"FORTUNE'S EVER-CHANGING FACE" IN EARLY MODERN LITERATURE

AND THOUGHT

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Although fortune is ubiquitous in Renaissance literature, treatments of it rarely agree about precisely what it is. "Fortune" often seems self-contradictory, at times associated with unpredictable chance and at other times with the inexorable unfolding of Providential design. Some writers treat it as a force of change beyond human control; others, as a pattern that reveals itself to those cunning enough to seize the opportunity. But what all of these "faces" of fortune have in common is a preoccupation with different ways of knowing: is randomness a feature of the world itself, or a reflection of one's limited ability to understand causes that come about by necessity? The early modern period was characterized by a burgeoning interest in the problem of contingent knowledge: the Reformation sparked debates about the necessity or contingency of salvation, the rise of modern statecraft necessitated new strategies for governance, exploration opened new markets and challenged wisdom about how trade works, and the New Science used empirical data to back up tentative hypotheses. The question early moderns confronted when they debated the nature of fortune, I argue, was more complicated than whether an actual entity called "Fortune" exists and controls some

outcomes; it was about how a concept called "fortune" could be a useful category for navigating contingent knowledge in these various fields. My dissertation claims that fortune enabled Renaissance thinkers and writers, including Shakespeare, Spenser, Bacon, and Jonson, to confront questions about contingency and the extent of human agency. My focus on fortune as an integral feature of literary narratives contributes to a growing body of criticism about literature's philosophical purchase. In particular, the issues fortune raises regarding certainty, time, and perspective serve as a fulcrum of literary plotting, demanding that audiences constantly reevaluate what constitutes chance or necessity and interpret order and chaos as relative to one's frame of reference. Literature serves as a crucial site for speculative inquiry that suspends questions of certainty, thereby revealing an alternate history of uncertainty that resists triumphalist narratives of the rise of rational modernity.

**Acknowledgements**

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**Introduction: An Alternate History of Uncertainty**

> LUCILLUS
> Her use is not to lend us still her hand,
> But sometimes headlong back again to throw,
> When by her favour she hath us extolled,
> Unto the top of highest happiness. (III, 270-273)
>
> ANTONIUS
> It was not Fortune's ever-changing face,
> It was not destiny's changeless violence,
> Forged my mishap. Alas! Who doth not know
> They make, nor mar, nor anything can do?
> Fortune, which men so fear, adore, detest,
> Is but a chance whose cause unknown doth rest,
> Although oft-times the cause is well perceived,
> But not th'effect the same that was conceived. (III, 279-286)

Mary Sidney's translation of Robert Garnier's *Tragedy of Antonie* (1590) stages an argument about Fortune that is at once highly conventional and deeply revealing of key intellectual currents of the early modern period. Lucillus attempts to console Antonius over his loss in battle by attributing it to the inscrutable will of the goddess Fortune, which, he says, possesses "Great force and power in every worldly thing" since she has "all things fast enchained / unto the circle of her turning wheel" (III, 260-262). His consolation paints the familiar portrait of Fortune as an all-powerful deity, lifting men up on her wheel only to cast them inexorably down. But Antonio immediately contradicts this view, insisting it was neither Fortune nor destiny that "forged" his downfall, since they neither "make nor mar, nor anything can do." He takes, in other words, full blame for his own defeat.

But beyond simply countering that Fortune has no power, Antonius offers a different view of it entirely, one that ceases to personify it altogether. Instead, he explains

that fortune (now small "f") is "but a chance whose cause unknown doth rest," shifting the focus away from conventional moralizing and questions of agency. His account of the "ever-changing face" of fortune is an epistemological one, which rests on our inability to ascribe causes in some cases, further compounded by the tendency of causes to produce effects beyond the agent's intent. The words echo *Hamlet*'s "purposes mistook/ Fall'n on th'inventors's heads" in their emphasis on causal relationships gone awry or otherwise disrupted. Far from making man master of his own destiny, denying fortune's divinity only opens up further questions about order and chaos, cause and effect, and humanity's ability to penetrate nature's secrets. The question early moderns confronted when they debated the nature of fortune was hence more complicated than whether an actual entity called "Fortune" exists and controls some outcomes; it was about how a concept called "fortune" could be a useful category for navigating various kinds of contingent knowledge.

As this brief debate illustrates, embedded within early modern discussions of "fortune" are a host of uncertainties. "Fortune" as it is deployed in early modern literature seems self-contradictory, at times associated with unpredictable chance, and at other times with the inexorable unfolding of Providential design. Some treat it as an all-powerful deity; others dismiss it as an inconsequential fiction. It is sometimes a force of change beyond human control, and at other times a pattern that reveals itself to those cunning enough to seize the opportunity. Ultimately, this confusion stems from the way "fortune" blurs the distinction between uncertainty as an intrinsic feature of the external world and as a limitation of our subjective experience of it. [1] Ascribing events to

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[1] Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment*, xiii; Bennett, *Randomness*, 83–87.

"fortune" can imply both a judgment about ontology—the nature of the world itself—and epistemology, how we access information about the world. As a result, the products of "fortune" can include both contingent events—that is, events whose outcomes are not guaranteed—and events of unknown cause, either because its cause is not yet known or cannot possibly be known. Of course, it is possible to believe that outcomes are the result of necessary causes (in particular, Providential design) while still worrying about the best way to act upon uncertain information when that design is not immediately apparent.

This blending of ethical and epistemological issues is the hallmark of early modern treatments of fortune: it is a signature of the period's novelty but also of the way it sought answers to the new questions that troubled it by looking back to the ancient world. Earlier representations of fortune tended to emphasize the fundamental unpredictability of events and, as a result, mankind's powerlessness to change fortune's outcomes. In such a context, fortune's perceived control over events merely presented a challenge to moral fortitude, since its influence over individuals high and low, virtuous and wicked demanded patient sufferance from all alike. In contrast, early moderns increasingly began to understand fortune's tendency to produce uncertainty (both with respect to external outcomes or internal states of mind) as an opportunity for action. Fortune, in other words, was not simply an all-powerful deity—or function of the mysterious workings of Providence—but a species of uncertainty that could be rectified, or at least managed. But the methods for managing fortune continued to treat it as an ethical concept, something to be mitigated through virtue, though many disagreed about what precisely this "virtue" entailed. Eventually, these "virtues" for influencing uncertain outcomes became displaced by scientific epistemology, such that by the late seventeenth

century, reasoning about uncertainty and possible outcomes had been enshrined as "probability." But the attribution of ethical judgments to random or otherwise uncontrollable outcomes is a legacy of early modern thinking about fortune that persists to this day.

Any account of fortune must inevitably confront the challenge of giving form to this evidently formless entity, to be precise about a principle of change that is itself adaptable to a variety of situations, as "ever-changing" as Antonius describes. Literary form, in fact, proved to be a crucial means by which early moderns worked through the related issues of contingency, uncertainty, and agency that are grouped together under the rubric of "fortune" in the period. Fortune has a special urgency in the early modern period, which begins to challenge well-established standards for knowledge production and transmission in a variety of fields. Each chapter of this dissertation, therefore, considers the way that a different author represents fortune in order to strategize about managing contingency in a specific field: in courtly conduct, in natural philosophy, in politics, and in finance. For Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*, fortune is hermeneutic uncertainty, something that needs to be re-interpreted to see the way that providential order governs courtly hierarchy. Writing in an allegorical mode, therefore, perfectly complements the way that Spenser understands fortune as a veil concealing the world's fundamental order, because Christian allegory demands a distrust of surface appearances in favor of a higher, spiritual significance. In the second chapter, I show how although Bacon, like Spenser, understands fortune as the element of uncertainty in human interaction that can be managed through prudence, he applies these methods to an entirely unexpected context: that of natural knowledge. His utopian fiction, *The New Atlantis*,

holds out the possibility of perfect knowledge but also recognizes the chaotic path that leads us toward it. For Jonson and Shakespeare, working in the context of theatrical performance gives fortune's contingency a special immediacy. Jonson treats the stage as a crucible where Stoic and Machiavellian philosophies of "fortune" dictate competing modes of political action. And for Shakesepare, "fortune" refers to risk—particularly financial risk—whose outcomes characters try to ascribe to the hand of providence, to blind luck, or to prudential thriftiness. But what all of these "faces" of fortune have in common is a preoccupation with the problem of how to derive general knowledge from particulars and the contrary, how to apply general principles in specific contexts. Regardless of whether "fortune" was the best term for uncertainty in these various contexts, it was a crucial tool for a host of writers and thinkers at this historical moment for determining how to put knowledge into practice, how to evaluate degrees of certainty, and how to anticipate possible outcomes.

Fortune owes its complexity partly to the varied traditions that twisted and adapted the concept to different viewpoints over its centuries-long history. Significant portions of this history will find their way into this study at various points, as they are relevant to the topic at hand: ancient Greek philosophers, Roman Stoics and their Renaissance imitators, early Christian theologians, political theorists, Protestant reformers, natural philosophers, and mathematical probabilists will all play a hand in painting this portrait of an idea at a crucial moment. Each chapter focuses on key works by prominent authors of Renaissance England—Spenser, Bacon, Jonson, and Shakespeare—in order to offer an in-depth treatment of fortune's particular relevance to a specific literary work, while simultaneously ranging across the varied contexts that

illuminate fortune's unique representation. This is not, therefore, an attempt to offer a teleological history of fortune's development as an idea. While it might seem tempting to provide a Whiggish account whereby great minds banish irrational superstition in favor of logical, deterministic accounts of causation, such a triumphalist narrative would occlude the great extent to which discussions about fortune engaged with very real problems about how to manage and account for uncertainty in a variety of fields. To present the rise of modernity as a story of the "onward march of human rationality" is to occlude many "ambiguities and confusions": "Whether the seventeenth-century enthronement of 'rationality' was a victory or a defeat for humanity," Stephen Toulmin asserts, "depends on how we conceive of 'rationality' itself: instead of the successes of the intellect having been unmixed blessings, they must be weighed against the losses that came from abandoning the sixteenth century commitment to intellectual modesty, uncertainty, and toleration."[2]

One of the broadest aims of this project, therefore, is to continue revising this teleological account of the rise of rational modernity. Typically, histories of fortune trace it— rather ironically—as a *de casibus* style rise and fall. In this account, "fortune" becomes prominent when Renaissance humanists turn away from a medieval, spiritual concern with the eternal.[3] Fortune in these accounts transforms from a species of fate,

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[2] *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 174. See also Susan Elizabeth Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise?: The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

[3] See Frederick Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Lib., 1983); Vincenzo Cioffari, *Fortune And Fate From Democritus To St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Goodrich Composition Co., 1935); Vincenzo Cioffari, "The Function of Fortune in Dante, Boccaccio and Machiavelli," *Italica* 24, no. 1 (1947): 1–13; Jerold C Frakes, *The Fate of Fortune in the Early Middle Ages: The Boethian Tradition* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988).

capricious yet inexorable, into a generalized uncertainty about the future that can be planned against. Fortune then falls out of favor when the probabilists abandon its insistence that uncertainty is an inescapable part of the world, arguing instead that uncertainty is merely a feature of gaps in our own understanding, which can be rectified. Fortune, according to Descartes, is a "chimera […] founded only on our failure to know all the causes that contribute to each effect."[4] Similarly, Hobbes rails in *Leviathan* against the "perpetual fear, always accompanying mankind in the ignorance of causes" that leads men to reify "their own ignorance, by the name of Fortune."[5] Walter Charleton offers an extended "exploration of [Fortune's] Nature," only to conclude that "if considered *per se & revera*, she hath no nature at all, i.e. that *in Reality she is nothing*."[6]

Fortune's main detractors in the mid-seventeenth century were proponents of the new science of probability. Probability offered a precise means of managing risk and evaluating uncertain outcomes, a scientific version of the daring confrontations with risk promoted by earlier remedies for fortune, which helped bring about the Financial Revolution, as I explore in Chapter Four.[7] With probability, uncertainty was allowable,

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[4] René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen H. Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989), 98–99.

[5] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 76, 80.

[6] Walter Charleton, *The Darknes of Atheism Dispelled by the Light of Nature a Physico-Theologicall Treatise* (London: Printed by J.F. for William Lee, 1652), Pp4. For further discussion of the decline of Fortune among probabilists, see Lorraine Daston, "Fortuna and the Passions," in *Chance, Culture, and the Literary Text*, ed. Thomas M. Kavanagh, vol. 14 (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Romance Studies, 1994), 26–27.

[7] Carl Wennerlind explains, "aleatory contracts, including games of chance and insurance, which were part of the new efforts to control and harness risk and uncertainty, were designed with the aid of probabilistic thinking," in *Casualties of Credit: The English Financial Revolution, 1620-1720* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 4.

but only as long as it could be evaluated, weighed, and ordered in degrees.[8] The irony of

this transformation from fortune to probability, however, was that the probabilists were

not looking to earlier thinkers who regarded fortune's uncertainty as something to be

analyzed and reduced through prudence, but were starting from the assumption that

fortune was a fiction, and that all outcomes could be explained as rationally necessary

with the right methods and tools.[9] By dismissing the legacy of writing about fortune,

probabilists were able to distinguish their insights as truly innovative. Later

historiography has often agreed with this assessment, occluding the extent to which

discussions of fortune and probability overlap.

Whether we see commonalities between probability and fortune depends in part

on whether we focus on uncertainty as a feature of individual experience or as inherent in

the world itself. That is, there are two fundamental ways of describing probability:

subjective, dealing with individuals' degrees of belief, and objective, dealing with the

likelihood of a set of different outcomes.[10] John Lyons describes the expansion of

fortune's meaning as a distinctly early modern phenomenon: "At the end of the sixteenth

century, fortune was no longer thought of as the career of an individual nor even as the

up-and-down movement of kingdoms as their prosperity waxed and waned. Instead, it

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[8] Daston, "Fortuna and the Passions," 27.

[9] Daston, "Fortuna and the Passions," 26. See also Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Lorraine J. Daston, "The Doctrine of Chances Without Chance: Determinism, Mathematical Probability, and Quantification in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Invention of Physical Science*, ed. Mary Jo Nye, Joan L. Richards, and Roger H. Stuewer, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science 139 (Springer Netherlands, 1992), 27–50.

[10] Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*, 1. In other words, probability is concerned with evaluating degrees of belief and with the tendency of certain devices to produce stable relative frequencies.

was a generalized uncertainty about outcomes and thus about the means to ends."[11] By "means to ends," Lyons indicates that fortune is not only a descriptor for events with unpredictable or random outcomes, but also a way of indicating our limited ability to accurately understand and describe causation in order to effect particular outcomes. In a similar fashion, Deborah J. Bennett identifies three positions about the meaning of randomness—"that it is a function of long-run frequency, a function of our ignorance, or a function of the length of its generating formula"—but suggests that they all share a common view of "the unpredictability of future events based on past events."[12] Lorraine Daston attributes this expansion of uncertainty into a quantity that is "relative to our state of knowledge" rather than absolute to the banishment of fortune from serious discourse.[13] I hold, however, that this distinction between uncertainty in the world and individuals' uncertainty *about* the world was already very much a part of the Renaissance tradition on fortune.

Probability is equally a statistical matter and an epistemological one; it describes both events with unknown outcomes and with our perception of what those outcomes might be.[14] According to Ian Hacking, the emphasis in the early modern period fell more heavily on the epistemological issue about the grounds for belief: "probable" for early

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[11] John Lyons, *The Phantom of Chance: From Fortune to Randomness in Seventeenth-Century French Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 24.

[12] Deborah J. Bennett, *Randomness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 164–165.

[13] Lorraine Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), fn12, 26.

[14] Ibid., 12. Accounting for changes in the epistemological and mathematical treatment of probability over time, Deborah Bennett explains that there are three positions on the meaning of randomness: "a function of long-run frequency, a function of our ignorance, or a function of the length of its generating formula" in *Randomness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 164–165. See also pp. 83–108.

moderns primarily meant approved by credible authorities.[15] Their approach, therefore,

tended to blur objective and subjective viewpoints about the grounds for "belief" and the

experience of risk.[16] Although the strategies described in gaming treatises, for instance,

demonstrated an understanding of the principles of mathematical probability prior to the

1650s, this knowledge was not applied to reasoning about risk to real-life situations such

as venture capitalism, insurance, and annuities.[17] Instead, individuals discussing chance

dealt more with probability as dependent on authority, on pragmatic experience that

enabled one to overcome hazards.[18] While on the one hand, such arguments from

authority did little to establish an objective means of describing uncertain outcomes, on

the other hand, they do provide a heuristic for predicting outcomes based on subjective

experience. Thus, probability and fortune bear more in common than early thinkers were

inclined to suggest.

Histories of probability draw a sharp distinction between discussions of fortune

and discussions of mathematical probability on the basis of the latter's emphasis on

objective, calculable frequencies. But fortune's representation in literature makes explicit

the fact that order and disorder are a function of our own frames of reference, which can

change over time or according to our location. I argue, therefore, that the literary tradition

of fortune offers us an alternate history of uncertainty, one that produced efforts to

manage uncertainty while simultaneously recognizing the limits of rationality to achieve

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[15] Ibid., 26.

[16] Lorraine Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), xiii.

[17] Ceri Sullivan, *Rhetoric Of Credit: Merchants in Early Modern Writing* (Fairleigh Dickinson, 2002), 58; Galileo Galilei, "Sopra Le Scoperte de I Dadi," in *Le Opere Di Galileo Galilei*, ed. A Favaro (Firenze: La Barbera, 1897), 591–94.

[18] Sullivan, *Rhetoric Of Credit*, 59.

utter dominance over the unknown. Literary representations of fortune engage with all its varied traditions and associations, complicating this progressive narrative of increasing rationalization. Fortune's literary life employs strategies of interpreting action and event and identifies causal relationships that go beyond the strictly deterministic. Attending to the strategies for limiting fortune's power or influencing its outcomes that we find in literature demonstrates how the discourse of fortune influenced probability theory and its applications long after the specific concept "fortune" lost favor.[19]

Far from a story of the triumph of reason over superstition, what emerges from my analysis of fortune in the Renaissance is a constellation of practices and habits of thought that enabled early modern writers to accept uncertainty as an enduring fact of life and also to develop contingent forms of knowledge to manage it. The early modern period saw a confluence of several issues swirling around the problem of contingent knowledge: the Reformation sparked debates about the necessity or contingency of salvation, the rise of modern statecraft necessitated new strategies for governance, exploration opened new markets and challenging wisdom about how trade works, and the New Science used empirical data to back up tentative hypotheses. Although the reality of fortune as a both a concrete agent and an abstract principle of change was forcefully rebutted by the probabilists of the mid-seventeenth century, the literary devices and

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[19] It is worth noting that while some probabilists dismissed fortune on the grounds that it is a "fiction," Pierre de Fermat understands Blaise Pascal's solution to the problem calculating the payout for an interrupted game as a "fiction": (*Ce qui vient de ce que, comme vous avez tres bien remarqué, cette fiction d'etendre le jeu à un certain nombre de parties ne sert qu'à faciliter la regle*). "Pascal's wager," as it has been since called, was one of the foundational texts of modern probability theory. Blaise Pascal, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: L. Hachette, 1858), 404.

habits of thought fortune inspired left an indelible mark on the intellectual world of early

modern Europe.

**Fortune and the Problem of Contingent Knowledge**

The present study joins a recent flourishing of criticism interested in contingency

and the practical intellect in the early modern period. J.G.A. Pocock's groundbreaking

treatment of fortune in *The Machiavellian Moment* as the pivotal crisis launching the

formation of the early modern state informs much of my own analysis of fortune,

principally regarding fortune's role in linking practical action to generalized theories.

Confronting fortune in Machiavellian thought, Pocock argues, entails attempting to

realize "a universality of values within a particular and therefore finite and mortal

political structure" wherein active, civic virtue provided a way of rendering finite, secular

phenomena intelligible.[20] In other words, the city-state faced a crisis in legitimizing itself,

projecting its continued existence through time in a way that monarchical governments

did not, thanks to their connection to providential design and God's rule over the earth.

Machiavelli's work intervenes in this system by offering strategies for evaluating

circumstances and responding to particular political dilemmas. He does not provide

specific policies, as other writers on the art of state had, but instead offers a general

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[20] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, Revised (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 84. See also Julie Robin Solomon, *Objectivity in the Making: Francis Bacon and the Politics of Inquiry* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002): "Generally speaking, from Aristotle until William of Ockham in the fourteenth century, most philosophers 'found the particular less intelligible and less rational than the universal,' since it was embedded in both space and time. Particulars, accidents, contingencies, adjuncts, and circumstances were all philosophic names for the thick, material shrouds that humans had to think through to comprehend the universal, intelligible essences of things," 163.

theory of politics that unites civil philosophy with the art of state.[21] In Pocock's wake, much of this criticism has focused on Machiavelli as the quintessential Renaissance theorist of Fortune, whose dictum "fortune is a woman, and if you want to control her, it is necessary to treat her roughly" represents a newfound confidence in man's ability to control contingency that stands in contrast to a medieval, Boethian notion that Fortune keeps us bound to her wheel.

The misogynistic violence of Machiavelli's statement, drawing upon the personification of fortune as a goddess, sets up masculine virtue (from the Latin *vir*) as the force opposing fortune's irrational chaos. Although Machiavelli at times uses other terms such as "fate," "fates," "providence," "heavens," "the stars," "grace," and "the times," "*fortuna* is Machiavelli's major term for designating the uncertainty and dependency of human affairs."[22] His emphasizing this term in particular draws upon a well-established tradition in Western thought that pits virtue against fortune as two opposing forces.[23] Rather than traditional Christian virtue however, Machiavellian *virtù* entails "the art of dealing with contingent events, with fickle fortune, the symbol of pure, uncontrolled and unlegitimated contingency."[24] Chapter Three in particular will explore

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[21] Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics, 1250-160* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 147, 177.

[22] Thomas Flanagan, "The Concept of Fortuna in Machiavelli," in *The Political Calculus*, ed. Anthony Parel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 127.

[23] Flanagan, "The Concept of Fortuna in Machiavelli" claims that Machiavelli would have been exposed to notion of a conflict between virtue and fortune from early studies and in everyday conversation since it was "the common property of an entire civilization," 134. Pocock in *The Machiavellian Moment* supports this claim, saying, "The problem of fortuna is a problem in virtue," 157.

[24] Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics, 1250-160* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 127.

how "fortune" in Jonson's *Sejanus* comes to represent political contingency, manageable by those best able to exercise *virtù*. The conflict between virtue (or *virtù*) and fortune reveals that the challenge of confronting fortune is a challenge, according to Renaissance thought, rooted in the makeup of the human intellect itself.

Increasingly, this virtue comes to be identified with prudence, a capacity central to understanding contingency and epistemology in the Renaissance. A detailed look at prudence reveals how rationality and uncertainty were not at all mutually exclusive. The most basic premise of prudential reasoning was that by gathering enough information about past instances, a shrewd observer would be able to make reasonable recommendations about what to do in the present while being fairly confident of the future result.[25] Philip Camerarius, writing in the early seventeenth century, describes the logic: "When one considers the past and pays attention to the present, one can draw reasonable conclusions about the future."[26] In its ability to mediate between the dictates of principles and the vagaries of experience, prudence is "halfway between an ethics of principles, in which those principles univocally dictate action […] and an ethics of consequences, in which the successful result is all."[27] Prudence therefore provided a means to bridge contingent and necessary knowledge, to connect knowledge gained from experience to necessary, or certain, knowledge of principles. With experience, one could

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[25] Summers, *The Judgment of Sense* describes an allegory of prudence by Titian that depicts a young, middle-aged, and old face looking forward, straight ahead and backward, respectively, above the motto, "from the past, the present acts prudently lest it spoil future action," 266.

[26] Quoted in Anthony Grafton, "The New Science and the Traditions of Humanism," *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, Cambridge Companions to Literature, 1996, 216.

[27] Eugene Garver, *Machiavelli and the History of Prudence* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 12.

use prudence to gain knowledge about general principles: experience refines prudence, ultimately allowing one to reason "about what sort of things conduce to the good life in general."[28] Prudence's dictates are not absolute, however: rather than functioning like an algorithm where the same input produces the same result every time, prudence resembles a heuristic, whose results are variable and whose applicability is uncertain.[29] Its conclusions are reasonable because they are consistent with past experience, but not certain, because outcomes are not guaranteed. While "animal" prudence entails simply the mind's tendency to make projections based on past experience, one can refine the exercise of "true" prudence through reason.[30] This ability to refine and develop prudence suggested that one could gradually become better equipped to combat fortune. Fortune was not simply an inexorable force of chaos; its management was a skill that could be learned.

Prudence played a significant role in Renaissance humanism, particularly due to humanists' emphasis on probabilistic reasoning in fields such as art, rhetoric, and ethics.[31] Granted, the divisions between disciplines were by no means standardized even

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[28] Summers, *The Judgment of Sense*, 268.

[29] Garver, *Machiavelli and the History of Prudence*, 13.

[30] Summers, *The Judgment of Sense*, 267, 270.

[31] A number of studies focus on the legacy of prudence in humanist scholarship and Renaissance political thought, particularly that of Machiavelli. See, for instance, Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*. Eugene Garver, *Machiavelli and the History of Prudence* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: from the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton University Press, 1994); Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics, 1250-160* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Summers discusses in detail how prudence expanded beyond its original parameters: the application of prudence in the Renaissance even exceeded its original boundaries in rhetoric, ethics, and politics; it also contributed to the flourishing of the arts. While prudence was typically understood as

among the ancient Greek philosophers who established the concepts of *theoria* and *praxis*

to distinguish the study of certain, necessary knowledge (e.g. of mathematical principles

or natural laws) from the study of contingent matters (e.g. of crafts, art, politics, or

ethics).[32] Nevertheless, these set the precedent for subsequent disciplinary structures,

including the liberal arts curriculum: the *trivium* (devoted to dialectic, grammar, and

rhetoric) and *quadrivium* (astronomy, geometry, music, and arithmetic). Within the

medieval liberal arts curriculum, greater precedence had been given to the *theoria* of

dialectic over rhetoric and grammar, since its object was *episteme*, the certain knowledge

of universal principles. *Praxis*, particularly its subdivision devoted to practical reasoning

(*phronesis* or prudence, from the Latin, *prudentia*), was more disconnected from the body

of certain knowledge, produced instead through the necessary logic of the dialectic and

unable to admit merely probable premises. However, in Renaissance humanist courts, the

demand for rhetorical and practical reasoning skills, especially applied to politics, was

considerable.[33] As a result, masters of rhetoric began to evaluate their own discipline

using the same standards with which dialectic had previously been regarded, calling it the

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a subdivision of *praxis* distinguished by its end (action), we also find that the other half
of *praxis* (*techne*/*ars*, whose end was making a product) makes use of prudential
reasoning. According to Summers, the visual arts applied practical reasoning in order to
determine the best composition of light and shadow, arrangement of figures, and so forth
in any given composition. See Summers, *The Judgment of Sense,* 30. In each of these
domains of *praxis* (that is, *phronesis/prudentia* and *techne/ars*), experience, repeated
trials, and practical action were crucial skills employed in mediating the relationship
between universal principles and particular cases—skills that had been dismissed by
earlier generations of thinkers.

[32] Richard Parry, "*Episteme* and *Techne*," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,
ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2008,
http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/episteme-techne/.

[33] See, for instance, Renato Barilli, *Rhetoric* (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 58–
62, and Brian Vickers, "Philosophy and Humanistic Disciplines: Rhetoric and Poetics,"
in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles Schmitt et al.
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 713–745.

"art of arts," and suggesting that mastery of rhetoric made one capable of mastering any skill.[34]

Renaissance thinkers repurposed and made more central the practical intellect through rhetoric, influenced by a widespread interest in uncertainty and contingency. David Summers argues that in the Renaissance, the faculties of "lower reasoning," including prudence, began to enjoy greater prominence than they had before, and activities thought to require only lower reasoning were seen to entail higher faculties as well.[35] The effect of this expansion of prudence's application was to legitimize practical knowledge as a means toward certainty. Uncertainty, Susan Schreiner asserts, is a "unifying question" of the sixteenth century: "the rhetorical tradition called into question the certitude of absolute, eternal, rational truth. The foregrounding of experience was characteristic of this era. It was in the experienced world that one looked for certainty, not in the abstract, unchanging, and eternal."[36] We can see this shift in the rise of modern scientific reasoning, particularly as outlined by Mary Poovey, whose history of the

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[34] Whereas Aquinas held dialectic to be the "art of arts," Bacon calls the "part of human philosophy which is rational" (which comprises invention, judgment, memory, and elocution—components of rhetoric, although he seems to refer here to both rhetoric and dialectic) the "art of arts" in Francis Bacon, *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers, 218. Bacon is clearly conflating rhetoric with dialectic, since the parts of dialectic are typically limited to "invention" and "judgment," according to Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 112–113.

[35] Summers, *The Judgment of Sense*, 21, 28. Here, Summers also mentions Seneca's claim that the mechanical arts "were devised by reason but not by *right* reason," which suggests that Stoic philosophy held the practical intellect in lower esteem than Machiavelli apparently did.

[36] Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise?*, ix, 30.

modern fact uncovers a system of knowledge that employed particular information in service of general principles.[37]

Machiavelli's forceful confrontation with the vicissitudes of fortune through prudence is but one of a wide range of responses to uncertainty, of course. Thomas Flanagan has usefully categorized Machiavelli's direct response as an exemplar of "immanent" views on fortune, which take seriously the need to strive to obtain the goods of fortune. This view offered the possibility that fortune's ministrations could be manipulated and directed to particular ends. Machiavelli's meditations on fortune in *The Prince* comprise the most prominent example of such thinking, but "remedies for fortune" were practically a genre unto themselves visible across a wide spectrum of writings, including courtesy literature, manuals for princes, and advice to merchants. Petrarch, Guicciardini, and Francis Bacon, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, are some notable authors of remedies for fortune.[38] The "immanent" view of fortune allowed that fortune comprised the element of uncertainty inherent in all decision-making, and provided various methods for minimizing such uncertainty, or preparing individuals to react to it.

This practical advice butted up against the writings of Neostoics and Christian theologians, who tended to diminish the importance of fortune by viewing it as a

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[37] Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*, 1st ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1998).
[38] For a review of the tradition in connection with the plays of Christopher Marlowe, see Don Cameron Allen, "Renaissance Remedies for Fortune: Marlowe and the 'Fortunati,'" *Studies in Philology* 38, no. 2 (April 1, 1941): 188–97. See also Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation 1500 - 1700* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 74–76; Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton*, 10–11; 93–106.

component of a larger, less immediately apparent divine plan.[39] Ben Jonson explores the

conflict between Machiavellian manipulators of fortune and a Stoic faction who profess

to look down upon the "Play of Fortune," as I describe in Chapter 3. This Stoic dismissal

of fortune constitutes a "transcendent" view of fortune, reframing the discussion by

asking whether the goods of fortune were even worthwhile, and instead advocated

pursuing things like virtue and salvation that are unassailable by fortune.[40] According to

this tradition, fortune was but a trick of individual perception, and not a valid topic for

serious, philosophical study. That is, such philosophies tended to locate fortune's

uncertainty in the fallible mind of man, rather than in the world itself.

This schema, briefly hinted at in Flanagan's article, proves immensely useful as a

way of categorizing responses to fortune. In practice, of course, these two poles often

overlapped, especially since it was possible to recognize the ubiquity of the inexplicable

in everyday life while simultaneously believing that an underlying order exists. Lyons

explains the apparent irony of the providentialist Stoics' fascination with shipwrecks,

accidents, and sudden death as an acceptance that "everyday life seemed, at least, to be

full of inexplicable, unforeseeable and uncontrollable events."[41] But more significantly,

the resolution of this seeming contradiction speaks to how apparent levels of order or

disorder depend on one's perspective: local chaos can be contained within global order.

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[39] Boethius' consolation forcefully denies the importance of fortune as does Stoic thought, which also emphasizes a providential order. Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in a related vein, rejects the idea that salvation can be contingent upon good works. See Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Joel C. Relihan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001); Ronald J. VanderMolen, "Providence as Mystery, Providence as Revelation: Puritan and Anglican Modifications of John Calvin's Doctrine of Providence," *Church History* 47, no. 1 (March 1, 1978): 27–47.

[40] Thomas Flanagan, "The Concept of Fortuna in Machiavelli," in *The Political Calculus*, ed. Anthony Parel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 143.

[41] Lyons, *The Phantom of Chance*, ix.

For example, as I discuss in Chapter 1, even as *The Faerie Queene* depicts individual

events that seem to be brought about by fortune, Spenser constantly revises such causal

accounts, ultimately redirecting our attention toward the inherent order of providence.

Such a compatibilist approach view clarifies why Neostoics were often simultaneously

advocates of a kind of aesthetic detachment and practitioners of Machiavellian

statecraft.[42] Even as some writers regarded fortune as a sham in some respect, daily life

seemed to provide countless examples of uncertainty and randomness that required

prudent management, which ensured the continued popularity of the "immanent" view of

fortune. So although the very existence of fortune fell into scrutiny and doubt among

some, the felt experience of uncertainty and chance continued to ensure fortune's

prominence in Renaissance thought, particularly regarding its influence on practical

matters.

Any study of fortune in the Renaissance must also take into account the

importance of chronological and spatial perspective: literature moves between matters

individual and universal, negotiates between temporal and spiritual concerns, and

persistently questions how past events determine the future. Likewise, immanent and

transcendent views of fortune often appear together in a single work, where the emphasis

on each changes according to perspective. Fortune can still seem like a compelling

problem from the perspective of lived experience, even if one acknowledges its

insignificance—or nonexistence—from another perspective. The fact that these

viewpoints existed side-by-side suggests the degree to which one could acknowledge the

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[42] See, for instance Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton*, 106; Jamey E. Graham, "Consciousness, Self-Spectatorship, and Will to Power: Shakespeare's Stoic Conscience," *English Literary Renaissance* 44, no. 2 (May 1, 2014): 241–74.

greater importance of more permanent matters at the same time one strove to attain the

goods of fortune. Fortune and Providence, therefore, need not be mutually excusive.

Montaigne, for instance, favors "a language appropriate to his time-bound and subjective

position" that acknowledges "the intersection of […] long term with the very short term,

or instant (*kairos*)."[43] Viewed in this light, fortune's treatment in the early modern period

reveals increasing cultural attention to time, the mutability of nature, the progress of

history, the eternity of Providence, and to the complex negotiations between these

temporal schemes. All of these issues collide and converge productively in literary

representations of fortune.

**Taming Fortune: Systems of Order in Literature**

What is absent from many accounts of fortune in the Renaissance is a meaningful

connection between the literary representation of fortune—sometimes as an allegorical

figure plotting events from within the fictional world, sometimes as an illusion to be

replaced by an alternate causal explanation, or sometimes as a principle of change—and

its philosophical purchase. Given literature's prominent role in the early modern period

as a means of conducting philosophical thought experiments, it comes as no surprise that

many of the most thoughtful examinations of fortune are found in works of fiction.[44]

Whether or not a complete causal account of an event is available in retrospect,

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[43] John D. Lyons and Kathleen Wine, eds., *Chance, Literature, and Culture in Early Modern France* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009), 3.

[44] I am referring to the Aristotelian tradition that mingles philosophical analysis with literary expression, as described in Kathy Eden, *Poetic and Legal Fiction in the Aristotelian Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986) and Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2001). In the Renaissance, Sidney's "Defense of Poesy" offers the most vehement defense of poetry as a medium for philosophical inquiry.

anticipating future outcomes is never a certain thing, and requires heuristic thinking, wherein the same actions do not necessarily produce the same outcomes. Likewise, literature produces the very counterfactual imagination and suspension of disbelief that this heuristic thinking demands. As Philip Sidney explains in his *Defense of Poetry*, the historian is hampered by fidelity to what has happened, which is not always the best indicator of future events:

> The [historian], in his saying such a thing was done, doth warrant a man more in that he shall follow […] (as if he should argue, because it rained yesterday therefore it should rain to-day), [but] the poet doth so far exceed him as he is to frame his example to that which is most reasonable […] where the historian in his bare "was" hath many times that which we call fortune to overrule the best wisdom.[45]

It is this kind of thinking, frequently associated with prudence or Machiavellian *virtù*, that a world governed by fortune requires, and that "poesy," to use Sidney's term for fiction, is best able to capture.

Far from a mere contrivance of lazy plot-writers, fortune takes on profound significance in a variety of genres. The very issues of certainty, time, and perspective inherent to fortune serve as a fulcrum of literary plotting, demanding that audiences constantly reevaluate what constitutes chance or necessity. The reduction of many branching contingencies to produce what seems to be in retrospect an inexorable sequence—effectively confusing *post hoc* with *propter hoc*—is the defining experience

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[45] Sir Philip Sidney, "Defense of Poesy," in *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2002), 224.

of live theater.[46] Characters within such plays frequently speak as if hemmed in by circumstance, even as their actions belie their words: "it could not choose but follow," Alsemero proclaims in *The Changeling*, implying that Beatrice's actions were not only inevitable, but also in possession of an agency of their own.[47] Romance is often understood as a genre governed by Fortune's arrangement of chance encounters, yet a countervailing trend found in many romances of the period depicts characters planning for or otherwise controlling contingency, rather than being controlled by it.[48] And of course, any depiction of "chance" in literature is ultimately the product of authorial design, which prompts us to look for order and disorder at both the levels of story and plot. By better understanding the many iterations of fortune and the intellectual challenges they posed, we can better understand fortune's prominence as a device in the literature of the period. Conversely, examining literary representations of fortune reveals the stakes of these intellectual debates about the nature of uncertainty, which entail distinguishing subjective and objective perspectives and determining the extent which one can control contingent outcomes.

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[46] John Campbell, "Chance in the Tragedies of Racine," in *Chance, Literature, and Culture in Early Modern France*, ed. John D. Lyons and Kathleen Wine (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009), 8–9.

[47] Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling*, (5.3.108).

[48] For the former view see, for instance, Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 84–258. Kathleen Wine complicates this view, asserting, "The character who seeks to exploit the law of chance, however, is no longer *on* trial, he is *conducting* trials. Rather than affirm his self in the face of whatever ordeals chance may throw his way, he attempts to control repetitions in time and position in space in order to increase the probability of the desired outcome. Informed that only chance can bring him to the island, a Danish prince who seeks Alcidiane puts the rule to the test." See "Random Trials: Chance and Chronotope in Gomberville's Polexandre," in *Chance, Literature, and Culture in Early Modern France*, ed. John D. Lyons and Kathleen Wine (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009), 90.

In exploring the links between literary and philosophical engagements with fortune in the early modern period, I draw from the methodology and insights of Michael Witmore's *Culture of Accidents*, which investigates how accident became a powerful category for philosophical inquiry and literary representation.[49] I follow Witmore's lead in seeing literature as a crucial place for working through the philosophical intricacies of distinguishing action and event, describing causation, and extracting knowledge from contingent circumstances. Witmore describes fortune as a species of accident that affixes outcomes to a particular agent, which thereby creates a parallel between authors' disposition of characters in adverse circumstances and the operations of fortune in real-world situations. As I have shown, however, fortune is not always personified, and seems to represent a more general category of unpredictable change than is indicated by the term "accident," which typically implies the complete absence of agency or control. While accident seems primarily indebted to an Aristotelean philosophical tradition, especially for Witmore, fortune would seem to sponsor a more varied range of formal expression than accident does. Its debt to competing traditions contributes to this versatility, particularly regarding whether and how one can affect its outcomes.

As Witmore's study demonstrates, literary engagement with fortune questions the extent of human agency in a world populated by complex and seemingly mysterious forces. But more significantly, it also raises epistemological questions about how causation itself is inseparable from the frameworks we create to understand it. Fortune was for early moderns a way of thinking about complex models of causation, instances where relationships between cause and effect seem to change according to one's

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[49] Michael Witmore, *Culture of Accidents: Unexpected Knowledges in Early Modern England*, 1st ed. (Stanford, CA: University Press, 2002).

perspective in space or time. Subjectivity is particularly important in these accounts, as the products of fortune in literature, namely the appearance of chaos and order, were a reflection of the fulfillment or frustration of desire. Chance, as John Lyons explains, is defined with reference to one's intention, as "an accidental cause in the sphere of […] actions for the sake of something which involves choice. Thought, then, and chance are in the same sphere, for choice implies thought."[50] The products of fortune, it follows, are represented as such because they reflect a particular set of expectations about what might or should happen at one moment. In their awareness of the arbitrariness of one's subject position, literary representations of fortune seem to anticipate many of the insights about order and disorder offered by second-order systems theory, as well as to provide a more nuanced narrative of rationality before the Enlightenment. The former of these, I believe, has a great deal to teach us about the latter.

Systems theory has drawn our attention to the ways in which order and disorder are products not only of the language we use to describe them, but also of the processes by which we observe them.[51] As I will detail in Chapter 2, Francis Bacon's understanding of how fortune relates to experiment illustrates how chance and necessity are understood through a constructivist lens of what *should* be. By constructivist, I mean the way that systems theorists understand chance and necessity to be a construction that "reflect[s] some of *our* abilities and inabilities, and not those of Nature," in contrast to the typical

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[50] Lyons, *The Phantom of Chance*, 4. These "expectations" need not be understood as subjective or dependent on an individual observer, but can be attributed to the operations of a system itself, Niklas Luhmann clarifies in "Self-Organization and Autopoesis," in *Emergence and Embodiment: New Essays on Second-Order Systems Theory*, ed. Bruce Clarke and Mark B. N. Hansen (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2009), 145.
[51] Heinz Von Foerster, "Disorder/Order: Discovery or Invention?," in *Understanding Understanding: Essays on Cybernetics and Cognition* (New York: Springer, 2002), 275.

narrative that sees chance and necessity inherent in nature's workings. [52] In this vein, Bacon suggests that "Nature" sometimes produces a fortunate disposition of circumstances whereby the usual operations of cause and effect play out differently from our expectations. Such operations are a matter of "fortune," that is, because Bacon judges them with reference to his own anticipations. In order to successfully discover the ultimate causes behind such occurrences, we must imitate Fortune by placing unusual constraints on natural processes, constraints that he calls "experiment." Here Bacon somewhat paradoxically posits Nature as an entirely separate entity while at the same time suggesting that its effects can be reproduced artificially. This intermingling of nature and artifice predates—and likely contributes to—what Latour describes as the forced separation of nature and culture in modern though, which precludes our ability to identify such nature-culture "hybrids." [53] In both the case of "experiment" and the fortunate productions of Nature, what constitutes chance is interpreted through human expectation and desire. In this respect, contingency reflects "particular expectations of necessity— that is, when an observer identifies events that escape or disappoint such expectations."[54] A look at the literary proliferation of fortune in the early modern period not only helps us understand the origins of such concepts as the nature-culture divide and scientific objectivity, but it also helps us revise those narratives about how these conceptual fields developed. The study of fortune, in other words, reveals the contingency of our own frameworks for distinguishing chance and necessity.

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[52] Ibid., 280.

[53] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[54] Edgar Landgraf, "Improvisation: Form and Event, a Spencer-Brownian Calculation," in *Emergence and Embodiment: New Essays on Second-Order Systems Theory*, ed. Bruce Clarke and Mark B. N. Hansen (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2009), 185.

Attending to fortune's role in early modern literature and thought, as I have shown, contributes to an ongoing revision of the intertwined histories of uncertainty and rationality. But as I have been suggesting, an extended analysis of fortune in early modern writing is especially valuable in helping us understand the epistemological role of literature. In particular, the way that "fortune" comes to resemble authorial intervention—particularly visible in Spenser's comparisons of narrative progress to a ship beset by Fortune—reveals how order is always willfully imposed from observers of a system.[55] Literary representation differs from "scientific, religious, or philosophical representations of the world" in its refusal to "insinuate 'necessity' into its constructions of the world," where the others must rely on "causality, teleology, transcendence, or transcendentality" to ensure necessity.[56] Through the use of multiple perspectives on different scales, literature becomes "an epistemological device for interminably deferring the location of an ultimate perspective from which the beginning of things could be thought to be known once and for all."[57] In other words, literature is uniquely capable of acknowledging the arbitrariness of objectivity as a standard for knowledge: it is but one of multiple possible perspectives or qualifications for knowledge.

