“speak what terrible language you will”: Fooling with the Other in Shakespeare’s All’s Well That Ends Well

Hiscock, Andrew

Arrêt sur scène / Scene Focus

Published: 14/12/2021

Peer reviewed version

‘speak what terrible language you will’: fooling with the Other in Shakespeare’s *All’s Well That Ends Well*

Andrew HISCOCK
Bangor University/ Research fellow to IRCL, UMR 5186, CNRS/Univ. Paul-Valéry, Montpellier

> everyday language is … the medium by which intersubjectivity of a shared world is maintained … The more the subject becomes individuated, the more he becomes entangled in a densely woven fabric of mutual recognition, that is, of reciprocal exposedness and vulnerability.[1]

In the post-war period, the cultural theorist Jürgen Habermas argued that the construction of a “shared world” of human exchange, or what he terms elsewhere as an unconstrained, but fragile “public sphere” (*Öffentlichkeit*), remained firmly tied to the practice of everyday language. Indeed, in the excerpt above from his discussion entitled “Morality and Ethical Life”, Habermas links explicitly the politics of subject identity-construction with the larger commitment to societal evolution – and all undertaken through the strategic medium of language. The latter is envisaged as the key instrument to be deployed for the improvement of, as well as the mending and healing of faultlines that emerge in, social discourse. In comparison with a number of post-war thinkers, Habermas’ philosophical undertaking invested prominently in the agency and dynamism of language to excite cultural reciprocity and cohesion. Speaking and action are seen to operate hand-in-hand, fully imbricated in larger narratives that a society builds of collective belonging, of engagement, response and obligation. At such moments, we may be reminded of the early modern voice of Michel de Montaigne contending that “En vérité, le mentir est un mauldit vice : nous ne sommes hommes, et nous ne tenons les uns aux aultres, que par la parole”.[2]

Nonetheless, post-war cultural debate has also been characterised by contrary voices seeking to highlight anxieties concerning the very viability and perilous friability of language as a communication system. In political controversy, concerns have returned again and again regarding the ways in which the acquisition and exploitation of languages may be hierarchised and subsequently placed in competition with each other. The social theorist Dick Hebdige, for example, has argued how

> Subcultures [may be seen to] represent ‘noise’ (as opposed to sound): interference in the orderly sequence… We should therefore not underestimate the signifying power of the spectacular subculture not only as a metaphor for potential anarchy ‘out there’ but as an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation.[3]

Turning back four hundred years, the early modern age can be discovered closely engaging with such enquiries and anxieties, exploring how language may enable, perplex and

---

[1] Jürgen Habermas, “Morality and Ethical Life. Does Hegel’s Critique of Kant Apply to Discourse Ethics”, in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicolsen, intro. Thomas McCarthy, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1999, pp. 195–216, p. 199.

[2] “Des Menteurs” (I.ix), in Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. J.-V. Leclerc, t. I, Paris, Garnier, 1878, p. 28. Translation: Lying is an abominable vice. It is only our words which unite us together and render us human. [Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.]

[3] Dick Hebdige, “Subculture”, in Raiford Guins & Omayra Zaragoza Cruz (eds.), *Popular Culture. A Reader*, London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi, Sage, 2005, pp. 355–371, p. 355.

elsewhere impede (to name just a few strains of agency) human interaction and consensus. The present discussion focuses upon a single scene (IV.i.) in Shakespeare's problem or bitter comedy *All's Well That Ends Well* (1602-6?) to consider precisely how these questions of social cohesion and communication – or rather, how impediments to them – are explored in a precariously constructed comic world, populated by ailing patriarchs, stalker heroines ("Doctor She" - II.i.77),[4] reluctant lovers and fractious states. Indeed, in her own intriguing account of "Shakespeare's only sustained piece of nonsense", Ann Lecercle has highlighted the "paradoxical" motions at work in this scene of the fool's "comeuppance": "for it is by hoodwinking that [Paroles'] unmasking takes place – a hoodwinking where nonsense of tongue makes sense of image".[5] Indeed, from a variety of perspectives, Shakespeare's entire dramatic narrative can be seen to constitute a meditation upon the recourse to violence from one form of human exchange to another; and for this discussion, in line with Robert Paul Wolff's critical formulation, violence is construed as "the illegitimate or unauthorized use of force to effect decisions against the will or desire of others".[6] As will become evident, in unveiling the construction of social experience through violent acts, Shakespeare's play continues to problematise the very undertaking of comedy.

