

8-9-2014

Ekphrasis and Skepticism in Three Works of Shakespeare

Robert P. Irons
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EKPHRASIS AND SKEPTICISM IN THREE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

by

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2014

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DEDICATION

For my Mother, for putting up with me for so long.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank departmental secretaries Dee Dee Cronise and Barbara Wachob for helping me overcome countless bureaucratic miseries. I owe thanks also to Bill Fairchild and Henning Liese, who assisted me in dealing with innumerable technological difficulties, allowing me to write a dissertation in record time.

I owe many thanks to my students as well, who served as a perpetual reminder for why research is to be done at all. I am very grateful for the remarkable teachers I've had here, in particular Mark Beck, Alexander Beecroft, Catherine Castner, Hunter Gardner, Heike Sefrin-Weiss, and Andrew Shifflett. I also owe great thanks to my committee members Catherine Castner, Amy Lehman, and Andrew Shifflett for their infinite patience and wonderful suggestions and insights.

I am very grateful to the Folger Shakespeare Library for a grant that allowed me to attend Sarah Beckwith's seminar *Shakespeare and Sacraments*. I thank Sarah as well as my fellow participants for an extraordinary seminar.

I want also to express great appreciation for the friendship, support, and encouragement I received from my sisters, Mandy and Caroline, as well as from Rob and Courtney Worrell and David Wang.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the most extraordinary teachers I have ever encountered: Paul Erb; James Arieti; Lawrence Rhu, who directed this dissertation; and my mother, Nancy FitzSimons. To these, my debt and gratitude are without measure.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the claim that “The truest poetry is the most feigning” by examining ekphrasis and its relation to skepticism in Shakespeare. Two fundamental claims comprise my argument: first, Shakespeare uses ekphrasis to acknowledge doubt in order that his poetry might become most true; second, ekphrasis is the unique means by which the spectators—at times both within and outside of the play—may question their own skepticism and additionally consider their role and place as audience.

In the introduction, after discussing key characteristics of ekphrasis conveyed in the Shield of Achilles, I argue that the spatial focus of Horace’s *ut pictura poesis* results in a distancing effect that allows for an ethical dimension within ekphrastic expression: in short, ekphrasis invites, and perhaps demands, the spectator’s recognition of her own consciousness as spectator, resulting in heightened self-knowledge. In the chapters that follow, I discuss ekphraseis that are centered around questions of language: in Chapter 2, I argue that the Mouse-trap allows Hamlet to test the representational fidelity of words; in Chapter 3, I assert that the wonder and momentary cessation of speech produced by viewing the statue of Hermione repairs tragedy; last, in Chapter 4, I argue that the Sonnets present framed moments of the failure of epideictic speech, and that these moments are inextricably linked with the development of a wholly novel poetic.

Throughout I observe dramatic and poetic prototypes from antiquity in light of the many overlapping characteristics shared by ekphrastic and intertextual approaches.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT	v
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 EKPHRASIS, OR THE REPRESENTATION OF REPRESENTATION.....	7
1.2 THE SHEILD OF ACHILLES	11
1.3 AESTHETIC DISTANCE AND EKPHRASIS	17
1.4 THE ETHICS OF EKPHRASIS	18
1.5 EPICUREAN THOUGHT IN SHAKESPEARE	20
CHAPTER 2: THE PLAY’S THE THING: ACTION, SPEECH, AND SKEPTICISM IN <i>HAMLET</i>	35
2.1 HAMLET AFTER DOUBT	49
CHAPTER 3: THE ART OF <i>THE WINTER’S TALE</i> : NATURE IS MADE BETTER BY NO MEAN?	56
3.1 <i>THE WINTER’S TALE</i> AND THE TRAGEDIES	59
3.2 <i>THE WINTER’S TALE</i> AND <i>ALCESTIS</i>	67
3.3 NATURE MADE BETTER	84
CHAPTER 4: MONUMENTAL INSIGNIFICANCE?	88
4.1 SUBJECTIVITY AND “SUPERMIMESIS” IN THE SONNETS	89
4.2 MONUMENTS AND THE BELOVED AS VERSE	98
4.3 TIME AND MORTALITY	103
WORKS CITED.....	120

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

AUDREY: I do not know what “poetical” is. Is it honest
in deed and word? Is it a true thing?

TOUCHSTONE: No, truly, for the truest poetry is the most
feigning....¹

This dissertation investigates Touchstone’s rather extraordinary claim above.²

What is of course immediately striking about the line is the ostensibly paradoxical equation of truth with falsity, rendered even more striking and emphatic by the enjambment of “feigning.” Yet the claim is not to say that the truest poetry is the most false; rather, it is to say, at least in part, that truth in poetry is contingent on falsifying, which is quite distinct from being false. The two superlatives of the claim indicate a continuum within the proportional relationship between truth and feigning, and so we might consider a few formulations of the inverse: “The least true poetry is the least feigning,” or “The falsest poetry is the most transparent.” Considered in this way, we can see more clearly how the statement asserts the superiority of “seeming” over “is” in

¹ *As You Like It*, 3.3.16-19.

² The idea of falsity appearing true in poetry is first most clearly conveyed in *Theogony*, 27-28 (though this is perhaps a conscious response to *Odyssey* 14.124-25): “We [Muses] know how to say [λέγειν] many false things similar to real things, / but we also know, when we wish, how to voice [γληρύσασθαι] true things.” Of additional note here is the contrast between *how* false and true statements are expressed: the former is done through a basic verb of speaking, while the latter is conveyed by a verb with artistic, and by extension, performative connotations. This sentiment has since undergone numerous reiterations and reformulations, but what makes Touchstone’s claim quite distinct from Hesiod’s is the idea that true things are rendered more true *by* appearing false.

respect to semantic signification, and it further indicates that completely perspicuous speech cannot be poetic. And to say that the truest poetry is the most feigning is wholly distinct from saying that the truest poetry is the most feigned: the progressive aspect of the participle grammatically signifies an ongoing process that continues indefinitely. And so while the statement seems at first self-negating, it in fact asserts that poetic truth arises from the continuous process of negotiation between seeming and being. The truth then, conveyed in poetry, is kinetic, and it derives its momentum from the movement among various modes and degrees of doubt inherent in the feigning of poetry.

Richard Wilbur conveys this process as well as the peculiar nature of skepticism in his short poem “Epistemology,” cited here in full:

I

Kick at the rock, Sam Johnson, break your bones:
But cloudy, cloudy is the stuff of stones.

II

We milk the cow of the world, and as we do,
We whisper in her ear, “You are not true.”³

The poem points to the discrepancy between perceived knowledge—even knowledge derived from immediate and basic sensory experience—and the inescapable uncertainty that this knowledge is indeed valid. However, more importantly, we see how skepticism is mediated through experience of the world. The Roman numerals separating the couplets reflect distinct divisions of the mind of the skeptic but additionally indicate the continuous, non-discrete process of moving from doubt to acceptance. This acceptance, at

³ *Collected Poems 1943-2004*, 361. For two remarkable ekphraseis by Wilbur, see “Playboy” and “A Baroque Wall-Fountain in the Villa Sciarra” *ibid.*, 223 and 344.

least while it lasts, occludes epistemological crisis: even the most earnest believer in the cloudy stuff of stones avoids the broken toe, just as Descartes avoids the hot stove, or the famished skeptic accepts the cow's milk. And so the sort of skepticism conveyed here is not to say something like, "p is p if and only if q is not present;" it is not to strive for apodeictic certainty about what is. Rather, it points to doubt and its acceptance negotiated through the experience of the world. And within the larger context of the world, the claim appears in the more immediate context of poetry. So too is Touchstone's assertion above located in a poetic, or more specifically, a dramatic or theatrical context, one that introduces "a pageant truly played" (3.4.51) between Phoebe and Silvius. The scene thus becomes thrice feigning: the "pageant," contained within the larger play, is one in which Rosalind (disguised as Ganymede) declares she will "prove a busy actor." (3.4.60) Rosalind plays three parts simultaneously, in part modeling for the audience how to become busy actors themselves through the busying act of belief.

In a few different ways, skepticism and its process of negotiation are implicitly conveyed in the word "theater" itself, derived from Greek *theaomai*. In its most basic sense, the root of theater signifies "seeing," which is often and commonly equated with knowing. But *theaomai* more specifically indicates the deliberate and often sustained gazing at an object, allowing for the possibility of contemplation of both the object itself and its effect on the viewer. Of further note is the grammatical voice of *theaomai*: as in English, Greek has an active and a passive voice, the former indicating that the subject performs the action of the verb, and the latter indicating that the subject receives the action of the verb; but Greek has also a middle voice, signifying a relationship between subject and verb that approaches reflexivity, but more properly indicates that the subject

effects a change that in turn affects her, usually in a favorable way. The middle voice of *theaomai* reflects precisely what happens when we watch a play: we give ourselves over to the spectacle in order that we may be moved emotionally by it, negotiating the crucial middle ground between belief and doubt, and positioning ourselves between roles as active agents of our belief and passive objects of emotional, affective change. However, it should be added that this is not ordinarily a willful act: who among us says to himself, taking his seat in the theater, “I shall now willfully suspend my disbelief concerning the spectacle before me.” This is no more valid than the idea that a child needs to prepare herself to play make-believe with her toys.

Another Greek word and its English derivative are of note here: *hypokrinomai*, also a verb in the middle voice, signifies, in a secondary sense, to “speak lines on a stage;” our English derivative is “hypocrite.” Just as an actor plays a part on stage, so too do we play along in life, rarely, if ever, whispering to the world “You are not true.” The negotiation involved in skepticism, whether in the world or on the stage, is something that is passively experienced more often than it is consciously employed.

Feigning and its relationship to truth in poetry, the skepticism inherent in poetic expression and reception, and the process of moving between belief and doubt make an examination of ekphrasis valuable. “Ekphrasis” etymologically signifies a “speaking out”: represented representation calls attention to itself, announces itself, discloses its own artifice and artificiality, thus rousing the reader’s awareness and consciousness of the very negotiation in which she participates. Like Wilbur’s divisions above, ekphrasis initiates continuous yet distinct stages of response: self-conscious doubt slips seamlessly into acceptance. And so my premise throughout this dissertation is that ekphrasis is used

by Shakespeare to acknowledge doubt in order that his poetry might become most true: doubt *requires* a temporally prior, initial belief, and the inherent fragility of this belief is potentially strengthened through skeptical interrogation. Emerson puts it this way: “The ground occupied by the skeptic is the vestibule of the temple.”⁴ To this end, I will discuss what I consider to be the three most feigning moments in Shakespeare,⁵ each of which centers on questions of language: in Chapter 1, I argue that the Mouse-trap allows Hamlet to test the representational fidelity of words; in Chapter 2, I assert that the wonder and momentary cessation of speech produced by viewing the statue of Hermione repairs tragedy; last, in Chapter 3, I argue that the Sonnets present framed moments of the failure of epideictic speech, and that these moments are inextricably linked with the development of a wholly novel poetic.

This focus on language is in accordance with the concept of ekphrasis as verbally depicting a visual representation. We may observe this idea, as well as the notion that all reading and writing metaphorically strive for ekphrastic expression,⁶ in the etymology of words concerned with literary production: “text” is derived from Latin *texere*, signifying (in a secondary sense) “to weave.” The metaphor implicit in the etymology is clear: just as an artisan weaves threads to form a fabric, so the poet weaves words to form a text.⁷

⁴ Emerson, “Montaigne; or, The Skeptic” in *Representative Men*, 161.

⁵ Other significant ekphraseis in Shakespeare include the performance of “Pyramus and Thisbe” in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 5.1; the pageant of the “Nine Worthies” in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, 5.2; the descriptions of the paintings of Trojan war scenes in *The Rape of Lucrece*, 1366–1568; Prospero’s masque in *The Tempest*, 4.1; and the entirety of *The Taming of The Shrew* after the Induction.

⁶ Sigurd Burckhardt puts it this way: “The painter’s tree *is* an image; but if the poet writes ‘tree,’ he does not create an image. He *uses* one; the poetic ‘image’ is one only in a metaphorical sense.” Cited in Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, 266; cf. Krieger’s discussion of Burckhardt’s claim of the non-corporeality of language, *ibid.*, 82–83.

⁷ For an etymological linking of Homer to a craftsman or “joiner,” see Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*, 56–57; for a discussion of the materiality of language, see Ford, *The Origins of Criticism*, chap. 7.

The feigning nature of the textual presentation of words reveals and conceals, elucidates and darkens, and exposes and hides meaning through texture. The word “text” itself thus invites the reader to feel the lexical contours, to examine the verbal textures, and to prod the interstitial spaces of the weaving in order to expose the bare idea underneath. In addition, the Greek analogue to *texere* further reflects the literary and especially dramatic significations implicit in ekphrastic language:⁸ *symploke*, an “interweaving,” is the term Aristotle employs to describe the complex plot of tragedy.⁹ Finally, we can observe all of these ekphrastic and literary elements in the feigning that this dissertation examines: “feign” is derived from Latin *fingere*, signifying “to touch, handle; devise; fabricate, alter, change.” We thus see here the convergence of the implicit physicality of ekphrasis with the illusion of theater, and this is commented on explicitly in *The Tempest*:

....These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,

esp. 166–69 for Atomic materiality of speech in Democritus, and 182 for Gorgias' parallels between painting and sculpture, along with the ensuing effects on the soul; underlying these connections is an implicit comparison and rivalry among the arts in ekphrasis: see Ford, *ibid.*, chap. 5, esp. his discussion of the emphatic opening of Pindar's *Nemean* 5: “I am *not* a sculptor” (οὐκ ἀνδριαντοποιός εἰμι), 119–20; see also Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, 122 and 122 n.13, for a discussion of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 3.10.1–8, in which Socrates questions a sculptor (Cleiton) and a painter (Parrhasius) about how, or even whether, concrete artistic depictions can represent abstract, non-physical human attributes such as character. Halliwell notes a series of verbs in the passage (*apeikazein*, *proseikazein*, *apomimesthai*, *ekmimesthai*, *aphomoion*), but I would add to these *energazesthai* (3.10.6), as well as the emphasis, though subtle, on the kinetic nature of these verbs signifying exact representation, making similar, copying, and working into. See too Lessing, *Laocoon*, *passim*, esp. 115; Leonardo offers seven arguments for the superiority of painting to poetry in “Poetry and Painting,” 36–69.

⁸ Goldhill asserts that the strong visual aspect brought about by *enargeia* involved in ekphrastic description “brings ekphrasis particularly close to the theatre--the space of seeing and illusion.” “What Is Ekphrasis For?,” 3.

⁹ *Poetics* 1455b. For the connection between a plot's interweaving and tragic recognition, see Zeitlin, “Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama,” 78–79.

And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. (4.1.165-73)

Throughout this dissertation, these threads of thought implicit in language and constitutive of the true yet “baseless fabric” of the “insubstantial pageant” of theater will persist, in varying degrees of subtlety, in each example of the ekphrasis I examine.

In the remaining sections of this introduction, I will discuss the following: the overwhelming difficulty of defining both ekphrasis and the logically prior concept of representation on which it depends; essential characteristics of ekphrasis conveyed in the description of the Shield of Achilles; aesthetic distance in Horace’s *ut pictura poesis*; ethical and didactic implications of ekphrastic reading; and overlapping elements of skepticism and Epicurean thought in Shakespeare.

1.1: Ekphrasis, or the Representation of Representation

Representation, or mimesis, is an endlessly difficult concept.¹⁰ Platonic conceptions of representation are rendered infinitely more difficult by the dramatic and ironic contexts in which they appear. Aristotle’s formulations of mimesis are ostensibly more transparent, but they are not without great difficulties.¹¹ For my purposes here, I will assert that all imitation is inherently ekphrastic when considered in light of Halliwell’s claim that Aristotle’s concept of mimesis is a synthetic duality. This concept fuses the depiction of relatable qualities of what could be so in the world with the distinct

¹⁰ For an excellent overview of mimesis in Plato and Aristotle, see Richard McKeon’s “Literary Criticism and The Concept of Imitation in Antiquity,” 1-35.

¹¹ For criticism of Aristotelian formulations of mimesis during Shakespeare’s lifetime, see Patrizi, *Della poetica Vol. 2 Vol. 2*, 61–64; Patrizi details seven Aristotelian definitions of mimesis and then systematically and convincingly refutes each.

yet contingent production of objects of art.¹² Thus, if mimesis at once conveys represented meaning and distinct yet inextricably linked “material” means, it accords with concepts of ekphrasis as production that is both represented and representing.

Here I would like to assess a rather striking sentence concerning mimesis in Plutarch, both because of the didactic implications involved, and because Plutarch rarely discounts or disparages the importance of mimesis:

τὸ γὰρ καλὸν ἐφ’ αὐτὸ πρακτικῶς κινεῖ καὶ πρακτικὴν εὐθὺς ὁρμὴν ἐντίθησιν, ἡθοποιοῦν οὐ τῇ μιμήσει τὸν θεατὴν, ἀλλὰ τῇ ἱστορίᾳ τοῦ ἔργου τὴν προαίρεσιν παρεχόμενον.¹³

The Good moves fittingly upon itself, and straightway an active rush-forward sets in, shaping character not by means of imitation by the spectator, but by means of providing a moral choosing through inquiry of an action.

There are a few ways in which the artistry of the sentence calls attention to itself: there is athroismos in the initial colon (πρακτικῶς ...πρακτικὴν), followed by a chiasmus in the next two cola (ἡθοποιοῦν....τῇ μιμήσει....τῇ ἱστορίᾳ....παρεχόμενον), with the neuter participles framing the two datives of means. Plutarch’s style is rich and abundant with rhetorical flashes, so the sentence may not appear at all unusual; however, it should strike the reader as salient because of those elements in the sentence that it highlights. First, the terms that are amplified in the athroismos are both derived from πράσσω, and Plutarch’s argument up till now has been for his reader to act, and to act fittingly in accordance with what the Good dictates. Second, Plutarch frames *how* one is to act fittingly and allow character to be shaped with two participles modifying the Good (τὸ καλὸν). The internal terms of the chiasmus (τῇ μιμήσει....τῇ ἱστορίᾳ) are simultaneously

¹² Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, Ch. 5.

¹³ *Pericles*, 2.4

structurally equated yet philosophically opposed to one another: inquiry (the lexical and philosophical root of “history”) is championed over mimesis as the means by which character should be shaped, yet Plutarch’s “history” is itself imitation. There is certainly a good deal of verbal artistry here and many other places in Plutarch’s prose, so one might ask, in light of Plutarch’s assertion that active observation of the Good is sufficient, why Plutarch’s prose style is so highly developed. In other words, Plutarch’s argument is a little like a reader averring that the words in a book are all that matters, and then insisting on volumes with gold-trimmed pages.

To investigate this question, let us continue with Plutarch’s sentence above. Character is formed by the Good providing a course of action, or moral choosing (προαίρεσιν). Aristotle too argues that character is that which reveals moral choice (προαίρεσιν)¹⁴, and this is connected with our understanding and distinguishing character from choice in tragedy. Furthermore, Aristotle argues that the finest tragedies represent fearful and pitiable events, though the representation of a man changing from a state of prosperity to adversity or a depraved man to a state of prosperity, elicits neither pity nor fear nor *philanthropia*, which Halliwell cleverly translates as “fellow-feeling.”¹⁵ Aristotle’s word seems to indicate an assimilated view of sympathy and empathy, for we “feel along with” the one suffering, at least in so far as we are “fellow” human beings. Both the experience and the understanding of tragedy are in some way compromised if we fail to distinguish character and choice. Halliwell notes that *philanthropia*, the “fellow-feeling” involved in tragic suffering, “may entail either a broadly humane

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450b8

¹⁵ Ibid., 1452b32.

sympathy, or a basic sense of justice.”¹⁶ We thus see here in *philanthropia* a fundamentally didactic purpose in that it results in moral choice (προαίρεσιν). My assertion here is that Plutarch’s aim is no different from the tragedian’s: to teach through contemplation of a work, whether theatrical spectacle or written word.

The earliest articulations and definitions of ekphrasis appear in the *progymnasmata*, rhetorical handbooks dating from as early as the first century C.E. to as late as the fifth century. In discussing the various formulations and definitions of ekphrasis among the rhetoricians, Andrew Becker notes that the “two virtues” of ekphrasis conveyed in each are clarity and vividness.¹⁷ However, I want to quickly touch on a potentially important difference conveyed in the rhetorician Nicolaus’ definition, cited below, and followed by Becker’s translation:

λόγος ἀφηγηματικός....ὅπ’ ὅσιν ἐναργῶς ἄγων τὸ δηλούμενον

“digressive language....bringing the thing made manifest vividly before the sight”

Nicolaus’ description of language as “digressive” is unique, and I want to suggest here that there is subtle importance conveyed by his word choice: ekphrasis in this estimation is brought closer, at least potentially, to the Longinian sublime, for the hearer of the vivid description *is led along*, i.e. he is on the brink of losing control as to whether or not he is persuaded. It may seem like I am making too much of a single word, but Nicolaus at times differs from the other writers of *progymnasmata* in subtle yet important ways.¹⁸ We

¹⁶ Introduction, xxvi.

¹⁷ Becker, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis*, 25.

¹⁸ For example, though the differences in accounts of the chreia vary only slightly among Greek rhetoricians, Nikolaus best emphasizes its morally corrective potential: Χρεία δέ ἐστι λόγος ἢ πρᾶξις εὖστοχος καὶ σύντομος, εἷς τι πρόσωπον ὀρισμένον ἔχουσα τὴν ἀναφοράν, πρὸς ἐπανόρθωσιν τινος τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ παραλαμβανομένη (“And a chreia is an account or action both well-aimed and brief, ascribed to a certain person, possessing the means for repairing, and taken up for rectifying some of the things in life”), Nicolaus Sophista, *Nicolai Progymnasmata*, 19.7–8;

will return to this idea periodically of the effects—sometimes overwhelming—of *enargeia*.

1.2: The Shield of Achilles

Although examples of ekphrasis abound in Greek and Latin literature, none conveys the narratological and thematic characteristics of ekphrasis as well and as fully as the Shield of Achilles. Therefore, in this section, I wish to point out these characteristics through a brief review of some of the seminal scholarship on the Shield of Achilles, focusing in particular on the pervasive and sustained self-consciousness of the artistic process conveyed in the ekphrasis. In support of this claim, I will note that Hesiod's *Shield of Herakles*, though it is often regarded as artistically inferior to its predecessor, nevertheless functions as both a response to and continuation of the poet's self-conscious interrogation of the artistic process, thus serving as an intertextual¹⁹ model for approaching Shakespeare's appropriation of classical prototypes in his plays. In

the emphasis on moral correction is continued through 19.17. Apart from establishing Nicolaus' distinctiveness, I quickly want to suggest here that Mamillius' tale (2.1.38 and 40), twice interrupted, functions essentially as a chreia: the tale at once adumbrates the action of *The Winter's Tale*, but it also introduces the moral rectification of Leontes, as well as the reparative potential of the play as a whole. See also Enterline's mention of chreia in her discussion of Aphthonius' examples of Hecuba and Niobe in ethopoeia, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom*, 136. The chief differences among the rhetoricians in defining the chreia are as follows: Aelius Theon asserts that the chreia, as opposed to the maxim, only sometimes states a universal, and that the chreia is *not* always useful for life. Hermogenes distinguishes among verbal, actional, and mixed chreiai. He further distinguishes declarative, interrogative, and investigative types. Aphthonius provides the following elaborations on the chreia: praise, paraphrase, clause, contrary, comparison (parabole), example (paradeigma), ancient testimony, and brief epilogue. See Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci*; and also see "Selections from the Commentary on the Progymnasmata of Aphthonius attributed to John of Sardis," in Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 193-95. John lists the five parts of a speech: the prooemium, narrative, antithesis, solution, and epilogue. He then locates the chreia in the agonistic part of the antithesis, because it is here where the auditor confirms or denies the claim of the statement.

¹⁹ Intertextuality, as formulated by Kristeva, is the means by which meaning is mediated through filtered codes, *Desire in Language*, 69.

addition, from this reading, we will observe the following characteristics of ekphrasis: explicit disclosure of the act of creation; narrative interruption and assimilation of description with narrative; conflation by the reader of realities conveyed by both the particular ekphrasis and the work of art in which it appears; and self-reference by the artist.

G. E. Lessing argues that the visible properties of bodies are the true subjects of painting, and that the sequential depiction of objects that follow one another through action is the true subject of poetry. Lessing further asserts that Homer depicts bodies only for the sake of an action, assigning the most vivid and apposite adjective to each object described.²⁰ However, the depiction of the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18 is potentially problematic to Lessing's assertions, for we have an extended description of scenes and bodies placed within a larger narrative. Yet Lessing views the act of describing the shield as fundamentally depicting an artistic process rather than descriptive stasis: "Homer does not paint the shield as finished and complete, but as a shield that is being made....we do not see the shield, but the divine master as he is making it."²¹ We might add here that in addition to seeing the divine master as he forges the shield, we are subtly reminded by the poet that what we are hearing is an immediately unfolding act of creation: the ekphrasis of the shield of Achilles is crafted through a *ritournelle* composition, which is structured further by adversitive particles coupled with verbs of preparing, making, placing, or embroidering that introduce each subsequent description

²⁰ Lessing, *Laocoon*, 78.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

within the whole of the shield.²² The audience is thus subtly reminded nine times of both the artificiality and the artistry conveyed in the description of the shield.²³ In contrast to this description of artistic creation is Virgil's depiction of the shield of Aeneas. Lessing argues that the description is "cold and tedious," and that "not a single one of the characters takes part in the description."²⁴ For Lessing, the descriptions on the shield of Achilles naturally follow as necessary depictions of the larger artistic process, while those in Vergil are done merely for the sake of decoration.