At the same time that literature about fortune portrayed the value of multiple, competing perspectives, it also played a role in enshrining the mental discipline that objectivity necessitated.  Julia Solomon makes the value of this discipline clear in her study of the origins of objectivity: using particular and contingent experiences as a source

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[55] See Chapter One, 60–62.
[56] Landgraf, "Improvisation: Form and Event, a Spencer-Brownian Calculation," 186.
[57] Bruce Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Systems*, 1 edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 71. See also David Roberts, "Self-Reference in Literature," in *Problems of Form*, ed. Dirk Baecker, trans. Michael Irmscher and Leah Edwards (Stanford, CA: University Press, 1999), 42.

of knowledge was only valuable if these particularities were attributes of the world, and not of the idiosyncrasies of the individual mind. To defend particular knowledge from such skeptical objections therefore required a kind of mental discipline, that of objectivity. Solomon understands this discipline as a modification of the Stoics' regulation of the passions, which transformed this ethical concept into an epistemological one.[58] Regulating mental phenomena toward epistemological ends also, I would argue, entails compartmentalizing the chaos of fortune.

Viewing fortune's literary life from a systems theory perspective reveals how its complex relationship to Enlightenment rationality is the product of the containment of disorder within particular closed systems such as the court, "Nature," politics, and so on—a containment which depends on our ability to strictly delimit one domain from another. Even while writing about fortune seems to emphasize the importance of individuals' subjective experiences of risk, it also enables a countervailing mode of thought, one that looks beyond the self and toward institutions and paradigms that hierarchically impose order from the top down. Thus, ironically, fortune produces a counternarrative of rationality that places value on uncertainty over determinism while at the same time enabling the establishment of Enlightenment rationality's virtual witnessing and objective standards.[59] Holding up objectivity as a standard for scientific knowledge entails an imaginative leap, breaking out of the limitations of an individual's position in time and space. Such a leap is modeled on the kind of thinking that fortune

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[58] Solomon, *Objectivity in the Making*, 43. See also Daston, "Objectivity and the Escape from Perspective" and Kathryn Murphy and Anita Traninger, *The Emergence of Impartiality* (Brill, 2013).

[59] Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*, 1st ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

demands, namely an assurance that some higher level of order exists in the totality of time or beyond the sublunary sphere to ensure order at a global level in spite of local chaos.

**Chapter Breakdown**

Fortune is so ubiquitous in the period that it would be difficult to find works that do not engage with it in some fashion, but the remarkable thing about this prevalence is that the range of phenomena attributed to fortune seems to have exploded in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. No longer did it refer exclusively to the trajectory of an individual's life; fortune comes to inhabit all manner of uncertainty, as I have described. Therefore, each of the texts I have chosen presents fortune as an element of uncertainty inherent to a number of fields: to courtly conduct in the *Faerie Queene*, to scientific experiment in *New Atlantis* and *The Advancement of Learning*, to political action in *Sejanus*, or to economic decision-making in *The Merchant of Venice*. Furthermore, as works of literature, these texts do not solely offer practical advice about managing fortune through prudence or virtue; they also consider the epistemological hurdles that reasoning about uncertainty entails. For each text, fortune appears as both a problem of knowledge about ethics, politics, finance, and nature as well as a problem of how we act upon that knowledge. Attending to the intellectual problems that fortune presents in literary works specifically reveals both the remarkable flexibility of fortune as a concept and the important role that literature plays in linking abstract philosophical inquiry to concrete forms of action.

While I do not offer a chronological history of the development of fortune as a concept, I have arranged the chapters in a way that reveals increasing attention to an

emergent discourse that treats fortune as a way of describing contingency, that is, phenomena that cannot be explained away as a guise of providential order. This tension between order and disorder becomes apparent not solely through explicit mentions of fortune in the narratives I discuss, but on the level of narrative form itself. The pressure to thread an errant narrative into a predetermined order is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the subject of my first chapter. Fortune appears in Book 6 as a temporary causal explanation, a feature of its romance landscape: events that first seem caused by "fortune straunge" are later revealed to be the product of authorial design. Spenser thus contains the energies of his story's romance elements within a providential, allegorical framework, whereby events that seem chaotic at the local level nevertheless conform to a global order. Characters' assessments of their situations parallel the experience of Spenser's audience: both must exercise their ability to suspend initial judgments, discern truth from falsehood, and to see order within chaos. The quest to "read" fortune "aright" shows that the process of interpreting causal relations comprises a crucial dimension of Spenser's use of allegory, which enfolds polysemous and sometimes incompatible general meanings in particular examples. Spenser's use of allegory allows him to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable influences of fortune and providence, the former of which is generally thought to adhere to no discernible pattern, and the latter of which is thought to admit no possibility of chance. While courtesy appears as a kind of virtue enabling one tame the chaos of fortune, such efforts are subordinate to the passive receipt of divine Grace.

This tension between order and disorder on the level of form also pertains to Bacon's experimentation with different forms of writing as an aid to natural knowledge:

he imagines the aphorism and the list to be valuable forms because of their very imperfection. But his utopian fiction, *The New Atlantis*, imagines a stable endpoint toward which such forms work. For Bacon, fortune upends the received wisdom that particular events only matter insofar as they are emblematic of a single, fixed order. In contrast to his predecessors, who held natural knowledge to be premised on unchanging, universal truths, Bacon developed a system to produce knowledge out of contingency, out of local events detached from a realized future. Both his philosophical writings and his utopian romance, *The New Atlantis*, reveal that moments are no longer a symbol of what is to come; they are open to a number of possible lines of explanation. Such a system allows for the tenuousness of our claims to knowledge at a given point, formulating speculations about the future and then gradually revising these speculations through practice in search of stable, certain knowledge. This process, as he describes it, requires the natural philosopher to imitate fortune to produce unexpected results.

The second half of the project focuses on fortune's representations in dramatic works, which by virtue of their medium are more invested in contingency as an aspect of lived experience, and therefore whose treatments of fortune are even more focused on practical action. The very medium of theatrical performance itself is fraught with contingencies: live performance represents events in real-time, making the possibility of unexpected occurrences a real concern. Jonson's *Sejanus* confronts this prospect through its representation of an internal audience, Stoics who believe themselves incapable of being observed and therefore caught up in the political tragedy. Contrary to their expectations, however, the play's Machiavellian protagonists pick off these dissidents one by one, implying the ease with which the theatrical audience itself can become

subject to such tragic reversals. By juxtaposing two incompatible views on fortune as they dictate political action, Jonson draws attention to how political policy based on the virtue ethics of individuals is impotent against the overwhelming political corruption of institutions.

The public theater of Elizabethan and Jacobean England was a vastly different context from the patronage-driven world that both Spenser and Bacon inhabited. Commercial theater at this time was moving away from the patronage model and toward a joint-venture system whereby investors who put up funds for performing companies did so in hopes of yielding a return on their investment—a risky prospect, at best. [60] Shakespeare himself was one such shareholder, and these very practical concerns about economic risk seem to be at the forefront of *Merchant of Venice*. Antonio's ships, Shylock's bond, and Bassanio's choice of the lead casket all hinge upon the management of risk. Uncertainty is a given in these financial transactions, but its remedy is disputed. Shylock describes "thrift" as careful saving to mitigate risk, whereas Antonio treats it as equivalent to "luck," so that success is entirely out of his control. Bassanio's similarly treats his success in Portia's "casket lottery" as a matter assured by "fortune," even though he actually succeeds by subverting the standards of the test. The play taps into an historical trend whereby the rise of venture capitalism, the vogue for gambling, and developments in English contract law all centered on a shared concern with managing risk. Thus, in the final chapter of the dissertation, we see the stirrings of an interest in

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[60] Kathleen E. McLuskie and Felicity Dunsworth, "Patronage and the Economics of Theater," in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 423; Mary I. Oates and William J. Baumol, "On the Economics of the Theater in Renaissance London," *The Swedish Journal of Economics*, no. 1 (1972): 145.

risk-management that becomes formalized as "probability" in the latter part of the

seventeenth century. Viewed in light of these earlier works, however, probability appears

not as an endpoint for discourse on fortune so much as an attempt to wrest fortune away

from the ethical valences encoded in its genes. But my dissertation reveals that this

objective treatment of risk is never wholly separate from the moral judgments we make

about contingent outcomes.

**Fortune's Reemergence**

By way of conclusion, I offer some remarks about why studying Renaissance

depictions of fortune is particularly apt to our present moment. I have suggested that

fortune's theorists remained open to rational approaches that nevertheless allowed for the

persistence of uncertainty, a kind of suspension of the question of whether complete

causal accounts are possible or even necessary. This cautious skepticism, I believe,

speaks to the socioeconomic concerns of our own moment. By unraveling the narrative

that the rise of modernity is necessarily about banishing uncertainty, we are able to

uncover fascinating resonances between the early modern moment and our own. A

significant component of what early moderns understood as fortune entails the inability to

anticipate things we don't know to look for. The "black swan problem," a popular

moniker for the problem of induction, gets its name for a popular sixteenth-century

phrase for an impossibility, animals once thought not to exist—an assumption that

seemed perfectly valid up until 1697, when Dutch explorer Willem de Vlamingh

discovered black swans in Australia.[61] Likewise, any conclusion reached through

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[61] See Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Fooled by Randomness: The Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets*, 2 Updated edition (New York: Random House Trade

induction is vulnerable to falsification by a single contrary instance, one which we cannot reasonably expect or anticipate. The "black swan" event of our own moment, the 2008 financial collapse, owed much to the boundless confidence of investors convinced they could outsmart a market driven by unforeseeable changes, a kind of "cozening fortune" on a mass scale. The hubris of "too big to fail" looks like an inevitable path to failure only in hindsight.

Furthermore, our own quintessentially American rhetoric of meritocracy—which is becoming increasingly apparent as mere rhetoric, rather than actuality—reflects a confidence in one's ability to influence outcomes by dint of one's "virtue" (broadly defined), whatever the circumstances, which is precisely akin to Renaissance consolations for fortune that advocated the development of personal virtue as the only sure means to combatting fortune. The so-called "new prophets of capital" tout a capitalist work ethic as antidote to all forms of structural inequality, particularly through an ever-growing body of self-help literature.[62] It is no coincidence that these personal responsibility mantras enjoy unprecedented popularity at a moment when risks are being shifted disproportionately onto individuals and away from institutions, governments, and

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Paperbacks, 2005); Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, 2nd edition (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2010).

[62] See Nicole Aschoff, *The New Prophets of Capital* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2015). A number of self-help guides explicitly link personal habits to socioeconomic success in terms much like Renaissance remedies for fortune. For instance, "7 Habits of Exceptionally Rich People" encourages readers, "do not entertain self-doubt," because "The wealthy hate risk as much as the average guy, yet they deal with it. It is important that you take risks. Calculated ones." See Murray Newl et al., "7 Habits of Exceptionally Rich People," *Inc.com*, accessed August 12, 2015, http://www.inc.com/murray-newlands/7-habits-of-exceptionally-rich-people.html.

businesses.[63] Likewise, Renaissance remedies for fortune turned to personal development in order to overcome the buffets of fortune. These writings, of course, reflected a crisis point in the Renaissance "meritocracy" of court culture. Such overestimations of our ability to influence events are the product of difficult-to-shake cognitive biases: attribution error, most notably, causes us to chalk up our successes to merit and our failures to bad luck, revealing the great importance of our subjective experience of uncertainty, despite our ostensible commitment to objectivity as a standard for knowledge. That we can see ourselves embroiled these centuries-old debates suggests the value of renewed attention to literary accounts of fortune in the Renaissance.

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[63] Jacob S. Hacker, *The Great Risk Shift: The New Economic Insecurity and the Decline of the American Dream* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

**1. Learning to "Read aright": Fortune, Providence and Allegory in *The Faerie Queene***

In many ways, fortune is at the heart of the romance genre. Romance suspends the usual operations of cause and effect, relying instead on the inscrutable whims of fortune. Its narratives characteristically shuttle characters from one encounter to the next as if at random. Mikhail Bakhtin has famously termed this suspension of the usual "adventure time," a chronotope where adventures "are strung together in an extratemporal and in effect infinite series" which "can be extended as long as one likes; in itself it has no necessary internal limits."[64] Importantly, these encounters act upon the romance hero without altering him in any significant way. There exists a distant narrative *telos* but the sequence of events that leads to it is in no way necessary. Instead, the events of the romance narrative constitute a tactic of "dilation and delay"[65] that defers narrative closure, leaving the endpoint "a Sabbath which remains very distant indeed."[66] In such works, the romance plot functions as a series of trials that test the hero's mettle. But increasingly in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Renaissance romances ceased to put characters "*on* trial" in this manner and instead depicted characters "*conducting* trials."[67] That is, rather than being powerless in the face of chance, characters manipulate the operations of chance in their favor. This generic transformation of romance's chance encounters in turn reflects a changing attitude in the period more

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[64] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," 94.

[65] Patricia Parker, "Dilation and Delay: Renaissance Matrices," *Poetics Today* 5, no. 3 (1984) points out that "to dilate," in Renaissance English, meant not only to expand, disperse, or spread abroad but also to put off, postpone, prolong, or play for time," 520.

[66] Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979), 64.

[67] Wine, "Random Trials: Chance and Chronotope in Gomberville's Polexandre," 90.

generally, whereby fortune is increasingly thought of as a force whose outcomes can be influenced by human efforts.

It is possible to understand aspects of *The Faerie Queene* in this light. Calidore, the Knight of Courtesy and hero of Book VI, as well as his companions confront a series of mishaps and adventures spurred on by fortune.[68] Calepine's rescue by the Salvage Man (VI.iv.2.1), Calepine's timely rescue of an infant from the jaws of a "cruell Beare" (VI.iv.17-21), Tristram's disenfranchisement (VI.ii.27), Serena's capture by brigands (VI.viii.34.8), and Calidore's interruption of the Graces' dance (VI.x.20.7) are all attributed in some way to fortune. The remarkable prominence of fortune in this book is deliberate, since the virtue of courtesy demands a controlled self-fashioning that potentially has the power to mitigate fortune's effects. Nevertheless, it often remains unclear in the poem to what extent human reason and action determine outcomes and to what extent fortune bears sway over events. My analysis of fortune in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* will hence begin with a local reading of fortune as a feature of the narrative of Book VI that Calidore and others seek to mitigate through courtesy.

Critics disagree about the efficacy of Calidore's exertions, and therefore about fortune's degree of influence as well. To some, the "dozens of references to fortune, hap or chance […] all contribute in some way toward the final resolution."[69] But to others,

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[68] Forms of the word "fortune" appear fifty-six times in Book VI, including "fortunate," "unfortunate," "misfortune," the verbs "fortune/d" and "fortunize" (an original Spenserian coinage). Forty-six of these are simply the noun, "fortune," which refers variously to both the mythological agent and the more general sense of an individual's station. By comparison, each of the other books contains an average of thirty instances of some form of the word and an average of twenty-one references to the word "fortune" itself.

[69] Richard McCabe, *The Pillars of Eternity: Time and Providence in The Faerie Queene* (Irish Academic Press, 1989), 179. Isabel G. MacCaffrey also suggests a relationship

fortune's sway over the poetic landscape is indicative of the unraveling of the poem's

own design.[70] Either Spenser deliberately portrays fortunate events in a way that

conduces to his aesthetic and ethical design for the poem, or he himself is powerless to

control the seemingly random string of encounters he depicts. This disagreement about

the role of fortune in the poem actually reflects Spenser's use of the trope to two distinct

ends. On the one hand, the linear sequence of events emphasizes characters' struggles to

mitigate the negative effects of the fortune-ridden landscape they find themselves in, for

which courtesy is a social virtue resembling *sprezzeatura*. On the other hand, the

allegorical component of the poem demands that we re-read events in light of their end,

such that fortune's role as a causal agent becomes subordinated to providential design,

and courtesy comes to resemble the gift of divine mercy. I find that Spenser's poem

straddles the rather conservative, Boethian notion that fortune is a product of our limited

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between Fortune and providential design in Book V in *Spenser's Allegory: The Anatomy of Imagination* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 388. For more on the sixteenth century revival of the Fortune-as-handmaiden-of- Providence theory, see Marie Tanner, "Chance and Coincidence in Titian's *Diana and Actaeon*," Art Bulletin, 56 (1974), 541-46.

[70] For instance, Clare Kinney *Strategies of Poetic Narrative: Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Eliot* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 1992) suggests that no providential design is evident in Book VI (93). Bruce Danner's argument in "Courteous Virtù in Spenser's Book 6 of The Faerie Queene," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38, no. 1 (1998) similarly takes the Mutabilitie Cantos to be an indication that disorder prevails in Faerie Land, and that disorder enables those who exercise *virtù* to take hold of their fortunes (16). Judith Dundas presents a more equivocal view in "Spenser's 'Wilde Fortune': Between the Forest and the Sea," in *Fortune: "All Is but Fortune,"* ed. Leslie Thompson (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 2000), saying that Spenser embraces the narrative indeterminacy that fortune enables, since attributing events to "grace or fortune" leaves the question of providence unresolved, and constitutes "the same kind of suspension of judgment, or indeterminacy, that characterizes the seemingly naive narrator and is thus part of the whole rhetoric of the poem" (99). But at the same time, she also argues that Spenser has a surer control over fortune than the knights whose wanderings resemble his own: "In the composition of his poem, art exercises a control over fortune that, in this life, may seem to be denied" (104).

perspective in time, whose significance fades in the divine perspective of the eternal and the increasingly prominent Renaissance notion that fortune can be controlled in a limited way. [71] In the latter portion of this chapter, I will turn my attention to the way that Spenser diminishes the importance of fortune by insisting that events must be re-read retrospectively in light of their endpoint.

Fortune's prominence in the Legend of Courtesy is no accident. Fortune produces a mode of reading fundamental to Spenser's ethical aims, because the analysis of action he inculcates resembles the process of reading and re-reading "fortunate" events. Not only is Spenser's depiction of fortune in the poem deliberate, but it also serves a didactic purpose, standing in for a fuller causal explanation for events that forces readers to seek a more complete answer. The confusion that fortune produces, in other words, is productive. Characters within the book and the narrator himself at times disingenuously present their intentional actions as the hand of "fortune," and at other times characters misinterpret rationally-explicable events as the result of fortune. In the Legend of Courtesy, courtesy initially seems like a means of managing social interactions but ultimately attains religious significance as a model of God's grace. The events of Book VI expose references to fortune as guises for the narrator's self-conscious interventions, which intentionally mislead the reader about the extent of fortune's influence in order to ultimately redirect the reader's attention toward providence. This providential outlook becomes even more pronounced in the Mutabilitie Cantos, which put the changes fortune brings into an eternal, apocalyptic context. Because fortune takes on these many roles in the poem, its most significant function is hermeneutic: it challenges audience and

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[71] For a fuller discussion of "immanent" and "transcendent" views on fortune, see Introduction, 15–18.

characters alike to "read aright" the true causes behind events. By understanding the place of fortune in Spenser's poem, we can better understand his relationship to the romance genre and how he transforms it to serve his ethical, political, and spiritual ends.

**"His Fortune, not his fault": Fortune and Courtesy**

Spenser's depiction of courtesy taps into a variety of religious and secular discourses that figure courtesy as an expression of virtue. Courtesy is both *a* virtue, in other words, and virtue *itself*. Fortune and virtue are frequently understood as opposing forces: fortune introduces contingent events that serve as trials of virtue. Virtue, in turn, raises the possibility that contingencies can be controlled, or at least minimized. Responding to anxiety about fortune's influence, a tradition of writing "remedies for fortune" emerged in the Renaissance to describe how one might avoid or mitigate fortune through virtue. Howard Patch identifies three categories of remedies for Fortune: "the remedy of fortitude," which suggests that the strong and the brave can withstand Fortune; "the remedy of prudence," which allows that one can learn to avoid Fortune's influence; and the "spiritual remedy," which limits Fortune's influence to material, not spiritual matters.[72] We see the first remedy in Cicero's *De Officiis*, which claims that although Fortune holds great sway, the man of (civic) virtue can avoid its worst blows.[73] The "spiritual remedy" lies behind Augustine's suggestion that fortune is a misapprehension by those not privy to God's plan.[74] These views are notably divided between changing fortune itself and changing one's views *of* fortune. The Legend of Courtesy at one level

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[72] R. Howard Patch, *The Tradition of Fortune of the Goddess Fortuna in Roman Literature and in the Transitional Period* (Northampton: Smith College Press, 1922), 148-150.
[73] Jerold C Frakes, *The Fate of Fortune in the Early Middle Ages: The Boethian Tradition* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), 14–15.
[74] Ibid., 20.

presents courtesy as a "remedy of prudence," but its allegory ultimately inflects courtesy

with religious significance that transforms the poem into a "spiritual remedy."

Renaissance discussions of fortune blend all of these traditions: Petrarch, for

instance, subordinates fortune to divine providence, but also asserts the power of virtue to

combat its influence.[75] Those who acknowledge fortune's insignificance in a grander,

universal scheme nevertheless seem interested in its local effects. They are divided,

however, on what constitutes an effective remedy for fortune. Perhaps because these

writers blend so many different traditions on the fortune-virtue dichotomy, the "virtue"

that mitigates fortune's blows is never a constant.[76] Generally speaking, it resembles

something like prudence, but some writers of "remedies for fortune" associate it with

moral virtue, while others associate it with expediency. Alberti depicts the virtues that

combat fortune as a kind of diligence.[77] The meaning of virtue stretches even so far as

Machiavellian *virtù*, which has very little to do with morality and everything to do with

adaptability to changing circumstances and a willingness to take what actions are

necessary to succeed.

Spenser shares his contemporaries' fascination with the potential for virtue to

mitigate fortune, but is similarly divided on just how virtue achieves this end, and

whether such methods are even worthwhile. Though he will ultimately turn to the

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[75] Francesco Petrarca, "Invective Against a Man of High Rank with No Knowledge or Virtue" in *Invectives - FRANCESCO PETRARCA* (Harvard University Press, 2008): 195.
[76] See Introduction, 11.
[77] Leon Battista Alberti, *I libri della famiglia di Leon Battista Alberti* (Waveland Pr. Inc., 1994): "And because I have no doubt that good governance, and careful and diligent fathers, good customs, the most upright of habits, humanity, competence, and civility make families most respectable and happy; so I deemed it necessary to analyze with every care and diligence which suggestions would be useful for the organization and education of fathers as well as the entire family to attain the highest and supreme happiness, without ever having to succumb to strange and iniquitous fortune," 14.

"spiritual remedy" for fortune, in the Legend of Courtesy, he places considerable emphasis on the "remedy for prudence," wherein courtesy is essential to preventing the destruction of social hierarchies that fortune threatens to upset. Book VI models the difficulties of recognizing and acting in accordance with true courtesy, which is difficult to recognize in Spenser's poem in part because of the sometimes-contradictory associations that pervade Spenser's source material. Just as the "remedy for fortune" tradition offers varied definitions of virtue, so too is Spenserian courtesy an assemblage of "loose and overlapping definitions of general moral duty, justice, and charity" that seems to draw upon multiple ideas of virtue as well as remedies for fortune.[78]

Critics, divided over what constitutes courtesy in Book VI, have advanced the notion that Calidore's courtesy is a kind of Machiavellian *virtù*, a imperialist force of "civilization," or even that the quest to embody courtesy fails altogether.[79] Kenneth Boris supports the notion that courtesy conflicts with fortune in Book VI when he claims that the Blatant Beast resembles fortune in its capacity to subvert social order, and that courtesy, in contrast, can liberate us from "the brute facts of circumstance."[80] But he does not agree that courtesy reflects Machiavellian opportunism; rather, it embodies "values

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[78] Dorothy Woodward Culp, "Courtesy and Fortune's Chance in Book 6 of The Faerie Queene," *Modern Philology: A Journal Devoted to Research in Medieval and Modern Literature* 68, no. 3 (1971): 39-40.

[79] Bruce Danner, "Courteous Virtù in Spenser's Book 6 of The Faerie Queene," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38, no. 1 (1998) suggests that Calidore's courtesy is an ethic of *virtu* necessitated by the prevalence of Fortune in the book and that violence functions as a means of social control in this environment, 1–18; Richard Neuse, "Book VI as Conclusion to The Faerie Queene," *ELH* 35, no. 3 (September 1, 1968): 329–353 argues, "the failure of courtesy, I believe, dramatizes Spenser's implicit avowal that the potential ideal which his epic was designed to embody has been defeated by a world hopelessly antagonistic to its realization" (331).

[80] Kenneth Borris, "Fortune, Occasion, and the Allegory of the Quest in Book VI," *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual* 7 (1987): 129, 123.

that surmount timeserving considerations."[81] My own reading of Spenserian courtesy lies

somewhere in between these virtue and *virtù*: as a synonym for virtue in a general sense,

it supersedes the buffets of fortune. However, when expressed in action, courteous deeds

may be undone by fortune, or may become indistinguishable from crass opportunism.

Courtesy, like fortune, presents a hermeneutic challenge because of the ease with which it

can be feigned, and the possibility that courtesy may be undone by fortune.[82] But

ultimately, the deference that courtesy promotes implies a reciprocal relationship between

individuals from different levels of a social hierarchy that can be iterated on any scale,

ultimately figured by the relationship between God and mankind itself.[83]

Indisputably, courtesy in Spenser's poem has some of its origins in the

practically-minded tradition of courtesy literature: Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*,

Guazzo's *Civil Conversation*, and Elyot's *Book of the Governor* are just a few potential

sources that Spenser may have been directly familiar with or may have been indirectly

aware of through their pervasive influence on Spenser's Italian romance sources such as

Ariosto. Gabriel Harvey, in a letter to Spenser from sometime around the 1570s,

complains that students at the university are abandoning "Xenophon and Plato" for Italian

courtesy books: "Matchiauell a great man: Castilio of no small reputation […] Galateo,

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[81] Ibid., 140.

[82] Gerald Morgan, "Spenser's Conception of Courtesy and the Design of the Faerie Queene," *The Review of English Studies* 32, no. 125 (February 1, 1981) makes a similar point: "No one can mistake the theme of Fortune in Book VI, and it provides an essential context in which human virtue is defined. But that virtue is itself an abiding reality for Spenser. The argument for the pervasiveness of Fortune defines the scope of human virtue, but does not abolish the reality of virtue" (27). The argument becomes muddled, however, when Morgan claims that Fortune is not "set over and against the order of virtue" but is in some way an agent of Providence (27).

[83] According to David Lee Miller, "Calidore," ed. A. C. Hamilton, *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (University of Toronto Press, 1997), "Spenserian courtesy is the social analogue to cosmic harmony," 128.

and Guazzo neuer so happy."[84] Interestingly, Harvey lumps together Machiavelli with authors of courtesy books, perhaps on the assumption that all offer models of courtly conduct. Although critical opinions vary on how much influence courtesy books had on Spenser, it seems clear that the Legend of Courtesy employs the same competitive "reciprocities of deference and demeanor" that characterize the rhetorical posturing advised in courtesy literature.[85] This understanding of courtesy takes its cue from the struggle to secure patronage, an interaction fraught with uncertainties.

In the context of patronage interactions, courtesy can be understood as the antidote to a certain kind of fortune: it creates mutual obligations between two parties that assures each of the other's reliability and hence reduces the need to rely entirely on fortune. Courtesy mitigates risk-taking on behalf of both the supplicant, who exposes himself to risk in asking for patronage, and the patron, who is always uncertain about the motives of those seeking his favor. Guazzo likens the process of acting courteously to navigating a ship, a metaphor that implicitly invokes fortune as antagonist to courtesy. He explains that just as mariners "learne to know the signes and tokens of windes and

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[84] Edmund Spenser, *The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition*, ed. Edwin Greenlaw, Charles Grovesnor Osgood, and Frederick Morgan Pedelford, vol. 10, 11 vols., 1st ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1933): 460. For more on Spenser and the courtesy book tradition, see Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton University Press, 1978).

[85] James Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976), 709. Both Robin Headlam Wells, "Spenser and the Courtesy Tradition: Form and Meaning in the Sixth Book of the Faerie Queene," *English Studies* 58, no. 3 (1977): 221–229 and Mohinimohan Bhattacharya, *Studies in Spenser* (Darby, Pa.: Arden Library, 1978) make the case that Spenser's depiction of courtesy draws directly from Castiglione, although the Harvey letter seems to be the only concrete evidence that Spenser was familiar with his work. Wells explicitly makes this case against Humphrey Tonkin, *Spenser's Courteous Pastoral: Book Six of the Faerie Queene* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), who traces the pervasive influence of Guazzo's *Civil Conversation* on the Legend of Courtesy. However, Wells' claim that Guazzo "is not concerned with the more philosophic aspects of his subject" (226) seems disingenuous, as I will discuss hereafter.

stormes, and the sight and place of rockes and shelues, and al other things any way contrarie or hindersome to nauigation, to the ende that foreseeing the imminent dangers, they may know how to auoide them," so must those intent on demonstrating "ciuile conuersation […] seeke to knowe which is the vnciuile and blameful conuersation, to the intent to flee it."[86] Courtesy, it seems, is the key to navigating the Sea of Fortune.

Courtiers participating in patronage interactions employed a number of strategies for managing its uncertainty. For one thing, polite behavior was itself an artificial reproduction of spontaneity, a way of mastering chance by performing it deliberately. Courtly *sprezzatura* creates the appearance of unstudied improvisation while simultaneously avoiding its uncertainties. Guazzo explains that the courtier's duty is to "do all things with carefull diligence, and skilfull art," but adds that this "art is hidden, and the whole seemeth to be doone by chaunce, that he may thereby be had more in admiration."[87] Ironically, then, the means managing social expectations and exerting control over behavior is not by rigidly codifying etiquette, but by feigning spontaneity.

Another way of mitigating the uncertainty of patronage interactions was to displace the uncertainty away from the specific patronage relationship and onto "fortune" in a more general sense. Making reference to fortune in the context of these exchanges displaces the risks of the social exchange onto a more nebulous, general uncertainty.[88]

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[86] Stefano Guazzo, *The Ciuile Conuersation of M. Steeuen Guazzo Written First in Italian, and Nowe Translated Out of French by George Pettie, Deuided into Foure Bookes*, trans. George Pettie, 2nd ed., Early English Books Online (London: Richard Watkins, 1581), 22.

[87] Ibid., 8.

[88] Sociologist Paul McLean describes the way in which a discourse of Fortune in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florence reflected the reality of tenuous ties built around the patronage system, arguing that politics, economics, and social interactions made Fortune central to that culture, which we see in the correspondence between patrons and

There is a great deal of overlap between writers of courtesy literature and those who inveighed against fortune. Even the arch courtier, Castiglione, penned diatribes against *fortuna* out of "extreme pessimism as to the difficulties and unpredictability of upward mobility through social interaction."[89] Castiglione's invective against fortune can be read as a means of transferring frustration about patronage interactions onto fortune in the abstract. Attributing the uncertainty of patronage to fortune is a way of strengthening bonds between patron and supplicant by downplaying the risk involved as a universal condition, no different from the everyday risks that fortune offers to all.

Spenser combines these approaches in his depiction of courtesy and patronage in *The Faerie Queene*. Despite the fact that Calidore is one "In whom it seemes, that gentlenesse of spright /And manners mylde were planted natural" (VI.i.2.3-4), his occasional missteps indicate that he still has much to learn. As the proem asserts, "The gentle minde by gentle deeds is knowne" (VI.iii.1.2): courtesy is an active virtue, one that changes from one situation to the next and demands considerable adaptability. Courtesy "combines an inner quality ('gentleness') with the judgment ('skill') needed to enact that

their dependents. Paul D. McLean, *The Art of the Network: Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). Ultimately, McLean contends, such pessimism reflected the reality of patronage interactions, each of which was "an encounter fraught with uncertainty" that could be mitigated by rhetorical strategies that liken favor-seeking to gambling, and that compare the patron's offer of favor to providential grace. See also Mario Santoro, *Fortuna, ragione e prudenza nella civilta letteraria del Cinquecento* (Naples: Liguori, 1971); Barbara Spackman, "Machiavelli and Maxims," *Yale French Studies* no. 77 (January 1, 1990): 137–155; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

[89] Paul McLean, "Chance in Renaissance Florence," accessed March 4, 2013, http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~pmclean/mclean%20ccacc%20paper%20final.htm.

quality and a talent for enacting it gracefully."[90] Calidore's *ad hoc* approach, wherein two similar situations demand quite different responses suggest that what constitutes courtesy for Calidore changes from moment to moment. His enactment of courtesy directly confronts the unstable configurations of fortune and virtue by exposing them as a function of circumstance: a courteous deed in one situation may be a grave offense in another. Spenser hence transforms the circumstantial nature of courtesy present in the courtesy book tradition into a narrative principle.

Calidore's errant wanderings are in part a series of interpretive tests: he must decide how to act from one moment to the next. In this way, Spenser avoids reducing courtesy to an inflexible rule, and instead depicts it as a developing capacity for analyzing situations. The situational nature of courtesy in action explains in part Calidore's stumbling and often inconsistent actions. In the first encounter with Fortune that tests Calidore's virtue, he accidentally stumbles upon Calepine and Serena in the forest in "their quiet loues delight" (VI.iii 21.5). Calidore's courtesy remains intact because this "rash default" is the result of "his fortune, not his fault," according to the narrator (VI iii 21.5-8). This scene of unfortunate interruption is prelude to the more extended scene on Mt. Acidale, where Calidore interrupts the vision conjured by Colin Clout's piping, causing it to disappear. Here again, Calidore's "ill fortune" causes him to transgress against the laws of courtesy (VI.x 20.9). But in this case, Calidore himself—not the narrator—attributes his actions to "ill fortune." Although Calidore's entrance into the scene on Mount Acidale is variously described as "lucklesse" (29.3), "unhappy" (20.2), and the product of "ill fortune" (20.9), he does not accidentally stumble into the

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[90] Miller, "Calidore," 127. See also Culp, "Courtesy and Fortune's Chance in Book 6 of The Faerie Queene."

midst of the scene, but instead intentionally "resolv[es], what it was, to know" and so

emerges from the wood (17.8). His interruption, however, stems from his curiosity, and

therefore seems appropriate to his mission to learn how to exercise judgment.

If courtesy is partly a rhetorical performance that presents the contingent as

necessary—i.e. Calidore's skill as nature—then fortune can exert significant influence on

how courtesy is read (or misread). Both performing and identifying courtesy are

processes governed by fortune: the artifice of courtesy as a performance of *sprezzatura*

raises the possibility that it may be feigned, and another challenge that the Legend of

Courtesy presents is correctly identifying courtesy in others. Turpine and Blandina, foils

for Calidore's courtesy, have all appearances of courteous skill. After Arthur acquiesces

to Blandina's plea to spare Turpine, she entertains him "With all the courteous glee and

goodly feast," and displays her knowledge of "how to please the minds of good and ill, /

Through tempering of her words and looks by wondrous skill" (VI.vi 41.4-9). However,

despite her evident skill, "Yet were her words and looks but false and fayned," her words

"but wynd, and all her teares but water" (VI.vi 42.1,9). Hence, the Legend of Courtesy

explores how, even in the idealized world of Faerie, understanding others' intentions with

such transparency is nigh impossible. Instead, social bonds must depend on a set of

uncertain, fortunate assumptions about whether interactions are backed by true

intentions.[91] This, too, is why perceiving true courtesy proves to be such a challenge.

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[91] This is similar to the way in which Francis Bacon discusses negotiation between individuals as the "architecture of fortune," as I will show in Chapter Two. Spenser achieves a similar end through more oblique means—i.e. allegory—that allows him to handle the contradictions between the idealized vision of courtliness and its somewhat baser reality in a more nuanced fashion. The social realities of courtesy in Spenser's time reflected similar anxieties about whether social hierarchy was naturally determined or changeable according to skill. The vogue for courtesy literature itself was prompted by

Because courtesy for Spenser is neither wholly learned nor innate, it presents considerable hermeneutic difficulty. Just as matters that appear to be the result of fortune later receive a fuller explanation, some performances of "courtesy" are later revealed to be feigned.

The proem to Book VI focuses on two related risks: the potential for courtesy to be feigned and the complementary potential for true courtesy not to be recognized for what it is. The poet searches for the source of this hermeneutic uncertainty, attributing it alternately to the present's degeneration from the Golden Age of the past and to the court's spatial distance from its center, i.e. Gloriana. Initially, the proem leads us to understand that courtesy is intrinsic to nobility, a "lowly stalk" that flourishes nonetheless by dint of "brave nobility" (VI pr. 4.4). But the current state of courtesy is debased; it consists of "fayned shows […]/ Which carry colours faire, that feeble eies misdeeme (VI pr. 4.8-9). These "fayned shows" cannot measure up when "being matcht with plaine Antiquitie" (VI pr. 4.7). Here, the proem continues the theme established in the proem of Book V that suggests man has fallen away from idealized virtue: "For from the golden age, that first was named, /It's now at earst become a stonie one" (V pr. 2.1-2). Given the poem's frequent references an idealized Golden Age of the past, it is not a stretch to imagine that courtesy in the present age does not measure up to its fullest realization in

the greater social mobility of the sixteenth century: courtesy literature theoretically cemented social difference as absolute even as it ironically enabled social mobility through its dissemination in print, according to Frank Whigham, "Courtesy as a Social Code," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 196–198. That is, although authors of courtesy manuals may have intended to repress illicit social mobility by representing the natural superiority of the nobility, codifying their practices made such behavior available to anyone. Courteous behavior functioned as a kind of rhetoric for persuading others of one's legitimacy and "representing contingent differences as absolute" (196).

antiquity. But Spenser has also asserted that the present model of courtesy that Elizabeth

presents supersedes its predecessors, complicating this temporal narrative of

degeneration. Instead, courtesy may also be presently debased because the present simply

offers more examples of what looks like courtesy, making true courtesy harder to detect:

courtesy in the "present age doe plenteous seeme," but it has such power to dazzle even

"the wisest sight, to thinke gold that is bras" (VI pr. 4.6, 5.7). The lack of a clear source

of courtesy's degeneration makes the remedy all the more elusive.

To lessen this anxiety about recognizing true courtesy, Spenser ultimately

describes it as a model of divine mercy, transforming the uncertainty of patronage into

inevitability. Spenser participates in the patronage system explicitly by making reference

to his desire for Gloriana's favor. In a manner similar to the rhetoric of fortune described

above, the proem demonstrates an effort to displace uncertainty away from this patronage

exchange. The Proem of Book VI describes how true courtesy, though presently rare,

ultimately emanates from the sovereign herself. While searching for the origins of

courtesy, the poet rejects a number of inadequate models. The sixth stanza opens, "But

where shall I in all Antiquity / So faire a patterne finde," a rhetorical question which

suggests that not even antiquity measures up for the example of courtesy that Elizabeth

offers (VI pr. 6.1-2). Spenser's "soueraine Lady Queene" possesses a "pure minde" that

exhibits courtesy like "a mirror sheene" whose "brightnesse doth inflame / The eyes of

all" (VI pr. 6.5-7). In this metaphor, the queen's mind acts as a mirror that *produces*

rather than reflects the image of courtesy. Its effect on viewers is a similarly astounding

image: their eyes, inflamed by the "brightnesse" of the mirror, become "thereon fixed," in

a seemingly involuntary reaction (VI pr. 6.7). Her courtesy, then, is a mirror in the sense

that onlookers cannot avoid reflecting its image.

If all courtesy derives from the sovereign, then any act of courtesy constitutes an exchange wherein one borrows courtesy from its source in hopes of eventually returning by serving the queen (and being repaid in patronage). By constructing an unavoidable exchange, the poet makes these social ties an inevitability, rather than leaving such interactions to chance. At the proem's conclusion, he asks pardon "That from your selfe I doe this vertue bring," (VI.pr. 7.2). In the very next lines, however, he offers to return virtue to its source, since

> So from the Ocean all riuers spring,
>
> And tribute backe repay as to their King.
>
> Right so from you all goodly vertues well
>
> Into the rest, which round about you ring,
>
> Faire Lords and Ladies, which about you dwell,
>
> And doe adorne your Court, where courtesies excell. (VI.pr. 7.6-9)

Once again, this image suggests how the Queen is both the source and destination of all courtesy, since her followers are like rivers that both "spring" from and "repay" tribute back to the sea. There is some potential irony here in the fact that rivers do not flow from the ocean, but to it. In both this and the mirror metaphor, the poet forces the image to be reflexive rather than unidirectional. Having located its source in Elizabeth herself, Spenser establishes a bond between any courtesy he might lay claim to and the debt he owes his patron. Rather than emphasizing the remunerative rewards of patronage, Spenser reframes its gift-giving economy as an economy of virtue. By shifting focus away from material concerns, Spenser erases the contingency of patronage ties: by

claiming to "return againe" Elizabeth's virtue, he glosses over the fact that it is a gift she cannot help but give.

At this point, it may seem that references to the higher functions of courtesy are a mere rhetorical shield for its more material purpose of securing patronage. But this isn't to say that the representation of courtesy in Book VI is limited to such practical concerns. When Spenser declares in the first Canto of Book VI that courtesy is "the ground/ And roote of civill conversation" (VI.i.1.5-6), he grants it a much loftier role than it might first seem. The term "civility" here emphasizes that courtesy deals not only with individuals' personal relationships, but also with the broader relations that knit society together. According to Dorothy Culp, courtesy, independent from political, economic, or personal advantage, concerns itself with aid for those in need.[92] Some also see the Legend of Courtesy as a complement to the preceding Legend of Justice, in that justice "is coextensive with virtue, but refers to external relation," whereas "courtesy is virtue complete in itself."[93] Courtesy for Spenser has an explicitly moral dimension, lodged as it is, in "vertues seat […] deepe within the mynd" (VI pr. 5.8). Its concern with right action in regard to unequal relationships will ultimately suggest a link between the courtier's grace and divine Grace itself.

In terms of immediate context, Spenser's association of courtesy with "civil conversation" seems to refer to Guazzo's 1574 manual of the same name, which had been translated into English in 1581 and 1586. Guazzo defines "civil conversation" as "an honest commendable and virtuous kind of living in the world" (22). And far from the practically-minded advice book that Robin Wells claims it to be, in this and other

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[92] Culp, "Courtesy and Fortune's Chance in Book 6 of The Faerie Queene," 45.
[93] Morgan, "Spenser's Conception of Courtesy and the Design of the Faerie Queene," 20.

moments the manual reveals deep interest in courtesy's status as an expression of the moral *vita activa*.[94] My own reading of this book aligns with Humphrey Tonkin's contention that Guazzo "is quite definitely interested in making his reader a *better person*" in contrast to the way that Castiglione and Della Casa are "concerned […] with preventing *faux pas* and winning for their readers influence and popularity in society."[95]

Guazzo's investment in a larger philosophical discourse is evident from his opening dialogue that initiates the conversation about courtesy, which is dedicated to assessing the comparative merits of active and contemplative life. Anniball, one of the chief interlocutors who propounds on the nature of courtesy, affirms that "Philosophie […] without woorkes […] is dead," and proceeds to praise Socrates for his commitment to making living well accessible to those living "our common life," rather than only to those "bent to the contemplation of nature."[96] And although Guazzo's intent is not to expound "those moral vertues which pertaine to the perfection and happy state of life," he does write with the understanding that civility is a necessary component of that life.[97] Spenser's investment in Guazzo as a source for depictions of courtesy may thus extend beyond the adoption of the phrase "civil conversation" and include a shared interest in the higher moral dimensions of courtesy. Spenser, however, goes even further in suggesting that courtesy is a model that operates on multiple scales, governing the relationships

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[94] Wells, "Spenser and the Courtesy Tradition" critiques Tonkin, *Spenser's Courteous Pastoral* on the grounds that "while Spenser makes it quite clear in the proem to Book VI that true courtesy is a matter of inward thoughts and not outward shows, Guazzo freely admits that he is not concerned with the more philosophic aspects of his subject" (226). I'm inclined to disagree with this contention on both points: courtesy for Spenser is concerned *both* with inward thoughts and outward shows, and Guazzo does express interest in philosophical matters.

[95] Tonkin, *Spenser's Courteous Pastoral*, 169.

[96] Guazzo, *The Ciuile Conuersation,* 10.

[97] Ibid., 21.

between individuals, between the body politic and the sovereign, and between mankind and God.

