

AFFECT, ABUSE, TRANSGRESSION: ORIENTING AMBIGUITY
IN EARLY MODERN TEXTS

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation seeks to articulate how early modern texts formalize their affective qualities in instances of ambiguity. Positioned within the recent turn away from humoral theories of the passions and toward the rhetorical underpinnings of affect in early modern criticism, my project offers an interpretive strategy that privileges the perspective of the text by attending to the vulnerabilities of first-person perspectives in ambiguous rhetorical structures and figures. I argue that these forms signal more than sites of critical debate encoded in the text, as Shoshanna Feldman has suggested; they also privilege textual perspective and reveal affect to be a feature of form. I argue that textual ambivalence may be approached through the logic of catachresis in order to examine how these instances may be read in ways that maintain the strangeness of their didactic and disruptive capability. Reorienting how one approaches ambiguity, I suggest, exposes the potential of often ignored textual elements and suggests that early modern literature models an interpretive agenda dependent upon vulnerable perspectives.

Reconceiving the interpretive strategies solicited by each text, I argue that early modern literature embraces the benefits of individual and collective vulnerability. I examine how Marlowe's *Edward II* disrupts the binary structure of the king's two bodies in order to turn an accusation of weakness against authority itself. I turn to Donne's

poetry and prose to argue that it models a hospitable interpretive method that uses form to manage ambiguity from the perspectives of his textual voices while orienting readers to welcome the strangeness of his contradictions. I then pursue an analysis of Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I* that reorients Falstaff's function in the play as its unlikely focal perspective, a position that stages a resistance to the play's power structures. Finally, I briefly consider how my analysis bears on familial and rhetorical conventions in Shakespeare's *Tempest* and Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*.

Attending to the formal practices that construct literary affect, this project reconsiders the ways in which early modern English literature navigates the intersections of vulnerability that articulate a text's orientation to the cultural networks in which it was produced.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

SEEING STRANGENESS, READING WILDLY: THE POTENTIAL OF TEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE

The name of watchmen belongs to our profession; thy prophets are not only seers, endued with a power of seeing, able to see, but watchmen evermore in the act of seeing.

—John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (94)

As we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know.

—Donald Rumsfeld, Pentagon Press Conference, 12 February 2002

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool and to do that well craves a kind of wit. He must observe their mood on whom he jests, the quality of persons, and the time, and like the haggard, check at every feather that comes before his eye.

—William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* (3.1.59-64)

At the present moment in early modern literary criticism, when critics historicize everything—from the material conditions of culture to the politics of marginalized individual identities to the ontology of objects—I am interested in justifying the practice of close reading.¹ I am interested, moreover, in licensing a critical method that attends to the strangeness of early modern literature, that attends to textual instances critics have identified as ambiguous and incomprehensible. In this project I develop a set of ideas for how close reading can address the concerns raised by new historicist and other critics, concerns surrounding the problems of critical perception when reading texts from earlier

¹ I acknowledge that close reading remains a practice of literary critics generally, especially New Formalists. I discuss their practices of close reading in detail below.

historical periods. To this end, I take seriously the provocation that each text has its own kind of perspective—present in what poststructuralists have called “the play of language”—that calls to be read closely. I will suggest in this project that by attending to a third perspective—not the critic’s or the author’s, but the text’s—late modern readers can apprehend a text’s orientation to the culture in which it was produced and stand to learn something new about early modernity that has been hitherto foreclosed. As Frank Kermode suggests in *The Classic*, “the text is under the absolute control of no thinking subject,” neither the author nor the reader, and, further, it is “capable of saying more than its author meant” (80). The capability of texts to exceed the agency of author and reader, I call *textual perspective*. I use the term not to suggest that texts have agency in the way that human subjects do, but to describe the actions of which a text is capable that result in meanings that exceed an author’s intent. The actions of a text may be both indicated and evoked, both literal and figurative, both intimately familiar and distinctly unexpected, both discernable in the denotations of words on a page and resonant in the connotations that vibrate around them.² I intend the term *textual perspective*, then, to provoke a method of close reading that intersects author-focused criticism and reader-focused criticism to articulate a third way of approaching a text that attends to both the formal craft of writing as well as the practice of interpretation. I suggest that careful attention to *textual perspectives* helps illuminate the possibilities, the complexities, the ambiguities, the fabulous strangeness of language, especially the language of early modern texts.

In contrast to some author-focused critics interested in form, and in contrast to some reader-focused critics interested in how readers reveal themselves in their analyses

² David Willbern calls this textual force “poetic will.” See his book by that title.

or what feelings texts elicit in readers and thereby expose their interpretive and subjective vulnerabilities, I argue that moments of ambiguity privilege the perspective of the text itself and indicate how a text both protects itself from and is most vulnerable to interpretation. That is, when a text deploys ambiguous element that are incomprehensible, it prevents the reader from penetrating or interpreting that part of the text. Ambiguity functions as a barrier between the text and the reader, a barrier that I call a *textual immune response*. However, insofar as ambiguous textual elements also call for interpretation, the barriers they create are also sites of vulnerability, which may constitute a *textual autoimmune response*.³ I understand instances of textual autoimmunity in terms similar to explanations of the early modern English development of revenge tragedy. Like autoimmune reactions, revenge tragedies work from the inside out because the antagonist is part of—and often, in revenge tragedies, in charge of—the community in question, the revenger therefore has no official recourse toward defense or retribution which leads him to take matters into his own hands, the consequences of which are personally and often communally catastrophic.⁴ More than an artifact that “succeeds at its own expense,” an instance of textual ambiguity stages a form of revenge (3).

Moreover, I contend that instances of incomprehensibility unsettle the text’s cultural ventriloquism, or the ways in which either a text seems to reflect the world view of the culture in which it was produced or a culture’s values seem to speak through a text. Some interpretations, especially New Historicist, have come to expect and therefore take

³ I build upon Stanley Fish’s understanding of the self-consuming artifact in his book by that title and Christopher Ricks’s self-enfolded simile, examined in his *Force of Poetry*, to suggest that these concepts are caused by and perpetuate textual blind spots.

⁴ See Catherine Richardson on the difference between and combined development of Elizabethan domestic and revenge tragedies (26).

for granted this mirroring relationship between texts and cultures. Texts certainly do mirror or ventriloquize the cultural narratives that have become commonplace, but to assume that texts do this, or only this, is to foreclose the possibility that they may also be otherwise oriented to their cultures. I am most interested in the potential for alternative textual orientations, especially insofar as texts reveal and conceal meanings in relation to their own orientations, how indicative and evocative textual elements can render a text immune to interpretation or autoimmune when it summons and succumbs to its own vulnerabilities.

READING LIKE THE HAGGARD: FESTE AND WILD CLOSE READING

Feste, Shakespeare's fool in *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, provides a useful example for testing the basic lines of my project's methodology. In exposing the limits of first-person perspective—his own and Duke Orsino's—Feste models an attempt to reorient how he thinks about what he thinks he knows, especially when what he knows is strange, counterintuitive, or incomprehensible to others. In her assessment of Feste, Viola articulates his aptitude for astute observation and interpretation of overlooked details.

As Viola parts company with Feste after engaging with him in a street-side battle of wits, she ruminates on the wisdom with which Feste must see others in order to accomplish his jests. He is not only “wise enough” but also possesses a particularly noteworthy “kind of wit” required “to play the fool” (3.1.59-60). Defined neither by intelligence nor eloquence, this kind of wit requires Feste's careful observation. Though he shares his folly through clever language, Viola understands Feste to develop his jests by observing the moods (the emotional energies or affects) of his fictional audience as

well as the circumstances of the immediate situation (the timeliness) and markers of social class. As she says, “He must observe their mood on whom he jests, the quality of persons, and the time” (3.1.61-2). To play the fool well, then, Feste must read his audience and his environment. He articulates a response based on his ability to read these elements that are evoked rather than indicated, elements that are inarticulate. Feste, Viola suggests, reads the frameworks of ideology, temporality, and affect.⁵

Implying that Feste responds with sensitivity to these contexts and also like an outsider or one not altogether accustomed to his surroundings, Viola understands the fool to be “like the haggard.” As Maurice Pope explains the simile, the haggard and the fool both have to test and judge for themselves the potential threats and benefits of their environments (139-42).⁶ Viola suggests that Feste not only examines “every feather,” every nuance, every minor detail of his audience and his contexts but does so as a hired fool who is privy to the culture of his superiors for whom he performs without necessarily having the power to influence that culture.⁷ In other words, he has a perspective that is at both inside and outside of his context, both wild and close at hand. The inside-outside perspective is common among Shakespeare’s fools, but Feste also functions as a disrupting perspective, one that cannot be anticipated in advance and one that provokes others, with more or less success, to reimagine their own perspectives,

⁵ See below for a detailed explanation of how I understand the term *affect*.

⁶ A haggard is an untamed, newly caught or uncatchable, often female, hawk (*OED*). Pope suggests that Feste is like a haggard in the process of becoming trained or accustomed to his surroundings because he “checks” or notices and responds to every feather.

⁷ Moreover, Feste reads *every* detail, not just those that his audience might think significant. Roger Warren and Stanley Wells imply that this is the case a few lines prior to Viola’s assessments of the fool. In their *Oxford World Classics* edition of the play, they note that Feste even “sees through Viola’s disguise” as the young man, Cesario, when he prays, “Jove in his next commodity of hair send thee a beard” (3.1.44). See Warren and Wells’s note on this line (155).

attitudes, and roles.⁸ He takes license to criticize his fictional audience and does so at his own peril, should he speak too freely.⁹ Feste reads from a position that is not transcendent but ambivalent, at once powerful and vulnerable.

Feste reveals the stakes of this ambivalent position at the end of the play when he confounds Duke Orsino with a counterintuitive analysis of the difference between friends and foes. Orsino expects the friends to help and the foes to hurt, but Feste has something stranger in mind. He says,

Marry, sir, [my friends] praise me, and make an ass of me. Now my foes tell me plainly I am an ass, so that by my foes, sir, I profit in the knowledge of myself, and by my friends I am abused. (5.1.15-20)

In this speech, Feste is concerned with perceptions: his own and those of others. Feste's friends tell him what he either already knows about himself or would like to believe.

They confirm or amplify his first-person biases and encourage a vain, unexamined first-person perspective. Feste's friends fail him because they allow him to remain ignorant of his faults. Feste reads the familiar and comfortable paths of their praise as abuse, yet he reads the uncomfortable abuse he receives from his enemies as profit. Feste seems to realize that he can benefit from examining those encounters he might rather ignore and, furthermore, that his friends confirm while his enemies refute what he would *like* to

⁸ He is successful, for instance, with Olivia when he shows her the folly of mourning her brother in the first act, but his logic in the final act, which I discuss in detail below, is lost on Duke Orsino.

⁹ Consider, for example, the fool in *Lear*: he clearly and repeatedly judges Lear's foolishness for his reaction against Cordelia, and Lear responds with threats of violence (see 4.90-172). The 2013 Oregon Shakespeare Festival production of *Lear* manages the fool's disappearance from the play by suggesting that the king unwittingly fulfills his promised violence by accidentally killing him in a blind rage aimed against his daughters in scene 13.

Falstaff, whom I discuss later in this project, takes similar license with Prince Hal. Falstaff is also punished once Hal takes the throne as King Henry V and publically rejects his old friend.

believe. His enemies tell him what he may not want to know about himself and present a perspective that challenges his own.

Feste benefits from the criticism of his enemies because they tell him straight that he is foolish, but he must be willing to hear this criticism. He profits, then, by knowing himself better, and he is better off than those who attend only to what they want to believe. Feste's explanation reveals that he wants to know what he does not know about himself, and it is his enemies rather than his friends who are most willing to supply that knowledge. In both cases, Feste must read what is said and also what is not said, what is indicated and what is evoked. If he reads praise as abuse or abuse as profit, he cannot arrive at those readings by attending to content alone. He must also attend to the limits of what that content can say, to costs and benefits for himself and for those speaking to him, and to the moods implicated for himself and for others. In order to profit, Feste must be willing to entertain criticism, not just withstand it. He must be willing, in other words, to make himself vulnerable.

Though Feste does not explicitly state his willingness to entertain criticism, his speech implies that if he does take criticism seriously, he can benefit from it and avoid being made an ass even though he may nonetheless be called one. As a fool, Feste's job is to be an ass, yet that is not the function Feste's character tends to play in the text, and it is not a role that his character embraces. His response to Orsino implies that he does not want to be an ass because he reads as abuse the praise that he understands to be making him an ass. Rather than the role of ass, the function Feste's character takes is one of disrupter, or, as he says, "corrupter of words" (3.134-5). Furthermore, his wit and seeming self-reflective tendencies discussed above do not lend to understanding his

character as clumsy, conceited, ignorant, or stupid, but the exact opposite of these defining terms of the proverbial ass.¹⁰ When his friends praise him, they certainly make him appear foolish, and therefore like an ass. In his counterintuitive understanding of friends and enemies, he causes himself to appear absurdly inconsistent to Orsino. But, as I show here, Feste's contradictions create the circumstances by which he and others can come to counterintuitive and uncomfortable conclusions that lead to more nuanced understanding.

Orsino cannot understand the reversal that Feste spins when he claims to profit from his enemies because Orsino refuses to take a similar risk. Feste, however, takes this risk a step further. When Feste recites for Orsino the example of his own conversion of vulnerability into power by way of his enemies' abuse, he suggests a coded criticism of the play's highest-ranking figure.¹¹ Orsino has demanded praise and even praised himself in this play and is, therefore, in Feste's estimation, an ass. This is not the only time Feste criticizes Orsino in this play. In a prior episode, Feste performs an "old and antic song" at Orsino's request, after which he pronounces a benediction of judgment on the Duke:

Now the melancholy god protect thee, and the tailor make thee a doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal. I would have men of such constancy put to sea, that their business might be everything, and their intent everywhere, for that's it that always makes a good voyage of nothing. (2.4.3, 71-77)

Despite Orsino's single-minded pursuit of love and despite his insistence that he is an incomparable lover, Feste suggests that the Duke is internally moody, externally variable

¹⁰ See the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of ass, n.

¹¹ Feste is not, after all, the Duke's "allowed fool," so Olivia's claim that "there is no slander" does not apply (1.5.88-89). For Feste, then, to wield the power of his self-knowledge to criticize the Duke is to court his own undoing.

and unreliable, and entirely inconstant, that he makes his intentions everything and thereby renders them meaningless.

Orsino reads Feste's strange analysis of friends and foes as nonsense. He responds to Feste in a way that refuses to understand Feste's point, first when Orsino says "Just the contrary—the better for thy friends" (5.1.12). Identifying himself with the false, flattering friends, the duke confirms his misunderstanding. He tells Feste that his assessment is "excellent" thereby praising him and making an ass of him just as Feste complains his friends do. Feste denies this excellence and calls out Orsino for behaving like a friend when he responds, "By my troth, sir, no, though it please you to be one of my friends" (5.1.22-3). Orsino concludes the exchange by denying once again the logic of Feste's original assessment, claiming "Thou shalt not be the worse for me," and thereby exhibiting his ungracious, limited reading skills and his unwillingness to learn from perspectives that challenge his own (5.1.24).

Orsino demonstrates these deficits throughout the play. Consider, for instance, his insistent wooing of Olivia and refusal to hear her rejection from his ambassadors—first Valentine and then Viola disguised as Cesario—starting at 1.1.23 when he solicits news from Valentine who has been attempting to woo Olivia on Orsino's behalf. He does, however, approach the vulnerable position of accepting influence from Viola in 2.4, but her own fear of vulnerable exposure thwarts his ability to learn from this experience. He shows marked change in attention to her story instead of his own superiority as a lover shifts in tone from condescending or scoffing ("What dost thou know?") to curious (And what's her history?") to concerned ("But died your sister of her love, my boy?") (2.4.104, 109, 119). But Viola cuts off this scene in which she codes her love for him by explaining

her experience through a story of her hypothetical sister who loved a man, and Orsino once again takes up his fruitless pursuit of Olivia. While Feste can see the potential benefits of a vulnerable position, Orsino cannot.

The analysis of Feste and Orsino's street-side scene, with its instruments of abuse and the ambiguous figures that respond and correspond to them, is just one example of the way this project addresses the concerns of interpretation and the orienting functions of textual perspective. What Feste shows is that he knows his perspective is limited and potentially flawed, and he arrives at self-knowledge by reorienting how he reads his friends and his enemies. In his encounter with Orsino, Feste provides a useful example of how I intend to read the potential threats and benefits available in early modern texts. In addition to exposing the limits of first-person perspective to reorient how he thinks about what he thinks he knows, Feste also abuses the interpretive sensibilities of Orsino because the duke finds the claim that Feste is "the worse for [his] friends and the better for [his] foes" incongruent and incomprehensible (5.1.21-22). Furthermore, Feste uses this strange assessment to expose his own defensive orientation to other instruments of abuse: false friends and faulty self-knowledge on the one hand, and the risk of self-blindness entailed in ignoring one's assumptions on the other. He not only defends himself against the abuses perpetrated by his friends—by whom he directly claims that he is abused. He also defends himself against *himself* and the biases of his own perspective by attempting to learn from the fact that he may not want to hear "plainly that [he is] an ass" and acknowledging that to entertain *this* abuse is to "profit in the knowledge of" himself. This implication is resonant in his explanation to Orsino, and it is the very

counterintuitive point that the duke not only seems to find ambiguous but also refuses to try to understand.

Feste as both reader and corrupter of words bears on my project as a textual function rather than as a representation of a person. His embodiment as a character is formal rather than physical, marked by language of wit and riddle rather than physical description. His textual position transgresses the boundary between inside participant in the narrative of the play and outside observer. His textual form, then, is exactly like the haggard: able to engage within the confines of a set environment while nonetheless transgressing those confines. Even in service to others, like the haggard, Feste remains wild and strange. Yet Feste offers an interpretive protocol that models a method of close reading ambiguity for others within his own text.

THE POTENTIAL OF EARLY MODERN PASSIONS: READING RHETORICAL AFFECT

Though much of the critical work on early modern affect has hinged on assessments of humoral theory, a relatively recent and still under-theorized shift in early modern affect studies has seen a move away from embodied and medicalized treatments of emotion in favor of exploring affect's rhetorical underpinnings for early modern writers.¹² My project suggests a return to form in light of critical approaches that

¹² Benedict Robinson, Daniel Gross, and Thomas Dixon are a few of the critics who have recently called for a rhetorical approach to early modern affect, in contrast to the work on early modern humoral theories of the passions by theorists like Gail Kern Pastor, Mary Floyd-Wilson, and others.

Ben Saunders also approaches a formalization of desire in his *Desiring Donne: Poetry, Sexuality, Interpretation*. Saunders suggests that bodily responses are effected by the formalization of affect, that affect cannot be understood as something natural and existing prior to social order, which he says structure the ways in which affects may be available to be felt and articulated. Eliding affect with human feeling and the concept *formal* with what might be considered *socially proper*, he explains the ways in which language is related to affect by analogy, showing how the forms taken by eating rituals inform bodily feelings like hunger and disgust.

privilege the reader, body, identity, and context. In effect, my project reassesses W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and M. C. Beardsley's concerns in "The Affective Fallacy." In Wimsatt and Beardsley's words,

The Affective Fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its *results* (what it *is* and what it *does*), a special case of epistemological skepticism, though usually advanced as if it had far stronger claims than the overall forms of skepticism. It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects and ends in impressionism and relativism. The outcome...is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear (31, emphasis original).

While I am skeptical of their distinction between what a poem is and what it does in some circumstances, I am sympathetic to their point that what a text makes a reader feel is beside the point of textual criticism. It is, perhaps, a cultural side-effect of their pronouncement that Fredric Jameson evokes when he claims that affect is waning in postmodernity, in his *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. While affect studies continues to face criticisms that expressly reject the vagueness of some of their assertions, the current vogue of Affect Theory suggests that Jameson was mistaken to disregard the ways in which affect impacts culture, such that newer texts in the field explicitly express the need to no longer even acknowledge Jameson's pronouncement. Eugenie Brinkema, for instance, opens the preface to her recent project, *The Forms of the Affects*, with "Is there any remaining doubt that we are fully within the Episteme of the

While I agree with Saunders, this is not the kind of affective form my project addresses. His project presupposes a human (or a representation of a human) subject managing human *feelings*, which my project distinguishes from both *affect* and *emotion*, concepts that other early modern critics also tend to merge. I discuss this distinction in greater detail below. My project attempts instead to understand *textual affect* through a text's formal habits and orientations. Thus, I am not concerned with the destruction or preservation or transformation of *feeling* when it is translated into the forms of language.

Also influential to my thinking about affect and form, Eugenie Brinkema's work on form and affect in film asserts that this rhetorical shift in affect studies is happening in all kinds of textual criticisms that investigate affect, across period, genre, and medium.

Affect? Must one even begin an argument anymore by refuting Fredric Jameson's infamous description of the 'waning of affect' in postmodernity?" (xi). My own concerns with the tendency of critical inattention to its own biases, as well as the concerns of most opponents to Affect Theory's vague appropriation of readerly feeling as a useful critical tool, echoes the concerns of Wimsatt and Beardsley, who were reacting against similar tendencies in the prior generation of literary critics. Furthermore, I similarly contend that, when one interprets a work of literature based on readerly feeling or even on historical evidence that fills gaps left in the text, one does not actually interpret the early modern text but instead reads and interprets another reader reading a text. Thus my project responds to reader-focused theories of affect that more or less still read texts for how they make a reader feel, while also calling for renewed skepticism of the often implicit, but remarkably New Critical, insistence on the authority of the critic (or reader) that persists among early modern critics and that privileges the critic's reading over the potential meanings of the text.

While my project's emphasis on ambiguous elements finds footing in the recent return to formalism among literary critics, I propose that a reconsideration of formalism by way of the affective turn in current early modern scholarship could further illuminate a text's orientation within the culture in which it was produced.¹³ My project engages with the questions proffered by early modern critics interested in this turn, questions that

¹³ William Empson and Erich Auerbach are notable formalists who also attended to cultural and material contexts in the heyday of New Criticism, both of whom, in addition to the critics and movements named above, influence my project. As is clear from the attention to readerly and textual orientations sustained so far in this chapter, my return to form does not seek to ignore context nor to concretize formal readings according to a conservative agenda akin to that of early twentieth-century American New Critics. Instead, I deploy attention to form as a tactic for expanding the possibilities for readings while also preventing to possibilities from wandering too far afield from meaningful, critical examination.

Heather Dubrow makes plain in her forward to a recent Palgrave volume devoted to *New Formalisms and Literary Theory*:

New Formalists pose questions about agency: To what extent is the author responsible? The audience? The culture? Similar questions arise as well in endeavors ranging from performance criticism to the recent interest in cognitive theory and the study of visualities. Debates about how form relates to historical and political pressures, the inquiry that many see as the core of a New Formalism, have been of interest to feminists, other students of gender, and, of course, materialist critics (viii).

Focusing on textual perspectives, my project offers to early modern literary and affect studies a method of analysis that interprets affect *in* and *as* textual form rather than as readerly feeling. In other words, my project returns to formal analysis that attends to textual perspective on culture as it is mediated by what I am calling *rhetorical affect*.

Rhetorical affect neither captures the odd idea that a text itself has feelings nor is the term concerned with how a text elicits feelings in a reader. Instead, rhetorical affect refers to the evocative, suggested, but not directly stated, and often ambiguous meanings that underlie a *textual perspective*. To clarify, I differentiate the term affect from feeling and emotion following the delineations posed by two affect theorists: Brian Massumi and Eugenie Brinkema. Massumi supplies affect theory with a basic definition of these terms, but one that remains fluid enough that it risks rendering affect studies so open as to be meaningless. Brinkema, in *The Forms of the Affects*, combats the problem of formlessness in Massumi's definition of *affect* that is not a problem for his delineations of *feeling* and *emotion*.¹⁴ His differentiation of *affect* from *feeling* and *emotion* is nonetheless useful for distinguishing the difference I will draw between bodily sensations and rhetorical affect.

¹⁴ I discuss Brinkema's criticism of Massumi's (and other Deleuzian theorists') understanding of *affect* below.

Following Massumi's basic delineations of these terms, I understand *feeling* as the individual, bodily encounters with sensations that one recognizes and names based on prior experiences. One names these experiences with terms like anger, fear, joy, and sadness. Thus, without language one does not have *feelings* because one cannot name them, but one can express *emotions* that may be interpreted by others. When others read these unarticulated expressions, they are not witnessing feeling but *affect*. Others, according to Massumi, interpret this affect based on their own prior experiences with their own feelings and with their interpretations of other emotional displays. Emotion is the display of these named bodily feelings that may be performed for and interpreted by others. Sometimes emotions express the feelings of a person, but sometimes emotions express the socially appropriate feeling response to a situation and do not correspond to actual feelings. Sincere or contrived, emotion is social, while feeling is personal; affect is neither personal nor social but pre-social.¹⁵ He defines *affect* following Deleuze and Guattari, and also Baruch Spinoza, as "an *ability* to affect and be affected;" it is not a personal feeling but "a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (xvi, emphasis mine). He defines *affection* as "each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include mental or 'ideal' bodies)" (xvi). Affect refers to the underlying potential of both feelings and emotions. Massumi proposes that affect is also preconscious and equates affect with intensities that one could eventually recognize and name as feelings (*Parables* 30). It mediates the relationships

¹⁵ This is Massumi's insight articulated in his introductory remarks on his translation of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

between individual people, societies, and environments. Eric Shouse explains, “affect is what makes feelings feel...In short, affect plays an important role in determining the relationship between our bodies, our environment, and others, and the subjective experience that we feel/think as affect dissolves into experience” (7, 11). Usefully, philosopher Matthew Radcliffe explains the concept of *mood* in similar terms. In “The Phenomenology of Mood and the Meaning of Life,” Radcliffe argues that scholars have neglected the ways in which mood and emotion are terms that name different phenomena. Some moods, he argues, are not personal or subjective feelings, “not intentional states at all” but pre-intentional, “part of the background structure of intentionality and ... presupposed by the possibility of intentionally directed emotions” (350). Moods are that through which we experience the world. He then goes on to argue that ‘deep’ moods, unlike emotions in this respect too, are pre-intentional, non-conceptual bodily feelings which provide “space[s] of significant possibility” (367). Affect, then, refers to something unknown, something that has been neither felt nor articulated, but something, I argue, that might be approachable from a textual subjective position by attending to instances of ambiguity that evoke something that cannot be anticipated.

An oft-noted problem for Deleuzian-influenced affect theorists is that they tend to understand affect as a generality, as formless potential that can describe the ways in which literature, for instance, *moves* readers rather than transmits meaning. Eugenie Brinkema, however, suggests that the formlessness of these affective approaches causes them to lose not only specificity but also “the wild and many fecundities of specificity: difference, change, the particular, the contingent (*and*) the essential, the definite, the distinct, all dense details, and—[evoking just] the spirit of Deleuze—the minor,

inconsequential, secret, atomic” (Brinkema xv, emphasis original).¹⁶ She further argues that this loss results in tedious arguments, chiefly arguments based on abstractions akin to readerly feeling rather than on “any particular textual workings” (Brinkema xiii).¹⁷ She calls for a formalization of affect to combat this impulse in current affect theory, which, for her, “offer[s] all repetition with no difference” and therefore no meaning (Brinkema xiii). Grounding her work in a much older tradition of rhetorical theory, Brinkema argues that assigning a vocabulary of form to what other theorists have claimed is formless despite being textual helps affect theorists specify difference and transform textual affect “into something [neither] given in advance, [nor] apprehendable except through the thickets of formalist analysis” (xv). In other words, Brinkema’s solution deploys formal, textual analysis to preempt the major criticisms of Affect Theory. By linking affect to textual form, Brinkema avoids a theory of affect that relies on readerly feeling, and therefore on the confirmation of biases already present in advance of reading, while also articulating an analysis of evocative meanings that have heretofore seemed unapprehendable because these meanings had been identified only as subjective readerly responses to intensity. Brinkema’s method instead grounds textual affect in rhetorical

¹⁶ Brinkema treats “affect not as a matter of expression, not as a matter of sensation for a spectator—in fact, not as a matter of spectatorship at all” but regards affect “as a fold, which is another way of saying that affect will be read for as forms” (36).

¹⁷ Brinkema’s criticism here represents a major complaint common among other kinds of literary critics against the vague or contingent readings affect theory seems sometimes to produce. See, for instance, Ruth Leys’s “The Turn to Affect: A Critique” in which Leys interrogates the claims of recent affect theorists, such as Massumi, that affect exists separately from meaning. Other works that have been critical of affect theorists’ lack of specificity include Claire Hemmings’s “Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn,” which responds with skepticism to both Massumi and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s affect theories; Constantina Papoulias and Felicity Callard’s, “Biology’s Gift: Interrogating the Turn to Affect,” which specifically criticizes Massumi’s tendency toward confirmation bias when appropriating the insights of neuroscience in order to develop his theory of affect, and, more recently, Daniel Gross’s *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle’s “Rhetoric” to Modern Brain Science* and Martha Nussbaum’s *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*.

form. Following Brinkema, my project examines the instances of textual affect that are potentially discoverable in occurrences of substantive and formal ambiguity.

I am interested, then, in a text's vacillation between what it *knows*, so to speak, but hides and what it does not *know* but nonetheless reveals. I discuss these epistemological concerns in detail below. In brief, what a text *knows*, it either directly asserts or else *hides* in figurative language; what a text does not know, it might reveal in patterns, sounds, cuts or other formal elements that do not necessarily articulate, but nonetheless suggest, meaning. These vacillations between what a text knows and what it does not are important because they suggest that textual ambiguity is one result of tensions in the thematic center of a text. Each text I examine in this study foregrounds ambiguity at the intersections of substantive crises of immunity and autoimmunity. By substantive instances of immunity and autoimmunity, I refer to the ways in which the narratives of a text are driven by plots that involve outside attacks—whether from outside of a community, a family, or an individual—that elicit defensive immune responses, or by plots that involve self-destructive autoimmune responses. Some textual narratives are driven by both kinds of plots. Such intra-textual crises threaten annihilation of communities from within kingdoms, from within families, and from within individual bodies: crises involving, for instance, the disruptive rule of inept kings, the presumed misrule imposed by the friends of new and future kings, the illness and finality approaching at the end of one's life. The texts I write about include Christopher Marlowe's *Edward the Second*, William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1*, and John Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* and select *Songs and Sonnets*. This project also briefly considers Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest* as well as John

Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. Each text in question evokes ambiguity in rhetorical forms and structures that frame these crises. The vacillations of ambiguity between form and thematics, I argue, suggest that each text's affective orientations are themselves ambivalent: wavering between extremes of vulnerability and defense, attraction and repulsion.¹⁸ My analysis suggests, then, that each text orients itself to the culture in which it was produced by formalizing an ambivalent affect, namely *disgust*.

Far from naming simply a rejection or repulsion, disgust simultaneously names an attraction or a desire.¹⁹ In "Sexual Disgust," Jonathan Dollimore articulates the ambivalence of disgust through Freud and Bataille and argues that "the relationship between desire and disgust is especially significant in the arena of sexuality where complex responses are at once registered, concealed and indeed repressed in that misleadingly simple designation, 'sexual preference'" (47). Dollimore picks up the problematic implications of Peter Stallybrass's and Allon White's influential assertion in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, that "disgust always bears the imprint of desire," in order to articulate a resistance to a simple Freudian understanding of this

¹⁸ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *ambivalent* as "having either or both of two contrary or parallel values, qualities or meanings; entertaining contradictory emotions (as love and hatred) towards the same person or thing; acting on or arguing for sometimes one and sometimes the other of two opposites; equivocal." Though the word itself was not in current usage in the early modern period, the *Oxford English Dictionary* links *ambivalence* to synonymous words that were in use, and pertinent to my project, including *ambiguity*, *doubleness*, and *indifferency*.

Though ambivalence is often not regarded as a useful textual feature, I discuss below how Stephen Orgel finds it useful. Furthermore, Amelie Rorty in "A Plea for Ambivalence" similarly suggests that ambivalence can be worth preserving and even constructive for greater civic good.

Of course, texts can be oriented in relation to their cultures in many, and even contradictory, ways. This project is particularly interested in the ways in which textual orientations may be ambivalent. Therefore, it focuses on orientations within this frame. However, this project is also concerned with the ways in which orientations may neglect their blind spots. Thus, I acknowledge this focus as a blind spot within this project, one to which future projects may be better suited to attend.

¹⁹ Disgust is also an affect concerned also with orientations, toward and against. Attending to the disgusting helps a reader see the blind spots involved in the turning of these orientations.

statement, a resistance that I maintain despite asserting a similar relationship between the two terms (Stallybrass and White 191; Dollimore 55 n. 7). In addition to these studies, newer projects highlight the ambivalence of disgust. In her editorial introduction to the special edition of the journal *Film-Philosophy*, entitled “The Disgust Issue,” Tina Kendall writes that disgust is “a form both of repulsion (inciting nauseated recoil and rejection) and attraction (sticky and contagious, it entices us to look, to linger, to tarry with the disgusting thing)” and that this ambivalence “makes it a particularly useful focal point for some of the questions that have concerned film theory and philosophy in recent years” (2).²⁰ While Sianne Ngai expressly states in *Ugly Feelings* that disgust is an “intense and *unambivalent* negativity” and that disgust differs from desire, offering “an entirely different set of aesthetic and critical possibilities... and a different set of limitations,” she also acknowledges that “artists as well as philosophers have demonstrated that desire and disgust are dialectically conjoined” (353, 345, 332, emphasis mine). She turns to Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* to explain how desire and disgust are interdependent and, at times, interchangeable, suggesting despite her claims otherwise that her concept of disgust is in fact ambivalent (353).²¹

In his study of disgust in early modern literature, “Disgust C. 1600,” Benedict Robinson emphasizes the ambivalence of disgust for early moderns. He understands

²⁰ Appearing in the same issue, Jennifer Barker’s article, “Chew on This: Disgust, Delay, and the Documentary Image in *Food, Inc.*,” emphasizes that this documentary formalizes the ambivalence of disgust. Similarly, Brinkema deploys a formalist analysis of what she calls this “paradox of disgust” and credits Austrian phenomenologist Aurel Kolnai (in *Der Ekel*) with bridging the gap between two philosophical positions on disgust: “the prohibitive accounts of the eighteenth-century aestheticians and the revaluations of the twentieth-century anti-metaphysicians” (161, 166).

²¹ This brief account of disgust’s ambivalent contours shows that disgust attracts and repulses similarly to the ways in which the kinds of literature that Derrida calls untranslatable in “Des Tours” both solicit and reject translation. Disgust, then, is formally aligned not only with the potential of affect generally but also the perspectival category of the *unknown unknown*, a concept discussed in detail below.

disgust as satiated desire, and the resulting repulsion for the once desired object and explores how disgust is an important and newly emerging word in English at the turn of the seventeenth century (554). Specifically naming the ambivalence of disgust, he writes, “At once desire’s opposite and a form of desire, disgust complicates the pursuit of clarity in the analysis of passion” (Robinson 555). My analysis of early modern disgust suggests that a disgust response is formalized in certain texts that display disgust in all its ambivalence, both attracted to and repulsed by the networks of power in their culture, and depicting both the vulnerability of individuals and their power to judge and influence their situations.²² The ambivalence of disgust signals a different orientation than a mimetic one of celebratory attraction or condemnatory repulsion that attempts to translate the text’s concerns into the familiar delineations of allegory, for instance. Textual disgust suggests instead a text’s defensive, even passively resistant, orientation to the concerns of the larger culture that are central to the environments of the texts in question.²³ In *The Transmission of Affect*, Teresa Brennan understands affect to name an evaluation, a judgment, a discernment, an intuition, a perspective, and, in short, an orientation (5). My project, then, is concerned with perspectives—a text’s, its culture’s, and its readers’—and their orientations relative to each other.

²² Ngai also attempts to formalize affect in relationship to orientation, reading for “a literary or cultural artifact’s feeling tone: its global or organizing affect, its general disposition or orientation toward its audience and the world” (28). However, as Brinkema suggests, “th[is] strength of *Ugly Feelings* is also its greatest limitation” (35). Ngai’s project proposes to read at affect as form, but, as Brinkema notes, it attends to forms “solely insofar as they explain the ugly feelings felt by a reader or spectator” (Brinkema 35). The problem is that Ngai is not reading affect as a formal element of a text, she is reading how texts elicit feelings in a reader.

²³ Brinkema reports that Kolnai similarly understands disgust “as an aversive or defensive reaction” (160).

I first encountered the term “textual environment” in a poetics colloquium led by Karen Ford. I follow her use to describe the text as an environment in which textual components are entangled in complicated codependent, contradictory, or other relative relationships.

THE PROBLEM OF TEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE: ORIENTING A METHODOLOGY

Every orientation or perspective necessarily entails blind spots. Indeed, all individual perspectives are inherently flawed. In a nutshell, the problem with first-person perspective is that it is not only biased but vulnerable to being most likely to be wrong when it is most certain it is right. Dependent upon one's own perspective, one risks the possibility that a first-person point of view could be deceived, that it stands as a limiting factor rather than a foundational starting point for reading anything: experiences or texts. Open to deception without knowing it is being deceived, a first-person perspective is not only blind to what it does not know, it is blind to what it does not even know it does not know. No perspective, critical or textual, escapes this vulnerability.²⁴ My project investigates the ways in which ambiguous textual elements negotiate these shortcomings of perception in order to articulate a textually grounded interpretive method that acknowledges this vulnerability and, moreover, renders *itself* vulnerable when it cracks open the brackets that have limned critical debates.

The infamous Donald Rumsfeld quotation with which I opened this chapter provides an unexpected frame for the project's perspectival and epistemological concerns. Excerpted from a 2002 press conference in which Jim Miklaszewski, NBC

²⁴ My own project is, of course, subject to this vulnerability. The vulnerability that I articulate here is not the same as the critical worry of New Historicist critics that one cannot apprehend the past because one can only interpret the past through a present perspective. See for example Lois Tyson's point in *Critical Theory Today*:

the inevitability of personal bias makes it imperative that new historicists be aware of and as forthright as possible about their own psychological and ideological positions relative to the material they analyze so that their readers can have some idea of the human 'lens' through which they are viewing the historical issues at hand" (289).

The worry over historical distance is, obviously, an area of blindness that has been recognized as such. I am suggesting something different and perhaps simpler: that perspectives necessarily have blind spots that remain unacknowledged, and that lack of acknowledgment creates vulnerability. I am interested, nonetheless, in what has been obscured by these biases that emerge by virtue of one's historical position.

Pentagon correspondent, asks what evidence the Secretary of Defense had that Iraq was funneling Weapons of Mass Destruction to terrorist organizations, Rumsfeld refuses to answer directly.²⁵ His response has been maligned as a non-answer, as nonsense, as meaningless. Over time, though, this quip achieved higher status as a result of the contemporary sound-bite culture that extracts statements from their contexts, rendering this statement a “brilliantly pithy piece of popular epistemology” according to New York Times writer David A. Graham. Though Rumsfeld does not answer the reporters’ direct questions, he identifies the epistemological underpinnings of the correspondent’s inquiry. He articulates a simple way of understanding how one may be oriented to knowledge and perception, one that has been visualized for some time by theorists of group dynamics in a diagram called the Johari Window (see Figure 1.1 below), and, moreover, one that is useful for visualizing critical and textual perspectives. The Rumsfeldian/Joharian rubric offers a useful frame for understanding how literary texts may be oriented to the cultures that produced them and how critics may be oriented toward texts, and helps visually organize the potential readings available in what has been obscured by those orientations.²⁶ Applied either as it was intended to the perspective of an individual or, as I suggest, to a textual perspective, each pane explains one perspective relative to the perspectives of others, either other members in a group or readers of the text.

²⁵ See Errol Morris’s opinion piece, “The Certainty of Donald Rumsfeld (Part 1),” published online in the *New York Times* March 25, 2014.

²⁶ My discussion of the Johari window is indebted to A. Samuel Kimball, who first acquainted me with the usefulness of this model for literary study. See his article, coauthored with Timothy Donovan and Jillian Smith, entitled “*The Fog of War: What Yet Remains.*”

	Known to Self	Unknown to Self
Known to Others	1 Open	2 Blind
Unknown to Others	Hidden 3	Unknown 4

Figure 1.1 The Johari Window.

Intended to describe how humans interact from different perspectives in a group setting, and named for its creators, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, the Johari Window is explained by Luft in *Group Processes*. This figure replicates Luft's Figure 5.1 (60).

The open pane contains what a person consciously knows about herself and what other people in the group know about her. These are, in Rumsfeldian terms, the known knowns that everyone can know, regardless of perspectival biases. These known knowns may be surface features (the observation, for instance that a person has red hair) or often-displayed traits (like an observable tendency of a person to be shy around strangers). For textual perspectives, this pane includes the facts of the text: the plot, or the names of the characters, for example. Critics may address these textual elements in commentary, but the observable givens of a text are not necessarily debatable.

Whereas the open pane involves the readerly practices of observation and commentary, the hidden pane involves the critical practices of analysis. The hidden pane contains what a person consciously knows about herself but keeps secret from other people. These known unknowns are things that a person knows, *and knows that others do*

not know.²⁷ For a person, these hidden elements might include, among other things, invisible ailments (like an intermittent mental illness or early stages of cancer) or personal history that one chooses not to share with others. From a textual perspective, this pane includes textual elements that are available in figurative language, elements that must be identified as such and analyzed, their referents often translated into what the critic herself already knows about the text or its culture. Critics tend to focus on the hidden pane, on the knowable unknowns that the critic recognizes are available for interpretation. The critic working in this category operates under the assumptions that the text reveals something about its context by replicating it in figurative language and that this coded replication is available to be translated.

Similarly, the blind pane is concerned with the ways in which individual perceptions may be coded and thus also may be initially, but not only, addressed through analysis and translation. The blind pane contains what a person does not consciously know about herself but what other people know about her. These are also known unknowns (known to others, but unknown to oneself) and may include unconscious habits or nervous tics that a person displays and that others can see, or pertinent information about a person that has not yet been revealed to her, like a medical prognosis prior to consulting with a doctor.²⁸ For texts, the difference between the hidden and blind panes has to do with the perspective of the text and its blindnesses. In the hidden pane,

²⁷ Others know, nonetheless, that these hidden facets of a person exist and that they may at some point be revealed.

²⁸ Information moves into the open pane from the hidden pane when a person shares secrets about herself, for instance, and from the blind pane when others reveal information about herself to her, as when parents tell their children the circumstances of their birth.

the text formalizes its objects of analysis in figurative language that may be mined by the reader; in the blind pane the text evokes or performs the elements under investigation.

