results are not meant to be exhaustive, i.e. they do not necessarily represent the complete tragic evidence related to specific *phenomena.* Our goal is rather to show that the system can be used to broaden the perspective on the text and to retrieve relevant passages to a specific research problem.

a) Not in the Mood for a Ritual

The first example concerns the paradoxical situation in which a character, despite being in a sacred place or on a ritual occasion, is not in the mood to perform the ritual and therefore claims his or her inadequacy for the ritual action.[15]

According to what we discussed in the introduction, the ritual inadequacy of the character on stage corresponds to his paradoxical position with respect to the festive occasion in which the tragedy is performed: pointing out his non-ritual mood, the character stands in contrast to the spectators who instead should have a joyful and exuberant attitude, in line with the Dionysian character of the festival.[16]

Following the approach with which we designed EuporiaRAGT, this kind of cluster is not marked *per se* (i.e. there is no tag marking the presence of a mood-inappropriate character within a ritual): tags that are too specific and too dense with information could make the annotation less cohesive and at the same time too interpretive, and therefore scarcely reusable.

Our retrieval method is therefore based on the combination of elements that are most likely mentioned in the text, which allow us to trace these *phenomena*. In this case, an effective marker of the emotions of a tragic character is the mention in the text of tears: due to the presence of masks and the environment in which the performances took place the characters frequently verbalised their

[15] On the right ritual mood to participate in a festival, see Taddei 2010 who also analyses the pleasure effect deriving from a well-performed ritual.

[16] See Loscalzo 2008 on the behavior of the audience in the ancient Greek theater.

emotions, signalling in words when they are crying (Medda 1997).

Tears can be a ritual object, precisely in the context of the non-festive rites frequently taking place on the tragic scene: in the context of funerary rituals, in addition to being an expression of emotion, weeping is ritualised in the form of lamentation. In supplication rituals tears can be a persuasive strategy, as well as a marker of the suppliants' condition.

Fig. 1 shows the results of search on the EuporiaRAGT retrieval system of the co-occurrences of the tag marking tears (#*lacrimae*) in the presence of a ritual. The system exploits the ontology to expand the query to all possible ritual activities present in the annotation.

Fig. 1. Tears in a ritual context

As expected, most of the rituals involve mourning rituals and supplications.

However EuporiaRAGT retrieves some rites that usually exclude tears, such as choruses, festivals and processions (marked with the transliteration of the Greek term *pompe*), highlighted in Fig. 1; the case of ritual hospitality, also marked with the Greek term *xenia*, is problematic and will be discussed separately.

The character of Electra experiences the different phases and the different modes of mourning. Both in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and in Sophocles' and Euripides' *Electra*, before Orestes' return Agamemnon's daughter is left alone in celebrating the funeral rites for her murdered father. In the three tragedies, however, we can observe a progressive marginalisation of the mourning theme (for example, in Sophocles and Euripides the tomb is not represented on stage), and a progressive isolation of Electra's character (Medda 2013).[17]

In Sophocles, the girl complains that while she stubbornly mourns her dead father, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra celebrate feasts rejoicing at the murder (Soph. *El.* 280-281).

In Euripides, however, there is a further gap, which exacerbates the ritual cluster we have been talking about: the festivals from which Electra is excluded are not hypothetical sacrilegious celebrations in honour of a murder, but ordinary religious festivals of the city of Argos, the *Heraia*.[18] Electra cannot take part in those festivals together with all the Argive girls of her age (including the women of the chorus), because her tears are not suitable for the ritual.

οὐκ ἐπ' ἀγλαΐαις, φίλαι,
θυμὸν οὐδ' ἐπὶ χρυσέοις
ὅρμοις ἐκπεπόταμαι
τάλαιν', οὐδ' ἱστᾶσα χοροὺς
Ἀργείαις ἅμα νύμφαις
εἰλικτὸν κρούσω πόδ' ἐμόν.
δάκρυσι νυχεύ-
ω, δακρύων δέ μοι μέλει

[17] On Electra's lamentation see Foley 2001, 150. On the character of Electra and the permanence of mourning in tragedy on a general level see Loraux 1999, 46-70.

[18] See Amandry 1980. On the *Heraia* in Euripides' *Electra* cf. Taddei 2020, 73-92.

δειλαίᾳ τὸ κατ' ἦμαρ.
σκέψαι μου πιναρὰν κόμαν
καὶ τρύχη τάδ' ἐμῶν πέπλων,
εἰ πρέποντ' Ἀγαμέμνονος
κούρᾳ 'σται βασιλείᾳ
τᾷ Τροίᾳ θ', ἃ 'μοῦ πατέρος
μέμναταί ποθ' ἁλοῦσα.
(Eur. *El.* 175-89)

[Electra No finery, my friends, no golden necklaces give flight to my wretched heart; nor setting dances along with the brides of Argos shall I pound out my whirling step. In tears I spend my nights, tears are my sorrowful care day after day. (Cropp 2013)]

In the passage from the exodus of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* in which Iphigenia, followed by the chorus, leads a procession which, while assuming the characteristics of a wedding procession, is in fact a sacrificial procession, that leads her to the sacrificial altar.[19]

The final part of the tragedy, following the exit of the chorus, poses many problems both from a philological and ritual point of view, which do not strictly concern the object of this study. In reading this passage, we are interested in the interference between an ordinary festive ritual (the sacrificial procession of the Great Dionysia ended right in the sanctuary of Dionysus adjacent to the theatre, and included the participation of young girls) and the mournful events represented in the drama.

In preparing the final procession as an ordinary, joyful and festive ritual, such as a wedding procession can be, Iphigenia wants to avoid any possible ritual interference with the mourning register, which should actually characterise her exit from the scene, and refuses to cry.

ὦ πότνια πότνια μᾶτερ, οὐ δάκρυά γέ σοι
δώσομεν ἀμέτερα·
παρ' ἱεροῖς γὰρ οὐ πρέπει.
(Eur. *IA* 1487-90)

[19] The overlap between marriage and human sacrifice in *Iphigenia at Aulis* is well known, see Foley 1985, 65-105. On tragic processions see Kavoulaki 1996.

> [Iphigenia O lady, lady mother, I shall not give you my tears; for it is not fitting at holy rites. (Collard and Morwood 2017)]

Finally, we are focusing briefly on the two passages that associate tears with the ritual of hospitality. In its initial stage, the ritual has the characteristics of a ritual supplication: to ask for hospitality, the *xenos* assumes the position of a suppliant (Giordano 1999) and can therefore use tears as a means of persuasion, as Menelaus does in Eur. *Hel.* 458.

In Euripides' *Alcestis*, there is a real problem of ritual incompatibility: in this tragedy, Heracles is a guest in Admetus's house, where he participates in a banquet unaware of Alcestis' death (Eur. *Al.* 747-762, cf. Segal 1992). The hero sings drunk, disturbing lamentations about the newly deceased hostess. Thus, in the house of Admetus, two opposing registers overlap: the chaotic one of the Dionysian symposium, which characterised many phases of the Great Dionysia, and the register of mourning, which dominated the tragic scene.

b) I Am Not Coming for the Festival

As a second example, we will deal with passages in which a character enters into a sacred space, pointing out at the same time that he does not want to perform a ritual.

The theatre of Dionysus is part of the sacred space of the sanctuary of Dionysus, whether we look at the sanctuary as an architectural space or as a space ritualised by the presence of the festive Athenians, who concluded the great procession of the Great Dionysia there.

In the fictitious space of the preserved dramas, sanctuaries in honour of the god Dionysus are never represented; at the same time, tragedies often take place in sacred spaces, including the major, renowned sanctuaries visited by all Greeks.

In this case, we will perform a three-variable query on the database. The query in Fig. 2 combines all the rituals (#*ritus*) that are rejected or criticised (#*ritum_aspernari*) with the mention of the sacred place (#*locus_sacer*).

The retrieved passages all belong to Euripides' *Suppliant Women*. The tragedy is set in the sanctuary of Eleusis, frequented by the entire Athenian population on the occasion of various rituals and festivals, and known above all as the setting for the Eleusinian Mysteries (Clinton 1993; Goff 1995).

Euripides' *Suppliant Women* is not set during the Mysteries, but during the festival of the *Proerosia*, a harvest-related festival that took place between Athens and Eleusis, and included the offering of first fruits (*aparchai*; Robertson 1996). The situation presented by Euripides is exceptional: not only is it set right during the festival, but the supplication that takes place onstage interrupts the ritual.

Aethra, the Athenian queen mother of Theseus, arrives in Eleusis with one of the offerings of the *Proerosia* and is surrounded and blocked by the suppliants, mothers of the seven Argives who died in Thebes, mourning for their children.

In the three passages from the first episode (111, 173, 230), Theseus blames the suppliants for resorting to a 'violent' ritual strategy. Criticisms of the supplication are a recurring rhetorical tool in tragedy, and they cannot be traced back to the dramatic mechanism we are studying.

In the parodos, the chorus of the mothers performs the ritual of supplication by falling at Aethra's feet and drawing her attention to their miserable appearance: black clothes, wrinkled face wet with tears, their body has suffered the blows and scratches typical of those who perform the lamentation.

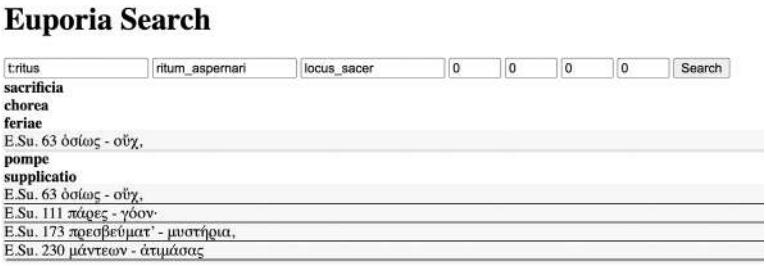

Fig. 2 Rejected or criticised rituals in sacred places

In performing the supplication and making their request, the women of the chorus emphasise that their arrival in the sanctuary is not for ritual reasons, but out of necessity:

> Χορος ὁσίως οὔχ, ὑπ' ἀνάγκας δὲ προπίπτου-
> σα προσαιτοῦσ' ἔμολον δε-
> ξιπύρους θεῶν θυμέλας·
> (Eur. *Supp.* 63-5)

> [Chorus Not in a holy manner have I come to the gods' altars which receive the fire, but out of necessity. (Morwood 2007)]

The words of the chorus in the *parodos* has an echo in the first episode, when Theseus notices that the women's mourning clothes are not at all suitable for the festival (πεπλώματ' οὐ θεωρικά, 97).

In this case, therefore, the chorus of the tragedy itself appears to be 'intruded' into the festive context, and indeed its presence in the theatre generates the interruption of a festival. Again, even if the interrupted festival is not a Dionysian ritual occasion, the scene must have been very engaging and problematic for the spectators of the drama, sitting in the theatre in their best clothes, taking part in the Dionysia.

c) Ritual Absence

In Greek tragedy the characters mention rituals that do not take place, at least as much as they speak of the rituals they perform on and off the scene: the funeral for Polynices and the denied wedding for Iphigenia are an emblematic case of the cumbersome absence of some rituals. In Fig. 3 we see the first items of the result list for a query on rituals whose absence is marked in the text.

We have highlighted in the list only the results concerning rituals that are present in the great festivals (processions, sacrifices, choruses and celebrations in general). We are not discussing marriage and funeral rites, the absence of which, as we have seen in the two previous examples, is particularly significant for the characters, but it does not interfere with the feast for Dionysus.

Fig. 3. Ritual absence

In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, the ritual inactivity of the war-torn city of Troy is pointed out.

Cassandra, for example, gives up her role as a prophetess of Apollo: she takes off her prophetic bandages and renounces the festivals, which will no longer be held.

> Κασανδρα ὦ στέφη τοῦ φιλτάτου μοι θεῶν, ἀγάλματ' εὔια,
> χαίρετ'· ἐκλέλοιφ' ἑορτάς, αἷς πάροιθ' ἠγαλλόμην.
> (Eur. *Tro.* 452-3)

> [Cassandra Garlands of the god I love so well, prophetic spirit's dress, leave me, as I leave those festivals where once I was so proud.]

