

Subjects of Advice: Drama and Counsel from More to Shakespeare

Ivan Lupić

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ABSTRACT

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The dissertation focuses on the relationship between political thinking and dramatic expression in the early modern period, especially in England. I approach this topic by considering what political historians have termed “the problem of counsel”—a vexed issue situated at the very center of Renaissance moral and political philosophy and informing in multiple ways the relationship between sovereign power and its subjects. Because of drama’s central concern with the transformation of speech into action as well as its focus on the moral making of the individual, dramatists found in counsel a powerful instrument with which to develop specific kinds of dramatic character, create tension within individual scenes, and provide motivation for dramatic plots. Counsel also proved a convenient, familiar space within which to think through different, often controversial, political ideas and to give them reality and shape in the embodied representations of the stage. By analyzing and contextualizing plays ranging chronologically from Tudor interludes, such as those by Henry Medwall or John Redford, to Jacobean tragedies, notably Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, the dissertation shows how significant counsel was as a shaping force in the construction of different kinds of plays in the period. It also demonstrates how this varied dramatic material itself contributed to the early modern understanding of the theory and practice of counsel.

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My six years at Columbia were supported by a Marjorie Hope Nicolson fellowship in the English and Comparative Literature Department. I had the privilege of working with some of America's best faculty and graduate students. I learnt from what they said and what they did, in and out of the classroom. I always felt at home. The Early Modern Dissertation Seminar proved a productive place for the occasional testing of my ideas, and I would like to thank its past and present members for being there. András Kiséry, who moved on soon after I arrived, nonetheless continued to show interest in my work and to comment on it with characteristic optimism.

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The friendship, faith, and learning of Irena Bratičević, never discouraged by distance, made everything better; it made Chapter 2 noticeably so. The friendship, insight, and humor of Vesna Bogojević, never discouraged by closeness, made everything more enjoyable.

*Castane, tibi: namque tu solebas
meas esse aliquid putare nugas*

PROLOGUE

Subjects of Advice

Don't criticize. Don't condemn. Don't complain. These pithy pieces of advice are not meant just for those who wish to have long and successful academic careers; they are addressed to all success seekers, to all those whose business it is to communicate with and to handle people. The advice comes from the first chapter of a major twentieth-century success story, Dale Carnegie's best-selling book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, first published in 1936, often reprinted, several times updated, and recently issued in a version adapted to the digital age. Among many other things, the book advises you to "arouse in the other person an eager want," to smile as often as you can, and to remember that "a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language." Never say to another person "you're wrong," Carnegie admonishes; instead, "get the other person saying 'yes, yes' immediately," and, finally—this is, for obvious reasons, my favorite—"dramatize your ideas."¹

Carnegie's book should always be read with what we might call its ancient antidote, Plutarch's essay "How a Man May Discerne a Flatterer from a Friend," as the title was rendered in English by Philemon Holland early in the seventeenth century.² Prior to this date, the essay was known to Renaissance England primarily in a Latin translation executed by Erasmus and dedicated to Henry VIII in 1513.³ Carnegie and Plutarch approach the idea of the friend, and

¹ Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends & Influence People*, rev. ed. (New York: Pocket Books, 1981). My quotations are taken from the summary reminders appearing after every chapter.

² Plutarch, *The Philosophie, commonlie called, the Morals*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: Arnold Hatfield, 1603), sigs. G6r-K4v.

consequently the idea of advice, from diametrically opposed viewpoints. The friends Carnegie wishes you to win are the same friends whom Plutarch is anxious to warn against the likes of Carnegie. To be criticized, to be told the truth however unpalatable it may be, and to have one's faults exposed or one's opinions corrected is, according to Plutarch, what one should expect, and indeed desire, from a friend. If one is flattered, one's access to truth is blocked and the central project of ancient philosophy—to truly know oneself—is thwarted. If, as Bacon observes in his essay "Of friendship," there is "no such flatterer as is a man's self," then self-knowledge can be obtained only in the presence of another person, through one's subjection to acts of what in Greek was called *parrhesia* and in Latin *licentia*, the freedom to speak plainly, fearlessly, truthfully.⁴

The task of telling the truth, of saying what one really thinks, acquires in the Renaissance a renewed urgency and becomes, for various historical, political, and cultural reasons, extremely complicated. We find it closely linked not just to the question of *ethos*, of character or moral subject, but to the question of the commonwealth and its central political relations. In the largely monarchical context of early modern Europe, the problem of frank speech in relation to moral character on the one hand and to politics on the other finds its dominant articulation in the idea of counsel.⁵ Trained in textual wisdom and equipped with experience, the humanist counselor

³ Fred Schurink, "Print Patronage, and Occasion: Translations of Plutarch's *Moralia* in Tudor England," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 38.1/2 (2008): 86-101, at p. 88.

⁴ Francis Bacon, "Of Friendship," in *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan, The Oxford Francis Bacon, vol. 15 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000 [1985]), p. 85.

⁵ For an informative survey, see John Guy, "The Rhetoric of Counsel in Early Modern England," in *Tudor Political Culture*, ed. Dale Hoak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 292-310. Guy explains the gradual disappearance of counsel from the center of political discourse in the course of the seventeenth century as a result of the increase of parliamentary powers. It remains an issue that is of interest to dramatists in England even after the

engages in a dialogue with the prince in order to help him shape the best kind of sovereign subjectivity but also to participate himself in the shaping of political outcomes. Compared to his baronial predecessor of the late medieval period, in England at least, the humanist counselor has a duty rather than a right to speak. He is invited into a parrhesiastic, truth-telling game in which character, power, and language intersect.⁶

But the situation is far from simple. As a concerned merchant in a mid sixteenth-century Ragusan comedy puts it, “not being counseled is bad, but being so is much worse.”⁷ Nonetheless, he grudgingly subjects himself to the advice of the Slavic countrymen he encounters in Rome while fruitlessly searching for his spendthrift son, hoping that some profit might after all come out of the pain. The Ragusan merchant may be an unfamiliar figure to most students of early English drama, but his understanding of counsel is in fact typical of the period. Counsel is not

Restoration, which partly has to do with the fact that Restoration drama draws on the Renaissance dramatic tradition as much as Renaissance drama builds on and continues the late medieval dramatic legacy, on which I will have to say more in Chapters 1 and 3. There is, in other words, no neat correspondence between political and dramatic developments. Another point that seems to me important is made by Thomas Hobbes, who argues in *Leviathan* that the term counsel truly makes sense only in a relationship that exists between a monarch as a single person and those who advise him. “[T]here is no choyce of Counsell,” Hobbes writes, “neither in a Democracy, nor Aristocracy; because the persons Counselling are members of the person Counsell’d”; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Noel Malcolm, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), vol. 2, p. 546.

⁶ The “medieval background,” as he calls it, of the Renaissance problem of counsel is discussed by Arthur B. Ferguson in his book *The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965). Several studies specifically focused the subject of counsel in medieval literature have been published since. See, for instances devoted to different genres of medieval writing: Geraldine Barnes, *Counsel and Strategy in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993); Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Nicholas Perkins, *Hoccleve’s Regiment of Princes: Counsel and Constraint* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); Frank M. Napolitano, Jr., “The Rhetoric of Counsel and Miracles in Middle English Biblical Drama,” Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Connecticut, 2009).

⁷ *Djela Marina Držića*, 2nd ed., ed. Milan Rešetar, *Stari pisci hrvatski 7* (Zagreb: JAZU, 1930), 1.1, p. 267. The Croatian text reads: “tko se ne konseļa—zlo, a tko se konseļa—još gore.” The play was probably composed in the 1540s.

just a preservative against tyranny,⁸ it is an ingrained cultural habit, a feature of obligatory mental, moral, and political hygiene. To be a Renaissance subject—and perhaps to be a subject at all—one must, like it or not, become first of all a subject of advice.⁹

The challenge of this subjection is nowhere more neatly illustrated than in the slowly changing conception of the figure of Echo from Ovid's story of Narcissus and Echo in *The Metamorphoses*. Whereas in the late Middle Ages, particularly in the influential interpretations of Boccaccio, Echo is seen as the symbol of absolute flattery—repeating, indiscriminately, everything that is said—in mid sixteenth-century England she begins to assume a more questionable shape. Thomas Howell, the first translator of Ovid's tale into English, appends to his 1560 translation a long moralization of the tale in which, despite the obvious indebtedness to Boccaccio, Echo is implicitly made to speak for a new and different generation of subjects. Echo is not simply the voice of flattery; Echo is the voice of good counsel. The paradox, indeed, is the point. The tragedy of Narcissus consists in his obsessive focus on himself and thus his inability to hear the voice of the other, represented by Echo.¹⁰ Counsel works, we could extend this logic a

⁸ See Frederick William Conrad, "A Preservative Against Tyranny: The Political Theology of Sir Thomas Elyot," Ph.D. Dissertation (The Johns Hopkins University, 1988), as well as the same author's "The Problem of Counsel Reconsidered: The Case of Sir Thomas Elyot," in *Political Thought and the Tudor Commonwealth: Deep Structure, Discourse and Disguise*, ed. Paul A. Fideler and T. F. Mayer (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 75-107.

⁹ The point is buttressed by the popularity of advice manuals of all sorts in the period. I should, however, make clear that I will largely be concerned with moral and political issues, which cannot be resolved in a recipe-like fashion. It is for this reason that the more practical aspects of the advice book—on husbandry, or cookery, or intercourse (well, perhaps not intercourse), or moletaps—are put aside even if at times there is significant overlap, as when the topic is the raising and education of children. Advice manuals have received a lot of attention from scholars working in various fields, but the English Renaissance, to my knowledge, still lacks the kind of survey provided for Italy by Rudolph M. Bell, *How to Do It: Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999). One particular kind of advice book produced in England in the early modern period is well represented in *Advice to a Son: Precepts of Lord Burghley, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Francis Osborne*, ed. Louis B. Wright ([Ithaca]: Cornell University Press for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1962).

little, not by complete opposition but by appearing to say the same thing while introducing somewhere along the way its crucial difference. Like Echo, good counsel sounds like our own words. The signification of these words, however, has changed beyond recognition.¹¹

As the distinction between flattery and good counsel becomes a matter of interpretation, we find ourselves running impatiently around the stage, like the unfortunate Ragusan merchant. When Roger Ascham observes in his *Toxophilus* that good counsel is known as a good bow is known, “by the ende and proefe of it,” he in fact points out the fundamental uncertainty inherent in every advising project, and is, in the rest of his curious digression, forced to admit that “bothe a bowe and good counsell, maye be made bothe better and worse, by well or yll handlynge of them: as oftentimes chaunceth.” By the end of this extended simile it is no longer clear how one is to ensure that the operation of good counsel is successful. Men must trust good counsel as archers (he calls them shooters) trust their bows, from which follows that one has to choose one’s bowyer as carefully as one’s advisor. The simile collapses as we realize that the archer always has to have three or four bows in store, in case one of them fails him, and that the wise man, likewise, needs to take plenty of counsel. But the point is not, if I am allowed to meddle in archery for a moment, that one can simply replace one piece of counsel that fails by another, as

¹⁰ [Thomas Howell,] *The fable of Ouid treting of Narcissus*, translated out of Latin into Englysh Mytre, with a moral ther vnto, very pleasant to rede (London: Thomas Hackette, [1560]).

¹¹ The association of Echo with counsel is taken up in dramatic context by John Webster, in the abbey scene from the final act of his *Duchess of Malfi*, where Antonio and Delio converse and where the echo from the ruined walls of the abbey reminds Antonio of his late wife’s voice. “Hark,” says Delio, “the dead stones seem to have pity on you / And give you good counsel.” Antonio is unmoved: “Echo, I will not talk with thee, / For thou art a dead thing.” To which Echo responds: “Thou art a dead thing.” See *The Duchess of Malfi and Other Plays*, ed. René Weis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.3.36-39, p. 192.

one does with one's bows; the point is that one has to decide which counsel to follow, or whether to go about making a makeshift bow of one's own.¹²

This dissertation turns to the field of early modern drama because I recognize in it a fascinating yet underexplored site for the elaboration, understanding, and complication of the problem of counsel as I have briefly outlined it. More than any other kind of discourse, it was drama that from the early sixteenth century onwards became positively obsessed with counsel. Even the humanist dialogue, the genre which we would expect to possess intellectual priority in discussions of counsel in the period, turns at crucial points to dramatic representation as the most powerful mode for thinking through the meanings and implications of advice.

This is hardly surprising. Like counsel, drama is interested in the combined problems of subjectivity, language, and political life; like counsel, it struggles with the relationship between words and actions. Both drama and counsel examine the possibilities for social action within the realm of rhetorical performance, and they both depend on character as one of their central organizing principles. Dramatists found in counsel a powerful instrument with which to develop specific kinds of dramatic character, create tension within individual scenes, and provide motivation for dramatic plots. Counsel also proved a convenient, familiar space within which to think through different, often controversial, political ideas and to give them reality and shape in the embodied representations of the stage.

I am not suggesting, as a significant body of scholarship has, that when engaging issues of counsel early modern drama itself becomes a medium of counsel or that plays constitute

¹² See Roger Ascham, *Toxophilus: The schole of shootinge conteyned in two bookes* (Londini: In aedibus Edouardi Whytchurch, 1545), sig. O3v.

straightforward acts of advice on important political issues, such as succession, war, rebellion, and so on. This may, in some cases, be what plays insistently invite us to do with them, but as a rule this approach fails to account for the enduring and rich presence of counsel in all sorts of early modern plays, at different historical moments, and under changing political circumstances.¹³ Rather, I am interested in the structural and intellectual affinity that exists between discourses of drama and discourses of counsel in the Renaissance, and in the common questions they pose to us: How does one go about one's business of decision making and action taking? Who does one rely upon and why? To what extent can language serve as a trustworthy medium of communication? These are, admittedly, big questions that are prompted by various kinds of texts, but it is my argument that in the meeting of drama and counsel in the Renaissance these important questions are given distinct and memorable shape. Few answers are provided, which to the positivist may appear frustrating, but positivists would be unlikely, then as now, to seek the answers in the playhouse anyway.¹⁴

¹³ One historical moment in particular has received a great deal of attention, the Jacobean era. See, for representative instances, Stuart M. Kurland, "'We need no more of your advice': Political Realism in *The Winter's Tale*," *Studies in English Literature* 31.2 (1991): 365-386, and Curtis Perry, "The Crisis of Counsel in Early Jacobean Political Tragedy," *Renaissance Drama* 24 (1993): 57-81. Although both insisting on the special relevance of counsel to the Jacobean moment, and therefore to the plays written at this time, Perry and Kurland provide different accounts of how counsel works on the Jacobean stage. Earlier historical moments upon which topically oriented scholarship has focused will be addressed in more detail in the chapters below.

¹⁴ In early modern England, they would be likely to turn to the rest of Europe and to texts such as *The Counsellor: A Treatise of Counsels and Counsellors of Princes*, written in Spanish by Bartholomew Phillip, Doctor of the Ciuill and Cannon lawe, Englished by I. T. Graduate in Oxford (London: Printed by John Wolfe, 1589), or *The Counsellor*, exactly pourtraited in two Bookes, wherein the offices of Magistrates, the happie life of Subiects, and the felicitie of Common-weales is pleasantly and pithilie discoursed [...]; written in Latin by Laurentius Grimaldus, and consecrated to the honour of the Polonian Empyre; newlie translated into English (London: Richard Braddocke, 1598). The latter work was reissued in London in 1607 under the title *A Commonwealth of Good Counsaile*. Goslicius's book has occasionally been linked to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, particularly to the significantly named counselor Polonius (called, interestingly, Corambis in the first printed version of the play); a thorough recent

For the literary scholar, the dialogue between drama and counsel is of interest not just because a good understanding of this dialogue helps her better understand individual plays but also because it prompts a somewhat different history of early modern drama in England, in which professional plays from the public theaters and plays from other venues and from the era before the public theaters in England were established are closely linked. My choice and my coupling of plays in the chapters that follow are meant to illustrate this point. I stop in the early seventeenth century not because drama and counsel stop interacting, but because the point I wish to make is that Jacobean stagings of counsel, often seen as motivated by the specific political circumstances of the era, fit very naturally within the longer sixteenth-century tradition of dramatic engagement with the issue of counsel. I do not wish to claim that Jacobean theater of counsel is completely derivative and therefore somehow less interesting; I merely want to invite others to take into more serious account a dramatic tradition that had concerned itself with similar issues for over a century.

While I hope, still, that my analyses will prove of some interest to those concerned with the history of moral and political thought in the early modern period, I primarily address the literary and cultural scholar who wishes to understand how literary texts, in this case plays, work and how we can understand them in their historical context, in their formal complexity, and in their continued appeal to our aesthetic, intellectual, and political sensibilities. The critical and the historical tasks I see as complementary: it is not only that plays intervene in contemporary political debates, it is also that their intricate dialogues with history—the kinds of dialogues that

discussion is Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa, *Goslicius's Ideal Senator and His Cultural Impact over the Centuries: Shakespearean Reflections* (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności and Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 2009).

the new historicist turn in early modern scholarship has done such an excellent job of examining—become the stuff that plays are literally made out of. While inspired by this nuanced interest in the relationship between Renaissance drama and its early modern contexts, I simply want to argue for a somewhat different balance between history and literature, and to insist that what we do is best tested in particular readings of plays, in specific interpretative activity, which is, and for better or worse is likely to remain, the mainstay of early modern literary scholarship as it is practiced in this country.

How exactly drama interacts with the philosophical and political legacies of counsel can therefore, I am suggesting, be ascertained only through detailed analyses of the difficult, messy, sometimes beautiful, performance-oriented verbal constructions that we call early modern plays. The political or philosophical ideas these plays engage are not easily separable from their dramatic contexts. Plays do not simply address issues of contemporary relevance; plays emerge, particularly in the early modern period, from a remarkable mix of native, foreign, and classical traditions of dramatic representation, all characterized by complex sets of artistic conventions and practices. Thus, the new relevance that counsel gains in the context of early modern politics and in relation to the rise of humanism in England enables drama not just to participate in larger cultural and political debates but also to engage productively with particular aspects of the dramatic tradition. I have done my best to treat the so-called minor plays with as much interest and respect as the revered masterpieces of Renaissance drama, and have thus occasionally given them an amount of space that may be found annoying. I can only hope that the disarming charm of these plays, in which tragic emotion is regularly mixed with pleasant mirth, will justify to some extent my own excesses.

Finally, since one of my arguments is that earlier and later drama work together, it would have been inconsistent not to apply the same argument to the existing body of critical scholarship, in which I have reveled with great gusto. My intention has been to place more recent studies in the context of a long tradition and thus to strive for a reasonable and fair critical balance. That I think the back and middle portions of this tradition are far from dead is only, perhaps, another way of desiring that its latter portion, including my own work, should have a longer life than what seems currently to be the norm. Even if that life must be, as so often here, confined to the bottom of the page.

Let me, in conclusion, briefly say what exactly the reader can expect to find in the pages that follow. Understood as the act of both giving and taking advice, counseling pervades the early dramatic record and insistently links dramatic representation to the discourses of politics, religion, and the law. This has forced me not just to choose plays that I think would be for some reason representative of the dialogue between drama and counsel but also to try and identify the main patterns or the most persistent features of this dialogue. I identify five closely interconnected problem areas where the meeting of drama and counsel becomes especially instructive: the performative nature of the practice of counsel, the rhetorical difficulty introduced into the discourses of counsel by humanism, the problem of counsel's relationship to historical knowledge, the place of friendship in the discourses of counsel, and, finally, the notion of plain and fearless speech as it is appropriated by the tradition of counsel on the one hand and the poetic tradition on the other.

My first chapter uncovers, describes, and explains the crucial links that were established between dramatic art and political thinking early in the sixteenth century, especially in the

context of the humanist dialogue. I bring the insights of this analysis to bear on my reading of the play of *Sir Thomas More*, possibly co-authored by Shakespeare, in which the staging of a moral interlude features More as the improviser of the role of Good Counsel. By scrutinizing the tradition of the moral interlude which richly informs *Sir Thomas More*, I show that this tradition, like the protagonist it is mobilized to represent, is centrally concerned with counsel and its gradual transformation from the moral into the political. This transformation is captured in More's notion of *philosophia civilior* from the first book of *Utopia*, where it is linked to the importance of apt rhetorical and dramatic performance.

The notion of rhetorical performance in relation to counsel is analyzed in my second chapter, where I discuss neo-Latin drama, particularly the work of the Scottish humanist, statesman, and political writer George Buchanan. In its interest in counsel and classical rhetoric, Buchanan's play *Baptistes sive calumniæ* creates suggestive parallels with the vernacular dramatic productions of the 1560s and later. I read *Baptistes* together with Buchanan's other original play, *Jephthes sive votus*, as well as his political treatise *De iure regni apud Scotos* to see in what sense *Baptistes* can be interpreted as a straightforward piece of advice to Buchanan's pupil James VI, which is what Buchanan explicitly wishes us to see in it. What my analysis reveals is how the treatise, also dedicated to James, and the two plays in fact work together to examine the issue of counsel in relation to tyranny on the one hand and law on the other, turning an unproblematic mediation of advice into a complex intellectual exchange. Buchanan's carefully wrought Latin dramas constitute, I argue, rhetorical and intellectual challenges any prince is expected to struggle with in order to learn how counsel actually works. The counselor should never be seen as the sole source of good counsel, only an important participant in the

process of its construction that occurs in the charged rhetorical space between the counselor, the monarch, and the law.

The source and authority of counsel provide the context for the discussion of *Gorboduc* (1561) and *Cambyses* (c. 1561) in my third chapter. Although they are regularly seen as belonging to different theatrical traditions, I show that both plays constitute significant and complementary early instances of what has come to be called the Renaissance crisis of exemplarity, as they question the deployment of historical examples in the discourses of counsel. I examine the use of Persian history in *Cambyses* and of British history in *Gorboduc* in relation to the use of historical examples in the political culture from which these plays emerged. I suggest that the repository of historical wisdom—foreign and native, classical and medieval—is represented in these two plays as a source of conflicting interpretations developed in the interest of specific political positions on the issues of succession, prerogative, and entitlement. Instead of reading these plays as straightforward pieces of advice, I try to see how they participate in the larger intellectual shift within humanist culture as appropriations of historical material for specific political purposes are viewed with growing suspicion.¹⁵

¹⁵ This suspicion has in recent scholarship been dated much later, mostly in connection with the great popularity of Tacitus in late sixteenth- and the early seventeenth-century England. John Guy writes: “But during the 1590s Tacitus was read as the historian who thought the past too complex and recalcitrant to be reduced to straightforward moral lessons. Empathy with his approach was felt by disillusioned courtiers and critics of late-Elizabethan venality and ‘corruption.’ Hence writers dissatisfied with the literature of ‘counsel’ sought to create a ‘Tacitean’ alternative”; *Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 415. See also F. J. Levy, “Francis Bacon and the Style of Politics,” *English Literary Renaissance* 16.1 (1986): 101-122; J. H. M. Salmon, “Stoicism and Roman Example: Seneca and Tacitus in Jacobean England,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50.2 (1989): 199-225; Alan Stewart, “Instigating the Treason: The Life and Death of Henry Cuffe, Secretary,” in *Literature, Politics and Law in Renaissance England*, ed. Erica Sheen and Lorna Hutson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 50-70, at p. 62. A balanced and informed view is provided by Peter Burke, “Tacitism, Scepticism, and Reason of State,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700*, ed. J. H. Burns and Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 479-498.

The plays of Christopher Marlowe, considered in relation to earlier drama and to the discourses of Renaissance friendship, are shown in my fourth chapter to be intimately concerned with the controversial place of affect in the practices of counsel, while the dramaturgical choices Marlowe makes in his plays, particularly *Edward II*, are seen as significantly motivated by the problem of counsel in relation to friendship, favoritism, and homoeroticism. Whereas Richard Edwards's *Damon and Pythias*, first performed in 1564, shows us the figure of perfect amity transforming tyranny into virtuous rule through a spectacular act of counsel, Marlowe's *Edward II*, first published in 1594, offers a much more sinister picture of friend-based regiment, complicated by Marlowe's deliberate multiplication of the meaning of the term *friend* in the play and its linking to the office of royal counsel. In *Edward II*, Marlowe turns the story of a medieval king misled by the evil counsel of his friends and favorites into a tragic meditation on the impossibility of friendship as the foundation of government.

I turn to Shakespeare in my final chapter partly because his plays bring together a number of relevant threads from the earlier dramatic tradition, partly because he has assumed the central place in the recent attempts to illuminate the relationship between literature and political thought in the early modern period.¹⁶ I consider *King Lear* in relation to its dramatic sources, notably the anonymous *King Leir*, to show how instead of writing counsel out of his play Shakespeare disperses it across *King Lear* and uses counsel's traditional link to plain and fearless speech as a

¹⁶ See, for example, Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004); Jean Howard, "Dramatic Traditions and Shakespeare's Political Thought," in *British Political Thought in History, Literature and Theory, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 129-144; *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, ed. David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare's Politics: A Contextual Introduction* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009). Additionally, a number of recent studies focusing on questions of political theology in Shakespeare testify to the lively interest in Shakespeare's engagement with early modern political thought even if they do not systematically consider the issues I address here.

vehicle of poetic and dramatic expression. While retaining its political connotations, counsel in Shakespeare's play also serves as a platform for asking questions about the promises and limits of sincerity. Plain speech as plain poetry in the closing scenes of Shakespeare's play remains to haunt the boundaries between the different subjects of advice: the father and the daughter, the individual and the state, the author and his source. As throughout the dissertation, the focus here is on how drama absorbs and contributes to the moral, intellectual, and political culture within which it emerges, how dramatic meaning proceeds from the demands of art negotiating, and struggling to outlive, the demands of the time.

CHAPTER 1

The More Part: Playing Good Counsel

Having defined poesy and those who make it, traced its origins back to ancient times, insisted on the legitimacy of “making” in the vernacular, described the function of the poet and identified him as the first priest, prophet, legislator, politician, philosopher, astronomer, historiographer, orator, and musician in the world, George Puttenham in his *Art of English Poesy* (1589) turns to the reputation in which poetry and poets were held “in old time with princes and otherwise generally, and how they be now become contemptible and for what causes.”¹ After mentioning the estimation accorded by Alexander the Great to “the noble poems of Homer” (106) and, somewhat inaccurately, the favors received by Theocritus from Ptolemy, king of Egypt, Puttenham observes that the munificence of ancient princes has been matched by the generosity of some of their more recent counterparts: from Richard II and Chaucer or Gower and Henry IV to the good fortune of Clément Marot in France or indeed Thomas Sternhold in England, who found preferment because of “a few psalms of David turned into English meter” (107)—an accomplishment that, Puttenham had told us in the opening chapter of his work, qualifies one to the title of a versifier, but hardly to that of a poet (93).² It is left to the reader to decide whether this example proves that the generosity of English monarchs exceeds that of their princely neighbors or whether it is not, rather, that in England little distinction was made between true

¹ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), Book I, Chapter 8, pp. 106-113. Further references by page number in the text.

² A more sympathetic account of Sternhold’s undertaking is provided by Beth Quitslund, *The Reformation in Rhyme: Sternhold, Hopkins and the English Metrical Psalter, 1547-1603* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

poesy and mere versifying. Queen Mary went so far as to give a Spanish poet a pension for life only because he wrote “one epithalamion or nuptial song [...] at her marriage with King Philip in Winchester” (107). Refraining from any comment on this apparent lack of discrimination in the disbursement of honors and rewards, Puttenham instead assures his readers that poets enjoyed this reputation not because theirs was “a delicate art” (where “delicate” is not necessarily a complimentary word) or because they were all “cunning prince-pleasers” (107),³ but because they possessed universal knowledge and were, thus equipped, capable of successfully discharging the highest offices of the commonwealth, “were it for counsel or for conduct” (108). “Ennius, the Latin poet,” writes Puttenham in order to illustrate his point, “was not, as some perchance think, only favored by Scipio Africanus for his good making of verses, but used as his familiar and counselor in the wars for his great knowledge and amiable conversation” (108).

Perhaps because, as Walter Raleigh later learnt, stories and examples taken from one’s own time—that pursuit of truth “too neare the heeles”—often result in the writer’s teeth being violently struck out by what they foolishly hoped to clench,⁴ Puttenham decides not to provide any English equivalent for the happy poetico-political union that Ennius and Scipius Africanus are meant to embody.⁵ Yet the description of their familiarity and the counsel that passed from the poet to the military commander brings to mind at once the most famous and the most tragic

³ This expression as well as the passage in which it occurs serve as the inspiration for Richard Firth Green’s insightful study *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); see esp. Chapter 5, “An Adviser to Princes,” pp. 135-167.

⁴ Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* (London: Walter Burre, 1614 [colophon: 1617]), “Preface,” sig. C4v. As Natta observes of the writing of contemporary history in Jonson’s *Sejanus*, “Those times are somewhat queasy to be touched”; Ben Jonson, *Sejanus*, in *Five Plays*, ed. G. A. Wilkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), I.82, p. 112.

⁵ As the editors of *The Art of English Poesy* note, “Ennius praised Scipio Africanus in verse,” but “the general he accompanied to the wars was Fulvius Nobilior” (108).

domestic union between a prince and a poet in the century in which Puttenham was penning his treatise. In *The Life of Sir Thomas More*, William Roper on two occasions refers to the familiarity with which his father-in-law was entertained when in King Henry VIII's company. Because More "was of a pleasant disposition," the King and Queen often called for him "to be merry with them." They were so fond of him "that he could not once in a month get leave to go home to his wife and children, whose company he most desired." The King, we are told a little later, took such pleasure in More's company that he would "sometimes come to his house at Chelsea to be merry with him" while "after dinner, in a fair garden of his, [the King] walked with him by the space of an hour, holding his arm about his neck."⁶

This idyllic friendship, in comparison to which Ennius and Scipius Africanus seem very cold companions indeed, finds its own distorted gloss in a letter which More wrote from the Tower to his daughter Margaret, the biographer's wife, around April 17, 1534. Removed from the eyes of the prince and former companion, More recalls a scene at Lambeth, where he was asked to take the oath that was designed to confirm the king's authority over the church and enable him to marry, and be merry, as often as it pleased him.⁷ More refused to swear and was sent away, but instead of going into the garden as commanded he remained in a chamber that overlooked it, and from there observed the following scene:

⁶ William Roper, *The Life of Sir Thomas More*, in *Two Early Tudor Lives*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester and Davis P. Harding (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), pp. 202, 208.

⁷ "[A] pretie and mery new enterlude" called *The Disobedient Child* depicts a disobedient son who "is not merry, until he be married." One is particularly tempted to apply the following lines from this sixteenth-century interlude to Henry: "He is not merry, until he be married, / He hath of knavery took such a smell"; Richard Wever and Thomas Ingelend, *Dramatic Writings*, ed. John S. Farmer (London: Early English Drama Society, 1905), pp. 56, 71.

In that time saw I Maister Doctour Lattemer come in to the gardein, and ther walked he with diuers other doctours and chapleins of my Lorde of Caunterbury, and very mery I saw hym, for he laughed, and toke one or tweyne about the necke so handsomely, that if they had been women, I wolde haue went he had ben waxen wanton.⁸

The familiar moment from Roper's *Life*, in which Henry, Catherine, and More were merry together, is anticipated here by a little drama set in a heat-oppressed garden in which men embrace other men and where women only feature as the absent element that nonetheless ensures the moral probity of the close homosocial transactions.⁹ The "worthy counselor," as More is remembered toward the end of Roper's *Life* (254), has been excluded from these transactions, but his assent is still required and his eye still provides the basic dramatic perspective on the events.

It will be the purpose of this chapter to consider the role which dramatic conceits—where conceit means both metaphor and idea—play in the larger narratives of counsel in early modern England, and thus set the stage for the chapters that follow. Because it is performative in nature, drama seems less likely than other kinds of literature to divorce itself from what we habitually refer to as the realities of life, but its relationship to any kind of historical reality is a complex one. This relationship is significantly affected by what drama decides to treat of but also

⁸ *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Elizabeth Frances Rogers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 503. On the importance of Margaret in More's life, particularly during his final years, as well as in the construction of his posthumous fame, see John Guy, *A Daughter's Love: Thomas & Margaret More* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008).

⁹ To these gardens should be added the garden in which the conversations from the first book of *Utopia* take place. The importance of this image in More's works more generally, and in *Utopia* in particular, is discussed by Wayne A. Rebhorn, "Thomas More's Enclosed Garden: *Utopia* and Renaissance Humanism," *English Literary Renaissance* 6.2 (1976): 140-155.

by the kind of dramatic representation, the literary tradition drama necessarily draws upon, the language in which it is expressed and which it in turn attempts to yoke to its own purpose, the particulars of theatrical performance (of stage, actor, or property) that are inscribed within the dramatic text and that keep drawing it back to its moments of origin while it strives to outlive any particular moment of the past and to find, instead, novel habitations and new literary and theatrical meanings in the present moment of reading, interpretation, impersonation. The relationship between drama and counsel embodies this historical problem in a persistent way; by studying this relationship we can learn something about the life of literature, particularly dramatic literature, in history.

To understand and illustrate this double process I turn in this chapter to the figure of Thomas More because it is firmly and richly lodged at the intersection of drama and counsel, politics and artistic representation, but also because it silently haunts drama's engagement with counsel throughout the sixteenth century, and beyond. After observing the scene of intimacy between More and his sovereign, William Roper records his happiness at the fact, as the King had never been seen in such familiarity with anyone else, "except Cardinal Wolsey," Roper adds, "whom I saw his grace once walk with, arm in arm." While grateful for the special royal favors, More is much more skeptical about his romance with sovereign power: "Howbeit, son Roper," he comments, "I may tell thee I have no cause to be proud thereof, for if my head could win him a castle in France (for then was there war between us) it should not fail to go."¹⁰ This is a grim picture of the political logic of the Henrician court, and it shows More's deep understanding of

¹⁰ Roper, *The Life of Sir Thomas More*, p. 208.

the tyrannical potential that he saw in his prince.¹¹ Although the prevalent political metaphor of the time represents counsel (*consilium*) as married to authority (*imperium*) or the counselor as *amicus principis*—both subtly and almost dramatically illustrated in the passages quoted above—it is a marriage that, in England at least, proved as precarious as the king’s real marriages.¹²

The rhetorical complexity and the humanist playfulness of More’s life and work have become critical commonplaces, yet a fresh examination of the role which dramatic conceits play in More’s moral and political thought, and especially in his treatment of what has come to be called “the problem of counsel” in the period,¹³ will reveal the significant and still very relevant implications this interplay has not just for our understanding of More and the culture of early sixteenth-century humanism in England but, more to the point, for our approach to the early modern dramatic record and its own engagement with counsel.

¹¹ On the tyrannical nature of Henry VIII’s government, esp. in its problematic relation to counsel, see Greg Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹² See John Guy, “The Rhetoric of Counsel in Early Modern England,” *Tudor Political Culture*, ed. Dale Hoak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 292-310. The metaphor of the conjugal bond between sovereignty and counsel is treated early in Francis Bacon’s essay “Of Counsell”: “The Ancient Times doe set forth in Figure, both the Incorporation and, inseparable Conjunction of *Counsel* with *Kings*; And the wise and Politique use of *Counsell* by *Kings*: The one, in that they say, *Jupiter* did marry *Metis*, which signifieth *Counsell*: Whereby they intend, that *Soveraignty* is married to *Counsell*.” As Jupiter eats up *Metis* in order to himself give birth to *Pallas*, so kings impregnate their councils of state with the matter submitted to them for deliberation, then take the matter back and deliver it as if it came “from their *Head*, and *Device*”; Francis Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan, The Oxford Francis Bacon, vol. 15 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000 [1985]), p. 64. Bacon’s complex conception of counsel will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 below.

¹³ See, for example, Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965), esp. chapter III, pp. 70-90; Stanford E. Lehmborg, “English Humanists, the Reformation, and the Problem of Counsel,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 52 (1961): 74-91; F. W. Conrad, “The Problem of Counsel Reconsidered: The Case of Sir Thomas Elyot,” in *Political Thought and the Tudor Commonwealth: Deep Structure, Discourse and Disguise*, ed. Paul A. Fideler and T. F. Mayer (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 75-107; J. H. Hexter, “Thomas More and the Problem of Counsel,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 10 (1978): 55-66.

The witty and wise counselor and poet will eventually find a logical, though extremely complicated, dramatic expression in the collaborative play of *Sir Thomas More*, composed at the end of the sixteenth century. It is by analyzing this play in the latter part of the chapter that I intend to illustrate the close relationship that existed in the period between dramatic imagination and the theory and culture of counsel. By focusing on the composite moral interlude staged within *Sir Thomas More*, I want to show how this interlude is made possible by the entire tradition of earlier moral drama and its repeated treatments and uses of counsel. To chart the basic outline of that tradition and to insist on its lively relevance for later drama is a task that other chapters of this study will continue to address. We shall see, finally, that, particularly in his later works, More cast the notorious problem of his conscience in terms of a moral play in which counsel is the central issue. The author/s of *Sir Thomas More* understood this conflict well and chose to articulate it by recourse to the dramatic tradition in which drama and counsel, the moral and the political, continuously and productively coexisted.

Fruitful, Pleasant, and Witty: More's Politic Poesy

Puttenham's failure to mention Thomas More where we would expect to find him, namely in the company of princes, appears especially odd when we realize that More is mentioned elsewhere in the work. We find him in Chapter 19 of the first book of *The Art of English Poesy*, devoted to "historical poesy, by which the famous acts of princes and the virtuous and worthy lives of our forefathers were reported" (128). The princes, it is true, are there, but they are removed in time and accessible to the poet as biographical subjects rather than real men, their lives more likely to

be reconstructed from historical documents—what Puttenham suggestively calls the “mass of memories assembled” (128)—than from lived experience. Reconstructed—or perhaps constructed, for More’s *Richard III*, to take one example, is famously controversial for its influential representation of this archetypal royal pretender as “little of stature, ill fetured of limmes, croke backed, [...] malicious, wrathfull, enuious, and from afore his birth, euer frowarde”; he even came into the world “not vntothed.”¹⁴ Perhaps because it features a villain rather than a virtuous prince, More’s *Richard III* is not the work Puttenham chooses to illustrate the preeminence of historical poesy. Instead, at the point where he explains that historical poetry is not always entirely historical but that it often mingles fact with fiction, he turns to *Utopia*, More’s most famous work.¹⁵

More, like Puttenham, was extremely aware of the importance and power of fictional representation, its central place in the thinking about and ordering of life. *Utopia* (1516) is largely fictional, yet as the rich archives of existing criticism have amply demonstrated, there is a deep seriousness and a genuine concern for the way in which people conduct, or ought to

¹⁴ Thomas More, *The History of King Richard III*, in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 2, ed. Richard S. Sylvester (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 7. For the consideration of More’s *Richard III* as a work of literature rather than straightforward historiography see Leonard F. Dean, “Literary Problems in More’s *Richard III*,” *PMLA* 58.1 (1943): 22-41. Dean notes the close association of humanist historiography with epideictic oratory (23), in accordance with the ancient rhetorical traditions, and points out that “a great merit of *Richard III* is its literary excellence” (24). The unfortunate results of “the failure or refusal of scholars to comprehend its [*Richard III*’s] literary nature” are discussed by Arthur Noel Kincaid, “The Dramatic Structure of Sir Thomas More’s *History of King Richard III*,” *Studies in English Literature* 12.2 (1972): 223-242, esp. at p. 224. See also the chapter entitled “Sir Thomas More’s Satirical Drama” in Alison Hanham, *Richard III and His Early Historians, 1483-1535* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 152-190. On the larger question of More’s literary artistry and reputation see Leland Miles, “The Literary Artistry of Thomas More: *The Dialogue of Comfort*,” *Studies in English Literature* 6.1 (1966): 7-33.

¹⁵ It is worth noting, however, that More’s translations of Lucian were printed more frequently during his lifetime than any other of his works, including *Utopia*. See C. R. Thompson, *The Translations of Lucian by Erasmus and St. Thomas More* (Ithaca, New York, 1940), p. 3; R. Bracht Branham, “Utopian Laughter: Lucian and Thomas More,” *Moreana* 22.86 (1985): 23-43, at p. 23.

conduct, their everyday affairs in the real world. The text communicates this serious concern despite its memorable ludic qualities, multiple framings, and dialogic form. “Elizabethan readers,” Terence Cave aptly observes, “were evidently entirely capable of grasping the essential point that the power of *Utopia* to deliver its high political message is inseparable from its character as a fiction.”¹⁶ Whatever that political message may be, we should add, for the relationship between poesy and political thought—the kind of thought that is articulated in the poetic mode—is precisely what is at issue here. That relationship is additionally complicated by the fact that *Utopia*, as Edward Surtz remarks, “is not merely a dialogue”; unlike Plato’s *Republic*, “it is a dramatic dialogue”—it deliberately “employs techniques of the drama.”¹⁷

The literary aspect of the undertaking is underscored in the 1518 edition of *Utopia* by the inclusion of More’s and Erasmus’s epigrams.¹⁸ Yet in the epigrams, too, we see More frequently turning to political topics, especially to the vexed questions of kingship and tyranny. Damian Grace rightly suggests that the *Epigrammata* should be of interest to political theorists or historians of political thought as much as to literary scholars if their aim is “the study of political

¹⁶ Thomas More’s *Utopia in Early Modern Europe: Paratexts and Contexts*, ed. Terence Cave (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 98.

¹⁷ Thomas More, *Utopia*, in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 4, ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), p. cxxxiv. There is a long-standing debate between the more literary (or comic) and the more political readings of *Utopia*. For some prominent contributions to this debate see the references in Quentin Skinner, “Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* and the Language of Renaissance Humanism,” in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 123-157; Alistair Fox, *Utopia: An Elusive Vision* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), pp. 15-24; David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 17-19. The most recent overview of scholarship, including information on earlier bibliographies, is Albert J. Geritz, “Recent Studies in More (1990-2003),” *English Literary Renaissance* 35.1 (2005): 123-155.

¹⁸ Thomas More, *The Latin Epigrams of Thomas More*, ed. and trans. Leicester Bradner and Charles Arthur Lynch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953). A number of More’s epigrams are translated from the *Greek Anthology*.

discourse and its changes in time.”¹⁹ Epigram 182, entitled “*Quis optimus reipublicae status*,” recalls the topic of *Utopia* (*De optimo reipublicae statu*) and addresses the question of whether it is better to be governed by a king or a senate, but—characteristically—concludes without a definite answer. Instead of considering to whom power should be given, the fictive addressee of the poem is instructed, one should ask what good it would do if one actually had the power to give power to anybody. Should one be able to give power? And is that a good idea?²⁰ The initial question is thus not fully answered; it is simply rephrased and playfully redirected.

Kings, on the whole, however, do not fare very well in these Latin poems. As the modern editors of the collection observe, it was unusual for an epigrammatist to treat of kingship. Furthermore, the author seems much more interested in bad than in good kings: “whereas the existence of good kings is a theoretical possibility, the existence of tyrants is a present danger.”²¹ To the group of epigrams usually cited as addressing the question of tyranny we should probably add epigram 21 (translated from the Greek), which reduces the majesty of kings (their *potestas*) to the power of a fart.²² No doubt this is one of the reasons why Beatus Rhenanus, in his letter to

¹⁹ Damian Grace, “Thomas More’s *Epigrammata*: Political Theory in a Poetic Idiom,” *Parergon* 3 (1985): 115-129, at p. 115. More recently, the question of political discourse in the *Epigrammata* has been tackled by Emily Ann Ransom, “The Intersection of Poetry and Politics in More’s *Epigrammata*,” *Moreana* 47.181/82 (2010): 219-234.

²⁰ Compare the translation of the final lines in More, *Latin Epigrams*, p. 205, with the translation in Thomas More, *Latin Poems*, in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 3, part II, ed. Clarence H. Miller, Leicester Bradner, Charles A. Lynch, and Revilo P. Oliver (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), where it is poem number 198, pp. 228-231. For a recent historical overview of the medieval and early modern terminology relating to the different forms of government (one, few, and many), see James Hankins, “Exclusivist Republicanism and the Non-Monarchical Republic,” *Political Theory* 38.4 (2010): 452-482; see also Quentin Skinner, “Political Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 389-452, esp. pp. 389-402.

²¹ More, *Latin Epigrams*, p. xxviii.

²² More, *Latin Epigrams*, p. 28 (Latin), p. 150 (English).

Willibald Pirckheimer prefacing the first edition of More's epigrams, refers to them as "these amusing trifles" (*lusus*).²³ In what will, especially in England, become a typical gesture of ambiguous reference, Rhenanus turns from these amusing trifles to *Utopia* to suggest that, while the epigrams show More's natural talent and his extraordinary learning (*Mori ingenium ostendunt et insignem eruditionem*), his *Utopia* represents the author's keen judgment of things (*iudicium nimirum acre, quod de rebus habet*).²⁴ The principles expounded in *Utopia* are not to be found in either Plato or Aristotle, not even in Justinian, Rhenanus observes without explaining what that should mean, but the vague compliment might make us wonder whether these principles are sound at all when they are so absolutely absent from these authorities.

Rhenanus goes on to say that More perhaps teaches less philosophically than the writers mentioned, but in a more Christian manner, and concludes his assessment of *Utopia* by relating a story he had recently heard. A thick fellow (*pinguis*, originally meaning fat, and then by extension dense, insipid) objected to Rhenanus's praise of *Utopia* since More expresses in that work no opinion of his own.²⁵ He is, the criticism continues, a mere reporter—what there is of

²³ More, *Latin Epigrams*, p. 5 (Latin), p. 127 (English). Literary play (*lusus*) is a significant concept, crucial in many ways for understanding both More and Erasmus, especially in their relation to Lucian, from whom it is ultimately derived. More on this idea and its implications for English literature, particularly drama, can be found in Douglas Duncan's elegant study *Ben Jonson and the Lucianic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), *passim*; a succinct explanation of the concept is given on p. 24.

²⁴ The translators of More's Latin epigrams take *res* to mean "politics" (127), but that may be misleading. The word is broad enough to mean practically anything relating to the affairs of life, but as will become apparent from what follows Rhenanus never mentions *res publicas*, choosing instead to consider *Utopia* in philosophical perspective. Compare Rhenanus's phrasing with Guillaume Budé's mention of More's "profound experience in judging human affairs" (*res humanae*), prefaced to the 1517 edition of *Utopia*; my quotation is from Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. and trans. George M. Logan, Robert M. Adams, and Clarence H. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 8-9.

²⁵ Compare this with the way in which Photius, a ninth-century Byzantine writer, characterizes Lucian, a significant influence on *Utopia*: "He seems to be one of those persons who regard nothing seriously; ridiculing and mocking at the opinions of others, he does not state what opinions he himself holds, unless we may say that his opinion is that

thought or content there, it is to be ascribed to Hythloday; More just related it skillfully (*commode retulisset*). The role that More plays, in other words, is that of a mute character on a stage (*doriphorematis ritu*, from the Greek *doryphorêma*), who has no lines of his own. Some of those who were present agreed with this description, which prompts Rhenanus to switch languages and conclude the discussion of *Utopia* in Greek: More's merry jest (*hariantisma*)—the device by which he framed *Utopia*, or perhaps *Utopia* itself—deceived even this learned, and theological, company.²⁶

More problematically, the slippage between Greek and Latin as well as the frequent use of More's name, which in both of these languages (as *morus* in Latin and as *môros* in Greek) suggests dullness, leaves a great deal of uncertainty about what is actually being said here and whether perhaps Rhenanus himself is not writing, to a degree at least, tongue-in-cheek. For he chooses to characterize *Utopia* by undertaking to tell a story about it, in which the principal speaker is a thick-headed fellow. The manner, once again, is inseparable from the matter, and the dull objector may not be wrong in assuming that More's major contribution is the way in which

one can know nothing for certain"; *The Library of Photius*, trans. J. H. Freese (London and New York, 1920), p. 215, quoted from Craig R. Thompson, "Lucian and Lucianism in the English Renaissance: An Introductory Study," Ph.D. Dissertation (Princeton University, 1937), pp. 40-41.

²⁶ Consider, in this connection, the merry dialogue between the friar and the fool in the first book of *Utopia* ("festivus dialogus fratris et morionis," as the marginal note describes it); *Utopia*, ed. Logan *et al.*, pp. 76-81. As Anne Lake Prescott points out, More's "merry tales" and "quick answers" were mentioned in the anecdotes that after his death celebrated More's jocular disposition and his incomparable wit. Even More's *Utopia*, Prescott notes in passing, may be no more than a merry tale—a suggestion which no disinterested discussion of this work's political design can afford to overlook. See Anne Lake Prescott, "The Ambivalent Heart: Thomas More's Merry Tales," *Criticism* 45.4 (2003): 417-433, at p. 417; also Mary Thelca, "St. Thomas More's 'Merye Laughing Harvest,'" in *If By Your Art: Testament to Percival Hunt*, ed. Agnes Lynch Starrett (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1948), pp. 161-173.

he discusses the best state of a commonwealth; what the objector fails to see is that the way in which the discussion is conducted is essential to any real understanding of the book.²⁷

Perhaps, then, following Rhenanus's characterization of More's epigrams as having "a certain very delightful humor" and of their author as "every inch pure jest," we should not forget that the same principle informs *Utopia* too. We can say of More that he is "every inch pure jest," Rhenanus observes, just as "Syrus in the play by Terence neatly praises Demea by saying 'You are every inch pure wisdom.'"²⁸ The point is that there is no clear distinction between More's wisdom and his jest, and, while attempting to establish one, the dramatic parallel does the opposite: we would expect to find wisdom in More and jest in Terence rather than the other way around. E. E. Reynolds captures this insight well when he says of More that he is "happiest when he is recording action or writing dialogue, when, that is, he is writing dramatically."²⁹

²⁷ In the course of his epistle to Pirckheimer, Rhenanus mentions Budé's epistle to Lupset, published in the 1517 edition of *Utopia*. It seems to me that what Rhenanus is doing is simply fictionalizing Budé's own interesting assessment of More's contribution to *Utopia* (the switch from Latin to Greek and then back to Latin is found in Budé as well, where the Greek text explains More's scrupulousness about assuming the central role in the book, since that would probably offend Hythloday, Budé suggests). On More's indisputable contribution Budé notes: "Thus, if Hythloday is the architect of the Utopian nation, the founder of its customs and institutions from which he has borrowed and brought home for us the very pattern of a happy life, More certainly is its adorer, who has bestowed on the island and its holy institutions the grace of his style, the polish of his diction"; *Utopia*, ed. Logan *et al.*, p. 17.

²⁸ More, *Latin Epigrams*, p. 126.

²⁹ E. E. Reynolds, *Sir Thomas More, Writers and Their Work*, no. 178 (London: Published for The British Council and the National Book League by Longmans, Green & Co., 1965), p. 13.

More's Cue for Counsel: Dumb Parts and Marred Plays

It is this work of dramatic imagination and theatrical inversion that needs to be understood in More's works—and in the general literary attitude of early-sixteenth-century humanism—if we are to understand the way in which drama in turn responds to More and his legacy. As we shall see, the central question of counsel is elaborated in *Utopia* by means of an extended dramatic comparison that makes a series of significant points about the relationship between the performance of drama and the successful performance of counsel. To be fully comprehended, the relevant moment in *Utopia* needs to be contextualized both in relation to More's other works and in relation to other texts he is drawing on or alluding to.

Erasmus mentions that More both wrote little comedies and acted in them,³⁰ and we see him very early in Roper's *Life* distinguished for his histrionic talent, the remarkable ability to join the players without marring the play. In the house of that "right reverend, wise, and learned prelate, Cardinal Morton," Roper tells us, More would "at Christmas-tide suddenly sometimes

³⁰ Desiderius Erasmus to Ulrich Hutten, 23 July 1519. Erasmus mentions More's little comedies in a passage in which he comments on More's merry disposition and love of witty sayings, even when they are directed against himself. He is also to be blamed, Erasmus concludes, for the creation of *The Praise of Folly*; *Opus Epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, vol. 4 (1519-1521), ed. P. S. Allen and H. M. Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), p. 16. On More's authorship of plays see also *John Bale's Catalogue of Tudor Authors*, trans. J. Christopher Warner (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2010), Century 8.LXIX, p. 42, where the list for Thomas More opens with "Comoediae iuueniles, Lib. 1." More has also been detected among the playful characters in Erasmus's colloquy *Exorcismus, sive Spectrum* (translated into English in 1567 by Thomas Johnson); for a discussion of this possibility as well as for the text of the colloquy, see Desiderius Erasmus, *Colloquies*, trans. Craig R. Thompson, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vols. 39-40 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), vol. 39, pp. 531-544. For overviews of the issues discussed in what follows, see: Walter M. Gordon, "Dramatic Elements in the Writings of Saint Thomas More," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of London, 1966); Richard S. Sylvester, "A Part of His Own: Thomas More's Literary Personality in His Early Works," *Moreana* 4.15-16 (1967): 29-42; Howard B. Norland, "The Role of Drama in More's Literary Career," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 13.4 (1982): 59-75.

step in among the players, and never studying for the matter, make a part of his own there presently among them, which made the lookers-on more sport than all the players beside.” It is this particular talent, More’s “wit and towardness” in the play of life, that prompts Cardinal Morton’s prophetic assessment: “This child here waiting at the table, whosoever shall live to see it, will prove a marvellous man.”³¹

One of the most dramatically developed moments in More’s *History of King Richard III* is undoubtedly the passage which the marginal note announces with the words “The protector taketh vppon him to be kyng.” It is preceded by the long courting of the Protector by the nobility to accept the crown of England and France, cleverly stage-managed by the Protector himself and engagingly described by More, who dwells on the detail and slowly reenacts the play of power. That the elaborate event was perceived as a dramatic performance even by the people who were made the instruments of it becomes clear from their agitated conversation as they depart from the scene. “But much they talked and marueiled of the maner of this dealing,” writes More, “that the matter was on both partes made so straunge, as though neither had euer communed with other therof before, when that themself wel wist there was no man so dul that heard them, but he perceued wel inough, that all the matter was made betwene them.”³² The

³¹ Roper, *The Life of Sir Thomas More*, pp. 197-198. Frederick S. Boas opens his influential *Introduction to Tudor Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) by discussing “the early Tudor group of playwrights,” at the center of which he places More since all the members of the group were in some way related to him: “In Morton’s service he [i.e. More] doubtless came into touch with Henry Medwall, the Cardinal’s chaplain, and author of our first known secular play, *Fulgens and Lucres*. This play was printed by John Rastell, himself a dramatist, who married More’s sister, Elizabeth. Their daughter, Joan, married John Heywood, the leading dramatist of the group. Thus Tudor drama begins as almost a family affair, with the genial, finely-tempered spirit of More presiding over it” (3).

³² More, *History of King Richard III*, pp. 80-81. The quotations that follow are from these pages as well. On the dramatic aspects of this work more generally, see A. F. Pollard, “The Making of Sir Thomas More’s *Richard III*,” in *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait*, ed. J. G. Edwards, V. H. Galbraith, and E. F. Jacob (Manchester: Printed for the subscribers, 1933), pp. 223-238; Kincaid, “The Dramatic Structure of Sir Thomas More’s *History of King*

courting of the nobility and Richard's feigned reluctance produced a long spectacle the essence of which the attending citizens could not quite disentangle. Is it all feigning, or is it that "all must be done in good order," which would by necessity make it appear artificial? What we learn is that "menne must sommetime for the manner sake not bee a knowen what they knowe"—that willing suspension of disbelief is as crucial to the good order of a major political event as it is to the performance of a play.

To make this interlinking of dramatic performance and political ritual even more vivid More develops it further in such a way that it is impossible to say whether what we find in the text is the voice of the narrator or the reported voices of the people discussing what they have just witnessed. Two examples are brought to bear on the observed experience. Appropriately enough, one of them concerns a ritual of (in this case spiritual) power, the other a ritual of the theater. At the consecration of a bishop, we are told, the candidate must be asked twice whether he will be bishop, "and he muste twyse say naye," only to accept upon the third asking. The second example follows:

And in a stage play all the people know right wel, that he that playeth the sowdayne is percuse a sowter. Yet if one should can so lyttle good, to shewe out of seasonne what acquaintance he hath with him, and calle him by his owne name whyle he standeth in his magestie, one of his tormentors might hap to breake his head, and worthy for marring of the play. And so they said that these matters bee Kynges games, as it were stage playes,

Richard III"; Hanham, *Richard III and His Early Historians, 1483-1535*, pp. 152-190; Norland, "The Role of Drama in More's Literary Career," pp. 63-66. In his discussion of the destiny of Richard III in later historiography A. R. Myers wonders "whether More regarded himself as writing history" at all: "his story is much more like a drama, unfolded in magnificent prose, for which fidelity to historical fact is scarcely relevant"; "The Character of Richard III," *History Today* 4.8 (1954): 511-521, at p. 515.

and for the more part plaid vpon scaffoldes. In which pore men be but the lokers on. And thei that wise be, wil medle no farther. For they that sometyme step vp and playe with them, when they cannot play their partes, they disorder the play & do themself no good.

That the person playing the sultan may to those who bring the experience of the world to bear on the play be known as a shoemaker is of little moment. What matters is the persistent power of the dramatic fiction, that good order of things which needs to be upheld if the play is not to be marred. Even though the people know that what they are witnessing may be no more than a stage play, yet the word “scaffold”—standing for a particular kind of stage but bringing in much more terrifying associations as well—suggests that meddling in it may not be a good idea. Fiction cannot be separated from fact, and even when it can it can still break one’s pate.³³

The full Latin version of this passage is found in a single manuscript discovered and edited only in the second half of the twentieth century by Daniel Kinney.³⁴ The differences between the English and the two Latin versions are worth noting because the dramatic vocabulary in particular undergoes some changes. For example, the “stage play” is specifically called *tragaedia* / *tragoedia* while instead of the sultan we find the more generic term *imperator* (as Sylvester notes [p. 259], the English phrasing may be recalling here “one of the Pharaoh plays from the medieval cycles”). What disturbs the play is stated more specifically in the Latin

³³ Cf. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 14.

³⁴ It has been published in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 15 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986) as “A New Text and Translation of *Historia Ricardi Tertii*.” The textual history of the *Historia* is discussed on pp. cxxxiii-cliv, and the relevant passage can be found on pp. 482-483. The implications for the diverging English texts are discussed by David Womersley, *Divinity and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 40-56, which is a revised version of his “Sir Thomas More’s *History of King Richard III*: A New Theory of the English Texts,” *Renaissance Studies* 7.3 (1993): 272-290. The Latin text printed earlier by Sylvester in vol. 2 of *The Complete Works* only has the first part of the passage I quoted, roughly corresponding to the English text up to “worthy for marring of the play.”

text: it is the bad joke of the spectator that prompts the sound beating furnished by the emperor's retainers (who are themselves, of course, part of the play: *personati satellites* in Sylvester's text, *simulati* in Kinney's). The bad joke is an "untimely truth" (*intempestiua veritas*) that upsets the fiction (*fabula*, which also means "a play"). The people's role is to watch, not to join the "tragic spectacles of kings" (*tragicos ludos regum*, translated by Kinney as "a regal tragicomedy"), for such a transgression would lead to their own, very real, tragedy.

More's use of this extended dramatic conceit is often linked to a passage in Lucian's dialogue *Menippus*, translated by More into Latin (as *Menippus sive Necromantia*), which describes the similarity of human affairs to stage actions.³⁵ As Leonard F. Dean quite rightly insists, however, More's use of this conceit in *Richard III* is much closer to what we find in Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* than in Lucian's *Menippus*.³⁶ In fact, I will suggest that Erasmus draws on Lucian more directly while also introducing the important idea of the marring of the play. This concern for dramatic integrity is fully evident in the passage from *The History of Richard III*, but it is in *Utopia* that we find it directly applied to the problem of counsel and to the question of the "more civil kind of philosophy."³⁷

³⁵ See More, *Translations of Lucian*, pp. 24-43 (Greek text and More's Latin translation), 144-145 (discussion of the topos), 169-179 (English translation); Arthur F. Kinney, *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), pp. 78-80.

³⁶ Dean, "Literary Problems in More's *Richard III*," p. 35.

³⁷ More generally on the dramatic qualities of More's *Utopia* see Edward Surtz's discussion of it as a three-act play, furnished with a prologue and an epilogue and distinguished by the use of a frame-within-a-frame technique; More, *Utopia*, ed. Surtz and Hexter, p. cxlvi. Michèle Le Doeuff on the other hand suggests that the island of Utopia is itself significantly shaped like a stage or an amphitheater, and proceeds to discuss the work with these theatrical implications in mind; *The Philosophical Imaginary*, trans. Colin Gordon (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), Chapter 2, "Daydream in *Utopia*," pp. 21-28.

The rather disturbing images from *Richard III* haunt More's discussion of the notion of *philosophia civilior* which occurs in the conversation between Peter Giles, Raphael Hythloday, and the persona More. After being introduced to Hythloday, an experienced traveler and a scholar versed more in Greek than in Latin because of his devotion to philosophy,³⁸ More admiringly listens to the man and then hastens to suggest that Hythloday should "followe some Princes courte" and by furnishing good counsel "greatlye helpe and further the commen wealthe."³⁹ The suggestion is met with a mixture of surprise and indignation. It triggers a long response in which Hythloday justifies his rejection of that idea as, we would say today, truly and thoroughly utopian: kings do not welcome the counsel of philosophers, and facing the prince with plain truths or telling him that he is "infected, and corrupt with peruerse, and euill opinions" (E5v) will result in the counselor being "driuen awaye, or elles made a laughyng stocke" (E6r).

More, however, disagrees. He describes Hythloday's argument as hopelessly scholastic, quite out of touch with the world. "This schole philosophie," he observes, "is not vnpleasaunte amonge frendes in familiare communication, but in the counselles of kinges, where greate matters be debated and reasoned with greate authoritye, these thinges haue no place" (F5v). To have a real impact on the life of the polis, philosophy needs to undergo a significant transformation. Since it is wrong to think "all thinges mete for euery place," the theory of good

³⁸ On the vexed issue of the contending claims in *Utopia* between the Greek philosophical tradition, especially Plato, and the Roman rhetorical heritage, especially Cicero, see Eric Nelson, "Greek Nonsense in More's *Utopia*," *The Historical Journal* 44.4 (2001): 889-917, and "Utopia through Italian Eyes: Thomas More and the Critics of Civic Humanism," *Renaissance Quarterly* 59.4 (2006): 1029-1057. Even though Nelson explicitly sides with the Greeks and sees in *Utopia*, particularly in its early reception in Italy, a repudiation of the ideas of civic humanism (largely inspired by Cicero), his articles constitute a good guide to this long-standing debate, one of the many surrounding *Utopia*.

³⁹ Thomas More, *A fruteful and pleasaunt worke of the beste state of a publyque weale, and of the newe yle called Vtopia*, trans. Ralph Robinson (London: Abraham Vele, 1551), sig. E5r. Further references are given parenthetically.

and plainly-spoken counsel must yield its place to “an other philosophy more ciuile” (*philosophia civilior*), a mode of thinking and speaking governed by circumstance rather than a set of ideal and unchanging propositions (F6r).

The problem of a more civil kind of philosophy has been recognized as in many ways central to More’s thinking as well as to the actual political choices he made in the course of his career. What is less often noticed, however, is the fact that in order to explain what this philosophy amounts to and how it is supposed to be practiced More turns to drama. *Philosophia civilior*, More remarks, “knoweth, as ye wolde say, her owne stage”; it is fully aware of “the playe that she hath in hande” and therefore “playethe her parte accordingelye” (F6r). The dramatic parallel continues: imagine, More further observes, that a comedy of Plautus is being staged, and everyone is enjoying the play’s humor, and then “you [...] sodenlye come vpon the stage in a Philosophers apparrell, and reherse oute of Octauia the place wherein Seneca disputeth with Nero” (F6r). It would have been preferable for the philosopher “to haue played the domme persone”⁴⁰ instead of turning a comedy into “a tragycall comedye or gallymalfreye” (F6r).⁴¹ Seneca’s *Octavia* may indeed be better than the comedy at hand, and the speech much more instructive than what is found in Plautus, but the event is spoiled and little is gained. So it is with

⁴⁰ This is the same role, that of *doryphorêma* (a mute character), which the anonymous objector invokes to describe More’s role in the composition of *Utopia*, as related by Rhenanus in his letter to Pirckheimer (discussed above). More’s Latin text has *muta persona*; *Utopia*, ed. Logan *et al.*, p. 96.

⁴¹ More’s Latin only has *tragicomoedia* (*Utopia*, ed. Logan *et al.*, p. 96); “gallimaufry” is Robinson’s embellishment. It also happens to be the earliest recorded example of the word, according to the *OED*. Compare this to Sidney’s objections in *An Apologie for Poetrie* (London: Henry Olney, 1595), sig. K2r: “But besides these grosse absurdities, how all theyr Playes be neither right Tragedies, nor right Comedies: mingling Kings & Clownes, not because the matter so carrieth it: but thrust in Clownes by head & shoulders, to play a part in maiesticall matters, with neither decencie, nor discretion. So as neither the admiration & commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mungrell Tragycomedie obtained.” More’s account of dramatic decorum, including his anticipation of Sidney, is briefly discussed in the context of the history of Renaissance literary criticism by George Williamson, “Sir Thomas More’s View of Drama,” *Modern Language Notes* 43.5 (1928): 294-296.

the commonwealth, More concludes: “you must with a crafty wile and a subtell trayne studye and endeuoure youre selfe, asmuche as in you lyethe, to handle the matter wyttelye and handesomely for the purpose, and that whyche you can not turne to good, so to order it that it be not uerye badde” (F6v-F7r).⁴²

“A fine and a fitte similitude,” as the above dramatic parallel is described in the margin of the first English translation of this work, serves not so much to signal its author’s humanist wit—with its playfulness and, especially in More’s case, conscious theatricality—as to emphasize one of the distinctive cultural and intellectual traits of the period: the tendency to use fiction, particularly dramatic fiction, in the attempt to analyze and understand the world.⁴³ More’s choice of his dramatic example is extremely subtle. Hythloday, we should notice, does not engage in a dialogue; he alone delivers the dialogue between Nero and Seneca, and he is placed in a play which shows us the inability of the philosophically minded counselor to change the tyrant’s opinions.

This moment in *Utopia* introduces not simply the familiar idea of the political arena as a stage upon which one enters at one’s given cue; more importantly, it introduces a series of considerations that qualify that entrance. The most significant of these is the question of decorum, here figured in terms of generic solecisms and the ensuing gallimaufry: the necessity of

⁴² Compare with this the following passage from Sir Thomas Elyot’s dialogue *Pasquil the Playne* (Londini: in aedibus Thomae Bertheleti, 1533), sigs. A4v-A5r, where the flatterer Gnato is speaking to Pasquillus: “I remembre / that ones I asked a man, that was wise and veyre well lerned, how I mought sonest come to promotion: he sayde. vsyng Aeschylus counsaylle / whiche was a writar of tragedies: and I demanded / what it was. And he answered holdyng thy tonge wher it behouet the. And spekyng in tyme that whiche is conuenient. And the same lesson Pasquillus if thou woldeste obserue, I doubt not, but that thou shuldest fynd therin no lytle commoditie.”