Wrestling with the arts of speaking and knowing in his *Art of Reason* (1573), Ralph Lever submitted, "I see and confesse, that there be *Plura rerum, quam verborum genera*, (that is, moe things, then there are words to expresse things by)".[7] Repeatedly, in both early (and late) modernity, language use is situated finely at the Nature/Culture discursive distinction and this has remained embedded in ideological projects in the West since at least the time of Homeric Greece. In antiquity, the Greeks had branded those incomprehensible aliens residing beyond the pale of the *polis* as βάρβαρος, *barbaros*, barbarian – interestingly, a word not identified in English usage before the sixteenth century – and language use continues to operate as a prime cultural operation through which we gain insights into how a given community envisages indiscipline, desire, menace, foreignness, the Other. Indeed, having duly reflected upon such debates in preceding ages, Michel de Montaigne concluded persuasively for his sixteenth-century (and twenty-first century) readers, "Or, je treuve, pour revenir à mon propos, qu'il n'y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation, à ce qu'on m'en a rapporté, sinon que chascun appelle *barbarie* ce qui n'est pas de son usage".[8]

Despite the vigorous mercantile culture of the early modern Britain, it seems that the xenophobic character of these island nations was distinctive even for a continent fully acquainted with (and sharing) such prejudices. Elizabeth I's minister, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, counselled his young son Robert for the future, "Marry thy daughters in time, lest they marry themselves. And suffer not thy sons to pass the Alps. For there they shall learn nothing but pride, blasphemy and atheism".[9] Looking further afield in *Of the Russe commonwealth* (1591) and with direct relevance to the present discussion of Shakespearean dramaturgy, Giles Fletcher took little solace when reviewing the distant lands beyond the Steppes. Dedicated to the last Tudor monarch, this publication summoned up the vision of

---

[4] All textual references to *All's Well That Ends Well* are taken from Stephen Greenblatt et al (eds.), *The Norton Shakespeare, based on the Oxford Shakespeare*, New York/London, W. W. Norton & Co., 1997.

[5] Ann Lecercle, "Interpretation and 'logique du sens': the Problem Plays' problematizing of language", in Christophe Hausermann (ed.), *Actes des Congrès de la Société Française Shakespeare* 31 (2014), pp. 151–163, pp. 158–159.

[6] Robert Paul Wolff, "On Violence", *The Journal of Philosophy*, 19 (Oct 2 1969), 601–616, p. 606. In this context, see also: Bernard Dagenais, *Éloge de la Violence*, Paris, Éditions de l'Aube, 2008, esp. pp. 11, 123, 189.

[7] Ralph Lever, *The Arte of Reason, rightly termed, Witcraft, teaching a perfect way to argue and dispute*, London, 1573, ¶4^{v}.

[8] "Des cannibales" (I.xxx), in Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. Leclerc, p. 178. Translation: Now, I find, to return to my discussion, that there is nothing barbaric or savage regarding these people, from I have been informed, except that each man calls barbarism that which is unfamiliar.