The problem of the absence of the gods does not concern only Cassandra and her relationship with Apollo. The theme of the city abandoned by its gods often emerges in the text of the *Trojan Women*: the altars are deserted, and all ritual and festive activity is now abandoned.

In this case, the interference with the contemporaneity of the spectators' experience consists not only in the association with the festival, but specifically with the ritual and celebrations that occur in a context of war.

> ΧΟΡΟΣ φροῦδαί σοι θυσίαι χορῶν τ'
> εὔφημοι κέλαδοι κατ' ὄρ-
> φναν τε παννυχίδες θεῶν,
> χρυσέων τε ξοάνων τύποι
> Φρυγῶν τε ζάθεοι σελᾶ-
> ναι συνδώδεκα πλήθει.
> μέλει μέλει μοι τάδ' εἰ φρονεῖς, ἄναξ,
> οὐράνιον ἕδρανον ἐπιβεβὼς
> αἰθέρα τε πτόλεως ὀλομένας,
> ἃν πυρὸς αἰθομένα κατέλυσεν ὁρμά.
> (Eur. *Tro.* 1070-80)
>
> [CHORUS Gone are your sacrifices, the choirs' glad voices singing, for the gods night long festivals in the dark; gone the images, gold on wood laid, the twelves of the sacred moons, the magic Phrygian number. Can it be, can it be, my lord, you have forgotten, from your throne high in heaven's bright air, my city which is ruined and the flame storm that broke it.]

In the *Trojan Women*, there is obviously the mechanism of *mise en abyme* determined by the fact that the Trojan War is a mythical event, distant in time and space from the present of the spectators. However, the Athenian citizens are facing the Peloponnesian War. We are confronted here with the paradox of a city at war which, while celebrating a festival, imagines another, more ancient city which, defeated after a long war, can no longer celebrate any festivals.

The passage from Euripides' *Phoenician Women* is the most interesting, and allows us to move towards our conclusions. War with its deaths and sufferings not only excludes rituals and festivals in general, as emerges in the *Trojan Women*, but it also conflicts with the specifical world of Dionysian ritual. The god Ares, in this tragedy, is said to be the opposite of the god Dionysus: he does not take part in the festivals of Bacchus, where a significant part of the ritual pleasure consists in wild dances and choruses.

> Χορος ὦ πολύμοχθος Ἄρης, τί ποθ' αἵματι
> καὶ θανάτῳ κατέχῃ Βρομίου παράμουσος ἑορταῖς;
> οὐκ ἐπὶ καλλιχόροις στεφάνοισι νεάνιδος ὥρας
> βόστρυχον ἀμπετάσας λωτοῦ κατὰ πνεύματα μέλπῃ
> μοῦσαν, ἐν ᾗ χάριτες χοροποιοί,
> ἀλλὰ σὺν ὁπλοφόροις στρατὸν Ἀργείων ἐπιπνεύσας
> αἵματι Θήβας
> κῶμον ἀναυλότατον προχορεύεις.
> (Eur. *Phoe,* 784-91)
>
> [Chorus Ares, who brings us trouble, lover of blood and death, why stand away from Bromius' feasts? Never, when dances are fair and the girls are crowned, do you loosen your locks and sing to the breath of the pipe which the Graces have given for dancing. No, you rouse the host, the armed host of Argos, against our Theban blood. You dance first in the dance that knows no music.]

In this case, the interference moves on three levels: the ritual, the war, but also the tragic performance in itself. In fact, through the references to the choruses, the dances, and the art of the Muses, we witness a mechanism of self-referentiality of the tragic chorus (Henrichs 1994): the musical and choral part is in fact the more traditionally ritual part of the tragic performance, as the spectators assist and take part in various choral performances on many ritual occasions (see Calame 1994; 2013a; 2013b; 2017).

Furthermore, Ares is described as the one who leads a κῶμον ἀναυλότατον (791), a *komos,* a noisy and agitated ritual procession (taking place in particular in the Dionysian festivals) that does not involve the use of the flute (*aulos*). The *aulos* is both the festive and the Dionysian instrument par excellence, and it is often used as a self-referential instrument for the tragic chorus.[20]

[20] The αὐλός is the most common musical instrument in ancient Greece, and the ritual instrument par excellence. It was used to accompany different kinds of choral performance and was played during processions and throughout the sacrificial procedure: see Papadopoulou 2004; Papadopoulou and Pirenne-Delforge 2015; Goulaki-Voutira 2004; Kubatzki 2016. As a versatile instrument, and particularly suited to accompany the πομπή, the αὐλός is also used during the funeral ritual, both during the ἐκφορά (Solon imposed a maximum of ten *aulos* players), and during the πρόθεσις – see

5. Conclusion

This last example allows us to focus on the last dramatic cluster, which is perhaps the densest in meaning and also the most characteristic of Greek tragedy as a ritual performance. The mournful events that occur in tragedy, including funeral rituals and lamentations, are often associated with the musical and choral register of tragedy.

Nicole Loraux (1999) has studied the mournful sound register of tragedy in its Dionysian dimension, in particular as regards the contrast between the register of the lyre, the Apollonian instrument par excellence, and that of the αὐλός characterising tragedy.

On the one hand, the mournful song of tragedy is often defined as a song without a lyre. The tragic sound αὐλός, on the other hand, is often described as baleful, mournful, out of tune: the passage from the *Phoenician Women* that we have discussed echoes a passage from the *Seven Against Thebes*, in which the dirge of the chorus is intoned, as in a mournful ξυναυλία, to the sound of the spears of the two brothers clashing (Aesch. *Sept.* 835-9). Also in Sophocles' *Ajax* (1199-204), the death of the hero is represented as an exclusion from the ritual pleasure, *terpsis*, of the symposium, another characteristic Dionysian ritual in which the αὐλός makes its appearance. Finally, in the *Trojan Women*, during the lament of Hecuba (120ff.) which mentions the mournful and dance-less muse of the defeated, reference is made to the fatal paean, sung to the sound of the αὐλός, which accompanies the arrival of the Greeks and the defeat of Troy.

So when it is not cited to point out its absence (together with the absence of choral performances, songs, and festivals) the tragic *aulos* is contrasted with the ritual and musical pleasure of the ordinary ritual activity.

In conclusion, the series of clusters we have discussed point out the disturbing register of the tragic performance and its contrast with the festive context, and in this way they demonstrate, through

Retief and Cilliers 2010. At the same time, the αὐλός characterises Dionysian rituals, from the symposium to orgiastic rites (during which it was combined with τύμπανον and κρόταλα). On the form of the αὐλός see Anderson 1994, 180-2 and Hagel 2010, 327-32.

the paradoxical extraneousness of the tragedy to its ritual context, that attending the tragic performances was an extremely specific form of ritual activity for Dionysus, very different from the Dionysian activity performed during the festival.

The approach we adopted in building the system, discussed in §2 and §3, and the actual information extraction methodology we saw it in action in §4, make it clear that the set of examples discussed in this essay, retrieved with the EuporiaRAGT system, is not meant to be neither an exhaustive set of all the ritual paradoxes in tragedy, nor a heuristic result per se.

The discussion of the individual cases reveals that the knowledge of the domain (in this case the tragic texts and the dynamics of the Greek rite) is an essential requirement at all levels of the process, both as a prerequisite of the annotation process, in constructing the query and in reading the results. The EuporiaRAGT system thus works as a support for the hermeneutic work on texts, allowing the user to organise knowledge and interrogate information in a complex way, obtaining interesting results not only when we are looking for simple evidence of a specific *phenomenon*, but also when it comes to working on problematic, exceptional or paradoxical cases.

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9

"It Is a Happiness to Be in Debt". Digital Approaches to the Culture of Paradox in Early Modern Drama

Alessandra Squeo

Abstract

In light of the significant innovations introduced by the digital turn in Shakespeare Textual Studies, this chapter invites reflection on how an open-access archive of machine-readable versions of paradoxes, like CEMP, may afford deeper insights into Shakespearean drama in relation to the early modern episteme. Focusing on the notion of debt as a rich source of paradox in Renaissance culture, as most notably exemplified by William Cornwallis' "That It Is a Happiness to Be in Debt", the chapter shows the broad hermeneutic horizons that digital resources may open up in the analysis of debt-related discursive practices in Shakespeare, taking *The Merchant of Venice* as a case in point. From this perspective, light is shed on the playwright's exploration of paradox as a powerful dramatic instrument to contrast different viewpoints, cultural attitudes and competing value systems on stage. Delving further into debt discourse, the chapter ultimately draws attention to how established assumptions regarding the value of money and human relationships in a rising capitalist society are problematised by Shakespeare, with a view to unveiling the disturbing ambiguities and inconsistencies beneath the monetary ethos of a market-inflected universe that acquires particular relevance in relation to the socio-cultural and ethical conflicts underpinning the play.

Keywords: debt; mock encomium; William Cornwallis; prodigality; William Shakespeare; *The Merchant of Venice*; commensurability

Increasing scholarly attention has been devoted over the last few years to how digital resources are reconceptualising ways of accessing, visualising, reading and studying early modern drama (Craig-Greatley-Hirsch 2017; Massai 2021). In the more specific field of Shakespearean studies, the growing availability of instruments for computer-aided language and text analysis have expanded the

possibilities of digitally-assisted approaches to the playwright's works, in combination with more traditional methodologies, in a wide range of directions. A remarkable instance is provided by the potentialities of digital lexicography that allows us to historicise Shakespeare's language in ways that were simply unthinkable only a few years ago. Searchable lexical corpora such as *Lexicons of Early Modern English* (*LEME*), for instance, directed by Ian Lancashire at the University of Toronto, reveal the lexical mobility of specific terms over a selected time span, thus affording insights into "how a word worked in the multifaceted context of late sixteenth-century English culture", and ultimately providing a broader frame for understanding the implications of "Shakespeare's distinctive use of a term in a play" (Jenstad et al. 2018, 10). In this sense, broader hermeneutic horizons are opened up in text analysis, offering crucial support to what Jonathan Culler defines as the "hermeneutics of recovery", namely the attempt to reconstruct "the original context of production, the circumstances and intentions of the author and the meaning a text might have had for its original readers" (1997, 67-8).

Based on these premises, this chapter invites reflection on how an open-access archive of machine-readable transcriptions of early modern paradoxes, like CEMP, potentially interoperable with other web-based resources, may enhance the potentialities of a digitally supported approach to Shakespeare in relation to the early modern episteme. Examining the relevance of paradoxes "in a period, like the Renaissance, of intense intellectual activity, with many different ideas and systems in competition with one another" (33), Rosalie Colie has noticed how "one element common to all . . . kinds of paradox is their exploitation of . . . relative and competing value systems" (1966, 10). In this sense, allowing access to paradoxes that were culturally available to Shakespeare and his contemporaries, CEMP offers insights, as I will argue, into Shakespeare's embeddedness in the Renaissance culture of paradox, permitting us to understand the extent to which paradoxes provided the playwright "with a vocabulary and a conceptual framework for his presentation of a dizzying array of perspectives" (2009, 1) on conventional thought and received truths, as Peter Platt has put it. To a large extent, Shakespeare "reveal[s] the paradox as an agent

of action and change . . . An encounter with paradox is crucial to a transformation of mind, a restructuring of thought and belief" (4, 12); in so far as "paradoxes highlight the fracture of received opinion and ordinary logic, they reveal the limitations of what we can know about the world" (15). These epistemological implications are crucial to Renaissance culture, where 'paradox' was not only a figure of speech but a way of perceiving the universe, "a mode of thinking and configuring experience" (Bigliazzi 2014, 7) in line with the sceptical frame of mind (Cavell 2003; Caldwell 2017; Gilman Sherman 2021) that underpins many Shakespearean plays, with their invitation "to question, from moment to moment, the inherited, standard truths of his time . . . and to view fearfully the results of abandoning the props of such beliefs" (Bell 2002, 5).

