

“And from her fair and unpolluted flesh / May violets spring!”
(*Hamlet*, 5. 1. 239–40)

Cover image: *Viola purpurea*/Mertzen veiel
Leonhart Fuchs (1501–1566), *De historia stirpium commentarii insignes, maximis impensis et vigiliis elaborati, adiectis earundem vivis plusquam quingentis imaginibus, nunquam antea ad naturae imitationem artificiosius effectis & expressis, Leonharto Fuchsio* (Basileae, In Officina Isingriniana, 1542), 311.

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Renaissance Metonymy and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

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1 Introductory Chapter: Renaissance Metonymy

1.1 Foucault's Renaissance *episteme* and Metonymy

Hamlet is still considered to be an elusive text with many prominent cruxes (the question of Hamlet's madness, Hamlet's delay, or Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia in the "nunnery" scene are exemplary), with various attempts by numerous scholars to try and interpret the play.¹ Why attempt another critical reading of this play? This dissertation is about Renaissance metonymy and an exploration of its manifest use by Shakespeare in *Hamlet*. It is the aim of this dissertation to define and identify the Renaissance use of this poetic trope as part of a more complete Renaissance rhetorical toolbox, as well as to explore the application of the linguistic tools included in this toolbox through the example of *Hamlet*. The specific inspiration and focus on metonymy as important to Renaissance dramatic poetry is derived from Foucault, and begs the essential question: does such a specific figurative approach to the dramatic poetry in *Hamlet* better help to understand Shakespeare's play? This dissertation sets out to answer this question.

Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* helped to establish what he famously termed

¹ *Hamlet* is one of the most written about texts in Western history. The *Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* notes how, "The play has held such an important place in the literary canon that the history of writing about *Hamlet* is practically the history of literary criticism itself, successive interpreters and schools of thought inevitably having to tryout their ideas, sooner or later, on this most celebrated and enigmatic of texts." Michael Dobson and Stanly Wells, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 181.

episteme.² By *episteme* Foucault means “the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems.”³ Foucault places an emphasis upon “discursive practices” and epistemological “figures” which I see as both relating directly to language and rhetoric. Foucault’s idea of *episteme*—that there was, for example, a distinct division between the Renaissance and the Classical period—is open to historical debate; yet it is not simply his notion of a historical division of *episteme* that is my primary concern, but a difference in rhetorical approaches and an emphasis upon metonymy.

Although the idea of a Renaissance *episteme* by Foucault may have helped to inspire a “New Historicism”⁴ as well as a recent “efflorescence of historical studies of English Renaissance culture,”⁵ I am not focused here on a renewed interest in history, or even a marriage of the Historian and the Literary Critic. This dissertation is concerned with historical distinctions, but only in so far as they relate directly back to the text through the use of figurative language (of which metonymy is the primary focus).

Historical context is essential to understanding Shakespeare, yet a stand-alone approach that focuses on literature according to historicizing Shakespeare has its limitations.⁶ Jonathan Culler notes how “the identification of historical sequences, while an inevitable and indispensable aspect of literary study, is not just open to oversimplification; it is itself an act of oversimplification.”⁷ Culler points to a modern trend in Shakespeare studies that continues through to today which often makes the presumption

² See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Abingdon: Routledge, [first pub. *L'Archéologie du Savoir*, 1969] 2002); Michel Foucault, *The Order of things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), chapt. 2. For further reading the subject of *episteme* see Barry Smart, *Michel Foucault: Critical Assessments*, 3 (London: Routledge, 1994), 32, 60; David Carroll, “The Subject of Archeology or the Sovereignty of the Episteme,” *MLN* 93, no. 4 (May, 1978): 695-722; and Vladimir Biti, “Periodization as a Technique of Cultural Identification,” in *Cultural History after Foucault*, ed. John Neubauer (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999): 177-184.

³ Foucault, *The Order of things*, 191.

⁴ See, for example, Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁵ Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier, *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1.

⁶ For further reading on the complexity of historicizing Shakespeare see Richard Levin, “The New and the Old Historicizing Shakespeare,” in *The Historical and Political Turn in Literary Studies*, ed. Winfried Fluck (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1995), 425-456; and Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

⁷ Jonathan D. Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 65.

that if something is viewed historically it is valid in relation to Shakespeare's plays.⁸ Terry Eagleton, for example, remarks how "though conclusive evidence is hard to come by, it is difficult to read Shakespeare without feeling that he was almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida."⁹ Shakespeare from a historical perspective in terms of Culler's "act of oversimplification," becomes potentially grounded in any possible relationship to English Renaissance history, or any period in history. Since such references are grounded in the historical (factual and identifiable) it is often considered true. A female character in one of Shakespeare's plays can be, for instance, arguably related to any historical discussion of women; or anti-Semitic themes in *The Merchant of Venice*, to use a more specific example, to any aspect of anti-Semitic concerns both modern and pre-modern.¹⁰ Consequently, James Shapiro points out in his book *Shakespeare and the Jews*, "the question of whether Shakespeare was anti- or philosemitic" are "anachronistic terms, inventions of nineteenth-century racial theory" that "are fundamentally ill-suited for gauging what transpired three hundred years earlier."¹¹ The potential problem with modern historical perspectives toward the relation between text and history, or a historicizing of Shakespeare—without a consideration of a use of rhetoric forms such as metonymy along with historical context (in a close-reading of Shakespeare's plays), is that Renaissance literary studies that prioritize such historical orientations do not necessarily further understandings of a specific text in relation to historical context.

For example, Stephen Greenblatt has argued that a specific understanding of Shakespeare's plays in terms of text and historical context is virtually impossible, and that "if any reductive generalization about Shakespeare's relation to his culture seems dubious, it is because his plays offer no single timeless affirmation or denial of legitimate authority and no central, unwavering presence."¹² This thesis includes the historical, but prioritizes

⁸ Robin Headlam Wells, Glenn Burgess, and Rowland Wymer observe that "[i]t is a widely held view among early modern literary scholars that New Historicism and Cultural Materialism represent a significant advance on earlier forms of historicism which were, it is claimed, naïve and theoretically unsophisticated." Robin Headlam Wells, Glenn Burgess, and Rowland Wymer, eds., *Neo-Historicism* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 2.

⁹ Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986), preface ix-x.

¹⁰ For example, Harold Bloom says that it would have been better for Jewish people "had Shakespeare never written this play," but admits, as do other scholars of the play, that he "cannot solve the puzzle of the representation of Shylock." Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: the Invention of the Human*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 190.

¹¹ James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 11. For further reading see John Gross, *Shylock: Four Hundred Years in the Life of a Legend* (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd., 1992).

¹² Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 254.

textual rhetorical analysis in its methodology. My approach includes a consideration of authorial intent as a “central, unwavering presence” important for the function of rhetorical tropes to engender specific meaning(s). The importance of reading Renaissance texts from a rhetorical perspective is especially motivated by the figurative trope metonymy; and metonymy, as this thesis will demonstrate, requires a high level of intention in order to successfully implement a trope of such complexity. Historical reference points according to the use of metonymy investigated in this dissertation become site specific and self-reflective in so far as they qualify a textual referential relationship within a specific context. Rhetorical usage and historical context work in tandem both in terms of a definition of Renaissance metonymy further outlined below and in my analysis of *Hamlet*.

1.1.1 Metonymy as Adjacency

What can Foucault’s theory of *episteme*, which relates to history, do differently in terms of reading Shakespeare? Firstly, an examination and implementation of Renaissance metonymy inspired by Foucault’s *episteme* (as a foremost trope among a Renaissance *epistemic* inspired toolbox for approaching and understanding Renaissance literature as outlined here in this introduction) offers a way of reading *Hamlet* that has yet to be considered in our critical historical interpretation of the play. Secondly, this method of reading offers novel solutions to resolving some of the most prominent cruxes in *Hamlet* (that are a significant part of this dissertation). Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, this methodology serves to better understand how Shakespeare, by using the rhetorical toolbox of a Renaissance *episteme* based around metonymy constructed his dramatic poetry—especially with regard to the play’s primary characters, their use of language, and any meaning that “can be extracted from Shakespeare” using this approach.¹³ Most chapters of this dissertation are titled after major characters and address these individual characters along with their use of rhetoric as a way of incorporating an examination of metonymy into the greater structure of the drama.

Hayden White’s work on Foucault further emphasizes how Foucault’s *episteme* is classified according to distinct different modes, or key rhetorical tropes through which

¹³ Jonathan Bate writes: “The genius of Shakespeare is neither the style nor the matter of Shakespeare; it is certainly not the wisdom that can be extracted from Shakespeare.” Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 336. The methodology I am proposing offers the possibility of another viewpoint on Shakespeare’s genius, particularly with regard to “style” and the use of specific rhetorical tools like metonymy in order to “extract” meaning and “wisdom” from the play.

meaning is created (and not simply by historical points of reference).¹⁴ The four primary tropes are: adjacency (metonymy), essentiality (synecdoche), resemblance (metaphor), and doubling (irony).¹⁵ These tropes distinguish rhetorically, rather than merely historically, how Foucault defined different *episteme* in Western history into distinct eras—the Renaissance, the Classical, the nineteenth century, and the modern (or Postmodern) respectively. This dissertation will demonstrate how metonymy, as a figurative language given prominence by Foucault to the Renaissance, helps to categorize a historical, contextual, and rhetorical interpretation of *Hamlet*.

The notion of a Renaissance *episteme* that supported Shakespeare's writings—that Shakespeare truly was a product of his age—would be represented rhetorically by metonymic usage in his plays as suggested by Foucault's theory *episteme*. To further clarify, this dissertation is not simply an application of Foucault's theories to *Hamlet*, but rather a response to his invitation to consider how a possible Renaissance emphasis upon (and particular use of) metonymy differed from the modern; and how this approach would in turn effect perspectives and readings of both historical context and text. Foucault did not develop his rhetorical observations according to his theory of *episteme* in great depth through the use of extensive examples or citations;¹⁶ nor have others after him applied a suggested methodology of metonymy to representative Shakespearean texts like *Hamlet*.¹⁷ Studies of Shakespeare have focused on the use of tropes in Shakespeare's plays,¹⁸ but they

¹⁴ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 119.

¹⁵ Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) is first accredited with giving unique prominence to these four distinct tropes. Vico is considered one of the first thinkers to identify metonymy, synecdoche, metaphor, and irony as four primary and distinct fundamental tropes, or modes of expression. See Theresa Enos, *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition* (New York: Garland, 1996), 712. Vico is also considered the first philosopher to “accept the sway of the human imagination and its translation into figurative language: the-past-as-history-as text(ual) product.” Alun Munslow, *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 241. For further reading on Vico in relation to Foucault see Nancy S. Struever, “Vico, Foucault, and the Strategy of Intimate Investigation,” in *Vico Studies* 2 (1984): 41-57; and Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975). An emphasis on these four tropes also has a Renaissance foundation in the work of Peter Ramus (1515-1572). See *Rhetoricae Distinctiones in Quintilianum*, English trans., *Arguments in Rhetoric Against Quintilian*, by Carole Newlands, James J. Murphy, eds. (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), 140.

¹⁶ George Huppert for example is critical of Foucault's lack of citations and illustrations of his theory. See George Huppert, “*Divinatio* and *Eruditie*. Thoughts on Foucault,” *History and Theory* 13 (1974): 191-207.

¹⁷ Metonymy is rarely used in interpretations of Shakespeare's plays despite Foucault's invitation. A notable exception is Lawrence N. Danson, “Metonymy and *Coriolanus*.” *PQ*, 52 (Winter, 1973): 30-42.

¹⁸ See for example Maurice Charney, *Style in Hamlet* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1969); Madeleine Doran, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Language* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976);

have not done so in terms of an emphasis on metonymy according to a Renaissance *episteme*.

The difference between Renaissance metonymy and modern metonymy central to the premise of this thesis then is a distinction between a function of metonymic figuration according to adjacency versus contiguity. It is not the Renaissance *episteme* itself that is of essence here, but Foucault's definition of metonymy according to a Renaissance *episteme*. Metonymy in terms of "adjacency"—especially according to White's emphasis on Foucault's rhetorical distinctions according to *episteme*—is a rhetorical trope that Foucault argued had particular resonance in the Renaissance *episteme*.¹⁹ Foucault's premise of an epistemological distinction through tropes, and that the Renaissance could be understood through metonymy, is further complicated by the assertion of this thesis that a Renaissance definition of metonymy was different from that of our modern *episteme*. An understanding of the way in which Renaissance metonymy differs from a modern use of the trope (including synecdoche) will ultimately serve to better understanding Shakespeare's use of rhetoric in *Hamlet*.

1.1.2 Metonymy (adjacency) and Synecdoche (contiguity)

There has also been a historical problem in trying to differentiate metonymy from synecdoche since the two are sometimes equated: both are generally considered according to contiguity and there is even a tendency to confuse the two tropes. This confusion is understandable since contiguity and inclusion (part to the whole) are sometimes difficult to discern from one another. For example, a "sail" to represent a ship could be seen according to contiguity in terms of "sail" and "ship" bordering on one another, as well as inclusion since the sail is part of and integral to the whole sailing-ship. How then is a Renaissance approach to metonymy distinguished from synecdoche?

Foucault defined metonymy as a form of metaphor used in the Renaissance *episteme* whereby "adjacency is not an exterior relation between things, but the sign of the relationship, obscure though it may be."²⁰ Foucault's description of metonymy is important

Margreta de Grazia, "Shakespeare and the Craft of Language," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley W. Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 49-64; and Jonathan Hope, *Shakespeare's Grammar* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2003).

¹⁹ For example, a metonymic approach to madness according to a Renaissance *episteme* is outlined throughout Foucault's book: *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Tavistock Publications, 1961).

²⁰ Foucault, *The Order of things*, 20.

for a definition of the term according to a Renaissance *episteme*, since “contiguity” rather than “adjacency” is generally used in a modern *episteme* to define metonymy. Contiguity rather than adjacency applies to our modern perspective on metonymy;²¹ and this modern way of dealing with metonymy can be traced in the linguistic approaches of Dirk Geeraerts and Peter Koch, who describe metonymy according to contiguity in terms of an established association between two seemingly separate entities.²² Klaus-Uwe Panther and Günter Radden in their work on metonymy “are aware of the fact that many aspects of metonymy are still poorly understood.”²³ Panther and Radden single out the nature of metonymic shift along with the pragmatic function of metonymy as particularly problematic. These problems, however, are not without possible solutions.

Synecdoche is a trope of inclusion, not contiguity, and this is what differentiates it from metonymy. Synecdoche is not two different things adjacent to one another; it is a part to the whole and as such occupies the same domain. Synecdoche is in essence an extension, elaboration, and a matter of *deduction* (or even *induction*) but not *abduction*. Or, as the terms *pars pro toto* and *totum pro parte* suggest, synecdoche works with the particular and the obvious.²⁴ Synecdoche is easily recognized on the basis of a logic of inclusion and an adherence to the terms of contiguity. In contrast, metonyms involve a cognitive shift (also referred to as the metonymic shift) through an act of both adjacency and comparison.²⁵ Another further distinction can be made through the quality and type of meaning that each trope engenders. One can recognize synecdoche from the standpoint of relation in so far as synecdochic associations seem to make perfect sense, while metonyms can be more surprising in their leap from one meaning to another. Consequently, meanings dealing with synecdoche may differ in scale as well, but not in content. In this respect, synecdoche operates within the domain of first level interpretations. It is thus important to distinguish

²¹ See Verona Hasser, *Metaphor, Metonymy and Experientialist Philosophy: Challenging Cognitive Semantics* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2005), 22.

²² See Dirk Geeraerts, *Theories of Lexical Semantics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 27; and Peter Koch, “Frame and Contiguity: On the Cognitive Bases of Metonymy and Certain Types of Word Formation,” in *Metonymy in Language and Thought*, ed. Klaus-Uwe Panther and Günter Radden (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1999), 139-168.

²³ Klaus-Uwe Panther and Günter Radden, eds., *Metonymy in Language and Thought*, 8-9.

²⁴ Generally these terms are used to distinguish metonymy from synecdoche although some have suggested that “we should integrate” the terms into metonymy since the “difference between *pars/totum* relations and (other) contiguities is often not easy to pin down.” See Peter Koch, “Frame and Contiguity,” 154.

²⁵ For further reading on the cognitive aspects of linguistic theory see, for example, Dirk Geeraerts and Hubert Cuyckens, eds., *Cognitive Linguistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Margaret E. Winters, Heli Tissari, and Kathryn Allan, eds., *Historical Cognitive Linguistics* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2010).

between what is merely an elaboration of an already established concept, and what introduces a shift in meaning or even a new level of meaning. In linguistic terms, it is important to distinguish what is a part of something, or a particular manifestation of something (synecdoche), and a particular element that is “extrinsically related” to another one (metonymy).²⁶

If Achilles’ shield is viewed as synecdoche this can only happen if it is logically false, or when we introduce a bigger “whole.” Logically speaking the shield is not part of Achilles, so there is no synecdoche. The trope awakens if we take the shield and Achilles together as a war-machine. In this case the shield it is a part of the whole machine and also representative of that particular machine by being an extension (contiguous) of the man. Metonymically speaking, Achilles’ shield is not representative of the whole man in terms of its associated symbolic strength, since Achilles has a famous weakness located near his heel that his Shield does not embody (although may suggest through adjacency). As I stated earlier, there is a third term in play—a term of a comparison through relation and adjacency. A consideration of the third term signifier “strength” and the signifiers/signifieds “Achilles,” and “Shield,” all in relation to one another becomes metonymic.

To give a more modern example, the signifier “Einstein” signifies the person. Yet this person is related to the signifier/d “Great Physicist” and the signifier/d “extreme intelligence”. If someone says something brilliant, we might call him or her a “real Einstein.” Because Einstein is close to “Great Physicist” on the scale created through adjacency, and “Great Physicist” is close to “extreme intelligence” on that same relative scale; a cognitive association of adjacency is made so that when a person is called an “Einstein” he or she is brought in close relation to the thought object “extreme intelligence.” In order for this metonym to work, one needs to know that Einstein was a great physicist and that being a great physicist also involves, or is close to, an extreme level of intelligence. This is where quite often contextualization is required in functional metonymic structure.

A modern perception of metonymy might argue that Einstein was a great physicist as well as extremely intelligent and there is little adjacency here, only contiguity, since all three concepts can be equated and are arguably one and the same. In other words, the terms are seen to be interchangeable and can replace one another. This literal approach to meaning and relation is, at least, how a modern perception based on contiguity might

²⁶ Hugh Bredin provides the following explanation: “For example, “wheels” is a synecdoche for an automobile, but if a racing driver is given the nickname “wheels”, this is a metonymy. In one case the particular is an automobile, and the wheels are part of it, structurally related to the automobile as part to whole. In the other case, wheels are a particular, and are extrinsically related to the driver, who is another particular.” Hugh Bredin, “Metonym,” *Politics Today* 5, no. 1 (1984): 54.

perceive this type of construction. It is also far simpler to use synecdoche or metonymy according to contiguity, than a metonymic demand to distinguish between signifieds and signifiers as separate thought objects. Yet, I am arguing that the Renaissance logic of metonymy works differently, and as a rhetorical tool for examining a text like *Hamlet*, Renaissance metonymy requires an understanding of how it functions differently than the way we see it today. The modern problem of confusing synecdoche with metonymy, or even confusion of the trope itself, can be resolved if metonymy is viewed in terms of “adjacency” rather than “the traditional view that metonymy involves contiguity.”²⁷ This re-defining of metonymy according to a Renaissance *episteme* also lends this rhetorical tool its own distinct and purposeful uses that not only distinguish it from synecdoche and other tropes, but also make it stand out from a more general application and interpretive approach to figurative language according to like terms simply replacing one another.

While metaphor can be defined as the relationship between two signifiers with a common signified, metonymy involves two signifieds with a common signifier. For example, a metonymic link can be made between the signified “Shield of Achilles,” and the signified “Achilles.” Metonymy would use one signified, the shield, in relation to another signified: Achilles. This metonymic operation can only work, however, because of cognitive connotations, such as when the man and the shield come together under the signifier “great strength.” In this manner, metonyms are triangulated between three thought objects that are contextualized. According to a modern definition of metonymy, Achilles and his shield would be seen as contiguous in a limited field of reference.²⁸ George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and Mark Turner for example, would argue that this sort of “metonymic mapping occurs within a single conceptual domain.”²⁹ This “conceptual domain” is related directly to the concept of contiguity. I follow Lakoff, Johnson, and Turner whereby metonymy is a type of cognitive mapping, especially in so far as metonymic relationship between signifieds and signifier pinpoints meaning. My contention, however, is that this

²⁷ Beatrice Warren, “An Alternative Account of the Interpretation of Referential Metonymy and Metaphor,” in *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast*, ed. René Dirven and Ralf Pörings (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003), 126. Further examples of defining metonymy according to contiguity can be found throughout this same modern collection of essays. See especially Roman Jakobson, “The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles,” 41-48; and René Dirven, “Metonymy and Metaphor: Different Mental Strategies of Conceptualization,” 75-112.

²⁸ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980); and George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason. A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

²⁹ Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 103. For further discussion see William Croft, “Domains in Metaphors and Metonymies,” in *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast*, ed. René Dirven and Ralf Pörings (London: Associated University Presses, 1996), 161-206.

does not occur within a single domain of contiguity, rather, in three triangulated separate cognitive domains where the domains of Renaissance metonymy remain autonomous and can still occupy distinct and different arenas. From a Renaissance perspective, as will be explored later in this chapter, it is the triangulation between three distinct thought objects with their own independent domains brought into cognitive relation that helps create the metonymic shift.

The use of “adjacency” rather than “contiguity” to define metonymy (as Foucault suggested) also represents the difference between a Renaissance application of the trope and a modern. I will explore these distinctions in more detail, but a basic difference between contiguity and adjacency involves signifiers and signifieds that, according to contiguity either border upon one another (even to the point of inclusion) and are considered in close material or physical relation; while adjacency, implies proximity primarily through a cognitive act of association that maintains the autonomy of signifiers and signifieds throughout the metaphoric domain, yet brings them together no matter how far apart they may seem.

For example, after holding the skull of Yorick, Hamlet considers the “noble dust of Alexander” (5. 1. 203).³⁰ Metonymy is at work here between the signifier/d “dust,” “Alexander the Great,” and the signifier/d “nobility.” The dust of Alexander is itself not noble even though “noble” is used as an adjective before it—rather it finds adjacency to this thought object by Hamlet due to an association with Alexander’s own proximity to nobility. This is to say that nobility is not part of Alexander, here, just as dust would not be through synecdoche (as a part to the whole) representative alone of Alexander. To be more precise, the dust is metonymy through adjacency to both nobility and Alexander. In a similar manner, the skull of Yorick is adjacent in the same scene to a jester who also was “a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy” (5. 1. 185). Hamlet separates and relates metonymic thought objects in a further consideration of Alexander’s dust “stopping a bunghole” (5. 1. 204) as he imagines Alexander’s material form used to “stop a beer-barrel.” This leaves a metonymic consideration of where nobility resides, or more specifically to Hamlet’s concern—where can the nobility that was so close to Alexander the Great’s character be found in Denmark? In relation to the drunkenness of King Claudius that Hamlet elaborately notes as part of Claudius’ character in Act 1, it is presumably found in Denmark stopping a beer-barrel from leaking. Metonymically, nobility in terms of Alexander has turned to concerns of a drunken and debauched kingship in Denmark. One can consider Hamlet’s inference of dust used to stop a barrel, but Horatio’s reply reflects

³⁰ All quotations follow *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), unless otherwise noted.

the complexity of Hamlet's *metonymic* reasoning: "Twere to consider too curiously to consider so" (5. 1. 205–6). In other words, such metonymic consideration of nobility is a subject of the play that will be addressed more fully in this dissertation. It is also a subject beyond the less than noble Gertrude's concern,³¹ and even too complex for Horatio's full faculty of consideration. The complexity and relationship of Hamlet's consideration of the dust of Alexander is witnessed through the trope of metonymy through adjacency, not contiguity. This very same metonymic comparison between man, nobility, and dust is made by Hamlet in Act 2:

What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god! The beauty of the world; the paragon of animals; and yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me—nor woman neither.

(2. 2. 303–309)

Simile is at work here: Hamlet says man is "like an angel" and "like a god," but not to compare man directly with a god or an angel, but to express man's potential for adjacency to "apprehension." The separate thought objects: man, angel/god, and apprehension work in triangulation. The last lines too could be referring to Hamlet's perception of a lack of nobility in the most prominent man and woman in Denmark with regard to nobility: Claudius and Gertrude. Yet, these associations are not direct, or even symbolic, but rather find their way through a metonymic adjacency inspired by the signifier/d "noble in reason." Hamlet's concern for "Noble Reason" will be a primary focus of his character examined in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, and also an argument in this thesis as one of the primary thematic elements of the play.

Foucault's defining term "adjacency" offers a Renaissance perspective on metonymy through recognition of the individual distinction between associated signifieds and signifiers especially when they come into relation with one another. As Foucault noted, this adjacent way of seeing from the perspective of a modern *episteme* is neither intuitive, nor is metonymy as a rhetorical tool in our modern figurative toolbox considered useful in relation to *Hamlet*. How can this be the case? Why has a consideration of metonymy in Hamlet not been included in the critical canon, especially since Foucault made his suggestion of such a reading of Renaissance text over fifty years ago? Part of the answer to this question lies in the "value" we have placed on figurative language in a modern *episteme* in comparison to the literal.

³¹ In Act 1, Gertrude advises her son: "Do not for ever with thy veiled lids / Seek for thy noble father in the dust" (1. 2. 70-71).

1.2 Figurative “Value” in a Modern episteme

This dissertation outlines some of the distinct and purposeful uses of metonymy as a figurative trope utilized by Shakespeare in *Hamlet* which can prove significant, especially since modern semantic claims to “literal” meaning have tended to deny figurative language the structural foundation by which linguistic content is grounded in modes of contextualization. This thesis contends, then, that instead of taking a literal approach to text, or promoting metaphor the master trope as the moderns do,³² the Renaissance takes metonymy as a master trope.³³

Raymond W. Gibbs explains how the “pragmatic view of figurative language understanding follows the centuries-old belief that literal language is a veridical reflection of thought and the external world whereas figurative language distorts reality and only serves special rhetorical purposes.”³⁴ I argue that figurative language for Shakespeare did serve “special rhetorical purposes” as a better method of reflecting “thought and the external world.” The problem, however, as Gibbs outlines, is a modern “centuries-old belief” that literal language tends to be considered more truthful than figurative.

In modern times the tendency is to reach toward a much broader reading of the metaphoric as any and all resemblances possible (similitude). This represents a shift of the figurative even further away from literal functionality; rather, than say, a consideration of the possibility that the figurative can perform with even more linguistic precision than literal language. Metonymies, Stephen Ullmann argues, generally lack the “originality and expressive power of metaphor,” because instead of forging new links or uncovering new resemblances they are motivated by relationships of spatial juxtaposition.³⁵ The spatial

³² See for example Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*; and Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*.

³³ Metonymy was viewed as a foundational poetic trope in the Renaissance and was emphasized in such texts as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (formerly attributed to Cicero and arguably the most well-known book on rhetoric during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance), Erasmus’ *De copia* (1512), Melancthon’s *Institutiones rhetoricae* (1521), and Susenbrotus’ *Epitome troporum ac schematum* (1540), as well as prominent English texts like Richard Sherry’s *Treatise of Schemes and Tropes* (1550), Henry Peacham’s *Garden of Eloquence* (1577), and George Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589). For further reading see Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³⁴ Raymond W. Gibbs, *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 20.

³⁵ Ullmann here as cited in Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 190. For further reading see Stephen Ullmann, *Semantics: An Introduction to the Science of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962).

juxtaposition involved in metonymy Ullmann views as a limitation rather than an asset. Metonymy as it is “motivated by relationships of spatial juxtaposition” is central to this dissertation, and in my approach to *Hamlet*, spatial juxtaposition in terms of adjacency (rather than in terms of contiguity or similitude) is of essence. Unlike Ullmann, I view metonymy as a trope according to relationships of spatial juxtaposition (through adjacency) as an asset rather than as a limitation.³⁶

A modern perspective often fails to value or acknowledge a Renaissance use of rhetorical structures, and tropes like metonymy have been marginalized or ignored completely. Jonathan Culler observes how “the privileging of metaphor over metonymy and other figures is an assertion of the cognitive value and respectability of literary language; the accidental play of verbal associations and contingent juxtapositions is given an ancillary status so that it can be ignored.”³⁷ A shift in rhetorical perspective is not the only difference between a Renaissance *episteme* and a modern one—the value of figurative rhetoric itself no longer holds the same importance it did in the Renaissance.

Despite the foundational work of Michel Bréal and others to follow,³⁸ Lisolette Gumpel has noted that “metaphor never made the transition from the fields of rhetoric to semantics,”³⁹ and that figuration as an effective trope for structural concretization of thought remains antiquated and highly suspect. Michel Bréal coined the term “semantics” in 1897. Yet despite the inspiration of his book *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning*,⁴⁰ metaphor became a problem of semantic approaches that took meanings for granted and a science around meaning with regard to metaphor still remains to be fully developed.⁴¹ Jonathan Culler further observes how “today metaphor is no longer one figure

³⁶ Angus Fletcher also questioned if we did Shakespeare’s “poetry a service in trying to bring it into line with the standard metaphoric usage of dramatic verse, a technique characterized by great freedom from iconographic pedantry.” Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1964), 74.

³⁷ Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 198.

³⁸ See Michel Bréal, *The Beginning of Semantics: Essays, Lectures and Reviews*, trans. and ed. George Wolf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); and Michel Bréal, *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning*, trans. Mrs. Henry Cust (New York: Dover Publications, 1964). Further studies that take up the problem of the structure of metaphor include the “root metaphors” work found in Stephen C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947); Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962); and Eva Feder Kittay, *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987),

³⁹ Lisolette Gumpel, *Metaphor Reexamined: A Non-Aristotelian Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), xi.

⁴⁰ Michel Bréal, *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning*.

⁴¹ For further reading see Gumpel, *Metaphor Reexamined*, xi.

among others but the figure of figures, a figure for figurality; and I mean this not figuratively but quite literally.⁴² This modern view of the figurative as providing almost unlimited “resemblances” as well as an emphasis on the value of continuously seeking new resemblances over established Renaissance semantic terms undermines precision of meaning for the figurative; or in Gumpel’s estimation, destroys “self identity by positing violated categories and proxy tenet substitutions that are not intrinsic to meaning anywhere.”⁴³ The metonymic emphasis is on a type of figuration that is “intrinsic to meaning” with regard to text, rather than a type of metaphoric invitation for any and all associations and similarities one can bring to a text. A Renaissance approach to metonymy is about enunciative function according to rules determined by both text and context.

Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson in their introduction to *Reading the Early Modern Passions* note how many of the contributors to their book, “question whether the binary of literal versus metaphorical prohibits our understanding of the way language and emotion functioned in the early modern period.” I agree in so far as the value of figurative language in a Renaissance *episteme*, of which metonymy is intrinsic, has been overshadowed by a linguistic binary in a modern *episteme* between a literal approach to meaning and a more generic use of the metaphoric to include any and all types of symbolic resemblances.⁴⁴

Taking up a similar argument to mine with regard to figuration and Renaissance text, Umberto Eco explains how,

Metaphor does not belong to the order of the symbolic. It can be open to multiple interpretations and can, as it were, be continued along the line of the second or third isotopy that it generates. But there are rules governing interpretation: that our planet is, as Dante says, “the threshing floor makes us all so fierce” (Par. 22.151) might suggest thousands of poetic inferences, but it will not convince anyone, so long as there are cultural conventions we all agree on, that it is a place where peace and benevolence flourish.⁴⁵

Eco is correct in his assessment that metaphor (figuration) is not simply a replacement of one term for another, but can generate multiple interpretations. Most importantly these

⁴² Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 189.

⁴³ Gumpel, *Metaphor Reexamined*, 4.

⁴⁴ Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyds-Wilson, eds., *Reading the Early Modern Passions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 17. Resolving the modern binary of literal versus metaphorical through metonymy as a better way of understanding the way language and emotion “functioned” in the Renaissance is central to this thesis.

⁴⁵ Umberto Eco, *On Literature*, trans. Martin McLaughlin (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2002), 143.

multiple interpretations are not arbitrary, they are finite and are engendered by “rules governing interpretation” that provide intended meaning and are a reflection of authorial intent. It makes sense that Eco, against a current of modern approaches to metaphor as an explicit lexicon with multiple “resemblances” such as Ullmann argues above, defines all metaphor according to metonymy: “A metaphor can be invented because language, in its process of unlimited semiosis, constitutes a multidimensional network of metonymies, each of which is explained by a cultural convention rather than by an original resemblance.”⁴⁶ I fully support Eco’s definition, but also concede that “metonymies” is not the way that metaphor has been generally defined, viewed, or utilized in a modern *episteme*.

1.2.1 A “Returnt” to the Figurative

But how does one change from a modern perspective on the use and value of figurative language—to bridge the divide between a preference for the literal value of language in our modern era and a view of metaphor today that is considered to be less precise than the literal? The implication of Foucault’s observation of different *episteme* involves a difficulty in the study of a period from another *epistemic* realm due to significant contextual changes to language that are especially noted in this thesis with regard to literal approaches versus figurative (which can be highly contextual). Greek and Latin are considered to be “dead” languages foremost because they have lost their “viable situational context.”⁴⁷ Thus, Gumpel asserts about *Hamlet*:

Its language, Elizabethan English, is essentially “dead” since no one today shares this inventory except at a written and mostly literary level. All modern Recipients, therefore, must “returnt” to the Elizabethan oppositional system where this differs from their own English or misconstrue Icons that still appear extant but not in the same indented Indexes.⁴⁸

Pertinent here is the specific notion Foucault presented of a Renaissance *episteme* where there was an “implicit assumption that words and things formed a unified texture and were linked through resemblance.”⁴⁹ It is through this methodology that we may in both a historical and a rhetorical sense “returnt” to a fuller understanding of *Hamlet*. With regard

⁴⁶ Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 78.

⁴⁷ Gumpel, *Metaphor Reexamined*, 53.

⁴⁸ Gumpel, *Metaphor Reexamined*, 141.

⁴⁹ Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 23.

to a difference between metaphors that are alive or dead, Cornelia Müller's work on what she calls the "activation of metaphoricity" is also an inspiration here for a re-examination of Shakespeare's figurative language and the procedural potential for it to be re-awakened.⁵⁰ A major difference between a Renaissance *episteme* and a modern is an emphasis on the figurative versus a symbolic or literal approach to language, with the implication that a figurative approach centered on metonymy can potentially bring Shakespeare's rhetoric back to life.

Rather than see figurative language as less precise than literal language, or having less "value" especially according to political and social functioning,⁵¹ this may indeed be a presumption of a modern *episteme* (even though similar debate existed in Shakespeare's time).⁵² Adjacency and context is what lends metonyms their rhetorical strength because they are not subject to overt semantic destructions since they are structurally based on etymological principles rather than proxy-tenet substitutions. Such a type of figurative trope, because it is inherently structurally based means that its foundation is "functionally and not lexically reinforced: is context sensitive instead of content sensitive."⁵³ This contextualization in turn provides concretization and a practical way to engender meaning with a high degree of functional determinacy. The potential to impart sophisticated levels of meaning is far greater than symbolic associations or simply replacing one term for another according to a more literal minded metaphoric approach.

Metonyms were a means by which Shakespeare could speak to his audience in a personalized way they would intuitively understand, thus emphasizing the power of his dramatic poetry to involve an audience. As a rhetorical strategy, metonymy offers the public speaker an opportunity to "personalize" complicated issues for those members of an audience who suffer from either too little or too much information, or, from political

⁵⁰ Cornelia Müller, *Metaphors Dead and Alive, Sleeping and Waking: A Dynamic View* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 5.

⁵¹ See George Orwell's 1946 essay, "Politics and the English Language," in George Orwell, *A Collection of Essays* (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1981), 156-171.

⁵² James I expressed concern over the stability of legal and civil discourse in his inaugural speech to Parliament in March of 1604. The new monarch advised, "That it becommeth a King, in my opinion, to use no other Eloquence then plainnesse and sinceritie. By plainnesse I meane, that his Speeches should be so cleare and voyd of all ambiguitie, that they may not be throwne, nor rent asunder in contrary sences like the old Oracles of the Pagan Gods." Charles Howard McIlwain, ed., *The Political Works of James I* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), 280.

⁵³ Gumpel, *Metaphor Reexamined*, 4.

disaffection.⁵⁴ The conveyance of complex ideas at this level is very difficult to convey to an audience by simply using literal language or a symbolic rhetoric alone. In his *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian showed a familiarity with the limitations of symbolic thinking and “the fact that there are certain things which it is impossible to represent by symbols.”⁵⁵ Therefore, figurative language (like metonymy) as opposed to the symbolic has its distinct and useful purposes, although both are certainly necessary for language to function.

David Crystal notes how, for much of the twentieth century, metaphor is approached as a “semantic” principle whereby meaning “was felt to be an ‘internal’ phenomenon, a mental residue not susceptible to direct investigation.”⁵⁶ Metaphor in terms of figurative language like metonymy has been subjected to a modern tendency to interpret it literally, or as Gumpel explains to “circumvent ‘internal’ phenomena and settle instead for the most tangible, ‘external’ base a language has to offer in the way of presentational immediacy, and that by way of expediency is the explicit lexicon.”⁵⁷ Rather than explicit lexicon in a Renaissance episteme the focus is upon implicit associations of meanings. Thus the Renaissance approach to rhetoric differs from a modern perspective on the use, value, and primacy of figurative language (a more detailed analysis of the value placed on the poetic arts during the Renaissance can be found in Chapter 2).

The use of figurative language in the Renaissance was not metaphoric in the modern way that Ullmann, for example, values the “expressive power of metaphor,” as a way of constantly “forging new links or uncovering new resemblances.”⁵⁸ In his *Garden of Eloquence* Henry Peacham wrote:

[F]or when there wanted words to expresse the nature of diverse thinges, wise men remembring that many thinges were very like, thought it good to borrow the name of one thing, to expresse another, that did in something much resemble it, and so began to use translated speech, and declare their meaning by wordes that made a likely similitude, of those thinges which they signified.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ See Patricia A. Chantrill and Jeffery Scott Mio, “Metonymy in Political Discourse,” in *Metaphor, Implications and Applications*, ed. Jeffery Scott Mio and Albert N. Katz (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1996), 173.

⁵⁵ Patricia P. Matsen, Philip Rollinson, and Marion Sousa, eds., *Readings from Classical Rhetoric* (Southern Illinois University, 1990), 229.

⁵⁶ As cited in Gumpel, *Metaphor Reexamined*, 1; also see David Crystal, *Linguistics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990).

⁵⁷ Gumpel, *Metaphor Reexamined*, 1.

⁵⁸ Ullmann as in Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 190.

⁵⁹ Henry Peacham, *Garden of Eloquence* (London, 1577), B1v.

It would be naïve to think that because Peacham is discussing similitude that he is thinking of language based upon our modern notions of metaphor in terms of similarity where “like” things or terms become associated. Rather, his use of similarity defines a structure of language that is brought about through a type of contingency established by “wise men” that are in agreement about such matters. Peacham is highlighting the value of figurative language that modern readers would immediately read as metaphor. Yet Peacham’s “semiotic” approach stresses adjacency and context in addition to a common contextual agreement made by participants in a language to “expresse the nature of diverse thinges.” Peacham’s description of speech is concerned with a high level of usage, or “eloquence,” that stresses rhetoric as elemental to poetics and a valuable tool. This type of rhetorical usage enables context for words that create more sophisticated levels of meaning than the words alone can normally engender (in a similar way that theorems work in mathematics with relation to numbers).⁶⁰

David Bathrick and Andreas Huyssen both argue that modern approaches have destabilized any foundation of meaning established by a tradition of contextualized agreements in language between men (such as Peacham defines in the quote mentioned above as agreements between “wise men”), and has “vaporized this notion of experience as tradition.”⁶¹ Terry Eagleton noted about Shakespeare “that though there are many ways in which we have thankfully left this conservative patriarch behind, there are other ways in which we have yet to catch up with him.”⁶² How much have modern theory and inspirations for reading and interpreting Shakespeare left us with less of a methodology by which to “catch up with him,” rather than a greater understanding of his own aesthetic and the function of his dramatic poetry?

Stephen Orgel noted about Shakespeare how “the breadth of interpretive possibility often seems both endless and, for modern readers looking for a key to Renaissance symbolism, distressingly arbitrary. Renaissance iconographies and mythographies are in this respect the most postmodern of texts, in which no meaning is conceived to be inherent, all signification is constructed or applied; the fluidity and ambivalence of the image are of

⁶⁰ Angus Fletcher, for example, further observes how: “The modern critic’s equipment tends to be psychological rather than logical, and he finds it hard to see in Aristotle’s discussion of metaphors that we would call metaphorical.” Fletcher, *Allegory*, 75.

⁶¹ David Bathrick and Andreas Huyssen, “Modernism and the Experience of Modernity,” in *Modernity and the Text: Revisions of German Modernism*, ed. David Bathrick and Andreas Huyssen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 6.

⁶² Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986), ix-x.

the essence.”⁶³ The modern preference here is for subjective approaches that are in a constant state of flux—ever re-imagining, re-fashioning, and re-inventing our experience of Shakespeare’s texts. Still, as Bathrick and Hussyen further note, this leaves us with the “intense suspicion that authentic experience is erased by modernity itself.”⁶⁴ Such sentiments further Foucault’s premise of a difficulty of one *episteme* understanding the texts of another.

Again, there still stands an open invitation to approach Shakespeare from the perspective of a Renaissance *episteme*. The nagging idea that “Shakespeare’s text contains all the material needed to make the play intelligible” has not escaped the attention of modern critics like Margreta de Grazia, who is representative of a renewed critical interest in looking at text and context.⁶⁵ In *Hamlet without Hamlet*, de Grazia suggests an approach to the text that tries to circumvent what she calls “a 200-year-old critical tradition” that has been “built on an oversight.”⁶⁶ Although she is not able to pinpoint what exactly this oversight may be, de Grazia reminds us of an invitation to rethink the methods by which we have been reading Shakespeare from the general perspective of our modern *episteme*.

A study such as *Renaissance Figures of Speech* illuminates the limitations of a modern language that places a strong emphasis upon literal senses and also serves as a modern paraphrase of the Peacham quote used above:

A language with only literal senses is condemned always to say the same thing or else to say nothing. Figuration provides the horizon of possibility for a language that can make sense of anything. Figures of speech allow a language to make things up, and thus (paradoxically) also create the conditions for mimesis. A language with figures is creative and productive (as Erasmus would say, copious), by enabling exchange to take place, and at the same time representational (mimetic) by providing the conventions of acceptance by which one word is used in place of another.⁶⁷

The quote helps to describe an essential difference between the literal and the figurative as well as a historical tendency to draw sharp distinctions between the two linguistic approaches (with the modern world seen to prefer the literal and the Renaissance the figurative). As the above quote suggests, metaphors were a possible solution to linguistic

⁶³ Stephen Orgel, *The Authentic Shakespeare: and Other Problems of the Early Modern Stage* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 109.

⁶⁴ David Bathrick and Andreas Huyssen, “Modernism and the Experience of Modernity,” 6.

⁶⁵ Frederick Beardsley Gilchrist, *The True Story of Hamlet and Ophelia* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1889), 3.

⁶⁶ Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet without Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

⁶⁷ Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettiheuber, eds., *Renaissance Figures of Speech* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 229.

dissolution in the Renaissance. There is a textual and linguistic shift in our modern *episteme* away from such figurative solutions, and re-introducing “figuration” through the specific metaphoric rhetorical practice of metonymy is a key here to understanding *Hamlet* and the use of metonymy made in it. Ultimately, though, it is not metonyms that are of most significance, but rather the contexts and patterns of intended meaning that they point to or engender. Insofar as “figuration provides the horizon of possibility for a language that can make sense of anything” it is not just tropes but also landscapes of potential meaning that are of essence. It is not enough to define and identify metonyms used by Shakespeare, but it is the context from which these metonyms are born, as well as “the conventions of acceptance” particular to an English Renaissance reader (or audience) that provided the opportunity for Shakespeare to offer a textual language that, as the above quote mentions, is “creative and productive,” “enabling exchange,” and “at the same time representational.”

This quote from *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, though, falls into the modern trend of interpreting metaphor as simply the use of one word or term “in place of another.” This simple act of replacement misses the sophisticated and pragmatic *semiotic* function of figurative language. In terms of semiotics, for instance, Kaja Silverman noted how “icon and index supplement each other as fully as they do the symbolic or conventional signifier. A photographic image, for instance, enjoys a relation of both similarity and adjacency to its object.”⁶⁸ One could take this a step further to suggest that a Renaissance approach to language was less literal and far more figuratively pictorial than in our modern world, with its visual culture represented through thought objects that were figuratively portrayed through a use of rhetoric.⁶⁹ Silverman’s observation implies a specific relation between icon and index that “supplement each other” in a way that would only occur according to certain accepted contextualized agreements or rhetorical rules. This issue brings back the topic of authorial intent with regard to intentional rhetorical relationships and the rules by which a writer such as Shakespeare may be structuring his dramatic poetry in order to suggest or promote specific meaning(s).

⁶⁸ Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 21-22.

⁶⁹ Rather than modern pictorial expression through illustrated books, films, or television. In his book *Nature and Art in Renaissance Literature*, Edward William Tayler notes how words such as “Art” and “Nature” held a special interest in the Renaissance specifically because of their “abstract character and multiplicity of meanings.” Edward William Tayler, *Nature and Art in Renaissance Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 2. The use of such potent words within specific contexts was utilized in the Renaissance to impart information that was not simply literal but figurative, and they functioned pictorially as complete thought images much more so than according to the modern practice of literal substitution of individual signifieds or signifiers.

1.3 Rules of the Game

Jacques Derrida noted that a person “would have understood nothing of the game who, at this (de coup), would feel himself authorized merely to add on, that is, to add any old thing. He would add nothing, the seam wouldn’t hold.” A Derridian approach of doing deconstruction stresses the need for literary integrity and adherence to the necessities of “the game.” Traditional practices of deconstruction, due to a respect for meaning (that also implies a consideration of authorial intent), are opposed to “arbitrary interpretation.”⁷⁰ Thus we find that recognition of the rules (actual or presumed) by which a structure originates is as much a part of deconstructive practices as are the challenges to inspirational forms and ideas an applied theory presents.⁷¹ Authorial intention is “A Concept We Hate to Love,” as Mieke Bal phrased it.⁷² Still, despite a modern critical tradition that may dismisses a consideration of authorial intent, a consideration of the rules of Shakespeare’s “game” are almost impossible to ignore completely. The polar notions of methodological structure and methodological interpretation are macrocosmic ideas of sign and signified,⁷³ or *langue* and *parole*,⁷⁴ both of which are embodied in the linguistic concept of “literary competence.”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ “Derridian deconstructionism challenges notions of meaning and identity but does not advocate arbitrary interpretation. It is not anarchy in which any text can mean anything, nor is it the reproduction of emptiness where all texts are deconstructed into nothing.” Allan Edwards, James Skinner, and Keith Gilber, *Extending the Boundaries* (Altona: Common Ground Publishing, 2002), 52.

⁷¹ For instance, Feminist criticism, to cite one example among other modern theoretical approaches, relies heavily on notions of and “authorial” Shakespeare that offer resistance (such as misogyny or patriarchy) to enable its practices as well as possibilities of “discovery” and affirmation. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock offer that, “feminism explores the pleasures of resistance, of deconstruction, of discovery, of defining, of fragmenting, of redefining.” Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, “Fifteen Years of Feminist Action: from practical strategies to strategic practices,” in *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women’s Movement 1970-1985*, ed. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (London: Pandora Press, 1987), 54.

⁷² Mieke Bal, *A Mieke Bal Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), chapt. 8, 236.

⁷³ Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

⁷⁴ Especially in terms of the “necessary conventions” adopted by society to promote language. Saussure saw language according to the rules by which society adheres: “Mais qu’est-ce que langue? Pour nous elle ne se confond pas avec le langage” elle n’en est qu’une partie déterminée, essentielle, il est vrai. C’est à la fois un produit social de la faculté du langage et un ensemble de conventions nécessaires, adoptées par le corps social pour permettre l’exercice de cette faculté chez les individus.” As cited in Carol Sanders, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 78.

⁷⁵ Including the conventions, or rules, by which we make sense of text. See Noam Chomsky, *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin, and Use* (New York: Praeger, 1986); Noam Chomsky, *Language and Politics*, ed. Carlos Peregrin Otero (Oakland: AK Press, 2004); Jonathan Culler, *Structural Poetics: Structuralism*,

With respect to this, even theoretical approaches that dismiss reading Shakespeare according to “Shakespeare” are grounded in a semiotic debate over authorial intent and interpretation, as well as addressing the problem of language and the conveyance of meaning.

For Derrida, “The reading or writing supplement must be rigorously prescribed, but by the necessities of a game, by the logic of play, signs to which the system of all textual powers must be accorded and attuned.”⁷⁶ Foucault also noted how discursive practice is “a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined by the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function.”⁷⁷ Identification of the rules of language, or use of rhetoric within a historical period is essential to understanding a Renaissance text like *Hamlet*.

The emphasis then lies on knowing, or on being sensitive to, the rules that are in play in the construction of a text’s form and meaning. This requires attention to poetics in terms of both rhetoric and the “logic of play.” Anyone who wishes to attempt to understand and “play” with a text like *Hamlet* at this level must first adhere and understand the rules of the “necessities” of the game with a consideration and adherence to the rhetorical approaches of a Renaissance *episteme*. For example, William Engel notes how historically “the invention of images for the Roman orator, like the composition of allegories in the Latin Middle Ages, and like the construction of places within memory theaters in the Renaissance, always had to be directed toward some prefigured end.”⁷⁸ The use of tropes is intentionally “directed” and “prefigured” according to specific end results that are constructed rhetorically to impart meaning. In other words, the “invention of images,” such as with a figurative use of language, was “prefigured” according to a “logic of play.” By the twentieth century, allegory, according to the observation of Walter Benjamin, becomes a mode where, “any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else.”⁷⁹ Is figurative language directed toward a “prefigured end” or is it a mode where it

Linguistics and the Study of Literature (London: Routledge, 1975); and Frederick J. Newmeyer, *Grammatical Theory: Its Limits and its Possibilities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁷⁶ Derrida quoted here as trans. in Allan Edwards, James Skinner, and Keith Gilber, *Extending the Boundaries*, 52.

⁷⁷ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 131.

⁷⁸ William Engel, *Mapping Mortality: The Persistence of Memory and Melancholy in Early Modern England* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 43.

⁷⁹ As cited in Engel, *Mapping Mortality*, 47. For Walter Benjamin, as Jennifer Todd notes, “the twentieth century languages of art have lost their traditional context of meaning. Artistic reference has become arbitrary; works can be interpreted in any manner.” Jennifer Todd, “Production, Reception, Criticism: Walter

can mean “absolutely anything else.” These differences in approaches to figurative forms like symbolism, metonymy and allegory are important for the formation of basic building blocks of an architecture of language that can influence interpretations and meaning. The rules by which the game of rhetorical interpretation is played are different from the different perspectives of these two unique *episteme*. I would further argue that it is these rhetorical approaches that most distinguish these *episteme* from one another. The consideration of *episteme* should not be thought of as merely a historical difference, but also a difference in rhetorical perspective. The question that Foucault poses of one *episteme* understanding another becomes central: is the difficulty of our understanding of *Hamlet* due simply to a difficulty of understanding and implementation a Renaissance rhetorical approach to text from the perspective of our modern *episteme*?

A difference in Renaissance and modern approaches to rhetoric extends into the realm of our modern critical perception of Shakespeare’s dramatic poetry. L. C. Knights, for instance, observes that *Hamlet*

contains within itself widely different levels of experience and insight which, since they cannot be assimilated into a whole, create a total effect of ambiguity. (This would help to explain why on different minds Hamlet can make such a different impressions; since it offers unusually varied possibilities of interpretation you pick what pleases you and what your temperament demands.)⁸⁰

Knights suggests an intention on Shakespeare’s part to create “different levels of experience”; yet, Knights is not referring to hierarchical structural levels of rhetorical interpretation that would function with a high degree of determinacy, but rather a function of text whereby any and all “possibilities of interpretation” become valid and you can “pick what pleases you.”

Terence Hawkes similarly offers us a “backwards” approach in his essay “Telmah” (Hamlet spelled backwards), valorizing the notion of interpretational multiplicity to a point that the very possibility of authoritative interpretation is called into question. He offers instead “the sense of the text as a site, or an area of conflicting and often contradictory potential interpretations, no single one or group of which can claim “intrinsic” primacy or “inherent” authority.”⁸¹ In *Meaning by Shakespeare*, Hawkes furthers this notion by saying

Benjamin and the Problem of Meaning in Art”, in *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History*, ed. Gary Smith (The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 102.

⁸⁰ L. C. Knights, *Explorations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 85.

⁸¹ Terence Hawkes, “Telmah,” in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. P. Parker and G. Hartman (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), 317, 330.

that Shakespeare's texts "do not transmit the meaning intended and embodied within them by their author."⁸² Therefore, Hawkes states that "Shakespeare doesn't mean, we mean by Shakespeare."⁸³ Yet, is Hawkes merely reflecting what Foucault noted as a difficulty of a modern *episteme* understanding a Renaissance one? In other words, I do not believe Hawkes is saying that Shakespeare has no meaning, but that that the context for understanding meaning in Shakespeare has radically shifted.⁸⁴ As a rhetorical approach, there is an aspect of contiguity in modern approaches that levels the playing field for any and all possibilities of interpretations to the exclusion of approaches based on hierarchy and adjacency whereby certain perspectives can be considered closer to the original intention and primary meaning of a text. With regard to critical approaches to Shakespeare's plays, these two markedly different approaches represent different "games" played according to very different rules (or theories) regarding language, interpretation, and meaning.

Stephen Orgel describes the editorial process toward Shakespeare as an attempt at elucidation where:

Elucidation assumes that behind the obscurity and confusion of the text is a clear and precise meaning, and that the obscurity, moreover, is not part of the meaning. And since the editorial process is committed to elucidation, it is largely helpless before a text that is genuinely obscure.⁸⁵

Orgel concludes that *Hamlet* is a genuinely obscure text and is the reason that elucidation of a "clear and precise meaning" leaves critics of the play "helpless" before this text. Orgel even suggests that Shakespeare may have been just as incomprehensible to people in Shakespeare's time as he is for us today.⁸⁶ Cedric Watts, in his critical introduction to the play, also lends his support to the idea that "Hamlet will tantalizingly offer cogent but not conclusive support to many different interpretations—the open secret of Hamlet is that it is so constructed as to invite, encourage, and reward this diversity."⁸⁷ Simply because

⁸² Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992), 3.

⁸³ Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare*, 3.

⁸⁴ See also Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer, *Shakespeare and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 1999), 12.

⁸⁵ Stephen Orgel, *The Oxford Shakespeare, The Winter's Tale* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10. For more examples see Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare*; Hawkes, *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*; Maynard Mack, *Everybody's Shakespeare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993); and Russ McDonald, ed., *Shakespeare, An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1945-2000* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004).

⁸⁶ Stephen Orgel, "The Poetics of Incomprehensibility," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991): 431-437.

⁸⁷ Cedric Watts, *Hamlet* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), 79.

elucidation of *Hamlet* has proved “helpless” to date, it does not mean that the text is “genuinely obscure” but merely that it has been obscure from a modern perspective.

The use of metonymy from a Renaissance perspective offers a rhetorical efficiency that can be effective and extremely potent for engendering meaning to a far greater effect than the literal or symbolic; but is arguably dependent upon complex and established social structures. In other words, metonyms are the product of language at a complex level, especially in terms of agreed upon contextual references (common internal iconization of referents among a group of people) that depend upon an insistence of specific meanings and conventions for their success. In terms of language, these conventions are subject to the passage of time as each *episteme* contextualizes language differently. This is not to deny that problems of language and meaning are as much a modern concern as one of bridging historical linguistic divides. Roland Barthes focused on the separation and interpretive gap between *langue* and *paroles*.⁸⁸ Julian Wolfreys also noted Derrida’s sentiment that an author’s “pure intentional act can never be protected from the dangers of contingency and catastrophe.”⁸⁹ Barthes and Derrida’s work in this context reflects a significant concern for meaning in the examination of Renaissance texts according to the function of signifieds and signifiers even without Foucault’s notion of time according to *episteme* further obfuscating contextualization.

The Derridian notion that “il n’y a pas de hors-texte” and that there is nothing but text and “context” is inspiration for a close reading of Shakespeare’s plays according to structures of meaning found within the text in addition to Foucault’s invitation to ascertain a Renaissance “context.”⁹⁰ The methodology of examining text and context that Derrida and Foucault suggest is an invitation to examine *Hamlet* according to internal textual structural rather than an imposition of meaning from without. This involves avoiding a tendency for external unlimited metaphoric impositions “hors-texte” made through associations and similitude rather than metonymic adjacencies and contextual concerns that are textually inspired.

If Foucault’s theory of the value of metonymy in a Renaissance *episteme* is correct, then it should resolve issues of indeterminacy as well as some of the play’s major cruxes. This dissertation sets out to demonstrate that Foucault’s theory is relevant to a Renaissance

⁸⁸ Roland Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue (The Rustle of Language)*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Micheal Moriarty, *Roland Barthes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); and Susan Sontag, ed., *A Barthes Reader* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

⁸⁹ See Julian Wolfreys, *The Edinburgh Encyclopaedia of Modern Criticism and Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 318. Foucault’s theory that different *epistemes* can also cause dangers of contingency for texts from various time periods is also a factor in obscuring authorial intent.

⁹⁰ James K. A. Smith, *Jacques Derrida, Live Theory* (London, Continuum Books, 2005), 44.

text like *Hamlet*, and that a metonymic approach resolves major textual incongruities (explaining Derrida's rules of the game) including prominent cruxes. The result of such a type of metonymic examination of *Hamlet* also illuminates a play with a high degree of rhetorical functional determinacy and significant authorial intent. Triangulation as part of the functional architecture of Renaissance metonymy offers a further guide to the linguistic "rules" of a Renaissance text like *Hamlet* and further factors in as another rhetorical tool for understanding how Shakespeare's "game" is played.