[9] John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion and other various occurrences in the Church of England during Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1824, vol. IV, p. 477.

the "true and strange face of a *Tyrannical state,* (most vnlike to your own) without true knowledge of GOD, without written Lawe, without common iustice".[10] Fletcher proceeded to exploit a wide repertoire of deeply embedded anxieties concerning that remote land. At a safe textual distance, his late Elizabethan readers were invited to discover a forbidding landscape where brutality of all kinds was commonplace and the inhabitants were subject to radically imbalanced power relations:

> The number of their vagrant and begging poore is almost infinite: that are so pinched with famine and extreame neede, as that they begge after a violent and desperate manner, with *giue mee and cut mee, giue mee and kill mee,* and such like phrases. Whereby it may bee gheassed, what they are towardes straungers, that are so vnnaturall and cruell towardes their owne. And yet it may bee doubted whither is the greater, the crueltie or intemperancie that is vsed in that countrie. I will not speake of it, because it is so foule and not to bee named. The whole countrie ouerfloweth with all sinne of that kinde. And no marueile, as hauing no lawe to restraine whoredomes, adulteries, and like vncleannesse of life. As for the truth of his word, the *Russe* for the most part maketh small regard of it, so he may gaine by a lie, and breache of his promise. And it may be saide truely (as they know best that haue traded most with them) that from the great to the small (except some fewe that will scarcely be founde) the *Russe* neither beleeueth any thing that an other man speaketh, nor speaketh any thing himselfe worthie to be beleeued.[11]

Nonetheless, information from such seemingly remote societies clearly had the power to tempt and beguile as well as estrange early modern audiences. Fascinated by official communications from Czar Ivan (the Terrible), it is reported that Elizabeth I herself sought to convince her court favourite, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, to immerse himself in "the famousest and most copious language in the world".[12] Building upon such cultural narrativization for their own intrigues in the early modern playhouses, Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists regularly presented audiences with evocations of the foreign, the alien and the barbaric – frequently, as sinister and/or disorienting environments where human exchange and language itself is under severe pressure to construct the very possibility of Habermasian intersubjectivity.

At IV.i. in *All's Well That Ends Well*, we are taken into the particularly volatile environment of the military camp. War is, of course, a prime example of the exploitation of violence as the very motor for social organisation and the conflict-ridden Tudor and Stuart realms often regarded with great suspicion those called to arms. Apart from learning their trade most often in dubious (read, Catholic) lands across the seas, the documentation which survives from early modern England offers ample evidence of faint praise and moral condemnation where combatants are concerned. John Norden was not an unrepresentative voice in *A pensiue soules delight* (1615) in insisting that "Among all other professions in the world: none is more dangerous then the militarie … no sort of people are more loosely, lasciuiously, and barbarously giuen then they".[13] Of particular interest here in this early

---

[10] Giles Fletcher, *Of the Russe Common Wealth. Or Maner of Gouernement by the Russe Emperour, (commonly called the Emperour of Moskouia) with the manners, and fashions of the people of that Countrey*, London, T. D. for Thomas Charde, 1591, A3^{v}, p. 116.

[11] Fletcher, *Of the Russe Common Wealth,* A3^{v}, pp. 116–117. In his poem *De Navigatione* (1582), the humanist Stephen Parmenius also argues that "ardere in bella necesque/Sarmaticas gentes" [Russia also has a burning thirst / For war and slaughter]. For text and translation, see David B. Quinn & Neil M. Cheshire (eds.), *The New Found Land of Stephen Parmenius*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1972, pp. 88–89.

[12] Qtd. in Francesca Wilson, *Muscovy. Russia Through Foreign Eyes 1553-1900*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1970, p. 48. For further discussion here, see: Daryl W. Palmer, *Writing Russia in the Age of Shakespeare*, London, Routledge, 2016; Edward A. Bond (ed.), *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century…*, London, Hakluyt Society, 1856, pp. 232–233.