If we were to think about this in terms of a third perspective, the author's, the hidden pane contains meanings the author intended to hide and is aware are hidden in figurative language. Similarly, the textual perspective would be aware, so to speak, of these meanings because they are perceptibly stated as figures that may be named, categorized, and interpreted. The blind pane, in contrast, contains meanings that a reader might glean that the author did not know were available and that the text suggests without directly or even figuratively stating. These meanings are most often evident in formal structures and patterns. For instance, this sentence of mine evokes but does not directly indicate a gendered bias that remains at odds with the masculinized biases of at least my pop-cultural if not my professional context when it replaces "literary critic" with the pronoun "she" since no gendered orientation is implied by that title. For a literary example, take these lines of Edmund's in *Lear* as an example in which formal elements amplify the textual content to evoke additional meaning:

Here stood he in the dark, his sharp sword out,
Warbling of wicked charms, conjuring the moon
To stand's auspicious mistress. (6.37-39)

In this passage, meant to accuse the innocent Edgar of violent intent, the sounds and meanings of Edmund's words work together to create an effect that the text does not directly articulate. The sibilant sounds—*stood, his, sharp, sword, charms, stand's, auspicious, and mistress*—are enhanced by the alliterative H to facilitate an effect of hissing. This combined with the prolonged vowel sounds create an effect of thickness or heaviness. Add to this the heaviness of the repeated vowel sounds and Edmund's speech

drags readers (and Gloucester) down into the gravity of his actions here. As soon as Gloucester is hooked, mid line (“But where is he?”) Edmund’s language need not persist with its evocative repetition. The passage evokes the sinister intent of Edmund’s story (which is false, as readers know, but Gloucester does not). The passage suggests meanings, then, that are available in but not directly articulated by the text. The literary critic might be working in this pane when she identifies something in a text that the text itself does not thematize but enacts, like unstated biases that may replicate, oppose, or be otherwise oriented to the biases of the culture in which the text was created. However, the critical work that uncovers these biases complicates the problem of blindness because it is particularly disposed to replicating the biases of the critic.²⁹ Thus, this pane categorizes instances of a text and of the critic negotiating self-blindness, enacting but not necessarily acknowledging the problems of their own first-person perspective. The failure to acknowledge one’s own blind spots, I argue, often leads readers either to ignore or to resolve textual ambiguities rather than engaging with and reveling in their strangeness. Though some critics avoid or else tame ambiguity because they do not like it, their aversion is exactly the problem.³⁰ Put differently, our own critical perspectives put blinders on us that often go unacknowledged. The critic caught in this pane risks not only replicating the problems of first-person perspective and confirmation bias, but also not realizing that these problems are thus redounded. My project navigates these risks explicitly in order to turn the risk into an interpretive benefit that can better approach

²⁹ Of course, all critical work risks replicating the critic’s own desires and biases. In *Desiring Donne*, Ben Saunders investigates a similar idea of critical biases in his explanation of what he calls a reader’s interpretive desire.

³⁰ Below, I discuss a related problem—bracketing, or foreclosing discussion of certain textual components that are uninteresting to the critic or else irresolvable.

what a text evokes that may gesture towards potential meanings, according to this schema, in the unknown pane.

The unknown pane visualizes the space of what Rumsfeld calls unknown unknowns that one can neither directly read nor necessarily intuit. In Derridean terms, which pick up on a much older mystical tradition, this pane contains the sacred (insofar as he understands it as unapproachable yet calling to be approached in his “Des Tours de Babel”). In psychoanalytic terms, this pane contains unconscious desires. Just as unconscious desires may be recovered in psychoanalysis, these unknowns may be recovered into either the blind or hidden pane. As the horizontal and vertical lines running through the two panes indicate, the unknown pane represents the intersection of the hidden and the blind. It contains information about a person’s potential, what neither she nor anyone else yet knows about her.³¹ For textual perspectives, the unknown pane contains the intersection of the text’s protecting itself from the critic’s interpretations on the one hand and revealing to the critic its own vulnerabilities on the other. Though the unknown pane may be approached through these intersecting perspectives, the unknown pane is different from both the blind and the hidden because its contents are, at least initially, unknown to both the text and the critic. If these contents may be teased out at all, they emerge into the blind pane in the form of either textual or readerly blindness or else they emerge into the hidden pane in the form of figurative language that a critic realizes has not been fully unpacked in ways that do not conform to readerly biases. The unknown pane approaches the most problematic aims of literature and of textual criticism: to reach the limits of what can be known, of what can be said, of what can be

³¹ Obviously each of these panes might suggest the potential readings of a text. What I am referring to here is specifically the potential meanings that are not yet known.

represented. While these aims are elusive, I argue that much criticism forecloses them altogether when it tames or else ignores ambiguities of textual content and form that might gesture toward these limits.

EARLY MODERNITY AND A HERMENEUTICS OF AMBIGUITY

Early modern texts are especially suited to an investigation of the intersection between the blind and hidden panes of perception because early modern texts often both thematize and enact the blindnesses of first-person perspective. Yet critics have oriented their investigations of early modern perspective to focus not on these blind spots but on more blatant assertions of selfhood and individuality, including subversive representations, in the period.

Since at least the nineteenth century, it has been a commonplace that modern notions of the self first emerged during the Renaissance. Over the years, critics have offered a variety of explanations for this supposed change, ranging from the technological (the rise of the printing press and the attendant dissemination of knowledge) to the theological (the Protestant Reformation) to the ideological (the replacement of feudalism by the state and the spread of capitalistic structures of commerce and consumerism). The precise nature of this modern self has also been extensively debated. The degree of agency ascribed to it has varied considerably from commentator to commentator. Jacob Burckhardt identifies the self as a work of art that one could fashion or change as one changes clothes. Stephen Greenblatt rewrites Burckhardt's insight, insisting in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* that the self is not the agent but the object of any act of fashioning. More recently, influential critics such as

Gail Kern Paster and Michael Schoenfeldt have drawn out the paradox of a psychological self at war with a physical self; in their work, “self-fashioning” seems to mean something like controlling the passionate imperatives and excesses of the body. Although quite diverse in their methodologies and conclusions, these theorists nevertheless share common presumption: each assumes that it is possible to offer a diachronic explanation of subject formation over time.³²

My project returns to early modern literature not because I see a paradigm shift in this era toward the modern human subject but because early modern texts grapple with the problems of first-person perspective in ways that various schools of twentieth- and twenty-first- century critics have overlooked, fallen victim to, or both.³³ If New Critics asserted the authority of their own first-person perspectives as translators of texts, theorists of the late twentieth century have reacted against their assertion by multiplying and extending the biases of first-person perspectives or else by seeming to ignore these

³² Subjectivity remains a concern in current early modern criticism. In the words of David Hawkes in his Winter 2013 “Recent Studies in the English Renaissance” in *SEL*, “The politics and poetics of subjectivity continue to provide the basic matter for a sizable percentage of this year’s publications” (228). But as the medievalist David Aers noted in a sharply worded article some years ago, the supposedly “modern” aspects of self these and other critics find emerging in the Renaissance can also be located in earlier texts. Subjectivity has long played a role in explaining a variety of distinct historical breaks and paradigmatic shifts. See Aers’s “A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; Or Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the ‘History of the Subject.’”

³³ While the remarks about major critical schools that follow are not intended to gloss these large and varied movements into monoliths, the broad strokes with which I paint their orientations to perspective can, I think, be recognized in representative samples of critical works across movements. Obviously, there are exceptions. Those to which my project is indebted are cited over the course of my argument.

Furthermore, my approach is not meant to replace one polemical method of reading for another but to suggest the ways in which the shortcomings of seemingly oppositional methods neglect similar problems, in order to energize critical discussions that transgress the debates established by methodological boundaries. I do not mean to render their differences meaningless but to suggest ways in which their differences could be deployed to enrich the study of early modern texts. What I term *yes, and* thinking on this subject—similar to Heather Dubrow’s when she evokes Linda Hutcheon’s “both/and” model—offers a more collegial pursuit of intellectual aims that may help to invigorate the study of literature and the humanities in general (Dubrow xiv). My approach, then, has practical consequences for reorienting the ways in which critics attend to their own critical and pedagogical practices.

biases altogether. Structuralist and Poststructuralist critics seem to avoid first-person perspectives by sidestepping the role of authorial and critical intention insofar as they destabilize all human subjectivity as something constructed in discourse and focus instead on the constructedness of language and form.³⁴ Sometimes critics claim that meaning exceeds intention, but sometimes the two words seem to be used synonymously. However, as Annabel Patterson notes, in regard to the rise of literary theory in general but also of Poststructuralism in particular, “the concept of authorial intention has come in for a new and potent form of disesteem, as a result of the convergence of a number of disparate attacks on the related ideas of human subjectivity, of selfhood, of the individual as a locus of subjectivity or an (even partially) free agent capable of having intentions” (143). Making a case for the inescapability of intention, Stanley Fish suggests the possibility that other entities besides the author and the reader possess a kind of intention and a biography. He contends that “the spirit of an age or a literary tradition or a culture or language itself” can be “the sources of agency” (“Biography and Intention” 12-13). Reader- and Affect-focused theorists react to this formalism by asserting the authority of the reader—and therefore the reader’s first-person perspective—thereby entrenching their

³⁴ Though I realize my stance is not commonly acknowledged, I understand Poststructuralism to be a philosophically inflected continuation of Structuralism rather than a clearly separate body of theory, that is, in a relationship of continuity with its predecessor. I recognize that Derrida’s “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” has been identified as demarcating the line between Structuralism and Poststructuralism. Furthermore, I understand that Roland Barthes’s work has been divided into early and late periods that could be categorized as Structuralist and Poststructuralist, respectively. I nonetheless suggest that the later theorists (designated Poststructural) continue to work through and extend the ideas begun by earlier theorists (designated Structural). Furthermore, I assert that this division between the two has been arbitrarily assigned as a point of origin for Poststructuralism.

Indeed, intention is also a complicating and destabilizing factor in the foundational text of Structuralism, Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics*, in which Saussure’s intentions may or may not be represented by the intentions of the redactors of his material and his student’s notes. Though I refer to *Course* as Saussure’s text, I do so in full knowledge that its origins are suspect because the text is an amalgamation of student and lecture notes that were compiled and published after Saussure’s death, with neither his knowledge nor consent.

analyses in the acceptance of multiple first-person points of view and, thus, multiplying biases.³⁵ Historicist, Materialist, and other critics of culture or identity politics have also extended the application of first-person perspective in order to understand contexts, showing that culture ventriloquizes the first-person voices of a text. In other words, for these critics, the culture is available to read by way of a metonymic link to a text's first-person voices, implying that elements of a text can stand as part of larger cultural perspectives.³⁶

³⁵ Take, for instance, both early and later works of Stanley Fish. Fish posits, in *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, that "if we transfer the emphasis from Milton's interests and intentions which are available to us only from a distance, to our responses which are available directly, the disparity between intention and execution becomes a disparity between reader expiation and reading experience... In this way we are led to consider our own experience as part of the poem's subject" (3). His point bears on the entire project of his book and serves to transfer the primacy of perspective from the author to the reader, thereby covertly privileging the perspective of the reader as such and as critic. He amplifies this point in *Self-Consuming Artifacts* when he claims that the execution of his methodology "involves an analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time" (387-88). In a later project, *Is There a Text in This Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Fish amplifies the role of the reader further by extending it from the individual to what he calls the interpretive community. He says: "meanings are the property neither of fixed and stable texts nor free and independent readers but of interpretive communities that are responsible for both the shape of a reader's activities and for the texts those activities produce" (322). The position of the reader is also crucial for his argument in *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric and The Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies*, when he differentiates between a reader "thinking with" and a reader "thinking within" a particular interpretive practice, which is, in brief, the difference between understanding one's perception as it is informed by a particular practice on the one hand, and understanding one's perception as natural to oneself on the other (386-87). In either case, he still refers to the perspective of the reader.

³⁶ Jonathan Dollimore is one such critic who implies that a text ventriloquizes its culture when he argues, in "The Cultural Politics of Perversion," that texts such as Milton's *Paradise Lost* or Shakespeare's *Othello* replicate "a much longer metaphysical tradition privileging dominant social formations, sexual and otherwise, in terms of essence, nature, teleology and universality," suggesting that these texts replicate a much larger and long-standing western, cultural perspective (193). Likewise, when Dollimore describes textual perversion, he continues to discuss how a subversive perspective is replicated in the voice and actions of Eve or Iago or Desdemona as *characters* to show that "the perverse remains inscribed irreducibly within the same tradition" (193). Put differently, Dollimore's argument shows that early modern texts mirror (or ventriloquize) cultural positions of all kinds. Similarly, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, propose that their "poetics of transgression reveals the ... self-representation of that culture" (202). In contrast, my project attempts to see how a text orients itself to cultural perspectives rather than simply replicating them. My project is nonetheless indebted to the inroads that cultural materialist critics have made against the assumptions readers may make, especially when reading early modern texts. The cultural materialist investigations of transgression are particularly pertinent to my argument.

Each of these critical stances on interpretation— structural, readerly, cultural, and historical—tries to overcome the problems that first-person perspectives introduce into textual and cultural analyses, but each stance tends to exacerbate these problems.³⁷ These analytical agendas fall especially short, I argue, when they attempt to tame ambiguities in early modern texts that seem incomprehensible to late modern readers. It is in these strange or ambiguous or incomprehensible textual elements and the critical assumptions and brackets that surround them that my project is most interested.

While my project cannot escape the problems of first-person perspective, by acknowledging this problem inherent in all critical analysis, I can begin to offer a method of reading that seeks always to learn what I do not (yet) know rather than to confirm what I already understand. Building upon Shoshana Felman's now decades-old insight—that texts offer clues to their own interpretive impasses—I suggest that texts not only contain the conflicts that cause their interpretive debates but also offer intra-textual lenses through which to understand these interpretive impasses from the text's perspective as an inroad to managing ambiguity differently.³⁸ Whereas some critics have attempted to

³⁷ I do not mean to suggest by this, admittedly, broad assessment of the critical tradition that critics do not worry about the problems of perspective. Obviously they have and they do. In fact, I explicitly state here and elsewhere in this chapter that a major project of critical literary interpretation has been the attempt to overcome these very problems. Neither do I mean to suggest that authorial intention as meaning is impossible or irrelevant, or that the act and experience of reading and interpreting is without merit or value. I contend, nonetheless, that even as critics have tried to work through issues caused by perspective, bias, historical and cultural position, they have also tended to exacerbate the problems they mean to address and perhaps resolve. The critical methods that destabilize subjectivity, as I have asserted above, at the same time destabilize perspective and avoid addressing its problems. The critical methods that amplify first-person perspective present problem shared by inductive reasoning: whereas one perspective cannot logically extrapolate to cultural perspective, and a collection of perspectives offers a more reasonable assumption about the cultural perspective, it remains a collection of first-person perspectives, caught in the same propensity toward confirmation bias, which either attempts to translate or else avoids what it does not understand.

³⁸ Felman has usefully explained that when critical responses to a text are divided, the division may be traced to divisions in the text itself in "Turning the Screw of Interpretation." Following Felman, Saunders has suggested that critics of John Donne have been thus divided in their readings of Donne's desire because they mirror Donne's own divided attempt to represent desire in his poetry.

manage ambiguous figures by imposing methods of interpretation that translate, define, or resolve ambiguity, Stephen Orgel has argued that such tactics aimed at resolution may be impossible, that ambiguity in a text may be intentional, and that critics who aim to delineate the potential of ambiguous textual elements do early modern texts a disservice.³⁹ Though he targets key instances of ambiguity in *The Winter's Tale*, Orgel's point applies broadly: he writes, "modern interpretation represents an essentially arbitrary selection of meanings from a list of diverse and often contradictory possibilities and does not so much *resolve* the linguistic problem as enable us to *ignore* it" (432, emphasis mine). Orgel argues that how critics interpret "obscurity...is the real textual question, and it remains an open one," ultimately suggesting that "we do it [a text] wrong when we deny that it is problematic and has always been so, and reduce it to our own brand of common sense" (437). Similarly, Stephen Booth takes on a methodology in his edition of Shakespeare's Sonnets through which he refuses to shape the reader's interpretation but instead offers every possible interpretation he can muster. Booth and Orgel both pick up the threads of older investigations of ambiguity like Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* and Rosalie Colie's *Paradoxica Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*, and the more recent work of close readers like Heather Dubrow, Christopher Ricks, and Helen Vendler. While I agree with the impulse to privilege the text itself over the critic's often arbitrary reading, my project works toward a method of articulating both the formal and affective capabilities of these incomprehensible elements that avoids the imprecision

³⁹ See "The Poetics of Incomprehensibility," which takes on the editorial tradition since the eighteenth century in order to suggest that readers take for granted the meanings, interpretations, and resolutions of ambiguity glossed by editors. Orgel's purpose "is not to propose a new reading or to announce the matter [of textual ambiguity] resolved" (434). Instead, he intends to highlight "how little attention the editorial tradition has paid" to the fact of ambiguity in texts *The Winter's Tale*, observing for instance that "few commentators get beyond Pafford's observation [in the Arden Shakespeare (1963)] that 'the speech [of Leontes when he suspects Hermione of infidelity] is meant to be incoherent'" (Orgel 434, Pafford 166).

implied by affect theorists' readings of ambiguity as simply potential without attention to form. Working in the lineage of formalist practices of careful reading and willingness of certain critics to remain open to irresolvable ambiguity, I argue that when we ignore or tame what we do not already know or understand, we foreclose potential meaning available in early modern texts.⁴⁰

Thus, I am wary of critical methods that aim to resolve ambiguity, especially methods that resemble or rely on translation—or at least translation as it is commonly understood—because translation presupposes a teleological approach to conveying what one already knows rather than orienting one's encounter with a text with the intent to learn something new. By way of explaining translation as it is commonly understood, consider, for example, the literal translation of a text from one language to another. In order to accomplish this kind of translation, one must be able to read and write in both languages. In other words, one must already know, or assume, or impose in one's translation what a text says in one language and then simply report that knowledge in the second language. In "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," Roman Jakobson calls this "translation proper," or interlingual translation. He distinguishes interlingual translation from intralingual translation, or the rewording or interpretation of language using that same language. Paraphrase is, obviously, an example of intralingual translation.⁴¹

Metaphor (*translatio*), and figurative language generally, is also a kind of intralingual translation. As Derrida points out in "Des Tours de Babel," both of these kinds of

⁴⁰ While I agree with Orgel's impulse to privilege the text itself over the critic's often arbitrary reading, my project works toward a method of articulating the formal capabilities of these incomprehensible elements that avoids the imprecision implied by simply reading ambiguity as affective potential without attention to form.

⁴¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies this definition, "to express in other words, to paraphrase," as the chief current sense.

translation depend upon the assumption that the translator already knows the limits of both sides of the translative equation (198). Insofar as my project is concerned with the problems and biases of textual and readerly perspective, I follow Derrida to explore Jakobson's third category of translation: intersemiotic translation or transmutation, which, Derrida explains "interprets linguistic signs by means of systems of nonlinguistic signs" (198). Derrida rightly argues that while translation is a valuable and productive or re-productive task that extends the life and perhaps guarantees the survival of original texts, translation cannot be accomplished without the translator's own imposition on the text. Jakobson's concept of intersemiotic translation includes the surplus of the translator's own creative act as well as the unapproachable call always to translate that Derrida sees happening in both sacred and poetic writing. In this way, in its necessary impossibility, translation is itself a kind of abuse.

The problem I see with tactics of translation is the very problem that became associated with New Criticism and against which theorists focused on the reader and on identity politics react: the critic becomes the authority who translates the secrets of the text for other readers. This problem, the privileging of the critical authority, covertly proliferates even as it is criticized in the movements of literary criticism in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first- centuries. Even critics who have questioned the idea of critical authority as part of their projects for reading against oppressive societal norms—like feminists, queer theorists, post-colonial theorists, and theorists of race and disability, to name a few—nonetheless proffer, as a consequence of identity politics in some cases, the right to speak as *critics under their own authority*. While I do not mean to suggest that critics speaking from marginalized perspectives do not have or deserve this critical

authority, it is nonetheless a kind of critical authority, one that is particularly fraught by virtue of being tied to advocating for the rights and the voices of people who have been violently marginalized, oppressed, and abused.

The issue I take with a translational method in the face of ambiguity, then, is that one must already know how to read or how to resolve or how to explain those textual components that critics have identified as unreadable, unresolvable, inexplicable. Carla Mazzio, for one, has suggested in her recent book, *The Inarticulate Renaissance: Language Trouble in an Age of Eloquence*, that scholars have not attended to the unreadable in early modern texts. She claims in contrast what is unreadable because it is “‘inarticulate’ [is] a central dimension of developing language practices and ideologies in the culture and drama of the period” (*Inarticulate Renaissance* 1). In one of many examples, Mazzio identifies as unreadable and unresolvable Hamlet’s “poorly composed” profession of love to Ophelia, which includes phrases like “to the celestial and my soul’s idol, the most beautified Ophelia” and which even Polonius identifies as vile (177, 2.2.109-11). She discusses the “acute awareness” and importance for early modern Protestant writers of “the phenomenon of mumbling” (21). She explains that mumbling combines “inaudibility, incomprehensibility, and undistinguished syllable formation” and “suggest[s] (at best) inaccessible content, (at worst) no content, and (either way) a passive or active resistance to norms of community and communicability” (22). In John Donne’s *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, for instance, the speaker of the tenth station is quite concerned about how murmuring identifies “the greatest mischiefs, which are least discerned” (51). Similarly, Benedict Robinson identifies the importance of

unreadable words for understanding early modern understandings of disgust. He writes that

if strong feeling sometimes carries us beyond language, disgust does so in a particularly intense way, generating a repertory of sounds that linger somewhere between speech and gesture: in the early modern period, “foh,” “faugh,” “and “fogh” . . . theater can perform disgust in a way no written text can, although the theatrical script has to find some written equivalent for these sounds. Such expressions—are they words?—can carry a wide range of meanings. (559)

To Robinson’s example of King Lear’s “verbal paralysis” and “radical loss of language”

when Lear’s discussion of female sexuality ends with “fie, fie, fie, pah, pah,” I add

Viola’s description of her interaction with Olivia: “methought her eyes had lost her tongue, for she did speak in starts, distractedly” (560, *Lear* 20.124, *Twelfth* 2.2.20-21).

While Lear’s inarticulate sounds find equivalents in written expression, Olivia’s distracted starts do not. Yet her inarticulate orientations toward Viola make meanings that bear on Viola’s, and our, interpretations of Olivia’s character. Following Mazzio, Robinson, and Orgel, who also call renewed attention to the strangeness of ambiguity, I am interested in navigating ambiguity differently by reorienting the ways in which readers attend to troubling elements early modern texts. I attempt to read each text on its own ambiguous terms rather than cling to the assumptions of prior critical readings of the texts I examine. Ultimately, this project argues that ambiguous textual elements invite the strangeness of each text to speak, that via ambiguities modern readers can approach what a text both obscures *and* reveals about the contexts that frame it.⁴² Furthermore, attending

⁴² This is not to suggest that a text can speak for itself, that is, as if language could somehow make meaning outside of or apart from interpretation. I am simply advocating for a stay on the tendencies of critics to tame, translate, resolve, or ignore textual strangeness in ambiguous figures and structures.

to what has been bracketed will enable a reading that is hospitable to the perspectives and orientations of individual texts.

My thinking about orientation and blindness toward and within texts is indebted to Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*. Ahmed deploys the tactics of phenomenological discourse to emphasize the importance of one's literal and figurative orientations toward objects of inquiry, highlighting how orientations are formed through habitual action.⁴³ She argues that orientation is as much about finding one's way as feeling at home and that the paths a person tends to take are familiar ones set out by others. Ahmed turns her attention to the orientations of her own discipline and its primary texts, investigating how objects of inquiry are presented to her field (phenomenology) and which paths of analysis it tends to take.⁴⁴ Interrogating phenomenology's practice of bracketing—a practice that formalizes the act of ignoring what one does not want to analyze—Ahmed asks us to look at what has been intentionally overlooked. Of course, the impulse to draw attention to what others have overlooked is shared by other queer critics and, to some extent, by all other critics. However, Ahmed's project is important and also relevant to mine insofar as she mounts a critique of various kinds of orientations—queer, racial, gendered, to name a few—and the different ways these orientations may affect each other as well as the kinds of marginalization that they each sustain or prevent. Following Ahmed, then, my project examines the habitual actions of early modern criticism in order to reconsider what has been bracketed or overlooked or ignored in primary texts.

⁴³ Considering phenomenological practices alongside queer theory, Ahmed's project focuses on the orientations of human bodies. She proposes a model of how bodies become oriented in intersections of gender, sexuality, and race.

⁴⁴ Ahmed considers the blind spots in phenomenology that prevent it from seeing, for instance, the gendered and labor practices and structures that enable it to take the paths it takes and orient itself as it does. She also considers how other kinds of social orientations intersect with and shape each other.

Jonathan Dollimore and Ben Saunders have similarly and explicitly called for attention to the blind spots of critical practice. Dollimore understands censorship as a kind of bracketing and even proposes that “an exaggerated respect for [art] becomes a way of *not seeing*” (*Sex, Literature, and Censorship* xi, emphasis mine). Articulating the practices that enable critics to bracket their own interpretive desires, Saunders suggests that “the injunction to ‘always historicize’ and the concept of the interpretive community can both be construed as evasions” (*Desiring Donne: Poetry, Sexuality, Interpretation* 4). In response to such evasion, Saunders argues that “at some level we must make [texts] speak for us, of our desires, and not only our desires as individuals but also the collective desires that percolate and bubble within the osmotic boundaries of interpretive communities, desires that we sometimes call ‘ideological’” (4). While my project finds affinity with his in the call to attend to personal and ideological orientations, my project differs from his insofar as I call for specific attention to the blind spots implicated in not only one’s own desires, habits, and perspectives be they personal or cultural, but also those of the texts one studies.

Though my project is also indebted in many ways to Dollimore, I find Saunders’ approach to critical blindness more helpful because his project is interested in interrogating its own assumptions. Dollimore, who also calls for attention be paid to others’ critical blindnesses, nonetheless responded defensively when his own critical orientations come under attack in Neema Parvini’s critique of cultural materialism.⁴⁵ Having himself been “attacked repeatedly and viciously by various old liberal humanists

⁴⁵ See *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory* and *Shakespeare’s History Plays: Rethinking Historicism* both published in 2012, and see Dollimore’s reaction to both in “The Legacy of Cultural Materialism” and “A Response to Neema Parvini.”

for simply not ‘getting’ humanism,” as Parvini rightly points out, Dollimore recycles this academic culture of exclusion for a new generation of critics when he, with an overt tone of disdain, refuses to see the younger scholar’s analysis as valid and even approaches ad hominem attacks (“A Reply” 725).

In addition to these more recent projects, my thinking is also influenced by Michel Foucault’s agenda in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. His work similarly tries to discover, in opposition to dominant discourses, what those dominant discourses are not saying and how their silence upholds their dominance. In *Archaeology*, he writes that all discourses are “composed of signs; but what they [discourses] do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this 'more' that renders them irreducible to the language and to speech. It is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe” (53). My project attends to “this more,” to those elements of texts that are formalized, and not necessarily articulated, in order to attempt to read a text’s affective orientation to the discourses of its culture. To this end, my project examines formal textual patterns, for these constitute the habitual actions of individual texts.

This attempt to read ambiguity differently is an attempt also to interpret the gaps, the cuts, the silences that underpin the ambiguity in these texts, some of which may be intentionally ambiguous as Orgel suggests, some of which may not have been ambiguous to early audiences and readers, and all of which conceal information from postmodern readers. In an unpublished talk entitled “Rethinking Cuts in an Age of Distraction,” Bruce Smith made a similar point in favor of attending to the ways in which cuts, breaks, and silences are instrumental for our ability to process meaning in texts, arguing that

critics should not be so quick to fill the spaces they leave in a text. He noted that all perception operates in consequence of cuts; all *seeing* is literally facilitated but the usually imperceptible cuts caused by the blinking of one's eyes. Smith calls for the need of a phenomenology of cuts, understanding bracketing itself as a habit of cutting (Smith "Rethinking Cuts"). Making a similar point, Mazzio argues "for the affective and conceptual potential of the disabled [or linguistically incomprehensible] utterance" and aims "through a historical analysis to give the inarticulate a place in our understanding of Renaissance culture" (2). Thinking through instances of ambiguity alongside a critical trajectory and tradition that attempts to read the inarticulate, the incomprehensible, the gaps, the spaces, and the silences of early modern literature, my project attempts to approach the unknown by way of textual perspective in an effort to capture the evasive and problematic elements of both the hidden and blind categories and to reorient the ways in which texts may be read before their gaps are filled by historical or other contexts. One route to accomplishing such a reading is by attending to textual elements that readers may not even know had been missed.

Reading ambiguity, then, is not initially an act of analysis and dissection but an act of attention and orientation. Indeed when we attend to orientation, to how we are positioned both physically, temporally, historically, and ideologically, we may begin to see what we are not attending to, what we have turned our literal or figurative backs on. Attending to one's own orientations to early modern, or other historically distanced, literature is important because, as Ahmed writes, "orientations involve different ways of registering the proximity of objects and others" (3). Though late modern readers are not historically proximate to early modernity, attending to one's own orientation can help one

see “different [textual] objects, those that are ‘less proximate,’” those that are also indicative of a text’s own orientations (Ahmed 3). Texts themselves become the “orientation devices” by which late modern readers can apprehend how texts may foreground or foreclose their possible interpretations. Ahmed concretizes this path from attending to one’s own orientations to approaching alternative perspectives of one’s orientation devices by deploying the physical example of a philosopher’s desk from which she can explain more clearly abstract ways of thinking about the orientations of perspective. She explains that for philosophers “tables are ‘near to hand,’ along with chairs, as the furniture that secures the very ‘place’ of philosophy” yet this necessary space of writing goes largely unnoticed, receding to the background of the task at hand (3). Ahmed’s task, like mine, is to bring “what is ‘behind’ to the front...creating a new angle, in part by reading for the angle of the different ‘slant’ to the concept of orientation itself” (4). In other words, my project attends to the less proximate perspectives of the text that have receded into the background but that are not only vital to reading early modern literature but also supply additional orientation devices for late modern readers. Ahmed’s argument takes on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s account in *Phenomenology of Perception* of how “the intellectual experience of disorder...the vital experience of giddiness and nausea” may be overcome, or tamed (Merleau-Ponty 296). She suggests instead that “if we stay with such moments then we might achieve a different orientation toward them; such moments may be the source of vitality as well as giddiness. We might even find joy and excitement in the horror” (4). Similarly, my project lingers with and finds vitality in the strangest components of early modern texts.

My project suggests that attending to what I call rhetorical affect in instances of ambiguity can disclose the potential readings that texts both proffer and attempt to prevent. It attempts to read the strangeness of strangeness, the ambiguity of ambiguity, by reading each ambiguous instance in relation to the open frame of each text's perspective, that is, on the text's own terms and as literally as possible. This is, of course, a tactic of close reading, but the difference between reading literally and reading closely is that the practice of close reading also involves reading figuratively. Part of the purpose of my project is to tease out what figurative language and figurative readings obscure in an individual text, not just what they foreground and enable. For example, consider Prince Hal's monologue in the first act of *Henry IV*, Part I. He says, "I know you all, and will awhile uphold the unyoked humour of your idleness" (1.2.182-3). One may read the opening line figuratively as apostrophe directed at his Eastcheap companions who are absent from the stage. In this reading, Falstaff and company are the "you all" with unyoked idleness whose impending rejection Hal foreshadows. But if we read this passage literally, it reveals something quite different. A literal reading exposes an alternative understanding of how this play may be oriented. Alone on stage, Hal's character literally addresses either himself or the literally present audience. Addressing himself as *you* seems less fruitful and does not jibe with the monologue explaining what Hal's character as an *I* will do. Reading this line, indeed the whole monologue, as addressed to a "you all" that is the audience suggests a far more sinister intent on Hal's part and a far more vulnerable position for his future subjects once he is king. Hal knows this audience, literally sees them. As Chris Fetter writes, this kind of seeing articulates "a warfare of the deadly gaze [that] accurately figures a world of hostile espials, of

potentially lethal social penetrations, active at the heart both of the play, and of the political climate of contemporary London” (99). In his sojourn in Eastcheap that enables his surveillance of his subjects, Hal penetrates the common culture and takes a threatening stance against it in his plan no longer to uphold their present idleness. And this audience is literally, presently idle, engaged in the entertainment of play-going rather than in working. In effect, Hal’s line plainly reveals the tenuous position of common subjects to the whims of those in power. Reading this line as figuratively addressing “you all” in fictional Eastcheap misses this point that reorients the play to warn the audience of political rhetoric and espionage.

A tactic of reading literally, then, reads closely while attending to what is openly available (to again deploy the language of the Johari schema) in figurative language. The strength of this approach lies in the ability to reorient oneself as a reader to what one has taken for granted, for what may be obvious but has been ignored in other readings of a text. This method reorients readings by asking the reader to examine her own assumptions—those informed by her contemporary culture, by her understanding of the historical and material contexts of the text in question, by the critical interpretations and disputes of others, by her own prior readings of a familiar narrative—in order to attend to the potential of literature to reveal an orientation that one cannot anticipate.

SEEING STRANGENESS, READING WILDLY: THE POTENTIAL OF TEXTUAL ORIENTATIONS

In the remaining pages of this introduction, I sketch the contours of the project as a whole. In each of the following chapters, I present ways of thinking about close reading that take account of the assumptions and risks entailed in any act of interpretation and

that specifically attend to instances of ambiguity in order to articulate the interpretive potential of textual perspectives.⁴⁶ I argue that ambivalent formal elements signal more than sites of critical debate encoded in the text, as Felman has suggested; they also privilege textual perspective and reveal the affect called disgust to be a formal feature of certain early modern texts.⁴⁷ I suggest that textual ambiguity may be approached through the logic of rhetorical abuse, not in order to identify instances of ambiguity as *catachresis*, per se, but to examine how readings of ambiguity may be oriented using the logic of this trope in ways that maintain the strangeness of a text's pedagogic and disruptive capability. I argue that reorienting one's approach to ambiguity exposes the potential for meaning in often ignored textual elements and suggests that early modern literature models a way of reading that is at once hospitable to and dependent upon vulnerable perspectives.

Vulnerability is a crucial component of early modern orientations to culture. I have offered one example from *Henry IV, Part I* of the play's potential orientation to threatening political rhetoric and machinations within the boundaries of the emerging nation. In *The Pain of Reformation*, Joseph Campana explains that vulnerability is a vital concept for early modern England, what with the uncertain line of succession to the throne, stemming from the War of the Roses, threatening from within, as well as England being a nation-state geographically vulnerable to invasive enemies, like France and Scotland, threatening from without. The early modern preoccupation is legible in tropes

⁴⁶ My project specifically looks at disruptive components of texts that signal dissolutions of meaning, components that have created critical impasses for readings of early modern texts, components that threaten interpretation with incomprehension.

⁴⁷ See the discussion of Felman's point above.

of vulnerability, he writes, like Spencer's bleeding trees, and in defensive stances on chastity, masculinity, and nationalism (6). Deployed in defense of vulnerability, the hero encased in armor as well as his discourse on honor stage immune responses to threat that repeatedly fail and are repeatedly questioned by the literature of the period (6). Also in defense of vulnerability in early modernity, James Kuzner, in *Open Subjects*, looks to the poststructural perspective on vulnerability, which

find[s] therapeutic and political value in being unbounded, whether by embracing human existence as one defined by a deep vulnerability to words, by taking on the (at times terrifying) openness of pure hospitality, or by seeking to become exposed and so undone by being with others as to become utterly incapable of possessiveness. (4-5)

He sees these late modern perspectives in direct conversation with early modern republican ones. Furthermore, he notes that vulnerability is tellingly ambivalent, an ambivalence which was

familiar to early modernity but supposedly obsolete now (or so states the *Oxford English Dictionary*): namely that 'vulnerable' initially indicates not just... 'susceptible of receiving wounds,' but also 'wounding' or 'having power to wound.' (102)

Kuzner is also interested in how "we are oriented—how we can be averse but also attached—to our vulnerability" (2). I call this a disgust response to vulnerability that signals an ambivalent or passively resistant orientation to early modern ideological networks of power. Vulnerability, then, informs the possible orientations a text may take toward cultural threats related to the political, religious, and personal forms of power.

Picking up threads of both personal and political vulnerabilities, Chapter II investigates how Marlowe's *Edward the Second* disrupts the binary structure encoded in the familiar trope of the king's two bodies in order to critique sovereign authority itself. The text is marked by substantive disgust for weakness in the king and for the upstart

economic climber Gaveston. But this explicit disgust conceals textual disgust directed toward cultural understandings of sovereignty itself, especially in the parallel rise to power of Mortimer, against whom the same criticisms of ambition apply but are not levied. The play deploys structural elements that seem to reinforce the power of sovereignty even as it undermines it. *Edward* illustrates how easily ambiguities left by textual silences lead readers to make assumptions and to lean on extra-textual material in order to fill in the gaps, while showing that these interpretive problems are already apparent in the ways in which the text thematizes the reading of inarticulate emblems and body language. The play's orientation toward deciphering the inarticulate informs this chapter's ultimate argument: that Marlowe's text criticizes the nature of authority in general and disrupts the expected succession of kings to privilege a vulnerable space of hospitality to the outsider as well as the uncertain space of textual silences and ambiguities.

Whereas my readings of Marlowe expose the vulnerability of dominant political discourses and model ways in which those in positions of weakness may exercise strength, I turn to John Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* and select poems to investigate vulnerability before the unknowns related to death, afterlife, salvation, the nature of the sacred. Chapter III argues that Donne's poetry and prose models a radically hospitable interpretive method that uses large and small-scale formal elements to manage ambiguity from the perspectives of Donne's textual voices while orienting readers to welcome the strangeness of his signature contradictions. Donne's narrative and poetic voices confess an orientation of fear but the structural elements he deploys to express this

fear suggest an irresolvable orientation of ambivalence that exposes the speaker's vulnerable position of repulsion and attraction to his unknowable future.

Chapter IV picks up the political and personal threads of the other chapters, turning to Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I* to pursue an analysis that reorients Falstaff's function in the play as its unlikely focal perspective, a perspective which stages a kind of confrontation with the play's power structures. Like Feste, Falstaff demonstrates how to be a better reader of *himself* insofar as he relies not only upon knowledge of his own faults but also on knowledge of how other people interpret him. Falstaff deploys a reading method that extends beyond Feste's into a still more vulnerable position, turning his own weaknesses into strengths when he uses them to reveal fissures in the play's dominant discourses of power, especially those verbalized by Prince Hal. For example, Falstaff uses against Hal the prince's deception at Gad's Hill which illuminates both the play's orientation toward honor and the deceitfulness of Hal's plan to throw off "loose behavior...and pay the debt [he] never promised" in order to take power. Falstaff thereby shows that Hal is not only blind, but blind to that blindness. In effect, Falstaff deploys a reading method that resembles a passive resistance to Hal's monopoly on interpretation in this play.⁴⁸ Though this play's substantive focus on disgust for the body and appetite seems to overshadow Falstaff's no less persistent disgust for honor, the play suggests that the honor is itself nothing but appetite, rendering honor itself the very thing that disgusts those who desire to be honorable. The fundamental orientation of the play is ambivalent, attracted to and repulsed by the terms of a system that carries the seeds of its undoing in its own defensive rhetoric.

⁴⁸ As I show in the fourth chapter, I see Hal's monopoly on interpretation in the readings of critics who position themselves *on Hal's side* as well as in the readings of critics understood to be *on Falstaff's side*.

Finally, I argue in a brief coda that Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* and John Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi* suggest ways in which textual affect may be oriented to familial and dramatic conventions. I argue that when affect turns within the family or within the text, a text not only offers its perspective on these conventional structures relevant to early modern culture, its affect also becomes textually contagious, infecting and unraveling the structures of each play with the transgressions they thematically attempt to contain and control.

The figure of a watchman is a useful way to think about the interests, methods, and goals of this project. A watchman is spatially positioned to be a liminal figure, located on the border between the inside and the outside of the city, watching the territory without in order to protect the city within. Thus, a watchman, the first to see and be seen by approaching threat, is at once powerful and vulnerable. Though watchmen may take a variety of posts, I imagine the image of the watchman on the ramparts, like Marcellus and Barnardo literally on the border of the castle, keeping watch over Elsinore, and encountering the inexplicable and the strange in *Hamlet's* opening scene. Both and neither inside and outside, at once exposed and protected, a textual watchman stands at the intersection of a text's immunity and autoimmunity, its methods of resisting interpretation and the ways in which it opens up interpretation and even undoes itself, its hidden and unknown panes on the one hand and its open and blind panes on the other. Donne names himself and presumably his priestly peers, if not all of humankind, "watchmen" in the *Devotions*. When he writes "the name of watchmen belongs to our profession; thy prophets are not only seers, endued with a power of seeing, able to see,

but watchmen evermore in the act of seeing,” he not only thematizes the liminality and vulnerability of his text’s perspective (*Devotions* 94). He also names its strength in *seeing*. Donne’s watchman, like the other textual features examined in this study, is an ambiguous figure that attends to seeing what others do not, that both exposes and protects a text’s ambivalent perspectives and orientations. This introduction has examined Feste as one such figure. The remaining chapters of this project illuminate others.

CHAPTER II

REVEALING SILENCE, AMBIVALENT GAPS, AND THE KING'S THREE BODIES IN MARLOWE'S *EDWARD THE SECOND*

As every reader of early modern literature knows, a single king's body is already multiple. As a man, a king has a natural body, which exists physically in time and is obviously vulnerable to decay and death. As the embodiment of the state, a king has a supernatural body, which is not physical but eternal, a rhetorically constructed body that establishes the unending supremacy of the king, which thwarts the decay of the natural body and unifies the commonwealth. Elizabethans understood the power this doctrine offered as well as its limitations. Edmund Plowden offers a concise, contemporaneous description:

Altho' the natural Body of the King is subject to Infancy, yet when the Body politic is conjoind with it, and one Body is made of them both, the whole Body shall have all the Properties, Qualities and Degrees of the Body politic which is the greater and more worthy, and in which there is not nor can be any Infancy. (217)¹

The body of a king, then, is glorified by the incarnation of kingliness, identified with the body politic. The doctrine enables kings to rule by virtue of this incarnation, but it also limits their rule within the bounds of what amounts to precedent: because the king's decisions, like his political body, are eternal, one king cannot overturn the ruling of a

¹ Edmund Plowden. *The commentaries, or reports of Edmund Plowden, of the Middle-Temple, Esq; and apprentice of the common law, Containing divers cases upon matters of law, argued and adjudged in the several reigns of King Edward VI. Queen Mary, King and Queen Philip and Mary, and Queen Elizabeth. Originally written in French, and now faithfully translated into English, and considerably improved by many marginal notes and references to all the books of the common law both ancient and modern. To which are added, the Queries of Mr. Plowden, now first rendered into English at large with references, and many useful observations. In two parts. With two new tables, more compleat than any yet published; the one, of the names of the cases, the other of principal matters.*

prior king.² Of course, the doctrine in practice was far more malleable than this gloss suggests.

Multiplying the king's body gives a king an odd, theoretical relationship to other minds, to other bodies, to time, and to perspective itself. The perspective of a king is strange. On the one hand, a king's body and mind are always plural. The king is unified with kings throughout history and, through the body politic, enjoys a kind of eternal life and a kind of unified mind. Thus kings extend exponentially into the future of kings who will share in this unified plurality. A king's body is also plural insofar as his subjects participate in his body politic. Subjects identify themselves as such within bounds of the nation, which is in turn represented by the king's eternal and invulnerable body politic. On the other hand, a king is also always singular. Of course, he has only one physical body, only one mind, only one lifetime. He is also socially singular, set apart from the noble peers as peerless. He alone stands for the nation: the one man who stands for many. A king, then, is logically equivalent to, and therefore poised to be, both the representative and the scapegoat of a nation. The rhetorical maneuvering that constructs the body politic conceals this vulnerability faced by an individual king's body natural in order to protect the state and the individuals who depend on it. The doctrine of the king's two bodies establishes a binary system that unifies kings but divides not only king from himself and from his subjects, but also one from many, strength from weakness, time from eternity, life from death. It is the strangeness of this doctrine with respect to time, bodies, and minds that enables the phrase, "the king is dead; long live the king" — a paradoxical

² For a complete explanation of the king's two bodies, see Ernst Kantorowicz's seminal text *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. For current views on the legacy of Kantorowicz's work, see Lorna Hutson, ed. *Special Forum: Fifty Years of The King's Two Bodies*.

formulation which preserves the continuity of the body politic despite the interruption of a king's physical death.