It is easy to conceive of the Shield of Achilles as a microcosm of the larger world:²⁵ on it we see represented heavenly bodies (18.484-89); a peaceful city contrasted with a city at war (490-540); workers plowing the field (541-49); a king viewing those harvesting crops and the preparation of a meal (550-60); youths gathering grapes to the sounds of a young man's music (561-72); a herd of cattle attacked by lions (573-86); a pasture filled with sheep²⁶ (587-89); men and women dancing happily (590-606); and the ocean encircling the rim of the shield (607-08). In his analysis of these scenes, Calvin Byre points out that some descriptions contain a higher degree of narrativity than others, as they "possess temporal sequentiality and causality."²⁷ In particular, the depiction of the lawsuit, the siege of the city, and the attack of the bull by the lions are salient because they arouse logical expectations characteristic of narrative, rather than the lexical expectations involved in description. For Byre, these minute, unresolved narratives

²² ἐν μὲν...ἔτευξ' (18.484); ἐν δὲ...ποίησε (490; 573; 587); ἐν δ' ἐτίθει (541; 550; 561; 607); ἐν δ' ἐτίθει (607).

²³ On artistic self-commentary in the description, see Atchity, *Homer's Iliad: The Shield of Memory*, 249.

²⁴ Lessing, *Laocoon*, 96-97.

²⁵ See Lessing's often noted statement, "Homer was able to make his shield the very essence of all that happened in the world by means of but a few pictures." *Laocoon*, 216 n. A.

²⁶ See also analogous scenes of serenity in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in Atchity, *Homer's Iliad*, 249.

²⁷ Byre, "Narration, Description, and Theme in the Shield of Achilles," 39.

function analogically to heighten and amplify the dramatic interruption--initiated by the ekphrasis--of the larger narrative of the *Iliad*. The reader wonders how each of these smaller narratives will be resolved, just as she wonders how the story of Achilles will end. Byre further argues that the purely descriptive scenes that are assimilated with these smaller narratives serve to suspend that which is depicted in a state of timeless stasis; this in turn reflects the pause and suspension of narrative in the story of Achilles. Byre's arguments here perhaps help us to see that, even on a narratological level, the shaping of the shield itself becomes a tool in fashioning the larger artistic and narrative process that encompasses it.

Apart from considerations of the processes that created it, the shield of course presents itself as a complete work of art in and of itself. All works of art—at least the ones of note—elicit emotional reactions, and Stephen Scully investigates these varied emotional reactions that accompany viewing the shield. While not one of the fear-struck Myrmidons dares to gaze directly at the shield,²⁸ Achilles stares straightway at it, and as he does, anger waxes in him,²⁹ but then he is pleased in his heart looking at the embellishments.³⁰ Scully ultimately argues that the pleasure that arises from Achilles' synoptic viewing of the shield is connected with what he terms the birth "into a paradoxical form of mortal godhood."³¹ However, it seems Scully is perhaps too quickly dismissive of the fact that Achilles' pleasure is linked not to viewing the entirety of the shield, but rather to the artistic embellishments (δαίδαλα) forged on the shield. In conveying mixed and varied

²⁸ οὐδέ τις ἔτλη / ἄντην εἰσιδέειν....(19.13-14).

²⁹ ὥς εἶδ', ὥς μιν μᾶλλον ἔδν χόλος....(19.15).

³⁰ αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ φρεσὶν ἦσι τετάρπετο δαίδαλα λεύσσων....(19.19).

³¹ Scully, "Reading the Shield of Achilles," 37.

emotional reactions to the shield, Homer perhaps provides both a brief catalogue and a model for possible reactions to not only the shield, but also to the experience of epic.

Thomas Hubbard explores “not only how the shield itself reflects the *Iliad* but moreover how Homer’s depiction of its fabrication reveals his view of his own artistry.”³² This focus, he argues, is not one that has yet been embraced or even explored by classical scholars. Hubbard argues that “the equation between poet and craftsman is certainly implicit in the shield itself, where the choral dancing place is likened to the work of the master craftsman Daedalus (18.591-92)” and “the dance is likened to the work of a potter (18.600-01).”³³ Hubbard additionally draws parallels between each of the four major divisions in the shield and species of poetry: the astronomical elements depicted at the beginning correspond to cosmogonic poetry; the city at peace and the city at war—along with their subdivisions—reflect epic themes; pastoral depictions are reflected in narratives of didactic poetry; and the dance scenes correspond to choral lyric.³⁴ Finally, Hubbard observes a “movement from lesser to greater figurality in artistic terms, a movement from temporality to timelessness, from linear sequence to cyclical immortality.”³⁵ While Hubbard makes compelling and overall persuasive arguments, at least part of his reasoning is contingent on his tacit acceptance of lines not in our manuscript, namely, the mention of the bard. However, Martin Revermann argues convincingly that the final scene depicted on the shield is lacunose. Although the absence of musical accompaniment is highly suspect when considered in light of evidence from relevant passages in Homer and Hesiod, as well as from vase depictions, Revermann assesses

³² Hubbard, “Nature and Art in the Shield of Achilles,” 17.

³³ Ibid., 27.

³⁴ Ibid., 28.

³⁵ Ibid., 34.

Athenaeus' assertion that the genuine text contains mention of the ᾠοιδός (V 180c-d, 181a-d) as highly dubious. Yet Revermann ultimately argues that the presence of the ᾠοιδός is the result of textual fluctuations brought about by rhapsodic intervention. Nevertheless, the verse and its mention of the poet was athetized by Aristarchus, and thus does not appear in our manuscript.³⁶ Though Revermann's argument is conjectural, if true, it would indicate an awareness on the part of the rhapsode that the passage performed involves, and to some degree is about, self-consciousness in artistic creation.³⁷

In the *Shield of Heracles*, we may observe a continuation of many of these same themes: vividness of description, attention to material means, the assimilation of narrative and descriptive elements, and the subtle suspension of the illusion created by means of self-referentiality by the bard. Andrew Becker argues that the *Shield of Heracles* effects a "double response" in the audience: on the one hand, the auditor is drawn into the illusion conveyed by vivid language, and on the other hand, her attention is directed to the one describing, thus complementing the illusion.³⁸ In addition, Becker argues that the audience is further drawn into acceptance of the illusion when the thoughts and emotions of those depicted on the shield are conveyed by the poet.³⁹ In particular, the declaration

³⁶ Revermann, "The Text of Iliad 18.603-6 and the Presence of an ᾠοιδός on the Shield of Achilles," 36. See too Hubbard n. 61, where he also notes the parallel passage in *Odyssey* 4.15-19.

³⁷ The role of Demodokos is of course particularly important to this point: see *Odyssey* 8 esp. 43 and 73-79; see Rhu, "After the Middle Ages: Prophetic Authority and Human Fallibility in Renaissance Epic" for a reading of how depictions of self-referentiality in Homer and Dante serve as classical models that in turn inform the intersection of poetry and prophesy in Tasso and Milton, 163-84, and esp. his discussion of the strong affiliation between Demodokos and Odysseus, resulting in part in "contexts of manifold duplicity....[which] welcome us into a hall of mirrors where reflections threaten to multiply ad infinitum or, at least, [confound] our conceptual control." 167. The self-referentiality described here reflects not only a crucial characteristic of ekphrasis, but additionally prepares us for the same effect that is at play during the Mouse-trap.

³⁸ Becker, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis*, 31-32.

³⁹ Ibid., 33.

by the poet that the shield is a thing of wonder (140; 318)--and this claim frames the description of the shield--augments the audience's acceptance of the illusion by drawing attention to the speaker. Becker concludes that the *Shield of Heracles* offers "a lesson in two movements in a text: the audience's acceptance of illusion is accompanied by an awareness of the source, the work, the contacts, and the production of that illusion."⁴⁰ Yet it seems that these elements of ekphrastic description perhaps collectively function as a rhetorical strategy to overcome skepticism in the hearer: by acknowledging their own artificiality, the depictions of both Homer and Hesiod allow for doubt to be overcome, in the same way that doubt is a prerequisite for faith.

Each of these characteristics of ekphrasis discussed above will prepare us to evaluate moments of ekphrasis in the chapters on Shakespeare that follow. In the Mouse-trap, we will observe a similar conflation by the reader of realities conveyed in both the play-within-the-play and the larger narrative of *Hamlet* in which it appears. In *The Winter's Tale*, we will see a pervasive attentiveness to the artistic creation of the statue of Hermione, along with a focus on the explicit act of creation and its ensuing effects on the spectators. Finally, in the Sonnets, we will note ekphrastic, framed moments that display artistic self-referentiality and the distinct self-consciousness of the poet.

1.3: Aesthetic Distance and Ekphrasis

Neander, in Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, in explaining the purpose of rhyme, makes the following claim about statues: "A Play, as I had said to be like Nature, is to be set above it; as Statues which are plac'd on high are made greater then the life,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 37.

that they may descend to the sight in their just proportion.”⁴¹ What is striking about Neander’s analogy is that it implicitly asserts that proportion and perspective are wholly relative, and that aesthetic success is largely contingent on the relative distance of the viewer.

For this reason, I wish to touch very briefly on Horace’s *ut pictura poesis*, which at least since the Renaissance has taken on a life of its own. First, below I include Ben Jonson’s translation of the five lines that qualify the comparison between poetry and painting:

As painting, so is poesy. Some man’s hand
Will take you more, the nearer that you stand;
As some the farther off: this loves the dark;
This, fearing it not the subtlest judges mark,
Will in the light be viewed: this, once the sight
Doth please: this, ten times over will delight.

The series of too often ignored comparisons⁴² that qualify the analogy between poetry and painting seem to me to convey the same focus on the perspectival importance and primacy of the viewer. The didactic implications of distance in viewing vividly described objects I will turn to in the next section.

1.4: The Ethics of Ekphrasis

We began the introduction with Audrey’s question concerning the truth of poetry. Of note here is her question of whether it is true in word and deed. To investigate this,

⁴¹ Dryden, *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, 93. A contrary view comes from Longinus: “In statues likeness to man is the quality required; in discourse we demand, as I said, that which transcends the human.” 36.3.

⁴² On the misreading of Horace’s phrase, see Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, 92–94; see too Trimpi, “The Meaning of Horace’s ‘Ut Pictura Poesis,’” for a very thorough discussion, and esp. 6ff. for a discussion of the five lines that follow the phrase.

I want to look first at Wittgenstein's claim concerning the relationship between works of art and ethics:

The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the connexion between art and ethics.

The usual way of looking at things sees objects as it were from the midst of them, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* from outside.

Is this it perhaps—in this view the object is seen *together with* space and time instead of *in* space and time?

(The thought forces itself upon one): the thing seen *sub specie aeternitatis* is the thing seen together with the whole logical space.⁴³

Here we can observe the importance of aesthetic distance, as well as the importance of the degree of persuasion within vivid descriptions that characterize instances of ekphrasis.

While we may be led along, swept away, or even enslaved by the content involved in descriptions characterized by *enargeia*, the form of ekphrastic description allows for careful and considered contemplation of the experience of viewing a work of art. In short, the form of ekphrastic description, *apart* from the content conveyed, allows for the possibility of seeing things *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Aristotle asserts the philosophy allows “for the activity of our truest thoughts....[and] is replenished from the most real realities...”⁴⁴ The most real of all realities is the realization and contemplation about one's own contemplation, and this self-consciousness and heightened self-awareness that can be effected by ekphrastic viewing. Simon Goldhill states that ekphrasis can “dramatize the viewing subject seeing himself seeing” and it is designed *to produce a viewing subject*.⁴⁵

⁴³ *Notebooks*, 83e (7.10.16).

⁴⁴ *Protrepticus* 52.1

⁴⁵ Goldhill, “What Is Ekphrasis For?,” 3.

1.5: Epicurean Thought in Shakespeare

Millicent Bell argues that Shakespeare's tragic plays in particular "exhibit the effects of a potent philosophic skepticism verging upon nihilism."⁴⁶ In addition, Sarah Beckwith writes that the tragedies, and *King Lear* in particular, "[show] us a graceless world, a world which God or the gods seem to have abandoned...."⁴⁷ It is therefore worthwhile to investigate the means by which such pervasive skepticism has entered into the works of Shakespeare. In so doing, I first want to examine particular elements of Epicurean thought in the works of Shakespeare that overlap with skepticism, arguing that Epicurean ideas Shakespeare draws on are entirely too strong to be accidental, and that Shakespeare's conception of skepticism is shaped and influenced through his reading of Montaigne.

Skepticism is and is not Epicureanism: on the one hand, they are clearly distinct schools of Hellenistic thought, along with Cynicism and Stoicism; on the other, they share many major concepts, most notably a view of happiness known as *ataraxia*, a life of tranquil withdrawal and freedom from disturbance. The chief difference, however, between the two is that the Skeptics attempted to locate happiness in the adherence to the concept of *epieikeia*, the suspension of judgment in all matters of knowledge, from sensory perception to questions of ethics.⁴⁸ The purported founder of skepticism was Pyrrho of Elis (ca. 300 B.C.E.), and though he wrote nothing, most of his ideas have

⁴⁶ Bell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Skepticism*, 2.

⁴⁷ Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 88.

⁴⁸ Major tenets of Skepticism are conveyed in *Pyrroneioi Hypotyposeis: The Skeptic Way*; see also Annas and Barnes' *The Modes of Scepticism: Ancient Texts and Modern Interpretations*, and further commentary in Long and Sedley's *The Hellenistic Philosophers: Translations of the Principal Sources*.

survived through the text of a Roman writer, Sextus Empiricus (ca. 200 C.E.). The eponymous founder of Epicureanism was Epicurus (ca. 300 B.C.E.), and much of his thoughts have survived through *De Rerum Natura* (DRN), the long didactic poem of another Roman writer, Lucretius. The most crucial aspect in regard to skepticism in Shakespeare—and especially Shakespearian tragedy, which demonstrates repeatedly the failure to acknowledge the other—is the distrust of sensory perception: if one cannot know with certainty the outside world, she cannot ever acknowledge another mind. The Epicureans, however, held that the senses were infallible, but they also advocated a rather limited social sphere: although friendships were regarded as crucial, politics and romantic love were eschewed.

Excavating moments of ancient skepticism in the works of Shakespeare is perhaps valuable, and perhaps unnecessary. James Shapiro seems simultaneously to validate and dismiss this approach:

[Shakespeare] had surely looked into Montaigne by the time he wrote Hamlet...but he didn't need to paraphrase him or pillage his essays for ideas...[t]here was more than enough skepticism and uncertainty to go around in England in the final years of Elizabeth's reign and in 1599 in particular; it did not have to be imported from France.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, European and Shakespearian skepticism had its beginnings somewhere, and locating moments of clear contact and influence within the Shakespearean corpus provides an important lens under which the plays may be examined; in addition, Shakespeare's appropriation of Epicurean concepts may aid in our understanding of the shifting attitudes towards Epicurean reception after Poggio Bracciolini's 1417 rediscovery of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*. A tercet in *Inferno* X is perhaps indicative

⁴⁹ A Year in *The Life of William Shakespeare*, 297.

of prevailing views towards Epicureanism in Europe before this rediscovery:

Suo cimitero da questa parte hanno
Con Epicuro tutti suoi seguaci,
Che l'anima col corpo morta fanno. (14-16)

Their cemetery has from this side
With Epicurus all his followers,
Who make the soul mortal with the body.⁵⁰

Dante clearly knows one of Lucretius' conclusions, i.e. the mortality of the soul; yet it is entirely doubtful whether he knew the Epicurean conception of the universe as composites of atoms and void that allows for the very claim that the soul is mortal. The atomistic aspects of Epicurean philosophy are either unknown or neglected by European authors until approximately the 17th century, and this knowledge presumably comes from Lucretius. Consider the following lines from Donne's 1609 poem "The First Anniversary".⁵¹

And new philosophy calls all in doubt,
The element of fire is quite put out,
The sun is lost, and th'earth, and no man's wit
Can well direct him where to look for it.
And freely men confess that this world's spent,
When in the planets and the firmament
They seek so many new; they see that this
Is crumbled out again to his atomies.

This "new philosophy" is not new at all, for the fundamental concepts of atoms and void are the very basis for all moral claims made by Epicurus. What is new for writers at the beginning of the 17th century is the awareness of the scientific foundations for this

⁵⁰ Translation by Sinclair.

⁵¹ I owe notice of this poem, as well as of Davies' below, and to passages from *Julius Caesar* and *Measure For Measure* to Jonathan Bate's Folger lecture, "The Good Life in Shakespeare." While Bate investigates Epicurean thought in Shakespeare, he does not discuss the passages below from Lucretius or Montaigne.

philosophy; what remains largely unchanged is the vehement indignation expressed by authors who view Epicurean claims as antithetical to Christian dogma. John Davies writes the following in his 1596 poem “Orchestra”:

Or if this (All) which round about we see
(As idle *Morpheus* some sicke braines hath taught)
Of vndeuided motes compacted bee,
How was this goodly Architecture wrought?
Or by what meanes were they together brought?
They erre that say they did concur by chaunce,
Loue made them meete in a well-ordered daunce. (134-40)

There are three salient aspects to this passage: first, while Epicurean philosophy is here regarded as incendiary and the result of “sicke braines,” it is no longer seen as overtly heretical, as in Dante; second, the reference to “undivided motes” indicates close textual familiarity with *De Rerum Natura*; and last, in spite of the fact that Epicurean philosophy is anathema to Davies, Lucretius’ influence is so thoroughly pervasive that the author begins his dedication to the work thus:⁵²

*O would you yet my Muse some Honny lend
From your mellifluous tongue, whereon doth sit
Suada in maiestie, that I may fit
These harsh beginnings with a sweeter end.* (5-8)

The strategy expressed here clearly reflects what is perhaps the most famous conceit in DRN. Justifying his explanation of Epicurean principles through the medium of poetry, Lucretius asserts the following:⁵³

⁵² Rather strangely, Bate makes no mention of Davies’ dedication.

⁵³ The reader is reminded of this conceit at 2.398-407 and 3.176-207 through the mention of honey and wormwood, and the metaphor is restated at 4.8-25. See also Lawrence Rhu’s discussion of the trope and its citation by Quintilian, “Shakespeare Italianate,” 18. In the Mouse-trap, immediately after a cutting couplet in which the Player Queen asserts that her second husband will be the murderer of her first (3.2.202-03), Hamlet exclaims, “That’s wormwood!”

But as physicians, when they seek to give
Young boys the nauseous wormwood, first do touch
The brim around the cup with the sweet juice
And yellow of the honey [mellis dulci flavoque], in order that
The thoughtless age of boyhood be cajoled
As far as the lips, and meanwhile swallow down
The wormwood's bitter draught, and, though befooled,
Be yet not merely duped, but rather thus
Grow strong again with recreated health....⁵⁴

Thus, even with his detractors, Lucretius exercises a powerful and perhaps even unconscious influence. If these works by Donne and Davies be indicative of both the spectrum of attitudes towards Lucretius and Epicureanism during the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries and its resonating influence, we can conclude that Shakespeare heard or read both praise and execration of this “new philosophy,” and furthermore that aspects of Epicurean influence can be seen in his plays.

Nothing, including the bard’s identity, seems certain with Shakespeare. The overwhelming difficulty inherent in asserting Epicurean connections in Shakespeare’s work is discovering the source or sources for this new philosophy. First, I will briefly examine Shakespeare’s probable sources, and second, I will detail the most salient textual evidence of Epicurean thought in select plays.

There are three recent studies concerning Lucretian reception in the Renaissance. In her work *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, Alison Brown argues for a powerful presence of the Roman poet in Florence beginning in 1440; perhaps most notable is her discussion of Marcello Adriani, in whose work Brown uncovers Lucretian

(3.2.204) The baroque verse of the Mouse-trap thus functions to “sweeten” a very harsh accusation.

⁵⁴ DRN, 1.936-42. All translations of Lucretius are by William Ellery Leonard, unless cited by Montaigne, in which case the translation is by D.M. Frame.

concepts of superstition, primitivism, and atomism.⁵⁵ Valentina Prosperi, in her work *Di Soavi Licor Gli Orli Del Vaso: La Fortuna Di Lucrezio Dall'Umanesimo Alla Controriforma*, primarily investigates the connection between honeyed words and didactic aims, and whether poetry is a potentially pernicious means by which dangerous ideas are disseminated. Ada Palmer, in her dissertation *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, examines and catalogues the marginalia in 41 Renaissance copies of Lucretius in order to discern the most immediate concerns, thoughts, and reactions of early Renaissance readers of Lucretius. Each of these studies is invaluable, yet they all share a narrow focus: Brown's study concentrates on Florence alone, and it is therefore difficult even to conjecture what Lucretian ideas made their way to London by 1600; Prosperi's work, while citing Lucretian influence in numerous authors, focuses only on a single aspect of Lucretian Epicureanism, as her title indicates. Palmer's work, while coming into direct contact with 41 texts and paratexts of Lucretius, has a sample size too limited to allow for conclusive claims about general Epicurean influence. She notes that concerning Epicurean philosophy in general, the marginalia yields very little evidence of general concern: "If we focus on what moderns think of as the most essential elements of Epicurean philosophy, we find them very rarely commented on at all."⁵⁶

One intriguing possibility as a source for Shakespeare of Lucretian concepts is the work of Giordano Bruno. While the bard's connection to Bruno is largely conjectural, and while they were never present in London simultaneously, they were connected through their common friend John Florio (Montaigne's translator, and to whom Shakespeare dedicates a sonnet) and through a common publisher, Thomas Vautrollier. It

⁵⁵ Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, ch. 3.

⁵⁶ Palmer, "Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance", 109.

is quite likely that Shakespeare knew Bruno's *Cena de le Ceneri*, and even more likely that he knew his *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante*. These works are in part concerned with Copernican cosmology, Epicurean "atheism," a critique of Christian ethics, a changing conception of conscience, and Bruno's debt to Lucretius in these works is clear. However, scholarship is divided on Bruno's specific influence on Shakespeare. While Hillary Gatti claims that Shakespeare "must have known" some of Bruno's dialogues,⁵⁷ J.L. McIntyre asserts that "The suggested analogies between one or two ideas in Hamlet and Bruno's conceptions....are of the shallowest."⁵⁸ Although the source of Shakespeare's knowledge of Lucretius is ultimately uncertain, it is known that Shakespeare enjoyed a friendship with John Florio, who published a 1603 translation of Montaigne. M.A. Screech notes that "editors and readers have noted up to one hundred and forty-seven"⁵⁹ quotations from Lucretius in the *Essays*, and it is therefore of all possibilities most probable that Shakespeare's knowledge of Lucretius is mediated through Montaigne. Therefore, in what follows, I will connect each instance of Epicurean thought in the plays with correlative passages from both Lucretius and Montaigne.

Cassius speaks the following to Messala in the final act of *Julius Caesar*:

This is my birth-day; as this very day
Was Cassius born. Give me thy hand, Messala:
Be thou my witness that against my will,
As Pompey was, am I compell'd to set
Upon one battle all our liberties.
You know that I held Epicurus strong
And his opinion: now I change my mind,
And partly credit things that do presage.
Coming from Sardis, on our former ensign
Two mighty eagles fell, and there they perch'd,

⁵⁷ Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno*, 146.

⁵⁸ McIntyre, *Giordano Bruno*, 34.

⁵⁹ Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, 411.

Gorging and feeding from our soldiers' hands;
 Who to Philippi here consorted us:
 This morning are they fled away and gone;
 And in their steads do ravens, crows and kites,
 Fly o'er our heads and downward look on us,
 As we were sickly prey: their shadows seem
 A canopy most fatal, under which
 Our army lies, ready to give up the ghost. (5.1.78-96)

This exchange in part involves an implicit comparison between Epicurean and Stoic philosophy, as Cassius is a follower of the former, and Messala to the latter.⁶⁰ Valerius Maximus writes that augury is an essential characteristic of the Roman mind,⁶¹ and in this passage we see that Shakespeare clearly knew the Epicurean tenet that the gods are removed and disinterested. The correlative passage in Lucretius that encapsulates this attitude appears in DRN 2.646-252:

omnis enim per se divom natura necessest
 immortalis aevo summa cum pace fruatur
 semota ab nostris rebus seiunctaque longe;
 nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
 ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri,
 nec bene promeritis capitur neque tangitur ira.

For all the gods must of themselves enjoy
 Immortal aeons and supreme repose,
 Withdrawn from our affairs, detached, afar:
 Immune from peril and immune from pain,
 Themselves abounding in riches of their own,
 Needing not us, they are not touched by wrath
 They are not taken by service or by gift.

⁶⁰ For a comparative analysis of these philosophies, see Sedley, "The Ethics of Brutus and Cassius.", 41-53.

⁶¹ Apud antiquos non solum publice, sed etiam priuatim nihil gerebatur nisi auspicio prius sumpto. *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, 2.1.1.