[13] John Norden, *A pensiue soules delight*, London, William Stansby for John Busby, 1615, p. 322. A shorter edition had been published in 1603.

modern debate concerning the ways in which violence, humiliation, victimisation may be practised and reserved for conflict zones and their outliers is Montaigne's contention that "Et certes la guerre a naturellement beaucoup de privileges raisonnables, au prejudice de la raison; et icy fault la regle, *Neminem id agere ut ex alterius praedetur inscitia*".[14]

The environment of the military encampment in *All's Well That Ends Well* at IV.i. is particularly concerned with the creation and exploitation of foolishness, notably linguistic foolishness, in order to test the limits of this comic world. Here, in a "hedge-corner" (IV.i.2) of the society of men-at-arms, the audience becomes privy to the stage-managing of a theatrical ritual of shaming, or *charivari*, for more general consumption – and located at the centre-stage, we are asked to attend primarily to the performances of the "manifold linguist" Paroles, or words (IV.iii.224).[15]

Language, Comedy and Conflict

At the opening of her broader discussion entitled *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable*?, Judith Butler argues that "We think of persons as reacting to war in various ways, but communicable reactions to war also variably constitute and de-constitute personhood within the field of war".[16] In this way, Butler highlights how engagement with conflict zones offers key insights into the ways in which identity construction is framed and un-framed. Paroles has already been identified earlier in Shakespeare's intrigue for his foolery and foolishness, but IV.i. remains significant in that the camp 'lords' now wish to tender superlative evidence of his incompetent humanity – and, specifically, through the medium of language.

In her own wide-ranging analysis of this play, Patricia Parker underlines that "in Act IV … Paroles is threatened with immediate death for want of 'language' before he is 'granted space', the extension of discourse, as of life, is linked with the creation of an intervening space"[17] and this cycle in the dramatic action begins at IV.i. with one of the elite figures, or lords, instructing the company to "speak what terrible language you will" even if "you understand it not yourselves, no matter; for we must not seem to understand him" (IV.i.2–4). Even when an "interpreter" is enlisted for this mock-king ritual onstage, the comic *coup de théâtre* in-the-making focuses attention upon the energies invested in managing a theatrically confected ambush, or "linsey-woolsey" (IV.i.10). The interpolation of a macaronic language associated with a perceived Other along with dramatic asides in the vernacular creates a farcical mix highlighting highly differentiated practices of telling and knowing amongst communities of auditors on- and off-stage and is in keeping, as Parker has pointed out, with the broader investment of Shakespeare's comedy in "pyrotchnical verbal exchange".[18] Code-switching between semi-choric interventions and instructions, on the one hand, and the mouthing of sonic (creatively russified) effects to the victim Paroles, on the other, all the parties in this ceremonial humiliation participate in the play's ongoing investigation into the failing project of social communication and exchange. Instead of staging "intersubjectivity" in the social environment, we are thrust in Shakespeare's comedy into the company of "some band of strangers i' the adversary's entertainment", into a company of aliens cawing the sounds of "choughs' language, gabble" (IV.i.13–14, 18).

More broadly, Maury D. Feld's contention is timely in this context that "Military service is one area of social activity that continually calls into question the costs of commonly

[14] "L'heure des parlements, dangereuse" (I.vi), in Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. Leclerc, p. 21. Translation: And, to be sure, war has by its nature many privileges which are reasonable at the cost of reason itself; and here the rule cannot be enforced [that] "Nobody should seek to exploit the foolishness of others".

[15] In this context, see Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1996, p. 201.

[16] Judith Butler, *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable*, London/New York, Verso, 2010, p. xii.

[17] Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins*, p. 188.

[18] Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins*, p. 196.

shared goals and that deliberately sets a price on human life".[19] Indeed, the upheaval of the Florentine wars operates as a perfect backdrop in *All's Well That Ends Well* not only for the questioning of existing structures of social cohesion in this dramatic world, but also of the formulation and locus of the Muscovy Other. In the festive, and notably elite, masquing staged in Shakespeare's military camp, we supposedly leave behind the sophisticated court and urban ideals customarily associated with contemporaneous constructions of Renaissance culture in works by Brunelleschi, Castiglione or Guazzo, for example. Instead, in this alien world of comic inversions and extravagant soundscapes, the aim is to remain supremely incomprehensible both to the victim and even to oneself: "therefore we must every one be a man of his own fancy. Not to know what we speak one to another, so we seem to know, is to know straight our purpose" (IV.i.15–17).