1.4 Triangulation

It is worth noting C. S. Peirce's work on Thirdness in relation to metonymy and triangulation. Peirce described Thirdness as a "category of intelligibility" that is "present in phenomena insofar as they are related to one thing through another."⁹¹ Carl Hausman described how for Peirce,

all genuine triadic relations involve meaning, because a genuine triad cannot be broken into two dyads, and the third component of the triad constitutes that triad as a meaningful whole. To put it another way, a genuine triad is genuine because thought or meaning binds together the relata of the triad.⁹²

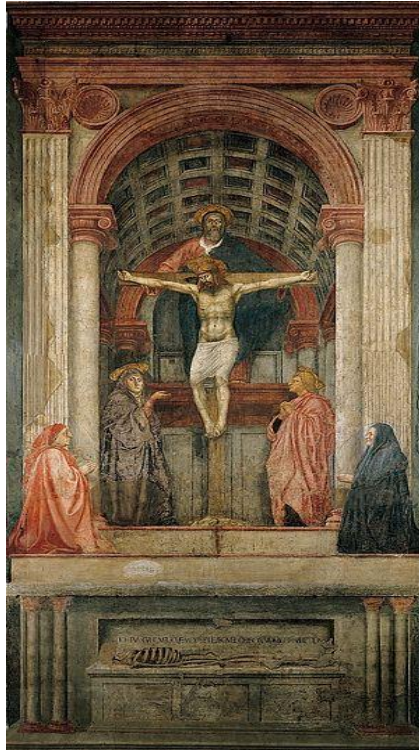
The profound implication here of C. S. Peirce's work is not his observation of Thirdness alone, but how triangulation is bound together by meaning. Just as with triangulation in the physical world, which enables locating a very site-specific location that leaves much less room for error than finding it through two points alone, literary triangulation involves specifics of meaning (and this is one of Peirce's main points). While we may take triangulation for granted in modern applications like GPS and surveying, this geometrical principle, as outlined briefly below, was one of the most consciously applied Renaissance guides for scientific, artistic, and spiritual investigations.⁹³

⁹¹ Carl R. Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce's Evolutionary Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 12.

⁹² Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce's Evolutionary Philosophy*, 13.

⁹³ See Alfred Leick, *GPS Satellite Surveying*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2004).

Triangulation, in terms of relation, was a defining factor not only for Renaissance theology, but three-point perspective in art, and metonymy in the use of poetics.⁹⁴ Masaccio's fresco painting *Trinity* is based upon these ideas of tripartite perspective and is considered one of the foundational pieces of art in the Renaissance.



Massaccio, *The Holy Trinity, with the Virgin and Saint John*, 1425
(Santa Maria Novello, Florence)

Nor is it a coincidence that a visual artistic technique based on triangles uses the Holy Trinity as its first subject. Here, however, the geometrically defined relation has to be framed and caught by a distinctly tropological one. In terms of visual representation, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit would be intrinsically related, but also portrayed as distinct

⁹⁴ The application of triangles as a way of explaining and defining perspective finds its roots in Euclid; but is also found in Alhacen's *De aspectibus* or *De perspectiva* and Roger Bacon's *Opis majus*: two of the most prominent works on perspective that were the likely inspiration for Filippo Brunelleschi to develop triangular geometric considerations of perspective into the application of linear perspective in the visual arts, and for Leon Battista Alberti to write his *De Pictura*. For a very good discussion of this history see Samuel Y. Edgerton, *The Mirror, the Window, and the Telescope: How Renaissance Linear Perspective Changed our Vision of the Universe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); also David Eugene Smith, *History of Mathematics* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1925), 338-342.

figures. This separation would be a way of considering them uniquely, which would threaten their very unity. They were and had to be, principally, contiguous and continuous with one another. Therefore, the relation between the three could be neither metaphorical, nor synecdochic, but metonymic, in a triangular sense.⁹⁵ Thus, the ideas based on geometrical perception and tropical triangulation were part of the very foundations of Renaissance theology and also reflected in Neo-Platonic thought whereby “Plato’s idea of the Demiurge composing the soul, through the gathering of the three elements into unity, was enthusiastically endorsed by Christian commentators who equated the triune principle of the mean with the Trinity.”⁹⁶ Metonymy according to adjacency was a rhetorical structure in the Renaissance that had particular association with the spiritual conception of man in terms of relation with the divine.

With regard to triangulated figures of speech, Foucault’s contention that it is adjacency and relationship that define Renaissance logic of metonymy cannot be a matter of just two signifiers being related; as for instance between “Adam’s seed” on the one hand and “mankind” on the other—to use an example from Dante.⁹⁷ There are in fact three elements in play here, or a triangulation of three distinct thought objects. Certainly there is contiguity in play as “Mankind” is contiguous with “Adams seed.” There is also synecdoche with consideration of a part to the whole. Yet, there is a difference between “Mankind” and “Adam’s seed” that contiguity and synecdoche do not embrace—as well as a type of meaning by bringing these two unique thought objects into relation with one another that only metonymy engenders. Metonymy is a more holistic inclusion of “Adam” as a signified, the signified “Mankind” and the signifier “seed” in relationship. There are not just two thought objects to contend with but three. What matters in Renaissance metonymy is not simple contiguity, then, but the particular relationship between signifieds that are connected cognitively through association and by comparison. “Mankind” is linked to “Adam” through his “seed,” a signifier/d that is shared by both signifier/ds and connects the two. There is also distance here, or better: a *scale* of relationship, as parts of mankind are considered historically closer to “Adam’s seed” than others, which brings in the Foucauldian notion of adjacency as thought objects that are separate. This cognitive act of

⁹⁵ In Plato’s *Phaedrus* we find a tripartite soul: the reflective or calculative (λόγος), the spirited (θυμός) and the appetitive (ἐπιθυμητής). Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. R. Hackforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 72. Also see Ralph M. Rosen, “Galen, Plato, and the Physiology of Erôs,” in *Erôs in Ancient Greece*, ed. Ed Sanders et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 111-128.

⁹⁶ Nicholas Temple, *Disclosing Horizons: Architecture, Perspective, and Redemptive Space* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 40.

⁹⁷ See for example Giovanni Boccaccio discussion of the same as in *Boccaccio’s Expositions on Dante’s Comedy*, trans. Michael Papio (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), Canto III, 157.

comparison, or bringing signifieds into relation, is what makes a metonym significant and creates a metonymic shift according to a cognitive act of comparison rather than a simple functional association between two terms.

Moving from a structural consideration of metonymy to include a cognitive perspective completes the way in which Renaissance metonyms functioned as a rhetorical tool. Relating more specifically to a Renaissance *episteme*, metonymy includes both materiality (functionality between sign vehicles and their contents) as well as immateriality (operational units of consciousness). In addition to viewing signifiers and signifieds as structurally informed terms, metonyms are triangulated between three thought objects both physically in mental relative space and cognitively in terms of independent thought objects bearing meaning. Metonyms then involve both a consideration of semantic structure as well as cognitive theory.

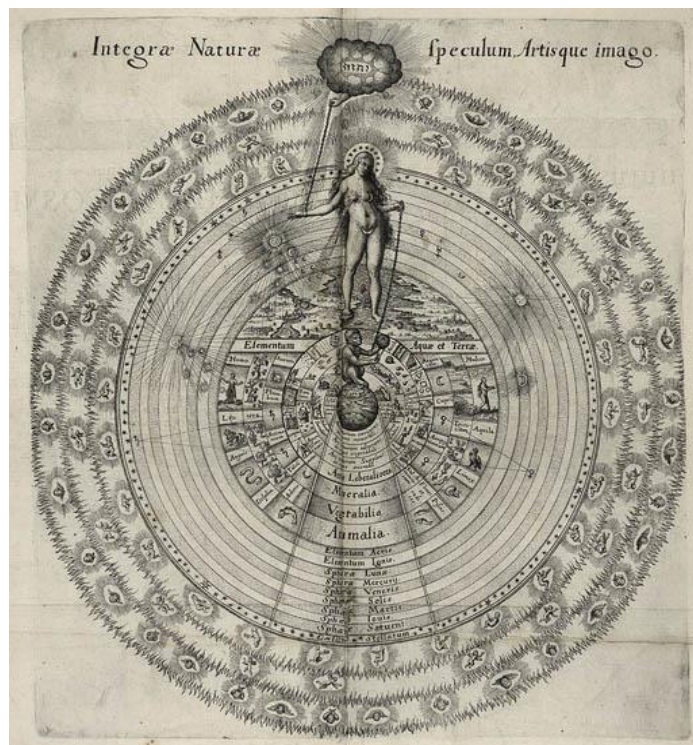
Metonyms, again, are not figures whereby “terms” replace one-another,⁹⁸ in metonymy two separate signifieds that are placed in cognitive close proximity maintain their own integrity which, through adjacency, create a scale of relative relationship.⁹⁹ Simply *replacing* one signified for another would destroy the scale of relative relationship. This scale of relationship is brought about through adjacency, or a consideration of the relative distance between two signifieds, which in turn leads to a triangulated relative scale and measure of distance from two signifieds to a signifier. This scale of relationship is another tool in a metonymical toolbox whereby metonyms can be seen to function according to a Renaissance *episteme* as adjacent rather than contiguous.

The following examples demonstrate how metonymy can work in the realm of thought objects. The Renaissance was the celebration of humanity, but humanity as a unifying force between nature (or the material world) and God (the spiritual). Robert Fludd (1574–1637) was a contemporary of Shakespeare who promoted the Renaissance Neo-Platonic idea of man as a microcosm directly influenced by the heavens as a macrocosm. An emblem by Fludd pictorially presents this philosophy as representing invisible ties as visible chains that link God (the cloud), Nature (the nude), and Man’s Art (the Ape):¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ As argued for example by Lakoff and Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*, see especially chapt. 3. For further reading see Verona Hasser, *Metaphor, Metonymy and Experientialist Philosophy*, chapt. 1.

⁹⁹ Alun Munslow point out: “Foucault’s own construction of the epistemic/figurative basis of historical experience is clearly derived from Vico. Foucault took Vico’s belief that narrative and trope represent both the sources and the connections we imagine between them.” Alun Munslow, *The Rutledge Companion to Historical Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 240.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Fludd, *Ultiusque cosmic maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technical historia* (Oppenheim: Heironymus Gallerus, 1617-1619), I, Frontpiece.



Robert Fludd, Frontpiece to *Ultiusque cosmic maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technical historia*, 1617–1619
(Oppenheim: Heironymus Gallerus,)

Fludd's image is a triangulated metonymic relationship of adjacency between God, Nature and Man. Contiguity exists, as all three elements are connected, but it is man's distance from God and Nature that are the measure and Fludd's image portrays man closer to the bestial ape than the celestial. According to such a hierarchical perspective, some men are closer to God (divinity) and understanding Nature (wisdom) than others. The chains uniting the three elements in Fludd's picture represent connection above contiguity, as each item remains autonomous and adjacent. Metonymy according to adjacency is in play, but each image has its own unique dimensions and complexity as an independent thought object no matter how closely adjacent they may be seen. A more detailed example of this same principle at work from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* follows.

1.4.1 The Test of the Three Caskets and Triangulation

The test of the caskets in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* provides an example of how rhetoric and logic are blended in the Renaissance poetic landscape

according to a metonymic structure and triangulation.¹⁰¹ The test also serves as a heuristic model for my approach to understanding *Hamlet*. In the test of the caskets, Portia's suitors are given the choice of three boxes each made of a different metal: gold, silver, and lead. If one chooses correctly, he wins Portia. If he chooses incorrectly, he must promise never to marry. The choice of the gold casket is the most obvious one, or literal interpretation, based on an association with a rich and beautiful potential bride; but somewhat surprisingly it is not the correct answer. Based on the following inscriptions and deductive logic a different choice is made:

1. The first, of gold, who this inscription bears,
'Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire;'
 2. The second, silver, which this promise carries,
'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves;'
 3. This third, dull lead, with warning all as blunt,
'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.'
- (2. 7. 4–9)

Looking at the choice of caskets as a logic problem, we can deduce the following. The phrase "Who chooseth me" can be taken away since it is common to all and provides no distinction of one casket over another. Contiguity is here but it is not what is significant so much as how and what one "chooseth." Likewise, any text can be subject to infinite interpretations or contiguous metaphoric associations, but certain adjacent placements will prove far closer to comprehension or a correct answer than others. What is distinctive in the test of the caskets is the adjacency of verbs and objects:

¹⁰¹ A similar set up to the casket test is found in the prominent incunabula example of Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* when Poliphilo encounters three doors inscribed in Ionic, Roman, Hebrew and Arabic text with the first door bearing the inscription *Theodoxia*, the second *Erototrophos*, and the third *Cosmodoxia*. As with Bassanio in Shakespeare's play, Poliphilo learns to not judge the triangulated riddle according to the outward appearances of what he encounters behind each door. The book was first published in Venice by Aldus Manutius (1499) with the title: *Poliphili Hypnerotomachia, ubi humana omnia non nisi somnium esse estendit, atque obiter plurima citu sane quam digna commemorat*.

Colonna's work is a possible inspiration for Shakespeare's that also suggests a metonymic grounding for Shakespeare's text in what is considered an allegorical Neo-Platonic work. It is also worthwhile to note that Colonna's book is written in a Latinate Italian that invents words from Latin, Greek, and even Hebrew and Arabic sources. Perhaps this type of linguistic invention inspired Shakespeare's own classically motivated coinage of new English words. This prominent Renaissance text underwent many editions, and was translated into English in 1592 in a printing for Simon Waterson when it was given the title *Hypnerotomachia. The Strife of Love in a Dreame*. Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1999), 135-141.

1. shall gain ... desire
2. shall get ... deserves
3. must give ... all

Immediately the third riddle stands out from the first two. The word “must” stands out as a commanding obligation, an imperative of duty, not present in the word “shall” of the first two lines, and the word “shall” implies some promise of receipt, while the word “give” is in direct contrast with the actions of gaining and getting. Lastly, the rewards promised in the first two instances (gaining your desire and getting what you deserve) are counter posed with the third promise of “hazarding” everything without promise of any reward at all.

From a purely dialectical, argumentative perspective, the last riddle is the clear “odd man out” and is, therefore, the obvious, that is to say reasonable, choice amongst the three. Shakespeare creates a type of Socratic dialogue in the choice of the caskets that leads to one choice as logically superior above the others. The test of the caskets, then, is not pure chance—some parlor game Portia’s father sets to the motions of blind fortune—but a true reflection of the state of wisdom (or ignorance) of each suitor. Portia’s father has given her the gift of a test whereby a suitor is found not through blind passion, or the commandments of an arranged marriage, but through the ability in this first inquiry to operate logically, through argumentative elimination.

The solution to the test is embedded into its linguistic structure. In terms of a trope this is a form of synecdoche. The solution is enclosed in the riddle. It is part of it. Yet, the riddle itself is resolved through an adjacent comparison between the three representative caskets and their relationship relative to one another. It becomes difficult, indeed, to find an answer to even a simple syllogistic problem like the casket test from the presumption that Shakespeare cannot be explained (the vexation of nineteenth-century criticism), or that Shakespeare’s text resists authorial intent by inviting any and all interpretations as equally pressing and valid. In terms of a Renaissance *episteme*, both in terms of argumentation, or dialectics, and in terms of tropes, the riddle is not hard to solve and an intended meaning presents itself upfront.¹⁰² In other words, this exploration is carried out under logistic and scientific standards that view rhetoric as something that is precise, measurable, and well defined.

¹⁰² The blending of rhetoric and logic here are not my own heuristic, but one native to Shakespeare’s day as logic and rhetoric were almost indistinguishable in Elizabethan times as both formal logic and rhetoric were founded on the Roman trivium of rhetoric, grammar, and dialectic (or logical argument). For further reading see Thomas M. Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 30. A modern antecedent to this method is found in the work of Charles Peirce with his tripartation of inference into *deduction*, *induction* and *abduction*. For further reading see Thora Margareta Bertilsson, *Peirce’s Theory of Inquiry and Beyond* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), chapt. 3.

There is also a second way to solve the riddle through metonymy that is indicated in Bassanio's terms that renounce outward appearances:

So may the outward shows be least themselves,
The world is still deceive'd with ornament.
(3. 3. 73–74)

Hamlet too is quick to remind the court regarding his outward shows and dark garments that he has “that within which passes show / These but the trappings and the suits of woe” (1. 2. 85–86). Metaphorically, we are reminded that the “outward shows be least themselves.”¹⁰³ Here too we are invited to look more closely at the inward character of a man, or at least the fictional characters that Shakespeare presents to us. This subject of measure between the interior workings of man and the exterior was a preoccupation of the Renaissance and one of the identifying aspects of this *episteme*. The relationship between the three caskets with the idea of outward shows being least important, and the value placed on the content through choosing wisely, is a triangulated form of metonymy that tests the application of the Renaissance measure of a man.

One might argue that a consideration of the common allegory alone of “outward shows” solves the riddle, but this would not indicate any specific one casket over another. Solving the test only with a consideration of the allegorical idea of the “outward shows be least themselves” does not necessarily point to the lead casket, as even this choice from such an approach should not be considered by outward appearance alone. It is only through a consideration of Portia's value adjacent to the “outward shows” that the lead casket becomes the greatest signifier/d of her true worth. In other words, although she may appear most adjacent to the gold casket, it is the lead casket that most highlights Portia's character as a person who is particularly (even especially or uniquely) to be valued, not for her riches, but for her inward virtues. Why? Because Portia herself, especially disguised as a judge in the final act of the play, is adjacent more to inward virtues in terms of her character than

¹⁰³ This notion of focusing on the interior (the heart and soul of man) over the exterior is reflected in scripture: “But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” (Samuel 16:7) This theme is also found in Shakespeare's sonnet 116, where a person's internal “worth's unknown, although his height be taken.” *Riverside*, 1770, line 8. Sonnet 116 stresses divine Love as the guiding star by which a person can adjust the bearings his soul's compass. The image of a compass effects the idea of triangulation by which an individual might find himself in relation to divine Love as “an ever-fixed mark.” In sonnet 146 is also found the notion of rejecting material “outward” shows in favor of inward virtues with the central advice: “Within be fed, without be rich no more.” *Riverside*, 1776, line 12.

outward ones; and Bassanio understands this about her. He comes to this conclusion in his speech over the caskets only through carefully considering his own idea of Portia (including her real value), adjacent to each separate casket through distinct acts of metonymy.

With metonymy, as said, meaning is created on the basis of a figure that works with adjacency, either in space or time. Thought objects that have specific qualities of adjacency can be considered to have more value than other contiguous thought objects. This is also the case for instance with the lead casket that borders on its content, and, surprisingly enough, comes to indicate the highest value. This question of value, or the “value-question,” has been the subject of much debate in twentieth-century critical analysis.¹⁰⁴ Yet, insofar as a metonymic reading might be possible for Shakespeare’s play, such a “value” reading might be contextualized against the backdrop of the commonplace Renaissance notion of the world and the heavens arranged as a hierarchical structure as found in Arthur Lovejoy’s influential book *The Great Chain of Being*.¹⁰⁵ Shakespeare may have been well aware that his play could be interpreted according to a hierarchy of intended meanings and thus ethical considerations of value that would give prominence to certain perspectives over others.

The test of the caskets serves as a heuristic model representative not only of a Renaissance rhetorical use of metonymy, but measures of adjacency and relationships that are triangulated. This example from *The Merchant of Venice* defines what is meant here by the application and value of Renaissance metonymy, and helps to prepare a methodological examination of *Hamlet* on similar terms.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Terry Eagleton remarked: “For there is no question that the installment of the “value-question” at the heart of critical enquiry is a rampantly ideological gesture. The ideological unity between the old-fashioned school of “appreciation,” and the anti-academicist school of “relevance,” is nowhere more clearly revealed than in the priority they assign to problems of value, on which all else is made to turn.” Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: a Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: New Left Books, 1976), 164.

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Lovejoy explains how: “It was implied by the principle of plenitude that every link in the Chain of Being exists, not merely and not primarily for the benefit of any other link, but for its own sake, or more precisely, for the sake of the completeness of the series of forms, the realization of which was the chief object of God in creating the world. We have already seen that, though essences were conceived to be unequal in dignity, they all had an equal claim to existence, within the limits of rational possibility; and therefore the true *raison d’être* of one species being was never to be sought in its utility to any other.” Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 186.

¹⁰⁶ The three casket model will be used again more directly in Chapter 3 of this dissertation in relation to the character of Hamlet and madness.

2 Metonymy and Madness

Foucault noted how the term “madness” was uniquely contextualized in a Renaissance *episteme*.¹⁰⁷ Despite this contextualization, the metonymic use and significance of this important term has yet to be thoroughly examined in relation to *Hamlet*, even though madness is a prominent theme in the play as well as its most famous crux. An investigation of madness on Foucault’s terms offers a different perspective on the use of madness in *Hamlet* that helps to resolve some of this prominent crux.

Foucault observed that the difference between modern views of madness and that of past eras is one between clinical, or psychologically based madness, and madness as a voice of truth (or even a signifier itself of truth). Foucault noted a:

transition from medieval and humanist experience of madness to our own experience, which confines insanity within mental illness. In the Middle Ages and until the Renaissance, man’s dispute with madness was a dramatic debate in which he confronted the secret powers of the world; the experience of madness was clouded by images of the Fall and the Will of God, of the Beast and the Metamorphosis, and of all the marvelous secrets of Knowledge. In our era, the experience of madness remains silent in the composure of a knowledge which, knowing too much about madness, forgets it.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ This argument is found throughout Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Tavistock Publications, 1961). For further reading see Hector Mario Cavallari, “Understanding Foucault: Same Saity, Other Madness,” *Semiotica* 56 (1985): 315-346; Bernard Flynn, “Derrida and Foucault: Madness and Writing,” in Hugh J. Silverman, ed., *Derrida and Deconstruction* (New York: Routledge, 1989): 201-218; and Arthur Still, and Irving Velody, eds., *Rewriting the History of Madness: Studies in Foucault’s ‘Histoire de la Folie’* (New York: Routledge, 1999);

¹⁰⁸ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, xiv.

The “experience” of madness from the Renaissance perspective that Foucault describes is not a literal meaning of madness, but a landscape that is “clouded by images” of potential divine truth and “all the marvelous secrets of Knowledge.” With a Renaissance consideration of madness there is adjacency between madness and knowledge (including spiritual wisdom), and an experience of these concepts in conjunction with one another.

Foucault’s invitation to question the modern basis from which we have viewed madness still has yet to be applied to *Hamlet* with regard to the character Hamlet and especially Ophelia, who is often considered by modern assessments “the very paradigm of madness.”¹⁰⁹ As I will further explain in this chapter, a religious consideration of madness has been circumvented by modern perspectives that, as Foucault observed in the above quote, “confines insanity within mental illness.” A reconsideration of Hamlet and Ophelia’s “madness” according to the religiously inspired potent images described by Foucault such as the “Fall,” the “Will of God,” the “Beast,” or “Metamorphosis” offer a contrast to a clinical diagnosis of madness in terms of inspiration, function, and meaning.¹¹⁰ While there has been much recent scholarship on the religious implications and themes in *Hamlet*,¹¹¹ most critics have not included Ophelia in these discussions. Furthermore, the few attempts to lend a religious perspective on Ophelia support (rather than challenge) a clinical perspective of Ophelia’s mental illness.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Theodore Lidz, *Hamlet’s Enemy: Madness and Myth in Hamlet* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1975), 34.

¹¹⁰ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, xiv.

¹¹¹ See for example Sarah Beckwith, “Stephen Greenblatt’s Hamlet and the Forms of Oblivion,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 261-280; John E. Curran Jr., *Hamlet, Protestantism, and the Mourning of Contingency: Not to Be* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006); David Daniell, “Shakespeare and the Protestant Mind,” *Shakespeare Survey*, 54 (2001): 1-12; John Freeman, “This Side of Purgatory: Ghostly Fathers and the Recusant Legacy in Hamlet,” in *Shakespeare and the Culture of Christianity in Early Modern England*, ed. Dennis Taylor and David Beauregard (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 222-259; Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and D. Douglas Waters, *Christian Settings in Shakespeare’s Tragedies* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1994).

¹¹² See Alison A. Chapman, “Ophelia’s “Old Lauds”: Madness and Hagiography in Hamlet,” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England: An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism and Reviews* 20 (2007): 111-135; and Andrew Moran, “Hamlet’s Envenomed Foil,” in *Hamlet*, ed. Joseph Pierce (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008): 245-262. Critics who have focused on the burial rights of Ophelia have also dealt with some religious aspects but more tangentially to her madness. See, for example, Maurice J. Quinlan, “Shakespeare and the Catholic Burial Services,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (Summer, 1954): 303-306.

2.1 Clinical Madness

Ophelia's words are traditionally viewed to be incoherent and the outward form of her irrational madness. *Hamlet* criticism, in the attempt to further delineate the content of this form, has focused primarily upon a clinical perspective of Ophelia born out of a medical tradition of linking women and madness.¹¹³ This pairing is due in part to what Elaine Showalter describes as a "fundamental alliance"¹¹⁴ between women and madness.¹¹⁵ Foucault further explored the gendered dynamics resultant from a clinical view of madness in the modern tradition. He observed how in the nineteenth-century the female body was controlled through a "process of hysterization,"¹¹⁶ especially in terms of sexual power relations played out on the physical as well as the social body.¹¹⁷ Modern perceptions of Ophelia as a "pathetic creature" suffering from extreme sexual frustration are reinforced not only by this clinical view of female insanity but also by Ophelia's suicidal death.¹¹⁸ Margaret Higonnet notes a distinct shift that occurs in the nineteenth-century literary

¹¹³ See Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); and Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1985).

¹¹⁴ Elaine Showalter notes how: "Contemporary feminist philosophers, literary critics, and social theorists have been the first to call attention to the existence of a fundamental alliance between "woman" and "madness." They have shown how women, within our dualistic systems of language and representation, are typically situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature, and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture, and mind." Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 3-4.

¹¹⁵ Hamlet has also been clinically viewed to be mad, but perhaps because he is a man, his mental illness has been more open to debate than is the general presumption that Ophelia is truly mad. The clinical "madness motif" of Hamlet can be found prominently in John Dover Wilson's *What Happens in Hamlet*: "We are driven, therefore, to conclude with Loening, Bradley, Clutton-Brock and other critics that Shakespeare meant us to imagine Hamlet suffering from some kind of mental disorder throughout the play. [...] In Hamlet Shakespeare sets out to create a hero labouring under mental infirmity." John Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 217-218. This view continues through to modern times. See for example Norman N. Holland, *Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare* (New York: Octagon Books, [orig. 1964] 1976.), 163-206; and Martin Dodsworth, *Hamlet Closely Observed* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 228.

¹¹⁶ Louis McHay, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 31.

¹¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2008), Part Four: "The Deployment of Sexuality," 75-132.

¹¹⁸ The renowned Shakespearean stage actress Ellen Terry (1847-1928) defined Ophelia as "Shakespeare's only timid heroine." Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Hamlet* (London: Associated University Presses, 1992), 249.

landscape that centers on “disintegration and social victimization” of women who are suicidal, rather than on “heroic self-sacrifice” or other factors.¹¹⁹ These nineteenth-century views of women, madness, and suicide have formed the foundation of a perspective on Ophelia that has become firmly fixed in the critical, poetic, and visual imagination of *Hamlet* to the present day.¹²⁰ The gendered presumptions of a nineteenth-century perspective toward women and madness evident in the medical tendency as well as a literary one of viewing women as susceptible to hysteria has been well observed.¹²¹ Simply because these perspectives on women and madness are ubiquitous in a nineteenth-century milieu does not mean that this is the case for a Renaissance one, or that they should be applied so readily to the character of Ophelia. The nineteenth-century perspective is acutely gendered and highly sexualized from a male perspective toward women, while this was likely not the case for the Renaissance period.¹²² Yet despite potential flaws in such highly gendered nineteenth- and twentieth-century perspectives, modern readings of madness in Elizabethan drama have presumed, as Duncan Salkeld argues, that Elizabethan’s in their dramas are “still abusing women.”¹²³ Feminist readings of Ophelia have supported an approach that confines Ophelia’s “insanity within mental illness,” with little to no challenge to the view of Ophelia as clinically insane.¹²⁴ Salkeld further argues that Elizabethan

¹¹⁹ Margaret Higonnet, “Representations of the Feminine in the Nineteenth Century,” *Poetics Today* 6, no. ½ (1985): 106.

¹²⁰ The image of Ophelia as one psychologically, “incapable of her own distress” (4. 7. 178) found in the critical cannon is further re-enforced and celebrated in the pictorial representations of Ophelia that originated in the Pre-Raphaelite school such as is represented in John Everett Millais famous painting, *Ophelia* (1852), Tate Britain, London. These pictorial representations marked a shift from eighteenth century pictorial representations focused on a dramatic scene within the play, to a “dramatic” suicide by drowning that markedly never occurs visually on stage. For further examples of a visual representational history of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* see Carol Solomon Kiefer, ed., *The Myth and Madness of Ophelia* (Amherst: Mead Art Museum, 2001); Alan Young, *Hamlet and the Visual Arts, 1709-1900* (Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing, 2002), 279-245; and with specific regard to representations of Ophelia and madness see Showalter, *The Female Malady*.

¹²¹ See Sander Gilman et al., *Hysteria Beyond Freud* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and Cristina Mazzoni, *Saint Hysteria: Neurosis, Mysticism, and Gender in European Culture* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1996).

¹²² This distinction is also suggested by Micheal McDonald, “Women and Madness in Tudor and Stuart England,” *Social Research* 53 (1986): 261-281.

¹²³ Duncan Salkeld, *Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), chapt. 5, “Still abusing women: Madness, confinement and gender in Renaissance drama,” 116-143.

¹²⁴ See for example Caroll Camden, “On Ophelia’s Madness,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15 (1964): 247-255; Carol T. Neely, ““Documents in Madness” Reading Madness and Gender in Shakespeare’s Tragedies and

madness reflects “strategies of male oppression exerted within texts which belong to a misogynist and patrician society.”¹²⁵ In this arena, somewhat surprisingly, feminist critics are among the most adamant voices against attempts to lend Ophelia her own articulate voice—perhaps in part due to an agenda of promoting a misogynistic Shakespeare.¹²⁶ David Leverenz remarks on Ophelia’s loss of voice and how “even in her madness she has no voice of her own, only a discord of other voices and expectations, customs gone awry.”¹²⁷ A closer examination of Ophelia’s words with a Renaissance consideration of madness according to Foucault’s distinctions helps lift the modern veil of clinical insanity from her poetic speech and restore the potential for her to have a viable voice in the play not previously afforded her even within modern feminist critical analysis of her character.¹²⁸ A resolution of this important question of madness opens up the possibility of re-examining the characters of Hamlet and Ophelia according to a different premise than the type of “madness” found in a modern *episteme* and re-contextualizing it according to a Renaissance perspective.

Early Modern Culture,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991): 315-338; Carol T. Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004): 50-56; Elaine Showalter, “Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism,” in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985): 92; Sandra Fischer, “Hearing Ophelia: Gender and Tragic Discourse in Hamlet,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 26 (1990): 1-10; and Nona Feinberg, “Jephthah’s Daughter: The Parts Ophelia Plays,” in *Old Testament Women in Western Literature*, ed. Raymond-Jean Fontain and Jan Wojcik (Conway: University of Central Arkansas Press, 1991): 128-143.

¹²⁵ Duncan Salkeld, *Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, 116.

¹²⁶ See Phyllis Rackin, “Misogyny is Everywhere,” in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Dympna Callaghan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 2000): 42-58. In their introduction to The Arden edition of *Hamlet*, Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor provide the following: “Unsurprisingly, feminist critics have expressed difficulties with the play, deploring both the stereotypes of women depicted in it and the readiness of earlier critics to accept Hamlet’s view of the Queen and Ophelia without questioning whether the overall view taken by the play (or its author) might be different.” Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds., *The Arden Shakespeare Hamlet*, 35.

¹²⁷ David Leverenz, “The Woman in Hamlet: an Interpersonal View,” *Signs* 4 (1978): 301.

¹²⁸ For example, Elaine Showalter argues that, “there is no ‘true’ Ophelia for whom feminist criticism must unambiguously speak, but perhaps only a Cubist Ophelia of multiple perspectives, more than the sum of all her parts.” Showalter, “Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism,” 92. Gabrielle Dane contends that, “Ophelia is, in essence, nothing, an empty cipher patiently waiting to be infused with whatever meaning the particular mathematician should require.” Gabrielle Dane, “Reading Ophelia’s Madness,” *Exemplaria* 10 (Fall, 1998): 410; and Carroll Camden advises that we should, “make little or nothing of Ophelia’s non sequiturs.” Camden, “On Ophelia’s Madness,” 251.

2.2 Renaissance Poetic Frenzy and Madness

The inspiration for an alternative reading of madness in *Hamlet* comes not just from Foucault, but also from Shakespeare and other prominent literary figures that help to define a metonymic approach to Renaissance madness offered here. Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* describes how “The lunatic, the lover, and the poet / Are of imagination all compact” (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5. 1. 7–8) and how:

The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5. 1. 12–17)

“Airy nothing” is a significant landscape for the “madness” of the poet who lends this immaterial place materiality. “Nothing” does not imply a meaningless local, but rather a world beyond matter that becomes the poetic landscape. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates argues that “in reality, the greatest blessings come by way of madness, indeed of madness that is heaven-sent.”¹²⁹ Socrates further defines a:

form of possession or madness, of which the Muses are the source. This seizes a tender, virgin soul, and stimulates it to rapt passionate expression, especially in lyric poetry, glorifying the countless mighty deeds of ancient times for the instruction of posterity. But if any man comes to the gates of poetry without the madness of the Muses, persuaded that skill alone will make him a good poet, then shall he and his works of sanity with him be brought to nought by the poetry of madness, and behold, their place is nowhere to be found.¹³⁰

Plato's observation praises the poetic Muse as a source of madness. Shakespeare also found his inspiration from the Muse of poetry. The character of Ophelia can be viewed too as a “tender, virgin soul” well suited to convey a particular type of poetic madness for “the instruction of posterity.” The poet's attempts to give to “airy nothing” a “local habitation

¹²⁹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. R. Hackforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), book VII, 243E-245C, 56.

¹³⁰ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 57. For further reading on the classical view of madness as a gift reflecting religious and philosophical truths see Stephen David Ross, *The Gift of Truth: Gathering the Good* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

and a name” without the gift of “possession or madness” guarantee that such works of “sanity” will be for “nought.” This quote from Plato lends further support to Foucault’s premise that methodologies of interpreting poetic madness according to clinical measures of “sanity” are ill suited for comprehending this type of poetic expression.

Plato’s famous parable of the cave madness and truth find adjacency in a literary landscape. In this parable, Mankind is likened to a group of men chained to a wall watching reality as a series of shadows falling on the opposite side of the cave. One man is let loose and discovers the real objects and the fire that is casting the shadow. He then makes a further ascent to discover the world above the cave, the world of the sun and its richness and greater truths. The man returns to the cave only to find that his ability to see the shadows has been obscured by his exposure to the sun and that his fellow cavemen ridicule him as mad. Plato offered his own interpretation of the parable, revealing that the realm of sight (the senses) corresponds to the prison, the light of the fire is the power of the sun, and the ascent of man into the upper world is the progress of man’s mind into the intelligible region.¹³¹ Here, too, is found a triangulated form of metonymy that is contained in a view of adjacency between three distinct but cognitively related thought objects.

Erasmus, in an attempt to offer an explanation for *The Praise of Folly* (with the Latin title, *Encomium Moriae*, a pun on the name of Thomas More), in a letter to Martin Dorp (1515) described how

The purpose of my *Folly* is exactly the same as in my other writings, though the approach is different. In my *Enchiridion* I presented in a straightforward manner a plan for Christian living. In my *Education of a Prince* I openly offer advice as to the type of training a prince should receive. In my *Panegyric* the praise is only a cloak for treating indirectly the same theme I treated in the previous work in a straightforward manner. In my *Folly* I am ostensibly joking, but my real purpose is the same as in the *Enchiridion*. My aim has been to advise, not to pain; to promote human conduct, not to thwart it.¹³²

Erasmus admits to using language in a manner that is “a cloak for treating indirectly the same theme” he uses in a “previous work in a straightforward manner.” Erasmus’ letter is testament to the fact that such ambiguity in writing was intended and purposeful. The aim was not to confuse, but to utilize such oblique writing as a further tool to “promote human conduct,” or as Plato advised above, “for the instruction of posterity.” Similarly, George

¹³¹ Plato, *The Republic* (London, Penguin Books, 1955, reprinted 1987), 320-321.

¹³² Hans Joachim Hillerbrand, *Erasmus and His Age: Selected Letters of Desiderius Erasmus* (New York: Harper and Roe, 1970).

Puttenham emphasized in *The Arte of English Poesie* that dramatic poetry “containe and enforme morall discipline, for the amendment of mans behaviour.”¹³³ Poetic madness was a rhetorical strategy whereby such “instruction” could be dramatically realized, and express what Foucault called “all the marvelous secrets of Knowledge.”

As with Erasmus, Shakespeare is fully aware that a poet’s words could be lost on certain listeners. In Act 3 of *As You Like It* he offers the following example from the character of Touchstone about the measure of truth and purity through verbal and poetic coinage:

Touchstone: When a man’s verses cannot be understood, nor a man’s good wit seconded with the forward child, understanding, it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room. Truly, I would the gods had made me poetical.

Audrey: I do not know what ‘poetical’ is. Is it honest in deed and word? Is it a true thing?

Touchstone: No, truly; for the truest poetry is the most feigning;
(3. 3. 12–20)

Shakespeare is in potential alignment, here with authors such as Erasmus before him that the greatest truths reside in the greatest points of obscurity for the “feigning” poet. Ethical arguments are presented through dialogue that often holds multiple meanings and requires the hearer to use his or her own moral judgment to discern the truth being presented. The ability to discern meaning from ambiguity on the part of the reader was a skill that could also reflect a propensity for ethical judgment. Shakespeare’s plays then may invite, by metonymic design, a certain specific intellect and ethical perspective to glean messages they are capable of presenting.¹³⁴

Polydore Vergil (1470–1555) in his *De rerum inventoribus* placed the poetic arts (*ars poetica*) as the most comprehensive of all the sciences and linked it to the divine:

Poetry is a goodly Art: as well because no other discipline can be perceived, except a man study it vehemently, for it comprehendeth all other sciences: as for that, where other faculties be devised by the pregnancy, of mans wit, this art onely is given of nature by a divine inspiration, without which Democritus affirmeth there could never

¹³³ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1590) STC (2nd ed.) / 20519.5, reprint ed. Edward Arber (Birmingham: 1869), 53.

¹³⁴ A similar argument/approach is presented in Joel Altman’s book *The Tudor Play of Mind* although his work focuses less on Shakespeare than on other prominent Elizabethan dramatic authors. Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

be excellent Poets: for it proceedeth not of Arts and Precepts, but of a naturall inspiration, and spiritual power.¹³⁵

The famous commentator on Dante, Cristoforo Landino (1424–1498) in *Dante con l'espositioni di Cristoforo Landino* (1578) wrote how “the origins of poetry are more noble than the other human arts is proved by the fact that the divine frenzy by which poetry is generated is more excellent than the human skills by which the other arts are generated.¹³⁶ Shakespeare probably shared in this perspective of the “fine frenzy” (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5. 1. 12) of poetry as the most prized of all the arts.

The art of poetry, or *ars poetica*, was foremost amongst the noble arts praised by the Renaissance Humanists that also included *ars grammatica*, *ars rhetorica*, and *ars historica*.¹³⁷ Shakespeare placed great value in *ars poetica* and devoted his life in service to this art. A dominant theme throughout his plays, as was the case with many poets through the ages, is how a person is to be both self-governed and governed by others. Rulership over the self became a primary concern as to how one was to navigate the bestial and celestial and ultimately live a virtuous life. It is not simply that Shakespeare wrote about kingship, virtue, and governance, but that poetry was the vehicle chosen as the best method to inspire (or even influence and instill) these ideas into the social and political arena.

Pico Della Mirandola said on virtue with regard to human dignity “Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms which are divine.”¹³⁸ François Rabelais' emblematic motto, “*non inferiora secutus*,” inspired Mary Queen of Scots to “not follow lowly things.”¹³⁹ And John Calvin remarked that when men turn from “true” judgment they “become brutish.”¹⁴⁰ Calvin linked truth to a greater focus upon spiritual aspirations than upon the worldly or material: “Alienated from right reason,” asserted Calvin “man is almost like the cattle of the field.”¹⁴¹ Pico Della Mirandola,

¹³⁵ Polydore Vergil, *De rerum inventoribus*, trans. John Langley (New York, 1868), chapt. 8, 24.

¹³⁶ “Ma che l'origine della Poesia sia piu eccellente che l'origine della arti umane, si manifesta perche il divino furore onde e generata e piu eccellente, che la eccellenzia umana onde hanno origine le altre arti” See Concetta Carestia Greenfield, *Humanist and Scholastic Poetics 1250-1500* (East Brunswick: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1981), 219.

¹³⁷ See Donald R. Kelley, *Renaissance Humanism* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), chapt. 5.

¹³⁸ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, “Oration on the Dignity of Man,” 13, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller and John Herman Randall, trans. Elizabeth Livermore Forbes (University of Chicago Press, 1948), 225.

¹³⁹ John Alexander Guy, *Queen of Scots* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 79-80.

¹⁴⁰ Roland Mushat Frye, *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 126.

¹⁴¹ Frye, *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine*, 126.

Rabelais, and Calvin all differed on how they viewed humanity, but they all share a common Renaissance consideration of what virtues would best serve to elevate humans out of a bestial state. Shakespeare probably shared in the overall viewpoint of some of these contemporary thinkers that most of humanity lacked basic virtues and were more bestial than ideal. In *Timon of Athens*,

Timon will to the woods, where he shall find
Th'unkindest beast more kinder than mankind.
(4. 1. 35–36)

The value, or primacy, placed upon poetry has changed in a modern *episteme* and Shakespeare was the product of a Renaissance *episteme* that valued and supported his craft. The focus placed upon poetry in the Renaissance was an extremely fertile environment for a poet like Shakespeare to become a rising star. Shakespeare's poetry functions also in the form of the pictorial—onstage in the form of performance. In the Renaissance there was a strong link between the pictorial and the rhetorical—as works like Leon Battista Alberti's *Della pittura* and the notion of *ut rhetorica pictura* prominent in Renaissance works of art established a link between pictorial imagery and rhetoric; and vice versa.¹⁴²

Still, despite a well-established tradition of viewing Renaissance visual works of art according to Neo-Platonic (and Renaissance Humanist) perspectives headed up by Ernst Gombrich in 1945,¹⁴³ and followed by Edgar Wind, Ervin Panofsky, and more recently by Denis Drysdall and Joanne Snow-Smith¹⁴⁴; many scholars still dismiss any philosophical potential, let alone a Neo-Platonic inspiration, for Renaissance works of art.¹⁴⁵ With specific regard to the poetic arts, E. M. W. Tillyard states that “more fundamental than any Aristotelian belief that poetry was more instructive than history or philosophy was the Neo-Platonic doctrine that poetry was man's effort to rise above his fallen self and to reach out

¹⁴² See John Spencer, “Ut Rhetorica Pictura, A study in Quattrocento Theory of Painting,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 20 (1957): 26-44.

¹⁴³ E. H. Gombrich, “Botticelli's Mythologies: A study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of his Circle,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 8 (1945): 7-60.

¹⁴⁴ Denis L. Drysdall, “Authorities for Symbolism in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Aspects of Renaissance and Baroque Symbol Theory 1500-1700*, ed. Peter M. Daly and John Manning (New York, AMS Press, 1999), 111-124; and Joanne Snow Smith, *The Primavera of Sandro Botticelli. A Neoplatonic Interpretation* (New York: P. Lang, 1993).

¹⁴⁵ See for example Francis Ames-Lewis, “Neoplatonism and the Visual Arts at the Time of Marsilio Ficino,” in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Micheal J. B. Allen, Valery Rees, Martin Davies (Boston, Brill, 2002), 330.

towards perfection.”¹⁴⁶ Any discussion including Tillyard raises the issue of theoretical contextualization.¹⁴⁷ At the risk of oversimplification, the direction of this dissertation takes Tillyard’s emphasis on the intent of poetry to “instruct” by suggesting a similar approach and intention by Shakespeare in his writings; as well as a link to a specific Renaissance Neo-Platonic “picture” that stressed poetry as fundamental to a person’s effort to rise above “his fallen self and to reach out towards perfection.”

When Erasmus wrote “that what differentiates man from the other animals, or brutes as they are called, is not reason, but speech,” he was not denying the importance of reason, but trying to stress the importance of rhetoric and speech.¹⁴⁸ This is a key element not just in the way the Renaissance differs from our own valuation (and evaluation) of poetry, but also in the Renaissance shift away from medieval views of grammar that placed textual meaning and interpretation above speech and communication: a shift from *ratio* to *oratio*. The scholar Donald Kelley observes how “in medieval discussions *oratio* had signified merely the grammatical unit of the sentence, but for humanists it meant connected discourse, or even speech, in a more general sense, which was the defining trait of human nature.”¹⁴⁹ This prominent shift laid the stage for poetic playwrights like Shakespeare to express wisdom through public speech. It is also an important direct link between rhetoric and “human nature” that can be used for understanding some of the aims and intent behind the creation of Renaissance dramas—not simply as entertainment but also a means to promote virtues through the poetic arts.

Rudolph Agricola in his *De inventione dialectica libri tres* (1479) places oration as one of the primary focuses of his books. Speech for Agricola was made up of the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic. He saw all three parts as essential elements in the art

¹⁴⁶ E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), 22. Graham Bradshaw notes how, “Tillyard’s works have in the last twenty years suffered a reversal of fortune in influence more meteoric and startling than their original climb to pre-eminent influence, and they have become the target of major revisionist effort.” Graham Bradshaw, *Misrepresentations: Shakespeare and the Materialists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 6.

¹⁴⁷ Subsequently, this dissertation suggests that the Elizabethan picture Tillyard argues to be so ubiquitous in the English Renaissance was perhaps not always so overt in relation to *Hamlet*, and only a certain percentage of the Elizabethan populous would have fully grasped the metonymic references in Shakespeare’s plays to this well-established perspective. The “Elizabethan World Picture” had a common nexus, but Shakespeare’s metonymical references were probably was not readily available to all playgoers.

¹⁴⁸ Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works*, vol. 4, ed. Jesse Kelley Sowards (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 369.

¹⁴⁹ Kelley, *Renaissance Humanism*, 88.

of language.¹⁵⁰ In Shakespeare's *Hamlet* it is Hamlet's advice to the player that stresses this same Renaissance obsession with correct oration:

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounc'd it to you, trippingly on the tongue, but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as live the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently, for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness.

(3. 2. 1–8)

Hamlet's lines reflect a Renaissance concern with speech and oration as well as an inherent trust in the poetic arts to convey wisdom and truth. The play that Hamlet is preparing the actor for is called "The Mousetrap" and it is the thing meant to "catch the conscience of the King" (2. 2. 605) and to reveal the truth of Claudius' murder of Hamlet's father. The choice of a play within a play to reveal truth is also a reflection of the value placed on poetry and oration to convey truth. The Mousetrap is a play that speaks indirectly on the moral nature of Hamlet's own kingdom of Denmark, just as macrocosmically, *Hamlet* speaks indirectly through figurative language about the moral nature of Elizabethan rule, or even broader issues of governance and what it means to rule virtuously. The notion of a mousetrap as a metaphor is also about capturing the bestial in order to present it to the conscience part of a person, and to that organ of conscience that may feel or express guilt (the heart). It is an instrument too that may speak to man's reason, his ability to distinguish between the bestial and celestial, or between what is bad and what is good—a consideration of virtue. The entire play of *Hamlet* can be seen as a sort of metaphorical mousetrap, catching those who lack the skill to navigate its rhetoric in the trap of literal interpretation in order to instruct and promote higher virtues.

In the Renaissance, both *Oratio Recta* and *Oratio Obliqua* were established Classical rhetorical forms used in the poetic arts to help convey truth. One of the most prominent Classical uses of both forms is found in Julius Caesar's *The Gallic War*.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ See Rudolph Agricola, *De inventione dialectica libri tres (Three Books Concerning Dialectical Invention)*, in *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, ed. and trans. Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), chapt. 5. See also Peter Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric 1380-1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapt. 4; and Peter Mack, "Humanist Rhetoric and Dialectic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 86.

¹⁵¹ Julius Caesar, *The Gallic War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Plato's *Parmenides* and *Timeaus* are also good examples of both forms. See Robert G. Turnbull, *The Parmenides and Plato's late philosophy*:

Renaissance rhetorical uses of madness and folly were methodologies poets used to clarify rather than obfuscate meaning according to *Oratio Recta* and *Oratio Oblqua*—to represent truth and not to distort it—found in such texts as Erasmus’ *The Praise of Folly* and François Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantegruel*. The modern “paradigm” of Langue/Parole does not readily embrace stylistic paradoxes found in *Oratio Obliqua*, or such rhetorical tropes as folly or madness. Deviation from a “healthy” language of functional opacity is generally viewed in opposition to the *Norm* much the way “an abscess marks the limits of a disease.”¹⁵² Just as Foucault observed that madness is viewed diagnostically according to a modern clinical perspective, rhetorical ambiguity is seen as similarly diseased. This historical linguistic distinction has not gone unnoted. Roland Barthes compared the “superposition of a *signified* and a *signifier*” used in Renaissance rhetorical usage (as found in a book like Erasmus’ *The Praise of Folly*) to the modern “Saussurian paradigm” of *Norm* and *Deviance*.¹⁵³ Barthes observed how the traditional opposition between *Res* and *Verba* and the relationship between form and content creates a historical problem: “can Form disguise Content, or must it be subservient to it (so that there can no longer be a “coded” Form)? It is this argument which sets in opposition, down through the centuries, Aristotelian (later Jesuit) rhetoric and Platonic (later Pascalian) rhetoric.”¹⁵⁴ These important historical distinctions (as outlined by Foucault and Barthes), apply to the different values placed on madness within a Renaissance approach to poetic language versus a modern one. This is relevant with regard to the representation of madness in *Hamlet* that will be explored throughout this dissertation both from a physical perspective embodied through character and a rhetorical perspective embodied through language. Where a modern definition and approach to poetic madness reflects a language where content and form that are not in alignment is viewed as lacking function, irrational, or simply to “fail as language”;¹⁵⁵ a Renaissance metonymic approach to language (and madness) reflects a historical linguistic distinction by which, as Barthes explains, “Form” can “disguise Content.” In this manner, a Renaissance poetic use of madness could

translation of and commentary on the Parmenides with interpretive chapters on the Timaeus, the Theaetetus, the Sophist, and the Philebus (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

¹⁵² Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue*, 92.

¹⁵³ Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue*, 91.

¹⁵⁴ Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue*, 91.

¹⁵⁵ In terms of a tradition based on Saussure, “for each signifier there is an inseparable signified, the two mutually interdependent like two sides of a sheet of paper. To the extent that a language, natural or artificial, fails to match single signifiers to single signifieds, it is held to fail as language.” See Derek Attridge, *Peculiar Language* (London, Routledge, 2004), 189.

metonymically inform, or find adjacency, with what Foucault described as “all the marvelous secrets of Knowledge.”¹⁵⁶

The value of a “poetry of madness” (*furor poeticus*) embodied in Shakespeare’s time was not an “esoteric idea.”¹⁵⁷ Giordano Bruno’s renowned *De gli eroici furori* was published in London in 1585.¹⁵⁸ In Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie* it is noted how: “drammatick poems” are “not of purpose to counterfiat or represent the rusticall manner of loves and communication: but under the vaile of homely persons, and in rude speeches to insinuate and glaunce at greater matters, and such as perchance had not bene safe to have beene disclosed in any other sort.”¹⁵⁹ Hamlet’s madness, according to Polonius, as the “ecstasy of love,” (2. 1. 100) has marked similarity to Puttenham’s “rusticall manner of loves” as the outward show of poetic madness.

Puttenham’s description of the function of dramatic poetry to present “rude speeches to insinuate and glaunce at great matters” is echoed in Gertrude’s complaint of Hamlet’s “noise so rude against me?” (3. 4. 40). After observing Hamlet in Act 3, Scene 1, Claudius concludes that: “Love? His affections do that that way tend; / Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little, / Was not like madness” (3. 1. 156–58). Upon close examination, the words Hamlet utters are “not like madness” and are such as “had not bene safe to have beene disclosed in any other sort.” As a result, Claudius determines to send Hamlet to England and his death. From Hamlet’s perspective “Denmark is a prison,” and in this oppressive environment Hamlet must “hold his tongue” (1. 2. 159); speak in a manner that is veiled by a rhetorical “crafty madness” (3. 1. 8); or if his words are understood encounter possible death.¹⁶⁰

It is worth emphasizing that Hamlet emphatically declares to Gertrude in Act 3 how he is “not in madness, / But mad in craft” (3. 4. 199), and that this sentiment is echoed in Guildenstern’s comment on Hamlet’s behavior as a “crafty madness” (3. 1. 8). In act 2 Polonius too says of Hamlet that “though this be madness, yet there is method in’t,” and in Act 3 Claudius remarks how “What he spake, though it lack’ form a little / Was not like

¹⁵⁶ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, xiv.

¹⁵⁷ Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare’s Humanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 168.

¹⁵⁸ Shakespeare was probably influenced by Bruno’s work. There are, for example, direct parallels between *De gli eroici furori* and Shakespeare’s *Phoenix and the Turtle*. See Kristen L. Olson, “*Semper Eadem*: The Paradox on Constance in Shakespeare’s *Phoenix and the Turtle*,” in *The Shakespearean International Yearbook*, 7, ed. Graham Bradshaw and Tom Bishop (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007): 92-122.

¹⁵⁹ Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, 53.

¹⁶⁰ Leo Strauss studied how persecution “gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing, and therewith to a peculiar type of literature, in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines.” Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 25.

madness” (3. 1. 163). The key words in these observations are “craft,” “method,” and “form”: all words not usually associated with clinical madness (feigned or real), but more appropriate to a discussion of the guild system, or perhaps even more meaningful, in terms of the art of *rhetoric*. These terms imply a skill, a technical ability, an art that is mastered and practiced and requires learning with specific attention to detail. My contention is that the “craft” or “method” that these characters are referring too includes the practice of a metonymic architecture of language that helps define a use of rhetorical madness in the Renaissance *episteme*. Of essence too are established contexts for such terms as “madness” within Shakespeare’s plays, and a common appreciation for poetic rhetoric as a highly respected art form (as opposed to modern critical practices of imposing external context through various theories and rhetorical aesthetics, or perspectives, not shared by a Renaissance *episteme*).

2.3 Ophelia’s Herbal Gifts

As with Hamlet, the cause of Ophelia’s madness on first glance appears to be from dejected love (*mal d’amour*)—hers by the loss of either her father, or Hamlet, or both. On closer examination, however, her madness displays a deeper level of meaning and potency. In the specific instance of Ophelia’s first herbal gift to her brother, her wish—or semantically important “prayer”—is that it inspire his ability for “remembrance” and “thoughts”:

Ophelia: There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance - pray you, love,
remember. And there is pansies, that’s for thoughts.

Laertes: A document in madness, thoughts and remembrance fitted
(4. 5. 174–176)

J. W. Lever contends that rosemary for Laertes “would at once suggest to the audience the death of their common father, whom they would naturally assume Laertes was being enjoined to remember,”¹⁶¹ and that pansies also bring thoughts “inevitably of the dead

¹⁶¹ J. W. Lever, “Three Notes on Shakespeare’s Plants,” *The Review of English Studies* 3, no. 10 (April, 1952): 124.

Polonius.”¹⁶² Although this interpretation has been foundational to critical tradition, there are inherent problems with a view based upon nineteenth-century presumptions that female madness is “naturally” and “inevitably” linked to loss of a central male figure,¹⁶³ or that an Elizabethan audience “would at once” get this. It is true that a *memento mori* to his father may be what Laertes is thinking when he receives his sister’s gift, but it is by no means the “inevitable” intention behind her gift, or the only way Laertes could receive it.¹⁶⁴

The ideas of remembrance, thought, and prayer as the central three elements of Ophelia’s gift are adjacent since they can be separated from her being—they are in the form of a gift to her brother. The line also suggests that she is closer in relation to these three thought objects than her brother as a gift she bears. Together, these three through objects: prayer, thought, and remembrance form a unique combination that, while they individually refer to a host of contextual ideas and concepts without apparent coherence, together point specifically to the tripartite construction of the trinity (especially as it was outlined by Augustine).

Augustine argues in *De Trinitate*, that memory and thought are preconditions of comprehension, and in addition to will formed the basis of his conception of the trinity. These essential and distinct elements of the trinity also form the basis of Ophelia’s gift for her brother. Rather than obscure references to memory, thought, or the will to prayer, Ophelia’s lines can be viewed as a reference to the conviction “that trinity arises from the memory, the inner vision, and the will which unites both. And when these three are drawn together (*coguntur*) into unity, then form that combination (*coactu*) itself, they are called thought (*cogitatio*).”¹⁶⁵ Taken together these elements of Ophelia’s gift form a distinct and identifiable concept with a high degree of rhetorical functional determinacy. Furthermore, the active verb “pray” is placed between Ophelia’s use of rosemary as symbolic for remembrance and the symbolic use of pansies for thoughts. While Augustine stresses “will” as part of his view of the trinity, Ophelia uses the verb to “pray.” Doesn’t this difference in signifier/d create a problem that questions, or even negates, this contextualized reference

¹⁶² Lever, “Three Notes on Shakespeare’s Plants,” 125.

¹⁶³ See especially Carol T. Neely, *Distracted Subjects*. The inherent problems of viewing female madness according to a modern clinical perspectives is addressed more fully in Chapter 6 of this dissertation which deals more in depth with the character of Ophelia.

¹⁶⁴ Compare for example, Hamlet’s response to the *memento mori* of Yorrick’s skull given him by the Gravedigger in Act 5, Scene 1. Hamlet’s response to this gift is very much a meditation on the death of someone he knew “well” and the temporality of existence, but Laertes does not openly express any of these types of sentiments around the death of his father.

¹⁶⁵ Augustine, *Augustine: On the Trinity*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Book 11, chapt. 3, 66-67.

to Augustine? Ophelia's use of the term "pray" instead of "will" is due to a more cohesive understanding of Augustine's theology, where "submission of the will becomes Augustine's prayer, since through the humility of submission truth gathers many to itself."¹⁶⁶ Structurally, Ophelia's metonymic triangulated line precisely represents the gathering of the cognitive elements of remembrance and thoughts together through the active submission of prayer by placing it at the center. This rhetorical structure is an even more precise conceptualization of Augustine's trinity than merely presenting these three thought objects in any random sort of order, and defining the act of will specifically as an act of prayer.

In his *De Trinitate*, Augustine considers at length the importance of memory as integral to thinking and the will needed by a person in order to comprehend the Trinity.¹⁶⁷ If Laertes is to understand his sister's "document" as other than madness, an invitation to the will to pray ("pray you"), memory, and thought are all needed as essential elements for a full comprehension of her use of metonymy. Ophelia's gift is an invitation of truth based in the trinity that requires a degree of understanding (contextualization) on the part of the recipient.