This strangeness is evident from the outset of Marlowe's play, *Edward the Second*. *Edward's* treatment of the king's two bodies ties the doctrine and the problem of sovereign rule by primogeniture to the problem of bias in interpretation. The opening lines set into motion the crisis of the primogeniture of the body politic surrounding the king that ignites the plot with Edward's line "My father is deceased..." (1.1.1). These words evoke the familiar ring of "the king is dead..." but the familiarity ends immediately. Rather than following with "long live the king," this play disrupts and delays the natural conclusion wherein one king succeeds the next. In the world of this play, the prior king has died, his body natural decays. What generally happens next, at least according to the ideology explicated by Ernst Kantorowicz, is the natural succession of the next king with the mystical transference of the body politic to the new king's natural body. But Marlowe is uninterested in the metaphysical significance of the body politic.³ Instead, his play explores the real-world consequences of the doctrine. What happens in this play is not the mystical succession of Edward II, who will enjoy his father's established authority as king. What happens, in the punctuation of this opening line, is a pause, a pause his noble peers claim will be the ruin of the commonwealth.⁴ In this pointed gap, the prior king is dead, but the body politic has not yet inhabited the person of the new king.⁵ One might even suggest that the entire play, in a sense, takes

³ In his introduction to Marlowe's play, Charles Forker highlights this very difference between Marlowe and Shakespeare's treatment of wealth and power (23).

⁴ The punctuation here is consistently a comma in all of the existent early modern printings of the play.

⁵ Edward's peers refuse to be a part of what they (and most readers) perceive as the king's bodily-focused desires.

place within this pause in which the king has not taken possession of (or been possessed by) body politic but instead lingers in his body natural. For Edward establishes a different understanding of sovereignty when he writes, “...come, Gaveston, and share the kingdom with thy dearest friend” (1.1.1-2). In the new Edward’s kingdom, the king will share his bodies, redoubling the vulnerability of the body natural and exposing the same vulnerability in the body politic. Clinging to his desire for his companion rather than attending to his duty as king, Edward exposes and reverses the ordinary hierarchical ordering of the king’s bodies (political before natural, now natural before political) when he pauses to share with his friend.

Edward’s dalliances with Gaveston identify what most readings of the play have suggested is the heart of Edward’s weakness as king: he is more interested in his own desire than in the good of the nation.⁶ Since the early 1990s, much of the criticism of this play has investigated Edward’s relationship with his favorite, considering various aspects of the king’s weaknesses as king in terms of his homoerotic relationship with Gaveston either as a problem of sexuality or as a problem of Gaveston’s low status.⁷ These readings levy the early modern discourse of sodomy as a tool for analyzing Elizabethan legal practices as well as critiquing the heterosexist readings of earlier critics. All of these readings depend upon the assumption that Edward and Gaveston’s relationship is indeed

⁶ Forker identifies two, related controversies in the criticism of Marlowe’s play. The older question is one of genre: is this a history play or a tragedy? In other words, critics debate whether or not the play focuses on the torment of one man or else on the nation that suffers as a result of his irresponsible rule. The more recent question inquires into Marlowe’s perspective on homosexuality, whether or not the play celebrates it, condemns it, or does not address it at all (85).

⁷ Crucial criticisms of this play along these critical lines include the following: Emily Bartel’s *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation, and Marlowe*, Gregory Bredbeck’s *Sodomy and Interpretation, Marlowe to Milton*, Mario DiGangi’s *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*, Jonathan Goldberg’s *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities*, and Bruce Smith’s *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England. A Cultural Poetics*.

homoerotic, and they all consider the ramifications of a weak king, subject to his subjects and to death at their hands. However, the play also stages a crisis of interpretation that the play's critical history depends upon but largely ignores: when information is missing, interpretation tends to depend upon assumption.⁸ Indeed, the interpretative history of this play in particular depends heavily on the very practice of reading what is not there in the text.⁹

Alan Bray and Stephen Orgel are rare but unmistakable exceptions in the critical history of *Edward the Second*. They too have identified and disputed instances in which others have based their interpretations of Marlowe's play on assumption. Bray, for instance, is wary of the pervasive assumption that Edward and Gaveston's relationship is obviously homosexual, suggesting instead that this assumption constitutes a modern misreading of Elizabethan friendship practices, which may well include "intense emotion" and "passionate language" without necessarily signaling "a sodomitical relationship" (*Friend* 187). Similarly, Orgel disputes critics' assumptions that Edward's murder in this play conveys obvious homosexual undertones. In fact, Orgel charges most critics with "'correcting' Marlowe by reference to Holinshed" when critics, critical editions, and performances alike "construe the murder scene as an anal rape with a hot spit or poker" (*Impersonations* 47). Orgel and Bray excluded, most modern criticism of

⁸ This is obviously true in pseudohistorical accounts of Shakespeare's biography, for instance. See Stephen Greenblatt's *Will in the World*.

⁹ As I explain below, I see the tendency to depend on historical documents to fill the gaps left by missing content in the play to be different from hearing "the king is dead" in the opening line because the opening line evokes the extra-textual content but the play does not evoke texts like Holinshed, which are wedged into the gaps to create a kind of narrative continuity that the play itself neither suggests nor requires.

this play hinges on the assumptions that critics make in order to fill particular gaps and silences in the text, based on what they think they already know.¹⁰

Rather than confirm the affective weakness of the historical Edward II, and rather than locate him as a failure in terms of the usual hierarchy apparent in the binary of the king's two bodies, I argue that Marlowe's play disrupts these binaries in order to turn the accusation of weakness against the ideology of authority itself. The play suggests that its thematic conflict depicted between Edward and his peers is not that Edward attends to the wrong one of the king's two bodies and ignores the other. Instead, in both thematic and structural elements, the play suggests that the conflict is that the concept of the king's two bodies introduces ambiguity and vulnerability into the very construct intended to delineate power and protect the nation.

Edward reconfigures the ideology of national power and autonomy that is tied to the doctrine of the king's two bodies by exposing not only the vulnerability of the body temporal but also the vulnerability of the body politic, effectively amplifying the experience of vulnerability from the individual subject to an entire nation. The play accomplishes this, as I have suggested, by arresting time in the gap between "the king is dead" and "long live the king" with the deferred though expected conclusion evoked in the opening line. Moreover, the play turns the doctrine of the king's two bodies against itself in three ways. First the play deploys structures that function through a disruptive logic, similar to catachresis, in the repeated use of grammatically symmetrical lines that expose their incongruity as well as in the exposed vulnerability of speakers whose lines should denote strength. Scaffolded by its thematic and structural ambiguities related to

¹⁰ This practice replicates a logic of allegory, which similarly depends upon what one thinks one knows.

vulnerability, the play presents three focal perspectives, ultimately privileging the most ambivalent one and thereby signaling the the play's potential both for embracing vulnerability and for avoiding it. Finally, the play suggests a method of harnessing this ambivalent perspective in order to read differently the gaps and silences of the play that critics have scrambled to fill with details from other texts. *Edward the Second*, then, offers more than an allegory or a cautionary tale of sovereignty. It offers more than an account of early modern friendship practices. The play offers an ambivalent textual orientation to the nature of authority.

ORGANIZING AMBIGUITY, PART ONE: THE FORM AND POTENTIAL OF *CATACHRESIS*

The concept of the king's two bodies at play in *Edward* lends itself to allegorical interpretations because the two bodies create a mystical analogy that designates and perpetuates the authority of the king. But I have suggested the text provides a stranger orientation to political authority that may not be available to allegorical readings. Allegory, by definition, operates analogically; it compares two things based on their similarities. An allegory, in other words, takes something that one already knows and maps it onto another thing that one does not know—or, more likely another thing that one also already knows and wants to teach to others—by emphasizing how the two things are alike.¹¹ The problem with an allegorical method of interpretation is that it creates a circular pattern of reading that operates by way of confirmation bias. This problem, true of inductive reasoning generally, is a key vulnerability of literary criticism, especially for

¹¹ M.H. Abrams defines allegory as “a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the ‘literal,’ or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of signification” (*A Glossary of Literary Terms* 5).

critics who study early modern texts and worry about their late modern perspectives and biases. Allegory specifically, and analogy generally, is unhelpful for reading textual instances of ambiguity, especially instances that are occupied by cuts, gaps, and incongruous comparisons, like when Mortimer abruptly changes his mind and Lancaster accuses him of “making white black and dark night day” (1.4.247, 249). If allegory and analogy, as strategies of interpretation, depend on similarity, with an eye to resolution or reconciliation with the familiar, interpretations of difference or ambiguity require a different strategy.¹² In contrast to translative strategies that rely on allegorical readings, I suggest a reading of ambiguity that deploys the logical structure of *catachresis* in order to approach the potential of literature to say something unexpected, to see past what one (thinks one) knows, and to approach instead what the *text itself knows*. Making a distinction between translative tropes and catachresis matters because, as I will show, catachresis offers alternative, and often unconsidered, ways to orient readings of ambiguous textual elements.

The logical structure of catachresis, more so than other tropes, can approach new textual perspectives *because* it is abusive of the reader’s perceptions and expectations. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *catachresis*, the Greek form of the Latin word *abusio*, as the “improper use of words,” the “application of a term to a thing which it does not properly denote,” and the abuse or perversion of a trope or metaphor.” Similarly, Richard Lanham identifies catachresis as “misuse, misapplication” and “abuse.”

¹² Analogy and allegory require a logic of translation or transference. Indeed, allegory is generally understood by textual critics as metaphor extended into narrative. Metaphor derives its name in both Greek and Latin from the respective words for transfer—*metaphora*, Latin for “carrying over,” which derives from the Greek μεταφορά (*metaphorá*), meaning “transfer” and itself deriving from μεταφέρω (*metapherō*), “to carry over”, “to transfer”—and operates by way of translating one thing into another (see Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott’s *A Greek-English Lexicon* for this etymology).

extending his definition into two parts: 1) “implied metaphor, using words wrenched from common usage” and 2) “an extravagant, unexpected, farfetched metaphor” (136). Lanham’s definition fits into a long lineage of similar understandings that identify catachresis as a kind of metaphor. I suggest, however, that catachresis is, paradoxically, the *proper* term for the originary or primary figure for the set of figures that includes the translative tropes. Though the taming of catachresis under a rubric of metaphor is certainly evident across the history of rhetorical considerations of the trope, the primacy of the catachresis over metaphor is also exists in the same classical and later texts.

My assessment of classical, medieval, and early modern definitions of catachresis is informed by Judith Anderson’s analysis of primary rhetorical texts from those periods, though my analysis of the same content arrives at a different conclusion.¹³ Anderson orients her focus on metaphor as the primary tropic category in order to challenge an exclusively negative emphasis on deficiency, dissimulation, and rupture in the Roman rhetorics and instead to explore their broad sense of propriety and their balanced discussions of metaphor, even including forms of catachrestic metaphor, as productive and creative.¹⁴ I agree with her conclusions that metaphor is potentially transgressive and catachresis potentially productive, but Anderson’s organization of catachresis under a rubric of metaphor is problematic because she repeatedly reveals the impropriety or the abuse or the *catachresis* at the heart of metaphor and, by extension, at the heart of all tropes. Although she is also critical of the problems with translation, Anderson names

¹³ See her recent study, *Translating Investments: Metaphor and the Dynamic of Cultural Change in Tutor-Stuart England*.

¹⁴ Harry Berger, Jr., in his recent investigation of metaphor (*Figures of a Changing World: Metaphor and the Emergence of Modern Culture*), similarly articulates the strangeness of catachresis but continues to privilege metaphor as the master trope. His analysis of metaphor similarly depends upon the abusive strangeness typically associated with catachresis.

metaphor the arch-trope and catachresis a subset within the category of metaphor, along with the more translative tropes simile, metonymy, and dead metaphor. Yet she goes to great lengths to explain that metaphor itself is generative, creative, transgressive, improper, and even abusive. Thus, I submit that her project also identifies catachresis as the arch-trope and metaphor as its translative subset. Anderson herself acknowledges that catachresis is “something of a master trope” in certain theological contexts (129, n. 2).¹⁵ As I will argue in a later chapter, catachresis and parable share a logical structure, and parable has been wrongfully tamed under a rubric of allegory thanks to the privileging of Greek rhetorics, especially Aristotle, over the Semitic origins and uses of parabolic language.¹⁶

The classical, Latin understandings of catachresis are marked by impropriety and inexact usage of language by misuse and boldness or audacity, and by adaptation based on proximity or nearness in response to lack.¹⁷ The impropriety is taken up by medieval and early Renaissance texts to emphasize the ambivalence as well as the overstepping of bounds, or usurpation, inherent in catachresis.¹⁸ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *usurp* can mean something quite similar to the function of figure generally: “to take (a word or words) into use; to borrow or appropriate from another language, source,

¹⁵ Anderson’s insight here informs my discussions of parable in subsequent chapters.

¹⁶ For centuries, western classical scholars ignored or suppressed the Afroasiatic—including Semitic and Egyptian—influences on Greek language and culture, influences acknowledged by the ancient Greeks themselves. Martin Bernal’s seminal study, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, forced a reassessment of scholars’ prior, racist assumptions about western culture.

¹⁷ See *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, Cicero’s *Orator* and *De Oratore*, and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*.

¹⁸ See, for example, (in Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* and in Erasmus’s *De Copia*). Lisa Freinkel, in *Reading Shakespeare’s Will*, understands Augustine’s use of the word *usurpantur* in relation to figurative language as simply “taken up” but then, more precisely, as a rhetorical “transfer of power and function” (*Shakespeare’s Will* 162).

etc.; to employ use.”¹⁹ Philip Melanchthon develops the reputation of catachresis for being disruptive in relation to usurpation.²⁰ He also identifies contradiction associated with catachresis, as when vices are called virtues.²¹ Similarly, English Ramist Dudley Fenner emphasizes the strangeness, the ambiguity, the misdirection, and significantly the violence of catachresis.²² He links catachresis explicitly to tropes like *audacia* and *hyperbole*, connecting excess to the unwanted and bold swerving from propriety. Other English rhetoricians pick up descriptions of catachresis familiar in the older, Latin rhetorics including the impropriety, abuse, misuse and substitution based on proximity.²³ Puttenham, following Quintillian, identified catachresis as “the figure of abuse” and understood it in terms of improper use, specifically use without proper return. Following Puttenham, Freinkel, in *Reading Shakespeare’s Will* and “The Use of the Fetish,” understands catachresis as a paradoxical but necessary figure that abusively compensates for the lacks in propriety itself, that has no firm or proper origin and no disciplining teleology to ultimately “set right” its impropriety. These understandings of catachresis resonate with Sarah Ahmed’s description of the ways in which orientations become taken as proper, ingrained, expected, and eventually ignored or taken for granted, versus those orientations that upset expectations and overstep the bounds of so called proper

¹⁹ Erasmus uses the word in this sense in *De Copia*, as does Ben Jonson in *Poetaster* and John Milton in *Eikonoklastes*.

²⁰ This is Judith Anderson’s assertion in *Translating Investments*.

²¹ See his *Elementorum Rhetorices*. English teacher Richard Sherry similarly ties catachresis to usurpation in *A Treatise of the Figures of Grammar and Rhetorike*.

²² See Fenner’s *Artes of Logike and Rhetorike*, which is a translation and adaptation of the Latin text *Audomari Talaiei Rhetorica* by Omer Talon, a colleague of Pierre de la Ramee.

²³ See Thomas Wilson’s *Arte of Rhetorique*, Henry Peacham’s *The Garden of Eloquence*, and George Puttenham’s *Art of English Poesie*.

perspective. Just as Ahmed's queer trajectory has no intention of returning to the familiar, normative, and originary path, *catachresis* announces its nonreturn, its nonrepayment to the terms out of which it creates itself as if it created itself from nothing.²⁴ If catachresis generates from nothing, it is neither created by nor a subset of metaphor.

I posit that catachresis names a primary or originary tropic category that is capable of approaching textual unknowns that elude the interpretations of late modern readers. The tropic trajectory of new-to-old, that I proffer below indicates the potential inclusiveness of catachresis, an inclusiveness that risks abusing and being abused in order to approach inarticulate or as yet untranslatable meaning. Catachresis, according to Quintilian, names the creation of terms that stand in linguistic gaps, vehicles that originate according not to similarity with the tenors they signify but to proximity or orientation to those tenors.²⁵ Its origin untraceable, catachresis generates in the improper borrowing of language from elsewhere without gestures of return or repayment. If it functions like a transfer, the transfer moves only in one direction.²⁶ In other words, catachresis has affinities with translation but it also rejects or deflects it. The movement

²⁴ Similarly, Brinkema claims that “theorizing affective replis [folds, or frames] involves thinking a construct that can never be returned to the thinker in its for-me dimension: a repli that does not reply” (36).

²⁵ See Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* 8.6.34. Catachresis, then, signals a textual move to fill the cuts, gaps, and silences before history fills those breaks for certain critics.

²⁶ Following Quintilian, Lisa Freinkel describes catachresis as a “contradiction in terms—a necessary abuse—[... that] destabilizes the notion of propriety itself [and] suggest[s] the ultimate untenability of any hard and fast distinction between abuse and translation” (*Reading Shakespeare's Will* 161). She suggests, then, that all catachreses are translations, all translations abusive, and that differentiating the two terms either impossible or unproductive. Elsewhere, she describes catachresis as a kind of figural translation-in-process: an “improper transfer” that is never properly translated, never settled or at home but always wandering, always turning, always troping (“Use of Fetish” 116). Freinkel also describes this endless movement of catachresis as a time-stopping perpetual turning in Petrarch, and as the basis underlying the logic of Luther's notion of conversion.

of catachresis has no ordinary source toward which it may translate in reverse.²⁷ It is, then, a translation without translation, but to define catachresis as such is to suggest that it is not just an improper translation but that it is not a translation at all.²⁸ Instead catachresis marks the boundary of what is translatable. Therefore, catachresis also identifies the boundary of what is knowable and what is representable in literature. Thus, I assert the usefulness of catachresis, distinct from the translative figures, for discussing potentially incomprehensible textual elements.

Rather than dissolve the strangeness of catachresis into the familiarity of translation I suggest that catachresis may be more usefully oriented on a spectrum of figure that traces a trajectory from new to old, starting with the unexpected or abusive in catachresis and moving through the novel turns of language in metaphor and other translative tropes before declining into dead metaphor and cliché (see Figure 1.2).²⁹

²⁷ As Freinkel says, catachresis, like fetish, is built upon lack (“Use of Fetish” 119).

²⁸ Also informed by Derrida’s “Des Tours,” my thinking here is logically similar Judith Butler’s explication of loss in Freud’s theories of mourning and melancholia in her *Psychic Life of Power*. She writes,

In mourning, Freud tells us, there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious. In melancholia, he maintains, ‘the object-loss is withdrawn from consciousness’: the object is not only lost, but that loss itself is lost, withdrawn and preserved in the suspended time of psychic life. In other words, according to the melancholic, ‘I have lost nothing’ (183).

That is to say, the loss of loss is the loss of nothing; there is no loss. Put another way, the loss of loss is, then, loss without loss. Loss without loss cannot be understood as loss because the loss is unrecognizable, incomprehensible. Similarly, translation without translation cannot be recognized as translation.

²⁹ Part of the nature of the abuse that catachresis inflicts is visualized in Figure 1.2. Anderson also understands the relationship between tropes as though they were organized on a spectrum, with catachresis as a more extreme kind of metaphor. Rhetoricians and theorists of rhetorical style advise a pattern of writing that moves along a trajectory that spans from old to new, not new to old. See, for example Joseph Williams’s *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. This old-new principle helps readers follow complex arguments by leaving a trail of information that they already know or have just come to understand by virtue of reading the argument in question. Catachresis inflicts the abuse of overturning this pattern, articulating something new out of something not yet known, thereby leaving the reader floundering to understand.

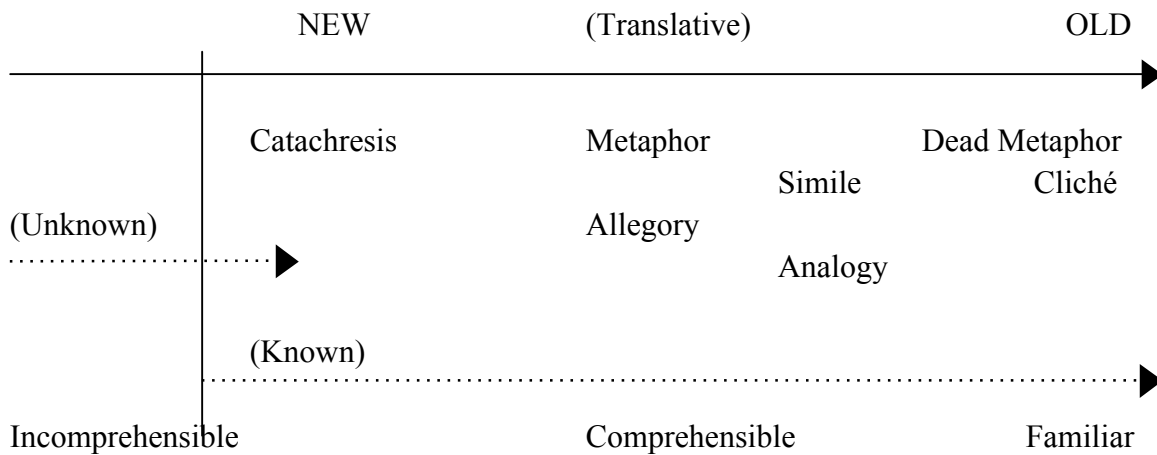


Figure 2.1: A Spectrum of Tropes.

The uppermost, solid arrow visualizes a tropic trajectory approaching the limits of what can be represented, what I call the Unknown/Known Horizon, and extended to the familiar. The bottom, dotted arrows indicate the shift from the unknown to the known, the unrepresentable to the representable, that happens to the right of this horizon, moving from the incomprehensible to the comprehensible and therefore translatable.

New readings come into this spectrum from catachrestic figures, and not from the clichéd or dead figures.³⁰ When instances of catachresis stagnate in definitive translations, they shift into the translative space of the metaphor, just as metaphors shift to cliché when they die or become hackneyed.³¹ Once either of these shifts occurs, though, the new cliché cannot return to being a fresh metaphor nor can the metaphor return to the abuse it

³⁰ Of course, these stale figures may be abused anew, thereby emerging as new instances of catachresis. In other words, the tropic spectrum I have laid out in a line may also fold back on itself to form a circle, by virtue of reorienting the ways one interprets settled, stale, or over done readings of texts.

³¹ All metaphor, then, has catachresis and therefore nothing at its origin. This formulation is similar to Derrida's insight on catachresis and metaphor in "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," appearing in *Margins of Philosophy*, an insight which he also implies in "Des Tours." Following Derrida, Freinkel likewise proffers "the ultimate catachrestic structure of all metaphor" (*Shakespeare's Will* 161). Indeed, as Judith Anderson also notices, both Freinkel and Patricia Parker link the early Greek and Roman understandings of catachresis in *Ad Herennium*, Cicero's *De Oratore*, and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* to Derrida's understanding of the trope in "White Mythology."

may have inflicted upon its first strange comparison as catachresis. If clichés are those commonplaces that readers may ignore because they have become the common sense readings of texts, then clichés constitute a formalization of readerly blindness.³²

Not open to gestures of return as translative tropes are, catachresis instead names a new creation, a neologism, a wonder, a miracle, and entails a conversion or a transgression of propriety that causes something new to emerge.³³ My project does not attempt to theorize transgression or representations of transgression. Instead, its methodology is itself transgressive, in the way that Ahmed considers her methodology queer, because it orients itself differently from, and intentionally does not follow, disciplinary paths laid out by others. Ahmed claims that when one follows the paths followed by others before, “the repetition of the act of following makes the line disappear from view as the point from which ‘we’ emerge” (15). In other words, the path disappears from view and is taken for granted as the right or natural way. Ahmed writes, under these circumstances, that “a good life” follows the path laid out for it while “a queer life might be one that fails to make such gestures of return” (21). When Dollimore aims to describe what he calls the necessary containment of transgression, he identifies

³² Stallybrass and White mount a similar project with Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on the carnivalesque in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* in which they aim to overcome “Bakhtin’s troublesome folkloric approach” insofar as the folkloric may be equated to a kind of common sense that maintains unproductive binary categories and equally unproductive critical debates (26).

³³ Transgression is of course a loaded term. I cannot proffer my own transgressive investigation without tracing the, often nomadic, genealogy of my own thinking on the subject, which cannot but be informed by a trajectory of prior theoretical investigations, leading from Nietzsche and Sade to Bataille and Foucault and on to Deleuze and his similarly nomadic and perverse intellectual descendants, Rosi Braidoti and Elizabeth Grosz. Likewise, I cannot begin to discuss transgression in early modern literature without acknowledging my indebtedness to the work of critics like Jonathan Dollimore, Peter Stallybrass, and Allon White. Though my project also has many affinities with these investigations of transgression, my project’s transgressive investigation differs from previous studies by focusing specifically on textual perspectives and introducing textual affective orientations as an inroad to new understandings of the early modern English ideological contexts of politics, religion, and identity.

“Renaissance metaphysics” as if it were itself a contained unity that might be described, acquiesced to, or undermined, but not easily changed. The kind of containment proffered by Dollimore draws the boundaries of his orientation to the subject of transgression, an orientation that (like all orientations) is necessarily fraught with blind spots, the likes of which my project aims to see. As the introduction makes clear, my project calls on critics—including myself—to acknowledge and learn from our own blindnesses. A catachrestic reading method is transgressive because it oversteps the horizons of perspective, knowledge, and critical paths laid out by others, as well as interpretive defenses that the text itself creates.³⁴ Catachrestic textual elements both identify and defend these horizons, these limits that potentially evoke a text’s blindnesses and unknown unknowns. Many early modern instances of catachresis are deployed by writers when language otherwise fails to capture or indicate meanings. Take for example Hamlet’s best-known soliloquy, which needs “to take arms against a sea of troubles” in order to gesture toward the ambivalence the character struggles to articulate. Thus, I contend that understanding the abuses of catachresis as distinct from translative tropes keeps open the potential of language to move, the potential for literature to approach the limits of what can be said.

As an instance of abuse, catachresis is also a textual self-defense—rendering itself incomprehensible to the reader who would comprehend—and an attack on itself that threatens its own, in Stanley Fish’s terms, self-consumption. Catachresis wavers between comprehension and incomprehension because it abuses language by strangely, or improperly, forcing together signifiers that do not correspond to their signifieds, or tenors

³⁴ The horizon of perspective is visually represented in the Johari window by the lines dividing the hidden and blind panes from the unknown pane.

that do not correspond to their vehicles, while implying that a correspondence nonetheless exists. Thus the logical structure of catachresis helps orient other kinds of incomprehensible or ambiguous or ambivalent textual habits insofar as these habits constitute ways in which a text may reject *and* call for interpretation, may deny *and* reconstitute the interpretive biases of the reader, may rebuff *and* replicate the cultural contexts in which it was formed.³⁵ Catachresis, then, helps structure one of a text's possible orientations to the culture that produced it: a double orientation of both rejection and desire. This is to say that catachresis names a figure that operates by the same logic as the affect called disgust because it flickers between rejection and attraction, toward and within, the comparisons it figures.³⁶

WEAK STRENGTH, STRONG WEAKNESS: READING CATACHRESTICALLY

The logic of catachresis is especially useful for reading the thematics of *Edward the Second* because the central conflict of the play stems from an abuse of the throne, and therefore the nation, that results in the abusive death that Edward faces in consequence. Janet Clare has argued that the structural elements of Marlowe's texts operate as abuse, as "an assault on the audience's sensory perceptions" (87). The formal elements suggest the ways in which *Edward* itself may be oriented toward its audiences. Furthermore, the

³⁵ I am not suggesting that other instances of ambiguity are necessarily themselves instances of catachresis. I am simply suggesting that catachresis offers a useful way to approach their ambiguous elements that does not resort to translation into the familiar. This is another way in which what I call a yes, and approach advocates for a hospitable relationship between text and reader.

³⁶ Judith Anderson acknowledges the ambivalence (ambi-valence) of the Greek and Latin terms for catachresis. In Greek *kata* and *chresthai* and in Latin *abusio*, the terms at once signify positively and negatively. For catachresis, Anderson attributes positively the following defining features of the trope: to "use polysemously," to "apply, extend," to "transfer," to "use tropically," to "use completely or boldly or with significant force" (*Translating* 150). On the negative side of this compound term, she attributes "misuse," to "use excessively (too boldly)," to "use degeneratively," to "use diachronously or literally," and to "use improperly" (150). She attributes to the Latin *abusio* the same ambivalence (150).

logic of catachresis offers a new perspective on the contradictory parallel structures typical of Marlovian style as well as the impossible necessity of interpreting what is not articulated in the text, whether in textual gaps, scripted silences, or evocative but unstated references to knowledge that arrives in the lack left by these kinds of unarticulated meaning. Though they do not proffer a catachrestic reading method, both Charles Forker and Stephen Greenblatt see Marlowe deploying and then disrupting translative, allegorical methods. In his introduction to the play, Forker writes, “Despite [Marlowe’s] use of emblematic figures such as the Mower and Lightborn (whom critics have often associated with the medieval Vice), Marlowe generally eschews the semi-allegorical, morality-play approach to the dramatization of history with its easily defined exemplars of good and evil” (88). Furthermore, Greenblatt, in an early version of “Marlowe and Renaissance Self-fashioning,” asserts that Marlowe disrupts allegorical methods “in *Edward II* Marlowe [by using] the emblematic method of admonitory drama... to such devastating effect that the audience recoils from it in disgust” (52). By exposing the ways in which interpretations of his play are complicit in the orientation of disgust and by revealing the vulnerable position of both sovereign and interpretive authority, Marlowe’s text reconfigures the ways in which the strengths of authority may be understood as weaknesses and suggests a model for reading itself catachrestically, offering the potential for new critical perspectives on how this play orients itself to figures of authority in its culture of origin.

The language of *Edward the Second* brims with opposing forces of symmetry and conflict, of being at one and at odds. In their introductory comments on Marlowe’s play, Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey identify both symmetry and conflict as key structural

features of *Edward*: these parallels delineate “irreconcilable conflict” and “verbal contest is everywhere” (xi-xxix).³⁷ The kinds of conflicts to which Romany and Lindsey refer arrange themselves as a series of hierarchical relationships between power and weakness, king and subjects, high class and low class. Of course, these relationships also expose the conflicts that drive the plot of the play by showing characters with opposing agendas butting against each other rhetorically. At the same time, the text of the play creates a kind of rhetorical vulnerability that disrupts the authority of sovereignty in particular moments of dramatic conflict when lines spoken by opposing factions—Edward and his peers—are arranged in pairs that are at once grammatically parallel and incongruous. These rhetorical conflicts deploy language in registers that should denote the speakers’ strengths but instead exposes the speakers’ vulnerabilities through incompatible links between the paired lines. Again, the opening lines suggest one way in which the play manages this phenomenon.

The play’s opening line is paired with a line that it evokes, a line that exists within the culture rather than within the narrative time of the play, a line that the play ignores or at least defers. By this I mean that no one has voiced the words “The king is dead; long live the king,” but the familiar phrase corresponds to the opening line in a way that calls attention to the similarities and the differences in this equivalence. The opening line suggests the slipping of sovereign power might be represented in language:

“The king is dead” becomes ““My father is deceased ...””

“long live the king” becomes ““...come, Gaveston...”” (1.1.1)

³⁷ See their comments in *The Complete Plays by Christopher Marlowe*.

In both cases, Edward's father is dead, but in the iteration voiced by the play, Edward does not take on the responsibility left to him by the death of his father. Instead, Edward will come with his friend to play at being king. The primacy of Edward's version of irresponsible kingship over the familiar gloss of kingly primogeniture is first emphasized by this difference. Once the difference is established, the absence of "long live the king" becomes palpable. The intensity of its lack is reinforced further by the line's dual voicing: first spoken in the narrative time of the play by Gaveston, but quoted by him from a letter presumably first penned by Edward outside of narrative time. Arriving from elsewhere, these words exist both inside and outside of the narrative time of the play and are already repeated, just like the words of succession that they serve to replace. This pair of lines, then, one voiced explicitly and one not, create an ambiguous symmetry that shifts the position of strength from the lines that uphold the supremacy of the sovereign to privilege lines that undo the sovereign's responsibility to the state. The priority to direct the focus of the play is granted to lines whose content should under usual circumstances represent the weaker of the pair: elevating Edward's desire over continuity for the state. Haunted by language that is not voiced but that stands for sovereign strength, this play's inaugural line anticipates nearly all of the play's rhetorical conflicts by establishing the central focus on a king who defies convention, who oversteps his bounds, who abuses his sovereign authority as well as duty, who is himself abused. The initial focal or orienting perspective of this play, then, is a catachrestic vision of a king.

Once Edward disjoints the order of succession, he undermines himself as king by turning the death of his father into an opportunity to share the kingdom with Gaveston. In consequence of divided sovereign authority, the language that executes the directives of

that authority begins to lose its force, disrupting the king's power to use language to affect material reality. Insofar as decrees may be made, taxes levied, favors and titles granted at his whim, a king's power largely depends upon his words having the power to execute actions and on his subjects obeying his utterances. A king's power, then, exists largely by way of the *perlocutionary action* of language (to use J.L. Austin's phrase) in which the utterance itself makes something so.³⁸ Because the play seems to occupy the time between "the king is dead" and "long live the king," and because the authority of the state, the body politic, has no new body to inhabit, the language of authority loses force without a proper king to authorize it.

Despite evacuating his own authority to speak as king, Edward nonetheless expects language to perform his will. Edward's will directly confronts the will of his peers, and their conflict is formalized in juxtaposed pairs of rhetorically symmetrical lines. In each instance, the king's speech should carry the force to enact the will of the monarch, but Edward's peers thwart his rhetorical assertions of material power. For example, when Mortimer voices the threat that the nobles will not stand to be ruled by a king who is ruled by his minion—"Their downfall is at hand, their forces down; We will not thus be faced and overpeered"—Edward calls for his guards to

Lay hands on that traitor Mortimer!

in a show of force that names the peers' response treasonous and targets Mortimer as the ringleader of the rebellion (1.4.18-20). Here, Edward, speaking as king, uses the language

³⁸ The force of the words to act depends upon the context and the authority with which they are uttered. For instance, a penalty is enacted by a guilty pronouncement in a courtroom by a judge, or, similarly, the legality of marriage enacted by both parties saying "I do" and an authorized representative of the state pronouncing a couple married. But neither event is actually binding when actors in a film make the same pronouncements. See Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*.

of power and kingly authority to overcome a show of force levied against him. He expects his words to materialize as force in the world that leads to the arrest of one who defies the authority of the king. But Edward's show of rhetorical force here does not maintain his authority: his words do not lead to the arrest of Mortimer. Edward's command and the lack of ensuing action against Mortimer reveal that the power of the king is directly tied to language and that language is failing Edward as a king disjointed from both time and power. Without his body politic to back him, which is itself bestowed in the language, "long live the king," Edward's words are no more authoritative than anyone else's.

The vulnerability of the position of king is literalized in Edward when his kingly language fails him. When Edward's language has no power, then Edward has no power. Edward's rhetorical cover of kingly authority falls away the moment no one seizes "that traitor Mortimer" and Edward's vulnerability as king is revealed in the consequences of the parallel line spoken by Mortimer Senior:

Lay hands on that traitor Gaveston! (1.4.21)

Mortimer Senior's line matches the structure of Edward's line but reverses the content: the traitor to the nation here is not his nephew Mortimer but Gaveston. Mortimer Senior's language, unlike Edward's, has consequences: the guards seize Gaveston. In the space of one line, the peers' overthrow of the king is underway. It seems as though the sovereign power to command through language has shifted alliances from the king to the peers.

Edward is vulnerable while the peers are strong. Edward's power has been thwarted and peers' has been extended.³⁹ This alone is a disruption of sovereign authority, but it

³⁹ This dynamic happens again when Edward says: "Look to your own heads, he [Gaveston] is sure enough; and Warwick replies: "Look to your own crown, if you back him thus" (2.2.92-93).

amounts to more than power changing hands. This play is not interested in simply the overthrow of a weak king by a strong peer. When Mortimer Senior's parallel response does result in real-world consequences, he decimates Edward's show of rhetorical force, but he also shows that the power to command is not God-given, not mystical. A king is powerful, then, because a culturally agreed-upon doctrine establishes his right to rule.

Mortimer Junior delivers a similarly parallel line toward the end of his short rise to power, though this time Mortimer's line matches one spoken by Edward's son:

Edward III: My lord, he is my uncle and shall live.

Mortimer: My lord, he is your enemy and shall die. (5.4.90-1)⁴⁰

Structurally parallel, Mortimer's line reacts with force to the young Edward's demand that his uncle Kent live. The differences between these lines are more striking than their similarities, and more striking than the differences in the prior example. Highlighted by this difference, the key words in this pair of lines are *my uncle*, *live*, *your enemy*, and *die*. It follows the natural inclination of reason and good sense that one's uncle should live and one's enemy should die. But that is not what happens here. Mortimer tries to hang the charge of treason onto Kent by aligning him with Edward II. However, aligning with Edward II cannot be treasonous if Edward III is king by way of the natural line of succession. In fact, Mortimer did not stage the coups that would overthrow Edward II, renounce Edward III's right to the throne, and install Mortimer as king. Instead, Edward II has given control to his son upon relinquishing the crown prior to his death, saying "Commend me to my son, and bid him rule better than I" (5.1.121-2). Thus, Edward III rules by virtue of his father preemptively granting him that right. It is illogical to call

⁴⁰ One may also make the point that Edward III challenges authority and gains power here in a reversal of the prior shows of rhetorical force, but that point is not developed in this chapter.

treasonous loyalty to Edward II, a loyalty which clearly transfers Edward III. Kent, then, cannot be Edward III's enemy, as Mortimer claims. Mortimer is the enemy and Kent dies for it. When Mortimer's language blurs the line between *uncle* and *enemy* in order to denounce Kent as treasonous, it also blurs the lines between *live* and *die*. Clearly, Edward's uncle cannot both live and die. But kings can. The differences between these words must be blurred in order to make the proclamation that governs the beginning of this play as well as the ending: The king is dead; long live the king. This proclamation that ensures divine right to rule is passed from father to son rests on the idea that the king's body politic cannot die. Mortimer's machinations to come to power through language, then, fall apart in this exchange because the king is living, and the new king is living, and now the body politic, which collapses the *many* of the nation into the *one* body of the king, has multiplied. The force of Mortimer's language in this exchange may enact the death of Kent against the will of either of the two kings Edward, but the ambiguity his line creates begins to unravel the language of authority to which Mortimer also clings to enact the blunt force of his brief rule.

The language registering sovereignty has, in the examples so far, occupied the second position of the two paired lines because the second line has the last word, so to speak, insofar as it has been the second line that effected an act of violence in each example. However, in the symmetrical pairs of lines that feature Edward speaking the second line, Edward does not use language to make an effective show of force but instead to expose his own vulnerability. The structures that have previously marked "verbal contest" and rhetorical triumph in this play now structure Edward's abject weakness. The language of emotion marks the final lines in these pairs. However, it is at the same time

in these instances that Edward's language is most forceful because these lines carry more power to focalize the textual perspective on his character. Rather than depending on the effective, though tyrannical, force of violence and sovereign strength bestowed by the mystical transference of sovereign authority, these lines derive force from the vulnerable position of fallible human responsibility. For example, when Spenser explains his parting with the king by deferring responsibility onto the divine, saying,

so will the angry heavens,

Edward corrects his placement of blame in a matching structure:

so will hell and cruel Mortimer. (4.7.73-4)

Spenser's lines detach authority from both Edward and Mortimer and instead leave the kingdom at the mercy of heaven. Though Edward does not accept personal responsibility here, he will not defer to language of sacred judgment as another discourse of power that oversees or validates human interactions and protects human agents (in this case Mortimer) from taking responsibility for their actions. Edward will not bend to sacred authority, but he does place the blame on the man who has ensured his downfall.

Unwilling to grant Mortimer's stance the credibility of alignment with God or the good or even righteous anger that "the angry heavens" might represent, Edward diminishes Mortimer's judgment by linking it to evil and hell. Moreover, by humanizing Mortimer's will in contrast to the sacred, Edward denies that Mortimer's right to rule is sanctioned by God, therefore calling into question the sacred sanctioning of all kings as well as the mystical sanctioning of the body politic.

When Edward pronounces that heaven is not involved in the judgments that have passed over him, he acknowledges the human anxiety that heaven has relinquished

control, that hope cannot be assured, that prince and pauper alike will face death and no amount of religious or political language, authorized or not, will stop it. What Edward does suggest, in this and similar parallel lines, is that acting without clinging to the authority of a higher power, be it religious or political, renders one not only responsible for oneself but also vulnerable.⁴¹ Edward's lines here show that the position of vulnerability allows one to see the structures that one has built up to protect oneself from being vulnerable, that these structures undergird both the individual and the hierarchies that support the powerful within a culture, and, most importantly, that these structures are themselves fragile.

In the play's instances of structural parallelism described here, the language of authority ceases to function as the play's audiences would expect. In each instance, language that should carry authoritative force becomes impotent. The pairs of symmetrical lines work to establish first the ambiguity and weakness of authoritative language and, as a result, the tenuousness of kingly authority. Lines that mirror each other syntactically but contradict in content create symmetrical boundaries between the characters who have organized themselves into opposing loyalties, which in turn parallel the potentially opposed values represented by the two bodies of the king. These syntactic

⁴¹ Whereas the prior pair of lines, highlight the vulnerable position of sovereign responsibility, two other pairs of lines focus on Edward's vulnerability as an individual. Edward exposes his vulnerability in similar structures in at least two other examples of parallel lines. See his exchange with Gurney:

Gurney: Your passions make your dolours to increase.

Edward: This usage makes my misery increase. (5.3.15-16)

See also his exchange with Lightborn:

Lightborn: What means your highness to mistrust me thus?

Edward: What means thou to dissemble with me thus? (5.5.79-80).

boundaries expose both the weaknesses of the characters and fissures in the system of sovereignty that governs the king's right to rule. Thus, these rhetorical shows of force uncover the vulnerabilities that such shows mean to hide, revealing that authority is precariously propped up by language. The anxiety this division names and avoids is the anxiety that kingly authority, and perhaps all authority, is based on nothing. Marlowe obscures this anxiety in the parallel structures of this play by evoking the language of authority and rank while seemingly to engage in rhetorical battles with clear winners and losers. But, like young Edward's *uncle-enemy*, the lines between friends and foes, king and subjects, strengths and weaknesses, and between the king's two bodies are not so neatly differentiated.