⁴³ On the importance of drama as a mode of intellectual and moral inquiry in the period, see Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). Altman, however, sees this inquiry as “released from the practical considerations of daily life” (389).

recognizing what is appropriate to be said, and in what manner, if it is to have the desired effect. The counselor, in other words, needs to conform to the precepts of the humanist rhetorical program, distinguished by its pragmatism and skeptical of any kind of philosophical idealism. As Victoria Kahn explains, this approach “rejects the validity of universal truth claims” and argues, instead, for “a conception of truth that involves reference not to some absolute ethical norm but rather to a standard of decorum, likelihood, or probability.” Eloquence thus becomes inseparable from prudence while “[a]esthetic decorum is seen to be inseparable from political effectiveness.”⁴⁴

While deploying the idea of decorum to make a specific point about counsel, More is making that deployment resonate more widely by using and adapting some of the most popular texts of his time. We find a very similar statement in the book for whose title More’s name provided a very famous pun and which, Erasmus tells us, was very much a result of More’s pushiness—*The Praise of Folly (Moriae Encomium)*. The importance of the extended dramatic example found in *The Praise of Folly* for our understanding of More’s *History of Richard III*, particularly its recurrent dramatic conceits, has already been noted,⁴⁵ but the passage seems to have left as deep an imprint on *Utopia*. As observed above, Erasmus clearly develops the conceit found in Lucian’s dialogue *Menippus sive Necromantia*, which More translated into Latin and

⁴⁴ Victoria Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 25, 36, 44. On this point see also Hanna H. Gray, “Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24.4 (1963): 497-514, at p. 506. As Betsy Weisberger Seifter notes, Renaissance rhetorical manuals often “present the orator as a kind of actor, playing on and to an audience as circumstances require.” She further observes that this rhetorical/theatrical performance “varies according to the situation from a pure exhibition designed to elicit pleasure, as in the demonstrative or epideictic oration of praise or blame; to the persuasive speech designed to elicit agreement about expediency, as in the deliberative address; to the dramatic contest or *agon* designed to elicit a judgment of right or wrong, as in the judicial oration”; “The Rhetoric of Thomas Nashe,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Columbia University, 1979), p. 32.

⁴⁵ See Dean, “Literary Problems in More’s *Richard III*,” esp. pp. 31-35.

published together with Erasmus's own translations from the same writer.⁴⁶ Lucian's comparison of human life to a pageant in which Fortune assigns to us different roles⁴⁷ is amplified by Erasmus, whose main interest seems to be the integrity of dramatic performance and the danger of spoiling or perverting the play.

Folly's invocation of drama occurs, significantly, in the course of her discussion of wise men and their role in the commonwealth. They are, she claims, "as vnapte for all publike offices and affaires, *as an asse is to fynger an harpe*."⁴⁸ Like Hythloday, who only seems capable of appreciating the solemn kind of dramatic representation, these wise men, when brought to "a Mydsomer watche, or a stage plaie, [...] will seeme to disdeine the peoples pastyme" (E1r). Even at the performance of a "solemne stage plaie" (E3v), if someone were to reveal the true identity of the actors by removing their masks (*personae*; in Chaloner's version "the plaiers garmentes"), "should he not," Folly asks, "marre all the mattier?" To remove the veil of representation means to pervert the whole play (*fabulam omnem perturbare*, 597-598) since it is precisely "the feignyng and counterfaiytyng [...] that so delighteth the beholders" (E3v). The wise man (*sapiens*)

⁴⁶ First published in 1506, More's and Erasmus's translations of Lucian were frequently reprinted, and in the 1519 Florence edition they appeared together with *Utopia*; see More, *Translations of Lucian*, p. lxiv. The English translation of this dialogue was published by John Rastell (probably in the 1520s) under the title *A dialog of the poet Lucyan, for his fantesye faynyd for a mery pastyme*. Rastell, who was a member of the More circle and was related to him by marriage, has also been suggested as the author, and not just printer, of this versified translation; see C. R. Baskervill, "John Rastell's Dramatic Activities," *Modern Philology* 13.9 (1916): 557-560, at p. 559, and, more extensively, Thompson, "Lucian and Lucianism," pp. 302-309.

⁴⁷ For a related example see Lucian's *Icaromenippus*, 17, in *The Works of Lucian of Samostata*, trans. H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), vol. 3, p. 136.

⁴⁸ References will be to the Chaloner translation; *The Praise of Folie: Moriae Encomium*, a booke made in latine by that great clerke Erasmus Roterodame, Englished by sir Thomas Chaloner knight (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1549), sig. D4v. The Latin text will be quoted by line number from Desiderius Erasmus, *Moriae Encomium, id est Stultitiae Laus*, in *Opera Omnia*, IV-3, ed. Clarence H. Miller (Amsterdam and Oxford: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1979).

who questions the dramatic illusion and insists that the god represented in the play is in fact not even a man, but a base slave driven by his passions, will be thought mad (*demens ac furiosus*, 611-612) by everybody: “For surely as nothing can be more foolissh than wisdome out of place,” Folly concludes, “so is nothyng more fonde than prudence out of season” (E4r).

Praepostera sapientia and *perversa prudentia* result in a bad play, or no play at all: “And dooeth he not out of season (trow ye) that plieth not him selfe as the world goeth? nor will not take the market as it ryseth?”⁴⁹ The truly wise man is he who does not overestimate his own wisdom, but is instead willing “to dissemble gladly, or to erre, and be deceiued with the most,” for “to dissemble, or erre so, is the right playng of the pageantes of this life” (E4r). The grave wise man praised by “the *Archestoike Seneca*,” on the other hand, should go and dwell with the other Stoics “in *Platos citee*, or in the lande of *Fairie*, or *Vtopia*” (E4v). The first English translation of *The Praise of Folly* thus introduces *Utopia* where Erasmus actually referred to the gardens of Tantalus—that which cannot be enjoyed or that is merely illusory.⁵⁰ This is

⁴⁹ *The Praise of Folie*, E4r. On “taking the market as it ryseth,” see the adage *Uti foro* (“To take the market as you find it”)—going back to Terence’s *Phormio*—and the commentary on it in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 31: *Adages I i 1 to I v 100*, trans. Margaret Mann Phillips and R. A. B. Mynors (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), adage I i 92.

⁵⁰ The Latin reads (636-37): “vel in civitate Platonis vel, si malint, in idearum regione vel in Tantaliis inhabitent hortis.” As Dominic Baker-Smith notes (*More’s Utopia* [London: HarperCollins, 1991], p. 103), *Tantali horti* is found among the *Adages* of Erasmus. This phrase from *The Praise of Folly* is linked by Baker-Smith to both Lucian and More’s *Utopia*, but he fails to mention Thomas Chaloner’s translation of Erasmus. Chaloner and Robinson as translators of Erasmus and More into English are discussed by David Weil Baker, who notes the interesting anachronism in Chaloner’s translation; see his “Topical Utopias: Radicalizing Humanism in Sixteenth-Century England,” *Studies in English Literature* 36.1 (1996): 1-30, at p. 20 (revised version in Baker, *Divulging Utopia: Radical Humanism in Sixteenth-Century England* [Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999], pp. 127-128). These passages from *The Praise of Folly* and *Utopia* are interpreted by Alistair Fox as exemplifying the opposing philosophies of Erasmus and More: the former is a fervent idealist (reminiscent of Hythloday), the latter a political realist (reminiscent of, well, More). The contrast Fox introduces forces him to read Erasmus’s passage ironically (“for Erasmus the play-acting was part of the corruption to be remedied”) and More’s passage without irony (“for More it constituted the most efficacious way of ensuring that what could not be made perfectly good was made as little bad as possible”). See “English Humanism and the Body Politic,” in Alistair Fox and John Guy,

Hythloday's Utopia, stern and idealistic, rather than More's more capacious and consequently more slippery vision of it.⁵¹

The choice of Seneca's *Octavia* as the play that intrudes upon the general merriment of the Plautine spectacle makes the dramatic *exemplum* developed in *Utopia* highly appropriate to the matter that is disputed by Hythloday and More—the question of counsel. Indeed, it shows More's great subtlety in approaching the question, for the scene from *Octavia* to which he refers features Seneca himself as the figure of counsel, confronting—both as a dramatist and as a politician—the problem of authority's inability to listen. As John Crossett observes in his discussion of the function served by this scene from the pseudo-Senecan play in the context of the first book of *Utopia*, the arguments advanced by Seneca the counselor are very much those given in *Utopia* to Hythloday.⁵² The fact that he is made to deliver the lines of both Seneca and Nero tells us, finally, that Hythloday's basic understanding of the dramatic situation and its

Reassessing the Henrician Age: Humanism, Politics and Reform, 1500-1550 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 38-40. Fox's approach to the work of Sir Thomas Elyot, exemplified in the same volume, follows a very similar logic; for a corrective to this view see Frederick William Conrad, "A Preservative against Tyranny: The Political Theology of Sir Thomas Elyot," Ph.D. Dissertation (The Johns Hopkins University, 1988).

⁵¹ In addition to Erasmus, More's dramatic figuring of counsel in *Utopia* may be indebted to the opening of one of the most influential critical documents in the early modern period, Horace's *Art of Poetry*, in which incongruous couplings—of human heads with equine necks, of birds with beasts, of women with fish—are ridiculed in both painting and poetry, but at least as important is a passage from Cicero, whose *De officiis*, Skinner points out, "furnished virtually the whole framework for civic humanist discussions of the active life"; "More's *Utopia* and the Language of Renaissance Humanism," p. 129. See also Gerard Wegemer, "Ciceronian Humanism in More's *Utopia*," *Moreana* 27.104 (1990): 5-26, and A. G. Harmon, "Sacrifice in the Public Square: Ciceronian Rhetoric in More's *Utopia* and the Ultimate Ends of Counsel," *Law and Literature* 16.1 (2004): 93-125. On More's use of Cicero's notion of *decorum*, see Thomas I. White, "*Festivitas, Utilitas, et Opes*: The Concluding Irony and Philosophical Purpose of Thomas More's *Utopia*," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 10 (1978): 135-150, at pp. 149-150. The relevant passage from Cicero is to be found in *The three bookes of Tullyes offyces*, bothe in latyne tonge & in englysshe, lately translated by Roberte Whyntinton poete laureate (London: Wynkin de Worde, 1534), sig. G4r.

⁵² John Crossett, "More and Seneca," *Philological Quarterly* 40.4 (1961): 577-580, at p. 578. More recently, More's use of Seneca has been discussed by Kinney (*Humanist Poetics*, pp. 69-72), who provides characteristically generous quotations from the primary texts. See also Baker-Smith, *More's Utopia*, pp. 127-130. On the Senecan counseling scene in English Renaissance drama, see Patrick D. Enright, "The Senecan Counselling Scene in English Renaissance," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Kansas, 1994).

dialogical structure is flawed.⁵³ He, in other words, should have known that the office of the counselor is only partly about speaking: a good counselor should be as ready to listen to what is being said (even if it is a tyrant that is speaking), and to frame his speech accordingly.⁵⁴ Let us see how More goes about this once, like Seneca in *Octavia*, he finds himself in his own play.

Extemp'rically Falling to the Matter: *Sir Thomas More*

Thomas More joins an actual play not in some recently discovered manuscript from the house of Cardinal Morton but in the pages of the most notoriously complex dramatic manuscript in the English language penned about a century later. Whether the play imperfectly recorded in the pages of this manuscript found its own playhouse in early modern London remains to this day a moot point. As we shall see, however, the play was engaged in a rich and instructive dialogue with the dramatic tradition, going all the way back to the entertainments at Morton's household,

⁵³ The point is often overlooked, even in otherwise stimulating studies. Thus Stephen Greenblatt remarks that "Morus tries to reduce Hythlodæus's authenticity itself to a part" and that "to insist upon reciting one's stiff-necked and solemn lines regardless of the other characters is to make oneself both absurd and ineffectual," but a significant part of the irony of the passage consists in the fact that Hythlodæus is made to "rehearse out of Octavia" not just Seneca's lines, but "the place wherein Seneca disputeth with Nero," which is how Robinson, very accurately, renders the Latin "et recenseas ex *Octavia* locum in quo Seneca disputat cum Nerone" (*Utopia*, ed. Logan *et al.*, pp. 96-97; notice that this edition gives a misleading translation: "and repeat Seneca's speech to Nero from the *Octavia*"). The choice of verb (*recenseo*) is significant since it suggests a very mechanical, almost scholastic, approach to the task, in line with More's earlier characterization of Hythlodæus (the same verb is used to describe the delivery of the entire story about Utopia: *Haec ubi Raphael recensuit...* [*Utopia*, ed. Logan *et al.*, p. 246]). See Stephen J. Greenblatt, "More, Role-Playing, and *Utopia*," *Yale Review* 67.4 (1978): 517-536, at p. 532; the relevant statements are also found in the revised version of this article, included in Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 35.

⁵⁴ Notice that Bacon opens his essay "Of Counsell" in precisely these terms. The counselor is the person who partakes of somebody's counsel, their secret thoughts: "The greatest Trust, betweene Man and Man, is the Trust of *Giving Counsell*. For in other Confidences, Men commit the parts of life; Their Lands, their Goods, their Children, their Credit, some particular Affaire: But to such, as they make their *Counsellours*, they commit the whole"; *Essayes or Counsels*, p. 63.

even if it seems to have been destined never to join this tradition on the stage. Central to this dialogue is the issue of counsel. The play in question is *Sir Thomas More*, recently made more prominent by its inclusion in the Arden Shakespeare series on account of Shakespeare's possible, though minor, participation in its complex genesis.⁵⁵

Sir Thomas More captures extremely well the legacy of its eponymous hero as it was gradually shaped in sixteenth-century England. It emphasizes More's link to London—the city of which he was, as editions of *Utopia* repeatedly announce, a citizen and undersheriff; it depicts both his poetic and political self: his love of play as well as his commitment to serve the commonwealth; it delineates his private, family life as well as his meteoric rise from the position of a city official to the highest political office, that of Lord Chancellor. It does all this, however, by relying on what, as we have seen, More himself often relied upon—the rich work of dramatic imagination and the specific forms of dramatic activity he was surrounded by and in which he willingly participated. The use of earlier drama in *Sir Thomas More*, I shall argue, creates a continuity between this play and the forms of drama the historical More was immersed in. These earlier forms of drama *Sir Thomas More* very deliberately draws upon, ingeniously re-imagines, and extends, and in this process it assures their continued popularity in the professional London playhouse. That the main author of such a play should be Anthony Munday is as fitting, for his problematic relationship to the persisting Catholic realities of English life, his commitment to the

⁵⁵ All references to *Sir Thomas More* will therefore be to this most recent text: *Sir Thomas More*, original text by Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle, censored by Edmund Tilney, revisions co-ordinated by Hand C, revised by Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood, and William Shakespeare, ed. John Jowett (London: Methuen Drama, 2011). Unlike Gabrieli and Melchiori in their Revels modern spelling edition (*Sir Thomas More*, a play by Anthony Munday and others, revised by Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood, and William Shakespeare, ed. Vittorio Gabrieli and Giorgio Melchiori [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990]), Jowett does not divide the play into acts.

celebration of London's past and present, his own literary and, especially, dramatic activities, including his youthful talent for dramatic improvisation, made him the ideal vehicle for the conflicting attitudes which late sixteenth-century English culture exhibited towards Thomas More and his religious, intellectual, literary, and political afterlife.⁵⁶

These conflicting attitudes are evident in the artifact itself—the unique surviving manuscript (British Library Harley MS 7368) that records what seems to have been an abortive theatrical project, marked by censorship, multiple revisions, and all sorts of inconsistencies: seven different hands are caught in the process of copying, cancelling, blotting, and revising the basic text, parts of which are in fact missing. Several passages, the prevailing argument has it, are understood—partly on paleographical, partly on stylistic grounds—to have come directly from Shakespeare's pen, which in this case at least seems to have been capable of an occasional blot.

The standard edition of the manuscript prepared for the Malone Society by W. W. Greg in 1911 distinguished between the original copy of the play, written in what was later identified as the hand of Anthony Munday and originally labeled by Greg as Hand S (the hand of the scribe), and six additions written in five different hands (labeled A-E) and inserted at different points in the manuscript to supply the revised text for what in some cases we can see are cancelled passages while in others we can only guess as the original leaves are missing and were

⁵⁶ On More's posthumous reputation see, most recently, Anne Lake Prescott, "Afterlives," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, ed. George M. Logan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 265-287. On Munday, see Tracey Hill, *Anthony Munday and Civic Culture: Theatre, History and Power in Early Modern London, 1580-1633* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004); Donna B. Hamilton, *Anthony Munday and the Catholics, 1560-1633* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005); Nora Johnson, *The Actor as Playwright in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Chapter 3.

probably torn out on purpose.⁵⁷ To these five additional hands, some of which are probably composing (for example Hand B) while others may be copying what someone else had already written elsewhere (for example Hand C), we should add the hand of Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels from 1579 to 1610, who censored the manuscript, indicating that portions of the text—because of their potentially inflammatory nature and their representation of street riots—need to be left out completely, while every now and then disapproving of what he found in the rest of the manuscript.

The confusing nature of the manuscript as well as the claim that it was directly associated with Shakespeare have had rather unfortunate consequences for the understanding of *Sir Thomas More* as drama rather than as a dramatic document or a piece of evidence used in the numerous theories of early modern authorship, collaboration, handwriting, play ownership, censorship, and so on. The focus on Shakespeare has meant that to most readers the play has been familiar only through the passages that he presumably wrote for it, which in turn has obscured significant continuities of theme, character, and dramatic design evident in the play as a whole. In order to make Shakespeare's contribution to the play as self-sufficient as possible, it was necessary, first of all, to see the play as fragmented and episodic and, secondly, to underrate its overall artistic

⁵⁷ *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, ed. W. W. Greg, Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911). The number of hands as well as their identity continues to be a contested issue even among experts; see the brief overview provided by Vittorio Gabrieli and Giorgio Melchiori in their edition of *Sir Thomas More* in the Revels Plays series, pp. 42-43 n. 5, in addition to Michael L. Hays, "Shakespeare's Hand in *Sir Thomas More*: Some Aspects of the Paleographic Argument," *Shakespeare Studies* 8 (1975): 241-253, as well as Harold Jenkins, "A Supplement to Sir Walter Greg's Edition of *Sir Thomas More*," Malone Society *Collections*, vol. VI (1961 [1962]), pp. 177-192. Jenkins also supplies a list of corrections to Greg's transcription.

achievement so that Hand D's (that is to say, Shakespeare's) contribution could be thrown into sharper relief.⁵⁸

We have seen that More repeatedly turned to drama in his published work to think about social, particularly political, interaction—the modes of engagement among those who find or devise for themselves particular roles on the big stage of life, governed, like every stage, by an implicit set of rules and habits, modes of expression, aims and expectations. His “wit and towardness” at the household of Cardinal Morton later combined with “his learning, wisdom, knowledge, and experience” to produce one of the most widely admired counselors in sixteenth-century Europe.⁵⁹ This is the note upon which Roper's *Life of Sir Thomas More* ends, and it is something that the author/s of *Sir Thomas More* understood very well since we see them combining counsel and drama in a way that vividly recalls More's own tackling of the problem of counsel, in *Utopia* and elsewhere. It is in a similar vein that we should read Edward Hall's account of More, incorporated into the 1586/87 edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, in which he insists on the peculiar mixture of wit and wisdom that is always somehow undercut by More's theatrical, clownish disposition: “I cannot tell (saith master Hall) whether I should call him a foolish wise man, or a wise foolish man, for vndoubtedly he beside his learning had a great wit, but it was so mingled with taunting and mocking, that it seemed to them that best knew him, that

⁵⁸ A good, and extremely influential, early example is Pollard's introduction to Alfred W. Pollard, W. W. Greg, E. Maunde Thompson, J. Dover Wilson, and R. W. Chambers, *Shakespeare's Hand in the Play of Sir Thomas More*, with the text of the Ill May Day Scenes edited by W. W. Greg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), in which he isolates a “miniature play” worthy to be reprinted without the rest of the text. The main contribution to this miniature play is that of Shakespeare. In contrast to this approach, I join those scholars who see the study of the manuscript and the study of the play (in its entirety) as mutually reinforcing and enriching activities. An example of a recent attempt in this direction is Nina Levine, “Citizens' Games: Differentiating Collaboration and *Sir Thomas More*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58.1 (2007): 31-64.

⁵⁹ Roper, *The Life of Sir Thomas More*, pp. 198, 200.

hee thought nothing to be well spoken except he had ministred some mocke in the communication.”⁶⁰

The authors of *Sir Thomas More* recognized both of these characteristics as well as the mode in which they came to be expressed. Wit and wisdom in the play are not mutually exclusive but mutually enabling qualities, and by the end of the play More is both a foolish wise man and a wise foolish man—a paradox that raises interesting questions about the kind of drama we are witnessing.⁶¹ Tragedy and comedy mingle in the context of familiar historical narratives, but, as is typical of so many Renaissance plays, the history is used creatively to throw into relief the moral and political character of the play’s hero.

Unlike, for example, *Thomas Cromwell*, this is not a strictly biographical play that follows its hero from early youth to the grave,⁶² but begins instead *in medias res*, with a scene of conflict between Londoners and foreigners that sets up the stage for More’s powerful rhetorical intervention and thus introduces one of the play’s main philosophical and political themes: the vexed relationship between words and deeds, between what words can and cannot do.⁶³ For what

⁶⁰ Quoted in Vittorio Gabrieli, “*Sir Thomas More*: Sources, Characters, Ideas,” *Moreana* 23.90 (1986): 17-43, at p. 21.

⁶¹ On this “chiasmic paradox” as “the shaping principle of the whole play,” see Alistair Fox, “The Paradoxical Design of *The Book of Sir Thomas More*,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 17.3 (1981): 162-173, at p. 165.

⁶² *Sir Thomas More* is seen as a biographical play by Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, rev. ed. (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 194-223, who also defines the genre. See also Baldwin Maxwell’s chapter on *Thomas Cromwell* in his *Studies in the Shakespeare Apocrypha* (New York: King’s Crown Press, Columbia University, 1956).

⁶³ According to an early thematic analysis of the play, one of the first to consider the play rather than the manuscript and to see it as artistically unified rather than fragmented, *Sir Thomas More* is held together by the theme of responsibility and by the tension between appearance and reality enacted in the play (Judith Doolin Spikes, “*The Book of Sir Thomas More*: Structure and Meaning,” *Moreana* 11.43-44 [1974]: 25-39). For a book-length study of the play’s theatrical unity, see Scott McMillin, *The Elizabethan Theatre and The Book of Sir Thomas More* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). Such critical efforts created the necessary foundation for Gabrieli and Melchiori’s

More manages to do with the citizens he eventually fails to do with the King, whose unwillingness to be ruled by counsel is underscored in the play by his failure to appear in person.

In the early scenes More is depicted as a London city official who can speak to the people and persuade them to change their violent ways; in the courtroom he instructs a thief on how to play a trick on one of the justices; in his Chelsea household he is an amiable host who devises a disguise trick for Erasmus and puts on a play for the Mayor's visit; at the council table he is wise and reserved; and in the final scenes of the play he becomes all of this together. He becomes a character who jokes about his beard (a point partly anticipated by the earlier episode with Falconer and his long hair),⁶⁴ who sees his own scaffold as a stage upon which he is transformed from "a state pleader" into "a stage player" in order to "act this last scene of my tragedy" (17.75-77), and yet holds firmly and earnestly to his principles with regard to certain mysterious "articles" to which he refuses to subscribe and which, appropriately I think, are never given verbal articulation: what More cannot subscribe to is that which cannot quite be said. Similarly, both in the play and in the historical record, what More cannot quite say is what he actually and truly thinks since there is no unproblematic relationship between the truth of one's convictions and their expression in language—hence More's paradoxical reliance on the slippery precision of theatrical articulation and the appropriateness of writing precisely this kind of play about Sir Thomas More.⁶⁵

landmark edition of the play for the Revels Plays series, in which they vigorously and influentially argued for the play's thematic and theatrical unity.

⁶⁴ On the function of this motif in the play, see Charles Clay Doyle, "The Hair and Beard of Thomas More (with special reference to the play *Sir Thomas More* and an epigram by John Owen)," *Moreana* 18.71/72 (1981): 5-14.

⁶⁵ The links between wit, wisdom, and theatricality are seen as central to both the play and More's historical character by Charles R. Forker and Joseph Candido, "Wit, Wisdom, and Theatricality in *The Book of Sir Thomas*

This distinctive mixture of qualities and characteristics has found its most brilliant expression in the interrupted interlude that is staged at More's house in Chelsea, after Erasmus's departure and in anticipation of the Mayor's visit.⁶⁶ In the original copy of the play the scene opens with More and the members of his household setting up for the Mayor's visit. While his wife entertains the guests somewhere off the stage, More receives a group of players, who "happen hither in a lucky time" (9.51)—to "pleasure" More and to "benefit" themselves. A play before the banquet is a suggestion that appeals to More and that reminds us both of his own youthful participation in similar kinds of stage representation at the house of Cardinal Morton, especially since the players in *Sir Thomas More* are in fact described as "My Lord Cardinal's players" (9.50), and of the kind of drama, usually rather brief, that is presented in the context of the Tudor household.

An early Tudor example of this kind of play is Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece*, itself probably performed at Morton's house in the late fifteenth century and printed by John Rastell, a member of the More circle, some twenty years later.⁶⁷ On the title page of the first edition of this play, Medwall is explicitly linked to Morton as the latter's "late chapelayne."⁶⁸ But *Fulgens and Lucrece* is linked to *Sir Thomas More* not just in this circumstantial way. As Arthur Brown observes in his discussion of the play-within-the-play device in early English

More," *Shakespeare Studies* 13 (1980): 85-104; a revised version of this article is found in Charles R. Forker, *Fancy's Images: Contexts, Settings, and Perspectives in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), pp. 54-68.

⁶⁶ This is scene 9 in Jowett's edition as well as in Greg's Malone Society text; it is the second scene of the third act in the Gabrieli and Melchiori edition.

⁶⁷ Pearl Hogrefe, *The Sir Thomas More Circle: A Program of Ideas and Their Impact on Secular Drama* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1959), pp. 51, 255-256.

⁶⁸ W. W. Greg, *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, 4 vols. (London: Printed for the Bibliographical Society at the University Press, Oxford, 1939-1959), vol. 1, nos. 1 and 2.

drama, Medwall frames the main interest of his play, the question of where true nobility resides, by having two servants move between the play and the household in which the play is staged. They are thus able to both comment on the action and take part in it, a strategy, we shall shortly see, deployed in *Sir Thomas More* as well.⁶⁹ The focus on London in *Sir Thomas More* is understandable given More's posthumous reputation as one of the city's most famous men and the fact that, apart from the diplomatic missions, most of his career took place in London, the city whose history fascinated Munday. It is, however, notable that Medwall's plays were also closely associated with London, where they were written and staged, and that his dramatic output, Alan H. Nelson reminds us, marks "a shift of focus in English drama from the provinces to London."⁷⁰

Fulgens and Lucrece is not, however, among the plays the players in *Sir Thomas More* offer for the occasion even if it is part of the early English dramatic culture implicitly invoked by them. There are good reasons for this. Asked about their repertory, the players list seven titles (ironically, the number equal to the number of hands found in *The Book of Sir Thomas More*), most of which denote moral interludes: *The Cradle of Security*, *Hit Nail o' th' Head*, *Impatient Poverty*, *The Play of Four P's*, *Dives and Lazarus*, and *Lusty Juventus*. Some of these are known from the surviving record of early English drama, but no play about Lazarus and the rich man is extant,⁷¹ whereas for *The Cradle of Security* we only have a seventeenth-century account of its

⁶⁹ Arthur Brown, "The Play within a Play: An Elizabethan Dramatic Device," *Essays and Studies* 13 (1960): 36-48, at p. 38.

⁷⁰ *The Plays of Henry Medwall*, ed. Alan H. Nelson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980), p. 1.

⁷¹ For the mention of plays on this topic, see Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700*, rev. Samuel Schoenbaum (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 40.

performance and for *Hit Nail o' th' Head* a couple of suggestive lines from the Epilogue to Francis Merbury's *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*, where we read: "For though the style be rough, and phrases found unfit, / Yet may you say, upon the head the very nail is hit!"⁷² The nail was indeed hit: *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* turns out to be the play that suits More's fancy best, partly on account of its theme, partly on account of its "liberal argument"—for wit and wisdom, More observes, are rarely found in one and the same head (9.65-68).

The intriguing thing is not that More should choose a play that in its title combines wit with wisdom but rather the fact that, while ostensibly presenting *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*, the players actually construct a text from several of the interludes they listed (with *Lusty Juventus* serving as the major source) and even turn to two additional interludes from which they borrow the prologue (*The Disobedient Child*) and the name Inclination for the vice character, as well as an occasional line (*The Trial of Treasure*). Elaborate and extremely learned explanations have been offered for these dramatic choices. Giorgio Melchiori, one of the most diligent researchers of the play's dramatic sources, supposes that Anthony Munday, whom he considers to be the chief author and not just the scribe of the original copy, must have read *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* in manuscript while working as an apprentice in the shop of John Alde in the late 1570s.⁷³

The problem, however, is that *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* was discovered only in the nineteenth century, not as a printed text but as a manuscript owned by Sir Edward Dering.

⁷² *Five Anonymous Plays*, ed. John S. Farmer (London: Early English Drama Society, 1908), p. 298.

⁷³ *Sir Thomas More*, ed. Gabrieli and Melchiori, p. 9.

Soon after the discovery James Orchard Halliwell printed the text for the Shakespeare Society,⁷⁴ but the strange thing about the manuscript is that it has a title page and a colophon resembling what is normally found in printed books: *The Contract of a Marige betweene wit and wisdome very frutefull and mixed full of pleasant mirth as well for the beholders as the readers or hearers: neuer before imprinted*. The year on the title page is 1579.⁷⁵ This has led some scholars to suggest that the manuscript is itself a copy of a printed text that has been lost, but Melchiori rejects this explanation because it creates problems for his theory about the way in which Munday apparently wrote the play: “If it [*The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*] existed in print in 1591, why did not Munday make direct use of it?”⁷⁶

Why, in other words, announce the performance of *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*, yet present a text composed of bits and pieces of several interludes, including the one that has been promised? Because the title page of the manuscript resembles the printed title page of Thomas Preston’s *Cambyeses* (“A lamentable tragedy mixed ful of pleasant mirth”) and because *Cambyeses* was printed by John Alde, Melchiori argues that *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* must have been prepared for the press by Alde too since it reflects “Alde’s house-style,”⁷⁷ but that it never

⁷⁴ *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom, an Ancient Interlude*, to which are added illustrations of Shakespeare and the early English drama, ed. James Orchard Halliwell (London: Printed for the Shakespeare Society, 1846). As Halliwell notes, the manuscript was discovered by the Reverend L. B. Larking. The most recent discussion of this manuscript (British Library Additional MS 26782) is Tamara Atkin, “Manuscript, Print, and the Circulation of Dramatic Texts: A Reconsideration of the Manuscript of *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*,” *English Manuscript Studies, 1100-1700* 15 (2009): 152-165.

⁷⁵ *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*, ed. Halliwell, p. 4. The reading “contract” is a conjecture, the manuscript being illegible.

⁷⁶ Giorgio Melchiori, “The Contextualization of Source Material: The Play within the Play in *Sir Thomas More*,” in *Le forme del teatro: III*, ed. Giorgio Melchiori (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1984), pp. 59-94, at p. 69. In the Arden edition, Jowett argues for a much later date for the composition of the text.

got printed. The ingenious conclusion is that Munday, who was Allde's apprentice from 1576 to 1578,⁷⁸ would have read the manuscript in Allde's shop as it was being prepared for publication, yet he would have had to do it before 1579, the date of the manuscript's title page, since he left Allde's service in 1578.⁷⁹ Once he started working on the *Sir Thomas More Play* in the early 1590s, Melchiori argues, Munday no longer had the manuscript about him; instead, he was forced to work "from the imperfect recollection he had of it."⁸⁰

The main reason for this too complicated theory seems to be the need to remove *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* from the sources directly available to Munday and thus explain the composite nature of the interrupted interlude staged at the house of Sir Thomas More as a result of authorial necessity. The title of the interlude to be performed, Melchiori suggests, "was chosen for its symbolic implications in connection with the character of Sir Thomas More," but Munday was unable to remember much else, except for the line "hit the nail on the head," which he then deployed as a title for a non-existent interlude included in the list of plays offered for performance.⁸¹ With the manuscript of *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* out of reach, Munday

⁷⁷ Melchiori, "The Contextualization of Source Material," p. 71.

⁷⁸ Celeste Turner Wright, "Young Anthony Mundy Again," *Studies in Philology* 56.2 (1959): 150-168, at p. 151; G. D. George, "Earning a Living as an Author in Early Modern England: The Case of Anthony Munday," Ph.D. Dissertation (Bowling Green State University, 2006), pp. 46-49.

⁷⁹ Melchiori, "The Contextualization of Source Material," p. 72. Notice, however, that the abbreviated version of this argument, found in the "Introduction" to the Revels edition, changes the date in order to make the narrative smoother: "Munday most probably read it in manuscript when he was an apprentice in John Allde's printing shop in 1576-79" (9).

⁸⁰ Melchiori, "The Contextualization of Source Material," p. 74. See also in this connection Forker and Candido, "Wit, Wisdom, and Theatricality," p. 89.

⁸¹ Melchiori, "The Contextualization of Source Material," pp. 74-75.

“resorted to other Interludes in print on the same subject, variations on the theme of the Prodigal Son.”⁸²

Although the prodigal son theme is a prominent feature of the educational interlude,⁸³ there is much more, I think, to the dramatic choices both offered and made in *Sir Thomas More*. It is true that *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* is distinguished by its “liberal,” humanist argument, but that is also true of some other plays mentioned by the players. Rather than referring to a specific text, the title in which wit and wisdom are combined conjures up the kind of play in which two important traditions of English drama intersect: that of humanism on the one hand, and that of the morality play on the other. Common and often central to both of them is the issue of counsel, which Sir Thomas Elyot in his *Book named the Governor* places in the transitional area between political and moral sapience and which *Sir Thomas More* features in precisely that way, both within and outside of the framed play.⁸⁴ While acknowledging the relevance of *Cambyses* and lamentable tragedies mixed full of pleasant mirth we should, perhaps, also remember that the words “fruitful” and “pleasant” that describe *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* also feature on the title page of the first English translation of More’s *Utopia*, and that its second edition adds “wit” as the third element that describes this mixed work.⁸⁵

⁸² *Sir Thomas More*, ed. Gabrieli and Melchiori, pp. 9-10.

⁸³ See Howard B. Norland’s discussion of the prodigal son plays in his *Drama in Early Tudor Britain, 1485-1558* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 149-160.

⁸⁴ Thomas Elyot, *The Booke Named the Governor* (London: Tho. Bertheleti, 1531), sigs. 257v-258r.

⁸⁵ The different paratexts of the early English editions of *Utopia*, including transcriptions of title pages, can be conveniently consulted in *More’s Utopia in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Cave, pp. 206-217.

What is still lacking, however, is wisdom, and it is Wisdom that Wit should seek in the play, directed by Good Counsel. The presence of counsel, a character found in *Lusty Juventus*, is what is needed, and in order to demonstrate that we are not necessarily faced here with faulty memory I shall briefly consider a document that tells us something about another play mentioned by the players, *The Cradle of Security*. As has already been observed, this play is not extant. What we have is an account of the play's performance left by Richard Willis, who saw it in the early 1570s, but wrote about what he saw much later, in 1639.⁸⁶ The account is found in Willis's *Mount Tabor, or Private Exercises of a Penitent Sinner*, where it is announced as an occasional meditation "Upon a Stage-play which I saw when I was a child."⁸⁷

The scene is set in Gloucester. It is the custom of most cities, Willis begins, that "when Players of Enterludes come to towne," they first go to the mayor to get the necessary permission to play. If the mayor likes the players, they first give a performance before him, the aldermen, and "common Counsell of the City," which can also be attended by anybody who wishes to see it since no admission is charged and the players receive a reward from the mayor himself. This first

⁸⁶ David M. Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 13; E. Pearlman, "R. Willis and *The Cradle of Security* (c. 1572)," *English Literary Renaissance* 20.3 (1990): 357-373. Pearlman discusses the influence of John Downname's *A Treatise of Securitie* (1622) on the substance of Willis's account and concludes that there is "the possibility, if not probability, that Willis's memory might be contaminated by his later reading" (371). The question Pearlman does not seem to consider is whether Downname's writing might also have been influenced by the experience of seeing morality plays performed, *The Cradle of Security* included. At any rate, it will be seen that my analysis of this account stresses those aspects that Willis is likely to have remembered from the performance. Finally, it seems to me that some of the features Pearlman identifies as originating with Downname could in fact be seen as the common stock of the Tudor morality play.

⁸⁷ *Mount Tabor, or Private Exercises of a Penitent Sinner*, serving for a daily Practice of the life of Faith, reduced to speciall heads comprehending the chiefe comforts and refreshings of true Christians: also Certain occasionall Observations and Meditations profitably applyed, written in the time of a voluntary retrait from secular affaires, by R. W. Esquire, published in the yeare of his age 75 (London: Printed by R. B. for P. Stephens and C. Meredith, 1639), pp. 110-114.

performance is called “the Mayors play,” and it was to such a play that Willis was taken by his father, who sat upon a bench and had the boy stand between his legs. What is particularly astonishing about the description that then ensues is the vividness and detail of Willis’s memories, to which no paraphrase could do justice:

The play was called (the Cradle of security,) wherein was personated a King or some great Prince with his Courtiers of severall kinds, amongst which three Ladies were in speciall grace with him; and they keeping him in delights and pleasures, drew him from his graver Counsellors, hearing of Sermons, and listning to good counsell, and admonitions, that in the end they got him to lye downe in a cradle upon the stage, where these three Ladies joyning in a sweet song rocked him asleepe, that he snorted againe, and in the meane time closely conveyed under the cloaths where withall he was covered, a vizard like a swines snout upon his face, with three wire chaines fastned thereunto, the other end whereof being holden severally by those three Ladies, who fall to singing againe, and then discovered his face, that the spectators might see how they had transformed him, going on with their singing, whilst all this was acting, there came forth of another doore at the farthest end of the stage, two old men, the one in blew with a Serjeant at Armes, his mace on his shoulder, the other in red with a drawn sword in his hand, and leaning with the other hand upon the others shoulder, and so they two went along in a soft pace round about by the skirt of the Stage, till at last they came to the Cradle, when all the Court was in greatest jollity, and then the foremost old man with his Mace stroke a fearfull blow upon the Cradle; whereat all the Courtiers with the three Ladies and the vizard all vanished; and the desolate Prince starting up bare faced, and

finding himself thus sent for to judgement, made a lamentable complaint of his miserable case, and so was carried away by wicked spirits.

So powerful was the impression the play left on Willis, as he records, “that when I came towards mans estate, it was as fresh in my memory, as if I had seen it newly acted.” What we see here is the power of theatrical performance that imprints itself upon the mind, and it was probably the force of that experience that preserved the memories of the play so well and for well over a half century.⁸⁸

Several points in this description bear directly on our understanding of *Sir Thomas More* and the play performed within it. We should notice, first of all, that this interlude features scenes familiar to us from the *Wit* plays. The three ladies rocking the prince asleep in a cradle are reminiscent of Idleness lulling Wit to sleep in *The Marriage of Wit and Science* (“Come, come, and ease thee in my lap, / And if it please thee, take a nap”) and thus vanquishing him (“For Idleness hath won, and wholly thee possess’d / And utterly disabled thee from having thy request”).⁸⁹ But whereas in this play Idleness and her son Ignorance leave “this lusty ruffling Wit here like a fool” without any suggestion that anything else is done to him except that Ignorance

⁸⁸ A similar point is made in *English Morality Plays and Moral Interludes*, ed. Edgar T. Schell and J. D. Shuchter (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. vi: “Willis’ vivid memory of one [morality play] he had seen more than half a century before suggests their dramatic effectiveness.” In sharp contrast to this is the moral that Willis, now probably speaking as a seventy-five-year-old rather than as an enthralled boy, extracts from the spectacle: “This Prince did personate in the morall, the wicked of the world; the three Ladies, Pride, Covetousnesse, and Luxury, the two old men, the end of the world, and the last judgement.” This leads to the logical conclusion that children should not be exposed to “spectacles of ill examples” since “their young memories are like faire writing tables” upon which the narratives of virtue ought to be imprinted so that the attractions of vice may be avoided. The plays of his own time, finally, are “schoolmasters of vice, and provocations to corruptions,” whereas those of former times carried “harmlesse morals.”

⁸⁹ *A New and Pleasant Interlude entitled the Marriage of Wit and Science* (first published in London, probably in 1570), in *Five Anonymous Plays*, ed. Farmer, IV.4, pp. 86-87.

decides “to chance coots with him” (that is, to change coats with him),⁹⁰ in *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* the scene begins to resemble Willis’s description of *The Cradle of Security* more closely. In this play Ignorance is the mother of Idleness and Irksomeness while Mistress Wantonness lulls Wit to sleep. A long stage direction explains what is supposed to happen on the stage: “Here shall Wantonness sing this song to the tune of ‘Attend thee, go play thee’; and having sung him asleep upon her lap, let him snort; then let her set a fool’s bauble on his head, and colling his face: and Idleness shall steal away his purse from him, and go his ways.” The song is accordingly adapted: “So now that he sleeps full soundly, / Now purpose I roundly, / Trick this pretty doddy, / And make him a noddy, / And make him a noddy!”⁹¹

Thus from a “scholar” Wit is turned into “a collier,” a comic figure of the Tudor interlude.⁹² Even though he snorts in his sleep and has undergone an amusing transformation, much like the Prince in *The Cradle of Security*, his story, unlike that of the prince carried away by wicked spirits, ends happily.⁹³ It is easy to see how a play like *The Marriage of Wit and*

⁹⁰ *The Marriage of Wit and Science*, IV.4, pp. 86-87.

⁹¹ *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*, I.2, p. 269. Isn’t this just lovely?

⁹² But also a black fool, linked, via the blackened face, to the the Wakefield cycle comic devils; on this point, see Robert Hornback, “Emblems of Folly in the First *Othello*: Renaissance Blackface, Moor’s Coat, and ‘Muckender,’” *Comparative Drama* 35.1 (2001): 69-99, at pp. 77-78.

⁹³ *The Cradle of Security* is thus among the less typical examples of the moral play. Robert Potter is right to identify innocence-fall-redemption as the basic structural pattern of the morality play, but it is incorrect to state that all morality plays adhere to this pattern. Potter claims that ending the play “with ‘mere oblivion’ or its spiritual equivalent – damnation” is “what will occur in the late sixteenth century, when the morality is reconstructed into the scheme of tragedy, and the result will be a play of tragic individuality, like Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*”; *The English Morality Play: Origins, History and Influence of a Dramatic Tradition* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 10. *The Cradle of Security* shows that this is not so and other examples can easily be adduced (for some of them, see Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936], pp. 232-246). Let me add an especially interesting one that may be related to *Sir Thomas More*. The character that appears towards the end of Thomas Lupton’s *All for Money* (entered in the Stationers’ Register in 1577 and published the following year) is called Damnation, and his words leave no doubt about the

Wisdom might carry the harmless moral that Willis wishes for, but the nightmarish, disturbing atmosphere of *The Cradle of Security* seems more designed to scare than to edify, which may be one of the reasons why a young boy would remember it so well. What is especially interesting about *The Cradle of Security* is that it is not a play about a youth who learns his lesson. We see instead “a King or some great Prince” who is drawn away from the influence of his wise counselors and who in turn succumbs to the temptations of the three ladies. He thus becomes a child, as vulnerable as the young Wit, and the cradle in which he is placed is the cradle of bodily pleasure, idleness, ignorance, and wantonness, from which, unlike Wit, he is not saved. These resemblances and analogies form a simple but important point: if the story of a prince’s political failure, represented as a rejection of counsel, can be understood in exclusively moral terms, then a story that depicts the moral growth of a young man can be seen to have potential political implications. The second point that needs to be made is that Melchiori’s Munday could hardly be imagined not to be able to remember plays that were probably still being performed around him (or that he read in manuscript!) when Richard Willis can deliver his childhood memories with such precision and vividness.

What is, therefore, needed from the perspective of *Sir Thomas More*, the play within which the constructed interlude was to be performed, is not one specific text, as Melchiori assumes, but rather a dramatic tradition that can be relied upon as a live body of material, rich and ready to be mobilized and made to comment on the issues embodied in the drama of Sir

destiny of the sinful characters: “Away! Away your wretched souls, to hell you must needs go, / And such as die as you have done shall dwell with you also.” The stage direction then reads: “Here Damnation drives them out before him, and they shall make a pitiful noise” (*All for Money*, ll. 1424-25, in *English Morality Plays*, ed. Schell and Shuchter, p. 472). One of the sinful characters is Dives, the rich man from the biblical parable, who delivers a long monologue just before Damnation enters. This can perhaps give us some clue about what went on in *Dives and Lazarus*, the non-extant play the players in *Sir Thomas More* mention.

Thomas More. Not the least of these is the issue of counsel—that complex mixture of the moral and the political. Melchiori, far from solitary in his convictions, sees the interludes listed in *Sir Thomas More* as basically dead, as plays that “by the ’nineties (when *Sir Thomas More* was written) would be viewed as quite old plays, belonging to a genre that the rise of the public theatres, and the emergence of the City pageant on the one hand and of the Court masque on the other, had sent out of fashion.” These “quaint productions,” he suggests, simply “lend a period flavour to a dramatic action set in the times of king Henry VIII,”⁹⁴ but, while of course partially correct, such a statement misrepresents the dramatic vitality of the moral play in the late sixteenth century and obscures the fact that these plays continue to mingle with the newly emerging genres and thus actively participate in the construction of dramatic meaning in *Sir Thomas More*. This point needs to be clearly established if we are to understand the significance of the composite interlude staged within *Sir Thomas More* and the function it has in the play as a whole.

The Moral Play: Continuity and Interruption

The habit of seeing moral plays as always already expired, as vestiges of an outdated medieval culture, is one of the extraordinary curiosities of the scholarship devoted to early modern drama, most of which naturally tends toward the last quarter of the sixteenth century, when the first professional playhouses are established and when Shakespeare arrives on the London scene. Yet as Ineke Murakami reminds us in her recent study of the moral play, “with only five extant

⁹⁴ Melchiori, “The Contextualization of Source Material,” p. 64.

‘medieval’ examples (one of which is a fragment), the English morality play is only problematically ‘medieval,’” especially when we consider that most of the surviving examples of this kind of drama come to us from the sixteenth century.⁹⁵ The editors of a 1969 collection of morality plays and moral interludes noted in their introduction that “we are beginning to recognize that the moralities were not replaced by a superior form of drama but rather absorbed into a different form,”⁹⁶ but it has been left to the work of succeeding critics to provide sufficient evidence in support of this insight. Foremost among such contributions have been those by Alan C. Dessen, who in a recent study reiterates the conclusions of his earlier scholarship: we should not assume that the tradition of the moral play constituted “a dead-end that has no significance whatsoever for the dramatists of the 1580s and 1590s”; instead, some features of later drama, notably the drama written “by dramatists in tune with the popular tradition” (as Munday undoubtedly was), “make more sense when viewed in the light of what would have been well known, if old-fashioned, in the 1590s and early 1600s.”⁹⁷

One of the problems with the morality tradition, as Dessen explains in one of his early contributions to this topic, is the slippery nature of the terms used to describe the plays belonging to it as well as the fact that “much of our evidence about the popular drama comes from hostile

⁹⁵ Ineke Murakami, *Moral Play and Counterpublic: Transformations in Moral Drama, 1465-1599* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), p. 171, n. 5. Murakami draws on Pamela M. King, “Morality Plays,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 240-264, at p. 240.

⁹⁶ *English Morality Plays*, ed. Schell and Shuchter, p. vi.

⁹⁷ Alan C. Dessen, “On-stage Allegory and Its Legacy: *The Three Ladies of London*,” in *Locating the Queen’s Men, 1583-1603: Material Practices and Conditions of Playing*, ed. Helen Ostovich, Holger Schott Syme, and Andrew Griffin (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 147-158, at p. 149.

witnesses.”⁹⁸ The terms most often used nowadays (“morality” and “morality play”) are for the most part the legacy of eighteenth-century scholarship, whereas the plays they denote were originally referred to as comedies or interludes (140). The term “morall,” on the other hand (used among others by Willis to describe *The Cradle of Security*), is actually more common “after 1600 than before,” as Dessen shows (143). Whether the moralls that “[t]he major dramatic companies [...] were specifically authorized to perform [...] along with tragedies, comedies, histories, and pastorals” (150) are the same as those from the 1570s and the 1580s remains an open question, but Dessen’s conclusion remains valid: “there can be no doubt that the legacy of what we now call the morality tradition is more complex and far-reaching than hitherto assumed” (156).⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Alan C. Dessen, “The Morall as an Elizabethan Dramatic Kind: An Exploratory Essay,” *Comparative Drama* 5.2 (1971): 138-159, at p. 142.

⁹⁹ See also Alan C. Dessen, *Jonson’s Moral Comedy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971); “The Intemperate Knight and the Politic Prince: Late Morality Structure in *1 Henry IV*,” *Shakespeare Studies* 7 (1974): 147-171; “Homilies and Anomalies: The Legacy of the Morality Play,” *Shakespeare Studies* 11 (1978): 243-258; *Shakespeare and the Late Moral Plays* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986). A note of disagreement is sounded by John Wasson, “The Morality Play: Ancestor of Elizabethan Drama?” *Comparative Drama* 13.3 (1979): 210-221, but his case is found “deliberately overstated” by David Bevington, “Castles in the Air: The Morality Plays,” in *The Theatre of Medieval Europe: New Research in Early Drama*, ed. Eckehard Simon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 97-116, at p. 106. Further on this topic see Madeleine Doran, *Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama* (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1954), pp. 110-111; A. P. Rossiter, *English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans: Its Background, Origins and Developments* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966 [1950]), pp. 85, 92, 110; Allardyce Nicoll, “‘Tragical-comical-historical-pastoral’: Elizabethan Dramatic Nomenclature,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 43 (1960): 70-87; Werner Habicht, *Studien zur Dramenform vor Shakespeare: Moralität, Interlude, romanisches Drama*, Anglistische Forschungen, 96 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter – Universitätsverlag, 1968); Joanne Spencer Kantowitz, “Dramatic Allegory, or, Exploring the Moral Play,” *Comparative Drama* 7.1 (1973): 68-82; Bob Godfrey, “‘I saie not, as by plaine storie, / But as yt were in figure by an allegorie’: A Re-examination of Dramatic Forms in the Early Tudor Period,” in *Allegory in the Theatre / L’allégorie au théâtre (Tudor Theatre, vol. 5, table ronde VII)*, Collection Theta (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 39-54. For the influence on tragedy, see Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); for the influence on comedy, Sylvia D. Feldman, *The Morality-Patterned Comedy of the Renaissance* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1970).

To illustrate the point, it will be enough to look briefly at a play that exemplifies the difficulties discussed above while also warning us against relying too much on the highly selective and at times even random nature of the dramatic and theatrical evidence that has come down to us. In *Henslowe's Diary*, our chief source of information about the work of English public theaters in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, we find a rather cryptic entry which tells us that Lord of Pembroke's Men began to play at the Rose theater on 28 October 1600 and that apart from a play entitled "RadeRicke" they also played "the ~~devel~~ licke vnto licke."¹⁰⁰ Concealed behind this corrected entry is probably Ulpian Fulwell's play, first published in 1568 as *An Enterlude Intituled / Like wil to like quod the Deuel to the Colier*,¹⁰¹ in which a vice called Nichol Newfangle shows through his dealings with characters such as Hankin Hangman, Pierce Pickpurse, or Rafe Roister the truth of Cicero's saying that friendship (of vice as much as of virtue) is primarily defined by likeness. Apprenticed to the Devil (Lucifer) even before he was born, Newfangle begins his match-making by finding a fit companion for his master in Tom Collier, whom he calls "tom lick hole," and who in turn calls Nichol "good vrend lick hole" (a pun on Nichol's name that seems vaguely reflected in Henslowe's entry as well).¹⁰² In a gesture familiar from the dramatic examples mentioned so far, after he has matched the various characters in accordance with the likeness principle Newfangle eventually "rideth

¹⁰⁰ For a facsimile of the relevant page, see *The Henslowe Papers*, ed. R. A. Foakes, 2 vols. (London: The Scolar Press, 1977), vol. 1, fol. 83r. For a transcription, see *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 164.

¹⁰¹ Dessen, "The Morall as an Elizabethan Dramatic Kind," p. 147.

¹⁰² I quote from the 1587 edition, sig. A4r.

away on the deuils back” to “make a iourney into Spaine” (F1r), which in sixteenth-century English parlance must be as good as hell.

There is no way of saying how many plays of a similar kind were given new performances in the context of the professional playhouse, but it is worth bearing in mind that *Like Will to Like* went through several editions, one dated 1587 and one, non-extant, probably published as late as the 1650s.¹⁰³ The play’s first edition was printed by John Alde, the same printer to whom some ten years later Munday himself was to be apprenticed, and performed at the Rose in 1600, a playhouse owned by Henslowe, for whom Munday composed plays during this period. The title page of *Like Will to Like* warned the reader of the punishment that “followeth those that wil rather followe licentious liuing, then to esteem & followe good council.”

The interludes offered by the players in *Sir Thomas More* should provide, therefore, a rich and active context for the understanding of the framing play and not merely serve as a convenient period backdrop: they bring to the fore the popular moral and educational aspects of the humanist tradition while linking them to the political meanings that have been part of that tradition since More’s time. *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* reworks *The Marriage of Wit and Science*, which in itself is a reworking of *Wit and Science*, a play authored by John Redford, a member of the Thomas More circle.¹⁰⁴ It was also within that circle, probably through the offices

¹⁰³ See Greg, *Bibliography*, vol. 1, no. 50.

¹⁰⁴ On John Redford as a member of the More circle and on the way in which *Wit and Science* embodies the educational ideals of that group, see Hogrefe, *Sir Thomas More Circle*, pp. 256, 314ff. The importance of *Wit and Science* in the history of early English drama is stressed by John W. Velz and Carl P. Daw, Jr., “Tradition and Originality in *Wyt and Science*,” *Studies in Philology* 65.4 (1968): 631-646. See also A. W. Reed, *Early Tudor Drama: Medwall, the Rastells, Heywood, and the More Circle* (London: Methuen & Co., 1926).

of John Rastell, that the first English political morality was printed—John Skelton’s *Magnificence*, a drama in which counsel forges the transition from the moral to the political.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Skelton’s play is present in *Sir Thomas More* quite explicitly, in a definite allusion to it given to Inclination, the vice, who is discussing the prospective performance with More. As Gabrieli and Melchiori note in their Revels edition of the play, Inclination’s remark that “we have no Folly in our play” is a double allusion: on the one hand to the leading character in Skelton’s *Magnificence*, on the other to Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly*,¹⁰⁶ the work whose author appears in the play and which itself, we have seen, actively informed More’s linking of political to dramatic decorum.

To see what this means when we turn to a detailed interpretative analysis of the text, let us look at the way in which the constructed but, significantly, discontinued interlude is made to function within the play of *Sir Thomas More*. The character called Good Counsel comes directly and logically from *Lusty Juventus* not because this was a makeshift choice but because, instead, that play had what the dramatists needed to make their larger point. For this is the part that More himself improvises when the actor who had gone to fetch Wit’s beard (a recurring motif in the framing play) does not return in time for performance.¹⁰⁷ More remarks that he could take the

¹⁰⁵ In his study “Skelton’s *Magnificence* and the Morality Tradition,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Columbia University, 1969), Leigh Winser observes that “Prince Magnificence was to face a peculiarly princely set of problems in a morality play, but he was not the first earthly ruler to serve as a protagonist” (10). “Rex Vivus from *Pride of Life* (between 1400-25),” Winser continues, “has royal blood in his veins” (10), but, as he further acknowledges, Rex Vivus is unlike *Magnificence* in that he is represented as politically passive and “appears to be less a prince than simply a proud man in a play that dramatizes his elemental struggle with Death” (10).

¹⁰⁶ *Sir Thomas More*, ed. Gabrieli and Melchiori, 3.2.157-158, p. 148.

¹⁰⁷ Compare the ensuing analysis with Melchiori’s claims that “Munday was planning to have the mature More take over Wit’s part when the lack of a false beard would have prevented Wit from playing” and that “it would have been absurd to have More step into the role of ‘young Wit.’” He concludes: “the borrowings from *Lusty Juventus* were

part of the vice—of Inclination—if he were inclined to do so (9.152), but he does not know until the performance of the play is well underway that the player who has gone to find a beard for Wit is supposed to play Good Counsel. “We’ll not have our play marred for lack of a little good counsel,” More exclaims as the play begins to falter (9.261-62), and proceeds to counsel Wit himself. He warns him that he is talking to Lady Vanity, not Lady Wisdom, and that “this naughty lewd Inclination / Does lead thee amiss in a very strange fashion” (9.267-68). The speech More goes on to deliver fits perfectly in the play, and when Wit starts protesting that Good Counsel is in fact “some deceiver” (9.277), he is advised not to judge things “by the outward show” (9.279). The missing player at this moment returns, which furnishes a convenient excuse for the audience to go to the banquet and continue watching the play afterwards. They are led away by More, who realizes that instead of helping the play he has in fact hindered it, and concludes by combining a pun on his own Latin name (*morus*, a fool) with his favorite comment on theatrical performance as a figure for real-life action: “Thus fools oft-times do help to mare the play” (9.295).

As I have shown in the analysis of More’s own texts earlier in this chapter, the idea of marring the play has significant implications that overstep the boundaries of dramatic fiction.¹⁰⁸

the decisive factor in this last minute change of mind”: not having *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* about, Munday makes do with *Lusty Juventus*, and there he finds “a much more suitable part for him [More] (and for the beard)” (“The Contextualization of Source Material,” p. 82). It will become apparent that I find this reading untenable, especially given the role that beards play in the entire play (for the better understanding of which a neglected clue may be found in *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*, p. 265: “he is in for a beard”), but also because of the strange nature of Melchiori’s argument: he suggests that Munday wanted More to play Wit (for which we have no evidence) only to say that Munday must have found that proposition absurd.

¹⁰⁸ Interesting parallels are found in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, where in Act 4, Scene 2 the mechanicals are waiting for Bottom, who is not to be found. Flute observes: “If he come not, then the play is marred: it goes not forward, doth it?” (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks [London: Methuen, 1979], 4.2.5-6, p. 100). No one has Bottom’s “wit” to be able to replace him. Notice also that earlier in the play Bottom’s question about his role concerns among other things beards: “What beard were I best to play it [i.e. the

That *Sir Thomas More* insists on this point becomes obvious when we observe what takes place in the play after More's departure. The players who remain behind disagree about More's assessment of the effects his performance had on the play. It is significant that More's performance is first judged by Inclination, the vice:

Do ye hear, fellows? Would not my Lord make a rare player? Oh, he would uphold a company beyond all ho, better than Mason among the King's players. Did ye mark how extemp'rically he fell to the matter, and spake Luggins's part almost as it is in the very book set down? (9.301-306).

Yet Wit will have none of it, warning his fellow actor against identifying the theater with the world, even when the world steps into it: "My lord a player? Let us not meddle with any such matters" (9.307-308). The responses are distributed well, for these characters enact a tension familiar to us from Sidney's juxtaposition of "erected wit" and "infected will" (we find it embodied in the characters Wit and Will in *The Marriage of Wit and Science*) as well as from the problematic position that early modern theatrical practice assumed within this larger debate about the serious demeanors of life and the playful seriousness of what is banished onto its stages. The flattering comparison of More the actor with one of the King's players is meant to both strengthen and invert the analogy since it is at the King's court that More's role in his own very real play is to be performed.

role of Pyramus] in?" (1.2.83-84). He proceeds to give a brief catalogue of odd beards, from straw-color to perfect yellow. Finally, as Jowett notes in his Arden edition of *Sir Thomas More* (p. 64, as well as p. 245, note to lines 60-63), More choosing from the offered list of plays is reminiscent of Theseus choosing from the list of potential wedding entertainments. These parallels are worth comparing further with the depiction of Munday's minstrels in *John a Kent and John a Cumber*.

That the play of *Sir Thomas More* very deliberately emphasizes the intermingled nature of political and theatrical life becomes additionally clear when we realize that the next scene of the play opens at the council table. Even though the theatrical troupe, having reclaimed its missing member, is ready to perform again, the next scene does not return to *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*, but takes us instead to a different, and in many ways more dangerous, theater of counsel. The fact that the words counsel and council are spelled “councell” in the manuscript (as they often were in the texts from this period) suggests that the concepts are not quite discrete and invites us to establish links between More’s role of Good Counsel and his position in the Privy Council, to which he was appointed early in the play thanks to his pacification of the citizens.¹⁰⁹ There are further details that suggest that we are meant to connect this new setting to the one from the previous scene. All the lords are ready to begin the deliberations—the topic being the relations between France and Germany—but, as previously in the theatrical performance, one of the actors is missing. This time, however, nobody steps in to replace him.

When More eventually arrives—as himself—he offers a description of the council table as the “serious square,” “this little board” upon which “is daily scanned / The health and preservation of the land” (10.13-15), powerfully reminiscent of the much more familiar “wooden O” from the Prologue to Shakespeare’s *Henry V* and of a series of kindred theatrical metaphors that invest insignificant objects (and, for that matter, people) with meanings much greater than those they normally carry. The performance of council that ensues, like the play that preceded it, is interrupted by the arrival of a messenger, who brings those fatal “articles enclosed, first to be viewed, / And then to be subscribed to” (10.69-70). By refusing to do it More will, in the final

¹⁰⁹ On this capaciousness of the term *councell* in the period, see Chapter 4, n. 38 below.

part of the play, be forced to climb once again upon the “goodly scaffold.” This time, however, more than just a beard is wanted; it is, as he himself aptly puts it, “a headless errand” (17.50-51): “I am now <on a> far voyage, and this strange wooden horse must bear me thither” (17.62-63).

This is the point at which we need to consider the state of the manuscript if we are to understand the dramatic logic of the play, especially the way in which it engages the issue of counsel. The juxtaposition of the two scenes described above is found in Greg’s edition of the manuscript but not in the Revels and Arden editions of the play. This is because Greg presents the original text continuously and prints the six additions at the end, whereas the more recent editions print what they think was meant to be the revised state of the text, with the additions and revisions inserted where they properly belong.¹¹⁰ Presenting a revised text means inserting the contents of Greg’s Addition VI at the end of scene 9 (in the Revels edition this is Act 3, Scene 2) and thus separating the performance of the interlude and the actors’ comments from the Privy Council scene.

What Addition VI does is provide an explanation for the fact that the performance of the interlude is not resumed in the remaining part of the play, as has been promised. In the original manuscript More notes that the banquet is ready and that afterwards “they shall begin the play again” (9.291), while the scene ends with the players concluding the discussion of More’s improvisation by saying “let us go and be ready to begin the play again” since Luggins (the actor who should play Good Counsel) has come back with the beard and now they “lack nothing” (9.310-12). In some sixty-five lines of dialogue constituting Addition VI, someone (probably

¹¹⁰ Jowett’s Arden edition inserts the addition, but marks it off by a rule, as it does other additions throughout the play.

Heywood, whose hand this is) has composed a scene in which the players receive payment, but realize that it is less than what More would have given them (another in a series of less-and-more puns in the play). More enters in haste since he has been suddenly called to council (which accounts for the discontinuation of the play), the cheat is discovered, and the bad servant rebuked and dismissed.

We are not witnessing here a dramatic defect in the original copy—a lack of integration and therefore a clear symptom of the basically episodic original structure of the play, the kind of structure we have been taught to expect in the so-called biographical play, such as *The Life and Death of the Lord Cromwell*.¹¹¹ My reading of scenes 9 and 10 of the original copy suggests, on the contrary, that the play makes very subtle, connected, and dramatically extremely effective points about the centrality of the problem of counsel to More's career and its complex link to the theatre. The point is that the moral interlude in which More plays Good Counsel is in fact continued as the political interlude in which he performs the public offices of counsel. The juxtaposition is not a gap that needs to be filled up; it is the point at which the moral and the political meanings of this play, and of the dramatic tradition that informs it, merge. Whoever wrote Addition VI seems to have known a lot about how you make sure that all the stage business is transparent and that no promises are left unkept, but he seems to have missed an important dramatic point that the play he was given to revise was making.

¹¹¹ This is the title found on the first page of the text (A2r); the title page reads: *The True Chronicle Historie of the whole life and death of Thomas Lord Cromwell* (London, 1602). How different this play is from *Sir Thomas More* can be judged from the following lines found in it: "Pardon if we omit all *Wolsayes* life, / Because our play depends on *Cromwells* death"; 1613 ed., sig. D3v.

A similar intervention occurs at another important juxtaposition of scenes in the play. At the end of scene 7 the execution of the rioters is interrupted by Surrey, who announces the King's pardon, procured by More. But the King did not just grant the pardon; he also made More Lord High Chancellor of England. In the original manuscript, the next scene opens in More's household, with More and his man Randall, dressed to impersonate More and thus attempt to deceive Erasmus, who is about to visit his English friend. This spectacle of More as a newly made Lord Chancellor and More as a servant dressed up as Lord Chancellor is meant to show the deceptive and superficial nature of office and of the power invested in it. It is meant to show what decades of recent criticism of early modern English drama have striven to explore and illustrate: that power and theatrical performance are closely and problematically allied.¹¹² For even though Erasmus can very easily tell that Randall cannot be More, what we see on the stage are two actors both dressed as More. Seeing through one theatrical impersonation is premised on our acceptance of the other as true. Considered in this way, the juxtaposition of scenes 7 and 8 in the original manuscript already tells us what Addition 3 (written by Hand C), inserted between these scenes, only explicates. The addition in question consists of a monologue given to More, in which he ponders the relationship between the constant truth of selfhood ("It is in heaven that I am thus and thus") and the changing fortunes to which that self is subject in the world below.

¹¹² An early suggestive statement is found in Greenblatt's discussion of More (without reference to the play *Sir Thomas More*), included in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (13): "It is as if he were watching the enactment of a fiction, and he is equally struck by the unreality of the whole performance and by its immense power to impose itself upon the world."

Leaning to the More Part

To what extent the self is affected and essentially changed by the forces of circumstance is the question upon which this play powerfully meditates and which as powerfully engaged More's historical, and historically theatrical, self. Although not drawing on the play that primarily interests us here, Stephen Greenblatt in his influential discussion of More reaches conclusions similar to those we find enacted in the play.¹¹³ Seeing More as "a consummately successful performer" (12), Greenblatt opposes his political thought to that of Machiavelli, as others have done. The fundamental opacity of the political world which Greenblatt finds in More's thinking (15) is, he argues, characterized by layers of theatricality that, once stripped, reveal no stable, unmediated reality (14). Motivated by biographical interests, Greenblatt dwells on More's "intense individuality," his "highly complex consciousness of fashioning himself," and finds this quality merging in More's final works, written in the Tower, with the "larger totality" of Christ and his institutional anchoring on earth (72). According to this interpretation, More and Hythloday, the performer and the philosopher, are finally and triumphantly brought together, only to be destroyed on a scaffold, the place where the unrealities of performance blur into the reality of death (173).

