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THE MELANCHOLY MALCONTENT IN EARLY MODERN THEATER AND
CULTURE

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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The following study illuminates a set of failed responses to social and political problems sedimented, personified, and explored through the “malcontent,” a politically charged word borrowed from French politics that became a key social and literary type in early modern England. Much prior criticism has approached typology as a set of static signs to be catalogued; instead, this study traces the role of the malcontent in an evolving inquiry in England at the turn of the seventeenth century into questions of injustice, participatory politics, tyranny, and political stability. The end of the Elizabethan and beginning of the Jacobean eras was a time of great fear and anxiety, forging these questions of abstract political philosophy into matters of immediate, pressing concern. Attending to the historical and literary contexts of exemplary malcontents (both historical persons and literary figures), the study demonstrates that far from being a static figure, the malcontent was a flexible hermeneutic for syncretically fusing multiple discourses: much as Drew Daniel has described “melancholy” as a Deleuzian “assemblage,” the politicized malcontent subset of melancholics acts almost as a rubics cube for early modern thinkers to examine the confluences and consequences of shifting arrangements of ideas. Because

these early modern writers deployed poetry and theater as methodologies of political philosophy, this study, too, requires an analytical hermeneutic which views literature and politics as coextensive or co-constitutive, while at the same time reserving the paradoxical possibility that they might also be mutually exclusive. Therefore, the study adopts the frameworks of two philosophers, Nietzsche and Aristotle, who extensively considered the intersection of literature and political philosophy; using the parameters of these competing philosophical frameworks, this study develops interpretations of malcontent literary experiments from Philip Sidney to William Shakespeare that are in conversation with the history of Western political thought while remaining acutely attentive to their historical specificity. The purpose of this study is thus twofold: I seek to develop a deeper and more nuanced account of some of the most pessimistic literary thought of the early modern period, what we might view as a “negative politics”; and in so doing, I hope to provide the reader with reflections of our own moment of political polarization and anxiety, as well as challenges to some of our most cherished political assumptions, many of which emerged from the more optimistic writing of this period.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
Chapter One: A Malcontent Introduction	1
i. “To the Reader”	1
ii. To the Critics	7
iii. The dual origins of the malcontent	11
iv. From figure to character: The malcontent and social taxonomy	21
Chapter Two: Melancholy Philisides; or Trapped Between Action and Idleness	32
i. The malcontent <i>figura</i>	32
ii. Love is politics in <i>The Lady of May</i>	47
iii. “ <i>otiosi tam funestae tragoediae spectatores</i> ”: Idle spectators on a Protestant stage	53
iv. “Love to cloake Disdaine”; or, a Defense of Idleness	63
v. “in compassion of his passion”; or, Apparel and the Peril of Performance.....	76
vi. “feigning notable images” and other lies: An alternative theory of poesy	90
Chapter Three: The Spectacle of Despair in Marlowe & Kyd.....	103
i. The malcontent, the machiavel, and the atheist.....	103
ii. “ <i>totus mundus histrionem agit</i> ”: The melancholy world-stage	110
iii. Anatomy of a machiavel in <i>The Massacre at Paris</i>	120

iv. “Religion and Policy” in <i>The Jew of Malta</i> : Marlowe's immorality play.....	131
v. Malcontent theatricality in <i>The Spanish Tragedy</i>	144
vi. “Twixt these two ways”; or, Revenge as divine principle	161
vii. “bugbeares and hobgoblins”: The malcontent school of atheism.....	168
Chapter Four: Shipwrecked on the Isle of Dogs; or a Poetics of Oblivion.....	174
i. Archival violence & bodily inscriptions.....	174
ii. The topography of The Isle of Dogs.....	183
iii. “May still this <i>Iland</i> be call’d <i>fortunate</i> ”; or, a malcontent matter of perspective in <i>EMO</i>	193
iv. Testing the limits of Jonson in the <i>Epigrams</i>	206
v. “this laughter ill becomes your grief”; or, Democritean theatricality in the <i>Antonio</i> plays	219
vi. “bespurtle whom thou pleasest”; or, the antipolitics of dogs in <i>The Malcontent</i> ..	229
Chapter Five: To Kill a King in the Malcontent <i>Hamlet</i>	248
i. A most moral malcontent: Revising the received Hamlet	248
ii. “like gawdy Butterflies”: The metamorphosis of the malcontent in the Inns of Court	257
iii. “great <i>Foelix</i> ”: Essex and the fall of politic history	265
iv. “ <i>hic et ubique</i> ”: The spirit of melancholy in <i>Hamlet</i>	275
v. “the satirical rogue”: Method, madness, and motivation.....	281

vi. “is't not perfect conscience?": The <i>Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos</i> and Hamlet's tyrannicide	298
vii. The <i>histoire tragique</i> of Amleth; or, the comic sources of Shakespeare's “tragicall historie”	307
Acknowledgment of Previous Publications	318
Bibliography	319

Chapter One: A Malcontent Introduction

“Now for poets, rhetoricians, historians, philosophers, mathematicians, sophisters, etc., they are like grasshoppers, sing they must in summer, and pine in the winter, for there is no preferment for them.”

- Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, I.2.3.xv (1621)

“I introduce in a discontented Scholar under the person of *Pierce Pennilesse*, tragically exclaiming upon his partial-eyed fortune, that kept an Alms box of compassion in store for everyone but himself.”

- Thomas Nashe, *Strange Newes*, H3^r (1592)

i. “To the Reader”

At its most basic level, this dissertation traces the historical roots and political stakes of a single English word: *malcontent*. Its highest stakes lie in its exploration of cultural and poetic responses to injustice—or, to put it more strongly, the impossibility of justice. The poems and plays I examine open onto an affective dimension of experience as *politēs*, the lived experience of being a political subject. Thinking politics in affective terms troubles political philosophy’s focus on the categorical and universal, while at the same time it reveals our need to formulate individual experience through categories. The malcontent, after all, is an early modern “type,” which gathers all the various expressions and motives for political and social discontent under a few parodic headings, namely, frustrated ambition and envy.

The early modern period, particularly the tense period from late in Elizabeth’s reign to the early Jacobean years, provides an ideal canvas for this investigation because of the intense uncertainty and consequently turbulent energies that marked this period of transition. Compared to the chaos of the Continent, England remained relatively politically static, usually understood as “stable,” but in fact this stasis was widely viewed as a dam about to burst forth with the possibilities of civil war, anarchy, and even

usurpation: let us not forget that the maneuvering for James as monarch was seen by many English Protestants as something like Catholic machinations for a Manchurian Candidate. These barely constrained potentialities are analogous to the malcontent's affective volatility that such a charged politosphere generated. Exploring these energies, this project attempts a cross-section of the early modern political imagination that pries open a space between the paradigms of orthodox and unorthodox belief that have largely shaped our view of early modern politics. Like "machivavel" or "atheist," "malcontent" is usually a form of derogatory name-calling, but unlike these, it is also often employed as parodic self-satire and self-reflection. Therefore, the malcontent intensifies the paradoxical proximity of poet and persona exemplified in satire, and thus each of the figures in this book who contributed to the formation of the malcontent as literary representation also mark various points along the spectrum of discontent.

Even the most disaffected of these men (and we do concern ourselves with men in the following pages; the malcontent is a deeply masculinist discourse) essentially saw themselves as loyal subjects struggling to serve faithfully. The often capricious nature with which the law responded to these attempts only reinforces the futility and despair that they often express. The Earl of Essex was executed for treason, but Philip Sidney, whose tumultuous relationship with Elizabeth prefigured Essex's actions, channeled his frustrations into a poetic theory that still shapes pedagogy today. And of all the playwrights I discuss, only William Shakespeare manages to somehow remain untouched by the law. Being a law-abiding citizen may not seem such a surprising feat, but consider the case of Ben Jonson. Written with Thomas Nashe, *The Isle of Dogs* (1597) got Jonson hauled before the Privy Council, yet a few years later he would write another *Isle of Dogs*

scene into *Eastward Ho!* (1605) with Marston and Chapman, which the Council seems to have appreciated just as much as the first time (see Chapter Four). By contrast, on the eve of the so-called Essex Rebellion (1601), Essex's men hired a special performance of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, famously dramatizing the deposition and murder of the monarch. Like Charles, Elizabeth took the analogy personally: "I am Richard II, know ye not that?" Elizabeth declared, aghast that "this tragedy was played 40^{tie} times in open streets and houses."¹ Yet unlike Jonson, neither Shakespeare nor any of his troupe were arrested or questioned before the Privy Council on the matter. We might put this down to a temperamental difference between Elizabeth and Charles, but a review of the legal troubles of Nashe, Kyd, Marlowe, Marston, Chapman, and so on—from neck verses to debtor's prison—demonstrate that to declare oneself a playwright was tantamount to entering a life of crime.

Economically, socially, and politically, the playwright was liminal, what Nietzsche called the "intermediary species." For Nietzsche, the artist lingered somewhere between the criminal and the insane, "restrained from *crime* by weakness of will and social timidity, and not yet ripe for the *madhouse*, but reaching out inquisitively toward both spheres with his antennae[.]"² This perhaps describes the malcontent better than the artist per se, but the resonance of in-betweenness may help explain their attraction to representing such figures on stage. The complicated feedback loop of melancholic madness and potential criminality is a feature of the malcontent that recurs throughout

¹ Cf. Paul E. J. Hammer, "Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the Play of 7 February 1601, and the Essex Rising," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 1–35; Jason Scott-Warren, "Was Elizabeth I *Richard II*? The Authenticity of Lambard's 'Conversation,'" *Review of English Studies* 64, no. 264 (July 2012): 208–30.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), sec. 864.

this study. However, I take inspiration from the perhaps unlikely source of a 19th century philosopher more particularly for two reasons: first, Nietzsche was obsessed with “art” (primarily what Sidney would have called “poesy”) as a vehicle for expressing an explicitly machiavellian, post-moral reality, and second, Nietzsche is the philosopher of *ressentiment*—a *Weltanschauung* that revalues the world according to the resentment of the powerless, which he describes as a kind of metaphysical “revenge.” *Ressentiment* not only helps to explain the metaphysical stakes of the malcontent’s discontent, then, but even why revenge tragedy became the malcontent’s natural habitat. While contemporary poetic theory often turned to Aristotle as a rediscovered source of poetic theory, the practice of the poets who evoked the malcontent are often strikingly anti-Aristotelian, particularly as regards the notion of catharsis. This oppositional tendency drives what we might call “malcontent poetics” closer to Nietzsche, but as poets that embrace *ressentiment* as a meaningful response to their world, they also present a challenge to Nietzsche’s easy condemnation of the “weak” and his sometimes facile embrace of injustice.

Thus, my approach juxtaposes Nietzsche and Aristotle as two competing frames for understanding the relationship between *politika* and *poēsis*; or more specifically to the early modern context, between policy and poesy. According to Nietzsche, “Aristotle’s great misunderstanding [was] in believing the tragic affects to be two *depressive* affects, terror and pity”; in reality, the tragic artist has “a *preference for questionable and terrifying things*” and “affirms the *large-scale economy* which justifies the *terrifying*, the *evil*, the *questionable*—and more than merely justifies them.”³ On Nietzsche’s errors,

³ Nietzsche, secs. 851–2.

Aristotle is silent; however, the present study re-examines Aristotle's notion of catharsis—not in its more legalistic early modern formulation, but as the lynchpin between Aristotle's poetics and politics.⁴

What emerges in the plays I analyze is neither the orthodox use of catharsis in theoretical treatises nor the expression of individual power unleashed from good and evil for which Nietzsche longs. "Tragedy does *not* teach 'resignation[.]'" Nietzsche insists:

—To represent terrible and questionable things is in itself an instinct for power and magnificence in an artist: he does not fear them—There is no such thing as pessimistic art—⁵

For Nietzsche, true tragedy, as that fountainhead of the will to power, is necessarily Greek, an expression of souls powerful and callous enough to affirm that the beautiful is the good; the Greeks pursued the transmutation of horror into a lofty, unnatural detachment so "alarmingly far" that the representation of terrible and questionable things became an occasion "*to hear beautiful speeches.*"⁶ For Nietzsche, such a powerful acceptance of the human condition cast into relief the *ressentiment* of the Romantic pessimists—those whose weariness of will takes out a metaphysical revenge in the moralization of philosophy and art.⁷

For the poets in the following chapters, the case is quite different. I found time and again that the specter of catharsis is raised only to demonstrate its impossibility—to

⁴ It can be argued that catharsis has bloated in importance disproportionate to Aristotle's actual theory. In part, the emphasis on catharsis has been a direct result of its centrality to early modern conceptions of tragedy, but its larger importance is evidenced by its centrality to Aristotle's refutation of Plato in the *Politics*: Cf. Aristotle, "The Politics," in *The Politics and The Constitution of Athens*, ed. Stephen Everson, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), VIII 5.1340a-7.1342a.

⁵ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, sec. 821.

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), sec. 80.

⁷ For more on *ressentiment* and its importance for understanding the early modern juxtaposition of revenge and melancholy, see Chapter 3.

nurse and nourish a gnawing animus with no direction of escape. Hand-in-hand with the invention of the melancholy malcontent emerged a poetics of *ressentiment*. Nietzsche continued to reevaluate tragedy throughout his life, and the struggle to frame his thinking between the tragic and comic produced a mode, best exemplified in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in which the malcontent is most at home: satire. The works in this dissertation cut across—indeed, invent—genres, but all of them engage in some form of satire. Satire is the expressive mode that delineates the malcontent’s metaphysical framework. The poets and playwrights in this study share a strong affinity with what Nietzsche calls the “nihilistic artist” who is drawn to the insight that there is “No justice in history, no goodness in nature[.]”⁸ Perhaps the closest any of my chosen playwrights comes to such an affirmation is Kyd, whose *Spanish Tragedy* explicitly constructs a metaphysical universe founded on such indifference, where grief and brutality become a subject for cruel laughter. To varying degrees, the poems and plays that give the malcontent shape touch upon yet also extend Nietzsche’s abysmal insight: Nietzsche struggles to overcome the nihilistic by forcing himself to embrace the abyss as *comic*, and thus he replaces Aristotelian catharsis with satirical catharsis—Democritus’ laughter at worldly folly. Malcontent satire, too, embraces Democritean laughter, but in these experimental poems and plays the laughter refuses even satire’s potential catharsis.

In the chapters that follow, I explore a variety of responses to *ressentiment* that take seriously the experience of futility, despair, and nihilism. These investigations expose a twofold laughter: *laughter-at*, which aligns with the Nietzschean sneer, but also *laughter-with*, which encompasses the affective dimension of lived experience in a

⁸ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, sec. 850.

manner quite different from the Romantic bombast and self-pity that prompted his response. There is another reason that I want to turn our attention to such a specific politico-affective early modern experience: for all its historical specificity, this malcontent frustration resonates with our own moment of political polarization and casual carnage, a great political meat-grinder turned by swollen heads of state precariously set atop a maggoty, bursting bureaucratic body. This project returns to a moment when “politician” was still synonymous with machiavellianism (one who employs “policy,” or political stratagems divorced from ethical constraints). The responses both literary and personal that I trace here belong to a time before such behavior was so naturalized that it no longer strikes us as “terrible and questionable”—it could still provoke outrage, horror, and disbelief.

ii. To the Critics

In large part, this work to unearth the political, historical, and affective stakes of the malcontent aims to apply this frame to *Hamlet* and treat the malcontent as a legitimate hermeneutic for Hamlet’s dilemma. The status, meaning, and solution to Hamlet’s discontent remains one of early modern criticism’s most enduring political questions; yet because early criticism discarded the historical specificity of Hamlet’s type as irrelevant and a reductionist approach to the Bard, this long conversation has remained unavailable to modern criticism, even as it continues to produce Hamlets from other perspectives of historicist precision and methodological ingenuity.⁹ In addition to legitimating the

⁹ To name just one such study that resonates with my own approach, Margreta De Grazia, *“Hamlet” without Hamlet* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007) is a brilliant historical

malcontent and typology more generally as generative interpretive lenses, this study also mobilizes philosophy, history, and biography as frames that, far from being mutually exclusive, can fashion in flexible configurations that can cut across texts in unexpected ways—my approach tries to bring to criticism the unique ability to couple philosophy and history that Sidney grants to poesy. Unlike the new historicists, who move from singular instances to broad contexts, I focus on the complex and idiosyncratic social networks and personal influences that produce a particular work, keeping an eye on theater in particular as a means of self-conscious intervention in modes of cultural production.

Following Lawrence Babb's seminal survey of melancholy in 1951, the malcontent has usually been treated as a set of types defined by a set of stereotypical signs and gestures.¹⁰ Since analysis of types has focused on such stable features, critics assume that the meaning of a type is deterministic, lacking in hermeneutic value. The most direct statement of this view appears in Oscar James Campbell's "Hamlet and Other Malcontents": while Hamlet is certainly a malcontent, if we used the malcontent in any manner as an explanatory frame, he claims, "it would destroy all the richness of Hamlet's nature and reduce the complexity of the dramatic action to a simplicity as jejune as it would be unreal."¹¹ However, the complex transformations of the Vice in early modern drama—the malcontent and the machiavel making up two such branches—demonstrate that in fact a stage type functioned as a frame structuring an evolving conversation.

contextualization which, as the title makes abundantly clear, puts Hamlet's status as malcontent quite to one side.

¹⁰ Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642*, Studies in Language and Literature (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), 73–101. Following Babb, Bridget Gellert Lyons treated literary melancholy extensively, including the malcontent: *Voices of Melancholy* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971), esp. 17–21.

¹¹ Oscar James Campbell, "Hamlet and Other Malcontents," in *Shakespeare's Satire* (London, New York, & Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1943), 150.

Common features lend intelligibility, but these are signposts for positions and problems upon which each writer inheriting the conversation plays, intervening in ways that alter the type's overall network of meanings.

These early-to-mid 20th century conclusions essentially closed the malcontent as a subject of interest.¹² Instead, malcontents tend to be treated from the perspective of some other aspect—as satirist, revenger, anti-machiavel, etc. What this criticism misses is the malcontent's immense potential for syncretism across discourses that makes such an approach possible. Drew Daniel argues that early modern melancholy is a kind of Deleuzian assemblage that powerfully strings together tenuous, syncretic, sometimes specious connections between a wide array of bodies and discourses, reshaping them in the process.¹³ This same capacity allows for the subset of malcontent melancholy to develop not just generic confluences but also deploy these shifting assemblages as a flexible, adaptable hermeneutic. The malcontent negotiates a discordant synthesis of many of England's most polarizing ideological anxieties—axes that forged a multifaceted, protean, and paradoxical tool of social analysis. I examine the malcontent's use as a key hermeneutic primarily for the following intersecting problems, although there are others I have emphasized less:

- The emergence of an educated class of ambiguous social standing who believed they were entitled to participation in their government but largely found only unemployment and disinterest;

¹² Mark Thornton Burnett provides a useful introduction to the study of the stage malcontent, but the scope is too limited to encompass the philosophical stakes I elaborate below: "Staging the Malcontent in Early Modern England," in *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney, Blackwell Companion to Literature and Culture 14 (Malden, MA & Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 336–52.

¹³ Drew Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 5–12.

- The internalization of the basic machiavellian principles of government as grounded not in ethics but in “reason of state” or “policy”;¹⁴
- The related development of increasingly abstract technologies of governance in terms of surveillance and bureaucratic management;
- And, as a consequence of these, the evolution of a newly urgent and politicized problem that supplants the older theological discourse of evil with a macro-political and micro-social discourse of injustice.

On one level, approaching Elizabethan and Jacobean politics through the malcontent nuances our understanding of the early modern political imagination from a lived perspective: while orthodox theory¹⁵ and literary representation frame crises in terms of stability and continuity, malcontent literary representation channels a wide swathe of the English population, largely the proto-middle class and the lowest strata of courtier, who saw their time as one of upheaval, precariousness, and intense anxiety. The historiographic reliance on facticity—history as a sequence of facts—further tends to privilege the orthodox: in light of the relative stability of the English government prior to Charles I, for example, it is easy to overlook the widespread fear of civil war and the imagined proximity of apocalyptic conditions when these conditions did not actually arise for another forty or fifty years. Consequently, we may fail to evaluate how these beliefs influenced actions during this period.

¹⁴ Essentially, reason of state was the notion that the ends justified the means: a principal that the actions of princes were not governed by morality but by the ultimate good of maintaining the stability, independence, and prosperity of the state. Policy was the method princes used to protect this good, especially acts of duplicity, but the term later came to broadly encompass all machiavellian strategy (see Chapter 3).

¹⁵ For example, Sir Thomas Smith’s *De Republica Anglorum* (1583) or Richard Hooker’s *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1593, 1597).

In the following pages, I will briefly outline some of the major contexts relevant to the arguments presented in these chapters. It should not be surprising that such a syncretic subject as the malcontent should have two largely separate origins, and any careful investigation of the malcontent as a hermeneutic will need to keep both constantly aligned. First, I will trace the roots of the malcontent to the confessional conflicts of France and its adoption into the hierarchy of melancholy. Then, I will describe the malcontent's theoretical structure in terms of an evolving technique of social taxonomy, which involves a reconsideration of contemporary critical prejudices toward biographical criticism. Finally, I will summarize the subsequent chapters.

iii. The dual origins of the malcontent

Before the malcontent was either a social type or subset of melancholy, it was a headline in news from the divided Continent. In 1572, Catherine de Médicis and the Duke of Guise plotted the assassination of Coligny, a prominent Huguenot leader, which sparked off the murder of thousands of Huguenots at the hands of mob justice in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. As Catholic persecution of European Protestants threatened to reach genocidal levels, these Protestants could no longer dismiss Machiavelli's analysis of power as essentially amoral. Following the Massacre, Huguenots began publishing proto-republican monarchomach tracts, many of which, like Gentillet's *Discours contre Machiavel*, attacked Catherine and the Guise's machiavellian practices while simultaneously conceding and modifying many of Machiavelli's key

insights. The term “malcontent” enters the English language in reference to two dissident groups emerging from this conflict that called themselves “Les Malcontents.”

The first group of *Les Malcontents* was a band of Huguenot nobles resisting Henri III under Francis, Duke of Anjou (then Alençon) between 1574 and 1576. More immediate to the English context was a group of Walloon soldiers who subsequently adopted the name (see Chapter 1, n69); these Catholic soldiers betrayed their Protestant allies in October 1578 in Flanders, provoking outraged responses such as Thomas Churchyard’s poem “The Miserie of Flaunders” (1579)/ John Stubbes’s infamous attack on Elizabeth’s proposed marriage to Anjou, *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf* (1579), taints Anjou through this connection, since Anjou “ioyned hymselfe with the Malcontents eyther in Fraunce or the lovve conntryes[.]”¹⁶ Anjou had nothing to do with the Walloon betrayal, but Stubbes’s disingenuous either/or constructs his guilt by association through the shared name, binding treachery, machiavellianism, and malcontentism together.

The critical body of work on the machiavel in particular displays how its twin the malcontent has received greatly impoverished attention: the machiavel and malcontent were both social and stage types that, as I will show, emerged from the same anti-machiavellian responses following the Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, yet the machiavel continues to garner critical respect as a powerful nexus of the early modern political imagination. The complexity of Iago’s character is in no way diminished by his very clear machiavellian features—indeed, his tantalizing vacuity, his “motive-hunting of motiveless malignity,” is produced by them. Felix Raab’s *The English Face of*

¹⁶ Stubbes, John, *The discoverie of a gaping gulf* (London, 1579): D4^v, *Early English Books Online*. Lucia Nigri refers to these printed uses of the term in Churchyard and Stubbes in “The Origin of ‘Malcontent,’” *Notes & Queries* 59, no. 1 (March 2012): 37-40 (esp. 38-9), <https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjr268>.

Machiavelli traces the reception of Machiavelli's thought through 16th and 17th century thought, locating in Machiavelli the invention of politics as we understand it; however, it would be more accurate to say that Raab demonstrates that early modern *responses* to Machiavelli—from horrified to begrudgingly accepting—invented politics. Machiavelli's own writings were a catalyst, but unlike a chemical catalyst, Machiavelli himself was not left untouched by the process: in the resistance that formed early modern political thought, the machiavel became an entity largely independent of "Machiavelli." The stage machiavel, which Raab calls the "most grotesque form,"¹⁷ is not so much a representation of Machiavelli at all, but a conversation about a new problem of evil that early modern thinkers saw as the result of Machiavelli's insights—and its horrors were playing out on the European world-stage before their eyes.¹⁸ This problem existed alongside and often independently from the new practical reality that the internalization of machiavellianism produced: the rise of the professional politician. In *Hamlet's Moment*, András Kiséry traces the role of the theater in educating audiences in the practicalities of governance, while also of course shaping their understanding of political practice. As Raab and Kiséry both make clear, these two responses, the horrors of the machiavel and the practical advice of Machiavelli, coexisted surprisingly easily. In *Sejanus*, in fact, I would argue that Jonson intentionally juxtaposes the machiavel (Sejanus) and Machiavel's *princeps* proper (Tiberius). Victoria Kahn's *Machiavellian Rhetoric* extends Raab's project, in

¹⁷ Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli*, Political Science 32 (London: Routledge, 1964), 70.

¹⁸ The elaboration of this particular problem of evil for early modern political philosophy which emerges in the space between the malcontent and the machiavel is thus a narrower version of the problem of evil analyzed in Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

particular arguing that Machiavelli's rhetoric produces both strands—the devious machiavel and the practical politician—as equally justified interpretations.¹⁹

Kiséry and Kahn both contextualize literary expression through a typical historicist reading of related political theories and discourses. While I similarly want to historicize the parallel development of the malcontent and the machiavel with Machiavelli, Tacitus, Gentillet, and so on, I am primarily interested in how these sophisticated discourses become translated into semi-allegorical personae that develop a surplus of meaning beyond these sources, and then interact within and across texts and performances to form configurations and conclusions that are radically different from other kinds of political writing.

Along with “massacre,” after the Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the word “malcontent” quickly naturalized into the English language, becoming a more general term, and the “melancholy malcontent” emerged as a subset of the affect of melancholy, which Robert Burton in his wildly popular *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) diagnosed as “an epidemical disease.”²⁰ In particular, the malcontent became associated with the growing class of men of letters with dwindling prospects. To understand how melancholy shaped the expression of this emerging social type, we first need to examine the evolution of melancholy from humoral theory to syncretic discourse.

Melancholy has garnered more critical interest than the humors more generally for two reasons: in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, everyone seemed to be afflicted with it, and everyone seemed to write about it. Thus, there is clearly more to melancholy

¹⁹ Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric from the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994).

²⁰ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Holbrook Jackson (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), 121 (“Democritus”).

than an imbalance of one humor analogous to any other. In Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Asper describes the humors thusly:

That what soe're hath flexure, and humidity,
As wanting power to containe it selfe,
Is Humour. So in euery humane body
The choller, melancholy, flegme, and bloud
[...]
Receiue the name of Humours.

Asper presents the basic Galenic theory of the humors as four essential substances that, when in balance, allow the healthy body to function: yellow bile (choler), black bile (melancholy), phlegm, and blood. Asper then states that these humors apply “by *Metaphore*” to men's dispositions, “As when some one peculiar quality / Doth so possesse a man, that it doth draw / All his affects, his spirits, and his powers, / In their confluents, all to runne one way[.]” To be “in” a humor is to be dominated by a particular emotional state which, in modern terms, slides somewhere between a bad attitude and a mood disorder. Asper's point is that wearing silly clothes (“a pyed feather, / The cable hat-band, or the three-pild ruffe”) is not an affect but an affectation—by the 1590s, humor had become fashion.²¹ As I shall argue in Chapter 5, this obsession with clothing or “habit” was a distinctive feature of the malcontent gentleman, although Asper is here dismissive of what was in fact a highly strategic construction of a new gentlemanly *habitus*.

The medical and psychological writings of Galen, the Hippocratics, and Aristotle had all been synthesized through Avicenna in the 11th century into a more or less consistent set of correspondences. Typically, humoral imbalances were aligned with

²¹ Ben Jonson, “Every Man Out of His Humour,” in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson, and Evelyn Simpson, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 431–32.

specific temperaments: light-heartedness with blood, hot-headedness with choler, apathy with phlegm, and worst of all, morbidity and depression with melancholy.²² Usually these states were in flux, but often one temperament dominated. While all of these could become pathological in excess, morbid melancholy was a special case. Other humors could combust (due to “improper diet, physiological disorder, or immoderate passions”), producing an unnatural “adust” melancholy or “burnt choler” which resulted in a particularly toxic state that was physically, mentally, and even spiritually dangerous.²³ Fused with the teachings of medieval Christianity, melancholy (*tristitia*) became a potential source of *acedia* or despair, which then became paradoxically central to the Lutheran and Calvinist path to faith: despair could spur either conversion or damnation.²⁴

This proximity to despair is a consistent feature of the malcontent that I will have cause to discuss throughout this study. However, there are several subtle things about Asper’s account that mark how the influence of humoral theory was shifting. First, Asper treats the humors as bodily substances and nothing more; he does not mention the elaborate system of correspondences that tied the humors into a total metaphysics: the four elements, their corresponding organs, the seasons, stages of life, their admixture of qualities (moist/dry, hot/cold), and so on. He does not even tie dispositions to actual humoral imbalances, merely treating them as “metaphors.” So Asper’s account is more physiological than traditional Galenic theory as well as lacking a causal explanation for

²² Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 45–46.

²³ Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 21–22; Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, 63. This theory explains, for example, why Shakespeare’s Coriolanus who is consumed with passion and rage (choler) for most of the play is vulnerable to melancholy (burnt choler) at the play’s end.

²⁴ Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, 69–70; Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy*, 5–6; Angus Gowland, “The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy,” *Past & Present* 191, no. 1 (May 2006): 101–8.

either pathological or non-pathological dispositions. In fact, as melancholy became “epidemic,” it became particularly divorced from the other humors, standing alone as its own endlessly elaborating affective framework, which is why the study of the malcontent rarely needs touch on humoral theory—by the late 16th century, melancholy had become a discourse all its own.

As opposed to a physiological state, then, the approaches of Drew Daniel and Angus Gowland demonstrate melancholy to be a “discursive” affect: as Gowland has argued, we cannot approach melancholy as an actual epidemic in either early modern or modern epidemiological terms, but rather what people meant when they described themselves as melancholic and why they perceived it as so universal. Melancholy essentially named an affective engagement in the interrelated intellectual crises of philosophy and theology: “it carried spiritual and ethical as well as medical significance, and assumed a prominent place within religious, moral-philosophical and political discourses on the passions of the soul.”²⁵ Thus, from the beginning, melancholy was a highly syncretic discursive phenomenon. Is it any wonder that “all the world is mad, [...] is melancholy, dotes,” when Burton is able to elaborate the causes of melancholy for some 200 pages, listing among them God, devils, magic, old age, heredity, diet, idleness, vengefulness, ambition, covetousness, and pretty much every negative emotion, but also

²⁵ Gowland, “Problem of Melancholy,” 83–84. As Gowland points out, an “epidemic” analogous to the European plagues is not borne out by the historical record of case histories, and as an affective “disease,” nor would we really expect it to be. Modern psychology has only recently started to acknowledge that any categories of mental disease or emotional disorder are highly culturally specific, and thus the precise expression and meaning of an affective disorder like melancholy is produced by a set of culturally and temporally specific beliefs and discourses. For an example of modern pharmaceutical companies confronting this problem in the face of globalized medicine, see Ethan Watters, “The Mega-Marketing of Depression in Japan,” in *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the American Psyche* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 187–248.

love, which dominates most of the third Partition?²⁶ Nor can we forget the “Love of Learning[...] With a Digression of the Misery of Scholars, and Why the Muses are Melancholy”: it would seem that all scholarly and literary production is melancholic *a priori*, which indeed follows inevitably from Gowland’s thesis. Not only is the scholar’s life poor and uncertain, as Burton spends not a few pages elaborating, but since it teaches us to see and judge the faults of the world, education is a clear cause of melancholy (yet so is ignorance, which breeds resentment).²⁷

In addition, the melancholic temperament was complicated by its association through Aristotle, particularly through the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata* XXX, with exceptional genius loosely in those fields we would call the “humanities”:

Why is it [...] that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, politics, poetry or the arts are melancholic, and some to such an extent that they are afflicted by the diseases arising from black bile?²⁸

These geniuses are such anomalies because in Aristotelian ethics the melancholic is of a basically “vicious” character, explaining the early modern association of the melancholic and the medieval Vice. Aristotle skews the Galenic distinction between melancholy as temperament and disease by suggesting that the melancholic is *always* “physiologically diseased” and in need of a cure; the temperament and the disease are one and the same,

²⁶ Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, “Democritus” (38); I.2 (177-382).

²⁷ Burton, I.2.3.xv (300-330). Burton does not directly make this connection between erudition and critique, but the *Anatomy*, for all its structural pretensions as a highly schematic medical treatise, is foremost a monumental demonstration of scholarship in the form of an eclectic and roving satire, such that “melancholy” becomes both the occasion and name for religious, political, and social critique. It is this aspect that prompts the title of Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* and an implicit connection between criticism and Menippean satire. See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), 311–12.

²⁸ In the context of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, melancholics are simply too impulsive, and “do not wait for rational deliberation’ because of their imaginative ‘intensity.’” Aristotle’s conclusion is that the melancholic is a kind of moral nullity: “melancholics are not themselves good or bad, precisely because they do not deliberate and so cannot be said to have made good or bad choices.” Qtd. in Angus Gowland, “The Ethics of Renaissance Melancholy,” *Intellectual History Review* 18, no. 1 (2008): 104–6.

although there exists this one astonishing and elusive point of balance at which melancholy transitions from vice to virtue.

This Aristotelian account comes to bear on early modern accounts particularly through the Neoplatonism of Marsilio Ficino, which added an occult dimension and expanded on this anomalous “genial melancholy,” which he emphasized was not a disease “but an exceptional, inspired state of self-alienation.” As a divine state that “draws the soul's desires away from the body,” it is in fact a highly *virtuous* condition. However, if “excessively agitated or heated,” genial melancholy attracts demonic influences, and excessive black bile can “induc[e] fear, sadness, despair and atheistic impiety,” as well as erotic over-stimulation. For Ficino, vice is essentially “the inclination of the rational soul towards bodily desire,” so the virtue or viciousness of the melancholic condition depends on the extent to which the balance of black bile orients the soul away from or toward the body.²⁹

Education and genius were thus a fraught hub of melancholy discourse, and such danger carries into the malcontent's roots in the type of the “melancholy traveler”: affected too much by his travels abroad and the internalization of too much Italianate learning, the traveler returned to England disaffected and potentially seditious.³⁰ Philip Sidney, the focus of this study's next chapter, was particularly representative of this type: the traveler returned a cynic, with too much exposure to the machiavellian politics of Europe, especially Italy, and such a resumé seems not to have helped his relationship with Elizabeth. The key feature shared by the melancholy traveler and the malcontent was a sense of frustrated ambition and unacknowledged superiority. As his taint of Italian

²⁹ Gowland, 107–8.

³⁰ Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 74–75.

learning suggests, the malcontent was also sibling to the machiavel: the malcontent's birth from the Huguenots' anti-machiavellian discourse initiated this conflation, and the adoption of both melancholy and machiavellian affectations secured it.

As an educated elite desperate for advancement emerged in the late 16th century, these English malcontents (especially the Wits) cultivated a melancholy demeanor as fashionable malady and *politique* strategy drawing on Ficino's melancholy genius and Castiglione's *sprezzatura*. In *Lyric Wonder*, James Biester argues that the cultivation of a malcontent melancholic disposition by the gentlemanly class had very specific political stakes: although melancholy rendered a courtier both politically suspect and morally unsound, the volatile and unpredictable personality of the melancholic also awed and shocked others, making them take notice. In a patronage system becoming both constricted and glutted, this strategic pose gave a certain kind of marginally positioned courtier a prospect, if a slim and treacherous one, for advancement.³¹

This is not to say that the courtier's melancholic demeanor was necessarily or even likely mere false seeming. The increasing centralization of the patronage system, "heighten[ing] the importance of royal patronage to the detriment of aristocratic patronage," gave humanist courtiers very real reasons to despair that they would secure a position that warranted and recompensed their education and ability.³² It was well known that those who felt themselves deserving but unable to serve the commonwealth were likely to become disaffected and dangerous malcontents. The other option was to become detached, like Burton, an imaginary separatist indulging in Utopian flights of fancy: "the

³¹ James Biester, *Lyric Wonder: Rhetoric and Wit in Renaissance English Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1997), passim.

³² Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy*, 247.

exuberant fantasy of the impossibly perfect commonwealth is, paradoxically, the product of despair at the failure of Ciceronian political commitment, and more particularly at the futility of offering counsel to a prince surrounded by an irredeemably degenerate court.”³³

Melancholy can be a highly dramatic emotion, driving malcontents to suicide or armed rebellion, but it can also breed a brooding discontent, as in the case of someone like Burton or Sidney, similar to the affects Sianne Ngai isolates as creating states of “obstructed agency,” the inability to act rather than passionate spurs to action.³⁴ These off-stage malcontents were such complex performative figures themselves that it is easy how attractive a subject they would make for the playwright. Often, the malcontent intensely desires a political life in an ideal Commonwealth, but those same desires cause disgust and dejection in the face of political realities. The malcontent is trapped between a desire or even sense of obligation to engage in the pragmatic politics of the *vita activa*, but they are driven back towards the *vita contemplativa* by a sense of futility. This fraught, liminal position can radiate in numerous neurotic directions, from Burton's retreat from the world into Utopian fiction to Marston's satiric vitriol or Essex's unfocused rage and violence.

iv. From figure to character: The malcontent and social taxonomy

The malcontent thus existed as both a social and a literary type, and as I shall show, it was malcontent men of letters who often generated the literary malcontents as satirical mirrors of self-reflection. It is this status of the malcontent as a quasi-allegorical

³³ Gowland, 249.

³⁴ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005), 3–4.

hermeneutic for interpreting and grouping the behaviors of real people that has led me to call the malcontent a *figure*, drawing on Erich Auerbach's notion of the *figura* as historically individuated allegory. In other words, particular historical figures can take on allegorical dimensions which do not fully universalize the unique specificity of the individual.³⁵ In this case, I am applying Auerbach's concept to the proliferation of early modern *personae* (usually satiric), which represent yet do not correspond to their author. These *personae*, sometimes also understood as "ciphers," are crucial to understanding how the malcontent slides between social and literary type. While Auerbach's literary examples share a name with their historical counterpart (from Dante's Virgil to Shakespeare's Caesar), the concept still applies to the self-allegorizing of Sidney's Philisides, Jonson's Asper, or Marston's Kinsayder. These figures are not ciphers that represent the "person" or "personality" of the author *in toto*, but represent an aspect of that individual allegorically: *qua* malcontent. Yet a certain amount of specificity remains. As self-allegories, these satirical figures cannot be fully evaluated, particularly in relation to the malcontent, without the context of the authors themselves. Thus the malcontent figure is characterized by a constant turn inward, an inherent self-implication, even as his

³⁵ In "Figura," Auerbach usefully traces the history of the notion of figure from its Latin origin meaning "plastic form" through its use in early Christian hermeneutics. In this latter stage, *figura* came to mean prefiguration, associated with *allegoria*, but rooted in the concrete expression. *Figura* presented an elegant solution to the claim that Scripture was 'merely allegory.' Figural interpretation *is* allegorical but maintains its "full historicity." Rather than an ideal fiction, a real historical event or person discloses a future stamped with this prefigured form, allowing Scripture to maintain prophetic and divine meanings without compromising the historical realities it records: "The figural structure preserves the historical event while interpreting it as revelation, and must preserve it in order to interpret it. Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Gloucester, MA: Meridian Books, 1973), 11–13.

discontent lashes outward. As such, this study consistently engages with—and calls for a reevaluation of—the academic dirty word of “biographical criticism.”³⁶

I do not treat biography as any more deterministic than type, however: the very complexity of these figures relies on their disjunction from what they are meant to represent, a disjunction particularly obvious in Sidney’s proliferation of satiric selves or Jonson’s dual representation as Asper/Macilente in *Every Man Out*. This self-reflexivity of the malcontent is crucial to the complications that this study explores. This project is essentially the study of an Elizabethan Vice figure: like the machiavel or the atheist, “malcontent” became a means of labeling someone and achieving some measure of power over the meaning of their words and actions. Uniquely, however, the malcontent also often takes on a confessional quality, representing an ethical struggle that goes beyond the facile tendency of the early modern world to run around accusing one another of vices like schoolyard name-calling.

“Figure” in this study represents this tie between real persons and literary representations that encompasses the malcontent’s shifting valances between cipher, *persona*, and character. In this final transformation, the malcontent becomes a part of a new social taxonomy. While the medieval Everyman homogenized humanity and leveled the moral playing field despite rigid social hierarchies, a new mode of classification arose at the turn of the 17th century: characterization. London came to be represented as a variegated place full of distinctive social groups, which were further associated with a new schema of virtue and vice. The morality plays treated humanity as universally

³⁶ Other critics have already started this reevaluation, of course, and new approaches to biographical criticism hold out a great deal of promise. For a particularly good analysis of the fallacies that led us to bury the author, see John Carey, in *Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson: New Directions in Biography*, ed. Takashi Kozuka and J.R. Mulryne (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 43–54.

susceptible to external abstractions of vice, represented in the personification of Vice. On stage and in character books, virtue and vice became a part of one's "character."

Social codifications such as the malcontent were becoming more formal and systematic. The character book was an outgrowth of the emblem book that anatomized society into human emblems of virtue and vice (see Chapter 4). The popular poetic form of the epigram similarly divided humanity into emblems of virtue and vice; however, the epigram's approach was divided (due to libel laws and the desire for patronage) between praise of named great persons and censure of abstract vices that avoid "particulars." Character books, on the other hand, presented abstract portraits of both virtues and vices. Like epigrams, such an approach to society and morality was fundamentally satirical and flattened human experience into "one peculiar quality"—these characters were essentially what Asper would call "Humours." The portraits were far more detailed and active than the typical epigram, much like the characters of a play, but with a crucial difference: the portraits were completely self-contained, and furthermore, one half of the book was typically reserved for virtue, the other half for vice. The effect was one of monadic isolation: the world of characters was fundamentally antisocial, since society is constituted by a network of interactions that the insular virtues and vices lacked.

As we use this term, we need to understand it in an early modern sense that is closer to its etymological roots: character is not, in the novelistic sense, a description of a totality of features arising from some interiority that forms a unique individual. Rather, a person is "stamped" with a character: it is a strategic means, as I said above, for wresting the interpretation of meaning away from the agent. As Womack's insightful analysis of early modern character argues, when character moves from the book to apply to real

individuals, it becomes a way “to exercise power—either the affective power of quasi-bureaucratic assessment, or the aggressive, unconfirmed power of persuasive rhetoric,” and this power is essentially violent and reifying: “To ‘characterize’ a *dramatis persona* is not to constitute, but to invade, its interiority, to subordinate it to one’s one word, to make it thing-like and knowable.”³⁷ Womack is here examining Jonson’s inventive integration of characterization into *Every Man Out*, but this violence is inherent in the character book itself. The vices, in particular, were not neutral descriptions, but rather they were clearly meant for application and might even be written with some particular person in mind. Such is almost certainly the case with Joseph Hall’s “Male-content,” which seems to reflect his longstanding feud with Marston.

Joseph Hall’s *Characters of Vertues and Vices* (1608) was one of the most prominent character books, and, not surprisingly, the “Characterism of the Male-content” is placed soundly on the side of vice. The primary characteristics of Hall’s malcontent are envy and universal dissatisfaction:

nothing dislikes him but the present: for what hee condemned while it was, once past hee magnifies, and striues to recall it out of the iawes of Time. What hee hath hee seeth not, his eyes are so taken vp with what he wants[...]; some things he must dislike hee knowes not wherefore, but hee likes them not: and other where rather than not censure, he will accuse a man of vertue. [...] Hee is a slaue to enuie[...] Faine would he see some mutinies, but dare not raise them; and suffers his lawlesse tongue to walke thorow the dangerous paths of conceited alterations[...] Nothing but feare keeps him from conspiracies, and no man is more cruell when hee is not maniced with danger. He speaks nothing but *Satyres*, and libels, and lodgeth no guests in his heart but rebels. [...] Finally, he is a querulous curre, whom no horse can passe by without barking at[.]³⁸

³⁷ Peter Womack, “Characters,” in *Ben Jonson* (New York: B. Blackwell, 1986), esp. 53-7.

³⁸ Hall, Joseph, *Characters of vertues and vices* (London, 1608): II.99-104, *Early English Books Online (EEBO)*, accessed 7 February 2019, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99839369.

In light of Marston's longstanding campaign against Hall in *Pigmaliions Image and Certain Satyres* and *Scourge of Villainie*, it is hard not to imagine Hall thinking of Marston as he wrote this "characterism."³⁹

Thus Marston's self-consciously malcontent Kinsayder has also become the means of criticism, wresting control of the malcontent's meaning from the figure and codifying it in the "character." In both the "Characterism" and the satire, Hall seems to have particularly latched onto a few lines from Marston's *Satyre IV*:

Yee Cedars bend, fore lightning you dismay,
Yee Lyons tremble, for an Asse doth bray.
Who cannot raile? what dog but dare to barke
Gainst *Phoebus* brightnes in the silent darke? (*Certaine Satyres*, IV.7-10)⁴⁰

While the ass is missing from the "characterism," Hall weighs whether Marston is the ass or the dog in his most direct attack on Marston. Before attempting to do the same to Jonson and sparking off the *poetomachia*, Marston had apparently irritated Hall enough that Hall "caused to bee pasted" a satirical epigram "to the latter page of euery *Pigmalion* that came to the stacioners of Cambridge." Hall essentially states that he does not care whether Marston's satiric persona Kinsayder is "*a mad dog, or a mankind Asse*[" Hall will give him the treatment for both, with whipping, cutting, and "*kinsing*."⁴¹ The OED notes that the meaning of the verb that forms Marston's pseudonym is obscure, but Edmund Gosse speculates that Kinsayder was "one who 'kinsed' or docked the tails of

³⁹ Burnett further claims that John Davies was likely writing about Marston in his own epigram on the "Male-content" in *Scourge of Folly* (1611), reflecting on Marston's retirement from public life. It seems there is good reason to consider Marston the representative Elizabethan malcontent. See Thornton Burnett, "Staging the Malcontent," 343.

⁴⁰ Editor Arnold Davenport also notes that Hall likely remembered Marston's dog imagery when sketching his "Male-content," though he does not note the proximity of the ass and dog in these lines in comparison to his epigram pasted into *Certain Satyres*. John Marston, *The Poems of John Marston*, ed. Arnold Davenport (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1961), 81, 244n10..

⁴¹ Marston preserves the epigram in his addition to the *Scourge*, "Satyre Nova" [X]: see Marston, 164-65.

stray dogs and stray social abuses”; Mark Thornton Burnett adds the notion of castration as a pun on his name “Marston/Marstone.”⁴² Whether or not these glosses are correct, Marston is certainly central to the paradoxical dog imagery that pervades early modern satire, as I will elaborate in Chapter 4: both the satirist and his enemies are reversibly figured as rabid dogs in need of curbing and punishment.⁴³

In the following chapters, I will trace in detail the malcontent’s evolution from disaffected courtier to “querulous curre,” but I will end this introduction by pointing out a commonality in all its manifestations that should by now be obvious. From the virtuous *parrhesiastes* speaking truth to power to the snarling dog that can’t help but bark at every passing horse, whether virtuous or vicious, the malcontent is a critic. Thus, I don’t believe it’s any accident that Jonson in particular was integral to the formulation of the types of both the Critic and the Malcontent. Both are embedded in the heritage of satire and its desire for political and social critique. The critic often either sees Vice everywhere, lashing out at injustice, or attempts to define value, threshing the good from the bad whether on moral, aesthetic, or political grounds. At its best, criticism does not shy from self-flagellation either, and Derrida’s attack on the value of *arkhē*, the root of the authority upon which criticism depends, is only one of the strongest statements of the modern skepticism that has shaken the foundations of the critic’s function. At the same time, as the scale of power has increased—digital surveillance, the abstractions of drone warfare, the local and global reach of counter-terrorism—the promise of participatory democracy is flagging in the face of great personalities that are perhaps the unconscious

⁴² See *OED Online*, s.v. “kinsing, n.,” accessed 7 February 2019; John Donne, *The Life and Letters of John Donne*, ed. Edmund Gosse, vol. 1 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1899), 33; Thornton Burnett, “Staging the Malcontent,” 340.

⁴³ Furthermore, the dog is a common symbol of melancholy. Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy*, 107.

attempt to give these abstractions of power some allegorical corporeality. Combined with a cultural and economic crisis about the value of the humanities, the critic has entered a new era where its function and efficacy are both in question.

This study has no intention of solving this crisis. However, I believe that it is instructive to excavate the negative politics and poetics from which the critic sprang as well as its negative image, the malcontent. While the critic flourished and, following Dryden, became something like a symbiotic (some might say parasitic) constituent of literary production with its own realm of meaning-making, the malcontent fairly quickly lost status as a productive social type and achieved the status of theatrical cliché. By *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613), for example, malcontents like Webster's Bosola became merely a stage parody, usually the crude tool of the machiavel. However, primarily between 1590-1610, the malcontent sedimented a set of failed responses to the most pressing social and political discontents in early modern literary writing, especially pastoral poetry, verse satire, and theater. This study seeks to elaborate the complex networks of events and beliefs that generated those discontents and to find value in those failures.

The chapters trace these issues through a focused subset of key writers and their malcontents or proto-malcontents:

In **Chapter Two**, I extend the reevaluation of Philip Sidney's historical reception, both as national hero and defender of poetic ethics, to trace the origins of malcontent melancholy. In opposition to his romantic legacy, Sidney's life as courtier consisted primarily of frustration and failure. Adding to our understanding of the social and coterie

dimensions of artistic production, I examine the role his personal connection to the Massacre and his coterie's militant Protestantism played in his conflicted relationship with Elizabeth. Sidney's obscure poem "Dispraise of a Courtly Life," which describes a "malcontent" courtier who retreats to his pastoral roots only to find himself alienated there as well, best expresses Sidney's status as frustrated courtier. Not only is Sidney an early exemplar of how the malcontent type evolved out of the melancholy traveler and courtier, he is the earliest figure to poetically formulate malcontent melancholy. Focusing on the malcontent's poetic development as a form of self-critique and an attempt to formulate new language for an affective response to political frustrations, it becomes clear that Sidney's project in the *Defense of Poesy* is an attempt to answer his own deep anxieties about poetry's ethical powers. Indicating the faltering of the humanist project, this twin skepticism in orthodox views of politics and poetics alike is the hallmark of the malcontent across its development.

In **Chapter Three** I argue that the Massacre continues to reverberate through the development of early modern poetics, examining how the malcontent arose in opposition to but in close relation with the machiavel. The origins of Elizabethan tragedy find root in what I term "malcontent theatricality," which innovates on morality play conventions and Senecan tragedy in an attempt to represent the impossibility of virtue in a machiavellian universe. Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe in particular transform the spectacle of the Massacre into a malcontent dramaturgy opposed to an Aristotelian theater of catharsis. Taking a cue from the biographical accusations of atheism which led to the deaths of both playwrights, I explore how these plays deploy Menippean satire in a purely negative critique of contemporary Europe. I thus reassess the status of satire, a

genre that cuts across genre, as a key strategy for formulating responses to the crisis of evil in the early modern political imagination.

While the stage machiavel emerges from these theatrical experiments as the allegorical embodiment of a new conception of evil, the stage malcontent often becomes the machiavel's naïve tool. In **Chapter Four**, however, I examine how both Jonson and Marston paradoxically invest in the stage malcontent their most optimistic experiments in theater as an engine for political and social change, a project each abandons in different ways. Although Marston's verse satire expressed skepticism in the ability of satire to have a positive ethical effect on the world, his stage malcontents are virtuous courtiers who speak truth to power. This notion of the malcontent as a model for virtuous social and political engagement reaches its peak in Marston's 1603 play *The Malcontent*, where he goes so far as to posit the malcontent mask as a set of strategies for the ideal ruler in a machiavellian universe. Ben Jonson, whose early satire expresses confidence in satire's ethical potential, simultaneously developed a new form of comic satire that staged the malcontent as a mask the satirist wears to effect social change. Jonson is increasingly skeptical of satire's social efficacy, however: I follow the traces of the lost play *Isle of Dogs* throughout Jonson's career to uncover the trope's disturbing double vision. The *Isle of Dogs* trope's world of snarling, vicious men clambering over each other in their ambition is in fact merely another name for the Fortunate Isles, often identified with the *insula canaria*. Thus the Fortunate Isles of Jonson's masques, an idealized world of hierarchy and royal authority, emerges as a poetic veneer painted over the satirist's world of corruption and vice, but a veneer that may also be a necessary fiction of social order.

Shakespeare had already expressed his skepticism of the malcontent's value as political strategy several years before in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare's works, especially *Hamlet*, have been central to the creation of "modernity" and a mouthpiece for the fantasies of our contemporary political imagination. In **Chapter Five**, I reexamine the long critical history underlying the still-dominant "modern" *Hamlet* to reassess the play's original political stakes and challenge its contemporary stakes. The previous chapters provide a framework for re-reading *Hamlet* as a deeply topical assessment of theories of legitimate resistance to tyranny routed through the English social type of the malcontent, both of which, through many twists and turns, arose out of the Frankocentric religious conflicts. The malcontent's entanglement of affect and politics demonstrates the affective charge underlying abstract theories of resistance that admix justice and vengeance. *Hamlet* thus enacts a kind of consequentialism: the twin early modern fears of civil war and foreign subjugation set a limit beyond which even tyranny is preferable to anarchy. *Hamlet* suggests a political pessimism that runs counter to contemporary political uses of the play and reveals a troubling origin story for our own *Hamlet*, the modern Everyman.

Chapter Two: Melancholy Philisides; or Trapped Between Action and Idleness

“For, as Aristotle saith, it is not *gnosis* but *praxis* must be the fruit.”

- Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesy*

i. The malcontent *figura*

Although remembered as a national hero, practically a posthumous poet laureate, Sir Philip Sidney is in fact an example of the what Lawrence Babb calls “the disgruntled or seditious traveler,” who was the “original melancholy malcontent,” the pattern of the social type that would proliferate from the late 1580s until about 1610. This traveler was seen as being corrupted by Italian influences in particular, and the Florentine intellectuals famous for affecting melancholy as a sign of under-appreciated genius.¹ Returning from his Continental tour in 1575, Sidney had been drawn to Italy despite his mentor Hubert Languet's warnings, a perfect example of the rash of young English gentleman afflicted with melancholy in his travels. Although Sidney was attracted to the ideas of Machiavelli, one of the prime figures linking Italy and discontent in the English mind, he does not seem to have “caught” melancholy from his time in Venice (1573-4), however: in fact, whether or not Sidney's reputed melancholic disposition predated his travels, it was mentor-figures like Languet in Germany and Austria who defined him as prone to melancholy, a description which came to dominate Sidney's self-perception.² Sidney fits

¹ Babb notes that the social type of the disgruntled traveler was established by 1580. Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 75. Zera Fink's chronology of the interplay between social type and literary figure is somewhat convoluted, but on this account, the malcontent traveler was a kind of second wave of development in the 1570s and 1580s of the “terrible Italianated Englishman of the late sixties,” virulently attacked in Ascham's *The Scholemaster* (1570). Fink actually mentions Sidney's criticism of Italy's “counterfeit learning” in his letter advising his brother Robert on his own Continental travels (1579?), but misses that Sidney himself spoke from experience as an “Italianated Englishman.” See Zera S. Fink, “Jaques and the Malcontent Traveler,” *Philological Quarterly* 14 (1935): 238–40; Robert Kuin, ed., *The Correspondence of Sir Philip Sidney*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 877–82.

² In two of his first three extant letters, Languet worries about Sidney becoming more melancholy (“*tristiores*”). Sidney was already in Venice by this time, and although he regarded Sidney as prone to melancholy, he certainly didn't think the city would have any beneficial effect: “Flee those lagoons, than which nothing is more unhealthy as soon as one has seen whatever is worth seeing in the city. I have been

the description of two malcontent types Babb isolates—the melancholy courtier of frustrated ambition and the melancholy scholar and poet—although these types would not sediment under the term *malcontent* until around the time of Sidney's death.³ On the surface, Sidney is perhaps not so dramatically antisocial as some descriptions of the malcontent, but his unstable temperament and his political disaffection mark his affinity with this emerging type. Sidney is more than an early representative of the social type, however: seeking to express his inarticulate discontent through the analogous and available discourse of *love* melancholy, Sidney's poetic figurations were crucial to shaping the discourses that would define the melancholy malcontent.

Contemporary literary criticism has an aversion to biography; from Barthes and Foucault, we have learned to think in terms of “texts” freed from authorial intent and abstract author-functions in which the “author” represents little more than the name organizing a particular set of texts to the exclusion of others. As both Barthes and Foucault well knew, however, the collection of “works” represented by the author-function are not the arbitrary grouping of historical accident, but rather a contemporary narrative resulting from a process of sedimentation: the distillation of successive historical interpretations. Authors like Philip Sidney, however, challenge us to rethink static or lax approaches to the canon: it is precisely *because* the contemporary Sidnean

surprised that you stayed so long in that perpetual din and stink[.]” Letters from Hubert Languet, 15 and 22 January 1574 in Robert Kuin, ed., *The Correspondence of Sir Philip Sidney*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 86–98. See also Malcolm William Wallace's claim that “Italy was the land of the sorceress who corrupted men's morals and undermined their religious convictions, and Languet must remember that Sidney was only nineteen years of age,” in *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1967), 128.

³ Babb defines four overlapping types: the melancholy traveler, the melancholy villain, the melancholy cynic, and the melancholy scholar. The first he defines as a “social type,” while “The other three are derivative types appearing principally in the drama.” Sidney and Robert Burton are two prominent examples of the melancholy scholar as real social type, however. Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 76.

author-function, supposedly divorced from biographical reading, contains the sediment of centuries of prior biographical interpretation that it has the shape it does. That shape, the contours of “Philip Sidney” as we have him, locates *The Defense of Poesy* and *Astrophil & Stella* at the center, relegating the Old and New *Arcadias* to the periphery, and leaving the rest of a rather large corpus virtually unread and untaught. Most importantly for our purposes, the *Defense*, one of the most widely read early modern texts, remains today the primary theoretical lens for understanding not just Sidney's poetry, but often early modern poetry more broadly: partly due to the critical tendency to collapse rhetoric and theory, a single rhetorical exercise is elevated to a theoretical handbook. In order to understand Sidney's contribution to the formation of the figure of the melancholy malcontent, we must actually re-engage with Sidney's biography, first quickly sketching some of the historical circumstances leading to our current picture of Sidney, and then examining how a closer look at the conditions of Sidney's literary production trace a very different project, in the process decentering the *Defense* and suggesting the contours of an alternate Sidnean author-function.

The constructed and self-conscious nature of early modern identities is well-trodden ground, but less attention has been paid to the structured conventions and tropes one uses to communicate identity. New historicist criticism has paid a great deal of attention to Sidney's attempts and failures to fashion himself into an effective Elizabethan courtier, but because political readings of Sidney tend to try to link Sidney's actions as courtier to his works as poet through topical readings rather than reading the ideological struggles that inform both, Sidney's key role in establishing a set of tropes for the malcontent type has been overlooked. Sidney developed his identity strategies from the

preexistent figure of the love melancholic, which enjoyed widespread popularity as a political strategy under Elizabeth. However, Sidney's use of the love melancholic becomes increasingly more idiosyncratic; in an attempt to formulate his growing discontent and frustration, he performed a shocking act of catachresis: emptied of its content, "love" became for Sidney a cipher to express an affective state which in the years following Sidney would come to be represented by the melancholy *malcontent*. Of course, the pose of love melancholy for the Elizabethan courtier was always at least half allegorical, a mingling of flattery and a stylized language of power that shored up Elizabeth's position as female monarch, even for suitors with actually erotically charged relationships with Elizabeth such as Leicester or Raleigh.

Sidney did not repurpose the poetic trope of love melancholy merely to cloak quasi-treasonous sentiments, as Blair Worden and Annabel Patterson have argued.⁴ The politically charged melancholic who comes to be termed "malcontent" is not a dissenter in any simple sense, although he certainly exists in a liminal political state that, for proponents of the Elizabethan or Jacobean status quo, bordered on treason. The status of the dissenter or rebel is comparatively clear: he takes a destructive stance in opposition to contemporary institutions. The malcontent, by contrast, has no desire to radically change the system, but rather finds himself supporting a system that has no place for him—that has (in his mind) abandoned him. In fact, the malcontent is often marked by nostalgia, a somewhat pathetic figure defending a view of the system which is tragically outmoded.

⁴ Patterson argues that Sidney utilized poetry as a form of social critique safe from literal censorship, while Worden claims that the *Arcadia* is "political allegory," although he is somewhat tentative regarding how literally we should read historical parallels into the *Arcadia*. Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 24–43; Blair Worden, *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney's Arcadia and Elizabethan Politics* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996).

In Sidney's case, the central ambivalence was rooted in a belief in the old strength of the aristocracy in the face of increasing centralization of power on the one hand, and a commitment to a utopian Protestant internationalism that conflicted with the rise of the state on the other.

Ironically, although Sidney belonged to an offshoot of political thought destined to flash in the pan of history, Sidney was picked up and re-written into both conservative and radical political narratives of the 17th century. Sidney's dramatic death in 1596 in the Battle of Zutphen catapulted Sidney to stardom, from failed courtier to cult hero. Sidney became a kind of ideological nexus, his transcendence to heroic courtier-warrior-poet turning him into a semi-allegorical figure for English nationalism and the interventionist, bellicose foreign policy which the Sidney-Dudley circle had been pushing on Elizabeth for decades.⁵ Primarily this image was fashioned by one of Sidney's closest friends, Fulke Greville, in his *Life of Sir Philip Sidney*, which has most often been described as a biography, but sometimes more accurately as a kind of hagiography.⁶ Even before Greville's biography, however, Sidney was transformed from mediocre, frustrated

⁵ Philip Sidney was at one point heir to both Henry Sidney and his uncle Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. At the end of the sixteenth century, the Sidney-Dudley coterie represented perhaps the most vocal and powerful faction of radical Protestants in England. These Protestants and their connections on the European continent believed that the Catholic threat needed to be countered by a strong military response. For a brief moment, until about 1578, the radical Protestants further envisioned a kind of resultant transnationalism bound by Protestant faith usually termed "the International Protestant League" by historians. Thus, to their detriment, the Sidneys and Dudleys continually pressed Elizabeth to change her insular foreign policy to one of active bellicose intervention in Europe. The gendering of the female monarch's "passive" stance and the implicit masculinity of the Protestant's "active" politics cannot be too heavily stressed.

⁶ Greville likely composed the work 1610-1612, just as radical Protestant hopes in Prince Henry reached their apex and sudden frustration, although it was not published until 1652, creating an ideal transition from the failed International Protestant League of the 1580s to the republican ideals of the Civil War and providing the material to forge the link between Philip Sidney and his grand-nephew Algernon Sidney, hero and martyr of the Civil War. Thus, Sidney's image was produced for a particular set of political, instrumental goals well after his death, then further refracted through the lens of a Civil War republicanism which would have been utterly foreign to Sidney, greatly obscuring Sidney's own political circumstances and aims. Patterson notes these same problems in *Censorship and Interpretation*, 24–25. However, she continues to rely too heavily on Greville's interpretation of Sidney.

courtier to English hero through two somewhat paradoxical propagandistic movements, as Alan Hager and others have argued. First, those related to Sidney's own circle produced a voluminous elegiac response, and in particular his sister Mary Herbert attempted to control Sidney's image through the publication of his literary works. Although much of this early production of the Sidnean imaginary was aimed at influencing Elizabeth's foreign policy and furthering radical Protestantism, however, Elizabeth herself seems to have played the second key role in this apotheosis: the lavish Sidney funeral may have all been arranged as an elaborate spectacle to distract England from Elizabeth's execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, making Sidney an ironic national hero of convenience.⁷

Sidney certainly had a hand in creating this image as well; however, the courtier-warrior-poet that Greville presents as a synthetic ideal was only possible posthumously and poetically, papering over the reality of Sidney's disaggregated identity. Sidney created his primary poetic persona to encapsulate the multiple layers of representation generated by the ambivalence that characterized his life: the melancholy would-be shepherd Philisides (Phili[pus]-Sid[n]e[u]s). He developed this poetic moniker early, evincing awareness of the performative aspect of self-representation that characterized the Sidney family's pseudo-fictionalized identity. Eulogistic poetry to Sidney made wide use of the Philisides identity, nicely indicating how much of a poetic construction the hero "Sidney" in fact was, a re-writing of his character in light of the theatrical nature of his death. In life, Philisides represented Sidney's understanding of his own persona as

⁷ Alan Hager, "The Exemplary Mirage: Fabrication of Sir Philip Sidney's Biographical Image and the Sidney Reader," *ELH* 48, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 5–8..

something between identity and performance, a coordinating device for navigating irresolvable conflicts.

The central conflict that leads Sidney to develop a prototypical malcontent discourse has been overlooked because of the historical accidents which created a distorted author-function “Sidney.” This Sidney is read as the ingenuous author of the *Defense*, and what little of his poetic corpus we read is invariably read through the lens of that rhetorical exercise.⁸ Reading the *Defense* into Sidney's poetry, we lose a sense of the central conflict that drove Sidney's literary production, seeing Sidney as a unified theorist and practitioner. In particular, we lose sight of the intense affects, the desperation and disaffection, that characterized Sidney's literary words and political deeds from his return to England in 1575 to his death in 1586. As I argued in the introduction, the melancholy malcontent is a *figura*, particularly as developed by Sidney, whose poesy repeatedly allegorized his melancholy and self-reflection through proto-malcontent melancholics. The malcontent is characterized by a constant turn inward, an inherent self-implication, even as his discontent lashes outward. Though Sidney himself did not write anything we would unequivocally call “satire,” this emphasis on social critique that cannot help but be first and foremost self-critique explains why the early malcontents following Sidney in the 1590s turn to satire as their favored strategy: in the *Arcadia*, Sidney describes the minor figure Mastix, the “scourge,” with satiric accuracy as “one of the repiningest fellows in the world, and that beheld nobody but with a mind of mislike (saying still the world was amiss, but how it should be amended he knew not)[.]”⁹ The satirists who

⁸ In this chapter, I follow Sidney's *Defense* in using “poetry” broadly to encompass roughly what we mean currently by “fiction” or “literature.”

⁹ Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*, ed. Jean Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), Ec. I.76.

styled their own railings in this manner adopted the same self-deprecating pose as Sidney's Mastix, who prefigured several important characteristics of the railing satirist: Mastix's Arcadian melancholy expresses itself as the voiced discontent ("repining") of the malcontent, a generalized disgust with the world; he is connected with Acteon's dogs, which turn on their master; and his scourging of social vices renders *him* unfit for society, an outcast. Mastix, too, is one of Sidney's self-mocking poetic figurations, if more leashed than his successors—the malcontent satirist as ludicrous as the vices he abhors. A favorite image of the malcontent satirist and anti-satirist at the turn of the 17th century, the whip scours the vice of the wielder as harshly if not more so than those he pursues, creating an odd corpus of mutual flagellation.¹⁰ The self-enfolding nature of the malcontent collapses the usual distinction between poet and speaker, person and persona, placing them in ironic proximity. Or to put it another way, the malcontent flaunts the affectations and socially scripted performances of a *habitus* that defines him as but one member of a class while vehemently insisting on his own absolute individuality.¹¹

Sidney is the first to develop a self-reflexive malcontent *figura* in Auerbach's terms—historically individuated allegory—and he produces them repeatedly, almost

¹⁰ Sidney's figure of the Mastix appears to be the first use of its kind in English; to use the term in the 17th century seems to have been to link oneself directly to Sidney's character. Much of John Marston's *The Scourge of Villanie* (1598) is devoted to whipping satirist Joseph Hall, Marston and his friend and fellow satirist Edward Guilpin both come under attack in *The Whipping of the Satyre* (1601), while meanwhile Marston seems to have sparked off the so-called Poetomachia in the *Histrionmastix* (1599), which climaxed in Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* (1600) and Thomas Dekker's *Satiromastix* (1601). See *OED Online*, s.v. "mastix, n."; "-mastix, comb. form," accessed February 2, 2016.

¹¹ We will see Hamlet's expression of this paradox in Chapter 5, but for now compare that famous "Monsieur Melancholy" Jaques's insistence on the uniqueness of his wholly stereotypical performance: "I have neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician's, which is fantastical; nor the courtier's, which is proud; nor the lawyer's, which is nice; nor the lover's, which is all these: but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples"—a defense of originality which is itself, of course, a self-conscious pose (*AYLI*, IV.i.10-16). William Shakespeare, "As You Like It," in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. Anne Barton, 2nd ed. (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 425. Parenthetical references to *As You Like It* refer to this edition.

obsessively.¹² Like Sidney's poet, then, who “coupleth the general notion with the particular example,” the *figura* stands as a bridge between the particular and the universal (between history and philosophy). We might add to this Sidney's favorite example of Xenophon's *Cryopaedia*. Sidney envisions poetry as a machine that can generate archetypes of the kind that shaped him as a young man, a single mold able to stamp out not one but thousands of great men: “so far substantially it worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses[.]”¹³ Much of the *Defense* separates the poetic creation from natural creation, and thus Sidney does mean us to read allegorically, completely divorcing the historical Cyrus from his improved fictional counterpart, purged of human flaws. While Sidney argues in terms of Neoplatonic or Hellenistic *forma*, however, his practice is often more aligned with *figura*: his poetry is full of what Julie Crawford calls “ciphers,” poetic figures designed to signify real people.¹⁴ Part of the pleasure of reading Sidney's poetry, particularly for his coterie of close associates, was deciphering these figures and presumably musing over their resemblances, ironies, and parodic caricatures.

Obviously, Sidney's ciphers are not simple one-to-one correspondences between poetic figurations and actual people. Rather, the figure always signifies *more* than the individual, sometimes much more, as in the case of the most important cipher of all: the beloved. “Love” for Sidney increasingly signifies an attempt to define the complex

¹² See Auerbach, “Figura,” 70.

¹³ Sir Philip Sidney, “The Defense of Poesy,” in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 9th ed., vol. B (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2012), 1055, 1050.

¹⁴ Julie Crawford, “Female Constancy and *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*,” in *Mediatrix: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 30–85.

affective frustrations of his very real but inarticulate discontent, an affective state that is significantly *not* tied to any individual body. In the process, Sidney developed the Ur-pattern for the many melancholy malcontents to follow over the next few decades.

Edward Berry has shown how Sidney's poetic project consistently aims to construct or poetically “make” an identity, “self-fashioning” to use the term popularized by Greenblatt.¹⁵ In the process, however, Sidney created something more: a figure or type which could be inhabited and developed by others—a Sidney to make many Sidneys.

On the other hand, neither is Sidney's use of multivalent ciphers an example of Patterson's “functional ambiguity,” deployed to keep the censor from pinning the proper but unsavory interpretation to the text, but rather a function of Sidney's ambivalence and an expression of the difficulty of delimiting a problem the contours of which defy clear conceptualization.¹⁶ The ability to capture *this* ambiguity is poetry's vital strength for Sidney, and belies Sidney's emphasis on a clear and unified poetic “Idea” in the *Defense*. To find the key to Sidney's work, we must look for what binds Sidney in a state of frustrated inaction: Sidney is driven into the pastoral exile of his mind not by a person but by an insoluble ideological paradox. Sidney's political career is marked by a failure of what Baldesar Castiglione calls *sprezzatura* in *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), causing him to vacillate between private retreat and public over-visibility. Whereas the courtier was meant to cultivate subtlety and the art of hinting at great potential by demonstrating as little as possible, Sidney seemed incapable of all but the most direct actions. His work evidences a sophisticated knowledge of the art of courtship, but the effort seems to have strained his capacities in practice. Strangely, it seems to have been his capacity for

¹⁵ Edward Berry, *The Making of Sir Philip Sidney* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

¹⁶ Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*, 18.

feigning that was strained—the central practice of the poet, according to the *Defense*.

Sidney works to distinguish this honest feigning (poetry) from dishonest feigning (dissimulation) in the *Defense*, but ultimately demonstrates the impossibility of maintaining that distinction in his own poetic practice. Although Elizabeth's court would seem to literalize a kind of poetics of courtship that we might expect someone like Sidney to embrace, it seems that Sidney was finally unable to accept or imagine a poetic politics that might straddle the middle ground between “action” and “idleness.” Thus “feigning” becomes for Sidney a charged and ambivalent term, positive or negative by turns, and his literary works from the *Arcadia* to the *Defense* represent a number of attempts to respond to this problem.

The following chapter traces Sidney's attempts to deploy the love melancholic figure to capture an affective state that, at the time, lacked a proper language of description, and in the process essentially creating a new cultural means of expression. The affective structure of this new breed of melancholy is structurally similar to love melancholy: the achievement of a desire is obstructed, leading to an affective intensity without direction. Rather than love, however, the obstructed desire is perhaps best described as ambition: the inability to act in a politically efficacious manner. Action is a charged term for Sidney, defining an entire discourse of virtue both as a form of masculinity and proper political service for one of Sidney's station. The Sidney family's political philosophy in the 1570s and 80s, however, was out of synch with Elizabethan policy, and the high expectations Sidney's family had for him were frustrated at every turn. Thus obstructed from the supreme value of action, Sidney was consigned to “idleness,” a state of futility, frustration, and vice. However, Sidney's situation was

complicated by the fact that he found value in idleness as well: though he resented enforced idleness and his own melancholic temperament, he also valued scholarly and poetic pursuits which did not meet the test of utility strictly demanded by his mentor Hubert Languet. Unable to maintain the binary of action versus idleness touted by Sidney's radical Protestant circle, Sidney's career is constituted by a series of attempts to resolve, question, or refute this binary.¹⁷

This central problem has been overlooked, however, because the most widely known Sidney text, *The Defense of Poesy*, proposes an apparently simple solution. Sidney formulates a clear rhetorical position for poetry that aligns it with the key values of action and virtue, defending it from the charge of idleness. Yet the measured rhetoric of the *Defense* is undermined by Sidney's own poetry, which represents alternative, contradictory "theories" of poetry. In fact, the obscure pastoral poem "Dispraise of a Courtly Life" mirrors the language of the *Defense* and embraces the very objection that Sidney counters in his rhetorical treatise: essentially a defense of idleness, the honest "mirth" of song becomes an escape from "false, fine, courtly pleasure" (lms. 46-8), and intimate homosocial enjoyment becomes a manner of insulating himself from the world rather than a drive to action.¹⁸ In the *Defense*, the persistent pastoral characterization of poesy tends to subtly contradict the principle of action upon which the argument is

¹⁷ Starting with Edwin Greenlaw in 1913, several critics have shown that the binary of action and idleness was rooted in the political discourse of Sidney's Protestant circle and his correspondence with his mentor Hubert Languet (see below). However, these critics have all taken these political values as absolutes for Sidney and failed to see that this inherited binary is in fact the key source of *anxiety* in Sidney's writing: he is neither able to accept the simple valuation of action over idleness, nor fully reject it. See Edwin A. Greenlaw, "Sidney's *Arcadia* as an Example of Elizabethan Allegory," in *Kittredge Anniversary Papers* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1913), 327-37; Annabel Patterson, "'Under...Pretty Tales': Intention in Sidney's *Arcadia*," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 5-21; Worden, *Sound of Virtue*.

¹⁸ Sir Philip Sidney, "Two Pastorels," in *Sir Philip Sidney's Complete Works*, ed. Albert Feuillerat, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1922), 325-28.

founded. In “Disprays,” by contrast, the world seems bereft of action: there is only the feigned and artificial love of the courtier against the sincere and natural love of true friendship. Although (like the *Arcadia* and “Lamon's Tale”) strongly invested in homosocial ties that represent Sidney's close relationships with fellow poets Fulke Greville and Edward Dyer, the discourse of masculine virtue and action in contrast to effeminate idleness is absent. Instead, the “malcontent” shepherd offers two opposing choices of idleness and pleasure, one natural and the other feigned. In the *Old Arcadia*, these two conflicting schemas of action versus idleness compete, as Sidney works through multiple attempts to solve the dilemma.

In both *Philisides* and *Astrophil*, even in the speaker of the *Defense*, Sidney teasingly insists that we read his poetry biographically. However, the necessity of negotiating between Sidney-the-poet and Sidney-the-speaker is not merely a matter of finding and aligning correspondences between events and texts. Sidney's poetic figurations attempt to capture the affective intensity generated by his historical conditions. These intensities are essentially like linear vectors of force; however, affects are culturally defined, regularized, and valued, essentially routed into authorized discourses—what the early modern period called “passions.” In the case of the “malcontent,” these affective intensities are incapable of being routed through socially acceptable channels: the *mal-content* is literally ill-contained.¹⁹ The creation of affective “pressures” creates a desperate need for escape valves, one of which is expression through language. However, as Sidney attempts to “plot” these affects through language,

¹⁹ The etymological meaning of “malcontent,” from *mal+contentus*, could be interpreted in a number of ways, but the OED suggests that, tracing it to the French origin, “content” here has the sense of “contained” (obsolete in English). *OED Online*, s.v. “malcontent, n.1 and adj.”; “content, adj.1,” accessed August 13, 2015.

he finds the same culturally coded axes underlying his means for expression. Thus each attempt at expression under different conditions generates refracted images, contradictory and inharmonious, yet illuminating from different angles the same affective state plotted against unsustainable cultural polarities, primarily configured in Sidney's case under the binary of action and idleness. The figure of the "malcontent" is itself the solution to this problem, ultimately developing a cultural "type" which, while it may not solve the affective maladjustment, regularizes and evaluates it in a manner that allows the malcontent to be safely threaded into the social fabric with a ready-made value judgment attached. In the following, I attempt to "map" Sidney's ideological struggle along an axis, starting from his most conservative acquiescence to the value of action in *The Lady of May* and the *Defense*, and moving to his most radical refusal of the binary in the obscure poem "Dispryse," while the *Old Arcadia* serves as the primary example of the various and inconsistent strategies Sidney developed along this spectrum. Usefully, Sidney likely did his major work on these texts in and around 1580: these refractions in no way allow us recourse to a "developmental" narrative, but rather a set of discontinuous responses to a diachronic crisis.²⁰ Re-reading the *Defense* more through the lens of the *Old Arcadia* rather than the other way around, we begin to excavate a poet as deeply suspicious of

²⁰ *The Lady of May* is one of the earliest compositions we can date reliably, from either 1578 or 1579. It is commonly thought that the *Defense* was written probably in the midst of Sidney's work on the *Old Arcadia*, sometime in the winter of 1579-1580, in response to *The School of Abuse* (1579), the rather hypocritical palinode attacking poets and actors that once-playwright Stephen Gosson dedicated to Sidney. Sidney had possibly started work on the *Arcadia* as early as 1577, but I have not been able to find evidence of a year for "Dispryse." With its references to court life separating him from his friends Greville and Dyer, the poem almost certainly dates from some time between his return to England from the Continent and his absence from court following the "Letter to Elizabeth" (1575-1581). Its mix of simplicity and experimentation strongly suggest an early date of composition, around the time he was composing the poems he integrated into *Arcadia* and perhaps the early Philisides/Mira poems (1577-1580). However, since the first copy of this poem appears in 1602, we can only say for sure that the poem dates from before Sidney's death in 1586. See William Ringler, "Poems Attributed to Sir Philip Sidney," *Studies in Philology* 47, no. 2 (April 1950): 144-45.

poetry as he was attracted to it, and are forced to take somewhat more seriously the flippant statement that he was thrown into his “unelected vocation” as poet almost against his will.

In the process, Sidney laid the foundation for the strategies that would define the melancholy malcontent in the following decades: vacillating somewhere between Stoic and hysteric, the malcontent exhibits a series of failed strategies for negotiating the frustrating gulf he experiences between ideal and real conditions, and in particular the difference between his own status and the status he believes he deserves.²¹ The malcontent, however, challenges Plato's fiction that no one chooses anything but the perceived good. Rather than a mis-recognition of the greater good through ignorance, the malcontent is trapped by a vision of a greater good he finds it impossible to achieve. *Given* the schema that passion must be yoked to reason, *given* the desire to be virtuous, the social and political landscape of the malcontent is one of unbearable affective pressure. Neostoicism intertwines with the figure of the malcontent for precisely this reason, and early modern Stoicism counter-intuitively provides us with a sophisticated exploration of the Stoic project's own impossibility: the malcontent responds to the fact of passion by trying to strangle it, because they fear the anarchic, violent alternative should passion overwhelm them. Somewhere between eschewing impious rebellion and the cardinal sin of suicide emerges, for the malcontent, the production of poetry. Whereas the *Defense* downplays the role of the passions to an almost stoical degree, until only the

²¹ Critical studies of the early modern period have tended to latch onto the same values of virtue and reason versus vice and passion that Sidney puts forth in the *Defense*: villains become unrealistic stock characters, because in such a simple system of virtue and vice, who would ever willingly choose evil? Even a study focusing on passion such as Christopher Tilmouth's *Passion's Triumph Over Reason* merely reverses the polarity of values and turns passion into the Renaissance hero. See Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph Over Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

defanged notion of “pleasure” remains, Sidney's own poetic production is almost universally self-consciously melancholic, and he evinces a constant struggle with the violence of passion and desire. The pastoral shepherds of the *Old Arcadia* posit poetry as essentially the symptom of a mortally dangerous passion, not the path to virtue. We find these figures often luxuriating in the pleasurable anguish of their lusts and ambitions, avoiding rather than spurred to action. Thus the poetic “making” that Sidney so lauds in the *Defense* comes to have a more ambivalent—sometimes even sinister—valence.

ii. Love is politics in *The Lady of May*

The narrative of Philip Sidney's life was written out for him at a young age. The security of being embedded in a familial narrative seems to have been alternately comforting and frustrating, but most frustrating was how difficult Sidney found it to actually put this predetermined narrative into practice. In his short adult life as a courtier, Sidney repeatedly encountered internal and external obstructions to *praxis*, action in the Aristotelian sense (the Latin *actio*). *Praxis* (the root of our word “practical”) comes from the verb *prattein*, which is synonymous, the *Poetics* tells us, with *dran* (the root of our word “drama”), which is “to do” or “to be in action.”²² The Aristotelian term is useful because *praxis* is grounded in *telos*, the end or “good” towards which the action is directed. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle asks us to “Suppose, then, that the things achievable by action [*prakton*] have some end [*telos*] that we wish for because of

²² Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Richard Janko (Cambridge: Hackett, 1987), 4 (48a28-b2). Critical tradition has downplayed Sidney's engagement with the *Poetics*, insisting that he likely read only mediated accounts of Aristotle's argument. However, Micha Lazarus has recently shown that Sidney clearly had access not even to just a Latin translation, but directly to a Greek edition, which he consulted carefully. Micha Lazarus, “Sidney's Greek Poetics,” *Studies in Philology* 112, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 504–36, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sip.2015.0022>.

itself[. ...] Clearly, this end will be the good, that is to say, the best good.” Logically, Aristotle argues, the highest end of every action is a (perceived) good, and the final good, the “best good,” when we trace our desires to their root will be happiness with the state of one's life, “*eudaimonia*.”²³ Aristotle establishes a triad of values that the Renaissance would call the *vita activa*: performance, action, and virtue are tightly knotted together, and the loss of access to action meant the impossibility of fulfillment in life.

Sidney faced a problem of *telos*, whether his end was diverted or apparently lacking altogether. While Sidney seems to have found the pastoral attractive from an early age, the pastoral genre comes to self-consciously dominate his poetic production: as a place of imaginative stasis, the conventional *locus amoenus* could simultaneously project safety and retreat or anxiety and frustration, allowing Sidney an ideal idyllic setting for exploring the failure of *praxis*. Moreover, pastoral was a dominant political motif of Sidney's time, the poetic aegis under which Queen Elizabeth coded her unique and fraught brand of court politics. Sidney's most direct and disastrous foray into this serious play of courtier-shepherds, Sidney's single dramatic composition *The Lady of May* (1578/1579?), serves as an emblematic example of the instability of the imaginatively projected ends of Sidney's actions. Furthermore, this work is a kind of control sample, exemplifying the pastoral poetry courtiers used to “advise” Elizabeth, showing Sidney trying to conform to the political expectations of his time. Unfortunately

²³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Hackett, 1999), 1 (1094a18-23). “Happiness” is a famously inadequate translation of *eudaimonia*, which means something more like “living well”; Aristotle is careful to distinguish this as *virtuous* living as opposed to hedonistic pursuit of pleasure. As a *telos*, *eudaimonia* is not precisely a quality of “lived experience,” but more like the sum of that experience; thus Aristotle uses his interpretation of *eudaimonia* to solve the “puzzle” of Solon's advice to “count no human being happy during his lifetime[.]” See also Irwin's glossary entries on “action,” “end,” and “happiness.” Ibid., 13–14 (1100a10–b22), 315 (“action”), 325 (“end”), 333–34 (“happiness”).

for Sidney, as Stephen Orgel first noted, *The Lady of May* ends in a travesty of interactive theater gone wrong. The failures of this performance and his other major attempt at advising the Queen, his direct and overly-frank “Letter to Elizabeth,” establish the background against which we can read the *Defense*, “Dispraise,” and the *Old Arcadia*, each interrogating his place in a system that seems to have rejected him. Generically, *The Lady of May* belongs to a set of “entertainments” devised and performed for Elizabeth at various estates the queen visited on her summer tours of the country. These entertainments were theatrical events unbounded by the stage, aiming at a nearly seamless overlap between reality and performance, and they sometimes involved a modicum of direct interaction with the queen rather than mere spectatorship. The performance of *The Lady of May* occurred at the Essex estate of the Earl of Leceister, Sidney's uncle, in May of 1578 or 1579. Walking through Wanstead Garden, Elizabeth found herself accosted by shepherds who suddenly demanded her immersion in Sidney's imaginative projection onto the country landscape. Such ambitious performances courted numerous obvious risks, and the textual accounts we have bear several traces of the disruptions attendant on attempting to perform around and with a body who could choose to engage the fiction as either willing actor following the fiction, or free agent who may take events in an unexpected direction.

In Sidney's entertainment, the performers do not simply address the queen directly, but finally present her with the choice of suitor for the May Lady, Elizabeth's own stand-in: Therion, the active forester who promises liberation, or Espilus, the wealth-bound shepherd, whose peaceful contemplative life conceals bondage and inactivity, clearly articulating a perfectly orthodox version of the Sidney circle's central value. These

entertainments were not *simply* diversions, but also political statements devised to advise or persuade the monarch, which greatly raised the stakes of the usual dramaturgical mishaps. Most critics side with Orgel that, rhetorically, Therion was clearly established as the 'proper' choice, and that by “*judg[ing] that Espilus did the better deserve*” the May Lady, Elizabeth brought Sidney's project to ruin.²⁴ Not reading much political context into the entertainment, Orgel sees Elizabeth's choice as a mere mistake. According to Orgel, rather than close reading the speeches, Elizabeth's judgment relies on the very pastoral tropes that Sidney is intentionally subverting. On this question, however, critical consensus tends to see Elizabeth's choice as a *deliberate* subversion of Sidney's intention. It is possible that Sidney meant to comment directly on Elizabeth's proposed marriage to Francis, Duke of Anjou, the topic that most haunted Sidney's political career—a marriage which favored a Catholic foreigner over Sidney's uncle Leicester, long Elizabeth's tireless suitor.²⁵ We could then straightforwardly align the pastoral figures with actual people:

Therion = Leicester | Espilus = Anjou

Since the pastoral genre tends to utilize stock figures that are more “positions” than “characters,” the genre lends itself well to such representational correspondences. Pastoral names become a code for real persons, and the reader is asked to “decode” the referent.

²⁴ Sir Philip Sidney, “The Lady of May,” in *The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.

²⁵ Crucially, critics do *not* agree that *Lady of May* directly comments on the Anjou marriage. Louis Adrian Montrose, for example, emphasizes the traditional philosophical stakes of the political debate: Action versus Contemplation. Stephen Orgel, “Sidney’s Experiment in Pastoral: *The Lady of May*,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 26, no. 1/2 (1963): 202; Louis Adrian Montrose, “Celebration and Insinuation: Sir Philip Sidney and the Motives of Elizabethan Courtship,” *Renaissance Drama* 8 (January 1977): 20; Bruce R. Smith, “Landscape with Figures: The Three Realms of Queen Elizabeth’s Country-House Revels,” *Renaissance Drama* 8 (January 1977): 75; Hager, “Exemplary Mirage,” 5; Edward Berry, “Sidney’s May Game for the Queen,” *Modern Philology* 86, no. 3 (February 1989): 253.

Seventeenth-century readers of Sidney's *Arcadia* commonly approached the pastoral romance in this manner, often supplying “keys” to the major figures.²⁶ However, the keys provide conflicting referents for most of the figures, with the exception of Philisides, Philip Sidney's own persona within the poem. The same vacuousness that allows these pastoral positions to be filled with real bodies also makes these correspondences unstable and multiple. The pastoral figure is indeed a “cipher,” but the very ambiguity and *lack* of direct correspondence that challenge us to take on interpretive agency and drives readers to become decipherers simultaneously (what Julie Crawford calls “the *Arcadia*'s deciphering imperative”) admits the possibility of multiple referents, allowing the position to be filled not only by multiple bodies but also multiple ideas.²⁷ Even “melancholy Philisides,” the most obviously “coded” of Sidney's figures, establishes a melancholic *type*, a kind of schema Sidney has abstracted from his own character and self-consciously distanced, however slightly, in the form of a crafted persona.

Thus, even if we are invited to supply the bodies of Leicester and Anjou in *The Lady of May*, it is more productive and more accurate to see those bodies as merely

²⁶ For example, according to Henry Oxinden's key in his 1598 edition, Philisides = “Sr. Philip Sydney himself”; Basilius = “the old Earle of Essex”; Philoclea = “the Ladie Rich” (Penelope Devereux); Parthenia = “the countesse of Pembroke who was Sr. Philips sister”; and Helen = “queen Elizabeth.” William Dean, “Henry Oxinden's Key to the Countesse of Pembroke's *Arcadia*,” *Sidney Newsletter & Journal* 12, no. 2 (1993): 16. In *Mediatrix*, Julie Crawford argues that “The existence of keys to the *Arcadia* from the very beginning of its circulation indicate the perceived connections between characters and real historical figures were structural, rather than merely ornamental, to the *Arcadia*'s meaning; the consistency of certain identifications suggests, moreover, that the romance was associated with a specific sociocultural milieu or community.” I agree, but want to insist below that there is a higher level of abstraction at stake which turns these historical persons *back* into ciphers, referring outward to their social type, the political views they stand for, and other ideas which they represent primarily as a particular instantiation. Philisides may be Philip Sidney's thin guise, taking on some of his color from the real poet's personality and quirks, but his love melancholy is also a cipher for more inarticulate anxieties. Crawford, “Female Constancy,” 35–37.

²⁷ Crawford, “Female Constancy,” 37.

mediums for translating the abstract political positions they represent.²⁸ The choice of *suitors*, as literal as those suitors may have been, was primarily a choice of foreign policy: Sidney offers Elizabeth an object of desire that stands as cipher for militant political action resisting the counter-Reformation. By choosing Espilus, Elizabeth was not so much indicating her desire to marry Anjou (which she ultimately did not), but rather telling Sidney and Leicester in no uncertain terms that she had no intention of changing her foreign policy. Essentially choosing herself, Elizabeth's "misreading" served not only to put Sidney and Leicester in their place in a gentle if embarrassing manner, it also established her own sovereign interpretive agency over the text. If the purpose of poesy, according to Sidney's *Defense*, is to lead men to virtue by the pleasant way, Elizabeth's deliberate counter-reading poses a serious challenge: the "manly" poetics of the *Defense* suggest an oddly passive relationship to the reception of poetry, while as a woman reader, Elizabeth's active role establishes the meaning of the text between author and audience, and positions virtue within the reader rather than in an external ideal. This ordeal sets the pattern for Sidney's brief political career, not only in terms of his relationship with Elizabeth, but also his struggle (and failure) to make the Renaissance series of values active/passive, masculine/feminine line up in neat rhetorical binaries.

²⁸ Therion "embodies the 'masculine' aggressiveness that both men [Sidney and Leicester] found wanting in Elizabeth's foreign policy towards the Netherlands." Berry, *Making of Sidney*, 54.

iii. “*otiosi tam funestae tragoediae spectatores*”: Idle spectators on a Protestant stage

The Lady of May is a rhetorical production that has more in common with *The Defense of Poesy* than the *Arcadia*. Written in a persuasive mode, they attempt to organize and categorize: Sidney's rhetoric proceeds by a logic of division, seeking through clarity to offer an unambiguous answer to a problem—although as we have seen, this method is thoroughly susceptible to failure. As Worden has argued, the active/idle binary permeated the political discourse of Sidney's “party,” the loose association of radical, militant Protestants historians call the International Protestant League.²⁹ As early as 1574, Wolfgang Zündelin, a Protestant scholar and diplomat Sidney befriended on the Continent, wrote of the capture of La Goletta in terms disparaging Philip II and the Spanish: those observers “freer of prejudice,” claims Zündelin, “most of all blame the King's ministers, who did not in time aid the African enterprise with men and money as the King [Philip II] had ordered, and preferred to be idle spectators of such a fatal tragedy—incurred through their own guilt—rather than actors [*et otiosi tam funestae tragoediae spectatores sua culpa suscitatae, quam actores esse maluerint*].”³⁰ These men viewed the clash of Catholicism and Protestantism as a great action played out on the European stage, and often figured it in such explicitly dramatic terms. On this stage, there was a clear division: there were “actors” and there were “spectators,” conceived as mere passive receivers. Sidney adopted this political vocabulary in particular from his mentor and most frequent correspondent Hubert Languet, who similarly condemned “those who are idle spectators [*ociosi spectatores*] of others' dangers,” sometimes in much more

²⁹ Worden, *Sound of Virtue*, 60–63..

³⁰ Letter from Wolfgang Zündelin, 5 November 1574. Kuin, *Correspondence*, 2012, 1:336.

personal terms. By 1580, the Netherlands were being torn apart between the Protestants under William of Orange and the Catholics under Philip II: “Orange is driven to ally himself to the French because he has no hope of aid from anywhere else.” Not so subtly, Languet indicates that “anywhere else” includes the country that ought to be their natural Protestant ally, England: “You [English] are idle spectators [*ociosi spectatores*] of these events, as if they had nothing to do with you.”³¹

Retrospectively, Sidney's close friend Fulke Greville lauded Sidney as one of the true “actors” on the stage of European politics.³² In reality, the high political expectations the Sidney family placed in Sidney were thwarted again and again, while physically Sidney was inclined more to study and melancholy, the life of the contemplative scholar, than to action. His only “actions” were the brash, spontaneous impulses characteristic of the melancholic: his plan to rush off to the Americas with Francis Drake and Greville seems to have been affectively equivalent to the temper tantrum that led Sidney to challenge Edward de Vere to a duel.³³ Sidney also seems to have been atrocious at

³¹ Letters from Hubert Languet, 24 September and 24 July 1580. Kuin, *Correspondence*, 2012, 2:1000, 988. Interestingly, Languet here characterizes Anjou as a moderate potentially capable of mediating between the Protestants and Catholics. These letters were written just before Francis, Duke of Anjou became the Protector of the Netherlands (29 September 1580). Being that Sidney wrote the infamous “Letter to Elizabeth” in this same year in hopes of “dissuading her from marrying the Duke of Anjou” and greatly angering his monarch (in fact, Sidney was already absent from court when he received these letters), Languet's account may suggest Sidney could have had a more nuanced view of Anjou than his recorded actions have led us to believe. If Sidney agreed with Languet, then perhaps his objections were not a matter of inflexible anti-Catholic sentiment: it is one thing for Anjou to be a useful ally in resolving the conflict with Spain, but it is quite another to have him marry your monarch.

³² Worden, *Sound of Virtue*..

³³ Apparently Sidney was upset that Elizabeth passed over him for Governor of Flushing, once again frustrating Sidney's political ambitions and keeping him far from what Sidney perceived as the seat of action on the world stage. Therefore, driven by “despair” and “disgrace,” in Walsingham's words, he came up with a scheme to accompany Drake to the Americas, funding the expedition on his own credit, intending, it seems, to be a governor in the New World if he could not be one in the Netherlands. He was with Drake and ready to set sail in September, 1585. Drake, on the other hand, seems to have wanted his money but not his presence, and when the Queen received a letter from Drake about the expedition, she ordered Sidney not to sail, but also gave him the governorship in Flushing. It was this post, of course, which finally allowed Sidney to participate in the fight against the Catholics and led to his death the next

returning correspondence, and Languet teasingly remarked during one of these many lapses that he worried his letters spread “a cloudlet over your delightful idleness [*suavi illi tuo ocio*]. My noble Sidney,” Languet admonishes him, “one must avoid that wicked siren, Sloth [*Desidia*].”³⁴ The Languet-Sidney correspondence is many things, but it is throughout an exercise in *amicitia*, male erotic friendship. As Sidney's mentor, Languet teaches Sidney the importance of the rhetoric of friendship throughout their correspondence, emphasizing the value of maintaining those ties of love, which are both private and political.³⁵ Although Languet's letters are generally teasing and playful, they ultimately serve to shape Sidney's character with much the same sweetness Sidney ascribes to poetry. Sidney's disposition may have been part of the charm that ingratiated him on the Continent, but it also betrays the difficulty Sidney had molding himself into the active man defined by a legacy of patriarchs to which Sidney was the heir. Not only was he the heir of the Sidney family, but for much of his life he was expected to be Leicester's heir as well, yet even the *Defense* where these orthodox family values most clearly dominate reveals a boyish, bookish Sidney ill at ease with those values.

Philip Sidney's family legacy loomed large: his grandfather, William Sidney, had distinguished himself as war hero and chamberlain to Edward VI, bringing the Sidney family to prominence. Philip's father followed in William Sidney's footsteps, although he was never to reach the same close relationship with Elizabeth that the Sidneys briefly enjoyed under Edward. The melancholy and somewhat whimsical disposition

year. Wallace, *Sidney*, 331–33; Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 273–74.

³⁴ Letter from Languet, 18 September 1575. Kuin, *Correspondence*, 2012, 1:523.

³⁵ Languet himself, for example, provided Sidney a key point of access to an entire continental social network, and Languet's teasing remarks that he is pining for want of another letter from Sidney also serve to lecture Sidney on the fragility of that network, which he endangers by failing to maintain adequate correspondence practices.

consistently imputed to Sidney aligns him with the same political *otium* that directly opposed these models of virtuous service, and Languet's gentle warning echoes Henry Sidney's admonition in a conventional letter of advice written when Sidney was perhaps no more than eleven years old (1566). The letter outlined his future and his family's expectations, couching Sidney within his predetermined path in a direct and personal way. The advice Henry gives his son is explicitly tied to his class and family, as the conclusion to the letter makes clear:

Remember, my son, the noble blood you are descended of by your mother's side; and think that only by virtuous life and good action you may be an ornament to that illustrious family. Otherwise, through vice and sloth, you may be counted *labes generis* [a blot on your family/birth], one of the greatest curses that can happen to man.³⁶

Strikingly, Henry uses the same terms as Languet: a gentleman faces a choice between virtue and sloth. The essential mark of Sidney's gender-class position is *action*, Sidney's mentors universally emphasize. For Philip Sidney and his siblings, William and Henry Sidney were abstract patterns as much as family members, “role models” of the most literal kind. The Sidney patriarchs were “types,” exemplars of gentlemanly virtue, and Philip Sidney was expected to fulfill such a type himself and weave himself into his family tapestry.

Aristocratic houses like Sidney's family were of course powerful political alliances which acted as the central node of a patronage network commonly called a coterie. Thus a “gentleman” like Sidney was as much a unit as an individual.³⁷ We know

³⁶ Qtd. in Berry, *Making of Sidney*, 11.

³⁷ Berry nicely summarizes the point: “What is most striking about Sir Henry's letter, in the context of the young Philip's sense of identity, are the assumptions about Philip's role that underlie it. His position in life is not something he must seek out or define; it was given at birth. He is a gentleman. All of the virtues his father commends to him are important to him in relation to that preordained social role. Piety, knowledge, obedience, courtesy, moderation, carefulness in speech, honesty—each of these

that during the late sixteenth century, increasingly power came to be centralized in the court, threatening the more diffuse distribution of power represented by these coteries. Yet by the time of Sidney's father, the ideal of the powerful aristocratic courtier was already outmoded. Henry Sidney, like the Earl of Leicester, had a great deal of pride in his own status, believing that his power and prestige as his Queen's Lord Governor in Ireland and Lord President of Wales reflected upon the Queen herself. In the Elizabethan political climate, however, aristocratic displays of power looked suspiciously like potential rivalry for the Crown. So when Henry Sidney arrived in October 1567 "with a grand entourage of some two hundred horsemen," Elizabeth did not take this as a reflection of her own glory in the person of her Lord Governor, as Henry expected, but rather "querulously enquired who was approaching her in such majestic state. When advised that it was [Henry] Sidney she dryly commented: 'It was well enough; for that he had two of the best offices in the kingdom.'"³⁸

Philip Sidney tried to live up to the ideal expected of him, but he was also increasingly aware that the ideal, however noble, no longer functioned. This awareness may explain Sidney's attraction to the Silver Age Roman writers who most influenced the malcontents of the following decades: the popularity of Seneca and Tacitus in particular was sharply rising, in part because Tacitus painted a bleak portrait of crumbling Rome, with Seneca cast as the ill-fated noble philosopher, a portrait that resonated with those who saw a crumbling Holy Roman Empire as tyrannical, to Protestants at least, as any Caligula or Nero. At an early date, the Sidney family seems to have been attracted to the

attributes is essential not as a general human virtue but as a distinctive mark of a gentleman: "There cannot be a greater reproach to a gentleman than to be accounted a liar." Berry, 12–13.

³⁸ Berry, 45–52.

picture of the long-suffering virtuous counselor portrayed in Tacitus' *Agricola*. The account of Tacitus' father-in-law Gnaeus Julius Agricola's faithful and thankless service in Ireland while his enemies slandered him at court mirrored Henry Sidney's own service from the Sidney family's perspective. As the most powerful of Elizabeth's governors, that power ironically worked against him, causing Elizabeth unease and making it easy for those at court to cast aspersions on his management abroad.

In the *Agricola*, the Sidneys saw a model and advice book for their own roles as public servants—patient, tireless, and under-appreciated. This model was essentially Stoic: the disaffection of the Silver Age that resonated with malcontents went hand-in-hand with the malcontent's still-born twin, the Stoic solution that is always as untenable as it is attractive. Exhaustive work has been done on the development of Neostoicism in the 16th and 17th centuries, but that work is ultimately incomplete without an understanding of how Stoicism intertwines with and feeds into the figure of the melancholy malcontent: as Andrew Schifflett argues, “Stoicism remained an important rhetorical means for noble English malcontents and their intellectual retainers to reclaim honor over and against institutional authorities[.]”³⁹ Stoicism was at times rhetorical, at times genuine coping mechanism, but it was always a performance of last resort—the final bastion of refuge for the malcontent in the face of the impossibility of dissent, and the failures of Stoicism only served to deepen his discontent. I believe Sidney's Stoicism in particular has been overstated. He was drawn to Seneca and Tacitus, as well as Machiavelli, whom we might call the premier theorist of discontent, but Sidney also hesitated to adopt ideas which were so far afield from his inherited values. Languet

³⁹ Andrew Schifflett, *Stoicism, Politics, and Literature in the Age of Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 15.

specifically notes in one letter, “I am not a Stoic, nor do I believe all sins are equal,” pointing to the places Roman Stoicism runs up against Christian convictions, the very wrinkles Justus Lipsius attempted to iron out in his Neostoic revival and synthesis of Tacitus and Seneca (Letter from Languet, 24 July 1574). Similarly, Languet attacks Machiavelli and his influence on “the Etruscans and especially the Florentines,” who he rather hyperbolically calls “the authors and creators of all the evil arts” (Letter from Languet, 9 April 1574). This letter causes a series of bantering epistles involving the Florentine Languet calls “your friend Machiavelli,” which carry lighthearted undertones of Languet's disapproval of Sidney's unauthorized sojourn to Venice and his unadvised study of Machiavelli (Letter from Languet, 13 May 1574). As Worden has shown, however, Sidney no more swallowed Machiavelli whole than he did Stoicism.⁴⁰

The slow emergence of Stoic ideas trickling into Sidney's work suggests his hesitation to fully embrace these principles, and surely his mentor's opinion gave him pause. On the other hand, the strong presence of Stoic themes in the *Defense* suggests that his flirtation with Stoicism had begun by 1580, while the later *New Arcadia* struggles to solve the problems of the *Old Arcadia* partly through the establishment of a Stoic lens. In fact, Sidney was responsible for introducing the late 16th century wave of Neostoicism to England through his burgeoning relationship with Lipsius. That relationship was cut short by Sidney's death, however, and although Lipsius' *De Constantia* (1584) was likely influential to the Sidney circle, I don't believe that we can read the Sidney of 1580 as

⁴⁰ Worden rightly notes that Sidney supports the right of the *nobility* to resist, not the grotesque and unnatural “mutinous multitude” Cleophila and Dorus quell in Book II of the *Old Arcadia*. Like Seneca in the face of Nero's power, Sidney's progressive temptation towards Stoic patience in the 1580s may be due to a dawning sense that even resistance of the aristocracy was no longer viable, as Essex would discover almost two decades later. Kuin, *Correspondence*, 2012, 1:300, 155, 215; Worden, *Sound of Virtue*, 260–63; 282–84; Sidney, *Old Arcadia*, 123–32.

truly “a Stoic.” Rather, Lipsius and Sidney likely resonated with one another because Lipsius, like Sidney, was a synthetic thinker, developing an appealing Christian Neostoicism out of Tacitus and Seneca at the same time that Sidney was reading and synthesizing these same works into his own thinking and writing.⁴¹

The *vita activa*, the active life, which William and Henry Sidney exemplified in their public service carried with it an implication of manly “virtue.”⁴² While Machiavellian *virtù* carried a more neutrally instrumental sense of “power,” or *effective* action, virtue for Sidney was laden with Protestant value, or *good* action, but that “good” also carried the force of the masculine archetypes that defined it.⁴³ The more we understand these models, the clearer the aims of Sidney's *Defense* become: one of the key

⁴¹ There is a small possibility that Sidney may have heard Lipsius speak as early as 1577, when they were both in Louvain; however, I have found no solid evidence of explicit interest in or interaction with Lipsius earlier than 1585, the year after Lipsius published *De Constantia*, the first major formulation of his Christian Neostoicism, and explicit Neostoicism seems to have flourished in the Sidney circle only in the 1590s under Sidney's sister, the Countess of Pembroke. Leicester famously went to hear Lipsius lecture on the *Agricola* in the midst of his troubles in the Netherlands (3 March 1585), and Sidney's brother Robert later purchased Lipsius' edition of Tacitus' *Opera* (he purchased the 1585 edition on 20 January 1588/9), and the contained *Agricola*, Brennan notes, “bears heavy annotations in Robert's own hand[.]” It is probably more accurate to say that knowing Sidney's familiarity with Roman Stoicism (and his respect for Seneca in particular), Sidney was developing views independently which found resonance in Lipsian doctrine, but only after Sidney's death (1586) did “Neostoicism” per se take hold among Sidney's associates. Adriana McCrea even suggests that Sidney may have influenced Lipsius' conception of the ideal Stoic man as much as Lipsius influenced Sidney. For the scant evidence on Sidney's relation to Lipsius, see Michael Brennan, *The Sidneys of Penshurst and the Monarchy, 1500-1700* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 94–95; *Constant Minds: Political Virtue and the Lipsian Paradigm in England, 1584-1650* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 32–34.