Ophelia's metonymy is presented linguistically, but also in the physical form as a gift. Augustine described the function of the Spirit by identifying the Spirit as Gift,¹⁶⁸ and the very qualities that make something a gift help Augustine define the qualities of the Spirit. Thomas Aquinas also describes the Holy Spirit according to considerations of the Gift.¹⁶⁹ The relationship between the gift and the Spirit is an inherent part of the history of Christian philosophical theology and modern gift culture examinations that stress inherent religious aspects of the gift.¹⁷⁰ The idea of Ophelia's herbs as gifts lends further incentive

¹⁶⁶ Paige E. Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine's Theological Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 149

¹⁶⁷ Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), Book 10; Augustine, *Augustine: On the Trinity*, Book 11; and for further reading Paige E. Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine's Theological Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁶⁸ For more on this subject see Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 323.

¹⁶⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. T. C. O'Brien (London: Blackfriars, 1976), vol. 7, 91-97. For further reading see Giles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 249-268.

¹⁷⁰ Marcel Mauss emphasized that the gift serves a religious and ritualistic significance, and Maurice Godelier further examined the religious aspects inherent in gift giving. Marcel Mauss, *Essai Sur Le Don*, English trans. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); and Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). For further reading see Beate Wagner-Hasel, "Egoistic Exchange and Altruistic Gift: On the roots of

to read them from a religious perspective (just as Foucault's image of a Renaissance perception of madness includes such configurations as the "Will of God"). Augustine's trinity as an act of prayer is echoed in the invitation to prayer that accompanies Ophelia's gift; her words, "Pray you," are a wish, but also a directive for specific action in association with her gift relating directly to how her gift is meant to be both interpreted (exegesis) and used.

Augustine's metaphysical philosophy further explains how a recipient like Laertes might receive such a gift. In response to the Spirit as "gift" Augustine notes how the will is

necessarily attracted to or repelled by that which it encounters. If so, the response of will either occurs in simple ignorance (inconceivable, one imagines, because of the implied irrationality), or there must be some kind of memory and understanding (and hence thought, *cogitatio*) intrinsic to the will.¹⁷¹

Ophelia invites Laertes to be more thoughtful, which he is either unwilling, or unable to grasp. Laertes' interpretation of Ophelia's gift as "madness" if read in relation to Augustine would be reflective of a "simple ignorance" and a will devoid of the "memory and understanding" necessary to move beyond an "implied irrationality" in order to grasp the true spirit of what is being offered. Augustine's "implied irrationality" also explains why Ophelia's words are interpreted by Laertes to be "inconceivable." This perspective helps define the character of Laertes as well as the character of Ophelia—especially in terms of Ophelia's ability to convey meaning through a sophisticated use of rhetoric, and Laertes' subsequent inability to comprehend her language. Ophelia's words are lost on her brother and she is left with no authoritative voice from his perspective.

Laertes' failure to see the spirit of his sister's gift, along with the spirit by which the gift as gesture is offered in terms of an act of prayer, may be reflective of a difference in religious perspectives—a secular perspective that fails to incorporate spiritual matters at all—or "simple ignorance" on the part of her brother. Laertes' response of "madness" is a direct rejection of the spiritual gift she offers, denies her voice any credibility, but also lends credence to his need for such a gift(s).

Laertes does, however, suspect that Ophelia's words may have meaning, or can somehow be made sense of. He remarks on her words how "This nothing's more than matter" (4. 5. 172), but he struggles to comprehend her offering of a poetic madness that

Marcel Mauss's Theory of the Gift," in *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-modern Figurations of Exchange*, ed. Gadi Algazi, Valentin Groebner and Bernhard Jussen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003), 141-142.

¹⁷¹ Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 323.

transcends the material and “gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.” Ophelia’s “nothing” then is not a reference to the female genitals as most modern scholars agree upon,¹⁷² but rather to a poetic landscape that transcends the material world and touches upon matters of divinity. “Nothing” represents the divine as Boethius explains in his *De trinitate*, since “there is no diversity in such a case as God, no plurality from diversity, no multitude arising from accidents and therefore no number.”¹⁷³ Lovejoy notes how for Plotinus “the One is perfect because it seeks for nothing, and possesses nothing, and has need of nothing; and being perfect, it overflows, and thus its superabundance produces an Other.”¹⁷⁴ The use of “nothing” to define divinity, God, or the One, was a prominent concept dating back to classical times that was adopted in Renaissance Neo-Platonic and theological debates.¹⁷⁵ There is textual evidence that the term “nothing” was viewed during Shakespeare’s day (contextualized) in much the same way Boethius or Plotinus defined the term. A prominent example is *The Prayse of Nothing* (1585) attributed to Edward Dyer.

Dyer’s *The Prayse of Nothing* credits Agrippa’s *Vanities* and Erasmus’ *Folly* as works that “might have beene a paterne” for his own attempt at *Oratio Obliqua*, but that he “clothed with bare garments this treatise.”¹⁷⁶ *The Prayse of Nothing* is an example of a rhetorical methodology focused around the term “nothing.” As opposed to the stronger use of *Oratio Obliqua* by Agrippa and Erasmus, or François Rabelais and Teofilo Folengo

¹⁷² See for example, Amy Cook, “Staging Nothing: Hamlet and Cognitive Science,” in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009): 55-72; Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1986), 64, 107; Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 236-37; Thomas Pyles, “Ophelia’s ‘Nothing,’” *Modern Language Notes* 64 (1949): 322-323; and Scott A. Trudell, “The Mediation of Poesie: Ophelia’s Orphic Song,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (Spring, 2012): 49. There are of course alternative interpretations of Shakespeare’s use of the word. Howard Cyagill, for example, deviates from the common sexualized contextualizations by considering Shakespeare’s use of “nothing” in relation to philosophical nihilism inspired by the work of Hegel and Heidegger. See Howard Cyagill, “Shakespeare’s Monster of Nothing,” in *Philosophical Shakespeares*, ed. John J. Joughin (London: Routledge, 2000), 107-114.

¹⁷³ Boethius, *De Trinitate*, trans. Erik C. Kenyon, <pvspade.com/Logic/docs/BoethiusDeTrin.pdf> (15/06/2014), electronic copy, 4.

¹⁷⁴ *Enneads*, V, 2. 1, ed. Volkmann (1884), II, 176, as cited in Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, 62.

¹⁷⁵ The re-emergence of Plato’s ideas in the Renaissance was heralded by prominent Renaissance thinkers like Marsilio Ficino (the Chancellor of the Florentine Republic and a renowned Neo-Platonist), who completed a commentary on Plato’s *Symposium* in 1474-75; and Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, a student of Ficino. Other prominent Neo-Platonic thinkers included Giambattista della Porta, Francesco Giorgi, Francesco Patrizi, Agostino Steuco, Tommaso Campanella, Pierre Gassendi, and Nicholas of Cusa. For further reference see James Hankins, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

¹⁷⁶ Edward Dyer, *The prayse of Nothing* (London, 1585) STC 218:20, sig. Aiiiv1.

(using the pen name of Merlinus Coccaius for his *Opus Macaronicorum*), whose rhetoric he praises as “men greatly traveled in this business: which being so well handled of the both,”¹⁷⁷ *The Prayse of Nothing* is a relatively thin rhetorical cloak for the praise of God. Dyer’s book also reflects a well-established Renaissance use of the word “nothing” as a rhetorical trope for “things” or “matters” of the Spirit thinly “clothed” by *Oratio Obliqua* that would have been readily grasped by a Renaissance reader (although perhaps less readily with the more subtle and complex works of Erasmus, Agrippa, Rabelais, or Folengo).¹⁷⁸ In this context, Hamlet’s response to Ophelia’s “nothing” (3. 2. 117) that is a “fair thought to lie between maids’ legs” (3. 2. 119) is a potentially bawdy remark—of someone lying between her legs—that becomes a pun through a reference to God resting in Ophelia’s lap. It is a “fair” thought because it is related to goodness. Ophelia’s response, “You are merry my lord” (3. 2. 122), to Hamlet’s “nothing” reinforces the pun as an unexpected shift from a bawdy implication, to something that both pleases and compliments her; accordingly, she compliments him back.¹⁷⁹ Hamlet reinforces this reading a few lines later when he says “O God, your only jig-maker” (3. 2. 111), meaning that God is the inspiration for his rhetorical dance, or provides the template for his linguistic game.

Reading Ophelia or Hamlet’s use of “nothing” as a “familiar Shakespearean euphemism for the female sexual orifice” is founded upon a modern presumption that feminine madness derives from hysteria, and strips Ophelia’s rhetoric of any spiritual or significant meaning.¹⁸⁰ The term “nothing” as female genitalia is a “familiar Shakespearean euphemism” as identified in a Modern *episteme*, but not a Renaissance one.¹⁸¹ The Renaissance “familiar” context of this word evinced in such works as *The Prayse of Nothing* or *De trinitate* is not reflected in any critical analysis of *Hamlet* that I know of, and illustrates an important *epistemic* difference. The modern reading also turns these puns into crass remarks not worthy of rhetorical praise (even bordering on the absurd) when this presumed meaning is re-contextualized in the text. Furthermore, a postmodern, and particularly feminist trend, to make Ophelia’s “sexual orifice” the focal point of her character makes sensible speech, let alone sophisticated rhetoric, all but impossible for her character to embody and overlooks another “orifice” that is speaking poetry. My concern

¹⁷⁷ Dyer, *The Prayse of Nothing*, Finis.

¹⁷⁸ For more on this topic see Paul A. Jorgensen, *Redeeming Shakespeare’s Words* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), chapt. 2.

¹⁷⁹ If Hamlet was using the term “nothing” to refer to Ophelia’s genitals, as many scholars suggest, the pun would be offensive and not warrant such a complimentary response.

¹⁸⁰ Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins*, 236.

¹⁸¹ Consider too other Shakespearean characters like Cordelia in *King Lear* who use the term (1. 1. 87-89).

in this dissertation is with a focus upon Ophelia's voice in the play. While previous feminist readings of *Hamlet* may have provided valuable perspectives, they overlook this emphasis on Ophelia's rhetoric. My reading of *Hamlet* provides a critical analysis of Shakespeare female characters that provides a richer understanding of Ophelia using a rhetorical (in addition to a feminist) approach to the text.

Ophelia's "nothing" that is more than matter has further associations with the Eucharistic in consideration of matter infused by spirit. With regard to her herbal gifts, this immaterial aspect (both symbolically and metonymically engendered) is valued as greater, or "more" than the material.¹⁸² Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* outlines the important issue of the matter of the Eucharist, and how "the matter of this sacrament is not bread and wine."¹⁸³ This issue of immateriality and materiality is an important one reflected here in Shakespeare's play.¹⁸⁴ Francis Cruickshank notes how figurative language like "metaphor carries matter into meaning, and connects it with material episodes through and across time. Seeing the value of this process depends on distinguishing imagination from delusion."¹⁸⁵ Cruickshank further argues that the "materialist would argue that the habit of using metaphors is an imposition on the inarticulate, and a kind of false consciousness that bends reality toward prescribed narratives and codes."¹⁸⁶ The figurative, like metonymy, especially with regard to Ophelia's words, "depends on distinguishing imagination from delusion," truth from madness. It also requires a counter-materialist perspective that re-

¹⁸² Aristotle makes a similar distinction between the material, or sensible, and the intelligible ideas that matter can engender. Aristotle writes of these distinctions in his *Metaphysics*: "With respect to matter, however, one kind is sensible, and another intelligible. And sensible matter, indeed, is such as brass and wood, and whatever matters is moveable: but intelligible matter is that which subsists in sensibles, yet not to far as they are sensibles, as, for instance, mathematical entities." Aristotle, *The Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: Davis, Wilkes, and Taylor, 1801), book 7, 175.

¹⁸³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. William Barden (London: Blackfriars, 1965), vol. 58, question 74, 25.

¹⁸⁴ Materiality is an important topic in both modern literary criticism and semantic debate. See Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism*; and Edward Pechter, "Making Love to our Employment: Or the Immateriality of Arguments about the Materiality of the Shakespearean text," *Textual Practice* 11 (1997): 51-67. Husserl, as an example from semantic debate, was interested in writing's ability to preserve an object and that the materiality of writing (*Verkörperung*) can effect a pure possibility of embodiment (*Verleiblichung*); while Derrida said that *Verleiblichung* and *Verkörperung* cannot be separated in language and that an author's material text as a "pure intentional act can never be protected from the dangers of contingency and catastrophe." For further reading see Julian Wolfreys, *The Edinburgh Encyclopaedia of Modern Criticism and Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 318.

¹⁸⁵ Frances Cruickshank, *Verse and Poetics in George Herbert and John Donne* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 114.

¹⁸⁶ Cruickshank, *Verse and Poetics*, 114.

configures the function of figurative language as “prescribed narratives and codes” that, especially in the case of metonymy, are neither an imposition nor a false “consciousness” as Cruickshank points out, but are exemplary of some of the most articulate aspects of Renaissance rhetoric.

The Gentleman in *Hamlet* remarks about Ophelia that “Her speech is nothing” (4. 5. 7), implying that her words lack anything tangible or material, but they also can be potentially inspired by the divine through a figurative approach to materiality. Conversely, the immateriality of words without thoughts is reflected in Claudius’ observation while at prayer: “Words without thoughts never to heaven go” (3. 3. 98). Ophelia’s speech lacks an immediate graspable object, while Claudius’ words, though outwardly coherent, lack the power of thought behind them. For both characters, the inability to bring either materiality or immateriality to speech creates a rhetorical issue of conveyance whereby Ophelia is delegated to a place outside the realm of rational thought, and Claudius from the realm of heaven. Claudius lives in a “rational” hell while Ophelia inhabits the realm of an “irrational” heaven. The moral distinction here is between the outward shows of sanity (by a character like Claudius) compared to the outward shows of “madness” (by a Hamlet or Ophelia) with interiors reflecting quite the opposite values. This emphasis upon defining outward shows against inward truth is one of the defining characteristics of the Renaissance.

Another reference to the Eucharist occurs when Ophelia offers rue to the queen:

[To Gertrude]¹⁸⁷ There’s rue for you, and here’s some for me; we may call it herb of grace a’ Sundays.

You may wear your rue with a difference.

(4. 5. 180–181)

Perhaps due to a political sensitivity of her herbal gifts, Ophelia no longer provides their significance, or specific use, but leaves their intended use more open for the recipient to determine. The queen could, as Ophelia suggests, use her gift of rue as something she might “wear”—a term that extends the metaphorical cloak of her rhetorical language to Gertrude. Ophelia does not simply identify her herbal gift as “rue” but also “herb of grace.” Rue, as described in a Renaissance herb book like Rembert Dodoens’ *A New Herball, or Historie*

¹⁸⁷ Since there are no specific stage directions in Shakespeare’s text as to whom exactly Ophelia gives her herbs (besides her brother), I follow the general critical tradition here. However, a closer metonymic reading of the lines lends further support to the general consensus that, for example, she gives fennel to the Claudius and rue to Gertrude.

of *Plants* was also called “Herbe Grace.”¹⁸⁸ Ophelia, however, emphasizes its particular use on “Sundays.” This is an unusual and particular additional naming of this herb not found in herbal books from the Renaissance. Grace on Sunday was associated with the Eucharistic embodiment, as the Eucharist performed on Sundays was considered the foremost way to receive the grace of God. Ophelia’s specific addition of the sacrament to her gift of Grace is one of the central religious considerations stressed in St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, whereby “sacramental grace adds something over and above grace as commonly defined, and also over and above the virtues and the Gifts, namely a special kind of divine assistance to help in attaining the end of the sacrament concerned.”¹⁸⁹ Ophelia’s definition of Rue as “grace a’ Sundays” can be taken as a reference to the religious practice of “grace” (or the sacrament) on Sunday as the most holy day of the week. This spiritual emphasis Ophelia places on “Sundays” included the importance of the addition of the sacrament. Metonymically, the sacrament is in addition to “grace” and “the Gifts” she offers as representative of the Gifts of God. The distinction of particular grace practiced on Sunday emphasizes the importance of the sacrament, and how sacramental grace as, for example, with Aquinas, “does add something over and above the grace of the virtues and the Gifts.”¹⁹⁰ Ophelia may be reminding the queen that if she indeed wishes to repent any sins of the flesh that she is best to take the gift offering of attending the sacrament on Sunday to heart as the best way to seek forgiveness.¹⁹¹

The notion of forgiveness brings into play the basic meaning of the word “rue” as “to affect (a person) with penitence or contrition (for sins or offences committed).”¹⁹² It is from this meaning that “rue” came to mean “sorrow, distress; repentance; regret,”¹⁹³ and also as the foundation of “ruthless.” Gertrude’s need for repentance weighs heavily and by her own admission her guilt quite literally overflows the boundaries of her “sick soul” to such an extent that it “spills itself in fearing to be spilt” (4. 5. 17–20). It is appropriate in this context that Ophelia offers the queen rue with the intended meaning for “repentance.”

¹⁸⁸ Rembert Dodoens, *A New Herball, or Historie of Plants* (1586) STC (2nd Ed.) / 6985, 294. Rue is also identified as, “Ruta, Garden Rue, or Herbe Grace” in John Parkinson (1567-1650) *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris* (London: Humfrey Lowmes and Robert Young, 1629), 530.

¹⁸⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. by David Bourke (London: Blackfriars, 1975), vol. 56, 59.

¹⁹⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 56, 57.

¹⁹¹ The deeper political ramifications of such a reading, especially with regard to Protestant versus Catholic perspectives on sacramental grace during the English Renaissance, I reserve for a later and more in depth study.

¹⁹² James A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, W. A. Graigie, and C. T. Onions, eds., prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), vol. XIV.

¹⁹³ *OED*, vol. XIV.

The gift of rue for this use is well suited to the queen's own perception of the guilt-ridden interior workings of her character, and shows a deep moral perception on Ophelia's part.

Ophelia further tells Gertrude: "You may wear your rue with a difference." The word "difference" as it relates to Shakespeare's play was a heraldic term for "an alteration of or addition to a coat of arms, to distinguish a junior member or branch of a family from the chief line."¹⁹⁴ George Steevens also noted how Ophelia's reference "seems to refer to the rules of heraldry, where the younger brothers of a family bear the same arms *with a difference*, or mark of distinction."¹⁹⁵ Shakespeare here is revealing an Ophelia who will challenge the queen on an heraldic level—an Ophelia who reminds the queen that she still holds the potential, as Hamlet's betrothed, to wear the same royal coat-of-arms and who in all likelihood comes from a royal bloodline herself. In heraldic terms, Shakespeare presents a classic distinction of houses dating back to the time of Richard II.¹⁹⁶ This is one way Ophelia's gift becomes politically as well as religiously charged. If the queen wears, or views, her gift of rue with a difference there may be no recognition at all of a gift of grace from God, especially if she partakes in a Protestant perspective based on Calvinistic notions of election predestined by God whereby sacramental grace is no longer a prominent factor in salvation. From this Protestant viewpoint there is no longer any particular grace on Sundays, and rue becomes a regret for sins past that have established a possible damnation without any hope of redemption.

Ophelia's noble bloodline could be contended, but the term "nobility" in this dissertation will be defined more through "Noble Reason" than through bloodlines alone—through a nobility of character, rather than only a physical matter of blood lineage. In this way, the play can be viewed to speak not only about and for nobility, but to anyone who values and seeks nobility of thought and to reason nobly (wisdom). This concept of "Noble Reason" will be explored in greater detail in later chapters of this dissertation, especially with regard to Hamlet's character. In terms of Ophelia's gifts, for example, the concept of "Noble Reason" includes religious concerns of grace and a concern of the divine through contemplative acts, but also what it means to live an active life of goodness. If we read Ophelia's character like this, far from being a weak and ineffectual madwoman, she is an extremely intelligent and powerful character able to stand up to the queen and challenge her—not just in the heraldic terms fundamental to the construction of nobility, but at potentially the very high level of queen-ship according to grace and goodness. Even if Ophelia is considered to be from lesser descent, it is the nobility of her character that is of

¹⁹⁴ *OED*, vol. IV.

¹⁹⁵ Samuel Johnson and George Steevens, eds., *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, vol. 10 (London: C. Bathurst, 1773), 298.

¹⁹⁶ See Hugh Clark, *An Introduction to Heraldry* (London: Geoerge Bell & Sons, 1892), 124.

essence here, not simply her bloodline and potential to be Hamlet's bride. The issue of madness, with regard to both Ophelia and Hamlet, would no doubt undermine the mental capacity central to the integrity of the thought object "Noble Reason." The question of Hamlet and Ophelia's sanity brings along with it a question of their capacity to reason nobly. This central question of character will continue to be explored more in depth later in this thesis.

Returning to Ophelia's gifts, tribute to a king or queen are universal symbols of diplomacy generally meant to engender good relations and not to stir bad ones;¹⁹⁷ and while it is possible that the herbs that Ophelia gives out can be interpreted as genuine tokens meant to promote friendship and peaceful exchange, it is also clear that they have the potential to be politically challenging and subvert this tradition. This reading also brings a different perspective to the traditional reading of Ophelia's herbs whereby, as Robert Magiola explains, "each of them functions as a 'signifier' different from the others (on this all scholars agreed), but what is the matching 'signified' for each of these 'signifiers'?" There has been heated controversy for centuries, but the upshot is that no one really knows. We have a case here of signifiers without operative signifieds."¹⁹⁸ In other words, there have been plenty of symbolic readings of Ophelia's herbs, but none of these readings have offered any coherence between these signifiers and a common signified. I offer that a reading inspired by Foucault's distinctions, or specific differences between a Renaissance *episteme* and a modern one (especially regarding madness) does in fact support authorial intent and a case for Ophelia's herbal signifiers with distinct and meaningful signifieds.

In this context, Ophelia's gifts of herbs move away from the pastoral,¹⁹⁹ and into the realm of the religious. Her herbal gifts become "gifts of grace" which are inspired from God; just as Thomas Aquinas explains in his *Summa Theologiae*, "grace is contrasted with nature, in the way that gifts of grace, which are from God, are distinct from natural endowments, which are from a source within man."²⁰⁰ In his observations of Renaissance literary pastoral form, Edward William Tayler saw how

¹⁹⁷ Plays were often used as a form of tribute in Renaissance times to flatter a King or Queen. For example, as Zillah Dovey notes, the play *The Lady of Mary* was intended as a tribute to Elizabeth I. Zillah M. Dovey, *An Elizabethan Progress: The Queen's Journey to East Anglia* (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1996), 14

¹⁹⁸ Robert R. Magiola, *Derrida on the Mend* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1994), 180.

¹⁹⁹ Modern critical tradition has placed an emphasis on Ophelia as representing the pastoral in her gift exchange. See for example Peter Erickson, *Rewriting Shakespeare, Rewriting Ourselves* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 82; and Elaine Showalter, "Representing Ophelia," 81.

²⁰⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. R. J. Hennessey (London: Blackfriars, 1976), vol. 48, 83.

Bucolic fiction requires before all else a poet and audience sufficiently civilized to appreciate primitive simplicity, to recognize that the gain of Art means the loss of Nature. To regard pastoral literature as simple stuff because it sings of simple things is to confuse the symbol with the thing symbolized.²⁰¹

Likewise, we can infer that Shakespeare's audience was "sufficiently civilized" to recognize that Ophelia's herbs are not reflective of "primitive simplicity," but complex religious themes. Ophelia makes a spiritual distinction from the simply pastoral with the herbal gifts she offers, as each gift acts as a powerful signifier/d that can offer more than one potential signifier/d. Just because critical tradition has only understood some of the symbolic meaning of her herbs or confound "the symbol with the thing symbolized" does not mean that she "sings of simple things."²⁰² Ophelia's herbs are signifier/ds that convey much about character, situation, and relationship. Her gifts, then, have the potential to increase the semiotic domain of the text, which also increases textual complexity.²⁰³ With respect to this semiotic value, gift exchange can be viewed in dramatic representation as offering textual complexities that may have been under-read, or even overlooked, in *Hamlet*, especially in regard to Ophelia's prominent role as gift giver.

John Sherry observes how "we give, receive, and reject gifts strategically, thereby symbolically predicating identity."²⁰⁴ The gift thereby illuminates power dynamics, but also can itself be both the physical and psychological exchange of power within these dynamics. The latter is particularly true in the case of tribute gifts given to people of higher status such as kings and queens—a dynamic inherent here in Ophelia's herbal gifts to the sovereignty of Denmark in *Hamlet*. Ophelia references a traditional English folktale, "The Owl and the Baker's Daughter,"²⁰⁵ when she says "They say the owl was a baker's daughter. Lord we know what we are, but we know not what we may be" (4.5.42–43). The folktale describes a baker's daughter who is "greedy" with her dough when a fairy disguised as an old woman comes into her shop. This tale of parsimony lends identity to the characters of the fairy as spirit (symbolic of Jesus) and the young girl through the idea of gift exchange in a religious context. The material gift of bread becomes a spiritual commodity of material transformation and the girl in the story is transformed into an owl who can only say "who,

²⁰¹ Tayler, *Nature and Art in Renaissance Literature*, 5.

²⁰² Tayler, *Nature and Art in Renaissance Literature*, 5.

²⁰³ Rawdon Wilson contends that "fictional worlds vary in complexity according to the number of "semiotic domains" they contain." Rawdon Wilson, *Shakespearean Narrative* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1995), 215.

²⁰⁴ John F. Sherry, Jr., "Gift Giving in Anthropological Perspective," *Journal of Consumer Research* 10 (September, 1983): 159.

²⁰⁵ K. M. Briggs, *Dictionary of British Folk Tales* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), vol. 2, 443.

who, who” Identity is stressed, but only in terms of a consideration of the spiritual relationship to the material. The tale is a lesson that shifts focus away from material attachment to the spiritual and the wisdom gained through this lesson. Ophelia also emphasizes the knowing of “what we are,” and the goodness embodied through acts of charity in the here and now, contrasted to the not knowing of what we may be in terms of predestination and damnation. This dissertation will return in Chapter 5, which deals more specifically with the character of Ophelia, to look more closely at the symbolic and figurative elements of this folktale in relation to Ophelia’s character. What is important to note for now is how the symbolic element of gift culture, especially a symbolic meaning “predicating identity,” can be an integral part of metonymic usage that lends meaning to Ophelia’s words and character. Her reference to the tale of the owl and the baker’s daughter reinforces a specific use of rhetoric that helps define the concerns of her character, especially in terms of religious contextualized distinctions surrounding materiality and the spirit.

2.4 Copiousness

Arguably, Ophelia’s rhetorical gifts are still not sufficient to materialize her language of “madness” into a meaningful voice. Rhetorically, what is needed is abundance, or what Erasmus defines as *copia* (Aristotelian *paradeigma*), outlined in his *De Utraque Verborum ac Rerum Copia*²⁰⁶ (also found in the tenth book of Quintilian’s *Institutio* and similarly used by Cicero), and related to the figures of *amplificatio* found in works such as Thomas Wilson’s *The Arte of Rhetorike* (1563).²⁰⁷ The rhetorical method of *copia* helps pinpoint a specific meaning that might otherwise be lost or overlooked in a single rhetorical trope, as well as limit the many possible meanings an individual trope could engender. Rather than an inquiry into site-specific content and meaning as found in modern debate, or the indeterminacy of semantic boundaries, the Renaissance tradition of rhetorical *copia* allows for denominations of a specific context to be reinforced through multiple transactions that greatly stabilize meaning. Through the use of *copia*, Shakespeare presents

²⁰⁶ Desiderius Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas (De Utraque Verborum ac Rerum Copia)*, trans. Donald B. King and H. David Rix (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1963).

²⁰⁷ Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorike* (1563) STC (2nd ed.) / 25802. For further reading on the use of *copia* see Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

us with multiple tropes, all pointing to the basic idea of the trinity, thereby closing the gap of determinacy. Within a use of *copia*, individual *exempla* are potent in so far as they relate to other *exempla* with which they have kinship.

References Hamlet makes to the trinity in his “madness” express his “love of grace,” (3. 4. 146) and help to establish precedent for reading Ophelia according to a similar use of metonymy. Hamlet’s references are *exempla* that help establish rhetorical *copia* and set precedent for reading Ophelia in a similar way. In Act 2, the following exchange takes place between Polonius and Hamlet:

Polonius: What do you read, my lord?
Hamlet: Words, words, words,
Polonius: What is the matter, my lord?
Hamlet: Between who?
Polonius: I mean, the matter that you read, my lord.
(2. 2. 191–195)

These “words” of Hamlet can be outwardly viewed as incoherent madness, or just playful banter with little significance. The subject, as Polonius gleans is “matter,” but more specifically an inquiry into the nature of matter in terms of the material and the immaterial, the worldly and the spiritual. Simply because language does not deal directly with cognitive content (the material) does not mean that it is meaningless. The pun Hamlet is making here is based upon John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The repeated use of “words” three times also brings attention to the concept of the Sanctus as a portion of the Eucharistic prayer: *Sanctus, Sanctus Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth* (Hebrew *Kadosh Kadosh Kadoah Adonai Tz’vaot*).²⁰⁸ Furthermore, the answer of words thrice repeated is the answer of one word as the word of God. This is part of the theory of predication used to explain the doctrine of the Trinity that was a central debate in Renaissance theology and a foundational premise in Boethius’ *De Trinitate* (which also greatly inspired Aquinas). Boethius uses the example of “sun, sun, sun” to demonstrate his own explanation of how “I would not have produced three suns, but I would have predicated of one sun so many times.”²⁰⁹ Shakespeare’s Hamlet “too much i’th’ sun” (1. 2. 67) offers the repetition of “words, words, words.” The thrice repeated term that Hamlet uses has particular relevance to the issue of predication in the context of Boethius’ *De Trinitate*. Furthermore, as Aquinas notes, no other words “having reference to the intellect are predicated personally in the godhead except ‘Word’ alone; for only

²⁰⁸ From Isaiah 6:3.

²⁰⁹ Boethius, *De Trinitate*, trans. Erik C. Kenyon, 4.

‘Word’ signifies something emanating from another.”²¹⁰ Hamlet’s pun is that for those who do not believe in the Mass of the Trinity these are merely words; but for those who do, these words form one of the most central aspects of faith integral to the Eucharistic embodiment of the sacred wine and wafer into the blood and body of Christ. The belief in the effect of the sacrament on Eucharistic embodiment was a question of matter that formed a pivotal point of debate between the Catholic tradition and the Protestant Reformation during the Renaissance that was ideological and politically charged.²¹¹ Contextualizing this reference historically, it is not surprising to find it within the political dialogue of Shakespeare’s play.

In case this reference to the Trinity was lost on Polonius (or the audience), Hamlet drives home his reference again with his next response. Hamlet’s question of matter “Between who?” is a reference to the subject of predication and relation. This was one of the most prominent theological topics of medieval times and the Renaissance *episteme*, and is foundational to the concept of the Great Chain of Being. The topic of predication and relation is covered famously in Boethius’ examination of predication in his *De Trinitate*, whereby matter is reconfigured in terms of relative relations (adjacency). Aquinas quotes Boethius as the source of his own inspiration on the topic: “There is Boethius’s text to the effect that *as predicates of divinity all the categories except relation become expressions of the divine substance.*”²¹² The Eucharistic reference to matter is to the word becoming flesh—the issue is one of both matter and spirit, as well as a person’s individual relationship to God. Polonius’ question of matter is only answered correctly in a consideration of what, or who, the thing is relative to—with particular regard to a consideration of the relative relation of God to all matter. These themes are so prominently displayed in Boethius’ and Aquinas’ texts that editions of both works can be considered the possible book Hamlet is holding.²¹³

²¹⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 7, question 34: The name ‘Word’, 31.

²¹¹ This is a large subject. For examples of further reading see Peter Lake, “Religious Identities in Shakespeare’s England,” in *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 57-84; and Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²¹² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 7, 159.

²¹³ Gerolamo Cardano’s *De Consolatione*, or *Cardanus Comferte* (as it was translated into English by Thomas Bedingfield in 1573), is speculated by some critics to be the book that Hamlet is reading. See Hardin Craig, “Hamlet’s Book,” *The Huntington Library Bulletin* 6 (November, 1934): 17-37. It is worth noting that Cardano’s book was written in imitation of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*. Speculations as to the actual book Hamlet is reading obviously must also include size considerations—with folio editions being too large to carry and even most quarto texts hardly portable. Shakespeare’s players would unlikely have

In Hamlet is found a reflection of a good portion of this specific cosmology:

Hamlet- Your worm is our only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else
to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots; your fat king and your
lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes, but to one table—
that's the end.

King- Alas, alas!

Hamlet- A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of
the fish that hath fed of that worm.

King- What dost thou mean by this?

Hamlet- Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through
the guts of a beggar.

(4. 3. 21–31)

A spiritual argument on the nature of man's relationship to the infinite is contained within Hamlet's lines.²¹⁴ Giordano Bruno stressed how all matter was infused with divinity and that the center of the universe was located everywhere. According to Bruno, one could distinguish between different things, but "in the Infinite these distinctions are indifferent—and what I say of these I mean to imply of all the other distinctions whereby things subsist as particular entities (*intendo di tutte l'altre cose di sussistenza particolare*).²¹⁵ Giordano Bruno noted how "[t]hou canst not more nearly approach to a likeness to the Infinite by being a man than by being an ant; not more nearly by being a star than by being a man."²¹⁶ The fact that Hamlet's school is in Wittenberg may also have been a nod to Bruno's strong presence and acceptance there, both as a teacher and a writer. Both his *De lampade combinatorial lulliana* and the *De progressu et lampade venatoria logicorum* were published in Wittenberg.²¹⁷ For Hamlet the infinite exists, like Bruno's "ant," in the worm just as in the mighty emperor. Hamlet recognizes the infinite in all things from the lowest worm to the greatest of kings. Hamlet, though, is making a hierarchical distinction between a king and a worm. According to a natural order of nobility where the king is meant to serve his people, to "fat" them and improve their well-being rather than the people serve to fatten him. The ideal king implied in the metonymic reading is meant to serve the guts of

carried real books, as they were both fragile and valuable, but prop pieces of painted wood made to represent books.

²¹⁴ Shakespeare's lines are also a reminder of the 1521 famous Reichstag zu Worms in which Martin Luther was brought before the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. The pun is on the word "Diet" which was the term for the religious assembly in Worms, Germany.

²¹⁵ *De la Causa, V, Lagarde, I, 277-279*, as cited in Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, 120.

²¹⁶ *De la Causa, V: Lagarde, I, 316*, as cited in Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, 120.

²¹⁷ Francis A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 307.

a beggar—to feed and care for the well-being of his people—and not vice versa. There is a metonymic triangulation between these “two dishes” and the signifier of one table as a contiguous domain (a metaphor to a contiguous domain in terms of the kingdom of God; but also the kingdom of a king which, through divine right, is meant to be a reflection of God’s kingdom). Since all matter was viewed as contiguous from this Renaissance Neo-Platonic perspective, contiguity between two signifieds does indeed always exist, but it rarely ever says something particular about the relationship between the two (except perhaps in the case of synecdoche, where the part is representative of the whole). Adjacency, however, can apply to two signifieds that occupy a similar place in the hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being and thus can denote a significant relationship.²¹⁸

Man viewed simply as food, or to feed his appetites or others is less than a man. In Act 4 Hamlet asserts “What is a man, / If his chief good and market of his time / Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more” (4. 4. 33–35). With a metonymic reading, the king according to appetites, the self-serving king of whom Claudius becomes a paradigmatic example, and finds adjacency with the breeding of maggots in a beggar. Such a reading of these lines cannot be inferred from a literal approach, or even a metaphoric approach of contiguity, since a term such as honor is not contiguous to man’s flesh as food for maggots. In this passage, Hamlet is in essence calling Claudius a “maggot,” but he does so in a metonymic way that incorporates more than simply name-calling.

In the example above, the worm is not synecdochic for fish even though the worm is eaten and becomes part of the fish (synecdoche/contiguity). The king, for Hamlet, as a thought object maintains an independent identity despite being eaten by a worm, a fish, and a beggar (metonymy/adjacency). The thought object of “king” remains intact. The cycle through which the king is eaten is one of the signifieds in a larger metonymical chain with metaphorical implications (as when the king is *compared* to a worm), which Hamlet engenders from a natural order of things, or a Chain of Being. What is important is adjacency and how closely Claudius is to being a maggot.

Similarly, in the same scene, Hamlet calls Claudius his mother since “father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh—so my mother” (4. 3. 51–52). There is contiguity here of flesh between all men, as well as metaphoric replacing of the term “father” for “mother” through association. Is Hamlet, though, confusing Claudius with his mother, perhaps in an act of madness? Again metonymically speaking the passage makes more than sense. When Claudius and Hamlet’s mother lie next to one another they are contiguous with one another and could even be considered “of one flesh.” The signified “father” and the signified “mother” are related, then, to the signifier/d of “flesh.” Through

²¹⁸ See Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, 186.

this triangulation is brought up a more complex question of the closeness of the relationship between Claudius and Gertrude that relates to flesh as the signifier that makes them adjacent as husband and wife, rather than say nobility of reason or common duty to the throne of Denmark. Could Hamlet here be saying, metonymically, that Claudius and Gertrude's relationship is one based upon matters of the flesh (related to sin) as opposed to higher principles such as duty to the throne and the love of God as the supreme father? This is not an arbitrary question, since Hamlet's response comes directly from Claudius' assertion that he is Hamlet's "loving father" (4. 4. 50). The reference to marriage and flesh has biblical associations²¹⁹ that are brought into greater play with a metonymic reading of Hamlet's line regarding the sin of the flesh and a marriage he views as incestuous.

When Hamlet considers his own flesh he also views it in relation to the figurative image of the trinity and a relationship between flesh and spirit:

O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
(1. 2. 129–130)

There has been much debate surrounding the term "sallied flesh" (as found in Q2) and whether Shakespeare actually meant "sullied" (as suggested by George Macdonald in 1885) or "solid" (as found in the Folio).²²⁰ The pun is a triple reference to the noun "a dew," which holds three possible meanings. If Hamlet is heard to say "solid," then the word dew conveys the image of a chemical or material transformation to "melt" from a solid to a liquid (a metamorphosis). If Hamlet says "sallied," meaning oppressed or "besieged,"²²¹ then he is considering an issue of "resolve" by saying "adieu" (from Old French), to the "thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to" (3. 1. 62–63) as matter becomes spirit (the "Will of God"—as opposed to Man's will). If "sullied," then Hamlet refers to the "Fall of Man," and man as tainted as he stands before God in order to redeem himself "a Dieu" or "a Deu." It is easier to derive "solid" from "sallied" or "sullied" and therefore "sallied" (Q2) seems to be the superior choice to the Folio's "solid" (as few will derive "sallied" or

²¹⁹ The Arden edition notes Genesis, 2.24, Mathew, 19.5-6, and Mark, 10.8 as possible biblical inspirations.

²²⁰ Samuel A. Weiss, "'Solid', 'Sullied', and Mutability: A Study in Imagery," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (Spring, 1959): 219. See also Philip Edwards, ed., *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* edition of *Hamlet*, 88; in this lengthy discussion about the usage of "sallied," versus "sullied" or "solid" the meaning of "sallied"—oppressed or besieged—is not mentioned.

²²¹ As in to "sally" forth against an enemy. *OED*, vol. XIV, cites Spenser, *Fairie Queene*, ii. iv., "Where gladsome Guyon salied forth to land," and Sir R. Williams, *Brief Disc. War* (1590), 51, "Hauing an easie entrie into the ditch, the defendants dare not sally." Hamlet further mentions a sort of sallying forth in Act 3 by considering taking "arms against a sea of troubles." (3. 1. 58)

“sullied” from “solid”). This triple pun, or play on words, becomes a Trinitarian representation—as the embodiment of flesh that Hamlet is concerned with relates directly to the spirit in terms of Foucault’s Renaissance distinctions that include spiritual concepts such as “Metamorphosis,” “The Will of God,” and “The Fall.”²²² Hamlet’s word play, with its triple pun, further indicates that discrepancies in textual variations may represent—instead of conflicts of interpretation—a Renaissance ability to infer multiple meanings from single words.

2.4.1 Comparative *Copia*

Copia is not only created through similitude but also through comparison or contrast, as suggested by Erasmus in Book 11 of his *Copia rerum*. This use of *copia* expands the richness of the text and “involves the assembling, explaining, and amplifying of arguments” by the use of examples, comparisons, and contrasts.²²³ A contrast or comparison to Ophelia’s herbal “document in madness” in Act 4, is found in Act 3, Scene 1 when Ophelia is asked by her father to “Read on this book” (3. 1. 44); which he evidently “gives” her in order to better attract Hamlet to her. She is not meant to actually read the book, but rather, the book is meant for appearance only; “That show of such an exercise may colour / Your loneliness” (3. 1. 45–46), is how Polonius intends the book to be used. Unlike a true gift that attempts to fulfill a need, the book is meant to enhance an iconographic tableau based upon Ophelia’s perceived loneliness. Polonius is deliberately “fashioning her into an image intended to convey an easily readable meaning” based upon outward appearances.²²⁴ The most prominent association here is of the Virgin depicted reading a book when visited by the Angel of the Annunciation.²²⁵ Artistic representations

²²² Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, xiv.

²²³ Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 23-24 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 301: 17-19

²²⁴ For further reading see Bridget Gellert Lyons, “The Iconography of Ophelia,” *ELH* 44, no. 1 (Spring, 1977): 60.

²²⁵ See M. T. Clanchy, “Parchment and Paper: Manuscript Culture 100-1500,” in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 204. See also Bridget Gellert Lyons, “The Iconography of Ophelia,” 61; Jeffrey F. Hamburger, “Representations of Reading—Reading Representations: The Female Reader from the Hedwig Codex to Châtillon’s Léopoldine au Livre d’Herures,” in *Die lessened Frau*, ed. Gabriela Signori (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009): 177-239; and David Linton, “Reading the Virgin Reader,” in *The Book and the Magic of Reading in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: Routledge, 2012): 253-276.

of the devotional image of the Virgin reading upon a book were common both before and during the Renaissance.²²⁶

This iconographic image of the Virgin with devotional book lends to Ophelia the outward appearances of piety, and is a carefully constructed picture (or tableau) meant to catch the attention of Prince Hamlet. The book here functions not as to what constitutes a gift, but rather as a command to read, or more specifically a command to pretend to read. Polonius explains his methodology further: “’Tis too much proved that with devotion’s visage / And pious action we do sugar o’er / The devil himself.” (3. 1. 46–48). This brazen confession of deceptiveness is compounded by his intent to spy on Hamlet and Ophelia. It is generally presumed that the book which Polonius gives his daughter is a prayer book.²²⁷ Although not a book of prayer *per se*, Marguerite of Navarre’s *Heptaméron* is worth observing in this context since it deals extensively with the idea of “devotion’s visage” and acts of pretended piety that “sugar” over various sins by the characters presented. The *Heptaméron* is a series of moral secular tales based upon Boccaccio’s *Decameron*.²²⁸ In one exemplary tale, a frozen piece of excrement is passed off by a servant seeking revenge as a sugar loaf to a stingy dishonest gentleman and his advocate friend who “was much such a man as himself.”²²⁹ The metaphor of “sugar” as the outward appearance that belies an inward stench is a theme applied throughout the work to pass judgment on the actual virtue of her characters despite their outward appearances. It is possible that Polonius’ lines refer indirectly to the *Heptaméron* since it deals so prominently with this topic, or even that is the very book he gives Ophelia to carry. In this metonymical context, Polonius’ words and action become demonically ironic, since he so openly takes on the practice of “sugaring” to his advantage rather than something to be shunned.

The *Heptaméron* shares much with Shakespeare’s text in how objects or gifts “witness textually to their own transformation.”²³⁰ The role of these objects, as Catharine Randall notes in relation to the *Heptaméron*, “refer to the invisible reality of which they are signs and which they invoke in a process analogous to the operation of the Hebrew

²²⁶ As found for example in the center panel in the Annunciation Triptych of the Merode Altarpiece from the Tournai workshop of Robert Campin (ca. 1427–1432), South Netherlandish, Belgium.

²²⁷ See for example the textual note in The Arden Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), 282.

²²⁸ Boccaccio’s *Decameron* was first printed in France under the title *Histoires des Amans Fortunez* (1558) and was translated and printed into English in 1599.

²²⁹ Margaret, Queen of Navarre, *The Heptameron*, trans. Walter K. Kelly (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1864), Novel LII, 332.

²³⁰ Catharine Randall, *Earthly Treasures: Material Culture and Metaphysics in the Heptaméron and Evangelical Narrative* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007), 13.

dabar: the creation of the material world through the effect of the dynamic Word.” She further adds that “material presence in Marguerite’s text provides a possible resolution to this dialectic of sinful flesh with spirit. Objects are images, but the text is word testifying to the Logos (*verbum tuum veritas est*).”²³¹ Ophelia’s words and gifts create a dialectic between the “sinful flesh” of the throne of Denmark and matters of the Holy Spirit that are referenced by her gifts in so far as they “refer to the invisible reality of which they are signs.” This dialectic is noted in Foucault’s distinction between *episteme* whereby during the Renaissance “man’s dispute with madness was a dramatic debate in which he confronted the secret powers of the world.”

In Act 3 of *Hamlet*, Polonius’ devotional book is an inauthentic or false gift representative of a sinful act of deception; while in Act 4, Ophelia, devoid of any book when she hands out herbs to the court, is able to call forth a potentially authentic devotional document without written text in hand (by memory or *par coeur*) through the combined use of gift object and Logos.²³² These two scenes from *Hamlet* present a contrasting mirror to one another: in one, a “document” of devotion becomes a document of deception and lies; while conversely, a “document” of madness can be read as theological truth. This comparison between a real gift and a false one, between a potentially devout gift and a deceptively nefarious one, helps to define the true nature of Ophelia’s gifts.

Shakespeare’s references to the trinity through the “madness” of Hamlet and Ophelia when taken together create a copious network of textual kinship and significance. While individually one may argue that an individual herb or reference is tangential or even speculative, the chances that these references all add up to the Trinity close the gap of determinacy exponentially. Furthermore, this offering of meaning to these words of “madness” is far more than an interpretive analysis of individual lines, but a cohesive expression of well-established philosophical and theological reasoning that forms a basis of truth underlying Ophelia and Hamlet’s “madness.” This type of reading is reflected in Angus Fletcher’s concept of teleologically controlled tropes and how “the whole may determine the sense of the parts, and the parts be governed by the intention of the whole. This would yield a concept of a teleologically ordered speech.”²³³ The teleological debate that ensues from a metonymic reading is one that was foremost in Shakespeare’s day, and

²³¹ Randall, *Earthly Treasures*, 13.

²³² When divine law was memorized, or internalized, rather than simply existing as external scripture, it was considered in the Renaissance to be inscribed in the conscience and the heart. The heart and conscience of a person were considered closely related. The heart and conscience were words, as Frederick Kiefer notes along with multiple examples, “that in practice are used interchangeably.” Frederick Kiefer, *Writing on the Renaissance Stage: Written Words, Printed Pages, Metaphoric Books* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1996), 115-116.

²³³ Fletcher, *Allegory*, 85.

allows for characters that have been muted through the accusation of a modern interpretation of clinical madness to have a viable and ordered speech.

2.5 The Bestial Snake in the Garden

With respect to Foucault's distinctions of a Renaissance use of madness touching upon images of "the Beast" as well as "the Fall," one more example from Ophelia's gifts is exemplary of both these thought objects.²³⁴ Fennel and columbines are the herb gifts that she gives to the king.²³⁵ The Cambridge edition of *Hamlet* references Robert Nares' *Glossary* (1822) when interpreting the symbolism of these herbs.²³⁶ In Nares' *Glossary*, fennel is associated with flattery and columbines—a "thankless flower"—with ingratitude.²³⁷ Herb books to be found in Shakespeare's day support these attributions. Fennel is found in Greene's *Quip for an Upstart Courtier*—"Fenell I meane for flatterers"—and also in the more classical source of Lyly, *Sappho* (ii, 4): "Flatter, I mean lie, little things catch light minds, and fancies is a worme that feedeth first upon *fennell*."²³⁸ Columbine is mentioned in Chapman's *All Fools*. "What's that? A columbine? No; that thankless flower grows not in my garden."²³⁹ Beyond the observations found by Nares, Greene, and Chapman, the fennel plant was also associated with serpents or adders. Pliny observed that serpents eat fennel "when they cast their old skins, and they sharpen their sight with the juice by rubbing against the plant."²⁴⁰ In an English rhyming Herbal from the period, the plant holds the same beneficial properties: "Whaune the heddere (adder) is hurt in the eye / Ye red fenel is hys prey."²⁴¹ The serpent image is associated with Claudius in

²³⁴ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, xiv.

²³⁵ As mentioned previously, although admittedly it is not absolutely certain to whom Ophelia is giving each herb, from the context and meaning of the herbs it can be adduced, and it is generally agreed, that Ophelia gives fennel to Claudius in this scene.

²³⁶ Philip Edwards, ed., *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 213.

²³⁷ Robert Nares, *A Glossary; or, Collection of Words, Phrases, Names, and Allusions to Customs, Proverbs, etc. Which Have Been Thought to Require Illustration, in the Works of English Authors, Particularly Shakespeare, and his Contemporaries* (London: Reeves & Turner, 1888, first published 1822), 181, 302.

²³⁸ Nares, *Glossary*, 302.

²³⁹ Nares, *Glossary*, 181.

²⁴⁰ Maud Grieve and C. F. Leyel, *A Modern Herbal* (Rockland: Courier Dover Publications, 1971), 294.

²⁴¹ As in Grieve and Leyel, *A Modern Herbal*, 294.

other parts of Shakespeare's play (*copia*). Hamlet overtly views Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, charged with the king's commandment, as "adders fang'd" (3. 4. 203), and Old Hamlet uses the metaphor of the serpent to identify Claudius as his murderer: "The serpent that did sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown" (1. 5. 39–40). Claudius, in the role of the serpent, kills his brother by pouring poison into his ear while King Hamlet is lying in his garden. The reference to the Biblical Garden of Eden²⁴² and the Fall is intentional, and the elements of a garden, a snake, and treachery all add up to a fall from grace whereby the State of Denmark becomes (at least in Hamlet's eyes) similar to the Biblical Fall.

For Hamlet, his father stands as an icon of perfect rulership in comparison with Claudius: King Hamlet was "So excellent as king, that was to this Hyperion to a satyr" (1. 2. 138–139). In other words, his father is likened to Hyperion who, as the son of Gaia (the earth) and the God of the Sun, is born out of a marriage between the heavenly and the earthly as essential elements of a paradisiacal garden; while the satyr Claudius is a bestial creature with associations to a Luciferian-like fall from grace and an accompanying hell.²⁴³ Dodoens' *A New Herball* notes how "The leaves and seede of Fenell drunken with wine, is good against the stingings of Scorpions, and the bitings of other wicked and venomous beasts."²⁴⁴ If fennel drives away the bestial it becomes an appropriate gift from Ophelia for Claudius as a bestial creature.

If Hamlet, and here too Ophelia, views Claudius as a serpent or a beast, the gift of fennel reflects this conceit. By giving fennel and columbines to the king, Ophelia could be criticizing Claudius as a "thankless" and "ungrateful" beast who feeds on self-serving flattery. This however, is not necessarily how Claudius views either the gift or himself. With the fennel's association with flattery, the king may simply be flattered by the gift. J. W. Lever takes up the argument that fennel is generally meant to flatter and this is how Claudius would interpret the gift of fennel.²⁴⁵ "Had Ophelia intended any particular use for

²⁴² *The Geneva Bible* (1560), (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 2007), Book of Genesis, chaps. 2, 3.

²⁴³ A parallel is to be found in *The Rape of Lucrece*, which also mentions precious flowers, an adder, and a fall from virtue to iniquity—all grouped together in three consecutive lines, which furthers an invitation for metonymic triangulation:

Unwholesome weeds take root with precious flowers;
The adder hisses where the sweet birds sing;
What virtue breeds, iniquity devours.

(*The Rape of Lucrece*, 870-872)

²⁴⁴ Dodoens, *A New Herball, or Historie of Plants*, 306.

²⁴⁵ Lever, "Three Notes on Shakespeare's Plants," 124, 125.

it,” Lever adds, “she would have had to indicate this to be understood, especially if the use was symbolical, e.g. to make the king “see” more clearly.”²⁴⁶ I agree with Lever that Claudius probably does not grasp the full potential of Ophelia’s gift, but this level of ignorance reinforces a bestial character type unable to grasp a level of rhetorical and ethical figuration that is the polar opposite of Ophelia’s character. Claudius cannot (or refuses to) acknowledge her spiritual gifts. In this dynamic of gift exchange, Ophelia’s intentions behind her gift may in fact differ dramatically from how the king receives her gift. I disagree with Lever that Ophelia would have to indicate a “particular use” in order for her gift “to be understood,” as this would not only negate the dynamic of gift exchange, but also the entire rhetorical methodology this dissertation is concerned with. In other words, some characters are more related to a use of rhetorical metonymy, while others are much more literal and less open minded. Some characters in *Hamlet* reflect the ethical and spiritual meaning embodied in the concept of the Gift, while others do not.

This last example is by no means the limit of textual *exempla* in *Hamlet* that lend support to a rhetorical “madness” based upon Foucault’s historical distinction; still, the use of *copia* in *Hamlet* presented here offers a cohesive sense of meaning behind a façade of apparent madness in both Hamlet and Ophelia’s characters. In addition, such a reading presents an alternative perspective to modern *epistemic* clinical approaches to literary madness found in a text like *Hamlet* that Foucault challenged as inadequate to understanding a Renaissance poetic “madness,” which promotes matters of the spirit. This perspective further challenges modern critical perspectives that have denied poetics in Shakespeare at all. For example, Morris Weitz contends that “poetics in Hamlet criticism are attempts at true, real definitions of essences that do not exist, need not exist, and, in the case of tragedy, cannot exist. They are logically vain attempts to define the indefinable.”²⁴⁷ Weitz’s perspective fails to take into account important rhetorical poetic structures, such as metonymy, that play a significant role in Shakespeare’s dramatic poetry and have the potential to “define” what is often considered “indefinable.” A rhetorical consideration introduces the possibility of a “conscious design” for “madness” that has been particularly absent in readings of Ophelia’s language and denied her a voice with any authorial intent.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Lever, “Three Notes on Shakespeare’s Plants,” 125.

²⁴⁷ Morris Weitz, *Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964), 309.

²⁴⁸ For example, Scott A. Trudell asserts that, “It is difficult to describe her as an author, since she does not compose her “old lauds,” and her madness robs her of conscious design.” Trudell, “The Mediation of Poesie: Ophelia’s Orphic Song,” 61.

My analysis here of a rhetorical “madness” challenges the vague offerings of past critics that this language means anything that one wishes to read into it, or lacks any meaning at all.²⁴⁹ From this rhetorical perspective, the characters of both Hamlet and Ophelia can be reconsidered as to the types of characters who would generate such specific (religious, ethical, and politically challenging) types of rhetoric. This rhetorical perspective is a structural element in Shakespeare’s dramatic poetry that significantly defines Hamlet and Ophelia as well as some of the other characters in the play with whom they interact. The focus of the rest of this dissertation is not only on a further examination of a use of metonymy, but how character itself becomes an identifiable rhetorical trope (a sophisticated rhetorical structure designed not only in terms of language but also ethical considerations). Character structure and their use of language as a primary function, or action, in the drama further adds to the dramatic structure of the drama and the potential ethical “wisdom” of the play.

²⁴⁹ For example, Duncan Salkeld in his book on the subject of madness in Elizabethan drama in direct contrast to the argument of this thesis asserts that, “[t]he Classical literary language of ecstasy and fury supplied a vocabulary of cognates for madness apart from humoral language, which lacked, and did not require for their effects, precisely individual meaning. This vocabulary was employed by writers without any particular theory to guide its usage.” Duncan Salkeld, *Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, 26

3 The Character of Hamlet

3.1 The Ghosts of *Hamlet*

How does a methodology based upon metonymy help to define character? A transition from a discussion of Renaissance metonymy (and its use in *Hamlet*) to an investigation of specific characters in this dissertation still follows the logic of Renaissance metonymy as a basic rhetorical structure for not only understanding Shakespeare's language, but also the primary characters in the play. The work of Hans-Georg Gadamer in terms of identity in relation to language is especially inspirational to this part of my dissertation for a consideration of character according to his or her use of rhetoric as a way of expressing meaning that in turn helps to establish character.²⁵⁰ Wilson Knight, as a counter example, encouraged in his approach to Shakespeare "thinking primarily in terms of symbolism, not 'characters'."²⁵¹ However, if Shakespeare was using a Renaissance metonymic structure of language to help define his characters such a symbolic approach as Knight suggests, or even a literal or allegorical approach, would find certain characters illusive by default.

Lisolette Gumpel noted how "Elizabethan English, is essentially 'dead' since no one today shares this inventory except at a written and mostly literary level. All modern Recipients, therefore, must 'returnt' to the Elizabethan oppositional system where this differs from their own English."²⁵² This asks the question not only how can we better

²⁵⁰ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); and Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

²⁵¹ Wilson Knight, *The Shakespearian Tempest* (London: Methuen, 1953), 4.

²⁵² Gumpel, *Metaphor Reexamined*, 141.

understand the “dead” language of Shakespeare, but also “return” to a better understanding of his characters which, in terms of Gadamer’s notion of identity in relation to language, have also become dead to us?

This consideration of the dead speaking back to us is one that is inherent in reading the works of dead authors, but also in terms of a play like *Hamlet* in which characters that were created hundreds of years ago speak again the words of its dead playwright. Most all of the primary characters in *Hamlet* die at the end, and the Ghost of Hamlet’s father may not be the only representative dead character speaking to an audience in this play—one may in fact consider all the characters to be historical figures (though fictional) speaking back to an audience from the dead. Stephen Greenblatt commences his book *Shakespearean Negotiations* pondering the nature of this very task of speaking with the dead.²⁵³ This textual consideration of the dead is covered more extensively by Jürgen Pieters in his appropriately titled *Speaking With the Dead: Explorations in Literature and History*.²⁵⁴

Pieters points out, through the example of Machiavelli, how a Renaissance writer of history took particular concern when approaching characters from the past:

For Machiavelli, then, the task of the historian is not to judge or to measure the past against criteria of his own making or of that of the present time. The historian should remain silent, in order to open to what the dead have to say; in short, to listen closely. Insight, understanding, compassion and self-knowledge, the things that make the conversation worthwhile, follow for his silence and close attention. The conversation that Machiavelli talks about is not so much a conversation *with* the dead, but a conversation *among* the dead.²⁵⁵

Pieters defines a marked difference in relationship to the dead of the past between a modern conversation and a Renaissance one. Greenblatt, for example, begins his journey with “the desire to speak with the dead.”²⁵⁶ Here we may infer a difference between the Renaissance and today in terms of how we speak to the dead and the dead speak to us, as well as between our relationship to text and a Renaissance one. I view these differences of approach, “with” versus “among,” as comparable to the terms “contiguity” versus “adjacency.” Hamlet, for example, is a prince and potential king who is conversing with his father’s ghost as it occurs onstage. Our experience as audience watching the play is also “not so much a conversation

²⁵³ See Stephen Jay Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), chapt. 1.