Within the wide array of political, social and cultural transformations that contributed to the pervasive sense of uncertainty informing early modern drama, a central example is provided by the advent of mercantilist and pre-capitalist ideologies (Sebek-Deng 2008) and by the destabilising implications of new economic paradigms, models and tropes 'invading' Elizabethan England (Cohen 1982), whose impact on Shakespeare has been extensively explored by New Economic Criticism (Woodbridge 2003; Hawkes 2015). From this perspective, the following pages will dwell on the notion of debt as a rich source of paradox which unveils conflicting cultural attitudes and values in the rapidly changing epistemological framework of early modern English culture, as most notably exemplified by William Cornwallis' paradox "That It Is a Happiness to Be in Debt", included in the CEMP archive. I will show how, in association with more traditional methodologies of text analysis, the cross-pollination of diverse digital resources and tools may open up broader hermeneutic horizons in examining the cultural resonances of debt discourse in Shakespearean drama, with a focus on *The Merchant of Venice* as a noteworthy case in point.

1. Debt as Paradox

In *The Economy of Obligation* (1998), Craig Muldrew offers a wide-ranging frame of reference for understanding the affective

implications of debt and credit practices in early modern England: "With limited amounts of gold and silver in circulation, the economic expansion was based on the increasing use of credit, much of which was informal, as might be expected in a society with a high level of illiteracy" so that, in most cases, "credit relations were interpersonal and emotive" (1998, 3). At the end of the sixteenth century, as Muldrew reports: "society came to be defined not just as the positive expression of social unity through Christian love and ritual as has been the case in medieval England, but increasingly as the cumulative unity of millions of interpersonal obligations which were continually being exchanged and renegotiated" (1998, 123). The polysemic status of the word 'credit', which stems from the Latin term *credo*, indicating honesty and trustworthiness, clearly testifies to the contiguity between moral and financial reliability in a cultural context in which the very notions of 'self' and 'personal identity' were shaped by debt and credit relationships. Examining concepts of worth, reputation and social status in early modern England, Alexandra Shepard (2015) has more recently drawn attention to how estimation was "firmly rooted in the assessment of people's material assets" (2) and individual value was commonly calculated in terms of debts and credits: "the reciprocal ties traditionally associated with a pre-modern 'moral economy' were inseparable from the calculative mentalities whereby worth and credit were appraised. People's worth was regularly assigned a cash value, derived from assessments of movable property and associated indebtedness" (2015, 313).

Likewise, the relevance of debt-related concerns in the life of Shakespeare's contemporaries has been explored at length by scholars. In particular, it has been shown how the activities of playwrights and companies of actors themselves were heavily affected by debt issues (Ingram 1988; Gurr 1996; Bearman 2016) in a period in which even "the promise of a play" was often seen "a means for often insolvent playwrights to get extensions of credit" (Garrett 2014a, 8). As Amanda Bailey reminds us, in many cases "bonds enabled the building and leasing of playhouses. Playscripts, costumes, and properties were obtained on bonds . . . [and] the impressive number of personal loans issued to players by company heads . . . gestures at the extent to which the fates of those whole

livelihood depended on the theatre were shaped by the jagged course of chronic indebtedness" (2013, 4-5).

Regardless of whether, and to what extent, the debt history of Shakespeare's family actually affected his most important life choices, as Lena Cowen Orlin has recently contended, it is a matter of fact that "debt reverberated through all early modern lives" (2020, 84), as shown by the unprecedented rise in cases of debt litigation in early modern English courts. A surviving letter dating 25 September 1598 and addressed to the playwright by Richard Quiney, one of his fellow travellers between Stratford-upon-Avon and London, asking for support in obtaining a loan, undeniably "suggests that Shakespeare's hometown neighbours believed that his name would carry weight with potential lenders" (ibid.). But the letter more importantly sheds light on a cultural context in which networks of credits and debts were mostly rooted in affective relationships involving relatives, friends and neighbours. Ample testimony in this respect is provided by a wide production of early modern "amicable debt letters": they show how "epistolary rhetoric created space within amicable relationships for discussion of economic matters: borrowing, lending, repayment and forbearance", as Laura Kolb has pointed out, ultimately illustrating the extent to which "friendship increased one's credit in the general sense of socially circulating reputation" and "credit flowed along channels of kinship, alliance and affinity" (2020, 306). From a broader perspective, the pervasiveness of debt-related vocabulary in common verbal exchanges is attested by early modern drama, even by "plays whose plots are not primarily money-oriented", as Linda Woodbridge has underlined: "in an age when credit buying was widespread and nearly everyone was in debt, characters in plays tend to say 'I am in your debt' when they simply mean 'thank you'" (2003, 10).

It is against such a multifaceted background that debt became "a rich source of paradox" (Douglas 2020, 331), starting from the assumption that being enmeshed in webs of credit and debt was, first and foremost, a sign of social interaction. At a time when most individuals were often simultaneously debtors and creditors, debt was perceived as "a basic condition of existence. Not having debt is like not existing at all, a form of social and economic death" (Kolb-Oppitz-Trotman 2020, 2). More importantly, offering a clear sign of

those "competing value systems" identified by Rosalie Colie (1966) as the main source of paradox, debt was invariably associated to vice and to virtuous behavior, two "seemingly distinct realms always in conversation with one another" in so far as "an encounter with a discourse of either model invariably implies the other" (Garrett 2014b, 53).

The *OED*'s entry on 'debt' displays a complex semantic area characterised by the overlapping of moral and economic meanings:

> 1. That which is owed or due; anything (as money, goods, or service) which one is under obligation to pay or render to another: a. a sum of money or a material thing . . . b. a thing immaterial, c. that which one is bound or ought to do; (one's) duty . . . 2. A liability or obligation to pay or render something; the condition of being under such obligation . . . Obligation to do something; duty. 3. Used in Biblical language as the type of an offence requiring expiation, a sin.

A searchable digital resource for lexical analysis like *LEME*, showing word-entries from a wide range of monolingual English dictionaries, bilingual lexicons, technical vocabularies, and many other encyclopaedic-lexical works, can offer deeper insights into such a broad semantic field enabling us to understand the far-reaching implications of the term 'debt' in different contexts. Carrying out a lexical search restricted to the time span 1570-1620, for instance, *LEME* features 355 results of 'debt' and allows access to a wide range of early modern definitions of the word in documents including the *Triple Dictionary in English, French and Latin* (1574) by the lexicographer John Baret, Thomas Cooper's *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae* (1578), Thomas Thomas' *Dictionarium Linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* (1588), or John Florio's *A World of Words* (1598), among many others. Interesting research perspectives open up by cross-referencing these data with the results provided by a text analysis software such as *Sketch Engine*, which enables us to study the lexico-grammar behaviour of a term in large text collections according to corpus linguistics methodologies. Searching through the *EEBO* (*Early English Books Online*) corpus via the functionalities of the *Sketch Engine* concordance tools, for instance, one can notice that in the time span 1578-1604 the word debt regularly appears as a

predicate noun in association both with sin, death and damnation, and with love, referring to the debt paid by Christ's sacrifice (fig. 1).

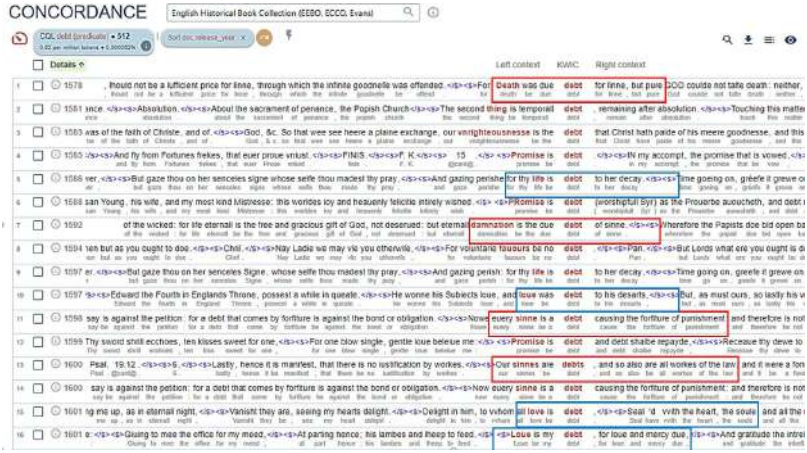

Fig. 1 Sample of concordance lines for 'debt' from *EEBO* using *Sketch Engine* (abridged). https://www.sketchengine.eu//

Going far beyond the *OED*'s aim "to work inductively from evidence of word usage to lexical definition" (Jenstad et al., 2018, 9), such digital approaches afford precious insights into how a term like debt "would have functioned in Shakespeare's social context" (11).

In this sense, still broader horizons in the understanding of the cultural implications of the concept and its resonances in the Renaissance episteme are opened up by a digital archive of early modern paradoxes. Searching through the keyword 'debt', CEMP allows access to "That It Is a Happiness to Be in Debt", one of the four paradoxes composed by William Cornwallis the Younger around 1600. The text belongs to the genre of mock encomium, or "praise of unworthy, unexpected or trifling objects" (Knight Miller 1956, 145), which enjoyed great popularity in Renaissance Europe, and whose bearing on Elizabethan and Jacobean drama has only recently received in-depth scholarly attention (Duranti and Stelzer 2022). Interestingly, Cornwallis underlines the pervasiveness of debt-related vocabulary in common verbal expressions with a view to highlighting how 'debt relations' are to be metaphorically extended to all forms of human ties and bonds ("take away being

in debt and take away all love and friendship form among men"), ultimately hinting at the intrinsic interconnectedness of all human relations:

> In a word, the excellency of being in debt is very apparent since in all our ordinary speeches we borrow the terms. As we owe to God a death: God lent us our lives and to him they are due. I am indebted to you for your kindness: I owe you the best of my affections with infinite others, all which apparently testify it worth since then those that most rail on it are compelled for expressing of the most excellent things to borrow the words. (133*r*)

More importantly, starting from the assumption that "we consist of a soul and a body", the former to be "preciously estimated", the latter "to be chastised lest it rebel against the spirit" (ibid.), Cornwallis emphasises the value of 'debts' as a source of spiritual flourishing in accordance with Christian ethics. Mentioning the Bible's statement that "it shall be as possible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle", he goes so far as to argue that no one is better prepared to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than those who have many debts: "who striveth so much to refine himself for that entrance as the debtor? Would you prepare yourself for heaven, for knowledge, for learning? It is only to be done by being in debt" (ibid.).

While certainly in line with many other early modern mock praises of debt, Cornwallis' paradox bears trace of the specific context of late Elizabethan England characterised by radical changes in socio-economic thinking, "an historical transition at once epistemological, ideological, and material . . . from feudal to nascent capitalism" (Leinwand 1999, 1). While the sweeping implications of such transitions have become a "virtual commonplace among historians" (Grav 2008, 19), particularly worthy of attention is how a "nostalgic regard for feudal affective-economic relations" (Garrett 2014a, 65) was culturally rooted in Christian values. The extent to which debt discourse was entangled with moral and religious issues in early modern England is clearly illustrated by William Burton's influential treatise, *A Caveat for Suretis* (1593) addressing, in particular, the question of whether, and to what extent, a Christian should stand surety for a debt for

the sake of a neighbour. With a view to drawing a line between the Christian duty of love and the necessary caution with regard to a potentially risky practice, Burton points out that "God would not have thee helpe thy neighour without any care to save the self", remarking on how the Bible itself warns us against such possible perils and aims not "to condemne Suertiship, but rather to shew that is must be done with advice, and good deliberation" (6, 34). This leads us to the core of an insoluble moral dilemma that further complicates the paradoxical discourse of debt for the Christian, highlighting its double nature as a sign of brotherly charity and as a potential sin, namely a form of excessive generosity and thoughtless extravagance that may lead a Christian to become prey of usurers:

> Therefore when Christians are about to become Suerties for other men, they must first sit down and wisely consider with themselves these three points: First thine own abilitie, if thou be a single man. Secondly, the estate and condition of thine owne family. Thirdly, the estate and condition of the partie for whom thou art to give thy word . . . How are you gentlemen and unthrifts taken in the usurers nets . . . It is a sin to venture rashly into their hands. God hath forewarned you to flee from the couetous, and yet you will venture, therefore are you not justly serves, if you be devoured of them? (45, 97)

It cannot go unnoticed how real the risks envisaged by Burton's treatise should sound to late sixteenth-century readers, within a society characterised by a rapidly increasing rate of debt ligation, where a growing amount of "lawsuits in the central courts concerned defaulted bonds of debt" and the common practice of "long-term imprisonment prevented debtors from repaying their debts and often resulted in sickness or death" (Garrett 2014b, 38).