⁴² The Latin root *virtus* makes clear the original associations between *manliness*, *strength*, and *excellence*, all contained within the single Latin word. “Virtue” came to be applicable to both men and women, but particular virtues were at least theoretically distinguishable into masculine and feminine virtues and carried strongly gendered implications, even if in reality these distinctions continually collapsed and created a great deal of anxiety. Both Roman and Renaissance Stoicism declare their masculinity as a matter of doctrine, and yet in practice Stoic virtues of patience and constancy were traditionally *feminine*, which sometimes caused a misogynistic expulsion of women from the Stoic “garden” (for example, in the fantasy of Eden without Eve in Lipsius' *De Constantia* or Marvell's “The Garden”) while simultaneously making Stoicism an attractive space for the assertion of a positive valuation of feminine virtue (as in the case of the Countess of Pembroke and the Neostoic circle she built following Sidney's death). For an excellent analysis of Lipsius' attempt to exclude women from Christian Neostoicism, see M. R. Sperberg-McQueen, “Gardening without Eve: The Role of the Feminine in Justus Lipsius's *De Constantia* and in Neo-Stoic Thought,” *German Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (Fall 1995): 389–407.

⁴³ Worden describes the difference between Sidney and Machiavelli's notions of virtue in *Sound of Virtue*, 261–63.

“objections” to poetry that Sidney sees it necessary to counter is that “before poets did soften us, we were full of courage and given to martial exercises, the pillars of manlike liberty, and not lulled asleep in shady idleness with poets' pastimes.”⁴⁴ Sidney repeats the political discourse of action versus idleness that Languet so often drilled into him, but militancy is now explicitly linked to “manlike liberty.” Sidney's word “manlike” stretches in two directions at once: the state of freedom itself is manly, the condition of a gentleman, while the warlike resistance of threats to that freedom—that is, the threat of tyranny—is likewise manly.

The political and personal charge of these terms remains: we can hear behind Sidney's defense Languet's charge that the English stand by in European politics as but idle spectators. Sidney charges that “idle England” plays spectator to the European stage not as a result of “imagination” sidetracking them from action, but rather *because* the barren “soil” of England has produced “fewer laurels than it was accustomed.” Poetry is not a distraction from action, but rather its point of origin, and far from being incompatible with courage and martial exercises, “poetry is the companion of camps,” part and parcel of the martial man.⁴⁵ Sidney seems to be defending himself directly from objections his mentor might (perhaps even did) level against Sidney's obsession with poetry. The first objection, “that there being many other more fruitful knowledges, a man might better spend his time in them than in [poetry],” echoes the hierarchy of study that Languet recommended to Sidney in 1574.⁴⁶ Languet always emphasizes the “use” of any branch of knowledge as the single criterion for its value: Sidney's unfulfilled *telos* as

⁴⁴ Sidney, “Defense,” 1068.

⁴⁵ Sidney, 1070–71, 1075.

⁴⁶ Sidney, 1068.

courtier once again becomes the future horizon against which any present action is measured. Most tellingly, however, alongside the hierarchy of sciences most useful for war or governance, Languet recommends languages for the texts that they will open to Sidney's experience. Contrary to Sidney's wishes, Languet does not recommend Greek, Sidney's love of which comes through clearly in the *Defense*, as devoting that time to Latin is far more important: "though [Latin] is considered less elegant than Greek, knowledge of it is more necessary for you." Being able to read scripture is likewise "most necessary of all for us." Then Languet recommends (specifically moral) philosophy and history:

After the study of that, I do not think there is any subject more useful for you than that part of moral philosophy which teaches what is just and unjust. I do not need to mention the reading of history, which more than anything educates one's judgment, as that field of study naturally attracts you and you have already made great strides in it.⁴⁷

Conspicuously missing from these morally fortifying disciplines is that field of knowledge which Sidney claims combines the abstract knowledge of the philosopher and the overly particular knowledge of the historian and who "ought to carry the title" of "the highest form in the school of learning" from them both: poetry, which educates us to virtue more effectively and more pleasantly than any other discipline.⁴⁸ At least, this is Sidney's famous contention in the *Defense*. His poetry, however, reflects a great deal more uncertainty.

⁴⁷ Letter from Hubert Languet, 22 January 1574. Nor does Sidney assign poetry any role in his own letters on education to his brother and Denny. In the letter to Robert, poetry is relegated to mere "Ornament," something he criticizes the historian for sometimes abusing (although he does encourage his brother to "keepe and increase yowr Musick, yow will not beleiue what a want I find of it in my Melancholie times"). Letter from Philip Sidney to Robert Sidney, 18 October 1580. Kuin, *Correspondence*, 2012, 1:96–97; 2:1007, 1009.

⁴⁸ Sidney, "Defense," 1054–55.

iv. "Love to cloake Disdaine"; or, a Defense of Idleness

It is clear that Sidney sees himself as championing poetry as a masculine practice (as both poet and reader) against the charge of poetry's effeminacy: "it abuseth men's wit," these nameless detractors assert, "training it to wanton sinfulness and lustful love."⁴⁹ Sidney adopts an old medieval binary: the homosocial practice of war versus the feminizing effect of the love of a woman. Sidney posits with Languet that "the ending end"—that is, the *telos*—"of all earthly learning [is] virtuous action[.]" Yet Sidney turns his straw men's objections on their head, describing their slander as a product of "very idle easiness," whereas the proper practice of poetry "intend[s] the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue"; lyric poetry in particular is "that kind most fit to awake the thoughts from the sleep of idleness." We need more poetry, not less, because poetry is not "an art of lies, but of true doctrine; not of effeminateness, but of notable stirring of courage[.]"⁵⁰ Which is to say, if the English spent less time writing tracts abusing poetry and read some, perhaps poetry itself would motivate the English to get out on the public stage and be "men," in the chivalric, exceptional sense of the word. Just as Agricola served as the model of a public servant, Sidney's examples are also consistently masculine archetypes, military heroes and conquerors.

Critics have generally viewed the *Defense* as a model for poetry, which they can apply as a tool to examine poetic production. In particular, Sidney's description of the pastoral as a place where political tyranny can be examined "under the pretty tales of wolves and sheep" has attracted critics interested in the *Arcadia's* political dimension.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Sidney, 1069.

⁵⁰ Sidney, 1053, 1060, 1066, 1074.

⁵¹ Sidney, 1062.

However, using the *Defense* as a model or lens has led us to forget what it explicitly is: a defense. As critics *have* long noted, the *Defense* is perfectly structured according to traditional rhetoric, more so than the “Letter to Elizabeth” or “Defense of the Earl of Leicester,” so carefully designed as to seem almost like a school exercise. The *Defense* is thus much more a *persuasive* and *poetic* document than a theoretical one. Sidney's poetry tells a much different story, and in fact the main goal of his defense seems self-directed: it is a space in which he can reflect on his own poetic practice, the problems and anxieties that his own work raises for him according to the normative schema set forth by his circle, in particular his mentor Languet, who hovers in the background of both the *Defense* and the *Arcadia* like Sidney's super ego.

Utilizing the *Defense* as the road map to Sidney's poetry results in a rationalized poetics that inevitably attributes to Sidney more coherence and consistency than his poetry in fact demonstrates. Such accounts are successful in tracing out Sidney's most rational and rationalizing thinking about poetry, such as the account found in the *Defense*. In doing so, however, the critical approach to Sidney's poetry tends to be one of overlaying the *Defense* onto his poetry—and we should further beware of the extent to which such accounts similarly flatten out and gloss over the tensions and inconsistencies present in the *Defense* itself.⁵² The *Defense* is more productively read *against* the poetry, rubbing together the two to find the contours and rough edges: the rationalizing impulse in Sidney is a reaction to the *problem* of poetry, and its co-constituent problem of

⁵² Ron Levao also sees the *Defense* as “filled with contradictions and shifts in emphasis.” However, his account develops the playfulness of the *Defense* to the extent that the work becomes a philosophical toy, paradoxically refuting the very possibility of a “defense” of poetry, at the expense of seeing the real ideological anxieties at the root of Sidney's paradoxes. Ronald Levao, “Sidney's Feigned Apology,” *PMLA* 94, no. 2 (March 1979): 223–33.

passion. In the *Defense*, passion is almost absent, because it is the central problem that reason and logic are employed to dispel: the project is almost hysterically Stoic in its attempt to localize, diminish, and manage affective experience, forcing what little passion remains to be yoked Horace-like to the production of virtuous subjects. Passion becomes mere “pleasure,” domesticated because yoked to the rational *telos* of virtue: “words set in delightful proportion” lead us to virtue “even as the child is often brought to take most wholesome things by hiding them in such other as have a pleasant taste, which, if one should begin to tell them the nature of [the medicine] they should receive, would sooner take their physic at their ears than at their mouth.”⁵³ The recurring adjectives “delightful” and “pleasant” are all the affect Sidney will allow poesy, the emphasis on pleasant taste mixed with moral effect echoing Horace's ideal of poetry which “blend[s] usefulness [*utile*] with pleasure [or sweetness, *dulce*.]”⁵⁴ Quite explicitly this pleasure is opposed to the “cumbersome servant” of vice, “passion, which must be mastered.”⁵⁵

However, this domestication of passion is belied by Sidney's criticism of contemporary poets' failure to convey affect forcefully and mimetically. The cold artificiality of much love poetry, Sidney argues, reveals “men that had rather read lovers' writings [...] than that [had] in truth [felt] those passions, which easily (as I think) may be bewrayed by that same forcibleness or *energeia* (as the Greeks call it) of the writer.” In failing to achieve this *effect*, we miss “the material point of poesy.”⁵⁶ Sidney resorts to

⁵³ Sidney, “Defense,” 1060.

⁵⁴ The rhetorical stakes of Sidney's argument are notably higher, however. Horace does not insist that the poet must aim at this combination; the elements of utility and pleasure are separable but *best* combined: “Poets aim *either* to benefit or to please, *or* to combine the giving of pleasure with some useful precepts for life” (emphasis added). Horace, “The Art of Poetry,” in *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. Penelope Murray and T. S. Dorsch (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 107–8.

⁵⁵ Sidney, “Defense,” 1054.

⁵⁶ Sidney, 1079–80.

the Greek word *energeia*, lacking an English equivalent like “energy.”—He requires a word that indicates force and impulse: not power withheld or released at will, but a constant pressure that only strives to burst forth with greater vigor the more tightly it is contained. He is not simply mistaking the word for the similar Greek *enargeia*, as many critics have assumed. In using the word “energeia,” Gregory Staley argues, Sidney is “confusing and blending two similar Greek terms”: *enargeia*, the typical Stoic word for lifelike vividness in art, and *energeia*, a key Aristotelian term for “activity” or “actualization,” one of two words generally translated as “actuality” in contrast to “potentiality” (*dunamis*). Staley argues that Sidney is “blending” these terms, but in practice his interest in Seneca squarely reduces Sidney’s term to a simple mistake and he pays no more attention to *energeia*.⁵⁷ However, as Geoffrey Shepherd’s editorial note to Sidney’s *Defense* hints, Sidney’s confusion of the terms may arise from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, where he uses “energeia” in a context very similar to where we usually find “enargeia”:

But it is necessary to say what we mean by bringing-before-the-eyes [*pro ommatōn poein*] and what makes this occur. I call those things “before the eyes” that signify things engaged in an activity [*energeia*]. [...] *Darting* is actualization and metaphor; for [Homer uses it to mean] “quickly.” And [*energeia* is,] as Homer often uses it, making the lifeless living through the metaphor.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Gregory A. Staley, *Seneca and the Idea of Tragedy* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 58–59.

⁵⁸ Note Aristotle’s further pun on *poiesis*: that poetic vividness *makes* (*poein*) something appear before the eyes. Aristotle implies same the creative potency of poetry that Sidney elaborates in the *Defense*. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 248–49 (1411b). Compare Geoffrey Shepherd’s note: “The first appearance in English of a form of the word ‘energy’, coming in through Latin rhetoric by a Renaissance modification of the sense given it by Aristotle[.] [...] So for Sidney ‘the forcibleness or *energeia*’ is the intellectual clarity with which the poet distinguishes or apprehends the fore-conceit or Idea[.]” Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry, or, the Defence of Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1965), 226n3. The note is referenced in passing by Staley in *Seneca & Tragedy*, 58.

Aristotle uses the rhetorical technique of etymology to reveal reciprocation between the two words: the vivid sensory impression of *enargeia* creates a representation of *energeia*.⁵⁹ For Aristotle, *energeia* is the actualization of *dunamis*, or “activity”: *energeia* is itself the *telos* or fulfillment of a natural potency (“being-at-work” in Joe Sachs’s translation), whereas “action” (*praxis*) is undertaken deliberately by a conscious being for the sake of a chosen *telos*. As the *Metaphysics* clarifies, *energeia* essentially means “motion,” extended metaphorically to an understanding of the mechanics of nature (*phusis*) itself.⁶⁰ Enhancing Aristotle’s interweaving of the terms to a conflation, Sidney’s “forcibleness or *energeia*,” then, emphasizes the physicality, even violence, of the vivid impression which in Stoic thought is the hallmark of *katalēpsis*: a quality of experience so striking that its truth is self-evident.⁶¹ Most importantly, Sidney’s muddled term focuses uniquely not on the conveyance of *sensory* truth but the vividness of the *passions* expressed. Sidney seeks to convey something closer to the modern use of “force” in physics, and much closer to the Greek meaning of the term. The force of the expression is an imitation or evocation (*mimēsis*) of the impulse and *action* of passion itself: most poets fail, Sidney argues, because they cannot capture mimetically the *experience* of passion. We lose Aristotle’s clear distinction between poetic expression and natural activity, but in doing so Sidney further erases the line between poetry and the world, establishing the possibility for the causal efficacy of *poiesis*.

⁵⁹ Offering a creative etymological analysis, whether accurate or purely invented, was an important persuasive technique in classical Greek and Roman rhetorical practice.

⁶⁰ As Joe Sachs explains, “the end and completion [that is, *telos*] of any genuine being is its being at work”: “In deliberate action [*praxis*] it has the character of purpose, but in natural activity [*energeia*] it refers to wholeness.” “Potency” is also Sachs’s alternative to the usual translation of *dunamis* as “potential.” See Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. Joe Sachs (New Brunswick & London: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2011), 244-246 (“*energeia*”; “*telos*”); Aristotle, “*Metaphysics*,” in *A New Aristotle Reader*, ed. J. L. Ackrill, trans. W. D. Ross (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), 324-5 (©.1047a).

⁶¹ Staley, *Seneca & Tragedy*, 58.

Although Sidney may not have fully thought through the Aristotelian meanings of *praxis*, *energeia*, and *enargeia*, in his appropriation of these ideas he did develop an implicit theory of affect, which are worked out in the struggle between action and activity that Sidney confronts in multiple configurations throughout his works. While the *Defense* treats action and affective “forcibleness” as a harmonious system, Sidney’s poetry exfoliates the relationship as the central aporetic paradox of melancholy.⁶² At times Sidney attempts to work through such rational and essentially Stoic models of poetic deployment—although these tend to display more anxiety about the virtuous *use* of poetry rather than virtue as poetry’s essential *telos*. At other times, however, the problem of poetry as the product of wildly *unconstrained* passion emerges: like the man who can’t restrain his eyes from the sight of the dead bodies in Plato’s *Republic*, poetry has the potential to give vent to the complex, inexpressible, even perverse facets of the human psyche.⁶³ Logic systematizes, categorizes, and divides in order to resolve; poetry, on the other hand, allows Sidney to face insoluble conflict and frustration. Where Stoicism

⁶² *Aporia* essentially means an impasse in which a question cannot be answered, as well as the co-constituent affective state of being at a loss. In certain skeptical traditions, a reduction to a state of *aporia* is an end in itself, freeing one’s mind for the formation of a judgment. Sidney’s situation is nearer to Aristotle’s use; as Sachs puts it, “the impasses reveal what the genuine questions are.” However, it is most crucially the *affective* toll on the individual, de-emphasized in Aristotle, that we encounter in Sidney’s impasse. Aristotle, *Physics*, 248-9 (“impasse”).

⁶³ Developing the notion of the tripartite soul, Socrates distinguishes appetite from spirit with this lost anecdote: “Leontius the son of Aglaion, on his way up from Piraeus under the outer side of the northern wall, becoming aware of dead bodies that lay at the place of public execution at the same time felt a desire to see them and a repugnance and aversion, and that for a time he resisted and veiled his head, but overpowered in despite of all by his desire, with wide staring eyes he rushed up to the corpses and cried, ‘There, ye wretches, take your fill of the fine spectacle!’” Plato, “Republic,” in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, trans. Paul Shorey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002), 682 (439e-440a). What exactly it is that attracts Leontius’ eyes has been much debated and recent critics have doubted the old interpretation of Leontius as necrophiliac, originally based on Theodor Bergk’s association of this passage and the obscure, corrupt lines of Theopompus (*PCG* Theopompus 25). For my purposes, however, Reeve’s overconfident interpretation is most illustrative: “Here anger, a spirited desire, is distinguished from sexual appetite—Leontius was notorious for his love for boys as pale as corpses.” See C. D. C. Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato’s Republic* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2006), 129; Rana Saadi Liebert, “Pity and Disgust in Plato’s *Republic*: The Case of Leontius,” *Classical Philology* 108 (2013): 181n10.

aligns itself with the systematizing reason of philosophy, poetry is patently aligned with passion in the Renaissance, even when, as in the *Defense*, passion is supposedly “yoked” to reason. Poetry is anti-Stoicism in a strong sense: it is not un-Stoic, but rather pulls at the stitches of Stoic logic, exposing the depth of the threat that *necessitates* the Stoic response, and yet which also threatens to reveal the impossibility of achieving the solution Stoicism so confidently offers in its more dogmatic presentations.⁶⁴ The nascent Stoicism detectable in Sidney's *Defense* likewise necessitates a corresponding poetic response: the real relation between the *Defense* and Sidney's poetic corpus is not map and terrain, but rather thesis and antithesis. Where the comforting socially constructed dichotomies of reason/passion and virtue/vice break down, Stoicism falters and poetry begins.

In light of the questions Sidney raises, the *Defense* begins to seem rather a *counter*-argument to (a defense against) the questions and claims Sidney examines elsewhere, in which poetry emerges as the *symptom* of passion, which threatens to undermine any possibility of Stoic mastery, and poetic “feigning” becomes difficult to distinguish from dissimulation. The clearest and most sustained exploration of this alternative conception of poesy appears in a very obscure poem (strikingly) entitled “Disprays of a Courtly life,” first published in 1602 in Francis Davison's *A Poetical Rhapsody*, which grouped together “Two Pastoralls, made by Sir *Philip Sidney*, never yet published,” both of which project Sidney's friendship with Fulke Greville and Edward

⁶⁴ In *Seneca & Tragedy*, Staley essentially argues that tragedy serves this purpose for Seneca, a “trial” to expose human psychology and thus develop a realistic Stoic response. I merely want to make the terms (and stakes) of this trial more emphatic, both for Seneca and Sidney: tragedy and poetry serve to effectively shore up the Stoic position only to the extent that they likewise potentially threaten to dismantle it.

Dyer into a pastoral landscape.⁶⁵ In this poem, the gendered contrast between action and idleness is conspicuously absent. Rather, we are faced with a world lacking all possibility of action, and merely a choice between two sorts of idle pleasure: the feigned love and false pleasures of court in contrast to the sincere love of friendship and the idle but honest delights of shepherds' song. The poem begins with a short frame narrative:

Walking in bright Phoebus blaze,
Where with heate opprest I was,
I got to a shady wood,
Where greene leaves did newly bud
And of grasse was plenty dwelling,
Deckt with pide flowers sweetly smelling. ("Dispraye," 1-6)⁶⁶

It becomes quickly apparent that this pastoral landscape is poetry itself made manifest as a poetic "golden" world, a "rich tapestry" which outdoes nature. We should recall that when Sidney describes Plato's own work as philosophy with a "skin" of poetry, he figures poetry as "Apollo's garden," a place where a reader can walk and examine individual poetic productions or "flowers."⁶⁷ Here, however, Phoebus Apollo does not appear as simply the beneficent master whose endowment allows poetry to blossom forth. Instead, the sun's rays drive the speaker "with heate opprest" to take *refuge*. Phoebus' influence here is rather a negative incitement, suggesting both affective and political oppression. Phoebus thus seems to be aligned with the "servile Court," and though it would be rash to read literal tyranny into these lines, the poem certainly suggests a stifling, intolerable atmosphere, in which real political action and ambition are impossible. More disconcertingly, the "shady wood" in which our speaker finds refuge echoes the "shady

⁶⁵ Ringler, "Attributed to Sidney," 144–45.

⁶⁶ Because the poem is so obscure, I will quote some passages at greater length to provide more context. Sidney, "Two Pastorels," 325–28.

⁶⁷ Sidney, "Defense," 1050, 1047.

idleness” in which poetry's enemies assert that poets lull men to sleep and lure them away from martial action.⁶⁸

In this wood, the speaker finds one who, “Once to Shepherds God retaining, / Now in servile Court remaining,” takes over the poem and launches into an extended complaint against courtly life while defending the pleasure of singing with fellow shepherds. The ex-shepherd is described as explicitly malcontent: “There he wandring malcontent, / Up and downe perplexed went” (11-14). This is probably one of the first uses of “malcontent” in English to refer not to the group of Walloon agitators, but as a naturalized expression of a politically charged affective state of discontent.⁶⁹ This malcontent shepherd presents some immediately interesting features. He expresses nostalgic desire for a lost state of bliss and a discontent with the kind of “Love” available to him in the court. He is also a “wandring” and “perplexed” figure: not unlike the forests of the *Faerie Queene*, this wood is a place of error, even madness, but rather than a sense

⁶⁸ Sidney, 1068.

⁶⁹ Lucia Nigri has pointed out two English printed uses of the noun “malcontent” in 1579, all to refer to the Catholic Walloon soldiers who betrayed their Protestant allies in October 1578 in Flanders. Thomas Churchyard uses the term in a poem “The Miserie of Flaunders,” while John Stubbes uses the term twice in *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf*, the tract against Elizabeth's proposed marriage to Anjou that resulted in Elizabeth ordering Stubbes's right hand cut off. Anjou was tainted by association, since he himself “had been the leader of a faction in Paris some five years earlier who had called themselves ‘Les Malcontents’, which was no doubt what suggested the name to the Walloon soldiers.” Nigri, “Origin of ‘Malcontent,’” 38–39. To these, we can add Jean de Serres's history on the civil wars in France, translated by Thomas Tymme in 1576, referring to Anjou's group, “which called themselves *Politikes* and *Malecontentes*[.]” See Jean de Serres, *The Fourth Parte of Co[m]mentaries of the Ciuill Warres in Fraunce, and of the Lovve Countrie of Flaunders*, trans. Thomas Tymme, Early English Books Online (London, 1576), 142. Nigri cites Thomas Newton's 1581 translation of Seneca's *Phoenissae* (or *Thebais*) as the first known use of “malcontent” in drama, where it is used as an adjective in the more abstract sense, divorced from its 1570s political valences (Nigri, 39). The adjectival sense quickly increases in popularity throughout the 1580s. Thus, although we only have evidence from readily available *publication* sources, the entrance of “malcontent” into English seems to transition quickly from proper noun to general noun and adjective between 1579-1581. Even if Sidney wrote “Dispraysse” late in his life, he was still participating in the early popularization of the general term which will become the dramatic figure of the melancholy malcontent at the beginning of the 17th century. Sidney's contribution to the development of the *usage* as well as the *type* has gone unnoticed not just because of the poem's obscurity, but because of our reliance on print sources with reliable dates for evidence.

of trial and decision, this wood evokes a sense of despair and anguish. We are not given a choice of confusing paths—only a sense that there are no paths and no way through. The lack of path or solution suggests the impossibility of action that conditions the world of the poem: the malcontent shepherd is not precisely idle, but rather he is engaged in pure, undirected motion. His is an excited, affectively dense space of energy and activity (*energeia*) without the release of action—*praxis* without *telos*. Furthermore, although his “change of wonted state” (9) appears to be permanent and without hope of recuperation, his situation still necessitates *flight*, and although what he rues is the loss of a particular utopian sociality, this flight renders him utterly antisocial and unable to even utter his troubles directly to the speaker: “Daring not to tell to me” his plight, the speaker observes, the shepherd “Spake unto a senseless tree” (15-16).

The shepherd's voice takes over the rest of the poem, until the speaker returns us to the frame in the final stanza. The shepherd's lengthy complaint (to a tree) places him outside human society in the most ludicrous manner, making him one of Aristotle's asocial creatures who, because he “is unable to live in society, or [because he] is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god.”⁷⁰ Abruptly breaking the playful repartee on Sidney's Machiavellian proclivities, the final letter in the series discussed above quotes just this dictum, evoking the other half of Aristotle's equation, those “sufficient” in themselves:

But, my dear Languet, what are we doing? Are we joking in these times? I am convinced that no one with any normal intelligence can fail to see where these wild storms that for so many years have shaken the whole of Christendom are heading. But if anyone can see the consequences of these things and can bear up patiently, I think that either he should be elected to the Association of the Gods, or

⁷⁰ Aristotle, “Politics,” 14 (I.1253a28–30).

numbered among the beasts with a human face, 'either a beast or a god.'⁷¹

The comparison is enlightening, because the major point of the letter is the importance of friendship, the central thesis of “Dispraysse.” Although by 1580, Sidney's rhetoric may have become more inflected with Stoicism, six years earlier Sidney aligns the “patience” of Stoicism with inhumanity, a kind of affective nullity which does not give proper weight to the gravity of events. Sidney seems to suggest that emotional responses must be *proportional* to their stimuli, and losing one's calm—being passionate in the face of “wild storms”—is sometimes a reasonable response.⁷²

Similarly, in “Dispraysse,” friendship is of great importance, and grief at its loss is unavoidable or even necessary. To stoically bear such a loss would be to diminish it:

My old mates I grieve to see,
Voyde of me in field to be,
Where we once our lovely sheepe,
Lovingly like friends did keepe,
Oft each others friendship proving,
Never striving, but in loving. (“Dispraysse,” 19-24)

Once friends with fellow shepherds and sheep alike, the shepherd now “grieve[s]” even to see them, because he is no longer part of their network of love. The shepherd is “present,” but now as a courtier a kind of distance has been imposed, such that he seems

⁷¹ Letter from Sidney to Languet, 28 May 1574. With a certain pride, I think, Sidney quotes Aristotle in Greek: “ὥς εἰ Θηρίον εἰ Θεόν.” Kuin, *Correspondence*, 2012, 2:230–33.

⁷² The *Old Arcadia* begins with just such a Stoic motif, much elaborated in the *New Arcadia*. The two princes are on their way to meet Pyrocles' father Euarchus in Byzantium, but “the sea, to which they committed themselves, stirred with terrible tempest, [and] forced them to fall far from their course upon the coast of Lydia” (*OA*, Bk. I.10-11). The tempest acts as an emblem of the passions about to befall them and divert their course of romantic action into pastoral idleness. According to Seneca's *De Ira*, we have voluntary control over only one moment in the entire process of passion: we are struck an “initial mental jolt” (*ictus*), leading to an involuntary judgment of “harm,” at which point we are momentarily able to either consent or resist the false judgment of passion. Beyond that, we are thrall to passion's domino effect. The princes are certainly implicated in a Stoic failure, but as in Sidney's letter, the *Old Arcadia* seems to question whether we have control even of that single moment of consent—any more than we have over being shipwrecked. See Lucius Annaeus Seneca, “On Anger,” in *Seneca: Anger, Mercy, Revenge*, trans. Robert A. Kaster and Martha C. Nussbaum (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 35-6 (II.2-3).

to see his own absence, the “Voyde” in this network he once occupied. With all true ties of friendship severed, and with all ties of court revealed to be mere lies and false flattery, the shepherd discovers himself apparently unable to form ties at all, blocked from reintegrating in the social fabric. His communication proceeds indirectly, only through a “senseless tree”; that is, through paper, textual correspondence, which inhibits the lively give-and-take of physical conversation. The humorous but troubling metaphor suggests that the alienation the shepherd feels is evocative of Sidney's feelings of isolation at court, where distance cuts him off from his friends except through the pale replacement of parchment, and he discovers that his daily interactions as a courtier are not the firmly braided ties of friendship as both private affection and political alliance, but rather the false show of a purely instrumental politics posing as private passion.

Because action is apparently impossible in this world of social ties, the terms of the *Defense* take on a strikingly different register, even though their meaning is essentially unchanged, and the idleness of the *vita contemplativa* is no longer effeminizing but rather merely an alternative homosociality, and one much to be preferred. Literalizing the image in the *Defense*, “Dispraysse” figures “shade” not as a place of effeminate inaction, but as a place of refuge and song; emphasizing this imagery through repetition, the malcontent shepherd reminisces:

Well was I, while under shade
 Oaten Reeds me musick made,
 Striving with my mates in Song:
 Mixing mirth our Songs among,
 Greater was the shepherds treasure,
 Then this false, fine, courtly pleasure. (“Disdayne,” 43-48)

Here homosocial pleasures are associated not with the “martial exercises” of war but with love, not with facing enemies in combat but with friendly poetic competition. Courtly

refinement is nothing but the imitation of 'cruder' pleasures, not their improvement. In fact, the shepherd makes clear that dissimulation, specifically feigning *love*, is the essential principle of a courtly existence. Shepherds do not need an “art of Love,” because art opposes *natural*, i.e. sincere, love; art is used only “When we doe but flatter men: / Friendship true in heart assured, / Is by natures gifts procured” (28, 34-36).

In the court, on the other hand, love is a cipher, not only signifying something *other* than love itself, but concealing what it signifies:

Therefore shepheards wanting skil,
Can Loves duties best fulfill,
Since they know not how to faine,
Nor with Love to cloake Disdaine[.] (37-40)

In the court, love is feigned and deeply ironic: it is a figure used to conceal but perhaps also to broadcast its opposite. It is as if the malcontent shepherd is a hostile reader of Castiglione, arguing, like Pallavicino, “This seems to me to be not an art, but an actual deceit; and I do not think it seemly for anyone who wishes to be a man of honor ever to deceive.”⁷³ *The Book of the Courtier* famously describes courtship as an intricate *technē* of concealment, knowing what to “cloake” and what to reveal, and even how much to reveal that you are concealing something. Throughout, it is fraught with the task of defending the courtier from the single obvious charge of deceit. As a practicing courtier, like Sidney himself, our ex-shepherd does not buy Castiglione's arguments for a moment. The “art” or “skil” of courtship is projecting oneself in a “false, “faine[d],” deceitful manner. While the “Seely shepheards” directly express and “disclose” true affection, the courtier discloses nothing, but merely misdirects and suggests (29-48).

⁷³ The discussion of Castiglione in this chapter is informed and inflected by personal discussions with Caroline Pirri and a presentation on courtesy which she was kind enough to share with me. Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. Daniel Javitch (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002), 101.

The shepherd's complaint is framed in the same affective terms as the *Defense*, but according to an opposing system of value. Like the *Defense's* ideal reader of poetry, the shepherd makes his valuation on the basis of "pleasure." However, the principle of "reason" which dominates the rhetoric of the *Defense* is absent in any explicit terms. While we might argue that the malcontent shepherd is making a reasonable decision in a rhetorical debate pitting country against court, the world of "Disprays" is one of "passions": love, disdain, rue, resentment, discontent. In fact, abstracting the poem purely into its affective terms, this could be any poem of pastoral love melancholy. However, "Disprays" does not deploy a Mira-figure or some other symbol of "love"; this poem allows us access to the melancholy malcontent without one of Sidney's typical ciphers: we find an explicit transition from Sidney's usual pose as love melancholic to the figure of the melancholy malcontent. But we further find that Sidney's use of feigned love as a projected site concealing affective tensions bears a disturbing resemblance to the very courtly love the poem rejects, "Love to cloake Disdaine."

v. "in compassion of his passion"; or, Apparel and the Peril of
Performance

Although cloaking and feigning are central to the shepherd's complaint in "Disprays," these are of course central terms Sidney uses to define and defend poetry in the *Defense*. Poetry, we know, "is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching" which is the distinctive mark of the poet. Pastoral, meanwhile, Sidney defends as base images which signify matters of great political import: "under the pretty tales of wolves and sheep, [pastoral poetry] can include the

whole considerations of wrong-doing and patience.”⁷⁴ That the true signification lies “under” these feigned images suggest that pastoral is essentially a cloak for truth. It would seem that Sidney is setting up a clear distinction of *kind*: the honest feigning of poetry does not “affirm” anything true or false, but is in the service of a greater truth—virtue. Feigning in the court, however, is pure dissimulation and sickening hypocrisy. But Sidney’s attempt to expropriate the meaning of “feign” out of simple opposition with truth and into alignment with virtue shows signs of strain, and ultimately the double meaning collapses. This anxiety frames the sonnet sequence of *Astrophil & Stella* (1582?), infusing the pun in the first line of the sequence with an irony which questions the pure efficacy of poetry that Sidney posits in the *Defense*: “Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show, / That she (dear she) might take some pleasure of my pain” (*A&S*, 1.1-2).⁷⁵ While “fain” here grammatically functions adjectivally to indicate his pressing desire to use “verse” as a medium of expression, in light of the parallelism that structures the first quatrain, it resounds with an alternative reading: self-consciously echoing his own *Defense*, Sidney sets up Astrophil’s verse as “feigning” an image of his love. It would thus be easy to read *A&S* as establishing a sonnet sequence grounded on the theory expounded in the *Defense*. However, the internal rhyme established between truth/fain in the first line and pleasure/pain in the second suggests that we should read “feign” in its ordinary sense: as pretending; as the opposite of truth.

⁷⁴ Sidney, “Defense,” 1052, 1062.

⁷⁵ Following Ringler, Duncan-Jones conjectures that the sequence was probably completed by the end of 1582, or at latest by his marriage in September 1583. Sonnet and line numbers noted parenthetically. Sir Philip Sidney, “Astrophil and Stella,” in *The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 153, 357n153.

The structure of the verse blurs any possibility of making a clear distinction between the “good” feigning imagined by the *Defense* and the “bad” feigning practiced in the court of “Dispraysse.” The “truth” of love emphasized in the first clause is undercut by its verse form, and even its generic form. As the first sonnet sequence in English, *A&S* plays upon the well-established conventions and tropes of the Petrarchan mistress, and though his sonnets show virtuosity and creativity, that skill is demonstrated by *virtue* of his indebtedness to the poetic tradition, not, as he claims in the sonnet, in spite of the “others’ feet” which “still seemed but strangers in [his] way” (1.11).⁷⁶ Astrophil’s disingenuous wit reminds us of the poets who seem to have “read lovers’ writings” rather than felt them “in truth,” resembling the manipulative flattery and feigned love of the courtiers in “Dispraysse.” The sonnet sequence is a particularly apt mode for undermining the arguments of the *Defense*, because sonnets do indeed declare an efficacious structure, an intended *telos*, but that goal is not to effect “virtue,” but something quite the opposite. The narratively defined efficacy desired by the poet struck by love melancholy is the sexual conquest of the love object. Like Aristotle’s “unnatural monsters, [which] are made in poetical imitation delightful[,]” Astrophil relies on his mistress’s inherent sadism to “take some pleasure of my pain” expressed in verse, and, with typical irony, to gain conquest through “pity” (1.2-4).⁷⁷ It is hard, in fact, to think of a poetic form more representative of poetry’s potential to spur “lust” and “wantonness” than the sonnet sequence addressed to an unattainable mistress. Thus the *energeia* of Sidney’s sonnets

⁷⁶ Of course, the pun on metrical “feet” in this line adds extra wit to his famous decision to break from traditional iambic pentameter and use hexameter in this first sonnet, but this only emphasizes the point that breaking from convention is merely another important manner of response and serves to reinforce the importance of form.

⁷⁷ Sidney, “Defense,” 1061.

emerges not from their direct and forcible expression of passion, as the *Defense* leads us to expect, but rather through bitter irony and self-satire. Astrophil's love melancholy is once more misdirection, a kind of affective sleight-of-hand that disguises a different kind of melancholic discontent—with courtly culture, with lust feigning love, with Sidney's own position. Irony is a particularly apt mode for expressing this kind of melancholy, because its force is indirect, arising from a kind of revelation as we peel back one “cloak” of meaning. Irony's meaning, then, as well as its affective energy, emerges by virtue of the obstruction and imposition of another meaning. Incapable of direct expression, this affective release is not surprisingly almost always satirical, simultaneously disgusted and amused—as if beneath the pretty cloak of wolves and sheep we found not patience but festering, smoldering resentment.

Similarly, “feigning” in the *Old Arcadia* tends to excite uncontrollable passion, not master it. Where we might most expect to see heroic deeds, we do not get the wise counsel of “the feigned Cyrus in Xenophon” or “a virtuous man in all fortunes, as Aeneas in Virgil.”⁷⁸ Instead we get two *potentially* heroic princes, along with melancholy Philisides and other pseudo-shepherds, hanging around in shady pastoral groves and languishing in love sickness just as the *Defense*'s Languet-like objector warned us we would if we read poetry. The romance of the *Old Arcadia* proceeds through five “Books or Acts” divided by four “Eclogues,” following the two princes, Pyrocles and Musidorus, who are struck by love melancholy, and abandon a career of heroic deeds for the pursuit of two princesses of Arcadia, Philoclea and Pamela. Essentially, chivalric romance devolves into romantic comedy as Pyrocles and Musidorus disguise themselves as an

⁷⁸ Sidney, 1056.

Amazon and a shepherd respectively to steal the princesses out from under their royal parents' watchful eyes. The two princes "crossdress" across gender and class boundaries, undermining the masculine, aristocratic virtue that defines them at the beginning of the narrative.⁷⁹ Although the narrative aligns our sympathies with the princes, the feigned roles of the courtiers are designed for explicitly licit purposes, and following their passions lands the princes on trial for their lives in the final book. On the one hand, Sidney establishes a clear lesson that we should learn to read the princes as negative examples, essentially aligning them with the feminized Elizabethan courtiers striking melancholic and pastoral poses rather than living lives of active virtue.⁸⁰ In other places,

⁷⁹ There is a large body of criticism on the *Arcadia* which has unfolded much of the relation of Sidney's poetry to women and gender. These critics have paid close attention to the *reader* of *Arcadia*, especially that reader as either female or feminized. Some of these feminist readings, however, have tended to valorize Sidney as a sort of proto-feminist in much the same way that his status as national hero has distorted our critical lens. Surprisingly, many of these critics have paid more attention to the more "heroic" and masculinized *New Arcadia*, where the role of women is reduced and the address to the "Fair Ladies" removed. See William Craft, "Remaking the Heroic Self in the *New Arcadia*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 25, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 45-67; Mary Ellen Lamb, *Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Kathryn DeZur, *Gender, Interpretation, and Political Rule in Sidney's Arcadia* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013); Julie Crawford, *Mediatatrix: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). In part, these readings, too, seem partly based on a back-projection: the powerful matriarchal position the Countess of Pembroke created through her deployment of her brother's poetry and Lipsian NeoStoic doctrines. Other readings, however, have noted the illicit and feminizing passions the "Fair Ladies" addressed in the first three books are invited to engage are part of a process of educating the reader to a reason and virtue gendered masculine. As Helen Hackett puts it, "A number of critics [...] have drawn attention to ways in which Renaissance texts which appear to be about women may tell us more about masculine anxieties" (17). See esp. Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993), 212-14; Mary Ellen Lamb, "Exhibiting Class and Displaying the Body in Sidney's *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 37, no. 1 (1997): 55-72; Helen Hackett, *Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000). In privileging Sidney's evaluations of masculinity in contrast to these approaches, I hope to lend support and nuance to the latter readings by emphasizing Sidney's valorization of the homosocial and his occasional direct misogyny, revealing a more complex and conflicted relation to gender. For an evaluation of the potentials and limits of female or feminized "visual agency," see Nancy Simpson-Younger, "'I Become a Vision': Seeing and the Reader in Sidney's *Old Arcadia*," *Sidney Journal* 30, no. 2 (2012): 57-85.

⁸⁰ Sidney seems to have followed a number of his contemporaries in quietly doubting the efficacy of a female monarch, interpreting many of Elizabeth's actions as "womanish," the same rhetoric the Protestants had used against the Catholic Mary. As Blair Worden notes, "Protestants in exile under Mary Tudor had produced pamphlets vigorously demanding her overthrow," and the pamphlet of John Knox and Christopher Goodman, the latter associated with Leicester and Philip's father Henry Sidney, "had animadverted on the evils of female rule. These Protestant doubts about the wisdom of a female monarch

the poetry is so passionate, playful, or otherwise unmotivated that we can take seriously Sidney's claim in his letter to his sister that the *Arcadia* is merely an “idle work of mine, which I fear (like the spider's web) will be thought fitter to be swept away than worn to any other purpose.”⁸¹

Prince		Disguise		Pursuing
Pyrocles	→	Cleophila (Amazon)	→	Philoclea
Musidorus	→	Dorus (Shepherd)	→	Pamela

(*The Arcadia's Romance Narrative.*)

The description of the *Arcadia* as an “idle work” encapsulates the central paradox of Sidney's poetic production: as idle work, it is energy ill-expended and wrongly diverted. Idleness is not a neutral state of inaction, but one of enormous pent up passion or affect which bursts forth arbitrarily, *without* the Aristotelian *telos* that would give that energy a moral structure. The energy and seduction of the narrative emerge from the passions stirred in the reader—the very passions that the dogmatic register of the narrative implores us to disavow. Sidney attempts to impose that structure in the *Defense* precisely because it is a pressing question in his own poetic production. Rather than expecting it to lead his sister or any other reader to act more virtuously, Sidney pleads for this poetic production to find safety (and seclusion) in the “sanctuary” that is the “livery of [Mary Herbert's] name,” trusting to the protection of its “virtue.” Virtue thus stands as something to be imposed *on* the work, not structurally integral to its teleology as poetry. As a “trifle,” its own worth is counted as “no better stuff than, as in a haberdasher's shop, glasses or feathers.”⁸² This is hardly the spur to heroism that the *Defense* has taught us to

did not simply vanish under Elizabeth, and Protestant praise of the queen tended to “praise the quality they wish their monarch had, or at least had more of.” Worden, *Sound of Virtue*, 187, 204.

⁸¹ Sidney, *Old Arcadia*, 3.

⁸² Sidney, 3.

expect, an account which has bewitched so many critics, nor is this simply a topos of modesty, as this anxiety is built directly into the structure of the *Arcadia* itself.

Just as Sidney describes the *Arcadia* as an idle recreation, he casts the narrative itself as a “digression” from a politically engaged world into a pastoral realm of self-enclosed idleness. Worden has already noted how the monarch Basilius' idle behavior and eventual slip into poisoned sleep echoes the Protestant political discourse of sleep and idleness.⁸³ However, the problem of idleness undermines the *Old Arcadia* at a much more fundamental structural level. What critics generally refer to as the two major “digressions” in the *Old Arcadia*'s narrative are in fact moments that reveal the romance narrative of action that the princes have diverted themselves from. The Erona episode, which directly precedes the introduction of Philisides, establishes that the princes have yet to complete the heroic narrative they have abandoned: Musidorus and Pyrocles stopped the rape of Erona by the “tyrannous” Otanes, whose “cruel heart” was “kindled” by love. Otanes attempts to extort a promise of marriage from Erona by threatening to kill her beloved Antiphilus (or “anti-love”). By killing Otanes, the princes allow Erona and Antiphilus to marry, but only provoke the vengeance of Otanes' sister Artaxia, driven by the “vindicative Cupid.” While captive, inconstant Antiphilus' affections were turned by Artaxia. As they listen to Histor's tale, the princes discover that after the two princes left the country, Antiphilus betrayed Erona to Artaxia, but Antiphilus was rewarded with death, while Artaxia promised to kill Erona in two years' time if Musidorus and Pyrocles do not return to fight her champions, so that they can take vengeance for her brother's death. Histor ends by explaining that the princes have been sought throughout the land

⁸³ Worden, *Sound of Virtue*, 63–77.

for a full year already, giving the narrative a pressing time limit: the time the princes spend in Arcadia is not merely a pleasant diversion before their return to Byzantium, but rather daily brings Erona closer to death (*OA*, Bk. I.68-70). Moreover, this convoluted and melodramatic tale defines love as a malicious and politically dangerous force, and even the constant love of Erona seems merely foolhardy in the face of her betrayal, while it is clear that Pyrocles and Musidorus have completely inverted their original narrative roles as the warlike *enemies* of Cupid.⁸⁴ However, these tales of action are reduced to exposition and reported speech, as if the gravity of the pastoral exerts such force in Arcadia that heroic action is rendered *narratively* impossible.

It is true that Cleophila and Dorus kill wild beasts and even quell a small rebellion (with Philisides' help), but these moments of activity merely serve to remind us that the real action that once defined the princes has become nothing more than a “digression” in a love story, their disguises becoming more real than their identities as noble heroes. In that story, the princes have become little better than tyrannous Otanes, achieving their ends through deceit and sexual transgression: both princes “rape” their beloveds in the literal sense of the word (*rapere*), seizing them from their families without the sanction of marriage. Pyrocles consummates his love with Philoclea outside wedlock, while Musidorus is about to sexually assault Pamela contrary to his explicit vows when he is interrupted by brigands that take them captive. It is striking how heroic interpretations of the princes deflect the seriousness of these acts, often by focusing on their removal in the *New Arcadia*, which fails to address why Sidney gave rape such a central role defining

⁸⁴ In fact, Erona “seized” the crown when her father died of heartbreak for the immoderate love of Antiphilus which drove her, thinking him dead, to multiple suicide attempts (*OA*, Bk. I.67-68).

the princes' relationships with Basilius' daughters in the first place.⁸⁵ Most importantly, Histor's tale does *not* spur the princes either to virtue or action. Pleased at hearing themselves lauded, the princes do not leap up and go to Erona's defense: “(besides their noble humanity) they were loath their own worthy work should be spoiled[,]” but they feel that one year is all the time in the world, so they put off their romantic rescue until “this their present action” is complete (*OA*, Bk. I.71). They trivialize Erona's danger and their human and “noble” feeling becomes literally parenthetical. Apparently lacking sympathy for Erona's continued abuse at Atraxia's hands until the two find time for heroic exploits, the once-princes reveal how perverse their sense of “action” has become: the *telos* of erotic fulfillment and idle enjoyment has utterly usurped valor, chivalry, and certainly selflessness—perhaps even human decency.

This abstract structure of the *Arcadia* creates a clear sense of the *didactic* intention: it is a cautionary tale of reason, action, and masculinity overcome by passion, idleness, and effeminacy. Yet this didactic purpose is only achieved by undermining poetry's value in the terms of the *Defense*. Pyrocles and Musidorus are, in fact, “feigning notable images of virtues”—appearing to be a *virtuous* Amazon and shepherd is part of the ruse, and the princes' deeds seem all the more exemplary because their achievements raise them above their apparent station. However, these images do not mimetically

⁸⁵ For example, Crawford's argument that rape is merely a symbol of tyranny and that the princesses teach the princes right rule does not adequately explain Sidney's re-writing of these episodes and disturbingly downplays just how seriously the original episodes undermine any heroic reading of the princes—or the princesses. Pamela and Philoclea both place themselves at the mercy of the sexual advances of men, and in both cases their trust is abused. Crawford talks about Philoclea's first near-indiscretion with Pyrocles, which is interrupted by a popular rebellion (in which the princes are literally *forced* into action and distracted once again from their pursuit of lust) but elides the later episode when Philoclea *does* submit to Pyrocles' advances. Sidney directly follows this scene with the pastoral marriage of Lalus and Kala, juxtaposing *proper* love, which routes passion through legal institutions, with impassioned lust, which undermines the virtue of both men and women. Crawford, *Mediatrix*, 58–63; Sidney, *Old Arcadia*, Bk. III.235–Ec. III.245.

inspire virtue as the Sidney of the *Defense* would have us expect. In Pyrcoles' design, the Amazonian guise of Cleophila is meant to achieve a covert purpose, not unlike the hidden messages of pastoral's "pretty tales of wolves and sheep"; yet this outward appearance excites uncontrollable, anarchic lust in both men and women, setting husband and wife (King Basilius and Queen Gynecia) against one another as rivals in a furtive race to adultery. The wife Gynecia, "whose love-open sight did more and more pierce into the knowledge of Cleophila's counterfeiting, which likewise more and more fortified her unlawful desires," is the more interesting case (*OA*, Ec. I.57). Her lust seems to be driven by the pleasure of the dissimulation itself: her sudden desire for a woman is only spurred on by the pleasure of peeling back the layers of disguise to discover a tantalizing male body beneath. Gynecia is a disturbingly good reader: enchanted by the fundamental gender confusion of the Amazon, a blend of masculine and feminine, she revels in interpreting and analyzing the invention, appreciating the complexity of the guise more than Basilius or Philoclea. Crossdressing as "counterfeiting" resonates with Sidney's fumbling attempt to pin down the meaning of Aristotelian *mimēsis* as "representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth[.]"⁸⁶ Gynecia's "unlawful desires" are strengthened the more that she pierces the cloak of disguise, but it is not merely the revelation of Cleophila as a pseudo-licit love object that confirms her in her lust. Rather, it is the pleasurable act of "piercing" itself: the readerly pleasures of interpretation and deciphering win her not to virtue but to vice.

As we have seen, however, "deciphering" is not a puzzle whereby we follow the clues to a single and self-evident "truth." Because the pastoral world of the *Arcadia* is

⁸⁶ Sidney, "Defense," 1051.

one of feigning, we are confronted with a proliferation of shadowy appearances, and interpretation is itself a poetic act of truth-making—interpretation merely pins down appearances for instrumental ends; it does not lift the cloak of appearance to give us access to a truth “beneath.” Poetry’s “golden world,” it turns out, is not Plato’s realm of metaphysical Truth: the only truths to which we have access are second-order, multiple, irreconcilable. Feigning is more than the proliferation of signs; as Pyrocles discovers, the transformative potential of feigning means that significations can mold and shape what they signify—our guises are not always so easy to remove. Pyrocles reveals his love melancholic obsession with Philoclea’s image, but while that melancholy is the product of his affliction, he also attributes to it his relief: “I will show you what my melancholy hath brought forth for the preparation at least of a salve, if it be not in itself a medicine” (*OA*, Bk. I.17). Pyrocles’ melancholy has brought forth a poetic fiction to ease his pain, and the fact that he explicitly roots his salvation in the same passion that afflicts him should give him pause, but for Musidorus, the danger is clear, almost hyperbolic: Pyrocles’ planned transformation threatens to confound the unambiguous hierarchical binaries upon which reason and virtue depend. Musidorus, shocked by what Pyrocles intends and “dismayed to see him [...] plunged in such a course of misery[,]” begs him to “Remember [...] that, if we will be men, the reasonable part of our soul is to have absolute commandment[.]” Musidorus warns him that gender, like virtue, is more a matter of practice than essence, “for to take this woman’s habit, without you frame your behaviour accordingly, is wholly vain; your behaviour can never come kindly from you but as the mind is proportioned unto it. So whatsoever peevish imperfections are in that sex, to soften your heart to receive them—the very first down step to all wickedness.” Musidorus’ attack on passion,

and even his sophisticated realization that there is a performative element to gender, go hand-in-hand with a misogynist attack on women. Love is “the basest and fruitlessest of all passions” because “effeminate love of a woman doth [...] womanize a man,” and it is “engendered betwixt lust and idleness” (*OA*, Bk. I.18-20). Musidorus might well be one of the nameless objectors along with Languet against whom Sidney defends himself in the *Defense*.⁸⁷

Some feminist critics have lauded Pyrocles' rhetorical defense in Book I against Musidorus' conventional misogynist attacks.⁸⁸ However, a purely approving reading overlooks that Pyrocles' defense rests on a shoring up of gender as essential in opposition to Musidorus' argument that gender identity is largely a matter of performance: “Neither doubt you, because I wear a woman's apparel, I will be the more womanish; since, I assure you, for all my apparel, there is nothing I desire more than fully to prove myself a man in this enterprise.” Apparel and identity, sign and signified, are separable, Pyrocles

⁸⁷ Although Musidorus is soon to fall into the same trap, he at first provides reason's counter-argument to passion. Tellingly, Musidorus at first intended to combat Pyrocles' defense of solitariness with “praise of honourable action (in showing that such kind of contemplation is but a glorious title to idleness; that in action a man did not only better himself, but benefit others; [...]) and that the mind should best know his own good or evil by practice [...]” (*OA*, Bk. I.16). Musidorus adheres to the same “rational” value system that structures the *Defense*, aligning action and virtue against idleness and vice. Rhetorically adept, however, he frames his actual arguments to Pyrocles' state; he does not attempt so much to present him with sound arguments, but, seeing that even his friend's speech has been disordered by “inward passion,” he tries to find the source of the “wound,” as Pyrocles calls it.