²⁵⁴ Jürgen Pieters, *Speaking With the Dead: Explorations in Literature and History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Ltd., 2005).

²⁵⁵ Pieters, *Speaking With the Dead*, 22.

²⁵⁶ Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 1.

with the dead, but a conversation *among* the dead.” The Ghost of Hamlet’s father is speaking to him while Hamlet listens attentively, adjacently, and in a scale of relationship that brings the two characters together onstage. Hamlet does not so much speak “with” his father, but his father’s ghost does most all of the talking while Hamlet listens “closely” in the manner of Machiavelli’s approach to the dead as outlined above by Pieters. Shakespeare’s audience is also not talking “with” these dead characters, but listening to what they have to say “adjacent” to the action while it is taking place.

Aristotle too in his *Treatise on Rhetoric*, when considering the difference between metaphors and representations (or similes), cites the *Politeia* of Plato whereby “those who spoil the dead are like young dogs “which bite the stone, without touching the person who throws it.”²⁵⁷ The quote supports a metonymic reading of the dead in terms of adjacency rather than contiguity. The dog that bites the stone is in relation with the object that he wrongly assumes contiguity “with,” but lacks a triangulated consideration of relationship and adjacency between itself, the stone, and the “person who throws it.” So to, is there an invitation to listen to the dead with a scale and distance of adjacency implied in Machiavelli’s approach; whereby the words of dead authors are not a speaking with (or a biting of the dead stone), but involves a deeper consideration, a listening for, the origin and adjacency to the person who wrote or speaks such language even if it happened in the distant past. The modern perspective involves a talking “with” while the Renaissance perspective is careful not to “spoil the dead” but rather, as Machiavelli recommended, remains silent “in order to open to what the dead have to say.”²⁵⁸

The Ghost of Hamlet, though, is not just a father speaking to a son but a dead king speaking to a prince. This is an aristocratic matter or a concern of nobility, and not simply a domestic dialogue. Pieters points out this aristocratic distinction in his further observations on Machiavelli’s method (as compared to a modern approach).

Machiavelli’s belief in the common truths that bind together (re-ligare) this civilized humanity betrays the aristocratic ideals from which his reading practice derives its solid, unbreakable foundation. The histories that interest him are those of kings, popes and princes – with butchers, bakers and farmers he plays cards or quarrels over money. This brings us to the first important difference between Greenblatt’s reflections on the dialogue with the dead and Machiavelli’s. Greenblatt’s historical predilections are much less biased: to him, history is the playing ground of the unique individuals that kings, princes and popes often turn out to be, but his interest does not stop there. His concern, much like that of Foucault, or Walter Benjamin, is also

²⁵⁷ Thomas Hobbes, trans., *Aristotle’s Treatise on Rhetoric* (London, Henry G. Bohn, 1833), 218.

²⁵⁸ Pieters, *Speaking With the Dead*, 22.

with the smaller people and with those who turned out less successful and victorious in the course of history.²⁵⁹

As Pieters observes in the quote above, while Machiavelli betrays an intentional “adjacency” to speak among those dead with aristocratic ideals, Greenblatt’s conversation “with” the dead is contiguously open to speak “with” the dead “with” much “less biased” predilections than Machiavelli. These distinctions between how we read and interpret the text of dead authors is important to consider when approaching Shakespeare and a Renaissance *episteme*. François Rabelais dedicated Book III of *Pantagruel* to the “Spirit of the Queen of Navarre”²⁶⁰ and reflects how kings and queens (both living and dead) were able to both inspire and be inspired through poetic art. Shakespeare was also likely inspired by Rabelais²⁶¹ and with most all of his plays focusing on royal characters, he also wrote poetry that directly reflected on the behavior and morals of kingship and rule. What Greenblatt calls “textual traces,”²⁶² although fragmentary, can be significant nonetheless and it is the textual traces of poetry that lead us back to the wisdom and inspiration of great rulers of the past. During a Renaissance *episteme* this wisdom and inspiration was viewed as one of the values of poetry itself, as well as one of the reasons, like Machiavelli, Shakespeare concerned himself primarily with the histories of kings and princes and not with the common man. It is also important to note that like Machiavelli, Shakespeare probably saw the function of literature in terms of dead authors as different from us today—especially with regard to aristocratic ideals and ethical principles related to what it means to be a good prince or a good king. In this way, a metonymic concern for adjacency can include ethical considerations. Does someone choose to align themselves adjacent to noble figures of the past so they might learn from them in a stance of humility and listening; or does someone choose to speak with “butchers, bakers and farmers he plays cards or quarrels over money?” This is an ethical question, not just a rhetorical one. The question relates to Shakespeare and his play *Hamlet* as well in terms of what characters do we listen to the most? In this manner, the play can effectively hold a mirror up to our propensities, or even perhaps our very natures. Shakespeare’s audience, then, can also be viewed as triangulated and participating according to a metonymic heuristic with the play and its content.

²⁵⁹ Pieters, *Speaking With the Dead*, 22-23.

²⁶⁰ François Rabelais, *The Complete Works of Francois Rabelais*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 248.

²⁶¹ Rabelais’ influence is especially marked in the character of Holofernes in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. Holofernes mirrors Rabelais’ character Thubal Holoferne, who teaches Gargantua the alphabet so well that he is able to repeat it backwards. In Shakespeare’s version, Moth asks of Holofernes, “What is ‘a, b’ spelled backward, with the horn on his head?” (5. 1. 42-43). The answer to the pun relates to the bestial: a sheep.

²⁶² See Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, chapt. 1.

3.2 A Prince of Denmark

Hamlet's character has long been debated with regard to the subject, or prominent crux, of madness. The heuristic model of the Three Casket Test from *The Merchant of Venice* outlined in my introduction serves to define a model for Hamlet's madness with the gold casket representing "clinical madness," the silver casket representing "feigned madness," and the lead casket representing "Noble Reason." While "madness" is a figurative element integral to Hamlet's character, it is merely a building block to a larger foundational structure of character from which a more complex picture of Hamlet's character can emerge through a consideration of his use of language. This chapter sets out to determine where the foundations of Hamlet's character lie, especially in relation to madness, just as the later portion of this dissertation will deal primarily with Shakespeare's characterization of Ophelia and her apparent madness (and subsequent suicide).

Hamlet as a character is such a significant aspect of the play *Hamlet* that an investigation, or rethinking, of his character must begin with how to approach the play as a whole. A brief consideration of how Shakespeare structured his drama provided the bedrock upon which Hamlet's character is built, and since *Hamlet* hinges on a primary and a secondary action, it is helpful to divide the play into two parts. The primary action involves Hamlet's quest to avenge the murder of his father, the former king. While there is much debate as to the nature of Hamlet's character, there is little question of an intent brought on by Hamlet's Ghost for Hamlet to kill his father's brother, the new king, Claudius and avenge his murder. Hamlet's main motivation for revenge is set before us plainly: Claudius has killed Hamlet's father, taken his throne, and married Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. As audience members, we are even given testimony of Claudius' guilt when he privately admits to his crime:

O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven,
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder.

(3. 3. 36–38)

Furthermore, through the ghost of Hamlet's father, Shakespeare delineates the murderous act in such great detail that it leaves the audience with little doubt as to what happened.

The secondary action in *Hamlet* centers round a very different plot: Hamlet's relationship with his bride-to-be, Ophelia, and her father, Polonius. Customarily, Hamlet's relationship to these characters is interpreted as peripheral to the primary theme of the play: Polonius and Ophelia are both seen as victims accidentally caught in Hamlet's main

agenda—to avenge the murder of his father.²⁶³ It is because Hamlet’s actions and words, in his scenes with Polonius and Ophelia, seem both to contradict and to delay his quest for justice that Hamlet’s apparently odd behavior is typically viewed as madness (feigned or otherwise). It is also this part of the play that provides the most opportunity for metonymic investigation. However, before illuminating the important and sometimes overlooked secondary structure of the play, it is first necessary to clarify the key elements of Hamlet’s character that have been occluded by the well-intentioned but somewhat distorted images of him handed down to us through the ages.

Hamlet is also often categorized as a revenge tragedy, and Prince Hamlet is traditionally seen as a revenge hero.²⁶⁴ Hamlet’s revenge, however, is not primarily about the murder of his father in the sense of a simple question of filial respect, but rather a question of succession and political power. I am suggesting a moral (and ethical) concern centered on the duties of kingship according to an ideal of nobility; or, where other critics have sometimes personalized Hamlet’s story, I propose to read Hamlet’s qualification as a prince as both straightforward and metaphorical—helped here by the play’s title: *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*.²⁶⁵ The qualification of an aristocratic prince should not be discounted along with all the associate duties inherent with this title. The representation of Shakespeare’s characters as meaningful political, social, and religious metaphors are not ephemeral conjecture, but are linked to the elemental question of what it meant to rule nobly in the Renaissance addressed in such books as Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and Baldasar

²⁶³ Nigel Alexander, for example, writes that “[t]he sudden sword-thrust through the arras of Gertrude’s closet transforms Hamlet from a man who has been training himself to perform the role of avenger into a homicide who falls victim to a pursuing and implacable vengeance.” And how, “[t]he death of Polonius allows Shakespeare to investigate what might have happened if Hamlet had killed the King without thinking about it.” Nigel Alexander, *Poison, Play and Duel: a Study in Hamlet* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1971), 119.

²⁶⁴ Among numerous works on this particular topic, Robert Hapgood’s introduction to the play offers that, “[i]n writing a revenge tragedy Shakespeare was reviving a genre that had been in vogue some years before, most notably in Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* (1587-9) and in an early version of the Hamlet story, now lost, which surviving allusions indicate to have included a ghost crying for revenge.” Robert Hapgood, ed., William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), *intro.* 9. Northrop Frye goes so far as to remark that, “God’s main interest, in Elizabethan tragedy, is in promoting the revenge, and in making it as bloody as possible.” Northrop Frye, *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 80. See also Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet without Hamlet*, chapt. 6; and Peter Mercer, *Hamlet and the Acting of Revenge* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987).

²⁶⁵ In their introduction to The Arden Shakespeare *Hamlet*, Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor risk the “generalization” that “the Anglo-American Hamlet has often been read through Freud as primarily a domestic drama.” Thompson and Taylor, ed., The Arden Shakespeare *Hamlet*, 29.

Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*. Shakespeare's play has much similarity with these seminal Renaissance texts both in terms of subject matter and an intent to instruct. Hamlet is both the Prince of Denmark as well as its "chiefest courtier" (1. 2. 117). Shakespeare's rhetorical use of madness is meant to instruct, but more specifically to instruct on how to be a good prince according to a nobility of reason. A modern tendency to conveniently overlook Hamlet as a prince and to turn him into a sort of Everyman ignores the important function of Shakespeare's play as ethical instruction for royalty.

3.3 Incestuous Sheets

The following words spoken by Hamlet are often viewed as reflecting a suicidal tendency²⁶⁶:

O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,
Thaw, resolve itself into a dew!

Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!
(1. 2. 129–132)

The political import of Hamlet's words should not be overlooked in this passage, though, and for this the word "canon" is pivotal. It is significant that Hamlet, in what many simply have viewed as proof of a suicidal nature, establishes his first speech of the play, that he is governed by a code of law that is outlined here as canon law.

Canon law had evolved from Papal laws as represented by the *Corpus juris canonici* or "Body of Canon Law." When Henry VIII broke with Europe and the Roman Catholic Church, he also symbolically broke from an entire system of ecclesiastical justice (the practical elements of this division are far more complex and took many more years for major shifts in power and policy change to occur). The system that developed from this split helped to form the foundations of our modern-day legal code. This is not to say that Protestant countries (including Denmark) immediately abolished or vastly modified their church courts, but that a significant division occurred at this point in European history that was eventually to alter religious justice as well as social and judicial conduct at all levels

²⁶⁶ This common perception on Hamlet as suicidal will be more fully addressed later in this chapter.

of society.²⁶⁷ The strong actions of Henry VIII (and figures like Martin Luther) were instrumental in creating this shift, and Queen Elizabeth I was quick to build upon her father's foundational work. This change could be seen in the physical manifestation of the Office of Faculties, which took over powers that were once held by the papacy, as well as the Court of Chancery. The highest (and arguably the most important) of these new tribunals were the Court of Delegates and the Court of High Commission, officially known as the Commissioners for Causes Ecclesiastical.²⁶⁸

Canon law is the foundation upon which Hamlet establishes his own claim to the throne. It is also the basis for maintaining that Claudius and Gertrude's marriage is illegitimate due to incest²⁶⁹:

—married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules. Within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married—O most wicked speed: to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets,
It is not, nor it cannot come to good,
But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

(1. 2. 151–59)

To better understand Hamlet's words metonymically, it is useful to think upon a similar situation in the marriage of Henry VIII to his brother's widow, Catherine of Aragon. Henry VIII obtained special dispensation from the Pope for this marriage, incestuous under the canons of the Roman Catholic Church, but was unable to receive a more exceptional

²⁶⁷ Henry VIII abrogated the canon law faculties at Oxford and Cambridge and early proposals for change such as the *Commons' Supplication against the Ordinaries of 1532* supported radical changes. Yet, the effect these changes was not immediate and according to R. H. Helmolz the, "abolition of papal jurisdiction in itself had remarkably little effect on the substantive law applied in the courts." R. H. Helmolz, *Roman Canon Law in Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 38.

²⁶⁸ This body, as noted by R. H. Helmolz, was created, "specifically to enforce the religious settlement and to supplement and support the work of the ordinary ecclesiastical tribunals, the High Commission was armed with the power to imprison and to fine, powers ordinary ecclesiastical courts lacked. The Commissioners did not allow these powers to lie idle. They used them throughout the realm to suppress dissent of varying sorts." R. H. Helmolz, *Roman Canon Law in Reformation England*, 45-46.

²⁶⁹ For further reading see Jason P. Rosenblatt, "Aspects of the Incest Problem in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (Summer, 1978): 349-346.

privilege in his request for a divorce when he wanted to marry Anne Boleyn.²⁷⁰ The complications surrounding this issue led to the English Reformation and England's resultant split from strict canon law. In the above-mentioned speech, Hamlet cites canon law in opposition to his mother's marriage with Claudius, for it is by viewing this marriage in terms of strict canon law during the Elizabethan era that it becomes an incestuous one and no longer valid.²⁷¹ Even though the debate of what was to be considered incestuous was argued on both sides, with Protestant support of strict prohibitions against what might be considered to be incestuous marriages, the sensitive political nature of Hamlet's words as they directly pertain to Elizabeth's right to succession are not devalued. Hamlet must be quiet and hold his "tongue" for a religious perspective that had great political import during Shakespeare's day.²⁷²

It is not straining credulity to suppose that contemporaries of Shakespeare would be reminded of Henry VIII when canon law is mentioned in conjunction with the "incestuous" marriage of a king to his dead brother's wife. Nor would it be difficult for Shakespeare's contemporaries to perceive the sensitivity of this subject in regard to the daughter of Anne Boleyn, Queen Elizabeth I, whose legitimacy—personal and royal alike—rested upon the supremacy of the English Crown over canon law and papal rule. The association the soliloquy has with Henry VIII challenges traditional interpretation of Hamlet's character; offering instead a Hamlet whose words display inspired rhetoric of a political nature rather

²⁷⁰ Only a few critics have made the association of Hamlet's mention of an incestuous marriage with the parallel situation of Henry VIII. See for instance Wilbraham F. Trench, *Shakespeare's Hamlet, A New Commentary* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1913), 54, 257-259. Hamlet's words are politically sensitive to Shakespeare's day and while it is common practice to see Hamlet's soliloquy primarily as a reflection of a mind bent on suicide, these words are arguably more of a political opinion than a personal one.

²⁷¹ Further incest discussions can be found in Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet*, 43-44; Rosenblatt, "Aspects of the Incest Problem in Hamlet"; and Richard A. McCabe, *Incest, Drama and Nature's Law, 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

²⁷² The idea of a crypto-Catholic Shakespeare is worthy of consideration, but 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' sensibilities may be far more political than religious in the context of royal succession and rightful rule. Rarely, however, do scholars who argue for a Catholic Shakespeare (or even a Shakespeare from a strong Catholic background) cite these specific and complex textual considerations from *Hamlet* in their speculations. Books like E. A. J. Honigmann, *Shakespeare: The Lost Years* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985); or Richard Wilson, *Secret Shakespeare: Studies in Theatre, Religion, and Resistance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) rely far more upon historical imaginings than upon play-text or facts. For further example, Stephen Greenblatt in *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* wonders if "the secret Catholic was the real John Shakespeare, and the Protestant civic officer was only the worldly, ambitious outward man." Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004), 102.

than revelations of psychological infirmity. The religious rhetoric found in Hamlet's language of "madness" is further extended here into distinctions between Catholicism and Protestantism that were played out upon the English historical stage as well as on Shakespeare's politically charged theatrical "scaffold."²⁷³

Hamlet's political reference is not, however, metonymically limited solely to the Tudors. In other words, this specific metonym for political "incest" is copiously supported by an English Renaissance historical context. Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, presents an equally eyebrow-raising parallel in her history of a marriage to a dead husband's murderer. In 1566 Mary's husband, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley (or King Henry during his wedding, which is less well known), was murdered in an explosion. The death of Lord Darnley was doubly suspicious in that he had no burn marks on his body after the explosion. Instead, he was found dead in the orchard of his house, like Hamlet's father. The murderer, presumably, was James Hepburn, the 4th Earl of Bothwell. Less than three months later Mary and Bothwell married. Many Protestants were quick to implicate the Catholic Mary in the death of her husband. Accused of treason and plotting to assassinate Elizabeth, Mary was eventually executed after a long period of confinement in England. Roland Mushat Frye examined closely how "the parallels between those historical developments in Scotland and the fictional events in Shakespeare's Danish story are striking although not exact (parallels never are, except in geometry)."²⁷⁴ In this context, King James VI of Scots, Elizabeth's successor to the English throne, could be considered a Hamlet figure, seeking to avenge the murder of his father, Lord Darnley, and restore moral rule.²⁷⁵

In this historical context also, the ghost apparition is analogous to a painting handed down to James through his paternal grandparents, the Earl and Countess of Lennox, reminding James of his duty to avenge his father's murder. The painting, by Livinus de Vogelaere of Antwerp (Royal Collection Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II), is best seen as an engraved copy by George Vertue (1684–1756), due to its age and poor condition.

²⁷³ Many people were persecuted or executed both before and during the Elizabethan period for their religious and political beliefs and perspectives. Shakespeare's "unworthy scaffold" (*Henry V*, 1. Prologue, 10) is only a shadowy reflection of an even more intense contextual historical reality. Tragically, many of the characters in Hamlet die at the end, but only in a fiction. Still, metonymically, the play holds a potential mirror up to such important historical Elizabethan context(s).

²⁷⁴ Roland Mushat Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet, Issues and Responses in 1600* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 102.

²⁷⁵ This historical contextual comparison is also made in Carl Schmitt, *Hamlet or Hecuba: The Intrusion of the Time Into the Play*, trans. by David Pan and Jennifer Rust (New York: Telos Press, 2009), chapt. 1, "The Tabu of the Queen." For further reading see Carsten Strathausen, "Myth or Knowledge? Reading Schmitt's Hamlet or Hecuba," *Telos* 153 (Winter, 2010): 7-29.



George Vertue, 1743 Engraving of Livinus de Vogelaere's painting,
 The Darnley Memorial (1567–1568)
 (National Portrait Gallery, London)

The image shows Darnley's family²⁷⁶ kneeling in prayer and is at first view not overtly remarkable except for the combined use of text and image and how they interplay with one another. An inscription inside the painting states, "if they, who are already old, should be deprived of this life before the majority of their descendent, the King of Scots, he may have a memorial from them in order that he shut not out of his memory the recent atrocious murder of the King his father, until God should avenge it through him."²⁷⁷ Not only is the incentive to the son obvious, so is his relation to God, whose instrument he should become through his act of revenge: the scroll of text that issues from the infant James VI of Scotland's mouth reads "Arise, O Lord, and avenge the innocent blood of the king my father and, I beseech you, defend me with your right hand." The theme and tone of the piece echoes the elder Hamlet's ghostly injunction to his son to "revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (1. 5. 25).

The analogies between the play and historical circumstances involve the theme of incest, and distinct metonymic structures are at work here. Roland Frye points out the continued, cultural importance of the incest taboo: "The basis is found in the Mosaic Law. Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21 emphatically prohibited marriage or other sexual relationship between a brother and a deceased sibling's widow, classing such unions not only as incest but grouping them with bestiality and other revolting practices."²⁷⁸ With regard to *Hamlet*, Frye further observes how "the sole exception to this taboo in the Old Testament could not have applied in *Hamlet*, for it took effect only if the previous marriage had been without

²⁷⁶ Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley; King James I; Matthew Stewart; Margaret Douglas; and Charles Stewart.

²⁷⁷ As in Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet*, 32.

²⁷⁸ Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet*, 78.

issue, leaving that deceased brother with no heir to carry on his name and line.”²⁷⁹ If this is correct, then Hamlet is the rightful heir to carry on the name and line of his father, leaving the marriage between Claudius and Gertrude as an incestuous act that deprives him of the right to rule.

Viewed in this light (or more of a historical shadow), Shakespeare has the potential as a political playwright, and arguably one of the more radically-minded of his generation.²⁸⁰ During Shakespeare’s time arose a group of anti-monarchists or “monarchomachists,”²⁸¹ yet even the crown’s most vocal detractors were hesitant to bring up the issue of legitimacy so directly and passionately by putting in question the practice of regal inheritance through incestuous marriage (and even the accusation of murder). Again, Hamlet states at the end of the speech that he “must hold his tongue.” Indeed, such politically charged words could not be spoken openly for fear that the author would lose his own life.²⁸² Contrary to a current tradition of de-politicizing Shakespeare, Hamlet’s initial speech quickly outlines a specific type of individual who is highly aware of his own precarious political position.²⁸³ Hamlet is not a character who is able to fashion himself,

²⁷⁹ Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet*, 78.

²⁸⁰ The historical tradition is one of depoliticizing Shakespeare, as well as a common portrayal of him as a playwright seeking the appeal of a wide audience (from groundlings to nobles), out to make a buck, and to “please the masses.” See for example, A. L. Rowse, *Shakespeare the Man* (London: Macmillan Ltd., 1973). This portrait of Shakespeare may have done more to obscure than illumine authorial intent. With respect to this, great art and literature (as well as the artist) often hold a vantage point not within, but on the outskirts of society; functioning somewhat metonymically as a commentary upon the social and political arena of the times. Shakespeare is rather uniquely viewed in our critical canon, not as the artistic outsider, but integral to the fabric of the Elizabethan era—a loyal supporter of the monarchy who would offer little to offend the English Renaissance sensibility, and therefore wrote in broad generalities. According to this model, he was the Walt Disney of his age, embracing humanity, while at the same time profiting from this largesse.

²⁸¹ A term used to refer to “identify militant and aggressive opposition to a monarch.” Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet*, 42.

²⁸² In a 1571 act, Elizabeth declared it treasonous if a subject “shall by writing, printing, preaching, speech, express words or sayings, maliciously, advisedly and directly publish, set forth, and affirm that the Queen our said sovereign lady Queen Elizabeth is an heretic, schismatic, tyrant, infidel or an usurper to the crown.” Rebecca Lemon, *Treason by Words: Literature, Law and Rebellion in Shakespeare’s England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 9. See also G. R. Elton, ed., *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Lisa Steffen, *Defining a British State: Treason and National Identity, 1608-1820* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001).

²⁸³ Historically, scholars often strive to depoliticize *Hamlet* and Shakespeare’s plays by denying the author any substantial political stance. This legacy continues its influence through to present day. For example, Stephen Greenblatt reiterates the notion of a politically impotent Shakespeare, an icon who neither threatens contemporary established rule nor fully supports it. See Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 254.

but is fashioned by the forces of his destiny that lie outside of himself—that which he is most adjacent to.

Hamlet is much concerned with the legitimacy of royal succession. Not coincidentally, this was also a theme that was given much attention during Elizabeth's reign, due in part to the fact that Elizabeth failed to marry or give birth to a successor. It is worth noting also that *Hamlet* is not set in an indistinct bygone age. Elsinore, for instance, was of next to no significance until 1574, when the construction of Castle Kronborg by Frederick II of Denmark transformed it into one of the most important military and political locations of the age, commanding access by sea to the entire Baltic region.²⁸⁴ Frederick II's daughter was the same Anna who married James VI (the future King James I of England) in 1588. Thus, Elsinore had not merely a metaphorical meaning but a metonymic one—namely as the place that connected the Danish stronghold to the English crown prince. It is through metonymy that such a theatrical setting gains political significance during Shakespeare's time, as the castle was directly related to the English royal succession. Rather than the vague, non-political, timeless arena that some critics suggest,²⁸⁵ *Hamlet* as a play set in Denmark was intended to be topical and politically challenging. From this perspective, the most essential element of Hamlet's character that cannot be overlooked is his royal birth, but more importantly a potential for "Noble Reason." As a result of ongoing attempts to popularize Shakespeare, specifically as a "man of the people," this important aspect is often ignored, but it is Hamlet's royalty as a prince that most identifies him and shapes his character.

What, by consequence, fascinates about the play is not the anticipation of Hamlet killing Claudius (the classic Revenge tragedy), but the overwhelming struggle of a young prince grappling with the burden of kingship, and the question of whether or not he can maintain himself physically, mentally, and morally in such a position. In the absence of a guiding (and foundational) idea of Hamlet's right to kingship—an important concern that is often overlooked as well from a modern audiences' more psychological vantage—the play does indeed become a series of delays. For by denying the play its political potential, it is easy to overlook the burden of kingship put upon Hamlet's shoulders. A failure to act can easily be misconstrued as indecisiveness and leads to one of the most prominent questions of the play: "Why Does Hamlet Delay?"

²⁸⁴ See William F. Hansen, *Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 83-84.

²⁸⁵ Terence Hawkes, for instance, proposes, "the text as a site, or an area of conflicting and often contradictory potential interpretations," Hawkes, "Telmah," in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, 317.

3.4 Hamlet's Delay

In Act 4 Hamlet chastises himself for his delay in killing Claudius:

– I do not know
Why yet I live to say, “This thing’s to do,”

Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
To do’t,

(4. 4. 43–46)

However, this is the thinking of a potential king who is acutely aware that his actions can have strong repercussions and must therefore be well thought out. By not considering Hamlet’s extreme sense of duty to his country, we reduce him to the level of a common revenge hero acting upon passion and self-motivation—a character profile far more in keeping with a Claudius or a Macbeth acting out of self-interest, or as a “common” revenge hero drawn from Kyd, Webster, or the like. Hamlet distinguishes himself from the common player who acts on his baser emotions when he observes an actor brought to court:

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.

(2. 2. 559–563)

Hamlet is asserting that he is not a common player—he is a prince who must put his country before himself. He is a man who understands well that he is inevitably both a creator of history and its subject. This aristocratic element of Hamlet’s character, contrary to a vague-thinking sort of Everyman, underscores his role as a Renaissance Prince.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ Linda Charnes is one of the few scholars who advocates for a “royal” premise of Hamlet’s character, although she does little to elaborate on her salient point: “The dictum (by now long familiar in high school classrooms) that Hamlet is the Everyman of the human condition, caught between desire and duty, conscience and cowardice, religion and revenge, passion and reason has grown hoarfrost. If we look at Hamlet’s actual political status in the play, no one could be less an Everyman: first, Hamlet – as sole heir of a royal father – is a Prince; second, he is at the center of all the other character’s attentions. Everyone in this play is obsessed with taking Hamlet’s pulse; in this regard at the very least, he is even more king than the king.” Linda Charnes, “The Hamlet formerly known as Prince,” in *Shakespeare and Modernity*, ed. Hugh Grady (London: Routledge, 2000): 189-90.

Much of the conflict within *Hamlet* surrounds the issue of the weighing of duty against personal gain, and the nature of rulership in this light. The protagonists are kings (or potential kings) and Hamlet inherits his bloody task as a claimant to the throne of a wealthy and powerful state, Denmark. The question of Hamlet's delay in killing Claudius and avenging his father's murder has been central to critical considerations of the play. In *Hamlet without Hamlet*, for instance, Margreta de Grazia addresses the question "Why does Hamlet delay?":

Great minds have been asking it for some two hundred years now, from Coleridge and Schlegel around the turn of the eighteenth century, to Bradley and Freud around the turn of the nineteenth, to Lacan, Lévinas, and Adorno in the middle of the twentieth and Derrida and Žižek at its end. So it could be said still to hold the title of "questions of questions" or "problem of problems," as critics continue to frame their criticism around this riddle, this sphinx, this Mona Lisa of literature.²⁸⁷

Hamlet's "delay," however, may be governed by a conceptual relationship according to the measures he applies to his sense of noble duty. From Hamlet's so called "delay" is a reflection of the depth of his inquiry into the very nature of his dilemma as both a man and a prince. Hamlet's most famous paradoxical question—"To be, or not to be, that is the question" (3. 1. 55)—is quintessential to Renaissance Humanism and a foundational debate in the philosophy of the Renaissance *episteme* between the active and the contemplative life. For example, Leonardo Bruni in his *Introduction to moral doctrine* addresses this question directly: "Each of these two lives has its own qualities worthy of praise and recommendation. The contemplative life is more divine and rare, the active life excels in that it is commonly useful."²⁸⁸ With regard to this quote from Bruni, Paul Kristeller addresses a problem of modern interpretation, or what I outline as a problem according to *episteme* that is also addressed in this thesis:

A modern reader or historian who infers from this statement that Bruni meant to assign to the active life an unconditional superiority over the contemplative life does not present Bruni's position in a faithful way. He merely follows his own modern inclination to consider as important only what is useful, and to attach no importance

²⁸⁷ de Grazia, *Hamlet without Hamlet*, 158.

²⁸⁸ Leonardo Bruni, *Isagogicon moralis disciplinae*, as in Leonardo Bruni, *Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften*, ed. H. Baron (Leipzig, Teubner, 1928): 20-41, 39. Trans. as cited in Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Active and Contemplative Life in Renaissance Humanism," in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, vol. 4, ed. Paul Oskar Kristeller (Rome: Edizioni de storia e letteratura, 1996) chapt. 12: 197-213, 207. For further reading see Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson, ed. and trans., *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts* (New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts, 1987), 235-317.

at all to what is divine. I do not think that this was the view held by Leonardo Bruni in the fifteenth century.²⁸⁹

Kristeller's viewpoint relates to the modern crux, or presumption, that Hamlet does in fact delay if viewed solely according to the active. In other words, the modern "inclination" is to consider important that which is useful, and give far less importance to what is divine. The common paradigmatic approach to Hamlet's character includes one who delays due to a lack of action. To cite just one example, Frederick Turner thinks that for Hamlet

There is no way out: no virtues he can pursue or values he can rely on. In a curious way, he loses interest in the world: he becomes a solipsist. He talks about himself incessantly. He cannot act because he has no interest (or no 'interests') in the world he must act in; he has paralysed himself by his own too exclusive dedication to the action of revenge, which leaves him, as it were, with no foothold in the sphere in which the action must take place.²⁹⁰

Turner presents an exemplary common critical focus on action in terms of estimating Hamlet's character with no inclusion of measured consideration or contemplation. For Hamlet, to resolve his apparent delay in action includes the question of resolving the dilemma between the active and the contemplative life with regard to being a prince—between the divine and the useful—and was one of the foremost defining questions of Renaissance (and medieval) thought.²⁹¹ This is not just any question, as Hamlet emphasizes: "that is the question" (3. 1. 55). Metonymically, the thought object of "Noble Prince," is triangulated here with both the "Active" and the "Contemplative." Hamlet, as a prince, is placing himself adjacent to the concepts of acting and not acting. He further elaborates: "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, / Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing, end them" (3. 1. 56–59). His consideration is a philosophical one that takes place "in the mind" and his major concern is one of "Noble Reason" according to the question of "whether 'tis nobler" to live actively or contemplatively, but also with specific regard to being a prince. Triangulation, adjacency, and contextual metonymy are all in play in Hamlet's (Shakespeare's) rhetorical

²⁸⁹ Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Active and Contemplative Life in Renaissance Humanism," 208.

²⁹⁰ Frederick Turner, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 86.

²⁹¹ For further reading on this topic with specific regard to Shakespeare see Cathy Curtis, "The Active and the Contemplative lives in Shakespeare's Plays," in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, ed. David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 44–63. Although, it should be noted, an examination of *Hamlet* is absent from Curtis's analysis.

game, played out in his reasoning as a prince caught between a consideration of the active and the contemplative.

The question of whether to act or not, “to be, or not to be,” includes a consideration of both man’s bestial and celestial nature too—since right action (through wisdom or *sapientia*) should produce the desired result. How to act, or not, was an essential question in the preoccupation of a Renaissance consideration of Man.²⁹² In Hamlet’s own words, such type of question “must give us pause” (3. 1. 67); and someone who did not “pause” to think and ponder these important queries would be likened to an animal, or more precisely a beast. Consideration is not a hindrance to right action but a pre-requisite. Delay in action through careful consideration is an inherent part of true nobility (*vera nobilitas*) and a princely virtue acquired in order to make right choices and rule wisely. In Bodin’s *Oratio*, “from the three virtues together (*prudential, scientia, relegio*) is created true wisdom (*sapientia*), man’s true and final good.”²⁹³ Careful consideration, prudence, and a practical or scientific mind, linked to a sensitivity for the divine are what make up the good. These are elemental to Hamlet’s own quest to define himself as a good prince and as a man adjacent to, or at least who wishes to reach close to, an ideal of “Noble Reason.”

Hamlet’s delay is a recognizable archetype of Humanistic thought that aspires to the good and questions the behavior of men like Claudius or Polonius. These are rulers associated with aristocratic nobility through their positions of power who demonstrate little to no hesitation in their actions; and who on close examination are viewed acting more through base instincts than from noble reason. This is not to deny that the ability to act deliberately and without hesitation does have its benefits with regard to rulership, this is the argument in favor of the active over the contemplative. The philosophical human, or Philosopher King/Queen, is caught between “heaven and earth” and perceives himself between the Fall and a restoration of divinity. Furthermore, the identity of Hamlet is a prince of noble birth and blood makes him subject to both earthly duty and divine guidance. Logically, or at least according to primogeniture, Hamlet would have become king upon his father’s death, but his uncle Claudius has usurped his claim to the throne.²⁹⁴ Hamlet’s mother, Gertrude, further hinders his claim by marrying Claudius; thereby legitimizing the

²⁹² For further examples and reading see James Hankins, “Humanism and the Origins of Modern Political Thought,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 118-141; and Eugene F. Rice, *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 30-57.

²⁹³ “ex his tribus virtutibus inter se conjunctis, conflatur vera sapientia, summum hominis extremumque bonum.” *Methodus*, 114B (trs. p. 15) trans. in Paul Lawrence Rose, *Bodin and the Great God of Nature, The Moral and Religious Universe of a Judaiser* (Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1980), 42.

²⁹⁴ Gaelic lands long operated under a different ‘logic’ (tanistry) while Polish and German kingship was often elective.

latter's rulership. This introduces the question of whether Claudius and Gertrude have a greater right to rule than Hamlet does. This question posed by the play is also a question posed before the judgment of the audience as to what type of rulership is preferable—the active, which can be more adjacent to bestial acts such as murder in order to claim authority, or the contemplative, which can be considered more divine but also less pragmatic and authoritative.

Any rulership based upon the murder of the previous ruler is morally problematic. Governance that includes murder, as in the case of tyrants, or rulership with strong arm (*le bras fort*) policies have historical precedent, but have also been subject to ethical scrutiny. Yet even before Hamlet is informed of his father's murder, he challenges the rulership of Queen Gertrude and King Claudius. In Act I, we understand from Claudius that Hamlet is the “most immediate to our throne” (1. 2. 109), and therefore any question of Claudius's rulership based on legitimacy would place Hamlet in direct line to the throne of Denmark. Coming from a prince, this challenge is direct and not an oblique or theoretical question of religious law and legitimacy. It also makes Hamlet the greatest threat to Claudius' supremacy.

3.5 Hamlet: Suicidal or Noble Duty?

In the context of Hamlet's royal decent and princely duties it is of relevance to see how, early in the play, Laertes, Polonius' son and Ophelia's brother, relays how Hamlet's nobility separates him from other men. He warns Ophelia about falling in love with a man who must put his kingship before himself:

His greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own,
For he himself is subject to his birth.
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself, for on his choice depends
The safety and health of this whole state,
And therefore must his choice be circumscrib'd
Unto the voice and yielding of that body
Wherof he is the head.

(1. 3. 17–24)

“The body” is the body politic of which Hamlet is the expected head. Shakespeare, through Laertes, is reminding us not to forget Hamlet's destiny as the future king and head of state

of which he is meant to serve through birth as the throne's "subject." If he proves a good prince or not, the choices he makes will affect the "the safety and health" of the whole State of Denmark. With respect to this, Hamlet's motivation to avenge the murder of his father includes bearing the weight of rulership, and some of the most prominent soliloquies in the play reflect Hamlet's doubts as to his worth—not his self-worth as a human, i.e., suicidal reflections—but his worth as a future ruler. These soliloquies are replete with crass images that belie his royal status or question the very nature of his nobility:

O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
(2. 1. 129–130)

Now I am alone.
O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
(2. 2. 549–550)

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them.
(3. 1. 55–59)

Traditionally we have interpreted these passages, and others like them, to be reflective of a suicidal nature, an indecisive mind prone to melancholy and not lending itself to action—an indication of madness.²⁹⁵ A. C. Bradley saw in the "To be" speech "a sickness of life, and even a longing for death, so intense that nothing stands between Hamlet and suicide except religious awe."²⁹⁶ Yet taking Hamlet's words literally, many have completely overlooked the irony of a potential king calling himself a "rogue" or a "peasant slave." Indeed, if Hamlet were truly suicidal (and a man of such inaction), he would likely have allowed the order for his execution delivered at the hands of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to be carried out. Instead, Hamlet acts to turn this treachery back upon itself.

Hamlet's desperate political position as a prince marginalized by Claudius' superior authority reduces Hamlet to his "lowly status" and fuels his wish to move beyond his current state (and the current "state" of Denmark in so far as the two are equated). Hamlet has gone from being a prince slated to inherit the throne to being a relatively powerless

²⁹⁵ For a good examination of suicide pertaining to *Hamlet* see Arthur McGee, *The Elizabethan Hamlet* (Avon: The Bath Press, 1987), 75-104.

²⁹⁶ A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1904), 117.

subject under the rule of his father's murderer. Rather than denigrating himself purely on a psychological level, Hamlet is observing how far he has fallen out of his princely position of power and desires to escape from it. If Claudius appears to be extending a kindness to Hamlet in Act 1 when he offers to adopt him as a son, "Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son" (1. 2. 117), one should consider whether his gesture is a political maneuver to bring Hamlet under his control and to establish more clearly the latter's subjection. Thus Hamlet, instead of realizing his own claim to the throne after his father's death, is forced into servitude by Claudius' bloody usurpation. Yet Hamlet maintains his noble purpose not merely to avenge his father's death but to gain royal power despite everything that weighs against him. This is a prince striving to navigate from the bestial to the celestial, and in tripartite matters of the soul he is looking to move from the material solid, "a dew," towards a closer relationship with the divine, "a Deu."

Furthermore, these are not, as some easily forget, the "outward shows" of the man; they are soliloquies that reveal an interior battle fought by one who believes himself to be the rightful heir to the throne of Denmark as he struggles to measure up to what is seen as not just a birthright, but a divine right to rule.²⁹⁷ It is a tremendous destiny to fulfill and Hamlet's self-doubts reflect an understandable fear of being unable to rise to the challenge. In one soliloquy, for instance, Hamlet calls himself "a dull and muddy-mettled rascal" (2. 2. 567). The word "mettle" is a variant of the word "metal," and also means "spirit" and "courage."²⁹⁸ Shakespeare's term "muddy-mettled" is carefully chosen. It first brings to mind traditional methods of testing coinage and the emblematic image of the touchstone: a black flint-like stone used to determine the quality of silver or gold coinage. Secondly this applies to Hamlet's own estimate of his courageousness and strength of spirit.

With a touchstone, the gold or silver coin was first rubbed onto the surface of the smooth stone and the resulting marks were compared with marks produced from alloys of "known composition, in the form of touch-needles."²⁹⁹ While another method of testing

²⁹⁷ The idea of *deus terrenus* can be noted in Seneca, Stobaeus, Suetonius, Plutarch, John of Salisbury, Thomas Aquinas, and Erasmus, as well as sources in Plutarch, Homer, Pliny, Plato, Curtius, and Plautus. See also Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 110.

²⁹⁸ *OED*, vol. IX.

²⁹⁹ Marian Campbell, "Gold, Silver and Precious Stones," in *English Medieval Industries*, ed. John Blair and Nigel Ramsey, (London: The Hambleton Press, 2001), 113. Campbell further notes how, "Archaeological evidence shows the use of touchstones in England from before the Conquest right through the Middle Ages, although records make only passing mention of the method," Campbell, "Gold, Silver and Precious Stones," 113.

metals was through cupellation or fire-assay,³⁰⁰ the image of dullness or “muddy-ness” is suggestive of the more common method of a touchstone and the use of color comparison to spot-check for purity. More to the point in this case is the fact that the image of coin and touchstone was often used to represent the monarchy in the form of a coin with the crowned head being tested on a touchstone by the hand of God: a symbol of the monarchy’s divine right to rule.³⁰¹ Hamlet, by calling himself a “muddy-mettled rascal,” gauges his own noble worth according to a common royal metaphor used during Shakespeare’s day, and the process doubts his current value as a ruler, especially as the word choice also implies “courage” and strength of “spirit.” The term “rascal” adds further irony and points to the precariousness of his royal position. The pressures upon Hamlet to “ring true,” to “prove” his royal bloodline in an almost metallurgical sense, are tremendous.³⁰² The religious considerations in relation to royal rule are implicit. For Nicholas of Cusa, Man was “‘the measure’ because he was the union of the finite and the infinite.”³⁰³ Just as the “finite” coin relates to the “infinite” hand of God that provides a monarch’s right to rule, the common contextual Renaissance obsession with the “measure of Man” heightens the metonymic quality of Hamlet’s concern with his own worth as a ruler.

To continue with this same theme, Hamlet’s “suicidal” thoughts are a product of his extreme sense of duty. They are not the workings of a sick mind, but the predictable and rational expressions of a man who must bear the weight of Denmark’s rotten political corpus upon his shoulders. Hamlet almost seems to prefer the thought of death in the face of his burdens; in his exchange with Polonius in Act 2, he says “You cannot take from me any thing that I will not more willingly part withal – except my life, except my life” (2. 2. 215–217). Yet he chooses, with the prudence and self-sacrifice expected of good kingship, to accept the harsh reality of his domain rather than escape into the unknown.

Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover’d country, from whose bourn

³⁰⁰ See Campbell, “Gold, Silver and Precious Stones,” 111.

³⁰¹ See Henry Green, *Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers* (London: Trubner & Co., 1870), 174-179. Green notes the use of this emblem by François I and François II, the kings of France from 1515 to 1560, and by Henry IV.

³⁰² Consider as well that Shakespeare’s fool in *As You Like It* is appropriately named Touchstone. The role of the fool in Shakespeare’s plays, with *King Lear* a prominent example, is to reveal through the art of punning the true nature of the king.

³⁰³ Agnes Heller, *Renaissance Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 246.

No traveler returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ill we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of?

(1. 1. 75–81)

If one forgets Hamlet's unique destiny, it is easy to infer from these lines that he is suicidal. Harold Bloom explains that "although countless explanations have been given, most readers and critics think that Hamlet is here contemplating suicide."³⁰⁴ While it is true that Hamlet might prefer to act in his own interest and take his life rather than face the horrors and difficulties of his existence, Laertes has pointed out: "For he himself is subject to his birth. / He may not, as unvalued persons do, / Carve for himself" (1. 3. 21–23). Hamlet's royal birth demands he act in the best interest of the kingdom. He may entertain the idea of suicide merely as a deep-felt expression and reflection of just how heavy the "fardels" he must bear really are, but it is not a credible course of action if he is to remain faithful to his royal title.

Donald Kelley notes how historically

the economic, social, and religious concerns of English statesmen and parliaments gave pride of place not to "interest of state" but to the "common wealth" (not unlike the Huguenots of France, who justified their actions in terms not of policy but of public welfare). Elizabethan notions of royal "prerogative," too, were associated with such communal language; and in her golden speech, Queen Elizabeth emphasized not just royal authority but also royal duty, social order, and – with a variety of medical metaphors – the common "health" as well as the common wealth.³⁰⁵

Considering the throne of Denmark in terms of the health of a "body politic," this commonly used early modern metaphor for the state, or the body politic of Denmark, is on closer examination one that is indeed "rotten." Hamlet is asked, or rather ordained by royal birth, to act as its cure:

– heaven hath pleas'd it so
To punish me with this, and this with me,
That I must be their scourge and minister.

(3. 4. 173–175)

³⁰⁴ Harold Bloom, *Bloom's Shakespeare through the Ages: Hamlet* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), 27.

³⁰⁵ Donald R. Kelley, "Elizabethan Political Thought," in *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500-1800*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 74-75.

As for illness and its cure, the medical tradition connects to the literary domain via the genre of satire, since satire may be aimed at addressing and curing societal diseases as well. Such a cure could follow two separate paths: in the first, the Juvenalian, the physician effects his cure through amputation of the offending limb—an *ense rescindendum* or “hacking of the sword.” The second, or Horatian, is a holistic approach, or “pleasant cure,” by which the physician attempts to save the diseased limb. Dryden wrote about these distinctions in his *Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* and in the Preface to *Absalom and Achitophel*, and found inspiration for the phrase *ense rescindendum* from a speech by Jove in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.³⁰⁶ Hamlet has chosen a Juvenalian approach to effect his cure; he tells Gertrude in regard to her sinning heart to “throw away the worser part and live the purer with the other half” (3. 4. 157–58), and with Claudius must his “thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth” (4. 4. 66). The marked choice of satirical style by Shakespeare, here, was a conscious shaping of poetics that pre-dates John Dryden’s renowned distinctions.³⁰⁷ Hamlet is the ‘satirical rogue’, and this is not accidental choice of words or rhetoric. Shakespeare, along with his contemporaries, was doubtless aware of the different modes of satiric style.³⁰⁸ In this way, *Hamlet* is far from a traditional revenge tragedy in which the protagonist acts solely upon his passions, butchering his victims at will. Rather, Hamlet is a hero whose nobility—his ability to rule reasonably and justly—remains intact as he consciously tries to achieve the best cure for Denmark. With

³⁰⁶ John Dryden, *A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire*, as in *The Works of John Dryden*, E. N. Hooker ed. et al., 1-20 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965-1997), vol. 4. Also see Paul Hammond, *Dryden and the Traces of Classical Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 106-107. The most important text on satire from a Renaissance perspective is Isaac Casaubon’s *De Satyrica Graecorum Poesi et Romanorum Satira* (1605). Casaubon had a preference for the style of Persius, but also exerts as noted by Dustin Griggin, a “clear sense of the particular excellence of Horace and Juvenal as well.” See Dustin H. Griffin, *Satire, a Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 12-14.

³⁰⁷ Mark W. G. Stibbe outlines these two distinctions clearly: “The first kind Dryden described as ‘raillery’ or ‘smiling satire’. This is exemplified by the Roman poet Horace, who always meant to make his readers laugh through the sophisticated use of wit. The second kind Dryden described as ‘raillery’ or ‘snarling satire’. This is exemplified by the Roman poet Juvenal, who sought to evoke a sense of moral outrage through the use of ‘saeva indignatio’, savage indignation. This distinction subsequently became very popular.” Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John’s Gospel* (London: Routledge, 1994), 115.

³⁰⁸ These styles were often exaggerated beyond their original sources. English Renaissance satirists, as described by *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Satire*, sought to “legitimate their works by defining them against a hard and fixed Roman past that never really existed, in handy “translations” of Horace and Juvenal that are always more Horatian than Horace, more Juvenalian than Juvenal.” Kirk Freudenburg, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 22.

respect to this, the connection with satire does not diminish his nobility, since it works within the frame of curing a disease. The method is rhetorical, whereby *ars poetica* is the means of bringing virtue to the corrupt.

Satire should be distinguished sharply, here, from its etymological root of the satyr, as the play demonstrates. Hamlet's character is defined by a deep-seated admiration for heroes of the past. His father, for instance, stands as an icon of perfect rulership in comparison with Claudius: "So excellent a king, that was to this Hyperion to a satyr" (1. 2. 138–139). In other words, his father is like Hyperion—a Titan who was the son of Gaia (the earth) and the God of the Sun—while Claudius is like a satyr, a bestial creature with the legs of a goat and associated with lechery. In general, the heroes of antiquity are held up as Hamlet's models throughout the play. In Act 2 he commands the player to tell a story, attributed to Aeneas, about the great figures of the Trojan War. This speech centers on Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles, who markedly shares Hamlet's quest to avenge his father's murder. Then, in Act 5, during the grave scene, Hamlet's meditation on the skull of his father's jester, Yorick, quickly turns to the fates of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, two of the most renowned leaders of antiquity. Alexander stands out not just in Hamlet's mind as the icon of classical rulership, but was also the preferred model for many Elizabethans.³⁰⁹

Hamlet's temperament is feudalistic with a strong emphasis on honor and respect for traditions of the past, but it is also neo-classical as it harkens back to Greek mythology. Claudius distinguishes himself from Hamlet in his drive to eliminate what is past, to try to forget his sins and cover up his wrongdoing, while Hamlet holds on to his ideal of better rulership with strong attachments to historical tradition.³¹⁰ Hyperion represents the ultimate ruler navigating both the celestial and the earthly realms; and Hamlet associates his murdered father with this figure, as he tries to live up to the royal task of serving as an intermediary between heaven and earth. When Hamlet asks Ophelia "What should such fellows as I do, crawling between earth and heaven?" (3. 1. 126–28), this is the complaint not of a commoner, but of a nobleman who believes himself to be divinely motivated,

³⁰⁹ In Act. 4, scene 1 of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is found the spirit of Alexander praised. See Fredson Bowers, *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 201-204.

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³¹⁰ Claudius tries to wash away his sins in prayer in Act 3:

What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow?

(3. 3. 43-46).

secure in his belief in the nobility's right to rule, as well as a duty to bridge the gap between the earthly and the divine, the active and the contemplative.

Hamlet's dilemma, then, is not how to die, but rather how to live as a king:

To be, or not to be, that is the question –
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them.

(3. 1. 55–59)

In the context of what I have been discussing so far, I propose here that these famous words are about kingship, not death. As a prince, Hamlet does indeed face a “sea of troubles.” As king, he would gain the real ability to unleash an army replete with “slings and arrows.” These are not the psychotic meditations of a suicidal and philosophical dreamer imagining himself to be a king, but the pragmatic workings of the mind of a potential ruler. Hamlet's careful deliberation reveals how seriously he takes the fateful role assigned to him by birth. To deny Hamlet his inherent power as a monarch, to reduce him (as so many have done) to a sort of Everyman, is to miss a primary element of noble duty in his character that is essential to understanding these soliloquies, if not the entire play.

Nor is this perspective to deny Hamlet's melancholic temperament, rather to reframe a perception of its function. The Elizabethans saw a person as composed of four elements, Earth, Air, Fire and Water, along with their respective humors, Melancholy, Blood, Choler, and Phlegm.³¹¹ When all four parts were equal that person would be in perfect balance—be it with himself, nature, or even the universe and God.³¹² Excess of one humor could cause great behavioral and physical abnormalities.³¹³ In the case of melancholy, an excess of heat or burning was often given as the cause of madness. Excess melancholy could also be the cause of genius, and it was this genius aspect of melancholy that held an interest for Renaissance philosophers in search of wisdom and truth.

This pre-occupation with melancholy as a possible catalyst for genius was typified by the French thinker Montaigne, who, along with other Renaissance thinkers, based his

³¹¹ Chinese, Indian/Ayurvedic, and other Eastern medicinal practices still find their foundations in such a system. The Elizabethans borrowed many of their ideas from Pythagoras though some may have found inspiration from travelers from the East.

³¹² See Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, 70.

³¹³ See Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Burton's book is considered one of the most extensive treatments on the subject of melancholy of the English Renaissance and focuses primarily on aspects of imbalance and disorder rather than poetic madness.

ideas upon classical precedent.³¹⁴ Socrates and Plato were considered by Elizabethans to be “divini” or madmen enjoying special revelations not accessible to the common man.³¹⁵ In Renaissance times, fear of madness went hand in hand with the hope of genius—specifically a genius that gave access to revelations of truth and wisdom.³¹⁶ Montaigne was especially interested in the faculty of revelation or ecstasy, as drunkenness was often used as an analogous way to describe these states for Montaigne. Drunkenness, more in the Bacchic sense of communing with the gods rather than a state of debauchery, was, for Montaigne, similar to a state of religious ecstasy by bringing us both “audessus de nous” (above ourselves) and “hors de nous” (outside ourselves). These concepts are ones related more to adjacency in terms of local rather than contiguity, with a concern for placement of the self in triangulated relation to being both “outside” and “above.” Montaigne does not divorce himself from classical sources and in writings on drunkenness his ideas of being above and outside of oneself is borrowed directly from the *Timaeus* of Plato.³¹⁷

Thus revelation or insight could only occur in a heightened state and when the subject’s normal intellect was in some way disturbed or obscure. The darkness of sleep would produce dreams just as illness and high fevers could produce similar illusions. The very act of dreaming promised revelation and became one of the primary vehicles by which the melancholic distinguished himself from the purely sensory world. These dreams are not simple excursions into another world, a nether-sphere—rather, they placed the melancholic neither in the realm of a tangible reality nor fully in the realm of the dreamlike. The melancholic was conveniently placed between the two—an active agent striving to bridge the gap between our bestial world and a celestial one. The reward was possible revelation and truth, the risk—madness or even death. All alone with his thoughts and his dreams, the melancholic was easily tempted into madness. The more the melancholic entered into the

³¹⁴ For example, Robert Cottrell points out that in the 1580 edition of Essay I:3 there are no references to classical sources, while the posthumous version of the same essay revealed the great extent to which Montaigne relied upon Cicero, Plato, Aristotle and other classical sources for his work. See Robert D. Cottrell, *Sexuality/Textuality* (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1981), 19.

³¹⁵ In Aristotle, Heracles shows his melancholy by his *ekstasis* (frenzy) towards his children. The melancholics of classical origin are *manikoi* (madmen) or *enthousiastikoi* (men possessed and inspired).

³¹⁶ See M. A. Screech, *Montaigne & Melancholy* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1983), 32-33. For the association between melancholy and genius argued here I am indebted in this section to Screech’s scholarship on the subject.

³¹⁷ Plato likewise “contends that the faculty of prophesying is ‘above ourselves’; that we must be ‘outside ourselves’ when we treat it; our prudence must be darkened by sleep or illness or else snatched out of its place by a heavenly rapture.” It is through examples such as this that we can see the direct development of Neo-Platonic thought and how the classics formed the foundation of Renaissance ideas. See Screech, *Montaigne & Melancholy*, 37.

realm of his dreams, the more he would distinguish himself from the rest of humanity and lose sight of the communal sense of reality. Dreaming is such an integral part of Hamlet's character, and his quest for wisdom, that the worst death for him is the loss of his ability to dream:

to die, to sleep.
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause.

(3. 1. 65–69)

Certainly Hamlet's lines carried with them a tinge of ironic humor as he ponders a death not about heaven or hell, but whether or not he will have the capacity to dream. His dilemma is rooted in Renaissance neo-classical thought, not in our modern sense of Christian doctrine regarding the afterlife. Hamlet's melancholic character is not a direct reflection of a suicidal nature, a type of clinical madness,³¹⁸ but rather metonymically linked to contextualized associations with genius that were highly valued in the Renaissance *episteme*.

Augustine declares truth “is neither mine nor his nor another's, but all of ours.” Thus we must commune in Gods' truth lest by desiring to possess the truth in private we find ourselves deprived of it.³¹⁹ This is a metonymic triangulated perspective between Man, God and truth that incorporates contiguity between all men as well as adjacency by those men who exist closer to the thought object of truth and may, for example, choose to share their knowledge of truth (wisdom) through the poetic arts. A person from this type of Renaissance perspective does not become knowledge, but exists in close proximity to it; or in terms of madness (a consideration that is particularly relevant to my analysis of Ophelia and Hamlet here) the mad are no longer simply defined clinically from a modern classification, they are viewed as being closer (or more adjacent) to insanity than reason.

³¹⁸ W. I. D. Scott, for example, only perfunctorily mentions a Renaissance view on melancholy, and instead defines and focuses his critical analysis of Hamlet's melancholy in modern clinical terms based on the psychiatry of the “Manic-Depressive.” W. I. D. Scott, *Shakespeare's Melancholics* (London: Mills & Boon, Limited, 1962), chapt. 7.

³¹⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 12.25.

3.6 The “dram of eale” Crux

The essential differences between the characters of Claudius and Hamlet helps to clarify the famous “dram of eale” crux.³²⁰ The crux comes at the end of Hamlet’s lengthy speech where he chastises King Claudius as a drunkard. Many scholars believe that the crux is inexplicable, and M. Nosworthy wrote that “the simplest explanation of this crux is that the sentence is unfinished, the implication being that Shakespeare lapsed into incoherence and gave up the struggle.”³²¹ It is worth viewing the crux in context with a consideration that instead of giving up, Shakespeare did something rhetorically artful:

that these men
Carrying I say the stamp of one defect
Being Natures livery, or Fortunes starre,
His vertues els be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergoe,
Shall in the generall censure take corruption
From that particular fault: the dram of eale
Doth all the noble substance of a doubt
To his own scandal.

(1. 4. 33–41)

Traditionally, the word “eale” is considered to be “ale” with a double pun on the word “evil.” This is the way that I also read this word. A “dram” is a very small measure of liquid and highlights the Renaissance theme inherent in Hamlet’s character of the measure of Man. What most troubles critics is the sense of the next line, leaving many critics perplexed. In order to extract a literal meaning from the line, Barbara Everett reads “eale” as an obsolete form of the word “oil” and then changes “of a doubt” to “overcloud” argued as a printer’s error and “confusion in secretary hand.”³²² This dubious transformation of the line

³²⁰ Harold Jenkins calls it “probably the most famous crux in Shakespeare,” while suggesting ‘esill’ meaning ‘vinegar’ for ‘eale’ and reading the line: “the dram of esill / Doth all the noble substance often sour / To his own scandal.” Harold Jenkins, ed., *The Arden Shakespeare Hamlet* (London: Methuen, 1982), 449.