The play conceives of this kind of ambivalence in a derogatory term that Mortimer uses to describe Gaveston: "a night-grown mushroom" (1.4.284). In their explanatory note, most editors cite Tilley's axiomatic explanation for Mortimer's turn of phrase: "Because mushrooms grow overnight, this metaphor was proverbially used to describe the unprecedented rise of an upstart."⁴² I acknowledge that the proverbial implications of an organism sprouting overnight applies to Gaveston as a lower-born man whom the nobles perceive as a threat to their authority. The problem with this explanation, though, is that Gaveston is not the catachrestic creature that the peers envision him to be. As minion, he is not simply an upstart arising as if from nowhere.⁴³ Gaveston finds precedence for his command of the king's favor in the example of the

⁴² See Romany and Lindsay 652, note 284; and Forker 173 note 284.

⁴³ Though Marlowe and his contemporaries may not have understood the morphology and reproductive practices of mushrooms, they did know that mushrooms were not self-generating but that their reproduction had to do with existing mushrooms releasing spores. Later mycologists realized that the surface appearance of a mushroom substantiates the existence of a much larger organism underground. See G.C. Ainsworth's *Introduction to the History of Mycology*.

minions of “the mightiest kings” and “the wisest men” (1.4.390, 394). Furthermore, Gaveston sets the precedent in this play for the rising of other upstarts, namely Spencer and Baldock. Gaveston is likewise reproduced by Spencer and Baldock. The play, I suggest, remembers Gaveston in these characters, his association with the natural body shifting to inhabit new bodies and thereby persisting according to the same logic as the persistence of the body politic.

Mortimer’s mushroom metaphor for Gaveston intends to categorize him neatly as a threat that may be easily contained and squelched, but the play imagines the upstarts persisting well past Gaveston’s personal demise. After all, Edward is able to prevail against the peers as long as he does because Gaveston’s spawned replacements side with the king. The proverbial explanation of mushrooms is overturned by this play in favor of the generative connotations of the mushroom. In this image, the play suggests that the state persists because of the natural and vulnerable lives of men and women who support it, not because a mystical ideal body protects the state from death and decay.

Furthermore, the memory of Gaveston as threat persists in the peers’ rebellion itself. If Gaveston’s rise in fortune were actually the problem, the peers would end their rebellion against Edward once they kill Gaveston. The peers’ objections to Gaveston that implicate the desires of the king’s natural body is a cover for a more sinister threat that arises from the body politic. Mortimer, imagining the minds of the earls and barons as collectively singular rather than dispersed, accuses Gaveston of “ambitious pride” and of being “the ruin of the realm and us” (1.2.31-2, 29). Mortimer imagines Gaveston as a real threat to the state, but by scapegoating him, Mortimer conceals the real threat Mortimer himself poses in his own prideful and ambitious rise to power. Gaveston, then, is not the

threat, and his death does not reunite the state. The body politic can produce similar kinds of upstarts (Mortimer) that are more threatening to the state than the natural desires of Edward. Thus the natural body, like the politic body, is both singular and dispersed across bodies, suggesting the opposite of the security that the division of the king's two bodies intends to offer for the preservation of the state. The play, then, develops the idea that the body politic is no different than the body natural. Both are always already subject to demise, their vulnerability increasing as more fallible bodies, more fallible perspectives—as all first-person perspectives are—become implicated in the preservation of the state. *Edward* suggests a textual orientation to sovereign power that wavers between acknowledging and undoing its force.

THE KING'S THREE BODIES: *EDWARD*'S GUIDE TO CATACHRESTIC INTERPRETATION

Edward's ambivalent orientation to sovereign power suggests one way in which the play offers its own method for reading that uses a logic of catachresis to help manage its many incongruities. The play interrogates three models of reading by strategically thematizing three focal interpretive perspectives, which might be understood as the three separate and conflicting orientations of the king's bodies: the body natural thematized by Gaveston's perspective, the body politic thematized by Mortimer's, and that of Edward's ambiguous and vulnerable body thematized by Edward himself. I suggest that these focal perspectives highlight ways in which a logic of ambivalence underpins the possible interpretations of textual gaps and significant silences. I argue that the play ultimately settles on a model of reading, a textual orientation, that embraces rather than resolves silence and ambiguity.

Gaveston poses a complex interpretive model simply because Gaveston himself is a difficult character to read. Even the peers have trouble penning Gaveston in a consistent interpretation. When they refer to him as “minion” they try to contain him in the space of subordination, but when they call him an “upstart” they accuse him of rising above his station, of being uncontained. The character of Gaveston introduces ambiguity into this play that critics are clearly attuned to because they continue to try to resolve it, often in less charitable understandings of Gaveston’s position. To take a critical stance that rejects Gaveston as a kind of corrupter of the king is to adopt the peers’ reading of Gaveston as an upstart. I propose, however, that a more sympathetic reading of Gaveston is not only possible but also necessary to this play’s conception of sovereignty.

Gaveston’s “draw[ing] the pliant king” is most often cited by critics as evidence of Gaveston’s ambition and disregard for Edward. Such readings focus on Gaveston’s claim that he can control Edward and, in turn, on Edward’s own malleability. I suggest, conversely, that a reading of this line need not be focused on the pliancy of the king but may also focus on the delight in pleasing Edward because it inaugurates a sustained description of seduction focused on pleasurable activities that Gaveston will initiate, as he says, to “best please his majesty, My lord” (1.1.70-1). Insofar as the perspective of the body natural is tied to desire, and insofar as Gaveston is the focal object of desire for Edward, reading Gaveston as invested in pleasing the king makes more sense than reading him as ruthlessly ambitious. Furthermore, Gaveston’s personal ambition is not expressly represented elsewhere in the play. For example, Gaveston does not ask for, nor flaunts, the titles and honors Edward bestows upon him, but he receives them by refocusing on his love for Edward, saying,

It shall suffice me to enjoy your love,
Which whiles I have, I think myself as great
As Caesar riding in the Roman street
With captive kings at his triumphant car. (1.1.170-3)

Gaveston makes no mention of the material benefits he receives from Edward. If readings take Gaveston at his word, the love of Edward is sufficient. To assert that these lines reveal Gaveston still playing upon the heartstrings of his pliant king to his own advantage by accepting his advancements so graciously is to read between the lines, to read already under the influence of the peers' perspective of Gaveston, to privilege Gaveston's ability to manipulate "the pliant king" over Gaveston's love for his friend.

Similarly, just before Gaveston dies at the hands of the peers, his demands to see Edward might be read as demands motivated not by love but by self-preservation. Amid the conversation between Arundel and Warwick as they discuss whether or not they will "gratify the king" by permitting Edward to see Gaveston before they kill him, Gaveston draws attention to his devotion to Edward, yet the peers either dismiss him or do not mark him (2.5.42). Responding to Arundel's reported promise from Edward that "He will be mindful of the courtesy" if they allow him to see Gaveston, Warwick asks:

How now? (2.5.41)

But the line is broken by Gaveston's interjection:

Renowned Edward, how thy name
Revives poor Gaveston! (2.5.41-2)

And Warwick continues:

No, it needeth not,
Arundel; we will gratify the king
In other matters;... (2.5.42-3)

Though some editors punctuate Warwick's continued "No, it needeth not" with a period as though he were responding to Gaveston, others punctuate it with a comma as though Warwick does not hear Gaveston and simply continues speaking to Arundel. In the one case, Warwick says, "No, Edward's name need not revive poor Gaveston." In the other case, Warwick says, "No, we need not gratify the king this way; we will in other ways." Though I recognize that arguments on punctuation are difficult to substantiate in early modern literature, none of the early modern printings of Marlowe's play punctuate these lines in a way that indicates definitively that Gaveston's interjection is either heard or responded to by Warwick and Arundel.⁴⁴ If the peers do not hear Gaveston's exclamation, then Gaveston's revival by Edward's name may indicate an honest devotion to Edward beyond self-interest. If the peers hear Gaveston and dismiss him, then he need not continue a ruse of devotion to Edward in order to preserve his own life because he will die either way. Yet he does continue this devotion, focusing on his "Sweet sovereign" up to his final line in the play "Shall I not see the king?" (2.5.92; 2.6.15).

The problem, in these and other examples, is that it is impossible to determine how and when Gaveston should be read with sympathy to his perspective. But the ambiguity that Gaveston introduces to critical interpretation reflects the problem with sovereignty that this play explores. Just as Gaveston unsettles the play, the king's natural body is unsettling for the state. Otherwise it would not have to be managed by the idealized body politic. The natural body introduces ambiguity and fallibility into one's ability to govern. The notion of the body politic tries to hide the fact that the king is only human. By unsettling the usual hierarchy of the king's two bodies and offering a

⁴⁴ My discussion below of Mortimer's unpointed Latin line suggests that Marlowe was well aware of interpretive reliance on and ambiguity of punctuation.

sympathetic reading of the king's personal desires through the ambiguity introduced by his natural body, this play turns the analogy meant to perpetuate the power of the king over the state into a relationship that puts the king's body at odds with the good of the state. Internally divided and now irredeemable by the analogy of the body politic, Edward becomes a figure that attempts at once to uphold and to deny his inherited right to the throne, that attempts, in other words, to generate an idea of kingship removed from the usual expectations implied by the continuance of the body politic and in effect to create a self-generated idea of kingship. The play suggests that the authority of the king to rule derives not from divine right but from the state's capacity to interpret the king as an authority. Edward by way of Gaveston's ambiguity tries to steer his subjects to accept his new interpretation, but fails precisely because he reinterprets kingship in a way they cannot accept. The crisis of sovereignty in this play, then, is a crisis of interpretation.

If we read Gaveston sympathetically, taking him at his word, privileging his devotion to Edward over his ambition, then we interpret the natural body as trustworthy and can interpret favorably the king's ability to rule, despite his human fallibility. If we read Gaveston unsympathetically as the peers do, then we cannot trust any king's ability to rule because every king is subject to this same human fallibility and self-interest that are simply hidden in language that divides the king's natural body from his body politic.

Mortimer, most clearly aligned with the self-assured confidence of mystically-backed sovereign power, also most obviously executes the problem of assumption for interpretation. He uses ambiguity for interpretation to his advantage, he assumes that others will and will not be able to interpret his own ambiguous statements, and he proffers interpretations that confirm what he already believes to be true about himself and

about others. When the play thematizes Mortimer's interpretive moves, it suggests the same problem I have identified with sovereignty: that despite the language meant to uphold and preserve authority, it is vulnerable to self-interested perspective of the one who interprets it.⁴⁵ The play most explicitly represents this vulnerability in Mortimer's letter that will end Edward's life. In one unpunctuated Latin sentence Mortimer instructs his men:

Edwardum occidere nolite timere bonum est

which he translates twice: once as

Fear not the king, tis good he die

and again as

Kill not the king, tis good to fear the worst. (5.4.8,11, 9, 12)

Significantly, these undecidable translations are both parallel and ambiguous. Mortimer draws attention to these features of his language and uses the ambiguity of the lines to his own benefit, thereby exonerating himself of Edward's death. In orchestrating a moment of interpretation that is impossible to resolve accurately, Mortimer assumes that others both will and will not be able to interpret his meaning. Following the pattern of the other parallel lines in this play, Mortimer confirms his will to power in the first translated line and refutes it in the second. In addition, he uses ambiguity to protect himself – both his desire that the king be killed and his hand in making it so – by willfully not punctuating his orders. Thus the structure of this sentence both gives and withholds the command that

⁴⁵ Similar claims are made by Ben Saunders and Stanley Fish. This conception of critical or interpretive desire is fully articulated in Saunders's *Desiring Donne* and in Fish's understanding of how reader's react to Milton's Satan in *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*. These ideas about literary interpretation assert that the reader makes a set of choices when reading a text that are based on a set of prior assumptions made by that particular reader. In interpreting texts, then, a reader reveals something about her or himself, sometimes unwittingly.

ends Edward's life. In other words, he enacts the order that will kill the king, acting through language as a kingly figure himself who relies upon the *perlocutionary* force of language to dole out death sentences. At the same time, he consciously protects himself from taking responsibility for the king's death. This is the same double-speak upon which most subversive political allegory depends: the idea that a writer can always disavow the any implication of criticism by clinging to the surface story. Yet placing this tactic in Mortimer's hands, Marlowe's text highlights the potential corruption at the heart of allegory and again accounts for Marlowe's tendency to avoid this trope.

The ambiguity that protects Mortimer from responsibility as potential king recalls the ambiguity of the opening line that disrupts the way in which language denotes the power of a king in this play. In Mortimer's ambiguous death sentence, the first translation is forceful, the second fearful. The first translation begins with fear that is immediately jettisoned but ends with death ("tis good he die"). The second translation begins with the potential for death but ends on the vulnerability of the speaker ("fear the worst"). This single, ambiguous line, for a moment, unifies the two sides of the conflict in this play. On the side of the body politic, this line enacts the force that will rid the nation of a foolish king. On the side of the body natural, this line protects both Edward and Mortimer as individuals. Even as this line reincorporates the two bodies of the king, it tears them apart again in its ambiguity that depends not on the force of the author of the line (Mortimer) but on the reading of the recipient (Gurney), who "know[s] not how to conster it" (5.5.15). In this one line, the language of power, imbued in the king and from which he gains authority, is vulnerable to the interpretations of those who receive it. Even in Mortimer's most powerful line, the one that ordains the most severe real-world action,

the killing of a king, even this line highlights the vulnerability that underlies its strength.⁴⁶

Edward, in contrast, quickly sees through Mortimer's manufactured ambiguity throughout the play, ultimately modeling a method of interpretation that handily reads past allegory to read interpret both silence and misdirection. Edward models a keen and perceptive interpretation of other characters in the play, especially when faced with mortal danger, first for Gaveston and then for himself. Take for example Mortimer and Lancaster's contrived emblems on their tournament shields.⁴⁷ Upon Gaveston's repeal from banishment, Mortimer and Lancaster describe to Edward these emblems that figure their disdain for Gaveston and Edward both. Mortimer's shield depicts a tall cedar tree that houses "kingly eagles" but that has become infected with a canker the "gets into the highest bough of all" (2.2.16-9). Lancaster claims that his emblem is harder to read. His shield simply depicts a flying fish with an elaborate backstory of being hated and pursued by the other fish before it is finally seized by a bird (2.2.22-7). Edward reads the supposed obscurity with ease:

⁴⁶ Mortimer takes great pride in his ability to exercise his strength over others, especially in his ability to wield language – "I seal, I cancel, I do what I will" (5.4.49). Yet this speech is often regarded as the tragic turn toward Mortimer's fall from power due to his certainty about his own infallibility and his claim that even fortune cannot harm him: "Now is all sure; the queen and Mortimer / Shall rule the realm, the king, and none rule us" (5.4.67 and 63-4).

⁴⁷ Each emblem, a kind of pictorial allegory, cannot conceal from Edward the treasonous meanings intended by his peers and, furthermore, reveals no new or unexpected information about their stance to Edward or to the audience.

They love me not that hate my Gaveston.
I am that cedar (shake me not too much!)
And you the eagles; soar ye ne'er so high,
I have the jesses that will pull you down,
And *AEquae tandem* shall that canker cry
Unto the proudest peer of Britainy.
Though thou compar'st him to a flying fish,
And threat'nest death whether he rise or fall,
'Tis not the hugest monster of the sea
Nor the foulest harpy that shall swallow him. (2.2.37-46)

This instance of dramatized interpretation reveals the problem with allegory: it cannot conceal what everyone already knows and it cannot reveal what is not already known.

Edward is keenly aware of the peers' hatred of Gaveston and of their intentions to get rid of him. He reads through their allegory to assert a threat of harm if they do not remain loyal to Edward as their king.

Edward shows that he can read beyond the peers' attempt at allegory, but he also models how to read using a catachrestic logic. That is, he can read new meanings from contradictory ones as well as from lack of or gaps in meaning. For instance, Edward can interpret what Lightborn is *not* saying. When Lightborn claims to visit Edward in the dungeon "To comfort [him] and bring [him] joyful news," Edward immediately knows Lightborn is lying: "Villian, I know thou com'st to murder me" (5.5.42, 43). It would seem that Edward interprets an inarticulate text: he claims to read his own "tragedy written in [Lightborn's] brows" (5.5.73). Edward is an astute reader of people, not just their words. Put differently, Edward can read meaning that seems to arrive from nowhere, or at least not from language. If the doctrine of the king's two bodies does indeed depend upon the successful interpretation of a man as a king by his people, then this play reimagines in Edward a sovereign who reverses this interpretive move to effectively read

others. Edward is not an astute reader of the collective body of the state, but he is attuned to the individual, be it Lightborn, Spenser, or Gaveston.

“NONE SHALL HEAR”, “NONE SHALL KNOW”: SIGNIFICANT SILENCES, INTERPRETIVE GAPS

Edward’s model for productively reading ambiguous as well as silent meaning helps elucidate two scenes that contain significant gaps, which bear on the ways in which this play may be interpreted: one at the outset of Mortimer’s rise to power and one at the culmination of Edward’s fall. Critics tend either to ignore gaps such as these or else fill them with extra-textual details. In his Introduction to *Constructing Christopher Marlowe*, J.T. Parnell points out that critics like Greenblatt, James Shapiro, Thomas Cartellini, and Emily Bartels “move, in their zeal to access Renaissance ‘realities,’ further and further away from the particularities of Marlowe’s texts” and “tellingly ignore” textual gaps and silences (8). However, these silences and gaps are particularly important because one’s interpretation of the scenes that contain them identifies in miniature the biases of a reader’s interpretive stance on the whole play. Leaving the silences to remain silent and the gaps unfilled helps elucidate *Edward’s* affective orientations to the ideological networks of early modern political culture to which this play responds.

A significant yet unexplained silence remains in the sudden shift in the plot that leads to Mortimer’s rise to power. When Queen Isabella approaches Mortimer and the other nobles, at Edward’s demand, in order to repeal Gaveston from banishment, she appeals specifically to Mortimer for help:

Isabella: Sweet Mortimer, sit down by me a while, and I will tell the reasons of such weight as thou wilt soon subscribe to his repeal.

Mortimer: It is impossible; but speak your mind.

Isabella: Then thus – but none shall hear it but ourselves.
(1.4.225-229)

The play never reveals what Isabella says to prevail upon Mortimer to ensure Gaveston's return. After speaking together so "none shall hear," Mortimer announces to the other peers, "of necessity, it must be so" that Gaveston return. Mortimer changes his mind in the space of a conversation that happens in full view of the audience but that cannot be heard. This silent shift is noteworthy because none of the peers in this scene wants Gaveston to return. Lancaster calls his repeal impossible "unless the sea cast up his shipwrecked body," "so sweet a sight" that Warwick affirms "there's none here but would run his horse to death" in order to see it (1.4.205-7). Just before Isabella draws Mortimer out of the earshot of the peers and the audience, he echoes the hope that Gaveston, "that vile torpedo," "floats on the Irish seas" (1.4.223-24). Yet pressed by her husband to secure his friend's repeal, Isabella somehow convinces Mortimer that this is the best course of action. The peers acknowledge this sudden turn in Mortimer's perspective as a complete change from his desire to banish Gaveston in the first place. Lancaster suggests that this change identifies a faulty interpretation: "Such reasons make white black and dark night day...In no respect can contraries be true" (1.4.247, 249). Yet this catachrestic logic prevails. Mortimer convinces the peers that contraries *can* be true by suggesting that Gaveston is too likeable and too wealthy to live at large where he may gain allies (1.4.256-62). The peers must repeal him in order to remove him permanently (1.4.264-70).

Mortimer's speech convinces the peers, but it also hides the gap that the text leaves at the outset of their conspiracy against Gaveston. In other words, Mortimer's speech seems sufficient to cover for his and Isabella's private conversation. However, their scripted silence may suggest that their joint conspiracy against Edward begins well before critics have otherwise acknowledged. For instance, Forker marks the following lines as the play preparing us for Isabella's adultery:

Isabel could live with thee [Mortimer] for ever.
In vain I look for love at Edward's hand,
Whose eyes are fixed on none but Gaveston. (2.5.59-60, note 59-60)

I read these lines differently. *Could* in the first line may indicate the conditional possibility of "Isabel liv[ing] with thee [Mortimer]," of course, but *could* may also indicate that she has the "power, ability, or capacity" to do so.⁴⁸ In other words, Isabella may be saying that she might, one day in an undefined future, possibly live with Mortimer, or she may be saying that she already has the power to do so, indeed may already be doing so, in the present and extending into the foreseeable future. In the second sense, this passage does not necessarily identify a preparation for adultery but an announcement of it. Moreover, depending on what she said to convince Mortimer to do Edward's bidding in order to turn Edward's desire for Gaveston to Mortimer's own advantage, Isabella could have orchestrated Mortimer's rise to power while putting on a show of faithfulness to Edward. This reading is supported by the fact that Edward and Gaveston see through her performance early in the play. Edward accuses her of swaying the peers to exile Gaveston, claiming "Thou art too familiar with that Mortimer" after Gaveston suggests that she fawns on Mortimer (1.4.154, 146-7).

⁴⁸ See the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of *can*, v.1.

It follows, then, that this ambiguous *could* in the lines above offers at least two possibilities for reading the silent conversation between Mortimer and Isabella. If we read this vital exchange by filling it with Mortimer's argument to the peers (that Gaveston is a bigger threat abroad than at home), we may interpret Mortimer as a calculating and duplicitous Machiavel (1.4.256-62). But if we read it in light of Isabella's betrayal, already visible to Edward one hundred lines before but confirmed later in the play by her adulterous relationship with Mortimer and her desire to have Edward murdered, then we can read her as the orchestrator of Edward's downfall and Mortimer as a tragic pawn in *her* scheme. This reading echoes Joanna Gibbs's argument that Isabella is not adrift in the emotional turmoil of finding protection from a man—Edward and then Mortimer—as other critics have assumed. Instead, Gibbs asserts, Isabella is a strategic and politically savvy arbiter of power that sustains her own social and political position. In other words, rather than the misogynistic readings of Isabella that see her as a victim in the schemes of men, she acts on her own behalf by appropriating the male-oriented political arena in ways that use to her own advantage stereotypically feminine spheres of action—including emotional ties to her husband and reactions to being banished as well as her private conversation with Mortimer. Such a reading places Isabella at the heart of the two competing plot lines that Marlowe names in his play's title: *The troublesome raigne and lamentable death of Edward the Second, King of England: with the tragicall fall of proud Mortimer*. Even from the outset of the play, the dual title establishes an interpretive scenario in which the reader is asked to take sides, but the play does not offer a clear vision for which side is better to take. Leaving this ambiguity open to interpretation

further complicates the play's interrogation of the strength of sovereignty and the power of language and perception to determine who rises and who falls.

Edward's death scene similarly calls for careful interpretation because it hinges on silence. His death is, of course, the culmination of his tragic fall from power and is widely discussed by critics who either use it to recuperate sympathy for Edward and Gaveston's relationship or attack it by citing Edward's demise as the just deserts of a foolish king.⁴⁹ Most critical discussion of Marlowe's play assumes a sodomitic relationship between Edward and Gaveston that culminates, in all modern productions and nearly all modern critical treatments, with a murder that mirrors this sodomitical relationship: Edward anally penetrated by his murderer Lightborn with the "red hot spit" that Lightborn does request.⁵⁰ Later editors have decided that the play's silence at the moment of Edward's death requires a gloss that they conveniently find supplied by Holinshed. The account is quite gruesome:

they came suddenlie one night into the chamber where he laie in bed fast asleepe, and with heavie featherbeds or a table (as some write) being cast upon him, they kept him down and withal put into his fundamente an horne, and though the same they thrust up into his bodie an hot spit, or (as others have) through the pipe of a trumpet a plumbers instrument of iron made verie hot, the which passing up into his intrailes, and being rolled to and fro, burnt the same. (341, lines 53-62)

In light of Holinshed's influence on modern critical interpretation, this instance of ambiguity in the text exposes the ways in which critics depend too heavily on extra-

⁴⁹ Bruce Smith, Jonathan Goldberg, and Gregory Bredbeck are representative of more sympathetic readings. Lukas Erne has identified the tendency toward hostile readings that link the characters in Marlowe's plays with assumptions about his own life experiences. See Erne's "Biography, Mythography, and Criticism: The Life and Works of Christopher Marlowe."

⁵⁰ Orgel is an exception to this critical assumption. Modern editors have inserted more or less graphic stage directions, with more or less dependency on Holinshed's account, to explain Edward's death in order to guide readers through the action of the final act. Lightborn requests the spit at 5.5.30.

textual historical context in their interpretations of early modern texts. This dependence differs from the way in which the first line of the play opens a gap between the death of one king and the succession of the next. The call of the opening line—which in turn recalls “the king is dead”—evokes its normal response—“long live the king.” In the case of Edward’s murder, nothing at this moment in the text evokes the act of sodomy by hot poker. When the text remains utterly silent, neither indicating nor evoking meaning, one cannot simply interpret textual silence through analogy to other stories, historical or not. These instances require a different kind of interpretative move, one that reads the ambivalent orientation the play silently takes on the death of a king.

Without the historical spackle supplied by Holinshed, Marlowe’s text is silent on the particulars of Edward’s murder. At the moment of Edward’s death, the text offers no description of the action in the dialogue and leaves the gap in stage direction that editors have been eager to fill. From the text, we know only that Edward’s body is pressed between the bed on which he lies and a table on which Matrevis and Gurney stamp—“But not too hard, lest that [they] bruise his body”—and that someone screams loudly—“this cry will raise the town” (5.6.112, 13). Indeed, no existing early modern copies of the play contain other direction at this moment. To interpret the penetration with a spit from these lines is to read between them. The text itself is silent on the matter except to suggest that it will not reveal the details. In fact, Lightborne clearly states, “none shall know my tricks” (5.4.38). The play is not explicit about the particulars of Edward’s murder but it is explicit about keeping those particulars silent.

With no stage direction and no directives worked into the dialogue between Lightborn and Matrevis, in marked contrast to the careful discussion of how to employ

the table, audiences who were not already expecting a gruesome rape would have no purchase on the interpretation that Edward was penetrated by the spit Lightborn requests earlier in the scene. Moreover, it is not necessarily safe to assume that Marlowe's audiences would know, by way of Holinshed, the story of Edward's demise. In an argument in defense of the theatre, Thomas Heywood asserts that

playes haue made the ignorant more apprehensiue, taught the vnlearned the knowledge of many famous histories, instructed such as cannot reade in the discouery of all our *English* Chronicles.⁵¹

The historical account would have to be staged in full view of the audience or else discussed in detail to teach this history lesson using theatre. This text, however, leaves the circumstances of Edward's death entirely up to the interpretations of readers or directors. How this gap is filled has direct bearing on how one interprets Edward's reign: Edward solicits a more sympathetic reading from those who witness his demise as a spectacle of violence and cruelty, but less sympathetic readings from those who can only imagine Edward's death offstage as the expedient, though illegal, removal of a king who endangers the whole state in order to please himself. On the one hand, sympathetic interpretations read the end of the play through an empathetic lens of Edward's pain while, while on the other, retributive readings ignore and effectively silence the torture inflicted upon this king. The two extremes of this interpretive spectrum are thematized in the implements that Lightborn requests: the fiery hot spit solicits images of screaming pain, no matter how he plans to use it, while the table and feather bed signify stifling, suffocating silence. The text paradoxically privileges the silence of the table over the pain of the poker by describing the one but not the other, thereby staking a willfully ambivalent and inarticulate position on the murder of the sovereign.

⁵¹ See also Orgel's point that the inarticulate elements of early modern plays were perhaps not at all intended to be understood by the average original audience member ("Incomprehensibility").

THREE “KINGS IN ENGLAND CANNOT REIGN AT ONCE”

While *Edward* suggests in several ways that two kings are always reigning at once, the politic king and the natural king, the play ends with the simultaneous reign of three kings: Mortimer’s, but also Edward’s as rightful king, and his son Edward’s as rightful heir and on whom his father bestows the office. Though the play repeatedly evokes the idea that sovereign power is not only vulnerable to the state but vulnerable to itself, it thematizes this vulnerability at the end with the clashing reigns of the three kings. Yet the play prevents the demise of the state, despite the wavering weakness of the body politic, when the threats to the state are dead—Gaveston and Mortimer—and Edward III succeeds the throne.

It would seem that Edward’s succession restarts the pause begun at the outset of the play by taking control of the state and restoring order to the kingdom. However, just as the dead Edward I haunts the beginning of the play, Edward II haunts the ending in his son’s final words. The brief portion of Edward III’s reign that this play stages suggests that he will not return to the political machinations that Mortimer resorts to or that his grandfather, upon his deathbed, uses against Edward II by banishing Gaveston. Instead, this play marks Edward III with the language of emotion. He speaks of his “loving father,” and even though he postures against his mother’s emotional pleadings for pity, she does make him cry: “Her words enforce these tears, / And I shall pity her if she speak again” (5.6.40, 84-5). Edward III’s words that conclude the play linger on his own uncontained emotion:

Sweet father, here unto thy murdered ghost,
I offer up this wicked traitor’s head,
And let these tears, distilling from mine eyes,
Be witness of my grief and innocency. (5.6.98-101)

These closing lines of this play leave open the question of whether or not Edward III will restore order and power to the sovereign body or will remember the vulnerability of the king's natural body through his act of mourning. He has indeed taken control of the political body by killing Mortimer, but the final lines of the play suggest that the natural body remains a liability because young Edward's personal grief for his father is neither resolved nor contained. Instead it lingers like a "murdered ghost" and persists like his tears that cannot be controlled. The conclusion of the play, then, ambivalently wavers between the the sovereign as political and the sovereign as natural, suggesting that the king is never free of the vulnerability of his natural body, but he is also never free of the vulnerability of the body politic.

Edward the Second asks readers to pass judgments on sovereignty in their interpretations of Edward and Gaveston, just as it requires Edward's peers to do. But the play turns the same judgment onto the body politic, introducing ambiguity, weakness, and silence into the language of authority. In its ambivalent waverings and unfillable gaps, the play questions the authority of kings as well as the authority of interpreters, and reimagines within the text the interpretive moves it solicits. Marlowe's play disrupts received ideologies of power, lingering instead on the potential to witness and embrace individual and collective vulnerability.

CHAPTER III

“I HAVE A SIN OF FEAR”: THE DEVOTIONAL WRITINGS OF JOHN DONNE AND THE STRENGTH OF CYCLICAL VULNERABILITY

John Donne has been held hostage by the polarized criticism that marks his reception history.¹ Scholars such as C.S. Lewis, Stanley Fish, Jonathan Goldberg and John Carey characterize Donne—metonymized by his poetic voices—as an unabashed egoist, an anxious masculine subject desperately asserting his own identity in poems they are inclined to interpret as exercises in compensatory rhetoric. By contrast, William Empson and, more recently, Dennis Flynn and Jeanne Shami have more sympathetically characterized Donne as invested in mutuality, and morally and intellectually courageous. Throughout Donne’s reception history, critics have been similarly split. This critical conflict is far from settled. However, as polarized as it may be, the line that divides critics of Donne’s writing often seems drawn on a very simple issue: the question of whether critics find Donne’s personality appealing or unappealing. Somewhat scandalously, it seems that disagreements about the interpretation and aesthetic value of Donne’s work are over-determined by an essentially moralistic argument about whether or not we should regard Donne as a decent person.

If critics are divided about Donne’s appeal, they are perhaps replicating a more fundamental division, detectable in the texts that bear his name. Annabel Patterson suggests that Donne used a “strategy of self division” by creating a rhetorical persona, a

¹ This chapter refers to Donne by name to indicate the person and writer and Donne’s speaker or similar designation to refer to Donne’s narrative voice.

In “What Was Donne Doing?”, William Kerrigan suggests that literary criticism in general has trended toward reductive strategies and that Donne studies have simply mirrored this general movement. See especially page 8.

voice that speaks on his behalf (48). Shoshana Felman has usefully explained that when critical responses to a text are divided, the division may be traced to divisions in the text itself. Following Felman, Ben Saunders has suggested that critics of Donne have been thus divided in their readings of Donne's desire because they mirror Donne's own divided attempt to represent desire in his poetry. Their ambivalent reactions suggest that critics may be responding to the ambivalent rhetorical affect evoked by Donne's texts.

Before his critics became caught up in the question of whether Donne is to be reviled or embraced, the cycle of self-love and self-loathing was operative in Donne's own writings. To offer one of many possible examples: Donne's speaker simultaneously demonstrates what we might call a profound self-attachment, on the one hand, and a desire to be rid of himself, on the other, in his account of physical and spiritual sickness, the *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*. Consider the following lines from the first prayer of this text:

O eternall, and most gracious *God*, ... enable me by thy *grace* to looke forward to mine end, and looke backward to, to the considerations of thy mercies afforded mee from the beginning; ... Deliver mee therefore, O my God, from these vaine imaginations; that it is an overcurious thing, a dangerous thing, to come to that tendernesse, that rawnesse, that scrupulousnesse, to fear every *concupiscence*, every offer of *Sin*, that this suspicious, & jealous diligence will turne to an inordinate dejection of spirit, and a diffidence in thy care & providence; but keep me still establish'd, both in a constant assurance, that thou wilt speake to me at the beginning of every such sicknes, at the approach of every such *Sinne*; and that, if I take knowledg of that voice then, and flye to thee, thou wilt preserve mee from falling, or raise me againe, when by natural infirmitie I am fallen: doe this, O *Lord*, for his sake, who knowes our naturall infirmities, for he had them; and knowes the weight of our sinns, for he paid a deare price for them, thy *Sonne*, our *Saviour*, *Chr: Jesus*, Amen. (9, 10)²

² All emphases in quotations attributed to Donne are original unless otherwise noted.

Donne calls upon his “eternall, and most gracious *God*” to deliver him from bodily and spiritual sickness, while also calling for deliverance from his own will, his “vaine imaginations” (9, 10). But his pleas for deliverance and declarations of self-surrender hint at a deeper ambivalence or even an unwillingness to give his will up or over to God to the extent that he speaks to God in imperatives: “enable me,” “deliver mee,” “keep me,” “preserve mee,” “raise me,” “doe this” (6, 7). Thus, it seems, Donne would command even as he relinquishes willful control.

Critics have attempted—indeed have seemed obligated—to resolve apparent contradictions like this one in order to discuss what Donne is up to. Some of the most vigorous interpretive arguments about Donne’s work involve resolving these contradictions to privilege one half or the other of the binary categories— sacred and profane, self and other – that are in fact blurred by his rhetoric.³ Most critics have chosen to look only at one side or the other to find the Donne they desire. William Kerrigan questions why Donne has not been more central to addressing polarizing debates because he seems to incorporate both sides and then some. He writes, “Why haven’t they found Donne, who discovers all these themes, and more, in a few dense lines?” (6). There is more than a dialectic of division at work in Donne’s texts. While Donne indisputably wrestles with these divisions, he also articulates a way through them. As a result, we can find in Donne’s writing a way to read it differently.

Where critics have tended to focus on resolving contradiction, I want to think about the ambiguity that Donne creates when he collapses binaries, when the two terms of a given binary cease to be discrete. I argue that Donne accommodates more than

³ Interpretive disputes also arise over many other binary divides that Donne articulates, including man and woman.

polarized reasons by way of ambiguous figures and structures. Donne creates a series of paradoxes and incongruities that lead to still more masterful rhetorical maneuvering. These tropes and structures suggest ways to encounter Donne's writing that maintain the ambiguity of his work, rather than resolve it toward one fixed interpretation or another. Donne models how to embrace ambiguity when he creates contradictions, thereby pointing critics toward the possibility of welcoming the strangeness of Donne's writing, toward the possibility of reading Donne otherwise.

The argument of this chapter responds to the critical habit of taming Donne's paradoxes in allegory and builds an analysis of the thematic and structural benefits of reading paradox differently. First, I propose the logic of parable as an alternative method for managing ambiguity that maintains Donne's contradictory meanings rather than trying to subdue them. I explain and deploy the logic of parable in readings of Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* before considering the liminal figure of the *Watchman* in station sixteen as a parabolic figure for Donne's counterintuitive textual perspectives and orientations. Finally, I explore Donne's contradictory figure of a circle that is also a line as a parabolic organizing principle for each station of the *Devotions*, the text as a whole, and also in miniature in Donne's short poem "A Hymn to God the Father." Ultimately, I argue that Donne's parabolic thematic and rhetorical habits reveal the ambivalence with which the narrative and poetic speakers orient themselves to the personal and cultural matters at issue in Donne's writing.

ORGANIZING AMBIGUITY, PART TWO: THE FORM AND THE POTENTIAL OF *PARABLE*

Many critical readings of Donne's work suggest that allegory and analogy are his master tropes.⁴ However, reading allegorically or analogically is inherently reductive and helps further entrench Donnean criticism into polarized camps. Kate Narveson has suggested in her chapter, "The Devotion," that Donne is up to more than allegory, something that not only operates by a logic that exceeds metaphor and tends toward riddle but also imitates scripture to offer alternative perspectives. She writes,

the remoteness of the metaphors and remarkable associative leaps set his work apart from other devotional writing. One of the most striking features of the *Devotions* is the way that each thought is subject to further angles of vision that cumulatively capture the riddling nature of human experience... Ostensibly imitating Scripture's voyages to fetch remote and precious figures, Donne's restless, associative heaping of figures gives his work much of its remarkable energy. (312, 313)

I press Narveson's insight to argue that allegory—as extended metaphor, both of which operate according to the logic of analogy—offers an inadequate figure to contain the contradictions with which Donne wrestles. I propose instead that Donne deploys the logic of parable to manage his complex and irresolvable rhetorical maneuvers in his prose.⁵

Though I have already articulated the difference between metaphor and catachresis in Chapter II, the difference between allegory and parable may not be readily apparent because many critics assume the two terms are synonymous.⁶ The word *parable*

⁴ See, for instance, Dennis Quinn's "Donne's Christian Eloquence," William Muller's *John Donne: Preacher*, Joan Webber's *Contrary Music: The Prose Style of John Donne*, and more recently, Hugh Grady's "Donne's First Anniversary as Baroque Allegory: Fragmentation, Idealization, and the Resistance to Unity."

⁵ My argument is indebted to Robert Guffey's "Parabolic Logic in John Donne's Sermons," discussed below. My project builds on his to read parabolic logic in Donne's work beyond his sermons, which are the focus of Guffey's investigation.

⁶ This understanding of parable as a species of allegory is indebted to Aristotle, as I discuss below. Usefully, twentieth- and twenty-first-century Christian theologians have been able to reorient the ways in

and its uses are themselves ambiguous, which likely contributes to critics' conflation of the two tropes. Robert Funk explains that the Greek word for parable, *παραβολή*, used in the *Septuagint*, held a broad range of meanings, with the primary meaning of simply "word saying" (*Language* 126).⁷ This usage, Funk continues, passed into modern Greek and Latin. Literary Latin, by way of Aristotle's works on rhetoric and poetics, uses parable to signify in only one sense: comparison.⁸ Aristotle contributes to a transcendentalized understanding of parable because he privileges correspondence over conflict in comparisons, which leads to a sanitized and simplistic approach to interpretation. In contrast, Funk and other contemporary theorists of religious language distinguish parable from tropes like allegory and analogy, and show that contradiction and disruption are at the heart of parable.⁹ They provide insight for reading these contradictions insofar as they propose something new, something unexpected, something that seems miraculous. Critics who work on parable from a literary or Aristotelian stance

which their contemporary readers can understand biblical texts, especially parables, without succumbing to the comfortable history of allegorical Christian readings that run rampant in the West.

Similar Hellenization impacted the ways in which Hebraic scholars have understood some forms of parable in Midrashic texts as allegory depending on the context and intention of the parable's circumstances and use, but Hebraic scholars have also retained the wider definition of parable as word saying and continue to acknowledge the strangeness and disruptiveness at the heart of parable. See, for instance, David Stern's historicized explanation of the form in *Midrash and Theory*.

⁷ The *Septuagint* refers to the ancient translation of Hebrew texts into Koine Greek.

⁸ Platonic philosophy, however, comes closer to parabolic logic. Plato acknowledges that he is trying to articulate something he cannot articulate because language is merely mimetic and therefore suspect. See his *Republic* book 10 for his concerns with all art as mimetic. Though I am not necessarily interested in thinking about parabolic logic in terms of Plato's allegories of the ideal forms here, in another project I am interested in identifying ways in which Plato uses incongruent logic and even catachresis, which have been sanitized or smoothed over or ignored by Aristotle or other critics or both.

⁹ These characteristics of parable are explained by C.H. Dodd in *The Parables of the Kingdom* (5-6). Though his text is a pioneering work for modern research on parable (especially for Robert Funk, Ian Ramsey, Donald Evans, and Paul Ricoeur), Dodd derives his formal explanation of parable from Rudolph Bultman's *History of The Synoptic Tradition*.

will, according to Funk, “have difficulty accommodating [this] diversity of biblical and popular usage” (*Language* 126).

Typical of this critical oversight, M. H. Abrams’s *Glossary of Literary Terms* offers a limited explanation of parable. Abrams initially defines parable as a species of allegory and allegory as “a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the ‘literal,’ or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of signification” (Seventh edition 5).¹⁰ Across genres, the signature feature of allegory is that it establishes “one coherent set of circumstances which signify a second order of correlated meanings” (6). In other words, allegory operates like any other translative figure in which one thing stands in for another. In Abrams’s estimation, then, allegory must be interpreted (or translated) because the author has a particular lesson in mind and relays it in a coded manner.¹¹ In order to solve the code, the reader of allegory must accurately interpret the primary and secondary levels of

¹⁰ Abrams emphasizes the importance of allegory in Renaissance texts, including the allegorical morality play *Everyman*, Spenser’s allegorical verse romance *The Faerie Queene*, Milton’s episodic allegory in which Satan meets with Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*. The wider reaching stakes of my project suggest that all of these instances in which allegory is specifically intended by the author or read as such by the critic may be fruitfully reread as parable.

See examples of the renewed interest in early modern allegory among early modern critics in Judith Anderson’s *Reading the Allegorical Intertext: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton* and Brenda Machosky’s edited collection *Thinking Allegory Otherwise*.

¹¹ Both Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe understand allegory as a less sophisticated trope *because it is translative*. In *The Statesman’s Manual*, Coleridge derides allegory as nothing “but a translation of abstract notions into picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses,” nothing but “empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with apparitions of matter” (438, Abrams 313). In other words, for Coleridge, allegory provides no new content but instead forces the information it intends to convey into an arbitrary relationship with representations of the known world. Similarly, Goethe in *Maxims and Reflections* understands allegory as a kind of translation of a “phenomenon into a concept, the concept into an image,” that forecloses the possibility of new meaning because “the concept always remains bounded in the image, and is entirely to be kept and held in it, and to be expressed by it” (No. 1112, Abrams 313). In both assessments, allegory serves little more than a didactic purpose. Abrams calls attention to both of these negative assessments.

meaning. This method implies that the reader uses what she already knows in order to understand something she does not yet know. However, in practice, both the primary and secondary orders (both the tenor and the vehicle) of allegory must be known in advance in order to be translated.¹²

The collapse of parable into allegory will not always be tenable even if it is convenient. If allegory must be based on public and shared knowledge, then so-called allegories that do something other than translate one familiar story by way of another disrupt allegorical conventions and must be approached differently. Even Abrams acknowledges that some figures are not conventional like allegory but must be decoded by way of inference.¹³ These figures, Abrams attests, generate “a more difficult problem in interpretation,” a problem which attempts to read the unknown unknowns toward which a text may gesture (311). Parable is more closely aligned with Abrams’s understanding of the private symbol than it is with allegory, and the disruption at the heart of parable offers a different, more nuanced perspective.

