

**Theatre as revelatory deception  
in selected plays  
by William Shakespeare**

by

**Marguerite Florence de Waal**

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**MA (English)**

in the

**Department of English**

at the

**University of Pretoria**

**Faculty of Humanities**

Supervisor: Mr P.C. Lenahan

March 2017

**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**  
**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**  
**RESEARCH PROPOSAL & ETHICS COMMITTEE**

**Declaration**

Full name : Marguerite Florence de Waal  
Student Number : 10010808  
Degree/Qualification: MA (English)  
Title of thesis: Theatre as revelatory deception in selected plays by William Shakespeare

I declare that this thesis is my own original work. Where secondary material is used, this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with university requirements.

I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of university policy and implications in this regard.



03/07/2017

\_\_\_\_\_  
Marguerite Florence de Waal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Mr. Patrick Lenahan, whose lectures first inspired my interest in Shakespeare. He has shown unwavering patience and kindness in guiding me, and without his support and insight, this dissertation and my experience in writing it would have been a great deal poorer. I am also grateful to Dr. Idette Noomé for proofreading the final manuscript – any errors which remain are entirely my own. Lastly, to the Department of English at the University of Pretoria: my teachers, colleagues, and friends – ‘thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks’.

## Abstract

This dissertation is concerned with the paradox of revelatory deception – a form of ‘lying’ which reveals truth instead of concealing it – in four Shakespearean plays: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*. Through close analysis, I show that revelatory deceptions in these plays are metatheatrical, and read them as responding to contemporary writers who attacked the theatre for being inherently deceitful. This reading leads to the identification of parallels in the description of theatre in antitheatrical texts and the descriptions of revelatory deceptions in the plays. I suggest that correlations in phrasing and imagery might undermine antitheatrical rhetoric: for example, the plays portray certain theatrical, revelatory deceptions as traps which free their victims instead of killing them. Such ‘lies’ are differentiated from actual deceptions by their potentially relational characteristics: deceptions which reveal the truth require audiences to put aside their self-interest and certainty to consider alternative realities which might reflect, reconfigure, and expand their understanding of the world and of themselves. The resulting truths lead either to the creation or renewal of relationships, as in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*, or offer glimpses at the possibility of renewal, which is ultimately denied, as in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. In both cases the imperatives for truth and right action are underscored – not obscured, as antitheatricalists would have argued – through the audience’s vicarious experience of either the gains or losses of characters within the plays.

### Key terms:

Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, metatheatre, antitheatricality, deception, truth, early modern religion, Stephen Gosson

## Contents

Declaration .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Introduction .....	1
Chapter I: ‘To counterfeit, and so to sin’: theatre as deception.....	14
Chapter II: False Sweet Baits: <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> and <i>As You Like It</i> .....	38
Chapter III: Learning to Lie: <i>Hamlet</i> and <i>King Lear</i> .....	76
Conclusion.....	120
References.....	127

## Introduction

In *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, what is true is not necessarily truthful. The ‘devil’ may ‘speak true’ (1.3.112),<sup>1</sup> but he does so deceptively, and the result is corruption and a movement away from honesty and goodness. That which is thought to be ‘fair’ (truth) proves to be ‘foul’. When the three weird sisters accost Macbeth and Banquo upon the heath, they prophetically hail Macbeth with three titles: Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and King. Macbeth is only Thane of Glamis at this point, but soon after the sisters disappear, Macbeth learns that he has been made Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth and Banquo have no reason to believe what the women told them before this announcement. Now, there is evidence that the sisters spoke the truth. What has been claimed correlates to what *is*. But the art of the sisters’ equivocation lies in telling truths which lead to falsehood, deceit, and moral collapse. Banquo realises this and warns Macbeth:

... oftentimes, to win us to our harm,  
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,  
Win us with honest trifles, to betray ’s  
In deepest consequence. (1.3.132-135)

Despite his friend’s reservations, Macbeth allows himself to be misdirected by these ‘honest trifles’ into practising falsehood: concealing the truth for selfish ends, putting on a ‘false face’ to hide what his ‘false heart doth know’ (1.7.91). His recourse to deception is a defining moral choice which he makes again and again. He kills Duncan through pretence and treachery, then instates himself as a replacement, posing as a lawful ruler. The deception which his kingship is based on must continuously be fortified by more deceit: he redirects all suspicion which might be aimed at him towards his enemies, he has spies in every household of the Scottish nobility, and soon he

---

<sup>1</sup> This and all other references to Shakespeare’s plays in this dissertation, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from Shakespeare, W. [1623] 2007. *The complete works of William Shakespeare*. Edited by J. Bate & E. Rasmussen. Basingstoke: MacMillan.

even hides his plans from Lady Macbeth, who was previously his ‘dearest partner of greatness’ (1.5.7). Macbeth creates a dangerous, dissolute reality – ‘[confusion’s] masterpiece’ (2.3.62) – in which no-one is left above suspicion or beyond the reach of violent murder. The play illustrates the encompassing proliferation of this deception based on a deceitful truth, and the disunity, chaos, betrayal, violence, and death in which it results. The effects of Macbeth’s actions infect all spheres: the natural and the political, the personal and the public.

The extent of this infection is articulated in Act 4 when Macduff flees to England, in defiance of Macbeth. There he meets with Malcolm, the son of the murdered king, who expresses doubts about Macduff’s loyalties. Macbeth ‘was once thought honest’, but turned tyrant, and Malcolm has no guarantee that the same will not be true of Macduff. Trust and good faith no longer seem possible when ‘all things foul would wear the brows of grace’ (4.3.26). There seems to be no solution to this problem: Malcolm’s suspicions cannot change whatever Macduff’s loyalties are, and Macduff cannot offer any argument for his innocence without being suspected of pretence. Deception has become so rife that honest men cannot identify each other in order to rally against their enemies.

Macduff understands that this is an insurmountable predicament and bids farewell to Malcolm. Before he can leave, however, something strange happens. Malcolm suddenly changes his approach and confides in Macduff, whom he could not bring himself to trust just moments earlier. He confesses that he fears Scotland will be even worse off under his rule than that of Macbeth: his vices outshine even Macbeth’s ‘luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful, / sudden, malicious’ (4.3.67-68) nature. Surely, Malcolm ventures, it is better for Macbeth to reign than for Malcolm to take his place. Macduff quickly rejects this idea. While Malcolm’s faults are undesirable traits in a king, compared to Macbeth’s superlative wickedness, Malcolm’s vices ‘are portable, / With other graces weighed’ (4.3.101-102). But Malcolm insists that he has no other graces. If he were king, he

would ‘pour the sweet milk of concord into hell, / uproar the universal peace, confound / all unity on earth’ (4.3.109-112); in other words, he would do exactly what Macbeth does. Again, Malcolm challenges Macduff to judge, and to ‘speak’ if ‘such a one be fit to govern’ (4.3.114). Malcolm’s confidences could lead Macduff to become his accomplice for personal gain, but Macduff does not take this bait. He cannot be a mentor to such a self-declared villain. He cannot be corrupted, cannot be swayed to support a tyrant, and replies that if what Malcolm has said is indeed true, Malcolm is neither ‘fit to govern [nor] to live’ (4.3.116-117). This proves that Macduff’s virtue and his loyalty to Scotland extends beyond personal attachment or aversion: his allegiance is, above all, to the good of the state and, by extension, only to a lawful and judicious ruler.

The play has already illustrated truths told to deceive; now, it presents a deception performed to reveal truth. Macduff’s ‘noble passion’ against apparent depravity convinces Malcolm of his ‘good truth and honour’ (4.3.129,132). Malcolm’s confidences, so inexplicably given, are lies intended to test Macduff’s position. Not only does Malcolm’s lie uncover Macduff’s true loyalties, but it also leads to an alliance between Malcolm and Macduff against Macbeth, effectively resisting and counteracting the malignant duplicity promoted by the Scottish tyrant. Admittedly, this is a very brief instance of an upside-down lie compared to the consummate false realities constructed by Macbeth and the provoking equivocations of the weird sisters. Also, given the negative moral connotations of deception already established by the play, the audience or reader might be left feeling, like Macduff, that ‘such welcome and unwelcome things at once’ are ‘hard to reconcile’ (4.3.153-154). Richard Horwich has discussed the ethical discomfort surrounding Malcolm’s strategy: when he ‘retrieves his confession and boasts of his truthfulness, he does so in the course of admitting to a lie’ (1978:370). William Scott notes that it is difficult for Malcolm to extricate ‘himself from the admission of falsehood, which (especially in suspicious times) seems as unkingly as the content of the lies themselves’ (1986:160). This is in keeping with the atmosphere of the tragedy. Ambiguity and uneasiness are universal taints in *Macbeth* and their constant presence is a



reminder of the distorted and unstable reality in which the characters find themselves. The play resists offering the comfort of a definitive victory of truth over multiplying falsehoods.

This is not, however, Shakespeare's first or last treatment of the problems surrounding deception and truth-telling. These are ubiquitous themes in the plays, and the exploration of their intricacies is not limited to *Macbeth*. This dissertation investigates whether it *is* possible to reconcile 'such welcome and unwelcome things' – specifically, whether the counterintuitive notion of what might be called 'revelatory deception' (a form of 'lying' which reveals truth) in its many and varied manifestations elsewhere in the plays might engage with the relationship between verity and falsehood in ways that are, ultimately, meaningful. To this end, I consider prominent instances of this strange species of deception in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*, focusing specifically on the revelatory deceptions performed by Don Pedro and Friar Francis, Rosalind, Hamlet, and Edgar. These plays are particularly rich in both deceptions and counter-deceptions. Like *Macbeth*, they give clarity and weight to deceptions which lead to truth by situating them within greater networks of falsehoods, lies, and illusions. Generally, malignant deceptions point to the pervasive duplicity in characters' interactions with others and within themselves, and the effects include broken relationships, disunity, violence, and death. By contrast, revelatory deceptions present alternative motivations, methods, and results, and this study delineates and comments on the significance of these often contradictory and surprising alternatives.

My interpretive approach acknowledges the phenomenon of revelatory deception as a kind of paradox: a rhetorical device which, defined broadly, implies a statement or situation which seems to be 'logically contradictory or absurd' (Abrams, 2009:239). Falsehood and truth are generally understood as mutually exclusive concepts, and a truthful lie or a revelatory deception contradicts its own definitions. In his book *Shakespeare and the culture of paradox*, Peter G. Platt elaborates on this idea of contradiction, explaining that the 'discourse of paradox' is one in which 'opposites can

coexist' (2009:1). He illustrates this definition by referring to *Twelfth Night* and Duke Orsino's reaction to seeing the twins, Viola and Sebastian, side by side: 'one face, one voice, one habit, and two persons, / a natural perspective *that is and is not!*' (Platt, 2009:1; 5.1.200-201; my emphasis). This double-vision is also characteristic of revealing deception: a concept in which the two opposite states of falsehood and truth – 'welcome and unwelcome things' – are made to coexist. A revelatory deception is a paradox which conceals what is true and, at the same time, reveals it. It *is and is not* a lie.

Because a paradox undermines the expected, one of its characteristic effects is surprise, or 'marvel', as Crockett observes in his analysis of dramatic and homiletic paradox (1995:59). The wonder, strangeness and sense of impossibility evoked by paradox is reflected in its classical etymology: a combination of the Greek '*para-*', meaning 'beyond', and '*doxon*', or 'opinion' (Platt, 2009:2). The notion of paradox stretching 'beyond' opinion, beyond what is traditionally known, is important because it implies something about another effect it has: 'challenging the absolute validity of rational constructs' (Crockett, 1995:59). In her classic work, *Paradoxica Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*, Rosalie Colie notes that, in its bewildering contradictions, paradox is 'always somehow involved in dialectic: challenging some orthodoxy ... [functioning as] an oblique criticism of absolute judgment or absolute convention' (1966:10). Given the accepted notions surrounding lies and truths, revelatory deception is a paradox which counters or goes 'beyond opinion'; and as Colie asks, 'what is opinion, received or otherwise, but the dialectical opposite of "truth"?' (1966:10). Revelatory deceptions therefore lead to truth in two ways, firstly by their definition, and secondly by undoing the falsehood of limited opinions about the way the world works, effectively enabling a view of reality which is more nuanced, and *more true*.

Paradox is also useful to the discussion of revelatory deception in Shakespeare because of the historical context of the plays. Colie (1966), Crockett (1995) and Platt (2009) all identify paradox

as a predominant feature of early modern literature. This predominance reflects the epistemological conflicts and negotiations provoked by rapid transformation in the religious, social, and political landscapes of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and especially England. The Reformation resulted in a turbulent national transition from Catholicism – the ‘old’ religion – to Protestantism. England’s exploration (and exploitation) of the ‘New World’ opened the gateway to influential cultural and commercial exchanges. Copernicus’s ground-breaking astronomic hypothesis, published in 1543, proposed a vision of the cosmos which directly contradicted the Ptolemaic model of medieval astronomy and Christian theology. This led to the development of the influential ‘new science’ by Copernicus’s successors, which had complex, long-term effects on the way scientists, writers, and philosophers interpreted the world (Abrams, 2009:307-308). In these circumstances, paradox, as a form of figurative language based in the co-existence of oppositional ideas, might be interpreted as an instinctive articulation of an abundance of conflicting and competing knowledge systems and ideologies. In *Paradoxica Epidemica*, Colie notes that while paradox is not peculiar to the period, it was a natural and pervasive expression of the ‘active speculation on the market of ideas’ (1966:34).

What Crockett calls the Renaissance ‘obsession’ with paradox reveals ‘the conflicts and contradictions’ that characterized society and ‘that all artistic modes of the period attempt to resolve’ (Crockett, 1995:3).<sup>2</sup> It is unsurprising, then, that drama – a central artistic mode of the English Renaissance – became one of the primary vehicles of paradox. In Shakespeare’s work, and as an ‘encounter with ... what the early modern period called “contrariety”’, paradox is an essential element of the playwright’s ‘sense of human experience and the theatre’ (Platt, 2009:3). Colie also suggests that, when paradox is as common as it was in Shakespeare’s England, it retains its vitality

---

<sup>2</sup> Paradox is an element within a variety of Renaissance literatures: it can be found in ‘rhetoric books, scientific writings, religious texts and sermons, lyric poems, and plays’ (Platt, 2009:19). Examples include Desiderius Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly* (1509) – a paradoxical encomium – and the work of metaphysical poets such as John Donne, and sermons of metaphysical preachers such as Thomas Playfere.

through being embedded ‘within a larger cover form’ (Colie, 1966:36), and the theatre provided an ideal creative space in which paradox could retain its characteristic novelty and startling effects.

But it is not only its context and its convenience as a ‘larger cover form’ that associate theatre with paradox. Paradoxes do not simply provide content for the contemporary theatre; they are inherent in the very *form* of dramatic practice. Theatre itself is a paradox: an embodiment of contradiction. The stage animates contrasting realities. The fictional world presented on the stage is enacted within the ‘real world’, using its spaces, materials, and people as constitutive elements: these worlds, both the one that *is* and the one that *is not*, exist simultaneously. The actor must become the character he plays. The actor is and is not himself, he is and is not his character. Within one physical and temporal space, two realities converge: the actor simultaneously participates in ‘the real world in which the representation takes place ... and the fictional world represented in the drama’ (Dillon, 2006:89). Paradox is therefore ‘a crucial component of all theatre, of any dramatic experience’ (Platt, 2009:141). Enactment requires the presupposition of the existence of separate realities within the same moment, and this possibly accounts for theatre’s ambiguity and powers of subversion: it is a space in which the accepted nature of reality and its knowledge system is placed in direct competition with alternative, possibly oppositional ways of being, speaking, thinking, and acting. It challenges the notion that any different reality is impossible by creating a space in which impossible realities are, for contained periods, made possible. As noted previously, paradox is ‘constantly involved in dialectic’, and if theatre is by nature paradoxical, then ‘both paradox and theatre – the paradox *of* the theatre – have the potential to ... challenge ... conventional teaching and modes of thought’ (Platt, 2009:142).

Shakespearean theatre is a paradox, and contains paradoxes, one of which is the phenomenon of revelatory deception. If paradox undermines absolute judgment and absolute convention, then revelatory deception within Shakespeare’s plays is a paradox which destabilizes accepted notions

surrounding deceit and, by extension, truthfulness. This takes on a metatheatrical aspect when one considers that antitheatrical writers of the period frequently raised the argument that plays were ‘nothing more than lying and hypocrisy’ (Platt, 2009:147). The concepts of verity and falsehood were a key part of the antitheatrical debates which spanned the period between the 1570s and 1642, ending with the closure of the theatres after the Puritan revolution. Plays were understood as illusions, and illusion was dangerous, a ‘form of deceit’ (Dillon, 2006:116). In his book, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, Jonas Barish suggests that this characterization of theatre as a lie was rooted in contemporary Protestant thinking, which required both ‘absolute identity’ and ‘absolute sincerity’, rendering plays immoral because of their ‘attempt to substitute “notorious lying fables” [a phrase used by antitheatrical writer William Prynne] . . . for things that have truly happened’ (Barish, 1981:93-94). This point of attack raises questions about the validity and morality of drama (and fiction in general), forming part of a longstanding debate in Western culture about the mimetic character of art and the theatre. To lie is to attempt to conceal the truth – that which *is* – with falsehood – that which *is not*. According to the antitheatrical perspective, this is what theatre does: it presents an audience with a made-up (and therefore false) narrative in which people pretend to be other people. The similarity between the theatre and malicious deception is, in fact, illustrated in Shakespeare’s plays. Macbeth knows himself to be an actor: his perception of himself is clear when he claims that ‘life’s but a poor player / that struts and frets his hour upon the stage’ (5.5.24-25). The effects of this deception, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, are what one might expect them to be. That theatre should reflect on its own nature in this way follows on the nature of paradox and theatre during the Renaissance: as Louis Montrose notes, the early modern ‘playhouse, playwright, and player’ both ‘exemplify the contradictions of ... society’ and ‘make those contradictions their subject’ (Montrose, 1980:57). In the examples of Macbeth and others like him, Shakespeare grants some credence to the contemporary perception of theatre’s dangerous duplicity, or at least the potential for duplicity to bear an uncomfortable resemblance to theatre.

However, as Malcolm's truthful deceit and the witches' deceitful truths in the same play suggest, lies do not always work in the way we expect them to. The revelatory deceptions in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear* are examples of this, and significantly, they are all metatheatrical. Edgar in *King Lear* and Hamlet both consciously assume roles of madmen, becoming actors who conceal their 'true' selves through inhabiting created personas. Both engineer play-acting routines; Hamlet orchestrates 'The Mousetrap' play while Edgar secretly guides his despairing and blinded father away from harm by directing him in a simulated suicide. Both Edgar and Hamlet succeed in revealing some kind of truth through their deceptions. Hamlet's 'antic disposition' discloses the character of the people around him and destabilises the corrupt court. His feigned madness effectively chips away at the façade covering that which is 'rotten in the state of Denmark' (1.5.100), and his specific intention for the performance of 'The Mousetrap' is to 'catch the conscience of the King' (2.2.537). Edgar's false identity enables him to bring both Gloucester and Lear to new degrees of insight. In an echo of Hamlet, Edgar sets up a fake reality when he leads the determinedly suicidal Gloucester to an imaginary cliff (in reality a level piece of land), and allows him to 'jump'. Gloucester believes he has survived by some miracle. Edgar succeeds in his aim: to 'trifle thus with [Gloucester's] despair . . . to cure it' (4.6.40-41).

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind is a skilled performer and role-player. She disguises herself as Ganymede and when 'Ganymede' encounters Orlando in the forest of Arden, he/she counsels him and proposes to cure him of his hopelessly idealistic lovesickness. This develops into an elaborate and sustained deception in which Ganymede pretends to be Rosalind, and has Orlando court him/her for the benefit of his education. Rosalind is able to test the truth of Orlando's love and his character, while also leading him to a truer understanding of love. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Don Pedro and Friar Francis are the directors of performances which act as revelatory deceptions. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Benedick and Beatrice's self-deception is undone when

Don Pedro arranges for both separately to overhear false accounts of how each has declared his/her love for the other. These ‘chance’ eavesdroppings that Don Pedro arranges for Benedick and Beatrice are performances put on for their benefit as unsuspecting audiences who must be guided out of their self-imposed blindness. The Friar’s concealment of Hero and his direction of her awe-inspiring ‘resurrection’ at the end of the play are similarly theatrical.

This dissertation shows how these revelatory deceptions, as metatheatrical events, engage with the morality of deception in ways which complicate the denunciation of drama as no more than a malicious falsehood. This research is therefore particularly interested in the claim made by Barish that the theatre – specifically Shakespearean theatre – might be read as providing a kind of defence against its detractors (1981:130).

To this end, the first chapter provides an overview of key antitheatrical texts which contain ethical and religious condemnations of the theatre based on charges of deceit, and which might therefore be read alongside revelatory deception in Shakespeare’s plays. The chapter includes a brief account of the historical context of antitheatrical writing, specifically focusing on the development of theatre as an artistic medium in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the repercussions this had on contemporary experience and thought. The antitheatrical texts under consideration include Stephen Gosson’s *The School of Abuse* (1579a), *An Apology for the School of Abuse* (1579b) and *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582), Antony Munday’s *A Second and Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theaters* (1580), Philip Stubbes’s *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583), William Rankins’s *A Mirror of Monsters* (1587), John Rainolds’s *The Overthrow of Stage-Plays* (1599) and, prolonging the debate into the next century, William Prynne’s famous *Histriomastix: The Player’s Scourge* (1633). Some attention is also given to the less numerous prose defences of literary arts, which include those of the theatre, in Thomas Lodge’s *A Reply to Stephen Gosson’s School of Abuse* (1579), Sir Philip Sidney’s *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), and, slightly later, Thomas Heywood’s *An Apology for Actors* (1612). Of secondary

interest is a small selection of texts which contain important discussions of truth, falsehood, and performance, even though their main focus is not on theatricality. For example, Bryan Crockett, in *The Play of Paradox* (1995), suggests that the metaphysical preachers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were criticized for the perceived artifice of their sermons, much as plays were condemned as deceptive performances. In discussing these texts, I am particularly concerned with identifying patterns in language, imagery, and thought which may provide points of connection to the metatheatrical, revelatory deceptions in the selected plays. These patterns suggest a framework according to which I structure my interpretation of the plays insucceeding chapters. This framework is developed further by considering structures for interpreting Shakespearean metatheatricality in antitheatrical contexts provided by Crockett (1995), Barish, in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (1981), Tanya Pollard in her *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Sourcebook* (2004), and Platt in *Shakespeare and the Culture of Paradox* (2009).

Within this historical framework, the second and third chapters turn to the revelatory deceptions in the selected plays, focusing on what Scragg calls the 'constant sequence of analogies and contrasts' (1992:46) revealed in the patterns of deception within the individual works, as well as in the parts of Shakespeare's dramatic corpus which they represent. The four plays are divided according to genre: Chapter 2 discusses the comedies, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*, while Chapter 3 contains the tragedies, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. This organisation of the plays is partially motivated by the convenience offered by generic categories and the sense of progression sometimes attached to them in approaches to Shakespeare's work. The chapters make some use of such interpretive patterns; as they attempt to compare the characteristics and outcomes of various revelatory deceptions, they briefly suggest ways in which patterns of similarity or difference might be correlated with the genre of the plays in which the deceptions occur. Such correlations do not, however, constitute the primary goal of this study, and my intention is not to deny the porous, shifting nature of Shakespearean genres. The paradox of revelatory, theatrical deception



might fruitfully be discussed as transgressing boundaries of comedy and tragedy, but such considerations require separate attention and lie beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Chapter 2 focuses on three central revelatory deceptions: those performed separately by Don Pedro and Friar Francis in *Much Ado About Nothing* and by Rosalind in *As You Like It*. All three are deceptive exercises designed to undo the false conceptions of love which certain characters hold up as incontrovertibly true. Their certainty makes them vulnerable to self-deception and the lies of others, and this is counteracted through revealing, theatrical deceptions. In *Much Ado*, Benedick and Beatrice's mutual animosity is rooted in self-deception. They confidently reject all forms of romantic love as foolishness, and deny the possibility that they love one another. Claudio, on the other hand, embraces the opportunity to love Hero, but his selfish and myopic understanding of love makes him vulnerable to the deception of Don John, who convinces Claudio that Hero is unfaithful. Despite his knowledge of Hero's character and virtue, Claudio lies to himself by unreasonably rejecting the truth he knows in favour of the lie which resonates with his paranoia. Like Claudio, Orlando in *As You Like It* is the victim of self-deception, as well as of the deception of others. His brother, Oliver, restricts his understanding by refusing him a proper education. To him, the world and its truths remain obscured: unrevealed. Furthermore, like Claudio, Orlando deceives himself. He has very definite (and very false) ideas about love, and resorts to false actions and words – empty posturing and bad poetry – to express his affection for Rosalind. These restrictive, false certainties are challenged by the paradox of theatre. Don Pedro presents Beatrice and Benedick with visions of the world which challenge their understanding of themselves and of each other. In these other realities, impossible love is made possible, granted that Beatrice and Benedick reconfigure their certainties and admit to a truth – their feelings – which lies beyond their previous power of opinion. Don John's lies and Claudio's self-deception are also offset through counter-trickery. The Friar's construction of Hero's putative death after Claudio leaves her at the altar confronts Claudio with the results of his actions made manifest, leading him to

realise the truth of Hero's honour and, consequently, of his own foolishness. When Hero is revealed to be alive, the full truth of her character is restored. A similarly theatrical deception is performed by Rosalind for Orlando's benefit. As Ganymede, and as Ganymede pretending to be Rosalind, she constantly challenges Orlando's lofty illusions of love with a more fickle, volatile, rewarding, and immediate experience of romantic interaction. This is the education of Orlando: the limits of his knowledge (imposed by others and by himself) are undone through a deception which reveals the reality – the truth – which lies beyond such limits.

Chapter 3 continues the discussion by moving into the realm of tragedy, focusing on Hamlet and Edgar as characters who counteract the losses they suffer because of malignant deception by 'giving their metamorphic instincts full scope' (Barish, 1981:128). If the goal of revelatory deceptions in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It* is to undo the falseness of misguided certainties, then those in *Hamlet* and *King Lear* are performed to oppose and defend against the destructive uncertainties within pervasively false worlds. In *Hamlet*, Claudius secretly murders his brother, the king (Hamlet's father), marries the king's widow and takes control of his kingdom. This act of usurpation, like that of Macbeth, transforms the state into a maze of concealments and treachery. A similarly corrupted world is created by King Lear. Both Lear and Gloucester are unable to recognise the nature and worth of truth, and allow themselves to be deceived. Lear rejects Cordelia because she is truthful, and divides his kingdom between Goneril and Regan because they are able to perform flattering, deceptive postures of filial affection. Gloucester, in turn, is too easily deceived by his illegitimate son Edmund into believing that his legitimate son, Edgar, is disloyal and treacherous. Hamlet and Edgar both assume false, theatrical personas in order to protect themselves. They become actors, concealing their true identities by pretending to be what they are not, and through this pretence they reflect the paradoxical and bewildering nature of the false worlds they inhabit. It is the reaction of those worlds' citizens, as audiences to Hamlet and Edgar's performances, which reveals their true natures. When Claudius and his allies attempt

to interpret Hamlet's madness, they provide clear demonstrations of their self-serving, deceitful methods and appearances. When Hamlet presents Claudius with a fiction in the form of 'The Mousetrap' which imitates Claudius's murder of the king, Claudius recognises his situation and actions in the play, and his disturbed reaction confirms Hamlet's suspicions of his guilt. To Lear, Poor Tom reflects and reveals the pitiable human condition, and the results of Lear's neglect of his kingdom. By leading Gloucester through the performance of a fictional suicide attempt, Poor Tom offers him an opportunity to learn to bear his sufferings. In this way, Edgar teaches both Lear and Gloucester to 'come to terms with truth through fictions adapted to limited capacity to receive truth unadorned' (MacIntyre, 1982:42).

Developing Barish's suggestion that Shakespearean theatre responded to theatrical debates of the period, I investigate the characteristics of antitheatrical polemic, testing it against readings of metatheatrical deceptions in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*. I argue throughout these chapters that Shakespeare's portrayal of certain kinds of truth-revealing deception amounts to more than simply a series of isolated plot mechanisms. Rather, these may be read as a defence of his art – itself a paradoxical 'deception' that reveals truth. The revelatory deceptions in a variety of plays develop, cumulatively, a kind of *apologia* for the dramatic arts, based on a creative resistance to typical characterisations in discourses surrounding truth, falsehood, and fiction.

## **Chapter I:**

### **'To counterfeit, and so to sin': theatre as deception**

In *The School of Abuse*, published in 1579, Stephen Gosson produces an impressive list of metaphors to expose the deceptive gulf between the seemingly benign content and functions of stage plays and their actual immoral, dangerous essence:

The deceitful physician gives sweet syrups to make his poison go down the smoother: the juggler casts a mist to work the closer: the sirens' song is the sailors' wrack; the fowlers' whistle, the birds' death; the wholesome bait, the fish's bane; the harpies have virgins' faces, and vultures' talons; the hyena speaks like a friend, and devours like a foe; the calmest seas hide dangerous rocks; the wolf jets in a weather's fells; many good sentences are spoken by Davus, to shadow his knavery; and written by poets, as ornaments to beautify their works, and set their trumpery to sale without suspect. (Gosson, 1579a [2004]:21)

This illustrates an element of drama which was profoundly unsettling to antitheatrical writers: it is a deception which embodies a discrepancy between the apparent and the actual. The mask of performance often contains a proliferation of masks and performances which ultimately creates a many-layered removal from what might be considered to be the truth – the world as it is, people as they are. The dissimulation which characterizes theatre therefore results in unsettling ambiguities which become a central moral concern for writers such as Gosson, who warns his readers that if they 'pull off the vizard that poets mask in, [they] shall disclose their reproach ... perceive their sharp sayings to be ... pearls in dunghills, fresh pictures on rotten walls, chaste matrons' apparel on common courtesans' (Gosson, 1579a:21-22). In this view, theatricals are in the business of deceiving their spectators to draw them to ruin, concealing the truth for ignoble purposes. All actors are like Macbeth, a false player-king, who takes up the appearance of 'th'innocent flower' while being the 'serpent under't' (1.6.66-67). The paradox of performance is that what seems fair is actually foul.

