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Shakespeare and the Question of Narrative

by

Richard James Meek

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with the requirements of the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis explores Shakespeare's preoccupation with narrative: it explores both acts of narration—moments in the plays and poems when characters tell stories—and the status of narrative as a mode of representation. It argues that the sites of narrative in Shakespeare's plays expose the limitations of storytelling, whilst simultaneously revealing narrative to be what Jonathan Culler has referred to as 'a fundamental form of knowledge'. It is also argued that the plays themselves anticipate current critical debates concerning the question of text versus performance: Shakespeare asks whether *seeing* events is a more 'authentic' experience than hearing or reading about them, and asks whether a narrative description can ever create what Murray Krieger has called 'the illusion of the natural sign'. Chapter 1 offers a survey of what other critics have said about the presence of narrative in Shakespeare's plays. Chapter 2 explores the ambivalent presentation of narrative in a variety of Shakespeare's plays and poems. Chapter 3 examines figures of reading and narration in *The Rape of Lucrece*, and its explicit concern with the difference between visual and verbal modes of representation. Chapter 4 investigates narrative and repetition in *Hamlet*, and suggests that the figure of the ghost is a powerful metaphor for the play's own sceptical treatment of both narrative and drama. Chapter 5 explores *King Lear*'s preoccupation with the difference between 'experience' and 'report', and describes ways in which this relationship might be related to the question of text and performance. Finally, Chapter 6 investigates the epistemological difficulties of narrative and the figure of ekphrasis in *The Winter's Tale*. By testing narrative and theatrical modes of representation against each other, Shakespeare's works offer a sophisticated but radically ambivalent statement concerning the power and limitations of art.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

This dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

SIGNED: R. J. Meek DATE: 5/9/03

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Introduction:
Polonius and the Critics

1. On Narrative

On encountering the players at Elsinore, Hamlet remembers a play that 'was never acted, or if it was, not above once, for the play I remember pleased not the million: 'twas caviary to the general' (2.2.395-96).[1] Hamlet asks the First Player to recite a speech from this play, an unnamed work that has been performed only once, if at all. However, the speech that Hamlet requests is decidedly undramatic: it is 'Aeneas's *tale* to Dido' (2.2.404-5), an extended piece of *narrative* extracted from a dramatic work. Here Shakespeare recalls both Virgil's *Aeneid* and Marlowe's narrative-heavy play *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1594), which is itself a dramatisation of Virgil's account of Aeneas's encounter with Dido.[2] After thirty lines of the Player's speech—which tells of Pyrrhus's pause before killing King Priam—Polonius interrupts the Player with a withering observation: 'This is too long' (2.2.456). Polonius appears to be criticising the Player for the excessive length of the narrative; the Player has said too much, and has taken up too much of Polonius's time. Yet we might also see Polonius's criticism as a comment upon the problems of including long passages of narrative within dramatic works. Indeed, many critics who have

[1] Quotations from *Hamlet* are taken from the New Cambridge edition, ed. Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Quotations from other plays discussed in detail in the thesis are taken from the following editions: *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate (London: Routledge, 1995); *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1997); and *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Quotations from *The Rape of Lucrece* are taken from *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). All other quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

[2] See James Black, 'Hamlet Hears Marlowe, Shakespeare Reads Virgil', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 18 (1994), 17-28. Black suggests that Marlowe's play might be related to the play that Hamlet mentions: '*Dido* was published in 1594: the title page states that it is printed as acted by the children of Her Majesty's Chapel. There is no record of a public performance' (p.18). See also Jonathan Bate, 'Marlowe's Ghost', in *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London: Picador, 1997), esp. p.128.

written about Shakespeare's use of narrative have directed Polonius's criticism at Shakespeare himself, and argued that his narratives are too long, incongruous, or simply incompatible with drama. The most famous example comes from Dr Johnson:

> In narration he [Shakespeare] affects a disproportionate pomp of diction and a wearisome train of circumlocution, and tells the incident imperfectly in many words, which might have been more plainly delivered in few. Narrative in dramatic poetry is naturally tedious, as it is unanimated and inactive and obstructs the progress of the action; it should therefore always be rapid and enlivened by frequent interruption. Shakespeare found it an encumbrance, and instead of lightening it by brevity, endeavoured to recommend it by dignity and splendour.[3]

Here, in his *Preface* to Shakespeare's works, Johnson writes that in 'dramatic poetry' narrative is 'naturally tedious'. Narrative is 'unanimated and inactive', and interrupts the 'progress of the action', suggesting that we prefer to watch *action* rather than listen when we experience a play in the theatre. For Dr Johnson, drama and narrative remain antithetical; not only does Shakespeare write narrative with an excessive grandiloquence, he also writes too much.[4] Johnson wishes that Shakespeare's narratives had been 'plainly delivered' in a few words, and craves a more precise 'brevity'. But it is interesting that Johnson's criticisms have been anticipated, perhaps even parodied, by Shakespeare. Polonius's comment that the Player's narrative is 'too long' suggests that Shakespeare's handling of narrative is not simply an artistic failure, but that here—and elsewhere—Shakespeare is self-consciously *exploring* the effects of including passages of narrative within his dramatic works. After the second part of the Player's speech, Polonius again asks the Player to stop, but this time because he has found the speech—and the Player's performance—too emotionally affecting: 'Look where he has not turned his colour and has tears in's eyes. Prithee no more' (2.2.477-78). Within this

[3] *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. H. R. Woudhuysen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p.131.

[4] Ben Jonson had levelled a similar criticism at Shakespeare, suggesting that he 'had an excellent fancy, brave notions, and gentle expressions; wherein he flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped', in *Timber; or, Discoveries* (1640-41), in *The Oxford Authors: Ben Jonson*, ed. Ian Donaldson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p.539.

scene, then, Polonius himself seems to display an ambivalence towards narrative; first resisting, but then being seduced by, the power of the Player's speech.

Despite the ambivalence towards narrative that we find in this scene, and throughout Shakespeare's works, several critics have—like Dr Johnson—written about Shakespearean drama with a kind of anti-narrative prejudice. In *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), A. C. Bradley suggests that there are inherent problems in inserting long narrative passages into dramatic works, and he recommends that the dramatist should attempt to 'conceal' such fragments of narrative from his audience. He writes:

> the process of merely acquiring information is unpleasant, and the direct imparting of it is undramatic. Unless he [the dramatist] uses a prologue, therefore, he must conceal from his auditors the fact that they are being informed, and must tell them what he wants them to know by means which are interesting on their own account.[5]

Bradley criticises Shakespeare's use of narrative in the second scene of *The Tempest*, explaining that 'Shakespeare grew at last rather negligent of technique', and writes that 'the purpose of Prospero's long explanation is palpable' (p.54). However, Bradley does not do justice to the extent to which the scene is interesting for its own sake. In this scene, Prospero explicitly asks Miranda—and, implicitly, the theatre audience—to listen to the story of how he and Miranda came to be on the island:

> The hour's now come,
> The very minute bids thee ope thine ear.
> Obey, and be attentive. (1.2.36-38)

Among Shakespeare's plays, only *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Tempest* conform to the dramatic unities of space and time, but in order for this to be achieved both plays have to begin with a long expository narrative. To appear more 'natural', these plays become all the more bound up with, and dependent

[5] A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.54.

upon, narrative and storytelling. Murray Krieger has discussed the trend in French neoclassical theatre for shortening the stage action to coincide with the 'real time' of the performance, but he comes to identify a fundamental problem:

> The desperate struggle to compress the stage action, so that its verisimilitude may deceive the audience as seeing it as real, leads instead to a severity that necessitates the increased employment of reported offstage action. This narrative intrusion on the dramatic, the theatrical, makes the members of the audience more and more aware of themselves as listeners, auditory recipients of a story being told, engaging in *verbal* activities that preserve their function within the conventions of a mediated aesthetic transaction; they cease being fully engaged onlookers (even voyeurs) of a real happening they have come upon.[6]

Prospero's extended narrative exposition in *The Tempest* is an example of 'reported offstage action'. And yet, the emphasis in the scene upon *listening*—reminding the audience that they are being told a story within a dramatic work—does not necessarily lead to a breaking down of mimesis. Rather than simply being what Krieger refers to as 'narrative in disguise' (p.55), our attention is drawn to the fact that Prospero is engaging in an act of storytelling. Throughout Prospero's narrative he interrupts himself to make sure that Miranda is paying attention: 'Dost thou attend me?' (1.2.78); 'Thou attend'st not!' (1.2.87); and 'Dost thou hear?' (1.2.106). What is more, each of these admonishments directly follows a reference to Prospero's brother Antonio, suggesting the intensity of Prospero's emotional involvement in the narrative that he tells, and that this is not merely or primarily an expository narrative. The events that Prospero describes and remembers are of critical significance within the present. In this way, far from 'conceal[ing]' the fact that the audience is being 'informed', as Bradley suggests, Shakespeare makes Prospero's act of narration an intensely *dramatic* experience.[7]

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[6] Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p.56.
[7] In *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), John Dryden comments interestingly upon different types of 'narrations' in drama. In the case of narrations that are employed to tell of things 'which are antecedent to the play', he writes that ''tis a fault to choose such subjects for the stage [...] because they will not be listened to by the audience, and that is many times the ruin of the play',

In *The Shakespeare Inset: Word and Picture* (1965), Francis Berry offers a critical account of the narrative episodes in Shakespeare's plays 'where the imagined spectacle is at odds with the actual spectacle', and proposes the term 'Inset' for such moments.[8] However, Berry begins his study by suggesting that Shakespeare's plays should be, and were intended to be, performed:

> a Shakespeare play while it is being enacted—i.e. during the course of the fulfilment of the intention behind its composition—is both language and spectacle; is, at one and the same time, both something to be heard—poetry, mainly poetry, though the poetry contains some deposits of prose—and something to be seen or watched—single or grouped figures on a stage, stationary or in movement, something we call drama. (p.1)

As Berry goes on to point out, drama can sometimes contain moments when the actors are motionless, and they speak what he calls 'narrative poetry—that is *sound*, much of this sound at variance with the picture on stage' (p.11). Yet Berry is primarily concerned with the function of these narrative insets in the theatre rather than how they might function on the page. Writing about the scene in *Hamlet* in which Ophelia describes an absent Hamlet who has appeared to her 'with his doublet all unbraced' (2.1.76), Berry suggests that Shakespeare needed to use a narrative inset as this scene would have been difficult to stage. This suggestion comes from a critical position that prioritises performance, and Berry uses the language of the cinema to describe this theatrical inadequacy. The details that Ophelia describes

in *The Oxford Authors: John Dryden*, ed. Keith Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.98. For Dryden, then, a narrative that tells of incidents prior to the action of the play—such as Prospero's long act of storytelling—is a 'fault', and will not be listened to by the audience. However, Dryden also mentions occasions when a narrative is used to tell 'of things happening in the action of the play, and supposed to be done *behind the scenes*' (p.98, my emphasis). Dryden clearly prefers such acts of narration, and writes: 'this is many times both convenient and beautiful, for by it the French avoid the tumult which we are subject to in England by representing duels, battles, and the like, which renders our stage too like the theatres where they fight prizes' (p.98).

[8] Francis Berry, *The Shakespeare Inset: Word and Picture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p.3.

> can be more forcibly impressed on the imagination than on the physical vision. Indeed, without the advantage of the cinematographic close-up they might not impress themselves on the physical vision at all. Moreover, the fact that the interview was wordless [...] would have rendered it unsuitable for dramatic exhibition. (p.8)

For Berry, then, the effects produced by Shakespeare's inset narratives are not literary, but cinematic: they produce a filmic 'close-up' in the mind's eye. Berry seems to regard Shakespeare as an aspiring filmmaker, and later in his study compares the dumb show in *Hamlet* to another filmic device: 'Claudius, almost before a word is said, is softened up by being made to see the equivalent of a *slow-motion* film of his crime' (p.136, italics in original). Berry, too, suggests that the relationship between narrative and drama is a problematic one, and he begins his second chapter, 'Narrative and Dramatic', with the following discussion:

> We ventured to assert that the narrative and dramatic modes were opposed. It might be replied that they were less opposed than complementary, and that the chapters to follow illustrate indeed Shakespeare's ability to render the narrative complementary to the dramatic. Yet, in despite of Shakespeare's achievement, the two modes are nevertheless theoretically opposed: they are opposed in theory, as are objective and subjective. (p.14)

Here, despite acknowledging 'Shakespeare's achievement', Berry finds that he has to argue that the two modes are 'theoretically opposed'. However, by the end of the chapter he suggests that 'a narrative frame can contain the dramatic, and *vice versa*' (p.28). Berry continues:

> When Shakespeare began to write, the narrative mode was ancient; the dramatic (for the Mystery plays were mainly genuine pageants—illustrated stories) very recent. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* was essentially narrative, and Peele was experimenting adventurously in *The Old Wives' Tale* when the old wife breaks off her 'tale' to say 'here they come' as the characters of her narrative enter on the stage to speak in their own persons. (pp.28-29)

Berry is misguided in suggesting that the dramatic 'mode' was 'recent', inasmuch as he fails to account for Greek drama, or Shakespeare's interest in

playwrights such as Seneca, Terence and Plautus.[9] Berry is right, however, to draw attention to the self-conscious treatment of narrative and drama in George Peele's *The Old Wives Tale* (1595). Berry suggests that 'the nearest Shakespeare came to imitating Peele in that method was in *Pericles*' (p.29). However, as I argue in Chapter 2, Shakespeare was *continually* exploring the issues that Peele's play raises, and exploring the interconnectedness—rather than the opposition—between 'the narrative and the dramatic modes'.

More recently, critics have been more positive about Shakespeare's handling of narrative, and in the last ten years there has been a resurgence of critical interest in the subject.[10] In his study of *Shakespearean Narrative* (1995), Rawdon Wilson argues that 'Shakespeare is a great narrative artist', but argues that 'there seems never to have been a major scholarly effort to discuss all of Shakespeare's narrative within a single perspective'.[11] One reason for this, one might suggest, is that Shakespeare's 'narrative' cannot be considered within a single perspective. Wilson identifies 'the tradition in Shakespeare criticism that sees the narrative elements in Shakespeare's drama as slowing, or even breaking, the forward movement of the dramatic action', and writes that

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[9] See, for example, Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); and *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy: The Influence of Plautus and Terence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

[10] For two recent book-length studies of the topic, see Rawdon Wilson, *Shakespearean Narrative* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), and Barbara Hardy, *Shakespeare's Storytellers: Dramatic Narration* (London: Peter Owen, 1997). See also Edward Costigan, 'Aspects of Narrative in Some Plays by Shakespeare', *English Studies*, 77 (1996), 323-42; and the essays in *Shakespeare Survey*, 53 (2000), the theme of which is 'Shakespeare and Narrative'. Jill L. Levenson, for example, in 'Echoes Inhabit a Garden: The Narratives of *Romeo and Juliet*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 53 (2000), 39-48, writes that 'drama is a form of narrative' (p.40), and suggests that '*Romeo and Juliet* is constantly preoccupied with its own narration, an account enriched by various stories and fragments of stories' (p.41). See also Helmut Bonheim's essay 'Shakespeare's Narremes', in the same volume, in which he suggests that 'What we need now is a proper narratology of drama', *Shakespeare Survey*, 53 (2000), 1-11 (p.2). In *Shakespeare and the Story* (London: Athlone Press, 1978), Joan Rees argues that in contrast to plays that prioritise what she calls 'dramatic structure' over the story element, 'Shakespeare's plays have stories at their core, stories which can be extracted and retold, as he himself extracted them from his sources and retold them' (p.6).

[11] Wilson, *Shakespearean Narrative*, pp.18, 19-20. Further references are given in the text.

> Since Johnson there has been a nearly overwhelming disposition to ignore, even to dispraise, the narrative aspects of Shakespeare's plays or to assimilate the embedded narratives, naturalizing them as "lines," "speeches," or "declamations," to the model of drama. In this respect, as in others, Johnson has set the tone for subsequent scholarship: Shakespeare has been insufficiently admired for his narrative craft. (pp.20-21)

Wilson goes on to suggest that the importance of narrative, both as a mode of thinking and as a rhetorical strategy in the Renaissance, was considerable:

> *Narratio*, the second and major move in a forensic oration, comprises the fundamental act of collating events into an effective sequence so that a compelling case can be made. It is not merely a rhetorical strategy for Renaissance theorists, but a basic mode of human thinking. Complemented by the resources of analogy, *narratio* makes available one of humanity's few handles upon reality. (p.21)

Wilson's study is particularly concerned with 'how the narrative conventions of [Shakespeare's] two nondramatic poems foreshadow the structural components of the embedded narratives [of the plays]' (p.56). However, Wilson's decision to structure his book thematically around chapters on 'Conventions', 'Voice', 'World', 'Character' and 'Boundaries'—rather than offering extended readings of individual Shakespearean texts—makes for a study that is ultimately repetitious and that fails to live up to the promise of its introductory chapters. Nonetheless, Wilson does make the suggestion that the two literary modes of narrative and drama can coexist happily:

> From the standpoint of Elizabethan literary practice, the addition of narrative to drama should not have seemed perplexing: poetry and drama were ordinarily copresent and distinct poetic forms (the sonnet, for instance), easily assumed roles within drama. One might perceive that Shakespeare's plays, narrative saturating them, are always more than drama. (p.203)

Wilson's comment—that the plays are 'always more than drama'—is suggestive, alerting us to the narrative and poetic elements in Shakespearean drama. He also implies, perhaps, that Shakespeare's plays acknowledge their literariness and written-ness, despite being texts that were intended, primarily at least, for

performance. However, Wilson does not explore fully this aspect of the plays, nor does he examine sufficiently the extent to which Shakespeare's dramatic works *test* narrative and dramatic modes of representation against each other, questions that the present thesis will address in detail.

Barbara Hardy, in *Shakespeare's Storytellers* (1997), writes that 'Drama is a narrative as well as a dramatic genre', and she offers a brief but wide-ranging survey of Shakespeare's interest in stories and storytellers.[12] We learn that Hardy concurs with Rawdon Wilson about Shakespeare's narrative proficiency, writing that 'Shakespeare is one of the great narrative artists' (p.13). Yet her study contains few references to recent criticism, and even fewer to critical or narrative theory. Furthermore, Hardy's general aims give the project a slightly dated air. The book begins by suggesting—promisingly—that Shakespeare's plays offer an enquiry into the 'narrative forms of theatre' that is self-conscious and 'conspicuou[s]', but it turns out that this is merely an incidental feature of Shakespeare's larger project, which is to write something that sounds suspiciously like a nineteenth-century novel:

> Shakespeare's subtle and sustained inquiry into human behaviour covers the psychological and sociological life-forms of narrative [...] It inquires, often self-consciously and conspicuously, into the narrative forms of theatre too: exposition, summary, retrospect, anticipation, fantasy, joke, short tale, long story. I do not suggest that Shakespeare sets out with such inquiry in mind. Like the novelist, he scrutinizes narration because he is an artist using narrative to write a drama of character in society. (pp.13-14)

Hardy's desire to characterise Shakespeare as being 'Like the novelist', writing 'a drama of character in society', is unsurprising, given that she is primarily known as a critic of the Victorian novel.[13] Yet Hardy occasionally displays a surprisingly pro-theatrical bias, for example in her description of the penultimate

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[12] Hardy, *Shakespeare's Storytellers*, p.13.
[13] See, for example, *The Appropriate Form: An Essay on the Novel* (London: Athlone Press, 1964); *Tellers and Listeners: The Narrative Imagination* (London: Athlone Press, 1975); and *Forms of Feeling in Victorian Fiction* (London: Peter Owen, 1985).

scene of *The Winter's Tale*: 'I have known Shakespeare scholars who dislike it, but I think it works as a kind of travesty which allows the dramatist to reserve dramatic immediacy for the reunion of Leontes and Hermione' (p.49). That Hardy, in a study of Shakespeare's storytellers, can refer to this fascinating scene as a 'travesty' suggests something of the limitations of her approach.[14] More generally, Hardy's argument here points to the limitations of a critical approach that fails to question the all-too-straightforward conviction that 'dramatic immediacy' is necessarily superior to narrative representations.

A recent example of such a critical approach—one that prioritises drama over narrative—is Pauline Kiernan's *Shakespeare's Theory of Drama* (1996). In this study, Kiernan argues that one can discern a 'Defence of Drama' throughout Shakespeare's plays and poems, and she writes that 'All representations of the human body fail to deliver the living, corporeal (present) presence of the subject that is being represented'.[15] This last assertion sounds persuasive, but one cannot help wondering whether Kiernan is stating the obvious: who would ever have expected a *representation* of the human body to 'deliver' the corporeal subject that is being represented? The implicit suggestion that drama—as opposed to narrative or verbal representation—unproblematically delivers the 'living, corporeal (present) presence' of the subject being represented must give us pause. Kiernan continues:

> In poetry, history and art, the subject is rendered inaccessible and lost to the present; such representations cannot restore to us the 'original'. [...] Shakespeare's drama privileges the living human body, the organic matter on which it is created. [...] In place of the painter's 'touches' and the 'strainèd touches rhetoric can lend' to poets (Sonnet 82.10) to make the subject appear to live, there will be the dramatist's cutting of breath:

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[14] See *OED* s.v. 'travesty' *n.* 1: 'A literary composition which aims at exciting laughter by burlesque and ludicrous treatment of a serious work; literary composition of this kind; hence, a grotesque or debased imitation or likeness; a caricature'. Whichever of these (more or less pejorative) senses Hardy intends, the word does not do any kind of justice to the interest and complexity of the scene she is discussing.

[15] Pauline Kiernan, *Shakespeare's Theory of Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.10-11.

> his instrument, the actors' bodies who speak and breathe and move indeed. (p.11)

These somewhat rapturous remarks raise a series of questions: what, precisely, distinguishes drama from 'poetry, history and art'? Does the fact that drama—in performance at least—uses 'actors' bodies' as its 'instrument' really restore to us the 'original'? Does Kiernan really imagine that Shakespearean drama is free of the 'strainèd touches of rhetoric', or that it is solely created out of the 'organic matter' of human bodies? She goes on to write that

> it is not possible within the scope of this present study to examine the question of 'Print *versus* Performance' in English Renaissance drama, or to speculate on Shakespeare's attitude towards the publication of his plays. (p.18)

This is unfortunate, as it is precisely these issues—and in particular the question of *reading* plays—that Kiernan's study needs to address in order to make good its 'large claim' (p.4); that is, that Shakespearean drama is 'concerned with the development of an art form that can overcome what it sees as the inadequacies of literary poetry' (pp.4-5). In a recent essay in the *London Review of Books*, Helen Cooper offers a précis of Kiernan's argument, writing that 'Shakespeare believed in the priority of drama over poetry because theatrical creation (like God's) took physical form'.[16] Cooper continues:

> His narrative poems constantly call attention to the failure of embodiment in the other arts, in Venus' fleshliness and sweat that can never get beyond verbal description, or in the painting of the Trojan War in *Lucrece* that can give the illusion of an entire body by a glimpse of the top of a head or a spear grasped in a hand. But then, 'Enter Lear with Cordelia dead in his arms'. The man and the corpse are both actual people: for the purposes of the play, a real old man and his dead daughter. (p.14)

I take it that here Cooper is attempting to set up a distinction between drama—'theatrical creation'—and what she calls 'the other arts'; in other words, the

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[16] Helen Cooper, 'Blood Running Down', *London Review of Books*, 23:15, 9 August 2001, 13-14 (p.14).

visual arts and narrative poetry. But in setting up this distinction Cooper soon runs into difficulties: how should one respond to her contention that King Lear and Cordelia are 'both actual people'? Furthermore, what should one make of the phrase 'for the purposes of the play'? This phrase does not effectively distinguish drama from the other forms of art that Cooper is discussing, and one could easily apply a similar formulation to the narrative poems. For example, we might equally say that, *for the purposes of the narrative poem*, Lucrece is an actual person. Indeed, Cooper's argument could be turned on itself: one could argue that *King Lear*, no less than the artworks described in the extraordinary ekphrastic passage in *The Rape of Lucrece*, is itself another form of 'illusion', and equally dependent upon a willing suspension of disbelief.

The assumptions that underlie the arguments of both Kiernan and Cooper—that it is possible to determine Shakespeare's preferences vis-à-vis drama and narrative, or that drama is more 'realistic' than narrative poetry or works of visual art—are precisely those that this thesis will explore and question. Both of these critics display a pro-theatrical bias, or even a Polonius-like anti-narrative prejudice. While Kiernan expresses surprise that 'the question of what might lie *behind* all this evident concern in [Shakespeare's] plays and poems with drama and aesthetics' (p.1) has received scant critical attention, and censures critics for being 'wary of attributing to Shakespearean drama any coherent position on aesthetics' (p.7), this thesis takes a more open approach, and makes no attempt to locate what might lie 'behind' the plays. However, this is not to lay myself open to charges of critical fence-sitting: I shall demonstrate that this openness comes from Shakespeare himself, and that his works manifest a complex ambivalence towards the question of narrative. I argue that Shakespeare was neither pro- nor anti-theatrical, but that the works themselves debate the question of text versus performance. In this way, the present thesis is a contribution to a genre of criticism that focuses upon Shakespeare's literariness

and self-reflexivity, and as such argues that Shakespeare's presentation of narrative is a central part of a larger exploration of the limitations and the claims of art.[17]

2. On Reading

We saw in the previous section how A. C. Bradley found problems with Prospero's extended act of narration in the second scene of *The Tempest*. Bradley does, however, go on to praise Shakespeare's use of narrative, writing that 'in general Shakespeare's expositions are masterpieces'.[18] In a footnote Bradley continues, making a fascinating connection between narrative and reading:

> This is one of several reasons why many people enjoy reading him, who, on the whole, dislike reading plays. A main cause of this very dislike is that the reader has not a lively enough imagination to carry him with pleasure through the exposition, though in the theatre, where his imagination is helped, he would experience little difficulty. (p.54, note 2)

Bradley assumes that one's 'imagination is helped' at the theatre, but perhaps this was not always the case. Certainly at Elizabethan public playhouses such as the Globe, where scenic staging was kept to a minimum, the audience's ability to *listen* and to *imagine* was as important, if not more important, than

[17] See, for example, Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962); Philip Edwards, *Shakespeare and the Confines of Art* (London: Methuen, 1968); James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), and *Metadrama in Shakespeare's 'Henriad': 'Richard II' to 'Henry V'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Robert Egan, *Drama Within Drama: Shakespeare's Sense of His Art in 'King Lear', 'The Winter's Tale', and 'The Tempest'* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975); Ekbert Faas, *Shakespeare's Poetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Graham Bradshaw, *Shakespeare's Scepticism* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987); Robert Knapp, *Shakespeare: The Theatre and the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and Robert Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[18] Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p.54.

what they saw.[19] Indeed, there is some evidence that playgoers in the Renaissance went to 'hear' a play, suggesting that—*pace* Polonius—they would not have objected to listening to long passages of narrative.[20] It is also worth noting that the word 'audience' refers to 'The persons within hearing; an assembly of listeners, an auditory' (*OED* 7a), and derives from the Latin *audire*, 'to hear'. Bruce R. Smith has suggested that the early modern period was 'a culture that still gave precedence to voice',[21] while R. A. Foakes has written that

> Shakespeare's plays were written for an audience that obtained much of its news, instruction (in sermons, for example) and entertainment through the ear; many people were illiterate, and there were no newspapers. It is hard now in our increasingly visual culture to imagine the excitement of listening to eloquent poetry and prose in stage dialogue, a pleasure that drew thousands of people to the theatres of London.[22]

In addition, it is difficult for us to imagine quite how fully or 'immediately' theatregoers in Shakespeare's day would have understood such words. A. C. Bradley suggests that Shakespeare's narrative expertise surpasses that of other playwrights, and that, as a result, Shakespeare's plays can be *read* without experiencing any sort of deficiency. He implies that Shakespeare made his expositions so vivid that even those readers without a 'lively enough imagination' are able to enjoy experiencing Shakespeare on the page. Dr

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[19] R. A. Foakes has written that 'The essential point is not that the stage [of Elizabethan playhouses] was bare, but that no attempt at scenic illusion was made; the stage-location was whatever the dramatist made his actors say it was', in 'Playhouses and players', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.21.

[20] In *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), Stephen Orgel describes an occasion when King James saw four plays in Christ Church hall in Oxford in 1605, during which time, despite the innovative and elaborate scenery, 'the king complained that he could not hear the play' (p.14). Orgel writes that 'Theater in 1605 was assumed to be a verbal medium', and that 'acting was a form of oratory' (pp.16-17). However, it is worth noting that Thomas Rymer, writing in 1693, commented that 'Some go to *see*, others to *hear* a Play. The Poet should please both; but be sure that the *Spectators* be satisfied, whatever Entertainment he give his *Audience*', in *A Short View of Tragedy* (1693; rpt. London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1994), p.6.

[21] Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p.128.

[22] *King Lear*, ed. Foakes, p.6.

Johnson also makes the link with reading, writing that drama is 'a dramatic exhibition is a book recited with concomitants'.[23] Johnson continues:

> A play read affects the mind like a play acted. It is therefore evident that the action is not supposed to be real, and it follows that between the acts a longer or a shorter time may be allowed to pass, and that no more account of space or duration is to be taken by the auditor of a drama than by the reader of a narrative, before whom may pass in an hour the life of a hero, or the revolutions of an empire. (p.136)

Johnson suggests that the experience of an 'auditor of a drama' is akin to that of a 'reader of a narrative', and that one should not criticise a dramatic work simply because it fails to obey the dramatic unities of space and time. Here, Johnson seeks to demonstrate that Shakespeare's plays could be *read*, and that the 'action' of a play 'is not supposed to be real', either on the stage or on the page. But is it possible to determine *Shakespeare's* attitude towards the question of reading plays? Did Shakespeare conceive of his plays as texts to be performed, or texts to be read? Is it valid to conceive of a *literary* Shakespeare?

While Shakespeare was undoubtedly a 'man of the theatre', an actor and shareholder in his acting company, he was also a published poet. Shakespeare saw two narrative poems—*Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594)—through the press, both of which found favour with the reading public.[24] *Venus and Adonis*, for example, went through at least sixteen editions before 1640, far more than any of Shakespeare's plays.[25] Yet as several critics have pointed out, Shakespeare did not seem especially concerned about getting his plays into print. For example, in his recent study of *Shakespeare and the Book* (2001), David Scott Kastan repeatedly stresses 'Shakespeare's apparent

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[23] *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Woudhuysen, p.136.
[24] On readers and reading in Shakespeare's time, see Heidi Brayman Hackel, 'The "Great Variety" of Readers and Early Modern Reading Practices' in *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp.139-57, and Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. pp.1-17.
[25] See *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Burrow, p.7.

indifference to the publication of his plays'.[26] However, Kastan is perhaps too hasty to dismiss the notion of a literary Shakespeare—which is odd, particularly given the title of Kastan's study. He writes that 'Although arguably Shakespeare does not "live" on the page quite as vitally as he does in the theater, at very least we must grant that in print he is preserved' (p.15), displaying a surprising reluctance to defend the pleasures and long-established practice of *reading* Shakespeare. Kastan quotes the following insights from W. W. Greg, but does so only to dismiss them:

> "It is foolish to suppose," writes W. W. Greg, "that Shakespeare was indifferent to the fate of his own work," though in truth nothing beyond the unactable length of some play texts can be educed to support Greg's supposition. And desire leads even the usually positivistic Greg to indulge in a fantasy of Shakespeare's literary ambition, as he wonders if Shakespeare did not "dream in his garden of a great volume of his plays, such as his friend Jonson was busy preparing." (p.53)

Greg's vision of Shakespeare's fantasy of an edition of his *Works* is, admittedly, a somewhat sentimental one. However, the fact that a number of Shakespeare's plays appeared in Quarto during his own lifetime suggests that Shakespeare must have been aware that people were reading his plays as well as going to hear (and see) them.[27] Furthermore, it is interesting that Kastan apparently feels the need to dismiss the one piece of evidence that he offers in support of Greg's thesis: that some of Shakespeare's play texts are of an 'unactable length'. It is surely worth further comment that some of the plays are, as Polonius would say, *too long* for performance. Writing specifically about *Hamlet*, for example, Anne Barton has suggested that Shakespeare probably 'knew at an early stage that what he was writing would inevitably require playhouse abbreviation', and points

[26] David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.15. He repeats this point on the next page, noting 'Shakespeare's apparent indifference to the publication of his plays' (p.16) and does so again at the start of his second chapter, writing that Shakespeare 'never revealed any interest in publishing his plays' (p.52).

[27] As Kastan himself notes, 'By the time of [Shakespeare's] death, over forty editions of his plays had reached print, and three—*Richard II*, *Richard III*, and *1 Henry IV*—had been published in five or more editions' (p.10).

to the play's 'impractical length'.[28] A play such as *Hamlet* then, certainly as it appears in its lengthier Q2 version, would seem to be more suited to the page than to the stage, and perhaps it is not so far-fetched to assume that, during the process of the play's composition, Shakespeare himself—whether in his garden or not—would have realised this.

Clearly some dramatists of the period regarded printed versions of their plays as being inferior to their execution in performance. For example, the 1604 Quarto of John Marston's *The Malcontent* includes an address 'To the Reader', in which Marston describes his anxiety regarding the ability of print to do justice to his play:

> I have myself [...] set forth this comedy, but so that my enforced absence must much rely upon the printer's discretion. But I shall entreat, slight errors in orthography may be as slightly overpassed, and that the unhandsome shape which this trifle in reading presents may be pardoned for the pleasure it once afforded you when it was presented with the soul of lively action.[29]

Marston writes of his 'enforced absence', and describes this printed version of his play as an 'unhandsome shape' that will appear inferior—a mere 'trifle', in fact—when compared to the play in performance. This Preface, despite being addressed 'To the reader', is pointedly pro-theatrical: this written version is inferior to the play's execution in performance, 'when [the play] was presented with the soul of lively action'.[30] When it comes to Shakespeare, however, the issue is more complicated, for example in the disparity between the two

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[28] Anne Barton, 'Introduction' to *Hamlet*, ed. T. J. B. Spencer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p.16.
[29] John Marston, *The Malcontent*, in *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington et al. (New York: Norton, 2002), pp.550-51.
[30] Marston makes an interesting distinction between comedy and tragedy in his address 'To My Equal Reader' in *The Fawn*: 'Comedies are meant to be spoken, not read: remember the life of these things consists in action; and for your such courteous survey of my pen, I will present a tragedy to you which shall boldly abide the most curious perusal' (quoted from *Parasitaster; or, The Fawn*, ed. David A. Blostein (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), pp.70-71). Dr Johnson makes a similar distinction in his *Preface*: 'Familiar comedy is often more powerful on the theatre than on the page; imperial tragedy is always less. The humour of Petruchio may be heightened by grimace; but what voice or gesture can hope to add dignity or force to the soliloquy of Cato?' (*Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Woudhuysen, p.136).

versions—or 'states'—of the 1609 Quarto of *Troilus and Cressida*. While the title page of the first state presents the play 'As it was acted by the Kings Majesties Servants at the Globe', the title page of the second state makes no mention of the play's stage history, and instead offers a taste of the play's content: 'Excellently expressing the beginning of their loves, with the conceited wooing of Pandarus Prince of Licia'.[31] Furthermore, this second state of the Quarto includes an address to the reading public, from 'A Never Writer to an Ever Reader'. However, unlike the Preface to *The Malcontent*, the attitude of this Preface is explicitly and unashamedly anti-theatrical. *Troilus and Cressida* is described as 'a new play, never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar'. The play is presented as a literary, written document, addressed to an 'Eternal reader'. The stage would 'stale' this literary work by performing it, suggesting that the play will only be kept fresh by being read. Apparently aimed at a sophisticated audience familiar with classical drama, the Preface invites its readers to draw comparisons between Shakespeare's play and 'the best comedy in Terence or Plautus'.[32] Perhaps, then, these two states of the Quarto—the first emphasising the play's theatrical credentials and the second insisting that the play was never acted—could be seen to represent Shakespeare's ambivalence towards the theatre manifesting itself in print.[33] It is also worth noting that *Troilus and Cressida* was written shortly after *Hamlet*, and that this Preface seems to recall the play Hamlet mentions that was 'never acted, or if it was, not above once', as if to suggest that Shakespeare was fascinated by the concept of a play that could not be acted, but could only be read.[34]

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[31] The title pages of the two states of the 1609 Quarto are reproduced in facsimile in *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. David Bevington (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 1998), pp.124-25

[32] The address is quoted from the modernised version in *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Bevington, pp.120-22.

[33] It would be unwise to push the argument about this Preface too far, perhaps, as it was not necessarily written by Shakespeare himself. However, its close proximity to Shakespeare's work, as well as its resonances with Shakespeare's own plays, make it richly suggestive and, I would argue, Shakespearean.

[34] Patrick Cheney has recently written that critics are beginning to describe a Shakespeare who was 'not just the writer of plays who assiduously avoids print and bookish immortality, but rather the writer of both plays and poems whose works as a whole show a fascination with—

Harry Berger, Jr., a critic whose recent work has been much concerned with the differences between text and performance, has argued that, 'However it came to be, textuality is deeply woven into Shakespeare's language and its dramatic practice. It preexisted quarto and folio; perhaps it generated them out of the transtheatrical necessities of its practice'.[36] Certainly the first Folio of 1623 was conceived of as a reading text: in their address 'To the great Variety of Readers', Heminge and Condell enjoin us to 'Reade him, therefore; and againe and againe'.[37] The plays are presented as texts to be read and, indeed, *re*read. As David M. Bergeron has commented,

> This ringing plea for a reader response also underlines a crucial matter of interpretation: the continuous, ongoing process of reading. This extraordinary argument from two actors puts into healthy perspective the legitimate activity of reading and interpreting Shakespeare without insisting that he can only be known from performance.[38]

However, I take it that Harry Berger is right to suggest that the textuality of the plays *preexisted* Quarto and Folio. In the final scene of *Love's Labour's Lost*, the Princess of France announces that she will refuse to dance with the men, and that she will treat their play-within-a-play with disdain: 'to the death we will not move a foot, / Nor to their penn'd speech render we no grace' (5.2.146-47).

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the writer of both plays and poems whose works as a whole show a fascination with—sometimes also a fear and scepticism of—print publication', in '"O let my books be...dumb presagers": Poetry and Theater in Shakespeare's Sonnets', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 52 (2001), 222-254 (p.227). More generally, Cheney's essay offers a critique of the critical tendency to see Shakespeare simply as a 'man of the theater' (p.225).

[36] Harry Berger, Jr., 'Text Against Performance: The Example of *Macbeth*' in *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p.102. See also his earlier study, *Imaginary Audition: Shakespeare on Stage and Page* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), esp. chs. 1 and 2. For a recent essay that attempts to address the question of 'how we are to understand the relation between the publication and the performance of Shakespeare's words', see Michael Dobson, 'Shakespeare on the page and the stage' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.235-49 (p.235).

[37] The address is reproduced in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p.95. Heminge and Condell go on to bemoan the fact that Shakespeare himself did not live to see his plays into print: 'It had bene a thing, we confesse, worthie to haue bene wished, that the Author himselfe had liu'd to haue set forth, and ouerseen his owne writings' (p.95).

[38] See David M. Bergeron, 'Introduction: Reading and Writing' to *Reading and Writing in Shakespeare*, ed. Bergeron (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), p.15.

This intriguing description of dramatic utterances as 'penn'd speech' seems suggestive of Shakespeare's awareness of the double nature of words in a dramatic work—that its words are *penned* ('Written (with a pen); set down in writing' (*OED ppl. a.*[2])) as well as spoken. This formulation suggests that Shakespeare was reflecting upon the relationship of the texts that he wrote—the literal inscription of characters upon a page—to their eventual execution in performance.

As well as containing many moments of theatrical self-consciousness, such as the plays-within-plays in *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, and various considerations of 'the purpose of playing' (*Hamlet*, 3.2.17), Shakespeare's plays also contain a remarkable number of references to reading and writing, and a variety of texts that are read and interpreted by characters within the plays.[38] As Jonas Barish has pointed out, among Shakespeare's plays, only *The Two Noble Kinsmen* does not allude to a single 'stage document'.[39] Barish notes that 'The action of [Shakespeare's] plays swarms with writings, and especially with epistles' (p.33), and goes on to claim that Shakespeare would not necessarily have thought speech to be superior to writing:

> Shakespeare, one suspects, would heartily agree with Jacques Derrida on one point: speech enjoys no mystical primacy over writing, but has coexisted with it as far back and as far wide as is possible to track either. Certainly he keeps us—even as spectators—in a world in which writings have a continuing and commanding importance, are constantly being appealed to, commented on, argued over, approved or repudiated. (p.33)

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[38] Stephen Orgel writes that 'Renaissance plays seem compulsively to turn to scenes of writing, to letters and documents, to handwritten discourse as the mode of action', in 'The Comedian as the Character C' in *English Comedy*, ed. Michael Cordner, Peter Holland and John Kerrigan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.37.

[39] See Jonas Barish, '"Soft, here follows prose": Shakespeare's Stage Documents', in *The Art of Performance in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Drama: Essays for G. K. Hunter*, ed. Murray Biggs et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), p.33. See also Barish's classic study of *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

This thesis does not attempt to offer a deconstructionist argument, but it does question the notion that Shakespeare prioritises voice, dramatic presence, or—in particular—visual immediacy. As we shall see in the next chapter, Shakespeare's plays display a range of attitudes and positions concerning the relationship between what we see and what we hear; and I would suggest that this relationship can be related to the question of text versus performance. While Shakespeare's works at times demonstrate the persuasiveness of what we see, implying a pro-theatrical bias, they also demonstrate the problems and limitations of theatrical representations.[41] In addition to the Preface of *Troilus and Cressida*, another notable instance of Shakespeare's plays exhibiting an anti-theatrical prejudice is the Chorus in *Henry V*. He refers to actors as 'flat unraised spirits' (Prologue, 9), and appeals to the audience's imagination, asking them to 'Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts' (23). Despite the emotiveness and apparent modesty of the Chorus's appeal, he nonetheless points to the 'imperfections' of the drama that we are about to experience. What is more, the Chorus also suggests that the *language* of the play will be so vivid that the audience will see the things being described: 'Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them, / Printing their proud hoofs i'th' receiving earth' (26-27). Using the rhetorical figure of *enargeia*, and with a suggestive reference to 'Printing', the Chorus raises the possibility that verbal descriptions can bring forth images to what Hamlet calls the 'mind's eye' (1.2.185), or what Renaissance commentators on rhetoric referred to as the *oculi mentis*.[42] Within his narrative poems *and* the plays, Shakespeare repeatedly asks whether

[41] For a fascinating—if somewhat politicised—argument that reads *Much Ado About Nothing* in relation to antitheatrical writings, and suggests that 'the play [...] appears to police its own pro-theater tendencies by acknowledging the validity of much antitheatrical polemic and reproducing its writing of the social order, especially its fear of the dangerous duplicity of women and those who aspire beyond their station', see Jean E. Howard, 'Antitheatricality Staged: The Workings of Ideology in Dekker's *The Whore of Babylon* and Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*' in *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp.47-72 (p.58).

[42] See Michael Bath, *Speaking Pictures: English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture* (London: Longman, 1994), p.253. On the figure of *enargeia*, see Adam McKeown, '*Enargeia* and the English Literary Renaissance' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, 2000).

language can, in the words of W. J. T. Mitchell, 'do what so many writers have wanted it to do: "to make us see"'.[43]

This thesis offers extended readings of four Shakespearean texts: one narrative poem and three plays. These works—*The Rape of Lucrece*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *The Winter's Tale*—seem to me to offer the most explicit and provocative explorations of the question of narrative, its relationship with drama and, more generally, with what we see. This thesis concludes, then, with an extended discussion of *The Winter's Tale*, a play that explicitly explores the difference between narrative and dramatic modes of representation. For example, the play's penultimate scene—described by Barbara Hardy as a 'travesty'—features three gentlemen who attempt to describe the offstage reunion of Leontes, Polixenes and Perdita in narrative form, while the final scene presents both the onstage audience and the theatre audience with a remarkable sight: Hermione's statue seemingly becoming 'real'. However, rather than simply prioritising drama above narrative in these scenes, Shakespeare asks us to consider the power and limitations of both narrative *and* drama. What follows is not an attempt to provide definitive solutions to such problems, because it seems to me that Shakespeare himself does not provide answers, but rather he confronts us with a series of complicated, irresolvable questions about the relationship between narrative and dramatic art. As one recent critic has put it, Shakespeare 'sets us thinking' in his plays and poems rather than telling us what to think.[44] Before moving onto detailed considerations of individual Shakespearean works, in the following chapter I examine a variety of Shakespeare's plays and poems, and

[43] W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Ekphrasis and the Other', in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.152. See Joseph Conrad's 'Preface' to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, ed. Cedric Watts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), in which Conrad commented that his 'task' as a writer was 'by the power of the written word [...] to make you *see*' (p.xlix).

[44] See Graham Bradshaw, *Misrepresentations: Shakespeare and the Materialists* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.31: 'My own concern is with Shakespeare as the directing intelligence at work within the work, not with the Shakespeare with laundry lists or prior intentions. [...] to be concerned with dramatic intentions in this sense—with the play as a highly organised matrix of potential meanings rather than as a chaotic site—is to be concerned with how the play thinks or sets us thinking, not with what the play "really" thinks, or tells "us" to think'.

begin to map some of the ways in which Shakespeare 'sets us thinking' about the question of narrative.

Chapter 2

Shakespeare and Narrative

Jonathan Culler has recently asked a fundamental question about the nature of narrative, a question that narrative theory is always seeking to address:

> is narrative a fundamental form of knowledge (giving knowledge of the world through its sense-making) or is it a rhetorical structure that distorts as much as it reveals? Is narrative a source of knowledge or of illusion?[1]

Is narrative, as Culler suggests, merely an 'illusion', or is it an essential way of making sense of the world?[2] This chapter examines some of the ways in which this question about narrative is itself explored in Shakespeare's works, and raises issues that will be discussed and negotiated in greater detail throughout the thesis. I argue that the power and limitations of narrative—and its problematic, sometimes fraught relationship with what we see (including what we see onstage at the theatre)—preoccupied Shakespeare throughout his career. The first section of this chapter examines the problematic relationship between narrative and tragedy, and suggests ways in which Shakespeare's tragedies not only expose the inadequacies of storytelling, but also demonstrate our need to categorize and make sense of tragic events by turning them into a coherent narrative. I also investigate a particular piece of tragic narrative that appears in Virgil's *Aeneid*—Aeneas's tale to Dido—and its influence upon

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[1] Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.94. See also Culler, 'Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative' in *The Pursuit of Signs: Literature, Semiotics, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp.169-87. For a useful introduction to narrative theory, see Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). See also Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative' in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp.79-124. My thinking about narrative has also been influenced by Peter Brooks's three studies of the topic: see *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1993); and *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994). See also Andrew Gibson, *Towards a Postmodern Theory of Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996).

[2] J. Hillis Miller asks whether narratives 'create' or 'reveal' the world in 'Narrative', in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), p.69.

influence upon Shakespearean thinking about tragedy. The second section investigates epistemological questions of narrative in the late plays, and in the opening scene of *Hamlet*, and suggests ways in which the representations of storytelling in these plays—and the figure of narrative turning into drama—are related to George Peele's *The Old Wives Tale*. Finally, in the third section, I explore the way in which many of Shakespeare's plays end with a demand for narrative, and suggest that these acts of narration—which are often described and promised but rarely heard—generate a powerful sense of narrative cohesion and completeness, but one that must necessarily be deferred until after the end of the play.

1. Sad Stories

In *Tragedy: Shakespeare and the Greek Example* (1987), Adrian Poole attempts to describe the problematic relationship between tragedy and language:

> Tragedy represents the critical moments at which words fail. But it also represents the power of words and the ways in which their meanings are scored into the body and spirit of the men and women who have to live out their consequences.[3]

As Poole characterises it, tragedy represents both the *failure* and the *power* of language. For a play to be a successful tragedy, it must find a way of representing failure successfully, demonstrating that its linguistic powers are inadequate in representing the 'reality' that it must nonetheless attempt to describe. I want to develop Poole's point by suggesting that Shakespearean tragedy also represents the failure and the power of narrative. Tragedy often dramatises a desire to tell: both to remember the past and to reconstruct tragic events in narrative form. Yet it also demonstrates that such a retelling is likely to

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[3] Adrian Poole, *Tragedy: Shakespeare and the Greek Example* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.11. Poole writes that 'language is necessarily essential to tragedy inasmuch as tragedy represents what men and women do to themselves and each other and their world *through* language' (p.11).

be inadequate, or even inappropriate.[4] A particularly apt Shakespearean example of this occurs in *King Lear*, a play very much concerned with the extent to which the events it depicts are unspeakable, or untellable. Watching his blinded father, Gloucester, conversing with the pitiful and outcast Lear, Edgar states that

> I would not take this from report: it is,
> And my heart breaks at it. (4.6.137-38)

Here Shakespeare sets up a distinction between a potential narrative retelling and 'the thing itself': a sight of which Edgar can only say 'it is'. This scene would not be as affecting—or believable—if it were merely told to us in narrative form: instead, Edgar highlights the fact that we are seeing this event occurring before our eyes. Its value, according to Edgar, resides in the fact that it *cannot be narrated*. What we are seeing, he suggests, is superior to anything that a mere report could represent. For Edgar, narrative is merely a 'rhetorical structure'—an 'illusion' that is no substitute for the event that it describes. However, as we shall see in Chapter 5, Edgar is ultimately unable to resist the power of narrative, and goes on to construct an extended narrative 'report' of his father's death, an event that is not represented in dramatic form.[5] The difference between 'report' and what we see is also explored in Shakespeare's narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece*—of which I offer an extended reading in Chapter 3—in which the narrator explicitly prioritises the visual over the verbal: 'To see sad sights moves more than hear them told' (1324). Here, the poem suggests that seeing 'sad sights' is a more tragic, more affecting experience than merely hearing about

[4] Peter M. Sacks, in *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), makes similar points in relation to elegy, and he writes of 'the elegist's reluctant submission to language itself' (p.2). Sacks himself suggestively discusses the elegiac features of Renaissance revenge tragedy; see ch. 3, 'Where Words Prevail Not: Grief, Revenge, and Language in Kyd and Shakespeare' (pp.64-89).

[5] In *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Dryden suggests that tragic events in dramatic works can be *more* believable when represented in narrative form: 'When we see death represented, we are convinced it is but fiction, but when we hear it related, our eyes, the strongest witnesses, are wanting, which might have undeceived us, and we are willing to favour the sleight when the poet does not too grossly impose upon us' (*The Oxford Authors: John Dryden*, pp.98-99). And yet, as we shall see, one could argue that Edgar's narrative of Gloucester's death *does* 'too grossly impose upon us'.

them, or, perhaps, reading about them. This thesis suggests that all of Shakespeare's tragedies implicitly address this question: of whether narrative representations can ever be a substitute for—or satisfactorily represent—'sad sights'.