⁸⁸ Crawford, for example, says that Pyrocles' defense is “explicitly feminist,” emerging from his “education via the love of a virtuous woman” away from “too rigid, or militarized, a sense of honor,” a path Musidorus soon follows, and asserting an analogy between misogyny and tyranny. See Crawford, “Female Constancy,” 55–56, 38. This argument ignores that Pyrocles has yet to even meet the object of his desire, that his affliction is merely an eye infection caused by the prick of a painted image, and that reason is clearly meant to triumph over passion. Pyrocles is not a victorious combatant in rhetorical debate, countering his opponents arguments with sound reasoning; he in fact cannot counter Musidorus, since he has been ignoring him all the while, “no more attentively mark[ing] his friend's discourse than the child that hath leave to play marks the last part of his lesson, or the diligent pilot in a dangerous tempest doth attend to the unskillful words of the passenger” (*OA*, Bk. I.20-21). The irony, then, is that Pyrocles' defense of women *is* witty and rhetorically persuasive, but the argument is in service of submitting himself to passion, and thus his blow against misogyny is likewise a blow against his virtue. As Musidorus laments, “how sharp-witted you are to hurt yourself!” (*OA*, Bk. I.23).

claims. However, no sooner does Pyrocles transform into the Amazon Cleophila (in reflection of his beloved Philoclea) than he becomes the part he plays. The narrator first signals the transformation: “with an art so hiding art,” like the *Defense*'s poet Pyrocles gives Nature a run for its money, “and thus did Pyrocles become Cleophila—which name for a time hereafter I will use, for I myself feel such compassion of his passion that I find even part of his fear lest his name should be uttered before fit time were for it” (*OA*, Bk. I.26-27). Until Cleophila reverts to the character (and *dress*) of Pyrocles, the speaker uses the female pronoun and for all intents and purposes Pyrocles *becomes* Cleophila. She becomes an eye-piercing image, a work of art like Philoclea's portrait, and her beauty captivates the eye even of Musidorus, though he is “full of extreme grief to see so worthy a mind thus infected” (*OA*, Bk. I.27-28). The narrator claims this transformation is the result of artistic costuming and sympathetic engagement: Pyrocles is Cleophila in the same way a boy becomes Lady Macbeth on stage, for as long as we engage ourselves in the fiction.

However, we know that fictions and imagination are not set in any simple opposition to reality for Sidney: the two are intimately, if troublingly, intertwined. We know that a feigned Cyrus can “make many Cyruses”—that *idea* and *eidos*, conception and form, are two sides of the same coin, and art is capable of stamping Nature in its own image. *Pyrocles* claims that his virtue and gender are not vulnerable to the influence of outward, artful signs—but as soon as she is alone, *Cleophila* immediately belies this imperviousness. Cleophila begins to sing, “with many sobs and tears,” that she has been “Transformed in show, but more transformed in mind,” admitting that her “poor reason's overthrow” has been effected by a “blow” to the eyes, leaving an impression on her

“inward thoughts [that] did faintly yield[.]” The transformation into Cleophila suddenly seems to have been not a clever ruse at all, but an inevitable outward expression of the internalization of Philoclea's *image* that happened the moment Pyrocles saw the portrait: “What marvel, then, I take a woman's hue, / Since what I see, think, know is all but you?” (OA, Bk. I.28-29). Pyrocles has been *stamped* with the pattern of Philoclea, not Cyrus, and that transformed Pyrocles is Cleophila, the name mimicking the mirror-image of a stamp.

We must resist the temptation to see Cleophila as either merely a theatrical character *or* a proto-transgender identity, as tantalizing as these options may be. Following Judith Butler, we have become familiar with thinking of gender as “performative,” not intrinsic: our actions construct our identity. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler distinguishes gender performativity from the gender play of drag (satirical crossdressing). Our gendered actions produce the appearance of a stable gender identity; because the actions of drag are self-consciously *feigned*, on the other hand, drag is performance, not performative.⁸⁹ Late 16th century Protestants, however, made no such distinction between performativity and performance. Anxieties about gender and the theater both revolved around the problem of performance: feigning produces real effects. The *Arcadia* reveals that Sidney is much more anxious about poetry's power to influence reality than he lets on—especially when that power is political. The transformative power of poetry for Sidney is always focused on *individual* transformation, either that of the poet or reader. The figure of Cyrus spreads from reader to reader, changing their internal quality. Divorced from the intrinsic *telos* of virtue, however, images become like viruses,

⁸⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2006), 183–93.

as likely to infect us with vice as much as virtue. Moreover, the pretty golden worlds poetry provides us may merely serve as distractions, becoming more real than the pressing realities of a continent at war. Just as Languet criticizes the English for their idleness in the face of Protestant struggle, the amusing pastoral diversions of the *Arcadia* move the world beyond closer to tragedy.

vi. “feigning notable images” and other lies: An alternative theory of poesy

Not only is it suspect that much poetry is likely to “intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue,” it is unclear that the effect on the reader is even poetry's primary motivation. The temporary release from melancholic pangs that Pyrocles feels in his transformation into Cleophila appears to be more like the illusory relief of scratching an itch. If the rhetorician of the *Defense* figures poesy in medical terms as a sweet-tasting “physic,” Sidney's love melancholics develop an alternative theory of poetry which suggests that poetry is more *symptom* than salve. The Eclogues which serve as interludes to the main narrative of the *Old Arcadia* associate the pastoral with melancholy and retreat from the *vita activa*. Through some affective magnetism, Arcadia “drew divers strangers, as well of great as of mean houses, especially such whom inward melancholies made weary of the world's eyes” (*OA*, Ec. I.56). Besides the love melancholic protagonists Musidorus and Pyrocles, chief among these strangers introduced in the first Eclogue lurks “another young shepherd named Philisides who neither had danced nor sung with [the other shepherds], and had all this time lain upon the ground at the foot of a cypress tree, leaning upon his elbow, with so deep a melancholy that his senses carried to his mind no delight from any of their objects” (Ec.

I.71). The audience-effect so crucial to poetry according to the *Defense* somehow has no effect on Sidney's own poetic self-representation: melancholy trumps the delight of song, and so far is their music from moving Philisides to virtue that it fails to even move him off the ground.

Rather, as the native shepherds attempt to conjure the melancholy strangers out of their despair, they develop an alternative conception of poetry that stands in stark contrast to the *Defense's* pseudo-Stoic approach. In the first full Eclogue, the ensuing singing competitions are explicitly a “sport” designed to “provoke [one] another to a more large expressing of his passions” (Ec. I.58). While much of their poetic production may be reflexively aimed *at* the unattainable object that it is *about*, this is a secondary re-purposing of its final cause, the (ultimately fatal) disease of love. The *telos* of poetry is merely a momentary respite from pain via the verbal expulsion of passion: “let songs thy sorrows signify,” Lalus exhorts Dorus (Ec. I.58). Poetry is little more than a pretty, decorously framed cry of agony, as Dorus makes clear in his reply:

Nightingales seldom sing, the pie still chattereth;
The wood cries most before it thoroughly kindled be;
Deadly wounds inward bleed, each slight sore mattereth[.] (Ec. I.58).

Dorus agrees that poetry emerges from pain, but the deeper that pain, the less outwardly it is expressed. The false shepherd, with the experience of about a full day's worth of love sickness behind him, insists that he is “thoroughly kindled,” so fully consumed by passion that there is little sound left in him. The image of fire consuming wood graphically depicts the causal link between pain and poetry, without the mediation of scheme or aim that we get in *Astrophil and Stella*. With his usual veiled contempt for the “authentic” shepherds, Dorus insists on the greater authenticity both of his pain and his poetic production, pitting the nightingale, Sidney's favored symbol of “real” poetry,

against the mere chattering shepherd-magpies, whose frivolous poetry makes much matter of little pain. Dorus rises to Lalus' challenge, in the process undermining his own initial claim, though his playfulness is given a biting superiority through his cultured vocabulary. Under the complex demands of the form they set for themselves, Lalus resorts to awkward, repetitive constructions to achieve his dactylic rhymes:

said to me / laid to me / paid to me

Dorus, meanwhile, responds with Frenchified multisyllabic nouns:

vanity / humanity / inhumanity (Ec. I.60).

Although Lalus is able to keep up with the ridiculously intricate rules of the competition he has provoked, not only maintaining a challenging rhyme scheme but also picking up the rhyme from the second to last line of the previous verse, Dorus shows him up verse for verse by elaborating his conceits and polishing his vocabulary. Drawn into these idle activities, however, Dorus comes under as much censure, as the older shepherds Geron and Dicus complain, “both plainly protest[ing] it was pity wit should be employed about so very a toy as that they called love was” (Ec. I.64).

Geron, the voice of age and wisdom, does not precisely deny poetry's value; rather, he imagines poetry not as a physic, but as a distraction and at best a symptom from which to make a diagnosis: “What can amend where physic is refused? / [...] Yet for my sake discover us thy grief[,]” he implores Philisides (Ec. I.72). Lalus having drawn out Dorus, Geron turns to work on Philisides, insisting that “sweet tunes do passions ease,” but Philisides is similarly resistant: Geron's attempt to heal inward wounds “With outward joys” is as good as trying “with oil to cool the fire” (Ec. I.72). Both Dorus and Philisides agree that melancholy turns the victim inward, toward something ultimately inexpressible. Like the malcontent shepherd of “Disprays,” they

imagine themselves cut off from even the limited, insular sociability of the shepherds. Although Philisides waits until the final eclogue to reveal the source of his despair, the irony of course is that both are drawn into the idle singing competitions of the shepherds, and neither of them resort to speaking to trees. In *Arcadia*, poetry is an act—as Philisides' modulates his beast fable in the third eclogue—betwixt mirth and sorrow (Ec. III.254). Poetry's pleasure is not unmixed and ornamental, but the pleasure of a momentary easing of pain, or even the pleasure of wallowing and indulging in pain.

While the *Defense* works to align poetry with Mars, the *Arcadia* clearly declares poetry the thrall of Eros, and both love and poetry (and painting as well) are loci of deception, as Dicus insists:

Poor painters oft with silly poets join
 To fill the world with strange but vain conceits:
 One brings the stuff, the other stamps the coin,
 Which breeds naught else but glosses of deceits. (Ec. I.65)

As “glosses of deceits,” poetry and painting are likened to scholastic interpretive procedures, cloaking false doctrine in clever but no less false authoritative images. In a grotesque reversal of the *Defense*'s poet, able to create a 'golden world' better than Nature, the *Arcadia*'s poet is literally able to “fill the world” with his creations, but those conceits are revealed for what they are—idols of an addled brain: “Is [Cupid] a god, that ever flies the light? / Or naked he, disguised in all untruth?” (Ec. I.65). The poet of the *Defense* “nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth.”⁹⁰ The poet here insistently affirms, confirmed in the deception of what he feigns.

Although obscure and misleading, it is Sidney's self-representation Philisides who develops the political aspect of this theory into a malcontent poetics. Philisides appears to

⁹⁰ Sidney, “Defense,” 1068.

be struck with the same love melancholy as the other shepherds, but the abstract and allegorical nature of his beloved, Mira, most clearly demonstrates Sidney's attempt to wrest *love* melancholy out of its proper sense to encompass and conceptualize the discontent more bluntly represented by the malcontent shepherd of "Dispraysse."

Philisides stands alone among the minor characters in exerting *narrative* influence.

Almost invariably introduced as "melancholy Philisides," he is the only figure ensconced in the Eclogues that is able to essentially 'break frame,' a "stranger shepherd" from "Samothea" (England) who enters the actual narrative at points. Like Pyrocles and Musidorus, he is a would-be shepherd of action, supporting the princes against the popular rebellion in Book II. This conflict, however, is solved not by the sort of glorious battle in which the princes once engaged, but rather by roughing up some ill-equipped shepherds and ultimately by virtue of Cleophila's rhetorical eloquence. Although he does not engage in the deception the princes do, Philisides is drawn into the same world of melancholy idleness, and if anything he is *more* hopelessly trapped in inaction. Although the reader must wait until the final Eclogue for the source of Philisides' melancholy to be revealed, anyone close to Sidney would not have been surprised: he is languishing for love of Mira. The Philisides-Mira poems are among Sidney's earliest extant work.⁹¹

Whomever Mira may have originally represented, it is clear that by the time of the

⁹¹ While Ringler contends that "Philisides, the shepherd good and true" was probably "written by an imitator of Sidney," Katherine Duncan-Jones argues that the "Two songs for an Accession Day Tilt," of which this is one, are genuine and most likely date to the 1577 Accession Day celebrations at Whitehall, thus making this Philisides poem one of "Sidney's earliest datable poems[.]" Since the poem also frames the poem through reference to Philisides and Mira, but centers on another pastoral figure, Menalcus, seeming to treat Philisides and Mira as an already well-known background, if Duncan-Jones is correct, then "Philisides, the shepherd good and true" indicates that the Philisides identity was already well-established, at least in Sidney's mind but perhaps even publicly, by as early as November 1577. Interestingly, Menalcus is recycled as the pastoral poet whose younger brother "Dorus" Musidorus pretends to be in the *Arcadia*. See Ringler, "Attributed to Sidney," 145–46; Sir Philip Sidney, "Two Songs for an Accession Day Tilt," in *The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 333n.

Arcadia, Mira has become an overdetermined symbolic space. Even if Philisides' love melancholy is a biographical cipher for Sidney's love melancholy, identifying a particular person to decode the cipher actually elides the multiplicity of the cipher and falls into the trap of shutting down interpretation. Philisides' Mira may allude to his sister,⁹² to Penelope Devereux, or even to Elizabeth, or the sign may stand in for all of these women at different times; however, the cipher itself is a diversion: by suggesting that a single possible interpretation is possible, it asks the reader to foreclose further interpretation. Once someone has written their "key" to the characters of the *Arcadia*, they feel no need to question the meaning of the sign further.

Crucially, Mira appears to Philisides as a dream vision in which Philisides is to choose, Paris-like, between Venus (lust) and Diane (chastity). The stakes of the traditional struggle between allegorized ideological stances are explicitly national, not personal. In the 4th Eclogue, the shepherds retreat from the political "garboils" of *Arcadia* to mourn the death of their monarch. In the aftermath of suicide and rape attempts, and the princes held for trial in the final book, the political consequences of love become even clearer: the self-contained pastoral world is now beset not only by "home wolves but alien lions" (Ec. IV.327-28). In this "doleful time" of political chaos, Philisides finally shares his sorrow. The semi-autobiographical narrative that introduces the dream emphasizes the same familial training Sidney received: the "learning" his parents imparted so that the children might be "maintainers of their name," with solitary travels

⁹² Despite the popularity of deciphering Penelope Devereux's presence in the *Arcadia*, we know that the *Arcadia* was really Pembroke's book, and "Mira" could easily be an anagram for "Mary." Critics have argued about the nature of this intense sibling relationship, but so apparently did Sidney's contemporaries. John Aubrey helpfully records the rumor that "there was so great love between [Sidney] and his faire sister that I have heard old Gentlemen say that they lay together, and it was thought the first Philip Earle of Pembroke was begot by him[.]" Quoted in Richard Hillyer, *Sir Philip Sidney, Cultural Icon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 13.

to “ripen my judgment[.]” Although Philisides claims that “love (which what is is, your own feeling can best tell you) diverted this course” of “a well guided life,” it is unclear what brings on the “deadly sleep [which] at length possessed my living corse[.]” The mingling of sleep and death clearly evoke the Sidney circle's favored imagery for political idleness, but most jarring is the *praeteritio* that self-consciously distances Philisides from a familiar court: “Far from my thoughts was aught whereto their minds aspire / Who under courtly pomps to hatch a base desire” (Ec. IV.334-35). Philisides is presumably describing lust, prefiguring the decision he will soon face, but the intrusion of a courtly context suggests the Machiavellian rhetoric of feigned love that “Dispraise” describes.

Philisides is charged with choosing which goddess should be subordinate to the other, “lest the ruinous want of government dissolve” the peace treaty between the goddesses. Diane describes Mira as a cipher, but an ideological one:

'Sweet Mira mine', quoth she, 'the pleasure of my mind,
In whom of all my rules the perfect proof I find,
To only thee thou seest we grant this special grace
Us to attend, in this most private time and place.

As chastity's prime exemplar, Mira is called to be a silent witness to the trial, but she is void of content, without even a line of dialogue: “[Diane] answered was with look, and well performed behest. And Mira I admired; her shape sank in my breast.” Declaring “How ill both you can rule,” Philisides chooses a third option, Mira, and is cursed by both goddesses to live in perpetual despair of an impossible desire (Ec. IV.338-40). “Mira,” it appears, is only an image, perhaps even a mirror, and it is this image which makes its impression on Philisides, as Philoclea does on Pyrocles. That Mira is chastity's image is first simply asserted by Diane, for Mira to be further defined after the fact by the

curse Diana and Venus place upon Philisides, in which she becomes the paradoxical image of *both*.

After Philisides relates his final communication to Mira in elegiac couplets, Dicus interrupts him, entreating him to “leave particular passions, and join in bewailing this general loss of that country,” Arcadia (Ec. IV.344). Like Philisides' beast fable in the 3rd Eclogue, Philisides' laments are obscure, and Dicus seems to misinterpret the poems by taking them literally, following most readers of Sidney in trying to fit a literal body into Philisides dream vision. Of course, Philisides tells us himself that he discovers and pursues the dream-Mira in reality, and as a pastoral figure ensconced in the narrative, Dicus can be forgiven his mistake. However, the frame and diction all indicate that Philisides' “personal passion” exceeds a mere individual love. Dicus is right that Philisides' passion is “particular” to the extent that his discontent has almost fully alienated him from the social sphere, literalized in his political alienation from his home country. Like the malcontent shepherd of “Disprays,” Philisides is almost inarticulate. He exhibits the malcontent tendency toward passionate extremes, taciturn and raving by turns. Until the 4th Eclogue, it seems that Philisides can do no more than gesture at the source of his despair; and when he does finally speak, it is in a flood of some 300 lines, like a burst dam, which is only stopped once more by Dicus' intervention. Dicus implies that the particular and general passion correspond to the private and the political. However, Philisides is clearly responding to the political situation in Arcadia, and that political tragedy leads to his uncovering of his own passion, which is somehow both explicitly political yet inherently private.

Mira acts as an organizing device for the despair Philisides attempts to articulate: she is an ideal, silent and inaccessible, yet somehow promising escape from the binary choice with which Philisides is faced. We could speculate on the topical significance of this choice, but Philisides is too deliberately obscure to make any solid interpretation. Whether or not there is a real person to correspond with Mira, this is no more important than who, rather than what, Therion and Espilus represent in *The Lady of May*. Mira is a peculiar personification: we are accustomed to allegorical persons representing abstract ideas, but the deciphering impulse that the *Arcadia* encourages and the fact that Mira has a long history as Philisides' beloved in Sidney's poetry make Mira insistently "particular." In Sidney's world, what counts as "political" is action; thus Sidney struggles to represent a response to the political when faced with the impossibility of action: the response is indeed alienatingly particular, but no less political, and these two, contraries in Dicus' mind, are bound up in the Mira personification. Sidney's poetic self-representation in the figure of Philisides represents a totality of desires and dissatisfactions, and the explicit object that the love melancholic's "love" compels us to seek is a deliberate red-herring. Love in Sidney's poetry is a cipher not of simple correspondence, but one which conceals a concatenation of multiple significations, many of them difficult to parse or articulate. Philisides' odd parenthetical that love is something beyond description, but rather must be experienced by the individual, signals Sidney's attempt to wrest "love" from its usual signification and apply it to something likewise conceptually amorphous. The representation of Mira we get in the *Arcadia* has been emptied of content so that Sidney can use the *structure* of love melancholy to represent the powerful *energeia* of discontent in the face of a politics which alienates and isolates in a manner analogous to obsessive

love. The object of discontent, however, is too abstract to be fully articulated: the “beloved” serves the function of containing and structuring, although not articulating, something too conceptually indefinite to yet count as an organizing poetic “idea.”

Sidney's emphasis on melancholy as the essential fountainhead of poetry founds the power and danger of poetry on a mood which binds sign and signifier together in an intimate but ambiguous transitive relation. As Philisides and the princes demonstrate, the affect of melancholy is also affected—as much a set of behaviors as an inward state. Thus, early modern writers concerned with melancholy often suggested that changing those marked behaviors could change the inner state, meaning that “playing the melancholic” is indistinguishable from, perhaps even the same as, “being melancholic.” This humoral psychology collapses cause and effect, such that one cannot decide whether one is melancholy because of the state of the world, or whether one is discontent with the state of the world because one is melancholy. Sidney's discontent is a passion with concrete external causes; yet at the same time, the humor colors Sidney's judgment, rendering it unreliable. Sidney acknowledges that there is no “outside” to the problem of passion, and while he tries to strip away passion in the *Defense*, the *Arcadia* implicates the reader through our own desire. The antic excess of Sidney's critique, the very “pleasure” we receive from the princes' violations, serve less to move us to virtue so much as implicate us in vice. Thus Sidney cleverly withholds direct description of the illicit sexual liaison between Philoclea and Pyrocles, instead diverting us with the recital of “a song the shepherd Philisides had in [Pyrocles'] hearing sung of the beauties of his unkind mistress” (*OA*, Bk. III.238). Simultaneously, by deferring the characters' sexual transgression Sidney forces his readers (his “fair ladies”) to acknowledge the erotic desire

to vicariously experience it, while also implicating poetry—Sidney's *own* poetry—in precisely the desires of “wanton sinfulness and lustful love” that Sidney's objectors attribute to poetry in the *Defense*. The final act forces a similar moment of self-compromising realization, as the trial scene makes clear the princes' guilt, and that the *deus ex machina* is undeserved (Bk. V.415-17). The unsatisfying conclusion makes the reader confront her *irrational* desire for the princes' success, and reveals her judgment to be compromised by poetry's ability to manipulate the passions.

It would be simplest to argue, as we have become accustomed to doing, that the technique of self-implication thus leads the reader to virtue through the experience of vice: a very Protestant message which ultimately affirms, if in a thornier manner, Sidney's message in the *Defense*. We would still be forced to acknowledge that the virtuous message is contingent on these ironizing moments, so at best, Sidney is able bring an essentially bad medium to good ends through a sophisticated reversal. However, Sidney does not even give us this much consolation. Bringing us to an ironic realization of our vicious condition in no way assures a movement towards virtue. In fact, virtue in Sidney's schema is directly dependent on action, and the *Old Arcadia*, like “Disprays,” structurally undermines the possibility of anything but a frenetic, directionless activity. The *New Arcadia* may search for a way around this problem, but only because the original version raises it as such an insoluble condition. The tragi-comic ending does not leave the reader with any action to take or even decision to make—we are left merely an affective residue of discontent.

On the other hand, we are also left with another affective residue, a corresponding pleasure: the rather *un*-virtuous acts of the two princes and the idle singing competitions

definitively provide us with a pleasurable affective experience. However, this is neither the naive pleasure Sidney promises his sister, nor the pleasure that leads us directly to virtue that he promises in the *Defense*. Rather, it is an antic, excessive energy understood to be the counterpart to melancholic languishing, the manic state which has caused some contemporary critics to describe melancholy as “early modern bipolar disorder.”⁹³ Sidney provides us with a sociocultural framework for understanding these two seemingly contrary states: pleasure is produced through the *indulgence* of vice—melancholy as rooted primarily in sloth and lust—not unlike the medieval Vice plays. The didacticism of those plays is lost, however, and we are not provided with the clear *telos* of virtue and salvation, in which the pleasure of play *does* serve the function of the kind of spiritual medicine Sidney promises in the *Defense*. Rather the pleasure is an ambivalent end in itself, one which we always embrace knowing that we are choosing an ephemeral pleasure *over* a better, more profitable action. Because of the structure of obstructed action which underlies melancholy, as I have argued, there is an attending intense affective pressure and any release of that energy is pleasurable, but because that release is erratic and irrational (“antic”), the pleasure acts merely as a feedback loop, reinforcing the melancholic’s irrational impulses and giving the appearance of madness.

Sidney thus gives us the tools to sketch the intricate problems of action and affect that define the melancholy malcontent. As we will see in the next chapter, the self-implicating discontent of this unstable figure leads us out of the idleness of pastoral and into the vitriol of satire—the favored weapon used by and against the malcontent. The

⁹³ Gowland warns that “we would do well to resist the temptation to begin our study by redescribing the disease [of melancholy] in terms of modern psychiatric or psychoanalytic language, for example as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.” Following this lead, I have attempted to analyze melancholy as a culturally and historically conditioned affective state. Gowland, “Problem of Melancholy,” 81.

“cult of Sidney” defined in particular by the Countess of Pembroke and Fulke Greville transformed Sidney into a Stoic exemplar, a pattern for elaborating a Neostoicism that ironed out Sidney's own conflicted stance. Thus, Sidney's limbo between malcontent and Stoic branches in two directions: the Countess of Pembroke and her circle's experiments in Stoic closet drama on the one hand, and the Earl of Essex who, whatever he might have deemed himself, became the model for the worst traits of the malcontent—treason and madness. While the Pembroke circle's Stoicism has accumulated a wealth of critical attention,⁹⁴ we will follow Stoicism's malcontent shadow, encapsulated in the vicious satirical poetry leading to the Bishop's Order of 1599 and the fall of the Earl of Essex.

⁹⁴ My thanks to Dr. Erin Kelly for pointing out this connection between the Sidney circle and Stoic closet drama, and for generously sharing her knowledge of Stoicism with me. For a few key works on the Pembroke circle's drama, see Jonas Barish, “Language for Study; Language for the Stage,” in *The Elizabethan Theatre XII: Papers Given at the Twelfth International Conference on Elizabethan Theatre Held at the University of Waterloo*, ed. A.L. Magnusson (Waterloo, Ontario: P.D. Meany Publishers, 1993), 19–20; Katherine O. Acheson, “‘Outrage Your Face’: Anti-Theatricality and Gender in Early Modern Closet Drama by Women,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 6, no. 3 (2001): 7.1-16; Marta Straznicky, “‘Profane Stoical Paradoxes’: *The Tragedie of Mariam* and Sidnean Closet Drama,” *English Literary Renaissance* 24, no. 1 (1994): 104–34; Lamb, *Gender & Authorship*; Matthew Hansen, “Gender, Power and Play: Fulke Freville’s *Mustapha* and *Alaham*,” *Sidney Journal* 19, no. 1–2 (2001): 125–41.

Chapter Three: The Spectacle of Despair in Marlowe & Kyd

“Stoicism is the refuge for the individual in an indifferent or hostile world too big for him[.]”

- T. S. Eliot, *Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca*

i. The malcontent, the machiavel, and the atheist

Stoicism, in Eliot's formulation, is one refuge of the malcontent; however, what comfort could stoic fortitude bring in the face of the greatest machiavellian spectacle of the 16th century? The malcontent response was as likely to be a *product* of Lipsian neostoicism's failure to handle the brutalities of the confessional conflicts. The Saint Bartholomew Day Massacre of August 24th, 1572 stands as the most brutal spectacle of the early modern confessional conflicts, and this theater of cruelty etched itself in the imaginations of Protestants across Europe. Orchestrated by the Duke of Guise and Catherine de Médicis, the organized slaughter quickly escalated and the mob took over the slaughter of the Huguenots; the most conservative estimates place the body count at a minimum of two thousand in Paris, with that number multiplying in the surrounding countryside over the grim fortnight that followed.¹ One witness to these events was Philip Sidney; the Massacre was perhaps the first formative event on his Continental tour, three months into his three year journey. James Osborn suggests that Sidney may even have been among those saved from the mob by the Duke of Guise and forced to ride about the city as witnesses to his design, especially the spectacle made of Huguenot leader Gaspard de Coligny, the Guise's main target.² In the words of Henri Noguères, the Guise

had driven away the mob that was besieging [the English nobles'] house[...]. But

¹ Alfred Soman, ed., *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew: Reappraisals and Documents*, International Archives of the History of Ideas 75 (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), viii; James M. Osborn, *Young Philip Sidney 1572-1577* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1972), 66–67.

² Osborn, *Young Sidney*, 70–71.

he thought it amusing [...] to keep them captive for the whole day and compel them to witness the slaughter of their co-religionists. To begin with, he took them to the Rue de Béthisy early in the morning to show them Coligny's mangled body.³

These amusements served as merely an object lesson, however; neither the Guise nor Charles IX desired to start a war with England. Along with other English nobles in Paris, Sidney was conducted safely amid the chaos to the house of Sir Francis Walsingham, the English ambassador, before Sidney's friends were able to transport him to Germany. However much Sidney saw of the Massacre firsthand, the experiences of his recently acquired friends would have been harrowing enough: his mentor Hubert Languet barely escaped murder in the streets, while the famed humanist logician Petrus Ramus met a grisly end on August 26th, his corpse desecrated and "his entrails [dragged] through the streets."⁴

The Massacre was one of the most tragic scenes on the stage of European politics, but the *theatrum mundi* was more than metaphor: in the week before the Massacre itself, Sidney would have witnessed four days of ambivalent and politically charged entertainments celebrating the wedding of Navarre, Huguenot and future Henri IV, to Margaret of Valois, daughter of Catherine and Henri II. A couple of these interludes allegorized Huguenot defeat directly, with Navarre's apparently oblivious participation; in retrospect, the allegorical combats were like rehearsals for the performance that would set the world-stage awash with real blood.⁵ Like Hieronimo's staged assassinations in

³ Henri Noguères, *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, trans. Claire Eliane Engel (New York: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), 100. Qtd. in Osborn, *Young Sidney*, 69.

⁴ Osborn, *Young Sidney*, 72.

⁵ Osborn, *Young Sidney*, 58–60; Brennan, *Sidneys & Monarchy*, 56. Osborn elaborates: "Henry [of Navarre] must have been both a good sport and a very naive young man to allow himself to be publicly displayed in the part he had to play. The scenery depicted heaven on one side of the hall and hell on the other; the chief roles were taken by the King and his brothers who occupied heaven and by Henry and some

Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, the Massacre blurred the bounds of theatrical acting and political action, demonstrating the proximity between fantasied violence and bloodshed. We might view the Massacre, along with other horrors of the confessional conflicts, as analogous to WWII or 9/11: historical turning points that shift a culture's interpretive paradigm. Perhaps these events explain some of Sidney's ambivalence towards theatricality.⁶ However, the perilous triangulation of politics, theater, and religion had a contrary effect on the following generation, inspiring the innovations of Elizabethan theater more than has been generally appreciated. For Christopher Marlowe especially, who seems to have been engaged in covert work with Walsingham in the years directly preceding the assassination of the Guise (1585-87), the Massacre marked the rise of a Machiavellian age, in which Machiavelli could no longer be dismissed as an evil aberration but came to stand for an inescapable condition.⁷ The connection was secured by 1576 in *Discours contre Machievel* by Innocent Gentillet and *A mervaylous discourse upon [...] Katherine de Medicis*, attributed to Henri Estienne, which describes her litany of sins real and invented as “a practise as she hath perfectly learned of her Machiavellistes.”⁸ Between the *politique* machinations of a Médicis and the anarchy of civil war, the theater stood as

of his Huguenot friends, a group of Knights-Errant, who tried to gain admittance. They were repulsed by the Valois brethren and sent to hell.”

⁶ The Massacre surely etched in Sidney's imagination an abhorrence of mob violence, which exerts a clear influence over the depiction of the peasant rebellion in the *Arcadia*.

⁷ Cf. A. G. Dickens, “The Elizabethans and St. Bartholomew,” in *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew: Reappraisals and Documents*, ed. Alfred Soman, International Archives of the History of Ideas 75 (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 59: “While I mention this thin stock of poetry, I should not neglect that more significant theme: the impact of the Massacre upon the English drama. Was it not one of that series of somber influences and events which brushed aside comfortable Tudor beliefs in 'legitimate' monarchy and providential history[...]? Thus to accept the universe of Machiavelli as a tragic statement of reality was a very different thing from the former practice of wrapping up evil as abnormal or 'Machiavellian' and pushing it under the carpet.”

⁸ Qtd. in Dickens, 61.

both a place of refuge and a voice of dissent, even if that dissent was knowingly directed at deaf ears.

In this chapter, I will trace English early modern discontent through the lens of the Massacre and its context, exposing the extent to which the schisms of the confessional conflict bred a more skeptical, pessimistic view of the workings of political power. In response, Machiavelli's analysis of "policy" stripped of the idealized fictions that maintain it, including religion, could no longer be dismissed, even as the visceral horror of the early modern reader remained largely undiminished. Theater and history, the great twin machines of early modern social thinking, read Machiavelli, Tacitus, and Seneca through a new lens, trying to synthesize their thought with more or less success to deal with the state of perpetual civil war raging across Europe in an attempt to re-conceptualize a political landscape in which enemy and neighbor were often synonymous. Out of this foment of discontent, the stage machiavel arose as the symbol of this melancholy worldview, a synergistic parody of the new evil called "policy." Through Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris* and *Jew of Malta* together with Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, I will analyze the disturbing new sense of helplessness and futility that arose in response to the wars of policy and religion; the machiavel was the figurehead of this response, but in Kyd and Marlowe, it is clear that the machiavel himself is not the problem: he is a symptom of something more abstract and pervasive that they strive frenetically to represent.⁹ The theatricality these playwrights developed represented the

⁹ We might name this as-yet indistinct abstraction, following Foucault, the first stirrings of "governmentality," in which machiavellian policy became channeled and domesticated, through the anti-machiavellian attempts to reinstate power's requisite fictions, through the basic workings an administrative entity. Contrary to Foucault's sense of the "overvaluation" of the state in the "lyricism of the cold monster," however, I'd like to posit that in the near-manic horror and disgust with which the early modern period viewed the coming Leviathan, even as they theorized it into existence, we can be reminded of our own apathy, our tendency to laugh at the universal corruption and ambition of politicians. We have come to

intense affective disturbance of the new political landscape. Through a refusal of catharsis and a transformation of both classical and medieval theatrical strategies, these playwrights developed a *historical* theater, rather than a religious or ethical theater, which viewed the processes of political history through an analysis of character and event rather than a set of *a priori* ethical or moral positions. In the modern term “character,” I intend the more accurate early modern sense of “person,” which roughly corresponds to the Greek term *ethos* as that set of universal traits that can be represented either historically or fictionally and are available to an ethical and causal analysis which, I argue, becomes the focus of both politic history and Elizabethan theater.¹⁰ From these persons, more abstract categories emerged to gather persons under quasi-allegorical figures such as the stoic, machiavel, and malcontent.

The stage machiavel developed hand-in-hand with the Elizabethan take on Senecan revenge tragedy. One of the earliest persuasive attempts to explain the Renaissance obsession with revenge, elaborated in the most detail by Fredson Bowers, took the Elizabethan revenge narrative as supporting the archaic notion of blood revenge against increasing state power over punishment.¹¹ Not surprisingly, this discussion focuses on *The Spanish Tragedy* as its primary exemplar. However, while Bowers presents a great deal of historical evidence to back the claim that personal revenge was

expect hollow and instrumental campaign promises, or that our minimal representation in government can only be bought at the price of funding a bureaucratic machine the only purpose of which is to make the rich richer. Perhaps we need a more “immediate, affective, and tragic” response to such a state of affairs, and early modern theater in particular delivers that response. See Michel Foucault, “Lecture Four: 1 February 1978,” in *Security, Territory, Population*, ed. Michel Senellart (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), esp. 109.

¹⁰ Cf. Womack, “Characters,” 31–75.

¹¹ See in particular Lily B. Campbell, “Theories of Revenge in Renaissance England,” *Modern Philology* 28, no. 3 (February 1931): 281–96; Fredson Thayer Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587-1642* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1959); Ronald Broude, “Time, Truth, and Right in *The Spanish Tragedy*,” *Studies in Philology* 68, no. 2 (April 1971): 130–45.

competing with state-sanctioned mechanisms, these readings universally fail to consider Kyd's innovations on his Senecan model as well as virtually ignoring the play's most unique feature, the perverse providential framework that metaphysically motivates the action. As opposed to the Pembroke circle's stoic closet drama or the translations collected in Jasper Heywood's *Ten Tragedies* (1581), staged revenge tragedy responded more directly to Kyd than to Seneca, a conversation that became codified in a set of literary conventions such as the ghost and the play-within-a-play. Thus, while *The Spanish Tragedy* is indeed a founding text, a closer examination reveals that the play has very little to do with revenge as such. More than a critique of injustice, the tragedy challenges its audience with the possibility that justice exists on neither a human nor a divine level; providence is supplanted by an incomprehensible and meaningless causality. The plays of both Kyd and Marlowe refuse the catharsis which would allow us to make sense of injustice and evil, developing instead a theater of spectacle which suspends the audience in a charged aporetic state. "Revenge" names both the metaphysical principle and the melancholy, nihilistic resentment that confronting such a world breeds.

Even machiavels fail to prosper in Kyd's bleak universe, but in its future instantiations this world would be increasingly populated by stage machiavels, a vision of the kind of being best adapted to this environment. Marlowe first develops the machiavel as a distinctive stage-type fully in *The Jew of Malta* as an outgrowth and reexamination of the morality play's Vice. Although Marlowe's debt to Gentillet has been demonstrated by a number of critics, exactly why the St. Bartholomew Day Massacre and the Guise, the theme to which Marlowe returns at the end of his abbreviated career, intrude in this play set in a quasi-historical Malta has received little attention as anything but a topical

reference to the Guise's relatively recent demise.¹² Much as Jonson's *Sejanus* stages the “machavel” and the “prince” simultaneously, *The Jew of Malta* displays the wanton atheistic amorality of Barabas, Marlowe's “antichrist,” only to juxtapose his malice with the impersonal and far more effective realities of reason of state, *virtù* divorced from human agency.¹³ As Simon Shepherd has pointed out, machiavellian policy disrupts the apparent Vice narrative's familiar closure; instead, the Vice-machavel's fall merely reveals that we have been paying attention to the wrong evil.¹⁴ As many critics have noted, Barabas fails because he isn't machiavellian *enough*; he evacuates his meaningfulness as an analytic of vice in a laughable caricature of evil that seems insignificant in the face of the abstract web of power relations that Ferneze represents. *The Jew of Malta* exposes the Vice to be defunct, the morality play insufficient to imagine the amoral world heralded by the St. Bartholomew Massacre; in truly machiavellian fashion, the providential frame which informed and insulated the morality play is stripped away and replaced with the bare realities of power. The banality of human evil is supplanted with Nietzsche's coldest monster, the state.

These plays confront the audience not with the didactic virtue of an Aristotle or a Sidney but with a bleak, skeptical analysis of “virtue” as impractical and unprofitable—

¹² The events of the play are pseudo-historical, but the play seems to draw inspiration from a number of actual events. Barabas claims to have helped Charles V “in the wars 'twixt France and Germany” (*Jew*, II.iii.190-1), presumably the Hapsburg-Valois Wars and the Counter Reformation conflicts, which would suggest a date after 1556. Thus, the Ottoman incursion in the play is probably meant to be roughly equivalent to the Great Siege of Malta in 1565. However, the confiscation of Jewish property recalls the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, when they were forced to pay compensation for their own expulsion, and under the Knights of Malta in the 16th century, there were no free Jews practicing openly.

¹³ John Parker has analyzed Barabas as an antichrist figure in depth in *The Aesthetics of Antichrist: From Christian Drama to Christopher Marlowe* (Ithaca & London: Cornell Univ. Press, 2007), 189–209. Claude Summers in particular has emphasized that the play gestures outward from Barabas to a universal principle of *virtù* in *Christopher Marlowe and the Politics of Power*, ed. James Hogg, Salzburg Studies in English Literature 22 (Salzburg: University of Salzburg, 1974).

¹⁴ Simon Shepherd, *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theatre* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 29–30, 175.

the “virtuous man” appears like a species maladapted to its environment. Yet the machiavellian alternative is presented as repulsive. The three plays we examine in this chapter can broadly be characterized as “revenge tragedy,” but as we can see from critics like Fredson Bowers, what revenge *means* has been taken at face value. It is not immediately apparent that we should think the early modern term revenge together with melancholy, unless we turn to the theorist of *ressentiment*. Understood in Nietzschean terms, “revenge” is the manifestation of an affect and a negative orientation toward the world; rather than an “act,” revenge names the various indirect ways what Nietzsche calls *ressentiment* comes to manifest. In the following section, we can begin to outline the metaphysics of revenge through a comparison with the surprisingly similar terminology that Nietzsche uses to describe Romantic pessimism. In doing so, we will not try to adapt Elizabethan thought to Nietzschean standards, but rather leverage Nietzsche's insights into the conjunction of affect and metaphysics to pry open the network of concepts undergirding the dense and often opaque Elizabethan terms revenge and melancholy.

ii. “*totus mundus histrionem agit*”: The melancholy world-stage¹⁵

In an early essay, “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” (1873), Nietzsche argues that language is a set of metaphors or “illusions” which attempt to capture human

¹⁵ Robert Burton quotes this famous formulation by John of Salisbury (“Salisburyensis”), who coined the term *theatrum mundi* in his *Policraticus* (c. 1159). Importantly, the *Policraticus* was also perhaps the first post-classical justification of tyrannicide on religious grounds, prefiguring Huguenot works like *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* (1579), probably some kind of collaboration by Hubert Languet and Philippe de Mornay. Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 52 (To Reader). On the development of the *theatrum mundi* in the Renaissance, see Björn Quiring, “Introduction,” in “*If Then the World a Theatre Present*”: *Revisions of the Theatrum Mundi Metaphor in Early Modern England* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014). Björn Quiring, “Introduction,” in “*If Then the World a Theatre Present*”: *Revisions of the Theatrum Mundi Metaphor in Early Modern England* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014). On the authorship of the *Vindiciae*, see Ernest Barker, “The Authorship of the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*,” *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 3, no. 2 (1930): 164–81.

relations by conflating similarities, or “equating what is unequal.” The treatise, which is in part a re-reading of Sidney through Hobbes, argues that “truths” are merely “a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically,” once-potent poetic figures sedimented into dead metaphors, “illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are.” Behind this negative critique of truth is the same valorization of poetic making we find in Sidney, which Nietzsche calls the “lie”: the attempt to articulate human experience in a radically revelatory fashion that still retains its “sensuous power.”¹⁶ “Revenge” in early modern theater names such a *living* metaphor, poetically stretching its well-worn “true” meaning to capture a less articulable experience through a catachrestic extension. The catachresis “revenge” names both an affective experience and artistic response which bears a striking resemblance to Nietzsche’s own remarks on revenge throughout his work.¹⁷

In the first scenes of *The Spanish Tragedy*, a war between two evenly matched armies comes to an end and the prince Balthazar is taken captive by Horatio and Lorenzo; victors and captives alike behave with a courtly dignity that contrasts sharply with the blood-soaked pettiness to come. The distinction between Balthazar’s noble surrender and

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, “(From) On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York & London: Penguin Books, 1982), 46–47.

¹⁷ Elaborating on Nietzsche’s essay, Derrida discovers philosophy to be “a system of catachreses” (257) which reveals the need for a new “articulation for the [...] classical opposition of metaphor and concept,” escaping the traditional confusion of the “*production*” of meaning as the “*revelation*” of truth (263). Philosophy’s implication in the poetic challenges metaphysical notions of truth (as “*troth*,” as that which pledges its faithfulness and constancy); however, what poses a problem for the validity of a philosopheme produces the conditions for thinking in the theater. That the theatrical experience is an exercise in meaning-making (a “*production*”) is a self-evident part of the experience; a play proclaims itself to be art, to be artificial. However, its revelatory capacity and its challenge to the spectator emerges from the possibility of experiencing its theatrical conditions as real conditions, “*resonating*” with the spectator both affectively and intellectually, and changing our conception of the world. I take Derrida’s final point to be that the metaphor always precedes the concept, and it is for this reason that the metaphor is “the death of philosophy” (271): because philosophy is ineluctably poetic. See Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), 207–71.

the play's numerous real and imagined slights provoking a vengeful response mirrors the distinction Nietzsche makes between master morality and slave morality. Nietzsche, the theorist of nihilism, knots discontent and revenge tightly in his concept of *ressentiment*.¹⁸ It will be helpful to briefly elucidate these meditations on revenge, although by deploying these insights in the early modern period, we will be using Nietzsche's observations against his own conclusions: Nietzsche saw the Renaissance as a moment of re-invigoration in the otherwise gradual moral degeneration leading to the decadence of romantic pessimism;¹⁹ by contrast, the malcontent lays bear the cankerous, entropic universe experienced by those who found the early modern orthodoxy uninhabitable.

For Nietzsche, metaphysics was always a problem of morality: the set of values determined in response to what a culture needs to survive. He found that he could sum up the history of morality as the product of power: the morality which has dominated modernity is the morality of the powerless ("slave morality"), an antagonistic reversal of the values of those who had power ("master morality"). The powerless are denied the capacity to act, and therefore "compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge."²⁰ We must keep in mind that Nietzsche's characterizations and histories are always cast in relation to his own goals: seeing the history of philosophy as a series of world-changing *acts*, where philosophy does not capture but rather produces truths, Nietzsche's radical and irreverent valuations aim to alter our perspective sufficiently to cast aside our most

¹⁸ I follow Walter Kaufmann in leaving Nietzsche's French term untranslated, partly because the term has taken on a life of its own in responses to Nietzsche, as Kaufmann points out, but more importantly because Nietzsche's use of the term extends it from a simple affective reaction to the defining mood of a particular way of being in the world.

¹⁹ See Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morals," in *On the Genealogy of Morals & Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 53 (I.16): "There was, to be sure, in the Renaissance an uncanny and glittering reawakening of the classical ideal, of the noble mode of evaluating all things[.]"

²⁰ Nietzsche, 36-37 (I.10).

well-worn beliefs in favor of something new. His attack on “slave morality,” which is largely an attack on the romantic pessimism emerging—in his view— from the Christian worldview, thus plays the role of villain in Nietzsche's revisionist history.

Nietzsche's reduction of complex worldviews to simple oppositions may seem suspect or even outright fallacious, but this distillation is often the strength of his accounts. The distinction he draws between the powerful and powerless turns on the meaning of revenge in a way that dramatically sets classical revenge cycles apart from early modern revenge tragedy. Nietzsche's analysis implies that revenge in the ancient world was an act asserting one's own power over an enemy, trading blow for blow, and Greek tragedy was a manner of containing and channeling the destructive capacity of this agonistic cycle. In the magnanimity between Spain and Portugal in war, we hear Nietzsche's pronouncement, which might have come from the mouth of one of Kyd's characters: “How much reverence has a noble man for his enemies!—and such reverence is a bridge to love.”²¹ Nietzsche discovers the origin of justice in Thucydides' disturbing account of the Athenian demand for absolute surrender from the Melians. Justice is essentially a principle of “barter” between factions of near-equivalent strength. Therefore, “revenge belongs initially to the realm of justice: it is an exchange,” the requital of the powerful.²² Equity, however, exists only between equal parties. Thucydides' Athenians make clear that justice exists only for those strong enough to lay claim to it:

we both know that decisions about justice are made in human discussions only when both sides are under equal compulsion; but when one side is stronger, it gets

²¹ Nietzsche, 39 (I.10).

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. Marion Faber (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 64 (II.92).

as much as it can, and the weak must accept that.²³

In contrast to strong revenge as reciprocity, weak revenge as *ressentiment* is an essentially imaginative, even literary, response, the only place the “vengefulness of the impotent” can find expression. Whereas the powerful act, requiting when necessary, *re-*action is the fundamental mode of the powerless, which condemns the external rather than affirming the self: “This inversion of the value-positing eye—this *need* to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself—is of the essence of *ressentiment*: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world[.]”²⁴ Thus, revenge is elevated to a kind of metaphysical principle, the foundation of what we will call the malcontent worldview. As T. S. Eliot observed, this is precisely the environment that produces the stoic:

Stoicism is the refuge for the individual in an indifferent or hostile world too big for him; it is the permanent substratum of a number of versions of cheering oneself up. Nietzsche is the most conspicuous modern instance of cheering oneself up.²⁵

Eliot's paraphrase of Nietzsche's project as a form of a Burton-like defense against melancholy is oddly but tellingly convoluted, casting Nietzsche himself as a stoic refugee and stoicism as a flight from the discontents of the world. Eliot's missing term is the malcontent: the stoic in Eliot's account emerges as one solution to malcontent despair, an attempt to “cheer” oneself. On the other hand, when the final refuge of stoicism reveals itself to be untenable, this failure completes the malcontent dilemma—the malcontent no longer has any escape or “consolation,” and the last cathartic door is shut. The

²³ Thucydides, “Thucydides,” in *Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists*, ed. Michael Gagarin and Paul Woodruff, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 119 (5.8.89).

²⁴ Nietzsche, “Genealogy of Morals,” 36-37 (I.10).

²⁵ T. S. Eliot, “Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca,” in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), 131–32.

malcontent's "discontent" negates the orthodox set of values, whereas the stoic develops this negation into a positive system of values; the stoic and malcontent thus comprise two halves of the inverse valuation Nietzsche terms *ressentiment*.

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, we can see *ressentiment* "becom[ing] creative and giv[ing] birth to values"—in other words, literature as an expression which gives conceptual shape to an affective response.²⁶ *The Spanish Tragedy* elevates the Sidnean expression of personal suffering to a universal critique, without losing any of its irony and self-deprecation. Although melancholy seems inward-turning, it in fact mirrors Nietzsche's *ressentiment*, rebounding back onto the world. Melancholic solipsism thus creates an odd form of removal from the world: although the entire world is viewed through the dark lens of melancholy, encompassed by it in one manner, at the same time the melancholic and the world are separated by the rejection of the external, those same melancholy-tinted objects. Thus, grief at his father's death and disgust at his mother's wedding transform Hamlet's entire world at a stroke into "an unweeded garden / That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely" (*H*, I.ii.135-7).²⁷ It is no accident, then, that "All the world's a stage," the most famous and extreme expression of the *theatrum mundi* trope, is uttered by the malcontent Jaques, who turns the ancient metaphor into an assertion of "ontological parity," collapsing being and appearance.²⁸ According to Paul Kottman, this conflation of world and stage is "perhaps the only grand announcement that passes unquestioned" by Shakespeare. Like Hamlet as the "paradigm

²⁶ Nietzsche, "Genealogy of Morals," 36 (I.10).

²⁷ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Robert S. Miola, Norton Critical Edition (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011). Parenthetical references to *Hamlet* refer to this edition unless otherwise noted.

²⁸ Shakespeare, "AYLI," II.vii.139. The term "ontological parity" is Kottman's.

of man,” Kottman identifies that “it is *this* affirmation that has burned itself into our cultural memory[.]”²⁹ However, far from remaining “unquestioned,” the source of this pronouncement is nothing if not suspect, and if our cultural memory has been formed by Shakespeare's most famous malcontents, we would do well to find this more troubling than affirming.

In fact, the melancholy worldview is theatrical because of the distance enforced between subject and object in what amounts to a purgation or catharsis of resentment: even one's own actions are viewed as the self-dissociated movements of an actor. Distanced from the world and even his own actions, the melancholic struggles to feel that anything is meaningful. As the other three humors declined in importance as what we might now call a tool of psychological analysis, melancholy became an increasingly dominant affective hermeneutic. Melancholy came to be understood less as a biochemical imbalance and more a ubiquitous “mood” in which, to borrow a description from modern affect theory, “the sense of subjectivity becomes diffuse and sensation [...] seems to pervade the entire scene or situation.”³⁰ Causality and agency become indeterminate, because our perception of the world is tightly bound to our mood, such that the world seems to cause our mood at the same time that our perception of the world is altered by the mood.

The *theatrum mundi* in this sense came to be deployed not so much as a statement about the world or social relations, but rather as a description of a newly fraught relation between self and world. The orientation is self-consciously solipsistic: although Jaques,

²⁹ Paul A. Kottman, *A Politics of the Scene* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 2, 206–7.

³⁰ Charles Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affects* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2003), 2.

for example, begins with “all the men and women [who are] merely players,” his stage is an oddly empty one, the performance of a single life in seven scenes whose interactions with others exist, monad-like, at best only through implication. The “play” we witness is merely a dumb show; from an imaginary position of objectivity, we watch our own progress from undignified birth (“mewling and puking in the nurse's arms”) to the slow disintegration of our bodies, “second childishness, and mere oblivion, / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything” (*AYLI*, II.vii.139-166). Throughout, Jaques' vision of the world-stage is unrelentingly nihilistic and oddly narcissistic, even as he exudes a self-deprecating sense of futility in every “scene.” Rather than ontological parity, these uses of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor insist upon the *problem* of seeing the world as stage: as a spectator, he watches the world's folly helplessly; as an actor, even his most serious efforts are laden with the suspicion that all this is at best mere entertainment, a kind of jig.

Burton elaborates the *theatrum mundi* effect produced by melancholy at length in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, which begins with the elaborate construction of his persona, “Democritus Junior”:

Gentle reader, I presume thou wilt be very inquisitive to know what antic or personate actor this is, that so insolently intrudes upon this common theatre to the world's view[.]³¹

Whether gloomy or “antic,” the melancholic is passionate, passive—his movements necessarily seem not entirely his own but rather the product of his humor. Retreating, contemplative, the melancholic is also an observer, “A mere spectator of other men's fortunes and adventures, and how they act their parts, which methinks are diversely

³¹ Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 15.

presented unto me, as from a common theatre or scene.”³² Although traditionally, the *theatrum mundi* enshrined God as spectator, emphasizing the world's folly from a divine objectivity, this pessimistic version places the *self* in the position of “mere” spectator, an ironic usurpation which replaces divine omnipotence with human futility.³³ The melancholic is both apart from and a part of the “common theatre”: in a strange way, like Don Andrea, he is the frame of the theatrical action itself, produced through melancholy's histrionic hermeneutic. In other words, melancholy results in a solipsistic projection of the internal state *onto* the world, which is then interpreted as a dissociation of self *from* the world. The melancholic narrativizes and universalizes the everyday occurrences of chance and happenstance into a unified vision of a mad, irrational universe:

Nay, what's the world itself? A vast chaos, a confusion of manners, as fickle as the air, *domicilium insanorum* [a madhouse], a turbulent troop full of impurities, a mart of walking spirits, goblins, the theater of hypocrisy, a shop of knavery, flattery, a nursery of villainy, the scene of babbling, the school of giddiness, the academy of vice[.]³⁴

Burton uses the so-called plain style's exploded period to full effect: claimed by neostoics, and by Burton, as an unaffected “extemporean style,” in fact the concatenation of clamoring clauses expresses a kind of histrionic mania.³⁵ With passion and vitriol writ in every line, Burton displays the plain style's ambivalent potential, suspended between passion and reason, malcontent and stoic.

³² Burton, 18.

³³ On the proliferation of versions of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor, see Björn Quiring, ed., “*If Then the World a Theatre Present*”: *Revisions of the Theatrum Mundi Metaphor in Early Modern England* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

³⁴ Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 64.