"Our ancestors never did anything without first taking the auspices, not only in public matters but even in private ones." (Walker translation)

While disinterested repose of the gods is a major concept in Epicureanism, there is no correlative passage in Montaigne, and therefore Shakespeare had at least one other source, whether Bruno, some other writer, or common knowledge. It is doubtful that this tenet was common knowledge, for the only other reference to Epicurus in the works of Shakespeare reflects the erroneous equation of Epicureanism with culinary indulgence.⁶²

Perhaps the most extraordinary moral claim of Epicureanism is reflected midway through *Measure for Measure*. Duke Vincentio, disguised as a friar, here gives arguments for the acceptance of death and the mortality of the soul to Claudio, who is condemned to death for fornication:

Be absolute for death; either death or life
Shall thereby be the sweeter. Reason thus with life:
If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing
That none but fools would keep: a breath thou art,
Servile to all the skyey influences,
That dost this habitation, where thou keep'st,
Hourly afflict: merely, thou art death's fool;
For him thou labour'st by thy flight to shun
And yet runn'st toward him still. Thou art not noble;
For all the accommodations that thou bear'st
Are nursed by baseness. Thou'rt by no means valiant;
For thou dost fear the soft and tender fork
Of a poor worm. Thy best of rest is sleep,
And that thou oft provokest; yet grossly fear'st
Thy death, which is no more. Thou art not thyself;
For thou exist'st on many a thousand grains
That issue out of dust. Happy thou art not;
For what thou hast not, still thou strivest to get,
And what thou hast, forget'st. Thou art not certain; (3.1.5-24)

....Thou hast nor youth nor age,
But, as it were, an after-dinner's sleep,
Dreaming on both; for all thy blessed youth
Becomes as aged, and doth beg the alms
Of palsied eld; and when thou art old and rich,
Thou hast neither heat, affection, limb, nor beauty,

⁶² *Antony and Cleopatra*, 2.1.29-30: "Epicurean cooks / Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite...."

To make thy riches pleasant. What's yet in this
That bears the name of life? Yet in this life
Lie hid moe thousand deaths: yet death we fear,
That makes these odds all even. (3.1.33-43)

This passage is remarkable because in it we see a friar counseling Claudio to approach death with equanimity, for men exist “on many a thousand grains,” and “issue out of dust.”⁶³ The idea itself is biblical, but the sentiment that this is all there is to human life is deeply Epicurean. Vincentio concludes his speech by likening death to sleep, which is a conceit seen in Lucretius. Although the same comparison is used by Cicero,⁶⁴ numerous passages in *Tusculan Disputations* involve the critique of Epicureanism (especially 2.7), while the passage above uses the imagery to assert an Epicurean point of view. Furthermore, the use of this very trope by Lucretius (3.951) is cited by Montaigne in essay 1.19, *That to Study Philosophy is to Learn to Die*,

Cur non ut plenus vitae conviva recedis?

Why not depart from life, as a sated guest from a feast?

and again in essay 2.6, *Use Makes Perfect*:

Nemo expurgitus exstat,
Frigida quem semel est vitae pausa sequuta (3.942)

No one was ever known to wake,
who has once fallen into the cold sleep of death.

⁶³ Cf. Hamlet’s assertion that man is the “quintessence of dust.” *Hamlet*, 2.2.332.

⁶⁴ Habes somnum imaginem mortis eamque cotidie induis, et dubitas quin sensus in morte nullus sit, cum in eius simulacro videas esse nullum sensum? *Tusculan Disputations*, 1.38. “You hold sleep as an image of death, and you take that on daily: and so do you doubt that there is no sense in death, when you see there is none in sleep, which resembles it?”

Shakespeare's use of this Epicurean sentiment spoken by a friar is thus a damning critique of the Christian church and the concept of the immortality of the soul.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the conclusion that death is nothing (DRN 3.939) is also cited in Montaigne 1.19:

multo igitur mortem minus ad nos esse putandumst,
si minus esse potest quam quod nihil esse videmus

Death would seem much less to us—if indeed there
could be less in that which we see to be nothing.

We see a similarly famous line from Lucretius spoken by King Lear at the beginning of the play, during the “love contest” among his daughters. Here Cordelia refuses to compete against her sycophantic sisters in professing hyperbolic statements of her love for their father:

LEAR:what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.
CORDELIA: Nothing, my lord.
KING LEAR: Nothing!
CORDELIA: Nothing.
KING LEAR: Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.
CORDELIA: Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
According to my bond; no more nor less. (1.1.94-102)

The principle that “nothing comes from nothing” is crucial to both Lucretius’ philosophy and to the development of the plot in *King Lear*. Shakespeare here interweaves three Epicurean ideas for his own dramatic ends. First, the principle of “nothing comes from nothing” allows both for Cordelia’s banishment and disinheritance, as well as for the

⁶⁵ Samuel Johnson differs in opinion: “I cannot without indignation find Shakespeare saying, that *death is only sleep*, lengthening out his exhortation by a sentence which in the Friar is impious, in the reasoner is foolish, and in the poet trite and vulgar.” *The Plays and Poems of William Shakspeare*, 97. The impiety of the friar’s assertion of Epicurean philosophy seems to me to be a major point of the passage.

implicit assertion that the hyperbolic pronouncements of Regan and Goneril amount to nothing. Second, we see in this passage attention drawn to the Epicurean idea because the laconic style in which it is expressed is juxtaposed with the contrived rhetoric of the competing sisters.⁶⁶ Third, there is the fusion of public and private life, and the reader can more readily see the validity and the tragedy of Cordelia's stance in light of the Epicurean admonishment to eschew politics. The correlative passage from Lucretius appears in 1.146-55:

hunc igitur terrorem animi tenebrasque necessest
non radii solis neque lucida tela diei
discutiant, sed naturae species ratioque.
Principium cuius hinc nobis exordia sumet,
nullam rem e nihilo gigni divinitus umquam.
quippe ita formido mortalis continet omnis....

This terror, then, this darkness of the mind,
Not sunrise with its flaring spokes of light,
Nor glittering arrows of morning can disperse,
But only Nature's aspect and her law,
Which, teaching us, hath this exordium:
Nothing from nothing ever yet was born.
Fear holds dominion over mortality....

Here we see that the principle is derived from Nature herself; in Cordelia's lines that immediately follow the passage above, she asserts that her love is in accordance with her nature as a daughter. The "nothing will come of nothing" with which Lear responds adumbrates the play's long denouement and Lear's final condition that has as its starting point the king's utter failure recognize and to act in accordance with the natures of each of his daughters. As the play unfolds, we see other passages that indicate Shakespeare's

⁶⁶ For a discussion and analysis of various rhetorical devices in the speeches, see Kallendorf, "King Lear and the Figures of Speech", 1-25. However, he makes no mention of the effect of Cordelia's sparse speech.

familiarity with Lucretius. Consider Lear's suffering in the tempest, bereft of his knights and betrayed by two of his daughters, his entire world in chaos:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world!
Crack nature's molds, all germens spill at once,
That make ingrateful man! (3.2.1-11.)

The "rotundity" of the world conveys an implicit comparison of the earth as pregnant mother, a metaphor used by Lucretius:

haud igitur redit ad nihilum res ulla, sed omnes
discidio redeunt in corpora materiali.
postremo pereunt imbres, ubi eos pater aether
in gremium matris terrae praecipitavit (DRN 1.250)

Nothing returns to naught; but all return
At their collapse to primal forms of stuff.
Lo, the rains perish which Ether-father throws
Down to the bosom of Earth-mother

Furthermore, the earth (as well as all things in nature) is composed of "germens" or seeds. Here Lear calls for the destruction of the world and its dissolution into its composite seeds.⁶⁷ The comparison of primordial elements to seeds is seen in DRN 1.55-62:

....de summa caeli ratione deumque
disserere incipiam et rerum primordia pandam,

⁶⁷ See also T.W. Baldwin, "Nature's Moulds" 239, who connects seeds to Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1; cf. *Henry V* and its mention of Epicurean moles: Every subject's duty is / the King's, but every subject's soul is his own. / Therefore should every soldier in the wars do as / every sick man in his bed: wash every mote out of / his conscience. And, dying so, death is to him / advantage.... (4.1.182-87)

unde omnis natura creet res, auctet alatque,
quove eadem rursum natura perempta resolvat,
quae nos materiem et genitalia corpora rebus
reddunda in ratione vocare et semina rerum
appellare suemus et haec eadem usurpare
corpora prima, quod ex illis sunt omnia primis.
I prove the supreme law of Gods and sky,
And the primordial germs of things unfold,
Whence Nature all creates, and multiplies
And fosters all, and whither she resolves
Each in the end when each is overthrown.
This ultimate stock we have devised to name
Procreant atoms, matter, seeds of things,
Or primal bodies, as primal to the world.

Lear thus expresses in Lucretian terms his desire to see mankind end. The idea of matter as composites of seeds or “germens” is expressed also in *Macbeth*:

MACBETH

I conjure you, by that which you profess,
Howe'er you come to know it, answer me:
Though you untie the winds and let them fight
Against the churches; though the yesty waves
Confound and swallow navigation up;
Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down;
Though castles topple on their warders' heads;
Though palaces and pyramids do slope
Their heads to their foundations; though the treasure
Of nature's germens tumble all together,
Even till destruction sicken; answer me
To what I ask you. (4.1.50-62)

And again in *The Winter's Tale*:

FLORIZEL

It cannot fail but by
The violation of my faith; and then
Let nature crush the sides o' the earth together
And mar the seeds within! Lift up thy looks:
From my succession wipe me, father; I
Am heir to my affection. (4.4.565-70)

In each passage, we see the Lucretian metaphor of *semina rerum* within a passage of destruction or chaos. The concept of change and dissolution into primordial elements could have been gleaned from Shakespeare's reading of Montaigne's essay 2.12 (*Apology for Raimond Sebonde*), in which he cites DRN 3.756:

quod mutatur enim, dissolvitur, interit ergo;
traiciuntur enim partes atque ordine migrant

What is changed is dissolved, and therefore perishes;
the parts are separated, and depart from their order.

Although Shakespeare's sources for Epicurean ideas and concepts remains highly conjectural, the passages cited above indicate strong concordance between Lucretian citations in Montaigne and sentiments conveyed by Shakespeare in various plays. No matter his source, the Epicurean ideas Shakespeare draws on are entirely too strong to be accidental. Shakespeare's conception of skepticism is therefore most probably informed and influenced to no insignificant degree by the crucial Epicurean ideas of atomism, augury, flattery, and the perils of political life, gleaned most probably from Lucretius and mediated through his reading of Montaigne.

Chapter 2: The Play's the Thing: Action, Speech, and Skepticism in *Hamlet*

Stanley Cavell asserts that “the advent of skepticism as manifested in Descartes’s *Meditations* is already in full existence in Shakespeare.”⁶⁸ This, in turn, is part of a larger question concerning the relationship between philosophy and poetry, and how each informs the other.⁶⁹ I will therefore begin this chapter with a brief discussion of Cartesian connections to Hamlet’s thought. Next, in my examination of *Hamlet*, I will argue that Hamlet’s particular skepticism is reconciled by means of the Mouse-trap. My claim is that Hamlet’s skepticism does *not* involve doubt about whether Claudius is guilty and the Ghost authentic; rather, my premise is that Hamlet is primarily skeptical about whether words may actually reflect what is the case in the world, and whether they can represent faithfully the mental state of another person. The ekphrastic dumb show omits language from action, and has no observable effect on Claudius. The same play is then replayed, but with words. Claudius is overcome. Words, then, not only have the power to affect others, but are capable of accurately representing reality. Therefore, the point of the Mouse-trap is not to test the veracity of the Ghost, but rather the verity of language. In concluding the chapter, I demonstrate that Hamlet’s linguistic skepticism is displaced by a fatalistic doubt concerning the agency of human action.

⁶⁸ Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

The immediate and perhaps unavoidable consequence of skepticism results at best in self-reflective interiority, and at worst, in solipsism. Hamlet's interiority and ensuing alienation are felt throughout the play. Cavell avers the following:

Now if we take 'interiority' as the mark of the modern self (the discovery, as in Descartes, of what philosophy will call the self's privacy, its metaphysical solitude), then the stake for me here is the suggestion that one may find in Shakespeare....the modern discovery of what the English-speaking tradition of philosophy calls the problem of other minds, confirming a surmise of mine, in a reading of *Othello*, that skepticism with respect to other minds may prove to underlie the much more celebrated issue, in the English tradition of philosophy, of skepticism with respect to the external world.⁷⁰

Thus the interiority of Hamlet marks him as both modern, yet it additionally lies at the very center of his difficulties with the other minds and the world that surrounds him. In addition, this modern interiority is wholly novel. Margreta de Grazia writes the following:

In what may be our earliest reference to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the play is classified as "modern." In a marginal note made sometime after 1598, Gabriel Harvey discusses the best works in English, "auncient & moderne": Chaucer and Lidgate represent the ancient, while *Hamlet* along with other works by Shakespeare and his contemporaries make up the modern. In this earlier and still current sense of the word, *Hamlet* was "modern" at its inception.⁷¹

⁷⁰ "Skepticism As Iconoclasm," 239. Arguing against this view in regards to Hamlet is Harold Skulsky, who maintains that "it is seriously mistaken to see Hamlet as something of a skeptic about our knowledge of other minds" in "'I Know My Course': Hamlet's Confidence," 477; Skulsky's argument hinges on the idea that the rhetorical tradition in which Hamlet is educated is largely determinative of his doubt.

⁷¹ "*Hamlet*" *Without Hamlet*, 9. It should be noted clearly, however, that de Grazia's aim in much of her book is to refute the centuries-old critical focus on modern interiority in Hamlet by reconnecting him with the immediate material and social contexts of the play. In addition, she details numerous seventeenth century accounts that characterize *Hamlet* as ancient and gothic, and also provides qualification of the usage of "modern" above. See also her article "The Motive for Interiority: Shakespeare's sonnets and Hamlet," as well as Katharine Maus' *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*, esp. 1-6, for her treatment of *Hamlet*. On the story of Hamlet as ancient and gothic, it should be noted that the tale appears, at least in germ, in *Beowulf* 2435-2459; see also Klaeber's *Beowulf*, 245 n.2435ff on the slaying of Herebeald by Hæðcyn (though the editors do not connect this to *Hamlet*): "Hrēðel was thus held to be obliged to avenge the death of Herebeald but was unable to do so because he must not lift his hand against his own kin." Of further note is the analogous narrative techniques employed by Shakespeare and the

This characteristic modernity and interiority has in turn elicited innumerable critical responses that focus on the psychological aspects of Hamlet as the forces and causes for his inability to act.⁷² There is indeed enough overlapping thought in Descartes' *Meditations* and Hamlet's speech to justify Cavell's claim discussed at the beginning of this chapter, as well as the many critical works that focus on Hamlet's interiority. Consider the overlapping thought expressed in the following lines from *Hamlet* and the *Meditations*:

Now I have sometime caught the senses deceiving me; and a wise man never entirely trusts those who have once cheated him.

I will suppose not that there is a supremely good God, the source of truth; but that there is an evil spirit, who is supremely powerful and intelligent, and does his utmost to deceive me.⁷³

The spirit that I have seen
May be a devil, and the devil hath power
T' assume a pleasing shape....⁷⁴

I [am] a man who habitually sleeps at night and has the same impressions (or even wilder ones) in sleep as these men do when awake!⁷⁵

To die, to sleep—
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause.⁷⁶

Beowulf-poet: the slaying of Herebeald by Hæðcyn is a *gyd* within a *gyd*, not unlike the play-within-the-play of the Mouse-trap.

⁷² See, for example, Ernest Jones' famous study, *Hamlet and Oedipus*; Janet Adelman's *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays*, esp. 22-30; and Richard Halpern's *Shakespeare Among the Moderns*, esp. 280-88. For a psychological interpretation that perhaps takes Cartesian skepticism in Shakespeare too far—though outside of Hamlet—see Thomas Vozer's "Body-Mind Aporia in the Seizure of Othello."

⁷³ *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 13 and 15.

⁷⁴ 2.2.627-29.

⁷⁵ *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 13.

⁷⁶ 3.1.72-76.

In both texts we observe a questioning of the senses, the assumption of an evil spirit, the assessment of sleeping and waking consciousness as qualitatively indistinct and, perhaps most telling, the thoughts of Hamlet strongly analogous to the *Meditations* appear in soliloquies.

However, a fundamental difference exists between Cartesian skepticism and the doubt exemplified in Hamlet. In detailing shared cultural schemata that comprise the intelligibility of human action and its relation to skepticism, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that the paradigmatic case of epistemological crisis is Hamlet.⁷⁷ MacIntyre asserts that Hamlet's doubt arises out of a background of well-founded interpretive schemata, while Descartes' skeptical system interrogates and attempts to displace all preconceived and pre-existing epistemological foundations.⁷⁸ Crucial to MacIntyre's assessment of Descartes's philosophical failure, and crucial as well to my argument concerning the Mouse-trap, is the notion that Descartes fails to observe the role that language plays in "ordering both thought and the world expressed in a set of meanings."⁷⁹ My view is that what Descartes fails to interrogate, i.e. the representative relationship between language and thought, and how they shape one another, is precisely what Hamlet sets out to test in coupling the dumb show with the Mouse-trap.

Hamlet's heightened conscientiousness regarding language leads Douglas Trevor to argue that "Hamlet's own skepticism, which ceaselessly imbibes and disgorges ideas and beliefs, is grounded in the scholar's disdain for and suspicion of the very qualities of

⁷⁷ MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and The Philosophy of Science," 54–55.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 59.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 60.

mind that are developed through study and writing.”⁸⁰ Along similar lines, Jonathan Bate asserts that “Hamlet as reader is an icon of conscience.”⁸¹ Furthermore, Bate argues, ‘conscience’ in Elizabethan English signifies not only aspects of motive for moral action, but also indicates inward knowledge, such that “‘Conscience’ was ‘consciousness’.”⁸² Hamlet’s unique interiority and perpetually perplexing skepticism are thus inextricably linked with a pervasive and paralyzing attentiveness to the representational powers and potential failure of language itself. Therefore, before turning to the Mouse-trap, it is necessary to examine Hamlet’s words themselves, how they reflect the nature of doubt itself, and how they contrast with the speech of the court.

“Doubt” is etymologically derived from Latin *dubitare*, signifying “to waver, be uncertain;” *dubitare* in turn has its root in *duo*, “two,” and therefore “doubt” implicitly contains the notion of opposing dualities in the mind of the one doubting. An exceedingly problematic, dual-natured doubt characterizes Hamlet’s thought: first, he questions the correspondence between words and reality; second, he doubts the authenticity of agency of his own actions. The progression of Hamlet’s doubt serves as a rough paradigm to the evolution of “doubt” itself, for the word later acquires the sense of “fear” in both Old French and Middle English (cf. “redoubtable”). Fear (as distinct from phobia) is contingent on the rational capacity to understand basic cause and effect—e.g., one rightly fears a heavy object falling towards him, for he understands that the effect of whatever causes the object to fall will be pain or injury. Hamlet’s skepticism is transformed by 5.2: while he no longer doubts that words may correspond to reality, he

⁸⁰ Trevor, *The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England*, 84.

⁸¹ Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, 255.

⁸² Ibid, 257.

fears that the cause of his actions is in some way not his own. What follows is an examination of the dualism of doubt and its manifestation in questions of authorial authenticity in speech and authentic agency of action.

Consider Hamlet's first two lines: "A little more than kin, and less than kind [Aside]." (1.2.65); "Not so, my lord; I am too much in the sun." (1.2.67) Puns function by conveying two distinct possibilities of meaning, and while each meaning is contextually valid, they cannot be comprehended with complete simultaneity. Puns therefore necessarily negate the possibility of an immediate unity of comprehension. Both of the puns above couple a familial claim with an aspect of nature (kin/natural kind; sun/son); the first implicitly asserts an unnatural kinship, and the second implies a relationship in accordance with nature. The puns, apart from how they function in general, here specifically assert dueling dualities that correspond to Old Hamlet and Claudius, and additionally reflect Hamlet's divided self. Furthermore, Hamlet's first pun is an aside: he is present, though in some way absent, publicly displayed, yet privately removed. Hamlet's ambiguous speech, considered along with whether it is spoken privately as an aside or publicly as direct address, thus indicates assimilated yet distinct modes of being: he fuses private, internal memory of the past with the public, external reality of the present. The overwhelming difficulty of reconciling these two states is reflected in the impossibility of comprehending simultaneously, with complete singularity of thought, the bivalent signification of the puns. Thus, we see in these first lines a mind divided.

The duality of Hamlet's thought is further reflected in the following exchange with his mother:

GERTRUDE: Thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.

HAMLET: Ay, madam, it is common.
GERTRUDE: If it be,
 Why seems it so particular with thee?
HAMLET: Seems, madam! nay it is; I know not 'seems.' (1.2.72-77)

The “it” that is “common” is stated and repeated four times. The verb “to be” that governs “it” is first asserted in the indicative mood, then conditioned by the subjunctive (“If it be”), next transformed into “seems”, and finally emphatically reiterated in the indicative. We are thus presented with a laconic and subtle spectrum and progression of possibilities of being in *Hamlet*. The antecedent of “it” is ostensibly mortality alone (“all that lives must die”), yet Hamlet’s pun on “common” renders the referent more complex. Mortality itself is common, but both Gertrude’s cold expression of it and the statement itself are incorporated in the pun. Hamlet’s pun thus calls attention to mortality itself and to the questionable quality of its expression in speech and appearance. The “it” that is “so particular” to Hamlet is the ineffable discordance between the absolute fact of mortality and the impossibility of its true expression in either word or deed. Hamlet must then doubt the verity of the world of words and deeds around him. The “it” that Hamlet knows with certainty is the fact of the unreliable and tenuous “seeming” of the world; thus Hamlet’s skepticism paradoxically arises from the necessary certainty that he must doubt all around him. To doubt is to deny affirmation and to assert “seeming.” We might therefore construe “I know not 'seems” as a statement of Hamlet’s fundamental problem: if “seems” is taken as the object of the verb “know,” then the statement indicates that Hamlet’s “particular” reaction to mortality is real and antithetical to mere appearance; however, were there no parentheses around “seems,” “seems” might then function as verb rather than object, and thus the statement becomes an assertion of the nature of doubt, i.e.

that not knowing is a state of perpetual seeming.

In stark contrast to this is Claudius' complete command of public speech; in addition, he is completely cognizant of the function and effects of his polished rhetorical veneer. Consider Claudius' following claim:

The harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
Than is my deed to my most painted word. (3.1.52-54)

Terrence Hawkes terms this metaphor "cosmetic," and argues that it "accurately illuminates Elsinore's use of language. 'Painted words' describes perfectly the kind of speech and gesture in which the Court deals." It is precisely this type of language that functions as "a means of disguising reality rather than revealing it."⁸³

Claudius' first speech functions in part as a linguistic foil to Hamlet's lines discussed above, just as Fortinbras' deliberate action serves as a reverse paradigm to Hamlet's ephectic inactivity. Claudius' speech reflects his ability to reconcile rhetorically the same dualities that divide Hamlet's thought. Claudius' words indicate his capacity to order his mind, his court, and his kingdom with complete concinnity:

Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
That we with wisest sorrow think on him,
Together with remembrance of ourselves.
Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,
Th' imperial jointress to this warlike state,
Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,--
With an auspicious and a dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole,--
Taken to wife.... (1.2.5-14)

⁸³ Hawkes, *Shakespeare's Talking Animals; Language and Drama in Society*, 121.

Claudius seamlessly fuses socially determined discretion with the law of nature (5), reconciling that which “seems” with that which “is.” The lawful yet unnatural change of Gertrude from “our sometime sister” to “our queen” is made palatable by honeyed and well-balanced clauses of antithesis, which assimilate and reverse natural emotion with its public expression (“mirth...funeral, dirge...marriage”). The periodic structure of lines 7-14 furtively delays the fact that “our sometime sister” was “Taken,” and the statement of this act literally has as its center a series of seamlessly integrated though unnatural reversals.

In contrast to this is Hamlet’s first soliloquy, in which he too details both a series of oppositions (Old Hamlet / Claudius; hyperion / satyr; himself / Hercules) and an account of marriage following funeral. However, Hamlet’s speech is punctuated by brusque breaks of aposiopesis and epanorthotic false starts, reflecting his own struggle to fit word to world and rhetoric to reality. Hamlet also speaks a single periodic sentence that parallels Claudius’ both in structure and content (Gertrude’s marriage):

Within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. (1.2.158-61)

Yet while Claudius frames and controls integrated opposites with subject (we) and verb (taken), Hamlet’s verb is delayed by reference to the temporal measure of mourning. Furthermore, Gertrude functions grammatically as the object in Claudius’ account of the marriage, but as the active and culpable agent in Hamlet’s description. Claudius acts; Hamlet reacts, rethinks, reassesses, desperately seeking to voice the “seeming” of capricious love.

Throughout the play, Claudius orders the perception of reality through ordering his words. For Claudius, words mask reality and establish that which seems as that which is. Cognizant of the connection between thought and word, only once does he lament that his speech cannot warp reality, that he cannot render “seeming” as “is”: “My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: / Words without thoughts never to heaven go.” (3.3.97-98) Here, even after his failed piacular prayer, Claudius is capable of ordering reality by poetically coupling “up” and “below” as well as harmonizing the discrepancy between contrived word and sincere thought.

In short, Claudius is a superb player who authors his own performance; playing so well on stage evokes admiration, playing so well in the world arouses disgust. Hamlet first mentions “play” in his response to Gertrude following his series of three puns: “these [outward appearances of mourning] indeed seem, /For they are actions that a man might play....” (1.2.84) Later, he asks Guildenstern, “You would play upon me....do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe?” (3.2.332/336) For Hamlet, the utterly execrable seeming and manipulation characteristic of playing are the constitutive elements of the world he inhabits; they furthermore occlude absolute certainty and breed increased doubt. Hamlet’s abhorrence of playing is so deeply rooted that he condemns even theatrical verisimilitude:⁸⁴

Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? (2.2.506-13)

⁸⁴ For an analogous situation in Corneille’s *Andromède* that couples acceptance and rejection of spectacle with ekphrastic framing, see Williams, ““For Your Eyes Only.””