In a particularly notorious scene in Shakespeare's early tragedy *Titus Andronicus*, we find one of the play's characters constructing a narrative account of a tragic event that is occurring *at the same time*, suggesting that Shakespeare is deliberately juxtaposing a narrative description against a 'sad sight'. In 2.3, Marcus discovers his niece Lavinia, who has been raped, and has had her hands and tongue removed. As several critics have pointed out, this act of violence is a peculiarly literary one.[6] The play's main structural model is the tale of Philomel, Tereus and Procne in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. However, this tale is far more important than being a mere source: this structural patterning is noted in the text itself, even to the extent that a copy of the *Metamorphoses* is at one point brought on stage.[7] In Ovid's version of the tale, Philomel is raped by her sister's husband Tereus, who then cuts out her tongue to prevent her from raising the alarm. Nonetheless, Philomel finds a way of communicating to her sister Procne:

> A warpe of white upon a frame of *Thracia* she did pin,
> And weaved purple letters in betweene it, which bewraide
> The wicked deede of *Tereus*.
> (*Metamorphoses*, trans. Golding, VI, 736-38)[8]

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[6] Andras Kisery has written that 'Violence, mutilation and bloodshed are curiously textual on most occasions [in the play], packed as it is with quotations and allusions', in 'The Wounds of Rhetoric' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Bristol, 1994), p.88. This valuable study, which focuses upon *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, 'outlines a view of images and visual signs in Shakespeare in which meaning in general [...] is essentially rhetorical, but where the illusion of the immediacy of vision lends extreme persuasiveness to visual representation' (p.ii).

[7] As Leonard Barkan writes, 'In a very "real" sense, the presence of the book of Ovid generates the events of *Titus*. Even before the prop is introduced, it is clear that the characters have read the *Metamorphoses*', in *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p.244.

[8] Quoted from *Shakespeare's Ovid: Being Arthur Golding's Translation of the Metamorphoses*, ed. W. H. D. Rouse (London: Centaur, 1961).

Ovid describes how Philomel had to convey the circumstances of her rape by weaving letters in a tapestry. Yet Shakespeare's play is even more self-conscious when it comes to such issues of writing and communication: Lavinia's attackers, Chiron and Demetrius, are all too aware of this Ovidian precedent, and cut out Lavinia's tongue *and* cut off her hands to prevent her from communicating their identity. As Chiron says, 'Write down thy mind, bewray thy meaning so, / And if thy stumps will let thee, play the scribe' (2.3.3-4). And when Marcus comes across Lavinia, he too mentions Ovid's tale, and notes that 'some Tereus hath deflowered [Lavinia]' (2.3.26). However, Marcus's observation appears within an extended metaphorical description of Lavinia, a piece of narrative that both readers and audiences of the play have found problematic.[9] When this scene is performed, the audience is forced to compare the sight they are already beholding to the mental picture that is created by Marcus's poetry:

> Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,
> Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind,
> Doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips,
> Coming and going with thy honey breath. (2.3.22-25)

As Christy Desmet has written, 'Although rhetoric exists to "bring things before the eyes" of spectators, on the stage speech and spectacle can come into conflict'.[10] Marcus's vivid and highly wrought metaphorical language—which echoes Golding's translation of Ovid's tale of Pyramus and Thisbe in the *Metamorphoses*—might have been more appropriate in a narrative poem, such

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[9] The classic essay on the problems of the play's Ovidian language is Eugene M. Waith's 'The Metamorphosis of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 10 (1957), 39-49. On the self-consciousness of language and metaphor in *Titus*, see the discussions by Albert H. Tricomi, 'The Aesthetics of Mutilation in *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 27 (1974), 11-19; Mary L. Fawcett, 'Arms/Words/Tears: Language and the Body in *Titus Andronicus*', *ELH*, 50 (1983), 261-77; Maurice Hunt, 'Compelling Art in *Titus Andronicus*', *SEL*, 28 (1988), 197-218; Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, pp.111-117; Gillian Murray Kendall, '"Lend me thy hand": Metaphor and Mayhem in *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40 (1989), 299-316; and Heather James, 'Cultural disintegration in *Titus Andronicus*: mutilating Titus, Vergil and Rome', *Themes in Drama*, 13 (1991), 123-140.

[10] Christy Desmet, *Reading Shakespeare's Characters: Rhetoric, Ethics and Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p.113.

as Shakespeare's own *The Rape of Lucrece.*[11] James Calderwood has suggested that 'the poem will abide the delay, perhaps even gain from it a suspenseful appeal, because in the narrative mode all action is created entirely *by* the language, not in conjunction with it as in drama'.[12] However, when Lavinia is represented by an actor on stage, Marcus's comparison of her body to a 'conduit with three issuing spouts' (2.3.30) might seem incongruous. Marcus notes the extent to which Lavinia's attackers have outdone Tereus, their classical precursor, and goes on to wax lyrical about Lavinia's now absent hands:

> Fair Philomela, why she but lost her tongue,
> And in a tedious sampler sewed her mind;
> But, lovely niece, that mean is cut from thee.
> A craftier Tereus, cousin, hast thou met,
> And he hath cut those pretty fingers off,
> That could have better sewed than Philomel.
> O, had the monster seen those lily hands
> Tremble like aspen leaves upon a lute
> And make the silken strings delight to kiss them,
> He would not then have touched them for his life. (2.3.38-47)

Marcus's description of Lavinia's 'lily hands' reminds the audience—and Lavinia—all too painfully that, as J. Hillis Miller writes, 'Storytelling is always after the fact, and it is always constructed over a loss'.[13] In this way, the speech questions the process of turning suffering into art, and, more generally, the very enterprise of writing tragedy. D. J. Palmer offers one of the better defences of the speech: 'The vivid conceits in which [Marcus] pictures his hapless niece do not transform and depersonalise her: she is already transformed and depersonalised, as she stands before him the victim of a strange and cruel metamorphosis'.[14] But the fact that Lavinia is 'already transformed', as Palmer puts it, suggests that the problem is not one of incongruity but redundancy:

[11] On the echoing of Ovid's tale of Pyramus, see *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Bate, note to 2.3.30.
[12] Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama*, p.35.
[13] J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p.61.
[14] D. J. Palmer, 'The Unspeakable in Pursuit of the Uneatable: Language and Action in *Titus Andronicus*', *Critical Quarterly*, 14 (1972), 320-39 (p.321).

Marcus is describing what is already all too apparent, and committing a further act of transformation. Seeing this 'sad sight' onstage renders the audience's imagination—and Marcus's metaphorical description—redundant. The very act of describing Lavinia itself seems indecorous and inappropriate. Shakespeare seems to be deliberately testing what we hear—verbal, narrative art—against a horrific sight.

This line of argument would appear to support the case of critics such as Helen Cooper. She writes that 'Lavinia is raped and mutilated offstage, then makes her entry as a silenced witness to her own tragedy, only for her uncle to rhapsodise at awkward length on the grievousness of her state'.[15] Critics seem to be anxious about the grandiloquence—and excessive length—of Marcus's narrative description. However, there are other ways of thinking about this speech. Jonathan Bate has suggested that Marcus's speech can be seen to dramatise our need for coherence in the face of suffering: 'As audience members, we need Marcus' formalization just as much as he does himself in order to confront the mutilated Lavinia'.[16] Marcus uses Ovidian narrative—both the stories that Ovid tells *and* the narrative mode and language of the *Metamorphoses*—as a means of making sense of the world. Rather than having failed to describe Lavinia adequately, Marcus's narrative seems to demonstrate that *no* language would be adequate to this particular subject. But does this speech's literariness also suggest that Shakespeare was writing for readers as well as for 'audience members'? Does this description work better when we *read* the play? Rather than simply demonstrating that theatre is a superior to narrative as a means of representing the world, Shakespeare seems to be self-consciously experimenting with what happens when he includes Ovidian narrative as part of a dramatic work.[17]

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[15] Cooper, 'Blood Running Down', p.14.
[16] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p.112.
[17] Ann Thompson writes that 'Shakespeare must have felt, or come to feel, that the story of Philomel was intrinsically narrative rather than dramatic material: if staged it would not work as straight tragedy but only as the peculiar kind of tragedy we find in *Titus Andronicus*, or better still, especially as it was fitted in with his growing interest in a kind of romantic pathos, as tragi-

Titus Andronicus, then, is a play acutely aware of the problems of telling and retelling tragic events. In 3.2, Marcus enjoins Titus to stop encouraging the already injured Lavinia to harm herself: 'Fie, brother, fie! Teach her not thus to lay / Such violent hands upon her tender life' (3.2.21-22). Titus then picks up on Marcus's unfortunate use of the word 'hands', making explicit reference to the *Aeneid* and Aeneas's tale to Dido:

> What violent hands can she lay on her life?
> Ah, wherefore dost thou urge the name of hands
> To bid Aeneas tell the tale twice o'er
> How Troy was burnt and he made miserable?
> O handle not the theme, to talk of hands,
> Lest we remember still that we have none. (3.2.25-30)

Lavinia's and Titus's hands have been removed, and to speak of them—even metaphorically—is akin to Aeneas's retelling of the tragic story of Troy. For Titus, the very act of speaking is a painful remembering of loss. In his *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), Thomas Wilson instructs those attempting a narration to be brief, advising them that 'the best is to speake no more than needs we must'. But Wilson then writes that one should not repeat oneself, nor retell that which is unpleasant to repeat: 'nor yet twyse to tell one thyng, or report that, whiche is odiouse to be tolde againe'.[18] To retell something awful—whether it is the fall of Troy or the loss of Lavinia's hands—is redundant and excessive, in the sense that it is indecorous to attempt to put something 'odiouse' into words, or to shape it into an orderly narrative form. In the final scene of *Titus*, a Roman Lord seeks an explanation as to why the 'body' of Rome—in a metaphorical sense—has been dismembered like Lavinia's body. The Roman Lord makes another explicit comparison between the events of *Titus Andronicus* and the *Aeneid*:

comedy', in 'Philomel in *Titus Andronicus* and *Cymbeline*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 31 (1978), 23-32 (p.32).
[18] Thomas Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), ed. Thomas J. Derrick (New York and London: Garland, 1982), p.222.

> Speak, Rome's dear friend, as erst our ancestor
> When with his solemn tongue he did discourse
> To lovesick Dido's sad-attending ear
> The story of that baleful burning night
> When subtle Greeks surprised King Priam's Troy.
> Tell us what Sinon has bewitched our ears,
> Or who hath brought the fatal engine in
> That gives our Troy, our Rome, the civil wound. (5.3.79-86)

Here, the Roman Lord attempts to pre-empt the narrative he is about to hear by placing it in the context of the story of his 'ancestor' Aeneas, a literary and historical authority, in an attempt to make sense of the present. This image of Aeneas's 'solemn tongue' intimately discoursing to Dido's 'sad attending ear' suggests that we are about to hear a narrative account of the play's events. However, what has occurred is so dreadful that Marcus cannot put it into words: he cannot translate it into narrative form. Nonetheless, Marcus is able to tell us that he cannot speak, and he tells us—in a highly rhetorical manner—what the effects of his discourse would have been:

> floods of tears will drown my oratory
> And break my utterance even in the time
> When it should move ye to attend me most,
> And force you to commiseration. (5.3.89-92)

This desire for narrative, coupled with an awareness that such a narrative will be difficult to tell, seems to be a fundamental feature of Shakespearean tragedy, and a feature that is indebted to Virgil.

At the start of Book II of the *Aeneid*, when Dido has asked Aeneas to tell the story of his trials, Aeneas states that to articulate his sufferings will be painful and problematic, as the repetition of his experience will be almost as bad as the real thing:

> A doleful worke me to renew (O Queene) y^u doost constrain,
> To tel how Greekes ye Troian welth, & lametable raigne
> Did ouerthrow, which I my selfe haue seene and been a part
> No small thereof, but to declare the stories all: what hart
> Can of the Greekes or soldiour one of all Vlisses rout

Refraine to weepe?[19]

To 'renew' the story—in the sense of 'To go over again, to repeat, relate afresh' (*OED* 5a), but also, perhaps, in the sense of 'To reopen (a wound)' (*OED* 1d) — will be, for Aeneas, a 'doleful worke'. Aeneas seems to suggest that his participation in these events has placed him in a position whereby he is able to retell them, 'to declare the stories all' (6). Yet the events that Aeneas has himself 'seene and beene a part' (5) will be hard to tell without 'weep[ing]' (8). In other words, it will be difficult to convert the sad sights that he has seen into narrative form. Nonetheless, he reluctantly agrees to attempt to retell his trials:

> But if such great desier to know, such longing haue your brest
> Of *Troy* the latter toyle to here, to speake or yet to thinke
> For all that it my minde abhors, and sorows make mee shrinke:
> I will begin. (*Aeneid*, II, 10-13)

This passage implicitly asks whether one ought to attempt to tell sad things at all, despite the listener's 'great desier' to hear them. It is clear that this act of narration as it is appears within Virgil's poem had a great impact upon Shakespeare.[20] For example, the opening scene of one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, *The Comedy of Errors*, is directly indebted to this part of the *Aeneid*.[21] The play begins with a long expositional narrative—another sad story—as Solinus, the Duke of Ephesus, asks Egeon to offer a brief account of his experiences:

Well, Syracusian; say in brief the cause

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[19] Quoted from *The Thirteen Bookes of Aeneidos* (1584), trans. Thomas Phaer and Thomas Twyne, ed. Steven Lally (New York and London: Garland, 1987), II, 2-8.
[20] See Heather James, 'Dido's Ear: Tragedy and the Politics of Response', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 52 (2001), 360-382. James comments that 'Plays from *Titus Andronicus* to *The Tempest* produce a kind of "Vergil Reduced," chiefly featuring elements from Books 2 and 4 of the *Aeneid*' (p.364).
[21] T. W. Baldwin has shown that Shakespeare would have been particularly familiar with the first two books of the *Aeneid* from his grammar school syllabus, and he also makes this connection between Virgil and *The Comedy of Errors*; see *William Shakspere's Smalle Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944), II, pp.485-87. See also Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, *Jonson, Shakespeare and Early Modern Virgil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. ch. 2.

> Why thou departedst from they native home,
> And for what cause thou cam'st to Ephesus. (1.1.28-30)

The Duke makes an explicit demand for narrative, echoing Dido's demand to hear Aeneas's tale. Yet Egeon, like Aeneas, claims that his story will not be an easy one to tell: 'A heavier task could not have been impos'd / Than I to speak my griefs unspeakable' (1.1.31-32). Here, Egeon addresses a central paradox that is explored by Shakespearean tragedy: how does one speak something that is unspeakable? But his heavy task is clearly not that heavy, considering that Egeon is able to talk for sixty-four lines before breaking off his narrative: 'O, let me say no more! / Gather the sequel by that went before' (1.1.94-95). However, the Duke will not allow him to break off at that point in his tale: 'Nay forward, old man, do not break off so, / For we may pity, though not pardon thee' (1.1.96-97). Egeon continues with his narrative, and, as with Aeneas, seems to say that he has survived in order to be able to tell the tale:

> Thus have you heard me sever'd from my bliss,
> That by misfortunes was my life prolong'd,
> To tell sad stories of my own mishaps. (1.1.118-20)

The Duke then asks Egeon to 'dilate at full' (1.1.122) the sorrows that have befallen Egeon and his family. To 'dilate' means 'To relate, describe, or set forth at length; to enlarge or expatiate upon' (*OED* 4), and writers of textbooks on rhetoric often used the word when describing the composition of a *narratio*.[22] But the characters in Shakespeare's tragedies often seem to be *too* adept at composing rhetorically accomplished dilations that describe and amplify their sufferings, particularly given their emotional states, their claims of being inarticulate, and their promises to be brief. Narrative seems to be problematic but also irresistible.

[22] See *The Comedy of Errors*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Methuen, 1962), note to 1.1.122. On Shakespeare's awareness of the principles of *narratio* and dilation, and his familiarity with the work of rhetoricians such as Erasmus and Aphthonius, see Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Smalle Latine and Lesse Greek*, II, pp.315-21. See also Patricia Parker, 'Shakespeare and Rhetoric: "Dilation" and "Delation" in *Othello*' in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey H. Hartman (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.54-74.

Romeo and Juliet is another play concerned with the problems of narrating tragic events. In the play's final scene, the 'story' of the lovers that is pieced together is a curiously partial one. The play's characters, especially the Prince, are not concerned with ambiguity or poetic paradox: the Prince's purpose is to silence meaningless mourning and to restore social order. But the Prince also seeks narrative causes and explanations, and seeks to convert the events of the tragedy into a speakable and narratable form. As Thomas Moisan has written, the Prince 'fashions a rhetoric that would make death a manageable [...] even adjudicable, phenomenon'.[23] Even before the parents are allowed to attempt to articulate their grief, the Prince orders their silence, and demands a narrative accounting for the present state of affairs:

> Seal up the mouth of outrage for a while,
> Till we can clear these ambiguities,
> And know their spring, their head, their true descent,
> And then will I be general of your woes,
> And lead you even to death. (5.3.216-20)

The 'outraged' response to the play's tragic events must be postponed until the Prince has learnt the 'spring' and 'head' of the tragedy. What follows is Friar Lawrence's narrative, which, like the Prologue at the play's outset, recounts the events of the plot. The Friar promises to 'be brief', as his 'short date of breath / Is not so long as is a tedious tale' (5.3.229-30). However, he still speaks for forty lines, revealing nothing new to the audience. Dr Johnson commented that 'It is much to be lamented that the poet did not conclude the dialogue with the action and avoid a narrative of events which the audience already knew'.[24] But in listening to the Friar's narrative we register that none of the characters has perceived the tragedy from the same perspective as that of the theatre audience. What is more, Shakespeare has already established that the reporting of events can be biased. After the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt in Act 3, Benvolio offers a detailed narrative account of what has taken place (3.1.152-

[23] Thomas Moisan, 'Rhetoric and the Rehearsal of Death: The "Lamentations" scene in *Romeo and Juliet*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 34 (1983), 389-404 (p.403).
[24] *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Woudhuysen, p.237.

75). However, Lady Capulet is not convinced: 'Affection makes him false, he speaks not true' (3.1.177). And while Benvolio's account is relatively accurate, he nonetheless implies that Tybalt was the aggressor, while it was, in fact, Mercutio.[25] Some narratives, then, seem to be more accurate than others. Friar Lawrence's narrative also interrupts the action of the play; it effectively silences the mourners, and we might wonder exactly how old Montague and the Capulets react as we listen to the Friar's tale. Furthermore, it remains a simplification of the play's events and the Friar's involvement in them; like Edgar's narrative at the end of *King Lear*, it has the tone of a confession about it, and it is not clear that the 'ambiguities' that the play has produced are entirely 'cleared' by it.

In *Macbeth* there are two provocative passages that offer further insights into the relationship between tragedy and storytelling. When Macbeth reveals his fear of Banquo's ghost, Lady Macbeth compares his exaggerated reactions to something that one might find in an old wives' tale:

> O, these flaws and starts
> (Impostors to true fear) would well become
> A woman's story at a winter's fire,
> Authoriz'd by her grandam. (3.4.62-65)

Lady Macbeth's reference to 'a woman's story' suggests that Macbeth's reactions to the events that we are witnessing on stage are exaggerated and false. And yet, the effect is also to make what we are witnessing—stage 'reality'—more real, setting up a distinction between Shakespeare's play and the world of artless old tales. More notorious is Macbeth's treatment of the metaphor that life is a story:

> It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing. (5.5.26-28)

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[25] See *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), note to 3.1.168.

We often like to think of our lives as if they were narratives; we imagine that the 'story' of an individual life can be told from start to finish, with some sort of meaning revealed at the end. However, the tale of Macbeth's life, as he portrays it, would be told by an idiot—a tale that, presumably, would be far from coherent.[26] He also implies, perhaps, that only an idiot would attempt to turn someone's life into a 'tale'. In this way, Macbeth's formulation can be read as a self-reflexive statement about the nature of the 'tragic'. Far from being cathartic, or making sense of our existence, Macbeth implies that a tragic tale is meaningless or incomprehensible, signifying nothing. Indeed, several critics have located the significance of tragedy in its very lack of coherence or meaning. Norman Rabkin has written that, in the tragedies, 'disturbing mysteries lie beyond the understanding to which they drive us, and we are repeatedly led to locate the essence of tragedy there, in the inadequacy of reasonable understanding'.[27] Shakespeare's tragedies point us towards this understanding—towards an answer—but their narratives are never properly closed: the answer never arrives. At first glance, then, tragedy would appear to be at odds with storytelling, in that it reveals the inability of narrative to sum up what has taken place.[28] Shakespeare's narratives—both the plays themselves and the acts of storytelling within them—seem to encourage the audience to believe that an artful narrative can order tragic experience, but they also suggest that this belief can itself be a fiction.

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[26] See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's comments on Macbeth's speech in *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), p.175.
[27] Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), p.140. On tragedy and its resistance to both theorising and definition, see Stephen Booth, *'King Lear', 'Macbeth', Indefinition and Tragedy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983): 'We use the word *tragedy* when we are confronted with a sudden invasion of our finite consciousness by the fact of infinite possibility—when our minds are sites for a domestic collision of the understanding and the fact of infinity. *Tragedy* is the word by which the mind designates (and thus in part denies) its helplessness before a concrete, particular, and thus undeniable demonstration of the limits of human understanding' (p.85).
[28] In *Shakespeare's Storytellers*, Barbara Hardy has written about Shakespeare's tragic endings and the way in which tragedy undermines the ability of narrative effectively to sum up the play's events. Hardy's comments about *Othello* could be applied to all of the tragedies: '*Othello* undermines the sense of narrative as a stable and ordering act: Gratiano says "all that's spoke is marr'd", Iago says nothing, and Othello chooses and controls narrative performance to disguise and facilitate suicide' (p.73).

However, if this belief is a fiction, then it remains one that is both powerful and seductive. Shakespeare's tragedies also demonstrate that we *need* to believe in the ability of narrative to make sense of our lives; that narrative remains, as Culler suggests, 'a fundamental form of knowledge'.[29] The fact that Shakespeare's tragic characters very often have recourse to storytelling when things are at their worst is a good indication of this. For example, Richard II breaks off the action of his tragedy to recount narratives that tell of others in his predicament: 'let us sit upon the ground / And tell sad stories of the death of kings' (3.2.155-56).[30] Titus Andronicus offers to take Lavinia to a private place where he can read her stories:

> Lavinia, go with me;
> I'll to thy closet and go read with thee
> Sad stories chanced in the times of old. (3.2.82-83)

And in *King Lear*, Cordelia notes that she and her father are not the first to have experienced suffering: 'We are not the first / Who with best meaning have incurred the worst' (5.3.3-4). Lear then attempts to comfort her with his vision of prison in which the two of them 'will sing like birds 'i'th' cage' (5.3.9), in a place of blessing and forgiveness—and perpetual storytelling:

> When thou dost ask me blessing I'll kneel down
> And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies (5.3.10-13)

It is only by comparing their predicaments with 'sad stories' and 'old tales'—replacing the outpouring of emotion with the consolations of classical, tragic narratives—that these characters can gain comfort or make sense of their lives. They also seem to find solace in imagining their own place within this tragic

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[29] Culler, *Literary Theory*, p.94.
[30] A. D. Nuttall writes that 'It is as if [Richard] knows everything about his situation except the fact that it is happening to him', in *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.88.

'tradition', imagining their story being told—and retold—in the context of other narratives. However, the consolations offered by these old tales are only temporary, and, arguably, illusory. Harry Berger, Jr. has written that Richard II's use of the phrase *sad stories* 'specifies a loose and ambiguous relation to history, since what are to be recounted are not the events themselves but previous accounts, and these may be parabolic, exemplary, false, or fictive, as well as historical'.[31] And in the case of *King Lear*, the play cuts against Lear's positive vision of narrative; and, moreover, Lear's imagined and idyllic place of storytelling never actually materialises. As the ending of *King Lear* approaches, we might imagine for a moment that the play will end happily, like the 'old tales' that Lear wants to tell; that the narrative of the play—and the play's view of narrative—is affirmative. Yet *King Lear* itself denies such affirmations, and refuses to be the sort of comforting old tale that Lear craves.[32]

The ending of *Othello* is also about failure of narrative, as Iago literally fails to give a narrative account of his actions. Othello demands an explanation: 'Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil / Why he hath thus ensnar'd my soul and body?' (5.2.301-2). Yet Iago's motives remain a mystery:

> Demand me nothing; what you know, you know:
> From this time forth I never will speak word. (5.2.303-4)

He offers no explanation. As a result, the events that Iago is largely responsible for do not benefit from any further illumination. What Othello knows, he knows. But the amount of 'knowledge' that Othello reveals in his final speech (5.2.348-56) is hard to determine. This speech is a narrative which turns into a drama, in which Othello comes to play both himself, loyal servant of the state, and the 'other', a malignant enemy. And yet, Othello's first-person narrative seems

[31] Berger, *Imaginary Audition*, p.120.
[32] In *Shakespeare's Scepticism*, Graham Bradshaw makes an interesting comparison between this ending and that of *The Winter's Tale*: 'Where *Lear* refuses to finish like a fiction, *The Winter's Tale* pointedly reminds us that it that it is a fiction. The ending of *Lear* is a radical and exemplary example of Sidney's idea of what tragedy, and works of art in general, should do—not merely because it ends horribly, but because it reminds us that it could so easily have ended happily' (p.93).

designed to act as a justification for—and a distraction from—his actions. Like Shakespeare's other tragic protagonists, he is concerned with how his story will be remembered; but Othello's speech is an attempt to write his story himself, even implying the absence of the speaker. He imagines how his story will be retold, or rewritten, in narrative form. Othello anticipates the letters which will be written about his tragedy—the attempt to put the events of the play into words: 'I pray you, in your letters, / When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, / Speak of me as I am' (5.2.340-42). Othello is careful not to say 'I loved unwisely'—he attempts to rewrite past events, requesting that people speak 'Of one that lov'd not wisely but too well' (5.2.344).[33] However, Othello's discourse then collapses to become part of his—and the play's—story:

> Set you down this;
> And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state,
> I took by th' throat the circumcised dog,
> And smote him—thus. [*He stabs himself*] (5.2.351-56)

Denied an explanation from Iago, Othello uses this act of storytelling to place the events that he has been a part of into some sort of order. Like the Roman Lord in *Titus*, Othello wants Lodovico to report the story as part of a wider chronicle, placing it in the context of Venetian history, demonstrating the eventual triumph of Venetian values. And yet, as Dennis Kay puts it, 'In such a proposed generic modulation from tragedy to history the event claims meaning beyond its immediate circumstances'.[34] On one level at least, Othello is simply telling tales, so to speak, recounting a story entirely different from his own.[35] The story Othello recounts cannot explain or encompass the events of his

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[33] See E. A. J. Honigmann's note to 5.2.336 in his Arden edition of *Othello* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1997).
[34] Dennis Kay, '"To hear the rest untold": Shakespeare's Postponed Endings', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 37 (1984), 207-222 (p.221).
[35] See T. S. Eliot's comment that 'What Othello seems to me to be doing in this speech is *cheering himself up*. He is endeavouring to escape reality, he has ceased to think about Desdemona, and is thinking about himself. [...] He takes in the spectator, but the human motive is primarily to take in himself' in 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', in *Selected Essays: 1917-1932* (London: Faber, 1932), pp.130-31.

tragedy, although he tries his hardest to blur the distinction between the two. His suicide is a literalisation, or even re-enactment, of the earlier murder. As Garrett Stewart has written, the word 'thus' is put 'to full work as an unstable marker between history and discourse'.[36] But it is this instability that is so important: there is no genuine connection between this earlier murder and Othello's suicide. It is all too apparent that the events of *Othello* cannot be made sense of by comparing them with other stories.

More suggestive still, perhaps, is the explicit demand for narrative to be found in the last act of *Richard II*. Here, Richard anticipates the retelling of his story in the context of other old, tragic tales, in an account that culminates in a striking image of the power of narrative:

> Think I am dead, and that even here thou takest,
> As from my death-bed, thy last living leave.
> In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire
> With good old folks and let them tell thee tales
> Of woeful ages long ago betid;
> And ere thou bid good night, to quite their griefs,
> Tell thou the lamentable tale of me,
> And send the hearers weeping to their beds.
> For why, the senseless brands will sympathize
> The heavy accent of thy moving tongue,
> And in compassion weep the fire out,
> And some will mourn in ashes, some coal-black,
> For the deposing of a rightful king. (5.1.38-50)

Richard asks the Queen to think of him as being dead: like Hamlet, he all but turns himself into a ghost, even before he 'actually' dies. Richard asks the

[36] Garrett Stewart, *Death Sentences: Styles of Dying in British Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), p.23. Stewart comments that 'The link between a tragic Shakespeare, say, and a melodramatic Dickens in this regard has to do with the playwright's need, and the salience of invention answering to it, for a language in which to externalize by irony and ambiguity, whether in dialogue or in soliloquy, that poetic justice in death that no narrator is on hand to articulate' (pp.22-23). Barbara Hardy writes that 'In *Othello* narrative is a dominant subject' (*Shakespeare's Storytellers*, p.58), and notes that '[Othello's] last word, "thus", is a blunt monosyllable to be released when the actor acts the stab, metamorphosing story to doing, history to immediacy' (p.62). Stephen Greenblatt's account of *Othello*, 'The Improvisation of Power', in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), pp.222-54, has some suggestive remarks on the notion of 'narrative self-fashioning' (p.234).

Queen to imagine a place of storytelling by the fire, where, as a prologue to his own tale, she will listen to 'good old folks' telling 'woeful' tales of 'long ago', placing the tragedy of Richard II in the context of other tragic narratives. Richard then enjoins the Queen to tell his story: 'the lamentable tale of me' (5.1.44). His will be such a pitiful tale that even the unfeeling coals of the winter fire—'the senseless brands' (5.1.46)—will start to cry, so much so that they will 'weep the fire out' (5.1.48), weeping themselves out of existence. However, it is unclear in the play whether we ought wholly to 'sympathize' with Richard. He imagines 'a lamentable tale' (5.1.44) that tells of 'the deposing of a rightful king' (5.1.50). But would such a narrative—a story that we do not hear—constitute a fitting summary of the events of *Richard II*? Shakespeare's play entertains the possibility that Richard II is a monarch who has lost his right to govern, and that his overthrow is legitimate. In this way, Richard's keenness to convert the action of the play into a tragic narrative might be questionable: the story that Richard wants to be told about him is not necessarily the same story that the play has told us. For Richard, then, as for Lear and Othello, narrative is a *distraction* from reality, rather than an accurate and credible representation of that reality. Here, and throughout the tragedies, Shakespeare suggests that narrative can be a mystification, and that it often imposes an order upon tragic events that the events themselves will resist.

2. Old Wives' Tales

Shakespeare was not the only dramatist in this period to explore the relationship between narrative and drama. In George Peele's suggestively titled play *The Old Wives Tale* (1595), three Pages, called Anticke, Frolicke and Fantasticke, spend the night at the house of Clutch, a Smith, and his wife Madge.[37] Anticke

[37] A. R. Braunmuller briefly refers to *The Old Wives Tale* and its frame narrative, and writes that 'In the late 1580s and 1590s, playwrights increasingly employ various narrative, 'framing', or 'distancing' devices: prologues and epilogues, inductions, dumbshows, choruses, presenter or commentator figures, and frame narratives. These devices may serve quite prosaic craftsmanly purposes. They describe action that cannot be represented mimetically; they fill in details (of

suggests that Madge tell them a story to pass the time: 'methinks, gammer, a merry winter's tale would drive away the time trimly' (85-86).[38] Yet the beginning of Madge's narrative suggests that Peele is treating the art and conventions of storytelling in a somewhat ironic manner: 'Once upon a time there was a king or a lord or a duke that had a fair daughter' (113-14). Madge tells the tale of a conjurer and his abduction of the king's daughter, Delia, and how Delia's two brothers set out to search for her. However, Madge's tale is fragmented, as she forgets details and has go back and correct herself: 'O, I forget! She (he I would say) turned a proper young man to a bear in the night' (128-29). But then her narrative is interrupted:

> *Madge.* [...] Gods me bones! who comes here?
> *Enter the* Two Brothers
> *Frolic.* Soft, gammer, here some come to tell your tale for you.
> *Fantastic.* Let them alone; let us hear what they will say. (132-35)

The two brothers from the story have appeared to 'tell [Madge's] tale for [her]'. Madge's act of narration is broken off, and the action of the play then becomes the enactment of Madge's tale in *dramatic* form. Madge's badly told tale becomes a piece of dramatic entertainment: her story appears to come to life before our eyes, suggesting that 'showing' is superior to 'telling'. And yet, Peele's play comes to question the reliability of what we see. For example, Erestus states that 'Things that seem are not the same' (164), and when the First Brother sees Delia he is not sure what he has actually seen: 'Brother, was not that Delia did appear? / Or was it but her shadow that was here?' (414-15). At the play's close, Jack reveals that Sacrapant, the conjurer, was not the young man that he had appeared to be: 'he deceived them that beheld him. But he was a miserable, old and crooked man, though to each man's eye he seemed young and fresh' (906-8). In this way, despite the play's apparent prioritising of

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characters or past events, for example) the playwright could not or did not wish to convey in other ways; they condense action', in 'The arts of the dramatist', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, ed. Braunmuller and Hattaway, p.81.

[38] Quotations are taken from *The Old Wives Tale* (1595), ed. Patricia Binnie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980).

drama above narrative, it constantly draws our attention to the deceptiveness of appearances, and the unreliability of seeing.

Shakespeare's plays display an even greater self-consciousness and ambivalence towards narrative and drama than we find in Peele's play. Indeed, Shakespeare appears to have been fascinated by *epistemological* questions of narrative—particularly in the late plays—and whether or not we should believe in extraordinary things that are merely told to us. For example, in the final scene of *The Winter's Tale*, when Hermione's 'statue' is revealed and appears to come back to life again, Paulina appears to undermine the authority of mere stories, and instead appeals to the persuasiveness of the visual:

> That she is living,
> Were it but told you, should be hooted at
> Like an old tale; but it appears she lives,
> Though yet she speak not. (5.3.115-18)

Here, one of Shakespeare's characters contrasts Hermione's reanimation—arguably one of the most visually powerful moments in Shakespeare's dramatic works—with an 'old tale'.[39] Paulina suggests that we ought to respond to such a mere narrative ('Were it *but* told you') with scepticism, or even laughter, as if it were a trivial piece of fiction. Paulina says that seeing is believing; or, at least, that seeing is superior to telling. Yet Paulina's suggestion that it 'appears' that Hermione lives is not as simple as it first appears (so to speak), while Paulina's admission that Hermione has yet to *speak* complicates things still further. This implied superiority of what we see over narrative telling—or *re*telling—is perhaps one reason why some of the critics discussed in Chapter 1 have argued that Shakespeare clearly preferred theatrical to narrative

[39] Inga-Stina Ewbank comments upon moments such as this, 'when a character will tell us that what we are seeing is truer than any fiction, beyond words' in 'The Word in the Theater', in *Shakespeare: Man of the Theater*, ed. Kenneth Muir, Jay L. Halio and D. J. Palmer (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1983), p.71. However, Ewbank fails to specify that this particular moment is not only beyond *words*, but is beyond telling in *narrative* form.

representations. However, as we shall see, Shakespeare also suggests that the visual can be ambiguous and unreliable, or even reliant upon 'report'.

A particularly interesting example of this occurs in the last act of *Pericles*, when Marina and Pericles are finally reunited. Marina is concerned that her story will not be believed: 'If I should tell my history, it would seem / Like lies disdain'd in the reporting' (5.1.118-19). Pericles says that he will believe her nonetheless, because she looks like someone he remembers:

> I will believe thee,
> And make my senses credit thy relation
> To points that seem impossible, for thou lookest
> Like one I lov'd indeed. (5.1.122-25)

Pericles states that he will believe anything that Marina says: he has already agreed to make a leap of narrative faith because of the way that she *looks*. Her appearance will verify the story that she is about to tell, even though that story will offer the proof of her identity, a story that might contain 'points that seem impossible' (5.1.124). As with Paulina's statement from *The Winter's Tale* discussed above, this passage displays an interesting circularity between seeing and hearing, as well as exploring the limitations of what we are prepared to believe. Is Pericles prioritising what he sees or what he is told here?

In *The Tempest*, Alonso's party is visited by various spirits under the command of Prospero, spirits described by Sebastian as 'A living drollery' (3.3.21). Sebastian says that he will now believe that there are unicorns and a phoenix, while Antonio says that he will believe anything: 'I'll believe both; / And what does else want credit, come to me, / And I'll be sworn 'tis true' (3.3.24-26). Gonzalo imagines how his audience back home will disbelieve his attempts to describe this event: 'If in Naples / I should report this now, would they believe me?' (3.3.27-28). But what are Sebastian, Antonio and Gonzalo actually looking at? The 'drollery' that they are watching is an illusion created by Prospero's magic, and the banquet that the '*strange shapes*' have left behind soon

disappears: '*Enter* ARIEL, *like a harpy, claps his wings upon the table, and with a quaint device the banquet vanishes*' (3.3.52, S.D.). Even in performance, the wondrous sight that the theatre audience sees is dependent upon a 'quaint device', a cunning or ingenious piece of stage trickery.[40] In this way, while Shakespeare's works often seem to imply the immediacy of the visual, they also suggest ways in which seeing itself can be ambiguous, contested, or deceptive. In *Cymbeline*, for example, Imogen is surprised to discover that there is civility beyond the confines of the court, and she offers an account of knowledge that prioritises what she experiences above what others have reported to her:

> These are kind creatures. Gods, what lies I have heard!
> Our courtiers say all's savage but at court.
> Experience, O, thou disprov'st report! (4.2.32-34)

However, the play reveals that *seeing* alone is not necessarily authoritative. As Imogen admits later in the same scene, 'Our very eyes, / Are sometimes like our judgements, blind' (4.2.301-2). Our own seeing, Imogen suggests, is not necessarily as reliable as we would like to think, and can be as susceptible to interpretative distortion as the reports of others.[41]

Such issues of epistemology and narrative are also explored in the opening scene of *Hamlet*, in which we learn that Horatio is sceptical about the existence of the Ghost: 'Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy', declares Marcellus (1.1.23). Upon Horatio's arrival, to convince him that the Ghost is more than a mere fiction, Barnardo offers to retell the story—to give a narrative 'report'—of the Ghost's two appearances:

> Sit down awhile,
> And let us once again assail your ears,
> That are so fortified against our story,
> What we two nights have seen. (1.1.30-33)

[40] See *OED* s.v. 'quaint' *a. adv.* 2: 'Of actions, schemes, devices, etc.: Marked by ingenuity, cleverness, or cunning. Now *arch.*'.
[41] See Cynthia Lewis, '"With Simular Proof Enough": Modes of Misperception in *Cymbeline*', *SEL*, 31 (1991), 343-64.

Horatio enjoins his two companions to sit, both suspending the play's action and increasing our feelings of suspense, preparing himself—and the audience—to listen to Barnardo's ghost story: 'Well, sit we down, / And let us hear Barnardo speak of this' (1.1.33-34). But while the epic style of Barnardo's opening suggests that this will be a long, leisurely narrative account, his story never gets off the ground, and he never makes it to the main verb of his sentence:

> Last night of all,
> When yond same star that's westward from the pole
> Had made his course t'illume that part of heaven
> Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
> The bell then beating one—
> *Enter* GHOST (1.1.35-39)

Here the Ghost itself interrupts Barnardo's narrative, in 'an uncanny repetition of the very events he is about to describe'.[42] In this remarkable moment, the appearance of the Ghost interrupts a narrative account of a *previous* appearance. Presumably Barnardo's sentence would have continued with something along the lines of 'Marcellus and myself, / The bell then beating one, saw a ghost'. However, the physical presence of the Ghost ensures that—in performance at least—we actually do this 'seeing' ourselves. Marcellus tells Barnardo to break off his narrative, 'Peace, break thee off. Look where it comes again' (1.1.40), recognising the redundancy and inauthenticity of narrative now that the 'actual' Ghost has appeared. But this sudden reappearance of the Ghost also gives the effect of Barnardo's tale becoming 'real', in a similar manner to Madge's tale coming to life in *The Old Wives Tale*. Barnardo's narrative is so vivid that it seems to bring forth the thing being described before our eyes.[43] We might even suggest that the Ghost acts as the verb of

[42] Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.220. See also Stephen Booth, 'On the Value of *Hamlet*', in *Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama*, ed. Norman Rabkin (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), p.142.
[43] McKeown comments that 'The ghost wanders in at this moment, standing in for the vivid description for which Barnardo has diligently prepared his audience' ('*Enargeia* and the English Literary Renaissance', p.164).

Barnardo's sentence—the Ghost is the word made flesh; except, of course, that a ghost is anything but flesh. Here, when we think we are experiencing the thing itself—when 'reality' appears to be interrupting art—we recognise that this 'reality' is itself a ghost. Horatio is now convinced of the Ghost's existence: 'Is not this something more than fantasy?' (1.1.54), asks Barnardo, and Horatio answers:

> I might not this believe
> Without the sensible and true avouch
> Of mine own eyes. (1.1.56-58)

Horatio prioritises what he has *seen* above the stories that Barnardo and Marcellus have *told* him. Yet Horatio's reliance upon visual proof here might prompt us to reflect upon the difference between dramatic and narrative art. In this scene, Shakespeare appears to be deliberately contrasting the physical presence of an actor—playing a ghost—with a narrative account. Shakespeare implicitly asks whether narrative or dramatic modes of representation are more authentic or reliable. In *Shakespeare's Theory of Drama*, Pauline Kiernan refers to the myth of Orpheus and 'his power to summon things into his presence', and argues that 'In place of the secondariness and belatedness of mimetic representation [...] Shakespearean drama attempts to offer the physical immediacy and present-centredness of Orphic representation'.[44] However, this passage from *Hamlet* suggests that Shakespearean drama, even when it *appears* to be offering physical immediacy and presence—in comparison to a narrative account—simultaneously reveals that presence to be ghostly. It might be argued (contra-Kiernan) that dramatic presence can be just as 'secondary' and 'belated' as narrative representation.[45]

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[44] Kiernan, *Shakespeare's Theory of Drama*, pp. 14, 13.
[45] In John Webster's *The White Devil* (1612), Francisco encounters the ghost of Isabella, but states that the ghost is the coinage of his own brain: 'Her figure 'fore me. [*Enter Isabella's ghost*] Now I ha't. How strong / Imagination works!' (4.1.99-100). However, when the ghost departs, he compares the *exit* of the ghost to the conclusion of an old tale: 'So now 'tis ended, like an old wives' story' (4.1.113).

The Winter's Tale also contains an explicit scene of storytelling in which a story is broken off before it has the chance to begin. After a miniature play of jealousy between Mamillius, Hermione and the waiting women, Hermione asks Mamillius to tell them a tale:

> HERMIONE
> What wisdom stirs amongst you? Come, sir, now
> I am for you again. Pray you sit by us,
> And tell's a tale.
> MAMILLIUS Merry or sad shall't be?
> HERMIONE
> As merry as you will.
> MAMILLIUS
> A sad tale's best for winter; I have one
> Of sprites and goblins.
> HERMIONE Let's have that, good sir.
> Come on, sit down, come on, and do your best
> To fright me with your sprites; you're powerful at it.
> MAMILLIUS
> There was a man—
> HERMIONE Nay, come sit down, then on.
> MAMILLIUS
> Dwelt by a churchyard—I will tell it softly,
> Yon crickets shall not hear it.
> HERMIONE
> Come on, then, and give't me in mine ear.
> *Enter Leontes, Antigonus and Lords* (2.1.21-32)

In this immensely detailed and naturalistic scene of storytelling, Hermione enjoins Mamillius—the storyteller—to 'sit', temporarily suspending the play's action. But why, in such an explicit site of narrative, does Shakespeare not give Mamillius's story a chance to begin? Mamillius states that 'A sad tale's best for winter', raising the possibility that his story is in some way related to the 'winter's tale' that we are watching (or reading). Hermione acknowledges Mamillius's ability to frighten her with his skill at weaving yarns, and urges him to 'do your best / To fright me with your sprites; you're powerful at it' (2.1.27-28). Storytelling, Hermione suggests, can have a profound effect upon its listeners, even when it is about fictional 'sprites'. And yet, despite this reported power in storytelling, Mamillius's tale is withheld from us. It is a 'powerful' story that is spoken about, but which we do not hear, apart from its first seven words ('There

was a man [...] Dwelt by a churchyard (2.1.31-32)). Four words into the tale, Hermione interrupts Mamillius: 'Nay, come sit down, then on' (2.1.31). Mamillius says that he will 'tell it softly' and that 'Yon crickets shall not hear it (2.1.32-33). Here, narrative is presented as an intimate act, even secretive, and Hermione wants to be the sole listener: 'Come on then, and give't me in mine ear' (2.1.34). But who is the man who 'Dwelt by a churchyard' (2.1.30)? Could this be Leontes? After all, we later discover that Leontes will pay his respects to his dead son and wife. He states that he will

> Once a day visit
> The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there
> Shall be my recreation. (3.3.236-38)

If the man Mamillius refers to could be Leontes, then his sudden appearance, interrupting a narrative account, seems to be reminiscent of Madge's tale in *The Old Wives Tale*,[46] and of the appearance of the Ghost in the opening scene of *Hamlet*. These three scenes all have a similar effect: a narrative is broken off when it is contrasted with stage 'reality'. However, these three moments also display a fascination with the act of storytelling, and suggest that narrative—for all its problems and perplexities—can be something so magical and persuasive that it can seem to bring the thing being described before our eyes.

3. Telling the Unsatisfied

While *The Tempest* and *The Comedy of Errors* begin with a long act of narration, at least fourteen of Shakespeare's plays *end* with an explicit demand

[46] See Philip Edwards, '"Seeing is believing": action and narration in *The Old Wives Tale* and *The Winter's Tale*' in *Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), esp. p.79. In 'Leontes and the spider: language and speaker in Shakespeare's last plays', Anne Barton also makes the comparison with Peele: 'as in Peele's *The Old Wives Tale*, someone has appeared on stage to tell Mamillius's tale for him. It is Leontes's story of the night, not Mamillius', that the theatre audience actually hears, and this adult fantasy is neither harmless or amusing', in *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.162.

for narrative.[47] They end, in other words, with an impulse to retell the events of the play in (spoken) narrative form, in what Barbara Hardy has called 'the figure of total future recapitulation'.[48] Not only do these endings create a doubling back or return to the play's beginning, they also posit a specifically narrative afterlife for the play we have just heard, seen, or read. The purpose of these figured offstage retellings seems to be to create a sense of coherence and completeness—inasmuch as they represent a successful conversion of the play's events into narrative form—as well as generating the sense of an ending. As we shall see, however, by forcing us to imagine a narrative retelling of the play we have just experienced, these endings serve to continue as well as to complete the play.[49] For example, at the end of *All's Well That Ends Well*, the King demands a retelling of the play's events: 'Let us from point to point this story know, / To make the even truth in pleasure flow' (5.3.325-26). The King wishes to hear the events of the play from beginning to end—'from point to point'—and suggests that this will generate pleasure because of the 'even truth'

[47] At the end of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Valentine says to Proteus "tis your penance but to hear / The story of your loves discovered' (5.4.170-71). In the last scene of *The Comedy of Errors*, the Abbess asks the Duke 'To go with us into the abbey here, / And hear at large discoursed all our fortunes' (5.1.395-96). In the final scene of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Mistress Page imagines a place of storytelling by the fire: 'let us every one go home, / And laugh this sport o'er by a country fire' (5.5.241-42). *Julius Caesar* ends with Octavius's command to 'call the field to rest, and let's away, / To part the glories of this happy day' (5.5.80-81), while *Pericles* ends with Pericles stating that he will defer his desire to hear the rest of the story until after the end of the play: 'we do our longing stay / To hear the rest untold' (5.3.83-84). Other examples that I have noted—in *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*—are discussed in more detail in the main body of the thesis.
[48] See 'The Story at the End: Narrative Injunction', ch. 3 of *Shakespeare's Storytellers*, pp.72-90 (p.72n). Hardy contends that Shakespeare originated this figure, although she notes that it also appears in Lyly's *Gallathea* (1595), in which there is a character called Dicke, who at the play's close states that he will make his 'Father laugh at these tales'. See also Kay, '"To hear the rest untold"'; and T. W. Craik, '"You that way; we this way": Shakespeare's Endings', in *Mirror up to Nature: Essays in Honour of G. R. Hibbard*, ed. J. C. Gray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp.44-54.
[49] This perhaps relates to what Peter Brooks has seen as being one of narrative's key tropes: "If the past is to be read as present, it is a curious present that we know to be past in relation to a future we know to be already in place. Perhaps we would do best to speak of the *anticipation of retrospection* as our chief tool in making sense of narrative, the master trope of its strange logic' (*Reading for the Plot*, p.23). Interestingly, in *Shakespeare's Storytellers*, Barbara Hardy twice uses the phrase 'anticipation of retrospect' (pp.80, 85), to describe Leontes's and Prospero's promises to narrate the events of *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, although it is not clear whether Hardy has read Brooks's study.

that this tale will provide. He suggests that Diana chooses a husband, and that this—and the play's other events—will be discussed presently: 'Of that and all the progress, more and less, / Resolvedly more leisure shall express' (5.3.331-32). The narrative that the King describes here is a leisurely account that will produce a sense of harmony from the revelation of 'even truth', and will answer any outstanding questions. However, this important act of narration does not take place until after the play has ended, and we might wonder, therefore, whether we have really seen or heard the end of this suggestively titled play at all.

At the end of *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia, still in a legalistic frame of mind, admits that Antonio, Graziano and Bassanio are owed an explanation:

> It is almost morning,
> And yet I am sure you are not satisfied
> Of these events at full. Let us go in,
> And charge us there upon inter'gatories,
> And we will answer all things faithfully. (5.1.295-99)

Portia is certain that the three men will not be fully 'satisfied' with the play's events as they stand, and she offers to give a narrative account of what has taken place. While Portia's promise to give this account under oath—'upon inter'gatories'—might be ironic, she does state that she and Nerissa will answer all things 'faithfully'. We are asked to imagine Portia and Nerissa 'going in', and retelling all of the play's events until the men *are* 'satisfied'. Yet when Portia says 'I am sure you are not satisfied' she is not merely addressing the onstage audience. At the close of *Hamlet*, the dying Hamlet uses a similar formulation:

> You that look pale, and tremble at this chance,
> That are but mutes or audience to this act,
> Had I but time, as this fell sergeant death
> Is strict in his arrest, oh I could tell you—
> But let it be. Horatio, I am dead,
> Thou livest; report me and my cause aright
> To the unsatisfied. (5.2.313-19)

Hamlet's language here is explicitly that of the theatre ('audience' and 'act'), and so we might say that, like Portia at the end of *The Merchant of Venice*, Hamlet is gesturing towards the theatre audience. We, the 'audience' experiencing these plays, are in a sense 'the unsatisfied'. Could this powerful tale that Hamlet could have told—but which, again, we do not hear—have satisfied our desire for meaning? After Hamlet has died, Horatio says that he will be able to offer a full and accurate account of the play's events:

> So shall you hear
> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
> And in this upshot, purposes mistook
> Fallen on th'inventors' heads. All this can I
> Truly deliver. (5.2.359-65)

Horatio promises that his account *will* be heard—'So shall you hear'—but this act of narration occurs after *Hamlet* has ended. In this way, Shakespeare's plays seem to cheat closure by suggesting that there will be more words to come, creating the sense that we have yet to understand what has happened.[50] After we have heard the Friar's narration in *Romeo and Juliet*, the Prince tells the survivors of the tragedy to 'Go hence to have more talk of these sad things' (5.3.307), while *Othello* ends with Lodovico's promise of an oral account of what has occurred, one that anticipates the play's future resolution: 'Myself will straight abroad, and to the state / This heavy act with heavy heart relate' (5.3.370-71). Yet the fact that we do not normally hear these figured acts of narration suggests that this sense of coherence is something that has to be *imagined* rather than something that could actually be presented to us.[51]

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[50] See Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.113.