³⁵ Burton, 32: “I neglect phrases, and labour wholly to inform my reader's understanding, not to please his ears; 'tis not my study or intent to compose neatly, which an orator requires, but to express myself readily and plainly as it happens. So that as a river runs sometimes precipitate and swift, then dull and slow; now direct, then *per ambages* [winding]; now deep, then shallow; now muddy, then clear; now broad, then narrow; doth my style flow: now serious, then light; now comical, then satirical; now more elaborate, then remiss, as the present subject required, *or as at that time I was affected*” (emphasis mine).

Northrop Frye calls *The Anatomy of Melancholy* “the greatest Menippean satire in English before Swift,” and suggests we adopt the term “anatomy” to describe this focused dissection of a mental attitude.³⁶ To place this “anatomy” back in its original dramatic tradition, Burton's prose satire emerges from the tradition of academic plays, including Burton's only other known work, *Philosophaster* (1606), and *The Spanish Tragedy*, although written for the popular stage, is still clearly indebted to this tradition. *The Spanish Tragedy* is itself a kind of anatomy of melancholy, situating us in a world saturated with the “Elizabethan malady” of melancholy; Bel-Imperia, the Viceroy, Balthazar, and of course Hieronimo are all explicitly melancholy, due to either love or loss—“Ay, ay, this earth, image of melancholy,” bewails the Viceroy (I.iii.12).³⁷ While Björn Quiring claims early modern uses of the *theatrum mundi* evince an uncomplicated ontology because they fail to turn to “the problem of what lies beyond the theater,” the lack of an “outside” is a crucial feature of the melancholic world-stage's ontology.³⁸ Like Burton's *Anatomy*, Kyd and Marlowe give us nothing “outside” that melancholy world. Far from Renaissance naivety or ontological innocence, the matryoshka doll-like embedding of multiple theatrical frames, most famously expressed in the play-within-a-play motif such as Hieronimo's *Suleiman* or Hamlet's *Mousetrap*, is in fact a key theatrical strategy eliciting a claustrophobic sense of being trapped in a space fraught with ambiguity. Such frames deliberately confound the ontological certainty of earlier iterations of the *theatrum mundi*. These plays evoke the resentment and disgust of a Juvenal, but without the individual or type to act as cathartic scapegoat. A universalized

³⁶ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 311–12.

³⁷ Of these, Hieronimo is the only one who is not called “melancholy” in the course of the play, despite being the most intensely motivated by the melancholy of his grief.

³⁸ Quiring, “Introduction,” 7.

melancholy of the sort Burton and Kyd describe leave us without the ability to act or change, nullifying the usual justification for satire. Burton sees two classical recourses in the face of such a world:

Heraclitus the philosopher, out of a serious meditation of men's lives, fell a-weeping, and with continual tears bewailed their misery, madness, and folly. Democritus, on the other side, burst out a-laughing, their whole life seemed to him so ridiculous, and he was so far carried with this ironical passion, that the citizens of Abdera took him to be mad[.]³⁹

However, if Burton asks us to laugh at the world's madness and folly with a Democritus, the satirical tragedies of Kyd and Marlowe ask if we dare laugh along with a Don Andrea or Barabas. These plays reveal such laughter to conceal a nihilistic despair at best, a universal malice at worst.

iii. Anatomy of a machiavel in *The Massacre at Paris*

Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris* (1593) attempts to virtually place its English audience in the shoes of witnesses like Sidney, depicting the sights and sounds of violence in scene after scene of martyrdom and cruelty. The play, much maligned by modern critics, attained instant popularity. One of the many reasons critics dislike the play is the monotonous scenes of murder, lacking in eloquence or even narrative momentum: time seems to halt as we pan through a series of bloody tableaux, and then speeds through a decade in a handful of minutes to depict the fall of the Guise and Henri III. While we may find the play static and repetitive, perhaps it was the play's capacity to give narrative shape to shapeless violence that made the play so appealing in its time; by distending time to encapsulate everything from the Massacre in 1572 to Henri III's

³⁹ Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 47.

murder in 1589, Marlowe is able to impose a *de casibus* structure on events which seemed senseless twenty years earlier. Superficially, we have a simple tragedy of rise and fall as promised by the original publication title, “The Tragedy of the Guise.”

Once dismissed by critics as crude anti-Catholic propaganda, apologists defended Marlowe's artistry only by arguing that the play was a corrupt memorial reconstruction. Since then the play has slowly received more serious attention, starting with Judith Weil, who was the first to seriously consider the possibility that the play was “a satire on the inhuman worldliness of Christian rulers.”⁴⁰ Julia Briggs demonstrates that Marlowe synthesized his accounts of the Massacre carefully, utilizing not only Huguenot sources but also sources written by the Guise's own Catholic League of France. Noting that the Huguenots maintained an ambivalent relation with English Protestants because they were resisting Catholic persecution but simultaneously developing a theory of political resistance that justified tyrannicide, Briggs finds in the play's ambiguous theatrical effect the possibility that the English audience reacted to the violent spectacle with either disgust or excitement.⁴¹ In perhaps the best analysis of the play, Kristen Poole rejects the idea that the play could be purely a “black comedy,” in Briggs's terms, emphasizing the degree to which the English spectators were likely to identify with the Protestant victims. For Poole, the tableaux of victims mirrors but also undercuts the scenes of Protestant martyrdom in Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*; she attempts to read the “garbling” of the text as a deliberate theatrical effect. Foxe joins the spectacle of violence to the martyr's free expression: at the moment of torment and death, the martyr's subversive potential

⁴⁰ Judith Weil, *Christopher Marlowe: Merlin's Prophet* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), 102.

⁴¹ Julia Briggs, “Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*: A Reconsideration,” *The Review of English Studies* 34, no. 135 (August 1983): 257–78.

through speech reaches its zenith. However, Marlowe's martyrs are never given a chance to speak; they are interrupted and mocked, and the play's soliloquies are generally reserved for the Guise.⁴²

Poole notes a crucial feature of the theatrical response to the confessional conflicts: a theatricality grounded in violent spectacle conjoined with inarticulate or muted speech. This speech which goes unheard is difficult to describe, because our terms for unheard speech usually place the fault with the speaker: inaudible, garbled, uncommunicative. However, Marlowe and Kyd are more interested in a form of speech that resembles the riddle about the tree in the forest: what is the status of speech when no one will listen? Because it lacks an object, such speech lacks the directionality that would give it meaning. It is “inarticulate” not because it lacks the joints between parts to properly convey meaning, but because it fails to join speaker and listener. In *Massacre*, the erasure of efficacious speech is the effect of violence; in *The Spanish Tragedy* and to some extent *The Jew of Malta*, it is also the cause: violence itself becomes the only means of communication in a world without ears to hear.

The familiar pattern of rise and fall provides some sense of closure to the events of the Massacre, partly through a conflation of two events which, although clearly related, occur sixteen years apart. Marlowe's *Massacre* is actually plural, referring to two events which France termed “massacres”: the slaughter of the Huguenots and the murder of the Guise brothers. Furthermore, the newly borrowed word “massacre” seems to have added another layer of meaning to the Catholic term “mass,” a keyword in the confessional struggles. The Guise's dying “*Vive la messe!*” (*Massacre*, xxi.85) resounds

⁴² Kristin Elizabeth Poole, “Garbled Martyrdom in *The Massacre at Paris*,” *Comparative Drama* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 1–25.

almost prophetically with Henri IV's perhaps apocryphal statement upon converting to Catholicism that "Paris is well worth a Mass" (*Paris vaut bien une messe*). The play begins with the marriage of Navarre and the "holy mass" that served to "consummate" the ceremony (i.19-20), a Catholic ritual that unwittingly became prelude, along with the entertainments, to the bloodbath.⁴³ The mass mirrors the massacre: one meant to join communities and the other, in Catherine's words, meant to "dissolve" them "with blood and cruelty" (i.25). Thus, the idea of mass and massacre structure the play so as to coordinate and interrogate the relationship between religion, politics, and violence. The polarized, politicized sides of the confessional conflict, Protestant versus Catholic, exert a force antithetical to the notion of a divine community, the schism ultimately serving to question the legitimacy of either side. Marlowe essentially establishes the historical frame of the play to test Navarre's thesis that God "will revenge the blood of innocents" (i.43)—that history has some form of divine, moral order.

The slaughter of the near-voiceless Huguenot martyrs would be bleak dramatic material without the final fall of the Guise just at the height of his success and power. The strong gravity of the tragic logic tracing the fall of great men provides an easy reading of the play in terms of its sources in Vice plays and mystery cycle drama. However, like the anti-machiavel literature that arose from the event, the play itself encodes a world of machiavellian realities even as it rejects the arch-machiavels Guise and Médicis. The Guise sees the wheel of fortune clearly; his desire to reach the pinnacle simply outweighs

⁴³ This thesis combines two insights: Briggs notes the dual use of "massacre" for both the Huguenots and the Guises, while Ardolino observes the pun on the wedding mass that preceded the Massacre in both Marlowe's *Massacre* and Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. See Briggs, "Massacre: A Reconsideration," 268; Frank Ardolino, "'In Paris? Mass, and Well Remembered!': Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and the English Reaction to the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 21, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 403.

his fear of the fall. In the soliloquy that sets the machiavellian tone of the play, the Guise makes his motives clear:

Set me to scale the high pyramides,
And thereon set the diadem of France;
I'll either rend it with my nails to naught,
Or mount the top with my aspiring wings,
Although my downfall be the deepest hell. (*Massacre*, ii.43-47)

The speech oddly combines Machiavelli's sense of *virtù* as human capacity to dominate fortune with a more fatalistic disregard for consequence. In keeping with his numerous self-comparisons to Caesar, it seems that Marlowe's history-play Guise has himself been reading history. If Machiavelli counseled the prince how to maintain his reign at the pinnacle for as long as possible, this in no way undermined the force of human history as a cycle of rises and falls. Such a cycle was implied in the nature of the prince as a *new* ruler seeking legitimation, and the “politick” historians integrated a secularized version of this cycle, reading history as embedding sequences of “tragedies.”

The tumultuous events at the end of the sixteenth century and the sensationalized accounts of political treachery turned historians' attention to Tacitus and the problem of tyranny, civil strife, and the duties of the citizen in the face of such turmoil. Tacitus' state was founded on civil war, and his history gave voice to those who had lost, “treat[ing] its citizens as defeated combatants.” Rather than the ancient Greek concept of the citizen-as-ally defined in terms of the external enemy, the formulation later picked up by Carl Schmitt, in Tacitus the enemy was within, thoroughly internalized: Tacitists imported “ideas about war into *civil* life: all politics was now seen as at least potentially civil war, and our fellow citizens were no different from enemies with whom we lived in uneasy

peace.”⁴⁴ It is easy to see how resonant such a political vision would be for the war-torn Netherlands and France, but for Elizabethan England, such conflict was always looming just over the horizon as well. Lipsian politics sought the stoic path of detachment, reading history only for “individual consolation”;⁴⁵ politic historians, however, still required a way to deploy the lessons of history and a politics of action. These pessimistic political historians “were coming to see the past in dramatic terms.”⁴⁶ Their method has mostly been examined as a process of analogy: historical events seem to result from a particular character, and finding a similar character can help explain or even predict contemporary events.⁴⁷ Thus, Elizabeth saw herself compared to Richard II, Henri III was compared to Edward II, and Marlowe's Guise compares himself to Caesar. However, the point of reading history seems to have been less a simple matter of analogizing and more the cultivation of the skill of *anatomizing* character. At the same time, playwrights were increasingly dramatizing history, and it was in the stage practice of dramatizing the consequences of a particular orientation to world events that a new method of reading history emerges. On the one hand, the Guise's self-analogy to Caesar is important precisely because it *fails*, and he is murdered before reaching his goal; on the other hand, examining the Guise raises a set of disturbing political questions. Do the Guise's actions *make sense*, given the political conditions he faces? Does politics offer any other method

⁴⁴ Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 10–11.

⁴⁵ J. H. M. Salmon, “Cicero and Tacitus in Sixteenth-Century France,” *The American Historical Association* 85, no. 2 (1980): 324. See also Halvard Leira, “Justus Lipsius, Political Humanism and the Disciplining of 17th Century Statecraft,” *Review of International Studies* 34, no. 04 (2008): 677.

⁴⁶ F. J. Levy, “Hayward, Daniel, and the Beginnings of Politic History in England,” *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 1987, 6.

⁴⁷ See especially Levy, “Politic History.”

of participation? And perhaps most troubling, is religion anything more than a tool of political ambition?

We could certainly read the Guise's obsessive ambition, with Weil, as an inverted mirror for princes, a negative exemplar; the Guise is clearly the major Vice-like figure anatomized by the play.⁴⁸ However, much like *The Spanish Tragedy*, the play gives us *too* much context for the apparently central figure, ultimately shifting the tragic center to Henry. The Guise's policy is outdone by Henry's "device" (*Massacre*, xxi.135): on December 23, 1588, at the very moment when Henry III has become the Guise's puppet and the "diadem" of France is within reach, Henry manages to assassinate the Guise.⁴⁹ The murderers enter on cue with the Guise's reiteration of his faith in the "sword," the politics of power (xxi.56). Unlike the Huguenots he slaughtered, the Guise manages a dying soliloquy pledging himself unrepentant to God or king, calling on the Pope and Philip to destroy the Valois' line, and establishing the gravity of his death through a final comparison to Caesar (xxi.77-86). Failing to end here, however, the play covers three scenes and eight more months to conclude with the symmetrical murder of Henry III and the passing of the crown to Navarre. The puzzling ending re-centers the tragedy around the ambiguous figure of Henry and the fulfillment of the Guise's curse: "the Valois' line ends in *my* tragedy," Henri declares (xxiv.92, emphasis added). As critics have long remarked, Marlowe's French Henry III is as opaque as Shakespeare's English Henry V. In his part in the Massacre and in his murder of the Guise, he wallows in violence and cruelty as much as the Guise or Catherine: "Ah, this sweet sight is physic to my soul. /

⁴⁸ Weil, *Merlin's Prophet*, 83.

⁴⁹ I have used the play's designations in reference to the characters, e.g. "Henry" for Henri III, but elsewhere I use the French names for the historical figures.

Go, fetch his son for to behold his death” (xxi.90-1). Yet he is given a dignified death in support of the Protestant faith, inciting Navarre against Rome, ironic, as Briggs notes, since Henri III in fact urged Navarre to convert to Catholicism, which he finally did in the same year Marlowe's play came to the stage.⁵⁰

Whatever Marlowe may have known about the historical Henri III's final moments, the seemingly heroic ending can only be intended to strike a false note. While the English might want to sympathize with the triumphant Protestantism of the ending, to take Henry's final soliloquy at face value would be, as many have argued, to render his character incoherent. However, read in the light of the “cold” machiavellianism he has demonstrated throughout the play in contrast to the Guise's “hot” machiavellianism, Henry's final moments take on a more sinister cast.⁵¹ Under the cover of true religion, Henry is in fact using his death as yet another device for personal revenge: “Weep not, sweet Navarre, but revenge my death. [...] He loves me not that sheds most tears, / But he that makes most lavish of his blood” (xxiv.95-101). By embedding the Guise's tragedy within Henry's, the Guise's political vision is ironically ratified: religion is a tool for reason of state, and “Beneath reason of state lurk personal animosities.”⁵² Marlowe outlines one of the key ideas implicit in the anti-machiavellian literature: reason of state relies on the notion that the preservation of the state is an *a priori* good, and therefore any action (“policy,” “device”) taken to this end (“reason of state”) is itself moral; however, this motive is at best bound up with or indistinguishable from personal motives. Reason of state was “a Tacitist approach to politics [which] went along with a combination of

⁵⁰ Briggs, “*Massacre: A Reconsideration*,” 271.

⁵¹ The contrast is from Briggs, 265.

⁵² Briggs, 270.

both scepticism *and* Stoicism[.]” In fact, its development had more to do with Lipsius than Machiavelli; in the *Politica* (1589), Lipsius emphasized that the ruler's power to break the law must always be in reference to the preservation of the state and for no other reason, contrasting this principle against what he took to be Machiavelli's position.⁵³ Gentillet and other anti-machiavellists made the same distinction; in the world of Marlowe's play, however, good and bad reason of state collapse. Machiavelli's *virtù* inevitably becomes a personal *technē* of power, and reason of state becomes synonymous with ambition.

Attempting to disprove Machiavelli's arguments, the anti-machiavellian authors in fact found themselves trapped within the logic they were attempting to dismantle, ironically inscribing machiavellian reason of state as not merely the condition of princes, but more deeply the condition of humanity itself. Although it has been proven that England had widespread access to Machiavelli's actual work in the original or various translations, and not only through Gentillet, I agree with N. W. Bawcutt that critics have overcompensated in diminishing Gentillet's influence, and Irving Ribner's dichotomy between “serious exposition” and mere “burlesque” is insufficient to capture the stage machiavel's dramatic power and influence.⁵⁴ This anti-machiavellian literature must be understood as the essential lens through which “machiavellianism” was refracted: as theories of intertextuality or adaptation have shown us, our primary point of reference in a set of related texts strongly influences our reading of the entire chain of texts. Marlowe

⁵³ Richard Tuck, “Scepticism, Stoicism and ‘*Raison d'état*’,” in *Philosophy and Government 1572-1651* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 45, 57–58.

⁵⁴ Ribner is thinking specifically of the parodic machiavellianism of Barabas; see my discussion of *The Jew of Malta* below. Irving Ribner, “Marlowe and Machiavelli,” *Comparative Literature* 6, no. 4 (Autumn 1954): 348–56; Raab, *English Face of Machiavelli*, 56; N. W. Bawcutt, “The ‘Myth of Gentillet’ Reconsidered: An Aspect of Elizabethan Machiavellianism,” *The Modern Language Review* 99, no. 4 (October 2004): 863–74.

is a key representative of the fact that for most Englishmen, the cultural context informing their reading was clearly far more Gentillet than Machiavelli. The foundation of the familiar stage machiavel, then, is the archetypal enemy as conceptualized by Huguenot malcontents, a term first used to describe Francis, Duke of Alençon's group of discontented Huguenot nobility, Les Malcontents, who opposed Henri III between 1574 and 1576, at the end of which Henri capitulated and Francis received the title Duke of Anjou. Despite his Huguenot sympathies, Anjou's personal Catholicism and blood relations with the forces behind the Massacre ensured that his potential marriage to Elizabeth was felt as a dire threat to a large portion of Protestant England between 1578 and 1581.⁵⁵ Although the English figure of the malcontent does not yet appear in the works of Kyd and Marlowe, their obsession with a post-Massacre world in which machiavallianism and politics seem to be synonymous created both the theatrical conditions and worldview within which the malcontent would come to thrive, a set of conditions I will refer to as "malcontent theatricality." In fact, although the machiavel is the malcontent's imagined antithesis, it is only in giving shape to the machiavel that the malcontent arises as a figure in its own right, and the two figures remain suspended in a fraught interrelationship in which distinguishing the malcontent from the machiavel is often merely a matter of perspective, a problem which is most thoroughly worked out in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Massacre's broad timeline of events thus brings a kind of tragic order to events that must have seemed frighteningly chaotic and random, but the order of history it represents also significantly undercuts any attempt to impose the *speculum principis*

⁵⁵ On Sidney and the militant Protestant's conflict with Anjou, see Chapter 1.

structure Weil would like to impute. We are given no other possible model of political engagement: even Navarre, however pure his motives might be, is ultimately manipulated into perpetuating Henry's blood feud, and the play reveals that nothing more than ambition and revenge drive the war for right religion. In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli claimed that from the perspective of politics, religion was instrumental, a means to preserve the stability of the state: he explains "How the Romans availed of religion to preserve order in their city" (I.13) and "How the Samnites resorted to religion as an extreme remedy for their desperate condition" (I.15).⁵⁶ In *Heaven and Earth, Religion and Policy*, Christopher Lever condemns this "politick religion" as a perverse reversal of the "religious policy" proper to a Christian commonweal.⁵⁷ Marlowe's ruthlessly skeptical vision leaves no room for anything but instrumental, "politick" religion in the political landscape: Navarre's apparently virtuous commitment to true faith leaves him merely the puppet of another's agenda. The idea that the common good might possibly guide reason of state seems naive in the face of the bleak facts of power's allure and the very human motivations of our rulers.

Marlowe does not glorify this state of affairs or suggest we should not resent it, but neither does he give us any alternative vision but the pathetic suffering of silenced martyrs. Given these political conditions, no matter how repugnant it might be, the Guise's philosophy, something like 'power for power's sake,' makes sense. The providential 'fall' that Navarre moralizes at the beginning of the play is naturalized as a historical process, an inevitability erased of its moral content, and the Guise merely takes

⁵⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, "Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titius Livy," in *The Prince and the Discourses*, trans. Christian E. Detmold (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 153, 158.

⁵⁷ Raab, *English Face of Machiavelli*, 87.

it as the price of entry for the chance to be on top, however briefly. Raab argues that in his *History of the World*, Raleigh sets the historian the “impossible task” of analyzing the “intricate mechanism” of providence worked out through human acts: “the one consistent theme which runs through this unwieldy masterpiece is confusion between 'first' and 'second' causes—between 'God's will' and the 'particular humours' in terms of which Raleigh found it necessary to explain the affairs of the world.”⁵⁸ Like the “atheist lecture” Marlowe supposedly delivered to Raleigh and his circle, the *Massacre* performs a kind of logical reduction, questioning whether we require a “first cause” at all, or whether “particular humours” aren't fully sufficient to explain the course of historical events.⁵⁹ While Raleigh remains conflicted, Marlowe embraces this increasing emphasis on the analysis of the individual that most marks the politic historians. Rather than the divine vengeance in which Navarre confidently places his trust, ultimately *human* revenge is the principle which drives Marlowe's history, even motivating religious conflict and faith.

iv. “Religion and Policy” in *The Jew of Malta*: Marlowe's immorality play

The *Massacre* frames the problem of politic history at the familiar tragic level of great persons; by emptying the tragedy of its promise to fashion history into something meaningful, the play satirizes the politic historian's attempt to cull pragmatic political knowledge without a divine frame of reference. By the late sixteenth century, “politique”

⁵⁸ Raab, 72.

⁵⁹ Paul Kocher persuasively argues from multiple independent references as well as a close analysis of the Baines note that Marlowe did in fact write a formal argument against the authority of Scripture which he presented to Raleigh's group. Such references also suggest that Marlowe actively contributed to the radical thought of Raleigh's circle. See Paul H. Kocher, “Marlowe's Atheist Lecture,” in *Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Clifford Leech (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 159–66.

had shifted from its neutral medieval connotation to the strongly negative sense of a self-serving stratagem or *technē* of ambition; in particular, the term became associated with the Guise's Catholic League and their strategies to eliminate the Huguenots.⁶⁰ *Massacre at Paris* demonstrates the Guise's politic actions to be the logical, if self-destructive and immoral, response to a political landscape defined on such a basis. Marlowe's turn to the history play, however, was preceded by a revision of the Vice play which staged the conflict on the level of economics and a political scale that was much more immediate to the average Londoner.

The Jew of Malta announces its engagement with Machiavelli in the prologue, actually having “Machevil” appear on stage to introduce Barabas the Jew as well as declare his tenure in England following the death of the Guise. Although machiavellian duplicity is an important theme in *Massacre*, the emphasis is more on treachery than strategy. *The Jew of Malta* establishes the notion of the cunning machiavel qua schemer, a skilled manipulator of contingency and appearances. Machiavelli's *Prince* (1513) was a generic confusion of public and private literature: a confidential memorandum on the stark practicalities of power in the public form of the idealized mirror-for-princes. The irony of Machiavelli's threat was its open *revelation* of the dissimulation necessary to the stability of the state: “Prudence was often associated with 'state secrets' (*arcana imperii*), and also with simulation and dissimulation.”⁶¹ Readers saw *The Prince* as insisting that political prudence consisted of the maintenance and production of fictions while at the

⁶⁰ Peter Burke provides an admirably compact summary of the development of the “politic” or “reason of state” discourse and its relation to Tacitus in “Tacitism, Scepticism [sic], and Reason of State,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 479–98. See also Levy, “Politic History”; Tuck, “Raison d'état”; Paulina Kewes, “Henry Savile's Tacitus and the Politics of Roman History in Late Elizabethan England,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (December 2011): 515–51.

⁶¹ Burke, “Tacitism & Reason of State,” 482.

same time hollowing out those fictions by announcing them publicly. This “open secret” became the nexus for an ideological, political, and metaphysical crisis I am tempted to define as “the Renaissance.”

As Irving Ribner pointed out long ago, the “machiavel” figure of Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* in fact synthesizes both the morality Vice and the Senecan villain-protagonist. Few contemporary critics have agreed with Ribner, however, that Barabas is purely “sensationalist [...] with no real political intentions.”⁶² In contrast to *The Spanish Tragedy*'s Hieronimo, critical discourse has de-centered Barabas with more success, despite the machiavel-Vice's similar charisma. Instead, critical attention has turned to the character of Ferneze, the Governor who manages to out-policy both Barabas and the Emperor of Turkey, as the true proponent of machiavellian doctrine.⁶³ However, Machevil is probably the closest the play comes to an allegorical embodiment of its villain: his inhuman, quasi-divine personification of evil coalesces the abstract energies of “policy” which Barabas struggles to master. Although policy names a manner of organizing circumstance or fortune to personal advantage, much like Machiavelli's *virtù*, this orientation towards the world begins to take on a compulsive necessity, drawing everyone into its network of ambition and revenge; thus, policy itself becomes a kind of agent in the play, insinuating itself through the play's inhabitants just as Machevil promises and becoming *the* principle of action in a world defined by machiavellian scheming.

⁶² Ribner, “Marlowe and Machiavelli,” 349–52.

⁶³ See Summers, *Marlowe & Politics of Power*; Catherine Minshull, “Marlowe's ‘Sound Machevil,’” *Renaissance Drama* 13 (January 1982): 35–53; and to a lesser extent in Shepherd, *Marlowe & Politics*, 29–30, 169–77.

When Marlowe invites the spirit of “Macheuil” on stage in *The Jew of Malta* (1590) to take up the prologue in place of the Senecan ghost, he expresses the deep scars Machiavelli left on the European imagination.⁶⁴ After acting as the reigning *Zeitgeist* over the St. Bartholomew Massacre, Machevil has come to England, implying the similar horrors he might inspire on English soil, but claiming to come merely to introduce “the Tragedy of a Jew” (*Jew*, Prol.30). A mocking-evil syncretism of Vice and vengeful spirit, Machevil outlines the principles that the machiavel learned from his studies. These lessons are disturbingly similar to the statements Baines attributes to Marlowe three years later: “I count Religion but a childish Toy” and “Might first made Kings” (Prol.14, 20).⁶⁵ Power derives from the sword not God, and if Machevil doesn't quite call religion the tool of power, he reduces it to a foolish fantasy.

Marlowe's Machevil is a good example of the degree to which the “machiavel” was a construction primarily emerging from the straw-man reconstructions in anti-Machiavelli literature.⁶⁶ The critical argument has centered largely on the *sources* of late Elizabethan anti-machiavellian thought: were responses like *The Jew of Malta* based on readings of Gentillet or on Machiavelli's own writings? Arguments over the popularity of Gentillet have obscured the real context of these books: Huguenot and Catholic conflict in France and the Netherlands reached its zenith at the end of the 16th century, and the

⁶⁴ I cite from the folio on EEBO which refers to the figure as “Macheuil,” indicating that the prologue is to be taken as a Vice figure. The Penguin edition retains the spelling and notes the relation to the morality plays, but the Revels edition regularizes the spelling to “Machiavel.” Christopher Marlowe, *The famous tragedy of the rich Ievv of Malta* (London, 1633): B1^r-B1^v, *EEBO*, accessed 16 Feb. 2016, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:10401:4.

⁶⁵ This and further parenthetical citations from the play refer to Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, ed. David Bevington, Revels Student Editions (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1997).

⁶⁶ See Foucault, “Lecture 4.”

“politick religion” of Machiavelli came to stand for political actions clearly aimed at power rather than religious truth. “The Tudor horror of Machiavelli,” Raab rightly argues, “even in its most grotesque form (the stage version) was not a 'distortion,' [...] it was the horror of a generation which saw its traditional *Weltanschauung* seriously and validly challenged.”⁶⁷ Politicians like Raleigh could practice policy while denouncing it; Kyd and Marlowe could present the new *Weltanschauung* that was coming to name itself by rejection: the increasing evocation of Machiavelli's name as a symbol of evil indicated the proportional influence of *realpolitik* policy on political thought in *practice*.

The “grotesque” stage machiavel was in fact a more complex product of this challenge, however. The machiavel developed simultaneously with a growing consciousness of and anxiety towards political economy, which has been called mercantilism or nascent capitalism. In the late 1580s, the connection was being forged between machiavellian pragmatism and the merchant's practice of seeking economic benefit without regard for political or religious stakes. Foreign merchants living in London were particularly vulnerable to being viewed, like Malta's Jews, as exploiting the nation for their own self-interest without regard for the commonwealth: for example, Shepherd notes that “in 1593 the libel on the Dutch church wall claimed 'Your Machiavellian merchant spoils the state' [...]”⁶⁸ Perhaps Marlowe's play helped to forge the association between machiavels and merchants; however, xenophobia is not the play's primary motivation. Marlowe takes advantage of the medieval stereotype of the Jew because of its potential for critique of *Christian* religion.⁶⁹ The playwright's aim is an

⁶⁷ Raab, *English Face of Machiavelli*, 70.

⁶⁸ Shepherd, *Marlowe & Politics*, 169.

⁶⁹ Greenblatt recognizes this in somewhat different terms: drawing on Marx's compellingly similar deployment of anti-Semitism, Greenblatt argues that far from rejecting the Jewish stereotype, the technique

examination of the tension between religion and policy, along the lines of Barnaby Rich's *Opinion Diefied* [sic] (1613): "Purely human policy, according to Rich, was the highway to atheism, the road of him that 'hath but Mammon for his God, and Machyvell for his ghostly father'."⁷⁰ Barabas is a Vice figure constituted precisely from this fusion of Mammon and machiavel.

Marlowe's innovation, however, is that Barabas' "policy," the Jew's favorite word, is not an internal trait which is exorcised by Christian faith; rather, it is the principle of the nominally Christian world within which he operates. Barabas sees that "all in policy" the Turks placed Malta in a position where it is impossible to pay their tribute, in order to gain control of the island, and Malta is extorting the Jewish population to forestall the invasion (I.i.175-83). The Jewish merchant lives by a thesis about Christian society borne out by the play:

For I can see no fruits in all their faith
But malice, falsehood, and excessive pride,
Which methinks fits not their profession. (I.i.115-17)

While England worried that domestic and foreign merchants were pursuing self-interest over the commonwealth purely for the sake of profit, Barabas' profit seeking and obsession with "policy" is surprisingly motivated primarily by external factors, emerging out of observations about the workings of the Christian world in which he is enmeshed. "Making a profit of [...] policy," Barabas explains, "is the life we Jews are used to lead, / And reason, too, for Christians do the like" (V.ii.112-16). Policy and revenge are almost synonymous for Barabas: "in extremity," he tells Abigail, "We ought to make bar of no

is rather to reveal, as Marx rather bluntly puts it, that "the Christians have become Jews." Stephen Greenblatt, "Marlowe, Marx, and Anti-Semitism," *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1978): 297.

⁷⁰ Raab, *English Face of Machiavelli*, 79.

policy” (I.ii.271-2). Like the Guise, Barabas *concludes* that machiavellian hypocrisy and self-serving stratagems are the only way to survive. Like the Guise, his policy profits him to a rather high degree, as Barabas muses to himself:

Thus hast thou gotten, by thy policy,
No simple place, no small authority:
I now am governor of Malta. (V.ii.27-29)

Barabas remarks on how well policy has served him just after his enemy Ferneze has fallen into his hands a captive, and Ferneze has promised that heaven will bring revenge down upon his head. There is no heavenly intervention, however: Ferneze brings about Barabas' death through the same policy and “treachery” for which he condemns the merchant-cum-governor (V.v.71-88). The subtle irony of this *de casibus* fall is that it comes at the moment when machiavellian hypocrite merges with Machiavelli's prince—the moment Barabas' self-interest has become equivalent to the interests of the commonwealth. As Barabas reminds Ferneze, “as for Malta's ruin, think you not / 'Twere slender policy for Barabas / To dispossess himself of such a place?” (V.ii.64-6).⁷¹

According to reason of state discourse, Barabas' deceit is morally justified as an act to preserve the independence of Malta, regardless of Barabas' personal profit from the strategy, because the act aims at the preservation of the state. Ferneze is now in the position of ambitious politician seeking merely to return to the top of fortune's wheel, and

⁷¹ It is true that Barabas' self-interest never wavers, and thus he equates “friend” with “advantage” (V.ii.113-4), but he also sees that so long as he has power in Malta, that advantage aligns with Malta's good. That men want to rule because it prospers them is axiomatic in Machiavelli's *Prince*; it is only a matter of having and seizing the opportunity, to which Barabas is committed: “Occasion's bald behind; / Slip not thine opportunity” (V.ii.44-5). Barabas' actions demonstrate the way that one who sees the world in terms of advantage and policy does preserve the commonwealth in maintaining his own interests, in accordance with reason of state, so long as he *rules* the state. However, Barabas also seems to learn another of Machiavelli's lessons the hard way: “unless he be a man of great genius it is not likely that one who has always lived in a private position should know how to command, and they are unable to maintain themselves because they possess no forces friendly and faithful to them” (Ch. VII). See Niccolò Machiavelli, “The Prince,” in *The Prince and the Discourses*, trans. Luigi Ricci and E. R. P. Vincent (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), chaps. VI–VII.

Malta is freed only as a byproduct through the usurpation of Barabas' plan: Barabas succeeds in destroying Calymath's army, leaving the Turkish prince at Ferneze's mercy as a hostage. Christianity triumphs over the Jews and Turkish infidels not through moral superiority but superior deceit and strategy. The play remains resolutely secular in a manner resoundingly discordant with the underlying Vice-play structure—the play is insistently concerned with a problem of *religions* but is as resolutely determined to keep the divine off the stage.

Thus, Barabas immediately distinguishes himself from his morality and cycle play predecessors in several ways. Barabas is a “hybrid” figure, in Bernard Spivack's terms, an allegory of evil set loose in the form of an individuated human image in a recognizable social landscape.⁷² No revelation or allegorical sword-bearing Christian Doctrine intrudes on the historical and political forces at work. If anything, the Vice's traditional dagger of lath is transmuted into the knife Barabas *passes* to Ferneze in order to cut the rope that will spring the trap on Calymath's army.⁷³ Barabas essentially relinquishes his role as Vice to the nominally Christian governor, and just as he hands the knife to Ferneze, he hands the fallen governor the weapon of policy that will undo him. The figure of the Jew in cycle plays such as the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* functions as a cathartic means of externalizing Christian anxieties from the banal to the paranoid, a screen onto which was projected problems of human greed and faltering faith. The stereotype could encompass even more than these human failings as well, merging into the inhuman

⁷² Spivack, *Allegory of Evil*, 28–34.

⁷³ Traditionally, the Vice rules over the first half of the morality play with a wooden dagger, the threat of which is rendered ridiculous in the light of the Christian figure that enters the second half of the play bearing a sword. See Alan C. Dessen, *Shakespeare and the Late Moral Plays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 19, 27, 29–31.

caricature familiar from Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*. Barabas evinces this entire spectrum of traits within a single play, but by displacing the morality structure into a purely secular world, the familiar didactic demonstration fails: rather than Christian revelation, Barabas' scapegoat-status for Christian hypocrisy is all that is revealed. Just as the ending of *Massacre* confirms the logic of the Guise's obsessive self-serving ambition, Barabas' death proves that the actions that are the "fruit" of Christian faith evince malice, falsehood, and prideful ambition, and to flourish in such a world one must do the same.

Modern readers of *Jew of Malta* have long been puzzled by Barabas' sudden shift from the human and even sympathetic Barabas of the first act to the inhuman Barabas who gloats with the Arabian slave Ithamore over practices of evil for evil's sake: he goes out at night and kills the already sick and suffering for no cause but his own amusement, poisons wells, and entraps Christian thieves simply to admire their shackled bodies from his balcony (II.iii.178-83). The reversal of expectations is certainly disorienting after the work Marlowe has put into humanizing the Jewish stereotype, but when the most hyperbolic version of the evil Jew emerges with a vengeance, the figure he cuts is more ludicrous than horrifying. Most difficult to reconcile with Barabas as a realistic human figure is his senseless slaughter in the Hapsburg-Valois Wars and Counter Reformation conflicts as a maker of war machines: "Under pretence of helping Charles the Fifth, [I] Slew friend and enemy with my stratagems," Barabas boasts (II.iii.191-2). Barabas equates these murders to the more subtle treachery of usury, the stereotypical profession of the Jew: through bankruptcy he drives men to madness and suicide, making his fortune along the way (II.iii.193-201). Barabas begins to sound like an abstract force of evil akin to Machevil of the Prologue, moving from country to country practicing forms of murder

as if they were trades. To this extent, the play mirrors the morality play practice of reducing vice to farce. In this case, however, the Vice himself is responsible for the farce; Greenblatt comes closest to suggesting as much: “Barabas devises falsehoods so eagerly because he is himself a falsehood, a fiction composed of the sleaziest materials in his culture.”⁷⁴ Rather than seeing Barabas as “almost” aware of his role, however, we should see Barabas and Ithamore as collecting these vicious fictions in a performance of self-fashioning. What we witness is Barabas becoming a caricature in the Christians' image: at the theatrical level, Barabas is teaching himself and Ithamore to play the machiavel in order to revenge himself on a world the foundational principle of which is “policy”; at the metatheatrical level, Barabas reverses the catharsis of the Jewish scapegoat and clearly roots evil in Christian practice.

The more hyperbolic the wanton, Vice-like evils of Barabas become, the greater the contrast with the play's true villain, policy, which insinuates its way into the actions of those who most decry it: “Admired I am of those that hate me most,” as policy's mouthpiece Machevil puts it (Prol.9). In the morality plays, caricature was deployed to degrade evil; its purpose was didactic and cathartic, allowing audiences to view the commonplace pervasiveness of sin in the Christian worldview from an allegorical distance.⁷⁵ Audiences were essentially “let in” on God's joke, as in the most optimistic iterations of the *theatrum mundi*. In *The Jew of Malta*, however, the caricature is pitted against the principle in a manner that raises the problem of evil anew. As critics like Catherine Minshull have argued, Ferneze seems to be a more compelling demonstration of machiavellian doctrine precisely because he never allows his hypocritical display of

⁷⁴ Greenblatt, “Marlowe, Marx, & Anti-Semitism,” 304.

⁷⁵ Spivack, *Allegory of Evil*, 121; Dessen, *Shakespeare & Moral Plays*, 34–36.

outward virtue to slip.⁷⁶ Barabas, by contrast, constantly performs his evil with suicidal devotion as if, for all his emphasis on secrecy and treachery, his true goal were to represent and display hypocrisy itself, and not only in the traditional asides to the audience or to his compatriot Ithamore.⁷⁷ Barabas may hide his stratagems, but to Ferneze or anyone else, he is incapable of hiding *himself*: just as his nose marks him racially throughout the play, he is marked out to audience and characters alike as villain and Vice. This villainy, however, evinces its own sort of integrity: “A counterfeit profession is better / Than unseen hypocrisy” (I.ii.292-3). Barabas' apparent inferiority to Ferneze's policy is more than a simple failure of *praxis* but in fact an ideological stance consciously taken. In this manner, Barabas' actions are more akin to Machiavelli's practice of openly revealing those dissimulations necessary to the functioning of the state.

Viewing Barabas' histrionic demonstrations of duplicity not as failures of machiavellian practice but rather as attempts to reveal the hypocrisy of a politic world, Barabas begins to seem more like a perverse Democritus, trapped in a world where the parodic performance of policy is the only available resistance. The familiar, cathartic pattern of “the Morality play confrontation is later experienced [by the audience] as fiction and cheat.”⁷⁸ Barabas is neither the Vice nor the machiavel but rather a grotesque mirror-for-machiavels; however, the ending which “cheats” us of catharsis signals the play's own assumption of failure. What is expelled through Barabas' death is any hope of performative transformation; the play merely *registers* dissent without the possibility of

⁷⁶ Minshull, “Marlowe's ‘Sound Machevill,’” 45–48.

⁷⁷ For example, Barabas plays up the Jewish stereotypes in his plot to do away with Friar Jacomo and Friar Barnardine, pretending to attempt to buy his way into heaven, only to reveal that for all their pious laws, they too are ruled by greed and more concerned with securing Barabas' gold than his soul (IV.i.25-85).

⁷⁸ Shepherd, *Marlowe & Politics*.

resistance or intervention. Although modern critics are careful to define Machiavelli's *virtù* largely in non-ethical (or anti-ethical) terms, to the early modern reader the most literal meaning of the word surely rang loudest in their ears, and when virtue is defined by the concealment of self-interest, to be a Vice begins to look like a reasonable alternative. Greenblatt persuasively locates “self-destructiveness” as the “virtue” extolled by the play: “the sign that the hero has divested himself of hope and committed himself instead to the anarchic, playful discharge of his energy.”⁷⁹ Barabas' pretension to the primacy of survival in his value system is but the echo of the machiavellian stance he has taken. There is a false note in his claim that “so I live, perish may all the world” (V.v.10). It seems more accurate to say that he lives only to bring the world down around him. The wrong done to him is too great, tells him too much of the world's workings, for Barabas to recover; “his heart filled with resentment and on fire with revenge,” Barabas seeks to become the “scourge” of his world, equal parts reflection and retribution.⁸⁰ In Nietzschean fashion, Barabas imagines and performs increasingly grandiose and improbable expressions of his *ressentiment*; *The Jew of Malta* is revenge fantasy played out on stage.

If Barabas is the initial inception of the fully formed “stage machiavel,” it is only because he is simultaneously the first attempt to realize the malcontent response in the form of a character or 'person'; the stage malcontent given form a decade later by Jonson and Marston is not so much an outgrowth of the stage machiavel but the working out of something already inherent in the impulses that drive it. The final act of the play loses the humor that still marks Greenblatt's characterization of Barabas' energy; Barabas'

⁷⁹ Greenblatt, “Marlowe, Marx, & Anti-Semitism,” 307.

⁸⁰ Spivack, *Allegory of Evil*, 347; Greenblatt, “Marlowe, Marx, & Anti-Semitism,” 303.

vengeance becomes bitter in tone, as if he has tired of playing his part. In the morality plays, the comedy emerges from the *a priori* separation of Man and Sin: the allegorical confrontation with an embodied vice already prefigures our ability to conquer and exorcise it. Such a separation no longer serves as an effective analytic for Marlowe: in Marlowe's anatomy of vice, the *person* is anatomized, and history rather than allegory becomes the realm of moral abstraction. Through this violent conceptual relocation, the problem of evil becomes synonymous with a problem of power: a systemic "set of power relations" defying medieval schemas of sin and vice, "within which 'Barabas as Vice' is a deliberate red herring."⁸¹ In the process, laughter is re-purposed: although still serving to seduce the audience, the anarchic energies of the Vice no longer debase evil. The humorless final act merely emphasizes the bitterness that Barabas' laughter always contained, a laughter produced out of resentment of his own complicity in a world of policy. Marlowe's laughter is the nihilistic expression of futility and despair, perhaps best described by the connotations of *cachinnation*, a term used in psychiatry to denote "inappropriate laughter, sometimes found in schizophrenia," capturing something of the intense affective and psychic distress that can at times only indicate itself through laughter.⁸² The scapegoating of Barabas is intentionally hollow, lacking the morality play's consolation or catharsis. Ferneze's "let due praise be given / Neither to fate nor fortune, but to heaven" resounds with irony and hypocrisy, perhaps serving to channel Barabas' resentment into the audience as they plod rumblingly out of the theater (V.v.123).

⁸¹ Shepherd, *Marlowe & Politics*, 30.

⁸² *Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged, 12th Edition 2014*, s.v. "cachinnation," accessed September 24, 2016.

v. Malcontent theatricality in *The Spanish Tragedy*

Marlowe's anti-Vice Barabas would fuse with Kyd's Villuppo to produce the typical stage machiavel: rather than a prince, he is a conniving courtier; he uses the duplicitous means associated with the Italian court rather than Machiavelli's actual proscriptions; he acts out of pure self-interest rather than the stability of the state. By the 1580s, political prudence such as that demonstrated by Ferneze became widely known as "reason of state," an ambiguous concept which semantically mirrored the equivocal stance it denoted. The term expressed its own strategic valuation of obscurity; according to Peter Burke, "Its ambiguity may well have been the secret of its success." Although better known today in the French form *raison d'état*, the English originally used either the Italian term or the term "policy." Burke traces the original Italian form "*ragione degli stati*" to the archbishop Giovanni della Casa's oration to emperor Charles V in 1547.⁸³ Obviously, reason of state and Machiavellianism were intimately connected with Italy, fusing with the melancholy pose of the courtier fostered by Ficino to produce the original "machiavel." Barabas attributes all his studies of fawning, duplicity, and poison to the Italians:

I learned in Florence how to kiss my hand... (*Jew*, II.iii.23)

Being young, I studied physic, and began
To practice first upon the Italian... (II.iii.184-5)

It is a precious powder that I bought
Of an Italian in Ancona once... (III.iv.69-70).

⁸³ Burke, "Tacitism & Reason of State," 479–80.

Through the Guise and the Italian-born transplant Catherine de Médicis, the conniving machiavel was further connected in the English imagination with France, as Marlowe makes clear in both *The Massacre at Paris* and the Prologue to *The Jew of Malta*.

However, in the 16th century, “Spanish hegemony” was the most striking exemplar of the politic exercise of power.

The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, whom Barabas claims to have provided dubious service, best exemplified Machiavelli's lessons as he used a combination of military and financial strategies of domination throughout the 1540s and 1550s to develop a loose, informal empire extending from Italy to the Netherlands.⁸⁴ The war between Portugal and Spain in *The Spanish Tragedy* (c.1587) alludes obliquely to these religious wars, although Kyd makes Portugal the instigator. The war, as the Viceroy laments, uses religion as a blasphemous excuse for ambitious conquest. The anti-machiavels, resenting a politics of dissimulation but usually unable to deny its *necessity*, are reduced to making distinctions: there is a “true” reason of state which aims at the common good and the “false” reason of state which serves self-interest.⁸⁵ Because machiavellian politics hinges on a division between reality and appearance that renders the *ethos* always something “secret” and inaccessible, however, the difference between the good king or courtier and the tyrant or machiavel is rendered indistinguishable, often a mere matter of perspective. The Viceroy is incapable of reading the difference between the good courtier Alexandro and the Machiavellian courtier Villuppo; or rather, because he is skilled at the manipulation of appearances, the machiavel can project his own image *onto* the good courtier like a ventriloquist. The machiavel's projection is itself a

⁸⁴ Tuck, “Raison d’état,” 31–33.

⁸⁵ Burke, “Tacitism & Reason of State,” 480.

displacement, however: exactly like Barabas, the anti-machiavel is forced to become “politic” to survive, while projecting his own *ressentiment* into the ever more monstrous figure of the machiavel.

Not only did Machiavelli divorce morality from his politically defined *virtù*, he eschewed providence in favor of fortune as the only (relevant) mechanic of history. This “fortune” was cast not as the wheel which was providence's shadow, but “as a whimsical pagan deity or as an unpredictable natural force”; it was a causal history that, while amoral and unknowable, *was* open to human influence. In the years following *The Spanish Tragedy*, Justus Lipsius' synthesis of Christian and stoic virtue would “equat[e] fortune and providence” and attempt to formulate a morality that could supplant and combat machiavellian reason of state.⁸⁶ However, providence would prove to be as absent or irrelevant in the neostoic account as in the machiavellian. In Kyd's comic subplot, Alexandro preemptively undermines Lipsian patience as the stoic victim of the machiavel: a Portuguese noble counsels cliché stoic patience, but Alexandro retorts, “But in extremes, what patience shall I use? / Nor discontents it me to leave the world, / With whom there nothing can prevail but wrong” (*ST*, III.i.31-4).⁸⁷ Alexandro stresses that certain abuses strain stoic virtue to its breaking point, preparing the ground for Hieronimo's transformation into revenger in the next scene. Would an audience not react incredulously to a Hieronimo who came onstage expressing his patience in the face of his son's brutal murder and the law's indifference to it? Further eroding the stoic position, Alexandro reveals stoicism's indifference to death as a suicidal world-weariness in which

⁸⁶ Levy, “Politic History,” 7–8.

⁸⁷ Unless otherwise noted, parenthetical citations refer to Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. Michael Neill, Norton Critical Edition (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2014).

death is the only release from the “discontent” which haunts the play. Alexandro renders the stoic and the malcontent as indistinguishable as the machiavel and the anti-machiavel. Alexandro's plight is not so dire as Hieronimo's, however: he is saved when an ambassador reveals Villuppo's lie moments before Alexandro's death by fire. Here at the center of the play, Kyd delivers an apparent moment of providential intervention; however, rather than a miracle, Alexandro is saved by mere mundane human contingency. If the ambassador came a few minutes later, his revelation would have done the crispy Alexandro little good. When juxtaposed with the murder of Horatio and the gruesome death of Hieronimo, a parody of the stoic Zeno's death, interpreting Alexandro's rescue as “providential” would once again be no more than an imposition of our own desire for meaning; but the double plot ends at this point, and the comic vision of history falls away in favor of the tragic.

A major strain of earlier critical interest in *The Spanish Tragedy* largely centered on its revenge narrative as recording a lingering endorsement for modes of personal vengeance, such as the duel, in opposition to the developing state judicial system,⁸⁸ which gave way to readings of the play as a critique of justice and the English legal system.⁸⁹ Perhaps the best readings of the play, however, have emerged from an interest in the play's linguistic chaos, especially since these readings manage to capture the play's perplexity, its entanglement in paradoxical, irresolvable impulses that release the drama's

⁸⁸ See in particular Campbell, “Theories of Revenge”; Bowers, *Revenge Tragedy*; Broude, “Time, Truth, & Right.”

⁸⁹ For example, see G. K. Hunter, “Ironies of Justice in *The Spanish Tragedy*,” *Renaissance Drama* 8 (1965): 89–104; Donna B. Hamilton, “The Spanish Tragedy: A Speaking Picture,” *English Literary Renaissance* 4, no. 2 (1974): 203–17; Lorna Hutson, “Hieronimo, Justice and Dramatist,” in *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 277–87; Timothy A. Turner, “Torture and Summary Justice in *The Spanish Tragedy*,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 53, no. 12 (Spring 2013): 277–92.

most anarchic energies.⁹⁰ Almost universally, however, critical readings of the play have centered on Hieronimo as a tragic hero, and indeed the play owed its popularity to Hieronimo “mad againe,” as the play's 1615 subtitle indicates. The cost of Hieronimo's charisma, on the other hand, has been severely atrophied attention to Don Andrea's frame story, unprecedented in revenge drama.

The malcontent revenge tragedy is not so much nostalgia for the catharsis of blood revenge, but, as Barabas' antic enactment of policy has suggested, rather a fantasy of nihilistic re-action in the face of the impossibility of action. *The Spanish Tragedy* wreaks its revenge on a rigidly immobile class system which produces alienation and futility in an educated elite that is empowered enough to value their potential contributions to the state but sufficiently disenfranchised to lack any actual access to the ear of power. By the time the malcontent reaches the stage, this discontented class, given voice but lacking audience, had expanded to the intellectual elite whose education and competence was blurring traditional class boundaries. In particular, the lawyer was usurping the position of *parrhesiastes* belonging in previous generations to lesser nobility like Sidney and Essex, inheriting their frustrations in the process. Studying law at the Inns of Court, for example, gave the sons of wealthy citizens the opportunity to attain an ambiguous access to the status of gentry, and a few, such as Donne and Marston, migrated to literary pursuits from this class.⁹¹ Although Marston had followed in his

⁹⁰ Especially Carla Mazzio, “Staging the Vernacular: Language and Nation in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 38, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 207–32. See also Alexandra S. Ferretti, “‘This Place Was Made for Pleasure Not for Death’: Performativity, Language, and Action in *The Spanish Tragedy*,” *Early Theatre* 16, no. 1 (January 2013): 31–49.

⁹¹ Although Jonson mocks Marston in the figure of Crispinus in *Poetaster* (1601), Marston bears more resemblance to Jonson's sympathetic portrayal of Ovid as lawyer-turned-poet, who is ultimately banished and contrasted with the court poet Virgil. In the person of “Ovid,” Jonson collapses a contemporary social type represented by Marston, the famous Roman poet himself, and Ovid's translator Marlowe. As Joseph Loewenstein has argued, Jonson stages Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Amores*, a

father's footsteps, becoming a member of the Middle Temple, he abandoned law for poetry and theater, leaving his father to bemoan in his will that "I hoped [Marston] would have profited by them in the study of the law but man proposeth and God disposeth."⁹² Like Shakespeare, however, Kyd emerged from a humbler background, matriculating at the new Merchant Taylors' School and likely proceeding no further.⁹³

Thus, *The Spanish Tragedy*'s insistent erudition, its polyglossia and allusiveness, likely demonstrate an ambitious mind anxious to confirm his status and authority despite a lack of institutional authorization. Kyd and Marlowe, like Marston and Chapman, were "displaced products of a culture of melancholia," and the malcontent was the figural locus through which "the experience of rejection, and the entertainment of unorthodoxy, could be addressed and negotiated."⁹⁴ Although Kyd was no lawyer, then, Hieronimo's metamorphosis from Justice to revenger allegorizes the vexed position of those who believe in the established systems of orthodoxy, promising participation and justice, only to find themselves without a place in that system. The rejection of an ideological position places one in the familiar position of resistance—the rebel, the detractor, the critic. To be rejected by the system of one's own ideological commitments produces a much more affectively intense dejection. Rather than a politically legible stance of change or reform, the negative remainder of the dominant position can imagine only the annihilation of self and system, an anti-politics of self-negation encoded as "revenge."

translation burned in the Bishop's Ban along with Marston's satires in 1599, in a gesture of homage and reverence that is simultaneously a rejection of Marlowe as a model for a politically efficacious poetry. See Joseph F. Loewenstein, "Personal Material: Jonson and Book-Burning," in *Re-Presenting Ben Jonson: Text, History, Performance*, ed. Martin Butler (New York & Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 107–11.