Gosson's complaint is a pertinent example of an antitheatrical discourse which developed largely as a response to drama as mode of entertainment which gained power, influence, and legitimacy at an alarming rate and scale in England in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This growth of the theatrical medium took place in the context of the changing national landscape of early modern England. With London developing as the political and financial centre of the country, theatre

professionals took advantage of the stable, situated audiences created by the expanding and diverse urban population.<sup>3</sup> The influx of theatres into the city started with establishment of the Red Lion in London in 1567 – the first known ‘purpose-built’ theatre in the city – followed by more than a dozen others in the following decades (Pollard, 2004:xi).<sup>4</sup> The power of this new, rapidly growing industry necessitated regulatory measures on the part of the government, such as the monitoring of plays and the licensing of both places of performance and performers by the Master of the Revels. At the same time, the theatre gained a new legitimacy through the patronage of royal authority. These developments were thrown into sharp relief by the fact that before this point, the dramatic arts had been comparatively limited in their reach and perceived influence. Theatre companies had previously taken the form of bands of travelling actors who entertained either visitors at inns or the elite few at great houses of England, and some plays were allowed by schools to be used for the education (and socialisation) of their pupils (Pollard, 2004:xi). Given such diffuse organisation and the limited audiences, the moral watchdogs of society – including early Protestant reformers – saw plays as ‘useful religious propaganda’ (Cooper, 2010:61) and allowed that theatre ‘might help form sober citizens and godly parishioners’ (Barish, 1981:82-83). But the stage was becoming much more influential, and as audiences rapidly grew in size and became less delimited, anxieties surrounding the possible evils effected by and contained within theatres increased.

---

<sup>3</sup> London’s population increased from seventy thousand to two hundred thousand between 1550 and 1600, and then doubled once more in the following 50 years (Maus, 1995:24). The city also offered a vast range of spectators to whom theatres could provide entertainment. It was the ‘center of intellectual, social, and cultural life for ... courtiers, students at the Inns of Court, wealthy merchants, [and] visiting country gentry’, all of whom had the ‘leisure and means’ to frequent the theatre, while the ‘penny-entrance standing room’ was populated by ‘apprentices, city wives, soldiers, artisans, and prostitutes’ (Gossett, 2000:154).

<sup>4</sup> Most prominently, these included Blackfriars and the Theatre, both built in 1576. The Curtain was erected in 1577, the Rose in 1587, the Swan in 1595, the second Blackfriars theatre in 1596, and the Globe in 1599. The new century saw the opening of the Fortune in 1600, the Boar’s Head in 1602, the Red Bull in 1604, the Whitefriars in 1608, the Hope and the second Globe in 1614, followed by the Cockpit in 1616 (Pollard, 2004:xxviii-xxx).

Many objections against the playhouses were based on practical, political, or economic concerns. These centred on the dangers of overcrowding, the increased danger of plague epidemics more easily transmitted in such circumstances, the distraction of workers from their duties and parishioners from hearing sermons, civil disorder resulting from the gathering of large groups, and the dissolute accessories (such as prostitutes and swindlers) drawn by the teeming industry of London theatres, which were also often neighboured by ‘brothels, drinking houses, and other places of ill repute’ (Pollard, 2004:xii). Added to this, the plays themselves were also seen as possible instigators of depravity. Transgressions of societal and moral frameworks were routinely performed on stage: boys playing female roles disturbed sexual and gender binaries, and class divisions indicated by dress codes were blurred when actors playing the roles of members of the nobility and royalty wore colours, materials, and styles which were, outside of the play-world, strictly reserved for their superiors in social status. Specific religious arguments condemned the theatre for such transgressions, focusing especially on objections to men in women’s dress (Barish, 1981:90). Other points of attack from this sphere complained of the representation of pagan religion and spectacle in plays, and the frequent depiction of sinful actions such as ‘murder, lust, incest, and adultery’ (Pollard, 2004:xiii).

Although some antitheatrical arguments tended to ‘disintegrate into free-associative rambles’ (Barish, 1981:88) which haphazardly involved every imaginable objection from the above catalogue, more specific moral-theological arguments such as Gosson’s can be identified as common threads in the writings of other antitheatrical polemicists like him. This dissertation is specifically concerned with the objection to the theatre on the basis of its hypocrisy: its duplicity, its deceptions, and its consequently assumed immorality. To illustrate and explore this charge, I will begin by considering three of Gosson’s publications in some detail: *The School of Abuse* (1579a), *An Apology for the School of Abuse* (1579b) and *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582). Together, these texts show the development of Gosson’s thinking about the dangers of drama’s ability to deceive

and the potential for evil in the theatre's creation and exploitation of discrepancies between inward truth and outward realities. This focus is partly due to Gosson's extensive articulation of the problem of theatrical deceit, and partly because of the perceived influence of his treatises on other antitheatrical and pro-theatrical texts. In early modern literary scholarship, Gosson's name is now synonymous with the antitheatrical movement, and, according to Pollard, he was probably that movement's most important writer, as he 'developed some of the most compelling arguments against the stage, and powerfully shaped the debates that followed' (2004:19). This discussion of his writing will relate his arguments (and the language he uses to make them) to the writing of other prominent detractors of the stage,<sup>5</sup> namely Antony Munday, Philip Stubbes, William Rankins, John Rainolds, and William Prynne,<sup>6</sup> and consider how they variously reflect the dominant moral and religious apprehensions of the time.

The *School of Abuse* (1579a) was written a year after Gosson left his unsuccessful career as an actor and playwright (Pollard, 2004:19). In it, Gosson argues against what he sees as the abuses of 'poets, pipers, and players', and suggests that such abuses should be 'purged', in keeping with the general moral regulation which is essential to fostering a healthy, stable society (Gosson, 1579a:22). At this point, Gosson does not condemn the theatre and actors in absolute terms, although his warnings seem to imply that abolition of the dramatic arts is the only solution to their abuses. This is partly

---

<sup>5</sup> Such writers have often been referred to as constituting the 'Puritan' attack on the stage. While the Puritan label is a convenient shorthand used by critics such as Barish (with suitable qualifications about its shortcomings), I prefer to avoid using it in this way. In the selection of antitheatrical writers dealt with by this dissertation, only William Prynne can be identified as a Puritan. Gosson was of the established Church and strongly opposed the Puritan movement; no conclusive evidence exists for Puritan sympathies in Stubbes, nor in Munday or Rankins. Rainolds was an Oxford theologian and president of Corpus Christi College, and therefore unlikely to have been a Puritan (Pollard, 2004:20,62-63,116,124-125,170-171).

<sup>6</sup> I include Prynne's *Histriomastix* briefly as an important bookend to the range of antitheatrical writing under consideration. It stands somewhat separately from the rest, particularly in chronology. Gosson and others span the period between 1579 and 1599, while Prynne's *Histriomastix* was published in 1633. The date of its publication might seem to place it outside of the scope of this dissertation's concern with the connection between such writing and Shakespeare's plays, which were produced between the early 1590s and 1613. However, *Histriomastix* is conspicuous in its length and extremism, and it is a useful (if particularly fanatical) representation and summary of the era's attacks upon the stage: a caricature of 'the tendencies of most antitheatrical polemic from 1575 to ... 1642' (Barish, 1981:88).



because of the elusive nature of such abuses, which cannot be readily detected through methodical discovery. The potential evils of plays ‘pass the degrees of the instrument, reach of the plummet, sight of the mind’ (Gosson, 1579a:27). Plays should therefore be rejected because of the impossibility of accessing the ‘truth’ of dramatic motive. This suggests an important aspect of the antitheatrical viewpoint: the deception of theatre is made particularly dangerous because what plays conceal cannot be readily determined. To attempt to reach the truth behind the mask of performance becomes particularly difficult when that performance’s worth is measured by its ability to present an utterly convincing manifestation of a separate reality. The actor’s art lies in erasing his true identity as completely as possible for the length of the theatrical performance, to ‘disappear’ into the role.

This kind of split between the inner, ‘true’ self and the outward manifestations of that self was a source of particular anxiety during the early modern period. The distinction and the relationship between the two have been discussed at length by Katherine Eisaman Maus in *Inwardness and the Theater in the English Renaissance* (1995), in which she argues that the perceived distinction between the two (and the consequent possibility of discrepancies between them) was particularly significant to the thinking of the late sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century. Within the distinction between ‘inward position’ and ‘outward appearance’, it is the inward position which is seen as the true state of being: the actual and essential, which may be veiled and obscured by a changeable, incongruous exterior. To one extreme wing of Protestant thinking, it was immoral to take advantage of such a ‘falsifiable exterior’ (Maus, 1995:4), and this judgment left the stage wide open to criticism. The ideal for such thinkers, as Barish notes, was ‘absolute sincerity and identity’: a direct correlation between identity and action, between essence and appearance (Barish, 1981:95). To appear, act, or speak in any way which could be identified as divergent from the truth – from reality, or from the essence of oneself or one’s place in the world – was seen as deceptive and morally reprehensible. If one acted in contradiction to one’s God-given (and therefore true)



identity, or appeared as something one was not, or made up new worlds in contrast to the existing one, then one denied the existence set out for one by God and replaced it with a construction which must be inferior and, as divergent from the truth of God's will, false. A legitimate, moral relationship with one's fellow human beings and with God depended upon 'a direct translation of one's inner self' (Barish, 1981:95) in all outward appearances, actions, and communications. Not only did theatricality imply the deliberate, arranged deferral of reality and certainty; worse, in its popularity, it stood as a *celebration* of the human ability to *seem* – to enact, depict, create, and fill (with exuberance) the gaps between what is and what is not. Even in circumstances where sincerity is intended, truth is both difficult to convey and to establish once 'the possibility of deception' in appearances has been granted (Maus, 1995:6). Any attempt at achieving certainty is wholly undermined, then, when stage performers present a premeditated, deliberate insincerity.

Gosson repeats his warnings against the deceits of theatre in similar terms in his follow-up work, *An Apology for the School of Abuse*, published later in 1579. While Gosson does defend himself against accusations that he forbids poetry, music, and recreation, stating that he '[touches] but the abuses of all these' (Gosson, 1579b:34), his position seems increasingly intolerant of any real theatrical practice – certainly, any moral participation in drama seems inconceivable in his developing view of its dissimulation. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, in the slightly earlier *The School of Abuse*, he characterized theatre as a poisoning physician, juggler, siren, hunter (of both birds and fish), harpy, hyena, and wolf in sheep's clothing. In *An Apology*, he repeats the perception of players as deceivers, again comparing them to 'rank poyson' and to hunters baiting their prey with the appearances of benign intent and rewards of goodness:

... hunters deceive the most when, seeming to walk for their delight, they craftily fetch the deer about ... players [counterfeit] a show to make us merry, shoot their nets to work our misery ... when comedy comes upon the stage, Cupid sets up a springe for

woodcocks, which are entangled ere they discry the line, and caught before they mistrust the snare. (Gosson, 1579b:35)

Antony Munday uses similar imagery in *A Second and Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theatres* (1580). Like Gosson, he describes the entrapment in vice of spectators at plays as exercises in hunting and snaring, adding spiders to Gosson's catalogue of player-predator analogies. Theatres and their players are arachnids who have caught many unsuspecting victims in their webs, which are 'so subtly spun that there is no man that is once within them that can avoid them without danger' (1580:70).

These metaphors indicate another of the main preoccupations of antitheatrical writers who accuse plays and players of deception: the anxiety that the audience is unable to perceive the truth. In Gosson's analogies, spectators are lured by the falsifiable outward appearances of their deceivers, who mask their true intentions and use their performances as traps for unsuspecting victims. This goes to the root of the word 'deceive': the French *deceivre*, meaning to catch, cheat, or ensnare. Following the metaphors to their conclusion, the question is then what happens to the audience once they are 'caught'. For prey, being trapped means death – but Gosson and Munday are unclear as to what this correlates to for the spectator of a play.

Some clarity on this is to be found in other strands of antitheatrical imagery. Besides using language related to hunting, baiting, and snaring, Gosson's writing also contains examples of another kind of imagery – that of poison, disease, and medicine – warning spectators against plays as a kind of 'deceitful physician' or poisoner. Interestingly, he then goes on to frame himself as an alternative source of medicinal assistance. He urges readers to accept his advice as a patient would accept a 'potion', offering healing and recuperation if they 'resist not the surgeon, though he strike in his knife' (Gosson, 1579a:31). There are, of course, important differences between the false physic of

theatre and the cures of Gosson: the deceitful physician's medicine is masked with 'sweet syrups', but Gosson's remedies are bitter and need to be endured 'though [they] like not [the reader's] taste' (Gosson, 1579a:31). In this formulation, that which is falsely sweet masks that which is truly bitter, but unmasked bitterness leads to that which is truly sweet. In *A Mirror of Monsters* (1587), William Rankins uses similar language to describe the 'false delight of a poisoned sweet' that actors proffer, and the 'secret poison and hidden harms' which await their spectators (1587:127, 129). These metaphors are closely related to the 'language of infection' often used by other antitheatrical writers to describe vulnerable, helpless audiences of plays (Myhill, 1999:293). Platt notes that the root of this imagery might be found in the physical circumstances of playhouses; antitheatrical writers are also known for raging 'against the theatre as a site of literal contamination' by the plague (2009:191)<sup>7</sup>. The fear which the threat of literal contamination inspired would have been a convenient association for antitheatrical writers to evoke. In another continuation of Gosson's argument, Munday describes the theatre as contaminating spectators with diseases of immorality and himself as the medical rescuer, offering an ominous warning to spur his audience to action: '[I]n the beginning every disease is to be stopped, and cured: but if a sore run over-long, it will grow past the cure of the physician' (1580:73).

As with the hunting metaphors, the implication for patients who choose the wrong physician or who are contaminated by the plague is annihilation. Platt, in his reading of *The Overthrow of Stage Plays* (1599) by John Rainolds, suggests what this annihilation might translate to for spectators. Rainolds also uses the language of infection, expressing his concerns about the possible 'infection' of players' minds resulting from the imitation of immoral actions, and the subsequently 'contagious' nature of theatrical spectacle on the audience (1599:176). In other words, 'playgoing

---

<sup>7</sup> This is also discussed by Keir Elam, who writes that 'the threat of bubonic infection through the drama' was 'both moral and medical', and that 'Elizabethan moralists anathematized theatre-going not only as a form of ethical contagion but as a mode of social, sexual, tactile and respiratory contact causing the rapid diffusion of the disease' (2003:154).

initiated a chain of corruption, from mind to body, as well as from actor to audience' (Platt, 2009:191). It is this 'infection' of the mind – the compromise of the inner self – which the antitheatricalists fear; that through the imitation of different realities, the identity of the actor, or the true self, will be transformed. If the realm of fiction ('what is not') infects reality, the implication is that reality takes on qualities of the fiction: it is also altered. If this is true, and the route of contagion between the actors and audience is similar to that between the fiction and the actor, then the fear of 'the loss of self in the act of playing' extends into the fear of a 'transformation of the audience into actors' (Platt, 2009:188)<sup>8</sup>.

It is worth noting that the fears antitheatricalists expressed about the infectious nature of acting and theatre – about their effects on both performer and audience – had some basis in experience. Interestingly, both Gosson and Munday felt first-hand the effects of theatre: both worked as actors and playwrights before they turned to writing against plays and playing. Why Gosson abandoned acting is unclear, but he left London in 1578 to become a tutor, after which he started writing against the theatres. Munday's reasons are clearer: he turned antitheatrical after being 'booed and hissed off the stage' for his attempts at improvisational acting (Pollard, 2004:62). Unlike Gosson, however, Munday did not remain immune to the arts he once practised: falling victim to the very 'disease' he proposed curing others of, he returned to writing plays (Pollard, 2004:63). William Rankins is also an example of the powerful draw of theatre: he started by writing against the theatre, but ended up becoming a playwright, authoring one play and collaborating on others between 1598 and 1601 (Pollard, 2004:124).

---

<sup>8</sup> This fear was expressed in 1597 by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen writing to the Privy Council that stage plays 'are a speaciall cause of corrupting their Youth ... being so as that they impresse the very qualitie & corruption of manners which they represent ... Whearby such as frequent them ... drawe the same into imitation and not to the avoidinge the like vices which they represent' (quoted in Nagler, 1952:115).

The fear of contamination through deception becomes increasingly defined in Gosson's writing, which reaches a climax in *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582). In this he argues, unequivocally, that plays are inherently corrupt and that the only acceptable action is to 'abolish [them] completely' (Pollard, 2004:84). The third 'action' of the document's title is concerned with the formal cause of Gosson's argument: plays in performance require, by their nature, that actors 'by outward signs ... show themselves otherwise than they are, and so [fall] within the compass of a lie' (Gosson, 1582:102). This explicit definition of the stage player or dramatist as liar and hypocrite – as falsifier, forger, and adulterer – is repeated by Munday, as well as by Philip Stubbes and William Rankins. In addition to the assertion that the best poets are 'notablest' liars, Munday also describes writers as tailors who 'can alter the fashion of any thing into another form and with a new face make that seem new which is old' (Munday, 1580:78). Even more colourfully, the *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) by Philip Stubbes describes stage players as 'dissembling hypocrites', 'double dealing ambi-dexters', and 'painted sepulchers' (1583:118). The biblical reference to the façade covering a rotting grave is repeated by Rankins, who describes players as monsters who 'in outward show seem painted sepulchers ... but [contain] nothing but a mass of rotten bones' (1587:125). This accusation is enduring: in 1633, more than half a century after the publication of *Plays Confuted*, William Prynne defines a hypocrite, 'in his true etimologie', as 'a Stage player', attacking the theatre's counterfeiting with vitriolic censure, denouncing actors as directly contravening the God-given imperative to be 'sincere, devoyde of all hypocrisie ... to be such in shew, as they are in truth: to seeme that outwardly which they are inwardly; to act themselves, not others' (1633:159).

The lasting impression of the hypocrisy of stage-players could perhaps be connected to Gosson's additional point of attack: he is especially concerned with the *enactment* of plays as a source of evil. In the *Apology* (1579), an early sign of this concern might be detected when he speaks about the insidious enchantment of audiences by 'the pleasant action of body' (Gosson, 1579b:34). In *Plays Confuted* (1582), this is developed into a full argument. To wear clothing normally restricted to

another gender or class, and to match such borrowed robes with the accompanying movements, mannerisms, and vocal inflections of another is ‘to falsify, forge, and adulterate, contrary to the express rule of the word of God’ (Gosson, 1582:102). An actor must learn to represent the character he is playing with great accuracy in order to ‘give life to the picture he presenteth’, but to do so is to ‘learn to counterfeit, and so to sin’ (Gosson, 1582:102). This is because playing the parts of others means neglecting the role one has been assigned by God. Comparing the metaphor of the body of Christ to the body of the Commonwealth, Gosson interprets actors as representing ‘feet [that] would be arms, the arms [that] would be eyes; the guts [that] would be veins, the veins [that] would be nerves, the muscles [that] would be flesh, the flesh [that] would be spirit’ (Gosson, 1579:35). Unsurprisingly, such utter confusion of order within the body is interpreted as weakening ‘the head’: ‘proportion is so broken, unity dissolved, harmony confounded’ (Gosson, 1579:35). Munday also echoes Gosson’s sentiments regarding the evils of enactment, describing the feigning of actors as a detestable triad of physical performance: ‘filthy *speech* ... vile *motion*, beastly *gestures*’ (1580:65-66). Similarly, John Rainolds expresses distrust of imitation and performance, stating that as ‘unseemly’ as it is ‘for men to play such men’s parts as defile their mouths with unmodest speeches’, it is even worse for them to ‘stain their bodies and minds with wanton deeds’ (1599:173).

It is perhaps telling that Gosson implicates the medieval tradition of the *Corpus Christi* plays in his denunciation of bodily enactment. He refers to Gregory Naziancen (a hymnist of the fourth century) who, he says, was wise enough to detest ‘the corruption’ of these plays, knowing that to perform the passion of the Christ on stage might result in ‘some base fellow that played Christ’ bringing ‘the person of Christ into contempt’ (Gosson, 1582:103). While ‘action, pronunciation, apparel, agility, [and] music’ are all gifts from God, to use them ‘to set out the pomp, the plays, the inventions of the devil ... is abominable in the sight of God, and not to be suffered among Christians’ (Gosson, 1582:103).

The significance of this lies in the tension between Protestantism and Catholicism. Protestant anxieties about hypocrisy logically extended to religious practice. Any reflection or self-consciousness expressed in rituals, forms, and repetitions could be suspected of contradicting the ideal of an ‘unpremeditated outpouring of the grateful soul’ (Barish, 1981:95). Apprehensions about the surviving influence of Catholicism were closely related to such thinking. Helen Cooper has written about the ‘incarnational aesthetic’ of the stage which survived from the medieval period into the Elizabethan era (2010:48). This aesthetic resulted from the emphasis on ‘the body in performance’, as opposed to the rhetorical focus of classical drama (Cooper, 2010:22). Instead of action reported simply through speech, both medieval and Elizabethan plays offered physical bodies performing movements and gestures, interacting both tenderly and violently (Cooper, 2010:22). This meant that, alarmingly, theatrical pretence did not limit itself to transgressions in speech, but insisted on involving enactments as well, deceiving spectators both aurally and visually. This focus on the body, within antitheatrical polemic, was linked to the celebration and re-creation of Christ’s body in the Catholic Mass (Cooper, 2010:48-49). The connection of the theatre to Catholicism has also been written about by Louis Montrose, who argues that the rituals of the medieval church had offered ‘form and meaning’ to adherents’ ‘material existence’, and that in the wake of the Reformation, the theatre became an important ‘secular’ substitute for such systems of sanctioning and ordering existence (1980:59-60).

The suspicions of contemporary religious authorities about such links between the experience of theatre and the forms and practices of Catholicism were, perhaps, exacerbated by the perception that churches and theatres had started to compete for audiences. Catholicism had been replaced by Protestantism, but the stage – which seemed to contain vestiges of the old religion – drew crowds away from the new church. In 1592, the Lord Mayor expressed this problem in writing to the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift:

... the daily and disorderlie exercise of a number of players & playeng houses erected within this Citie, the youth thearof is greatly corrupted & their manners infected with many euill & vngodly qualities ... all sorts in generall [are withdrawn] from the daylie resort vnto sermons & other Christian exercises, to the ... prophanation of the good & godly religion established amongst vs. (quoted in Chambers, 1923:306)

Antitheatrical writers also seized on the popularity of plays and consequent downturn in the attendance of sermons as a sign of the theatre's ungodly nature. Munday writes:

For if it fall out ... that at one and the same time a holy day be kept and common plays proclaimed, I demand, whither do men flock most: to the court of God, or to the den of plays; to the temple, or to theatres? And what do men hear most willingly, the sayings of the Evangelists, or the toys of players; the words of life, or the words of death; the words of Christ, or the words of a fool in a play? ... if the Church keep any feast on that day when the deadly pastime is shown, men, such as say they are Christians ... come not at all unto Church ... the temple is despised, to run unto theatres; the Church is emptied, the yard is filled ... (Munday, 1580:67)

This competition between church and stage has been discussed at length by critics such as Louis Montrose, in *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (1996), and Jeffrey Knapp, in *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation and Theater in Renaissance England* (2002). They present differing interpretations of the comparative content of stage plays and sermons and the significance of their levels of popularity. Montrose contends that theatres provided secular substitutes for religious ritual, while Knapp argues that 'there is no reason to assume ... that if a play were not a sermon it could not be religious, or that if the stage were not a pulpit the audience could not be a congregation' (2002:119). David Scott Kastan is more hesitant to conjecture about the possible religious import of plays, and suggests that 'the competition between players and preachers seems far more likely to be, as was regularly said, a competition for audiences rather than for souls' (2014:9). Regardless of the extent to which plays were intentionally functioning as secular or religious agents, spectators certainly seem to have found something of worth in them,



and there is a suggestion that they might have acted as important suppliers of ideological guidance, ‘proffer[ing] aids to understanding and to endurance’ (Montrose, 1996:40). Stubbes, in his *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) identifies this argument in order to reject it. He presents this in the form of a dialogue between two characters, Philoponus (the antitheatrical voice) and Spudeus (his questioner). Spudeus says that he has heard that ‘some hold the opinion that they [plays] be as good as sermons, and that many a good example may be learned out of them’ (1583:120). Philoponus rejects this categorically, stating that the only education plays offer their spectators is an education in dishonesty – ‘if you will learn falsehood; if you will learn cozenage; if you will learn to deceive; if you will learn to play the hypocrite, to cog, to lie and falsify’, then ‘you need go to no other school’ than the ‘school’ of theatre (Stubbes, 1583:121).

The equation of theatre with deception and hypocrisy and the anti-Catholic sentiment which might have partially informed this would have been fuelled even further by the moral predicaments arising from religious persecution. Most religious sects agreed on the distinction between inner position and exterior comportment, but there was a great deal of debate on what right moral action would be, given this divided structure of human existence (Maus, 1995:16). As already noted, religious thought after the Reformation generally held that outward appearance should be a direct translation of the inner self. This was a difficult ideal for even devoted Protestants to uphold, and even more so for those religious minorities who did not conform to post-Reformation doctrine. Faced with the Protestant regime’s sometimes violent persecution, the Catholic minority had to find ways to navigate a world in which the relationship between ‘what they believed and what they decided to make apparent was posed in life-shattering terms’ (Maus, 1995:18). It was in this context that the infamous technique of equivocation became prevalent. Before the Reformation, Thomas More argued in *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529) that if a judge asked questions that were not rooted in clear evidence, then the interrogated party did not need to answer; and later, Catholics like Persons and Allen (Jesuit priests) dismissed the obligation to answer questions directly, based

on the legitimacy of the questioner's reasons for wanting to know the answer (Maus, 1995:20). Truth, to equivocation theorists, became something which exists primarily within the inner world, and the expression of that truth, whether accurate or not, does not alter it. This allows some room for the use of 'ambiguous or deceptive language' by those wishing to evade persecution through obscuring the truth of their dissent to questioning authorities (Maus, 1995:21).

It is perhaps useful at this point to note that religious attacks against artifice and 'ambiguous and deceptive language' were not only aimed at Catholicism and the theatre, but also against the verbal arts of metaphysical preachers. This has some implications for this discussion, as the metaphysical preachers' use of rhetorical features, and especially paradox (as a form of artifice), has been discussed by Bryan Crockett as the source of anxiety to writers such as John Stockwood (*A Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse on Barthelmew Day*, 1578) and Samuel Hieron (*The Preachers Plea*, 1604). Stockwood refers to the use of such artifice as a kind of 'painted', 'labored', and 'purpose sought for eloquence', characteristic of those who 'seek rather the praise of men than the glory of God' (Crockett, 1995:51). Hieron warns that excessively artful rhetoric casts 'a mist before a man's speeches, to cause him to be the more hardly understood' (1604:196).<sup>9</sup> Crockett sees this 'denigration of metaphysical preaching' as possibly stemming from the antitheatrical prejudice described by Barish (1993:53).

What is particularly interesting about Crockett's discussion is his identification of the way in which the metaphysical preachers themselves conceive of their sermons: in the words of Andreas

---

<sup>9</sup> Hieron criticizes the artifice of a 'strange manner of preaching which is in use in many places', focusing specifically on creative uses of language. A preacher who is guilty of this strange manner 'playeth vpon euery word ... as though the scripture were but a rattle for children and fooles ... he tosseth it hither and thither, & will not faile to offer it any violence, to frame it to an imagined conceit, & to draw it to an idle purpose'. Importantly, he associates this artifice explicitly with theatre. A preacher who uses such stylistic turns is 'all in his great words, & new coyned phrases, more fit for some Mimick or Tragedian, then a Minister of the Gospel' (Hieron, 1604:193).

Hyperius, the preacher's task is 'the craft of amplifying and moving of affections' (Crockett, 1995:51). In his *An Exposition upon the Prophet Jonah*, George Abbot claims, for example, that listeners 'must be entised & allured with a bait of industrie and eloquence, of prety and witty sentences' (1600:619). The work of preachers is 'not onely nakedly to lay open the truth, but to vse helpes of wit, of inuention and arte, (which are the good gifts of God)', and in doing so they would be 'imitatours of Christ', for 'where should skill be shewed, but in fishing for mens souls, after whom Christ himselfe so caught?' (Abbott, 1600:619). Richard Hooker, in the fifth book of his *Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1579), writes that 'these multiplied Petitions of wordly things in Prayer have therefore, besides their direct use a Service, whereby the Church under-hand, through a kind of Heavenly fraud, taketh therewith the Souls of men as with certain baits' (Hooker, [1579] 1676:236). Not only does this echo the language used to describe theatrical deception in antitheatrical writing – as luring and baiting its audiences – but it conceives of the practise as a paradox of positive trickery: it is a 'heavenly fraud', or in the words of Jasper Mayne, writing to William Cartwright, a 'holy cozenage' with which preachers 'catch'd the souls of men' (quoted in Crockett, 1995:50).

Antitheatrical polemicists did not go unanswered either, and defenders of the theatre, like the proponents of metaphysical preaching, used the images associated with deception to their advantage. An early example of a prose apology for theatre from the period is *A Reply to Stephen Gosson's School of Abuse, in Defence of Poetry, Music, and Stage Plays* (1579) by Thomas Lodge. Lodge, at this stage of his life, was neither a poet nor a playwright: he wrote from outside the theatrical profession. He later went on to write several prose romances<sup>10</sup> and collections of poetry, and although he did write two plays, these were only published in 1594, more than a decade after the

---

<sup>10</sup> He is particularly known for the prose romance *Rosalind, or Euphues' Golden Legacy* (1590), which was a source for Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. The connection between Lodge and Shakespeare's play is discussed in Chapter II, pp. 59,63,72.

*Reply* (Pollard, 2004:37). Nevertheless, Lodge is erudite and energetic in his reply to Gosson, which was ‘the first English response’ of its kind to the ‘growing accusations against the theatre’ (Pollard, 2004:38). Lodge picks up Gosson’s metaphorical description of infectious and poisonous plays and poetry (with Gosson himself in the role of physician) and turns it around, explaining that it is the *poets* who are the physicians, offering knowledge and understanding in an imperfect world, using their art to ‘so frame their potions that they might be applicable to the queasy stomachs of their wearish patients’ (Lodge, 1579:41). He goes on to cast his own counter-argument as a ‘receipt’ (remedy) which will cause the ‘purgation’ of the ignorant and addled Gosson, after which Gosson’s thinking will be set aright, proving ‘a clean recovered patient, and [Lodge] a perfect practicer in framing so good a potion’ (Lodge, 1579:46). Speaking of poetry, Lodge writes – citing Lactanius’s *De Divinis Institutionibus* – that accusing poetry of being false shows a lack of understanding, an inability to interpret: ‘[I]f we weigh poets’ words, and not their meaning, our learning in them will be very mean’ (1579:47).