This moving account depicts More as a solitary morality figure, torn, like most morality figures, between heaven, where things are "thus and thus," and earth, where no clear distinctions between truth and fiction obtain (15). But fiction, as we know, is not opposed to truth, only to

¹¹³ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, pp. 11-73.

fact, and morality figures enact their solitude only in relation to other people, with whom they are always in an implicit dialogue and by whom they are always potentially swayed. This is what is so unusual about More, inside and outside of the play. His rhetoric sways the opinions of others,¹¹⁴ but his own opinions are fortified against the power of words by exalting the idea of “conscience” to a place where words cannot reach and where others have no access. “Ye well ought and haue good cause to chaunge your owne conscience,” More is told by his daughter Margaret, “in confirming your owne conscience to the conscience of so many other.”¹¹⁵ Margaret’s reasoning, focused on earth rather than heaven and on conscience as socially contingent rather than unchanging,¹¹⁶ prompts More to see in her the archetypal temptress Eve, who plays the part of the Vice in the morality drama of his conscience, and who plays it “not much a misse.”¹¹⁷

The relation of this narrative to what we find in the morality plays themselves becomes apparent when we turn to one of the earliest printed examples of this kind of drama in England. In *The Interlude of the Worlde and the Chylde*, dating from the first decades of the sixteenth

¹¹⁴ Cf. the testimony of Erasmus, recorded in the preface to their joint translations from Lucian: “I have yielded to the influence of Thomas More, whose eloquence, as you know, is such, that he could persuade even an enemy to do whatsoever he pleased”; quoted in *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Rogers, p. viii.

¹¹⁵ Margaret Roper to Alice Alington, August 1534; *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Rogers, p. 524. Margaret here voices the argument common among those who had sworn the oath, “so many so good men and so well learned.”

¹¹⁶ As James Simpson notes in his discussion of the relationship between rhetoric and conscience in More’s thought, the kind of conscience that More advocates is “a distinctively modern conscience,” solitary in form and, interestingly, similar to the idea of conscience formulated by “his courageous Lutheran enemies”; “Rhetoric, Conscience, and the Playful Positions of Sir Thomas More,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature, 1485-1603*, ed. Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 121-136, at p. 135.

¹¹⁷ *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Rogers, pp. 524, 529.

century, we find Manhode approached by Conscience, who “counseyleth both hie and lowe.”¹¹⁸ Conscience complains that he is hated by the whole world, and this is amply confirmed by the epithets bestowed upon him by Manhode: “harlot” (319), “bychyde brothell” (321), “false flaterynge frere” (400). A dialogue ensues in which Conscience attempts to counsel Manhode away from the deadly sins in which he has been reveling, but Manhode, who “must haue sportynge of playe” (469), is not easily persuaded: “For thou counseylest me from all gladnes / And wolde me set vnto all sadnes. / But, or thou brynge me in this madnes, / The deuyll breke thy necke” (404-407). The conclusion, even though only temporary, is predictable: “A, Conscience, Conscience,” exclaims Manhode, “now I knowe and se / Thy cunnynge is moche more than myne” (477-78). Soon enough, however, Manhode will none of Conscience’s counsel (714): “The Worlde and Folye counseyllmeth me to all gladnes, / Ye, and Conscience counseyllmeth me to all sadnes” (705-706). It is only with Perseueraunce that the failure of Conscience will be remedied.

No such wavering is found in More, whose conscience is in full possession. He is aware, he reminds Margaret in the Tower, what his name signifies in Greek,¹¹⁹ but that foolishness is very different from the example to which Margaret eventually, and desperately, resorts. When “Master Harry Patenson,” More’s fool, was looking for his master and heard that More was still in the Tower, he became angry with him: “Why? What aileth hym that he wilnot swere?”

¹¹⁸ *The Worlde and the Chylde*, ed. Clifford Davidson and Peter Happé, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series, 26 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), l. 302. Further reference will be given parenthetically by line number.

¹¹⁹ *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Rogers, p. 519.

Wherfore sholde he sticke to swere? I haue sworne the oth my self.”¹²⁰ If More is unwilling to follow the example of the wise man, Margaret urges, then he should follow that of his fool—and daughter (another More). The problem, however, is that More cannot take counsel. To play the More part means to play the double role he is given in *Sir Thomas More*: the part of Good Counsel, by which the play is marred, and the part of the extemporizing Fool, who is unable to take counsel even when it is good. The point is subtly put by More himself, when in *A Dialogue concernynge heresydes & matters of religion* he explains how he has responded to the diversity of advice given him by several wise men:

And therefore after that suche had red it and seuerally said their aduice, I founde as it often happeth, that som thyng which one wise and well lerned man woulde haue out, twayne of like wisdom and lernyng specially would haue in, neither side lackynge good and probable reasons for their parte. Wherfore sith it became not me to be iudge ouer the iudgement of them, whom I toke and chose for my iudges, beyng such of them selfe, as harde were it for any man to say, which of them before the other he coulde in erudicion, witte, or prudence any thing preferre, I could no further go, but lene to the more parte.¹²¹

The irony, of course, is that the More part is not the more part, the part played by the majority in England. Leaning toward himself, More became not a man for all seasons, but a man out of season. While producing in *Utopia* the most influential statement about what a counselor should do in order to be heard, he embodied in his life the even more difficult problem of what the

¹²⁰ *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Rogers, p. 529.

¹²¹ Thomas More, *A Dialogue concernynge heresydes & matters of religion*, in *The workes of Sir Thomas More Knyght, sometye Lorde Chauncellour of England, wrytten by him in the Englysh tonge* (London: John Cawod, John Waly, and Richarde Tottell, 1557), sig. h1v, p. 106. The corresponding marginal note reads: “Lene to the more parte.”

individual who receives counsel should do in order to hear and discern.¹²² To this problem, and to another counselor poet, is devoted my next chapter.

¹²² That true wisdom is all about being able to listen and thus discern good counsel rather than about being able to give counsel is suggested in a very memorable way by Thomas Scott in his *The Second Part of Philomythie, or Philomithologie, containing certaine Tales of True Libertie, False Friendship, Power Vnited, Faction and Ambition* (London: Francis Constable, 1616), sigs. A8v-B1r: “Some are of opinion that wisdom consisteth in the ability to giue good counsell. But I think the knowledge how to take good counsell, and how to discerne the differenc[e]s of aduise, is the principall part of wisdom. That Frog in *Aesop* which in a great drought spying water in a deepe pit aduised his fellow to leape downe, that they might be satisfied and liue there, gaue good counsell and seemed to be a patterne of the first wisdom spoken of. But the other Frog that refused his aduise, and diued deeper then the present time, then the bottome of the pit with this question; But if the water faile vs there, how shall we then get out or how shall we liue there? was a figure of the second wisdom, and teacheth vs that it is harder to take good counsell then to giue it. Let vs therefore beware in this point, and learne to looke a little beyond that good which is first and most apparant in euery proiect, The second and third good is that which we must rest on: for truth is often most remote and nearest the bottome, all that swims vppermost is the froth and false good and fraud.”

CHAPTER 2

Counsel's Tyranny: The Instructive Case of George Buchanan

When in 1582 Stephen Gosson published his second treatise against the acting of plays—itsself, ironically, consisting of “fiue Actions”—he tried to achieve two things: first, to provide good counsel for his readers; second, to show that stage plays are never able to do the same.¹ The first concern is evident throughout the treatise. As early as the epistle to the gentlemen and students of both Universities and of the Inns of Court, Gosson observes that counsel is “a bright shining lampe” that dispels the darkness of the soul and that it is therefore as necessary to our ears as light is to our eyes (A5r). Aware, however, that one may speak wisely yet not be regarded by his audience, Gosson reminds his addressees “that the counsel I bring is good and sounde,” but that its efficacy is not in his power: “I haue my bokes in my study at commandement,” he despondently observes, “you are out of my walke, & your owne men” (A7r). In the treatise itself, Gosson invokes the image of the happy man from the first Psalm, “that walketh not in the Counsel of the vngodly,” in order to suggest that “if we flocke to Theaters to gase vpon playes, wee walke in the Counsell of the vngodly” (B7r). Theaters, and the plays performed in them, thus become sources of evil counsel, and they bring together an “Assembly of wicked worldlings” characterized by “the cunning drift, the deepe search, the subtill cast of the Children of darknes which are sharpe sighted in all kind of mischief” (B6v-B7r).² To show that this is

¹ Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in fiue Actions* (London: Thomas Gosson, [1582]). References will be given parenthetically.

indeed the case, Gosson has to refute the arguments of those who mention dramatic or theatrical examples that might argue the contrary. A prominent instance of such a potentially beneficial play turns out to be “*Bucchanans booke*” of *John the Baptist*, which was quoted against Gosson after he had published his earlier work *The School of Abuse* and which now must be shown for what it is—“an old wormeaten obiection” misunderstood and unadvisedly deployed by the defenders of playing (D6r).

The point that needs to be proved is not so much that dramatic texts are necessarily evil as that their representation on stage cannot be allowed in a truly Christian commonwealth. “It cannot bee denied,” Gosson writes, “that *Gregory Naziancen* one of the fathers of the Church, wrote a Playe of Christe; *Bucchanan* wrote an other of John Baptist,” but the real question is “to what ende? To be Plaid vpon Stages?” The answer is a vehement no (E5v).³ What follows is one of the most spectacular, and spectacularly willful, misreadings of early modern drama. It is also a great early example of superficial criticism since it shows, as we shall see, that Gosson has looked at Buchanan’s book and read the author’s preface, but does not appear to have read the play upon which he proceeds to pronounce a judgment. Unwilling, it seems, to tolerate even unperformed or unperformable plays, Gosson attempts to reduce Buchanan’s play to a mere treatise that chose verse as its mode in order “to bee the deeper imprinted in the mindes of men.”

² Further reliance on counsel as the mode of communication between Gosson and his readers is evident, for example, in the following passage (E3r): “Neuerthelesse sithince tongues are giuen vnto vs to speake, and eares vnto euery man to heare, that the one might teach, the other be ready to receiue good Counsell, and receiuing it, practise the same in life: according to the measure of those giftes that God hath giuen mee, I will speake somewhat farther against Playes, requesting my cuntrymen to open their eares as they do their bottles, and shake out the dust of contention that lyes within for corrupting good liquour when they haue it.”

³ The play traditionally, and mistakenly, attributed to Gregory Nazienzen is *Christ’s Passion*, on which see Katharine Lee Bates, *The English Religious Drama* (New York and London: Macmillan and Co., 1893), pp. 4-5.

Both Gregory Nazianzen and George Buchanan, Gosson argues, “penned these bookes in numbers with interloquutions dialogue wise, as *Plato* and *Tullie* did their Philosophy, to be reade not be played” (E5v):

So *Bucchananus* wrote his playe of *Iohn Baptist* for the kinge of Scots to reade, that beholding therein, the practise of Parasits in *Herods* court, The Tyranny of *Herod* powred out vpon the messenger of the Lord, & the punishment that followed: He might learne to gouerne his owne house, and beware what entreatie he guies to the Prophettes of God.

If it shoulde bee Plaied, one must learne to trippe it like a Lady in the finest fashion, another must haue time to whet his minde vnto tyranny that he may giue life to the picture hee presenteth, whereby they learne to counterfeit, and so to sinne. Therefore whatsoeuer such Playes as conteine good matter, are set out in print, may be read with profite, but cannot be playd without manifest breach of Gods commaundement. (E6r-E6v)

Like some later writers on Buchanan's works, Gosson apparently sees no difference between a text like the controversial *De iure regni apud Scotos*, first published in 1579 and cast in dialogue form, and *John the Baptist*, written much earlier. Not to acknowledge the difference, however, is to miss important aspects of the play that in fact have to do with counsel even if they suggest a more complicated understanding of it than what is found in Gosson's five-act treatise.

Instead of saying with the majority of scholars that *Baptistes* is but a poetical draft of *De iure regni*, in this chapter I suggest, contrary to chronology, that *De iure regni* is but a political

draft of the much more interesting and demanding *Baptistes*.⁴ I will link the discussion of *Baptistes* to Buchanan's other play, *Jephthes sive Votum*, in order to show how the more explicit engagement with counsel in the latter play reflects back upon *Baptistes* and its elaboration of the issue of tyranny. I want to see what happens when we read *Baptistes* the way Buchanan apparently wishes us to read it—as a piece of counsel communicated by a counselor poet to his prince. But I want to do this by considering the play in the light of what Buchanan tells us elsewhere about tyranny and counsel as two sides of the same political coin. It will become evident that both the question of tyranny in *Baptistes* and the question of counsel in *Jephthes* share an obsessive interest in the question of rhetoric, which makes any act of interpretation and therefore any act of taking counsel extremely difficult.

The rhetorical difficulty is, however, crucial. It shows how the relationship between the monarch and his counselor has been affected by the legacy of humanism and thus somewhat

⁴ Consider the following statement by one of Buchanan's nineteenth-century biographers: "Strictly speaking, indeed, the piece is hardly a drama at all, but simply a series of dialogues which naturally end with the death of the Baptist. [...] The *Baptistes* is, in truth, but the poetical draft of his famous tract *De Jure Regni apud Scotos*, whose publication long afterwards made him known to Europe as a political revolutionary"; P. Hume Brown, *George Buchanan: Humanist and Reformer: A Biography* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1890), pp. 122, 124. Almost a century later, the same sentiment is expressed by Buchanan's most authoritative twentieth-century biographer: "Hume Brown was not far off the truth when he wrote that the *Baptistes* was 'but the poetical draft of his famous tract *De iure regni apud Scotos*'"; I. D. McFarlane, *Buchanan* (London: Duckworth, 1981), p. 387. David Norbrook similarly sees the two texts as being about one and the same thing except that the dramatic form of *Baptistes* apparently made the ideas it conveyed less threatening than those found in *De iure regni*, "of which," he continues "it [*Baptistes*] constituted the 'poetical draft'"; *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*, rev. ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 151. See also Roger A. Mason, "Rex Stoicus: George Buchanan, James VI and the Scottish Polity," in *New Perspectives on the Politics and Culture of Early Modern Scotland*, ed. John Dwyer, Roger A. Mason, and Alexander Murdoch (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, [1982]), pp. 9-33, at pp. 12-13, and, more recently, Carine Ferradou, "Jean-Baptiste ou la remise en cause des autorités politiques et religieuses dans *Baptiste*, tragédie néo-latine de George Buchanan (1577)," *Anglophonia: French Journal of English Studies* 17 (2005): 51-62, at p. 54, as well as Tricia A. McElroy, "Performance, Print and Politics in George Buchanan's *Ane Detectioun of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes*," in *George Buchanan: Political Thought in Early Modern Britain and Europe*, ed. Caroline Erskine and Roger A. Mason (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 49-70, at p. 62.

changed from what is found in the medieval tradition of advice manuals for princes.⁵ Buchanan's elaboration of the rhetorical difficulty of counsel in relation to tyranny creates suggestive parallels with the vernacular dramatic productions published in England to which I will turn in the succeeding chapters, and thus reminds us once again that plays written in English, though often focused on England, participate in the larger cultural and political debates of the period. The problem of counsel like the problem of good rule, Buchanan seems to be telling us, cannot escape the question of language and its ability to communicate. When that language is Latin, things become especially difficult.

The first section of this chapter therefore takes up the question of tyranny, which in the monarchical form of government is always defined as rule without counsel or rule that does not heed good counsel. In the words of John Guy, "[b]y instructing in the ways of virtue and honesty rulers who would otherwise become tyrants," good counsel "is the touchstone of government."⁶ It is, to borrow the words of another writer on early modern political thought, "a preservative against tyranny."⁷ Counsel serves to remind the monarch of his duties and thus gently steer him on the course of good government. But Buchanan is anything but gentle. The aggressiveness of his counsel in the preface to *Baptistes* is underlined by an insistence on the impersonality of the laws as the curbing agents of the power-wielding monarch, also evident in *De iure regni*. It will

⁵ For the transition see Arthur B. Ferguson, *The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965). A more nuanced view of the medieval advice manual can be found in Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

⁶ John Guy, "The Rhetoric of Counsel in Early Modern England," in *Tudor Political Culture*, ed. Dale Hoak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 292-310, at p. 293.

⁷ Frederick William Conrad, "A Preservative against Tyranny: The Political Theology of Sir Thomas Elyot," Ph.D. Dissertation (The Johns Hopkins University, 1988).

be seen, however, that the notion of the law—and consequently of both tyranny and counsel—is precisely what the text of *Baptistes* throws into question by relying on the complexity of Latin rhetoric and on a mode of representation in which little is shown directly; instead, we are forced to rely on what the characters tell us about one another and thus constantly labor to distinguish calumny from truth.

To elucidate this problem, in the second section I bring Buchanan's *Jephthes* to bear upon the discussion of tyranny, laws, and counsel in *Baptistes* since it seems to me that the two plays form a kind of dramatic diptych focused on the slippery yet potent role of words in the realm of politics. Together, they foreground some of the central contradictions of the humanist political project. The rhetorical program trains the humanist to communicate his meanings in a compelling way, but in its obsessive focus on language it also threatens to render every act of political communication between the monarch and his advisor, and therefore every act of counsel, problematic. In the concluding section I return to Buchanan's own understanding of both his plays and his practice of counsel to show how what we find in the plays continues as a problem even when, like Gosson, we think we have left the plays behind.

Teaching by Example: Herod's Tyranny

The irony of Gosson's discussion of *Baptistes* consists in the fact that Buchanan wrote his play primarily for performance, not "for the kinge of Scots to reade," and that no punishment follows Herod's actions in the end. We know that the play was written and successfully produced in the early 1540s, while Buchanan was a teacher of Latin at the Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux,

where he also wrote his other Latin biblical play, *Jephthes sive Votum*, and where his pupils—Montaigne among them—performed, in addition to these original plays, Buchanan's two Latin translations from the Greek: Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Medea*.⁸ However, *Baptistes* was first published much later, in London in 1577, when Buchanan was securely settled in Scotland as tutor to the young Scottish king James VI. It is this printed book that Gosson must have looked at, since his description of the play is heavily indebted to the dedicatory epistle addressed by Buchanan to James VI, then a ten-year old boy, and dated November 1, 1576. The epistle is in fact a fascinating critical document. It shows the author pointing out how the play may be applied to the addressee's own situation: "that part of it may seem to concern you particularly," Buchanan notes, "which clearly sets forth the torments of tyrants and their miseries when most they seem to flourish, a lesson which I deem not only advantageous for you to understand, but also necessary; so that you may early begin to hate that which you must always avoid."⁹ But as if

⁸ On the chronology of Buchanan's plays, see *A Critical Edition of George Buchanan's Baptistes and of Its Anonymous Seventeenth-Century Translation Tyrannicall-Government Anatomized*, ed. Steven Berkowitz (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1992), pp. 107-109. Montaigne provides a personal testimony in his essay "Of the Education of Children" (I, 26): "I played the leading parts in the Latin tragedies of Buchanan, Guerente, and Muret, which were performed with dignity in our Collège de Guyenne. [...] Acting is an exercise that I do not at all disapprove of for young children of good family; and since then I have seen our princes take part in it in person, honorably and commendably, after the example of some of the ancients"; *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 131. That the plays were performed successfully is attested by Buchanan himself in his *Vita*, a biographical sketch written in the third person: "during this period he wrote four tragedies, afterwards published on favourable opportunities. But the first play to be written (the *Baptistes*) was the last to be published; the second play he wrote was the *Medea* translated from Euripides. Now Buchanan had composed these works in obedience to the custom of the school which required a play every year [for the pupils to play]. As Buchanan succeeded almost beyond his hopes in this design, he took somewhat greater pains with his remaining plays—the *Jephthes* and the *Alcestis*"; Latin text and translation in James M. Aitken, *The Trial of George Buchanan before the Lisbon Inquisition* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1939), pp. xviii-xxi. Early editions of Buchanan's translation of *Medea* inform us that the play was acted in 1543 in Bordeaux ("Acta fuit Burdegalæ, an. M.D.XLIII."); see *Medea Euripidis poetæ tragici Georgio Buchanano Scoto interprete* [Paris: Michel Vascosan, 1544], sig. 32v). The first edition of Buchanan's translation was published in 1544 together with Erasmus's extremely popular translations of *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

unsure of the effectiveness of this piece of theatrical counsel, Buchanan quickly turns to self-defense:

I also want this little book to be a witness to posterity, that if ever impelled by wicked counsellors, or with the license of royal power overcoming right education, you should do something wrong, it should be imputed as a failing not to your teachers, but to you who did not obey their virtuous warnings.¹⁰

What we have here is a wise and aged counselor offering good and timely counsel to the young, and good, prince in the form of a play which he had written almost forty years before and in which evil and parasitical counsel rules, it seems, an already tyrannical king. Disorienting, to say the least.

One way of orienting ourselves is to consider what kind of terrifying example Buchanan paints in the character of Herod and how James could learn from the failures of this princely predecessor. The question of Herod's tyranny in *Baptistes* is one upon which the criticism devoted to the play has in fact often stumbled. As Rebecca Bushnell observes in her study of this play in relation to tyranny and tragic form, Buchanan's Herod does not exhibit the kind of passion or licentiousness we find in, for instance, another humanist Latin version of the biblical story, Nicholas Grimald's *Archipropheta*, also written in the 1540s.¹¹ In Buchanan's play, Herod

⁹ "Illud autem peculiarius ad te videri potest spectare, quod tyrannorum cruciatus, & cum florere maxime videntur miserias dilucide exponat. Quod te nunc intelligere non conducibile modo, sed etiam necessarium existimo: ut mature odisse incipias, quod tibi semper est fugiendum"; Buchanan, *Baptistes*, ed. Berkowitz, pp. 350-351.

¹⁰ "Volo etiam hunc libellum apud posteros testem fore, si quid aliquando pravis consultoribus impulsus, vel regni licentia rectam educationem superante secus committas, non praeceptoribus, sed tibi, qui eis recte monentibus non sis obsecutus, id vitio vertendum esse"; pp. 350-351.

¹¹ Rebecca W. Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 110.

and his wife engage in debate, but we never see them exchanging kisses or losing themselves in voluptuous passion.¹² That kisses and embraces would not have been quite what the French boys would have been expected to learn under Buchanan's tutelage may be part of the explanation (let us leave Grimald's amorous English boys aside for now), but that consideration does not fully explain Herod's character in the play.¹³ Lasciviousness may have been out of the question, but some sort of exhibition of tyrannical passions—or at least those torments and miseries Buchanan refers to in his address to James VI—could not have posed a problem or a danger to the boys who were allowed to stage the rather spectacular *Medea*, with the dead bodies of her children and her grandfather's dragon-dragged heavenly chariot that carries Medea away toward the end of Euripides' play.¹⁴ In order to explain this anomaly, Bushnell is forced to read Buchanan's Herod as exemplifying "more subtle tyranny" (112), as "more politically astute—and a better actor" (113). In other words, the kind of sophisticated, deeply dissembling "tyrant" familiar from

¹² Compare this with the first appearance of Herod and Herodias in Grimald's *Archipropheta*, Act 2, Scene 4: "He. Who, who would not love such a face? Who would not gladly kiss it? Sweetheart, give me a kiss, I beg you. Her. There, there, my dearest!" ("HE. Quis o quis talem non amet faciem lubens? / Quis non exosculetur hanc lubentius? / Da, da roganti basium mihi, cor meum. / HER. Sic sic suauissimum caput"); *The Life and Poems of Nicholas Grimald*, ed. L. R. Merrill, Yale Studies in English, 69 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), pp. 264-265.

¹³ That Grimald's plays were meant for both reading and performance can be gathered from his dedicatory epistle to Richard Cox, where *Archipropheta* is seen as teaching the lesson of repentance to both readers and spectators: "Here the reader or the spectator will learn true, genuine, unfeigned repentance, the way to approach Christ, and the lesson the first preacher of the Gospel so strongly impressed upon the ears and minds of men" ("Cognoscet hic, siue lector, siue spectator ueram, solidam, & infucata poenitudinem: qua uia incedendum sit, ut ad Christum ueniatur: quid primus Euangelicae disciplinae concionator tantopere hominum auribus, ac mentibus inculcauerit"); Merrill, ed., *The Life and Poems of Nicholas Grimald*, pp. 234-235. Abbreviations in the Latin text are silently expanded. On Grimald's plays see Frederick S. Boas, *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), chapter II, and Howard B. Norland, *Drama in Early Tudor Britain, 1485-1558* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 319-334.

¹⁴ See Buchanan's Latin version of the lines in question: "Quid frustra in istas arietas pulsans fores, / caesosque meque caedis auctorem petens? / laborem omitte hunc, meque si qua in re est opus / adfare; manibus haud licebit tangere. / talem parentis Sol pater currum mihi / quo me tuerer e manu hostili dedit"; George Buchanan, *Tragedies*, ed. P. Sharratt and P. G. Walsh (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1983), p. 206.

Jacobean drama; a tyrant who does his anti-tyrannical act so well that it is impossible to say whether he is a tyrant at all.

This failure of straightforward representation may, however, be central to what this play aims to do. The difficulty with the representation of tyranny in the play was acknowledged in published criticism very early on, especially when it focused on the tradition of representing Herod in the drama prior to the 1540s. Buchanan's Herod is clearly not the raging tyrant of the medieval cycles partly because these two Herods were two different historical personages (albeit often conflated in literary treatments),¹⁵ partly because Buchanan does not seem to have been writing a play in which the representation of tyranny—of the problem of bad rule—is linked to the conflict between reason and passions, the divine and the beastly. This is all the more interesting since in his infamous dialogue *De iure regni apud Scotos*, also dedicated to the young king and published two years after the first edition of *Baptistes*, Buchanan gives us a vivid picture of tyranny. The tyrant is a creature torn by fear, dreading both enemies and friends, tormented by his conscience and “roused from his sleep by terrifying visions of the living and the dead and pursued by the Furies with their torches.”¹⁶ This image is significantly at odds with the

¹⁵ On this topic see Roscoe E. Parker, “The Reputation of Herod in Early English Literature,” *Speculum* 8.1 (1933): 59-67; Warren E. Tomlinson, *Der Herodes-Charakter im englischen Drama* (Leipzig: Mayer & Müller, 1934); S. S. Hussey, “How Many Herods in the Middle English Drama?” *Neophilologus* 48.3 (1964): 252-259; David Staines, “To Out-Herod Herod: The Development of a Dramatic Character,” *Comparative Drama* 10.1 (1976): 29-53.

¹⁶ George Buchanan, *A Dialogue on the Law of Kingship among the Scots*, a critical edition and translation of [...] *De Iure Regni apud Scotos Dialogus*, ed. Roger A. Mason and Martin S. Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 90-91: “neque solum vigilans his conscientiae tormentis crucietur sed terrificis etiam vivorum et mortuorum simulacris e somno excitetur et furiarum facibus agitetur.” The classic statement from antiquity is Xenophon's dialogue *Hiero or Tyrannicus*. For a detailed modern discussion, as well as the text of this dialogue, see Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, rev. ed., including the Strauss-Kojève Correspondence, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Toronto: The Free Press, 1991).

image of Herod as represented in *Baptistes*, where there are no furies, no visions of dead people, and no great torment of conscience.

Even more puzzling is the realization that one can easily imagine a play about Herod and John the Baptist that develops the theme of tyrannical passions while remaining completely faithful to the New Testament accounts of the episode. To write a tragedy in which John the Baptist is the hero may be hard, mainly because the idea of a Christian tragedy is such a paradoxical one,¹⁷ but to write one in which the tragic interest is focused on Herod is not only possible but seems to be suggested by the Biblical source itself. It is rarely noticed that the story of the encounter between Herod and the Baptist in the two major biblical sources (Matthew 14 and Mark 6) is told retrospectively. It is when Herod hears about the preaching of Jesus that he is reminded of John the Baptist: "It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead" (Mark 6:16).¹⁸ To explain Herod's reaction, the gospel narrator proceeds to tell how Herod imprisoned John because Herodias, his wife, asked him to. Annoyed by the prophet's pronouncement that Herod's marriage to her is unlawful (since she is his brother's wife), Herodias wanted to kill him, but could not prevail upon Herod, who knew that John "was a just man and an holy" and

¹⁷ Cf. Ferradou, "Jean-Baptiste ou la remise en cause des autorités politiques et religieuses," p. 59: "Le caractère tragique de *Baptiste* ne peut reposer sur la personnalité du protagoniste. Sa valorisation de la mort est en contradiction avec la conception antique et classique du tragique, qui implique une faute du héros le confrontant douloureusement aux limites de sa condition." For the play's failure to adhere to specific Aristotelian precepts regarding tragedy, see P. G. Walsh, "Buchanan and Classical Drama," in *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Sanctandreami: Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies*, St. Andrews, 24 August to 1 September 1982, ed. I. D. McFarlane (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1986), pp. 99-112, at p. 102. Having identified this failure, Walsh is forced to speculate that between the writing of *Baptistes* and the writing of *Jephthes* Buchanan must have read Aristotle's *Poetics* since the latter play, Walsh argues, conforms to the philosopher's rules (103). He concludes: "By his close observation of Aristotelian theory and Euripidean practice, Buchanan has transported us a whole world away from his lesser achievement in *Baptistes*" (110). I shall return to this controversial point later.

¹⁸ I quote from the King James Version.

therefore “heard him gladly” (Mark 6:20). Herod’s birthday feast becomes a convenient opportunity for revenge. Prompted by Herodias, her daughter (unnamed in the biblical accounts) asks for the prophet’s head on a charger when she is offered whatever she wishes as a reward for her dancing. Herod grants her wish “for his oath’s sake, and for their sakes which sat with him,” but is “exceeding sorry” to have to do it (Mark 6:26).

Unlike Buchanan’s *Baptistes*, Nicholas Grimald’s *Archipropheta* provides a good example of a play in which Herod’s respect for John as well as his willingness to repent is used to create a conflict between Herod’s love of his wife and the consciousness of his own transgression of the law.¹⁹ In this play, Herod’s birthday feast becomes the central event at the end of which the terrible request is made. Herod grants it quickly, and quickly attempts to go on with the feast,²⁰ but we get to see both him and Herodias tormented by the deed.²¹ Grimald stops there; no ghosts that lurk between the lines of the biblical narrative appear and we do not follow

¹⁹ See, for instance, Act 3, Scene 4, where Herod says to John: “Truly, I confess I am ashamed. I am sorry, and I repent. Now I see that I have wronged my brother’s marriage-bed. But, O my wife, whom I love, and who loves me more than her very eyes, how will you bear this? My heart is rent by various cares, which call me now this way, now that, in my indecision” (“Sane pudet (fatebor) pigetque; is poenitet: / Et agnosco me iam intulisse iniurias / Thalamo germani. At hoc coniux mea qui feret? / Quam ego, quae item me plus ocellis diligit. / Varias uocant curae scissa huc, illuc meae / Ancipiti cogitatione pectora”); *The Life and Poems of Nicholas Grimald*, ed. Merrill, pp. 292-293. See also Herod’s monologue in Act 4, Scene 8.

²⁰ “I will give it [or rather *whatever*], come what may, lest I should be thought either fickle or perjured. Go, lictor, cut off the head of the Baptist, and bring it here in a charger. I desire that everything here should be as is wished. Eat, drink, laugh, strike the lyre” (“Dabo quodcunque; obuenerit, ne uel leuis / Vel periurus uidear. I lictor, amputa / Baptistae caput, & in quadra positum feras. / Nihil hic non succedat uolo ex sententia. / Edite, bibite, ridete, plectra tangite”); pp. 344-345.

²¹ Herodias is given a short monologue in Act 5, Scene 2, where she is shown in some mental anguish, but tries to shake off the sense of guilt by focusing on the importance of her continuing royal status. Herod, on the other hand, shows little hope: he is troubled, restless, possessed by overwhelming grief (Act 5, Scene 3). It is notable, also, that he cannot sleep and thinks he is pursued by the furies, which we have seen above (see note 16) is the torment associated with tyranny: “Alas, what a troubled mind I bear with me! What furies madden and drive me! When I would sleep, what trembling seizes upon me, and what restlessness!” (“Hui quam irrequietum animum gero? furiis quibus / Incensus agitor? Inire somnos dum uolo, / Qui me tremores? quae auferunt insomnia?”); pp. 354-355.

Herod further, even though for many of his details Grimald clearly draws on Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*, where the entire point of the story is to show that Herod's subsequent defeat at the hands of his divorced wife's father is to be seen as a punishment for his violent act against John the Baptist.²²

What does Buchanan decide to do in his "tragedy," as the play is called on the title page of its first printed edition? Compared to Grimald's wealth of characters—including a very entertaining fool, two Pharisees, a Syrian man, a Syrian girl, the disciples of John, Jehovah himself, and finally a series of choruses: of common people, of banqueters, and of Idumaens—Buchanan's play appears minimalistic: beyond the characters the two plays have in common (John, Herod, Herod's wife and her daughter, and two Pharisees) all we find in *Baptistes* is a Prologue, a single Chorus, and a Messenger. Instead of Grimald's spectacle—centered especially on the birthday banquet, with its songs and dances—we get a series of dialogues between which the Chorus makes its curious interventions: Malchus and Gamaliel, Herod and the Queen, Herod and John, Malchus and John, Malchus and the Queen, John and the Chorus, Herod and the Girl (Salome, unnamed in the play), and finally the Messenger and the Chorus. Instead of showing us a banquet or the reactions of Herod and the Queen to the death of the Baptist, Buchanan chooses

²² The relevant passages from Josephus are given in *The Life and Poems of Nicholas Grimald*, ed. Merrill, pp. 222-224. As I hope my brief analysis of the play has shown, Merrill is wrong to insist that Grimald draws on Josephus alone, and not on the Bible (222). There is nothing in Josephus' account to suggest Herod's sorrow after the killing of the Baptist or his respect for him while he was alive, both points of utmost importance to the dramatic structure of Grimald's play. John Milton's plan for a tragedy entitled *Baptistes*, first published from manuscript by Thomas Birch in his 1738 account of Milton's life, focuses on Herod's birthday. As we would expect, Milton's Queen "praepares the King to some Passion, and at last by her Daughter's dancing effects it." As if this were not enough, Milton adds: "It may also be thought, that *Herod* had well bedew'd himself with Wine, which made him grant the easier to his Wives Daughter." Ghosts were to appear too: "There may prologize the Spirit of *Philip, Herod's Brother*"; John Milton, *A Complete Collection of the Historical, Political, and Miscellaneous Works of John Milton*, 2 vols. (London: A. Millar, 1738), vol. 1, p. xliii.

to end the play with a brief account of the crucial event delivered by the Messenger plus the final lamentation of the Chorus. What is thus given prominence are several competing points of view that keep shifting; in fact, similar views are often refracted by being given to different characters and deployed as part of different, often contrasting, arguments. As if to stay true to his title (*Baptistes sive Calumnia*), Buchanan is presenting us with a dramatic puzzle: Is the play about the Baptist? Or is it about calumny? How is one to tell good counsel from bad, truth from falsehood? Where exactly is the princely reader expected to see the tyrannical passions he is advised to shun or the working of evil counsel that he is instructed to watch out for? Here the nature of Herod's rule as represented in the play needs to be analyzed in some detail if we are to understand how the play as a whole may constitute a piece of thoughtful counsel.²³

“It is not clear,” remarks Warren E. Tomlinson, “whether Herod as found in Buchanan's *Baptistes* is an evil, tyrannical king.”²⁴ Tomlinson proceeds to point out three sets of problems that complicate the interpretation of Herod and, consequently, of Buchanan's play. First, when other characters mention Herod, they refer to him as a cruel tyrant (something we find in Grimald's *Archipropheta* as well). Thus, when the Pharisee Malchus opens the play, he describes the “savage king Herod” as someone who “wields his cruel sceptre.”²⁵ While opposing

²³ It does not seem to me right to claim, given the prominence of spectacle in Grimald's play, that all humanist drama turns away from spectacle to language in order to differentiate itself from the medieval traditions of popular theater, particularly the morality play and the interlude. That Buchanan does so in *Baptistes* to such an extreme degree appears to me to be a deliberate artistic choice. Cf. McElroy, “Performance, Print and Politics in George Buchanan's *Ane Detectioun of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes*,” p. 61.

²⁴ Tomlinson, *Der Herodes-Charakter im englischen Drama*, p. 72: “Es ist nicht klar, ob der Herodes aus Buchanans ‘Baptistes’ ein böser, tyrannischer König ist.”

²⁵ The original reads: “Crudele sceptrum saevus Herodes gerit”; 65 / 135. Further references will be to Buchanan, *Tragedies*, ed. Sharratt and Walsh. The first number is the line number of the Latin text, the second is the page

Malchus's reasoning on how the problem of the Baptist's preaching should be approached, Gamaliel, the calmer and more reflective Pharisee, closes his long speech with a casual mention of Herod's "monstrous behavior" and "the uncontrolled cruelty of his savage mind."²⁶ These characterizations begin to appear odd as soon as we see Herod in dialogue with other characters and with himself, which is the second problem identified by Tomlinson. Not only is there no sign of his cruelty or savageness, but he comes across as rather reasonable, patient, and willing to listen; he may not be the Stoic ideal Buchanan keeps invoking in *The Dialogue on the Law of Kingship*, but he is certainly not the creature torn by lust and anger that Buchanan opposes to this ideal and that some characters in *Baptistes* would want us to see in Herod.²⁷ In his first dialogue with the Queen, Herod resists the Queen's invitation to violence by arguing that the Baptist is both harmless and innocent: "The condition of kings is wretched," he observes, "if it fears the wretched."²⁸ What is more, Herod seems perfectly aware of the difference between a king, who "keeps watch on enemies," and a tyrant, who "is the enemy of the citizens."²⁹ He goes on to insist that "[i]t is the mark of good kings when the power is great to put limits on their use of force."³⁰

number of the literal translation. I quote from this edition because it offers modern translations of both *Baptistes* and *Jephthes*, but I check the Latin text of *Baptistes* against Berkowitz's critical edition of as well. Alongside the Latin text Berkowitz prints the first translation of the play into English, published in 1642.

²⁶ "immanitatis non sat Herodes habet / ni facibus irae subditis accreverit / animi furentis impotens crudelitas?"; 278-280 / 140.

²⁷ This "king-centred conception of politics" found in *De iure regni* is usefully contextualized by Mason, "Rex Stoicus: George Buchanan, James VI and the Scottish Polity," p. 18.

²⁸ "Condicio regum misera, si miseros timet"; 367 / 142.

²⁹ "Nempe hoc tyrannus interest regi bono; / hic servat hostes, hostis ille civium est"; 371-372 / 142.

³⁰ "Cum multa possis, facere viribus modum / regum bonorum est"; 398-399 / 142.

Finally, Tomlinson observes, problems are created by what the Chorus says in the course of the play. Just before we are to witness the argument between Herod and his wife, the Chorus delivers a long and rather general statement on one of the major themes of the play: the distinction between truth and falsehood, dissimulation and honesty, virtue and vice. The speech seems as applicable to the debate between Malchus and Gamaliel that prompted it as it is to the ensuing debate between Herod and his Queen. We are told that “[f]eigned devotion cloaks the cruelty of tyrants,” but when Herod says to the Baptist that he will have in him “a judge amenable and fair,” the Chorus does not see this as a hypocritical statement.³¹ Instead, Herod is urged to continue in this spirit:

Proceed by this path to win affection, and you will live famous in the eyes of posterity.

Believe that kingdoms are safe not so much through gold or bands of soldiers, but when love and loyalty gained through fairness defend them.³²

Whether Herod does pursue this path remains an open question. At the end of his conversation with John he concludes that the matter is complicated and that he will postpone his decision until more is known.³³ At this point we would expect his counselors to enter and help him make his decision, but instead the Chorus intervenes to observe that the tyrant's words are often at odds with his thoughts.³⁴

³¹ “*ficta crudeles pietas tyrannos, / impios mores stola fimbriata / celat*” (334-336 / 141); “*facilem et aequum iudicem / Herodem habebis*” (449-450 / 144).

³² “*Hac perge carus esse; vives posteris / clarus. nec auro nec catervis militum / tam crede regna tuta quam quae caritas / et aequitate parta defendit fides*”; 458-460 / 144.

³³ “*perplexa res est. donec cuncta certius / comperta pateant, stat nihil decernere*”; 517-518 / 145.

Since John has left the stage and Herod now delivers a long speech that in fact discovers his thoughts, we are invited to see it as responding to the choral comment as well as to our expectations: Herod here is in council with himself. But whereas the Chorus spoke of tyrants, Herod speaks of kings. Like the Chorus, Herod is conscious of the gulf between thought and language, yet he uses it to pursue a different line of argument. "Words cannot express by speech," he begins, "nor the eye of the mind grasp by thought how wretched and troubled is the destiny of kings."³⁵ What follows is an impressive monologue on the nature of kingship in which Herod renders problematic the distinctions between kings and tyrants drawn in Buchanan's *De iure regni apud Scotos* and referred to above. Since there is no other character on the stage except the Chorus, it makes little sense to read the speech ironically and consequently argue that Herod is dissembling. What is especially notable about the speech is the total absence of tyrannical passions; instead, we see Herod reasoning with himself as a ruler whose primary aim is to preserve order and by preserving order secure the rights of kingship. Unlike common people, Herod observes, who are allowed to show their feelings, kings have to appear

³⁴ "Qui de tyranni oratione se autumat / perspicere mentis posse sensus abditos, / ne turbido se credere speculo sciat"; 519-21 / 145. Sharratt and Walsh translate *tyrannus* as king, which is misleading. The Chorus is commenting on the nature of tyrants; Herod, on the other hand, is speaking of kings.

³⁵ "Fortuna regum quam misera sit et anxia, / nec fando poterit explicare oratio / nec cogitando mentis acies adsequi"; 524-526 / 145. Compare the following speech by Viceroy of Portingale in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (in *Two Tudor Tragedies*, ed. William Tydeman [London: Penguin Books, 1992], 3.1.968-974, p. 176): "Infortunate condition of kings, / Seated amidst so many helpless doubts! / First we are plac'd upon extremest height, / And oft supplanted with exceeding heat, / But ever subject to the wheel of chance; / And at our highest never joy we so, / As we both doubt and dread our overthrow." In a recent discussion of this section of *Baptistes*, Tricia A. McElroy argues that Herod is "publicly speaking the lines of a wise and prudent king" while in soliloquy he reveals his true tyrannical nature, but I don't think the text bears out this interpretation; see McElroy, "Performance, Print and Politics in George Buchanan's *Ane Detectioun of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes*," p. 62.

respectable, and respectably calm, even though they are tortured by fear and tossed by emotions as much as other human beings are.

This speech is the closest we get to Buchanan's description of the tyrant in *De iure regni*. But unlike Buchanan's tyrant, who is tortured by fear because he cares only about his own person,³⁶ Herod's king is concerned about kingship and the future of the commonwealth. "If I destroy this prophet," he reasons, "I shall displease the people; If I preserve him, I neglect the interests of my kingdom."³⁷ The problem is that the prophet is challenging the authority of the king and thus setting an example for others to follow. If he is not punished, who knows where, if at all, he will stop and how many others might follow him? The course Herod is forced to choose is to seek the favor of the people if possible; if not, to preserve the kingship. At stake are not the Jewish laws that Malchus is invoking but what Herod problematically sees as the basic law of

³⁶ Herod does controversially state "imperi / habenda ratio est; ipse mihi sum proximus" ("I must take thought for my rule; I am my own neighbour"; 544-545 / 146). Sharratt and Walsh explain the line as "Herod's cynical answer to the question posed to Christ and answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan"; Buchanan, *Tragedies*, ed. Sharratt and Walsh, p. 280. I would, however, be inclined to go elsewhere. *Sibi quisque proximus* is a Renaissance commonplace. We find it, for instance, as a marginal *sententia* placed next to the lines spoken by Paedagogus to Nutrix in Euripides' *Medea*, in a mid-sixteenth century Latin translation of the play (Buchanan, as has been observed, himself translated *Medea* into Latin): "Quis hominum non nouit hoc, / Quod omnes se magis quàm alios amant: / Alij iustè, alij propter commodum aliquod"; *Euripidis tragoediae, quae hodie extant, omnes, Latinè soluta oratione redditae* (Basileae: Apud Ioannem Oporinum, 1558), sig. n4r. The idea is also common in English sixteenth-century drama. I find it somewhat adapted, for instance, in the words of a character called Painted Profit in George Wapull's play *The Tide Tarrieth No Man*, first published in 1576: "*Ne quisque sapit, qui sibi non sapit. / This saying I read when as I went to school, / One not wise for himself is but a very fool*"; *English Morality Plays and Moral Interludes*, ed. Edgar T. Schell and J. D. Shuchter (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), lines 212-214, p. 318. Should this example not be admitted, I can offer one from Christopher Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*: "*Ego mihimet sum semper proximus*"; Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, ed. J. B. Steane (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 1.1.192, p. 354. Or perhaps from a play that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 below: "Report declares he is a man that to himself is nie"; Thomas Preston, *Cambises*, ed. Robert Carl Johnson (Salzburg: Institut für englische Sprache und Literatur, 1975), line 67.

³⁷ "hunc si prophetam perdo, populum offendero; / si seruo, regno consulo parum meo"; 542-543 / 146.

kingship that the people need to observe: “to believe that for me anything contrary to the laws can be lawful.”³⁸

The statement in the original, to which I will return, is much more convoluted than what the translation is saying, but we are obviously faced here with the central debate over the nature of kingship in the early modern period. In *The Dialogue on the Law of Kingship among the Scots*, Buchanan insists that the law comes before the king and that the king “is placed in office for the sake of maintaining justice,” which further leads Buchanan to assert that there is no difference between king, leader, emperor, or consul since their office is identical.³⁹ What this also means is that the king himself is subject to the law and must suffer under the law if he decides to be a tyrant. This is the question that in fact frames Buchanan’s dialogue with Thomas Maitland on the law of kingship in Scotland. Written in the aftermath of the deposition of Mary Queen of Scots in the late 1560s, the dialogue was not published until a decade later, but its circulation in manuscript made it well known. It was so well known that Maitland, Buchanan’s interlocutor in the *Dialogue*, felt obliged to write a letter to the deposed queen to explain that he had nothing to do with the writing of the work and that Buchanan made him say in the *Dialogue* whatever happened to suit the purpose of his argument.⁴⁰ The deposition of Mary Stuart becomes in the *Dialogue* an occasion for reflection on the relationship between the ruler and the law,

³⁸ “quid Malchus iste garriat de legibus, / quas curiosas quaestiones litibus / inexplicatis iactet, id nihil mea / referre credo, modo populus unam hanc sciat / legem tenendam, praeter ut leges mihi / licere quidvis esse legitimum putet”; 567-572 / 146.

³⁹ Buchanan, *Dialogue*, 34-35: “neque multum referre puto, rex, dux, imperator an consul vocetur qui praesit, modo illud teneatur, eum aequitatis tuendae causa in magistratu esse collocatum.”

⁴⁰ The letter has perished since it was consulted in the early eighteenth century by Thomas Innes, whose account of its contents is all we have. See Buchanan, *Dialogue*, ed. Mason and Smith, pp. xvii-xviii.

which in the case of *Baptistes* becomes, via Buchanan's dedicatory address to James, also the relationship between the ruler and his counselor. If the ruler is bound by the law, then he is also bound by the advice of his counselor; the counselor's duty to advise becomes the monarch's duty to take the advice.⁴¹

The deliberate blurring of the image of the ruler with that of the tyrant that we see in *Baptistes* is found, though to a somewhat lesser degree, in the *Dialogue* too, where Maitland is at pains to preserve the distinction as he is being besieged by Buchanan's arguments. It is not the punishment of tyrants, Maitland observes, that people outside of Scotland are worried about but rather the punishment of lawful kings. This observation prompts Buchanan to raise the question of the difference between a tyrant and a king, but the question quickly becomes more complex than it appeared at first. Buchanan observes that tyranny was not originally a bad word. It merely characterized someone "who had unlimited power in all matters, bound by no legal restrictions and subject to no judicial investigation."⁴² In other words, "among the ancients kings and tyrants were exactly the same."⁴³ But as tyranny degenerated into bad rule, Buchanan continues his historical argument, good rule began to be referred to by the term kingship, which itself inevitably degenerated and had to be subjected to "the moderating influence of laws" (*legum moderatio*). That is how we have come to the point where the authority of the laws (*legum imperia*) is stronger than the authority of the kings (*regum imperia*) and good kingship, obedient

⁴¹ Cf. Guy, "The Rhetoric of Counsel," p. 294: "A ruler's obligation to seek counsel was strictly moral: 'counselling' was a duty and not a right. A ruler was free to choose his own counsellors and could not be bound by their advice."

⁴² *Dialogue*, pp. 80-81: "Tyranni enim et Graecis et Latinis vocabantur, penes quos erat libera omnium rerum potestas, nullis legum vinculis adstricta aut iudicum cognitionibus obnoxia."

⁴³ *Dialogue*, pp. 82-83: "Reges profecto et tyranni apud veteres idem plane fuisse videntur."

to the laws, is opposed to tyranny, which strives to be above them (84-85). From this follow other conclusions: tyranny is contrary to nature (since the laws of justice are natural) and a tyrant rules over unwilling subjects who thus become slaves.

By developing this historical argument, Buchanan explains what he asserted earlier in the *Dialogue*, namely that the king should be guided by the law since he is himself a human being, imperfect and prone to error (33-34). The security of the laws consists in their ability to limit the authority of the king, who is otherwise likely to be governed by his lust (*libido regum*, 34-35). The good king who does not need to be governed by the laws is an ideal that can be imagined but is rarely seen (50-51); the reality is the king who is always on the verge of becoming a tyrant. Everything that is here said about the law could be, and often was, said about counsel: even if the giving of counsel is a duty rather than a right, it is still understood to have the moderating influence comparable to that of the law. To subject himself to the law as it is described in the *Dialogue*, the monarch first has to subject himself to the advice the *Dialogue* embodies. The analogy is underlined by the fact that Buchanan both writes the dedicatory letter to James and finds himself in the *Dialogue* as the main speaker.

How does this pessimistic vision of human nature as always being, once it is given power, on the verge of tyranny relate to what we find in *Baptistes*, where several competing systems of both rule and law are at work? As I have already argued, Buchanan's Herod does not fit the image of the tyrant so vividly and repeatedly painted in the *Dialogue*; he is unwilling to resort to violence and happy to discuss matters with the Pharisees, the Baptist, with his wife and her daughter. The first line with which Herod is greeted in the play is the Queen's "You are ever slow-witted" (*lentus*, 345 / 141), but there is no indication that this upsets him. He is criticized by

John for being in an unchaste union with his own brother's wife, but this criticism does not provoke Herod into anger and is not used in the play to emphasize Herod's lustful or lascivious nature.

The figures that do exhibit tyrannical passions in the play are the Queen and Malchus, both of whom are violently set against the Baptist and eager to persuade Herod to eliminate him. In the opening dialogue of the play Malchus is contrasted with Gamaliel, the rabbi who wishes to understand the case before he can judge it and calmly opposes "pride, violence and arrogance" that he sees in Malchus' speeches.⁴⁴ What is more, Gamaliel explicitly links Malchus' obstinacy and aggressiveness to tyranny while advising him to change his opinions.⁴⁵ Even the Chorus concurs, yet pessimistically adds that "anger is the enemy of right counsel."⁴⁶ The strategy Malchus devises is to assail Herod's ears with disturbing rumors, but his efforts eventually fail. Unlike Herod, however, Malchus is unable to contain himself even when he is determined to do so. "I burst with anger," he exclaims during his conversation with the Baptist, and soon realizes that the king cannot be easily persuaded since he is not moved by the same passions.⁴⁷ Malchus thus finds an ally in the Queen, whom he describes as resembling "a raging tigress robbed of her

⁴⁴ "O Malche, vero procul aberras a scopo, / nostram tueri dignitatem si putes / nos posse fastu viribus superbia"; 171-174 / 137.

⁴⁵ "Quin potius illud adsequere, ut omnibus / grassatus esse viribus tyrannidis / credere, sanctum donec opprimeres virum, / ratione quem non potueris convincere"; 207-210 / 138.

⁴⁶ "Recte Gamaliel admonet me iudice, / et tu monenti obtempera. sed consili / recti hostis ira mentis aciem obnubilat, / auremque monitis obstruit salubribus"; 217-220 / 138.

⁴⁷ "Disrumpor ira"; 734 / 150.

cubs”: “Whilst this flame of her seething anger is still fresh and blazing,” he continues, “I shall thrust torches beneath her disturbed mind and feed them with appropriate words.”⁴⁸

What Malchus, in some ways the embodiment of evil counsel, sees in the Queen is the ultimate instrument of persuasion: she may succeed where he has failed. On her side, the Queen is soon disappointed by both Malchus and Herod and decides to seek revenge with the help of her daughter. The dialogue that ensues in the following scene between Herod and the Girl, to whom at a recent banquet he promised whatever she wanted, proves once again that Herod is a most unusual tyrant and that the working of evil counsel that James is being warned about once again, as in the case of Malchus, is successfully resisted without the assistance of wise counselors. We now find Herod stating the same principles about the limits of royal authority that Buchanan expounds in his *Dialogue on the Law of Kingship*. Asked for the Baptist's head, Herod attempts to convince his daughter that the request is unreasonable. He is concerned that the people's hatred may turn against them all, but the daughter insists that “[t]he people's role is to obey, the king's to command.”⁴⁹ The response she receives is that “the king's role is to command what is just,”⁵⁰ to which she in turn responds that “[t]he king by his command can make just what was earlier unjust.”⁵¹ When Herod urges that the law sets a limit upon the authority of the king, the daughter claims that it is the other way around. Kings are to be feared,

⁴⁸ “superest doloris sola nostri particeps / regina, tigris orba ceu catulis furens [...] flamma dum recens calet / irae aestuantis, turbidae menti faces / supponam alamque commodis sermonibus”; 885-892 / 153. The same image is used earlier in the play by Gamaliel, who comments on Malchus' plan to work upon the king (278-280 / 140).

⁴⁹ “Parere populi est, imperare regium”; 1203 / 160.

⁵⁰ “Aequa imperare regium est”; 1204 / 160.

⁵¹ “Quod iniquum erat / prius, imperando facere rex aequum potest”; 1204-1205 / 161.

she continues, rather than be loved, and the reputation of a tyrant that Herod fears matters little when the king wields power as he should. Bound by his oath, Herod eventually yields, but does not fail to repeat his advice to the Girl. Both women are urged not to be ruled by anger and warned that the danger, like the fault, will be theirs. These are the last words Herod is given in the play. The Queen, on the other hand, gives us a version of one of Herod's earlier thoughts: "whether kings enjoin just or unjust commands, the people must believe that they are all to be borne without resentment."⁵²

What is especially noteworthy about the stichomythic debate between Herod and the Girl and about the Queen's comment is that the two women are now voicing what Herod himself shared with us earlier in the play as his own position, when in response to the choral remark that the king's thoughts are never fully revealed Herod went on to do exactly that. The whole of this earlier speech (lines 524-572) hinges on Herod's closing words, which seem to suggest that we are confronted with a prototypical tyrant intent on turning his own wishes into laws and himself into the only absolute law. But the case is more complex than that. As has already been noted, the problem with the speech is that it is voicing political views very similar to Buchanan's own in *De iure regni*. When Herod speaks of "the mob" and of "the common folk" as "capricious in embracing joy and anger," he is in agreement with both Buchanan and Maitland, perfectly aware that trying to make political decisions that would merely please the mob cannot be a wise political course.⁵³ The question is one of kingship and the laws. Who is allowed to impose laws?

⁵² "et sive reges aequa iniquave imperent, / aequo ferenda populus animo omnia putet"; 1262-1263 / 162.

⁵³ "plebs gaudia / irasque temere sumit et temere abicit" (549-550 / 146). It has been objected that in his conversation with John Herod first claims that people are like the limbs of his body only to assert later that the fickle

To answer that question we need not only to scrutinize again Herod's conclusion of the speech but also to place it in the context of the play. Even though *Baptistes* has appeared to many readers as a simple series of rhetorical debates devoid of dramatic interest and thus inferior to his *Jephthes*, there is a great deal of dramatic continuity in the text: points made in one scene are in an implicit dialogue with the points made before as well as those that will be made after. Thus certain rhetorical positions are almost turned into dramatic characters themselves, demanding that we follow them through the play and see how they behave in different contexts. The speech on the relationship between kingship and law that Herod delivers follows his conversation with John the Baptist and is divided from it only by the comment of the Chorus—always in this play a complicating factor—in which we are warned that tyrants are not what they seem. But that begs the question of Herod's tyranny instead of answering it, since both the preceding conversation and the subsequent monologue speak of kings, not tyrants.

As a king, Herod is worried about the effects John's words have on the commonwealth. The old laws are thrown into question, the people are restless, the religious leaders mutter, the peace of the state is under threat. What we also glimpse here is a point otherwise absent from the play: the fact that above Herod's rule hovers the mighty arm of the Roman emperor. "It was no Assyrian or Egyptian father who begot me to make me a tyrant eager for your blood," Herod observes, insisting further: "You and I share the same country as native land, wet nurse, and

attitudes of the people cannot dictate the manner in which he should rule. There is no necessary contradiction here and accusations of duplicity are as applicable to Herod as they would be to Buchanan, who in *De iure regni* finds no difficulty in maintaining these two views at one and the same time. See Buchanan, *Dialogue*, pp. 10-11, where he speaks of *imperita multitudo*, and pp. 88-89, where he describes *vulgus* easily swayed by the tyrant; compare this with the discussion of *populus* and its limited participation in the government of the realm: not *populus universus* but selected men; pp. 54-55. For the problems such references in *De iure regni* create for the interpretation of Buchanan's political thought, see Mason, "Rex Stoicus: George Buchanan, James VI and the Scottish Polity," p. 20. A similar logic is at work in Herod's equation of his kingdom with his rule in the same speech.

mother” (443-446 / 143-144).⁵⁴ At this point the Chorus commends Herod’s words while the Baptist gets the chance to state his own position. Less concerned about unrest and mutiny, he insists on the importance of his mission of truth-telling. His condemnation of Herod’s marriage to his brother’s wife is what the Baptist is compelled to utter if he is to speak the naked truth (*nuda veritas*). He is no enemy to the earthly prince and no violator of ancient laws (a point also made early in the play by Gamaliel, the reasonable Pharisee). Herod himself, John continues, is subject to the laws, primarily to the law of God, who is everybody’s king.

It is at this point that the question of the divine as opposed to the earthly law is raised. Herod reminds John that they are both on earth, not in heaven: John’s obedience to the kings, he ironically notes, is shown in the fact that he wants kings to obey his laws. John on his part insists that he has no problem with kings and their kingdoms, Herod included, but that his native land is the eternal kingdom: “If I could pass laws, I would decree that peoples should obey kings, and kings God.”⁵⁵ And what would Herod do if he could pass laws? Though the question is not explicitly asked, it is addressed in Herod’s ensuing monologue. It is not just a question of ancient laws; it is a question of laws more generally, some of which need to be created anew since the political realities are constantly changing and since there may be aspects of the life in the kingdom that are not necessarily taken care of by the existing laws. So when Herod is made to say that only one law matters, namely for the people to believe that for him “anything contrary to

⁵⁴ “neque enim tyrannum genuit avidum sanguinis / vestri pater me Assyrius aut Aegyptius, / et patria et altrix et parens eadem mihi / vobisque terra est”; 443-446 / 143-144. Contrast this with Malchus’ first speech, where Herod is represented as a foreign tyrant, “great-grandson of the half-Arab Antipater” (“Antipatri Semiarabis pronepos,” 64 / 135) and “one unholy” (*impius*, 67 / 135), but the fact that already the elder Antipas became Jewish by religion goes unmentioned; see on this Buchanan, *Tragedies*, ed. Sharratt and Walsh, p. 271.

⁵⁵ “Si ferre leges mihi liceat, edicerem / parere populos regibus, reges deo”; 514-515 / 145.

the laws can be lawful,” we need to look more closely at what the Latin text is saying and how that relates to the preceding discussion between Herod and the Baptist.⁵⁶

Herod's speech closes with the following lines:

quid Malchus iste garriat de legibus,
 quas curiosas quaestiones litibus
 inexplicatis iactet, id nihil mea
 referre credo, modo populus unam hanc sciat
 legem tenendam, praeter ut leges mihi
 licere quidvis esse legitimum putet.

The most noticeable thing about this passage is the persistent presence of words relating to laws and lawfulness. Malchus is babbling about laws (*legibus*), but that, Herod says, is of little significance. There is then the mention of one single or only law (*unam hanc legem*), a mention of laws in the plural (*leges*), then the use of the verb that signifies what is allowed or lawful (*licere*), and finally of an adjective that suggests something similar (*legitimum*). Herod here sounds much more like a lawyer than a tyrant. And he chooses such a complex syntactical construction that we are entitled to wonder what exactly he is saying. The reading of the passage will depend on what we understand *unam hanc legem* to refer to and on what we do with *praeter*. Most translations see “this one law” (*unam hanc legem*) as referring to what follows. All will be fine as long as people know (*sciat*) that one law (*unam hanc legem*) ought to be observed (*tenendam*): to think (*ut putet*) that whatever is contrary to the law (*leges quidvis praeter*) is

⁵⁶ Cf. Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants*, p. 111: “Only in the last lines of his speech does Herod clearly speak like a traditional tyrant.”

allowed to Herod (*mihi licere*) to be lawful (*esse legitimum*). This is in itself a legitimate interpretation of the passage. But we should acknowledge that *praeter* can mean different things and, more importantly, that *unam hanc legem* may not be referring to what follows but rather to something else. What that may be is suggested by a passage in Buchanan's other original play, where the question of laws is more explicitly joined with the question of counsel.

Counsel Twice Blessed

Una lex is an expression that in Buchanan's *Jephthes sive Votum* serves to denote the singleness of the divine law. It is used in the dialogue between Jephtha and the Priest who attempts to persuade him that Jephtha's vow to sacrifice his daughter is unlawful. The two scenes are worth comparing not just because of this particular interpretive crux but also because in both the questions of law and tyranny loom large. The Priest warns Jephtha that their God does not want blood sacrifice but, instead, "hearts defiled by no pollution" and "a mind refined by ingenuous truth."⁵⁷ Jephtha responds by mentioning "our sacred laws" (*leges sacrae*) that seem to demand victims; vows need to be kept. The Priest observes that "the law (*lex*) bids us utter only vows that are just";⁵⁸ Jephtha insists in turn that it is the same heavenly law (*lex missa caelo*) that actually

⁵⁷ "nostro non litatur victimis / deo cruentis bubulove sanguine, / polluta nullo corda sed contagio / et mens recocta veritate simplice / illi offerenda et casta conscientia"; 895-899 / 82.

⁵⁸ "Sed nuncupare iusta tantum lex iubet"; 905 / 82. Notice the similarity with the dialogue between Malchus and Gamaliel early in *Baptistes*, where Malchus argues that killing John would not be a sin since it would be a sacrifice offered to God. Gamaliel, however, like the Priest here, insists on the innocence of the victim.

dictates the fulfillment of vows.⁵⁹ The debate develops to the point where even the logical conundrum of vowing to destroy the ancient laws is introduced: should the laws or the vows to destroy the laws be respected? What happens when vows are rashly made and turn out to be contrary to the laws? The Priest—who propounds what to us is the familiar logic of the New Testament—is annoyed by Jephtha's persistent invocation of the consecrated ancient laws (*sacratae leges*, 936 / 83). He opposes to them the single law of God:

God's voice is the single, simple, self-consistent truth (*una simplex veritas*). What he has once ordained continues fixed and implanted on its unchangeable course, and cannot diverge (*nec deflectere licet*) in the slightest degree to left or right. One must train one's eyes on this one, true mark (*unum hunc scopum*), and from that one law (*ab una lege*) fashion the strategy of one's life, for God has ordained that this be, as it were, a torch to guide our unsteady steps over ways made uncertain through blind wandering. [...] So do not despise this friendly advice, and cease to anger God in your wish to placate him. He rejoices in being worshipped not according to your decree but by the law (*lege*), rite and customs which he approves.⁶⁰

It is at this point that the ignorant mob—i.e. the people—enter the debate. They are introduced by Jephtha, who argues that “[t]he untaught and ignorant crowd holds fast to vows, and has no

⁵⁹ “nunc, re peracta, quod semel votum est deo / lex missa caelo nos iubet dependere”; 908-909 / 82.

⁶⁰ “divina vox est una simplex veritas / sibi que constans. quod semel iussit, ratum / fixumque perstat tramite immutabili, / nec ad sinistram dexteramve paullulum / deflectere licet. intueri unum hunc scopum / verum est, ab una lege consilia suae / vitae capessere, quando ceu facem deus / hanc esse iussit, quae per incertas vias / errore caeco reget instabiles gradus. [...] igitur amica monita ne sperne, et deum / placare dum vis concitare desine, / non instituto qui coli gaudet tuo / sed sibi probatis lege ritu moribus”; 938-946, 958-961 / 83-84.

truck with deceit,” unlike the wise folk.⁶¹ What men gain with education, he concludes, is a disrespect for “the sacred rites.”⁶² The Priest takes up the challenge, but turns the example of the mob against Jephtha by introducing the image of the tyrant. If the crowd considers the evil doings of a tyrant to be right, that does not make them right or honorable:

There is one undiluted form of the honourable (*una est honesti forma simplex*), which neither the power of the tyrant nor the authority of the powerful will be able to water down or defile. [...] You abolish distinctions of all kinds when you decide that what is just and unjust, mean and honourable depends on the opinion of the fickle mob. [...] The final fire will make heaven and earth, air and waters dissolve, but length of time will not detract a tittle from the law bestowed by God.⁶³

The primary tension here is between the single law (*una lex*) or the single truth (*una veritas*) of God, defended by the Priest, as opposed to the ancient laws and rites with which Jephtha is obsessed. In his obsession, Jephtha resembles Malchus from *Baptistes*, for whose babbling about the ancient laws Herod has as little patience as the Priest has for Jephtha's. What complicates the vexed passage from *Baptistes* is the possibility that Herod is not simply opposing to the ancient laws his own absolute law, but that by invoking *unam legem* he is responding to the earlier debate he had with the Baptist about heaven and earth, the divine and the earthly laws. Malchus's insistence on ancient laws (*legibus*) is of no significance; what matters is that the people know

⁶¹ “vulgus indocile ac rude / voti tenax est, nescium fraudis”; 967-968 / 84.

⁶² “nam litterarum quo quis est peritior, / huic est sacrorum cura neglegentior”; 980-981 / 84.

⁶³ “una est honesti forma simplex, quam neque / vel vis tyranni vel potentum auctoritas / adulterare poterit aut corrumpere. [...] rerumque tollis omnium discrimina / dum iniqua iusta, foeda honesta mobilis / pendere vulgi statuis ex sententia. [...] caelum et solum / et aëra et aquas solvet ignis ultimus; de lege vero quae data est divinitus / non carpet apicem temporis longinquitas”; 994-996, 1031-1033, 1048-1051 / 85-86.