³²¹ J. M. Nosworthy, *Shakespeare’s Occasional Plays: Their Origin and Transmission* (London: E. Arnold, 1965), 141.

³²² Barbara Everett, *Young Hamlet: Essays on Shakespeare’s Tragedies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 139-41. Everett omits from her discussion past considerations of “of a doubt” as “overcloud”; as, for example, found in Horace Howard Furness, ed., *The New Variorum Shakespeare: Hamlet*, vol. 1. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1877), 82.

Everett attributes to a mistake in Shakespeare's hand, or a printer's error, and corrects it herself in order to create a literal meaning so that "Shakespeare's coherence is triumphant and his sentence closes like a lock."³²³ This example of a literal approach facilitated by re-writing Shakespeare does in fact "lock" in a cohesive literal reading of the line, but it also locks out a further consideration of the context in which Hamlet is speaking this line, most importantly an inclusion of the important word "doubt" along with its associated concepts when read metonymically. Everett asserts that the image of oil over clouding makes sense in relation to the "play's night-scenes, its hauntings, and all its panoplies of death."³²⁴ I see her reading as a reflection of a modern tendency to reach toward the literal and then a very general application of the metaphoric/figurative. Everett's literal solution to a prominent crux makes perfect sense in terms of meaning, but how she relates it to the rest of the play is extremely vague in terms of "hauntings" and "panoplies of death." Is the line read as "overcloud" then simply meant to increase—metaphorically through similitude—the play's eerie atmosphere?

A metonymic approach to the line pivots around the central word "substance." In much the same way, the argument of faith during the Renaissance centered round the nature of the "matter" of the Eucharist and the difference between what is "noble," and a lack of faith or "doubt." The emphasis that Hamlet places upon a concern for doubt is important not in terms of meaning as "disbelief," so much as it relates to a concern for the religious and a noble substance" such as the love of God. The double pun of "eale" as evil further highlights this metonymic context. The word "substance" functions both as "noble substance" and "substance of a doubt." The transubstantiation occurs exactly at the pivotal word of most concern—the very "matter" that Hamlet is talking about.³²⁵ The word "substance" rhetorically and poetically functions doubly and can be influence by what comes before it as well as what comes after it. In other words, it is adjacent to and acts in relation to both "noble" and "doubt." The terms "noble," "substance," and "doubt" are triangulated metonymically and function accordingly. The element of faith is necessary to keep the noble substance pure and not to corrupt it with "ale" or "evil." In the context of the entire speech, Claudius is a drunken king "as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down" (1. 3. 10). By inference in Hamlet's lines there is more than just a drop of corruption in Denmark, but it is overflowing with debauchery and perhaps even evil to its core.

³²³ Everett, *Young Hamlet: Essays on Shakespeare's Tragedies*, 142

³²⁴ Everett, *Young Hamlet: Essays on Shakespeare's Tragedies*, 142.

³²⁵ In a similar manner that Hiram Corson argued how in this line, "the ill transubstantiates the noble." Furness, *The New Variorum Shakespeare: Hamlet*, 86. Although this reading is very different from mine since I see the ill preventing any transubstantiation on a spiritual level from happening at all.

Arguably this crux is a very difficult line to understand, but another problem with Everett's reading along with similar attempts at the crux is that it merely paraphrases the lines that come before the crux; and therefore creates redundancy rather than further clarification, or amplification. The crux in question is a bit of a riddle and only able to function because most of the context of the line has been established in the preceding lines about how the smallest taint of sin can lead to a public measure of "censure." This obsession with the measure of Man and public opinion are royal concerns. So too is the religious idea of Man according to the Fall (found too in Foucault's idea of a Renaissance *episteme*), and that while all men have faults, some have more than others. In Eucharistic terms the "noble substance" of the sacrament is corrupted by the slightest amount of "ale" since it is made from wheat, and the sacrament is distinguished according to the wheat of the wafer and the grapes of the wine. Confusion of these elements, or a lack of faith in their essence (the substance of doubt), would lead to a corruption of the substance itself and its nobleness. The exact nature of noble substance (in such terms as divinity, kingship, faith, or goodness) is a defining factor of a Renaissance *episteme* and one of its central themes. "Doubt" is an important word to understanding this crux and critics, like Everett, who try and solve it by removing it take away this line's central expression of meaning.

The word "doubt" in relation to "nobility" of a substance (such as love) is expressed in Hamlet's love letter to Ophelia:

Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move,
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love.

(2. 2. 116–119)

The triple repetition of the word "Doubt" in the first three lines is structurally similar to Hamlet's "words, words, words" (2. 2. 192), which is also a reference to a difference between the material and the immaterial (or spiritual) as previously described. Hamlet's lines make a similar material distinction as is found in the crux between all "substance" as matter and the immaterial. The first two lines address the material realm that can be subject to doubt; the second line an archetypal Renaissance perception of what it means to be human in terms of the concept that outward forms of truth spoken by a character can, when subjected to doubt, reveal an inward liar; and the last line regarding a noble "immaterial" substance such as "love" which in its purity of form, and its relation to God, is beyond real doubt. The "dram of eale" is the material aspect of a person's inability to see clearly, to doubt, which clouds the true, transforming a noble substance into a substance of doubt. A

literal interpretation of the word “doubt” solely based upon “suspect, apprehend; fear”³²⁶ or in a modern sense, is to miss the metonymic potency of a word that had strong resonance in a Renaissance *episteme* in terms of science, philosophy, and theology.³²⁷

The prominent crux can be seen to bring together some of the foremost concerns, or elements, of a Renaissance episteme: the measure of Man, the Fall, a Eucharistic concern of the nobility of substance and matter in terms of materiality and immateriality, and importantly issues between a nobility of faith and doubt. Hamlet brings all of these elements of this prominent crux into the last lines of his speech as the crowning poetics of what are the foremost concerns of a good ruler according to a measure of “Noble Reason.” In other words, the foremost concerns of the Renaissance in terms of Man, matter, and faith are also the foremost concerns of young Hamlet. The general public, from Hamlet’s aristocratic perspective, is not generally expected to, or as nuanced and trained in making, these distinctions. Indeed, if Shakespeare’s play is a mirror, then critical interpretation of this crux has been reflective of a “general censure” that closes out meaning like a “lock” that does not include Hamlet’s princely concerns and makes Denmark a rhetorical “prison.”

I conclude that in the character of Hamlet, we are presented with a potential king who possesses a poetic and perhaps all too idealistic sense of honor. With *Hamlet*, Shakespeare presents us with a tale that pits honor and duty against a corrupt sensibility that would gain power at any price. If we are to judge Hamlet’s character, his own estimation of himself should be placed foremost, and the perspectives of characters like Claudius, Gertrude, and Polonius who stand against him with less weight. In Act 4 Hamlet declares:

Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour’s at the stake.

(4. 4. 53–55)

Hamlet’s words are not mere echoes of a chivalric code of conduct primarily reserved for nobility, they also help define him as a prince who is (according to his own estimation)

³²⁶ See glossary of David Bevington, ed., *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Glenview: Scott Foresman, 1973), 1389.

³²⁷ Robert Bozanich’s examination of Hamlet’s use of the word “doubt” takes a literal, rather than a rhetorical, or figurative, interpretation of the lines. This leads him into a speculation on the veracity of Hamlet’s love for Ophelia and his own “doubt” of believing what Hamlet says. Robert Bozanich, “The Eye of the Beholder: Hamlet to Ophelia, II. ii. 109-124,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Spring, 1980): 90-93.

not overly melancholic, suicidal, or mad. His greatest concern is of nobility, honor, and how that relates to “Noble Reason.”

3.7 Hamlet: Madness or Noble Reason?

Hamlet’s character, being primarily dictated by a host of qualities outlined above under the heading “Noble Reason,” is not a proof of content so much as a proposed context. In other words, this type of dialogue presents a fuller argument for a noble Hamlet, not through positive justification, but through the question of what it means to be a good prince. The issue of Hamlet’s “Noble Reason” is akin to an axiom, or postulate, identifying a certain context by which other parts of the play might further support, or refute, this proposed contextual theory. The rhetorical “game” I have been proposing is one based upon Renaissance metonymic usage and classical guidelines of rhetoric as part of creating argument in *Hamlet* around the signifier/d “Noble Reason.” Cicero was the model in which many Renaissance and Elizabethan texts found structure as well as inspiration and provided a guideline for the rhetorical rules of this type of argument.³²⁸ The intention behind a use of such rhetorical structures was to impart knowledge, the highest form of which was wisdom.

Joel B. Altman’s *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* has provided further inspiration for my approach and describes how “the argument *in ultramque partem* is conducted in a variety of ways: in the traditional manner of explicit mimetic debate; by introducing contrastive rhetorical *imagines* to

³²⁸ These rules are outlined in five distinct categories as outlined here by William B. Hunter according to Cicero’s distinctions: “(1) invention (*inventio*), or the discovery of “arguments” to prove what one had to prove (today we would think of “invention” rather as “use of imagination,” but in the highly oral disputatious climate of antiquity, all statement was more or less presumed to be a statement-against-opposition and thus require “proof”); (2) disposition or arrangement (disposition) sometimes called also “judgment” (*iudicium*) of the material one had discovered, corresponding to what we would today call “composition” of an oration or bit of writing; (3) style (*elocutio*), or the investing of “naked reasons” with variously effective trappings by means of rhythmic pattern, balance, antithesis, metaphor, synecdoche, or other figures or tropes; (4) memory (*memoria*) or mnemonic control of the entire speech (normally never verbatim memorization, but mnemonic arrangement of themes and formulas); and (5) oral delivery proper (*pronunciatio*).” William B. Hunter, *A Milton Encyclopedia Le-N*, vol. 5 (London: Associated University Presses Ltd., 1979), 32.

suggest other levels of meaning; through palimpsestic exposition.”³²⁹ Similarly, Renaissance metonymy works not literally but through a type of “mimetic debate” that considers both the “black and the white” of multiple signifieds; takes place in a cognitive field of “rhetorical imagines to suggest other levels of meaning”; and finally are palimpsestic due to a high level of contextualization. With regard to the metonymy, Hamlet, a good prince, and “Noble Reason” an argument (*inventio*) is established that requires proof that is “conducted” in these various ways.

Any theorem has an antithetical set and the real task is to prove a theorem, not to disprove it. This task of proving a rhetorical postulate is done mainly through *elocutio*, and in this case I postulate that the use of metonymy is Shakespeare preferred method to prove his *inventio*. *Hamlet* as text can be simplified by identifying Shakespeare’s *inventio*—in this case, the proposal of a prince with “Noble Reason,” while *Iudicium* is established between the concept of a prince of “Noble Reason” and its antithesis: a madman (or madwoman in the case of Ophelia). If Shakespeare fails to support this notion of Hamlet or Ophelia’s “Noble Reason,” and at the same time leaves us with madness (feigned or not), his rhetorical logic fails. In other words, to insist on a mad Hamlet (feigned or otherwise) is to prove that Shakespeare’s rhetorical argument, at least as outlined here, fails to stand up to scrutiny. Rhetorical proof of Hamlet and Ophelia’s “Noble Reason” is the “ethical” argument of this play that is potentially available to any reader or audience member familiar with a classical use of the poetic arts to instruct and educate. The question of madness versus noble reason with regard to both Hamlet and Ophelia will be further addressed and answered in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

³²⁹ Joel B. Altman’s, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama*, 319.

4 The Character of Polonius

4.1 Chief Advisor to the State of Denmark

Hamlet's rather cavalier behavior regarding Polonius' death remains one of the mysteries of the text—a rough area that is often smoothed over in scholarship by minimizing Polonius' significance as chief advisor to the State of Denmark.³³⁰ There is a need to contextualize Polonius better with consideration of his position within the court. Just as Hamlet's status as a potential heir to the throne is often downplayed in terms of political relevance, so too is Polonius' character diminished despite his position of great power as chief adviser to the king and queen. Hamlet repeatedly calls Polonius a “fool,” and it has been the pitfall of many dramatic and critical interpretations to take Hamlet's jest far too literally. Willard Farnham notes how “Polonius in his absurdities can sometimes remind us strangely of the stock rustic clown moving and having his say among his betters.”³³¹ Consequently, it has become traditional to brush Polonius aside; to turn him into a sort of buffoon. The consequence of such readings of Polonius is that Hamlet's murder of the old man becomes an insignificant accident, “collateral damage,” and a mere byproduct of Hamlet's revenge on Claudius. Polonius is expendable and not essential to the plot in this model. However, Polonius' death marks the first climax of the play and is central to the tragedy. When Hamlet claims that he can “answer well / The death I gave

³³⁰ Harold Bloom, for example, describes him as, “an old man—active, practical, sensible, but at the same time narrow-minded and garrulous. He is an excellent chamberlain and an exemplary father.” Bloom, ed., *Bloom's Shakespeare Through the Ages: Hamlet*, 166.

³³¹ Willard Farnham, *The Shakespearean Grotesque: Its Genesis and Transformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 114.

him” (3. 4. 176–77), and in essence justify Polonius’ killing, his words may have some truth to them.

Several scholars have seen Polonius as a subtle portrayal of William Cecil, Lord Burghley (1520–1598), the chief adviser to Queen Elizabeth for most all of her reign.³³² It is not within the scope of this chapter to confirm or deny this; yet it is worth noting that—though sometimes the object of parody during his life—Burghley’s power at court was tremendous, and his words held a weight and power in the court and over the people that could lead to banishment, prison, or death. The fictional Polonius holds a comparable position at the Danish court. The allegation of the prince’s madness coming from the chief adviser to the monarch is, as we have seen, a potent weapon against Hamlet. The prince takes a grave risk in mocking Polonius, and Hamlet’s advice to the Player “mock him not” (2. 2. 545–546) cautions others who lack royal authority against similar actions. Hamlet can risk calling Polonius a “fool” and an “ass” precisely because of his royal position. With the ass, we may enter the realm of metonymy, as the following picture demonstrates.



William Cecil, Lord Burghley riding a donkey.
(Hatfield House, England)

In Act 2 Hamlet derides Polonius with the words “Then came each actor on his ass” (*Hamlet*, 2. 2. 395). In Hatfield House there is a painting of William Cecil riding on a donkey. Riding on a donkey, or an ass, he could also metonymically be indicated as an “ass.” Hamlet’s use of the term “actor” to refer to Polonius can also be seen as a rhetorically adequate metaphorical reference to Cecil or Polonius who both operate rhetorically and diplomatically by hiding or masking true intentions whereby some amount of acting is involved. Seen both in the light of the text and of the context of Cecil’s political maneuvering, the character of Polonius holds much political power behind a façade of

³³² See A. L. Rowse, *Shakespeare the Man*, 185-186.

courtly mannerisms. The scenes between Polonius and Hamlet are far less like lighthearted wordplay, and more like battles between two agile warriors. These are both powerful men in very powerful positions, who are able to use their words to command and earn respect.

Shakespeare may be taking his cue in this instance less from the Italian *Commedia dell'arte* tradition (so evident in some of his other plays) than from the ancient tradition of “flyting”: that is, a battle of words commonly found in Old-English texts (many of them inspired by Norse sagas and Icelandic prose narratives such as *Beowulf*).

The flyting, like its near relative the wisdom dialogue, is conceived as a *certamen vocis* [oral contest], with its own rules and its own winners and losers. The equation between physical and verbal combat, with language equivalent to ammunition, is the working metaphor of the flyting.³³³

Shakespeare may have been aware of a link between his textual use of flyting in the verbal sparring between Polonius and Hamlet in Denmark’s court and these Norse legends. As a stylistic technique, flyting remained known through the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and was especially prevalent in Ireland and Scotland; but the type of non-physical combat that Hamlet and Polonius engage in is more reflective of a Norse verbal tradition—akin to war—than just pure verbal abuse.³³⁴ Mentioning this tradition is not coincidental here; many scholars recognize the original source for *Hamlet* already to be found in Norse legend.³³⁵ The associations the flyting had as a rhetorical method to convey wisdom furthers the premise of this dissertation for Shakespeare’s use of language to convey specific meaning.

Although only one copy of *Beowulf* existed during Shakespeare’s day (in the form of a manuscript of the epic English poem dating back to c. 1000), there are strong enough parallels to it in the text of *Hamlet* to suggest a possible influence. Laurence Nowell (1520–1576) compiled the first Anglo-Saxon dictionary and was the earliest known owner of what

³³³ Paul Acker and Carlyne Larrington, eds., *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 99.

³³⁴ Shakespeare’s style here is not out of keeping with *oroum bregoask* (battle with words), *onbindan beadurune* (unleash war-words), and *sakask saryroom* (fight with wound-words). See Paul Acker and Carlyne Larrington, eds., *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, 99.

³³⁵ Part of the origins for the story of *Hamlet* is found in Norse legend. The character of Amlothi, found in the third book of the *Historia Danica* of Saxo Grammaticus (c. 1200; printed in 1514) is similar to Shakespeare’s play. For a detailed summary, see introduction to *Hamlet* in *The Riverside Shakespeare: Hamlet*, 1136.

is now known as the Nowell Codex of *Beowulf*.³³⁶ Shakespeare may have had either accessed this copy of *Beowulf* himself or was influenced in part by someone who was familiar with it, perchance even by Laurence Nowell himself. Nowell's patron was Sir William Cecil, who commissioned Nowell to be a tutor for his son Thomas in 1562. Shortly thereafter, he was formally made tutor for Cecil's ward, Edward de Vere, in 1563, and William Lambarde, the future keeper of the Records of the Tower of London, was also a pupil of Nowell's while he resided at William Cecil's house.³³⁷ In other words, there were scholars, contemporaries of Shakespeare, who both had access to the Nowell Codex and were prominent in the public eye. This is to say, the texts, *Beowulf* and *Hamlet*, may border on one another. The presence of the former and its influences may be enough evidence to consider a contextual consideration as a reality for Shakespeare and some of his contemporaries. To the extent that some sort of connection does exist between the two texts, *Beowulf* and *Hamlet*, it would put Polonius in the interesting position of the Unfirth character: the ambiguously evil and contentious counselor to the king who tries to damage *Beowulf*'s reputation (just as Polonius tries to do to Hamlet through the accusation of "madness"). Unfirth is referred to as a *pyle*, meaning a rhetorician who is the king's right-hand man or adviser. Whatever Shakespeare's intentions may have been, Polonius certainly exhibits strong similarities to both the real William Cecil and the fictional Unfirth.

Whether or not my assessment is historically accurate in this respect, these well-known role models serve, at least, the purpose of better defining Polonius' powerful character and drawing focus away from traditional representations of the old man as an insignificant fool. Instead, this approach shifts perspective away from both Polonius as a fool and these interchanges as light-hearted punning and banter to serious word battles fought by two extremely serious and potent opponents. It is important to note that many of the misperceptions of Hamlet's mental state arise not from his own statements, but from critical acceptance of the accuracy of the perceptions of a character like Polonius that surround him. In other words, he is "fashioned" by other characters in the play and not just readers of the text. It is from characters like Polonius and Claudius that most of the ambiguities about Hamlet's character arise. In Act 3, Hamlet complains to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

³³⁶ See Kevin S. Kierman, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 120.

³³⁷ Given Nowell's significant position as teacher, the *Beowulf* manuscript may have been a part of his teaching and his pupils influenced by it. See Raymond J. S. Grant, *Laurence Nowell, William Lambarde, and the Laws of the Anglo-Saxons* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996), 196.

You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery ... Call me what instrument you will, though you fret me, yet you cannot play upon me.

(3. 2. 364–372)

In Hamlet's own words, his madness stems from the accusations of those who will "play upon" him. In this regard, it is Polonius who would most "seem to know" Hamlet's "stops," and this chapter focuses on Polonius' character in this context. Polonius and Hamlet act in relative relation to one another that contributes to defining their characters. In other words, an examination of Polonius' character helps define Hamlet's character and vice versa, and each character is further defined according to the relationship with one another. It follows that Polonius' use of language and rhetoric is dramatically different from Hamlet's.

In the following passage, Ophelia recounts Hamlet's strange behavior when he comes into her closet. Polonius is quick to provide an explanation based upon his own prejudiced view of Hamlet:

Ophelia: My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac'd,

.....
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors – he comes before me.

Polonius: Mad for thy love?

Ophelia: My lord, I do not know,
But truly I do fear it.

(2. 1. 74–82)

Hamlet's behavior thus described is indeed out of the ordinary, but notably, it is Polonius who first introduces the notion of Hamlet's madness in the play, and then brings his discovery to the king and queen.

However, is Polonius a man to be taken at his word? In considering Hamlet's character, is he a man governed by an honest nature and a propensity to tell the truth? Granted, Polonius advises his son, Laertes, not to be false:

This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

(1. 3. 78–80)

But this piece of seemingly truthful advice is just one among a long list of stock phrases Polonius presents to his son. These phrases are often contradictory or so vague that they have little substance even though they are presented as hard facts.³³⁸ Polonius' advice to his son Laertes continues in a similar manner:

Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportion'd thought his act.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not express'd in fancy rich, not gaudy,
For the apparel oft proclaims the man.

(1. 3. 59–72)

The ideas in Polonius' speech follow so closely upon one another that they ultimately lose any originally intended force—they become ornamental rather than substantive. Taken as a whole, they reflect a distinct philosophical materialism that valued the appropriation of apparent wisdom and truths as an ornamentation of character rather than a true expression of self-worth. This is artifice, it is wisdom valued according to quantity rather than quality. Polonius is reciting the sort of prudential maxims that the early modern world delighted in and were an elemental part of courtly life. Here, though, they resound as borrowed phrases lacking the type of original thought we find in, say, Hamlet's character. Polonius' words are the type found from stock phrases that connect to a century-old Elizabethan culture of commonplace books.³³⁹ Polonius' speech is the Elizabethan equivalent of political sound-bites, meaningless stock phrases meant to confound rather than illuminate, or more so, to gain approval and dominate political discourse. Shakespeare too may have been parodying some of the political figures of his day that found it fashionable to offer advice to their sons in this formal and didactic manner. Linguistically, this metonymic perspective, far more than a literal approach, allows one to make a

³³⁸ Polonius' absolutist principles reflected in the play are similar in form to the rather extreme neo-Calvinist idea of 'right' or 'wrong'; or that whole persons are born *in toto* and that a whole 'right' person doesn't stop being 'right' simply because he *behaves* badly, nor does a 'wrong' person change for the better by doing good works. This idea is closely related to more modern concepts of predestinarianism and supralapsarianism whereby moral agency is downplayed as a governing force. Such ideas would be antithetical to those argued in this dissertation as presented by Hamlet. See Micheal B. Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 21.

³³⁹ For more on the subject of commonplace books see especially Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Ann Moss, *Renaissance Truth and the Latin Language Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

consideration between words and the thoughts behind them, between what someone says and what they actually mean. This concept is reflected in a Renaissance *episteme* preoccupation with the comparison between the external and the internal aspects of Man.

Polonius has already been contextualized to the historical figure of Lord Burghley, and Joseph Hunter observed how

Polonius is the dull prosing politician of the time. There is probably much personal satire in the character. It was the practice of those politicians to deliver maxims to their children to be their guide in life. Thus Lord Burghley left ten admirable precepts of worldly prudence to his son Robert, afterwards Earl of Salisbury, which may be read in the *Desiderata Curiosa*; and in *The Harleian Miscellany* is a letter from Sir Henry Sydney to Philip his son, containing divers lessons of prudence delivered in a didactic form.³⁴⁰

There are further historical examples during Shakespeare's time of this type of practice. Polonius' advice to his son also mirrors the instructions given by Henry Percy, the 9th Earl of Northumberland to his son, Algernon Percy, which he wrote while confined to the Tower,³⁴¹ as well as some of the messages in King James' *Basilikon Doron* (1599), which were written for his eldest son Henry.³⁴² James' book was a "text-book of political ethics and a statement of personal aims"³⁴³ that the king did not (or could not) live up to. It is one thing to quote a virtue and quite another thing to live by it. Shakespeare may well have been expressing a personal disdain for the use of pithy truisms and borrowed maxims by those in court circles who did not abide by them. He may also be distinguishing the type of men who rely on outward shows of virtue from those men who live these truths. This is the polar opposite of the formulation of stock characters (symbolic), and Shakespeare is working with a complexity and a richness that invites a depth of inquiry (metonymic) into individual characters exhibited both externally and internally.

In this context, the irony of Polonius' phrases is particularly apparent: "to thine own self be true" may suggest a man who acts only in his own interests. Giving thoughts "no tongue" belies Polonius' own extreme verbosity; if "the apparel oft proclaims the man" we might also say of Polonius that he is one to "judge a book by its cover" and is more

³⁴⁰ Joseph Hunter, *New Illustrations of the Life, Studies, and Writings of Shakespeare*, vol. 2 (London: J. B. Nichold and Son, 1845), 219.

³⁴¹ Haywood Markland, "Instructions by Henry Percy touching the Management of his Estate," *Archaeologia* 27 (1838): 306-358.

³⁴² Julius Walter Lever argued (along the lines of Chalmers and Albrecht) that James' *Basilikon Doron* was a direct source for *Measure for Measure*. See J. W. Lever, ed., *Measure for Measure*, Arden edition of William Shakespeare (New York: Methuen & Co., 1985), xlviii.

³⁴³ Lever, ed., *Measure for Measure*, xlviii.

interested in appearance than in substance. His advice, “Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, / grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel” (1. 3. 62–63), is echoed by Macbeth:

And I will put that business in your bosoms
Whose execution takes your enemy off,
Grapples you to the heart and love of us
(Macbeth, 3. 1. 103–105)

Macbeth is here befriending the two “Murderers” (as they are named in the text) and their adoption is tried through the killing of Macbeth’s enemies, which will in turn grapple them to his heart and apparently win his love. The similarity in the lines begs a comparison between the two characters, and what type of tests Polonius might demand in the adoption of his own friends.

To put this briefly, Polonius on closer examination is far more of a hypocrite than a bearer of “admirable advice” to his son Laertes.³⁴⁴ Nor is his tendency for deception and falsehood something he himself is blind to. For instance, in the above-mentioned scene with Laertes, Polonius offers his son some “good” farewell advice before he departs for France. Two scenes later, Polonius orders his servant, Reynaldo, not only to spy on his son, but to slander his character with lies and false accusations: “put on him / What forgeries you please” (2. 1. 19).

Polonius reveals more of his corrupt nature in the scene that follows:

See you now,
Your bait of falsehood take this carp of truth,
And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,
With windlasses and with essays of bias,
By indirections find directions out
(2. 1. 59–63)

The passage is of importance to what follows, since it explicitly indicates how indirections can be used to find directions. Yet, this logic can also be followed the other way around, in that directions are hidden by explicitly forged indirections. Polonius’ own estimate of himself is as a man of both “wisdom and of reach.” There is little question, as chief advisor to the king and queen that he is a man of reach and influence; but his definition of what constitutes wisdom differs from that of Hamlet—his estimate of wisdom is based upon

³⁴⁴ For critical examples that support Polonius as “admirable” see William Glasser, *The Art of Literary Thieving: The Cather in the Rye, Moby-Dick, and Hamlet* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2009), 150; and Fred B. Tromly, *Fathers and Sons in Shakespeare* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 156-58.

“falsehood” and how clever he can be in distorting truth. It is at least possible that Polonius is using such a method of forgery and falsehood when he warns Ophelia of Hamlet:

Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers,
Not of that dye which their investments show,
But mere implorators of unholy suite,
Breathing like sanctified and pious bonds,
The better to beguile.

(1. 3. 127–131)

Polonius’ description of Hamlet’s character better fits his own. He is trying to slander Hamlet in much the same manner that he is bent on slandering his own son. It is Polonius, not Laertes or Hamlet, who utilizes deceptions in order to “beguile” others. Ultimately, it is Polonius’ proclivity for deceptions that brings about his death as he tries to hide himself behind an arras (a hanging tapestry) to spy on Hamlet. The ekphratic use of a tapestry to hide behind reinforces the invitation to look at what is behind an image, and not just taking an object of art, or the pictorial, at its most symbolic or face value.

Polonius’ language is also replete with monetary terms, and his use of “investment,” “brokers,” and “bonds” all equate his character with Elizabethan mercantile culture. It is probably no accident that Polonius’ character is linked to mercantile ethics based upon personal gain, while Hamlet’s character is aligned more with principles emphasizing honor, political continuity, and justice.³⁴⁵

When Polonius offers the advice to Laertes, “Neither a borrower nor a lender be” (1. 3. 75), the focus is upon monetary interest. Polonius further advises his son, “For loan oft loses both itself and friend, / And borrowing dulleth th’ edge of husbandry” (1. 3. 76–77). Polonius suggests that you cannot trust friends to pay you back to whom you are presumably lending at no interest rate. In *Deuteronomy*, this concept of loan at interest only for strangers and not one’s friend or brother is laid out clearly:

Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother, usury of money, usury of victuals,
usury of any thing that is lent upon usury. Unto a stranger thou mayest lend under
usury: but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend unto usury.

(*Deut.* 23:19)³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ See Curtis Brown Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); and Arthur Ferguson, *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England* (Washington: Associated University Press for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1986).

³⁴⁶ This law is traceable to the Mosaic Law and is also found in the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (c.1790 B.C.): Article 71. Hammurabi reigned in Babylon from 1792-1750 B.C. The Code of Hammurabi was

In accordance with this friend-stranger/enemy distinction, in *The Merchant of Venice* we find that Antonio says he enters the agreement with Shylock not as a friend, “for when did friendship take / A breed for barren metal of his friend?” (1.3.133–134). In this context, Hamlet calling Polonius a “friend” has overtones that are less than friendly. Polonius also mentions the topic of “husbandry,” which has metonymic value within a Renaissance *episteme*. Husbandry was a practice of not paying servants in money for their services but in forms such as food and shelter.³⁴⁷ Thus borrowing money would dull this practice by giving servants a way to argue that their employers could have access to ready cash to pay them. Not paying servants in money was a way to keep them bound to service by leaving them with no money to venture out on their own.³⁴⁸ Husbandry was an arguably effective form of bondage during Shakespeare’s time of which Polonius is no doubt in favor of at least with regard to keeping people within domestic control.³⁴⁹ The fact that Polonius is in favor of this controversial practice says much about his character, and is an important contextual aspect of the text that has been glossed over in past readings.

engraved on a black stele that now resides in the Louvre and was one of the earliest “coherent system of laws defining the different forms of credit, interest rates, its legal basis, modes of repayment, guarantees and recovery.” See Rosa-Maria Gelpi and Francois Julien-Labruyere, *The History of Consumer Credit: Doctrines and Practices* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 2000), 3-4.

³⁴⁷ For more on husbandry see Mark Thornton Burnett, *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997); and Ann Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

³⁴⁸ This may have been partially a good thing since vagrancy among young men was already a problem in England, yet a disdain of such servitude and practices may have contributed to this Early Modern phenomenon. See A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985).

³⁴⁹ The early part of the seventeenth century was a notable time for the institution of domestic service in England. According to Michelle Dowd, “[a]bout sixty percent of those aged fifteen to twenty-four were servants living in the households of families other than their birth families, and young women were more often employed in service than in any other occupation.” Michelle M. Dowd, “Desiring Subjects: Staging the Female Servant in Early Modern Tragedy,” in *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Michelle M. Dowd and Natasha Korda (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), 132. For further reading see Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 32-33.

4.2 Polonius and Madness

If we accept Polonius as someone who is out to discredit Hamlet, his attempts to undo the prince by calling him a liar are minor in comparison to the accusation of madness. It is this madness that is a danger to all parties concerned, whether they relate to a new mercantile ethics of gains and losses, or to a more feudal one of honor and stability. With regard to madness, Polonius is not so much trying to slander and weaken an opponent, but to remove him politically. By calling Hamlet mad, Polonius cuts to the root of Hamlet's right to rule and command.

Mentioning the word "madness" in association with kingship is akin to lighting a match under a barrel of gunpowder. Madness in a successor to the throne would no doubt be an impairment feared above any physical ailment since the country relies upon the judgments of its king. The cases of George III, Ludwig II of Bavaria, Carlos II of Spain, Bernadette of Sweden, and Charles VI of France are just a few of the more prominent examples of the disastrous effects of mental incapacity upon systems of rule based on strict primogeniture. In one way or another, most were eventually removed from power by their own courts, or in the case of Charles VI passed his mental illness onto his grandson Henry VI, whose inability to properly rule was a contributing factor in the start of the Wars of the Roses.³⁵⁰ England, by the time of Elizabeth I, was well aware of the disastrous effects a weak and ineffectual ruler could have on an entire country.

The gravity of the accusation of madness is double-edged, however. If Polonius' assessment of Hamlet's condition is unfounded, his insistence on the madness of young Hamlet could be tantamount to treason.³⁵¹ Could Polonius be right in his diagnosis of a mad

³⁵⁰ In August of 1453 Henry went mad. Henry, according to this history noted by Peter Saccio, "fell into a speechless and motionless stupor, unable to recognize or respond to anything. The lords closest to him could not long disguise his incapacity. Although it is not certain how much ruling Henry ever did, it was necessary at least that he appear to rule." Peter Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings, History, Chronicle, and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 130-131. A parallel can be found in Polonius' diagnosis of Hamlet: "Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness, / Thence to a lightness, and by this declension / Into the madness wherein now he raves" (2. 2. 147-149).

³⁵¹ John Ballamy notes that there were over sixty-eight treason statutes enacted between 1485 and 1603. John Ballamy, *The Tudor Law of Treason: An Introduction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 12. In Elizabeth's reign a total of ten acts were passed. Significantly, Elizabeth expanded on Henry VIII's 1534 act that included words as treasonous acts. This was a marked difference from Mary's rule, which had acted to wipe out the statutes that designated words as potentially treasonous. See Christopher Ocker et al., eds., *Politics and Reformations: Communities, Polities, Nations, and Empires* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 385.

Hamlet? Or is Hamlet's diagnosis of his own behavior the more accurate of the two? After confronting his father's ghost, Hamlet forewarns Horatio and Marcellus that he may act out of the ordinary:

How strange or odd some'er I bear myself-
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on-
(1. 5. 170–173)

But Hamlet is not issuing a sentiment of madness; he appears mentally competent, and aware that those lacking the knowledge of his father's murder might think his actions to be strange. The term "antic" is distinct from our modern word "antique," but is related and is directly associated with the ancients—and not to be taken simply as an aspect of melancholia or madness.³⁵² An "antic" disposition was one that is directly equated with a classical approach (rather than a modern referent to psychological pathology). Horatio at the end of the play echoes Hamlet's conceit when he says that he is "more an antique Roman than a Dane" (5. 2. 341). Hamlet is well aware of how "strange" his behavior may seem just as the grotesque and fantastical forms of the ancients also appeared bizarre and strange when first observed without understanding the method behind such apparent madness.³⁵³ Again, it is Polonius and other characters in the play, not Hamlet, who present us with a mad prince.

Returning to the scene in which Ophelia first notes Hamlet's odd behavior, Polonius is quick to move from a conjectural mode to the certainty of his accusation:

Polonius: What, have you given him any words of late?
Ophelia: No, my good lord, but as you did command
I did repel his letters, and denied
His access to me.
Polonius: That hath made him mad.
(1. 1. 104–108)

The passage well illuminates Polonius as a brilliant schemer and tactician. He has first ordered Ophelia not to respond to any of Hamlet's attempts to be in touch with her, in order to have a motivation for his accusation of madness. Immediately thereafter, Polonius presents Hamlet's madness to the king and queen not as a theory but as fact:

Polonius: I will be brief. Your noble son is mad:

³⁵² *OED*, vol. I.

³⁵³ *OED*, vol I, cites Serlio *Architettura* (Venice, 1551) iv. Lf. 70a, "seguire le uestigie de gli *antiqui* Romani, li quail costumarono di far . . . diuerse bizzarrie, che si dicono *grottesche*."

Mad I call it, for to define true madness,
What is't but to be nothing else but mad?

(2. 2. 92–94)

Polonius' lines as a type of reductive fallacy sound almost comic, but this does not diminish their seriousness. The accusation of madness is an effective rhetorical weapon because it is so difficult to refute; any words or actions by the accused become suspect. To proceed, however, from the assumption that Hamlet's words and actions *are* a reflection of madness throughout much of the play, is to acquiesce in Polonius' circular argument that madness is as madness does; or that the fundamental difference between sanity and insanity is the presence or absence of an accusation.

Polonius, whose honesty we are given ample reason to doubt, may in fact be falsely presenting himself to the queen as the representative of truth:

Madam, I swear I use no art at all.
That he's mad, 'tis true, 'tis true, 'tis pity,
And pity 'tis 'tis true.

(2. 2. 96–98)

Shakespeare's dark humor is illustrated in Polonius' syllogistic and assonant insistence upon the truth of his own falsehood. He uses a perverse chiasmic, or parallel rhetorical structure whereby truth becomes "pity" and "pity" makes it necessarily "true."³⁵⁴ So, one had better close read the text for what is in and between the lines. When Polonius continues to discuss Hamlet's madness as if he is an expert on it, telling the king and queen that Hamlet

Fell into a sadness, then into a fast,
Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness,
Thence to a lightness, and by this declension,
Into the madness wherein now he raves

(2. 2. 147–150)

³⁵⁴ The word "syllogism," from the Greek συλλογισμός, means a "conclusion," or "inference." It can be traced to Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*, which offered that "a deduction is a discourse in which, certain things being stated, something other than what is stated follows of necessity from their being so." Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* 24b19-20, as in *Handbook of the History of Logic*, trans. Dov M. Gabbay and John Woods (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2008), 469. Neo-Platonism departed from the Aristotelian based syllogisms used to promote falsehoods divorced from any moral or ethical truths. It is precisely this type of dialectical reasoning reflected in Polonius' logic that Neo-Platonic thinkers, Humanists, and other philosophers of Shakespeare's time found corrupt.

There is a linguistic pun here that comes from the fact that English depends much upon word order for its declensions (and thus meaning to exist). Unlike many other European languages that have more inflections to indicate number, case, or gender, English is greatly simplified in this regard. Polonius relies on a logical progression to make his declension from “sadness” to “madness” make sense. The joke is that there is a false logic here, and Polonius’ declension can be seen itself as a declension into madness since sadness does not by order necessitate raving madness. Polonius’ logic is Aristotelian in nature and one that relies upon specific points of reference to mark change and as exhibits of proof that infer a logical progression from one state to the next. In Polonius’ own words and logic, “it must follow, as the night the day”. But just because the night follows the day does not make it equally true, as Polonius argues, that if one is true to oneself that “Thou canst not then be false to any man.” The two are not equated.

Polonius sketches a process here that substantiates his accusation of Hamlet as mad, that, apparently, was not produced overnight. It is almost as if he had been studying Hamlet as his doctor. He further suggests that his daughter is the cause of Hamlet’s madness; with the love letters Hamlet gave to Ophelia providing the tangible evidence so crucial to Polonius’ case. This allows Polonius to make his next move: offering to “loose” Ophelia on Hamlet in order to prove his idea of Hamlet’s madness to the king (2. 2. 162). “Loose” is a term better fit for a prostitute, or a dog, than a daughter, and it is revelatory of the pawn-like treatment Polonius accords Ophelia in his chess-like endgame. Polonius’ use of rhetoric differs dramatically from Hamlet’s and substantially defines his character.

The resulting “nunnery” scene, however, in which Hamlet tells Ophelia to retire to a nunnery in order to escape the sins of the court (while Polonius and the king hide behind a curtain), fails to convince Claudius that Hamlet is mad for Ophelia’s love, or even mad at all for that matter.

Love? his affections do not that way tend,
Nor what he spake, though it lack’d form a little,
Was not like madness.

(1. 1. 162–164)

Rather than showing the king an infirm Hamlet, this scene convinces Claudius that Hamlet is a prince in command of some reason, and by consequence he may represent a real threat to his throne. As a result, the king makes arrangements for Hamlet’s rapid departure to England and his execution upon arrival there. Critics who have posited a mad Hamlet probably find themselves in difficulty at this point in the play, and even Polonius welcomes King Claudius’ decision to send a now “sane” but doomed Hamlet packing:

It shall do well; but yet I do believe
The origin and commencement of his grief

Sprung from neglected love.

(3. 1. 176–178)

“Madness” has reverted back to the “grief” and “neglected love” he first noted as the root cause of Hamlet’s melancholy. Realizing he may be viewed as acting out of bounds or even treasonously, Polonius quickly defuses, or retreats, from his terminology of madness. Grief is synonymous with sadness, the original precept Polonius based his argument of Hamlet’s madness upon. As chief adviser, Polonius is a man whose power rests in his words, and his changed word choice here is extremely significant. He reiterates the same change of position when he adds: “Let the queen his mother all alone entreat him / To show his grief” (3. 1. 182). He has subtly but completely withdrawn from the frontal attack he had previously made upon Hamlet’s ability to rule himself. If Polonius’ intention, in declaring Hamlet to be mad, had been to deprive Hamlet of power, it is superseded by Claudius’ plan to send Hamlet to his death in England, an equally effective means of disposing of the young prince.

As for Polonius, his scheming does not appear to stop at court. He spreads the idea of Hamlet’s “madness” out to the general populace. When Hamlet returns from England, he is surprised to learn from the gravedigger that the people think Hamlet was sent to England “because he was mad” (5.1.127). This means that Hamlet, once “beloved” by the people, is politically damaged by Polonius’ accusation not just in court, but also in relation to his possible subjects, who would also question his ability to rule both himself and the kingdom. Polonius’ accusation of madness is a truly insidious mistruth that has potentially powerful and long-lasting repercussions.

When, by a twist of fate, Hamlet is able to change his death warrant to read “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern” and thus return to Denmark alive, the accusation of madness is taken up again; not this time by Polonius, but by the king and queen. Claudius now resorts to Polonius’ deceitful tactics in order to keep Laertes, who is torn between believing Hamlet and the corrupt court aligned against Hamlet. “Oh, he is mad, Laertes” (5. 1. 174) insists the king. No matter how strongly Hamlet expresses the truth, here in the form of his love for Ophelia, it is quickly distorted into madness (this time by the queen):

Hamlet: ‘Swounds, show me what whou’t do.

Woo’t weep, woo’t fight, woo’t fast, woo’t tear thy-self?

.....

Be buried quick with her, and so will I.

And if tho prate of mountains, let them throw

Millions of acres on us, till our ground,

Singeing his pate against the burning zone,

Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, and thou’lt mouth

I’ll tant as well as thou.

Queen: This is mere madness.

(5. 1. 276-287)

Clearly, Hamlet's language is exalted, here. Yet, the image of Hamlet's grave expanding to accommodate "Millions of acres" lends credence, metonymically, to him as a potential ruler over the land; it is not merely a metaphor. Hamlet, as part of the nobility, is representative of an entire country for which he is ready to be buried by—not as a token for his love—but as part of his readiness to die in service. His sentiment to "Make Ossa like a wart!" reflects his noble values inspired by classical models. In Greek mythology, the Aloadaes attempted to pile Mount Pelion on top of Mount Ossa in order to reach Olympus. In response, the queen's qualification of "mere madness" is as much understandable as it may be false. One accused of madness will almost find no way of defending himself and will not be seen fit to rule. The queen too, may not share Hamlet's readiness to die in service of her country, or such noble values inspired by classical models.

5 The Character of Gertrude

5.1 Gertrude as Monarch

A Renaissance metonymic approach potentially alters the way we view Shakespeare's political characters (and their relatedness) and invites us to re-appraise and re-evaluate the scale and substance by which we view them. This type of re-evaluation is done in this dissertation for the prominent characters in *Hamlet*, but nowhere does this shift become more significant than for the female protagonists. Feminist approaches have noted a marginalization of female characters both within the format of Shakespeare's poems and dramas,³⁵⁵ and by critics (mostly men) who write about these works. In point of fact, this marginalization is almost universally accepted, and often attributed to be a product of Elizabethan view toward women in general.³⁵⁶ In Shakespeare's plays the female characters are often viewed as secondary, and their royal status overlooked. This examination will further attempt to envision Shakespeare's female characters (Gertrude and Ophelia) as primary to Shakespeare's drama, and establish the very fact of their being feminine as positively significant. This represents a shift from viewing female characters from subordinate to independent and positively inscribed in their own right.

In an examination of Hamlet's character, Hamlet's mother and father are primary forces that help shape his being and cannot be ignored; but they are not simply his parents, either in a biological or a Freudian sense. The nobility of these two characters is a defining

³⁵⁵ See for example Katherine Duncan-Jones, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London: Arden, 1997); and multiple examples in Callaghan, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*.

³⁵⁶ The Elizabethan writer Sir Thomas Smith in his *De Republica Anglorum* said of women that, "nature hath made to keep home and to nourish their family and children, and not to meddle with matters abroad, nor to bear office in a city or commonwealth no more than children or infants." As cited in Jeffrey L. Singman, *Daily Life in Elizabethan England* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 18.

characteristic. Hamlet's own "body politic" is sharply defined by the fact that he is the son to a king and a queen. Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, is the Queen of Denmark—a position that begs comparison with Elizabeth I, who ruled England for much of Shakespeare's time (and also brings to mind Mary Tudor, Mary Stuart, or Anna of Denmark—all of whom ruled and had husbands even though Elizabeth herself remained unmarried). Just as there is a scholarly tendency to overlook or downplay Hamlet's royal position, Gertrude's power as monarch, even if some consider her merely a royal consort, is something that should not be ignored. Nor should we assume that that she is any less Machiavellian, bloody, or culpable than Claudius, be it because she is a woman, Hamlet's mother, or whatever other aspect of her feminine character might marginalize her.³⁵⁷ If a comparison is to be made with the fictional Gertrude to Elizabeth I, this historical queen was arguably even more "bloody" than her precursor "Bloody Mary" who earned that epithet.³⁵⁸ In Elizabeth's case, one of the crown's chief concerns was in controlling any threat of a peasant rebellion; the Catholic uprisings led by the Earls of Westmorland and Northumberland in the North during 1569 illustrate this type of threat to the queen's authority. Although few people lost their lives during the actual rebellion, hundreds were hanged and thousands died of starvation caused by the throne's attempt to suppress any hint of future uprisings.

A portion of the tenor of Elizabeth's commandments are preserved in a letter by the Earl of Sussex to Sir George Bowes in which he writes:

I have set the numbers to be executed down in every town, as I did in your other book, which draweth near to two hundred; wherein you may use your discretion in taking more or less in every town, as you shall see just cause for the offences and fitness for example; so as, in the whole, you pass not of all kind of such the number of two hundred, amongst whom you may not execute any that hath freeholds, or

³⁵⁷ Scholarly debate over whether the Tudors were or were not despotic has raged for over a century. Prominent examples are G. R. Elton, *England Under the Tudors* (New York: Routledge, 1955, 2005); and for the opposing side, Joel Hurstfield, *Elizabeth I and the Unity of England* (London: English Universities Press, 1960). See also discussions in Lindsay Boynton, "Martial Law and the Petition of Right," *English Historical Review* 79 (April, 1964): 255-284; Lindsay Boynton, "The Tudor Provost-Marshal," *English Historical Review* 78 (July, 1962): 437-455; J. V. Capua, "The Early History of Martial Law from the Fourteenth Century to the Petition of Right," *Cambridge Law Journal* 36, no. 1 (1977): 152-173; David Edwards, "Beyond Reform: Martial Law and the Tudor Reconquest of Ireland," *History Ireland* 5, no. 2 (1997): 16-21; and Micheál Ó Siochrú, "Atrocity, Codes of Conduct and the Irish in the British Civil Wars 1641-1653," *Past & Present* 195 (May, 2007): 55-86.

³⁵⁸ Perhaps this is reflective of dominantly pro-Protestant scholarship maintained in England since Elizabethan times that has portrayed the "Virgin" Queen Elizabeth I in a mostly favorable light.

noted wealthy, for so is the queen's majesty's pleasure. By her special commandment, 10th of January, 1569–70.³⁵⁹

The details of 1569 resound more like an extended inquisitional persecution rather than a single strife. William Cecil, the chief councilor to the crown, recommended that people be imprisoned at random and starved until they confessed who led the rebellions. Those who were not hanged were forced to pay fines, while their crops were destroyed and everything of value was confiscated. Cecil was later inspired to write a pamphlet entitled *The Execution of Justice in England* (1584), defending the government's policies.³⁶⁰ The queen's suppression was so extreme that it caught the attention of Pope Pius V, who formally excommunicated Elizabeth in the spring of 1570. Although the suppression and oppression brought to the north of England was great, it did little to bring peace to these regions of Elizabeth's kingdom. In other words, despite the use of random executions as a practical policy, the threat of rebellion remained a political concern.

What is to be gleaned from these conflicts is that the crown no longer showed any real interest in bringing peasants into its fold, as it would have in a feudal world. This was the new paradigm. The feudal peasant certainly faced disease and starvation—mostly through forces of nature, or the occasional Norman invasion, but these hardships were transitory. The early modern European peasant, however, saw a displacement that was extreme in both its measure and duration. Peasant wars were the natural outcome of the effects caused by the new commodity-driven state. All crops, once made to benefit those who grew them, were now seen as a commodity to be appropriated even if by force and at a great expense of life. For the most part, though, these rebellions failed in their attempt to establish any real shift of power, and it wouldn't be until the French Revolution that the European peasant would reclaim any sort of real power (though also ephemeral).³⁶¹ Be that as it may, the peasant was now viewed as a potential threat, rather than an asset, and to be controlled with the utmost authority and force. The very concept of a ruler like Hamlet,

³⁵⁹ As cited in Agnes Strickland, *The Life of Queen Elizabeth* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1910), 269–70.

³⁶⁰ Dorothy Auchter, *Dictionary of Literary and Dramatic Censorship in Tudor and Stuart England* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), 350.

³⁶¹ The scholar Lewis Hyde explains how, “[t]he basis of land tenure had shifted. The medieval serf had been almost the opposite of a property owner: the land had owned *him*. He could not move freely from place to place, and yet he had inalienable rights to the piece of land to which he was attached. Now men claimed to own the land and offered to rent it out at a fee. While a serf could not be removed from his land, a tenant could be evicted not only through failure to pay the rent but merely at the whim of the landlord.” Lewis Hyde, *The Gift* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 121.

who is according to Claudius “lov’d of the distracted multitude” (4. 3. 4), would be an anathema to such a state.

I have been focusing in more detail on the realities of the exercitation of power by Elizabeth I in order to provide a better metonymic framework for assessing the character of Gertrude. An important scene in regard to Gertrude’s authority and power, traditionally known as the “closet” scene, comes in Act 3 when Hamlet approaches Gertrude with his case against King Claudius. The closet scene finds historical context in an incident in which Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, made his way into Queen Elizabeth’s bedchamber unannounced in October 1599. Essex was in desperate need to obtain Elizabeth’s direct counsel: he had fallen out of favor with her and was seeking to regain prominence in the Court after being sent away on a tour of duty to Ireland. Essex failed in his attempt to win Elizabeth over to his side, and this famous infraction ultimately contributed to his execution.³⁶² The closet scene in Hamlet parallels Essex’s situation in that Hamlet is also trying to win the queen over to his cause. As in the historical episode, Queen Gertrude interprets Hamlet’s approach as more of an attack than an attempt at reconciliation.

When Hamlet tries to command the queen, saying, “Come, come and sit you down, you shall not budge,” the queen cries out “What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murder me?” (3. 4. 18–21). It is Hamlet’s aggressive behavior that brings forth Polonius, attempting to rescue the queen, which in turn leads to Hamlet’s act of stabbing the adviser to death. In trying to command the queen, Hamlet becomes a threat to her authority and is acting treasonously, just as Essex’s imposition was viewed as a sign of a possible *coup d’état*. The tendency of modern interpretation to downplay Gertrude’s possible culpability, as well as her real political power, must ignore the fact that Hamlet may indeed be on the edge of actually murdering his mother (like she fears) and incorporating her into his plan of action to revenge his father’s murder and presumably take the throne that is rightfully his own. Before he enters the queen’s closet, Hamlet calls upon Nero (the famous figure who murdered his mother for poisoning her husband the Emperor Claudius) for strength, “The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom, Let me be cruel, not unnatural” (3. 2. 394–95) but tempers his demand according to the nature of his own soul, “I will speak [daggers] to her,

³⁶² For a more detailed description of the Essex affair see Anne Somerset, *Elizabeth I* (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 533-547. See also Paul E. J. Hammer, “Myth-Making: Politics, Propaganda and the Capture of Cadiz in 1596,” *Historical Journal* 40, no. 3 (Sept., 1997): 621-642; and Paul E. J. Hammer, “The smiling crocodile: the earl of Essex and late Elizabethan “popularity,”” in *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, ed. Peter Lake and Steven Pincus (Manchester and New York, 2007): 95-115.

but use none” (3. 2. 396). It is also credible to think that Gertrude might also be at times considering her son as a possible threat to her position on the throne.

As with Hamlet, the option of looking at Gertrude as a truly political figure that *as such* might be an opposing force to her son, has become almost impossible because of the charge of the history of criticism. At the turn of the last century, Sigmund Freud found inspiration for his oedipal complex first in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* before turning to the Greek source. Moreover, Freud’s student, Ernest Jones, wrote the classic psychoanalytic study *Hamlet and Oedipus*.³⁶³ As a consequence, critical tradition³⁶⁴ and many stage productions of the play have put emphasis upon a sexual bond between Hamlet and his mother according to a Freudian inspired approach. In Lawrence Olivier’s 1949 film version, for example, Gertrude is often captured kissing Hamlet on the lips, while Ophelia is not offered the same privilege.³⁶⁵ Is Hamlet’s true obsession to kill his father and sleep with his mother? Is Shakespeare’s play Oedipal at heart? These questions have been much debated in the past, and have greatly enriched various portrayals of Hamlet’s character, as well as supporting the case for the prince as neurotic.³⁶⁶ There are distinct problems with an oedipal interpretation of the play that stem from problems inherent in Freud’s interpretation as applied to the Greek source. Eric Fromm explains how

If Freud’s interpretation is right, we should expect the myth to tell us that Oedipus met Jocasta without knowing that she was his mother, fell in love with her, and then killed his father, again knowingly. But there is no indication whatsoever in the myth

³⁶³ Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus: A Classic Study in Psychoanalytic Criticism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976).

³⁶⁴ An Oedipal approach to *Hamlet*, although debated in a variety of ways and degrees, has been almost universally accepted. See for example, Holland, *Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare*, 163-206; Neil Friedman and Richard M. Jones, “On the Mutuality of the Oedipus Complex: Notes on the Hamlet Case,” *American Imago* 20 (Summer, 1963): 107-131; Theodore Lidz, *Hamlet’s Enemy: Madness and Myth in Hamlet*; and Scott A. Trudell, “The Mediation of Poesie: Ophelia’s Orphic Song,” 72.

³⁶⁵ Lawrence Olivier, *Hamlet* (United Kingdom: Two Cities, 1948).

³⁶⁶ Marvin Rosenberg provides an example of Roger Rees as Hamlet:

The line between “neurosis” and full-blown “insanity” can be a very delicate one. It was tested by the Roger Rees Hamlet (1985-6). Dark and slender, easily assuming a melancholic cast to his face, Rees revived the Booth-Irving image, the dark, handsome, brooding, “haunted,” “sunken-cheeked,” vulnerable outcast. His distraction went deep: “a neurotic living on the edge of his nerves” (*Malvern Gazette*); a psychotic case, a wild-eyed neurasthenic “tortured by a too intense inner life.” (*Daily Telegraph*)

Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Hamlet* (London: Associated University Presses, 1992), 153.

that Oedipus is attracted by or falls in love with Jocasta. The only reason we are given for Oedipus's marriage to Jocasta is that she, as it were, goes with the throne.³⁶⁷

The elements of both plays on closer examination revolve not so much around sexual lust as around power. Both plays, I suggest, are far more about kingship than about all men's subliminal desire to kill their father and sleep with their mother. The ambiguities awarded a critical history of Shakespeare's text may have provided much more flexibility for Freud to develop his oedipal theory, and was therefore is the primary text of traditional investigation of the theory and not Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. The invitation here is for a shift away from subliminal sexual intentions to issues that center on primacy and the right to rule. This is not to deny sexual tension as often integral to power, but to contextualize it differently.

Surely, the intimacy of the queen's closet provides the perfect backdrop for this presumed sexual tension. In fact, the supposed sexual intimacy of this scene has been so widely assumed that many refer to this scene as the "bedroom scene." Yet, although the queen's closet does suggest intimacy, in reality such places were primarily sites of political discourse, not sexual congress or sleeping.³⁶⁸ Even the so-called "bedroom" of Queen Elizabeth marked a place where the most delicate matters of state could be discussed with such figures as the Lord Chamberlain without the interference of other members of the court.³⁶⁹

The historically political reality of the queen's closet is one index, and there other issues that bring into question presumptions of a relationship based primarily upon

³⁶⁷ Erich Fromm, *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales and Myths* (New York: Rinehart & Co. Inc., 1957), 201.

³⁶⁸ This tradition is especially well documented in the French court of Versailles, where the political arena was established as successively smaller and smaller rooms each demarking increasing levels of status eventually leading to the King's bedchamber. This political exercise of power was carried out in the tradition of *lit de justice* in the Parliament of Paris whereby the king could exert his judicial authority, and it also became a device to mark the ascendancy of a new monarch. See Sean Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 54-58.

³⁶⁹ The "chamberlain", as the name implies, traditionally presided over the King's bedchamber, but also ruled over the Royal Treasury. When referring to the bedchamber of the King or Queen, items of the highest order of political and economic concern are also implied. The Lord Chamberlain's men were one of the most illustrious acting groups in Shakespeare's day, in no small part due to the prominence of their benefactor, Henry Carey, the Lord Chamberlain and first cousin to Queen Elizabeth. The idea of the bedchamber as a political centerpiece also holds meaning from a modern historical perspective in terms of how royal bloodlines and close-family ties were active on a political level. See Paul Hammer, *The Polarization of Elizabethan Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 283.

emotional and physical attraction. Arguably, Hamlet's approach is primarily a political one, in that he wants to marry his mother to his cause, but not to actually sleep with her or marry her in the matrimonial sense. Hamlet wishes to convince his mother that her choice of husband is an irresponsible one, and a marriage that is morally deleterious to just rulership. Hamlet tells Gertrude that Claudius is:

A murderer and a villain,
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe
Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule
(3. 4. 96–99)

Hamlet is exercising his duty to the throne of Denmark as he continuously pleads his case against Claudius in this scene, markedly accusing him of robbing the state. Hamlet's description of Claudius is in direct opposition to his own philosophy of rulership which is based upon a deeply felt obligation to serve and benefit Denmark, not profit from it.