2. Conflicting Views of 'Prodigality' on Stage

The pervasiveness of debt relations in early modern England finds ample testimony in Shakespearean drama, where a wide variety of economic and affective forms of 'debt' are explored, including "oaths, vows, promises, asseverations, legal bonds, gages, contracts;

the whole array of utterances and acts by which people in early modern England committed themselves to the things past, present, and to come" (Kerrigan 2016, ix). Polonius' warm advice to his son Laertes in *Hamlet* offers perhaps one of the most prominent occurrences of the theme in Shakespeare: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be, / For loan oft loses both itself and friend / And borrowing dulleth th' edge of husbandry" (1.3.74-6). But a particularly relevant case in point to explore debt discourse in Shakespeare is provided by *The Merchant of Venice,* whose plot is entirely built upon an intricate network of loans, purchases and pledges, beginning with the opening scene where, being unable to pay off his old debts to Antonio, to whom he owes "the most in money and in love" (1.1.130), Bassanio asks him to finance his second voyage to Belmont with a view to marrying Portia, a "lady richly left" (160), as a decisive solution to "get clear of all the debts I owe" (134). Having no ready money, Antonio requests for a loan from Shylock who, in turn, demands the help of his friend Tubal: "I cannot instantly raise up the gross / Of full three thousand ducats. What of that? Tubal, a wealthy Hebrew of my tribe, will furnish me" (1.3.47-50).

In technical terms, peculiar though its penalty may appear, the kind of contract proposed to Antonio is a 'debt bond', "by far the most important form of indebtedness after sales and service credit" (Muldrew 1998, 109), a financial instrument commonly used in early modern England to formalise lawful lending practices that were seen as an acceptable alternative to usury.

> Shylock Go with me to a notary, seal me there
> Your single bond, and, in merry sport,
> If you repay me not on such a day,
> In such a place, such sum or sums as are
> Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit
> Be nominated for an equal pound
> Of your fair flesh to be cut off and taken
> In what part of your body pleaseth me.
> (1.3.136-44)

Strictly speaking, insofar as the Jew proclaims his intention to take "no doit / of usance for my monies" (1.3.133-4), his bond does not respond to the logic of 'usury', but rather embodies those forms

of 'interest contracts' that were widely accepted by Christians, as Antonio himself recognises: "The Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind" (1.3.171). In *Arraignment and Conviction of Usury* (1595), Miles Mosse clearly explains the distinction between the two concepts: "Usurie is an overplus or gain taken more than was lent; Interest is . . . a recompense demaunded and due for the damage that is taken"; thus, while usury is always due and is calculated from the day of borrowing, "interest is never due but from the appointed day of payment forward, as for so long as I forebear my goods after the day in which I did covenant to receive them again" (1924, 377). Undeniably, if read in light of the Jew's thirst for revenge ("If I can catch him once upon the hip / I will feed the ancient grudge I bear him" (1.3.38-9), the bond proposed by Shylock should be more exactly included in those cases of "clocked" or "mental usury" that Miles Mosse illustrates in the following terms: "if I lend and demand nothing, but yet I hope well that at the appointed day the borrower will not for shame send home any money without recompense, herein I am a user: not an open and actual, but inward and mental usurer" (1924, 386).

Regardless however or whether, and to what extent, the play ultimately aims to problematise the subtle boundary between usury and interest or to focus on the dangers hidden in what the Christians perceived as acceptable lending practices (Garrett 2014b), it is Antonio's acceptance of the risks implicit in such a debt bond that deserves particular attention. According to Amanda Bailey, "reading *The Merchant of Venice* as a debt play, rather than as a usury play" clarifies the fact that "this play is less interested in the sin of usury than in . . . an expanding credit economy marked by a rise in debt suits" (2013, 56). From this perspective, Antonio's apparently ill-advised suretyship, which might seem as a "pervasively self-destructive" act, "not only masochistic but antisocial too" (Wilson 2003, 33), largely epitomises, I suggest, the paradoxical condition of the Christian faced with the complex web of human, moral and religious problems woven into early modern debt discourse, searching for a challenging and precarious balance between a generous act of love and a potentially risky practice. Significantly, the merchant goes so far as to define himself as a victim ready for sacrifice:

> ANTONIO I a tainted wether of the flock
> Meetest for death; the weakest kind of fruit
> Drops earliest to the ground, and so let me.
> You cannot better be employed, Bassanio,
> Than to live still and write mine epitaph.
> (4.1.114-18)

It is worth noticing that Antonio's readiness to offer security for a loan, in line with Cornwallis' paradoxical view "that it is a happiness to be in debt", bears also trace of other discursive practices, widely circulating in early modern England (Squeo 2012), which contributed to idealise the 'merchant', seen as an 'allegory' of the 'true Christian', whose risky life lies in the hands of God. "The Kingdom of heaven is like to a merchant", affirms one of Daniel Price's most famous orations, *The Merchant: a Sermon Preached at Paul's Cross* (1608), starting from the assumption that "they that go down to the sea in ships and merchandise in great waters, these men see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep for at his word, the stormy winds arise, which lift up the waves" (1608, 14). On the other hand, the merchant adventurer's profit was seen as a legitimate recompense for the perils of the sea, in opposition to the illicit gain of usurers who ran no risk at all. In *The Death of Usury, or the Disgrace of Usurers* (1594), it is openly stated that the usurer "does not adventure, like the merchant that crosse the sea", receiving instead "a guaranteed return on his money" (27). Such a condition of danger is stressed in the opening scene of the play, where Salarino and Solanio dwell at length on the perils of Antonio's ventures as the most plausible reason for his mysterious sadness: "Had I such ventures forth, / the better part of my affections would / be with my hopes abroad" (1.1.15-17).

A curious trend of praising merchants for their 'courageous' and 'adventurous' enterprises, rather than for their talent in business is discernible in early modern popular culture, as Laura Stevenson has pointed out in *Praise and Paradox* (1984). The awareness of the potentially dangerous impact of economic transformations in Renaissance England led, according to the scholar, to "the understandable temptation to admire business success and still cling to old values, thus reaching a psychological compromise

between new and old", so that "the authors did not praise merchants for their diligence, thrift, or financial talents, they praised them for being 'magnanimous', 'courtly', 'chivalric', vassals of the king" (1984, 6). In this respect, the Venetian setting of Shakespeare's play acquires particular relevance. Indeed, due to the noble origin of most Venetian merchants, many efforts were made here to adapt the logic of trade to the ideal portrait of the gentleman, thus producing what Ugo Tucci has defined as an "adulterated image of the merchant", seen as an "entirely disinterested man, bound to his work not by the desire for profit but by the convenience and advantage of others" (1973, 347-8). Alessandro Sardo's *Discorso della Bellezza,* published in Venice in 1586, openly argued that "the relationship between a virtuous man and wealth consists in giving away, not in acquiring it, because a nobleman does not take, he gives" (qtd in Tucci 1973, 351).

Such a complex overlapping of Christian values, mercantile and aristocratic codes, in which a clear line between 'Christian generosity' and magnificent 'want of prudence' was difficult to draw, is crucial to understanding the characterization of the Christian merchant Antonio, whose extreme liberality in 'giving' is also linguistically emphasised by his extensive use of hyperbolic expressions.

> Antonio My purse, my person, my extremest means
> Lie all unlocked to your occasions.
> (1.1.137-9)

> Antonio Therefore go forth;
> Try what my credit can in Venice do,
> That shall be racked even to the uttermost
> To furnish thee to Belmont to fair Portia.
> (1.1.178-81)

The merchant's carelessness about money and readiness to be in debt for the sake of his friend is thus paradoxically celebrated in a world in which all human actions, with the notable exception of the merchant, are governed by the logic of profit. It is a universe in which Bassanio's love for Portia is only too explicitly related to his purpose to get rid of all his debts; the servant Lancelot abandons

the miserly Jew for the free-spending Bassanio who "indeed gives rare new liveries" (2.2.89); Jessica steals her father's jewels and ducats before fleeing with her lover ("catch this casket, it is worth the pains", 2.6.34), and even her conversion to the Christian faith is curiously related by Lancelot to the increase of the price of pork: "this making of Christians will raise the price of hogs: if you grow all to be pork eaters" (3.5.18-19).

In this sense, Shakespeare draws attention to competing cultural models and value systems, the underlying premise of the early modern culture of paradox (Colie 1966), by contrasting different characters' viewpoints on Antonio. Thus, Salarino's admiration for the merchant's boundless generosity and readiness to help his friend ("A kinder gentlemen treads not the earth", 2.8.36) is counterpointed by Shylock's contempt towards him: "in law simplicity / He lends out money gratis, and brings down / The rate of usance here with us in Venice" (1.3.34-6), a view that Antonio himself will later report to Solanio from his own standpoint: "He seeks my life, his reason well I know: / I oft delivered from his forfeitures / Many that have at times made moan to me" (3.3.21-3). But along with his endless generosity, it is precisely the merchant's carelessness about risks that Shylock deplores, as most notably shown by his reference to Antonio's "ventures he hath squandered abroad" (1.3.18-19). M. M. Mahood notices that 'squandered' "may simply mean 'scattered', without any hint of contempt", but seeing that "Shakespeare's only other use of the verb, 'squand'ring glances of the fool', in *As You Like It* (2.7.57), implies folly", Shylock "may, from the viewpoint of a prudent financer, be glancing at the want of prudence in Antonio's undertakings" (1987, 71).

This idea finds ample resonance in Shylock's use of the term prodigal. The Jew employs the term twice: the first time referring to Bassanio's lavish lifestyle, after grudgingly accepting his invitation for dinner, "I'll go in hate, to feed upon / The prodigal Christian" (2.5.13-5); the second time speaking of Antonio: "There I have another bad match! A bankrupt, a prodigal, who dare scarce show his head on the Rialto, a beggar that was used to come so smug upon the mart!" (3.1.39-41), with regard to what he perceives as the Christians' lack of prudence, the "profligate or, more exactly, unregulated, financial dealings of the Christian Antonio" (Drakakis 2010, 283).