If playing is honestly disclosed as playing, which is certainly the case with the Player's requested speech (2.2.429-458), why should verisimilitude remain repugnant to Hamlet? In addition, what are we to make of Rosencrantz' response to Hamlet's question "What players are they?" (2.2.305): "Even those you were wont to take delight in, the/tragedians of the city." (2.2.306-7) What accounts for Hamlet's change in attitude and response to tragedy in particular? Perhaps it is the case that the relief and release of theater are no longer desirable or even possible for Hamlet. Viewing certain images elicits particular corresponding emotions, e.g. the portrayal of a funeral evokes sadness. Common scenes elicit common emotions, but some emotions are more rarely exercised than others, much like nerves in the body. If the response to tragedy results in the exercising of emotions which we are capable of feeling but rarely do, then we might delight in tragedy, just as it is more pleasurable to have one's back scratched than one's arm, for the nerves in the back are less frequently exercised. Hamlet perhaps then takes no delight in feelings vicariously elicited by tragedy simply because he is embroiled in real tragedy, not unlike being on a slowly sinking ship and feeling disgust at the idea of reading a poem about drowning.

Whether or not emotional exhaustion is the case, I suggest here that Hamlet's disgust arises not from contrived appearance alone, but results as well from the language of the Players' speech:

Pyrrhus at Priam drives; in rage strikes wide;
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
The unnerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium,
Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top
Stoops to his base; and with a hideous crash
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear: for lo! his sword,
Which was declining on the milky head
Of reverend Priam, seem'd i' the air to stick:

So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood;
And, like a neutral to his will and matter,
Did nothing. (2.2.455-467)

The connections and parallels to *Hamlet* are obvious enough: Hamlet and Pyrrhus, sons seeking vengeance for a renowned father who was slain, wish to murder a tyrant, yet are paralyzed by their own wills. A further connection we might draw is that both sons are depicted as tyrants (465): in the case of Hamlet, this equates him with Claudius, and adumbrates this same equation made later in the Mouse-trap; in the case of Pyrrhus, or Neoptolemus,⁸⁵ the revenge of the “new warrior” inaugurates a new regime, one that is by definition tyrannical because it arises from means different from lineal succession. But what is especially salient in the speech is that Pyrrhus is depicted as a *painted* tyrant: I suggest here that Hamlet would perhaps take some solace in the speech—as he surely possesses the requisite self-awareness to discern the connection between himself and Pyrrhus—except that he is to some degree cognizant of the possibility that he too is as contrived and inauthentic as the cosmetic, painted rhetoric of the court. This point is strengthened when we note the particulars of Shakespeare’s appropriation of the speech from Book II of the *Aeneid*:

Hoc dicens altaria ad ipsa trementem
traxit et in multo lapsantem sanguine nati,
implicuitque comam laeva, dextraque coruscum
extulit, ac lateri capulo tenus abdidit ensem. (2.550-53)

Saying this [“Now die”], he dragged him to the very altars, trembling
and slipping in the copious blood of his son,
and seized his hair with his left hand, and with his right,
drew out his shining sword and buried it in his side up to the handle.

⁸⁵ For the use of the two names and their relation to cult/epic, see Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, 119, sec.2 n1.

Shakespeare conveys faithfully many of the details leading up to the passage above (486ff), but then completely reverses the climax of the passage, which is certainly one of the most memorable in the entire *Aeneid*: the quick murder and subsequent beheading of Priam has been transformed into a transfixed and statuesque portrait of Pyrrhus. The innovation is perhaps entirely Shakespeare's,⁸⁶ and its purpose is to expose Hamlet not simply as one who cannot act, but as one who bears the signs of the same falsity he finds so abhorrent.

In addition, Hamlet's criticism of theatrical verisimilitude thrusts the audience into the immediate reality that we are indeed watching a mere play. We as the audience must therefore consider what tragedy is, and Hamlet's questions become our questions: Is tragedy monstrous? Is there a point to this fiction? Should we be outraged if our souls are moved by imitated passion? Neil Rhodes asserts that "[Q]uestions to do with the theater, with rhetoric, and with the nature of representation in general are central to Shakespeare's concerns in his own play. They were also very much Hamlet's concerns." He continues, "The question of theatrical representation and truth is not a side issue. It is intimately related to—indeed, inseparable from—the dominating consciousness of Hamlet in the play."⁸⁷ These are questions that prepare the viewer to assess *Hamlet* as a whole, and although they are most fully explored by Shakespeare in the Mouse-trap, they are never far from his mind in any of his plays, even in extremely subtle ways. Consider, for example, Bottom's reply to Quince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "We will meet, and

⁸⁶ However, in the middle of a rather exhaustive and exhausting ekphrasis of dozens of statues in *The Greek Anthology*, there appears a description of a statue of Pyrrhus who, bearing a sword, "was holding up his right hand" (δεξιτερὴν δ' ἀνέτεινεν ἑήν), though poised over Polyxena rather than Priam (2.1.195). In the next chapter, I will note Hutton's assessment of whether Shakespeare might have had exposure to *The Greek Anthology*; in short, it is by no means improbable that Shakespeare had access to it, nor would his "less Greek" preclude his to reading it.

⁸⁷ Rhodes, "Hamlet and Humanism," 125-126.

there [in the palace wood] we may rehearse / most obscenely and courageously.”

(1.2.103-04) The line is rather amusing when we picture the players rehearsing in the woods, but its full comic effect is conveyed when we attend to the use of “obscenely”: Varro writes that *obscaenum* (“foul”) has as its root *scaena*, signifying “stage.”⁸⁸ In accordance with Greek convention, violent or other “foul” acts were done off stage, i.e. away from or opposite the *scaena*; Bottom and his troupe are forced to rehearse in the woods, and thus literally most obscenely. Thus, even in a jest, Shakespeare is constantly considering the medium of his craft. This focus persists even outside of speech.

Marjorie Garber construes a moment in *Othello* (3.3) in a similar metatheatrical way: “At a distance, Othello and Iago appear on the scene, too far away to hear, and Iago, the opportunist, makes of Cassio’s chastened exit a dumb show that he can interpret.”⁸⁹ We might make a similar observation in *Hamlet*: soon after Hamlet deliberately creates and stages a public dumb show for Claudius, Claudius unwittingly stages an accidental and private dumb show for Hamlet: praying in the chapel, Claudius appears to be repenting, but this time Hamlet misinterprets what the show means. The irony of the scene is twofold: first, Hamlet’s failure to discover Claudius’ inability to express contrition is the result of his not doubting—perhaps for the first time—what merely appears to be the

⁸⁸ Varro, *On the Latin Language*, 348 (7.96-97).

⁸⁹ Garber, *Shakespeare After All*, 607. Patrick Cheney also examines Shakespeare’s concerns with the notion of the ideal relationship between speech and action, word and gesture, and his occasional conflation of forms and genres. Cheney investigates in particular the intersection between Shakespeare’s sonnets and plays, focusing on the language of theater in the sonnets. In his discussion of lines 9-10 of sonnet 23 (“O, let my books be then the eloquence / And dumb presagers of my speaking breast”), Cheney notes Evans’ gloss (in *The Riverside Shakespeare*) of “books” as signifying the sonnets and “dumb presagers” as “presenters, as in the dumb show of a play.” “‘O, Let My Books Be...Dumb Presagers’: Poetry and Theater in Shakespeare’s Sonnets,” 224, n. 8. For a similar focus, see also Bate’s wonderful observation that Romeo and Juliet perform a “verbal dance” (1.5.92-105) at the ball when they address and respond to one another in sonnet form. *The Genius of Shakespeare*, 279.

case; second, Claudius' confession in some way succeeds *because* of its failure.

"Confession" etymologically signifies to "acknowledge in full;" therefore, although Claudius cannot confess sincere remorse, he has succeeded in acknowledging in full his own moral deficiency.

The thoroughly metadramatic⁹⁰ Mouse-trap and the dumb show preceding it constitute an instance of ekphrasis, but the ostensibly simple representation of representation becomes exponentially more complex: the Mouse-trap is preceded by the dumb show, which is itself interrupted by Ophelia's inquiry "Will 'a tell us what this show means?" Thus we have a play within a play within a play that is punctuated by the questioning of the play by one of the players. This in turn is paralleled and introduced by a partial play within the play (the Players' speech), punctuated by the repudiation of tragedy by Hamlet. To return to a point from the introduction: all writing is metaphorically ekphrastic: "text" is derived from Latin *texere*, signifying (in a secondary sense) "to weave." The metaphor implicit in the etymology is clear: just as an artisan weaves threads to form a fabric, so the poet weaves words to form a text. Shakespeare fashions twin patterns of plays within plays, but interrupts each pattern with threads of speech or dialogue that question the very pattern that they punctuate. When the dizzying array of referents is considered (discussed below) along with the heightened awareness that one is watching a play, the effect is that the viewer is perpetually thrust alternately into and outside of the play itself. The multiple ekphraseis thus become a *mise en abîme*, and the viewer must struggle along with Hamlet to discover the "is" immersed in a vast sea of "seeming":

⁹⁰ A somewhat nebulous word. I follow J.L. Calderwood, who asserts that it is a type of drama "in which the boundaries between the play as a work of self-contained art and life are dissolved," *Shakespearean Metadrama*, 4.

Table 2.1: Associations in the Mouse-trap.

<u>Hamlet</u>	<u>Player's Speech</u>	<u>Dumb Show</u>	<u>Mousetrap</u>
Gertrude=	Hecuba	Queen	Player Queen / Baptista
Old Hamlet=	Priam	King	Player King/ Gonzago
Claudius=	Pyrrhus (as one who commits regicide)	Poisoner/King	Lucianus/Player King/Gonzago (as one susceptible to regicide)
Hamlet=	Pyrrhus (as avenging son)	Poisoner	Lucianus

Lucianus, Hamlet tells us, is “nephew to the king” (3.2.223), and thus Hamlet’s identity is conflated with Claudius’ as both Poisoner and Lucianus; and if Hamlet is equated with the nephew Lucianus, then Claudius’ identity is in turn metaphorically melded with Old Hamlet’s as a victim of regicide. From these multiple possibilities of identities surfaces a single actuality: Claudius rises, crying for “Light” (3.2.246), and thus equates himself with Lucianus (from *lux*, “light”). Hamlet’s inquiry as to whether Claudius is “frightened with false fire” (3.2.242) of tragedy, along with Claudius’ cry for “light,” further reflects how the verisimilitude of tragedy corresponds to reality. It is of note that this reality of the power of the theater to affect even someone like Claudius is one of the few things Hamlet never questions; it is a fundamental premise fully accepted by Hamlet that allows for the testing of Claudius.⁹¹

⁹¹ That even the most nefarious tyrant is not left unaffected by theater is an idea that Shakespeare surely took from Plutarch. I include here Dryden’s translation of the *Life of Pelopidas* (29), recounting Alexander Phraeus’ crying in response to Hecuba in Euripides’ *Troades*: “And once seeing a tragedian act Euripides’s *Troades*, [the tyrant Alexander] left the theatre; but sending for the actor, bade him not to be concerned at his departure, but act as he had been used to do, as it was not in contempt of him that he departed, but because he was ashamed that his citizens should

The Mouse-trap serves three purposes: first, it allows Hamlet to test whether all that has hitherto seemed is rooted in reality. Claudius' response certifies not only the Ghost's words, but validates the notion that words can successfully signify states of reality—even the baroque and rather lifeless verse of the Mouse-trap. The dumb show introduces the Mouse-trap; that it produces no effect in relation to the spectators amplifies and isolates the paramount importance of words as the vehicle for both tragedy and the successful representation of reality. Hamlet has here perhaps authored reality, for the performance might contain the inserted “dozen or sixteen lines” (2.2.497) that he composes (it is interesting to consider what these lines might be, where they might appear in the Mouse-trap, and what they might say about both the skepticism of Hamlet and his view of tragedy). Second, the Mouse-trap, as much as it tests Claudius' culpability, additionally tests the powers of tragedy itself. The play within the play is thus doubly successful, for tragedy, despite its mere verisimilitude, possesses the power to express something fundamentally deeper. What it expresses is inextricably linked with the third function of the Mouse-trap: the reflections reflecting upon reflections reflect the thought of Hamlet himself, who thus verifies and orders reality through the verse of the play just as Claudius orders the world through the rhetoric of prose. The viewer, however, in light of the criticism of drama and the beginning of the second soliloquy, must pause to inquire: Is there an “is” apart from what “seems” in *Hamlet*? Hamlet's certainty of Claudius' guilt is, after all, just another part of the play. By being prepared by the second soliloquy to question tragedy even as we watch it, we become conscious of Hamlet's consciousness, conscious of consciousness represented in *Hamlet*, and finally conscious

see him, who never pitied any man that he murdered, weep at the sufferings of Hecuba and Andromache...” Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, 229. Sidney was aware of this connection in *Hamlet* to Plutarch: see *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, 96.

of our own consciousness. The “is” which lies behind that which “seems” is an awareness of ourselves, and thus the realization of the ridiculous nature of verisimilitude is fused with the sublime state of self-knowledge. Theater, and tragedy in particular, is therefore very much like “a glass where [we] may see the inmost part of [ourselves].”

2.1: Hamlet After Doubt

We observe an immediate change in Hamlet after the conclusion of the Mouse-trap: he is prepared for action, freed from doubt, and ready to kill a king. However, his first opportunity is thwarted, because Claudius happens to be praying. Hamlet’s concern that he might send a newly contrite soul to heaven is a legitimate one. His inactivity here is the product of a logical and deliberate decision, rather than the result of endless doubting and questioning. He is soon after so ready to act that he unquestioningly kills Polonius with utter temerity, making inquiries only after the act is accomplished. Hamlet is consequently sent immediately to England; yet, when he returns, he once again delays his dull revenge. If the Mouse-trap has succeeded in purging Hamlet of his doubt, what accounts for his further delay upon his return? What, exactly, has happened to Hamlet by 5.2? Here I wish to return to MacIntyre’s assessment of epistemological crises in order to frame what is at stake at this point in the play:

When an epistemological crisis is resolved, it is by the construction of a new narrative which enables the agent to understand *both* how he or she could intelligibly have held his or her original beliefs *and* how he or she could have been so drastically misled by them. The narrative in terms of which he or she at first understood and ordered experiences is itself made into the subject of an enlarged narrative.⁹²

⁹² MacIntyre, “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and The Philosophy of Science,” 56.

The rest of this chapter will in large part discuss Hamlet's construction of a new narrative in which a growing belief in a fatalistic, providential design is assimilated with the view that human action is largely contingent on the vicissitudes of Fortune. These ideas are reflected directly in both Hamlet's speech and in lines from the Mouse-trap.

Let us first consider the preceding scene and how it prepares us for what follows in the rest of Act 5. The dialogue in 5.1 in some ways parallels and responds to 1.2: questions of and responses to the problem of mortality characterize exchanges that incorporate numerous puns. Added to this is the concern about the relationship between human action and divine law. Consider the Clown's comment concerning Ophelia's culpability in committing suicide:

....if I drown myself wittingly,
it argues an act: and an act hath three branches: it
is, to act, to do, to perform: argal, she drowned
herself wittingly. (5.1.8-11)

Though the Clown's reasoning is on the one hand absurdly paralogistic, the tautological claim serves to amplify the indivisible singularity of human action and agency: "an act....is to act, to do, to perform." We thus have here an assertion of the autonomy of the human will, and part of the humor arises in assigning a tripartite structure to the indivisible phenomenon of action. This view contrasts sharply with numerous references throughout the play to the fickle nature of Fortune. Hamlet characterizes her as "a strumpet" (2.2.228) and as one who "plays" people: "a pipe for Fortune's finger / To sound what stop she please." (3.2.61-2) This comes as part of Hamlet's praise of Horatio, whom Hamlet admires

As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,
A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
Hast ta'en with equal thanks (3.2.57-59)

Hamlet's thinking here is both influenced by and a reflection of the Player's speech:

Out, out, thou strumpet, Fortune! All you gods,
In general synod 'take away her power;
Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel,
And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven....(2.2.518-21)

.... Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steep'd,
'Gainst Fortune's state would treason have
pronounced.... (2.2.535-37)
(Unless things mortal move them not at all....) (2.2.542)

In the act of killing a king, Pyrrhus banishes Fortune and shatters her wheel; Fortune is also equated with a sovereign undone by treason. Hamlet's mental state at this point, undone by an uncle's treason, is ruled by Fortune; "all occasions...inform against" him, and Fortune plays him as much as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern attempt to sound his notes and know his stops. "Who this had seen" applies equally to Hamlet and to us, and our reaction has a fixed end, contingent only on whether "things mortal move" us. Pyrrhus' fictive action, Hamlet's potential action, and tragedy's actual action on the soul of the one "who.... had seen" all have the force of will and agency. The Clown asserts (though through specious reasoning) what might be true, that action is authored by human will alone.

But is this true? Are our acts generated by our autonomous wills alone? 5.1 offers subtle suggestions that Hamlet's view of human agency is transforming. Consider the following:

HAMLET: Whose grave's this, sirrah?
CLOWN: Mine, sir.

Sings O, a pit of clay for to be made
 For such a guest is meet.
 HAMLET: I think it be thine, indeed; for thou liest in't.
 CLOWN: You lie out on't, sir, and therefore 'tis
 not yours: For my part, I do not lie in't, yet it is
 mine.
 HAMLET: 'Thou dost lie in't, to be in't and say it is thine:
 'tis for the dead, not for the quick; therefore thou
 liest.
 CLOWN: 'Tis a quick lie, sir; 'twill away again,
 from me to you.
 HAMLET: What man dost thou dig it for?
 CLOWN: For no man, sir.
 HAMLET: What woman, then?
 CLOWN: For none, neither.
 HAMLET: Who is to be buried in't?
 CLOWN: One that was a woman, sir; but, rest
 her soul, she's dead.
 HAMLET: How absolute the knave is! We must speak by
 the card, or equivocation will undo us. (5.1.120-41)

The Clown's pseudo-scholastic ripostes contrast with the "plain language" of Hamlet's questions, which reminds the reader of Hamlet's conviction that words can indeed represent reality. Of particular note is the implicit metaphor contained in Hamlet's assertion that "We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us." The card refers to the mariner's compass, the means by which the sailor directs and steers his ship. If precise speech is a card, then equivocation is implicitly likened to the sea's inconstancy. That which allows the mariner to survive the vicissitude of the sea is the fixed and determined pattern of the stars. Hamlet's response thus subtly suggests that human speech, a product of the will, also has an underlying form and structure. The "equivocation" eschewed here by Hamlet etymologically resonates with similar significations seen in "doubt": two opposing utterances having "equal voice" yield "wavering uncertainty" concerning two possibilities. The concerns here for Hamlet the

character and in *Hamlet* the play are whether human action indicates autonomy of will or reflects divine design, whether speech and action are guided by celestial influence or buffeted by Fortune's occasions and occurrences, and whether Hamlet will finally act and what this action signifies.

In 5.2, Hamlet speaks overtly about the relationship between human will and providential design:⁹³ There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will....” (5.2.11-12) He continues:

....there's a special
providence in the fall of a sparrow.⁹⁴ If it be now,
'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be
now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the
readiness is all.... (5.2.233-37)

Has Hamlet here subsumed all human will to divine design? Is he asserting a deterministic view of the universe? Or is there another voice, another possibility that reconciles the duality of design and will? In the Mouse-trap, we observe the integration of these polarities, and one wonders earnestly whether these might be part of the “dozen or sixteen lines” penned by Hamlet:

⁹³ A strong parallel appears in Montaigne's *Apology for Raimond Sebonde* (2.12): Montaigne declares that man is “fettered and circumscribed” and “restrained within the bounds of [his] polity.” He offers the following from Lucretius (DRN 5.921):

Res....quaeque suo ritu procedit; et omnes
Foedere naturae certo discrimina servant.
(All things by their own rights proceed, and draw
Towards their ends, by nature's certain law.)

Montaigne then concludes of man: “Miserable creature!”

⁹⁴ The fatalism expressed here is increased when we observe the allusion to Matthew 10:29: “...and not one of them (the two sparrows) will fall to the ground apart from your Father (καὶ ἓν ἐξ αὐτῶν οὐ πεσεῖται ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἄνευ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν.)” The first half of the verse states that the sparrows are of little monetary value; we might thus construe the second half of the verse as a statement that everything, no matter how insignificant, that occurs is in accordance with God's will, but we might also read this as a comment concerning the complete insignificance of the striving and suffering of life and human action.

But, orderly to end where I begun:
Our wills and fates do so contrary run
That our devices still are overthrown;
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.... (3.2.233-6)

The assimilation and reconciliation of free will and fate, “seeming” and “is,” doubt and certainty, and “play” and authenticity can be observed in the speech and action of the remainder of Act 5. An attendant announces that Laertes and Hamlet will “fall to play” in dueling. This duel has a dual nature: what Hamlet perceives as mere play is to Laertes visceral reality. In addition, the purported purpose of the duel is entertainment, yet the drama is real. Thus we see Hamlet here as a willing participant in playing. But what of his abhorrence of such a thing, expressed at the beginning of his second soliloquy? “Is it not monstrous” that Hamlet plays, rather than straightway killing Claudius? Let us look more closely at “monstrous”: first, it is derived from Latin *monstrum*, which in turn is rooted in *monere*. A later meaning in the development of *monere* is “to show, inform.” The player’s monstrous speech informs the Mouse-trap, which in turn demonstrates the effects of tragedy and remonstrates wicked action by exposing it. However, the original sense of *monere* is “to warn,” and *monstrum* therefore first signifies “warning of misfortune, divine or evil omen.” The player’s speech of the avenging son Pyrrhus thus adumbrates and warns of Hamlet’s tragic end through the “play” duel. Finally, “monstrous” acquires connotations by the 16th century of “largeness,” and thus “monstrous” suggests the enormousness of providential design that encapsulates much of Hamlet’s thought by 5.2. The players happen to come to Elsinore, and one of them happens to remember Hamlet’s preferred speech, but Hamlet has *already conceived* of the Mouse-trap before he details it in the second soliloquy; otherwise, he would not have been able to request that the player learn his inserted lines. The player’s

speech is monumentally monstrous, for it “informs” the Mouse-trap, augurs a tragic end, and offers itself as an omen of the providential design that governs the play.

The duel begins, and human will rough-hews shaping divinity: Hamlet is purposely cut, Gertrude happens to drink from the poisoned cup, Laertes is undone by a sword accidentally exchanged, and Claudius is finally deliberately slain. Monstrous, divine ends end Fortune’s play, and the play ends with the end of play. Divinity has shaped all “seeming,” and at the end of the play we see that all “is,” as Hamlet, dying, tells his audience, “But let it be.” (5.2.370)

Chapter 3:

The Art of *The Winter's Tale*: Nature is made better by no mean?

In Act 4 of *The Winter's Tale*, during a discussion between Perdita and Polixenes of streaked gillyvors, Polixenes asserts the following:

Yet nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean. So, over that art
Which you say adds to nature is an art,
That nature makes. (4.4.106-09)

In their immediate context, these lines argue that arts such as plant or animal husbandry are in fact themselves products of nature; furthermore, no interpretive leap is required to see the connection between the art of husbandry and marriage: Florizel, a “bud of nobler race,” will soon be married to Perdita, thought at this point in the play to be “of baser kind.” (4.4.111-12) Yet the lines of course make a universal statement about the relationship between nature and art. Though art and nature are distinct, all art is the product of nature. Art, it seems, no matter how great or grand, cannot transcend the boundaries of nature that confine it, nor can art equal nature. Yet the lines themselves may question their own validity: line 107, concluding with “So, over that art,” has a feminine ending, and it occurs between two lines of “natural” length. Thus, even in the assertion that art is subsumed by nature, we observe a small yet significant example of the striving of art to exceed that which confines it. In some ways, throughout *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare explores the validity of Polixenes’ claim, and we may apply

the lines above equally well to the ideas of the mixing of genre, ekphrasis, and the effects of theater in *The Winter's Tale*.

In this chapter, I will ultimately argue that art and nature become indistinguishable at the end of *The Winter's Tale*. Furthermore, I will argue that the conflation of art and nature, in a theatrical and ekphrastic context, allows for the possibility of the improvement of our own natures by inviting contemplation of our own consciousness as spectators. I wish to examine three distinct yet interrelated instances of ekphrastic expression: first, I argue that the play is both a response to and a reconciliation of *Othello* and *King Lear*; second, I compare Euripides' *Alcestis* with *The Winter's Tale*; third, I consider the statue of Hermione and the ensuing effect of wonder.

I will refer to wonder throughout this chapter, and so I begin with Gervase of Tilbury's formulation of it:

When anything strange is observed we seize on it, partly because of the inversion of the natural order which surprises us, partly because of our ignorance of the cause, whose working is a mystery to us, and partly because of seeing our expectation cheated in unfamiliar circumstances of which we lack a proper understanding. From these causes [*ex hiis*] arise two things, miracles [*miracula*] and marvels [*mirabilia*], though they both result in wonderment [*admiratio*]. Now we generally call those things miracles which, being preternatural, we ascribe to divine power, as when a virgin gives birth, when Lazarus is raised from the dead, or when diseased limbs are made whole again; while we call those things marvels which are beyond our comprehension, even though they are natural: in fact the inability to explain why a thing is so constitutes a marvel.⁹⁵

Thus, according to Gervase, wonderment is the result of both miracles and marvels, and the immediate cause of wonder is the confounding of reason. To know whether one wonders at either a miracle or a marvel is to know whether the phenomenon observed is supernatural or part of nature, though beyond comprehension. Gervase's articulation of

⁹⁵ Banks and Binns, *Gervase of Tilbury*, 558–59.

wonder characterizes two dominant critical approaches to the statue of Hermione in 5.3: do we witness an allegory of a miraculous and true resurrection, or is the transformation of the statue part of nature, though beyond the reach of reason?