(*sciat*) that the single (divine) law is to be observed (*unam hanc legem tenendam*), but that in addition to this (*praeter*) they consider (*ut putet*) that it is allowed to Herod (*mihi licere*) to make into laws or allow to be law (*leges esse*) whatever is lawful (*quidvis legitimum*). In other words, as long as they do not clash with the divine law, the earthly laws are within the power of the earthly king, a position that the Priest in *Jephthes* similarly holds when he insists that the laws (for him primarily spiritual and moral rather than political) are good to the extent to which they do not conflict with the single law of God.⁶⁴

What, in short, Herod may be saying is that there is a space for earthly politics of which he is in charge, that this is what kingship is about, and that the king has the unhappy duty of navigating between the Scylla of the divine law (which he fears the Baptist is redefining as the earthly law) and the Charybdis of the restive multitude.⁶⁵ Thus the conclusion of the speech in part reasserts the idea with which Herod began, namely the unenviable and therefore lamentable position in which kings find themselves.⁶⁶ “Kings will be tyrants from policy,” we could say with a much later defender of monarchy, “when subjects are rebels from principle.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ In *De iure regni*, Buchanan seems to equate what for his theory of rule is the central idea of “natural law” with the law of God; on this point, see Mason, “*Rex Stoicus*: George Buchanan, James VI and the Scottish Polity,” p. 16.

⁶⁵ That *una lex* often has the signification suggested here is noted by Carine Ferradou and Roger Green, “Some Aspects and Examples of Biblical Inspiration in George Buchanan’s Tragedies *Baptistes* and *Jephthes*,” in *George Buchanan: Poet and Dramatist*, ed. Philip Ford and Roger P. H. Green (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2009), pp. 197-213, at p. 205, who discuss the passage in *Jephthes* and relate it to the first Psalm, which the Priest’s description of wandering off the right path clearly draws on, but do not make a connection to *Baptistes*. It may be objected that *hanc in unam hanc legem* is more likely to refer to what is to follow in a discourse rather than to what has already been mentioned or to something else altogether, but a similar example from *Jephthes* quoted above (*unum hunc scopum*) clearly shows that this is not necessarily the case.

⁶⁶ Some of the topics addressed in Herod’s speech and elsewhere in the play, especially the nature of kingship, are to be found everywhere in Seneca’s plays. As Peter Sharratt notes, the dialogue between Atreus and his attendant in *Thyestes* (lines 204ff) seems especially resonant since it deals with royal power in relation to public opinion; “Euripides Latinus: Buchanan’s Use of His Sources,” in *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Bononiensis: Proceedings of the*

It is not the point of this analysis to demonstrate that one reading should be preferred over the other or that Herod is not tainted by dissimulation, vacillation, and self-interest. What it does demonstrate, however, is the deliberately slippery nature of the language and the arguments deployed in the play that is offered to James as a piece of straightforward counsel. Herod's concern with what is lawful is mirrored in John's earlier statement, also cast in the subjunctive mood, in which he does seem to be interested in earthly laws after all ("Si ferre leges mihi liceat, edicerem / Parere populos regibus, reges Deo," 514-515 / 145). When later in the play the Chorus advises John to be less absolute in his attitudes, John is no longer willing to maintain that there is no contradiction between the obedience to the heavenly and the earthly king: the two kings demand opposite things (1024-1025 / 156). Yet at the same time he is capable of producing potentially ambiguous statements, as when he says: "How could I appease the king [i.e. Herod] more than by our wanting and not wanting identical things?"⁶⁸ In order to make the characters conform to unchanging lines of arguments and the play to a consistent interpretation of the events, critics have been willing to attribute even to John an occasional recourse to irony, as when earlier in the play he calls Herod just but does it by relying on so many cognate words (*aequum, aequitatis, aequi, aequus*) in just two lines that he very much sounds like Herod speaking about what is lawful.⁶⁹ Nobody in this play is free from the language of the other.

Four International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies, Bologna, 26 August to 1 September 1979, ed. R. J. Schoeck (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1985), pp. 613-620, at p. 616. But I would add that there is nothing of Herod's careful and ambiguous legal language in Atreus, and whereas Atreus is mad with fury and cannot contain himself, Herod is composed even while he is telling us about his internal struggles. See also Walsh, "Buchanan and Classical Drama," p. 100.

⁶⁷ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Chicago: Gateway Editions, 1955), p. 114.

⁶⁸ "qui magis regem queam / placare quam cum volumus eadem et nolumus"; 1022-1023 / 156.

The word *calumnia* in the title of Buchanan's play may suggest, therefore, that this play is not so much about the representation of tyranny as it is about the power that calumny has once it becomes the dominant discursive mode—and everybody in the play seems to be a potential victim of it.⁷⁰ “Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,” says Hamlet to Ophelia, “thou shalt not escape calumny.”⁷¹ Both of Buchanan's original plays, Timothy J. Reiss aptly observes, “were exercises in the problems involved in the use and ordering of language.” But it is in *Baptistes* in particular, he goes on to say, that the dispute on the power of language “forms both the structure of the play and its principal theme.” The language is imagined as a barrier; it is “always, and by its very nature, a calumny.”⁷² This is perhaps most evident in the fact that the play's construction of character, as we have seen, largely depends upon the words of some other character. While often echoing one another grammatically or rhetorically, these accounts are as often in mutual contradiction semantically. Every statement is potentially a controversial argument and no trustworthy point of reference is given. The central tension thus consists in the

⁶⁹ “dixi, tu, ut aequum est aequitatis vindicem, / aequi bonique bonus et aequus consule”; 500-501 / 145. For an ironic reading of this passage, see Buchanan, *Tragedies*, ed. Sharratt and Walsh, p. 279.

⁷⁰ Walsh, it seems to me, misses the point when he claims that “the emphasis laid in the Prologue (and in the subtitle) upon calumny as the unifying theme may be retrospective, a valiant attempt to lend unity and coherence to a disjointed plot”; “Buchanan and Classical Drama,” p. 101. The Prologue talks mostly about the criticism to which Buchanan's plays have been exposed, which leads Walsh to argue that this must have been written from the perspective of 1577 (the publication) rather than the early 1540s (the original production). But this strikes me as too literal a reading of a literary commonplace; in order to work, it has both to denigrate the play's artistic achievement and to disregard the pervasive thematization of calumny in the play. Cf. also McFarlane, *Buchanan*, p. 389: “At one point the chorus touches on the theme of calumny, but when one has finished reading the play, one does not feel this is a major theme.”

⁷¹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3.1.137-138, p. 244.

⁷² Timothy J. Reiss, *Tragedy and Truth: Studies in the Development of a Renaissance and Neoclassical Discourse* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 50.

implication of even John the Baptist as the harbinger of *nuda veritas* in the play's preoccupation with the impossibility of expressing the truth in language or argument.⁷³

Once we approach the play in this way, we see that tyranny is not necessarily represented as resulting from the vicious nature of the ruler but proceeds rather from a particular system of government in which excessive passions and wicked counsel prevail over reason and good advice. The problem is that it is not clear what constitutes good advice in this play or outside of it and what exactly Buchanan the counselor would have done had he found himself with Herod in a situation as complex and as uncertain as the one depicted in the play. What this difference of perspective does, as Maitland observes in his dialogue with Buchanan, is simply shift the problem from the king to his counsel without resolving anything. When Buchanan concedes to Maitland that the many-headed multitude cannot be allowed to participate directly in the governing process, he proposes that men from all estates be selected and called to council (54-55). But if the king is prone to err and yield to his passions, how is it, Maitland asks, that the counselors will escape the logic of Buchanan's argument? "Are they too not tormented by the same evils as afflict the king?"⁷⁴ The ideal of the king ruled by the law and ruling with the people, in other words, can only be upheld by the fiction of good counsel. Yet that fiction, like the law it mirrors, must be grounded in the argument of language.

⁷³ See Reiss, *Tragedy and Truth*, p. 52.

⁷⁴ *Dialogue*, pp. 54-55: "Quid isti consultores e populo dati? Nonne et ipsi eodem illo intestino bello vexantur? Nonne eisdem quibus rex malis conflictantur?" Buchanan is forced to reply that a multitude of people judges better than individuals, but the argument becomes circuitous in that it returns us to the problem of the mob and *universus populus* (elegantly avoided in the *Dialogue*). For a more charitable reading of this passage, see Mason, "Rex Stoicus: George Buchanan, James VI and the Scottish Polity," p. 19.

The first translation of Buchanan's play into English, published in a very different political context of the 1640s, captures precisely this problem when instead of literally translating the original title as *John the Baptist, or Calumny* it transforms it into *Tyrannicall-Government Anatomized: or, A Discourse Concerning Evil-Councillors*.⁷⁵ The play is turned into a *discourse* (Gosson would have been pleased) not about a tyrant but about tyrannical government, which is primarily defined by evil counsel. As a warning to James VI, however, the play can hardly be said to function in an unambiguous way. We have seen that Herod consistently resists evil counsel and by the end of the play himself turns into an odd sort of good counselor: his objections to anger are comparable to the objections Gamaliel raises early in the play in response to Malchus's arguments and even Seneca, in his moral essays, could not but approve of them.⁷⁶ What makes the play complicated is the fact that Herod is not guided by evil counsel but bound by an oath, and it is only because of the oath that he yields to what he considers to be a misguided wish of his wife's daughter. It is as if Buchanan had written not one play, but two plays that need to be read together. For it is in *Jephthes* that the question of the oath gets to be anatomized and turned back upon the question of good counsel.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Tyrannicall-Government Anatomized: Or, a Discourse Concerning Evil-Councillors, Being the Life and Death of John the Baptist, and Presented to the Kings most Excellent Majesty by the Author* (London: Printed for John Field, 1642). Interestingly, the text of the translation is printed as prose throughout even though it is clearly composed in verse. A modern edition of the text, printed as verse, is found in Buchanan, *Baptistes*, ed. Berkowitz.

⁷⁶ See, especially, his *De ira (On Anger)*, in Seneca, *Moral Essays*, vol. 1, trans. John W. Basore (London: William Heinemann, 1928), pp. 106-355.

⁷⁷ The two plays are rarely read together except when the goal is to prove the inferiority of *Baptistes*, in which critics merely follow Buchanan's own reference to the play as *abortivus foetus* (in the prefatory epistle to James VI). As will be apparent from what follows, Buchanan's statements about his own plays should be taken with a grain of salt. A significant exception to this critical tendency is Reiss, *Tragedy and Truth*, who sees the conclusion of *Baptistes* as providing Buchanan with "the point of departure for his new play" (61). Reiss's deconstructive reading of the two plays is still relevant; his interest in the concept of truth and the limits of discourse relates to my interest in the

As with *Baptistes*, Buchanan is working in his second original play with slender source material. The short Biblical narrative of a man who, hoping to win a battle, vows to sacrifice to God the first thing he meets upon his return home (Judges 11:30-31) becomes in Buchanan's play an occasion for a sustained examination of the religious, ethical, and political implications of such an act.⁷⁸ Whereas in *Baptistes* it was the Queen's daughter who demanded the death of the prophet, here it is Jephtha's daughter who is the unfortunate victim of the oath.⁷⁹ Whereas in *Baptistes* it was a king who was bound by an oath, in *Jephthes* it is "an exile from his father's house, despised by his brothers and sprung from a lowborn father" (65), but who becomes a military leader (*imperator*) and then an important state official. Buchanan is thus setting up in his original plays something similar to what he does with the choice of his translations from the Greek. There, the story of Medea, the spurned wife who successfully undertakes revenge, finds her counterpart in Alcestis, the wife who willingly dies for her husband only to be miraculously resurrected. Buchanan has offered us in his four plays powerful and complex representations of womanhood that range from innocent submission (Alcestis) to triumphant revenge (Medea) and from valiant virtue (Storge and Iphis) to unreasonable excess (Herod's wife and daughter). In all of them, however, he has primarily given us problems to ponder, and the problem in *Jephthes* is

concept of good counsel since good counsel is traditionally understood to be the vehicle of truth. This is nowhere more apparent than in the notion of *parrhesia*, upon which more will be said in Chapter 5 below. We have seen already in the previous chapter, on the example of More, that what is at issue, however, is the mediation of that truth by discourse and thus the proper way for the articulation of counsel.

⁷⁸ For a detailed reading of *Jephthes* in the context of sixteenth-century theology and in relation to the question of sacrifice, see Debora Kuller Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 134-160.

⁷⁹ It is worth observing further that, in the Biblical account at least, Jephtha's daughter welcomes him back from the battle with a dance: "And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter" (Judges 11:34).

not simply the problem of an unfortunate vow that has to be kept but the problem of counsel that the vow immediately prompts.

The central section of Buchanan's *Jephthes* is taken up with two debates. The latter of these has already been discussed, namely the Priest's ultimately failed attempt to persuade Jephtha to follow his friendly advice and give priority to the single law of God as opposed to the ancient laws about vows. Even more interesting is the conversation between Jephtha and Symmachus, his friend, who insists on the importance of taking counsel before doing anything of moment and who has therefore been seen as a "prudent and sympathetic *raisonneur*."⁸⁰ The name Buchanan chooses for Jephtha's friend may have special significance. If the allusion is to Symmachus, the golden-tongued Roman orator whom the early Christian poet Prudentius addresses in his *Contra orationem Symmachi*, then we are to imagine here a rhetorically skilful individual who has written an eloquent work in defense of paganism. While Prudentius' task is to refute it, he pauses at the end of Book I to wonder at Symmachus's wonderful gift of speech and to pity his choice of employing it against the Christian God.⁸¹ More to the point, we are led to perceive in the name of this counselor friend a very ancient question: the moral end of rhetorical skill.

Buchanan's Symmachus proves true to his name. As yet unaware that the victim of the vow is Jephtha's own daughter, Symmachus gives us an enthusiastic description of Jephtha's rise and all the reasons for which he may be counted blessed in the eyes of men. Unlike the Priest,

⁸⁰ Buchanan, *Tragedies*, ed. Sharratt and Walsh, p. 258.

⁸¹ More on this in Ivan Lupić, *Prijetvorni subjekt: transtekstualni okviri Shakespeareovih Soneta* (Zagreb: Zavod za znanost o književnosti Filozofskog fakulteta, 2007), pp. 312-317.

however, who will oppose Jephtha's decision to perform the vow, Symmachus treads carefully when he hears what the problem is. "Clearly this scruple afflicts your mind," he unhelpfully observes.⁸² Yes, exclaims Jephtha, and goes on to deliver a passionate speech about his iniquity (he is "this wicked and unholy slayer of my kin") and misfortune.⁸³ "Pull yourself together," Symmachus calmly urges: "So serious a step is not to be taken rashly while the mind is uncontrolled, disturbed by blinding confusion."⁸⁴ What is required is composure combined with good counsel: "Once passion subsides and the mind is free to listen to sound advice, you must decide the whole matter in detached fashion in the company of friends."⁸⁵ Jephtha, however, continues impatient. Counsel, Jephtha argues, can help when matters are doubtful; his case is not like that, since the vow is unambiguous and its performance inevitable. To take counsel would be to add stupidity to injury. Yet for Symmachus the matter is still undecided. "If fortune initially seems hard," he presses on, "there is no need to fall at once into mental despondency":

No, I think you must take counsel all the more because of it. Often when something seems insoluble to one person, another copes with it easily. If matters which elicit poor advice turn out well, the fame will accrue to you; if they fall out badly, you are still not to blame. An act of folly prompted by a person of weight is virtually an act of sense.⁸⁶

⁸² "Hic scrupus animus scilicet premit tuum?"; 732 / 79. This is posed as a question in the original but is translated as a statement by Sharrat and Walsh.

⁸³ "scelestum parricidam et impium"; 750 / 79.

⁸⁴ "Non transigenda temere res est tam gravis, / turbata caeco dum tumultu mens furit. / compone tete"; 755-757 / 79.

⁸⁵ "cum quiescet impetus / et liber animus sana consilia audiet, / una cum amicis cuncta statues libere"; 757-759 / 79.

This cynical advice on the importance of taking advice continues in a way that makes Symmachus appear almost in love with what he is saying. If what is advised cannot be done, then those who have advised you will approve of your action, whatever it is. If, however, you do the act without consulting anyone, the man who has not been asked for advice will quickly condemn the act if it turns out badly: "He may know no remedies, but he wishes to be regarded as knowledgeable."⁸⁷ One fascinating thing about Buchanan's plays is their deployment of silence: Jephtha here is not given an opportunity to answer. Instead, the Chorus intervenes with its parrot-like remark: "Do not despise one who offers good advice, for repentance usually accompanies a deed rashly performed."⁸⁸

What kind of effect friendly counsel would have had on the calmed-down Jephtha we have no way of saying; it is not a possibility that the play offers us. Instead, it gives us the same tormented Jephtha in conversation with the Priest, who advises him against the act. The disagreements between them were the disagreements that marked the religious and political debates of the sixteenth century: the questions of vows and oaths, of true and false religion, of divine and human laws. Another disagreement, as present and as important, is the one over the basis of good counsel, so cleverly travestied in Symmachus' lines. "If such is your pleasure," Jephtha impatiently ends his conversation with the Priest, "these matters I leave you to pursue, who delight in being regarded as the high-priests of wisdom. But I prefer foolish and simple truth

⁸⁶ "Si sors initio res videtur ardua, / non est quod animum protinus despondeas; / quin consulendum censeo vel eo magis. / quod saepe visum est uni inexplicabile / expedit alius facile. si cedant bene / consulta prave, te sequetur gloria; / si male ceciderint, tu tamen culpa vacas. / auctore magno desipere paene sapere est"; 765-771 / 80.

⁸⁷ "quamquam sciat / remedia nulla, scisse vult credi tamen"; 780-781 / 80.

⁸⁸ "Ne commonentem recta sperne, nam fere / temere patrati poenitentia est comes"; 782-783 / 80.

to impious wisdom gleaming with deceit.”⁸⁹ The opposition set up here between the simplicity of truth and the deceitful multiplicity of wisdom rearticulates the problem that runs through both Buchanan's plays. It is the problem of a single and certain point of view as opposed to the diversity of views that any act of counsel presupposes.

Buchanan's Advice

It has become clear, I hope, that Buchanan's own fictions of advice that he served to his pupil King are inextricably entangled in the ambiguous rhetorical webs he has spun in the plays and in his other works. I have given you my counsel, he says to James in the letter prefaced to *Baptistes*; if you err, the fault is yours. But should not the fault be also Buchanan's, if Symmachus is right?⁹⁰ And is there no certainty that good counsel can provide? If Jephtha is right, is counsel based on wisdom and experience really as good as it appears? It would be impoverishing to read *Baptistes* (and *Jephtes*, for that matter) as a demonstration of a single viewpoint or as a straightforward piece of advice that Buchanan would like James—or his other pupils—to see in it. We are entitled, rather, to apply to Buchanan what Malchus says of John in *Baptistes*: “What traps this fellow lays, how he deceives with ambiguities!”⁹¹ The value of this

⁸⁹ “Vos ista per me, si libet, sectamini, / quos iuvat haberi antistites prudentiae; / ego veritatem malo stultam et simplicem / quam splendidam fuco impiam sapientiam”; 1052-1055 / 86.

⁹⁰ Compare Symmachus' phrasing (“si cedant bene / consulta prave, te sequetur gloria; / si male ceciderint, tu tamen culpa vacas”) with Buchanan's words from the dedicatory epistle: “si quid aliquando pravis consultoribus impulsus, [...] secus committas, non praeceptoribus, sed tibi [...] id vitio vertendum esse.”

⁹¹ “Quos iste laqueos nectit atque ambagibus / eludit!”; 792-793 / 151. Sharratt, “Euripides Latinus: Buchanan's Use of his Sources,” calls Buchanan “an ironic writer” whom it is hard to see as espousing a particular partisan view. He

ambiguity may have consisted not so much in James's correct deciphering of the play's message as in his grappling with the text—and with his advisor. I am telling you what to see, Buchanan seems to be saying, but what I actually hope to have taught you is that, helped by my counsel, you should look with your own eyes because what you see is never really simple.

Judging from James's later political and intellectual career, he has heeded the lesson in a surprising way. “[W]hen James rejected his tutor,” writes Rebecca Bushnell, “he also modeled himself on him,” deciding to write his own royal manual on the perfect institution of the prince.⁹² In *Basilikon Doron*, a royal gift of advice to his son Prince Henry, James counsels Henry to use the laws in order to suppress Buchanan's infamous invectives, his books, since they resemble their author's ghost infecting with rebellious opinions his unsuspecting readers.⁹³ The only way to be completely safe from Buchanan is to ban his books. Yet James's own book quickly proves to be the source of what Buchanan dramatized in *John the Baptist*, namely calumny. In the epistle to the readers of the 1603 London edition James is at pains to defend himself from the calumny spawned, he claims, by those who got their ill-meaning hands on one of the few and secretly circulated copies of the 1599 edition. The first calumny, as he calls it, is spread by the

sees him, and I think rightly, “as a detached, uninvolved observer” (618-619). Cf. Buchanan, *Tragedies*, ed. Sharratt and Walsh, pp. 18-19, where the ironic stance, this time I think wrongly, is not perceived in *Baptistes* as much as in *Jephthes*.

⁹² Rebecca W. Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching: Early Modern Humanism in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 68.

⁹³ *Basilikon Doron, or His Maiesties Instructions to His Dearest Sonne, Henrie the Prince* (London: Richard Field for John Norton, 1603), sig. H6v. The book was first published in Scotland in 1599, but in an edition of only seven copies. James refers here primarily to Buchanan's *History of Scotland*.

Puritans, who question James's religion; the second concerns his mother, Mary Stuart, vilified among others by Buchanan.⁹⁴

But most surprising, perhaps, is the gesture which James borrows from Buchanan when addressing his own son. Not wishing to be blamed for a possible failure of his advising project, James warns:

I charge you, as euer yee thinke to deserue my fatherlie blessing, to followe and put in practise, as farre as lyeth in you, the precepts hereafter following. And if yee followe the contrarie course, I take the great God to record, that this booke shall one day be a witnessse betwixt me and you; and shall procure to bee ratified in heauen, the curse that in that case here I giue vnto you. ()(6r-)(6v).

If this is what James has learnt from Buchanan, what, if anything, has Buchanan learnt? Gosson was happy to take Buchanan at his word, and those that came after Gosson followed suit by attempting to find easy explanations and neat political allegories for the plays, especially for *Baptistes*. While Steven Berkowitz is right to insist that “the ideas in *Baptistes* depend on the dramatic nature of their presentation,” the play, he points out, has been considered “worthy of extended discussion only as a topical allegory or as a statement of political doctrine.”⁹⁵ The first extended critical account of the play illustrates the problem well. In his *New Memoirs of the Life*

⁹⁴ Buchanan is not mentioned explicitly at this point, but it is clear that “the false and vnreuerent writing” against his (and therefore Henry's) “Parents and Predecessors” (D8v) includes Buchanan's *Ane Detectioun of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes* (originally published in Latin as *De Maria Scotorum Regina*, 1571) as well as, I would say, *De iure regni*. On the *Detectioun* see, most recently, McElroy, “Performance, Print and Politics in George Buchanan's *Ane Detectioun of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes*.” See also Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching*, p. 70.

⁹⁵ See Buchanan, *Baptistes*, ed. Berkowitz, pp. 106-107. Berkowitz's account of the critical tradition has served as an important guide for the discussion that follows. See also McFarlane, *Buchanan*, pp. 382-385.

and Poetical Works of Mr. John Milton, published in 1740, Francis Peck printed the Latin text of *Baptistes* with the first English translation of it, published in 1642 under the title *The Tyrannicall-Government Anatomized*. In the preface, Peck recounts how he first thought the 1642 publication was an original work of John Milton, but subsequently learnt that it was a translation of Buchanan's play. The realization did not stop him from insisting that Milton was the translator and that in translating the play he "saw how exactly all the characters of the *Baptistes* might be understood to answer to the characters of divers great persons then living as if they had been written on purpose for them."⁹⁶ According to Peck's reading, Herod is Charles I, Malchus is archbishop Laud, Gamaliel is bishop Williams, Herodias and her daughter are combined to represent Queen Henrietta Maria while the Baptist is—William Prynne. To make it work, Peck had to claim that the translation was made in the late 1630s, while Prynne was in prison (he was released in 1640) and the rumors of his execution were abroad. The unfortunate irony is that Prynne was not executed, but both Laud and Charles I eventually were.

While ridiculing Peck's attribution of the translation to Milton as well as his antiquarian model of argumentation, David Irving in his 1807 biography of Buchanan agreed that *Baptistes*' "great theme is civil and religious liberty."⁹⁷ Without dwelling on the issue, Irving quoted from a speech by Gamaliel (*Baptistes*, lines 227-38), criticizing the duplicitous dealings of the time, to suggest that some of Buchanan's expressions "bear a very easy application to the late conduct of

⁹⁶ Francis Peck, *New Memoirs of the Life and Poetical Works of Mr. John Milton* (London, 1740), p. 281.

⁹⁷ David Irving, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of George Buchanan* (Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute, 1807), pp. 32, 39. On the theme of liberty, see Peck, *New Memoirs*, pp. 267, 276.

Cardinal Beaton” (33), Buchanan’s great enemy.⁹⁸ Various possibilities have been suggested since—some of them focusing on France, where the play was first performed, others on Scotland, where Buchanan was at the time of the play’s first publication. None of them, however, sought to direct the play’s topical meanings toward England until Buchanan’s own testimony before the Lisbon Inquisition (1550-1552) came to light in the late nineteenth century.⁹⁹ Here we see Buchanan performing readings of his plays that baffle us in a way similar to the reading of *Baptistes* we find in the prefatory letter addressed to James VI.

Although not specifically asked about his plays, Buchanan mentions them in the course of his First Defense in order to illustrate his orthodox religious and political views. These had to do, on the one hand, with vows, and, on the other, with the relationship between the laws of the Church as opposed to those of secular rulers. Buchanan’s position on vows is once stated in relation to the marriage of priests (“I considered that those bound by vow should keep their vow”),¹⁰⁰ another time in a more general sense:

On vows I revealed my opinion by a passage in my tragedy on the vow of Jephthah. The sum of the discussion was as follows:—vows which were lawfully made should always be kept.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ This passage has often been taken to be an example of Buchanan’s anti-clerical satire (like his *Franciscanus*), but, as Berkowitz notes, Gamaliel is here criticizing his own order; *Baptistes*, ed. Berkowitz, p. 505.

⁹⁹ On how this knowledge was first obtained, see Guilherme J. C. Henriques, *George Buchanan in the Lisbon Inquisition*, the records of his trial, with a translation thereof into English, fac-similes of some of the papers and an introduction (Lisbon: Typographia da Empreza da Historia de Portugal, 1906), pp. vii-viii. For the documents relating to the trial, see also Aitken, *The Trial of George Buchanan*.

¹⁰⁰ “De matrimonio sacerdotum hoc sensi: votum his qui fecissent servandum”; Aitken, *The Trial of George Buchanan*, pp. 14-15.

By what part of the composition (*scripto*) Buchanan revealed his opinion he does not pause to say. The *disputatio* he mentions can refer to the entire play or to one of its dialogues, possibly the one between the Priest and Jephtha. The “lawful” manner (*licite*) of the vow, as we have seen, is however the central question upon which the Priest and Jephtha were unable to agree. It is not simply a matter of a vow that goes against the law/s but of a vow that is given without the person who vows knowing what it entails—a rash vow. Herod in *Baptistes* did not know what the Queen’s daughter will ask for and Jephtha’s tragedy consists precisely in his absence of knowledge regarding the promised sacrifice.

Something similar is found in Buchanan’s account of his other play. As if continuing the discussion initiated in *Baptistes* between Herod and John, Buchanan notes at one point that “we should obey not only the laws of the Church but also the laws of civil rulers.”¹⁰² Very soon after this he comes to his disagreement with the English regarding human rules or commands (*praecepta humana*). He first repeats his earlier point (“I thought that the laws and orders of even the civil magistrate should be obeyed on pain of sin”) and then clarifies it by saying that “[the English] could never convince me that the King of England was head of the Anglican Church.”¹⁰³ The conclusion of the question introduces *Baptistes*:

Accordingly, as soon as possible when I had escaped thence [i.e. from England], I recorded my opinion of the English in that tragedy which deals with John the Baptist,

¹⁰¹ “De votis scripto in tragoedia de voto Jephthe meam sententiam ostendi cuius disputationis haec summa est: vota quae licite fiunt omnia servanda”; pp. 12-13.

¹⁰² “cum non solum Ecclesiae sed etiam principum legibus obediendum sit”; pp. 22-23.

¹⁰³ “Dissentebam item ab Anglis de praeceptis humanis cum existimarem etiam profanorum magistratuum leges et iussa sub poena peccati observanda: item quod nunquam persuadere mihi poterant Regem Angliae caput esse Ecclesiae Anglicanae”; pp. 24-25.

wherein, so far as the likeness of the material would permit, I represented the death and accusation of Thomas More and set before the eyes an image of the tyranny of that time.¹⁰⁴

When we combine these statements with Buchanan's letter to James prefaced to the first printed edition of *Baptistes*, we see that Buchanan was the first resourceful allegorizer of his own plays. More was as careful as the Baptist to distinguish between the divine law and the laws of kings, and wanted if at all possible to respect both. He may have been a victim of the King's vow to his new wife, but his tragedy was also one of the oath required of him and the unwillingness to take it. In other words, More's refusal to listen to the counsel of his friends and family, as we have seen in the previous chapter, makes him as good a candidate for the figure of Jephtha as for that of the Baptist. More vexingly, Herod is not represented in *Baptistes* as someone who wants to be a religious authority, only a secular one, and the one reference in the play that may have been drawn from Thomas More's works is given by Buchanan to Herod, not John.¹⁰⁵

Subsequent topical interpretations of the play have shown that "the matter" to which Buchanan refers is similar to so many different political and religious contexts that any use of the play as evidence of a particular point of view necessarily qualifies as a distortion of it.¹⁰⁶ But the

¹⁰⁴ "Itaque cum primum potui ut illinc evasi meam sententiam de Anglis explicavi in ea tragoedia quae est de Io. Baptista, in qua quantum materiae similitudo patiebatur mortem et accusationem Thomae Mori repraesentavi, et speciem tyrannidis illius temporis ob oculos posui"; pp. 24-25.

¹⁰⁵ Ironically, it is More's epigram on the distinction between a king and a tyrant; see Buchanan, *Baptistes*, ed. Berkowitz, p. 513.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. McFarlane, *Buchanan*, p. 385: "In all this, the very multiplicity of hypotheses becomes a sign of their invalidity, and no pattern corresponds satisfactorily in the detail to the situation and characters of the play. This does not preclude the possibility of a general relevance of the dramatic pattern to a contemporary network of themes and social relations." It is impossible to say whether Buchanan chose More as a convenient allegory because he wanted

space for allegorical and topical interpretations opens up precisely where there is resemblance rather than identity and where there is probability rather than certainty. It is the kind of space in which Buchanan felt at ease and which is more typical of Renaissance culture than we seem to be willing to accept in our interpretations of dramatic evidence. It is precisely this kind of ever-sliding field of interpretative reference that we need to bear in mind when we think about drama's engagement with counsel and about counsel's necessary reliance on language, rhetoric, and performance.

Since Buchanan turned to England in his applications of his own plays, I want to turn with him in the chapter that follows to see how some of the issues raised here work in the context of English Renaissance theater. The persistent topical readings of *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex*, a play about advice apparently written with the intention to advise, seem to thrust the choice upon me. With so many advisors in the play and with so much conflicting advice, the question that *Gorboduc* seems to be asking is not so much the question of counsel's tyranny as the question of its authority. In an educational scene often described in the discussions of humanist teaching and tyrannical disposition, we find Buchanan whipping his princely pupil because, prompted by historical example, James dared his tutor *to bell the cat*.¹⁰⁷ But the tutor was first annoyed by the fact that he was disturbed in his reading by the pupil who was not

to appear as a good Catholic or whether he actually composed the play with allegorical intentions. For example, Sharratt and Walsh are not convinced "that More's death would have had as much impact in Bordeaux in the early 1540s as Aitken [in his study of Buchanan's trial in Lisbon] suggested," but they do not seem to be aware of earlier scholarship that demonstrated "a definite reaction to More's death in the circle of the Collège de Guyenne at the time when Buchanan was writing his tragedy," as can be seen from the epigrams of Antonio Gouveia and Simon Vallembert; see Buchanan, *Tragedies*, ed. Sharratt and Walsh, p. 12 vs. Dominic Baker-Smith, "More, Buchanan and Florence Wilson," *Moreana* 2.7 (1965): 106-108, at p. 107.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching*, pp. 65ff, and Alan Stewart, "Boys' Buttocks Revisited: James VI and the Myth of the Sovereign Schoolmaster," in *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Tom Betteridge (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 131-147, at pp. 137ff.

paying sufficient attention to the historical example set before him. The function of reading and especially the deployment of historical example, both prominently featured in *Gorboduc*, will serve as the focal points in the ensuing analysis of the counselor's authority. For not every counselor had the privilege of beating his prince, however unsuccessfully, into sense.

CHAPTER 3

Counsel from History: Exemplary Advice in *Cambyses* and *Gorboduc*

Among the Yelverton manuscripts in the British Library is a volume of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century political, religious, and diplomatic papers, some of which were formerly in the possession of Thomas Norton, the author, with Thomas Sackville, of the first English tragedy composed along classical lines and in blank verse. Although the volume does not give us the document we would wish to find in it, namely the original manuscript of *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex*, it does contain a fascinating account of the play's original performance by the members of the Inner Temple during their grand Christmas revels in 1561/62.¹ The irony, however, is that the account in question, penned by an unidentified hand, bears no marks of disagreement from one of the play's authors, and erstwhile owner of the volume, even though it diverges significantly from what we would imagine this performance to have been given the evidence of the early printed editions.² Whereas the said account has in recent decades received considerable scholarly attention, resulting in occasionally discordant interpretations, historians and literary scholars alike have been less willing to look at other parts of this manuscript volume

¹ The volume in question is Yelverton MS 26, today kept as Additional MS 48023. The part of the manuscript where the account of the first performance of *Gorboduc* is found has been edited as "A 'Journall' of Matters of State" by Simon Adams, Ian W. Archer, and G. W. Bernard, in *Religion, Politics, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England*, ed. Ian W. Archer, with Simon Adams, G. W. Bernard, Mark Greengrass, Paul E. J. Hammer, and Fiona Kisby, *Camden Fifth Series* 22 (2003): 35-136.

² On the relationship between the performance, as described in this manuscript, and the play, see: Henry James and Greg Walker, "The Politics of *Gorboduc*," *English Historical Review* 110 (1995): 109-121; Norman Jones and Paul Whitfield White, "*Gorboduc* and Royal Marriage Politics: An Elizabethan Playgoer's Report of the Premiere Performance," *English Literary Renaissance* 26.1 (1996): 3-16; Mike Pincombe, "Robert Dudley, *Gorboduc*, and 'The masque of Beauty and Desire': A Reconsideration of the Evidence for Political Intervention," *Parergon* 20.1 (2003): 19-44.

to see whether it can tell us anything about *Gorboduc* as a play that is still very much with us, and not just about the play's first performance. Whatever the original political purpose of the play's performance may have been, if indeed there was a single purpose, its subsequent publication made it available for readings at other moments and under different circumstances. And *Gorboduc* certainly deserved rereading. It was not simply the first English tragedy inspired by the renewed interest in classical antiquity; it was the first play of its kind to turn to the matter of British history for the communication of its artistic message.³

Twenty years after the play's first performance, in the early 1580s, Thomas Norton was languishing in the Tower, probably because of his strongly expressed opinions regarding the Anjou match.⁴ Even if we decide to read *Gorboduc* as in part responding to the succession crisis

³ The play was much more present in the cultural imagination of the sixteenth century than it is in ours. In addition to the editions of 1565 and 1570 there was yet another edition of the play in 1590. *Gorboduc* was famously featured by Sidney in his *Apology*, from which it appears that Sidney saw the play performed and that it was therefore available on stage through the 1570s; see Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 130-131. William Haughton composed a play entitled *Ferrex and Porrex* for Philip Henslowe in 1599-1600, which may have been a reworking of the Sackville and Norton play; see *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. 134-136. *Gorboduc* was apparently also performed in Ireland around 1601; see W. R. Chetwood, *A General History of the Stage* (London: W. Owen, 1749), pp. 50-51, and Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 2-3. It has been suggested that the play is also one of the sources for Shakespeare's *King Lear*; see Barbara Heliodora Carneiro de Mendonça, "The Influence of *Gorboduc* on *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Survey* 13 (1960): 41-48. In terms of turning to British, particularly English, history, without adopting classical form, John Bale's *King John* (1538) constitutes an important precedent; it was possibly revised for performance early during Elizabeth's reign.

⁴ The only explanation for Norton's imprisonment comes from a contemporary letter sent from Court by Roger Manners on 5 December 1581, where he states: "Mr. Norton, the great Parliament man, is committed for his overmuch and undutiful speaking touching this cause." The cause in question was the possibility of Elizabeth marrying Francis, Duke of Anjou, who was visiting Elizabeth at the time. Norton was against the match and thus, perhaps unwittingly, placed himself in opposition to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, who was Lord Treasurer at the time. The Privy Council itself was divided on the issue. The most notorious objector to the match was of course John Stubbs, who in 1579 published his *Discovery of a Gaping Gulf whereunto England is like to be swallowed by another French Marriage if the Lord forbid not the bans by letting her Majesty see the sin and punishment thereof*, for which he lost his hand; Philip Sidney wrote a letter to the Queen suggesting as much. See J. E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments, 1559-1581* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971 [1953]), p. 405; Conyers Read, *Lord Burghley and*

and the marriage question in the early 1560s, we will be forced to admit that the play's position on this issue, whatever it may have been, brought no harm to its authors and that, despite possible rhetorical similarities, the writing of a play and "the undutiful speaking" of "the great Parliament man" were things with very different political consequences.

There are two letters in the Yelverton volume from the period of Norton's imprisonment that seem especially interesting when set against the text of *Gorboduc* as we know it. Both letters, copied by Norton himself, are from Francis Walsingham, the Queen's Principal Secretary, and both are addressed to Owen Hopton, Lieutenant of the Tower and therefore Norton's keeper. In the first letter, dated the last day of December 1581, Walsingham instructs Hopton to pass on to Norton "the enclosed note conteyning certaine pointes for the reformation of the *present* corruption in religion." Since Norton is now "at leysure by reason of the restraint of his libertie," Walsingham wants him to consider these points and, as someone known "to haue a godly care that the church of God may be well ordered," supply his own considered thoughts on the matter. To perform this task, Norton will also be furnished "with penne and ink and paper to write his opinion thereon." Implicitly acknowledging that this is a favor of sorts, Walsingham closes by urging Hopton to tell Norton that, in return, his wife will be taken care of while he is in prison and, moreover, that she will be urged "to be bold" with Walsingham himself "if she do want any thing."⁵ Only five days later, on January 4, 1582, Walsingham writes to the Lieutenant of the Tower again with a comparable request:

Queen Elizabeth (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961 [1960]), pp. 203-234; Michael A. R. Graves, *Thomas Norton: The Parliament Man* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 391-392.

⁵ British Library, Additional MS 48023, fol. 41v. The first letter from Walsingham is briefly mentioned by Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments*, p. 405, as well as by Patrick Collinson, "Puritans, Men of Business and

I send you here enclosed certaine pointes to be gathered by M^r Norton out of such as haue written the histories of this realme, which I pray you to deliuer vnto him to be begonne when he hath ended that that he hath in hand concerning the state of the church.

This time more than just ink, paper, and pen will be provided; Walsingham also promises the provision of “any histories or other bokes that I can furnish him with all.”

Elizabeth’s “most sharpe sighted, subtile searching” Principal Secretary obviously needed examples and precedents from the history of England in the arguments of the realm he was to advance before the Queen, and Norton—with time on his hands, zeal for commonwealth in his heart, and learning in his pen—was the ideal secretary for the job.⁶ The points Norton was asked to consider included the wars that had been fought since the Conquest: “vpon what cause: and what hath ben the issue: and what meanes they had to beare the charges”; the laws that had been made “that haue concerned the publike state, the profit wherof hath ben deruied to this time”; and finally “What rebellions haue growen in eche princes time, and what hath ben the cause and issue.” Thus, twenty years after the composition of *Gorboduc* and under very different circumstances, Norton found himself returning to the same chronicles from which he and Sackville had borrowed the story for their play—and to rather similar issues.⁷

Elizabethan Parliaments,” *Parliamentary History* 7.2 (1988): 187-211, at p. 200. A more substantial discussion is found in Graves, *Thomas Norton*, pp. 127-28. As Graves observes, the result of this request was one of Norton’s best known treatises, the so-called “Mr. Norton’s Devices.” The second letter, discussed below, is consistently overlooked.

⁶ For this description of Walsingham, see Robert Norton’s remarks in William Camden, *Annals, or, the historie of the most renowned and victorious princessse Elizabeth*, trans. R. N. Gent (London: Thomas Harper for Benjamin Fisher, 1635), pp. 254-255.

⁷ British Library, Additional MS 48023, fol. 44v. The plural that Walsingham uses—“any histories or other books”—suggests more than a single historical source. The big difference between the early 1560s and the early 1580s was the fact that the first edition of Holinshed’s *Chronicles* was published in the meantime (1577). *Gorboduc*

What this second letter shows is that history was an important resource for the construction of political advice. Be that advice on war, laws, or rebellions, histories provided examples that could be cited in support of certain opinions and against others. Such examples were used, both before and after the 1580s, as powerful instruments of persuasion and their deployment was in fact part of a larger intellectual and political trend. Seen ideally as embodying both experience and learning, the humanist advisor found in the books of the ancients the understanding of history as a teacher of life and as a reliable guide to political action, then viewed the histories of his own country in the same light. When after Walsingham's death Robert Beale composed "A Treatise of the Office of a Councillor" (1592) for the benefit of Edward Wotton, who was expecting to be appointed Principal Secretary, he chose to close it by insisting on the importance of reading histories precisely because of the examples they provide: "By the readinge of histories you may observe the examples of times past, judginge of their successe."⁸ Similarly, in *Basilikon Doron* (first published in 1599), King James advised his son to be "well versed in authenticke histories, and in the Chronicle of al nations," but above all "in our owne histories" since their examples would be of most use to him. Since there is nothing new

was similarly indebted to multiple English chronicles, probably modified by the authors in the interest of their drama; see Homer A. Watt, "Gorboduc; or, Ferrex and Porrex," *Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin, Philology and Literature Series*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1910), pp. 48-49.

⁸ The treatise is also found among the Yelverton manuscripts, most of which were at some point owned by Robert Beale. It has been published as an appendix to Conyers Read, *M^r Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), pp. 423-443. It contains other invaluable pieces of advice, such as the following two: "When her highnes is angrie or not well disposed trouble her not with anie matter which you desire to have done unles extreame necessitie urge it"; "When her highnes signeth, it shalbe good to entertaine her with some relacion or speech whereat shee may take some pleasure" (438).

under the sun, James argued, “bypast things” can very usefully be applied to “the present estate.”⁹

At the same time, however, exemplarity was undergoing a significant crisis. Thomas Elyot’s confident pronouncement in *The Governour* that “in every discipline example is the beste instructor” cannot easily be reconciled with the derisive pronouncement found in Montaigne’s essay “Of Experience”: “Every example limpeth. And the relation, which is drawn from experience, is ever defective and imperfect.” The problem, Montaigne suggested, is that things are essentially dissimilar and that examples can work only when adapted to our situation “by some wire-drawen, forced and collaterall interpretation.”¹⁰

When exactly the Renaissance crisis of exemplarity began and when the limping example finally went defunct are questions that in current scholarship remain unresolved.¹¹ These

⁹ *Basilikon Doron, or His Maiesties Instructions to His Dearest Sonne, Henrie the Prince* (London: Richard Field for John Norton, 1603), sigs. H6v-H7r. In *The Art of English Poesy* (1589), George Puttenham argues that historical poesy is superior to history precisely because of its more exemplary quality: “Again, as ye know, more and more excellent examples may be feigned in one day by a good wit, than many ages through man’s frailty are able to put in ure”; *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), Book I, Chapter 19, p. 129.

¹⁰ *A Critical Edition of Sir Thomas Elyot’s The Booke named the Governour*, ed. Donald W. Rude (New York and London: Garland, 1992), II.ix, p. 140; Michel de Montaigne, *Essayes*, trans. John Florio (London: Melch. Bradwood for Edward Blount and William Barrey, 1613), sig. H31v, p. 602.

¹¹ The more prominent contributions include: Karlheinz Stierle, “L’Histoire comme Exemple, l’Exemple comme Histoire: Contribution à la pragmatique et à la poétique des textes narratifs,” *Poétique* 10 (1972): 176-198 (also available in German as “Geschichte als Exemplum—Exemplum als Geschichte: Zur Pragmatik und Poetik narrativer Texte,” in *Geschichte—Ereignis und Erzählung*, ed. Reinhart Koselleck and Wolf-Dieter Stempel [München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1973], pp. 347-375); John D. Lyons, *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Timothy Hampton, *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); G. W. Pigman III, “Limping Examples: Exemplarity, the New Historicism, and Psychoanalysis,” in *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, ed. David Quint, Margaret W. Ferguson, G. W. Pigman III, and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992), pp. 281-295; *Unruly Examples: On the Rhetoric of Exemplarity*, ed. Alexander Gelley (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); François Rigolot, “The Renaissance Crisis of Exemplarity,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59.4 (1998): 557-563 (as

questions are closely related to the conceptions of reading in the period, particularly the practice of studying and reading “for action,” apparently popular among early modern statesmen and would-be statesmen as much as among their counselors and would-be counselors.¹² Political wisdom was sought in all sorts of texts, but most prominently in histories, both ancient and modern.¹³ In the early seventeenth century, in the aftermath of a major unsuccessful rebellion, a famous European scholar wryly commented on the cause of Essex’s downfall. It was, Isaac Casaubon noted in his manuscript journal, the advice of his secretary Henry Cuffe, who drew his fatal counsel from Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, an epic account of the Roman civil war.

As Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton observe, this moment marks the gradual disappearance of “the book-trained politician” (*politicus e libro*), whom they saw symbolized especially poignantly in the figure of Gabriel Harvey and in the humanist culture more generally, with its focus on the textual wisdom of the ancients and on the useful lessons that history in general was considered capable of yielding. But it remains unclear whether Casaubon had in mind all books or just the kind of book Cuffe relied upon.¹⁴ The problem is succinctly, even if with comic exaggeration, put by Jonson when in *Cynthia’s Revels* Asotus claims, “Nay, sir, I

well as other essays in this issue devoted to the topic of exemplarity); Michael Ulliyot, “The Life Abridged: Exemplarity, Biography, and the Problem of Metonymy,” *Journal of the Northern Renaissance* 3.1 (2011): 58-81.

¹² See Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy,” *Past & Present* 129 (1990): 30-78.

¹³ On the use of aphoristic citations in particular, see Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 93-115.

¹⁴ Cf. Jardine and Grafton, “‘Studied for Action,’” p. 75. A much later example of a goal-oriented reader, rather Machiavellian in his orientation, is discussed at length in Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). On Henry Cuffe’s role in the Essex rebellion and in relation to Renaissance reading practices, see, more recently, Alan Stewart, “Instigating the Treason: The Life and Death of Henry Cuffe, Secretary,” in *Literature, Politics and Law in Renaissance England*, ed. Erica Sheen and Lorna Hutson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 50-70.

haue read historie, I am a little *humanitian*,” thus conflating the reading of romances and the reading of politic history, or when Sir Politic Would-be’s conspiracy against the State of Venice in *Volpone* turns out to be based on “notes drawn out of play-books.”¹⁵

The purpose of the ensuing discussion is to understand how early English historical drama participated in and exploited this larger humanist problem of counsel fashioned from the written matter of history. Even though Norton’s responses to Walsingham’s requests do not survive, we can be sure that, desirous of his release and of his wife’s well-being, he produced neat summaries of what he had found in the English chronicles on the questions of war, laws, and rebellions. We can also be sure that whatever it is that he eventually submitted to Walsingham, it was not a play, and it was certainly not *Gorboduc*.

This may appear to us surprising given the abundance of criticism that insists on the political relevance of *Gorboduc* in the context of the 1560s, and later.¹⁶ As we shall see, Norton and Sackville turn to the textual repository of British history not just to produce a dramatic account of the dissolution of Gorboduc’s kingdom following an uncertain succession, the

¹⁵ Ben Jonson, *Cynthia’s Revels, or The Fountain of Self-Love*, ed. Alexander Corbin Judson (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1912), 3.5.35-36, p. 65; *Volpone; or The Fox*, 5.4.41-42, in *Ben Jonson’s Plays and Masques*, ed. Robert M. Adams (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), p. 84.

¹⁶ Even when attention is shifted from the early performances to the early editions, *Gorboduc* remains a “political document.” Thus Stephen Alford, wanting to save *Gorboduc* from the grip of the early 1560s, sees its universality as extending—to 1570: “[When *Gorboduc* was published, in 1565 and 1570], [t]he political situation in Britain and England was completely different from the state of the marriage issue in 1561 but *Gorboduc* was still supremely relevant as a political document. In other words, the play had a more universal significance as a *succession* text than historians and literary critics have given it credit for”; *The Early Elizabethan Polity: William Cecil and the British Succession Crisis, 1558-1569* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 100. An early example of this approach is Edith Rickert, “Political Propaganda and Satire in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” *Modern Philology* 21.1 and 21.2 (1923): 53-87 and 133-154 respectively. Rickert writes: “In 1590 appeared the third and last edition of *Gorboduc*, and in 1591 Hertford made his attempt to win the Queen’s favor at Elvetham. I cannot believe that these concurrences of dates are accidental” (140). In recent years, Rickert’s article has been cited approvingly, particularly regarding its understanding of the constant topicality of *Gorboduc*, by Lisa Hopkins, *Drama and the Succession to the Crown, 1561-1633* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 13.

ensuing wars, lawlessness, and rebellion, but also to give the counselors in the play examples upon which they could fashion their own pieces of advice. I read this, however, more as an intellectual than a political intervention and thus align myself with those scholars who have recognized in *Gorboduc* an extended artistic elaboration of a very complex moral and political problem—that of advice.¹⁷

What I hope to contribute to this critical trend is the realization that examples and exemplarity lie at the very heart of the problem of counsel as it is represented in the play. Since in this chapter I am interested to see how arguments of history, and not just British history, work in the dramatic engagements with counsel, I couple the use of history in *Gorboduc* with its use in Thomas Preston's *Cambyses*, a play from the same decade focusing on the matter of Persian history. It is, I think, significant that in his "Treatise of the Office of a Councillor" Robert Beale does not mention *Gorboduc*, but does mention *Cambyses*, casually identifying this notorious Persian tyrant with no less a figure than Henry VIII.¹⁸

¹⁷ In more general terms, this approach is ably represented by Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). For a good example of what I have in mind when it comes to writing about *Gorboduc*, see Dermot Cavanagh, *Language and Politics in the Sixteenth-Century History Play* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 36-57.

¹⁸ "It is written of Xerxes, when he called all his captaines and officers, intendinge to make warres upon Greece, he used thes speeches: *Ne viderer meo tantum consilio hoc aggressus convocavi vos, ceterum mementote mihi parendum magis, quam persuadendum est*. Princes finde such flatterers and Councillors as Cambises and Rhexoboam did to followe their humours, yea manie times will urge their Councillors, as it is reported King Henry 8 was wont to do to Sir Edward Montague, the Chiefe Justice and others"; Robert Beale, "A Treatise of the Office of a Councillor," p. 440. The Latin quotation given by Beale circulated in Erasmus's popular *Apophthegmata*, the book to which, as we shall see, Preston was also indebted via his primary source; see *Apophthegmatum, sive scite dictorum libri sex* (Basileae: In officina Frobeniana, 1531), V.10, p. 408, with slight verbal variations (*contraxi vos, suadendum*). Erasmus comments on the doubly tyrannical nature of Xerxes's statement: "Vox bis tyrannica, & quod principum conuentu pro fucio abuteretur, & quod negocium multo periculosissimum, sua unius cupiditate uerius, quam consilio susceperet." Note the use of *consilium* by Xerxes to signify his own plan or decision, for the making of which he should have, in fact, requested *consilium* from the assembly. Erasmus neatly paraphrases the problem by explaining Xerxes's *consilium* as *cupiditas*, then using *consilium* to signify counsel in the sense of advice. On the

Cambyzes and *Gorboduc*, nevertheless, are not plays that are normally considered together, perhaps because one of them, if we are obliged to believe the prevailing critical opinion, went terribly awry and ever since Falstaff's invocation of it in *The First Part of King Henry IV* has been seen as an early object of ridicule, and has continued as such. Yet it is notable that Falstaff does not adopt the ranting tyrannical style that his announcement promises and that the older play apparently exhibits: "I must speak in passion, and I will do it in King Cambyzes' vein." Instead, his impersonation of the king is cast in euphuistic terms, and in prose, while the only three lines he speaks are endearingly addressed to Mistress Quickly as a sweet yet weeping (because of course laughing) queen. The lines are unlike those in *Cambyzes*; the scene in which his newly-wedded queen weeps anything but endearing. By wanting to find in Shakespeare the confirmation of our prejudices about earlier drama we may have missed what may be the actual point of Falstaff's joke. Falstaff's announcement that he will speak in passion is preceded by a command: "Give me a cup of sack to make my eyes look red, that it may be thought I have wept." Cambyzes' vein is Falstaff's vein in a much more concrete sense; those who have read the older play will know that, in addition to its admittedly awkward numbers, what flows through its veins is a great quantity of wine—the king's central problem.¹⁹

importance of Persian history in early modern England, see Jane Grogan, "The Not-Forgotten Empire: Images of Persia in English Renaissance Writing," *Literature Compass* 7/9 (2010): 912-921.

¹⁹ David Scott Kastan's gloss in the Arden edition of *King Henry IV, Part One* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002) is typical of the tradition: "*King Cambyzes' vein* ranting style." Commenting further on the three lines that precede Falstaff's actual impersonation of king Henry, Kastan sees in them a parody of the high tragic style, "still in *King Cambyzes' vein*," but proceeds to make the following observation: "Editors have noted a number of analogues, though interestingly not to the archaic work of Preston and his contemporaries" (notes to 2.4.377 and 2.4.381). "Archaic" is a significant word choice in this context: only thirty years, probably less, separate the work of Preston and his contemporaries (whoever *they* may be) from the work of Shakespeare. That we can comfortably call Preston's work archaic in relation to Shakespeare's but not, say, John Heywood's in relation to Preston's or

That drunkenness—combined, as it inevitably is, with lechery—was Cambyses’s problem should surprise us because it is a vice that proper upbringing and sufficient educational discipline are likely to prevent. And no king had the upbringing that Cambyses had. He was brought up at the court of his father Cyrus, the ideal king immortalized in Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* and mentioned everywhere in the Renaissance as an example of a ruler whose own good education ensured his future success as a king. For Philip Sidney, he was the figure that embodied the poet’s most exalted task: “to bestow a *Cyrus* vpon the world to make many *Cyrus*’s, if they [i.e. the readers] will learne aright, why and how that Maker made him.”²⁰ Cyrus was the symbol of everything the humanist project could have hoped to achieve at its most ambitious; Cambyses was that project’s drunken shadow, its tyrannical nightmare.

As the preceding chapters have demonstrated, counsel was the main channel through which the humanist project communicated its political desires and by which it hoped to shape its role in the world. What *Cambyses* and *Gorboduc* show is that different possibilities of counsel co-exist at any given moment and that their efficiency cannot be adjudicated by a mechanical application of a pre-defined set of handy precepts. On the contrary, these different possibilities constitute competing rhetorical arguments that turn to the common material of history in order to fashion out of it complex and ideally persuasive, even if often mutually opposed, fictions of advice. The problematic relationship between such fictions and the historical material they draw upon is what *Gorboduc* in particular brings to the fore and then patiently examines, but this

Shakespeare’s own early dramas in relation to his late plays, clearly shows how our conceptions of history are governed by our notions of aesthetic achievement.

²⁰ Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie* (London: Henry Olney, 1595), sig. C2r. King James cites *Cyropaedia* as one of his main sources in his discussion of a good king (and indeed throughout his book of advice to his son); see *Basilikon Doron*, sig. D5r.

examination, I hope to show, is enriched when itself viewed in relation to *Cambyses*. To justify what might appear as an odd coupling, I first turn to the question of historical, theatrical, and intellectual links that exist between these two plays and that, for reasons that go beyond the scope of this inquiry, have been consistently obscured. I want to show how the mixture of humanist learning and popular theater in *Gorboduc* and *Cambyses*, of political and moral drama, provides a meaningful context for the engagement with the larger problem of counsel, itself inherited in part from the humanist tradition and in part from the tradition of moral thought and theater of the late Middle Ages.²¹

Humanist Politics and Popular Drama: *Cambyses* Meets *Gorboduc*

Although composed within a year of each other and although concerned with related themes, *Gorboduc* and *Cambyses* are rarely discussed together, mostly because they have been seen as belonging to two very different dramatic traditions, one elite and the other popular.²² It is well known, for example, that *Gorboduc* has consistently been interpreted as a play concerned with

²¹ While setting the stage for my analysis of the two plays, the section that follows also extends the argument in the section on the moral play in Chapter I. Here, however, more attention is given to popular historical drama and its infrequently acknowledged links to the learned dramatic tradition. As such, it silently takes issue with David Bevington's influential account of this relationship in *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

²² When they are, it is the differences that are highlighted. The following statement describes the prevailing understanding well: "Thomas Preston's *Cambyses* reflects the morality tradition; it virtually defines 'popular' theatre, from its doubled roles to its sensationalist violence. Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* looks like *Cambyses*'s opposite: a humanist Inns of Court play with Senecan characters, long rhetorical speeches, offstage action, and scores of performers"; Kent Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism: English Drama in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 102. Cartwright proceeds to look for an "affective dramaturgy" that these two plays, as well as Richard Edwards's *Damon and Pythias*, apparently share, but they share many other things, including their reliance on humanist learning and some of their popular elements.

the problem of succession and with questions of advice whereas *Cambyses* has never been viewed in this way, even though both plays could easily be seen to provide warnings to monarchs, and specifically to the monarch before whom each was at some point performed. If *Gorboduc* has been comfortably read as a play that tells the Queen she should marry in order to resolve the issue of succession and avoid civil war, *Cambyses* could as comfortably be read as a play that tells the queen she should shun drink and lechery to avoid wreaking havoc upon her kingdom. That *Cambyses* has not been read in this way, or with this degree of specific topical application, suggests not that the play would not support that kind of reading, but that only certain kinds of plays are likely to produce such readings. The *kind* of play, however, is the problem.

A major English example of the kind of play that is seen as embodying erudite, classically inspired principles and that is constructed on the basis of important historical narratives cast in the high, usually tragic, mold is the tragedy performed by the members of the Inner Temple in the course of their grand Christmas revels in 1561/62 and then before Queen Elizabeth at Whitehall on 18 January 1562. It was published four years later under the title *The Tragedie of Gorboduc* and then again around 1570 under the title *The Tragidie of Ferrex and Porrex*, when it was included among “[a]ll such treatises as haue been lately published by Thomas Norton,” one of the authors of the play.²³ It appeared in a decade notable for the sudden rise in the number of published plays—more plays were published in the 1560s than in the entire

²³ See W. W. Greg, *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, 4 vols. (London: Printed for the Bibliographical Society at the University Press, Oxford, 1939-1959), vol. 1, no. 39.

first half-century of play printing in England.²⁴ *Gorboduc* thus mingled with the translations of Seneca's plays (such as *Hercules Furens* or *Medea*), but also with biblical interludes such as *The Repentance of Mary Magdalene* and *Jacob and Esau*, comedies such as *Ralph Roister Doister*, and the popular plays that have already been discussed: *Like Will to Like*, *Lusty Juventus*, *The Marriage of Wit and Science*, and so on.

This mingling was quite appropriate, for as it has been sporadically noticed, *Gorboduc* draws on the native morality tradition as much as it does on the tradition of Latin drama.²⁵ The play's lack of a recognizable tragic hero and its loose understanding of dramatic unity, Howard Baker argues, connect *Gorboduc* to the plays like *Respublica*, where the only real protagonist might be the abstract notion of the commonwealth. "*Gorboduc* is also structurally like a moral play," Baker further suggests, "in that good and evil counsellors, who are given tag-names, vie with each other for the favor of the central characters."²⁶ Thus the tradition of Senecan drama, in which royal counsel plays a prominent role, fuses here with the tradition of morality drama, in which virtues and vices wage a battle over the moral identity of the protagonist. It is a fusion that

²⁴ I start my count with *Thyestes* (number 29 in Greg, *Bibliography*) and stop at *Cambyses* (number 56, probably printed in 1569). Note that for the period preceding the 1560s two numbers are given by Greg to *Fulgens and Lucrece*, as well as to *Gentleness and Nobility* and *Nature*, because these plays are in two parts. They are, however, single publications (and single plays) and are counted as such here. Greg's additions and corrections in vol. 4 do not alter this basic ratio.

²⁵ See, for example, Watt, "Gorboduc; or, Ferrex and Porrex," pp. 74-75; Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936), pp. 352-356; Howard Baker, *Induction to Tragedy: A Study in a Development of Form in Gorboduc, The Spanish Tragedy and Titus Andronicus*. ([Baton Rouge]: Louisiana State University Press, 1939), pp. 38-41.

²⁶ Baker, *Induction to Tragedy*, pp. 39-40. See also Watt, "Gorboduc; or, Ferrex and Porrex," pp. 62, 74-75. More recently, *Gorboduc* has been recognized by Andrew Hadfield as "a crucial link between plays of persuasion such as John Skelton's *Magnificence* (1519), Nicholas Udall's *Respublica* (1553) and John Bale's *King Johan* (c. 1538), and later drama on the commercial stage which commented on political events"; "Tragedy and the Nation State," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 30-43, at p. 36.

follows the logic of such earlier plays as John Skelton's *Magnificence* (c. 1515), where moral counsel is already transformed into its political counterpart even if the structure of the play is still entirely indebted to the native theatrical tradition.²⁷

Baker's observations are important because they identify features of popular drama within those parts of *Gorboduc* that are usually described as the most classical. Much more directly linked to popular theatrical traditions are some elements of the elaborate dumb shows preceding each act of the play. They sometimes create rich allegorical contexts for the unfolding historical narrative while at other times they form literally spectacular theatrical counterparts to the slow-moving, stately rhetoric of the long dramatic speeches. The play—unsurprisingly, if we accept that humanist and popular traditions were in dialogue—opens with a silent dramatization the dangers of division represented by “six wild men clothed in leaves,” the familiar figures from folk plays.²⁸ The other dumb shows range from extreme realism—such as the one before the fifth act in the course of which “a company of harquebussiers and of armed men, all in order of battle” enter, discharge “their pieces,” and march about the stage—to mythological excess combined with theatrical horror, as when before the fourth act three Furies come forth “from under the stage, as though out of hell,” and, as if that were not enough, “clad in black garments

²⁷ Sidney therefore misses the point when he judges *Gorboduc* by purely classical standards. In *An Apologie for Poetrie*, he commends the play for being “full of stately speeches, and well sounding Phrases, clyming to the height of *Seneca* his stile.” He proceeds to note that it is also “full of notable moralitie, which it doth most delightfully teach; and so obtayne the very end of Poesie,” but finds it “very defectious in the circumstaunces”: “faulty both in place, & time, the two necessary companions of all corporall actions.” The authority of Aristotle as well as of common sense is then explicitly invoked to buttress the point: “the stage should alwaies represent but one place, and the vttermost time presupposed in it, should be [...] but one day”; sigs. I4v-K1r. This is very far from the understanding of either time or place in the popular dramatic tradition, upon which this play relies and in which it to a certain extent participates.

²⁸ See Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex*, ed. Irby B. Cauthen, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. 8, note to line 3. All references will be to this edition.

sprinkled with blood and flames, their bodies girt with snakes, their heads spread with serpents instead of hair, the one bearing in her hand a snake, the other a whip, and the third a burning firebrand, each driving before them a king and a queen which, moved by Furies, unnaturally had slain their own children.”²⁹ It is significant, and similarly unsurprising, that a contemporary account of an early performance of this play dwells on the dumb shows longer than on any other aspect of the play.³⁰ The models for these elaborate theatrical devices, scholars nowadays agree, are not to be sought in the *intermedii* of Italian drama, and thus seen as a learned importation, but are rather to be located in the native tradition of English civic pageantry, of mummings or disguisings (which feature already as parts of larger dramatic structures in Medwall’s *Fulgens and Lucrece*), and of court masques—all of which sixteenth-century audiences had plenty of opportunities to see and therefore be thoroughly familiar with.³¹

²⁹ As Karen L. Raber notes, “*Gorboduc* produces the classical Furies in their original, pre-Eumenides form (more common in early modern myth and story) to indicate the primal nature of Videna’s crime”; “Murderous Mothers and the Family/State Analogy in Classical and Renaissance Drama,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 37.3 (2000): 298-320, at p. 312.

³⁰ See note 1 above. We know from the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century descriptions of *intermedii* played between the acts of Italian comedies (and later in the century tragedies) that this kind of dramatic spectacle received special praise, often at the expense of the play—so much so that in the second half of the century authors complained that plays must be written in such a way that they fit the *intermedii* rather than the other way around; see John W. Cunliffe, “Italian Prototypes of the Masque and Dumb Show,” *PMLA* 22.1 (1907): 140-156, at pp. 153-154, and “The Influence of Italian on Early Elizabethan Drama,” *Modern Philology* 4.4 (1907): 597-604, at p. 601. Cunliffe’s search for the origins of the English dumb show in the *intermedii* of Italian drama has been abandoned in subsequent criticism and a native development offered as the alternative. See the following note.

³¹ See Dieter Mehl, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show: The History of a Dramatic Convention* (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 3-18. Mehl dates this reaction to Cunliffe’s theory to the middle of the twentieth century, but we should note that already Watt in his study of *Gorboduc* (published in 1910, only three years after Cunliffe’s articles) suggested that we should look to “the English city pageants and court masques” for possible influences and models (80). When we pursue Watt’s reference from the corresponding footnote, we realize that the Germans had been there first. Referring the reader to R. Brotanek’s “brillante Darstellung der Englischen Maskenspiele” (published in 1902), W. Bang notes “daß es unnötig ist, für das *dumb-show* an fremde Einflüsse zu denken”; [Review of L. L. Schücking’s *Studien über die stofflichen Beziehungen der englischen Komödie zur italienischen bis Lilly*, 1901] *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 38 (1902): 276-278, at p. 277.