Digital tools can usefully open up broader horizons for understanding the semantic prosody of these scenes and the implications of the term 'prodigal', as perceived by an Elizabethan audience. An instrument for lexicographical investigation like *LEME*, for instance, offering access to the digital format of various early modern vocabularies and encyclopaedic-lexical works, enables us to lay bare the palimpsests of meanings in the term prodigal (fig. 2), comprising not only ideas of "extravagance in expenditure" as shown in the *Dictionarium Linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* by Thomas Thomas, but also generous "careleness in giving" and "readiness to sacrifice" in line with Christian ethos, as attested by Thomas Wilson's *Christian Dictionary* (1612):

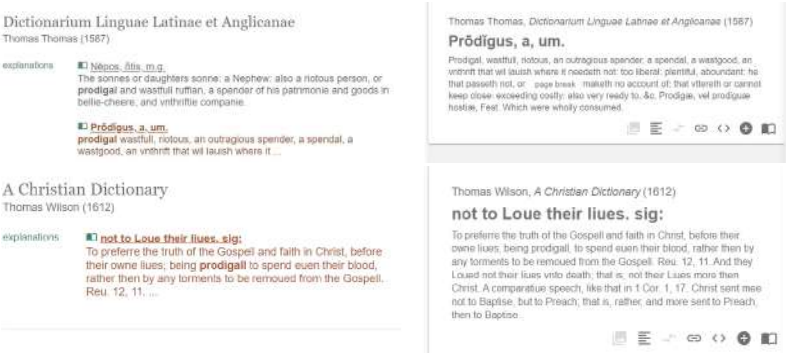

Fig. 2 *Lexicons of Early Modern English,* ed. by Ian Lancashire, University of Toronto
https://leme.library.utoronto.ca/

In a parallel way, investigations of the lexico-grammar behaviour and collocates of the term 'prodigality' in searchable corpora like *EEBO,* through *Sketch Engine*, shed light on the wide-spreading resonances of the concept in a cultural context in which positive and negative connotations coexist. Along with expressions such as "prodigality of love" or "prodigality of nature", the term is associated with 'dissipation', 'improvidence' and 'misconduct' (fig. 3), as also attested by the Thesaurus function of *Sketch Engine* (fig. 4) displaying the results of more than 2,250 occurrences of the adjective 'prodigal' in the *EEBO* corpus:

Fig. 3 Sample of *Sketch Engine* Word Sketch: 'prodigality' from *EEBO* (abridged)
https://www.sketchengine.eu//

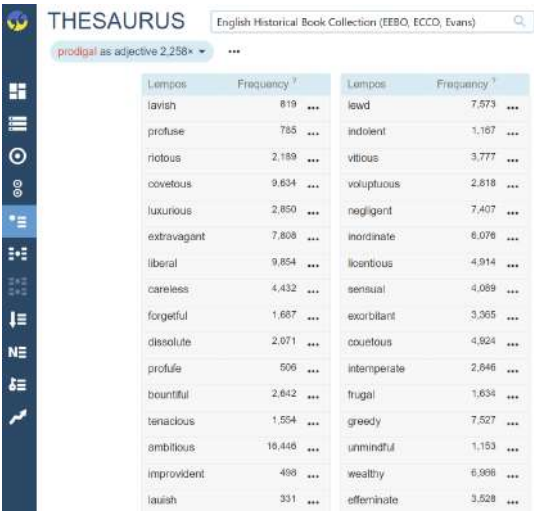

Fig. 4 Sample of *Sketch Engine* Thesaurus: 'prodigal' from *EEBO* (abridged)
https://www.sketchengine.eu//

The competing value systems and cultural codes underpinning *The Merchant of Venice* find their most explicit expression in Shylock's definition of the merchant as "a good man" in 1.3, when assessing the terms of the debt bond:

> Bassanio May you stead me? Will you pleasure me? Shall I know your answer?
> Shylock Three thousand ducats for three months, and Antonio bound.
> Bassanio Your answer to that.
> Shylock Antonio is a good man.
> Bassanio Have you heard any imputation to the contrary?
> Shylock Ho no, no, no, no! My meaning in saying he is a good man is to have you understand me that he is sufficient.
> (1.3.6-12)

The word 'good' underwent a significant semantic broadening at the end of the sixteenth century, as attested by the *OED* that mentions *The Merchant* as one of the earliest occurrences of the new meaning: "*Comm.* of a trader: able to fulfil his engagements, financially sound", also mentioning the expression "*good debts*: those which are expected to be paid in full". The misunderstanding with Bassanio, who only takes the moral significance of the term for granted, points to the problem of assessing the 'worth' and 'trustworthiness' of a creditor, his liability in financial and legal terms, an issue that is inherently related to debt discourse and allows us to shift attention to its paradoxical implications from a broader perspective, as we will see in the following pages, within a cultural universe overwhelmed by economic criteria of assessment.

3. Beyond Commensurability: Paradoxical Scales

In *Accounting for Oneself. Worth, Status and Social Order in Early Modern England*, examining how men and women of different social classes tried to attest their reliability when they appeared as witnesses in courts, Alexandra Shepard has remarked on how frequently they mentioned their material possessions, along with their virtuous behaviour: "The legal presumption underpinning

enquiries about witnesses' worth was that as their worth increased so their susceptibility to bribery or corruption decreased. The wealthier a witness, the greater value attached to his or her word" (2015, 36). In particular, in so far as they tried to "estimate their worth in goods taking into account all outstanding debts" (2015, 37), a direct correspondence was established between 'debt' and a broad notion of 'credit', to be meant in its moral meaning of honesty and trustworthiness. In wider terms, the study shows how ideas of individual and social estimation were firmly rooted in material assets: while only "few witnesses explicitly asserted credit in ethical terms", Shepard remarks on how often, instead, "pecuniary expressions of worth" were employed by the witnesses, as most notably illustrated by the one "from Potterne (Wiltshire) [who] declared himself worth of £10 in 1594, adding that he was 'a man of good name'" (44).

Besides Shylock's above-mentioned definition of Antonio as a "good man", expressions of rating and self-rating abound in *The Merchant of Venice*, where Portia's suitors offer noteworthy cases in point. The Prince of Morocco's opening remarks on his 'complexion' ("The shadowed livery of the burnished sun", 2.1.2) unquestionably introduce "a discourse of racial otherness . . . within whose boundaries the Jew is vilified in Venice" (Drakakis 2010, 86), but his reflections dwell above all on the problem of establishing whether, and to what extent, his own merits may make him worthy of Portia's hand:

> MOROCCO Pause there, Morocco,
> And *weigh* thy value with an even hand.
> If thou be'st rated by thy estimation
> Thou dost deserve *enough*; and yet '*enough*'
> May not extend so far as to the lady.
> (2.7.24-8, my emphasis)

Along with the verb 'weigh', suggesting the idea of balancing and evaluating as if on scales, the term 'enough' – "a quantitative commensurate with worth" (Drakakis 2010, 264), which is repeated twice in the same line and placed in end-focus position – draws attention to notions of quantification and commensurability that

acquire increasing relevance in the play. If Arragon, the second suitor, offers another interesting instance of self-appraisal, seeking to distinguish himself from "the barbarous multitudes", preferring not to "jump with common spirits" and accordingly refusing to "choose what many men desire" (2.9.30-2), Bassanio goes so far as to provide an explicit association between an individual's 'worth' and his debts, openly referring to the web of debt-bonds in which he is himself entangled:

> Bassanio *Rating* myself at nothing, you shall see
> How much I was a braggart. When I told you
> My state was *nothing*, I should have told you
> That I was *worse than nothing*; for, indeed,
> I have engaged myself to a dear friend,
> Engaged my friend to his mere enemy,
> To feed my means.
> (3.2.256-62, my emphasis)

The extent to which notions of "debt, property and personhood" were related in early modern England has been explored at length by Amanda Bailey in *Of Bondage*, which offers a wide-ranging framework to understand the manifold repercussions of these concepts in a society in which a legal relation was established "not only between creditor and debtor, but also between the body and the coins he borrowed" (2013, 2). As Bailey points out: "A debt bond was a promise that could be quantified and enforced. More particularly, its terms initiated an 'economic logic of justice', whereby restitution relied on the state's ability to convert the debtor's body from a form of collateral, a surety, into a forfeit, the equivalent of the unpaid loan" (2013, 2). Such ideas of 'quantification' and 'equivalence' characterised a universe in which "people began to use new measures to account for themselves" (Shepard 2015), a society, above all, in which money and bodies became comparable forms of property in a sort of "economic logic of justice" and "the body of the debtor could stand in for the original loan" (Bailey 2013, 3).

Set against this cultural framework, the debt bond Shylock proposed to Antonio epitomises what Jacques Derrida defines as an 'impractical translation':

> In *The Merchant of Venice,* as in every translation, there is also, at the very heart of the obligation and the debt, an incalculable equivalence, an impossible but alleged correspondence between the pound of flesh and money, a required by impractical translation between the unique literalness of a proper body and the arbitrariness of a general, monetary or fiduciary sign. (2001, 184)

Positing an equivalence between three thousand ducats and "an equal pound / Of your fair flesh to be cut off and taken / In what part of your body pleaseth me" (1.3.142-4), the bond establishes a form of "indebtedness in which exchange-values are incommensurable and thus each is untranslatable into the other" (Derrida 2001, 186). To find a somewhat similar example of 'equivalence' in Shakespearean drama, we should turn perhaps to *Measure for Measure*, where Isabella's body becomes a pledge to 'redeem' the debt to justice incurred by her brother, "a forfeit of the law" (2.2.74). In accordance with the literal meaning of the word 'forfeit', "from the medieval Latin *foris factum* . . . the sum of money one paid for committing a crime" (Bailey 2013, 53), Angelo offers to spare his life on condition that Isabella will sleep with him: "finding yourself desire'd of such a person / Whose credit with the judge, or own great place / Could fetch your brother from the manacles / Of the all-binding law" (2.2.92-5). As Peter Grav has pointed out, Angelo performs "the role of a quasi-Shylock; only instead of three thousand ducats, it is Claudio's life that is on offer, and rather than a literal pound of flesh, Isabella must 'lay down the treasures of [her] body'" (2008, 114). But the main focus is definitely on the very notion of 'equivalence' in a play that "explores the significance not only of paying money for a body but also of using a body as money", a play in which "heads and maidenheads are traded as if they were commensurate" (Shell 1988, 125), within a broader context in which the notions of balance and equivalence are problematised, weighing up justice and mercy, power and responsibility, appearance and reality.

From a similar perspective, Shylock's bond allows us to delve deeper into debt discourse, shifting attention to the paradoxical implications of the very principle of commensurability, upon which a market-inflected society and its "economic logic of justice" are rooted. Aristotle's thought can help clarify this point: "In

associations that are based on mutual exchange, the *just* in this sense constitutes the bond that holds the association together", a function performed by money which "acts like a *measure*: it makes goods *commensurate* and *equalizes* them. For just as there is no community without exchange, there is no exchange without equality and no equality without commensurability" (1962, 124-7). In particular, the problem at issue is to establish "how money, as 'quantitative' measure of value for 'qualitatively' incommensurable objects, can leap a categorical gulf separating quantity and quality, 'exchange value' and 'use value', such that fair exchange, which for Aristotle requires true commensuration, is possible" (Spencer 2003, 145).

Taking the search for such an impossible balance to extremes, Portia can go so far as to formulate her paradoxical promise: "Thou shall have justice more than thou desirest" (4.1.312), thus hinting at scales that undermine the very notions of 'justness' and 'equity' in the law. But many other characters in the play are confronted with the difficulty of weighing up things that pertain to incommensurable orders of value. The terms 'worth' and 'value' themselves are subject to a bewildering multiplicity of meanings, beginning with the opening scene where Bassanio lays emphasis on Portia's high 'worth' – "nothing *undervalued* / To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia / Nor is the wide world ignorant of her *worth*" (1.1.164-6, my emphasis) – a notion that is clearly inseparable from the fortune of "a lady richly left". In the casket scenes, where 'fair' Portia's worth is repeatedly compared of the value of the metals of which coins were made, Morocco's choice of gold interestingly bears trace of the mercantilist ideology, as Mark Netzloff has pointed out, which "mistook the function of money, rendering equivalent abstract forms of values with their material embodiment by equating reserves of coins and bullions (as 'treasure') with national wealth" (2003, 171). Assessing and comparing value is, from a broader perspective, a constant and unrewarding effort throughout the play. Interestingly, Bassanio equates the value of his own life and of his love for Portia and weighs them up against his affection for Antonio: "Antonio, I am married to a wife / Which is as dear to me as life itself; / But life itself, my wife, and all the world / Are not with me esteemed above thy life" (4.1.278-81). Similarly, at the end of the trial, Antonio

persuades Bassanio to give Balthazar the ring he has received from his wife, thus openly establishing a form of equivalence between Balthazar's merits and Portia's will: "Let him have the ring / Let his deserving and my love withal / Be valued 'gainst your wife's commandment" (4.1.445-7). Shylock himself proves to be aware of forms of 'value' that exceed mere principles of commensurability, referring to the precious turquoise his daughter has bartered for a monkey: "I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of moneys" (3.1.95-6).