⁹² Qtd. in the introduction to Marston, *Poems of Marston*, 1.

⁹³ Thomas Kyd, *The Works of Thomas Kyd*, ed. Frederick S. Boas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), xvi–xvii.

⁹⁴ Thornton Burnett, "Staging the Malcontent," 337.

The degree to which criticism has conflated justice and revenge marks their parity within the play. However, the focus on justice aligns with the critical tendency toward an interpretation of positive critique: we attempt to explicate the text's critical intentions as aimed at social or political change for the better, often finding within the text proposed solutions, whether or not we agree with those solutions. This model works well for classical revenge cycles like Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, which demonstrates the way revenge creates socially destructive and potentially endless blood feuds that can only be overcome through an objective, if somewhat arbitrary, judicial institution. Justice and revenge are defined in direct opposition to one another, and our abhorrence for the latter outweighs our dissatisfaction with the former. Similarly, Senecan tragedy seeks to confront us with negative exemplars of passion that perversely mirror and challenge stoicism, allowing us to meditate on the problem of passion from a safe distance.

Such a model breaks down, however, in the face of the anarchic impulses of a play like *The Spanish Tragedy*. There is little meaning or catharsis to be garnered from our horror at Andrea's inhuman reaction to the final staged bloodbath that ends the play:

Ay, now my hopes have end in their effects,
 When blood and sorrow finish my desires:
 Horatio murdered in his father's bower,
 Vild Serberine by Pedringano slain,
 False Pedringano hanged by quaint device,
 Fair Isabella by herself misdome,
 Prince Balthazar by Bel-Imperia stabbed,
 The Duke of Castile and his wicked son,
 Both done to death by old Hieronimo,
 My Bel-Imperia fallen as Dido fell,
 and good Hieronimo slain by himself:
 Ay, these were spectacles to please my soul. (*ST*, IV.v.1-12)

Kyd elevates revenge to a metaphysical principle, and replaces the *telos* of Aristotelian poetics with effect—in the excess of *spectacle*, we are able to experience an affectively charged encounter with meaninglessness.

Aristotelian pity and fear likewise tend to obscure the troublesome fact that tragedy shares a key aesthetic reaction with all other forms of art: pleasure. Is it not facile—and hypocritical—to speak of “our horror” at Andrea's inhumanity? In doing so, we spectators dismiss the titillation we too feel in the face of this spectacle: we cannot ignore that Andrea is clearly the audience surrogate, standing in place of the Chorus. Aristotle tells us that we encounter in representation with pleasure what in life we would experience with pain because with the reality stripped away we are left only the delight of “learning.”⁹⁵ Distanced from the world by death, however, Andrea views *real* events as theater, with a delight that in modern terms we would call psychopathic. Andrea's *Schadenfreude* finds release in perversely externalizing his own tormented state: he delights in the deaths of friends and enemies alike. Andrea's empty rationalization is best represented by Revenge, who gleefully concurs with Andrea: “Then haste we down to meet thy friends and foes, / To place thy friends in ease, the rest in woes” (IV.v.45-46). The equivalence set up between “friends and foes” cannot be overcome by the distinction between afterlives of “ease” and “woes.” Andrea's desire for company in his misery consumes all alike, and his unconvincing distinctions are belied by the catalogue of bloody spectacles he admits to enjoying irrespective of their desert: “false” and “fair,” “good” and “wicked” alike “please [his] soul,” because they assuage Andrea's suffering in their very resemblance to it. The “ease” Revenge promises Andrea's “friends” is

⁹⁵ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 4 (48a9-18).

nothing but the release Hieronimo has already achieved for himself, “Pleased with their deaths, and eased with their revenge” (IV.iv.190). *The Spanish Tragedy* turns attention to the *affective* dimension of revenge: it is not just a matter of acts of violence which beget further acts of violence, but also the desire to impart one's suffering to the world: revenge becomes the foundation of a malcontent worldview. Such a malcontent does not seek to share suffering by partitioning and thus reducing it, but merely seeks the temporary relief of externalizing an internal pressure, a pain that cannot be alleviated but only momentarily assuaged.

Although rooted in Galenic humoral theory, the literary examination of the malcontent becomes increasingly fine-grained, distilling the malcontent to two essential passions, envy and grief, which could be summed up under a rather broad conception of “ambition,” in the early modern period conceptualized as a thwarted state of incompleteness.⁹⁶ In *The Spanish Tragedy*, we might say that this ambition is the engine that Revenge uses to generate tragedy. Balthazar's surrender to Horatio and Lorenzo is an idealized moment of masculine courtesy, in which both conqueror and conquered act with an ease and temperance that belie the dismembered dead, “legs and arms [lying] bleeding on the grass, / Mingled with weapons and unbowed steeds / That scattering

⁹⁶ One ceases to be ambitious if one achieves all of one's ambitions, of course. However, like melancholy, ambition is a vague affective state in search of an object, which often seems to be secondary to the state itself. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, for example, anatomizes a pure state of ambition incapable of being sated; in fact, it gradually becomes clear that “conquering” for Tamburlaine is merely a way to feed an inexhaustible death drive rooted in melancholy. The play represents these visually in the Messenger's description of the three color-coded “days” of Tamburlaine's warcraft, white, scarlet, and finally a black that signals an utter and universal hostility to life; these colors are reflected in the phases of Tamburlaine's clothing throughout the play, in which ambition and melancholy finally fuse in the nihilism of the fifth act. See Christopher Marlowe, “Tamburlaine the Great, Part I,” in *The Complete Plays* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), IV.i.47-63, IV.1, V.i.63-128.

overspread the purple plain” (I.ii.60-2). As if speaking of a tennis match, Balthazar nobly concedes defeat at the hands of both Horatio and Lorenzo:

To him in courtesy, to this perforce:
 He spake me fair, this other gave me strokes;
 He promised life, this other threatened death;
 He won my love, this other conquered me;
 And truth to say, I yield myself to both. (I.ii.161-5)

Already the illusion of harmony and balance is disrupted, however, by the erotic language underlying this courteous surrender: Balthazar evokes a kind of love triangle in which he is both courted and conquered, foreshadowing Lorenzo's reaction to the King's “device” (I.ii.191). The multiple revenges in the play hinge on the erotic center of Bel-Imperia, whose name obliquely suggests political as well as erotic ambition. Engaged in a secret affair with a woman above his station, Don Andrea dies trying to improve himself: “And for his love [Andrea] tried fortune of the wars, / And by war's fortune lost both love and life” (I.i.39-40). By contrast, she spurns the advances of the prince Balthazar, and in an instant Horatio transforms from friend to foe in Balthazar's estimation.

Balthazar demonstrates the conceptual proximity of the love melancholic and the malcontent revenger, sliding with ease from one role into the other: given an object of rivalry, Balthazar's pining after an impossible object transforms into a life or death conflict—“Yet must I take revenge or die myself” (II.ii.115). In this strange, histrionic reaction to the discovery of the identity of Bel-Imperia's lover, Bel-Imperia herself is elided from the equation, and Balthazar's revenge seems to become a struggle against his *own* sexual conquest: “Thus hath he ta'en my body by his force, / And now by sleight would captivate my soul” (II.i.130-1). The earlier peaceful yielding to desert and fortune gives way to a sense of personal violation. Balthazar's courtesy turns to resentment, and though he now resents both force and persuasion, seductive rhetoric in particular changes

character: fair words become “sly deceits” (II.ii.126), and the rape of the soul deemed worse than rape of the body. Although his motives are stated less clearly, Lorenzo, like Balthazar, is corrupted by envy of one below his station. When he kills Horatio, Lorenzo gloats over the hanged corpse that “Although his life were still ambitious proud, / Yet is he at the highest now he is dead,” revealing that he primarily resented Horatio's climb to an equivalent social rung despite their difference in class (II.iv.60-1). Both Horatio's equal merit in the conquest of Balthazar and his love for Lorenzo's sister mark him as “ambitious,” a pronouncement which deflects Lorenzo's own ambitious desire to marry Bel-Imperia to the prince and increase his family's station.

Balthazar's attack on rhetoric, which itself functions through rhetorically dishonest “sleights,” underscores the failure of language that Hieronimo confronts in the play. The death of Horatio heralds the death of oratory. The spectacle of tongues in Hieronimo's final play-within-the-play merely exaggerates language's fundamental lack of intelligible communicability. Not only can honest words find no ear to land upon, but the ambiguity inherent in “fallen” language means that the signification of speech belongs not to the speaker but to the interpreter, as in Jonson's *Sejanus*. Witness testimony was a new concept in early modern law, and along with other innovations in the legal system, necessitated epistemic adjustments. Early modern justice depended on the supposition that “it was possible to gain adequate if not perfect knowledge of events that could not be seen, heard, or repeated in court”; modern law, too, relies greatly on testimony, but the assumption that parties could accurately determine the truth was much

stronger: “The law adopted an epistemology that put great faith both in witness observers and in jurors as ‘judges of fact.’”⁹⁷

The Spanish Tragedy assaults in no uncertain terms this assumption with all the force of contemporary debates about the decay of language, not only the inability to be heard and thus for language to have a performative effect, but also the contamination of English by other tongues and, most importantly, the hollowness of machiavellian performative language, the “device.”⁹⁸ The device takes physical form in the first half of Act III, in which, as Don Andrea summarizes, Pedringano is “hanged by quaint device” (IV.v.5).⁹⁹ “[P]roud and politic” Lorenzo gives a box to a Page, instructing him to tell Pedringano his pardon lies within it.¹⁰⁰ The Page opens the box only to discover it empty (III.iv-v). Like a Hitchcockian MacGuffin, the promise of the pardon is purely instrumental, perversely performative; literally empty, it merely acts to set in motion Lorenzo's plot. Truth, by contrast, is infelicitous, incapable of influence unless it, too, is deployed and framed within a device. The device is an “odd jest,” making a mockery of language's deictic ability to point to realities through appearances (III.v.13). Moreover, the device entangles others in the “jest”; the Page rationalizes that it is a “sin against secrecy” to betray what he knows, as if there was something sacred about duplicity itself,

⁹⁷ Barbara J. Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact* (Ithaca & London: Cornell Univ. Press, 2000), 12–13. See also Lorna Hutson, who examines Hieronimo's plight in terms of a gathering of evidence (the handkerchief, the letter) but failure to be able to deploy that evidence as a public accusation in *The Invention of Suspicion* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 277–86.

⁹⁸ Carla Mazzio focuses on the contamination of English, while Alexandra Ferretti emphasizes the loss of performativity as speech and action become divorced. See Mazzio, “Staging the Vernacular”; Ferretti, “Performativity, Language, and Action.”

⁹⁹ The notion of the “device” is crucial throughout the play, initially appearing in Minos' “device” in Act I, scene i to form a compromise between Aeacus and Rhadamanth and send Don Andrea on the third path, Kyd's innovation on the *Aeneid*'s two paths. Hutson argues that the third path is analogous to purgatory in *Invention of Suspicion*, 280.

¹⁰⁰ The description of Lorenzo belongs to the 1602 additions, and thus might be read as Jonson's gloss of Lorenzo's character (IV.iv.[34]).

and feels justified in acting just as if he did not hold knowledge of the empty box (III.v.6-9). What truly seems to draw him into conspiracy, however, seems to be the perverse humor of the device: he can choose to reveal the lie, but he “*cannot* choose but smile” at the “scurvy jest” of watching Pedringano “jest himself to death” (III.v.10-16, emphasis added). Manipulation of appearances provides a malicious *pleasure* not unlike dramatic irony; we watch on as one ignorant of what is to come follows a script that we delight in already knowing. The audience is thus implicated in the Page's position as well, and we *all* watch on laughing as Pedringano unwittingly cracks witticisms on his way to the very final crack of the noose.

Like Marlowe, Kyd plays on this disjunction that links policy and humor, directly juxtaposing Lorenzo's manipulation of appearances with literal gallows humor. The epistemic problem of equivocal appearances is condensed into the now-familiar early modern pun, which functions by allowing language's essential ambiguity to produce a surplus of meaning. As he climbs the steps to the gallows, Pedringano's antic puns turn on his certainty that his certain death is only an appearance, and that he holds the device to avert it: “What hath [the Page] in his box, as thou think'st?” (III.vi.73). The box means nothing to the hangman. He engages Pedringano with a more troubling humor—the apathy born of his office has come to find humor in death itself: “thou art even the merriest piece of man's flesh that e'er groaned at my office door!” (III.vi.79-80). The hangman is not the psychological portrait of a character but rather the space of a dual function; like *Hamlet's* gravediggers, his involvement as an official overseeing the governmental administration of death carries an unearthly residue of death at a

metaphysical level. The hangman's humor thus echoes Revenge and the careless mirth of the divine.

This humor parallels Lorenzo's deadly “jest,” setting up a structural unity between the divine framework and the machinations of the machiavel: like Marlowe's Guise, Lorenzo appears to be “on the right side of history,” as it were. Morality and justice run counter to survival; the play confronts Nietzsche's insight that “life depends upon immoral preconditions”; that “morality *denies* life[.]” For Nietzsche, morality is posited as itself a form of revenge: “it is the exhausted and disinherited who *take revenge* in this fashion.”¹⁰¹ On the surface, *The Spanish Tragedy* can be read fairly straightforwardly as a demonstration of such revenge. However, the play in fact reverses the polarity of Nietzsche's positive account: after the first act, in which something like will to power is shown in aspects of graciousness and admirable strength, the Greek and Roman values that Nietzsche likes to praise, the play submerges itself in precisely what the “absolute immorality of means” would entail, steeping itself in the full horror of that reality.¹⁰² Where Nietzsche wants to align immorality with strength, policy bypasses strength and agonistic measures of man precisely to overcome by indirect means what cannot be confronted face on. The dissimulation of the machiavel produces its own sense of superiority, as the Page experiences it, through hidden knowledge. Nietzsche's attempt to recover the heroic through Machiavelli is undermined by the Renaissance's own reading of Machiavelli—the machiavel. Stripped of morality's fictional trappings but without a positive response to overcome it, the specter that haunts Nietzsche's own work asserts

¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 254 (II.461).

¹⁰² Nietzsche, 254.

itself with a vengeance: the impulse to rebel against the immoral preconditions, the fact that duplicity is superior to integrity, breeds despair and suicidal nihilism.

The play is thus not a critique of English justice, but a demonstration of the impossibility of legal justice on epistemic and linguistic grounds. Kyd's theatrical turn away from action in favor of spectacle is not purely sensationalist, as Nashe would have it. As language and action both unravel into obscurity and unintelligibility, the only alternative remaining is spectacle's powerful immediacy and violence. Like Hieronimo and Revenge's dumb shows, spectacle affects us with "mystery," an affective, primarily visual experience which captivates us with its potential for meaning, but it lacks the gloss, denying us a complete interpretive mechanism for accessing that meaning: "this masque contents mine eye," the King says of the first dumb show, "Although I sound not well the mystery," while Don Andrea asks Revenge to "reveal this mystery" after the second (I.iv.138-9, III.xv.27). The final spectacle of *The Spanish Tragedy* dramatizes the final sundering of meaning from both language and action, dazzling the eyes but denying us revelation.¹⁰³ The piecemeal intelligibility of the "*sundry languages*" intended in Hieronimo's *Soliman and Perseda* turn the spectator's focus to the pure sights and sounds of violence. In attempting to restore our "*understanding*" of the play, the publisher signals the difficulty and discomfort this scene aimed to inflict on its audience (IV.iv.10sd). Reflecting the structure of *The Spanish Tragedy* itself, *Soliman and Perseda* satirizes the tragic action "fitting kings, / Containing matter, and not common things" (IV.i.158-9); instead, the performance reduces tragedy's structure of signification to a set of histrionic gestures followed by a series of gruesome deaths. The garbled spectacle,

¹⁰³ Cf. Ferretti, "Performativity, Language, and Action," 44; Mazzio, "Staging the Vernacular," 221.

reminiscent of Marlowe's *Massacre*, draws its inspiration from the memory of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, as Lorenzo unwittingly reminds Hieronimo:

Lorenzo. [...] I have seen the like
 In Paris, 'mongst the French tragedians.
 Hieronimo. In Paris? Mass! and well remembered! (IV.i.165-7)

Hieronimo immediately twists Lorenzo's memory of French actors' theatrical skill into an allusion to the Massacre, punning on the violent conflation between the Massacre and the Catholic mass that preceded it, perhaps “remembering” the attendant theatrical entertainments as well.¹⁰⁴ The allusion casts Hieronimo's playlet as a kind of memorial reconstruction of the Massacre, setting the event as the triumph of the politic machiavellianism that inescapably structures Hieronimo's world and renders it uninhabitable.

Famously, the impact of the spectacle relies on a disorienting special effect: the fictional audience is told that what they experienced as stage deaths of characters were in fact the real deaths of the actors. As Frank Ardolino argues, the real deaths on stage may have alluded directly to the entertainments before the Massacre; according to Protestant Simon Goulart in *Memoires de L'Estat de France*, one entertainment was planned in which Coligny and his friends were meant to besiege a fake fort, in which the Catholic defenders were to have loaded arquebuses.¹⁰⁵ Whereas tragic representation gives meaning to death as part of a coherent action, understanding the motives or causes of

¹⁰⁴ For *The Spanish Tragedy* as a reaction to a post-Bartholomew's Day world, I am drawing extensively on Ardolino, “In Paris?”

¹⁰⁵ Ardolino, 405–6. The effect on the real audience might have been even more troublingly immediate, since the same year that *The Spanish Tragedy* hit the stage, the second part of *Tamburlaine* also debuted with a graphic demonstration of the fluid boundary between staged violence and real violence: in early November 1587, a gun used in the execution of the Governor of Baghdad was accidentally loaded with real shot, and when discharged killed a child and pregnant woman, and severely injured another member of the audience. See Charles Nicholl, *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 202.

these real deaths does nothing to resolve them. Ferretti notes that although Hieronimo explains what has happened in full, the monarchs seem to lack the context to grasp what he is saying.¹⁰⁶ Such context seems to be what Hieronimo is seeking: no representation will suffice to convey the surfeit of loss he has suffered. The “reason” for a stage littered with real bodies is to contextualize the “spectacle” of his dead son, whose lifeless body visually signifies a loss that cannot be fully articulated, no matter how many times Hieronimo repeats it:

Here lay my hope, and here my hope hath end;
 Here lay my heart, and here my heart was slain;
 Here lay my treasure, here my treasure lost;
 Here lay my bliss, and here my bliss bereft[...] (IV.iv.88-93)

The very rhetorical balance of caesuras and repetition of structure that is so distinctive of the play reveals language's inability to encompass or convey loss. Hieronimo hopes that now the monarchs “whose loss resembles mine” finally have the context to understand the injustice done to him (IV.iv.114). Only loss can speak for loss, and only spectacle can convey it. Still, Hieronimo discovers that this loss cannot be shared but only enacted on others: revenge finds catharsis only in passing its privation on to others.

As opposed to action, spectacle is structurally incomplete, obliterating the meaning of its own *telos*; thus, Hieronimo turns to a final spectacle: he “enacts the final meaninglessness of language and action by violently severing his own tongue.”¹⁰⁷ The parody of Zeno's stoic defiance hinges, as many critics have noted, on the fact that Hieronimo has no secrets left; “The thing which I have vowed inviolate” is literally created in the act of its denial (IV.iv.188). He creates a “mystery,” at the same time

¹⁰⁶ Ferretti, “Performativity, Language, and Action,” 44.

¹⁰⁷ Ferretti, 44.

removing any possibility of a gloss, and that denial of revelation is precisely what he means to communicate: “he hath bitten forth his tongue / Rather than reveal what we required” (IV.iv.193-4). The fact that he has nothing to reveal is irrelevant; he is imparting the lesson he has learned: the impossibility of closure and catharsis. Carla Mazzio has best interpreted this Zeno-like paradox as a moment in which Hieronimo's act makes known that “he has *already* 'lost his tongue.'”¹⁰⁸ Hieronimo's play has already demonstrated his rejection of language in favor of spectacle. Both Barabas and Hieronimo demonstrate the malcontent paradox of responding to a world in which one is already complicit, a world that can only be engaged on its own terms. The response is to become a spectacle, a bodily image of the world's monstrosity, magnified to ludicrous proportions. The response, in other words, is satire.

vi. “Twixt these two ways”; or, Revenge as divine principle

The malcontent is most obviously a stage figure abstracted from social archetypes; however, it is more accurate to say that the famous stage malcontents are various responses to a melancholic worldview developed by Kyd and Marlowe, something akin to 19th century German pessimism. In Villuppo, we have a clear example of a machiavel, but neither Don Andrea nor even Hieronimo can be precisely identified as “a malcontent.” Rather, Don Andrea's status as vengeful spirit establishes the narrative and metaphysical frame motivating and interpreting the subsequent action. The revenge tragedies that would follow Kyd's experiment would isolate the divine in the “ghost” and focalize the action through the corporeal revenger. This structure seems to have had more

¹⁰⁸ Mazzio, “Staging the Vernacular,” 222.

in common with the lost *Ur-Hamlet* play generally attributed to Kyd around the same time as *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587-88). Hamlet's ghost motivates and justifies the revenge from beyond the grave, but the revenge properly *belongs* to Hamlet, and the ghost is a deliberate evocation of an unknowable divinity: famously, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (*H*, I.v.174-5). Kyd's Horatio, by contrast, dies in a world where the divine is fully established, and the petty human revenge to which he falls victim is merely a step in an inhuman but known metaphysical revenge which seems to have encompassed the entire world of the play.

By the standards of later revenge tragedies, critics often see *The Spanish Tragedy* as a poorly wrought play, and puzzle over why Hieronimo, the proper revenger, does not become the clear focal character until the third act. Without doubt, Hieronimo and his madness became the central attraction of the play, as evidenced by Jonson's 1602 additions. However, the divine frame is crucial for Kyd, a feature he may have emphasized in his *Hamlet*, which seems to have been less concerned with Hamlet's internal struggle and more with the supernatural struggle of "a mortal upon whom the ghost of his murdered father had laid a terrible and terrifying command."¹⁰⁹ Donna Hamilton, who typically makes Hieronimo the narrative focal point, argues that "within the frame of Andrea and Revenge, [...] the audience can witness man-made chaos obtusely mistaken for divinely ordained events."¹¹⁰ Rather than an ambiguous and equivocal ghost, however, Kyd gives us a well-defined and explicitly pagan divine

¹⁰⁹ Paul S. Conklin, *A History of "Hamlet" Criticism, 1601-1821* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), 9-10.

¹¹⁰ Hamilton, "Speaking Picture," 205.

framework: the metaphysical consequences only suggested in Burton's "vast chaos" are fully developed in Kyd's capricious heaven.

Andrea's relation of his experiences in the underworld mirror the torments of Seneca's prologue-bound ghosts; however, rather than demonstrating stoicism to be difficult but necessary, Kyd's divine framework uses stoicism's own grounds to render it impossible. There are three paths through the underworld: the fields of lovers and martialists; a hell of punishment; and the Elysian fields, which seems to be the home of gods, a paradise devoid of humans (*ST*, I.i). Afterlife thus appears to be a choice between idleness or pain—or another sort of idleness, the strange, spectatorial frustrations of the avenging ghost. In death, Andrea becomes a figure for his own *ressentiment* at the unfortunate course of his life; his relation to "revenge" is a growing enjoyment of the suffering of others over the course of the play. Like the other figures in the play, Andrea has no agency over his course, no ability to resist the passion which he comes to embody. According to Seneca, passion is a causal process of involuntary response: an external *ictus* or blow occurs (Horatio's death); our mind attributes a value judgment (the death was wrongful); and we conceive a response (Hieronimo must revenge). Our reason either voluntarily assents or dissents at this point; if we assent, we then experience this process as a "passion" (an involuntary judgment) that dominates reason and determines our future "actions," which in some sense are no longer our own. In this stoic model, we have only one "gap" in the process of passion in which rational decision can intrude and short-circuit the process: "Passion, then, consists not in being stirred in response to impressions presented to us, but in surrendering ourselves to those impressions and following up the

mind's first chance movement.”¹¹¹ This gap, stoicism's single glimmer of hope, is conspicuously absent in *The Spanish Tragedy*: melancholic grief or love undermine stoic rational decisionism in Kyd's world by simply eliding any possibility for reason to intervene in the process—reason simply has no claim over melancholy.

The divine order of *The Spanish Tragedy* undermines the possibility of justice rather than ensuring it; if providence exists, it is essentially irrelevant to human affairs. Andrea's journey through the pagan underworld leads him through a series of ordered contingencies. When “Minos, in graven leaves of lottery / Drew forth the manner of [Andrea's] life and death” (*ST*, I.i.36-7), man's “lot” manifests as inscribed, available to narration, yet simultaneously contingent and random. The lottery enmeshes human life within a causal history that we would describe as “deterministic”; this world reduces providence and fortune to a single process: time is a series of interlocking effects without any divinely ordered end or *telos*—chaos not as formlessness, but irrational order. This structure mirrors the malcontent's own frenetic activity, elevating it to a transcendental principle: the melancholic's pure *energeia* without *telos* renders action impossible, and that same purposelessness, along with its attendant discontent, is reflected in a pitiless divine *nomos*. In Seneca's tragedies, the divine order shudders with horror at monstrosity: “we see the universe trembling at Medea's words, [...] the sun hides its face in response to Atreus's crime[.]”¹¹² In *The Spanish Tragedy*, the gods shudder only with laughter as they help orchestrate catastrophe.

¹¹¹ This account is based on Robert Kaster's introduction and Book II of Seneca, “On Anger,” 7–8, 36–37.

¹¹² Elizabeth Asmis, Shadi Bartsch, and Martha C. Nussbaum, “Seneca and His World,” in *Seneca: Anger, Mercy, Revenge* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), xxii.

Senecan tragedy can be summarized as stoic irony: as antithetical images of the Stoic life, the Senecan villain-protagonist deploys stoic precepts in perverse manners. Rather than the sympathetic hero model that has influenced much early modern criticism, most Elizabethan and Jacobean tragic protagonists are better understood as the syncretic fusion of the native Vice of the morality plays with the Senecan villain. As Staley argues, “To the Stoics, literary tragedies are by definition stories about characters who are not Stoic.” Staley is correct in seeing tragedies *about* stoics, like Addison's *Cato* or Chapman's *Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, as un-Senecan.¹¹³ These anti-revenge tragedies, however, are not responding to Stoic tragedy but the malcontent satirical tragedy initiated by Kyd and Marlowe, which extend the stoic technique of irony into the structural principle of a new Menippean satire. This tragedy, too, takes Seneca as its genesis, but it accepts the morally void universe stoicism describes while questioning the viability of stoicism to confront that world. This causality is present in Andrea's final catalogue of death, but most apparent in the Viceroy's effusion of melancholy grief. The Viceroy blames Fortune for the supposed loss of his son Balthazar, and in the process parodies stoic fortitude in the face of life's vicissitudes: “let Fortune do her worst, / She will not rob me of this sable weed” (I.iii.19-20). The stoic claims “reason” as the single real virtue because it is immune to contingency; the Viceroy replaces reason with the “sable weed,” the garb of melancholy. Reason gives place not just to a passion, but the mere, contingent *sign* of a passion; the Viceroy seems to see a complicit capitulation to melancholy as the only resistance in the face of Fortune's worst wounds, ironically mistaking wounds for

¹¹³ Staley, *Seneca & Tragedy*, 123.

armor. However, the clean conscience of being at Fortune's mercy is replaced by the inescapable moral implication of cause and effect:

My late ambition hath distained my faith,
My breach of faith occasioned bloody wars,
These bloody wars have spent my treasure,
And with my treasure my people's blood,
And with their bloody, my joy and best beloved,
My best beloved, my sweet and only son.

“The cause was mine,” the Viceroy is forced to admit (I.iii.33-40).¹¹⁴ There is no sense of a justly ordered universe in the Viceroy's complaint: innocent blood was spilled through his action; there is culpability, but no justice. As G. K. Hunter argues, these lines also makes explicit “the connection between national sin and individual sorrow”; however, Hunter's description implies a providential causality—“sin” begets “sorrow.”¹¹⁵ The Viceroy's emphasis on his “breach of faith” suggests that he is interpreting the wars as a “scourge of God” in the usual manner, but there are two problems which disrupt a simple providential reading. First, the *telos* of the Viceroy's narrative of events is simply mistaken: his son is alive and well, and *will* die in the course of events, but not as a direct result of the Viceroy's war. Rather, Balthazar dies as a result of his own love melancholy and resultant complicity in the murder of Horatio, undermining even the last tenuous rational ordering the Viceroy attempts to impose on events. Secondly, the divine framework of the play narratively *displaces* the Christian framework occasionally alluded

¹¹⁴ Lukas Erne claims that Kyd is the first English playwright who “skilfully represents human causality on stage.” Contrary to the progress toward realism that I think Erne's phrasing implies, this human causality is an effect of the syncretic machiavellian and neostoic turn from providence to fortune and the consequent perspective of politic history, which analyzed political action as shaped by human *ethos*—that is, how a particular kind of person interprets and reacts to certain worldly conditions. Although structurally similar, the force of causality *qua* providence lost for the Elizabethans is the horror of an amoral and chaotic universe, rather than the comforting rational ordering of events felt by 18th century rationalism and modern science. Lukas Erne, *Beyond The Spanish Tragedy* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 4.

¹¹⁵ Hunter, “Ironies of Justice,” 96.

to: the play challenges us to do violence to the fiction by imposing a Christian interpretation, which we can do only by following the Viceroy's mistaken practice of narrativizing providence *into* events. Providence, then, appears to be more the practice of men than God.

The only rationality *The Spanish Tragedy* allows us is the symmetry of a perfect microcosmic and macrocosmic homology—between personal, national, and divine injustice; the weight of this symmetry forces us to ask whether it isn't more *rational* to accept the irrational ordering of events on all levels than the comforting fantasy that at the highest level of abstraction, beyond human perception, there is a final recompense and equity. *The Spanish Tragedy* refuses us even the conspicuous *deus absconditus* of Marlowe's plays;¹¹⁶ the play posits revenge as a principle perfectly capable of supplanting heavenly justice, a demonstration via Occam's razor that divine justice bears a high burden of proof.¹¹⁷ The dead Andrea bears witness to the irrational workings of Revenge, which becomes the name for a series of effects that fail to balance any cosmic accounts but rather generate and spread tragedy indiscriminately—consequence rather than compensation.

¹¹⁶ Most of Marlowe's plays follow the pattern of *Massacre* and *Jew* in evoking the divine but refusing to allow it on stage, with the notable exception of *Doctor Faustus*.

¹¹⁷ By contrast, most critics attempt to establish some kind of positive justice to which Kyd finally adheres. While Bowers claims that revenge tragedy represents an order of personal justice in opposition to state justice, for example, Hallett & Hallett claim that the pagan framework of revenge represents a third order of "justice": natural justice as opposed to the justice of God or man. Charles A. Hallett and Elaine S. Hallett, *The Revenger's Madness: A Study of Revenge Tragedy Motifs* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 26.

vii. “bugbeares and hobgoblins”: The malcontent school of atheism

The early modern theater has often been interpreted as a turn to the “secular”; however, it is more accurately described as an “atheist” theater, which better captures the *religious* stakes of even the most secular-seeming plays. While Marlowe pits religious precept against religious practice, Kyd re-fashions providence in man's image. In the 1593 “Note” which sparked off the events leading to Christopher Marlowe's brutal death, Richard Baines claims that Marlowe believed “That the first beginning of Religionn was only to keep men in awe.”¹¹⁸ Whether or not Baines's statement is accurate, both Kyd and Marlowe stage this troubling possibility in various ways through their plays.¹¹⁹ In the triangulation between stoic idealism, machiavellian pragmatism, and malcontent despair, atheism as much as Machevil was a specter haunting England at the end of the 16th century. It was an infection of men's reason, and Marlowe was one of the primary carriers: “into almost every company he cometh he perswades men to Atheism willing them not to be afeard of bugbeares and hobgoblins[.]”¹²⁰ According to Raleigh, religion *was* the bugbear.¹²¹ Atheism was a necessary product of the skeptical crisis, especially when so broadly defined: Protestant schisms and the renewal of pagan philosophies

¹¹⁸ Kyd, *Works of Kyd*, cxiv.

¹¹⁹ The statement is probably a close approximation to something Marlowe said, likely on several occasions. Long ago, Paul Kocher collated the numerous references to Marlowe's seditious beliefs, which are similar enough to suggest that Marlowe did present an “atheist lecture” to Raleigh's circle, as Richard Cholmley asserted, and that Marlowe would repeat the same provocative arguments in conversation. As much as one can sift through the deliberate slander of these accounts, it seems that Raleigh and Marlowe were engaged in a rational, skeptical critique of religion in general, partly inspired by Raleigh's scientific adviser Thomas Harriot, who Marlowe seems to have compared to Moses: “Moyses was but a Jugler & that one Heriots being Sir W Raleighs man Can do more than he.” Boas and Kocher both reproduce the Baines note in full. Kocher, “Marlowe's Atheist Lecture,” 161–65. On Harriot the “necromancer and rationalist,” see James P. Bednarz, “Marlowe and the English Literary Scene,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 92–93.

¹²⁰ Kyd, *Works of Kyd*, cxv.

¹²¹ Raleigh calls religion a bugbear in a poem: Shepherd, *Marlowe & Politics*, 155.

meant new ideas, a problem encapsulated in Nashe's epitaph to *Martins Months Minde* (1589): "I meddle not here with Anabaptists, Familists, Machiavels, nor Atheists."¹²²

In contrast to Baines's machiavellian blasphemy, the "atheist" theological disputation found in Kyd's possession was an anti-trinitarian Arrianist argument questioning how we can reconcile Christ's humanity with God's perfection, rejecting not God but one of Christianity's central paradoxes.¹²³ Like sodomy, "atheism" was a capacious crime in the early modern period, not just the rejection of the Christian God but encompassing religious heterodoxy of any kind, and in the process oddly blurring the lines between conscientious religious inquiry and the dismissive skepticism Baines describes. Writing to the Lord Keeper in an attempt to clear himself of the charge of atheism, Kyd famously alleges that the treatise found in his possession belonged to his once-roommate Marlowe; he assures Sir John Puckering that "if I knewe eny whom I cold iustlie accuse of that damnable offence to the awefull Ma[jesty] of god or of that other mutinous sedition tow'rd the state," Kyd would quickly reveal them.¹²⁴ Kyd equates heterodox religious opinions with treason and incitement to rebellion, a conflation apparently shared by the Privy Council. Kyd understandably distances himself from the charge, uncharitably delivering his recently deceased friend Marlowe up as the sacrificial lamb, but the torture alone appears to have so severely compromised Kyd's health that he

¹²² The condensed translation is Buckley's. The original reads: "O Vos Martinistae / Et Vos Brounistae, / Et Famililouistae, / Et Anabaptistae, / Et omnes sectistae, / Et Machiuelistae, / Et Atheistae, / Quorum dux fuit iste, / Lugete singuli." George Truett Buckley, *Atheism in the English Renaissance* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), 49.

¹²³ Kyd, *Works of Kyd*, cx–cxiii. The document is often misidentified as *The Fal of the late Arrian* (1549) by John Proctor, an attack on John Assheton. Assheton was the first recorded English Arianist, and Proctor's attack took a form of a quotation-refutation structure reminiscent of Gentillet's attack on Machiavelli. In reality, the work in Kyd's possession was either an original copy of Assheton's work or a version of the *Fal* from which Proctor's refutations were deliberately excised. I've found no record of what Assheton's original work might have been titled.

¹²⁴ Kyd, cx.

died a year later.¹²⁵ Combined with a new state surveillance system and a political climate striving violently to define a new orthodoxy amidst the chaos, professional informers like Baines had the perfect conditions to foment a personally profitable hysteria, and accusations of atheism made the perfect political weapon.

Whether or not Kyd and Marlowe deserved the charges that led to their deaths, their plays are certainly atheist in this sense: they harshly critique the world in which they found themselves by juxtaposing experience with orthodox belief. The absence of providence from Machiavelli's account won it a reputation as "atheist," a common charge against machiavels and politics at the turn of the sixteenth century, and Kyd's pagan framework in *The Spanish Tragedy* paradoxically gives this causal history divine shape, insinuating that providence was not merely suspended parenthetically but actually supplanted as a hermeneutic. It is possible, if not likely, that Kyd and Marlowe intended to construct a theatrical version of the Protestant moment of despair. In reality, "the radical condemnation of historical Christianity" was actually "a normative convention" for Protestants at that time: Protestantism developed precisely as a critique of orthodox Christianity, only gradually establishing an orthodoxy of its own.¹²⁶ For Luther, melancholic despair was a test of faith, spurring the realization that theodicy through reason would only result in despair; understanding could come only through faith (what Milton would dramatize some eighty years later).¹²⁷ However, such a test risked failure: as Ficino warned in *Theologia Platonica*, melancholy could also lead a "despair and

¹²⁵ The papers were found in May 1593. The letter was written sometime after Marlowe's death (buried June 1st), and Thomas Kyd was buried August 15th, 1594.

¹²⁶ Parker, *Aesthetics of Antichrist*, 189–90.

¹²⁷ Gowland, "Problem of Melancholy," 103–4.

atheistic impiety” that could drive one to suicide.¹²⁸ Such Protestant intentions, if present in these plays, paradoxically risked atheism through their very religious project. Showing that notions like Christian providence and the great chain of being existed only by faith and not by reason was tantamount to the Machiavellian revelation of the fictions that maintained order in the world. These plays struck a chord with their audience, generated just by their ambivalent effect. We might count Richard Baines as much spectator as informant: Baines's statements could very well be readings of Marlowe's plays, the potential sedition and atheism that could be read into them projected cathartically onto their author.

Orthodox, Aristotelian defenses of a socially constructive theater like Sidney's *Defense* emphasized that representations of virtue instilled exemplars of virtue to follow, while representations of vice served as examples to be avoided, and critics have tended, however implicitly and unintentionally, to perpetuate this assumption in a variety of critical approaches. Sidney himself serves as a prime example of how these orthodox rationalizations, however, occlude a much more heterodox practice. In practice, early modern theater plays at the edges of social, political, and religious collapse. Although the liminal class status of the playwright has garnered much critical attention, the liminal *legal* status of the playwright has largely been relegated to a biographical footnote. Implications of sodomy and radical atheism have led to portrayals of Marlowe as a colorfully unique case, but placed in the context of the continual encounters between playwrights and the Privy Council,¹²⁹ the theater itself might be better understood as a

¹²⁸ Gowland, “Ethics of Melancholy,” 107.

¹²⁹ For example, Ben Jonson famously escaped the gallows after the murder of actor Gabriel Spenser, with whom he'd previously been imprisoned for the seditious play *Isle of Dogs* (written with Nashe). Jonson, Chapman, and Marston were all involved in *Eastward Ho*, for which Jonson and Chapman

necessarily heterodox, “atheist” space, its multiplicity and play of appearances necessarily at odds with any attempt to confine discourse to a univocal orthodoxy.

This essential heterodoxy represented by the stage has often been ecstatically apprehended by New Historicists as a site of both resistance and containment, as a kind of *heresy*. While there might not be much distinction in early modern legal practice either, however much these playwrights ran afoul of the law, their disruptive potential appears to stem less often from reasoned resistance, and more often from an economically, politically, and socially liminal status that structurally undermined orthodox categories. The disruption of early modern theater was more discontent than dissent, marking the frustrations of those caught between theory and practice. The malcontent became such a powerful and seductive subject for translation onto the stage precisely because his powerful affects and antisocial impulses question the conditions for the possibility of social and political life—whether injustice and oppression aren't the costs of civilized life, rather than what it remedies. The malcontent has always been understood as a stage *type*, which of course it is, but together with the machiavel and the stoic, these types are the locus for an entire *Weltanschauung*, a complex of axioms about reality which constitute a hermeneutic for understanding the world and a *technē* for operating within it. The malcontent, machiavel, and stoic are intimately intertwined, facets of and approaches to a single problem: the encounter with injustice in a world released from the tenuous containment of providence. This injustice may begin as frustrated ambition or persecution by the government, but where providence sublimed

were imprisoned. Marston fled but was later imprisoned in 1608 on unspecified charges probably related to a satire of James I, which seems to have ended Marston's theater career. Shakespeare was the anomaly, remaining somehow aloof from such legal troubles, even in the *Richard II* incident.

justice to a transcendental, divine compensation, the intuition of the malcontent ran counter, instead subliming injustice itself to a transcendental, metaphysical level. Unable to tolerate the disjunction between thing and appearance, the malcontent begins to perceive the early modern crisis of signification as a metaphysical principle. Therefore, providence is either perversely replaced with a *nomos* of vengeance, or simply too removed from the world to matter in human affairs: to this extent, the malcontent worldview is essentially “atheist.”

Chapter Four: Shipwrecked on the Isle of Dogs; or a Poetics of Oblivion

Oblivioni Sacrum

- Epitaph of John Marston (1634)

“There is not one archive fever, one limit or one suffering of memory among others: enlisting the in-finite, archive fever verges on radical evil.”

- Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*¹

i. Archival violence & bodily inscriptions

The year 1597 proved a formative start for fledgling playwright Ben Jonson. *The Isle of Dogs*, his second recorded play, landed Jonson in prison for some six weeks, along with Gabriel Spenser, the actor Jonson would kill in a duel one year later. Despite leaving almost no textual trace, this play caused a lasting impression on the theater, becoming a byword for dangerous political satire, alluded to in Jonson's own *Eastward Ho!* (1605), John Day's *Isle of Gulls* (1606), and the academic drama *Return from Parnassus, Part II* (1601/2). Although Thomas Nashe evaded arrest for his part in the play, it haunted the last years of his life. As the more established name, Nashe was credited as the principal author, but he tried to downplay his role in his last published work, *Nashes Lenten Stuffe* (1599), claiming in a note that he “hauing begun but the induction and first act of it, the other foure acts without my consent, or the least guesse of my drift or scope, by the players were supplied[.]”² In his summary of the play's authorship, Ian Donaldson argues that Nashe was likely minimizing his role considerably.³

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 20.

² Nashe, Thomas, *Nashes Lenten stuffe* (London: 1599): 2, *EEBO*, accessed 8 June 2017, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88.

³ Ian Donaldson, “The Isle of Dogs, Lost Play,” *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online*, 2015.

However much Jonson had a hand in the play, the experience reverberates throughout his work. Nashe's particular style of satire, including some of his favorite tropes, seem to have had a profound impact on the young Jonson. Perhaps it was the intensity of the backlash against the *Isle of Dogs* that caused him to rework and rethink this material over the course of his career. It probably motivated his satirical innovations over the next few years and helped shape Jonson's parallel preoccupation with surveillance culture that culminated in *Sejanus His Fall* (1603), the second play to put Jonson in hot water with the Privy Council. He even remembered it in the *Discoveries*, a kind of commonplace book of his late reflections published posthumously. In an oddly personal aside, he shifts from a pithy statement on the "innocent man" to the final of his long set of self-defenses against the malicious interpretation of his work; he claims that he could forgive some of the lies, "as granted to a nation of barkers," but he could not stomach how they maliciously used "mine own writings against me; but by pieces[,] out of context."⁴

So what precisely can we do with a lost play? We can "find" it, as some scholars have done with *Double Falsehood*, now widely accepted as a kind of palimpsestic Shakespeare play. In the case of the irrecoverable, though, we are reduced to traces in the archive. In the theater, this problem is compounded by its defining ephemerality, its *desire* to disappear.⁵ While Marston's poems were literally burned to ash in 1599, his

⁴ Ben Jonson, "Timber: Or Discoveries," in *The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 414-5 (ll. 1645-81).

⁵ For Peggy Phelan, "Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. [...] Performance's being [...] becomes itself through disappearance." While this constant Becoming in a Nietzschean sense is what I want to emphasize, I agree with Diana Taylor that performance's defining feature *is* its continual afterlife: "performance makes visible (for an instant, live, now) that which is already there: the ghosts, the tropes, the scenarios that structure our individual and collective life." We as scholars of historical theater are mostly confined to the stability of the archive—that

collections have survived. Of *The Isle of Dogs*, we have no more than an almost illegible entry in a crude table of contents on the cover of a manuscript at Alnwick Castle indicating that a “frmn” of the “Ile of dogs” was once (but no longer) contained in the manuscript.⁶ To study early modern drama is always to approach the traces of performance and in doing so acknowledge—or fail to acknowledge—what the archive cannot contain. The difference between studying a written work and studying a written theatrical work is thus one of intensity rather than quality, and in the case of Marston and Jonson, of peculiarly marked intensity.

In bringing the malcontent to the stage, Marston and Jonson made a psychic and metaphysical problem into a literary problem. Hamlet crystallizes the malcontent's struggle with oblivion in his vehement insistence that he has “that within which passes show.”⁷ The malcontent is a figure who sees his great talents go unacknowledged while deceitful parasites are rewarded, which in turn creates psychic distress and erratic behavior. The malcontent's disheveled and eccentric exterior “is supposed to veil great interior excellence,” as Babb puts it, overlooked by a careless world.⁸ On the surface, at least, Hamlet is not expressing a neglected superiority, but his insistence that the outward “trappings” and signs of grief fail to define his internal state even as they correspond to

which a confluence of forces has preserved and deemed of value—but we must also attend to “the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge[.]” The crucial phenomenology of performance is not insuperable *différance* but the constant improvisation of the future through the past. Though we can only access those traces which have “become other” (or contemporary performances reborn in a radically new context), attending to theater as a confluence of the reproducible, knowable and the radically ephemeral, unknowable allows us our own improvisations (some might say speculations) and the ability to reassess the ossified values of the archive. Peggy Phelan, “The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction,” in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), 146; Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* (Durham & London: Duke Univ. Press, 2003), esp. 19–22, 142–3.

⁶ Donaldson, “Isle of Dogs,” 120–21.

⁷ Although in fact, as I will examine in the next chapter, Hamlet does express here, perhaps in a repressed form, the malcontent's defining characteristic of frustrated ambition. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 14.

⁸ Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 76.

that state would be patently ridiculous to an Elizabethan audience that sees a malcontent type being sketched out in these early scenes precisely through a set of conventional signs. The malcontent is not an identity but an identification, the accusation of a character flaw, and is thus always a flattening stereotype which renders his insistence on his personal uniqueness necessarily ironic and ludicrous. Hamlet's vitriolic speech mirrors Shakespeare's other famous malcontent, Jaques, who claims that his melancholy does not conform to any one melancholy stereotype, but is rather "a melancholy of mine own," a personal blend synthesized from many sources (*AYLI*, IV.i.10-18).⁹

Malcontent ambition thus expresses the continual attempt to "make one's mark" under the constant threat of oblivion. Marston and Jonson both experienced this same struggle in print through the confrontation with censorship and the attempt to negotiate what Derrida calls "archival violence."¹⁰ This violence was as easily marked on skin as on paper: for example, Jonson was threatened with mutilation for his part, with Marston and Chapman, in *Eastward Ho* (1605). The irony is that the offending passage of this play once again returns to the Isle of Dogs, where villains Quicksilver and Petronel are shipwrecked along with their Captain Seagull. Not unlike Sidney's own abortive trip to the Americas with Francis Drake, their journey to Virginia fails even to leave the Thames. Tracing *Eastward Ho*'s satire back through Nashe, Richard Hillman remarks that "Jonson might well have accused himself of tempting fate" for returning once again to this cursed isle.¹¹ So what tempted Jonson back to this island? In fact, Jonson does not seem to have ever left. While the machine of Elizabethan censorship successfully erased

⁹ Shakespeare, "AYLI," 286–87.

¹⁰ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 7.

¹¹ Richard Hillman, "Returning to One's Vomit: An Intertextual Tour of *Eastward Ho*'s Isle of Dogs," *Notes & Queries* 53, no. 4 (December 2006): 508, <https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjl174>.

the text of *The Isle of Dogs*, Jonson insists on making this mark through various reiterations under different guises. This tenacious insistence comes as some surprise in light of Jonson's repeated acknowledgment of the role of the state as the ultimate authority for the poet's meaning, and perhaps a key to Jonson's ambivalent relationship with this authority.

Throughout his career, Jonson attempted to negotiate the relationship between poetic and state authority, evincing an indefatigable belief that there *should* be such a relationship, despite the difficulties he had establishing it in practice. Marston, by contrast, seems to have found the state's intervention in literary production to remove its efficacy as a social and spiritual purgative. Since Annabel Patterson, critics have found that censorship in early modern England was far less systematic than earlier criticism assumed, and in reality the mechanisms of censorship were applied in a manner "often contradictory and idiosyncratic," as Cyndia Clegg puts it.¹² This very arbitrariness, however, created conditions perhaps even more frustrating and dangerous for early modern writers than systematic repression—never certain what could and could not be said, these writers *encountered* the violence of state control more often because they lacked clearly defined lines they could avoid crossing. Shakespeare is something of an anomaly, having traversed these waters without incident even in the case of the production of *Richard II* involved in the Essex affair. However, the whims of state authority had a profound effect in particular on the careers of Jonson and Marston.

¹² In *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), esp. 4-5, Cyndia Susan Clegg develops a full revision of the earlier view of strongly repressive state controls, building on the complications raised by Philip Finkelpearl, Richard Dutton, Richard Burt, Blair Worden, and others. On the older view, see esp. Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*.

Jonson proved strangely resilient in the face of repeated brushes with death or mutilation. By the time *Every Man Out of His Humour* debuted, Jonson was literally a branded felon, yet he never gave up attempting to negotiate the tricky line between instrumental satire and dangerous slander. In fact, he went even further, theorizing again and again the relationship between poetry and power, and attempting to establish himself not as one abjected by authority but as its authorial voice, the court poet.¹³ By contrast, Marston's brushes with the law seem to have had a more fatal impact, leading him eventually to abandon the pen altogether in favor of the church. Marston seems to have started out highly idealistic, eschewing the path in law his father laid for him in favor of poetry.¹⁴ Other than *Pygmalion*, however, his published poetry evinces a Calvinist emphasis on man's fundamental corruption that renders satire's putative purgative properties null and void. Although Jonson increasingly struggles to pin down and circumscribe literature's efficacy, *Every Man in his Humour* (EMI, 1598) and *Every Man out of his Humour* (EMO, 1599) both confidently assume satire's socially cathartic potential. In the same two-year period, Marston's *Certaine Satyres* and *Scourge of Villanie* have already abandoned social catharsis for personal catharsis: since the world's vices cannot be purged, satire serves merely as railing, the vomiting up of one's own resentment and disgust.

After the Bishop's ban, in which both Marston's volumes of satire were burned, Marston turned from attacking Joseph Hall in verse to challenging Jonson on the stage.

¹³ As Dutton points out, Jonson inverts his branding in the "Apologetical Dialogue" to *Volpone*, suggesting that he might legitimately brand those who libel his play. Richard Dutton, *Ben Jonson: Authority: Criticism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 81–82, 190.

¹⁴ Famously, Marston's father left him his law books in his will (1599), writing that he had "hoped [Marston] would have profited by them in the study of law but man proposeth and God disposeth." See Marston, *Poems of Marston*, 1.

Marston perhaps thought Jonson, like Hall, boasted too much of his supremacy in the genre of satire when Marston, though new to the theater, had become a dominant force in satirical verse. His first play, *Histriomastix* (1599), announced his presence on stage in much the same brash tenor as his verse satire, with the same “serious iest” and “iesting seriousness” of the *Scourge*.¹⁵ As James Bednarz argues, the portrait of Jonson in *Chrisoganus* is neither fully critical nor particularly complimentary, nor is the play entirely a critique of the theater. He adapted an old six-act morality play, with less generic experimentation than Marlowe or Jonson, and aimed more generally at cupidity, a somewhat obvious choice.¹⁶ Despite Bednarz’s contention that Shakespeare, Marston, and Dekker “Answer[ed] Jonson play for play, plot for plot,” Jonson seems to have largely waged the Poet’s War by himself.¹⁷ While Marston may have sparked off the war, he did not wage it with any of the tenacity with which he had pursued Hall. According to his boasts, Jonson replied not only on stage but by “beat[ing] him, and [taking] his pistol,” as he boasted to Drummond, evincing the darkly physical violence underlying Jonsonian poetics.¹⁸ Marston’s fervor for agonistic combat seems to have been quelled either by the Bishop’s ban, Jonson’s own violent show of authority, or a mix of both. Rather than satirizing persons, social types, or specific vices, Marston began satirizing dramatic genres themselves, and apparently exploring generic solutions to discovering a constructive form of satire. After Jonson and Marston’s shared troubles with *Eastward Ho!*, Marston was again imprisoned in 1608; though we don’t know if it was for another

¹⁵ Marston, 149 (Proem III.1-2). Parenthetical citations refer to this edition.

¹⁶ James P. Bednarz, *Shakespeare & the Poets’ War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 83–99.

¹⁷ Bednarz, 10.

¹⁸ Ben Jonson, “Horace, of the Art of Poetry,” in *The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 465.

play, he subsequently left the theater. He famously became a deacon and then a priest and, after twenty-five years of almost complete textual silence, was buried with the epitaph *Oblivioni Sacrum*, echoing his final poem in the *Scourge*.¹⁹ If for Jonson the struggle against oblivion wore him thin, Marston slipped into a silent piety that one cannot help feeling was a defeat.

This chapter traces the development of the stage malcontent through the struggles of both Jonson and Marston with the paradox of the immortality and ephemerality of literary production. Tracing this struggle first through Jonson's *EMO* and *Epigrams*, I will turn to Marston's malcontents in the *Antonio* plays and *The Malcontent* (1603).²⁰ As I argued in Chapter 3, revenge tragedy became a vehicle for expressing *ressentiment*, particularly the feeling of political powerlessness in a machiavellian world. It is no accident, then, that the revenger fused with the satirist and the malcontent, both of which shared a frustration with the world's degeneracy. Although the plays I examine here cut across and even invent genres, they partake in this satiric obsession with the fundamental corruption of human nature. Oscar James Campbell describes Marston's expression of this in his verse satire as "a kind of exasperation, a counterpart of Juvenal's *saeva indignatio*."²¹ However, frustration is not the *furor* of the classical revenger, and it is this disjunction, the unfitness of the malcontent satirist to play the role of revenger, that Shakespeare explores in *Hamlet* (see Chapter 5). Marston does not seem unaware of this. In *Antonio's Revenge*, the outpouring of resentment is expressed in a tyrannicidal

¹⁹ Anthony Caputi, *John Marston, Satirist* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1961), 247–48.