[51] In *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice*, Robert Weimann has written that 'since such "talk" and knowledge is formally announced but never, in the text of the play itself, actually conveyed, communication as such is stimulated [or even simulated?] rather than provided in the representational context of an image or picture of that communication' (p.227).

In the final scene of *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare *does* dramatise an attempt to retell the play's events in narrative form: at Cymbeline's request, all of the characters attempt to recount their role in the play's story. Yet rather than leading to complete satisfaction, the story that is told is notable for its fragmentary and unsatisfactory nature. For example, when Pisanio is forced to end his narrative because he is unaware of the ultimate fate of Cloten, the Queen's son, Guiderius concludes Pisanio's tale for him: 'Let me end the story: / I slew him there' (5.5.286-87). As more and more details of the plot are revealed, they seem to overwhelm the story rather than to clarify it, and the more incomplete the retelling appears to become. Cymbeline becomes overwhelmed—'New matter still' (5.5.243)—and has to break off the story when he realises just how long it is going to take to construct a full and satisfying account:

> O rare instinct!
> When shall I hear all through? This fierce abridgement
> Hath to it circumstantial branches, which
> Distinction should be rich in. Where? how liv'd you?
> And when came you to serve our Roman captive?
> How parted with your brothers? How first met them?
> Why fled you from the court? and whither? These,
> And your three motives to the battle, with
> I know not how much more, should be demanded,
> And by all the other by-dependences,
> From chance to chance; but nor the time nor place
> Will serve our long interrogatories. (5.6.380-92)

But how could Cymbeline ever hear 'all' through? His curiosity has been aroused by the 'fierce abridgement' he has heard, but to hear everything would take as long as the play itself, or even longer. T. W. Baldwin writes:

> What has been said is only a "fierce abridgement" of the story. It has circumstantial branches which the rhetorical art by its distinctions of where, how, when, why, whither, etc. would enlarge it into a complete framework for the story [...] Here is sketched out the system by which Shakespeare and his contemporaries were taught to "invent" stories or any other compositional type.[52]

[52] Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Smalle Latine and Lesse Greeke*, II, p.319.

But this passage from *Cymbeline* seems to suggest that, even with the greatest proficiency in 'rhetorical art', such a 'complete framework' will be impossible to construct. In this way, Shakespeare reveals the idea of a full and satisfying narrative account to be something that is impossible to achieve, or even something that is undesirable; we have to 'abridge' things in order for us to be able to make sense of the world. What is more, there will not be time for Cymbeline's long series of questions to be answered in the course of this final scene, which must come to an end: this is not the time nor the place for such a long tale.

This desire for a full and satisfying narrative account also features in the final scene of *The Tempest*. When Alonso is reunited with Prospero, he is not sure whether Prospero is who he claims to be, alerting us to the ghostliness and potential insubstantiality of what Alonso sees:

> Whe'er thou beest he or no,
> Or some enchanted trifle to abuse me
> (As late I have been), I not know. Thy pulse
> Beats as of flesh and blood; and since I saw thee,
> Th'affliction of my mind amends, with which
> I fear a madness held me. This must crave
> (An if this be at all) a most strange story. (5.1.111-17)

Given the strangeness of the events that have befallen Alonso in the play thus far, he cannot help wondering whether Prospero, too, is merely an 'enchanted trifle'. Prospero's pulse 'Beats *as of* flesh and blood' (5.1.114), but it is not clear whether he *is* flesh and blood. The visual proof that Alonso has before him must be supplemented by a narrative that will explain everything, but it will be a narrative that will necessarily be odd, or even beyond belief: 'This must crave [...] a most strange story' (5.1.116-17). In an analogous passage in *1 Henry IV*, when Hal discovers that Falstaff has seemingly risen from the dead, he states that he cannot be sure what he is seeing until he has heard Falstaff *speak*:

> I saw him dead,
> Breathless and bleeding on the ground. Art thou alive?

> Or is it fantasy that plays upon our eyesight?
> I prithee speak, we will not trust our eyes
> Without our ears: thou art not what thou seem'st. (5.4.133-37)

This passage anticipates Paulina's statement at the close of *The Winter's Tale*, as well as Alonso's reunion with Prospero. It *appears* Falstaff lives, though yet he speak not. Hal previously had visual confirmation that Falstaff had passed away: 'I saw him dead'. Now, however, he realises that his earlier interpretation may have been mistaken, and he is not sure what to think now that he can see Falstaff again. Hal wants *verbal* confirmation that Falstaff is not a figment of the imagination, or a ghost: 'we will not trust our eyes / Without our ears' (5.4.136-37).

At key moments such as this, Shakespeare's plays display uncertainty towards the claims of the visual.[53] Like Hal, many of Shakespeare's characters reveal an awareness that things are not always what they seem, or that what we see might be a 'fantasy' that 'plays upon our eyesight' (5.4.135). Bruce R. Smith has written that 'Early modern opinion about hearing vis-à-vis the other senses, especially sight, was divided'.[54] And despite a philosophical tradition that can be traced back to Aristotle arguing that sight was the noblest of the senses, one can also locate a parallel tradition of scepticism concerning what we see. As David Michael Levin has written,

> Even before Plato—in fact long before Plato—not only in the fragments attributed to Heraclitus, but in fragments attributed to Parmenides (475 B.C.)—philosophical thinking in the Western world was drawn to the tuition, the authority, of sight. But also, we can see that these philosophical teachings repeatedly insisted on calling to mind all the dangers in placing too much trust in vision and its objects.[55]

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[53] David Bevington writes that 'Shakespeare's exploration of neoplatonic assumptions about correspondences leads him to the heart of the problem. Even if one allows vision the primacy over spoken language to which neoplatonism is committed, vision remains capable of error', in *Action is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p.33.
[54] Smith, *The Acoustic World*, p.103.
[55] David Michael Levin, 'Introduction', to *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, ed. Levin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p.1. In *Body Work*, Peter Brooks writes that 'Sight is the sense that represents the whole epistemological project; it is conceived to be the

In his rhetorical manual *De Oratore* (55BC), Cicero states that sight is 'the keenest of all our senses',[56] while Thomas Aquinas, in his thirteenth-century commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*, writes that 'sight is the highest of the senses; with hearing next to it, and the others still more remote in dignity'.[57] In *Sylva Sylvarum* (1631) Francis Bacon states that sight is 'the most spiritual of the senses', but he also suggests that 'the Objects of the Eare, doe affect the Spirits (immediately) most with Pleasure and Offence'.[58] And in the first book of *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Bacon quotes a biblical passage that comments upon the limitations of both senses:

> nothing can fill, much less extend, the soul of man, but God and the contemplation of God; and therefore Salomon speaking of the two principal senses of inquisition, the eye and the ear, affirmeth that the eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing.[59]

This intriguing formulation—from Ecclesiastes 1:8—suggests that both seeing *and* hearing are partial, mediated, and mutually dependent. Shakespeare, too, seems to have been aware that what we see sometimes needs to be confirmed by, or supplemented by, what we hear.[60] The events that Alonso has seen in *The Tempest* require an explanation, even if it will be 'strange'. Alonso demands a narrative account, and Prospero assures him that he is who he says he is: 'howsoev'r you have / Been jolted from your senses, know for certain / That I am

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most objective and objectifying of the senses, that which best allows an inspection of reality that produces truth. "I see," in our common usage, is equivalent to "I know"—*voir* is *savoir*. But truth is not of easy access; it often is represented as veiled, latent, or covered, so that the discovery of truth becomes a process of unveiling, laying bare, or denuding' (p.96).

[56] Cicero, *De Oratore*, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham, 2 vols (London: Wm. Heinman, 1942), I, p.429 (2.87.357)

[57] *Aristotle's De Anima in the Version of Wm. Of Moerbeke and the Commentary of St Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Kenhelm Foster and Silvester Humphreys (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p.267.

[58] Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum*, no. 700, quoted in Smith, *The Acoustic World*, p.103.

[59] Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, in *The Oxford Authors: Francis Bacon*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.123.

[60] Ambrose of Milan (*c*.340-97), in his Commentary on Luke's gospel (iv. 5), also points to the limitations of seeing, writing that 'Sight is often deceived, hearing serves as guarantee', quoted in Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), p.119.

Prospero' (5.1.157-59). However, Prospero suggests that this is not an appropriate time to hear his full story:

> No more yet of this,
> For 'tis a chronicle of day by day,
> Not a relation for a breakfast, nor
> Befitting this first meeting. (5.1.162-65)

Prospero's story cannot be told all in one go, but must be told 'day by day', suggesting a narrative that is recounted gradually over many days, or even longer.[61] Alonso demands an oracle that 'Must rectify our knowledge' (5.1.245), but Prospero tells him to be patient:

> Sir, my liege,
> Do not infest your mind with beating on
> The strangeness of this business. At pick'd leisure,
> Which shall be shortly, single I'll resolve you
> (Which to you shall seem probable) of every
> These happen'd accidents; till when, be cheerful
> And think of each thing well. (5.1.245-51)

Prospero tells Alonso not to attempt to unravel the strange events that he has experienced, and assures Alonso that he will be told everything at a more convenient time agreeable to the two of them ('At pick'd leisure'), and in private. Prospero then reveals when and where his story will be told:

> Sir, I invite your Highness and your train
> To my poor cell, where you shall take your rest
> For this one night; which, part of it, I'll waste
> With such discourse as, I not doubt, shall make it
> Go quick away—the story of my life,
> And the particular accidents gone by
> Since I came to this isle. (5.1.301-7)

The story of Prospero's life, then, is something that will make the time pass quickly and pleasurably. However, there seems to be an ambiguity in the word *waste*, even though Stephen Orgel glosses this word as having 'no pejorative

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[61] According to the *OED*, *day by day* can mean 'on each successive day, daily, every day in its turn (without any notion of cessation)'.

connotation'.[62] Nonetheless, Alonso has a great desire to hear Prospero's tale: 'I long / To hear the story of your life, which must / Take the ear strangely' (5.1.312-14). Prospero—like Horatio at the close of *Hamlet*—promises that he will offer a complete account: 'I'll deliver all' (5.1.314). But again, this complete account takes place elsewhere, and our ears are not taken with it, strangely or otherwise.

In this way, Shakespeare's works demonstrate that narrative—like literature itself, perhaps—is both illusory and hugely powerful. One could argue that this is something that all of the most sophisticated and self-conscious literature has to address, but Shakespeare's works seem particularly concerned to explore—and even take advantage of—this duality.[63] In his study of *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur discusses Frank Kermode's early work of narratology *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), finding an 'ambiguity' in its treatment of death and endings. Ricoeur suggests that Kermode's book oscillates between

> the inescapable suspicion that fictions lie and deceive, to the extent that they console us, and the equally invincible conviction that fictions are not simply arbitrary, inasmuch as they respond to a need over which we are not masters, the need to impress the stamp of order upon the chaos of existence, of sense upon nonsense, of concordance upon discordance.[64]

But Shakespeare's works also operate somewhere between these two modes. Despite the fact that narrative is often presented in Shakespeare's plays and poems as an illusion, or a complicated confidence trick—as I argue in Chapters

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[62] See *The Tempest*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), note to 5.1.302. To *waste* can mean 'to spend, pass, occupy (time) [...] *Obs.*' (*OED* 8), but also 'To spend, pass, occupy (time, one's life, etc.) idly or unprofitably' (*OED* 9e). The latter usage is first recorded in 1300, and is used by Shakespeare in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1.1.51).
[63] Terence Cave has written that 'the conceptual frame of reference [Shakespeare] draws on for his reflections on poetry, art and nature is the broader late Renaissance preoccupation with the status of the imaginative faculty and with the capacity of language to articulate at once the most persuasive visions of harmony and truth and the most insidious simulacra of that truth', in *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.273. See also Cave's earlier study, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).
[64] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985), II, p.27.

5 and 6—at the same time Shakespeare reveals our deep need for representations and storytelling. If narrative is, in Roland Barthes's words, 'simply there, like life itself', then Shakespeare questions what its relationship with drama—and with life itself—might be.[65]

[65] See Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', p.79.

Chapter 3

'Unseen Grief': Tragedy and Ekphrasis in *The Rape of Lucrece*

In the years 1593-94, when London's theatres were closed because of the plague, Shakespeare wrote two narrative poems—*The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis.* Richard Lanham has characterised these two works as 'Ovidian *epyllia*, show off diploma pieces short on action but long on speeches'.[1] This sense of 'showing off' might stem from Shakespeare's desire to establish himself as a non-dramatic poet; John Roe has even suggested that at this time Shakespeare might have thought he was destined for a career as a poet rather than a playwright.[2] This chapter explores how Shakespeare responded to this challenge of having to write in a different artistic form, and suggests that much of what is interesting and distinctive about *The Rape of Lucrece* might come from Shakespeare's anxiety over writing non-dramatic poetry. What artistic problems would Shakespeare have faced in undertaking this enterprise? What is the relationship between this narrative poem and Shakespeare's dramatic works?[3] Katherine Eisaman Maus has written that '*The Rape of Lucrece* inevitably lacks the visual dimension of a painting or dramatic production. This deficiency seems important in *Lucrece* because throughout the poem vision is

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[1] Richard Lanham, *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), p.94.

[2] See *The Poems*, ed. John Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.1. In his Arden edition of *The Poems* (London: Methuen, 1960), F. T. Prince notes how *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* have the unique distinction among Shakespeare's works of being the only texts in which Shakespeare claims the status of a professional poet, ones that he doubtless saw through the press himself, and which include signed dedications to a formal patron—the irony being that these poems are among Shakespeare's works least valued by posterity. Prince suggests one possible reason for this: '*Lucrece* is undoubtedly as a whole an artistic failure, despite the magnificence of many of its parts' (pp.xxv-vi).

[3] See Harold R. Whalley, '*The Rape of Lucrece* and Shakespearean Tragedy', *PMLA*, 76, (1961), 480-87. Whalley writes that 'Although ostensibly a narrative poem, *Lucrece* exhibits close affiliations with Shakespeare's dramatic work. At every turn both its technique and its predominant concerns betray the hand of a poet whose preoccupations are basically those of a dramatist' (p.480).

associated with the manifest, the immediate, the unquestionably real'.[4] In her discussion of the play's metaphors, Maus goes on to note that 'no sooner does the poem insist upon the superior certainty and cogency of the visual than it qualifies that privilege' (p.80). I take it that Maus is right to point to the poem's implicit questioning of the correlation between the visual and 'the unquestionably real'. However, she does not fully explore the extent to which *The Rape of Lucrece* asks to be read as an exploration of the *ut pictura poesis* debate; the question of whether language can ever achieve the qualities of what Philip Sidney called a 'speaking picture'.[5] Jean H. Hagstrum, in his classic study of literary pictorialism, *The Sister Arts* (1958), has charted the Renaissance preoccupation with the ancient tradition of *ut pictura poesis*—and the *paragone* between poetry and painting—and writes: 'So frequently was Horace's dictum repeated that a literary historian has said that *ut pictura poesis* may be considered "almost the keynote of Renaissance criticism"'.[6] Hagstrum goes on to note the Renaissance interest in *enargeia*, or rhetorical vividness.[7] I intend to focus in particular on this aspect of the poem: its *visuality* ('The state or quality of being visual or visible to the mind; mental visibility' (*OED* 1)). To what extent does Shakespeare attempt to achieve this quality in *Lucrece*—to present a

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[4] Katherine Eisaman Maus, 'Taking Tropes Seriously: Language and Violence in Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 37 (1986), 66-82 (p.80).

[5] See *The Defence of Poesy* in *The Oxford Authors: Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.217. Duncan-Jones notes that Plutarch had attributed the phrase—that poetry is a speaking picture and painting a silent poem—to Simonides of Ceos (*c.* 556-467BC) in his *Moralia* (p.347n). In the *Defence*, Sidney goes on to offer the following comparison of the poet and the philosopher: 'he [the poet] yieldeth to the powers of the mind an image of that whereof the philosopher bestoweth but a wordish description, which doth neither strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the soul as that other doth' (pp.221-22). See also Forrest G. Robinson, *The Shape of Things Known: Sidney's Apology in its Philosophical Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).

[6] Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp.61-62, quoting Joel E. Spingarn, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* (New York, 1920), p.42. See also Lucy Gent, *Picture and Poetry 1560-1620: Relations between Literature and the Visual Arts in the English Renaissance* (Leamington Spa: James Hall, 1981).

[7] See Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts*, p.63. Hagstrum does briefly mention the painting of the fall of Troy in *Lucrece*, but merely comments that this ekphrastic passage 'quickens to new life many of the dry bones of the venerable iconic tradition' (p.80). For a more recent discussion of *enargeia* in the Renaissance, see McKeown, '*Enargeia* and the English Literary Renaissance', esp. pp.1-23.

visual image of its events and characters to the mind's eye? Can narrative ever be a *substitute* for the visual?

In *Discoveries*, Ben Jonson offers his own consideration of the relative claims of both visual and verbal art:

> Poetry and picture are arts of a like nature, and both are busy about imitation. It was excellently said of Plutarch, poetry was a speaking picture, and picture a mute poesy. For they both invent, feign, and devise many things, and accommodate all they invent to the use and service of nature. Yet of the two, the pen is more noble than the pencil; for that can speak to the understanding, the other, but to the sense.[8]

Despite claiming the nobility of the pen, Jonson goes on to concede that visual art is closest to 'nature', and, despite being 'silent' can exceed the power of speech, provided it is executed by a skilful artist:

> Picture is the invention of heaven: the most ancient, and most akin to nature. It is itself a silent work, and always one and the same habit; yet it doth so enter and penetrate the inmost affection—being done by an excellent artificer—as sometimes it o'ercomes the power of speech and oratory. (pp.561-62)

In *Lucrece*, Shakespeare seems to prioritise visual experience above what Jonson calls 'the power of speech and oratory', and, implicitly, seen evidence above the testimony of others. There are continual references in the poem to the superiority of seeing: 'Beauty itself doth of itself persuade / The eyes of men without an orator' (29-30), 'All orators are dumb when Beauty pleadeth' (268) and 'To see sad sights moves more than hear them told' (1324).[9] However, as we shall see, these statements are ultimately complicated and contradicted by the poem itself, especially when Lucrece compares her plight to 'a piece / Of skilful painting' (1366-67) which depicts another tragedy—the fall of Troy. Indeed, it is not clear that this painting—a piece of *visual* art—offers a more authoritative or authentic depiction of suffering than language can offer. In this

[8] Jonson, *Discoveries*, in *The Oxford Authors: Ben Jonson*, ed. Donaldson, p.561.
[9] Quotations from the poem are taken from *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

chapter I argue that while *Lucrece* suggests that *all* art is a partial representation—dependent upon artistic 'conceit'—it also demonstrates the seductiveness of Shakespeare's narrative poetry, and its ability to bring forth visual images to what the narrator calls 'the eye of mind' (1426).

In the first section of this chapter, I examine at the ways in which Shakespeare's interest in writing, interpretation, and the afterlife of his text as a read artefact are continually figured in *Lucrece*. Does the poem manifest anxiety about Shakespeare's new, literary audience? Does the poem also highlight the problems of turning the world into a literary text? In the second section, I explore the ways in which the poem's characters seem to be aware that they are constituted by an act of reading—as if they themselves are texts. I also investigate the problem of length in Lucrece's monologue. In the third section, I examine Lucrece's own attempt to depict her predicament in written form, as she writes a letter to Collatine, and how this might reflect upon Shakespeare's own literary enterprise. In the fourth section, I consider the poem's extended description of a painting of the fall of Troy that Lucrece interprets and gives voice to, and the ways in which we are invited to compare the poem we are reading with this visual artwork. Finally, in the fifth section, I investigate what happens when Lucrece falls silent, and how the other characters attempt to make sense of the poem's events.

1. Taking Things at Face Value

As suggested above, *Lucrece* seems peculiarly anxious about its own status as a text, as if it wants to be something seen rather than something that we read. Yet it is worth noting that Shakespeare changes his sources to have Tarquin's desire inflamed not by seeing Lucrece, but by hearing Collatine's description of her. Certainly in Ovid the stress seems to be on the superiority of deeds to words. In the tale as it appears in Ovid's *Fasti*, Collatinus states that there is no

point in sitting around talking: 'No need of words! Trust deeds!'.[10] One could argue that Shakespeare is revealing the literariness of his sources—demonstrating that they never really 'showed' Lucrece at all. They are verbal, textual artefacts—like Collatine's description of his wife. However, by focusing on the way Lucrece is described, Shakespeare makes language the central focus of his poem, and, as a result, the poem's own rhetoric is itself implicated in Lucrece's rape.[11] This question is expressly formulated by the narrator:

> What needeth then apology be made
> To set forth that which is so singular?
> Or why is Collatine the publisher
> Of that rich jewel he should keep unknown
> From thievish ears, because it is his own? (31-35)

It is paradoxical, perhaps, that this published poem, so concerned with describing a woman's body, should be so hostile towards Collatine's act of 'publishing'. The narrator even offers a moral imperative: Collatine *should* keep the 'rich jewel' of Lucrece unknown, or even undescribed. The question asked here could also be directed at Shakespeare: why should anyone attempt to represent the world in language? What is the status of Shakespeare's poem, which is itself an extended rhetorical account of Lucrece? Indeed, it is a verbal act that engenders Tarquin's desire for the sight of Lucrece, and his desire to possess her visually; to find the referent to Collatine's signifiers.

In this way, the poem implicitly asks whether Collatine, who has told the story of Lucrece's beauty, is to blame for the subsequent events of the poem.[12] From

[10] Ovid, *Fasti*, II, trans. James G. Fraser, reprinted in *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: The Poems*, ed. H. E. Rollins (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott, 1938), p.430.
[11] A similar point is made by Joel Fineman in 'Shakespeare's Will: The Temporality of Rape', *Representations*, 20 (1987), 25-76. Fineman suggests that 'the poem's rhetoricity is [...] implicated in the rape that it reports, as though the poem itself, *because* it speaks rhetorically, were speaking to the reader's "ear" so as to "taint" its reader's "heart."' (pp.35-36).
[12] In '"The blazon of sweet beauty's best": Shakespeare's *Lucrece*', in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.95-115, Nancy Vickers writes usefully on the blazon in *Lucrece*, and she suggests some implications for this mode of poetic description being placed within a narrative: 'By situating blazon within a story, Shakespeare's narrative provides a locus for reading this specific mode of description not as an isolated icon, but rather as motivated discourse positioned within a specific context that produces and consumes it' (p.96).

the outset, the poem contrasts Collatine's—and its own—rhetoric with what Tarquin sees:

> Now thinks he that her husband's shallow tongue,
> The niggard prodigal that praised her so,
> In that high task hath done her beauty wrong,
> Which far exceeds his barren skill to show.
> Therefore that praise which Collatine doth owe
>   Enchanted Tarquin answers with surmise,
>   In silent wonder of still-gazing eyes. (78-84)

Collatine's 'barren skill' means that Tarquin's seeing Lucrece is even better than he could have imagined it, or, at the very least, superior to the mental picture that Collatine described. Tarquin already regards Lucrece as if she were a silent pictorial artwork, and, finding that words are inadequate, he responds to her beauty with 'silent wonder'. Clearly there is a discrepancy between Collatine's description and the 'reality' that we imagine, yet what we 'see' in the poem is conveyed to us by way of Tarquin's metaphorical constructions: 'This heraldry in Lucrece' face was seen, / Argued by Beauty's red and Virtue's queen' (64-65). Tarquin reads the red and white of Lucrece's face as a sign of battle, a 'silent war of lilies and of roses' (71). Indeed, while the reader cannot see Lucrece in any literal sense, all Tarquin sees is a series of metaphors. Tarquin thinks that he is able to read the external signs on Lucrece's body; and yet he seems to misread her blushes as sexual excitement. Similarly, we learn that Tarquin is impervious to visual interpretation: his 'inward ill no outward harm expressed' (91). Lucrece fails to interpret Tarquin correctly; or, as the narrator expresses it, she fails to realise that there could be a need for interpretation in what she sees. Lucrece is too trusting in bodily appearances:

> But she that never coped with stranger eyes
> Could pick no meaning from their parling looks,
> Nor read the subtle shining secrecies,
> Writ in the glassy margents of such books.
> She touched no unknown baits, nor feared no hooks,
>   Nor could she moralise his wanton sight
>   More than her eyes were opened to the light. (99-105)

According to Lucrece, Tarquin's face speaks for itself: 'parling' (100) means 'Speaking; parleying' (*OED*, first cited usage). Lucrece takes Tarquin at face value, as it were, and fails to construct a more complex reading of his character. 'Margent' refers to 'The margin of a book as being the place for a commentary upon or summary of the text; hence, the commentary or summary itself' (*OED* 2b).[13] However, Lucrece fails to see Tarquin as being like a text (in the sense of being in need of elucidation or commentary): she is unable to get beyond a surface interpretation. We, on the other hand, are better informed: Shakespeare has described the Tarquin beneath the 'surface'. Yet it is with a *narrative* that Tarquin begins his seduction of Lucrece, and he tells her a story of Collatine's public, external self: 'He stories to her ears her husband's fame, / Won in the fields of fruitful Italy' (106-7). Lucrece is greatly impressed by Tarquin's narrative artistry, and finds that the only appropriate response to his tale is silence: 'Her joy with heaved-up hand she doth express, / And wordless so greets heaven for his success' (111-12). She uses body language—in a somewhat theatrical gesture—rather than expressing her joy in words. In this way, the poem is already making us consider exactly how the characters express themselves and interpret each other—visually or verbally—and which is the more reliable. Shortly afterwards, Tarquin attempts to interpret this encounter with Lucrece, and the way in which his narrative affected her external appearance: 'O how her fear did make her colour rise!' (257). Here Tarquin is trying to read the Lucrece beneath the surface: but how reliable is this reading?

The characters in *The Rape of Lucrece* seem to desire an existence in the world of actions—or, perhaps, the world of drama—but this is denied them. They seem aware of the inevitability of their actions, displaying an almost uncanny awareness that their actions are already written into history. In addition, we might suggest that the characters in *Lucrece* realise that they cannot make anything happen in the 'real' world; that they exist only in language. As Ian

[13] The *OED* cites an analogous use of the word in *Romeo and Juliet*, in Lady Capulet's description of Paris: 'And what obscur'd in this fair volume lies / Find written in the margent of his eyes' (1.3.85-86).

Donaldson has commented, 'Longing for the simplicity of action, Shakespeare's characters find themselves entangled in a web of words'.[14] After the action-packed 'Argument' that prefaces Shakespeare's poem, one might expect an eventful, historical narrative. Instead, *Lucrece* is more concerned with the subjectivities of his two protagonists than their actions. In this way, the poem is more interested in the motivations of individuals against the background of historical events rather than the events themselves. It is for this reason, perhaps, that '*Lucrece* has seemed an undramatic drama, too static for the stage, too rhetorical for narrative verse'.[15] Not much happens in the poem by way of actual events: Tarquin encounters Lucrece; he rapes her (an action which is not described); Lucrece writes a letter to Collatine who then returns; after which Lucrece commits suicide. Instead, much of the poem is taken up with the soliloquies of Tarquin and Lucrece, and their attempts to situate themselves in history—to make sense of their actions. As Jonathan Bate writes, '*Lucrece* is not a dramatic poem in the dynamic sense—it is interested in the action of language, not a language of action—but it shares with the Shakespearian drama a taste for interior monologue'.[16] Both Lucrece and Tarquin are obsessed with how they will be perceived after they are dead, and how their legend will be set down in narrative form. They both seem to see the present as past, almost as if it is already written. Approaching Lucrece's chamber, we learn that Tarquin 'gazeth on her yet unstainèd bed' (366), as if he is anticipating the future time when his action will already have been completed. There is the sense that Tarquin has already written the rape of Lucrece; it is simply a question of articulating his motivation in narrative form. As Tarquin says, 'O what excuse can my invention make / When thou shalt charge me with so black a deed?' (225-26). But this sense of having to finding excuses is also

[14] Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucrece: A Myth and its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p.43.
[15] J. W. Lever, 'Shakespeare's Narrative Poems' in *A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, ed. Kenneth Muir and Samuel Schoenbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p.117.
[16] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p.71.

suggestive of Shakespeare's *poetic* 'invention'.[17] How can Shakespeare realistically show what was going through Tarquin's mind as he approaches what we already know to be his destiny?

Tarquin's perception of himself now seems entangled in metaphors. His reservations about the rape do not stem from his concern for Lucrece; they are all concerned with the possible infamy that will be brought upon his own heraldic crest:

> 'Yea, though I die, the scandal will survive,
> And be an eye-sore in my golden coat.
> Some loathsome dash the herald will contrive
> To cipher me how fondly I did dote,
> That my posterity, shamed with the note,
>   Shall curse my bones, and hold it for no sin
>   To wish that I their father had not been. (204-10)

Tarquin's offence is imagined both as part of an oral tradition which will survive—a 'scandal'—but also translated into a permanent visual emblem of his offence, a mark on his golden coat of arms. The herald's 'dash' will be a signifier ciphering Tarquin's offence. Tarquin, like Lucrece, thinks that his offence will be easily readable: 'my digression is so vile, so base, / That it will lie engraven in my face' (202-3). Tarquin too is unable to imagine that the world can be misinterpreted; that things might have hidden meanings. Indeed, he fails to read deeper significance into the objects that delay him on his way to rape Lucrece (302-36). He has to 'enforce' his way through the locks that separate him from Lucrece. The wind tries to blow his torch out. He picks up Lucrece's glove, and the needle in it pricks his finger. However, Tarquin does not read the same significance into these signifiers that we are tempted to. Instead of seeing them as a warning, he reads them as a pleasant deferral of the rape: 'The doors, the wind, the glove that did delay him / He takes for accidental things of trial' (325-

[17] The first example given in the *OED* of *invention* meaning 'In art and literary composition: The devising of a subject, idea, or method of treatment, by exercise of the intellect or imagination' (*OED* 3b) dates from 1638, but Henryson uses the word to mean 'The faculty of inventing or devising; power of mental creation or construction; inventiveness' (*OED* 4) referring to a 'poeit' in *The Testament of Cresseid* in 1480.

26). Tarquin states that 'these lets attend the time' (330), and for him this is the correct reading of these 'lets'. To speak of misreading hints at the possibility that there is a correct reading that Tarquin rejects. Here the poem presents us with the notion that there is no one single reading of even visual 'texts', and suggests that they are open to alternative interpretations.

Lucrece's body is depicted as being so bright that it actually prevents Tarquin from seeing her at all. But the metaphorical way in which it is described to us—'Look as the fair and fiery-pointed sun, / Rushing from forth a cloud, bereaves our sight' (372-73)—itself threatens to obscure any image of Lucrece that we may have constructed in our mind's eye. This description places the reader in the same relation to Lucrece as Tarquin: 'his eyes began / To wink, being blinded with a greater light' (374-75). However, it is not clear whether it is shame or Lucrece's metaphorical brightness that makes Tarquin shut his eyes, 'Whether it is that she reflects so bright / That dazzleth them, or else some shame supposed, / But blind as they are, and keep themselves enclosed' (376-78). Lucrece is crystallised as a frozen, rhetorical description. However, it is also here that Shakespeare raises various questions about the ethics of reading. The narrator comes to describe Tarquin's lascivious gaze: 'Where, like a virtuous monument, she lies, / To be admired of lewd unhallowed eyes' (391-92). Again, Lucrece is depicted as a still monument; a silent artwork to be wondered at. But are these 'unhallowed eyes' merely Tarquin's? We might suggest that the (male) reader is also implicated in Tarquin's crime; he also enjoys this vivid description of Lucrece. Again, the question of poetic decorum resurfaces: why does the narrator here attempt to 'publish' Lucrece's beauty? Is he addressing his poem to an exclusively male audience? His description fixes Lucrece in a series of pastoral conceits: 'Without the bed her other fair hand was, / On the green coverlet, whose perfect white / Showed like an April daisy on the grass' (393-95). The questionable metaphors that follow come to shape both Tarquin's and our own vision of Lucrece, as the narrator seems to become seduced by his own powers of description:

> Her breasts like ivory globes circled with blue,
> A pair of maiden worlds unconquered:
> Save of their lord no bearing yoke they knew,
> And him by oath they truly honourèd.
> These worlds in Tarquin new ambition bred,
> Who like a foul usurper went about
> From this fair throne to heave the owner out. (407-13)

In this metaphorical scheme, Lucrece becomes a 'new found land', like the woman in John Donne's poem 'To his Mistress Going to Bed'.[18] Tarquin becomes Lucrece's conqueror, his 'new ambition' turning him into a 'foul usurper'. But again, whatever we make of this metaphorical strategy, the narrator seems to be complicit in this rhetorical act. R. Howard Bloch has suggested that such poetic praise always imagines a time when the perfection which it describes will have fallen: 'there is [...] no poetics of praise that is not already complicit in the violence of rape, no magnification of the perfection of woman abstracted that is not a taking of possession'.[19] For Tarquin, this seeing of Lucrece is itself a form of possession, and is almost enough to temper his desire: 'So o'er this sleeping soul doth Tarquin stay, / His rage of lust by gazing qualified' (423-24). However, as 'Thoughts are but dreams till their effects be tried' (353), Tarquin must convert this visual 'dream' into reality.

When she wakes up, Tarquin threatens Lucrece with another anticipated narrative retelling of her story. Tarquin had previously imagined a blot on his heraldic self; now he tells Lucrece that *Collatine's* reputation will be tarnished. Lucrece's life will be turned into a notorious narrative, with Lucrece herself as its implied author. What is more, this tale will rhyme, lending itself particularly well to future repetition:

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[18] John Donne, 'To his Mistress Going to Bed', in *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.125 (l. 27). Burrow notes that a section of this passage of *Lucrece* (407-20) appeared in *England's Parnassus* (1601), and that another part was rewritten by Suckling. He writes: 'The desire to record, and at times rewrite, this passage, may have been prompted by the obvious complicity which it establishes between a male reader and a male viewer' (p.64).

[19] R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), pp.111-12.

> 'So thy surviving husband shall remain
> The scornful mark of every open eye;
> Thy kinsmen hang their heads at this disdain;
> Thy issue blurred with nameless bastardy;
> And thou, the author of their obloquy,
>   Shalt have thy trespass cited up in rhymes
>   And sung by children in succeeding times. (519-25)

This loss or tarnishing of reputation is again figured as mode of visual representation. Collatine will be like a 'scornful mark', while Lucrece's issue will be 'blurred with nameless bastardy', both a social embarrassment, but also a wordless 'blotting' of reputation. The children's rhymes will immortalise her shame as effectively as any permanent written record. Her shame will also constitute a 'blemish that will never be forgot— / Worse than a slavish wipe or birth-hour's blot' (536-37). Is this 'blot' an unsightly birthmark or a kind of writing on Lucrece's body? As well as a moral stain, 'blot' can also mean 'To make a blot over (writing) so as to make it illegible' (*OED* 4). The poem itself refers to this type of blot, as we later learn that part of Time's glory is 'To blot old books, and alter their contents' (948). But Lucrece's reputation will be changed by Tarquin's act of blotting as if she were a text—the content of her 'story' will have been altered. Picking up on Tarquin's threats of a notorious narrative, Lucrece tries to use all of her available eloquence to persuade Tarquin not to rape her, but her long plea (575-666) is not enough. Despite all her eloquence, Lucrece's long narrative fails to prevent Tarquin's action. Indeed, it is interesting how little effect the characters' narrative strategies actually have in the world of the poem.[20] Instead Lucrece tries to impress upon Tarquin the readable nature of his potential offence; that his subjects, who are supposed to respect him, will see him and judge: 'For princes are the glass, the school, the book, / Where subjects' eyes do learn, do read, do look' (615-16). Both characters, then, seem

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[20] Jonathan Hart, in 'Narratorial Strategies in *The Rape of Lucrece*', *SEL*, 32 (1992), 59-77, writes that 'The poet implies the impotence of narrative to dissuade vice or to pervert virtue. The power of the word and the tale knows crucial limits. Shakespeare seems to be saying that human life and action are more than language, that we and our lives are not texts' (p.62).

to be convinced of their readability. Shakespeare suggests that words must be published for them to exist; that words must be seen rather than heard.[21]

2. Textual Harassment

We have begun to see some of the ways in which *Lucrece* presents the interpretation of visual signs as an act of reading, and always inescapably textual. We find that even the characters' bodies are frequently described as if they were textual artefacts.[22] In this section I examine the way in which Lucrece comes to regard herself as a written text. Like the protagonists in Shakespeare's dramatic tragedies—Richard II, for example—Lucrece tries to make sense of her tragedy by repeatedly narrating her story to herself, and reading her predicament in the light of other narratives. However, as we shall see, there are problems with Lucrece's attempts to tell the story of her suffering.

As the poem continues, we discover that the actual rape is not represented. As Tarquin puts out his torch, we too are prevented from seeing what actually takes place. It is hard to know how much to make of the following: 'Till with her own white fleece her voice controlled / Entombs her outcry in her lips' sweet fold' (678-79). This formulation suggests that Lucrece's voice—her ability to express her predicament—is silenced as the rape takes place. In this way, rape and inexpressibility are associated from the very moment of violation. Shakespeare certainly hints at the inexpressible nature of Tarquin's offence: 'O deeper sin than bottomless conceit / Can comprehend in still imagination!' (701-2). This suggests conceit in the sense of 'imagination', but perhaps the narrator also implies *poetic* conceit: Shakespeare's poetics alone cannot express Tarquin's offence. Despite the perfection of Shakespeare's use of the stanza form, we learn that Lucrece herself was an imperfect speaker. In what amounts to an

[21] See Lanham, *Motives of Eloquence*, p.96.
[22] For a stimulating account of the relationship between texts and bodies, see Brooks, *Body Work*, esp. 'Narrative and the Body', pp.1-27. Brooks writes that 'The signing of the body is an allegory of the body become a subject for literary narrative—a body entered into writing' (p.3). On the issue of 'reading' in *Lucrece*, see Burrow, 'Introduction', pp.55-66.

unacted stage direction, we are told that Lucrece's 'modest eloquence with sighs is mixed' (563), and that 'She puts the period often from his place, / And midst the sentence so her accent breaks / That twice she doth begin ere once she speaks' (565-67). It is as if Lucrece doesn't actually *sound* like a text; that Lucrece's 'delivery' of these lines was different from the way in which we experience them on the page. Shakespeare does not have an actor to convey this inarticulacy, and the reader has to imagine it; Shakespeare thus creates the illusion that Lucrece has an existence outside the text. We attempt to see beyond Shakespeare's poem to this traumatised woman. Yet, unlike her silent counterpart Lavinia, Lucrece becomes caught up in her own verbosity. After her rape, Lucrece talks for several hundred lines, displaying surprising eloquence for one so recently traumatised. How can Lucrece's tragic experience be told effectively but realistically?

Lucrece is convinced that her tarnished inner-self will be easily read on her body: she still assumes that there is a direct correspondence between one's 'surface' and one's inner-self. Making use of personification, she condemns Night for conspiring in Tarquin's foul deed ('Grim cave of death, whisp'ring conspirator / With close-tongued treason and the ravisher!' (769-70)). Lucrece also wishes that it would remain night forever to keep her sin unseen. In particular, Lucrece wants her eyes to remain in darkness, 'To have their unseen sin remain untold; / For they their guilt with weeping will unfold' (753-54). Here, because Lucrece finds it hard to dissemble, she believes that her eyes will function as an all-too-transparent window to her soul, even actively *telling* the story of her rape as people look upon them. By crying, an unspoken expression of grief, her eyes will 'unfold' her predicament, a word that Shakespeare uses elsewhere to refer to an act of narration.[23] We learn that her eloquence will be intermingled with more 'natural' expressions of grief: 'Mingling my talk with tears, my grief with groans, / Poor wasting monuments of lasting moans' (797-

[23] See *OED* s.v. 'unfold' *v.*[1] 2: 'To disclose or reveal by statement or exposition; to explain or make clear'. Lucrece uses the word later in the poem when she addresses Philomel: 'there we will unfold, / To creatures stern, sad tunes to change their kinds' (1146-47).

98). Here words are presented as monuments, but they are *wasting* monuments: perhaps because they are unwritten. The written text Lucrece fears being revealed is her own body:

> 'Make me not object to the tell-tale day;
> The light will show charactered in my brow
> The story of sweet chastity's decay,
> The impious breach of holy wedlock vow.
> Yea, the illiterate that know not how
> To cipher what is writ in learnèd books
> Will quote my loathsome trespass in my looks.
>
> 'The nurse to still her child will tell my story,
> And fright her crying babe with Tarquin's name;
> The orator to deck his oratory
> Will couple my reproach to Tarquin's shame.
> Feast-finding minstrels, tuning my defame,
> Will tie the hearers to attend each line,
> How Tarquin wrongèd me, I Collatine. (806-19)

Because daylight will reveal Lucrece to the world, it becomes the 'tell-tale day'—she believes that the day will actively tell her tale. Furthermore, this story will be written ('charactered') on Lucrece's brow.[24] The signs of shame will be readable on her body—as Lucrece expresses it, her body will be a pictorial gloss for those who cannot read; a visual 'text' that will be particularly easy to interpret. Both Tarquin and Lucrece, then, convince themselves that their moral decline is real by imagining that it is somehow *visible*.[25] But this strategy—turning the body into signs—means that Shakespeare's representation of Lucrece in *The Rape of Lucrece* is peculiarly effective. Shakespeare creates the illusion that Lucrece wanted to be a textual being all along, as if the poet is merely completing the process that Lucrece herself began. She comes to imagine her narrative afterlife, seeing her story as being so significant that it will be told and retold—it will become a classic, exemplary narrative. It is as if this is how Lucrece is able to cope with what has happened to her: through a forgetting of self as body, she comes to see herself as mere language. Nonetheless, she comes to reflect on

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[24] As Lanham comments, '[Lucrece] thinks of her face as a mask, her predicament as a story' (*Motives of Eloquence*, p.101).
[25] See Maus, 'Taking Tropes Seriously', p.80.

the problems of the words she uses. In her long complaint (747-1211), Lucrece wants to dismiss language even as she acknowledges its necessity; she has to employ words in order to dismiss them: 'Out idle words, servants to shallow fools, / Unprofitable sounds, weak arbitrators' (1016-17). She continues: 'In vain I rail at Opportunity, / At Time, at Tarquin, and uncheerful Night' (1023-24), pointing to 'This helpless smoke of words' (1027). The only thing which will achieve anything, she thinks, is the act of suicide: 'The remedy indeed to do me good / Is to let forth my foul defilèd blood' (1028-29). Lucrece believes that it is only by moving from words to the act of suicide—albeit an action which will end Lucrece's life—that she will have any impact upon the world. Before this, however, Lucrece writes a letter—an action that is also an artful arrangement of words, an act of communication.

3. Conceit and Grief

Lucrece clearly has an ambivalent attitude towards the spoken language that she has been using. She has already expressed doubt as to the ability of 'bottomless conceit' (701) to comprehend the sin which has been perpetrated. But what might Shakespeare mean by *conceit* here? As suggested in the previous section, there seem to be at least two senses in play, both 'That which is conceived in the mind, a conception, notion, thought, idea; device' (*OED* 1), but also 'A fanciful, ingenious, or witty notion or expression; now applied disparagingly to a strained or far-fetched turn of thought, figure, etc., an affectation of thought or style' (*OED* 8). There appears to be a conflict between Lucrece's own extended poetic metaphors, and a more 'natural' outpouring of suffering which she craves. Lucrece takes the positive step of writing to Collatine—fashioning a web of words that will actually have an effect in the world. Yet Lucrece faces similar problems when she comes to *write* this brief account of her tragedy. What might Lucrece's act of writing have to tell us about the literary aspects of tragedy? As an artistic arrangement of words that must somehow express that which is beyond expression, an aestheticizing of that

which is traumatic, we might wonder to what extent 'conceit' can ever effectively *show* inner grief? In *Richard II*, the Queen offers her own solution to this problem: 'Conceit is still deriv'd / From some forefather grief' (2.2.34-35). This suggests that such 'conceit' does indeed come from 'that within which passeth show'—that Shakespeare wants to create the impression of suffering behind the surface of 'conceit'. Yet later in *Richard II*, the deposed Richard expresses an anxiety about being unable to show his suffering to the spectators. Sounding like a precursor of Hamlet, he gestures towards an inner 'grief' that cannot be seen:

> 'Tis very true, my grief lies all within,
> And these external manners of laments
> Are merely shadows to the unseen grief
> That swells with silence in the tortur'd soul.
> There lies the substance (4.1.295-99)

Richard states that his 'grief lies all within', and he suggests that his 'external manners of laments' are merely 'shadows'. *Shadow* here seems to have the sense of 'An unreal appearance; a delusive semblance or image; a vain and unsubstantial object of pursuit. Often contrasted with *substance*' (*OED* 6a), but also 'Applied rhetorically to a portrait as contrasted with the original; also to an actor or a play in contrast with the reality represented' (*OED* 6b). Like Hamlet, then, Richard II implies that these external signifiers are merely a form of performance, and can never be identical with the reality that they represent; his 'unseen grief'. Lucrece, too, remains unconvinced of her ability to represent her predicament successfully. Could it be that Lucrece is an even earlier precursor of Hamlet than Richard II? Lucrece is, after all, a character who continually agonises over her ability to articulate her grief effectively, and who becomes obsessed with the act of telling her own story. More specifically, Lucrece feels that writing is deficient and open to misinterpretation without a pictorial gloss—without her own body. She even sees her own suicide as a written act: 'How Tarquin must be used, read it in me' (1195). Yet in order for people to 'read' her, she must have an audience present—her grief must be published. Speaking to

her maid, Lucrece acknowledges the redundancy and insufficiency of telling her woes:

> 'O peace', quoth Lucrece, 'if it should be told,
> The repetition cannot make it less;
> For more it is than I can well express,
>   And that deep torture may be called a hell
>   When more is felt than one has power to tell. (1284-88)

Retelling achieves nothing, especially when Lucrece's experiences are untellable. She realises that the act of repeating or telling her story will fail to reduce her suffering: 'The repetition cannot make it less' (1285). She also suggests that such an act will intensify her 'deep torture'—it 'may be called a hell'—as the expression will inevitably be inadequate to what she feels: 'When more is felt than one has power to tell' (1288). However, when Lucrece sits down to write, she has to face up to a specifically literary dilemma—a similar predicament to that in which Shakespeare might have found himself during the composition of *Lucrece*. What we find is a brief study of tragic epistolary poetics:

> Her maid is gone, and she prepares to write,
> First hovering o'er the paper with her quill.
> Conceit and grief an eager combat fight:
> What wit sets down is blotted straight with will.
> This is too curious good; this blunt and ill.
>   Much like a press of people at a door
>   Throng her inventions which shall go before. (1296-1302)

Lucrece uses the letter to try to express herself in a new way, to impose a shape upon her suffering.[26] But here we find a self-conscious contest between 'conceit' and 'grief', as if Lucrece is replaying all of the stylistic difficulties of the poem she inhabits in miniature. How can something so conceited, so obviously artificial as *The Rape of Lucrece*—in both its modes of expression and its stanza form—be adequate to the 'reality' of the experience in attempting to express the grief of a woman who has been raped? While in *Richard II* we find that 'conceit' is actually *derived* from 'some forefather grief', in *Lucrece* the two

[26] As Jonathan Hart comments, 'It is as if she is trying to control the rape and codify her response with the objectification of script' ('Narratorial Strategies', p.70).

would appear to be at odds with one another: 'Conceit and grief an eager combat fight' (1298). As the narrator expresses it, 'conceit' gives rise to expressions that are 'too curious good' (1300). Burrow glosses the phrase as 'too mannered, over-artful', but 'curious good' might also imply an expression in which there is something peculiar or strained about its ingenuity.[27] Both Lucrece and the narrator are prone to expressions that are themselves 'curious good'. On the other hand, where 'grief' is allowed to reign in Lucrece's letter, the effect is 'blunt and ill', suggesting that the ideal is an (un)happy medium, in which verbal wit does not obscure the writer's meaning. Nevertheless, the narrator actually shows off his verbal wit in order to express this very problem, through the use of alliteration: 'What *wit* sets down is blotted straight with *will*' (1299). Drawing attention to his verbal virtuosity, the narrator here is certainly open to charges of obscuring his meaning with verbal 'wit'. And yet, one thing is definitely to be said in favour of Lucrece's written effort. The letter, which actually appears as an almost complete stanza in the poem (1303-9), has the virtue of brevity, as it is only seven lines long. As Lucrece's letter states, 'My woes are tedious, though my words are brief' (1309). Yet it is worth noting that, to the reader, the written Lucrece looks exactly the same as the spoken Lucrece as she appears on the page. By refusing to distinguish between a written and a spoken Lucrece, Shakespeare reminds us that the Lucrece we imagined we were seeing and hearing has always been a purely textual being.

Lucrece saves up what she sees as her 'real' expression of suffering for when Collatine returns, when actions will be able to express her grief more eloquently: 'To shun this blot she would not blot the letter / With words, till action might become them better' (1322-23). But it is interesting that Lucrece's disgrace is again associated with text—the same word ('blot') is employed to refer to both writing and rape. Fearing that her 'blots' will be misinterpreted, Lucrece thinks

[27] See Burrow's note to 1300. The *OED* cites this passage as the first usage of *curious* in the sense of 'quasi-*adv.* Curiously. *Obs.*' (*OED* 18). The word *curiously* can mean 'With careful art, skilfully, elaborately, exquisitely, cunningly. *arch.*' (*OED* 3), but I would argue that Shakespeare's usage here anticipates the following definition, first cited in 1665: 'In a way that excites interest or surprise; remarkably, strangely, oddly; queerly' (*OED* 6).

that it will be better if Collatine sees her. Here, the narrator explicitly prioritises showing over telling:

> To see sad sights moves more than hear them told,
> For then the eye interprets to the ear
> The heavy motion that it doth behold,
> When every part, a part of woe doth bear.
> 'Tis but a part of sorrow that we hear:
> Deep sounds make lesser noise than shallow fords,
> And sorrow ebbs, being blown with wind of words. (1324-30)

The narrator seems to be suggesting that seeing is non-linguistic, and that the eye 'interprets to the ear', or converts 'sad sights' into language. This passage also raises a larger question that, as I suggested in Chapter 2, is addressed throughout Shakespeare's tragedies. Which is the more authentic or affecting mode of representation: being shown 'sad sights', or hearing about them in narrative form? The irony, of course, is that it is the narrator of a narrative poem—a poem that is reliant upon its own *linguistic* powers to tell the reader a sad story through language alone—who makes this appeal to the superiority of 'sad sights'. This stanza suggests that when we *see* a sad sight, the whole experience is a valid signifier of woe: what we *hear* can only ever be a part of sorrow (''Tis but a part of sorrow that we hear'). Here the narrator seems to be suggesting that language is always bound up with metonymy and synecdoche, as words can never be adequate substitutes for the things they represent. However, the narrator's argument here is at odds with the way in which the poem functions as a whole. As Lucrece is soon to realise, looks and actions are as open to misinterpretation and as potentially deceptive as written or spoken accounts.[28] This desire for an ideal, visual mode of interpretation is immediately called into question with Lucrece's encounter with the groom, in which she reads too much into the young man's blushes. The groom's silence is stressed in this encounter; and with no words at all, Lucrece attempts to interpret his body language. Blushing, but 'with a steadfast eye', he 'Receives the scroll without or yea or no' (1339-40). Unfortunately, Lucrece still thinks that her inner

[28] See Bevington, *Action is Eloquence*, p.22.

turmoil—and her supposed moral 'blot'—are easily readable on her face: 'Lucrece thought he blushed to see her shame' (1344). Meanwhile, the groom believes that actions speak louder than words, and that verbal promises are easily broken:

> Such harmless creatures have a true respect
> To talk in deeds, while others saucily
> Promise more speed, but do it leisurely.
>   Even so this pattern of the worn-out age
>   Pawned honest looks, but laid no words to gage. (1347-51)

But Lucrece misinterprets the silent groom, thinking that he blushes 'knowing Tarquin's lust' (1354). The narrator even implies that Lucrece projects her own anxieties onto the groom's face, so that 'Her earnest eye did make him more amazèd' (1356). Here, even when Lucrece is interpreting a visual object, we find that her response as an individual 'reader' actually shapes her interpretation. However, before Lucrece's letter reaches its destination and Collatine returns, Lucrece finds herself engaged in another act of reading, the interpretation of yet another text.