Lodge writes this in response to the issue of poetry, but he deals with theatre separately. He agrees with Gosson that serious abuses of the theatre are committed, especially when theatres and churches are placed in competition on Sundays. He differs from his opponent, however, on how to deal with such abuses. Whereas Gosson, according to Lodge, believes that ‘unless the thing be taken away the vice will continue’, Lodge feels that ‘if the style were changed, the practice would profit’ (1579:54). He adds that comedies are justified because of their antiquity, the respectability of classical writers of comedy, and the good entertainment they provide. The veiled nature of drama is also something of a commodity, he argues, referring to the prohibition of preaching in Germany when comedies were used by the ‘learned’ to ‘covertly ... incite people to virtues’ (1579:55).

More than a decade later, Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* (1595) was published posthumously (Sidney died in 1586). The *Apology* is commonly thought to have been written in the early 1580s. It was, then, possibly formulated as a response to antitheatrical writers like Gosson (who had, interestingly, applied unsuccessfully to Sidney for patronage with his first publication in 1579). While Sidney's *Apology* is well-known for its eloquent, intellectual argument in defence of poetry, this art form is distinguished from the theatre, which is not championed as readily. Like Lodge, and more thoroughly than Lodge, Sidney pays attention to the accusation that poetry is a form of lying. He famously answers that the poet 'nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth: for, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false'. This freedom from restricting writing to the realm of fact allows poets a special access to moral insight, dealing with that which 'should or should not be' instead of 'what is or what is not' ([1595] 1979:123-124). Also like Lodge, Sidney expresses misgivings about the abuses of the theatre, and additionally takes issue with contemporary drama's flouting of traditional forms and models, ignoring the Aristotelian necessity for unities of time and place. Thus plays are judged to observe neither 'honest civility,<sup>11</sup> nor skillful poetry' ([1595] 1979:133).

*An Apology for Actors* (1612) by Thomas Heywood is the last defence of theatre within the scope of this dissertation, and it is the only one which focuses mainly on drama. This focus is possibly due to the fact that Heywood 'was an insider in the London theatre world' (Pollard, 2004:213). He was both an actor and a playwright; Lodge penned two plays, but Heywood claimed to be involved in writing over two hundred, of which twenty-three have survived (Pollard, 2004:213). Heywood importantly differs from Lodge and Sidney in his involvement in the theatre and his undivided attention to defending actors and their craft. His argument is divided into three sections, dealing with the antiquity of acting, its ancient dignity, and 'true use of [its] quality' (1612:237). His defence

---

<sup>11</sup>The word 'honest' in this case does not seem to be a reference to truthfulness. The phrase 'honest civility' is glossed by Sidney's modern editor, Geoffrey Shepherd, as 'decent behaviour' (1979:219).

of the art form is similar to Lodge and Sidney's defences of poetry, calling for responsible treatment and the regulation of its abuses, but rejecting any absolute condemnation based on isolated instances of misuse. Heywood compares the logic of rejecting acting outright to condemning 'the use of fire' because one man 'had his house burnt', and forbearing to drink because 'one man quaffed poison' (1612:239). Further, he argues that plays are 'an ornament to the city', making it attractive to foreign visitors, that they are instrumental in developing the English language from a 'rude and unpolished tongue' to 'a most perfect and composed language', and that they instruct their spectators in becoming informed and obedient subjects to the king (Heywood 1612:241). In many ways, however, Heywood's apology falls short. Barish (1981) has pointed out that he makes several embarrassing blunders in his reasoning, especially in the first two sections, which are filled with horrifying examples of the stage's power to facilitate and inspire violence. In the first book, for example, Heywood illustrates the power of theatre by referring to Ovid's account of the rape of the Sabine women by the followers of Romulus (the founder of Rome, according to legend), which took place at a theatre performance put on with the express purpose of luring and catching the women in order to populate the new city of Rome: '[T]hus were the ravished Sabines blushing led / (Becoming shame) unto each Roman's bed' (Heywood, 1612:241). The second book does not do much better, emphasising the origins of acting in pagan ritual and idolatry – 'one of the most persistent charges against the stage' – and relating an anecdote about Julius Caesar, who got so carried away while playing Hercules that 'by the perfect shape of the madness of Hercules' he actually killed the actor playing the hero's servant, Lichas (Barish, 1981:118-119; Heywood, 1612:241). With such examples from the first two sections as backdrop, the third section's claims about the beneficent, instructive quality of plays are in danger of becoming ridiculous.

Ultimately, then, prose apologies for the theatre during Shakespeare's lifetime were neither as vigorous nor as abundant as the attacks they responded to. Both Lodge and Sidney's committed

defences of poetry are separated from the defence of theatre, and both express reservations about the theatre that effectively restrain concessions about its positive qualities. Heywood gives the most attention and credit to the theatre, but he does so in terms which constantly undermine his argument and affirm the suspicions of detractors. He is, in Barish's words, 'constantly thrusting weapons into the hands of his adversaries' (1981:120).

Yet engagement with issues of dissimulation, mimesis, and the nature of drama was not limited to the prose writings of the period. Importantly, early modern plays reflected on their own nature, and so spoke to and opposed the discourses of their historical moment. This dissertation is driven by what Pollard identifies as 'the larger ... question of how the drama of the time responds, either directly or indirectly' (2004:xviii) to the debates surrounding the theatre, as well as Barish's identification of Shakespearean theatre as the site, above all others, where the dramatic arts are 'explored and championed' (1981:127).

The above discussion offers material for the construction of a framework according to which revelatory deceptions in Shakespeare's plays (as discussed and defined in the Introduction) might be read in the context of contemporary discourses surrounding theatrical hypocrisy. Firstly, the nature of the actor and the world he creates is central to the antitheatrical understanding of drama as deception. Theatrical performance implies the creation of an alternative, false reality to replace the true one, and actors undermine the ideal of a perfect agreement between inward truth and outward appearance. Actors are liars by profession, the temporary loss of identity which they strive towards in their performances contradicts the truth of the identity given to them by God, and they risk corrupting this identity through the corruption and transformation of their inner selves through false performances. Secondly, antitheatricalists are concerned with the effects of deceptive performances on audiences, who are also in danger of being contaminated by the false realities and identities which they are presented with. The language and imagery used to articulate both of these

central concerns is noteworthy. Actors are described in the antitheatrical rhetoric variously as hypocrites, counterfeiters, dissemblers, falsifiers, forgers, adulterers, monsters, and whited sepulchres. Audiences are conceived of as the victims or prey of jugglers, sirens, hunters, fishers, fowlers, harpies, hyenas, wolves, and spiders. Another important analogy for the relationship between actor and audience is the one between poisoner, or deceitful physician, and patient.

Defences of theatre are largely based on the potential edification drama might offer audiences. This recalls the previous function of plays in early modern society to some extent: before theatre established itself permanently in the urban sphere of London, plays were thought to provide useful, contained examples of good behaviour to students. Thomas Lodge also uses similar imagery in his answer to the antitheatricalists at times in order to turn their arguments against them. Specifically, he uses the language of medicine to frame his own writing as a purgative to what he considers are Gosson's misapprehensions about poetry. Both Thomas Lodge and Sir Philip Sidney are fairly conservative in their discussion of theatre, however, allowing that its 'abuses' should be remedied. Thomas Heywood is more enthusiastic, but makes several blunders in attempting to praise the effect of plays on their performers' audiences, not least because these effects, in his examples, usually involve inspiring either rape or murder.

Therefore, in analysing revelatory deception in Shakespeare's plays as potential engagements with the contemporary discourses surrounding theatre, these will be the central concerns: the characteristics of the performers of revelatory deceptions; the effects of these deceptions on both the performers and their 'audiences'; and the language and imagery used to convey this. This approach will be inflected by the commentaries of Barish and Pollard on Shakespearean theatre's responses to criticisms against the dramatic form.



In considering the performers of revelatory deceptions, I will give some consideration to Barish's claim that one mode of self-reflection in Shakespearean theatre is the presentation of and interaction between antagonists and protagonists who embody varying degrees of theatricality. In 'his astounding comprehensiveness', Barish says, Shakespeare presents his audiences with 'not only the theatrical or histrionic villain ... but the theatrical hero, and the nontheatrical protagonist as well – plenitude and rectitude both' (1981:127). Barish's definition of the 'theatrical hero' is largely dependent on a chameleon-like ability to engage in 'mimicry and metamorphosis' through which a character achieves something of a 'heroic stature' through continued transgression against the ideals of absolute identity and sincerity (1981:127). Relevant examples of such characters cited by Barish include Hamlet and *King Lear's* Edgar, to whose ranks Rosalind in *As You Like It* could be added. Beyond the definition of theatrical heroes based on their powers of self-transformation, however, is the possibility of identifying worthy representatives of theatricality by their ability to effect and facilitate transformation in the world around them. The main actors are not the only participants or potential champions of the theatrical process. Smaller, more contained parts prop up and legitimize greater illusions or offer steady counterfeits to balance unrestrained changeability: so Celia/Aliena acts as a companion to Rosalind/ Ganymede, and Kent provides steady support to Lear in a single guise while Edgar's multiple personas flit nervously across all corners of the heath. There are also those who tell the story, who devise the action, climax, and dénouements: Don Pedro, and Friar Francis.

Pollard identifies three ways in which plays meditate on their own nature,<sup>12</sup> and I will categorise the revelatory deceptions in the plays according to these. The first category is the 'play within a

---

<sup>12</sup> Critics such as Andrew Gurr (1992, 2004) and Suzanne Gossett (2000) have argued for the potential importance of metatheatrical allusions and devices to early modern audiences. Gurr argues that, because of the relative limitations and nature of stagecraft during the period – players 'lacked the facilities for presenting the pictorial aspects of illusion' while also being 'in the midst of the audience', spectators must have had a great 'awareness of the illusion as illusion' was therefore much closer to the surface all the time (1992:180). The 'metatheatrical tricks' of authors such as Shakespeare indicates that they had 'some

play’ device, and the second is the *theatrum mundi* metaphor – both are overtly metatheatrical. The third category contains the less conspicuous but equally important ‘instances of play-acting’ which ‘conjure up questions about the nature of acting, performances, and spectatorship’ (Pollard, 2004:xix-xx). In the selection of plays dealt with in this dissertation (*As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*) plays within plays are most clearly apparent in *Hamlet* as the ‘Mousetrap’ play and in *King Lear* as Edgar’s direction of the scene at Dover, while the *theatrum mundi* category is famously exemplified by Jaques’s ‘all the world’s a stage’ speech in *As You Like It*. Pollard’s examples of the third kind of self-reflexive theatricality include the tricks played on Claudio by Don John and on Beatrice and Benedick by Don Pedro in *Much Ado About Nothing*, as well as the play-acting of Rosalind in *As You Like It*. To this I would add Friar Francis’s staging of Hero’s death and resurrection in *Much Ado*, Hamlet’s madness, and Edgar and Kent’s disguises in *King Lear*. All three categories are relevant to the discussion which follows, but *theatrum mundi* will be of less importance than the other two forms, as this functions as a kind of internal commentary on the nature of playing instead of presenting enacted examples of it. Jaques’s speech is more meditation than active lie. Within the play-world, at least, he is not trying to hoodwink anyone through his philosophizing. Rosalind, on the other hand, deliberately disguises herself as Ganymede and role-plays in an elaborate deception of Orlando. Attention will be paid where it is due to passive meditations or passing comments like Jaques’s when they are important to forming an understanding of a play’s approach to deception, but the sustained performances of characters within the performance of a play will be the primary focus.

If revelatory deception in Shakespeare is interpreted as a paradox which challenges orthodoxies and overturns common prejudices about the theatre, then framing it as a response to antitheatrical polemic requires qualification: such a response cannot be interpreted as an obsequious exercise in

---

confidence in the audience’s active capacity’ to recognise them (Gurr, 2004:128). Playwrights, according to Gossett, constantly attempt to ‘remind [spectators] of theatrical conventions’ (Gossett, 2000:158).

placating authority. If it is argued, as this dissertation attempts, that Shakespearean theatre offers an apology for the dramatic arts through the portrayal of theatrical lies which reveal the truth instead of concealing it, then the kind of truth it reveals is not the same kind of truth sought by writers such as Gosson, Munday, Stubbes, Rankins, Rainolds, and Prynne. The truths which result from revelatory deception do not necessarily offer the same stability and certainty of limited and exclusionary absolutism of antitheatrical judgments. Instead of attempting to present a fixed and infallible interpretation of reality, the paradoxes discussed by this dissertation reveal a vision of the world which contains a ‘dizzying array of perspectives on ... truth’, thereby anticipating, as Platt argues, Keats’s recognition of the creative potential of ‘uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts’, and his celebration of Shakespeare’s ability to access this potential (Platt, 2009:1).

## Chapter II:

### **False Sweet Baits: *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It***

Together, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*, both dated at around 1599, offer a spectrum of metatheatrical deceptions: role-playing, trickery, pretences, masks, disguises, impersonations. These represent everything worthy of mistrust from the antitheatrical view, especially as they underscore the power of theatre to influence its audience and highlight the many possible points or modes of separation between inward truth and outward appearance. As revelatory deceptions, these pieces of theatre within theatre are paradoxes which destabilise established perceptions, not only of love and its manifestations (as is the wont of the comic genre), but also of deception and seeming, and therefore of theatre itself. Theatrical deceits which undo deceit – lies which obscure the truth in order to reveal the truth – are constantly foregrounded through the parallels and oppositions in plot, subplot, and characterization in these plays. This includes examples of

malicious (sometimes theatrical) deception, whose performers and their victims provide revealing counterpoints to the performers and audiences of paradoxical, positive deceptions. Read within their own constructed, fictional settings, and in the wider contemporary context of the antitheatrical debates, the revelatory deceptions in these plays draw attention to and interrogate the concepts of truth, lies, and fictions through the illuminating paradoxes surrounding the characters who perform them, the characters who act as audiences to such performances, and the language with which the deceptions are described.

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the first instance of revelatory deception is found in the play's primary subplot, which almost works itself into usurping the main plot by virtue of the bickering, lively, intensely human anti-couple at its core – Beatrice and Benedick. As companions to Hero and Claudio (the very traditional romantic leads of the main plot), Beatrice and Benedick are figures of conspicuous singledom, acting as counterpoints to the idealism and sentiment signified by the impending nuptials of their friends, each in turn offering dissensions and protestations against the illusions of love. If Claudio and Hero exemplify a highly conventional (almost trite) version and view of love, then Benedick and Beatrice function as a challenge and critique of it through their contrarian attitudes. In their protestations against love, they seem to be bearers of knowledge gained through experience of the world; they are often portrayed as older than the young Hero and Claudio and, subsequently, less prone to entertaining naïve beliefs about romance. They believe themselves to be free of illusions, beyond the reach of false ideals.

This opposition between one set of perceptions and experiences and another is underscored by references to sight and seeing. An early instance of this appears when Claudio tells Benedick that 'in [his] eye', Hero is 'the sweetest lady that ever [he] looked on' (1.1.125). Benedick does not share this view, responding that he 'can see yet without spectacles, and [he sees] no such matter' (1.1.126), implying that his sight is perfect, without need of assistance or enhancement, and that

Claudio's vision must be obscured, as Benedick fails to see what his friend sees. To Benedick, Claudio's lovesickness suggests a movement away from reality and truth, from lucid perception and action. Before he falls in love with Hero, Claudio 'was wont to speak plain and to the purpose like an honest man', but now, Benedick complains, his friend 'is turned orthography, his words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes' (2.3.14-15). It is interesting that honesty and plain speaking are established as the counterpoint to Claudio's 'fantastical'<sup>13</sup> words and orthography, which, in their strangeness, are removed from the ordinary, the sensible, and the true. This opposition is not unfamiliar within rhetoric surrounding the theatre – itself a seemingly 'fantastical' thing – and the contradiction is reinforced by the fact that Benedick is not wrong about Claudio's obscured vision; Claudio's approach to love and to Hero proves, later on, to be dangerously flawed and immature. Claudio's naivety and dogged certainty about his own experiences and views reveal him to be an expert in self-deception; his illusions show themselves to be susceptible to catastrophic distortion. In some ways, then, the play starts by dramatizing the conflict between clarity and delusion, between plain truth and artifice.

But this opposition is complicated almost immediately. The fact that Claudio's love is based on illusion does not mean that Benedick's view of the world is any more real or true. What Claudio and Benedick share is their confidence that their perceptions are infallible, and it is this confidence which leads both of them astray. Benedick and Beatrice may, at first, seem to stand in a paradoxical relationship to Claudio and Hero; they undermine one view of love by presenting an opposite view of their own. Shakespeare is not content with only one layer of subversion, however, as both these views are equally fixed and, consequently, equally problematic. The amounts of energy and attention Benedick and Beatrice expend on each other strain against their proclamations of aversion. The extreme terms in which they express their views undercut their supposed rationality:

---

<sup>13</sup> 'Fantastical', in this context, means 'fanciful', 'highly creative', or 'imaginary' (Crystal & Crystal, 2015:104).

Beatrice says that ‘she would rather hear a dog bark at a crow than hear a man swear he loves [her]’ (1.1.90), and Benedick, accused of being ‘an obstinate heretic in the despite of beauty’, asserts that he ‘will live the bachelor’ (1.1.156,163). The absolute certainty with which they view the world and their places within it is limiting and, within the comic universe, nigh impossible to uphold as an unchanging truth. The accusation of heresy against beauty (and by extension, against love), is echoed when Benedick questions whether he may ‘be so converted [as Claudio has been] and see with these eyes?’, and concludes: ‘I think not’ (2.3.15-16). This is the kind of conviction which begs to be undermined. No sooner does Benedick pose the question than the expectation is created that he *will* be answered, that he *will* be converted. This is the stuff of comedy – that Benedick and Beatrice will fall victim to their own protestations, will be proven wrong through merry trickery. Beatrice and Benedick’s reality is bound to be disrupted by the requirements of fiction and *through* fiction.

Their self-imposed ignorance is, then, undone through theatre. Don Pedro conspires with Claudio, Leonato, and Hero to trick Benedick and Beatrice into ‘a mountain of affection, th’one with th’other’ (2.1.252). The affectionate deception is this: Don Pedro, Claudio and Leonato will inform Benedick (through allowing him to eavesdrop on them) that Beatrice has confessed that she is madly in love with him. She has, of course, done no such thing. Exactly the same deception is performed on Beatrice: Hero, together with her companion, Ursula, ensures that Beatrice overhears them speaking about how Benedick has revealed that he is besotted with her. In each case, a kind of performance is put on – enacted – for the sake of Benedick and Beatrice as unwitting auditors. Each is presented with a set of falsehoods, with made-up realities in which each is reported to be in love with the other.

This deception is not as overtly theatrical as some meta-histrionics in other Shakespearean plays, but it does engage with issues of performance and spectatorship, especially in the language used

to describe the trickery. It is an example of Pollard's third category of metatheatrical action – informal instances of play-acting (as opposed to a more formally established play within a play or *theatrum mundi* metaphor). Anne Richter has noted that while this deception does not rely on disguise – it is exclusively 'verbal' – in Hero and Ursula's deception of Beatrice, 'the nature of the situation lends a specifically theatrical colouring to the familiar "play the part" idiom' (1962:82). This idiom is evoked when Hero tells Ursula to 'let it be [her] part' (3.1.18) to praise Benedick's many virtues, and Ursula responds: 'Fear you not my part of the dialogue' (3.1.31). The use of the words 'part' and 'dialogue' indicate that Hero and Ursula conceive of their trick as a kind of planned theatrical performance.

Beyond this overtly theatrical language, however, I would add that there are other images and turns of phrase in the deceptions of Beatrice and Benedick which indicate that it is a dramatic performance. It has already been noted that antitheatrical arguments often frame the relationship between play and spectator as one between snare and prey (see Chapter 1, p.17 & pp.22-23): Stephen Gosson is particularly fond of the metaphor, likening audiences to birds lured to their death by the 'fowler's whistle' (or 'woodcocks' caught by Cupid's 'springe' and 'snare'), and fish caught by apparently 'wholesome bait' (Gosson, 1579a:21, 1579b:35). Furthermore, metaphysical preachers describe the craft of their sermons, in which they use rhetoric which their opponents (in an antitheatrical vein) characterised as deceptive artifice, as an art of baiting and luring their listeners in a kind of 'heavenly fraud' (in the words of Richard Hooker – see Chapter 2, pp. 29-30). Intriguingly, the tricks played upon Benedick and Beatrice are described in precisely these terms: Claudio, Leonato, and Don Pedro, in their attempt to fool their friend, are described as hunting him as one would hunt a bird. Once Don Pedro has initiated the performance for Benedick, Claudio (presumably noting Benedick react to the news that Beatrice loves him), encourages his friends in an aside to 'stalk on! the fowl sits' (2.3.75). When Don Pedro asks Leonato what 'effects of passion' Beatrice has shown, Claudio urges him to 'bait the hook well' – in other words, to give

an utterly convincing account of Beatrice's love symptoms so as to catch Benedick's belief – for Claudio is convinced that 'this fish' (Benedick), 'will bite' (2.3.86). Again, Don Pedro arranges for 'the same net [to be] spread' (2.3.157) for Beatrice by Hero and Ursula. Ursula describes their deceit as 'pleasant'st angling' which will see the 'fish' (Beatrice) 'cut with her golden oars the silver stream, / And greedily devour the treacherous bait' (3.1.26-28). Hero replies that they should position themselves close to Beatrice, so that she does not miss any 'of the false sweet bait that we lay for it' (3.1.26-33). After they have revealed Benedick's supposed affection for Beatrice, Ursula says 'she is ta'en ... we have caught her' – to which Hero replies: 'If it prove so, then loving goes by haps: / Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps' (3.2.106-108).

The description of the 'bait' in this instance as 'false sweet' offers another important connection and counterpoint to the antitheatrical argument, which claims that the sweetness of the bait is overshadowed by the false purposes it is used for. In the double-characterisation of the treacherous, false sweet 'bait' laid out for Beatrice, however, the supposed falseness of the bait in this case seems to be cancelled out by its sweetness – as in metaphysical preachers' conception of their verbal 'performances' in their sermons for the benefit of their congregations. This does not mean that Shakespearean drama uses this imagery to categorically deny the malevolent face of deception. Elsewhere in the plays, baiting and snaring metaphors depict less benevolent tricks. In *Twelfth Night*, for example, Sir Toby Belch, Maria, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and Fabian present Malvolio – whom they describe as the 'woodcock near the gin' (2.5.64) – with a fiction which is designed with no better intention than to humiliate him. In *Hamlet*, Polonius describes his own trickery of people as a kind of baiting<sup>14</sup> – and his deceptions are performed either in service to the schemes of the duplicitous Claudius or for Polonius's own networks of devious surveillance. As noted in my Introduction's discussion of *Macbeth* – a play which contains clear instances of

---

<sup>14</sup> The imagery used to describe his techniques is discussed at greater length in Chapter III, pp.85-87.



theatrical lies – Shakespeare’s plays do not reject the possibility of deception’s being used for nefarious purposes. Rather, they challenge the conviction which insists that it be rejected as uniformly and universally immoral through depictions of revelatory deception.

*Much Ado About Nothing* subverts any such absolutism by offering an approach which is rich in suggestions about the moral possibilities of deception, specifically when that deception is theatrical. Don Pedro and Hero’s fictions are not only used to portray counterfeit realities in which Benedick and Beatrice have declared their love for one another. They serve two purposes beyond this: to exaggerate the supposed lover’s virtues, painting them as supremely desirable companions, and to prompt introspection in the recipient of the lover’s affections. To Benedick, Beatrice is described as ‘virtuous’, ‘an excellent sweet lady’, and ‘exceeding wise’ except ‘in loving Benedick’ (2.3.121-124). According to Claudio, however, Benedick would ‘make but a sport’ (2.3.119) of Beatrice’s affections. In the same way, Benedick is described to Beatrice as ‘foremost in report through Italy’ (3.1.99) for his ‘shape ... bearing, argument, and valor’. Yet, Hero bemoans, no lady is made ‘of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice’, and her ability to see Benedick’s virtues is impaired, as ‘disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes, / misprizing what they look on’ (3.1.51-53). In these ways, Don Pedro’s deception functions according to the ‘purpose of playing’ as outlined by Hamlet, who states that theatre should ‘hold ... / the mirror up to Nature’, and in doing so ‘show Virtue her feature’ and ‘scorn her own image’ (3.2.15-16).

This theatrical deceit is therefore, first and foremost, an agent of revelation: it changes Benedick and Beatrice’s views by revealing to them very different and, apparently, very welcome new angles of perception. Benedick and Beatrice’s readiness in accepting and returning each other’s fictional affections reveals the truth of their own, very real feelings. The false revelations they are offered also lead to self-insight. Benedick hears ‘how [he] is censured’ (2.3.163) and readily accepts the criticisms against his character, claiming that ‘happy are they that hear their detractions / and can

put them to mending' (2.3.166-167) and Beatrice takes good note of the charges against her and promptly bids 'contempt, farewell', and 'maiden pride, adieu!' (3.1.111). To each, the overheard praise of the other also takes root speedily: Benedick claims that the praise he overheard his friends give Beatrice is 'truth' (2.3.167), and Beatrice 'believes it better than reportingly' (3.1.118) that Benedick is a noble, deserving man.

The transformation achieved by this revealing deceit is emphasised in the language used to describe it. The motifs of sight, perception, and religious conversion are used again, now in contrast to the proclaimed immutability and clarity of vision at the beginning of the play. Margaret, observing Beatrice in the first scene in which she appears after the trickery, says to her that she has been 'converted', and looks 'with [her] eyes as other women do' (3.4.60-61) – as opposed to the obstinate refusal to see what other women see with regard to romance. Benedick admits to his friends that 'he is [not] as [he has] been' (3.2.10), and when he approaches Leonato about marrying his niece, Benedick says that Beatrice regards him 'with an eye of favour' and that he 'with an eye of love requite[s] her' (5.4.22,24). This is unfamiliar territory for both of them:

BENEDICK	I do love nothing in the world so well as you. Is not that strange?
BEATRICE	As strange as the thing I know not. It were as possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you ...

(4.1.270-272)

The 'strangeness' of this new reality is important: to Beatrice and Benedick, it is unexpected, surprising, and wondrously different from their old realities. To enjoy the goodness of this new reality, it is necessary for them to become humbled and vulnerable, stepping out of the detachment which their convictions afforded them and into new relationship with each other and with the world around them. Both Beatrice and Benedick, previously 'heretics' to love, have been 'converted', as Benedick declared himself immune to being. This idea of 'conversion' is important when considered with the fact that Don Pedro's theatrical deception of his friends is framed in

very similar terms to the rhetorical baits of metaphysical preachers designed to catch the souls of men. This might function to align theatre, in this instance, with the metaphysical tradition as discussed in Chapter I (see p. 31). George Abbott specifically refers to the wonderful strangeness of Christ's own message and methods of speaking: Christ's 'speech prouoked reuerence, and amazednesse, and astonishment' (Abbott, 1600:619). He also argues that those engaged in rhetorical 'baiting' and 'fishing' follow the example of Christ, who himself 'so caught' the souls of men, and did so through fictions – through 'Parables & similitudes, the mysticalnesse whereof preuailed much with the auditours' (Abbott, 1600:619). The image and argument has a biblical source: in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus's first disciples work on a fishing boat, and he calls them to leave their work and to follow him, to become 'fishers of men' (Matthew 4:19). This imagines a person's conversion to Christianity as a paradoxical process: one must be caught in order to be truly free. Also, to hear Christ's message – to be 'caught' by it – means to experience a sense of wonder: astonishment and amazement at divine revelation and truth. This is echoed in the experience of Benedick and Beatrice, who are baited by an illusion in order to be released from their false opinions, to experience the wonder of revelation and the benefits of conversion.

Don Pedro, the instigator of this revelatory deception, thus stands as a hero and champion of romantic love. When he first undertakes the task of uniting Beatrice and Benedick, he compares it to completing one of 'Hercules's labours', and asserts that if the plot is successful, then 'Cupid is no longer an archer: his glory shall be [theirs]' (2.1.251,264). As in Gosson's description, 'Cupid' successfully sets a trap for his unsuspecting victims in the form of a fiction. The audience of his trap (Benedick and Beatrice) benefit from this deception, however, and the audience of the play is happy about Don Pedro's victory. He is a great positive figure of deceit, using it creatively: to establish relationships, new life, and hope. Before his trickery of Benedick and Beatrice, he disguises himself as Claudio at a masquerade and woos Hero on his behalf. In these deceptions, Don Pedro acts as a 'theatrical hero' in Barish's terms: he responds to contemporary Protestant ideals

of honesty, standing as a partial answer to accusations of hypocrisy such as those lodged by Stubbes, Munday, and Gosson.<sup>15</sup> He cozens and deceives, but he is no villain; rather, he shows the merits of ‘falsifying’ and false appearances in leading to greater truths.

The moral potential of Don Pedro’s deceptions is thrown into relief by the opposite methods of his brother, Don John. The contrast between the two is representative of what Richard Henze has identified as the contrast between ‘right’ deception with ‘wrong’ deception in the play (1971: 188). In Barish’s framework, one might expect ‘wrong’ deception to be perpetrated by theatrical villains (as opposed to the ‘right’ deception of theatrical heroes such as Don Pedro). I would, however, add another category – that of the non-theatrical villain – to accommodate Don John. In immediate opposition to Don Pedro as a figure of benevolent misdirection, Don John describes himself as a ‘plain-dealing villain’ (1.3.21) – he rejects any form of ‘seeming’, refuses to act and be anything other than what he is and feels:

DON JOHN                    ... I cannot  
                                      hide what I am: I must be sad when I have cause,  
                                      and smile at no man’s jests, eat when I have  
                                      stomach, and wait for no man’s leisure, sleep when  
                                      I am drowsy, and tend on no man’s business, laugh  
                                      when I am merry, and claw no man in his humour ... (1.3.8-12)

This complicates the moral view of honesty and sincerity of character and action; Don John is both honest and sincere in an absolute sense, but to no good purpose. He refuses to change who he is, which might suggest integrity if he were a good man, but he is not; his obstinate refusal to act in a manner contrary to his feelings shows him to be selfish, adversarial, and arrogant. He

---

<sup>15</sup> Phillip Stubbes points to the stage as a kind of school in which sincerity and good identity are completely undermined, in which is taught ‘falsehood ... cozenage ... to deceive ... to play the hypocrite ... to lie and falsify’ (1583:121), while Antony Munday equates performance with inconsistent identity, suspecting actors of being ‘as variable in heart, as they are in their parts’ (1580:80). For Gosson, to act is to ‘learn to counterfeit, and so to sin’ (1582:102-103).

problematizes the antitheatrical ideal of ‘absolute sincerity’ and ‘absolute identity’ (see Chapter I, pp. 21-22). He rejects any attempt at self-change, charging those around him to: ‘let me be that I am, and seek not to alter me’ (1.3.24). Theoretically, this might seem desirable – but in practice he is not only unpleasant to deal with but also, ultimately, a force of immoral chaos and destruction. His villainous agenda drives the plot of the play to the brink of tragedy when he and Borachio convince Claudio that Hero is unfaithful to him.