This expanded role for courtesy offers an alternate explanation for why Spenser frames patronage interactions as an exchange of virtue. Instead of being a mere rhetorical shield for the baser components of courtly patronage, there is a higher, spiritual analogue to the relationships being described. This is particularly evident in the scene on Mt. Acidale, when Calidore impetuously stumbles upon the shepherd Colin Clout's piping, which has conjured a vision of hundreds of dancing ladies that Calidore's intrusion causes to disappear. First, Calidore sees "An hundred naked maidens lilly white, / All raunged in a ring, and dauncing in delight" (VI.x.11.8-9). Within this group are "Three other Ladies" whom the poet identifies as the three Graces, and in the middle of those is "Another Damzell […] That with her goodly presence all the rest much graced" (VI.x.12.3-9). The courtly, artistic, and theological aims of the poem come together in this moment, where human "grace" as "the art of control" is supplanted by "divine grace […] beyond any human control."[98] Harry Berger suggests that the dissolution of the Acidalian vision is less a helpless testimony to the poet's loss of control over his supreme fiction than a manifestation of "the controlled surrender whereby [the 'secret discipline' of the imagination] acknowledges the limits of sacrifice."[99] There is, then, a connection between the controlled surrender of poetic authority that Berger recognizes and the way that courtly grace is supplemented by divine grace.

Notably, the transcendent vision of perfect courtesy on Mt. Acidale begins with

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[98] Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 106.
[99] Harry Berger, "A Secret Discipline: The Faerie Queene, Book VI," in *Form and Convention in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William Nelson (New York: Columbia UP, 1961), 75.

Calidore's seemingly discourteous curiosity. In that moment, the limitations of courtesy as a social grace become apparent, and require reliance on providential grace. Whatever his natural gifts of courtesy might be, it is clear that Calidore, like many of the heroes of other cantos, is a flawed, imperfect character who constantly struggles to exemplify virtue. Courtesy, then, also entails ceding some control over our actions, much in the way that the vagaries of chance inhibit the extent to which each man makes his own fortune. Rather than courtesy functioning as a prudential remedy for fortune here, in this case it becomes a spiritual remedy, emphasizing the need for relying on divine mercy to forgive imperfection. Colin, uncertain of whether his vision will be attainable again, resigns himself to the fact that the figures "being gone, none can them bring in place / But whom they of them selues list so to grace" (20.4-5). The finality of the first assertion is tempered by the possibility that at some future point Colin might be graced by their presence once again. However, he emphasizes his own inability to bring about such an event: if he is to be graced again, it will not be by dint of his own efforts. In this way, the episode transforms the representation of virtue in the proem, circulating between patron and recipient to a unidirectional, seemingly arbitrary gift, closer to divine grace. The fashioning of a gentleman in virtues such as courtesy has its limits, and must be supplemented by the gift of grace, which depends on envisioning a distant, future perspective.

Further evidence for relationship between courtly and divine grace lies in the connection between Elizabeth's gift of virtue described in the proem and the image of the Graces here. The graces, we are told, "to men all gifts of grace do graunt, / And all, that Venus in her selfe doth vaunt, / Is borrowed of them" (VI x 15.4-6). The roughly chiastic

grammatical structure—"To men […] all gifts […] graunt" and "all […] is borrowed of them"—would seem to suggest a reciprocal relationship between the gifts given to men and the things "borrowed," but the gift-giving described is entirely one-sided, gifts are given by and borrowed from the very same Graces. The gifts of the Graces in the center of the circle resemble the pattern of giving alluded to at the end of the proem, where the poet brings virtue from the sovereign only to "it returne againe" (VI pr. 7.3).[100] Freely giving and receiving without expectation of return thus seems to be a central component of courtesy and something that links it to divine grace.[101] And indeed, Colin explains that the gifts these graces bestow include "all the complements of curtesie" (VI x 23.6). This connection suggests an idealized version of courtesy, wherein the sources of artistic inspiration mirror the divine gifts of grace and virtue.

The order that the Graces represent extends to the very natural order of the cosmos itself when the poet likens these concentric circles of dancers to the orbit of the stars around Ariadne's crown:

Looke how the Crowne, which *Ariadne* wore

  Vpon her yuory forehead that same day

  That *Theseus* her vnto his bridale bore,

  When the bold *Centaures* made that bloudy fray

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[100] Cf. Gerald Snare, "*The Poetics of Vision*: Patterns of Grace and Courtesy in The Faerie Queene, VI," *Renaissance Papers* (1974): 3; Catherine Bates, *The Rhetoric of Courtship in Elizabethan Language and Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 157–159.

[101] Donald Cheney, *Spenser's Image of Nature: Wild Man and Shepherd in The Faerie Queene*, Yale Studies in English: 161 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 203; Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1993), 29–66, 214–226; Lisa M. Klein, "Your Humble Handmaid: Elizabethan Gifts of Needlework," *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (July 1, 1997): 459–493.

> With the fierce *Lapithes*, which did them dismay;
>
> Being now placed in the firmament,
>
> Through the bright heauen doth her beams display,
>
> And is vnto the starres an ornament,
>
> Which round about her moue in order excellent.

The constellation described here, Corona Borealis, was "culminant in [Elizabeth's] nativitie" and therefore was associated with her.[102] The concentric rings of ladies become like the stars orbiting around the semi-circular constellation in this image. The mythological origins of the constellation suggest that it represents an end to violence and an establishment of cosmically-ordained order. But even as that order suggests a connection between the micro- and macrocosmic visions of courtly grace, the connection can only ever be a poetic fiction, since the crown is not in fact the center of the night sky, and itself orbits around the North Star.

All of these examples serve to illustrate the broadest functions of Spenserian courtesy: unasked for, it is granted willingly; granted, it produces a harmonious relationship between giver and receiver, part and whole. Drawing inspiration from the courtesy book tradition and the related writings on remedies for fortune, Spenser depicts courtesy as a means of mitigating the uncertainty that fortune presents. But, faced with the impossibility of completely eliminating such uncertainty, Spenser ultimately resolves the problem by recasting social grace as a version of spiritual grace, a change of

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[102] William Camden, *Remaines of a Greater Worke, Concerning Britaine, the Inhabitants Thereof, Their Languages, Names, Surnames, Empreses, Wise Speeches, Poësies, and Epitaphes*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 878:03 (London: G[eorge] E[ld] for Simon Waterson, 1605), 174–175. See also Frances A. Yates, "Queen Elizabeth as Astraea," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 10 (January 1, 1947): 73–74.

perspective away from questions about what to do about fortune and toward questioning whether such efforts are worthwhile. This emphasis on seeing a quality such as "courtesy" from a practical and from a religious standpoint employs hermeneutic that Spenser applies toward causal relationships in the poem as well. Courtesy operates on two levels, the local and the universal, or the temporal and the spiritual, which in turn correspond to how fortune functions throughout book 6. While it appears potent at the local level, when viewed in light of the whole, it becomes far less important.

**Reading Fortune as a Function of Perspective**

Perspective is a crucial component of Spenser's artistic vision for his poem, as the different valences of courtesy suggest. His arrangement of the plot is another way in which he forces re-evaluation of concepts—in this case, causation—from different perspectives. Rather than discoursing as the historiographer does, depicting events "orderly as they were done," he prefers to thrust "into the middest even where it most concerneth" him. This non-linear arrangement allows the poet to recount "things forepaste" and to anticipate "things to come." The most significant advantage of this method is that it enables a "pleasing analysis of all." [103] Although the knights of *The Faerie Queene* are already on their quests when the poem begins, we know that Gloriana's court is both the origin and endpoint of their journeys. Likewise, the various twists and turns of fortune that propel characters through the romance landscape of Book VI will become meaningful in light of their endpoint, from the apocalyptic perspective of providential design as revealed in the Mutabilitie Cantos. Spenser's vision for the structure of the poem emphasizes the importance of perspective in gauging the

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[103] Spenser, "Letter to Raleigh," 716-717.

relationship of narrative part to whole, which is crucial to understanding how fortune's influence is circumscribed by providence.

Understanding fortune's significance in the poem as a matter of perspective clears up some critical controversies about Book VI, which disagree about the degree of fortune's influence, especially when compared to that of Providence. Frederick Kiefer identifies several contradictory configurations of relationships between fortune and providence—at (III.vii.27), (I.xi. 29–45), and (III.vii.20). In these and other moments, fortune variously opposes Virtue, Justice and Nature, and then later becomes aligned with Mutabilitie (II.ix.8), (V.iv.6).[104] Part of the problem, according to some, is the poem's blending of medieval and early modern strains of thought. Joan Klein, for instance, claims that Spenser, "unlike his medieval predecessors, divorces chance from Dame Fortune.[105] But something overlooked by studies that suggest Spenser conflates Fortune and Providence is this very issue of perspective, wherein what seems like Fortune at one point could be seen as a foregone conclusion guaranteed by Providence from another viewpoint.[106]

Because fortune takes on many roles in the poem, its most significant function is hermeneutic: it challenges audience and characters alike to "read aright," particularly with regard to attributing causes. One of the challenges to understanding the relationship between fortune and providence in the poem is the way that Spenser, in the figure of the

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[104] Frederick Kiefer, "Fortune," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 816–818.

[105] Joan L. Klein, "The Anatomy of Fortune in Spenser's Faerie Queene," *Annuale Mediaevale* 14 (1973): 75.

[106] Dundas, "Spenser's 'Wilde Fortune'" seems to concur with such a view when she suggests that Spenser treats Fortune as a fact of life, even if it is not the ultimate arbiter of human destiny (98).

poem's speaker, directs *mis*readings of the text that overstate fortune's importance. Once they are revealed as such, these misreadings reinforce the contrast between the longer, stable perspective of providential time and the short, fallible perspective of experienced time.

An episode featuring the beleaguered Florimell illustrates the short-sightedness that causes characters to overstate fortune's importance. Florimell finds herself "Driuen to great distresse by Fortune straunge" (III.viii.20.2), having been chased to the point where she must seek refuge in a man's boat. When she attempts to explain how she came to be in such distress, she finds that she cannot "read aright" what put her in her current state: "Ah (said she) father, I note read aright, / What hard misfortune brought me to the same; / Yet am I glad that here I now in safety am." (III.viii.23.7-9). Though she correctly identifies fortune (or, at least, misfortune) as the source, she can offer no specific cause. But at this very moment even, Florimell is misreading her situation: far from being "in safety," she is about to be cruelly assaulted by the boatman. "Reading" and understanding causes in the poem seems to be a crucial skill: Spenser produces one understanding of fortune only to replace it with the "correct" explanation in order to train the reader to correctly assess risks and act properly.

The forms of reading that Spenser depicts unite his philosophical and formal concerns so that reading becomes both a way of analyzing causation and a step towards deliberate action. Originally the verb "to read," along with its Saxon and Germanic cognates, refers to something along the lines of "deliberate, advise, think," but its usage

in Elizabethan England typically refers to the more familiar sense of scanning text.[107]

Spenser seems to use the term in a deliberately broad and often archaic sense. In many

places he uses it as a synonym for "to see," with the potential implication being that in

some cases seeing and understanding are instantaneous. In the case of "reading aright,"

there is an important connection between reading as deliberation or thinking and reading

as interpreting a text: these scenes of interpretation within the poem speak to the risks

undertaken by the reader *of* the poem. The phrase appears multiple times in the *Faerie*

*Queene*, including a moment when Arthur wonders at how difficult it is to understand the

workings of providence: "Full hard it is (quoth he) to read aright / The course of heauenly

cause" (I.ix.6.6). The stakes of reading the poem itself are no less dire: allegories may be

"doubtfully […] construed," and thus require the reader's vigilance.[108] To read well, in

short, is to do well.

The quest to "read" fortune "aright" shows that the process of interpreting causal

relations comprises a [crucial] dimension of Spenser's use of allegory to enfold

polysemous and sometimes incompatible general meanings in particular examples.

Spenser's use of allegory allows him to reconcile the seemingly incompatible influence

of fortune and providence, the former of which is generally thought to adhere to no

discernible pattern, and the latter of which is thought to admit no possibility of chance.

Instead, for Arthur, and hence the reader, reading "fortune" is the initial step toward

understanding the design of providence: fortune appears in the linear experience of

narrative, which is understood incrementally, whereas understanding providence (if such

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[107]"Read, V.," *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1989),
http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/158851.
[108] Spenser, "A Letter of the Authors," 714.

a thing is possible) requires an allegorical reading that considers the significance of the entire trajectory of events from a fixed perspective. Allegory and narrative are therefore not two incompatible methods of writing; they are two complementary ways of *reading*. Following Frank Kermode's distinction between "chronos" and "kairos," I suggest that reading the poem—or fortune—as narrative entails the "simple chronicity" of taking events as they come, or "*chronos*."[109] In contrast, reading for allegorical significance— like reading signs of Providence—means that events must be interpreted in light of their end, consistent with the conception of time called "*kairos*." As with reading narrative, so it is with reading fortune: the significance of events becomes clearer gradually as characters gain new insights. Likewise, taking a broader perspective and viewing fortune as a component of providence entails reading its significance in terms of a predetermined end, just as Spenser plots the broadest aims and ultimate conclusion of his allegory in his "Letter to Raleigh."

Britomart's experience in the Castle Busirane at the end of Book III further illustrates the difficulty of "reading aright." There, she witnesses twisted representations of Petrarchan passion in various media, culminating in a masque where Amoret has been "cruelly pend" (III.xi.11.1)—that is, both imprisoned and written about. The episode thus allegorizes the process of reading and writing poetry, with particular focus on the effects it produces on its audience. Britomart's experience in the castle confronts the potential perils of misreading through the oft-cited refrain "Be bold" written above the doors of the castle, a phrase she does not understand but that she successfully enacts: "*Bee bold*: she oft and oft it ouer-red, / Yet could not find what sence it figured: […] / But forward with

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[109] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending; Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, 1st ed., Mary Flexner Lectures (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 46-47.

bold steps into the next roome went" (III.xi.50.4-9). Feeling more than comprehending the sense of the warning, Britomart is content to wait until the meaning of the castle's scenes becomes clear, and the canto ends with her patiently awaiting more (III.xi.55). When Amoret finally appears at the end of Cupid's masque, Britomart does not act hastily (in accordance with the qualification "*but not too bold*"), but "Abode to weet, what end would come of all" (III.xii.37.6). Here, too, Britomart patiently allows the meaning of a reading to unfold, since Busirane has just agreed to reverse his charms by reading them over once again (III.xii.36). As he re-reads the charms, Britomart must endure the torture that Busirane has enacted on Amoret, but Britomart's patience allows the charms to break, leaving both her and Amoret unharmed.

Britomart, unlike Florimel, does not draw premature conclusions from what she witnesses. Instead, she recognizes the limits of her own understanding and allows meaning to unfold organically. The repeated emphasis on Britomart's failure to understand what she reads does nothing to undermine the success of her venture, which makes her a positive model of a thoughtful reader. Misunderstanding in that sense is a crucial component of the reading process. The episode constitutes a model of reading that I identify with the process of interpreting both fortune in the poem and the poem itself. Rereading and reassessment—particularly in this scene, where Busirane's rereading undoes his charms—doesn't merely correct error, it interrupts the linear progress of narrative in order to provide a more holistic viewpoint. To read effectively, one must both reflect what has come before and anticipate that more will follow. Neither Britomart nor Florimell is able to assess their situation fully from moment to moment. Nevertheless, these episodes of misreading, or struggling to read prove productive as models for how

error is ethically and intellectually productive.

Florimell's misplaced trust in the boatman who rescues her is but one instance of many scenes of error: Redcrosse and Una, Guyon and Redcross, Britomart and Scudamore, and Timias and Belphoebe all face conflict at various points because of some misrecognition between them. Together, error and understanding constitute a significant motif in the poem. "Error," both as physical and intellectual wandering, becomes significant even from the first Canto, when Una and Redcrosse enter "Errours den," initiating a quest to defeat the allegorical beast. Error's importance on a structural level also becomes clear in the many scenes of misrecognition that often produces characters' errant wandering. The two endings (1590 and 1596) of Book III clearly illustrate the relationship between "error" and narrative dilation. In the earlier edition, wherein Book III is a temporary conclusion to the poem, Amoret and Scudamore's reunion is so complete that they come to resemble "that fair Hermaphrodite" (III.xii.46.2). The reunion, in some sense, enables the poet to close the story, though he promises more. But the 1596 edition, which continues the narrative beyond Book III, averts such narrative closure. Instead, Scudamore flees Busirane's castle "misdeeming sure that her [Britomart] those flames did burn" (III.xii.45.5). Scudamore's departure, founded on his erroneous assumption that Britomart has died, thus provides impetus for another portion of the narrative.

In contrast to how the earlier edition brings characters together to enact a resolution, this new version must drive them apart in order to enable the continuance of the narrative. In that respect, the new closing mirrors many other canto endings, wherein the canto breaks off at the moment someone departs on a journey, found frequently in

Book I (Cantos 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 10) and Book V (Cantos 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, and 11). By this

logic, the reunion of Amoret and Scudamore is unsuitable for a canto ending, since

scenes of reconciliation and renewed understanding occur more frequently in the middle

of a canto. Spenser's canto breaks are therefore not moments of narrative closure that

look forward to a grander conclusion, but sparks for further storytelling (a fact also made

clear by the way that cantos that don't end in journeys often end instead with a

storytelling scene that promises to relate the yarn in the next canto).

What, then, is the function of these scenes of recognition and renewed

understanding if not to produce narrative closure? How do they fit into Spenser's poetic

project? Crucially, scenes of renewed understanding are framed as moments "reading,"

and therefore offer models of reading the poem itself. That these moments do not produce

narrative closure is key to Spenser's depiction of reading as a continual process of

revision, as examination of a few of these scenes will reveal. For instance, Guyon and

Redcrosse avoid conflict at the last minute when he recognizes "The sacred badge of my

Redeemers death/ Which on your shield is set for ornament" (II.i.27.6-7). Another scene

of re-reading appears in Book 4 when Timias reconciles with Belphoebe. At first his

looks, "messengers of his true meaning and intent," go unrecognized ("Yet nathemore his

meaning she ared") (IV.viii.14.1). But he explains how her "high displeasure" is "through

misdeeming bred," prompting her to "deeme aright" the situation (IV.viii.17.3). Reading

does not always produce instantaneous understanding, but when characters do reach a

renewed understanding, it comes through their willingness to reexamine the evidence

before them. The pattern of misreading followed by belated understanding models the

reading process that Spenser's narrator initiates in the reader, often through references to

fortune.

In addition to being an important element within the plot of the *Faerie Queene*, delay and error function on a metanarrative level as well. On many occasions, the narrator delays his explanations of particularly suspenseful moments at the end of one canto until the beginning of the next. These moments misleadingly overstate the role of fortune and thus eventually force the reader to reassess causal relationships. Frequently, "fortune" and "chance" together serve as interchangeable placeholders delaying the explanation of what actually transpired. Their ability to forestall these explanations occludes the full sequence of events: when Calepine finds himself in dire straits, the narrator promises that "wondrous chaunce his reskue wrought" (VI iii 51.6); the relation of Serena's reunion with Calepine waits because "now I must delay, / Till Mirabellaes fortunes I doe further say" (VI vii 50.8-9); and Calidore's dalliance with Pastorella delays the telling of "what straunge fortunes vnto him befell, / Ere he attain'd the point by him intended," which "Shall more conueniently in other place be ended" (VI ix 46.7-9). Calepine's wondrous rescue, the narrator assures us, is part of a more general trend, since "Such chaunces oft exceed all humaine thought: / That in another Canto shall to end be brought" (VI iii 51.8-9). Here and elsewhere—e.g. (VI ii 48.9) and (VI x 44.8-9)—the narrator explicitly calls attention to the structure of the poem by referring to the conclusion in "another Canto." Such interruptions are uniquely prominent in Book VI.

Attributing such events to fortune proves to be misleading both because the poet himself takes the liberty to arrange events as he pleases by "thrust[ing] into the middest" and because events that at first glance appear to be the result of chance often upon closer consideration reveal themselves as the product of human agency. Between one canto and

the next, a process of substitution occurs, wherein "chance" or "fortune"—as for instance the mention of "fortune, passing all foresight" (VI iv 2.1)—acts as a placeholder for events that eventually receive a more specific explanation. The active verb "wrought" initially suggests that chance has great agency in bringing about Calepine's rescue, taking the place of the human agent who performs the rescue. But we soon learn that his rescuer is not "chance" but the Salvage Man, who is not given credit for his deeds until the following Canto. The division imposed between chance event and its explanation delays our ability to interpret events according to their particular details, a romance trope that connects the reader's experience of events to the protagonists' progress through an unpredictable landscape.[110] Instead of being an alternative agent behind events that is outside of human control, fortune is simply the most general category for understanding how things happen and a way of registering surprise at what happens. In this way, then, the final stanza of Canto iii blurs the distinction between the actions of "wondrous chance" and the poet's *arrangement* of events into a framework that delays the reader's full understanding. The suddenness of these breaks and the delay of their explanation produces the kind of reading that a limited perspective in time encourages in the same way that experiencing adversity in real time might encourage one to attribute it to cruel fortune. Both are misreadings, however, that fail to conduct "a pleasing analysis of all."

　　The abrupt intrusions of fortune at the ends of cantos produce two competing

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[110] James Nohrnberg connects the reader's experience of fortune in *Orlando Innamorato* to the titular character's: "Interpretation is impossible without a hiatus or meantime between the positing of a sign and the depositing of its significance" (56). James Nohrnberg, "Orlando's Opportunity: Chance, Luck, Fortune, Occasion, Boats and Blows in Boiardo's Orlando Innamorato," in *Fortune and Romance: Boiardo in America*, ed. Jo Ann Cavallo and Charles Stanley Ross, vol. 183, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies (Tempe, Arizona: MRTS, 1998), 56.

impulses: "a compromise between the storyteller's demand for a resolution and the moralist's conviction that the world stands irresolute still."[111] On the one hand, breaking off at these suspenseful moments spurs the reader forward through the story. Such sudden, suspenseful breaks are a familiar trope of romance narratives, also employed, for instance, in *Don Quixote*.[112] But on the other hand, the revelations that these events are not in fact caused by fortune requires the reader look back and reflect on what has come before. Thus, I suggest that these references to fortune are intentionally misleading, directing readers to attend to the poet's artful design, itself an analogy for providential design. This alternation between chance events and providential order resolves the critical dispute between those who see fortune in the poem as a sign of unraveling moral agency and reliance on fortune-driven source materials and those whos ee fortune merely as an indication of authorial artifice. That "fortunate" happenings receive clearer explanations later is not evidence that fortune is unimportant; rather, it reflects how fortune is a marker of a linear reading practice, which the poet encourages his readers to recognize and move beyond. Spenser shifts deliberately between local and global scales of causal explanation, from chronological fortune to atemporal providence.

The poem's speaker explicitly addresses the purposefulness of such misdirection through the repeated motif of sea voyages, which are used to describe both the progress of particular characters and the progress of the narrative itself. In direct contrast to

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[111] Berger, "A Secret Discipline," 294.

[112] James Nohrnberg delineates medieval and Renaissance ideas of fortune in "Orlando's Opportunity," noting that *Don Quixote* is typical of Renaissance attitudes when its protagonist declares to Sancho Panza, "Nothing that happens here below, whether of good or evil, comes by chance, but by the special disposition of Providence, and that is why we have the proverb: 'Every man is the maker of his own fortune'" (II.66 qtd. in Nohrnberg, 31-32). We may also take the novel's self-consciously suspenseful chapter breaks as part of that same manipulation of Fortune.

Dorothy Culp's claim that Spenser's Fortune is more purposeful than "blind chance" because it features "no storms, no shipwrecks," the conceit of a ship adrift at sea is purposeful, and proves to be one of the unifying images that illustrates how Fortune ultimately serves a greater design. The image of a ship beset by fortune, or the narrator steering his story as one would a ship (found for instance at (I.xii.1), (I.xii.42), (VI.iv.1), and (VI.xii.1)) doesn't only serve as a shield for the intrusion of authorial control; it also later serves as an explicit metaphor for the progress of the plot.[113] Jerome Dees links the wandering progress of characters, to that of the narrator, and further still, to the experience of the audience. In this light, it is clear that the wandering produced by the vagaries of Fortune serves a larger purpose that has implications for the way we read the poem. By "way we read," I mean more than the way we interpret an image or a motif, I mean specifically the process of reading itself.  The purposefulness of the wandering produced by fortune comes about through error, through the process of reading and re-reading.

While the narrator forges relentlessly onward, steering his "barke" through the Sea of Fortune, this continual forward movement leaves characters little time for retrospection. Amidst his continual wandering, Calidore expresses a desire "To rest my barcke, which hath bene beaten late / With stormes of fortune and tempestuous fate" (VI.ix.31.4-5), which leads him to seek the company of the shepherds. He imagines this pastoral community lives "a life so free and fortunate, / From all the tempests of these worldly seas" (VI.ix.19.3), mistakenly assuming that the fortunes of some are stable and unchanging. Of course, this illusion is shattered when brigands ravage the shepherds'

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[113] Jerome S. Dees, "The Ship Conceit in 'The Faerie Queene': 'Conspicuous Allusion' and Poetic Structure," *Studies in Philology* 72, no. 2 (April 1, 1975): 222.

homeland, but the desire to be free from the buffets of fortune and its "worldly" concerns speaks to how a change of perspective can reduce fortune's power over events. What Calidore expresses here is a desire for a "spiritual remedy" for fortune, insight into a stable perspective from which to look down upon mankind's petty temporal concerns. Although the narrative doesn't afford Calidore such insight, the Mutabilitie Cantos that follow his story offer that broader perspective to the reader. Calidore's misunderstanding highlights the difference between the unpredictability of events as lived and the stable perspective of retrospection. The poet posits fortune as a causal agent before illustrating the actual sequence of actions and events in order to reproduce in the reader the very lessons of "reading aright" that Calidore must discover on his journey. Spenser's attribution of events to fortune is not mere romance convention; rather, the delayed explanation of causes constitutes a lesson in how to read the text—and, by extension, chance itself. Through the Mutabilitie Cantos, we see how fortune's significance fades in light of the stable, unchanging perspective of providence.

**Fortune as Guise of Providence in the Mutabilitie Cantos**

The reading process Spenser depicts is, as we have seen, a function of perspective. Understanding only happens through retrospection and repetition that alters our view of what has come before, including our understanding of fortune. It seems as though fortune bears significant sway over events, particularly in Book VI, until we consider the providential outlook of the poem as a whole, where fortune has no place, as I will show hereafter in a reading of the Mutabilitie Cantos. The allegoresis of fortune that Spenser models changes drastically when considering the eternal perspective of providence.

Recent analyses of allegorical interpretation go against a longstanding assumption that allegory is incompatible with narrative, or exists on a level "above" that of the literal meaning of narrative events. Such practice derives from the way early commenters, such as Quintilian, take allegory's definition as "speaking other" to refer to the correspondence between tenor and vehicle, "some other hovering above the words of the text," which narrative threatens to undermine.[114] The perceived incompatibility of allegory and narrative has prompted a long-standing critical disagreement about whether narrative in the *Faerie Queene* is subordinate to allegory or vice versa.[115] More recently, critics have suggested that a productive tension exists between allegory and narrative, and that Spenser's allegory has a narrative element because he wants to depict the evolution of forms and figures.[116]

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[114] Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 25–26.

[115] A.C. Hamilton counters earlier critics for failing to treat the allegory's literal level, and instead suggests that early readers took delight in the fiction, and that Spenser, like Dante, "labours to render the fiction in its own right" in Albert Charles Hamilton, *The Structure of Allegory in the Faerie Queene* (Clarendon Press, 1961), 17, 32–33. Paul Alpers subsequently criticizes this critical turn because, he argues, "Spenser's attention is focused on the reader's mind and feelings and not on what is happening within his fiction" in Alpers, *The Poetry of The Faerie Queene*, 5. Essentially, Alpers contends that the use of narrative in the *Faerie Queene* is rhetorical, namely, that it aims "to direct and extend the reader's emotional responses and awareness of issues"—a claim which Alpers makes of the invocation of Providence, but which also applies to Spenser's use of narrative material in general (27). In contrast to this view, Nohrnberg suggests that Book VI in particular is divested of allegorical significance in favor of a focus on romance plot structures: see Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene*, 655. To some extent, each of these studies presumes a static relationship between narrative and allegory, rather than imagining how the poem negotiates between prioritizing one or the other throughout.

[116] This claim is central to Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996): "from the tension between [abstract meaning and literal narrative] the various approaches to allegory have been generated," 6. Clare Kinney also contends that "narrative" and "allegory" cannot be treated separately in *The Faerie Queene*. Instead, Kinney claims, it is essential to consider how the two modes are in "dialogue" with each other. Kinney, *Strategies of Poetic Narrative* notes that narrative

The Mutabilitie Cantos prove to be a particularly fruitful place for considering the relationship between allegory and narrative, since they shift "our attention away from metaphysics to genealogy, from the being of the universe as an order of forms to the memory of its emergence in time," or in other words, since they examine the development of forms—mythological, political, and philosophical genealogies—rather than the nature of their existence.[117] Witnessing this process of development, according to Gordon Teskey, is one of the chief pleasures of allegory, a pleasure "of recognizing the aptness and wit of an imaginative presentation of ideas, of building up complex structures of meaning out of a narrative unfolding in time, of seeming to penetrate to the center of a truth that is hidden from view."[118] That is, allegory in the *Faerie Queene,* and especially the Mutabilitie Cantos, does not entail a one-to-one correspondence between tenor and vehicle, but rather a more complex unfolding of an image and its multifarious connotations. Specifically, in the Mutabilitie Cantos, Spenser's allegorical narrative expands its focus toward a more broadly allegorical way of understanding the relationship between local and universal models of causation, or "subjective self assertion" in Mutability and "objective necessity" in Jove.[119]

The way that the Mutabilitie Cantos' allegories depict the unfolding of forms over time, as Teskey claims, also affects the reading process *The Faerie Queene* initiates. Allegorical interpretation, as I have said, mediates between linear reading and

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thrust moves forward while "formal" structures are more circular, repeating and developing the same motifs (70-72).

[117] Gordon Teskey, "Mutability, Genealogy, and the Authority of Forms," *Representations* no. 41 (January 1, 1993): 105.

[118] Teskey, *Allegory and Violence,* 24.

[119] Sean Kane, "Spenser's Broken Symmetries," in *Craft and Tradition: Essays in Honour of William Blissett*, ed. H. B. de Groot and Alexander Leggat (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990).

retrospective re-evaluation from a more stable perspective, wherein "meaning accretes serially," with the result that the allegory is "best sensed […] over a complete unit of narrative."[120] Time is therefore a crucial component of allegorical reading (or re-reading), which can be described as an "alternating motion" between "prospective and retrospective moment."[121] Describing a scene of reading in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, Paul DeMan asserts that allegorical representation "leads toward a meaning that diverges from the initial meaning to the point of foreclosing its manifestation."[122] Since "any narrative is the allegory of its own reading," narratives are in a double-bind; treatment of a theme inevitably leads to "the confrontation of incompatible meanings between which it is necessary but impossible to decide in terms of truth and error."[123] The irreconcilability of these readings means that truth itself is deferred, "since what we call time is precisely truth's inability to coincide with itself."[124] The only way to account for these incompatible readings, in other words, is to project them onto a temporal framework so that one supersedes the other.

This is precisely the function of the Mutability Cantos with respect to Spenser's depiction of fortune: the cantos change the temporal outlook of the rest of the poem, arresting linear narrative progress. The Mutabilitie Cantos bear an uncertain relation to the rest of the poem, both in terms of the events they depict and their placement in the poem. This spatial and temporal instability is partly due to the mythological aspect of the events in the Mutabilitie Cantos, seemingly set in a time and space separate from that of

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[120] Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory*, 28, 33.
[121] Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 57.
[122] Ibid., 75.
[123] Ibid., 76.
[124] Ibid., 78.

Faerie Land. But like other parts of the poem, the events in the Mutabilitie Cantos are

spurred by an act of misreading, in this case Mutabilitie's misreading of her own place in

the cosmological order. The trial that reaffirms her subordination to higher orders—of

Nature, and eventually, of providence—introduces a higher level of meaning that also

forces a re-evaluation of fortune's influence in the rest of the poem. When Nature

condemns Mutabilitie to the sublunary spheres, the poem creates a cosmology that allows

randomness and unpredictability to exist within a predetermined order, reconciling the

apparent contradictions between fortune and providence by dismissing fortune as a trick

of perception. The changes Mutabilitie brings about are temporary, and anticipate a time

when all change will cease. The poet reconciles the mutability of forms with the stability

of eternal providence by imaginatively anticipating a final re-reading from the stable

perspective of apocalyptic time, although this stability and closure remains always just

out of his reach.

The turn away from mutability and toward the stability of providence, and indeed,

the very use of allegory as a representational strategy borrows from Christian theology's

exegetical practices.[125] And indeed, the way that providential design can only be

discerned from a distant perspective resembles how allegory must be apprehended from a

complete narrative unit, according to Maureen Quilligan. The reader in this schema

achieves the "necessary self-consciousness" by undergoing a constant process of

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[125] John King argues that *Piers Plowman*, *The Faerie Queene*, and *Paradise Lost* are all Protestant apocalypses with a "shared pattern of biblical imagery" that guides readers' interpretations in *English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 447. Likewise, James Boulger claims, "The need for signs, emblems, and new dramatic presentation of the theological life is Calvinism's greatest incentive to imaginative literature," and that as a consequence the Faerie Queene must be read in light of Calvinist ideology in *The Calvinist Temper in English Poetry* (The Hague; New York: Mouton, 1980), 153.

revision, since "the exegesis of meaning at any one point can be made only in reference to the next event in the sequence."[126] I contend that this reading and revision process is essential not only to Spenser's allegory, but also to a worldview that incorporates the limited agency of fortune into a providentially ordered universe. In *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser not only trains his reader to "read aright" allegorical images in the poem, but he also ascribes to an epistemology that is fundamentally allegorical. Fortune's seeming interference with Providential order thus provides an essential test of the reader's ability to discern wider patterns of meaning that unites poetic exegesis with ways of seeing the world itself.

According to the printer of the 1609 *Faerie Queene*, the Cantos of Mutabilitie comprise the sole fragments of the incomplete legend of Constancy. Although their omission from earlier editions of the poem casts their relationship to it in an uncertain light, the editor's placement of them following Book VI emphasizes the increasingly important role of change and uncertainty in the world of the *Faerie Queene*. Our introduction to the titular character of these Cantos seems to gesture toward a continuation of Book VI's preoccupation with fortune, but ultimately reinforces a divide between fortune as a feature of a limited temporal perspective and Mutability as the transformation of matter over time.[127] The distinction becomes evident in the earliest lines of the Cantos, which tease us with what seems to be an image of fortune:

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[126] Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory*, 235.

[127] James Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976) suggests that Spenser intentionally aligns the two: The identification of Fortune and Mutabilitie is a natural one: 'Thou pinchest at my mutability,' says Chaucer's Fortune, and Spenser speaks of "fortunes mutabilitie" (Virgil's Gnat, 560). *La Primaudaye*, coming closer to the balance struck at the end of Spenser's poem, says that Fortune is constant in her very inconstancy. Stories are told about Fortune that parallel the 'plot' (VII.vi.23) of

What man that sees the euer-whirling wheele

Of Change, the which all mortall things doth sway,

But that therby doth find, and plainly feele,

How MVTABILITY in them doth play

Her cruell sports, to many mens decay? (VI.vi.1.1-5)

The "euer-whirling wheele," of course, is the emblem most frequently attributed to the

figure *Fortuna*. Burying the agent of change discussed throughout the stanza in the fourth

line makes the revelation of "MVTABILITY"'s name all the more surprising in a line

where one might expect to find Fortune as the agent holding sway over "all mortall

things." Here, Spenser repurposes the wheel in order to describe a more general type of

change essential to the transformation of all matter, not simply changes in man's material

circumstances. However, the changes Mutabilitie brings about are merely superficial, as

the Garden of Adonis episode suggests: "The substance is not chaungd, nor altered, / But

th'only forme and outward fashion" (III.vi.38.1-2). Mutabilitie's role as an agent of

change builds on this materialist account of the progress of souls, which itself betrays a

debt to Lucretius's account of the atom.[128]

Increasing the scope of the types of change also suggests the importance of

perspective in matters of causation. In addition to Mutabilitie's attempted conquest and

Mutabilitie." 744–45. The stories to which Nohrnberg refers seem to be a literary
tradition of Fortune rebelling against Jove. For more on this tradition, see Henry Gibbons
Lotspeich, *Classical Mythology in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser* (Princeton University
Press, 1932), 13; Harold L. Weatherby, *Mirrors of Celestial Grace: Patristic Theology in
Spenser's Allegory* (University of Toronto Press, 1994), 113; Klein, "The Anatomy of
Fortune in Spenser's Faerie Queene," 89. Despite these apparent similarities, it is also
worth considering why Spenser did *not* make Fortune the subject of these Cantos.
[128] Jonathan Goldberg, *The Seeds of Things: Theorizing Sexuality and Materiality in
Renaissance Representations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 107.

subsequent trial in the heavens, her role in bringing about the Fall of Man makes her

function as a bridge between human time and divine providence clear: "O pittious worke

of MVTABILITIE! / By which, we all are subject to that curse, / And death in stead of

life haue sucked from our Nurse" (VII.vi.6.7-9). Limiting fortune to smaller, local forms

of change diminishes its importance in a providential scheme to essentially a mistake of

perception.

Spenser's depiction of Mutabilitie's influence as a matter of perspective draws

upon a long tradition of allegoresis of fortune. Like Spenser, Boethius reconciles the

natures of fortune and providence by suggesting that signs of both are the product of

different ways of "reading" events.[129] *The Consolation of Philosophy*, uniting classical

and early Christian traditions, banishes fortune as a trick of perception in a providential

universe.[130] After demonstrating that the world cannot be governed by "random and

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[129] For a succinct account of possible connections between Spenser and Boethius, see Deborah MacInnes, "Boethius," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), which notes the availability of a number of editions and English translations of Boethius in Elizabethan England, in addition to observing that the Mutabilitie Cantos take up the theme of stability through change, even as the narrator is not comforted by these reassurances, 260–262. Michael F. N. Dixon's, "Fairy Tale, Fortune, and Boethian Wonder: Rhetorical Structure in Book VI of The Faerie Queene," *University of Toronto Quarterly: A Canadian Journal of the Humanities* 44 (1975): 141–165 offers a more thorough analysis of their connection, claiming that Spenser evokes "Boethian wonder" by using fate, fortune, and chance as motifs, repeated and varied through the structure of the book, while keeping Providence more distant because the poem is more concerned with material world, 161. Brents Stirling, "The Concluding Stanzas of 'Mutabilitie'," *Studies in Philology* 30, no. 2 (April 1, 1933): 193–204 suggests that the outcome of the trial of Mutabilitie is indebted to Boethius's *Consolatio*.

[130] Even if Spenser was not directly influenced by Boethius, the debate on Providential necessity and contingency that Boethius helped initiate was immensely influential on the theology of the sixteenth century as a whole. It is difficult to say how exactly Spenser aligns himself in this debate: Spenser's relationship to Calvinism is unclear, especially because Calvinism itself is fairly unstable. Una makes reference to Redcross knight's being "chosen" (I ix 53.5), but Spenser also believes in the crown's authority over church

chance occurrences (*temerariis [...] fortuitisque casibus*)," Philosophy explains that

providence "is the divine reason itself," whereas Fate, we are told, is the "unfolding of

the order of things in time"; Fate executes the unity of Providence "set out and unfolded

in specific times" (I.pr. 6.3; IV.pr. 6.9-10).[131] The speaker in the dialogue needs

consolation because of his fixed view of events that unfold over time, so Philosophy

encourages him to consider how matters appear differently from the eternal perspective

of the divine mind. To see how providence, not fortune, governs events, the observer

must interpret them counterintuitively, looking for long-term connections despite the

apparent disorder of the present moment.

By conceding that the signs of divine Providence often go against common

sense—that is, the evidence for events being caused by capricious fortune may outweigh

the evidence for a benevolently ordered universe, Boethius produces a allegorical mode

of reading events, parallel to the practice of reading texts to find hidden significance

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and a celibate clergy. (See Peter Auksi, "Calvin, Calvinism," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 129, which cites Article 37 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* and *View of the Present State of Ireland*.) Certainly, the *de casibus* tradition in literature was well-established by the mid-Tudor period, so "one need not trace back to Luther and Calvin the dramatic exploration of predestinarian ideas and of the problem of divine justice in a universe that may deny salvation to human beings lacking free will," according to King, *English Reformation Literature*, 450. Nevertheless, a number of critics see an explicit engagement with Protestant doctrinal questions in Spenser's work: A.P. Woodhouse describes how Spenser "interweaves the religious motive with the secular," and displays "a large inheritance from the Catholic Middle Ages" despite his Protestant emphasis in "Nature and Grace in the Faerie Queene," *ELH* 16, no. 3 (September 1, 1949): 194–228. The theological influences on Spenser's poetry may be muddled, Alan Sinfield says, because his attitude "moves towards a general disillusion with protestant values" according to *Literature in Protestant England, 1560-1660* (Croom Helm, 1983), 27.

[131] All quotations taken from Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Joel C. Relihan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001).

behind the narrative surface.[132] In the Reformation, Erasmus and Luther similarly debate

whether this allegorical mode of reading events is a valid means of understanding God's

providence.[133] Fortune was allowed an existence subordinate to divine will, insofar as

fortune directs our attention toward greater causes. Calvin explains that "the order,

meane, ende and necessitie of those thynges that happen, doeth for the moste parte lye

secrete in the purpose of God." We are inclined to "thynke that fortune ruleth the world

and men, and vnaduisedly tosseth all thynges up and down" because "so farre as the

capacitie of our minde conceiueth, all thinges herein seme happening by chaunce."

Providence itself exercises influence over fortune: "What shall a Christian here thinke?

he will not doubt that the prouidence of God did gouerne to directe fortune to her ende."

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     Failing to see the limitations of her own influence from the heavenly perspective,

Mutabilitie assumes that the workings of earth are analogous to those of the heavens. In

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[132] Allegoresis typically pertains to the interpretation of texts, which may or may not be allegories themselves.Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 25. (Quilligan, 25). Gordon Teskey offers a paradigmatic example of allegoresis in the Song of Songs: though it is not an allegory (because it lacks "instructions for its own interpretation") the Christian Fathers allegorize it as a poem about Christ's love for his Church despite the lack of explicit evidence for such an interpretation (2-3).

[133] Ronald Vandermolen characterizes this the two sides of this debate as "divine revelation," or the search for signs of divine order in secular history on the one hand, and "divine mystery," the Calvinist caution against searching too far, on the other in "Providence as Mystery, Providence as Revelation: Puritan and Anglican Modifications of John Calvin's Doctrine of Providence," *Church History* 47, no. 1 (March 1, 1978): 27–47.

[134] Jean Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion, Vvrytten in Latine by Maister Ihon Caluin, and Translated into Englysh according to the Authors Last Edition. Seen and Allowed according to the Order Appointed in the Quenes Maiesties Iniunctions*, trans. Thomas Norton, (London: Reinolde VVolfe & Richarde Harison, 1561), 1.16.9, fol 60v. See also Richard Anthony McCabe, *The Pillars of Eternity: Time and Providence in The Faerie Queene* (Irish Academic Press, 1989), 162.

her plea to Jove, she contests the distinction between natural and supernatural order by asserting that the gods owe her reign over the Earth

> And heauen it selfe by heritage in Fee:
>
> For, heauen and earth I both alike do deeme,
>
> Sith heauen and earth are both alike to thee;
>
> And, gods no more then men thou doest esteeme:
>
> For, euen the gods to thee, as men to gods do seeme.  (VII.vii.15.5-9)

Deeming "heaven and earth … alike," Mutabilitie threatens to erase any hierarchical distinctions between the two. But Jove already refuted the error of such thinking when he insisted that Mutabilitie erroneously took her cue from her sister Bellona "Since thou hast seene her dreadfull power belowe, / Mongst wretched men (dismaide with her affright) / To bandie Crownes, and Kingdomes to bestowe" (VII vi 32.6-8). In contrast, rather than securing his reign by might alone, Jove's conquest of the heavens was guaranteed by "by eternall doome of Fates decree" (VII.vi.33.6). Therefore, the analogy between martial conflict "belowe" and that in heaven does not hold: at best, the operations of the heavens might be analogically related to those on earth, but only because they would be incomprehensible otherwise. Despite her desire to erase this hierarchical relationship, Mutabilitie even suggests as much in her appeal to Nature: the only way that Mutabilitie can say that heaven and earth are alike is "sith […] are both alike to thee."