²⁰ I also wanted to address Jonson's late, and largely ignored, malcontent masque, *The Fortunate Isles and their Union* (1625), which attests to his unbroken obsession with the Isle of Dogs/Fortunate Isles trope, but I have had to bracket this discussion for now.

²¹ Campbell, "Hamlet and Other Malcontents," 145.

bloodbath so deliberately overwrought as to be almost torture porn. First the nominal villain Piero's tongue is torn out, the fate usually reserved for neo-Senecan victims, before the revengers reveal the dish of sweetmeats on the banquet table to be his dismembered son, Philomela-style, and finally they take turns ecstatically stabbing him like Caesar (*A's Rev*, V.v).²²

Although Marston the writer deeply embeds himself in layers of near-impenetrable ironic personae, Marston's various responses across his career stem from the stultifying Calvinist conviction in man's essential state of original sin; what John Gillies in his analysis of *Hamlet* calls the "bicameral model of the self." In Calvinist terms, we *seem* to know ourselves through our good deeds and repudiation of vice, yet at "the ground of the heart," where an Id-like Hydra of spiritual monstrosity lurks, our self-knowledge ends. Since there would seem to be nothing to do about a thorough and essential viciousness, a peculiar abandonment of catharsis marks Marston's satire; but it is still possible to attack the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of those who see only their own public surfaces and refuse to acknowledge their hidden heart.²³ A similar belief seems to underlie Jonson's obsession with the duck-rabbit of the Isle of Dogs/Fortunate Isles, but with a greater sense of (frustrated) optimism: all that is noblest and good is an illusion floating on a sewer of humanity; we close our eyes and noses to it for a brief glimpse of perfection. However, Jonson's plays and masques hold out a glimmer of hope that seeing those glimpses we can also move ourselves to reach out of that sewer and

²² John Marston, *Antonio's Revenge*, ed. W. Reavley Gair (Manchester & Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), 153–55. Parenthetical references are to this edition.

²³Gillies, 400; Intro to Marston's Poetry 21. "The ground of the heart" is Luther's phrase; I am here paraphrasing Gillies's quotations from Calvin's *Institutes* and Luther's *Lectures on Romans*.

move a little higher, if we care to, and theater is—may be—a machine capable of enabling that climb.

ii. The topography of The Isle of Dogs

The Isle of Dogs is one of those densely allusive topoi that seem to have such boundless potentiality that they can mean anything or nothing. It is, of course, the peninsula in London which the shipwrecked Quicksilver and Petronel mistake for the coast of France. This area was known for collecting sewage as well as unsavory criminal sorts, yet “it lay plumb opposite the royal palace at Greenwich, scene of many lavish Elizabethan entertainments.”²⁴ However, the Isle of Dogs might also refer to the *canaria insula*, one of the so-called Fortunate Isles which came to be associated with both the Canaries and Azores, key military locations in the conflict with the Spanish. The same month *The Isle of Dogs* had its ill-fated debut (July 1597), the Earl of Essex made a similarly ill-fated voyage to the Azores that would be the first stumble on his long fall from grace.²⁵ Only two or three years later, Jonson sets his “*Scene*” in the radical comical satire *EMO* in this same quasi-mythical location, “*Insula Fortunata*.”²⁶ Long after the *Eastward Ho!* affair, Jonson returns once more to these islands in his final masque for King James, *The Fortunate Isles and their Union* (1625).

²⁴ Charles Nicholl, *A Cup of News: The Life of Thomas Nashe* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 244–45.

²⁵ Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson, A Life* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 119. Cf. the description in Anghiera, Pietro Martire d’, *The decades of the newe worlde*, trans. Richard Eden (London, 1555): 1, *EEBO*, accessed 28 January 2019, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99840143: “The fortunate Ilandes (as manye thinke them to be, whiche the Spaniardes call *Canarie*, [...] were called fortunate, for the temperate ayre which is in them.”

²⁶ Jonson, “Every Man Out,” 438. Parenthetical citations refer to this edition.

The identification of Britain with the Islands of the Blessed is a traditional and orthodox symbol of English perfection particularly befitting a masque. Yet one cannot avoid the whiff of sewage that the Isle of Dogs brings to the ideal image. This unsavory and ordinary patch of land available to any Londoner's feet contrasts the distance and abstraction of the Fortunate Isles with the immediacy of social and political realities. Similarly, setting Jonson's panorama of London social types against the subtle background of the idealized *Insula Fortunata* serves to make these figures all the more ludicrous. While in some ways synonymous, the Isle of Dogs and the Fortunate Islands thus become mirror images, one referencing the vulgar and the other ideal. The Isle of Dogs literalizes the notion of *topos koinos* or "common place": these rhetorical motifs function as "storehouses of trains of thought," as Ernst Robert Curtius translates Quintillian's *argumentorum sedes*.²⁷ We often think of early modern commonplaces as rather static statements of universal truths meant to be copied down in books and deployed verbatim; however, understanding commonplaces as compressed trains of thought allows us to see that beneath this stasis the commonplace unfolds over time and adapts to occasion. The Isle of Dogs becomes a theatrical *locus* for thinking and arguing about the state of English society stretching from Nashe and Harvey to playwrights Jonson, Marston, Chapman, and others.²⁸

The Isle of Dogs topos essentially functions as a means to debase the ideal, and it performs this function on several different levels. The first involves the tenuous

²⁷ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen, XXXVI (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton Univ. Press, 2013), 70.

²⁸ I am here making an argument in support of Nicholl's suggestion that "It is tempting [...] to think of the Isle of Dogs not just as an actual place but as a metaphorical *topos*." Nicholl, *Cup of News*, 245.

distinction between satire and slander. The Isle of Dogs seems to have been a favorite topos of Thomas Nashe, which figures in his play *Summers Last Will and Testament* (1592). The play first makes reference to dogs in the Prologue, establishing that the players refuse to fear “the imaginary serpent of Enuy,” since they “wey not” immature wits: for “Whelpes will barke, before they can see, and striue to byte, before they haue teeth.” Taking place in the midst of a plague which Autumne blames on the dog days of summer, the middle of the play stages a defense of dogs by the constellation Orion. When Orion leaves, Will Summer dismisses this defense as “dogs dinner” or vomit: “If I had thought the ship of fooles would haue stayde to take in fresh water at the Ile of dogges, I would haue furnisht it with a whole kennell of collections to the purpose.”²⁹ In conjunction with the *Eastward Ho!* shipwreck, there is perhaps a hint of the plot of *Isle of Dogs* in this line. As the parody of Nashe in the anonymous *Return from Parnassus, Pt. II* makes clear, the Isle of Dogs is ruled by slander: “our voyage is to the Isle of Dogs, there where the blatant beast doth rule and reign[.]”³⁰ Apparently, the Blatant Beast left uncontained in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* has come to rule the island.

The multiple extant allusions to the Isle of Dogs suggest a fantastic location requiring a journey on the *Narrenschiff*, only to arrive where you started. The paradoxical here-and-nowhere location of the topos reflects what made the Isle of Dogs both captivating and dangerous: the slippery double vision of the figure does not quite create enough distance to ward off the suspicion of direct attack on “public persons,” nor keep

²⁹ Nashe, Thomas, *Summers last will and testament* (London, 1600): B1^v, D4-E2, *EEBO*, accessed 25 July 2017, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99845698.

³⁰ Oliphant Smeaton, ed., *The Return from Parnassus, or the Scourge of Simony* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1905), V.iv.38-40.

the satirical critique from redounding on its author. As Nicholl notes, it is a place where slander and libel run rampant.³¹ If the scourge is the weapon of the virtuous satirist, the dog paints a degrading picture of those who lash out irrationally with envy, practicing not corrective critique but the deliberate misconstruing of intent. In the Epistle to *Volpone*, Jonson calls this practice “construction,” malicious misinterpretation, and “application,” the deployment of these misinterpretations for advancement. It is the “trade” of “invading interpreters” that gather the favor and reward of powerful men by proffering cunningly framed information.³²

Jonson was likely thinking of the *Isle of Dogs* affair while writing this epistle, both of those who accused him and those who tried to extract new crimes from him in prison. Such an invading interpreter brought the play to the attention of interrogator Richard Topcliffe and Robert Cecil, son of Elizabeth's spymaster William Cecil. While the content of the *Isle of Dogs* play is lost to us, Ian Donaldson, Charles Nicholl, and others have gone some way toward reconstructing the political stakes that may have been at the heart of the censorship. In *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), Jonson attacks the “state-decipherer, or politic picklock” who would comb the *personae* looking for real persons, treating the play as a cipher much as readers treated Sidney's *Arcadia* (see Chapter 2).³³ Specifically targeting Arabella Stuart, the added prologue to *Epicene* (1609) warns that while satire presents “feigned” simulacra (following Sidney) and taxes crimes not persons, it is paranoid interpreters who produce slander, not true poets:

If any yet will (with particular sleight)
Of application) wrest what he doth write,

³¹ Nicholl, *Cup of News*, 248.

³² Reproduced in the appendix to Dutton, *Jonson*, 177.

³³ Ben Jonson, “Bartholomew Fair,” in *The Alchemist and Other Plays*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 333 (“Induction”).

And that he meant or him or her will say:
 They make a libel which he made a play.³⁴

Such defenses by Jonson and others would seem to suggest that proper satire never attacked individuals and that the whole confusion between libel and satire rested on such malicious “application.” In truth this *a priori* defense is belied by the numerous clever glances at contemporaries that editors have hunted down, and in particular by the rather prolific derision heaped on the obscure Henry Brooke, 11th Baron Cobham.³⁵

Nashe’s satirical attacks on public persons landed him in trouble constantly, and the *Isle of Dogs* seems to have been ruthlessly topical. As Ian Donaldson has suggested, the play likely formed a part of the theater’s involvement in the growing tensions between the Essex and Cecil factions.³⁶ If the *Isle of Dogs* portrayed the ship of state as a ship of fools, it was an appropriate topos for a war of intelligence: in the early 1590s, Essex was the Queen’s key intelligencer, so much so that, according to Anthony Standen, “all matters of intelligence are wholly in his handes.”³⁷ *The Isle of Dogs* was historically poised right at the moment that Essex permanently lost his grip on this position and was overshadowed by Robert Cecil; it was performed in July 1597, the same month Essex returned from the disastrous second expedition to Cadiz. In 1596, Essex had organized the first Cadiz expedition, a successful preemptive strike against the Spanish. Cobham, brother-in-law to both Lord Burghley and his son Robert Cecil, apparently attacked the expedition’s success as “but a matter of chance,” made “without anie certain

³⁴ Ben Jonson, “Epicene, or the Silent Woman,” in *The Alchemist and Other Plays*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 123.

³⁵ There is some confusion as to whether Cobham should be accounted the 8th or 11th of that title, but newer sources tend toward the 11th. I have not yet hunted down the source of this confusion.

³⁶ Donaldson, *Ben Jonson*, 120.

³⁷ Qtd. in Paul E. J. Hammer, *The Polarization of Elizabethan Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 191.

knowledge.”³⁸ Thus, in a sense it was Cobham who first accused Essex of captaining the *Narrenschiff*, and we might conjecture that *The Isle of Dogs* replied to Cobham and other detractors of Essex in kind. From the perspective of the Essex faction, Cobham was a “Sycophant” and Cecil tool, which is probably close enough to the truth, and Essex’s enmity went back to Cobham’s father, who had unwaveringly routed intelligence to the Cecils.³⁹ While *The Isle of Dogs* may perhaps have celebrated Essex’s victory in Cadiz and attacked Cobham’s skepticism, it would also likely have been anticipating Essex’s less fortunate return from the Fortunate Isles, however.

Nashe and Jonson seem to have been drawn into these high political games due to professional rivalry. Nashe seems to have been writing for the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, which had passed to George Carey after the death of his father Lord Hunsdon in 1596. The Carey family was closely related to both the queen and Essex, and Hunsdon had worked closely with Essex.⁴⁰ With Hunsdon’s passing, however, the title of Lord Chamberlain passed not to his son Carey, as expected, but to Cobham’s father (William Brooke, 10th Baron Cobham), slighting Carey and demoting the players to merely the players of Lord Hunsdon.⁴¹ Moreover, contentions with Cobham were exacerbated when a year later, in March 1597, Cobham’s father died and Cobham inherited the Wardenship

³⁸ According to Edward Reynoldes, qtd. in Hammer, 190. On Cobham’s relation with the Cecils, see Hammer, 357n83; Alexandra Gajda, *The Earl of Essex and Late Elizabethan Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 145.

³⁹ Gajda, *Earl of Essex*, 145.

⁴⁰ Hammer, *Polarization*, 283.

⁴¹ They were forced to call themselves “the L. of Hunsdon his Servants.” Qtd. in Nicholl, *Cup of News*, 249. As Dutton has noted, while the Lord Chamberlain had control over the Revels Office, the theatrical responsibilities were only a portion of a larger post that crucially “to a degree controlled access to the monarch”; thus Elizabeth was likely not thinking about the theaters at all when making the choice of the aging Cobham, but as lack of access was the spark that ignited the “rebellion” of Essex, it was another small blow to the Essex faction. Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels: The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 44.

of the Cinque Ports. George Carey competed with Cobham for the position, while Essex attempted to promote Robert Sidney, pointing out that the position was best suited for someone with martial experience (of which Cobham had none).⁴² Thus the series of attacks on the Cobhams between 1596 and 1599, in which even Shakespeare participated with his rescinded parody of Cobham ancestor Oldcastle, seem to have largely stemmed from two personal slights: the strictness of Cobham's father toward players during his brief tenure as Lord Chamberlain and Cobham's rivalry with Carey.

Fresh out of jail, Jonson would take another stab at him just a year later in *EMI*, and Nashe would satirize Cobham again in his final work, *Lenten Stuffe* (1599).⁴³ The play of course would have had a complex set of aims, including probably an attack on cheaply distributed knighthoods, as in *EMO* and *Eastward Ho!*, but the anti-Cecil sentiment also persists in *Isle of Gulls* (1606), converting slanderous dogs into mere fool birds, which landed John Day in front of the Privy Council.⁴⁴ Jonson's stakes in these broils may have been enhanced by his relationship with Essex and the Bacons, for whom he expresses great admiration in the *Discoveries*. Jonson might possibly have participated in Bacon's scriptorium as a young scholar in the 1590s, but any evidence was destroyed in Essex's purging of papers in 1601. Whatever the case, the inclusion of the lost "fragment" of *The Isle of Dogs* in the Alnwick manuscript along with works by Francis Bacon suggests some connection to Essex interests.⁴⁵

⁴² Nicholl, *Cup of News*, 250; Gajda, *Earl of Essex*, 145.

⁴³ *EMI*'s "Cob" (a herring), the water-bearer, trivializes Cobham's succession to the Wardenship of the Cinque Ports. Nashe continues Jonson's fish puns in *Lenten Stuffe*'s defense of the *Isle of Dogs* affair. See Nicholl, *Cup of News*, 251–54.

⁴⁴ Hillman, "Eastward Ho's Isle of Dogs," 508–14; Donaldson, *Ben Jonson*, 233.

⁴⁵ Donaldson, *Ben Jonson*, 120–22.

However intentionally or unintentionally youthful playwright Jonson got caught up in these affairs, with their mix of political and personal motives, their consequences would persist throughout Jonson's career, and it is these consequences that bear on Jonson's role in the creation of the stage malcontent. Attacking Cobham meant indirectly slighting Robert Cecil, who was about to become one of the most important people in the realm. Burghley and Robert Cecil heard the *Isle of Dogs* case, along with a number of others including the new Lord Chamberlain George Carey (who may have acted as mediator, considering that much of the "seditious" play seems to have been for his benefit).⁴⁶ Famously, Burghley had secured an unprecedented dominance over the privy council and created England's first spy network.⁴⁷ Jonson would voice his resentment at the level of surveillance both at home and abroad that Burghley established to combat the Catholic threat in his epigrams, *Poetaster*, and *Sejanus*. Already powerful, upon Burghley's death, Robert Cecil took over the role of Secretary of State, as well as Elizabeth's chief councilor and intelligencer.

When the *Isle of Dogs* once again lands Jonson in trouble for *Eastward Ho*, oddly it is to Cecil, recently made Earl of Salisbury, to whom he writes for help. Although Jonson does not refer to *The Isle of Dogs* by name, he is clearly working to distinguish his current predicament from that affair, first, on the grounds that the play contains nothing offensive, and second, by distancing the offense of *The Isle of Dogs* as the transgressions of "others." It is in this letter that Jonson develops the notion of the malicious interpreter that founds the Epistle to *Volpone*: he accuses his accusers of lacking charity in their interpretation, choosing instead to be "too witty in another man's

⁴⁶ Donaldson, 113.

⁴⁷ On Burghley's monopoly of the queen's counsels, see Hammer, *Polarization*, 114–15.

works, and utter[ing] sometimes their own malicious meanings, under our words.”

Although he claims that an examination of all his books would reveal that he never gave “offence to a nation, to any public order or state, or any person of honour or authority,” he also includes the subtly paradoxical caveat that he should not suffer for “other men’s errors, or faults past[.]”⁴⁸ The redundancy of errors and faults suggests that he is arguing that he should not be judged on his own past mistakes either, perhaps the fault of working with the libelous Nashe in contrast to the “learned and honest” Chapman with whom he wrote *Eastward Ho*. It would be hard for Jonson to argue having no hand in the transgressions of that play, however, when he chose to yet again deploy its primary topos, even extending its moralized London landscape. As Nicholl summarizes:

‘Eastward ho!’ leads to the court at Greenwich, ‘Westward ho!’ to the gallows at Tyburn, the twist being that too much ambition for the one will probably lead to the other: ‘Eastward Hoe will make you go Westward Hoe’.⁴⁹

While Jonson escaped this second Isle of Dogs affair unscathed, Jonson seems to have maintained a sublimated antagonism with Salisbury. Jonson’s next play for the popular theater was *Volpone*, which included the Epistle in the 1607 quarto edition. As Donaldson has argued, this play strives to maintain Jonson’s defense against invading interpreters and resistance to treating satire as cipher, but it may have encoded personal resentment more abstractly and deeper in the fabric of the play, taking its politic sensibility from the “fox” Salisbury, as he was sometimes called. The suggestions, which Donaldson calls “a fleeting, subliminal, and finally incoherent pattern [that...] remain[s] at all times firmly deniable[.]” are embedded more directly in the project of the Epistle.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ “Letter to the Earl of Salisbury, over the *Eastward Ho* affair,” reproduced in Dutton, *Jonson*, 213–14.

⁴⁹ Nicholl, *Cup of News*, 245.

⁵⁰ Donaldson, *Ben Jonson*, 233–34.

This preface transports Jonson's personal defense to Salisbury into the realm of a public defense of satire and the authority of interpretation.

On the one hand, Jonson thus succeeds in developing satire that is almost immune to accusation, but on the other, Salisbury's apotheosis into a kind ubiquitous world-state begins to verge on a representation of the kind of radical machiavellian evil that I have argued Marlowe in particular endeavored to capture (see Chapter 3). As the new spymaster, Salisbury represented the system that attempted to wheedle new crimes from him while in prison for the *Isle of Dogs* affair in the form of "Pooly" and "Parrot," the two informers Jonson pointedly does *not* invite to dinner in Epigram 101.⁵¹ The price of Salisbury's help extricating Jonson from the *Eastward Ho* difficulty seems to have been Jonson's acting in some ways as an informant himself, which could only have deepened his resentment. Another factor in the *Isle of Dogs* affair had been the suspicion of Catholic motives behind the offense. Nicholl notes the "Catholic tinge" of Nashe's writing, and Misha Teramura has recently argued that the informant that brought *The Isle of Dogs* to Topcliffe's attention, who in turn brought it to Salisbury's attention, was likely William Udall, a regular informant for Salisbury with a penchant for pursuing Catholic plots and just the kind of capacity for creative interpretation that Jonson abhorred. Udall also seems to have taken particular aim at Essex, later claiming that he had single-

⁵¹ Ben Jonson, "Epigrams," in *The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 70. Epigrams cited parenthetically refer to this edition. Whether or not these names refer to the specific informers who attempted to entrap Jonson during his imprisonment or simply well-known informers of the type, he seems to refer to actual spies known to report to Salisbury (and since these are not "great men," this naming apparently does not violate Jonson's rules of satirical decorum). Since Eccles' influential article, most scholars agree that Jonson is surely pointing here to Robert Poley, the busy informer present at Marlowe's death. The informer Parrat, who is the subject of a complaint to Salisbury in 1598, is harder to identify, but Eccles suggests Henry Parrat, himself a minor epigrammatist. See Mark Eccles, "Jonson and the Spies," *The Review of English Studies* 13, no. 52 (October 1937): 385–89; Joseph Loewenstein, "The Jonsonian Corpulence, or the Poet as Mouthpiece," *English Literary History* 53, no. 3 (Autumn 1986): 500–504.

handedly brought Essex down.⁵² Whether or not *The Isle of Dogs* had crypto-Catholic aims, Jonson's time in prison had the somewhat ironic effect of converting him to Catholicism. Jonson was further accused of "popery" when he was interrogated about *Sejanus* (1603).⁵³ Drummond relates that, after Salisbury was safely several years in his grave, Jonson accused Salisbury of machiavellian instrumentalism: "Salisbury never cared for any man longer nor he could make use of him."⁵⁴ In this vein, Salisbury may have seen Jonson as a useful tool following Jonson's third time before the Privy Council for *Eastward Ho*: it is unclear whether Jonson was already acting as Salisbury's agent when he attended a party hosted by Robert Catesby, the leader of the Gunpowder Plot, but Jonson was called in a month later to find a priest related to the plot, which Jonson ultimately failed to do, though he protested that he had given the matter a great deal of effort.⁵⁵

iii. "May still this *Iland* be call'd *fortunate*"; or, a malcontent matter of perspective in *EMO*

If Jonson struggled to find a satirical mode that was both efficacious while avoiding the suspicion of slander, Salisbury is a recalcitrant spectral presence, shaping Jonson's reactions to contemporary modes of authority and surveillance. Like many early modern gentlemen given to the malcontent strain, Jonson turns to stoicism; but also like

⁵² Udall also claimed to have discovered the Gunpowder Plot. Misha Teramura, "Richard Topcliffe's Informant: New Light on *The Isle of Dogs*," *The Review of English Studies* 68, no. 283 (2016): 44–59; Nicholl, *Cup of News*, 254.

⁵³ Jonson, "Horace," 469.

⁵⁴ In a somewhat pettier vein, Jonson also attacks Salisbury's hospitality, narrating how he quibbled to Salisbury that while he was invited to dinner, he was not truly a dinner guest, since Salisbury did not share his meat. Jonson, 469–70.

⁵⁵ Dutton, *Jonson*, 84.

many others, attempting to force stoic patience tends to exacerbate rather than quell Jonson's discontent. Stoicism and satire both aim in different ways at recuperating the possibility of virtue in a corrupt world, and the fusion of the two is a powerful formula for birthing malcontentism: as Katharine Eisaman Maus has argued, "Jonson's apparent misanthropy in the plays and satiric poems is not a violation of his social commitment, but one way in which that social commitment is realized." Maus notes both Seneca's statement that separation from "the vulgar" (in Lodge's translation) will make us healthy and Jonson's own assertion in the *Discoveries* that virtue naturalizes a man anywhere while the vicious man "deserves to be a stranger, and cast out of the commonwealth, as an alien."⁵⁶ The role of catharsis in the trials that feature in Jonson's comical satires is obvious, but very few are apparently so resolutely vicious that they deserve either expulsion or even punishment. In the quarto version of *EMI*, only Mateo and Bobadilla apparently require legal and corporal punishment; in both version, Justice Clement threatens Musco (renamed Brainworm in the folio) with a sword, but Musco takes off his disguise and reveals himself to have been the witty manipulator of events all along.⁵⁷

In the trope of virtue disguised as vice, which Jonson develops in the double character of Macilente/Asper in *EMO*, Jonson grapples with the paradox of the stoic man of virtue. He is apparently a citizen of the world, Diogenes' *kosmopolitēs*, yet his elitist virtue springs from a *contemptus mundi* that estranges him from society at the same time. At times, Jonson's search for a judicious audience makes him seem an elite society of

⁵⁶ Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), 132. See also Seneca, "His booke of a blessed life," *The works of Lucius Annaeus Seneca*, trans. Thomas Lodge (London, 1614): 611-12, *EEBO*, accessed 15 January 2019, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99852278; Jonson, "Discoveries," 419 (ll. 1852-1856).

⁵⁷ Ben Jonson, *Every Man In His Humour*, ed. J. W. Lever (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1972), 276, 257-60.

one, desperately attempting to imagine a fit audience out of thin air. In *Bartholomew Fair*, we can see Jonson laughing at the impossibility of creating such an elite, and instead he has the Stage-Keeper make a madcap contract with the audience to define judgment ad hoc. The Stage-Keeper attempts to contractually delimit censure by defining judgment as a function of money to the limit of wit:

It is further agreed that every person here have his or their freewill of censure, [...such that] it shall be lawful for any man to judge his six pen'orth, his twelve pen'orth, [...etc.], to the value of his place, provided always his place get not above his wit.⁵⁸

This sense of elite superiority at the root of the neo-stoic is identical to the politico-affective core of the malcontent. It is not hard to see Jonson's likeness in the character portraits of Nashe, Earle, and Hall—a man who believes “our common welth were but a mockery of gouernment,” and is so intent on scourging vice that “His life is a perpetuall Satyre” (see Chapter 1).⁵⁹ Certainly narcissism and egotism are often the words that come to mind to first-time readers of Jonson today. As a young playwright, Jonson's lofty goals put him significantly at odds with the realities of the patronage system, particularly his need to get along with men of status like Salisbury. As Maus argues, Jonson's approach shifts after the comical satires, sometime around *Sejanus* (1603), Jonson's account of the fall of a machiavellian courtier who traffics in gathering and maliciously interpreting intelligence, not unlike Salisbury.⁶⁰ In plays like *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson abandons the

⁵⁸ Jonson, “Bartholomew Fair,” 332 (“Induction”).

⁵⁹ Nash, Thomas, *Pierce Pennilesse* (London, 1592): B2^v, *Early English Books Online*, accessed 16 January 2019, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99845711; Earle, John, *Micro-cosmographie* (London, 1628): C1^r, *EEBO*, accessed 16 January 2019, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:20051603.

⁶⁰ Annabel Patterson's anecdote of Buckingham's impeachment and assassination in 1626 drives home the lesson of *Sejanus* that a malicious interpreter can bring even the most ludicrous context to bear on the interpretation of a text. Sir John Eliot made the analogy between Buckingham and Sejanus in the trial, and Charles strongly objected to the analogy's implication that he was therefore Tiberius. Bizarrely, the

attempt to separate the wheat from the chaff of society in any serious sense; as Maus puts it, “Meaningful judgment becomes pointless or impossible in a morally diminished world.” Maus persuasively argues that Jonson’s inability to abandon his ideals or develop a socially efficacious theater causes him to waver between or paradoxically affirm unsatisfying alternatives.⁶¹ I argue that Jonson develops a more consciously paradoxical stance, one which was already at play in *Every Man Out*’s corrupted vision of the Fortunate Isles.

As opposed to *Bartholomew Fair*’s cynical economy of wit, *EMO* is the play that most directly attempts to conjure a worthy audience, and it does so through the traditional early modern method of exemplar: Jonson literally creates ideal audience members and places them on stage to discuss the play. Jonson’s chorus or “Grex” sets out in an unprecedented metatheatrical manner the social and formal parameters for evaluating the play before the third sounding, while the audience is still finding their seats. Jonson thus creates a disorienting continuity between the real audience in the stands and the ideal audience talking on stage, which places the audience in a murky space between the participatory performance of the morality plays and the emerging theater of illusion. Jonson perhaps hoped that this space is capable of opening the audience to a more reflective and transformative form of engagement. After Cordatus, the good critic “*Of a discreet, and understanding iudgement[.]*” explains that poetry is defined by progressive invention and not immutable laws, Mitis brings the discussion to a close on the topic of

tenuous analogy brought Jonson once again into conflict with the law: “When, shortly afterward, Buckingham was assassinated, Jonson was momentarily arrested on suspicion of having incited the assassin; almost as if it were believed that, having patented the topicality of the Sejanus story, Jonson was somehow responsible, if only as a prophet, for Buckingham’s fate.” Moreover, Jonson very nearly found himself fulfilling the analogous position of his politic historian Cordus, who is imprisoned and his books burnt, rather than the heroic *parrehiastes* Arruntius. Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*, 56–57.

⁶¹ Maus, *Roman Frame of Mind*, 132–34, 150.

location:

MIT. Well, we will not dispute of this now : but what's his *Scene* ?

COR. Marry, *Insula Fortunata*, Sir.

MIT. O, the fortunate Iland ? masse, he has bound himselfe to a strict law there.

Cordatus argues that the physical limits of the space are quite sufficient without bounding over oceans to new locations as some plays do (in contradistinction to *Henry V*'s defense the same year).⁶² This discussion of precise geographic bounds cleverly diverts the conversation from the metaphorical dimensions of the island. "Where" is this fortunate island? What sort of place is it? Mitis recognizes the island immediately, presumably imagining the idyllic lands of Greek mythology. What the audience gets instead is a satirical portrait of England, populated by a cross-section of London's worst "characters," representatives of social vices which Jonson innovatively sets down in a mini-character book at the beginning of the printed versions of the play.

In Act III, the identification is made particularly concrete by the long "*Scene of Paules*" (III.i.19), in which the play's overall dramatic structure is condensed within the space of Paul's Walk. The bustling nave of St. Paul's Cathedral acted as London's hub of news- and rumormongering, and here the various characters intersect and establish relations in ways that the monad-like structure of the character book makes impossible. Helen Ostovich describes the scene as a "stylized dance" that turns St. Paul's into a satirical microcosm of London. She argues that St. Paul's functions as "a rhetorical *locus communis*" which acts as the fulcrum for the transformation of the characters: "Before the Paul's Walk scene, the characters each introduce their humours; during the scene, they parade their humour in particularly emblematic displays; after the scene, they suffer

⁶² Jonson, "Every Man Out," 427, 438.

reversals until [...] everyone is out of his humour.”⁶³ These choreographed arrangements of characters, like particles forming various new atomic structures, enact a dynamism of social types belied by characterization.

However, Paul’s Walk as a literal and figurative common place is subordinate to the primary identification of England with the Fortunate Isles. In turn, the Fortunate Isles is complexly undercut by a series of references to dogs that essentially renders “Fortunate Isles” a polite euphemism. Just after Cordatus establishes the scene as the Fortunate Island, the Prologue (“a humorous fellow”) humorously escapes his nominal duty by arguing that Cordatus has agreed to undertake it for him. Finally bending to ridiculous necessity, Cordatus begins to deliver a makeshift prologue—only to be interrupted by the play’s buffoon, Carlo Buffone. The buffoon drunkenly usurps the prologue in a manner that subtly resituates the entire play:

in place of a bad prologue, I drinke this good draught to your health here, *Canarie*, the very *Elix’r* and spirit of wine. This is that our *Poet* calls *Castalian* liquor, when hee comes abroad (now and then) once in a fortnight, and makes a good meale among Players, where he has *Caninum appetitium*[.] (*EMO*, Prol.332-37)

If we are paying attention, the series of dog references clearly redefine the kind of Fortunate Isles we should expect. The “good draught [...] here” with which Buffone toasts comes from the Canary Islands, or the dog islands, and we might also read “here, *Canarie*” as punningly relocating the play to these islands as well.⁶⁴ The impression is

⁶³ Helen Ostovich, “‘To Behold the Scene Full’: Seeing and Judging in *Every Man Out of His Humour*,” in *Re-Presenting Ben Jonson: Text, History, Performance* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 76–79.

⁶⁴ Furthermore, canary wine was deeply intertwined with the Spanish conflict, since “sack” (from either *sec* or *saca*) was produced only in the Spanish provinces of Canary, Malaga, or Xeres (which was anglicized to “sherry”). Because of the war with Spain, these wines were illegal and dangerous to procure, yet widespread. (In fact, Jonson’s increased annuity from Charles I in 1630 included a yearly supply of canary wine.) One such expedition returned the same year *EMO* debuted, which an anonymous account records in heroic terms, although the expedition seems to have succeeded in little but gathering up some

reinforced by the digression on the poet's dog-like appetite, which the reference a few lines later to the poet as a "one-headed CERBERVS" further emphasizes (Prol. 341-42). Moreover, the poet, Buffone says, refers to this liquor as "*Castalian*," identifying it with the (oft conflated) Pierian spring of poetic inspiration, and perhaps punning on the Castilian domination of the Canary Islands as well.⁶⁵ The poet's idealization of simple wine as mythological waters is thus analogous to the poet's idealized conceit of the Fortunate Isles pasted over the rather more unsavory *topos* of the Isle of Dogs.

The obsession with dogs continues throughout the play, particularly in relation to Macilente. Although Macilente is Asper's persona, he goes beyond the usual disguise trope of early modern drama. More than any other early modern play, *EMO* is the greatest test of Nietzsche's assertion that "A great moralist is, among other things, necessarily a great actor; his danger is that his dissimulation may unintentionally become nature[.]"⁶⁶ Asper and Macilente each have their own "character" in Jonson's character book, which emphasizes that Macilente is no mere persona. The former is the ideal *parrhesiastes* and satirist, whose name suggests he is full of "bitter" (or "sour") reproof

wine "buried in the earth," since the Spanish managed to carry everything else of value with them. Apparently, Essex's 1596 Cadiz expedition, which returned with large quantities of *seco de Xeres*, did much to popularize the wine. It is thus tempting to speculate that the reference to Spanish wine here is in part an oblique reference to Essex's Spanish expeditions that may have served as the *Isle of Dogs*'s topical background, much as Barbara Sebek argues that Falstaff's wine drinking plays an important role in "questions about legitimacy, majesty, and valor" in the *Henry* trilogy (118), plays which were similarly bound up in the theater's mini-war (apparently started by Cobham, Oldcastle's descendant) over the Essex-Cecil conflict. Barbara Sebek, "'More Natural to the Nation': Situating Shakespeare in the 'Querelle de Canary,'" *Shakespeare Studies* 42 (2014): 106-21; Consul Crawford, "Art.VII.-1. Commercial Reports Received at the Foreign Office from Her Majesty's Consuls in 1867.-Report by Mr. Consul Crawford upon the Port Wine Trade of Portugal," *Edinburgh Review*, 1802-1929 126, no. 257 (July 1867): 201. See also anon., *The conquest of the Grand Canaries* (London, 1599): 20, *EEBO*, accessed 28 January 2019, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99846238.

⁶⁵ This is the same "rich *Canary-wine*" served at the Mermaid in "Inviting a Friend to Supper," which Jonson also compares to "the Thespian spring" (Aganippe), another spring associated with poetic inspiration. Cf. Jonson, "Epigrams," 70 (101.29-33).

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, sec. 304.

for “*the worlds abuses*[.]” but he eschews both nihilistic rejection of the world and “*seruile hope of gaine*[.]” The latter, by contrast, is the traditional over-educated, over-traveled malcontent, full of envy and a sense of superior merit unacknowledged by his “*place in the worlds account*.”⁶⁷ Later, Buffone characterizes Macilente even more harshly as a hungry dog:

SOG[LIARDO]. Is he a Scholler, or a Souldier?
CAR. Both, both; a leane mungrell, he lookes as if he were chap-falne, with
barking at other mens good fortunes[.] (*EMO*, I.ii.211-13)

Although Jonson clearly distinguishes the characters on the grounds of motivation, rendering one a virtue and one a vice, it is just as clear that we could read Jonson’s own character into either the transcendent satirist or the frustrated soldier-scholar—indeed, Buffone’s description of the poet as a hungry dog is of a piece with Macilente. Several characters describe each other as dogs throughout the play, but much of the action revolves around Macilente’s poisoning of Puntarvolo’s dog. Puntarvolo, whose knighthood seems to be of the frivolous kind later attacked in *Eastward Ho*, intends to take his cat and especially his dog on a journey to Constantinople (II.iii.243-67). Expelling Puntarvolo from his humor somehow requires killing his dog, which by the standards of the day was apparently quite funny (V.i.69-86). Even while Macilente is one of the first exemplars of the stage malcontent, the elements of the malcontent and the satirist are already mixed, and Macilente’s connection to the multivalent trope of dogs

⁶⁷ Jonson, “Every Man Out,” 423 (“Characters”). The Latin *asper* would usually translate to “bitter,” but as *Cambridge Ben Jonson Online* editor Randall Martin notes, Jonson translates *asper* as “sour” in his translation of Horace: “and would try, / Though sour, with safety of his gravity, / How he could jest” (*et asper / Incolumi gravitate iocum temptavit*). “Sour” is something of a key word in Jonson’s *Horace*, and something of its connotation is captured by his earlier description of “sour laments,” which adds an adjective to Horace’s simple *querimonia*. Ben Jonson, “Every Man Out of His Humour,” *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online*, 2015, sec. “Names of the Actors” (Commentary 2); Jonson, “Horace,” 356, 362 (ll. 107, 321-3); Horace, “Horatius de Arte Poetica,” *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online*, 2015, ll. 75, 227–8.

links these two inheritances: while the dog is not a common feature of malcontent character sketches, it is an ambiguous sign, as I have argued, for both the biting satirist and his ever barking targets. Joseph Hall, for example, does not include any dog imagery in his “Characterism of the Male-content,” which he almost certainly wrote with Marston in mind, but in the satirical epigram he had pasted in Marston’s *Certain Satyres*, he does attack Marston’s Kinsayder as a “mad dogge” in need of whipping (see Chapter 1).⁶⁸ Hall pauses short of poisoning the dog-satirist, but we can see Macilente taking up Hall’s prescription for the purging of a bad satirist and literalizing it in the case of his own satirical victim.

As Peter Daly argues, the early modern theater “was the most emblematic of all the literary arts”;⁶⁹ however, the malcontent retains while complicating this emblematic character, since the malcontent synthesizes strands of melancholy, the discontented traveler, the satirist, and its odd twin, the machiavel. All of these strands include their own sets of emblematic signs, and the malcontent accrues these.⁷⁰ What little time Daly spends on the emblematic character, he devotes to Jonson’s masques, but Jonson’s plays for the public theater are largely populated by characters of vice in a similar manner.⁷¹ The plays are distinguished from the masques in two key ways: the characters display the vices of particular social types rather than abstract allegorical vices per se; and the characters are far more dynamic in their interactions and transformations. In other words, Jonson’s plays are social rather than metaphysical. *EMO* is Jonson’s most masque-like

⁶⁸ See Marston, *Poems of Marston*, 164–65.

⁶⁹ Peter M. Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 153.

⁷⁰ Babb’s work on melancholy focuses heavily on the various emblematic gestures and poses of the “malcontent types.” (He isolates four: the traveler, villain, cynic, and scholar). See Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 76–101.

⁷¹ Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem*, 162–64.

play, eschewing dramatic action for the dramatic interaction of social types, turning the stage into a kind of petri dish. *Figura* as “character” has become both taxonomic and diagnostic. However, Jonson’s attempt to deploy the prognosis of satirical catharsis encounters a crisis of knowledge production.

Synthesizing persona and character destabilizes the notion of instrumental masks like Macilente, because there is no “interiority” in this taxonomy—you are what you do; or rather, you are what someone describes you as doing. Moreover, characterization as a crisis of knowledge production is also, in Peter Womack’s terms, a crisis of authority. Womack argues that Jacobean (and late Elizabethan) characterization is a form of social classification in which someone exerts dominance over another person by defining them—a kind of Aristotelian production of categories. Womack emphasizes the violence of satirical catharsis in *EMO*: Asper suggests a theater in which “the judicial text is inscribed on the bodies of the malefactors” and through “a series of violent exposures,” the characters are thrust out of their humors.⁷² The first of these reversals, the poisoning of Puntarvolo’s dog, certainly demonstrates this inherent violence. Characterization ultimately undercuts Asper’s satirical project, since there is now no authority to distinguish between Asper’s character and his instrumental mask, staging a crisis that, like most of Jonson’s early plays, can only be re-grounded in the monarch. Asper is fully submerged into his mask Macilente, who was “*so strongly possest with Enuie*” that (in Jonson’s original design) only the monarch’s visual impression on him “*should effect so suddaine and straunge a cure upon him, as the putting him cleane Out of his Humor.*”⁷³ Much like Brainworm in *EMI*, it is the comic villain who is ironically necessary to effect

⁷² Womack, “Characters,” 53–58.

⁷³ Jonson, “Every Man Out,” 602 (App. X).

social change, and Asper, recognizing this necessity, takes on this role. Doing so, however, raises serious issues with the developing notion of character and the distinction between virtue and vice. To use the case of the dead dog once more, while Macilente may have effected the change in Puntarvolo, the act of poisoning still belongs to the person of Asper even if it goes against his character.

Jonson raises in a new way the old medieval fear that taking on the role of a vicious person could instill that vice in the actor. *EMO* suggests that the satirical persona, such as Jonson's Brainworm or Marston's Kinsayder, can only enact social change at the cost of its own virtue, functioning analogously to the revenger. Such an insight prefigures Hamlet, where the scourge of God and the satirist's scourge are one and the same. This uprooting of satire's social potential is thus as socially nihilistic as Marston's satire, insofar as virtue seems divorced from social efficacy. If the play stopped here, we would be left with a social world in which vice was by definition the ground of social action, while virtue would be defined by a kind of passive insularity—in other words, extreme stoics trapped on an island of dogs.

Later plays like *Volpone* or *Bartholomew Fair* suggest something like this, but in *EMO* and other Elizabethan plays such as *Cynthia's Revels* and *Poetaster*, Jonson can only find grounds for a universal standard of judgment in absolute authority. As Bednarz argues, *EMO* collapses the possibility of establishing social norms or the universal standard of judgment Jonson seeks, only to resolve this anarchic conclusion in the body of the monarch.⁷⁴ However, even in *EMO*, this resolution is equivocal: the play subtly implies that this resolution, like the masques, is the product of a theatrical technology.

⁷⁴ Bednarz, *Shakespeare & the Poets' War*, 64–66.

Power ratifies theater, and theater provides power its necessary illusions. As if Jonson were already imagining his future masques, Elizabeth's presence transforms not only Macilente but the island itself. Macilente makes Elizabeth's catharsis analogous to the purgative power of "the siluer *Thames*" to absorb London's filth (a power increasingly tested in reality), ending with a strangely ambiguous wish:

I implore,
O heauen, that shee (whose presence hath effected
This change in me) may suffer most late change
In her admir'd and happie gouernement:
May still this *Iland* be call'd *fortunate*[.]⁷⁵

Stasis and alteration are oddly conflated: the "late change" turns out to be an already "admir'd and happie government" and an island that is "still" fortunate. Syntactically, the renewed Asper wishes for a change that turns out to be remaining the same, which mirrors the circularity of Asper's own transformation into what he already was. However, the syntactic paradox also suggests a kind of fiction: transformation guised as preexisting reality. The final reciprocal action between poet and monarch is one in which absolute authority grants a conduit for the poetic fiction of the ideal state, which in turn circularly ratifies monarchical authority. Thus the *locus* of *EMO* is a place common to both the Isle of Dogs and the Fortunate Isles, like different angles viewed through a prism. That prism is poetic invention—yet this invention renounces the efficacy of cathartic social change in favor of an illusionistic perspective-based construction. In theory, *EMO* ends with the *parrhesiastes* successfully utilizing and discarding the malcontent persona (with the help of pure brute power). In reality, the malcontent leaves a remainder that undermines typical Sidnean constructions of poetic virtue—both in the sense of ethics and power.

⁷⁵ Jonson, "Every Man Out," 599.

This problem of perspectives pervades Jonson's later satires, masques, and epigrams in various forms, leading Jonson to develop a poetics of equivocation. Sidney claimed art could make a golden world apart from the brazen reality; Jonson wants art to change the world as it is. The comical satires reveal that art fails to make the brazen world gold—but it can gild it. There really is no difference between the Isle of Dogs and the Fortunate Isles but the poet's play between the truth and the ideal. In the following section, I will explore this poetics at work in Jonson's *Epigrams*, where the apparent simple divide between encomiastic and satiric epigrams collapses. As the distance between idealized praise and servile flattery quickly shrinks, the encomia become open to satiric readings as well. Most problematically, this equivocation expressly requires the kind of readerly "construction" that Jonson repeatedly damns, including in the *Epigrams*'s Dedication. Such equivocation becomes Jonson's compromise with oblivion, a *modus operandi* of plausible deniability. However, the compromise is always brimming with the pressure of Jonson's conviction that "the bitterness of truth" is more profitable "than all the honey distilling from a whorish voice," and that an ideal prince "fears no libels, no treasons. His people [...] have nothing in their breasts, that they need a cypher for."⁷⁶ However much Jonson's epigrams cast James in such idealized terms, this is clearly not the reality of Jacobean England. Thus, the life Jonson creates in this chaotic dance of virtues and vices is one of perpetual satire indeed. Beneath the perfect schema of the *Epigrams* lurks such a malcontent pressure: whereas in *EMO*, the satiric mask of Macilente hid the virtuous machination of Asper, Jonson's later works take recourse in a

⁷⁶ Jonson, "Discoveries," 406-10 (ll. 1333-1477).

mask of innocent virtue that barely restrains a more deeply cynical and malcontent humor.

iv. Testing the limits of Jonson in the *Epigrams*

Jonson's epigrams reflect the complexities of maneuvering through a patronage system built on attracting the favor of powerful people whom you may not particularly like.⁷⁷ In the process, we see a struggle similar to *EMO*, as Jonson strives to distinguish his project as the Asper-like refusal to be a parasite rather than the Macilente-like need for recognition. As Ann Coiro has argued, in his usual fashion, Jonson chose to return to classical sources rather than extending from the existing English tradition, modeling his epigrams on Martial. At the same time, he rejects Martial's pose of servile flattery: instead, "his strategy seems often designed to maintain his own dignity."⁷⁸ Jonson's epigrams combine satire and encomium, aiming to deride vice (in allegorical figures) while praising virtue (in the form of real persons). While Jonson frames the satirical *Epigrams* carefully to avoid allegations of libel, it is his attempts to praise without being obsequious that most destabilize the project. It is no accident that Coiro's analysis of Jonson's "problematic" praise centers around Salisbury. Jonson dedicates three poems to

⁷⁷ The encomiastic epigram is a challenging genre with, on the face of it, little literary value. In 1973, Anthony Mortimer first attempted to point out that despite this impulse, if we consider that half of Jonson's nondramatic verse consists of encomia, we ought to pay more heed to its generic conventions and objectives. He provides the simple black-and-white framework of an epigrammatic "commonwealth" of virtues (encomia) struggling against vice (satires) that I take as my starting point in this section. With the notable exception of Ann Baynes Coiro's "Father Ben," the critical practice has remained focused on epigrams as self-contained units rather than pieces of a larger project. See Anthony Mortimer, "The Feigned Commonwealth in the Poetry of Ben Jonson," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1973): 69–79.

⁷⁸ Ann Baynes Coiro, "'Father Ben': Jonson's *Epigrammes*, *The Forrest*, and *Underwood*," in *Robert Herrick's Hesperides and the Epigram Book Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 98.

Salisbury in *Epigrams* (1616).⁷⁹ A few others got this much attention: King James; Lucy, Countess of Bedford; Benjamin Rudyerd; and Sir John Roe. Briefly examining Jonson's method in these encomiastic sequences, I will place Jonson's praise of Salisbury, the king, and the contemporary political system particularly in the context of Jonson's relationship with obscure poet John Roe. Herford and Simpson call the significant sequence of epigrams to the Roe family "the most heartily affectionate of all his epigrams," yet there is little information about this relationship that does not come from Jonson himself.⁸⁰ However, one incident sheds considerable light on the false note of frustration underlying Jonson's encomia. Before Jonson became the premier writer of masques, Jonson and John Roe were kicked out of one of the first Jacobean masques, an event commemorated in a rather pointed political satire by Roe himself. The problem of power and praise that Roe elaborates in this poem highlights Jonson's failure to find an epigrammatic form that is socially constructive without violating a decorum enforced by a brutal and capricious legal system.

In addition to the Salisbury sequence, Jonson also wrote three dedicated epigrams to Lucy, Countess of Bedford, an important patron, and to Benjamin Rudyerd, a minor poet and one of Jonson's several friends who were once followers of Essex. These poems are relatively conventional: Jonson praises Bedford hyperbolically, dwelling mostly on her beauty, but also a soul able to withstand the mirror of satire (*Ep.* 76, 84, 94); he

⁷⁹ The volume was published together with *Forrest*, but seems to have been available since at least 1612, perhaps in manuscript. See Colin Burrow, "The Poems: Textual Essay," *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* Online, 2015.

⁸⁰ Ben Jonson, "Life of Ben Jonson," in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 52. What information H. J. C. Grierson, C. H. Herford, P. and E. Simpson, and others have collected on John Roe's life has been thoroughly stitched together and expanded upon by Alvaro Ribeiro in "Sir John Roe: Ben Jonson's Friend," *Review of English Studies* 24, no. 94 (May 1973): 153–64.

similarly lavishes praise on Rudyerd's (largely forgotten) poetic prowess (*Ep.* 121, 122, 123). In addition to three epigrams to Sir John Roe (27, 32, 33), his brother William and cousin Thomas get two poems a piece (70, 128; and 98, 99, respectively).⁸¹ Like the Rudyerd sequence, these seem to be largely concerned with personal friendship. By the time the *Epigrams* was published, Jonson's close friend John was dead. Jonson's Roe epigrams are part elegy and part expression of gratitude for the family's support.⁸² Thomas, diplomat and explorer, was one of Bedford's circle, so Jonson's relationship with him may have been part of his bid for Lucy's patronage. While Thomas's epigrams for Jonson emphasize friendship, Jonson's later epigrams focus on professional encouragement and advice.

These poems share with the Salisbury and James sequences a focus on personal virtue; however, they tend to emphasize a combination of the personal and professional rather than their place in a larger political system. The poems on Salisbury and James are distinctly more abstract and emblematic, thus embodying Jonson's project of presenting portraits of virtue and vice in an almost allegorical manner. In the process, despite the poems naming real persons (instead of, say, Court-Worm or Sir Luckless Woo-All), these encomia draw closer in form to the satirical epigrams. The formal similarity of these epigram types causes their explicit distinction to collapse as soon as we begin to see satirical elements in the encomiastic poems as well. Jonson attempts to guard against

⁸¹ See Jonson, "Epigrams," n. LXX "Title" (492); Ben Jonson, "Volpone, or The Fox," The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online, 2015, n. "To My Friend"; Ribeiro, "Sir John Roe," 155, 157–58. On Thomas Roe, the most famous of the family, see Michael Strachan, *Sir Thomas Roe, 1581-1644: A Life* (Salisbury, Wiltshire: Michael Russell, 1989).

⁸² Little is known of John or William, but Thomas was a rather famous diplomat and explorer who contributed commendatory verses to *Sejanus* and *Volpone*. In a 1610 deposition, Jonson claims to have known "William Row gent." for "about 5. Years[.]" Ben Jonson, "LR39 - National Archive - Town Depositions of the Court of Chancery - C 24/357, Fols. 1-6," The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online, 2015.

such vicious readerly misreading (or “construction”), but as I will demonstrate, such construction is in fact a formal necessity of the *Epigrams* book itself.

With five poems, James receives more direct attention than anyone else in the *Epigrams* (*Ep.* 4, 5, 35, 36, 51). These poems have two basic thrusts, one specific and the other abstract. Jonson identifies the health and life of the king with the symbiotic stability of the realm (“First thou preservèd wert, our king to be, / And since, the whole land was preserved for thee,” *Ep.* 35; also 51). This abstract symbiosis seems to flow from James’s personal fitness as king, who Jonson figures as a kind of poet-king, perhaps a deliberate play on Plato’s *Republic*:

How, best of kings, dost thou a scepter bear!
How, best of poets, dost thou laurel wear!

Read together, Epigrams 4 and 35 suggest that James is a poetic *figura* made flesh.

Although Jonson does not directly impute a causal connection in James’s conjoining of these “two things, rare,” he seems to imply through temporal sequence that James’s ability to match the “chief” poets while “green” has led to his perfection as an exemplar that “chief” princes only promise to be (*Ep.* 4). In Epigram 35, Jonson figures James as something like Sidney’s Cyrus made flesh. Rather than a poetic fiction that distills the historical person into an ideal, James’s own poetic prowess seems to have made person and ideal coextensive, allowing James to lead by the force of his own “example[.]” Most importantly, James “Hast purged thy realms” of disorder. Although Jonson refers to thwarted treasons, in addition to his status as Sidnean exemplar, James seems to be imbued with a power analogous to ideal satire: he has affected a purgation of the state’s soul, and this purgation redounds on each individual. James’s purgation of the realm has “no cause / Left us of fear, but first our crimes, then laws” (*Ep.* 35). Much as Jonson

commends Lady Bedford for having a character pure enough to read satire with pleasure, where the sight of their own sins reflected leaves most readers offended (*Ep.* 94), James's cleansing leaves his citizens only the reflection of their own crimes to fear. Of course, this James is itself a poetic invention of Jonson's epigrams, which thus make James commensurate with Jonson's own book.