4. Every Picture Tells a Story

Lucrece comes to find another means of articulating her grief, realising that 'For now 'tis stale to sigh, to weep, and groan' (1362). Instead of attempting to verbalise her grief, she now comes across a pictorial analogue to her plight—a different mode of representation entirely. Lucrece believes that a specifically visual mode of artistic expression, a painting, will be a more reliable means of depicting the world. But what the reader of Shakespeare's poem experiences is an extended *ekphrasis*—in other words, a specifically literary description of a work of visual art: 'the verbal representation of visual representation'.[29] One of

[29] Mitchell, 'Ekphrasis and the Other', p.152. James A. W. Heffernan defines ekphrasis as 'the verbal representation of graphic representation', in 'Ekphrasis and Representation', *New Literary History*, 22 (1991), 297-316 (p.299). See also Grant F. Scott, *The Sculpted Word: Keats, Ekphrasis, and the Visual Arts* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1994), p.1.

the inspirations for this painting is Virgil's description of Aeneas contemplating similar images of the fall of Troy in Book I of the *Aeneid*[30] In addition, E. H. Gombrich has suggested that some of the poem's supposedly pictorial images derive elements from Philostratus's verbal descriptions of paintings in the *Imagines*.[31] These sources, then, suggest that this passage has more to do with Shakespeare's reading than with his interest in pictorial art. Yet while ekphrasis does not literally 'show' the reader anything at all, Shakespeare uses it as an opportunity to *explore* the relationship between verbal and visual art.[32] This segment of the poem also constitutes an act of reading on Lucrece's part, one that she takes a little too literally, allowing herself to be seduced by this work of art. At first the painting appears to live up to Lucrece's expectations, inasmuch as she discovers a direct correspondence between how things appear to be on the surface, and what she knows them to be actually like—a direct link between the signifier and signified:

> In Ajax and Ulysses, O what art
> Of physiognomy might one behold!
> The face of either ciphered either's heart;
> Their face their manners so expressly told.
> In Ajax' eyes blunt rage and rigour rolled;
>   But the mild glance that sly Ulysses lent
>   Showed deep regard and smiling government. (1394-1400)

Both Ajax and Ulysses are easily readable from their surface meanings, their faces 'ciphering' their inner selves. Their faces are so eloquent—'so expressly told'—that they have no need of speech. Ulysses's mild glance shows '*smiling* government', the terms here suggesting that our reading of Ulysses's character is directly influenced by our reading of his face. Nestor, too, has no need for speech with such compelling body language:

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[30] In his New Cambridge edition, John Roe suggests that because the inspiration for this passage is a literary one, 'there seems little point in speculating whether "a piece of skilful painting" means a tapestry or some other form of representation' (see his note to 1366-1568). And yet, as Burrow points out, the references to 'each dry drop' (1375) and 'painter' (1390) suggest that Lucrece is looking at a painting (see his note to 1366-1568).
[31] See E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 4th edn (London: Phaidon, 1972), pp.176-77.
[32] S. Clark Hulse, in '"A Piece of Skilful Painting" in Shakespeare's *Lucrece*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 31 (1978), 13-22, comments that 'The passage really tells us less about the actual object than about the illusion it creates' (p.16).

> There, pleading, might you see grave Nestor stand,
> As 'twere encouraging the Greeks to fight,
> Making such sober action with his hand
> That it beguiled attention, charmed the sight.
> In speech it seemed his beard, all silver white,
> Wagged up and down, and from his lips did fly
> Thin winding breath, which purled up to the sky. (1401-7)

Here the painting represents speech as something visual.[33] These physical flourishes are all visual forms of communication, perhaps even the non-verbal equivalent of rhetoric, and all of which appear to be highly lucid. But the narrator begins to remind us that these painted images are silent, and only become 'eloquent' when they are described verbally. We begin to realise that the painting might be deficient in some way. The 'Thin winding breath' that flies from Nestor's lips is a compelling visual image, but 'breath' can also refer to 'speech' (*OED* 9a). Thus, while Lucrece can see this breath in the painting, Nestor's eloquence can never be heard. We are told that the 'gaping faces' around Nestor might 'swallow up his sound advice' (1408-9), but no matter how *sensible* it was, the word 'sound' reminds us that his advice will always be unheard. Furthermore, the realism of the artwork that the narrator promised us ('In scorn of Nature, Art gave lifeless life' (1374)) begins to look increasingly artificial and contrived:

> Here one man's hand leaned on another's head,
> His nose being shadowed by his neighbour's ear;
> Here one being thronged bears back, all boll'n and red;
> Another, smothered, seems to pelt and swear,
> And in their rage such signs of rage they bear
> As, but for loss of Nestor's golden words,
> It seemed they would debate with angry swords. (1415-21)

Here, the way that the narrator describes this pictorial scene makes the painting that we imagine look slightly peculiar, with one man's hand 'on another's head'. The narrator describes the surface of the painting too literally, failing to imagine

[33] Joel Fineman comments that 'At stake in all this, of course, or what is being presupposed throughout, is the perennial aesthetic of the "speaking picture," the idea, as well as the ideal, of a visual verisimilitude, a specular mimetics, so effective and affective as to erase the difference between representation and that which representation represents' ('Shakespeare's Will', p.57).

the three-dimensional space that the painter asks us to imagine. Thus Shakespeare demonstrates that visual works of art can be misappropriated and misinterpreted by a reader or viewer. We can try to imagine how the 'original' artwork appeared in Lucrece's 'reality', but we are forced to see the imagined painting through the narrator's fragmented description of the painting's surface. We begin to realise that visual art has to use metonymy and synecdoche just as writing does. This is made even more explicit in the following stanza, as the narrator focuses more closely upon the ways in which an artwork needs to be supplemented by the imagination of the viewer. The narrator also provides us with an explicit definition of synecdoche:

> For much imaginary work was there,
> Conceit deceitful, so compact, so kind,
> That for Achilles' image stood his spear,
> Gripped in an armèd hand, himself behind
> Was left unseen, save to the eye of mind:
> A hand, a foot, a face, a leg, a head
> Stood for the whole to be imaginèd. (1422-28)

Here Shakespeare is ostensibly praising the skilfulness of the artist: he allows the viewer to contribute imaginatively to the painting by merely hinting at that which cannot be seen—Achilles is unseen apart from his spear.[34] If synecdoche is a rhetorical figure in which a part stands for the whole, here we find it realised in a visual form (albeit one that is described verbally): Achilles's spear stands for the whole person.[35] But Shakespeare is also praising his own rhetorical skills, demonstrating that visual works of art must resort to those effects that we thought only existed in literary texts. Earlier the narrator had claimed that only 'sad sights' could show us grief in its entirety; now we discover that a painting is

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[34] Gombrich cites a specific passage from Philostratus's *Imagines*, suggesting that it is a source for this stanza of *Lucrece*. Gombrich writes: 'In his description of a real or imaginary painting Philostratus commends the trick of the artist who surrounds the wall of Thebes with armed men "so that some are seen in full figure, others with the legs hidden, others from the waist up, then only the busts of some, heads only, helmets only, and finally just spearpoints. All that, my boy, is analogy, for the eyes must be deceived as they travel back along with the relevant zones of the picture."' (*Art and Illusion*, p.176). Burrow notes that the *Imagines* was 'required reading at St John's College, Cambridge, where Thomas Jenkins, principal master of Stratford Grammar School, was a student' (note to 1422-8).
[35] Roe notes this as 'A famous example of metonymy. Achilles' spear was legendary and would stand as sufficient emblem for him' (note to 1424).

an equally partial mode of representation—it too can only show parts of the whole. Intriguingly, the rest is 'unseen', except in 'the eye of mind' (1426). In this way, Shakespeare points out that paintings, too, ask the viewer to imagine things that are outside the 'text'. While in the painting these painted bodily parts stand for the whole person to be imagined, in the narrator's description the words *hand*, *foot*, *face* and *leg* stand for the (represented) things themselves.

While Lucrece tries to make sense of her life through this pictorial narrative, she also denies the specificity of her own story. It is now enlarged by this new reference to a social, historical, political, even intertextual context. Lucrece comes to the painting 'To find a face' for her suffering (1444). She reads her own predicament in the context of Hecuba—but, as Hamlet might have put it, what's Hecuba to her?[36] She 'shapes her sorrow to the beldam's woes' (1458). While Lucrece sees in Hecuba an idealised physical representation, the way it is described suggests a kind of written suffering, as if Hecuba's trials are somehow inscribed on her body:

> In her the painter had anatomized
> Time's ruin, beauty's rack, and grim care's reign.
> Her cheeks with chaps and wrinkles were disguised:
> Of what she was no semblance did remain. (1450-53)

While the artist has attempted to depict Hecuba's inner suffering on her body, the change in Hecuba, which Time has effected, has to be inferred by the narrator. The image of what Hecuba was has to be imagined in narrative time. In this way, the painting lacks this sense of temporal process that Shakespeare's narrative poem possesses. To quote Katherine Eisaman Maus:

> If *The Rape of Lucrece* seems to be narrative striving for a missing visual element, the painting described in the poem seems to yearn for the missing dimension of temporality, and to usurp the privileges of narrative by displaying successive episodes in a deceptive present.[37]

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[36] See Lanham, *Motives of Eloquence*, p.107.
[37] Maus, 'Taking Tropes Seriously', p.81.

Despite Hecuba looking sufficiently sorrowful, she is frozen in time, and silent. The narrator draws attention to this important difference between Hecuba and Lucrece: 'The painter was no god to lend her those; / And therefore Lucrece swears he did her wrong, / To give her so much grief, and not a tongue' (1461-63). Implicitly, Shakespeare is claiming for himself an almost god-like status, as he is able to provide Lucrece with a voice. But here the narrator also refers to the silence of Philomel, and to the silenced Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. As John Kerrigan suggests, the story of Philomel 'seems to have been Shakespeare's familiar recourse when figuring rape'.[38] 'Tongue' here is being used as a metonymic substitute for 'voice', but Lucrece's references to Philomel earlier in the poem ('Come, Philomel, that sing'st of ravishment: / Make thy sad grove in my dishevelled hair' (1128-29)) suggest that Lucrece is also reading her own story—and now that of Hecuba—in terms of the Philomel myth. However, while Philomel was silent, Lucrece feels the need to give voice to this silent artwork—the supplement of speech that will supposedly make it complete. Philomel 'told' her plight by sewing a tapestry, but here Lucrece attempts to find a voice (or in this case a face) in another tapestry. In a remarkable formulation, Lucrece seems to carry out an aesthetic transaction with the pictorial artwork she is looking at:

> So Lucrece, set-a-work, sad tales doth tell
> To pencilled pensiveness, and coloured sorrow;
> She lends them words, and she their looks doth borrow. (1496-98)

John Roe offers the following gloss for this last line: 'Lucrece speaks for the silent figures in the painting, who in exchange teach her how to look sorrowful'.[39] We might go further, however, and suggest that this symbiosis of 'words' and 'looks' amounts to a Shakespearean definition of ekphrasis itself—Lucrece seems to 'borrow' the visuality of the painting that Shakespeare has created verbally. As Lucrece tries to give voice to the silent artwork to make it seem more real, we as readers attribute the visual qualities we have imagined the

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[38] John Kerrigan, 'Keats and *Lucrece*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 41 (1988), 103-118 (p.111).
[39] See Roe's note to 1498.

picture possessing to Lucrece: she 'borrows' their looks. Lucrece and the picture are said to supplement each other, but of course this is another example of 'conceit deceitful': both the poem's and the picture's visuality are created entirely by language. Leonard Barkan has written about this feature of ekphrasis, although he perhaps puts too much emphasis upon its deceptiveness:

> It [ekphrasis] is not a visual figure so much as a figure of speech, and like all tropes it is a lie. The specific figural activity is akin to prosopopoeia, that is, the bestowing of a voice upon a mute object; and the larger lie is that these pictures have a prior existence independent of the poet, who is ostensibly merely "describing" them.[40]

But if ekphrasis is a 'lie', then it can be a very convincing one. While Hecuba remains a silent image, Lucrece seems to become a speaking picture—by borrowing the painted images she views, and trying to enter the visual artwork fully, the language that describes Lucrece appears to become more and more transparent.

However, Lucrece goes too far, in the sense that she allows herself to read too much into the artwork; so much so that she mistakes the artwork for reality, and even attempts to interact with it. She comes across the image of the wicked Sinon, whose unreadability reminds her of Tarquin. Lucrece 'tears the senseless Sinon with her nails, / Comparing him to that unhappy guest / Whose deed hath made herself herself detest' (1564-66), just as she had wanted to tear Tarquin with her nails earlier. We remember that Lucrece berated herself because she 'wast afeard to scratch her wicked foe' (1035), and that she also wanted to tear the beauty of Helen ('the strumpet') with her nails (1471). But it is revealing that all Lucrece can do with her nails is to scratch at the surface. It is as if she is more dissatisfied with the duplicitousness of surfaces than the evil that can lurk within. Yet the actions of both Sinon and Tarquin are now in the past—it is

[40] Leonard Barkan, 'Making Pictures Speak: Renaissance Art, Elizabethan Literature, Modern Scholarship', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 48 (1995), 326-351 (p.332).

impossible for Lucrece to rewrite history, or, for that matter, her own personal history. Besides, Sinon is 'senseless'; he is unable to feel pain. Lucrece herself comes to realise this: '"Fool, fool", quoth she, "his wounds will not be sore."' (1568). She has forgotten the distance between nature and representation. However, she soon regains a more stable awareness of the medium—the pictorial equivalent of seeing the words on the page again:

> Which all this time hath overslipped her thought
> That she with painted images hath spent,
> Being from the feeling of her own grief brought
> By deep surmise of others' detriment,
> Losing her woes in shows of discontent:
>   It easeth some, though none it ever curèd,
>   To think their dolour others have endurèd. (1576-82)

This stanza appears to be about how we respond to a work of art, whether it is on the page or on a canvas. Like Lucrece, we are prone to forgetting that we have spent our time with painted images, or with Shakespeare's speaking pictures. Something similar happens in a striking moment in the *Imagines*, when Philostratus's orator steps back from the painting 'Hunters', and realises that he has mistaken the picture for life itself:

> How I have been deceived! I was deluded by the painting into thinking that the figures were not painted but were real beings, moving and loving—at any rate I shout at them as though they could hear and I imagine that I hear some response—and you did not utter a single word to turn me back from my mistake, being as much overcome as I was and unable to free yourself from the deception and the stupefaction induced by it. So let us look at the details of the painting; for it really is a painting before which we stand.[41]

The narrator states that he has been 'deceived' and 'deluded' by the artistry of the visual art that he describes: he has mistaken this work of art for reality. He also suggests that the reader was similarly seduced by the painting, 'being as much overcome as I was and unable to free yourself from the deception and the stupefaction induced by it'. Here, as we are taken into the narrator's confidence,

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[41] Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines*, trans. Arthur Fairbanks (London: Wm. Heinman, 1931), p.109 (1. 28). See also Scott's comments on this passage in *The Sculpted Word*, p.13.

we forget the way in which *our* imaginations are being acted upon, and the extent to which we mistake the narrator's *verbal* descriptions for works of pictorial art. What we are 'seeing'—both in the *Imagines* and *The Rape of Lucrece*—is a kind of confidence trick. We, like Lucrece and Philostratus's orator, have been 'taken in', in the sense of being subject to a deception, but also in the sense of being drawn into a fictional world.

5. Publishing Bodies

When Collatine and his companions return from Ardea to Rome, Lucrece is considerably less articulate than she has been thus far in the poem. In fact, much of the poem's final 'scene' is about inarticulacy and problems of expression. Even Collatine, whose narrative artistry so enflamed Tarquin's lust, remains oddly reticent. Collatine gently asks Lucrece to tell them the cause of her external misery: 'Unmask, dear dear, this moody heaviness, / And tell thy grief, that we may give redress' (1602-3). Thus Collatine stresses the positive effects that telling her story will lead to—decisive, mitigating actions. But she finds herself unable to speak, and her narrative is delayed by sighs: 'Three times with sighs she gives her sorrow fire, / Ere once she can discharge one word of woe' (1604-5). However, Lucrece also seems to betray an awareness that her tale is about to come to an end:

> And now this pale swan in her wat'ry nest
> Begins the sad dirge of her certain ending:
> 'Few words', quoth she, 'shall fit the trespass best,
> Where no excuse can give the fault amending.
> In me moe woes than words are now depending,
>   And my laments would be drawn out too long
>   To tell them all with one poor tirèd tongue. (1611-17)

It is interesting to note the way in which Lucrece conceives of her own story: it is 'too long', and thus a story that she is unable to tell, not least because Lucrece's tongue is already 'tirèd'. Such a narrative would be something of a diversion, and would be inadequate to her extensive 'woes'. Despite this promise of brevity, however, Lucrece cannot resist telling the story at some length, and

there now follows a seemingly superfluous retelling of her ravishment of almost one hundred lines. But this act of retelling also suggests a certain narrative recursiveness in Shakespeare's treatment of his tale. Indeed, Shakespeare's poem is preoccupied with the possibility of different versions of the story of Lucrece. The larger, political narrative is recounted at the start of the poem in the Argument; Shakespeare's narrator then tells the story of the rape, focusing more on Tarquin and Lucrece than the historical background. However, this is itself a retelling of the story as it appears in Ovid and Livy. Finally, future retellings are anticipated both by Shakespeare and his characters, not least in Lucrece attempting to tell the story herself.[42] These repeated retellings bring about the sense that there is no singular truth or narrative about Lucrece—that Shakespeare's retelling is only one possible version of the story. But the poem's hinting at other possible versions of Lucrece's story also creates the impression that Shakespeare's text is *not* an extra version, but that it somehow contains the actual events themselves.[43] As we shall see in the next chapter, this is a device that Shakespeare was to use to even more brilliant effect at the close of *Hamlet*. In addition, if we remember that Time will 'blot old books, and alter their contents' (948), we also realise that texts will be ravished by the passage of time—audiences will respond differently to a particular version of Lucrece's story at different historical periods. Yet when Lucrece retells her tale for the benefit of Collatine, she is telling it with a decisive purpose. She knows that this time it will have a performative effect: her husband's revenge upon Tarquin. She actually writes her present self out of her narrative, preferring to see herself as a character in her own story: '(For she that was thy Lucrece now attend me)' (1682).[44] She delays her narrative still further, making sure that before the tale is completed with the naming of Tarquin, she extracts a promise of action from her audience:

[42] See Wilson, *Shakespearean Narrative*, p.70.
[43] See Heather Dubrow, 'The Rape of Clio: Attitudes to History in Shakespeare's *Lucrece*', *English Literary Renaissance*, 16 (1986), 425-41 (p.440).
[44] This phrase anticipates the final moments of *Othello*, in which Lodovico says 'Where is this rash and most unfortunate man?' (5.2.283), and Othello replies: 'That's he that was Othello, here I am' (5.2.284).

> 'But ere I name him, you fair lords', quoth she,
> Speaking to those that came with Collatine,
> 'Shall plight your honourable faiths to me,
> With swift pursuit to venge this wrong of mine (1688-91).

The tears that Lucrece has wept are not permanent: 'she turns away / The face, that map which deep impression bears / Of hard misfortune, carved in it with tears' (1711-13). Here there is physical evidence of her suffering, but it is not written permanently. Similarly, Richard II looks for a written suffering on his body:

> I'll read enough,
> When I do see the very book indeed
> Where all my sins are writ, and that's myself.
> *Enter one with a glass.*
> Give me that glass, and therein will I read.
> No deeper wrinkles yet? Hath sorrow struck
> So many blows upon this face of mine
> And made no deeper wounds? (4.1.273-79)

Richard hopes to be able to read himself like a book, and that his suffering will be readable on the outside of his body. But without any 'written' evidence of his suffering, Richard finds that his body is meaningless, and that his grief cannot be 'shown'. Lucrece, too, finds that she needs to supplement her sorrowful body with words, but just as the delayed climax of Lucrece's story—the naming of Tarquin—is about to arrive, Lucrece becomes inconveniently monosyllabic. It would appear that 'grief' has now overtaken 'conceit':

> Here, with a sigh as if her heart would break,
> She throws forth Tarquin's name: 'He, he', she says,
> But more than 'he' her poor tongue could not speak,
> Till, after many accents and delays,
> Untimely breathings, sick and short assays,
> She utters this: 'He, he, fair lords, 'tis he,
> That guides this hand to give this wound to me.' (1716-22)

Here the word 'he' changes from being an empty signifier into a performative utterance. Lucrece makes the word 'he'—a synecdoche for Tarquin—perform the action of killing her. He 'guides [her] hand' as she stabs herself. The surrounding company stand 'Stone-still' (1730), as if they are now like a static

work of art. There then follow some highly artful descriptions of Lucrece's actual suicide. As the blood flows from Lucrece's body, we might see the narrator's description of this event as being rather too 'curious good':

> And from the purple fountain Brutus drew
> The murd'rous knife, and as it left the place,
> Her blood in poor revenge held it in chase,
>
> And, bubbling from her breast, it doth divide
> In two slow rivers, that the crimson blood
> Circles her body in on every side (1734-39)

This description of Lucrece's blood flowing from her body is reminiscent of the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe from Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as well as Marcus's problematic description of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*.[45] Is this a poetic or inappropriate way of describing Lucrece's body? Both this passage and Marcus's problematic description of Lavinia raise important ethical (and aesthetic) questions about Shakespeare's art: what are the problems of turning suffering into this sort of poetic language? As we question Shakespeare's means of describing Lucrece in death, she is also used and abused by the rhetoric of those around her. Having apparently learnt nothing from Lucrece's narrative, old Lucretius misreads Lucrece's young body, seeing the ravages of time upon her: 'But now that fair fresh mirror, dim and old, / Shows me a bare-boned death by time outworn' (1760-61). Lucrece is nothing more than a 'Poor broken glass' (1758) in which Lucretius sees only his own predicament.

Collatine is another image of inarticulacy, as 'The deep vexation of his inward soul / Hath served a dumb arrest upon his tongue' (1779-80). Collatine eventually pronounces the name of Tarquin, but he seems to want to make the word a physical object, as if he wants to do harm to it. However, this passion in

[45] The tale of Lucrece was certainly in Shakespeare's mind when he composed *Titus*. Aaron explicitly compares Lavinia to her literary precursor: 'Lucrece was not more chaste than / This Lavinia, Bassanius' love' (1.1.608-9).

Collatine and Lucretius gives rise to a competitiveness in their shows of grief inappropriate to the occasion:

> Yet sometime 'Tarquin' was pronouncèd plain,
> But through his teeth, as if the name he tore.
> This windy tempest, till it blow up rain,
> Held back sorrow's tide, to make it more.
> At last it rains, and busy winds give o'er.
>   Then son and father weep with equal strife,
>   Who should weep most, for daughter, or for wife. (1786-92)

Collatine seems to be consciously holding back his sorrow in order to appear more sorrowful—an oddly self-conscious exercise for one in his situation. This competition between Collatine and Lucretius, and the excessiveness of their mourning, is noted by Brutus, who, 'Seeing such emulation [rivalry] in their woe, / Began to clothe his wit in state and pride' (1808-9). Brutus now shows himself to be a decisive and articulate political leader. He notes that excessive grief will have no effect on the events of the poem: 'Why, Collatine, is woe the cure for woe? / Do wounds help wounds, or grief help grievous deeds?' (1821-22). Brutus advocates a decisive form of action—to enact revenge upon Tarquin. But the poem's abrupt end informs us of the men's conclusion: 'To show her bleeding body through Rome, / And so to publish Tarquin's foul offence' (1851-52). In this echo of line 33—another reference to publishing—we learn at the end of Shakespeare's poem that the body of Lucrece is 'published', just as she had always wanted. We learn that Tarquin was banished from Rome forever; and that Lucrece created rebellion in Rome posthumously. Her body becomes a visual means of communicating the story of her rape. And yet, as the whole poem has been concerned with the conflict between the verbal and the visual, this reference to publishing at its close reminds us that we have been reading Shakespeare's text all along. Indeed, on the title page of the Quarto the poem is called simply *Lucrece*.[46] As Lucrece's life is brought to an abrupt end, she has always already been the text that bears her name. Lucrece and *Lucrece* are inextricably intertwined.

[46] The title page is reproduced in Rollins's *Variorum* edition, p.109.

6. Conclusion

We saw in Chapter 1 how Shakespeare's dramatic works can be read as well as performed, and that they too contain many figured acts of reading. Yet *Lucrece* seems particularly preoccupied with the problems of interpreting the world by reading an imagined 'depth' into surface meanings. Indeed, it might not be going too far to see *Lucrece* as being about the reading process itself. Even if Shakespeare felt anxious about the poem lacking the supplement of dramatic performance, he explores this supposed lack by providing us with visual supplements from within the poem itself, metonymically 'borrowing' its visuality from the pictorial elements that it describes. Shakespeare's creation of a visual 'reality' in this poem can be seen as a complex confidence-trick, for as we become engrossed in all of the acts of reading and interpretation in the poem, we forget that we ourselves are reading Shakespeare's text. Shakespeare and his characters seem to crave this ideal visuality, and yet the poem makes it clear that our reading experience is ultimately textual and not visual—that the effects we are experiencing are cause for wonder, but that they are also an illusion. This doubleness in the poem's attitude to art—a simultaneous adequacy and inadequacy—is also figured in Lucrece's 'reading' of the painting. In his study of *Ekphrasis* (1992), Murray Krieger considers what happens when we apply terms usually reserved for the verbal arts to the visual arts. Interestingly, this amounts to a deconstruction and defence of art that sounds curiously Shakespearean:

> instead of asking all the arts—even the verbal—to become natural signs, we are told to move beyond the naiveté of such a semiotic, to accept the arbitrary and conventional nature of *all* signs—even the visual—and make the most of it, recognising that pictures, no less than verbal structures, are human inventions and, as such, are products of an artificial making process. There would thus be no representational transparency, so that all art would come to be seen as emerging from a mediated activity.[47]

[47] Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, p.4.

If we think back to the uses of synecdoche in the painting and the narrator's descriptions of them, we find that Shakespeare, too, suggests that both visual and verbal works of art are incomplete—that there is no representational ideality. In particular, we discover that any attempt to represent 'grief' to the eye or ear will always be bound up with the means of its expression—with artistic 'conceit'. However, while *The Rape of Lucrece* refuses to present a stable answer to these questions, the poem is also an implied defence of the imagination and its ability to fill in the gaps left by artworks. It at once insists on the limitations of art, yet simultaneously champions the power of the imagination to piece out these imperfections.

Chapter 4

Ghost Stories: Repetition and Narrative in *Hamlet*

Where is the 'real' *Hamlet*? Is it the text of the play that we find in a standard scholarly edition? Is it an especially good performance of the play? Or the first production by the Chamberlain's Men? Clearly, these questions could be asked of any dramatic text, but Shakespeare's *Hamlet* seems to be a play uniquely preoccupied with the issue of its own authenticity. In particular, *Hamlet*'s exploration of narrative and storytelling comes to question this notion of an authentic 'original'.[1] Indeed, the play begins and ends with a demand for narrative.[2] In the first scene, Marcellus asks for an account of the events preceding the opening of the play: 'Who is't that can inform me?' (1.1.79); while at the play's close, Hamlet is particularly anxious that Horatio will be able 'To tell [his] story' (5.2.328).[3] However, despite the fact that the play is framed by this insistence upon storytelling, in *Hamlet* Shakespeare seems to be concerned with the problems and limitations of narrative. We frequently discover the characters within the play attempting to turn its events into narrative form, finding causes and explanations for what goes on. As Michael Neill has written, 'Narrative is that kind of speaking which offers to put a form on the inchoate matter of experience; with its emphasis on cause and effect, on beginnings,

[1] Michael Neill claims that 'from its very beginning, *Hamlet* manifests a fascination with and an anxiety about narrative more intense than in any other play of the period', in *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.218. However, Neill perhaps fails to explore fully this 'anxiety' about narrative that he identifies. See also his earlier essay, '"Exeunt with a dead March": Funeral Pageantry on the Elizabethan Stage' in *Pageantry in the Elizabethan Theatre*, ed. David M. Bergeron (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985). In *Shakespeare's Storytellers*, Barbara Hardy observes that 'The figure of narration is crucial, central and assertive in *Hamlet* but not presented with Shakespeare's most conspicuous and self-conscious virtuosity' (p.177). If anything, however, Shakespeare's 'virtuosity' appears to me to be at its *most* conspicuous and self-conscious in his treatment of narrative in the play.
[2] See Wilson, *Shakespearean Narrative*, p.95.
[3] All quotations from the play are taken from *Hamlet*, ed. Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

middles, and ends, it is precisely a *making* of a sense'.[4] Yet while we see most of the characters in *Hamlet* trying to make sense of the play's events, we leave the theatre with all sorts of questions ringing in our ears. There is much in the play that does not add up: that which cannot be 'told' in any simple sense. Dr Johnson was moved to speculate upon the difficulties of constructing a succinct narrative out of the plot of *Hamlet*, on the grounds of its sheer number of events: 'The incidents are so numerous that the argument would make a long tale'.[5] Nonetheless, many critics seem to be of the opinion that *Hamlet* is 'tellable', and that it is possible to make sense of the play. Robert N. Watson has commented that '[Hamlet's] metatheatrical consolation is that he dies as part of a meaningful and repeatable story'.[6] Yet the play itself seems to question the notion that Hamlet's story is meaningful, or that the tragedy will lend itself to future repetition as a 'story'.

Listening to Horatio's promise to retell the play's events at its close, we are momentarily seduced into thinking that we have seen the 'real events' of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, rather than having listened to this proposed narrative retelling of the play's events. Of course, we realise that we have not witnessed the 'actual' events of the tragedy; but how, then, does Horatio's proposed narrative relate to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*? Should we imagine the play to be a transcript or dramatisation of Horatio's narrative account? We might argue that Shakespeare makes it appear that Horatio—one of the play's characters—is the 'source' of the play. And yet, it is even more complex than this, for Horatio's summary of the story he is about to tell does not sound like a suitable prologue to the play we have just experienced, with its seemingly reductive account of 'carnal, bloody and unnatural acts' (5.2.360). Shakespeare seems to be deliberately complicating our responses to the play: not only our emotional responses, but also our sense of what it is we have been watching (or

[4] Neill, *Issues of Death*, p.218.
[5] *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Woudhuysen, p.243.
[6] Robert N. Watson, *The Rest is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p.96.

reading). This discrepancy between Horatio's retelling and the play itself adds to the strange 'ghostly' quality that *Hamlet* possesses. Shakespeare manages to create the impression that the play is different from itself, for just as we are duped into thinking that we are watching the actual events of the tragedy, *Hamlet* reveals itself to have always already been a retelling—the play seems to be both there and not there. In *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers* (1987), Marjorie Garber has hinted at a reading of *Hamlet* as a 'ghostly' text. Following J. Hillis Miller's *Fiction and Repetition* (1982), Garber discusses two types of repetition, 'the Platonic model based upon resemblance, and the Nietzschean model based upon difference', and quotes Hillis Miller's observation that 'there is something ghostly about the effects of this second type of repetition'. [7] Garber goes on to suggest that the Ghost in *Hamlet* is a figure of the ghostliness inherent in this Nietzschean model: 'the Ghost of Hamlet marks the text of that play as a belated harbinger of repetition as difference' (p.153). Certainly there is a great deal of repetition in *Hamlet*: phrases, events, even levels of representation are often repeated or replayed, often with a difference. However, Garber fails to give a full account of the ways in which *Hamlet* is like the Ghost. To what extent does the play itself explore the notion of repetition as difference? At the end of his book-length study of the play, James Calderwood goes further than Garber, suggesting that 'Hamlet's story is as ghostly as the Ghost itself [...] The play is not what it is, or what it appears to be'.[8] But, again, Calderwood does not develop this idea sufficiently. My contribution to this line of enquiry is the suggestion that the play's own ghostliness—its insistence that it is a belated

[7] Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* (London: Routledge, 1987), p.153, citing Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, p.6. Garber's Freudian account of the play examines the ghosts that haunt *Hamlet*, as well as the way in which the play haunts Freud's own writings; in particular, she examines the play in the light of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Peter Brooks has read *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* from a narratalogical perspective in his chapter 'Freud's Masterplot' in *Reading for the Plot*, pp.90-112. I am indebted to both of these important studies, although, as I have suggested above, Garber's approach does not seem to do justice to her notion of the play's own ghostliness. I should note that Miller's chapter in *Fiction and Repetition* on '*Wuthering Heights*: Repetition and the "Uncanny"' (pp.42-72) has also been useful in shaping my thinking about *Hamlet*, repetition, and ghosts.
[8] James L. Calderwood, *To Be and Not to Be: Negation and Metadrama in 'Hamlet'* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p.191.

repetition of itself—is central to our understanding of *Hamlet*, and that it is bound up with the play's preoccupation with narrative.

In this chapter, then, I focus upon the ways in which Shakespeare explores narrative and repetition in *Hamlet*, and how the play questions notions of authenticity and originality. In the first section, I consider briefly whether the feeling of 'something missing' in the play might be related to the lost *Ur-Hamlet*. I also examine the play's first scene—in which the Ghost first appears to the audience—and the ways in which the scene appears to be an uncanny repetition of itself. The second section explores the ways in which Hamlet is himself a 'ghostly' character, and how he is presented as a peculiar absence in the play. In the third section I investigate Hamlet's problems in expressing his grief, and suggest ways in which the self that Hamlet presents is elusive and ghostly. I also look at the play's concern with 'matter' and 'art', and the apparent search for an original meaning beneath the 'surface' of its language. In the fourth section, I explore the Player's Speech, and the way in which Hamlet uses this fictional narrative to assist him in a more 'authentic' display of his grief. Finally, in the fifth section, I look in more detail at the play's ending, and Horatio's promised narrative retelling of the play's events—which he claims that he can 'Truly deliver' (5.2.365)—suggesting ways in which this promise of narrative might relate to the play we have just experienced.

1. Repeating Oneself

Peter Buce and Andrew Scott have recently written that 'Literature has always been [an] accommodating place for ghosts, perhaps because fiction itself shares their simulacral qualities: like writing, ghosts are associated with a certain secondariness or belatedness'.[9] Not only does Shakespeare's *Hamlet* feature a ghost, but, as I have suggested above, there is also something ghostly

[9] Peter Buce and Andrew Scott, 'Introduction' to *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. Buce and Scott (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p.8.

about the play as a whole: it appears to be a 'secondary' or 'belated' version of itself. Certainly as it stands, there is a curious incompleteness to *Hamlet*: there is the sense that retelling its story—which happens again and again within the text of the play itself—might restore a completeness to the play that it lacks in its present form.[10] Particularly notable occurrences of narrative in the play include the Ghost's account of his demise; Horatio's account of recent events at Elsinore (which he gives despite having just returned from Wittenburg); Ophelia's narrated account of Hamlet 'with his doublet all unbraced' (2.1.76); the Player's Speech—which retells Aeneas' tale to Dido; Gertrude's account of Ophelia's drowning; and the promises of narrative at the play's close. These tellings and retellings of absent events are perhaps responsible for the feeling of 'something missing' in the play—that there is more to it than meets the eye or ear; that we are not always seeing 'the thing itself'. The play tries to tell its own story—to make sense of itself—in a variety of ways within its own boundaries, producing the impression that the play's 'story' could be reconstructed: a more complete, 'original' version of itself. In addition, there are several hints at a more 'authentic' story which could be told but which we never hear.[11] For example, when the Ghost finally speaks, it tells Hamlet that he 'could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul' (1.5.15-16)—a powerful story which is spoken *about*, but which we do not hear. Also, Hamlet seems to imagine a more 'authentic' performance of *Hamlet*, one in which the Player would play his part, and 'would drown the stage with tears, / And cleave the general ear with horrid speech' (2.2.514-15).

This quest for authenticity or a lost 'original' is perhaps related to the critical interest in the so-called *Ur-Hamlet*, the play upon which Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is supposedly based. This earlier drama, which was perhaps also called *Hamlet*,

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[10] Edward Costigan writes that 'In *Hamlet* [...] the relationship of enacted events to the history they form is uneasy, intensely so at the close of the play, and also at the beginning. Attempts at reaching a satisfactory view of the past meet with difficulty; settled conceptions of past experience go askew, the total cannot take account of all the factors involved' ('Aspects of Narrative', pp.327-28).
[11] See Neill, *Issues of Death*, p.223.

featured a ghost who cried 'Hamlet, revenge'.[12] G. R. Hibbard has suggested something of the spectral qualities of this literary relationship: 'Just as Hamlet is haunted by the ghost of his father, so his tragedy is haunted by the ghost of an earlier play, the *Ur-Hamlet*' (p.12). Hibbard writes about the lost *Ur-Hamlet* as if it were a ghost, and that all that remains of it is a trace or echo that somehow 'haunt[s]' the text of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Yet we might go further than Hibbard, and suggest that *Hamlet* presents *itself* as 'the ghost of an earlier play', an echo of a lost 'original'. Edward Pechter has suggested that *Hamlet* would appear to be a belated reworking of an 'original' even *without* our knowledge of the *Ur-Hamlet*, and argues that 'The real ur-*Hamlet* is *Hamlet* itself'.[13] And in 1969, Stephen Booth pointed to the tendency of critics to 'overestimate the distance between the *Hamlet* we have and the prelapsarian *Hamlet* to which they long to return'.[14] But *Hamlet* seems to invite us to imagine such a prelapsarian 'ur-text', a more coherent original that is different from the play we read or see performed; and this is one possible reason why critics often seem to want to 'return' to this original play implied by the text of *Hamlet*. In addition, if there is a suggestion of a more coherent original text in the play, the play also suggests a more coherent time in the past, before it begins its version of events—a prelapsarian time when Old Hamlet was still alive and Prince Hamlet was more like himself ('Th'expectancy and rose of the fair state' (3.1.146)). However, while *Hamlet* from its outset suggests that it is a copy of an earlier version of the same story, the play simultaneously questions the idea of a single 'original'. Indeed, the first scene of the play points to a series of other beginnings, suggesting that it is no more than a copy of a copy.

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[12] Quoted in *Hamlet*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p.11.

[13] Edward Pechter, 'Remembering *Hamlet*, or, how it feels to go like a crab backwards', *Shakespeare Survey*, 39 (1986), 135-47 (p.147). He writes: 'If the historical details did not exist to tell us that there was a Kyd play, we'd have to invent it. But it works the other way round as well. If we found the Kyd play, we'd have to *dis*-invent *it*, for something would still be lost' (p.147).

[14] Stephen Booth, 'On the Value of *Hamlet*', in *Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama*, ed. Norman Rabkin (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), p.138.

One might be forgiven for feeling a strange sense of *déjà vu* upon experiencing the opening scene of *Hamlet* for the first time. This might be unsurprising in what is arguably the most famous work in all of western literature, but what is so interesting about *Hamlet* is that this impression—of what Barthes calls the '*already* read'[15]—is so brilliantly and painstakingly generated by the play itself. Everything in this scene presents itself as being a repetition of something else, or a belated version of an original. The characters talk about the strange events they are experiencing as if they have happened already.[16] Marcellus asks if the Ghost has *returned*—whatever 'this thing' is, Marcellus has seen it before: 'What, has this thing appeared again tonight?' (1.1.21). We learn that the Ghost has appeared on *two* previous occasions: 'this dreaded sight, twice seen of us' (1.1.25). Barnardo then offers to tell the story of the Ghost to Horatio:

> Sit down a while,
> And let us once again assail your ears,
> That are so fortified against our story,
> What we two nights have seen. (1.1.30-33)

It transpires, then, that Horatio has heard this story before: 'let us *once again* assail your ears' (1.1.31). One might say that we are about to hear the ghost of a ghost story: this is to be a *retelling* of Barnardo's 'original' tale. And yet, as we saw in Chapter 2, Barnardo's narrative is interrupted at a particularly interesting point:

> Last night of all,
> When yond same star that's westward from the pole
> Had made his course t'illume that part of heaven
> Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,

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[15] See Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (1974; rpt. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990): 'they are so many fragments of something that has always been *already* read, seen, done, experienced; the code is in the wake of that *already*' (p.20).

[16] Terence Hawkes has noted how '*Subsequence, posteriority*, these are the effective modes of the opening'. He also calls attention to 'the extent to which looking backwards, re-vision, or reinterpretation, the running over of events again, out of their time sequence, ranks, in fact, as a fundamental mode of *Hamlet*' in '*Telmah*', in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (London: Methuen, 1985), p.313. Edward Pechter also has some suggestive remarks on repetition in the play; see 'Remembering *Hamlet*', esp. pp.141-43.

The bell then beating one—
Enter GHOST (1.1.35-39)

As we have seen, the Ghost's appearance is both a dramatisation of Barnardo's narrative account, and a repetition of this previous appearance that Barnardo was about to describe. As Marcellus says, 'Look where it comes *again*' (1.1.40). We might also see the Ghost as being a repetition of the ghost from the *Ur-Hamlet*, which the play's first audiences might have remembered. It is this sort of suggestiveness and elusiveness that gives the scene its strange sense of belatedness and intertextuality. Coleridge also noted the significance of this moment, and his comments on Barnardo's speech are worth quoting at length:

> Horatio's confirmation of his disbelief—and the silence with which the scene opened again restored by the narration [...] seem to contradict the critical law that what is told makes a faint impression compared with what is beheld, and does indeed convey to the mind more than the eye can see; and the interruption of the narrative at the very moment when we are most intensely listening for the sequel, and have our thoughts diverted from the dreaded sight in expectation of the desired yet almost dreaded tale—thus giving all the suddenness and surprise of the original appearance[17]

For Coleridge, Barnardo's narrative account 'convey[s] to the mind more than the eye can see' (p.79). The account 'shows' us something different from the thing itself: it is a metaphorical (verbal) picture of the scene Barnardo is describing. Coleridge suggests that in listening to the tale, our thoughts are 'diverted from the dreaded sight', as if narrative is something non-visual; something absent. Yet this sudden reappearance of the Ghost gives the uncanny effect of Barnardo's tale becoming real. As Coleridge suggests, the effect is that the Ghost's reappearance is as surprising and sudden as its 'original appearance'. But again, we are giving the Ghost an authenticity that it does not deserve.[18] The Ghost is only a representation of Old Hamlet, a signifier

[17] *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare: A Selection*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), p.79.
[18] Marjorie Garber suggests that a ghost is 'the sign of something missing, something omitted, something undone. [...] Onstage, as in the plot of a tale or story, a ghost is the concretization of a missing presence, the sign of what is there by not being there' (*Shakespeare's Ghost Writers*, p.129).

of his absence: 'Is it not like the King?' (1.1.58), asks Marcellus. 'As thou art to thyself', replies Horatio (1.1.59). The Ghost is like the King, but here Marcellus, too, becomes a repetition of himself, taking on an uncanny, ghostly quality. More generally, these repetitions generate the sense that *Hamlet*, too, is a repetition, referring to its previous attempts at beginning. It is also worth noting that the Ghost makes two separate appearances in this opening scene. After its first appearance the Ghost comes back, returning for a second time. As Horatio says, 'But soft, behold, lo, where it comes again!' (1.1.126). This repeat performance further adds to the Ghost's repetitious nature; now the audience, too, is made to experience the Ghost's *coming back*. Here the Ghost's appearance is a repetition of its 'original' appearance, but even that was presented as being a *re*appearance. This continual insistence that what we are seeing is a repetition of an earlier version of the same events could also be seen as referring to past performances or readings of the play, seemingly leading us back to the actual beginning. But where is the actual beginning? Peter Brooks has suggested that 'Narrative always makes the implicit claim to be in a state of repetition, as a going over again of a ground already covered'.[19] Yet in *Hamlet*, this ground appears to be an earlier version of the events of *Hamlet*, as if the play is a repetition of itself, rather than some pre-existing event or story.

2. A Ghost in the Machine

While *Hamlet* shares its name with an earlier play, Prince Hamlet shares his name with his father.[20] The correspondence of their names is impressed upon the audience when Hamlet finally comes into contact with the ghost: 'I'll call thee Hamlet, / King, father, royal Dane' (1.4.44-45). As David Scott Kastan writes, Hamlet 'cannot name himself without simultaneously naming his father, and the

[19] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p.97.
[20] See David Scott Kastan, '"His semblance is his mirror": *Hamlet* and the Imitation of Revenge', *Shakespeare Studies*, 19 (1987), 111-124: 'Both the play and the prince seek their individuality in their complex relationship with the past, relations obscurely inscribed in the name each takes from its forebear' (p.111).

shared name asserts his inescapable filiation' (p.111). But this filiation with his father has a rather unexpected side effect: Hamlet takes on some of Old Hamlet's ghostliness, increasingly so as the play progresses. Geoffrey Hartman has written that 'Naming does have a spectral dimension if we seek to perpetuate someone by calling a child after him. (It makes the child a *revenant*, Freud said)'.[21] In this way, even Hamlet's name takes on a spectral quality: he becomes the ghost of his own father.[22] In this section, I look at how Shakespeare impresses Hamlet's ghostliness and his written-ness upon us. Certainly Hamlet is often absent in the play, and appears in the form of a text, either in letters or in passages of narrative.

In 2.1 we hear Ophelia's narrative account of her encounter with Hamlet to Polonius; she describes an absent, undramatised scene of silent action. Yet while the play's opening scene contains an 'actual' ghost, here Hamlet himself is curiously absent. How do we respond to Hamlet now that he is presented to us in narrative form? In the absence of any reported speech, we find an excess of visual detailing in Ophelia's account that actually threatens to obscure the 'real' Hamlet from our mind's eye. Furthermore, the account is unglossed and unexplained. Ophelia finds it hard to construct a coherent 'picture' of Hamlet because she is unable to explain or make sense of Hamlet's actions: as a result, she is unable to turn these events into a successful, meaningful narrative. This is perhaps why Ophelia is 'so affrighted' (2.1.73): she does not know how to interpret the thing she is describing. Ophelia's account of the incident begins with an excessively detailed description of Hamlet's external features—one that concentrates on physical 'trappings'—which results in our seeing only a succession of pieces of him:

> My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
> Lord Hamlet with his doublet all unbraced,

[21] Geoffrey Hartman, *Saving the Text: Literature/Derrida/Philosophy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p.126.
[22] Dickens uses the phrase 'the ghost of a man's own father' in *Great Expectations*, ed. Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.218 (Vol. II, Chapter 8).

> No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
> Ungartered, and down-gyvèd to his ankle,
> Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
> And with a look so piteous in purport
> As if he had been loosèd out of hell
> To speak of horrors—he comes before me. (2.1.75-82)

How are we to interpret this description? It is worth noting that Ophelia was 'sewing in [her] closet' (2.1.75). Is it possible that she was sewing a tapestry, a piece of visual art, before she goes on to construct a 'speaking picture' of Hamlet? Francis Berry has suggested that the fact that the encounter that Ophelia describes was silent would have made it problematic to stage at the Globe:

> It would have been a dumb show, for all [Hamlet] utters are sighs "pittious and profound". Wordless 'close-ups' were impossible on the Elizabethan stage, but Shakespeare, by means of Ophelia's narration, enables the audience to possess a 'close-up' view of Hamlet's gestures and demeanour.[23]

However, it is not clear how well we can 'see' this close-up view. There is a dumb-show later in the play, so why does Shakespeare have Ophelia *tell* us about the encounter instead of *showing* us the scene? As Hamlet says in Act 5, 'to divide him inventorially would dozy [dizzy] th'arithmetic of memory' (5.2.107). We are encouraged to stitch these visual details into one imagined whole, but any mental image of Hamlet that we do 'see' here will be different from seeing the thing itself—it will be elusive; ghostly. This might be one way of interpreting the elements of Ophelia's description that call to mind the Ghost. Hamlet's 'look' suggests that he has come from hell 'To speak of horrors'. Like the Ghost, Hamlet looks like he has a story to tell, but this story never arrives—Hamlet says nothing. But Hamlet is like the Ghost in more ways than this: here Hamlet is absent from the play; he has to be brought back to the performance we are watching through Ophelia's verbal 'picture'. But again, we might wonder to what extent Hamlet is made present by this description. Peter Brooks has written that 'Representation of the body in signs endeavors to make the body present, but

[23] Berry, *The Shakespeare Inset*, pp.8-9.

always within the context of its absence, since use of the linguistic sign implies the absence of thing for which it stands'.[24] This attempt by Ophelia to make Hamlet present inevitably implies his absence, as if her comparing Hamlet to a ghost suggests something of the ghostliness of her narrative. Here, Hamlet is explicitly a textual effect; a verbal ghost.

Ophelia's description of Hamlet leaving the room is also strangely elusive and ambiguous: Hamlet 'falls to such perusal of [Ophelia's] face / As a would draw it' (2.1.88-89). Rather than making any attempt to communicate with Ophelia verbally, Hamlet comes to express his sorrows in inarticulate sighs and groans. Nonetheless, we cannot experience this scene of inarticulacy except through Ophelia's account:

> He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
> As it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
> And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
> And with his head over his shoulder turned
> He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
> For out-a-doors he went without their helps
> And to the last bended their light on me. (2.1.92-98)

Hamlet's 'look' back to Ophelia seems to echo Ovid's description in the *Metamorphoses* of Orpheus when he loses Eurydice for a second time after returning from hell.[25] However, while in the *Metamorphoses* it is Eurydice who is the ghost, now Hamlet appears to be affiliated with the 'ghost' of Orpheus, replaying the actions of a literary figure. As Jonathan Bate writes, 'The allusion is possibly more recognisable as narrative than it would have been as a stage image'.[26] But the fact that Hamlet is *already* turned into narrative at this point in the play suggests that Shakespeare is thinking about his central character's presence and absence in the text, and emphasising Hamlet's status as a literary character.

[24] Brooks, *Body Work*, pp.7-8.
[25] See *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), p.462.
[26] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p.201.