That is, the analogy between conquest on earth and in heaven holds because Nature governs both. But some distinction between the two is still consistent with Nature's perspective, since her perception of the gods is analogous to the gods' perspective on men: "even the gods to thee, as men to gods do seem." The relationship

between heaven and earth that Mutabilitie posits ultimately depends on maintaining the hierarchical perspective that she attempts to transcend.

Nature's verdict in the conclusion of the Cantos emphasizes the distant, apocalyptic perspective by which beings do not change, but "dilate," or come into the fullness of their existence. Nature, "still moouing, yet vnmoued from her sted" (VII.vii.13.3), provides a model of this seemingly paradoxical change within a stable form. Likewise, her speech promises that the appearance of change doesn't guarantee Mutabilitie's dominance, but rather shows a that change proceeds toward a single end, since beings "worke their owne perfection so by fate," moving ever closer to their intended form (VII vii 58.7). The apocalypse will reveal this final form, since "time shall come that all shall changed bee, / And from thenceforth, none no more change shall see" (VII.vii.59.4-5). The lines' repetition of the modal "shall" and its internal rhyme "all" emphasizes the totality and finality of Nature's decree, as does the double negative "none no more." Nature proves that even Mutability's cyclical transformations are a product of our limited perspective in time, much in the way that Fortune proves illusory when viewed relative to divine Grace.

In spite of the finality of Nature's decree, which deems Mutability should be "content thus to be rul'd by me" (VII.vii.59.2), it is the narrator and not dame Nature who gets the final say in the Cantos of Mutabilitie. We realize that the narrator's references to Fortune have been a kind of ruse to misdirect our attention away from providential fulfillment when the narrator's voice once again intercedes after the trial of Mutabilitie. The final, "unperfite" eighth canto reframes the poem's depiction of temporal change in terms of apocalyptic time (or *kairos*), "that same time when no more *Change* shall be" (VII.viii.2.2). The fulfillment of this vision "is contrayr to *Mutabilitie*," in that it

anticipates a future when "all that moveth […] / thence-forth [] shall rest eternally / With Him that is the God of Sabbaoth hight" (VII.viii.2.6-8). These lines anticipate, but do not provide, a vision of that Sabboth: the narrator stops short of envisioning the fulfillment of such an end. As a result, the narrator's poetic authority, though it earlier seemed to resemble a godlike authority capable of manipulating outcomes, gives way to a higher power whose design the narrator can only imitate, not recreate. The final line looks toward such authority: "O that great Sabbaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight" (VII.vii.2.9).

The relationship between secular time and divine providence is of interest to our understanding of Fortune in *The Faerie Queene* because it reveals a connection between the poem's hermeneutics and its epistemology. Specifically, the wandering narrative structure that promises a return to origins (i.e. the court of the Faerie Queene, when the knights of each book were sent on their quests) produces a process of reading and revision as new information is revealed that resembles the interpretation of fortunate events in light of a providential framework. Gestures toward providence, or "heavens will," seem to acknowledge the shifts in perspective that are necessary for making sense of events represented as they occur. The representation of linear, contingent time as it is experienced within Mutabilitie's domain comes to resemble the wandering progress of the narrative that threatens to continue interminably. Likewise, the promised return to the origins of the story—the court of the Faerie Queen—is a more stable configuration that resembles apocalyptic, providential time.

As much as it would seem that the Mutabilitie Cantos offer a model of the benevolence of divine order, its incomplete form and uncertain relationship to the rest of

the poem unsettles this conclusion. Instead of the return to the court of the Faerie Queene described in the letter to Raleigh, the poem ends leaving that promise unfulfilled, as if such a conclusion would be overly reductive, and would close off the poem's polysemous allegory. Nevertheless, the tenuousness of the Cantos' relation to the whole poem does not invalidate Spenser's attempt to unify the limited perspective of fortune/*chronos* with the fuller perspective of providence/*kairos* in it. Instead, it illustrates how Spenser's emphasis lies on allegoresis as a process of meaning-making, just as the allegorical figures in his poem themselves are continually reshaped and revised. The process-oriented poetics in the *Faerie Queene* mean that fortune plays an integral role in shaping the reader's perspective on the significance of events. The Mutabilitie Cantos simultaneously affirm the ultimate unity of truth and acknowledge that the poem itself— because of its focus on the role of fortune in the process of understanding—cannot contain that truth.

## 2. "Sudden Passages and Surprised Words": The Contingency of Discovery and Bacon's "Architect of Fortune"

Fortune's contingent operations occupied an uncertain status in the cosmic order according to early modern natural philosophy. The Aristotelean, scholastic tradition established the natural world as the realm of fixed, necessary truths, of cyclical changes that existed within a predetermined order. Fortune, it seemed, had no place here. Nature's dominance over Mutability in the seventh book of *The Faerie Queene* described in the previous chapter illustrates the degree to which early moderns held nature to be part of a fixed order, its operations a matter of necessity, and our ability to penetrate its secrets limited. The methods of natural philosophers also reflected this notion that nature's truths were fixed and unchanging. Natural philosophers gained knowledge by consulting written authorities rather than the natural world itself; in this they emphasized the need to preserve knowledge, not produce it.

Francis Bacon is perhaps best known for overturning this emphasis on written authority in favor of attending to the "thing itself" (*res ipsa*).[135] In histories of scientific thought, he frequently appears as an example of the way in which the New Science established itself by differentiating the facts of nature from the "idols" of the poets, as an endorsement of technology as a mode of human power, and as a champion of the epistemological priority of a reformed logic over the ornamental excesses of rhetoric. But

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[135] For a fuller account of Bacon's transitional status between humanism and science, see Michael Hattaway, "Bacon and 'Knowledge Broken': Limits for Scientific Method," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39, no. 2 (June 1978): 183–97 and Mary Horton, "Bacon and 'Knowledge Broken': An Answer to Michael Hattaway," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43, no. 3 (July 1, 1982): 487–504.

this is only half the story. In addition to emphasizing the natural world as the primary source of natural knowledge, Bacon also re-envisioned the natural world as a place of contingency, a world that produced surprising revelations by fortune. If the natural world is governed by contingencies just as the social world of human interactions is, he posited, then it follows that the methods of prudence, including forms of writing, are a valid means of deriving natural knowledge. And indeed, Bacon's writings on prudence, a method which he calls "The Architect of Fortune," bear a striking resemblance to aspects of his inquiry into the natural world, to the extent that he envisions a method of "natural prudence."

Bacon's embrace of contingency as valid component of natural philosophy produces Bacon's second legacy: a reputation as one who reveals the essential discursivity of science.[136] Bacon imagined that information—a component of knowledge, distinct from knowledge itself—could be refined and put to use in a progressive project of social and technological reform. The transformation of information into knowledge was possible in Bacon's work through written forms such as the list and the aphorism, which decontextualize knowledge and enable new relations to emerge, as well as through the structures of fictional narrative, which establish circumstances and logical relations of cause and effect.

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[136] See, for instance, Karl Richards Wallace, *Francis Bacon on Communication & Rhetoric: Or: The Art of Applying Reason to Imagination for the Better Moving of the Will* (The University of North Carolina press, 1943); Brian Vickers, *Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Lisa Jardine, *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974); and James Stephens, *Francis Bacon and the Style of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

Scholarship on this aspect of Bacon's work reflects a more widespread attention to the way that the so-called "two culture" divide in fact conceals the fictions and narrative strategies that underlie the veneer of objectivity and certainty reflected in scientific practice. Fictions, like scientific hypotheses, are "mental structures," valued insofar as they possess "operational effectiveness." Though "consciously false," they ask us to provide "conditional" or "experimental assent," with the result that "they change as the needs of sense-making change."[137] The exploration of possible worlds, whether in the form of totalizing fictional utopias, philosophical thought-experiments, or even the "black box" of other minds, links the contingent epistemic practices of fiction to those of science, and demonstrates the degree to which both benefit from thinking with and about contingency.

The chapter that follows aims to demonstrate how, in Bacon's work, narratives and other forms of writing produce a progressive movement from contingent information toward legitimate philosophical knowledge. It does so first by examining how Bacon conceives of fortune in two ways: as an element of uncertainty in human affairs that one can seek to reduce through the careful accumulation of information and as sudden changes that one can seize upon opportunistically to gain new knowledge. In defiance of traditions that suggest fortune is essentially unpredictable and unknowable, Bacon reimagines iconic emblems to suggest how mastering fortune entails acquiring the attributes of fortune itself: "Nothing is more politic than to make the wheels of our mind

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[137] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000), 39–40.

concentric and voluble with the wheels of fortune."[138] Here, Bacon twists the original meaning of the wheel of fortune, which suggested that those at the top of fortune's wheel will inevitably be cast down. Instead, he posits that fortune's mutability can be advantageous for the man who is able to reproduce its changeability. The reasoning behind a fortunate man's success becomes something of a tautology: he is fortunate because he possesses the attributes of fortune.

In the second portion of the chapter, I will discuss the parallels between these methods of "architecting fortune" and those of "natural prudence." The latter holds that the quest for certain knowledge can blind one to events that overturn previously held assumptions about the natural world. Instead, natural prudence is most concerned with arriving at conclusions that are useful in the immediate moment, even if that means they must be discarded later. His methods therefore recognize that progress toward certainty is limited by one's perspective in time. The possibility remains that we can gradually acquire greater certainty; however, this requires that we develop our capacity to anticipate the unknown. Bacon holds that maintaining awareness of the provisional status of any conclusion from repeated observations allows us to set aside the question of certainty and remain open to the influx of new information and avoid errors caused by premature conclusions. Ultimately, Bacon envisions a method of scientific inquiry that is as adaptable to change as nature itself. The interplay between gradual accumulation and apocalyptic revelation of knowledge reaches its fullest realization in Bacon's utopian fiction, *The New Atlantis*, as I demonstrate in this chapter's third and final section.

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[138] Francis Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, vol. 6 (London: Spottsworth and Company, 1858), 376–377.

**The Architect of Fortune**

Fortune, appearing as unexpected events in both natural and social worlds, bridges together two realms of Bacon's thought. Prudential reasoning is the faculty best suited to confronting the epistemological challenges posed by fortune, as Bacon's meditations on human philosophy demonstrate. Bacon's use of probabilistic reasoning in scientific and social endeavors grew out of the larger humanistic movement to apply prudence (typically associated with ethics) to a wide number of fields, including business, politics, and natural philosophy. Whereas knowledge of human philosophy had always been regarded as temporary and provisional, subject to change along with changing events, Bacon's application of such reasoning to the natural world marks a significant shift in thinking about the status of natural knowledge. Previously, natural knowledge had been regarded as solely comprised of static, unchanging truths accessible by logic, rather than direct observation. His similar treatment of these distinct fields of knowledge suggests that he has adopted the notion that probable reasoning provides a more useful approach to progressively increasing knowledge of the world, the uncertainty of its principles notwithstanding.

For Bacon, both natural and human philosophy demanded the use of probabilistic reasoning and practical knowledge; in both contexts, fortune became the name for a problem that probability and practical experience were invoked in order to solve. Bacon proposes that the most useful approach to knowledge is one that doesn't depend on absolute certainty, but instead uses provisional conclusions that simultaneously advance knowledge and identify areas where more investigation is needed. This is a prudential approach to knowledge: that is, a practical means of charting a course of action on the

basis of probable reasoning derived from partial information. Eventually, I will argue that the same methods of reasoning confront the problems of fortune under a different guise in Bacon's natural philosophy, but first I want to examine how Bacon *directly* treats fortune by providing a systematic, prudential approach to understanding, imitating, and mastering it.

Within Bacon's outline for the advancement of human philosophy in *The Advancement of Learning*, which is subdivided by matters within and between individuals (individual and civil philosophy, respectively), he describes a method for the "Architect of Fortune," a guide to conducting business with others in order to advance one's status. The architecture of fortune requires a balance between gathering particular information and keeping in mind the ends to which this information will be put. Emphasizing the balance between precept and example, and aiming toward practical action makes the methods of the Architect the methods of prudence. Here, they applied to interpersonal negotiations, rather than statecraft as Machiavelli had already done, or rhetoric as it was typically used for.

To describe the process of managing fortune through prudence as "architecting" is particularly revealing of Bacon's aims. The architect's skill—especially as such Renaissance masters as Guarino Guarini and Leone Battista Alberti described it—brings together the practical skills of *ars* with the theoretical knowledge of principles applied through prudence.[139] This revolutionary change in the status of architecture has been

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[139] Summers, *The Judgment of Sense*, describes how Guarini advocated adapting general principle to particular example: "to satisfy the eye one must take away from or add to measures, since an object appears one way when beneath eye level, another when at a great height, one way in an enclosed space, otherwise in the open," 29. Leone Battista Alberti, *Ten Books on Architecture*, ed. Joseph Rykwert, trans. James Leoni (London:

connected to the way developments in perspectival painting corresponded to a new historical consciousness, or awareness of one's perspective in time.[140] Likewise, to "architect" fortune is to master the unsteady relationship between past experience and present action. The relevance of architecture to prudence is also evident in Bacon's remarks about fortune: Bacon's oft-repeated aphorism, *"faber quisque suae fortunae,"* or, "the mould of a man's fortune is in his own hands," suggests the craftsman-like quality of the "architecture" of fortune.[141] A more literal translation might simply state, "each man makes his own fortune," but Bacon's translation emphasizes "molding" fortune with one's "hands," a clear nod to the artisanal quality of the pursuit of fortune. Fortune's architect must work information about others to one's own advantage and forge a connection between fortune's mutability and one's own character.

The characteristics that contribute to one's fortune according to Bacon are also the attributes of fortune itself. But fortune appears in multiple guises in Bacon's writings, both as a condition of uncertainty about causes and as unexpected events. That is, it is both something internal to the observer and something external, inherent to the world itself. In the first case, one can work incrementally to eliminate uncertainty, but in the second case, some uncertainty inevitably remains, which means that one must also be prepared to respond to unexpected events. To banish uncertainty, Bacon advises careful

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Alec Tiranti, 1965), explains that the Architect uses craftsmen as "instruments" and himself employs "Art and Method" with "Thought and Invention to devise" works "adapted to the Uses of Mankind," ix.

[140] Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (Zone Books, 1997). For a broader picture of Alberti's pursuits aside from architecture, see Anthony Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance* (Harvard University Press, 2002).

[141] The phrase can be found in Francis Bacon, "A Letter and Discourse to Sir Henry Savill, Touching Helps for the Intellectual Powers," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 13, 297; Francis Bacon, "Essays," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 12, 216–217; and Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," 360.

observation and investigation to reveal fortune's secrets. This optimistic approach to gaining certain knowledge appears in how he re-appropriates the emblematic status of "blind" fortune to suggest that discerning individuals can "see" it. Rather than describing fortune as blind because it distributes gifts without regard for merit, Bacon makes the exact opposite claim: those who "look sharply and attentively" may "see Fortune." In other words, the savvy can see the wisest possible action and thereby direct fortune to their ends.[142] Those who look attentively have an advantage because, although fortune is blind, "yet she is not invisible." The implication is that only a blind *observer* would be incapable of seeing fortune. That is, Bacon attributes the emblematic blindness of fortune to those who pursue fortune inattentively, intermingling the attributes of both object and agent of inquiry. Fortune as Bacon understands it distributes its favors in accordance with man's virtues; it only appears to operate randomly because we have not rightly discerned what those virtues might be.

The ways of fortune as well as the virtues of the fortunate are similarly hidden; the savvy architect of fortune must bring both to light. According to the essay "Of Fortune," secret, internal "virtues" predispose certain men to being fortunate. Bacon makes an analogy between the way that smaller stars in the Milky Way together make a clear path and the "little and scarce discerned virtues, or rather faculties and customs [that] make men fortunate."[143] Rather than imply that fortune has no systematic approach to dispensing favor, Bacon suggests that there *is* an organized system, but that it hinges on secret, scarcely discernible virtues that only some men possess and others may

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[142] Bacon, "Essays," 216.

[143] Ibid. In the same essay, he also claims that "there be secret and hidden virtues that bring forth fortune."

imitate—if they are astute enough. The fact that these virtues are constelled into a navigable "path" suggests a causal relationship between inner "virtue(s)" and fortune, in contrast to how fortune is often depicted as favoring those least worthy.[144] The "virtues" Bacon refers to are apparently, like Machiavellian *virtù*, not only those that the virtuous man might be said to possess.[145]

Examining causes to eliminate fortune's uncertainty requires accumulating reliable information. In Bacon's first and most detailed precept, he explains that working up from the "knowledge of present actions" is important, because "these informations […] are as the minor propositions in every active syllogism; for no excellency of observations […] can suffice to ground a conclusion, if there be error and mistaking in the minors."[146] In other words, particular information about the present state of things will allow one to generalize about the way that fortune operates. This comparison to syllogistic logic tellingly resembles Bacon's approach to natural knowledge and anticipates Bacon's criticism in the *Novum Organum* that scholastic logic "flies from the senses and particulars to the most general axioms" rather than "rising by a gradual and

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[144] The view that virtue (broadly defined) is capable of combatting fortune, which I associate with Machiavelli and others' "remedies" for fortune, is described in detail in Chapter One. See 33–38.

[145] This turn to the influence of internal virtues seems like something of a contradiction in the traditional division between fortune and virtue as external and internal determinants of status, respectively. See, for instance, the dedication to the *Advancement*, which remarks on the "emulation and contention of your Majesty's virtue with your fortune," or in other words, the remarkable harmony of James's moral character and his status, 3. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* describes the medieval, Boethian worldview as one where the inscrutable progress of secular events (i.e. fortune) provided the context for an individual's virtue. This view changed in the Renaissance, he claims, with the politicization of virtue, such that fortune became intrinsic to virtue, 76. Bacon, I would claim, performs a similar blending of these two concepts of "virtue" and "fortune."

[146] Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," 364.

unbroken ascent."[147] Sound information about others, like well-founded minor propositions, yields reliable conclusions: with it, we can "inform ourselves in men's ends and natures," i.e. gradually create generalizations that will serve us in future dealings. Notably, Bacon's discussion of the logical soundness of this process seems directed toward connecting "present actions" to future events, or "ends": to understand fortune is to be capable of foresight in regard to personal matters.

Understanding fortune as this condition of uncertainty means that its architecture requires imitating fortune's propensity for working deviously. Becoming as secretive and devious as fortune itself offers the Architect of Fortune an informational advantage over his peers. Bacon combats pervasive secrecy with a type of experiment that exposes men's hidden natures: the lie. In order to "procure good informations of particulars touching persons" (note here the emphasis on "particular" information as opposed to generalizations), one must "obtain that window" in order to see "in the frame of man's heart […] angles and recesses."[148] The presumption here is that truth about people is hidden and must be extracted. Assembling correct particular information requires "distrust" of surface appearances in favor of "sudden passages and surprised words."[149] Bacon often returns to this notion that truths are hidden and must be forcibly uncovered—even, as I will demonstrate, with respect to the natural world. The method to generate these reactions in people is to employ counter-dissimulation. Words become instruments for extracting truth: "experience sheweth, there are few men so true to themselves and settled, but that sometimes […] they open themselves; specially if they be

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[147] Francis Bacon, "The New Organon," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 8, 71.
[148] Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," 363.
[149] Ibid., 364.

put to it with a counter-dissimulation, according to the proverb […] 'Tell a lie and find a truth.'"[150] John Briggs remarks on the instrumentality of the lie in Bacon's thought: "The lie is a heuristic form of persuasion that secretly turns its object inside out," such that the lie "operates in the mode of the new sciences' capture of the sleeping Proteus."[151] Presumably, if the Architect is able to make the most accurate anticipations of future events, he will be best situated to reap the benefits from whatever changes occur.

The second, related type of fortune in Bacon's writings, the unexpected event, requires a slightly different set of methods. Incrementally approaching knowledge of fortune cannot eliminate uncertainty entirely. When one presumes that some uncertainty must remain despite whatever methods one uses for exposing its secrets, a supplementary approach is required. This approach requires one to become capable of capitalizing on opportunity. Bacon explains, "this variety of knowledge tendeth in conclusion but only to this, to make a better and freer choice of these actions which concern us, and to conduct them with the less error and the more dexterity."[152] That is, more accurate information yields greater freedom, which in turn reduces the likelihood of error. Rather than completely eliminating uncertainty, Bacon's prudential approach to fortune creates a self-reinforcing feedback loop, yielding ever-greater levels of freedom to seize opportunities.

Good fortune derives from the kind of flexibility toward changing circumstances just as, conversely, ill fortune is the result of stasis: "For nothing hinders men's actions or

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[150] Ibid., 367. The expression is found elsewhere in several of Bacon's works, including Francis Bacon, *Promus of Formularies and Elegancies* (British Library MS Harley 7017) and "Of Simulation and Dissimulation," in Bacon, "Essays," 98. Its popularity in Bacon's writings suggests a sustained interest in the systematization of the "architecture of fortune" over his career.

[151] John C. Briggs, *Francis Bacon and the Rhetoric of Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 38.

[152] Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," 369.

fortunes so much as this, 'to remain the same when the same is unbecoming,' that is, for men to be as they were and follow their own nature, when occasions change."[153] Since prudential knowledge is realized in action, it follows that freedom of action, and not certainty, must be the aim of this field. This self-reinforcing process also informs Bacon's scientific approach to the related projects of speculation and experiment. The shifting terrain of this domain of knowledge means that the best one can hope for is the freedom to act in response to unanticipated events, rather than being locked into one specific, "certain" path. Though Bacon devotes a great deal of energy to describing methods for mitigating uncertainty as much as possible, he also recognizes he limits of information-gathering to completely eliminate uncertainty.

**Age of Discovery: Fortune in Bacon's Natural Philosophy**

Natural knowledge, unlike the knowledge of negotiations between men, had consistently been regarded by Bacon's predecessors as a field of necessary, not contingent matters. But Bacon's natural philosophy draws upon the contingent reasoning of prudence: "For as in civil matters there is a wisdom of discourse, and a wisdom of direction; so is it in natural."[154] Bacon's natural philosophy consists of both "natural science" and "natural prudence," the latter of which entails an adaptable method of reasoning also found in his approach to the architecture of fortune in human philosophy. This division of natural science and natural prudence in turn corresponds to the fundamental divide between *episteme* and *prudentia*, between necessary and contingent

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[153] Francis Bacon, "Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 287. The English version of the *Advancement* refers only to "men's fortunes" only, which reveals the great extent to which Bacon links fortune and action. See Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," 375–376.
[154] Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," 214.

forms of knowledge. The relative devaluation of contingency in natural philosophy makes it all the more surprising, then, that the method Bacon lays out for the advancement of natural knowledge is so closely aligned with that of the "Architect of Fortune." Like his human philosophy of prudence, Bacon's natural philosophy also negotiates a bipartite system that aims at limiting the destructive potential of the unexpected while also harnessing its powers through the artificial imitation of fortune. In what follows, I will outline the way that Bacon brings contingency and probable reasoning to bear on natural knowledge.

Bacon's rejection of the search for final causes demonstrates his willingness to accept the inevitability of some level of uncertainty. The Aristotelean model of looking for final causes he calls the "flats of discoursing causes," metaphorically likening it to a ship struck aground. Such debates are dangerous because final causes are "but remoras and hindrances to stay and slug the ship from further sailing."[155] Instead, he prefers the Democritean model, which "did not suppose a mind or reason in the frame of things, but attributed the form thereof able to maintain itself to infinite essays or proofs of Nature, which they term fortune."[156] In this model, one cannot attribute final causes to a "mind or reason"; matter exists in the state that it does because it is brought together by the "essays" [i.e. trials or experiments] of fortune. Here, Bacon treats "fortune" as an agent of change. Suggesting that nature operates through fortune is apt because, in the absence of a necessary cause, nature performs "experiments" haphazardly, without regard to any particular end, much in the manner of the prudent architect of fortune, whose methods are

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[155] Ibid., 223–224.

[156] Ibid., 224. This is not to say that Bacon, like the Democriteans, abandoned the search for necessary/final causes, but he does suggest that the inquiries into final causes should be "kept within their own province" in the field of metaphysics.

heuristic because the same inputs do not always produce the same results. Judging between these two models entails debating whether nature is part of an organized, providential design or an infinitely varied pattern governed by chance. But Bacon seems less interested in arbitrating this dispute than in bracketing it off and working from what *can* be known.

With respect to the ability of nature to reveal its operations through these "infinite essays," fortune seems to be an agent of change that one can eventually anticipate, but elsewhere, it most closely resembles a condition of insurmountable uncertainty that one can only react to. Fortune's dual role as an agent of unpredictable but useful changes and as a permanent condition of uncertainty is hence not only operative in Bacon's explicit treatments of fortune in matters of human philosophy; it is also a crucial element of his natural philosophy. Both cases entail balancing between knowledge that is opportunistically revealed through "sudden passages and surprised words" and that knowledge which the architect (or natural philosopher) "molds" with "his own hands."

Bacon illustrates the relationship between natural science and natural prudence by way of an alchemical metaphor. In natural science, on the one hand, discoveries, like precious metals, can be "mined," that is, uncovered by the keen observer of nature, and in natural prudence on the other hand they can also be artificially "forged," or produced as metals are in an alchemist's furnace. He justifies this division through Democritus, paraphrasing, "the truth of nature lieth hid in certain deep mines and caves," and adds that if we can uncover precious metals with "mines," then we can also accelerate the production of these metals (i.e. discoveries) with alchemists' furnaces. He finds that "nature worketh by ambages [i.e. circuitous ways] and length of time," producing the

same effects that man recreates artificially in the "furnace" more "dexterously and compendiously [i.e. briefly]."[157] We can more efficiently produce materials (and knowledge) through artifice than through natural processes alone. Nature and fortune bear a strong resemblance in Bacon's metaphors: both have a propensity for concealing secrets, and both are subject to being reproduced artificially, molded and shaped by human effort. This portrait of nature, like that of fortune, implies that knowledge is either obtained through uncovering its hidden secrets or produced through artificial means that approximate natural processes.

This passage illustrates how discovery, for Bacon, entails both finding knowledge that already exists, known to some but hidden from others as well as producing entirely new knowledge. And indeed, two senses of the word "discovery" corresponding to these two methods were prevalent. Initially, discovery typically meant, "To disclose or expose to view (anything covered up, hidden, or previously unseen), to reveal, show."[158] This first definition is consistent with The Architect of Fortune's persistent emphasis on uncovering secrets and finding out hidden information. However, from around the mid-sixteenth century a new sense of the word "discover" as well as an entirely new noun form, "discovery," were coming into currency. This sense of the word is more consistent with modern usage, meaning "To obtain sight or knowledge of (something previously unknown) for the first time; to come to the knowledge of; to find out." The nominalization of the term conceptually and grammatically posits "discovery" as an object one can gradually work toward. To discover in the sense of uncovering secrets

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[157] Ibid., 214.

[158] "discover, v.". OED Online. June 2012. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/54005 (accessed August 24, 2012).

implies that knowledge objectively exists and awaits the keen observer; to discover in the sense of finding something new implies that knowledge is capable of being crafted without any finite end in mind.

Discovery, then, is a twofold process, involving both sudden, opportunistic events and gradual, methodical processes. Bacon's approach to discovering knowledge, in turn, reflects this divide. He proposes a two-pronged approach: speculation, or the "Inquisition of Causes" and operation, or "the Production of Effects." The two "have a great connection between themselves," working in tandem to produce knowledge, "like a double scale or ladder, ascendant and descendent, ascending from experiments to the investigation of causes and descending from causes to the invention of new experiments. [159] Experiment confirms what speculation proposes, and speculation raises questions to be answered with further operations in a back-and-forth cycle. Natural science and natural prudence therefore work hand in hand. Bacon characterizes "natural prudence" as the ability to choose the most effective experiment in any situation; it is "prudential" because it necessitates reasoning based on a set of particular circumstances, i.e. the environment in which the experiment is produced.[160] Just as acquiring information about others through prudence yields greater freedom and greater freedom yields further information in the architecture of fortune, so too does the accumulation of natural information build knowledge and open new areas for investigation.

The purpose of advancing knowledge through operation and speculation together is to have a self-correcting system where the two methods work in tandem to identify errors and accommodate unanticipated events while simultaneously making incremental

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[159] Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," 214–215.
[160] Ibid., 214.

progress toward greater certainty. Bacon imagines the benefit of such a system to be twofold: alternating between "speculation" and "operation" serves to continuously refine the scientific process by gradually winnowing out "speculative" ideas that have proved unproductive in their execution, and by discovering new areas for speculation through activity. This twofold method mitigates the possibility of error by opening up the scientific process to critical evaluation at every step: "within the ladder of axioms there is no reason to make it immune to further crucial assessment; what has been established or verified at one point may be susceptible of falsification at a further stage in the light of new evidence suggested by other axioms."[161] At no point, that is, does one stop scrutinizing established truths: all knowledge, in a sense, becomes contingent.

The necessity of verifying axioms by reference to other axioms necessitates the continual deferral of certainty: what seems to be established at the present moment may be overturned with the influx of new information by the "fortune and essays of experiments."[162] Note that the term "fortune" here describes the variable, unpredictable aspect of experiment that makes it resemble a heuristic for advancing knowledge, just as the Architect of Fortune employs fortune's unpredictable heuristic methods to advance his status. So, even as established principles are the basis of present "operation," they must also be accommodated to the influx of new information. The unanticipated—the element of "fortune" in experiment—hence has a dual status. In one case, the unanticipated can potentially upset the gradual accretion of knowledge. In the other case, it can suddenly open up new avenues of research. This two-fold method of discovery is

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[161] Francis Bacon, qtd. in Antonio Pérez-Ramos, *Francis Bacon's Idea of Science and the Maker's Knowledge Tradition* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1988), 277.
[162] Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," 229.

best suited to harnessing the sometimes deleterious but sometimes beneficial buffets of unforeseeable fortune.

As these examples show, both the architecture of fortune and the investigation of the natural world require navigating uncertainty by becoming adaptable to changing circumstances. Much in the way that the architect must imitate the adaptability of fortune, the natural philosopher must also imitate the chancy workings of nature. Michael Witmore has described Baconian experiment itself as an imitation of chance. "Nature," Witmore explains, "approximat[es] experiment to the extent that it is bringing together the Forms in unusual, artificial ways. Chance creates these 'artificial' conditions of revelation, just as the investigator will 'artificially' dispose the conditions of nature's operation in an experiment."[163] The intervention of chance in the natural world, in other words, produces effects that reveal natural forms—not unlike the Architect's "sudden passages and surprised words—which experiment seeks to reproduce. Bacon's treatment of fortune, wherein imitating the features of personified Fortuna makes one fortunate, resembles his description of experiment as an artificial imitation of the chance productions of nature.

The derogatory sense of "artificial" as cheap and in some way inferior is not operative in Bacon's discussions of experiment as a reproduction of chance, because Bacon suggests that at the deepest causal level artificial and natural products are the same:

> The artificial does not differ from the natural in form and essence, but only in the
> efficient; in that man has no power over nature except that of motion; he can put

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[163] Witmore, *Culture of Accidents*, 121.

natural bodies together, and he can separate them […]. Nor matters it, provided things are put in the way to produce an effect, whether it be done by human means or otherwise.[164]

Essentially, Bacon offers a neatly materialistic model of natural operations as the result of the "uniting or disuniting" of bodies; once we recognize the extent of man's power over nature, we can reproduce this natural process and thereby understand nature itself. The question remains, however, as to how imitating chance operations produces necessary knowledge. If we understand the fruits of "experiment" to be no different from natural accidents in "form and essence," then how do we get from productions of chance to the certainty of necessary causes? Does the foreknowledge of an outcome or the experimenter's intention inflect our understanding of what constitutes "necessity"? Ultimately, Bacon treats knowledge itself as something unstable that concretizes over time, such that necessary knowledge is deferred and mediated by practices that must treat conclusions as contingent and subject to change.

The status of knowledge derived from nature's "experiments" depends in part on how we define experimentation. That is, experiments can be said to be defined by either the agent's intention or the experiment's outcome, a distinction that complicates the relationship between nature and artifice. In contrast to the "essays and proofs" of nature that are distinguished by their uncertain outcomes, Bacon understands the term "experiment" as something distinguished by the observer's *intention*. According to the *Novum Organum*, experience, "if taken as it comes, is called accident [*causus*]; if it is

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[164] Francis Bacon, "Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 8, 410–411.

deliberately sought, is called experiment [*experimentum*]."[165] That is, experiment may be distinguished as a matter of perspective: it is performed with a deliberate anticipation of a particular end, rather than observed retroactively. Nature is said to perform "essays or proofs" because it acts without any predetermined intention. Presumably, the alternative would be a deliberately acting Nature who produces effects by necessity, as in the Aristotelian model of a nature with "mind or reason," the model that Bacon rejects. However, when a *human* experimenter acts upon nature, the identity or "mind" of the observing agent becomes particularly important.

Natural and human causes can bring about the same effects, but producing such events that happen by chance intentionally makes them more useful as sources of knowledge. It becomes unclear whether experiment aims at reliably and consistently reproducing "accidents" of nature that are then revealed not to be accidental at all, or whether nature itself operates deliberately with respect to some, but not all, causes. The essential result of this blurring of human and natural agency in producing knowledge is that the underlying intention behind natural inquiry becomes a central concern: causal relationships are evaluated according to how they line up with one's intentions or expectations to determine their degree of certainty or necessity. The observer's frame of reference becomes all-important to determining what constitutes chance. By offering a twofold method that both observes outcomes of natural "experiments" and reproduces those outcomes through intentional, artificial experiments, Bacon attempts to mediate between these variant understandings of causation in natural processes.

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[165] Bacon, "The New Organon," 115.

Given the concern about the validity of artifice, it is perhaps surprising that one of the chief tools of Baconian experiment is writing. His proposed reform of scientific writing would seem to make the skill of the artificer all the more evident, since effective communication could clarify connections in the natural world that are not immediately apparent. But as I will examine hereafter, the aim of Bacon's proposal to reform scientific writing is to efface the role of the individual artificer, to transform writing itself into a transparent and reproducible kind of experiment. Bacon's emblematic depictions of fortune demonstrated that we can transform fortune into an object of inquiry through writing that imputes tangible, visible attributes to fortune, but that this writing does not allow us to anticipate with any certainty what turns fortune will take in the future. Likewise, scientific writing aims to collapse the distinction between the natural world and the artificial frameworks (e.g. writing, experiment) through which we understand it. Scientific writing, like Bacon's reform of natural philosophy as a whole, is an attempt to create a self-sustaining system that moves ever closer to a complete understanding of the natural world, one that is constantly deferred because of our limited capacity to anticipate future events.

**"Tables of Discovery" as Information Systems**

Recent scholarship has devoted considerable attention to Bacon's information-management techniques, noting the ways in which they parallel the research and writing practices of humanist scholarship, legal practice, and political bureaucracy.[166] While

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[166] Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know* describes early modern "information load," an anxiety about the proliferation of reading material introduced by the printing press that prompted the development of textual apparatuses such as indices, topic headings, and collections of notes. For more on the legal and political dimensions of Bacon's methods, see Neal Ward Gilbert, *Renaissance Concepts of Method* (New York: Columbia

Bacon's approaches to writing are indebted to such established practices, he also

theorizes the epistemological role of information in a novel fashion. He treats information

and knowledge as separate concepts, the former of which is particular and contingent,

and the latter of which is universal and necessary. In contrast, his predecessor Petrus

Ramus's method was something more akin to rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*:

it proposed dividing concepts into binary trees to facilitate the mastery of knowledge, but

did not challenge ingrained assumptions about the sources of knowledge itself. Under

Bacon's approach, information works incrementally toward knowledge by relying on

provisional analyses that can be revised as new information emerges. This realignment of

the relationship between information and knowledge helped transform natural

philosophy—a field that treated the natural world as a static, unchanging body of

knowledge—into modern science, a field that develops gradually over time.[167] This

realignment, in turn, owes much to the way Bacon brings methods for mitigating or

harnessing fortune to bear on his natural inquiry.

The broader approach to information that we find in contemporary scientific

theory, as well as in Bacon's own work, includes anything that stands out as remarkable

in a meaningful way: a light on a car dashboard that was not illuminated before can tell

one about the state of the vehicle, an icon on a map can indicate the location of important

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University Press, 1960), 223; Jonathan Marwil, *The Trials of Counsel: Francis Bacon in 1621*, 1st ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976), esp. 64–65, 119; Vickers, *Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose*, 44, 61–69.

[167] Shapin and Schaffer cite Hobbes to clarify the distinction between modern science and natural philosophy: empiricism "yielded an inferior grade of certainty, and was excluded from the ambit of philosophy, 'because such knowledge is but experience, or authority, and not ratiocination,'" in *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, 108.

destinations, or the color of a fruit can suggest whether it is safe to eat.[168] Each of these

examples, however, requires further clarification to qualify as knowledge: a light on the

dashboard might indicate a mechanical problem or might be the result of a

malfunctioning light; maps need a key; and edible fruits can mimic the appearance of

dangerous ones. In each case, the status of "information" is independent from its truth

content.[169] And this, I propose, is closer to Bacon's understanding of information. His

term for this is "particulars," which may be found in the natural world or may be

recorded in text, and which may deepen our understanding or lead us to premature

conclusions, depending on how we use them. The natural world, Bacon explains, presents

"particulars" so profuse as to "confound […] the understanding" unless it be arranged "in

a suitable order."[170] That is, an observation alone does not constitute knowledge:

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[168] Such a definition is consistent with the discussion of "information" as a metaphor for
the dramatic text in William B. Worthen, *Drama: Between Poetry and Performance*
(Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010): "information culture asserts the notion that the
material platform is irrelevant to the information it displays," 15. Bacon implies a similar
equivalence between information as observed in the outside world and as recorded in
text: so long as information has its basis in the former, it is a viable path toward
knowledge.

[169] Some information theorists argue that information is merely factual; others that factual
information is simply one type of information, preferable perhaps to misinformation but
not categorically different from it. For a concise explanation, see Luciano Floridi,
*Information: a Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Jon
Barwise and Jeremy Seligman, *Information Flow: The Logic of Distributed Systems*
(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Fred I. Dretske, *Knowledge and
the Flow of Information* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1999), 45; H. Paul
Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991),
371; Alan R. Hevner et al., "Design Science in Information Systems Research," *MIS
Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (March 1, 2004): 77.

[170] Francis Bacon, "The New Organon," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James
Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, vol. 4 (London: Spottsworth
and Company, 1858) mentions this in two places: "natural and experimental history is so
various and diffuse that it confounds and distracts the understanding, unless it be ranged
and presented to view in a suitable order. We must therefore form *Tables and
Arrangements of Instances*, in such a method and order that the understanding may be

information is a step toward knowledge that anticipates its distillation into a particular

form in order to become intelligible. Probable, as-yet-unverified information can prove

valuable to the knowledge enterprise because inductive logic relies on a mechanism of

falsification to strengthen its claims, and because hypothetical scenarios can direct future

research. Just as a single data point does not reveal a trend, information is always

evaluated in relation to something else; it is a "difference that makes a difference," as

Gregory Bateson puts it. [171] Quantitative analysis has expanded the varieties of forms for

presenting information, but Bacon's attention to the analytical capacities of written forms

especially represented a major development.

A brief example will illustrate how Bacon approaches managing information as a

step toward natural knowledge by devising a form of writing that makes "differences that

make a difference" apparent. In the *New Organon*, Bacon describes a system for

"digest[ing] and arrang[ing]" particulars into lists that he calls "Tables of Discovery."

Because particulars in nature are so numerous and scattered "as to distract and confound

the understanding," the tables will help by "draw[ing] up and marshal[ling]" all details

relevant to the "subject of inquiry."[172] Bacon then draws together a list of phenomena that

illustrate properties of heat. He further subdivides these examples into instances of

presence, absence, or difference in degree. The "*Instances Agreeing in the Nature of*

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able to deal with them," 127, and "there is so great a number and army of particulars, and
that army so scattered and dispersed as to distract and confound the understanding, little
is to be hoped for from the skirmishings and slight attacks and desultory movements of
the intellect, unless all the particulars which pertain to the subject of inquiry shall, by
means of Tables of Discovery, apt, well arranged, and, as it were, animate, be drawn up
and marshalled," 96. All citations of *The New Organon* are of this edition.
[171] Gregory Bateson, "Form, Substance, and Difference," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind:
Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*, (Jason
Aronson, Inc., 1987), 460.
[172] Bacon, *New Organon*, 96.

*Heat*" include items such as: "The rays of the sun, especially in summer and at noon;" "Liquids boiling or heated"; "Green and moist vegetables confined and bruised together"; "Animals, especially and at all times internally."[173] Those where heat is absent include "The rays of the moon and of stars"; "liquid itself in its natural state"; and "colder weather than is suitable to the season of the year, which we find occurs during east and north winds." Finally, those in the "Table of Degrees" include "Substances once hot, as horse dung from animal heat, and lime or perhaps ashes and soot from fire, retain some latent remains of their former heat"; "In the parts of animals after death or separation from the body, we find nothing warm to the human touch"; and "The sun and other planets are supposed to give greater heat when nearer to the larger fixed stars."[174] The tables thus serve as an information system that renders differences (of degree or kind, as above) significant by winnowing out irrelevant details. They are the first step along the path of induction, since once information is arranged in tables, axioms can be "educed from those particulars by a certain method and rule" and these will "in their turn point out the way again to new particulars."[175] Hence, knowledge works its way up from particular information as part of an ongoing feedback loop through the written form of tables.

Tables adapt the organizational methods of humanist scholarship, particularly commonplacing, which entails gathering quotations about a general topic and grouping them under a heading, sometimes in order to weigh contradictory viewpoints.[176]

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[173] For an illustration of the tables, see Francis Bacon, *Francisci de Verulamio, Summi Angliae Cancellarii, Instauratio Magna*, (Londini: Apud [Bonham Norton and] Ioannem Billium typographum regium, 1620).

[174] Bacon, *New Organon*, 127–145.

[175] Bacon, *New Organon*, 96.

[176] See, for instance, Thomas Fulton's discussion of Milton's commonplace book in Thomas Fulton, *Historical Milton: Print, Manuscript, and Political Culture in*

Commonplaces gathered together in this way then serve as a reference source for more polished compositions. However, Bacon's tables, unlike humanist commonplace books, are not demonstrative or persuasive; rather than trying to prove a particular point, they proceed toward no particular conclusion. This is what distinguishes them as information systems, and not rhetorical aids. As currently used, Bacon complains, commonplace books carry "merely the face of a school and not of a world," replicating widely accepted opinions and ignoring things themselves. Bacon's tables retain the commonplace book's organizational framework and provisional function, but redirect their aim toward the natural world and toward a more open-ended inquiry. Bacon thus adapts the commonplace book into an experimental form of writing by exploiting its organizational capacities and its transitional form, both essential features of information processing. As he explains, such a writing system "assureth copie of invention, and contracteth judgment to a strength."[177] The emphasis on *copia* here is particularly telling, since the inductive analysis Bacon proposes requires extensive quantities of information in order to reach reasonably sound conclusions. But the term "contract" also indicates a contradictory movement that eliminates extraneous detail until only the most crucial information

*Revolutionary England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010); Richard Serjeantson, "Natural Knowledge in The New Atlantis," in *Francis Bacon's the New Atlantis: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Bronwen Price (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003); Ann Blair, *The Theater of Nature: Jean Bodin and Renaissance Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Ann Blair, "Humanist Methods in Natural Philosophy: The Commonplace Book," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 4 (December 1992): 541–51. The distinction here is that Bodin's sources are primarily textual, a tendency which Bacon criticizes, even if he sometimes makes recourse to such authorities himself, as in the natural history, *Sylva Sylvarum*.

[177] Francis Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, vol. 3 (London: Spottsworth and Company, 1858), 398. All citations of *The Advancement of Learning* are of this edition.

remains. Hence Bacon's adapted commonplace-book system balances the opposing concerns of thoroughness and legibility in order to provide a foundation for clear, comprehensive analysis.