By problematising the notion of commensurability, the play definitely interrogates the founding principles of the market logic within a broader cultural context of 'radical scepticism' that "turns on itself", ultimately "weighing the human need to affirm values against the inherently problematic nature of all acts of valuing" (Bradshaw 1987, 7). From this perspective, it cannot go unnoticed how *The Merchant of Venice* also ultimately points to the notion of 'gift' as an alternative to the logic of debt. In this sense, the play can be read as contrasting the dynamics of the market, based upon monetary 'equivalence', with the spirit of the gift (Sharp 1986; Coral 2022) that only entails gratuitous reciprocity, as most notably exemplified by Portia's observations after the trial: "He is well paid that is well satisfied / And I delivering you I am satisfied / And therein do account myself well paid; My mind was never mercenary" (4.1.411-14).

Warning against the risks of oversimplified views of "a rapid and spectacular shift from traditional feudal systems of production to modern capitalism", Jordi Coral suggests we should rather read the play in light of what anthropologists such as Marcel Maus regard as the constituting principle of archaic communities, that is the logic of gift-exchange, "the obligation to reciprocate bonds that keep the community socially cohesive in a way that . . . modern societies have ceased to be" (2022, 3). Undeniably, the whole play is punctuated by "the giving of gifts" (Sharp 1986, 250) in a wide array of forms, beginning with "the gifts of rich value" (2.9.90) that suitors offer Portia on arriving in Belmont, or the "present" that Old Gobbo brings to his son's master, the Jew, a gift that Lancelot choses, instead, to offer to Master Bassanio, up to the final "record of gift" (4.1.384), the legal deed that, by supreme irony, Shylock is

forced to sign after the trial; ending with the last scene, where the misunderstanding regarding the gift of the lovers' rings weaves the theme into the texture of the comic plot.

Among the several lexicographic resources made available in a digital format by *LEME*, Thomas Cooper's *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae et Britannicae* (1578) helps us understand the meanings of the term 'gift' in the range of contexts in which it appears in the play: "a gift given to a prince at his first coming", "a pleasure done in recompense of another: gift for gift", "to give as a present . . . to give for ever or freely", "a present, a charge, a benefit or friendly pleasure done to one". From a different perspective, the functionalities of *Sketch Engine* (fig. 5) may shed light on the co-occurrences of 'gift' and 'debt', and on their lexico-grammar behaviour in the *EEBO* corpus:

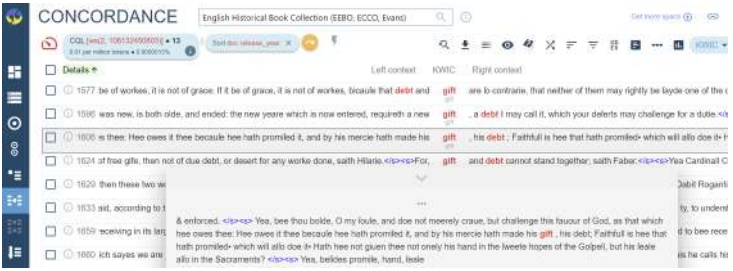

Fig. 5 Sample of co-occurrences of 'debt' and 'gift' from *EEBO* using *Sketch Engine*
https://www.sketchengine.eu/

But, once again, insights into a corpus of early modern debt paradoxes can provide a broader framework to understand the sweeping implications of the two concepts in Shakespeare's play and their cultural resonances for early modern audiences, with reference to the Renaissance episteme. Interestingly, "That It Is Good to Be in Debt", another paradox by Cornwallis published in 1616, dwells at length on notions of natural indebtedness and reciprocity that govern the whole universe, mentioning the Sun that 'lends' its light and warmth to the Earth, thus blurring the borderline between the concepts of 'debt' and 'gift':

> Without debt and loan, the fabrick of the world will be disjoynted and fall assunder into its first *Chaos;* the beauty of the Starres, what would it be but vastnesse, and deformity, if the Sun did not lend them light? The earth would remain unfruitfull, if it did not borrow refreshing dews from the watery Signes and Planets. . . . And to say the truth, there is nothing good or great in the world, but that it *borroweth* something from others to make it great, or *lendeth* to another to make it good. (1616, G3*v*-G4*r*)

Whether *The Merchant of Venice* ultimately aims to provide a "negative depiction of monetized societies" and a pessimistic "indictment of money's influence on the human condition" (Grav 2008, 85), or rather point, as a possible alternative, to human transactions based on a system of reciprocity in line with the logic of gift economy, is open to debate. As this chapter has tried to illustrate, the incongruous equivalence assumed by the debt bond around which the play is woven allows Shakespeare to explore the many paradoxical implications of the early modern debt discourse. Besides contrasting different moral codes and value systems by staging opposite viewpoints of the merchant's carelessness about money and readiness to act as surety for his friend, the play increasingly lays bare the disturbing ambiguities and inconsistencies that lie beneath the monetary ethos of market-inflected world, a universe overwhelmed by a paradoxical attempt to "commensurate the incommensurable" (Spencer 2003, 146). From this perspective, a digital archive offering access to early modern debt paradoxes offers precious insights into how early modern audiences perceived those 'bonds of death' and 'bonds of love' (Serpieri 1999) that underpin all human relations in the play. Cornwallis' texts, in particular, help us bring into sharper focus the sweeping resonances of what Laura Kolb and George Oppitz-Trotman have shown to be the very roots of "early modern debts", that ultimately "shape human identities and interactions, binding individuals into connectives whether they know it or not" (2020, 4).

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10

"Do you see this?". Ambiguity and Paradox in *King Lear*

Michael R. Best

Abstract

The conventions of print are so familiar that they are effectively invisible. Digital media, however, are still evolving as the screen makes available an interface capable of a wide range of visual presentation and interaction. In this paper I explore some possibilities for enhancing a reader's awareness of nuances of variation, poetic rhythm, and meaning in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, illustrating some experiments in making apparent some of the richness that this complex text yields. Because it was originally published in two widely variant versions, an editor preparing the play for print is confronted with the necessity of making choices, often between two readings that make sense, but which may modify a reader's understanding of the action or sense of character. Print editions record variants in collations separate from the text; the web can display them with a simple mouse-hover. Differences in the lineation of blank verse are especially difficult to collate in print, though the resulting changes of emphasis will be of interest both to critics and actors: a web page can relineate with a click. The climax of the play, where Lear dies holding his dead daughter in his arms, is paradoxically different in the two versions; one is pessimistic, the other deeply ambiguous, as Lear dies believing Cordelia is alive. On the web, a dynamic representation of the passages can make both alternative endings fluently available, visibly dramatising the questions arising from the two endings and the evolution of the play in the fifteen years between the two early editions. Print is fixed and authoritative; the digital page can be dynamic, revealing more levels of meaning at the choice of the reader.

Keywords: *King Lear*; digital; interface; variants; blank verse; editions

This essay embodies a paradox. It is a print version of a visual demonstration in which I argued that in the digital age scholars have an opportunity to go beyond print and to exploit the still-new medium in ways that can vitally enhance the presentation of

the information they seek to impart. My example is Shakespeare's textually challenging play, *King Lear*, but it is my belief that other texts and other scholarly pursuits would benefit from a revaluation of our means of communicating to our audiences.

At the climax of *King Lear*, as his inert daughter lies in his arms, the King asks those around him, "Do you see this?". What it is he sees, or thinks he sees, is the subject of a great deal of critical energy, and a topic I shall return to later. I want to begin by asking the question a little differently. What do we, as readers or as members of an audience, see when we experience Shakespeare's *King Lear*? If it is a performance or film, we will be immersed in visual and aural media, and we may particularly remember moments that strike us as illuminating the text – or irritating in what we think to be mistaken or exaggerated. When we read the play, as distinct from watching it, are we at all aware of what we see?

The physical, printed page is the traditional interface between editors and their readers. Print conventions vary only minimally from text to text, and those who design the material appearance of the page have few options: paragraphs may be indicated by white space or indentation, there may or may not be a running title at the top of the page, the position of page numbers can vary, and there is a range of type-faces to choose from. Perhaps the choice that most clearly impacts readers is the location of footnotes, at the bottom of the page, at the end of each chapter or essay, or at the end of the volume; this decision, however, is more likely to be made for economic reasons than as the result of considering the nature of the content or the comfort of the reader.

A web page is far less fixed in concept or design. In addition, whatever the design, its appearance to the viewer will vary significantly according to the screen it is displayed upon, which may be a large desk monitor, a tablet, or a smart phone; thus there is of necessity much more variety and flexibility in its interface. I am very much aware that there is a long and admirable tradition in academic scholarship to focus on the importance of the content itself rather than the presentation of that content, but I argue that the visual presentation of at least some complex texts in digital media provides scholars with the opportunity to communicate a richer awareness of nuance in the works they edit and read.

1. Line Breaks in Verse

I would like to start with a seemingly trivial matter that arises in the editing of blank verse drama – the decisions the editor needs to make from time to time concerning the appropriate point for line breaks in cases where printing practices were inconsistent or unstable. Line breaks are a powerful and very visible form of punctuation: the core of verse drama is the rhythm signaled by a new line, directing both actors and readers to the words, phrases, and images that are especially significant. The problem is that lines were routinely changed or modified in the process of printing, for example where the copy had been cast off inaccurately, forcing the compositor either to fill a page by creating extra lines, or conversely to switch from verse to prose to cram in more content. One of the tasks of the editor thus becomes the process of making choices in attempting to reverse the compositors' assumed modifications.

King Lear presents a challenge of recording changes in lineation in an unusually extreme form. First published as a Quarto in 1608 as *The History of King Lear*, the later version in the First Folio, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, differs significantly in its printing of verse. Q1 *King Lear* is a difficult and puzzling publication. It remains so even after decades of intensive research, from Doran (1931), Greg (1940), and Stone (1980), to the meticulous scholarship of Peter W. M. Blayney (1982). Originally rejected as a 'bad' quarto, more recent scholarship has accepted that it was probably printed from an early draft of the play, possibly in Shakespeare's own hand (Halio 1994, 4-7; Wells 1986, 510; Weis 1993, 3; Foakes 1997, 199-21; Wells 2000, 3; Jowett 2016, 1244-5). Blayney discovered a great deal about the process involved in printing the Quarto and about the practices of the printer responsible for it, Nicholas Okes. The manuscript was sufficiently difficult to read that the compositors set it *seriatim* – page by page – instead of by the more efficient method of "casting off" – a process of estimating where pages would be completed so that they could be set in the order of printing rather than the order of reading. In addition, Blayney has established the fact that *Lear* was the first play Okes printed, with the result that his compositors were inexperienced in reading the characteristics of play manuscripts; this may well account for the fact that substantial

sections of the play were printed as prose, where the language is clearly verse — a format the Folio duly records. The manuscript the compositors were working from was clearly difficult and puzzling: a collation of the twelve extant copies shows that there were an unusual number of "stop press" changes made as it was being printed (see Greg 1940, Blayney 1982, Warren 1989).

Another unusual feature of the Quarto is illustrated in this passage. It begins with verse that is generally similar to the Folio, though it omits one Folio line, here recorded in square brackets. King Lear has stormed away from his elder daughter, Goneril, and is seeking entrance to speak with the husband of his younger daughter, with whom he intends to stay; his first request has been denied:

> LEAR The King would speak with *Cornewal*, the deare father
> Would with his daughter speake, commands her seruice,
> [F: Are they inform'd of this? My breath and blood:]
> Fierie Duke, tell the hot Duke that Lear,
> No but not yet may be he is not well.

The compositor then switches to a kind of 'fake' verse, with irregular, hypermetrical lines, each dutifully beginning with a capital letter.