Don John causes Claudio’s downfall through deceit, but importantly, he does not construct the deception himself – he is too much of a plain-dealing and ‘honest’ villain to achieve anything like it. His companion in villainy, Borachio, is more talented at deceiving: he promises Don John that he can ‘cross’ the union of Hero and Claudio, ‘not honestly ... but so covertly that no dishonesty shall appear in [him]’ (2.2.2,6-7). This ‘crossing’ takes the form of a show, much like the one put on for Benedick and Beatrice, but displaying the moral reverse in its results. Whereas the preceding deceptions by Don Pedro are portrayed as positive, Don John’s ‘method is deception’ and their ‘purpose is evil’ (Babula, 1976:10). Borachio’s plan is for Don John to accuse Hero of infidelity. As proof, he should take Claudio to watch at Hero’s chamber window the night before the wedding, where Borachio will meet with his lover, Margaret, who will represent Hero. Henze’s (1971) categories of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ deception can also be understood as revelatory, theatrical deception contrasted with destructive theatrical deception; so, Don Pedro’s benevolent theatrical trickery is contrasted with Don John and Borachio’s staged performance, suggesting points of differentiation between the theatricalities represented by the two brothers.

As Benedick and Beatrice deceive themselves into one view of love and relationships and are deceived out of it by their friends, so Claudio also undergoes a change in vision – but, unlike Benedick and Beatrice, this transformation is one which ends in catastrophe. The intentions of the deceivers – the actors or performers – are not the only thing that differentiates the deception of

Beatrice and Benedick from the deception of Claudio; it is also the effect on and reaction of the deceived – the audience. When first told of Hero's supposed infidelity, Claudio claims that 'if he [sees] ... why [he] should not marry her', then he will 'shame her' (3.2.82-83) in front of the congregation on their wedding day. His resolution about what he will do if Hero is revealed to be unfaithful before he has been convinced of her sin already shows him to be injudicious and too ready to accept any proof Don John produces against her. Don John succeeds in making Claudio 'see' that Hero is unworthy and deceitful, and Claudio keeps his promise to disrupt the wedding and denounce Hero as a guilty, lying, and impure pretender. As Leonato offers his daughter as a bride to the groom, Claudio rejects her absolutely, bidding Leonato to 'take her back again':

Give not this rotten orange to your friend.  
She's but the sign and semblance of her honor.  
Behold how like a maid she blushes here!  
O, what authority and show of truth  
Can cunning sin cover itself withal!  
... Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty. (4.1.26-30,36)

In this vein, Claudio continues to bewail the deceitful nature of appearance as the ceremony rapidly disintegrates, in tones of bitterness, shock, and repulsion; Hero is 'most foul, most fair', 'pure impiety and impious purity' (4.1.101-102). Claudio's use of these paradoxes to describe Hero's supposed falsehood echoes the concerns of antitheatrical writers. Like them, he believes himself to have discovered the treacherous gap between 'sign and semblance' and the reality they supposedly denote. In contrast to Beatrice and Benedick, Claudio's 'sight' is corrupted. No longer able to trust what he sees, Claudio asserts that 'on / his eyelids shall conjecture hang / to turn all beauty into thoughts of harm' (4.1.104-105). Dawson suggests that the appeal of Don John's deception to Claudio is that it 'offers certainty' (1982:214). Importantly, this 'certainty' is unreliable and destructive. Unlike his friends, Claudio is not deceived out of his limitations; rather, he allows himself to be deceived into a confirmation of his worst suspicions and, therefore, into an even greater myopia. It is bitterly ironic, then, that when he does disrupt the wedding and denounce the

supposedly guilty Hero, he bemoans ‘what authority and show of truth / ... cunning sin [covers] itself withal’ (4.1.29-30). At the moment when he proves himself utterly deceived, he proclaims himself disillusioned and undeceived, and bewails the deceitful nature of appearance, all the while completely blind to the true sources of deception – Don John, Borachio, and ultimately, himself.

This transformation is not limited to Claudio. Because he shames Hero publicly, she becomes unworthy in the sight of all in attendance, who had originally gathered to bear witness to the union of Hero and Claudio. Hero’s own father, Leonato, questions why Hero ‘wast ever lovely in [his] eyes’ (4.1.131), declaring, when she faints, that ‘death is the fairest cover for her shame’ (4.1.115). The irony in this is that Claudio’s ‘uncovering’ of what he believes is Hero’s shame is not an uncovering at all: instead, it becomes a deception itself, a concealment of her virtue and faithfulness. Death is not a cover for her shame, but a concealment of her truth.

This completes the chiasmic reversal of romantic fortunes in the play: Beatrice and Benedick, isolated, bickering, at odds, become united, just as Hero and Claudio, the archetypal, ideal couple, are rent asunder. Beatrice and Benedick are led to see themselves, each other, and the world differently, and the result is the formation of a new relationship, of an unthought of future life revealed; in an act which is essentially creative in its nature and consequences, possibility replaces certainty. Claudio and Hero experience the opposite: Claudio also undergoes a paradigm shift, but to a view of Hero and of the world which results in the death of relationship, the death of their expected future, and the seeming-literal death of Hero herself. Possibility and life are negated in the wake of certainty (based in destructive deception and self-deception) regarding Hero’s sin.

It is at this point that another major revelatory deception takes place. Friar Francis steps in, proposing a redemptive scheme: that the truth be withheld in order to be fully revealed later on. It should be announced that Hero has died, and this, he predicts, will transform ‘slander to

remorse' (4.1.215), leading Claudio and others to realise the wrongness of their actions, the error in their judgments. But this is not the only good he hopes to achieve – his ambitions for his deceit are much broader in scope. Through Hero's supposed death, he looks 'for greater birth' (4.1.217). Not only will she 'be lamented, pitied, and excused / of every hearer' (4.1.220-221), but

Th'idea of her life shall sweetly creep  
Into [Claudio's] study of imagination  
And every lovely organ of her life  
Shall come apparelled in more precious habit,  
More moving-delicate and full of life,  
Into the eye and prospect of his soul  
Than when she lived indeed ... (4.1.228-234)

Through the 'study of the imagination', activated by the fiction constructed by the Friar, Claudio will not only be shown his own shortcomings and reasons for remorse; his perception of Hero's worthiness will also be infinitely expanded and enhanced. He will see and experience a reality, 'in the eye and prospect of his soul', which shows Hero's virtues more clearly than any reality which preceded it. It seems at first that, in opposition to the heretical Benedick's treatment of Beatrice, Claudio fully loves and appreciates Hero. But his easy belief in Don John and Borachio's lies reveals him to be rash and injudicious. He, too, labours under an illusion of love: an immature, fragile one. He does not see as clearly as he thinks he does. This is a universal human failing, as the Friar describes:

... what we have we prize not the worth  
whiles we enjoy it; but, being lacked and lost,  
why, then we rack the value, then we find  
the virtue that possession would not show us. (4.1.228-231)

The paradox used to reveal this truth is expressed when the Friar encourages Hero to participate in his deceit, describing how 'to strange sores strangely they strain the cure', and that, therefore, she will 'die to live' (4.1.257-258). Thus the 'study of imagination' functions exactly as a paradox might be expected to: it requires a move 'beyond opinion', beyond what is previously known, and



consequently provides a fuller, ‘more precious’ vision of reality. The revealing deception is used, then, for a second time, and for a similar purpose: to undo and to counter false, limited perception.

Once again, the imagery used here is of interest, given that antitheatrical writers such as Stephen Gosson and Antony Munday describe theatre as contaminating spectators with disease (immorality), and urge their readers to accept their advice and arguments against stage plays as remedies to their infected souls (see Chapter I, pp. 23-24). Like Gosson and Munday, Friar Francis is a figure of moral authority, and like them, he functions as a physician who cures the victims of malignant, theatrical deception. Unlike them, however, he does not do this through bidding them to be sincere in all things and never again to be victims of deception. This advice would be of no use to Claudio or Hero: Claudio is convinced that he is already honest and without illusion, and Hero is unable to live freely ever again, as her reputation (and therefore, her life) has been publicly destroyed. She has, in her uncle’s words, been ‘slandered to death by villains’ (5.1.95). For her, true restoration means nothing less than resurrection: rebirth, or – in the Friar’s words – ‘greater birth’.

This requires a creative act on the part of the Friar, who constructs a grand deception – a restorative fiction – which undoes the false taint on Hero’s character and re-establishes the truth of her virtue and goodness, not only to her accusers but also to the same general public who witnessed Claudio’s shaming her to the world. Leah Scragg has noted the ‘spiritual overtones’ of this process which is, essentially, redemptive: Hero’s death is ‘a response to the workings of the forces of evil, initiating a period of self-examination and contrition leading ultimately to renewal’ (1992:169). This process has also been read as a comment on the value of theatre. Jonathan Bate suggests that Claudio’s vicarious experience of loss in order to enhance understanding and insight into what is ultimately gained mirrors the experience of a theatrical audience. Just as Claudio is taught both the true value of Hero and how to truly value her, ‘drama may serve an educative function’ for the audience, since we come to ‘value our Heros through living through the stage-

deaths of others like them' (Bate, 2009:7). The Friar's deception, like that of Don John, counters self-deception and its effects by revealing to characters not only external truths, but also the truths of their own nature and shortcomings.

The final moment of renewal and resurrection is also theatrical. Leonato requires Claudio to show his repentance by marrying his unnamed (and, in fact, imaginary) niece. When Claudio agrees to do so, Leonato arranges for Hero to appear as one of a group of masked women at the wedding. While Claudio unknowingly submitted himself completely to the malevolent deception of Don John in rejecting Hero, this is reversed when he commits himself fully to his masked bride – thereby completing the process set in motion by the Friar's benevolent deceit. This moment of the deception fulfilled is also the moment of revelation, when the bride unmask and reveals herself to be 'another Hero', and states: 'One Hero died defiled, but I live / and surely as I live, I am is a maid' (5.4.62,64-65).

The trick played on Benedick and Beatrice and the feigned death of Hero are theatrical deceptions which, paradoxically, function as agents of revelation. Because they succeed in undoing malignant delusions and self-deceptions, and because of the language used to describe them, they may be read as responses to antitheatrical writers who accused the theatre of deceiving audiences into falsehood and immorality. This language of theatrical deception is especially subversive in that it seems, at times, to engage with the religious ideas on which most antitheatricalists based their ideas, not only framing theatre as revelatory, but also drawing parallels between theatre and biblical paradoxes which lead to eternal truths. Such a response would not, however, appear to be an exercise in appeasing authority: the truth which theatre offers does not necessarily offer the same stability and certainty of the absolute judgments voiced by writers such as Gosson, Stubbes, and Munday. Shakespeare does not show how theatre might replace one absolute with another, but rather illustrates the value of ambiguity.

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, obdurate certainty is almost always deceptive and leads to delusion, isolation, and at worst, annihilation. This is illustrated not only in the overt, stubbornly honest villainy of Don John, but also in the foolishness of protagonists who should know better. Benedick and Beatrice are, at first, fixed in their rejection of love and of each other, effectively trapping themselves in isolating snares of their own making. Claudio is also a victim of self-deception, but the destructive results stretch beyond his own experience to devastate those around him as well. Claudio's unreserved acceptance of malicious rumour and his resulting public condemnation of Hero shows that uncritical, unthinking conviction is at the root of the most abhorrent, immoral action in the play. When Borachio takes responsibility for his crime, saying that '[he] alone' is responsible for the death of Hero, Leonato contradicts him, saying that Claudio, who is supposed to be honourable, had as much a hand in Hero's demise as Borachio and Don John. The example of Claudio questions whether the moral onus should fall exclusively on the performers of fictions. Audiences are not simply the helpless victims conceived of in antitheatrical terms: it is Claudio's choices and reactions as a spectator to what he perceives that ultimately determine the play's most devastating events.

In order to achieve any constructive, relational truth, convictions must be undermined; for transformation to take place, misguided pride in apparent knowledge must be replaced with humble receptivity to new and greater realities beyond the bounds of the limited self. *Much Ado About Nothing* seems to suggest that, contrary to the view of antitheatricalists, theatre is a deceit which does not necessarily trap audiences into sin and ignorance, but has the power to free them from their conceits by replacing these with possibility, reflecting not only the worlds of the audience as they are and revealing their faults, but also suggesting possible new worlds and even creating or recreating realities in which the potential for discovery and edification is ever-present.

As in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the dramatization of conflict between truth and falsehood in *As You Like It* is centred on romantic love. The characters in *As You Like It* also suffer from false conceptions of love and compromised relationships, because of either self-deception or malicious dissimulation. In the play, theatre becomes even more central as a place or mode of resistance to such destructive and misguided falsehoods. Theatricality which opposes deceit is most significantly embodied by the character of Rosalind, who disguises herself as Ganymede, and after meeting with Orlando in the forest of Arden, ‘Ganymede’ supposedly role-plays as Rosalind in order to provide ‘good counsel’ (3.2.298) to Orlando in matters of love. This elaborate deception undoes restrictions and reveals truths, counteracting the effects of duplicitous authority on both Rosalind and Orlando. For the purposes of this discussion, the counsel (or education) which Rosalind offers Orlando will be considered as the primary revelation stemming from her theatrical deceit. If revelatory deception in the play is read as a possible response to antitheatricality, then the position and effects of theatre (performed by Rosalind) on the audience (Orlando) is of specific interest. The connection between the ‘audience’ *within* the play and the audience *of* the play is recognised by Katherine Duncan-Jones, who interprets the forest of Arden – the site of the majority of the play’s self-conscious theatricality – as ‘a place of relaxed pleasure, generous friendship and an abundance of therapeutic laughter, both onstage and off’ (2005:1).<sup>16</sup> This makes the play ‘an explicit celebration of theatre itself’: just as Orlando finds counsel and liberation in his interaction with Rosalind-as-Ganymede-as-Rosalind, audience members are allowed to ‘discover freedom and healing in the theatre’ (Duncan-Jones, 2005:1). To understand Orlando’s experience as an audience to Rosalind’s performance, it is equally important to consider Rosalind’s position, character and methods as the performer in relation to Orlando as an audience.

---

<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding note that ‘characters in the play often see themselves as actors, and in the end audience members are invited to think of themselves as actors too’ (2004:239). This interpretation of the play is directly and popularly associated by what are arguably its most famous lines, spoken by Jaques: ‘all the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players / they have their exits and their entrances, / and one man in his time plays many parts’ (2.7.140-143).

The nature of Rosalind's virtuoso one-woman performance possibly makes *As You Like It* more conspicuously subversive than *Much Ado About Nothing*. Whereas *Much Ado* contains several instances of theatrical deceptions instigated and acted by a range of characters, Rosalind's deception is rooted in the heart of the play and develops with it, leading to insight and discovery in different layers of plot and characterization. Her acting is also different in kind from the revealing lies of *Much Ado*, in which the agents of theatrical counter-deceptions function in the directorial mode: Don Pedro and Friar Francis author and manage elaborate fictions for the sake of their pseudo-audiences. This measure of control, paired with a certain degree of trust in traditional authority, is abandoned in *As You Like It*. Rosalind is not subject to a script or guiding authority when she assumes the identity of Ganymede. Rather, she uses her theatricality to escape from the limitations imposed on her by the authors of her entrapment. Her greater degree of subversive individual freedom is also underscored by her obvious physical disguise (a mode of deception which is not employed to any significant extent in *Much Ado*). The element of disguise makes Rosalind's theatricality explicit; to be an actor is to change appearance through dress, to assume a different persona through mannerisms, speech, and action. Rosalind commits all of these deceptions, and when she dresses as a man and calls herself Ganymede, she directly draws attention to the divide between the inner and outer self which caused so much of the contemporary anxiety surrounding theatre. She states that she will wear men's clothes and carry manly weapons, and while in her heart, 'lie there what hidden woman's fear there will', she will have 'a swashing and martial outside' (1.3.115-116). The uneasiness which this might inspire (or have inspired) about duplicity is immediately undercut when Rosalind implicitly points to the hypocrisy of such accusations by referring to a masquerade of real life: when 'many other mannish cowards' hide their true feelings, and 'outface it with their semblances' (1.3.117-118). Rosalind's layers of identity as a performer could be emphasised through the facts of the play's performance: in the contemporary theatre, her character would have been played by a young boy, and so audiences would have been presented with a boy, playing a girl (Rosalind) who plays a boy (Rosalind-as-Ganymede), who plays a girl

(Ganymede-as-Rosalind). Even if Rosalind were played by a young woman, the logistics of the character's dissembling are hilariously conspicuous, effectively drawing attention to the nature of the performance *as a performance*. At the same time, the humour evoked by this bizarre state of affairs is disarming, denying suppositions that it is malevolent in its intent or consequences, especially when Rosalind's merry sport in the forest of Arden is placed in such clear opposition to the scheming corruption at court.

Paradoxically, it is through obscuring her identity that Rosalind can engage with the world and express herself within it most fully. Before her transformation, Rosalind is at the mercy of Duke Frederick, her usurping uncle, who banishes her from the court under threat of death. The Duke's rule represents the general sense of entrapment and conflict under which its protagonists labour in the first act. Furthermore, Rosalind is unable to interact with Orlando beyond the bounds of the conventional modesty and submission expected from women, leaving little hope for their potential courtship. Removal from this world is an opportunity for escape more than it is a bitter rejection: just after Rosalind and Celia decide to flee to Arden and to disguise themselves as Ganymede and Aliena, Celia declares that they will go in 'content / To liberty and not to banishment' (1.3.133-134). Entering the forest in the guise of a man, Rosalind leaves behind the societal restrictions on her sex and escapes her vulnerable position in her uncle's court as the daughter of the banished Duke. Rosalind therefore enjoys 'considerable physical and intellectual freedom' (Scragg, 1992:57) as Ganymede.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Recent criticism of the play has been largely focused on applying theories of gender and gender performativity to the role of Rosalind. Certainly, as noted on p. 57, Rosalind's character would have drawn attention to the confusion of gender identities in performance. The issue of one gender's 'becoming' another through acting, and the anxieties this inspired in antitheatricalists, has been addressed by Laura Levine, who specifically focuses on 'the fears of effeminization' displayed by Gosson and other writers (1994:11). Jean Howard discusses the social, class, and gender disruptions both signalled and constituted by 'transgressions of the dress code' (1988:422). Such considerations lie beyond the scope of this dissertation, however, and the focus on revelatory deception across a range of plays must remain narrow and necessarily exclude some aspects of criticism on individual works.

But the fullness of Rosalind's character is not the only truth set free by the lie of her disguise. The 'theatre' of Arden is not only a space for Rosalind – the performer – to express and explore her identity; it is also the site of discovery and development for Orlando – the audience. It is Orlando's entrapment which opens the play, and it is this situation which the rest of the action is geared towards resolving. Like Rosalind, Orlando is a prisoner of his circumstances, prevented from living fully. The central problem which keeps him bound is his lack of education, despite his noble birth. Orlando is the charge of his older brother Oliver, and is supposed to be cared for and given an education according to his late father's wishes. Oliver refuses to grant this, instead keeping Orlando 'rustically ... at home', while Oliver's 'horses are bred better' (1.1.5,7). This is described as a kind of deceit: Orlando tells his brother that he has 'trained [him] like a peasant, / obscuring and hiding from [him] all gentleman-like qualities' (1.1.46-47). Orlando's obscured vision does not result from a direct, specific deception which replaces the truth with a different reality for malicious purposes. Instead, Oliver circumscribes Orlando's experiences, disempowering him by excluding as much insight, truth, and knowledge from his life as possible.

Rosalind must undo the effects of Oliver's 'deception' of Orlando through theatrical 'counsel' (3.2.298). According to Garber (1986:105-110), Orlando's progress towards becoming educated is dependent on his 'development as a lover', and this process may be divided into three stages: the period before his meeting with Ganymede, his meeting with Ganymede and subsequent role-playing in Arden, and the end of their role-playing, prompted by Oliver's arrival, repentance, and betrothal to Celia/Aliena. Orlando's relationship with Rosalind at different points in the play therefore becomes a measure of his growing maturity. In this process, it is Ganymede's instruction which bears most fruit in the development of his understanding. I would add that this mode of teaching – Rosalind's revelatory deception, her *theatricality* – is contrasted with several other styles of instruction, particularly prominent in the first stage of his development, which have varying but fairly limited effects on the young Orlando. The comparison and contrast between these various

potential sources of education underscore a concern with different kinds of knowledge and the many ways in which they might be obtained, as well as with what it means to be educated. The play, through its portrayal of Rosalind, offers a view of theatre as a powerful alternative to traditional modes of learning, showing it to be a source of knowledge and insight instead of false information and immoral ignorance.

The play's concern with education is also pertinent because of its possible connection to the writing of Thomas Lodge. Not only did Lodge author one of the few prose apologies for poetry and theatre – *A Reply to Stephen Gosson's School of Abuse, in Defence of Poetry, Music, and Stage Plays* (1579), as discussed in Chapter I – but he also wrote the primary source material for *As You Like It*: a prose romance entitled *Rosalynd*, published in 1590. Significantly, Lodge's defence is based in large part on the argument that poetry has an educative function, referring to Seneca's opinion that 'the study of poets is to make children ready to the understanding of wisdom' (1579:42). Lodge also accuses Gosson (who does not admit that plays may have a pedagogical function) of not having 'won the mastery of learning', because he has not received any 'instruction' in his reading (Lodge, 1579:42). This must be qualified by the fact that, as mentioned in Chapter I, Lodge's apology centres chiefly on poetry. His defence of theatre is not wholehearted, as he grants that stage plays suffer from 'abuses', as Gosson calls them. Nevertheless, he does insist that 'it were pity to abolish that which hath so great a virtue in it because it is abused', and that 'it were good to bring those things on stage that were altogether tending to virtue' (Lodge, 1579:54-55). Lodge's defence of poetry and theatre as sources of education seem to be taken up by Shakespeare in *As You Like It*, although his focus on theatrical education and the specific learning it offers is more extensive than that of Lodge.

During the first stage of Orlando's education, in the world of the court (and being denied any form of conventional instruction), he attempts to prove himself by trying his strength against Charles, a



champion wrestler. He feels his nature ‘mutiny against this servitude’ (1.1.15), but ‘know[s] no wise remedy how to avoid it’ (1.1.16). The first ‘remedy’ he seems to test is that of challenging, testing, and developing himself through physical assertions. Being unable to access and participate in the world of thought, he turns to the world of action. Some indication of this is given in his first conversation with his brother: he grabs Oliver by the throat (2.2.56-57) and refuses to let go until he has made his complaints heard. Orlando explains that he intends to face Charles in order to ‘try with him the strength of his [Orlando’s] youth’ (1.2.196). When Oliver learns of Orlando’s plans, he incites Charles against his younger brother by describing him as a terrible villain. In Charles, Orlando faces a representation of the world turned against him by his brother’s slanders. To everyone’s surprise, he manages to defeat the wrestler: a potentially symbolic defeat in which the truth of his worth and character overcome his brother’s attempts to quell them. But while this show of physical ability wins Orlando admiration and sympathy, it does not render him suddenly erudite. He meets Rosalind at the wrestling match, and even though they are obviously attracted to each other, he ‘cannot speak to her’ (1.2.187-189). When Rosalind gives him a necklace after his victory, he is struck dumb, and when they leave, he laments that he is unable to say ‘I thank you’, and that his ‘better parts / are all thrown down’, rendering him ‘a mere lifeless block’ (1.2.187-189). While he successfully shows himself to be a man of action in the face of a physical challenge, he is rendered static and silent<sup>18</sup> in his attempt at social engagement.

The looming bulk of Charles with his proven physical prowess is the first and least of Orlando’s challenges on his quest for edification. As Orlando enters Arden, it soon becomes apparent that, despite his virtuous instincts, Orlando still has much to learn. In this first stage, the gaps in his education are further revealed through his behaviour and his encounters with others, such as Duke Senior, his men, and Jaques. Too much knowledge and wisdom still remain hidden – unrevealed,

---

<sup>18</sup> He calls himself a ‘quintain’ (2.1.189): a post used for target-practice. His understanding of his failure is articulated in semi-martial terms, to match and contrast with the battle he has just won.

obscured – to Orlando. These encounters expose Orlando’s shortcomings, but they also present possible solutions to them: the world of Arden, as an escape from the French court and its restrictions, offers alternative means to achieving insight, or revelation.

The first way in which Arden does this is through exemplifying a pastoral mode which offers a critique of the city and human corruption, offering other forms of and pathways to knowledge to counterpoint the supposed civilization of urban authority. When the forest space is first introduced to the audience at the beginning of Act 2, Duke Senior immediately compares it with the world of Duke Frederick and Oliver, asking his companions rhetorically, ‘are not these woods / more free from peril than the envious court?’ (2.1.3-4). In contrast to the ‘painted pomp’ left behind in the old world, the forest offers revelatory access to reality through the undiluted natural environment, in which the ‘icy fang / and churlish chiding of the winter’s wind’ present humans with the truth of their existence in the world, acting as ‘counselors’ which ‘feelingly persuade [them] what [they are]’ (2.1.3,6-7,10-11). The truth of their vulnerability, highlighted by their exposure to the elements, by the cold which ‘bites and blows’ upon their bodies, is preferable to the lies and ignorance bred from courtly ‘flattery’ (2.1.8,10). This outlook might appear bleak: the Duke’s words will later be echoed by those of King Lear, who experiences a revelation in the storm on the heath, as opposed to his previously sheltered existence – King Lear exclaims: ‘...take physic, pomp / expose thyself to feel what wretches feel’ (3.4.36-37). But the Duke’s speech is primarily geared towards hope, focusing on the transformative power of interpretation when he and his men, ‘exempt from public haunt’, find ‘tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / sermons in stones, and good in everything’ (2.1.15-17). This speech frames nature as a source of education, finding sources of good counsel ‘in everything’. In this situation, as with Orlando’s enforced ignorance under his oppressive brother, learning and counsel are posited as solutions to a kind of deceit: in this case, the illusions created by the indulgent, false, illusory comforts of courtly life.

Because more traditional forms of knowledge and instruction associated with the ‘public haunt’ are not accessible to the exiles, they seek and find knowledge and belonging in unlikely places.

As Marinelli notes, the pastoral mode recalls the myth of the golden age, in which ‘human life is conceived in terms of the contemplative and the recreative rather than in terms of the active’ (1971:17). This ideal is embodied by the courtly exiles, who are not ‘engaged in any major actions in the forest’, besides hunting (Latham, 1975:xlvi). This notion of a life which exalts contemplation is accompanied by intellectual and creative pursuits, such as the writing of poetry, which function as ‘commentaries’ on the ‘practices’ of the pastoral genre itself (Dubrow, 2000: 194). Orlando’s next appearance sees him adopting this approach to life, indicating that his interaction with the Duke and his men has inspired a kind of pastoral transformation. Orlando the wrestler has become Orlando the poet, who fills the forest with love poems to Rosalind by hanging them on trees, echoing the Duke’s words when he proclaims that the ‘trees shall be [his] books, / and in their barks my thoughts I’ll character’ (3.2.5-6), and that he will hang ‘tongues on every tree’ (3.2.96). But this attempt at education is unsuccessful, and leads Orlando away from instead of towards truth. Orlando is an eager but fantastically bumbling student: his poems are terrible, filled with contrived, hollow declarations. When Rosalind discovers his poems (at first not knowing who the author is), she incredulously finds her name being forcefully rhymed with ‘Inde’, ‘wind’ ‘mind’, and ‘lined’ (3.2.62-67). His words would match the description of Claudio’s love-talk by Benedick in *Much Ado*: they are a ‘fantastical banquet’ which contain many ‘strange dishes’. His insistently overblown praise of her in awkward couplets is disingenuous: ‘all the pictures fairest lined / are but black to Rosalind’, and ‘let no face be kept in mind / but the fair of Rosalind’ (3.2.66-68). His idealisation of Rosalind, combined with his expression of his love in poetry and his declaration that Heaven intended for him ‘to live and die her slave’ (3.2.123) indicates that Orlando is a Petrarchan lover. Other characters recognise that Orlando’s behaviour is ridiculous, removed from reality, and false. Touchstone, the fool and companion to Rosalind and Celia, comments that the

tree on which they find Orlando's poetry 'bears bad fruit' (3.2.88). Celia/Aliena further deflates Orlando's behaviour when she describes his lovelorn appearance to Rosalind: she has seen him lying 'stretched along like a wounded knight' – indicating his supposed nobility in suffering – and, undercutting that nobility, says that he lies 'under a tree, like a dropped acorn' (3.2.181,185).

While Orlando takes the opportunity to learn from the pastoral values evoked by the Duke, his ineptitude and misapprehensions about love derail any possibility of significant improvement. Instead of achieving a balance between thoughts, words, and actions, Orlando retreats completely into a pseudo-contemplative world of his own. Like Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the more isolated Orlando becomes, the further he moves away from the truth of things, and the more he tends towards self-deception. His resulting self-absorption is comical and acts as fertile ground for a second form of education, represented largely by the melancholy Jaques: the instruction of satire.

The audience has already been exposed to Jaques's sharp commentary. He provides a melancholy, critical opposition to the happiness and merry foolery represented by the other forest dwellers: to Jaques, 'all the world's a stage', but in contrast to the play's general impetus towards theatrical celebration, this metaphor is destined for gloom, with the 'last scene of all' ending in 'second childishness and mere oblivion, / *sans* teeth, *sans* eyes, *sans* taste, *sans* everything' (2.7.166,168-169). This famous speech is characteristic of a man who is described earlier as being able to 'moralize [a] spectacle ... into a thousand similes' (2.1.46-47). This tendency to moralize speaks of Jaques's aspirations to be a Fool, so that he might speak his mind and consequently 'through and through / cleanse the foul body of th'infected world, / if they [would] patiently receive [his] medicine' (2.7.60-62). Critics such as Juliet Dusinberre and Agnes Latham have recognised that Jaques's wish to 'heal' the corruption of the world through the 'medicine' of his observations possibly align him with contemporary satirists such as John Marston and John Donne (Dusinberre, 2006:22; Latham 1975:xlvi). It also echoes something of Thomas Lodge's conception of poetry as a curative agent

for ‘diseases’ of false or limited perceptions,<sup>19</sup> and it is interesting that Lodge himself turned satirist in the 1590s, presumably to achieve similar effects.