Polonius certainly seems able to make something out of the 'matter' of Ophelia's account—'This is the very ecstasy of love' (2.1.100)—and in the next scene he tells Claudius that he has found 'The very cause of Hamlet's lunacy' (2.2.49). Claudius then informs Gertrude that Polonius 'hath found / The head and source of all your son's distemper' (2.2.54-55). Here we find Claudius and Polonius attempting to find causes and explanations for Hamlet's state. Polonius thinks that the answer is to be found in Hamlet's letter to Ophelia, which Polonius reads out. After four lines of questionable verse, Hamlet's letter professes its literary shortcomings: 'O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers, I have not art to reckon my groans; but that I love thee best, O most best, believe it. Adieu' (2.2.119-20). Here, Hamlet's problem appears to be that of turning his suffering into textual form: he does not believe that he has the skill, or the 'art', to express himself in poetic language, to 'reckon his groans'. When we read the play, we experience Prince Hamlet in the form of a text, but here his very textuality is foregrounded. Here we find an absent, *written* Hamlet. Hamlet's letter alludes to the fact that it will survive the death of his body: 'Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him, Hamlet' (2.2.121-22). Here Hamlet is referring to his own body, but also, implicitly, a time when he will be dead, when his 'machine' ('Applied to the human and animal frame as a combination of several parts' (*OED* 4c; first cited usage)) will no longer be his. Ultimately, the reference of the letter is 'this machine'—Hamlet's own body.[27] The text is, metaphorically speaking, a piece of him, a synecdoche for Hamlet's absent self—and this letter will still 'create' Hamlet even after his death.

Polonius has a dogged belief that the truth about Hamlet exists somewhere, and that he is the man to discover it: 'I will find / Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed / Within the centre' (2.2.155-57). Polonius seems to think that there is a 'truth' at the 'centre' of Hamlet, waiting to be discovered. But Polonius is not the only character in the play who seeks the substance of 'truth' beneath the

[27] See Brooks, *Body Work*: 'Is the body the ultimate field from which all symbolism derives, and to which it returns? Are we to conclude that ultimately the text itself represents the body, and the body the text?' (p.6).

surface of language. Asking Polonius to dispense with his artful digressions, Gertrude sets up a distinction between language and meaning, or rhetoric and reality: 'More matter with less art' (2.2.95). Later in the play, in his letter to Horatio, Hamlet uses a similar distinction: 'I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb, yet are they much too light for the bore of the matter' (4.6.20-22). However, the play remains oddly reticent when it comes to revealing to us the 'matter' beneath its verbal artistry.[28] While some of the play's characters—and its critics—assume that there is a meaning lurking 'behind' or beneath the surface of the play's language, Shakespeare seems to question this assumption, and repeatedly confounds our attempts to determine what the 'matter' is with Prince Hamlet.[29]

3. Hamlet's Interiority Complex

Hamlet is himself particularly concerned with the relationship between words and meanings, but also with the efficacy of visual signs. His speech to Gertrude about 'seeming' (1.2.76-86) raises many complex questions about his grief and its relationship to theatrical display. In recent years this speech has been appropriated by cultural materialists such as Francis Barker and Terry Eagleton for what it supposedly reveals (or fails to reveal) about the 'self' in the play, and, by extension, in the Renaissance more generally. For Eagleton, this speech is suggestive of the 'irony' that the play reveals: 'that there is no heart of the mystery to be plucked out. Hamlet has no "essence" of being whatsoever, no inner sanctum to be safeguarded: he is pure deferral and diffusion, a hollow void

[28] See *OED* s.v. 'matter' 11a: 'The substance of a book, speech, or the like; that which a spoken or written composition contains in respect of the facts or ideas expressed; often as opposed to the form of words ('manner') in which the subject is presented'.

[29] It is worth recalling A. C. Bradley's observation that Shakespeare seems to have given Hamlet a particular idiosyncrasy: 'a trick of speech, a habit of repetition', in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p.143. Some examples of this 'habit' are noted by Bradley (pp.143-44), such as 'Thrift, thrift, Horatio' (1.2.180), 'Words, words, words' (2.2.189) and 'except my life, except my life, except my life' (2.2.210). Even on a local, verbal level, the play keeps repeating itself, questioning the notion of an 'original' utterance. Hamlet's very utterances—his words, words, words—are made to appear echoes of themselves, even ghostly.

which offers nothing determinate to be known'.[30] Yet rather than being simply a 'hollow void', Hamlet is all too aware of his 'inner sanctum'; the problem for Hamlet—and, implicitly, for Shakespeare—is conveying this unseen self to the spectators. It might be instructive here to consider Hamlet's speech in relation to his Shakespearean precursors, in particular Lucrece and Richard II. These two characters have problems not only in expressing their grief but also in attempting to *show* it. Both characters acknowledge that conveying one's grief to the outside world must be bound up with the means of its expression. As we saw in Chapter 3, Lucrece finds that she has to look to different models and modes in order to express her grief, writing a letter and then discovering literary and pictorial analogues to her own situation. Yet Hamlet goes one stage further, and suggests that all modes of external signification are ultimately unsatisfactory:

> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
> Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
> That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
> For they are actions that a man might play.
> But I have that within which passes show—
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.77-86)

Hamlet suggests that these external signs of mourning are insufficient, in that they 'alone' will be unable to 'denote' him 'truly', and he speaks of their potential falseness, in that they might be 'play[ed]'.[31] Tears and sighs, black clothes, and a facial expression of dejection will not be enough. But then, we discover, neither will '*all* forms, moods and shapes of grief' (1.2.82). Does this list include speech, or the attempt to express grief verbally? Is speaking an external

[30] Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.72. See also Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays in Subjection*, 2nd edn (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), esp. pp. 31-33.
[31] Graham Bradshaw comments that 'What [Hamlet] says is that the "trappings" cannot *alone* denote him truly, although he feels obliged to wear them. [...] he intercepts criticism by insisting that there is no way of showing grief that cannot be dissimulated, and no way of making visible that authenticating inner grief which passeth show' (*Shakespeare's Scepticism*, p.107).

signifier; a form of 'seeming'? For Hamlet, 'seeming' is associated with acting: these physical manifestations of grief, Hamlet reminds us, can be faked. Anything that could be 'acted' is potentially false; it will be somehow lacking in authenticity or value. As John Lee has written, '"That within" is of value because it cannot be duplicated, it "passeth show"'.[32] At this stage in the play, Hamlet refuses to allow his 'self' to be duplicated: he refuses to convert his predicament into a repeatable or narratable form. Yet this resistance to repetition might have something to do with the value of *Hamlet* more generally: as a play it must be repeated, and yet each performance and reading is different. The fact that *Hamlet* proclaims its own inauthenticity to us suggests that it is *already* a duplication—but the play also suggests the impossibility of bringing its original 'meaning' to the surface. Richard Lanham writes that 'The whole play [...] seeks authenticity, reality behind the arras, things as they are'.[33] But what Hamlet says about 'seeming' here seems related to this search for authenticity. While the 'original', unseen essence of Prince Hamlet is lost among these inadequate signifiers, we might wonder if the play, too, asks us to look for an original essence of *Hamlet*. This essence cannot be unearthed no matter how many times the play is repeated. Yet we might argue that the play gains an authority from the variety of different performances and re-readings that we experience. Hamlet's inner-self cannot be 'repeated', in the sense that he cannot construct a faithful representation of it, and yet the play as a whole *can* be repeated. However, the play is never exactly the same: its 'meaning' is different every time. In this way, when we watch the play we seem to be watching the trappings of an essence—we are not watching the thing itself. Like Prince Hamlet, Shakespeare's play appears to be the ghost of the 'actual' *Hamlet*.

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[32] John Lee, *Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' and the Controversies of Self* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p.157. Lee has suggested that the issues of narrative and identity in the play are inextricably linked: 'the tragedy of Hamlet does not lie in the Prince's death in the final scene. Rather it inheres in the Prince's life, in his struggle to find an identity or story that will express him' (p.206).
[33] Lanham, *Motives of Eloquence*, p.137.

Katherine Eisaman Maus begins her study of *Inwardness and Theatre in the English Renaissance* (1995) by examining this speech, which is suggestive of the speech's centrality to the whole question of subjectivity in Renaissance studies. Maus writes that '[Hamlet's] black attire, his sigh, his tear fail to denote him truly not because they are false—Hamlet's sorrow for his father is sincere—but because they *might* be false, because some other person might conceivably employ them deceitfully'.[34] But who might this 'some other person' actually be? Could it be the actor playing Hamlet? It is worth noting that Shakespeare often exploits Hamlet's ambivalence towards—and fascination with—acting to make Hamlet seem compellingly real. In particular, we might think of the mimetic effects of Hamlet's 'antic disposition'. When Hamlet says that he is going to 'put an antic disposition on' (1.5.172), he is saying, effectively, that 'from this point on I am going to be acting'. By doing this, Shakespeare almost manages to remove one layer of representation from the performance we are seeing. We might articulate Hamlet's position thus: 'I am an actor; you will see me doing strange and inexplicable, even contradictory things, but remember than I am me underneath it all—that I do have an internal self behind this show of madness'. The performance of the actor playing Hamlet—his words and actions—becomes Hamlet's performance of his antic disposition, while the distinction between Hamlet and the actor playing him becomes decidedly blurred.

Hamlet sets up a metaphysical hierarchy between seeming and being, thinking that signs are secondary to what they signify: 'Seems madam? nay it is, I know not seems' (1.2.76). Despite the extravagance of Hamlet's 'trappings' of woe, what we see on stage, Hamlet says, is not the thing itself: it only *seems* to be the thing itself. To be able to act his grief, to show it, Hamlet suggests, is impossible. The show would not be the thing itself, and therefore it would be false; or at least, at one remove from the actual grief, which is, as Hamlet imagines it, 'within' him. It is: it cannot be shown, described or represented.

[34] Katherine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theatre in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), p.1.

Nonetheless, by dismissing acting and show in this speech, Hamlet is gesturing towards an interiority that he supposedly possesses. These modes of seeming gain an authenticity through Hamlet's acknowledgement of what they cannot do, and we might relate this to Marjorie Garber's description of a ghost: 'the sign of what is there by not being there'.[35] Instead of simply signifying Hamlet's grief, these signifiers become signifiers of their own inadequacy at performing their task: they represent something by refusing to represent it. In terms of the way in which it is presented to us, Hamlet's self is there by not being there: paradoxically, it appears more 'real' by proclaiming its ghostliness to us. But how does Hamlet's apparent distrust of acting in this diatribe against 'seeming' relate to his reaction to the Player's Speech in 2.2?

4. The Relativity of Sorrows

As we saw in Chapter 2, Shakespeare's tragedies are often indebted to other sad stories, and not only the narrative sources that Shakespeare drew upon. Other narratives and, in particular, certain modes of epic narrative appear to have been in Shakespeare's mind during the composition of his tragedies—clearly he could not stop thinking about other texts that deal with 'tragic' subject matter. One tragic character seems to have held particular fascination for Shakespeare. In *Titus Andronicus*, Young Lucius uses the story of Hecuba to interpret the actions of his aunt: 'I have read that Hecuba of Troy / Ran mad for sorrow' (4.1.20-21). It turns out, however, that this narrative does not 'explain' the behaviour of Lavinia, despite the boy's finding the story relevant and compelling. Did Shakespeare also find this story, from Ovid and Virgil, a kind of tragic blueprint, or what Jonathan Bate calls 'an archetypal set piece'?[36] Here is Hecuba in the *Metamorphoses*, when she comes across Polydorus's corpse:

> But shee was dumb for sorrow.
> The anguish of her hart forclosde as well her speech as eeke

[35] Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers*, p.129.
[36] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p.191.

Her teares devowring them within. Shee stood astonyed leeke
As if shee had beene stone. One whyle the ground shee staared uppon.
Another whyle a gastly looke shee kest too heaven. Anon
Shee looked on the face of him that lay before her killd.
(*Metamorphoses*, trans. Golding, XIII, 645-50)

As Jonathan Bate has suggested, Hecuba's silence—the extremity of her emotional state preventing her from expressing her sorrows—is highly Shakespearean, suggesting that Shakespeare's tragedies are haunted by the ghosts of Hecuba and Ovid.[37] Several of Shakespeare's characters seem to have Hecuba in mind when they are attempting to articulate their sorrow.[38] In the last chapter, we saw how Lucrece found a pictorial depiction of Hecuba extremely compelling, reading her own predicament in the light of Hecuba's sorrows. However, there are problems with authenticating one's expressions by appropriating literary antecedents. We might ask whether comparing one's suffering to that of characters from other texts brings about a universalizing effect, or if it is an irrelevant and unhelpful textualising of experience. Clifford Leech has written that 'tragedy is a form of writing, not a form of living'.[39] If this is the case, then perhaps we ought to expect Shakespeare's tragedies to be inhabited by and in dialogue with other written texts and 'tragic' precursors. We might also suggest that there is something about tragedy that prompts its characters to reflect upon their position in relation to other suffering individuals; and that there is always something *comparative* about our sorrows, or, indeed, all of our emotional responses.[40] Richard II comments on this aspect of suffering:

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[37] Bate quotes this passage from the *Metamorphoses*, relating it to *King Lear*, although it seems relevant to Shakespearean tragedy more generally, and perhaps *Hamlet* in particular. See *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p.191.

[38] Hecuba is also referred to in *Gorboduc* (1561), one of the earliest English tragedies, as 'the woefullest wretch / That ever lived, to make a mirror of' (3.1.14-15; quoted in *Hamlet*, ed. Jenkins, p.480). Clearly Hecuba was often held up as a classical exemplar or, indeed, a 'mirror' for suffering individuals to see themselves in.

[39] Clifford Leech, *Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1969), p.68.

[40] In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Tess happens upon some pheasants that are either dead or 'writhing in agony', and she compares her plight with theirs: '"Poor darlings—to suppose myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight o' such misery as yours!"'. See Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, ed. Juliet Grindle and Simon Gattrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.271 (Chapter 41). At the start of Chapter 42, Hardy's narrator writes that Tess's

Thoughts tending to content flatter themselves
That they are not the first of fortune's slaves,
Nor shall not be the last—like seely beggars,
Who sitting in the stocks refuge their shame,
That many have and others must sit there;
And in this thought they find a kind of ease,
Bearing their own misfortunes on the back
Of such as have before endur'd the like. (*Richard II*, 5.5.23-30)

Richard suggests that it is 'seely beggars' who take solace in placing their suffering in the context of others, suggesting that there is something foolish about attempting to contextualise one's plight in such a situation. Yet
It is clear that Hamlet likes comparing his sufferings with those of other *literary* figures, as we do in life. *Hamlet* contains numerous classical references, but when Hamlet requests the Player's Speech, it is as if he—like Lucrece—is attempting to find another mode in which to express himself. Will the classical mode of the speech be more effective at showing Hamlet's grief? Or will turning to this story be a classical model for Hamlet to imitate?[41] The speech tells of the trials of Pyrrhus, Priam and Hecuba; but it also raises many important questions about the nature of representation. For while Lucrece—a character in a narrative poem—found solace in a pictorial representation of Hecuba, in *Hamlet* we find an extract from another play. It is typical of *Hamlet*'s obsession with self-reference that it should include a passage from another dramatic text. And yet, the piece which Hamlet chooses is not an especially 'dramatic' extract: it is 'Aeneas' *tale* to Dido' (2.2.404-5); a piece of narrative taken from a dramatic work. However, this is a play, we learn, which was 'never acted, or if it was, not above once' (2.2.395-96). Intriguingly, this anonymous play was performed only once—if it was performed at all. The suggestion that there was a single performance of this play, which Hamlet found so memorable, posits yet another unseen 'original' text behind the text of *Hamlet*. This play was never repeated, but it gains its authority by being performed only once, suggesting that Shakespeare is contrasting *Hamlet* with this unnamed play—a play which had a

'recollection of the birds' silent endurance of their night of agony impress[ed] upon her the relativity of sorrows, and the tolerable nature of her own' (p.272).
[41] See Kastan, '"His semblance is his mirror"', p.113.

single, original, authoritative performance, of which subsequent performances are a belated copy.

Hamlet's choice of story is an interesting one; for one thing, the piece of narrative he remembers includes a moment of stasis. While we might want to see this as being analogous with Hamlet's own inactivity, this inaction also comments upon the problems of this passage of narrative being included as part of the action of *Hamlet*. Dr Johnson noted that 'The action [of *Hamlet*] is indeed for the most part continual progression, but there are some scenes which neither forward nor retard it'.[42] This scene is notable for its lack of action: in performance we watch several static characters on stage, one uttering this long extract, supposedly from another play. We are expected to concentrate on the First Player's attempts to convey this absent, described scene of Pyrrhus and Priam to the mind's eye—and the speech is certainly noteworthy for its focus on visual qualities and details.[43] It attempts to create a visual image of the act of revenge; but the speech also makes us identify Pyrrhus with Hamlet. When Pyrrhus lay in the Trojan Horse, he 'did the night resemble', with his 'sable arms, / Black as his purpose' (2.2.410-11). Now that Pyrrhus has been busy killing Trojans, however, he is 'total gules, horridly tricked / With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons' (2.2.415-16). Hamlet, who first appeared to us in black, must—like Pyrrhus—end up covered in blood in order to become an 'authentic' revenger. However, this image is not necessarily an attractive one. Is 'The rugged Pyrrhus' a model for Hamlet or for Claudius? And is Priam a model for Claudius or for Old Hamlet? As with 'The Mousetrap', it is not clear whether this inset narrative is an image of the past or Hamlet's prediction of what will take place in the future—as if the play is working out its own problem of inaction

[42] *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Woudhuysen, p.243. David Young comments that 'The whole episode of the players [...] may be seen as a structural dilation, a slowing-down of action and forward movement while questions of interest—in this case questions that are remarkably reflective to the dramatic medium itself—are investigated and discussed', in *The Action to the Word: Structure and Style in Shakespearean Tragedy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), pp.26-27.
[43] See Arthur Johnson, 'The Player's Speech in *Hamlet*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 13 (1962), 21-30 (p.25).

through other forms of art. The story of Pyrrhus and Priam, too, reaches a moment of stasis, as Pyrrhus's sword seems to freeze in mid air:

> for lo, his sword,
> Which was declining on the milky head
> Of reverend Priam, seemed i'th'air to stick.
> So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood,
> And like a neutral to his will and matter,
> Did nothing.
> (2.2.435-40)

Pyrrhus is said to be like 'a painted tyrant', as if he were a frozen, static work of art. Indeed, the Player's Speech can be read as another example of a Shakespearean ekphrasis.[44] The line (or rather half-line, or hemistich) 'Did nothing' (2.2.440) is especially interesting, as it not only describes a pause in the action of the narrative, but also produces a *metrical* pause. The metrical regularity of the previous lines makes the listener (and indeed reader) expect another iambic pentameter, so the fact that the line is only two words long means that the eye sees—and the ear hears—a gap in the verse, a gap that corresponds to the pause in Pyrrhus's action as described by the narrative. Furthermore, this shortened line demands to be read or recited slowly as it stretches out to fill the gap that comes after it. In addition, the fact that 'Did nothing' is metrically irregular—with two heavily stressed syllables at the beginning of the line—slows the rate at which the words can be spoken, forcing the Player to enact Pyrrhus's pause. Pyrrhus's state of active suspension, the suspense of the narrative describing Pyrrhus, the dramatic suspense induced by the Player suspending the play's 'action' as onstage narrator, the suspension of meter, and the full stop at the end of the phrase 'Did nothing', all occur simultaneously to extraordinary effect. *Hamlet* itself seems to grind to a halt at this point: the play, too, seems to do nothing.

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[44] Ruth Webb writes that, for ancient rhetoricians, '*Ekphrasis* was an evocation of a scene, often a scene unfolding in time like a battle, a murder or the sack of a city', in '*Ekphrasis* ancient and modern: the invention of a genre', *Word and Image*, 15 (1999), 7-18 (p.14).

Hamlet might want to see this moment of inactivity as a metaphor for his own state, consoling himself with the idea that his failure to kill Claudius is only the result of a temporary pause—that it is merely the calm before the storm:

> But as we often see against some storm,
> A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still,
> The bold winds speechless, and the orb below
> As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder
> Doth rend the region; so after Pyrrhus' pause,
> A rousèd vengeance sets him new a-work,
> And never did the Cyclops' hammers fall
> On Mars's armour, forged for proof eterne,
> With less remorse than Pyrrhus's bleeding sword
> Now falls on Priam. (2.2.441-50)

The Player speaks of how we often see a 'silence in the heavens', or 'the rack stand still', or 'the bold winds speechless', but the effect of these poetic similes —what Lawrence Danson calls the 'retarding motion of the verse'—is to extend Pyrrhus's pause still further.[45] While the Player's Speech (eventually) describes Pyrrhus's new course of action, *Hamlet* has become, in the words of Dr Johnson, 'unanimated and inactive', and the play comes to resist this intrusion of the narrative mode.[46] As we saw at the start of Chapter 1, this artistic problem is voiced by Polonius: 'This is too long' (2.2.456). Hamlet, on the other hand, appears to be entirely absorbed by the Player's narrative, and tells the Player to ignore Polonius's interruption: 'Say on, come to Hecuba' (2.2.458-59). Such is the power of the second part of the Player's narrative—the part that deals with Hecuba—that Polonius appears to find himself moved by the Player's performance, and asks him to break off his speech: 'Look where he has not turned his colour and has tears in's eyes. Prithee no more' (2.2.477-78). Yet the story that the Player tells—a story that Hamlet clearly finds immensely compelling—has disturbing overtones. For if Hamlet identifies himself with

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[45] Lawrence Danson, *Tragic Alphabet: Shakespeare's Drama of Language* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), p.41. On the suggestiveness of the word *still* in the context of ekphrastic writing—meaning both 'Motionless; not moving from one place, stationary' (*OED* 1), and 'Constant, continual; continued until now' (*OED* 7)—see Krieger's 1967 essay '*Ekphrasis* and the Still Movement of Poetry; or *Laokoön* revisited', reprinted in *Ekphrasis*, pp.263-88.
[46] *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Woudhuysen, p.131.

Pyrrhus, then he not only finds himself aligned with a bloody revenger, he also finds himself identified with Claudius, another man who killed a King.[47] Revenge, then, is also a form of repetition: by repeating Claudius's crime of regicide—the Player's Speech implies—Hamlet becomes the ghost of Claudius. Here, as with 'The Mousetrap', Hamlet thinks that art will have a univocal function, that it will provide clear moral exempla, and that it mirrors the 'real' world in a specific manner. However, the relationship that both the Player's Speech and 'The Mousetrap' have with the larger play is problematic and ambiguous. While these narrative insets appear to tell the story of *Hamlet* again—to be a repetition—they are not the same. As a result, it is difficult to compare them with the play proper in any simple sense.

It would appear that Hamlet thinks that the story of Pyrrhus, Priam and Hecuba will allow him to express his grief more effectively, or create a comforting intertextual analogy for his plight. In this way, it might teach him how to react to his own story, making sense of his predicament. And yet, in the soliloquy that follows the Player's Speech, Hamlet appears to be all too aware that this literary precedent is a fiction. He berates himself for not reacting to his own 'real' situation in the same way that the Player does to a 'fictional' situation: that of Hecuba. As Hamlet points out, the Player does not have any external grounds for his lament: it is created by 'borrowing' his emotional motivation from the tale of Hecuba:

> O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all his visage wanned,
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing?
> For Hecuba! (2.2.502-10)

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[47] As David Scott Kastan writes, 'Pyrrhus, then, becomes a figure both of the avenging son and of the father's murderer, subverting any moral distinction in the single example which shows at once "virtue her feature" and "scorns her own image"' ('"His semblance is his mirror"', p.113).

But in what sense is Hecuba 'nothing'? If Hecuba is 'nothing'—a mere story; a fiction—then what is Hamlet? Hamlet presumably finds Hecuba's displays of emotion impressive, for example in the Player's description of her seeming to extinguish the burning city of Troy with her tears, 'threat'ning the flames / With bisson rheum' (2.2.563-64). Yet Hamlet is also captivated by the Player's ability to *show* his suffering, and—ironically—the same external forms of grief that Hamlet had referred to so disparagingly earlier: a wanned visage, tears, and a broken voice. According to Hamlet, the player is able to do that which Hamlet cannot do—bring his suffering to the surface: 'his whole function suiting / With forms to his conceit' (2.2.508-9).[48] Here, the 'show' appears to be authentic. However, it is perhaps surprising that Hamlet does not end up wanting to emulate Pyrrhus, carrying out an act of revenge inspired by the Player's narrative, but wants to be like the Player. Hamlet is fascinated by, and envious of, not the exemplar from the story, but the manner of its expression—the means of its telling. He is particularly interested in the effect of this story upon the person telling it. Hamlet comes to wonder how the player would (re)act if he had the 'real' (as opposed to fictional) motivation for grief that Hamlet himself has. Michael Neill offers the following paraphrase of Hamlet's speech: 'What might the player's art be capable of if it were charged with Hamlet's own suppressed narrative?'.[49] But it is also as if Hamlet wishes that the Player could play his part for him:

> What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
> That he should weep for her? What would he do,
> Had he the motive and the cue for passion
> That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,
> And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
> Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
> Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
> The very faculties of eyes and ears. (2.2.511-18)

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[48] Edwards's gloss for this phrase seems apt: 'all his bodily powers producing the expressions proper to his imaginings' (note to 2.2.508-9)
[49] Neill, *Issues of Death*, p.227.

Here Hamlet describes what he sees as the arbitrary relationship between the Player and Hecuba: why should the Player weep for a fictional character? Hamlet suggests that if the Player had his 'real' motivation for grief—rather than borrowing his suffering from literary models—the Player's response would appear more 'authentic' than Hamlet's own attempts to express this grief. While the Player's presentation of his fictional suffering *seems* authentic, Hamlet implicitly admits that his own presentation of his 'real' suffering is false, or *in*authentic. And yet, the complex relationship that Hamlet sets up between himself and the Player seems to point towards Hamlet's authentic inner-suffering. We can never see this internal grief, but Hamlet tells us what he thinks an ideal performance of this grief would look and sound like. However, this performance is unseen, except through Hamlet's verbal description. This performance would be both visual and aural, and would amaze 'The very faculties of eyes and ears' (2.2.518), but we do not experience it. Furthermore, while 'motive' and 'cue' (2.2.513) are applied to the Player, they also suggest that Hamlet possesses a metatheatrical awareness of his own fictitiousness, adding further to the complexity of what Hamlet says. Does Hamlet wish that he was more 'real', or does he simply wish that he could be a better actor? The image of a man not only weeping, but drowning the stage with tears, is presumably how Hamlet thinks he *should* be reacting to his predicament. Here, Hamlet imagines a performance that would be pure, unalloyed grief, unmixed with artistic 'conceit'. The Player would only able to utter 'horrid speech', a phrase suggestive of wordless noise, suggesting that Hamlet thinks that his grief cannot be expressed verbally. Yet Hamlet finds that he is 'unpregnant of his cause, / And can say nothing' (2.2.520-21). Here Hamlet appears to be echoing the Player's description of Pyrrhus, who '*Did* nothing' (2.2.440), while Hamlet can '*say* nothing'.[50] While Hamlet clearly has no trouble speaking, it would appear that he remains dissatisfied with his attempts to turn his grief into language; he is unhappy that he 'Must like a whore unpack [his] heart with

[50] Anne Barton comments that Hamlet 'has just been contemplating the Player's over-reaction to the Hecuba speech, but his choice of the verb *say* as opposed to the word *do* is still peculiar and revealing' ('Introduction' to *Hamlet*, ed. Spencer, p.43).

words' (2.2.568). By the play's final scene, Hamlet appears to have a new-found confidence in the ability of language to represent him faithfully. However, Hamlet's confidence about the successful conversion of his self into narrative—into a repeatable, representable form—coincides with his coming to terms with his own ghostliness; with his own death.

5. The Rest is History

Hamlet ends with the cue for a retelling of its own story; but this promise of storytelling comes to be figured as a continuation both of Hamlet's life—in the form of the story that is to be told by Horatio—but also as a repetition of *Hamlet* itself. One striking aspect of the play's final scene is that the Ghost fails to appear, unlike the ghost in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, which makes another, final, appearance. Instead, Hamlet takes on the qualities of his father's ghost, as he attempts to ensure that he will survive in Horatio's narrative:

> You that look pale, and tremble at this chance,
> That are but mutes or audience to this act,
> Had I but time, as this fell sergeant death
> Is strict in his arrest, oh I could tell you—
> But let it be. Horatio, I am dead,
> Thou livest; report me and my cause aright
> To the unsatisfied. (5.2.313-19)

Intriguingly, Hamlet's language here echoes that of Barnardo in the play's opening scene, as he watches Horatio's reaction to the Ghost: 'How now Horatio? you tremble and look pale' (1.1.53). It is as if *we* are now watching a ghost: the ghost of Prince Hamlet. Shakespeare has extended Hamlet's death moment to allow Hamlet himself to articulate it, but Hamlet's use of the phrase 'I am dead' suggests that he is *already* dead. Moreover, this statement also suggests that Hamlet has been dead since the play began, as if he has always been a fictional ghost. Hamlet wants Horatio to finish off his 'story'; but what is it, we ask ourselves, that Hamlet could have told us? We want to ask Ophelia's

question which followed the dumb show: 'Will a tell us what this show meant?' (3.2.126). The explanation for the tragedy, the answers we seek, are missing.

Hamlet is clearly concerned with how he will be remembered if events are not explained: 'O God, Horatio, what a wounded name, / Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!' (5.2.323-34). This statement suggests that Hamlet hopes Horatio will tell his story in a favourable light—that Horatio will convert Hamlet's life into the tale of a virtuous prince. Hamlet is already preparing posthumously for the reception of his life's story:

> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
> To tell my story. (5.2.325-28)

But as well as imagining a story which is to be told, its telling postponed until after the close of *Hamlet*, we are also referred back to the same narrative of *Hamlet* we have just witnessed; this is why Hamlet's anticipation of his story being told as a dramatic narrative is so uncanny.[51] However, we might begin to wonder how far the story that Hamlet imagines and the narrative of the play we have just seen coincide. Thomas Hyde has written that 'The audience feels privileged to have witnessed the actual events rather than their narrative re-presentation'.[52] But the sense that we have witnessed the 'actual events' is a mimetic effect of the text—this is precisely what we have *not* witnessed: we have merely seen a representation. For whether we read the play or experience it in performance, we are experiencing a 'retelling'. Every performance, every reading is different. As James Calderwood writes, 'We tend to think of these performances as different versions of a platonically ideal *Hamlet*, as various actual circles are imperfect representations of ideal circularity'.[53] And yet, as

[51] See John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.189.
[52] Thomas Hyde, 'Identity and Acting in Elizabethan Tragedy', *Renaissance Drama*, 15 (1984), 93-114 (p.113).
[53] Calderwood, *To Be and Not to Be*, p.184.

Calderwood himself notes, *Hamlet* is a play: it is nothing like a circle, suggesting that there might be no platonically ideal *Hamlet*.

Peter Sacks has written of the elegiac qualities of these final moments, and the ways in which they refer us back to what we have just seen and to future retellings:

> The distance traversed is nothing less than that from vengeful to elegiac pursuits, from action to language. And with the request, or rather bequest of storytelling, the play refers back to itself, as though suggesting that its entire unfolding could already have been a version of that "story". [...] It is as if the play were thus a prologue to its own reenactment—or, rather, renarration—being recast this time in words alone.[54]

But what form does Sacks imagine that these words take? 'Recast' might suggest a written narrative, but perhaps he is thinking primarily of Horatio's oral report. Either way, this transition of Hamlet's life into words is less effective than Sacks might assume. At the very moment when Hamlet seems to be at his most 'real', free from acting and stories, we realise that he has always already been a story, possibly even with an awareness of his *written*-ness.[55] Nonetheless, even *Hamlet* itself can only be one version of Hamlet's story. For one thing, we know that the play we read is not a definitive text. The so-called 'bad' Quarto in particular is a garbled summary, a badly remembered retelling of a more 'authentic' version. But this first Quarto is nonetheless valued by critics for being a record of the 'original' performances of Hamlet. Calling the first Quarto 'bad' further creates the impression that there is a definitive *Hamlet* out there

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[54] Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp.88-89.

[55] Hamlet's impossible utterance 'I am dead', is a phrase discussed by Jacques Derrida in *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973); Derrida suggests that this phrase accompanies every written 'I am': 'The statement "I am alive" is accompanied by my being dead, and its possibility requires the possibility that I be dead; and conversely. [...] Earlier we reached the "I am mortal" from the "I am"; here we understand the "I am" out of the "I am dead"' (pp.96-97). Could it be that Hamlet knows he is already part of the scriptive order? See Jonathan Goldberg, 'Hamlet's Hand', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39 (1988), 307-27 (esp. pp.323-24). In *Titus Andronicus* Aaron uses the same phrase, making a striking connection between death, writing and the body, as he tells Lucius how he wrote on dead men's bodies 'Let not your sorrow die though I am dead' (5.1.140).

somewhere. However, even the play's two 'authoritative' texts—the second Quarto (1604) and the 1623 Folio—are significantly different. We find that this textual multiplicity further confounds our attempts to locate a singular, definitive version of the play.[56]

We certainly cannot be sure that Horatio can offer a definitive account. James Calderwood even suggests that Horatio's narrative might be no better than the version we find in Q1: 'Horatio's story is merely a bad quarto of Shakespeare's play, a pirated edition based on memorial reconstruction by an actor who, though he knows much, cannot possible know all that has happened in the castle at Elsinore or on the stage of the Globe'.[57] But in what sense can Horatio's story be a 'bad *quarto*'? Does Calderwood imagine that Horatio will go off and write another version of Shakespeare's play? When Fortinbras and the English ambassadors arrive, Horatio asks us to imagine a *spoken* narrative, and tells us what his story will consist of, creating a context for its telling:

> So shall you hear
> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
> And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
> Fallen on th'inventors' heads. All this can I
> Truly deliver. (5.2.359-65)

As various commentators have noted, despite claiming to be able to deliver 'Truly', Horatio's prologue does not sound like an accurate summary of the play's events. But then, Horatio has not seen the play's events from our own—or Hamlet's—perspective. Anne Barton comments that 'Horatio astonishes us by leaving out everything that seems important, reducing all that is distinctive

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[56] The notion of ghostliness might also be a useful way of thinking about the question of text versus performance. For example, do we see a Shakespearean text as being the 'ghost' of a performance? Or is the performance the 'original'? As Michael Dobson has recently asked, 'Is a play's printed text to be seen as prior and superior to its theatrical embodiments, which if so are only belated, partial, and imperfect glosses upon an essentially literary artefact? Or is that text itself to be seen as only a belated, partial, and imperfect souvenir of a theatrical event, the incomplete written trace of a dramatic work which can only fully be realized in performance?', in 'Shakespeare on the page and the stage', p.235.
[57] Calderwood, *To Be and Not to Be*, p.xii.

about this play to a plot stereotype. Although his tale is, on one level, accurate enough, it is certainly not Hamlet's "story"'.[58] But on what 'level' is Horatio's tale 'accurate enough'? We should remember that Horatio is addressing Fortinbras, a practical man of war, one who is more concerned with the question of the succession: he will no doubt be quite satisfied with Horatio's simplified narrative retelling of events. The final funeral procession, then, rather than bringing about closure, is instead a prologue to an offstage re-enactment of the story—though what form this re-enactment will take is left for us to imagine. As Calderwood writes, 'Even Horatio's story, which symbolizes the recovery and perpetuation of the play, transforms drama into narrative, and this loses at least as much in form as it does in content'.[59] By imagining Horatio's spoken narrative, Calderwood argues that Shakespeare implies a 'degenerative linearity' as well as a circular return to the beginning of the play. In the play itself the Ghost's narrative was converted—problematically—into a drama ('The Murder of Gonzago'); now the play is turned back into a narrative, back into the form in which Shakespeare found his source material in Saxo Grammaticus and Belleforest, which are themselves earlier versions of Hamlet's 'story'.

However, at the end of his treatment of the play's ending, Calderwood seems to lose faith in the complexity of the play, and gains a new faith in Horatio's ability to tell Hamlet's story:

> But these arguments seem overly complicated. More simply, the tone and mood of the ending of the play establish Horatio as an authority, an ideal teller who, even in narrative form and despite the obvious limitations of his knowledge, can recapture to everyone's satisfaction all that has taken place. I think, that is, that we must take his word on faith when he says "All this can I / Truly Deliver." (p.184)

But the 'tone and mood' of the play's ending is anything but simple. Furthermore, as Calderwood argues on the same page that there is no ideal *Hamlet*, is seems odd that he should believe Horatio to be an ideal teller.

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[58] Barton, 'Introduction' to *Hamlet*, ed. Spencer, p.52.
[59] Calderwood, *To Be and Not to Be*, p.184.

Horatio's narrative might contain one possible version of the play's story, but it is difficult to imagine Shakespeare being satisfied that Horatio would be able to 'recapture [...] all that has taken place'. In his essay 'The Storyteller', Walter Benjamin has written that 'the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings'.[60] Certainly *Hamlet* has been retold countless times in the years since its composition, in a variety of critical interpretations and creative reworkings; but, as we have seen, the play seems to retell itself so many times within the text that it gives the impression of having always already been a retelling.

6. Conclusion

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare seems unusually preoccupied with narrative. However, as we have seen, he subjects the very idea to searching interrogation, questioning the ability of narrative to make sense of the world. In particular, Shakespeare exposes the *ghostliness* of narrative: it is highlighted as a mode of discourse that creates a belated, secondary 'reality' that is both there and not there; a non-corporeal, ghostly version of the events that it attempts to reproduce. In this way, *Hamlet* might be seen to emphasise and reflect upon the 'ghostliness' inherent in every fictional work, and representation more generally. Jacques Derrida begins his study *Specters of Marx* (1994) with an extended meditation on the opening of *Hamlet*:

> Repetition *and* first time: this is the question of the event as question of the ghost. *What is* a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes of it also a *last time*. Each time is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other.[61]

[60] Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p.93.
[61] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p.10.

Hamlet manages to appear both repetition *and* first time. But as Derrida obliquely suggests, while *Hamlet* insists upon its simulacral nature, it also gains an authenticity from this: each time it appears to be 'the event itself', even as it deconstructs the opposition between the thing itself and its copy. Derrida continues his discussion by suggesting that 'a specter is always a *revenant.* One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*' (p.11). But it is also difficult to make sense of the comings and goings of *Hamlet.* The play does not simply begin: it returns, in the manner of a ghost. It gives the impression of being a retelling, one that, like Barnardo's story in the opening scene, is about a ghost. But a ghost is only half there to begin with. This sense of ghostliness that the play generates actually adds to the feeling that there is a 'real' *Hamlet* out there somewhere, waiting for us to discover it. There is a sense that when we read or attempt to interpret the play, we are attempting to unearth a more 'original' version; but this supposed original is an effect of the text of *Hamlet.* If Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is its own *Ur-Hamlet*, then perhaps the play is also its own ghost.

Chapter 5

'I would not take this from report': Reading and Experiencing *King Lear*

We saw in Chapter 3 how *The Rape of Lucrece* is concerned with the question of whether 'To see sad sights moves more than hear them told' (1254), and the present chapter is, in part, an attempt to consider *King Lear* in the light of this statement. There is a continual emphasis upon 'seeing' in *King Lear*, and there are many references to both literal and metaphorical blindness, including 'See better, Lear' (1.1.159) and 'I stumbled when I saw' (4.1.21).[1] In the play's opening scene, Goneril implies that seeing is the most valuable of the senses when she claims that she loves her father 'Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty, / Beyond what can be valued' (1.1.56-57). Indeed, the play asks whether *seeing* something is more valuable than having others tell us about it, or more valuable than *reading* about it, as if Shakespeare is implicitly asking whether the play should be read or performed. A. C. Bradley notoriously argued that 'The stage is the test of strictly dramatic quality, and *King Lear* is too huge for the stage'.[2] For Bradley, the play is unperformable, except in the mind's eye: the blinding of Gloucester on stage is 'revolting and shocking', he writes, but 'it is otherwise in reading' (p.232). Bradley would prefer to experience the scene of Gloucester's blinding without actually seeing it.[3] By *reading* the play we experience 'the wider or universal significance of the spectacle presented to the inward eye' (p.247). *King Lear* is, we learn, 'one of the world's greatest poems' (p.255). Bradley, then, wishes to experience the play as a 'spectacle', but one

[1] All quotations from the play are taken from *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1997). Foakes's edition identifies words and passages unique to Quarto and Folio by framing them with superscript [Q]s and [F]s respectively, which I have retained. I have also consulted the two versions of the play in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
[2] Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p.228.
[3] The blinding of Gloucester in 3.7 is an immensely *visual* scene, a spectacle of (excessive?) violence that almost demands to be seen; but it is also a scene about blinding, about *preventing* someone from seeing. Indeed, we might suggest that there is something self-reflexive about a scene in which the audience watches someone having their eyes removed, as if the play is committing an act of violence upon our eyes as well.

that is presented to his 'inward eye'. Charles Lamb also preferred to internalise the play, believing that we can experience the tragedy more directly through the solitary experience of reading: 'On the stage we see nothing but corporeal infirmities and weaknesses, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear, we are in his mind'. He concludes that: 'Lear is essentially impossible to be represented on a stage'.[4] I want to suggest that the play itself explores the difference between seeing an unmediated, 'authentic' tragic experience and having it conveyed to us at a distance; recollected in tranquillity, or even read. In his Arden edition of the play, R. A. Foakes argues that 'Plays have a double life, in the mind as read, and on the stage as acted; reading a play and seeing it acted are two different but equally valid and valuable experiences' (p.4). But as a play which is itself concerned with the question of value, and the problems of valuing one thing over another, what might *King Lear* have to tell us about texts and performance? Or the difference between hearing about things and reading about them?

King Lear asks to be read as a testing of the limits of art, a meditation on the difficulty of presenting an authentic, 'tragic' experience. Is it possible to turn grief into language successfully? Can we ever really 'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say' (5.3.323)? *King Lear* is also concerned with the relationship between tragedy and narrative: the play's characters, in particular Edgar, often attempt to impose a narrative structure upon the play's events, and attach meanings to them.[5] This is an unenviable task, as the events depicted in *King Lear* are far more bleak and unbearable than those we find in *Hamlet*, for example. In *King Lear* Shakespeare seems deliberately to be cultivating

[4] Charles Lamb, 'On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for stage representation' (1811), reprinted in *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, ed. Jonathan Bate (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), pp.123-24. More recently, Harold Bloom has concurred: 'Our directors and actors are defeated by this play, and I begin to agree with Charles Lamb that we ought to keep rereading *King Lear* and avoid its staged travesties' (*Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), p.476).

[5] In *Shakespeare's Scepticism*, Graham Bradshaw writes that Edgar 'is both a participant in a stubbornly unconventional "tragedy", and a surrogate critic or commentator, who is continually struggling to make sense of, or impose sense on, arbitrary and contingent horrors' (p.88).

incoherence and resisting straightforward moralising. As Richard Fly has written, 'we seem inevitably to encounter an artist intent on exploding customary systems of coherence and frames of representation'.[6] Shakespeare comes to question the power of narrative—and art more generally—to persuade and to create fictions. In this chapter, I argue that *King Lear* manifests a profound ambivalence towards art, writing and theatrical representation. I suggest ways in which Edmund and Edgar—both of whom construct morally questionable narratives—can be seen as figures for the playwright, and that through these two characters Shakespeare comes to interrogate his own artistry.[7] In this way, *King Lear* anticipates Shakespeare's late plays, and—in particular—*The Winter's Tale* and the figure of Autolycus. One of the most suggestive lines in *King Lear* is Edgar's 'I would not take this from report: it is, / And my heart breaks at it' (4.6.137-38). This stark phrase, 'it is'—reminiscent of Hamlet's 'Seems madam? nay it is, I know not seems' (1.2.76)—suggests something of Shakespeare's quest for an *un*-artful 'reality' that cannot be described in language, or represented in narrative form. Perhaps this is what Lear is getting at when he says to Edgar 'thou art the thing itself' (3.4.104), suggesting that both Lear and the play share a desire to show life as it 'really' is.[8] Yet Shakespeare demonstrates that this paring down to 'the thing itself' is fraught with difficulty, and even undesirable: that people *need* excess and superfluity in order to exist. Shakespeare dramatises not only the difficulty of imposing narrative meanings and value upon experience, but also our simultaneous need

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[6] Richard Fly, *Shakespeare's Mediated World* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976), pp.89-90.
[7] In 'Creative Uncreation in *King Lear*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 37 (1986), 5-19, James L. Calderwood has suggested that 'in his reportorial role [Edgar] specializes in secondhand experience in a way somewhat like that of the poet' (p.11).
[8] Calderwood argues that 'Shakespeare is engaged in a kind of creative uncreation' (p.5) in the play, and that 'in subjecting *King Lear* to a state of entropic uncreation Shakespeare is stripping it of "report" en route to the naked "it is" of immediate experience' (p.8). The present chapter focuses upon how the issues that Calderwood's essay raises—concerning the competition between visual immediacy and 'report'—feed into the question of text versus performance. When we *read* the play, do we, too, quest after 'the thing itself', as its characters seem to? In *Tragic Alphabet*, Lawrence Danson suggests that 'the language of the play "imitates" one of the play's dominant actions, the stripping away of old social forms until they are as naked as "the thing itself" and ready (possibly) for a rebirth in a new dispensation' (p.178). However, Danson's bracketed 'possibly' suggests the problems of this quest for 'the thing itself'.

to attempt to do so. In this way, *King Lear*, arguably Shakespeare's most affecting tragedy, also represents one of his most extended explorations into both the power and limitations of art and narrative.

The first section of this chapter examines Edmund's use of a written text and a narrative account to deceive his father and brother respectively, and asks what the 'image and horror' (1.2.173) that Edmund describes, but cannot only represent 'faintly', might represent. The second section investigates the way in which the play's characters seem either to say too much or not enough, and the play's exploration of the value of 'nothing'. The third section examines Edgar's description of Dover cliff, both the extent to which this description appears to expose narrative as a kind of 'nothing', and what it reveals about the other acts of narration in the play. The fourth section examines Edgar's long narrative account in the play's final scene, and asks how this powerful, but problematic, narrative relates to Edgar's earlier proclamation that he 'would not take this from report' (4.6.137). The final section considers the play's ending, and how our witnessing Lear's death 'directly' might relate to Edgar's narrative report of Gloucester's death.

1. Reading Between the Lines

In the second scene of the play, Edmund uses a forged letter to dupe his father into believing that Edgar wants to assassinate him. By telling his father that the text he holds is 'nothing', Edmund manages to convince his father of its importance: 'The quality of nothing hath not such need to hide itself. Let's see. —Come, if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles' (1.2.34-35). Gloucester suggests that if the letter were nothing, then Edmund would not need to hide it. In this way, Edmund has managed to give the letter the quality of something, and Gloucester assumes that this text—which Edmund hides from him—has the immediacy of truth. However, Gloucester does not entertain the notion that this text might be a false one. Gloucester repeatedly demands to see the letter—

'Let's see, let's see' (1.2.43)—with what Sigurd Burckhardt has called 'an ignoble greediness for "the real thing"'. Burckhardt continues: 'Determined as he is to distrust the direct word, [Gloucester] is at the mercy of report, of hearsay, of signs. With this scene, the letter becomes the emblem of the illicit and dangerously mediate'.[9] While we are reminded that texts do not always refer to reality, Edmund's forged letter brilliantly generates the illusion of a real, absent author: 'Come to me, that of this I may speak more' (1.2.51-52). This phrase creates the sense both that Edgar has more to say, but also that this letter is somehow 'spoken'; that there is an intention and a greater meaning behind the letter's forged handwriting.[10] Edmund goes on to suggest that he will allow his father to overhear his conversation with Edgar, thereby 'by an auricular assurance have your satisfaction' (1.2.91-92): the letter will be backed up by the immediacy of *spoken* and *overheard* words.

However, it is also clear that Edmund is adept at creating persuasive *oral* fictions. Edmund informs Edgar that he has offended their father, and that he should avoid his sight. But Edmund convinces Edgar of the veracity of his tale by stating that he has not been able to convey the authenticity of the event; that there is more to be told: 'Brother, I advise you to the best, [Q]go armed.[Q] I am no honest man if there be any good meaning toward you. I have told you what I have seen and heard—but faintly; nothing like the image and horror of it. Pray you, away!' (1.2.170-74). Edmund has attempted to convey his experience of the event —'what I have seen and heard'—but he has only done so 'faintly'; it is a ghostly retelling of the 'actual' events. Edmund apologises for his inability to represent the thing itself: but by admitting the insubstantiality of his account, he distracts Edgar from the possibility that there were no 'actual events' in the first place. Edmund's report is a lie, but it succeeds in tricking Edgar into making something out of nothing by making him complicit in Edmund's imaginative

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[9] Sigurd Burckhardt, '*King Lear*: The Quality of Nothing', in *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p.242.
[10] Stephen Orgel comments that 'Gloucester simply substitutes Edgar's forged handwriting for everything he knows about his son, what we would call character—in effect, the character itself can be forged' ('The Comedian as the Character C', p.39).

enterprise. Edmund admits that his brief description does not have the visual immediacy—and the aural distinctiveness—of the thing itself; it is 'nothing like the image and horror of it'. Here, Edmund uses the figure of *hendiadys* to describe this 'horrifying picture',[11] but the effect of this piece of rhetoric is to separate these two words in such a way that Edmund's 'image' and 'horror' anticipate the exchange between Kent and Edgar in the play's final scene: 'Is this the promised end? [...] Or image of that horror?' (5.3.261-62). Edgar's description, then, anticipates the final scene's tragic 'tableau', but it also relates to Shakespeare's attempts to create a 'horrifying picture' through language. Often in his tragedies Shakespeare gestures towards an unseen, terrifying image which is never actually shown to us, but which is all the more disturbing for that. For example, Macbeth asks what the 'horrid image' is which 'doth unfix [his] hair, / And make [his] seated heart knock at [his] ribs, / Against the use of nature' (1.3.135-37). However, it is unclear precisely what this terrifying mental image—which Macbeth does not describe in his self-report—might be. This description of its *effects* is an admission that the thing Macbeth imagines cannot be shown: it can only be gestured at. And yet, the horrifying picture that Edmund describes never existed in the first place. Indeed, if we draw a parallel between Edmund's artistry and that of the playwright, this suggests that Shakespeare's art is also a lie; an illusion.

Edmund reminds us that a text and a verbal report are no substitute for the thing itself, and yet, for Gloucester and Edgar, this adds a greater plausibility to the two 'original' events that have never existed: Edgar's writing of the letter, and 'the heat of [Gloucester's] displeasure' (1.2.160). In a later scene, Edmund offers Gloucester a false report of Edgar: 'Here he stood in the dark, his sharp sword out, / Mumbling of wicked charms, conjuring the moon / To stand[Q]'s[Q] auspicious mistress' (2.1.38-40). Edmund then uses his own blood as visual 'evidence' of this encounter: 'Look sir, I bleed' (2.1.41). Here, Edmund's own body becomes a sign of Edgar's reported evil. But this use of seen evidence

[11] Foakes's gloss; see his note to 1.2.173.

suggests that even visual signs can be false, and that their meaning is dependent upon the way in which they are contextualised verbally. The act that caused Edmund to bleed remains merely reported—Edmund's reportage here substitutes for Gloucester's direct observation of the event. Throughout the play, different modes of representation are rendered duplicitous and problematic, with storytelling becoming particularly dubious. Barbara Hardy has written that 'Truthful telling [in the play] becomes rare'.[12] As we shall see below, even the supposedly 'truer' of Gloucester's sons, Edgar, does not construct truthful narratives either: his description of Dover cliff is another artful falsehood; a lie. It would appear, then, that our attention is being drawn to the *un*truthfulness of the play's many narratives, as if we are being taught to *resist* the rhetoric and embellishments of complex storytelling in favour of a supposedly more reliable 'plainness'. But is such a thing possible?