Much of the scholarship on *The Winter's Tale* tends to offer approaches that focus either on Christological or metatheatrical readings. In *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, Sarah Beckwith combines these approaches, examining both what forgiveness means and how it is expressed in light of the linguistic, religious, and social changes effected by the Reformation in England. The formal, legally-mandated, tripartite conception of penance (contrition, confession, and absolution) is nullified during the Reformation (along with the four other sacraments), yet nothing is put forth to fill this lack. Beckwith continually examines particular instances of the rich and varied linguistic manifestations of remorse and forgiveness woven within the context of the plays and their greater historical background. This approach, as well as Gervase's formulation of wonder above, accords well with how we might read the statue of Hermione in 5.3, and it is further reflected in the earliest use of the word "resurrection": the word is derived from Latin *resurgere*, "to rise again, appear again," but it is originally the name of a Church festival commemorating Christ's rising from death. So there seems to be an element of theatricality buried in the word's earliest uses, and so Shakespeare in *The Winter's Tale* is perhaps in some way resurrecting resurrection by placing it before our eyes on the stage. In the following section, I will follow this approach by discussing the work of Leontes' particular and self-imposed penance, along with its relation to the tragedies that precede *The Winter's Tale*.

3.1: *The Winter's Tale* and the Tragedies

Numerous parallels exist between Othello and Leontes: both are characterized by the overwhelming anguish of irrational jealousy and steadfast skepticism; each acquiesces only after a tragic action occurs; and the primary means by which each effects transformation of self is through a particular work of art. However, while Othello finally remedies his skepticism with certain knowledge only after perpetuating a tragic act of violence, Leontes reconciles his deep doubt by embracing mystery and wonder.

Marjorie Garber argues that the story of Aphrodite (whose alternative name Kypris gives its name to the city Cyprus) “underlies the plot of *Othello*.”⁹⁶ Garber points to the underlying tale of adultery between Aphrodite and Ares, and the snare set by Hephaistos to catch his perfidious wife. However, we might also note that Aphrodite’s birth is the result of Uranus’ castration by Cronus,⁹⁷ and so thematic issues that arise from this are equally applicable to *The Winter's Tale* when we read it as a response, in part, to *Othello*: concerns over paternity, usurpation of royal place and power, and the parallels between Cyprus and Venice on the one hand, and Bohemia and Sicilia on the other, are made more clear through Garber’s observation.

Cavell offers the character of Leontes as a paradigm to Othello, for both men are seen to deny “knowledge of [their] other”⁹⁸ through images of the beloved as a statue. In each case, the failure to recognize the other stems from skepticism and results in a compromised self-knowledge that is symbolized by references to scars and wounds. This

⁹⁶ *Shakespeare After All*, 589.

⁹⁷ For the story of Aphrodite’s genesis, see Hesiod, *Theogony* 176-199; for a few alternative versions, cf. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 3. 21–23.

⁹⁸ Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 125.

lack of recognition of the other constitutes the essence of skepticism—what Cavell calls “the conversion of metaphysical finitude into intellectual lack”;⁹⁹ the consequence of such doubt both affirms and denies what is human: the former by means of its expression and the latter by converting humanity into an intellectual conundrum.

In his analysis of Descartes, Cavell asks why the philosopher does not attempt to diminish doubt and deny absolute solitude by positing the existence of a finite being (rather than God). Othello’s problem, Cavell concludes, is that he knows *too* much. That is to say, he knows other finite beings, and this therefore renders his existence as partial and contingent. The consequence of Descartes’ conclusion that God must exist, and that one’s existence depends on this very idea, leads to a necessary “double-nature” in man, as well as the ensuing striving for self-knowledge. Cavell then asserts that Othello encapsulates the “logic, the emotion, and the scene of skepticism.”¹⁰⁰ Othello oscillates endlessly between the inclination for conjecture and the demand for proof. Everything that he knows requires opposition, and his imagination trumps reality. His identity and self are affirmed by Desdemona’s imagination and then displaced by Iago’s innuendo.

Cavell additionally examines the question of Desdemona’s virginity, as well as the question of the security of her marriage to Othello. Othello’s skepticism requires him to need Iago’s conjectures, and thus Desdemona’s faithfulness is more abhorrent than her faithlessness. The dueling dualities of Othello’s thought are epitomized in his wondering whether he has indeed deflowered Desdemona: either possibility stains him. Furthermore, in each case Desdemona exists as the other, rendering Othello both separate and displaced and nullifying the possibility of true unity through marriage. These concepts

⁹⁹ Ibid., 138.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 128.

converge during the final scene on the bridal bed, during which Desdemona is compared by Othello to a statue, constituting the “ocular proof” of her constructed otherness through separation and denial of her human otherness. Here Othello embodies extreme skepticism, in that he knows too much, yet cannot conform to that which he does know.

Othello, narrating how he won Desdemona, speaks thus:

....My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of kisses.
She swore in faith ‘twas strange, ‘twas passing
strange; ‘Twas pitiful, ‘twas wondrous pitiful.
(1.3.157-60)

She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.
This is the only witchcraft I have used.
(1.3.166-68)

Desdemona, who sees “Othello’s visage in his mind” (1.3.247), is moved to love by both pity and wonder. As we shall see later, the primary emotion elicited at the close of *The Winter’s Tale* is wonder, and in the case of Desdemona’s love we have an admixture of essential emotional elements that adumbrate the emotional effect at the end of *The Winter’s Tale*. Othello’s speech and Desdemona’s response stand in stark contrast with and firmly negate the charges of witchcraft. Furthermore, Desdemona’s love is rooted in the purely spiritual: there is nothing in her formulation that admits of physical desire. Therefore, perhaps the most compelling and perplexing evidence of Othello’s unyielding skepticism is the very means by which he tests Desdemona’s love: a single, physical object, a work of craftsmanship, or even art: the embroidered handkerchief. It is interesting to note here the origin of the handkerchief in light of Desdemona’s “proof” of her love, Othello’s denial of the charge of witchcraft, and his demand for “ocular proof.” Othello claims (and we will have reason to doubt this later) that the handkerchief originates with an Egyptian “charmer” who gives it to Othello’s mother, saying that her

perpetual possession of it ensures her husband's love, and its loss will bring "such perdition / As nothing else could match." (3.4.67-68) Each thread is spun by holy worms, and it is colored with dye extracted from the mummified hearts of maidens. Othello asserts that "There's magic in the web of it." (3.4.69) We thus see Othello amplify nascent doubt into boundless skepticism, for this work of art, the handkerchief, necessarily damns both Othello and Desdemona.¹⁰¹ Two possibilities exist regarding Othello's tale of the origin of the handkerchief: either he speaks truly or he lies. Furthermore, added to these two possibilities are two more potential outcomes for each: either the handkerchief will be produced, or it will remain lost. Let us look more closely at each possible outcome. If the story is true, and the handkerchief is produced, Othello must doubt further Desdemona's earlier claim of love without witchcraft, the purported origin of her affection. If the story is false, and the handkerchief is produced, Othello must still doubt Desdemona's claim of love, for she would lend credibility (in Othello's mind) to the idea of witchcraft by taking back the handkerchief from Cassio, negating her previous claim that she loves Othello on spiritual grounds alone. If the story is false, and it remains lost, Othello will continue to think that Desdemona's affections lie with Cassio. The best case scenario is what might actually be the case, and its result is indicative of Othello's extreme skepticism: if the story is true, and the handkerchief remains lost, one might construe this as validation of Desdemona's claim of purely spiritual love; however, Othello is incapable of reconciling the unnatural charm inherent in this "ocular proof" with Desdemona's claim of natural love without witchcraft.

Othello's skepticism here involves the striving to conflate two mutually exclusive

¹⁰¹ Cinthio, from whom Shakespeare takes the story of Othello, chooses the name "Disdemona" because it signifies "hated augury" or "unfortunate spirit," in Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 252.

possibilities; if Desdemona loves him, it is either by nature or by witchcraft, but not by both. The test of the handkerchief, considered along with the story of its origin and Desdemona's actual claim of love, creates an endless epistemological *mise en abîme* that fosters further skepticism and inexorably progresses towards tragic action. Though Emilia asseverates repeatedly that Desdemona is chaste and blameless, it is not until Othello is provided with corroborated proof of Emilia's finding of the handkerchief that he allows himself to embrace the certainty that Desdemona was true. Here the question of the authenticity of the origin of the handkerchief is heightened, for Othello states that "It was a handkerchief, an antique token / My father gave my mother." (5.2.213-14)

However, in first telling the story, he states that "That handkerchief / Did an Egyptian to my mother give" (3.4.55-56) for the purpose of charming his father. The second account cannot be reconciled with the first. It is interesting to consider whether the story of the handkerchief's origin is false, and if so, *why* Othello chooses to tell this particular lie involving witchcraft. Let it suffice here to say only that the test is impossible to pass, whether the story is true or false, and regardless of whether the handkerchief is produced or lost. The handkerchief, along with its possible histories and outcomes, precludes wonder rather than fostering it, for all possibilities lead to increased skepticism. Consider Desdemona's response to Emilia after Othello demands the handkerchief's return: "Sure there's some wonder in this handkerchief; / I am most unhappy in the loss of it." (3.4.101-2) The immediate antecedent of "it" is clearly the handkerchief, but we might also connect it with wonder itself. What remains after this loss is what Othello says later of the handkerchief: "'Tis pitiful;" (5.2.207)

The subtle yet powerful response to this occurs in Act V of *The Winter's Tale*. We are reminded of the claims of witchcraft in *Othello* when Polixenes, revealing his identity to Florizel and Perdita, addresses the latter as “thou, fresh piece / Of excellent witchcraft.” (4.4.496-97) Thus Polixenes, like Brabantio, hurls false accusations, threatening to turn the tale towards tragedy once again. The idea is reestablished here, and then reiterated by Paulina in Act V: “....but then you’ll think, / Which I protest against, I am assisted / By wicked powers.” (5.3.89-91) Leontes’ response soon after indicates a stance completely antithetical to *Othello*’s: “If this be magic, let it be an art / Lawful as eating.” (5.3.110-11) We therefore see in Leontes’ acceptance of the spectacle before him—whether it is witchcraft or not—a reversal of the tragic skepticism that characterized both Leontes’ thinking as well as that of *Othello*.

The Winter's Tale perhaps responds more powerfully than *Othello* to *King Lear*, a tragedy that leaves us with the palpable and unceasingly unbearable feeling of dread. *The Winter's Tale* 1.2 is at once a continuation and a reversal of *King Lear* 1.1: in the latter, a ruler consciously sets up a contest to judge, qualify, and assess the affection of his daughters, while in the former a ruler unwittingly becomes a participant with his own wife to win the agreement of Polixenes to remain in Sicilia. What Leontes *knows* is that Hermione has succeeded where he has failed. Polixenes’ agreeing to stay is indubitable. This then functions as what Wittgenstein terms a “hinge” proposition: “the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.”¹⁰² All of Leontes’ doubts consequently arise from the bare fact of Polixenes’ continued presence, and thus his

¹⁰² Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 341.

skepticism is rooted in the fact that he, as Cavell says of Othello, knows too much. Leontes therefore displays an “inability to say what exists”:¹⁰³ how *could* Hermione’s fidelity be stable when Leontes and Polixenes are “as twinned lambs” (1.2.66), and Hermione admittedly “spoke to th’ purpose twice” (1.2.166), once to “earn a royal husband” (167), and once to win Polixenes? Yet Leontes’ skepticism seems to vanish as quickly as it arose when it is reported that Mamillius is dead. However, as Cavell argues, there is no reason to believe that Leontes’ capacity to believe his own suspicion “too much” might not be again actualized. The sixteen years of self-imposed penance are therefore not indicative of a true conversion. Leontes’ conversion and reconciliation of skepticism are deferred until 5.3, when his awakened faith in what cannot be (resurrection) balances and repairs the tragedy effected by his past insistence of what must be (infidelity). Or, as Beckwith states it, “[Hermione’s] recovery depends on the renunciation of epistemology as our mode of access to others.”¹⁰⁴ Leontes’ new way of “knowing,” as we will observe in 5.3, is the wonder evoked by viewing the statue.

Something fundamentally human has been hardened, calcified in us, and by the end of *King Lear*, and we are only almost ourselves. Gloucester, after all, proclaims

I do remember now. Henceforth I’ll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself
“Enough, enough!” and die. (4.6.93-95)

And Cordelia cries “Let pity not be believed.” (4.3.30) The only glimmer of hope that appears in the play is reflected in Lear’s wish:

No, no, no, no. Come, let’s away to prison.
We two alone will sing like birds i’ th’ cage.
When thou dost ask me blessing, I’ll kneel down

¹⁰³ Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 197.

¹⁰⁴ Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 130.

And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news, and we'll talk with them too—
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out—
And take upon 's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies. And we'll wear out,
In a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones
That ebb and flow by th' moon. (5.3.9-20)

Yet this hope is expressed in a series of four “wills,” and thus hope is deferred indefinitely into the future. However, hope ends as the curtain closes, and we are left with nothing except ceaseless, unbearable, and numbing dread.

I want to suggest here that this feeling of dread we are left with is not qualitatively different from the dread felt by Leontes after Act 1. Thus, we in some way share in the penitence practiced by Leontes. Penitence comes from Latin *paenitere*, signifying “to cause or feel regret.” This verb in turn has its root in *paene*, meaning “almost.” So at the heart of both the word and the one who is penitent lies a lack, a void, an incompleteness. Cleomenes speaks thus of Leontes' penitence:

Sir, you have done enough, and have performed
A saintlike sorrow. No fault could you make
Which you have not redeemed—indeed, paid down
More penitence than done trespass. At the last,
Do as the heavens have done: forget your evil;
With them forgive yourself. (5.1.1-6)

Yet the void, the incompleteness, or the “almostness” of Leontes cannot be undone by infinite visitations to the chapel, and we see here the utter insufficiency of a quantified calculus of proportionality and reciprocity. Leontes responds:

I think so. Killed?
She I killed? I did so, but thou strik'st me
Sorely to say I did. (5.1.19-21)

The resonating “I”—“I”—“I” of Leontes’ response reflects his own reflection on his crime, and his confession mirrors Augustine’s repeated statement in his *Confessions*, *Questio mihi factum sum*, “I have become a question to myself.” But Leontes, like Augustine, knows that his incompleteness cannot be remedied internally through the self-forgiveness that Cleomenes suggests. It is only through wonder, as we shall see at the end of this chapter, that Leontes may be transported out of himself in order to be made whole again through forgiveness.

The Winter’s Tale itself may be characterized by the Clown’s description of ballads: it is “doleful / matter merrily set down; or a very pleasant thing / indeed, and sung lamentably.” (4.4.189-90) It is a play that elicits a “noble combat....’twixt joy and sorrow” (5.2.78) and offers “words as medicinal as true” (2.3.36) in order that the affliction of *King Lear* might be remedied, as Leontes exclaims “For this affliction has a taste as sweet / As any cordial comfort.” (5.3.76-77) So affliction is remedied and transformed by this cordial, this heart-warming medicine, and in “cordial” we see the root for the word “heart” that is reflected in the name Cordelia; thus, we are simultaneously reminded of how and why we are being affected.

3.2 *The Winter’s Tale* and *Alcestis*

Euripides’ *Alcestis* has been much neglected in critical discussions of potential sources for *The Winter’s Tale*.¹⁰⁵ I will begin this section by pointing out some of the

¹⁰⁵ Notable exceptions are Sarah Dewar-Watson’s “The Alcestis and the Statue Scene in The Winter’s Tale,” and Robert Ketterer’s “Machines for the Suppression of Time: Statues in Suor Angelica, The Winter’s Tale and Alcestis.” Dewar-Watson provides compelling evidence for *Alcestis* as a source play by demonstrating parallels in George Buchanan’s Latin translation, and

more remarkable and unnoticed parallels between the two plays, but my aim here is not to argue for *Alcestis* as a definitive source. Rather, my comparative approach is more like that of a zoologist who analyzes homologous anatomical structures among distinct species in order to understand better the course of evolution. In accordance with this, I will offer two alternative depictions of statues at the end of this section. However, I will suggest along the way possible, and even probable, features of the works under discussion that might have served as sources for Shakespeare.

The *Alcestis* and *The Winter's Tale* are both metatheatrical plays of mixed genre that feature a husband who errs and an incomparable wife who dies and is resurrected. Both plays feature an image or reference a statue, and both end in restorative wonder. The cause of tragic action in *The Winter's Tale* is the seemingly inexplicable jealousy of Leontes; Lawrence Rhu has suggested that this jealousy arises from the inherently competitive granting of courtesy, and this courtesy is a type of grace.¹⁰⁶ What has not been suggested in a comparison of these plays is the connection between the causes of tragic action: each play balances precariously on the threshold between tragedy and romance/satyr play because of an improper practice of or reaction to the practice of hospitality, or *xenia*.¹⁰⁷ In addition, as Cavell has demonstrated, the loss that cannot be recovered is the death of Mamillius. The prince, lest we forget him, tells a tale of winter (in part) that provides the play with its title. I want to suggest quickly here that Mamillius' tale, twice interrupted, was a device Shakespeare observed in *Alcestis*. At the

Ketterer uncovers many thematic overlaps between *Alcestis* and *The Winter's Tale*.

¹⁰⁶ "Introduction," 27-28.

¹⁰⁷ Admetus is even referred to as *polyxeinos*, "too much defined by *xenia*," 569.

height of his grief over his dead wife, Admetus is weeping uncontrollably, at which point the chorus leader speaks the following:

ἐμοί τις ἦν
ἐν γένει, ᾧ κόρος ἀξιόθρη-
νος ὤλετ' ἐν δόμοισιν
μονόπαις.... (903-906)

I had a relative whose boy,
most worthy of sorrow, died at home,
an only child.

A few lines later, this tale, just like Mamillius', is interrupted and never finished. Moreover, apart from the content of the tale, the chorus leader's short speech probably coincides with the parabasis, and thus the illusion of the theater is confronted, at least for a moment, as the chorus leader steps forward and addresses directly the audience; in a similar way, Mamillius' story, introduced and called for as a story, announces itself to the audience. In this way and others discussed below, questions of death and questions of theater linger in both plays. What follows is an investigation of how death lingers and theater is interrogated in the *Alcestis*. In the final section of this chapter, I hope to demonstrate and to clarify the metatheatrical connections shared by both plays.

Consider James Siemon's argument concerning the structure of *The Winter's Tale*:

What I wish to do here is to suggest the extent and importance of iteration in *The Winter's Tale*. For the second part of the play, while completing the first, stands also (I believe) as an alternative to it, parallel but distinct in its action. And it is from variant repetition of common motifs in the two parts of the play that we come to see good and evil as exercising mutual restraints upon one another.¹⁰⁸

Siemon continues:

¹⁰⁸ Siemon, "But It Appears She Lives," 10.

Hermione's loss and recovery is at once the central problem in the relation of the two parts of the play and the clearest indication that we may see its two-part structure as giving form to a concept of independent possibilities.¹⁰⁹

I want to suggest here that correlative to the binding technique of iteration in *The Winter's Tale* is Euripides' use of deixis: although *Alcestis* lacks two distinct parts, the tragic elements at the beginning of the play are fused with romantic elements at the end, and this cohesion is achieved through the subtle yet pervasive grammatical signification of the title character.

Egbert Bakker asserts the following:

“Deixis is what speakers do to locate themselves in space and time, with respect to things, events, and each other. When speaking, it is impossible not to be deictic, not to ‘be in’ the context of one’s discourse. Not being deictic is not communicating, not being in a situation, not being.”¹¹⁰

The function and effect of deixis are particularly salient in plays, for the audience is presented with the representation of direct speech and action with limited instances of narration. Therefore, in foregrounding both space and time relative to speaker, addressee, and audience, plays perhaps uniquely possess the capacity to demonstrate and comment on the nature of communication and its relationship to being. I will argue that Euripides prepares his audience to recognize the seemingly irresolvable conflicts that threaten to make *Alcestis* a tragedy through the predominant use of *hode* among deictic demonstratives. Through the continual use of deictic demonstratives, Euripides foregrounds the presence of the title character even and especially in instances when she

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹¹⁰ Bakker, 1. See also Keith Green, 11, who defines deixis as “that phenomenon whereby the tripartite relationship [among] the linguistic system, the encoder’s subjectivity and contextual factors is foregrounded grammatically or lexically.”

is absent from the stage. In addition, the high frequency of *hode* both subtly conflates and confounds spatial reference in regards to the audience; this serves to amplify metatheatrical effects by forcing the audience to consider more consciously its place as spectators, as well as the negotiation between inside and outside, passive and active, belief and disbelief, real and artificial, and near and distant.

The demonstrative *houtos* in Classical Greek has overtaken the Homeric anaphoric pronoun *ho*, though the force of the latter survives in adversative particles *men/de*, as well as in *ho de*, indicating a change in speaker. Homer often employs *houtos* as a referent in dialogue, and *ho* for antecedents in narrative which are often distant or not immediately present. Thus, the anaphoric *ho* marks a greater distance between the presence of the speaker and the referent indicated, and this is seen primarily in narrative. One effect of this is that the speaker, in iterating *ho*, requires the hearer to recreate through imagination and memory the presence of the referent. This anaphoric *ho* is displaced by three deictics: *houtos*, *(e)keinos*, and *hode*.¹¹¹ The first orients the referent in relation to the hearer, the second indicates that the referent is distant from both speaker and addressee, and the third points to a referent nearer to the speaker.

By subtly conveying relative distance among speaker, referent, and addressee, *houtos*, especially in response to another, can thus be dialogic as well. Bakker examines a scene in the *Teichoscopia* in which Priam asks Helen about Agamemnon. Priam asks who “this (*hode*) man” is, and Helen responds by referring to Agamemnon as “that (*houtos*) man there.” Bakker argues that “Helen is dealing with a reality that is not produced by her own discourse; it exists before her, not in her speech but preceding

¹¹¹ An approximation of this is Scottish English *this*, *that*, and *yon*, cited in Huang, 253.

it....Helen's answer acknowledges Priam's earlier perception. Helen's and Priam's joint seeing is in fact the very point of the use of *houtos*.”¹¹² The use of a particular demonstrative can thus subtly indicate whether the speaker's point of view is shared or private, discursive or idiosyncratic.

In *Alcestis*, by my count there are 160 instances (in only 1163 lines) of the demonstrative.¹¹³ There are 17 uses of *houtos*, 10 of *(e)keinos*, and 133 (83%) of *hode*. There are a few possible explanations for the unusually high frequency of *hode*: first, it is a result of metrical exigency; second, it is a conscious choice by Euripides. The first is unlikely, because while any given instance of a particular demonstrative is not metrically fungible with another, the relative fluidity of the trimeter makes substitutions of demonstratives possible through change in word order. Furthermore, each particular form of each demonstrative is just as metrically malleable as another in isolation, i.e. not in a line of verse. It is therefore more reasonable to assume that Euripides built particular lines around the demonstratives, rather than using demonstratives as metrical “fillers,” not unlike some epithets in Homer. What the conscious use of *hode* in part signifies is the present immediacy of the particular referent both by poet and speaker. In the 50 uses of *hode* that refer to a person, 34 have as their antecedent either Alcestis or her corpse.

As we will see in the passages discussed below, the effect of Alcestis' being most

¹¹² Bakker, 7.

¹¹³ These are lines 7, 8, 9 (twice), 20, 23, 27, 29, 34, 36, 40, 41, 43, 44, 49, 60, 71, 75, 82, 105, 122, 145, 156, 176, 178, 223, 228, 240, 242, 256, 258, 265, 272, 283, 297, 299, 302, 304, 305, 308, 320, 326, 331, 334, 342, 358, 363, 366, 370, 374, 375, 377, 413, 416, 420, 422, 426, 433, 473, 476, 480, 489, 499, 503, 507, 512, 513, 517, 525, 529 (twice), 537, 539, 546, 557, 559, 565, 618, 619, 624, 625, 629, 635, 636, 645, 648, 655, 660, 665, 683, 688, 690, 702, 711, 716, 718, 719, 721, 722, 728, 729, 736, 745, 749, 750, 761, 764, 773, 792, 803, 806, 809, 823, 829, 833, 841, 858, 866, 881, 927, 931, 954, 979, 1001, 1006, 1028, 1033, 1037, 1039, 1046, 1056 (twice), 1062, 1065, 1069, 1074, 1075, 1084, 1090, 1092, 1094, 1102, 1107, 1110, 1116, 1123, 1124, 1126, 1127, 1128, 1139 (twice), 1141, 1144, 1147, 1152, 1163.

frequently referred to by a demonstrative renders her both present and absent, signified but not directly named. Neither the audience nor those on stage are permitted to forget that the death of Alcestis is immediately present. Furthermore, this constant use of *hode* conflates spatial orientation between actor and audience. However, uses of *houtos* and *keinos* allow for a “zooming-out” effect that, combined with the diminishing of distance achieved by *hode*, forces the audience to question their “place” within the drama.

It is a conventional feature of Greek tragedy to establish particular themes and concerns in the prologue. The play begins with Apollo speaking thus: ὦ δῶματ’ Ἀδμήτει’ (“O halls of Admetus”).¹¹⁴ Apollo’s apostrophe to the house of Admetus at once establishes an immediate and particular concern with a specific place at a specific time. It additionally calls attention to the presence of the setting both as the setting for all action and as thematic space. The audience might pause here to consider its position relative to the house of Admetus: the viewers are at once removed from the setting, yet it remains immediately present to them. Within the 27 lines of the prologue, *hode* is the only demonstrative used, and it appears 7 times. These instances have as their antecedents death (7), the house or land of Admetus (8, 9, 23), and the day or moment in which the play is being acted (9, 20, 27). The viewer is thus repeatedly reminded that this tragedy and the death of this woman are taking place in a particular place in the immediate present, and the imminence of death is established and foregrounded. In addition, Apollo states (3) that the ultimate cause (*aitios*) of Alcestis’ death can be traced through a series of retaliations and punishments for murders perpetuated by the gods. By situating the ostensibly inescapable death of Alcestis within this causal chain, Euripides

¹¹⁴ All citations are from Dale’s edition.

prepares Admetus and the audience alike for “this unhopd for wonder” (θαῦμα, ἀνέλπιστον τόδε, 1123) with which the play concludes. We will return to the concept of wonder and its effect in considering the threshold of theater.