Jaques has an opportunity to practise his cleansing commentary when he meets Orlando, whom he addresses as ‘good Signor Love’ (3.2.224). Jaques perceives Orlando as a patient in need of medicine, or counsel, and points out the foolishness of his behaviour, requesting him to ‘mar no more trees with writing love-songs in their barks’ (3.2.201). But if Jaques sees himself as an educator to Orlando, then Orlando proves an unwilling pupil. In answer to Jaques’s request that he should stop ‘marring’ the trees with his poetry, Orlando retorts that he should ‘mar no more of [his] verses with reading them ill-favouredly’ (3.2.202). When Jaques says that he was ‘seeking for a fool when [he] found [Orlando]’, Orlando replies that there is a fool ‘drowned in the brook’, and if Jaques looks into the water, he ‘shall see him’ (3.2.220-221). The joke is on Jaques – he will see his own reflection. This mocking of Jaques hits a mark: his melancholy disposition may well be interpreted at points as being ridiculous. This is exacerbated by his confidence in his own ability to moralize, which renders him a fool according to Touchstone’s maxim that ‘the fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool’ (5.1.25). In some ways, this interaction with Jaques is like a second, rhetorical wrestling match for Orlando, and he wins it just as he wins his physical match against Charles. But Orlando does not escape the encounter with his integrity intact. Jaques might not have found a fool, but he has found a man acting foolishly. As much as Orlando might call Jaques a fool, he is himself a hypocrite: his lovesickness has made him as much of a fool, a Narcissus staring at his own reflection in a pond (or several trees, in this case). But this is as much progress as Jaques will make. ‘Signor Love’ and ‘Monsieur Melancholy’ (3.2.225), both proud and deceived in their own supposed wisdoms, cannot help each other.

---

<sup>19</sup> Poetry, Lodge argues, is employed by writers (whom he describes as ‘good physicians’) in order to serve their audiences as ‘patients’ (1579:41). As he describes it, this process is also closely linked to the process of enlightenment – ‘what [the poets] wrote’ was intended to ‘draw men to wisdom’ (1579:41).

In this first phase of his development, Orlando moves from an approach of brute force to one which attempts communication, but while he advances from ‘total speechlessness’, he does not ‘attain the condition of discourse’ (Garber, 1986:106). He moves from one extreme to the other; first, he is a man of action and no words, then he transforms into a man of many words and no action. This second state is characterised by egocentrism. It is a state of contemplation which loves itself, and therefore cannot lead to a true love for and communion with others. This might be a step toward self-knowledge in some ways, but this insight is necessarily restricted by the fact that the self is only understood in relation to itself, and not in relation to others. To achieve development beyond this point, to attain a truth beyond his own assumptions, Orlando’s certainties must be disrupted, and he must allow this to occur through sustained, balanced interaction with another human being, which is the third, final, and most fulfilling form of education the forest provides.

The disruption necessary to Orlando’s progress is effected by the revelatory deceptions of Rosalind disguised as Ganymede. Directly after his failed conversation with Jaques, Orlando meets Ganymede, and she/he will prove to be his most effective teacher. Rosalind/Ganymede shows a propensity for wit and invention, and also for dissembling, evasion, and ambiguity. She quickly establishes herself as the source of answers to Orlando’s questions, which reveal both his curiosity and his lack of knowledge and experience. When their opening conversation wanders into an exchange about the time of day, Ganymede commences her first lesson on the topic of temporal relativity: ‘who Time ambles withal, who Time trots withal, who Time gallops withal and who he stands still withal’ (3.2.235-236). Orlando questions her on each of these sub-sections, and her agile, insightful answers seem to capture his attention. Ganymede then steers the conversation towards the topic of love by fabricating an ‘old religious uncle’ who, after falling in love at court during his youth, later ‘read many lectures against it’ and against the ‘many giddy offences’ of

women (3.2.261-263). Orlando, lovesick and lacking education, is further drawn to Ganymede as a professed benefactor of this uncle's supposed, studied insight on romantic attachment. This reinforces the pattern established in the beginning of their exchange: Ganymede positions 'himself' as a reliable source of instruction to Orlando, the uninformed but curious student. Rosalind, disguised as Ganymede, puts on a performance, using her false identity to lure Orlando into her fictive, deceptive construction of their exchange. Unlike the Duke and Jaques, as representatives of the pastoral and satirical methods of education, Rosalind does not attempt to 'cure' Orlando by telling him what he must do, without involvement from his side. Rather, she tricks him into asking her questions, thereby engaging his curiosity and, crucially, quickening his imagination.

Once she has lured him into entreating her to share her wisdom, Ganymede prompts Orlando to confess that it is he who has been hanging love poems upon the trees. When she expresses her disbelief, he says that he can 'make [Ganymede] believe that [he loves]' (3.2.286). With sharp observations and commentary on love, Rosalind/Ganymede labels it 'merely a madness' which 'deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do', suggesting that she is able to 'cure' this madness through 'counsel' (3.2.298). Importantly, Ganymede describes this counsel in medical terms, referring to her knowledge of women and love as 'physic' (3.2.269) and promising Orlando that she will 'wash' his liver 'as clean as a / sound sheep's heart, that there shall not be one spot of / love in't' (3.2.309-310). This use of language invites comparison with Duke Senior's pastoral reference to the elements as 'counsellors' of men 'that feelingly persuade' (2.1.10-11) us of our own natures, and with Jaques and his desire to cleanse the foul and infected world, and his failed attempt to treat Orlando as one of his patients. Like Jaques, and like antitheatrical writers, Rosalind characterises herself as a physician who will cure Orlando of his false ideas. But her methods are different: she counters illusion with illusion. She challenges Orlando's misguided opinions through fictive representation and role-playing. Rosalind's claim that she will remedy Orlando is an important departure from Thomas Lodge's *Rosalind*, in which her character makes no such claim,

and their courtship ‘is carried on in a pastoral vein’ (Muir, 1977:130). The courtship in *As You Like It* is dependent on the art of theatre once Orlando’s pastoral education fails.

The theatricality of Rosalind/Ganymede’s approach is underscored when she says that she will ‘cure’ Orlando if he would ‘*imagine* [her] his love, his mistress’ while she sets him ‘every day to woo’ her (3.2.300-301; my emphasis). The word ‘imagine’ importantly signals an active engagement of Orlando in the fiction which Rosalind/Ganymede constructs for him. Like the Friar in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Rosalind seeks to activate the ‘study of the imagination’ within her audience. While Orlando still does not want to be cured, he offers less resistance than he did to Jaques. He agrees to pretend that Ganymede is Rosalind herself, and to visit her and woo her every day, viewing it as a challenge through which he might prove the truth of his affections. From an antitheatrical point of view, this is a potentially disturbing development. Rosalind’s first deception is her disguise as Ganymede, of which Orlando is a victim. He is unaware that what is presented to him is a lie. In this second deception, however, Rosalind prompts Orlando to knowingly participate in a false, counterfeit reality. Antitheatricalists feared exactly this connection between actors and audience: that spectators would be infected by performance, and become performers themselves. In Chapter I, I noted that the theatre was seen as a ‘school’ in which audiences ‘learn to play the hypocrite, to cog, to lie and falsify’ (Stubbes, 1583:121; see p. 29).<sup>20</sup> This is the kind of education in lying into which Rosalind seems to guide Orlando.

But upon closer inspection, this education is not unethical. Orlando’s willing participation in Rosalind/Ganymede’s deceptive fiction is an important turning point in his moral and social development. Through dialogue, Ganymede has promptly removed him from his self-indulgent isolation. He is no longer able to claim the topic of love as his own: Ganymede ‘usurps and

---

<sup>20</sup> Also refer to the discussion of the ‘contagious’ nature of performance and the relationship between actor and audience, pp. 24-25.



desentimentalizes it', forcing Orlando to move beyond his idle egocentrism, and beyond the isolating and stereotypical 'intercourse between a man and his pen' (Garber 1986:107). The role-playing with Ganymede, which Orlando agrees to, requires Orlando to demonstrate his feelings through communication and interaction – something which he has been unable to do up to this point.

The greater responsibility which is required of Orlando is evident when he meets for the first time with Ganymede-as-Rosalind. He is late, and this earns him a scolding. When he attempts to excuse himself, saying that he is less than an hour late, she claims that a man who will 'divide a minute into a thousand parts and break but a part of the thousand part of a minute in the affairs of love' (4.1.30-32) is not truly in love at all. She then warns him that, if he is 'so tardy', then he should 'come no more in [her] sight' (4.1.35). Time, the subject which started their interaction, becomes a measure of Orlando's accountability to Ganymede/Rosalind. This accountability is an important antidote to false behaviour and speech: Orlando must establish a balanced and realistic correlation between his thoughts, words, and actions. The rest of the scene continues to require Orlando's participation, focusing always on investigating his behaviour towards his beloved and identifying the irrational, false tendencies in it. Once he is sufficiently reprimanded for his lateness, Ganymede/Rosalind changes her tone and encourages him to 'woo' her, asking him what he would say to her if she 'were [his] very very Rosalind' (4.1.47-49). Typically of him, his instincts regarding speech and action are imbalanced: he replies that he would 'kiss' (act) 'before he spoke' (4.1.50). She corrects this imbalance by counselling him to speak to her instead, because kissing is the refuge of lovers who cannot talk sense.

Ironically, given his own inability to form a sentence when he first met Rosalind, Orlando questions 'who could be out [of words], being before his beloved mistress?' (4.1.57). This possibly indicates his growing confidence, albeit still very young and premature, given his threat to 'die'

(4.1.64) if Rosalind will not have him. This melodrama once again indicates a lack of reason. Orlando's injudicious claim would be foolish to translate into action: if Orlando is truly interested in pursuing a fruitful relationship with Rosalind, then dying as a response to conflict would be supremely counterproductive. Ganymede/Rosalind immediately punctures his grandiose statement, significantly refuting tales of great romantic heroes like Troilus and Leander as 'lies' (4.1.72). Ganymede/Rosalind seems to align herself with the view that fictions are lies. The truth, she says, is that 'men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love' (4.1.72-73). At this moment, Ganymede/Rosalind is establishing an implicit comparison between deceitful and truthful fiction. At once, she challenges the veracity of heroic tales and replaces them with the 'truth', which is *also* based in fiction. She herself is presenting Orlando with a falsehood by pretending to be Ganymede and setting up an alternative, play-acted reality. The one falsehood is distinguished from the other in terms of the accountability they require. Melodramatic tales of heroism feed into Orlando's narcissism and isolation: his disconnection from reality and responsibility towards others. Ganymede/Rosalind's play-acting, on the other hand, requires dialogue and responsible action. Paradoxically, Ganymede/Rosalind's fictions are falsehoods which undo falsehoods: they are lies which reveal the truth through relationship, countering lies which deceive and falsify through isolated egocentrism.

There are signs that this theatrical education – a revealing deception – is having the desired effect. Ganymede/Rosalind guides Orlando away from thoughts of death by taking up a 'more coming-on disposition' (4.1.77), welcoming any request Orlando might have. What he requests indicates progress. Instead of declaring his love for Ganymede/Rosalind without giving much thought to what she might feel, he asks her to love him. It is in this humbled, vulnerable state which Ganymede/Rosalind enthusiastically accepts him, and quickly involves Celia/Aliena as a stand-in priest to officiate a play-acted wedding ceremony. Orlando holds up well to being confronted with the prospect of marriage, showing his willingness to commit to her by stating that he will marry

immediately, as fast as Celia/Aliena can marry them (4.1.94). Ganymede/Rosalind has (within the space of three scenes) successfully brought Orlando through most of the process of romantic courtship: they have flirted and conversed; she has been both difficult and approachable, stern and loving; he has been both foolish and earnest, selfish and considerate; now, they have accepted and committed to each other in marriage. But Ganymede/Rosalind does not allow this to lead into an illusion of perfect happiness. When Orlando claims that he will remain faithful to Rosalind ‘forever and a day’ after getting married, Ganymede/Rosalind tells him to drop the ‘ever’ and say only a ‘day’ (4.1.102-103), because men and women are as changeable as the seasons. She warns him that she will be ‘jealous’, ‘clamorous’, ‘new-fangled’, and ‘giddy’ (using a menagerie of animal-similes to express this unhappy state); she will ‘weep’ when he is ‘disposed to be merry’, and ‘laugh’ when he is ‘inclined to sleep’ (4.1.105-110). Ganymede/Rosalind never allows sentimentality to take over her interactions with Orlando. In their exchanges, irony and laughter must balance sentiment in order to create a nuanced, realistic interaction. The fiction she presents him with is not designed to provide him with a false reality in which he can be comfortable and complacent (such as the world he constructed for himself in his bout of artificial love). Instead, the role-playing insists on constantly destabilising and refiguring Orlando’s understanding of love, thereby keeping him always engaged, and always learning. Paradoxically, her fictions insistently propel him away from the foolishly fantastical and towards a grounded, complex reality.

To his credit, Orlando is not deterred by Ganymede/Rosalind’s threats and sharp ironies. He remains dedicated throughout the exercise, and develops promisingly (if imperfectly) towards a better understanding of himself and of himself in relation to his beloved. As his tutoring progresses, he becomes more and more adept at and involved in the dialogue and playful (in the emotional and theatrical sense of the word) interactions which Ganymede/Rosalind encourages him into. Orlando is moving away from flat, false posturing and towards spontaneous and sincere interaction. This sincerity does not mean that wordplay (which might be rejected by the

antitheatrical view as artifice) must be rejected; on the contrary, witty exchanges are central to the process. Orlando's development as a more honest and true lover is accompanied by his ability to express himself in conversation. Prompted by Ganymede/Rosalind, he starts to participate in the word-play in which Ganymede/Rosalind is so skilled. To Ganymede/Rosalind's comment that the wiser a woman is, the more wayward she is, and to the claim that a woman's wit 'will out at the casement', he replies that 'a man that had a wife with such a wit, he might say 'Whit, whither wilt?' (4.1.115,118). Ganymede/Rosalind is always ready to dispense some elaborate wisdom on whatever topic presents itself. Orlando seems to test his own ability to do so when Ganymede/Rosalind says that 'a woman's thought runs before her actions', and he replies sagely: '...so do all thoughts; they are winged' (4.1.98-100).

In this way, Ganymede/Rosalind 'teaches Orlando not only the rules of love and its nature, but the uses of language – and even ... the gentle arts of irony and self-deprecation' (Garber, 1986:108-109). This process involves undoing Orlando's false ideas about love and the self-deception resulting from isolation – from a disengaged, unchallenging existence. An important test of Orlando's progress comes with the arrangements made for their third play-acting session: he promises to meet Ganymede/Rosalind at two o'clock, and says he will keep this promise 'with no less religion' (4.1.139) than if she were truly Rosalind. Given his previous tardiness and in the face of Ganymede's elaborate warnings against repeating such an error, there is much riding on his punctuality. This is exactly the kind of arrangement which could prove that he is able to keep his responsibility towards Rosalind in their relationship; being on time is an explicit exercise in matching actions to words. When he does not arrive at two o'clock, it appears that he has not learned much at all. Celia conjectures that, like the lovelorn and selfish creature he was before, he has fallen asleep somewhere and has forgotten his commitment.

But this is not the case. Soon Oliver arrives and relates how his brother saved him (*he* was the one sleeping, unaware, beneath a tree) from a snake and a lioness. This is Orlando the hero, who readily does battle, but with an important difference from his previous attempts at gallantry. Orlando took part in the wrestling match in order to prove himself, to try his strength, motivated by bitterness against his brother's oppressive actions. In this case, Orlando faces serpent and lion in order to save Oliver, showing 'kindness', which is 'nobler ever than revenge' (4.3.127). This is the most convincingly heroic thing Orlando has done in the entire play. This is because he acts in order to save someone who does not deserve his pity; he is willing to put his pride aside and attempt to recover and restore a lost, broken relationship. This speaks to a good deal of development in his character: before being 'deceived' by Rosalind, Orlando was bitter towards his brother and unable to take constructive action in his relationships; now, he is able to put his own interests aside in order to reach out to Oliver. Orlando breaks the pattern of antagonism and deception which Oliver established, instead of perpetuating it. Another important sign of his 'development as a lover' is that he matches the integrity of his actions with a commitment to those he is responsible to: he is wounded during his encounter with the lion, and asks Oliver to take a napkin stained with his blood to Ganymede/Rosalind, as an excuse for his broken promise. Besides the fact that he considers the position of others even when he has just been mauled by a lioness, his commitment is especially impressive given that he believes Ganymede is only pretending to be Rosalind, that he calls this 'shepherd youth' by her name 'in sport' (4.3.155-157). The detail that he calls a shepherd Rosalind 'in sport' underscores the fictional, 'false' nature of their relationship at the very moment that he proves how truthful this fiction has made him.

This is a clear indication of the progress Orlando has made under the guidance of Ganymede/Rosalind's deceptive, theatrical education. Another important sign of his maturation is that, after witnessing his brother find happiness with Celia/Aliena, he contemplates 'how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes' (5.2.31). This indicates that he is

ready to experience happiness first-hand; his play-acting with Ganymede/Rosalind has allowed him to experience a vicarious courtship through participating in a fiction, but now he is willing (in fact, eager) to venture into reality. This is underscored by his statement that he can 'live no longer by thinking' (5.2.35). 'Thinking', in this context, refers to the 'imagining' which has preoccupied him until now. His mind has exercised itself within the hypothetical realms of fiction for long enough, and he is now ready to translate thinking into action: to take the lessons of imagination into reality. Garber interprets this as a 'graduation and a commencement', as Orlando 'finally feels ready to choose the real, despite its inherent dangers, over the make-believe' showing that he has 'profited from the unsentimental education he has received' (1986:110).

Once Orlando confirms his readiness to put aside the fictional world created by his role-playing with Ganymede/Rosalind, she promises him that she will 'set' Rosalind 'before [his] eyes' the next day, claiming that she has had instruction from a magician (much as she has had from her 'old religious uncle') and can 'do strange things' (5.2.41-42,46). The magic Rosalind performs is the transition between play and reality. When she appears as herself, without the disguise, the revelatory process which her performance sets in motion is completed. The fruition of Rosalind's theatrical deception is made even more explicit by the fact that she reveals herself during a wedding ceremony over which the goddess of marriage, Hymen, presides. Hymen, the Greek goddess of wedding ceremonies, appears in this instance as a character from a court masque, an elaborate piece of theatre often featuring mythical features and celebrating an event such as marriage. The subtler theatricality of Rosalind/Ganymede is therefore concluded by a more explicitly theatrical ritual. This echoes the events of *Much Ado About Nothing*, not only because both plays end in wedding ceremonies (typically of comedy), and those ceremonies have strong theatrical overtones, but because the truth which results from the preceding revelatory deceptions enables the formation of strong personal relationships. As in *Much Ado About Nothing*, this process is paradoxical. In order for Orlando to detach himself from a false, fictitious love removed from real human interaction,

he must submit himself to a supposedly false interaction, which, in its fictiveness, offers a truer reality and personal relationship than those offered by convention and actuality.

Just as *Much Ado About Nothing* appears to do, *As You Like It* seems to oppose the judgments of antitheatricalists such as Gosson in its celebration of theatre. It also picks up on Lodge's idea that fiction acts as education – but *As You Like It* does not simply recast Lodge's arguments through dramatization. It takes the discussion of theatre beyond the pattern of attack and defence represented by Gosson and Lodge, by not only portraying the educative function of theatre, but also questioning and exploring the complexities of what is being taught, how it is being taught, and who is doing the teaching. The play recognises that conventional education is often rendered either inaccessible or inadequate by personal and societal power structures, and subsequently explores different routes to knowledge. The wisdom offered by the pastoral world of Arden is celebrated by Duke Senior and his company, and is complicated by Jaques's satire and Orlando's love-struck distortions. While Jaques's comments on the world's shortcomings are memorable and frequently perceptive, his tone is too similar to that of antitheatricalists. His confidence in his own knowledge is often absurd, and can be read as a warning against false medicine – against the instruction which emanates from any source which deems itself infallible.

Rosalind's theatrical role-playing succeeds above all these elements because it combines all of their virtues and bypasses their shortcomings. As Ganymede, Rosalind can be 'at once caustic and caring, tender and tough' (Garber, 1986:104). She maintains the playful spirit of pastoral and its concerns with topics such as love and time, while simultaneously illustrating the value of gentle satire in establishing self-awareness. Her wisdom and lessons are neither passive nor self-centred. The virtue of theatre is that it is active: the knowledge it offers is more complete because it goes beyond statements of what might or ought to be done by embodying choices in performance and requiring the audience to participate in the resulting process of moral and interpersonal

negotiations. The reality of this fictional interaction is underscored by the emphasis on Rosalind's own emotional involvement in her performance. Unlike Jaques, Rosalind's attempts at counsel are not rooted in a detached and secure belief in her own grasp of the truth. Instead, much of the endearing humour of her character lies in the fact that she is never allowed to be invulnerable.

In the figure of Rosalind, Shakespeare goes much further than a defence of theatricality through rhetorical disputation; more importantly, he humanizes it. A great deal of the play's humour resides in the audience's knowledge of Rosalind's predicament and feelings: for all her effective role-playing as Ganymede, her love for Orlando is apparent. This inspires empathy and identification rather than suspicion and horror, as a duplicitous villain (such as an Iago or Macbeth) might. Theatricality is not held up as an absolute, in which case it might be interpreted as an imposing and opaque threat which defies moral interactions. Instead, it is presented as an intensely human activity which attempts to establish relational truths. Such truth is the ultimate goal of Rosalind's deception of Orlando, and of the play's deception of its audience.



### Chapter III:

#### Learning to Lie: *Hamlet* and *King Lear*

The previous chapter showed how two of Shakespeare's comedies demonstrate the triumph of theatre as a counter-deception and a means to revelation, and how such revelations might lead to insight and relationship. *Hamlet* and *King Lear* also contain such revelatory deceptions, but the gap between what has been lost because of deception and what might be recovered through counter-deception is far greater than in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*. Hamlet, and Edgar in *King Lear*, are the chief performers of the deceptions under consideration in this chapter. Their deceptions are similar: both pretend to be mad, and both engineer plays-within-plays. These performances led Barish to interpret Hamlet and Edgar as champions of theatre who show 'striking powers of transformation', and 'resourcefulness in shaping [their] circumstances' (1981:127). Both characters fulfil a variety of roles in the metatheatrical framework. Not only are they directors (like Don Pedro and Friar Francis) and role-players (like Rosalind), but they also have a great kinship with the audience. Hamlet and Edgar are clearly characterised as witnesses to theatrical deceptions, and in response to this they become performers. More than any character discussed in the previous chapter, Hamlet and Edgar therefore fulfil the roles of both actor *and* audience. Orlando is guided into participating in the fiction Rosalind constructs for him, but his development is slow and he never overtakes Rosalind in her performative skill. But Hamlet and Edgar are more brilliant students of their circumstances: they have an aptitude for performance, and *Hamlet* and *King Lear* show how they learn to act – to lie, as Lear's fool says (1.4.131) – and how they use this ability. They are therefore ideally positioned to offer a spectrum of engagements with the dangers, limitations, and possibilities of theatre. As with the plays in the previous chapter, the revelatory deceptions in *Hamlet* and *King Lear* contain patterns in language and thought which might be read as responses to contemporary antitheatrical debates. It is the goal of this chapter, then, to discuss Hamlet's and Edgar's theatrical deceptions, considering what these imply about them

as performers and what they reveal about themselves, others, their worlds, and the world of their audience through their performances.

Hamlet's theatricality may be delineated as two threads of counter-deception: his assumption of an 'antic disposition' (1.5.170) after meeting his father's ghost, and his later presentation of *The Murder of Gonzago* (or "The Mousetrap") to the Danish court. These revelatory deceptions work against the pervasive effects of his uncle's deception of the kingdom, which stands as a thorough example of a morally destructive kind of theatricality. Truth has been supplanted by falsehood in Denmark; Hamlet's father, the lawful king, has been murdered and replaced by his brother, Claudius. Claudius obscures his evil deed and legitimises his kingship by setting up a parallel reality which imitates the one preceding it in many respects. He acts not only as the new sovereign of his brother's kingdom, but also as a husband to his brother's wife and a father to his brother's son. He takes up these roles with an accomplished, polished performance which balances a pretence of fraternal mourning with responsible action as new king – with 'wisest sorrow' thinking on the past king 'together with remembrance of ourselves' (1.2.6-7). In showing 'defeated joy', 'mirth in funeral', and 'dirge in marriage', Claudius proceeds in his takeover with the freely given approbation of the royal councillors (1.2.15). The acceptance and involvement of the court further confirms the narrative which he has constructed regarding his ascension to the throne. That which is false is therefore held up to be irrefutably true by royal and political authority. Denmark's reality is determined from the apex of its hierarchical structures, leaving little room for questioning the legitimacy of this world.

Hamlet, however, does offer resistance, rooted in the sense that there is something false in the reality that is presented to him. He feels deeply the disjunction between past and present, between his father and his uncle. What he is being told and asked to believe does not correlate with what he believes to be right and true. He therefore rejects Claudius as a poor, insulting imitation of his

father. Claudius is a ‘satyr’ when compared to King Hamlet’s ‘Hyperion’ (1.2.139-140), and he is ‘no more like [Hamlet’s] father / Than [Hamlet] to Hercules’ (1.2.153). Because of his contrary perspective, Hamlet isolates himself by refusing to participate in the world constructed by his uncle. In a court where Claudius wields his power, with the consent of all its members and with Gertrude by his side, Hamlet is an incongruous figure clad in mourning black and over whom ‘clouds still hang’ (1.2.66).

Hamlet’s rejection of and refusal to participate in what he perceives to be a counterfeit reality is important, because he fulfils the role of a sceptical onlooker. He shares the position of antitheatrical writers: he is a spectator who suspects that the performance presented to him is insidious and false. This is underscored when he first appears to the audience as someone who bitterly comments on the potential discrepancies between what appears to be true and what *is* true. When Gertrude asks him why it ‘seems ... so particular with [him]’, he retorts:

‘Seems’, madam – nay it is, I know not ‘seems’.  
Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,  
...  
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,  
That can denote me truly. These indeed ‘seem’,  
For they are actions that a man might play,  
But I have that within which passes show,  
These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.76-86)

The word ‘play’ in this context underscores the tenuous relationship between all outward appearances and a person’s inner life, ‘true’ self and feelings – ‘that within’. ‘Play’, as a synonym for ‘act’ (as in a stage performance), connects this dubious ‘seeming’ with theatricality, the first of many references in a play full of theatre and theatrical metaphors. Hamlet acknowledges that his ‘inky cloak’ and dejected behaviour are only the ‘trappings and the suits of woe’, but insists that they represent a very real grief. He *is* that which he seems to be. The fact that Hamlet asserts the truth of his own grief implies a suspicion of the truthfulness of others. His words offer a distrustful

view of the truth of appearances and actions, and might form a response to the speech which Claudius has just provided to the court. Claudius is an example of a character who takes up ‘forms, moods’ and ‘shapes’ of grief and royal responsibility, all of which Hamlet interprets as ‘actions which a man might play’.

Hamlet expresses the kind of anxieties which characterized the contemporary rhetoric surrounding the theatre. In his first appearance he immediately evokes apprehensions about the potential disconnect between what *is* and what *appears to be*. Maus, in *Inwardness and the Theater of the English Renaissance*, sees this speech as a clear reflection of the ‘truism’ of the distinction between inner truth and outward appearance that was ‘endlessly rehearsed in Renaissance sermons, advice literature, coney-catching pamphlets, doctrinal debates’ and, importantly for this discussion, ‘antitheatrical debates’ (Maus, 1991:29). It is the presupposition of a distinction between the inner life and outward performance which seems to have driven the insistence in some elements of Protestant thinking on the desirability of an absolute correlation between appearance and essence: an absolute truthfulness. But Hamlet’s speech highlights the difficulty of achieving any certainty once the differentiation is made between inner ‘truth’ and falsifiable appearances (see Chapter I, pp. 19-20). Hamlet knows that his own grief is real, but he cannot be sure about the true motives and feelings of Claudius or anyone else in the court, because all of their proper behaviours and observances in the wake of King Hamlet’s death might simply be actions that they play, to hide either the emptiness or malice of their hearts. Their true characters are completely inaccessible.

As a figure who is separated from the courtly ‘performance’ he witnesses, and who is particularly aware that this (and all other interactions) might be based on mere ‘playing’, or acting, Hamlet possibly invites identification from the play’s audience. For example, the connection between Hamlet and the audience is strengthened by the fact that the audience of the play cannot, at this point, know any more definitively than Hamlet that there is ‘something rotten in the state of

Denmark' (1.4.90) or that Claudius is the cause of this rottenness. Hamlet's grief at the loss of his father evokes sympathy, and it is perhaps a cause of unease for an audience that Gertrude has married her husband's brother as quickly as she has. But while the almost inevitable rebellion against a replacement father by a grieving son is not unexpected, it does not necessarily speak objectively of any moral fault in the replacement father. The audience *does* have the advantage of knowing that King Hamlet's ghost is haunting the castle's battlements – something which clearly indicates that something is amiss. Horatio interprets the ghost as a sign 'of some strange eruption of [the] state' (1.172) – possibly symptomatic of the past and pending conflict between Denmark and Norway. When he tells Hamlet of his father's appearance, the prince also takes it as an omen of some undisclosed crime: '...foul deeds will rise / Though all the earth o'erwhelm them to men's eyes' (1.2.254-256). But the ghost has been silent up to this point, and no sign of *its* trustworthiness has been given. The resulting uncertainties, and the fact that Claudius does not reveal any concrete evidence of his wrongdoing until much later in the play, bear witness to the power of the illusion that he has created. The audience's slow collection of information that chips away at this illusion and points to the truth around King Hamlet's death closely parallels Hamlet's own process of discovery and investigation.

Importantly, this process is facilitated by revelatory deceptions. At the beginning of the play, Hamlet is aware of the proclivity for pretence ('play'), and is suspicious of it, insisting that, while his appearance is not sufficient to express his true feelings, it does intimate something of his true state. He then changes his approach, however, by using theatrical methods to retaliate against theatrical deceptions. He enters the world of seeming in order to oppose it. This is prompted by Hamlet's meeting with his father's ghost, which provides an affirmation of his instincts in rejecting his uncle: the spectral King relates his 'most foul, strange, and unnatural' murder (1.5.28) at the hands of Claudius and urges his son to avenge him. This is a traumatic revelation for Hamlet: he seems to be taken by surprise by the fact that his father was murdered, although this, once revealed,

quickly aligns with his perception of his uncle's true nature, confirming the terrible accuracy of Hamlet's 'prophetic soul' (1.5.41). This confirmation of his uncle's deceit prompts the Danish prince into a tirade against Claudius as a 'smiling damnéd villain' (1.5.106). The clear disjunction between nature and expression, 'that one may smile and smile and be a villain' (1.5.108), picks up on Hamlet's earlier commentary on the 'actions that a man might play'. Faced with both the supernatural (in the form of his father's ghost) and the unnatural (his uncle's murderous actions), Hamlet renounces accepted methods of thinking and behaving: he wipes 'all saws of books, all forms, all pressures past / that youth and observation copied' from the 'table of [his] memory' (1.5.98-101). This he does to keep his promise to avenge his father's death, to keep his 'commandment all alone ... / within the book and volume of [his] brain' (1.5.102-103).