It is this special combination of spectacular dramatic effect and the long and carefully crafted speeches that defines the special flavor of a play like *Gorboduc*. Failing to appreciate the theatrical effects of *Gorboduc* as a whole, from which the dumb shows cannot be removed without significant violence being done to the play, scholars have been all too quick to dismiss the play as an “alteration of beauteous Latinate debates with awkwardly interpolated dumb shows,” the actual assumption being that beauteous Latinate debates can never be elegantly or logically combined with dumb shows.³² Yet a number of plays after *Gorboduc*, including plays written for the professional stage do precisely that. Plays such as *Jocasta*, *Tancred and Gismund*, or *The Misfortunes of Arthur* may be understood to follow a certain kind of dramatic tradition within the Inns of Court, but the same cannot be said of *The Spanish Tragedy*, a wildly popular Elizabethan play which in its dramaturgy also relies on dumb shows, not to mention the most famous deployment of the device, in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

Whereas *Gorboduc* creates problems for any classifier of early dramatic literature because of its popular, native elements and its insistent theatricality, *Cambyses* has proved difficult for opposite reasons—its undeniable traces of humanist erudition panting under the pressure of a popular theatrical entertainment if ever there was one. How does one explain the fact that Thomas Preston, a scholar of considerable reputation and later a college master at Cambridge, began his career by writing what many critics have described as a kind of popular monstrosity in verse, and in fourteeners at that? The play tells the story of the tyrannical Persian

³² Eugene D. Hill, “The First Elizabethan Tragedy: A Contextual Reading of *Cambyses*,” *Studies in Philology* 89.4 (1992): 404-433, at p. 432. The focus of Hill’s essay is not *Gorboduc*, but it is precisely judgments which are offered in passing and are not thought to require substantiation that best represent the prevailing critical opinion on a particular play. Similar statements abound.

king that begins with his one good deed, namely the execution and flaying of a corrupt judge, and continues with the king's descent into vice and consequently tyranny: from his apparent love of wine and lechery, to his shooting an arrow into his counselor's son's heart to prove that he is not actually drunk, to the cutting out of the heart to produce the necessary proof of his point, to the murder of his brother, and further to his incestuous marriage with his cousin, whose death he commands soon after the wedding because of her talent for producing uncomfortable interpretations of pleasant fables, i.e. her tendency to read fictions topically. Cambyses's final encounter with the audience is with a sword in his side, upon which he has accidentally fallen. One learns a great deal about English humanism when one realizes that this exact series of incidents from Cambyses's life is found in Richard Taverner's decorously titled book *The Garden of Wisdom*, most of which is preoccupied with making Erasmus's *Apophthegmata* available to English readers. But not finding the story popular enough, Preston embellishes it with one subplot involving Huf, Ruf, and Snuf and another involving Hob and Lob, two country bumpkins, while the play is dramaturgically held together by the figure of Ambidexter the vice, whose importance in the play increases as the events unfold.

Having surveyed Thomas Preston's career, from his arrival in Cambridge in 1553 to his becoming Master of Trinity Hall in 1584 and Vice-Chancellor in 1589, E. K. Chambers asserts: "It seems to me incredible that he should, as is usually taken for granted, have been the author of *Cambyeses*, about which there is nothing academic, and I think that there must have been a popular writer of the same name, responsible for the play."³³ The problem is that *Cambyeses* was

³³ E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), vol. 3, p. 469. Compare a similar view from roughly the same time: "Our crude writer seems to have been one of the obscure poets, possibly

published in 1569, five years after Queen Elizabeth gave Preston an annual pension for his skillful philosophical disputation with Thomas Cartwright, which she witnessed at Cambridge, as well as for his acting in *Dido*, the play she saw during the same visit. How could someone who has been named Elizabeth's "scholar" in 1564 attach his name five years later not just to a play such as *Cambyses* but also to several broadside ballads? Such questions are made possible only once we accept that academic men had no contact with popular drama and would have had no interest in using it for their own dramatic experiments.³⁴ The problem is compounded by a letter which was sent from London in February 1561 and which carried news about the most recent entertainments at Elizabeth's court. The context of the letter is as significant as the possible reference to *Cambyses*:

at Christ. time there were certaine Masters of Defence, that did challenge all comers at all weapons, as long sworde, staffe, sword and buckler, rapier, with the dagger: and here was many broken heads, and one of the Ma^{rs} of Defence dyed upon the hurts w^h he received on his head. This challenge was before the Queenes Ma^{tie}, who seemed to have pleasure therein; for when some of them would have sollen a broken pate, her Majesty bade him not to be ashamed to putt off his cap; and the blood was spied to run about his face. There

an actor-playwright, who in the early days of the professional drama supplied troupes with manuscripts"; *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas*, ed. Joseph Quincy Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), p. 638.

³⁴ The logic of incompatibility persists even in more recent scholarship, as the following statement about a different play testifies: "Merbury embarked on a successful career as a preacher in 1578, and a play like *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* would have been extremely inappropriate for a churchman. If the ascription of the final folio of the manuscript is correct, it is likely that Merbury composed the play while a student at Christ's College, Cambridge between 1571 and 1578"; Tamara Atkin, "Manuscript, Print, and the Circulation of Dramatic Texts: A Reconsideration of the Manuscript of *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*," *English Manuscript Studies, 1100-1700* 15 (2009): 152-165, at p. 165 n. 27.

was also at the Corte new plays, w^h lasted almost all night—the name of the play was *Huff-suff-and ruff*, with other masks, both of Ladies and Gents.³⁵

As *Gorboduc* was remembered for its dumb shows, so *Cambyses* seems to have been remembered by its popular episode involving Huf, Ruf, and Snuf, three ruffians who come on stage singing and who fight not with the masters of defense described in the letter above but with a whore. Elizabeth obviously enjoyed seeing broken heads (excuse the pun)—both fictional and real—and *Cambyses* offered a great deal of precisely that kind of entertainment.

But the play offers much more. As William A. Armstrong notices, Preston used Taverner's *Garden of Wisdom* for his source “not only because of its theatrical possibilities but also because it provided special opportunities for moral and political *exempla*.” The play, in other words, shows “an ethical and polemical interest” that the doggerel verse—or rather our perceptions of what constitutes doggerel verse—is likely to obscure.³⁶ As Armstrong further observes, “[t]he doggerel verse of the scholars who wrote such ‘academic’ plays as *Ralph Roister Doister*, *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, and *Damon and Pythias* is almost as crude as that of the author of *Cambyses*” (290), but the important thing is not to see such mixtures of high and low, of skilled and unskilled, of serious and humorous as anomalous or surprising. Although

³⁵ John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, a new edition, in three volumes (London: John Nichols, 1823), vol. 2, p. 250. See also Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 4, p. 79.

³⁶ William A. Armstrong, “The Authorship and Political Meaning of *Cambyses*,” *English Studies* 36.6 (1955): 289-299, at p. 299; on Preston's use of *The Garden of Wisdom* see also Farnham, *Medieval Heritage*, pp. 263-268. *Damon and Pythias*, one of the plays I discuss in Chapter 4, is written in this, to our ears very offensive, kind of verse. That it did not have anything to do with Edwards's inability to write more regular kinds of verse is neatly illustrated by the fact that his poems, included in *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*, are written in meters we consider more harmonious and respectable. It does seem, in other words, that this particular metrical medium was seen as appropriate for dramatic composition. Judgments about its effects cannot be made without access to the way in which the lines were actually spoken on sixteenth-century stages.

Cambyzes and *Gorboduc* are in many ways very different plays, it is significant that both were performed at court in 1561/62 and in front of comparable audiences. My intention is not to speculate about the specific responses those audiences may have had to the two plays, but it is to insist that *Cambyzes* and *Gorboduc* should be viewed together more often than they are in our accounts of early English dramatic and theatrical history. In what follows, I propose to consider the ways in which the two plays draw on the discourses of counsel to make their dramatic point and to suggest that considering them in conjunction can make the deployment of counsel in dramatic context more intelligible.

“Counsaile grave and sapient”: The Education of *Cambyzes*

King Cambyzes would have been familiar to sixteenth-century Christian readers primarily as the man who obstructed the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple,³⁷ but Thomas Preston’s play offers us little, if anything, in way of religious allegory. Nor does Preston go to Herodotus, where this king’s actions are all blamed on madness,³⁸ to construct a tragedy about a state that had the misfortune to be ruled by an insane monarch. Instead, it is in an interpolated account of Cambyzes’s reign in Richard Taverner’s *The Garden of Wisdom* (1539) that Preston found the basic materials for his story, which he then decided to transform into a drama which the title page of the first printed edition quite accurately describes as *A lamentable tragedy mixed ful of*

³⁷ On the Jewish connection, see Hill, “The First Elizabethan Tragedy.”

³⁸ See Don Cameron Allen, “A Source for *Cambyses*,” *Modern Language Notes* 49.6 (1934): 384-387; William A. Armstrong, “The Background and Sources of Preston’s *Cambyses*,” *English Studies* 31.4 (1950): 129-135.

pleasant mirth, and then varies this further on the top of each page as *A Comedie of King Cambises* or, as one fragment of an otherwise non-extant edition has it, *A Tragedye of King Cambises*.³⁹ The play ends, the same title page informs us, with Cambyses's "odious death by Gods Justice appointed," which is only one in a series of deaths that the play depicts and that are found in Taverner's account in *The Garden of Wisdom*. The source has thus yielded a great deal of tragic material, but Preston's introduction of the figure of Ambidexter, the vice, and a series of lowly characters from English life—including one called Marian-may-be-good—pushed the play toward comedy, which made it possible even for Venus and Cupid to join in at one point in the plot and make Cambyses fall in love with his cousin. The division of the parts also found on the title page of the printed editions clearly shows that Cambyses and Ambidexter are the two heroes of the play, and whereas for the former the play ends tragically, the latter moves on: "Farwell, my maisters, I will goe take barge; / I meane to be packing; now is the tide; / Farwell, my maisters, I will no longer abide!"⁴⁰

There was no special reason for Cambyses and his atrocities to feature in *The Garden of Wisdom*, but the placement of the story in this particular publication has interesting resonances for the play, especially for its relation to humanist learning and to the kind of precept and advice that similar humanist publications supplied in abundance.⁴¹ While Taverner offers his readers

³⁹ See Greg, *Bibliography*, vol. 1, pp. 133-136. How this mixture works is explained by Richard Edwards in the prologue to his play *Damon and Pythias*; more on this in the next chapter.

⁴⁰ Thomas Preston, *Cambises*, ed. Robert Carl Johnson (Salzburg: Institut für englische Sprache und Literatur, 1975), 1184-1186. All references are to the line numbers in this edition.

⁴¹ Charles Read Baskervill notes that the two books of *The Garden of Wisdom* are different from Taverner's other publications, all of them in one way or another translations or adaptations, since here in addition to precepts we also find examples, i.e. "anecdotes, usually fairly brief, about the deeds and sayings of great men of the past." In this

“proper wytty and quycke sayenges of princes, philosophers, and dyuers other sortes of men,” drawn, he further claims, from both Latin and Greek sources (but mainly translated, in fact, from the *Apophthegmata* of Erasmus), he does not claim that his flowers are planted with any special design in mind. Philosophers follow princes and princes philosophers sometimes in alphabetical order and sometimes because a particular philosopher was a tutor to a particular prince. In the address to the gentle readers prefacing the second book of *The Garden of Wisdom* Taverner explicitly asks them “to wynke at the confuse [*sic*] order herin” and openly protests that he keeps no order in the book “but accordynge to the prouerbe that fyrst commeth to the hande that I write.”⁴²

This is also the case with Cambyses. Taverner comes to this king—whose story he takes not from Erasmus but from a contemporary chronicle published in German in 1532 and later in the century translated into both Latin and English⁴³—via an entry on the Egyptians, whose custom it was to require their judges to take an oath according to which they should follow right and equity even if the king himself orders them to do otherwise (B8v). This prompts some reassuring comments about the absence of corruption among judges in England, but should there be corrupt behavior, Taverner wishes it would be rewarded in the same way in which the corrupt judge Sisamnes was rewarded by the Persian king Cambyses, who had the judge executed, his

way, *The Garden of Wisdom* gives its readers “the sacred twins of humanistic training for wise conduct”; “Taverner’s *Garden of Wisdom* and the *Apophthegmata* of Erasmus,” *Studies in Philology* 29.2 (1932): 149-159, at p. 154.

⁴² Rycharde Taverner, *The second booke of the Garden of wysdome, wherein are conteyned wytty, pleasaunt, and nette sayenges of renoumed personages* ([London: R. Bankes], 1539), sigs. A2r-A2v.

⁴³ This was Johan Carion’s history of the world, published in Latin as *Chronicorum libri tres* in 1550, and in the same year also published in an English translation by Walter Lynne as *The thre bokes of Chronicles, whyche John Carion [...] gathered wyth great diligence of the beste Authors that haue written in Hebrue, Greke, or Latine*; see Armstrong, “The Background and Sources of Preston’s *Cambises*,” p. 132.

skin “plucked of, and layde ouer the iugement seate,” which was then given to the corrupt judge’s son Otane to judge from and thus constantly be reminded of where his skin will finish if he follows the bad example of his father (C1v-C2r).

From this admonishing example Taverner turns to others furnished by the tyrannical and wicked life of Cambyses, who after this one good deed committed a series of atrocities that should serve as warnings to “all rulers, what so euer they be” (C2v). The first of these involves the office of counsel. Prexaspes, the chief counselor, tells Cambyses “very freely” (C2v) that the Persians think him a great king except that they object to his drunkenness. This act of free speech is greeted by Cambyses with a command for the counselor’s son to be brought forward so that Cambyses could shoot an arrow through his heart and thus show that he is not drunk even after he has “throughly wasshed hys braynes wyth wyne” (C3v). The feat successfully accomplished, the boy’s heart is produced as proof of the counselor’s misguided reasoning. Although extremely cruel, Cambyses’s act is informed by logical thinking, which creates significant problems for the humanist writer who wishes to impress upon his readers the importance and value of rational behavior. “[A]lbeit the dronkerd is not ignorant of the feate of shotyng,” Taverner desperately argues, “yet in the meane season he *can* not vse the ryght counsaylles of reason, but lacketh those vertues whiche be wont to incite men vnto gentle sobriete and to the studye of honest renowme” (C4r).

But if this story shows anything, it shows that Cambyses went too far in applying reason to his situation: contrary to what Taverner is saying, shooting is not something that drunk people do very well even if, then as now, they too often enjoy combining it with “the foule vice of ebriete” (C4r). Nonetheless, drunkenness is blamed for all the ensuing crimes Cambyses is

charged with, from the preventive murder of his own brother Smerdis, the potential claimant to the throne, to the marrying of “hys owne suster germayne” (C4r), who herself is murdered when she remembers while at a feast with her husband his cruelty to his own brother. With everybody thus done away, there was no one but God to effect vengeance: “For as he [i.e. Cambyses] was commynge out of Egypte in to Persia,” writes Taverner, “when he shulde mownt on horsbacke, his swerde felle out of the skaberd and sore wounded him in suche wyse that he dyed of it. This exemple testifyeth, *that god woll not longe suffre tyrantes to reigne*” (C5r).

As with the episode of the chief counselor, the example here points in the direction opposite to what Taverner wishes us to see. The completely silly, accidental death shows us that God could not care less about what happens to tyrants, and if he does care, even the Renaissance reader is entitled to object, should he not have done something before Cambyses runs out of subjects to kill? The point to notice here is the precarious, double nature of the humanist *exemplum*, which is often built on slippery foundations and which, as Montaigne observes, requires desperate interpretative maneuvers on the part of the humanist advisor if the historical material is to serve the moral and political purpose for which it is revived in print. The account of Cambyses’s reign in *The Garden of Wisdom* shows us in miniature the kind of problem that any advisor faced in turning to history—and to stories in general—in order to fashion out of such material viable and persuasive arguments for action. Persian history became in the sixteenth century an important source of such material, and its lessons—from Cyrus to Cambyses and from Cambyses to Darius—form an interesting counterpart to the material of British history that, in *Gorboduc*, serves the same purpose and produces similar results.

But before turning to *Gorboduc* it will be useful to see how Taverner's material from *The Garden of Wisdom* is deployed by Preston in the construction of his play, especially because Preston's treatment accords counsel a very prominent role. We have seen that *Cambyses* features a lot of additional, largely comic, material that is not to be found in *The Garden of Wisdom* and that is not directly related to any events of Cambyses's reign, coming instead from the native tradition of the moral play, represented in the figure of Ambidexter, and the popular English comedy closely associated with the morality tradition, featuring the likes of Huf, Ruf, and Snuf, Hob and Lob, aggressive whores, and domineering wives. Another innovation is the attention given in the play to counsel and its function not just within the Persian kingdom but within the world of the play as a whole.

Both the Prologue and the opening sentence of the play invoke counsel, as if to assert that it is somehow the starting point for any play, good or bad, comic or tragic. The actions of any dramatic character occur within the space that is on the one hand defined by what that character thinks and intends to do, on the other by what other characters say and do, and how they work upon each other.⁴⁴ It is not without reason that early modern English conflated various meanings in one variously spelled word *counsel*, which stands as much for thoughts (one's secret counsels, shared only with some, who then become "of one's counsel") as it does for the action of giving

⁴⁴ A representative example of this process in "pure" comedy is *Ralph Roister Doister*, where in the opening scene Matthew Merrygreek asserts that he must be Ralph Roister Doister's "chief of counsel." And, indeed, when in the second scene Ralph arrives on the stage, he says to Matthew: "Thou must with thy good counsel help me if thou can." This request serves to set off the action of the entire play. See *Ralph Roister Doister*, in *Minor Elizabethan Drama*, vol. 2: *Pre-Shakespearean Comedies*, ed. Ashley Thorndike (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1958), 1.1.45 and 1.2.78 respectively. In his edition of Terence's comedies, Philip Melanchthon claims that "[c]omedy is nothing unless it is the image of human counsels and events"; see Marvin T. Herrick, *Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century*, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, vol. XXXIV, nos. 1-2 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950), p. 14.

or taking advice, and, in the indistinguishable spellings of *counsel* and *council*, for the process of consultation or even the deliberative body itself. The play closes with a prayer “for our noble Queene” and “for her Honorable Council” conventionally found at the end of other plays from the period, particularly from the mid-sixteenth century, but the prayer acquires a special poignancy in the Epilogue to a play like *Cambyses*, where the king and his counsel/council are often at odds.

The unexpected thing about the Prologue that opens the play regularly described as an extremely popular entertainment—dissociated, we have seen critics claiming, from any serious learning—is its invocation of Cicero, Seneca, and, most surprisingly, Agathon. The three lines of Agathon’s advice to kings—counseling them “to rule with lawes, eke justice” and to understand that they will not rule forever—are in fact a translation of the lines found in the *Eclogae* of Stobaeus, where fragments of the work of the Athenian tragedian Agathon survive. There were Latin translations of Agathon’s dictum upon which the author of *Cambyses* could have drawn, but probably no English source, which again suggests that the play was unlikely to have been authored by a hack playwright.⁴⁵ Like Agathon, Cicero too invokes the law, the “schoolmaister devine” who should plainly speak through the mouth of the prince himself. The law and the humanist advisor, as we have seen in the discussion of Buchanan, overlap in significant ways. But what the Prologue avoids to say is that princely counsel obviously did not perform its task successfully at the court of Cambyses, or educational counsel at the court of his father. Cyrus, the ideal king, is mentioned, and Cambyses is identified as his lawful successor, but the education of the good prince—which is the main reason *Cyropaedia* was so popular with

⁴⁵ I draw here on Armstrong, “The Authorship and Political Meaning of *Cambyses*,” p. 291.

the humanists—and kingship are put in strange juxtaposition instead, as we would expect, harmonious conjunction: “As heir due, to take the crowne Cambises did proceed. / He in his youth was trained up by thrace of vertues lore; / Yet, being king, did cleane forget his perfect race before” (18-20).

The play, however, begins with a promising relationship between Cambyses and his *councell*. The “Counsaile grave and sapient” which Cambyses addresses is represented by a single character simply called Councell, reminiscent of similarly named figures in the tradition of morality drama,⁴⁶ but here in the company of the “lordings,” represented by a Lord and a Knight.⁴⁷ Both Councell and the nobility are asked whether a military expedition against the Egyptians would be a desirable thing, something that would extend the fame and “worthy facts” (9) of the very famous Cyrus and ensure that his son Cambyses lives up to the ideal. The Lord and the Knight speak with laconic brevity, not so much to advise as to express their readiness to join the expedition,⁴⁸ whereas Councell, who (or which) speaks first, offers a more thoughtful consideration of the idea. The conclusion of that consideration is that the king should fix all his delight “[t]o martiall feats and kingly sport” (34), but it remains unclear whether this is because these feats are good in themselves or because they will keep the king from the vice of drinking.

⁴⁶ Evil Counsel is a character in *John the Evangelist*, first printed around 1550 but probably composed much earlier. We have already encountered Good Counsel in *Lusty Juventus* (composed around 1550). A character called Counsel appears in John Pickering’s *Horestes* (printed in 1567).

⁴⁷ Interestingly, the second edition of the play, published by John Alde’s son Edward sometime after 1584, changes the reading “Councell” of the opening stage direction to “Councillor.” But it is clear from the text that follows that Councell represents not a single counselor but a kind of council, which works in conjunction with the nobility represented by the Lord and the Knight. Cf. “My Councell, speake, and, lordings, eke: is it not best do so?” (20). More on the significance of this point later.

⁴⁸ They are all asked to offer advice (20), but after Councell speaks, Cambyses puts a more specific question to the others: “But now, my lord and valiant knight, with words give answer plain: / Are you content with me to go the Marsis games to try?” (38-39).

If you decide to do this worthy deed, Councell argues, you should not turn back, but “to proceed in vertuous life imploy indeavour still” (32) and, more specifically, “[e]xtinguish vice, and in that cup to drinke have no delight” (33).

Thus, contrary to what we find in Taverner, even before Cambyses’s one good deed of executing a corrupt judge, the vice of drinking is here explicitly associated with the king. Ignoring the fleeting allusion to drink, Cambyses is pleased with the advice, which he thinks fully supports his idea, and the play moves on with Councell serving as the character that will set the events of the play into motion. On the suggestion of Councell, Cambyses appoints a governor who will rule the land while the king is away, and continue to rule if he does not come back.⁴⁹ But like Cambyses, the judge Sisamnes is depicted in the opening scene as someone who even before he is given an opportunity for great corruption is corrupted in a small way. “Report declares he is a man that to himself is nie,” observes the Lord, “[o]ne that favoureth much the world, and sets to much thereby” (67-68). It is, however, fear of punishment, both the Lord and Cambyses believe, that will ensure the justness of Sisamnes’s rule.

If Councell sets in motion the main plot of the play, Ambidexter is the *spiritus movens* of its miniature mirror plots and ultimately of the whole play. As progeny of the figure of the vice in the morality drama, Ambidexter is fittingly positioned within the play as the evil (or at least unprincipled) counterpart to the actions of the (Good) Councell. Instead of staging Cambyses’s campaign against the Egyptians, the scene that follows Cambyses’s departure gives us a parody of the campaign. Ambidexter enters “with an old capcase on his head, an olde paile about his

⁴⁹ This is different from what we find in Taverner, where Sisamnes is a governor of one of the provinces of the empire, not an interim governor of the whole realm.

hips for harness, a scummer and a potlid by his side, and a rake on his shoulder,” and exclaims that he is “prepared for the field” (the rake in particular underlines the joke here), “appointed to fight against a snail” (126-130). While appearing as one about to go to the war, Ambidexter plots the destruction of Sisamnes the judge—for no other reason except, it seems, that this is what he, as a vice, is supposed to do in a play. How reasonable Cambyses’s expedition against the Egyptians is meant to appear becomes clear in the scene that ensues between “three ruffians, Huf, Ruf, and Snuf,” ready to join the expedition, and Ambidexter, who soon swings them about when they make fun of his soldierly outfit. Instead of the vice of drinking which the play associated with Cambyses in the opening scene, here its lecherous shadow makes an appearance in the figure of Meretrix, who beats this lusty army of ruffians and causes Ambidexter, though obviously cognizant of Meretrix’s charms, to flee the scene.

From Ambidexter and Meretrix to characters such as Execution, Shame, Commons Complaint, Small Habilitie, Prooffe and Triall, Preston’s *Cambyses* gives us a series of seemingly allegorical and therefore static characters, all of them associated, however, with the busiest parts of the play and with what we may call the play’s reality effects. They create a rich dramatic context for the series of almost emblematic royal cruelty scenes that follow one another without any necessity, except the necessity of history that authorizes the events but that, Aristotle reminds us, itself often lacks plausibility. Preston’s artistic aims do not seem to be concerned with plausibility, of either history or fiction, but rather with varied juxtapositions of the allegorical and the historical, where the allegorical—in the series of characters fashioned out of the morality tradition—suggests the realities of lived experience, whereas the historical—in the actions of Cambyses—points to an allegory of rule and vice. This movement between the

different effects of allegory and history in the play, not unusual in early modern drama and evident, it will be argued here, also in *Gorboduc*, can best be understood if attention is turned to how counsel is represented in the play. That, too, is not entirely unexpected since counsel is often the site at which allegory and history, fiction and action intersect.

The character called Councill that urges Cambyses to follow through his idea about a military expedition against the Egyptians, if only because the quest for fame will keep the king away from the bottle, disappears from the play early. “My Council,” as Cambyses repeatedly calls him, accompanies the king in the opening scene, and seems to depart with him to Egypt,⁵⁰ but once Shame announces “[t]he odious facts and shameles deeds” (343) of the king while away in Egypt—notably lechery and drunkenness—Cambyses is no longer seen with Councill at his side. Instead, he returns with a figure of counsel that has acquired some historical specificity and that will have a tragic role to play in the succeeding scenes. In Taverner’s account of Cambyses in *The Garden of Wisdom*, only this specific advisor appears: “Prexaspes one of hys chosen Counsailours” (C2v). The play, however, expands the sentence that precedes the mention of this counselor and that refers to Cambyses’s conquest of Egypt into the moral frame of the play within which somewhat generalized Councill is given the most prominent role.

Although the division of the parts that the early editions provide distinguish between Councill and Praxaspes (as the counselor is called in Preston’s play), both of whom are to be played by one man (in addition to his playing Huf, Murder, Lob, and the Third Lord), we have seen that Councill’s allusion to drink before the Egyptian expedition links this figure directly to

⁵⁰ Cf. the following: “My Council, then let us depart a final stay to make; / To Egypt land now forth with speed my voyage will I take” (109-110).

the character Praxaspes, who both in Taverner's account and in Preston's play tells the king in very direct terms that the Persians object to his love of wine, which the quest for fame seems to have increased instead of eradicating.⁵¹ This wavering between the abstract voice of counsel represented allegorically and the concrete voice of a historical counselor is so specific to the play that the second edition of the text, published after 1584, perceives it as an anomaly and attempts to normalize it, as it were, by having the link between Councill and Praxaspes strengthened. In the opening stage direction of the play, the second edition replaces "Councill" with "Councillor."

It is only when the character of Councill is given a more specific historical shape that the wisdom of his words can be questioned in the play. As we have seen, in the opening scene Councill is the exclusive voice of advice, while the Knight and the Lord merely express their readiness to join Cambyses in his military campaigning. But when the king's party returns, the Lord and the Knight contradict Councill's / Praxaspes's claim that Cambyses is out of favor with his subjects because he loves wine so much. "No, no, my lord!" exclaims one, "it is not so!" And continues: "For this of prince they tel, / For vertuous prooffe and princely facts Cirus he doth excel" (497-498). The other modifies this compliment somewhat by saying that Cambyses will be completely like Cyrus when he leaves a child behind and thus secures legitimate rule for the future. In Taverner's account, these words are spoken by Cresus, "a worthy lord, vnto whose cure [*sic*] and gouernaunce Cyrus had committed hys son Cambyses to be instytute and brought vp in honestie & vertue" (C3r). In the play, Cresus is not among those present; instead, the

⁵¹ Praxaspes says: "The Persians much doo praise your Grace, but one thing discommend, / In that to wine subject you be, wherein you doo offend. / Sith that the might of wines effect doth oft subdue your brain, / My counsel is, to please their harts from it you would refrain" (493-496).

Knight quotes him: “In person of Cresus I answer make” (501). The tutor to the king, whose advice and instruction should have ensured that Cambyses follows Cyrus primarily in virtue, is conveniently absent; his voice is used to contradict the words of another figure of advice, Praxaspes, who will soon suffer for his outspokenness by having his own issue—of which, it is important to notice, Cambyses is unpossessed—eliminated. Whereas Taverner blames the lords for flattery, Preston leaves the situation undecided, as if unwilling to follow the false logic of his source, according to which counsel is always single and always good and therefore always likely to suffer for the plain message it communicates.

Still, by removing one advisor who may be responsible for the way things have turned out with Cambyses, namely Cresus, and leaving Praxaspes to bear the burden of counsel in the play, Preston has, in a way, followed Taverner’s logic of humanist advice that, in theory at least, is never failing in that it can never be blamed for the adverse results it produces. Yet both Taverner and Preston must have been familiar with the seminal dialogue of counsel between Hythloday and More in *Utopia*, which turns entirely upon the question of what will happen to the counselor who speaks the truth without bearing in mind what effects that act of free speaking will have. Both More and Hythloday draw their wisdom from history, and their different arguments about counsel point towards different understandings of what the historical material offers to the humanist advisor. Hythloday opens his case by stating that what the English king who wants a war with France wishes to hear is that wars are good things, but that is not, Hythloday argues, what any good counselor should think. Still, *Cambyses* opens with one figure of counsel supporting the king’s decision to conquer Egypt because some good effect may come out of it, only to give us another figure of counsel that, this time like Hythloday, values the act of

free speech regardless of the results it produces. The disagreeing arguments of counsel featured in More's *Utopia* have found themselves combined within the confines of one and the same play and in counselor figures that are distinguished in such a way that we are led to believe that no real distinction between them can be maintained.

What makes Praxaspes additionally interesting is that, as a figure of counsel, he has been given a family. As we will see in *Gorboduc*, and as the dominant part of the dramatic tradition indicates, counselors preserve something of their abstract allegorical nature given them in the morality plays by continuing in historical plays without family ties and without lives outside of their advisory office. The most moving scene in *Cambyses*, however, is constructed around the episode of the advisor Praxaspes and the shooting of his son. Not prompted by his source, Preston introduces the counselor's wife—simply called Mother—who comes onto the stage to weep the cruel murder of her son, whose heart had been carved out of his body to produce proof in an argument between the king and his counselor: “With velvet paps I gave thee suck with issue from my brest,” she tenderly laments, “[a]nd danced thee upon my knee to bring thee unto rest” (591-592).

This scene which, it has been observed, is “at the mathematical center of the play,”⁵² mourns what neither the play nor the history it draws upon give us. The counselor's dead issue—both literally and metaphorically—stands for the tragedy to which the play eventually leads but chooses not to address. After the murder of his own brother and of his newly-wedded wife, with

⁵² Hill, “The First Elizabethan Tragedy,” p. 407. On the importance of the imagery of the heart in the play and on its unifying function as a complex dramatic symbol, see James Phares Myers, Jr., “The Heart of King Cambyses,” *Studies in Philology* 70.4 (1973): 367-376; on the poignancy of the Mother's lament scene, see Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism*, p. 105.

whom he produces no issue, Cambyses's falling upon his own sword amounts to a kind of inevitable self-slaughter. The only way he could be like Cyrus, he has been told by his absent advisor-tutor Cresus, is by ensuring that he is succeeded by another great king. Cambyses was, in fact, succeeded by one of the greatest Persian kings, but the question of the Persian succession is best introduced in relation to *Gorboduc*, a play that has consistently been seen as directly engaging the question of succession and approaching this question by framing it within the networks of family and counsel.

“Now is the time for present good advice”: The Issue of Counsel in *Gorboduc*

Cambyses opens with Councill's concern about government—who will reign while Cambyses is absent on his military campaign?—and closes with complete uncertainty about future government. The play in a sense continues in the figure of Ambidexter, the voice of trouble-making counsel in the play, who simply moves on. Put this way, the play's movement resembles what we find in Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville's *Gorboduc*, where the story of the ancient British king more explicitly addresses the problem of succession and similarly ends in total political dissolution: “These hugy mischiefs and these miseries, / These civil wars, these murders, and these wrongs / Of justice.”⁵³ The hope offered by the counselor Eubulus in the closing lines of *Gorboduc* is as elusive as it is uncertain; it is to be believed that God will restore the crown unto the lawful heir (5.2.277) even though there are no surviving heirs in the play, nor any indication as to who the lawful heir of the future might be.

⁵³ Sackville and Norton, *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex*, ed. Cauthen, 5.2.274-276.

As with *Cambyzes*, counsel and princely education feature prominently in *Gorboduc*. What this play gives us, however, is not a king who has no issue, but a king who has too much issue—and then none. The problem *Gorboduc* poses is how royal succession works when a king has two sons, one older and one younger, and how his decisions about the future of the kingdom are to be made. Should decisions be made while Gorboduc himself is alive? Should the sons be trained in the art of government while they can be monitored by the experienced eye of their father, or should only one son be given power, and if so, which one? Now or later? These are the questions the early counsel scenes of *Gorboduc* discuss at length. The play gives us more counselors with more specificity attached to each than what we find in *Cambyzes*, but these counselors are sought in vain in the historical record. Their names—Eubulus standing in Greek for prudence, Arostus for weakness, and so on⁵⁴—tell us that, like Councell and Praxaspes in *Cambyzes*, they occupy the interconnected space of historical specificity and allegorical abstraction. What the consultation scene early in the play suggests is that the main tasks of counsel consist in reducing the conflicting diversity of historical material to straightforward *exempla*, turning all history into allegorical lessons of counsel.

Unlike *Cambyzes*, however, *Gorboduc* has continued to attract critical interest, especially in recent decades. This is less because the play is found engaging or entertaining and more because it is regularly found to be directly participating in Elizabethan political life. That this should make any play more interesting or more deserving of scholarly interest is one of the curiosities of our current critical habits, but the play has nonetheless greatly benefited from the

⁵⁴ Cf. Sackville and Norton, *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex*, ed. Cauthen, p. xviii; also Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, rev. ed. (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 47.

attention it has received. Above all, and unsurprisingly, *Gorboduc* has proved resistant to easy political applications and has caused critics to disagree about the extent of its topical meaning, the precise role, if any, the play had in the early Elizabethan succession debate, or about the different impacts of the early performance in the Inner Temple as opposed to the court performance that soon followed.⁵⁵

Despite this diversity of critical opinion, a recent account of the play by Andrew Hadfield, one of the leading British students of the relationship between literature and politics in the early modern period, states matter-of-factly that “*Gorboduc* was explicitly concerned with the fate of England and showed in painstaking detail what was likely to happen if the monarch failed to behave in the best interests of his or her subjects.”⁵⁶ The play was intended, Hadfield continues, “as a warning to [the new queen] of what might happen if she failed to govern sensibly” (31). Finally, the play’s performance in the Inner Temple made the audience “an integral part of the political nation capable of advising monarchs” (32). *Gorboduc* thus acquires the status of “a national tragedy” (36) and becomes a play that “looks as if it is advising the

⁵⁵ See, in addition to the studies already cited, S. A. Small, “The Political Import of the Norton Half of *Gorboduc*,” *PMLA* 46.3 (1931): 641-646; Sara Ruth Watson, “*Gorboduc* and the Theory of Tyrannicide,” *Modern Language Review* 34.3 (1939): 355-366; David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 141 ff; Marie Axton, “Robert Dudley and the Inner Temple Revels,” *Historical Journal* 13.3 (1970): 365-378; Marie Axton, *The Queen’s Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Historical Society, 1977); Kevin Dunn, “Representing Counsel: *Gorboduc* and the Elizabethan Privy Council,” *English Literary Renaissance* 33.3 (2003): 279-308; Terry Reilly, “‘This is the case’: *Gorboduc* and Early Modern English Legal Discourse Concerning Inheritance,” in *Tudor Drama Before Shakespeare, 1485-1590: New Directions for Research, Criticism, and Pedagogy*, ed. Lloyd Edward Kermode, Jason Scott-Warren, and Martine van Elk (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 195-210; Jessica Winston, “Expanding the Political Nation: *Gorboduc* at the Inns of Court and Succession Revisited,” *Early Theatre* 8.1 (2005): 11-34; Karen J. Cunningham, “‘So Many Books, So Many Rolls of Ancient Time’: The Inns of Court and *Gorboduc*,” in *Solon and Thespis: Law and Theater in the English Renaissance*, ed. Dennis Kezar (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), pp. 197-217.

⁵⁶ Hadfield, “Tragedy and the Nation State,” p. 30.

monarch, but it really has designs on would be-counsellors, trying to persuade them to intervene in politics to ensure the nation is properly protected and shepherded” (32).

What this reading—in its inability to decide whether the play is advising the queen or advising would-be counselors—registers are the different points of view recent criticism has taken in relation to the question of counsel in the play. The traditional view of the play as a piece of counsel to the monarch has been challenged by the more recent view, prompted largely by the context of the Inns of Court performance, of the play as a piece of counsel to the legal profession and thus to future counselors. Both of these views, however, rest on the assumption that the counsel *Gorboduc* gives can be easily recovered, whether the play’s addressee is the queen or her subjects. Hadfield insists on the play’s “straightforward political message” (36), which in turn largely depends on the straightforwardness of the play’s depiction of counsel: “Counsellors have the power to guide the monarch in the right or wrong direction” (32). The early consultation scene in which Gorboduc asks for advice regarding his plan to divide the kingdom between his two sons is consequently read as a clear opposition between bad and good advice. Arostus and Philander, Hadfield suggests, “offer what looks like—but is clearly not—good advice” (32), while only Eubulus, “the king’s secretary and therefore closest counsellor, applies sensible political logic” (33). Eubulus’s argument that “[w]ithin one land one single rule is best” is therefore to be preferred:

Here we have sensible advice in which all the desiderata of the nation are in alignment.

Unlike the other counsellors, Eubulus provides advice that does not involve a compromise, a trade-off or dubious logic. He makes it clear that the realm must be united under one ruler; that the consequences of division are bad for the king, his family and,

above all, the nation. Eubulus argues the monarch must ‘Keep them in order and obedience’ (l. 300), training the elder son to learn ‘mildness in his governance’ (l. 303), and the younger, ‘a yielding contentedness’ (l. 304), clearly supporting the English legal tradition of primogeniture, the rule that the eldest son inherits the crown (or land).⁵⁷

The slippage in the last sentence is significant. Eubulus, an advisor to an ancient British king, is made to support the English legal tradition of primogeniture although this law—or any law of the kind—is never referenced in the play. What Eubulus does mention is only “kind and custom” that might give the elder son “a rightful hope”—the tentative phrasing is significant—to be Gorboduc’s heir (1.2.285-286).

If, nevertheless, one is to see this particular English legal tradition not just operating in the play but defining what constitutes good as opposed to bad advice, one is entitled to ask how exactly this invocation of the sixteenth-century English legal situation applies to the message of the play as a whole and particularly to the monarch who is unmarried and has no direct heirs. That she should marry and produce an heir? And if two heirs, to know, together with her counselors, that the elder is to be preferred no matter what? The question is important and will be returned to; suffice it to say for now that what Eubulus is actually supporting in the play is a point of view that argues against the logic of the counselors who have spoken before him and against the force of examples they have selected to buttress their arguments. The different acts of advice draw to various degrees and in different ways on historical examples, not some abstract, however sensible, political logic, in order to make their arguments persuasive.

⁵⁷ Hadfield, “Tragedy and the Nation State,” p. 33.

This is especially true of the advice given by Eubulus, who speaks last. To agree with Hadfield that something looks like but is clearly not good advice is to take the voice of Eubulus as the exclusive voice of good counsel in the play, but it is also to refer the question of advice to the question of history—which precedes and succeeds the play. If nothing else, the play makes clear one thing: all the counselors that are invited to give their advice to Gorboduc act in good faith and they are all consistently contrasted with the voices of flattery and evil counsel that we will see later in the play in the young parasitical figures accompanying Ferrex and Porrex in their newly established courts. It is a significant complication of the single narrative of good counsel regularly perceived in the play.

Identifying the logic and strategy of counsel in the early consultation scene means, above all, turning to the logic of the historical examples deployed by the official figures of advice. The precepts the counselors offer are informed by the examples they adduce to support their case. Precept and example are inseparable in humanist thought; the latter is not just an illustration of the former but also its context and source. Both are drawn from the pool of classical and Christian wisdom that the culture of print made more abundant and more easily available. That the counselors in *Gorboduc* use British history to authorize their positions is understandable, but the play as a whole participates in the larger Renaissance project of using history for political insight as well as for useful models of political action. The promise and the problem of turning to texts to find in them arguments for action inform a great deal of familiar activities not just of counselors but of Renaissance readers in general. To understand the working of counsel in *Gorboduc*, I want to take a brief look at how an early reader perceived the logic of practical

counsel in the play. This reader's response neatly shows what the promise and the problem just mentioned involve.

Among the "Pithie Sentences and wise sayinges" that in the late 1580s or early 1590s William Briton excerpted from various texts and included in his commonplace book—today British Library Additional MS 61822—are also found around one hundred and fifty lines from *Gorboduc*, taken from different sections of the play (fols. 89v-90v).⁵⁸ These excerpts are occasionally accompanied by comments in the margin that explain what the reader thought a particular passage was about. Thus Arostus's advice to Gorboduc early in the play, according to which it is good for the king to divide his kingdom while still living so that he can supervise the princes' reign and restrain their youthful wills (1.2.117-132), is described as "a caveat for government of youth."⁵⁹ Gorboduc's decision to appoint an experienced counselor to each of the

⁵⁸ Because the manuscript also includes one hundred sonnets from Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, it has been carefully examined by William A. Ringler, Jr., the editor of Sidney's poems. He provides a description of the entire manuscript in *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 540-542. At the time, the manuscript was in the possession of Arthur A. Houghton, Jr. An even more detailed description is kept with the manuscript itself as a series of typewritten pages, again provided by Ringler. These are included in the microfilm reproduction of the manuscript (*British Literary Manuscripts from the British Library*, series 1, part 3, reel 53), which is the source of my transcriptions from the *Gorboduc* excerpts. John Manning has published the translations of "Emblemata Andreae Alciati" with which the section of "Pithie Sentences and wise sayinges" opens; see "An Unedited and Unpublished Sixteenth-Century English Translation of Some Alciato Emblems: British Library Additional MS. 61822," *Emblematica* 7.1 (1993): 181-188. To my knowledge, the only existing discussion of the excerpts from *Gorboduc* is found in Laura Estill's doctoral dissertation "The Circulation and Recontextualization of Dramatic Excerpts in Seventeenth-Century English Manuscripts" (Wayne State University, 2010). Influenced by the dominant interpretations of the play, Estill sees Briton as "reading *Gorboduc*, at least in part, for the political message" and goes on to say that its topicality would have been even more pointed at this later date since the question of succession was more uncertain given Elizabeth's age (21). She later refers to the excerpts as "Briton's political extracts from *Gorboduc*" (51) and then claims that "Briton's extracts from *Gorboduc* in BL MS Add. 61822 commented on the succession crisis in the late sixteenth century" (54). Little attention is paid to the extracts themselves and they are not identified; instead, only two marginal notes are mentioned. Since I am using a modern spelling edition of *Gorboduc*, I have decided, for harmony's sake, to modernize the spelling of my quotations from this manuscript.

⁵⁹ This excerpt is a good example of the way in which Briton occasionally adapts or compresses the text of the play—which he had, it seems, in the edition of 1565—to make it more generally applicable. Direct address, for

two sons in order to prevent the pernicious effects of flattery is seen as “a fatherly care of a prince for his sons” and “a counselor” is written next to the words that describe this person of wisdom and trust (1.2.351-364). The lines of the Chorus from the conclusion of the first act, in which the first dumb show is explained (1.2.370-381), are seen, predictably, to represent “the difference between union and division.” The explanation of the second dumb show the Chorus offers at the end of the second act (2.2.107-108) is a warning about what might happen if one decides to “reject good counsel and embrace flattery” while its condemnation of “the lust of kingdom” at the end of the third act (3.1.170-175) is a comment on “usurped reign.”⁶⁰ That the excerpts are meant to function without reference to their original dramatic context is confirmed by the final marginal note—placed against a passage from Porrex’s address to Gorboduc after he has murdered his brother (4.2.43-55)—which describes the content of the passage as “remorse of conscience in a malefactor described.” But it is not at all clear in the play whether Porrex is truly repentant or whether he is merely dissembling.

A number of extracted lines and passages are not accompanied by any marginal comment. The shorter ones seem to have been noted because they express something in a striking way. For example, the first extract comes from the first scene of the play, in which

instance, is avoided. “Custom, O king, shall bring delightfulness” becomes “Custom therein shall bring delightfulness” and “But if you so dispose it that the day / Which ends your life shall first begin their reign / Great is the peril what will be the end” becomes “But if you leave them void of governor / great is the peril what will be the end.” The “you” of Gorboduc thus becomes in the excerpt a more general “you”—whoever is charged with the “government of youth.” For a parallel case from the middle of the seventeenth century, see James G. McManaway, “Excerpta Quaedam per A. W. Adolescentem,” in *Studies in Honor of DeWitt T. Starnes*, ed. Thomas P. Harrison, Archibald A. Hill, Ernest C. Mossner, and James Sledd (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), pp. 117-129, at p. 124.

⁶⁰ The phrase “usurped reign” occurs earlier in the play (2.1.118) and is, interestingly, used by Hermon, Ferrex’s parasite, to describe Porrex’s rule. This may be a sign of the impact Hermon’s speech (on which more later) had on this particular reader.

Ferrex responds to his mother's complaint by saying: "A causeless wrong and so unjust despite / May have redress, or at the least revenge."⁶¹ A similar logic prompts the excerpting of Gorboduc's words on flattery (1.2.29-30) or Eubulus's lines "Good is, I grant, of all to hope the best, / But not to live still dreadless of the worst." The clearest example of this is the single half line by Ferrex, "In silence let it die" (2.1.179). Sometimes the reason is some general moral value of a particular passage—on the theme of ambition, pride, fame, and so on—while at least in one example we can see that the reader was affected by the descriptive power of an especially poignant section in the play. This is Marcella's moving description of Videna's murder of her own son Porrex, from which the following lines are quoted (4.2.223-226): "A deep-fet sigh he gave, and therewithal / Clasping his hands, to heaven he cast his sight. / And straight, pale death pressing within his face, / The flying ghost his mortal corpse forsook."

That counsel features as a prominent theme in these excerpts is no surprise, *Gorboduc* being populated with so many counselors and counsel being so frequently offered in the play. But two passages Briton extracts merit special attention. The first comes from the first scene of the second act, which takes place at the court of Ferrex after he has been given one half of the kingdom. His evil counselor Hermon, described in the list of dramatis personae as "a parasite," argues that fratricide is a small matter when kingdoms are at stake. Once the deed is done, the old king will be appeased and the nobility, Hermon continues, will look forward to future favors while ignoring the present wrongs: "Wise men do not so hang on passing state / Or present princes, chiefly in their age, / But they will further cast their reaching eye, / To view and weigh the times and reigns to come" (2.1.126-129). What is interesting about this passage is that it is

⁶¹ This is a slightly adapted version of 1.1.12-13.

one out of only five places that in the second edition of *Gorboduc* (1570) are marked with gnomic pointing in the margin. No such pointing is found in the first edition of the play (1565), which was, as the textual variants show, the source of Briton's extracts. It is a significant coincidence, especially given the fact that *Gorboduc* abounds in sententious passages and that Hermon is the most spectacularly Machiavellian character in the entire play. Yet the 1570 edition marks another passage from his same long speech with gnomic pointing (2.1.146-151). We would expect, on the contrary, that Eubulus's wisdom should serve as the main source of sententious sayings, but out of his many lines only five are singled out in this way, and they have no direct political import.⁶² Apart from a single desperate line pronounced by Gorboduc ("Oh no man happy till his end be seen," 3.1.11), we find gnomic pointing in the 1570 edition only once more, in a speech by Philander, the counselor whom Gorboduc assigned to Porrex and who is unsuccessful in his advising efforts, a failure which prompts the following lines: "O most unhappy state of counselors, / That light on so unhappy lords and times / That neither can their good advice be heard, / Yet must they bear the blames of ill success" (2.2.69-72).⁶³

This profoundly ironic situation in which wisdom is found in pieces of both evil and good counsel reveals, I would like to suggest, a troubling truth about the play and its preoccupation

⁶² "The heart unbroken and the courage free / From feeble faintness of bootless despair / Doth either rise to safety or renown / By noble valor of unvanquished mind, / Or yet doth perish in more happy sort" (3.1.141-145).

⁶³ On gnomic pointing see G. K. Hunter, "The Marking of *Sententiae* in Elizabethan Printed Plays, Poems, and Romances," *Library*, 5th series, 6.3-4 (1951): 171-188; also András Kiséry, "Politicians in Show: The Circulation of Political Knowledge in Early-Seventeenth-Century English Drama," Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University, 2008), pp. 145-205, and, most recently, Irena Bratičević and Ivan Lupić, "Držićeva *Hekuba* između izvedbe i knjige," *Colloquia Maruliana* 22 (2013): 77-116. Zachary Lesser and Peter Stallybrass ("The First Literary *Hamlet* and the Commonplacings of Professional Plays," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59.4 [2008]: 371-420) point out that the 1570 edition of *Gorboduc* may be the earliest English printed play marked in this way (385). Their essay focuses on the significance of gnomic pointing in the first quarto of *Hamlet* (1603). It is worth noting that the passages thus pointed are given to Corambis, the figure of compromised counsel in the play.

with counsel. Contrary to what Philander is saying, counselors bear no explicit blame in the play. They are never accused of being responsible for the evil turn the events take; instead, they are ready to pride themselves on offering good counsel, as Eubulus (cf. 3.1.134-136), or to blame the times in which good advice simply does not work, as Philander in the passage just quoted. But throughout the play they keep themselves in business, like the bawd in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, whose alarm over the potential pulling down of her bawdy house Pompey, the play's tapster, palliates by wisely noting: "Come, fear not you. Good counselors lack no clients."⁶⁴ No matter how pressing the matter may be, the only action that is advisable is the act of advising itself: "O noble prince," urges Eubulus, the consummate performer of this conciliar strategy, "now is no time / To wail and plain and waste your woeful life. / Now is the time for present good advice" (3.1.137-139).⁶⁵

Paradoxically, even when early in the fifth act we learn that all the royal figures in the play have been killed, the counselors continue in business.⁶⁶ With so much good advice to go

⁶⁴ *Measure for Measure*, 1.2.87. Editors normally gloss the line as referring to legal counsel. Eubulus is so enduring that we find his namesake in as late a play as John Dryden's *Marriage à la Mode* (1673).

⁶⁵ That we should consider Eubulus in a more skeptical light than is commonly done is further suggested by the manner in which he opens his speech, to which I have referred above: "Lo, here the peril that was erst foreseen / When you, O king, did first divide your land / And yield your present reign unto your sons" (3.1.134-136). The first thing Eubulus does is blame the king and point out that he, Secretary to the King, was in fact right. Compare this with the advice Robert Beale gives to the future Principal Secretary in "A Treatise of the Office of a Councillor," p. 440: "If, not followinge your advice and Councill, thinges shal not falle out well as you advised, insult not, magnifyinge your owne opinion and condemninge hers [i.e. the Queen's], but with patience and meekness helpe to remedie that which may be amisse. Afterwardes, when the like occasion may fall out, you may use it as a persuasion, but yet humblie and dutifullie."

⁶⁶ This prompts Kevin Dunn to read the play as embodying the notion of "conciliar perpetuity." According to this interpretation, the play "shows the conciliar class instantiating itself as the representative of the state, the entity that persists through changes of monarch and government." The play is thus seen as arguing for a particular model of political arrangement and the history of Elizabethan government, especially the Privy Council, is brought to bear upon the play; "Representing Counsel," pp. 289, 304.

around, it must appear disappointing, to say the least, that the play closes with a long speech by Eubulus, who opposes the idea that the parliament should resolve the question of succession. Untroubled by the absent basis of his own authority to advise, he denigrates the whole idea of consultation by resorting to a tautology worthy of Hermon: “Alas, in parliament what hope can be, / When is of parliament no hope at all” (5.2.253-254). Too many self-interested opinions are not likely to produce consent, he argues, thus casting doubt on the value of the consultative process itself, of which, paradoxically, he himself is the chief representative in the play. All he can do is predict “the entry to the woeful wreck / And utter ruin of this noble realm” (5.2.181-182).⁶⁷

It is hard to imagine anybody who could leave the performance of *Gorboduc* thinking that he has actually been given a straightforward piece of advice on any of the many issues raised in the course of the play. It is perhaps in this, more than in anything else, that this play resembles the real world of early modern politics. In his discussion of “the moral cultivation of ambivalence” in Tudor literature and culture, Joel B. Altman mentions a state paper prepared by William Cecil on the question of Elizabeth’s potential marriage to the Duke of Anjou, the affair, it will be remembered, on account of which Thomas Norton ended up in the Tower. Composed on October 2, 1579, the paper lays out all the advantages and all the shortcomings of the Anjou match, but in a move reminiscent of Eubulus in the final scene of *Gorboduc*, the Council turns to

⁶⁷ Poor Eubulus is, of course, restrained by the dictates of the history upon which the play draws and which is announced in the dumb show before the final act: “Hereby was signified tumults, rebellions, arms, and civil wars to follow as fell in the realm of Great Britain which, by the space of fifty years and more, continued in civil war between the nobility after the death of King Gorboduc and of his issues, for want of certain limitation in the succession of the crown, till the time of Dunwallo Molmutius, who reduced the land to monarchy.” The use of the verb “reduced” is significant, the irony being that the land was eventually reduced to monarchy by force, not the effects of good counsel.

the hope of a timely divine intervention, this time into the heart of the sovereign, instead of stating what the preferable course of action should be. Graced with this report, Elizabeth “uttered many Specheis, and that not without sheddyng of many Tears,” regretting that she had committed the matter “to be argued by them” in the first place. “The Queen wanted an answer,” Altman aptly notes, “but all she got was a disputation.”⁶⁸

A comparable difficulty has been perceived in *Gorboduc* by Dermot Cavanagh, who suggests that counsel in the play is fundamentally a problem, not a solution. His claim that “the play evidences the complexity of Elizabethan thinking in relation to counsel both as an ideal and as a practice” captures something important about *Gorboduc* that other readings miss. To resist seeing it as a piece of counsel means to begin to appreciate its complex intellectual inquiry into the very nature of counsel. As Cavanagh observes, the language of counsel in the play is under constant pressure; its limits are tested and its operation subjected to critical scrutiny.⁶⁹ What we are offered in the play, Cavanagh argues, are “contrary perspectives upon opposing uses of the past, as well as projections of the future, in the practice of counsel” (39). Extending these observations somewhat, I would like to suggest that the play cannot constitute an admonishing example precisely because exemplarity is represented in it as a problem, not a solution.

How exactly this works can best be seen if we return to the first scene of consultation in the play (1.2) and patiently consider the way in which advice is constructed in the three speeches

⁶⁸ Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind*, pp. 38-40. The paper is one in a series of Burghley’s memoranda on the issue. These and some other Burghley memoranda have more recently been analyzed from the viewpoint of early modern rhetoric by Peter Mack in his *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 188-202. Like Altman, Mack thinks that the memoranda are structured by the logical and rhetorical procedures of academic disputations. He also acknowledges that they are baffling documents in that it is not always clear what purpose they served in the political process.

⁶⁹ Cavanagh, *Language and Politics in the Sixteenth-Century History Play*, pp. 38, 42-43, 45.

delivered by the royal counselors on the question of the division of the kingdom.⁷⁰ Gorboduc listens while three counselors—all good and all meaning well—deliver their considered and tightly argued responses. We have seen that the most recent critical discussion of this scene, that by Andrew Hadfield, reads the first two responses (by Arostus and Philander) as politically misguided and the third one as politically orthodox and wise (by Eubulus).⁷¹ But to read them as such—and consequently to read Gorboduc as a stubborn king unable, or worse unwilling, to tell good advice from bad—is to ignore the way in which the arguments actually operate.⁷² The more considered the responses, the more they rely on historical precedent and on the kind of wisdom that one can gain from reading texts.

The question, however, is how the wisdom of these examples will work in the new political context where outcomes are as yet unknown. The opening and closing lines of Gorboduc's request for advice are particularly worthy of notice. His successful reign, he notes, has been upheld by the strength of the advice given him throughout by his faithful counselors,

⁷⁰ Cavanagh analyzes this scene too, but his focus is rhetorical controversy, not exemplarity, and he therefore identifies patterns of argument rather than engaging the specificity of the historical material deployed by the counselors. Although our analyses are largely in agreement, we differ, as it will be seen, in how we read Eubulus, of whose speech in this advising scene Cavanagh writes: "Eubulus's speech is often assumed to carry most weight with the authors and the audience and, given that his name denotes wise counsel, it may do so. Yet Norton and Sackville also make an audience experience the complexity of the issue at question as much as the solution to it" (42). It does not seem to me that there is a solution to be experienced.

⁷¹ See Hadfield, "Tragedy and the Nation State."

⁷² It could be argued that the opening scene of *Gorboduc*, in which Videna informs her elder son of the king's decision to divide the kingdom, makes the consultation scene that follows not just superfluous but downright tyrannical. Like Xerxes, whom Robert Beale mentions in his "Treatise of the Office of a Councillor" (see note 18 above), Gorboduc could be seen as enacting a scene of consultation only to make it seem that his decision has been prompted by good advice as opposed to his own *consilium*, understood of course as *cupiditas*. The play, however, does not support such a reading, according to which Gorboduc would wish to be obeyed, not persuaded. Gorboduc does not conceal his purpose to divide the kingdom; the whole point of the consultation scene is to consider the wisdom of such a decision. As my analysis of this scene will show, Gorboduc patiently listens to the advice given to him and explains in rational terms why his decision has remained unmodified.

the same ones that are now asked to advise him on what is possibly his most important decision. This significant act of praise is balanced by the closing lines of Gorboduc's speech, where the counselors are urged to be plain and to avoid flattery because their speech acts come with a great deal of responsibility: "Lest as the blame of ill-succeeding things / Shall light on you, so light the harms also" (1.2.31-32).⁷³

What the counselors are offered is a reasonable proposition, as Gorboduc sees it, that nevertheless requires advice. Because his two sons are now capable of other and greater things than staying at court with their mother and father, Gorboduc's plan is to divide the kingdom into two (he calls them "two sundry parts," 1.2.60) and have each son rule one half.⁷⁴ Not only that, but he wishes to put this plan into effect while still living so that they may learn to rule betimes and he rejoice in their good rule. Arostus speaks first. He agrees with Gorboduc that under his rule the realm has been very happy and that everyone therefore wishes the king to continue in office. But the issue is not one of wishes, Arostus continues, but of what is best "for the common state" (1.2.87). His agreement with Gorboduc is mainly prompted by his understanding of kingship as a laborious affair that, if performed well, does "waste man's life and hasten crooked age" (1.2.103). It is for this reason that Gorboduc would do well to retire, while the division of the kingdom would make it easier for the two sons to rule. As someone experienced in the art of government and seasoned by age, Gorboduc could furnish counsel to the young kings, restrain

⁷³ Notice that the rhetoric of potential blame is invoked by both the king, as here, and by his counselors, as in the example of Philander quoted above. The significant point, however, is that counselors do not suffer in this play when things go awry, whereas kings do. The king, the king's to blame.

⁷⁴ See also the conclusion of Arostus's speech: "to part the realm in twain / And place your sons in present government" (1.2.144-145).

their “youthful heats” (1.2.114), and bend their wits while they are still young (1.2.118). Should it happen otherwise and the rule is not given to the sons until after the king’s death, it will be impossible to predict the perils that might proceed from having power suddenly thrust upon Ferrex and Porrex—unaccompanied by the old king’s counsel—and making them “[a]n open prey to traitorous flattery” (1.2.128). Gorboduc’s thought, in short, is bred by his “tender care of common weal” (1.2.136), concludes Arostus, who is desirous to hear what the others think and whether agreement on the question will be reached.

“In part I think as hath been said before,” begins Philander, the second counselor to speak, “[i]n part, again my mind is otherwise” (1.2.148-149). Like Gorboduc and like Arostus, Philander thinks that the division is a good idea. Arostus’s point is elaborated: “The smaller compass that the realm doth hold, / The easier is the sway therof to weld, / The nearer justice to the wronged poor, / The smaller charge, and yet enough for one” (1.2.168-171). Besides, the offspring of one father’s seed being equal, it would seem a crime against nature to favor one brother over the other. Instead of ensuring a prosperous future for the kingdom, the decision not to divide the realm may move the younger brother to rebellion, which is in turn likely to destroy the state. What Philander disagrees with is the suggestion that the sons should begin their rule while Gorboduc is still living. The argument is still one of “kind.” Once the course of nature is interrupted, everything goes wrong: “When fathers cease to know that they should rule, / The children cease to know they should obey” (1.2.207-208). In other words, there is no guarantee that if Gorboduc gives his kingdom over to Ferrex and Porrex they will still be willing to listen to his advice. One does not learn to rule well by ruling, Philander concludes, but by observing good rule and, most importantly, by practicing obedience.

Already with Philander we have entered the world of historical example as providing guidance and authorization for present actions. Arguing for division, Philander notices that Britain in a sense began with a foundational act of division. After the death of Brute, the kingdom was divided between his three sons Lochrine, Camber, and Albanact, who contentedly and successfully ruled what are now England, Wales, and Scotland.⁷⁵ The unified kingdom that Gorboduc inherited had been, in fact, at an earlier point already divided. The act of renewed unification, we hear in passing, was itself an act of violence. Morgan and Cunedag, nephews of Cordelia, rebelled against her rule and took over the kingdom, which was then duly divided between the two brothers. When Morgan, the elder of the two, tried to be the sole ruler of the island, he was defeated and killed by Cunedag, from whose line Gorboduc was descended. Gorboduc's kingdom thus came into being as a result of the eldest born attempting to claim what he, prompted by others, saw as his right, and failing.⁷⁶

It is very easy to perceive that the historical examples mentioned by Philander in passing create all sorts of problems. That the play is interested in the argument of history becomes additionally apparent when we realize that in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* there is no mention of Gorboduc contemplating the division of his kingdom. "When their father grew old," Geoffrey writes, "they quarreled about which of them should succeed to the

⁷⁵ Sackville and Norton, *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex*, ed. Caughen, p. 7, note to line 7. See also Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, an edition and translation of *De gestis Britonum [Historia Regum Britanniae]*, ed. Michael D. Reeve, trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), Book II.

⁷⁶ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Book II, 32, p. 44.

throne.”⁷⁷ It is this contention that informs the final oration in the advisory scene, delivered by the king’s secretary Eubulus.

Whereas Arostus was in full agreement with the king and Philander only in partial agreement, Eubulus is in complete disagreement with the idea of abdication and division. The historical example briefly alluded to by Philander is elaborated at length by Eubulus, who interprets it in a completely opposite manner. Brute’s division of the kingdom into three was according to Eubulus the cause of all subsequent troubles: “But how much British blood hath since been spilt / To join again the sundered unity!” (1.2.275-276).⁷⁸ He does not stop to consider the fact that Gorboduc’s own rule was made possible only by a previous usurpation and subsequent division of the kingdom between Morgan and Cunedag, Cordelia’s nephews. Instead, the right of Ferrex, the elder son, is vehemently defended, this despite the fact that it was the younger of the two nephews, Cunedag, we have seen, that not only questioned the right of the elder nephew but in fact made it possible for Gorboduc to eventually inherit the kingdom. If Porrex, the younger son, is given one half of the kingdom, Eubulus argues, he will want more; if Ferrex, the elder son, is not given the entire kingdom, he will feel wronged. Removing the two

⁷⁷ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Book II, 32, p. 44.

⁷⁸ John E. Curran, Jr. comments on this statement, contrasting it with what the other counselors said: “The next mention of the recent past, however, is imprecise. Gorboduc’s best counselor, Eubulus, urges him to remember how Brute, Britain’s first king, inaugurated the practice of dividing the realm among sons, which resulted in ‘much British blood’ being lost (1.2.269-81). Although recent British history is full of civil strife, none is associated with Brutus’s particular bequest; his sons were content in their several kingdoms and cooperated with one another against common enemies”; “Geoffrey of Monmouth in Renaissance Drama: Imagining Non-History,” *Modern Philology* 97.1 (1999): 1-20, at p. 7. Note that this manipulative understanding of British history, nonetheless, serves also as King James’s main historical argument in preferring the law of primogeniture: “And in case it please god to prouide you to all these three kingdomes, make your eldest sonne *Isaac*, leauing him all your Kingedomes; & prouide the rest with priuate possessions. Otherwaies by diuiding your kingdoms, ye shall leaue the seede of diuision and discord among your posteritie: as befel to this Ile: by the diuision & assignement thereof, to the three sonnes of *Brutus*, *Lochrine*, *Albanact*, and *Camber*”; *Basilikon Doron*, sig. H2r.

far from the father's eye and placing them as rulers in two distant parts of the kingdom is likely to make them victims of flattery and ambition. The result will be a civil war.

One could hardly blame Gorboduc if, after this advice, he decided, like Elizabeth, to cry. Here is wisdom pointing in different directions; here is history authorizing different wisdoms. But, like Elizabeth, Gorboduc was given advice only because he had asked for it.⁷⁹ Instead of despair, however, Gorboduc proceeds with calmness. The suggestion that his sons will hate and want to kill each other is rejected since it does not accord with their behavior so far; the warning that they might be corrupted by flattery is acknowledged. The solution is to give the sons what the father has just been given in abundance, namely advice. Loyal and experienced counselors will be appointed at each son's court to make sure that the voice of good advice wins over the attractive emptiness of adulation.

Advice does win in the play; though failing throughout, it continues even after every lawful prince is dead. Who is "the lawful heir" to whom God will restore "[t]his noble crown" and whom Eubulus envisions in the closing speech of the play? In her reply to the House of Commons regarding the question of succession, delivered on February 10, 1559, Elizabeth disagreed with the petition submitted to her, which argued that her marriage would resolve the crisis by giving the realm a certain heir. Her choice of single life, she claimed, was not in conflict

⁷⁹ In Elizabeth's first speech, delivered before her coronation, advice explicitly features as something she desires to be given. The speech consists of two parts; the first addressed to William Cecil, the other to the lords. She says to Cecil: "I give you this charge, that you shall be of my Privy Council [...] and that without respect of my private will, you will give me that counsel that you think best." She returns to this point in her address to the lords: "I mean to direct all my actions by good advice and counsel. [...] And for counsel and advice I shall accept you of my nobility, and such others of you the rest as in consultation I shall think meet and shortly appoint, to the which also, with their advice, I will join to their aid, and for ease of their burden, others meet for my service"; Hatfield, November 20, 1558; PRO, State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth 12/1/7, quoted here from Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 50-51.

with a happy future for the realm. Not only will the realm “not remain destitute of an heir that may be a fit governor,” but, she continued, it may have governors “peradventure more beneficial to the realm than such offspring as may come of me.” Elizabeth thus provides an interesting gloss on *Gorboduc* in that she, unlike Gorboduc, mistrusts her issue and gives us yet another version of the political future: “For, although I be never so careful of your well-doings, and mind ever so to be, yet may my issue grow out of kind and become, perhaps, ungracious.”⁸⁰

This striking royal sentiment is given an even more forceful expression in Elizabeth’s conversation with William Maitland, the Scottish Ambassador, in September and October 1561, several months before she was to see the first performance of *Gorboduc*. The conversation is mainly about Mary, Queen of Scots’ title to the English throne and her unwillingness to ratify the 1560 Treaty of Edinburgh, whereby she would renounce her title to the English throne, but also about Elizabeth’s unwillingness to name an heir or to marry since in both of these options she saw obvious dangers to herself. To name an heir, she observed, is comparable to announcing one’s own death, which no historical example could authorize: “this desire is without an example—to require me in my own life to set my winding-sheet before my eye! The like was never required of no prince.” Historical examples, however, authorized something else:

⁸⁰ British Library, MS Lansdowne 94, art. 14, fol. 29, here quoted from Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, p. 58. In the second, and probably inauthentic, version of this speech, preserved in William Camden’s printed Latin translation (1615) and translated into English in 1625, Elizabeth refers to her subjects as her children (“for every one of you, and as many as are English, are my children and kinsfolks”), thus opposing the statement that she is childless, and closes by stating the following, not without some contextual irony: “you shall have no cause to doubt of a successor which may be more profitable for the commonwealth than him which may proceed from me, sithence the posterity of good princes doth oftentimes degenerate.” The degeneration of posterity refers here to her own posterity, but given the identification mentioned above, it can also be read as the degeneration of her subjects. The speech is printed in Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, pp. 58-60. On Elizabeth’s adoption of the strategies and arguments of counsel in the furtherance of her own political objectives more generally, see Mary Thomas Crane, “‘Video et taceo’: Elizabeth I and the Rhetoric of Counsel,” *Studies in English Literature* 28.1 (1988): 1-15.