> Infirmitie doth still neglect all office, where to our health
> Is boũd, we are not our selues, when nature being oprest
> Cõmand the mind to suffer with the bodie, ile forbeare,
> And am fallen out with my more hedier will,
> To take the indispos'd and sickly fit, for the sound man,
> Death on my state, wherfore should he sit here?
> (2.2.300-7, TLN 1376-89)

While these variations in lineation are largely of bibliographical rather than critical interest, there are some passages where both texts record blank verse, but the line breaks vary. Variations of this kind shift poetic emphasis, and thus meaning, and will be of interest to both actors and critics. While the Folio is far more carefully printed, it is clear that it was subjected to modification and revision in the theatre, and even in the process of printing. Paul Werstine has convincingly implicated compositorial intervention

in modifying lineation from the copy used for the Folio (1984, 111); thus, while the Quarto compositors were clearly prone to error, the Folio lineation may itself be sophisticated. In the following example Kent protests against Lear's decision to banish Cordelia; in anger, Lear warns Kent not to intervene: "The bow is bent and drawn. Make from the shaft" (1.1.143). Kent replies:

Quarto

Let it fall rather,
Though the fork invade the region of my heart.
Be Kent unmannerly when Lear is mad.
What wouldst thou do, old man? Think'st thou that duty
Shall have dread to speak when power to flattery bows?
To plainness honor's bound when majesty falls to folly.
Reverse thy doom, and in thy best consideration
Check this hideous rashness.

Folio

Let it fall rather, though the fork invade
The region of my heart. Be Kent unmannerly
When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man?
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak
When power to flattery bows? To plainness honor's bound
When majesty falls to folly. *Reserve thy state*,
And in thy best consideration check
This hideous rashness.
(1.1.145-51, emphasis added)

In the Quarto the lines tend to end with strong pauses, though there is one hypermetrical line ("To plainness . . ."). The Folio differs consistently, as line breaks occur more in the middle of longer phrases, a difference that has the effect of driving the passage forward rhythmically, perhaps conveying a stronger passion. The Folio also changes one phrase of significant semantic interest (italicised). Quarto Kent asks Lear to change his mind about his personal choice to banish Cordelia ("Reverse thy doom"), while Folio Kent urges Lear to make the political decision to retain his status as king. Changes of this kind are awkward to include in normal collations so that an attentive reader can see the alternative modes of expression, or the extent of editorial intervention. If they are recorded at all they tend to be relegated to an appendix: Foakes's Arden edition devotes fourteen pages to a list of modifications of

lineation, and Stanley Wells's edition of the Quarto for Oxford includes a similar number. Meticulous though these records are, it is doubtful whether readers, perhaps other than fellow editors, pay any attention to them.

Differences of lineation are particularly interesting where editors have chosen to modify the originals in passages of intense emotion. In his dramatization of mental instability, Shakespeare's characters express emotion, thoughts, and judgements that would otherwise be repressed. In general, however, they express their often disjointed thoughts in prose rather than verse. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia, when she is not singing snatches from old songs, expresses her disjointed thoughts in prose (4.5.21-72), and Hamlet himself provides an especially well-known example as he uses the cloak of madness, real or assumed, unkindly to tease Polonius about his age (2.2.196-202). Polonius's rather generous and perceptive response, in a well-known phrase, is to observe the paradox that "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (2.2.203-4), and he is generous as he acknowledges that Hamlet's disturbed mental state paradoxically allows him to speak in ways that "reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of" (2.2.208-9).

In *King Lear*, when Edgar takes the part of a mentally disturbed beggar, Poor Tom, as his disguise, he combines snatches of song with long prose passages of invented irrationality. His constructed world is peopled by demons who torment him, identified by colourful names Shakespeare garnered from Samuel Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603). When Lear asks of him "What hast thou been?" (3.4.83), Edgar recites the details of a past, real or imagined, that was peppered with vice: "Wine loved I dearly, dice dearly, and in woman out-paramoured the Turk" (3.4.91-2). As if taking Poor Tom as his model, at this point in the play Lear's speeches switch from verse to prose, signalling that his mind has become disoriented; as Polonius observed of Hamlet, Lear's mental breakdown paradoxically brings a depth of insight beyond that which is possible when language is constrained by social norms. Like Hamlet and Ophelia, Lear, in both Quarto and Folio texts, initially records his passion in prose despite the intense power of his language.

The most interesting, and most radical, editorial intervention

in lineating speeches in *King Lear* is to be found in Lear's so-called 'mad' speeches where he meets Gloucester and his disguised son Edgar. Perhaps taking his cue from the fact that the Folio switches briefly from prose to verse at the line where Lear claims to be "every inch a king" (4.5.110), Samuel Johnson, in his edition of 1765, changed the verse lineation from that of the Folio, and also decided to convert a later, intensely felt section of prose to somewhat irregular blank verse. In the process, the decisions he made about line breaks in both sections inevitably communicated critical judgements about the passages. This extract begins with blind Gloucester's recognition of the King's voice, while Lear obsessively returns to what he sees as the cause of his fall in fortunes. Johnson follows the Folio for the first three lines, but then chooses to leave one line as a single word, just three syllables, thus giving it immensely strong emphasis: "Adultery?" (4.5.113; fig. 1).

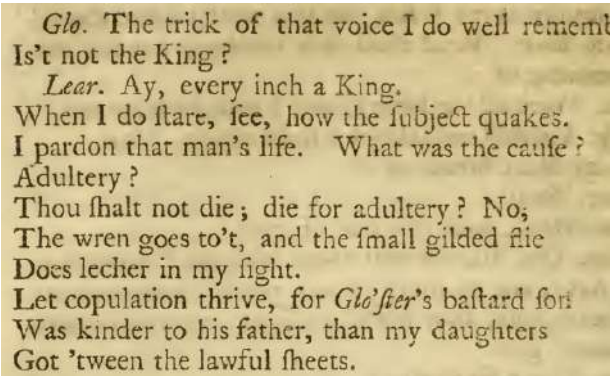
Glo. The trick of that voice I do well remem
Is't not the King?
Lear. Ay, every inch a King.
When I do ſtare, ſee, how the ſubject quakes.
I pardon that man's life. What was the cauſe?
Adultery?
Thou ſhalt not die; die for adultery? No;
The wren goes to't, and the ſmall gilded flie
Does lecher in my ſight.
Let copulation thrive, for *Glo'ſter*'s baſtard ſon
Was kinder to his father, than my daughters
Got 'tween the lawful ſheets.

Fig. 1: New York Public Library. Public domain. Image from the Hathi Trust Digital Library.

Two lines later Jonson creates another short line, this time emphasizing lechery. As a poet himself, Johnson was keenly aware of the importance of rhythm; his choices have the effect of focusing Lear's – and the reader's – thoughts powerfully on the supposed adultery of his absent and seemingly long-dead wife. This indirect and glancing reference to Lear's queen is anticipated earlier when Lear scolds his daughter Regan for not welcoming him more positively after he has stormed out of Goneril's castle:

If thou shouldst not be glad,
I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,
Sepulchring an adultress.
(2.2.324-6)

Lear's immediate suspicion of the possibility of his wife's infidelity contrasts vividly with Shakespeare's immediate source, the anonymous *History of King Leir*. This earlier play opens with Leir extolling the virtue of his recently "deceased and dearest queen", "Whose soul, I hope, possessed of heavenly joys, / Doth ride in triumph 'mongst the cherubim" (*Leir*, TLN 2-5).

Lear's implied judgement of his wife is an early indicator of his later obsession with female sexuality when his inhibitions are diminished by his state of mental disturbance. But female sexuality is just one of the multitude of human foibles his disturbed mind darts to; a few lines later, in a passage converted to verse from the original prose, this time by Nicholas Rowe, Lear's focus shifts to a sweeping and deeply moving indictment of human injustice under the influence of power and wealth:

Plate sin with gold
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.
(4.5.166-8)

His final logic is that since all are equally guilty no-one is guilty: "None does offend, none, I say, none" (4.5.169). Johnson's choice, rhythmically and visually to emphasise adultery in particular, has been followed by many later editions, but is it justified bibliographically, or is it a kind of critical special pleading? Should readers be alerted in some way that there are alternatives?

The digital medium invites a solution. It is possible to create dynamic lines that can be redrawn at will for the reader curious enough to explore the variations. On the Internet Shakespeare Edition site, horizontal tabs allow the reader to see the text in its original form in prose, in Johnson's highly influential relineation, and, as illustrated here (fig. 2), in the lineation I chose for the edition, where I have more closely followed the Folio verse lineation so that the word "adultery" is part of a longer line, and thus is less heavily emphasised.

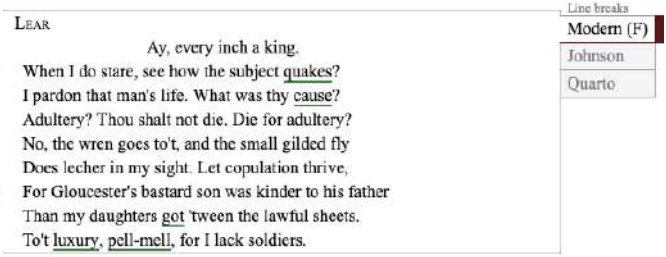

Fig. 2: *King Lear* 4.5.110-18, TLN 2554-62, *Internet Shakespeare Editions*

This static representation on the page becomes fluently dynamic on screen, where lines are changed according to the version chosen on the tab. The visual presence of tabs invites the reader to explore the nuances of meaning and emphasis the alternatives convey. It is important to realise that where lineation in the two versions varies, the tabs do not substitute the alternative text, but change only the line breaks, thus focusing on one characteristic of the work, its rhythm. My point is not which version might more accurately represent an imagined original (supposing there was one original); and it is not to suggest that my version is closer to Shakespeare's intention (supposing we can somehow ascertain what that was); rather it is how we might represent the text to the modern reader in such a way that options of this kind are conveniently and transparently visible.

2. Clusters of Individual Variants

A more familiar task for the editor arises when differing editions record variants in words or phrases. Again, *King Lear* is something of a test case, with a very large number of variants between Quarto and Folio. Halio (2005, 85) estimates that there are "roughly 1,500" that are substantive, and by my count at least 150 of those are of significant semantic or critical interest. Many variants can be explained as errors brought about through conventional bibliographical means: eye-skip, wrong fount, misreading of a difficult manuscript and so on. But there are some that are clearly the result of a deliberate change, and there are passages where

variants cluster, sometimes including words that are not readily explained in bibliographical terms.

In the opening scene, where Lear formally announces his intention to retire, to abdicate the throne and to pass it on to his three daughters, there is a short passage where there are four clustered variants. In this, admittedly rather awkward print representation, the Quarto reading is recorded first and underlined, the Folio follows in square brackets, italicised:

> Know we have divided
> In three our kingdom; and 'tis our first [*fast*] intent
> To shake all cares and business of our state [*from our age*],
> Confirming [*Conferring*] them on younger years [*strengths*]…
> (1.1.37-40)

Two of these can be seen as simple errors, though in each case both readings make good sense: first/*fast* and Confirming/*Conferring*. But the other two cannot be so readily explained. Quarto Lear wishes to be relieved of his "state", his involvement in the business of government, while Folio Lear emphasises his "age" as motive. Quarto Lear sees the youth of those who follow as a justification for his action, while Folio Lear points to their "strengths", suggesting that the weakness of his age is his motive. The cumulative effect of all the changes, including all those that could be accidental, is that the Quarto Lear is more businesslike, while the Folio Lear is more emotional, stressing his age and declining strength. These lines are followed by a passage unique to the Folio, where Lear continues in this vein, speaking of his desire "Unburdened" to "crawl toward death" (1.1.41).