Hamlet immediately takes up a riddling, ambiguous tone, revealing little of what has passed between him and the ghost, despite Horatio and Marcellus's concern when they meet again. His own act, or deception, has already begun: he conceals himself and what he knows through assuming a contrary, aloof manner. He makes his companions swear by his sword that they will never speak of what they have 'seen' or 'heard' that night (1.5.153,159). The ghost's disembodied voice joins in Hamlet's imperative, crying 'swear' a total of four times. When Horatio protests that the situation is 'wondrous strange' (1.5.163), Hamlet reiterates that traditional reason and received knowledge are insufficient responses to the world, telling Horatio that 'there are more things in heaven and earth ... / than are dreamt of in [Horatio's] philosophy' (1.5.165-166). This statement anticipates Hamlet's assertion a few lines later that he will 'put an antic disposition on' (1.5.170), a way of being defined by contrariety, opposition, changeability: an overt rejection of attempts to correlate his actions with his motivations and feelings through interpretation.

Hamlet's 'antic disposition' is therefore a paradox based on a rejection of accepted frameworks of knowledge and behaviour, of all that has previously been written in the 'table of his memory': a

piece of theatre which destabilises supposed truths in favour of probing the illusions at the heart of the kingdom. The utter contradiction he offers to the Danish court is apparent in the court's perception of his altered state. Before Hamlet appears on stage again, Claudius and Polonius already describe his 'transformation' as a 'lunacy', and a 'madness' (2.2.5,49,100). Significantly, Claudius notes that neither 'th'exterior nor the inward man / resembles what it was' (2.2.5-6). The constituent elements in Hamlet's identity, 'th'exterior' and the 'inward man', have transformed and resist easy correlation of these two aspects of himself by onlookers. In other words, Hamlet becomes an actor, exercising an ability to be something other than what he is and has been, undoing easy connections between words, actions, and intentions. At the beginning of the play, Hamlet and the audience are presented with the daunting task of separating truth from falsehood in Claudius's Denmark. Hamlet conducts this investigation by setting up a mystery of his own (which the audience is privy to), effectively reversing the power structures of the court: he resists his position as an audience to Claudius's performance by becoming the performer to Claudius's audience. This is what makes Hamlet's subversion particularly threatening to the king's power. Previously, Claudius had the monopoly on knowledge, freely influencing and manipulating the perceptions of his subjects. This monopoly is undermined when Hamlet attains secrets of his own.

This deception is revelatory in part because it allows Hamlet the freedom to speak truths in the guise of nonsense. In this, he becomes very like a court fool, showing a great propensity for riddling, teasing, and wordplay. His role in this respect is also based on the traditional paradox of the wise fool. But Hamlet's 'one-man play within the play' (Nuttall, 2007:196) also succeeds in revealing other realities in other ways: as a kind of audience attempting to interpret and determine the truth of Hamlet's performance, Claudius and his lackeys are prompted to reveal *their* true characters, motives, and methods. As in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*, the audience's reaction to and interpretation of the 'lie' of theatre reveals truths about their own selves. Wise folly and the game of interpretation are patterns of revelation that can be identified in Hamlet's effect

on and interaction with the spies whom Claudius enlists to root out the cause of Hamlet's madness: Polonius, a royal councillor, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet's friends and fellow students.

Polonius is Claudius's foremost assistant in his circuitous attempts at determining the cause of Hamlet's strange behaviour, declaring to his master that he 'will find / where truth is hid' (2.2.154-155) – a kind of investigation which he has been 'used to' do by 'hunt[ing] the trail of policy' (2.2.47). This analogy which likens Polonius the investigator to Polonius the hunter is reinforced when he suggests that his own daughter, Ophelia, be used as bait to lure Hamlet and confirm his theory that *she* is the cause of the prince's madness. When Hamlet wanders in the lobby (as he is wont to do), then Polonius will 'loose' his daughter to him, while he (Polonius) and Claudius 'mark the encounter' (2.2.161). Polonius's methods reveal him to be a hypocrite. Earlier in the play, he warns Ophelia against accepting the 'many tenders' Hamlet makes of his affection towards her as 'true pay' – the 'holy vows of heaven' he makes to support his earnestness in courtship are 'springs to catch woodcocks' (1.3.98,105,113,114). In ironic contrast to his warning to Ophelia, Polonius himself is laying baits of his own to achieve his purposes. To make things worse, he plans to use Ophelia as the very bait he warns her against being; she becomes the lure in the snare set up by Polonius and Claudius to test and sound Hamlet's apparent madness.

The first time Hamlet appears on stage after assuming his antic disposition, Polonius is the first to interact with him. Polonius shows his expectation of Hamlet's altered mental state when he asks Hamlet whether Hamlet knows him. Hamlet does not disappoint Polonius's expectations of lunacy, replying that he knows Polonius 'excellent well', he is 'a fishmonger' (2.2.171). This designation sounds comically nonsensical and appears to be random, in line with Hamlet's pretence of madness. But Hamlet's first words already establish that there is some sense in his nonsense, some truth in his act. Polonius has described himself as a hunter to Claudius; earlier in



the play, he uses a similar analogy which frames him as a fisherman. Polonius sends his servant, Reynaldo, after his son Laertes, when he goes to France. He tasks Reynaldo to seek out Laertes's acquaintances and from them learn about Laertes's behaviour. He further instructs Reynaldo to fabricate rumours about Laertes – that he engages in 'such wanton, wild and usual slips / as are ... most known to / youth and liberty' (2.1.22-24) – and test these rumours against the experiences of Laertes's acquaintances, thereby guiding them into revealing the particulars of whatever tomfoolery Laertes *does* (or *does not*) participate in. Polonius explains that his 'bait of falsehood' is designed to 'take the carp of truth' – in this way, 'we of wisdom and of reach . . . by indirections find directions out' (2.1.60-61;63). Hamlet therefore hits upon a description of Polonius which is unsettlingly apt: as a fishmonger catches and sells fish (such as carp), so Polonius makes it his business to discover truths and to deal in them.<sup>21</sup> These descriptions of Polonius align his methods with an insidious theatricality. Like Don Pedro and his accomplices in *Much Ado About Nothing*, his deceptions are described as acts of hunting and baiting. In that play, Beatrice and Benedick are caught by the 'false sweet bait' (3.1.233) which Don Pedro lays for them, and the confession of their feelings is the truth which results from this trick. But Polonius differentiates himself from such comic deceivers, because the truth which results from his trickery is not used for particularly admirable or moral purposes. As an ally of the deceitful Claudius, he evokes and confirms antitheatrical sentiments to some extent. His intentions are dubious, and his trickery is used in the service of corrupt illusions.

Hamlet's theatricality is compared and contrasted with Polonius's performances in their interaction. Polonius attempts to practise upon Hamlet, but Hamlet subtly reveals Polonius's motives while disclosing nothing about his own position. Moreover, Hamlet is using Polonius's

---

<sup>21</sup> In 'The Bait of Falsehood' (1977), Joan Larson Klein also notes this connection between Polonius's descriptions of his own methods and Hamlet's identification of him as a fishmonger. This connection is not discussed in terms of antitheatrical language, however: Klein focuses on Shakespeare's ironic 'manipulation of proverbial references' (1977:223).

own methods against him: his madness is an exercise in indirection which find directions out. When Polonius then denies that he is a fishmonger, Hamlet says that he ‘would that [Polonius] were so honest a man’, because ‘to be honest as this world goes is to be one man picked out of ten thousand’ (2.2.173,175-176), to which Polonius says ‘that’s very true’ (2.2.177). If Polonius feels any accusation in Hamlet’s words, he does not show it – it is quite possible he is unaware that Hamlet is consciously toying with him and teasing out the truth of his character. It is only when Hamlet describes what he is reading – ‘slanders’ by a ‘satirical rogue’ about ‘old men’ (again in indirect mockery of his companion) – and he claims that Polonius ‘shall / grow old as [Hamlet] is – if, like a crab, [he] could go / backward’ (2.2.193-194,199-201), that Polonius seems to realise that Hamlet’s madness is not without sense: ‘Though this be madness yet there be method in’t’ (2.2.202-203).

As Polonius exits the stage, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive, with similar purposes. They visit the court at Claudius’s request; the king asks them to learn the cause of Hamlet’s behaviour – ‘to draw him on to pleasures and to gather / so much as from occasion [they] may glean (2.2.15-16) – and to report back to himself and Gertrude with their findings. With this duplicity afoot it is unsurprising that, as in his conversation with Polonius, Hamlet expresses his doubts about the world’s honesty. When Rosencrantz says that ‘the world’s grown honest’ (in response to Hamlet’s inquiry about news), Hamlet claims that ‘then doomsday is near’ (2.2.234). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not accomplished enough liars to hide the truth from Hamlet. He is immediately suspicious of his friends’ visit, guessing that they were ‘sent for’ and urging them to ‘deal justly’ with him, detecting a ‘kind of confession in [their] looks, which [their] modesties have not craft enough to colour’ (2.2.240-241,245-246). Here, Hamlet uses the word ‘craft’ to denote cunning, or pretence. This word is used twice after this, but as a description of Hamlet, not his enemies. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report back to Claudius, they describe Hamlet’s behaviour as a ‘crafty madness’ which he uses to ‘keep aloof’ and resist their attempts to ‘bring him on to

some confession / of his true state' (3.1.8-10). Later, Hamlet describes himself as 'not in madness / but mad in craft' (3.4.185-186). The use of the word 'craft' to describe his madness might suggest a characterisation of Hamlet's pretence as being both cunning and creative. This works as a description of theatricality: a deception requires imaginative and performative skill. Hamlet overcomes the pretence of his uncle's agents by becoming the greater craftsman, or performer. He is a counter-deceiver, out-pretending the pretenders while revealing them to be mere performers.

Hamlet interprets his friends' methods as similar to those of Polonius, asking Rosencrantz: 'Why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as / if you would drive me into a toil?' (3.2.338-339). That is, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are like hunters who attempt to get windward of their prey, prompting the prey to 'move away from the scent of the hunter and towards the trap'<sup>22</sup> he has prepared' (Thompson & Taylor, 2006:322). He adds another metaphor for their scheming when, later, he defiantly asks Guildenstern to play upon a pipe. When Guildenstern protests that he cannot, Hamlet insists that it is 'as easy as lying' (3.2.349). This interaction is another example of Hamlet springing traps on his would-be pursuers: when Guildenstern insists that he would not be able to 'command [the pipe] to any / utterance of harmony' (3.2.353-354), Hamlet swiftly activates the figurative snare, turning his friend's admission of inability against him:

Why, look you now how unworthy a thing you  
make of me: you would play upon me! You would seem  
to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my  
mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to  
my compass. And there is much music, excellent voice,  
in this little organ. Yet cannot you make it speak.  
'Sblood! Do you think I am easier to be played on than  
a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you  
fret me you cannot play upon me. (3.2.355-363)

---

<sup>22</sup> The 'toil' being a kind of 'net or trap' (Thompson & Taylor, 2006:322).

Hamlet revolts against all attempts to ‘play upon’ him; to manipulate him, to ‘sound’ him. This ‘playing’ not only *resembles* lying, but *is* lying. Claudius tries to manipulate Hamlet with lies designed to hide the truth (that his father was murdered), attempting to make him act in accordance with the masquerade Claudius has constructed and directed. Failing this, Claudius uses lies designed to reveal the truth of the prince’s behaviour, his objectives, what he knows and what he does not (again, in the interest of identifying and eliminating any threats to Claudius’s narrative of just and rightful rule). But Hamlet resists attempts to trap, control, manipulate, or play upon him, instead transforming into a kind of pied piper, catching the rats of the court by playing a tune all his own.

Hamlet’s interactions with Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern therefore reveal their positions and methods as Claudius’s representatives. It is only once Hamlet and the audience have witnessed something of their scheming in Claudius’s employ that Claudius himself starts to reveal his true character. When the king conspires with Polonius to use Ophelia to bait Hamlet, they conceal themselves to eavesdrop on Hamlet and Ophelia’s conversation, and Polonius notes that ‘tis too much proved that with devotion’s visage / and pious action we do sugar o’er / the devil himself (3.1.46-48). At this moment, Claudius reveals himself to the audience in an aside:

How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!  
The harlot’s cheek beautied with plastering art  
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it  
Than is my deed to my most painted word. (3.1.42-52)

The idea introduced by Hamlet in describing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s inability to ‘colour’ their looks is repeated here, when Claudius describes his ‘most painted word’, which disguises the ugliness of his deed, as ‘plastering art’ that beautifies the cheek of a prostitute. He is aligned with his minions – like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (and more successfully than they), he hides behind false appearances, and he joins Polonius in his baiting and snaring of Hamlet and Ophelia. The performances of these deceptions outside of himself do touch his conscience. In other words,

the deceptions surrounding him (and ordered by him) become spectacles which remind him of his own deceiving actions.

The paradox of Hamlet's theatrical performance as a madman is that while he pretends to be distracted, deprived of his wits, and full of non-sequiturs, he is actually incisively observant, witty, and full of apposite insights. Hamlet's feigned lunacy gives him freedom to speak wisdom in madness, and the distance he places between himself and others through his performance enables him to see the truth of people's behaviour and to resist being controlled. Through his madness, he undermines the supposedly sane and righteous court of Claudius, provoking the king into showing his hand through the various deceptions designed to interrogate Hamlet's position (and presumably to subdue him). To himself and to the audience, Hamlet's antic disposition reveals the cracks in the state of Denmark's beautified exterior, revealing the truth of the rot beneath.

This truth is not a pleasant one; Hamlet's newfound knowledge and insight into the world's deceptive machinations perhaps prompt his description of 'this goodly frame the earth' as 'a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy the air ... this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire' which appears to him as 'a 'sterile promontory', 'nothing ... but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours' (2.2.265,268-269). The references in this speech to the 'goodly frame', the 'brave o'erhanging firmament' and 'majestical roof fretted with fire' are possibly references to the Globe playhouse, in which Hamlet would originally have been performed (Thompson & Taylor, 2006:256-257). Thus Hamlet places himself as an actor on multiple, concentric stages: that of his own madness, that of Denmark, that of the world, that of the play, and that of all of these contained within the theatre in which it is performed. It is a metatheatrical moment which both wonders at and regrets humankind's ability to create different realities. As much as Hamlet discovers a means of expression and empowerment in his play-acted madness, it also reveals the pervasiveness of subtler and more menacing forms of seeming and pretence, which

lead to the destruction and isolation which might reduce a man – ‘the paragon of animals’ – to the ‘quintessence of dust’ (2.2.273-274).

Still, the uses of dramatic fiction continue to guide Hamlet’s actions. Immediately after Hamlet’s speech regarding the majestic theatre of the world with its foul and pestilent vapours, Rosencrantz reveals that a group of travelling ‘players’, ‘tragedians of the city’ (2.2.292), whom he and Guildenstern have met on their way to Elsinore, will soon arrive to entertain him. Their arrival inspires Hamlet’s second major revelatory deception, in which he takes on the role of playwright and theatrical manager in having the actors stage a play for the court’s entertainment, titled *The Murder of Gonzago*, or as he later calls it, ‘The Mousetrap’. This second designation suggests Hamlet’s purpose for the play, which is to reveal Claudius’s true nature. He does this after he starts to question the claims of his father’s ghost: the ghost might have been ‘a de’il, and the de’il hath power / t’assume a pleasing shape’ (2.2.534-535). He turns to theatre in order to test the veracity of what he has been told – a deception performed in order to determine truth. To this end, he writes additional material for *The Murder of Gonzago*, which will contain ‘something like the murder’ (2.5.530) of King Hamlet. Hamlet plans to observe Claudius’s reaction to this performance, recalling that he has heard that people guilty of some sin who attend a play have been known, ‘by the very cunning of the scene / [to be] struck so to the soul that presently / they have proclaimed their malefactions’ (2.2.525-527). It is significant, given the baiting and snaring metaphors used by Polonius earlier in the play, and combined with the later ‘Mousetrap’ label, that Hamlet describes the play as the ‘thing / wherein [he’ll] catch the conscience of the King’ (2.2.539-540). At this point Hamlet’s counteractive deceptions reach a climax – for a while, the tables have completely turned, and Hamlet and Claudius have exchanged roles as prey and predator. Hamlet counters Claudius’s deceptive theatricality by constructing his own revealing, dramatic ‘lie’.

Hamlet counts on the effect the play will have on Claudius when he sees his own, secret actions being re-enacted, in the guise of fiction, on the stage. It is worth considering why he believes this scheme will work, beyond the anecdotal evidence of other ‘guilty creatures’ watching plays. Hamlet’s conviction that a well-acted play could have such an effect is rooted in his own experience as a spectator. No sooner do the players arrive than Hamlet insists that they give a demonstration of their talents, particularly requesting a speech which mirrors his own situation, in which Aeneas speaks to Dido ‘of Priam’s slaughter’ (2.2.385) by Pyrrhus (son of the slain Achilles). The players’ subsequent performance of this speech and Hamlet’s experience of it anticipates Claudius’s position as a spectator of ‘The Mousetrap’ play. Hamlet’s reaction to an enactment of a situation which so closely resembles his own provides a basis for his theories about the uses of theatricality, anticipating his plans to present Claudius with a fiction resembling his murder of his brother. Hamlet can conjecture about the effects of theatre on Claudius’s conscience because he has experienced those effects himself.

What Hamlet experiences in watching the player’s performance is recognition and, consequently, revelation. From the beginning, his involvement in the performance is evident. When he asks that Aeneas’s speech be performed, he explains which section of the speech he is referring to by reciting a good part of it himself, and then requests the first player to continue with it. The part which Hamlet speaks is a description of ‘the hellish Pyrrhus’ (2.2.401). Seeking Priam in the battle of Troy, Pyrrhus embodies violent determination: his armour is ‘black as his purpose’, his ‘dread and black complexion smeared’ with blood, his frame ‘o’ersized with coagulate gore’, and his eyes ‘like carbuncles’ (2.2.391,393,400-401). Pyrrhus, in his bloody physicality, represents what Hamlet must become if he is to follow the ghost’s imperative to avenge him. Hamlet’s recitation suggests that his imagination has seized upon this image of revenge as an identity which he must fulfil. But as much as this lives in his imagination, he has not yet taken up this identity. Hamlet, in his ‘antic disposition’, acting the mad fool in the Danish court, is far removed from Pyrrhus in Troy.

However, the speech, as the player continues it, reveals a greater similarity between Pyrrhus and Hamlet. Once he finds Priam, Pyrrhus hesitates. His sword ‘seem[s] ‘i’th air to stick’, and he ‘[does] nothing’ (2.2.417,420). This is the point in the narrative at which Hamlet might best be placed: the moment between the resolution to achieve revenge and the act itself. But the speech does not end at this point. Pyrrhus’s hesitation is the ‘silence in the heavens’ which precedes ‘the dreadful thunder’, and ‘Pyrrhus’s bleeding sword / ... falls on Priam’ (2.2.422,424,429-430). This is the point at which one might expect Hamlet to be satisfied. The fictional deed which correlates with his own agenda has been completed. But Hamlet encourages the player to ‘come to Hecuba’ (2.2.439) – Priam’s wife and, presumably, representative in some ways of Gertrude. The sympathetic description of Hecuba’s grief at Priam’s death ends the speech on a note of pity and regret at the tragedy. Pyrrhus’s actions are not without consequences. His father is avenged, he has enacted his justice, but any triumph this might hold within the narrative is overshadowed by the irreparable loss expressed by the weeping woman.

The impromptu performance of this speech acts a revealing experience to Hamlet. Listening to the account of Pyrrhus killing Priam, Hamlet vicariously experiences the vengeance that he is bound to enact upon Claudius. The ‘truth’ of the speech lies in its correlation with Hamlet’s reality; it contains feelings, characters, and situations which he recognizes. This fiction is an image which reflects what *is* – Hamlet’s father has been murdered and he must enact vengeance, as Pyrrhus seeks retribution for his father’s death – and *what is supposed to happen next*. The imperative is that Hamlet must be resolute, he must overcome his doubt and hesitation and kill Claudius, as Pyrrhus only pauses for a moment and kills Priam. It causes in him the introspection and self-examination he sees as the necessary result of theatre: he feels himself a ‘dull and muddy-mettled rascal ... unpregnant of [his] cause’ (2.2.502-503). The actor’s speech causes this in two ways: he tells the story of a son who successfully avenges his father’s death (which Hamlet cannot bring himself to



do), and the actor himself matches his actions and behaviour perfectly to that which is merely imagined – ‘a fiction ... a dream of passion’ (2.2.486) – putting Hamlet to shame as he himself cannot enact vengeance even though he has what seems to be a very real, non-fictive cause.

It is with this experience, which is shared by the audience (as spectators of *Hamlet* and the play within the play which Hamlet witnesses), that Hamlet moves forward with his plan to use theatre to reflect and reveal Claudius’s treason. He has great admiration for the players and a keen understanding of their function and power, perhaps displaying a kind of ‘envious kinship’ (Barish, 1981:128). He instructs Polonius to have them ‘well bestowed’ and ‘well used’, ‘for they are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time’ (2.2.461). Hamlet’s description of players as presenting a distilled reality, as a reflection of the world in a given time, anticipates his later claim that ‘the purpose of playing’ is ‘to hold .... / the mirror up to Nature to show Virtue her feature, / scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the / time his form and pressure’ (3.2.20-24). In other words, the ‘mirror’ of theatre does not only reflect the ‘truth’ of reality with disinterest; it also prompts moral engagement in the viewer by encouraging the recognition of both virtue and shortcomings in the image it presents.

The players’ visit is a central event in the play, especially if it is contended, as Hibbard does, that ‘acting, in all its various senses, is at the heart of *Hamlet*’ (1987:247). Various forms of acting and pretence have been exemplified by the play up to this point, many of which are decidedly negative and immoral. Elsinore is a place suffused with malicious deception, and false appearances: it is a great emblem of duplicity in all its worst manifestations. It would be unsurprising, from an antitheatrical point of view, that this duplicity is often associated with dramatic performance. But, ironically, when the players arrive, they stand out as truth-bearers, ‘chronicles of the time’, admired by Hamlet as being in the business of reflecting reality, as a mirror might show a counterfeit but accurate image of whatever is presented to it. In a situation which contains such characters as

Claudius and Polonius, the actors appear benign, or even actively moral, figures who are able to penetrate the heart of the matter, to reach something of the inner truth which proves to be so elusive in the kingdom of Denmark.

Hamlet, whose desperation for truth informs a great deal of his character, therefore insistently and enthusiastically directs the players in their performance. When he appears with them on stage again, he instructs them in the particulars of their speech and mannerisms, bidding one to ‘speak the speech ... trippingly on the tongue’, to abstain from ‘saw[ing] the air too much with [his] hand’, to avoid ‘tear[ing] a passion / to tatters’ (3.2.1-2,4-5,9-10). In his direction, Hamlet seems to strive for a ‘low-key, naturalistic mode of delivery’ (Thompson & Taylor, 2006:296), instructing the actors to ‘beget a temperance’, to ‘suit the action to the word, the / word to the action’, and not to ‘o’erstep ... the modesty of nature’ (3.2.7,17-19). Hamlet does not need to instruct them in this way: presumably, they know more than he does about their craft. Hamlet’s intense involvement in the play’s performance indicates something about its nature and purpose. Despite his insistence on a naturalistic presentation, his motives are not subtle. He knows exactly what he wants Claudius to see in the mirror of performance: a crystal clear reflection of a horrid reality. The effect he desires is claustrophobically specific: Claudius must either be led to a confession of his sin, or be left unperturbed (and, therefore, innocent). Hamlet knows exactly what revelation he wants his deception to lead to.

This specificity undermines the realism Hamlet desires of the performance. The play leaves little room for interpretation or ambiguity. It is obvious in its content: the plot is repeated twice, first in a dumb-show and then proceeding with the play in performance with dialogue. This performance, in its conspicuous familiarity, fulfils its purpose: both Gertrude and Claudius show signs of discomfort at the player queen and murderer’s actions. When Claudius intervenes, questioning the ‘argument’ of the play, and whether there is ‘offence / in’t’ (3.2.226-227), Hamlet insists that there

is ‘no offence i’t’h’ world’, and that while the play is a ‘knavish piece of work’, it cannot disturb those who ‘have free souls’ (3.2.229,234-235). The audience knows that this is at the heart of what Hamlet is trying to achieve – if Claudius *is* affected, then he *does not* have a ‘free soul’. Hamlet therefore continues to persistently guide the interpretation of the play by its audience. When a new character enters the stage, Hamlet identifies him as ‘Lucianus, nephew to the king’ (3.2.237). This is an ominous relation for the murderer to have to the player king. In one way, the action mirrors Claudius’s murder of King Hamlet, but by making the murderer the player king’s ‘nephew’, the play suggests that Hamlet (Claudius’s nephew) is bound to kill his uncle. What Hamlet presents to Claudius is not only a sign that Hamlet knows Claudius took King Hamlet’s life, but also a threat that Hamlet will take *his* life, repaying regicide with regicide.

Lucianus then commits the play-murder, pouring poison into the king’s ears. This action is probably inflammatory and enough, given Hamlet’s ominous comments thus far, but he forces the tension to breaking point by adding the explanation that Lucianus poisons the king ‘for his estate’, and that they shall ‘see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago’s wife’ (3.2.254, 256-257). Hamlet promptly receives his pay-off. The game is up: Claudius stands, orders the performance to be halted and disappears with the alarmed court in tow, excepting Hamlet and Horatio. It is significant that, in this moment of revelation, the king orders a ‘light’, the urgency of which is underscored by all the audience calling for ‘lights, lights, lights!’ (3.2.232-233). The truth is revealed: what was hidden in darkness is uncovered, or brought to light, as it were, by the deception of the play. Following the ‘mousetrap’ metaphor of the play, implying the catching or hunting of an animal, Hamlet celebrates with a song bidding ‘the stricken deer go weep’ while the ‘hart ungalled play[s]’ (3.2.263-264). Claudius is the stricken deer, who has left the stage injured and weakened, leaving Hamlet to play as the ungalled hart.

But the cycle of baiting and snaring has not been broken, it has simply been reversed. This may suggest some reason for uneasiness. Hamlet's scheme succeeds perfectly in revealing Claudius's guilt, but this event launches him and the other characters onto a negative trajectory which follows the swift disintegration of affairs ending in the long list of fatalities at the close of the play. While Hamlet latches onto Claudius's reaction, asserting it as the sought-after proof he needed of his uncle's guilt, Horatio seems noncommittal in his affirmation of his friend's apparent success. It seems as if Hamlet has reached the height of his dramatic talents, and he asks Horatio:

Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers, if the rest  
of my fortunes turn Turk with me, with provincial  
roses on my razed shoes, get me a fellowship in a cry of  
players?  
(3.2.267-270)

To this Horatio's muted response is: '...half a share' (3.2.271). Horatio's reserved reaction anticipates the short-lived nature of Hamlet's triumph. The Prince's mood darkens soon enough when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive to report of the consequences of the play: the king 'is in his retirement marvellous distempered' and the queen 'in most great / affliction of spirit hath sent [them] to [Hamlet]' (3.2.303-304). These are the results of Hamlet's revealing, theatrical deception: he has uncovered the truth of Claudius's guilt, but this truth does not bring freedom. It is a certainty about Claudius's wicked actions which must restrict all future action: Hamlet is bound even more strictly to his fate. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern therefore present Hamlet with the necessity of dealing with reality once the play has ended. Reality does not resolve itself: the court is corrupt, Claudius is a murderer, and Hamlet must act.

Hamlet's meeting with Gertrude further emphasises both what he has achieved through his theatrical behaviour, and the harsh limits of that achievement. As with the staging of the play, Hamlet is interested in exposing the reality of things through reflection: he insists that Gertrude 'shall not budge' until he shows her 'a glass / where [she] may see the inmost part of [herself]'

(3.4.17-19). Hamlet's use of 'a glass' in this instance replicates his use of theatre as a 'mirror'. As he uses the play to show Claudius his own actions, he uses the mirror to confront Gertrude with her own reflection. This attempt to force Gertrude into recognition is rash and desperate, however, and it results in disaster. Gertrude resists Hamlet, thinking he will murder her, and Polonius (hiding and spying once again) cries out from behind an arras. Hamlet stabs him through the drapery, mistaking him for Claudius. The results of this are far-reaching, causing Hamlet to be temporarily exiled from Denmark, Ophelia to descend into madness and her subsequent death, Laertes to return to Elsinore from France, violently demanding vengeance, and Claudius to engage in a final series of schemes to kill his nephew.

Hamlet complements the action of holding up the mirror to his distraught mother by launching into a lengthy comparison between his father and Claudius. He compares two pictures, one of each, 'the counterfeit presentment of two brothers' (3.4.52) –another form of the paradoxical comparison of images and imperative for recognition and realisation implied by the mirror, and by Hamlet's forays into theatre. This has the desired effect, as Gertrude pleads with her son:

O Hamlet, speak no more.  
Thou turn'st my very eyes into my soul  
And there I see such black and griev'd spots  
As will leave there their tinct. (3.4.86-89)

But, however much Hamlet succeeds in showing his mother her faults, this does not lead to any real resolution or reconciliation, just as his success in exposing his uncle's lies cannot undo the damaging influence of these lies or reclaim what was lost in their wake. Hamlet succeeds in undermining illusion, but the reality he exposes cannot be worked toward any lasting good. This becomes clearer the further the play progresses, which lends an affecting irony to Hamlet's insistence on describing and underscoring the truth during his exchange with Gertrude. The player's recitation of the circumstances surrounding Priam's slaughter by Pyrrhus takes on an

almost prophetic character in hindsight: just as Hecuba's mourning is a reminder of the loss which underpins the story's events, so Hamlet's interaction with Gertrude does more to highlight the true wretchedness of their situation than anything else. He himself seems to realise that his situation is ultimately doomed, once more showing *his* gift for prophecy when he says that 'this bad begins, and worse remains behind' (3.4.181).