Think you that I could love my winding-sheet? Princes cannot like their own children, those that should succeed unto them. Being witness, King Charles VII of France, how like he his son Louis the XI, Louis the XI his son Charles the VIII, King Francis his son Henry? How then shall I, think you, like my cousin, being once declared my heir apparent: as Charles liked Louis the XII when he was duke of Orleans?

Since the subject of the conversation was Mary, French history was chosen with great aptness and with delicious irony.⁸¹

There was no better illustration of this degenerative possibility than the history of Cyrus, the ideally educated prince, the full story of whose life was translated into English in the same decade in which both *Gorboduc* and *Cambyses* were written and published.⁸² “Now I will declare to whome I leaue my kingedome,” Cyrus announces as he feels the end of his virtuous life approaching, “that there be no busines for it whan I am gon.”⁸³ As if heeding Eubulus’s advice and resisting Gorboduc’s fatherly impulses, he goes on:

⁸¹ The quoted version is from British Library, MS Royal 18.B.VI, *Tractatus et Literae Regum Scotiae, 1448-1571*, here quoted from Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, pp. 64-66. The text here is very different from the much later account, given by George Buchanan in his *Rerum Scotticorum historia* (1583) and then in a free English version by John Hayward in his *Annals of the First Four Years of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, written early in the seventeenth century but not published until the nineteenth century. This later version has Elizabeth say something completely opposite: “It is natural, indeed, for parents to favor the succession of their children, to be careful for it, to provide for it, to assure it by all means unto them, because nature is of force to extinguish both the cause and the care of other respects”; see Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, p. 65; also on this question Leah S. Marcus, “Confessions of a Reformed Uneditor (II),” *PMLA* 115.5 (2000): 1072-1077, at pp. 1072-1073. The French examples Elizabeth provides are all about political struggles between fathers and sons.

⁸² See *The Bookes of Xenophon containyng the discipline, schole, and education of Cyrus, the noble kyng of Persie*, translated out of Greeke into Englyshe, by M. Wylliam Barkar (London: Reynolde Wolfe, [1552]). These were only the first six books of Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*. The full translation was published in 1567, including the eighth book, which relates the death of Cyrus; see the following note.

⁸³ *The VIII. Bookes of Xenophon, Containyng the Institution, schole, and education of Cyrus, the noble Kynge of Persye*, translated out of Greeke into Englishe by M. William Bercker (London: Reginalde Wolfe, 1567), sig. E4v.

Children myne, lefe & dere, I loue you bothe alike: but reason and skill requireth, that he that is first borne, should haue the first place, beinge more able to gouerne, in that he hath more counsel & intelligence. [...] You sonne Cambises, take mine empire, which with all my power I giue you, & truste that god will therin confirme you. (E5r)

We have seen in Thomas Preston's *Cambyses* the results of this particular decision. In Taverner's *The Garden of Wisdom*, upon which Preston directly drew, the story of Cambyses is followed by the story of the Persian succession crisis. It is another story of consultation and counsel. The case for single rule is made by Darius, and as in the closing scene of *Gorboduc* "the lotte of the election" is left "vnto god": "It was agreed vpon, that vpon a mornynge very erly the princes on horsbacke shulde mete togyther at a certayne place, & that whose horse fyrst neyghed, he shulde be proclaymed kynge."⁸⁴ By knowing more than the others about the copulation of horses, Darius—whose idea this was—makes sure his horse neighs first. That is how one of the greatest Persian kings, history tells us, came to office and how God's decision to punish Cambyses for his atrocities was followed by a reestablishment of lawful kingship.

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the excerpts made from *Gorboduc* by William Briton is his choice of a passage that most readings of the play do not stop to consider (4.2.142-164). Distressed by the interview with Porrex, who has just murdered his brother, Gorboduc complains about the working of cruel destiny: the sons that should have been his chief source of joy have proved to be sources of insufferable grief. Whether with deliberate sarcasm or not, it is hard to say, Arostus comforts Gorboduc by saying that, surely, he is old enough to know that mortal joys are short-lived and that the only certainty is death—the kind of Stoic advice that

⁸⁴ Taverner, *The second booke of the Garden of wysdome*, sig. C7v.

applies equally well to all sorts of situations, no matter how difficult they may be. Or perhaps just embarrassing. In this particular case it is enough to remember that it was Arostus who actually wholeheartedly supported Gorboduc's decision to divide the kingdom and that he now may be defending himself while seemingly comforting his king. But Gorboduc has had enough:

Many can yield right sage and grave advice
 Of patient sprite to others wrapped in woe
 And can in speech both rule and conquer kind,
 Who, if by proof they might feel nature's force
 Would show themselves men as they are indeed,
 Which now will needs be gods.⁸⁵

The power of counsel is here contrasted with the power of natural passions to which all men are slaves.⁸⁶ We are reminded here of Buchanan's argument in *The Dialogue on the Law of Kingship among the Scots*, where princes are but men, ruled by passions and prone to err. Buchanan's advice to such kings, as we have seen, is to subject themselves to the law, which comes in the garb of counsel. In *Gorboduc*, they subject themselves to advice, which offers itself as the law. In both, an attempt is made to escape the fact of the body and its passions—to avoid, in other words, what the story of Cambyses dramatizes. That the body, however, remains at the centre of

⁸⁵4.2.159-165; Briton's extract has "spirit" for "sprite" and "find nature's force" for "feel nature's force."

⁸⁶ Cf. Richard's denial of this in Shakespeare's *Richard II*: "Throw away respect, / Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty; / For you have but mistook me all this while. / I live with bread, like you, feel want, / Taste grief, need friends—subjected thus, / How can you say to me, I am a king?"; *King Richard II*, ed. Peter Ure (London and New York: Routledge, 1991 [1961]), (3.2.168-173), 3.2.172-177, p. 103.

the problem of counsel—as it does at the centre of dramatic representation—will be seen in the next chapter, where power and counsel meet in the contested space of Renaissance friendship.

CHAPTER 4

Imperious Friendships: Reclaiming Counsel in *Damon and Pythias* and *Edward II*

Although it might appear strange, the best way to introduce the problem that lies at the heart of this chapter is not to turn immediately to the two plays, Richard Edwards's *Damon and Pythias* and Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, that constitute its main topic, but to consider briefly a play that, in a dazzlingly self-promoting manner, suggests that *Damon and Pythias* and *Edward II* should not, indeed cannot, be considered together since they are fundamentally different. Like *Cambyses*, this play turns to Persian history, and it brings once again the question of counsel onto the early modern stage. Christopher Marlowe's *The First Part of Tamburlaine the Great* (1590) arrogantly dismisses the "jigging veins of rhyming mother-wits," the dramatists who wrote in the past and in outdated metrical forms, and offers to replace them "with high astounding terms."¹

Notable for its distinctive style and its consistently powerful rhetorical molding of dramatic character, this newly and differently dressed drama develops in its first two acts a theme that the chief source materials upon which it draws conspicuously lack. In the prose narratives that Marlowe is likely to have relied upon and that all go back to Pedro Mexia's collection *Sylva de varia leccion* (first published in 1543) nothing is said about the existing

¹ *The First Part of Tamburlaine the Great*, "Prologue," 1-5, in Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, ed. J. B. Steane (London: Penguin Books, 1969 [1986]). All citations of Marlowe's plays will refer to the act, scene, and line numbers of this edition.

structures of Persian government that Tamburlaine's natural force sweepingly supplants. Thus George Whetstone's *The English Myrror* (1586), the English rendering of the Tamburlaine narrative that probably constituted Marlowe's immediate source, mentions the Persian king in passing—only as an anonymous figure to be removed, his court a vague and temporary space of fraternal feud to be quickly vacated for the accommodation of the larger-than-life stature of Tamburlaine and his valorous and virtuous friends.² In contrast to the silence of the sources, Marlowe chooses to spend considerable time painting in the early scenes of his play a character of a witless Persian king accompanied by a wise counselor, and he casts this particular relationship of counsel and power in terms of friendship.

Mycetes, king of Persia, is depicted in Marlowe's play as an awkward rhetorician, a man hopelessly unable to express himself. This lack of rhetorical ability is seen, by himself and others, as a lack of wit, and, consequently, as a lack of *virtù*, that quality that qualifies men—women, as usual, are excluded—for undertaking the great enterprises of life, including the attainment of princely regiment. As soon as Mycetes opens the play he asks his brother Cosroe, a better wit, to tell the cause of his grief, “[f]or it requires a great and thundering speech” (1.1.3). Abused by his brother, who uses the opportunity to blame Mycetes for Persia's predicament, the king turns to Meander, his faithful counselor, to declare, again and this time correctly, the cause of his grief. What we witness in the opening scene is Marlowe's witty, ironic comment on the familiar problems of succession and rule found, among other places, in a number of early

² The accumulation of insight regarding Marlowe's sources for *The First Part of Tamburlaine* can be followed in the following three publications: Leslie Spence, “The Influence of Marlowe's Sources on *Tamburlaine I*,” *Modern Philology* 24.2 (1926): 181-199; Thomas C. Izard, “The Principal Source for Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*,” *Modern Language Notes* 58.6 (1943): 411-417; Hugh G. Dick, “*Tamburlaine* Sources Once More,” *Studies in Philology* 46.2 (1949): 154-166.

English plays. An elder, incompetent brother insists on his royal status and on his rightful inheritance of sovereign power while being surrounded by competitors for the crown who are his superiors in both mind and body. Marlowe is merciless here; his rightful Persian king strives to match the rhetorical ability of his subjects by producing speeches filled with bombast and checkered with amusingly incongruous images:

Go, stout Theridamas, thy words are swords,
 And with thy looks thou conquerest all thy foes.
 I long to see thee back return from thence,
 That I may view these milk-white steeds of mine
 All loaden with the heads of killed men,
 And from their knees even to their hoofs below
 Besmear'd with blood that makes a dainty show. (1.1.74-80)

The exploits of Mycetes's great predecessors Cyrus and Darius, alluded to in the same scene (1.1.130, 1.1.154), serve to make the point Marlowe needs—that kings are great only because of their heroic actions and that these actions are the absolute and perfectly natural justification for the usurpation of sovereignty.

Like Mycetes, however, and like his brother Cosroe, Tamburlaine, we see in the rest of the play, rules within a system of rule that includes and is enabled by other people. They are consistently addressed by Tamburlaine as his sweet and trusty friends, and the fantasy of future rule Tamburlaine describes early in the play is premised on a cult of passionate male friendship—“the love of Pylades and Orestes, / Whose statues we adore in Scythia” (1.1.243-244). Although put in more powerful terms, the imagined picture of Tamburlaine's friendly rule

is not new; we have already seen its potent shadow conjured up by the Persian king, who uses it to properly thank Meander, his counselor, for the speech he gave on his behalf:

Full true thou speak'st, and like thyself, my lord,
Whom I may term a Damon for thy love. (1.1.49-50)

Two sets of ideal, loving friends—Pylades and Orestes, Damon and Pythias—emerge as authorizing figures for two very different sets of rule. That Mycetes's counselor, his faithful Damon, will soon continue as a faithful friend of the new ruler suggests that the relationship between friendship, counsel, and sovereignty is fundamentally compromised.³ Figures and terms of friendship are so frequently invoked in *Tamburlaine* on all sides so that very soon they become a confused, but still crucial, field of signification. What is the role of friendship in the structuring of rule, and what role is counsel made to play in the fantasies of friend-based government?

I approach this complex question—encountered often in the period and as often accompanied by contradictory responses—by considering Marlowe's great exploration of it in *Edward II* and by linking it, despite *Tamburlaine*'s objections, to an earlier play about friendship, counsel, and power, Richard Edwards's *Damon and Pythias*. The two plays are worth considering together because they both mobilize the rich humanist tradition of talking about friendship in order to think about different possibilities of rule. In both plays friendship and sovereignty come together in the contested space of counsel. While drawing on the rich archive

³ Says Cosroe: "Meander, you, that were our brother's guide, / And chiefest counsellor in all his acts, / Since he is yielded to the stroke of war, / On your submission we with thanks excuse, / And give you equal place in our affairs." This placement Meander readily accepts, adjusting the terms of kingship as the occasion demands: "Most happy emperor, in humblest terms / I vow my service to your majesty, / With utmost virtue of my faith and duty"; 2.5.10-17.

of recent scholarship on the links between sexuality, friendship, and power, I hope to illuminate aspects of both Marlowe's and Edwards's play by making them work together in spite of their formal differences. In Edwards's play, tyrannous rule is transformed by a spectacular act of counsel, and that act performed by the figure of the ideal friend; in Marlowe's play, the friend and the counselor merge in the figure of the royal favorite to show both the possibilities and limits of what Edwards points toward but never fully addresses. It is not simply that Edwards's understanding of friendship is single and unproblematic because it emerges from the mainstream of the idealizing classical discourses of *amicitia*, or that Marlowe's vision of friendship is overtly homo/sexualized and its politics therefore rendered controversial; it is that both plays struggle with a concern which they cannot clearly express because it is overdetermined. Friendship in these two plays is envisioned as the ideal form of counsel, but its political embodiment is always compromised by questions of practical rule. The ideal form of counsel clashes with the realities of political history that infect the drama and make its meanings—always themselves historical—form a picture of life that is at once a perfect dream and a terrible nightmare.

A Mad Kind of Amity: Passionate Reasons in *Damon and Pythias*

In a recent discussion of Richard Edwards's *Damon and Pythias*, a play performed for the first time at Whitehall in 1564 and printed several times in the course of the sixteenth century,⁴

⁴ On the play's initial performance at Whitehall, in the presence of Elizabeth, see Walter Yale Durand, "Notes on Richard Edwards," *Journal of Germanic Philology* 4.3 (1902): 348-369. Obviously considered a success, the play was revived at the University of Oxford in 1567/8; see Frederick S. Boas, *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), pp. 157-158. An earlier performance of an unnamed play by Edwards at Lincoln's Inn in February 1565 may have in fact been a performance of *Damon and Pythias*; cf. Donald Jerry White, "The

Robert Stretter goes so far as to deny this obviously popular play any genuinely dramatic interest, not to mention aesthetic value.⁵ The play, Stretter argues, is a dramatic failure. It is at first allowed to be a dramatization of an ethical treatise, but by the end of the discussion even this slight compliment is withdrawn: “*Damon and Pithias* is simply not *dramatic*.”⁶ If the play is not dramatic, the statement certainly is. It serves to underpin a larger argument about the destiny of friendship in English Renaissance drama. Edwards’s versified account—that should be an uncontroversial generic marker—of the idea of perfect amity described by Aristotle, enlarged upon by Cicero, and disseminated in England through the meandering prose of Elyot’s *The Governour* is seen as an example of an earnest, pedagogical, humanist enterprise whose dramatic failure is to be seen as the cause of the later fortunes of friendship on the English stage. The plays of Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, to take two prominent examples, that

Works of Richard Edwards: A Critical Edition,” Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1977), p. 7. The first quarto edition of the play came out in 1571, the second in 1582. All references here will be to the text in *The Works of Richard Edwards: Politics, Poetry and Performance in Sixteenth-Century England*, ed. Ros King (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001). I use this edition because it is the most widely available one, but it will be noticed that at several points I resist its drastic modernizations (*takes* for *taketh*, for instance, the spelling of some names, etc.).

⁵ We learn from *Henslowe’s Diary* that in 1600 Henry Chettle was composing a play entitled *Damon and Pythias*, which may have been a reworking of Edwards’s original; *Henslowe’s Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. 63, 131, 133. That the play was read by all and sundry is shown by several hitherto unnoticed quotations from it in the commonplace book of Sir Julius Caesar, British Library MS Additional 6038. Edwards’s popularity at the end of the century is attested by Francis Meres, who includes him in the group of English writers described as “the best for Comedy”; Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia: Wits Treasury, Being the Second part of Wits Commonwealth* (London: P. Short for Cuthbert Burbie, 1598), sig. 2O3v. Before Meres, Edwards is mentioned in a similar way, now in connection with comedy and interlude, by Puttenham: see George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), Book I, Chapter 31, p. 150. Noting the high estimation in which Edwards was held in the sixteenth century, Jackson I. Cope argues that two anonymous plays, *Common Conditions* and *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, are also by Edwards; see his article, “‘The best for comedy’: Richard Edwards’ Canon,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 2.4 (1961): 501-519.

⁶ Robert Stretter, “Cicero on Stage: *Damon and Pithias* and the Fate of Classical Friendship in English Renaissance Drama,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 47.4 (2005): 345-365. See pp. 346, 358, and 359 respectively.

flirt with the humanist discourse of ideal friendship do so, Stretter concludes, by resorting to parody and even “an often scathing mockery of classical friendship” (346).⁷

Dissenting critical voices do, however, exist.⁸ Investigating *Damon and Pythias* as primarily a piece of dramatic art, Kent Cartwright has concluded that it is “our best early instance of a play structured according to a principle of suspense,” the very quality which Stretter sees as woefully lacking.⁹ Cartwright recognizes in Edwards’s play an example of affective dramaturgy at work, which he defines as a dramaturgy that combines political concerns with emotional values, “a theatricality that washes across both humanist and popular traditions” (102). Like Cartwright, Andrew James Hartley sees in the concluding scenes of the play significantly

⁷ Stretter does see in *Damon and Pythias* signs of questioning the doctrine of perfect amity, “hints at the possible inadequacy of friendship to live up to its ideals” (359), but such questions are not seen as seriously entertained by the dramatic artist. Edwards has no doubts, in other words, about “the naturalness or superiority of friendship” (359); the doubts are introduced only as rhetorical tricks whose elimination in the play confirms the didactic singleness of dramatic purpose. If the ideal does have cracks in it, Edwards is not analyzing them—he does his best to plaster them over.

⁸ Even the first properly informed full-scale discussion of *Damon and Pythias* found in it significant dramatic innovation and recognized in Edwards a dramatist who very skillfully combined the popular and the erudite traditions of English theater. Edwards built his play, Leicester Bradner notes in his landmark monograph, “with a combination of complexity and compactness which is nothing short of marvelous for the period at which he wrote”; Leicester Bradner, *The Life and Poems of Richard Edwards*, Yale Studies in English, 74 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), p. 63. See also White, “The Works of Richard Edwards,” for a detailed analysis of how seemingly disparate aspects of the play are designed to work together. Yet more boldly, J. A. Kramer recognizes in *Damon and Pythias* a drama whose structure “reveals the sophisticated control, ignored by commentators, of an artist at the height of his powers” and which as a whole constitutes “one of the earliest apologies for dramatic art that appear in the English language”; J. E. Kramer, “*Damon and Pythias*: An Apology for Art,” *English Literary History* 35.4 (1968): 475-490, at pp. 476-477.

⁹ Kent Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism: English Drama in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 121. Cf. Stretter, “Cicero on Stage,” p. 359: *Damon and Pythias* “lacks both the conflict necessary for dramatic suspense and the spectacle for which Elizabeth is known to have praised Edwards’s *Palamon and Arcyte*.” That suspense is the play’s prominent structuring feature was observed early. Charles William Wallace, for example, writes: “This fine old tale out of Syracusan history, with its tragic and comic elements happily mingled in a rising tide of suspense to the climax, as presented by Edwards, formed the high-water mark of English drama up to that time, and the author was acclaimed by his wide circle of friends as an unmatched genius”; *The Evolution of the English Drama up to Shakespeare, with a History of the First Blackfriars Theatre* (Berlin: George Reimer, 1912), p. 110.

unresolved threads that cannot simply be ignored but have to be taken into account as we consider the way in which the play as a whole works.¹⁰ According to Hartley, *Damon and Pythias* “seeks to present the opposition between courtly and Christian honesty and to champion the latter,” but “the circumstances of the performance, coupled with the ambiguous language of ‘honesty’” undermine the play’s moral purpose (90). There is an obvious tension in the play, Hartley argues, between the ideal friendship represented in the figures of Damon and Pythias and the courtly pragmatism of the other characters. But because the friendship between the title characters is envisioned as “unaffected by and independent of sociopolitical power dynamics,” the notion of courtly pragmatism opposed to it is not fully undermined (98): “Since all courtly relationships are political, how does one discern true friendship from self-interested attachment, genuine respect from flattery, or one form of honesty from another?” (108).

I wish to turn to these questions in my own analysis of *Damon and Pythias* and to put under some critical pressure the political situation of the friendship/s represented in Edwards’s play. To do so means to focus on those dramatic situations where acts of friendship assume political significance, but also to give this play—its plot, characters, and language—the kind of treatment and the amount of space regularly accorded only to the better known plays from the period. In *Damon and Pythias*, politics and friendship meet in the notion of counsel, which is what the great finale of the play in fact dramatizes. What this dramatization of counsel—for the most part ignored in the existing critical discussions of the play—reveals is the complete openness of Edwards’s dramatic experiment. The spectacular transformation of Dionysius, the

¹⁰ Andrew James Hartley, “The Color of ‘Honesty’: Ethics and Courtly Pragmatism in *Damon and Pythias*,” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 11 (1999): 88-113.

Sicilian tyrant, in the concluding section of the play can be read literally or ironically, depending on how we understand the larger argument of counsel in the play. This argument brings together questions of friendship, of theatrical spectacle, and of the body and its passions. It is heavily complicated by the fact that during their visit to Syracuse Damon and Pythias inhabit a world where intricate structures of both counsel and friendship, favoritism and flattery, honesty and dissembling are already in place. The transformative intervention of ideal friendship does not wipe these structures out. Instead, the sovereign friendship the play promises finds its place within what is already there and what, one character excluded from the reformed court rightly tells us, will always be there.

Friendship, tyranny, and counsel in Sicily bring to the minds of most readers of early English drama Shakespeare's late masterpiece *The Winter's Tale*, but it was with *Damon and Pythias* half a century before that these connections were first made on the English stage.¹¹ Judging from the fact that Richard Edwards also wrote a play based on Chaucer's tale of Palamon and Arcite, which unfortunately does not survive but which was performed to great acclaim in Oxford before Elizabeth, there was something about the theme of friendship that this dramatist saw as demanding repeated dramatic elaboration.¹² We do not know what the drama of

¹¹ Shakespeare and Edwards have been linked in existing scholarship via an allegorical interpretation of the trial scenes in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Damon and Pythias*, whereby both plays are seen to draw on the Parliament in Heaven trope. See Allan Holaday, "Shakespeare, Richard Edwards, and the Virtues Reconciled," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 66.2 (1967): 200-206. It should perhaps be observed that both plays also explore the notion of friendship as determined by notions of profit and exchange. Although the trope of the world as a stage is a Renaissance commonplace, it is possible to see in *The Merchant of Venice* a subtle allusion to *Damon and Pythias* when Antonio says: "I hold the world but as the world, Graziano— / A stage where every man must play a part, / And mine a sad one" (1.1.77-79). Compare this with the following lines given to Damon: "Pythagoras said that this world was like a stage / Whereon many play their parts. The lookers on the sage / Philosophers are, says he" (7.71-73). On the issue of counsel in *The Winter's Tale*, see Stuart M. Kurland, "'We need no more of your advice': Political Realism in *The Winter's Tale*," *Studies in English Literature* 31.2 (1991): 365-386.

Palamon and Arcite absorbed from the Chaucer narrative, or what else it included in addition to this primary source, but it is clear that there was a central romantic thread that featured a female character and that is so frequently found in later friendship plays, including those by Shakespeare. *Damon and Pythias*, on the other hand, is a drama that envisions a world purely homosocial.¹³ The bonds of love, power, and friendship are forged exclusively between men.¹⁴

The male characters that populate the city of Syracuse, not always found in Edwards's primary sources, serve, as critics have noticed, to comment on and complicate the friendship between Damon and Pythias that the play takes as its central theme. Two courtiers, Aristippus and Carisophus, thus provide a perspective on friendship that is much less ideal but not entirely

¹² See Walter Yale Durand, "Palaemon and Arcyte, Progne, Marcus Geminus, and the Theatre in Which They Were Acted, as Described by John Bereblock (1566)," *PMLA* 20.3 (1905): 502-528.

¹³ A heterosexualized dramatization of the story is found in seventeenth-century France; Samuel Chappuzeau's *Damon et Pythias* (first published in 1657) was soon reprinted under the title *Les Parfaits Amis, ou le Triomphe de l'Amour et de l'Amitié, Tragicomédie*. See J. F. L. Raschen, "Earlier and Later Versions of the Friendship-Theme. I. 'Damon and Pythias,'" *Modern Philology* 17.2 (1919): 49-53, at p. 53.

¹⁴ Femininity is suggested in the play only at several removes, humorously or in the negative key, as when the hangman wonders at Pythias's willingness to die for his friend ("Wilt thou do more for a man, than I would for a woman?" 10.321) or in the scene of the shaving of the Collier, perhaps, and the fact that this scene is haunted by a tradition which Edwards deliberately avoids dramatizing. Dionysius, the Syracusan tyrant, Cicero tells us in his *Tusculan Disputations*, so feared for his life that he mistrusted even his barber, training instead his two daughters for the job: "Also, because he would not trust any barber to shau him, he caused his owne doughters to learne to shau. So the maydens of honoure, when they had learned, that filthy and slauishe science as barbers, shaued the beard, & heares of theyr father. And yet neuerthelesse, theym also, when they came to yeares of discrecretion [*sic*], he would not truste, with a raser: but, commaunded that with the shales of walnuttes heated, they should burne of his beard, and his heares"; *Those fyue Questions, which Marke Tullye Cicero, disputed in his Manor of Tusculanum*, trans. John Dolman (London: Thomas Marshe, 1561), Book V, sigs. B6r-B6v. The significance of the beard motif in the play is argued at great length by Mark Albert Johnston, "Playing with the Beard: Courtly and Commercial Economies in Richard Edwards's *Damon and Pythias* and John Lyly's *Midas*," *English Literary History* 72.1 (2005): 79-103. Along with the daughters, the play chooses not to feature the tyrant's two wives; see "The Life of Dion," in Plutarch, *The Lienes of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, trans. from the French of James Amyot by Thomas North (London: Thomas Vautroullier, 1579), sig. 4R5v, p. 1030. Scene 6 of *Damon and Pythias* does, however, briefly take up the female theme. In what is a familiar counseling scene between a servant and his master, Will advises Aristippus not to jest with women any longer. Aristippus acknowledges the wisdom of it: 'By'r lady Will, this is good counsel. Plainly to jest / Of women, proof has taught me it is not best' (6.9-10). He proceeds to instruct Will to bring him news of the secret conversations between women at court. Nothing seems to be made of this in the rest of the play.

dismissed in the play. Their servants, Will and Jack, shave Grim the Collier as opposed to the shaving of Dionysius conducted in the sources by his daughters. Stephano, the servant to Damon and Pythias, and Gronno, the hangman, are among the more memorable characters in the play partly, no doubt, because they are not paired off the way most other characters are, partly because they embody important differences of status in relation to other characters, differences that, although not explicitly developed, color the ambiguous resolution of the play. On the other end of the social hierarchy is a couple that existing criticism has for the most part had little to say about. Unlike the lonely Renaissance tyrants depicted in both the philosophical and imaginative literature from the period, Dionysius is always followed by his counselor. His name is Eubulus, and his character is in apparent keeping with his name.¹⁵

Although the play does maintain some distinctions in terms of courtly offices, it does not follow that we should see in the figures of Aristippus and Carisophus the opposed poles of evil and good counsel.¹⁶ Carisophus is described in the list of *dramatis personae* as a parasite, while Aristippus is “a pleasant gentleman.” The distinction is so vague that it allows for an amusing scene in the play in which Will and Jack, the servants of the two courtiers, quarrel over whose master is the true courtly parasite. Will defends the integrity of his master by asserting that “[h]e is no parasite, but a pleasant gentleman, full of courtesy” (13.22), but it is precisely the definition

¹⁵ We have already encountered some dramatic examples of this idealized type of counselor, but there are prose ones too, as for instance in John Lyly’s *Euphues*. For an analysis of this character in relation to the question of counsel on the one hand and rhetorical practice on the other, see Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 160-162.

¹⁶ Cf. E. P. Vandiver, Jr., “The Elizabethan Dramatic Parasite,” *Studies in Philology* 32.3 (1935): 411-427, at p. 418: “Carisophus, the parasite of *Damon and Pithias*, who as evil adviser is opposed to Aristippus, the good counsellor.” Nor does it strike me as very accurate to see in both characters merely “flattering parasites”; cf. Kramer, “*Damon and Pithias*: An Apology for Art,” p. 479.

of courtesy that Aristippus and Carisophus cannot agree upon in the opening scene of the play. Loosely fashioned out of the information in “The Life of Aristippus,” included in Diogenes Laertius’s *Lives of the Philosophers*, this pleasant gentleman is meant to represent in the play the fortune of a philosopher turned courtier, of someone who loves wisdom for its own sake transformed, just before the play begins, into someone who loves wisdom for *his* own sake (1.11-12).¹⁷ Aristippus’s description of himself and his courtly philosophy terminates in a proud invocation of his nickname—the royal dog:

And I profess now the courtly philosophy,
 To crouch, to speak fair—myself to apply—
 To feed the King’s humour with pleasant devices,
 For which I am called ‘*regius canis*’. (1.19-22)

This is hardly a picture of good counsel. Carisophus denounces it as a “feigned philosophy” (1.33), even “a plain kind of flattery” (1.34) that has succeeded in supplanting him in Dionysius’s favor. Although Aristippus may not be guilty of “servile scurrility” (1.49)—the quality of which he accuses Carisophus—his notion of “pleasant urbanity” (1.49) has proved an understandable stumbling block in the interpretations of the play.

The scene obviously carries wonderful irony. Aristippus accepts Carisophus’s offer of friendship, only to inform the audience once he is alone on the stage that his acceptance was feigned. An ass and a philosopher, he argues, have nothing in common, and friendship, everybody knows, is based on a resemblance of qualities and proceeds “of nought but of virtue”

¹⁷ See “The Life of Aristippus,” in Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives, Opinions, and Remarkable Sayings of the Most Famous Ancient Philosophers*, trans. by several hands (London: Edward Brewster, 1688), pp. 142-169.

(1.28). He calls Carisophus a liar and a dissembler, and tells us that he himself has just dissembled. There is, thus, more common ground for friendship—imperfect as it may be—between these two characters than Aristippus would like us to believe. The opening scene of the play gives us philosophy and courtesy mixed in such a way that it is no longer clear whether courtly philosophy—the kind of philosophy More influentially termed *philosophia civilior*, prudent and rhetorically apt—is a necessarily good thing. What is the fate of philosophical ideals once they are translated into courtly practices?¹⁸

The problem is a familiar one, and it is found plaguing the theories and practices of counsel throughout the period, in fiction and in fact. Edwards addresses it by articulating it in terms of friendship and its role in the exercise of power. If for Aristippus the movement from philosophy to court has meant an awkward compromise, we are led to wonder what it will entail for Damon and Pythias, who, as disciples of Pythagoras, enter upon the stage in the ensuing scene. That they are two Greek friends should perhaps indicate that they share more than the play discloses. What it does disclose, however, is that they share a single servant, Stephano, whose comments on the philosophy of the two friends provide a sobering, grounding perspective that keeps the question of friendship tied, throughout the play, to the realm of the practical and, consequently, to the locus of the court. Stephano's speeches at times even threaten to completely destabilize the ideality Damon and Pythias both embody and explicitly theorize by constantly rehearsing the doctrines of *amicus alter ipse*, of virtue as the foundation of friendship, and of likeness as its crucial prerequisite. The proverbial wisdom that suffuses the play in both Latin

¹⁸ Versions of the same question characterize other humanist enterprises as well; for the educational one see Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

and English is travestied in Scene 5, where Stephano observes that he proves the well-known saying that one cannot serve two masters wrong since he happily serves both Damon and Pythias.¹⁹ Having patiently listened to his two masters' treatise-like enumeration of the qualities of perfect friendship, Stephano loses patience and interrupts their philosophy, as he calls it: "for all your philosophy, / See that in this court you walk very wisely" (7.62-63). The term "wisely" is aptly chosen since it replaces philosophical wisdom—of which Stephano has had enough—with something more practical, more skillful, and more cunning.²⁰

The suspicion under which philosophy is thus occasionally held in the play is further underlined when Carisophus, who accuses Damon of spying and causes the king to imprison him, justifies his accusation by insisting again that what appears as innocent philosophy is in fact artfully disguised villainy, of the kind he earlier perceived in Aristippus: "Damon smatters as well as he [i.e. Aristippus] of crafty philosophy" (9.74). That some congeniality of philosophical spirit does exist between Aristippus and Damon is suggested by the fact that Pythias turns to Aristippus to beg him to plead with Dionysius on Damon's behalf. But the philosopher-turned-courtier claims to be of no use. His pleasant urbanity no longer pleases the king, who has changed drastically: "Dionysius, of late so pleasant and merry, / Is quite changed now into such melancholy / That nothing can please him" (10.89-91). The fault is thus Damon's, who was, Aristippus concludes by ambiguously invoking wisdom again, "more curious than wise in

¹⁹ See also scene 11, where Stephano stays behind Damon to serve the imprisoned Pythias. Waiting on Pythias, Damon observes, is the same as waiting on Damon since they are perfect friends and therefore indistinguishable.

²⁰ See *OED*, s.v. wisely, 3.

viewing this city” (10.104). Even Aristippus’s skills are unlikely to change Dionysius’s newly and firmly formed opinion.²¹

The real problem, however, is not so much the stubbornness of Dionysius’s opinions or the failure of Aristippus’s rhetorical skill. It is at this point that we begin to glimpse the differentiation of offices at the court of Dionysius as Aristippus explains that he is “of the court” but “none of the counsel” (10.129). And so, even though he cannot counsel the king, he can counsel Pythias:

Yet if any comfort be, it rests in Eubulus,
The chiefest counsellor about King Dionysius,
Which pities Damon’s case in this great extremity,
Persuading the King from all kind of cruelty. (10.142-145)

But Eubulus’s persuasions appear to be of as much avail as Aristippus’s. “Eubulus, thou hast talked in vain,” Dionysius exclaims as he and Eubulus enter the stage with Gronno the hangman (10.156). The vain talk nevertheless continues in a stichomythic debate between the tyrant and his counselor closely modeled on the scene of counsel between Seneca and Nero in *Octavia*, the pseudo-Senecan play translated into English for the first time in the 1560s.²² The debate turns on the relative advantages of mercy and terror in princely government. Eubulus warns Dionysius that to trust flatterers is to become a tyrant and that therefore mercy, justice, and liberality are to be preferred to fear and terror. But Dionysius is unrelenting: “I tell thee, fear and terror defends

²¹ “Nought availeth persuasion, where forward opinion taketh place” (10.110); this is, interestingly, one of the lines Sir Julius Caesar extracts from the play in his commonplace book, today British Library Additional MS 6038.

²² See *The ninth Tragedie of Luicus Anneus Seneca called Octauia*, translated out of Latine into English, by T. N. Student in Cambridge (London: Henry Denham, [1566]), 2.2.

kings only” (10.219).²³ He goes on, ironically, to paint a picture of himself haunted and tormented at night by the fear of Damon’s presumed conspiracy. While claiming that he is acting as wise kings do, Dionysius gives us the traditional picture of the inwardly tormented tyrant, identical in outline to the image we have seen conjured up, for example, by Buchanan in his treatise *De iure regni apud Scotos*.

The scene is ironic for another important reason. Attention has been drawn in the first chapter of this dissertation to the dialogue of counsel between More and Hythloday in the first book of *Utopia* during which, in order to make his point about counsel, More invokes this very dialogue between Nero and Seneca in *Octavia*. The dialogue is invoked not to commend Seneca as a good counselor but to demonstrate by rich and implicit allusion that Hythloday’s understanding of the office of counsel at court is deeply flawed. When the performance of a comedy in which everybody is taking enormous pleasure is interrupted by a grave philosophical speech from a sententious tragedy, everything is spoiled and the wisdom of the philosopher counselor is bound to appear as worldly foolishness. Edwards seems to re-enact the scene, with Eubulus standing for Seneca and with Dionysius standing for Nero, and thus to make an identical point: that grave, philosophical counsel must learn its place and time if it is to be efficient. “He shall die,” Dionysius concludes, “though Eubulus consent not thereto” (10.226). And as if echoing the debate between Herod and Baptistes in Buchanan’s play, Dionysius asserts: “It is lawful for kings as they list all things to do” (10.227).²⁴

²³ See in this connection Chapter VII of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, entitled “Of cruelty and mercy, and whether it is better to be loved than to be feared, or the contrary,” in Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. and ed. Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 57-59.

But unlike More—or perhaps just like More—Edwards wants to have it both ways. Whereas the invocation of Seneca in *Utopia* is meant to stress the importance of decorum and to reject imprudent mixing of genres—that awkward gallimaufry of the tragical and the comical—*Damon and Pythias* is very consciously a mixed play. In the Prologue to the play Edwards asserts that the proper name for the play the audience is about to witness is a “tragical comedy” (37) since the matter of friendship that forms the play’s topic is mixed with both mirth and care (37).²⁵ More significantly, the same Prologue insists on the importance of decorum in the construction of comedies. Horace is duly acknowledged as the great teacher of this doctrine, where *kind* must be considered and speeches written in such a way that they correspond to the nature of the character delivering them.²⁶

Can we, then, contrary to More’s observation, imagine a successful theatrical piece that mixes comedy and tragedy, grave philosophical discourse with pleasant urbanity, servile scurrility, and general amusement? More to the point, what kind of theory and practice of counsel are we to envision as represented in this kind of play? This is the idea around which Edwards seems to have built his drama, and the response he provides is fully theatrical albeit hardly less ambiguous than More’s. Dionysius’s decision to have Damon executed is delayed

²⁴ The counseling scene from Seneca’s *Octavia* serves, in reverse, as a model for the conversation between Tiberius and Sejanus in Jonson’s *Sejanus His Fall*. Here the favorite Sejanus is arguing for tyranny while Tiberius resists the idea; see Ben Jonson, *Sejanus*, in *Five Plays*, ed. G. A. Wilkes (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 2.164ff, pp. 134-139.

²⁵ The early printed book nicely illustrates the point: the title page describes the play as “the excellent Comedie of two the most faithfulllest Freendes, Damon and Pithias,” whereas the running title calls it “the Tragical Comedie of Damon and Pithias.” What the tragic part of the play is we learn from Stephano in scene 11 (“O cursed Carisophus that first moved this tragedy”; 11.19). The earliest reference to the play in performance dubs it “Edwards’s Tragedy”; see Durand, “Notes on Richard Edwards,” p. 350.

²⁶ There is some significant punning going on in the Prologue, as Edwards opens it by stating that his pen has been forced from his kind, i.e. that he is now writing a different kind of play and not merely light-hearted entertainments.

when he refuses to let Damon go back to Greece to dispose of his “worldly things” (10.242) and “to dispatch this invent’ry” (10.249) unless a worthy pledge is found. Thinking this a nice trick, Dionysius is surprised to see Pythias willingly submit himself to imprisonment instead of his friend. Despite the earlier failure of counsel in the play, Dionysius is so confused that he again turns to Eubulus for advice (“Eubulus, what shall I do? I would dispatch this Damon fain, / But this foolish fellow so charges me, that I may not call back my word again,” 10.283-284). To save his honor, this time Dionysius does follow his counselor’s advice and gives Damon two months to set his affairs in order. The tyrant and the counselor leave the stage together “to talk of this strange thing within” (10.298).

But talking, the play proceeds to suggest, is futile. As if to prepare us for the final scene of resolution, Edwards first confronts us with a couple of scenes filled with theatrical action. The first shows Stephano beating the flattering parasite Carisophus and his servant; the second introduces Grim the Collier, who gets shaved by Will and Jack.²⁷ The beating scene is again constructed in such a way that it brings to the fore the problematic nature of the distinction between flattery and plain dealing, Carisophus and Aristippus. It is tempting to see in this scene, as J. A. Kramer does, a certain kind of poetic justice since Carisophus, the symbol of corrupt service, is beaten by “his rightful antagonist” Stephano, who is “the embodiment of good service” (479), but more in line with the play’s overall exploration of the relationship between honesty and dissembling is Hartley’s recognition of a deep irony coloring Stephano’s way of

²⁷ In his discussion of *Damon and Pythias*, Kramer calls the first of the two scenes “an amusing excrescence,” while he finds the second to be “clearly germane to plot and theme” and proceeds to discuss it at some length (485). This is one more reason to offer a brief reading of the larger logic of the first scene; another suggestive reading of the second scene is found in Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism*, pp. 129-130.

proceeding. While savagely criticizing Carisophus for craftily misrepresenting himself—pure villainy parading under the color of honesty—Stephano conceals his own identity by inventing for himself the name Onaphets. The scene thus mirrors the original encounter between Aristippus and Carisophus and suggests once again that everything in this play is potentially the reverse of what it claims to be.²⁸

Physically attacked by Stephano, Carisophus is verbally assaulted by Eubulus, who, we learn, has been denouncing him as a flatterer and thus causing the king to suspect Carisophus's "truth and honesty" (14.16) even more strongly. Eubulus's plain talk, Carisophus tells us, made in Dionysius's heart a "deep impression" (14.13). This is, again, somewhat surprising given that we have witnessed Eubulus's spectacular failure to persuade Dionysius to release Damon, but what Carisophus tells us serves to introduce the central preoccupation of the culminating scene in the play, which dramatizes Dionysius's radical change of heart, and of opinion, as he witnesses the selfless love linking Damon and Pythias, each of the two friends vying for the privilege to die for the other. It is often stated that the point of this scene is the *action* of the two friends—for this, rather than the words of good counsel furnished by Eubulus, is what effects the change in

²⁸ In order to explain Stephano's surprising recourse to word play Kramer is forced to read, unpersuasively to my mind, the character of Carisophus as decidedly literal-minded. According to this interpretation, Carisophus "perverts the word and insists upon the literalness of expression despite context" since in Carisophus's reading Damon's statement that "[h]e was come hither to know the state of the city" is taken literally—to mean that Damon is a spy rather than a curious tourist. Because of this apparent literal-mindedness, Carisophus, Hartley argues, is justly foiled by Stephano's "nominalist jest" (480). But Carisophus is clearly an expert informer whose understanding of language, here as elsewhere in the play, is in keeping with his profession and therefore much more sophisticated than Kramer acknowledges. The point is not that Carisophus is unable to detect a rhetorical trick (is not his examination of Damon precisely that?); rather, the scene asserts what the play repeatedly draws our attention to, namely that the language of honesty and the language of dissembling are not always easy to distinguish, or at least that there is no necessary link between the moral good and the im/moral means of its achievement. I will have more to say on this in the following chapter, concerned with Shakespeare's *King Lear*, where the problem is subjected to a more sustained dramatic scrutiny. One thing worth bearing in mind is that Shakespeare develops themes that are of long standing in the sixteenth-century dramatic tradition.

the tyrant. Damon and Pythias thus put their philosophy into practice, embody the ideals they profess, and expose the false premises upon which other relationships in the play are based, particularly the pretended friendship between Aristippus and Carisophus, motivated, each accuses the other, by profit and selfish interest. But the interest of this dramatic episode consists precisely in the fact that we are overwhelmed by words and protestations, and there is no real action except as something that is promised and then deferred.

What is it, then, that ultimately affects Dionysius? If the point is to show us a tyrant who is transformed by witnessing deeds of friendship, a sacrifice—or at least a bungled execution—should serve the dramatist's purpose better. Instead, once Damon stays the sword and insists that the role on this stage of death is rightfully his, what follows is an amusing debate between the two friends whether or not it is yet noon, whether to believe the town clocks or the sun, and thus whether Damon has been late for execution and whether Pythias should not, despite his friend's return, play the tragic part. The disagreement over what time it is briefly threatens to destroy this ideal friendship: "Ah my Pythias," exclaims Damon with considerable disappointment, "shall we now break the bonds of amity? / Will you now over-thwart me, which heretofore so well did agree?" (15.158-159). Not wanting to leave any doubt about who the dominant friend in this perfect relationship is, Edwards gives Damon a long speech in which he tries his hand at Eubulus's task and assaults the tyrant's ear with wholesome counsel.

No new argument is advanced. We hear again that "fickle is the ground whereon all tyrants thread" (15.178) and that cares and fears haunt them since they are obeyed by their subjects out of terror, not love, and have "[n]o trusty band, no faithful friends" (15.179) to guard them. The answer to the problem is simple: "That you may safely reign, by love get friends

whose constant faith / Will never fail, this counsel gives poor Damon at his death” (15.182-183).

And then again:

Your sure defence and strongest guard stands chiefly in faithful friends.

Then get you friends by liberal deeds, and here I make an end,

Accept this counsel, mighty King, of Damon, Pythias' friend. (15.192-194)

Dionysius's reactions are telling. He turns for instruction to the man whom we can be excused for believing his trusty friend—Eubulus, the chief counselor: “Eubulus, my spirits are suddenly appalled, my limbs wax weak, / This strange friendship amazes me so, that I can scarce speak” (15.199-200). All Eubulus can say is “O unspeakable friendship” (15.203), on the one hand confusing us by inadvertently invoking the language of sodomitical union—that crime *inter Christianos non nominandum*—on the other amusing us by suggesting that amidst all this speechifying one somehow feels deprived of words, and that this should be a wondrous thing.²⁹ Dionysius, for one, is still fully capable of speech, and he uses it to tell us what it is that we should see:

Stay, Groano—my flesh trembles—Eubulus, what shall I do?

Were there ever such friends on earth as were these two?

What heart is so cruel that would divide them asunder?

O noble friendship, I must yield—at thy force I wonder.

My heart, this rare friendship has pierced to the root

²⁹ As Stretter notes, the play also features the phrase “against kind” to describe the ideal friendship between Damon and Pythias; “Cicero on Stage,” p. 354. I agree with Stretter that the play does not pursue this thread, keeping the friendship mostly free of any sexual associations, but the phrases are nonetheless tantalizing. This is precisely the kind of ambiguity Marlowe will set out to explore in *Edward II*.

And quenched all my fury. This sight has brought this about,

Which thy grave counsel, Eubulus, and learned persuasion could never do. (15.210-216)

Dionysius's request to be admitted as Damon's and Pythias's third friend, although authorized by the sources,³⁰ is nonetheless funny in the light of all the theorizing of friendship rehearsed in the play, the central tenet of which is that it is a relationship between *two* individuals similar in age, status, interest, and, most importantly, the love of virtue. Untroubled by this theoretical difficulty, Damon readily accepts the extended hand and the reformed heart of a king, not tyrant: "For my part, most noble King, as a third friend, welcome to our friendly society, / But you must forget you are a king, for friendship stands in true equality" (15.237).

How is it that a king can forget that he is a king and still continue as a king is not something Damon, or indeed the play, pauses to tell us. It is clear, however, that Dionysius's kingdom continues as before, and that the court will absorb the two, or three, friends without necessarily reforming its status structures and thus without transforming Syracuse into Utopia, where friends hold all things in common.³¹ Dionysius puts the point with more than sufficient clarity:

Unequal though I be in great possessions,

Yet full equal shall you find me in my changed conditions.

³⁰ The source is probably Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, where the same phrase appears, while it is absent from Elyot's account in *The Governour*. Different versions of the narrative also vary as to whether Dionysius is or is not admitted as the third friend; Cicero is silent on this point. In connection with *The Governour* it is worth observing that Edwards might not be so much indebted to Elyot's brief retelling of the story of Damon and Pythias as he is perhaps to the account unconnected with this episode, which features Plato's spectacular failure as a counselor-philosopher at the court of Dionysius. The topic is taken up again by Elyot in his dialogue *Of the Knowledge which Maketh a Wise Man*, discussed at some length in Greg Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 195-217.

³¹ See Kathy Eden, *Friends Hold All Things in Common: Tradition, Intellectual Property, and the Adages of Erasmus* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

Tyranny, flattery, oppression, lo here I cast away,

Justice, truth, love, friendship shall be my joy. (15.239-242)

Whether this is a perfect or an imperfect friendship remains an open question,³² but Damon and Pythias quickly adapt to this new friendly configuration—thanks to which, Dionysius informs us, they are to become “the jewels of my court” (15.260)—as Eubulus, the rather speechless but rejoicing counselor, is sent to fetch new clothes for the king’s new friends, exclaiming: “I go with a joyful heart—O happy day” (15.256). The final scene of the drama shows the chief counselor beating Carisophus, the figure of parasitical flattery, out of court, surely a strange conclusion to a play that has just abandoned all violence, and even stranger in that the representative of grave counsel and learned persuasion is shown acting not by the power of words and reasons but by the strength of his fist.

Edwards’s play, like the seemingly inconsequential dramaturgy it rests upon, thus wavers between giving us a vision of potent and a vision of impotent counsel. Eubulus, the good counselor who continues in his office at the reformed tyrant’s court, is victorious, but his beating of Carisophus can almost be read as a venting of a frustration, a desperate revenge for his failure to persuade by reasoned speech. Instead, as Dionysius does not fail to mention, it is the power of spectacle that has changed the king’s heart. The complicating problem, all of Edwards’s making,

³² Angel Day, who admittedly has an axe to grind in his discussion of the office of the secretary in relation to friendship, writes: “The limits of *Friendshippe* (as it might bee objected) are streight, and there can bee no Friend where an inequality remaineth. Twixt the party commanded & him that commaundeth, there is no societie, and therefore no *Friendship* where resteth a *Superiority*. But I say & affirme, that if it be true that the sum of all friendship taketh his originall of loue, and that a true demonstration of loue, by the feruencie of affection, may any wayes bee caryed, then (notwithstanding this separation in qualitie) a man virtuously disposed, may euen in the selfe place of seruice wherein he standeth, fulfill many partes of a *Friend* vnto him whome hee serueth”; Angel Day, *The English Secretorie* (London: Richard Jones, 1592), sig. R1v. How *Damon and Pythias* preserves the boundaries of status is perhaps best seen in the fact that Stephano, a slave, is granted freedom, but that he could never be imagined as a third friend to Damon and Pythias. In other words, for ideal friends there is upward mobility, for servants only horizontal mobility.

is that this change of heart happens after a long speech that Damon delivers and that constitutes the most extended piece of counsel and of affective rhetoric in the play. A further complication is that this counsel is out of place and delivered by someone who could hardly be expected to advise the king. Since the speech urges the king to embrace friendship and since Damon himself is the perfect friend, the counsel cannot but appear somewhat self-serving. By engaging the king's passions and by transforming his heart rather than persuading his mind, Damon has opened up an ambiguous future space in which rational counsel will be displaced by a whirl of aroused emotions. The reformation of the tyrant has given us an enthusiastic new tyrant, guided by his affections and his body rather than the learned reasoning of his chief counselor. Seeing Damon and Pythias as his enemies, the beaten Carisophus gives us the only glimpse into the future life of the state: "Yet, Eubulus, though I be gone, hereafter time shall try, / There shall be found, even in this court, as great flatterers as I" (16.7-8).

The most instructive gloss on what Edwards is struggling with in his dramatization of friendship, counsel, and the power of spectacle is provided a century later, by Thomas Hobbes. Although normally thought of as participating in what was to come rather than summarizing or explaining what was in the past, Hobbes's *Leviathan* is in fact in many ways a work of Renaissance commentary. Hobbes's discussion both summarizes and reformulates, in calm and systematic prose, the lessons of the rich humanist tradition of thinking about counsel: how it should be defined, how given, and how taken. It strives to clarify the terms and to introduce firm distinctions. We see here, in a sense, Hobbes both embracing and repudiating what he has learnt from the great revival of interest in the art of persuasive public speaking in the preceding century. As Quentin Skinner painstakingly demonstrates in what is at once a history of

Renaissance rhetoric, particularly in England, and a polemical argument about the philosophy of Hobbes, *Leviathan* marks Hobbes's recognition that the art of rhetoric has, after all, an important role to play in *scientia civilis*, which is that science of the moral and the political which humanism tied together precisely with the help of a strong rhetorical thread. Having rejected the claims of rhetoric in his early writings, such as *The Elements* and *De Cive*, in *Leviathan* Hobbes reverts, so at least Skinner argues, to the basic humanist assumption that "if we are to succeed in persuading others to accept our arguments, we shall have to supplement the findings of reason with the moving force of eloquence."³³ At issue here is the ability of eloquence to engage the passions and persuade not simply by the inexorable logic of the argument but also, and sometimes predominantly, by the power of affect.³⁴

Hobbes's discussion of counsel, however, does not quite support the scenario Skinner masterfully sketches.³⁵ Hobbes begins by distinguishing between command, given for one's own benefit, and counsel, given for the benefit of another person. Both, however, take the same

³³ Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 426. Skinner's book, as he acknowledges, represents, finally, an attempt to practice what he elsewhere only preaches (15). Its larger claim is that "[t]he canon of leading treatises in the history of philosophy is at the same time a canon of major literary texts" and that there is therefore no divide "between literary and other historical texts" (14). Although controversial, the claim has helped historians understand the value of literary analysis and adopt some of its strategies.

³⁴ The issue is explored more broadly in Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Tilmouth's focus on the end of the sixteenth century onward and, when it comes to drama, on the Jacobean era predictably leads him, however, to simplify what comes before. It should be clear from my discussion that when I refer to the body and its passions I assume as my primary context the rhetorical debates over these issues rather than those concerned with humoral medical theory, linked to early modern drama in books such as Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³⁵ Skinner notes the difficulty (343-346), but decides to dismiss it: "Despite these doubts and criticisms, the fact remains that in *Leviathan* Hobbes abandons his earlier insistence that the art of rhetoric must be outlawed from the domain of civil science. Although he never came to view the *ars rhetorica* with positive favour, he undoubtedly came to believe in the inescapable need for an alliance between reason and eloquence, and hence between the art of rhetoric and the methods of science" (346).

imperative form, but the latter is asked for and cannot therefore be punished since he who asks for it becomes, in a sense, its author, free to do with the counsel what he thinks best. While commands and counsels are thus distinguished, a further differentiation is made between proper counsel and exhortation. “EXHORTATION, and DEHORTATION,” Hobbes explains, “is Counsell, accompanied with signes in him that giveth it, of vehement desire to have it followed; or, to say it more briefly, *Counsell vehemently pressed*.”³⁶ This counsel vehemently pressed does not tie itself “to the rigour of true reasoning” (400) but rather encourages him that is counseled in this way to undertake immediate action. Those who exhort consider “the common Passions, and opinions of men, in deducing their reasons” and they also “make use of Similitudes, Metaphors, Examples, and other tooles of Oratory, to perswade their Hearers of the Utility, Honour, or Justice of following their advise” (400). The conclusion is inevitable:

From whence may be inferred, First, that Exhortation and Dehortation, is directed to the Good of him that giveth the Counsell, not of him that asketh it, which is contrary to the duty of a Counsellour; who (by the definition of Counsell) ought to regard, not his own benefit, but his whom he adviseth. And that he directeth his Counsell to his own benefit, is manifest enough, by the long and vehement urging, or by the artificiall giving thereof; which being not required of him, and consequently proceeding from his own occasions, is directed principally to his own benefit, and but accidentally to the good of him that is Counsell'd, or not at all. (402)

³⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Noel Malcolm, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), vol. 2, Chapter XXV, “Of Counsell,” p. 400. Further references will be given parenthetically.

Important to notice here is Hobbes's suspicion, authorized in part by the rhetorical tradition,³⁷ of engaging the passions in the interest of persuading someone—and for Hobbes that someone is ultimately the sovereign—to take a particular course of action.³⁸ The true counselor “ought to propound his advise, in such forme of speech, as may make the truth most evidently appear; that is to say, with as firme ratiocination, as significant and proper language, and as briefly, as the evidence will permit” (406):

And therefore *rash, and unevident Inferences*; (such as are fetched only from Examples, or authority of Books, and are not arguments of what is good, or evill, but witnesses of fact, or of opinion,) *obscure, confused, and ambiguous Expressions, also all metaphoricall Speeches, tending to the stirring up of Passion*, (because such reasoning, and such expressions, are usefull onely to deceive, or to lead him we Counsell towards

³⁷ The conflicting views are summarized in Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*, pp. 120-127. Skinner claims that humanism on the whole, and English humanism in particular, inclined towards the Roman (rather than the Aristotelian) model in its endorsement of the affective approach and thus its willingness to manipulate the emotions of the audience in the interest of persuasion. The question, ultimately unresolved, is at the center of the important conflict within the classical tradition between philosophy and rhetoric.

³⁸ For an account of *Leviathan* on the whole as counsel to sovereigns, see Gerald M. Mara, “Hobbes’s Counsel to Sovereigns,” *The Journal of Politics* 50.2 (1988): 390-411, as well as Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Malcolm, vol. 1, pp. 54-56. That counsel is an office peculiar to the monarchical form of government is something Hobbes observes in Chapter XXX of *Leviathan*, “Of the office of the Sovereign Representative” (which he translates into Latin as *De Officio Summi Imperantis*). Hobbes notes the wide semantic range of the English word *Counsell* and the Latin word *Consilium* (corrupted, he claims, from *Considium*), comprehending “all Assemblies of men that sit together,” but in his discussion limits the term in the following way: “I take it here in the first sense onely: And in this sense, there is no choyce of Counsell, neither in a Democracy, nor Aristocracy; because the persons Counselling are members of the person Counsellled. The choyce of Counsellours therefore is proper to Monarchy”; vol. 2, p. 546. Interestingly, the same capaciousness of the term is noted a century earlier in a Spanish treatise devoted to the question of counsel, but the author proceeds to discuss what, for the most part, modern English denotes by the terms *council* and *councillor* rather than *counsel* and *counselor*; see Fadrique Furio Ceriol, *El Concejo, i Consejeros del Principe* (Anvers: Martin Nucio, 1559), translated and adapted into English as *A very briefe and profitable Treatise declaring howe many counsells, and what maner of Counselers a Prince that will gouerne well ought to haue* (London: William Seres, [1570]).

other ends than his own) *are repugnant to the Office of a Counsellour*. (406, emphasis in the original)

The difficulty with the use of examples in the process of consultation and advice was something, the preceding chapter has shown, that the humanist enterprise repeatedly struggled with. As Edwards's *Damon and Pythias* shows, however, it also struggled with the problem of the stirring up of passion and engaging the body of the sovereign. What we may call the cool orthodox view, represented in Hobbes's exposition, turns *Damon and Pythias* into a deeply ironic play since Dionysius changes his ways not thanks to the firm ratiocination and the significant and proper language of Eubulus but as a result of Damon's exhortation and the sovereign's total loss of control over the feelings of his body that, Dionysius himself tells us, trembles, its limbs waxing weak. More in line with the existing interpretations of the play is the opposite view, according to which the affective power of theatrical fiction—of what Damon and Pythias stage before Dionysius and what Edwards stages before his sovereign—is beneficial and has a significant potential to do political good.³⁹ Although critics have largely ignored the question of counsel in the play, what the logic of such interpretations suggests is that the play attempts to reclaim the body and its passions as the central, yet ultimately controversial, force in the enterprise of counsel.⁴⁰

³⁹ See, for a representative example, Kramer, "*Damon and Pythias*: An Apology for Art," p. 489: "Clearly, what we are given to see is the great force for moral transformation contained in true dramatic art."

⁴⁰ The most recent, and to my knowledge only, sustained consideration of counsel in *Damon and Pythias* is Jennifer Richards, "Male Friendship and Counsel in Richard Edwards' *Damon and Pythias*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, ed. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 293-308. Richards, however, is mostly interested in the play's debt to Tudor rhetorical education, especially the deployment of *sententiae*.

Lovingly Advised: The Struggle for Counsel in Marlowe's *Edward II*

Marlowe's *Edward II* plays with this idea of reclaiming the body in the political and personal narrative of counsel by considering the realities of masculine friendship in the exercise of rule. Partly because of the influence of the sources, partly out of Marlowe's own design, the play reveals a contested space of counsel, one that the barons insist on occupying but that equally seems reserved for the sovereign's sweet friends, first Gaveston and then Spenser Junior. I am not suggesting that the three friends of Marlowe's play—often a complicating factor in its interpretation—have anything to do directly with the three friends of Edwards's play,⁴¹ but I would like to suggest that in *Edward II* we find an extended elaboration of a problem which *Damon and Pythias* was the first to introduce onto the English stage. The unspeakable friendship of the two Greek youths becomes in Marlowe's play a more ambiguous union still in part articulated within the idealizing discourse of *amicitia* but now also marked by the sodomitical suggestion of the complex web of source materials, underscored—albeit controversially—by the manner of Edward's execution in the play.⁴² The vague contours of the Syracusan court fade

⁴¹ Note, however, that they *are* three friends in that they are all interlinked by bonds of love. When Spenser Junior appears on stage for the first time, in conversation with Baldock, he announces that he is Gaveston's companion, not his follower, and that Gaveston loves him well (2.1.12). His preferment to the king will similarly occur, as he here anticipates, via Gaveston. To Gaveston's urging "His name is Spenser; he is well allied; / For my sake let him wait upon your grace" Edward replies as follows: "Then, Spenser, wait upon me; for his [i.e. Gaveston's] sake" (2.2.250-253). In the latter part of the play Spenser emerges as the new favorite, but the fact that he is taken away to be executed together with Baldock underlines Marlowe's interest in complicating the relationship of friendship and favoritism in the play, as the ensuing discussion is designed to demonstrate.

⁴² It is difficult to protect the play's execution scene from the suggestion—found in various historical and fictional accounts of Edward's death—that he is impaled on a spit, which in the play Lightborn explicitly asks for as he prepares for the job of execution but whose function in the act of execution itself remains unclear. Andrew Hadfield

away as the more familiar aspects of the English court come into view, still however muddied by the fact that, like Edwards, Marlowe is writing during the reign of Elizabeth, but like many of his contemporaries, most notably Shakespeare, he is staging a piece of English medieval history.

That Edward's problem is one of counsel is suggested in that great fountainhead of English historical drama and one of Marlowe's sources for *Edward II*, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, where the cause of all trouble is located in Edward's inability to appoint wise and discreet counselors:

All these mischeefes and manie more happened not onlie to him, but also to the whole state of the realme, in that he wanted iudgement and prudent discretion to make choise of sage and discreet councellors, receiuing those into his favour, that abused the same to their priuate gaine and aduantage, not respecting the aduancement of the common-wealth, so they might attaine to riches and honour.⁴³

Holinshed does not invent the story. As Judith Ferster shows in her study of the literature and politics of counsel in the fourteenth century, contemporary accounts of Edward's downfall repeatedly cast it as a tragedy of advice.⁴⁴ The surviving documents, Ferster further argues, are part of a larger political narrative in which "the tropes of advice are deployed in the medieval power struggles between rulers and ruled" and are often meant to assert the right of the nobility

persuasively argues that the play itself suggests death by pressing, not by forceful penetration, but the argument is unlikely to stick given the influence of the traditions of both criticism and performance; see Andrew Hadfield, "Marlowe's Representation of the Death of Edward II," *Notes and Queries* 56.1 (2009): 40-41. Reading *Edward II* in relation to the legal category of sodomy has been a common procedure in recent criticism. The contributions, not always in agreement with each other, are too numerous to list here, but a good recent guide is Alan Stewart, "Edward II and Male Same-Sex Desire," *Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion*, ed. Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., Patrick Cheney, and Andrew Hadfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 82-95.

⁴³ Raphael Holinshed, *The Third volume of Chronicles* (London, 1587), p. 342.

⁴⁴ Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 70.

to advise and in this way limit the king (68).⁴⁵ Proceeding from the desire to redefine political authority or merely to ensure a distribution of wealth within which the lordly peers are regular beneficiaries, or both, counsel in medieval England becomes an important arena where power and privilege are negotiated and defined. The main problem with Gaveston, Mortimer Junior observes after he hears his uncle's eloquent defense of minions—those of princes as much as those of philosophers—is not Gaveston's attachment to the king or the king's inordinate passion for Gaveston; it is the fact that Gaveston's rapid elevation at court threatens to destroy the established modes of power and patronage which the barons are keen to preserve and perpetuate. Throughout Marlowe's *Edward II*, the barons present their interests in the form of some larger, unselfish argument—their “country's cause,” as they call it—but frequent presence of dramatic irony as well as the context of the entire play reveal the deeply compromised nature of such arguments.⁴⁶

The political structures of Marlowe's plays are complicated by the fact that baronial counsel has its important ally, especially early in the play, in the spiritual counsel, no less temporal and political. It is, after all, the Archbishop of Canterbury who first appeals to the counselors' right as he plots the banishment of the base and obscure minion:

We and the rest, that are his counsellors,

⁴⁵ Cf. Edward's exclamation in Marlowe's play: “The headstrong barons shall not limit me” (2.2.263).

⁴⁶ Thus Mortimer Junior is apparently worried about unpaid soldiers (1.4.408) while Warwick, a morally compromised character, justifies his execution of Gaveston—which he announced by referring to his own “wit and policy” (2.5.103; for the negative meaning of the word “policy” see 2.3.5-6: “I fear me you are sent of policy, / To undermine us with a show of love)—by repeatedly insisting that it is merely his “country's cause” he wishes to further (2.5.23, 3.1.11). For the deployment of the same term by Kent, see 4.1.3, who earnestly (but ironically, given what happens by the end of the play) uses it to describe his allegiance to Mortimer Junior. Similarly, Isabella excuses her actions against Edward as “[c]are of my country” (4.6.76), and that after we have learnt from Kent that “Mortimer / And Isabel do kiss, while they conspire” (4.5.21-22).

Will meet, and with a general consent

Confirm his banishment with our hands and seals.⁴⁷

When during the temporary reconciliation Edward showers new honors upon his peers, it is Warwick who is appointed as his “chief counsellor” on account of his “silver hairs,” signifying experience and wisdom (1.4.347-348). That this is a far cry from the kind of chief counselor we see in Eubulus becomes evident very soon, when Warwick, who upon receiving the office proclaimed his readiness to be slain if he ever offends the king, now reacts to Gaveston’s return by openly threatening his monarch: “Look to your crown, if you back him thus” (2.2.93).⁴⁸

This is not merely counsel vehemently pressed; it is counsel violently pressed. The threat of deposition that is so frequently advanced by the nobles against the king in Marlowe’s play finds its counterpart in the actual language of the formal deposition of Edward II, where counsel, again, is key. The deposition justifies itself by noting not just the prevalence of evil counsel at Edward’s court but also the king’s receptiveness to it. “Throughout his reign,” the text of the deposition runs, “he has been controlled and governed by others who have given him evil counsel.” The fault, however, is the king’s too: “And throughout his reign he has not been willing to listen to good counsel.”⁴⁹ Good counsel, it is implied, is what was offered by the peers; evil counsel was what was offered by Gaveston and the king’s other favorites. Marlowe, however, blurs these clear distinctions not merely by making the actions of the nobles morally

⁴⁷ *Edward II*, 1.2.69-71; see also Canterbury’s words at 1.4.43-44: “Why are you mov’d? Be patient, my lord, / And see what we your counsellors have done.”