The basic characteristics of parable, according to Dodd, are familiar to most readers. First, parables may take a variety of forms, but most commonly understood, parables are extended narratives like Jesus’s story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Parables may also be single vignettes or aphorisms – such as “the watched pot never boils,” shorter narratives, or more detailed and action-packed vignettes that communicate a complex idea – such as Jesus’s claim that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye

¹² To recognize the second order *Christ* in the first order *Chanticleer*, for example, one must already know the story of Christ.

¹³ Abrams’s solution to the interpretive problem for what he calls *private symbol* resembles my agenda for interpreting ambiguous elements. Abrams explains that private symbols “suggest a direction or a broad area of significance rather than, like an emblem in an allegorical narrative, a relatively determinate reference,” and asserts that this attribute makes the private symbol an “irreplaceable literary device” (312).

of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Luke 15:11-32, Matthew 19: 24, Mark 10:25, and Luke 18:25). Each of these familiar forms nonetheless take on catachrestic characteristics of contradiction, strangeness, and incongruity in one way or another. Secondly, and significantly less disruptively, the images and narratives deployed by parable must not only be common to everyday experience. They must also behave or unfold in ways that the audience can predict. In other words, parables appeal to the audiences' expectations for what should logically happen in everyday situations. For instance, a farmer in a parable should sow seeds and reap crops, while shepherds should tend to flocks, and not vice versa. This characteristic of parable makes the form seem similar to allegory, but the similarities end with the disruption that parables provoke. Parable inevitably turns away from the familiar, rendering it strange and providing perspectives on every-day issues that the audience cannot predict. While parable involves knowns, the form also involves unknowns and potentially unknown unknowns.

Though parable begins with the familiar and predictable, parable necessarily contradicts or violates the audience's expectations. Thus, like catachresis, parable entails a transgression that creates confusion and renders the familiar unfamiliar.¹⁴ Dodd explains that parable "arrest[s] the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leav[es] the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application" (5). Paul Ricoeur similarly describes the logic of parable—in catachrestic terms—as a "process of 'transgression' that ruptur[es]...ordinary speech" and thereby "open[s] up our very experience" to the metaphysical (*Figuring the Sacred* 58-61). Ricoeur and Funk both show how this transgression is made possible in New Testament parables through excessive actions,

¹⁴ Whereas allegory is primarily didactic, parable cannot be simply so because the form both elucidates and confuses in order to leave open the interpretive potential of its contents.

breaks in judgment, foolishness, and especially hyperbole (Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred* 60 and Funk *Language, Hermeneutic* 160-62).¹⁵ Thus parable does not attempt to indicate something metaphysical, as allegory or analogy might. Instead, parable disrupts the ordinary logic of these other tropes to evoke something that ordinary language cannot capture, something that transgresses ordinary experience.

This disruptive, transgressive quality of parable asks readers change their orientations, to see the familiar differently, and as Dodd suggests, parable pushes readers to glimpse beyond the limits of the known world (159). Yet these glimpses remain wide open to individual interpretations because parables are less indicative than they are evocative.¹⁶ In other words, because parable gestures toward but does not concretely indicate, parable must be interpreted and reinterpreted, never settled on a single interpretation.¹⁷ Another defining feature of parable, then, is that its methodology results in alternative or counterintuitive perspectives for the reader, perspectives that approach the blind and the unknown categories of perception. Similarly, Robert Guffey differentiates parable from analogy through this kind of change in perspective, suggesting that the logic of analogy is limited to what one already knows rather than what one may be taught by encountering a text (117). Reading with the logic of parable, Guffey

¹⁵ Hyperbole, as a misuse of language in overstatement, has associations with catachresis that are resonant, for instance, in Postcolonial Theory but also in early modern rhetorical understandings of both terms.

¹⁶ In “Parabolic Logic in Donne’s Sermons,” Guffey explains that “parabolic logic is part of a persuasive strategy that is aimed not only at rational argumentation and illustration, but at active transformation of the audience’s consciousness” (109).

¹⁷ Their understandings of parable, then, are exactly like Abrams, Coleridge, and Goethe’s understanding of private symbol, which, in turn, is like Lisa Freinkel’s suggestion, in *Reading Shakespeare’s Will* and “The Use of Fetish,” that catachresis is the trope that never stops turning. Parable, then, cannot be understood by way of translation into allegory, at least not concretely.

suggests, “dislodge[s] the auditor from this [analogical] way of thinking and...open[s] the conscience to a radically different standard of judgment” (117).

Parable, then, functions as a kind of puzzle that has no clear, or at least no single, solution, operating like vehicular images and stories without established, culturally shared tenors. The point of a parabolic story is not necessarily to confound but to acknowledge that readers will not understand if they do not try to see differently, and to encourage readers to stop reading complacently. To read a parable parabolically, then, is to read it against the grain—especially, for Western readers, against the grain of Christian allegory—and to look for the blind spots in the familiarity of the story, to read otherwise.¹⁸ That is to say, parabolic readings reorient the reader to take another path through the text than is customary or expected or accepted as *the way*. The parables of Jesus, in contrast to their allegorical interpretations, disrupt the audience’s expectations for whom in the story to model and ask those who can hear and see to hear and see for themselves rather than assume that they already know the conventional moral of the story.¹⁹ Western Christians have done New Testament parables a disservice—akin to the one Stephen Orgel exposes in early modern studies bent on resolving ambiguity—when they tamed parables into established and controlled allegorical interpretations. The way of reading parabolically for which I advocate takes a vulnerable position by implicating

¹⁸ New Testament parables have similarities and differences with other Hebraic parables. While both are didactic, New testament parables are future oriented rather than aimed at textual exegesis as in the rabbinic tradition and therefore avoid teleological assumptions, making them more disruptive and abusive rather than simply didactic.

¹⁹ This idea is repeated in the familiar parabolic refrain characteristic of New Testament parable, “he who has ears, let him hear,” as translated in the King James, Revised Standard, and other versions (Matthew 13:9, and elsewhere).

the reader in working out an answer, and implicates the text itself in an ambivalent stance of passive resistance.²⁰

Just as most scholars of language and literature understand the narrative extension of metaphor to be allegory, I suggest that *catachresis* extends into narrative as *parable* because, like catachresis, parable participates in an ambivalent structure that has affinity with the translative tropes but is primarily identified by its tendency toward disruption.²¹ Like catachresis, parable cultivates ambiguity, but it is also useful for organizing it. Parable formalizes an extended logic for approaching ambiguity, for gesturing toward the ways in which texts navigate content that is difficult or even impossible to say, for approaching how a text may teach readers something they cannot anticipate.²² Articulating the characteristics of parable as an extension of catachresis further develops the logic through which this project orients itself toward ambiguity.

²⁰ I explain the concept of passive resistance in Chapter IV.

²¹ To my knowledge, no one has considered the potentials for thinking about catachresis as an extended into narrative form in the way I propose. David Stern comes close when he articulates the different ways of understanding *mashal* (parable) in midrashic texts. In *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies*, Stern argues that midrashic forms, especially *mashal*, offer “an alternative to the various ‘logocentric’ hermeneutical traditions, like that of allegoresis, that have dominated Western literary cultures since antiquity” that also mediates between the Israelite and the Hellenized traditions in which this literary form finds its origin and to which it is “simultaneously receptive and resistant” (15-16). Though he opposes the kind of immanent readings I advocate, favoring instead an even more theoretically inflected, and specifically poststructuralist, methodology than I advance here, Stern argues that most rabbinic *meshalim* offer “neither a secret tale with a hidden meaning nor a transparent story with a clear-cut moral,” that they contain “an allusive narrative told for an ulterior purpose” drawing “a series of parallels” between the story and a real-world situation that they do not make explicit but leave “to [their] audience to figure out” and are, indeed, often not just contradictory but ambivalently so (44, 47). Similarly, Donald Evans, without directly saying so, understands parable as comparable to catachresis, as a means by which one may read one thing through the context of another, even though the two things may be in no way related (131-32). Thus, it is not appropriate to equate parable with allegory.

²² Abrams turns to the language of parable when he evokes Mark Turner’s suggestion in *The Literary Mind* that parable is more than a trope or teaching tactic, but “a basic cognitive principle” relevant to every instance of interpretation. It is telling, I think, that Abrams avoids discussing catachresis in his *Glossary*, deploying a discussion of *symbol* that fills the catachrestic gap in his text.

In sum, a parabolic reading takes the familiar and predictable, uses it to evoke something that cannot be anticipated in advance of each reader's reading, and, in the process, emphasizes the strangeness of the familiar, thereby reorienting readers to new perspectives both on what readers think they already know as well as on what they do not know. Reading parabolically extends the transgressive logic of catachresis into larger—structural and substantive—patterns of textual affect and offers critics a route to reorientation that navigates ambiguity differently while privileging the perspectives of the text. It is with the full ambiguity afforded to parable that I differentiate it from allegory and define the potential of parable as a trope.

EARLY MODERN PARABLE: DONNEAN ERUPTIONS AND DISRUPTIONS

Critics already recognize the importance of parable to the structures of early modern literature insofar as parabolic plots are borrowed and amended from New Testament stories and from the mediating influence of English morality plays. Whereas the morality play tradition picks up on the didactic quality of parable, it also subdues the strangeness of parable by forcing it into allegory. Later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century appropriations of parabolic structures do something different. As Janet Clare has asserted, early modern texts do not ask audiences to “passively assimilate received biblical or moral truths;” instead, texts deploy disruptions in “dangerous effects and emotions” (80). Early modern inclusion of parabolic structures and narratives, replicated and revised with a difference, picks up on the uneasiness that the New Testament parables evoke. In this dissertation, I show that Marlowe and Shakespeare deploy

cataphoric forms and re-readings of parables in discrete instances and vignettes.²³ So does Donne, but he also uses this logic on a macro-level as a structuring or organizing principle. Parable, then, offers a way of understanding the uneasiness, both thematic and structural, inherent in Donne's work and in critical responses to it.

Critics have identified the productive significance of contradiction in Donne's writing. Though they do not consider the logic of parable as a means for organizing these contradictions, they come quite close to describing Donne's writing in parabolic terms, especially in regard to the inherent disruption at the heart of parable. For example, in "The Exegesis of Experience," Janel Mueller notes that the merging of various and often contradictory practices is characteristic of Anglican theology and has been so since the beginning of English theology and ritual, especially in devotional texts. She cites Helen White's influence on the idea that "English devotional writing exhibits the hardiness and vitality frequent in mixed strains" led to a focus on "the eclectic spirit of Donne as at once both dominant and representative of its expression" (Mueller 1). Mueller does not see Donne's use of scripture as a means to lend himself authority as other Protestant devotional texts do (3). Instead, as Mueller and Kate Narverson both observe, Donne uses scripture to stand for a counterperspective to his own (Mueller 3, Narverson 313). Narverson attributes "Donne's remarkable style...in part to his departures from convention in the way he used Scripture," as well as to his departures in form that distinguish Donne's *Devotions* from the devotional texts of Augustine, Ignatius of

²³ Much of the appropriation of these plots in Shakespeare and Middleton for instance shows that the stories themselves are internally strange. Although he does not necessarily acknowledge parable as itself strange, in *Thomas Middleton and the New Comedy Tradition*, George Rowe highlights the ambiguity that Middleton creates when he introduces the structures of the Prodigal Son parable into his comedies and, "by juxtaposing two contradictory structures [creates] a play which is deliberately unsettling, a play which insistently pulls its audiences sympathies in two opposite directions" (56).

Loyola, Thomas Rogers, John Hayward, and other medieval and early modern religious writers (313). She claims that “Donne’s innovations in the devotional genre [should] be seen as the product of a hermeneutic far more sophisticated than is usual in devotional works” (315). I suggest that this hermeneutic extends the earlier, first-century uses of parable.

Though critics have not identified Donne’s counterintuitive use of parable in the *Devotions*, in “Parabolic Logic in Donne’s Sermons,” Robert Guffey argues that Donne’s sermons deploy a parabolic logic because they use “the same figurative technique and persuasive strategy” as the New Testament Parables of Jesus (104). Furthermore, Guffey argues that critics have mistaken these parabolic rhetorical moves for analogy in Donne’s sermons, probably because Donne “sets up the expectation of an analogical similarity” (105). For example, Guffey explains the analogy in the central image of Donne’s sermon on Psalm 38. Donne writes, “For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore,” in order to compare arrows to temptations. However, Donne does not let these similarities stand. Instead, he “contradict[s] expectations by shifting the proportional scale in which the analogy is based or by representing the image in a radically incongruous way” (Guffey 105). Donne goes on to articulate the ways in which arrows are not at all like temptations because “a man cannot shoot an arrow at *himself*, but we can direct *tentations* upon our selves” (2:57). Thus he retracts the initial analogy, which would only work as such if the vehicle and tenor behave counterintuitively, differently that one might expect. Guffey proposes that the initial image of the arrow implies temptation striking from outside and a passively victimized position for those who are tempted (110). When Donne changes the image to a self-shot arrow, he disrupts the

familiar understanding of how arrows operate in the world and shifts the text's orientation "from one of passivity and the implicit denial of responsibility for his condition to one of active responsibility for sin and suffering" (Guffey 110-11). In other words, Donne attempts to teach his original audiences a different way of approaching sin, one that at once embraces self-responsibility and an unexpected vulnerability to oneself. When late modern readers grasp this counterintuitive lesson, we glimpse the way in which the text orients itself to unspoken attitudes, assumptions, and orientations of early modern audiences. I argue that Donne deploys similar contradictory strategies of parable throughout his poetry and prose writings, that the logic of parable not only pervades Donne's corpus but is also central to reading the ambiguous figures and forms that open Donne studies into new directions.²⁴

The *Devotions* creates ambivalence when it wavers but ultimately refuses to choose between willful assertion and surrender—one version of the moralized binary structure that I have suggested divides critical discourse on Donne into two polarized camps.²⁵ Donne's tendency toward this blurring is apparent in his treatment of the binary to which his speaker seems most vulnerable: life and death. Both merging and vacillating between these two opposites, Donne's text demonstrates how to negotiate ambivalent rhetorical structures and paradoxical language in order to articulate a first-person perspective on

²⁴ William Kerrigan does not discuss "what Donne was doing" in terms of parabolic logic, but his strategy for unpacking Donne's rhetorical maneuvering around the topic of love closely resembles the parabolic logic I am deploying here. Kerrigan shows how Donne takes common or traditional (especially Petrarchan) tropes and narratives and turns them to say something altogether different about the nature of love. Kerrigan says that "Donne idealizes mutual love, and he will not...abandon his partner. Whereas the eyes of the conventional lady scorch or chill, Donne makes a world of reciprocal gazes, transforming St. Paul's symbol of heavenly perfection – knowing even as we are known, knowing then – into an emblem for returned love here and now" (12).

²⁵ The blurring of willful assertion and surrender that I pursue here is only one of the many ways in which the *Devotions* create ambivalence.

something which such a perspective can not articulate: a first-person report of one's own state in death.

In the *Devotions*, reading illness as analogous to sin and death does not account for death as the ambivalent concept that it seems to be for Donne, something he both desires and detests. Ramie Targoff, for one, catalogs the contradictory positions that Donne takes when considering death: “an urge to battle death directly; a desire to take death into one's own hands; a loathing of the separation of body and soul; an overwhelming concern for the material decay of the corpse; an anxiety about the mixing of remains in the grave; a longing above all for resurrection” (Targoff, “Facing Death,” 217). This indecisive orientation toward death pervades the *Devotions*. Take for example a contradictory image of dying in the final station: the self-executed executioner.

wee are not onely executed, (that implies guiltinesse) but executioners,
(that implies dishonor;) and executioners of ourselves, (and that implies
impietie). (124)

The seeming analogy dependent upon the image of execution breaks down because the players—the executioner and the executed—are not operating in an ordinary or recognizable way. The image instead invokes the logic of contradiction.

The guilty, dishonorable, and impious self-executing executioner entails a paradoxical, circular, and twice doubled perspective on impending death, a perspective that is irresolvable. The obvious doubled perspective, of course, is the speaker's simultaneous occupation of the usually separate perspectives of the executioner and the executed. This doubling of first-person perspective is incongruous and virtually impossible. But to suggest that the executioner is executing himself recombines the two perspectives, suggesting that the first image is not incongruous at all. In effect, the perspective of the speaker is singular, double, and both singular and double at once when

he suggests he executes himself. The final image of the self-executing executioner turns again toward the opening image of the collective experience of “we” “ourselves” being executed, resulting in an infinite cycle of being executed, that is, of dying. The cyclical image suggests that one never stops being executed, and never stops executing oneself, never stops dying.

The endless cycle of dying is complicated by the parenthetical implications of each perspective. The implication that executed person is guilty in turn implies that the execution is deserved. The implication that the executioner is dishonorable implies that whoever is responsible for the death also loses, particularly within a community within which honor is gained and sustained by reputation. The proposition that the self-executed executioner is impious identifies such a death as a kind of suicide. The perspectives of the three parties begin with guilt and end with guilt because taking one’s own life was considered sinful, but also suggests that in self-executing one takes responsibility for one’s sins. Taking responsibility for one’s sins paves the way to the possibility of forgiveness. If this were not true for Donne and his first readers, then his speaker would not worry as he does about the possibility of not being forgiven if one relapses but does not afterward repent. This self-canceling, indeed suicidal, image provides another incongruity in dying: a pious impiety. That is, the piety implicated in taking responsibility for ones sins and seeking forgiveness is accomplished by the impious act of suicide, a paradox that is circular and therefore undecidable.²⁶ The convoluted first-person perspective on dying and the ensuing images and implications identify the

²⁶ This recalls the much debated, incongruous aphorism, “living is Christ and dying is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

impossibility of articulating a first-person perspective of the the actual state of death that Donne nonetheless attempts to articulate using a logic of productive incongruity.

Similarly, Targoff argues that Donne's differing views of death must be considered together to make sense of the most counterintuitive element of his speaker's apparent fear of death: that he is not actually attached to his mortal life (Targoff 217).²⁷ What Donne's speaker does seem to be attached to, however, is his body and thus his identity. Indeed, four of the six fears that Targoff lists indicate a concern for the body itself: the frightening desire to kill one's own body, the soul leaving the body, the decaying of the body, the body mixing with the remains of other bodies (217). Donne's homiletic speaker even considers resurrection to be a reunion of the soul with a perfected material body. In a sermon, he identifies the new life, the perfected body, that is no longer subject to death but is nonetheless born out of death when he says,

unto God the Lord belongs the issues of death, and by recompacting this dust into the same body, and reanimating the same body with the same soule, hee shall in a blessed and glorious resurrectin give mee such an issue from this death, as shal never passess into any other death, but establish me into a life that shall last as long as the Lord of life himself. (*Sermons* 10. 239-40)

This wish to overcome death in death attempts to cover the terror of death with eternal life, but succeeds in merging the two concepts in an irresolvable tension. The passage opens with a birth ("the issues") that immediately contradicts itself because it is a birth resulting from death itself. Wavering again toward life—and the *same* life, "the same body" and "the same soul"—preserves the speaker from death because no part of the former body or soul has been lost, in effect suggesting that no death occurred. The

²⁷ Targoff refers to Donne's homiletic speaker as if he represents Donne himself. Because she analyses sermons to come to her conclusions, I refer to the perspectives in question as those of Donne's homiletic speaker instead.

sameness of the identifying features advances a stronger attachment to the mortal life than Targoff posits.

Targoff argues, following John Carey, that Donne's homelitic speaker at once favors sameness of his own identity while attempting to avoid a collective sameness, identifying what the speaker most fears as "the collapse of distinctions between persons, the complete erasure of individuality" (Targoff 228). Donne's speaker, Targoff continues, cannot tolerate considering "the horror of losing himself within the collective mass of the dead" (Targoff 228). Gary Kuchar sheds light on this overwhelming fear when he explains that Donne cannot conceive of himself "as an image of God" without his own "ideally unified body," and, further, that Donne registers separation from God "in terms of a dismembered and disorderly body" (157).²⁸ In other words, Donne needs his body in order to feel close to God, and when his body fails him, he feels he fails God. These readings of Donne's sermons depend on an analogous relationship between the disorderly body and sinfulness. In contrast, I argue that it is precisely at the moment when Donne's devotional speaker identifies his own heart as "dismembered and disorderly" that he most clearly surrenders his will to God's will and therefore moves spiritually closer to God and physically closer to death. Thus, when he is most vulnerable, he can be closest to God, but he clearly fears the vulnerability entailed in the loss of control that he also most strongly desires. When Donne's devotional speaker loses control over his certainty about his spiritual relationship with God, the text ceases to function analogically, introducing

²⁸ Kuchar evokes Daniel Featley's term "autologie" to describe Donne's task in the *Devotions*. A kind of theology, "autologie" indicates that the way to God is through the self, and Kuchar says that Donne "does more than merely enact a devotional quest toward God via the self; [he] diagnoses how changes in concepts of the body impact and threaten the preconditions of 'autologie' as a means of coming to know God by coming to know the self as an embodied being" (Kuchar 154).

paradox and disrupting readerly expectations. For example, the speaker's heart, in station 11 and discussed in detail below, is not perfect enough to be given in submission to God, but giving makes it perfect. The speaker says his is not like other hearts that are either faint or joyful, thereby rejecting the analogous association invoked by simile. The speaker's heart is instead a middle heart, "not so perfit, as to bee given, but that the very giving, mends them" (59). The initial paradox is apparent: the heart cannot and must be given. The disruption of expectation requires more clarification. The middle state of the speaker's heart would likely startle his protestant audience who recall the description of God who detests and rejects middle hearts, those that are lukewarm rather than either hot or cold.²⁹ Furthermore, rather than calling on God and relying on grace to perfect his heart and make it joyful as the protestant audience might expect, the speaker suggests that he himself has control over his heart's mending.³⁰ In other words, the speaker mends his heart through his own act of giving it. He thereby takes responsibility for his own heart and remains uncertain about God's grace. The speaker's does not fit into any of the analogies evoked by the hearts his is not like nor those anticipated by his audience. Therefore, rather than understanding Donne's account of illness in the *Devotions* as a degeneration of body that is analogous to the degeneration of the soul, I suggest that the degeneration happens on the level of ambivalent and incongruous turns of phrase and that

²⁹ See Revelation 3: 15-17: "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."

³⁰ See God as the agent of heart-mending in Psalms: "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit" and "He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds" (34: 18, 147: 3). See God's grace rather than one's own active faith as the salvific agent in Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast" (2: 8-9).

this ambivalence registers a kind of textual disgust toward both life and death. This disgust that makes it possible for Donne to teach personal responsibility for one's life so as to mediate, first, the repulsion to life in favor of ending it in death and, second, the attraction to life in asserting one's own will and identity and to preservin these features of living in death. In effect, the wavering between the two, suggests a textual disgust that mediates the speaker's attempt to destroy and preserve life in death.

Even though critics have seized upon Donne's stance on death in *Devotions* and elsewhere, none of the current scholarly work has considered Station 15 "*I sleepe not day nor night*" despite this station's sustained focus on the body's need for sleep and the clear connection that Donne lays out between sleep and the initial state of death that he most fears: when consciousness is dissociated from the body. When Donne's speaker collapses the binary of life and death through the concept of sleep and the liminal figure of the *Watchman*, he deploys a parabolic logic that reveals a personal or individual vulnerable state: loss of control, loss of perspective, and ultimately loss of identity, all of which forgo the possibility of forgiveness and the preservation of a liminal perspective that superscedes that of the individual.

Donne's project here becomes suspect when he attempts to explain why sleep is the model for death that allows humankind to greet death as the familiar restorative comfort that sleep provides to the body. At first glance, the speaker appears to set up a commonplace analogy to resolve fear of the unknown in death. In this analogical reading, sleep as a metaphor allows Donne's speaker to subsume his fear of death by making death familiar and restorative in sleep and thereby equating death with life and other processes that sustain and enrich life. In doing so, the speaker does not actually face his

fear; he tries to hide it, to disempower it, to tame it in the familiar, a tactic that informs in analogical readings of Donne's final sermon as well as in some of his lyrics, like "Death be not proud." But such readings likewise avoid the ways in which Donne's devotional speaker makes the comparison of sleep and death strange. Though he equates death with the comfort of sleeping, he cannot sleep. Indeed, his sleeplessness propels the speaker on sleep. Thus sleep does not work as an analogy because it does not use sleep's presence but its lack to confront death, and the would-be sleeper does not act according to what audiences expect sleepers to do. In other words, if Donne's speaker can find comfort in death through sleep but cannot sleep, then this analogy breaks down, the speaker cannot find comfort in death, and his fear persists. But by the end of this station, Donne's speaker is neither comforted nor submissive but still self-interested and demanding that God "consider [him] in that *condition*" he was in when "thou wast pleased with [him]" (81). Equating death with sleep attempts to disarm one kind of vulnerable state with another, but the analogy fails to find comfort and understanding in sleep's familiarity.

However, sleep proves to be worth considering as a parabolic image because, in addition to the would-be sleeper thwarting expectations, sleep is a troubling and incongruent figure for death. At the outset of this station Donne's speaker links life and death in the act of sleeping by both asserting and distancing himself from this analogy.

Naturall men have conceived a twofold use of sleep; that it is a refreshing of the body in this life; that it is a preparing of the soul for the next; that it is a feast, and it is the grace at that feast; that it is our recreation and cheers us, and it is our catechism and instructs us; we lie down in a hope that we shall rise the stronger, and we lie down in a knowledge that we may rise no more. (*Devotions* 77)

The first words inaugurate his distancing before the analogy is even posed. In attributing the "twofold use of *sleep*" to "Natural Men," Donne's speaker suggests that their double

usage does not follow. As Guffey points out, Donne understands natural reason to be stunted, fallen, chaotic (124).³¹ Thus, the reasoning of natural men is immediately marked by a lack of reason. The disruption of this analogy bears out through the entire station as the comparison becomes more and more convoluted. Donne's speaker explicitly refutes the usefulness of analogy when he says,

though naturall men, who have induced secondary and figurative considerations, have found out this second, this *emblematicall* use of *sleepe*, that it should be *representative of death*...God, I say, intended *sleepe* onely for the *refreshing* of man by bodily rest, and not for a *figure of death*, for he intened not *death* it selfe. (77-78)

The speaker directly repudiates what natural men think of sleep as a figure for death, a figure that strains under the forced induction, the unnatural birth, of their "secondary and figurative considerations." In what follows, the issuing equation of sleep and death becomes strangely entangled and divided. After proving false the analogy of sleep to death based on what the speaker takes to be the original intention of God, he asserts that God did in fact appropriate this analogy to comfort men:

God hath taken *Mans Creature, death*, into his hand, and mended it...[and] presents it to him, in a *familiar*, in an *assiduous*, in an *agreeable*, and *acceptable* forme, in *sleepe* (78)

Thus the speaker's refutation of natural men's analogy wavers because God has apparently taken this logic, already identified as faulty, and used it for human benefit, thereby validating the fallen logic upon which this analogy depends. Donne's speaker attempts to untangle this tenuous analogy throughout the station but never fully settles on a confident assertion that the analogy works.

³¹ Donne replicates this point in several sermons. See, for example, sermons three, four, and five.

For example, from the outset of the prayer, the text divides the singular act of sleeping into its two separate uses for life and death. It multiplies and condenses the “twofold use of *sleep*” both thematically and structurally in the abrupt opening sentence. Donne complicates the the analogous relationship between sleep and death with the main verb in the opening clause. Donne’s “Naturall Men” do what at once can and cannot be done: they “have conceived,” thought of and given birth to their analogy that links sleep to death. It seems sleep as death has a double conception: conceived and induced by natural men and then created by God despite his not intending to equate the two. Both God and natural men become surrogate mothers of death through their ideas. Elsewhere in the *Devotions*, Donne deploys a similarly problematic image of surrogacy and birthing. In the first station, the known unknown (the certainty of death) is already prefigured in the familiar signs of *illness*: “our *dissolution* is conceived in these *first changes*, quickned in the *sicknes* it selfe, and *borne* in *death*, which beares date from these first changes” (7). Interestingly, this passage suggests another incongruous concept: the *life cycle* of death. It figures illness itself as a third mother of death in which the conception and the quickening—the coming to life and its perception—of death occur. Death figures as the offspring of illness, born at the moment one dies. Donne deploys an extended, paradoxical image of generation, development, and birth to describe the fact of mortality. The incongruity of the figures—God, natural men, and illness as mothers of death—suggests that the logic of parable is at work in Donne’s attempt to understand death because the key terms of the three analogical mothers are not behaving as would normally be expected.³² Rather than using the familiarity of illness or sleep to explain the

³² Readers may object that this idea is characteristic of Platonic and therefore Neo-Platonic understandings of men giving birth to ideas as a higher or more important form of birthing than literal childbearing.

signs of death, Donne suggests that death is always already a part of and comes to life in both.

Ramie Targoff similarly understands Donne's writing to insist "that what we regard as life is indistinguishable from death" and that life itself is "a continuous act of dying, beginning with conception" (226). Targoff asserts that the final sermon, *Death's Duel*, shows a "marked departure" from Donne's other dealings with death which she reads as "normally regard[ing] death as a highly marked transition between one world and the next" (226). Targoff notes that *Death's Duel* reduces the "bustle and activity of life" to the "rattling of bones underground" and thereby emptying "all meaning from human vitality and achievement" (226). Further, she understands Donne's move to conflate life and death as "a negation of the joy of birth" and a "perverse strategy for conquering the terrors of death" (226). Building on Targoff's arguments concerning *Death's Duel*, I have shown that this collapse happens earlier in his career in the *Devotions*. Furthermore, I argue that Donne's thematic and structural conflation of life and death is birthed from a perverse lack of reason that fails to familiarize death through sleep and instead defamiliarizes life.

The structure of the station's first sentence, taken as a whole, reveals the multiplicity of uncertain and contradictory meanings that Donne will apply to *death* and *sleep*. Like the thematic content, the structure first suggests analogy before rendering it strange. The main clause ("Naturall Men have conceived a twofold use of *sleep*;"') announces the primary claim of this sentence and reveals the first doubling in its content

However, I suggest that Plato too is deploying more parabolic logic than analogical logic because he repeatedly suggests in the *Republic* that he is not able to articulate what he is trying to say, that he is grasping at what cannot be grasped. Though I have no interest in idealizing my argument here, I do posit that Plato's texts are similarly up to something more than simple analogy or allegory.

(“a twofold use”) while remaining singular in its form (emphasis original). It is formally a single simple sentence, but its grammatical singularity immediately splits after the first semicolon. The second phrase, in content, announces the first division of the “twofold use of *sleep*” the “*refreshing* of the body.” This split is not singular: it still depends upon the initial independent clause and it anticipates its partner in the “twofold” split, which appears after the second semicolon. Further, it precisely parallels its dependent partner

That it is a *refreshing* of the body in this life;

That it is a *preparing* of the *soule* for the next;

This parallel structure implies not only that these two parts of the use of sleep are equally important, but also that the terms of these parts are somehow equivalent. In other words, the syntax implies that a refreshing is a kind of preparing. This refreshing preparation of sleep enables the body to live well in this life and also prepare itself spiritually for death. In this parallel structure, Donne collapses the body and the soul, life and death, into the act of sleeping. He hides death in the image of sleep and equates death to life in the same collapse. Thus, he turns his fear of the sleep of death into a restorative feature of life and not only renders death familiar, but also reintroduces into the sleeping stage of death the life he hopes to regain in the resurrection of his body.

The next pair of phrases structurally confirms and denies this analogical reading. While these dependent phrases are also almost parallel to each other and to their internal phrases, they also contain internal parallel pairs. In the first internal pair,

That it is a *feast*,

and it is the *Grace* at that feast;

Donne renders sleep strange by calling it the feast itself and also the grace, a part of that feast. He turns a metaphor of sleep as a feast into a synecdoche of sleep as grace. Thus, sleep is both the whole analogy (the feast) and also part of the whole analogy (the grace). Thematically, the comparison does not hold either because grace cannot be a feast. *Grace*, that is the *words* designating blessings or virtues, can itself be neither food nor festival. *Grace* constitutes meaning twice here and that meaning devolves: first, as the literal grace as the part of a literal feast and then as the term *grace* as a part of the whole of the feast, which stands for sleep. The seeming parallel, *feast* and *grace*, also divides the concept of sleep into two coordinated clauses, recombines them as part and whole in a twofold process of sleep, and dissolves them as it deteriorates into a cover for the fear of death it means to dissolve.

Similarly, the text parallels division and recombination in the next phrase pair,

That it is our *recreation*, and cheers us,
and it is our *Catechisme*, and instructs us;

He first divides the recreation—in the already double sense of amusing activity and the act of creating anew—and cheer of the body from the catechism and instruction of the soul, yet this division leans on a recombination because each part still describes sleep. He introduces the ambiguity of the stance he takes on sleep itself, identifying the positive aspects of sleep as “*recreation*” and “cheere” and then turning to the less enjoyable but important aspects of sleep as “*Catechisme*” and “instruction”. Oddly, he pairs the emotion cheere with instruction, conflating the unreliable perceptions associated with emotion and the generally reasonable logic underlying instruction. This pair, then,

suggests that emotion may be a worthwhile route to instruction and that instruction may be hampered by emotion.

Turning to the parallel structure of the larger phrases,

That it is a *feast*, and it is the *Grace* at that feast;

That it is our *recreation*, and cheers us, and it is our *Catechisme*, and instructs us;

feast becomes a recreation that cheers us while *grace*, now neither a blessing nor a gift bestowed by God, becomes a *catechisme* that instructs, suggesting that the gift of grace is not free, that one must first learn one's lesson. Because *feast* has already been conflated with *grace*, these matches can also be reversed when this pair of larger phrases divides into a parallel trio.

That it is a *feast*, and it is the *Grace* at that feast;

That it is our *recreation*, and cheers us,

and it is our *Catechisme*, and instructs us;

Though this configuration does not change the parallel structures for grace (it is still cheer and instruction), feast takes on the the additional parallel with catechism, which intertwines feasting and delight in this life with fear of judgment in the next.

Thus, the entangled illogical pairs require body and soul, life and death, to be both separate and intertwined, sleep to be both death and feasting as well as enjoyment, rebirth, and interrogation.

The final pair of phrases in this opening sentence repeats the the dissolution of parallel structures. Here a troubling parallelism both aligns and contrasts the terms of this final pair of phrases. This ambiguity reveals the tenuous position of how natural men irrationally rationalize their fear of death. Again, one could naturally read this pair to

show that Donne uses grammatical parallelism to align terms such that they imply a similarity between otherwise dissimilar terms.

wee lie downe in a hope, that wee shall rise the stronger; and

wee lie downe in a knowledge, that wee may rise no more.

This double pairing is strange for a couple of reasons. First, *hope* aligns with *knowledge*. Of course, a person on his deathbed may hope to awake from sleep, but a faithful person can only hope to arise from death in salvation. A person knows that soon he will one day not awake from sleep. But this knowledge of rising no more also offers a hint of doubt in salvation after death. The uncertainty of salvation that pervades this text implies the uncertainty of *hope* and not the certainty of *knowledge*. Furthermore, “ris[ing] the stronger” aligns with “ris[ing] no more,” effectively wavering between virile living and feeble dying.³³ Thus, the grammatical structure of the sentence suggests that life and death are the same — a hopeful implication that is clearly designed to diminish the fearfulness of death. But the structure also suggests that life and death are not the same, so the hopefulness of the analogy breaks down in its knowledge of a fearful state for Donne’s speaker. Thus, this parallel structure does not, by the end, compare terms but instead contrasts them and reinstates the terror of death. The final pair of phrases in this sentence reinforce the uncertainty and fear that Donne’s speaker faces when he contemplates death by exposing the ambiguity and irrationality of the natural argument for coping with this fear. The image of sleep intended to provide comfort in the face of death dissolves into doubt.

³³ I discuss Donne’s habit of punning on “more” in detail below.

None of these structural incongruities lend themselves to a simple analogical understanding of this opening sentence upon which the entire fifteenth station is built. Rather than confirming a tidy equation, Donne's speaker wavers on the border between life and death. Without the familiarity of sleep, he can only face the unknown in death. He says that this "is the *misery* of [his] *sickness*, that death...is now before [his] *Eies*" and he can no longer see death through "that forme [sleep], in which *God* hath mollified it to us, and made it acceptable" (78). If he cannot face death through the familiar lens of sleep, then all that is left for him is to face death itself, thereby also rendering sleep unfamiliar.

Positioned on the outskirts of human activity, isolated by virtue of his illness, so far removed from the joy and wonder of birth, Donne's speaker confronts the unknown. From this perspective, he watches for the certain uncertainty of death. The fifteenth expostulation introduces the *Watchman*, a liminal figure that confirms and denies vulnerability Donne's speaker faces in his tenuous position between life and death (80). The speaker names himself and presumably his priestly peers, if not all of humankind, watchmen, identifying them all with an unsleeping perspective oriented to the possibility of seeing both sides of a binary at once. He says, "The name of *Watchmen* belongs to our *profession*; Thy *Prophets* are not only *seers* indued with a *power* of seeing, able to see, but *Watchmen* evermore in the *Act* of seeing" (80). The term *watchman* carried a number of meanings that were available in the early seventeenth century. Generally, the term takes on the meaning of one who watches, a sentinel, a lookout "posted to give warning at the approach of danger," one who keeps vigil and all of these especially imply that the

one who is watching watches at night while others sleep.³⁴ The watchman, importantly, does not sleep; his duty is to remain awake to see approaching danger. This liminal figure, tasked with the responsibility to *see*, stands on the border between the inside and the outside of a city, for instance, watching the outside in order to protect the inside. Because a watchman is both and neither inside and outside, he stands where oppositions cease to function. Announcing both ambiguity and vulnerability, the watchman as figure may be understood as a turn of language that stands for the function of undecidability.³⁵ Identifying with the watchman, Donne's speaker thematizes his perspective as well as the ambiguity of his position on sleep and, therefore, on life and death. With the perspective of a watchman, he can maintain his tangled and uncertain binary between life and death.

DONNE THE WRITER, DONNE THE *WATCHMAN*

For Donne's devotional speaker, the watchman thematizes his vulnerable embodied state. As Targoff has asserted, Donne as writer "positioned himself again and again on the threshold between this world and the next," and as Kuchar affirms, "neither alive nor dead, neither animate nor inanimate, Donne lingers in a liminal state between life and death, a purgatorial state where one is radically dislocated from the power of one's will" (Targoff 217 and Kuchar 166). Donne's speaker occupies the liminal space of the watchman, neither inside nor outside, neither alive nor dead. Though he watches the

³⁴ See the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of watchman.

³⁵ The watchman may analogically replace sleep to evoke more certain comfort because the watchman can actively defend against death. However, the watchman contains within itself the logic of parable as a figure for undecidability, ambivalence, ambiguity. The watchman is a parabolic figure that behaves according to the logical expectations for his profession, yet these expectations are themselves ambivalent, wavering literally between defending the city and permitting it to be permeated through in-trafficking of resources and out-trafficking wastes.

signs of his illness for his impending death, he does not watch his own life, nor his unreadable body; he has negated the joy of life by claiming conception as a kind of death. Thus, Donne's speaker, as a watchman himself who has seen death coming since birth, is an outcast of sorts. Existing on the border, he is not part of the daily life of like other people are, and he watches for death to approach. In this liminality, Donne's speaker juxtaposes death and life, altering perspectives on both. On the one hand, he protects the boundary between life and death, and this is vital for Donne the writer. Without this boundary, he loses the bodily boundary that identifies him as John Donne. On the other hand, the watchman dissolves this boundary, creating exactly the indistinction that Donne, across his writing, seems to fear.

The watchman, as a means to think differently about the text's orientation to death, illuminates Targoff's insight that Donne the writer most fears decomposition and that Donne removes from life the vitality of living by conflating life with death. He will apparently fight death to ensure that he will not be taken asleep, by which he seems to mean that he will not face decomposition before the resurrection of his body. Donne will not be content to find his soul with God; he must retain the identity that his body affords him. He recognizes his physical life as imperfect: he is tenuously positioned in society as a former Catholic in a Protestant England, he made a poor match in marriage, and he did not prosper financially. If he did not lead the life he expected to lead, he can hope for a perfected life in the resurrection. What he fears, then, is not the dying: rather, he seems to look forward to it. What he fears is losing his body and the losing the promise of a fulfilled life that resembles the life he perhaps wanted to have in his body. He fears his own impotence and vulnerability in this life and in death before the resurrection. This

fear makes sense in light of one of his letters. He reveals his fear of that part of death before the resurrection that he equates with sleep in Station 15. He says, “I would not that death should take me asleep” (*Letters* 50). While the lines that follow go on to explain how he wants to actively engage death and be overcome by it in vigorous battle, this line hints that Donne already finds sleep problematic in regard to death. He does not fear death taking him forcefully; he fears death taking him asleep. If he is afraid of sleeping with the threat of death looming, then he cannot be using *sleep* as a simple analogy to disarm the unknown in death. More interestingly however, he hints at what he may be doing by turning this analogy on its head. He suggests that if death took him forcefully, his own vulnerability would be excused, but if death took him gently as he slept, he would have no excuse for his impotence (*Letters* 50). If he dies awake, then, he would not be guilty of weakness, but if he dies sleep, the weakness of his imperfect body would be exposed for all to see.³⁶ Wakefulness, and not sleep, then is the better comparison for death despite the pervasive, familiar, and comforting analogy that suggests the opposite.

Thus, Donne’s devotional speaker does not find comfort in sleep but watches so that death does not catch him unaware, so that he can retain control over himself, so that he can preserve his body from decomposition, so that he will not appear weak but will instead appear perfect, as well as willful, in body and in soul. By emphasizing this strong yet fragile covering of vulnerability, Donne’s texts solicit readings that manage ambiguity as undecidable.

The readings that conclude this chapter will trace the ways in which Donne’s *Devotions* structures and thematizes a paradox of willful vulnerability that suggest the

³⁶ Donne expresses this same attitude toward his experience in his poem “Batter my heart, three-personed God” when he calls for God to violently overthrow of the speaker’s own will.

text's devotional model may be disruptively oriented toward the expectations of Donne's first readers. As Guffey also explains, parabolic logic necessarily but, unlike analogical tropes, only "initially represents the world as the audience members know it," its goal being to "effect a transformation of the auditor's way of being in the world" (121). In Donald Evans's words, "to accept a parable is to adopt an attitude" which alters one's natural perceptions of the world. Thus, parabolic logic, more than the logic of any other figure, identifies the ways in which a text attempts to alter perception and therefore evokes auditors' natural perceptions as well as a text's affective orientation to the networks of perception in which the text originated.

LINEAR CIRCLES: THE STRUCTURE OF THE STATION

Soliciting the expected only to render it utterly strange, the *Devotions* offers not only an affirmation of parabolic readings but also a textual pattern of organization that operates according to the same logic of contradiction. Donne stretches the ambiguous logic as a means to organize the *Devotions* through a structure that collapses two of the images Donne deploys to describe God, the circle and the line. He writes,

O eternal, and most gracious *God*, who considered in thy selfe, art a *Circle*, first and last, and altogether; but considered in thy working upon us, art a *direct line*, and ledest us from our *beginning*, through all our waye, to our *end* (6).