The theatrical deceptions discussed above successfully reveal the truth, but unlike the insights resulting from similar deceptions in the comedies, this truth cannot offer any restoration or creation of relationship. Claudius's conscience is affected by Hamlet's actions, but he is unable to repent. Hamlet might, through his theatrics, expose the false narratives his uncle has constructed, but Claudius still has the responsibility of acknowledging his actions, and he is unwilling to do so. Nor can he be obliged by any mortal authority to do so: he himself is the king, and he retains the power to shape his own, secured reality through the political and violent forces available to him. In this case, the moral possibilities of the truth's resulting from revealing deceptions depend on the conscience of the individual. Also, revelatory deception might lead to truth, but such truths might be used deceptively. Polonius, Claudius's chief assistant in constructing a 'false' reality, goes to work by gleaning truths through deception, and then using them to his own advantage. Claudius and Polonius represent a greater truth about the nature of the world: it is corrupt, dishonest, filled with artifice, and often ruled by people who are skilled in crafting self-serving falsehoods. The play is steeped in this knowledge, following Hamlet's revelations and musings on the pervasiveness of 'smiling, damnèd' villainy. We might respond to this, like Horatio, that 'there needs no ghost ... come from the grave' (or play on the stage) 'to tell us this' (1.5.124-125). It is an accurate reflection, but a fairly obvious one. Catching the conscience of the king is necessary, but leads to Hamlet's greater problem: finding 'the name of action', by suiting 'the action to the word, the / word to the action'. That is, he needs to find a way of being in the world when reality consistently undermines the connections between words, actions, and essence.

Hamlet becomes an actor in his world in reaction to being acted upon by it, and demonstrates the uses of performance (or deception) in revealing truth. But the truths he reveals about those who surround him and the nature of reality are painfully limited. A.D. Nuttall has observed, however, that Hamlet does not only use his theatrical, 'crafty madness' to manipulate his circumstances: he also uses his own theatricality to 'practise upon himself' (2007:198). The most significant truths Hamlet discovers through his theatrical deceptions are those he finds in gaining insight into the tragic human condition, and by implication about his own nature. In the guise of his 'antic disposition', and through his involvement in 'The Mousetrap' play, Hamlet grapples with whether 'to be or not to be', and also *how* to be. Hamlet notes to Horatio that '... blest are those [like Horatio] / whose blood and judgment are so well co-meddled / that they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger / to sound what stop she please' (3.2.64-67). This is the point to which Hamlet must progress: his anxieties are caused by the conflicting requirements imposed upon him by Claudius and by his father's ghost. He is his father's son, but also his uncle's. He must accept his mother's marriage, yet he must avenge his father's murder. He must submit to Claudius, and he must kill him. Hamlet's theatricality becomes a mode of defiance against Claudius and a deferral of his father's imperative to take revenge. This leads to the point where Hamlet can 'defy augury', claiming that 'there is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all ... Let be' (5.2.197-200).

Following his own definition of the 'purpose of playing', Hamlet's theatricality allows him to recognise and scorn the image of nature, to reveal the form and pressure of the time, and to discover virtue. Importantly, if Hamlet is representative of both audience and actor, and he acts upon himself in this way, then the knowledge he gains is extended to the audience of the play. Indeed, given the tragic nature of the play, this knowledge (the product of theatrical revelation) seems in some ways to be the most beneficial to the spectators. In light of his eventual death, the

fruitfulness of Hamlet's insight might be questioned in the context of the play, but the weight of revelation remains and is placed firmly in the hands of the audience. This transferral of knowledge is made possible because of the connection between the audience of the play and Hamlet, as representative of an audience within the play. This is apparent in the last scene: when Hamlet is dying, he refers to the onlookers of the court, who 'look pale and tremble at this chance' as 'mutes or audience to this act' (5.2.318-320). This is a point of separation between Hamlet and the play's audience, who have been implicitly connected up to this point. Hamlet shifts the identification of the audience with him to a crowd of onlookers within the play, establishing a connection with the onlookers outside of the play. Hamlet is tied to his world, and is doomed to die. The audience, however, is free to leave, to 'tell [Hamlet's] story', and, perhaps, enabled to tell their own.

The world of King Lear is, like Hamlet's Denmark, a fragmented and dangerous place suffused with flattery and pretence, where wilful delusion counteracts any attempt at honesty and plain speaking. This is apparent in both the main plot, involving Lear and his daughters, and the subplot, dealing with Gloucester and his sons. In both cases, falsehoods proliferate because of the actions of injudicious, morally blind fathers. In Lear's case, Cordelia acts as the stubbornly honest counterpoint to her father's demand for flattery and her sisters' indulgence of it. Edmund, like Goneril and Regan, takes advantage of his father's inability to recognise the truth, while Edgar becomes the honest victim of his brother's scheming and his father's misguided wrath. Cordelia and Edgar are echoes of Hamlet in that they are the young victims of deceit originating from the actions of their elders. All three oppose the falseness of their world, but Edgar and Hamlet are much more closely related in their strategies in that they are both agents of theatrical deception. *King Lear* is concerned with what Jean MacIntyre identifies as 'the relationship between telling the truth, telling lies, and inventing fictions' (1982:34) – with Edgar being the clearest exemplification of the latter action. Like Hamlet, Edgar adopts theatricality as a mechanism of defence and resistance to his circumstances. He, too, pretends to be mad, and goes a step further than Hamlet



by disguising himself as a beggar, 'Poor Tom'. He also sets up a short play of his own later on, describing a fictional cliff at Dover to which he can safely lead his suicidal, blinded father. When he is compared to Cordelia in her staunchly overt honesty, Edgar's revelatory deceptions might present more viable alternatives to achieving truth in a world which is anything but receptive to it.

The perilous situation of truth in Lear's kingdom is explicitly foregrounded more than once by his fool. Because of his status as an entertainer, the Fool has the most leeway openly to criticize his master's injudicious behaviour. In his first appearance, for example, he commences his jesting by remarking to the disguised Kent (who has offered himself to Lear's service) that 'this fellow [Lear] has banished two on's daughters and did the third a blessing against his will – if thou follow him, thou must needs wear my coxcomb' (1.4.80-82). Even in his privileged position, however, the Fool is made to understand that he should watch his tongue, as Lear tells him to 'heed ... the whip' (1.4.86). To this the Fool responds that 'truth's a dog that must to kennel; he must be whipped out, when the Lady Brach may stand by the fire and stink' (1.4.87-88). Threatened with whipping, the Fool identifies himself with truth which, in Lear's world, is like a dog beaten out of the house. This metaphor may also be applied to other characters, most notably Kent and Cordelia, who are both banished by Lear because they are truthful. Cordelia's description of the love she has for her father is honest and unembellished, paling, in Lear's eyes, in comparison with the obsequious protestations of her sisters. When Kent pleads with Lear to recognise how foolish his subsequent treatment of Cordelia is, he only succeeds in incurring the king's wrath. While truth is the dog that is swiftly cast out from the house that Lear built, the malodorous 'Lady Brach' is presumably allowed to stay inside and warm herself by the fire. This 'lady brach' is easily associated with Goneril and Regan, who seem to have mastered what Cordelia calls 'that glib and oily art / to speak and purpose not' (1.1.229-230). This description is important, as it shows that Cordelia recognises and rejects the paradox of deception – to sever one's words from one's intentions – as an immoral 'art'. In opposition to this, Cordelia insists (much as an antitheatricalist might) on a

correlation between what she says and what she feels: she loves her father ‘according to [her] bond, no more nor less’ (1.1.85).

By banishing Kent and Cordelia, Lear reveals his relationship with the truth. When Cordelia insists that she is ‘true’ in her speech, Lear bitterly rejects this truthfulness, telling her to have ‘truth’ as her ‘dower’ (1.1.101), effectively converting moral value into monetary terms and assessing honesty to be worth nothing. Kent interprets Lear’s behaviour as an inability to see things clearly, pleading with him to ‘see better’ (1.1.155) – to accept good counsel, to recognise the verity of Cordelia’s honour and true affection. Lear ignores this, confirming Kent’s perception of his moral blindness.

Cordelia and Kent are primary examples of the dangers of acting as overtly truthful counterpoints to deception in a world governed by an intransigent preference for hollow adulation and ignorance. Their honesty is honourable, but it does not remedy falsehood; if anything, it seems to exacerbate it. Lear is unable to receive truth plainly; his weakness is his susceptibility to flattery. Exiled and unable to do anything to reverse her father’s obstinacy, Cordelia leaves her home with the King of France, who marries her, despite her sudden lack of fortune. She can do nothing more until she is sent for and remains absent until late in the fourth act.

If the Fool is a representative of truth, then it is interesting to note that ‘the fool hath much pined away’ (1.4.57-58) after Cordelia’s banishment. Cordelia’s loss signifies that truth becomes diminished. The Fool returns to the issue of truth and lies a small while later when he asks Lear to give him an instructor in lying:

FOOL     Prithee, nuncle, keep a schoolmaster that can teach thy fool to lie; I would fain learn to lie.

LEAR     An you lie, sirrah, we’ll have you whipped.

FOOL     I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are: they’ll have me whipped for speaking true, thou’lt have me whipped for lying, and sometimes I am whipped for holding my peace. (1.4.131-136)

The Fool is in an impossible position. Lear's first threat of whipping was made because the Fool was speaking the truth, and it seems that Goneril and Regan ('they') have now given him the same warning. When the Fool requests to be taught how to lie, Lear threatens the whip again. An unpersecuted existence seems impossible to him. He can neither tell the truth nor lie without being whipped, and his last recourse, silence, is also punished. It may be for this reason, paired with his low spirits at Cordelia's departure, that the Fool says he 'had rather be any kind o'thing than a fool' (1.4.136).

This is not the last word on the possibility of opposition to that which is deceitful and false in the play. As much as *King Lear* is often characterized as an exceptionally bleak play in which nothing exists without ending in disaster and despair, the conflict at the heart of the play is still between truth and falsehood, honesty and deception. The tragedy evokes a feeling of desolation because a sense of the fragility and value of hope, life and truth informs and heightens the experience of their loss; therefore, the drive against lies and towards truth is not abandoned when Cordelia exits the stage. Certainly, Cordelia's resolute, direct truth-telling will not, as has been noted, achieve anything in these circumstances. But there are other methods of conveying the truth available to the remaining honest characters.

Edgar proves this point, although he is an unlikely candidate to do so. He enters the play as the unwitting victim of his half-brother Edmund's malicious schemes, centred on removing Edgar from their father's favour so that Edmund (an illegitimate child) might be his father's sole heir. Edmund describes him as 'a brother noble, / whose nature is so far from doing harms / that he suspects none – on whose foolish honesty / my practices ride easy' (1.2.134-137). Edmund's plot is further enabled by Gloucester, his 'credulous father' (1.2.134). Gloucester lacks judgment as much as Lear with regard to his children, and to some extent he shares the king's troubled

relationship with the truth. In the play's first scene, he coarsely relates the circumstances of his illegitimate son Edmund's origins to Kent, claiming that he has 'so often blushed to acknowledge him that now I am brazed to't' (1.1.6-7); 'yet was his mother fair, there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged' (1.1.15-16). This is not the kind of recognition and affirmation of parentage which inspires filial affection and loyalty. While Gloucester is truthful, he does not tell the truth to any positive effect. Gloucester's impaired judgment is further emphasised when he locates his and the kingdom's misfortunes in astrological causes, claiming that 'these late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us' (1.2.83). Gloucester does not place the responsibility for Lear's decisions upon Lear himself, and similarly does not consider that he is being tricked by Edmund and is effectively bringing ruin upon himself. Rather, he follows what Edmund later calls the 'excellent foppery of the world', by which the sun, moon and stars are blamed for 'our disasters', as if 'we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion' (1.2.95-96).

This is not to say that Gloucester is completely blind to truth. He follows his imprudent metaphysical speculation with a relatively accurate description of the state of the world:

... love cools, friendship falls off, brother's divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction – there's son against father. The King falls from bias of nature – there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time. Machinations, hollowness, treachery and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves. (1.2.85-90)

This speech is paradoxical, because it shows Gloucester being simultaneously observant and myopic. His son has turned against him, but it is not the son he suspects. He sees that his world is falling victim to 'ruinous disorders', but he has no conception of how much he himself is being deceived. Gloucester's misguided acknowledgment of Edmund and his gullibility in the face of Edmund's trickery shows an inability to grasp the significance of truth and the workings of

deception. It is remarkably easy for Edmund to trick Gloucester into believing that Edgar is plotting against his life. He does this by forging a letter which he supposedly tries to hide when Gloucester accosts him. The letter contains musings by Edgar on killing Gloucester in his sleep. To verify the truth of this letter, Gloucester asks Edmund whether it is written in Edgar's handwriting. Showing his lack of insight, Gloucester takes Edmund's word for truth instead of allowing a more extensive investigation. It is also hard to believe that Gloucester himself is unfamiliar with his son's handwriting, yet he gives no indication of whether he recognises it or not, choosing instead to be led by Edmund – the only person who can objectively be linked to possession of the evidence. Like Lear, Gloucester must learn to 'see better'. Both are disastrously predisposed to be manipulated by the lying villains surrounding them, and once they have been deceived, 'they prove impenetrable to the truth of either words or experience till experience changes their minds' (MacIntyre, 1982:37).

Importantly, Edmund's deception of Edgar is framed in theatrical terms. Reibetanz has noted that, in setting up his brother's downfall, Edmund 'functions zestfully as scriptwriter, actor, and director' (1977:58). Edgar enters shortly after Gloucester exits the scene, and Edmund comments that 'he comes, like the catastrophe<sup>23</sup> of the old comedy', and situates himself in this theatrical metaphor as the dissembler, or 'wily comic intriguer' (1.2.104; Reibetanz, 1977:58), whose 'cue is villainous melancholy' (1.2.104-105). Edmund tells Edgar that Edgar has offended their father for some (supposedly) unknown reason, and that he should avoid him at all costs and take refuge in Edmund's lodgings until his brother 'fitly [brings] him to hear [his] lord speak', and to 'go armed' in order to defend himself if necessary (1.2.126;127). In this way, Edmund directs every element and unwitting character to his purpose: namely, to set Edgar fleeing at the right moment (sword in hand), to injure himself and to frame Edgar as the assailant, and to send Gloucester and his men

---

<sup>23</sup> That is, the 'final event in a play', as opposed to 'sudden disaster' – according to David and Ben Crystal, Edmund is 'calling his brother a clown' (2015:47).

hunting after his unfortunate brother. Like Hamlet, Edgar starts as a character who is the victim of theatrical deception: he is an audience targeted by his brother's performance.

Theatre is not only the tool of villains, however. Despite his initial 'foolish honesty', Edgar is a character who is forced to transform under the pressures of the predatory world he is thrust into. He is like Cordelia in that he is forced into exile by a father whose moral insight is impaired, and, also like Cordelia, he is the inherently honest victim of malicious sibling cozenage. Unlike her, however, he is not able to escape to another country: in Cordelia's absence, Edgar is a painfully present reminder of the destructive results of deception. Necessity is the mother of invention, and Edgar is in dire straits when he finds himself on the run from Gloucester and his men, who are under orders to capture and kill him. As he escapes the hunt by hiding in 'the happy hollow of a tree' he resolves to disguise himself as a Bedlam beggar called 'Poor Tom'. He therefore goes through a drastic transformation from the good-natured, well-bred, legitimate son of a nobleman to 'the basest and most poorest shape / that ever penury in contempt of man / brought near to beast' (2.2.163-165).

This disguise is the first way in which Edgar's action as a victim of deceit echoes that of Hamlet. Both are sons who, in self-defence, wear the mask of insanity. Edgar's disguise is even more encompassing than Hamlet's, however. While some indication is given that Hamlet's physical appearance has changed, nobody is in doubt that he *is* Hamlet. Edgar, on the other hand, erases his identity completely, and none of the characters who encounter him recognises him as the man he was. Hamlet places a very deliberate distance between himself and those he bears relationship to, but Edgar cannot maintain any contact with anyone from his former life except through chance.

His act of self-negation is altogether more violent, emphasised by his physical description of his transformation:<sup>24</sup>

My face I'll grime with filth,  
Blanket my loins, elf all my hair in knots  
And with presented nakedness outface  
The winds and persecutions of the sky.  
The country gives me proof and precedent  
Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices,  
Strike in their numbed and mortified bare arms  
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary ...  
... Poor Turlygod, poor Tom,  
That's something yet: Edgar I nothing am. (2.2.165-172,176-177)

Of the disguises and personas discussed in this dissertation, Edgar's are perhaps the most extreme. They combine the changes in appearance of Celia and Rosalind when they disguise themselves before entering Arden, with the psychological posturing of Hamlet when he puts on his 'antic disposition'. Where Celia dresses herself in 'poor and mean attire' and 'smirch[es]' her face with 'a kind of umber' (1.3.106-107), Edgar 'grime[s]' his face with 'filth', blankets his loins and knots his hair. Whereas Rosalind hides her sex by pretending to be a man, Edgar exposes himself completely in his disguise, outfacing the skies with 'presented nakedness'. Edgar must negate himself to the extreme, become 'nothing' of who he was. The paradox of disguise in this instance seems to threaten to do explicitly that which antitheatricalists fear it will: in other words, replace the identity of the performer completely with grotesque falsehood.

The next time Edgar appears on stage is when Lear, the Fool and a disguised Kent enter a hovel to shelter from the raging storm outside, only to find this hovel already occupied by 'Poor Tom'.

---

<sup>24</sup> R.A. Foakes observes in his notes on the text that it has become customary on the stage for Edgar to 'tear off his clothes as he speaks these lines, and transform himself in front of the audience into a poor, almost naked, Bedlam beggar' (1997: 237). This has a powerful visual effect, especially if the actor literally illustrates the striking of the arms with 'pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary' as is done in Trevor Nunn's 2008 film adaptation of the play, with Ben Meyjes in the role of Edgar.

Tom frightens the Fool, who was the first to step into the hovel, evoking alarmed cries for help in his appearance as what the Fool takes to be a ‘spirit’ (3.4.41). Lear, who himself is in the throes of madness by this stage, seems immediately to be fascinated by the lunatic living in the hovel. He immediately identifies with Tom, or at least identifies Tom with himself by asking him whether he, too, has given all he has to two unkind daughters. As he is questioned by Lear, the disguised Edgar performs his role expertly, launching into a series of sustained speeches which convincingly illustrate his false identity as a fiend-haunted madman. Edgar’s power of imagination becomes manifest in his account of himself. In his first response to Lear, Tom describes the landscape that the ‘foul fiend’ (3.4.45) has hunted him through (from the ‘fire ... [and] flame’, ‘ford and whirlpool’, to ‘bog and quagmire’), as well as its methods in tempting him to suicide (he lays ‘knives under his pillows’, ‘halts in his pew’; puts ‘ratsbane by his porridge’, makes him ‘proud of heart, to ride on a bay trotting horse over four-inched bridges’, and to ‘chase his own shadow for a traitor’) (3.4.49-52). This is a catalogue of sharp, varied images which imply that the fiend tempts Poor Tom to suicide. Presenting such temptations is an occupation usually associated with the devil, who was traditionally imagined as ‘encouraging’ his victims ‘to kill themselves and bring their souls to damnation’ (Foakes, 1997:275). Edgar further complements his performance by interspersing his speeches with nonsense phrases, such as ‘summ, mun, nonny, Dolphin my boy, my boy, sessa!’ (3.4.83); garbled verses suggestive of traditional rhymes or narratives, such as ‘Childe Rowland to the dark tower came, / His word was still “Fie, foh and fum, / I smell the blood of a British man’ (3.4.160-162); and moral imperatives, such as to ‘obey thy parents, keep thy word justly, swear not, commit with no man’s sworn spouse, set not thy sweet-heart on proud array’ (3.4.70-71). All of this, combined with his intermittent direct address of the fiend that haunts him, is a skilful and improvised performance designed to convince Lear and company of Tom’s lunacy.

Adding even more to his mad creation, Edgar gives the fiend which haunts Poor Tom many faces and many names (Flibbertigibbet, Smulkin, Modo, Mahu), and varied and horrifying appearances



and effects on Tom. As Foakes observes, all of these devils who supposedly torment Poor Tom are mentioned in a contemporary piece of writing by Samuel Harsnett, titled *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603), which was ‘a polemical attack on a group of Catholic priests who conducted exorcism in private houses’, and was ‘part of an official campaign against exorcism as practised by some Protestants and by Catholics’ (1997:102). In terms of contemporary theatre, Harsnett aligned himself with antitheatrical attacks on the stage by ‘attacking exorcisms as merely theatrical’ (1997:102).<sup>25</sup> Foakes goes on to suggest that the function of Edgar’s ‘theatrical’ possession is, perhaps, to reclaim ‘the power of theatre to embody profound truths in its shows and rituals, and make audiences feel what kings and wretches feel’ (1997:104).

In some ways, Edgar’s grotesque play-acting in this scene functions like the mirror Hamlet imagines theatre to be. In his role as Tom, he reflects, distils, and records the madness, corruption, and chaos of the times, as well as prompting introspection in individuals – most notably in Lear, who has until this point ‘but slenderly known himself’ (1.1.299). At first, Lear can only understand Tom in terms of his own experience: he insists to Kent that nothing but the treatment of two treacherous daughters could make a man as miserable as Tom seems. Later, Lear questions Tom as to what he ‘hast been’, and he replies that he was a ‘serving man’, as multiplicitous in his sins as his fiend is in fiending: he describes himself in his subsequent speech as a lusting, swearing, drinking, gambling, promiscuous, slothful, stealthy, greedy, mad, and predatory character. Lear reacts to Tom by moving away from his ego-centric approach. Poor Tom’s confession does not inspire disgust in Lear as much as it inspires pity. He shows concern for the beggar’s wellbeing,

---

<sup>25</sup> In the introduction to his text (which is unpaginated), Harsnett describes the Catholic priests performing exorcisms as ‘grand Impostors, and enchaunters of ... souls’, whose business is ‘impious dissimulation’. They are deceptive and theatrical in their deceptiveness: ‘the Pope, and his spirits he sendeth in here amongst you, do play Almighty God, his sonne, & Saints vpon a stage, do make a pageant of the Church, the blessed Sacraments, the rites & ceremonies of religion, do cog & coine deuils’. Like antitheatricalists discussed in Chapter I, priests are seen as agents who ‘captivate’ the ‘wits, wils, & spirits’ of audiences through ‘palpable fiction, and diabolical fascination’, which ‘hath the power ... to metamorphose men into asses, bayards, & swine’ (1603). Such descriptions which negatively associate Catholicism and exorcism with acting, playing, staging, and false appearances, continue throughout the text.

saying it would be better if Tom were ‘in a grave than to answer with [his] uncovered body this extremity of the skies’ (3.4.85-86). Lear recognises that Tom is a representation of the human condition: ‘unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as [Tom is]’ (3.4.88-89). Ironically, and in contrast to the falsehood which an antitheatrical perspective might read into the erasure of Edgar’s identity, this vision of mankind is absolutely uncovered and unadorned, stripped bare of artifice. This is exactly the kind of truth required by antitheatrical thought: an essential, eternal identity.

It is at this moment that Lear seems to experience a significant paradigm shift: instead of trying to make Edgar resemble him (only being able to relate to someone else if they are like him) and using Poor Tom as a tool of self-pity, he realises that *he* resembles *Tom*. Instead of trying to enforce an identity upon the ‘other’ in order to suit his personal needs, Lear empathises with Poor Tom, showing a willingness to change himself to reflect the state of his companion – so much so that he attempts to undress himself, which Kent and the Fool step in to prevent. Paradoxically, Edgar’s loss of identity leads to some amount of self-knowledge in another, much as Hamlet might envision that an actor’s negation of the self allows him to reflect the state of his audience.

Lear’s attachment to Edgar and his recognition of him as a source of insight is underscored when he insists on conversing ‘with this philosopher’ (3.4.128). To describe Poor Tom as a philosopher might sound like yet another sign of Lear’s loss of sanity to his other companions. Poor Tom seems to be Lear’s companion in madness – the mad leading the mad, as it were. The paradox of Lear is that he gains insight into his own, real madness, and experiences revelation through witnessing the deception of Edgar’s feigned madness. Edgar, as ‘philosopher’, is similar to Rosalind in that he teaches Lear, who willingly submits himself to Poor Tom as a kind of pupil. Like Orlando, Lear’s unadulterated experience of reality is dependent upon his interaction with the fictions presented to him by a theatrical figure. In the brief moments that Edgar appears alone on

stage and is able to cease his act as Poor Tom, he reflects on his position and the positions of those around him and delivers pertinent observations and insights. Bearing witness to Lear's suffering and misfortune, he considers the merits of solidarity in such suffering and the effect of seeing 'our betters ... bearing our woes' (3.6.99);<sup>26</sup> at this point, he is able to distance himself from his own suffering by sympathising with Lear, whom he considers to be 'his better'. While his reflections are by no means cheerful, some indication is given of Edgar's ability to endure his trials; he looks towards his future action, planning to listen to 'the high noises' (rumours and reports about court events) and to reveal himself when his 'just proof' is measured against 'false opinion' (3.6.108-110). At first, Edgar takes up the persona of Poor Tom in self-defence. He must hide his true identity, for fear of being captured and killed by Gloucester's men. But after his meeting with Lear, he seems to decide to "lurk" in his disguise in case he can help' (MacIntyre, 1982:40). Importantly, his deception does not lead to self-deception or corruption. He remains loyal and kind. His 'lies' lead to perhaps even greater objectivity and with it, a greater understanding.

It is perhaps useful, following MacIntyre, to compare Edgar's performance as Poor Tom to Kent's disguise, adopted in order to remain in the kingdom despite his banishment and to provide assistance to Lear. Kent describes his transformation as allowing him to 'carry through' his 'good intent': he expressly uses his disguise to serve his master, invoking elements of revelatory deception. This transformation does not change Kent's identity or his clarity of purpose. When Lear asks him (as an unfamiliar inferior), what he 'professes', Kent answers:

I do profess to be no less than I seem; to serve him truly that will put me in  
trust, to love him that is honest, to converse with him that is wise and says little,  
To fear judgment, to fight when I cannot choose ... (1.4.12-14)

---

<sup>26</sup> This, as well as the next quotation, are taken from the Arden Third Edition of *King Lear*, edited by Foakes, which includes 3.6.99-111 as part of the Quarto text.

There is very little that is dishonest about this pretence. Kent's disguise makes him unrecognisable to those he once knew, but in external appearance only. His deception 'allows him to give full expression to his true nature as a faithful follower of Lear' (Foakes, 1997:102). In his lie, he is being utterly truthful. This, according to MacIntyre, places Kent in the same category as the Fool: Kent's disguise, like the Fool's motley, is revelatory, allowing him to 'tell Lear truths he would rather not know in a form he can neither object to nor repudiate' (1982:39). They are also similar, however, in that neither Kent nor the Fool can do any more than remind Lear of 'the continued presence of loyalty in a world that seems bent on uprooting it' (MacIntyre, 1982:40). Both Kent and the Fool might offer Lear the truth, but the knowledge of truth is not enough for Lear, who must experience the reality he has created in order to achieve insight and understanding. Kent's deception is a paradox which imitates revelatory deception in some ways, but it is limited in its results. He is not, in MacIntyre's words, 'a major poet' (1982:40).

But Edgar is. He is a complete counterpoint to the 'verbal lies' told by Goneril, Regan, and Edmund, and which characterise the falsehoods of the first half of the play. To some extent, Kent and the Fool achieve a rhetorical resistance to this falsehood, coupled with the comfort of true service (as opposed to the shifting loyalties of Lear's daughters and their husbands). Edgar as Poor Tom, however, is the embodiment of the poor state of man and the effects of deception (and Lear's negligence) on the kingdom. He has no relationship to Lear and his company, is isolated from them on the stage of his madness. In some ways, he is unreachable by Lear, Kent, and the Fool: they can only observe him, a kind of audience to the alternative reality of his lunacy. This distance between himself and his spectators, together with the fact that he 'sinks his identity with true "negative capability" into a succession of invented personages' (MacIntyre, 1982:40), makes Poor Tom the most theatrical character in the play. While there is a psychological distance between Lear and Tom because of their unique insanities, they share the same space – the unforgiving heath. This mirrors the situation of the audience and play in some ways: they are subject to the

paradox of one reality existing within (and at the same time) as another. Like an audience, Lear witnesses Tom existing within his own reality, while also sharing Lear's: they are both pelted by the storm.

In his next appearance, Edgar is alone (Lear, Kent, and the Fool have fled to Dover). He again shows resilience and insight in the face of his circumstances, holding that it is 'known to be contemned / than still contemned and flattered' (4.1.1-2). This highlights a paradox of Edgar's disguise: when he appears as 'the lowest and most dejected thing of fortune' (4.1.3), then people despise him, but if he appears as himself, then he will be despised in secret but flattered to his face. In other words, his disguise causes people to act truthfully (in showing their contempt), while his true self causes disguise in others (as they hide their contempt behind a mask of flattery). This is a topical insight considering that the originating catastrophe of the play is caused by Lear's inability to recognise and reject flattery in favour of true and plain actions and words. This becomes even more significant when Edgar, as one of the few surviving characters at the end of the play, is set up to become the new ruler of the kingdom which Lear leaves behind.

Later, when the now-blinded Gloucester meets the disguised Edgar again, he recalls Tom from the night before, and asks that he lead him to Dover, where 'there is a cliff whose high and bending head / Looks fearfully in the confined deep' (4.1.75-76); here Gloucester plans to commit suicide by jumping from the edge of the precipice. Edgar's meeting with Gloucester initiates his second great theatrical deceit. He continues his disguise while leading Gloucester to Dover, and once they reach their destination, he allows Gloucester to *act out* his wish to commit suicide, guiding him to the edge of an *imaginary* cliff, where he 'jumps', falling to the ground. This piece of direction is preceded by a slow transformation in Edgar's disguised appearance. When Edgar and Gloucester arrive in Dover, Edgar is dressed in the peasant's clothes given to him on Gloucester's request by the old man who led him previously. His altered physical appearance is accompanied by changes

in his voice and the way he speaks. Gloucester picks up on this, but Edgar denies it, saying that Gloucester is ‘much deceived’, and that he is ‘in nothing ... changed / but in his garments’ (4.5.12-13). There is significant dramatic irony in this statement which reflects the paradoxical theatricality of Edgar’s role. His words carry double-meanings. Gloucester is ‘much deceived’, but not because he is wrong about Edgar’s accent, but because he believes Edgar is Poor Tom and that Poor Tom is leading him to a cliff.

Edgar distracts Gloucester from the issue of his accent by announcing that they have reached the edge of the cliff. He is lying: while they are probably somewhere near Dover, they are not at a cliff. Gloucester comments that he thinks the ‘ground is even’ and cannot ‘hear the sea’ (4.5.3,5), but Edgar dismisses this as Gloucester’s ‘other senses [growing] imperfect’ because of his ‘eyes’ anguish’ (4.5.7-8). These details (in addition to Gloucester’s questioning of Edgar’s voice) serve as explicit reminders to the audience that Edgar is in the process of an involved, carefully constructed deception.