⁴⁸ Alluding to the discrepancy between Warwick’s age and his wisdom, Kent warns: “Warwick, these words do ill beseem thy years” (2.2.94).

⁴⁹ B. Wilkinson, *Constitutional History of Medieval England, 1216-1399*, vol. II: *Politics and the Constitution, 1307-1399*, pp. 170-171; quoted in Ferster, *Fictions of Advice*, pp. 70-71.

inconsistent and, notably in the case of Mortimer Junior, ultimately self-serving but especially by infusing the play with the idealized rhetoric of humanist friendship and, as if that were not enough, by pushing that friendship dangerously close to its rhetorical double, the sodomitical union.⁵⁰

That friendship may be crucial to the understanding of Marlowe's *Edward II* was observed early in the twentieth century. As with Edwards's *Damon and Pythias*, however, the scholarly pursuit of friendship in the play occurred at the expense of obscuring its link to the discourses of counsel. That, however, can be easily forgiven once we realize that these early critics had enough problems dealing with the friendship as it is represented in Marlowe's play and which they set out to recover. Although obviously much more passionate than the friendly affair in *Damon and Pythias*, the relationships between Edward and Gaveston and then between Edward and Spenser Junior as figured in the play still leave enough space for critics to disagree as to whether sex has anything to do with it. The founding figure of English homosexual historiography, in the posthumously published monograph tellingly entitled *The Friend*, thus sees the critics rather than the play overly obsessed with homosexual action and, perhaps more importantly, identity.⁵¹ While *Edward II* continues to be cited as an important document of gay love—partly because it is Marlowe's, partly because it frequently conjures up the ancient world

⁵⁰ On this double perception of the signs of affection between men in Renaissance England, see Alan Bray, "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England," *History Workshop* 29 (1990): 1-19.

⁵¹ Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003). His groundbreaking monograph was *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982). Probably because he left the manuscript unfinished, Bray's *The Friend* is not always consistent, especially when it comes to Marlowe's *Edward II* (which he also considers in his earlier essay on homosexuality and the signs of male friendship in Renaissance England and from which the book occasionally borrows). Bray first reacts against those critics who find homo/sexuality rather than friendship in the play (187), terming this an anachronism (189), but, preferring the term sodomy as historically more accurate since it has to do with acts rather than identities, eventually concludes that the tension between sodomy and friendship in the play is never allowed to be resolved (190).

of homosexual passion, and partly because Edward's death apparently has to do with his anus—dissenting opinions are voiced by critics who claim to be neutral and willing to accept that “which men delight to see” (1.1.65), yet ultimately profess to be unable to find any evidence of sexual intimacy in the play and therefore no evidence for Edward's homosexuality, sodomitical leanings, homoerotic desires—or whatever may be the most uncontroversial label for a relationship between two men enjoying one another.⁵²

In the first part of the twentieth century, critics saw in Marlowe's play a friendship more passionate than what is normally found in good English drama and went on to explain the anomaly in relation to the kind of play Marlowe was writing and in the context of Marlowe's entire dramatic oeuvre. In one of the most important and still valuable early studies of Marlowe's *Edward II*, William Dinsmore Briggs argued that “it is in Edward's very nature to have favourites” since “[h]is greatest need is to be loved as a friend, not obeyed as a sovereign.”⁵³ In this view, the play becomes a tragedy of a private person who has the misfortune to be a king,

⁵² A more exhaustive attempt to represent the play's critical history might consider the following rough classification (for which I for the most part have no space to list specific examples, but that should be an easy task for anyone familiar with the play's critical reception): homophobic, homosexual, gay, sodomitical, homoerotic, and perhaps queer. Homophobic readings are rarely just that, but a significant example has been found in Wilbur Sanders's book *The Dramatist and the Received Idea*; see Claude J. Summers, “Sex, Politics, and Self-Realization in *Edward II*,” in *A Poet and a filthy Play-maker: New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Kenneth Friedenreich, Roma Gill, and Constance B. Kuriyama (New York: AMS Press, 1988), pp. 221-240. Homosexual readings acknowledge the importance of homosexual desire for the understanding of the play, but interpret it as an aberration or a perversion (be it Marlowe's or Edward's), in accordance with the reigning sexual ideologies. Gay readings, helped no doubt by the influential cinematic adaptation of the play by Derek Jarman, celebrate Marlowe's achievement along identitarian lines. Sodomitical approaches are careful to understand the problem in historical terms, especially in relation to the legal category of sodomy as the determining factor in most discussions of same-sex desire in the early modern period. They open themselves to the criticism of being too limited, and the term homoerotic is offered as more capacious and more positive; the broad term “queer” belongs here as well. Between these stand contributions that cannot make up their mind or those that simply avoid this central issue and choose instead to discover, for example, whether *Edward II* is a tragedy or a history play or whether it is the embodiment of the sublime. Topical and political historicist readings, as usual, abound, and more often than not focus on the figure of the minion or favorite in the play.

⁵³ *Marlowe's Edward II*, ed. William Dinsmore Briggs (London: David Nutt, 1914), pp. cv-cvi.

and is obviously constitutionally unsuited—no pun intended—for the office. He loves his friends, but his friends use him. Briggs defends the play from the persnickety objections of the German critics, who apparently could not understand “why Edward should have so deep an affection for Gaveston” (104) and, unable to locate plausible motivation in the play, rashly dismissed the whole affair as an artistic failure. Briggs’s defense is interesting because—either consciously or unconsciously, it is impossible to tell—it repeatedly falls into a (hetero)sexual narrative while insisting on *just* friendship as the key to the proper understanding of the play. It is “Edward’s imperious craving for personal friendship” (104), Briggs argues in very suggestive language, that best explains his interest in Gaveston. “A dramatist is not bound to supply a logically formulated first cause to account for the passions of his characters,” Briggs urges, “any more than our friends are bound to demonstrate to our satisfaction why they marry the women they do” (104).

This curiously configured friendship was taken up a couple of decades later by the most influential student of friendship in the English Renaissance, Laurens J. Mills. His article on “The Meaning of *Edward II*” was published in 1934, three years before the book entitled *One Soul in Bodies Twain*, still the most complete—although greatly outdated—survey of the theories and representation of friendship in Renaissance England.⁵⁴ Mills extends Briggs’s argument by noting that it is the will and the passions that form the focus of the play rather than the intellect and the reason. The passion in question is friendship, “enforced by Edward’s will” and therefore the cause of his ruin and death (13). While insisting that passionate expressions of friendship are

⁵⁴ Laurens J. Mills, “The Meaning of *Edward II*,” *Modern Philology* 32.1 (1934): 11-31; and *One Soul in Bodies Twain: Friendship in Tudor Literature and Stuart Drama* (Bloomington: The Principia Press, 1937).

the norm in the Renaissance, Mills avoids commenting on the explicit evocations of classical homosexual love—from Jove and Ganymede to Mortimer Senior’s admittedly inconclusive catalogue of same-sex couples of the ancient world⁵⁵—observing instead all the points in the relationship between Edward and Gaveston that conform to the Ciceronian ideal. One of these is the sharing of property, which apparently explains why Edward showers honors upon Gaveston (but does not explain why Dionysius in *Damon and Pythias* shows no intention to share much, let alone everything); another is the precedence given to male friendship over marital love. The conclusion, however, is identical to Briggs’s. The tragedy of the play consists in Edward’s poor choice of his friends, who turn out to be flatterers. The other problem is that Edward is a king, so that “the nature and intensity of his devotion, admirable as they would be under different circumstances, are quite unsuitable to a man in his position” (26). In short, Edward’s “passion for friendship, uncontrolled by reason and unmodified by the logic of his situation, destroys him” (28). *Edward II* thus becomes similar to Marlowe’s other plays, where the centrality of the hero’s passion is the unifying theme.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See *Edward II*, 1.4.393-403. While some of the examples Mortimer Senior mentions fit the sexual interpretation and may be seen to parallel the relationship between Edward and Gaveston, both of them young men, the catalogue is problematic for several reasons. First of all, it contains one textual difficulty. All the early quartos join Hylas with Hector, not Hercules, but ever since Dodsley’s edition in the eighteenth century editors have accepted the familiar emendation. The text would otherwise, claims the Revels Plays editor, make no sense; see Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, ed. Charles R. Forker, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994 [1999]), p. 180, note to line 391. But as Briggs noted in his 1914 edition (131), the other examples do not make perfect sense either. Socrates is hardly an appropriate figure to represent a king who, Mortimer Senior claims, will eventually grow wiser, “[f]or riper years will wean him from such toys” (1.4.403). The citation of Cicero and Octavius Briggs also finds to be particularly inapt. Note, however, that Edward gets Hylas and Hercules right when he welcomes Gaveston back from his exile (1.1.140-145).

⁵⁶ Mills thus reacted against the mainstream of the critical tradition, which saw *Edward II* as standing somewhat apart from the other plays; see, for a representative example, John M. Berdan, “Marlowe’s *Edward II*,” *Philological Quarterly* 3 (1924): 197-207.

A great deal of later criticism on the play is really a series of variations on the basic tensions that Briggs and Mills somewhat too earnestly labored to resolve. As long as we translate Mills's passion and Briggs's imperious cravings into the more familiar language of queer and sodomitical desire permeating recent criticism, we can see that the basic problem is still there, and that it has to do with the questions of friendship and desire in relation to power, status, and sovereignty—with the fact, in other words, that the play represents a king, rather than a private person, who engages in relationships that deeply and tragically affect the commonwealth of which he is in charge and ultimately cause the destruction of both him and those to whom he wished to be attached.⁵⁷ A significant effort to reconnect the question of friendship in the play to the question of sovereignty is found in the recent work of Laurie Shannon, who first in a scholarly article and then in a book advanced the argument that Marlowe's *Edward II* dramatizes the deep-set conflict that existed in the period between the demands of monarchy and the demands of ideal friendship. "Where friendship rules," Shannon argues, "kingship fails."⁵⁸ According to this interpretation, "[t]he rules of *amicitia* run afoul of the monarch's proverbial singularity, his public function of representing polity in generic terms, and his duty to sublimate his affective life to the good of the realm" (93). A monarch engaged to a friend, the argument

⁵⁷ In one of the most memorable speeches in the play, Edward suggests as much: "The griefs of private men are soon allay'd; / But not of kings" (5.1.8-9).

⁵⁸ Laurie J. Shannon, "Monarchs, Minions, and 'Sovereign' Friendship," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 97.1 (1998): 91-112, at p. 102. In an expanded form, the article is included as part of two different chapters in Shannon's book, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). There, the argument about Marlowe's *Edward II*, where friendship has the power to unking, is coupled with a reading of Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, where its abandonment is a necessary condition for Prince Hal's accession to the throne. It is not my business to comment here on whether it makes sense to link the friendship, such as it may be, between Falstaff and Hal to what we find in Marlowe's play or in the discourses of perfect amity in the period, but because Marlowe's play and Shannon's larger historical argument are presented together in her article, it is to the article that I will refer. The claims in the book, although interrupted by discussion of some other dramatic texts that complicate the situation, are unchanged.

continues, becomes “a captured sovereign” (93). Striving to distinguish this argument from both its early articulation by Mills and its more recent endorsement by Bray, who approvingly cites Mills’s pioneering work on friendship, Shannon somewhat unjustly claims that, following Mills, Bray “fails to address the conflict between friendship and Edward’s specific kingly status” (103). While Bray, primarily interested in the ambiguous figurations of friendship and sodomy in the play, may be seen as guilty of the omission, Mills clearly is not.⁵⁹

It is, however, correct to say that, unlike Shannon, Mills never claims that kingship and friendship are always and everywhere completely incompatible, only that this happens to be the case in Marlowe’s *Edward II*. In contrast to this, Shannon constructs a larger historicist argument according to which, for the king, *amicitia* always necessarily turns into *mignonnerie* and friendship into favoritism (98). Thus, as we would expect, in Marlowe’s play it is Edward who “speaks in the idiom of virtuous friendship” while those around him “consistently refer to Gaveston as the king’s ‘minion’” (104). The point was already made by Mills, but Mills carefully notes that the play is not entirely consistent on this point.⁶⁰ Edward himself, in fact, uses both “favorite” and “minion” as terms with which to refer to Gaveston.⁶¹ His overwhelming

⁵⁹ Bray’s larger argument shows that he is fully aware of the always politicized context of the relations he describes.

⁶⁰ Cf. Shannon, “Monarchs, Minions, and ‘Sovereign’ Friendship,” p. 111, note 50: “Mills (‘Meaning of *Edward II*,’ 18 n. 30) enumerates Edward’s friendship terms and the others’ insistence on ‘minion,’ but he does not address what is at stake in this conflict.” No inconsistencies that Mills enumerates are noted.

⁶¹ “Were he a peasant, being my minion, / I’ll make the proudest of you stoop to him” (1.4.30-31); “Now ’tis time / To be aveng’d on you for all your braves, / And for the murder of my dearest friend, / To whom right well you knew our soul was knit, / Good Piers of Gaveston, my sweet favourite” (3.3.40-44). Notice the interchangeability of the words “friend” and “favorite” here as well as the insistence on the bonding of souls. The statement echoes the opening lines of the play, where Gaveston reads the letter he has received from Edward and equates the terms “dearest friend” and “favorite”: “*My father is deceas’d. Come, Gaveston, / And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend. / Ah, words that make me surfeit with delight! / What greater bliss can hap to Gaveston / Than live and be the favourite of a king!*” (1.1.1-5). The way these lines continue provides the best illustration of the slippage between

deployment of the term “friend” has led Mills to observe that the use of “favorite” and “minion” in these isolated instances does not carry a disparaging sense, which is probably true, but what the observation misses is that even when used by other characters the terms are not always necessarily disparaging, as for example in the already mentioned enumeration of royal and philosophical minions that Mortimer Senior offers in defense of Edward and his attachment to Gaveston. When Shannon finally asserts that “[w]hile kings could (and good kings must) have their counselors, Renaissance texts stress the difference between a monarch’s private friend and this counselor role” (93), we need to pause and see how exactly, if at all, this difference is maintained in Marlowe’s *Edward II*.⁶²

I have observed already that the barons and the bishops see the problem with Gaveston precisely in the fact that he has usurped the role that they think rightfully theirs, that of the king’s chief counselor.⁶³ They are the counselors, and the king should therefore listen to them and

some of the key terms in the play, as friendship and favoritism blend with love and the suggestive (homo)erotic embraces of Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander*: “Sweet prince, I come! these, these thy amorous lines / Might have enforc’d me to have swum from France, / And, like Leander, gasp’d upon the sand, / So thou wouldst smile, and take me in thine arms” (1.1.6-9).

⁶² Although accused of flattery and self-interest by his enemies (see, for instance, Mortimer Junior’s words: “Who loves thee, but a sort of flatterers?”; 2.2.171), Gaveston is very different from the figures of courtly flatterers, favorites, and parasites that populate later drama and that Jonson, for instance, in the opening scene of *Sejanus* describes with such gusto. It is true that the royal entertainments he envisions for Edward are meant to “draw the pliant king which way I please” (1.1.53), but instead of being pursued in the play, the suggestion is abandoned, and when later in the same scene Edward bestows various titles upon him, his response is identical to that of the barons: “My lord, these titles far exceed my worth” (1.1.158). What Gaveston gains by this sudden elevation is a lot of trouble; what he loses is his head.

⁶³ The office bestowed upon Gaveston by Edward is “Lord High Chamberlain, / Chief Secretary to the state and me” (1.1.155-156), and only then an earldom and the lordship of the Isle of Man. Alan Stewart rightly takes the role of the chief secretary not to be that of the Lord High Chamberlain, in which case these would be two offices, not one. Stewart is also right to observe that “[t]he implication of Marlowe’s [use of the term] secretary is that secretarial service to the state at the highest level has necessarily to be mediated in a personal relationship to the monarch—and that relationship in the case of Edward II and Gaveston, is one vulnerable to the joint accusations of bad counsel, theatricality and sodomy”; Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 179.

banish the “base flatterer” Gaveston (2.5.11). This tension is given additional emphasis in the play once Gaveston is removed and his place occupied primarily by Spenser Junior, and only secondarily by the only figure of humanist learning in the play, the scholar Baldock.⁶⁴ That both Gaveston and Spenser are meant to be seen as occupying the advisory office is suggested by the verbal echoes Marlowe introduces to underscore the similarity of their roles in relation to the king. For example, Gaveston’s aggressive advice, “No, threaten not, my lord, but pay them home! / Were I a king—” (1.4.26-27), is interrupted by Mortimer Junior, who reminds Gaveston of his hardly gentlemanly birth (1.4.29), and the scene continues with the barons and the bishops insisting that they are the king’s true counselors (1.4.44). Conscious of the boldness of his speech, Spenser Junior advises Edward to oppose the barons in an identical way:

Were I King Edward, England’s sovereign,
 Son to the lovely Eleanor of Spain,
 Great Edward Longshanks’ issue, would I bear
 These braves, this rage, and suffer uncontrolled
 These barons thus to beard me in my land (3.2.10-14, emphasis added).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Cf. Baldock’s description of himself at 3.3.243-244, where true virtue is associated with trained talents rather than birth: “My name is Baldock, and my gentry / I fetch’d from Oxford, not from heraldry.”

⁶⁵ The phrasing is not necessarily meant to indicate the evil nature of the proffered advice. We find it in other plays from the period given to characters who act as official advisors to the prince. Thus, for instance, Eristus, the first counselor in John Lyly’s *Midas*, begins his statement of advice by saying “Were I a king...” (John Lyly, *Gallathea and Midas*, ed. Anne Begor Lancashire [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969], 1.1.23). Lyly’s *Midas* is especially interesting in this connection since the theme of counsel is given great prominence in the play, but is not found at all in Lyly’s main source, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Eristus’s advice, that Midas should ask Bacchus to obtain for him the possession of his mistress, is not meant to be taken as especially wise, but at least it is not the advice that causes the king’s great misfortune. It is the third advisor, whom we would expect to be wise (cf., for instance, Eubulus in *Gorboduc*), that in Lyly’s play is rightly blamed for what happens afterwards.

The play further develops this theme by having the barons explicitly assume the office of advice as soon as they hear that Spenser Junior is the king's new companion. A herald is promptly sent to the king with the following request couched in terms of advice:

The barons, up in arms, by me salute
 Your highness with long life and happiness;
 And bid me say, as plainer to your grace,
 That if without effusion of blood
 You will this grief have ease and remedy,
 That from your princely person you remove
 This Spenser, as a putrifying branch
 That deads the royal vine, whose golden leaves
 Empale your princely head, your diadem,
 Whose brightness such pernicious upstarts dim,
 Say they, and lovingly advise your grace
 To cherish virtue and nobility,
 And have old servitors in high esteem,
 And shake off smooth dissembling flatterers. (3.2.159-174)⁶⁶

To cherish “nobility” means, as the text subtly suggests, to cherish the nobles, the peers who “lovingly” advise their king by giving him an ultimatum. Virtue resides in blood, not in the

⁶⁶ The imagery in this passage serves to identify Spenser's role with Gaveston's as it echoes the device that Mortimer Junior describes earlier in the play as his contribution to the stately triumph organized in honor of Gaveston's return, where Edward is a lofty cedar tree climbed by Gaveston: “And by the bark a canker creeps me up, / And gets unto the highest bough of all” (2.2.18-19).

naturally able person regardless of his status and background, as the first English secular play, Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece*, claimed and the culture of humanism wishfully imagined. As opposed to Medwall's interlude, however, here the nobleman can argue his case only by vilifying the opponent.⁶⁷

More significant in this speech is the coupling of "love" and "advice." It is a strategy that characterizes Marlowe's deployment of language throughout *Edward II*, as love, friendship, and advice literally infect each other and make any critical attempt to uncouple these terms quite impossible. *Edward II* renders problematic not just the distinction between sodomy and friendship that recent criticism, particularly the influential work of Alan Bray, has described as being marked by an unresolvable tension; the play in fact destabilizes the very notions of friendship and love by having them invoked again and again by Edward and his favorites, by Isabella, and by the barons. This destabilization is so persistent that it cannot but be taken as deliberate. It is so intense that by the end of the play it is no longer clear, if at any point it has been, where ideal friendship stops and other kinds of friendship, the profit- and benefit-based one among them, begin and what kind of friendship should be preferred, especially in the politicized context of the court.

This, I hope to have shown, is something that Richard Edwards flirts with in *Damon and Pythias*, but in Marlowe's *Edward II* the flirtation becomes a maddening infatuation that turns

⁶⁷ See the debate between Gaius and Cornelius in *Fulgens and Lucrece*, where it is the nobleman Cornelius who is vilified by his opponent, the plebeian Gaius, who, although mostly arguing in a negative way and not furnishing proof for his claims, seems eventually to win. This is the brilliantly ironic moment of Medwall's lovely interlude. In Marlowe's *Edward II*, especially in the latter part of the play, Mortimer Junior resembles some of Marlovian military heroes in his aspiration for power and desire for kingship without regard for the legitimate line of succession, but his dissembling villainy, his hiring of murderers, and his reliance on sexual liaison as the route to political power distance him from the figures such as, for example, Tamburlaine.

the language of the entire play into a major semantic minefield. Everybody in Marlowe's play is a friend and is in need of friends, everybody loves and is loved, and, ironically, everybody appears rather "sweet," as this adjective is liberally attached to all and sundry: "sweet sovereign" (2.5.100), "sweet lady" (4.2.17), "sweet uncle" (2.4.11), "sweet favourite" (3.3.44), "sweet friend" (1.4.113 and elsewhere), "sweet Gaveston" (2.4.12), "sweet Spenser" (sweet to Edward at 3.2.147 and to Baldock at 4.6.111), but also "sweet Sir John" (2.2.31), "sweet Lancaster" (2.4.41) and even "sweet Mortimer," first addressed so by Isabella (2.4.60) and then by sweet Lancaster himself (3.3.66). And yet *Edward II* is anything but sweet, unless we take the term to mean also pleasing to the ear and, in its sweetness, always potentially deceptive.⁶⁸

Similarly, the language of friendship in the play is deployed on all sides and in opposing contexts. To take Edward's reliance on it—often, but not always, supplemented by the metaphors of sameness and spiritual union from the classical tradition yet complicated somewhat, as we have seen, by the use of the terms "favorite" and "minion" as well—and to elevate it to *the* language of friendship in the play means not to notice how friendship and counsel actually work in the play. Early in the play, the barons use the term "friends" ironically to indicate the hatred they nurture for Gaveston (1.1.129) and Lancaster refers to his "friendship" with Mortimer Junior, which he is ready to sacrifice, so at least he claims, if Mortimer is won over by the soliciting queen (1.4.239). Mortimer warns that Gaveston may purchase friends in Ireland (1.4.260) and oppose the barons, a strategy he does not condemn but merely fears.⁶⁹ Instead of

⁶⁸ See *OED*, s.v. sweet, 4.a. On the early modern rhetoric of sweetness, particularly between male friends, see Jeffrey Masten, "Toward a Queer Address: The Taste of Letters and Early Modern Male Friendship," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10.3 (2004): 367-384.

insisting on the importance of a single ideal friend, even Edward grieves that Gaveston has only him: “Poor Gaveston, that hast no friend but me!” (2.2.220). When Gaveston, forcefully taken from his appointed guardians by Warwick, accuses Warwick of treachery, he does so by saying the king, Warwick’s “friend,” is thus wronged (3.1.1), and James, who had been appointed to guard Gaveston, stresses the point by invoking the same term: “Your lordship doth dishonour to yourself, / And wrong our lord, your honourable friend” (3.1.10). Edward is hopeful that he and Valois “will soon be friends again” (3.2.69) and, after his victory over the barons, he calls those who fought along his side “my friends” (3.3.77). On the other side, Isabella complains that her “friends” in France have failed her (4.2.1), but Younger Mortimer assures her that despite the loss of “many friends” in the battle against the king (4.2.54), she still has “friends” (4.2.57) in England. Edward’s proud boasting about his and his friends’ victory—“Thus, after many threats of wrathful war, / Triumpheth England’s Edward with his friends, / And triumph Edward with his friends uncontroll’d!” (4.3.1-3)—is matched on the opposite side by Isabella passionately rallying her “loving friends,” her “kindest friends,” her “friends at home” (4.4.1-4).⁷⁰

It becomes especially clear in the final act of the play, where Prince Edward emerges as a capable future ruler of the realm, that the language of friendship in Marlowe’s play is closely linked to the question of access to the king’s body and, consequently, to his thoughts (counsels), his decisions, his patronage and power. The point is handled with brilliant dramatic irony when

⁶⁹ Even in Edward’s longing for Gaveston the language of friendship is saturated with images of economic exchange: “He’s gone, and for his absence thus I mourn: / Did never sorrow go so near my heart / As doth the want of my sweet Gaveston; / And, could my crown’s revenue bring him back, / I would freely give it to his enemies, / And think I gain’d, having bought so dear a friend” (1.4.307-312).

⁷⁰ So passionately, in fact, that Mortimer Junior feels she ought to show more control and interrupts her with considerable condescension: “Nay, madam, if you be a warrior, / You must not grow so passionate in speeches” (4.4.15-16).

Mortimer carries Prince Edward away by force, in order to stop the Earl of Kent, the deposed king's repentant brother, from approaching and thus influencing the future king. Isabella justifies this action by exclaiming "Brother Edmund, strive not; we are his friends" (5.2.116), at once dissemblingly addressing Edmund as still her brother and severing the natural bond to her son, of whom she is now merely—or perhaps ideally—a friend.⁷¹ Marlowe reveals the nature of that friendship by opening the next scene near Kenilworth Castle, where the imprisoned and humiliated Edward, covered in "foul excrements" (5.3.26), is comforted by his keeper and later one of his murderers, Matrevis: "My lord, be not pensive; we are your friends" (5.3.1).

With so many friends in the play, it does not seem right to claim that kingship and friendship in Marlowe's play are hopelessly at odds and, moreover, that Marlowe's dramatic statement captures a larger truth about the period's politics and its political thought, at least in England. Shannon observes that humanists unanimously recommended friendship to princes as a key to good rule, but claims nonetheless that "a sixteenth-century king could not enter into that private, 'soveraigne' bond without becoming an icon of 'improper' sovereignty'" (98). If that sovereign bond is taken to mean the absolute exclusion of everything else, as the most extreme understanding (more ours than theirs) of humanism-inspired friendship would have it, then friendship and sovereignty do stand fundamentally at odds, but that is clearly not what Marlowe's play dramatizes. It understands friendship in a much more complex manner that reflects the rich and wide scope of the term, authorized not just by the limited understanding of the Ciceronian legacy but also by the discourses of friendship that preceded it in medieval

⁷¹ The whole scene shows Isabella practicing the art of dissembling, with great success, as Mortimer notes: "Finely dissembled! Do so still, sweet queen" (5.2.76).

England and that continued to complicate themselves in the changing political and economic conditions of the sixteenth century.⁷²

Drawing on the work of Mervyn James,⁷³ Alan Stewart makes a similar point when he claims that in their endorsement of classical *amicitia* English humanists “had to negotiate a strong alternative native tradition of ‘friendship’ which explicitly accepted that relationships between men should be cemented by the exchange of women,” noting further that even a relationship to a benefactor or patron, of special interest to him, might be described in terms of friendship.⁷⁴ Yet the most influential humanist accounts of friendship, including for instance Elyot’s well-known retelling of the story of Titus and Gisippus in *The Governour*, involve an exchange of women. Such exchanges in the fiction from the period more often threaten the stability of the friendly relation than they cement it (as, for example, Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*), because this simply makes for a more interesting story, but what is important to note that the notion of woman as a property exchanged between two friends is not something foreign to humanist discussions of friendship. In Marlowe’s play we see how these different uses of woman—as a cementing and as a threatening force—are in fact combined.

⁷² A good recent survey that attempts to do justice to the complexity of the term “friend” in the period is Keith Thomas’s chapter “Friendship and Sociability” from his book, *The Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfilment in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 187-225.

⁷³ See his *Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁷⁴ Stewart, *Close Readers*, pp. 124-125. See also in this connection Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer’s Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

Gaveston is placed between Isabella, who is presented as his rival, and Edward's niece, whose marriage to Gaveston is designed to strengthen the bond between the king and his male friend.⁷⁵

That friends and princes are far from constituting a contradiction in terms is suggested in one of the most suggestive short discussions of friendship and counsel in Renaissance England, found in Francis Bacon's *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, a book that Bacon first published in 1597, expanded in 1612, and expanded and revised again in 1625.⁷⁶ As in the plays considered in this chapter, counsel and friendship are closely intertwined, and Bacon strives to understand how, in the tradition of humanist scholarly and political culture he so impressively embodies, they might work together.⁷⁷ Bacon opens his essay "Of Counsell" by giving us an image we would be more likely to associate with the classical idea of *amicitia*. "The greatest Trust, betweene Man and Man," he writes, "is the Trust of *Giving Counsell*":

For in other Confidences, Men commit the parts of life; Their Lands, their Goods, their Children, their Credit, some particular Affair: But to such, as they make their *Counsellours*, they commit the whole. (63)

⁷⁵ In addition to the obvious struggle between them, the rival roles of Gaveston and Isabella are underlined in the play by echoing words and imagery. Thus, Gaveston's desire for poets and musicians that will "draw the pliant king which way I please" (1.1.52-53) should be compared with the following lines by Isabella: "From my embracements thus he breaks away. / O, that mine arms could close this isle about, / That I might pull him to me where I would" (2.4.16-18).

⁷⁶ References will be to the Oxford Francis Bacon edition, vol. XV, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985 [2000]).

⁷⁷ Shannon ("Monarchs, Minions, and 'Sovereigne' Friendship," pp. 98-99) references Bacon only to comment on the fact that in his essay of friendship he does not mention the term "minion," which, she claims, suggests it was a negative term Bacon did not want to associate with friendship. But Bacon's mention of the equivalent terms "favorite" and "privado" only serves to point out, as we shall see, that most people misunderstand friendships between kings and their subjects.

The essay proceeds to explain how counsel, inseparably conjoined with kings (64), is to be taken and how a prince should select his counselors, “of the *Inconveniencies of Counsell*, and of the *Remedies*” (64). The conclusion is a kind of absolute mutuality: “But the best *Remedy* is, if *Princes* know their *Counsellors*, as well as their *Counsellours* know Them” (66). In contrast to the idea of the sovereign as an isolated, peerless figure, Bacon develops a rich allegorical account of the marriage between counsel and sovereignty as the marriage between Jupiter and Metis. Fully sexualized—with begetting or impregnation, the womb of counsel, and the bringing forth—the “monstrous Fable” (64), as Bacon calls it, is deeply disturbing, since in the figure of Jupiter eating Metis up and giving birth to his wisdom-child (Pallas Armed) himself the marriage of counsel and sovereignty obliterates the difference between the self and the other. By turning a marriage between a man and a woman into a masculine singularity capable of reproducing itself in the ideal form of wisdom, the fable conjures up a fantasy similar to the fantasy of ideal friendship, where identity and difference blur in a marriage of two masculine souls.⁷⁸

While here joining sovereignty with counsel, in the essay “Of Frenship” Bacon joins sovereignty with friendship. Solitude, he argues, is not for men, but for beasts. Having insisted on the importance of this general point, equally applicable to all men, Bacon quickly moves on to take up the question of friendship in relation to princes. He is conscious of the special status of

⁷⁸ The blurring occurs in the shift from *counsell* to *council* in this section of Bacon’s essay, not to say Bacon’s *counsel*, where the fable begins with *counsel* and ends with *council*, two terms that, it has been observed already, are not clearly distinguished, or at least not fully divorced, in the period, in English as in other languages. This merging of one and many, of counsel and council, corresponds to the problem that, in relation to the vocabulary of friendship, I have described as active in Marlowe’s *Edward II*. The fable of “Metis, or Counsel” is also found in Bacon’s *De sapientia veterum* (*Of the Wisdom of the Ancients*), where “[t]his monstrous and at first sight very foolish fable” is used to make the same point about government; see *The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. John M. Robertson on the basis of the edition by Ellis and Spedding (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1905), p. 857. Spedding’s preface, reprinted in this volume, notes that *Metis sive consilium* is found in the same form in a fragment called by Spedding *Cogitationes de scientia humana* (815).

princes—"the distance of their Fortune, from that of their Subjects and Servants" (81)—but instead of using this knowledge to deny the possibility of kingship's and friendship's coexistence Bacon uses it to illustrate the power and prevalence of friendship in human society. The language, interestingly, is of fruit and purchase: great kings and monarchs crave "this *Fruit of Friendship*" even though "they purchase it, many times, at the hazard of their owne Safety" (81). In order to make friends, princes are forced to elevate someone to the position of near-equality ("to be as it were Companions, and almost Equals to themselves," 82), a position described, he goes on to note, in the modern languages by the terms "*Favorites, or Privadoes*" (82).⁷⁹ Yet the more appropriate term, Bacon argues, would be the Roman name *participes curarum* since it is in the cares of princes that the favorites participate as much as in the pleasures (let us not forget, for example, that Edward, although himself eventually murdered, survives all of his favorites in the play). Favoritism and friendship blend as Bacon observes that this turning of princes to other persons is not a characteristic merely of "Weake and Passionate *Princes*" but of "the Wisest, and most Politique that ever reigned" (82). They joined themselves to their servants calling them "*Frends*" and allowing others to call them by the same name: "Using the Word which is received between Private Men" (82).

⁷⁹ In the fable "Endymion, or the Favourite" in *Of the Wisdom of the Ancients*, Bacon develops the idea that princes "admit to familiar intercourse" (833) men who are, like Endymion, sleepy, quiet, and complying because of the suspicions princes have of overly curious and observant people. With such people, princes put aside the masks forced upon them by the burden of their public duty and enjoy the company of the favorite in a place resembling the cave in which Endymion sleeps and in which the moon visits him. Favoritism here is seen in a positive light, as something that, like true friendship, proceeds from affection rather than utility: "And it is true that favourites of this class are commonly prosperous in their private fortunes; for princes though they may not raise them to honours, yet since their favour springs from true affection and not from considerations of utility, they generally enrich them with their bounty" (834).

Such bonds, Bacon concludes after providing a long list of princes who have had their favorites, are not necessarily in conflict with the other bonds princes form. “[T]hey were *Princes*,” he notes, “that had Wives, Sonnes, Nephews; And yet all these could not supply the Comfort of *Frendship*” (83). Their felicity, in short, is “but as an Halfe Peece” that is made entire only by the existence of a friend (83). The best friends, however, are those “able to give a Man Counsell” (84). Recalling the discussion in the essay “Of Counsell,” the essay “Of Frendship” goes on to elaborate the link between the two. One’s friend is one’s best counselor, better than one’s own self: “For there is no such *Flatterer*, as is a Mans Selfe” (85). The flatterer and the friend, the self and the counselor thus ultimately merge in Bacon’s meditation on friendship, favoritism, and counsel, indebted to the ideals of the humanist tradition yet seasoned with observations of practical statecraft and historical example. There is no drama, Bacon closes the essay by saying, without friendship: “If he have not a *Frend*, he may quit the Stage” (87).

Bacon’s discussion of friendship and favoritism in his two essays accords with the arguments of the recent critical work devoted to the same issues. Thus, in his study of literary representations of favoritism in early modern England, Curtis Perry observes that “[the] idea of monarchy uncorrupted by the personal makes more sense as an ideological fantasy than as a practical or proscriptive idea of government.” He notes “the dissonance between this fantasy of rule and the emphasis elsewhere in Tudor political writing upon the importance of intimacy for securing sound and reliable counsel for the monarch,” commenting further that “intimacy and friendship” represent “an important and persistent way of imagining the laudable relationships that make up the king’s service and provide much needed advice.” Perry therefore finds in early modern England a significant and deep-set paradox, embodied in the fact that the importance of

king's personal relationships is stressed within the same culture that kept fantasizing "that he or she might be able to rule without them."⁸⁰

Friendship and counsel in Marlowe's *Edward II* work in a way that resembles this mixed, dissonant, and perhaps even partially nostalgic conception perceivable in Bacon's *Essayes*. The play shows us a monarch who is at the end completely alone, yet who throughout the play forges bonds of what he thinks is true friendship, as he marries his favorite to his niece, daughter to the Earl of Gloucester and herself in charge of a household from which Spenser and Baldock will emerge as the king's new favorites. And so do other characters. As all of these ties are violently dissolved in the play—by the deposition and destruction of the king and of his friends, by the elimination of the barons, and finally by the undoing of the natural bond between Isabella and her son—the world of normalcy that ensues emerges, we should not be surprised, from "the council-chamber" (5.6.20). It is there that the young king has gone, Isabella informs us, "[t]o crave the aid and succour of his peers" (5.6.21), and it is from that space—distant and unavailable to view—that one after another enter onto the stage the king's new friends. They are significantly unnamed—the First Lord and the Second Lord—but they make sure that justice is served and that the realm continues under the new king, who wears the marks of "grief and innocency" (5.6.102). In the place of bodies with names attached to them and with violent passions moving them, we see the cold faces of the smooth apparatus of the state in which both friendship and counsel continue, but in which they no longer affect us.

⁸⁰ Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 8.

CHAPTER 5

Out of Season: Language, Politics, and Counsel in Shakespeare's *King Lear*

In one of the many beating scenes in *The Comedy of Errors*, Dromio of Syracuse protests that he has been “beaten out of season” by his master, Antipholus of Syracuse, and that the injustice he has suffered has no parallel.¹ The assertion prompts a long exchange between the servant and the master filled with puns yet designed to establish by strict logical reasoning whether there is a time for all things (2.2.64), including beating and jesting, or whether human actions are sometimes bound to happen out of season, without regard for occasion. True to the comic demand, Dromio attempts to argue his side of the question, that there is not a time for every kind of action, by introducing “the plain bald pate of Father Time himself” (2.2.68-69) as his chief example. “There’s no time for a man,” Dromio claims, “to recover his hair that grows bald by nature” (2.2.71-72). As the argument continues, lack of hair is associated with wisdom and wit whereas the presence of “so plentiful an excrement” (2.2.78) is perceived as common—a blessing that Time bestows even on beasts. As in the case of Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*, the discussion of hair and baldness quickly acquires unpleasant sexual connotations and bald pates become signs not of wit but of venereal disease.² In *The Comedy of Errors*, however, “hairy men” are not just witless; they are also “plain dealers” since their lack of wit is taken by

¹ William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, based on the Oxford edition, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 2.2.47. Further references will be given parenthetically. All Shakespeare citations, except for *King Lear*, will be from this edition.

² Cf. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1.3.77ff.

Antipholus to mean a lack of cunning, deception, and what in the period would have been called policy. “The plainer dealer, the sooner lost,” concludes Dromio, observing that the plain dealer “loseth it [the hair] in a kind of jollity” (2.2.89). Casual plain dealing, in other words, might be fun, but it comes, then as now, at a significant risk.

The sexual humor of this scene relies heavily on its moral and political undertones. Plain dealing occurring out of season and without regard for decorum, we have seen in the first chapter of this dissertation, is unlikely to produce beneficial political results. To be plain, to be bold does produce a kind of moral jollity for the speaker, but the effects of such hairy wit might only reveal its essential political vulnerability—its presence nothing but a useless and often annoying excrement. Yet to say that the plain stuff of *The Comedy of Errors* is merely a comic variation on an otherwise serious theme is to underestimate the degree to which the affective and the political overlap in the culture from which this play emerges, as the preceding chapter, focused on Richard Edwards’s *Damon and Pythias* and Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II*, attempted to argue. We see this overlap often and in many different places, including the mainstream works of Renaissance political philosophy that turn to antiquity in an effort to tease out relevant political meanings for the present.

Wishing to explain the role of plain speaking in the world of politics, Francis Bacon in his *De sapientia veterum liber* links it, as we would expect, to the question of counsel on the one hand and the tradition of *parrhesia* on the other, but he also sexualizes the link. *De sapientia veterum liber*, first published in Latin in 1609, was on account of its interest and popularity soon translated into English, by Arthur Gorges, under the title *The Wisdom of the Ancients* (1619). Bacon opens his little book with the story of the Trojan prophetess Cassandra, seeing in her the

image of *parrhesia*.³ Gorges translates this Greek term as “divination,” but in modern critical and historical scholarship it is more familiar in renderings such as “free speech,” “fearless speech,” or “true speech.”⁴ For Bacon, the moral of Cassandra’s story is what it tells us about counsel given out of season, where counsel exemplifies *parrhesia* in its most exalted role.

What exactly does the story of Cassandra tell us? Deluded by her “many shifts & cunning sleights,” Apollo gives Cassandra the gift of prophesying in the hope that his sexual desire for her will be gratified.⁵ Instead, she rejects his suit, having deceived him into promising her the irrevocable gift of prophecy. Angered and frustrated, all Apollo can do is retaliate by predetermining the effects of Cassandra’s prophecies: “that shee should euer foretell the trueth, but neuer be beleued” (A1v). The truth she dispenses will always be at odds with the faith it encounters. Thus, even the prophecies of the ruin of her own country will meet with disbelief. Bacon sees in this story “the vnprofitable liberty of vntimely admonitions and counselles” (A1v). Cassandra’s unwillingness to submit herself to the god of harmony has deprived her of the qualities she could have gained from Apollo: to know “the method and measure of affaires, the grace and grautie of discourse, the differences between the more vulgar eares, and the due times

³ The fable is entitled “Cassandra, sive parresia”; Francis Bacon, *De sapientia veterum liber* (Londini: Robertus Barkerus, 1609), sig. B1r.

⁴ See Luigi Spina, *Il cittadino alla tribuna: Diritto e libertà nell’Atene democratica* (Napoli: Liguori Editore, 1986); Giuseppe Scarpato, *Parrhesia greca, parrhesia cristiana* (Brescia: Paideia, 2001); Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2001); David Colclough, *Freedom of Speech in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). On the link between *parrhesia* and counsel, see Colclough, *Freedom of Speech*, pp. 62-76. Scarpato notes that in the Latin culture of the Christian Middle Ages the term was translated as *fiducia*, *constantia*, *confidentia*. In the rhetorical tradition we find the term *licentia*. Renaissance English offers no stable translation either, and for the most part occurrences of *parrhesia* are therefore to be sought in context rather than in specific verbal references.

⁵ “Cassandra, or Diuination,” in Francis Bacon, *The Wisedome of the Ancients*, trans. Arthur Gorges (London: John Bill, 1619), sig. A1r. Further references will be given parenthetically.

when to speake and when to be silent” (A1v-A2r). As a result of this failure of submission, Cassandra’s gift—her knowledge of the future—becomes apparent and acknowledged, if at all, only in the aftermath, when things are ruined and when it is too late to do anything. A parallel insight from Cicero closes Bacon’s explication of the fable: “Cato (saith he) iudgeth profoundly, but in the meane time damnifies the State, for he speakes as in the commonwealth of *Plato*, and not as in the dregs of *Romulus*” (A2v). The wise Cato, like the wise Hythloday and the stubborn but knowledgeable Cassandra, is a political idealist whose philosophy, innocent of all rhetorical knowledge, can work only in Utopia.

As in his *Essayes*, Bacon’s understanding of counsel in *The Wisdom of the Ancients* is stated in strongly gendered metaphors in which relations of power between the sovereign and the counselor, the god and the prophet, are figured as images of sexual subjection and submission. The story of Cassandra, however, is not without irony: she wins the gift of prophecy by dissimulation and rhetorical manipulation, but is unable to use her prophetic speech in accordance with the demands of occasion. She can have either knowledge or rhetorical ability, either wisdom or prudence, not both, yet truly efficacious speech and truly successful counsel, Bacon seems to suggest, can only be encountered when wisdom speaks in season. What he fails to tell us is how seasoned and decorous speech is to be recognized as a piece of good counsel rather than an instance of manipulative rhetoric, how we can distinguish between true *parrhesia* and the kind of *parrhesia* that is just another rhetorical effect, an instance of plain but carefully wrought style. Cassandra may be conscious of her own knowledge, but the only way to make that knowledge efficacious in a social context is by rhetorically manipulating the audience. We

do not seem to have moved beyond the problem as stated in the disagreement between More and Hythloday, the scholastic and civic philosophy, early in the sixteenth century.⁶

Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the focus of this chapter, comes onto the stage when all of the above questions, still unresolved and still controversial, are actively circulating in the intellectual and theatrical culture of the period. In the course of the 1590s, plays such as *Thomas of Woodstock* and *A Knack to Know a Knave* dramatized precisely the problem of plainness and honesty in the realm of monarchical politics. *Thomas of Woodstock*, closely linked to Shakespeare's *Richard II* and to Marlowe's *Edward II*, provides an extended dramatic conceit of plainness in the figure of Plain Thomas, the King's uncle, who speaks and dresses plainly—and then gets killed.⁷ In *A Knack to Know a Knave*, the figure of Honesty, familiar from the tradition of the morality play, rubs shoulders with characters from historical drama and argues for the value of free and truthful speaking in a well-governed commonwealth.⁸ Earlier in the century, Thomas Elyot devoted an entire dialogue to this question, entitling it *Pasquil the Plain*.⁹

⁶ Foucault describes prophecy as a mode of truth-telling that should be distinguished from *parrhesia* proper, and further distinguishes the figure of the parrhesiast from the figure of the sage as well as the teacher; see Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth (The Government of Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 15. However, Foucault's "four major modalities of truth-telling" in antiquity, namely "prophetic, wise, technical, and ethical or parrhesiastic" (26) are not always easily distinguishable, nor should it be assumed that they were consistently understood as discrete in the Renaissance. Hythloday is a case in point; he is clearly presented in *Utopia* as a wise man, yet he also embodies the ideal of *parrhesia*. Foucault would probably grant as much given his observation that "there is a tendency for the mode of truth-telling characteristic of wisdom and the mode of truth-telling characteristic of *parrhēsia* to come together, join together, to link up with each other in a sort of philosophical modality of truth-telling" (28). In a parallel fashion, Bacon sets up prophecy as a fable that is then interpreted as *parrhesia*, and exemplified in *counsel* as its concrete political form.

⁷ See *Thomas of Woodstock, or Richard the Second, Part One*, ed. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

⁸ See *A most pleasant and merie new Comedie, intituled, A Knacke to knowe a Knaue* (London: Richard Jones, 1594).

As this chapter will show, Shakespeare, too, takes up similar questions and invites us to think of these texts, particularly the plays, as he is rewriting the anonymous chronicle history of *King Leir*, in which counselor figures feature prominently. Rather than deal with counsel plainly, that is to say explicitly, Shakespeare, I argue, disperses it across his play, associating it with the figures of Kent, Gloucester, the Fool, and Cordelia rather than with a single character, while using counsel's link to plainness to construct a series of prominent dramatic metaphors and sets of interlinked theatrical meanings. Counsel in *King Lear* becomes a charged space where the virtues and dangers of plain speech are carefully weighed. The dramatist's intention does not seem to be to decide on the long-standing question of counsel but rather to use this question for a complex dramatic purpose. The plain poetry, the "unpoetic poetry" of the final scenes of *King Lear*, often commented upon and admired by critics, comes out of a subtle engagement with the question of counsel that reverberates through the dramatic and intellectual traditions of the sixteenth century. Speaking out of season, on the other hand, becomes the central metaphor of the play, most powerfully embodied in the storm scenes, with the figure of sovereignty exposed to the mercy of unseasonable weather. I set out to recover the main threads that, informed by the link between counsel and plainness, support Shakespeare's rich dramatic texture in *King Lear* and to speculate, toward the end, about the relationship between poetry and political speech the play ultimately envisions.

In this attempt, two tasks seem especially important. The first task is to connect the discussion of *parrhesia*, a concept inherited from antiquity, to discussions of plainness as a

⁹ See *Pasquil the Playne* (Londini: In aedibus Thomae Bertheleti, 1533). An extensive recent discussion of this dialogue is found in Greg Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 181-195.

concept that in the Renaissance transcends the merely rhetorical and absorbs an array of cultural and political meanings central to our understanding of the political, religious, and literary culture of the period.¹⁰ In the field of early modern studies, this would mean connecting the more recent scholarly contributions such as David Colclough's *Freedom of Speech in Early Stuart England* (2005) with the scholarship that, under a somewhat different name, is in fact interested in similar questions.¹¹ An outstanding example of this scholarship would be Kenneth J. E. Graham's book *The Performance of Conviction: Plainness and Rhetoric in the Early English Renaissance*,¹² but also, as will become apparent in my discussion of *King Lear*, a number of other studies that subject to analysis specific literary texts without necessarily venturing to speculate on the applicability of their conclusions to a wider set of literary texts, or to the entirety of early modern literary culture. The second task, more complicated than daunting, is interpretative in nature. It is to show how these intertwined and mutually enabling intellectual traditions—of *parrhesia* or true and fearless speech, of plain speaking, and of counsel—work in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and what consequences their intricate intertwining might have for our understanding of the play. This

¹⁰ The history of *parrhesia* in antiquity has been traced most scrupulously by Michel Foucault, whose work has recently given the concept prominence in historical, theoretical, and critical scholarship. For a couple of recent examples, see Reinier Leushuis, "Montaigne *Parrhesiastes*: Foucault's Fearless Speech and Truth-telling in the *Essays*," and Virginia Krause, "Confession or *Parrhesia*? Foucault after Montaigne," both in *Montaigne After Theory, Theory after Montaigne*, ed. Zahi Zalloua (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2009), pp. 100-121 and 142-160 respectively. For Foucault's work on the topic, see Foucault, *Fearless Speech*; Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982-1983*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*.

¹¹ Colclough, *Freedom of Speech in Early Stuart England*. The crucial part of this study was published previously as David Colclough, "*Parrhesia*: The Rhetoric of Free Speech in Early Modern England," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 17.2 (1999): 177-212.

¹² Kenneth J. E. Graham, *The Performance of Conviction: Plainness and Rhetoric in the Early English Renaissance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994). Graham's reading of *King Lear*, included in the book, was published previously as a separate essay entitled "'Without the form of justice': Plainness and the Performance of Love in *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42.4 (1991): 438-461.

interpretative work must take into account both Shakespeare's main dramatic source, the anonymous *King Leir*, and the dramatic tradition from which this anonymous play as well as Shakespeare's play emerge if we are to understand how certain subdued motifs, episodes, or themes might be more central to *King Lear* than we have been willing to allow, or even recognize.

That such an analysis needs to be undertaken seems to me beyond question. First, because the issue of counsel in *King Lear* has not been accorded the attention it deserves despite the enormous mass of critical material that has accumulated around the play. When given proper attention, on the other hand, counsel has been understood as a question upon which the play delivers a simple and unambiguous judgment. Had King Lear taken counsel before he divided the kingdom, it is argued, everything would have been fine.¹³ This conclusion, the ensuing analysis will show, does not sufficiently account for the role counsel plays in *King Lear* beyond an act of advice taking that we imagine Lear as having failed to perform in some prehistory of the play. Such a simple political lesson could not be extracted even from the much less sophisticated earlier play, the anonymous *King Leir*, in which everything turns out fine despite the fact that the king does not listen to his wisest and most faithful counselor. Counsel in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, although motivated by the earlier play, has a more extensive role in that it introduces the question of plainness not just into the world but also the language and the theatrical makeup of the play.

¹³ See Andrew Hadfield, "The Power and Rights of the Crown in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*: 'The King—the King's to Blame,'" *Review of English Studies* 54.217 (2003): 566-586.

The second justification for what follows is found in the fact that *King Lear* has not been seen by critics who have in recent years turned to the problem of counsel in Shakespeare as a promising object of inquiry. In the course of considering counsel and persuasion in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, David Colclough observes that in this play "the forms and processes of counsel" are "submitted to an almost unremittingly bleak scrutiny," and proceeds to note that similar concerns can be found in *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Coriolanus*, and *Richard II*, without mentioning *King Lear*.¹⁴ The conclusions he reaches about *Julius Caesar* are in fact, when it comes to political language, similar to the conclusions I offer below about language, politics, and counsel in *King Lear*. But first things first.

King Leir and King Lear: Rewriting Counsel

When in *Utopia* More rejects Hythloday's claim that speaking truly and wisely, even if out of season, is the preferred approach to courtly politics, he uses, it will be remembered, a theatrical comparison. Hythloday, according to More, is the actor who interrupts a successful comic performance in order to deliver a weighty tragic oration, thus marring the play in hand and turning its stage performance into a mess.¹⁵ If there is a famous example of a comedy that by the force of a single speech act is turned into a mess, and then into tragedy, it is surely Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Both in the chronicles and in the earlier anonymous play *The True Chronicle History*

¹⁴ David Colclough, "Talking to the Animals: Persuasion, Counsel and Their Discontents in *Julius Caesar*," in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, ed. David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 217-233, at p. 218.

¹⁵ Thomas More, *A fruteful and pleasaunt worke of the beste state of a publyque weale, and of the newe yle called Vtopia*, trans. Ralph Robinson (London: Abraham Vele, 1551), sig. F6r.

of *King Lear*, the story of Lear ends happily: he is reunited both with Cordelia and with his throne. Shakespeare's choice to have both Lear and Cordelia die before the end of the play necessarily turns our interest back to the cause of the tragedy as depicted in the opening scene, where the division of the kingdom goes awry because of Cordelia's failure to speak in accordance with the king's expectations. It also prompts us, I would like to suggest, to pay more attention to the way language is deployed throughout the play, particularly by those characters who occasionally occupy the office of counsel and are explicitly associated with Cordelia. The most important among these characters is the Earl of Kent.

The opening scene of Shakespeare's *King Lear* has been analyzed in great detail and at great length by both literary scholars and political scientists, but these analyses, as we might expect, have produced little agreement. Lear has been blamed for political shortsightedness and praised for political foresight on account of his decision to divide the kingdom among his daughters.¹⁶ Most of these analyses turn to *King Lear* as a tightly closed text, in dialogue only

¹⁶ A representative, and influential, early statement of Lear's folly is found in A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), pp. 250-251, who does allow some space for gradation: "In fact his whole original plan [i.e. to divide the kingdom among the three daughters], though foolish and rash, was not a 'hideous rashness' or incredible folly. If carried out it would have had no such consequences as followed its alteration [i.e. the disinheriting of Cordelia]. It would probably have led quickly to war, but not to the agony which culminated in the storm upon the heath." In contrast to this, Harry V. Jaffa, approaching the play from the standpoint of political philosophy, claims that "Lear's action in dividing the kingdom was not arbitrary or foolish—it was an action predestined by the very means required to bring unity to the kingdom." According to this interpretation, Lear is "truly wise in the ways of politics" and is "the greatest of Shakespeare's kings"; see Harry V. Jaffa, "The Limits of Politics: An Interpretation of *King Lear*, Act I, Scene 1," *American Political Science Review* 51.2 (1957): 405-427, at pp. 412, 415, 405. Jaffa's article, alongside an article on *Othello* published in the same journal by Allan Bloom, prompted a lively and still relevant exchange on political readings of Shakespeare's plays: see Sigurd Burckhardt, "English Bards and APSR Reviewers," *American Political Science Review* 54.1 (1960): 158-166; Allan Bloom, "Political Philosophy and Poetry," *American Political Science Review* 54.2 (1960): 457-464; Sigurd Burckhardt, "On Reading Ordinary Prose: A Reply to Allan Bloom," *American Political Science Review* 54.2 (1960): 465-470; Allan Bloom, "A Restatement," *American Political Science Review* 54.2 (1960): 471-473. A more literary reading of the opening scene that defends Lear's actions is provided by G. R. Elliott, "The Initial Contrast in *Lear*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 58.2 (1959): 251-263. Elliott accuses earlier critics of "reading back into the initial episodes [of the play] the subsequent folly of Lear" (258), thereby destroying the dramatic

with itself—or even only one of its two textual versions—and try to figure out on the basis of what they find in the text how the opening scene ought to be read and what we possibly need to imagine as occurring before the opening scene in order to make sense of the text.¹⁷ This is, of course, a fully legitimate approach (fine word—legitimate). What it chooses to ignore, however, is the fact that Shakespeare’s dramatization of the Lear story is only one in a series of always slightly variable treatments and that its meanings are therefore in an active dialogue, as so often happens in Shakespeare, with this textual and cultural history.

When viewed in the light of the anonymous *Leir* play, in particular, the opening scene of Shakespeare’s *Lear* shows deliberate rhetorical complication. The deliberateness is all the more striking when we realize, as recent scholarship has, that Shakespeare read the earlier play very carefully and borrowed from it in a variety of ways. Richard Knowles, for instance, scrutinizes “the almost hundred details common to these two plays but found in virtually none of the other sources,”¹⁸ and logically concludes that the reading of the old play and the composition of the

contrast Shakespeare labors to achieve in the opening scene. Elliott describes Lear in the division scene as “both masterful and sane” (254), his original plan as “very far from weakly irrational” (262) but instead “carefully pondered and rational” (255), and his modified plan, prompted by Cordelia’s response, as “a shrewd second best” (261). Lear’s outbreak thus constitutes “a great *dramatic* surprise” (259), and he has our sympathy “not because he is old, but [...] because he is a great person greatly provoked” (263). A largely historicist reading of the opening scene that explores the confusion of the political with the personal, mostly in relation to King James, yet claims to bridge “the gap between ‘deep’ historical readings and the ‘surface’ phenomenology of dramatic action,” is William Dodd, “Impossible Worlds: What Happens in *King Lear*, Act 1, Scene 1?,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50.4 (1999): 477-507, at p. 479.

¹⁷ Examples are numerous. A book-length exemplification of the approach is Paul W. Kahn, *Law and Love: The Trials of “King Lear”* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000); one of the most celebrated essay-length examples is Stanley Cavell, “The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*,” in *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976 [1969]), pp. 267-353. As for the imagined prehistory of the play, Elliott claims, for example, that “[t]he whole affair, particularly the declarations on the part of the three daughters, has been carefully ‘weighed’ by Lear beforehand, with the full awareness of his intimate counsellors, Kent and Gloster”; “The Initial Contrast in *Lear*,” p. 256. The assumption is very common; see Jaffa, “The Limits of Politics: An Interpretation of *King Lear*, Act I, Scene 1,” p. 409. It is contested by Dodd, who does glance at *Leir* in passing; “Impossible Worlds: What Happens in *King Lear*, Act 1, Scene 1?,” p. 502.

new one were closely related activities. The implications of the rhetorical complication—and the apparent lack of motivation for characters' actions in the opening scene of Shakespeare's *King Lear*—are directly related to the way counsel is treated in the play.¹⁹

In this earlier play about King Lear (called, unpronounceably, *Leir*), probably first performed in the 1590s but published in print at the time when Shakespeare was composing his own *Lear*, the scene of division, particularly the love test that stands at its center, is carefully motivated.²⁰ The play opens with a scene in which Leir, recently widowed, requests counsel from his officials on the question of his daughters' marriage since in this play all three daughters are as yet unmarried. The daughters, we are told, have just been deprived of "their mother's good advice" (1.10), and since widowed fathers, Leir claims, are good at governing sons (1.17), but are of little help to daughters, whose "steps the mother's counsel turns" (1.18), he decides to marry his daughters off. The question that calls for advice is Lear's idea to divide the kingdom equally among his three daughters, who, thus endowed, would marry the neighboring princes. A

¹⁸ Richard Knowles, "How Shakespeare Knew *King Leir*," *Shakespeare Survey* 55 (2002): 12-35, at p. 14.

¹⁹ My exploration of the issue of counsel adds to the existing body of scholarship on the relationship between the two plays. See, in addition to the article mentioned in the preceding note, Wilfrid Perrett, *The Story of King Lear: From Geoffrey of Monmouth to Shakespeare* (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1904); W. W. Greg, "The Date of *King Lear* and Shakespeare's Use of Earlier Versions of the Story," *The Library* 20.4 (1940): 377-400; Richard H. Perkinson, "Shakespeare's Revision of the Lear Story and the Structure of *King Lear*," *Philological Quarterly* 22 (1943): 315-329; Robert Adgar Law, "*King Leir* and *King Lear*: An Examination of the Two Plays," in *Studies in Honor of T. W. Baldwin*, ed. Don Cameron Allen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), pp. 112-124; I. A. Shapiro, "Shakespeare and Mundy," *Shakespeare Survey* 14 (1961): 25-33; Peter Pauls, "*The True Chronicle History of King Leir* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*: A Reconsideration," *Upstart Crow* 5 (1984): 93-107; Martin Mueller, "From *Leir* to *Lear*," *Philological Quarterly* 73.2 (1994): 195-217; Jean R. Brink, "What Does Shakespeare Leave Out of *King Lear*?" in *King Lear: New Critical Essays*, ed. Jeffrey Kahan (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 208-230.

²⁰ See *The True Chronicle History of King Leir, and his three daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella* (London: Printed by Simon Stafford for John Wright, 1605). My references, by scene and line number, will be to the following modern edition: *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and His Three Daughters, Gonorill, Ragan and Cordella*, ed. Donald M. Michie (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1991).

consultation scene, common in its basic shape to a number of English Renaissance plays, follows.

The first counselor to speak, called Skalliger and later in the play represented as a favorite at Gonorill's court, advises that the daughters should be given unequal parts, according to their worth. Leir disagrees, repeating his original idea that his daughters are all alike and should therefore be treated equally. The second, unnamed counselor unhelpfully wishes Leir had a son, but knowing that this cannot be proposes that the daughters be married to "some of your neighbor kings / Bord'ring within the bounds of Albion" (1.50-51), thus protecting the state from foreign invasion.²¹ This suggestion agrees with Leir's wishes: Gonorill and Ragan are already courted by Cornwall and Cambria while Cordella, as Cordelia is called in this play, courted by many, should be prevailed upon to marry "some king within this isle" (1.64; there is initially some confusion in the play as to whether this is to be King of Brittany or King of Hibernia). Perillus, another counselor, warns Leir: "Do not force love, where fancy cannot dwell" (1.73). To deal with this problem, Leir comes up with a stratagem. Certain that Cordella loves him best, he will stage a love test which will prompt Cordella to say she will do anything for her father. This way Leir will not force her into a marriage; she will force herself into it by her protestation of filial love.

The plan fails partly because the office of counsel fails. Skalliger, one of the counselors later associated with Gonorill and serving as a model for Oswald in Shakespeare's play, runs to Cordella's sisters to reveal this secret plan. Envious of Cordella's beauty and reputation, Gonorill

²¹ It is worth noting that some of the political analyses of the play mentioned in note 16 above deploy precisely this argument to defend Lear's political prudence, without, however, mentioning the *Leir* play.

and Ragan want to make the situation as difficult for her as possible, which is why they resort to hyperbolic expressions of love before their father. They also know that Cordella would never agree to marry the Irish king, a refusal which is bound to make Leir hate her. The love test goes as the sisters predict. Cordella is disgusted by her sisters' flattery and prompted to say: "I cannot paint my duty forth in words" (3.78). Accused of being too proud, she insists that her "plain meaning" is misconstrued and that her tongue "was never used to flattery" (3.102-103), but she is nonetheless disowned by Leir. Perillus, the counselor who will later follow Leir through his tribulations but who here refrains from intervening, closes the scene by commenting on the distinction between flattery and good counsel, suggesting that Leir's rash decision to disinherit Cordella is the result of his failure to weigh "with good advice" Cordella's plain words. Had he so weighed the situation, he would have seen in her presumed truth the natural opposite of her sisters' flatteries.²²

In Shakespeare's play the motivation behind the love test and the division of the kingdom is deliberately obscured. Yet, as in Shakespeare's dramatic source, the love test is still a rhetorical game, and the test's apparent purposelessness only serves to emphasize the rhetorical problem that lies at its center. Having given two out of three parts of his kingdom to Goneril and

²² Perillus explicitly contrasts Cordella's plain meaning with the flattery of her sisters and equates this with the relationship between flattery and good advice. The others, however, including Leir, see Cordella as being too proud. This is underlined in the play by frequent references to Cordella's beauty and the envy it prompts in her sisters: "That pretty piece," says Gonorill, "that thinks none good enough / To speak to her because, sir-reverence, / She hath a little beauty extraordinary" (6.2-4). Even though the play does not have the Gloucester subplot, it does have a secondary disguise plot that continues this theme of Cordella's beauty. In it, the Gallian king and one of his lords go to Britain in disguise to see the wonderful daughters of Leir. They both fall for Cordella when they see her, but of course Lord Mumford (whose bluntness, we will see, served as a partial model for Kent's bluntness in his role as a disguised servant Caius) must yield to the desires of his king. Nonetheless, he vows: "I'll never marry whilst I live, except I / have one of these British ladies" (7.158-159). Lines like "Ah, dear Cordella, cordial to my heart" (7.126) illustrate well the kind of poetic height the play aspires to reach and explain why critics are often unwilling to consider the play along Shakespeare's very different poetic achievement.

Regan, who in Shakespeare's play already have husbands, Lear puts to Cordelia the following impossible question: "What can you say to win a third more opulent / Than your sisters'?" (Q, 1.1.77-78; F, 1.1.84-85: *to draw*).²³ The only logical answer is, of course, Cordelia's "Nothing": her third has already been carved out and no rhetorical performance, however dazzling, can enlarge it. "I love your *majesty*"—the phrasing is significant—"according to my bond, nor more nor less" (Q, 1.1.82-83, emphasis added). Cordelia's truth, captured in that "nothing" and in that "nor more nor less" becomes her dower (Q, 1.1.98). Her plainness, Lear claims, is nothing but a disguise for her pride. The plain school philosophy, the philosophy of truth, has no place in the theater of majesty.²⁴

But as in More's *Utopia*, the problem is not plainness *per se*; the problem is the manner in which it is articulated and the occasion upon which it is deployed. The occasion in this case is an outstanding public ceremony during which the participants are expected to observe the rhetorical and political decorum such ceremonies demand. G. R. Elliott observes, for example, that Cordelia "was expected to utter her love briefly, simply, and sincerely," and thus differentiate herself from the overly ornamental, even if in many ways quite impressive, rhetoric

²³ Quotations from *King Lear* are taken from *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition*, ed. René Weis (London and New York: Longman, 1993). I give both Quarto and Folio references only when I provide variants; I always specify which text my quotations are from, however. I will occasionally discuss the more significant differences between the two texts, but I should perhaps make clear that I do not share the confidence of those who consider the Folio to be Shakespeare's deliberate revision of the Quarto text despite the fact that I choose Weis's edition as my source. My understanding of the relationship between the Quarto and the Folio is more skeptical, or if you like more confused, and largely agrees with what is found in Richard Knowles, "The Evolution of the Texts of *Lear*," in *King Lear: New Critical Essays*, ed. Jeffrey Kahan (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 124-154.