Donne takes a traditional metaphor for God—the circle—and marries it to something unexpected, something a circle cannot be—a direct line.³⁷ Not conforming to simply a

³⁷ For more on God as a circle and the use of circles in Donne and elsewhere, see Jay Dean Divine's "Compass and Circle in Donne's 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning,'" Frank Livingstone Huntley's "Sir Thomas Browne and the Metaphor of the Circle," Marvin Morillo's "Donne's Compasses: Circles and Right Lines," Isabel Rivers's *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry*, James L. Spenko's "Circular Form in Two Donne Lyrics," and more recently Barbara Correll's "Symbolic Economies and Zero-Sum Erotics: Donne's 'Sapho to Philaenis,'" Verena O. Lobsien's "Squaring the

linear, Augustinian path “from confusion and error to spiritual understanding,” Donne instead “structures his work around the always necessary, recurrent exercise of transcending the perspective of natural man” (Narverson 314). In other words, Donne imposes a structure of cyclical progression. Donne’s impossible linear circle is the basis for a counterintuitive organizing principle that spans each station of the devotion and sustains itself across the whole document.³⁸ Because this self-cancelling structure of cyclical progress allows Donne’s speaker continually to submit and reinstate his will, it also provides an organizational pattern for the other contradictions that he faces in his assertive submission to his God. Key among them are, first, the complex need both to live and to find salvation in death discussed above and, second, the equally complex need to submit and to reinstate his own will. The ambiguity of both needs is organized by textual disgust as the *Devotions* waver between attraction to and repulsion from both death and submission, both life and willful resistance. Through thematic and structural contradictions that indicate and then disrupt the ordinary expectations his audience likely has for devotional literature, Donne’s speaker evokes that which is difficult to know or to understand as well as that which is difficult to articulate—about affect, the sacred—while

Circle: Neoplatonic Versions of the Self in Early Modern Poetry,” and Brian Rotman’s *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*, Helen Wilcox’s “Squaring the Circle: Metaphors of the Divine in the Work of Donne and His Contemporaries.”

³⁸ Other critics have identified a circular and other patterns structuring Donne’s *Devotions*, but no one to my knowledge has linked this pattern to either the image of the linear circle or to its parabolic logic. See N. J. C. Anderson’s “Donne’s Devotions and the Psychology of Assent” understands a linear structure extant on both the micro and macro scale of the text, apparent in each station and across the entire text; Kate Gartner Frost’s *Holy Delight*, which considers several different patterns; Clara Lander’s “A Dangerous Sickness which turned to Spotted Fever,” which understands the Devotions within the progression of typhus; Janel Mueller’s “The Exegesis of Experience;” and Sister Elizabeth Savage’s reading of the *Devotions* as structured like the cyclical Ignatian meditation. Jonathan Goldberg, in “Not unto Death,” sees the *Devotions* as non-sequential.

suggesting a method for late modern readers to negotiate the silences and gaps that may inhibit readings of early modern cultural perspectives.

Donne's text harnesses parable's logic in the content and the structure of the linear circle in each station of his *Devotions*, engaging his ambivalent desire to submit to his God while retaining his own will. Station one, "*The first alternation, the first grudging, of the sicknesse,*" offers a clear example of Donne's localized use of parabolic logic and the structure of cyclical progress. The first meditation's abrupt opening, a signature Donnean move across his writing, invites the reading of parabolic logic in his texts because parable necessarily startles one out of one's ordinary perception. In this case, Donne's speaker is both startled and unable to articulate the cause: "This minute, I was well, and am ill, this minute. I am surpriz'd with a sodaine change, & alteration to worse, and can impute it to no cause, nor call it by any name" (7). The opening meditation explores the abrupt imposition of illness on the body and suggests from the outset that the text will proceed by disrupting the familiar with the unknown and by attempting to articulate that which cannot be named.

This meditation establishes the familiar facticity of the human condition (bodies sicken and die) but then disrupts how one may perceive this outcome. One cannot change the fact of death but one can read its signs, its "jealousies and suspitions and apprehensions of *Sicknes*, before we can call it a sicknes; we are not sure we are ill; one hand asks the other by the pulse, and our eye asks our own urine, how we do" (7). Yet this method is unreliable. It emerges from three emotional states: 1) jealousy, or vehemence of emotion on the one hand, devotion on the other; 2) suspicion, or the feeling or intuition of evil; and 3) apprehension, or "The action of 'feeling' anything [or,...]"

sympathetic perception” (*OED*). Emotion, as I have already discussed, is subject to interpretation and misinterpretation, but the words Donne chooses here suggest a particular kind of affective ambivalence, wavering between wrath and devotion, between imaginative, sympathetic perception and certainty, an ambivalence that suggests a general orientation of disgust. He further thematizes this ambivalence when he writes that we call it sickness when we can not be certain we are ill. Indeed, the diagnosis of illness relies entirely on perception and interpretation, which, like emotions, are unreliable and subject to all of the problems of first-person perspective. The speaker’s explanation amplifies the problem because the person who may be ill reads the symptoms of his illness privately, internally, without alternative perspectives: “one hand asks the other” and one’s “eye asks [one’s] own urine.” One may read one’s body but one may not be assured of correctly interpreting. One is, in other words, vulnerable to one’s own fallible perspective. From the outset, Donne gestures toward the strangeness of not being able to correctly interpret the most familiar thing of all: one’s own body.

The meditation first describes illness as external assault, “a Cannon batters all, overthrowes all, demolishes all; a *Sicknes*...summons us, seizes us, possesses us, destroyes us in an instant,” when the audience, both early and late modern, understand illness as internal to the body (7). The images of assault begin externally with cannons, summons, and sieges on the physical space of the body metaphorized as a building. But the externality of these descriptions of illness shift toward ambivalence between internal and external effects: one may be overthrown, demolished, possessed, and destroyed from either the outside or the inside, and these words do not specify the orientation. Donne’s speaker concretizes the internalization of illness when he equates humans to “*little*

world[s...with] *earthquakes* in him selfe, sodaine shakings; these *lightnings*, sodaine flashes; these *thunders*, sodaine noises” but then externalizes one’s ability to make sense of the little world’s sudden, often loud, and frightening signs when he switches to signs typically associated with interpretation, “these *Eclipses*, sodaine offuscations, & darkening of [the] senses; these *blazing stars*; sodaine firey exhalations; these *rivers of blood*, sodaine red waters” (8). By invoking untranslatable—or often mistakenly translated—portents alongside obfuscated senses and perceptions while explaining the human condition, Donne’s speaker posits the problem one’s first-person perspective to disrupt the idea that one can understand one’s own illness and anticipates his parabolic turn to shift the perspectives of his audience. The ambivalence of inside and outside terms and the strangeness of not being able to read one’s own body bears on the way in which the *Devotions* connects illness with sin.

The first expostulation continues the external pattern in respect to sin. “I run, I flie into the wayes of tentation, which I might shun; nay, I breake into houses, wher the plague is,” suggests that one seeks out sin, moves toward it, must break and enter into sin in order to be affected by it (8-9). He even suggests that he is deploying an analogy between illness and sin. He writes, “why is not my soule, as sensible as my body? Why hath not my soule these apprehensions, these presages, these changes, those antidates, those jealousies, those suspicions of a sinne, as well as my body of a sickness?” (8). However, he has already disrupted the first term of the analogy (illness), suggesting that the body is not at all sensible. The signs of the body are, first, external and ambivalently internal to the body, and, second, not able to be read or, if they are, the readings are problematic in the same way as readings of other prophecies. He suggests the same thing

in this supposed analogy (that equates body with soul) when he refers to the signs of sin as apprehensions, presages, and suspicions, none of which are dependably legible. At the heart of the common reading of illness as analogy for sin is disruption and incongruity. Considering this and heeding the interpretive warnings Donne has already announced, it makes little sense to read the *Devotions* only with attention to analogy.

In the first expostulation, Donne extends the seemingly analogical move of translating his body into his soul when he writes, “I am more than *dust & ashes*; I am my best part, I am my *soule*” (8). With this move, the speaker can escape his miserable, embodied human condition of sickness and death, and focus instead upon preserving his immortal self, his soul. He makes this move to preserve himself in the face of bodily decay and to establish his own authority to negotiate with God. He says that his soul, his true self, is the “breathe of God” and, as such, “[he] may breathe back these pious expostulations to [his] God” (5). Then he launches into a complaint that continues to blur the line between the concrete body and the insubstantial soul, blurring the terms of his analogy. The speaker complains that “[his] soul [is not] as sensible as [his] body” (5). He wants a soul that that he can read – a soul that emits signs of spiritual illness, just as his body emits signs of physical illness – so that he may seek remedy in order to preserve his “best part” for eternal life. But Donne has already established that reading the body does not necessarily produce reliable interpretations. A soul is in fact just as sensible as a body; or rather neither one is particularly sensible. Donne has turned back on itself the analogy of understanding the soul as we understand the body. After spending much of this station requesting legible bodily and spiritual signs, Donne turns midway to explain that he does have these signs but he does not heed them and, in fact, avoids them:

Thou hast imprinted a *pulse* in our *Soule*, but we do not examine it; a voice in our conscience, but wee do not hearken unto it. We talk it out, we jest it out, we drinke it out, we sleepe it out; and when wee wake, we doe not say with *Jacob*, *Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not*: but though we might know it, we do not, will wil not. (9)

Here Donne's speaker accuses the audience of ignoring their personal responsibility for sin. He also notes their inability to change their perspectives alone, to recognize that something strange is happening (the Lord being in this place) and they did not know, but even though they may recognize the bodily or spiritual signs, they also do not and will not acknowledge the strangeness. Those who are ill no less than those who are sinful can not will themselves to be physically or spiritually well.

This is a turning point in the larger parabolic structure of the first station, the point at which Donne both disrupts the analogical logic of the body/soul equation and suggests that the only means of recovering is to give up one's first-person efforts to do so. In other words, this turn moves the speaker from an incongruent position of both self-reliance and lack of personal responsibility (because illness comes from outside of oneself), on the one hand, to taking responsibility for himself while also submitting to rely on God for mending or redemption, on the other. The repetition of these paradoxical positions of a kind of willful submission perpetuates the cycle of the individual station as well as the progressive repetition of the same cycle across all twenty-three stations.

Opening abruptly on inexplicable illness and the original state of man before turning in the middle of the station to address the impossible contradictions at the heart of its content, the first station ends with the willful misery with which it began. But first, the closing of the station suggests a tentative surrender. Unable to recover body or soul on his own, Donne's speaker can only surrender to God in the prayer, and he names God here as the circle that is also a line:

O eternal, and most gracious *God*, who considered in thy selfe, art a *Circle*, first and last, and altogether; but considered in thy working upon us, art a *direct line*, and leadest us from our *beginning*, through all our waye, to our *end* (6).

Donne's God is both inside time ("first and last") and outside of time ("altogether").

Donne's God is, in Paul Tillich's words, "the ground of being," the answer to the crisis of the human condition (64). It is here that the speaker calls upon his God for spiritual and physical healing as well as for relief from his own will (10). But it is also here that the speaker makes demands even as he surrenders ("enable me," "deliver mee," "keep me," "preserve mee," "raise me," "doe this") perhaps in suspicion that God will forget him or not keep his promises to him (10). In either case, his is a willful surrender, a paradoxical surrender that signals the ambiguity of the speaker's own vulnerability to the unknowable will of God, a vulnerability that exceeds his embodied vulnerability to the sickness at hand.

This station opens with the vulnerable and "miserable condition of man" and concludes with a hint at the exact same condition, "our naturall infirmities" for which Christ "paid a deare price" (3-7). The circular structure of this station is complete, but it also offers a vector out into the next cycle with the suggestion that Donne's speaker remains vulnerable, and that he both can and cannot surrender to God's will. Thus, this first station creates thematic and structural ambiguity that does not permit critics to expose Donne as only an egoist or exactly submissive. Instead, it offers a new perspective on the *Devotions* that wavers between the two opposed perspectives to suggest an affective reading strategy that has been missing from Donne studies.

CONCENTRIC EXTENSION: THE STRUCTURE OF THE *DEVOTIONS*

Donne's parabolic logic transgresses the bounds of a single station. The structure of the entire *Devotions* takes this cyclical turn as it progresses. Just as each station divides this progression into three parts, dividing the whole text similarly into three parts to focus on the the first station, the central station (Station 11), and the final station (Station 23) will show the cyclical form of the collective *Devotions*. Station one, we have seen, lays out the strangeness and the vulnerability of the human condition, body and soul. It presents in miniature the same cyclical form of opening abruptly, laying out the facts of the speaker's illness, negotiating an argument to overcome these conditions, proposing a surrender of will, then reinstating it, that is amplified in the larger trajectory of the text. As the opening of this larger cycle, station one lays out the initial facts of the "miserable condition of Man," and reinforces that this station as a whole is about beginnings. By repeating the misery of man's condition (three times in this first station) the station lingers, indeed pauses to wallow, in humankind's distress. In effect, it stops time at the beginning, marking this station as the beginning thematically in addition to structurally by virtue of being the first. Stressing the pause, the repetition of man's condition suggests that it is insurmountable because the phrase is paired with other desperate proclamations of the speaker's state:

unprevented for all our diligence,
unsuspected for all our curiositie; nay
undeserved, if we consider only *disorder* (7).

The parallel structure of these phrases not only emphasizes the miserable condition but also externalizes it. It is foisted upon man from outside, susceptible to no preemptive

defense, not even anticipated as a possibility, and unwarranted, but unwarranted only when one sees the disorder of sickness as an external force. Though the condition of man is contextual, the speaker seems to suggest even here that his audience is wrongly (or only) considering it from outside and therefore not taking responsibility for their conditions as individuals, and also that this lack of personal responsibility contributes to their misery. Even as the cycle of this station turns, it delays movement away from this beginning. The station emphasizes the lack of movement by continually evoking beginnings and suddenness (these words are each repeated seven times), suggesting that station one turns internally in its own circle with unresolved lines connecting it to the next station. In its attention to sudden *beginnings* this station also inaugurates the larger circle of the *Devotions* as a whole.

At the heart of the *Devotions*, Station 11, “*They use Cordials, to keep the venom and Malignitie of the disease from the Heart,*” turns, like the first expostulation, to the heart of the human experience, the “best part”, the soul.³⁹ At the heart of this station Donne’s speaker posits a heart that is vulnerable: imperfect and decomposing. It is a heart that is weak and unreliable, yet upon which the entirety of one’s perceptions depends. Donne writes,

Whence can wee take a better argument, a clearer demonstration, that all the *Greatnes* of the world, is built upon *opinion* of others, and hath in it self no *reall being*, nor power of subsistence, then from the *heart of man*? It is alwayes in *Action*, and *motion*, still busie, still pretending to do all, to furnish all the powers, and faculties with all that they have; But if an enemy dare rise up against it, it is the soonest endangered, the soonest defeated of any part. (56)

³⁹ The word *heart* appears 79 times, significantly more often than any other word in the station.

Donne's speaker claims that the heart of man argues for and demonstrates that the greatness of the world has no real being and no power to survive without the perceptions or opinions of others, which he locates in the hearts of men. Yet as a means of organizing and perpetuating the world, the heart busily pretends to be the origin and sustenance of all worldly powers and all senses or talents. The speaker suggests that the heart is responsible for perceiving all of the greatness of the world as nothing and asserts that the heart is only pretending to supply the greatest things the world has to offer with all they have to make them great. If they are not actually great, have no real being nor power, and the heart merely pretends to give them all they have, then the heart pretends to give worldly greatness nothing while exposing that worldly greatness is nothing. The nothingness of worldly greatness redoubles as the responsible, if pretending, heart turns tail in response to external assault. The perceptions of the heart, then, are fraught with pretense that cannot be maintained and perception constitutes nothing. If everything worldly is created by this weak heart, and it is the best of parts, Donne's speaker asserts his intensely vulnerable position as nothing.

After explaining the nothingness of the heart, Donne's speaker divides hearts again into two kinds: joyful and faint. Claiming to have neither "*joyfulness of heart*" nor "*faintness of heart*," Donne's speaker disrupts the binary that identifies hearts in order to place his own heart flickering in between the two:

There is then a middle kinde of *Hearts*, not so perfit, as to bee given, but that the very giving, mends them: Not so desperate, as not to bee accepted, but that the very accepting dignifies them. This is a *melting* heart, and a *troubled* heart; and a *wounded* heart, and a *broken* heart, and a *contrite* heart... such a *Heart* I have. (59)

Here, the speaker identifies his vulnerability to the will of God. If his heart is imperfect, "melting", "troubled", "wounded", "broken", and "contrite", then he has given over his

heart, and therefore his will, to God at last. Yet this giving over happens almost exactly in the middle of his *Devotions*, indeed buried here in the middle of his central expostulation, out of place in the section in which he typically negotiates his arguments against the conditions laid out in the prior mediation. The middleness of the heart emphasizes the middleness of this station. The word *middle* is only used in the explanation of a middle kind of heart, and roughly in the middle of the station. This is the turning point of the parabolic movement of the the larger structure of the *Devotions* because this vulnerable display is not the speaker's final or definitive action even in this station. Though the speaker maintains the semblance of surrender to the will of God to the end, leaning toward submission "in thy kingdome" in the final lines of the eleventh prayer, he remains ambiguously assertive, continuing to make willful demands ("Preserve that to mee") and to elevate himself ("I may take a greater *degree*, and serve thee in a higher place") (61). Donne's speaker exposes and hides his most vulnerable moment of surrender at the heart of the *Devotions* cycle.

The *Devotions* does not end on surrender, but anticipates a return to the fearful state of sudden sickness considered at the outset. The final station, entitled "*They warne mee of the fearefull danger of relapsing,*" does not evoke a final submission but culminates in a plea for protection from a fear of relapse. The word *relapse* itself suggests a circular movement at the end of an illness that turns toward the beginning of a sickness, as in taking a *turn* for the worse, a turning that also suggests figurative turns of language that quickly devolve into incongruity.

This station opens with the refutation of one of Donne's common analogies. The comparison of the large to the small. In the opening lines, Donne writes,

It is not in *mans body*, as it is in the *Citie*, that when *the Bell* hath rung, to cover your *fire*, and rake up the *embers*, you may lie downe, and sleepe without fear. Though you have by *physicke* and *diet*, raked up the *embers* of your *disease*, stil there is a feare of a *relapse*; and the greater *danger* is in that. (121)

The city is not like a man's body. In the city, one can extinguish one's fire and sleep without fear of burning, but people facing the fear of illness leading to death cannot be so certain of their fates after death, either salvation or damnation. In other words, in sickness, one can never find contentment in sleep, nor can one find contentment in death. Though in the city neighbors depend upon each other to put out their own fires, thereby preserving the city, the individual's body has no externally shared responsibility for self-preservation—neither medicine nor diet. Each person faces death alone. This is a source of the fear because one must take personal responsibility in the face of an uncertain future in death.

Though the word *city* is not explicitly used as a figure earlier in the *Devotions*, the comparison between city and body evokes the idea that man is a little world from the first and fourth stations. *City* similarly suggests, on a smaller scale, the expansion of one man to many. Yet this passage refutes the analogy. That the text explicitly says that analogy does not work—"It is not in *mans body*, as it is in the *Citie*"—suggests that prior instances of this kind of micro-macro analogy also break down. The expansion of the one man to the whole world already becomes uncertain and therefore ambivalent when it retracts again in the image of the *little* world.⁴⁰ The return to and revision of prior images

⁴⁰ The opening lines of this station also evoke images from other earlier stations, too many to fully treat in the scope of this chapter, suggesting that they may similarly break down. Though the references for all of these images are likewise too many to list here, *death*, *fire*, *man's body*, *sleep*, *fear*, and *disease*, appear as comparative images throughout the *Devotions*. The *Bell*, for one, stands out in its repetitions because this image is so often referenced in the line, "Any Mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in Mankinde; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bells* tolls; It tolls for *thee*" (87).

reinforces the degeneration of the ending—of one’s illness, of one’s text, of one’s life. But it also emphasizes the turning of the cyclical structure of Donne’s *Devotions* through the backward-looking, formal and thematic characteristics of the final station.

The incongruent but simultaneous combination of degeneration and return amplify the ambivalence of the final station, which overflows with references to and invocations of both fear and ambiguity. For example,

wee must *watch* through all those long *nights*, and *mourne* through all those long *daies*, (*daies* and *nights*, so long that *Nature* her selfe shall seeme to be *perverted*, and to have put the *longest day*, and the *longest night*, which should bee *six moneths* asunder, into one *naturall, unnaturall day*)...(121)

In the “natural, unnatural” pairing of the longest night with the longest day, nature herself seems perverted. The speaker’s fear is so ambiguous that he “can scarce fix a *feare*, because wee know not what to feare” and so he affixes fear to relapse “the *nearest object*, the most *immediate* exercise of that *affection of feare*” (122). Sharon Seelig does not see this relapse as a fearful return to illness but as a paradoxical hopefulness in anticipation of death. In her words, “a return to health...is in theological terms a postponement of the goal, and that fear of relapsing, contrary to our first impression of the matter, may be taken as a sign of hope” (112). A return to health is itself the cause of anxiety, but a relapse quickens death. This strange hopefulness, a kind of rebirth of death in relapse, recalls the opening station’s concern with the life cycle of death. Similarly, in the word *relapse* Donne stages a return to the beginning of the *Devotions*. This return occurs in the formal and thematic revisions described above, but it becomes explicit in the repetition of the opening lines of the first station. Compare the two passages:

Variable, and therefore miserable condition of Man (Station 1, 7)

wee fall from that *comfort* which wee might have in our first *sickness*,
from that *meditation*, *Alas, how generally miserable is Man.*” (Station 23,
122)⁴¹

The latter line claims to be different from the former. It not only misremembers and therefore revises the fear of that first station—that the first sickness was not then comfortable. It also refutes this difference when it invokes the miserableness of man.

At the end of his final station, Donne’s speaker again claims surrender to God to avoid relapse but does so with imperatives directed at God (“*preserve me*,” “Say to my *Soule*,” “let mee”), ultimately reasserting his own will rather than giving it over to God (126,127). The final station formalizes the certain uncertainty—“where is my *assurance*”—in incongruously paired analogies and recollections of the first station, suggesting that this final station is formally relapsing to the sudden fear of sickness, completing the linear yet cyclical structure of the *Devotions* as a whole (123).

ONE MORE LINEAR CIRCLE

In a short poem composed around the same time as his *Devotions*, Donne’s poetic speaker confirms a reading, not of rampant egoism, nor of congenial wit, but one of radical fear and vulnerability before his most important critic – his God. This poem, “A Hymn to God the Father,” deploys in miniature the same cyclical structure of the *Devotions*, the effect of which is the text’s ambivalent orientation to faith evoked by the iterative cycle of submission in confession and willful, fearful doubt. The poem is short enough to reproduce in its entirety:

⁴¹ The *Devotions* is preoccupied with man’s miserable condition throughout.

I.
 Wilt thou forgive that sinne where I begun,
 Which was my sin, though it were done before?
 Wilt thou forgive that sin, through which I runne,
 And doe runne still: though still I doe deplore?
 When thou hast done, thou has not done,
 For, I have more.

II.
 Wilt thou forgive that sinne which I have wonne
 Others to sin? and, made my sinnes their doore?
 Wilt thou forgive that sinne which I did shun
 A yeare, or two: but wallowed in, a score?
 When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
 For I have more.

III.
 I have a sinne of fear, that when I have spunne
 My last thred, I shall perish on the shore;
 But swear by thy self, that at my death thy sonne
 Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
 And, having done that, thou hast done,
 I feare no more.

At a distance, the poem takes the same three-stage arrangement that Donne's speaker lays out in the *Devotions*. The poem opens with reference to the familiar: the past, the "miserable condition of man," original sin, "that sin where I begun" and the propensity for humanity to continue to sin even as they regret it. The second section extends the present or perpetual heart of sin, the willfulness of both urging "others to sin" and wallowing in one's own sins despite knowing better. The final section names the speaker's sin as a fear of eternal death and, like the prayers of his *Devotions*, calls imperatively upon God to preserve him in the future.

These thematic concerns are replicated by the poetic forms, including rhyme scheme and register. The repetition of rhyming trios through all three stages emphasizes not only the same three-part structure of the *Devotions* but also the simultaneous circling back and progressing forward of the linear circle. As each stanza proceeds, flickering

between rhymes in a two-part rhyme scheme, it also recalls the rhymes of both the prior and the forthcoming stanzas. For example, “begun” at the end of the opening line anticipates all of the other words which which it rhymes—“runne,” “wonne,” “shun,” “spunne,” “sonne,” and “done”—while all of these words recall “begun” as well as each other. Furthermore, the repetition of the word “done” at the conclusion of each stanza creates the effect of finality that is not at last final, repeating twice more and recalling all of the prior and forthcoming end lines and therefore suggesting that none of the seemingly definitive ends can be understood as final with any certainty. This repetition orients the poem toward an end that can always circle back to the beginning.

The cyclical progression repeats when the rhyming words organize into a pattern of first lines, third lines, and fifth lines of each stanza, offering the same three-part cycle in terms of their registers, which respectively evoke beginnings, middles, and ends. The first lines of each stanza end with words that evoke beginnings. Obviously, “begun” and “done” suggest beginnings and ends. The other rhyming words at the openings of the second two stanzas also suggest newness and creation. The word “wonne” of the second stanza suggests a new accomplishment, a new acquisition, and the procession of the life of a project. The word “spunne” of the third stanza evokes both creation of something new, as in the act of spinning thread, and a perpetual circling, as in the movement of spinning or turning. Advancing and stalling this progressive turning, the middle registers of the end-words of each stanza’s third line falter with the progressive movement of turning toward in “runne,” to the regressive movement of turning away in “shun,” followed by the turn to redemption evoked by the “sonne.” Similarly cyclical registers organize the rhyming words of the second and sixth lines of each stanza. The liminality

of beginnings emerges in “before,” “doore,” and “shore,” while the twice repeated “more” concludes every stanza by evoking the potential for another progressive reproduction. The spiraling yet wavering momentum of repetitions in the three-part structure combined with the fact that the poem proceeds with only a two-part rhyme scheme—ABABAB—recalls the ambivalent thematic concerns that pervade Donne’s writing.

Unlike, the *Devotions*, this poem seems to stress thematically a final surrender in its closing line. Whether we read it as most modern editions, “I fear no more,” or in some manuscripts, “I have no more,” the effect here is of ultimate dissolution of the self rather than a reconstituting of the will. This poetic “I” appears at last empty, empty of fear and possessing nothing, thus belying critics’ polarizing synecdochal readings of Donne’s ego. Instead, Donne’s poetic speaker has translated his identity into a lack of identity, a nothingness, akin to the identity of lack in catachresis. He has, in other words, turned his linear self (represented by the literally linear form of “I”) into a circle, the signifier that represents nothingness (zero).⁴² However, Donne’s speaker does not say that he no longer fears. He says something slightly different: “I fear no more.” Because this poem repeatedly evokes one of Donne’s oft repeated puns on his own name, it stands to reason that this final “more” is another of his naming puns based on his wife Anne’s maiden name.⁴³ The “more,” then, deserves a second glance as a “more” that is more than more, as a “more” that is inconclusive because it invites the possibility of progression into the future. The emphasis on more as the concluding word of the line and of the poem

⁴² For a more on zeroes and nothingness, see Brian Rotman’s *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*.

⁴³ Because puns are grammatically incongruent, their rampant use by Donne throughout his corpus offers further support for the method of understanding his work through an incongruent rather than analogical lens.

suggests that the speaker clings to fear, that despite the “no” there is always “more” at the end. In the poem’s concluding phrase, the poetic speaker’s fear may be simultaneously released and retained. The speaker either submits and therefore evacuates himself of identity or else stubbornly asserts the extension—the more—of his willful control. Either way, speaker remains vulnerable to retribution and loss.

Both thematically and formally, Donne’s texts negotiate what it means to be radically vulnerable, which they revealed in their complete incompleteness, in their transgressions and disruptions. Donne the writer knew something about fear and vulnerability. He was vulnerable to the networks of power that structure his world (the State, the Church, the interpretations of his first audiences, language itself). Donne turned this fear and his experience of vulnerability to the systems of his day into rhetorical resources that reveal how his texts are oriented within these cultural networks.⁴⁴ Donne’s texts manage a fear, which is, on the one hand physical—a fear of the dissolution and disappearance of his body—and on the other hand metaphysical—a fear of being misinterpreted, misunderstood, unforgiven.

In the final wavering embrace of vulnerability in both “A Hymn to God the Father” and the *Devotions*, Donne’s speakers offer a reading strategy that reveals the productive ambiguity of willful lack, of evacuated identity. By evacuating identity, Donne’s texts revoke the distinctions that identify things by what they are not and thereby call for readings that are hospitable to the possibility of new paths to understanding things heretofore unknown. It is rhetorical willfulness that enables lack to generate something

⁴⁴ This also constitutes a rhetorical practice of passive resistance.

new in catachrestic figures. Reading the polarizing effects inherent in Donne's writing as undecidable through the catachrestic logic of parable turns ambivalence from an interpretive hindrance to an interpretive asset.

CHAPTER IV

“IS NOT THE TRUTH THE TRUTH?”: STRANGER TRUTHS AND LIES IN SHAKESPEARE’S *HENRY IV, PART I*

What if Falstaff tells the truth? More precisely, what if Falstaff says something true when he lies? This question drives my analysis of Shakespeare’s second *Henriad*. Herbert Weil works from the same proposition in a brief article, “Montaigne and Falstaff,” in which he reads the old knight along with Montaigne’s ideas about truth in “How We Cry and Laugh for the Same Thing.” Weil asserts that though he is

More renowned for his outrageous lies, Falstaff, I think, comes much closer than any other character in his plays (and perhaps in any play in early modern literature) to telling certain sorts of truth. It seems far-fetched to argue any direct influence by Montaigne on the creation of Falstaff. But I think that the fictional character shares with his predecessor an exceptional ability to tell truths that others deny—or ignore—or fail even to notice. (49)

Similarly, I am interested in disrupting the critical tendency to trust Hal and suspect Falstaff, specifically in *Henry IV, Part I*. I intend to show that Falstaff offers a reliable focal perspective when he transgresses the boundaries between truth and lie, presence and absence, bravery and cowardice in ways that suggest a different tactic to interpret the play’s pervasive discourse of honor, one that finds strength in weakness.¹ I argue, in

¹ Though I sympathize with A.C. Bradley’s generous reading of Falstaff, I am not suggesting that he lies out of jest or “on purpose to get himself a difficulty” or that he does not expect others to believe him (Bradley 264). I will argue in this chapter that his lies are intentional, motivated, and revelatory of truths that others do not want to face. I am suggesting that Falstaff (or disorder generally) is less contained than Stephen Greenblatt admits when he suggests that *Henry IV, Part I* does allow for subversive voices that may be “powerfully registered” but “do not undermine that order” that permits them and contains them (in “Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*.” *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*. Eds. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1985. 18-47. Print. 38). In *Shakespeare’s History Plays: Rethinking Historicism*, Neema Parvini also counters Greenblatt to argue that he “overestimates the level of Henry [IV]’s ideological control over the state” and that just because the play invites readers “to understand the costs of power, [but] it does not follow therefore that we are invited to accept that power” (206). Equating Greenblatt’s point to a kind of ideological victim blaming, Parvini analogizes Greenblatt’s suggestion: “to say that Henry IV’s state ‘produces’ its own subversive elements is akin to saying that a bank that has failed to secure its vaults

other words, that Falstaff's function in relation to Hal's suggests alternative ways of reading that endorse embracing one's own vulnerability in order to stake a rejection of the systemic and ideological abuses perpetrated and sustained by one's culture.

Falstaff exaggerates to exceed the bounds of truth, but the textual and critical attempts to contain him in his lies suggest that these same lies must be contained because they are actually threatening. If Falstaff were not powerful, then he would not need to be stopped, he need not be confronted for lying, he need not ultimately be rejected. In Neema Parvini's words, King Henry V's rejection of his friend is less a rejection and more "a tacit acknowledgment of the fact that Falstaff is too wily a character to have at close quarters" (*Shakespeare's History Plays* 207). Harry Berger suggests that Falstaff is complicit in Hal's final rejection of him, that he knowingly misleads the Prince, and that he knows that his friend must ultimately discard him.² Berger sees Falstaff as a sinner in search of punishment for his sins, which is a far more charitable reading of the character than the role of self-interested Vice in which many other critics cast him.³ Despite his

'produces' its own robberies" (206). In contrast to the argument I develop in this chapter, however, Parvini ultimately agrees with Greenblatt that Falstaff is finally contained "but only to the extent that he was 'contained' by the terms of his own self-interest at the start of *1 Henry IV*" (*Shakespeare's History Plays* 207).

² See his reading of Hal's rejection of Falstaff in "The Prince's Dog."

³ As the critical history surrounding this character suggests, critics tend to divide themselves into two camps: pro-Hal (and therefore anti-Falstaff) and pro-Falstaff (though not necessarily anti-Hal). As is clear from the outset of this chapter, my position is sympathetic toward Falstaff and may at times appear to be especially critical of Hal. However, participating in this critical impasse to proffer yet another apology for Falstaff is not the purpose of my argument.

Falstaff launched critical debate long before William Empson suggested that he "started the whole snowball of modern Shakespearean criticism" ("Falstaff" 38). Strong reactions to Falstaff's character, both positive and negative, have been a part of the critical reception of this play from its inception. Much Falstaffian criticism is marked by critical ambivalence that vacillates between the two responses: critics who oppose what they read as Falstaff's moral depravity also tend to forgive him because he is not only funny but witty while critics charmed by Falstaff struggle to accommodate his less savory characterizations. Shakespeare's second tetralogy, and especially the characters of Hal and Falstaff, have

remained so critically popular that the body of work addressing this particular critical division is massive. What follows is merely a sketch of a much larger whole.

Though much morally focused Falstaffian criticism, especially in the eighteenth century, attended to Falstaff as though he were a real person, one early defense of Falstaff anticipates the project I undertake here, considering not only his character as textual form but also commenting on the acts of analysis and interpretation of this play. Reacting to critics like Samuel Johnson, who read Falstaff negatively, Maurice Morgann specifically counters charges of the knight's assumed cowardice by rereading the scenes like Gad's Hill that are used to level those same charges ("An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff," 1777). Christy Desmet identifies the usefulness of taking seriously Morgann's attention to interpretation, and my project's focus on critical perceptions and blindnesses benefits from these earlier considerations (*Reading Shakespeare's Characters: Rhetorics, Ethics, and Identity*).

Reacting to pro-Falstaff critics like A.C. Bradley, cited above, and reinvigorating the anti-Falstaff camp for the twentieth century, Dover Wilson reads Falstaff through his allegorical connections to the Vice figure of morality plays and the miles gloriosus in order to highlight Hal as the play's intended focus (*The Fortunes of Falstaff*). W.H. Auden in "The Prince's Dog" and C.L. Barber in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, among others, follow suit to allegorize Falstaff as a Lord of Misrule and position Hal and the obvious focal perspective thematized by the play.

Some later twentieth-century readings of the play refocused on positive readings of Falstaff. Valerie Traub, for instance, understands Falstaff as a kind of mother figure for Hal in "Prince Hal's Falstaff: Positioning Psychoanalysis and the Female Reproductive Body." Others read Falstaff as once again central to understanding the play, as a carnivalesque inversion of moral values (in Robert Hunter's "Shakespeare, Pattern of Excelling Nature," and Graham Holderness' *Shakespeare Recycled*), as an extra-textual perspective that transcends both the political and comic plots of the play in order to comment on both (in Derek Traversi's *Shakespeare: From Richard II to Henry V*), and as a metaphorical embodiment of these two textual and ideological spaces (in Francois Laroque's "Shakespeare's Battle of Carnival and Lent").

More recent criticism of Falstaff highlights the continued critical ambivalence associated with the old knight's reception. Alan Stewart, for example, sees both Hal and Falstaff as representatives of corruption in the Gad's Hill episode (*Shakespeare's Letters*). Michael Davies, who is also concerned with the dangers of ignoring Falstaff's longstanding appeal, reads Hal's rejection of Falstaff as justified insofar as it stages a kind of protestant conversion for Hal that would have resonated with the play's original audiences ("Falstaff's Lateness: Calvinism and The Protestant Hero in *Henry IV*"). Charles Forker considers the relationship between Falstaff and Hal insofar as it figures early modern political maneuvering and religious reconciliation in "The State of the Soul and the Soul of the State: Reconciliation in the Two Parts of Shakespeare's *Henry IV*." The persistence of linking Falstaff to subversions, both productive and destructive, may be seen in studies like Phebe Jensen's *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare's Festive World*, Robert Bell's "The Anatomy of Folly in Shakespeare's *Henriad*," Douglas Hayes' *Rhetorical Subversion in Early English Drama*, and Neema Parvini's *Shakespeare's History Plays*. And advocates of the anti-Falstaffian camp remain: see, example, Christopher McDonough's brief comparison of Falstaff to classical cowards in "'A mere scutcheon': Falstaff as *Rhospaspis*" and Karen Marsalek's "Marvels and Counterfeits: False Resurrection in the Chester *Antichrist* and *I Henry IV*" in which she refers to Falstaff as Shakespeare's abusive "Antichrist figure."

My project stands in clear opposition to the less charitable readings of Falstaff, but it also attempts to expose the tendency of critics to privilege their sympathy with Hal's perspective even when, perhaps especially when, also sympathizing with Falstaff's. For instance, in *Shakespeare's History Plays*, Parvini reads Falstaff not so much vicious as simply self-interested, and he reads Hal exactly the same way. Acknowledging the impossibility of understanding the play without considering "where the play ultimately intends the audience's sympathies to lie," Parvini nonetheless seems to sympathize with Hal's project to establish his own ideological order as king (206).

charity toward Falstaff, whom he casts as a *repentant* “old white-bearded Satan,” no one would accuse Berger of being of this devil’s party (2.4.446). Berger still favors Hal, Hal’s perspective, Hal’s need to reject his misbegotten youth once he becomes King Henry V.⁴ Yet Berger suggests that Hal’s rejection of Falstaff in *Part II* is also a rejection of his former self, the youthful and perhaps indiscreet Hal (Berger, “The Prince’s Dog,” 41). Berger concludes that in rejecting *Hal*, Henry V avoids “an unknown or half-known fear of himself,” disposes of his corruptible self, and publically solidifies his conversion from prodigal.⁵ In other words, when the new King casts out his former friend, he engages in willful self-blindness, a refusal to acknowledge parts of himself that Henry would rather ignore, parts that make him feel shame, and therefore parts that make him vulnerable.

Following, though amending, Berger, I suggest that Falstaff is not simply complicit in Henry’s rejection of him in *Part II*. I argue instead that Falstaff pressures Hal to acknowledge and learn from his own vulnerable positions starting in *Part I*. Rather than reading Falstaff’s shenanigans as vicious or self-interested, I read them as didactic and radically self-deprecating. Furthermore, I read both Henry’s rejection of Falstaff and his clemency toward his former friend as Falstaff’s failure to make Hal see the potential of his own strength through the lens of his own vulnerability.⁶ I argue that Falstaff urges

⁴ Berger falls prey to identifying with Hal, as many other critics do. Greenblatt argues that spectators are “dazzled by their own imaginary identification with the conqueror” and Jonathan Goldberg suggests critics identify with Hal as mirror of Christian kings and “an ego ideal” (Greenblatt, 63; Goldberg, 152).

⁵ As I discuss below, Hal establishes an elaborate deception that involves him appearing to squander his resources and reputation only to reemerge as heir-apparent, more respectable for having overcome this contrived low point. Rejecting Falstaff, I am suggesting here, is another of Hal’s exercises in lying.

⁶ I build here on Berger who builds on William Empson who, oddly enough, agrees with Dover Wilson, to acknowledge the pity King Henry takes on his former friend (William Empson, *Essays on Shakespeare*, 68). But Berger suggests that King Henry, in this same move, both forgives and forgets his former self (Hal) as a form of “moral self-protection” (Berger, “The Prince’s Dog,” 42).

Hal to see his personal faults, to acknowledge the vulnerability and shame they cause him, and to change them from deficits to assets that will enable him to rule England responsibly and honorably without deferring to the empty discourse of honor that drives his father, Henry IV, and his political rivals in this play. At the same time, I contend that Falstaff acknowledges for the audience the vulnerabilities imposed upon the population by Henry IV and other monarchs, including Shakespeare's, Queen Elizabeth. By illuminating the shadows that inform how Hal navigates spaces of tavern, court, and battlefield, Falstaff's function in this play ultimately suggests that Hal's interpretations protect him from acknowledging his own vulnerabilities.⁷

THE STRANGEST FELLOW AND RESISTANT READING

How one reads Falstaff, and how one reads Falstaff reading, both bear on the kinds of interpretations one may make of this play. Reading along with Falstaff offers an interpretive perspective that refocuses the ways in which this play—and the rest of the *Henriad*—understands the concepts of sovereignty, autonomy, and honor.⁸ As my discussions of the Gad's Hill and the play's extempore episodes will show, I argue that Falstaff offers a textual perspective on which to focus interpretation of this play that is at least as worthwhile as Hal's. While I do suggest that Falstaff is a better reader than Hal, I also argue that Falstaff tries to show Hal how to be a better reader of *himself*. To this end, I suggest that Falstaff models how to be a better reader of *himself* insofar as he relies

⁷ This interpretation comes close to Berger's point that Hal rejects Falstaff out of self-preservation that distances and defends him from his own former life of vice, a point also echoed by Neema Parvini. At the same time, I suggest that Falstaff acknowledges for the audience the vulnerabilities imposed upon the population by Henry IV and other monarchs.

⁸ Insofar as Falstaff embodies this method in the play, I will continue to attribute this method of interpretation to his character as a function of the text.

upon knowledge of not only his own faults but also on knowledge of how other people interpret him.⁹ Furthermore, I suggest that Falstaff's perspective is counterintuitive because he turns his own weaknesses into sites of strength when he uses them to reveal fissures in the play's dominant discourses, especially as they are thematized by Hal. In effect, Falstaff deploys a reading method that resembles a passive resistance to Hal's monopoly on prescribing and authorizing intra-textual interpretation in this play.

Before proceeding to my argument, I will briefly explain what I mean by an interpretation that is passively resistant. A passively resistant reading model neither ignores nor assents to a dominant discourse; it resists by exposing the tenuous presumptions that underpin that dominant discourse. This method is not the way of cowards conceding to their own complicity within networks of power. Such a method would be simply passive. Instead, I suggest that Falstaff's interpretive method resists the dominant discourses in ways that seem at first to be passive but that nonetheless prove to be subversive and confrontational. Though it reflects back to Hal the problems embedded within his ideas about himself, about honor, about sovereignty, Falstaff's method does not use Hal's discourses against him. Instead, Falstaff deprecates himself by modeling an exaggeration of those problems, often putting himself further into harm's way.¹⁰

⁹ Here Falstaff has the self-knowledge demonstrated in *Twelfth Night* by Feste who profits from his enemies who tell him plainly that he is an ass (5.1.15-20). See the discussion of Feste's exemplary reading skills in Chapter I. Phebe Jensen explicitly links Falstaff to Feste in "Falstaff in Illyria: The Second Henriad and *Twelfth Night*," reading a trajectory of festival that spans the histories to this mid-career comedy.

¹⁰ For example, Falstaff deploys this method when he takes on and extends his role as butt of Hal and Poins's joke by lying extravagantly to call out not only a problem with the prince—he is sneakily dishonest—but the systemic problem that a figure of authority abuse can deceive and abuse others for fun. I discuss the aftermath of the Gad's Hill robbery in detail below.

The model I have in mind for this kind of interpretive resistance comes from a problematic moment in the New Testament Sermon on the Mount.¹¹ The call to “turn the other cheek” in this sermon attributed to Jesus has long been decried as advocating complacency in the face of oppression or sidestepped when violent acts are perpetrated in defense of another person or simply ignored in favor of violent resistance.¹² These

¹¹ My project reads *Henry IV* in light of an earlier New Testament model because the terms of the Sermon on the Mount and the parable of the Prodigal Son, which I discuss below, are also terms evoked or indicated by Shakespeare’s text. Illuminating one on its own terms can illuminate the other.