2. All or Nothing

In contrast to Gloucester's sons, Kent appears to prefer plainness, remaining distrustful of artful narratives: 'I can keep honest counsel, ride, run, mar a curious tale in telling it and deliver a plain message bluntly' (1.4.31-32). Kent recognises his inability to construct a 'curious' (complicated) narrative, his preferring to keep things simple, with the optimistic—and self-justifying—belief that telling things in a 'plain' fashion makes an account more honest. As he himself states plainly to Cornwall, 'Sir, 'tis my occupation to be plain' (2.2.90). But is it possible to have a narrative without embellishment? Kent later notes that 'All my reports go with the modest truth, / Nor more, nor clipped, but so' (4.7.5-6). However, as James Calderwood writes, 'in all cases, whether more clipped or so, reports are interpretations—verbal orderings of immediate experience that in themselves do not "mean" but simply "are"'.[13] Kent believes that his reports modestly express the truth: they do not exaggerate, and yet are

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[12] Hardy, *Shakespeare's Storytellers,* p.192.
[13] Calderwood, 'Creative Uncreation', p.8

more effective than speaking too much: 'Few words, but to effect / More than all yet' (3.1.47-48). But everything else in the play seems to be either understated or overstated, suggesting that there can be no happy medium for expressing oneself in this tragedy. Terry Eagleton has written that 'Language, like so much else in the play, has a problem with pitching itself at the elusive point between too much and too little—except, perhaps, in the formally precise yet generously affectionate discourse of Cordelia'.[14] The first part of Eagleton's comment seems apt, but 'formally precise' is a rather generous, even misguided way of characterising Cordelia's discourse. Her plainness in the opening scene is shown to be problematic, and is characterised by Lear rather differently: 'Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her' (1.1.130). Goneril and Regan are proficient at speaking too much, but all that Cordelia says is 'nothing'—the word, not the (no)thing itself. Cordelia wants to 'Love, and be silent' (1.1.62); she does not want to have to speak or put her feelings into language. But she is not silent: she says the word 'nothing', the closest one can get to *not* saying anything in language. Cordelia's 'nothing' is a something; a word.

Yet much of *Lear* is about being compelled to speak, and the *necessity* of language—despite an acknowledgement of its limitations. Both the play's characters and its critics often seem to find themselves in this predicament. Edward Dowden observed that 'Of the tragedy of King Lear a critic wishes to say as little as may be; for in the case of this play, words are more than usually inadequate to express or describe its true impression'.[15] Like Cordelia and Kent, critics of the play want to speak 'as little as may be', as if the very act of speaking—the attempt to describe the tragedy in words—would itself be indecorous. Hazlitt's famous comments are an excellent example of such a resistance to language, in which he states that he—like Cordelia—would prefer to say 'nothing':

[14] Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, p.83.
[15] Edward Dowden, *Shakspere: A Critical Study of his Mind and Art*, 2nd edn (London: Henry S. King, 1876), p.274.

> We wish that we could pass this play over, and say nothing about it. All that we can say must fall far short of the subject; or even of what we ourselves conceive of it. To attempt to give a description of the play itself or of its effect upon the mind, is mere impertinence: yet we must say something.[16]

Recognising the limits of language, Hazlitt, like Cordelia and Kent, wishes to say as little as possible. Hazlitt would prefer silence; but if he said nothing, his essay would come to an end: he must say something. Hazlitt's comments are particularly interesting, given that *King Lear* is itself an extended consideration of the nature and value of 'nothing'. The word 'nothing' brings about the rift between Lear and Cordelia, and continues to resonate throughout the play's first scenes. In addition, the play's silences and interpretative gaps, the 'nothings' which critics try to make sense of, suggest the ways in which something can be made out of nothing: and perhaps this is where we might locate something of the play's *literary* value.[17] In 1.4, the fool's song, which begins 'Have more than thou showest, / Speak less than thou knowest' (1.4.116-17), also favours economical speaking, and suggests the value of not revealing 'all'. Cordelia certainly speaks less than she 'knowest', but the consequences of this are disastrous: it would appear that speaking the bare minimum is problematic. Cordelia thinks that it is not necessary for her to tell Lear how much she loves him, but the play suggests that sometimes we need a show of affection that might seem excessive. This is why Lear's 'O, reason not the need!' (2.2.453) is so central to *King Lear*'s play of ideas: we need superfluous things to make sense of our lives, and to give them value. Kent remains non-plussed by the fool's song: 'This is nothing, fool' (1.4.126), but the Fool's rejoinder is, again, suggestive: 'Then [F]'tis [F] like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer, you gave me nothing for't. [*to Lear*] Can you make use of nothing, nuncle?' (1.4.127-29). What, the fool seems to be asking, is the value of language? Lear replies that 'nothing can be made out of nothing' (1.4.130), echoing his 'nothing will come of

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[16] William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J. M. Dent, 1930-4), IV, p.257.

[17] In *Hamlet*, Laertes suggests ways in which interpretative gaps can be productive of meaning, when he comments, of Ophelia's mad pronouncements, 'This nothing's more than matter' (4.5.173), suggesting that 'nothing' can be more productive of meaning than some 'matter'.

nothing' (1.1.90) from the opening scene. But this scene (1.4) asks whether language can make meanings out of nothing, and is, implicitly, a comment on literary creativity. We might think of Theseus's speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in which he describes how the poet's pen 'gives to aery nothing / A local habitation and a name' (5.1.16-17). Here, the poet is someone who creates something out of an 'aery nothing' through *writing*: 'as imagination bodies forth / The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen / Turns them to shapes' (5.1.14-16). The act of writing—not by drawing these 'things' as 'shapes' but by shaping them *verbally*—can make substantial that which previously existed only in the imagination. But if Edmund represents one sort of creative artist, an immoral *con*-artist, what of Edgar? What sort of something does he create through language?

3. Blindness and Insight

We might have expected Edgar's narratives to be more truthful than those of his brother, but when Edgar says that he will take Gloucester to Dover in 4.6, he subjects his father to another act of deception. Edgar's narrative has caused much debate: it is designed to deceive Gloucester in order to prevent his attempting suicide, but how is the audience supposed to react to it? Certainly Edgar's description is characterised by an excess of visual detailing and metaphors, which, one could argue, like Ophelia's description of Hamlet 'with his doublet all unbraced' (2.1.76), focuses our attention on the fragmented nature of the description itself. What, exactly, is being described here?

> Come on, sir, here's the place. Stand still: how fearful
> And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low.
> The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
> Show scarce so gross as beetles. Half-way down
> Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade;
> Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
> The fishermen that walk upon the beach
> Appear like mice, and yon tall anchoring barque
> Diminished to her cock, her cock a buoy
> Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge

> That on th'unnumbered idle pebble chafes,
> Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,
> Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight
> Topple down headlong. (4.6.11-24)

At first hearing, or at first reading, this passage appears to be a fine example of Shakespeare's narrative art, conveying to us the absent Dover cliff. But in this case, we are being asked to attend to the fact that Edgar is creating a *fiction*. Despite this, however, many readers and audiences seem to be 'taken in' by this description. As William H. Matchett has pointed out:

> modern critics continue to call this the Dover cliff scene, though (in spite of the fact that Lear and Gloucester must be near Dover when they meet) the logic of the scene turns out to indicate that the cliff is precisely where Edgar has *not* taken his father. The poetic description is so convincing that, in naming the cliff, we continue to be taken in by the trick.[18]

But how 'convincing' is Edgar's poetic description? The play seems to be explicitly calling attention to the way in which Edgar is creating an illusion—Shakespeare exposes Edgar's narrative art as a kind of 'nothing'.[19] Edgar also demonstrates, perhaps, that Shakespeare's narrative descriptions in his dramatic works have *always* been an illusion. As Matchett writes, 'What we see in Shakespeare's theater is the same bare stage we always see. We will only be where the actors tell us we are' (p.191). But here we are asked to think about the illusion itself and *not* the thing it represents. But what, then, do we actually 'see' here?

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[18] William H. Matchett, 'Some Dramatic Techniques in *King Lear*', in *Shakespeare: The Theatrical Dimension*, ed. Philip C. McGuire and David A. Samuelson (New York: AMS Press, 1979), p.206, note 6.

[19] As Richard Fly comments: 'the entire episode, despite its fine evocation of graphic particularity, demonstrates a general inadequacy of apprehension [...] We never forget that the entirety of Edgar's speech is finally an artful structuring of nothing because a felt absence permeates the whole elaborate deception' (*Shakespeare's Mediated World*, p.95).

Edgar's narrative seems to be characterised by *absence*, and every attempt at describing something is immediately complicated or undermined.[20] As soon as we have imagined choughs and crows, we are told that they 'Show scarce so gross as beetles' (4.6.14).[21] Presumably we are being asked to imagine jackdaws and crows that are *as small as* beetles, but do we also imagine beetles themselves? The man gathering samphire is 'no bigger than his head' (4.6.16). Edgar could be suggesting that, seen from above, all that can be seen of the man is his head, but on a more literal level this description sounds somewhat peculiar, and is reminiscent of the narrator's overly literal description of the figures in the painting in *The Rape of Lucrece*: 'Here one man's hand leaned on another's head' (1415). In both cases, the description of the visual 'reality' is shown to be problematic. We are then asked to imagine fishermen walking on the beach, only to be told that they 'Appear like mice' (4.6.18). What is the effect of this simile? In other words, do we see mice or men? In this way, Edgar's description seems to be an exploration of the problems of metaphorical language. We are being asked to imagine what Gloucester will imagine as a result of Edgar's narrative, but at the same time its metaphorical descriptions obscure—or, at the very least, complicate—any 'real' picture that we might have in our minds.[22] Dr Johnson believed that the passage was at fault, but because he thought the verbal details were *too* effective:

> He that looks from a precipice finds himself assailed by one great and dreadful image of irresistible destruction. But this overwhelming idea is dissipated and enfeebled from the instant that the mind can restore itself to the observation of particulars and diffuse its attention to distinct objects. The enumeration of the choughs and crows, the samphire-men and the fishers, counteracts the great effect of the prospect as it peoples

[20] Matchett suggests that this strategy is central to the play: 'Every time Shakespeare raises our hopes, he pulls the rug out from under us. This is the rhythm of *King Lear*, and it remains consistently so to the end of the play' ('Some Dramatic Techniques', p.190).
[21] Foakes glosses *chough* as 'jackdaws', but the *OED* favours 'the Red-legged crow, which frequents the sea-cliffs in many part of Britain, being particularly abundant in Cornwall; whence distinguished as the *Cornish chough*' (*OED* 2).
[22] Robert Egan comments that 'We are never allowed to forget that the entire project rests on the deception and manipulation of a blindman and the substitution of illusory falsehood for experiential truth' (*Drama within Drama*, p.26).

> the desert of intermediate vacuity and stops the mind in the rapidity of its descent through emptiness and horror.[23]

In the face of such an immeasurable precipice, one should not be able to construct a description with such a degree of specificity. Edgar describes too much, too well, suggests Dr Johnson. But Johnson does not appear to have noticed that everything Edgar describes is either obscured, or should not be looked at, or 'suffers a diminution in scale', as if to complement Gloucester's blindness.[24] The passage seems to show that any description can only be a description, and not the thing itself, whether it is clipped, or curious. Edgar says that it makes him feel 'fearful' and 'dizzy' looking down so low (4.6.11-12), but the following description certainly seems intended to dizzy the mind: 'yon tall anchoring barque / Diminished to her cock, her cock a buoy / Almost too small for sight' (4.6.18-20). We are asked to imagine a tall barque (a small sailing vessel), which is 'diminished to her cock' (4.6.19). *Cock* here refers to 'A small ship's-boat, *esp.* the small boat which is often towed behind a coasting vessel or ship going up or down river' (*OED* s.v. 'cock-boat'). Does this mean that, according to Edgar, this ship appears to be as small as its cock-boat, or that we can only see this cock-boat? Either way, the cock-boat that we imagine is then renamed as a 'buoy', which, we finally discover, is 'Almost too small for sight' (4.6.20). The sounds and sights of this scene are continually described, but then taken away from us: 'The murmuring surge / That on th'unnumbered idle pebble chafes, / Cannot be heard so high' (4.6.20-22). Here, as soon as we have imagined the sounds of this absent scene, we are told that it is silent. However, unlike Ophelia's description of the absent Hamlet, there is no pretence on Shakespeare's part that Edgar is attempting to describe the play's 'reality'.

Edgar breaks off his description: 'I'll look no more, / Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight / Topple down headlong' (4.6.22-24). But what has he been looking at? This line suggests that Edgar fears he will become dizzy and fall

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[23] *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Woudhuysen, p.220.
[24] Harry Levin, 'The Heights and the Depths: A Scene from *King Lear*', in *Shakespeare and the Revolution of the Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.177.

over the cliff, but it also implies that his description of this 'deficient' sight—deficient because it does not exist—will undo itself and collapse if he describes any more. Gloucester appears to have been seduced by Edgar's verbal artistry, which is understandable, perhaps, given his blindness.[25] As Jonathan Goldberg has written, 'Gloucester embraces this illusion and plunges into it. He has been convinced by the *trompe l'oeil* of representation and his fall shows that he is the perfect audience for it'.[26] We might, then, see Gloucester as a figure for a blind, naïve audience (or reader), and Edgar a figure for the playwright. We are asked to consider the effect of Edgar's narrative upon Gloucester. And yet, the only reason that Gloucester is taken in by Edgar's illusion is that he is blind: Gloucester is perhaps *right* to rely upon Edgar's verbal description, in the sense that he is no longer able to test this description against what he sees. But then, like Gloucester, both on stage and on the page, we cannot literally see the things that are being described. Shakespeare seems to be suggesting that reading is also a kind of blindness.

In Ben Jonson's play *The Staple of News* (1631) the Prologue states that its author wants its audience to *listen*, not to watch, and that it will be for the audience's own benefit:

> For your own sakes, not his, he bade me say,
> Would you were come to hear, not to see a play.
> Though we his actors must provide for those
> Who are our guests, here, in the way of shows,
> The maker hath not so; he'd have you wise,
> Much rather by your ears than by your eyes[27]

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[25] Burckhardt comments that 'always in the dark, [Gloucester] is now enclosed in darkness and made to feel the mediacy of report' ('The Quality of Nothing', p.244).
[26] Jonathan Goldberg, 'Perspectives: Dover Cliff and the Conditions of Representation', reprinted from *Shakespeare and Deconstruction*, ed. David M. Bergeron and G. Douglas Atkins (New York, 1988), in *King Lear: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Kieman Ryan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), p. 151.
[27] Ben Jonson, 'The Prologue for the Stage' in *The Staple of News* (1626; pub. 1631), in *The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson*, ed. G. A. Wilkes, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981-82), IV, p.250.

This Prologue wishes that a play could be something heard and not seen, but acknowledges—albeit unwillingly—that it will be experienced in both ways. In this way, Ben Jonson's attitude towards the verbal medium of drama appears to have been less ambivalent than that of Shakespeare.[28] Michael O'Connell, in his recent study of idolatry and iconoclasm *The Idolatrous Eye* (2000), writes that Jonson's Prologue

> not only distinguishes between the poet and those who perform his words on stage, but seems indeed to yearn for a blind audience [...] This comes but as an extreme version of what Jonson in one way or another seems always to have wanted: near exclusive attention to the verbal element of the mixed art that theater is.[29]

I take it that O'Connell is right to suggest that Jonson seems to crave a 'blind audience', but it is worth pointing out that Shakespeare creates such an audience in Gloucester. In this way, the competition between the visual and the verbal in drama that causes Jonson such anxiety appears to have prompted Shakespeare to further experimentation. Rather than merely *craving* a blind audience, Shakespeare investigates the implications of including a blind audience in one of his plays. Derek Peat comments that:

> As Edgar has trifled with Gloucester, so Shakespeare has trifled with his audience. What he presents is so ambiguous that, to an extent, they are placed in Gloucester's situation: they too must trust the eyes and word of another, because they can't see for themselves.[30]

Yet Edgar's illusion has much to tell us about the question of text and performance, as well as the question of seeing and hearing. Christy Desmet has suggested that 'Here, finally, the testimony of our own eyes and ears parts company, as *King Lear* challenges our methods for listening to, watching, and

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[28] For a fascinating account of Jonson's antitheatricality, see Barish, 'Jonson and the Loathèd Stage' in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, ch. 4. See also D. J. Gordon, 'Poet and Architect: The Intellectual Setting of the Quarrel between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones', in *The Renaissance Imagination: Essays and Lectures by D.J. Gordon*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp.77-101

[29] Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.121.

[30] Derek Peat, '"And that's true too": *King Lear* and the Tension of Uncertainty' *Shakespeare Survey*, 33 (1980), 43-53 (p.48).

even reading Shakespearean drama'.[31] However, Desmet fails to explore the implications of this intriguing suggestion. To engage with this scene, we have to imagine what it would be like to be in Gloucester's position and to experience the play *without seeing it*, as if the act of reading is being figured in the text. Jay L. Halio has commented that 'The trick Edgar plays on his father's imagination is also the trick Shakespeare plays on ours—except that here he means us to be conscious of everything that is happening, including the way in which our imagination is being made to work'.[32] Both when we read the play, and when we see it on stage, Dover cliff is only present in our minds, suggesting that performance can itself be an act of 'reading'. The play demonstrates that there is a felt absence both in reading *and* performance; that both are constructed through language and that both require an imaginative leap of faith.

After Gloucester has 'fallen' off the imagined cliff, and asks Edgar if he has fallen or not, Edgar once again perpetrates a piece of narrative deception, describing something which cannot be experienced except through his description. Edgar tells his father that he has fallen

> From the dread summit of this chalky bourne.
> Look up a-height: the shrill-gorged lark so far
> Cannot be seen or heard. Do but look up. (4.6.57-59)

Again Edgar is telling Gloucester to look at something which cannot be seen; something that is, in fact, nothing. For if the lark cannot be heard, then how does Edgar know that it is 'shrill-gorged'? And if it cannot be seen, then how does Edgar know that it is there at all? Gloucester does not think to ask these questions, perhaps because of the inappropriateness of Edgar's telling him to 'look up', knowing that Gloucester is unable to do any such thing. As Gloucester has to remind him, 'Alack, I have no eyes' (4.6.60). Edgar then offers a description of the 'poor unfortunate beggar' (4.6.68) who Gloucester says is at the top of the cliff:

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[31] Desmet, *Reading Shakespeare's Characters*, p.129.
[32] *The Tragedy of King Lear*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.22.

> As I stood here below methought his eyes
> Were two full moons. He had a thousand noses,
> Horns whelked and waved like the enraged sea.
> It was some fiend. Therefore, thou happy father,
> Think that the clearest gods, who make them honours
> Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee. (4.6.69-74)

Here Edgar constructs an entirely fabricated 'report' of the figure Gloucester imagines to be at the top of the cliff, focusing—rather unfortunately—upon this imagined figure's eyes. What Edgar reports is unseeable, inasmuch as it would not be possible to see so many of the details of this figure at such a distance. But it is revealing that Edgar has depicted this figure—a fictionalised version of himself—as 'some fiend', suggesting Edgar's unconscious awareness of the fiendishness of his enterprise. However, Lear then enters, '^{Q}*mad*^{Q} [*crowned with wild flowers*]'. The first thing Lear says is that 'they cannot touch me for coining. I am the King himself' (4.6.83-84). He is not a copy, or an image; he is the King. This juxtaposition of Edgar's description of a madman with the physical presence of the mad Lear suggests that Shakespeare is deliberately contrasting Edgar's report with Lear's substantial existence. Edgar comments that this is a 'side-piercing sight' (4.6.85), a sight that is so powerful that it causes physical pain. Lear then states that 'Nature's above art in that respect' (4.6.86), as if he is responding to Edgar, but this statement can also be read as a comment on Shakespeare's poetics. Lear suggests that nature is superior to art in producing a powerful emotional effect; that seeing 'the thing itself' is more affecting than anything which art, including Shakespeare's narrative art, could provide.[33] But, of course, the play itself is also a form of 'art'. Lear is himself a somewhat ghostly presence—the Fool describes him as 'Lear's shadow' (1.4.222), and he says to Cordelia that 'You do me wrong to take me out of my grave (4.7.45)—but by comparing himself to Edgar's verbal artistry, he creates the illusion that he is the thing itself, or at least the King himself.

[33] See Foakes's note to 4.6.86.

Lear's encounter with Gloucester on the heath is hard to interpret. Gloucester says that he remembers Lear's voice: 'The trick of that voice I do well remember' (4.6.105), but Lear responds rather inappropriately by stating that he recognises Gloucester by his eyes: 'I remember thine eyes well enough' (4.6.132). Indeed, the characters in *King Lear* seem to have trouble remembering that Gloucester is blind. And yet, Lear's statement is ambiguous: does he mean that he recognises Gloucester by his eyes—mistakenly believing that they are still there—or does he mean that he sees that Gloucester's eyes are lost, but he remembers what they were like? With a similar lack of propriety, Lear then offers Gloucester something to read: 'Read thou this challenge, mark ^F^but^F^ the penning of it' (4.6.135). Lear commands Gloucester to look only at the 'penning' (handwriting) of the letter: he is being instructed to look at the surface of the composition, rather than the 'matter'. Gloucester had, we remember, misread Edgar's handwriting earlier in the play, and had absorbed the matter of Edmund's false text too readily, failing to attend to the letter's 'surface'—the written matter itself. Now he is being given a second chance, but after he has been blinded. Gloucester's 'Were all thy letters suns, I could not see ^Q^one^Q^' (4.6.136) could also refer to his *sons*, who he has misread. But it is interesting that it is at this point in the play—a moment about the inability to read a text; about blindness and misinterpretation—that Edgar says that he would have to *see* this event to believe in it, or experience it properly, in a formulation which I take to be central to our understanding of Shakespearean tragedy:

> I would not take this from report: it is,
> And my heart breaks at it. (4.6.137-38)

Here, Edgar recognises not only the limits of language, but also the inability of a spoken 'report' to convey or represent the tragic 'reality' he sees before him. Edgar admits that he will be unable to construct a coherent, pithy moral out of what he sees; and yet, what he says here *is* a coherent, pithy moral. This paradox would appear to be central to the play: here, when Shakespeare's artistry admits defeat, we have what some commentators have seen as Shakespeare's greatest stroke of genius. Inga-Stina Ewbank goes so far as to

say that 'In many ways, this "it is" is the greatest line of Shakespeare, the theatre poet'.[34] Unfortunately, Ewbank fails to specify the way or ways in which this line is great; but Edgar's 'it is' is striking inasmuch as it is Shakespeare's *least* 'poetic' line. It represents the ultimate paring down of description; so paired down, in fact, that nothing is, or is capable of being, described. Edgar wishes to say as little as may be, for—in Dowden's words—no language will be able to convey the 'true impression' of what Edgar sees. The scene Edgar is witnessing is not capable of being turned into narrative form, or described at all. If retold, its immediacy would be lost. But Edgar's pointing to the inadequacy of 'report' seems to bring about a far more compelling sense of immediacy than any extended narrative description could provide. Here, despite—or perhaps *because* of—the way in which the phrase professes its inadequacy, the thing that it describes comes to appear more 'real'. This formulation suggests that Shakespearean tragedy is both unnarratable, and yet, *at the same time*, inextricably bound up with narrative and the compulsion to tell. James Calderwood finds this phrase useful for his argument about mediated and unmediated experience:

> Edgar's term "report" is convenient to my purpose here since as a secondary verbal account it may be contrasted with the primary "it is" of direct experience. These two modes might be regarded as dividing up *King Lear* itself, or any play—the mediated *re*-presentation of past affairs, the "then and there" we call narrative, and the immediate *present*-ation of the "here and now" we think of as dramatic.[35]

I take it that Calderwood is right to say that Edgar's comment is about the difference between narrative and drama, but we might also see it as an oblique

[34] Inga-Stina Ewbank, '"More Pregnantly than Words": Some Uses and Limitations of Visual Symbolism', *Shakespeare Survey*, 24 (1971), 13-18 (p.18). Anne Barton has also written about the significance of this line in her essay 'Shakespeare and the Limits of Language', reprinted in *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.51-69: 'to those two words, the barest possible indication of existence, much of what happens in *King Lear* must be reduced' (p.62). Burckhardt writes that '*It is*—it no longer means. Report and interpretation try to make sense, to clothe the nakedness of being in the orderly garments of discourse. They either falsify *Lear* at this point or break at it. It is—the worst' ('The Quality of Nothing', p.254). But it is interesting that Burckhardt uses the same metaphor of clothes and 'stripping down' as the play's characters.
[35] Calderwood, 'Creative Uncreation', p.8.

comment on the question of text versus performance. For the line that immediately follows Edgar's contrasting of seen and heard experience is Lear's injunction to 'Read' (4.6.139). Gloucester then points out that he cannot: 'What? With the case of eyes?' (4.6.140). Edgar's attempt to divide up, categorise, or *value* the two modes of narrative and drama—contrasting experience and 'report'—is framed, even *prompted* by, this failed act of reading. But what does this have to tell us about our experience of the play? If we are not experiencing this scene in performance, we are participating in a *successful* act of reading. When we read this scene, is it also a kind of 'report', a written report of an absent event. Shakespeare implies that reading can be an alternative to seeing or hearing about this poignant scene. And not only here: in 4.3, a Gentleman describes Cordelia's reactions to Kent's letter informing her of the events that have befallen Lear. Kent asks 'Did your letters pierce the queen to any demonstration of grief?' (4.3.9-10), and the Gentleman replies:

> Ay sir. She took them, and read them in my presence,
> And now and then an ample tear trilled down
> Her delicate cheek. It seemed she was a queen
> Over her passion, who, most rebel-like,
> Sought to be king o'er her. (4.3.11-15)

Here the play demonstrates the ability of piece of text—a letter—to have an emotional impact upon its addressee: Shakespeare suggests that it is not always necessary to see the thing itself in order to be affected by it. This passage's reflexivity is suggested by the fact that this act of reading is *reported* to us. Shakespeare places us in situation comparable to that of Cordelia, in the sense that we do not see this scene, even in performance: we experience this absent scene of reading through the Gentleman's verbal 'report'. To return to 4.6, Lear makes it clear to Gloucester that there are alternative methods of experiencing the world without literally 'seeing': 'Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a light, yet you see how this world goes with no eyes' (4.6.143-44). Gloucester states that 'I see it feelingly' (4.6.145). Lear continues: 'What, art mad? A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears.

See how yon justice rails upon yon simple thief' (4.6.146-48). Gloucester now must *look with his ears*, and experience the world through what he hears.[36] Are we in a similar predicament when we read the play? Lear tells Gloucester to 'Get thee glass eyes, / And like a scurvy politician seem / To see the things thou dost not' (4.6.166-68). In 1.2, Gloucester claimed that he would not need spectacles ('glass eyes') to see 'nothing' (1.2.35-36): now that he literally sees nothing, Gloucester is being told to wear spectacles in order to *pretend* that he can see. But when reading *King Lear*, we, too, 'seem / To see things'. Gloucester states that he has 'ingenious feeling / Of [his] huge sorrows' (4.6.275-76). Again, the play demonstrates that we do not necessarily need to *see* sad sights to have 'ingenious feeling' of them.

The scene ends with Edgar's discovery of a letter in Oswald's pocket. But, interestingly, Edgar's 'Let's see these pockets' (4.6.251) and 'Let us see' (4.6.253), echo his father's demand to see Edmund's pocketed forged letter in 1.2. Now, Edgar seems to think that writing *can* possess immediacy and truth, and, breaking open the letter's seal, states that it will be a reliable way of finding out people's inner thoughts: 'To know our enemies' minds we rip their hearts' (4.6.255). He assumes that Goneril's heart is in the contents of the letter. Edgar reads the letter out loud—perhaps reminding us that his speech is always 'penn'd' (*Love's Labour's Lost*, 5.2.147)—and states that he will show the letter to Albany. He also states that the letter will have a powerful visual impact: Edgar will 'With this ungracious paper strike the sight / Of the death-practised duke' (4.6.271-72). Here, 'strike the sight' suggests a successful showing, and Edgar's use of the word *strike* suggests that the letter will have a performative function. Edgar seems to think that this written 'report'—a letter—*will* have the force of 'the thing itself'. When Albany finally confronts Goneril with the letter, and finds himself unable to find words to describe her, he uses the letter as a more

[36] Shakespeare has an analogous formulation in the closing couplet of Sonnet 23: 'O, learn to read what silent love hath writ: / *To hear with eyes* belongs to love's fine wit' (13-14). It would appear that Shakespeare was aware of the 'eloquence' of books, and that one can 'hear' things when one reads, as well as the extent to which one can 'see' by hearing a description.

expressive alternative: 'Thou worse than any name, read thine own evil' (5.3.154). Throughout the course of the play, Edgar finds himself reliant upon narratives and texts, despite his claims that he wishes to experience the world directly. And perhaps this accounts for the appearance of Edgar's long—and problematic—narrative account of his adventures.

4. No Time to Explain

In the final scene, we are given a series of signals to suggest that the play is ending.[37] Edgar's moralising, directed at Edmund, has the tone of summation and resolution about it; and yet there are problems with his account of what has happened to his father. Indeed, it is rather bizarre:

> The gods are just and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us:
> The dark and vicious place where thee he got
> Cost him his eyes. (5.3.168-71)

Edgar seems to be telling Edmund—and, perhaps, himself—a rather implausible story about how Gloucester came to lose his eyes. 'In Edgar's account', writes Janet Adelman, 'the play comes full circle and we are returned to its beginning. [...] And now the vice lightly acknowledged—and dismissed—by Gloucester is revealed as the cause of all his suffering'.[38] But Edgar's moralising is deeply problematic, and seems to have the same triteness as some critical accounts of the play, in particular those which tell us that Gloucester learns to 'see better' through his blindness, as if this could somehow explain or make sense of what has happened to Gloucester, or that he

[37] See Booth, *'King Lear', 'Macbeth', Indefinition and Tragedy*, pp.7-8.
[38] Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origins in Shakespeare's Plays, 'Hamlet' to 'The Tempest'* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p.106. Adelman takes Edgar's moralising to its logical conclusion: 'Wholly excising Cornwall's role in Gloucester's blinding, acknowledging even Edmund's only parenthetically ("where thee he got"), Edgar in effect names the female sexual "place" as the blinding agent, metonymically making the darkness of that place equivalent to the darkness into which Gloucester is plunged' (p.106).

somehow deserved it because of his 'fault'.[39] This tendency among critics to turn the events of the play into a neat summary-sounding moral is epitomised by Kenneth Muir's attempt to summarise Lear's experiences: 'He loses the world and gains his soul'.[40] Here, Muir creates a miniature narrative that recounts Lear's journey to spiritual enlightenment through suffering, a reading which more recent criticism of the play has come to question.[41] The play continually resists such attempts to reduce it to a straightforward narrative. However, Edmund appears ready to accept Edgar's reading of the play's events, or at least is willing to accept his punishment, suggesting that the play is moving towards its conclusion: 'Thou'st spoken [F]right, 'tis[F] true; / The wheel has come full circle, I am here' (5.3.171-72). Albany attempts to bring about a sense of *dénouement* by inviting Edgar to give a narrative account of what has taken place—'Where have you hid yourself? / How have you known the miseries of your father?' (5.3.178-79)—and Edgar is all too happy to oblige. He provides a highly self-conscious, rhetorical, and—arguably—overlong, account: 'By nursing them, my lord. List a brief tale; / And when 'tis told, O, that my heart would burst!' (5.3.180-81). The very fact that Edgar says he is about to recount the narrative of an absent, heartbreaking scene is surprising, given what he said earlier on the heath: 'I would not take this from report' (4.6.137). But this discrepancy is again suggestive of the play's ambivalent attitude towards its own verbal artistry, both narrative and dramatic; we might suggest that Shakespearean tragedy is an extended—and ultimately inconclusive—meditation on this very topic. *King Lear*, and Shakespearean tragedy more generally, remains both deeply sceptical of, and yet deeply reliant upon, art's ability to convey an unseen, tragic 'reality' through language. Edgar promises that his tale will be 'brief', and yet, according to Albany at least, it goes on for far too long. Like Polonius's second response to the Player's Speech in 2.2 of *Hamlet*, Albany is unable to endure any more of Edgar's narrative because of its

[39] See Calderwood, 'Creative Uncreation', p.11.
[40] 'Introduction' to *King Lear*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1972), p.l.
[41] For a judicious account of the play's critical reception, see R. A. Foakes, *Hamlet versus Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), ch. 3.

emotional impact. And yet, Edgar's narration appears to be intended to elicit such an emotional response, and designed to justify his role in the play, as he evades all of the difficult questions that critics have asked about him:

> The bloody proclamation to escape
> That followed me so near—O our lives' sweetness,
> That we the pain of death would hourly die
> Rather than die at once!—taught me to shift
> Into a madman's rags, t'assume a semblance
> That very dogs disdained; and in this habit
> Met I my father with his bleeding rings,
> Their precious stones new lost; became his guide,
> Led him, begged for him, saved him from despair,
> Never—O fault!—revealed myself unto him
> Until some half hour past, when I was armed,
> Not sure, though hoping of this good success. (5.3.182-93)

Edgar's aside ('That we the pain of death would hourly die / Rather than die at once'), which appears near the start of his account, seems designed to guide his listeners' response. Do we submit to his rhetorical performance, or do we want to resist and ask questions? Did Edgar really save his father from despair? After all, in the previous scene Gloucester had resisted Edgar's moralising sentiments, commenting that they are only one way of interpreting the play's events: 'And that's true too' (5.2.11). Edgar's 'O fault!' sounds like an admission of guilt, giving his tale the tone of a confession; and yet he fails to explain why he did not reveal himself to his father sooner. As Harry Berger, Jr. comments, Edgar's tale 'drastically foreshortens his performance on the heath, edits out all his darker moments, and stresses his devoted dependence'.[42] Disturbingly, there is also the implication that Edgar only revealed himself to his father when he was sure of his own safety, 'when [he] was armed' (5.3.192). Edgar then attempts to explain how and why his father died, in a redemptive reading that could be read as a gloss on Lear's forthcoming demise:

[42] Harry Berger, Jr., 'Text Against Performance: The Gloucester Family Romance' in *Making Trifles of Terrors*, p.64. In this reading of *Lear*, Berger suggests that 'there is a difference between the story the text tells and the story or sermon performance preaches, which includes the stories the characters tell [...] What the text shows, as I read it, is that these are stories they prefer to hear about themselves rather than others that strike closer to home and that they would find harder to bear' (p.66).

> I asked his blessing and from first to last
> Told him our pilgrimage. But his flawed heart,
> Alack, too weak the conflict to support,
> 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
> Burst smilingly. (5.3.194-98)

This is a highly self-reflexive piece of Edgar's narrative, a story about the power of storytelling. Edgar tells his father the story of their trials, revealing to him—finally—who he is; but the imparting of this knowledge, in the form of a narrative account, breaks Gloucester's heart. Edgar interprets Gloucester's death in a (relatively) positive light, stating that he was suspended between joy and grief; but do we believe this interpretation? After all, we know that Edgar has constructed artful but deceptive narratives before. Nonetheless, Albany seems to be deeply moved by this tale, perhaps as Edgar had hoped he would be. Albany's emotional response is anticipated and figured in Edgar's tale, a story that is about the ability of narrative to move people. Our response is anticipated too, but does the audience react in the same way as Albany? He suggests that Edgar's tale is plenty; it is more than enough:

> If there be more, more woeful, hold it in,
> For I am almost ready to dissolve
> Hearing of this. (5.3.201-3)

Albany's protests make the audience think that Edgar's narrative is complete, but five lines later Edgar continues. The excessiveness of the speech—going beyond what the narratee says he is capable of listening to—is one possible explanation why it was cut from the Folio text. The second part of Edgar's narrative (5.3.203-20), in which he goes on to tell the sad story of Kent, appears only in the Quarto:

> This would have seemed a period
> To such as love not sorrow, but another
> To amplify too much would make much more
> And top extremity. (5.3.203-6)

Again, we are alerted to the fact that we are hearing a 'report', one that Edgar knows is rhetorically designed to create pity. As Wittgenstein writes in his

Philosophical Investigations, 'The language game of reporting can be given such a turn that a report is not meant to inform the hearer about its subject matter but about the person making the report'.[43] Here, Shakespeare gives Edgar's report such a turn by explicitly employing terms of rhetoric, suggesting that Edgar's tale is a self-consciously told one. A *period* is a classical paragraph that 'involves continuously suspended syntax carrying the narration forward without a single full stop'.[44] But also, more importantly, Shakespeare calls attention to Edgar's use of *amplification* ('The extension of simple statement by all such things as tend to increase its rhetorical effect, or to add importance to the things stated' (*OED* 4)).[45] The fact that the second part of Edgar's speech does not appear in the Folio text suggests that someone, possibly Shakespeare himself, thought that Edgar had amplified too much, and decided to reduce the speech to make it more acceptable. In his rhetorical manual *De Copia* (1512), Erasmus instructed his readers how to amplify, but warned them about going too far. According to Patricia Parker, this was 'a concern repeated in the countless Renaissance rhetorical handbooks which both teach their pupils how to amplify and repeatedly warn them against the intimately related vice of "Excesse"'.[46] This suggests that we are being shown the extent to which Edgar has spoken *excessively*, as if amplification is at odds with the facts. In *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Francis Bacon writes that his work will be characterised by 'no amplification at all, but a just and measured truth',

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[43] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), p.190.
[44] *King Lear*, ed. G. K. Hunter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), note to 5.3.181-97.
[45] In *William Shakspere's Smalle Latine and Lesse Greek*, T. W. Baldwin writes that 'Quintilian would have explained to Shakspere [*sic*] how one could amplify to top extremity' (II, p.228), and glosses Edgar's comment thus: 'Such sorrows as had preceded would seem to have reached a period of possibility. But another sorrow yet to come would amplify what is already too much (i.e. beyond possibility) into much more, thus topping extremity' (II, p.229). But despite Albany's protests at the threat of amplification, in the Quarto text Edgar does indeed 'amplify what is already too much' by continuing with Kent's story.
[46] Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.14. Christy Desmet, discussing a passage from Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, writes that 'For Quintilian emotional identification is the source of enargeia, but that identification is effected through stylistic amplification [...] For Quintilian and Erasmus, the kind of amplification that induces enargeia belongs more to figurative embellishment than to proof' (pp.128-29). Is Edgar producing emotional identification through rhetoric without any concrete proof?

suggesting that truth is actually at variance with amplification.[47] If we say too much, then we find ourselves further away from the (imagined) truth. But is it ever possible to articulate our experience of such emotional moments 'truthfully'? The eloquence and loquacity of the characters in Shakespeare's tragedies dramatise the extent to which tragic narrative will never be adequate to the events that it attempts to organise or summarise. Shakespearean tragedy shows that there are times when speaking too much is the right amount.[48]

Because of the absence of an omniscient narrator in Shakespeare's plays, we might think that we are able to experience his characters more directly; but Shakespeare shows that this is not necessarily the case. Stanley Cavell, in his fascinating essay on *Lear*, touches on such issues, arguing that 'no character in a play *could* (is, logically, in a position from which to) narrate its events'.[49] Cavell's comments—on Edgar's choice to tell a first person narrative where he does—merit a long quotation:

> This further suggests that a "first-person narrative" is not a narrative; or rather, why the more a first-person account takes on the formal properties of a narrative, a tale, the more suspicious it becomes. For a first-person account is, after all, a confession; and the one who has something to confess has something to conceal. And the one who has the word "I" at his or her disposal has the quickest device for concealing himself. And the one who makes a tale with this word is either distracted from the necessity of authenticating his use of it, or he is admitting that he cannot provide authentication by himself, and so appealing for relief. (pp.106-7)

Cavell's comments are relevant to all of Shakespeare's tragedies that include an example of, or a promise of, a first-person narrative at the close. Edgar has told us that to 'amplify' too much would 'top extremity', but his account of his meeting

[47] *The Oxford Authors: Francis Bacon*, ed. Vickers, p.122.
[48] See Alexander Nehamas's comments in *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1985) about Nietzsche's prolixity: 'It is true that Nietzsche's texts, compared to many other philosophical works, often say too much; but this comparison leaves open the possibility that the excess may after all be even more accurate than the literal standard, which may itself come to be seen as a trope in its own right, as a litotes or understatement' (p.31).
[49] Stanley Cavell, 'The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*', in *Disowning Knowledge*, p.106.

with Kent is notable for its amplification. We learn that Kent bellowed out 'As he'd burst heaven' (5.3.212). Kent then 'Told the most piteous tale of Lear and him / That ever ear received' (5.3.213-14). In recounting this tale—another narrative within a narrative—Edgar informs us that Kent's 'grief grew puissant and the strings of life / Began to crack' (5.3.215-16). Again, Edgar seems to anticipate the listener's response to *his* tale by showing the effects of another within it. Barbara Hardy comments that 'Edgar's narration is presented as self-generated, powered by unpremeditated passions, but Shakespeare's narration is cunningly constructed, built on the armature of three references to heartbreak'.[50] But clearly it is not possible to separate Shakespeare and Edgar so easily. Edgar's narrative *does* seem 'premeditated' and 'cunningly constructed', as if Shakespeare is drawing our attention to the fact that Edgar's report is excessively artful: we resist this speech because we feel that it has such a palpable design upon us. In addition, Edgar's narration reminds us all too painfully that a narrator who fashions a 'tale' within a play is doing something that takes up precious time. Edgar's narrative interrupts the action of the play, and inadvertently provides Cordelia's captors the time necessary to execute her, thus providing the play with an even more tragic ending.

5. The horror, the horror!

The ending of *King Lear* is notoriously unbearable, and this is perhaps related to our attitude towards narrative, and our expectations of a conventional ending.[51] There is also an implicit contrast between Edgar's narrative account of his

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[50] Hardy, *Shakespeare's Storytellers*, p.198.

[51] While Shakespeare does not allow the play to end like an old tale, the Restoration redaction by Nahum Tate, which was acted for 150 years afterwards, does indeed have a happy, storybook ending. Tate's version, *The History of King Lear* (1681), can be read in *Shakespeare Made Fit: Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare*, ed. Sandra Clarke (London: Everyman, 1997), pp.291-372. Clarke comments that 'where Shakespeare's play is open, ambiguous, multi-faceted, Tate's operates to restrict meanings and render the rough faces plain' (p.lxviii). In *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning*, Norman Rabkin writes that 'Shakespeare's tragedies define the genre for us; whatever successes his redactors achieved they achieved by making them into something other than tragedy, something more reducible to rational explanation' (p.114).

experiences, and the raw, unexplained sight of Lear and the dead Cordelia.[52] The scene's power owes much to our *inability* to understand what is going on, and there are several references in these final moments of the play to 'uninterpreted seeing'. [53] It is not always clear what we are supposed to be looking at: 'This is a dull sight' (5.3.280); 'I'll see that straight' (5.3.285); 'O, see, see!' (5.3.303), and 'Do you see this?' (5.3.309). The experience of reading this final scene is clearly very different to *seeing* it performed. In reading, we miss the visual immediacy of performance; and yet, performance, too, fails to reveal the 'meanings' of this scene. Perhaps, then, we also miss the *mediacy* of report when we witness the scene on stage. I want to suggest that we read the play's final moments in the context of Edgar's narrative, and that we are being asked to imagine how Lear's death could be rendered in narrative form. And yet, this scene is so preoccupied with the question of seeing and not seeing, and the difficulty of interpreting visual signs, that it comes to highlight the limitations of both text *and* performance. Albany offers an Edgar-like moralising summary, but he finds it to be contradicted by what he sees before him, suggesting that the characters' attempts to turn the play's ending into a satisfactory, conventional one are contradicted in the face of experience. Here, Albany's 'report' of the play is contradicted by what he *sees*:

> All friends shall taste
> The wages of their virtue and all foes
> The cup of their deservings. O, see, see! (5.3.301-3)

Whatever it is that Albany has seen, it seems to have dismantled his facile moralising summary: the play is resisting both narrative and interpretative closure. As William Matchett has written, '[Albany's] tidying up which would permit the play to end properly breaks against the rock of actuality'.[54] Any sort of

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[52] James Calderwood writes that 'Lear's dying moments [...] are harrowing to an audience in part because they are presented as immediate, uninterpreted experience. We must make of them what we can. But Gloucester's death comes to us more comfortably because its rawness has been filtered, ordered, and endowed with meaning by Edgar's long report of it' ('Creative Uncreation', p.10).
[53] See Calderwood, 'Creative Uncreation', p.16.
[54] Matchett, 'Some Dramatic Techniques', p.201. He continues: 'We never learn what precisely leads Albany to break off [...] but the effect is surely to force us to concentrate upon the event

'tidying up' in this play seems to be fraught with difficulties; and to extend this notion to the process of interpretation itself, 'tidying up' is precisely what tragedy resists. In the preceding scene, Kent proclaims that 'Report is changeable; 'tis time to look about' (4.7.92), suggesting that he prefers to look at the world directly, distrusting other people's interpretations of events. Yet it is impossible to experience the world without any sort of narrative or interpretative structure. Towards the close of the Folio text of the play, Lear tells the onlookers to 'look', but we are unable to 'see' or understand, because we are not told what we are supposed to be looking for. Indeed, it is not clear whether Lear thinks Cordelia to be dead or alive. One moment he states that 'she's gone forever. / I know when one is dead and when one lives; / She's dead as earth' (5.3.257-59), but then asks for a looking glass: 'If that her breath will mist or stain the stone, / Why then she lives' (5.3.261-62). In this way, Lear's contrariety of certainty that Cordelia is dead and uncertainty that she is living belies his earlier declaration that he knows 'when one is dead and when one lives' (5.3.258). Consequently it is extremely difficult to know how to interpret Lear's dying moments, even more so given the disparity between the two texts of the play:

> [*to Edgar?*] Pray you undo this button. Thank you, sir.
>   [Q]O, o, o, o.[Q]
> [F]Do you see this? Look on her: look, her lips,
> Look there, look there!   *He dies.*[F]
>   (5.3.307-9)

What is Lear looking at? And what is the meaning of what he sees? A. C. Bradley believed that 'any actor is false to the text who does not attempt to express, in Lear's last accents and gestures, an unbearable *joy*'.[55] But it is not clear *which* text Bradley is attempting to be true to. In the Quarto text, Lear remains alive long enough to deliver the line 'Break, heart, I prithee break'

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itself, abandoning such contingencies as might be used to protect ourselves from experiencing it' (p.201). Perhaps narrative itself might be such a contingency: something which is not 'the event itself' but *protects* us from it, as Edgar's narrative 'protects' us from experiencing Gloucester's death directly.

[55] Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p.291.

(5.3.311), suggesting that he dies in a state of grief.[56] However, in the Folio, this line is spoken by Kent, and Lear's last line before the stage direction '*He dies*' is 'Look there, look there!' (5.3.309). Thus Lear's death in the Folio is more ambiguous, and it is even possible that Lear dies in the same manner as Gloucester, ''Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief' (5.3.197). In the Folio the two lines before Lear's death might be of despair and not joy, and they could be read as conforming to the previous pattern of Lear's veering from certainty to possibility, and *not knowing* when one is dead and when one lives. Alternatively, the Folio text could suggest that Lear *does* now know the difference between life and death, with the additional 'no' in 'No, no, [F]no[F] life' (5.3.304) and the additional two nevers in 'Never, never, never, [F]never, never[F]' (5.3.307), suggesting the certainty of death. The very ambiguity of Lear's death retrospectively implies that Edgar's narrative account of *Gloucester's* death might be suspect. For if Gloucester's death was anything like that of Lear, then for Edgar to say that he died betwixt 'joy and grief' comes to sound like a rather dubious interpretation, and not an accurate account of the event. Perhaps any account of a man's death remains an interpretation.[57]

Lear asks 'Do you see this?' and tells us to 'look there!', but we do not know what he has seen, nor what we are supposed to be looking at. Lear has

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[56] In his Arden 2 edition, Kenneth Muir has the following note to 5.3.309, explaining Lear's use of the word 'Look': 'Lear dies of joy, believing Cordelia to be alive (Bradley)', failing to acknowledge both the textual and interpretative difficulties in coming to this conclusion. It is perhaps worth noting that there is no stage direction to indicate Lear's death in the Quarto, so it is far from clear *when* Lear dies in the earlier text.

[57] Peter Brooks's chapter 'An Unreadable Report: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*' in *Reading for the Plot*, pp.238-65, has influenced my thinking here, and there is certainly a suggestive relationship between *King Lear* and Conrad's novella. At the close of *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz's Intended says that 'I cannot believe that I shall never see him again, that nobody will see him again, never, never, never' (*Youth/Heart of Darkness/The End of the Tether*, ed. John Lyon (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p.146). Indeed, Brooks twice alludes to *Lear* in his chapter on *Heart of Darkness*, suggesting that both texts share similar concerns about the limits of language and narrative: 'For language, nothing will come of nothing' (*Reading for the Plot*, p.252); 'In the lack of finality of the promised end, Marlow must continue to attach his story to Kurtz's, since to detach it would be to admit that his narrative on board the *Nellie* is radically unmotivated, arbitrary, perhaps meaningless' (p.254). It is also worth noting that James Calderwood briefly mentions Conrad: 'Like the Fool, [Edgar] cannot accompany Lear into what Conrad calls the heart of darkness, though like Marlow he can return to tell us about it in words we know are incommensurate to their subject' ('Creative Uncreation', p.11).

interpreted without telling us what 'this' is. Furthermore, Lear has already admitted that his vision is blurred: 'Mine eyes are not o' the best' (5.3.277), further complicating our sense of what he is seeing. R. A. Foakes includes the stage direction '[*to Edgar?*]', speculating that it might be Edgar who undoes the button Lear refers to, while the Oxford editors suggest that Lear's request is addressed '*To Kent*' (*The Tragedy of King Lear*, 5.3.285)—but we cannot even be certain whether it is Lear's or Cordelia's button. We are confronted with a variety of interpretative possibilities; we are told to interpret, but any single interpretation is a reduction of Lear's death.[58] In his study of Shakespeare's open silences, Philip C. McGuire explores the different possibilities of Lear's request: does Edgar or Kent undo Lear's button? Or does Albany undo Cordelia's button? Or does Edgar undo Cordelia's button? Or is Lear's request ignored?[59] The point is, perhaps, that we do not know, and that the text refuses to tell us. While Lear points to 'the thing itself', we are not told what it is, and yet we find ourselves unable to resist imposing meanings upon this scene. Howard Felperin's comments are apt:

> Lear enacts in advance our dilemma as interpreters, alternating between antithetical visions of experience, only to abandon both in favour of a pure and simple pointing to the thing itself. Interpreters of the play, like Albany, Kent, and Edgar within it, have been understandably reluctant to follow him into this state of aporia, of being completely at a loss, so peremptory is the human need to make sense of things, to find unity, coherence, resolution in the world of the text and the text of the world.[60]

But, of course, the truth is rarely pure, and never simple. Felperin does not state what 'the thing itself' is in this case. Is he referring to Cordelia's death, an uninterpreted *visual* fact? It is worth noting that Kent and Edgar's response to the entrance of Lear with Cordelia in his arms is a pair of speculative questions: 'Is this the promised end?' asks Kent; 'Or image of that horror?' asks Edgar (5.3.261-62). Kent implicitly asks if this is the ending to the play that we were

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[58] As Foakes writes, 'It is impossible to say what Lear sees, or thinks he sees, but these lines complicate the ending by their very ambiguity' (note to 5.3.309-10).
[59] See Philip C. McGuire, *Speechless Dialect: Shakespeare's Open Silences* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp.101-5.
[60] Howard Felperin, *Shakespearean Representation: Mimesis and Modernity in Elizabethan Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p.105.

expecting, while Edgar suggests that here, when we think we have discovered the thing itself, it is 'a mere image of that horror, not the thing itself'. [61] In its most powerfully tragic moments, the play admits that—even in performance—it is *not* the thing itself, and only a representation. Edgar finds that the play's sad sights compel him to offer an appropriate verbal response, and he produces a beautifully crafted quatrain to round off the proceedings:[62]

> The weight of this sad time we must obey,
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
> The oldest hath bourne most; we that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long. (5.3.322-25)

And yet, this *is* what we ought to say. Edgar's appeal for a 'natural' response to the appalling sights witnessed in the play—to 'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say'—is so artfully constructed, and has such a tone of closure and authority, that even the Arden editor seems to think that it is the play's final line, forgetting that there are still two more to come.[63] Again, the play exposes the problems of expressing what we 'really' feel, and presenting an authentic response to what we see. Perhaps offstage, after the close of the tragedy, Edgar will attempt to speak what he feels, but this is left for the audience to imagine. We might remain sceptical about Edgar's ability to ever speak what he feels. Within the boundaries of the play, art and rhetoric are the order of the day.