While crucial, the legibility that comes with tables' organization is also potentially debilitating: it threatens to create the same dependence on textual authority that Bacon condemns in others. He rejects the emphasis his predecessors have placed on textual authority, wherein writers and readers transmit written accounts without consulting things themselves (*res ipsae*): "hitherto more has been done in matter of invention by thinking than by writing; and experience has not yet learned her letters."[178] The complaint implies that rhetorical "*inventio*," the method of finding arguments, does not advance knowledge as much as it could, since invention only entails self-reflexive thinking and is not outward-looking. Still, some method of recording experience is necessary; organizing experience in tables is perforce textual. Bacon calls this "literate experience," and asserts that it is necessary for invention: "no course of invention can be satisfactory unless it be carried on in writing. But when this is brought into use, and experience has been taught to read and write, better things may be hoped."[179] Such literacy illustrates Bacon's protracted vision for reform: if real things are to be accomplished, inquiry itself must mature. Writing is both the foundation of certainty and dangerously persuasive.[180] Even as nature is the only reliable basis for Bacon's scientific

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[178] Bacon, *New Organon*, 96; Lisa Jardine, "Experientia Literata or Novum Organum? The Dilemma of Bacon's Scientific Method," in *Francis Bacon's Legacy of Texts: The Art of Discovery Grows with Discovery*, ed. William A. Sessions (New York: AMS Press, 1990), 47–67.
[179] Bacon, *New Organon,* 96.
[180] In the words of Ronald Levao, "claims for certainty and infallibility are often themselves 'rhetorical'" and rely on "a process of discovery itself shaped by rhetorical

enterprise, his proposed apparatus for managing information in the natural world becomes itself a superior source of information: less profuse than nature, more organized, and more accessible.

The organization that the tables offer hence paradoxically improves on the natural world through the ministrations of art. But far from becoming another aspect of rhetorical art, the writing Bacon proposes avoids persuasion as a method of proof and replaces it with information—i.e., particulars—as the only valid form of proof in empirical science: as Michael C. Clody has put it, "his project endeavors to meet its fundamental challenge of sustaining a type of literality that heeds, rather than overwrites, the hidden forms of nature."[181] To this end, Bacon breaks down information processing into component steps that each stop short of making absolute conclusions in order to combat the tendency of writing to become overly persuasive. The incomplete, provisional status of the commonplace book as a step prior to composition therefore becomes advantageous. By drawing attention to its imperfections, he makes the incomplete, provisional form of the commonplace book align with the ongoing process of empiricism. Since both the volume of information required for induction and the liability for new information to challenge ingrained assumptions demand a continual process of inquiry, the forms of writing that aid this process must not give the impression of a complete, comprehensive account.

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categories." In Ronald Levao, "Francis Bacon and the Mobility of Science," *Representations* 40 (1992): 25, n. 8. Levao here complicates a claim in Jardine's *Discovery and the Arts of Discourse* that Bacon employs writing toward both imaginative eloquence and scientific method, casting doubt on whether we can ever wholly distinguish the two in practice. Levao argues instead that Bacon's work and seventeenth century science more generally confront a "skeptical paradox" wherein science looks to the representation of nature as the source of knowledge, 4.

[181] Michael C. Clody, "Deciphering the Language of Nature: Cryptography, Secrecy, and Alterity in Francis Bacon," *Configurations* 19, no. 1 (2011): 123.

Since they are an aid to future composition and not a finished composition in themselves, commonplace books are an ideal starting point for empirical analysis.

Like the forms of writing used to contain it, information itself is provisional: a step on the path toward knowledge, but not something that demands one particular interpretation. Its ultimate significance depends on the way that it is contextualized or organized. The "Tables of Discovery" not only compile inquiries already completed, they also encourage future inquiry by drawing attention to their own incompletion.[182] Thus, the intermediary format of the commonplace book—a midway point between consumption and composition of a text—is a suitable form for capturing the evolving path toward knowledge, commensurate with the back-and-forth movement between "speculation" and "operation." But this format also has its limitations: as lists, Bacon's tables are bound to be sequential and additive—a portrait of evolving knowledge *over* time—even as they attempt to provide a comprehensive view of the state of knowledge at *one* particular time. What they do not depict is a clear progression of that evolution: instead, the addition of further information demands a reconsideration of the organization system in the tables themselves.[183] The problem of how knowledge is produced over time challenges this and other forms of writing in Bacon's reform of science.

**Aphorisms: "Knowledge Broken" and Induction**

The tables are an information system suited to temporary storage in order to accommodate "best-fit" models of natural principles. Because information must be not

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[182] This complements the function of *desiderata* described in Keller, "The 'New World of Sciences,'" whose printed form signal an intention to be completed "gradually, over time, and by more than one person," 728.
[183] See, for instance, Bacon's deliberation about whether cold, oily substances are an instance of the absence of heat or the presence of cold: Bacon, *New Organon*, 137.

only organized but also managed over time, Bacon's system requires a form that advertises its own incompletion and encourages future work. The aphorism is just such a form. Aphorisms go beyond tables in the process of transforming information into knowledge. They maintain the tables' emphasis on incompletion and open-ended inquiry while consolidating that information into tentative, more generalized analysis. The tables may have advertised their incompletion, but aphorisms theorize incompletion even more radically, because their short, disjointed form intentionally prohibits hasty conclusions. Such incompletion changes our relationship to scientific knowledge: knowledge is not something "out there" that needs to be grasped, but something that we *produce*, a product of the forms used to discover it.

Aphorisms lay bare the process of knowledge production by fixing in writing tentative generalizations that can then be used to generate ever more certain analyses. Aphorisms, a term which Bacon uses to describe a "definition or concise statement of a principle in any science," are ideally useful because they perform analysis without prematurely making any conclusion.[184] By offering a higher level of generalization while remaining concise, they work from particular, practical information toward more universal generalizations. Because the aphorism is neither a comprehensive account of relevant information nor a certain principle derived from such information but something in between the two, its incomplete form complements its intermediary status, aiding both the search for particulars and the derivation of certain principles. Their incompletion becomes a virtue because they do not demand complete conviction and can therefore be more easily discarded in order to fit evolving theories about natural principles. According

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[184] "Aphorism, N.," *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 2012), http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/9141.

to the *New Organon*, "aphorisms, representing a knowledge broken, do invite men to inquire farther; whereas Methods, carrying the shew of a total, do secure men, as if they were at furthest."[185] By referring to aphorisms' incomplete form as "broken" knowledge, Bacon calls attention to what others might call their imperfection, to the fact that they stop short of offering clear connections between concepts. Bacon turns this seeming flaw into a strength by emphasizing the need for incomplete writing to ensure the continuation of scientific inquiry. For instance, aphorism IV of the first book of *The New Organon* declares, "Toward the effecting of works, all that man can do is put together or put asunder natural bodies. The rest is done by nature working within." As several critics have shown, the Baconian aphorism aims for concise expression that is pithy not for the sake of being rhetorically effective but in order to stop short of directly stating conclusions.[186]

Tables and aphoristic language together point toward new directions for research, attempting to build an apparatus that works toward ever-greater levels of certainty, even as that endpoint is continuously deferred. These systems of knowledge production both emphasize adaptability and forward-thinking in a clear echo of the methods of the Architect of Fortune. Induction relies on temporary information storage systems because it, too, requires the flexibility and freedom afforded by incompletion. There is an asymmetry between proof and refutation; collecting corroborative instances could continue indefinitely, but one negative instance alone can falsify a theory.[187] The deferral

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[185] Francis Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning," 405.

[186] See, for instance, Stephens, *Francis Bacon and the Style of Science*; Alvin Snider, "Francis Bacon and the Authority of Aphorism," *Prose Studies* 11, no. 2 (1988): 60–71.

[187] The argument, and the term "problem of induction" are found in Karl R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, (New York: Basic Books, 1959). A translation by the

of certainty is a necessary component of Baconian science because of this potential for

error introduced by inductive logic.[188] While useful for its reliance on particular

information before arriving at its conclusion, induction is susceptible to falsification: just

because a pattern has held true in the past does not mean it must continue to do so in the

future. With the onset of new information liable to unravel carefully-gathered particulars,

how is the natural philosopher to formulate reliable theories, let alone anticipate future

events?

Bacon struggles to reconcile the aphorism's ideally disjointed form with this

impulse to draw conclusions and anticipate further connections. As a result, the aphorism

is imperfect in its quest for imperfection. Aphorisms in *The New Organon* soon cease to

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author with the assistance of Julius Freed and Jan Freed of *Der Logik der Forschung*, (Vienna: J. Springer, 1935).

[188] Bacon is often accused of failing to account for the problems attendant on induction in his own work: see Hattaway, "Bacon and 'Knowledge Broken': Limits for Scientific Method," 187. However, Antonio Pérez-Ramos refutes this claim, arguing instead, "The exclusion and rejection of *axiomata* (Popper's "hypotheses") are in Bacon a matter of falsification no less than in Popper, who insists that his method of 'guessing' (not of acquiring knowledge) consists in looking deliberately for such potential falsifiers among the 'basic statements' (in Bacon *particularia*) which the researcher has to scrutinize," Pérez-Ramos, *Francis Bacon's Idea of Science and the Maker's Knowledge Tradition*, 276. According to Pérez-Ramos, Baconian induction is actually an amalgam of several different logical elements, some of which entail deduction and analogical reasoning, (Ibid., 239). See, in particular, Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon: Baron of Verulam, Viscount St. Alban, and Lord High Chancellor of England* (Printed for C. and J. Rivington, 1819), 36. "*At in forma ipsa quoque inductionis et judicio quod per eam fit opus longe maximum movemus. Ea enim, de qua dialectici loquuntur, quae procedit per enumerationem simplicem, puerile quiddam est, et precario concludit, et periculo ab instantia contradictoria exponitur, et consueta tantum intuetur; nec exitum reperit.*" (But I make by far the greatest change in the form of induction and in the judgment which is made from it. For [the induction] of which the logicians speak, which proceeds by simple enumeration, is childish and somewhat precariously concludes, and is upset by a contradictory instance, and looks at the customary so much, and it sees no issue). Given this indictment of enumerative induction that is "upset by a contradictory instance," we must presume that Baconian induction attempts to employ logic that tries to account for such negative instances rather than ignoring them.

be short, direct, and disconnected: they comprise full paragraphs around aphorism 50,

and in the second book they span multiple paragraphs and pages, becoming more and

more essay-like.[189] As the aphorisms of the *New Organon* become increasingly

discursive, we become increasingly aware that the process of converting information to

knowledge is an ongoing one that overtakes the very form of the aphorism itself. Tables

and aphorisms treat things as they are, but are limited in their capacity to envision how

things might be.[190] In their place, the more capacious form of narrative becomes essential

to the scientist's ability to suspend judgment from his limited temporal perspective, given

the "capacity of a thing to reveal itself in unexpected ways in the future, […] possessing a

significance that is not exhausted by our conception of any single aspect of it," in the

words of Michael Polanyi.[191] Our progress toward understanding of the stable truths is a

constant, ongoing struggle against "Idols" that cloud the understanding, as well as the

purely human limitations on how much experience one individual can collect. In short,

truth is static, but our relationship to it is always evolving.

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[189] Snider, "Francis Bacon and the Authority of Aphorism" notes that Bacon's aphorisms are neither self-contained nor pithy, but goes on to explain that aphorists "see their work as embodying positive truth in form," and Bacon's aphorisms "take the form of carefully weighed, even tentative judgments" 60, 63, 64. As such, their claims to limited authority take precedence over their syntax.

[190] One exception to this rule, described in Vera Keller, "The 'New World of Sciences,'" is Bacon's lists of *desiderata*, which provide directions for future research. These are a unique class of tables/ lists more similar in their imaginative capacity to the *New Atlantis* itself, which may explain their placement at the following that text. Keller describes their function in very similar terms to my reading of the *New Atlantis*'s function: "An individual did not need to prove an ability to produce the desired object for the journey to be worthwhile, since approximations might prove fruitful even if ultimate goals remained always out of reach" (732).

[191] Quoted in Clody, "Deciphering the Language of Nature," 128. Clody discusses this quotation in the context of another work, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things* (Stanford, CA: University Press, 1997), p. 23; see also pp. 102–113.

### *The New Atlantis* **and The Temporal Dimensions of Knowledge**

Having grasped this essential dilemma of the Baconian project—the uncertainty from one moment to the next about what and how certain information will become useful—we are now in a better position to understand what an experiment in utopian fiction might have offered Bacon. In the *New Atlantis*, a fictional account of travellers shipwrecked on an unfamiliar island and their growing familiarity with its technologically-driven society, Bacon shows that narrative is a crucial heuristic for information-processing, wherein one employs a momentarily convenient approximation of truth in order to work toward what he regarded as the stable, unchanging principles of nature. While the *New Organon* attempts to describe a method for arriving at complete understanding of nature, the *New Atlantis* depicts this vision as an exchange between its narrator and the society he encounters in order to intertwine the stability of truth and the contingency of our path toward it. What results is an image of perfected knowledge that transforms every aspect of society, giving research a direction beyond the expansion of knowledge for its own sake. This makes the *New Atlantis* the culmination of Bacon's efforts to envision and initiate an epistemological revolution. Bacon's utopian narrative is more than a model for social reform; it is a conceptualization of how contingent, individual experience, when considered in light of its wider contexts, can become a path to certain knowledge. In its concern with how contingent information works asymptotically toward a necessary end, *The New Atlantis* is an exemplar of the epistemological purchase of fortune's literary tropes.

To understand how this is the case, we must first consider the characteristics of utopian narrative, whose function and form have been subject to contention. Is the

utopian civilization a blueprint for future reform? An exotic "other" that highlights social

ills by displacing them onto a distant, imagined population? Or something else entirely?

It has been argued that all utopias must be inducements to violence because they propose

radical reform that can be achieved through no other means.[192] The results of real-life

utopian experiments would seem to support such a conclusion. But critics of this view

have rightly observed that treating all utopian narratives as nothing more than blueprints

ignores the way that utopia's fictional form models possibility—"what if this were the

case?"—and not pure exhortation, "this should be the case." Utopia's dynamism derives

from the fact that it can move fluidly between imaginative and prescriptive modes.[193]

Darko Suvin has bridged this apparent divide between "utopian projects" and "utopian

fictions" by understanding them as different configurations between three key concepts:

the agent's "locus," the utopian "horizon," and the "orientation," or vector, between the

two.[194] Suvin uses these spatial metaphors to describe the way that utopias are oriented

toward a better place somewhere "forward," though they may not necessarily entail literal

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[192] Karl Popper, "Utopia and Violence," in *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2002), 477–88. For a refutation of this claim, see Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 90–91.

[193] For instrumentalist readings of utopian literature see, for instance, Judith Shklar, "The Political Theory of Utopia: From Melancholy to Nostalgia," *Daedalus* 94, no. 2 (April 1, 1965): 367–81. For a refutation of such a view see Darko Suvin, "Locus, Horizon, and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as a Key to Utopian Studies," in *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*, ed. Jamie Owen Daniel and Tom Moylan (New York: Verso, 1997), 124. James Holstun, *A Rational Millennium: Puritan Utopias of Seventeenth-Century England and America* (Oxford University Press, 1987) is a study of the intersection of the literary and practical utopia, and rests on the understanding that utopian literature combines critical and instrumental reason, as both social satire and as a blueprint for reform. See especially 23–27.

[194] Suvin, "Locus, Horizon, and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as a Key to Utopian Studies."

travel.[195] These connections can be triangulated differently to different effects in

particular utopian works. A static, doctrinaire utopia such as Campanella's *City of the*

*Sun* is one where locus coincides with horizon. Works of utopian theory, in contrast, lack

a locus in favor of pure horizon.[196] Contrary, then, to some anti-utopian criticism, there is

room for remarkably subtle interplay between the utopia's relatively static social

formation and the dynamism of utopian literature's narrative form.

Many recent studies of the place of the *New Atlantis* in either Baconian

philosophy or seventeenth-century science and society treat it as a proposed "utopian

project," assuming that Bacon regards knowledge as a tangible thing, something out there

to be found. When one does, then the *New Atlantis* appears to be a purely instrumental

text, a prescriptive model for cataloguing and disseminating information. But in utopias,

narrative form matters: when one attends to the formal structure of *New Atlantis*, the way

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[195] Ibid., 130–131. Suvin's spatial metaphors for utopian thought derive from the association between social/intellectual progress and geographic expansion—a link made explicit in Bacon's work as well. Holstun, *A Rational Millennium*, describes "utopian discipline" in the Americas as both a temporal and a spatial arrangement that is always open to further expansion. See 154–158. Bacon's emblem for the "total reconstruction of the sciences, arts, and all human knowledge, raised upon the proper foundations" is an image of ships passing through the Pillars of Hercules on the frontispiece of Bacon's *Instauratio magna* (1620)" in Bacon, *New Organon*, 8. For more on the motif of sea voyages, see John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), who describes the image as "a metaphorical vehicle of the experimental method," 223. This frontispiece appears over an adapted Biblical motto, "*Multi pertransibunt et augebitur scientia*" (many will pass through, and knowledge will be increased). The source of the phrase is Daniel 12.4, rendered in the Vulgate "*plurimi pertransibunt, et multiplex erit scientia,*" wherein "*plurimi*" refers to the many generations that will pass through before Daniel's visions come to fruition—an interesting distinction, given that the image of ships passing through the pillars is a metaphor for this ongoing process of discovery, a project protracted over time. See also Holstun, *A Rational Millennium*, 48–56 for a discussion of the *New Atlantis* as a Millennial vision.

[196] Suvin, "Locus, Horizon, and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as a Key to Utopian Studies," 133.

it mediates knowledge through narrative becomes more significant, and we can see that

knowledge is a process, not a thing in itself.[197] On the one hand, it depicts a narrator who,

like a good empiricist, slowly acquaints himself with the customs of an unfamiliar island.

On the other hand, the inhabitants' knowledge is comprehensive and apparently

buttressed by sudden, apocalyptic revelations of truth. While the former sort of gradual

accretion of experience resembles the process of inquiry envisioned by the tables and

aphorisms, the latter sort is precisely the kind of broad generalization that those other

forms aim to avoid. Narrative is unique, however, in its capacity to hypothesize such a

distant endpoint without forcing us to assent to it as if it were dogma. Thus, it provides

the structural framework that definitively links information to knowledge, but does so

without overstating its own claims to authority.

The confluence of two distinct scales of knowledge in Bacon's utopian narrative

reflect his adaptation of utopian source materials. Utopia has mixed roots in millennial,

typological prophesy that imagines the return of Edenic prosperity on Earth as well as in

travel narratives that recount the existence of such landscapes among naïve peoples in

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[197] A number of works focus on the acquisition of knowledge in similar terms to colonialist consumption: see, for instance, Charles Whitney, "Merchants of Light: Science as Colonization in the New Atlantis," in *Francis Bacon's Legacy of Texts: The Art of Discovery Grows with Discovery*, ed. William A. Sessions (New York: AMS Press, 1990), 255–68; Charles Whitney, "Reading Bacon: The Pathos of Novelty," in *Francis Bacon and Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 173–204. More recently, Sarah Hogan, "Of Islands and Bridges: Figures of Uneven Development in Bacon's *New Atlantis*," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 12, no. 3 (June 1, 2012): 28 adopts a similar reading. Colclough, "Ethics and Politics in the New Atlantis" refutes such views, arguing that the "text refuses the prescriptive modes of political writing" and instead offers "a way of reading" or an "allegory for the new knowledge," 75.

far-flung locales.[198] In short, utopia is both no-where and no-*when*. Furthermore, each of

these traditions employs a distinct temporal mode that posits a different relationship to

knowledge: the former treats it as a proleptically achieved whole, whereas the latter treats

it as a distant *telos* sought but never reached through journeying. *The New Atlantis* hence

draws from both travel narrative and millennialism to unite the micro-scale of

information, which is contingent and particular, with the macro-scale of knowledge of

principles, which is necessary and universal. Bacon achieves this effect by giving almost

equal weight to describing the narrator's experience of the island as he does to the

description of the island itself. The chaos of the narrator's journey presents a succession

of fortunate coincidences that contrast with the static, unchanging perfection of the island

itself and offer an alternative epistemological model based on contingent, additive, and

imperfect knowledge rather than absolute, universal truths.

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[198] The first lines of *The New Atlantis* declare, "We sailed from Peru, (where we had continued by the space of one whole year), for China and Japan, by the South Sea," in Francis Bacon, "The New Atlantis," in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, vol. 3 (London: Spottsworth and Company, 1861), 129. All citations of *The New Atlantis* are from this edition. The straightforward language here echoes that of such travel narratives as Sir Walter Ralegh's *The Discovery of Guyana*, which begins, "On Thursday the 6. of February in the yere 1595, we departed England and the Sunday following had sight of the North cape of Spain, the winde for the most part continuing prosperous," qtd. in Paul Salzman, "Narrative Contexts for Bacon's New Atlantis," in *Francis Bacon's the New Atlantis: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Bronwen Price (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), 32. An even more direct historical connection emerges in an account found in *Detectio Freti Hudsoni* of the explorer Ferdinand Quirós, a Spaniard (like the travellers in the *New Atlantis*) who sailed from Peru west for the Solomon Islands—a destination whose name further strengthens the connection to Bensalem. Cited in Whitney, "Merchants of Light: Science as Colonization in the New Atlantis," 261. Salzman, "Narrative Contexts for Bacon's *New Atlantis*" offers another possible connection: William Adams' voyage to Japan, 37.

Utopia, it has been said, is a genre characterized by its intertextuality—any new utopia is effectively a response to or modification of some previous text or genre.[199] And so a brief comparison between the way that More and Bacon fashion their utopias will reveal how Bacon comparatively emphasizes the continuity between the utopian civilization's millennial perfection and the narrator's limited, contingent experience of the island. In the case of More's *Utopia*, the exhaustive description of its ideal society forms a core around which commentary and supplementary material accumulate in order to compound the hermeneutic difficulty of pinning down the relationship between the fictional society and More's own (and that between the fictional interlocutor "More" and the author himself). The inclusion of precise details about population and geography, then, serve mainly to emphasize the impossibility of Utopia's existence. In comparison to Bacon, More maintains a skeptical distance from both the utopian society and England's present moment. The frame narrative provided in Book One, where More describes meeting and conversing with Raphael Hythloday and others interested in an account of his travels, supplemented what became Book Two, which More composed first. Dialogue all but disappears in the second part, which is primarily Hytholoday's uninterrupted description of the island. There, Hythloday functions as a conduit for information; we have little sense of his individual perspective, the sources of his accounts, or his experiences on his journey. Hythloday's biographical background is limited to a mention that he was exploring the New World with Amerigo Vespucci and stayed longer to explore the continent.

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[199] Holstun, *A Rational Millennium*, discusses the generic features of utopian literature as the effect of its relations to other genres, 12–13.

Bacon's interest, in contrast, lies in imagining how to bridge that distance between the utopian society's perfected knowledge and the narrative present. Bacon's account of the New Atlantis seems comparatively lively with action (though there is in fact little) and painfully earnest about the exciting possibilities its scientific utopia presents. Before introducing any description of the utopian civilization, *The New Atlantis* provides a narrative account of the voyage to it. The "plot" of *The New Atlantis*, such as it is, consists first of a brief account of the narrator's journey to Bensalem and then of his experiences there, which primarily consist of conversations with different inhabitants. In lieu of any narrative *telos*, the story consists of a succession of chance encounters; the travellers' discovery of the island during a storm is but one of many sudden occurrences. After arriving, the sailors meet a series of natives eager to share their knowledge of the island, but whose stories are interrupted on multiple occasions. The account of the island's conversion to Christianity ends abruptly when its narrator "pause[s] and a messenger c[omes] and call[s] him forth from us." And later, when the narrator converses with his guide Joabin, "there came one that seemed to be a messenger," and Joabin is "commanded away in haste."[200] These interruptions and digressions subvert the sense of unchanging, utopian certainty elsewhere in the *New Atlantis* in favor of "adventure time," the potentially endless succession of chance encounters deferring narrative closure.[201] These elements of the narrative correspond to the *New Organon*'s insistence on the ongoing process of inquiry, and the sense that inquiry can proceed in strange and unexpected directions.

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[200] Bacon, "The New Atlantis," 154.
[201] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," 94. For a more detailed discussion of "adventure time," see Chapter One, 30.

Unlike More's *Utopia*, where the narrator and interlocutor are both Europeans remarking on the difference between Utopian and European customs without referring to the specifics of Hythloday's experience, Bacon's traveller provides a direct account of his conversations with the utopians themselves, significantly reducing the narrative distance between the experience of the island and the reportage about it. In some respects, the descriptions of the island resemble those found in *Utopia*: we learn of the people's religious beliefs, something of their family life, and a great deal about the institutional organization of Salomon's House (which nevertheless has an ambiguous role in the island's governance). But there is no deliberate sequence to these accounts outside of the narrator's experience, no attempt to be comprehensive; instead, the narrator indiscriminately acquires information as it comes. Some of this information must be gathered through inference rather than reportage: he realizes the islanders consider the salaries of their offices sufficient payment when they refuse offers of coin as thanks, for instance. There is a relative dearth of empirical details about the island itself: the color and appearance of islanders' clothing receives peculiar attention, but we hear nothing about the city's layout or its place on the island, its natural resources, its flora or fauna. This is a surprising contrast to Bacon's own advice to travellers in the essay "Of Travel":

> Let diaries therefore be brought in use. The things to be seen and observed are,
> the courts of princes, specially when they give audience to ambassadors; the
> courts of justice, while they sit and hear causes; and so of consistories
> ecclesiastic; the churches and monasteries, with the monuments which are therein
> extant; the walls and fortifications of cities and towns, and so the havens and
> harbours; antiquities and ruins; libraries; colleges, disputations, and lectures

where they are; shipping and navies; houses and gardens of state and pleasure

near great cities; armories; arsenals; magazines; exchanges; burses; warehouses;

exercises of horsemanship, fencing, training of soldiers in the like; comedies, such

whereunto the better sort of persons do resort; treasuries of jewels and robes;

cabinets and rarities; and, to conclude, whatsoever is memorable in the places

where they go.[202]

Bacon advises travellers, in short, to compile a remarkably comprehensive account of

their destinations. There is little of that, however, in the *New Atlantis*: the narrator does

not deliberately collect information about the island so much as he haphazardly absorbs

it.

Plot in Bacon's utopia has been afforded greater weight than in More's: the

accounts of the narrator's experiences are given almost equal weight to the description of

the island itself. While the linear temporal sequence of the narrator's experience provides

one framework for understanding events in *The New Atlantis*, the typological description

in the embedded narrative of the island's history introduces another, less sequential

structure where Biblical precedents provide both a foundation and a projected future

vision of perfect knowledge. Together, these plot structures suggest a connection between

utopian stasis and scientific progress. Linear plot all but disappears in this latter part as

travel narrative tropes are eclipsed by the timeframe of millennialism found in

descriptions of the island's conversion to Christianity and its use of Biblical models in

founding Salomon's House. Millennial typology in utopian narratives can simultaneously

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[202] Bacon, "Essays," 417.

situate an ideal society as both a return to a past golden age and a realization of a future that exceeds past models.[203]

The utopian state of Bensalem is, of course, a relatively static social formation. We could imagine a story where narrating the history of such a state could produce a sense that its organization is the product of historical contingency. But presenting the utopia as a version of the millennium allows for the past, present, and future to be read typologically as versions of the same necessary and eternal present. In Bacon's utopia, this typological reading is made quite explicit when the islanders explain that their institution for scientific advancement has been modeled on the Biblical Solomon. Such a typology sees promise in the past and implies on that basis that a better future may lie ahead. Suvin describes the utopian adaptation of millennial thought as a "secularization of the static millennium and projection of a final paradise onto Earth, as a political version of earthly paradise." In this process of adaptation, "the notion of a more or less ongoing evolution appears," so that the utopian system is not entirely "closed."[204] This sense of possibility and evolution contrasts significantly with More's *Utopia*, which

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[203] Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1979) argue, "Any strict compartmentalization of future utopia and nostalgia for an idealized bygone human condition is invalidated by their constant interplay in Western thought. In the fiction of the original Morean utopia, the ideal already exists on a faraway island and has been seen by human eyes. […] The existence of an ideal society in the past, was often an essential rhetorical way of justifying a radical future innovation." 5. Kumar, *Utopianism*, explains that the Christian Millennium lends utopias a temporal duality: "To a vision of perfection the millennium has added a dynamic dimension—an account of how it will be achieved—and the sense of an ordained or preordained history with a beginning, middle, and an end. All this has encouraged action." 9. This only amounts to a call for action if the millennium is something brought about by human action, not an act of God in what Holstun calls the "rational millennium." See especially *A Rational Millennium*, 45–46.

[204] Suvin, "Locus, Horizon, and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as a Key to Utopian Studies," 127.

contains brief gestures to a utopian past but little hope of an improved future. The character More concludes the *Utopia* by pessimistically noting, "there are many things in the Commonwealth of Utopia that I wish our own country would imitate—though I don't really expect it will."[205] Although More's utopia serves as a comparison to the author's present moment, this comparison doesn't extend beyond the present. Bacon's considerable attention to the utopian past as a model for its present state of perfection, in contrast, suggests a deliberate interest in utopian perfection as an ongoing *process*. Bacon's version of utopian fiction emphasizes the longevity of utopian society in order to depict an endpoint for scientific inquiry: the perfection of scientific knowledge brings order to every aspect of their society, from familial relationships, to economics, to political organization and religion.

The continuity of Bensalem's past and present is most visible in the account of the island's conversion to Christianity, when we find that their enlightenment was achieved proleptically. Even before their conversion to Christianity, they pay devotion to the cross: when one appears, "rising from the sea, a great way up toward heaven," one of the members of Salomon's House—with great foresight—"attentively and devoutly view[s] and contemplate[s] this pillar and cross, […] and lifting up his hands to heaven, ma[kes] his prayers."[206] At the very moment of the revelation of this miracle, which the members of Salomon's house later affirm, this fellow is already aware of its divinity, such that his devotion to God both prompts and is prompted by his scientific study. His prayer makes this paradoxical relationship explicit:

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[205] Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. George M. Logan, trans. Robert M. Adams, Second Edition (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 85.
[206] Bacon, "The New Atlantis," 137.

Lord God of heaven and earth; thou hast vouchsafed of thy grace, to those of our order to know thy works of creation, and true secrets of them […]. I do here acknowledge and testify before this people that the thing we now see before our eyes is thy finger, and a true miracle. And […] we most humbly beseech thee to prosper this great sign, and to give us the interpretation and use of it in mercy; which thou dost in some part secretly promise, by sending it unto us.

The logic of this last part is particularly interesting. The fellow asks for divine guidance in making use of the miracle, but in the same breath says that the very act of *sending* the miracle guarantees its usefulness, eliminating the need for any prayer requesting guidance. In a similar fashion, divine grace gives them the knowledge of the "works of creation" even as this knowledge verifies the certainty of divine grace in the miracle they witness. Their faith drives their natural inquiry and that inquiry affirms their faith.

The way the islanders describe the origins of Salomon's House further supports the timelessness of Bensalem's history. As the Father of Salomon's House suggests, "our own excellent king had learned from the Hebrews that God had created the world […] and therefore he instituted that house for the finding out of the true nature of all things."[207] The typological relationship between the Biblical Solomon and the royal founder of Salomon's House is no accident: the "King of the Hebrewes" penned a natural history, lost to all but Bensalem, whose citizens honored him "with the title of that foundation." Salomon's House is thus both an idealized model of a potential future organization that Bacon's followers could adopt as well as a fulfillment of ancient natural inquiry. The name invites a typological reading that presents Bensalem as both endpoint

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[207] Ibid., 146.

and origin of a technologically driven society. In Bacon's hands, the utopia genre acquires apocalyptic significance. Implicitly linking the reign of Solomon to that of Bensalem's Salomon, Bacon casts their deeds and their society as a whole into an eternal present that is both historical precedent and typological fulfillment of modern scientific advancement.

In this way, the *New Atlantis* brings together two temporal schemes to emphasize how scientific inquiry looks different from different perspectives. Bacon unites the more distant, comprehensive and objective viewpoint of the members of Salomon's House with the first-person perspective of immediate, lived experience—depicted in the narrator's increasing acquaintance with the ways of Bensalem. Initially the narrator filters observations through his own sense of what is familiar: the messenger who greets them, for instance, has a hat "in the form of a turban," but it is "not so huge as Turkish turbans." And the notary they meet carries a fruit "like an orange, but of colour between orange-tawney and scarlet."[208] But the narrator slowly begins to discard his self-centered means of interpretation in favor of absolute openness to new explanations. The dynamic elements of travel narrative contrast with the static, unchanging elements of utopia and instead present a succession of coincidences that offer an alternative epistemological model based on contingent, additive, and imperfect knowledge rather than absolute, universal truths. The story thus weaves together different genres and different perspectives in order to reconcile distant knowledge with immediately useful information, not unlike Bacon's vision of the "twin ladders" of speculation and

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[208] Ibid., 132.

operation.[209] Through narrative, Bacon is able to extend his vision for the process of

discovery through time, projecting an endpoint where certainty is guaranteed by God's

providence even as he emphasizes our great distance from that end. Plot in the *New*

*Atlantis* provides a temporally organizing structure that allows Bacon to link the

temporary, contingent process of garnering provisional speculations with the more

permanent and certain endpoint of the universal knowledge of principles that Bacon

describes in the *New Organon*.[210] Whereas aphorisms and Tables achieved one portion of

that vision, elevating incomplete textual forms into a valuable tool for knowledge, the

*New Atlantis'*s incomplete narrative goes a step further, illustrating how even mistakes

and misinformation can point the way toward further discoveries, and thereby move us

closer to the truth.

However, the *New Atlantis* is a work of utopian fiction after all, not a scientific

experiment, and true to its genre, it leaves open and unsettled its specific procedures for

coming to knowledge. Famously, after the Father of Salomon's House finishes his

account of their practices and suggests that he has revealed such information so that it

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[209] The *New Atlantis* knits together the speculative and the certain, offering a defense of what we might anachronistically call scientific hypothesis. Interestingly, a number of critics associate the theoretically condensed and preliminary form of the aphorism with hypothesis, including Marwil, *Trials of Counsel*, 119 and Michael Hattaway, who claims that Bacon's aphorisms are connected "with a notion of scientific hypothesis" and "a feeling that the sensible world should be open to possibilities seemingly uncharacteristic of its finite limits," 183–184. It should be noted, however, that these critics use "hypothesis" in the modern sense of "prediction," whereas Paolo Rossi, *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science; Translated from the Italian by Sacha Rabinovitch* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1968) is careful to note that Baconian method is explicitly opposed to hypothesis, except in "moral science […] where consequences can be deduced from unquestionably sound principles of conduct," 222. This usage refers to "hypothesis" as a particular application of an accepted generalization in the form of a "thesis."

[210] In making this distinction, I am inspired by the descriptions of "*chronos*," the mere succession of events, and "*kairos*," time considered from its end described in Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 45–46.

might be published more widely, the narrative breaks off entirely. William Rawley,

Bacon's secretary who published the volume, reports that, "The rest was not

perfected."[211] Immediately following the *The New Atlantis* is the "Magnalia Naturae," a

speculative list of what could be hoped from scientific advancement, which includes

goals such as "the retardation of age" and "the acceleration of time in maturations."[212]

Whether Bacon intended this juxtaposition or not, the list is interesting as a coda to *The*

*New Atlantis*. Latent in the form of all lists is their perennial incompletion. Enumeration

could proceed indefinitely, but doing so would hamper the list's functionality, since lists

are ideally an impetus for action. On the one hand, this orientation toward action makes

lists a fruitful tool of speculation for Bacon. But on the other hand, Bacon also values the

list's particularity as a check on the mind's tendency to over-speculate. These two

impulses collide in the *Magnalia Naturae*, which boldly imagines the possibility that

humanity could come to manipulate time itself, but stops short of suggesting any methods

for doing so. If we take incompletion to be a deliberate motif of the *New Atlantis*, then in

addition to the apocalyptic revelation of truth, we also find a portrait of contingent,

provisional forms of discovery, of the useful sort of information that works progressively

toward an accumulation of knowledge that always remains unfinished.

The open-endedness of Bacon's writings is especially fitting, given that the

problems that he grapples with—translating experience into language, connecting general

precept to particular example, confronting the inevitable obsolescence of one's own ways

of thinking—comprise the legacy that Renaissance science has passed on to our present

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[211] Bacon, "The New Atlantis," 166.
[212] Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, vol. 3 (London: Spottsworth and Company, 1858), 167–168.

moment. Information is more accessible now than perhaps ever before, yet the more

challenging task of employing that information in service of the truth remains elusive.

Bacon's work, and indeed his career, suggests that narrative—and particularly fictional

narrative—can structure and manage the disparate interpretive possibilities that

information presents.

### 3. *Sejanus* and "the Play of Fortune"

Tragedy and fortune have been closely intertwined since their conception. From Roman and Greek tragedy, through medieval writers such as Chaucer and Boccaccio, and into the early modern period, tragedy revels in fortune's power to raise men up only to cast them down. Chaucer's Monk defines "tragedie" as "a certeyn storie, as olde bokes maken us memorie, of him that stood in greet prosperitee, and is yfallen out of heigh degree into miserie and endeth wrecchedly" ("Monk's Prologue," 3163-7). The fall in such *de casibus* tragedies comes about by the hand of fortune: "for certein whan that fortune list to flee, ther may no man the cours of hire withholde" ("Monk's Tale," 3185-6). Likewise, Bocaccio's *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, according to Derek Pearsall, is "a history of Fortune, of the crushing blows dealt to the most illustrious characters in history and mythology, […] with the object of teaching princes wisdom and virtue by showing them the misfortunes brought on by pride, ambition, and sin, or simply the salutary lesson of misfortune.[213] Such tragedies enjoyed a particular revival in the late sixteenth century, as Frederick Keifer describes: "Man's destiny" in Marlowe's tragedies, "is the product of two forces: his own will and Fortune's might. […] The adoption of Fortune as the paramount external force in the lives of the characters enables Marlowe to achieve powerful theatrical effects."[214] In Marlovian tragedy, characters such as Tamburlaine vie with fortune in an attempt to defy the inevitability of their own downfalls. Ben Jonson takes up these themes about the contest between will and fortune in his tragedy *Sejanus, His Fall*, but with markedly different results.

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[213] Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970) cited in Frederick Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Lib., 1983), 53.

[214] Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, 140–141.

The focus on the rise and fall of a particular individual reveals *Sejanus*'s clear debt to the *de casibus* tradition—the play's full title makes that clear. But in many other ways the play is hardly typical of the genre. From the first act it becomes evident that the play's tragedy emerges not from Sejanus's rise and fall alone, but also from the utter inefficacy of those who oppose him.[215] Our introduction to Sejanus and his supporters is through the eyes of a competing faction, who comment on those entering the stage and are in turn commented upon themselves. The slow dwindling of their numbers as Sejanus consolidates his power prefigures his own demise and the concomitant rise of his replacement, Macro. In the final estimation, he proves to be as expendable to Tiberius as the figures for whom he arranges sham trials or casually murders. A significant disjunction emerges, then, between his central role as tragic (anti-) hero and his more marginal role as political figure. As a result, the way Sejanus is embedded in a political community becomes all the more significant: the conflict is not between competing personalities (along the lines of a Harry-Hotspur rivalry) but between competing modes of political action. The conflict between these two models of political action—one promoted by vicious political opportunists such as Sejanus and the other by their critical (but relatively powerless) victims—is a key engine driving the play's plot.

The play's opening scenes swiftly shut down the possibility that the plot will revolve around rival figures. At the end of the first act, Drusus, Tiberius's brother and

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[215] For different perspectives on the function of the "Stoic chorus," see Alvin B. Kernan, *The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance* (Archon Books, 1976) and Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind* (Princeton University Press, 1984). Although Kernan critiques the chorus of Sejanus's political opponents as "futile, sterile, and cowardly" (161), and Maus claims that they are less relevant to the plot since their "Stoic virtue makes plot beside the point" (31), I argue that Sejanus's opposition is an essential component of the play, aesthetically and philosophically.

heir, seems poised to fill such a role as he rails against Tiberius's abuse of power, to the

delight of those watching him onstage, unseen, who proclaim, "O good prince!" and

"Brave, brave Drusus!" (1.551, 553). After the speech, Sejanus insults Drusus, prompting

Drusus to strike him, and bolstering the impression that this will be a significant rivalry.

However, Drusus never gets the chance to fill this role: when the second act opens,

Sejanus's plan to poison him is already underway, and we soon hear reports of his death.

Sejanus claims to poison Drusus in revenge for the blow (2.139), but the plot had already

been set in motion beforehand, and his flimsy pretense reaffirms Drusus's relative

insignificance as a credible rival to Sejanus's rise to power. In contrast to Sejanus's role

as the public face of Tiberius's nefarious powers and thus as the lightning rod for

criticism, his chorus of critics lack an identifiable leader. Germanicus, the heir who could

have played such a role, is dead before the play begins, and his factions, retaining the

appellation "Germanicans," can only impotently invoke his memory. From these events,

we become aware that this is not a play solely concerned with the interpersonal tensions

at court, pitting one individual against another. Instead, we see how such tensions are

viewed through the lens of competing factions, specifically factions made identifiable

through their opposed philosophical outlooks.

The focus on political factions in Jonson's tragedy does not mean, however, that

the play does not revolve around the power of fortune. Instead, Jonson's modification of

the *de casibus* genre to focus on the fortunes of political factions also reflects different

interpretations of the role of fortune in tragedy. In the play, fortune becomes a figure for

political authority, a way of rationalizing the limits of the political subject's ability to act

outside of or against the regime. The different ways of operating in Rome's corrupt

political system, wherein characters either use its corruption to personal advantage or try to distance themselves from that corruption, reflect two divergent interpretations of fortune. Characters invoke fortune and proffer ethics of political action in ways consistent with both Stoic and Machiavellian thought, the former of which attempts to transcend the vagaries of fortune by reinterpreting change through a providential framework, and the latter of which takes action to mitigate a kind of fortune immanent in contingent circumstances.[216] Characters conceive of fortune either as a cosmic cycle of rise and fall, or as a radically contingent political force. The play's Machiavellians take it for granted that the political stability offered by dominating fortune is worth the effort; however, the Stoics dismiss this vain pursuit of fortune's goods in favor of cultivating inner virtue to withstand fortune's blows. On the one hand, the Stoics criticizing Sejanus's practices tend to isolate themselves from the political landscape and focus on limiting fortune's influence over their mental resolve; on the other hand, Sejanus and his Machiavellian compatriots seize upon the opportunity to improvise and boldly react to the uncertainty offered by the goddess Fortune, whom Sejanus actually worships in an elaborate ceremony toward the play's climax.

Illustrating the way individuals and their ethical systems fare in an ever-shifting political climate is ultimately a way of dissecting the features of political power from multiple perspectives: as an external force that acts upon unwilling subjects and as a loose set of strategic practices that entail attributing or insinuating intent behind others' actions in order to dissimulate one's own. Through his portrayal of Machiavellian and Stoic attitudes toward fortune, Jonson presents a philosophical controversy over the

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[216] See Introduction, 15–18 for a fuller explanation of immanent and transcendent views of fortune.

efficacy of ethical guidelines within a contingent political landscape; questioning the degree of fortune's influence over the individual is tantamount to searching for a means to attain political agency.

**Stoics vs. Machiavels: *Sejanus*'s Political Struggle**

*Sejanus* betrays a strong debt to the Senecan tragic and philosophical tradition, particularly where its anti-tyrannical politics are concerned. Seneca's philosophy and indeed his very biography invited a political reading of his works. As tutor to the tyrant Nero, Seneca was at the very heart of Roman imperial politics, a fact reflected in his dramatic and philosophical works. Seneca's discussion of constancy linked the body's liberation from the passions to political liberation from the tyrant. Contrary to the assumption of some, that Stoic virtue passively accepts that outside events cannot be changed, Stoics see virtue as an active struggle to retain rational control over the passions. This activity, Seneca suggests, is analogous to political conflict: "To Stoics the controlling force of the personality was called the *hegemonikon*, the entity that gains hegemony in battle. […] Seneca himself preferred to internalize the opposition of the just king and the tyrant as a figure for subjective moral turmoil."[217] "A vertuous man," Seneca says, "accounteth his adversities, his exercises" just as "wrastlers, who have a care of their strength, doe contend with the strongest whatsoever." Virtue, like physical prowess,

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[217] Michael Evenden, "Inter-mediate Stages: Reconsidering the Body in 'Closet Drama'," in *Reading the Social Body* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 247. See also Yvonne Bruce, "'That Which Marreth All': Constancy and Gender in The Virtuous Octavia," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England: An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism and Reviews* 22 (2009), who notes that Stoic virtue is an "active— and largely impossible—achievement of the will, confirming the wise person's recognition of the unity of nature, god and reason (44).