The portion I am interested in here concerns the statement on retaliation: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile” (Matthew 5:38-41). All biblical citations in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, come from *The Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (3rd ed. Ed. Michael D. Coogan. Oxford, Oxford U P, 2001. Print).

¹² I acknowledge and am indeed indebted to the readings of this passage that do not assume that it advocates complacency, including mainline theological understandings as well as secular uses of this idea to further the social justice agendas of both Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. I cite my indebtedness as appropriate in this chapter. Nonetheless, the dismissal of this passage insofar as it is understood to be a passive acceptance of oppression is long-standing, despite its incongruity with the words and actions attributed to Jesus.

Even Augustine, who recognizes that the New Testament teaches nonviolence in regard to self-defense, does not advocate nonviolence when one’s neighbor is threatened and therefore opens the door for just-war theory to eventually justify violence against any threat whatsoever. In his words, “War is justified only by the injustice of an aggressor; and that injustice ought to be a source of grief to any good man, because it is human injustice” (*The City of God* 447). His understanding persists in contemporary theories of justified violence.

Walter Wink explains the persistent misreading that leads to rejecting this passage and why it should be reread otherwise:

Many otherwise devout Christians simply dismiss Jesus’ teachings about nonviolence out of hand as impractical idealism. And with good reason. “Turn the other cheek” has come to imply a passive, doormat-like quality that has made the Christian way seem cowardly and complicit in the face of injustice. “Resist not evil” seems to break the back of all opposition to evil and to counsel submission. “Going the second mile” has become a platitude meaning nothing more than “extend yourself” and appears to encourage collaboration with the oppressor. Jesus’ teaching, viewed this way, is impractical, masochistic, and even suicidal—an invitation to bullies and spouse-batterers to wipe up the floor with their supine Christian victims.

Jesus never displayed that kind of passivity. Whatever the source of the misunderstanding, such distortions are clearly neither in Jesus nor his teaching, which, in context, is one of the most revolutionary political statements ever uttered... The

readings of the passage tend to turn it into an allegory on how to be submissive to authority or else find a loophole in the new commandment to “not resist an evildoer” by resisting on behalf of another person rather than oneself.¹³ Both of these interpretations miss the counterintuitive point of the advice. In a passage that specifically addresses retribution—”You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’”— the text signals a counter-logic with the contrasting language, “*But* I say to you.” The conclusion of this counter-point is strange: “do not resist an evil doer.” In this scenario, an evil has been committed, an eye or a tooth taken, and the audience has heard that they can get even with those who hurt them, but Jesus wants them to do something else instead. If Jesus were making a statement about passive *acceptance* of oppression, he would have said something like “Do nothing” or “Accept what is done to you.” What Jesus suggests instead is a series of positive actions one should take: turn the cheek, give the cloak, go the extra mile. These actions seem incongruous with the command to “*not resist* an evil doer.” The problem is one of translation. The Greek word translated as

traditional interpretation of “do not resist an evildoer” has been nonresistance to evil—an odd conclusion, given the fact that on every occasion Jesus himself resisted evil with every fiber of his being. (*The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* 98-99)

¹³ There is a political reason for the persistence of these kinds of readings among the early modern English. King James I was concerned about the marginal notes included in the Geneva bible that permitted opposition to the king’s authority. In his words,

No marginal notes should be added [to the new translation that will become the King James Version], having found in them which are annexed to the Geneva translation...some notes very partial, untrue, seditious and savouring too much of dangerous and traitorous conceits: as, for example, Exod. 1:19, where the marginal note alloweth disobedience to Kings. (*Historical Account of Several English translations of the Bible* 47, qtd. in David Norton 84)

Though James is not here specifically concerned with the Sermon on the Mount, Wink suggests that his resistance to Geneva marginalia resonates in his commissioned translation of this passage. In other words, the value of passivity is crystalized by the translators of the King James Version to encourage submission to the monarch, for fear that passages like this one would be an endorsement of rebellion.

See also my discussion on the problems of allegorical readings in Chapter 2.

“resist” is *antistenai*, which literally means *to stand against* but is most often used figuratively to refer to *warfare*, to confront a potential equal as on a battlefield. The point, then, is not “do not take a stand” but “do not respond violently in kind.” Instead of retribution, Jesus recommends three unexpected and utterly strange counter-actions, all of which work in essentially the same way to force the abuser to acknowledge the humanity of the abused and stop abusing. Each example shows the abused person acting out of and exaggerating vulnerability to wield this force against the abuser.¹⁴ For example, the turning of the cheek suggests that the cheek-slapper has intended the slap as an insult and therefore backhands the victim’s right cheek.¹⁵ The slapper would have struck the other man with his right hand: left hands were restricted to “unclean” tasks. The only way to strike another person on the right cheek with the right hand is to backhand him or her. Furthermore, to strike the victim on the left cheek with an open palm or with a punch would have signaled to Jesus’s first-century audience a relationship of social equality between the slapper and the slapped.¹⁶ Therefore, when the victim turns to suggest the slapper strike again, either the abuser has to hit such that he acknowledges his victim as his social equal or else stop slapping. The victim, then, has effectively stopped the abuse against him or her without actually fighting back. The message is that one can take a

¹⁴ While the slapping addresses resistance to violence, the cloak scenario involves economic oppression and compels the abuser to publicly shame himself, and the extra mile scenario involves oppression perpetrated by the military arm of the government and forces the abuser to break the law and therefore fear for his own wellbeing. My reading of this portion of the Sermon on the Mount is indebted to Walter Wink’s *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (especially 98-111). Though I offer an overview of the slapping example here, see Wink for full elucidation of the strangeness of all three of these scenarios.

¹⁵ For ease of explanation, I imagine that both the slapper and the slapped are men.

¹⁶ Wink elucidates this cultural difference associated with the connotations of slapping other people:

Masters backhanded slaves; husbands, wives; parents, children; Romans, Jews. The whole point of the blow was to force someone who was out of line back into place... but only equals fought with fists. (101-2).

stand against abusive authority without engaging in the same wrong acts against which that stand is taken. Jesus is saying, in other words, “Do not wage war against an oppressor” or “Do not dish back what has been served to you.” Do something strange instead.

The strangeness that this sermon calls for is self-deprecation as a form of nonviolent retaliation. I suggest that Falstaff deploys a similar strangeness when he models moments of interpretation that rely on own faults. I turn now to the Gad’s Hill and play extempore episodes in *Henry IV, Part I* to elucidate this point.

When Poins explains to Prince Henry the purpose of the jest they will perpetrate against Falstaff at Gad’s Hill, he identifies two of Falstaff’s signature faults: cowardice and dishonesty. Indeed, Poins avers that Falstaff will “fight [no] longer than he sees reason” and will tell “incomprehensible lies” (1.2.172-3, 174). Falstaff may be the lying rogue that Poins claims he is or he may be something else altogether: “the strangest fellow” for whom Hal will vouch when he covers another of Falstaff’s lies, offering to “gild it with the happiest terms I have” (5.5.150, 153). This strangeness in Falstaff that the Prince acknowledges in their final scene of this play draws me to question the expectation that Falstaff’s lies are only ever lies. Perhaps something stranger than mere lying is afoot.¹⁷

Poins frames Hal’s interpretation of Falstaff: as a liar. At Gad’s Hill, Falstaff, Hal, Poins, and their companions stage a highway robbery after which Hal and Poins stage a counter-robbery of Falstaff and the others in order to enjoy the aftermath which will no

¹⁷ Falstaff ruminates on many things, but not on his lying. Yet critics read his lying as if he were Autolycus in *The Winter’s Tale*, who more clearly resembles a caricature of the morality play’s allegorical Vice and who monologues about the villainy he will undertake and profit from as a result of his lying. See *The Winter’s Tale*, Act 4.

doubt entail the crucial and hilarious telling of “incomprehensible lies.” In this phrase, Poins announces his expectation that Falstaff will lie, but also that the lies will be incomprehensible, that is, that they cannot be contained and that they cannot be understood. Thus, even as Poins functions to control interpretation of Falstaff in this scene, he acknowledges that he cannot interpret, or even understand, Falstaff.¹⁸ Poins’s assessment here shapes late modern critical readings, drawing the boundaries for how Hal and critics alike will interpret Falstaff. Despite the weakness of those boundaries, freeing Falstaff from the constraints that contain him in labels like “that reverend Vice,” “that villainous abominable misleader of youth,” “that old white-bearded Satan,” is far from easy (2.4.437, 445-46).¹⁹ However, Poins’s influential pronouncement on Falstaff’s honesty rests on a faulty assumption: that incomprehensible statements are necessarily lies. In effect, Poins asserts that because he is incapable of understanding Falstaff, the old knight must be lying.²⁰

Falstaff undeniably lies about the circumstances of the Gad’s Hill robbery. Hal, Poins, their companions, and the audience know that Falstaff did not fight “a hundred upon poor four of us” nor “a dozen of them two hours together”; he was not set upon by “sixteen at least” (2.4.155-6, 159, 168). Falstaff is overstepping the bounds of truth in

¹⁸ Though the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites this passage as an example for incomprehensible to mean uncontainable, boundless, or immense, the second sense of the word—a lack of understanding—was available and in usage in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries. Granted, Poins may also be making the point that he can’t understand how Falstaff would expect anyone to believe his lies rather than the point that he cannot understand the lies themselves.

¹⁹ In *Shakespeare’s Practical Jokes*, David Ellis acknowledges that Poins’s “promise of ‘incomprehensible lies’ creates audience expectation for Falstaff’s next appearance following the robbery” (92). A.C. Bradley’s earlier argument ties sympathetic readings of Falstaff to how readers *feel* about his humor in relation to his rejection (*Oxford Lectures on Poetry* 252). As is also evident in the broader scope of this project, I am less interested in Falstaff makes readers feel and more interested in *why* he speaks and acts so outrageously.

²⁰ Falstaff himself offers an alternative, which I will discuss below.

wild and obvious hyperbole.²¹ His response to the counter-theft is clearly deliberate because he goes to great lengths to procure props and stage effects that signify a fight: a hacked sword and artificially bloody noses. The question, then, is *Why* does Falstaff lie when a gang of five eye-witnesses may call his bluff at any moment?

I propose that Falstaff lies so obviously and so extravagantly about the Gad's Hill incident in order to catch the Prince off guard. Jonathan Goldberg suggests something similar when he says that, in this scene, "Falstaff catches Hal out—his truth that he robbed Falstaff makes the difference between lying and truth-telling moot" (173). I agree with Goldberg, and would extend his point to suggest that in this catching out that collapses the difference between truth and lie, Falstaff models another of Hal's limitations: his tendency to ignore or project his own faults, and to become entrenched in his own first-person perspective. The problem with first-person perspectives is that they are not, of course, omniscient; but Hal behaves as if *his* is (and too many critics of the play choose to believe him). However Hal, like all of us, is most at risk of being dead

²¹ Gadshill, compatriot and organizer of the initial robbery, participates in Falstaff's exaggeration, and the audience knows his description is also false: "We set upon some dozen—" (2.4.167). Yet another thief, Peto, joins in the contradiction in a way that almost confirms to the audience the ability of both Falstaff and Gadshill to recollect:

Peto: No, no they were not bound.

Falstaff: You rogue, they were bound, every man of them.

Granted, the bound men Falstaff and Gadshill recall here may be the imaginary dozen or sixteen, but Peto does not deny the numbers just the fact that they were bound, and someone was indeed bound: one may know this from stage direction, though stage direction may itself be unreliable. After the travelers are waylaid on the highway, the stage direction tells us "here they rob them and bind them" just before the original band of robbers leave the stage and the direction for "the Prince and Poins [to enter] in buckram" (2.2.86). Hal, however, ignores these details, and even goes on to believe Peto's reporting of how Falstaff's sword came to be hacked and the party came to be bloody. Hal, then, selectively believes reports of others, even when they have been shown to lie.

wrong at the very moment he is most secure in his beliefs.²² Falstaff belabors his own lying to draw attention to Hal's predicament here. With his defenses down because he believes himself to have the upper hand, Hal is set up to experience feeling most secure, most superior, when indeed he is vulnerable—in this case to criticism for his own complicity in the Gad's Hill episode. In other words, Falstaff lies in order to catch Hal lying at just the moment when Hal expects to mock and embarrass the old knight. Furthermore, insofar as Falstaff's counter-jest understands the problem of first-person perspective through the act of *seeing*, Falstaff calls into question Hal's abilities to perceive and to interpret the events at Gad's Hill.²³ At issue, first, is Hal's ability literally to *see*, and Falstaff makes plain that Hal's seeing is faulty precisely in the way he goes about modeling faulty seeing: by sneaking truth into his lies.

After an extended description of numerous and vague foes encountered and subdued in the course of the robbery, Falstaff settles the focus of his lies precisely on the truth: the "two lads in buckram suits" that we, and Hal, recognize as the Prince and Poins (2.4.185-86). We might expect a glimmer of a realization from Hal that Falstaff has identified him, but Hal is, I suggest, still too securely enveloped in the humor of his own

²² See Chapter I for an extended discussion of the problems of first-person perspective and how formalizing the ways in which perspective may be described helps illuminate how textual perspectives like Hal's operate within their own texts and in relation to their own cultures.

²³ Neema Parvini similarly argues that "the depth of Falstaff's understanding goes much further than the nature of value [of an object understood to be valuable because others think it is]; he realizes that the law, the aristocracy, the crown, the nation and any other such ideological constructs are fundamentally *imaginary*—they exist inside people's minds," and "this is perhaps why he routinely transgresses the law and also why he tells so many lies: *perception* is all that truly matters" (*Shakespeare's History Plays* 205, emphasis original). Parvini orients himself more cynically to Falstaff than I do when he attributes to the old knight the "insight that *perception* of [Hal's] subjects is *all* that truly matters," insinuating that Falstaff is at fault for teaching Hal to lie (*Shakespeare's History Plays*, first emphasis original, second emphasis mine). My project also differs from Parvini's insofar as he understands Falstaff to pass "his subtle understanding of ideology on to Hal...through osmosis rather than direct teaching" while I assert that Falstaff deploys a strange, self-deprecating mode of teaching that has not been recognized as such (Parvini 205).

jest that he does not see that he has been identified so precisely. With Hal still tucked away in his security that his jest will humiliate the old knight, Falstaff keeps the true account moving in the same direction as his prior lies, spinning a story that multiplies marauders from two in buckram to eleven. Just as the buckram lads seem to be spinning out of control, Falstaff abruptly turns again to precision: it was “three misbegotten knaves in Kendal green” who were solely able, in Falstaff’s account, to subdue him. They “came at [his] back, and let drive at him, for it was so dark, Hal, that thou couldst not see thy hand” (2.4.214-16). The *real* buckram boys Falstaff claims to have “peppered” and “paid”; the fictitious Kendal knaves he credits with victory (2.4.184). The exaggerated numbers cease to matter to Hal, who has been amusedly tracking Falstaff’s multiplications all along, marking the final transformation of himself and Poins into the “monstrous...eleven buckram men grown out of two!” (2.4.212). Once Falstaff’s description of the Kendal color is so particular, the blinding darkness so tangible, and, most importantly, the honor of subduing him attributed so erroneously, Hal can no longer brook Falstaff’s exaggerations. The rage with which the Prince lets loose a tirade of lewd insults—combined with Falstaff’s clear but subtle insinuation that Hal was present and could not see his own hand—suggests Hal knows he’s been caught, that he’s been led along by the lies and cries of “a plague of all cowards,” that he is indeed one coward to whom Falstaff directs this curse (2.4.216, 18-21, 110).²⁴ Falstaff’s reply only serves to amplify the Prince’s rage at being called out on his jest before he can enjoy it: “What, art thou mad? Art thou mad? Is not the truth the truth?” (2.4.222-23). In effect, he asks the

²⁴ Once Hal’s anger takes over, he lashes out: “These lies are like their father that begets them, gross as a mountain, open, palpable. Why, thou clay-brained guts, though knotty-pated fool, thou whore-son, obscene, greasy tallow-keech—” (2.4.218-21).

Prince, “Are you so foolish that you cannot see that I saw you?”—rudely prompting Hal to acknowledge his own faulty seeing. But Hal cannot yet see that he cannot see. Hal has forgotten that Falstaff has already explained that he not only *saw* but also “peppered” and “paid, two rogues in buckram suits” (2.4.184). Falstaff has shown his lie to be true: before our eyes Falstaff has “peppered” the rogues with an onslaught of lies and “paid” them for their jest by exposing it. If Falstaff could see buckram, he certainly could see Kendal green. His ability to see is not at issue; Hal’s is.²⁵

Hal does not notice Falstaff’s initially precise buckram reference because he expected it.²⁶ Hal knew that there were two buckram-clad rogues: himself and Poins. Perhaps Falstaff tries to call out Hal’s trickery as early as his first mention of buckram, but Hal cannot yet see that the jig is up. It is not until Falstaff specifies and credits rogues that Hal could not see (because, of course, they were not present), not until Falstaff proposes an unambiguous lie that Hal cannot anticipate, that Hal objects. Yet Hal interrupts to question not his own ability to see but Falstaff’s:

Prince Henry: Why, how couldst thou know these men in Kendal green,
when it was so dark thou couldst not see thy hand?

Hal’s protest against the Kendal green knaves shows the complexity of his own inability to see: his seeing is unreliable and he cannot see that it is. Hal slyly misquotes the knight to avoid acknowledging that *he* cannot see. Falstaff has not, in fact, said that *he* couldn’t

²⁵ Hal cannot see his own hand before his face, yet Falstaff, in contrast can make out precise shades of green in the dark. We might dismiss this as just another of Falstaff’s humorous lies, but Hal’s response is visceral and emotional. Falstaff has clearly touched a nerve in the Prince at this moment.

²⁶ In Chapter I, I discuss the inherent problems of commonplace readings that rely on what a reader already assumes or expects.

see. He specifically said that *Hal* could not see: "...it was so dark, *Hal*, that *thou* couldst not see *thy* hand" (2.4.214-16, emphasis mine).²⁷

Hal turns Falstaff's description of the darkness to his own purposes that aim at self-preservation. Furthermore, Hal cannot see the two in buckram when Falstaff first mentions them because one of them is Hal himself. Falstaff shows, then, that when Hal's self-interest is concerned, Hal is blind. Falstaff attempts to accomplish this lesson through a model that depends upon making himself vulnerable: by turning the critical attention on himself, by blatantly lying, and by showing himself to be vulnerable before he turns the attention to Hal. Falstaff thus kindly, though raucously, sets Hal up to acknowledge the ways in which he hides from his own faults; but Hal defends himself by turning the attention back to Falstaff and *his* lying. Hal, in other words, will not learn the lesson. Nonetheless, Falstaff collapses one kind of truth and lie to reveal another truth: that Hal is also lying by perpetrating an extended and deceptive jest against his friends and then concealing his involvement in order to laugh at their expense. Hal's is a lie of omission.

It is the question of whether or not *Falstaff* sees the Kendal knaves that causes Hal to respond sharply again, resulting in the slinging of more insults between the two until Hal pulls rank in order to take control of the emotional exchange that he initiated. "Breathe awhile," he says to Falstaff who may be literally out of breath from exchanging insults with the prince.²⁸ "Breathe awhile, and then to it again, and when thou hast tired

²⁷ Hal and Falstaff often refer to each other familiarly, as *thou*. But in this moment, perhaps Falstaff is also gesturing toward "thou" as an address not of intimacy by condescension that suggests, again, that Hal is lying. Falstaff may be "giving Hal the lie"—calling him a liar and therefore challenging him to a duel—just as Sir Toby eggs on Sir Andrew to "give the lie" to Cesario by encouraging him to speak condescendingly to Cesario: "If thou 'thou'st' him some thrice, it shall not be amiss" (*Twelfth Night*. Eds. Roger Warren and Stanley Wells. 3.2.41-42, notes 42 and 43.).

²⁸ Of course, Falstaff could be figuratively in need of breath here, but that the fat old knight may be literally out of breath remains a valid possibility after this exchange.

thymself in base comparisons, hear me speak but this” (2.4.240-43).²⁹ The “this” Hal speaks is the truth, as best as he can tell, of what happened at Gad’s Hill. He directly contradicts Falstaff and reports the double-crossing caper as he *sees* it. Despite Falstaff’s repeated clues that Hal has been caught in a lie, Hal’s method to resolve the interpretation of the episode is to make his first-person perspective the only valid telling of the story.

The scene is often, if not always, understood from a perspective that mimics Poin’s assumption that Falstaff will run away and lie about it. The audience confirms Poin’s expectations when it “knows” Falstaff is lying because the audience witnessed the incident unfold differently on stage. The audience, like Poin, “knows” the truth: that Hal and Poin do not participate in the initial theft in which Falstaff and the others succeed, that Hal and Poin attack this band of robbers and steal their booty. We know that Falstaff and the others run away, and Poin emphasizes “the fat rogue [Falstaff] roared!” (2.2.105).

We learn later, after the scene in which Falstaff lies about the robbery, that Hal’s interpretation here is suspect. The others had to have met up prior to rejoining Hal and Poin at the tavern because the party of fleeing thieves were together to witness Falstaff “hack [his sword] with his dagger” and to “tickle [their own] noses with spear-grass to make them bleed and then to beslubber [their] garments with [the blood]” (2.4.96, 299-301). If, as they’ve told us, the party of thieves did in fact “meet each other,” then it is

Prince Henry: I’ll be no longer guilty of this sin. This sanguine coward, this bed-presser, this horse-backbreaker, this huge hill of flesh—

Falstaff: ’Sblood, you starveling, you eel-skin, you dried neat’s tongue, you bull’s pizzle, you stockfish! O for breath to utter what is like to thee, you tailor’s yard, you sheath, you bow-case, you vile standing tuck— (2.4.234-40)

²⁹ Hal accuses Falstaff here of “base comparisons” when he is not only guilty of making the same, but guilty because he started it.

also possible that they were not “possessed with fear,” as Hal seems to assume or even to hope. Hal would have to interpret their feelings of fear on their behalf, in the dark, and at a distance as they ran away. Hal’s prediction of fear so intense that they will “each take his fellow for an officer” is, in retrospect, mistaken (2.2.101). Because the account of Gad’s Hill is mediated in the text by commentary from Poins and Hal and sparse stage direction, we are asked by the text to see the jest only through the eyes of these two, self-interested perpetrators. The text sets us up to trust their descriptions, some of which are not plainly observable. For instance, we may rely on the report (from both Hal and the stage direction) that “the [first] thieves are all scattered” but Hal must interpret that they are “possessed with fear so strongly that they dare not meet each other” (2.2.99-100). Hal has rendered his own telling immediately dubious because of the very evidence he has already deployed to accuse Falstaff of not seeing. If Hal can suspect Falstaff’s seeing because it is so dark, then Hal’s ability to see and report events is likewise suspect.³⁰ Hal cannot have it both ways: either it was light enough to see and to report the incident, or it was not.

Hal refuses to see his own complicity in this situation that has, in effect, triple-crossed him: “What trick, what device, what starting-hole canst thou now find out to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?” he asks of Falstaff, but might as easily ask of himself (2.4.254-56). The trick is that neither Hal nor critics will see his own “open and

³⁰ See Hal’s explanation of the counter-robbery beginning at line 245.

Prince Henry: We two saw you four set on four and bound them, and were masters of their wealth. Mark now how a plain tale shall put you down. Then did we two set on you four, and, with a word, outfaced you from your prize, and have it, yea, and can show it you here in the house. And, Falstaff, you carried your guts away as nimbly, with as quick dexterity, and roared for mercy, and still run and roared, as ever I heard bull-calf. (2.4.245-52)

apparent shame” and Falstaff digs it in again, in case anyone missed his point the first two times: “I knew ye as well as he that made ye” (2.4.268). In other words, I saw you, Hal, and you know it.

TRUTHFUL LIES: FALSTAFF’S AMBIVALENT PERSPECTIVE

In the Gad’s Hill aftermath, Falstaff establishes his function in the play as a model of intra-textual interpretation: he literally can see what others like Hal cannot. Parvini also notices that Falstaff “seems to see through all ideological illusions,” that he “seems to occupy a place outside of ideology; as he says himself, ‘I live out of all order, out of all compass’” (3.3.16-17 and *Shakespeare’s History Plays* 203). Moreover, Falstaff shows that all perspectives—including his own—are limited. In another episode in the same scene, Falstaff’s extends his function from localized seer/interpreter to a pervasive interpretive force in this play. Here I follow Joan Linton’s observation that Falstaff haunts the final play of the *Henriad* even though his character never appears on stage in *Henry V*.³¹ He is, for Linton, a kind of absent presence in that play. I suggest that Falstaff functions as an absent presence as early as *Henry IV, Part I* in moments when his intra-textual interpretive moves recall, rely on, or suggest knowledge of textual information that he should not be able to know.

In the already meta-textual episode of the play extempore, Falstaff again calls attention to the act of interpretation by staging himself interpreting King Henry IV’s interpretation of Hal. At the same time, Falstaff reveals his own interpretive chops as an

³¹ In Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti’s edited volume *Shakespeare and Religion: Early Modern and Postmodern Perspectives*, see Linton’s contribution to entitled “The Passing of Falstaff: Rethinking History, Refiguring the Sacred.”

analytical function of the text. He “reads” Hal again in this scene as if he has been reading (or watching) along with the audience of the play. Falstaff seems to know things about the text that his character simply should not know because they happen under cover of darkness or disguise or while Falstaff absent from the stage. The Gad’s Hill counter-plot is one instance.³² His reading of Hal in the play extempore is another.

Significantly, the play extempore episode arrives in the wake of Falstaff’s open chiding of Hal and Hal’s inability to be chidden. Nonetheless, even as he exposes the prince, Falstaff helps Hal save face in front of the others at the tavern by once again turning their attention to himself and his own “instinct” to avoid “turn[ing] upon the true prince” by suggesting a change in subject: “What, shall we be merry? Shall we have a play extempore?” (2.4.260-270). When the subject quickly shifts again to the news that Hal has been summoned before his father, Falstaff turns the play’s purpose from distraction to exam preparation.³³ Falstaff worries that Hal “wilt be horribly chid tomorrow when [he] comes to [his] father,” and the knight once again appeals to his friend’s love: “If thou love me, practise an answer” (2.4.360-62).³⁴ Falstaff not only tries

³² The accounting for Falstaff’s knowledge of the counter-theft is easily explained in the physical act of actually seeing the buckram rogues. He need not be privy to Hal and Poins’s covert planning of the jest in order to see what they are up to. The play extempore offers a more complicated example of Falstaff’s potential textual knowledge.

³³ Hal, again, is not quick on the uptake and continues insulting Falstaff until Mistress Quickly interrupts the party, announcing news from King Henry IV. Falstaff, however, has the last word before the scene shifts from the Gad’s Hill aftermath to the news from the king. In response to Hal’s final dig despite his agreement to have a play—“Content; and the argument shall be thy running away”—Falstaff hushes his young friend: “Ah, no more of that, Hal, an thou lovest me!” (2.4.271-73.)

The news from Hal’s father prompts Falstaff to remember his idea for a play extempore, but he has altered its purpose: from making merry fellowship with the “Gallants, lads, boys, hearts of gold” to once again helping Hal (2.4.67-68).

³⁴ This line stands chiasmatically related to Falstaff’s prior phrasing that hushes Hal after the Gad’s Hill aftermath: “Ah, no more of that, Hal, an thou lovest me!” (2.4.272-73.)

to help Hal prepare for his father's examination, but he also helps Hal save face again by suggesting that the practice is for Falstaff's own peace of mind rather than to supply Hal's lack of preparation. Falstaff's doubled concern for Hal, punctuated by the doubling of the phrase "if thou love me," establishes the old knight as a concerned mentor rather than a vicious misleader of youth.

Falstaff begins the mock examination innocuously enough. Anyone might expect the king to be critical of his son and "not only marvel where [Hal] spendest [his] time, but also how [he is] accompanied" (2.4.385-86). Falstaff specifies the point of criticism that Hal expects from his father:

If then thou be son to me, here lies the point: why, being son to me, art thou so pointed at? Shall the blessed sun of heaven prove a micher and eat blackberries? A question not to be asked. Shall the son of England prove a thief and take purses? A question to be asked. (2.4.392-96)

Hal is openly reckless, and Falstaff evokes the Gad's Hill robbery, the taking of purses, as proof of Hal's recklessness. He emphasizes this example rhetorically by punctuating it with "A question to be asked." In other words, the most important—and most obvious—point Falstaff seems to make here is that the son of the King should not go about thieving.

More interestingly, though, Falstaff suggests a point that Hal does not expect. Falstaff elides his initial proof for why Hal is "pointed at" when he skips past it with "A question *not* to be asked" (2.4.394-95, emphasis mine). This point—that Hal is a "micher" and an eater of blackberries—is also overlooked by editors. Editors of the *Norton*, the *Oxford*, and the *Arden* editions gloss "micher" as "truant," an interpretive move that emphasizes the fact that Hal is absent from the responsibilities of court so long as he remains in Eastcheap and also helps solidify charges that his absenteeism marks Hal as a kind of Prodigal Son. Yet the word "micher" also renames Hal as a "petty thief" and

“a person who skulks or sneaks about with dishonest intent.”³⁵ In effect, then, this point of evidence doubles the Gad’s Hill example. However, it also adds nuance to the charge of “thief,” suggesting that Hal is not only sneaky but also untrustworthy. If Falstaff insinuates in the Gad’s Hill aftermath that Hal is dishonest by calling him out on a cruel trick and a lie of omission, here, Falstaff calls Hal a sneaky and inattentive liar.

Why is this the question “not to be asked,” and why have editors and critics not asked it? One answer reinforces Falstaff’s role as Vice or “misleader of youth” because the thieving and eating he evokes to accuse Hal are both activities that he participates in with the Prince.³⁶ I suggest an alternative answer: Falstaff’s mention of “michers” and blackberries hints at his own meta-textual perspective. In this evidence against Hal that he hedges with the assertion that he should not ask or even mention it, Falstaff echoes the language of Hal’s soliloquy in Act 1, suggesting that he has, for want of a better word, “overheard” it. I do not mean by this that Falstaff *qua* character is himself skulking about, eavesdropping on the prince. I propose that Falstaff’s function as the alternative interpretive model in this play for which I advocate is strengthened in moments like this one and Gad’s Hill where he subtly suggests that he knows more about the play than one expects.³⁷ Furthermore, Falstaff’s perspective usurps Hal’s when he suggests that he is

³⁵ See the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry 2. a.

³⁶ This is, of course, reflective of the dominant critical perspective on Falstaff, both those that read Falstaff negatively and those that read him positively. It is nonetheless a perspective that is based on the interpretive cues provided by Poins and Hal himself. Both of these characters are not only complicit in the vices they accuse Falstaff of perpetrating, they are also themselves untrustworthy.

³⁷ Even though I suggest that Falstaff haunts the *Henriad* as a kind of super-reader, I am not suggesting that one must have transcendental insight in order to be a careful reader of a text. I am suggesting quite the opposite: that those who claim to have the upper hand often do not, as Hal and Poins expect to have in the aftermath of Gad’s Hill and like Hal in his opening soliloquy. Furthermore, I am deploying a strategy similar to Berger’s in “The Prince’s Dog: Falstaff and the Perils of Speech-Prefixity.” Here, Berger suggests that “When a speaker echoes the words and sentiments uttered in an episode from which he was absent...it usually means that he is inscribed in the same discourse” (44). Contra Berger, I am suggesting

aware of textual elements that occur when his character is absent from the text. Falstaff, then, functions counter to Hal: he is present, not truant, and he is a careful reader.³⁸ But if Falstaff's point about "michers" and blackberries reinforces a perspective that trumps Hal's apparent reign over a dominant strain of critical interpretations of this play, it is a card that Falstaff must play carefully because it risks treason and leaves him vulnerable to retribution, which Hal is all too ready to supply.³⁹ Even critics who are charmed by or sympathetic to Falstaff retain the interpretive position on the play that Hal's character occupies. Indeed, Hal will win the game in the end, ascend to the throne, make the rules, authorize the history.⁴⁰ Many audience members would align their perspectives with the figure of power. Yet this persistent privileging of Hal's perspective proves questionable at best when the text repeatedly reveals that Hal is unreliable.⁴¹

that Falstaff is not necessarily complicit in but critical of that discourse. Berger does acknowledge, as I also do, that Falstaff "parades himself as an example of what he mocks" (44).

³⁸ Falstaff is certainly a more careful reader than Hal, who, as we have seen, misquotes Falstaff to suit his own purposes. Berger also notes how well read Falstaff seems to be in his chapter on *Henry IV, Part II* in *Making Trifles of Terrors*.

³⁹ Hal's final retribution is of course the public rejection of his friend after his coronation in *Henry IV, Part II*.

⁴⁰ Here, I echo Bradley's point that Hal is not only dishonest but also succeeds in his dishonesty (Bradley 253). My point in disagreement with Bradley Hal is not "on the whole, a fine and very attractive character" and, furthermore, that Shakespeare does prepare readers for Hal's perhaps catastrophic rejection of Falstaff throughout *Parts I and II*, but that this preparation is largely ignored (Bradley 254-55). Bradley acknowledges that in other instances, critics notice inconsistencies, particularly in delineating good and evil characters, but that it is oddly hard to read evil in Hal (256-59). Bradley solves this problem by focusing on Falstaff as the supreme genius of Shakespeare's work in this play who overshadows even the king and will not be dethroned (Bradley 259). I suggest in this chapter that the problem may be addressed by rereading Falstaff and Hal through Falstaff's perspective rather than deferring to the perspective of the king.

⁴¹ In addition to the examples Hal's dishonesty investigated here, Hal orchestrates the picking of Falstaff's pocket, pockets Falstaff's papers to peruse later at his leisure, and intentionally confounds Francis the drawer in *Part I*, and impersonates a tavern worker to tease Falstaff again in *Part II* (*Part I*, 2.4.510-530 and 2.4.1-81; *Part II*, 2.4.254-60).

Hal also uses this mock trial before his father as yet another opportunity to criticize Falstaff and solidify critical audience support for himself. And he reveals his own hand by refusing to play the game or the role of the initial play. He turns it to criticize Falstaff explicitly. This turn is akin to his emotional outbursts in

In the instance of the play extempore, Falstaff evokes Hal's private speech—in which the prince insinuates a confession that he is indeed untrustworthy—when Falstaff plainly equates the son of England to the “sun of Heaven.”⁴² No doubt, the common equation of a king to the sun and the common quibble on *sun* and *son* make an easy explanation for Falstaff's language here, and Falstaff also may be telling us that we should not ask the question raised by his first point because it is so common, as common as blackberries. This simple explanation is perfectly reasonable. Nonetheless, his reference to the sun *also* calls to mind Hal's earlier speech in a way that implies Falstaff's character can function as an interpreter within its own play. My assertion that Falstaff is aware of Hal's speech is strengthened when Falstaff ties it directly to Gad's Hill, another instance in which he has proven to know more than Hal anticipated. Falstaff links the two points not only by their proximity in his speech, but by this overlooked word, “micher.” At once referencing truancy, secrecy, and thievery, this word evokes absence and presence, knowledge of hidden information, and, in the Gad's Hill instance, theft and covertly plotted counter-theft. Nonetheless, as most editors confirm, “micher” also references the prodigality that Hal confesses to trying on awhile in his soliloquy. By tying all of these references together in a point that quibbles on the prodigality and dishonesty of the son/sun in exactly the same way Hal does, by evoking the immediately prior episode in which Falstaff's perspective, his ability to *see*, proves more reliable than Hal's, and by doing all of this in an instance that is already a meta-textual moment of intra-

the Gad's Hill aftermath episode and is tied to these by the similar strings of insults he lobs at the knight when he refuses to face his vulnerable position under Falstaff's scrutiny.

⁴² In his soliloquy, Hal reveals his plan to “imitate the sun” (1.2.185).

textual interpretation, Falstaff hints at an awareness and a criticism of Hal's plan to play the prodigal.

THE PROBLEM OF HAL'S PRODICALITY

Hal's plan is simple. He will model his own life trajectory on the parable of the prodigal son.⁴³ He will squander his resources and reputation, conveying the impression of a ne'er-do-well and wastrel, before unexpectedly reconciling with his father and taking on his role as heir apparent. Hal's plan is also dishonest. He is not simply wasteful and negligent like the son in the parable. He intentionally takes up loose living in order to make his return and ascent to the throne that much more spectacular. In effect, Hal's plan is to enhance the appearance of honor by at first being purposefully dishonorable.

⁴³ In the New Testament text, the Book of Luke frames this story as a lesson for the Pharisees and scribes who were irritated that tax collectors and sinners were coming to listen to Jesus speak. The prodigal story is one of seven examples that make up this lesson. The other examples in this sequence are 1) the story of the shepherd who seeks and finds one lost sheep when it strays from the flock of one hundred; 2) the woman who has ten silver coins and, after losing one, rejoices when she finds it; 3) the rich man whose manager is dishonest in his accounting after squandering his master's wealth in order to secure friends who will look after him if he loses his job, yet the master commends him for shrewdly forgiving portions of debts in order to secure welcome for himself in the debtors' homes; 4) the statement that even though the "good news of the gospel is proclaimed" the letter of the old law stands; 5) the statement against divorce that equates it with adultery; and 6) the story of the rich man who scorns the poor Lazarus in life, but in death laments his selfishness once he sees Lazarus lounge in the bosom of Abraham while he suffers for his earthly transgressions in Hades. Nearly all of these lessons bear on the ways in which Falstaff frames his own interpretive methods, yet Hal's appropriation of the prodigal has dominated critical discourse that links this play to parable as allegory.

In the prodigal story, a man has two sons. The younger son demands that his father give him his inheritance immediately rather than waiting to inherit his portion once his father dies, so the father divides his estate and gives his younger son what is coming to him. The son leaves town and wastes his inheritance on prostitutes. When he runs out of money, he takes a poorly paying job feeding pigs. He cannot afford to feed himself as well as the pigs are being fed, so he returns to his father to ask for a job as a hired hand because he has "sinned against heaven and before [his father]" and is "no longer worthy to be called [his] son." But the father welcomes him warmly, gives him clothes and jewelry, and hosts a barbeque to celebrate his return. When the older son, who has not squandered the father's wealth, complains about his brother's treatment, the father proclaims that the older son has no cause to complain because the father's wealth has always ever been shared with the older son and celebration is in order because "this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found" (Luke 15:32).

Shakespeare thus offers a rereading of the parable of the prodigal son that critics have obviously picked up on when they link Hal's trajectory of loose living in Eastcheap and subsequent redemption to this first-century text. Critics who analyze Hal's prodigality, however, tend to do so by reading it allegorically.⁴⁴ If we map Hal onto this story when conceived as an allegory, then Shakespeare appears to tell a story we already know, or can be expected to approve: a story about how it is better not to waste opportunities in life, but even if we do, a transcendental figure (in both the parable and the play, represented by the father) will help us reemerge from the darkest places in our lives. But such a reading does not jibe with Hal's appropriation of the parable, because he takes on the role of the wayward son precisely in order to redeem *himself*, not to be redeemed by his father.⁴⁵ Part of his purpose for taking a leisurely sojourn in Eastcheap is to distance himself from his father who has lately usurped the throne of England.

Though Falstaff perhaps only gestures toward Hal's plan in the play extempore, he does so under the guise of scrutiny, implying that Hal's speech warrants closer critical inspection. If we read Hal counterintuitively, in the manner suggested by Falstaff, we may get closer to articulating the vulnerability and outright fear associated with accepting the father's gift of forgiveness – fear and vulnerability that Hal disavows in his move to

⁴⁴ In *Shakespeare's Practical Jokes: An Introduction to the Comic in His Work*, David Ellis proposes that Shakespeare had a hard time "making Hal both a prince *and* a madcap," suggesting that the prodigal son model offers a way to organize Henry V's rise to power after a wild and misspent youth (84).

⁴⁵ In "Hal as Self-Styled Redeemer: The Harrowing of Hell and *Henry IV Part I*," Beatrice Groves argues that, similarly to the two kings before him, "Hal *stages his own redemption* in Christian terms: a Lenten period of expectant, self-imposed exile is followed by a reconciliation between a father and son through a decisive single combat which is staged with a resonant allusion to the harrowing of hell" (236, emphasis mine). Though Groves offers a pro-Hal, anti-Falstaff reading that positions Falstaff as the Satan figure to Hal's Christ, she also acknowledges that "the connections are not simple analogies" (236).

redeem himself.⁴⁶ Falstaff's prompting to undertake a play extempore as a rehearsal for Hal's audience with his father is marked by Falstaff's worry that Hal is (or ought to be) afraid. He says,

But tell me, Hal, art not thou horrible afeard? Thou being heir apparent,
could the world pick thee out three such enemies again as that fiend
Douglas, that spirit Percy, and that devil Glendower? Art thou not horribly
afraid? Doth not thy blood thrill at it? (2.4.354-58)

Falstaff here is not articulating a fear that Hal ought to have of his father, but the subtext of this fear is clearly related to King Henry IV's position. It is a fear Hal ought to have if he reconciles himself to his father and takes his place as king. Hal, as usual, refuses to acknowledge that he might be vulnerable. He will not admit to fear, "not a whit," and he takes Falstaff's naming of a potential vulnerability again as an opportunity to attack his friend by evoking his own prior criticism of Falstaff's cowardice when he says, "I lack some of thy instinct" (2.4.359). In other words, Hal says "I am not afraid because I am not a coward like you." Rather than acknowledge his own sites of weakness, Hal's signature move, it seems, is to attack those who point them out.

Hal's appropriation of the prodigal story bears out this interpretation of his strategy. He is most concerned about the ways in which others, especially his father and peers, interpret him, and he zeros in on ways to spin these interpretations to his advantage in his early soliloquy.⁴⁷ Though David Ellis argues that this speech cannot possibly reveal anything about Hal's character because to read it thus would inconveniently establish

⁴⁶ Falstaff also comes closer to articulating a first-century method of interpreting parable in ways that original audiences might have understood this method of teaching. See Chapter III on parabolic readings.

⁴⁷ A.D. Nutall cites this speech as "the spoken equivalent to the programme note," and David Ellis seizes upon this insight to declare that Hal's speech has a choric function (145; 85). Parvini, I have already noted, suggests that Hal learns, though perhaps misapplies, this lesson in the importance of interpretive perspective from Falstaff.

“Hal as an odious hypocrite at the beginning of three plays clearly intended to celebrate his achievements,” I argue that this celebratory intention is not nearly so clear (Ellis 85). Indeed, Hal behaves as the Pharisees against whom Jesus speaks in the gospel of Luke rather than like the prodigal son because, like the Pharisees, Hal attempts to “justify [himself] in the sight of others” by “being wanted [that] he may be more wondered at,” by waiting until the time is opportune to “throw off” his “loose behavior,” so that, “like bright metal on a sullen ground,” his

reformation, glitt’ring o’er [his] fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set it off. (Luke 16:15 and *Henry IV, Part I*
1.2.201-3)

The end of Hal’s speech is marked with the language of both value and forgiveness, relative to the judgment of others and spun to his own advantage. At the moment when he declares he will cease his “loose behavior,” his diction shifts from a moral register to an economic one with words like “pay” and “debt.” But the debt he will pay by “redeeming time” and, presumably, himself is one he “never promised” to pay.⁴⁸ Furthermore, if his loose living is linked to money in this play, it is through his counter-theft at Gad’s Hill. Otherwise, his faults thematized here are more closely tied to dishonesty. This soliloquy articulates his plan to deceive his friends, his family, and his kingdom. The only other evidence that Hal is, indeed, a loose cannon comes not from textual evidence but from hearsay: reports of rumor from either his father or his rival, Harry Hotspur Percy.⁴⁹ Hal’s purpose in taking on the role of the prodigal, then, is marked by a value system that is

⁴⁸ Here, he is less like the prodigal son and more like the parabolic son who refuses to do the father’s bidding but then does it anyway (Matthew 21:28-32).