6. Conclusion

King Lear presents us with a deeply sceptical and ambivalent account of art and narrative. The play's two most proficient narrative artists, Edgar and Edmund, both of whom we might align with the playwright, are presented as con-artists,

[61] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.82.
[62] In the Quarto the play's final lines are spoken by Albany.
[63] In the 'Introduction' to his edition, Foakes writes that 'The last line [*sic*] remains enigmatic, since saying what one feels (Lear in his rages? Goneril and Regan expressing their lust for Edmund?) may be just as damaging as saying what one ought to say (Goneril and Regan speaking by the rules in the opening scene?)' (p.79).

who create dangerous but powerful and seductive fictions. On the one hand, narrative in the play is viewed as a form of deception, a lie which we know is not really there—we are shown that art signifies 'nothing'—and yet, on the other hand, the play demonstrates the need for the comfort and sense-making power of storytelling. We cannot resist reading the world as if it were a narrative, and our inability to resist attempting to imagine Dover cliff by way of Edgar's description might be suggestive of this. We know narratives to be an illusion, and that they only exist in language, but we still need to invest in and attach value to them. In this way, Shakespearean tragedy can be seen as being about the problems of attempting to structure and give form to or make sense of the unspeakable horrors which it presents us with. Inevitably, we find ourselves in the position of Edgar, attempting to articulate or retell the tragedy, even when we know this to be an artful lie. Franco Moretti has attempted to paraphrase Macbeth's formulation that life is 'a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury' (5.5.26-27):

> That is to say: only a madman or an imbecile (in effect, those like Edgar or Malcolm who step in claiming to "conclude" the tragedy) can think that Macbeth's story can be "told", ordered on the basis of comprehensible meanings. Such a combination of meaning and value-judgement has become impossible, and what remains is only "sound", the word without force, and "fury", force without sense. This is, in miniature, the lesson of tragic structure as a whole.[64]

But the lesson the tragic structure of *King Lear* also teaches us that we need to invest in such value-judgements, and that we cannot escape our fundamental desire to attach meanings to the text of the world. Even in its most self-conscious moments, Edgar's narrative account of his father's death is about the power of narrative to move people. In this sense, the play can be read as Shakespeare's highly self-conscious and exploratory apology for tragedy. In particular, Edgar's 'I would not take this from report', stresses the failure of narrative or dramatic art to represent a tragic scene in words; and yet, it

[64] Franco Moretti, 'The Great Eclipse: Tragic Form as the Deconsecretion of Sovereignty' in *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs and David Miller (London: NLB, 1983), p.65.

manages to create this unrepresentable scene nonetheless. Shakespeare makes this admission of the *failure* of art central to its success. By saying what it *cannot* do, Shakespeare's tragic art does it without our noticing it: Shakespeare draws us into his confidence through this disarming honesty about the limitations of his artistry. By approaching *King Lear* in this way, Shakespearean tragedy emerges as a form that is profoundly ambivalent about its own status as a work of art, but one that gains its emotional and aesthetic power through this ambivalence, and continues to produce something out of nothing.

Chapter 6

'Here's a sight for thee': *The Winter's Tale* and the Claims of Narrative

What are we to make of a play whose title is *The Winter's Tale*? After all, the word *tale* usually refers to 'a literary composition cast in narrative form' (*OED* 4). The word can also mean 'That which one tells; the relation of a series of events; a narrative, statement, information' (*OED* 3a), as well as 'A mere story, as opposed to a narrative of fact; a fiction; an idle tale; a falsehood' (*OED* 5a). The play's title, then, raises several questions concerning its status as a dramatic work and its relationship with narrative. In what sense is the play a *tale*? Since it calls itself a 'tale', how seriously should we take it?[1] And what is the significance of the many acts of narration in the play? Rawdon Wilson has noted that 'Like *Hamlet*, *The Winter's Tale* foregrounds narrative, makes the possibilities of story (whether retrievable or irretrievable, true or false) a central preoccupation, contains numerous instances of storytelling in very different modes, and seems, ultimately, a play that is stunningly reflexive about narrative'.[2] In his brief treatment of *The Winter's Tale*, which takes up fewer than five pages of his book-length study of *Shakespearean Narrative*, Wilson adds that the play 'is also reflexive about drama and performance' (p.102). However, he fails to explore how these two issues might be related. The present chapter is an attempt to offer a full account of the play's preoccupation with narrative, and the extent to which it self-consciously tests narrative and theatrical modes of representation against each other. In the trial scene in 3.2, one of the play's

[1] George Peele's *The Old Wives Tale* (1595) is another example of a play that is called a tale, and one that, like *The Winter's Tale*, is also interested in the interplay between narrative and drama. See Philip Edwards, '"Seeing is believing": action and narration in *The Old Wives Tale* and *The Winter's Tale*' in *Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp.79-93. J. H. P. Pafford writes that a *winter's tale* 'meant an old trivial tale of some length suitable for nothing better than to while away a winter evening', while the word *tale* 'could mean something untrue, not to be taken seriously' in his Arden edition of *The Winter's Tale* (London: Methuen, 1963), p.liii.
[2] Wilson, *Shakespearean Narrative*, p.102.

characters appears to betray an uncanny self-consciousness about this very issue: Hermione states that her unhappiness is 'more / Than history can pattern, though devised / And played to take spectators' (3.2.34-35).[3] Hermione suggests that 'history' will be unable to represent her grief, even when 'devised' and played in front of 'spectators'.[4] She implies that a dramatic representation will be more effective than a mere narrative in representing her grief, but that ultimately both will be inadequate in doing justice to her suffering. *The Winter's Tale* is itself a dramatisation of a 'history', Robert Greene's novel *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time* (1588).[5] This is not unique to this play, of course—almost all of Shakespeare's plays are reworkings of a narrative source—but *The Winter's Tale* seems *especially* concerned to explore the relationship between a written or spoken narrative and a drama that is 'played to take spectators'. While the play concludes with the dramatic spectacle of Hermione's statue, many of its significant events—for example, the voice of the oracle; Antigonus's dream; Antigonus's death; the sixteen-year gap in the play's action; and the reunion of Leontes, Polixenes and Perdita—are conspicuous by their absence.[6] We do not see these events, even in the theatre; instead they are narrated by one or more of the play's characters.[7] Some critics have argued that these narrative passages are artistically inferior to, and less believable or credible than, those

[3] All quotations from the play are taken from Stephen Orgel, ed., *The Winter's Tale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
[4] See *OED* s.v. 'history' 1: 'A relation of incidents (in early use, either true or imaginary; later only of those professedly true); narrative, tale, story'; 'That branch of knowledge that deals with past events, as recorded in writings or otherwise obtained' (*OED* 3); and 'A series of events (of which the story may be told)' (*OED* 4a).
[5] Greene's romance narrative was immensely popular, and was in its fifth edition when Shakespeare turned it into a drama. See Lori Humphrey Newcombe, '"Social Things": The Production of Popular Culture in the Reception of Robert Green's *Pandosto*', *ELH*, 61 (1994), 753-81. *Pandosto* is reproduced in Orgel's edition of the play, pp.234-76.
[6] The classic treatment of the play's 'unrepresented events' and the question of 'How can we know that what has not been shown has not happened?' is that of Howard Felperin, in '"Tongue-tied, our Queen?": The Deconstruction of Presence in *The Winter's Tale*' in *The Uses of the Canon: Elizabethan Literature and Contemporary Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp.35-55 (p.37). My approach differs from Felperin's inasmuch as I am concerned with how these offstage events *are* represented in narrative form within the action of the play.
[7] As B. J. Sokol writes, 'repeatedly throughout the play, the audience is obliged to rely on verbal reports of crucial happenings they are not allowed to see' (*Art and Illusion in 'The Winter's Tale'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p.18).

scenes that Shakespeare does stage. For example, Philip Edwards has written that

> Shakespeare chooses to give emotional credence to particular scenes in *The Winter's Tale* by having them acted out in scenes which he has written with his full powers [...] Seeing is believing, and *only* seeing is believing. Those passages of the story which are not privileged with performance are relegated to the status of old wives tales.[8]

However, while Shakespeare *seems* to privilege the visual immediacy of dramatic performance, I am going to argue that the acts of narration in the play are also written with Shakespeare's 'full powers', and that he remains undecided about the status of both theatrical and narrative representations. I am going to suggest that both 'showing' and 'telling' in the play are revealed to be partial and mediated: that the play demonstrates the epistemological difficulties in both hearing *and* seeing.[9]

In the first section of this chapter, I investigate the way in which our debates about the play's fictionality are figured in Leontes's keenness to believe in the fictions that he creates. How does Leontes's belief in Hermione's infidelity relate to our own experience of the play? The second section examines two of the play's significant absences: Antigonus's account of his dream in which Hermione's ghost appears, and the Clown's account of Antigonus being eaten by a bear. I also consider these narrative descriptions in the light of classical rhetorical tropes such as ekphrasis and *enargeia*. The third section explores the response of some of the play's characters towards Autolycus's ballads, and how this might relate to our attitude towards the play itself. I argue that Autolycus—both a narrative artist and a sophisticated con-artist—is a central figure for our thinking about the play's rhetorical and mimetic strategies. The fourth section

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[8] Edwards, '"Seeing is believing"', p.89.

[9] In the 'Introduction' to his Oxford edition, Stephen Orgel notes that 'narration is a crucial form of knowledge in the play' (p.57), and goes on to offer a subtle reading of the play's sceptical epistemological position: 'one of the most striking aspects of the intellectual life of the play is its insistent separation of interpretation and belief from knowledge; and it makes no difference whether the knowledge is constituted by what we observe or what we are told' (p.58).

examines 5.2 and the three gentlemen's descriptions of the absent recognition scene between Leontes, Polixenes and Perdita. Finally, in the fifth section, I consider the critical responses to Hermione's statue; a work of art that appears to be 'natural', but is, ultimately, a product of Shakespeare's dramatic art. I also discuss Paulina's statement concerning Hermione's reappearance: 'That she is living, / Were it but told you, should be hooted at / Like an old tale; but it appears she lives' (5.3.115-17). Here, the play asks the question that all of the narrative passages in dramatic works implicitly ask: do we believe in what appears to us above what we are told? Do we need to see something in order to believe it?

1. Faith and Credit

The opening scenes of *The Winter's Tale* themselves constitute a fascinating essay on the question of believing, and interpreting, what one sees. Leontes constructs a narrative of Hermione's infidelity in his own mind, but does not seem to require any conclusive evidence for it, allowing himself to construct this narrative from ambiguous visual signs.[10] Leontes's statement to Camillo, in which he first reveals his 'knowledge' of Hermione and Polixenes's affair, is particularly complex and suggestive in its treatment of the relationship between seeing, hearing and thought:

> Ha' you not seen, Camillo—
> But that's past doubt; you have, or your eyeglass
> Is thicker than a cuckold's horn—or heard—
> For to vision so apparent Rumour
> Cannot be mute—or thought—for cogitation
> Resides not in that man that does not think—
> My wife is slippery? (1.2.264-70)

[10] Rawdon Wilson compares the highlighting of the narrative act in the play to the cognitive process itself: 'Like hypotheses (to suggest causes and premises), stories are also inferred by cognitive acts that involve the use of the imagination. Inferring the story from a narrative, or more energetically from mere narrative fragments, is rather like inferring premises from conclusions or causes from effects: one is left with an inconclusive back-formation marked by incertitude and lacking in total persuasiveness' (*Shakespearean Narrative*, p.100).

For Leontes, the truth is obvious. Leontes states that Camillo *must* be aware that Hermione is 'slippery', unless Camillo is half-blind ('or your eyeglass / Is thicker than a cuckold's horn').[11] That Camillo has 'seen' evidence of Hermione's unfaithfulness, according to Leontes, is 'past doubt' (1.2.264-65). But Camillo must also have 'heard' about her infidelity, for such is Leontes's certainty that he imagines that 'Rumour'—in a suggestive personification—cannot help himself from reporting what he has already seen in front of his eyes: a 'vision so apparent' (1.2.267). Leontes, then, associates truth with the visually immediate, and thinks that it comes prior to 'Rumour' and 'thought'. However, Leontes's belief is *already* bound up with 'Rumour' and 'thought': this metaphorical image of Rumour himself seeing a 'vision' of Hermione's slipperiness is created entirely by Leontes's verbal description. Leontes is effectively addressing the interpretative process itself, but without allowing for the possibility that the vision he has seen, or imagines that he has seen, might only be an *apparent* vision, in the sense of 'Appearing to the senses or mind, as distinct from (though not necessarily opposed to) what really is; seeming. Contrasted with *real*' (*OED* 6).[12] Leontes does not think to attend to the potential ambiguity of the evidence of his senses.[13] Furthermore, Leontes's reasoning is entirely circular: to say that 'cogitation / Resides not in that man that does not think' (1.2.268-69) is tautologous.[14] If you can think at all, Leontes suggests, you *must* have thought about Hermione's slipperiness, even if you do not have any

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[11] According to the *OED*, *eye-glass* here refers to 'The crystalline lens of the eye. *Obs.*' (*OED* 1, citing this passage). See also Orgel's note to 1.2.265, in which he suggests that the word refers to 'the vitreous humour'.

[12] The *OED*'s first citation of this meaning of *apparent* dates from 1645, but *The Winter's Tale* seems to anticipate this usage. The sense of 'Likely so far as appearances go. *Obs.*' (*OED* 5) was available to Shakespeare, and is used in *Richard III*: 'the fear of harm, as harm apparent, / In my opinion, ought to be prevented' (2.2.130-31).

[13] Graham Holderness writes that 'Our senses tell us what is real; but our senses can be possessed by fantasy or compelled by a performed dramatization. Leontes appeals to the evidence of the senses with an absolute assurance of their infallibility', in '*The Winter's Tale*: Country into Court', in Graham Holderness, Nick Potter and John Turner, *Shakespeare: Out of Court, Dramatizations of Court Society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p.209.

[14] In the Folio text the phrase is enclosed within parentheses: '(for Cogitation / Resides not in that man, that do's not thinke)'. Quoted from *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (1623), a facsimile edition prepared by Helge Kökeritz, with an introduction by Charles Tyler Prouty (London: Oxford University Press, 1955).

evidence for it. Leontes goes on to suggest that the eyes of everyone apart from Hermione and Polixenes must be faulty:

> And all eyes
> Blind with the pin and web but theirs, theirs only,
> That would unseen be wicked? Is this nothing?
> Why then the world and all that's in't is nothing,
> The covering sky nothing, Bohemia nothing,
> My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings
> If this be nothing. (1.2.287-89)

Leontes sees the same things that everyone else in the court sees—and, implicitly, what the theatre audience sees—and he cannot understand why no one else has noticed what is going on between Polixenes and Hermione. Leontes's explanation is that everyone except Polixenes and Hermione is blinded by the 'pin and web', an eye disease affecting the cornea.[15] Leontes imagines that if those around him cannot see Polixenes and Hermione committing acts of adultery, then they must be blind; but Leontes himself is blind to the equally possible explanation that they cannot see these events because they are not taking place. Leontes is inventing excuses for his not having seen explicit evidence for what he imagines, or for what he *thinks* he has seen. It is as if Leontes is able to create something out of nothing, simply by repeating the word 'nothing'. Leontes commands Camillo to agree with him, 'Say it be, 'tis true' (1.2.295), but when Camillo refuses, Leontes simply accuses Camillo of lying: 'It is—you lie, you lie!' (1.2.296). Leontes no longer seems to accept the possibility of alternative interpretations, and goes on to rebuke Camillo for being too attentive to ambiguities:

> I say thou liest, Camillo, and I hate thee,
> Pronounce thee a gross lout, a mindless slave,
> Or else a hovering temporizer that
> Canst with thine eyes at once see good and evil,
> Inclining to them both. (1.2.297-301)

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[15] See Orgel's note to 1.2.288. In *King Lear*, a play in which blindness is a central concern, Edgar states that Flibbertigibbet 'gives the web and the pin, squinies the eye and makes the hairlip' (3.4.113-14).

Leontes objects to Camillo's ability to see a variety of possible meanings in what he sees around him. He accuses Camillo of being a 'mindless slave' and an opportunist—'a hovering temporizer' (1.2.299)—for not having strong enough interpretative convictions. Interestingly, this passage seems to anticipate the sort of perspectival criticism espoused by Norman Rabkin that finds multiple meanings coexisting in Shakespeare's plays. We might regard the question of whether or not Hermione has had an affair with Polixenes as being an example of an 'either/or' debate.[16] Camillo is presented as being a reader or interpreter who can 'with [his] eyes at once see good *and* evil' (1.2.300); he is capable of seeing 'both/and'. However, he is damned by Leontes for sitting on the fence and 'hovering' between these two possible interpretations. Leontes—like a bad literary critic—can only see one interpretative possibility in the 'either/or' debate that he finds himself in.[17]

Neville Coghill and other critics have outlined the ways in which Shakespeare leaves the question of Hermione's fidelity ambiguous, and that subsequently we cannot know for certain whether or not Polixenes is the father of the child that Hermione is carrying.[18] When we *read* the play, the question of what Leontes sees is left open, in the sense that we do not literally 'see' anything at all; while in the theatre our interpretation of Hermione's and Polixenes's behaviour is inevitably influenced by the way in which the director decides to stage these scenes.[19] But while we may acknowledge the *possibility* that Hermione and Polixenes might have had an affair, Leontes is wholeheartedly convinced by his

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[16] See Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning*, esp. chapters 1 and 2. On 'either/or' debates, and their limitations, see also Bradshaw, *Misrepresentations*, esp. p.39.
[17] Howard Felperin has also likened Leontes to an inadequate critic (see '"Tongue-tied, our Queen?"', p.37), but he does not write about this passage, nor about the way in which Shakespeare draws this interesting distinction between Camillo and Leontes as interpreters.
[18] See Nevill Coghill, 'Six Points of Stagecraft in *The Winter's Tale*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 8 (1953), reprinted in *Shakespeare: 'The Winter's Tale', A Casebook*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Macmillan, 1968), esp. pp.199-202. See also William H. Matchett, 'Some Dramatic Techniques in *The Winter's Tale*', *Shakespeare Survey* 22 (1969), 93-107, and Felperin, '"Tongue-tied, our Queen?"', esp. pp.43-46.
[19] Rawdon Wilson notes that 'The story materials that he [Leontes] uses [...] may or may not be available to a theater audience, but they can certainly be held in suspension while reading' (*Shakespearean Narrative*, p.98).

'reading', with the confidence of a man who has seen the things that he imagines. Camillo describes the situation to Polixenes:

> He [Leontes] thinks, nay with all confidence he swears,
> As he had seen't, or been an instrument
> To vice you to't, that you have touched his Queen
> Forbiddenly. (1.2.409-12)

Camillo states that Leontes believes in Hermione's infidelity with such conviction 'As he had seen't' (1.2.420). Leontes's convictions are so strong that it is as if he has seen these things happening before his eyes. For Leontes it is not so much a question of seeing is believing, but of *believing is seeing*: belief itself seems to be just as persuasive as, and appears to come prior to, the visual proof. Walter Lim has recently suggested that the strength of Leontes's convictions amount to a critique—or even parody—of faith, and, implicitly, Catholic religious belief:

> In a parodic version of faith, Leontes believes, even though he has not directly witnessed, Hermione's infidelity. Nothing that comes by way of council can convince him of the fallacy of that belief, and what Shakespeare's play does in portraying Leontes' obdurate blindness is foreground the gulf separating conviction from truth. Translated into the discourse of religious conviction, belief in things unseen does not necessarily add up to possessing the truth.[20]

Leontes's belief in Hermione's infidelity seems to be not so much a leap of faith as a stab in the dark. But this has interesting ramifications for the audience of *The Winter's Tale*. To what extent does Leontes's fiction-making enterprise overlap with our own?

Leontes remains ever confident of the truth of his suspicions, and in 2.1 refers to a piece of folk wisdom which suggested that a spider mixed with one's food would make it poisonous.[21] Again, this speech is about the relationship between

[20] Walter S. H. Lim, 'Knowledge and Belief in *The Winter's Tale*', *SEL*, 41 (2001), 317-34 (pp.321-22). Lim writes that '*The Winter's Tale* tantalizes its audience by finally raising the question of how one can know with absolute certainty and total conviction that the faith to which one adheres is indeed valid and true' (p.319).
[21] See Orgel's note to 2.1.40-45, and Pafford's note to 2.1.40-41.

visual perception and knowledge. However, whatever point Leontes is trying to make, his logic is odd and his reasoning faulty—for Leontes, the spider becomes poisonous only if one *sees* it:

> There may be in the cup
> A spider steeped, and one may drink, depart,
> And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge
> Is not infected; but if one present
> Th'abhorred ingredient to his eye, make known
> How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides
> With violent hefts. I have drunk, and seen the spider. (2.1.39-45)

Once again, Leontes seems to have become confused as to the relationship between knowledge and seeing. In Leontes's version of this old wives' tale, the spider's poison is, effectively, a placebo, a drug that only works when one is aware of having taken it: from having visual proof. The first objection to Leontes's logic is that poison does not work by infecting knowledge: it infects the body whether you know about it or not. For Leontes, the body is 'infected' by *knowledge* of the spider, and this only occurs when one *sees* it.[22] Leontes then attempts to apply this fiction to his own situation, claiming that 'I have drunk, and seen the spider' (2.1.45). Leontes implies that the 'abhorred ingredient'—the primal scene of Hermione's infidelity?—has been presented to his eye. Again, Leontes is convincing himself that the knowledge he possesses has an external cause: Leontes invents a justification for his 'poisoning', one that exists in the 'real' world, outside his mental world of speculation and opinion. However, what Leontes *does* see is corrupted and complicated by his 'knowledge', which is *already* 'infected'.[23]

Yet when he sends for the oracle, Leontes tacitly acknowledges that he only has circumstantial evidence of Hermione's affair:

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[22] As Stephen Orgel puts it, 'the spider is poisonous only in conjunction with the knowledge of it, and this assumption appears to be unique—if not to Shakespeare, at least to Leontes' (note to 2.1.40-45).
[23] Anne Barton comments that 'Leontes' mind, as his words involuntarily but quite explicitly inform us, has poisoned itself, breeding madness from an illusory evil', in 'Leontes and the spider: language and speaker in Shakespeare's last plays', in *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, p.163.

Camillo's flight
Added to their familiarity—
Which was as gross as ever touched conjecture,
That lacked sight only, naught for approbation
But only seeing, all other circumstances
Made up to th' deed—doth push on this proceeding. (2.1.174-79)

Again, Leontes states that the things that he believes in are unmistakable. The only thing that he has not done, according to what Leontes says here—hidden in his mangled syntax—is *seen* anything. The 'familiarity' of Hermione and Polixenes was 'as gross as ever touched conjecture, / That lacked sight only'; in other words, it was as 'gross'—both in the senses of 'plain, evident, obvious, easy to apprehend and understand' (*OED* 3) and 'Extremely coarse in behaviour and morals; brutally lacking in refinement and decency' (*OED* 15)—as anything that could ever be thought, except that no one has actually seen it. All of the other circumstances 'made up to the deed' (2.1.179), but one cannot help thinking that Leontes has 'made up'—imagined, invented—the 'deed' himself. Leontes himself raises doubts about his own rashness:

Yet, for a greater confirmation—
For in an act of this importance 'twere
Most piteous to be wild—I have dispatched in post
To sacred Delphos to Apollo's temple
Cleomenes and Dion, whom you know
Of stuffed sufficiency. (2.1.180-85)

Cleomenes and Dion are sent to consult Apollo's oracle at Delphi to get a second opinion. Indeed, it is interesting that Leontes feels the need to return to a divine authority, given his certainty of his convictions in what he 'sees'. But the oracle itself is another of the play's significant absences: we do not hear the oracle's original proclamation, but merely the passage read out by the Officer in the trial scene. All that remains of the marvellous theatrical presence of the oracle—whose 'ear deaf'ning voice' is said to have reduced Cleomenes to 'nothing' (3.1.9-11)—is a piece of text.[24]

[24] T. G. Bishop, in *Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), writes that 'The play's presentation of such an experience through Cleomenes and Dion offers us a limit case at once of an absolute knowledge and an absolute theatre—a theatre

Unlike Leontes's pronouncements, the oracle's statement is notable for its plainness and lack of ambiguity: '"Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten, and the King shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found"' (3.2.130-34). However, this unambiguous text fails to convince Leontes. He asks the Officer 'Hast thou read truth?' (3.2.136); but while the Officer has faithfully read out what is in front of him, Leontes fails to accept the 'truth' of the oracle or the authority of its interpretation of the play's events.[25] When Hermione apparently dies, Paulina appeals to the immediacy of the visual, offering the possibility of visual proof if anyone should doubt what she says: 'I say she's dead—I'll swear it. If word nor oath / Prevail not, go and see' (3.2.201-2). At this point in the play, we have no reason to think that Paulina has engineered an elaborate trick to deceive Leontes, nor that Shakespeare would deliberately deceive us. We assume that, at the end of this scene, Leontes goes off stage to see the dead Hermione and Mamillius: 'Prithee bring me / To the dead bodies of my Queen and son' (3.2.232-33). However, at the play's close, the status of this event—which we do not see—is thrown into question. In *The Winter's Tale*, perhaps more so than in any other piece of Shakespearean drama, we are asked to believe in 'the evidence of things not seen', and to believe in happenings that are only described to us.[26] More than this, some of the play's offstage events—such as this scene of Leontes seeing Hermione's dead body—are not only unseen but also unknowable. It turns out that Hermione did not actually die; so what, if anything, does Leontes see? What should *we* believe took place?

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whose powers of skepticism have been abolished by *force majeure*, and which has therefore abolished itself as theatre' (pp.147-48).

[25] See David M. Bergeron, 'Treacherous Reading and Writing in Shakespeare's Romances', in *Reading and Writing in Shakespeare*, ed. Bergeron (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), p.169.

[26] Felperin makes the link with Pauline Christianity, 'which is based precisely on the evidence of things not seen' ('"Tongue-tied, our Queen?"', p.38). See also Orgel, 'Introduction', pp.59-62.

In the first three acts of the play, then, Leontes is presented as an interpreter who believes too readily in what he sees, or thinks he sees, wholly accepting the interpretation that he has constructed as being 'true'. As Leontes puts it after he accepts that he has been mistaken, he is a man who has 'too much believed [his] own suspicion' (3.2.149). Leontes is like a simplistic reader or interpreter of Shakespeare's plays: one who is unable to see multiple meanings, and one who is all too ready to fill in gaps of the play with his own unambiguous imaginings. Graham Holderness has written that

> a play is neither pure imagination nor a self-evidently fictitious delusion: it is rather imagination caught in the act of judging itself, creating images of the real and simultaneously questioning both its own reality and the reality to which it alludes. Leontes is a man who loses all sense of distance, of detachment, of distinction. He cannot tell the difference between dream and reality, between role and actor, between art and nature.[27]

But we might go further than Holderness, and note the extent to which the play deliberately places its audience in the same predicament as Leontes, and repeatedly confounds *our* attempts to draw a distinction between dream and reality, role and actor, and art and nature. The more we reflect on the play's status as a work of art, and attempt to separate what is real from what is fictional in the play, the more entangled we become in its mimetic complexity. If *The Winter's Tale* represents 'imagination caught in the act of judging itself', then the jury is still out by the end of the play. Holderness goes on to argue that the play 'reflects critically on the self-deluding powers of an absolutist fantasy that habitually constructs and then credits its own simulations of the real' (p.235). But how, then, are we supposed to react to the play, and to its conclusion? In the play's final scene, we are told that what we are watching is impossible, and yet we are simultaneously encouraged to take part in, and believe in, a different sort of 'absolutist fantasy'. *The Winter's Tale* ultimately places its audience in an impossible predicament.

[27] Holderness, '*The Winter's Tale*: Country into Court', p.210.

2. Absent Friends

We have seen how *The Winter's Tale* can be 'syntactically and lexically often baffling', particularly in the speeches of Leontes.[28] However, the play also seems deliberately to baffle us in terms of plot, as well as complicating our sense of what it is that we are watching. Peter G. Platt has written that 'epistemological mastery can never be fully achieved in this play', while Walter Lim has pointed to 'the epistemological (un)certainty underwriting the play's events'.[29] One possible explanation for this bafflement is that Shakespeare is purposely generating confusion, confounding our attempts to reduce the play to a straightforward reading. Another possibility, of course, is that at various points during the composition of *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare had not decided how his play was going to end.[30] In 3.3, for example, we discover Antigonus on the coast of Bohemia with the baby Perdita. Before he abandons the child, Antigonus recounts a dream in which Hermione appeared to him. However, the more we consider Antigonus's narrative account of this absent event, the more puzzling and problematic it becomes. Antigonus addresses the child, stating that he thinks that he may have seen its mother in the dream, although he is not sure exactly what he 'saw', nor even whether it was definitely a dream:

> I have heard, but not believed, the spirits o'th' dead
> May walk again. If such thing be, thy mother
> Appeared to me last night, for ne'er was dream
> So like a waking. (3.3.15-18)

Antigonus's dream-narrative, then, is also a ghost story. As we saw in Chapter 4, ghosts have a suggestive relationship with narrative, and—like Horatio in the opening scene of *Hamlet*—Antigonus is sceptical about the existence of ghosts having merely *heard* about them. Antigonus suggests that what he experienced might have been an apparition and not a dream. If ghosts exist, Antigonus says,

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[28] Orgel, 'Introduction', p.7. See also his essay 'The Poetics of Incomprehensibility', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42 (1991), 431-37.
[29] Peter G. Platt, *Reason Diminished: Shakespeare and the Marvelous* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p.154; Lim, 'Knowledge and Belief', p.323.
[30] See *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Ernest Schanzer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.15.

then it was Hermione who appeared to him, because the dream was particularly life-like: 'ne'er was dream / So like a waking' (3.3.17-18). But the point about Antigonus is that, like Leontes, it is unclear whether the vision he describes was a figment of his imagination—a dream—or if he actually saw it with his own eyes. Antigonus cannot decide whether what he saw was a dream or reality, and yet the 'reality' in this case is highly questionable. The presence of a ghost suggests that what Antigonus experienced could not have been reality, and *must* have been a dream. Yet if the ghost is a figment of his imagination, then how does Antigonus know that Hermione is dead? It is hard to see how Antigonus could have heard about Hermione's 'death', given that he leaves Sicilia with the baby in 2.3. We have just witnessed Leontes go offstage to see Hermione's dead body, and at this point in the play there is no reason to suspect that he sees anything else. The fact that Hermione appears to Antigonus in the form of a ghost—suggested by his description of her appearing 'In pure white robes, / Like very sanctity' (3.3.21-22)—is further evidence that she is dead. Hermione's ghost, then, is a messenger, bringing Antigonus the news of her death. However, at the play's conclusion we discover that Hermione has *not*, in fact, died. As Marjorie Garber has written, 'The apparent fact of Hermione's death in the dream is [...] puzzling, since she is later demonstrated to be alive'.[31]

There are, then, at least three possible explanations for what Antigonus has seen: firstly, that what he witnessed was not a dream, but was the ghost of Hermione. But this suggests that Hermione *has* died, and that in the play's final scene—at least, in the fictional world of *The Winter's Tale*—her statue really does 'come to life'.[32] A second possibility is that Hermione is still alive, and that

[31] Marjorie Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare: From Metaphor to Metamorphosis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), p.171.
[32] For an essay that presents the evidence suggesting that Hermione dies and then comes back to life, see James Edward Siemon, '"But it appears she lives": Iteration in *The Winter's Tale*', *PMLA*, 89 (1974), 10-16: 'That [Shakespeare] chose to give Antigonus a vision of Hermione's ghost can only mean that he intended to reinforce the audience's belief in her death. There can be no doubt that Hermione is, at this point in the play, dead. [...] That she has been alive all along is suggested in only one, or perhaps two, expository details' (p.14). Siemon cites the

what Antigonus saw was an apparition of her *living* spirit.[33] A third possibility is that what Antigonus experienced was a dream, and nothing more; a dream that just happened to coincide with Hermione's apparent death. These possibilities are all held in suspension, and it is not clear whether the Hermione that Antigonus saw was pure fantasy, a ghost, or an apparition of the living Hermione. At this point in the play, and, indeed, at many others, we are not sure what to think or who to believe.[34] However, Antigonus states that he will, like Leontes, make a leap of faith and believe:

> And so with shrieks
> She melted into air. Affrighted much,
> I did in time collect myself, and thought
> This was so, and no slumber. Dreams are toys;
> Yet for this once, yea superstitiously,
> I will be squared by this. (3.3.36-40)

Antigonus decides to believe in Hermione's ghost, and thinks that what he experienced was *not* a dream: 'I did in time collect myself, and thought / This was so, and no slumber' (3.3.37-38). Antigonus admits that 'Dreams are toys', suggesting that dreams are dubious things that we should not believe in, like old wives' tales, or even *The Winter's Tale* itself. And yet, Antigonus is convinced that Hermione has died, and leaps to the conclusion that Perdita is Polixenes's illegitimate child:

> I do believe

Second Gentleman's comment in 5.2 that Paulina has visited a 'removed house' two or three times a day (5.2.102-5), which is, admittedly, ambiguous, but it is hard to dismiss Hermione's revelation that she has 'preserved / [Her]self' (5.3.127-28) as a minor expository detail.

[33] See Orgel's note to 3.3.15-16. He writes that 'At this point in the play, Hermione has certainly been represented as definitively dead; but apparitions of living people were not unknown'. In support of this, Orgel cites an anecdote in which John Donne was visited by the spirit of his (then still living) wife when he was in Paris. However, as Schanzer notes in his New Penguin edition, 'There is no precedent in Elizabethan drama for the spirit of a living person appearing to others either in dream or waking' (p.15).

[34] Walter Lim also points out the uncertainty in what Antigonus has seen, and even raises the possibility that the ghost is an evil spirit: 'Is Hermione a body or a dream, and therefore insubstantial? Is this the spirit of the dead queen or a "goblin damned"? [...] Once again, the answer is not forthcoming, reinforcing the play's destabilization of the familiar frames of reference grounding religious conviction and theological understanding' ('Knowledge and Belief', p.322).

> Hermione hath suffered death, and that
> Apollo would, this being the issue
> Of King Polixenes, it should here be laid,
> Either for life or death, upon the earth
> Of its right father. (3.3.40-45)

But we might want to remain sceptical about this ghost story: *our* faith in ghosts is being tested. We do not experience this dream—we *don't* see Hermione—but instead hear this questionable, ghostly narrative account of Hermione's appearance. Antigonus takes his dream for reality, but we have to ask ourselves whether we believe in his narrative account. Shakespeare is playing a trick on us, seemingly confirming that Hermione has died, not by having her dead body appear on stage, but by having Antigonus describe her appearance as part of a highly ambiguous and questionable ghost story. Although we might disagree with Antigonus's *interpretation* of his dream, we cannot help imagining that it took place, and speculating upon its meaning and significance.[35]

Antigonus's death at the hands of the bear is another unseen event in the play, one that we experience through the Clown's narrative account. However, the Clown's account has its own set of problems. The Old Shepherd has discovered Perdita, and tells the Clown to come and see her: 'If thou'lt see a thing to talk on when thou art dead and rotten, come hither' (3.3.77-78). The Old Shepherd describes a story that will be worth telling even when one is dead; but the Clown says that he has already seen two events of such import: 'I have seen two such sights, by sea and land!' (3.3.80). The Clown attempts to give an account of these two events—Antigonus's death and the sinking of Antigonus's ship—at the same time. Yet the Clown's account of Antigonus's death and the shipwreck is almost a master class in how *not* to construct a narrative:

> I would you did but see how it chafes, how it rages, how it takes up the shore; but that's not to the point. O, the most piteous cry of the poor

[35] Christy Desmet writes that 'any skepticism we have about the reality of Hermione's ghost is deflected by Antigonus's misinterpretation of her request. [...] The improbability of his conclusion distracts attention from the ontological status of the vision', in *Reading Shakespeare's Characters*, pp.107-8.

> souls! Sometimes to see 'em and not to see 'em; now the ship boring the moon with her mainmast, and anon swallowing with yeast and froth, as you'd thrust a cork into a hogshead. And then for the land-service, to see how the bear tore out his shoulder-bone, how he cried to me for help and said his name was Antigonus, a nobleman! But to make an end of the ship, to see how the sea flapdragoned it; but first, how the poor souls roared, and the sea mocked them; and how the poor gentleman roared, and the bear mocked him; both roaring louder than the sea or weather. (3.3.85-98)

The clown's narrative is an incongruously comic account of two tragic events, demonstrating that it is possible to make an event seem comical simply by the way you tell it. This account is an example of what the Clown himself later refers to as 'doleful matter merrily set down' (4.4.190-91). A partial answer as to why this account is so inept is that the Clown is a clown—he is playing it for laughs—and the reason that we do not see these events is that they would be difficult to stage. Yet the passage is also an interesting comment upon the relationship between experience and 'report'.[36] The Clown garbles his account of these two sights by trying to tell both tales simultaneously, getting his ordering of events confused in the process. He starts by wishing that his audience could see the things that he describes, attempting to bring this sight in front of our eyes—'I would you did but see how it chafes'—but then says that this is a false start: 'but that's not to the point'. We learn that this account is not simply a retelling of events that happened in the past, recollected in tranquillity, but a simultaneous alternative to performance: 'Name of mercy, when was this, boy?', asks the old shepherd; 'Now, now; I have not winked since I saw these sights; the men are not yet cold under water, nor the bear half dined on the gentleman—he's at it now' (3.3.99-102). The Clown's statement begins with a repeated 'now' and ends with the word 'now', generating a powerful sense that these events are still occurring somewhere else, perhaps offstage. The Clown says that he has not winked since seeing these sights, suggesting that he saw these events taking place only a moment ago, but it is also as if the events are still present to his eyes. There seems to be an excited desperation in the Clown's voice, and we

[36] Barbara Hardy merely comments that 'The event is unactable and has to be narrated, and Shakespeare makes the most of the rhetoric of inexpressibility' (*Shakespeare's Storytellers*, p.52).

might wonder whether even the greatest orator would be able to construct a moving and coherent account of these events under the circumstances. The fragmented nature of the Clown's narrative reminds us that life is *not* like a story, and that our experience of tragic events is often fragmented and incoherent. The Clown has not had a chance to convert his experience of these events into a meaningful or organised rhetorical account, such as Edgar's account of Gloucester's death at the end of *King Lear*. This passage, then, seems to be an ironic comment on the relationship between tragedy and narrative, and asks whether the Clown's tale seems more 'realistic' or 'life-like' than the artfully constructed narratives that we examined at the close of the tragedies. And yet, of course, the passage is Shakespeare's immensely artful piece of apparent artlessness. The Old Shepherd then presents Perdita to the Clown, not only highlighting the contrast between the death of Antigonus and the sailors and the newly born Perdita, but also highlighting the fact that the theatre audience can also *see* her: 'Now bless thyself; thou meetst with things dying, I with things newborn. Here's a sight for thee' (3.3.109-11). Here, Shakespeare appears to be deliberately drawing our attention to the represented physical fact of Perdita on stage, contrasting this with the absent scene described by the Clown. And yet, the events that the Clown describes do not take place offstage, but in the hearer's mind. We cannot help imagining the events that are described, even though the Clown has made 'a broken delivery of the business' (5.2.9-10).

In this way, the Clown's speech prompts us to reflect upon the relationship between narrative and the events that it describes; and whether narrative merely *reports* or actually *creates* these events. Another way of thinking about this speech is in the light of classical and renaissance theories of rhetoric. The Clown's 'Sometimes to see 'em and not to see 'em' (3.3.88) is suggestive of what happens when we listen to—or read—this verbal account, or any narrative: while we don't *literally* see the events described, we feel that we 'see' them in our mind's eye. The idea of the 'eye of the understanding'—the *oculi mentis*—

was a key concept in renaissance rhetoric, and was closely associated with the figure of *enargeia*, or vivid description.[37] Adam McKeown has suggested that the Clown's narrative—which employs the word 'see' five times—is the play's 'first conspicuous moment of *enargeia*'.[38] Classical rhetoricians such as Quintilian and Theon instructed their readers in how to employ *hypotyposis* and *enargeia* to create a vivid description of an object or event. In his *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian writes that 'There are certain experiences which the Greeks call *φαντασίαι*, and the Romans *visions*, whereby things absent are presented to our imagination with such extreme vividness that they seem actually to be there before our very eyes'.[39] He goes on to refer to *enargeia*, 'which makes us seem not so much to narrate as to exhibit the actual scene, while our emotions will be no less actively stirred than if we were present at the actual occurrence' (6.2.32). *The Winter's Tale* seems particularly concerned with the question of whether language alone can exhibit an 'actual scene' in the way that drama can.[40] Can narrative descriptions ever create what Murray Krieger—in his study of ekphrasis—calls 'the illusion of the natural sign'?[41]

Despite its classical-sounding name, Ruth Webb has noted that ekphrasis is 'essentially a modern coinage', and points out that it is only in recent years that the term has come to mean the description of works of sculpture and visual art within literary works.[42] In classical rhetoric, the term could refer to virtually any

[37] See Michael Bath, *Speaking Pictures: English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture* (London: Longman, 1994), p.253.
[38] McKeown, '*Enargeia* and the English Literary Renaissance', p.196.
[39] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H. E. Butler, 4 vols (London: Wm. Heinman, 1921), II, pp.433-35 (6.2.29). See Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.321; and Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect', in *French Literary Theory Today*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp.11-17.
[40] It is highly likely that Shakespeare would have read Quintilian: T. W. Baldwin writes that 'Along with Cicero, Quintilian was *the Rhetorician*, at the pinnacle of the grammar school', in *William Shakspere's Smalle Latine and Lesse Greek*, II, p.197.
[41] See Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). For a brief discussion of *The Winter's Tale* and ekphrasis, see Sokol, *Art and Illusion in 'The Winter's Tale'*, pp.18-19. See also Leonard Barkan, '"Living Sculptures": Ovid, Michelangelo and *The Winter's Tale*', *ELH*, 48 (1982), 639-667 (esp. p.649).
[42] Ruth Webb, '*Ekphrasis* ancient and modern: the invention of a genre', *Word and Image*, 15 (1999), 7-18 (p.14).

extended description: the word literally means 'to speak out' or 'to tell in full'.[43] As Murray Krieger points out, 'The early meaning given "ekphrasis" in Hellenistic rhetoric [...] was totally unrestricted: it referred, most broadly, to a verbal description of something, almost anything, in life or art' (p.7). But even then, ekphrasis had a specific rhetorical function. As Ruth Webb writes, 'What distinguishes *ekphrasis* is its quality of vividness, *enargeia*, its impact upon the mind's eye of the listener who must, in Theon's words, be almost made to see the subject [...] *Enargeia* is at the heart of *ekphrasis*' (p.13). Ekphrasis is a particularly suggestive term for thinking about *The Winter's Tale*, inasmuch as the play culminates with an object of the plastic arts—the 'statue' of Hermione—that appears to become real, and continually invites its audience to take narratives and verbal descriptions for the thing itself. And yet, the play also suggests that one should be *sceptical* about taking such descriptions for reality. For one thing, the play's depiction of Leontes's vivid imaginings—in which he had such a strong sense of Hermione's infidelity that it was 'As [if] he had seen it' (1.2.410)—has warned us *against* imagining that we can see things that are not there. In addition, we might suggest that there is always an element of deception and trickery in such vivid descriptions. In *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), George Puttenham offers the following description of the figure of '*Hypotyposis*, or the counterfait representation': 'The matter and occasion leadeth vs many times to describe and set foorth many things, in such sort as it should appeare they were truly before our eyes though they were not present'. But he goes on to suggest that this figure requires a certain amount of deceit:

> which to do it requireth cunning: for nothing can be truly counterfait or represented in his absence, but by great discretion in the doer. And if the things we couet to describe be not naturall or not veritable, than yet the same axeth more cunning to do it, because to fain a thing that neuer

[43] See Theresa M. Kelly, 'Keats and "Ekphrasis"', in *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.170. In *The Sculpted Word*, Grant Scott writes that 'Keats was never more interested in nature than when it was mediated through art', and that 'Keats uses ekphrasis as a verbal substitute for visual experience' (pp.xi, 19), but one could easily substitute 'Shakespeare' for 'Keats' in both of these comments.

was nor is like to be, proceedeth of a greater wit and sharper inuention than to describe things that be true.[44]

This passage suggests that such an act of description requires 'cunning' and involves 'counterfeiting', and that the less 'naturall' or 'veritable' these things are, the more cunning will be needed. By the late sixteenth-century, *cunning* could mean 'Skilful in compassing one's ends by covert means; clever in circumventing; crafty, artful, guileful; sly' (*OED* 5). And, of course, the character in the play that best fits this description is Autolycus, confidence trickster and purveyor of fictional ballads that are taken for fact.

3. 'O master pedlar with your confidence tricks'[45]

While the narratives of Antigonus and the Clown are presented as being problematic, or *potentially* artful and deceptive, in the case of Autolycus we *cannot but* doubt the truth of his stories, and reflect upon why the play's other characters are taken in by him. Like Leontes, Autolycus is another character whose actions seem designed to make us more sceptical about believing in things that we have not seen; and yet there is something remarkably attractive and compelling about Autolycus, both the fictions that he creates, and the ballads that he peddles. Terence Cave has written that, 'Like all good advertisers, con-men and story-tellers, [Autolycus] is a master of the art of lying'.[46] But how do Autolycus's skills in storytelling and lying relate to the mimetic strategies of *The Winter's Tale*? How might Autolycus's fictions relate to Shakespeare's own artistic practice? Like a literary artist, Autolycus creates and sells sophisticated fictions that people believe in. However, before we see Autolycus selling fictions, we witness him perpetrating a particularly ingenious

[44] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), p.238. See also Nick Groom's comments on this passage in *The Forger's Shadow* (London: Picador, 2002), p.37; and McKeown, '*Enargeia* and the English Literary Renaissance', pp.133-35.
[45] Louis MacNeice, 'Autolycus', line 31, reproduced in *Casebook*, ed. Muir, pp.232-33.
[46] Cave, *Recognitions*, p.287. Cave writes: 'The ambivalent power of narrative is advertised with what is—even for Shakespeare—a special exuberance in the intervention of Autolycus in the fourth act of *The Winter's Tale*' (p.287).

confidence trick. The ingenuity of this trick, in which Autolycus picks the Clown's pocket, hinges upon Autolycus's pretence that he has *himself* been robbed: 'I am robbed, sir, and beaten, my money and apparel ta'en from me, and these detestable things put upon me' (4.3.61-63). Here, Autolycus tells the Clown about an absent event—the theft of his money and clothes—but in this case, at least for the audience, the event is *explicitly* a fiction: it never took place. Autolycus manages to reinvent his raggedy attire as visual proof for the tale that he spins, demonstrating that visual proof is not always reliable, and that it can be dependent upon, or even created by, a narrative. Indeed, this is a skilful sleight-of-hand on Autolycus's part: like Edmund in *King Lear*, he pretends that a visual effect can authenticate an invisible—or, in this case, non-existent—cause. Furthermore, Autolycus boldly names himself as the man responsible for the robbery: 'Some call him Autolycus' (4.3.97-98). The Clown is taken into Autolycus's confidence, and fails to notice what is happening to him because he thinks that it has *already* happened to Autolycus. But a similar thing happens to us when we experience *The Winter's Tale*. Mary L. Livingstone has written that 'Seeing [Autolycus's] guises deceive simpler folk should make us question how art, either his or *The Winter's Tale*'s, works on us: perhaps the pockets of both audiences are being picked'.[47] This critic offers a moral imperative: Autolycus's confidence tricks *should* make us more sceptical towards the art of the play, as if Livingstone is concerned that they might have the opposite effect. Similarly, Louis MacNeice's fascinating poem 'Autolycus' offers a comparison of Autolycus and the playwright, cautioning the reader to

Watch your pockets when

[47] Mary L. Livingstone, 'The Natural Art of *The Winter's Tale*', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 30 (1969), 340-55 (p.346). Philip Edwards briefly mentions the 'self-images of the artist in the last plays', and writes that 'Beside the heroic image of the brooding, careworn Prospero, we have the anti-heroic image of Autolycus, the man who depends for his living on his protean resourcefulness and the gullibility of the public' ('"Seeing is believing"', p.92). Stephen Orgel suggests that Autolycus 'is the figure in this play closest to the playwright' ('Introduction', p.52), and notes the way in which Autolycus 'continually reveal[s] his disguises, tricks and plots to us' (p.53). However, neither Orgel nor Edwards offers a full account of precisely how Autolycus's collusion with the audience might relate to that of Shakespeare, nor do they recognise the significance of the trick Autolycus plays upon the Clown.

> That rogue comes round the corner, he can slit
> Purse strings as quickly as his maker's pen
> Will try your heart strings in the name of mirth. (27-30)

But it is not enough to say that Autolycus is a figure for the playwright: Shakespeare's inclusion of Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* is itself an Autolycus-like confidence trick, inasmuch as the very presence of a confidence trickster distracts us from the way in which we are 'taken in' by Shakespeare's artistry.[48] We watch people being taken in by fictions in the play, yet we fail to notice the extent to which we begin to take the play for 'reality'. More precisely, Autolycus's confidence trick highlights the extent to which *all* of the acts of narration in the play are—on one level at least—acts of deception on the part of the playwright, in the sense that they describe fictional events that have not taken place. But if we align Autolycus with the playwright, then what are the implications for critics' rapturous accounts of the play's final scene? Autolycus is a scandalous figure, and, as we shall see, some critics feel uneasy about identifying the playwright or the play with him. But Autolycus is not only guilty of gulling the Clown: he also sells dubious *written* narratives.