One of the greatest problems with a Freudian position is that it elides Hamlet's noble duty vis-à-vis the throne. For, unlike Oedipus, Hamlet expects, indeed intends, that his fate be carried out. Where Oedipus' actions (insofar as they contribute to his fate) are unintentional, or as per Freud motivated by subconscious desires, Hamlet's are clearly intended. His emotions for Gertrude, though overwrought at times, are primarily to win her over to his righteous cause, ridding the court of misrule. If Hamlet's goals were really self-interested to the point that his primary motivation is to eliminate the father in order to sleep with the mother, the play is about two selfish rulers vying for power. But *Hamlet* is a tragedy, not a farce.

When the ghost appears near the end of the closet scene, Gertrude is unable to see the specter and assumes that Hamlet is truly mad. The metaphor is fitting in that everyone to whom the ghost has presented himself—including the audience—is able to see the apparition, but somehow Gertrude cannot. To the extent that the ghost stands for Hamlet's relationship to the throne, his right to succession, it is poignant that Gertrude refuses, or is unable to recognize it. In other words, Gertrude is blind to Hamlet's cause because it lies outside the realm of her present political agenda, as well as her own claim to the throne. The artificiality of this device may be jarring for a modern viewer, but is reflected in metonymic sources of context such as the Lennox family memorial portrait by Livinus de Vogelaare (previously described here) with the inscription over James VI's head calling for the revenge of his father's murder.

Whereas Hamlet's speeches in the closet scene may seem to dominate the scene, it is Gertrude who ultimately stands in judgment over the prince and the entire court. The

thrust of Hamlet's argument concerns Gertrude's judgment as a queen: to question her choice of Claudius as a political mate.

You cannot call it love, for at your age
The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgment; and what judgment
Would step from this to this?

(3. 4. 68–71)

Hamlet's words belie that Gertrude is motivated by lust (as many Freudian-inspired critics have insisted upon). In Hamlet's appeal there is no doubt of Gertrude's real political power. Hamlet blames her for Claudius' present position, endowing her with the authority to choose, or at least to have chosen, a better and different husband. He appeals to her to change her judgment and to withdraw her support from Claudius as king. Gertrude is neither an object of Hamlet's physical desire, nor herself a "lusty" protagonist; she is, rather, the highest authority in the court. The denial of this aspect of her character for so long is reflective of a critical tendency to limit Shakespeare's female protagonists of their own voice—a fate that the character of Ophelia also shares. Greenblatt argues that it is "characteristic of early modern culture that male submission to narrative is conceived as active, entailing the fashioning of one's own story (albeit within the prevailing conventions), and female submission as passive."³⁷⁰ Allocating power to female figures was problematic for Elizabethan's as well, and despite the prominence of rulers like Mary and Elizabeth, the period was not without colorful figures such as John Knox who took issue with women in positions of authority.³⁷¹ Yet, I take issue with a post-modern "fashioning" of the Renaissance that takes for granted a "passive" female narrative as characteristic of a Renaissance *episteme*. This is a conceit of a modern perspective on the female that has greatly limited the feminine voice found in Renaissance texts like *Hamlet*.

Carolyn Heilbrun, in "The Character of Hamlet's Mother," notes the almost universal scholarly trend of reducing Gertrude to a weak and feeble character:

³⁷⁰ Greenblatt, "The Improvisation of Power," 44.

³⁷¹ In 1558 Knox published a treatise entitled, "The first Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women" in which he attacked the practice of allowing females to participate in government. See Thomas M'Crie, *Life of John Knox* (London: Whittaker & Co., 1838), 134. Also on the debate of women rulers see Lisa Hopkins, *Women Who Would be Kings: Female Rulers of the Sixteenth Century* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1991); Paula Louise Scalingi, "The Scepter or the Distaff: The Question of Female Sovereignty, 1516-1607," *The Historian* 41 (November, 1978): 59-75; and Amanda Shephard, *Gender and Authority in Sixteenth-Century England: the Knox Debate* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994).

The critics, with no exception that I have been able to find, have accepted Hamlet's word 'frailty': as applying to her whole personality, and have seen in her not one weakness, or passion in the Elizabethan sense, but a character of which weakness and lack of depth and vigorous intelligence are the entire explanation.³⁷²

Yet Heilbrun's corrective—to view Gertrude as a woman acting primarily on lust—is no doubt inspired in part by Freud and is if only for that reason unsatisfactory. Heilbrun may come closer to the queen's character than other critics insofar as she recognizes Gertrude as a more powerful figure,³⁷³ but she still portrays a woman, no matter how intelligent Heilbrun claims her to be, acting primarily out of "lust"—a slave of desire rather than a prominent player in a political game of chess. If Gertrude's position relative to the throne of Denmark was as tenuous as most critics suggest or presume, it seems unreasonable that Claudius would have married her, or that Hamlet would appeal to her to join his cause in the terms that he does. If Shakespeare borrowed the structure of accession from the *Historia Danica* of Saxo Grammaticus, which some scholars cite as the source for *Hamlet*, then Claudius' position as king relies entirely upon Gertrude as the true inheritor of the throne.³⁷⁴ If Shakespeare's model was England's own royal house, the extent of the power wielded by female rulers in the sixteenth century is likewise inescapable. The possibility that Gertrude's alliance with Claudius may reflect her own political agenda for the Danish polity cannot be ignored. In such a case, even though Hamlet is her son, he represents a very real threat to her own regal authority, and as his power increases Gertrude's must necessarily decline.

³⁷² Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Hamlet's Mother and Other Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 10.

³⁷³ Heilbrun defines Gertrude as a woman who possesses the weakness of lust and that critics, "misunderstand Gertrude largely because they are unable to see lust, the desire for sexual relations, as the passion, in the Elizabethan sense of the word, the flaw, the weakness which drives Gertrude to an incestuous marriage, appalls her son, and keeps him from the throne. Unable to explain her marriage to Claudius as the act of any but a weak-minded vacillating woman, they fail to see Gertrude for the strong-minded, intelligent, succinct, and, apart from this passion, sensible woman that she is." Heilbrun, *Hamlet's Mother and Other Women*, 10.

³⁷⁴ See introduction to *Hamlet* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 1136.

5.2 Drowning by a Willow Tree

It is striking that Gertrude speaks of Ophelia's death as if she had actually been there to witness it. In addition to this peculiarity, her use of rhetoric at that point—flowery and poetic—is incongruous not only in the context of reporting a tragic death, but stands out in comparison to the language Shakespeare uses in the rest of the play.

In terms of poetic style most of *Hamlet* is written in dramatic form while Gertrude's speech is incongruously written out in lyrical style. This speech is rhetorically distinct from the rest of the play, but also linguistically defined, as Stephen Ratcliffe notes, since "Ophelia's death does not happen in the play. It happens off stage—happens that is to say in the words Gertrude uses to describe it."³⁷⁵ The only other piece of text in the play that stands out so markedly is the Player's speech, which A. C. Bradley notes is written in poetic language "of lyric vehemence and epic pomp, and not of the drama.' This is probably due to the fact that Shakespeare had to distinguish the style of the speech from that of his own dramatic dialogue."³⁷⁶ As audiences' sense of the epic, dramatic, and lyric forms as the basic building blocks of poetic works has diminished with time, it becomes more difficult to appreciate the jarring quality of the queen suddenly breaking into the lyric at this point in the play.³⁷⁷ Gertrude's speech is worth quoting at length to allow this lyric style to resonate the better:

There is a willow grows askant the brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream:
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crowsfeet, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cull-cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds
Clamb'ring to hang, an envious silver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaidlike awhile they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,

³⁷⁵ Stephen Ratcliffe, "What Doesn't Happen in Hamlet: The Queen's Speech," *Exemplaria* 10, no. 1 (1998): 124.

³⁷⁶ A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), note F, 413.

³⁷⁷ A modern corollary may be found in the idea of a quartet suddenly playing a more contemporary ballad in the middle of a classical concerto.

As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

(4. 7. 166–183)

Why, though, would Shakespeare suddenly depart from the dramatic form to use the lyric style at this point in the play?³⁷⁸ Is he asking us to pay particular attention to Gertrude's lines?

The immediate identification of a willow tree that is mirrored in a "glassy stream" also brings with it a commonplace Renaissance context of discerning the truth from lies, the outward appearance from the real, the mirrored from the actual. Meredith Anne Skura points out in *Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing*, that "to hold a (truth-revealing) mirror up to Nature was to reveal something the unaided eye could not see—an absent ideal." Hamlet's "purpose of playing" is "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (3. 2. 21–24). Shakespeare's lines stress the importance of poetry to reveal truth even if it is indirect expressed through a rhetorical form such as *Oratio Obliqua*. Gertrude's speech offers a mirrored rhetoric reflecting two different pictures or perspectives. Skura further notes that

[t]he important question of a sixteenth-century mirror-gazer was not whether but why the image in the glass differed from the subject's ordinary impression. Was it dictated by a higher truth (moral judgment or superior models) or only by the subject's own distorting wishes? In the latter case he would be looking at a flattering glass rather than a true glass—like Vanity in the emblem books, misled by worldly beauty.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ Stylistically, this rhetorical shift would be a key for an Elizabethan audience to have paid particular attention to what is being spoken. These poetic shifts mark a specific authorial manipulation intended to point the reader toward a different type of reading. Stuart Curran notes how this rhetorical technique was also implemented in a Romantic narrative use of poetic form as "[t]he objective narrative voice plunges into a lyric stream of consciousness at one moment, and in the next is as likely to disrupt the supposed integrity of the narrative by pointedly reminding the reader of authorial manipulations. The effect of such experiments is, however, not a confusion of values, but a paradoxical reinforcement of them, reminding us sharply of the very aesthetic distance they subvert." Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 5.

³⁷⁹ Meredith Anne Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 149-150.

Is the “beautified” picture of Ophelia’s death a “vile phrase” (2. 2. 111) that Gertrude tells simply to mislead Laertes and the audience away from a deeper truth through its haunting and pastoral beauty? Skura suggests it is an Elizabethan *episteme* that was accustomed to question the outward rhetorical form of text against actual meaning and intention, especially in the case of a speech like Gertrude’s, where there is a mirrored image at the outset. This same type of perception is necessary for metonymical thought, but further suggests that these metonymic excursions were dominated by a quest for veracity and truth. The implication here is a strong presence of moral (or even ethical) concerns inherent in Elizabethan rhetorical metonymic usage. Insofar as I am suggesting that Shakespeare used metonyms to support deeper truths and moral perspectives, metonyms (seen as triangulated perspective) were a rhetorical device perfectly suited for this purpose. By extension, a metonymic reading of Shakespeare lends support to the idea that metonyms were considered a useful tool to promote higher principles—in much the same way the Renaissance utilized triangulation to promote higher values in religious works of art. Or, to put this yet differently, a metonymic reading might help to read corruption, in the political and ethical sense of the word. This type of rhetorical usage is often oblique, and “differed from the subject’s ordinary impression,” requiring a level of interpretation that tested the ability of a reader (or audience) to sort out fact from fiction, or moral truth, and “superior models” from “distorting wishes.” The “askant” mirroring that is found at the outset of Gertrude’s speech demands at the outset two distinct readings, or perspectives, on what about her speech is truth and what are distortions.

The willow in both classical and biblical tradition was associated with chastity and Christian purity. For the Greeks the willow tree was seen as unfruitful or “fruit-destroying” and associated with extreme chastity as St. Methodius in *The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity* notes how “sacred Scripture everywhere uses it as a symbol of chastity.”³⁸⁰ Gertrude’s willow tree, though, is mirrored and perhaps Shakespeare wishes to draw his audience’s attention to more shadowy images associated with the willow tree. The willow was for Homer said to induce parturition: “Of the abortive kind have been these three, / The alder, poplar, and the willow-tree.”³⁸¹ Does Gertrude’s violation of poetic form mirror a further violation of law outside of the laws of poetics and against nature itself?³⁸² Just as

³⁸⁰ St. Methodius, *The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1958), 77. For further reading see Hugo Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), chapt. 6.

³⁸¹ See Rev. T. Owen, *Agricultural Pursuits* (London: J. White, 1806), 76.

³⁸² Gertrude is relating a tragic history of Ophelia’s death, but there is an invitation to consider the tragedy as occurring more poetically than as an actual historical event. Consider Philip Sidney’s *The Defence of Poesy*: “And do they not know that a tragedy is tied to the laws of poesy and not of history,” *Sidney’s ‘The*

the willow is reflecting the “abortive” or the “fruit-destroying.” The mirrored image of the willow presents a different reality than simple outward shows of pastoral grief, little of which is expressed verbally in Gertrude’s speech—the brook is the only thing described as “weeping” but the queen apparently is not.

The classically weeping willow tree brings associations of Myrrha who was, as punishment for the incestuous crime of sleeping with her father Cinyras, turned into a tree—as represented in Dryden’s translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*:

Her solid Bones convert to solid Wood;
To Pith her Marrow, and to Sap her Blood:
Her Arms are Boughs, her Fingers change their Kind,
Her tender Skin is harden’d into Rind.
And now the rising Tree her Womb inversts,
Now, shooting upwards still, invades her Breasts.³⁸³
(*Cinyras and Myrrha*, 342–347)

Myrrha is condemned to be a weeping myrrh tree that gives forth its precious sap, and Shakespeare has transplanted this form from a native Eastern desert to be a Western weeping willow by a brook; from a classical reference to one distinctly Elizabethan.

Nor is Ophelia’s watery “element” an arbitrary context. The “notion that large bodies of water are unable to wash away the stain of a crime is a topos dating back to Greek tragedy.”³⁸⁴ The inability of water to wash away the stain of sin is found overtly in *Macbeth* with Lady Macbeth’s fervent hand-washing, “Out damned spot! out, I say!” (5. 1. 35), as well as in the myth of Gellius represented in Catullus, who is accused of incest with his mother, aunt, and sister while the sea deities Tethys and Oceanus cannot wash away his crimes no matter how hard they try.³⁸⁵ The watery environment Queen Gertrude describes Ophelia inhabiting as a “weeping brook” is not without implication of sin.

Defense of Poesy’ and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism, ed. Gavin Alexander (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 46.

³⁸³ John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden: Poems 1697-1700* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), Tenth Book, “Cynras and Myrrha,” lines 242-247, 257.

³⁸⁴ See S. J. Harrison, “Mythological Incest: Catullus 88,” *The Classical Quarterly, New Series* 46, no. 2 (1996): 581.

³⁸⁵ Catullus 88:

Quid facit is, Gelli, qui cum matre atque sorore
prurit et abjectis pervigilat tunicis?
quid facit is, patrum qui non sinit esse maritum?
ecquid scis quantum suscipiat sceleris?
suscipit, o Gelli, quantum non ultima Tethys

Gertrude's words are for Laertes, but they focus on a story that exists outside of his presence. Just as Ratcliffe notes, Gertrude's words take the plays audience "beyond the physical boundary: toward action we can't see because it takes place off stage—not performed, not shown, yet wholly imagined (and imaginable) as it enters the ear."³⁸⁶ They portray an Ophelia, who is "incapable," who merely sings "lauds," songs of praise, without meaning. But is this story as it is "wholly imagined" representative of fact, fiction, or a consideration of the two? Prominent words like "fantastic garlands," "mermaidlike", and "melodious lay" in Gertrude's speech suggest an imaginable world that is incongruous with the non-lyrically dramatic poetry of the rest of the play that portrays a much less "beautified" picture. As mentioned previously, this picture of Ophelia, bedecked with flowers and drowning peacefully, has stuck in our historical image of the play and has provided inspiration for much of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century artwork associated with Ophelia. It has further established in our critical perception the concept that Gertrude here is telling the truth (despite the obvious linguistic outward appearances of a fiction), and that her image here of Ophelia as mad, suicidal, and "mermaidlike" are also true representations of Ophelia's character. Gertrude paints an image of Ophelia for Laertes that obscures a potential reality of Ophelia's as a strong and rational character, while at the same time rendering her as pathetic and powerless. The rhetoric that Gertrude uses to describe Ophelia's death have been "wholly imagined" according to a literal reading of the lines as representative of fact and truth, even to the extent that the herbs that Gertrude mentions in association with Ophelia are included in many critical discussions of Ophelia as herbs that Ophelia herself has chosen, rather than images brought into play by Gertrude. In terms of language, the herbs that Ophelia carries here are according to Gertrude's tale, are not represented explicitly with regard to Ophelia, and are more to the point Gertrude's herbs that she associates with the death of Ophelia.

The implications of this reading for a modern feminist perspective are significant in terms of a sophisticated rhetorical use of language for the exertion of power by both Ophelia and Gertrude, but not previously noted as far as my research has shown. As I already indicated, modern dramatic presentations have for the most part denied Gertrude

nec genitor Nympharum abluit Oceanus:
nam nihil est quicum sceleris, quo prodeat ultra,
non si demisso se ipse voret capite.

Harrison, "Mythological Incest: Catullus 88," 581.

³⁸⁶ Ratcliffe, "What Doesn't Happen in Hamlet," 126.

such exercise in rhetoric and political power, and further reinforced this image of a weak, mad, and ineffectual Ophelia.³⁸⁷

5.3 Gertrude's Herbs

Gertrude, as previously discussed, traditionally has been viewed as Claudius' pawn, and somehow outside, or at least on the periphery of, the corrupt court. I have been arguing so far that not only is she powerful, but like Claudius, she shows guilt over her wrongdoing: telling us of her "sick soul, as sin's true nature is" (4. 5. 16). Gertrude's speech about Ophelia's death is striking firstly because it breaks into a lyrical form of poetic language that is divorced from the language used in the rest of the play, and secondly since it devotes more than two lines to the poisonous herb *Digitalis purpurea*, also known as Digitalis, Deadmen's Bells, Fairy Fingers, Foxglove, and The Great Herb.³⁸⁸

The first scientific description of Foxglove was by the German botanist Leonhard Fuchs (1501–1566), who named the plant genus *Digitalis*, signifying "finger," from the Latin *digitus*. While Gerard recommended foxglove tea to cause vomiting and purge "grosse and slimy flegme and naughty humours," he and other herbalists of the time did not attribute any significant therapeutic value to the plant (today regarded as one of the most significant heart medicines ever discovered). The probable reason that Shakespeare's contemporaries could not find a significant use for Foxglove, other than its capacity to induce vomiting, was probably its small "therapeutic index" or ratio of its therapeutically beneficial dosage to its toxicity. Digitalis contains a host of glucosides (including digoxin and digitoxin that are used today to regulate heart rate) that in even very small doses will cause cardiac arrest.³⁸⁹ Drinking the water out of a vase holding foxglove has proven fatal

³⁸⁷ Consider the following prominent film productions as readily accessible sources somewhat reflective of stage tradition (as many of them were initially done for the stage): Laurence Olivier, dir., (UK, 1948), Grigori Kozintsev, dir., (Russia, 1964), Richard Burton, *Hamlet* (USA, 1965), Tony Richardson, dir., (UK, 1969), Franco Zeffirelli, dir., (USA, 1990), Kenneth Branagh, dir., (UK, 1996), Michael Almereyda, dir., (USA, 2000). This has also been the case for other visual mediums portraying Ophelia. See further examples in Carol Solomon Kiefer, ed., *The Myth and Madness of Ophelia*.

³⁸⁸ See Scott Cunningham, *Cunningham's Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs* (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1996), 106-107.

³⁸⁹ Digitalis contains four important glucosides (derived from glucose) of which three are cardiac stimulants: Digitoxin, Digitalin, Digitalein, and Digitonin, which is a cardiac depressant. The most powerful is

to humans, and there is no understating its power as an efficient poison that can both lower and increase the heart rate, depending upon the dosage given and the condition of the heart.

By the eighteenth century, people were effectively using Foxglove tea to cure dropsy (or what would now be identified as edema caused by congestive heart failure), and in 1775 Dr. William Withering studied the plant. “Experimenting with it on a flock of turkeys, he confirmed his suspicion that the herb in its natural state was lethal; administering it to the dropsy-sufferers among his Birmingham patients, he learnt to reduce and refine the dose.”³⁹⁰ Withering was instrumental in bettering the therapeutic value of the plant, but one wonders how many sufferers of dropsy before him accidentally overdosed on the use of the herb as a medicine.

A speech like Gertrude’s could have set off many alarm bells for a contemporary Elizabethan audience. Foxglove is ubiquitous in the English countryside, and I was warned of its poisonous dangers many times while walking in Warwickshire with local people. Shakespeare’s reference to the plant shows, unsurprisingly, that he was aware of the deadly touch these “dead men’s fingers” could deliver, and also narrows the identification to those plants we might call “long purples” to poisonous varieties.

It is generally assumed that all of the flowers mentioned in Ophelia’s garland are meadow varieties. Ophelia is near a brook, however, and in *Shakespeare’s Garden*, James Bloom mentions how

It is equally probable that they are those of the shady hedge bank, and that the crow-flowers are the poisonous rank *Ranunculus reptans*, L., and its allies, that the nettles are the ordinary *Urtica dioica*, L., not necessarily in flower; or if this be objected to on account of the stinging qualities, which the distraught Ophelia might not be insensible to, its place could be taken by the white dead-nettle (*Lamium album*, L.).³⁹¹

The distinction between meadow varieties of the herbs that Ophelia carries and their shady counterparts is potentially an important difference, especially as the second possibility transforms their identity from plants with relatively benign properties to poisonous ones. Bloom, however, does not apply these distinctions to a closer reading of *Hamlet*. The implication of the text is that the herbs Gertrude mentions are to be found at the shaded bank of a river, as described in her speech as the local of Ophelia’s death, and not in a

Digitoxin, an extremely poisonous and cumulative drug that is insoluble in water. See Donald G. Barceloux, *Medical Toxicology of Natural Substances* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008), 773.

³⁹⁰ Miranda Seymour, *A Brief History of Thyme and other Herbs* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), 54; John Fenton, *Toxicology* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2002), 495-6; and especially J. K. Aronson, *An Account of the Foxglove and its Medical Uses 1785-1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), which includes Withering’s original study, “An Account of the Foxglove and some of its Medical Uses, etc.”

³⁹¹ J. Harvey Bloom, *Shakespeare’s Garden* (London: Methuen, 1903), 34.

meadow. Mats Rydén also notes how the word crowflower is, “elliptical for *crowfootflowers*,” and that this was the general name for *Ranunculus* in Shakespeare’s day. Rydén further notes the poisonous quality of *Ranunculus* in the form of buttercups that were also called “crazies.” Critical readings of these varietals as poisonous have surprisingly lacked any further conjecture as to the possible significance of such an interpretation of these herbs as poisonous with regard to *Hamlet*. Dodoens’ *A New Herball*, offers an even more explicit Renaissance explanation for crowflower in terms of its dangers; and provides a contemporary Elizabethan reference and explanation for this first herb that Gertrude mentions in connection with Ophelia’s death:

The danger.

All the Crowfoots are dangerous, and hurful, yea they kil and slay, especially the second, and *Apium rifus*, the which taken inwardly spoileth the senses, and understanding, and doth so srawe together the sinewes of the face, that such as have eaten therof do seeme to laugh, and so they die laughing, without some present remedie.³⁹²

I have not witnessed Dodoens’ reference in relation to *Hamlet* mentioned before, although it makes sense. Poison was one of the most convenient and inconspicuous ways to get rid of royalty, and many measures were taken (such as appointed food tasters) to prevent such mishaps.³⁹³ Mentioning such a strong poison as digitalis in relation to Ophelia’s supposed suicidal drowning (as well as the possibility of *Ranunculus reptans* that could also deliver a nettle-like “prick” or “sting” of death) immediately brings up the question of foul play.³⁹⁴

³⁹² Dodoens, *A New Herball, or Historie of Plants*, 492.

³⁹³ H. F. McMains point out that “Renaissance and baroque princes employed food tasters and—one may infer—poisoners.” H. F. McMains, *The Death of Oliver Cromwell* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 94. In Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II*, Lightborn boasts:

You shall not need to give instructions;
I learned in Naples how to poison flowers,
To strangle with a lawn thrust through the throat,
To pierce a windpipe with a needle’s point,
Or while one is asleep, to take a quill
And blow a little powder in his ears.
Or open his mouth and pour quicksilver down.

(Edward II, 5. 4, 29-36)

Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, ed. Peter J. Smith (London: Nick Hern Books Ltd., 2001), 90.

³⁹⁴ Miranda Seymour considers further contextualization: “[W]hy was it that John Gerard recommended the use of foxglove for those ‘who have fallen from high places’? Did Gerard envisage such people poisoning themselves out of despair for all they had lost – or was the foxglove thought to possess some consolatory

Nettles are associated with the image of a poisonous adder in Shakespeare's *King Richard II*, "Yield stinging nettles to mine enemies: / And when they from thy bosom pluck a flower, / Guard it, I pray thee, with a lurking adder" (3. 2. 18–20). Moreover, coupled to the incongruous way Gertrude describes the moment of Ophelia's death as if she were there actually to witness it, Ophelia's death by suicide, or "subintentioned cessation" as M. D. Faber calls it,³⁹⁵ becomes less credible.

In most modern editions of *Hamlet*, "long purples" are either un-glossed or identified as wild orchids.³⁹⁶ It is hard to say which approach is more imprecise: orchids are the largest family of flowering plants with close to 25,000 species (not including more than 100,000 modern hybrids), and it may be better to simply not identify this plant so generically at all. For example, Charlotte F. Otten, encourages reading "long purples" as a referent to all orchids so as to include "not only the extensive catalog of grosser names but the lewd botanico-medical history of orchids."³⁹⁷ The tradition of interpreting Gertrude's speech and herbs as a final representation of a suicidal death by hysteria is supported here by emphasizing the sexual imagery associated with Gertrude's herbal references. Salvador de Madariaga asks, for example, "What other value are we to give to *Shakespeare's* deliberate and insistent words if we do not accept that he meant to describe Ophelia to the very last under a kind of sexual obsession?"³⁹⁸ There is another value (metonymically) we can give to Shakespeare's deliberate words that is not so sexualized and belies an Ophelia suffering to death from "a kind of sexual obsession," or hysteria, according to a modern clinical perspective.

To the extent "long purples" are identified more specifically, it is usually as either *Orchis mascula* (Crimson Meadow Orchis), or the *Arum maculatum* (Cuckoo-pint). The majority of scholars who identify the plant insist on the *Orchis mascula*. This identification starts in the eighteenth century with editors such as Johnson and Steevens (1778) and is maintained up through today in editions including *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* and

property? Gerard was intimate with the Elizabethan court: is this perhaps some sly topical reference, now lost on the modern reader?" Seymour, *A Brief History of Thyme and Other Herbs*, 55.

³⁹⁵ M. D. Faber, "Ophelia's Doubtful Death," *Literature and Psychology* 16, no. 2 (1966): 103-108.

³⁹⁶ Eds. Hardin Craig, Dover Wilson, George Lyman Kittredge, Gareth Lloyd Evans, as well as the *Riverside Shakespeare*, to name just a few.

³⁹⁷ Otten emphasizes the overall sexual imagery of these herbs as what Shakespeare intended to be conveyed, but argues against any specific reading of Shakespeare's mention of herbs and the futility of, "demanding a botanic certainty not available to Shakespeare, or even to the botanists of his day." Charlotte F. Otten, "Ophelia's "Long Purples" or "Dead Men's Fingers," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (Summer, 1979): 397.

³⁹⁸ Salvador de Madariaga, *On Hamlet* (London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1964), 72.

the Arden edition. This is apparently based on an assumption that “long purples” are positively identified as *Orchis mascula* in the herbals of Shakespeare’s time—particularly Lyte’s 1578 translation of Dodoens. However, this is simply not the case; Karl Wentersdorf has been able to trace this fallacious argument back to its source.³⁹⁹ For, even though *Orchis mascula* is listed and described in sixteenth-century herbal books, “nowhere is its popular name given as *long purples* or *dead men’s fingers*”; and therefore, it is likely that this “confidently expressed observation was nothing more than an educated guess, based on Shakespeare’s poetry,” since its original source—the eighteenth-century herbalist Lightfoot—“referred neither to authorities nor to popular usage.”⁴⁰⁰ A long tradition of relying upon Lightfoot’s highly questionable authority has been founded upon a modern insight and perspective rather than considerations based on Elizabethan herbology. My approach here is a shift away from modern conveyance toward Elizabethan metonymic usage based upon a context in textual sources site specific to Shakespeare’s day.

Shakespeare invites us, in the very first lines of Gertrude’s speech, to read as sensitively as possible what can be found between the lines. “There is a willow grows askant the brook, / That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream” is the archetypal “mirror up to Nature.” The metaphor of a mirror revealing nature is a well-worn one: the most notable Elizabethan example is perhaps the fact that Queen Elizabeth translated *Le Miroir de l’ame péçgeresse* (1531) by Margaret of Angoulême (also known as Marguerite de Navarre) when she was only eleven years old.⁴⁰¹ It is not without significance to this dissertation that *Le Miroir* focuses on the theme of holy incest, and when it was republished in 1553 was publicly burned and censored by the Sorbonne.⁴⁰²

Shakespeare’s use of the word “askant” in particular reminds us that in order to see the truth, we must be ready to look obliquely and not take everything at face value. It also questions if the popular image of Ophelia’s suicide bedecked with flowers and drowning as she mumbles the ravings of a madwoman is a “distorting” wish on the part of Gertrude. I do not see Gertrude’s speech exactly as apostrophe, but I think that viewing it according to this trope helps to better understand it as a type of aside that describes something

³⁹⁹ Karl P. Wentersdorf, “*Hamlet*: Ophelia’s Long Purples,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29 (1978): 413-414.

⁴⁰⁰ Wentersdorf traces this essentially un-sourced assumption back to Lightfoot, who is followed by a long tradition of scholarship that makes the same assumption of identity: “The confidence displayed by these writers derived apparently from the forthright opinion of the eighteenth-century herbalist Lightfoot—“that admirable old Shakespearean” in Grindon’s phrase.” Wentersdorf, “*Hamlet*: Ophelia’s Long Purples,” 414.

⁴⁰¹ Janel Mueller and Joshua Scodel, eds., *Elizabeth I: Translations, 1544-1589* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 40-128.

⁴⁰² Maureen Quilligan, *Incest and Agency in Elizabeth’s England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 38.

occurring outside of the drama onstage—as an “askant” romanticized fiction rather than a true reflection of Ophelia’s watery death. Jonathan Culler views apostrophe as “a fiction which knows its own fictive nature.”⁴⁰³ Gertrude not only tells of Ophelia’s death as if she was there to witness it, but includes the fantastical describing Ophelia as “mermaidlike.”

Gertrude’s invocation of nature starting with the image of the willow tree as well as a tone of pity are both associated with apostrophe that are appropriate for Gertrude’s herbal references and drowning death of “the poor wretch” Ophelia.⁴⁰⁴ Jonathan Culler observes how apostrophe as a trope is “a figure spontaneously adopted by passion, and it signifies, metonymically, the passion that caused it.”⁴⁰⁵ Does the history that Gertrude tells through a lyrical form also include a metonymic reading beneath her external rhetoric? What passion might inspire such an invocation? Is Gertrude inspired by a genuine grief over the death of Ophelia, or do the herbs that she mentions with regard to Ophelia bring metonymy into play according to a different type of passion.

Culler further points out “to apostrophize is to will a state of affairs, to attempt to call it into being by asking inanimate objects to bend themselves to your desire.”⁴⁰⁶ The “inanimate objects” that Gertrude mentions in regard to Ophelia’s death are poisonous herbs that could be used “to will a state of affairs” as the queen bends them to the true passion and desire that metonymically underlines her fantastical tale. One could argue the possibility that Ophelia poisoned herself; but to the extent one accepts that she is not really “mad,” it appears far more likely that an arm of the corrupt court murdered her. This idea is also suggested by Stephen Ratcliffe, although he admits “at the outset that I cannot prove this theory about Ophelia’s death (we will never know because we were not there—can never see what actually happened), it is fair to say that it cannot be disproved either, again because there is no evidence, no ocular proof.”⁴⁰⁷ His note is merely a speculation, as others have done with many other aspects of the play (such as Ophelia’s possible pregnancy and corruption by Hamlet), but few of these speculations have offered any textual grounding to substantiate their claims. Ratcliffe is looking for “ocular proof” for an action that is implied, yet never seen on stage; the proof of the argument is instead to be found linguistically in Gertrude’s rhetoric according to a close reading of the text from the perspective of Renaissance Metonymy.

⁴⁰³ Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 146.

⁴⁰⁴ For a definition and usage of apostrophe I follow Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, chap. 7; and Jonathan Culler, “Apostrophe,” *Diacritics* 7, no. 4 (Winter, 1977): 59-69.

⁴⁰⁵ Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 138.

⁴⁰⁶ Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 139.

⁴⁰⁷ Stephen Ratcliffe, “What Doesn’t Happen in Hamlet,” 126.

In case playgoers failed to register that Gertrude might have poisoned Ophelia, Shakespeare further emphasizes the idea that Ophelia was murdered in Act 5, scene 1, between the two clowns/gravediggers. Derrek Attridge points out a historical tendency of Shakespearean scholarship to view ambiguity and punning in Shakespeare's plays as diversions from more serious intentions, rather than regard what might be essential to Renaissance standards of figuration and a metonymic reading. This tradition, he notes, leads back as far as Samuel Johnson:

The pun remains an embarrassment to be excluded from "serious" discourse, a linguistic anomaly to be controlled by relegation to the realms of the infantile, the jocular, the literary. It survives, tenaciously, as freak or accident, hindering what is taken to be the primary function of language: the clean transmission of pre-existing, self-sufficient, unequivocal meaning.⁴⁰⁸

The scene between the two clowns or gravediggers in Act 5 is one that is traditionally glossed over as mere punning, to be excluded from serious "discourse," but there is much more "unequivocal meaning" engendered here through metonymy than surface banter. For example, this scene between the clowns includes a repetition of the following riddle:

1. Clo. What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?
2. Clo. The gallows-maker, for that outlives a thousand tenants.
(5. 1. 41–44)

Clown 2 repeats the same riddle back to Clown 1 (5. 1. 51), but he cannot come up with a punchline:

1. Clo. Ay, tell me that, and unyoke.
2. Clo. Marry, now I can tell.
1. Clo. To't
2. Clo. Mass, I cannot tell.
(5. 1. 52–55)

Either the clowns are so stupid that they cannot recall the answer to the riddle that they have just mentioned, or there is a second answer to the riddle that is being asked here. The three craftsman can be read as three of the most prominent biblical prophets of God: Solomon the mason, Noah the shipbuilder, and Jesus the carpenter. God is the answer to this reading of the pun. The answer by "Marry" and by "Mass" that Clown 2 both "can" and "cannot" tell is due to the fact that he could provide the answer in merriment, but

⁴⁰⁸ Attridge, *Peculiar Language*, 189.

according to respect of Christian Mass (a Eucharistic concern) he would not joke about such matters. The two puns in relation are not to be understood literally, but metonymically according to very different types of adjacencies: one with a gallows-maker, the second according to God. The relationship and adjacency that Clown 2 has to the question and to its answer (a triangulation between the question, the clown, and God) further effects whether or not he is able to provide the answer. The clowns as gravediggers are presumably closer to gallows-makers through profession than to God.

An equally sophisticated multiple perspective analysis of Ophelia's death is included in the conversation between the two clowns. Clown 1 asks: "Is she to be buried in Christian burial when she willfully seeks her own salvation?" (5. 1. 1). There is a double meaning to this line. Firstly, it is implied that if Ophelia has committed suicide by "willfully" ending her life, she would be denied a Christian burial according to tradition, although, if she were insane, she might be allowed a full Christian burial.⁴⁰⁹ The line though is a question, not a statement of fact. The question also asks if those who "willfully" (in other words through prayer) seek their "own salvation" deserve a Christian burial. The line includes two portraits of Ophelia: a suicidal non-Christian and a Christian who seeks her "salvation" through willful acts of prayer.

The scene continues with Clown 2 answering the question according to the following reasoning: "I tell the she is, therefore make her grave straight. The crowner hath state on her, and finds it Christian burial" (5. 1. 2). The clown here includes the fact that the coroner has found, in observing the cause of death, that she deserved a Christian burial:

1. Clo. How can that be, unless she drown'd herself in her own defense?
2. Clo. Why, 'tis found so.

In other words, if she did drown herself, *se deffendendo*, in her own defense, by which the defense would be madness. This might be a reason to grant her a Christian burial, but the crowner's inquest has not "found" it so and as the clowns continue to explain:

1. Clo. It must be [se offendendo], it cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act, and an act hath three branches—it is to act, to do, to perform; [argal], she drown'd herself wittingly.

The clown is arguing that her death must be an offense (*se offendendo*) since she drowned herself "wittingly," and not a defense of madness (*se deffendendo*) as some critics argue here is a malapropism or misprint.⁴¹⁰ In other words she was not mad, but had her wits

⁴⁰⁹ The Anglican Constitutions of 1603 in canon 68 stated that the right to a full Christian burial was not to "be denied those who committed suicide while insane." See Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet*, 300.

⁴¹⁰ See, for example, textual footnote in Philip Edwards, ed., *The New Cambridge Hamlet*.

about her when she died. The problem is, who, being a good Christian would drown themselves “wittingly?” The implication is that Ophelia had her sanity when she died, as opposed to the picture that Gertrude paints of her death of pastoral madness. He further explains that drowning oneself *compos mentis* implies an action: to do it and to perform the act on one’s own accord. Herein lies the problem with Ophelia’s death and the facts; if an act or performance of drowning occurred, who in fact did it? According to the Crowner’s quest law Ophelia did not drown herself.⁴¹¹ How is this possible? Even Clown 2 needs further explanation:

2. Clo. Nay, but hear you, Goodman delver—

1. Clo. Give me leave. Here lies the water; good. Here stands the man; good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he, nill he, he goes, mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself; argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.

2. Clo. But is this the law?

1. Clo. Ay, marry, is’t—the crowner’s quest law.

(5. 1. 15–20)

The clown is presenting a fact here; the coroner’s inquest has found that Ophelia’s death was not intentional, and that she did not drown herself, and that she had her wits about her when she died. There is a marked discrepancy between the inquest according to the Crowner’s quest law and Queen Gertrude’s telling of Ophelia’s death. The Doctor of Divinity or priest says during Ophelia’s burial that “her death was doubtful (5. 1. 227), but he no doubt sides with the queen’s story of her death in opposition to the Crowner’s quest law and says that she “should in ground unsanctified been lodg’d” (5. 1. 229).

If Ophelia did not drown herself, how did the water come to her? And if it did, was it merely in the form of a glass of water tainted with poison? As shown in these lines, the gravedigger does not believe that Ophelia is “guilty” of shortening her own life. He also distinguishes how the water came to the victim and drowned him/her, such as would a dosage of poison. Is the clown’s story merely his own speculation? No, it is presented from his knowledge of the law according to the “crowner’s quest law” after investigating Ophelia’s body for the cause of death.

A related incongruity attending Ophelia’s “accidental” death, along with Gertrude’s speech as if she had witnessed Ophelia’s death first hand, is the fact that King Claudius had

⁴¹¹ For further reading on the important Renaissance function of the Law of the Coroner see Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet*, 297; James Craig, *The Law of the Coroner: And on Medical Evidence in the Preliminary Investigation of Criminal Cases in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Sutherland and Knox, 1855).

already ordered his guards to “give her good watch.” In his article “The Death of Ophelia,” J. M. Nosworthy suggests that it is one of these guards who witnesses Ophelia’s drowning, but strangely does nothing to prevent it from happening.⁴¹²

Murder by poison occurs as a dramatic element in the death of Hamlet’s father and is one of the main plot elements of this drama. It comes as no great structural surprise that Shakespeare would echo this important plot device through the death of another character through the same means. There is also a structural consistency in a play that hinges on the poisoning of royalty, and a certain “poetic justice” in the death of Gertrude through a poisoned drink. It is heavy with “drink” that she too finds her “melodious lay,” and the “poor wretch” of Gertrude’s Ophelia is echoed in Hamlet’s words to his dead mother, “Wretched queen, adieu!” (5. 2. 333). With respect to this, the plants mentioned are metonymical indices to the removal of an important, possibly abused political player from court and not a mad woman. This dissertation will focus more closely on this abuse in its discussion of Ophelia’s character in the final chapter.

⁴¹² J. M. Nosworthy remarks how Claudius had, “commanded that she should be closely followed and given good watch, and the Queen’s account suggests that this had been obeyed, at least in part, too literally. The story certainly implicates an eye-witness, who followed closely, observed minutely, and doubtless reached for his tables with a “Meet it is I set it down”. He began with some detailed botanical observations, proceeded then to contemplate with interest the way in which Ophelia contrived to keep afloat, and finally lent an attentive ear to the recital of old tunes. And the incredible thing is that he apparently made no effort to rescue her.” J. M. Nosworthy, “The Death of Ophelia,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1964): 346. It is interesting to note Nosworthy’s presumption that it is a “he” and not a “she” who is eyewitness to the death of Ophelia, and that Gertrude’s words are merely the relaying of a male “authorship” (besides the obvious Shakespeare) to the story of Ophelia’s death.

6 The Character of Ophelia

6.1 Ophelia as an Archetype for Madness

As already noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, the nineteenth-century views of women, madness, and suicide have formed the foundation of a perspective on Ophelia that has become firmly fixed in the critical, poetic, and visual imagination of *Hamlet* through to the present day. Margaret Higonnet observes how

[t]he nineteenth-century reorientation of suicide toward love, passive self-surrender, and illness seems particularly evident in the literary depiction of women; their self-destruction is most often perceived as motivated by love, understood not only as loss of self but as surrender to an illness: *le mal d'amour*.⁴¹³

The viewpoint that promotes Ophelia as mentally ill or hysterical is a diagnostic one, and the language often used to describe Ophelia, with terms like 'symptoms' and 'disease', are clinical and diagnostic.⁴¹⁴ According to a nineteenth-century orientation, female "self-destruction is most often perceived as motivated by love," and the cause of Ophelia's

⁴¹³ Margaret Higonnet, "Representations of the Feminine in the Nineteenth Century," 106.

⁴¹⁴ For example, Carol Neely defines how "[t]he context of her disease, like that which will (much later) be termed hysteria, is sexual frustration, social helplessness, and enforced control over woman's bodies. The content of her speech reflects this context." Carol T. Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture*, 52; and Carol Camden proposed that "the symptoms which she exhibits are so clearly portrayed and most of them so easily recognized that the Elizabethan audience, we have reason to suppose, would at least see Ophelia as a girl suffering physically and mentally the pangs of rejected love." Caroll Camden, "On Ophelia's Madness," 255. While Ophelia's speech and behavior may certainly be interpreted by some of the plays critics, readers, or audience as madness, I propose that the actual content of Ophelia's speech does not reflect either of the contexts Neely and Camden argue for.

madness along with her suicide is almost always seen to be a *mal d'amour* associated with male loss.⁴¹⁵

The foremost cause of Ophelia's madness—in association with a paradigmatic madness caused by male loss—has historically been viewed as extreme grief over the death of her father, Polonius.⁴¹⁶ This perspective is partially supported in Shakespeare's text by Claudius who proposes to Gertrude that Ophelia suffers from “the poison of deep grief. It springs / All from her father's death” (4. 5. 49–50). It is problematic, as Gabrielle Dane observes, that a “centuries-long tradition exists which simply accepts Claudius's diagnosis.”⁴¹⁷ The line that has been a foundational inspiration for these readings is spoken by one of the most maligned and least trust-worthy characters in Shakespeare's entire canon. Viewpoints that alternatively see Ophelia as suffering more from a loss of Hamlet's affections are equally problematic since they are founded on Polonius' diagnosis of dejected love for Hamlet (which turns out to be wrong), and is a misdiagnosis that has been readily applied to reading Ophelia's character.

For example, Carol Camden presents the same argument put forth by Polonius about Hamlet's dejected love melancholia by offering that Ophelia is also suffering from *erotomania* (erotic melancholy) and *passio hysterica* brought about by dejected love.⁴¹⁸ Maurice and Hanna Charney also see Ophelia as reflective of a clinical standard in Elizabethan drama and medical texts whereby the madness of women in Elizabethan drama is brought on by “the pangs of despised love” (*Hamlet*, 3. 1. 72), and accordingly they diagnose Ophelia as “suffering from the classic symptoms of love melancholy, and her sexual frustration is compounded with grief of her father.”⁴¹⁹ Gabrielle Dane extends this concept of male loss to include Ophelia's brother Laertes and claims that “her yearning for

⁴¹⁵ For example, Caroll Camden asserts that “[w]hen Ophelia reports Hamlet's conduct, Polonius sees that Hamlet suffers from “the very ecstasy of love”, but never suspects that in following his orders Ophelia is about to succumb to the same ecstasy, “whose violent property fordoes itself and leads the will to desperate undertakings.” Caroll Camden, “On Ophelia's Madness,” 249.

⁴¹⁶ This viewpoint is foundational. See for example, Sir Thomas Hammer, *Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (London: 1736), 46. This anonymous work attributed to Thomas Hammer is considered one of the first extended works of Shakespeare criticism. For more recent examples, Scott Trudell asserts that “her tragedy and self-destruction are rooted in excessive loyalty to paternal *logos*,” Scott A. Trudell, “The Mediation of Poesie: Ophelia's Orphic Song,” 64: and Carol Thomas Neely asserts that her characterization, “represents women's madness as gender-inflected in the context of bodily illness, lost love, and family.” Neely, *Distracted Subjects*, 53.

⁴¹⁷ Dane, “Reading Ophelia's Madness,” 411.

⁴¹⁸ Camden, “On Ophelia's Madness,” 255.

⁴¹⁹ Maurice Charney and Hanna Charney, “The Language of Madwomen in Shakespeare and His Fellow Dramatists,” *Signs* 3, no. 2 (Winter, 1977): 453.

an unnamed, missing, beloved pilgrim might also signify Ophelia's (possibly incestuous) longing for the absent Laertes."⁴²⁰ The presumed grief of male loss that Ophelia "suffers from," be it from the death of her father, or an absent Hamlet, or even a lustful incestuous longing for her brother Laertes (unsubstantiated by Dane with any textual evidence) is widely accepted as a general weakness in her personality, a frailty that makes her especially susceptible to the mental disease that engulfs her. Thus Camden argues that "the death of Polonius, then, may well have been only the last in a series of shocks to her basically weak personality."⁴²¹ The portrait of Ophelia that has resulted from a diagnosis of hysteria extends from one of frailty to a complete lack of identity altogether caused by male loss. Barbara Smith offers a good summary example of this common perspective on the character of Ophelia:

The loss of her father—her link to emotional security once she can no longer trust in her own perceptions—is the final, fatal assault on her tenuous mental stability and survival instinct. The issues of perceptual and emotional dissonances, lover's rejection, paternal loss, and the deprivation of knowledge with which Ophelia struggles throughout the play, combine explosively, engendering—pitiably but not surprisingly—madness and suicide.⁴²²

On stage she is generally portrayed as a childlike innocent or a sexually frustrated hysteric.⁴²³ Jane Kromm observes how "portrayals of Ophelia as a sufferer from love melancholy include elements ranging from the naïve to the knowledgeable—the innocent flower girl to the close-to-nature erotomaniac."⁴²⁴ J. W. Lever, supporting a vision of a childish Ophelia describes how "she has regressed into a simplified world of pretty gestures and childlike responses. Only a sentimentalized grief at her father's death seeps in from the outer world of reality."⁴²⁵ Feminist critics, in turn, prefer to imagine her "condemned to martyrdom on the altar of male fantasies and priorities." Without a clear voice of her own,

⁴²⁰ Dane, "Reading Ophelia's Madness," 415.

⁴²¹ Camden, "On Ophelia's Madness," 253.

⁴²² Barbara Smith, "Neither Accident nor Intent: Contextualizing the Suicide of Ophelia," *South Atlantic Review* 73, no. 2 (Spring, 2008): 98.

⁴²³ The role of Ophelia was, as Alan Young notes, "regularly subjected to careful cutting in order to preserve a sanitized image of her purity and innocence, a form of censorship that in some form or other remained common through the nineteenth century and on until the 1940's." Alan R. Young, *Hamlet and the Visual Arts, 1709-1900* (Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing, 2002), 279.

⁴²⁴ See Jane Kromm, "The Feminization of Madness in Visual Representation," *Feminist Studies* 20, no. 3 (Autumn, 1994): 507-535.

⁴²⁵ Lever, "Three Notes on Shakespeare's Plants," 123.

Ophelia becomes a character constructed from without according to delineations of a clinical diagnosis of hysteria as an eroticized form of madness, rather than from within the metonymic framework of her own presentation of rhetorical form.

The claim that Ophelia represents the “prototype of the madwoman in Elizabethan theatre” and is penned according to the “conventions” of this stock character is not fully supported either.⁴²⁶ This reading of Ophelia’s character is most prominently argued by Maurice and Hanna Charney, who assert that “everything we know about Elizabethan acting suggests that the boy actors understood the conventions of playing madwomen.”⁴²⁷ Charney and Charney use two examples to support the notion of this convention: the first, Isabella, in the Jacobean drama *The Changeling* by Middleton and Rowley as “the most frenzied (and most poetic) example of feigned madness”; the second, the Jailor’s Daughter from *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as “the most extensively developed madwoman in all of Elizabethan Drama.”⁴²⁸ Both of these characters are sexually motivated. Isabella feigns madness in order to sleep with her beloved, while the cure for the Jailor’s Daughter’s “melancholy humor” is for her to have the sexual activity denied her by the lover Palamon supplied by an anonymous gentleman called the “Wooer.” The sexual frustration that these two characters exhibit in their madness (feigned or not) is supportive of modern clinical views of women’s hysteria, and also reflective of an Elizabethan perspective on madness. Charney and Charney conclude that “in this area, we are likely to find remarkable consistencies between Elizabethan attitudes and our own.” Yet, despite some similarities, this character type is not as neatly defined in the Elizabethan theatre as it is from a modern perspective on madness, and Charney and Charney fail to base their analysis of Ophelia’s character on sexualized hysteria rather than on madness according to a Renaissance poetic.

Isabella is feigning madness in order to gain access to a place (a madhouse) where she can have congress with her lover outside of the bounds of both societal perimeters and parameters. In this case, madness represents a freedom of constraint and not a disease of constriction. It is hard to find a direct parallel here with Ophelia in terms of both character and motivation. So too, does the Jailor’s Daughter differ markedly from the Ophelia character. It is a stretch to claim a stock character similarity between the Jailor’s Daughter and the gentlewoman Ophelia. Ophelia is of noble rank; the Jailor’s Daughter is not. The Jailor’s Daughter is considered so lasciviously “undersexed” that it causes her to go insane. Her lapse into madness is only cured by the introduction of a character called “Wooer” who is going to supply the necessary sexually satisfying cure. The comparison here to Ophelia supports a vision of her as sexually frustrated and hysterical; and further implies that if the

⁴²⁶ Dane, “Reading Ophelia’s Madness,” 422.

⁴²⁷ Maurice and Hanna Charney, “The Language of Madwomen in Shakespeare,” 454.

⁴²⁸ Maurice and Hanna Charney, “The Language of Madwomen in Shakespeare,” 457.

object of her affection was restored she would be cured, but this does not happen and Ophelia dies tragically. Ophelia is unique in many ways and while as a character she has inspired views on hysteria there is little precedent to support her origin as a stock character for madness. The difference between these characters is so marked that the common denominator of madness is not enough to engender a stock character that would create a “convention” of the type. Furthermore, it brings up the question as to why Shakespeare would rely on such a convention to portray Ophelia? If this is the case, did he deny her a complexity that is afforded other of his characters? This is a question I will be exploring more in depth in what follows.

6.1.1 A Fishmonger Father

In discussing the character of Ophelia, it is important to understand that Hamlet’s relationship to her father, Polonius, plays an integral role in shaping her character—not simply biologically as her father, but how he views and speaks of his own daughter. Her character, like Hamlet’s, is partially constructed by the characters that surround her by way of metonymic relationship. The relationship between Polonius and Hamlet in Act 2, Scene 2, or the “Fishmonger scene”, introduces some of the metonymic poetry that helps to define her. In other words, Ophelia is not physically present in this scene, but the opposing viewpoints of Hamlet and Polonius presented in this scene regarding her character help an audience better understand her.

In their first encounter, or battle, Polonius says he will “board” Hamlet—a term that has aggressive overtones and reminds one of a warrior trying to board an enemy ship. Polonius begins his attack early on. “Do you know me my lord?” he says, implying that Hamlet’s madness has advanced so far that he can no longer recognize people he has known well (2. 2. 172). Hamlet makes a witty riposte that reveals he knows Polonius far better than the latter suspects: “Excellent well, you are a fishmonger” (2. 2. 174). On one level, Hamlet is asserting his position as heir to the throne by giving Polonius a sharp reminder of his lower status. Hamlet further digs into Polonius by rightly observing that the old man is not so good or honest a man as a lowly fishmonger: “Then I would you were so honest a man” (2. 2. 176). On a second level, “fishmonger” is not just any occupation, and the use of the term as a metaphor for prostitution cannot be ignored—the term “fishmonger” being closely related to “fleshmonger.” Our modern critical history of recognizing “fishmonger”

for “fleshmonger” is well established and dates back to the nineteenth century.⁴²⁹ Calling Polonius a trader in flesh, further denigrates the chief councilor’s prominent position as a figure of the court who is supposed to act as a protector of the body politic, but is someone who instead profits from it.

In the context of the entire scene, “fishmonger” introduces the motif of sexual misconduct (especially regarding Ophelia) that is the primary theme argued here of Hamlet’s discourse. As cutting as Hamlet’s wit is on this occasion, Polonius does not attempt to parry the blow. Instead, he avoids direct conflict with an aside that further promotes a mad Hamlet: “Yet he knew me not at first, ’a said I was a fishmonger. ’A is far gone” (2. 2. 188–189). Not unlike his deployment of Iago in *Othello*, Shakespeare presents us with a villain who uses the potential sympathy of the audience to support his cause, and in much the same way Iago largely succeeds in convincing us of Othello’s jealous and murderous nature, Polonius presents a convincing argument for Hamlet’s madness.

In keeping with the idea of “fishmonger” as associated with prostitution, Hamlet next suggests to Polonius that his daughter, Ophelia, is associated with some sort of sexual impropriety:

For in a dead dog,
being a good kissing carrion – Have you a daughter?
(2. 2. 181–182)

It has often been suggested that Hamlet, through an act of feeble-mindedness, is associating two unrelated subjects, which reduces all of Hamlet’s words to the status of gibberish. Yet here, too, it can be argued that Hamlet’s so-called madness has a definite subject as well as an intense through-line of intention that belie any vague or uncontrolled wanderings of the mind. The corruption of the court is being closely related to Ophelia’s predicament.

The “sun” is a universal metaphor for the court that pre-dates Elizabethan times; it was the prominent emblem of the great European and English monarchies during Shakespeare’s day just as it was for Louis XIV of France, the “Sun King,” in the seventeenth century. The “dead dog” in Hamlet’s line can easily be equated with Hamlet’s dead father and his court. The image of the dog stands as an appropriate symbol for faithful rulership,⁴³⁰ and Hamlet brings this metaphor back at the end of the play—“The cat will

⁴²⁹ See for example, footnote in Horace Edward Furnace, ed., *The New Variorum Shakespeare*, vol. 3, *Hamlet* vol. 1 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1877), 145. The term ‘fish’ also could be used alone to refer to a whore, and both fish and flesh were used together in Shakespeare’s day to denote a sexual partner. See Gordon Williams, *A Glossary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Language* (New York: The Athlone Press, 1997), 126.

⁴³⁰ The Latin word *fidelis* for “fidelity” is closely related to the word *fido* for “dog”.

mew, and dog will have its day” (5. 1. 292) when he vows to restore his father’s court through eliminating Claudius from the throne. In the present state of Denmark’s court, the “dog” is dead—Hamlet’s father has been murdered, and his body “politic” in terms of the state of Denmark has been replaced by a new corrupt court of maggots (a true politic of worms). Claudius is not the only “maggot” that has arisen for this feast, and Polonius also contributes to Hamlet’s view of the present court as one of absolute corruption, here rendered literal.

In his next thrust Hamlet drives his point, aiming acutely at Polonius, further along the same theme of corruption regarding Ophelia:

Let her not walk i’th’sun. Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive, friend, look to’t.

(2. 2. 184–186)

He does not rail against all pregnancies, for he emphasizes that “conception is a blessing.” The notion of the sun’s potential to produce the blessing of pregnancy is well established in the context of Elizabethan folklore and poetry.⁴³¹ In Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* is found:

The sunbeams bright upon her body playd,
Being through former bathing mollified,
And pierst into her wombe, where they embayd
With so sweet sence and secret power unspide,
That in her pregnant flesh they shortly fructified.⁴³²

(*The Faerie Queene*, Book III, Canto VI)

In Shakespeare’s version, there is no “sweet sence” and Hamlet is noting that there is something greatly amiss in the *particular* way Ophelia might conceive. She should not be allowed to walk in the sun; into the daylight where her sins might be visible, perhaps, but also into the realm of the present court (viewed notably by Hamlet as corrupt) where she might become corrupted. As M. P. Tilley has already noted, Phillip Stubbes in his *Anatomy of Abuses* (which had numerous Elizabethan editions) provides further insight into the relationship Hamlet makes between the sun and a carrion dog breeding maggots. In Stubbes’ book the cause of such corruption in terms of breeding,

proceedeth from their own genuine corruption and natural imperfection; for no more is their fowlenes to be ascribed to the stelliferous beams of the glistering Sun, then

⁴³¹ See Rose Jeffries Peebles, “A Note on Hamlet,” *Modern Language Notes*, 31, 2 (Feb., 1916): 117-120.

⁴³² Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, book III, Canto VI. For further reading see Peebles, “A Note on Hamlet,” 119.

the stench of a dead carcasse may be said to come of the sun, and not rather of it own corruption and filthines. They busie themselves in preserving the beautie of their bodyes, which lasteth but for a time, and in time is cause of his own corruption, and which, in effect, is nothing els then putrifaction itself, and a dunhil covered with white and red ; but for the beautie of the soule they care nothing at all.⁴³³

I would like to elaborate on Tilley's suggested contextual association between the two texts. Polonius is the "carrion," or "dead carcasse," Hamlet is speaking about, specifically a "God kissing carrion" (2. 2. 182), one who "kisses" up to King Claudius, and whose true nature under such illumination reveals "genuine corruption and natural imperfection." The breeding that Hamlet suggests is an earthly one that springs from polluted flesh. This concept is later underscored by Laertes at the burial of Ophelia. Laertes, ignorant of Ophelia's possible predicaments, insists that she is free of corruption and describes her dead form as "fair and unpolluted flesh" (5. 1. 239). It is Laertes' ignorance and naiveté of the true corrupt nature of the court (his father, Claudius, and Gertrude) that is a key element to the tragic end of Ophelia. Hamlet in this scene is calling the court one of "corruption and filthines" at which Polonius as chief advisor plays an integral role. As Marcellus observes, "Something is rotten in the State of Denmark" (1. 4. 90), although the "sun" as the image of the court is not to blame, but the "cause therof proceedeth from their own genuine corruption and natural imperfection." Polonius as chief advisor is central to the rotten State of Denmark.