However, it soon becomes evident in documents surviving from the period that there was no need to cover great distances in order to encounter the problematisation of language acquisition and usage. Having settled in London throughout the reign of Elizabeth, the Antwerp merchant Emmanuel van Meteren (1558-1612) concluded that

> The English language is broken German (*de Enghelsche sprake is gebroken Duyts*), mixed with French and British terms, and words, and pronunciation, from which they have also gained a lighter pronunciation, not speaking out of the heart as the Germans, but only prattling with the tongue. Where they have no significant words, they make use of Latin, and sometimes of German and Flemish words.[20]

Early modern Europe was thus easily given to estranging (the language of) Others close at hand.

Nonetheless, as the lordly tormentors in Shakespeare's military camp recognise, the highly sought-after prey (Paroles) has already "a smack of all neighbouring languages" (IV.i.14–15). Thus, they must transplant him to even more remote climes. Moreover, intrinsic to the comic staging of Paroles' humiliation is the knowledge that the victim is deprived of immediate response through language to his captors, but also of seeing them. The comic energy of this theatrical setpiece is thus linked directly to the variant and competing performances of knowing, hearing and seeing across the many and various auditors privy to this performance. The blind-folded victim must rely wholly upon his power to hear (i.e. vain attempts to process macaronic Russian) and the dubious services of the interpreter, while those around him on- and off-stage have additional recourse to comic asides and to the faculty of viewing the baiting of the quarry.

Language, Other and the Fortunes of War

In her illuminating discussion of the "dialectic of excess and lack" in *All's Well That Ends Well*, Ann Lecercle has persuasively drawn attention to the contrary thematics of "presence and pregnance" in this vexed comedy highly preoccupied with characters' desires for swelling rhetoric and swelling bodies.[21] While certain, prominently placed women in Shakespeare's intrigue seem remarkably determined to yield their "drum" in the fulfilment of their erotic ambitions, a most reluctant Paroles (later, like the beleaguered Bertram) is sent out to seize the instrument and take ownership of the offending article: "What the devil should move me

---

[19] Maury D. Feld, *The Structure of Violence. Armed Forces as Social Systems*, Beverly Hills/London, Sage, 1997, p. 18.
[20] William Brenchley Rye (ed.), *England as seen by Foreigners in the days of Elizabeth and James the First, comprising translations of the journals of the two Dukes of Wirtemberg in 1592 and 1610; Both illustrative of Shakespeare*, London, John Russell Smith, 1865, p. 71.
[21] Ann Lecercle, "Anatomy of a Fistula, Anomaly of a Drama", in Jean Fuzier and François Laroque (eds.), *All's Well That Ends Well: Nouvelles perspectives critiques*, Montpellier, UPVM, 1985, pp. 105–124, p. 107. In this context, see also Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins*, pp. 191, 202.

to undertake the recovery of this drum" (IV.i.31–32). Nonetheless, in the punishing landscape of this bitter comedy, even before losing the power of sight, the fool acknowledges that he must first take up arms against tongues, rather than drums: "Tongue, I must put you into a butter-woman's mouth and buy myself another of Bajazet's mule, if you prattle me into these perils." (IV.i.36–38). Like his Shakespearean near-contemporary Falstaff, Paroles tries to contrive some theatrical stunt by which he might showcase his derring-do: "I would I had any drum of the enemy's. I would swear I recovered it" (IV.i.54–55). Swiftly after expressing this ambition, the hapless Paroles is taken hostage and singled out for a public shaming by his lordly predators. However, as has been appreciated above, this theatrical humiliation is not primarily staged in somatic terms (i.e. of physical mortification), but rather the cut-and-thrust of the action resides for the most part in arresting displays of verbal violence. Nor should we underestimate the tactical power of this latter practice, as Paul Ricoeur has underlined: "La violence qui parle, c'est déjà une violence qui cherche à avoir raison ; c'est une violence qui se place dans l'orbite de la raison et qui commence déjà de se nier comme violence".[22]