In addition to establishing the importance of place and space through Apollo’s opening speech, Euripides constantly reminds the audience that the action is occurring *right here*: the house and land of the setting are referred to 17 times, all by *hode*. Within this setting, Euripides further focuses the audience’s awareness of place in Alcestis’ speech to her marriage bed (Ἦ λέκτρον..., 177). However, unlike Apollo’s opening address, Alcestis’ speech is reported by Therapaina; the audience is therefore required to visualize that which is being narrated. The reported address and statements made to the marriage bed are prefaced by a self-referential statement that indicates the immediacy of the statements themselves: καὶ λέγει τόδε (“And she speaks these things” 176). The subtle yet crucial effect of the use of *hode* here is to conflate imagined and actual space: the viewer must imagine that which is narrated as if it is immediately present; this is in turn amplified by the historical present of the verb for speaking as well as the progressive aspect of the verb. Euripides therefore achieves a “zooming in” effect in regards to how the audience conceives of space. In this speech, the audience must internalize the spatial relations of the setting, and thus all subsequent deictics pointing to place are in part conflated with the imagination of the viewer, and space is transformed from that which is indicated externally to that which is imagined internally.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ For a discussion on how deictic utterances can affect the “constructive imagination” of the hearer, see Buhler’s distinction (22) between *demonstratio ad oculos* and *deixis at phantasma*. See too Aquinas’ distinction between “proper and common sense” (*sensus proprius et communis*) and imagined representations (*phantasia sive imagination*), *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Q. 78, art. 4.

The marriage bed carries particular importance as both the symbolic sign and immediate space of fidelity. It additionally is the specific focus of Alcestis' dying requests to Admetus: for the sake of her children, Admetus is asked to promise never to remarry. When Heracles presents Admetus with the disguised Alcestis, the widower asks the following:

καὶ πῶς ἐπεσφρῶ τήνδε τῷ κείνης λέχει;

And how can I introduce this one here into the bed of that one? (1056)

Here we may observe the clear yet subtle distinction signified by the different demonstratives, made salient in part through the juxtaposition of τήνδε and κείνης, as well as their being linked by the dative article indicating place: τήνδε indicates that the disguised woman is immediately proximate to Admetus, while κείνης (this is only one of two uses in the entire play referring to Alcestis) signifies that the dead Alcestis is removed from him, Heracles, and the audience, yet remains part of a shared discourse and perception.¹¹⁶ Admetus' question encapsulates much of the matter of the play: how are we to know who belongs to this particular space (bed), *this here* one, or *that* one?

Admetus throughout the play is concerned with how he will be viewed and how he will

¹¹⁶ There are instances of this outside the consideration of deixis. Consider, for example, Admetus' fear of a double reproach: διπλὴν φοβοῦμαι μέμψιν, ἔκ τε δημοτῶν,/μή τίς μ' ἐλέγξει τὴν ἐμὴν εὐεργέτιν/προδόντ' ἐν ἄλλης δεμνίοις πίτνειν νέας,/καὶ τῆς θανούσης (ἄξια δέ μοι σέβειν)/πολλὴν πρόνοιαν δεῖ μ' ἔχειν ("I fear a double blame, both from the citizens,/ lest someone reproach me for having betrayed my benefactor and falling into the bed of another young woman,/ and of she who died (it is worthy for me to revere her) / it is necessary for me to have great respect.") 1057-61. Dale assesses the construction as a zeugma, noting that rather than καὶ ἐκ τῆς θανούσης, "the second limb acquires a new finite verb." However, ἔχειν does not perform the double, yoking duty of zeugma; it is therefore perhaps more plausible to assess these lines as anacoluthon. The point is that while speaking, Admetus corrects the more natural iteration of καὶ ἐκ τῆς θανούσης because he realizes, mid-sentence, that Alcestis is no longer alive, precluding the possibility of reproach from her. Yet she remains ever present in his thought. The audience must conjure her image and memory, making the absent present, conflating internal memory with the actual, external space of the stage.

act both inside and outside the house. He additionally goes to great lengths to justify who shall be permitted to enter and under what circumstances. He admits Heracles because it is shameful to violate *xenia*,¹¹⁷ though perhaps equally shameful to entertain a guest whilst mourning the death of a wife; and he promises not to admit any other woman in the place of Alcestis because it is in accordance with her dying wish, yet now Heracles is giving her over to him.

The possibility for tragedy here involves two antinomies that are equally justifiable. Hegel asserts the following:

The original essence of tragedy consists then in the fact that within such a conflict each of the opposed sides, if taken by itself, has justification, while on the other hand each can establish the true and positive content of its own aim and character only by denying and infringing the equally justified power of the other. Consequently, in its ethical life, and because of it, each is just as much involved in guilt.”¹¹⁸

The conflict in *Alcestis*, however, is not whether it's just for Alcestis to die. The essential conflict is rather the proper negotiation of space: where is one to mourn, where is one to host another, where (spatially) is she who is to be admitted or repelled? What happens when two equally legitimate claims seek to occupy the same space? Admetus must either violate *xenia* and deny Heracles' request to house his prize, or he must violate his oaths made to the dying Alcestis. Heracles, though on the one hand offering a woman unknown to Admetus, nevertheless states the following to him in regards to Alcestis:

¹¹⁷ For a discussion on the tension in *Alcestis* between *xenia* and *philia*, see Scodel, who argues that *xenia* is a species of *philia*. See also Schein, who argues that *philia* contains three potentially conflicting species: the marital, parental, and *xenia*. Goldfarb argues convincingly that the tragic conflict in *Alcestis* arises not from the conflation, but from the confrontation of *xenia* and *philia*. Murnaghan (116) goes so far as to claim that “a constituent feature of tragic representation” is the concealment of death “in deference to the ongoing ties of the larger social world,” including *xenia*. My focus here is on how Euripides artfully prepares us to recognize these conflicts.

¹¹⁸ Hegel, 1196.

κείνην ὅπουπερ ἔστι τιμᾶσθαι χρεών.

Wherever that one is, it is necessary to honor (her). (1092)
The line is on the one hand comically ironic, for we know that the “wherever” of Alcestis’ location is right before our eyes. However, the line also points to the real problem at hand: Alcestis is now merely *ekeine*, referred to as distant and removed here in 1092 as well as 1056. Heracles thus simultaneously offers this unknown woman while asserting that it is necessary to honor the removed, far-gone Alcestis. The scene in which Admetus decides to entertain Heracles prepares us for this by providing a thematically similar situation, though far less grave. Admetus’ problem is not that he is selfish, ungrateful, or a poor son, father, or husband. Rather, his problem, and the problem that threatens to turn the play to tragedy, is that he cannot properly negotiate space. Heracles criticizes the manner of Admetus’ mourning thus:

ὥς δὴ θυραίου πῆματος σπουδὴν ἔχων.
as if indeed having concern for a removed sorrow (1014)

Heracles’ censure is centered on *thuraios*, signifying “at the door or just outside the door.” (L&S) Admetus’ grief, couched through a spatial metaphor of the home, is thus rendered ontologically ambiguous, and herein lies the problem: this sorrow in this home has been treated as *thuraios*, removed from its proper place, neither outside nor inside, but at the threshold. Grief has been deferred because Admetus wishes to act in accordance with *xenia*; *thuraios* is used elsewhere in tragedy to modify “strangers,” and we thus see in its use here the conflation and confusion of two opposing yet equally legitimate claims. Euripides here brings the audience and the play to the threshold of

tragedy.¹¹⁹ Admetus must decide whether to allow this woman to cross the threshold, or to remain removed and outside the home. In choosing either possibility he errs,¹²⁰ either violating *xenia* or his promise to Alcestis.¹²¹

Euripides' continuous calling attention to space and presence through iterated deictics, narrated images, and implicit metaphor situate both the characters on stage and the audience on a theatrical threshold. Heracles orders Admetus to look upon this woman he is presenting, adding "λύπης δ' εὐτυχῶν μεθίστασο"¹²² ("and having good fortune, cease from sorrow" 1121). In addition to signifying "cessation," *Methhiemi* (in the middle) may also mean "to change or alter" and "to change one's position." (L&S) The word in its primary and secondary senses thus conveys the concept of transformation, and Heracles' remark introduces the extraordinary transformation Admetus will soon witness: the return to life from death. Yet the remark additionally adumbrates the transformation and change that both Admetus himself and the audience will undergo. Admetus exclaims, "This is a wonder unhopèd for" (θαῦμα' ἀνέλπιστον τόδε 1123) when Heracles informs him that this woman may truly be his wife. The words "wonder" and "not-hopèd-for" that Admetus uses to describe his own emotional state and the situation at hand are answered seven lines later by Heracles, who wonders (θαυμάζω) not at Admetus' disbelief (ἀπιστεῖν, 1130). Wonder, disbelief, and hopelessness in turn frame an

¹¹⁹ Kitto (312-13) categorizes *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, *Ion*, *Helen*, and *Alcestis* as tragicomedies, but also sees this genre as deeply problematic.

¹²⁰ Furley (193) argues that the "hospitality extended to Herakles despite the recent bereavement provides the necessary condition for Alkestis' subsequent rescue from death by Herakles." I add only that this hospitality provides the necessary condition for tragedy as well.

¹²¹ The inescapability of error resulting from these mutually exclusive possibilities is further underscored by Heracles' alternating between blame (καὶ μέμφομαι μὲν, μέμφομαι, παθὼν τάδε 1017) and praise (αἰνῶ μὲν αἰνῶ....1093) of Admetus.

¹²² Dale notes that at this point "Heracles unveils Alcestis, so that Admetus can see more clearly than in 1066."

interweaving of Heracles' mentioning that he was a *xenos* (1120, 1126) with his mentioning Alcestis as wife (1122, 1128). Euripides here juxtaposes these terms to remind Admetus and the audience alike that the reconciliation of these oppositions is logically impossible. We naturally wonder about things that defy rational and logical explanation, and the shared wonder of Admetus and the audience allows for tragedy to be repaired, counterbalancing pity and fear with wonder and amazement. The play itself is on the threshold between two genres, and that we end with wonder and amazement explains why the play was performed in fourth place as a satyr play. Euripides brings us right to the threshold of tragedy, but we end with restorative wonder.

Alcestis' return from the dead, though completely contrary to reason, nevertheless prompts an attempt by Admetus at rational explanation: he asks Heracles whether this (*hode*) thing he is seeing is "some phantom" (τι φάσμα 1127). Heracles, referring to himself in the third person, asserts that "this one you made a guest is no leader of souls" (ψυχαγωγὸν 1128). Admetus then inquires, "But do I look on my wife whom I was burying?" (ἀλλ' ἥν ἔθαπτον εἰσορῶ δάμαρτ' ἐμήν; 1129). The verbs Admetus employs subtly indicate both his state of mind and the logical difficulty inherent in accepting what he is seeing: first, ἔθαπτον is imperfect in tense and progressive in aspect; both the tense and the aspect convey the incomplete, on-going process of Alcestis' death. Second, we observe a change from *horao* (1127) to *eisorao* (1129): Admetus thus has moved from merely seeing what might be a phantom to gazing intently at the image of his wife. In a tertiary sense, *eisorao* signifies "to look on with the mind's eye" (L&S). Admetus, by internalizing both the process and object of seeing, models for the audience *how* to see what is before us. Admetus shortly thereafter addresses Alcestis thus: ὦ φιλάτης

γυναικὸς ὄμμα καὶ δέμας....(“O eye and bodily form of a most dear wife” 1133). Two things are of note here: first, Admetus’ acceptance of what he sees progresses from wondering whether it is a phantom he sees (*horao*), to asking whether it is his wife he beholds (*eisorao*), to accepting that it is indeed Alcestis, though perhaps only her form; for this reason he addresses her periphrastically, and he is still not fully convinced that it is she until he literally grasps her (ἔχω σ’ 1134). Second, Admetus couples an image of the eye with bodily form in his address. This hearkens back to his fantasy of preserving the memory of Alcestis through her δέμας (348), crafted by “the hand of skilled artists.” Admetus will enfold his hands around this imagined image of Alcestis as well, though “having, [he does] not have” her (οὐκ ἔχων ἔχειν 352). He therefore acknowledges that this artistry is mere artifice, that the δέμας falls short of reality.

However, when we read this passage (348-354) metatheatrically, we note that it not only adumbrates the final scene, but it additionally comments on how theater affects the audience. Admetus’ fantasy in 348-354 has been actualized in 1134, and the imagined has become real. Furthermore, the purported end of verisimilitude is that the weight of the soul “may be lightened” (ἀπαντλοῖν ἄν 354), and this is answered by Heracles’ command in 1122 to cease from or be “transformed” from grief (λύπης δ’ ...μεθίστασο). The potential optative here (354) points to the potential theater has to affect and indeed even transform the soul. Yet how is this possible? Euripides fashions the character of Admetus in part to model to the audience how to watch a play. Admetus, not unlike us, watches all before him, and he wonders (θαῦμα’ 1123), is struck (ἐκπλήσσει) by joy (1125), questions (1123-25; 1129; 1131), and doubts (ἀπιστεῖν 1130). He has imagined Alcestis’ image on the marriage bed, just as we too are directed to imagine her

through Therapaina's narrative. By weaving these parallels into the play, Euripides addresses the nature of theater itself.

To return to a point in the introduction, "theater" comes from *theaomai*, signifying "to look or gaze at." What is particularly telling about this verb is that it is middle/passive: it thus conveys that the subject effects change which in turn affects it, and this process is done for the subject's benefit. We actively watch theater in order that it may act upon us, in order that our souls may be lightened. Speaking lines on stage is described by the verb *hypokrinomai*, another middle/passive verb that has its English derivative in "hypocrite." We noted at the beginning that Bakker asserts that "Deixis is what speakers do to locate themselves in space and time." Euripides, through continual use of *hode*, calls attention to the immediate presence of both time and space in order to examine what theater does. The playwright places us *here* that we might negotiate, along with Admetus, the crucial thresholds of theater.¹²³ If our souls are to be lightened, if what we imagine is to become real, we must learn to negotiate the spaces between belief and doubt, wonder and knowledge, artificial ("hypocritical") and authentic, and internal and external (*thuraios*).

Her I wish to offer briefly two other examples of depictions of statues that may assist in reading the final scene of *The Winter's Tale*. The first is from Ovid:

Dum tamen arma geres diverso miles in orbe,
Quae referat vultus est mihi cera tuos;
Illi blanditias, illi tibi debita verba
Dicimus, amplexus accipit illa meos.
Crede mihi, plus est, quam quod videatur, imago;
Adde sonum cerae, Protesilaus erit.
Hanc specto teneoque sinu pro coniuge vero,
Et, tamquam possit verba referre, queror. (*Heroides*, 13.151-58)

¹²³ Or, as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, "Mimesis is always accompanied by—indeed is always produced by—negotiation and exchange." *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 8.

Yet while you will be bearing arms, a soldier in remote lands,
a waxen image exhibits for me your features:
those flatteries, those words due only to you
we speak. It accepts my embrace.
Believe me, it is more than it appears, this statue:
Add speech to the wax, it will be Protesilaus.

Protesilaus was the first of the Greek warriors to land at Troy and the first to be killed, in accordance with a prophecy. What makes the tale additionally moving is that he had just married Laodameia (a hero cult was later established for the slain newlywed). After the death of Protesilaus, Laodameia begs the gods for permission to converse with him for three hours only. Granting her request, the gods send Hermes to lead Protesilaus back to the upper world, and when he dies a second time, his wife dies with him. So we see here within this tale, in addition to the creation of a waxen image, the death and subsequent return of a spouse.

Of additional note here is that the *Heroides* are examples of *suasoriae*, school exercises in which the pupil would compose a soliloquy and argue as well as possible from the point of view of the character represented.¹²⁴ These rhetorical exercises would have been common in Shakespeare's education, and so it is by no means unlikely that he found inspiration for the resurrected Hermione in the *suasoriae* in general, and more specifically in the story of Protesilaus.

The second example is from Anacreon, Ode 28. In this rather extraordinary poem, the poet exhorts a painter to depict his absent mistress. He commands him to paint her as he describes her, detailing each part: her soft, black, myrrh-scented hair; her cheek in profile; her ivory-white forehead; her eyebrows subtly joined; her eyelids framing a

¹²⁴ See Ovidi Nasonis *Heroides: with the Greek translation of Planudes*, xiii; see too Palmer's citation of a scholiast who asserts that the story of Protesilaus derives from Euripides, 401. cf. cf. *Iliad* 2.695ff.

shining eye; her nose and cheeks, like roses and milk; her provocative lip; her delicate chin and neck; and her body concealed under purple robes. The ode concludes with

Ἀπέχει· βλέπω γὰρ αὐτήν.
Τάχα, κηρέ, καὶ λαλήσεις.

Hold off: for I see her very self.
Soon, wax, you will even speak.

These examples, as well as the depiction of Alcestis at the end of the play, focus on the crucial characteristic of speech and its relationship to acknowledgement; as we will observe in the final section below, the success of the final act of *The Winter's Tale* is largely contingent on the failure, though momentary, of speech.¹²⁵ These are but few reasons why sources other than the Pygmalion myth ought to be considered as sources.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Compare, however, the following: Dryden, translating from the proem of Philostratus' *Figures*: "He who will rightly govern the art of painting, ought of necessity first to understand human nature... and to make the dumb, as it were, to speak." in "A Parallel of Poetry and Painting" 123; consider too the following from the Greek Anthology, 2.1.117-18: Ἠγασάμην δ' ὀρόων σε, Περικλέες, ὅτι καὶ αὐτῷ / χαλκῷ ἀναυδήτῳ δημηγόρον ἦθος ἀνάπτεις "I wondered gazing at you, Pericles, that even in the same / speechless bronze you hold fast to the manner of your speech...."

¹²⁶ It might be objected that Shakespeare's "less Greek" precludes Anacreon as a possible source. However, a guiding thought in Colin Burrow's *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* is that Shakespeare (or any English schoolboy at that time) possessed a significant amount of classical learning. In addition, James Hutton traces the history of Marianus Scholasticus' epigram in the Greek anthology from Latin translations through Italian and French imitations to Shakespeare's sonnets 153 and 154, noting along the way which elements of the original are retained, omitted, or transformed, and it is by no means outrageous to assume that Shakespeare could have accessed, and could have read Anacreon. In addition, the two anacreontic sonnets ending Shakespeare's sequence are further evidence that he at least surely knew the poet's compositional style; cf. Green, Martin. *Wriothesley's Roses*. 69-79 for discussion of 153 and 154 to the Greek Anthology; for discussion of 153 and 154 pertaining to questions of authorship, see Atkins, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 375-77; for a discussion of how these two anacreontic poems function in establishing the sonnets as "multi-generic," see de Grazia, "Revolution in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*", 57-58; however, for a comprehensive account of appropriations of the Pygmalion myth, including interesting instances in Vasari and Cavalier Marino, see Victor I Stoichita, *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock*.

3.3 Nature Made Better

In the case of Leontes, we see a path of jealousy and skepticism that ends tragically by the close of 3.3. However, the means by which tragedy is reconciled, balanced, and repaired is the wonder evoked by the statue. This wonder in Leontes is ostensibly freely granted and implanted by and through time. Similarly, Time speaks and shows us both suddenly and naturally “Perdita, now grown in grace/Equal with wond’ring.” (4.2.24-25) Through Time, Perdita (and all loss that her name implies) is transformed by the free gifts of grace and wonder. The capacity for wonder involves the ability to hold with equanimity two opposing views in the mind simultaneously; the capacity for wonder in Leontes is adumbrated by Polixenes’ speech to Perdita (with which we began) concerning grafting/husbandry/marriage, which concludes “This is an art/Which does mend Nature, change it rather; but/The art itself is Nature.” (4.4.95-97) Polixenes here assimilates and reconciles two polarities, and the speech further serves to prepare the audience for the wonder the statue will elicit. In addition, we might read these lines a subtle commentary on the conflation of genres with implication that tragicomedy is the honey-rimmed “cordial” to remedy tragedy.

Act 5 scene 2 serves in part to prepare the audience for the miraculous ending. A Gentleman says of Leontes and Camillo that “A notable passion of wonder / appeared in them” (17-18), and that “[o]ne of the prettiest touches of all” (88) had such an effect that “Who was most marble/there changed color.” (96-97) Thus we see wonder affecting Camillo and Leontes to such a degree that they are dumb and still, and wonder transforms others of the hearers from insentient and statuesque to sensate and animate. Leontes,

upon first seeing the statue, captivated by awe and wonder, might be likened to a statue; we therefore see a subtle, reciprocal reversal and recognition between Leontes and the statue, for Leontes and Hermione gaze motionless at one another. Paulina remarks of Leontes, “I like your silence; it the more shows off / Your wonder” (5.3.21-22) Though magic and witchcraft are mentioned, the success of Leontes is the success of the ideal spectator, for he ceases any attempt to locate a rational explanation, opting instead to embrace the wonder of the statue. Paulina, unsure of Leontes’ full transformation, tells him that “...you’ll think,/which I protest against, I am assisted/By wicked powers.” (5.3.89-91) Yet Leontes accepts unquestioningly the unexplained of the supernatural, remarking only that “If this be magic, let it be an art/Lawful as eating.” (5.3.110-11) His use of the subjunctive indicates that he does not know causes or explanations, yet nevertheless gives himself over fully to Hermione.

However, this is not to say that Leontes has relinquished his own agency. Yet he chooses to allow himself to be led by Paulina. Nevill Coghill has pointed out the kinetic directedness achieved by the accumulation of colons in the following passage:¹²⁷

Musick; awake her: Strike:
 'Tis time: descend: be Stone no more: approach:
 Strike all that looke vpon with meruaile: Come:
 Ile fill your Graue vp: stirre: nay, come away:
 Bequeath to Death your nurnnesse: (for from him,
 Deare Life redeemes you) you perceiue she stirres....(5.3.98-103)

Yet there is more still achieved by the succession of colons: the predominance of monosyllabic words, syncopated irregularly by a disyllabic word, are rushed along by the colons in such a way that the sounding of the succession of syllables mimics an excited heartbeat. Furthermore, when Paulina commands “Strike all that looke vpon with

¹²⁷ “Six Points of Stage-Craft in The Winter’s Tale,” 40.

meruaile,” we may render the marvel / marble pun in three ways: first, it can indicate that some are already viewing the spectacle with marvel; second, marvel can indicate that with which we are to be struck; and third, that we may be struck with marble indicates the same type of reciprocity of wonder and acknowledgement adumbrated in the report of the Gentlemen.

In some of the most powerful lines in the play, Leontes speaks thus:

For this affliction has a taste as sweet
As any cordial comfort. Still, methinks,
There is an air comes from her. What fine chisel
Could ever yet cut breath? Let no man mock me,
For I will kiss her. (5.3.75-79)

Here the “affliction” and disease of tragedy is rectified and cured by the “cordial comfort” of wonder. Yet the transformation is deeper still. In the lines 76-79 above, there are two feminine lines juxtaposed against two of regular length; there are only five words that are not monosyllabic; and in addition the one metrical irregularity lies in the spondee of “air comes.” The cumulative effect is highly mimetic, for the onward thrust of the meter combined with both the monosyllabic pattern and the spondaic “air comes” yields a reading or delivery that is moderately aspirated and therefore highly conscious of breath and life itself. These extraordinary and brilliant “prettiest touches” culminate with the reader’s breath being cut (along with Leontes’) after the caesura that occurs after “breath.”¹²⁸ Thus, art here not only transforms Leontes but the reader herself, for she too, through this art, has her breath measured and cut. We might therefore revisit Polixenes’ lines concerning art and nature in light of this reading: “This is an art/Which does mend

¹²⁸ For this observation, see Rhu, “Introduction,” 35; consider too Felperin’s observation on these same lines: “[Shakespeare] has fixed our sense of wonder on a succession of monosyllables composed of short vowels chopped off by dental stops, and by so doing, has imitated in language the sharp clicks of a chisel tapping through its medium.” *Beyond Deconstruction*, 175.

Nature, change it rather; but / The art itself is Nature.” (4.4.95-97) Thus, wonder is the natural art that transforms characters, shapes readers, and repairs tragedy.

Chapter 4: Monumental Insignificance?

In previous chapters, we observed how ekphrasis is employed by Shakespeare in order to confront the ordeal of skepticism: in Chapter 2, Hamlet uses the Mouse-trap as a means for testing the mimetic fidelity of words to corresponding states of reality; in Chapter 3, the statue of Hermione elicits a restorative wonder in both Leontes and the audience. In this chapter, I will investigate the role that ekphrasis plays in the development of Shakespeare's thought in the *Sonnets*.¹²⁹ This in turn is in accordance with Paul Edmundson's ekphrastic view of the experience of reading the sonnets:

The analogy of sonnets as paintings is utterly pertinent to an overall consideration of their form. Since a sonnet resembles an approximate square of canvas, it is possible for the reader's eye to hold suspended words as shapes and shades within a single frame of reference and to consider the sonnet as a spatial, as well as a literary experience.¹³⁰

In particular, I argue that Shakespeare, by framing his thought in an ekphrastic and self-reflexive manner—both implicitly throughout the sequence and most overtly in sonnets 105 and 126—is able to confront his own skepticism about the power and possibilities of poetic expression to outlive the tyranny of time. To demonstrate this, I examine first Joel

¹²⁹ Although my focus throughout this chapter might be said to reflect a concern primarily with poetic subjectivity, I am sympathetic to the approach taken by David Schalkwyk in “‘She Never Told Her Love’: Embodiment, Textuality, and Silence in Shakespeare's Sonnets and Plays.” By focusing on the embodiment of the speaker as well as the sonnet itself, Schalkwyk attempts to negotiate middle ground between what he sees as the two distinct, paradigmatic critical approaches towards the sonnets: the first interrogates historically situated biographical, socio-economic, and political particulars; the second subsumes persona to questions of poetic subjectivity.