⁴⁹ See those instances in *Part I* (1.1.77-89, 1.3.229, 3.2.124-28, 4.1.94-95, 5.2.70-71) and in *Richard II* (5.3.1-22).

based not on material wealth but the value of popular and personal opinion, in a word, on *honor*.

Honor is a system of value nonetheless, functioning under the same logical structure as the value system that the prodigal son parable thematizes in terms of material wealth. Thus, I turn to that first-century system in order to tease out a counterintuitive reading that takes seriously Falstaff's fear associated with Hal's rise to power, that the prince will stake his claim to authority on the shifting and ephemeral grounds of honor, which the dishonesty of his prodigal plan undermines.

The structures of power in both Hal's plan and the prodigal parable function according to a logic that depends upon the act of giving that is thematized, in the outcomes of both texts, as redemption. The Prodigal Son, of course, is given his inheritance early, and he returns to his father because "no one *gave* him anything" after he squandered his inheritance and so must work—and hard—for his living (Luke 15:16, emphasis mine). He seems only to know how to function in relation to the *giver*. He returns to the father when he cannot tolerate a relationship of *exchange*: working for pay. Though he offers to hire himself out to his father, the father will not allow him to participate in this kind of reciprocal economy. Instead, the father keeps the son under his control through the logic of the gift: when he gives the son gifts—inheritance or forgiveness—he renders the son indebted to him.⁵⁰ Hal tries to avoid this indebtedness by claiming that he will "pay the debt [he] never promised," that he does not actually owe (1.2.197). Hal, though, is just as indebted to his father as the Prodigal Son is to his. He

⁵⁰ See Berger's *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare* for elucidation of Marcel Mauss's gift theory through Berger's explanation of the ethical discourse of the donor.

will assume the throne thanks first to his father's usurpation and second to his father's forgiveness. Both fathers keep their sons under their control by keeping them indebted. Both sons are depicted, then, for their value, not in terms of familial bond but in terms of their use. Hal is clearly useful to Henry IV as a path to legitimizing his own claim on the throne: Hal will inherit the kingdom through the legitimate path of primogeniture and lend his father legitimacy despite his usurpation. Harry Berger plots this circular trajectory of legitimacy in "What Did the King Know and When Did He Know It? Shakespearean Discourses and Psychoanalysis." He writes that Henry IV "badly wants moral, and not merely political, legitimacy, which is a point generally missed by so-called new-historicist and cultural-materialist readings (or un-readings) of the second tetralogy" (244). To legitimize his usurping reign, Henry needs his son to stand as legitimate King of England. In Berger's words, "if Henry feels uneasy about usurpation and regicide he must be aware of how much he depends on his son *retroactively* to secure the legitimacy denied him so long as he lives" (245 emphasis mine).

Henry, in effect, "gives the prince a function similar to that of the rebels in the economy of guilt management" (Berger 245). Henry creates in Hotspur and the other rebels "scourges to punish his misreadings, delegates Richard's revenge to them, and at the same time sets *them* up for justified punishment" (245). He transfers onto his son his "buried fear" of Richard II by linking Hal's distancing in Eastcheap to the prior King's similar activities, which enables Henry to disavow—if not disown—his legitimate son in favor of a preferred—but also usurping—heir, Hotspur, which allows Hal to become "in effect *Richard's* son," unruly but now legitimate, and free to take the throne (246). Indeed, Hal must distance himself from his illegitimate father/king (Henry) in order to

endear himself to his people and thereby “being wanted he may be more wondered at,” securing for himself the throne.

In this complicated set of transfers, Henry punishes himself for usurping the throne, legitimizes his own son’s claim to rule, legitimizes his own claim in consequence, punishes those who would punish him for usurping, and renders illegitimate the prior King. Meanwhile, Hal figures himself as a prodigal son who is never quite redeemed, but always prodigal, always truant, and always making his own way in the world beyond the control of the father for whom he must play redeemer. The father figures in the *Henriad*—both Henry and Falstaff—disappear: neither one ultimately redeems the lost son Hal.

Furthermore, if Hal remains truant in Eastcheap or carries his irresponsibility with him onto the throne, Henry IV’s reign becomes a hiccup in the history of England: a brief interruption in the legitimate line of English kings that is reestablished if the rebel factions succeed in his overthrow or else a return to the carelessness of Richard II. Henry needs his son to be redeemed and back under his control. The use value of the Prodigal Son in the parable becomes clearer if we consider the story in the context of the larger lesson that the book of Luke establishes. The clear problem that Luke acknowledges is that the Pharisees are “lovers of money” rather than gracious hosts to people (Luke 16:14). The younger son is not so much the lost sheep or coin that is found, forgiven, and redeemed as he is simply returned to the control of the father again, because all of these found items that parallel the son are objects of value and use to an owner.⁵¹ The father

⁵¹ The older son provides insight on the level of control the father demands from his sons: the older son has lived in servitude, “working like a slave” for his father, but is neither paid nor rewarded. The father claims the older son he has access to everything of the father’s, but the son reveals that he has no authority over this access because he is not permitted to have a barbeque with his friends. Luke 15:29-30.

describes the younger son as dead when he left because he was out of his father's control, and, like the missing sheep or coin, he became worthless, nothing.⁵² The father, then, is just as complicit as the son and the Pharisees for being driven by the power that material wealth offers. If Jesus is in fact using these lessons to criticize the Pharisees for privileging material wealth over human compassion, then it makes little sense to read this parable—or the other stories that take up the return of valuable lost items—as a celebration of the valuable item's return.

What *is* happening in this parable then? Western Christian exegesis of the passage—from Augustine to contemporary popular theology—turns the story into allegory.⁵³ The younger brother is translated into either any repentant sinner or else followers of Jesus who are not Jewish and therefore not beholden to the Law of Moses. The older brother is often identified as either the pious keeper of the law or else the older, Jewish, children of god who are mad that Christians showed up and took what was not theirs to take, squandered it, and still are welcome home to an afterlife in the Kingdom of Heaven. The father, in either case, is allegorized as God. But reading this passage

⁵² Luke 15: 32. This son is also like Cordelia who also becomes *nothing* to her father when she is outside of his control in *Lear*.

⁵³ We allegorize the tale to suit our own self-interest, our own expectation that our trials will work out in our favor in the end, whether by providence or some other means. In either case, we will not have to work on our own behalf in order to pull ourselves out of misery. We need only ask those in charge to forget our transgressions and then be forgiven.

Though Jill Robbins still reads the prodigal story in terms of the radical love of God/the father, thereby reading the parable explicitly allegorically, in *Prodigal Son / Elder Brother* she aims to disrupt the allegorical readings of this particular parabolic structure that perpetuate the critical exclusion of Judaic models of interpretation, a critical exclusion which reads Judaic only as forerunners to Christian models that lay claim to “shedding light” on their Judaic predecessors. In other words, Robbins aims to reread a hermeneutical history of reading Judaic models as figures of the Christian ideals to come. She says that though Judaic models are included in these allegorical readings, they are nonetheless “eclipsed by being seen” or “excluded *as* included” (2, emphasis original). Robbins project, then, is of a piece with my claim—and Stephen Orgel's, both articulated in Chapter I—that these kinds of figural interpretations foreclose the potential meanings of a text in favor of promoting a “common sense” reading. Robbins, also in accord with my project, calls for the necessity of reading a model “in its own terms” (2).

allegorically also does not make sense because in either case, the father gives the wayward son exactly the same thing he has already squandered, and then some. In other words, the father is just as unthrifty, just as wasteful, as the son who must be redeemed for being unthrifty and wasteful. If the son needs forgiveness for wastefulness, then so does the father. If Hal is this kind of prodigal son, then his dishonorable sojourn does not distance himself from his father but shows him to be exactly the same as his father. Henry IV needs to redeem Hal because he needs Hal to redeem *him*. Furthermore, the father offers forgiveness in order to recover the son to his control, just like all of the other lost items. The lesson is not—or not only—that we can rely on the transcendental figure—whether it is allegorically the deity or literally the parent—to swoop in and save the day. The lesson is, perhaps, that we should think twice about expecting salvation from our transgressions to come in a gift-wrapped package and without consequence.⁵⁴ We miss this and no doubt more when we tuck the prodigal son story neatly away into allegory instead of pausing to notice its strangeness: when what is lost is found again and this is not necessarily a good thing.

For scholars who are interested primarily in early modern literature and criticism and not in New Testament scholarship, my interpretation here is likely not a familiar one. That is precisely the point. A familiar or common sense reading of these parables might suggest that they are about the unending capacity of the father (or Father) to love, to seek the lost, and to forgive the sinner. Even if this infinite capacity—to love, to seek, and to

⁵⁴ The older son is the only figure in this parable who seems to know that the gift of atonement is also a threat of servitude and dominance. The older son tells us he is a slave to the father and gets nothing for his servitude. He questions the priority of wealth and the seeming generosity of the father's gift of forgiveness. The older son claims to have "worked like a slave" for years, yet the father dismisses his complaint, effectively silencing him (Luke 15:29).

forgive—is humanly unfathomable and therefore strange, to read this string of parables in terms of these capacities is nonetheless commonplace and personally comforting. As this project makes plain, the common-sense reading is neither the only reading nor necessarily the best one. It may blind the reader to the other possible meanings of a text that may be even more strange and (especially) that may be uncomfortable to acknowledge. The common-sense reading identified here is one that is comforting for both the redeemed figure in the text and, in consequence, for the reader. It is a reading that confirms the desires and preferences of a self-interested, first-person perspective, though it may be uncomfortable to think of this kind of redemption as available also to one’s enemies. It is, nonetheless, a reading that takes the responsibility off of the Prodigal Son and places it squarely in the hands of the transcendental figure (the father or the Father). In other words, the lesson from this interpretation based on love is one of license to do as one pleases, knowing that one will be redeemed in the end. Indeed, reading a text and feeling reassured by that reading suggests that a reader is most likely to be taking her own assumptions for granted rather than attending to the text, and, in the case of the Prodigal Son, the trajectory of the larger, textual context.⁵⁵

This way of reading parable is useful for understanding the strange path to redemption that is the theme of Hal’s prodigal plan. In his early soliloquy, Hal suggests

⁵⁵ The message of endless divine love is a powerful one and, indeed, a more appealing one than the sinners-in-the-hands-of-an-angry-God version of divine-human relations. But it is not the only message of the New Testament, even though it sometimes appears to be. Its predominance, however, has tended to supersede or even silence the messages of personal responsibility, social justice, radical hospitality, ecological stewardship, and economic equality. These important counter-messages are commonly analyzed in contemporary theological investigations mounted by scholars who are not on the fringes of biblical exegesis but who are working out of traditions including main-line Protestantism, Catholicism, and even some strands of emergent Evangelicalism. See especially the work of Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, Matthew Fox, Tony Jones, Brian McLaren, Elaine Pagels, Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, and N.T. Wright, among many more.

that he will redeem himself by “redeeming time when men think least [he] will,” thereby sidestepping the need for forgiveness and escaping the logic of the gift (1.2.205). If forgiveness evokes the economy of the gift, it is a temporally strange gift. *For*-giveness implies that it is a gift given in advance, but it is nonetheless given in retrospect to recuperate loss after a transgression.⁵⁶ Forgiveness, in other words, gives license to future transgressions in advance by dismissing them after the fact.⁵⁷ Hal will not just *recover* himself in this redemption, he will *forgive* himself and therefore occupy both positions: both giver and receiver, in effect, both father and son. If Hal is a kind of prodigal son, then his dishonorable sojourn does not distance himself from his father but shows him to be exactly the same as his father. Furthermore, if Hal redeems himself, he will also redeem his father by lending legitimacy backwards in time. In other words, Hal will forgive his father’s wrongdoing when he forgives his own. His plan requires that he be self-generating and self-reliant, which, as I have suggested, is the strange lesson available in the prodigal son parable. His task of “redeeming time” is often read as making up for time lost in Eastcheap, but is also a much stranger task that this interpretive resolution suggests. Hal does not need to recuperate the time he spends in Eastcheap: this time is not wasted or lost but part of his planned return to honor. He suggests he will become his own legitimate son by playing the part of his father’s prodigal son. Hal’s plan suggests

⁵⁶ Though the *Oxford English Dictionary* does not make this sense of the prefix *for-* explicit, the *American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* identifies the word *forgive* as cognate with other words that contain *per-*, which means “forward,” “through,” “in front of,” “before,” “early,” “first,” “chief,” “toward,” “against,” “near,” “at,” and “around” (67). This etymological connection suggests the temporal strangeness here. In forgiving himself, Hal also *pushes against*—another available sense of the word *forgive* in this etymology—the gift of the father by repaying a debt he doesn’t owe, thereby usurping the role of giver for himself.

⁵⁷ The logic of forgiveness is literally preposterous: it puts the end before the beginning. Moreover, forgiveness arrests the consequences of transgression on a cosmic scale so that one may do what one will with the ability to fall back on divine intervention to save us from our own transgressions.

that he will reverse or reenact time to become, in effect, his own authorizing origin, his own father. But this kind of circling back, this “redeeming [of] time” reveals that the authorizing positions of the father and the giver are also vulnerable. Hal’s plan shows, then, that the gift is also a threat to the giver when debts that are “never promised” are paid in advance, that is, with for-giveness.⁵⁸

Hal cannot then escape the threat that this play thematizes in the authorizing voices of his father and his political rivals, who equate power with honor. Indeed, even as Hal pretends to not be indebted to his father, his entire project is driven by his indebtedness to *honor* itself. Honor is not something that one bestows upon oneself as Hal claims he will do in his soliloquy and in his audience with his father when he claims he will acquire Hotspur’s honor by besting him in battle.⁵⁹ Honor depends upon the perceptions and reports of others.⁶⁰ Thus, Hal alone cannot authorize himself; he cannot redeem himself without the perceptions of others. Honor, in other words, depends upon

⁵⁸ In *Lear*, Shakespeare also revises this parable to have the prodigal children (Cordelia and Edgar) redeem the fathers (Lear and Gloucester), and that redemption is the very *punishment* these fathers need. In that play, Shakespeare rereads the prodigal son as a prodigal father who gives (or wastes) all, and consequently wastes away: in accommodation, in mind, and finally in body. Shakespeare shows in this play the violence of giving directed back toward the giver. But Cordelia is also a kind of prodigal who will not play the game of conventional familial bonds. Neither Cordelia nor Lear (nor Gloucester nor Edmund) will play by the rules of inheritance. And they all squander everything. Both fleeing children redeem the fathers who would have gladly taken the lost child back into custody and therefore back under control. But it is the children who (potentially) have lost everything who must take their fathers in hand. In *Lear*, then, Shakespeare turns the prodigal story to reveal the violence due to the giver when the gift is returned with for-giveness.

⁵⁹ See 3.2.132-52.

⁶⁰ Berger elucidates the function of honor through the ethical discourses of both the hero and the martyr in *Making Trifles of Terrors*.

This concept of honor is an ancient one that began as a concept of eternal life for warriors eternally glorified in cultural memory through song. It may be observed in the Babylonian epic of *Gilgamesh*, in Homer’s Greek epics the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in Virgil’s Roman epic the *Aeneid*, among other ancient texts. Despite the advent of a Christian concept of eternal life through salvation, this concept of honor based on cultural memory persists in the political and moral hierarchies of early modern English culture.

words. This, I suggest, is the source of the fear that Falstaff evokes and that Hal denies, and it is exactly the theme of Falstaff's criticism of honor itself.

Honor is one of the things on which Falstaff ruminates. Characteristically, as I have argued, resisting the play's major discourse of power, Falstaff will show how honor forces him into a position of naked vulnerability by enacting overblown cowardice once again, by pretending to be dead in the battle of Shrewsbury.⁶¹ Falstaff is no coward; he simply resists the oppressive discourse of honor in unexpected ways.⁶²

At Shrewsbury, Falstaff fights no longer than he sees fit (as Poins, and therefore we, expect of him). Rather than literally resisting the force of the rebels, Falstaff pretends to be dead. When the coast is clear, he stages his own resurrection (also strange, also faintly Christ-like) and pontificates on honor recalling his prior catechism before the battle began. Here he explains why the discourse of honor should not dominate human interactions: because it is merely "a word," "air," "a mere scutcheon" or sign of one's reputation.⁶³ Honor for Falstaff is nothing.

Standing over Hotspur, the play's embodiment of militarized honor, Falstaff's point becomes visceral. He exposes the lunacy of boys fighting with sticks to the death by counterfeiting his own death, rising again, and besting the dead Hotspur whose honor does not protect him from Falstaff's posthumous wound, an insulting injury which further wounds the dead man's honor by dishonoring his body. In hefting the dead rebel as his

⁶¹ My reading here is not far afield from Berger's point in "The Prince's Dog" that Falstaff reveals and comments on what he does—conscripting soldiers to become "food for powder" at Shrewsbury—in a way that exposes who makes him do it: King Henry IV (Berger 66).

⁶² A.C. Bradley suggests that Falstaff is no coward but a respected military leader, present at the king's tent at Shrewsbury, leading his band of ragamuffins to battle rather than sending them in, handily capturing Coleville in *Part II* (266-67).

⁶³ See 5.1.133-39.

war-prize, Falstaff renders absurd the rebels' militarized resistance.⁶⁴ He nonetheless cashes in on his prize with his strange story of fighting two hours by Shrewsbury clock. His story evokes the two hours' progress of a play on the stage, highlighting the similarity between the staged play and the staged battle. If the play, like honor, is nothing but words, then the battle itself and the force of the resistance, embodied in the dead burden that Falstaff now hefts, are also nothing but air. When he stabs Hotspur, Falstaff lets the air out of the old windbag honor. Indeed, Hotspur is most notably marked as being the embodied representative of honor who is also a blow-hard windbag, a man of too many words, who even dies midsentence: "No, Percy, thou art dust, and food for—" (5.4.84-85). If the road to honor begins in the stabbing of another man, then Falstaff has fulfilled the requirements of honor and is as honorable as any man on the battlefield, which is not very honorable at all.

It is nonetheless this scutcheon, this façade, this scarecrow called honor that drives Hal. As early as his soliloquy, Hal explains that he will become more honorable by being less so. In doing so, Hal directly counters Falstaff's method that I am calling passive resistance. While Falstaff exaggerates weaknesses in order to confront the dominant forces in this play, Hal exaggerates a counterfeit weakness in order to become the most dominant force in the play. Hal's intentional trying on of the prodigal parable only to cast it off when it no longer suits him is perhaps one of his most dishonorable moves and it renders him vulnerable, once again, at precisely the moment he plots his

⁶⁴ Here, I reframe and extend Bradley's point that Falstaff "had reduced the idea of honour *ad absurdum*, had scarcely any self-respect, and only a respect for reputation as a means of life, naturally he avoided death when he could do so without a ruinous loss of reputation, and (observe) with the satisfaction of playing a colossal practical joke" (268). Though Bradley goes on to say that Falstaff only appears vile and disgusting if we look at him through serious eyes, his reading is still vaguely critical of Falstaff's dissolution of honor at Shrewsbury.

triumph. Falstaff asks, “Art thou not horribly afraid? Doth not thy blood thrill at it?” or, in other words, Can’t you see that you are vulnerable (2.4.357-58)? But Hal refuses to consider that possibility. By taking on the role of the prodigal in a way that avoids these consequences and ignores the fear attached to the return to the father, Hal is not the parabolic prodigal son: he simply plays the role. Hal *counterfeits* the prodigal in order to gain a counterfeit honor.

The payoff of Falstaff’s insight is that honor is never present in this play but always deferred to the future or described in the past. For both Hal and Hotspur, honor is the antidote to its opposite: shame. Falstaff shows that the two terms are not opposed. Instead, he collapses the difference between honor and shame by showing both the pursuit of honor and honor itself to be shameful.⁶⁵ Hal and Hotspur are Falstaff’s unwitting accomplices in staging this collapse.

Though Hal promises to gild the strange stories of this strangest fellow, Falstaff’s didactic and interpretive role wanes from the *Henriad* after *Part I*. As his access and proximity to Hal recede, the final two plays of the *Henriad* shore up a defense of Hal’s triumphant return from truancy that protects Hal from Falstaff’s challenge to insubstantial honor. *Part II* embodies the empty hearsay of opinion in the choral voice of Rumour himself. In *Henry V*, the choral voice of the collective helps activate a cover of the emptiness of honor: reframing Hal not as a reformed prodigal but as “the mirror of all

⁶⁵ Furthermore, Falstaff suggests that shame is itself the feeling of acknowledging the fact that one is vulnerable.

Christian kings.”⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Falstaff’s position fades from view: he is absent from the stage, only rumored to be sick and dying in this final play.

As Falstaff drifts into the oblivion of history, Hal’s perspective dominates as he fulfills his prodigal plan by “rejecting the unyoked humor” of his former friend Falstaff, ultimately failing to comprehend the counterintuitive lessons Falstaff reveals (1.2.184). Poinc was warned that Falstaff would lie but that his lies would not be understood. He calls Falstaff’s lies incomprehensible, which suggests that they are both boundless and disorderly, that they spiral out of control, that they cannot be contained. Yet Poinc, Hal, and not a few critics use these very limitless and uncontainable lies to limit and contain Falstaff in vicious categories.

Falstaff proffers a new rubric for interpretation that begins by unraveling the validity of eyewitness accounts and suggests a method of seeing—therefore, interpreting—differently.⁶⁷ Falstaff acknowledges his power, though he self-aggrandizes by self-deprecating means. Behaving shamefully, he defies the demands of honor that drive Henry IV, Hotspur, and Hal. Thus, he continually draws attention to his own vulnerable position: as a washed-up, overweight, aging person in the world of the text and as a textual function that illuminates fears that Hal and other characters may wish would remain in the dark. Because he is shameless rather than honor-bound, Falstaff is at once the most vulnerable and the most invulnerable figure in the *Henriad*. He is the “strangest fellow” who tells the “strangest tale[s],” some of them incomprehensible to his

⁶⁶ See in *Part II* the Induction spoken by Rumour and in *Henry V* the choral prologue and epilogue, and the intervening choral scenes before Acts 2-5.

⁶⁷ I diverge from Berger here. I agree with him that Falstaff knows he’s lying, but I suggest that his lying is helpful rather than vicious.

companions, some of them too pointedly comprehended to bear. Indeed, Falstaff's tactic, I have suggested, has been to turn his own vulnerability into a powerful tool, and he wields it to transgress dialectical boundaries that frame the play by showing that sometimes the accepted truth is a lie, and sometimes lies reveal truths one would rather avoid.

CHAPTER V

CODA

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AND JOHN WEBSTER'S TEXTUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

The Duke there? A most perverse, and turbulent nature: what appears in him mirth, is merely outside—if he laugh heartily, it is to laugh all honesty out of fashion...He speaks with others' tongues, and hears men's suits with others' ears; will seem to sleep o'th' bench only to entrap offenders in their answers; dooms men to death by information, rewards by hearsay.

Why do you make yourself so wild a tempest?

—John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi* (1.1.160-168 and 2.5.16-17)

In this project, I have examined instances of textual affect, discoverable through a text's formal habits related to ambivalence and ambiguity. I have advocated for textual analysis that takes seriously the provocation that texts have perspectives and considers what these perspectives may reveal about the cultural networks within which they are situated. I have argued that textual ambiguity may suggest an orientation of disgust toward networks of political and religious power. In this concluding chapter, I briefly attend to the habits of Shakespeare's *Tempest* and Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* to explore how a text may be oriented in relation to familial hierarchies and dramatic conventions, in order to suggest other possible routes of inquiry that may be engaged through a text's affective orientations.

Critics have long discussed the pervasive ambiguities in *Tempest* and *Duchess*. Brinda Charry (2014), for instance, suggests that the most enriching critical readings of *The Tempest* “are based on the play's language and structure, and take into account the complexity and ambiguity of the play” (76). Maurice Hunt highlights the control of

ambiguity over the play through the oxymoronic phrase “still vexed” (299). Turning to the ambiguous positions of characters, Stephen Orgel sees Prospero as an ambiguous father/mother (“Prospero’s Wife”). Deborah Willis notes the ambivalent characterizations of Prospero and Caliban, arguing that the play directs sympathy and ridicule toward both (286). Taking a broader view of the cultural implications of ambiguity in the play, Jeffery A. Rufo exposes the ambiguity and complexity of political authority (145-46). Even the genre of the play has been ambiguous since the late nineteenth century, when Edward Dowden classified *The Tempest* as a romance rather than a comedy.

Critics have been drawn to but often repulsed by ambiguity in *The Duchess of Malfi*. William Archer found the play’s ambiguity troubling, claiming that the play’s “fatal lack of clearness ruins everything” (141-42). More than twenty-five years later, Ian Jack argues “there are too many inconsistencies in Webster’s plays” that serve “no deeper purpose than to make our flesh creep, and we feel an inevitable resentment” (43). Jack’s focus on audience response persists in the threads of current criticism. Critics like Philip D. Collington and Leah Marcus have considered the ways in which *Duchess* has evoked reactions in various audiences, both early as well as late modern. Collington proposes that *Duchess* offers audiences “a remarkably ambivalent theatrical experience, in that as her plight becomes increasingly pathetic, she becomes more adamant that witnesses *not* pity her” (170). Leah Marcus sees links between audiences’ reactions to the Duchess’s marriage to Antonio, the depiction of the corrupt and lecherous Cardinal, and Ferdinand’s lycanthropy as potential evidence of the audience’s anti-Catholic orientations (108-15). Yet Marcus also suggests that “even in its own time the play, like all great art, transcended the immediate milieu and ideology of its creation” (116). If not transcendent,

Duchess, according to Fran Dolan, is undecidable. She maintains that the play is ambivalent that audiences' orientations to its content cannot be determined, "nor can the play itself prove anything about contemporary [early modern] attitudes" (125). The play, Dolan argues, invites characters and the reader alike to "surrender one's self to *not* knowing" (133). While I agree with Dolan on both accounts, I extend her analysis to argue that a surrender to not knowing is a surrender to ambiguity. Furthermore, by focusing on affective textual orientations, we may not recover the ideologies of early modern audiences as representative of their cultural values, but we may recover ways in which these texts were oriented relative to their cultures through their ambiguous textual habits. Both plays thematize perspectives that are ambivalent: wavering between the extremes of vulnerability and defense, of attraction and repulsion, or, as this dissertation has suggested for a number of literary works, textual *disgust*.

Both plays entangle affect with challenges to contemporary dramatic conventions and familial hierarchies in response to intra-familial transgressions that contaminate the respective families. These include, for instance, the usurpation of Prospero's dukedom by his brother Antonio on the one hand, the assertive sexuality of the Duchess through which she defies her domineering brothers on the other. Both *Tempest* and *Duchess* thematize these transgressions as contagion. Prospero recreates his brother Antonio "most wicked sir," because "to call [him] brother would even *infect* [Prospero's] mouth" (*Tempest* 5.1.131-34, emphasis mine). The Duchess's twin brother Ferdinand is plagued by his emotions that develop into "a very pestilent disease ... [called] lycanthropia" and that lead to the murder of his sister (*Duchess* 2.5.17-18 and 5.2.5-6). These representations of bodily reactions to transgression suggest straightaway that the textual

crisis of each play is autoimmune, that is, a crisis that comes from within the represented family that catalyzes a revenge response that, in turn, threatens the family's annihilation.

These thematic contagions infect each play at the level of structure. Each text tries to reinstate the boundaries breached by the transgressions that ignite each plot. Each text tries to maintain order within the hierarchical structures of families and within the conventions of drama and even syntax by creating in these elements disorder and outright chaos. This chaos occurs formally, for instance, the disordered diction and syntax that surrounds Prospero's attempt to explain his brother's original transgression and Ferdinand's tempestuous rage directed at his sister that leads his brother and his doctors to pronounce him mad. This chaos appears thematically in Prospero's literal storm and Ferdinand's mental tempests that find their origins in each character's disgust at his sibling. I argue, then, that a disgust response is both thematic and structural in *Tempest* and *Duchess*, and that these texts manage revenge strategies according to this ambivalence that both attracts and repels, that adheres to and disrupts dramatic and hierarchical conventions, that shows both the vulnerability of individuals and their power to judge and influence their situations. Both Prospero and Ferdinand enact revenge thematically by disseminating disgust as they delegate the power of their bodies and minds to other characters, that is when Ariel and Bosola become the eyes and ears and extended wills of their masters. This dissemination is itself a kind of textual transgression, blurring the boundaries between discrete characters, and therefore not simply extending the reach of Prospero's and Ferdinand's agency through their respective texts. For instance, Prospero blurs his character with Ariel's when he orders the spirit to take a shape invisible to every eye but his, and Ferdinand "speaks with others' tongues,

and hears men's suits with others' ears," primarily Bosola's (*Tempest* 1.2.302-3 and *Duchess* 1.1.164-65). Their revenge is also a proliferation of contagious disgust by which both characters attempt to purge the prior transgressions of their siblings but succeed in destroying themselves.

Prospero and Ferdinand's textual functions as revengers are ambivalent: they are both politically or magically powerful and, at the same time, vulnerable to their siblings' threatening acts of agency. In other words, they can enact top-down punishments and yet are subject to the machinations of powerful others. Prospero's vulnerability to his brother occurs before the narrative time of the play when he is "thrust forth of Milan" by Antonio's usurpation of his brother's dukedom (*Tempest* 5.1.160). Yet throughout the *Tempest*, Prospero claims to control the outcomes of his revenge against Antonio, beginning with the tempest that causes his brother's shipwreck and culminating with the terms under which they will return from the island, terms that are secured through Prospero's own demise.

Prospero's extension of affect through Ariel remedies the contagion caused by his brother Antonio, maintaining the ambivalence typical of romance rather than giving in to the annihilation of tragedy. *The Tempest* unfolds as a revenger's triumph over his antagonist, made explicit to his enemies in the strange banquet that Prospero orchestrates to drive mad his brother and the other "men of sin" who supported Antonio's rise to power and confirmed by Prospero himself by the end of the play (3.3.53). Though Prospero enacts his revenge through this maddening scene and admonitions of Ariel as a "minister of fate" perhaps literally dressed as a harpy, he counterintuitively ensures his triumph not with might or magic but with his own tenuous and therefore vulnerable

position (3.3.61, 83). In the final scene, Prospero reveals that he has enacted revenge on both Antonio and Alonso who were “enem[ies] to [him] inveterate” and secured his perpetual gain through the loss of his daughter such that it does not matter that he relinquishes his powerful magic at the end of the play (1.2.121-22, 5.1.319-20). Prospero does “require [his] dukedom of thee [Antonio], which [he] knows [his brother] must restore” (5.1.132-33). Yet Antonio owes his control of Milan to Alonso and pays “homage and...tribute” to Naples in exchange for Alonso’s help in “extirpat[ing Prospero] out of the dukedom, and confer[ing] fair Milan, with all the honours, on [Prospero’s] brother” (1.2.124-27). Alonso, now indebted to Prospero for the return of his son Ferdinand, not only has the power to restore Prospero’s dukedom, but he must also submit to Prospero’s orchestrated marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda, which seals the alliance and ensures that Prospero’s “issue should become kings of Naples” and also protected dukes of Milan through their mother’s right (5.1.205-6). Losing his daughter to marriage, Prospero successfully executes a revenge that will persist after his own demise. He can retire to Milan and look forward to his death because Antonio will no longer have the support of Naples to perpetrate political machinations against Prospero or his heirs, thanks to the marriage alliance he has secured (5.1.310-11). Prospero’s greatest act of strength, then, manifests in his own loss.

Though different from Prospero’s, Ferdinand’s position is also ambivalent. Ferdinand’s revenge on his sister seems conventional of tragedy, yet his function as revenger is uncertain because the play also suggests a clash between two revenge plots when the Duchess marries, thereby enacting her revenge on her brothers for attempting to control her choices. Ferdinand directly states that he is the victim of a revenge when he

says “I do think it is some sin in us [himself and his brother the Cardinal] heaven doth revenge by her” (*Duchess* 2.5.66-67). Paired with his mental and emotional dissolution that unfolds throughout the play, Ferdinand identifies his own vulnerability despite his familial position as male authority and his political position as Duke of Calabria. Like a tragic revenger, Ferdinand destroys the continuity of the play’s community, a destruction which the play thematizes in the murders of nearly every character including himself. Interestingly, though madness is conventional for revengers, the dissolution of Ferdinand’s own mental integrity extends beyond his character’s function.

The outward sign of Ferdinand’s madness, a lycanthropic transformation, infects the language of the text and extends the dissolution of the community to a kind of textual dissolution even before the culmination of his revenge. Ferdinand’s lycanthropic shape-shifting infects the language of the text by introducing the hybridity thematized by his mental transformation into a wolf-man, a hybridity that also suggests the nature of his orientation toward his sister’s impure bloodline. His disgust at “a sister damned... [who is] lose i’th hilts, [and] grown a notorious strumpet” manifests in the text as his own hybrid transformation into a wolf in man’s clothing. This hybrid image captures his attraction and repulsion relative to his perspective on impure (and therefore hybrid) matches between people like the Duchess and her new husband Antonio who are not equal in respect to their economic, social, and familial positions. Whether his concern that his sister remain unmarried is driven by his hope for monetary or incestuous gain, Ferdinand would prefer to keep everything—her money and her bloodline—in the family and under his control. On the one hand, he claims that he hated her match with Antonio because he “had a hope, had she continued a widow, to have gained an infinite mass of

treasure by her death” (4.2.275-77). On the other hand, he laments the impurity of his own blood that once ran pure in her body, claiming that his pure blood “was worth more than that which though wouldst comfort, called a soul” (4.122-24). Ferdinand reveals a two-fold, and therefore hybrid, aversion to the hybridity that results from exogamy, a hybridity that inherently remains outside of his control. His uncontrolled hybridity infects the very language of the play.

We see this textual infection not only in abundant references to wolves, hyenas, dogs, and the digging up mandrakes and bodies, but also in the ambiguous hybrid images peppered throughout the play. For example, Antonio attributes to the Cardinal the incongruity of oracles spoken by the devil, and even the Duchess accounts her brothers’ advice to avoid marriage “terrible good counsel,” which may be terrible counsel that inspires the terror of awe but more likely that inspires the terror of fear (1.1.175-77 and 303). Furthermore, once the Duchess’s marriage to Antonio is discovered, Delio pronounces Antonio’s predicament an “unfortunate fortune” (2.4.80). Bosola reports the Duchess’s silence as expressive and labels his own deceitful, “painted honour” with images like sweating in ice and freezing in fire (4.1.9-10, 4.2.328-30). Furthermore, Ferdinand’s incoherent intentions infect his syntax when, for example, he tells the Duchess that he will “be—bespeak a husband” for her (3.1.39-40). Edited out of nearly all editions since the 1640 reprinting, this syntactical hiccup contradicts itself, replicating Ferdinand’s ambivalent connection to his sister.¹ These syntactical gaps and incongruous images evoke the chaos of Ferdinand’s obsession with their sister that leads the Cardinal to ask “why do you make yourself so wild a tempest?” (2.5.16-17). In effect,

¹ I am aware of only one edition that preserves this syntax from the first quarto of 1623: the Arden, edited by Leah Marcus in 2009.

when the language breaks down in undecidable, ambivalent turns of phrase, the play itself takes on characteristics similar to Ferdinand's wild tempest, both unmoored to the legitimacy of syntactical or familial convention.

Similarly disrupting his own legitimacy, Prospero's syntax undermines his authority when he interrupts himself throughout the play, suggesting that he is anxious about his unstable position of power.² In telling Miranda how they came to the island, he directs his ire toward her in repeated interjections that she mark him, attend to him, and hear him, despite her obvious rapt attention (1.2.67, 78, 87, 87, 106, 135). These structural disturbances formalize the ambivalence of the text's depiction of Prospero as both political and familial authority. Even as he asserts his authority, his syntax compromises it by both bolstering and undercutting his right to deliver his perspective on his exile from Milan. His habit of interrupting himself to solicit the agreement or attention of his audience suggests that he is concerned with ensuring that his version of his and Miranda's story is the official one. But the disruption also exposes his worry that it will not be. Similarly, his brother Antonio interrupts his plan for Sebastian to usurp Naples with phrases that evoke Prospero's "mark me," phrases like "Do you hear me speak?," "if you heed me," and "do you understand me?" (2.1.208, 18, 66). Like Prospero, Antonio repeatedly seeks confirmation when he speaks. When Antonio replicates Prospero's habit, the play formally unites the play's attitude toward the two brothers, a bond that Prospero works to polarize. For instance, with the exception of a brief encounter with Antonio under the duress of the shipwreck in the first scene,

² Peter Hulme and Francis Barker make a similar point about Prospero's anxiety at the moment when he interrupts the masque he stages to celebrate Miranda's betrothal to Ferdinand. See their chapter "'Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish'—the Discursive Con-Texts of *The Tempest*," appearing in *Alternative Shakespeares*.

Prospero has the privilege of shaping the interpretive perspective on his brother. He paints a grim picture of Antonio, identifying his brother as false, evil, and his inveterate enemy, by the end of the play a “most wicked sir” and a traitor while he draws sympathy for himself and Miranda (*Tempest* 1.2.92-93, 121-22, 5.1.128, 130).

Though Antonio’s wickedness bears out in his conspiracy with Sebastian to usurp the throne of Naples, when Antonio discusses his plan to establish Sebastian as king and the nature of ambition, his language becomes ambiguous. For example, he says to Sebastian,

O, out of that no hope [that Alonso’s son Ferdinand is undrowned], what great hope have you! No hope that way is another way so high a hope that even ambition cannot pierce a wink beyond, but doubt discovery there.
(2.1.140-41).

Sebastian’s hope to gain the throne is catachrestic: hope springs from nothing, from lack, from no hope. Furthermore, as Stephen Orgel notes, the line seems to say that there is no higher ambition than the hope of a crown, but the syntax suggests “the opposite of what the meaning requires.”³ Antonio, rather than saying that the height of ambition results in the crown, he says that ambition can only doubt that outcome. Orgel suggests that Antonio’s confused syntax evokes his own anxiety over his own usurpation of Milan, an anxiety that he inadvertently presses onto Sebastian even as he encourages him to similarly usurp Naples. This anxiety bears out for Antonio and once again ties him, and now Sebastian, directly to Prospero’s anxiety over his own power as when Antonio evokes Prospero’s habit of interrupting and undermining the authority of his own perspective. This unity, however, reveals an unarticulated, contagious anxiety toward their own positions of authority. The brothers’ shared rhetorical habit casts doubt on

³ See Orgel’s note on the lines in the Oxford edition of the play.

Prospero's perceptions and explanations throughout the play because he deploys the same rhetorical habits as his duplicitous brother.⁴

The ambivalence that results from these habits complicates the reliability of Prospero's perspectives when he interprets the play's other characters, including himself. Indeed, Prospero's perspective orchestrates the characterizations of nearly every character in the play as he makes a habit of telling the other characters who or what they are. Miranda directly asks to be interpreted by her father—"tell me what I am (1.2.35). The play goes on to develop nearly all of the characters according to Prospero's own disgust, thereby contaminating each character with his ambivalent interpretations. We learn through Prospero that, among other things, Ariel is a moody liar but also brave and graceful; that Sycorax is a "damned witch" even though Prospero himself is a kind of malevolent wizard who rivals Medea; that Caliban is a "poisonous" and "most lying slave," a "thing of darkness" but also one Prospero acknowledges his own; that Ferdinand is "a goodly person" but also a spy and a traitor (1.2.244, 256, 263, 319, 344, 417, 457, 461; 3.3.83-84; and 5.1.33-57, 275). Even Prospero's self-interpretation is ambivalent, painting him as innocent and vulnerable, his brother Antonio as guilty and powerful, despite the obvious role reversal Prospero perpetrates on the island through the tempest that shipwrecks his enemies and leaves them at his mercy to exact physical and emotional revenge as he sees fit. Prospero nearly confesses to duplicity when he deflects his role as agent of revenge onto "some subtleties o'th' isle," which he blames for causing the shipwrecked men not to "believe things certain" when Prospero himself directed Ariel to

⁴ Similar to the *Tempest's* critique of Prospero's faulty perspective, *Duchess* both formally and thematically presents Ferdinand's perspective as duplicitous. His sister's new husband Antonio plants the idea that Ferdinand is untrustworthy (*Duchess* 1.1.160-168).

drive them mad (5.1.124-25). He goes on to say “at this time I will tell no tales,” meaning that he will not tattle on Sebastian and Antonio’s treacherous plot against Alonso, but also suggesting that he will at this time tell no lies but at other times he has.⁵ The text thus asserts that Prospero engages in misdirection, and that readers along with Miranda may be susceptible to contracting his infectious interpretive perspective. His disgust, then, articulated in response to his brother and other characters belies an orienting textual disgust directed to authorities like Prospero himself.

The form of disgust in *Tempest* and *Duchess* appears in instances of contradiction, ambivalence, and dissolution, especially recognizable human forms transforming into the magical and the monstrous, into wizards and werewolves, but also through disorienting focal perspectives offered by Prospero and Ferdinand. One might call this formalization of disgust a kind of rhetorical gaslighting in which a text asserts as true that which is not, or as Feste would say to his own play’s Sebastian, “Nothing that is so, is so” (*Twelfth Night* 4.1.8).

Eugenie Brinkema writes that disgust formalizes something abusive, something worse than the worst (141). As form, disgust is not a disgusting object to be pointed at, desired, or even rejected. It is not a disgusting scene of gruesome murder in a play that compels audiences to look and also to turn away, to read and also to close the book. It suggests, instead, something worse than the worst thing a particular text articulates or thematizes. Insofar as Prospero and Ferdinand tell their audiences, both fictional and real, who and what is disgusting in their respective texts, they both engage in a kind of magic, a sleight of hand, redirecting sympathies and judgments and interpretations away from

⁵ See the *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions under “tale, n.”

what they articulate as worse than the worst. Prospero and Ferdinand point to their siblings, but the texts' formalization of their dispersed agency and affects suggest that Prospero and Ferdinand are even worse, and exponentially so. The question that opens this chapter then may be answered. Why do Prospero and Ferdinand make themselves so wild a tempest? Because the text formalizes their disgust as textual chaos, as their own undoing in which "every third thought shall be [the] grave" and "like diamonds [they are] cut with their own dust" (*Tempest* 5.1.311, *Duchess* 5.5.72).

Throughout this project, I have argued that, when a text is ambiguous or obscure or inarticulate, these textual difficulties signal responses of a text that strike in two directions: first, as immune responses whereby a text deflects the interpretations of critics and second, as autoimmune responses whereby a text fails to protect itself from the meanings most difficult to entertain. In both cases, a text reveals its orientations to the networks of power with its culture of origin. In both cases, a text calls for readings that attempt to learn from what is unfamiliar, to approach what has been unknown and even unknowable, and to profit from that knowledge like Feste who profits from his enemies but is by his friends abused.

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