Towards the end of the opening scene there is another moment where variables may either be accidental or the result of deliberate revision (whether by Shakespeare or someone else). The two elder sisters are left alone on stage; warily they test each other on their reactions to Lear's disowning of Cordelia and the best path for them to follow in the future. In both texts Goneril observes that Lear is impetuous and that his age is "full of changes" (1.1.289). Quarto Goneril goes on to say that this is something they have seen many times before, that the "observation" they have made of

this kind of behaviour "hath not been little". Folio Goneril says the opposite, omitting that crucial word *not*: "The observation we have made of it hath been little". An editor may choose to decide that the Folio compositor skipped the word accidentally, but both readings make perfect sense; the difference is that they create interestingly different 'back stories' to an understanding of Lear's personality. A few lines later there is what appears to be a trivial change in a word, but again there is a significant effect on the emotional vector of the scene. Quarto Goneril counsels a more aggressive response to Lear's more predictable unpredictability: "Pray you let us hit together", whereas Folio Goneril proposes that they "sit together" (1.1.304) to plan their next steps in the light of this shocking new behaviour. In modern type it looks as if there is a difference of just one letter, but in the original the Quarto's "hit" took three type-forms, while the Folio took just two, the ligature "ſi" and the letter "t"; it is perhaps a misreading, but cannot be a simple typographical error. Stone comments that the Folio's reading "is probably to be ascribed to the compositor, and if so, to a lapse of aural memory" (215). Whichever version is chosen, the different effects of the variants raise keen questions about the characters both of Lear and the two elder sisters, who are too often seen in terms of simple black and white. In performance, the difference between the readings can have extensive ramifications. Alexa Alice Joubin (2013, 58) writes of the 2013 Oregon Shakespeare Festival production of *King Lear*, directed by Bill Raunch, where two different actors played Lear on alternating nights as a means of reducing the intense pressure on the lead performer:

> The dramaturgical decision showcased contrasting interpretations of the play and solved the pragmatic issue of labor by dividing the creative effort. Michael Winters played a childlike "Lear of Light" who suffers from dementia, truly a "foolish, fond old man" (4.6.61). The daughters do not so much fear as worry for his well-being. In contrast, Jack Willis offered a wrathful "Lear of Darkness" who is a "bullying mob boss". (Minton and Quarmby 2014, 65)

It does seem to be something of a paradox that very minor variations of this kind can create major echoes in the play. I am reminded of the famous crux where Othello realises that he has thrown away a

pearl, "Richer than all his tribe" (5.2.344). Quarto and Folio versions variously identify the tribe as "Indian" or "Judean", original spelling requiring just a single letter change, "Indean" (Q) to "Iudean" (F), so easily might a single piece of type be inserted upside down. But one of these readings, "Indian", emphatically invites a neo-colonial critical approach, while the other, "Judean", fits neatly with an overall Christian view of the play.

Variants of this kind are recorded in collations, and, in cases where they the editor considers them to be of sufficient importance, they will be discussed in a commentary note of whatever length the edition allows. The limited space print provides means that commentary is either relegated to small print at the bottom of the page, or recorded in a section at the back of the book, widely separated from its text; collations are similarly segregated, and further separated from the reader by dense contractions difficult to expand for those other than scholars. In the process, the presence of fascinating and stimulating readings, whatever their provenance, are likely to be missed. What readers see, or fail to see, can radically modify their experience of the text. An online edition has the opportunity to make visible and interactive these features of the text. It has been my intention in creating the online *Lear* edition to take a step in this direction. Alessandra Squeo has extensively documented this approach in a recent article and book (2021, 32-6, and 2022, 195-204). In the online text, variants that suggest potentially interesting semantic alternatives are highlighted; when the mouse hovers over the word or phrase the reading in the alternative text appears above (fig. 3).

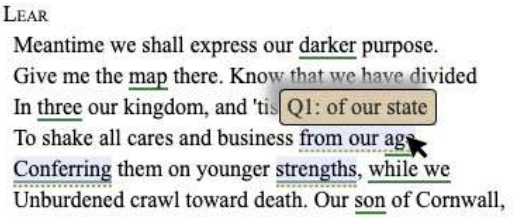

Fig. 3: *King Lear* 1.1.36-41. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*

The advantage of this approach is its convenience and immediacy. A further click or tap on the link opens up a standard footnote

pop-up window where the editor can more fully discuss nuances of differing readings. I want to stress that this editorial interface does not result in an "un-edited" text, but in one that adds an extra dimension for the reader. The editor retains the responsibility of choosing which variants are of sufficient semantic interest to be highlighted in this fashion, and the separately edited base texts, Quarto and Folio, require the editor, in traditional fashion, to make countless decisions on readings in difficult or obscure passages, on the minutiae of matters such as punctuation, and, as I have earlier been discussing, of lineation.

Squeo points out that the effectively unlimited space of the digital edition creates a danger that the reader may become confused or overburdened with a multiplicity of too many signals, too many choices, too much data (2021, 35-6). As Edgar admits, at the end of his already lengthy narrative describing the last hours of his father, "To amplify too much, would make much more,/ And top extremity" (5.3.208-9, Quarto). The responsibility to avoid this excess rests both with the editors and the web developers who create new online spaces under their direction. The initial screen can be invitingly straightforward and simple, leaving it to the reader to invoke access to annotations, to collations, and to further features, perhaps incrementally increasing the range and complexity of editorial apparatus as she or he becomes curious and learns to access additional information. The ISE site takes a step in this direction; a menu in the left-hand column offers a series of display options of varying complexity that can be turned on or off.

The digital medium is still ripe for experimentation and innovation. Over time, web and app interfaces have become somewhat more standardised in function and appearance, but as I scan the news in the morning on my iPhone I have to remember a range of different ways of navigating the apps or websites I access. Users of the medium are of necessity constantly involved in the equivalent of a kind of low-level computer game as they figure how each site responds to a mouse or tap. I don't for a moment wish to suggest that *King Lear* is some kind of game, but might it be possible for academics to allow themselves to be a little playful? Alan Galey has done some creative and original work on the interface for the Shakespeare Variorum project, decoding dense textual collation

in order to display timelines for variants and changes made by individual editors on readily understood coloured spreadsheets. On his personal site at the University of Toronto, Galey has also implemented his slightly mischievous idea of animating variants where it is not easy to determine which has precedence. I use this feature in my *Lear* Folio edition of *King Lear* where in the opening scene the speech prefix "*Cor.*" might plausibly be taken to mean either Cornwall or Cordelia. As Beth Goldring has pointed out in her essay in *The Division of the Kingdoms* (1983), this ambiguity creates another instance of a variant reading that has a far-reaching influence on how we understand Cordelia's character.

3. Paradox and the Limitations of Conflation

The complex dialogue set up by the two variant endings of *King Lear* provides the hardest test for the design of a display that will permit, even encourage, the kind of inclusive, multi-valent reading I am advocating. In an attempt to address this challenge, my online text extends the convention of the horizontal tabs created to display variant lineation between Quarto and Folio rather like those I used above for comparison of line breaks in Q1 and the Folio, to make it possible for the reader to flip between the two versions or to see them in parallel columns, without leaving the virtual page. This visual tool is particularly appropriate for use in the final moments of Lear's life (fig. 4):

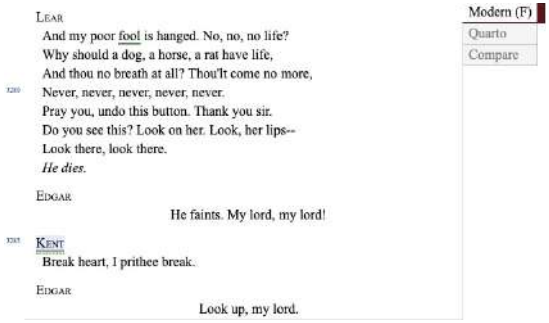

Fig. 4: *King Lear*, 5.3.309-16, TLN 3277-85, *Internet Shakespeare Editions*

Critical readings of the climax of the play make very clear that it embodies a complex paradox. One school of thought, very prominent in the middle years of the twentieth century, sees, in Lear's belief that Cordelia lives, a redemptive movement towards a realization that he will be reunited with her in another life. Contrastingly, from the time of Swinburne in the late nineteenth century, Lear's vision has been seen as self-deceptive, and the conclusion of the play deeply pessimistic, even nihilistic. Both views, however, have almost exclusively been based on conflated texts which choose the Folio's more extensive ending, including, most importantly, Lear's last lines, from which I have taken the title of this paper, "Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips – / Look there, look there" (5.3.314-15)".

In the Quarto, in place of these moving and profoundly ambiguous lines, Lear simply groans, "O, o, o, o." In both texts Edgar attempts to revive him. In the Quarto, Lear calls on his heart to break, and dies (though, typically, the Quarto offers no stage direction); the Folio Lear dies immediately after the words I just quoted where Lear believes he sees some signs of life in his daughter; here his death is made specific by the stage direction "*He dies*", and it is Kent who calls on his own heart to break as he sees his master die.

The difference between the two texts is profound. The only comfort offered Quarto Lear is release from suffering as his plea for his own death is fulfilled; Folio Lear dies seemingly in the belief that Cordelia lives, and the significance of this moment is left to the production or the reader to interpret as redemptive, as a final delusion, or as a paradoxical moment of unknowing where both possibilities are held in suspension, the play ending with a question rather than a clear resolution. Any attempt to conflate the two passages forces the editor to make a choice, limiting the resonances generated by multiple textual possibilities. The print solution is often to provide the alternative passage, tucked away in an appendix or commentary; an online text invites an approach that makes possible fluent awareness of the alternatives, and of the critical dialogue they initiate.

4. The Communicative Power of the Interface

Tabs toggling between versions and parallels may not be the ideal solution to the challenge posed by complex, multiple textual differences in passages of this kind; it is my hope that other editors and developers will explore alternatives. My more general, and more important, point is that the digital interface allows precisely this kind of experimentation in making it possible for our audiences to view and explore the content we provide. From its inception, this was one of the aims of the *Internet Shakespeare Editions* (ISE). Founded in 1996, the ISE developed a tag-set based on Ian Lancashire's Renaissance English Texts. Its focus was as much on recording the appearance of old-spelling texts as on their content; in due course tags were readily adapted to experimentation in terms of the visual interface needed to enhance the display of multiple versions in the manner I have illustrated above. As is so often the case with pioneering projects, however, the ISE tags are now superseded. The original ISE material is still available on a static site generated from the earlier files, but static sites are inevitably subject to erosion in usability over time as Web protocols evolve. The ISE editors' texts remain at the University of Victoria as part of the Linked Early Drama Online (LEMDO) project, under the direction of its director, Janelle Jenstad, where they are in the process of being converted to conform with what is now the accepted standard for encoding texts in the Humanities, the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI). A significant strength of TEI is that its community has developed sophisticated tools for converting texts either to an HTML Web display or to PDF for print. Standards of this kind are essential if the work of one scholar on a medieval manuscript is to be encoded and made accessible by the same tools that are used for early modern texts or Victorian novels. But standards can also shape thought, and the continuing need for scholars to publish in print inevitably reduces any incentive for research that focuses on online scholarship and publication. Fortunately, TEI has been constructed as a very capacious tent; it allows flexibility for local variation within its overall structure, so there is ample room for future experimentation with digital interfaces. At the present time, however, there are no plans for LEMDO to include the display features I have outlined in this paper.

The work I have outlined thus far is an initial attempt to use the dynamic flexibility of the digital medium as a way of revealing features of texts that are largely hidden beneath the surface of page-oriented scholarship. When we look at a book we see a fixed page with well-understood conventions: chapter headings; footnotes indicated by a small superscript, with the notes either at the bottom of the page or at the rear of the book; quotations set apart from the main paragraph, and so on. The book designer has little opportunity to modify these conventions. Responding to the need for coding that displays attractively on screens of widely different sizes, from compact phones to expansive monitors, Web design has become increasingly dynamic; unfortunately, under the pressure of commerce, its focus tends to be on distracting the reader, seeking attention in the hunt for compelling click-bait for advertisements. Academic, non-profit sites have the opportunity to use this dynamism in service of the text, where exploration of deeper meaning replaces distraction.

We are so accustomed to thinking of the digital in terms of print that we speak constantly of web 'page', unthinkingly using what has become a dead metaphor. It might be helpful to change the image, and to trumpet the fact that the still new digital medium provides a very different canvas to paint on. The screen that displays a digital text is far more open for editors to work with programmers and web designers to develop enhanced and nuanced visual rhetoric to assist, guide, and stimulate their audiences. It is my hope that the digital medium will enable scholars to find, in more elegant ways than are recorded in my experiments, ways of visually revealing the riches of both textual and conceptual features of the works they publish: to enable readers to see better.

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