"hath no vertue, if it be not impugned."[218] The implication here that external conflicts are entirely internalized belies a tension present in Seneca's life and corpus between withdrawal and engagement with politics.[219]

In Stoic thought, self-control becomes a microcosmic analogue for political autonomy, made possible by a discourse that links the executive control of the passions via reason to the hierarchically ordered state governed by an absolute monarch. Guillaume Du Vair's 1589 *De la constance et consolation dès calamités publiques* (published in English as *A Buckler against Adversity* in 1622) describes "a great proportion and correspondencie" between the "nature of man" and "the Royall State," where laws and magistrates function similarly to the understanding and other mental faculties.[220] From this, Du Vair's dialogue concludes that, lacking means to "doe the Publicke some Service," you are justified in turning instead to "settle your Mindes, by brave and constant Resolutions, to withstand undauntedly the Violence of the Tempest that threateneth this State."[221] As we will see, however, this autonomy is achieved by the active suppression of the political realities, the environment of which the Stoic individual is a part.

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[218] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *The Workes of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Both Morrall and Naturall*, trans. Thomas Lodge (London: Printed by William Stansby, 1614), Tt5. Seneca, *On Providence*, 2.4-5. *Viris bonis esse faciendum ut dura ac difficilia non reformident nec de fato querantur, quidquid accidit boni consulant, in bonum uertant; non quid sed quemadmodum feras interest.*
[219] Salmon, "Stoicism and Roman Example," 203.
[220] Guillaume Du Vair, *A Buckler against Adversitie, Or, A Treatise of Constancie Written in French by the Right Honourable the Lord Du Vair*, trans. Andrew Court, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1775:16 (London: Printed by Bernard Alsop, 1622), C1v–C2.
[221] Ibid., y.

Suicide most clearly expresses one's independence from the passions and acceptance of fate, as visible in a 1614 edition of Seneca's prose works that gruesomely depicts his death by Nero's order above the inscription, "*Sic vivit, sic moritur*" (As he lives, so he dies).[222] For Seneca, the virtuous man's constancy in the face of adversity is all-important: "It importeth not what burthen thou bearest, but with what courage thou endurest it."[223] Seneca's letters repeatedly emphasize how the fear of death limits one's freedom: "diuers men […] float betwixt the feare of death, and the torments of life; they will not liue, and they know not how to die."[224] In contrast, the sage can face death unencumbered by passions such as fear: "If [a man] dare looke on a drawne sword with a manly eie, if he know that there is no great matter whither his soule depart, by his mouth, or by his throat; call him happy."[225] Suicide therefore offers the ultimate defense against fortune: "Shal I beleeue that fortune hath power in all things ouer him that liueth, rather then suppose, that fortune can do nothing ouer him that knoweth how to die?"[226] Suicide here and in Stoic drama affirms the hero's ability to exhibit self-control under tyranny.

The tension between passive and active virtue, between noble sufferance under tyranny recommended in Seneca's letters and violent passion in response to chaotic events found in his plays, demonstrates how Stoic virtue is an ongoing struggle, one that is entangled with man's membership in a political community. By casting the effort to

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[222]  Seneca, *The Workes* (1614). See Salmon, "Stoicism and Roman Example" 199–200 for a detailed interpretation of the scene and its popularity among Renaissance writers such as Greneway and Montaigne.

[223] Ibid., Tt5. Seneca, *On Providence*, 2.4–5: "*non quid sed quemadmodum feras interest.*"

[224] Ibid., P6. See also Richard Tarrant, "Seeing Seneca Whole?," in *Seeing Seneca Whole: Perspectives on Philosophy, Poetry, and Politics*, ed. Katharina Volk and Gareth D. Williams (Boston: Brill, 2006), 112–113.

[225] Ibid., "Letter LXXVI," Dd7v.

[226] Ibid., "Letter LXX," Bb6.

conquer passion as a heroic struggle, submission transforms into "magnificent conquest," in what Marta Straznicky calls "the heart of the stoic paradox."[227] The risk, however, is that this behavior can be read in a number of different ways: as disinterest, as Christian meekness, or as fortitude. The analogy between freedom from the passions and freedom from political domination only holds so long as one takes the Stoic at his word: that his impassivity conceals an inner struggle, and not mere acquiescence. This dynamic, in which a chaotic political world reflects an interior struggle against the passions, features prominently in Renaissance tragedy.

In *Sejanus,* we find a curious blend of attitudes toward Stoic virtue, in part because of the varied sources that inform Jonson's composition. He does not present an uncritical perspective on Stoicism, possibly in part because Tacitus, a primary source of the history he stages, was himself critical of Stoic inaction.[228] Still, the play portrays many of the themes and controversies within Stoicism and its later incarnations. Jonson provides a nuanced portrait of many of the contradictions present in the Neo-Stoic tradition: a disengagement from political conflict coupled with a strong distaste for tyranny, confidence in man's ability to overcome the buffets of fortune alongside clear

[227] Marta Straznicky, "'Profane Stoical Paradoxes': The Tragedie of Mariam and Sidnean Closet Drama," *English Literary Renaissance* 24, no. 1 (1994): 116.

[228] See Henry and Walker, "Tacitus and Seneca," who argue that Tacitus's portrait of Seneca is not as nuanced and penetrating as many of his characterizations of historical figures are reputed to be. Instead, Seneca is treated inconsistently as a pedant, a spineless adviser, or a calculating pragmatist. There is little to suggest in Tacitus's portrayal, they claim, that he was interested in the disjunction between Seneca's private life and philosophical works, since he tends to write dismissively of Stoicism. William Turpin disputes this claim (somewhat less convincingly), arguing that descriptions of the deaths of influential Stoics such as Barea Soranus and Thrasea Paetus are portrayed sympathetically. See "Tacitus, Stoic Example, and the *Praecipuum Munus Annalium*," *Classical Antiquity* 27, no. 2 (October 2008): 359-404. Whatever the case may be, it seems that there is little substantive treatment of Stoicism in Tacitus' works.

evidence to the contrary, and the depiction of virtue as an active feat of willpower that results in the Stoic actor's subordination and objectification by superior forces. In particular, the play's Stoic figures recreate Seneca's reassignment of value—namely, recovering the "activity" of Stoic virtue by making the exercise of willpower analogous to physical conflict. Through this interpretive act, the rhetoric of Stoic resistance metaphorically represents inner strength as outward, physical force. However, as a result of this reinterpretation of "activity," the Stoic figure, prizing generalization over particularity, abstraction over corporeality, becomes a static figure incompatible with the play's constantly-changing political climate.

The depiction of Stoic willpower as a kind of active force necessitates a dismissal of other types of force, namely fortune and the political authority it represents. Two moments in the play stand out as representative of how Stoic rhetoric proffers abstractions of willpower as an active force, and thereby freezes the Stoic subject, rendering him incapable of responding to a political reality that insists on the instability of meaning. First, when on trial for trumped up charges of treason, the Stoic Silius commits suicide before he can be sentenced. Explaining the advantages of this gesture, he proclaims,

> Silius hath not placed
>
> His guards within him, against Fortune's spite,
>
> So weakly but he can escape your gripe,
>
> That are but hands of Fortune. She herself,
>
> When virtue doth oppose, must lose her threats! (3.321-325)

Silius metaphorically represents his mental capacities as "guards within him," and so casts inner fortitude as a martial struggle, reminiscent of Seneca's remarks. The reverse of this reassignment of values is that Silius must consequently dismiss the actual conflict that besets him: the authorities' punishments are no more than "the hands of Fortune" that "lose their threats" since they have no bearing on Silius's virtue.

Silius's contempt for fortune here reflects a wider attitude in Stoic philosophy, which holds the irrational chaos of fortune to be an illusion, the result of a failure to perceive the fundamentally rational order of the universe. Only by positing a higher-order system that contains worldly disorder (e.g. Providence) can these figures ensure the possibility of objective rationality. By changing the frame of reference from a limited, interpersonal perspective to a cosmic one, Stoic thought reveals order and disorder to be a product of "the chosen framework […] in which these computations are carried out," such that "in changing language, different orders and complexities are created."[229] This resolution of chaos into order in Stoic philosophy frequently takes the shape of a conflict between fortune and providence. By recasting the vagaries of fortune—in essence, social discord—as part of a providential design when viewed from outside the temporal world, Stoic philosophy holds out the possibility of not only escaping but also manipulating that world, of imposing order from the top down.

God himself, Seneca argues, is bound to the necessity of fate: "One course irrevocably bears along human and divine affairs alike. The creator and ruler of all things

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[229] Heinz Von Foerster, *Understanding Understanding: Essays on Cybernetics and Cognition* (New York: Springer, 2002), 275.

himself authored Fate, yet he follows it. He always obeys, he commanded only once."[230]

Stoic constancy, in turn, is itself an attempt to live in a rational manner consistent with

nature. In so doing, Seneca tells the virtuous man that he is capable of mastering fortune

by becoming impervious to it:

> I haue armed your minds against all things. Suffer manfully, this is the way
>
> whereby you may walke before God, he is without the patience of euill you aboue
>
> the patience. Contemne pouertie, no man liueth so poore as he was borne.
>
> Contemne paine, it will either be ended, or end vs. Contemne Fortune, I haue
>
> giuen her no weapon to wound the minde.[231]

Here we see the Stoic paradox in action: in order to understand things like poverty, pain,

and fortune as part of a rational, orderly cosmos, one must reinterpret them. The way to

master fortune according to Seneca's strictures is to arm the mind, which remains free

despite other forms of subjugation such as poverty and physical pain. Likewise, Silius's

oppression at the hands of Tiberius's agents can only be as meaningless as fortune

because he imposes a narrow interpretation of "power" that the play repeatedly

undermines. He can assert his own interpretation of power, but that does not exclude

others from exercising power as they understand it.

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[230] Seneca, *On Providence*, 5.8: "*Inreuocabilis humana pariter ac diuina cursus uehit: ille ipse omnium conditor et rector scripsit quidem fata, sed sequitur; semper paret, semel iussit.*"

[231] Seneca, *The Workes*, Vu3v. From Seneca, *On Providence*, 6.6: "*animos uestros aduersus omnia armaui: ferte fortiter. Hoc est quo deum antecedatis: ille extra patientiam malorum est, uos supra patientiam. Contemnite paupertatem: nemo tam pauper uiuit quam natus est. Contemnite dolorem: aut soluetur aut soluet. Contemnite mortem: quae uos aut finit aut transfert. Contemnite fortunam: nullum illi telum quo feriret animum dedi.*"

The Stoic response to the Western philosophical tradition that "accuse[s] freedom of luring man into necessity," according to Hannah Arendt, is to search for freedom in "non-acting, in abstention from the whole realm of human affairs as the only means to safeguard one's sovereignty and integrity as a person."[232] Stoicism was useful for thinking about how to operate in a corrupt world where material status and virtue are at odds: people may suffer misfortune undeservedly, but they are assured a higher reward. Despite limited control over material—particularly political—circumstances, one can still live the "good life" by redefining what constitutes "the good," such that suffering can be good for how it strengthens virtue. In this sense, Stoicism and its Renaissance incarnations provide a philosophical justification for being subordinate to external authority, be it a ruler, fortune, or providence—a concept prominently displayed in Jonson's *Sejanus*. Reframing referents in this way, however, has the effect of restricting the possibility for effective action. The political reality of power in *Sejanus* is tangible, multifaceted, and diffuse, but Silius imagines it here to be monolithic and insubstantial. This rhetorical strategy for reassigning value to inner force through metaphor is too static; it offers no way of responding to other manifestations of power and therefore severely limits the Stoic's ability to respond to changing circumstances.

Stoic and Machiavellian philosophies are similarly founded on the imitation of nature, but in contrast to providentialist Stoic philosophy, Machiavellian thought takes inconsistency and change to be the only constants in nature. Certainly, the philosophies are aligned in some respects: Jamey Graham has characterized Machiavelli's writings as an adaptation, in fact, of Stoic masculinity in Cicero. Both posit "necessity" as a

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[232] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 234.

substitute for "the good" in their ethics, such that Machiavelli's Prince becomes a version of Cicero's sage or ideal statesman: "The Machiavellian agent is continually judging necessity, imitat[ing] the actions of a hypothetical master of fortune, […] with perfect knowledge of necessity."[233] The notable difference from Stoic models here however is that Stoics take "the good" to be a constant, whereas Machiavellian "necessity" seems to change from one minute to the next. In other words, Machiavelli envisions an ideal persona, the prince, capable of adapting rapidly to changes in the environment. *Virtù*, in turn, has the power to transform fortune's influence, rather than reinterpret it. The reinterpretive element of Stoic philosophy that relies on metaphor to make inaction an "active" deployment of willpower simultaneously devalues action and power as exercised politically. The reality of power in the play is Machiavellian, more dynamic in its approach to interpretation and therefore better able to respond to contingency. Dismissing fortune means dismissing the inevitability of changing, particular circumstances that determine the attribution of meaning (and thus responsibility) from one moment to the next.

Just as Stoics reinterpret what constitutes "good fortune" in order to account for why what seems like good fortune may befall unworthy men, so too does Machiavelli offer a redefinition of virtue as a more effective way to respond to fortune. Machiavellian *virtù*, though never explicitly defined by Machiavelli, essentially equates to adaptability, or the ability to respond to circumstances. The adaptability required for *virtù* is what makes rhetoric such an essential component of Machiavelli's politics since rhetoric is an

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[233] Jamey E. Graham, "Consciousness, Self-Spectatorship, and Will to Power: Shakespeare's Stoic Conscience," *English Literary Renaissance* 44, no. 2 (May 1, 2014): 252–253.

equally flexible tool. In essence, rhetoric is *virtù* and *virtù* is rhetoric: "both are faculties for responding to the realm of contingency or fortune. [...] Political innovation proves to be inseparable from rhetorical invention."[234] In *Sejanus*, the rhetorical flexibility demonstrated by Machiavellians extends to include the instability of what constitutes "action" itself. That is, not only does language become subject to flexible interpretations, but the range of material subject to interpretation also expands. The means of defining "treason" explodes, encompassing a number of deeds, states, or expressions. The horror of the play's political world is not only that modes of interpretation are contingent, but also that it becomes increasingly difficult to identify what details will become meaningful.

In contrast to the way Stoics abstract fortune in order to render it inconsequential to one's virtue, Machiavellians locate fortune in particular, material details and therefore shape it to their own ends, redefining "virtue" in the process. Just as Machiavellian *virtù* transforms traditional virtue into the force that mitigates fortune, Sejanus's successor Macro proclaims that in order to "thrive in state" one must find "new, wilder ways for virtue" where "men's fortune" is their "virtue" (3.735-740). Macro acknowledges that fortune's significance lies in its rhetorical manipulability: something that is merely the result of chance can be made to seem the result of skill or even favor, and can therefore become an influential tool. Fortune determines the difference between "revenge" (1.579) and political assassination, between being "found" and "made" guilty (2.317), "license" and "law," "reason" and "will" (3.740-741). The distinction between terms such as these is not purely semantic; it also reflects the willful efforts of Sejanus and others' *virtù* to

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[234] Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric,* 17.

legitimize their actions. As Sejanus explains, "state is enough to make th'act just, them guilty"—in other words, holding power grants legitimacy to any act, and de-legitimizes the opposition by the same token (2.173). That such disparate terms become functionally equivalent speaks to how fortune is made from one moment to the next, in contexts of setting, medium, speaker, or gesture. In contrast to the devaluation of the particular and material among the play's Stoics, Machiavellianism's prudential, practical philosophy evaluates individual policies according to their merits in a particular context.

The willful act of creating virtue out of the circumstances of fortune, like the willed effort to make Tiberius's critics guilty, is a rhetorical and interpretive feat. This rhetoric has crucial implications for the play's interpretation of political authority, which is analogous to power over fortune: Tiberius and Sejanus have "power explicitly thematized in language that becomes power over language."[235] A crucial means for these Machiavellians to domesticate fortune is to literalize and corporealize both the effects of fortune and Fortuna, a feat partially accomplished through language. The way Sejanus (and/or Tiberius) make their own fortune is by legitimizing their own language. Words such as "guilty" or "virtue" have their own force, "the word as deed," according to Loxley, is the Jonsonian model of political or ethical language.[236] These alternative definitions work against the ethical assertions offered by the Stoic chorus, uncoupling language from morality. In its place, they offer the self-legitimizing force of deeds buttressed by an idiom that conveys the corporeality of this force. These questions Jonson raises in *Sejanus* about how virtue figures into the fate of political communities, and how

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[235] Loxley, *Critical Guide to Ben Jonson*, 60.
[236] ibid*.,* 59.

fortune functions as a guise for political force reflect his own experience of political controversy, as I will demonstrate hereafter.

**Rhetoric and Jonson's "integrity in the story"**

Jonson published *Sejanus* amid a flurry of controversy: an earlier, staged version had not only been unpopular with the public but had earned Jonson a summons to the Privy Council on the charge of "popperie and treason."[237] Likely in order to defend against such charges, Jonson's typography and marginal notes in the 1605 publication cast the work in a historical, literary mode: defending himself in his introduction to the play, he explains that his references to classical texts "shew my integrity in the story" in order to "save myself from those common torturers that bring all wit to the rack."[238] By citing classical authorities, Jonson divests himself of responsibility for potentially objectionable sentiments that may be seen as attempts to "parallel the times" (2.310-311) by suggesting relationships between Jacobean England and Rome under Tiberius. But far from divesting his play of political intent, these historical parallels only more forcefully assert Jonson's interest in contemporary politics.

However much Jonson may deny the political intent in *Sejanus*'s preface, his use of Tacitus as source material is itself a politically charged tactic. Tacitus's *Annals* had a reputation for being "a favorite for translation and interpretation" among "disaffected

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[237] Dutton, A.R., "The Sources, Text, and Readers of *Sejanus*: Jonson's 'Integrity in the Story'," S.P., LXXV (1978), 185.

[238] Ben Jonson, "To the Reader" in *Sejanus, His Fall.* At London: Printed by G. Elld, for Thomas Thorpe, 1605, unpaginated prefatory material. For background on the topicality of *Sejanus,* see Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Reading and Writing in Early Modern England*, 2nd ed. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) 105-106; and W. David Kay, *Ben Jonson: A Literary Life* (St. Martin's Press, 1995), 72-73.

aristocrats such as those in the Essex circle."[239] The 1591 Savile translation of Tacitus'

*Historia* (appended to the Greeneway translation of the *Annals*) included a note to the

reader which Ben Jonson alleged was actually written by the Earl of Essex.[240] In the note,

"A.B." advises readers to use the figures in the history as *exempla* for political behavior;

for example, Vespasian teaches us "that in civil tumults an advised patience, and

opportunity well taken, are the only weapons of advantage."[241] Tacitus and Seneca's

writings became associated with the noblemen involved in the Essex Rebellion, through a

long history involving Philip Sidney's friendship with antiquarian and Neo-Stoic Justus

Lipsius and the tradition his friends (including Essex) carried down.[242] Through Tacitus

(whose histories give an account of the life and death of the playwright-philosopher

Seneca, although he himself was often critical of Stoics), Stoicism became a stance of

political resistance in Renaissance Europe.

The Stoics' rational outlook toward worldly matters appealed to writers

bewildered by the tumultuous political scene at the turn of the seventeenth century.

Foremost among them was Justus Lipsius, whose influential Neostoic text, *De Constantia*

(1584), offered a course of action to those seeking consolation from the wars of religion

ravaging the continent.[243] Lipsius's work displays an interest in the philosophy and the

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[239] Alberto Tricomi, *Anticourt Drama in England, 1603-1642* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 73.

[240] Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*, 55.

[241] Cornelius Tacitus, *The End of Nero and the Beginning of Galba. Four Books of the Histories of Cornelius Tacitus. The Life of Agricola* (London, 1622 [1591]), unpaginated prefatory material.

[242] For a detailed account of Lipsian Neo-Stoicism's fate in early modern England, see J.H.M Salmon, "Stoicism and Roman Example: Seneca and Tacitus in Jacobean England," Journal of the History of Ideas, 50, no. 2 (1989): 199-225.

[243] Several editions of Lipsius's work were printed in England: *Iusti Lipsi de constantia libri duo*, (Londini: Impensis Geor. Bishop, 1586), a reprint by the same stationer in

court politics of Rome in Seneca's time:  Seneca's writings were a source of *sapientia*, a guide to living well, and Tacitus's account of politics a model of *prudentia*, practical reasoning particularly relevant to statecraft.[244] Lipsius selectively adapts Seneca's philosophy for a Christian context: the even temper, or constancy, of the Stoic sage is achieved through patient suffering, "enduring whatever happens to a man externally or internally, willingly and without complaint."  Reason, "a true judgment and feeling about things human and divine," is the means by which one achieves constancy and becomes "free from hope and fear, a king indeed, subject only to God and free from the yoke of Fortune and the emotions."[245]

In England, Stoicism—and Lipsius's Christian adaptation of it—offered a model of conduct amidst the political instability produced by the gunpowder plot, the Essex rebellion, anxiety about the succession, and concern about Elizabeth's "increasingly autocratic rule."[246] Its popularity continued into the seventeenth century as worry about the potential for tyranny persisted under James's reign: writers such as Henry Savile and Henry Cuffe, Essex's co-conspirator and secretary, began to speak as if England under James I were as corrupt and rife with spies as Rome under Nero.[247] Monarchs themselves

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1592, and English editions in 1594 and 1595, *Tvvo bookes of constancie. Written in Latine by Iustus Lipsius. Englished by Iohn Stradling, Gentleman*, (Printed at London: by Richard Iohnes, 1594). New English editions emerged throughout the seventeenth century, e.g. *Two bookes of constancy: Written in Latine by Justus Lipsius*, (London: Printed [s.n.], 1653).

[244] Mark Morford, *Stoics and Neostoics: Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 175.

[245] Ibid., 162.

[246] Marta Straznicky, *Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama, 1550-1700* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 2004), 14.

[247] Salmon, "Stoicism and Roman Example," 223. See also Alan T. Bradford, "Stuart Absolutism and the 'Utility' of Tacitus," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (April 1, 1983): 127–155; Mary F. Tenney, "Tacitus in the Politics of Early Stuart England,"

were clearly aware of Stoicism's political orientation: in *Basilikon Doron* (1599), James

rails against "that Stoick insensible stupiditie that proud inconstant Lipsius perswadeth in

his *Constantia.*" In a later edition, he amends this to a more general criticism of how

"many in our days, pressing to win honour in imitating that ancient sect, by their

inconstant behaviour in their own lives belie their profession," nevertheless retaining his

parody of Stoic constancy.[248] The politics of Stoic philosophy were open to

interpretation: Elizabeth's translation of *Hercules Oetatus* suggests an interest in its

topical relevance, since the translated fragment explores the themes of disloyalty of

subjects and the treachery of public office. Stoicism, in short, through the work of

scholars such as Lipsius, was highly politicized, a touchstone for courtiers, monarchs, and

dissenters of all stripes in late sixteenth century England. *Sejanus*, emerging in print out

of political controversy and drawing as it does on Stoic philosophy and Tacitean history,

must also be considered as a part of this intellectual milieu.

     *Sejanus* developed out of this politically charged Senecan tradition: Jonson adapts

his Tacitean source material to suit his own political moment. *Sejanus* uses its historical

source material tactically to invite topical readings while avoiding charges of sedition.

Given the play's original reception, it is no surprise that so much of Jonson's revised

version explores the exercise of political control through control over language. In a

scene that likely alludes to Jonson's own troubles with the law, the historian Cremutius

Cordus is punished for supposedly seditious content in his annals. The trial demonstrates

that Stoic language, like its conception of virtue, is distanced from its source, such that

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*The Classical Journal* 37, no. 3 (December 1, 1941): 151–163; Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993), 105–119.
[248] James Stewart, *The Political Works of James I, Reprinted from the Edition of 1616*, ed. Charles Howard McIlwain (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918).

the Stoic is no more implicated in the events around him than he is in his own utterances. When he is introduced in the play, Cremutius Cordus, not having yet published his histories, is a political enigma: Sejanus's henchman Natta asks, "Is he Drusan or Germanican? / Or ours? Or neutral?" (1.80-81), and the question is only ever answered through interpretations of his history writing. As a writer, his statements circulate widely, as if considered to be public property. For instance, Arruntius, in conversation with Cordus and Sabinus, actually quotes Cordus's annals—"Brave Cassius was the last of all that race" (1.104)—using the very phrase for which Cordus is later punished. Later, Tiberius, thanks to a warning from Sejanus (2.303-312), interprets the phrase to be an attack on himself, an attempt to "parallel the times" between the past and present (2.310-311). In his defense, Cordus explains that he is "innocent [...] of fact," (i.e. the deed of treason), on the grounds that his words, and not his person are subject to scrutiny—"but my words are argued," he explains—and even those words do not constitute treason, "Not reaching either prince or prince's parent, the which your law of treason comprehends" (3.407-410). To prove that he is guilty, Cordus argues, Tiberius would have to demonstrate the harmful effect of his words, and would also have to demonstrate a crucial link between the words' guilt or innocence and Cordus's. Cordus here draws a telling distinction between words and deeds, especially insofar as he grants agency (and guilt) to words but not their speaker.

Cordus's careful parsing of guilt reveals the apparent disconnect between words, or bodies, and how they are interpreted, which in turn raises a larger question about what constitutes "action." Elam explains one philosophical theory of action: "There is a being conscious of his doing who intentionally brings about a change of some kind to some end

in a given context."[249] According to this model, the "actor" here is he who "makes"

words treasonous, but of course the one held responsible for these actions is invariably

the speaker. There is, then, a sharp disconnect between those who carry out political

actions and those held responsible for performing them. In part, this is due to the fact that

the informational content of a statement (the locutionary act) becomes subordinate to its

effect on listeners (the illocutionary act, or the act performed in saying something).[250] In

the case of statements such as "Cassius was the last of the Romans," the transparency of

its semantic content belies the obscurity of the action performed by writing such a phrase.

The condensed, abstracted form of Stoic rhetoric contributes to its exploitation by the

likes of Sejanus and Tiberius.

The linguistic slippage that deprives these Stoics' criticism of its bite stems from

the failure of Stoic characters to escape the system that they profess to criticize from

without. While they might redefine misfortune as a positive thing, they still operate in a

world where misfortunes have real, tangible effects that cannot be ignored. Sabinus, too,

grants words agency independent of their speaker moments before he is arrested for

treason (in an instance of supreme dramatic irony). Losing authority over the ability to

precisely connect words and deeds means that words and writings can be "made to speak/

What they will have," as Sabinus complains (4.134-135). That is, outside actors ("they")

can forcibly manipulate one's writings and make them "speak" something entirely new,

and likely treasonous. In a moment that recalls Jonson's own arraignment by the Privy

Council for suspected treason in *Sejanus,* Cordus's writing is also punished along with

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[249] Keir Elam, *Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 109-110.

[250] For more on the relationship between dialogue and action, as well as the categorization of speech acts, see Ibid., 143-144.

him when his books are ordered to be burnt (3.465). Such incidents raise the question of

whether subversive words are themselves treasonous, or whether treason resides in the

locutionary act that produces them, i.e. their utterance in writing or speech. The evident

self-consciousness about language here performs a metalinguistic function, as Keir Elam

describes, "foregrounding language as object" by drawing attention to it in a way that

frames the process of verbal communication.[251] *Sejanus* shows how characters' words

and bodies alike can have their meaning forcibly wrested away from its original context.

This presents a rather dire prospect for the Stoic as actor: meaning is inscribed onto his or

her body and words externally, at times directly contrary to their intended effects.

Words that circulate independent of their original utterance are not only a topic

within the play's plot; they are built into the very text of *Sejanus* itself. The quarto edition

of the play includes citations of historical facts and gnomic pointings in the margins that

draw attention to generalized statements suitable for extraction and reapplication, both to

protect Jonson's "integrity in the story," and, likely, to invite the politically charged

readings he ostensibly denies.[252] Furthermore, the style of these sayings, which tend to be

generalized, pithy truths suitable for reapplication, perfectly complements the Stoic

outlook on virtue as something distant and abstracted from messy particularities. In

Cordus's trial scene in particular, Jonson cites and translates part of the scene from

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[251] Ibid., 142.

[252] See, for example, Daniel Boughner, "The Tyrant's Arts in *Sejanus*" in *The Devil's Disciple: Ben Jonson's Debt to Machiavelli*. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1968), A.R. Dutton, "The Sources, Text, and Readers of *Sejanus*: Jonson's 'Integrity in the Story'," S.P., LXXV (1978), 185-187, John Jowett, "'Fall before this Booke": The 1605 Quarto of *Sejanus'*, TEXT, v. 4 (AMS Press: New York, 1988), 279-295, and Evelyn Tribble, "Genius on the Rack: Authorities and the Margin in Ben Jonson's Glossed Works" in *Margins and Marginality: the Printed Page in Early Modern England*, (University of Virginia Press, 1993) 130-150.

Tacitus, including a sentence, "the punishment / Of wit doth make the authority increase" (3.475-476), that circulates in the writings of Bacon and Milton.[253] Cordus's words, we have seen, get picked up by vocal opponents of Tiberius such as Arruntius, and it is their use in this context that makes them politically subversive. Through such devices, the text simultaneously encourages readers to recontextualize the play's language to topical situations and reveals the dangers of such a practice.

The ways characters deploy these *sententiae* reveals yet another rift between Stoic and Machiavellian factions in the play. The Stoics latch on to Cordus's words as a way of expressing generalized dissatisfaction with Tiberius's reign. In this context, gnomic sayings have weight because of their very universality: they connect the particular dissatisfaction of individuals with a more universal condition of suffering. The weakness of such a position is that its generality creates the appearance of truth without spelling out specifically how such knowledge is applicable or useful. Such *sententiae* are only ever useful as a kind of currency, a marker of learnedness that eschews the work of application and interpretation. On the other hand, Tiberius and his Machiavellian henchmen display a marked interest in *sententiae* as a means to veil particular intentions in generalized language. These moments reveal how greater authority is granted not to those (such as Arruntius and Cordus) who circulate sayings, but to those (such as Sejanus and Tiberius) who give them context and exploit their wide applicability in a particular moment. Although Stoics deploy sentences as if their universal applicability were self-evident, their very non-specificity makes context, the contingent dimension of meaning which changes from moment to moment, all-important. Ultimately, the different methods of

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[253] Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*, 60.

circulating *sententiae* in the play reveal markedly different rhetorical strategies among the play's Stoics and Machiavels.

Abstraction and generalization define Stoic rhetoric, as their frequent *sententiae* on the nature of power demonstrate. Denying the reality of fortune's influence forces a narrow interpretation of virtue and power, one that renders them distant and intangible, as immaterial as the "false" deity Fortune. Lepidus laments the systematic destruction of his allies: "Fortune, thou hadst no deity if men/ Had wisdom. We have placed thee so high/ By fond belief in thy felicity" (5.743-745). This perception of fortune is reinforced by rhetoric that tends to value abstraction and generalization over literalism and particularity. Likewise, in order for Silius to claim that the powers of his will are "guards," or for Sabinus to compare the subject's resistance of "force" to godly power, one must take such material concepts as "force" and "guards" to be more accurately defined as immaterial abstractions. By distancing the good man from worldly events both through the linguistic representation of virtue as an abstract force and through blocking onstage, *Sejanus's* Stoic philosophers ultimately distance men from agency. Conceding that true virtue or power is not outwardly apparent—even the opposite of what it appears to be—uncouples signifier from signified, leaving interpretation open to individuals.

The Stoic rhetoric of generalization and abstraction makes characters such as Cordus, Sabinus, and Silius static and hence victims of those who exploit a more dynamic rhetoric, one that employs the very particularity and corporeality of power as it actually functions in the play. This opposing rhetorical mode, I argue, is Machiavellian, attuned to the contingency of the political world, which Jonson shows to be a theatrical world of outward appearances, utterance, and action. In the hand of the Stoics' Machiavellian

opponents, gnomic sayings (to cite one feature of both types of speech) are deployed not

for their ability to frame universal truths but for the exploitability of their generalizations,

their openness to interpretation and contextualization. In one moment, a saying can mean

many things, giving the speaker plausible deniability. And much in the manner that

Machiavellian rhetoric self-legitimizes its own lexicon to the detriment of the Stoic

contingent, so too do Machiavellian spectators legitimize their interpretations of action.

While the maxims offered up by Stoic figures present abstract notions such as

virtue and fortune as if their meaning is universal and fixed, Machiavellians exploit the

very ambiguity and contingency of such terms in order to avoid taking responsibility for

the policies they promote. In perhaps the most memorable scene of Machiavellian advice-

giving, Tiberius asks Sejanus whether cruel, underhanded policies will affect his grip on

power. Fully one third of the lines in this counsel dialogue are marked in the quarto text

with gnomic pointing (thirty-nine lines in all), underscoring the scene's importance. The

entire conversation is about Tiberius's policies, but nowhere are such specific terms used.

Instead, questions are posed in the abstract—"When the master prince/ Of all the world,

Sejanus, saith he fears, / Is it not fatal?" (2.165-167)—and Sejanus's responses employ

metaphor or simply avoid stating the subject of the conversation, referring to "those"

(2.167), "he" (2.168), "the prince" (2.178), or "wolves" (2.273). Notably, the focus of the

conversation is quite different from the Stoic *sententiae* lamenting the state of the age or

the devaluation of virtue, which are general complaints without a specific but

unacknowledged referent. Here, however, the lack of clarification deliberately eschews

linking these policies to Tiberius himself, and is ultimately a way of avoiding culpability.

Virtues such as "faith, love, piety" (2.177) are situationally determined. That is, their

value must be weighed against the metrics of power that shift from moment to moment. Hence, the form of the sentence lends itself equally well to Machiavellian rhetorical contingency.

The same scene of advice-giving demonstrates the way that the balance of power shifts from moment to moment. When Tiberius asks, "Are rites / Of faith, love, piety, to be trod down? / Forgotten? And made vain?" (2.175-177), Sejanus responds, "All for a crown" (2.177). The enjambment here demonstrates the extent to which Sejanus has played into Tiberius's hands. By finishing the line and completing the rhyme, Sejanus implicitly authorizes Tiberius's cruelty while simultaneously taking responsibility for it. That Tiberius has planned this all along becomes evident when he reveals his "true intent" to Sejanus. Tiberius explains,

> We can no longer
>
> Keep on our mask to thee, our dear Sejanus;
>
> Thy thoughts are ours, in all, and we but proved
>
> Their voice, in our designs, which by assenting
>
> Hath more confirmed us. (2.278-282)

Tiberius claims that this is a moment of authenticity where he can reveal his inmost motives. However, Sejanus is the one with designs on the emperorship whom Tiberius must put down through the very methods he promotes. Tiberius has not ceased to act, but has instead replaced one "mask" with another.[254] He, like Latiaris with Sabinus, adopts a

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[254] Cave et al., *Ben Jonson and the Theatre* contextualizes Tiberius's behavior in terms of a trend in Jonsonian depictions of disguise: "Acting for Jonson meant impersonation to the fullest degree; none of his disguised characters is ever detected until they choose to reveal themselves [....] Tiberius would not be the dire threat to everyone's security in

particular idiom in order to provoke a response from the speaker. In essence, the

Machiavellian performative mode entails a more versatile exchange between speaker and

listener. Other individuals become "tools" of fortune/ political influence in the sense that

dialogic exchange, which is usually a contingent activity involving input from both

parties, becomes a one-sided execution of the Machiavellian's agenda. The partner in the

dialogue exists to carry out the Machiavellian's will.

Jonson's depiction of Machiavellian rhetoric here and throughout the play

suggests a sustained interest in Machiavelli's "rhetorical politics." According to Victoria

Kahn, Machiavellian rhetorical politics transformed the humanist rhetorical practice of

*argumentem in utramque partem* into "a rhetoric that could generate compelling political

arguments for republicanism from within a critical analysis of the status quo."[255] In

essence, Machiavelli's rhetoric is as adaptable as his politics; the Machiavel is able to

manage contingency through both flexible policy and rhetoric. Interpretive ability is

paramount in these circumstances. Machiavelli examines situations from multiple

perspectives not to strengthen one argument by appearing to give credence to another, but

because the methods of republicanism and autocratic governments alike were to be

analyzed in the context of their advantages and disadvantages in different circumstances.

The perception that there were "two Machiavellis," one the scheming supporter of

autocracy in *The Prince* and another the champion of republicanism in *The Discourses*,

[Felix] Raab explains, is a nineteenth century anachronism that does not reflect

Machiavelli's reception in sixteenth century England, which was varied and complex, but

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Rome if his acting were overt: it is the total credibility of his performances that lures his
victims to disaster (59).
[255] Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric*; 58–59.

never "simply dichotomous."[256] While Machiavelli's readers may have adapted his works for one purpose or another, the varied responses to Machiavelli's works more clearly reflects his rhetorical skill in presenting the competing claims of different political policies rather than advocacy for one single method as the key to gaining political stability.

*Sejanus*'s Machiavels likewise demonstrate an ability to adopt to different rhetorical registers to suit their purposes. In one instance, Latiaris provokes Sabinus into treasonous speech by adopting the rhetoric of Stoic discourse, praising Sabinus for not being one who "follow[s] fortune/ And in the winter of their fate forsake/ The place whose glories warmed you" (4.117-119). Latiaris's use of the phrase "to follow fortune," also adopted by Lepidus, clearly indicates his attempt to coopt the discourse of Stoic resistance. The compliment suggests, quite simply, that Sabinus deserves praise for his constancy to the Germanicans, who have been maligned so much that Latiaris claims he is "ready to accuse the gods / Of negligence, as men of tyranny" (4.126-127). In the previous scene, Latiaris declares a willingness to forcefully "make" Sabinus guilty by whatever means (2.317). Having just witnessed Latiaris plan this trap for Sabinus, the audience must recognize the dramatic irony in his readiness to accuse "men of tyranny." Here, we see that the interpretive flexibility of Tiberius's tyrannical regime even implicates the theatrical audience in this process of attributing meaning of vague statements to particular circumstances. Audiences must constantly attend to the particulars of the theatrical scene to understand the significance of intentionally vague speech: Who is listening? How much do they know? Sabinus's opponents more

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[256] Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli,* 255.

efficiently respond to the flexibility of meaning, denying the difference between *finding* and *making* one guilty, a distinction "visible to the audience but capable of making no difference in the Rome we see on stage."[257] Stoic rhetoric, in contrast, meets the interpretive fluidity of tyranny by treating power as it should be, not as it is. The Stoics focus on escaping, not reshaping, political reality.

Much in the way that Victoria Kahn describes Machiavellianism as the advantageous leveraging of rhetorical contingency, political action in *Sejanus* entails the attribution of meaning to words and actions for personal gain.[258] The spaces of political contingency in the play are frequently the spaces of communication: overhearing, listening, writing books, circulating letters, delivering speeches, and so on. Throughout the play, the ambiguity of words and deeds creates an opportunity for one faction to leverage power against another. The source of the instability of meaning of language and action in these cases is the fracturing of "meaning" itself, which characters look for in a variety of sources: the speaker/doer's intent, the action/word itself, the impact on witnesses, legal responsibility, even the absence of word or action. The source of Tiberius's authority, then, lies in his ability to arbitrarily impute meaning in any of these areas, a luxury that his subjects do not enjoy. Asserting the primacy of one locus of meaning over another does not preclude competing claims—instead, it often becomes a tradeoff, where prizing one source means neglecting another. The political condition of *Sejanus* is one of contingency and interpretation, which the play reveals to be key elements of tyrannical rule.

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[257] James Loxley, *The Complete Critical Guide to Ben Jonson* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 60.

[258] Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: from the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton University Press, 1994).

**Action and Spectatorship**

In addition to being an elaborately referential publication, replete with citations of written authorities, *Sejanus* is also, crucially, a theatrical work. Ultimately, Jonson's depiction of the linguistic instability of abstract rhetoric provides a theatrical insight into the production of meaning, in which audiences play a crucial role. By this, I mean that Jonson not only shows meaning to be determined by context, but he also demonstrates how that context can be understood as a theatrical "scene," wherein agents ascribe or attach meaning to actions through coding, interpreting, disclosing, or hiding. This scenic understanding of meaning-making challenges the distance Stoic characters impute between the "good man" and everyone else. This distance, they suggest, is akin to that between actor and audience. However, the play itself demonstrates that that dichotomy is less clear than imagined: actors become spectators; spectators become crucial components of action. Their emphasis on spectatorship leaves little room for action for the Stoic characters within the world of the play. As Katherine Maus explains, "the prejudice against the Stoic as dramatic character arises not only from the demands of the theater, but from the Stoic personality itself."[259] The evident resistance toward acting in what Jonson calls the "Play of Fortune" renders Stoics within the intensely metadramatic world of *Sejanus* immobile and politically impotent.

In *Sejanus*, the interactions between actors and spectators, indeed the very instability of these groups, is an essential plot element. The terrifying aura of secrecy and espionage means that Jonson's examination of political power in *Sejanus* is "experiential,

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[259] Maus, *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind*, 33.

rather than simply presented,"[260] informed by the distinction between what Robert

Weimann has called "theatrical presentation" and "dramatic representation."[261] That is,

the portrayal of spectatorship within the play—its "dramatic representation"—informs

how we understand the position of the play's audiences, readers and spectators alike, who

are the addressees of "theatrical (and, crucially, literary) presentation." The consensus

among critical perspectives on *Sejanus* seems to be that its self-conscious theatricality is

a device designed first to make the audience aware of these spectacular contrivances, and

second to force the audience to exercise moral judgments in the framework of a play

where morality has become relative and all choices are equally unappealing.[262]

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[260] Cave et al., *Ben Jonson and the Theatre*, 35-36.

[261] Robert Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre*, ed. Helen Higbee and William West (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 193. The distinction between these modes of acting is an expansion of the division between *locus* and *platea* conventions described in Weimann's seminal work, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

[262] A number of people have acknowledged the impact that the play's atmosphere of secrecy and intimidation has on theatrical audiences. Dutton, A.R., "The Sources, Text, and Readers of *Sejanus*: Jonson's 'Integrity in the Story'," 192; Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 91 describes the play's impact on audiences as a version of the Brechtian "estrangement effect," wherein the audience, prevented from passively observing the actor's presentation of a character, becomes a consciously critical observer. McEvoy in *Ben Jonson, Renaissance Dramatist* supports this view, adding that *Sejanus's* estrangement effect "produces a further level of dramatic irony," which "elides the division between the world in the play [...] and the play in the world" in a way that "debases our moral and emotional involvement with the world in the play" (41). Cave et al. in *Ben Jonson and the Theatre* argue that the terror of Tiberius's Rome is realized "in terms of the audience's relation to the stage action," for example in how Arruntius's asides create "a degree of complicity [...] colored by covert sedition" and hence "a moral dillemma" emerges "between siding with an establishment that is evidently corrupt or joining league with a dwindling band of threatened rebels" (35). And elsewhere, Cave argues in *Ben Jonson* that Jonson's "mature dramatic style" owes to an "awareness of the value to the playwright of the technique of purposeful theatricality" that throws "into increasingly sharp relief the relationship of actor to audience" (32).

But critical accounts have often overlooked the play's subversion of both theatrical and literary conventions.[263] In particular, the play vacillates between representational action and nonrepresentational dramaturgy, resolving a tension between realism and convention. Weimann describes Renaissance drama as being caught between *locus* and *platea* staging practices: the *locus* corresponds to the drama's fictional setting, whereas the *platea* served a more ritualistic "acting-area" function.[264] Typically, soliloquies and asides comprise a form of *platea* staging, offering moments of unmediated access to a character's interior motives. But these conventions in *Sejanus* are constantly subject to appropriation by other characters: *locus* and *platea* constantly overlap with one another. For instance, when Arruntius comments derisively on Sejanus's fellows in the opening scene, Sabinus interrupts him, noting, "You'are observed, Arruntius" (1.258). But Arruntius seems unconcerned at this point, and taunts his spy: "Death! I dare tell him so, and all his spies: / You, sir, I would, do you look? And you!" (1.259-260). The lack of immediate consequences for his defiance here builds the play's suspense up until the spectacular moments when characters in Sejanus's camp reveal their true intentions and exact their revenge. Given the ever-shifting makeup of the play's internal spectators, those external to the dramatic world are pulled in many

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[263] In conceiving of the play as both literary and theatrical artifact, I am drawing upon the arguments of both Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Keir Elam's *Semiotics of Theater and Drama*. While Erne argues about how the publication history of Shakespearean texts make a case for their gradual acceptance into a "literary" and thus not purely popular, theatrical canon, Jonson's careful supervision of the publication of his texts—especially *Sejanus*— state the case more clearly. However, I want to make clear that use of a textual, literary medium (what Elam would refer to as "drama," in contrast to staged theater), does not preclude drawing upon the play's performative elements, especially given the prevalence of metatheatrical devices in *Sejanus*.