Like his opening confidence trick, the broadside ballads that Autolycus sells also depend on the belief in something unseen, and for which there is no evidence other than Autolycus's verbal persuasiveness. Advances in the technology of printing gave rise to the popularity of printed 'news' in the late sixteenth century, which took the form of such printed ballads, and which had the ability to report almost instantly upon newsworthy events. Michael McKeon has noted how such ballads were characterised by 'a naive dedication to the wonderful and the incredible', and, like the ballads depicted in *The Winter's Tale*, purported to be

[48] Lee Sheridan Cox's essay 'The Role of Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*', *SEL*, 9 (1969), 283-301, begins promisingly, by noting that Autolycus is 'the professional, the most active teller of tales in this winter's tale' (p.285), and asking the question 'why should Shakespeare, himself telling a tale and constantly reminding the reader of that fact, use a liar and pickpocket for a tale-teller, a singer whose song is a means to an end?' (p.286). However, Cox concludes, disappointingly, that Autolycus is ultimately 'a representative of a Providence whose "secret purposes" are revealed at the end of the play' (pp.300-1)

based upon the testimony of first-hand witnesses.[49] The questions that the play's characters ask of the ballads—'Is it true, think you?' (4.4.264), asks Mopsa—are suggestive of a naïve audience's need for a text or narrative to be based upon real events.[50] It is also interesting that Mopsa makes the mistaken assumption that the truth of such ballads can be guaranteed by their status as printed texts: 'I love a ballad in print, a-life, for then we are sure they are true' (4.4.258-59). Mopsa does not need to *see* the events that the ballads describe in order to believe in them: the fact that they have the authority of print is proof enough. At this point, Shakespeare appears to be holding Mopsa, and the ballads in general, up for ridicule.[51] Autolycus assures Mopsa that the first ballad he describes is based upon real events, and that these events occurred recently: 'Very true, and but a month old' (4.4.265). As Leonard Davis has written, such ballads always claimed to be 'new', 'as if that word were at once a guarantee and a disclaimer'.[52] Shakespeare's play, then, explores the paradoxical nature of such ballads, which used the claims of newness and strangeness to attest to their being true. As Michael McKeon puts it,

> In Shakespeare and some other uses, the effect is humorously but decisively to subvert the claim to historicity. But in many of the ballads themselves there is no evidence at all of an ironic intent, and the old claim that a story is "strange but true" subtly modulates into something more like the paradoxical "strange, therefore true." The fact of "strangeness" or "newness" ceases, that is, to be a liability to empirical truth-telling, and becomes instead an attestation in its support. (pp.46-47)

But, of course, Shakespeare's play also claims to be strange but true, or even strange *therefore* true. Furthermore, the play explicitly compares its *own* resolution to the outlandish events that were usually depicted in broadside

[49] See Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p.46. The whole of chapter 1, 'The Destabilization of Generic Categories', is relevant to my discussion.

[50] See David Young, *The Heart's Forest: A Study of Shakespeare's Pastoral Plays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p.127.

[51] It is worth noting that *The Winter's Tale* was not published until it appeared in the First Folio (1623), suggesting that it was not available to a popular reading audience.

[52] Leonard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p.48.

ballads. In the penultimate scene, the Second Gentleman tells the First Gentleman the news: 'The oracle is fulfilled, the King's daughter is found; such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour that ballad-makers cannot be able to express it' (5.2.22-23). It is not simply that the play's events are *comparable* to the sort of thing that we find in ballads: the wonder that they have produced is such that ballad-makers will be *unable* to represent it. The play suggests that it is somehow *more* improbable than the narrative material of Autolycus's ballads.

The first ballad described by Autolycus is said to have a certain amount of authority: 'Here's the midwife's name to't, one Mistress Taleporter, and five or six honest wives that were present' (4.4.268-69). This ballad is, quite literally, an old wives' tale, and the author is named 'Taleporter', a tale-bearer or gossip. However, we do not hear from these witnesses directly: their testimony is itself absent and is reported to us by Autolycus.[53] 'Why should I carry lies abroad?' (4.4.269), asks Autolycus; and this rhetorical question convinces Mopsa, as she commands the Clown to purchase the ballad: 'Pray you now, buy it' (4.4.270). Yet if Shakespeare mocks this naïve belief in the truth of Autolycus's ballads, they are also a reworking in miniature of the larger narrative they inhabit. As Howard Felperin writes, 'Autolycus's ballads re-enact in a grotesque or surrealist form not only Leontes' opening fantasies of illicit pregnancy and condign punishment, but also his—and our—eagerness for verification, for grounding what must forever remain linguistic and poetic possibility in historical fact or empirical truth'.[54] One ballad in particular sounds strangely familiar:

> Here's another ballad, of a fish that appeared upon the coast on Wednesday the fourscore of April forty thousand fathom above water, and sung this ballad against the hard hearts of maids. It was thought she was a woman and was turned into a cold fish for she would not exchange flesh with one that loved her. The ballad is very pitiful, and as true. (4.4.273-79)

[53] Orgel comments that 'Autolycus' ability to produce documentary confirmations of the most fantastic of [the ballads'] claims provides a wry commentary on the questions of evidence that fill the play' ('Introduction', p.52).
[54] Felperin, '"Tongue-tied, our queen?"', p.52.

Shakespeare appears to be inviting us to interpret this ballad as an allegory of the play's events. For one thing, we might want to detect a pun in 'fish' and 'flesh', anticipating our discovery that Hermione has been supposedly turned into 'cold flesh'—into a statue.[55] In addition, the appearance of the fish 'upon the coast' is reminiscent of the arrival of Perdita on the coast of Bohemia. Dorcas asks if this ballad is true: 'Is it true too, think you?' (4.4.280). According to Autolycus, this ballad has 'Five justices' hands at it, and witnesses more than my pack will hold' (4.4.281-82). One cannot help wondering whether in some sense *we* are these witnesses. Are we watching a dramatisation of this peculiar and unlikely ballad? Lori Humphrey Newcombe has written that '*The Winter's Tale* folds into its romance plot repeated representations of popular narrative as unsophisticated or foolish, as though denying its own dependence on the feigned narratives designed to beguile the simple'.[56] But not only that: the play both denies and admits the fact that *it is itself* a feigned narrative designed to beguile people. Shakespeare deliberately distinguishes his play from such ballads and popular written narratives—including his narrative source, Greene's *Pandosto*—while simultaneously drawing attention to its affinity with them.

Certainly we are tempted to reflect upon the relationship between Autolycus's ballads and the 'art' of *The Winter's Tale*.[57] Yet the presence of the ballads has induced embarrassment in one of the best critics of the play, Northrop Frye. Commentating on the different forms of 'art' in the play, Frye cites the art of the gardener discussed by Perdita and Polixenes in 4.4, the art of painter and sculptor Giulio Romano, and then moves onto Autolycus:

> Thirdly, though one blushes to mention it, there is the crude popular art of the ballads of Autolycus, of which one describes 'how a usurer's wife was brought to bed of twenty money-bags at a burden'. [...] And when one of the Gentlemen says 'Such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour that ballad-makers cannot be able to express it', we begin to

[55] See Livingstone, 'The Natural Art of *The Winter's Tale*', p.348.
[56] Newcombe, '"Social Things"', p.767.
[57] In his earlier treatment of the play in *Shakespearean Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), Howard Felperin comments that 'Autolycus' art, in that it never really leads us back to life, is really a low parody of the high art of the play itself' (p.237).

> suspect that the kind of art manifested by the play itself is in some respects closer to these 'trumpery' ballads than to the sophisticated idealism and realism of Polixenes and Romano.[58]

Frye's uneasiness seems to come from his realisation that the art of the play might be more akin to the confidence trickery of Autolycus than the 'high' art that is represented by the work of Giulio Romano. In 5.2, Romano is said to have produced a work of art that is so scandalously realistic that the viewer would mistake it for life itself:

> a piece many years in doing and now newly performed by that rare Italian master Giulio Romano, who, had he himself eternity and could put breath into his work, would beguile nature of her custom, so perfectly he is her ape. He so near to Hermione hath done Hermione that they say one would speak to her and stand in hope of answer. (5.2.95-100)

But this ambiguous appraisal of Romano's skills—which are only described and not seen at this point—implies that art will never really be able to duplicate life exactly as it is. No artist will ever have 'eternity' in which to fashion his works of art, and no painter or sculptor will be able literally to put 'breath' into his work. Frye writes that 'it turns out that in fact no statue has been made of Hermione, and the entire reference to Romano seems pointless' (p.191). But the point of the reference is to allow Shakespeare to contrast his dramatic art with the idealised representations of Giulio Romano; and this comparison is hinted at by the ambiguity of the phrase 'newly performed'.[59] Seeing Hermione's supposed statue becoming 'real' after hearing this description of Romano's perfect mimetic skills has the effect of making Shakespeare's art appear even more authentic than what was *already* a perfect work of art. The Autolycus-like trick, however, is that our only evidence for Romano's skills is the Third Gentleman's verbal

[58] Northrop Frye, 'Recognition in *The Winter's Tale*' reprinted from *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honour of Hardin Craig*, ed. Richard Hosley (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1962), in *Casebook*, ed. Muir, pp.192-93. Terence Cave has also noted Frye's 'evident embarrassment' in this passage: see *Recognitions*, p.287. On critics being 'upset' by Autolycus, see Sokol, *Art and Illusion*, p.177.

[59] Leonard Barkan writes that 'Hermione is indeed "many years in doing," and Giulio's *performance* of the statue, while in a literal sense suggesting its completion, can hardly fail to remind us of both the character of Hermione's performance and of Shakespeare's own medium of art' ('"Living Sculptures"', pp.657-58).

description.[60] The effect is similar to that of Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which the 'reality' is said to be better than a work of art, so much so as to render it undescribable:

> For her own person,
> It beggar'd all description: she did lie
> In her pavilion—cloth of gold, of tissue—
> O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork nature. (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 2.2.197-201)

Here, within a narrative account that self-consciously denigrates its own powers of narration ('It beggared all description'), Cleopatra is said to 'o'erpicture' a picture of Venus in which the artist outdid nature: life has outdone a work of art that was already better than life. But, paradoxically, this remarkable 'reality'—which we do not see—can *only* be depicted within the self-proclaimed inadequacy of Enobarbus's narrative account. It is impossible to show something that is better than what was *already* an example of visual perfection: it can only exist within an imaginative space inferred from a narrative account. Similarly, perhaps, the penultimate scene of *The Winter's Tale* is particularly fascinating for what Shakespeare decides *not* to show us.

4. Take My Word For It

5.2 is the play's most explicitly 'absent' scene, in which a recognition scene featuring the reunion of Leontes, Polixenes and Perdita is not dramatised, but is instead described by three gentlemen, who talk incessantly about the fact that they are only talking about it. Perhaps Shakespeare felt that two emotional recognition scenes would be excessive, and wanted to save up his audience's emotions—and their desire for visual spectacle—for Hermione's 'resurrection' in the subsequent scene. Garrett Stewart writes that the scene 'seems to praise experience over representation' and that it 'actually elevates drama over

[60] Orgel comments interestingly that 'Romano's statue is, in the most literal sense, the evidence of things not seen, said to have been sculpted by an artist whose statues, if he did in fact make any, Shakespeare could have known only by reading or hearsay, a work created out of pure inference from a narrative' ('Introduction', p.57).

narrative, for we too would have *seen* the spectacle if only Shakespeare had mounted rather than circumvented it'.[61] But the scene comes to demonstrate both the limitations and the power of narrative: the sentiments expressed by the gentlemen are very much those of 'you had to be there', and yet their desire to tell is overwhelming and irresistible. In addition, Shakespeare draws our attention to the visuality of the gentlemen's descriptions, in a scene notable for its numerous references to sight and seeing.[62] Sometimes the gentlemen profess the inadequacy of narrative in the face of the events that they describe, while at others they demonstrate the persuasiveness and 'vividness' of narrative. Indeed, their descriptions also show that narrative can do things that 'showing' alone cannot.

The First Gentleman begins by apologising for the incoherence and insufficiency of the narrative account he is about to give, but his retelling is another example of *enargeia*, as he attempts to bring the scene before our eyes:

> I make a broken delivery of the business; but the changes I perceived in the King and Camillo were very notes of admiration. They seemed almost with staring on one another to tear the cases of their eyes. There was speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture; they looked as they had heard of a world ransomed, or one destroyed. A notable passion of wonder appeared in them, but the wisest beholder that knew no more but seeing could not say if th'importance were joy or sorrow—but in the extremity of the one it must needs be. (5.2.9-19)

This focusing of our attention on the eyes of the King and Camillo—and the Gentleman's own 'looking' at them—enacts our desire to see this spectacle as it is described to us. This ekphrastic description manages to produce a sense of spectacle, whetting our appetite for the immensely visual scene that is to follow, without our actually seeing anything. Here, the First Gentleman describes Leontes and Camillo as if they were a silent work of art, preparing us for our

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[61] Garrett Stewart, 'Shakespearean Dreamplay', *English Literary Renaissance*, 11 (1981), 44-69 (p.57).

[62] Carol Thomas Neely has noted the 'repeated emphasis on eyes' in this scene, in '*The Winter's Tale*: The Triumph of Speech', *SEL*, 15 (1975), 321-338 (p.334). But, as we have seen, the emphasis on eyes is to be found throughout the play.

experience of the statue of Hermione in the next scene.[63] Michael O'Connell writes that 'The speech and language that were eloquent dumbness and articulate gesture are, to our regret as spectators, rendered as mere report, speech that cannot really convey the "notable passion of wonder" that we would hope for in the enacted scene'.[64] But this 'eloquence' was not really there to begin with, and is produced rhetorically *by* and *within* this description. There could not *literally* have been 'speech in their dumbness': the Gentleman purports to be giving voice to a silent, absent scene, but he actually *creates* it. What is also interesting about this description is its figuring of multiple interpretations, and the implication that it is not enough merely to *see* events to decipher their meaning. The First Gentlemen implies that even 'the wisest beholder'—emphasising both knowledge and intellect—'that knew no more but seeing' would be incapable of delivering an authoritative interpretation of this scene unless he had *heard* about the circumstances as well. This is in direct contrast to Leontes's epistemological certainty in the first half of the play, when his interpretation of events did not even require the evidence of seeing. Hermione's infidelity was 'as gross as ever touched conjecture, / That lacked sight only' (2.1.176-77). Now, the emotional state of Leontes and Camillo is presented as something that was undecidable, even when the interpreter is presented with the thing itself; it is unclear whether 'the notable passion of wonder' that the King and Camillo were experiencing was 'joy or sorrow'. Thus visual 'proof' is something that is open to interpretation: both hearing *and* seeing have their limitations. Even if we had been present at this absent scene, then we still would not have had all the answers.[65]

[63] In *The Sister Arts*, Jean Hagstrum defines ekphrasis as 'that special quality of giving voice and language to the otherwise silent art object' (p.18, note 34), and writes that 'The entire last act of the *Winter's Tale* is compounded of themes intimately associated with the tradition of *ut pictura poesis* and iconic poetry' (p.86).
[64] O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye*, p.140. He writes that 'the scene itself has been entirely repressed. Where is it? Has it occurred or not? Did *anyone* see it? Is it really only to be imagined, imaged, by *hearers* of what happened?' (p.140).
[65] Inga-Stina Ewbank comments on this scene that 'the vision (and how much of it do we visualize?) is created in words, and some of these point to the imprecision or ambiguity of a purely visual scene' ('The Word in the Theater', p.69).

It is worth noting that the first speaker in the scene is Autolycus, hungry for knowledge: 'Beseech you, sir, were you present at this relation?' (5.2.1-2). He has already shown us what fictions people are prepared to believe: now a scene of the play asks us to compare the events it describes—but does not show—with Autolycus's ballads and the naïve faith and credit of the rustics. As we have already noted, the Second Gentleman says that 'such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour that ballad-makers cannot be able to express it' (5.2.22-23). When Paulina's steward enters, the Second Gentleman asks for more information: 'How goes it now, sir? This news, which is called true, is so like an old tale that the verity of it is in strong suspicion. Has the King found his heir?' (5.2.22-25). The news is only *called* true, owing to its likeness to a fictional narrative: it is like an old tale, inasmuch as it adheres to certain fictional conventions, and therefore seems unlikely or strange, like a ballad. The Third Gentleman informs us that the telling will be as vivid as seeing the thing itself, again using the figure of *enargeia*: 'That which you hear you'll swear you see, there is such unity in the proofs' (5.2.31-32). However, when the Second Gentleman tells him that he did not see 'the meeting of the two Kings' (5.2.39-40), the Third Gentleman states that his descriptive powers will be *unable* to represent the scene as effectively as seeing: 'Then have you lost a sight which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of' (5.242-43). And yet, as with the First Gentleman, the Third Gentleman cannot resist attempting a retelling:

> There might you have beheld one joy crown another so and in such manner that it seemed sorrow wept to take leave of them, for their joy waded in tears. There was casting up of eyes, holding up of hands, with countenance of such distraction that they were to be known by garment, not by favour. (5.2.43-49)

He tells the Second Gentleman what he *might* have beheld if he had been there. And yet, we are told that the two Kings were so distracted that it was hard to tell them apart. Leontes and Polixenes were only to be 'known by garment, not by favour' (5.2.48-49). 'Favour' can mean 'The countenance, face' (*OED* 9b), but also, more generally, 'Appearance, aspect, look' (*OED* 9). This suggests, once

again, that *seeing* the scene did not necessarily guarantee straightforward interpretation. At the end of his account, the Third Gentleman again points to its inadequacy: 'I never heard of such another encounter, which lames report to follow it, and undoes description to do it' (5.2.55-57). Not merely *out*does, but *un*does—description itself is said to unravel at the attempt to recount this event. Nonetheless, when asked about the fate of Antigonus, the Third Gentleman is so enraptured with his own description that he seems to get visual experience and verbal retelling confused: 'Like an old tale still, which will have matter to rehearse though credit be asleep and not an ear open—he was torn to pieces with a bear' (5.2.60-62). The Third Gentleman only relates the story of Antigonus after he has drawn attention to its improbability; but one might expect him to say 'not an *eye* open'. The Third Gentleman's formulation adds to the sense that we are *seeing* this absent scene with our ears.

The First Gentleman comments that 'The dignity of this act was worth the audience of kings and princes, for by such was it acted' (5.2.78-79). But why, then, if this dignified 'act' was worth such a noble audience, was it not staged? Is it because we do not deserve to see it? The First Gentleman's desire for a royal audience is particularly ironic, given that the play was performed at court seven times before 1640, and was performed in front of the King in 1611.[66] By creating this image of a majestic theatre, in which both actors and audience are kings and princes, the First Gentleman also intimates that any attempt by Shakespeare's acting company to represent this scene would have been inadequate. Indeed, he sounds like the first Chorus of *Henry V*, who craves 'A kingdom for a stage, princes to act, / And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!' (Prologue, 3-4).[67] And yet, the First Gentleman's estimation of the

[66] See Orgel, 'Introduction', pp.1, 80. See also the textual note in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 1997), on a possible reference to Jonson's *Masque of Oberon*, which was performed at court in January 1611 (pp.2881-82).
[67] Anne Barton also makes this connection with *Henry V*; see '"Enter Mariners wet": realism in Shakespeare's last plays', in *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, p.195. However, Barton goes on to write that 'those conditions are about to be realised. Before an on-stage audience of kings and princes, there will be enacted the resurrection of a real, not a player queen' (p.195). But is the 'on-stage audience' *really* one of 'kings and princes'? Is Hermione a 'real' queen?

'worth' of this scene is a act of deception: this scene was *not* acted by kings and princes, *nor* by Shakespeare's company—it was not 'acted' by anyone. The Second Gentleman then describes how Leontes related to Perdita the circumstances of her mother's death:

> One of the prettiest touches of all, and that which angled for my eyes—caught the water, though not the fish—was when at the relation of the Queen's death, with the manner how she came to't bravely confessed and lamented by the King, how attentiveness wounded his daughter; till from one sign of dolour to another she did, with an 'Alas!', I would fain say bleed tears; for I am sure my heart wept blood. Who was most marble there changed colour. Some swooned, all sorrowed; if all the world could have seen't, the woe had been universal. (5.2.80-90)

Like Edgar's narrative in the final scene of *King Lear*, this passage of narrative is highly self-reflexive, inasmuch as it describes an immensely affecting act of narration.[68] Our response is figured, anticipated and perhaps even *produced* by this account. There is even an explicit proleptic allusion to stone becoming flesh: 'Who was most marble there changed colour' (5.2.88). People who are 'most marble' are so moved by this tragic tale that they are brought back to life, metaphorically speaking; and, indeed, this metaphor is literalised in the following scene. The Third Gentleman describes an event so sorrowful that, 'if all the world could have seen't, the woe had been universal' (5.2.89-90). This is another attempt to make us imagine the visual and emotional impact of this reported scene. It is also the play's most striking image of a total theatre: a universal 'woe', in which the world's entire population is the audience. But the Third Gentleman is being like Autolycus in his subverting of effects and (non-existent) causes. By employing this powerful metaphorical image of a universal theatre to describe the *effect* of seeing this scene, the Gentleman asks us to imagine that we have seen it. However, we did not see this scene; and, in fact,

[68] The Third Gentleman's somewhat inflated description of Paulina, 'But O, the noble combat that 'twixt joy and sorrow was fought in Paulina!' (5.2.71-73), echoes Edgar's description of his father's death in *Lear*. Edgar states that Gloucester's 'flawed heart [...] 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief, / Burst smilingly' (5.2.194-98). This echo highlights the similarity of the endings of these two plays, inasmuch as *King Lear* also juxtaposes a site of narrative—Edgar's rhetorical account of Gloucester's death—against the unmediated but ambiguous sight of Lear's death.

no-one has seen this scene, as it has not taken place. We imagine the cause—the scene itself—from the Gentleman's description of an entirely imaginary effect.[69] This passage suggests that descriptions can create the *illusion* of presence, but that this remains an illusion, one dependent upon 'cunning'. The First Gentleman then prioritises seeing as a means of acquiring knowledge: 'Every wink of an eye, some new grace will be born—our absence makes us unthrifty to our knowledge' (5.2.108-10). The First Gentleman implicitly includes us in his 'our' as well: now it is *we* who are absent from the event that is about to take place somewhere else. Our desire for this spectacle is satisfied in the next scene, but, as we shall see, it is not clear that this spectacle offers the audience the 'knowledge' that the First Gentleman promises. Nonetheless, after so many absences, some readers mistake the final scene for what the play has been promising all along: the thing itself.

5. The Statue and the Critics

If *The Winter's Tale* repeatedly shows us characters taking things that are not real for reality, in the play's final scene, the characters mistake the play's 'reality' for a work of art. As we have seen, at certain moments in *The Winter's Tale* we are enjoined to question our beliefs, and those of the characters in the play, while at others—the final scene in particular—the play seems designed to elicit our total conviction.[70] Indeed, some critics and audiences of the play seem to have been seduced into accepting the play for 'reality', in spite of—or perhaps even *because* of—the disengagement that the play has encouraged. Other critics, however, particularly those writing in the eighteenth-century, have been less kind. Dryden dismissed the play, along with several other Shakespearean

[69] This description is reminiscent of Hamlet's account of an ideal performance of his grief that is both visual *and* verbal, but which we do not see: it would 'Make mad the guilty and appal the free, / Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed / The very faculties of eyes and ears' (2.2.516-18).

[70] William R. Morse has written that the final scene 'relies heavily on a participative engagement with the audience that dramatically contrasts with the disengagement or alienation that most of the play has sought to maintain', in 'Metacriticism and Materiality: The Case of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*', *ELH*, 58 (1991), 283-304 (p.298).

works, as being 'grounded upon impossibilities',[71] while Charlotte Lennox thought that Shakespeare's alterations and additions to his source—in particular the statue scene—made the play inferior to what was already a 'paltry' tale: 'The Novel has nothing in it half so low and improbable as this Contrivance of the Statue; and indeed wherever *Shakespeare* has altered or invented, his *Winter's Tale* is greatly inferior to the old paltry Story that furnished him with the Subject of it'.[72] And Arthur Murphy, reviewing a production of the play in the *London Chronicle* in 1757, objected to the discovery of Hermione: 'Reason operates too strongly against the Incident, and our passions subside into Calmness and Inactivity'.[73] But it is worth noting that these objections are themselves figured in the play. The play compares its own resolution to an 'old paltry Story', or an 'old tale' that should be 'hooted at' (5.2.116-17); while Paulina states that if the Oracle's prediction were to come true—which it does—it would be 'monstrous to our human reason' (5.1.41).

By the time of Helen Faucit's celebrated performances as Hermione in the mid nineteenth-century, however, critics and audiences seemed less concerned with the lack of 'Reason' in the statue scene. A reviewer in the *Glasgow Herald* (1848) noted how the audience was entirely taken in by Faucit's performance as Hermione's statue, and then astounded by its coming-to-life:

> So complete was the illusion, so still the figure, so sightless the eyeballs, that you seemed insensibly to forget it was a living being who stood before you: and when amidst the melody of music, she turned her head

[71] John Dryden, *A Defence of the Epilogue; or, An Essay on the Dramatique Poetry of the Last Age* (1672), quoted in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Brian Vickers, 6 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974-81), I, p.145.

[72] Charlotte Lennox, *Shakespear Illustrated* (1753), quoted in *The Critical Heritage*, ed. Vickers, IV, p.126. Maurice Hunt has suggested that 'Lennox's preference for the "novel" that Greene supposedly wrote most likely reflects the success of Samuel Richardson and other eighteenth-century novelists in forging a new genre whose speciality was the painstaking recitation of causal relationships', in *'The Winter's Tale': Critical Essays*, ed. Hunt (New York: Garland, 1995), pp.5-6. But it is interesting that *Pandosto* should actually appear in Richardson's *Clarissa*, and is depicted as being compelling enough to lose sleep over, but also a dangerous distraction: a cook-maid accidentally sets fire to 'an old pair of calico window-curtains' after sitting up all night reading 'the simple history of Dorastus and Faunia'. See *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p.723.

[73] *The Critical Heritage*, ed. Vickers, IV, pp.288-89

> towards the king, the whole house started as if struck by an electric shock, or as if they had seen the dead arise.[74]

This reviewer knows that the performance is a dramatic 'illusion', but notes how the audience 'insensibly' seemed to 'forget' that the statue was played by an actress.[75] The 'whole house' reacts physically when Hermione moves—it is like 'an electric shock'—as if they had seen a ghost. According to this reviewer, this audience reacted to Hermione's coming-to-life as if it were something miraculous or supernatural, and accepted what they were watching as if it were a real happening. More recently still, several critics have used the 'resurrection' of Hermione as a metaphor for the life-likeness of the play.[76] In his treatment of the play in *Shakespearean Romance* (1972), Howard Felperin writes that

> No play of Shakespeare's (I venture to say not even *Hamlet* or *Lear*) creates a world of greater amplitude and variety. The peculiarly Shakespearean ability to create in a mere three thousand lines an imaginative environment so fully realised that we take it, like Hermione's "statue," for life itself and its creatures for fellow beings is nowhere more in evidence than in *The Winter's Tale*.[77]

Here, Felperin uses Hermione's statue as a metaphor for the play in which it appears; now the play itself becomes an ekphrastic work of art, one that we mistake for reality. But do we *really* take the play—or, for that matter, Hermione's statue—'for life itself'? Patricia Southard Gourlay uses a similar formulation to Felperin: 'As the play's title reminds us, its truths are fiction. Yet it moves and convinces; it brings itself to life'.[78] Again the play is described in terms redolent of the coming-to-life of Hermione's statue: we know that the play is a work of art, but it somehow 'comes to life'. Both of these critics appear to

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[74] Quoted in *Casebook*, ed. Muir, p.51.
[75] The word *insensibly* can mean both 'imperceptibly; unconsciously' (*OED* 1), but also 'Without sense or understanding; stupidly, irrationally' (*OED* 2).
[76] Janet Adelman has suggested that 'Hermione's aliveness alludes to the risky aliveness of theater itself, with its moving actors', in *Suffocating Mothers*, p.235.
[77] Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance*, pp.212-13.
[78] Patricia Southard Gourlay, '"O my most sacred lady": Female Metaphor in *The Winter's Tale*', *English Literary Renaissance*, 5 (1975), 375-95 (p.395), quoted in Charles Frey, *Shakespeare's Vast Romance: A Study of The Winter's Tale* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980), p.7.

have become so enthralled by the reanimation of Hermione's statue that they have transferred this reanimation onto *The Winter's Tale* itself.

The most famous analogue to this scene is the tale of Pygmalion in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which Pygmalion's statue—a work of art that he has created—magically becomes a real woman.[79] But the statue in 5.3 of *The Winter's Tale*, supposedly a product of Giulio Romano's art, turns out to have been 'nature' all along—except that the 'nature' we are experiencing is the one created by Shakespeare's art.[80] In performance, the statue is played by the same actor who played Hermione in the first half of the play, so when watching this scene for the first time it is hard to know whether the actor is supposed to be representing a statue of Hermione or representing Hermione herself. It turns out that the actor is representing Hermione, who is pretending to be her own statue, but this overloading of art and levels of mimesis creates enough confusion to make some critics write about Hermione as if she were real. The moment we try to distinguish between the statue, Hermione, and the actor *playing* Hermione, and attempt to work out at any particular moment which one is imitating which, the more confused we become. Shakespeare, in Milton's words, 'Dost make us Marble with too much conceaving'.[81] Jean Hagstrum writes about this scene as if nature has triumphed over art:

> Hermione is not a statue. She only seems to be one. A living being, she steps down from her niche in the gallery and is restored to her husband. Shakespeare has reversed the situation that usually prevails in the art epigram. Art has not defeated nature; nature has defeated art. [...] The Shakespeare of this play, unlike the Keats of the "Urn" or the Yeats of

[79] See Barkan, '"Living Sculptures"', passim, and A. D. Nuttall, '*The Winter's Tale*: Ovid Transformed', in *Shakespeare's Ovid: The Metamorphoses in the Plays and Poems*, ed. A. B. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.135-49. For Ovid's version of the tale, see the *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 10: 240-301.

[80] See Edwards, '"Seeing is Believing"', pp.92-93, note 12: 'This is a brilliant double-cross by Shakespeare, for [...] it is not a triumph of art that Leontes is beholding, but Hermione herself. It is in that "Hermione herself" that the mockery lies, for Hermione is a boy-actor pretending to be Hermione pretending to be a statue'.

[81] John Milton, 'An Epitaph on the admirable Dramaticke Poet, W. Shakespeare', originally published in the Second Folio (1632), quoted from *The Norton Shakespeare*, p.3360.

> the Byzantium poems, finds only temporary and limited value in art. It is nature and reality that finally satisfy.[82]

But to say that 'nature and reality' finally 'satisfy' in *The Winter's Tale* is perhaps the opposite of what one should say. In the theatre we watch actors representing characters who talk and move like real people, but we are not watching 'nature' or 'reality' in any simple sense. Similarly, Rosalie Colie, in *Shakespeare's Living Art* (1974), waxes lyrical about the 'reality' of this scene:

> At this highest point of illusionism, illusion itself is abandoned, in the claim that reality is more startling, more miraculous, than any contrivances of art—that life itself, in its most significant moments, is hardly lifelike.[83]

But this claim—that 'reality' is more miraculous than art—is a claim that is made by a dramatic illusion: one that is *not* reality, and one that is *particularly* dependent upon the 'contrivances of art'. Even Leonard Barkan, who—as we saw in Chapter 3—was so insistent that ekphrasis is a 'lie', appears to have been seduced by the theatrical ekphrasis of *The Winter's Tale.* He writes: 'It is at this moment [when Hermione speaks and moves] that the central dream of ekphrasis can be realised, that is, when the work of art is so real it could almost come to life. Theater removes the *almost*'.[84] Critics and audiences of the play seem to end up answering Mopsa's question 'Is it true, think you?' (4.4.264) with a resounding 'yes'. But we might ask what would it mean to consider this final scene in the light of Autolycus and his ballads. Now we are the witnesses of a woman seemingly becoming 'cold flesh' and then unbecoming it. However, if the playwright is like Autolycus, then have we, like the Clown, had our pockets picked? Or is Shakespeare more like Giulio Romano, an artist who can imitate life exactly as it is?

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[82] Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts*, pp.87-88.
[83] Rosalie L. Colie, *Shakespeare's Living Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p.280.
[84] Barkan, 'Making Pictures Speak', pp.332, 343.

After the emphasis on verbal representation in 5.2 we find the stress to be on visual art, and we hear that the company have been shown around Paulina's gallery, having seen 'many singularities' (5.3.12). But, again, we do not see these impressive works of visual art: this description increases still further our desire for the sight that we—and the characters onstage—are about to behold. Indeed, there is something remarkably suggestive and self-reflexive about the fact that we find ourselves watching an audience onstage who themselves contemplate a work of art that becomes real. Leontes and his fellow spectators become a figured critical or interpretative community, and, as the scene progresses, the distinction between the theatre audience and this figured audience before us becomes increasingly blurred.[85] Paulina becomes a narrator, or even a figure for the playwright, revealing Hermione to her audience, and to us:

> But here it is—prepare
> To see the life as lively mocked as ever
> Still sleep mocked death.
> *Paulina draws a curtain, and reveals Hermione*
> *standing like a statue*
> Behold, and say 'tis well.
> I like your silence; it the more shows off
> Your wonder. (5.3.18-22)

Hermione is presented as if she were an uncannily realistic work of art. But by using the *trompe l'oeil* of a legitimate stage illusion—using an actor to represent a statue—Shakespeare makes the statue look uncannily realistic already. Leontes states that the statue has Hermione's 'natural posture', and praises its likeness to its subject: 'Chide me, dear stone, that I may say indeed / Thou art Hermione' (5.3.23-25). But Leontes is more correct than he realises: it is indeed 'Hermione', complete with the wrinkles that she has acquired in the sixteen

[85] In *The Jonsonian Masque* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), Stephen Orgel describes the process whereby the spectator of a masque became completely absorbed into the performance he was watching, a process which seems relevant to our experience of Hermione's reappearance: 'The end toward which the masque moved was to destroy any sense of theatre and to include the whole court in the mimesis—in a sense, what the spectator watched he ultimately became' (pp.5-6). See also Orgel, *The Illusion of Power*, p.39.

years since Leontes last saw her. Paulina ascribes these wrinkles to the skill and imagination of the artist:

> So much the more our carver's excellence,
> Which lets go by some sixteen years, and makes her
> As she lived now. (5.3.30-32)

But which artist is Paulina referring to? Rosalie Colie suggests that 'Of Hermione's wrinkles the playwright has made a symbol of all the failures of art to match reality'; but, on the contrary, the wrinkles demonstrate the ability of Shakespeare's art to *coincide* with 'reality'.[86] And yet it is worth pondering Leontes's equivocal appraisal of the statue that comes some thirty lines later: 'The fixture of her eye has motion in't, / As we are mocked with art' (5.3.67-68). The use of the word 'mocked' by both Paulina ('To see the life as lively mocked' (5.3.19)) and Leontes expresses something of the play's sophisticated and ambiguous attitude towards its own artistry. For the word *mock* can mean both 'to accurately represent' and 'to ridicule', and shifts between these two meanings, even within an individual definition in the *OED*: 'To ridicule by imitation of speech or action. [...] Hence, to resemble closely; to mimic, counterfeit' (*OED* 4). In this way, the play demonstrates the ability of art both accurately to counterfeit life *and* to hoodwink us; both to hold the mirror up to nature and 'To hold up to ridicule; to deride; to assail with scornful words or gestures' (*OED* s.v. 'mock', 1). The imaginative leap Leontes desperately wants to take is symbolic of his repentance; but we, too, have to make this imaginative, even logical leap. Paulina's appeal to a suspension of disbelief is addressed to us as well as to Leontes: 'It is required / You do awake your faith' (5.3.94-95). Leonard Barkan suggests that this scene demonstrates the superiority of drama to narrative, and that Hermione's coming to life is a metaphor for Shakespeare's dramatisation of narrative material: 'Shakespeare's medium, with its three—we should say four—dimensions, is the equivalent of sculpture, for as painting is to sculpture, so is narrative fiction to drama'.[87] It

[86] Colie, *Shakespeare's Living Art*, p.282.
[87] Barkan, "'Living Sculptures'", p.661.

transpires, however, that Hermione is neither a static picture nor a statue, but exists within time, within the temporality of drama. Yet it is *music* that seems to bring Hermione back to life:

> Music; awake her—strike!
> *Music*
> (*To Hermione*) 'Tis time; descend; be stone no more; approach;
> Strike all that look upon with marvel—come,
> I'll fill your grave up. (5.3.98-101)

The wonder of this moment is undeniable, but it is undercut somewhat if we recall that it was music that Autolycus used to mystify and seduce his rustic audience in 4.4. The Clown and 'the rest of the herd' (4.4.604) are so mesmerised by 'the wenches' song' (4.4.602-3) that, according to Autolycus, 'all their other senses stuck in their ears' (4.4.605). Art—in this case a song—induces a 'time of lethargy' (4.4.610), with the assembled audience 'admiring the nothing of it' (4.4.609). Autolycus then 'picked and cut most of their festival purses' (4.4.610-11). The song appears to have robbed the listeners of their senses and their scepticism, allowing Autolycus to rob them of their money. Does something similar happen to the audience of *The Winter's Tale* in its final scene? Paulina emphasises our act of perception: 'You perceive she stirs' (5.3.103); now seeing is believing. But this marvellous sight is qualified by an enigmatic and ambiguous formulation:

> That she is living,
> Were it but told you, should be hooted at
> Like an old tale; but it appears she lives,
> Though yet she speak not. (5.3.115-18)

Here, Paulina explicitly prioritises seeing above hearing, and, implicitly, drama above narrative. She highlights the fact that we are not listening to a narrative account (or reading one), and that we are *watching* Hermione's coming back to life. Paulina is denigrating the status of the sort of stories to which she refers:

'an old tale' is something that we would be justified in 'hooting' at.[88] She admits that what we are experiencing has all the qualities of an 'old tale': it is contrived, improbable, and magical. However, Paulina is at pains to stress that, rather than being a fictional or dubious narrative—one of Autolycus's ballads, for example—this event is actually occurring before our eyes. What we are witnessing in this last scene, Paulina suggests, is the actual, 'original' event and *not* a retelling in narrative form, including, perhaps, Greene's nontheatrical romance. The very fact that we are watching this event constitutes visual proof. But what does it mean to speak of an 'actual event' when we are talking about a play? And how do we respond to this scene when we *read* the play? Paulina suggests that this event—unlike an old wives' tale, or a written text—is happening before our eyes, and subsequently we *should* believe that this is Hermione. This is how Anne Barton glosses this passage:

> Report, addressed solely to the ear, without visual confirmation, would be as suspect as those ballads peddled by Autolycus, fictions to be credited only by hearers as naive as Mopsa and Dorcas. But Hermione's resurrection is not dependent upon a narrative, a tale told at secondhand. She 'appears' to live. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the meaning of the verb 'appears' was almost always straightforward: 'to come forth from sight' (sometimes from a place of concealment), 'to become visible'.[89]

Here, Barton paraphrases the *OED*'s primary definition of *appear*: "To come forth into view, as from a place of concealment, or from a distance; to become visible" (*OED* 1). Yet the range of definitions offered by the *OED* suggests that the meaning of the word *appear* was far from "straightforward" in the early seventeenth century. Perhaps a more apt definition for *appears* as Paulina uses it is 'To be clear or evident to the understanding; to be plain, manifest' (*OED* s.v. 'appear' 9). Furthermore, the word 'appear', then as now, could also suggest the deceptiveness of appearances: 'To seem, as distinguished from *to be*; to be in

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[88] See Bradshaw, *Shakespeare's Scepticism*: 'We do not "hoot", but by reflecting on its own resemblance to "an old tale" Shakespeare's *Tale* challenges us to reflect on our deeper reasons for not hooting. [...] We find ourselves contemplating a play which appears to exist in some realm between our world and the world of artless old tales' (p.87).
[89] Barton, '"Enter Mariners wet"', p.193.

outward show, or to the superficial observer' (*OED* 11), with the first citation of this usage found in *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1559). We might suggest, then, that only a 'superficial observer' would be wholly convinced by the appearance of Hermione. What is more, 'appear' could also mean '*esp.* of angels, disembodied spirits and visions' (*OED* 2). Both 'appear' and the more explicitly ghostly word 'apparition' derive from the Latin *apparere*, suggesting that Hermione is like a ghost, a dead woman 'appearing' before us. It is worth noting that Antigonus uses this word in his narrative that describes his dream of Hermione's ghost: 'thy mother / *Appeared* to me last night' (3.3.16-17). This last definition of 'appear' suggests that Hermione is a ghostly presence on stage; in this way, the word prompts us to reflect upon the ghostliness of all actors that 'appear' before our eyes. The fact of Hermione's being alive is merely an appearance of fact; even though we can see this 'fact', it remains a piece of dramatic artifice. As Andrew Gurr has written, 'as a stage appearance it is only apparent life, not a reality. It is of a piece with the rest of the tale, a myth'.[90] Paulina states that speech will act as confirmation that Hermione lives, suggesting that appearances can be unreliable without words, or even that Hermione may be a phantom that plays upon our eyesight.[91]

Yet despite the ambiguity of Hermione's reappearance, and Paulina's reference to 'old tales', it is hard to resist responding to this scene as if it were something magical. Philip Edwards writes that 'What is so interesting is Shakespeare's keenness to impress upon us that we have been cheated', and notes the unusual willingness of critics to suspend their disbelief:

[90] Andrew Gurr, 'The Bear, the Statue, And Hysteria in *The Winter's Tale*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 34 (1983), 420-25 (p.425). Gurr writes that 'It is an ambiguous assertion both in its moral imperative—if it were merely told it *should* be hooted at—and its affirmation: "it *appears* she lives" (p.425).

[91] As Marcellus says of the Ghost in the opening scene of *Hamlet*, 'What, has this thing appeared again tonight?' (1.1.21).

> In spite of the dramatist's care, you will find critics inattentively referring to "the miracle" at the end of *The Winter's Tale*. What miracle there is is just there: in our being so convinced by what the dramatist keeps assuring us is just an old wives winter's tale.[92]

I take it that Edwards is right: Hermione's resurrection is, as Florizel says of Camillo's proposed plot in 4.4, 'almost a miracle' (4.4.531). However, Edwards fails to say precisely how this mimetic strategy relates to Autolycus's confidence tricks. As Shakespeare now appears to believe in Polixenes's notion (and Renaissance commonplace) that 'The art itself is nature' (4.4.97), and repeatedly confides in us—pointing out that what we are watching is like an old tale, and that Hermione's resurrection does not make sense—we allow ourselves to be taken in by him.[93] By letting his guard down and confiding in us, as Autolycus did when he pretended that his pocket had been picked, Shakespeare distracts us from the 'trick' that is being practised upon us. For if Leontes is mocked by Hermione's statue, then we too are mocked by Shakespeare's play. What we have just witnessed is highly unlikely, if not impossible:

> Thou hast found mine—
> But how is to be questioned, for I saw her,
> As I thought, dead, and have in vain said many
> A prayer upon her grave. (5.3.138-41)

In this audacious move, Shakespeare brazenly reveals to us the inconsistencies in his play's plot.[94] It transpires that Leontes did actually see Hermione's dead body, or at least he 'thought' he did; so what did he actually see? We are reminded that this scene was withheld from us, so what should we think happened? The audience is not sure what to think in terms of plot, and subsequently our emotional responses remain uncertain and ambiguous. While art seems to heal Leontes, it is a somewhat muted triumph, as even the most

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[92] Edwards, '"Seeing is believing"', pp.91, 92.

[93] Platt writes that Shakespeare 'shows us the seams, the texture of his work and suggests that this is where the marvelous [*sic*] can dwell: not in concealing but in foregrounding art' (*Reason Diminished*, p.161).

[94] As Northrop Frye writes, 'The explanations given do not satisfy even Leontes, much less us' ('Recognition in *The Winter's Tale*', p.192).

skilful art cannot restore all of his losses. Our attentions are focused upon Paulina, who is artificially paired off with Camillo, but Mamillius is silently forgotten.[95]

As with the other Shakespeare plays that we have examined, *The Winter's Tale* concludes with the figure of anticipated retrospection, or total recapitulation. We are asked to imagine that the characters go off stage and explain the key points of the plot to one another; but this final unseen, offstage scene is perhaps the most fictitious of all of the play's absences. The play's dénouement is itself deferred and displaced to a place beyond the temporal and spatial limits of the play. Hermione asks Perdita for an account of her life up until this moment, and tells Perdita about the account of her own life that she will give:

> Tell me, mine own,
> Where hast thou been preserved, where lived, how found
> Thy father's court? For thou shalt hear that I,
> Knowing by Paulina that the oracle
> Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved
> Myself to see thine issue. (5.3.123-28)

But this is all that we hear of Hermione's story, a story that does not make sense: Hermione was herself present at the reading of the oracle in 3.2, so it is not clear why she needed Paulina to tell her the details of its pronouncement.[96] More importantly, of course, this revelation contradicts all of the evidence that suggests that Hermione has died. Paulina prevents anyone from narrating *anything*, as if she is deliberately suppressing any unpleasant details or narrative inconsistencies that might spoil the joy and concord of the play's climax: 'There's time enough for that, / Lest they desire upon this push to trouble / Your joys with like relation' (5.3.128-30). Yet the play concludes with Leontes's demand for narrative:

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[95] A. C. Swinburne did not forget Mamillius: 'at the very end...it may be that we remember him all the better because the father whose jealousy killed him and the mother for love of whom he died would seem to have forgotten the brave little spirit with all its truth of love and tender sense of shame', reprinted from *A Study of Shakespeare* (1879) in *Casebook*, ed. Muir, pp.38-39.
[96] See Orgel's note to 5.3.126.

Good Paulina,
Lead us from hence, where we may leisurely
Each one demand and answer to his part
Performed in this wide gap of time since first
We were dissevered. Hastily lead away. *Exeunt*

What's the rush? On one level, Leontes is, understandably, eager to hear the answers he seeks; but we might want to read this speech differently. There appears to be a certain embarrassment here about the lack of the play's narrative logic, and even an *anxiety* about getting off stage promptly, before anyone notices the various loose ends.[97] Despite the play's immensely theatrical and *visual* climax, we are left wanting to hear this absent, 'leisurely' account of the play's events.[98] This desire that the play produces at its close—a desire both for seeing 'the thing itself', and a desire for the logical structure of a verbal report—seems to be suggestive of the interconnectedness and interdependence of narrative and theatrical representation. The play has dared us to believe in various events that we have *not* seen, and then asks us to believe in the 'resurrection' of Hermione, which is visually and theatrically powerful, but which makes little narrative or logical sense. The very fact that this final explanation is merely talked *about*, and not heard, suggests that the play is Autolycus-like to the end—in that it only gestures towards and describes the absent proof that we, like Leontes, feel is owed to us.[99]

[97] Peter Platt writes that 'The audience, then, must attempt to fill in a great number of narrative *lacunae*: why did Mamillius die? What made Leontes convinced that he had seen his dead wife? What did Hermione do for sixteen years?' (*Reason Diminished*, p.168). However, Platt concludes his discussion of the play with a somewhat sentimental image of Shakespeare's faith in his audience, rather than examining the faith that Shakespeare explicitly elicits *from* his audience: 'Shakespeare allows reason and wonder both to diminish and to sustain each other, putting tremendous faith in the ability of the audience to reckon with these paradoxes in their own hearts and minds' (p.168).
[98] Robert Weimann notes that 'the text inscribes a gesture of recapitulation in withdrawal that is adverbially marked as both "leisurely" and "hastily." While "leisurely" can be read as a gesture of reintegrating the text in a story-telling culture, "hastily" responds to the dramatic need for a swift conclusion (and withdrawal) once the play was virtually over' (*Author's Pen and Actor's Voice*, p.230).
[99] Interestingly, *Pandosto* ends with the King committing suicide after recalling to himself the events of the tale's narrative: 'Pandosto calling to mind how first he betrayed his friend Egistus, how his jealousy was the cause of Bellaria's death, that, contrary to the law of nature, he had lusted after his own daughter, moved with these desperate thoughts he fell in a melancholy fit

6. Conclusion

In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare seems explicitly preoccupied with the possibilities and problems of narrative, perhaps even more so than in the tragedies that we have examined. While *The Winter's Tale* suggests that neither theatrical representations nor narrative descriptions can ever be perfect representations of the real, it simultaneously reveals the persuasiveness and seductiveness of both drama *and* narrative. In his chapter on the play in *Disowning Knowledge* (1987), Stanley Cavell suggests that when *The Winter's Tale* compares its events to an 'old tale', in each case 'the purpose is to say that one will have trouble believing these things without seeing them'.[100] He goes on to argue that Shakespeare is purposefully comparing drama and narrative:

> It is uncontroversial that Shakespeare's late plays intensify his study of theater, so we may take it that he is here asserting the competition of poetic theater with nontheatrical romance as modes of narrative, and especially claiming the superiority of theater (over a work like his own "source" *Pandosto*) in securing full faith and credit in fiction. (p.199)

Cavell suggests that Shakespeare's 'poetic theater' will 'secure full faith and credit in fiction', and that *The Winter's Tale* is Shakespeare's claim that theatre is more immediate, more inclined to make us suspend our disbelief than a 'nontheatrical romance'. But the notions of 'faith and credit' are precisely those that the play throws into question; in particular we are taught to question Leontes's faith and credit in the fictions that he creates, and the rustics' naïve faith in Autolycus's ballads. Furthermore, if Shakespeare had wanted to prioritise theatre and the visual over the spoken or written, then it is odd that he chooses *not* to dramatise so many events in the play, but has his characters narrate them instead. Through these many acts of narration in the play, Shakespeare demonstrates that verbal descriptions—no less than drama—can

and—to close up the comedy with a tragical stratagem—he slew himself' (in *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Orgel, pp.273-74). Perhaps the self-consciousness of this passage prompted Shakespeare to close up his tragedy with a comical 'stratagem'?

[100] Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, p.199.

sometimes persuade us that we are seeing the thing itself. In this way, the play can be read as a highly sophisticated Autolycus-like confidence trick, one that seduces us into believing that there is something outside the text, both when we see the play performed *and* when we read it. Shakespeare presents narrative—and art more generally—as being a seductive chimera that we cannot help believing in; but also a chimera that we decide to be fooled by, and that we know is only an illusion. In this way, Autolycus becomes an immensely suggestive figure for the play's own narrative and epistemological tactics. *The Winter's Tale* is as bold and audacious as Autolycus himself, inasmuch as the play's action seems designed to instil scepticism in its audience, but then presents us with what is perhaps the most illogical piece of plotting in the whole of Shakespeare's plays, daring us to believe in it. By repeatedly emphasising what it is *not* showing us—and not *telling* us—Shakespeare's art seduces us into mistaking it for nature.

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