Even prior to his capture, Paroles (as one of the play's key emblems of excessiveness) recognizes that his braggart performances have placed his own safety in jeopardy and brought him into uncomfortable proximity with the battlefield: "I find my tongue is too foolhardy, but my heart hath the fear of Mars before it, and of his creatures, not daring the reports of my tongue" (IV.i.25–28). Subsequently, the carefully managed, bound body of Paroles, whose human agency is now reduced to mouth and ears, has to engage with the surrounding company in a painful matrix of radically unequal power relations – relations which mirror those operational in the wider dramatic world of Shakespeare's comedy:

SECOND LORD *Throca movousus, cargo, cargo, cargo.*
SOLDIERS [severally] *Cargo, cargo, cargo, villiando par corbo, cargo.*
PAROLES O, ransom, ransom! do not hide mine eyes.
INTERPRETER *Boskos thromuldo boskos.*
PAROLES I know you are the Muscows' regiment,
And I shall lose my life for want of language.
If there be here German, or Dane, Low Dutch,
Italian, or French, let him speak to me,
I'll discover that which shall undo the Florentine.
(IV.i.58–67)

As might be expected of one who is identified as words, or Paroles, the agile clown has a whole repertoire of languages at his disposal, but all to no avail in this comic ambush. Significantly, he is repeatedly robbed of his linguistic authority onstage by his captors:

INTERPRETER *Boskos vauvado*.-
I understand thee, and can speak thy tongue. –
Kerelybonto. – Sir,
Betake thee to thy faith, for seventeen poniards
Are at thy bosom.
PAROLES O! (IV.i.68–72)

As we have witnessed, in this encounter it is words, rather than bodies, that have been weaponised and are pressed into service to achieve the desired result. It takes little time for

[22] Paul Ricoeur, "Violence et Langage", *Recherches et Débats: La Violence* 16.9 (1967), pp. 86–94, p. 87). Translation: The violence that speaks is already a violence that seeks to justify itself; it is a violence which locates itself in the realm of reason and which is already beginning to deny that it is violence.

the "hoodwinked" victim to agree to impart "all the secrets of our camp" and thus is "granted space" to fulfil his potential to be gulled (IV.i.76, 79, 83). As so often in Shakespearean comedy, the audience may feel at this stage that it is drawn in contrary directions of sympathy and judgement through its responses of amusement. If in the earlier *Twelfth Night*, for example, Feste assumes the rather different garb of tormentor in the shaming of Malvolio, here in *All's Well That Ends Well* the comic operation is reversed with the victimisation of the "allowed fool". Nonetheless, here at IV.i. the case is also altered significantly because the imposture is situated firmly within a military context and thus engages with a recurring source of anxiety for early modern England's authorities.

Elizabeth's government drew attention on repeated occasions in its proclamations to the dangerous propensity for masking and hoodwinking which becomes evident in the company and conversation of seemingly "armipotent soldier[s]" (IV.iii.224). Within just a four-year span, for example, in 1589 her ministers imposed martial law on vagrant soldiers in response to "the great outrages that have been and are daily committed by soldiers, mariners, and others that pretend to have served as soldiers upon her highness' good and loving subjects", while in 1590 a royal proclamation bore witness to the "many gross and manifest frauds and deceits daily practiced and committed by captains and officers".[23] The following year, in 1591, a proclamation reimposing martial law signalled that "the Queen's Majesty" had been "informed of sundry great disorders committed in about her city of London by … [amongst others] some coloring their wandering by the name of soldiers returned from the war"; and in 1592, "notwithstanding her late proclamation", the queen's representatives still noted the presence of "such persons as wander abroad in the habit of soldiers … pretending to have served in the late wars".[24] Indeed, the practice of double-dealing on and off the battlefield seems have been widely in evidence on the early modern continent as, across the Channel, Montaigne contended that "On a raison de descrier l'hypocrisie qui se treuve en la guerre: car qu'est il plus aysé à un homme practique, que de gauchir aux dangiers, et de contrefaire le mauvais, ayant le coeur plein de mollesse?".[25] Ultimately, Paroles is left to exit the scene in the knowledge that he will be kept, like *Twelfth Night*'s Malvolio, "dark and safely locked" (IV.i.89–90). Just a little later in the intrigue and for the general entertainment of assembled companies both on- and off-stage, this remorselessly mocked fool will be heard slandering his tormentors who have conducted their revels in the world just beyond his blindfold.