¹³⁰ Edmundson, “The Effect of Shakespeare's Sonnets,” 23.

Fineman's formulation of subjectivity as the developmental end of the sonnet sequence; second, I connect this view of subjectivity with what Howard Felperin terms "supermimesis"; I then trace examples in the *Sonnets* of the well-established Renaissance conceit of equating the beloved with verse itself; next, I discuss the themes of time and mortality through the poet's examination of the comparative perdurability of monuments and verse. Finally, because Sonnet 126 is widely recognized as the formal departure from the fair youth sonnets, and because of its place of importance in the larger sonnet sequence, I conclude the chapter by arguing for the emergence of a new poetic through an analysis of the structurally salient sonnet 126, along with an interpretation of its "missing" lines (usually bracketed by editors).¹³¹

4.1: Subjectivity and "Supermimesis" in the Sonnets

In *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, Joel Fineman assesses Shakespeare's sonnet sequence as a move to the purely rhetorical, and this move is made possible in part by resolving issues of authorship through converting questions of poetic persona into assertions of poetic subjectivity. Fineman argues that Shakespeare achieves a new poetic subjectivity in the *Sonnets* by rupturing the long-established and, by Shakespeare's time, hackneyed model of epideictic expression, which is largely determinative of poetic topoi and tropes, the claim to praise the subject, and poetic persona itself.¹³² This wholly

¹³¹ I follow the editorial arrangement in Shakespeare, *The Sonnets*, ed. Stephen Orgel. All quotations from the sonnets follow this edition. For alternative arrangements, see Stirling, *The Shakespeare Sonnet Order: Poems and Groups*; see also Winny, *The Master-Mistress. A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets*.

¹³² Though Fineman's work has been deeply influential and is recognized as such, it is not without its critics: for a dismissal of Fineman's position concerning the relationship between

novel, first-person poetic subjectivity is achieved more specifically by the expression of praise through paradoxical mock encomium, which reiterates traditional epideixis while simultaneously transcending it through transgression. This formulation in turn leads to what Fineman admits to be his grandest claim about the development of subjectivity within the sonnets as well as their place in literary history:

Shakespeare's sonnets understand themselves to inherit the debts of a bankrupt poetic tradition, but... they also understand this legacy, which is the burden of literary history itself, to impose specific constraints upon poetic practice, constraints that are particularly compelling with regard to the presentation of poetic subjectivity.¹³³

Furthermore, the traditional mode of epideictic praise, characterized by a poetics of "visionary presentation," clashes with and is sublated by the self-aware subjectivity of poetic re-presentation. This emergence of verbal re-presentation and its vanquishing of poetic representation then becomes determinative of poetic subjectivity within the sonnets.

It is worthwhile to note briefly here the remarkable concinnity between Fineman's argument and the role of representation in Kant, though Fineman never makes a mention of him. Kant's distinction between *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung* (representation vs. re-

Shakespeare's Sonnets and Petrarchan poetics, see Gordon Braden, "Shakespeare's Petrarchism," who argues that the sonnets are in many ways quintessentially Petrarchan; Lisa Freinkel, in "The Name of the Rose: Christian Figurality and Shakespeare's Sonnets," questions Fineman's assertion about the place of the sonnets in Post-Petrarchan poetics, and argues that the sonnets, seen in their post-Reformation context, present instead a challenge to Christian allegory; Michael Schoenfeldt, in "The Matter of Inwardness: Shakespeare's Sonnets," critiques Fineman's claims of modernity and interiority in the sonnets as anachronistic, and highlights instead the similarities and differences between early modern and modern uses of the language of interiority; and Peter Herman questions Fineman's distinction of sequences within the sonnets, in "What's the Use? Or, The Problematic of Economy in Shakespeare's Procreation Sonnets." In regards to Fineman's rather difficult and revisionary prose style, Margreta de Grazia remarks, "What is said changes in the resaying" in "Book Review," 529.

¹³³ Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, 42.

presentation, or more technically in Kant “the making sensible of a concept”) serves not only as a clear analogue to Fineman’s assertions above, but additionally parallels the mental mechanisms involved in reading ekphrasis. The concept of *Darstellung* is persistently problematic in Kant’s *Critiques*: it does not accord with conceptual sensibility, nor with cognitive synthetic unity in understanding, and is thus beyond the reach, as it were, of the synthetic unity of apperception, necessarily occluding the possibility of the subject’s representing himself to himself.¹³⁴ The crucial point here is that Kant’s epistemological system and the possibility of subjectivity within that system is to a large degree rhetorical, i.e., that what we know and how we know it is contingent on our understanding of representation. So too with Fineman: subjectivity does not, and perhaps cannot, arise until visual representation is displaced by verbal re-presentation, and thus the rhetoric of representation is determinative of poetic subjectivity. This visual component of representation is present in the usage of Greek rhetoricians and persists in Kant’s formulation. After locating Kant’s conception of representation in the idea of *hypotyposis* (“beneath” or “below” a “molded figure”) within the Greek rhetorical tradition, Martha Helfer states the following: “This visual dimension of *hypotyposis* is transmitted to the German philosophical tradition and is also evident in Stieler’s dictionary definition of the German word *darstellung* as *ante oculos ponere*, to place before the eyes.”¹³⁵ Thus, the idea of representation as a molded figure (or even a statue) placed under the eyes of the viewer is inherently ekphrastic. Furthermore, while for Kant the limits imposed by reason in his larger epistemological system render this conception

¹³⁴ Helfer, *The Retreat of Representation*, 10–11.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 22. Fineman also notes that “*Ponimus ante oculos* is a commonplace in epideictic theory,” *Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye*, 337 n.13.

of representation deeply problematic, for Fineman this ocular representation not only can be displaced, but indeed is surpassed as the sonnet sequence progresses.

Fineman asserts further that epideictic poetry – and especially the Renaissance sonnet – is in part characterized by a reflexive reflexivity that in turn makes the “poetry of praise [the] praise of poetry itself.”¹³⁶ Epideictic speech points to what is outside itself, but in so doing, reflects back on itself as a point of reference, linking subject and object through the very act of reference. This circular reflexivity inscribed in figures and conceits in Renaissance poetry makes manifest a physical materiality of praise—what Fineman terms “the *phenomena* of epideictic logos.”¹³⁷ The physicality of these phenomena results in part in an idealizing and visually oriented view of language in which words reflect ideas and figuration legitimates metaphor. Fineman argues that Shakespeare’s reworking of this established poetics of vision results in

a different account that characterizes language as something corruptingly linguistic rather than something ideally specular, as something duplicitously verbal as opposed to something singly visual. The result is a poetics of a double tongue rather than a poetics of a unified and unifying eye, a language of suspicious word rather than the language of true vision.¹³⁸

I will argue that Fineman’s assertion of language’s transformation from the “ideally specular” to a poetics of a “double tongue” is developed at length first through conventional self-referentiality, and finally realized by means of the response to ekphrastic expression; in addition, we will see that Shakespeare, in response to his continuous skepticism that previous poetic language is wholly insufficient to achieve immortality, develops a new poetics that culminates in the farewell to his beloved in

¹³⁶ Fineman, *Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye*, 9.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

Sonnet 126--itself an “ideally specular” example of poetic materiality that bridges the transition to the sonnets that follow, characterized in part by their “corruptingly linguistic” approach.

The project of producing perspicuous and mimetically faithful praise of a subject is deeply problematic. The idea of linguistic fidelity, though not unique to Shakespeare, is treated gradually by Shakespeare with increased skepticism as the sonnet sequence progresses. Howard Felperin argues thus:

All the major Elizabethan sonneteers –Sydney, Spencer, and Shakespeare– recognize within their sequences the manifold difficulties involved in representing an object conventionally or actually ‘fair’ [y]et it is only Shakespeare....who apprehends the full difficulty of that project....¹³⁹

Epideictic speech develops from an implicit awareness of the insufficiency of language to signify its subject with faithful transparency. Thus, epideictic praise is in essence compensatory, and it is largely characterized by linguistic surfeit: it attempts more than it can express, strives to formulate the inexpressible, and reaches beyond its own capacity for signification. This linguistic overreaching is additionally often coupled with an attempt to surpass previous poets; this emulation through amplification is what Felperin terms “supermimesis,” and it characterizes Shakespeare’s consistent strategy early on in the sonnet sequence. However, perhaps the best example of this--itself is an instance of ekphrasis--appears in *Antony and Cleopatra*:

The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Burned on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
Purple the sails, and so perfumèd, that
The winds were lovesick with them; the oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made

¹³⁹ Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction*, 172.

The water which they beat to follow faster,
 As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
 It beggared all description: she did lie
 In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue,
 O'erpicturing that Venus where we see
 The fancy outwork nature. On each side her
 Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
 With divers-coloured fans, whose wind did seem
 To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
 And what they undid did. (2.2.197-211)

When we compare this with Shakespeare's probable translational source for Plutarch,¹⁴⁰ it is clear that no detail from Plutarch's account is omitted: the poop of gold, the purple, perfumed sails, the silver oars stroking in time to the accompanying music, Cleopatra's reclined position, the pavilion of cloth of gold, and the fair boys framing and fanning the queen—each particular is faithfully conveyed. Yet what is most striking about the passage, as well as most telling about how Shakespeare strives to emulate and surpass Plutarch's poetic description, is the amplification that he adds to an already lofty description: the “commonly drawn” Venus in North's translation of Plutarch's γραφικῶς (“in a manner capable of being drawn or painted”) is transformed into an “[o]’erpicturing....Venus where we see / The fancy outwork nature.” Enobarbus' claim

¹⁴⁰ From North's translation of the “Life of Marcus Antonius,” in Bullough, 274: “She disdained to set forward otherwise, but to take her barge in the river of Cydnus, the poepe whereof was of gold, the sailes of purple, and the owers of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sounde of the musicke of flutes, howboyes, citherns, violls, and such other instruments as they played upon in the barge. And now for the person of her selfe: she was layed under a pavillion of cloth of gold of tissue, apparellled and attired like the goddessse Venus, commonly drawn in picture: and hard by her, on either hand of her, pretie faire boyes apparellled as painters doe set forth god Cupide, with litle fannes in their hands, with the which they fanned wind upon her. Her Ladies and gentlewomen also, the fairest of them were apparellled like the nymphes Nereides (which are the mermaides of the waters) and like the Graces, some steering the helme, others tending the tackle and ropes of the barge, out of the which there came a wonderfull passing sweete savor of perfumes, that perfumed the wharfes side....” For an overview of Shakespeare's use of Plutarch, see also Spencer's introduction in *Shakespeare's Plutarch*.

(and we should keep in mind here the skeptical character of Enobarbus) that the sight of Cleopatra “beggar[s] all description” is validated by the numerous, vivid details and yet is simultaneously negated by the assertion that the image of the queen—and thus the artistry of the very language used in making the claim—transcends that of nature.¹⁴¹ Plutarch’s hypertactic description of Cleopatra, conveyed faithfully by North, heaps clause upon clause, accumulating details in a long-flowing sentence that mimics how one would see this very scene, with the eye grasping one detail and then moving seamlessly to the next. The result is a vivid picture in motion that is at once fantastic yet nevertheless realistic. Yet the technique of “supermimesis” used by Shakespeare “o’erpictures” this very picture: the description begins with the same kinetic flow as Plutarch’s, but this flow is then necessarily interrupted by the hearer’s inability to picture that which overpictures both Venus and nature, resulting in the halting of the imagination that in turn freezes the description. Thus, just as Cleopatra’s smiling cupids did “what they undid” in their labor, so too does Shakespeare in his description undo what he does, i.e., freezes that which he has set in motion.

Felperin asserts further that Shakespeare’s sonnets are distinct from those of other Renaissance sonneteers precisely because they call attention to their own “literal textuality.”¹⁴² This distinction is in turn linked with the tempting, though perpetually frustrated, attempt of scholars to locate in and equate poetic authority with the personal

¹⁴¹ It should be noted that this is a continuation of a motif of oxymoronic and paradoxical images established in Act I: “Nay, but this dotage of our general’s / O’erflows the measure” (1.1.1-2); “...the sides of nature / Will not sustain it.” (1.3.19-20); “quick winds lie still” (1.2.120); “And quietness, grown sick of rest, would purge...” (1.3.65); “’Tis sweating labor / To bear such idleness” (1.3.114-15); “Our separation so abides and flies / That thou, residing here, goes yet with me, / And I, hence fleeting, here remain with thee.” (1.3.124-26); “we do bear / So great weight in his lightness.” (1.4.28-29); “...the varying tide / To rot itself with motion.” (1.4.52-53).

¹⁴² Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction*, 150.

experience of the author: in short, poetic persona has been conflated with biographical person. Indeed, there has additionally been much ado involving the identification of the fair youth as well, yet he remains an exceedingly problematic figure.¹⁴³ The reader is perpetually denied significant particulars of him, and never senses any reciprocity whatsoever in the relationship between the poet and the beloved.¹⁴⁴ Thus, many of the sonnets achieve a connecting, emotional mimesis of the poet's lack: the elusive beloved is the outline without the image, the key without the note, the syllable without the sound. In addition, the few biographical particulars of the Dark Lady readily render her thematically fungible with Propertius' Cynthia or Ovid's Corinna¹⁴⁵: she is little more than the material that allows for the poet's endless oscillation between desire and

¹⁴³ This is not to argue, however, that there is a coherent narrative in the sonnets; rather, my view accords with Helen Vendler's view of the sonnets "as individual experiments in lyric language and structure rather than as narrative sites of thematic expression" Vendler, *A Life of Learning*, 17. However, see her introduction in *Poets Thinking*, 1-9, for an assessment of how non-linear arguments--potential corollaries to narrative--are constructed in poetry. It is important to note here that I am adopting Vendler's approach throughout this chapter, and that the "arguments" Shakespeare makes are non-linear: thus, assertions made in earlier sonnets often anticipate sentiments conveyed in later sonnets, and these in turn revise ideas in the earlier sonnets, sometimes confirming, and sometimes denying what has been said. For this reason, the only editorial distinction in the order of the sonnets that I will observe strictly is the traditional division between the young man sonnets (1-126) and the sequence associated with the "Dark Lady" (127-152). For arguments concerning narrative in the sonnets, see James Schiffer, "The Incomplete Narrative of Shakespeare's Sonnets," 45-56; see as well also Olga Valbuena, "The dyer's hand": The Reproduction of Coercion and Blot in Shakespeare's Sonnets," 325-46.

¹⁴⁴ Against this position is a claim made by David Schalkwyk, "What May Words Do? The Performative of Praise in Shakespeare's Sonnets," 259ff: noting Austin's argument that praise necessarily constitutes reciprocity within any given relationship, Schalkwyk asserts that the sonnets interrogate unequal relationships of power, whether political or social; in addition, performative speech--rather than descriptive language--is the means by which these relationships are established.

¹⁴⁵ Though it is not a focus of discussion here, consideration of the reception of the largely binary view of the beloved in Latin elegy and its relation to sonnets 127-154 would be valuable. For a discussion of the *amator's* perpetually ambivalent attitude toward the *candida puella* and *dura puella* in Latin elegy, along with their Callimachean precursors, see Fredrick, "Reading Broken Skin: Violence in Roman Elegy," esp. 173-79. Yeats conveys this ambivalence in his poem "A Thought From Propertius": She might, so noble from head / To great shapely knees / The long flowing line, / Have walked to the altar / Through the holy images / At Pallas Athene's side, / Or been fit spoil for a centaur, / Drunk with the unmixed wine.

abhorrence, love and hate, and praise and execration. Thus the reader is left with mere apparitions composed of generalities— and this from the sonnets in which these characters actually appear: twenty-six sonnets are addressed to no one at all, and six more appear as apostrophes to Time or Love.¹⁴⁶

However, Felperin views the notion of poetic authority as ultimately inextricably linked with some sort of subject, even if this subject is depersonalized into a phantom anonymity that lingers always over questions of the text.¹⁴⁷ For Paul de Man, the liberation by the reader of questions concerning authorial intent through either poststructuralist or even structuralist analysis nevertheless results inevitably with the poetic subject's being "endowed with a function that is not grammatical but rhetorical."¹⁴⁸ In addition, the dearth of biographical and autobiographical details functions as a rhetorical technique of protracted negative description that results in the reader's striving to see a depiction never fully depicted and endlessly deferred. The most telling instance of this appears in Homer, and it is offered here as a succinct example that is indicative of the general effect of negative description in the *Sonnets*. Consider the response of the Trojan elders, who are gifted speakers, as they catch sight of Helen: "No cause for anger that the Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans / suffer pains for a long time for the sake of a woman such as this: / Awe-fully (αἰνῶς) is her face like those of the

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Hollander, "Introduction" in *The Sonnets*, xxvi; cf. also Leishman, *Themes and Variations in Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 21-23, who groups the sonnets in the following categories: sonnets on poetry; sonnets containing personifications or metaphorical descriptions of abstract ideas; and sonnets expressing "hyperbolic" or "religious" ideas.

¹⁴⁷ This is true even with respect to moments in the Sonnets when we are given concrete details, e.g. "My name is Will" (136.14).

¹⁴⁸ de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, 18.

immortal goddesses.”¹⁴⁹ Lessing comments on these lines as follows: “What can convey a more vivid idea of beauty than to let cold old age acknowledge that she is indeed worth the war which had cost so much blood and so many tears?”¹⁵⁰ More importantly, Homer conveys the scope of Helen’s beauty by indicating its effect while conscientiously omitting all of the particulars of her beauty. Never is the reader told the color of her eyes or hair or the shape of her face, nor can one even begin to conceive of what Helen looks like compared to any one goddess, for she is compared to all of the goddesses at once. In a similar way, Shakespeare utilizes negative description in his treatment of the fair youth. But what if we did know all: his complete character, habits, disposition, every contour of his countenance, the location of each hair on his head with scientific exactitude? What if we had his very words, faithfully relayed by our poet, complete with context? Even all of these biographical particulars¹⁵¹ do nothing to change the nature and status of a text that Fineman asserts is largely the “praise of poetry itself,” and one that we may characterize further as a text of indeterminacy and undecidability.

4.2: Monuments and The Beloved as Verse

In this section, I will examine the pervasive theme of monuments in the sonnets¹⁵² and demonstrate how this theme is inextricably linked with implicit equations of the fair

¹⁴⁹ *Iliad* 3.156-58. cf. *The Rape of Lucrece*, 1424-28: That for Achilles’ image stood his spear, / Grip’d in an armed hand; himself behind, / Was left unseen, save to the eye of mind: / A hand, a foot, a face, a leg, a head, / Stood for the whole to be imagined.

¹⁵⁰ Lessing, *Laocoon*, 111.

¹⁵¹ See Bate, “Shakespeare’s Autobiographical Poems?” 301-26.

¹⁵² The theme of monuments occurs throughout the sonnets: note, for example, 123.2-3: “Thy [Time’s] pyramids built up with newer might / To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;” also 60.13: “my verse shall stand;”; and 81.8-10: “When you entombed in men’s eyes shall lie / Your

youth to verse itself. In numerous instances the poet overtly equates himself with the beloved. Consider the following:

O, how thy worth with manners may I sing
When thou art all the better part of me?
What can my praise to mine own self bring,
And what is't but mine own when I praise thee? (39.1-4)

Here the final sentiment is clear: the poet praises himself when he praises the beloved, for they are two parts of the self-same whole, though perhaps qualitatively distinct as the poet asserts in line 2 as well as in 74.8: "My spirit is thine, the better part of me." If the subject and the poet are one, and the poet is identified by his poetry, then how far removed is the subject from the poetry itself? The first quatrain of sonnet 55 argues thus:

Not marble nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme,
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time.

The first two rhymes assert that the "powerful rhyme" is itself a monument capable of outlasting the most durable of materials, and it is in these same "contents" that the beloved "shall shine more bright." Sonnet 55 clearly both responds to and emulates Horace 3.30 (*Exegi monumentum*), amplifying Horatian claims in order to surpass the Roman poet;¹⁵³ yet Shakespeare's claims in 55 are no different in kind than those of

monument shall be my gentle verse, / Which eyes not yet created shall o'er read"; and 101.11-12: "To make him much outlive a gilded tomb, / And to be prais'd of ages yet to be." It is also interesting to note that Milton and Jonson employ this same motif in their encomia to Shakespeare (see Milton's "On Shakespeare," 7-8; and Jonson's "To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author, Mr. William Shakespeare, and What He Hath Left Us," 22-24).

¹⁵³ For earlier emulation and appropriation of Horace 3.30 in Latin poetry, consider Ovid's concluding lines in his *Metamorphoses* (15.871-72):

Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iovis ira nec ignis
nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas.

Horace.¹⁵⁴ The sonnet is perhaps a powerfully perdurable monument indeed and, thus far, the poet has in fact held time in check. Yet we will soon observe a growing skepticism about the power and possibility of poetic language both to represent the subject accurately and, even if accuracy is achieved, to preserve the image conveyed against the tyranny of time. The claims of the poet in sonnet 55 (and this applies equally to Horace in 3.30), are in Austin's terms performative, and more specifically, illocutionary;¹⁵⁵ the validity of the declaration of immortality rests solely on the authority of the speaker, yet this assumed authority is repeatedly interrogated and doubted as the sonnet sequence progresses.¹⁵⁶ But what of the second claim in 55, that the beloved "shall shine more bright?" Where is he? He is reduced to nothing but two instances of "you" and a "yourself" within the entire sonnet. Here the shining beloved is to the monumental poem as the superficial surface is to the "gilded monuments": there is no substance to the sheen. However, when we read sonnet 54, the beloved's importance is given greater weight, though he is not treated until the couplet:

.... Sweet roses do not so [die unto themselves]:
 Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odors made.
 And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth,
 When that shall vade, by verse distills your truth. (54.11-14)

(And now, I have completed a great work,
 which not Jove's anger, and not fire nor steel,
 nor fast-consuming time can sweep away.) Translation by More.
 For a more somber boast of poetic immortality, see also *Tristia*, 3.7.43-54. See also Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, esp. 87-100.

¹⁵⁴ Horace, however, skips the middle man, so to speak: "Ever new / My after fame shall grow" (usque ego postera / crescā laude recens). Translation by Conington in *Horace, Odes and Epodes* (3.30.7-8).

¹⁵⁵ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 9-11.

¹⁵⁶ This doubt, however, is by no means linear, and it is punctuated by moments of supreme confidence, as when the poet goes so far as to usurp the office of the muse: "Then do thy office muse; I teach thee how, / To make him seem long hence as he shows now." (101.13-14)

Extending the metaphor above validates the argument that the beloved has now become the material subject for the poem, but he functions only as generic fodder for distilling truth. Here are the terms of the metaphor:

<u>Odor</u>	<u>Truth</u>
Rose	Beloved

Thus, odor is to a rose as truth is to the beloved. However, the distillation of the rose's odor is achieved only through death. Therefore, in accordance with the implicit terms of the metaphor, the poetic process is likened to death. The beloved has here been promoted from mere "gilding" to the material necessary for poetic distillation of truth.

But as we look further into the sonnets, we see a more explicit and substantive equation of the beloved with the verse itself: "The worth of that [the body] is that [the soul] which it contains,/ and that [the soul] is this [the poem], and this with thee remains." (74.13-14) The very soul of the beloved is now equated with and embodied in poetry, with the semantic thrust of the claim amplified and reinforced by the mimetic structure of the argument in the form of a chiasmus¹⁵⁷: that (body)– that (soul) – that (soul) – this (beloved embodied by poetry). Just as the body contains the soul, so too is the soul embodied in the couplet.

Let us now turn to sonnet 96:

Some say thy fault is youth, some wantonness;

¹⁵⁷ The chiasmus and its many species are of particular importance in Fineman's study. Following Puttenham's translation of *syneciosis*, Fineman refers to the many types of chiastic constructions with the term "cross-coupler," and they are of note for the following reasons: these figures are convenient to the "paradox of praise;" they point to their "own surplus repetition;" they accord with Petrarchan and "para-Petrarchan complaint;" and they enlighten the "poetic self" of Shakespeare in the sonnets. Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, 37-38.

Some say thy grace is youth and gentle sport;
 Both grace and faults are loved of more and less:
 Thou mak'st faults graces that to thee resort.
 As on the finger of a throned queen
 The basest jewel will be well esteemed,
 So are those errors that in you are seen
 To truths translated and for true things deemed.
 How many lambs might the stern wolf betray
 If like a lamb he could his looks translate!
 How many gazers mightst thou lead away
 If like a lamb he could his truths translate!
 But do not so; I love thee in such sort,
 As, thou being mine, mine is thy good report.