This deception exhibits another way in which Edgar echoes Hamlet. Like Hamlet, his theatrical talents are not limited to acting as a madman, but extend to include the direction of a sort of playacting routine, effectively presenting the audience with a ‘play within a play’. Nuttall recognises this as a ‘theatrical stratagem’ (2007:311), and Robert Egan notes that this is the ‘most overt instance of dramatic artifice in the play’ (1972:17). In Edgar’s case, the dramatic presentation is much less formal than that in Hamlet: no official stage is set up and no group of tragedians is at his disposal to do his bidding. These are not necessary because Edgar’s sole audience member within the world of the play is the blinded Gloucester. Excepting Gloucester’s inability to see, the relationship between Edgar and Gloucester is similar to the one between Shakespeare and his audience – ‘on a bare and empty stage, Edgar conjures up a vivid scene purely by the powers of gesture and fictive language’ (Egan, 1972:21). Edgar sets the scene for the blind Gloucester,

describing the different levels in the drop of the imaginary cliff with all the imaginative flair he previously used in describing the devils tormenting Poor Tom. The birds in ‘the midway air’ (4.5.13), a samphire-gatherer, the fishermen on the beach, and a vessel and its buoy are all given attention and described in terms of their diminished sizes in the perspective of the cliff’s dizzying height. Edgar pre-empts any question regarding the silence of his imaginary ocean by explaining that the ‘murmuring surge / that on th’unnumbered idle pebble chafes, / cannot be heard so high’ (4.5.24-26).

Through his vivid, gratuitously detailed fiction, Edgar acts as a theatrical chorus of sorts to set the scene on the bare stage of Gloucester’s blindness, like the chorus in *Henry V*, who must conjure the audience to accept the presentation of ‘so great an object’ of history on the ‘unworthy scaffold’, within the limitations of the ‘wooden O’ that was the early modern stage (1.1.9,11,13). In that play, the chorus requests the audience to let the actors ‘on [their] imaginary forces work’ (1.1.18), to allow the performers to prompt within their minds the construction of an imagined scene.<sup>27</sup> Edgar is closer to this chorus figure in the effectiveness of his creative evocations than he is to Hamlet, with the prince’s fairly awkward and forced comments during the performance of ‘The Mousetrap’.

Having set up a seemingly safe stage, Edgar leads Gloucester to the edge of the ‘cliff’ and wishes him farewell when Gloucester asks that he ‘let go [his] hand’ and to ‘and let [him] hear [Poor Tom] going’ (4.5.33;37). Edgar recalls the ‘foul fiend’ who haunts Poor Tom and tempts him to self-slaughter<sup>28</sup> when he leads his father in this mock-suicide: he himself ‘is playing the traditional role of the devil’ (Foakes, 1997:326). Edgar evokes a demon whose intent is to rob his victims of life, but this feigning is designed to have the opposite effect: the rejection of death (and death-wishes)

---

<sup>27</sup> In another interesting parallel, the chorus both alludes and directly refers to Dover as part of the scenery the audience of *Henry V* should construct within their imaginations.

<sup>28</sup> In the tradition of demons who must be exorcised, as conceived of by Harsnett (1603).

and the revival of the will to live. To this end, Edgar promptly leaves his role as Poor Tom behind at the top of his constructed cliff and assumes the role of someone on the beach who has played spectator to Gloucester's fall. He acts amazed, telling Gloucester that it is a miracle that he lives, having fallen from such a terrible height. He then proceeds to tell Gloucester, once again taking advantage of his blindness, that the person at the top of the cliff was 'some fiend', who 'had a thousand noses / horns whelked and waved like the enraged sea' (4.5.83-84). Edgar prompts Gloucester to interpret this as an act of the 'clearest gods' who make 'honors / of men's impossibilities' (4.5.86-87). Despite his initial disappointment at not being dead, Gloucester takes his 'new' companion's advice to 'bear free and patient thoughts' (4.6.93) and resolves to endure (and perhaps outlast) his suffering.

MacIntyre reads Edgar's actions in this scene as 'teaching Gloucester to come to terms with truth through fictions adapted to limited capacity to receive truth unadorned' (1982:42). Edgar's intention, at least, is for his theatrical deception of his father to be revelatory. Before Gloucester jumps, Edgar explains his actions in an aside, stating that he '[trifles] thus with [Gloucester's] despair / ... to cure it' (4.5.40-41). So, by guiding his listener to live, act, and attain his desired ends within the safety of an illusion, Edgar hopes to achieve an outcome which results in life rather than in death. His deception, unlike the deception of Edmund, is not aimed at destroying life for selfish ends, but rather at revealing the value of life for his father's benefit.

It would, perhaps, be imprudent to interpret this scene as essentially optimistic or affirming, however. There is something inherently absurd and tragic about Edgar and Gloucester's situation, especially considering that, as MacIntyre notes, whatever insight results from Edgar's deceptions 'comes too late to avert madness, mutilation, and remorse, and much too late to halt the evil deeds their refusal of truth and acceptance of falsehood have started' (1982:44). Furthermore, critics such as Nuttall and Foakes question both the motivation and supposed benevolence of Edgar's actions.



Edgar does not need to remain disguised from his father. Gloucester admits to 'Poor Tom' that he was mistaken about his son Edgar, and regrets his actions towards him. The despairing man tells his companion that he wishes nothing more than to make peace with Edgar. Edgar gives no reason for not revealing himself at this point. Nuttall calls the Dover cliff scene a 'cruel piece of trickery' – Edgar's 'theatrical stratagem is infected with moral dubiety' because it is a lie (2007:311). Of especial concern to Nuttall is Edgar's claim that it was divine power that saved Gloucester – the gods have, he claims, intervened on the older man's behalf. But the 'devout and virtuous state' which this is designed to inspire in Gloucester is 'predicated on the lie' (2007:311). Gloucester has not been saved by a miracle performed by gods who turn out to be merciful, after so apparently little evidence of their consideration has been given up to this point. In writing this scene, Nuttall speculates, Shakespeare 'may have been visited by a kind of nausea as he contemplated the obscene power of his own manipulative art' (Nuttall, 2007:376).

Edgar might lead Gloucester to emotional insight and truth, but he cannot heal his wounds or undo the damage caused by his previous ignorance. When Edgar finally reveals his true identity, Gloucester's 'flawed heart' dies 'twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief' (5.3.222-223). Part of this tragedy (which mirrors that of Lear and Cordelia) is that reconciliation is glimpsed but, ultimately, denied. In both Lear and Gloucester's cases, Edgar's theatrical deceptions 'mitigate [their] sufferings' and help them to 'understand and accept what they have done and what they are', but in a 'limited way' (MacIntyre, 1982:44).

As in *Hamlet*, and in contrast to the comedies, the truths revealed by theatrical deception in *King Lear* are limited by the tragic universes the characters inhabit. In another parallel to the Danish Prince, Edgar's theatricality is perhaps the most successful in its effects upon himself as performer. His direction of Gloucester's mock-suicide attempts to exorcise Gloucester's despair, but it also (and more definitely) acts as an exorcism of Poor Tom and the fiends who accompany him from

Edgar's identity. This is part of Edgar's slow progression towards revealing his re-constituted, true self at the end of the play when he challenges and defeats Edmund in a duel. Barish interprets Edgar's shifting performances as representing a positive process of transformation: 'as Mad Tom, he can claim kinship with the most benighted pariahs and pitiable outcasts of the kingdom, and as the country lout in Act IV, he reaches the level of rustic humanity, a denizen of farms and rural settlements, speaking a regional dialect' (Barish, 1981:129). His experience of and identification with different levels of society, combined with his experience of the effects of falsehood, truths, and fictions, place Edgar in a position where he might rule more successfully than either Lear or Gloucester when the Duke of Albany charges him to 'rule in this realm' (5.3.341) after the death of Lear and all his daughters.

Like Hamlet, Edgar connects his own experience with that of the audience of the play in the last scene. Edgar concludes the play using the pronoun 'we':

The weight of this sad time we must obey,  
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.  
The oldest hath borne most; we that are young  
Shall never see so much nor live so long. (5.3.344-347)

By referring to 'we', Edgar might already be assuming the royal plural as new ruler of Lear's kingdom. But the effect of the pronoun possibly stretches beyond indicating Edgar's new position and into an inclusion of the play's audience. There are very few characters left alive at this point, and those who are seem to have no future. Kent, for instance, is asked to rule with Edgar, but implies that he will soon die when he says that his 'master', Lear, 'calls' to him and he 'must not say no' (5.3.343). Edgar, who has witnessed Lear and Gloucester's despair, just as the audience has, now expresses melancholy and a sense of 'the weight of this sad time' in reaction to the events he has observed, and this is a reaction which the audience might be expected to share. The use of 'we', then, potentially invites the audience to look upon the devastation in front of them *with* Edgar,

and through his eyes. If this identification is established, then the audience is included in the imperative to ‘speak what we feel, and not what we ought to say’. This honesty would be in response to the tragedy which they have witnessed – a stock, rehearsed response cannot do it justice. But it is also a requirement which seems to respond to the events of the play, which have largely been caused by false action, by the pretence required of convention and the resulting inability to recognise truth and genuine emotion. It is this knowledge and imperative which the audience is left with, after being presented with the paradoxical deception of theatre offering a revelatory experience. Crockett notes that the play’s paradoxes centre on the ‘massive theme of gain through loss’, but because ‘vision, sanity, and wisdom’ have come too late for both Lear and Gloucester, the play’s paradoxes can be resolved only in the communal experience of the audience’ (1995:70).

Edgar and Hamlet are characters who display the power of theatre and theatricality in performing deceptions which lead to truth. In both *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, however, the primary mode is tragedy, and so these truths are always painfully and necessarily limited. It is possible that in depicting revelatory deceptions, Shakespeare does not only interrogate the ways in which truth may be obtained through theatrical deception, but also suggests something about the qualities of truth which make it morally desirable. In these plays, the loss of truth leads to death and the breakdown of human connections. The deceptions and self-deceptions practised by villains and those infected with hubris cannot be simply reversed by means of straightforward truth. Revelatory deceptions attempt to recover truth; they succeed in doing so to an extent, although the truth they reveal can never fully recover that which has been lost. This correlates to the isolation at the heart of tragedy: the positive moral quality of truth is debilitated in its scope if it cannot lead to the restoration or growth of human relationships. Nevertheless, revelatory deception brings tragic characters nearer to truth than plain truth can, and importantly, it serves the same function for the audience. Through the lie of fiction, some characters in *Hamlet* and *King Lear* glimpse the possibility

of greater moral truth, although they are, tragically, denied the opportunity to grasp it. Through the lie of fiction, the audiences of these plays are offered the chance to experience vicariously the loss and possible recovery of truth. This fictional loss is, paradoxically, the gain of its onlookers. Contrary to the view of antitheatricalists, it is geared towards an appreciation and search for the truth, not an immoral, deliberate obscuration of it.

## Conclusion

The metatheatrical, revelatory deceptions of Edgar, Hamlet, Don Pedro, Friar Francis, and Rosalind engage with contemporary issues of spectatorship and performance not only according to their functions within the plot of each individual play, but also according to the various references to and images of theatricality, whether overt or associative, which accompany their portrayals. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*, references to parts and playing, imagination, sight and seeing, learning, and the transformation of the self and of others, are all indicative of the reflection of an actor-audience dynamic from within the plays in a specific type of self-referential action.

This dissertation has also identified less overtly theatrical patterns of imagery which may, nevertheless, be indicative of metatheatrical commentary, based on the use of such imagery to describe and often attack performance and rhetorical artifice during the early modern period. This category includes references to hunting, baiting, fishing, all of which might usefully be read in relation to the etymological root of the word ‘deceive’ – *deceivre*, and the Latin *decipere* – to cheat, catch, or ensnare. Such metaphors are used by antitheatricalists of the period to describe the relationship between actor and audience as one between predator and prey: the one who catches and the one who is caught. Also prominent in their rhetoric is the use of language related to bodily corruption through disease or poison, and the medicinal treatment and remedying of such ills. From the antitheatrical point of view, playhouses posed the threat of figurative contamination by deception as much as they did literal contamination by the plague: audiences were in danger of becoming casualties in what Elam calls ‘a veritable mimetic epidemic’ (2003:153-154). In response to this figurative epidemic, antitheatrical writers such as Gosson and Munday frame themselves as physicians, saving their ‘patients’ from succumbing to the diseases of theatre. Shakespeare, on the

other hand, implies that the curative function lies with performers themselves, not those who reject performance.

Paradoxes in language and contemporary associations underscore and reflect the paradox of theatre itself. The preceding chapters have shown that Shakespearean plays portray certain theatrical deceptions as snares which free their victims; as remedies which cure disease, instead of as diseases which need remedies; as sources of education and insight which result in more truthful pupils; as deceptions which lead to revelation, and the dissolution of false, limited conceptions of the self and of the self within the world. There is a subversive quality in these paradoxes, as they insist on the deferral of absolute definitions. The nature of paradox is truth-telling – not through proclamations of certainty, but rather through imaginative suggestions of possibility, always expanding the scope of what might be considered meaningful and true.

In the comedies, the instigators of revelatory deception – their authors and performers – are all sympathetic characters (in Barish's term, 'theatrical heroes') who, through their fictions, aim to establish or re-establish relational truths: that is, truths which leads to connections between the self and the other, to insight and positive, realistic, and sincere expressions of identity. Don Pedro and Friar Francis in *Much Ado About Nothing* construct fictions which are framed as responses to the isolating and hurtful self-deceptions of Beatrice, Benedick, and Claudio. All three characters, as spectators or recipients of revelatory deceit, suffer from false certainties about themselves and others: the more sure they are about their own view of the world, the more false that view is. The deceptions of Don Pedro and the Friar challenge these untrue convictions by presenting alternative realities which undo restrictive frameworks of understanding and, consequently, remedy falsehood. These 'false', fictional realities are essential to the process of paradox: through the 'study of imagination', they exist within the minds of spectators as possible contradictions of and alternatives to the realities they have established through self-deception and the deception of

others. This forces them to reconsider what is and is not possible, and also what is as opposed to what could be.

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind achieves similar results in her many-layered deception of Orlando who, like Beatrice, Benedick, and Claudio, must be disabused of his misguided convictions about love in order for him to love truly. Through her enactment of a ‘false’ identity, Rosalind is consistently able to challenge Orlando’s false ideas and his self-deceptive tendencies by confronting him with the necessity for direct, genuine human interaction. Her theatricality is a fiction which forces Orlando to participate in reality. Rosalind is like Don Pedro and Friar Francis in that she is clearly aligned with what is good and right, but far more than them, she is depicted as an intensely human champion of theatricality: the truth of her attachment to Orlando is never in doubt, so her deception is framed as an attempt to establish relationship – not to break it down.

These revelatory deceptions are juxtaposed with other theatrical deceptions which are, in fact, blatant exercises in destructive lying, such as those of Borachio and Don John: a scheming pair who wish to undo the trust and relationship between Claudio and Hero, and do so by presenting Claudio with a fiction which panders to his worst suspicions and tendency to jealousy. Importantly, it is not only the intention of the performers in this case which differentiates Borachio and Don John’s lies from those of their counterparts; it is also the reactions of their audience and the choices that audience make based on what they have been presented with. Claudio does not become less sure of himself; rather, he takes the information that he is given as an affirmation of his own insights. Unlike Beatrice and Benedick, led by well-wishing friends, he is not led to reflect upon his own shortcomings and to open himself to moral and relational possibilities by Borachio and Don John. His subsequent actions are based on bitterness and wilful belief in his own understanding, and so he becomes the most destructive character of the play.

This contradicts the antitheatrical view of theatrical deception in some ways, reimagining the relationship between performer and audience by placing a much greater share of responsibility on the moral discernment of the spectator. The audience's involvement in the theatrical process and the consequent requirement for their accountability is also a prominent concern in the depiction of Orlando's education through Rosalind's deceptive, revelatory instruction. Like Claudio, Orlando's confidence in his own knowledge isolates him from reality and prevents him from undertaking constructive, moral action within his world.

In *As You Like It* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, the dynamic between the performances of Shakespeare's plays and the effects of these plays on their audiences are reflected and engaged with through the depiction of characters such as Orlando, Beatrice, Benedick, and Claudio, and their reactions to the metatheatrical deceptions of Rosalind, Don Pedro, and Friar Francis. These depictions destabilise the notion of theatre as malignant deceit, presenting alternative understandings of the roles of actors and audience through the portrayal of the role of each in the process of revealing deception. This treatment of the relationship between spectator and performer is also present in the two tragedies discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation. In *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, the points of separation between actor and audience are undermined to an even greater extent than in the comedies. Hamlet and Edgar are both spectators and performers. They represent, from an antitheatrical perspective, the worst case scenario for victims of theatrical deception: they are wholly infected by the mimesis surrounding them – they 'learn to lie', 'to counterfeit, and so to sin'. But while the results of revelatory deception might be much more restricted in the tragedies than in the comedies, within the larger relationship between the play and its audience, their restriction does not mute moral imperatives: rather, it adds significant weight and urgency to the need for relational truth and right action, and envisions certain kinds of theatricality as a potential means of achieving these.



Hamlet and Edgar are victims of the malicious deception and destructive disregard for truth which characterise the theatrical universes they inhabit. These worlds reflect, in some ways, the concerns of antitheatrical writers: characters such as Claudius, Polonius, Edmund, Goneril, Regan, and their allies are all self-serving dissemblers, using powers of performance to serve their own agendas at the expense of others. The theatricality of these villains and the pervasive duplicity of the false realities they create place Hamlet and Edgar, as outcasts within these realities, as bewildered and abused spectators. The problem posed by their situation is how to survive and retain a sense of what is real, accurate, and good when outward appearances are so consistently removed from inward truths (in Maus's terms), when it is nearly impossible to determine whether and to what extent this removal has taken place – as in Elsinore – and when complacency, flattery, and comfortable ignorance are favoured above sincerity and plain-speaking – as in Lear's kingdom.

Both Hamlet and Edgar turn to theatricality as a mechanism through which to defend themselves and through which to establish or reveal truth. Through his antic disposition, Hamlet is able to put a distance between himself and those who wish to discover his position and loyalties for nefarious political purposes. In Denmark, authority is exercised through aligning all opinion to the overarching narrative constructed by Claudius. Hamlet's feigned madness resists this process, opposing and evading the assimilation or annihilation which the king would impose upon him as a rogue element within his carefully ordered false reality. Hamlet is an embodiment of paradox in his performance: he is contrary, variable, undermining, and disruptive in his existence within Claudius's world. As paradox is wont to do, the disruptions Hamlet causes reveal the limits and weaknesses in the reality they oppose: the truth of Claudius's fraudulent actions and the deceptive methods of his allies become increasingly apparent as they attempt to interpret Hamlet's behaviour. Furthermore, Hamlet enlists the help of a group of travelling actors to perform a play which reflects both what has been (King Hamlet's murder at the hands of Claudius), and what will

be (Claudius's death at the hands of his nephew). As with his antic disposition, the reactions of Hamlet's audience determine the revelatory nature of this performance, or deception.

Edgar, as Poor Tom, also reveals truth through his feigned madness and through the direction of a kind of play-within-the-play, although in ways that are different from Hamlet's antic disposition. When Poor Tom encounters Lear on the heath, Lear becomes a witness, or spectator, of Tom's wretchedness. This shocking, plaintive state triggers recognition and introspection in Lear, who shows empathy for the first time in the play when he interacts with Tom. The fiction of Tom is a truthful reflection of the reality of 'unaccommodated man', and of the results of the self-imposed ignorance of rulers such as Lear. Like Rosalind, Edgar offers a meaningful interaction which leads to insight through embodying a character who confronts and involves his spectator in previously undiscovered realities. Then, through role-playing with an unwitting Gloucester, allowing him to believe that he has survived a suicide attempt, Edgar endeavours to lead his father to come to terms with his burdens.

The effects of these revelatory deceptions are limited – the possibility of relationship and new life are, unlike in the comedies, denied to the characters of *Hamlet* and *King Lear* – but the kinship with the audience of the play which both Edgar and Hamlet establish means that spectators are directly confronted with their own responsibilities and choices, as spectators of the tragedies. In the comedies, the development of characters such as Orlando, Beatrice, Benedick, and Claudio suggest possible models of audience interaction with and reaction to what they see. In the tragedies, this fictional model becomes an even more real and immediate choice for spectators. They are witnesses to irreparable loss, and that loss might be their gain, if they should choose to accept the insight which the vicarious experience offers them: in other words, if they accept the invitation to participate in the paradoxical relationship between play and audience, between fiction and reality.

Of course, this is exactly what the antitheatricalists would have warned against. As noted in the conclusion to the first chapter, the truths offered by the revelatory deceptions of theatre are not perfectly conciliatory responses to antitheatrical arguments against drama as a form of lie. Rather, I would argue that the depiction of revealing deceptions in Shakespeare shows an awareness of the debates surrounding theatre and theatricality, and an attempt to contribute to and complicate such discourses on their own terms. Writing about the antitheatrical debates of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Tanya Pollard identifies the following key questions regarding the nature of stage performances:

Are they dangerous lies, leading us to act on false premises, or are they imaginative acts which use the shadow of make-believe to convey deeper truths? Does play-acting reveal something essential about a character ... or does it mask crucial features? Perhaps, most importantly, if the theatre has the capacity for both positive and negative effects, how – if at all – can we, as audience members, tell when it is performing which, or how we should approach it? (2004:xx)

This dissertation has attempted to trace Shakespeare's engagement with these questions, reading certain metatheatrical actions in a limited range of plays as paradoxical, revelatory deception in order to suggest ways in which Shakespeare affirms theatre as a creative medium which 'conveys truths' through 'imaginative acts', ways in which his works express the distinction between the 'positive and negative effects' of theatre, and ways in which they define and redefine the role of both performer and spectator in the revelatory processes of the dramatic arts. To this end, I have investigated how Shakespearean theatre reflected on its own status, taking its own paradoxes as its subject. I have argued that these paradoxes reflect the work of the theatre: to enable ever-expanding, ever more nuanced views of reality by providing a space in which opinion could be questioned, falsehoods undone, and ambiguities expressed, effectively enabling a consistent and vital process of negotiating the many uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts that constitute the nature of reality.

## References

- Abbott, G. 1600. *An Exposition Vpon the Prophet Ionah Contained in Certaine Sermons, Preached in S. Maries Church in Oxford. By George Abbot professor of Diuinitie, and Maister of Vniuersitie Colledge.* Early English Books Online. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A16485.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext> [Accessed: 8 February 2017].
- Abrams, M.H. 2009. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 9<sup>th</sup> edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Babula, W. 1976. *Much Ado About Nothing* and the spectator. *South Atlantic Bulletin*, 41(1):9-15.
- Barish, J.A. 1981. *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Bate, J. 2009. Introduction. In: Shakespeare, W. [1623] 2009. *Much Ado About Nothing* (pp. 1-12). Edited by J. Bate & E. Rasmussen. Basingstoke: MacMillan.
- Braunmuller, A.R. & Bulman, J.C. (eds.). 1986. *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan*. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press.
- Chambers, E.K. 1923. *The Elizabethan Stage*. Oxford: Clarendon. <https://archive.org/stream/elizabethanstage04chamuoft#page/306/mode/2up> [Accessed 6 February 2017].
- Colie, R. 1966. *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cooper, H. 2010. *Shakespeare and the Medieval World*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Crockett, B. 1995. *The Play of Paradox: Stage and Sermon in Renaissance England*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia Press.

- Crystal, D. & Crystal, B. 2015. *Oxford Illustrated Shakespeare Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dawson, A.B. 1982. Much ado about signifying. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 22(2): 211-221.
- Dillon, J. 2006. *The Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dubrow, H. 2000. Lyric forms. In: Kinney, A.F. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1500-1600* (pp. 178-199) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Duncan-Jones, K. 2005. Introduction. In: Shakespeare, W. [1623] 2015. *As You Like It* (pp. xxi-lviii). London: Penguin.
- Dunton-Downer, L. & Riding, A. 2004. *Essential Shakespeare Handbook*. London: DK.
- Dusinberre, J. 2006. Introduction. In: Shakespeare, W. [1623] 2006. *As You Like It* (pp. 1-142). Edited by Dusinberre, J. Arden Third Series. London: Bloomsbury.
- Hawkes, T (ed.). 2003. *Alternative Shakespeares: Volume 2*. London: Routledge.
- Egan, R. 1972. *Drama Within Drama: Shakespeare's Sense of His Art in King Lear, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Elam, K. 2003. In what chapter of his bosom? In: Hawkes, T (ed.). *Alternative Shakespeares: Volume 2* (pp. 140-163). London: Routledge.
- Foakes, R.A. 1997. Introduction. In: Shakespeare, W. [1623] 2007. *King Lear* (pp. 1-151). Edited by R.A. Foakes. Arden Third series. London: Thompson.

- Garber, M. 1986. The education of Orlando. In: Braunmuller, A.R. & Bulman, J.C. (eds.), *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (pp. 102-112). Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press.
- Gossett, S. 2000. Dramatic achievements. In: Kinney, A.F. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1500-1600* (pp. 153-177). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gosson, S. 1579a. *The School of Abuse*. In: Pollard, T. (ed.), 2004. *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Casebook* (pp. 1-18). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gosson, S. 1579b. *An Apology for the School of Abuse*. In: Pollard, T. (ed.), 2004. *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Casebook* (pp. 34-36). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gosson, S. 1582. *Plays Confuted in Five Actions*. In: Pollard, T. (ed.), 2004. *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Casebook* (pp. 84-114). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gurr, A. 1992. *The Shakespearean Stage: 1574-1642*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gurr, A. 2004. *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harsnett, S. 1603. *A declaration of egregious popish impostures*. Early English Books. Online. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A02750.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext> [Accessed: 17 February 2017].
- Henze, R. 1971. Deception in *Much Ado About Nothing*. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 11(2):187-201.
- Heywood, T. 1612. *An Apology for Actors*. In: Pollard, T. (ed.), 2004. *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Casebook* (pp. 213-254). Oxford: Blackwell.

- Hibbard, G.R. 1987. Introduction. In: Shakespeare, W. [1623] 1987. *Hamlet*. The Oxford Shakespeare (pp. 1-130). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hieron, S. 1604. *The Preachers Plea: Or, A Treatise in Forme of a Plain Dialogue Making Known the Worth and Necessary Vse of Preaching: Shewing Also How a Man May Profit by It, Both for the Informing of His Iudgement, and the Reforming of His Life*. Early English Books Online. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?cc=eebo;c=eebo;idno=a03304.0001.001;seq=207;vid=16516;page=root;view=text> [Accessed: 7 February 2017].
- Hooker, R. [1579] 1676. *The Works of That Learned and Judicious Divine, Mr. Richard Hooker: In Eight Books of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Google Books. <https://books.google.co.za/books?id=fiRWA AAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false> [Accessed: 8 February 2017].
- Horwich, R. 1978. Integrity in Macbeth: the search for the 'Single State of Man'. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29(3):365-373.
- Howard, J. 1988. Crossdressing, the theatre, and gender struggle in early modern England. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39(4):418-440.
- Kastan, D.S. 2014. *A Will to Believe: Shakespeare and Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Klein, J.L. 1977. The bait of falsehood. *College Literature*, 4(3):220-224.
- Kinney, A.F. (ed.). 2000. *The Cambridge companion to English literature 1500-1600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Knapp, J. 2002. *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Latham, A. 1975. Introduction. In: Shakespeare, W. [1623] 1975. *As You Like It* (pp. ix-xci). London: Methuen.

- Levine, L. 1994. *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization, 1579-1642*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lodge, T. 1579. *A Reply to Stephen Gosson's School of Abuse*. In: Pollard, T. (ed.), 2004. *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Casebook* (pp. 37-61). Oxford: Blackwell.
- MacIntyre, J. 1982. Truth, lies and poesie in *King Lear*. *Renaissance and Reformation*, 18(1):34-45.
- Marinelli, P.V. 1971. *Pastoral*. London: Methuen.
- Maus, K.E. 1995. *Inwardness and the Theater of the English Renaissance*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Montrose, L.A. 1980. The purpose of playing: Reflections on a Shakespearean anthropology. *Helios*, 7:51-74.
- Montrose, L.A. 1996. *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Munday, A. 1580. *A Second and Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theatres*. In: Pollard, T. (ed.), 2004. *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Casebook* (pp. 62-83). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Muir, K. 1977. *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays*. London: Methuen.
- Myhill, N. 1999. Spectatorship in/of *Much Ado About Nothing*. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 39(2):291-311.
- Nagler, A.M. 1952. *A Source Book in Theatrical History*. New York: Dover.
- Nuttall, A.D. 2007. *Shakespeare the Thinker*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Platt, P.G. 2009. *Shakespeare and the Culture of Paradox*. Farnham: Ashgate.



- Pollard, T. (ed.). 2004. *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Casebook*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Prynne, W. 1633. *Histriomastix*. <https://archive.org/stream/maspla00pryn#page/158/mode/2up>  
[Accessed: 5 September 2016].
- Rainolds, J. 1599. *The Overthrow of Stage Plays*. In: Pollard, T. (ed.), 2004. *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Casebook* (pp. 170-178). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rankins, W. 1587. *Mirror of Monsters*. In: Pollard, T. (ed.), 2004. *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Casebook* (pp. 124-134). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Reibetanz, J. 1977. *The Lear World*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Righter, A. 1962. *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Scragg, L. 1992. *Shakespeare's Mouldy Tales: Recurrent Plot Motifs in Shakespearian Drama*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Scott, W.O. 1986. Macbeth's – and our – self-equivocations. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 37(2):160-174.
- Shakespeare, W. [1623] 2007. *The complete works of William Shakespeare*. Edited by J. Bate & E. Rasmussen. Basingstoke: MacMillan.
- Shakespeare, W. [1623] 2007. *King Lear*. Edited by R.A. Foakes. Arden Third Series. London: Thompson.
- Shepherd, G. 1979. Notes. In: Sidney, P. [1595] 1979. *An Apology for Poetry* (pp. 1-92). Edited by G. Shepherd. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Sidney, P. [1595] 1979. *An Apology for Poetry*. Edited by G. Shepherd. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Stubbes, P. 1583. *Anatomy of Abuses*. In: Pollard, T. (ed.), 2004. *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Casebook* (pp. 115-123). Oxford: Blackwell.

Thompson, A. & Taylor, N. 2006. Notes. In: Shakespeare, W. [1623] 2006. *Hamlet*. Edited by Thompson, A. & Taylor, N. Arden Third Series. London: Bloomsbury.