Concluding Thoughts

In the course of this short scene, a number of audiences (and, indeed, Others) have been identified. However, by way of conclusion, it might prove timely to reconsider the discrepant conditions of hearing and seeing in this example of Shakespearean dramaturgy. As we have seen, the dramatic action serves to interrogate at several reprises the dual status of language as a communication and sound system. If much of the present discussion has been devoted to the ways in which speech acts are deployed to comic effect, I would like to close just briefly by considering the empowered conditions of tormentors and audiences (so often a remarkably fine distinction in Shakespearean dramaturgy) as this scene unfolds.

In a recent, more general critical discussion of our consumption of artistic creativity, W. J. T. Mitchell has argued persuasively that "Beholding … is best understood as a special kind of attention (perhaps we should call it an 'a-tension') between attachment and

[23] Paul L. Hughes & James F. Larkin (eds.), *Tudor Royal Proclamations. Volume III: The Later Tudors (1588-1603)*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1969, pp. 46, 63.
[24] Hughes & Larkin, *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, pp. 82, 105.
[25] "De la gloire" (II.xvi), in Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. Leclerc, p. 21. Translation: It is right to condemn false-dealing in times of war: for what is simpler for a devious man, with a heart full of weakness, than to avoid danger and to commit wrong-doing?

detachment, holding and being held on the one hand, holding at arm's length, on the other".[26] This kind of theatrical experience for the audience, oscillating between affective engagement and more distanced (moral) reflection, is one which is constructed repeatedly in Shakespearean play-making. Nevertheless, the recuperation of victims such as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, Katharina in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, or Paroles in *All's Well That Ends Well* for responses of sympathy and/or pity in more contemporary productions for the stage may not only result in a comic loss for these often unexpectedly farcical early modern intrigues, it may also impede our understanding of a former age well acquainted with rituals of shaming, public humiliation and the enactment of violence. Across early modern Europe, the battlefield, the scaffold, the bear pit, and the streets encountered in everyday life might prove the locations of sometimes harrowing scenes of violence. Furthermore, in times of political crisis, responses of mercy and compassion might be even less frequently witnessed. In such ways, the supposed singularity of the *allowed fool* as he makes his way through the Florentine wars should be placed in question: moreover, the fate of Paroles, or words, is constantly subjected to hard scrutiny as Shakespeare's bitter comedy draws to a close.

In an age antagonistic to all kinds of perceived deviancy, the baiting of Paroles might have been echoed frequently in the workaday existence of the audience members. However, when attempted political *coups d'état* were uncovered, the trauma visited upon malfeasants would not be restricted to verbal threats. Indeed, in the wake of the discovery of the Ridolfi Plot in 1571, for example, Elizabeth issued a warrant that two of the accused Duke of Norfolk's men should be dealt with mercilessly by the nominated officers:

> And if they shall not seem to you to confess plainly their knowledge, then we warrant you to cause them both, or either of them, to be brought to the rack, and first to move them with fear thereof to deal plainly in their answers. And if that shall not move them, then you shall cause them to be put to the rack, and to feel the taste thereof until they shall deal more plainly, or until you shall think meet.[27]

Works cited

BOND, Edward A. (ed.), *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century…*, London, Hakluyt Society, 1856.