[264] Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, 74.

directions: they become witnesses to political subterfuge, implicated by the allegations against inactive characters, simultaneously drawn into and pushed away from the play's political dystopia, and finally asked to participate in the contingent, locally determined process of ascribing meaning. In this manner, the play's dramaturgy intersects with representational action: moments that seem to break with verisimilitude are in fact entirely legible within the dramatic world. The way that *Sejanus* portrays the volatility of speech within the dramatic world makes the subversion of theatrical convention at such moments doubly significant.

The divide between Stoic and Machiavellian factions in the play continues to assert itself in their different approaches to theater itself. The play's many metatheatrical devices can be described in terms of Machiavellian role-playing and Stoic spectacle.[265] It should come as no surprise that the protean Machiavellians move adeptly between roles, co-opting the language of their opponents when it suits them. And, consistent with the way that Stoic rhetoric emphasizes the stable universality of truth, characters such as Silius are reluctant to act at all. The way that Stoic philosophy demands the Stoic's detachment from outside events and the chorus-like manner in which Stoic characters comment upon the play's proceedings would seem to position the Stoic characters as a

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[265] Braden in *Anger's Privilege* holds that Stoicism depends on a kind of role-playing, detaching oneself from a role in the manner of an orator (29). However, this does not hold true for the Stoics that Jonson represents. Jonson's representation of Stoic resistance to role-playing is closer to plays in the closet drama tradition, wherein the refusal to perform in plays such as Mary Sidney's *Antonius* and Elizabeth Carey's *Tragedie of Mariam* is a virtue in itself. See Katherine O. Acheson, "'Outrage Your Face': Anti-Theatricality and Gender in Early Modern Closet Drama by Women," *Early Modern Literary Studies: A Journal of Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Literature* 6, no. 3 (January 2001), who argues that the closet drama's lack of action was an attempt to re-envision Stoic values away from masculine, active striving for virtue toward a liberation through the refusal to play-act.

kind of internal audience, at a distance from events. However, the slow dwindling of their ranks proves otherwise: the observers themselves are observed. When cognizant of this observation, however, they do not role-play or adapt themselves to circumstances. If anything, the Stoic "actor" is a static emblem whose role is most notably realized through his spectacular death. The effect of these different approaches to performance is to offer two perspectives on the role of the (meta)theatrical audience. To what degree are they embedded in the theatrical event? How essential are they to it? The violence with which the Stoic internal audience becomes a spectacle of noble death and the Machiavellians' smooth shifting between these roles effectively dramatizes the impossibility of pure, passive spectatorship. Although the Stoic ideal entails viewing follies of fortune from above, the play affirms that those who imagine themselves spectators are in fact implicated within society and subject to the very same forces they mock, a gesture which has the effect of implicating the theatrical audience in this atmosphere of conspiracy and secrecy. The play models different ways of reading "action" both within and through the play by depicting characters who conform to Stoic and Machiavellian modes of "action" and by requiring the audience to reevaluate theatrical conventions that dictate how we perceive stage-audience interaction.

For the Stoics, linguistic order is imposed by the speaker onto the objects of his observation. Lapses in the communicative process are the result of a failure of understanding by the recipient. This hierarchical relationship between speaker and audience comes about through a metatheatrical understanding of social groups: the Stoic sage's function is to observe social disorder from without as a spectator observes a play. The Stoic sage's higher-level observation comes about because he maintains confidence

in an orderly universe despite apparent disorder on a more local level. In order for there to be order, it has to exist outside of and above individual experience. The bind, then, is that Stoic figures in these plays are unable to observe their own observation, to see the way it displaces their own participation in both theatrical action and the contingency it entails. This view reflects what Niklas Luhmann calls the "operational theory of observation," whereby the act of observation entails creating distinctions, but also makes observers blind to the distinction on which they base their own observation.[266] Machiavellian characters in *Sejanus*, in contrast, seem more at ease with the inescapability of chaos, participating in "the overwhelming contingency and complexity which forces the system to establish an order that in turn reproduces the system's own disorder."[267] As I have illustrated, the rhetorical flexibility of Machiavellians becomes their greatest strength. The ability to fluidly inhabit multiple roles speaks to these plays' interest in not only a performative definition of identity, but more radically, a remarkably contingent sense of meaning.

The Stoic imagines himself capable of standing outside of the "world stage" and looking on as spectator: hence, from the perspective of one capable of standing outside worldly chaos, the possibility of imposing order remains. The presumed order of the universe, in other words, enables objective observation. The dramatic expression of this idea has had a powerful influence on Renaissance stage. "Stoic moral psychology," Jamey Graham has suggested, "furnished Shakespeare with a model of theatricality stressing the activity of the audience, making unobstructed spectatorship of one's own

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[266] Dietrich Schwanitz, "Systems Theory According to Niklas Luhmann: Its Environment and Conceptual Strategies," *Cultural Critique*, no. 30 (April 1, 1995): 156.
[267] Ibid., 155.

performance prerequisite for effective performance."[268] But this "unobstructed

spectatorship" is more of an ideal than a theatrical reality. The Stoic self is, as Gordon

Braden describes, "always more implicated than it knows in the conditions it strives to

transcend": the Senecan influence on early modern tragedy sets "extraordinary standards

for the self's ambitions" by means of a "rhetoric of psychic aggression that seemingly

allows a character to make himself and his world up out of his own words" even as it also

"invites a countervailing astringency—a more sophisticated awareness of the relations

between the self's ambitions and its grounds, between the speaker and the audience to

whom he will always be beholden."[269] That is, Stoic philosophy presumes a kind of

spectatorship where the performer is absolutely capable of effective performance,

creating "himself and his word out of his own words," but the irony of Senecan tragedy is

that the performer is always more beholden to his audience than he realizes.

The presumption in Stoic philosophy that perceived goods are in fact indifferent

to actual virtue creates a crisis of meaning in *Sejanus*: the Stoics' self-distancing from

external circumstances not only deprives the "good and wise men" of control over their

environment, but also radically undermines the equivalence between semantic content of

an act and its interpretation.[270] What is more, this crisis has an explicitly theatrical

dimension. As Reina Green describes, "dramatic speakers may have the power to create

and voice an identity, but the meaning ascribed to their words is believed to reside in the

audience who hears them, regardless of whether that meaning is intended by the

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[268] Graham, "Consciousness, Self-Spectatorship, and Will to Power," 268.

[269] Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 62.

[270] Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind*, 32.

speaker."[271] The repeated diegetic misinterpretations of Stoics' words and bodies disrupt the communicative process central to theater itself, in which "speech events" play a "constitutive role."[272] Underlying the confusion over the locutionary acts described above is a breakdown of what Keir Elam refers to as "co-reference," or the way that "references to the object [...] are assumed to concern the same entity."[273] Instead of an assumed equivalence of what constitutes "virtue," "justice," or "constancy," for instance, widely differing interpretations are forced into the same field of reference. Speech is "woven entirely […] with citations, references, echoes, cultural language, antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it and through it in a vast stereophony."[274] By distancing the good man from worldly events, *Sejanus's* Stoic philosophers ultimately distance men from agency. Characters' words and acts become subject to interpretation through competing paradigms: conceding that true virtue or power is not outwardly apparent— even the opposite of what it appears to be—breaks down the transparency of language, leaving it open to individuals' interpretations.

This Stoic distance from agency is not purely linguistic or rhetorical; it also figures into the way that characters describe themselves as theatrical spectators to the "Play of Fortune." Despite its strong political charge, Stoic philosophy seems committed to a contemplative life away from the sphere of action. This is something of a paradox within Stoic thought, however, as Stoics also emphasize the martial, active quality of Stoic constancy. But the Stoic achieves tranquility and freedom from the passions in part

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[271] Reina Green, "'Ears Prejudicate' in 'Mariam' and 'Duchess of Malfi,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 43, no. 2 (April 1, 2003): 461.

[272] Elam, *Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, 124.

[273] Ibid., 137.

[274] Roland Barthes, qtd. in Clark Lunberry, "'(Silence)': Scripting [It], Staging [It] on the Page, for the Stage," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 15, no. 2 (2001): 73–74.

by withdrawing from the world; he "advocates withdrawal to a place 'Above all Humane pow'r' where one can be unconcerned with one's actual surroundings, responsibilities, and possibilities."[275] Andrew Shifflet here cites Richard Goodridge's translation of Lipsius's *Discourse of Constancy* (1654), which proclaims, "And what is't that can harm Me now? I'm free;/ Yet by no Monstrous, taynted Liberty, / Above all Humane pow'r, secure and High / I quietly attend all misery."[276] And indeed, such professions are a commonplace in both Stoic philosophy and Renaissance drama. Stoic philosophy lends the familiar *theatrum mundi* trope a particular concern with spectatorship, with the ability to remove oneself from the field of action and its many contingencies. In *Timber*, Jonson envisions how "our whole life is like a Play: wherein every man, forgetfull of himselfe, is in travaile with expression of another […]. But [good men], plac'd high on the top of all vertue, look'd downe on the Stage of the world, and contemned the Play of *Fortune*. For though the most be Players, some must be *Spectators*."[277] In this metaphor, the Stoic spectator is at once deeply implicated in dramatic conceptions of identity and simultaneously set apart from the theatrical sphere of action.

The spectatorship of the *theatrum mundi* that Jonson describes in *Timber* acquires an additional layer of complexity when represented onstage. The "philosopher-spectator" Damon of Richard Edwarde's *Damon and Pithias* (1565) places himself above those around him:

Pithagoras said, that this world was like a Stage

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[275] Andrew Shifflett, *Stoicism, Politics and Literature in the Age of Milton: War and Peace Reconciled* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 39.

[276] Justus Lipsius, *A Discourse of Constancy in Two Books Written in Latin by Justus Lipsius*, trans. Richard Goodridge, Early English Books, 1641-1700 / 1618:20 (London: Printed for Humphrey Moseley, 1654), 159.

[277] Ben Jonson, *Timber:* 6–37.

Whereupon many play their partes: the lookers on, the sage

Phylosophers are, saith he, whose parte is to learne

The manners of all Nations, and the good from the bad to discerne.[278]

The irony of such a profession, of course, is that Damon is being portrayed by an actor

and is therefore incapable of the level of spectatorship that his audience enjoys. A further

irony, as Paul Kottman describes, is that in spite of this profession, Damon finds himself

ultimately caught up in the tragedy, revealing "the impossibility of separating

spectatorship from interaction."[279] The effect of such a moment, Kottman explains, is that

the "world stage" becomes no longer purely figural; it generates an ontological parity

between world and stage.[280] In addition to the blurring of distinctions between world and

stage, I would emphasize that there is a further confusion of the distinctions between

spectator and actor. Evocations of the *theatrum mundi* trope raise a number of ethical and

epistemological questions: does being a spectator foreclose the possibility of action?

Does equating identity with dramatic persona render objective spectatorship impossible?

Does the world stage metaphor fracture the possibility of consistent meaning and place

the exercise of power in the hands of those capable of redefining terms in their own

favor?

In light of his comments in *Timber*, it is interesting to find that Jonson stages the

impossibility of pure spectatorship in *Sejanus*. The Stoics' staging, where they stand apart

from events and comment upon action, reinforces their philosophical stance. Silius,

defending himself against charges of treason, contends, "All that can happen in humanity

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[278] quoted in Paul Kottman, *A Politics of the Scene* (Stanford, CA: University Press, 2007), 203–204.

[279] Paul Kottman, *A Politics of the Scene* (Stanford: University Press, 2007), 204.

[280] Ibid., 205.

/ […] I'am fortified against, / And can look down upon: they are beneath me" (3.325-330). Here, Silius places himself in the privileged position of spectator, distancing himself from his immediate social context. But almost immediately afterward, he transforms himself into a spectacle within that world: "Romans, if any here be in this Senate, / Would know to mock Tiberius's tyranny, / Look upon Silius, and learn to die" (3.337-339). Clearly, Silius fashions his own suicide as a model of a noble death in the Senecan tradition by directly addressing "Romans" in his presence, a term he qualifies as a marker of virtue. Limiting who counts as a Roman reinforces the sense that Silius's death—instigated by senators loyal to Tiberius—is a defiance of Tiberius's un-Roman tyranny. However, it also calls to our attention the futility of Silius's attempt to remove himself from his surroundings: even as he looks down upon the folly of others, he makes himself into an object for their scrutiny, a symbol of resistance to tyranny.

As Silius's death demonstrates, characters' professions that they are spectators to action are complicated by the fact that they themselves are portrayed by actors, and as a result the implied hierarchy of spectatorship over action cannot hold. Spectators are simultaneously also played by actors, and furthermore, spectatorship ideally serves as a means to learn how to act. In addition to acting as spectators to others' folly, Stoics are exhorted to become actors themselves as a means toward attaining the sage's virtue. Cicero, for instance, employs the *theatrum mundi* trope to suggest how individuals become virtuous by playacting: "The world-as-stage metaphor was already a commonplace capable of bearing diverse meanings, but Cicero uses it consistently to illustrate the Stoic point that ordinary persons *imitate* the good, that is, function as

imperfect representations of a hypothetical sage."[281] Imitation was an exercise whereby one strove to embody abstract precepts of virtue: "To follow Seneca was to be deeply involved in the problem of imitation, and to sense as Seneca does in *Epistulae Morales* that reading and writing themselves are best conceived as competitive operations of an individual's 'strength.'"[282]

The actor as well as the spectator, then, is a figure with affinities to the Stoic sage. The actor's imitative abilities furthermore entail a kind of detachment from roles that resemble the sage's dispassionate self-control.[283] Controlling the passions through reason in the struggle to attain constancy requires a degree of control. This inward turn has rightly been understood as a response to political impotence: the fantasy of the spectator of the "play of fortune" is that he doesn't have to be subjected to the power of fortune or contingency. Instead, he limits the possibility of being controlled by external powers (be they fickle Fortuna or a tyrannical monarch) by focusing his efforts on self-control, which has the potential to lapse into solipsism. Stoic spectatorship and constancy together serve as ways of reasserting order over a world that at ground level appears hopelessly chaotic. The fantasy is that it allows one to impose order from outside the system, but in reality, this entails a narrowing of the scope of observation, a willful ignorance of the fact that one is implicated in the very same system one professes to criticize and abjure. The tragedy of these Stoic figures is then that by withdrawing from the field of action, they lose control of the terms they attempt to control from the top down.

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[281] Graham, "Consciousness, Self-Spectatorship, and Will to Power," 249.
[282] Shifflett, *Stoicism, Politics and Literature in the Age of Milton*, 26.
[283] Braden, *Anger's Privilege*, 26–27.

The suddenness with which Sejanus finds favor and with which his opponents are condemned as well as how Jonson portrays many such momentous events through narration by other characters after they've been accomplished suggests how the contingent particularity of fortune, analogous to political favor, dictates the course of the play. We do not witness the details of how such acts as Livia's seduction, Drusus's poisoning, or Sabinus's suicide play out; hearing about them after the fact reinforces the impression that fortune can change in a moment. On the one hand, Sejanus is able to turn a chance collapse in a cave to his advantage when he heroically shields Tiberius, but on the other Tiberius just as quickly reverses Sejanus's fortune through a letter that shifts abruptly from praise to condemnation (5.600).[284] In the same manner that Machiavelli depicts *virtù* as both the means of acquiring and losing good fortune, Sejanus's cunning manipulation of circumstances raises him and condemns him in Tiberius's estimation. The innovative force of *virtù* is a double-edged sword. *Virtù* is both the means of controlling fortune and the source of the consequences of action, the means "by which men control their fortunes in a delegitimized world" as well as "that by which men innovate and so delegitimize their worlds."[285] This dichotomy is also evident in how Sejanus's attempts to wrest power for himself are both the means by which he rises to

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[284] The letter's rhetorical presentation is a crucial component of our perception of fortune's suddenness at this moment. Richard Cave et al. in *Ben Jonson and Theatre* argue that the letter leaves the hearers "wholly unsure of how to respond, which is reflected in the way the sycophantic senators alternately shift their places either towards or away from Sejanus" (71). Furthermore, Jonas A. Barish, *Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy* (Harvard University Press, 1960) draws attention to the prose style of the letter, which provides a counterpoint to Tiberius's duplicity in "the winding, shifting indirections of the loose period, in the casually appended 'thoughs,' 'yets,' 'excepts,' and 'howsoevers,'" that seem to endorse Sejanus in one moment only to condemn him in the next (142).

[285] Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 166.

become Tiberius's confidante and the means by which he loses that same favor. In the very scene where he seems to be most intimate with Tiberius and capable of shaping his policies, Sejanus sows the seeds of his own destruction. Fortune in these incidents has a very tangible presence felt in the play's rapid reversals of power and favor.

Sejanus's climactic downfall breaks sharply from the emphasis on verisimilitude and *realpolitik* that permeate the rest of the play. Surprisingly, his fall reasserts the vengeful power of Fortuna as deity, not as abstract political force. As Sejanus begins to realize that his grasp on power is waning, he participates in an elaborate ritual before a statue of Fortune. The stage directions in this scene are replete with citations verifying the historical accuracy of Sejanus's ritual for Fortune. Priests enter with offerings, trumpeters and flautists play music, ministers pray. After passing the libation of milk and honey amongst each other, they present it to the statue, who turns away in response. After witnessing such a precise, historically dense ceremony, to see such an obviously fantastic event jolts the audience into an awareness of the fictional contrivance and theatricality of the moment.

Sejanus seems to have taken it to heart that the personification of Fortune enables one to dominate her through bold action. He disparagingly calls her a "peevish giglot" (5.206) and elsewhere promises that "Fortune shall be taught / To know how ill she hath deserved thus long / To come behind thy wishes" (1.363-365). Unlike Silius's remark that the guards as metaphorical "hands of fortune" are powerless because they have no material impact on virtue, however, Sejanus's comments take literally the personification of Fortune. His proclamations about Fortune are not metaphorical articulations of the limits of human agency so much as actual attempts to direct Fortune and his relation to

her through the dynamic rhetoric described above. When Fortune doesn't seem to act in his favor, he psychologizes her, attributing his misfortune to "shame" or her "bashful" nature and "modesty" (5.207-210). The extent to which Sejanus carries the corporeality of Fortune actually creates ambiguity—why does Fortune act the way she does?—when such an intentional explanation is impossible.

The moving statue is an abrupt shift, quite uncharacteristic of the rest of the play, which otherwise features little in the way of spectacle (the wooing of Livia, murder of Drusus, and death of Sejanus all happening offstage). The moment might most resemble the spectacle of Silus's death in terms of being an unexpectedly active moment in a play full of narration of action; however, it differs from the trial scene in its break from verisimilitude. The extraordinary moving statue of Fortune is especially surprising given that other characters have frequently dismissed fortune as an artificial construction. The audience can easily infer that their disregard for fortune is entirely reasonable given our privileged understanding of how events like Sejanus's fall from favor are in fact the result of shrewd political maneuvering, not divine intervention. Witnessing the animation of a statue of Fortune as the culminating event in a meticulous Roman ceremony must then reassert the fictional nature of the spectacle, pointing to its theatrical efficacy as a manifestation of Sejanus's doubts. It is quite unlike Hermione's reveal in the climax of *The Winter's Tale*, where the event is at once wondrous and rationally explicable for characters and audience alike: our interest there lies in how Leontes' deliberate reading of the "statue's" appearance leads to a joyous reconciliation that all can partake in. Here, however, we receive no explanation within the play's fiction for the statue's miraculous movement, but we know that from a theatrical perspective it signifies Sejanus's doom, a

fact he stubbornly refuses to accept. Hence, the audience's experience is distinct from that of the characters onstage: the play within the world becomes more present than the world within the play; *locus* and *platea* are wrested forcibly apart.

Though inconsistent with the realism of the rest of the play, this climactic moment suits Sejanus's Machiavellian rhetoric that corporealizes fortune and figures power as a performance of brute strength. After the ritual, Sejanus continues to act in defiance of Fortune's disfavor, summoning his allies and scrambling for arms. As evidence of his strength against Fortune's trials, he recounts his successes in a long-winded, highly wrought speech. Each success includes a powerful figure, a "lofty cedar" (5.241) or an "upright elm" (5.244) whom he has "cut down" (5.243) with his axe. Sejanus figures his power here—and the evidence of his immunity to fortune—through the sheer physical force required to bring down his enemies one by one. The arboreal metaphor reinforces the notion that Machiavellian, literalizing rhetoric depicts outcomes as determined by immediate physical causes: notably, even those deaths such as Drusus's and Sabinus's, for which Sejanus was only indirectly responsible, are described as though he personally felled them himself. He measures his immunity to fortune according to whom he can physically control: "All Rome hath been my slave" (5.256); "All/ The fathers have set ready and prepared to give me the empire, temples, or their throats" (5.259–261). The zeugma in the last example nicely encapsulates how Sejanus takes more remote measures of power and reduces them to brute strength, the power over human life. The materiality of Machiavellian rhetoric stresses immediate, corporeal causes in order to suggest how

power (and fortune) emerge from action that responds to circumstances from moment to moment.

In Sejanus's final moments, we see an antiquated style of *de casibus* tragedy reassert itself. Here, Sejanus comes to resemble a character type, a lesson in hubris, rather than a fully realized character. In this type of tragedy, a personal plea for Fortune to intervene would not be out of place. What makes this episode so disjunctive with the rest of the play is the way it hearkens back to an outmoded, irrational, mode of fortune, one that looks to the fortuitous in the outcome of a single event otherwise inexplicable. Elsewhere, the play depicts a broader perspective of fortune as a more rational principle that explains how power struggles dictate large social causes, or how power legitimizes itself. The rift between this scene and the depiction of fortune in the rest of the play emphasizes the relative insignificance of individual actors within this wider "play of Fortune." While Sejanus's fall as an individual can be understood within a certain pre-rational, fatalistic narrative of fortune, his utter insignificance within the power structures of imperial Rome tells quite a different story. The society the play depicts, in contrast, is one governed by a more rational principle wherein fortune falls to those best able to manipulate contingent language to assert power. By juxtaposing these two modes of fortune, Jonson compels us to consider the wide rift between power as it is exercised and power as it is represented theatrically. *Sejanus* offers the attractive notion that the exercise of political power is akin to the willful struggle against the overwhelming power of fortune through improvisation and Machiavellian cunning. But by emphasizing the growing rift between the narrative of Sejanus's rise and fall and Tiberius's increasingly unassailable authority over the course of the play, Jonson reveals that what makes for

compelling drama is not necessarily a faithful representation of how power works—and that is precisely *Sejanus'*s point. In *Sejanus,* individuals become endlessly replaceable, subsumed within their membership within a larger polity, as Sejanus is eventually replaced by the even more ruthless Macro. The possibilities for amending corruption in such a world are limited by the overwhelming power of political institutions, which are capable of legitimizing and reproducing themselves through a flexible rhetoric of fortune.

**4. "I should questionless be fortunate!": Assessing Risks in *The Merchant of Venice***

A concern with hazard and risk permeates Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*:
from the uncertainty surrounding the casket lottery, to Antonio's ships, to Shylock's
contract. In each of these venues, characters search for a law that governs the risks they
face: might chance be subject to manipulation through skill? Might it favor those
possessing self-evident merit? Or can one determine an equitable distribution that
anticipates possible outcomes? The contingencies of Antonio's mercantile ventures and
Bassanio's endeavor in the casket lottery are clear enough, but it is less intuitive to
include the trial scene among the play's depictions of contingency. We are inclined to
think of the Law as the domain of unassailable certainty, but in fact the trial scene reveals
it to be more of a piece with the rest of the play's hazards than we might initially
imagine. Though these various subplots seem at first glance to be unrelated, the play
juxtaposes these disparate spheres in order to domesticate fortune, transforming its
sudden, dramatic reversals in romance incarnations into everyday encounters with risk.
When experienced in this way, fortune becomes subject to commonsense rules, its
uncertainty planned against and lessened.

Contrary to criticism that the play is insufficiently unified, the way characters
manage and respond to uncertainty ties together each of the play's various subplots.[286]
Antonio's ships, Shylock's bond, and Bassanio's casket all share a concern with

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[286] Herbert S. Donow, "Shakespeare's Caskets: Unity in The Merchant of Venice,"
*Shakespeare Studies* 4 (January 1, 1968); William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*,
ed. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge
University Press, 1926); Harley Granville-Barker, "The Merchant of Venice," in *Prefaces
to Shakespeare*, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946); Wystan Hugh
Auden, "Brothers and Others," in *The Dyer's Hand, and Other Essays* (New York, NY:
Random House, 1962), 218–37.

determining the rules whereby chance operates, or at least, some rule according to which one can act within a chance-driven world. Eventually, Descartes and others will develop a system for calculating probabilities mathematically to compare possible outcomes against one another. But Shakespeare's play looks to a number of other possible rules for taming chance. Antonio says he has confidence in heavenly favor to ensure his ships' safety, although in actuality he relies on his social network to secure his prosperity. Shylock, in contrast, practices a more risk-averse strategy of thrift, relying on the stability of contracts and the law to safeguard his wealth, but fails to account for the uncertainty inherent in the law's application. Bassanio outwits the seemingly arbitrary terms of the casket lottery, which actually serves as a test of merit masquerading as random chance. The other suitors fail because they imagine themselves subject to the irrational influence of fortune and therefore choose blindly. If chance is subject to some law, the play seems to suggest, that law is both variable and elusive.

Characters sometimes treat chancy elements of the play as though their outcomes are random, but at other times they act as though outcomes can be controlled by craft or wit. The uncertainty about influencing fortune that pervades the play isn't only a matter of whether agents can influence unpredictable outcomes, it is also a question of how they can exert that influence. There is a clear sense that fortune isn't purely random, but nobody can seem to agree about how to influence its outcomes. The play's blurring of chance, merit, and skill therefore comprises an important element of its engagement with law and commerce, where, in the decades prior to the mathematical treatment of probability, a cluster of traditions orbiting the central theme of fortune dictated the treatment of risk. Even as late as the eighteenth century, "Credit" assumed allegorical

status as a figure hovering between impartial benefactor and shrewd judge of merit.

Defoe describes her in precisely the same terms that earlier periods described Fortune:

she is "brought about by the interactions of particular human wills, appetites and

passions," "operating malignantly and irrationally," but "capable of recognizing 'the

stock of real merit.'"[287] Similarly, Charles Davenant says that Credit "'tis never to be

forc'd; it hangs upon Opinion; it depends upon our Passions of Hope and Fear; it comes

many times unsought for, and often goes away without Reason."[288]

Finance is clearly a crucial realm of uncertainty in the play. *The Merchant of

Venice* has strongly influenced critics seeking to understand the Renaissance's transition

into a capitalist, mercantile economy. The discourse of exchange that pervades the play

interests critics who note the "apparent commensurability of men and money" and the

blurring of the friendly, "gift" economy with the competitive, mercantile economy.[289]

But, given the play's persistent focus on the subjectivity of risk, which offers conflicting

versions of the sources of financial success, an account of its economics would not be

complete without an account of its engagement with fortune. Those who have examined

the play's treatment of fortune have tended to treat it as a holdover from allegorical

morality plays by linking Portia's performance in the trial to impartial Fortuna

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[287] Quoted in Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 453–456.

[288] Charles Davenant, *Discourses on the Publick Revenues, and on the Trade of England in Two Parts* (London: Printed for James Knapton, 1698), D3v. See also Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit*, 1–2.

[289] See, respectively, Marc Shell, *Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophic Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Engle, "'Thrift Is Blessing'"; William N. West, "Nothing as Given: Economies of the Gift in Derrida and Shakespeare," *Comparative Literature* 48, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 1–18; Ronald A. Sharp, "Gift Exchange and the Economies of Spirit in 'The Merchant of Venice,'" *Modern Philology* 83, no. 3 (February 1, 1986): 250–65.

distributing punishment and rewards.[290] But to treat fortune in the play as straightforwardly allegorical is to overlook the transformation of "fortune" into a synonym for chance, "neither a goddess nor a personification," but "a force of nature which man can check through timely preparations and appropriate measures of protection."[291]

In this respect, fortune as depicted in *The Merchant of Venice* serves as a significant precursor to modern probability, inviting a calculated approach to risk, but stopping short of providing any precise method. This quasi-systematic approach that nevertheless relies on a kind of moral code governing mercantile exchange marks the play's depiction of commerce as a midpoint between a medieval understanding of economy as a "matter of individual morality" and a modern, systematic approach to commerce through the science of economics.[292] Although the early proponents of probability theory dismissed fortune as a "vulgar error," we can detect shades of the methods of early probabilists prior to the seventeenth century in the ways that merchants and legal practitioners responded to the pervasive uncertainty of those fields. Such fields required decisions based on limited, incomplete knowledge of past and future events, and

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[290] Stanley J. Kozikowski, "The Allegory of Love and Fortune: The Lottery in 'The Merchant of Venice,'" *Renascence* 32, no. 2 (Winter 1980); Barbara K. Lewalski, "Biblical Allusion and Allegory in 'The Merchant of Venice,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (July 1, 1962): 327–43; Raymond B. Waddington, "Blind Gods: Fortune, Justice, and Cupid in The Merchant of Venice," *ELH* 44, no. 3 (1977): 458–77.

[291] Leonardo Olschki, *Machiavelli the Scientist* (Berkeley: Gillick Press, 1945), 37; Lyons, *The Phantom of Chance*, 16–17; Bennett, *Randomness*.

[292] Jonathan Gil Harris, *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare's England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) examines the works of early mercantilist Gerard de Malynes in such terms, 7. I wish only to add that even prior to Malynes' writings, *The Merchant of Venice* raises the possibility that mercantile exchange can be understood in systematic terms, even if it falls short of an empirical and mathematical approach.

so the lived experience of uncertainty as it influenced decision-making was made all the more important. Prior to a specific science of probability, there reigned a wide variety of attitudes about when, how, and how much individuals could shape their fortunes, attitudes which shape the central conflicts of *The Merchant of Venice*.

**Uncertainty, Equity, and Law**

Among the various venues where characters encounter risk and uncertainty in the play, the courtroom is perhaps the most counterintuitive. But as Francis Bacon explained in his "Maxims of the Law" (1596, publ. 1630), uncertainty was "the principall and most iust challenge that is made to the lawes of our nation at this time."[293] The most obvious way in which the law is tasked with confronting uncertainty is in reconstructing sequences of events when witnesses are unavailable or the reliability of their testimony is unknowable. However, a less prominent but no less significant concern is determining how to fit established laws to particular cases. Indeed, such was the very basis of the common law itself, the "application to particular circumstances of a set of principles or maxims which had their standards of proof in divinity, natural law, and philosophy."[294] Hence the success of such a system then lay not in the infallibility of the law itself, but in the ingenuity with which its practitioners applied it—an uncertain prospect, at times. In this respect, the Law is not a perfectly stable and infallible entity, but the product of a series of negotiations that make it subject to the uncertainty of fortune. Its application, if

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[293] Francis Bacon, *A Collection of Some Principall Rules and Maximes of the Common Lawes of England*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1437:03 (London: [Robert Young], 1630), B1v.

[294] Christopher Brooks and Kevin Sharpe, "History, English Law and the Renaissance," *Past & Present*, no. 72 (August 1, 1976): 136.

practiced inconsistently, could pose a threat to the very justice system itself.[295] The

question, then, was how best to determine and apply the legal principle of equity, whose

basis was the fair distribution of punishment or reward.

Portia's performance at Antonio's trial, wherein she adroitly uses legal reasoning

to save both Antonio's fortune and his life, displays a talent for *virtù* in her ability to

adjudicate between the general letter of the law and the individual case in which it is

being applied. Equity can be determined on multiple bases, so the way one pursues it is a

contingent matter and can even seem inequitable according to one's perspective. The law

of the state in Antonio's case calls for the pound of flesh to be delivered to Shylock, but

the law of God condemns such an action as tantamount to murder—a punishment

disproportionate to Antonio's failure to repay his loan on time. Portia manages to

determine an equitable outcome, nevertheless, according to both standards. The difficulty

she faces is that the terms of the bond, which equate Shylock's money with Antonio's

flesh (and hence life), are themselves so disproportionate as to make the fulfillment of the

contract itself morally abhorrent, if legally sound.[296] Still, to violate Venetian law by

letting Antonio off the hook is to set a dangerous precedent: "If you deny it, let the

danger light / Upon your charter and your city's freedom!" Shylock threatens (4.1.38–

39). Portia agrees: "'Twill be recorded for a precedent, / And many an error by the same

example / Will rush into the state. It cannot be" (4.1.220–222). Likewise, Antonio

laments, "No lawful means can carry me / Out of his envy's reach" (4.1.9–10). Antonio's

concern here emphasizes the way that Shylock is leveraging the law to carry out a

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[295] Brooks and Sharpe attribute this uncertainty to an increase in central court litigation that led to substantial changes in law and court procedure in Ibid., 134.

[296] Kieran Dolin, *A Critical Introduction to Law and Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 93.

personal enmity, which makes his case abhorrent to the principle of Christian mercy.

Given these legal and moral restrictions, Portia is tasked with using the law to both save

Antonio's life and punish Shylock for his bloodthirstiness.[297]

Portia appears to be a figure of impartial justice upon her entrance in the trial,

although the audience, aware of her disguise, is also privy to her clear interest in securing

a favorable outcome for Antonio (and, by extension, Bassanio and herself). Her question,

"Which the merchant here, and which the Jew?" speaks to her neutrality as a

representative of the law (4.1.174).[298] In her speech on the "quality of mercy," she

emphasizes mercy's reciprocity, apparent even in her balanced syntax: mercy "blesseth

him that gives and him that takes," and "We do pray for mercy; / And that same prayer

doth teach us all to render / The deeds of mercy" (3.1.187, 200–202). Her actions, too,

display a noticeable even-handedness: she subjects both Antonio and Shylock to the

precise letter of the law, and gives both opportunities to exercise mercy. The difference,

of course, is that the Duke and Antonio accept the opportunity to be merciful and spare

Shylock the harshest extremes of his sentence, whereas Shylock demands the harshest

application of the law. In this, he mistakenly imagines the law to be absolute, not subject

to the variability of particular circumstances and particular individual interests. Portia, in

contrast, is able to couch her self-interest in terms of impartiality.

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[297] The scene imitates a practice in the Inns of Court whereby law students would dispute a complex, hypothetical case and dispute the cleverest solution. This in turn became the foundation for many conflicts in Elizabethan drama. See Ibid., 80–84; Ina Habermann, "'She Has That in Her Belly Will Dry up Your Ink': Femininity as Challenge in the 'Equitable Drama' of John Webster," in *Literature, Politics and Law in Renaissance England*, ed. Erica Sheen and Lorna Hutson (New York, N.Y: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 100–120.
[298] Waddington, "Blind Gods," 471.

Equity, in this case, does not mean equal treatment before the law. Because of Shylock's outsider status, Portia is able to leverage the law not only to spare Antonio's pound of flesh, but also to punish Shylock for his un-Christian "envy." Portia applies a very narrow interpretation of the law to the terms of the bond, which allows her to use Shylock's insistence on pursuing the letter of the law against him. Understanding the pound of flesh to include no drop of blood and understanding the pursuit of the terms of the bond as an attempt on Antonio's life demonstrates how the law is flexible according to the interpretation one brings to bear on a particular case. In order to see the forfeiture of Shylock's property and his forced conversion to Christianity in response to his pursuit of damages of Antonio's default as the most equitable solution, we have to take into consideration the unequal treatment of citizens and strangers under the law. Early on in the scene, the Duke emphasizes Shylock's outsider status; his "strange apparent cruelty" is not only strange because it is exceptional, but also because it is alien to Venice itself. Likewise, when encouraging Shylock to be merciful, he explains that Antonio's losses are so great as to move even "stubborn Turks and Tartars" to pity, suggesting that Shylock is even more foreign than such figures. Furthermore, the law by which Shylock is punished applies only to strangers seeking the lives of Venetian citizens. Only because of his unequal status is the trial's outcome an equitable solution to the problem.

Although the theoretical basis of equity in geometrical proportions suggests that it can be determined with certainty, its application to particular cases, as this example shows, was far more complex. Aristotle's equation of justice with proportionality encouraged the application of mathematical principles: "Humans were capable," Joel Kaye describes, "of measuring and manipulating the world as geometers manipulated

lines and ratios—all toward the end of equity."[299] Equity, in Aristotelian thought, was the

foundation of both economic exchange and distributive justice: Carl Wennerlind explains

how "Money, for Aristotle, was first and foremost an instrument of justice, binding

people together and thus keeping society in tact. […] However, since all people are not

equal, nor are the products they produce of equal value, upholding the social bond is not a

trivial matter."[300] In other words, in order to maintain the economic and social balance

that equity demands, particular cases must be considered in terms of their own merits.

Equity was therefore a "practical science" concerned with yoking particular cases to more

general principles. Each individual case is exceptional in its own way, leading St.

German to explain that equity is an exception "agaynste the lawe of god, or the lawe of

reason, the which excepcion is secretly understand [sic] in euery general rule of euery

positive law."[301]

The yoking of particular cases to general examples in the law required prudence,

which in the Renaissance was also expanding to address questions of religion and natural

philosophy, as we have seen in previous chapters.[302] Because laws derive from general

principles of natural law and equity, but they are executed in specific, individual cases,

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[299] Joel Kaye, *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange, and the Emergence of Scientific Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 42–43. See "The Aristotelian Model of Money and Economic Exchange" in Ibid., 37–55.

[300] Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit*, 34.

[301] Christopher, 1460? Saint German, *The Dialogues in Englysshe, Bytwene a Doctour of Dyuynyte [and] a Stude[n]t in the Lawes of Engla[n]de, Newly Corrected and Imprinted with Newe Addycyons* (London: Wyllyam Myddylton, 1543), fo. 32v; James E. Phillips, "Renaissance Concepts of Justice and the Structure of 'The Faerie Queene', Book V," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (February 1, 1970): 111.

[302] For an overview of prudence, see Introduction, pp. 11–15. For a discussion of contingency and religion, see Chapter One, 68–70. For a discussion of prudence and natural philosophy, see Chapter Two, 85–88. See also Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment*, 65.

there is some room for imprecision and uncertainty to creep in: "For written Lawes must needs be made in a generality," William Lambarde explains, "and can be grounded upon that which happeneth for the most part, because no wisdom of man can fore-see everything in particularitie, which Experience and Time doth beget."[303] The necessity to act upon uncertain information in legal matters comprises a species of the problem of fortune in general, whereby particular case and general principle fail to align perfectly. Only through the application of prudence can one discover the most equitable solution in any given case.

The degree to which determining equitable outcomes was an uncertain matter becomes even more apparent when we consider its impacts in the seventeenth century. Loraine Daston in *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* suggests that developments regarding equity in contract law led to the formalized, mathematical approach to probability in the latter half of the seventeenth century. In the face of a "crisis of information" where participants in the economic system "lost intellectual control […] of the system to which they were bound," precisely because no numerical calculus of risk existed, quantifiable, mathematical hazard was viewed through the lens of moral hazard, wherein all risk is equally perilous and combatted through decisive ethical action.[304] The

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[303] William Lambarde, *Archeion, Or, A Discourse Vpon the High Courts of Iustice in England* (London: Printed by E. P[urslowe] for Henry Seile, 1635), 44; Donald R. Kelley, "History, English Law and the Renaissance," *Past & Present*, no. 65 (November 1, 1974): 24–51; R. S. White, *Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 53–54.

[304] Martha C Howell, *Commerce before Capitalism in Europe, 1300-1600* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27–28. Ceri Sullivan, *Rhetoric Of Credit: Merchants in Early Modern Writing* (Fairleigh Dickinson, 2002) suggests that, although some basic understanding of odds in gaming was evident, merchants didn't want to present risk in mathematical terms because doing so would detract from the merchants' self-presentation as high-minded individuals undertaking risk for the good of the state (58). See also

trend toward describing risk mathematically, most visible in the context of gaming and

economics, also owes a significant debt to developments in the legal system that sought

to apply the principles of prudence toward equitable judgment. This came about because

the legal concept of equity was imported into games of chance, wherein equity referred to

the fair distribution of stakes. Famously, the first mathematical treatments of probability,

by Pascal, were those used to distribute winnings in an interrupted game of cards

according to the chances each player had of winning should the game be finished. With a

means of calculating probable outcomes, risk could be quantified, no longer mystified as

subject to the combined influence of individual merit or skill, virtue or *virtù*.

Anticipating this trend, Luke Wilson has remarked on how characters in *The

Merchant of Venice* conflate what he calls a "technology of risk" with an "ethic of

risk."[305] The technology of risk, as Wilson describes it, is a legal and mercantile practice

that emerges in insurance systems devised to compensate individuals for injury and loss

of goods, which invites a calculated and careful approach to risk. The ethic of risk, in

contrast, rewards those willing to undergo risks without regard for the consequences,

those willing to "hazard all," as the lead casket encourages. Although we might read the

play itself as simply aligned with this ethic as inscribed on the lead casket—"Who

chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath" (2.7.16)—the gap between the way

characters talk about risk and the way they act to confront it suggest a more nuanced

view. Ultimately, the ethic of risk in *The Merchant of Venice* invites a kind of

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Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability*. Luke Wilson, "Monetary Compensation for Injuries to the Body," in *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism*, ed. Linda Woodbridge (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 19–38 describes how *Merchant of Venice* anticipates this trend, conflating a "technology of risk" with an "ethic of risk."

[305] Wilson, "Monetary Compensation."

"calculation" or shrewdness we might associate with the technology of risk, though it stops short of numerical calculation and instead employs the methods of the prudent "architect of fortune" described in remedy for fortune literature.

As the new science began to undermine the certain, static worldview of Aristotle, the mathematical understanding of justice transformed from one based on geometrical proportions into one based on relative probabilities. Unlike Aristotle's vision of the perfectly balanced, idealized systems of justice and economics, real world problem-solving required working within varying degrees of uncertainty that affected the determination of equity:

> Seventeenth-century natural philosophers, increasingly aware that the search for absolute truths was largely in vain, had come to realize that their efforts would be better spent looking for ways to navigate a world of radical uncertainty. This led to a breakdown in the strict demarcation between, on the one hand, *scientia*, knowledge and certainty, and, on the other hand, opinion, probability, and appearance.[306]

Rather than abandon the pursuit of equity altogether, jurists began to evaluate degrees of certainty in mathematical terms. Equity, prudence, and reasonableness formed foundation of early probability theory as thinkers tried to calculate equity in mathematical terms due to "the practical necessity of acting in the face of uncertainty."[307] Essentially, in the courtroom, judges wanted to be able to assess the reliability of evidence and testimony with a more precise metric: for instance, just how much more convincing is corroborating

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[306] Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit*, 86.
[307] Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment*, 67.

testimony from two witnesses than one?[308] Doing so would make determining equity

easier, and would eliminate the element of fortune from this type of decision-making in

any context: as Pascal explains, "The uncertainty of fortune is so well ruled by the rigor

of the calculus [the "*geometrie du hasard*," or probability] that two players will always

be given exactly what equitably belongs to him."[309] The methods for taming fortune in

gambling thus developed alongside efforts to reduce uncertainty in the law. By

quantifying the principles of equity as found in legal, mercantile, and ludic contexts,

moral hazard became mathematical hazard in the mid-seventeenth century.

    The most striking difference between the pursuit of equity in *The Merchant of

Venice* and in Daston's historical account is the greater capacity the former allows for

*virtù* to bring about an equitable resolution. Such a possibility is striking given Daston's

account elsewhere of the dogged determinism of the early probabilists, who were

optimistic that careful study could produce complete accounts of the causes and therefore

likelihood of particular outcomes.[310] In contrast, the Machiavellian *virtù* practiced by

Portia and others operates under the condition of uncertainty, when complete causal

accounts are impossible because of their complexity or because of the need to act swiftly

and opportunely. Portia embodies this quality of *virtù* to carry out the principle of equity

in a precarious particular situation. But Portia is not the only character, however, who

must act upon uncertain information. Throughout the play, in fact, characters employ a

variety of approaches that aim to either eliminate or reduce the potentially devastating

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[308] Ibid., 6.

[309] Blaise Pascal, "Celeberrimas Matheseos Academiae Parisiensi (1654)," in *Ouvres
Complètes de Pascal*, ed. Jean Mesnard, vol. 1 (Paris: Bibliothèque Européene-Desclés
de Brouwer, 1964), 1034; Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment*, 7.