The couplet in 96 echoes the argument in 74 while mimicking the form: thou – mine – mine– thy. The chiasmus here in line 14 better visually asserts the connection between the poet and the beloved/ poem, with “mine” stated and repeated, neatly framing the caesura. The device facilitates the resolution that the couplet by convention strives for, leaving the reader with a sense of completion. Furthermore, line 14 is salient for its metrical irregularity, and that the previous thirteen lines conform closely to the iambic pentameter only serves to amplify the syncopation of line 14 by juxtaposing a precedent of firm regularity. None of the thirteen lines contains a feminine ending: therefore, it makes sense to assign the word “being” in 14 only one syllable. While prosody is to some degree conjectural, it makes sense to render “thou being mine, mine” as a double spondee. The resonating effect of the spondees makes the message of the line exceedingly emphatic: the poet is one with the beloved. Further, the beloved is again equated with poetry itself in the word “report.” While the primary meaning of “report” is “reputation,” it can also signify the poem– that is, the poem is the report. An alternative reading of the entire sonnet strengthens the argument for this secondary meaning. The

sonnet's ostensible argument is this: the fair youth, though excoriated for his alleged faults, is of such a nature that error turns to truth through him; but, were it his wish, he could lead astray admirers as a wolf in the guise of a lamb could betray lambs. Why are a person's faults referred to as "errors?" (7) And in what kind of person are "truths translated?" (8) And why is deception described by the verb "translate?" (10) Taking into consideration the evidence above that the beloved is either equated with the poem or is verse itself, we can easily explain the language of language used in the sonnet: the poem is the deceptive, controlled, and sheepish response of a poetic wolf to a contrary critic. Furthermore, the phrase "truths translated" (8) hearkens back to the couplet of 54: verse is the very means by which truth is translated, or distilled. Additionally, the only other occurrence of metrical variation in sonnet 96 lies in line 4: "Thou mak'st faults graces...." If 96 is indeed an example in the sonnet sequence of an implicit, almost surreptitious commentary on the poet's own craft, then the meter of line 4 can be construed not as an artistic blemish but as mimetic metrical irony: the spondee in the first half of the line creates the "fault" in meter, yet the line then gracefully recovers regularity.

4.3: Time and Mortality

We have thus far seen the following transferences, equations, and transformations of the beloved: first, to the poet; second, to mere ornamentation; next, to poetic material; and lastly, to the very soul of poetry. Therefore, viewing the beloved as the poetry itself, we can read some of the remaining sonnets as reflections on the nature of poetic language

and its relationship to mortality. Continuing the theme of monuments, the opening quatrain of sonnet 65 asks the essential question of the poet's "fearful meditation" (65.9):

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold of plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?

The poet's answer is tenuously posited in the couplet: "O, none, unless this miracle have might,/ That in black ink my love may still shine bright." The lasting effects of the poet's work are wholly contingent on a supernatural phenomenon, a miracle, and his hope is reduced to a weak, tenuous, subjunctive "may." What could account for this fearful uncertainty? Why is there such a change in the poet's supreme confidence exhibited in the opening quatrain of 55? Perhaps there is an increasing awareness by the poet of what he bases his confident claim on in sonnet 55: nothing. The argument is circular, self-referential, and ultimately empty. Why should these poems not be susceptible to "devouring time"? (19.1). Has the poet remembered here in 65 his "papers, yellowed with their age"? (17.9). What monument can withstand the ceaseless ravaging of time? In order to answer this, let us consider first the status and function of monuments in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Brian Chalk states the following:

For a Protestant culture that had severed its commemorative connections to the dead, monuments, both statuary and poetic, had become charged symbols that represented the precarious enterprise of attempting to secure a posthumous existence. The early seventeenth century saw a striking increase in the building of funeral monuments, over one-third of which were commissioned and built while the subjects they depicted were still alive. Whereas the impulse to build monuments is traditionally thought to derive from the desire to mold and stabilize history, those built during the Jacobean era were just as often meant to mold the present as a means of manipulating the future.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Chalk, "Webster's 'Worthyest Monument': The Problem of Posterity in *The Duchess of Malfi*", 381-82.

Thus, there is an important shift at this time in England not only in the increased frequency with which monuments were constructed, but there is also a transition to dedicating the monuments to those still living. Important too is the underlying skepticism of a post-Reformation culture that questions how effective monuments may be in securing future remembrance; thus, as Chalk observes, we see a shifting stance regarding the function of monuments: the poetic or material means by which the past is potentially captured is transformed into an instrument for shaping present and future time. Here I want to examine what we might call the formal cause of a sonnet—or any poem—in order to understand more fully how Shakespeare begins to build a new poetic monument. In so doing, I want to look briefly at how the poet’s language previously functions by examining sonnet 18:

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer’s lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature’s changing course, untrimmed:
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st,
Nor shall Death brag thou wander’st in his shade
When in eternal lines to time thou grow’st.
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Sonnet 18 is salient within the sequence for numerous reasons: first, it officially departs from the arguments of procreation, fusing future genealogy with poetic reception and remembrance in “eternal lines.” (12) Second, we get the first instance of the poet’s

explicit contemplation of his craft and, more specifically, a meditation on the transformative power (and potential failure) of metaphor itself. The first eight lines function as a point-counterpoint argument within the author's mind, and its point of departure is framed by a question put forth by the poet to the poet of whether or not to utilize the very essence of figurative speech, whether or not he is to "compare" (1) at all. Shakespeare's thinking here is not unlike Cavell's, who asserts the following in distinguishing between metaphor and idiom:

Any theory concerned to account for peculiarities of metaphor of the sort I have listed will wonder over the literal meaning its words, in that combination, have.... Theory aside, I want to look at the suggestion, often made, that what metaphors literally say is *false*. But to say that Juliet is the sun is not to say something false; it is, at best, wildly false, and that is not being just false.... Such a use [a sentiment that defies paraphrase] seems to me present in a line like... Wallace Stevens' "as a calm darkens among water-lights," from "Sunday Morning." One may be able to say nothing except that a feeling has been voiced by a kindred spirit and that if someone does not get it he is not in one's world, or not of one's flesh. The lines may, that is, be left as touchstones of intimacy.¹⁵⁹

The reader of sonnet 18 is thus presented with the poet's own analysis of the tropological nature of language as he strives to convey an elusive "touchstone of intimacy" that repeatedly defies description. "Metaphor" comes from the Greek *meta* (over; across) and *pherein* (to carry), yielding the idea of "carrying across," or transference. Thus, any one particular attribute within a given genus is "transferred" and applied to the characteristics of another genus. For example, consider the Ghost's words referring to Claudius in an address to Hamlet: "The Serpent that did sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown."

¹⁵⁹ Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 80-81. cf. Wallace Stevens, "The Relations Between Poetry and Painting," who, I think, would readily agree; however, because Stevens argues that both painting and poetry derive from a unified and universal art, he might add that each can "paraphrase" the sentiment of the other; cf. also Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 14: "The appeal of lyric lies elsewhere than in its paraphrasable statement."

(1.5.38-39). In order for the metaphor to function, at least one of the numerous qualities of the serpent is transferred and applied to the similarly numerous characteristics of Claudius. The metaphor is valid only if it remains relatively static: for example, if the serpent's attribute of either "kills with poison" or "sneaky" is carried over to Claudius, and the metaphor here freezes, the comparison works; however, multiple transferences inherent in the referential indeterminacy of metaphor are problematic to the metaphor's legitimacy, and ultimately it collapses upon itself into risible absurdity: is Claudius' tongue forked? Does he slither on his stomach? Perhaps he possesses a pronounced lisp? Does he eat mice?¹⁶⁰ A similar type of analysis is performed by the poet in sonnet 18: individual qualities of the summer are scrutinized against those characteristics of the youth, and lines 2 -8 argue for the non-validity of the metaphor proposed; it won't work. Then, remarkably, the poet makes the comparison anyway in line 9: "But thy eternal summer...." Yet how is this possibly valid, especially in light of the poet's own rhetorical analysis and negation of the proposed metaphor? The couplet attempts resolution, yet we are left with the same tautological bombast characteristic of the claim in 55: art justifies itself by itself, and alone can build a preeminently perdurable monument of immortality. But does the poet really believe this? He again interrogates his craft most explicitly in sonnet 76:¹⁶¹

Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
 So far from variation or quick change?
 Why with the time do I not glance aside
 To new-found methods, and to compounds strange?
 Why write I still all one, ever the same....(1-5)

¹⁶⁰ For the metaphor turned laughable, cf. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 80.

¹⁶¹ Fineman remarks that sonnet 76 "is significant because it introduces a new kind literary self-consciousness into the already highly self-conscious tradition of the Renaissance sonnet." *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, 149.

So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again what is already spent:
For as the sun is daily new and old,
So is my love still telling what is told. (11-14)

The poet must struggle to build anew, using language in an unprecedented way. The problem of monuments in achieving immortality is that, like the metaphor of sonnet 18, they are wholly static. The word “monument” comes from the Latin *monere*, “to remind.” In order to be reminded of something, one must have a static, fixed image of the thing itself. But there’s the rub: once the object memorialized is set, still, and frozen, it begins to yield to the decay of time. Yet how is one to build a monument of flux? The recognition that “a modern quill doth come too short” (83.7) enlists the poet to invent an innovative ultra-modernity of language. The poet must stretch language to “engraft....new” (15.4) perspectives. Language must be stretched, re-molded, and reshaped; it must be newly stamped in a way that rival poets cannot emulate; the poet is as a result “enforced to seek anew/ Some fresher stamp of the time-bettering days.” (87.7-8)

The subject alone is insufficient to erect a “time-bettering” monument; the subject is static, susceptible to decay. The concept of subject as stasis is juxtaposed with the increasing realization of the poet of how to build this new type of monument:

“Fair, kind, and true” is all my argument,
“Fair, kind, and true,” varying to other words;
And in this change is my invention spent. (105.9-11)

These lines function in three crucial ways. First, they are transgressive of Petrarchan poetics in their self-conscious admission of their own artificiality. In addition, I want to

suggest here that these lines are ekphrastic and are further transgressive in their inversion of how ekphrasis generally functions: if, in Heffernan's formulation, ekphrasis is a "verbal representation of a visual representation," what we are presented with here is a visual representation, bounded and framed by the quotation marks, of a verbal representation. Second, these lines prepare the reader for the encounter with sonnet 126 (discussed below), especially in consideration of the "missing lines" of the couplet. Third, I suggest here that these lines function as an epigram to the linguistic monument that Shakespeare is constructing, and this is in accordance with historical changes to inscriptions occurring in England during Shakespeare's lifetime. John Sparrow details the progression and development of inscriptions, including their transition from stone to paper in the seventeenth century. At this time in Britain, the most important feature of sculptured monuments—whether "permanent" or temporary constructions for occasions like weddings and funerals—was the inscription itself, such that "the lineated inscription became a recognized type of literary composition."¹⁶² This focus on literary elements of the inscription and the lapidary style—characterized as "half-way between the oratorical and the poetical"¹⁶³—was in part the result of the earlier development of *argutezza* (witty or pointed writing); this style of writing, exemplified by Pontano's epitaphs in his chapel at Naples in the 1490s, imitated classical models while infusing them with "unclassical strains of feeling and turns of expression."¹⁶⁴ This lamented admission by the poet that he has said nothing before except varied iterations of "Fair, kind, and true" is most

¹⁶² Sparrow, *Visible Words: A Study of Inscriptions in and as Works of Art*, 102.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

unclassical, and it is a complete departure from the Horatian confidence invoked in sonnet 55.¹⁶⁵

However, simultaneous with the lamented recognition of hackneyed sentiments is the realization of how to surpass rhetorical banality¹⁶⁶: “And in this change is my invention spent.” (105.11) The key lies in linguistic variation, change, and invention. “Invent” comes from the Latin *invenire*, literally “to come upon.”¹⁶⁷ This discovery and “finding out” involved in poetic invention is inextricably fused with semantic variation, and further refers to the perpetual “coming upon” of how words work and what meaning means. Only through a conscious and concentrated invention of a poetics of flux can the stasis of the subject defeat decay. Further, this “invention”, this discovery, is certainly not exclusive to the poet: “So till the judgment that yourself arise, / You live in this, and dwell in lovers’ eyes.” (55.13-14) The “judgment” here has, of course, strong theological connotations, as does the word “miracle” in the couplet of 65: “O, none, unless this miracle have might, / That in black ink my love may still shine bright.” Miracle is connected thematically with the theological implications of the “judgment” in 55, but the

¹⁶⁵ Beyond consideration of Horace 3.30, we might draw a parallel between Shakespeare’s desire for immortality through ekphrastic description of monuments and the most famous example of ekphrasis in Western literature, i.e., the shield of Achilles. Thomas Hubbard argues that “The shield is a complex monumental artifact, composed out of diverse elements and endowed with multiple registers of figural meaning. Its status as an *artifact* is significant, revealing Homer’s view of the artistic work as a concrete product of manual activity, a permanent sequence of signs, inscribed, as it were, into immortality.” Hubbard, “Nature and Art in the Shield of Achilles,” 17. Here, by framing and referring to his previous verse, Shakespeare establishes the same sort of artifacticity.

¹⁶⁶ However, inherent in this self-conscious recognition is the realization of the power of representation itself. Schalkwyk argues the following: “This capacity of representation to reflect upon both itself and the conditions of its own possibility, thereby displaying its limitations and precariousness, is precisely the sign of its massive authority.” “What May Words Do? The Performative of Praise in Shakespeare’s Sonnets”, 253.

¹⁶⁷ See Edward Hubler, *The Sense of Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, 22: “With [Shakespeare] *invention*, as with the Elizabethans as a whole, had the primary meaning of finding, not the means of expression, but subject matter for composition.” The view I am taking is that Shakespeare’s subject matter becomes *one and the same* with his means of expression.

“miracle” refers specifically to the poem’s potential for perdurability; and, keeping in mind the equation of the beloved with poetics itself, one can conclude the following: the “miracle” that yields immortality is achieved through the perpetual, critical artistic flux of “invention” and “judgment” of poetic value and meaning by the reader. Additionally, the “might” of the “miracle” in 65.13 exemplifies semantic flux: is the “might” of the “miracle” one of power, or does this “might” signify the “perhaps” or “maybe” of semantic determination of signifiers set “in black ink?” (65.14)

Shakespeare both revisits and expands the sentiments expressed in 105 in the opening of sonnet 115:

Those lines that I before have writ do lie,
Even those that said I could not love you dearer;
Yet then my judgment knew no reason why
My most full flame should afterwards burn clearer.
But reckoning time, whose millioned accidents
Creep in ’twixt vows and change decrees of kings,
Tan sacred beauty, blunt the sharp’st intents,
Divert strong minds to th’ course of alt’ring things—
Alas, why, fearing of time’s tyranny,
Might I not then say, “Now I love you best”
When I was certain o’er incertainty,
Crowning the present, doubting of the rest?
Love is a babe; then might I not say so,
To give full growth to that which still doth grow.

“Time’s tyranny” (9) is nothing new to the poet, but here it is constricted and applied to the immediate workings of language and meaning within the poem itself. But, instead of fighting with time, the poet solves his dilemma by allowing metaphor to work with and through time: “Love is a babe; then might I not say so, / To give the full growth to that which still doth grow.” “Crowning the present” meaning of language stabilizes meaning,

but positing growth of metaphor and meanings in 115.13–14 indicates an overt departure from the fixity of language seen in sonnet 18. Time is now not simply an inimical destroyer, but is transformed into the ultimate vehicle of semantic sublation: time simultaneously preserves that which it destroys. Let us now turn to sonnet 107:

Not mine own fears nor the prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come
Can yet the lease of my true love control
Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.
The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured,
And the sad augurs mock their own presage;
Incertainties now crown themselves assured,
And peace proclaims olives of endless age.
Now with the drops of this most balmy time
My love looks fresh, and Death to me subscribes,
Since, spite of him, I'll live in this poor rhyme,
While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes:
And thou in this shalt find thy monument
When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

In line 7 above the poet “crowns” what he refused to (present time) in 115.12:

“Incertainties.” But the crowning of incertainties is reflexive in line 7; the fact that incertainties are able to act as well as be acted upon is indicative of the growing organic fluidity of the poem. Here we have the explicit voicing of the poet’s solution to the problem of monumental fixity: flowing linguistic indeterminacy. The poet can now work with time, for time only “insults....dull and speechless tribes.” The poet’s “drops of ink” and “balmy time” (9) heal in a wholly new transformative process that forces “Death” (10), not time, to “subscribe” to the poet. Here is the pedestal to the poet’s monument, its semantic flow of “present-absence” (45.4) that distinguishes it from all other monuments

sonnets 126, 99, and 145 are the sole deviations from the standard sonnet form (these contain six couplets, fifteen lines, and tetrameters, respectively).¹⁶⁹

In this sonnet, we see a simultaneous farewell to the fair youth as well as to conventional form itself. That the poet in the sonnets following 126 (if editorial arrangement be historically accurate) again embraces formal convention only reinforces the idea of the beloved as verse, for the farewell is simultaneous. Sonnet 126 is not simply a poem of precariousness or an agglomeration of couplets;¹⁷⁰ rather, we see in it the culmination of the poet's new poetics. We have seen how the "power" of the "lovely boy," i.e., the verse itself, can now "hold Time's fickle glass" by allowing language to work with Time. The reconciliation of verse and Time is made more clear when David West's observation is considered: the word "time" appears 78 times in sonnets 1–126 and is *absent* in all of the following sonnets.¹⁷¹ Meaning, through Time's sublation, "hast by waning grown;" meaning continues to grow like "a babe" (115.13), through the critical "judgments" (55.13) of the poem's lovers (4), i.e., its readers. In the next 6 lines (5–10) of sonnet 126 "Nature" is introduced as a new foe.¹⁷² Again, viewing the "sweet boy" or "babe" as language itself, Nature now presents a new danger: meaning, Nature's "treasure," can become too slippery and protean within the constant flux of time; thus, even Nature can "not still keep" (10) or not keep still the meanings left unchecked by form. The connection between meaning and form is clearly a consideration for both poet and reader in 126: the linearity of the argument, pushing the reader forward, is here fused

¹⁶⁹ McGuire, "Shakespeare's Non-Shakespearean Sonnets," 304.

¹⁷⁰ Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 534. Vendler here notes the perfect octave and sestet of 126 (counting the bracketed lines as part of the sonnet).

¹⁷¹ West, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 384.

¹⁷² Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 534. Vendler here argues that Time and Nature are competing for the fair youth. I agree, but am here concerned with how this struggle works when we substitute poetry itself for the fair youth.

with the cyclic, resonating rhymes of the couplets, resulting in the combination of a “calling back” of meaning with the onward thrust of the argument. The form of 126 renders the reader and the poem at once fixed and fluid: as meaning “goest onwards,” form can “pluck....back” (6) and ground the reader. “Meaning” is etymologically connected with “moaning,” and thus the monumental, moaning resonances fill the “missing” lines (13-14) with poetic and readerly invention.

Furthermore, these tensions gather, explode, and echo on the semantic level in a single word, the final metaphor: “quietus.” This particular word calls attention to itself in numerous ways. First, its formal phonetic and metrical aspects render it salient within the sonnet: in mapping out the sonnet’s “exceptionally dense interphonetic relations” and metrical patterns, Vendler notes a total of twelve amphibrachic feet, which collectively serve “to highlight the amphibrachic conclusive word *quietus*.”¹⁷³ Second, the technical and legalistic denotation initially strikes the reader as odd. West notes that the word “quietus,” from medieval Latin, is an accounting term truncated from *quietus est*, “he is quit”; this usage then develops into a general metaphor for death, as in *Hamlet*: “When he himself might his quietus make / With a bare bodkin.” (3.1.77-78)¹⁷⁴ Yet the use of technical or legal terms and motifs is not particularly strange when we consider how judicial inquiry was assimilated with modes of narration in Jacobean era education of schoolboys. Lorna Hutson asserts the following:

In the sixteenth century in England, *narratio* or narrative was one of the skills taught through reading and composition, but the way in which it was taught—the elements schoolboys were asked to identify when reading narrative, and to

¹⁷³ Ibid, 535.

¹⁷⁴ West, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, 384.

include when composing it—was directly derived from writings on classical judicial oratory.¹⁷⁵

In addition, when we accept Patrick Cheney's argument that Shakespeare is concerned with the notion of the ideal relationship between speech and action, word and gesture, conflating at times forms and genres,¹⁷⁶ this legalistic element becomes intimately connected with ekphrasis, *enargeia*, and with epideictic rhetoric. Hutson continues:

In discussions of Senecan declamatory drama, the *enargeia* of narrations of offstage events tends to be linked to *ecphrasis* and with epideictic rhetoric....[In] Quintilian's discussion of narrative, the Greek word *enargeia* is glossed as the Latin '*evidentia*,' meaning distinctness or clarity. *Enargeia*, in other words, is linked to the etymology of the English legal concept of 'evidence.'¹⁷⁷

Here then, in a subtle but pervasive way, we may additionally observe in the word "quietus" the conflation of the resonances of ekphrastic *enargeia* with the rhetoric of presence and display, foregrounded by an aesthetics of evidence and imagination, and establishing the conditions by which visual imagination may be called forth in order to confront the missing lines of the couplet.¹⁷⁸ "Quietus," taken in this respect, prepares the reader to *see*, finally, the moment of transition--achieved through a "poetics of a double tongue"--from a "poetics of a unified and unifying eye" to "a language of suspicious word."¹⁷⁹

The O.E.D. gives three definitions for "quietus," the first of which is "a discharge or acquittance given on payment of sums due; a receipt." Although this meaning (which accords with West's comment noted above) signifies much, to stop at this meaning of

¹⁷⁵ Hutson, "Forensic Aspects of Renaissance Mimesis," 91.

¹⁷⁶ Cheney, "O, Let My Books Be... Dumb Presagers." I discuss his arguments in Chapter 1.

¹⁷⁷ Hutson, "Forensic Aspects of Renaissance Mimesis," 94.

¹⁷⁸ Most helpful to my thinking here is Heinrich Plett's *Enargeia in Classical Antiquity and the Early Modern Age: The Aesthetics of Evidence*.

¹⁷⁹ Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, 10.

“quietus” is to render the metaphor as fixed and feckless as the one examined in sonnet 18. The second definition: “A discharge from office for duty.” Keeping in mind the poet’s usurpation of the “office” of the muse (101.13-14), we see here in the second definition the reinforcement of the idea of the poet’s farewell: he quits his office of muse, embracing the silent and the quiet (from Latin *quietus*). The third entry in the O.E.D. is simply “death, or that which brings death.” But before discussing this third definition, let us more closely examine the etymology of “quietus,” and additionally revisit our primary definition in light of our etymological inquiry. “Quietus” hearkens back ultimately to the Indo-European root *k^wejə / k^wijē*, signifying “restfulness; space of time.”¹⁸⁰ From the same root we get the following English words: “quiet,” “acquit,” and “requite.” The poet’s magnificent, monumental metaphor of “quietus” resonates all three ideas: the poem and the poet both achieve “restfulness” and “quiet;” “quietus” introduces the “space of time” in 13-14; and here, finally, is his beloved, verse itself, reconciled and “requited.” But what of “death,” the O.E.D.’s third meaning? To answer this, let us review the primary meaning of “quietus”: “A discharge or acquittance given on payment of sums due; a receipt.” The metaphor of quietus harkens back to sonnet 107, which initiates the idea of the beloved being under lease: “...the lease of my true love” (107.3). To whom is “payment of sums” rendered at the end of the lease? It is neither Time, nor Nature, but Death. Yet no payment will be rendered, for “death to me [the poet] subscribes” (107.10). To “subscribe” literally means to “write under;” returning to the idea that 126 constitutes a poetic monument, we may perhaps see here epigraph

¹⁸⁰ Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 638.

transformed to epitaph.¹⁸¹ The poet here achieves a stunning and supernatural reversal of the natural order of things: it is Death that now surrenders to the poet, who forces Death to sign the document and receipt of the quietus, forged with the poets' own "fluid drops" of ink and resonating, "balmy time" of sonnet 126.

Finally, I suggest here that the brackets that comprise the couplet are subversively ekphrastic, both according with and responding to the same ekphrastic inversion observed in "Fair, kind, and true" of sonnet 105. Just as "quietus" functions as epigraph/epitaph, so the bracketed couplet becomes the new monument, or tomb,¹⁸² of the "present-absent," static-flux of poetic invention.

Finally, these brackets complete the compact between ekphrastic vision and unspoken thought expressed in sonnet 47:

With my love's picture then my eye doth feast,
And to the painted banquet bids my heart;
Another time mine eye is my heart's guest,
And in his thoughts of love doth share a part:
So, either by thy picture or my love,
Thy self away, art present still with me; (47.5-10)

The relationship between vision (of things seen both with the eye and in the imagination) and thought expressed in 47 is problematized by epideictic speech. In one of his more difficult passages, Fineman asserts the following:

It is not exactly the case, therefore, as I said earlier, that because the epideictic "see[s] the same" it cannot see what is not the same, that because it "imagines" it

¹⁸¹ In her discussion of epitaphs in *Timon of Athens*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and Sonnet 81 ("Or I shall live your epitaph to make"), Anita Sherman concludes that Shakespeare conveys deep doubt "about the ability of epitaphs to stave off oblivion." Sherman, *Skepticism and Memory in Shakespeare and Donne*, 180. Here I argue that the ekphrastic bracketed lines function as a way of overcoming this skepticism.

¹⁸² Vendler has a similar thought: "Inside the parentheses there lies, so to speak, the mute effigy of the rendered youth." *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 538.

cannot imagine what is other than itself. Quite the contrary, the epideictic can imagine—indeed it *must* and regularly does imagine – this alternative to itself, but it does so as precisely as that which it *cannot* imagine, as precisely that which visionary language cannot speak.¹⁸³

Epideictic speech, the language associated by Fineman with vision, may “imagine” in the space framed by the bracketed lines that which is fundamentally other to itself: a space of silence that defies expression by the very language that brings it into being.

¹⁸³ *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, 118.

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