BUTLER, Judith, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, London/New York, Verso, 2010.

DAGENAIS, Bernard, *Éloge de la Violence*, Paris, Éditions de l'Aube, 2008.

ELIZABETH I, *Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller and Mary Beth Rose, Chicago/London, University of Chicago Press, 2000.

FELD, Maury D., *The Structure of Violence. Armed Forces as Social Systems*, Beverly Hills/London, Sage, 1997.

FLETCHER, Giles, *Of the Russe Common Wealth. Or Maner of Gouernement by the Russe Emperour, (commonly called the Emperour of Moskouia) with the manners, and fashions of the people of that Countrey*, London, T. D. for Thomas Charde, 1591.

GREENBLATT, Stephen et al (eds.), *The Norton Shakespeare, based on the Oxford Shakespeare*, New York/London, W. W. Norton & Co., 1997.

HABERMAS, Jürgen, "Morality and Ethical Life. Does Hegel's Critique of Kant Apply to Discourse Ethics", in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicolsen, intro. Thomas McCarthy, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1999, pp. 195–216.

[26] W. J. T. Mitchell, "Foreword", in Allie Terry-Fritsch & Erin Felicia Labbie (eds.), *Beholding Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, pp. xv-xxv, p. xviii.

[27] Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller and Mary Beth Rose, Chicago/London, University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 127.

HEBDIGE, Dick, "Subculture", in Raiford Guins & Omayra Zaragoza Cruz (eds.), *Popular Culture. A Reader,* London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi, Sage, 2005, pp. 355–371.
HUGHES, Paul L. & James F. LARKIN (eds.), *Tudor Royal Proclamations. Volume III: The Later Tudors (1588-1603)*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1969.
LECERCLE, Ann, "Interpretation and 'logique du sens': the Problem Plays' problematizing of language", in Christophe Hausermann, ed., *Actes des Congrès de la Société Française Shakespeare* 31 (2014), pp. 151–163.
LECERCLE, Ann Lecercle, "Anatomy of a Fistula, Anomaly of a Drama", in Jean Fuzier and François Laroque, eds., *All's Well That Ends Well : Nouvelles perspectives critiques*, Montpellier, UPVM, 1985, pp. 105–124.
LEVER, Ralph, *The Arte of Reason, rightly termed, Witcraft, teaching a perfect way to argue and dispute*, London, 1573.
MITCHELL, W. J. T., "Foreword", in Allie Terry-Fritsch & Erin Felicia Labbie (eds.), *Beholding Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, pp. xv–xxv.
MONTAIGNE, Michel de, *Essais*, ed. J.-V. Leclerc, t. I, Paris, Garnier, 1878.
NORDEN, John, *A pensive soules delight*, London, William Stansby for John Busby, 1615.
PALMER, Daryl W., *Writing Russia in the Age of Shakespeare*, London, Routledge, 2016.
PARKER, Patricia, *Shakespeare from the Margins*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1996.
QUINN, David B. & Neil M. Cheshire (eds.), *The New Found Land of Stephen Parmenius*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1972.
RICOEUR, Paul, "Violence et Langage", *Recherches et Débats : La Violence* 16.9 (1967), 86–94.
RYE, William Brenchley (ed.), *England as seen by Foreigners in the days of Elizabeth and James the First, comprising translations of the journals of the two Dukes of Wirtemberg in 1592 and 1610; Both illustrative of Shakespeare*, London, John Russell Smith, 1865.
STRYPE, John, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion and other various occurrences in the Church of England during Queen Elizabeth's Happy Reign*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1824, vol. IV.
WILSON, Francesca, *Muscovy. Russia Through Foreign Eyes 1553-1900*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1970.
WOLFF, Robert Paul, "On Violence", *The Journal of Philosophy*, 19 (Oct 2 1969), 601–616.

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Sklodowska-Curie grant agreement N°702104