The distinguishing factor of these characters is a Hamlet and Ophelia who are primarily concerned with the "beautie of the soule" in contrast to a corrupt court for whom "the beautie of the soule they care nothing at all." Hamlet calls Polonius a "God kissing carrion"—the piece of flesh that rots from within due to its "own corruption and filthiness" and advises him not to let his daughter walk in the sun under such adverse conditions. The implication being that she is at risk of conceiving a child in a way that is filthy and corrupt, and that her soul may still be salvageable from such corruption. But what way could Ophelia get pregnant that would be corrupt? Perhaps Hamlet is referring to the risk of her having a child out of wedlock; or perhaps he is referring to the more corrupt act of incest with her "fishmonger" father.

The risk of Ophelia becoming corrupted in the context of a Renaissance *episteme* by becoming pregnant out of wedlock (by say, young Prince Hamlet) is not very great. All that was required for marriage in Shakespeare's day was the act of sex and the declarations

⁴³³ Phillip Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses* (London: 1583), STC (2nd Ed.) / 23377. Reference as cited by and credited to M. P. Tilley, "'A Good Kissing Carrion' ('Hamlet' II, 2, 182)," *The Modern Language Review* 11, no. 4 (Oct. 1916): 463.

of its participants: no priest, no church, no exchange of rings.⁴³⁴ Instead, marriage was often based on a private exchange of vows and physical consummation as a frequent Elizabethan nuptial practice that was accepted under Canon Law.⁴³⁵ The risk of incest as a possible source of corruption to Ophelia is to be considered more seriously than conception out of wedlock.

Hamlet calls Polonius by the term “friend.” The use of the word here is not casual, and we know by now that Polonius is anything but Hamlet’s friend; so what other meaning could this word have? If read ironically, it simply means Polonius is not Hamlet’s friend. Other prominent meanings are “sexual lover” and “kinsman.”⁴³⁶ When these two terms are used in combination, however, the result is “incest,” and is especially notable when viewed in an Elizabethan context.⁴³⁷ Marc Shell points out, Shakespeare was well aware of the rhetorical usage of the term “friend” in this combination, and uses it in *Measure for Measure* when Lucio reports that Claudio “hath got his friend with child” (1. 4. 28).⁴³⁸ In regards to Hamlet, using the term “friend” prominently in the middle of a sentence directed at Polonius about conception and his daughter creates particular resonance both in terms of sexual congress and kinship. The possibility that Shakespeare here may be utilizing “friend” to convey the concept of “incest” furthers the idea that the lines: “Let her not walk i’th’sun. Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive, friend, look to’t” (2. 2. 184–186) relate to a type of corrupt breeding engendered not from the sun itself, but from a “carrion” whose nature is one of “corruption and filthines.”

The “sun” could be taken as a pun on “son,” with Hamlet as the most obvious candidate, him being the prominent son and heir to the throne of Denmark. This very same pun is used at the beginning of *Richard III* in the line “this sun of York,” but in *Richard III* the metaphor of “sun” for “son” is easily interchangeable, whereas in *Hamlet* it is not; how does one walk in a “son”? It has already been suggested that Hamlet could be telling

⁴³⁴ Marriage was primarily considered a domestic affair in the Elizabethan period.

⁴³⁵ According to the Common Law of England, no ceremony, no priest, and no physical consummation was required. While Canon Law, which governed the Church and therefore the validity of wedlock, required physical consummation. See W. L. Scott, “Nullity of Marriage in Canon Law and English Law,” *University of Toronto Law Journal* 2, 319 et seq. Henry Swinburne, who wrote on the subject of marriage around 1600, states that, “Albeit there be no Witnesses of the Contract, yet the parties verily (though secretly) contracted Matrimony, they are very Man and Wife before God; neither can either of them with safe Conscience Marry elsewhere, so long as the other party liveth.” Henry Swinburne, *Treatise of Spousals*, (London, 1686), 87.

⁴³⁶ *OED*, vol. VI.

⁴³⁷ For a more in depth discussion of this context see Marc Shell’s brilliant scholarship on the subject. Marc Shell, *The End of Kinship, ‘Measure for Measure,’ Incest, and the Ideal of Universal Siblinghood* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 191.

⁴³⁸ See Shell, *The End of Kinship*, 191.

Polonius not to let Ophelia come near him, for if she is corruptible, Hamlet, as Ophelia's betrothed, is a viable candidate as a possible corrupter of her virginity, and scholars who speculate upon a pregnant Ophelia tend to portray Hamlet as the culprit.⁴³⁹ Yet, especially this early in the play, such misconduct seems improbable. Hamlet's purpose is to purge Denmark of its corruption, not to promote it further. The pun of "son" from "sun" though could imply that Hamlet is compared to and associated with Stubbes' description of the "stelliferous beams of the glistening Sun" as representative of a prince who cares about the "beautie of the soule."

Although Polonius (and even Hamlet) is suspect, it still remains unclear what "carrion" Ophelia has been kissing; it is evident, though, that Hamlet pursues a consistent theme in this scene regarding Ophelia and conception. At the close of the scene, Polonius concedes that he understands some of Hamlet's meaning:

How pregnant sometimes his replies are!
(2. 2. 209)

The word "pregnant" carries added weight in view of all of Hamlet's terms regarding birth and conception, and is an excellent example of the textual logic that I am following. Polonius uses the term "pregnant" metaphorically, here, but the choice of the word is clearly motivated metonymically, since pregnancy has been the theme. There is another implied meaning in Polonius' line as it refers directly to Hamlet's replies in terms of the rhetorical structure being offered which, through metonymic repetition, is an instance of *copia*. Agricola used the phrase *ubertas orationis* to define this form of speech⁴⁴⁰ and along with the notion of abundance, the ideas of fertility and pregnancy are also applicable to the rhetorical form Hamlet uses in addition to being its subject (although to the offence of some feminist critics).⁴⁴¹

Building upon the rhetorical metonymy in the above phrases suggesting pregnancy and ill conception, and corruption breeding with goodness, it is not difficult to add these concepts together to arrive at the idea of "incest." This may seem like a leap, but this is what is required of metonymic construction, and is what "solves" Shakespeare's logical

⁴³⁹ See for example Stephen Ratcliffe, *Reading the Unseen* (Denver: Counterpath Press, 2010), 79-80.

⁴⁴⁰ Peter Mack, *Renaissance Argument: Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 305.

⁴⁴¹ Patricia Parker argues that, "discursive "copia" or "dilation" is associated with misogynistically construed aspects of female sexuality: both with the pregnant female body, necessary for the perpetuation of the patriarchy, and this unbridled licentiousness, which patriarchy seeks to control." Patricia Parker, "Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property," in *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace (New York: Routledge, 2009), 494.

problem by aligning all of these phrases perfectly together. The implied meaning of “incest” is reinforced through multiple applications of metonymy pointing to the same context—or copiousness according to Erasmus. With this concept of “incest” we are led to an Elizabethan context and a term, especially in a Renaissance *episteme*, that is rich and “pregnant” with meaning.

Shakespeare in the copious metonymic pattern above has established a level of functional determinacy whereby transactions, as Gumpel notes, between “reference and transference stabilizes content by making it point through its denominations at a specific context: meanings become focalized in engendering an act of meaning, with their direction-factors signifying the authorial intent.”⁴⁴² In other words, pregnancy and ill-conception become a common through line of Hamlet’s words that “point through its denominations at a specific context” and lends coherence and meaning to his apparent madness.⁴⁴³ This further points to certain “direction-factors” pointing toward a common theme that can support an authorial intent behind outward shows of words that may appear to have no specific content.

The metonymic meaning of any single phrase mentioned above in the exchange between Polonius and Hamlet is not ultimately what we are looking for rhetorically. Along the lines of Erasmus’ copiousness, whereby rhetorical abundance is valued not from multiple meanings but rather by meaning that is expressed in multiple ways, the use of multiple metonymies in Hamlet supports a method by which adjacency closes the gap of determinacy in terms of metonymy, but also in terms of metonyms in conjunction with similar metonyms.

The display by Shakespeare above along the subject of ill-mannered conception is rhetorically presented not just metonymically, but *copiously*. It is this adjacency of metonymic meanings that close the gap of determinacy and limit metaphoric variances. This rhetorical method of *copia* pinpoints a specific meaning that might otherwise be lost through a single rhetorical trope and the multiple possible meanings it could engender. Instead, Shakespeare presents us with multiple metonymic tropes, all pointing to the same or similar meaning(s) according to a model for conveying specific authorial intent that was well established by the Renaissance tradition of rhetorical *copia*.

⁴⁴² Gumpel, *Metaphor Reexamined*, 87.

⁴⁴³ So too is there a tendency to try and lend a certain coherence to Shakespeare when faced with a rhetoric that is not easily definable by creating cohesion through that very indefinability and calling it madness, or senselessness. Thus, the notion that these phrases are the product of madness (or vice-versa) is easily established, but without another solution linking these phrases, madness (real or feigned) is by far the simplest and best overt solution—also perhaps why critics have stuck with it for so long.

In Hamlet's interchanges with Ophelia, as will be further demonstrated in what follows, the same subject of conception is metonymically pursued again and again (*copiousness* being a hallmark of this metonymic architecture in order to create functional determinacy, thus providing us with some further insight into Ophelia's character and situation).

6.2 Ophelia and Conception

During the Mousetrap play—the “play within the play” that Hamlet stages in order to try and trap Claudius—Hamlet continues to pursue this theme of conception and pregnancy in his exchanges with Ophelia. In the first conversation, Hamlet introduces the topic of sexual exchange:

Hamlet: Lady, shall I lie in your lap?
Ophelia: No, my lord.
Hamlet: I mean, my head upon your lap?
Ophelia: Ay, my lord.
Hamlet: So you think I meant country⁴⁴⁴ matters?
Ophelia: I think nothing my lord.
Hamlet: That's a fair thought to lie between maid's legs.
Ophelia: What is, my lord?
Hamlet: Nothing.

(3. 2. 112–121)

The second interchange contains further punning of a sexual nature. Hamlet's punning is not arbitrary or that of a fool who jests for jesting's sake—it follows a specific theme concerning Ophelia's sexual state.

Ophelia: Will 'a tell us what this show meant?
Hamlet: Ay, or any show that you will show him. Be not you asham'd to show, he'll not shame to tell you what it means.
Ophelia: You are naught, you are naught.
I'll mark the play.

(3. 2. 143–148)

⁴⁴⁴ With some actors pronouncing “country” as “cunt-try” emphasizing a sexualized pun.

Hamlet's pun on the word "show" holds several possible meanings: a play or performance; to show or reveal a hidden face; to reveal oneself sexually; and also as it is commonly used to refer to the visibility of a woman's pregnancy. Again, there is a metonymical logic involved. The noun "show" borders on the verb, as does the performance on the act of showing. Meanwhile, on one level Hamlet is making sexual puns, asking Ophelia to reveal herself sexually; on another, he is challenging her to admit to a sexual indiscretion about which he is ready to offer his advice. Still another meaning lies in the Elizabethan use of the word "show" as hermaphroditic, a deformed creature, or something contrary to nature.⁴⁴⁵ Hamlet is making every implication that there is something strange and unnatural related to Ophelia's sexual conduct. Hamlet will later, in the "nunnery scene," freely give his advice to Ophelia about how she can free herself from the corrupt court of Denmark. For now Ophelia brushes him off with "You are naught."

The third interchange takes the form of more sexual punning, but this time with the added possibility of childbirth:

Hamlet: I could interpret between you and your love, if I could
see the puppets dallying.

Ophelia: You are keen, my lord, you are keen.

Hamlet: It would cost you a groaning to take off mine edge.

(3. 2. 246–250)

Ophelia's groaning may both indicate an orgasm or the groaning of childbirth. "Dallying" is defined as "Leisurely love-play with a member of the opposite sex."⁴⁴⁶ Some have suggested that the "puppets dallying" holds the further sexual meaning of "pooopies": "poop" was an Elizabethan term used to refer to the female genitals or more generally the "hinder part of a man or animal, the posteriors, rump."⁴⁴⁷ Hamlet is either saying he could act as interpreter for Ophelia's love if he could "dally" with her, i.e. play with her in a sexual way, or that he could interpret what actually happened to her previously chaste state if he could see her and her mysterious lover having sex. Ophelia observes how Hamlet's wit has improved but also become far more cutting:

Ophelia: Still better and worse.

Hamlet: So you mistake your husbands.

⁴⁴⁵ Frankie Rubinstein, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and Their Significance* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 240.

⁴⁴⁶ See Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 114.

⁴⁴⁷ *OED*, vol. XII.

(3. 2. 251–252)

Hamlet's response again suggests several possible meanings. One is of a corrupt Hamlet who reneges on his promise to marry Ophelia, and who possibly even corrupts her based upon her "mistaken" understanding that they are betrothed. Perhaps more likely an interpretation is that Ophelia has wrongly taken someone else as her "husband" by sleeping with someone other than her betrothed, Hamlet.⁴⁴⁸

Again, Hamlet's words are not the ravings of a madman, but maintain a consistent meaning even if it is often masked in wordplay and punning. His lines do not suggest an innocent Ophelia, but rather one who has experienced sexual congress and may even have conceived a child. Later Ophelia, in *her* "madness," aligns Hamlet's story with her own, reiterating his suggestions of conception and pregnancy. Even though Ophelia appears truly to go mad (a subject not hitherto disputed but brought in question here), there is much "method" to her madness that scholarship to date has not attempted to explain or question. Most of Ophelia's mad utterances are in the form of song or ballad and, like Hamlet's own "madness," she resorts to a more cryptic form of communication when the subject is too delicate or dangerous to be said outright. In terms of Ophelia's diagnosis, rather than seeing Ophelia's madness as a potential site of communication on the part of the playwright, critical tradition has preferred to regard her language as the meaningless babble of a madwoman, and often specifically a "hysteric."⁴⁴⁹ We are left with an as-yet-unchallenged view of Ophelia as pathetic, both in her apparent inability to handle her own emotions (pathological) and in her tendency to generate sympathy from all who view her as weak (pathos). While Hamlet's madness is much debated as to whether it is feigned or not, the tendency of the "weaker sex" toward hysteria has been widely accepted both by our society at large and by standard approaches to Shakespeare's play. Indeed, the way we view

⁴⁴⁸ As is implied by Iago about Desdemona in *Othello* regarding Michael Cassio.

⁴⁴⁹ G. S. Rousseau, to cite a further example from this critical tradition, contends that Ophelia's hysteria was a matter of course for a Renaissance *episteme*: "This view of woman as the quintessence of frailty is the one the Renaissance grapples with. Woman, whether viewed in theological or medical contexts, whether by the ancient scholiasts or the derivative Aristotelian biologists and philosophers, whether concretized as weak virgin, bride of Christ, or as deranged Ophelia (another hysteric of course), continues to be conceptualized as part *animal*, part *witch*; part *pleasure-giver*, part *wrecker of destruction* to avenge her own irrationality—anything but as strong, rational creature resembling *homo mensicus*, this view co-existing with men of the Renaissance debate the heresies of Gallilean astronomy and the subtleties of Cartesian physiology." G. S. Rousseau, "'A Strange Pathology' Hysteria in the Early Modern World, 1500-1800," in *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, ed. Sander Gilman et al., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 107-108.

Ophelia adds much to the present debate in psychology about the problematic tradition of viewing women as hysterical.⁴⁵⁰

Ophelia's "matter," like Hamlet's "method," pursues the same consistent theme of conception and pregnancy: Ophelia speaks, or "sings" in some instances, with intention. The second ballad Ophelia sings is on the subject of St. Valentine's Day:

To-morrow is Saint Valentine's Day,
All the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.

Then up he rose and donn'd his clo'es,
And dupp'd the chamber-door,
Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more.

(5. 48–55)

Beginning with Chaucer in *The Parliament of Fowls*, St. Valentine's Day became associated explicitly with mating and with the copulation of birds on the first day of spring.⁴⁵¹ Ophelia's song also deals with the act of copulation and the loss of virginity. The word "maid" as used by Ophelia implies a state of virginity and the "he" in the ballad steals the maid's "maidenhead" so that she "out a maid / Never departed more." If this appears too crass, given the traditional view of a chaste Ophelia, her next song is even more graphic:

By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack and fie for shame!
Young men will do't if they come to't,
By Cock, they are to blame.

Quoth she, 'Before you tumbled me,
You promis'd me to wed.'
(He answers.)
'So would I 'a' done, by yonder sun,
And thou hadst not come to my bed.'

⁴⁵⁰ See Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness*; and Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, Inc., [reprint of the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 2, Hogarth Press] 1955), 250-251.

⁴⁵¹ See *Chaucer's Major Poetry*, ed. Albert C. Baugh (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), 67.

(4. 5. 58–66)

Because Shakespeare's lexicon here is obscure as well as obscene, it has been assumed that Ophelia substitutes "Gis" for Jesus and "Cock" for God in the context of the original song.⁴⁵² I would like to stick to the literal text. The bawdy meaning of the first term has perhaps been lost to us, but in England "Gis" was "a word, repeated quickly, used to call swine to approach," and had many associations with pigs—no doubt a term that could easily have had bawdy connotations within this context in Shakespeare's day.⁴⁵³ The bawdy meaning of the second term, "Cock," is still explicit to a modern audience. So, whereas Ophelia's songs might at first be interpreted in a pastoral sense, lifted from a country setting and recounting the story of a maid who loses her virginity with an overly anxious lover; this is to remove her from the courtly world and likewise to divorce her words from possible meanings that are relevant to the plot and the concept of "Noble Reason." We should consider whether Shakespeare intended these songs to have real relevance in his play, and the possibility that the maid who loses her virginity is none other than Ophelia herself. In this context, the "sun" in Ophelia's ballad is once again a reference to the court: Ophelia now stands outside the court, the "yonder sun" placed beyond her reach and never to be approached again. The cause is a grave sexual indiscretion. Ophelia is saying that young men will have sex if they get the chance, for in such circumstances they are guided by their lower parts and not their minds. But Ophelia separates her subject from this "excuse of the senses"; rather, the person she blames for her unmarried state has grown past youth's

⁴⁵² See Howard Furness, ed., *Hamlet, A New Variorum edition of Shakespeare*, vol. 3 (London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1918), 334, 335. The text is footnoted for "Gis" as follows: JOHNSON: Rather, 'By Cis,' i. e. By St Cecily. RIDLEY: There is not the least mention of any saint whose name corresponds with this, either in the *Roman Calendar*, the service in *Urum Sarum*, or in the *Benedictionary* of Bishop Athelwold. I believe the word to be only a corrupted abbreviation of *Jesus*, the letters J. H. S. being anciently all that was set down to denote that sacred name, on altars, the covers of books, &c. RITSON: Though Gis may be, and I believe is, only a contraction of *Jesus*, there is certainly a Saint *Gislen*, with whose name it corresponds. And for "Cock": DYCE: A corruption, or euphemism, for *God*. This irreverent alteration of the sacred name formerly very common; it occurs at least a dozen times in Heywood's *Edward the Fourth*, where, in one passage, the *Herald* says, 'Sweare...so help you God,' and *King Lewis* replies, 'So helpe me Cock.' Furness, *Hamlet*, 334-335.

⁴⁵³ In Scots, "Gis" is a thick mist or fog, a meaning which may also have implications here of obscuring the "sun" of the court. See *The English Dialect Dictionary*, vol. 2, ed. Joseph Wright (London: Henry Froude, Amen Corner, E. C., 1900), 'Gis'. See also Sir William A. Craigie, *A Dictionary of the Oldes Scottish Tongue*, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 'Gis'. It is also worth considering "gism," as a slang term for semen.

follies. Before illuminating the ways in which Shakespeare further identifies the culprit, let us examine the notion of a pregnant Ophelia more fully.

During her “madness” Ophelia alludes to a traditional English folktale, “The Owl and the Baker’s Daughter.”⁴⁵⁴ “They say the owl was a baker’s daughter. Lord we know what we are, but we know not what we may be” (4. 5. 42–43). The fairy tale has already been examined here in brief to be a moral on the subject of parsimony, but another primary metaphor is pregnancy. The association of baking with pregnancy is a venerable tradition and the image of womb as oven dates back to pre-classical times. The Elizabethan audience could hardly have been unaware of the sexual meaning associated with words pertaining to bread and baking. A few examples make the point: the Latin *formux* means “oven” or “arch” but it is also closely related to the word *fornicatia*, meaning “prostitute,” and thence to fornication. Today we still refer to a brothel as a “hot house” or say that a pregnant woman “has a bun in the oven.” The tale of the baker’s daughter likewise connects baking with fertility, and it is argued here that Shakespeare introduced this allusion to further the image of a pregnant Ophelia.

The examination of the herbs that Ophelia carries, as outlined in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, is worth briefly returning to with regard to the specific topic of pregnancy and Ophelia’s character. John Gerard’s *The Herbal or General History of Plants* (1597)⁴⁵⁵ and *Hieronymus Bock: Kreutterbuch, Strassbourg* (1577) suggest how Shakespeare’s audience

⁴⁵⁴ K. M. Briggs, *Dictionary of British Folk Tales* gives the following summary of the tale:

A Fairy once went into a baker’s shop, disguised as a poor, ragged old woman, and begged for a piece of dough. The baker’s daughter gave her a tiny piece, and the old woman begged that she might be allowed to put it into the oven with the bread.

But when she took the bread out, the girl saw that the dough had swelled into the biggest loaf in the oven, so she would not give that to the old woman. At last, however, she gave her another piece, about half the size of the first one, to go in with the second batch. But that swelled up even larger than the first one, and so the old woman couldn’t have that either. But she begged for the very tiniest piece, and the girl gave her a bit hardly bigger than your thumb, and she shoved it in with the third batch. And it came out bigger than the others. The stupid, greedy girl was frightened at last, and turned great round eyes on the old woman, who had thrown down her cloak, and was standing there all tall and shining, “why, who, who...” she stammered. “Who--who is all you shall ever say again,” said the fairy. “The world has borne too long with your selfish, greedy ways.” She struck her staff, and the girl turned into an owl, and flew hooting into the night, “Lord, we know what we are, but we know not what we may be.”

K. M. Briggs, *Dictionary of British Folk Tales*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), I-443.

⁴⁵⁵ John Gerard, *The Herbal or General History of Plants* (London. 1597), STC #11750.

might have perceived the use of rue in both practical and metaphorical terms. In *'As your daughter may conceive': a Note on the Fair Ophelia*, Erik Rosenkrantz Bruun observes that Gerard's book "assumed great importance for the English peoples."⁴⁵⁶ Indeed, herbs were highly praised during Shakespeare's time not just for their symbolic properties, but for their practical medicinal value as well. Of the herbs Ophelia hands out, many have specific medicinal roles—particularly in relation to pregnancy and birth. Bruun observes that in both Gerard's and Bock's herbal books, fennel⁴⁵⁷ and columbine were used as herbs used to give relief during childbirth, as well as being associated in Shakespeare's day with marital infidelity.

The real significance of Bruun's observation in comparing, perhaps for the first time, Ophelia's herbs with a known Elizabethan herb book is "that nearly all of them are abortives, or are intended to induce parturition."⁴⁵⁸ Bruun's all too brief observation suggests an Ophelia who is pregnant, and while he is not the first scholar to do so (with most naming Hamlet as Ophelia's seducer),⁴⁵⁹ Bruun's conclusion comes from a close reading of text that is metonymically grounded in herbal books and knowledge of the Elizabethan era. Yet one can take Bruun's note in relation to Shakespeare's text still further.

Rue (*Ruta graveolens* Linn.), the herb Ophelia draws the most attention to, is also the most powerful purgative and abortive. Gerard's entry for rue contains the following: "The juice of Rue drunke with wine, purgeth women after their deliuerance, driuing forth the secondine, the dead childe, and the unnaturall birth."⁴⁶⁰ Rue is the only herb Ophelia actually gives to herself—"There's rue for you, and here's some for me"—and may be suggesting to the queen that the herb has commonality to both of them in terms of female-specific use.⁴⁶¹ Ophelia further tells Gertrude, "You may wear your rue with a difference." The most important meaning of the word "difference" as it relates to Shakespeare's play has nearly disappeared from modern usage; in the early modern era, it was a heraldic term for "an alteration of or addition to a coat of arms, to distinguish a junior member or branch

⁴⁵⁶ Eric Rosenkrantz Brunn, "'As your daughter may conceive': A Note on the Fair Ophelia," *Hamlet Studies* 15 (Summer and Winter, 1993): 93-99.

⁴⁵⁷ An infusion of fennel seed is still given today to relieve stomach cramps in neonates, through breast-feeding.

⁴⁵⁸ Brunn, "As your daughter may conceive," 95.

⁴⁵⁹ See Rosenberg, *The Masks of Hamlet*, 775-776.

⁴⁶⁰ Gerard, *General Historie of Plants*, 1070.

⁴⁶¹ It is strongly suggested through context here that Shakespeare is setting up a layered meaning based upon rue as an herb used primarily for women; which helps satisfy the question of exactly to whom Ophelia is handing out her herbs.

of a family from the chief line.”⁴⁶² Steevens also noted how “this seems to refer to the rules of heraldry, where the younger brothers of a family bear the same arms *with a difference*, or mark of distinction.”⁴⁶³ Shakespeare is revealing an Ophelia who will challenge the queen on an heraldic level—an Ophelia who reminds the queen that she still holds the potential, as Hamlet’s betrothed, to wear the same royal coat-of-arms and who probably comes from a royal bloodline herself. In heraldic terms Shakespeare presents a classic distinction of houses dating back to the time of Richard II.⁴⁶⁴

On another level, Ophelia is distinguishing how she will put her rue to a different use from the queen’s. Following Bruun’s suggestion, I want to point out that they are both women who might use it as an abortive; but Ophelia values rue for its abortive properties, while in the older woman it stands as an appropriate symbol of marital infidelity. Both meanings are appropriate for each character’s situation, position, and age. This polysemous usage confirms Shakespeare’s sophisticated level of rhetoric.

6.3 Incestuous Sheets Again

If we choose to take both Ophelia and Hamlet at their word according to this rhetorical use of metonymy, the resulting meaning becomes that Ophelia is pregnant and that she was murdered. The next problem is that of identifying her corrupter. The first ballad Ophelia sings in her “madness” brings us closer to the culprit, I would argue.

How should I your true-love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon.

(4. 5. 23–26)

Ophelia introduces the subject of a lover, but her words are confusing—even to the queen, who repeatedly asks Ophelia the meaning of her song. In the above stanza, Ophelia posits not one true love, but multiple loves among whom she must distinguish her “true-love.” To

⁴⁶² *OED*, vol. IV.

⁴⁶³ Samuel Johnson and George Steevens, eds., *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, vol. 10 (London: C. Bathurst, 1773), 298.

⁴⁶⁴ See Hugh Clark, *An Introduction to Heraldry* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1892), 124.

add further to the irony of this apparent love ballad, there is the introduction of a character in the second line that bears the trappings of an older man, or a Catholic pilgrim, with a “bar by his side” and “shelles of Galys,” such as are identified in William Langland’s *Piers Plowman*.⁴⁶⁵ Again, the hat, staff, and well-worn sandals of experience, are also the type of costume accessories that are found in many of the portraits of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, to denote his rank and authority, as the following picture suggests.



Portrait attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger
William Cecil, 1st Baron Burghley, c. 1585
(National Portrait Gallery, London)

William Cecil is presented here with his cockle hat and staff in his right hand and one could even read the white emblem on his shoulder as a reference to the scallop pilgrim’s shell. This is not to suggest that Ophelia is necessarily indicating Cecil in her ballad. My suggestion is that she is metonymically hinting at a figure of great authority, and a counselor to the queen, Cecil is part of this association, but her father Polonius is foremost.

Puzzled by the ballad, Gertrude tries to make Ophelia clarify herself. The latter is fully able to understand the queen, and insists that Gertrude pay closer attention to the

⁴⁶⁵ The shells were souvenirs, like the *ampullae* of Canterbury, from the scallop-shells of St. James of Compostella in Galicia. For example, in William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* is found the following:

He bar a bordoun ybounde with a brood liste,
In a wethewynde wyse ywrithe al aboute.
A bolle and a bagge a bar by his side;
An hundret of aunpolles on his hat sett,
Signes of Syse and shelles of Galys

William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Derek Pearsall, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 137.

meaning of her words. “Pray you mark me,” she commands as she embarks on the next stanza:

He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone,
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone.

(4. 5. 29–32)

The dead man is the lover from the first stanza. It is also interpretable, however, as a reference to the ghost of Old Hamlet, or to Ophelia’s authoritative dead father, Polonius, the queen’s counselor. Claudius may be right when he observes that what Ophelia sings about most is “Conceit upon her father” (4. 5. 45). Ophelia’s ballad is believed to be a variation of the Walsingham ballad.⁴⁶⁶ Sir Walter Raleigh wrote a similar version of this poem on his deathbed.⁴⁶⁷ Ophelia’s ballad does seem superficially appropriate as mourning for a lost father. Yet, it remains strange that she should also refer to him in association with her “true love.”

The song finishes with a significant “not” that is out of keeping with the rhythm of the poetry, adding a further twist to what might have been a standard song for the dead. Ophelia stresses the fact that the dead lover of her ballad was *not* her true love:

Larded all with sweet flowers,
Which bewept to the ground did not go
With true-love showers.

⁴⁶⁶ See for example Alison A. Chapman, “Ophelia’s “Old Lauds”: Madness and Hagiography in Hamlet,” in *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 20, ed. S. P. Cerasano (Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp., 2007), 124-128.

⁴⁶⁷ Shakespeare’s version, although differing greatly from Raleigh’s, entitled ‘The Passionate Mans Pilgrimage’, is believed by many to take its cue from the first stanza of Raleigh’s poem:

Give me my scallop shell of quiet,
My staff of Faith to walke upon,
My scrip of Joy, Immortal diet,
My bottle of salvation:
My Gown of Glory, hopes of true age,
And thus Ile take my pilgrimage

See *The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh*, Agnes M. C. Latham, ed. (London: Constable & Co., Ltd., 1929). Ophelia’s ballad, in contrast, stresses the idea that the “dead pilgrim” was a lover. Aside from the shared use of the words “scallop” and “staff,” Shakespeare’s text (like his textual agenda) bears little similarity to Raleigh’s.

(4. 5. 38–40)

If the subject of Ophelia's ballad is her father, the question is: is he also her lover? This would well explain Ophelia's addition of a prominent "not" into the ballad with reference to him not being her true love.⁴⁶⁸ It would also explain much of the action throughout the play, providing a good reason for Hamlet's strong accusations against Polonius, a good reason for his eventually stabbing him, and a good reason for Ophelia's distress—so often interpreted as madness in the second half of the play. This would have relatively little impact if the author made us wait until Ophelia's ballads in the fourth act of the play before we knew about it; but just as we are told that Claudius murdered Hamlet's father in Act 1, and that Gertrude had a hand in Ophelia's murder before the clown tips us off, we are given an opportunity to notice that, in Act 2, Hamlet accuses Polonius of sleeping with his daughter. It is useful to view the key passage in its entirety:

Hamlet: O Jephthah judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!

Polonius: What a treasure had he my lord?

Hamlet: Why-

 'One fair daughter and no more,
 The which he loved passing well'

Polonius: Still on my daughter.

Hamlet: Am I not i' th' right, old Jephthah?

Polonius: If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I have a daughter that I love
 passing well.

Hamlet: Nay, that follows not.

Polonius: What follows then my lord?

Hamlet: Why-

 'As by lot God wot,'
 And then you know-
 It came to pass, as most like it was,'
 the first row of the pious chanson will show you more, for look
 where my abridgement comes.

Enter the Players [stage direction]

(2. 2. 403–420)

⁴⁶⁸ Shakespeare's lines of irony in association with the idea of true love find similarities with Ovid in terms of Ovid's "disillusionment with love elegy as a literary genre," and Ovidian uses of irony in relation to this genre. For further reading see Kathleen Morgan, *Ovid's Art of Imitation: Propertius in the Amores* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 48.

Hamlet, foregoing “fishmonger,” calls Polonius “Jephthah.” The reference is to the Biblical character found in *Judges* who, having made a vow to God to sacrifice the first person he met on returning home, is forced to sacrifice his own daughter.⁴⁶⁹ I note, first of all, that the theme of murder, or at least of the willful removal of the daughter is again stressed by means of this inter-textual allusion. There is more to it, however.

The Biblical Jephthah’s daughter is allowed to bewail her virginity in the mountains for two months before being put to death without ever having known a man. Hamlet will soon refine his metaphor to better suit the particulars of Ophelia’s situation. At first Polonius agrees with Hamlet’s comparison and admits he has a daughter he loves “passing well.” This choice of words does not reveal an excess of affection for his daughter, but even so Hamlet’s approach seems intended to focus more on the idea of a father sacrificing his daughter than on the father’s feelings. In taking such a self-centered view of the Jephthah tale, Polonius has missed the point of Hamlet’s words and the latter quickly corrects him: “Nay, that follows not.” When Polonius inquires what Hamlet means, Hamlet’s reply cuts closer to the meat of his argument: not Jephthah, but Lot.

The character of Lot is found in Genesis 19, lines 30–36, and though he is probably best remembered for his wife turning into a pillar of salt, he also notably slept with his daughters.⁴⁷⁰ The meaning of the word “wot” is also found in Genesis (21:26) and is an obsolete form of the word “know”: “I wot not who hath done this thing.” The term “know”

⁴⁶⁹ And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, “If thou wilt give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes forth from the doors of my house who meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord’s, and I will offer him up for a burnt offering. (Lines 30-32) See *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, ed. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 310.

⁴⁷⁰ The full reference as it is found in Genesis:

Now Lot went out of Zo’ar, and dwelt in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to dwell in Zo’ar; so he dwelt in a cave with his two daughters. And the first-born said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father.” So they made their father drink wine that night; and the first-born went in, and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. And on the next day, the first born said to the younger, “Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father.” So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. Thus both daughters of Lot were with child by their father.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, 23.

is used to refer to sexual congress throughout the Bible, and is used in this context in the story of Lot when he says “Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man” (Genesis 19:8). Hamlet is also punning on the word know in the sexual sense when he describes God as “knowing” that Polonius acted like Lot; in the next line, suggesting further—“And then you know”—that Polonius does indeed “know” his daughter. The passage concludes with a very unusual “double take,” asking us to look again at a particular line: “the first row of the pious chanson will show you more, for look where my abridgement comes.” Hamlet’s abridgement is a potential triple pun on the arrival of the players, an abridgement (i.e. an unplanned shortening of the prince’s present discourse), and also a biblical or literary abridgement that points to the character of Lot found in Genesis, as it is found in the first line of his “pious” poem.⁴⁷¹ The word “pious” stresses the last meaning related to Biblical exegesis as the most important.

Shakespeare is using a powerful Biblical metaphor to imply that Polonius is sleeping with his daughter, and has impregnated her just as Lot did his own daughters.⁴⁷² While perhaps certain religious perspectives from more modern times have, due to a certain moral rectitude, chosen to gloss over this Biblical story of incest, the Renaissance more readily embraced the story of Lot in such artistic representations as Hendrik Goltzius’ 1616 painting.



Hendrik Goltzius, Lot and his Daughters, 1616
(Rijksmuseum, Netherlands)

⁴⁷¹ It is interesting to consider how Shakespeare is asking his audience to “look” back upon the words that Hamlet has spoken, more as if they were to be read than spoken; or perhaps the Elizabethan sensibility had a much more visual sense of language than we do today, and would have been able to easily recall the first couple of lines of Hamlet’s words at will.

⁴⁷² The subject of incest is also found in other plays of Shakespeare and is a primary theme in *Pericles*, a topic explored in more depth at the end of this section.

The picture testifies that the story lived in the public realm. One must note, however, that the picture is less explicit than the story in the Bible itself. The father is presented with wine to get him drunk, but the actual “laying with the father” is un-represented. Just as we have seen earlier with the words “Gis” and “Cock,” Shakespeare’s allusion is one that may disturb audiences in his own as well as in later times. Accordingly, most critics have read “lot” as meaning God’s lottery into heaven, thus perpetuating the notion of a mad Hamlet, and rendering both the “Jephthah” and “Lot” terms as meaningless. By consequence, this section is often omitted from stage productions. Scholarly attraction to chance, or Fortuna, as a non-teleological necessity through which God (and man) is informed is well established.⁴⁷³ With respect to this, I am not suggesting that “lot” can only point to the Biblical figure of Lot. I am suggesting that it is also the most literal reading that lies at hand.

Ophelia further supports a reading of sexual impropriety with her “wise protector” of a father.⁴⁷⁴ In terms of the herbs that she carries, she prominently notes that she would have brought violets but that “they withered all when my father died.” The name violet, as it is defined in Dodoens, *A New Herball, or Historie of Plants*, originates from the Greek, “Ion.” According to Dodoens, Ion was “the name of that sweete girle or pleasant damosel Io, which Jupiter after that he had got her with child, turned her into a trim Heyfer or gallant Cow, because that his wife Juno (being both an angry and jealous Goddesse) should not suspect that he loved Ion.”⁴⁷⁵ The association that violets had with improper sexual relations was metonymically established in Shakespeare’s day through the etymology of the flower’s name. Violets are associated with the death of her father since the cause of sexual impropriety has also withered away and died. Ophelia’s mention of violets in relation to her father furthers the metonymic imagery of sexual impropriety and resultant pregnancy.

Gerard’s definition of violets in his *General History of Plants* further helps to explain the term “withered” according to Elizabethan context, and lends credence to the idea of Polonius as a dishonest character:

⁴⁷³ For example, the Arden edition of the play offers the note: ‘as by chance (lot), God knows (wot)’, but nothing more.

⁴⁷⁴ Many interpretations of Ophelia and her relationship with her father merely offer an opinion with little textual or contextual support. For example, contrary to the argument of this thesis Barbara Smith, without much elaboration, contends that, “Ophelia regards Polonius as a wise protector and moral compass whose demands for submission and compliance, especially in light of her own perceived inadequacy, must be heeded,” Smith, “Neither Accident nor Intent,” 97.

⁴⁷⁵ Dodoens, *A New Herball, or Historie of Plants*, 164.

For they admonish and stir up a man to that which is comely and honest: for floures through their beautie, variety of colour, and exquisite forme, do bring to a liberall and gentle manly minde, the remembrance of honestie, comeliness, and all kindes of vertues. For it would be an unseemely and filthie thing (as a certaine wise man saith) for him that doth looke uon and handle faire and beautifull things, and who frequenteth and is conuersant in faire and beautifull places, to have his minde not faire, but filthie and deformed.⁴⁷⁶

The withered violets associated with her father have resonance with the “filthie and deformed,” who have handled such “faire and beautifull things,” and offer an ethical comment on the opposite character type of a “gentle manly minde” that represents “honestie, comeliness, and all kindes of vertues.” Here we have further rhetorical and metonymical illumination of the distinct character differences between Hamlet and Polonius, especially as they relate to Ophelia’s character and from her own perspective.

6.3.1 God’s Lottery

I would like to take the reference to “lot” as “lottery” seriously as well, even though I see it as a modern misinterpretation of the Shakespeare’s use of the word. A closer analysis of Fortuna helps to better define the character of Hamlet. The discussion of Fortuna as it is outlined by Machiavelli in chapter twenty-five of *The Prince* provides a focal point and inspiration for modern interpretation and debate.⁴⁷⁷ In his *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Leo Strauss notes that “Fortuna is not only one god among many as Machiavelli indicates by using in this chapter ‘Fortuna’ and ‘heaven’ synonymously. He notes how Fortuna reminds one in some respects of the Biblical God. She takes the place of the Biblical God.”⁴⁷⁸ Just because Fortuna “reminds one” of the Biblical God does not necessarily mean that she can “take the place” of that force, and Machiavelli’s use of Fortuna and heaven in the same breath does not imply that “Fortuna takes the place of all gods.” Strauss is confusing contiguity, or even replacing one associated term with another, with metonymy and adjacency. The idea of Fortuna replacing God (or other gods) would extend the authority of the material realm to all aspects of the soul. As attractive as this concept might be to a modern anti-essentialist atheist, it would have made little sense to Renaissance

⁴⁷⁶ Gerard, *The Herbal or General History of Plants*, 849.

⁴⁷⁷ See Anthony J. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 60, 84.

⁴⁷⁸ Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1958), 214.

thinkers.⁴⁷⁹ What Strauss overlooks is the traditional Renaissance view of Fortune as limited to the affairs of men and directly related to the Fall. This argument is particularly stressed by St Augustine in Book IV of *The City of God*, where he warns about transforming the goddess of Fortuna into an object of worship “since it is God himself, and ‘not Fortuna, the goddess of luck’ whose will is involved.” For even though Augustine’s position was somewhat countered by the likes of Petrarch, Machiavelli and Leon Alberti, who give far more power to fortune as against divine providence, Fortuna was still modeled after the Boethian idea of “a heavenly instrument, a ‘general minister and guide’ ordained by God to dispose of ‘the goods of the world’.”⁴⁸⁰ In the Renaissance, Fortuna was not equated directly with God, but rather with the material realm and the Fall of Man. The reason that fortune is often depicted as blind is not because she holds a divine intuition that does not need sight, but because she is an errant force; and as the Italian scholar Brunetto Latini (1220–1294) discussed in *The Books of Treasure (Li Livres dou Trésor)*, we should not rely on “the goods of Fortune,” but “we must rather believe what wise men say, that it is God by whom the powerful are thrown down and the feeble lifted up.”⁴⁸¹ The running debate on how large a role Fortune played in the lives of men in relation to Divine providence provided one of the most prominent philosophical, theological, and artistic focal points of the Renaissance. Works like Alciato’s *Emblem of Fortuna*, 1551 and Sigismondo Fanti’s *Triumph of Fortune (Triumpho di Fortuna, 1526)*—especially emblematic images like the “Sphere of Jove”—show us in images this archetypal role Fortuna played in the minds of many Renaissance philosophers.

The natural adversary of Fortuna was Virtus (as virtue was tempered through wisdom, through a person rising above the base nature of their passions). In *Hamlet* it is expressed when Hamlet says:

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,
And could of men distinguish her election,
Sh’ath seal’d thee for herself; for though hast been
As one, in suff’ring all, that suffers nothing,
A man that Fortune’s buffets and rewards

⁴⁷⁹ Strauss for example, “seeks to maintain at all costs his position that Machiavelli is the bearer of modernity,” with an “overwhelming concern to present Machiavelli as the founder of modern political philosophy” primarily through an assertion of the latter’s atheism. Strauss’ logical slide serves an overtly Marxist argument “that religion, including Christianity, is a purely human invention, to be manipulated by an unscrupulous, often irreligious political elite.” Anthony J. Parel, *Machiavellian Cosmos*, 59. See also Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 95.

⁴⁸⁰ Skinner, *Foundations*, 96.

⁴⁸¹ Skinner, *Foundations*, 96.

Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those
Whose blood and judgment are so well commedled
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee.

(3. 2. 64–74)

Fortune is representative, here, of the “whips and scorns of time,” i.e. the struggles the soul encounters in its “imprisonment” through a descending movement (“the Fall”) from a universal realm to one of particulars. John Pocock explains how

[t]he problem of the particular was its finitude, its mortality, its instability. The mortality in time of a system of human justice, moreover, was not simply a matter of *physis*, the natural life and death of living things; it was a moral failure, a repetition of the Fall, and at the same moment another triumph of the power of Fortune. When men sought to erect moral systems in finite and historical shapes, they were placing their virtue at Fortune's mercy.⁴⁸²

Pocock's observation speaks to the type of finite moral systems that characters such as Shylock and Othello represent, that is to say empirical or Aristotelian arguments rather than Platonic ones. These concern fundamentalist principles that lack the guidance of universal virtues to carry them through the storms of mis-Fortune.

With respect to this, the character of Hamlet is distinguished from his two colleagues Rosencrantz and Guildenstern not solely on account of his rank, but according to a higher sense of virtue, as these supposed friends are each exposed as “passion's slave” and bedfellows of Fortuna. It is later revealed in the play that the virtue of their friendship is built upon a foundation of dishonesty, double-crossing, and betrayal. When Hamlet inquires about their relation to Fortuna, they do not reside in a house of virtue that tries to place Fortuna outside its door, but admit to sleeping with the goddess at every chance they can.

Guildenstern: Happy, in that we are not over-happy, on Fortune's cap we are not the
very button.

Hamlet: Nor the soles of her shoe?

Rosencrantz: Neither, my lord.

Hamlet: Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?

⁴⁸² John Greville Agard Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 78.

Guildenstern: 'Faith, her privates we.

Hamlet: In the secret parts of Fortune? O, most true; she is a strumpet.

(2. 228–236)

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are more than just unwilling participants in Fortune's material promises and rewards; in their conspiracy to kill Hamlet they soak up the king's "rewards, his authorities" (4. 2. 16). Hamlet shows no remorse upon their death when he tells Horatio "Why, man, they did make love to this employment, / They are not near my conscience" (5. 2. 57–58). It is not just conscience that separates Hamlet from these men but consciousness: their baser natures are beneath that of the prince who strives to make the right choice of action despite the "whips and scorns of time." In Hamlet's estimation, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths are not due so much to Fortune, or God's lottery, but to their own base choices:

Their defeat

Does by their own insinuation grow,

'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes

Between the pass and fell incensed points

Of mighty opposites.

(5. 2. 58–62)

In the light of this all, the commonplace reading of Hamlet's "lot" in the Jephthah scene as "lottery" or "chance" rather than "Lot" (unless of course Hamlet is being incredibly ironic) cannot stand. It is not through chance that God knows, but rather through divine will. Early modern thinkers would have accepted this almost universally. The "lottery" interpretation runs counter to Hamlet's position from a more Neo-Platonic and Humanist spiritual atheistic as outlined through the rest of the play. It seems highly unlikely that Shakespeare would write a character who strongly stands on the side of Virtue in opposition to Fortune through multiple passages of the play, and who then asserts that Fortune trumps even God. In this respect, critical interpretation of this line does not make any real sense, or merely adds to an interpretation of Hamlet's "madness."

There is, however, a secondary meaning imbedded in Shakespeare's choice of words less overt than the reference to the Biblical Lot. This reference points instead to the end of the tenth book in Plato's *Republic* with Socrates' telling of the myth of Er. A type of "lottery" is implied here, although not of the nature described above since chance is not an element; and explicit is the prominence given to an individual's freedom of choice. Chance is not as prominent as are the ideas of tyranny and incest. A portion of the story is as follows:

And when the prophet had said these things, Er said that the one drawing the first lot rushed out and chose the greatest tyranny, and he chose it because of his

senselessness and his gluttonous greed, not having considered everything sufficiently, and it escaped his notice that part of the fate of his lot was the eatings of his own children and other evils.⁴⁸³

The anonymous figure may bear a resemblance to Thyestes, but the point is that of representing any tyrant (with all of the political implications that term carries to the consideration of statehood) as someone who is capable of such horrors as sacrificing his or her own children to their selfish desires. The cannibalistic notion of feeding upon one's own progeny is linked closely to the act of incest as "that part of the soul that is willing to eat or copulate with its own kin operates, on a figurative level, as a representation of the illimitable desire or greed that possesses the tyrant; but also operates as the actual part of the tyrant's soul that drives him to do those things."⁴⁸⁴ Plato represents these two symbolic and causal aspects of the soul through the characters of Oedipus and Thyestes in much the same way King Claudius and Polonius are found exemplary in Shakespeare. Working with *iudicium* according to disposition and arrangement, Shakespeare is here presenting his *inventio* in reverse three-part triangulated order: from "incest" to "tyranny," and then to the now antithetical property of "Noble Reason" free of such corruption. Metonymy is consistent as a method to establish and verify the points of reference (often as aspects of character) that help generate this semiotic architecture (logic) and ethical wisdom.

Hamlet's reference to "Lot" offers an image of a greedy, tyrannical, and sexually active Polonius, and in the same breath uses metonymy to accuse Polonius of incest. It is not the only passage that concerns this possibility (*copia*). In the same "fishmonger scene" in Act 2 is also found the following exchange:

Polonius: What is the matter, my lord?

Hamlet: Between who?

Polonius: I mean the matter that you read, my lord.

Hamlet: Slanders sir, for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plumtree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams. All which sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down, for you sir shall grow old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.

Polonius: (Aside) Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.

⁴⁸³ As cited in Brian S. Hook, "Oedipus and Thyestes among the Philosophers: Incest and Cannibalism in Plato, Diogenes, and Zeno," *Classical Philology* 100, no. 1 (January, 2005): 24.

⁴⁸⁴ Hook, "Oedipus and Thyestes among the Philosophers," 25.

(2. 2. 192–204)

Critical tradition sides with Polonius that Hamlet is mad (whether feigning it or not), and despite Polonius' confession of a "method," has not hitherto attempted to attribute meaning to these words of Hamlet's—generally assuming instead that Hamlet is actually reading the text randomly out of some book. Rather, the prince is making a calculated attack on Polonius. Hamlet is emphasizing that this old man has sexual potency, and is trying to take his place as Ophelia's lover. The operative word in Hamlet's speech is "together," which markedly separates the subject of "weak hams" from the rest of his description of what old men like Polonius are supposed to be like.

The "hams," or thighs, were an area of the body widely associated with sexual potency in Shakespeare's day.⁴⁸⁵ They are traditionally ruled over by the astrological sign of Sagittarius,⁴⁸⁶ but in *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare puts their rulership under the astrological sign of Taurus.⁴⁸⁷ Taurus, in turn, is ruled by the planet Venus and furthers the link to sexuality and exaggerates the sexual pun.

The first part of the speech is an apt description of Polonius, and what Hamlet "powerfully and potently" believes to be "not honesty" is that Polonius is sexually inactive, i.e. that he has "weak hams." Hamlet is telling Polonius that he is aware that the old man

⁴⁸⁵ In Donne's *Sapho to Philaenis* is found:

And between us all sweetness may bee had
All, all that nature yealds, or art cann adde:
My two lips, Eyes, thighes, differ from thy two,
But soe as thine from one another doe
And oh noe more: The likenes beeinge such
Why should they not alike in all parts touch?
Hand to strange hand, lip, to lip none dennies;
Why should they brest to brest, or thighes to thighes?

(*Sapho to Philaenis*, 43-50)

John Donne, *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, vol. 2, *The Elegies*, ed. Gary A. Stringer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 410.

⁴⁸⁶ Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 6.

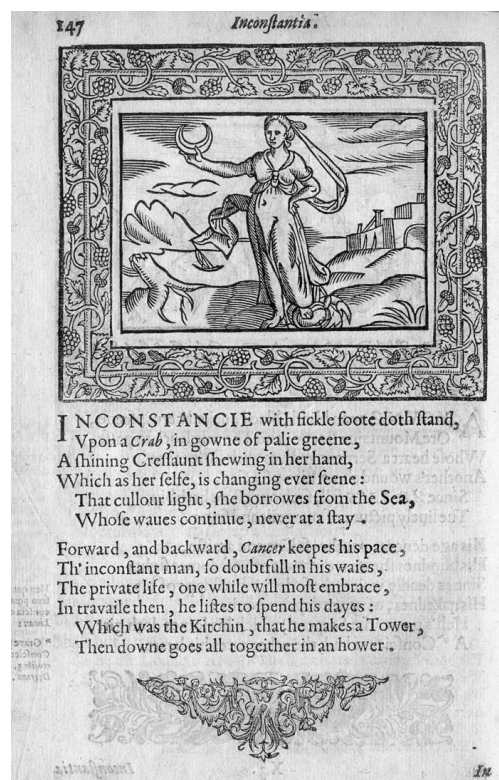
⁴⁸⁷ In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* the comedy comes from the characters' confusion of the ruling signs:

Sir Toby: What shall we do else? were we not born under Taurus?
Sir Andrew: Taurus? That['s] sides and heart.
Sir Toby: No sir, it is legs and thighs.

(*Twelfth Night*, 1. 3. 138-140)

is both sexually powerful and potent. Furthermore, Hamlet accuses Polonius of trying to take his place in time: of growing “old as I am,” trying to act the part of the young, powerful and potent Hamlet. Polonius, old as he is, is not ready to give up power to the young Hamlet; a fact already established on a political level, but underscored here in this sexual arena of power.

The “crab” is the constellation of Cancer, which moves both forwards and backwards in the night sky. The implication is that if Polonius could turn back time and become young enough again, he would be a more appropriate sexual competitor with Hamlet. As evinced in Henry Peacham’s emblem from *Minerva Britanna*, Cancer was also associated with inconstancy, and further helps define Polonius as a man duplicitous by nature: “Forward, and backward, *Cancer* keeps his pace, Th’inconstant man, so doubtfull in his waies.”⁴⁸⁸



Emblem 147

Henry Peacham, *Minerva Britanna*, 1612

The “inconstancie” of the backwards crab further delineates Polonius as a character who cannot be trusted and whose rhetoric is constantly shifting to accommodate his own desires.

⁴⁸⁸ See Henry Peacham, *Minerva Britanna* (London, 1612), STC (2nd Ed.) / 18511, 147.

The outward shows of Polonius' literal semantics are reflective of an interior duplicity, while conversely, Hamlet's outward metonymic complexity is reflective of specific meanings aligned in accordance with "Noble Reason."

The thought objects "hams" and "grow old as I" and "if like a crab you could go backward" are three elements that work metonymically in this passage. The word "hams" has the secondary meaning of Noah's son Ham, "grow old as I" can refer to Noah as being 500 years old when he begat his sons (Genesis 5:32), and "backward" to Noah's curse upon his son Ham for his inability to go backward "like a crab" as his brothers did when confronted with his nakedness. In Genesis we find:

And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid *it* upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces *were* backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.

The occurrence of three different signifiers all with secondary meanings that metonymically relate to the specific story of Ham's relationship to Noah is hardly a non-significant coherence. The prominent interpretation of this passage according to Rabbi Judah ben Samuel dating back to the twelfth century as an act of sodomy, further promotes the metonymic and copious reading of incest as significant in *Hamlet*.

One last illuminating example of Polonius' character reveals Shakespeare's contempt for the kind of self-serving man Polonius represents:

Hamlet: Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?
Polonius: By th' mass and 'tis, like a camel indeed.
Hamlet: Methinks it is like a weasel.
Polonius: It is bak'd like a weasel.
Hamlet: Or like a whale.
Polonius: Very like a whale.

(3. 2. 376–82)

The camel image may have served to reinforce the character of Polonius as a lecher: it is an animal recognized primarily by its "hump," which may have been a term for copulation in Elizabethan times just as it is today.⁴⁸⁹ The "deed" Polonius speaks of is a further pun on the "act" of copulation. An even more cutting meaning from the metaphor comes from the notion that the camel with its hump was a sort of monster, "deviating in one or more of

⁴⁸⁹ *OED*, vol. VII.

its parts from the normal type,⁴⁹⁰ just as Shakespeare's Richard III's deformed body was a direct reflection of the deformation of his character and soul rather than a factual representation of the historical figure. In associating Polonius with a camel, Hamlet is suggesting that he too is a type of monster.

With the image of the weasel, Hamlet digs at another aspect of Polonius' character—as a loathsome animal that takes more than its share, sucking on the defenseless eggs of nobler animals. A more detailed description is found pointedly in *Henry V*:

For once the eagle being in prey,
To her unguarded nest the weasel
Comes sneaking, as so sucks her princely eggs,
Playing the mouse in absence of the cat,
To 'tame and havoc more than she can eat.

(2. 2. 169–73)

Hamlet is beginning to pun on Polonius' self-serving nature. He continues along the same line with the “whale.” The whale is found in Act 2 of *Pericles* when one of the fishermen inquires how the fishes live in the sea. The other fisherman replies,

Why, as men do a-land; the great ones eat up the little ones. I can compare our rich misers to nothing so fitly as to a whale: 'plays and tumbles, driving the poor fry before him, and at last devour them all at a mouthful. Such whales have I heard on a'th' land, who never leave gaping till they swallow the whole parish, church, steeple, bells, and all.

(1. 1. 28–34)

What better portrayal of Polonius is there than this whale, greedily trying to gain ranks in the court and, like the monarchy in Denmark, ready to take on the church as well. The non-fictional character of William Cecil also developed “like a whale” the maritime power of England by encouraging fishing, pirating, and even authorizing illegal slave trading.⁴⁹¹

Modern alternative reading of these lines are not nearly as specifically explained. Harold Bloom wonders: “Is it not evident that in this scene Polonius is at the same time a courtier who humors the prince and an adult who would not cross a sickly, capricious boy? Polonius does not in the least believe Hamlet, and he is right.”⁴⁹² A. D. Nuttall writes in *Shakespeare the Thinker* how

⁴⁹⁰ *OED*, vol. IX.

⁴⁹¹ Henri See, *Modern Capitalism, Its Origin and Evolution*, trans. Homer B. Vanderblue (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968), 53.

⁴⁹² Bloom, ed., *Bloom's Shakespeare through the Ages: Hamlet*, 166.

Hamlet cruelly draws Polonius into warm, positive agreement and then hits him with the emergent truth that a cloud can be made to resemble pretty well anything we like. Polonius is left stammering agreement with the last interpretation given, and we sense that he would now agree with anything. So Polonius is made a fool of, as the play *Hamlet* makes a fool of any critic who offers a single positive interpretation.⁴⁹³

Nuttall's comments are exemplary of a critical trend grounded in the assumption that Shakespeare offers no authoritative voice and unlimited potential for possible interpretation. *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* offers the following as a footnote: "A cloud is whatever you think it to be, and, like the authenticity of the Ghost, one's view of it changes all the time."⁴⁹⁴ Nuttall's conclusion supports the idea of a Shakespearean text that is open to any and all interpretation, yet Polonius is made a fool, according to Nuttall, precisely because he follows the lead of interpreting the cloud as "pretty well anything we like." Specific meanings, such as here offered by the symbolic animal shapes of the clouds that Hamlet point out to Polonius, are not viewed as possible by Nuttall, or any critical analysis of the play that I have encountered. How, though, does one make the leap from Polonius being made a fool of suddenly to the play *Hamlet* making a fool of any critic—the two ideas are not precise. If any critic is made a fool by offering a "single" positive interpretation, does that not also imply that any and all interpretations are likewise futile? The characterization of Polonius as a fool is also too simplistic according to the character as outlined in this dissertation.

⁴⁹³ A. D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 201. Nuttall's approach is not revolutionary. There are strong echoes here of critics like William Hazlitt or Cedric Watts, and as I have shown previously, this view of an ambiguous text has become one of the standard and universally accepted approaches to *Hamlet*.