[310] Daston, "Fortuna and the Passions," 26.

influence of uncertainty. Jonathan Gil Harris has remarked on the "uneasy but willing

subjection to universally binding laws governing transnational 'hazards' […] evident in

both subplot and main plot: just as Bassanio bests Morocco and Aragon while submitting

to the *jus patris* dictated by Portia's father, so does Antonio triumph over Shylock while

paying lip service to the *lex mercatoria* of global commerce."[311] I would contend,

however, that these are not so much instances of characters "subjecting" themselves to

laws, so much as examples of how characters leverage the law in various arenas in order

to insulate themselves against risk, particularly through contracts, wills, or even marriage

alliances. The "law," in other words, can be understood as a loose set of practices that

allows one to predict or direct others' behavior in such a way as to minimize the

influence of chance.

**Bassanio and the Casket Lottery**

We find another central episode illustrating how characters test the various laws

governing risks in the series of scenes that depict the competition between suitors seeking

Portia's hand in marriage. In what has come to be known as the "casket test," Portia's

father's will stipulates that her suitors will choose from among three caskets—gold,

silver, and lead—to win Portia's hand in marriage. Should they fail, the suitors must

promise to leave Belmont immediately and to never "speak to lady afterward / In way of

marriage" (2.1.41-42). The inscriptions inside the gold and silver caskets rebuke the

suitors for their overvaluation of the importance of material wealth and their own worth,

so the test apparently gauges the suitors' ability to look past surface appearances. In

addition to being the most unassuming in its appearance, the lead casket in its inscription

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[311] Harris, *Sick Economies*, 11.

also challenges the suitor to "hazard all he hath" (2.7.16). The letter inside reinforces the importance of taking chances when it announces, "You that choose not by the view, / Chance as fair and choose as true! / Since this fortune falls to you, / Be content and seek no new" (3.2.131-132). The inscription endorses two not entirely complimentary values: on the one hand, it makes the fairly conventional point that we should not judge by appearances, but on the other hand, it also encourages risk-taking, as if to imply that ignoring appearances when forming judgments is an inherently risky prospect. For Bassanio, the rewards are worth the risk, since his beloved Portia's hand in marriage comes along with her seemingly endless wealth.

This talk of "hazard" resonates with other key elements of the play, such as Antonio's bargain with Shylock, Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo, and the exchange of rings in the comic resolution. Hence, the casket test has been described as the "heart of the play's dramatic meaning."[312] For critics such as Joan Ozark Holmer, Lars Engle, and Mark Netzloff, the lead casket's endorsement of "hazard," which unites the play's depiction of commercial, social, and moral risks, makes it either crucially important or potentially detrimental to the play's message.[313] But something overlooked in these accounts—and in the very term "casket test" itself—is the way characters in the play

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[312] Joan Ozark Holmer, *The Merchant of Venice: Choice, Hazard, and Consequence* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 95.

[313] Engle, "'Thrift Is Blessing.'"; Mark Netzloff, "The Lead Casket: Capital, Mercantilism, and The Merchant of Venice," in *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism*, ed. Linda Woodbridge (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 159–76. Donow, "Shakespeare's Caskets." Luke Wilson, "Monetary Compensation for Injuries to the Body," in *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism*, ed. Linda Woodbridge (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), cautions that the play equivocates about the value of hazard, encouraging it but also emphasizing that one must not hazard too much (33).

describe the caskets as a "lottery" (1.2.29; 2.1.15), not a test.[314] Describing the three

parallel scenes with Portia's suitors as a "test" and not a "lottery" rightly identifies the

contrivance as a determinant of merit, but in so doing conceals the way that characters in

the play frequently conflate merit-based outcomes with the products of chance. The

lottery's moralizing inscriptions are designed such that only those meriting Portia's

hand—those with the skill to discern the riddles' true meaning—will be able to choose

correctly. But the suitors approach the caskets as if its outcomes are a matter of fortune,

and therefore at least partially arbitrary. The parallelism in the lead casket's proclamation

invites such a reading: the winner has both "*chanced* […] fair" and "*chosen* […] true"

(emphasis mine).

Shakespeare's "lottery" appeared shortly before public lotteries became

something of a craze across Europe, attracting fortune hunters from all walks of life.

Lotteries' earlier commercial success as a means for merchants to unload unsold goods

seems to have made it an appealing way of levying taxes without raising public ire. In the

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[314]Several critical accounts do mention the caskets as a "lottery," although frequently without examining the implications of the term.  Richard Henze, "Which Is the Merchant Here? And Which the Jew?," *Criticism* 16, no. 4 (October 1, 1974) notes it is a lottery (294), but does so to emphasize the omnipresent influence of fortune and chance. Raymond B. Waddington, "Blind Gods: Fortune, Justice, and Cupid in The Merchant of Venice," *ELH* 44, no. 3 (1977) discusses the lottery as something capable of distinguishing between those who think that fortune is merited or tricked (Morocco, Arragon) and those who trust in divine providence (Bassanio) (465). Waddington's argument builds on that of Barbara K. Lewalski, "Biblical Allusion and Allegory in 'The Merchant of Venice,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (July 1, 1962), which links Bassanio's willingness to undergo hazard in the casket test to the characteristics of true Christian love (335-336). Another allegorical reading, Stanley J. Kozikowski, "The Allegory of Love and Fortune: The Lottery in 'The Merchant of Venice,'" *Renascence* 32, no. 2 (Winter 1980) sees Portia as a figure for Fortune, dispensing gifts seemingly arbitrarily to those who seek to "cozen fortune" with "the stamp of merit, " but changing the rules to recognize Bassanio's merit when he shows himself willing to undergo "hazard" (107-112). The reading neglects to recognize the contradictions between chance and merit inherent in the tradition of Fortune itself, however.

early seventeenth century, they would even be used to raise funds for the Virginia

colony.[315] But they were not an immediate hit: Elizabethans regarded the earliest public

lotteries with superstition and suspicion. England's first lottery in 1567–9 struggled to

find enough investors to cover its costs: it seems the public was not convinced that the

outcomes would be truly impartial.[316] Additionally, the "poesies" that participants wrote

as identifying tags for their tickets reveal a quasi-superstitious association between the

lottery and the gifts of Fortune, not dissimilar to Arragon and Morocco's invocations of

the goddess: "If Fortune be froward my Angell is gone, / But if Fortune be frendly with

encrease it cometh home"; "As salt by kind gives things their savour, / So hap doth hit

where fate doth favor"; "*fortuna an sorte nec curo forsan an forte.*"[317] Not only is the

public's approach to chance in these situations blind to mathematical probability—

namely the abysmal odds of getting a decent return on an investment in lottery tickets—

but it also displays marked imprecision about whether outcomes are the result of chance

or merit. "Fortune" itself can imply both random outcomes (consider Boethius's wheel,

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[315] John Ashton, *A History of English Lotteries* (London: The Leadenhall Press, 1893), 28–29, http://archive.org/details/cu31924030209260.

[316] According to Cecil L'Estrange Ewen, *Lotteries and Sweepstakes: An Historical, Legal, and Ethical Survey of Their Introduction, Suppression, and Re-Establishment in the British Isles* (London: Heath Cranton Ltd., 1932), because of low participation rates, Elizabeth had to extend deadlines multiple times and dispatch a number of officers to drum up participation: "notwithstanding royal auspices, five proclamations, pursuivants and surveyors scouring the country, the organization of the mayors, and official exertions for over a year, sold fewer than 34,000 tickets at 10s each [despite projected sales of 400,000]" (63). See also Gary Hicks, *Fate's Bookie: How the Lottery Shaped the World* (The History Press, 2009); Ashton, *A History of English Lotteries*.

[317] "Perhaps by fortune, or luck, and not by care or fate" (my translation). Alfred John Kempe, ed., "Prises Drawen in the Lottery, from the Xvi to the Xxvi Day of February," in *The Loseley Manuscripts: Manuscripts and Other Rare Documents, Illustrative of Some of the More Minute Particulars of English History, Biography, and Manners, from the Reign of Henry VIII, to that of James I., Preserved in the Muniment Room of James More Molyneux, Esq. at Loseley House, in Surrey ... Now First Edited, with Notes* (London: J. Murray, 1836), 207–15.

for instance) and merit- or skill-based outcomes (e.g., "Fortune favors the bold").
Ambiguity about the various means by which Fortune distributes rewards, including
virtue and *virtù*, hence found its way into attitudes about lotteries. *The Merchant of
Venice* exploits such ambiguity in the "lottery" of the caskets in order to fashion its
depiction of commerce into a quasi-moralistic rather than a purely random and impartial,
worldview.

A look at the source materials for *The Merchant of Venice* reveals how the play
deliberately obfuscates the distinction between agency and chance. Shakespeare's play in
particular creates the appearance that chance determines outcomes even while characters
attempt—sometimes successfully—to work events to their own advantage. It therefore
becomes unclear whether the lottery's outcomes are a matter of chance or of some
combination of skill and merit. The "casket lottery" as such does not appear in *Il
Pecorone*, the main source material, which otherwise contains all of the play's basic plot
points—the pound of flesh leveraged to woo the lady, the trial scene, and the exchange of
rings.[318] Its romantic plot is a test not of the hero's virtue, but of his powers of
subversion. In lieu of the lottery, the Lady of Belmont in this version challenges suitors to
sleep with her or risk losing their merchandise. The hero fails twice after being given a
sleeping draught and so must go into debt for the third trial. On the final occasion, he
succeeds when a maid reveals the secret about the sleeping potion. In this case, the hero
has indeed "hazarded all," but he also doesn't seem to have done anything to woo the
lady or to suggest his particular suitability as a marriage partner (unless you count his

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[318] Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare: Early
Comedies, Poems, Romeo and Juliet*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (New York, NY: Columbia
University Press, 1957), 458–463.

substantial contributions to the lady's wealth). In fact, by typical measures, he doesn't seem to merit her much at all: he deceives his uncle into providing financial backing for his repeated trips to Belmont on multiple occasions and only wins by through the maid's underhanded assistance. This version of events makes the hero's victory seem entirely arbitrary, not a demonstration of his skill in successfully outwitting the conditions of the lottery or proof of his superior merit.

For the casket lottery plot, Shakespeare seems to have consulted other sources besides *Il Pecorone*. A survey of these reveals the degree to which Shakespeare deliberately conflates the ethics and technology of risk in his play by creating the appearance of a random lottery while retaining the moralizing tone of a test. The oldest sources, dating as far back as the ninth century, emphasize the lesson about deceptive appearances by asking the hero to choose correctly among golden caskets and ones covered in pitch and bound in twine.[319] The *Gesta Romanorum*, Bocaccio's *Decameron*, and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* also contain versions of this test. Gower's and Bocaccio's stories, however, both employ identical caskets (which a game theorist might call "equiprobable chances"). Logically, since there's no possible means of distinguishing the choices, these stories emphasize the arbitrariness of fortune rather than the hero's particular skill or merit.[320] The *Gesta Romanorum*'s version of the lottery, however, seems closest to Shakespeare's, since its heroine must choose between gold, silver, and

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[319] Ibid., 458.

[320] In Bocaccio's version, a King orders his advisor to choose between two identical coffins, one of which contains soil and the other which contains his crown and scepter. When the counselor chooses the one with soil, the King treats it as a lesson about Fortune, which distributes gifts irrespective of merit: "You can well see, Sir Ruggieri, that what I told you about Fortune was true. But indeed your worth is such that I must oppose her on your behalf. […] That chest which Fortune took from you shall be yours in spite of her" cited in Ibid., 1:459.

lead caskets with inscriptions promising "what many men desire," "as much as he deserves," and "what God hath disposed," respectively.[321] In this case, however, the lead casket's promise of the gifts of providence seems to dismiss the possibility that chance has any role in the outcome of this test. Instead, the heroine's willing submission to providence marks her as one who deserves to win.

In Shakespeare's version of the casket lottery, the results appear to be neither wholly a product of arbitrary chance nor the product of characters' virtue or ingenuity. Characters in the play display significant confusion about whether or how they might affect the lottery's outcomes. From Portia's perspective, the lottery as a mechanism for determining her spouse appears arbitrary, since she has no say over its results. Describing the terms of the lottery, she laments, "O me, the word 'choose!' I may neither choose whom I would nor refuse whom I dislike; so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father" (1.2.22–25). The power of choice is invested entirely in the lottery, which she nevertheless seems confident that its "choice" will reflect the "will"—in both contractual and volitional senses—of her father. Thus, she explains to her suitor, the Prince of Morocco, that "the lott'ry of my destiny / Bars me the right of voluntary choosing" before assuring him that he stands "as fair / As any comer," at least in the sense that the lottery is an impartial test (2.1.15-16, 20-21). Morocco himself also treats the test as if its outcomes were random with no regard for his particular merit: he comes to "try [his] fortune" (2.1.24), and worries that "If Hercules and Lichas play at dice / Which is the better man, the greater throw / May turn by fortune from the weaker hand" (2.1.32-34). That is, in a game of equally probable outcomes, one unworthy may by

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[321] Ibid., 1:460.

chance succeed where a more worthy opponent fails. He fails to recognize here, however, that the choice of the caskets does not entail   equiprobable outcomes. Arragon, likewise, initially imagines the outcome of the lottery as similarly random: he pleads, "Fortune now / To my heart's hope!" (2.9.19-20), and speaks of the "fortune of my choice" (2.9.15) as if fortune, and not the chooser, were responsible for the outcome.

If the caskets were indistinguishable from one another, the odds of winning would be pretty good—each suitor would have a one in three chance of choosing the correct casket. But this "lottery" does not operate through random chance; it operates through a test of virtue preordained by Portia's absent father. When Nerissa first introduces the concept, she assures Portia that her father cleverly designed the test so that "who chooses his meaning chooses you" and confidently asserts that the correct casket "will no doubt never by chosen by any rightly but one who you shall rightly love" (1.2.30-33). Puzzlingly, the suitors themselves, despite their pleas to Fortune, imagine themselves capable of influencing the outcomes by cunning or by force. Morocco boasts about the feats of bravery he would perform to win Portia, but is cowed by the inscription on the lead casket exhorting him to "hazard" bravely: "This casket threatens," he complains (2.7.18). Furthermore, he fails to recognize himself in the description of the lead casket: "Men that hazard all / Do it in hope of fair advantages" (2.7.18-19). Arragon, too, reveals confusion over whether Fortune rewards merit in these circumstances: "who shall go about / To cozen fortune, and be honorable / Without the stamp of merit? (2.9.37-39). Being able to deceive or subvert fortune's will, in other words, is a sign that one deserves to win, as proven by the caskets' test of the suitors' skill. Portia makes the folly of this contradiction clear when she declares, "O, these deliberate fools, when they do choose, /

They have the wisdom by their wit to lose" (2.9.80-81). Their deliberate miscalculation, she suggests, is even worse than accidental error: because they think to outsmart the terms of the contest—to "cozen fortune"—it is all the worse when they fail.

Together, these scenes evince notable confusion about the nature of this so-called "lottery": Portia treats it as an impartial decider of her fate, Morocco and Arragon alternately think of it as an impartial contest and a determinant of merit (overestimating their own merit in the process), and Nerissa sounds assured that it is purely a contest of merit and not chance. Why, then, call it a "lottery" at all? What is the value of creating the appearance of impartiality if in fact the odds are weighted differently for different suitors so that only the right one can win? I suggest that the blurred lines between merit and chance are precisely the point of this lottery, since it serves to mystify the causes of one's successes and failures, allowing one to overstate one's responsibility for the former and downplay it for the latter. The lottery sublimates anxiety that these matters are subject to chance by presenting a contrived spectacle of chance whose outcome is rigged in favor of the most "worthy" suitor, however that may be determined. Insofar as it determines one's ability to outsmart fortune and thereby influence its seemingly arbitrary outcomes through skill, the lottery resembles Antonio's mercantile ventures. In neither case, however, do characters have access to a means of calculating risk mathematically. In the absence of a system for weighing and comparing probable outcomes, characters employ different determinants of merit, including guile, "thrift," and virtue, in an attempt to influence uncertain outcomes in their favor.

Much like Portia in Antonio's trial, Bassanio uses his prudence and pragmatism to overcome hazard in his "venture" for Portia's hand. His careful exploitation of the

blurred distinction between chance, skill, and merit sets him apart from the other suitors. Given how much is made of Bassanio's correct choice of the lead casket, it is interesting to note that Bassanio's analysis of the caskets doesn't make any reference to its inscription at all—or to any of the caskets' inscriptions, for that matter. Instead of determining where he fits into the caskets' inscriptions, Bassanio's skill lies in penetrating the terms of the lottery itself. He judges the caskets purely on the basis of their appearance, correctly recognizing that the least showy is the most worthy. Hence, he employs a process of elimination, dismissing the gold and silver caskets together as overly superficial: "So may the outward shows be least themselves: / The world is still deceived with ornament / […] Therefore, thou gaudy gold, / Hard food for Midas, I will none of thee; / Nor none of thee, thou pale and common drudge / 'Tween man and man" (3.2.73-104). All this can be gleaned merely from looking at the caskets themselves: one of these things is not like the others. In contrast to the other suitors who discuss each inscription in turn, Bassanio perceives the core ethical premise of the test itself, acting upon its moral lesson without performing the exegesis that it demands. He succeeds by working outside of the parameters set by the casket lottery (i.e. reading and interpreting the caskets' inscriptions), by acting in accordance with the lead casket's description without explicitly remarking on it. (In contrast, Shylock's insistence on having his bond and unwillingness to adapt to the changing tides of the trial mark him for failure by this same metric.) Bassanio's methods employ a Machiavellian "ethics of consequences" that focus on the successful outcome, rather than an "ethics of principles" that would consider the value that each casket endorses.[322] What Bassanio exercises in this performance is

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[322] Garver, *Machiavelli and the History of Prudence*, 15.

*virtù*, the ability to seize opportunities when confronted with hazard. For all their talk of "cozening fortune," the other suitors are content to meekly choose according to the lottery's rules as if chance determined the winner.[323] Through Bassanio, the play endorses not hazarding itself, which could be reckless, but exploiting opportunity, which often seems hazardous.

Further ensuring Bassanio's success is the fact that he distributes his risks to reduce the potential impact of any losses. Requesting additional loans from Antonio on top of those he has apparently incurred prior to the play's events, Bassanio appears remarkably confident. "I have a mind that presages me such thrift / That I should questionless be fortunate!" he proclaims (1.1.175-176). He is so confident of his success, in other words, that his fortune itself is beyond question. Given that Bassanio is the one who reaps the sole rewards of this undertaking, it is strange for his friend Gratiano to imply that they all have won: "We are the Jasons, we have won the fleece" (3.2.241). Here Gratiano employs the same metaphor that Bassanio had earlier when describing Portia, remarking, "many Jasons come in quest of her" (1.1.72). Bassanio's success in the casket lottery isn't purely a tale of a lone genius overcoming the odds. Obviously, Bassanio is backed by Antonio's financing, but in addition to this, he also brings Gratiano along, and the two describe their excursion in terms of a joint enterprise, like that of Jason and the Argonauts questing for the golden fleece. From this perspective, it is easy to see why he was so confident when requesting a loan from Antonio: he had little of his own to lose. He gambles with others' stakes, but is the sole beneficiary of his success.

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[323] Holmer, *Choice, Hazard, and Consequence*, 103–109. According to Holmer, Morocco reveals his weakness "when he misreads the test as a game of chance and not merit. The consequence of his choice is foreshadowed by his reliance on 'blind fortune' (2.1.36)."

Reading the golden fleece venture as a providentialist narrative, Raymond Waddington has suggested that Bassanio's pursuit of Portia required divine intervention: "In romantic venturing, as in commercial venturing, one risks all to gain all, succeeding only 'by helpe of power deuine.'"[324] But to limit the reading of the fleece story to such providential terms is to ignore its association with national mercantile ventures as collective endeavors. Bassanio's participation as part of a group of adventurers adds an additional layer of complexity to his role as practitioner of Machiavellian *virtù*. As a member of a group, Bassanio does not simply bring about a favorable outcome solely by his own merit; he displaces the potential losses onto his friend Antonio. Viewed from this perspective, any association of financial success with the hand of providence seems like a contrivance to justify such success after the fact, and less important than the way collectivizing risk constitutes an effective strategy for minimizing loss. Bassanio's performance in the wooing of Portia approaches risk as something potentially mitigated by strategy; however, the methods he employs hover between proto-capitalist risk distribution and opportunism and pre-capitalist leveraging of *virtù* to turn hazards to his advantage. In this way, he embodies a midpoint between moral risk, wherein all risk is viewed as equally hazardous and combatted through decisive ethical action, and technical risk, wherein risks can be precisely weighed against one another and diminished through careful strategy.

**Financial Ventures: Antonio and Shylock's "Thrift"**

A similar collectivization of risk and creative interpretation of the letter of the law ensured the success of Shakespeare's own acting company, whose fortunes as a joint

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[324] Waddington, "Blind Gods," 467.

stock venture, it has been said, informed the protocapitalist hazarding depicted in *The Merchant of Venice*. [325]  Commercial theater was a potentially lucrative business, but one that came with many risks: few companies survived for more than a few years, and many private theaters were constantly in financial straits. The threat of financial ruin was a defining experience of the professional theater at the turn of the seventeenth century. [326] Despite the Chamberlain's Men's eventual success, Cuthbert Burbage, who took over the lease of the Theater from his father, complained how "sums of money taken up at interest […] lay heavy on us many years."[327] "The corollary of collective ownership," Bart Van Es explains, "was the dangerous fact of joint liability": that is, members who entered into collective agreements often found themselves hampered by those very bonds.[328] Other companies were not so lucky: the Lord Pembroke's Men had an exclusive contract to perform for their backer Langley at the Swan, but when things went south at the Swan and the underemployed actors went to work for Henslowe, they were pursued by Langley who held them with £100 bonds. Acquiring their own permanent playhouse allowed

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[325] James Shapiro has suggested that *The Merchant of Venice* should be read as a reflection of Shakespeare's own "capitalist hazarding" in the London theater in James Shapiro, "'Which Is The Merchant Here, and Which The Jew?': Shakespeare and the Economics of Influence," *Shakespeare Studies* 20 (1988): 276–277.

[326] Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, were uniquely successful, thriving financially over the course of some fifty years; only three or four other troupes were able to last as long as twenty years. See Mary I. Oates and William J. Baumol, "On the Economics of the Theater in Renaissance London," *The Swedish Journal of Economics*, no. 1 (1972): 145; Gerald Eades Bentley, *Shakespeare: A Biographical Handbook* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 88.

[327] Quoted in Bart Van Es, *Shakespeare in Company* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 160. For a lengthier account of Burbage v. Eyllaerdt Swanston, see C. C. (Charlotte Carmichael) Stopes, *Burbage and Shakespeare's Stage* (London: De la More press, 1913), 132.

[328] Van Es, *Shakespeare in Company*, 106.

actor-shareholders to minimize the financial damage that chance events could have, but such risky investment decisions could also become burdensome.

The Chamberlain's Men and their chief rivals, the Admiral's Men (backed by entrepreneur Philip Henslowe) owe part of their success to savvy investment strategies but also, in some sense, to good fortune.[329] "Surely it was no accident," S.P. Cerasano explains, "that [Henslowe's] new playhouse was named 'The Fortune,' which alluded not only to the fact that the owners had pinned their hopes on the good favors of Dame Fortuna, but to the 'fortuna' that the investors hoped to reap as benefits, both in the area of London commerce and at court."[330] It is therefore unsurprising that theater entrepreneurship styled shareholders as "adventurers," who, although they distributed risk by sharing it, still engaged in perilous endeavors.[331] Although several notable figures (including Shakespeare) reaped great profits from their theatrical ventures, the system within which these ventures were undertaken was both unstable and undergoing significant transitions from a patronage-based system in which itinerant companies' sole assets were their costumes, properties, and playbooks and toward a system of speculative investment, where individuals disconnected from the theater purchased shares in a company in the hopes of reaping profits.

Part of the good fortune of the Lord Chamberlain's men was due to their ability, like Bassanio, to work outside typical channels and seize opportunities at the proper

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[329] Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare's Theatre*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 35.
[330] S. P. Cerasano, "The Fortune Contract in Reverse," *Shakespeare Studies* 37 (2009): 89–90.
[331] S. P. Cerasano, "Competition for the King's Men? Alleyn's Blackfriars Venture," *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England: An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism and Reviews* 4 (1989): 233. Ceresano's emphasis on risk revises E.K. Chambers' description of theatrical enterprise as founded on protection, cooperation, and trust.

moment. Before 1599, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, including Shakespeare, performed

at The Theatre. Its principal actors, who were also the company's shareholders, received

a portion of the takings from performances, but also shared their profits with the landlord,

Giles Allen. In 1599, the lease of The Theater would expire and, Allen claimed, the

building itself would become his, entitling him to an even greater share of the profits.

Until that point, however, the building still belonged to the company. So, faced with this

prospect, the company contracted a carpenter, Peter Street, to dismantle The Theater

(which had likely been built to be transportable) while Allen celebrated Christmas at his

country home.[332] They transported its timbers across the Thames to build the Globe, a

new, larger venue entirely the company's own.[333] Thanks to their creative takeover of the

theater, the company was able to re-establish itself on more stable financial grounds and

become the most successful, long-lived acting troupe of its time. Attending to the way

that various forms of risk were central to the theatrical enterprise itself allows us to see

how the rhetoric of fortune was not merely a holdover from long-since defunct theoretical

debates of the classical and medieval periods; it was the product of lived experience, as

risk was becoming an ever-more apparent feature of everyday life. Fortune, for early

moderns, did not merely capture the cosmic cruelty of whereby some failed while others

succeeded in life, it was experienced in minute, daily interactions and decisions.

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[332] Thomson, *Shakespeare's Theatre*, 37.

[333] An account of the founding of the Globe Theater may be found in James Shapiro, *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*, Reprint edition (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 1–9. For more on the court proceedings between Allen and the Burbages, see Julian Bowsher and Pat Miller, *The Rose and the Globe - Playhouses of Shakespeare's Bankside, Southwark: Excavations 1988-91* (London: Museum of London Archaeology, 2009), 90.

The experiences of Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's men in the volatile

theatrical market of the late sixteenth century find expression in their plays themselves.

From its very opening, *The Merchant of Venice* draws our attention to characters'

subjective experience of fortune and derives much of its dramatic tension from

characters' responses to such risk. The commercially minded world of the early modern

theater provides a perfect crucible for refashioning tropes such as the romantic "sea of

fortune" and Stoic providentialism into more quotidian encounters with chance. We have

already seen how Machiavellian *virtù* becomes a means for Portia and Bassanio to submit

uncertain matters to a "law" of chance, not yet conceived as mathematical probability for

calculating equitable outcomes. Portia's pursuit of legal equity and Bassanio's crafty

hazarding in the casket lottery both constitute attempts to manage chance through

prudence. The emerging practices of global commerce, visible in the professionalization

of London theater, are another key realm of uncertainty represented in the play. But in

contrast to the contrived outcomes of the lottery, or the legal constraints of the courtroom,

there is more of a sense that Antonio and Shylock's financial affairs are largely beyond

the influence of these individual actors. The consensus in the play seems to be that

"thrift" is a means of attaining financial success, but Antonio and Shylock offer markedly

different interpretations of the word, one which embraces risk, and another which avoids

it at all costs. The strategies of financial risk-management complete the spectrum of laws

for taming chance in the play.

"Thrift" appears throughout the play as a reflection of characters' intuitive

assessment of risk. Depending on how they understand "thrift," they either regard

financial success as product of providence or as a product of human ingenuity. Risk is

either something to avoid through prudent management or something to embrace as

essentially unavoidable, a product of the human condition. The sense of "thrift" most

familiar from our modern perspective is risk-averse, equivalent to frugality, saving, and

parsimony; risk in this sense is something we manage and control through careful

planning.[334] But "thrift" in this period can also refer to "prosperity, success, good luck, or

fortune," which implies that the outcomes of risky endeavors are essentially

uncontrollable.[335] This is why it is surprising that Bassanio places his "thrift" when

wooing Portia beyond question: clearly, he does not yet know the outcome of the

lottery.[336] Bassanio's thrift, it seems, requires a Machiavellian taming of chance in

contrast to the more providentialist moral of other versions of the test, a rhetorical

performance whereby his confidence in his own success produces that success. But the

main reason he is so confident of his success is that it is Antonio who actually undertakes

the existential and financial risks. Antonio, in turn, takes rather brazen risks both as a

merchant and as Bassanio's friend. Nevertheless, he appears confident that the outcomes

of these risks reflect not his successful risk management but his heavenly favor.

Bassanio and Portia both demonstrate a willingness to act prudently and take

advantage of uncertainty in particular situations, but Antonio displays a more fatalistic

acceptance of the uncontrollability of fortune. When it appears that he will be forced to

offer Shylock the pound of flesh, Antonio passively accepts the destruction of both his

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[334] "Thrift, n.1," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed July 9, 2014, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/201245.

[335] "Thrift, n.3," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed July 9, 2014, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/201245.

[336] Henry Turner remarks on the way Bassanio simultaneously treats his success as the product of cosmic inevitability and his own decision-making. See Henry S. Turner, "The Problem of the More-than-One: Friendship, Calculation, and Political Association in The Merchant of Venice," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2006): 428–429.

wealth and his life at the trial, musing, "herein Fortune shows herself more kind / Than is her custom. It is still her use / To let the wretched man outlive his wealth [...] / Of such misery doth she cut me off" (4.1.267–272). Antonio here imagines himself as the innocent victim of Fortune's impartial wheel, not as one facing the consequences of his own brazen risk-taking.[337] He looks to a higher power than the (temporal) law itself as the cause of his dejection, transforming the case from a matter of casuistic legal wrangling and into a deeper conflict about the nature of the spiritual contract between God and man: is redemption earned through adherence to God's law or is it received in spite of our inherent imperfection? In casting himself as Fortune's victim, Antonio refuses to see any distinction between temporal and spiritual law. By that logic, the same spiritual grace that ensures his salvation will also ensure the preservation of his worldly wealth (as indeed, it does). What Antonio does and the way he talks about it are starkly opposed. Even as the play endorses the opportunistic manipulation of risk through prudence, in the figure of Antonio it also moralizes these situations in providential terms.

In contrast to Antonio's providentialism, the idea of thrift as parsimony, or as success borne of careful saving rather than lucky risk-taking, is more frequently associated with Shylock, for whom "unthrifty knave" seems to be the ultimate insult (3.1.176). Shylock attributes his own success to his careful management of wealth, which he calls "thrift." He complains about Antonio's abuse, explaining, "he rails […]/ On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift, / Which he calls interest" (1.3.48-51). Shylock can only call his thrift "well-won" because he attributes it to his skill as an investor; the word here lacks any hint of luck. Clearly one element of this skill is his parsimony: Launcelot

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[337] Wilson, "Monetary Compensation" reads this attitude as a submission to providence that sets Antonio apart from the selfishly cautious Shylock, 33.

complains, "I am famish'd in his service; you may tell every finger I have with my ribs" (2.2.106–107). Shylock's admonition to Jessica to shut the windows and doors at his absence hits upon the same theme: "Fast bind, fast find—/ A proverb never stale in thrifty mind" (2.5.54–55). Shylock sees risks everywhere and therefore takes steps to avoid them. His (legitimate) paranoia about his wealth and his daughter here indicate the degree to which he is risk-averse.

These competing senses of the word "thrift" each imply different ways of attributing success—to luck or to skill—that in turn offer different perspectives on the very question of the ontology of fortune. These perspectives become clearest in Shylock and Antonio's competing exegeses of the story of Jacob and Laban. Lars Engle offers a detailed reading of the scene, explaining that Shylock understands the Jacob and Laban story as a "model for the relationship between usury and venture capitalism," whereby Shylock "suppl[ies] [Antonio's] needs and care[s] more providently for the money supply than the Christian merchants around him do."[338] But I would also draw attention to the way this exegesis is defined by a particular interpretation of the word "thrift" that emphasizes one's ability to avoid misfortune through prudence. Shylock emphasizes the importance of thrift when he explains that the trick used to breed "parti-colour'd lambs" was "a way to thrive, and he was blest: / And thrift is blessing, if men steal it not" (1.3.83-85). "Thrive," of course, is the verbal form of "thrift," and Shylock sees Jacob's ability to claim some portion of Laban's flock for himself as a fitting example of thrift because it produces prosperity not through luck, but through ingenuity. "Thrift is

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[338] Lars Engle, "'Thrift Is Blessing': Exchange and Explanation in The Merchant of Venice," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37 (Spring 1986): 31. See also Neil Carson, "Hazarding and Cozening in The Merchant of Venice," *English Language Notes* 9 (1972): 168–72.

blessing" only if it is earned, Shylock suggests, and "men steal it not." The exegesis reinforces Shylock's conviction that success is earned through effort, not granted by providence.

Antonio's description of the scheme as a "venture," which echoes Antonio's own financial enterprises, implies that it was a rash deed with a real possibility of failure, except that providence intervened on Jacob's behalf. Antonio rejects Shylock's reading of "thrift" as cautious acquisition when he interjects, "This was a venture, sir, that Jacob served for; / A thing not in his power to bring to pass, / But sway'd and fashion'd by the hand of heaven" (1.3.86-88). This providentialist interpretation of the episode leaves little room for Jacob's skill or ingenuity to bring about his success, and implies that "fortune" is simply another name for ineluctable providence. It seems that Antonio regards his own financial prospects in much the same way: when Salerio and Solanio wonder whether the sea-tossed vessels bearing his fortunes are the source of his sadness, he vehemently denies that such risks disturb him. Jacob's success as a venturer by the "hand of heaven" conceals the toil by which prosperity actually happens. Furthermore, by assuming that financial prosperity is the mark of heavenly favor, Antonio implicitly offers a backward justification for the Venetians' economic dominance: their wealth is a sign of heavenly favor because their heavenly favor brings about their wealth. Shylock and the rest of the Venetian Jews' participation in the market must be controlled in order to reinforce this mystification of the means of "thrift" in the sense of prosperity. That is, the play shows that allowing success to appear to be the product of luck or some other force beyond our control is a way of excluding some from full participation in the economy on the basis of religious difference.

Taken together, these examples suggest that the play toggles between these multiple senses of the word "thrift" in order to deliberately obfuscate the causal relationship between hazarding and material wealth. The fact that "fortune" is a synonym for both "chance" and "material wealth" reinforces the degree to which these concepts are interrelated. It is not only the case, as Theodore Leinwand asserts, that characters "act out a felt experience of venture and thrift" in the absence of "tools that could produce an accurate knowledge of the capacities of wealth, money, or capital."[339] It is also the case that continuing to mystify the mechanisms by which one accrues wealth becomes a means of safeguarding that wealth from competitors. The ambiguous attitudes toward fortune at this historical moment, wherein fortune can be either an irrational force that eludes control or an aspect of chance that can be mitigated and corrected, produce a similar image of market forces as simultaneously irrational and subject to deliberate manipulation. The question that remains open, however, is how best to perform this manipulation: through prudence, through thrifty parsimony, or through opportunistic risk-taking.

Although its existence as an objective phenomenon was called into doubt, individuals continued to refer to fortune as a way of capturing the subjective experience of risk. Attitudes toward fortune, practically speaking, borrowed from numerous sources. Popular opinion about fortune, therefore, hovered between two extremes, neither wholly "immanent" nor "transcendent."[340] This eclectic approach allowed that each individual event could be approached with a suspended hope that merit, virtue, or effort might

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[339] Theodore B. Leinwand, *Theatre, Finance and Society in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 120.
[340] See Introduction, 15–18.

influence outcomes, but a simultaneous recognition that some matters were beyond influence. As a result, the outcomes of particular events could be attributed to either chance or merit, depending on one's perspective. Furthermore, this confusion about the attribution of causes could be leveraged strategically by attributing successes entirely to merit, and failures to forces beyond one's control, such as fortune—a tendency that persists even today and is described psychologists as "self-serving bias."[341]

Clearly, merchants benefit from refraining to reveal too much about the sources and status of their wealth, and Antonio is no different. As the play opens, his friends Salerio and Solanio describe Antonio's ventures as subject to the volatile sea of fortune, but Antonio seems unburdened by these worries. Instead, he projects confidence that he has carefully avoided as much risk as possible by sending his ships to different ports and by retaining a portion of his assets in case the ships should fail. It is only when he speaks with Bassanio that we learn the true state of his fortunes, which do in fact seem subject to the very risks Salerio and Solanio describe. The opening of the play merges a mythical, romance *topos* with a practical, realistic depiction of exchange also mirrored in its primary settings, Belmont and Venice. The union of these two generic registers affects its depiction of fortune, which sometimes figures as a stand-in for providence, and sometimes as principle of (ex)change, subject to the manipulations of the market. Ultimately, this uncertainty serves to blur the lines between chance and skill: outcomes that appear to be the result of luck or heavenly favor are actually accomplished through savvy opportunism, such that characters approach "hazard" as moral risk overcome through virtue (or *virtù*). This confusion justifies the dominance of the insiders of Venice

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[341] Donelson R. Forsyth, "Self-Serving Bias," ed. W. A. Darity, *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, NY: Macmillan Reference, 2008).

and Belmont by implying that wealth is an affirmation of their superior virtue, whatever its actual sources may be. In the absence of a more precise account of how markets function, risk taking is interpreted through a moral lens.

The play, as shown by its treatment of "thrift," emphasizes intuition about risk over the precise mechanisms by which it operates. As a result, characters interpret the respective roles of chance and merit according to their own biases; no single interpretation of fortune predominates. "In sooth, I know not why I am so sad" (1.1.1): Antonio's opening lines convey the sense that risk is something one feels rather than something one calculates. Antonio's merchant ships undertake actual risks at sea, but also metaphorically figure his emotional state. Salerio and Solanio imagine Antonio's sadness to be a result of the precarious state of his vessels at sea:

> Believe me, sir, had I such venture forth,
>
> The better part of my affections would
>
> Be with my hopes abroad […]
>
> And every object that might make me fear
>
> Misfortune to my ventures, out of doubt
>
> Would make me sad.  (1.1.15-21)[342]

The space of "venturing" here is, as in romance, the space where fortune has most sway. Solanio's comment, which Salerio renders even more vivid with a description of various disasters at sea, imagines Antonio's "affections" travelling along the very seas his vessels

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[342] All citations of *The Merchant of Venice* taken from William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare, 2nd Edition*, 2nd ed. (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996).

do, subject to the same violent changes and reversals. Thus the "sea of fortune" becomes a metaphor for Antonio's supposedly changeable and sensitive emotions.[343]

But Antonio denies that his finances are the source of his melancholy, and indeed, he doesn't seem prone to the violent swings in mood that Salerio imagines. Instead, his approach to his finances appears to be more subdued and rational. "I thank my fortune for it," he explains, "My ventures are not in one bottom trusted, / Nor to one place; nor is my whole estate/ Upon the fortune of this present year" (1.1.41-44). In a very material sense, Antonio's fortune depends on the success of his ships at sea. Although his ships may literally be tossed upon the sea, this does not mean that his estate is subject to the same sudden reversals that one finds upon the metaphorical "sea of fortune." With this remark, Antonio conjures a very different sense of "venturing" as calculated risk. Instead of being subject to random luck, his ventures, and by extension his fortunes, can be managed through strategy, which here means distributing risk across several ships at several ports.

Even as Antonio assures Salerio and Solanio that he has carefully weighed his risks, it seems his confidence ultimately derives from his faith in providence. The way he "thanks […] fortune" for his relative safety prefigures his later willingness to submit himself to the fortunes of the courtroom. The more we learn about his ships, the more it seems that Antonio's willingness to endure risk is a means for him to express his devotion to Bassanio, backed by the assurance that heaven rewards such selflessness. Antonio remains confident in his ability to pay back the loan from Shylock, even as he

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[343] Raymond B. Waddington, "Blind Gods: Fortune, Justice, and Cupid in The Merchant of Venice," *ELH* 44, no. 3 (1977): 459. For discussion of the Sea of Fortune *topos* specifically, see Howard Rollin Patch, *The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna in Roman Literature and in the Transitional Period* (Northampton, Mass: Smith College, 1922), 101–107; Jerome S. Dees, "The Ship Conceit in 'The Faerie Queene': 'Conspicuous Allusion' and Poetic Structure," *Studies in Philology* 72, no. 2 (April 1, 1975): 208–25.

reveals to Bassanio "all my fortunes are at sea, / Neither have I money nor commodity/ To raise a present sum" (1.1.177-179). This stands in marked contrast to Shylock's careful evaluation of Antonio's cleverly distribution of risk among several ships on the one hand and the perils of sea travel on the other: Antonio is "sufficient; yet means are in supposition" because "ships are but boards, sailors but men; there be land-rats and water-rats, water-thieves and land-thieves, I mean pirates, and then there is the peril of waters, winds and rocks" (1.3.17–25). In other words, Antonio is worth extending a loan to despite the fact that his financial status is uncertain. Here, Shylock's attitude toward risk appears to be shrewdly calculating. In contrast, beyond distributing his risks among several ships, Antonio appears much more content to leave matters to be resolved by forces out of his control, including, perhaps, providence itself. [344] By "thank[ing] […] fortune" for the relative safety of his finances while simultaneously describing the actual means by which he has mitigated his risks, Antonio creates an equivocal image of merchant venturing as partly a matter of skill and partly a matter of fortune.

Given their centrality to the set-up of the main bond plot, it is surprising that the fate of Antonio's ships tossed on the sea of fortune diminishes so markedly by the play's conclusion. By the time we learn about their safe return to Venice, they have become

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[344] Richard Henze, "Which Is the Merchant Here? And Which the Jew?," *Criticism* 16, no. 4 (October 1, 1974) reads Antonio's confidence in his ships straightforwardly as an indication of his overconfidence in fortune (287–300). Wilson, "Monetary Compensation," 33. In contrast, Lars Engle, "'Thrift Is Blessing': Exchange and Explanation in The Merchant of Venice," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37 (Spring 1986) suggests that Antonio is playing the shrewd merchant here, overemphasizing his confidence (22). Joan Ozark Holmer, *The Merchant of Venice: Choice, Hazard, and Consequence* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) agrees, seeing the scene as indicative of Antonio's prudence (130).

entirely extraneous to both Bassanio and Antonio's fortunes.[345] Antonio seems to depend on their successful return in order to repay Shylock's bond, and Salerio and Solanio's periodic updates about rumors of shipwrecks—which may or may not be Antonio's ships—sustain the tension of this problem (2.8; 3.1). But when Shylock calls in his bond and brings Antonio to trial, the quasi-romantic form of chance visible in Antonio's ships tossed on the "sea of fortune" gives way to the more methodical legal fortunes of the court and the marketplace. In other words, the play constantly questions Antonio's self-assurance, only to reveal that matters fall out exactly in his favor. But the mechanisms by which his redemption comes about are no longer mystified by this point: the actual resolution comes about by dint of the concerted efforts of Portia, whose clever manipulations of the law outdo the seemingly impossible bind Antonio finds himself in. This resolution of the bond plot in turn parallels the romance subplot, whereby Bassanio subverts the strict terms of the "casket lottery" that Portia's father has devised to select her husband. In both cases, outcomes apparently subject to chance and outside the choice of individual characters prove more malleable than they first seem. The appearance of chance that ultimately proves to be subject to deliberate manipulation invites the possibility of a systematic approach to fortune without specifying what produces successful results.

While Shylock, Portia, and Bassanio each submit risk to a different sort of law, Antonio questions whether any efforts can influence events in the hands of Fortune. The only law governing such outcomes, he suggests, is heaven's. Shylock's prudent

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[345] Richard Henze, "Which Is the Merchant Here?," reads the surprise return of Antonio's ships as "one of a series of audience manipulations" that reveals "the larger drama of prejudice and mistaken trust in certainty that the play presents," 287.

management of wealth most closely resembles Portia and Bassanio's prudence, and yet it fails despite his best efforts. Given this resemblance, it is all the more surprising that Antonio's providentialism prevails. The contrast between the way Antonio talks about his acquisition of wealth and the way the play reveals its dependence on the concerted efforts of his friends suggests something more at work. Ultimately, it seems that those in positions of power and wealth are able to consolidate that power and wealth through prudence even as they speak about it as a marker of providential favor. A more precise account of the mechanisms of wealth and the methods of hazarding would sever this link between status and virtue, and would therefore be counterproductive, undermining their economic and social dominance. In the conflict between virtue and fortune, the play suggests, it is advantageous for those in power to exercise *virtù* while speaking in terms of virtue.

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