²⁴ The theatrical presentation of Cordelia is somewhat complicated by the fact that, as in the earlier play, she in this scene repeatedly speaks in asides. It is possible to interpret all she says as an expression of her simplicity, plainness, and truthfulness, but the fact that she does say things which are not open and public has led some critics to see in Cordelia more artfulness than is normally allowed. See on this point Carol Rutter, "Eel Pie and Ugly Sisters in *King Lear*," in *Lear from Study to Stage: Essays in Criticism*, ed. James Ogden and Arthur H. Scouten (London: Associated University Presses, 1997), pp. 172-225, esp. pp. 184-185.

of her sisters.²⁵ Elliott continues: “But instead of that right kind of plainness she has used the wrong kind: she has spoken, as Lear perceives and as every reasonable person must perceive, with ‘pride which she calls plainness’” (257). That Cordelia is blinded by “blind, unconscious, angry pride” (257) is shown, Elliott argues, by the fact that she exhibits “unsound self-pity,” pride’s regular companion. Cordelia refers to herself as “unhappy” (Q, 1.1.81) and as “poor Cordelia” (Q, 1.1.69) “even while richly gratified by her own bluntness” (258).²⁶

Shakespeare is here obviously interested in the problem of *parrhesia*, of the function of frank and true speech, explicitly described as *plainness*, at the intersection of the personal and the political. Even that most controversial Renaissance book of advice, Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, specifies that the only individuals to whom the prince should give “permission to speak truthfully to him, and only on such matters as he asks them about and not on other subjects,” should be the prince’s counselors, whom he ought to choose carefully.²⁷ Acts of free and frank speech are regulated; they cannot be performed at will if the proper relationship between the king and the counselor—and, by extension, the king and the subject—is to be upheld.²⁸ As Michel

²⁵ Elliott, “The Initial Contrast in *Lear*,” p. 257.

²⁶ Elliott’s analysis is interesting. Commenting on Cordelia’s address to Lear (“Good my Lord, / You have begot me...”), he writes: “Ironically, after avowing extreme brevity, she has now uttered a speech somewhat longer than those of her sisters and, though truthful unlike theirs in diction, equally untrue in *tone*”; “The Initial Contrast in *Lear*,” p. 258.

²⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. and ed. Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Chapter XXIII: “Of How to Avoid Flatterers,” p. 81.

²⁸ Machiavelli puts this point well: “For there is no other way to guard yourself against flattery than by making men understand that by telling you the truth they will not injure you. But when anyone can tell you the truth, you lose respect”; *The Prince*, p. 81. A neat illustration of the decorum upon which Machiavelli insists is found in the opening scene of Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, where the right of free speech is bestowed by Richard upon both Bolingbroke and Mowbray, who are thus allowed to argue their respective cases without fear. “He is our subject, Mowbray,” says Richard, “so art thou. / Free speech and fearless I to thee allow” (1.1.122-123). The linking of free

Foucault shows in his survey of the history of *parrhesia* from Greek antiquity to the Middle Ages, the implications of this kind of speaking—characterized by fearlessness and by complete truthfulness—change as political conditions, particularly forms of government, change. Ironically, *parrhesia* is considered an impossibility in democratic governments precisely because everyone is allowed to speak freely and there is therefore no risk, for Foucault the defining feature of parrhesiastic acts, taken by the truth teller. “When there is *parrhēsia* as freedom for everyone,” Foucault observes, “there cannot be *parrhēsia* as courage to speak the truth.”²⁹ As a result of this, the democratic form of rule appears to be “not the privileged site of *parrhēsia*, but the place in which *parrhēsia* is most difficult to practice.”³⁰ Instead, it is the monarchical context, and specifically the relationship between the prince and the counselor, that becomes the privileged site of *parrhesia*, its paradigmatic relationship.

In *King Lear*, we see this best depicted in Kent, who, unlike Perillus in *Leir*, is not explicitly assigned the role of the counselor, but clearly acts upon the presumed prerogatives of this office. In fact, we are invited to see in Kent’s intervention a courageous act of pointing out where the truth, as opposed to flattery, resides, and thus link his bluntness to the office of counsel. But investigating truth, to modify somewhat a pertinent critical observation, means

speech and fearlessness is suggestive of *parrhesia*. Mowbray had already referred to his own “free speech” in a context that indicates not just freedom but licentiousness—the danger and disruptiveness of *parrhesia*: “First, the fair reverence of your highness curbs me / From giving reins and spurs to my free speech, / Which else would post until it had returned / These terms of treason doubled down his throat” (1.1.54-57). This is a typical way in which the concept of *parrhesia*, for which no specific translation was available, finds its ways into English Renaissance texts.

²⁹ Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, p. 39. The problem has to do with fundamental ethical distinctions in the political field between the good and the bad, the better and the worse: “democracy is unable to recognize and cannot make room for the ethical division on the basis of which, and only on the basis of which, truth-telling is possible” (44). And again: “one cannot find *parrhēsia* in democracy, due to the fact that it lacks the ethical sense of discrimination which is indispensable for truth-telling” (45).

³⁰ Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, p. 57.

plunging into debates about plainness.³¹ To extend this observation, we could note that debating truth in relation to plainness also means plunging into controversies over the forms and theories of moral and political counsel. As David Colclough observes in the course of his discussion of *parrhesia* in Renaissance England, “[l]iberty of speech is considered to be essential in virtually all early modern treatments of counsel,” and the appearance of one automatically prompts us to think of the other.³² Lear, according to this scenario in which truth-telling, plainness and counsel are inextricably linked, would not simply appear as a tyrant who cannot tolerate to hear the truth but as a prince who is still in charge of the situation. The truth-teller, in the figure of the plain-spoken Kent, is silenced, but the figure of Kent is obviously complicated already in this scene, and then more significantly later in the play, as is the idea of Lear as a tyrant. Shakespeare presents us with situations that are unlike the typical representations of tyranny that is deaf to advice and blinded by its own affections. If anything, feelings and affections in *King Lear*, unlike violent emotions or sexual attraction, receive positive treatment while the possibility and mode of their expression constitute some of the main questions raised in the course of the play.

So how is the character of Kent complicated, and why might that matter? In constructing Kent Shakespeare turns to all sorts of traditions and draws in interesting ways on what is already found in some of his sources. The reduction of Lear’s retinue to a single servant in Holinshed may have suggested the idea of Lear accompanied by someone in a dramatization of the story, but the advisor Perillus found in the anonymous chronicle history *King Leir* is much more than

³¹ Graham, *The Performance of Conviction*, p. 1: “To investigate plainness is to plunge headfirst into debates—or, more often, battles—about truth.”

³² Colclough, *Freedom of Speech in Early Stuart England*, p. 63.

Holinshed's unnamed servant. Leir calls him his Damon, thus implying that he is the ideal friend who, like Plutarch's friend in the famous essay on flattery and friendship, tells the truth—*amicus principi*.³³ While taking his cue from his dramatic predecessor, Shakespeare is careful not only to change what he finds in Perillus but also to combine it with what he finds in Mumford, the nobleman faithfully accompanying the Gallian (French) king. When Mumford expresses his wish to accompany the French king in his disguised amorous expedition, he is allowed to do so provided that he pretends to be the king's friend rather than subject. He has to be blunt when he speaks to the king: "I am some kin to the Blunts," Mumford exclaims, "and I think the bluntest of all my kindred; therefore, if I be too blunt with you, thank yourself for praying me to be so" (4.44-47). Kent, however, is explicitly warned by Lear about the danger of his bluntness, yet he persists in his decision to intervene and, as he is banished, significantly describes the loss of his relationship with the king as a loss of friendship.³⁴ But he is never acknowledged by Lear as a friend. Ironically, the closest Kent gets to this status is when, disguised as Caius and after attacking Oswald, he is addressed by Lear as "a friendly knave."³⁵

³³ See "How a Man May Discerne a Flatterer from a Friend," in *The Philosophie, commonlie called, the Morals*, written by the learned Philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea, trans. Philemon Holland (London: Arnold Hatfield, 1603), sigs. G6r-K4v. Perillus perhaps goes over the top, but it is this extremity of devotion that really links him to Kent: "Feed on this flesh," he says to the starving Leir, "whose veins are not so dry / But there is virtue left to comfort you. / Oh, feed on this; if this will do you good, / I'll smile for joy to see you suck my blood" (24.34-37). For at least a couple of scenes he also wears a disguise, but so does, in this play, Leir.

³⁴ Kent says: "Why, fare thee well, King. Since thus thou wilt appear, / Friendship lives hence, and banishment is here" (Q, 1.1.168-169; F, 1.1.179 reads "Freedom lives hence").

³⁵ "Now, friendly knave, I thank thee. There's earnest of thy service" (Q, 1.4.86-87). When in the final scene of the play Kent attempts to help Lear, he is ordered by Lear to step back, at which point Edgar intervenes: "'Tis noble Kent, your friend." Lear's response to this intervention is telling: "A plague upon you murderous traitors all" (Q, 5.3.261-262).

The mixed critical responses to the character of Kent suggest that he cannot simply be described as “a figure of responsible public service and counsel.”³⁶ I observed that in the earlier play *Perillus*, Kent’s partial prototype, does not intervene because his advice is not sought, but, like Kent, *Perillus* follows Leir throughout the play as the emblem of the king’s proper, rather than tyrannous, subjectivity and without any need to disguise himself. Kent, however, does speak out, and he does so in such a way that his speech act is aligned with Cordelia’s by its insistence on plainness, yet designed to further complicate the valuation of plainness by its obviously violent and angry thrust. Kent intervenes by addressing Lear not just as his king, but also as his father (thus putting himself in Cordelia’s role), as his master, and as his patron. Even though he is warned by Lear—“The bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft” (Q, 1.1.133)—he persists, invoking, interestingly, the idea of love as his justification, through the image of the heart:

Let it fall rather, though the fork invade
 The region of my heart. Be Kent unmannerly
 When Lear is mad. What wilt thou do, old man?
 Think’st thou that duty shall have dread to speak
 When power to flattery bows? To plainness honour’s bound
 When majesty stoops to folly. Reverse thy doom,
 And in thy best consideration check
 This hideous rashness. Answer my life my judgment:

³⁶ The description is found in Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 79.

Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least,
 Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound
 Reverbs no hollowness. (Q, 1.1.134-144)

This is certainly very plain: the king is a hideously rash, nay, mad old man who stoops to folly. One need not be a king to be deeply offended by such a choice series of epithets. The political effect of this kind of plain speech is that Kent is banished. Lear's reaction is put in perfectly orthodox political terms and appropriately complex sentence structures, as the gravity of the occasion demands. The central point is that the person who cannot hear is not Lear but Kent. Like Cordelia, Kent is accused of pride masquerading as plainness (Q, 1.1.157), his allegiance is questioned (Q, 1.155), and the futility of his effort pointed out since Lear has already vowed to do something and vows leave no space for counsel, even when they are rash.³⁷

Contrary to what Kent is saying in his violent verbal attack on Lear, the play as a whole gives us no license to insist on a neat distinction between flattery on the one hand and truth as plain speech on the other. To translate this point into moral terms, the play gives us no license to posit a straightforward distinction between what is evil and what is good. As is well known, Shakespeare has often been understood to think of the characters of *King Lear* as either very good or very evil, and the play's world consequently interpreted as a scene of conflict between moral and political absolutes.³⁸ The obvious complications, such as Edmund's decision to do something good before he dies by reversing the ordered execution of Lear and Cordelia, are less

³⁷ See in this connection the discussion of Buchanan's *Jephtha, or the Vow* in Chapter 2 above.

³⁸ Bradley's discussion of *King Lear* in his *Shakespearean Tragedy* is the classic statement. According to him, in *King Lear* we witness "something universal,—a conflict not so much of particular persons as of the powers of good and evil in the world" (262-263). Bradley recognizes "two strongly contrasted groups of good and evil beings" (298) in the play, with King Lear possibly constituting an exception to this rule (263).

interesting, I think, than the play's multi-level exploration of the problem of language; after all, the notion of plain speaking is repeatedly attached in the play to different ideas about moral truth and to different conceptions of political action. This exploration of language, motivated by the problem of plain speaking, is haunted throughout the play by the traditional but far from unproblematic association of plain speech with the idea of good counsel. A commonplace representation of this association is found in the dumb show before the second act of *Gorboduc*, a play that is related to *King Lear*,³⁹ where we read that "a faithful counselor holdeth no treason, but is plain and open, ne yieldeth to any indiscreet affection, but giveth wholesome counsel, which the ill-advised prince refuseth."⁴⁰ We have seen, however, that what happens in the dumb shows and what happens in the rest of this play prompts questions precisely about the way good counsel is imagined to operate.

In Shakespeare's *King Lear* the counseling scene from the earlier *Leir* play is removed not because the question of good counsel is no longer interesting but because the question of counsel has a different role to play. What we find in *King Lear* is a much subtler engagement with the philosophical basis of counsel, its grounding in a certain form of unexamined rhetorical practice. The play is not an invitation to decide on bad as opposed to good counsel; it is instead an invitation to consider the nature of political language as it is silently shaped by the inherited discourses of counsel, and of earlier drama. It is an intricate dramatic elaboration of the problem

³⁹ See Barbara Heliodora Carneiro de Mendonça, "The Influence of *Gorboduc* on *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Survey* 13 (1960): 41-48; Franco Moretti, "'A huge eclipse': Tragic Form and Deconsecration of Sovereignty," in *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1982), pp. 7-40; Andrew Hadfield, "Tragedy and Nation State," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. Emma Smith and Garret A. Sullivan, Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 30-43.

⁴⁰ Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex*, ed. Irby B. Cauthen (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. 26.

of plainness that is associated in the period with the discourses of counsel and that enters the play thanks to previous engagements with counsel, particularly in the dramatic literature. My analysis of this dramatic elaboration joins the existing scholarly contributions that strive to bridge the familiar divide in Shakespeare scholarship between the readings of *King Lear* interested in the play's political meanings and the readings preoccupied with its style; I mean the divide between, very roughly speaking, historicism and formalism. The moral and political implications of *King Lear* cannot, it seems to me, be divorced from the complex and astonishing way in which Shakespeare deploys language in this play.

Problems with Plainness

An important consideration of *King Lear*, and a host of other texts from the period, that turns to plainness in this larger sense is Kenneth Graham's book on true conviction and its rhetorical performance.⁴¹ Graham considers plainness not just stylistically—as “plain style”—but in the broadest rhetorical sense, focusing on “the political, epistemological, psychological, and theological dimensions of the subject” while also giving some attention to the subject's legal, economic, and sexual implications (xi). He correctly notes that as a result of the critical focus on “plain style” in the middle of the twentieth century, plainness as a literary category disappeared with the more recent critical developments while at the same time “failing to reemerge as a historical interest” (4). His own contribution is designed to address this failure, but it seems, unfortunately, to have attracted few followers. The place of plainness in the Renaissance thus

⁴¹ Graham, *The Performance of Conviction*.

still awaits its full and proper acknowledgment, and part of the reason for this may be precisely the fact that plainness normally appears in the period linked to other issues and to larger cultural and political interests.

Counsel is a good example here, even if it is not an issue that Graham specifically studies. Instead, he analyzes plainness as it relates to the performance of true conviction in the poetry of Thomas Wyatt, or as it relates to the public convictions of the sixteenth-century religious movements.⁴² Drama, too, is an important part of this narrative. In a discussion that is not without relevance for Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Graham shows how in early modern revenge tragedies anger and plainness become linked and the characters such as revengers, malcontents, and satirists regularly appear as plainspeakers (125). Although not belonging to this character type, Shakespeare's Kent is a character that insists both on plainness and the privilege of anger.⁴³ It would therefore be interesting to think of him in relation to this character type and to the kind of drama in which it prevails. Kent does, in fact, achieve a kind of moral revenge, attempting to prove that he is right, and he does this by resorting on several occasions to instances of extremely angry speech.

Graham, however, saves *King Lear* for a different kind of discussion, thus choosing to keep generic distinctions and character types neatly placed within their explanatory boxes and resisting the temptation to consider generic contamination or borrowings across character types.

⁴² In this latter respect, and in connection with Shakespeare's *King Lear*, see Judy Kronenfeld, *King Lear and the Naked Truth: Rethinking the Language of Religion and Resistance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998).

⁴³ When rebuked by Cornwall for publicly abusing Oswald, and for having no reverence for those present, Kent as Caius responds: "Yes, sir, but anger has a privilege" (Q, 2.2.64). Cf. a comparable breach of decorum in Shakespeare's *King John*, where Pembroke defends the nobles' verbal attack on the king by saying: "Sir, sir, impatience hath his privilege" (4.3.32).

The same tendency is evident in his discussion of Shakespeare more generally, in which the treatment of plainness in plays such as *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens* is contrasted with its treatment in *King Lear*. In *Timon* and *Coriolanus*, Graham argues, plainness becomes little more than a performance of pride (189). In contrast, in *King Lear* plainness is subjected “to the full force of a skeptical challenge,” yet it manages, in a somewhat modified form, to withstand this challenge (192). To simplify somewhat, both Kent and Cordelia, although accused of pride masquerading as plainness, are recuperated in the course of the play. Thus, *King Lear* makes “the positive case for plainness” (193); the message of the play is that “[o]nly plainness can be the performance of love” (217):

In the play the private and public forms of plainness most common in the early English Renaissance both suffer because the powerful have found it in their interests to manipulate and undermine the public criteria of judgment. These powerful few attempt to usurp the language of plain truth and virtue to justify their own ends. But they are outnumbered by those who maintain the plain truth by finding new ways to perform the conviction of love. [...] Plainness is thus the principle that permits the rediscovery of “commonplace” truths in corrupt and skeptical surroundings. [...] Despite efforts to turn it into the performance of pride, then, plainness emerges from *King Lear* as the performance of love. But the play shows just how costly such a performance can be. (218-219)

Such conclusions rest primarily on a specific understanding of the development of dramatic character in the play. For the question of plainness the most relevant characters are Cordelia and Kent (also, but to a lesser degree, Edgar and the Fool). If we are to accept the positive valuation

of plainness in the play, we need to disregard a number of moments that argue against such a valuation and, consequently, to read all of these characters as not presenting any considerable interpretative difficulty. But that would mean to ignore a long tradition of criticism that regularly, and rightly, stumbles upon precisely these characters, unable to account for their moral inconsistencies, or, to put the point less controversially, discrepancies between what the characters think they are doing and what actually transpires in their speech and actions.⁴⁴

Thus, for example, Graham's claim that Cordelia "cannot *artfully* speak" and that "[s]he can only speak plainly" (195) is negated by several instances of her speaking that we witness in the play after the love trial. She is, in fact, the person who continues the formal, weighty royal rhetoric of the opening scene and who resorts to rhyme more often than any conception of plainness would lead us to expect. She can move us by her rhetoric, as when she describes Lear's altered state of mind by carefully cataloguing the weeds he is crowned with:

Alack, 'tis he. Why, he was met even now,
 As mad as the vexed sea, singing aloud,
 Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds,
 With hardocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,
 Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow
 In our sustaining corn. (Q, 4.4.1-6)⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Alarm bells were sounded early. Bradley, for instance, asks: "why does Edgar not reveal himself to his blind father, as he truly says he ought to have done?" (258). He answers by proclaiming such instances to be dramatic defects, but that has not proved to be an acceptable approach to the interpretative problems *King Lear* poses. Stanley Cavell is a good example of a critic who struggles to account, mostly in psychological terms, for the apparently inconsistent actions of the "good" characters in *King Lear*, Edgar among them; see Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love."

Yet when she is given the words of no smaller a personage than Jesus Christ (“O dear father, / It is thy business that I go about”; Q, 4.4.23-24), we are entitled to wonder whether this is not, on Shakespeare’s part, a deliberate attempt to make Cordelia sound a little over the top. Unable to tell her love in the opening scene, she is careful to mention it as the reason for the French invasion: “No blown ambition doth our arms incite, / But love, dear love, and our aged father’s right” (Q, 4.4.27-28). Perhaps most disappointingly, when she and Lear are captured and face a life together in prison, she rhymes and alliterates, while reminding the audience that she is selfless and can think only about Lear’s misfortune: “We are not the first / Who with best meaning have incurred the worst. / For thee, oppressèd King, am I cast down, / Myself could else outfrown false fortune’s frown” (Q, 5.3.3-6). There is nothing artless about these instances; on the contrary, they conform to the formal rhetoric deployed earlier by Lear and at times by Cordelia’s sisters.⁴⁶ If, as Graham argues, “[f]or characters such as Cordelia, Kent, Edgar, and the Fool, plainness to a considerable degree comprises the conviction and performance of love” (205-206), then we need to ask how this performance of love agrees with plainness as a performance of a certain kind of political language.

Problems become especially acute when we try to account for Kent’s deployment of plainness. Kent is more artful in his bluntness than Cordelia, Graham claims, and a more conscious performer given his adoption of a disguised identity, yet his behavior is still described as “artlessness,” but an artlessness, paradoxically, that is “artful” (210). To claim, finally, that in

⁴⁵ These lines have recently prompted an essay-long analysis: see Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Richard Marggraf Turley, and Howard Thomas, “The Autumn King: Remembering the Land in *King Lear*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63.4 (2012): 518-543.

⁴⁶ A good example is Goneril’s impressive speech when she encounters Lear after Oswald disobeys him (“Not only sir, this your all-licensed fool...”; Q, 1.4.188-201).

the course of the play Cordelia and Kent learn how “to combine the private, inward reality—ahistorical, incommunicable—that is the essence of private plainness with the public, outer realm of historical dialogue” (210) is to obscure the fact that both Kent’s and Cordelia’s speech acts in the opening scenes are statements of public, not private, plainness.⁴⁷ Kent, in fact, can think of himself only in terms of public relationships, particularly with the king. Once these relationships dissolve, Kent dissolves. The journey he says he is obliged to undertake after Lear’s death is a journey that will connect him with his master, be he the dead king or the ever-living one, without whom Kent’s life is empty of meaning.⁴⁸

Out of Season: Kent’s Untimely Counsels

An excessive focus on characters, however, obscures the larger contours of plainness in *King Lear*, especially the central trope of being “out of season,” which owes its existence to the

⁴⁷ Graham’s arguments, though extremely thoughtful, often verge on paradoxes, as for instance in the following statement, where a conviction is “private but public”: “This plainness is therefore aware of the skeptical threat posed by the self-interest of the powerful, and acts accordingly. Its performance is designed to protect a conviction that is private but public, and public but powerless” (211). Similarly, the world of *Lear* is described as one where “public and private are neither entirely the same nor entirely different” (218). I fail to perceive in *King Lear* any attempt by the “evil” characters to usurp plainness—and by extension the truth of which it would be an expression—as a mode of political rhetoric; on the contrary, I find that plainness is complicated in the play precisely by the “good” characters, who insist on their right to speak plainly, and therefore truthfully, yet deploy plainness in such a way that by having harmful political effects it ceases to be the unquestioned space of absolute truth or justice in the play. This is why Graham’s conclusions seem to me too neat.

⁴⁸ “I have a journey, sir, shortly to go; / My master calls, and I must not say no”; Q, 5.3.313-314. On the notion of service in the play, see the following (both sympathetic to Kent): Jonas A. Barish and Marshall Waingrow, “‘Service’ in *King Lear*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 9.3 (1958): 347-355; Richard Strier, “Faithful Servants: Shakespeare’s Praise of Disobedience,” in *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture*, ed. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 104-133. More broadly on the problem of the self in relation to the social order, see David Aers and Gunther Kress, “The Language of Social Order: Individual, Society and Historical Process in *King Lear*,” in David Aers, Bob Hodge, and Gunther Kress, *Literature, Language and Society in England, 1580-1680* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1981), pp. 75-99.

discourses of plainness and counsel underpinning the play. “For surely as nothing can be more foolissh than wisdom out of place,” says Folly in Erasmus’s celebrated work, “so is nothing more fonde than prudence out of season.”⁴⁹ Acts of plain speech that are out of season (out of time) and out of place become in the play the foundation for a number of parallel dramatic and theatrical developments that vie for our attention while participating in the play’s intricate design. This occurs in the play at several levels, from its setting and its plot to its construction of character or deployment of dramatic technique. It is also evident in the dramatic language. It is, in other words, important to understand how the role of plainness in the building of dramatic character is part of a larger engagement with plainness and counsel in the play. I would therefore like to briefly re-consider the familiar characters from *King Lear* within this larger dramatic logic and in relation to some theatrical techniques that support it, and to return once again, and inevitably, to Kent.

The storm, perhaps, is the most obvious example of a world that is suddenly pushed out of joint; the weather in the play is with good reason repeatedly compared to tyranny, the kind of rule that has lost its relation to counsel.⁵⁰ The crucial coming together of everyone at Gloucester’s house, the place necessary for the plot to work, explicitly connects the night, as a moment that is “out of season,” to the issue of counsel. “You know not why we came to visit you,” says Cornwall, and Regan completes his sentence: “Thus out-of-season thredding dark-eyed night: / Occasions, noble Gloucester, of some prize, / Wherein we must have use of your

⁴⁹ *The Praise of Folie: Moriae Encomium*, a booke made in latine by that great clerke Erasmus Roterodame, Englished by sir Thomas Chaloner knight (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1549), sig. E4r.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Kent’s statement “The tyranny of the open night’s too rough / For nature to endure” (Q, 3.4.2) or Gloucester’s statement “Though their injunction be to bar my doors / And let this tyrannous night take hold upon you, / Yet have I ventured to come seek you out” (Q, 3.4.134-136).

advice” (Q, 2.1.118-121). The irony of their expedition is illustrated by the fact that they eventually pluck out Gloucester’s eyes, but before we get to that cruel point in the play Cornwall and Regan actually assume the advising role, urging Gloucester to keep Lear out of his house. “Shut up your doors, my lord,” says Cornwall, “’tis a wild night. / My Regan counsels well. Come out o’th’ storm” (Q, 2.4.277-278). As with the absence of the counseling scene before the division of the kingdom, where the question of counsel is instead dramatized in problematic acts of plain speech, the absence of Gloucester’s counsels here, at his house, is underwritten by the violent counsels of Cornwall and Regan, whose bloody advising project takes place “out of season.”

Extremely out of season is also the presence of the Fool in the play, whose link to Cordelia makes her character both more sympathetic and more problematic. Removed from the stage and unseen for most of the play, Cordelia is replaced by Lear’s court fool, who, we learn, has a special bond with Cordelia and is saddened by her absence. The Fool and Cordelia never appear on the stage together and the two roles are sometimes, and with good reason, played by a single actor to stress the point that even without this choice is fairly obvious.⁵¹ The Fool’s voice becomes the dominant voice of bitter, facts-driven truth in the middle sections of the play, as Lear is repeatedly reminded of his folly. But fascinating here is not that the voice of truth, wisdom, and explicitly on several occasions counsel continues to be given space in the play; it is rather that truth, wisdom, and counsel become associated with a dramatic character that is

⁵¹ Whatever may have been the actual casting of the first performances of *King Lear* the invitation to think of the Fool as both a dramatic and a theatrical elaboration of the absent Cordelia is indisputable. Lear’s “And my poor fool is hanged” (Q, 5.3.297) is a poignant reminder of this.

himself woefully out of place.⁵² The mingling of kings and clowns is the major objection that Sidney in his *Defense of Poesy* raises against the mongrel tragicomedy, the same genre that More invokes in *Utopia* as the emblem of counsel's failure, calling it "a tragycall comedye or gallymafreye."⁵³ The Fool in *King Lear* embodies the huge gap between the wisdom of words and the folly of human action since he himself, despite his apparent wisdom, after all lives the life of a fool. The only advice he can give Lear is to tell him the obvious. As the traditional figure of licensed, free speech, the Fool can have no effect as the vehicle of counsel because there are no limits to his words and therefore no political differentiation.⁵⁴ Foucault's insistence on the defining role of risk involved in true acts of *parrhesia* is relevant here; the Fool cannot fulfill the moral and political role of the counseling truth-teller because the liberty of his speech is not subject to the laws that govern the normal relationships between the king and his subjects.

⁵² It is interesting that the Quarto and the Folio texts differ, among other things, in two passages that explicitly mention counsel. One of these is given in the play to the Fool. In the Quarto, when explaining the difference between a bitter and a sweet fool, the Fool says to Lear: "That lord that counselled thee / To give away thy land, / Come, place him here by me; / Do thou for him stand. / The sweet and bitter fool / Will presently appear, / The one in motley here, / The other found out there" (1.4.130-137). The passage is not in the Folio. What it suggests is that Lear followed his own counsel, and that he now suffers the consequences. I am not sure, however, that the statement should be read as a comment about bad kingship. As elsewhere, the Fool's comments attempt to wrench the personal from the political. He does not comment here on the political wisdom of dividing the kingdom or abdicating; instead, he describes Lear as any other father who gives away his property prematurely. The other passage, found in the Folio text only, is given to Goneril. As if to contradict what the Fool is saying (or rather not saying in the Folio text), Goneril exclaims: "This man [i.e. Lear] hath had good counsel. A hundred knights! / 'Tis politic and safe to let him keep / At point a hundred knights!" (1.4.291-293). Here the statement, interestingly, is phrased in purely political terms while being made by a daughter to a father.

⁵³ Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie* (London: Henry Olney, 1595), sig. K2r: "But besides these grosse absurdities, how all they Playes be neither right Tragedies, nor right Comedies: mingling Kings & Clownes, not because the matter so carrieth it: but thrust in Clownes by head & shoulders, to play a part in maiesticall matters, with neither decencie, nor discretion"; More, *Vtopia*, sig. F6r.

⁵⁴ See note 29 above.

If the Fool is linked to Cordelia, he is also linked to Kent as they follow Lear together through the storm, both claiming the right to speak bluntly. Kent does take risks, thus qualifying himself for the role of the parrhesiast, but his plainness undergoes a series of problematic transformations in the play. In order to continue serving Lear, Kent chooses to disguise himself. When he offers his services to Lear, he describes himself as being no less than he seems, as serving truly, as loving honesty, and as being “a very honest-hearted fellow” (Q, 1.4.17). “I can keep honest counsel,” he says, “ride, run, mar a curious tale in telling it, and deliver a plain message bluntly” (Q, 1.4.29-30). But he is also a master of disguise and announces his plan to borrow “other accents” (Q, 1.4.1) and thus disguise his speech as well. Here, then, is honesty, bluntness, and plainness masterfully disguised as—honesty, bluntness, and plainness.⁵⁵ A comparable instance is provided by Edgar, Gloucester’s legitimate son, who is ousted by the deceptions of his illegitimate brother and himself forced to seek safety in deception. While honest and naive in his own person, Edgar becomes in his disguise as a bedlam beggar the vehicle of the play’s most inventive rhetorical register and the architect of the play’s biggest theatrical deception: his father’s fall from the cliffs of Dover.⁵⁶

Kent’s plainness, however, is complicated not just by his disguise but by the fact that, even when we forget about the disguise, we cannot forget the often inexplicable outbursts of

⁵⁵ See, along similar lines, the words of Alan Stewart, *Shakespeare’s Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 206: “Kent isn’t the ‘blunt’ man he appears. We first see him alongside Gloucester, discussing matters of state, a seasoned politician. His first intervention with the king reveals an adept courtier [...]. His attack on Oswald, couched as a parody of a formal introduction with its ‘addition’, its litany of titles, is an articulate *tour de force* of alliteration and word-minting.”

⁵⁶ An excellent analysis of Edgar’s language is provided by William C. Carroll, “Language, Politics, and Poverty in Shakespearian Drama,” *Shakespeare Survey* 44 (1992); reprinted in *Shakespeare and Politics*, ed. Catherine M. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 142-154.

verbal abuse showered upon Oswald, the other named figure of courtly service in the play. It is deeply ironic that Kent, of all people, is intent on teaching Goneril's steward "differences," as he puts it (Q, 1.4.83), when just a couple of scenes earlier he so loudly denied them in his presumptuous address to the king. Kent's second encounter with Oswald, now at Gloucester's castle, gives us at once the most inventive and the most abusive speech in the play:

A knave, a rascal, an eater of broken meats, a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy worsted-stocking knave; a lily-livered, action-taking knave; a whoreson, glass-gazing, superfinical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave; one that wouldst be a bawd in way of good service, and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pander, and the son and heir of a mongrel bitch, whom I will beat into clamorous whining, if thou deny the least syllable of the addition. (Q, 2.2.13-21)

As if this were not enough, Kent ends with the famous compliment "Thou whoreson zed, thou unnecessary letter," and concludes by vowing to tread Oswald into mortar and daub the walls of a privy with him (Q, 2.2.58-60). When Kent protests to Cornwall that he is no flatterer, Oswald notes that Kent's original attack on him was in fact a result of Kent "flattering [Lear's] displeasure" (Q, 2.2.110)—by humiliating Oswald Kent merely wanted to flatter Lear and ingratiate himself. Kent's insistence that his occupation is to be plain is met with a response from the Duke of Cornwall that again throws into question the strict equation of plain speech with truth and dutiful speech with flattery: "This is a fellow," says Cornwall,

Who, having been praised for bluntness, doth affect
A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb
Quite from his nature. He cannot flatter, he;

He must be plain, he must speak truth.

And they will take't, so; if not, he's plain.

These kind of knaves I know, which in this plainness

Harbor more craft and more corrupter ends

Than twenty silly-ducking observants

That stretch their duties nicely. (Q, 2.2.87-96)⁵⁷

The problem here is that the accusation is made by one of the least likable characters in the play, the Duke of Cornwall. It would, however, be rash to dismiss what Shakespeare's villains say as simple expressions of self-interest, guise, and moral bankruptcy. Cornwall here, and Shakespeare through Cornwall, points to a problem familiar to students of *parrhesia* in the period, particularly in the context of early modern rhetoric.⁵⁸ It is in *Ad Herennium*, the popular rhetorical handbook traditionally ascribed to Cicero, that *parrhesia* (translated into Latin as *licentia*) appears under the heading for style: "It is Frankness of Speech when, talking before those to whom we owe reverence or fear, we yet exercise our right to speak out, because we seem justified in reprehending them, or persons dear to them, for some fault."⁵⁹ As the discussion continues,

⁵⁷ It is worth noting that bluntness and sauciness seem to be often linked together, especially when there is a suggestion that bluntness is inappropriate or indecorous. Thus Belarius in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*—who, like Kent, is a banished lord—before he reveals his true identity uses the occasion to be a little saucy. Disguised as old Morgan, he points out to Cymbeline in the complicated scene of resolution that Cymbeline had a subject named Belarius. Cymbeline's response is to proclaim Belarius a banished traitor once again; the mention of his name is out of place, and the imprisonment of Guiderius, guilty of killing Cloten, the Queen's son (interestingly, Cloten's fault was, as Guiderius has it, to have provoked Guiderius "with language"; 5.5.294-295), should duly proceed. Here Belarius has some fun: "Not too hot," he says to Cymbeline, "first pay me for the nursing of thy sons; / and let it be confiscate all so soon / as I have receiv'd it," but quickly corrects himself: "I am too blunt and saucy; here's my knee" (5.5.322-326).

⁵⁸ For a detailed consideration of *parrhesia* in the context of English Renaissance rhetoric, see Diane Parkin-Speer, "Freedom of Speech in Sixteenth Century English Rhetorics," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 12.3 (1981): 65-72.

however, frankness of speech appears in connection with craftier rhetorical devices and thus takes us onto very slippery ground. What the author of *Ad Herennium* suggests, Colclough observes, is “that self-consciously announced frankness can even be a cloak for flattery.”⁶⁰

The mention of bluntness that affects—both in the sense “assuming” or “putting on” and in the sense of liking or having a tendency to become—a saucy roughness captures, therefore, rather well the ambiguous nature of Kent’s rhetoric. He does, on the one hand, draw on the tradition and prerogative of free and plain speech, associated with *parrhesia* and with good counsel. On the other hand, however, Kent’s language is also the language of satire: a discursive practice and a rhetorical mode in which language is used aggressively in order to expose vice and to teach by pure verbal force. This point is reflected in the play through a series of vivid dramatic metaphors that give us scenes of violent, and yet unsuccessful, instruction: the Fool’s claim, for example, that Lear has given his daughters a rod and put down his own breeches (Q, 1.4.161-162); or Kent’s claim that he is too old to learn when he is put in the stocks (Q, 2.2.119-120) to suffer for his verbal excess. The epithets Kent bestows upon Oswald remind us of the dramatic villains and of scurrilous pamphleteers more than they do of wise counselors and their verbal wisdom.⁶¹

⁵⁹ [Cicero], *Ad C. Herennium de ratione dicendi (Rhetorica ad Herennium)*, trans. Harry Caplan (London: William Heinemann and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), IV. xxvi. 48, p. 349.

⁶⁰ Colclough, *Freedom of Speech in Early Stuart England*, p. 6. He continues: “Freedom of speech remains rhetorically coloured, and the rhetorical tradition of *parrhesia* is an important strand of the theory of counsel.” Elsewhere Colclough writes of duplicitous *licentia* or, as he calls it, “a frankness effect” (28). In his discussion of *parrhesia*, Foucault is at pains to dissociate it from rhetoric even while acknowledging its appearance in the rhetorical tradition as a figure of style; see Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, p. 53. Once we enter the field of literary writing, however, and particularly drama, there is no way to protect acts of true speaking from rhetorical contamination, as is made amply evident in *King Lear*.

⁶¹ Compare the following account of the origins of satire, with the significant mention of *parrhesia*: “But I suppose that the word commeth from the Graecians, who at their publike and solemne feastes, did bring in vpon their stages

The point is not made as often as we would expect, if at all.⁶² Instead, and not of course entirely without rewarding insights, Kent has been interpreted as belonging to the type of the plain, blunt Englishman, of the bluff soldier, or as embodying the figure of honesty found in the earlier dramatic tradition.⁶³ Pursuing a somewhat different path, William Dodd still voices the typical critical sentiment when he writes:

Kent in many respects is the summation of a long tradition of worthy, plain-speaking counselor figures. Among his forerunners in relevant earlier plays are Eubulus

(*Gorboduc*, 1561), Thomas of Woodstock (*Woodstock*, c. 1592-93), Shakespeare's own

Gaunt and York (*Richard II*, 1595), and of course Perillus (*Leir*).⁶⁴

or scaffolds, certaine persons disguised, like vnto Satyres, whom the people supposed to be halfe Gods, full of lasines, & wantonnes in the woods [...]. And these men disguised after this manner, being naked and tattered, took a certaine kind of libertie vnto themselues, to nippe and to floute at all the worlde, without punishment. [...] And there are great numbers of them found in our countrie of Parresie, who loue rather to lose a good friend, then a good word or a merrie iest, applied well to the purpose"; *A pleasant satyre or poesie wherein is discovered the Catholicon of Spayne, and the chiefe leaders of the League* (London: Printed by the widow Orwin for Thomas Man, 1595), sigs. 2A4v-2B1r. As for Kent's abuse of Oswald quoted above, I am reminded of the following passage: "May St Anthony's fire burn you, the epilepsy throw you, the thunder-stroke and leg-ulcers rack you, dysentery seize you, and may the erysipelas, with its tiny cowhair rash, and quicksilver's pain on top, through your arse-hole enter up, and like Sodom and Gomorrah may you dissolve into sulphur, fire, and the bottomless pit, in case you do not firmly believe everything that I tell you in this present *Chronicle*!"; François Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1955), pp. 168-169.

⁶² The Arden editor of *King Lear* moves in the right direction when he warns: "the play generally favours directness and simplicity, but the temptation to align plain speaking with goodness and rhetoric with flattery or hypocrisy should be resisted." Among the reasons he lists are the unfortunate effects of Kent's bluntness; see William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1997), p. 9.

⁶³ See Robert H. Goldsmith, "Plain, Blunt Englishman," *Renaissance Papers* (1957): 94-99; Paul A. Jorgensen, "The Metamorphosis of Honesty in the Renaissance," *English Literary Renaissance* 3 (1973): 369-379; Paul A. Jorgensen, "Honesty in *Othello*," *Studies in Philology* 47.4 (1950): 557-567. For the type of the bluff soldier that might have served as a model for Kent Goldsmith adduces the examples of Miles in *Thersites* and the old soldier Sateros in *The Cobbler's Prophecy*. More interesting is the example of the faithful steward Laches from *Timon*, an academic comedy probably from the 1580s, about which Goldsmith writes as follows: "Like Kent, he [i.e. Laches] is cast off by his master because of his plain speaking; he puts on the disguise of a war-scarred soldier, is re-employed by his former master, and follows Timon faithfully thereafter. Furthermore, Laches hoodwinks and beats the parasite Hermogenes much as Kent curses and beats Oswald" (95).

⁶⁴ Dodd, "Impossible Worlds," p. 501.

The difficulty here, however, is that the characters listed are not all equally Kent's forerunners, and when they are, it does not necessarily follow that they are his forerunners as worthy and plain-speaking counselors. Eubulus does not resemble Kent at all. He does not get involved and, as we have seen in Chapter 3, he is quite happy to go on with his deeply compromised work even though no princely figures survive to be counseled. Perillus from *King Lear* is the character Shakespeare obviously worked with, but what is interesting is precisely what Shakespeare decides to change about Perillus. Throughout the play Perillus is a dutiful and loving subject who speaks decorously and stays with the king during his tribulations as himself, not as somebody else.

Thomas of Woodstock and John of Gaunt are more relevant, but their relevance, I think, has to do not so much with the wisdom of their counsels as with their tendency to lose control over their speech and to become rebukers rather than advisors of kings. They are like Kent precisely because they dramatize a similar rhetorical problem in the world of politics. The relationship between Shakespeare's *Richard II* and the anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock*, sometimes also called *The First Part of Richard II*, is not our business here, but it is clear that the two plays are linked and that Shakespeare's John of Gaunt and the eponymous hero of *Thomas of Woodstock* share more than their uncleship to the king. They are both plain speakers, and they both wish to advise the king.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ *Thomas of Woodstock* survives only in manuscript, where it is given no title. Shakespeare has been believed at various times to have been the play's author; there is still no consensus on the play's authorship. A good discussion of the problems involved is found in *Thomas of Woodstock, or Richard the Second, Part One*, ed. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002). Recently, Macd. P. Jackson has argued that *Thomas of Woodstock* is in fact much closer in date to *King Lear* than to *Richard II*, an argument that my analysis, although not focused on dating, does perhaps corroborate; see "Shakespeare's *Richard II* and the Anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 14 (2001): 17-65. Some

John of Gaunt, although on his deathbed, wants his last breath to be spent “in wholesome counsel” to Richard’s “unstaied youth” (2.1.1-2). That we should be suspicious is suggested early, when the sick uncle manages to deliver a long and moving rhetorical piece on “this royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle...” (2.1.4), and, as Richard wryly observes, manages, in spite of sickness, to play ingeniously with his own name: “Gaunt am I for the grave, gaunt as a grave” (2.1.82-83). The Duke of York’s urging to “deal mildly” with the king’s youth (2.1.69) has no effect on Gaunt. What follows is a downright condemnation of Richard and of his rule (with a threat of deposition very shrewdly worked in), which would have gone on interminably, it seems, had Richard not stopped it. Young Richard does so in a way that anticipates old Lear’s royal rhetoric:

And thou, a lunatic lean-witted fool,
 Presuming on an ague’s privilege,
 Dar’st with thy frozen admonition
 Make pale our cheek, chasing the royal blood
 With fury from his native residence.
 Now by my seat’s right royal majesty,
 Wert thou not brother to great Edward’s son,
 This tongue that runs so roundly in thy head
 Should run thy head from thy unreverent shoulders.⁶⁶

comments on the relationship between *Thomas of Woodstock* and *King Lear*, following Jackson’s work, are found in Peter Holland, “Mapping Shakespeare’s Britain,” in *Shakespeare’s Histories and Counter-Histories*, ed. Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves, and Stephen Longstaffe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 198-218.

John of Gaunt's brother, Thomas of Woodstock, whose death haunts the opening scenes of *Richard II*, illustrates even better counsel's problematic relationship to plainness. As protector, Woodstock has a much more prominent role to play in directing and advising Richard, whom the Duke of York describes as a "wild" prince (1.1.28). In this advising project, plainness becomes the dominant technique. Woodstock does not only speak plainly; as the play opens, we learn that for the last twenty years he has been dressing plainly too, in plain English frieze, a kind of coarse woolen cloth. He even plans to attend Richard's wedding wearing his plain clothes, but is ultimately dissuaded by the other peers and appears at the celebrations dressed to the occasion. Yet to make sure everybody understands the occasion is the exception rather than the rule, Woodstock reminds us that he is Plain Thomas, who speaks the truth (1.3.34-35), and insists on his "plain and honest phrase" (1.3.18). His "golden metamorphosis" from "home-spun huswifery," as Richard teasingly puts it (1.3.75-76), becomes in fact the main subject of the conversation. Richard and his companions make jokes, Woodstock gets angry, and problems begin. "Scoff ye my plainness," he says, "I'll talk no riddles. Plain Thomas will speak plainly" (1.3.114-116). His plain speaking quickly becomes, as the play's editors Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge put it, "a direct challenge to the King's authority."⁶⁷ Thus, the treatment of plainness in *Thomas of Woodstock* resembles its treatment in *King Lear* in that both plays oppose

⁶⁶ *Richard II*, 2.1.115-124. "Ague's privilege" should be thought of together with anger's privilege Kent invokes and impatience's privilege from *King John*; see note 43 above. That we are meant to be careful how we interpret what Gaunt is saying is clear from the preceding act, where Richard takes advice from Gaunt, who first agrees to his son's banishment, but then demurs. Richard reminds Gaunt: "Thy son is banished upon good advice, / Whereto thy tongue a party verdict gave. / Why at our justice seem'st thou then to lour?" To which Gaunt can only give a desperate response in, significantly, rhyme: "Things sweet to taste prove in digestion sour" (1.3.226-229).

⁶⁷ *Thomas of Woodstock*, ed. Corbin and Sedge, p. 71. They are commenting on the following lines by Woodstock: "Hear me, King Richard: / If thus I jet in pride, I still shall lose, / But I'll build castles in my t'other hose" (1.3.107-109). Apparently, the challenge to the king's authority consists in the fact that "nobles needed the monarch's permission to erect fortifications" (71).

it to flattery, yet make sure the neatness of the opposition is undermined. *Thomas of Woodstock* is additionally instructive because outward plainness and the plainness of language are linked. In this, too, the play resembles *King Lear*, which pushes this link much further.

Leo Tolstoy, one of the most hostile critics of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, observed that its characters "speak in a way in which no living men ever did or could speak."⁶⁸ He meant it as a major criticism of Shakespeare's art, but what his remark reveals is in fact something that is crucial to the way this play works, something that is, I believe, one of the play's major virtues. Tolstoy is even closer to the point when he goes on to observe that all the characters "suffer from a common intemperance of language" and that "all alike speak much and unexpectedly about subjects utterly inappropriate to the occasion."⁶⁹ It is another way of saying that being out of season is something the play very insistently dramatizes. There is a veritable explosion of language in *King Lear*, and this explosion does not happen by accident. The play constructs different and unusual modes of speaking because language is presented in the play as the divisive but crucial space where personal and political relations combine and collide.

This is often highlighted by the use of specific dramatic techniques, one of which in particular has produced an enormous amount of critical frustration—the use of the letter. Letters and messengers pervade the play and attempts to trace and explain the movement of the letters and their carriers often encounter significant difficulties. While in the stocks, Kent suddenly produces a letter he then tells us about; Oswald, Goneril's faithful steward, dies trying to deliver

⁶⁸ *Tolstoy on Shakespeare*, trans. V. Tchertkoff and I. F. M. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1906), p. 54.

⁶⁹ *Tolstoy on Shakespeare*, p. 54. Tolstoy, however, is plain wrong when he claims that the characters "speak all alike" and that "[t]he words of one of the personages might be placed in the mouth of another, and by the character of the speech it would be impossible to distinguish who speaks" (54).

a letter; Edmund's conspiracy hangs on a forged letter; the resolution of the play cannot happen without a letter. Letters are crucial for the plot, but they also literally embody on the stage the play's preoccupation with language and communication. The way language in the play is designed to work finds, in other words, confirmation in the use of stage letters, which, Alan Stewart observes, are not presented as "straightforward missives" but are instead "forged, intercepted, undelivered, and misdelivered" while "the epistolary transactions are obscured, confusing, and even preposterous."⁷⁰

Even the more obscure sources Shakespeare relied on, such as the pamphlet from which Gloucester borrows some of his anxieties about the strange eclipses of the sun and moon, silently inform this preoccupation with language. *Strange, fearful & true newes, which happened at Carlstadt, in the kingdome of Croatia* describes "how the sunne did shine like bloude nine days together, and how two Armies were seene in the Ayre, the one encountering the other, and how also a woman was deliuered of three prodigious sonnes, which prophised many strange &

⁷⁰ Stewart, *Shakespeare's Letters*, p. 195. One of Stewart's aims is to show that the movement of letters in *King Lear* can in fact be accounted for if we bear in mind some early modern practices concerning the duties of messengers or carriers. Contrary to some previous work on the circulation of letters in *King Lear*, particularly that of Jonathan Goldberg, Stewart argues that the movement of letters sent by Goneril and Regan in the second act of the play can be accurately traced: "the play's temporal plotting of the writing, sending, and receiving of these letters is absolutely precise" (224). Even after Stewart's painstaking, and absolutely correct, analysis (see esp. p. 225) I still find it impossible to account fully for what happens with the letters in question, or at least for their motivations or their carriers' movements. The problem is the scene at Gloucester's house (2.2), where Kent and Oswald meet and quarrel. My understanding is that Oswald was sent to Gloucester's house by Regan, who in 2.1 says to Gloucester: "Our father he hath writ, so hath our sister, / Of differences which I best thought it fit / To answer from our home. The several messengers / From hence attend dispatch" (Q, 2.1.122-125). I take this to mean that she did not want to answer the letters (both letters, not just Kent's) from her home, but directed the messengers to go to Gloucester's house, to receive answers there. The confusing thing is that when Goneril arrives, Regan is unsurprised because Goneril's letter had told her she would come to Gloucester's house (and probably instructed Regan to go there). Regan says: "This approves her letters / That she would soon be here" (2.4.153-154). Now, if Regan went to Gloucester's house to consult with Gloucester (she wants his advice—as we have seen) but also to meet Goneril, why would she send Oswald to Gloucester's house to wait for an answer when she knew she would meet Goneril there in person?

fearefull thinges, which should shortly come to passe.”⁷¹ In its address to the reader the translator does not merely assure us that he checked his High Dutch copy of this pamphlet with the original published in Vienna (albeit he gives no clue as to whether the original is in German or in Croatian); he also asserts, and this is important, that “The playnesse of the Style wherein it is written, voide of *Ambages*, Amplifications, and all other Vaine flourishes [...] is to me no small argument of the verity thereof.”⁷²

Shakespeare’s *King Lear* is so absorbed in the question of plain speech and flattery or truth and rhetoric that we can perceive in the play as a whole a certain shift in style away from the ornamental rhetoric of the early scenes to a kind of language that gradually loses its superfluities as Lear divests himself of his clothes and as the nakedness of the play’s political machinations comes into full view. This process of stripping-down is something that those who have written on the play’s style noticed long ago, without linking the plainness of style to any political question or, as I am doing here, to the larger question of political language that is set off in *King Lear* by a deliberate rewriting of the discourses of counsel the play is indebted to. “Where else are we to seek the imagination,” writes A. C. Bradley in a classic discussion of *King Lear*, “that could venture to follow that cry of ‘Never’ with such a phrase as ‘undo this button,’

⁷¹ *Strange, fearful & true newes, which happened at Carlstadt, in the kingdome of Croatia* (London: Printed for G. Vincent and W. Blackwal, 1606). On the connection of this publication to Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, see G. B. Harrison, *Introducing Shakespeare* (West Drayton, Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1948 [1939]), pp. 114-116. If Harrison is right, and if Croatia had indeed something to do with the composition of *King Lear* (upon which question I, for one, for various learned reasons, all too complicated to be fully presented here, do not entertain the slightest doubt), the play was composed in the course of 1606 as the preface to the pamphlet is dated February 11, 1605 (i.e. 1606 new style).

⁷² *Strange, fearful & true newes*, sig. A3r.

and yet could leave us on the topmost peaks of poetry?”⁷³ This is Shakespeare’s “unpoetic poetry”—the kind of poetry that emerges from the dramatic context, the dramatic event, and that gives special weight to the closing scenes of *Lear*.⁷⁴ It is, apparently, plain speech appropriated for purely poetic purposes.

In an admittedly lower key than Bradley, Emily W. Leider observes that the final scenes of *King Lear* exhibit “a kind of verbal nakedness” when compared with the magniloquence that dominates the opening scenes.⁷⁵ Even though she claims, contrary to what is being claimed here, that Kent is “the exemplar of plainness” for whom “speaking and doing are one and the same thing” (49), she is careful not to regard plainness as “the unchallenged stylistic hero of the play” (52).⁷⁶ She suggests instead that *King Lear* is “neither an endorsement of the plain style” nor “a poetic experiment in the plain mode,” but “an experiment in poetic elasticity and variety” (52). Still, Leider considers *King Lear*, in a gesture that characterizes a great deal of criticism devoted to the play, to be “a tragedy of reduction” that “moves away from superfluities, towards necessity, simplicity, and truth” (52). Even if plainness is not the unchallenged stylistic hero of the play, its imagined moral and philosophical counterparts—politics being for the most part absent from this reading—are.⁷⁷

⁷³ Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 293.

⁷⁴ See Maurice Charney, “Shakespeare’s Unpoetic Poetry,” *Studies in English Literature* 13.2 (1973): 199-207.

⁷⁵ Emily W. Leider, “Plainness of Style in *King Lear*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 21.1 (1970): 45-53, at p. 45.

⁷⁶ Leider is compelled to acknowledge a little later that “[e]ven Kent wears a disguise, adopts an accent, ‘defuses’ or disorders his speech” (53).

⁷⁷ For several sustained reflections on the question of language in *King Lear*, see *Some Facets of “King Lear”*: *Essays in Prismatic Criticism*, ed. Rosalie L. Colie and F. T. Flahiff (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto

Should we, then, read this poetic transformation in the play's language as perhaps suggesting that the plainness of language has been shown to be unfit for the world of politics and has therefore been relegated to the realm of poesy, reduced to a stylistic effect? Or should we imagine that the play endorses moral values in their pure form and ultimately free of their expression in language, of their rhetorical contamination? I don't think so. In fact, I don't think the play shows a complete movement from the elaborate to the plain even though a transformation is discernible—a transformation that, in its imperfection, we are invited to observe. The clearest instance of this imperfection is Lear's famous speech on poor naked wretches in the play, claimed by socialists as much as by humanists and existentialists, and even sometimes seen as a direct act of advice to monarchs or power figures more generally:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
 That bide the pelting of this pitiless night,
 How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
 Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
 From seasons such as these?"

Lear does not stop there:

O, I have ta'en
 Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
 That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
 And show the heavens more just. (Q, 3.4.24-32)

Press, 1974), especially the contributions by Sheldon P. Zitner ("*King Lear* and Its Language") and Martha Andresen ("‘Ripeness is all’: Sententiae and Commonplaces in *King Lear*").

The image of shaking the superflux as the answer to the problem of social injustice strikes me, well, as woefully out of place. In a passage largely characterized by native diction and syntactic simplicity the deeply Latinate nature of *superflux*, never used in English before Shakespeare (and very rarely after), combines with the arrogance of the act of shaking off. This image of justice—justice that comes about not through genuine sharing or equal distribution but through a fitful dumping of superfluity—resonates very strongly with the problem of language and rhetoric that I have tried to describe.⁷⁸ The answer to the problem of political language cannot be its reduction to the level of plain speech and its shaking off of superfluous rhetorical baggage.

Discarded in the political sphere, plain speech as plain poetry proves equally insufficient as the channel for the play's emotions precisely because the personal and the political remain indistinguishable.⁷⁹ Plain speech as plain poetry in Shakespeare's *King Lear* remains to haunt the boundaries between the king and his subject, the father and his daughter, the author and his source. It is hardly a reassuring political landscape. Whereas in *Gorboduc* we know that, despite the death of all the princes, the land will be reduced to monarchy again even if much bloodshed will precede it, in *King Lear* there is no such comforting message. Holinshed gave us Gonoril's and Regan's sons, Cordelia's nephews, who eventually depose her. Shakespeare does not even give us Cordelia. By the end of the play nobody wants to rule as if sovereignty itself has

⁷⁸ Superfluity is an important image in the play. Consider, for example, Lear's argument with Regan, when he says: "O reason not the need! Our basest beggars / Are in the poorest thing superfluous" (Q, 2.4.234-235). Lear's *superflux* should also be contrasted with Gloucester's deployment of a similar image, but with somewhat different results: "Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens' plagues / Have humbled to all strokes. Heavens deal so still. / Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man / That stands your ordinance, that will not see / Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly. / So distribution should undo excess, / And each man have enough" (4.1.62-69).

⁷⁹ For this problem, especially in relation to the humanist letter as a vehicle of affect, see Lisa Jardine, "Reading and the Technology of Textual Affect: Erasmus's Familiar Letters and Shakespeare's *King Lear*," *Reading Shakespeare Historically* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 78-97.

somehow been irremediably tainted, as if there is no longer any kind of language that can serve the purposes of meaningful political action. It is all “cheerless, dark, and deadly,” Kent observes as he refuses Albany’s offer to rule the kingdom (Q, 5.3.282). The fact that the play’s final lines are assigned to different speakers in the two early texts of *King Lear*—they are spoken by Albany in the Quarto edition, and by Edgar in the Folio edition—is not without special irony: we do not know who will rule this land. Whoever it is, his words sound deeply disappointing: “The weight of this sad time we must obey,” he says, “Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say” (Q, 5.3.315-316; F, 5.3.299-300). But has not the play asked us to examine this very injunction and to see how insufficient it is as a solution to the messy nature of our personal and political worlds?

In effect, what the closing lines of *King Lear* are telling us is at odds with what the play as a whole has just shown us. This semantic discrepancy, this strange hope in the power of linguistic decorum to make things well may be the whole point. If we have really paid attention to what *King Lear* as a play had to show us, then the neat contrast between what we feel and what we ought to say must appear to us false. The closing scene of the play becomes a kind of rhetorical, intellectual, and ultimately political test for us, similar to the test with which the play opened. Can we reconcile what we think *we* see with what we are *told*, in plain language, to do?

It is significant that the word *counsel* appears in *King Lear* more often than in any other Shakespeare play, and as significant that the issue of counsel in the play, in this larger intellectual context delineated here, has been neglected even in such readings that are overtly political and that see in the play either a harbinger of capitalism or a fall back into feudalism.⁸⁰

Those few who have in recent years turned to the issue of counsel to consider it in relation to early modern political thought have concluded that *King Lear*, unlike *Hamlet*, “is an optimistic work” because “the ways and means of avoiding tragedy are explicit within the play.” Despite the bleakness of the world represented in the play, Shakespeare, according to this interpretation, “never loses sight of the political manoeuvres that would have prevented the catastrophe from unfolding,” the manoeuvres of counsel.⁸¹ I hope to have shown that the way in which Shakespeare plays with the Renaissance problem of counsel, and with us, is not just much darker but much more interesting than this. If nothing else, Shakespeare’s playing with the problem of counsel, and with the question of free and plain speech associated with it, literally helped him compose one of his greatest plays. It may not be the kind of political landscape that either the early modern period or our own would find inhabitable, its shape being so questionable, but it is a landscape across which readings of *King Lear* have to stumble as they try to understand what the many different voices that surround them are trying to say. Even if not always as bleak, it is the kind of landscape, I have tried to demonstrate, in which some of the most memorable encounters between drama and counsel in the period take place.

⁸⁰ See, for instance, Edwin Muir, *The Politics of King Lear* (Glasgow: Jackson, Son, & Company, 1947), p. 7; John F. Danby, *Shakespeare’s Doctrine of Nature: A Study of “King Lear”* (London: Faber and Faber, 1949); Paul Delany, “*King Lear* and the Decline of Feudalism,” *PMLA* 92.3 (1977): 429-440; John Turner, “The Tragic Romances of Feudalism,” in Graham Holderness, Nick Potter, and John Turner, *Shakespeare: The Play of History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987), pp. 83-154; Richard Halpern, “*Historica Passio: King Lear’s* Fall into Feudalism,” in his book *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 215-269. The same is true of the readings interested in the Britishness of the play, particularly the idea of a unified Britain; see, for instance, Glynne Wickham, “From Tragedy to Tragi-comedy: *King Lear* as Prologue,” *Shakespeare Survey* 26 (1973): 33-48, or, more recently, Willy Maley, “Critical Review: ‘Great things of us forgot’?: New British Angles on *King Lear*,” in *King Lear: A Critical Guide*, ed. Andrew Hiscock and Lisa Hopkins (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 156-179, where this strand of criticism is given extensive coverage.

⁸¹ Hadfield, “The Power and Rights of the Crown in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*,” p. 586.

EPILOGUE

Drama and Counsel

It might be objected that the account of the encounter between drama and counsel in the long sixteenth century as offered in the preceding pages still leaves a lot to be desired. Why, it might be asked, focus on drama when counsel pervades so many different sorts of texts? Is the relationship between drama and counsel in Renaissance England more central to certain genres, such as tragedy, than others, such as comedy? What is the logic informing the selection of only a handful of dramatic texts through which to depict, by means of slow and lengthy interpretive work, the interest counsel held for early modern dramatic writers? Like most authors who think they are done with their texts, I find answers to all of these questions in what has already been written. But as these answers are often left to the reader's inference, and sometimes may indeed prove to be figments of the author's imagination, it will not hurt to submit here, by way of conclusion, some remarks that confront these questions directly, one by one. If the answers come across as overly familiar, they will have proved the uselessness of this Epilogue. But at least the rage of Form, that god of gods, will have been appeased.

Counsel is not a Renaissance invention, nor is it an exclusively Renaissance preoccupation. Bring two people together and sooner than you think you will have a scene of counsel. It is such a common human activity that we would expect it to pervade not just all kinds of literary texts coming from different historical periods, but all kinds of texts and all kinds of social situations, whether we imagine the latter to be structured like texts or not. It is, however,

an activity that always and fundamentally takes place between only two persons: the person who seeks counsel and the person who gives it, even when counsel happens to be unsought (whether this is counsel or its tyrannical double is an interesting question about which I say more in Chapter 2). This is why Hobbes insists that political counsel—the kind of counsel he is primarily interested in—only properly exists in the monarchical context. The sovereign body can be counseled only on the condition of its otherness. Aristocracies and democracies do not provide true instances of counsel because those who counsel are by definition members of the body that is counseled; their participation in power makes it impossible for them to counsel power.¹ The insight is an important one, and it is by no means limited to political counsel.

Stated in this way, the problem of counsel becomes not so much a problem of what is conveyed in an act of counseling, but a problem of the relationship between the counseling agent and the subject of advice. Not what kind of counsel one gives, but how one frames it; not what kind of counsel one is given, but how one is to use it. The problem of counsel, in other words, becomes a problem of performance. It is for this reason, I argue, that drama is interested in counsel and that, more importantly, dramatic discourse becomes a privileged site for the elaboration of counsel as a fundamental human challenge. This is not to say that counsel does not play a prominent role in epic literature (witness Homer's *Iliad*) or prose romance (witness Sidney's *Arcadia*); rather, it is to argue that in whatever discursive context counsel appears, it retains traces of its basically dramatic nature. Epic poetry, Aristotle explains, combines both narrative and dramatic modes. The same is true of prose romances, and much more so of debates,

¹ “[T]here is no choyce of Counsell,” Hobbes writes, “neither in a Democracy, nor Aristocracy; because the persons Counselling are members of the person Counsell’d”; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Noel Malcolm, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), vol. 2, p. 546.

dialogues, and other genres that might be considered frequent vehicles for the thematization and discussion of counsel.

But why should an interest in the performative nature of counsel necessarily lead the scholar to an investigation of plays as opposed to the multitude of performance practices that constitute social life in any period? This is where what might appear as a severe limitation in my argument in fact enables me, I hope, to say something specific about a specific body of literature that, more often than we realize, thinks of itself as constituting a tradition.² English dramatic literature is linked to other kinds of discourse, and there are many kinds of drama that we can describe as transitional or borderline cases, but when dramatists write their plays they normally have a sense that they are doing something that has been done before. It is not just that dramatists in England, as we have learnt in recent decades, collaborated with other dramatists when they wrote their plays; they collaborated with the dramatic tradition within which they were creating. My choice of dramatic texts is meant to illustrate the richness and complexity of this dialogue as it is refracted through the problem of counsel.

This is, in part, also an answer to the question of genre, and to my unwillingness to limit my interests to the study of a particular generic category: to speak of tragic counsel or of comic counsel, or of any other kind of counsel that we might see as determined by the genre in which it has found itself. Or, conversely, to see counsel doing one kind of work in tragedies, another in comedies, yet another in history plays, not to mention many other generic categories we have

² That I have myself benefited from the study of performance understood in this broader sense should be clear from a different doctoral dissertation I have written and later published in a revised form as *Shakespeare između izvedbe i knjige* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Globus, 2010), where the notion of performance as understood in the field of performance studies is brought into dialogue with the field of book history. My interests in the current doctoral dissertation are different.

come up with in order to classify the surviving dramatic material in a meaningful way. But when we actually face the facts, we must admit that our classifications are not always meaningful. It is quite clear, for example, that “history” as a dramatic genre in the English Renaissance owes its existence not to our desire to be meaningful, but to our inability to discard the legacy of the Shakespeare first folio, where—almost out of desperation—Shakespeare’s editors listed plays dealing with English history as a separate category. While (for the most part) they list tragedies and comedies according to generic criteria (these plays share certain formal features, and are therefore grouped together), histories are listed in accordance with their subject matter, and then also in accordance with the chronology of that subject matter. It is not certain that without the Shakespeare first folio we would be likely to ask whether Marlowe’s *Edward II* is a history or a tragedy, and yet this very question has received considerable attention in the annals of Marlowe scholarship. Or, to take another example from the preceding chapters, what exactly is *Cambyeses*, that lamentable tragedy mixed full of pleasant mirth that is called both a comedy and a tragedy?

I remember taking an excellent graduate seminar at Columbia University devoted exclusively to English Renaissance tragedy. The idea informing the syllabus—extremely noble in its articulation—was that we do not want to bring to Renaissance plays our own or anybody else’s definition of tragedy, but that instead we want to see from the plays themselves what constitutes English Renaissance tragedy. And yet the plays selected for the course could not have been selected without some idea of what Renaissance tragedy was. We read *Edward II* but not *The Jew of Malta*, *Doctor Faustus* but not *The Merchant of Venice*. There are a number of Renaissance plays I do not know what to do with when I approach them from the perspective of generic criticism, and I have therefore largely refrained from adopting genre as an explanatory

mechanism in my effort to understand the dialogue between drama and counsel in early modern England.

This is why my principle of selection should be viewed as in itself an argument about the relationship between drama and counsel in early modern England. Counsel is everywhere—in comedies, in histories, in tragedies—but I think one can discuss its concrete signification only in the complex context of particular plays and the demands these plays place upon their interpreter. Hence my choice of a handful of texts rather than a catalogue of counsel and counselors in Renaissance drama, a project which I leave to the machinery of our digitally equipped advocates of the quantitative method. Whatever they find in the corpora, they will have to account for in terms of individual plays, and we are thus bound to meet again in the battlefield of interpretation. I do not claim for the texts I selected for analysis special resonance that would tell us how the entirety of English Renaissance culture actually operated,³ but I do believe these texts have special resonance in that they form a pattern against which the relationship between drama and counsel can be better understood and the results of that relationship—both for drama and for counsel—more fully acknowledged. They are all very different plays, and in their difference I often see the virtue of my choice. I do not claim to have described a historical reality so much as suggested some ways in which a particular historical relationship might be seen as deserving more attention than it is usually given.

³ Cf. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 5-6.

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