⁴⁹⁴ Philip Edwards, ed., *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 168. The Arden Shakespeare *Hamlet* furthers this theme of constant change without any fixed perspective or meaning: "Either Hamlet enjoys contradicting himself and exposing Polonius' insincerity, since a weasel is very unlike a camel, or we assume that the supposed cloud is changing very rapidly, like the one evoked by Antony at AC 4.14.1-11" Thompson and Taylor, eds., *The Arden Shakespeare: Hamlet*, 324.

6.4 Incest and Context

Incest is a textual theme found throughout our Western history with prominent works such as John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*,⁴⁹⁵ the Constance Theme,⁴⁹⁶ and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* are exemplary.⁴⁹⁷ Shakespeare develops the theme of incest prominently in some of his other plays, however, so there is little need to rely on antecedent literary phenomena in order to contextualize the theme of incest according to a metonymic reading of incest in *Hamlet*. Incest in relation to the political had a distinct and particular resonance in a Renaissance *episteme*. Adonis in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* was born of an incestuous father-daughter relationship between Cinyras and his daughter Myrrha.⁴⁹⁸ The most prominent of Shakespeare's works that includes incest as its theme is *Pericles*, in which the king, Antiochus, has committed the sin of sleeping with his daughter but has hidden it behind a royal secret riddle. The person who guesses the riddle is granted the privilege of marrying the king's daughter, and those who fail, are killed.

I am no viper, yet I feed
On mother's flesh which did me breed.
I sought a husband, in which labor
I found that kindness in a father.
He's father, son, and husband mild;
I mother, wife – and yet his child.
How they may be, and yet in two,
As you will live, resolve it you.

(*Pericles*, 1. 1. 64–71)

Pericles is quick to discover the answer to the riddle, but is no longer interested in his prize. He flees the country and in doing so escapes suffering Antiochus' intention to kill him:

⁴⁹⁵ See C. David Benson, "Incest and Moral Poetry in Gower's "Confessio Amantis"," *The Chaucer Review* 19, no. 2 (Fall, 1984): 100-109.

⁴⁹⁶ Named after the heroine in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*. For further reading see Elizabeth Archibald, "The Flight from Incest: Two Late Classical Precursors of the Constance Theme," *The Chaucer Review* 20, no. 4 (Spring, 1986): 259-272.

⁴⁹⁷ See for illustration Kent R. Lehnhof, "Incest and Empire in the "Faerie Queene"," *ELH* 73, no. 1 (Spring, 2006): 215-243.

⁴⁹⁸ Shakespeare found inspiration here likely from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* where the theme of incest is found prominently in the story of Byblis in Book 9 and in the story of Paphos's Granddaughter Myrrha in Book 10. See William S. Anderson, ed., *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Books 6-10 (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972); and Betty Rose Nagle, "Two Incest Narratives in the "Metamorphoses"," *The Classical Journal* 78, no. 4 (April-May, 1983): 301-315.

Pericles having “found the meaning, / For which we mean to have his head. / He must not live to trumpet forth my infamy” (1. 1. 143–145). The test of the riddle is set up so that there is no way to overcome it but through escape. The same holds true for a proposed incest theme in *Hamlet*, where Ophelia’s only possible release from the sins of her father is through escape to a safe haven such as a nunnery.

Pericles escapes to a kingdom (similar to Hamlet’s ideal of a Catholic nunnery as an escape for Ophelia from an incestuous and immoral Denmark) that judges him upon his honor and good deeds—a tournament providing the means for gallantry that wins him his wife. The counterpoint between the two kingdoms amounts to a condemnation of the kingdom whose “outward shows” are of power and wealth but which is corrupt at heart. The heuristic model of the casket test outlined in the introduction becomes particularly relevant in *Pericles* when Antiochus’ daughter, in Act 1, enters “apparel’d like the spring” (1. 1. 13) with all the outward shows of virtue, but as W. B. Thorne points out “she who seemed to be a representative of fertility, like the other women in the comedies, is really a representative of age and winter, because, through her incestuous relationship with her father, she confounds the seasons and offends the very laws of nature.”⁴⁹⁹ Yet, the theme of incest involves not simply the breaking of a prohibition by the gods or nature; it is specifically a metaphor for a rulership that has turned inward on itself, and seeks its own selfish ends rather than extending itself to the benefit of others.

The issue of marriage in Shakespeare’s plays reflects not just a pragmatic aristocratic approach to union but also a measure of “Noble Reason.” What is wrong with illegitimacy? Marc Shell provides two answers to this question in his examination of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*: the first is “the appropriate dispensation of patrimonies depends on ascertainable parentage and birth order”; the second is that “if illegitimacy becomes widespread, then any man and woman risk incest when they satisfy natural desire by sexual intercourse.”⁵⁰⁰ Legitimacy, though, as it is outlined in *Hamlet* is not merely about royal birth or royal blood, but a possession of “Noble Reason” that is the foremost judge of a good prince or king. Incest is a procreative act that goes against natural order, but more so it is one that transgresses the measure of “Noble Reason” and is akin to an act of madness.

Since nearly all of the characters in Shakespeare’s plays are aristocratic, marriage is not simply about free will and love in the romantic sense; it is more about political unions between powerful families. Legitimacy plays an essential role in these unions. In *Pericles*,

⁴⁹⁹ W. B. Thorne, “Pericles and the “Incest-Fertility” Opposition,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (Winter, 1971): 47.

⁵⁰⁰ Shell, *The End of Kinship*, 37.

we see that honor stands above the purely selfish motives of the protagonist to win the king's daughter. The theme of incest is representative of a kingship that refuses to establish the alliances that were such an essential part of the political workings of rulership.⁵⁰¹ The implication is also one of a rulership based upon faulty moral grounds, as this type of sexual indiscretion is indicative of deep greed and self-serving passions that are not in alignment with just and honorable rule.

The claim that legitimate rule would, or should not act incestuously is implied. Rather, legitimate rule is meant to be defined and judged by principles such as virtue or "Noble Reason" and not simple sexual congress as the sole guide of progenitorship and right to rule. In other words, incest is simply a telltale and repeated symptom of a much deeper problem with the type of self-serving rulership that Shakespeare is presenting in these plays. The personal damage done to the victim of incest is a metonymic indication of an even greater transgression against the people at large for whom the incestuous king is supposed to serve. Thus, in Shakespeare's poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, the sexual (and moral) crime of rape becomes interwoven with the weak foundations of rulership. Lucrece looks upon a painting depicting the fall of Troy and complains

Why should the private pleasure of some one
Become the public plague of many moe?
(*The Rape of Lucrece*, 1478–79)

A father sleeping with his daughter is an act reflecting ownership and title beyond the boundaries of honor. Likewise, a government acting for its own benefit and profit is clearly not in service of its people (just as greed, according to Aristotle, is contrary to justice).⁵⁰² Richard III, one of Shakespeare's most degenerate characters, is like Claudius and kills to gain power that at the same time transgresses the prohibition on incest. Also like Claudius, Richard III shows little to no sign of trepidation or remorse:

What though I kill'd her husband and her father?
The readiest way to mae the wench amends
Is to become her husband, and her father.
(*Richard III*, 1. 1. 154)

⁵⁰¹ Elizabeth's unmarried status could have been viewed as an "incestuous" state, or "State," in that she does not go forth and increase her relations with another country through a marriage alliance, but stays, so to speak, in her own house.

⁵⁰² See Richard Kraut, ed., *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 193.

While not as forcefully as in *Pericles* or *Richard III*, this notion of incest as a proprietary act of power can be seen in plays other than *Hamlet*. In *Measure for Measure*, Isabella is used as a bargaining chip for her brother Claudio's life. Angelo, the newly appointed Duke, asks Isabella to exchange her "maidenhead" for her brother's "head." Isabella's virginal loss in relation to her brother's life might seem rather slight in light of modern sensibilities, but the crux of Shakespeare's dramatic dilemma is not that she is asked to have sex with Angelo but that she is bartered in this matter.

Isabella swears that "O, were it but my life, / I'd throw it down for your deliverance / As frankly as a pin" (3.1.103–104). When her brother asks her to sacrifice her honor for his life, she turns on him, "Is't not a kind of incest, to take life / From thy own sister's shame?" (3. 1. 138–139). In Isabella's question, the element of exchange in *Measure for Measure* is put simply and eloquently: honor is weighed against personal gain. "Incest" is the specific term used to describe this transgression. Despite the play's happy outcome and its title's evocation of justice and balance, it can be seen as continuing Shakespeare's argument that honor is something that cannot be bartered. Angelo, the instigator of these corruptions, condemns himself. "Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary / And pitch our evils there, Oh fie, fie, fie!" (2. 1. 70–71). He knows that his action is not a fair exchange, a "measure for a measure," or a *lex talionis* according to the law of like for like, but a dishonorable corruption of something that is both good and honorable.

In *King Lear* a similar theme is found. As with Ophelia and Hamlet, it is important to define the exact nature of Lear's madness. It may come as no surprise that it hinges upon the theme of incest, as Shakespeare further explores the metaphor of incest as representing a corrupt government bent on satisfying its own selfish desires.

The play opens with the king intent on dividing his lands between his three daughters.⁵⁰³ His provision is that each one professes her love to him. The way that they express their love is in quantitative terms—their words measured just as one would count money. Lear challenges his daughters to a contest in which they must voice their love in exchange for property: "Which of you shall we say doth love us most, that we our largest bounty may extend" (1. 1. 51–52). The daughter who can profess the strongest affection will win the lion's share of Lear's domain.

Goneril, the oldest, professes her love to be "Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare, / No less than life, with grace health, beauty, honor" (1. 1. 57–58). Her pledge may seem honest enough on the surface, yet these are the very things that she is prepared to

⁵⁰³ While the history of English land and title is not the focus here, such an inquiry would find its foundations in William the Conqueror's *Domesday Book* (1086). For further reading see Elizabeth Hallam, *Domesday Book Through Nine Centuries* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986); and Anne Williams and W. H. Erskine, eds., *Domesday Book Studies* (London: Alecto Historical Editions, 1987).

sacrifice in exchange for the land – grace, health, beauty, and honor. The second, Regan, drives home Shakespeare’s point by saying that her sister “names my very deed of love” (1. 1. 71). When it is Cordelia’s turn to quantify her love for her father, she answers that she is willing to sacrifice “Nothing” in exchange (1. 1. 85). The two elder sisters’ speeches seem righteous enough but in comparison with Cordelia’s words, they emerge as replete with imagery based upon monetary gain; their professions become a “deed of love”—deed being used in the transactional sense—in exchange for the land promised by Lear. Cordelia will not use her love as currency, not matter how “rich or rare,” in order to buy Lear’s affection. Yet it is Cordelia who is thrown out of court because she will not offer all of her love to her father, as her sisters have. She protests:

Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Happily, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
(1. 1. 99–104)

The implication is that the king’s demand for his daughter’s love goes beyond the norm and threatens the boundary of husband-hood. What at first seems to be a simple demand for a declaration of love, Cordelia’s comment reveals to be an incestuous demand. Lear is laying claim to that part of his daughter she reserves for her husband only. It is her sisters who have willingly partaken in Lear’s unnatural demand for their love by “selling” it in exchange for a part of the kingdom. Like Isabella, Cordelia holds true to her honor rather than partake in what she views as a corrupt exchange. Even though it means that she is expelled from the kingdom, she maintains her integrity as Lear loses the one daughter who truly loves him. The almost overt theme of incest in Lear is nothing new to Shakespeare scholarship,⁵⁰⁴ but it is the context of incest with regard to “Noble Reason” that is pertinent to my argument here; and while a historically common topic of this theme, it is not often brought into discussions of either *King Lear*, *Pericles*, let alone *Hamlet*.

Lear’s choice of Goneril and Reagan of his three daughters, to the exclusion of Cordelia, reflects the choice of the three caskets found in *The Merchant of Venice*. This

⁵⁰⁴ See for example John Donnelly, “Incest, Ingratitude, and Insanity: Aspects of the Psychopathology of King Lear,” *Psychoanalytic Review* 30 (1953): 149-153; Richard McCabe, *Incest, Drama, and Nature’s Law, 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Arpad Pauncz, “Psychopathology of Shakespeare’s King Lear,” *AI* 9 (1952): 57-78; Marureen Quilligan, *Incest and Agency in Elizabeth’s England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), chapt. 7; Lawrence R. Schehr, “King Lear: Monstrous Mimesis,” *SubStance* 11, no. 3 (1982): 51-63; and S. C. V. Stetner and Oscar B. Goodman, “Lear’s Darker Purpose,” *L and P* 18 (1968): 82-90.

parallel was explored in depth by Freud in his essay, “The Theme of the Three Caskets.”⁵⁰⁵ The first two caskets/daughters promise rich rewards, but in reality bear no fruit. Cordelia promises “Nothing” in return, as she is the leaden casket that holds the greatest love as well as the highest virtue. “Nothing” is representative of her divine love, not a “love” that is materialized as her sisters do in order to please her father and in order to fatten their inheritance. Through a re-alignment with Nature, Lear is able to regain a sense of his own humanity, and reinstate a sense of duty; this time, not as a self-serving king, but universally as a man, a father, and a potentially loving soul. Lear’s madness is rooted in his choice of material reward and gain above the non-material (essentialist) aspects of true love. In this manner, the play becomes an ethical dialogue and a teaching of virtues leading toward greater wisdom. The theme of incest is implicit in the depiction of a father who measures his daughter(s) according to the material benefit they can promise him.

6.4.1 The Economy of Incest

There are marked similarities here with the relationship between Polonius and Ophelia, and Lear and Cordelia. There are also similarities, as noted previously, between the characters of Polonius and Lear with their use of monetary terminology in their speech. This is metonymically significant since usury was associated with incest within a Renaissance *episteme*. Thus the idea of kingship and the metonymic meaning of incest extended into the economic realm of rulership as well as the political. The two were considered adjacent and close in proximity.

Strictly speaking, usury was defined as the charging of any interest.⁵⁰⁶ The crime of usury “before the Reformation, consisted in the taking of any interest for the use of money; and now in the taking a higher rate of interest than is authorized by law.”⁵⁰⁷ In general, interest was allowed but limited; for example, interest rates in early modern Venice were tolerated but limited to five percent. In 1544, for example, the Council of Geneva defined usury as anything exceeding five percent return.⁵⁰⁸ The fact that usury was considered to

⁵⁰⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 109-121.

⁵⁰⁶ From Medieval Latin *usuria* meaning “use” was the charging of a fee for the use of money. To be included here is also the term “usance” OED, vol. XIX. Ivo of Chartres defined usury as “anything taken above principle.” See Anna Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1995), 61.

⁵⁰⁷ OED, vol. XIX, cites Erskine, *Princ. Sc. Law* (1809).

⁵⁰⁸ Robert Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France, 1555-1563* (Geneve: Librairie Droz, 2007), 37.

be a criminal act was nothing new. One of the age-old complaints, especially apparent in the Middle Ages, about charging interest was that it was against nature for money to breed money. Aristotle was one of the first to condemn the practice as “contrary to nature.”⁵⁰⁹ He considered it incestuous that money could be reproduced from itself—like a father breeding with his own offspring—and therefore immoral: “For money was intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase at interest. And this term usury (*tokos*), which means the birth of money from money, is applied to the breeding of money because the offspring resembles the parent. Wherefore of all modes of making money this is the most unnatural.”⁵¹⁰ So with the Greek term, *tokos*, both incestuous pregnancy, birth, and usury are implied. Metonymically, these three thought objects of incest, birth, and usury can be related to the throne of Denmark in Hamlet that extends into a natural adjacency with how the kingship rules inside the castle and the monetary policies that extend out from it.

Still others made usury akin to an act of sodomy, wasting good seed on barren soil for the pleasure of the individual without benefit to others.⁵¹¹ For instance, the allegorical character Sodomismus, in John Bale’s *Comedy Concernynge thre lawes, of Nature, Moses and Christ, corrupted by the Sodomytes, Pharysees and Papystes* (c. 1548) says “I wyll corrupe Gods Image / With most unlawfull usage, / And brynge [man] into dotage, / Of all concupiscence.”⁵¹² While it was considered natural for animals to breed, the same rules did not apply to capital. Moreover, the issue of usury was so controversial, as Bale’s text illustrates, because it connected to a problem that had been one of the recurring vexing points in European history, namely the problem of representation and, by consequence,

⁵⁰⁹ See for example Mary P. Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen, A Study of Aristotle’s Politics* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1992). Nichols explains that, “Aristotle condemns usury as unnatural, rather, because it radicalizes the abstraction from nature that money represents. Aristotle explains that money can take the place of a variety of goods and thus make them commensurable. It reduces goods to one another and gives the impression that natural diversity can be comprehended by a single universal. Usury carries this abstraction from the heterogeneity of nature even further. In nature, everything that comes into existence does so from some particular thing, but usury makes something come from nothing. While for Aristotle the origins do not completely control development, usury denies the origins altogether.” Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen*, 27.

⁵¹⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2000), 1258b, 46. For more in depth discussions of usury see Benjamin Nelson, *The Idea of Usury: From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), and John T. Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

⁵¹¹ See David Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), chapt. 5, “Sodomy, Usury, and the Narrative of Shakespeare’s Sonnets,” 95-114.

⁵¹² As cited in Hawkes, *Idols of the Marketplace*, 98.

idolatry. Money was originally invented as a representation of real goods, not to be considered a commodity in and of itself, which would bring in the danger of the simulacrum.

In 1545, Henry VIII reversed the historical trend that had made usury illegal, by legalizing interest charges on loans and setting an upper limit of ten percent.⁵¹³ Henry's daughter Elizabeth I continued to allow this practice of legalized usury to flourish in a world of expanding mercantile interests.⁵¹⁴ William Cecil, Elizabeth's chief adviser and the Lord Treasurer of England, was instrumental in drafting a renewal of the Usury bill following the rule of Edward VI, who had forbidden all lending at interest.⁵¹⁵ The banking system that grew up around these laws and practice of usury has been identified as the origin of modern financial capitalism.⁵¹⁶ This Elizabethan revival of the Henrician legislation did meet with some complaint. Both Thomas Wilson's *Discourse upon Usury* (1572)⁵¹⁷ and John Hales' *Discourse of the Common Weal of this Realm of England* (1581)⁵¹⁸ took hard looks at the moral implications of an English government allowing usury to flourish. The contextual historical reality is perhaps more illustrative than the historical discourses in terms of the problems of a rule that allows usury to flourish. A result of usury practiced during Shakespeare's day was the practical horror of debtor's prisons as a common part of London life.

Shakespeare likely knew people, or fellow playwrights, who both wrote about and were subject to the perils of this phenomenon.⁵¹⁹ The dark history of debtors' prisons in Renaissance England formed a growing concern at this point in Elizabethan history. These institutions were the direct and tangible result of a new economic system of laws regarding interest and penalties surrounding debt payment. According to Elizabethan law, if you

⁵¹³ Norman L. Jones, "William Cecil and the making of economic policy," in *Political Thought and the Tudor Commonwealth*, ed. Paul A. Fideler and T. F. Mayer (London: Routledge), 179.

⁵¹⁴ The 1545 royal act to authorize interest at ten percent was repealed in 1552 and then made anew in 1571. See Henri See, *Modern Capitalism, Its Origin and Evolution*, 39.

⁵¹⁵ Jones, "William Cecil and the making of economic policy," 177.

⁵¹⁶ See, *Modern Capitalism, Its Origin and Evolution*, 7.

⁵¹⁷ Thomas Wilson, *A Discourse Upon Usury*, ed. R. H. Tawney (London: George Bell, 1925).

⁵¹⁸ John Hales, *Discourse of the Common Weal of this Realm of England*, ed. Elizabeth Lamond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893).

⁵¹⁹ Plays like Lodge and Greene's *A Looking Glass for London and England* (c. 1590), George Wapull's *The Tide Tarrieth No Man* (1576), and Robert Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London* (1584) took a critical stance at usurious practice. A few playwrights: Henry Chettle, John Day, and most notably Thomas Decker, found themselves imprisoned for debt. See Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare & Co.: Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker, Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, John Fletcher, and Other Players in His Story* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008).

owed money that you could not pay, you were sent to prison until you could. The irony was that imprisonment for debt, as the modern historian Liza Picard points out, “provided no way for the debtor to raise any money, and weighed on the consciences of decent citizens.”⁵²⁰ These prisons, she notes, were ubiquitous, “scattered all over London—some worse than others, but all bad”; they were maintained not by public institutions, but by “private individuals, who had no duty to feed prisoners or to look after them in any way.”⁵²¹ Begging on the street by charitable individuals just to provide food for debtors in prison became not only commonplace, but necessary for the survival of those imprisoned who had little means of providing the basics for life. Among many firsthand accounts, this one of Philip Stubbs’s *Anatomy* will serve:

Beleeve me it greeveth me to heare (walking in the streats) the pitiful cryes, and miserable complaints of poore prisoners in durance for debt, and like so to continue all their life, destitute of libertie, meat drink (though of the meanest sorte), and clothing to their backs, liying in filthie straws, and lothsome dung, wursse then anie Dogge, voide of all charitable consolation and brotherly comfort in the World, wishing and thirsting after death to set them at libertie, and loose them from the shackles, giues, and yron bands.

Notwithstanding, some mercilesse tygers are growen to such barbarous crueltie that they blush not to say, “tush! He shall either paye me the whole, or els lye there till his heels rot from his buttocks; and before I will release him, I will make dice of his bones. (522)

Evidently, there was horror involved when one was not able to pay one’s debt. And the theme of flesh as a means of paying is in play, here, as well: “merciless tigers” who would rather have the flesh rotting from their prisoner’s bones than releasing someone from his goal or debt. Hamlet’s phrase “false as dicer’s oathes” further reflects the morality of the people who maintained these debtors prisons for their own profit.

The Merchant of Venice, with its metonymical use of the pound of flesh, falls within this Elizabethan usury debate cannon; but Hamlet is also metonymically linked to this topic. The triangulation of incest (usury) and rulership adjacent to monetary rule is contextualized in a historical Shakespearean context that is also adjacent to incest, and rulership according to rule by monarchy. Hamlet calls Claudius “A cutpurse of the empire and the rule” (3. 4. 96–99). From Hamlet’s perspective Denmark in terms of both money

⁵²⁰ See Liza Picard, *Elizabeth’s London: Everyday Life in Elizabethan London* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003), 253.

⁵²¹ Liza Picard, *Elizabeth’s London: Everyday Life in Elizabethan London*, 253.

⁵²² Phillip Stubbs, *Anatomy of the Abuses in England in Shakespeare’s Youth*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall (London: N. Trubner & Co., 1877-9), 127.

and monarchy is not governed by “Noble Reason” but by incestuous acts that make it illegitimate it on multiple political levels. In *King John*, Philip the Bastard rails against “Commodity” and declaims a “Mad world! Mad kings! Mad composition!” (2. 1. 561). In Hamlet, commodity is metonymically linked to the “rotten” state of Hamlet’s Denmark—where the rulers express their madness through self-centered acts like murder or incest, and perhaps even more damning is their “Mad composition” (rhetoric), since it shows little regard for metonymic considerations of important thought objects such as “Noble Reason” and its adjacencies.

Thus, at the end of the play, Hamlet relates to Laertes that he has not offended him by killing his father since the real culprit is the madness that exists in Denmark as exhibited by the current rule (of which his father was an integral player):

What I have done
That might your nature, honor, and exception
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
Was’t Hamlet wrong’d Laertes? Never Hamlet!
If Hamlet from himself be ta’en away,
And when he’s not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
Who does it then? His madness. If’t be so,
Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged,
His madness is poor Hamlet’s enemy.

(5. 2. 230–239)

Hamlet’s lines could be read literally as a form of *se deffendendo* with his own loss of sanity as his excuse for killing Polonius. Hamlet, though, is speaking these lines in the presence of the king and queen metonymically, and not directly or literally. Still his lines emphatically state that he is not the cause of the “purpos’d evil” but rather it is his madness. He has been “from himself” taken away not only to England, but also from the political arena of the court where a rule of madness has supplanted Hamlet’s potential as a rightful and “right” or “noble” ruler. Why is the madness of the court Hamlet’s madness? Simply because he is adjacent to it as the Prince of Denmark. For this same reason, it is also by his noble duty, his “enemy.” Laertes is almost as blind to Hamlet’s metonymic speech as he is to Ophelia’s earlier in the play, although he does admit that killing Hamlet is “almost against my conscience” (5. 2. 296)—so there is some glimpse that in his heart he suspects where the true madness lies. Even so, Hamlet’s invitation for Laertes to think according to the triangulated terms of “nature, honor, and exception” are not able to “roughly awake” him any more than Ophelia’s invitation to remember, think, and pray were interpreted by Laertes as anything more than the outward shows of madness.

6.5 Incest, Hamlet, and Oedipus

Rather than a Freudian approach to Hamlet that supports the notion that Hamlet wishes to commit incest, it is the argument of this thesis that Hamlet strives to fight the metonymically implied forms of incest at all levels: familial, political, and economic.

In 1560, Alexander Neville wrote the first English translation of Seneca's *Oedipus*. The play was available in Latin before that time, so what is interesting about this version is the manner in which Neville translated the play, and the emphasis (or additions) he made to certain parts of the text. In his book, *Incest, Drama, and Nature's Law 1550–1700*, Richard McCabe outlines some of these stylistic differences both between Seneca's original and revisions of Neville's translation in 1563 and 1581: for example, "Seneca's Oedipus laments the unnatural reversal of family relationships, whereas Neville's berates the power of 'filthy lust'," "Jocosta develops from lamenting a 'woofull soul' in 1563 to a 'sindrownd soule' in 1581," and there is "more of the association between incest and violence ... for example, from 'incestuous lothsome lust' to 'incest, and bloody deedes'."⁵²³ These differences set the stage for Elizabethan approaches to incest as they differed markedly from the classical; translated and reinvigorated with a distinctly Renaissance view. As McCabe notes, there is a shift from Aristotelean concepts of "sinne," "chaunce," and "error" to an Oedipus who is very much aware of "wicked misdemeanor" and "detestable deedes," as well as a "corrupted conscience." McCabe stresses that "so inextricable are the strands of personal guilt and fatal design in Neville's version that Oedipus's final speech is expanded (from twenty lines to fifty-three) into a grotesquely convoluted monologue which was to serve as a pattern for much early Elizabethan tragedy."⁵²⁴

One is reminded, here, of Hamlet's soliloquies; "filthy lust" in Hamlet is also stressed, Jocosta "sindrownd" is mirrored in Ophelia "drowned, drowned, drowned," and Hamlet's "corrupted conscience" which "doth make cowards of us all." The stylistic similarity between Hamlet and Nevill's text are symptomatic of an Elizabethan approach to the incest theme that highlighted individual consciousness and violence over chance and error. "Royal Blood" is infused with divinity as well as great responsibility in Shakespeare's time and both Hamlet and Oedipus (from an Elizabethan modeling) support this concept. "Attempting to preserve the "ever sacred laws" of Nature, he overthrows "the

⁵²³ Richard A. McCabe, *Incest, Drama and Nature's Law, 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 110.

⁵²⁴ McCabe, *Incest, Drama and Nature's Law*, 110.

lawes of sacred shame,” affording an “example unto ages all of *Gods foretold before*,” writes McCabe of Neville’s Oedipus, but this could equally apply to Hamlet, whose “Royal Blood” ghost/god of a father foretells the crime of incest from the very beginning.⁵²⁵

Even before Hamlet encounters his father’s ghost he, as an educated prince, would have been familiar with the easy association of incest with royal rule. The idea of incest as symbolic and representative of an even broader set of behaviors marked by excess and a breach of the limits of power was prominent in discussions dating back almost to the Ptolemaic Dynasty (which supported the practice of incestuous marriage among royalty).⁵²⁶ The Egyptians were part of a host of classical examples used in such prominent Elizabethan discussions of subject such as Thomas Beard’s *The theatre of Gods iudgements: or, A collection of histories out of sacred, ecclesiasticall, and prophane authours* (1597).⁵²⁷ Even though incest in England was not a civil crime,⁵²⁸ incest for Elizabethans was seen as not only a deformity of character, but also a deformity against nature, exemplified by such artifacts as the Colwall pamphlet which bears the title: *A most straunge, and true discourse, of the wonderfull iudgement of God. Of a monstrous, deformed infant, begotten by incestuous copulation, betweene the brothers sonne and the sisters daughter, being both unmarried persons*.⁵²⁹ When Hamlet laments that “[t]he time is out of joint: O cursed spite / That ever I was born to set it right” (1. 5. 188–189), his task is to right a breach of politics as well as nature. This is the obligated through birth and is reflective of the concept of “Royal Blood.”

In *Hamlet*, as in some of these other plays such as *King Lear* mentioned above, the daughter is brought into play as the pawn of her father’s desires. In *Measure for Measure* and *King Lear* this action is only partially successful; whereas in *Hamlet* and *Pericles* the court has reached a more extreme state of corruption. Ophelia is already mired in the corrupt court and the sins of her father doubtless well before the action begins. Hamlet, though, does not believe her to be beyond saving, yet it is clear that there are few options available. For Polonius, Ophelia is another tool with which he is able to advance his own power with the crown, even if it means jeopardizing his daughter’s real chance as Hamlet’s bride.

⁵²⁵ In much the same way Oedipus’ fate is foretold by the fortune-teller, Tiresias, in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*.

⁵²⁶ Sheila L. Ager, “The Power of Excess: Royal Incest and the Ptolemaic Dynasty,” *Anthropologica* 48, no. 2 (2006): 165-186.

⁵²⁷ See Robert Hole, “Incest, Consanguinity and Monstrous Birth in Rural England, January 1600,” *Social History* 25, no. 2 (May, 2000): 188.

⁵²⁸ It was not until 1908 that incest became an offence under statute law according to The Punishment of Incest Act. For further reading see Victor Bailey and Sheila Blackburn, “The Punishment of Incest Act 1908: A Case Study of Law Creation,” *Criminal Law Review* (1979): 708-718.

⁵²⁹ As cited in Hole, “Incest, Consanguinity and Monstrous Birth in Rural England,” 185.

From a consideration of the thematic concept of incest in terms of the *episteme* of the Renaissance, as well as the internal proposed contexts of Shakespeare's play, the resonances become copiously rich. The significant extent to which this idea born out of Shakespeare's rhetoric supports our original context of a Hamlet of "Noble Reason" and extends to an Ophelia of "Noble Reason." This rhetorical model is markedly Ciceronian, and supports my overall thesis that Shakespeare uses complex rhetorical structures like metonymy to engender context that is highly cohesive and comprehensive to impart greater meaning and to create argument. Within this topology, the term "madness" becomes metonymically potent as a referent to the meaning that it pretends to distort. Thus the act of reading truth for madness is a commonplace rhetorical form dating back to classical times. "Incest" also becomes a contextualized metonymic trope that is used in a Renaissance *episteme* to criticize governments that act out of self-interest rather than in the interest of the people. These rhetorical structures formulate a debate around specific arguments that are presented by the significant characters in the play. Does one side with Gertrude or Ophelia? With Polonius or Hamlet?

According to a modern *episteme*, whereby under the act of doubling meaning is believed to engender meaning, the classical notion of multiple tropes without any individual or particularly identifiable meaning somehow creating logic through a method of rhetorical *copia* is foreign to us. In such an environment where meaning seems to be born out of nowhere, it may be more comfortable to say that meaningless engenders meaningless, i.e. that these phrases represent incoherent madness, than to argue a case for meaning where none appears at first to exist. In any attempt to either formulate or interpret a theorem it is far easier to turn to its "null set" than to prove it (creation of formulas is often considered so difficult as to be the challenge of geniuses).

With the metonymic establishment of the theme of incest, Shakespeare here, however, has proven his theorem of a noble Hamlet and Ophelia through refuting a mad prince or princess with a consistent structure that supports a very specific meaning in opposition to its antithetical (of madness, or any and all interpretation presented by such a "null set"). Shakespeare has proven his argument rhetorically, or structurally, and has also presented his case copiously (*copiousness*).

6.6 “Get thee to a nunnery”: a Re-investigation of a Prominent Crux

Before concluding this chapter on the character of Ophelia, and this particular metonymic examination of *Hamlet*, it is worthwhile to take up one of the most traditional “problem” scenes of the play—the so-called “nunnery” scene, in which Hamlet tells Ophelia to leave the corruption of the court and retire to a nunnery.

Many interpretations of the play give the term “brothel” as an alternate gloss to “nunnery.” However, I would argue that in this scene Hamlet uses the term “nunnery” in the a more literal sense of a nunnery, but that this term functions metonymically in a profound way that relates to the prominent incest theme in *Hamlet*. Marvin Rosenberg noted that “as a vestige of Protestant England’s anti-Catholic cant, *nunnery* could presumably connote a brothel.”⁵³⁰ Is “presumably,” though, a modern presumption? John Dover Wilson helped establish the idea of Hamlet in this scene as “coming very near to calling Ophelia a prostitute to her face.”⁵³¹ Philip Edwards also writes, in order to promote Hamlet as offering a nihilistic view of mankind as a whole: “Only in a convent will Ophelia be able to resist the inclinations of her own nature, and by desisting from sex and propagation she will the sooner put an end to sinful Mankind. As with Lear and Timon, Hamlet’s disgust with Mankind makes him think it were better if generation ceased.”⁵³² Edwards’ perspective fails to include that Shakespeare’s prince views “conception as a blessing,” but not in the exceptional case of how Polonius’ “daughter may conceive.” The notion of a nunnery as an escape from abuse (in terms of violation or perversion) is too often overlooked.⁵³³ James Howell’s *Letters* (1647) refers to this traditional usage when he tells of a friar who made a pact with the devil to ravish any woman “whom he fancied” after which “The Gentlewomen whom he had abuse’d put themselves into a Nunnery by themselves.”⁵³⁴ If such abuse is mentioned in association with Ophelia, it is generally Hamlet who is named as the perpetrator.⁵³⁵ Historically, the scene has confounded critics

⁵³⁰ Rosenberg, *The Masks of Hamlet*, 532.

⁵³¹ Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet*, 134.

⁵³² Philip Edwards, ed., *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, 161.

⁵³³ Gordon Williams, *Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature* (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), 3.

⁵³⁴ Williams, *Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery*, 3.

⁵³⁵ Scott F. Crider writes how “[i]n one of *Hamlet*’s most painful sequences, Hamlet’s violently sexual despair leads him to abuse Ophelia with his own self-loathing.” Scott F. Crider, *With what Persuasion: an*

dating as far back as Dover Wilson, who wondered whether “Gertrude had played the harlot with Claudius; why pour abuse which might be appropriate to her upon the unoffending head of Ophelia?”⁵³⁶ Exasperated from the attempt to find a cohesive explanation for this scene (among other problematic passages), some critics have suggested that Shakespeare’s text is purposefully devoid of meaning.⁵³⁷ While multiple meanings may be possible, this does not necessitate that specific authorial intent is not possible. As one of the great cruxes of the play, the meaning of this scene has not gone unanswered, but still remains a mystery. John Dover Wilson noted that: “The attitude of Hamlet towards Ophelia is without doubt the greatest of all the puzzles in the play, greater even than that of the delay itself, a fact which should long ago have created suspicion that in the course of three centuries Shakespeare’s original intentions have somehow been obscured.”⁵³⁸

The nagging suspicion that Shakespeare’s “original intentions have somehow been obscured” continues through to this day. This has not prevented attempts to discern meaning from the text. Jacques Lacan, in his essay “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*,” suggested that Ophelia is an unattainable object of desire for Hamlet, an *objet petit a*, that has deprived Hamlet of his phallus.⁵³⁹ She is “the phallus, exteriorized and rejected by the subject as a symbol signifying life.” Lacan argues that the name Ophelia itself represents this lost phallus of Hamlet by meaning “O phallus,” and that the phallus is the signifier of Hamlet’s “alienation in signification.” Thus, when the “subject is deprived of this signifier, a particular object becomes for him an object of desire.”⁵⁴⁰ Lacan further asserts that since Hamlet cannot possess Ophelia, he is trapped forever “in the time of the Other,” which accounts for his delay and procrastination.⁵⁴¹ Lacan presents an interesting

Essay on Shakespeare and the Ethics of Rhetoric (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2009), 9; and Gabrielle Dane argues how Ophelia, “has been verbally and very likely physically assaulted by Hamlet in the course of Polonius’s little love test.” Dane, “Reading Ophelia’s Madness,” 408.

⁵³⁶ Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet*, 101-2

⁵³⁷ Eleanor Prosser, for example, in a postmodern historicist fashion notes that, “[t]he ambiguity of Shakespeare’s cryptic and contradictory references to the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia can never be resolved to the satisfaction of everyone. But does a valid interpretation of the play require that we find “the truth”? May Shakespeare have been purposely ambiguous?” Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), 148. See also Leo Kirschbaum, “Hamlet and Ophelia,” *Philological Quarterly*, 35 (1956): 376-93.

⁵³⁸ Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet*, 101.

⁵³⁹ I am indebted here to a translation and summary of Lacan’s essay, “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*,” in Marvin W. Hunt, *Looking for Hamlet* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 182-85. Also see Jacques Lacan, “Desire and The Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*,” in *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982): 11-52.

⁵⁴⁰ Hunt, *Looking for Hamlet*, 183.

⁵⁴¹ Hunt, *Looking for Hamlet*, 183.

counterpoint to modern critical perspectives of Ophelia as “nothing” and representing the female genitalia by seeing her as a phallic object. I am not convinced that either of these perspectives do justice to explaining the complexity or nobility of her character, though.

True to an honest and just nature, Hamlet is advising Ophelia to escape the sins of the court by retreating to a nunnery where she might successfully atone for an incestuous crime (as a “breeder of sinners”) through prayer (as well as recommending the best possible place where she might actually have a child away from the view of the court). Again, while some have noted “nunnery” to be contemporary slang in Shakespeare’s time for a brothel, and while this may hold true in certain other plays, it is more in keeping with Hamlet’s character that he would attempt to save Ophelia rather than drive her further into disrepute. It is in Ophelia’s prayers, her “orisons,” that Hamlet is reminded of the sins of the court at the beginning of this scene:

Nymph, in all thy orisons
Be all my sins remembered

(3. 1. 88–89)

Likewise, it is in prayer that he asks Ophelia to find refuge. Hamlet commands her to “Get thee to a nunn’ry, why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?” (3. 1. 120–121). The notion of “breeding” is a further reference to her pregnant state and is closely associated with the sin of incest.

In fact “nunnery” was a metonymic term in Shakespeare’s day that held adjacency with incest. The major topic of debate was between the pure love that is found on a spiritual level that does not distinguish between physical consanguinity and physical, or corrupted, love that potentially succumbs to the attractions of the flesh. The two are mediated by grace. Marc Shell explains how

This give-and-take of kinship can be seen in two opposed but closely interrelated literary plots. In the first, a lay person, for whom some people are kin and some are not, tries to escape from the desire to commit sibling incest or the guilt of having done so by entering into a nunnery or monastery. Here all the people are equally kin or not kin and making love to one’s sibling is no worse or better than making love to any other person in the Universal Siblinghood. By entering the nunnery or monastery a protagonist thus ascends from earthly incest into Universal Siblinghood in the order. In the second plot, a monk or nun leaves the convent and commits physical incest with a biological sibling, thus descending from Siblinghood in the convent into physical incest outside it. Taken together, the typologies of ascending from earthly

incest and descending into it help to define the ideological significance of and the social need for such apparently fictive places or *topoi* as heaven on earth.⁵⁴²

Hamlet confesses in this scene: “What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunn’ry” (3. 1. 126–129). His *topoi* are almost as pointedly specific to the subject of incest as is the term “nunnery.” The locus of nunnery is the notion of incest in terms of its profane as well as its sacred (or holy) implications, or “that of the polar opposition between and the sameness of incest on earth (“sin”) and incest in heaven (“grace”).”⁵⁴³ The religious topic of the sacred and the profane was a prominent theme in the Renaissance *episteme* and its literature.⁵⁴⁴ “Incest” as metonymically related to “nunnery” according to a Renaissance *episteme* becomes not only the most prominent semantic association, but also the most semantically potent.⁵⁴⁵

With this metonymic rhetorical analysis, Hamlet and Ophelia find common ground in the concept of the nunnery as a place of mitigating sin through grace. It is also a rhetorical fulcrum around which the issue of both Hamlet and Ophelia’s “Royal Blood” revolve. This is why the term is repeated by Hamlet so many times in this one scene (*copia*) as “nunnery” has metonymic resonance with both “grace” and with “incest.”

Hamlet’s good advice (imploration of grace) includes within it and counters a list of possible deceptions that Ophelia might use to cover up her sin. The meaning of these deceptions has eluded scholarship, which has once again preferred to interpret most of Hamlet’s words, in this scene as elsewhere, as predominantly the ranting of a madman. One alternative would be for Ophelia to marry in an attempt to legitimize her pregnancy. This idea is abhorrent to Hamlet: “If thou dost marry, I’ll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunn’ry, farewell” (2. 2. 134–136). Even if Ophelia marries and is faithful she cannot escape the sin she harbors. Hamlet, displaying the requisite ability for good kingship, to weigh issues and choose the most noble course, is urging her to follow similar advice he

⁵⁴² Shell, *The End of Kinship*, 10.

⁵⁴³ Shell, *The End of Kinship*, 64.

⁵⁴⁴ For further reading see Mary Arshagouni Papazian, ed., *The Sacred and Profane in English Renaissance Literature* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2008).

⁵⁴⁵ The metonymic association of nunnery with incest carried into Reformation polemics and was therefore not an isolated linguistic phenomenon of the Renaissance but one with strong historical semantic roots. See Thomas A. Fudge, “Incest and Lust in Luther’s Marriage: Theology and Morality in Reformation Polemics,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 34, no. 2 (Summer, 2003): 319-345.

gives to Gertrude in Act 3: “throw away the worser part of it, / And live the purer with the other half” (3. 4. 157–158).

A second method of deception would be for Ophelia to hide her pregnancy. This form of deceit is equally intolerable to Hamlet: “I have heard of your paintings, well enough. God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another. You jig and amble, and you lisp, you nickname God’s creatures and you make your wantonness your ignorance” (3. 2. 142–145). On one level Hamlet is talking about the affectation of women and their use of make-up. He introduces this idea as an example of how women are particularly adept at hiding physical incongruities in their natural beings. More, Hamlet is referring to the ways he has “heard” of women disguising their pregnant state.⁵⁴⁶ He is aware of how women can feign ignorance of their “wantonness,” their sexual indiscretions that have caused pregnancy, and even how they “nickname” their babies once they are born, thus hiding them under a different name. How might a woman like Ophelia be able to disguise such an obvious fact as a pregnancy? During the Renaissance this was in fact not so far-fetched a possibility since pregnancy (as well as child-birth) was considered for the most part a women’s concern. It was not until later centuries that male doctors included in their active practice overseeing pregnancy and birth.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁶ Pregnancy had a certain mystery about it that was delegated to the female arena in the Renaissance. Hamlet talks about some of the practices surrounding pregnancy and childbirth as if they were issues he had heard about, but had little real understanding of. For more on this subject see Cathy Clive, “The Hidden Truths of the Belly: The Uncertainties of Pregnancy in Early Modern Europe,” *Social History of Medicine* 15 (2002): 209-227; Janelle Jenstad, “‘Smock-secrets’: Birth and Women’s Mysteries on the Early Modern Stage,” in *Performing Materinty in Early Modern England*, ed. Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 87-100.

⁵⁴⁷ Generally, scholars place the medicalization of childbirth as late as the eighteenth century. See Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 82. Female midwives played an important role in childbirth during the Renaissance period. Childbirth was considered a natural process and not involving disease or active interventions, so the presence of a male doctor, or any men for that matter, during a woman’s birth was often deemed unnecessary and even inappropriate. Elizabeth Furdell’s research on the subject has shown the value of midwives to royal births and that the Stuart royal midwives Anne Dennis and Margaret Mercer, “received generous warrants for their essential services to the nation.” Elizabeth Lane Furdell, *Publishing and Medicine in Early Modern England* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 94. See also Caroline Bicks, *Midwiving Subjects in Shakespeare’s England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).



Sixteenth century childbirth
Eucharius Rosslin

Woodcut from *Der Swangern Frawen und he bammen rosgarten*, 1513

The sixteenth century woodcut above shows the process of childbirth reflected as one involving only women—and not male doctors or even husbands.⁵⁴⁸ In short, Hamlet is telling Ophelia that the disguise method for unwanted babies he has heard rumors of will not work any better than a hasty marriage.

Hamlet further notes also how women walk differently when they are pregnant: they “jig and amble.” It is also of note that the Second Quarto reads “list” for “lisp,” introducing the metaphor of a ship listing to one side: much as a woman sometimes does when she is overburdened with child. Shakespeare’s Titania also uses this same image of a ship to describe a pregnant woman in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.⁵⁴⁹

Nor is Hamlet’s strong insinuation that he has been cuckolded by Polonius absent from this scene. “Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them” (3. 1. 133–135). The term “monster” is a commonly used Elizabethan alternative for cuckold.⁵⁵⁰ The consistent use by Hamlet of the term “fool”

⁵⁴⁸ Another example can be found in Alrecht Dürer’s woodcut, *Birth of Mary*, 1503. The image reflects a sixteenth century style birth attended entirely by women; some even depicted drinking and chatting to one another in the bedchamber.

⁵⁴⁹ Titania says:

When we have laughed to see the sails conceive
And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind;
When she, with pretty and with swimming gait
Following-her womb then rich with my young squire-
Would imitate, and sail upon the land

(*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 2. 1. 113-117)

⁵⁵⁰ See Partridge, *Shakespeare’s Bawdy*, ‘make a monster of’, 185.

to refer to Polonius, as we have seen, is well established throughout the play. Shakespeare even sets up this pun a few lines earlier, reminding us of Hamlet's adopted name for Polonius:

Hamlet: Where's your father?

Ophelia: At home my lord.

Hamlet: Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in's own house.

(3. 1. 126–129)

For those who still might try to implicate Hamlet in the corruption of Ophelia, it is clear here that he is the one who feels cuckolded, and not vice versa. These lines of Hamlet's are very reminiscent of his early conversation with Polonius in which the idea of Ophelia's pregnancy is first mentioned: "Let her not walk i'th'sun. Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive, friend, look to't" (2. 2. 184–186).

A possible meaning of these lines has already been explained in detail, but it is important to remember that the terms "friend" and "fool" are not here used in the modern sense, but in a more complex and derogatory way in Shakespeare's day. We can still grasp some of the force of Hamlet's words and the irony in calling Polonius a "friend" or a "fool," and it is easy to hear in the language of passages like this one Hamlet's strong defiance of the corruption that he sees in the court around him. Far from being someone whose worldview is one of absolute pessimism, Hamlet's sad predicament is precisely that he can envision a better court for Denmark: it is precisely this vision, this insight that makes Hamlet persist in his dream for a better world around him. The mankind Hamlet faces in Denmark includes murder, corruption, incest, and deceit, just to name a few. In spite of all this, Hamlet carries himself with poise, and if at times he is "proud, revengeful, ambitious," he must be in order to maintain his sanity against such opposition (3. 1. 125). Through all of this, Hamlet bears himself like a king ready to take on a "sea of troubles," even though all of Denmark seems bent on his demise. Our traditional vantage point on Hamlet as mad, suicidal, or psychologically infirm renders useless the entire possible structure of the play delineated in this chapter. If Hamlet is unable to rule himself, his quest to rule Denmark becomes meaningless. The Catholic associations with a nunnery cannot be overlooked either, and are a reminder that Hamlet (and Ophelia) has a tendency to be governed by canonical inspirations and codes of conduct. These inspirations during a time of flourishing Protestantism could be considered by some to be the ravings of a madman, or simply a political stance that needs to be cloaked in *Oratio Obliqua* in order to be safely expressed.

By advising Ophelia to retreat to a nunnery, Hamlet is also displaying his love for her. This sentiment is further revealed in Act 5 during the funeral of Ophelia, when he tells Laertes:

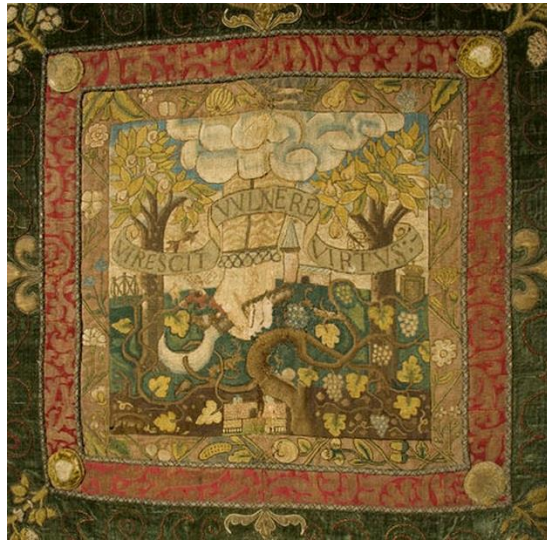
I lov'd Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love
Make up my sum.

(5. 1. 271–273)

What we learn from these scenes interpreted in this way is that Hamlet and Ophelia hold the hope of just rulership as potential king and queen, although in reality they face the machinations of a corrupt court. Ophelia is aligned to Hamlet in her insistence upon the truth, and her death is further testimony that she was not party to the deceptions of the court, but rather their victim. The result is a highly tragical political play in which, though the potential for honest leadership is great, the reality of unjust rule proves even greater.

One interchange from the nunnery scene stands out particularly in this regard when read metonymically. Hamlet tells Ophelia that “Virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it” (3. 1. 116–118). Hamlet’s lines are reflective of the motto of Mary Queen of Scots, “*Sa virtus m’atire*” or “Its virtue draws me” with the emblem of a marigold flower turning to face the sun in heliotropic fashion. Mary’s motto was also chosen because it stands as an anagram for Mary Stuart. When Mary was imprisoned by Elizabeth she changed her motto to “*Virescit Vulnere Virtus*,” or “Virtue flourishes by wounding,” and created an emblem incorporating this motto that she embroidered onto a cushion (now titled: The Marion Hanging), and was used as evidence of her treasonous intent. The emblem showed a hand holding a pruning hood and cutting unfruitful branches from a vine. Margaret Swain, in *The Needlework of Mary Queen of Scots*, provides an explanation: “It appeared to be a pious exercise on the part of the captive breathing the spirit of Christian resignation, but the panel was intended to convey a very different message. Mary sent it to Norfolk, and the message was plain for him to read: the unfruitful branch of the royal house (Elizabeth) was to be cut down; the fruitful branch (Mary) would be left to flourish and bear more fruit.”⁵⁵¹

⁵⁵¹ Margaret H. Swain, *The Needlework of Mary Queen of Scots* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1973), 75. Thomas Howard, the Duke of Norfolk had the expectation to marry Mary and surpland Elizabeth. He was executed in 1572 for treason against the throne.



Mary Queen of Scots, The Marion Hanging, 1570–1585
(Oxburgh Hall, Norfolk)

Mary's emblem may be differentiated from Hamlet's image to the extent that the act of pruning differs from the act of grafting; but this is not to diminish the emblematic nature of Hamlet's words. He is speaking to Ophelia in terms that are linked to royal status, and of the importance of virtue over vice in terms of royal succession and rule. The image here fully supports Hamlet's Juvenalian proposed use of *ense rescindendum* to affect a cure for Denmark's "body politic." Another motto from Mary's embroidered display of emblems is "*Virtutis Vincula Sanguinis Arctiora*" or "The bonds of virtue are straighter than those of blood," and drives home the point of royal virtue alongside images of plants and flowers personifying proper royal expression of flourishing and growth.⁵⁵² The issue here is one of "Noble Reason" as virtue is given more prominence than Royal Blood. The use of plants as metaphor by both Ophelia and Hamlet become reflective, not of the pastoral, but of political and religious concerns on ruling both the body and the soul. These are aristocratic concerns related to divinity and virtue, and not reflections of incoherent "madness."

⁵⁵² See Albert Frank Kendrick and Patricia Wardle, *English Needlework* (London: A. & C. Black, 1967), 67.

7 Conclusion

Without the high ideals of Hamlet's quest, one is left not with high tragedy but drama on a scale more akin to Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, in which the protagonist, Willy Loman, succumbs to the weight of psychological traumas.⁵⁵³ By focusing on the psychological aspects of Hamlet's character—madness, melancholy, suicidal tendency, etc.—our critical tradition has turned Hamlet into more of a Willy Loman than a man guided and inspired by dire *external* circumstances and an internal spiritual quest. One character is pathetically tragical, deteriorating consistently as we watch. The other is tragical through his striving upwards against forces that eventually overcome him. Hamlet belongs in this latter realm of “high” tragedy.

T. S. Eliot complained that Hamlet “is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear.”⁵⁵⁴ Eliot felt there was not enough substance to sustain the tragedy and intensity of Hamlet's emotions. Over eighty years ago, William Hazlitt remarked that “we have been so used to this tragedy that we hardly know how to criticize it any more than we should know how to describe our own faces.”⁵⁵⁵ To date, an internally cohesive system for reading Shakespeare has yet to be named; or rather, a host of scholars have concluded that *Hamlet* is simply not cohesive. For example, Stephen Booth writes that

the thing about Hamlet that has put Western man into a panic to explain it is not that the play is incoherent, but that it is coherent. There are plenty of incoherent plays; nobody ever looks at them twice. This one, *because it obviously makes sense and because it just as obviously cannot be made sense of*, threatens our inevitable

⁵⁵³ Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998, orig. pub. 1949).

⁵⁵⁴ See T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1966), 98-101.

⁵⁵⁵ William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1930) v. 4, 233.

working assumption that there are no “more things in earth” than can be understood in one philosophy.⁵⁵⁶

The significance of Booth’s observation is that he understands the dilemma of a genius playwright who appears to be incoherent and the problems this poses for the question of literary competence and meaning.

In the absence of knowledge of the incestuous relationship between Polonius and Ophelia, or of an interpretive framework other than “madness” for Hamlet and Ophelia’s words, the play indeed lacks the necessary elements to sustain it as high tragedy. Returning again to Booth, he further remarked “that the history of criticism shows us too ready to indulge a not wholly explicable fancy that in *Hamlet* we behold the frustrated and inarticulate Shakespeare furiously wagging his tail in an effort to tell us something.”⁵⁵⁷ One can choose to stay in the realm of nebulous conjecture; or a modern reader of Shakespeare’s text can address a dialogue of politics, ethics, religion, and the nature of rulership based upon English Renaissance historical artifacts and rhetorical acts of metonymy as suggested by the reading methodology (rhetorical toolbox) in this dissertation.

This examination has delineated a counter-structure to Ophelia as a vague and “mad” girl without textual meaning or power. Ophelia, no longer a pathetic figure, who is “unable to navigate her own way once the protective custody of her father is unavailable to her,”⁵⁵⁸ reveals herself through metonymy to be a strong potential ruler with a wit and a moral philosophy that matches Hamlet’s sense of honor and duty. Polonius, no longer a weak or foolish old man, or “exemplary father,”⁵⁵⁹ is one of the most conniving and powerful figures in the play. Gertrude is no longer merely the object of Hamlet’s oedipal lust, but is rather a queen with power and authority as she exercises her own right to the throne of Denmark. Claudius, still the treacherous murderer, moreover provides a counterpoint to Hamlet’s philosophy of rulership based upon a selfless ideal: Claudius acts as if he is both above the law and outside of any religious or moral boundaries.

This dissertation has used a metonymic approach to the play *Hamlet* in order to extract “wisdom” from the text and offer an affirmation of legitimate authority behind the structural intent of its dramatic poetry. To summarize, the entire play shifts its focus away from the psychological dilemmas of individual character into a very different level of political, religious, and moral debate. *Hamlet* is not just one of Shakespeare’s most political plays, but also one of his most cynical. When Hamlet is asked while dying whom he thinks

⁵⁵⁶ Russ McDonald, ed., *Shakespeare, An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1945-2000*, 244, italics mine.

⁵⁵⁷ Booth, “On the Value of Hamlet,” 19.

⁵⁵⁸ Smith, “Neither Accident nor Intent: Contextualizing the Suicide of Ophelia,” 97.

⁵⁵⁹ Bloom, *Bloom’s Shakespeare through the Ages: Hamlet*, 166.

will succeed him as king of Denmark, he replies “Fortenbras”—literally, “strong arm.” The name’s meaning is echoed in Claudius’ desire to send Hamlet to England and to his death: “must not we put the strong arm upon him?” (4. 3. 3). It portends another dark rule for Denmark and the play ends not only tragically but also pessimistically with regard to human ability to rule the self and be ruled according to “Noble Reason.”

At the end of the play, Shakespeare presents us with the certainty of a Machiavellian future by which a mostly bestial minded humanity will continue to be ruled by strong-armed leaders. Such leaders base their morals on a desire for power, not a morality towards the proverbial “power of the people” as Hamlet is “lov’d of the distracted multitude” (4. 3. 4). Though there will always be people who wish for a ruler who serves others’ needs rather than their own selfish wishes, Shakespeare suggests that such a reality cannot yet exist, even in dramatic fantasy.⁵⁶⁰ Hamlet’s dying words to Horatio, “report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied” (5. 2. 339–340), beg for a proper assessment of his rhetoric and suggest that perhaps one day there will be a ruler whose causes align with the noble virtues of duty, justice, and honesty. Until then it will have to suffice to have his cause retold to those who are satisfied with strong-armed, power-hungry governments, until the “unsatisfied” people awaken to the very fact that they are unsatisfied. Fortenbras-type rulers are symbolic of governance premised upon satisfying themselves and not the “unsatisfied” people they govern. Ironically, we have ignored Hamlet’s last request to be reported “aright”: often mistaking his ethical stand for justice against corruption merely as a mad quest of revenge. King Claudius represents a court antithetical to “Noble Reason,” which is not about preservation and sanctity but bloodletting murder and tainted incestuous acts. If we are to take Shakespeare’s canon as a whole we might see *Macbeth* or *Richard III* as antithetical arguments to Hamlet’s “Noble Reason,” whereby self-serving butchery become the way “to be,” or act. In *Richard III* incest and murder are closely linked as Richard unabashedly brags “What though I kill’d her husband and her father? / The readiest way to make the wench amends / Is to become her husband, and her father” (1.1.154–156). In these plays, Shakespeare’s argument for “Noble Reason” is argued not directly, but through the antithetic exploration of what it is to be a corrupt ruler, or how “not to be.” These misled rulers lack a sense of consideration and adjacency to the divine. The use of metonymy to reach such ethical positions is not merely a function of this play, but a preoccupation suggested earlier in this dissertation’s argument of Renaissance rhetorical usage that was markedly different from our own. It is also a rhetorical perspective that is

⁵⁶⁰ Consider Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), especially his *The Rights of War and Peace* (Clark: The Lawbook Exchange, 2004). See also Micheal P. Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), chapt. 5.

particularly suited to ethical argument and ethical consideration. Such a tool may even be a key to uncovering further wisdom in Shakespeare's texts.

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