Poetry thus tacitly functions both to fashion the monarch's own putative cathartic ability as well as to fashion the *image* of a monarch with such purgative puissance. We cannot separate the powers Jonson imputes to James from the project of his own book of epigrams: to provide examples of virtue and purge vice. This interweaving of power and poetry is subtler than in Jonson's early plays: for example, in *EMO*, where Jonson made the risky decision to use Elizabeth's physical presence as the impetus for the purgation of Macilente and his transformation back into Asper (alternative version of V.xi);⁸³ or in *Poetaster*, in which the true poet (Virgil) becomes the censor, handing out purgative emetics and legal sentences "With Caesar's tongue" (V.iii).⁸⁴ Rather than insisting on the poet's centrality to power, these epigrams function more like his masques, shaping the image of power without overtly asserting poetry's role.

The poems to John Roe are not overtly political, and the elegiac nature of the sequence gives it a different tone from the other encomia, which often point to future prospects or current accomplishments. Instead, this fairly tightly grouped set of poems models Christian stoic grief.⁸⁵ However, structurally, the memory of John Roe becomes

⁸³ See Jonson, "Every Man Out," 599.

⁸⁴ Ben Jonson, "Poetaster, or His Arraignment," in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 297–316. Subsequent parenthetical citations are to this edition.

⁸⁵ Epigram 32 also includes a brief sketch of Roe's life. He appears to have been in Moscow at some unknown point, and probably fought in Ireland in 1601 and/or 1603, perhaps earning his knighthood in autumn 1603. He returned to soldiering in the Low Countries around May 1605. Sometime just before

central to Jonson's struggle to distinguish praise from flattery. Jonson begins by replacing the ceremonial coat of arms on John's hearse with "better ornaments, my tears, and verse." If the epigrams to James and his satirical epigrams suggest the power of verse to purge vice, here the verse gives outlet to personal loss, softened by the assurance of heaven: "wherein / We, sad for him, may glory, and not sin" (*Ep.* 27). The few poems intervening between this epigram and the second set perhaps indicate an interval of time has passed since the fresh grief of the first poem. In these epigrams, the tone is more purely stoic, admitting grief but allowing it no hold: "I'll not offend thee with a vain tear more," Jonson promises, since John has merely arrived at the destination of all living things, and if Jonson too is lucky enough to reach heaven, "Who wets my grave, can be no friend of mine" (*Ep.* 33). This elegiac interlude is followed by a kind of commonplace couplet that draws the question of grief to a close:

He that fears death, or mourns it, in the just,
Shows of the resurrection little trust. (*Ep.* 34)

The heartfelt but piously stoic lines of the epigrams are less interesting than their context. First, the epigrammatic portrait of John Roe as an emblem of virtue, one half of Jonson's project in the *Epigrams*, contrasts vividly with the casually satiric portrait Jonson later gives Drummond in the *Conversations*. Second, just as Jonson's other remarks reveal the cracks in the ideal image of John, John's own poetry introduces a countercurrent to Jonson's masque-like idealization of the court.

the 5th of October, 1605, he acquitted himself on the field when the Hollanders and English were routed in Flanders. According to a letter by Philip Gawdy (qtd. in Ribeiro), Roe was one of "only fower [that] did charge those fower hundred" Italians. He was wounded in the head and barely escaped with his life, only to return to London and die of the plague in January 1605/6. This bathetic death adds a powerfully stoic exemplar of the vagaries of fortune to Jonson's final couplet: "Which shows, wherever death doth please t'appear, / Seas, serenes, swords, shot, sickness, all are there" (*Ep.* 32). Ribeiro, "Sir John Roe," 156–58, 163–64.

Although Jonson's epigrams do not emphasize John Roe as a poet like the Rudyard epigrams, Drummond collects his portraits of John under "poets living with him" (§11) and "the actions of other poets" (§12). Drummond's record of a very different John Roe demonstrates a certain duality in Jonson's perception and poetics. From an elegiac view, John is a man pious enough that Jonson has no doubt of his final destination. In a satirical vein, on the other hand, Roe is a bit of a rake with no qualms about taking satirical aim at God or King. This Roe "was an infinite spender, and used to say, when he had no more to spend he could die." Together, John and Jonson were kicked out of a masque, presumably for being disruptive: "they two were ushered out by Lord Suffolk."⁸⁶ The masque appears to have been Samuel Daniel's *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (1603/4), which largely established the structure and tropes of the Jacobean masque before Jonson.⁸⁷ Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk, was the newly appointed Lord Chamberlain, and he seems to have helped release Jonson and Chapman from prison two years later in the *Eastward Ho* affair, even though the play turned out to lack the Chamberlain's license for performance.⁸⁸ It is thus remarkable that Jonson was ever commissioned to produce masques of his own; if Chamberlain ever read John Roe's poem commemorating the event, the chances would almost surely have dropped to nil.

This spendthrift provocateur's "To Ben. Iohnson, 6 Ian. 1603," once misattributed to John Donne, criticizes the court on several points.⁸⁹ First, Roe invokes the *theatrum*

⁸⁶ Jonson, "Horace," 465. Jonson's remarks to Drummond are supported by the fact that Roe repeatedly sold off his inherited lands for cash over the span of his short life and seems to have had only incidental employment as a soldier after leaving Queen's College in 1597 without taking a degree: Ribeiro, "Sir John Roe," esp. 156-7.

⁸⁷ Jonson, "Horace," 608n146-9; Ribeiro, "Sir John Roe," 159.

⁸⁸ Dutton, *Jonson*, 83-89.

⁸⁹ This poem is collected in Appendix B of John Donne, *The Poems of John Donne*, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), 414-15. Grierson helped shape our understanding of

mundi trope: “The State and mens affaires are the best playes” next to Jonson’s own (Roe, 1-2). He seems to suggest that a masque is a fitting vehicle for politics that is already theater. Roe’s second point touches more directly on Jonson’s project in the *Epigrams*: he warns Jonson not to write too much on the “much descending race / Of Lords houses,” who are not viewed as “usurpers” only because time has “settled [them] in worths place” (3-5). This rather baldly derisive attitude toward the nobility carries through the poem, and Roe next tells Jonson that if the whole court follows the queen to a masque or the king to a hunt, “Let them.” These somewhat oblique lines suggest that the Lords will never equal the king and queen “in goodnesse [...] / For that were vertue, and not flatterie” (7-10). Roe tactfully avoids criticizing his sovereign, but he makes the same distinction between the praise of true virtue and flattery that haunts the *Epigrams* following Jonson’s poems to Roe. Roe’s advice here is quite contrary to the entire project of Jonson’s *Epigrams*, which precisely seeks to praise the virtue of important lords while simultaneously eschewing flattery. Roe then blames their expulsion from the masque on hierarchy. Being the low men on the totem pole, “God threatens Kings, Kings Lords, as Lords doe us” (11-12). This trickle-down theory of power avoids stating the exact reasons Suffolk had to escort Jonson and Roe out of the performance as much as Jonson’s description does, instead emphasizing complete subjection to the whims of their superiors, which seem to be merely surrogate vengeance for the ills heaped on them by their own superiors. The resentment is even more biting when we remember how artificial this hierarchy of “usurpers” is in Roe’s view. Perhaps hypocritically, Roe also criticizes the masque as the “riot and excesse” of an “unthrifty rout” (19-24). Although

Roe by convincingly arguing for Roe’s authorship of several poems previously attributed to Donne. References to line numbers refer to this edition.

once again aimed at the “court,” it is hard not to see the king and queen implicated as well, being that they are the ones footing the bill. Roe’s final criticism ridicules the court for dressing up as a panoply of pagan gods when they supposedly “allow / But one” (27-30). While we cannot know what actions caused Jonson and Roe’s expulsion, Roe’s poem makes clear that they were motivated by a depth of resentment that borders on treasonous. Thus, while Jonson gives no hint in the *Epigrams* that he is thinking of Roe’s sentiments, which he seems largely to have shared, Roe’s poem adds a discordant note to the epigrams that follow Jonson’s tribute to him.

Jonson’s epigrams to John Roe directly precede the important Epigram 35 to James and the set of problematic epigrams to Salisbury. The epigrams often seem spread out at random, leaving the reader to discover networks of connection between them. This technique is surely part of his elaborate attempt to avoid accusations of slander, as he sets forth in the *Epigrams*’s dedication to William Herbert. This paradoxical strategy, however, demands readerly “construction” of connections between sets of poems even as Jonson insists that he is the sole arbiter of the collection’s meaning, “For if I meant them not, it is so.”⁹⁰ While we cannot pin down the exact degree to which Roe’s concerns might have impacted the project of the *Epigrams*, Roe’s contrast between the “due praise” of “vertue” and servile “flatterie” becomes the key distinction between Jonson’s project and the epigrams of Martial that he imitates (Roe, 2, 10). Much as the perfect “vertue” of the king and queen that Roe protests is in tension with the scathing condemnation of the masque, the epigram to Martial that follows Epigram 35 suggests that the perfect image of James that Jonson has been poetically constructing diverges

⁹⁰ Jonson, “Epigrams,” 33–34.

more than a little from his personal opinion of the king. While Martial's epigrams are nobler, Epigram 36 claims, Jonson's "royal subject" surpasses Martial, since "Thou flattered'st thine, mine cannot flattered be" (Jonson, *Ep.* 36). Clearly, James' virtue is so superlative that nothing Jonson can say could flatter the king. Yet it is Jonson himself who is constructing these portraits of virtue, and the epigrams become increasingly preoccupied with insisting that the idealized portraits do not flatter the real names they bear. Moreover, a suspicious reader might "construct" a different reading of this final line: perhaps Jonson cannot flatter James because he can find nothing good to say about him.

The potential negative reading of Epigram 36 becomes more plausible in relation to the sequence ending with Epigram 65, "To My Muse," which Coiro calls "the pivot upon which the drama of the volume turns."⁹¹ That drama, the tension between praise and flattery, centers perhaps unsurprisingly around Salisbury, Elizabeth's last spymaster. The poems loosely chart his late career: Epigram 43 commemorates the bestowal of the title Earl of Salisbury (1605) and Epigram 64 his position as Lord High Treasurer (1608). Although Salisbury died several years before the publication of the *Epigrams* volume, his presence is strongly felt, not only in epigrams dedicated to him, but also in his attacks on spies in *Ep.* 59, and this prologue of spies, although coming a few verses before the Salisbury sequence, points out Jonson's conspicuous silence on Salisbury's role as Secretary of State and Elizabeth's key intelligencer, just as Underwood 30 commemorates the passing of the role of Treasurer rather than spymaster from father to

⁹¹ Coiro, "Father Ben," 103.

son.⁹² The only hint of this role occurs in the final couplet of Epigram 63, which insists that Salisbury's virtue compels Jonson to write: "Cursed be his muse, that could lie dumb, or hid / To so true worth, though thou thyself forbid." Such potential censorship perhaps gestures back again to Salisbury's role in the *Isle of Dogs* affair, where spies attempted to entrap him. The final couplets of Epigram 64 are similarly equivocal in the shift from Salisbury to the state:

These (noblest Cecil) laboured in my thought,
Wherein what wonder see thy name hath wrought!
That whilst I meant but thine to gratulate,
I have sung the greater fortunes of our state.

The first half of the epigram, which strikingly begins "Not glad," lists a series of negative comparisons. Distinguishing himself once again from those who would flatter or look for personal gain from their epigrams, Jonson insists that he is merely "glad to see that time survive, / Where merit is not sepulchered alive." Salisbury's place as living proof of this assertion is almost an afterthought before the final couplet, and the contrast in the first half of the poem between the values of the "golden age" and "th'age of gold" suggests the tenuousness with which such merit "is not sepulchered." The relentlessly negative structure of the epigram implies a world of vicious, ambitious men barely kept in check through the efforts of the "wise" king who allows only the best to rise to the top. As such, Jonson is quite right to say that the epigram praises James more than Salisbury.

Epigram 65's double palinode directly follows: one of the most personal epigrams, it clearly reflects Jonson's frustrations with his perception at court and his project in the *Epigrams*. Corio argues that Jonson "remained decidedly uneasy with what

⁹² Jonson presented the commemoration of Lord Burghley "upon a plate of gold to his son Rob[ert], E[arl] of Salisbury, when he was also Treasurer[.]" Ben Jonson, "Underwoods," in *The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 168.

Salisbury's 'name hath wrought[.]'" noting both the tortuous style of the epigrams to Salisbury and the violent rejection of Jonson's muse in Epigram 65.⁹³ The epigram strikes a strident chord, nearly shrieking: "Away, and leave me, thou thing most abhorred / That has betrayed me to a worthless lord[.]" It is impossible not to suspect this "worthless lord" is none other than Salisbury himself, just as Coiro does. Such suspicion is only made stronger in Jonson's grievances: "Get [your next master] the time's long grudge, the court's ill will; / And, reconciled, keep him suspected still" (*Ep.* 65). Jonson is now the usual suspect, and just as he had to insist to Salisbury that he not be judged for "faults past" in the *Eastward Ho* affair, he is painfully aware that the court is inclined to see sedition or popery in any line he writes.

Salisbury acts as the test case to John Roe's criticism of Jonson's project from beyond the grave, and Epigram 65 attempts to answer Roe's accusation that praising a worthless lord is the very definition of flattery. The final couple reverses Jonson's position once more, but the answer is not exactly satisfying. Jonson insists that by idealizing his subjects of greater state, he is actually criticizing the distance between the virtue he depicts and their true character: "Whoe'er is raised, / For worth he has not, he is taxed, not praised" (*Ep.* 65). Straining to maintain a distinction between flattery and false praise, the epigram disrupts Jonson's imitation of Martial and calls into doubt all the prior idealized portraits. Making true praise indistinguishable from censure not only calls into question the entire project of the *Epigrams*, as Coiro has argued, but undermines Jonson's key satiric defense. While the structure of the *Epigrams* leaves the reader with the implicit invitation to "construct" meaningful networks among the poems, Epigram 65

⁹³ Coiro, "Father Ben," 99–100.

essentially charges the reader with the task of determining true praise from false, and in so doing undermines his defense that any libel is the work of invading interpreters. Each epigram's praise of the ideal becomes subject to ironic revision, such that epigrams of praise and censure alike carry the potential to "tax" the vicious. Without a clear distinction between good and bad models, the straightforward moral project of the *Epigrams* collapses into something far more ambiguous.⁹⁴ If we must praise men of status in ideal terms purely because of their status, then status becomes its own measure of virtue. Jonson's statement in Epigram 64 that James raises only the virtuous thus becomes perversely, tautologically true—at least on paper.

Given the impossibility of criticizing such great names, the readerly construction that Jonson abhors turns out to be an essential condition of reading satire, if not the condition of all reading. This instability between satire and slander is the crux out of which the malcontent is born. For Jonson, the impossibility of constraining interpretation results in a deepening skepticism in his work of the potential for a socially constructive poetics. Marston, on the other hand, embraces and redeploys machiavellian duplicity, developing a wit that layers potential meanings. Rather than wrestling to establish a single unassailable meaning, Marston confounds direct interpretation. For both Jonson and Marston, the demands of law and its capricious hand in literature spurred them to develop a poetics of masks and misdirection, their work (mostly) surviving the flames of archive fever by virtue of the partial capitulation to oblivion through self-effacement—or

⁹⁴ Jonson final renunciation of the possibility of true praise appears in the *Discoveries*: "how much more profitable the bitterness of truth were, than all the honey distilling from a whorish voice; which is not praise, but poison. But now it is come to that extreme folly, or rather madness, with some: that he that flatters them modestly, or sparingly, is thought to malign them." Jonson, "Discoveries," 406-7 (ll. 1330-40). Jonson's figuration of flattery as a form of prostitution resonates in Epigram 65's "abhorred" Muse. See Coiro, "Father Ben," 100.

rather through the proliferation of faces. Temperamentally, however, Marston seems to have been more naturally suited to such effacement: while Jonson burned with the desire for the pure self-expression of “honesty,”⁹⁵ what we know of Marston’s personality suggests a certain impish delight in obscurity. Perhaps this fascination with oblivion, coupled with a complex but fervent religious devotion, is as close as we can come to explaining Marston’s abandonment of page and stage. In the following sections, I will examine Marston’s response to this dilemma in his tragicomedies, a genre he created as a new form of satire. Marston’s preceding collections of verse satire, *Certaine Satyres* and *The Scourge of Villanie*, are also crucial to understanding his central role in the formation of the malcontent stage type, but I have bracketed most of this discussion until the next chapter because these poems are central to understanding how *Hamlet* responds to Marston’s drama, essentially bringing Kinsayder to life on stage.

v. “this laughter ill becomes your grief”; or, Democritean theatricality in the *Antonio* plays

At the time of the Bishop's Order banning satire, the malcontent figure was reaching its peak cultural utility as a hermeneutic capable of aligning multifaceted generic and ideological axes. Often these axes are determined based on perspective. Perhaps the single figure critics most often single out as the representative Elizabethan malcontent, Marston might have seen himself as a devout Calvinist—even perhaps a

⁹⁵ “Honesty” is a particularly dense and crucial term for Jonson, appearing throughout his works. James P. Crowley has argued that the term fuses Jonson’s moral and religious commitments. One who is *honestas* aligns the external signs of *decorum* with inner virtue. In the early modern period, the classical concept comes to rest on a Christian foundation: as opposed to the empty and purely formal performance of the *honnête homme* anatomized by Castiglione, true honesty was founded in a reverence for Christian justice and faith. James P. Crowley, “The ‘Honest Style’ of Ben Jonson’s *Epigrams* and *The Forest*,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 20, no. 2 (1996): 33–56.

Neostoic Calvinist, as Geoffrey Aggeler argues—using the classical techniques of satire to force himself and his readers to turn away in disgust from the worldly and toward the spiritual.⁹⁶ Others may have seen him, in the mode of Biester and O'Callaghan, as an ambitious, pseudo-machiavellian wag. Such a Marston certainly emerges in the most scandalous anecdote about him, recorded in John Manningham's diary. Dancing “last Christmas” (1601) with Maria Perez de Recalde, Spanish-born stepdaughter of Alderman John More, Marston reportedly “fell into a strang commendacion of her witt and beauty.” Clearly understanding from this “strang” manner that she was being teased or mocked, she “thought to pay him home” by calling him a poet—a damning title to be sure. Marston's response displays not only his typically obfuscating irony but also a shocking mean-spiritedness:

“Tis true,” he said, “for poetes fayne and lye, and soe dyd I when I commended your beauty, for you are exceedingly foule.”⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Geoffrey Aggeler, *Nobler in the Mind: The Stoic-Skeptical Dialectic in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1998), 72–108. I agree in large part with Aggeler's assessment of Marston's Calvinism, but I believe he overstates Marston's evaluation of stoicism. Aggeler's assertion that Alvin Kernan saw Marston as having “[become] a Neostoic when he began writing plays” is a misreading: in fact, Kernan only points out that Marston's *representations* of satirists on the stage return to the familiar stoic declarations, as opposed to his much more radical representation of Kinsayder, the Puritan zealot persona of *The Scourge*. Although Marston eventually retreats from the world into religious obscurity, like Burton this retreat seems more motivated by melancholic frustration than stoic *apatheia*, which insists on a paradoxical active engagement with the world. Despite the contention of Aggeler, Anthony Caputi, and others that Marston's plays display a neostoic temperament, the weak evidence for this hypothesis has been pointed out by Philip J. Finkelpearl, and James P. Bednarz argues that convincingly that Marston is a Calvinist *skeptic*, and his argument with Jonson in the *poetomachia* is founded on his ambivalence about stoicism. In fact the untenability of stoicism seems to me to be one of the strongest points of agreement between Marston and Kyd. This is not because of a preconception, as Aggeler contends, that neostoicism and Calvinism were incompatible; it is in fact their striking similarities and the fraught attempts at synthesis that, in my view, productively motivated Marston's engagement with stoicism. Rather, I will argue that Marston is working out the subtle, crucial points of friction between neostoic and Calvinist pessimism, seeking—unsuccessfully—a novel Calvinist approach to worldly engagement. Alvin Kernan, *The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 126; Caputi, *John Marston, Satirist*, 52–79; Philip J. Finkelpearl, *John Marston of the Middle Temple* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1969), 110n; Brownell Salomon, “The Theological Basis of Imagery and Structure in *The Malcontent*,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1974): 271–73; Bednarz, *Shakespeare & the Poets' War*, 100–103.

⁹⁷ From the diary of John Manningham, qtd. in Douglas Lanier, “Satire, Self Concealment, and Statecraft: The Game of Identity in John Marston's *The Malcontent*,” *Pacific Coast Philology* 22, no. 1/2

Douglas Lanier has briefly but importantly examined the implications of this anecdote for Marston's "self-presentational strategy": Marston turns "a moment of seeming self-disclosure into yet another moment of self-concealment" by re-framing the charge of poet. This method of "cite and subvert," which Lanier argues parallels his defense of his derided *Pygmalion*, deploys wit in a purely instrumental manner; the layers of meaning cancel one another out in an irony which obscures any "true" intent or meaning.⁹⁸ Marston's strategic speech acts are thus "devices" like that used by machiavels like Lorenzo in *The Spanish Tragedy* or Iago in *Othello*.

The device is typical of both the Wits and the stage machiavel: speech does not convey information but rather achieves dominance and success. We thus cannot take anything Marston says at face value—certainly not his interpretation of poetry here—but it is important to note that Marston's device relies on the negative sense of "fayne" as "lye" that Sidney had tried so hard to redefine in his *Defense*. Throughout Marston's literary works, there is an almost hyperbolic effort to subvert expectation and elicit wonder through shock and spectacle. It is likely due to this strategy that Jonson labeled Marston a poetaster: while no stranger to irony, Jonson's commitment to language as properly a conveyor of *truth* is almost diametrically opposed to Marston's use of language as *effect*.⁹⁹ Like Jonson, Marston often insists on his use of the plain style, as in the *Malcontent*'s epistle "To the Reader": "I am an ill orator and, in truth, use to indite more

(November 1987): 35. Lanier discusses his reasons for recuperating the anecdote in his "Appendix" (41-42). I think it is particularly important that charges against the anecdote have largely been motivated by its "distastefulness," which makes it all the more important to take seriously.

⁹⁸ Lanier, 35-37.

⁹⁹ The difference between Marston and Jonson can be summed up in a single line from Jonson's *Discoveries*: "Language most shows a man; speak that I may see thee." Such a lens ensured that Jonson would fail to "see" Marston. Jonson, "Discoveries," ll. 2515-6.

honestly than eloquently, for it is my custom to speak as I think and write as I speak.”¹⁰⁰
 To this should be appended something along the lines of 'as the occasion demands.'

The plain style was itself a stylistic paradox, emerging from Lipsius' synthesis of Seneca and Tacitus. Although the Roman writers had almost opposite styles, Lipsius yoked them under the umbrella of “terse, strong, and truly masculine.”¹⁰¹ Morris Croll, George Williamson, and Wesley Trimpi have usefully defined certain key features of the plain style, but Tacitus and Seneca seem to have been originally joined by their ideological similarity, with the effect of equating the brevity and clarity of Seneca with the asymmetry and obscurity of Tacitus.¹⁰² Tacitus' “darkness of utterance” earned him the title “*prince des ténèbres*” in the seventeenth century.¹⁰³ Yet it was still possible for Jonson to criticize the overly “concise style, which expresseth not enough” of Sallust and the “abrupt style” of Seneca in contrast to Tacitus' perfect “strict and succinct style [...] where you can take away nothing without loss[.]”¹⁰⁴ This is a very different Tacitus from that of Marc-Antoine Muret, one of the key promoters of Tacitus and the scholar who inspired Lipsius to edit his edition of Tacitus. Muret defends Tacitus' obscurity and asperity in his controversial 1580-1 lectures on the *Annals*:

For although a bare and clear style gives pleasure, still in certain special kinds of writing *obscurity* will win praise sometimes. By diverting discourse from common and vulgar modes of expression, it wins a dignity and majesty even out of strangeness (*peregrinitas*) and grips the reader's attention. It acts as a veil, to exclude the vulgar. [...] *Asperity* of style, again, has almost the same property as

¹⁰⁰ John Marston, *The Malcontent*, ed. W. David Kay (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998), 5. Parenthetical references to the play cite this edition.

¹⁰¹ Schifflett, *Stoicism, Politics, and Literature in the Age of Milton*, 26.

¹⁰² See esp. Morris W. Croll, “Muret and the History of ‘Attic Prose,’” in *Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm*, ed. J. Max Patrick and Robert O. Evans (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), 107–62; George Williamson, *The Senecan Amble* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Wesley Trimpi, *Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962).

¹⁰³ Croll, “Muret & Attic Prose,” 153.

¹⁰⁴ Jonson, “Discoveries,” ll. 2441–48.

bitterness in wine: which is thought to be a sign that the wine will bear its age well.¹⁰⁵

A few decades of familiarity seem to have changed this estimation, at least for Jonson. His insistence on clarity rather than obscurity seems to indicate that he saw Tacitus, who he claims wrote “best Latin,” as using a style that perfectly balances concise, clear periods.¹⁰⁶ Marston's style, by contrast, bears much more resemblance to Muret's Tacitus—harsh, strange, and often obscure. Kernan rightly notes that Marston was the unexpected “raging rough *Lucile*” Hall hoped to incite with his “quiet stile” in *Virgidemiae* (V.iii.13-14): Hall's “meter is far less rugged, his meaning less obscure, his diction and imagery less harsh and cryptic, and his tone in general less frantic than is usual in the new satires,” of which Marston's satires were one of the most extreme examples.¹⁰⁷ Marston learned his asperity more directly from Juvenal than Tacitus, but the revival of the Silver Age style heralded by Muret and Lipsius provide a crucial background for penetrating the deliberate obfuscation of malcontent speech.

¹⁰⁵ The translation is Croll's, qtd. in Croll, “Muret & Attic Prose,” 153–54. Despite the fact that Muret deploys Seneca in his defense of Tacitus, Seneca's stylistic aims were almost diametrically opposed. More aphoristic than enigmatic, Seneca preferred the brevity of the maxim for the impact or “blow” (*ictu*) of truth delivered suddenly (Ep. 94.43). As opposed to Muret's delight in the arduous extraction of truth, for Seneca, quoting Euripides, “the language of truth is simple” (*Veritatis simplex oratio est* [Ep. 49.12]). I should note here that the self-evidence of truth shares a strange relationship with Seneca's theory of passion: “none can even doubt or ask ‘why?’” (*nec ulli licet dubitare aut interrogare “quare?”*) in the face of such truths. Thus, much as Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* denies the moment where reason can assent or dissent to passion's judgment of the external *ictus*, the truth of maxim bypasses reason: “so far indeed does truth alone, unattended by reason, draw us” (*adeo etiam sine ratione ipsa veritas ducit* [Ep. 49.43–4]). Perhaps Seneca's naive faith that only the truth can bypass that crucial moment of stoic judgment partly explains the Renaissance suspicion that such poetic and aphoristic *ictus* could mislead as easily as lead. Lucius Annaeus Seneca, “Epistle XCIV. On the Value of Advice,” in *Seneca*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. Richard M. Gummere, vol. 6, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA & London, England: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006), 38–39; Lucius Annaeus Seneca, “Epistle XLIX. On the Shortness of Life,” in *Seneca*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. Richard M. Gummere, vol. 4, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA & London, England: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006), 330–31. Cf. Staley, *Seneca & Tragedy*, 29–36.

¹⁰⁶ Jonson, “Horace,” sec. 9. See Jonson, “Discoveries,” ll. 2470–2: “Whatsoever loseth the grace, and clearness, converts into a riddle; the obscurity is marked, but not the value.” Cf. Trimpi, *Ben Jonson's Poems*, 47–48.

¹⁰⁷ Kernan, *Cankered Muse*, 95–96.

Marston, more so than Jonson, should probably be credited with the development of the stage malcontent. About the same time Jonson was putting the railing Macilente on stage, Marston debuted his second play, his tragicomic burlesque of Kydian tragedy entitled *The History of Antonio and Mellida* (1599-1600).¹⁰⁸ Still considered by most to be a 'bad play,' it highlights the bewilderment that attends Marston's technical effects, making Eliot proclaim that the "badness" of the play and its sequel "cannot be explained simply by incapacity."¹⁰⁹ John Scott Colley has examined a number of these effects, demonstrating how Marston draws the audience's attention to the ludicrous language and actions of his characters undermine their heroic and stoic poses. When Marston turned to the stage, he developed a "negative dramaturgy" founded on a principle of discord rather than unity: "His dramatic materials are jumbled together violently, the rules of decorum breached often, suspense undercut, serious dramatic moments burlesqued."¹¹⁰ There is something almost postmodern about Marston's ruthless refusal to allow any basic theatrical principle to stand untested.

The first *Antonio* play follows a plot similar to *Romeo & Juliet*. We meet Antonio after the overthrow of his father Andrugio, Duke of Genoa, by the Duke of Venice, Piero Sforza, namesake of Francesco Sforza, who Machiavelli saw "as the epitome of the self-made governor."¹¹¹ His father dead or missing, Antonio plans to woo Piero's daughter amidst the hostile court under the Sidney-inspired guise of the Amazon Florizel. The

¹⁰⁸ On *Antonio & Mellida*'s contribution to the development of tragicomedy, see Nathaniel C. Leonard, "Embracing the 'Mongrel': John Marston's *The Malcontent*, *Antonio and Mellida*, and the Development of English Early Modern Tragicomedy," *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 12, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 60–87.

¹⁰⁹ T. S. Eliot, "John Marston," in *Elizabethan Essays* (New York: Haskell House, 1964), 182.

¹¹⁰ John Scott Colley, *John Marston's Theatrical Drama*, Jacobean Drama Studies 33 (Salzburg: University of Salzburg, 1974), 47–80.

¹¹¹ John Marston, *Antonio and Mellida*, ed. W. Reavley Gair (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), 16. Parenthetical citations are to this edition.

idleness of the *Arcadia* becomes in Antonio a frustration at his powerlessness that prefigures Hamlet's own inability to act, while Antonio also seems to have inherited Philisides' difficulties standing upright (*A&M*, II.i.206-10). Antonio's love melancholy is contrasted with Feliche's malcontent melancholy. Feliche is the play's quintessential railing malcontent, the *parrhesiastes* of Piero's court who bemoans that the Duke has surrounded himself with parasites who label their regent's most foolish plans "policy" (I.i.76-7). As Stoll noted long ago, Feliche prefigures all the key features of Malevole.¹¹² As opposed to the Timon-like misanthropism of Guilpin's malcontent, Feliche professes the stance of the positive satirist: despite his railing, Feliche insists, "I hate not man but man's lewd qualities" (III.ii.285).

However, in many ways it is Andrugio who best captures the malcontent dilemma. His kingdom lost, Andrugio relies on stoic fortitude to sustain him; yet he cannot help but undercut his stoic sententiae with passionate outbursts.¹¹³ In his speech "I never was a prince till now," Andrugio boasts to Lucio of his equanimity in the face of his lost title; he has realized, he claims, that to be just, content, and unmoved is to be a king and that "of this empire every man's possessed / That's worth his soul." At Lucio's mere mention of the Genoese subjects who have forsaken him under Piero's rule, however, "Unkings me quite, makes me vile passion's slave," and sets Andrugio to some 16 lines of unsightly and unstoic railing (IV.i.45-83). Like Hamlet, Andrugio is a passionate malcontent who wishes to be—even pretends to be—a stoic. Andrugio best

¹¹² Elmer Edgar Stoll, "Shakspeare, Marston, and the Malcontent Type," *Modern Philology* 3, no. 3 (January 1906): 286.

¹¹³ Cf. Colley, *Marston's Drama*, 74–76.

captures Marston's undercutting of all serious action, mocking stoic pretension in a Calvinist world.

Played within a year of the first part, *Antonio's Revenge* (1599-1600) is Marston's idea of a sequel: the same comic characters jarringly transposed into what appears to be a bloody Kydian revenge tragedy. Piero has not reformed after all, and begins to do away with the cast members one after another. If *Antonio & Mellida* subverts the tragic momentum of the plot by characteristically undercutting the serious *telos* and grafting on an improbable comic ending, *Antonio's Revenge* further develops a tragicomic sensibility: as Colley points out, Marston's drama of high-intensity moments anticipates Beaumont and Fletcher, eschewing the movement and compounding arousal of an unfolding Shakespearean tragic plot.¹¹⁴ Whereas *Antonio & Mellida* merely mocked passion and stoic pretension alike, *Antonio's Revenge* turns Piero into a test case for our ability to control our passions *in extremis*, the Duke deliberately goading his victims to revenge: "Have none of you / Courage of vengeance?" (I.iv.13-14). The dead Feliche's role of virtuous malcontent is supplanted by his father Pandulpho, whose perfect stoicism becomes more awful than tyrannicide and its own sort of madness. Laughing indecorously at the gruesome spectacle of his son's body, he expresses the horrific alternative to Hieronimo's grief demanded by stoic *apatheia*:

Alb[erto]. Uncle, this laughter ill becomes your grief.
Pan[dulpho]. Wouldst have me cry, run raving up and down
 For my son's loss? Wouldst have me turn rank mad,
 Or wring my face with mimic action,
 Stamp, curse, weep, rage, and then my bosom strike?
 Away, 'tis apish action, player-like.
 If he is guiltless, why should tears be spent? (I.v.75-81)

¹¹⁴ Colley, 81.

Pandulpho's laughter belies his detached, orthodox stance, drawing him closer than he'd like to admit to the "player-like" melodrama of Hieronimo that Marston and other playwrights both mocked and imitated. Pandulpho's stoic posture quickly unravels, and his failed stoicism gives way to malcontent railing only a few scenes later. At the funeral of Feliche and the mock-dead Antonio, Pandulpho seals his capitulation to Kyd's fundamental truth: "Man will break out, despite philosophy" (IV.v.46).

Marston's parody of revenge tragedy takes as its target Kyd and the early Senecan tragedy of Shakespeare such as *Titus Andronicus*. If *Titus* attempts to out-Seneca Seneca by combining all the classical horrors into a single drama, Marston sets his sights on surpassing the famous bloodbaths of these Senecan imitators: the play ends in a *Spanish Tragedy*-style masque of murder announced by an echo of Hieronimo's famous *Vindicta!* (V.iii.1), in which the wronged masquers, serve sweetmeats made from Piero's son, rip out the Duke's tongue, and then participate in a round-robin stabbing session reminiscent of *Julius Caesar*, all while the ghost of Andrugio watches on (V.v).

What earlier critics saw as 'bad plays' more recent critics have acknowledged as exercises in an alienation effect not dissimilar to Brecht's *gestus*.¹¹⁵ While Shakespeare reinforces a double consciousness of the fiction and the production of the fiction through strategic metatheatrical moments, Marston never allows the audience to be absorbed in the fictional setting. If it was not clear that the forced comic ending of *Antonio & Mellida* provided a false catharsis, *Antonio's Revenge* simply crosses out the artificial ending and starts over, while the over-the-top validation of the Kydian revenge fantasy denudes the

¹¹⁵ See "Marston's self-conscious tragic pattern [of] distanc[ing] his audience from the fiction" in Colley, 86; and Piero's "staging of actors in an almost Brechtian manner" in Leonard, "Embracing the 'Mongrel,'" 67.

fantasy and renders it hollow. Marston's drama belabors the *fiction* in the *theatrum mundi* trope: just as he accepts that the job of poets is to “fayne and lye” in his battle of wits with Maria Perez de Recalde, Marston seems to insist that feigning is the condition of life. In this, Marston and Jonson seem to have come to a similar conclusion, though Jonson’s response is more clearly one of anxiety verging on despair. In the Induction to *Antonio & Mellida*, Alberto's player insists that “if you cannot bear two subtle fronts under one hood, idiot go by, off this world's stage” (“Induction,” 78-9), which Colley glosses as an equivalence between the “qualities necessary for living in the real world” and “the attributes one should use in feigning upon the stage.”¹¹⁶ Marston accepts Kyd's world of despair, but he replaces revenge fantasy with a Democritean theatricality that joins laughter and religion: to see the unreality in reality and laugh, to see the futility of our worldly frustrations and laugh—this becomes Marston's cathartic solution. However, such a solution does not resolve the *contemptus mundi* attitude so much as deepen it. By revealing the pleasures of the revenge fantasy to be hollow narrative fictions, Marstonian catharsis refuses to take the problem of *ressentiment* seriously; moreover, the larger implications of Marston's *theatrum mundi* cast narrative as the mere structuring of an intolerable reality within a tolerable frame, which borders on a disturbingly nihilistic revelation that our existence relies on our ability to accept the very lies Marston strips bare.

¹¹⁶ Colley, *Marston's Drama*, 52.

vi. “bespurtle whom thou pleasest”; or, the antipolitics of dogs in *The Malcontent*

If *Hamlet*, as I will attempt to demonstrate in the next chapter, is the most complex use of the malcontent figure in early modern literature, the *Malcontent* (1603) is oddly the most obscure.¹¹⁷ *The Malcontent* follows Altofronto, the dispossessed Duke of Genoa, who disguises himself as the malcontent courtier Malevole. Like a more skillful and stable Hamlet, the usurping Duke Pietro sees Malevole’s mad rhetoric as entertaining rather than dangerous, allowing him to avoid suspicion and manipulate events to purge the court of vices and regain his status as Duke. What is shocking about the play, in early modern terms, is that no one dies—to focus only on the main plot, order is restored through mock-murders that cause Pietro to willingly hand over the throne, while the true villain, the machiavel Mendoza, is revealed, imprisoned but spared.

Is the play the simple tragicomedy that it appears to be on the surface, a reversion to a theory of instrumental masks that Jonson had abandoned years before? Or is it a more ironic expression of political despair in a machiavellian universe, exposing the fantasy of the “good ruler” able to employ policy for the common good? These questions of political philosophy have not been of much interest to recent critics, although there was a brief flurry of interest in the 1970s. While these works debate the extent to which Malevole and Altofronto are coterminous or the extent to which the malcontent overlaps with the machiavel, most interpretations agree on two points: that the play’s ending, as it

¹¹⁷ W. David Kay establishes the date of the *Malcontent* as definitively between 1602 and 5 July 1604, favoring a date of late 1603/early 1604. The play’s close relationship to *Hamlet*, though, and Sly’s assertion that he’d seen the play “often” in Webster’s 1604 Induction both suggest an earlier date, especially taking into account the closure of the theaters due to plague for most of 1603. That the play’s performances were cut short by the plague might also explain Condell’s reply to Sly that the play was “lost.” Cf. Marston, *The Malcontent*, xiv–xvi. Parenthetical references to *The Malcontent* refer to this edition.

seems, instates and creates an ideal ruler (given the corrupt state of the world); and that the play ultimately ratifies the power of satirical catharsis for social change.¹¹⁸ One of the earliest of these is also one of the most nuanced: Finkelpearl argues that the play's malcontent is a "virtuous machiavellian" who has come to terms with the machiavellian universe and mastered policy to turn it to good ends, but the play also acknowledges "what it must cost the morally innocent to participate in a degraded society."¹¹⁹ There are two more recent arguments that warrant attention. Burnett's insightful summary of the malcontent stage type notes that society's plague in the *Malcontent* is rooted in Marston's favorite theme, "corrupted sexuality," and that "questions" remain regarding Malevole's fitness to rule, but his question is whether or not Malevole has learned his lesson about the need for "political perspicacity" (although Malevole's mastery of policy and "temporizing" seem to definitively answer this question), rather than a problem with his status as malcontent.¹²⁰ Michael Cordner, meanwhile, draws on actual performance experience and, putting the *Malcontent* in dialogue with *Hamlet*, argues that Malevole

¹¹⁸ William Slight counters Finkelpearl by separating the machiavel and malcontent based on their core motivation: lust for power versus disgust for power; ultimately, however, his analysis is less nuanced, arguing that Altofronto's time as Malevole serves as a self-catharsis of his *contemptus mundi* attitude which prepares him for wise rule. William Babula's argument is even more typical of the optimistic reading, seeing Malevole's "destruction" as "a cloak for [Altofronto's] construction" (51): the tragicomic form, he argues, is Marston's solution to the "dead end" of revenge tragedy (50), since the comic resolution allows for an efficaciously redemptive satirical catharsis (57). R. A. Foakes's criticism of the play as "see-saw[ing]" between "fooling" and "moralizing" in favor of the "fully successful fusion" in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is an interesting corrective: "since there is nothing to sustain in action what is serious in the dialogue," he argues, "the total effect is weighted toward the absurd" (71). Such absurdity, a key feature of the Antonio plays as well, does not mean we must discard the play's moral questions, but rather we must attend more to the nihilistic qualities of the play—placing it more in the company of Kierkegaard, Camus, and Sartre than the "preachings" Jonson sees. William W. E. Slight, "'Elder in a Deform'd Church': The Function of Marston's Malcontent," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 13 (1973): 360–73; William Babula, "The Avenger and the Satirist: John Marston's Malevole," in *The Elizabethan Theater*, ed. G. R. Hibbard, vol. VI (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978), 48–58; R. A. Foakes, "On Marston, *The Malcontent*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy*," in *The Elizabethan Theater*, ed. G. R. Hibbard, vol. VI (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978), 59–75; as well as Colley, *Marston's Drama*, 119–52. Important earlier arguments include Campbell, "Hamlet and Other Malcontents," 142–50; Kernan, *Cankered Muse*, 211–18.

¹¹⁹ Finkelpearl, *Middle Temple*, 178–94 (esp. 188, 194).

¹²⁰ Thornton Burnett, "Staging the Malcontent," 348–49.

remains a malcontent who sacrificially accepts the role of ruler which, as Malevole tells Pietro, is in reality the role of “royal jailer”—“*a gaoler’s office to keep men in bonds*” (*Malcontent*, IV.v.117).¹²¹ Inherent, however, in all of these arguments (even Burnett and Cordner’s) is a belief that underlies most critical encounters with the malcontent: the malcontent is just not as interesting as the machiavel, or the satirist, etc.¹²² Rather than seeing the malcontent as a constellation or crucible of some of the early modern period’s most pressing anxieties, they are taken as separable topics, leaving the utility of the malcontent as a hermeneutic rather impoverished.¹²³

I have argued that the malcontent stage type emerges directly out of the stage machiavels of Kyd and Marlowe (Chapter 3). Rather than belaboring this genealogy, this reading of the *Malcontent* will return to the question of the play’s central political (and theological) problematics first by reversing the priority of the “mask”: given Jonson’s dizzying conjunction of persona and character in *EMO*, we can reassess William Slight’s assertion that “The tension between Altofronto and Malevole is not the result of total opposition in attitudes, but rather of Altofronto’s revulsion at recognizing the

¹²¹ Michael Cordner, “*The Malcontent* and the Hamlet Aftermath,” *Shakespeare Bulletin* 31, no. 2 (2013): 165-90 (esp. 182-3).

¹²² Like *Hamlet*, critics of the *Malcontent* follow Babb in treating the malcontent as a set of static, cliché conventions. In fact, as I have endeavored to demonstrate, the malcontent stage type is a dynamic synthesis shifting with each instantiation, with one finger on the pulse of generic experimentation and another on the emerging social taxonomy through the lens of character.

¹²³ One partial exception to this tendency, which I left out of the 1970s conversation, is Lyons’s study of melancholy, which is the most thorough treatment of literary representations of melancholy I know. Lyons argues that *The Malcontent* best mines the “potentiality of the malcontent satirist for heroism and for true vision” (“except for *Hamlet*”), demonstrating the compelling dramatic possibilities of synthesizing the melancholic, satirist, and revenger. She prefers *Hamlet*, however, for its ability to demonstrate “that the good and bad aspects of melancholy are inextricably connected.” Unfortunately, Lyons spends only a few pages supporting this reading of *The Malcontent*, but I think Lyons’s assertions are useful with two caveats: I do not think that “hero” is a useful lens for understanding Malevole (or most early modern protagonists); and, as I will argue in this section, I think that the central questions of *The Malcontent* are so thorny that the very frame of “good and bad aspects of melancholy” is far too morally unambiguous such that they can only hinder interpretation of the play. Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy*, 73–75.

grotesqueness of this caricature of himself.”¹²⁴ While at some level this is true, all of the analyses of the distance or proximity of the Altofronto/Macilente dyad take as their start one obvious assumption: that Altofronto is the primary or fundamental *character*. I have wrestled with the *Malcontent* for some years now, and my own frustrations with it, my sense that there was something trite and disingenuous in it that was highly un-Marstonian, emerged primarily from this assumption. And while it may seem like a bit of rhetorical trickery, what we find when we analyze Malevole as primary is a much richer character that draws on Marston’s long engagement with the ambivalent social value of the malcontent type, the satirist’s paradoxical relationship with dogs, and the nihilistic potential of cynical philosophy as expressed through the “dog” philosopher Diogenes of Sinope.

Second, although the *Malcontent* is Marston’s most studied work, it is considered apart from the *poetomachia* which has garnered a great deal of critical attention. *Hamlet* has been noted as tangentially related through the “little eyases” passage, but clearly neither are parading on allegorical parodies of particular playwrights. However, the *Malcontent* and, as I will argue in the next chapter, *Hamlet* are in fact extensions of the central question of the *poetomachia*, which was of course more than a mere professional squabble. Jonson first raised this question: *what is the relation between poetry, particularly satire, and sovereignty?* Although the question continued to concern Jonson throughout his career, *Hamlet* and the *Malcontent* might be considered a side conversation between Shakespeare and Marston—one which is hard to make out because Shakespeare shifted the genre and stakes of the conversation. In this section, I will take

¹²⁴ Slight, “Function of Marston’s *Malcontent*,” 365.

the *Malcontent* on its own grounds: since the play is so ambiguous, we do not need to approach it as an “answer” to *Hamlet*, while it is more enlightening to reframe *Hamlet* in terms of Marston than the other way around.

If the *Malcontent* is indeed as comic as it seems, then the play attempts to supplant the revenge fantasy through the same Democritean theatricality as the Antonio plays: joining laughter and religion to create a transcendental catharsis. In doing so, however, it indulges in a vapid tragicomic fantasy of theocracy, figuring the satirist-malcontent’s antic rejection of the world as somehow the *technē* of the philosopher-king—in this way, Marston’s Altofronto/Malevole becomes a more successful version of Asper/Macilente, because the absolute authority that Jonson lacked is supplied in the body of the malcontent king himself. This is not an unreasonable reading of the *Malcontent*, given its resonance with the Jacobean atmosphere of divine right and surveillance. However, the disguised ruler is a trope that Shakespeare also deployed around the same time in *Measure for Measure* (1604). Similarly, Jonson later upended the structure of his comical satires in *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) by having the disguised Justice Overdo perform a similar function.¹²⁵

These other plays share one thing in common that can guide a different reading of the *Malcontent*: they are “problem plays,” dark comedies verging on the tragic that undermine any comfortable understanding of power and justice. Along with the Antonio plays, the *Malcontent* is of a piece with Marston’s project to create a synthetic genre of tragicomedy, but the *Malcontent* was the first to announce this new genre, catalogued in

¹²⁵ I came across this reference too late to evaluate it, but on the origins of the disguised ruler trope and the relation between *The Malcontent* and *Measure for Measure*, see Kevin A. Quarmby, *The Disguised Ruler in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

the Stationer's Register as a "*Tragicomedia*."¹²⁶ While the play is clearly influenced by its Italian predecessors, the genre-bending experimentation of the Antonio plays should warn against too quickly assimilating the *Malcontent* to either its sources or later expressions of the genre in, for example, the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher. In fact, due to the success of this genre in post-Shakespearean drama, it is easy to forget that the generic experimentation of the *Malcontent* is *more* radical than the Antonio plays, since Marston places *A&M*'s romantic comedy in uneasy tension with the bloody tragedy of *A's Revenge*, but within their respective plotlines they do not deviate from the conventions they parody. In the *Malcontent*, Marston strikes out to internally subvert tragedy: prefiguring the stoic protagonists of Tourneur's *Atheist's Tragedy* or Chapman's *Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, Altofronto refuses to follow the course of blood vengeance and instead choreographs events to entrap the various villains in their vices, essentially putting them out of their humors in a manner similar to Asper, if darker. Generically, the play produces an Asper instilled with self-justifying authority as the rightful Duke of Genoa—an elegant but troubling solution to the dilemma of *EMO*.

Like Asper and Hamlet, Altofronto is clearly putting on an antic disposition, but Altofronto seems in control of his mask, or at least Altofronto wants to believe as much. When he moves between characters, he "*shifteth his speech*" with apparent ease (*Malcontent*, I.iv.43sd); he does not seem trapped in his character like his predecessors. At the same time, his explanation to his loyal coconspirator Celso is revealing. "Peace, temporize," he says:

¹²⁶ Marston, *The Malcontent*, xvii.

What? Play I well the free-breathed discontent?
 Why man, we are all philosophical monarchs
 Or natural fools. (I.iv.28-33)

For Altofronto, “temporize” is almost a tic, repeated again and again: his inability to temporize, or to strategically wait for a politic advantage, is what lost him his dukedom: “I wanted those old instruments of state / Dissemblance and suspect: I could not *time* it, Celso” (I.iv.9-10, *emph. added*). Now everything hinges on maintaining a philosophical separation between his temporizing and Mendoza’s machiavellian stratagems. It is worth noting that unlike Asper and Macilente, who are treated as separate characters, the *Dramatis Personae* treats Altofronto as the true character “disguised [as] MALEVOLE,” but the text treats him as “MALEVOLE” throughout, even in his final reveal. In this passage, Malevole’s explanation of his disguise is not immediately very clarifying, but rather than suggesting that we are *either* philosophers or fools, he seems to suggest that his disguise is enabled by the fact that we are *alternately* philosophers or fools. More radically, as “philosophical monarchs,” Malevole suggests we inhabit a space of individual sovereignty, standing on the threshold of society not unlike the natural fool.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ In a move that prefigures Nietzsche’s “sovereign individual,” Malevole thus thrusts all of society to the liminal space Agamben reserves for the reciprocal figures of the *homo sacer* and the sovereign. As in part a descendant of the “Wit,” the malcontent has strong connections to the fool, as is made clear through the banter between Malevole and his fool-counterpart Passarello (a role Webster added for Robert Armin). The natural fool was an amusement because he stood outside the social order, a permanent emblem of the Lord of Misrule, but as such, the fool stood for the fragile boundary of society as much as he shored it up. For Burton, while “most men are fools” in the general sense, only natural fools and stoics are immune to melancholy, since they are “*similes fere diis*” [almost like gods]. In such a disordered universe, Malevole paradoxically points to a radically anarchic collapse of the possibility of society as such even as he is attempting to impose right rule. See Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 75, 172 (“Reader”; 3.3.ii); Nietzsche, “Genealogy of Morals,” II:2; Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). On the development of the fool, see esp. Welsford, Enid, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935). For a serious consideration of the role of Passarello, see Ian Munro, “Knightly Complements: *The Malcontent* and the Matter of Wit,” *English Literary Renaissance* 40, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 215–37.

Malevole's explanation dangerously naturalizes his malcontent "persona" as a synthesis of these two sides of human nature, and thus in a sense his more basic character, as opposed to his role of sovereign which contains only one aspect—Altofronto's name, meaning "high-browed" or "wise," suggests that his character is that of the philosophical monarch alone. Malevole ("ill-willed") emphasizes that he is more character than persona as he lays out his plan: "Discord to malcontents is very manna; / When the ranks are burst, then scuffle Altofronto" (I.iv.38-39).¹²⁸ Speaking in the third person like a schizophrenic movie villain, Malevole sees himself as feeding on the court's disarray so as to give way to his alter ego's contest for the dukedom. The semi-independent reality of Malevole's character thus moves his role beyond strategic *technē* and into the realm of a more complex negotiation of the human condition. Perhaps the play is not about politic sovereignty at all, but rather a more universal meditation on the relations of power between individual and society, the latter cast in typical Calvinist terms of utter corruption.

Thus, taking Malevole's role as primary rather than "high-browed" and philosophical Altofronto, we find that he has an interesting philosophical heritage of his own. In fact, we might even say that his is an anti-philosophical heritage, rooted in misanthrope Diogenes, Machiavelli, and of course, dogs. For usurping Duke Pietro, Malevole's vitriol is too outrageous to be dangerous, so his mad biting is as much an amusement as a court fool: "Come down, thou ragged cur, and snarl here," Pietro invites. "I give thy dogged sullenness free liberty; trot about and bespurtle whom thou pleasest" (I.ii.9-11). W. David Kay, the New Mermaids editor of *The Malcontent*, notes that

¹²⁸ "Scuffle" here means "To contend vigorously or resolutely": *OED Online*, s.v. "scuffle, v.," accessed 22 February 2019.

Malevole's obsessive dog imagery and vitriolic language associates him with Diogenes the "dog," but Malevole's name links him to Machiavelli as well.¹²⁹ Perhaps Jonson's roots with Nashe rubbed off on Marston at this point (seeing that Marston has gone from baiting Jonson to dedicating *The Malcontent* to him), but surprisingly there are some hints that the Malevole character takes some sketchy inspiration from Nashe. In *Pierce Pennilesse*, Nashe tells the story of "the grunting Dogge" Diogenes spitting in his hostess's face, afterward claiming "it was the foulest place he could spie out in all [the host's] house"; then turning to Envy, Nashe shakes her awake, "for thou must appear before *Nicalao Maleuolo* great Muster maister of hell."¹³⁰ This likely allusion to Machiavelli suggests that Malevole and Mendoza are not so different: Malevole might detest the machiavellian universe in which he finds himself, but ultimately he also proves to be the best machiavel.

Thus rather than a facile comic assertion that satirists would make the best kings, the *Malcontent* seems to offer its tragicomic resolution in order to unsettle contemporary notions of kingship. Diogenes of Sinope, or Diogenes the Cynic, is the key to understanding why Marston would proffer such a malcontent monarch. Diogenes was considered dog-like (*kunikos*, the root of cynic) in an ambivalent sense. On the one hand, he claimed for himself the virtues of the dog, but on the other, he deliberately flaunted social decorum, as in Nashe's anecdote, and he too was not afraid to bespurtle his enemies. For example: "At a feast certain people kept throwing all the bones to him as they would have done to a dog. Thereupon he played a dog's trick and drenched

¹²⁹ Marston, *The Malcontent*, xx.

¹³⁰ Nashe, *Pierce Pennilesse*, C4.

them.”¹³¹ Diogene felt his antisocial behavior to be an ethical stance, however, and another anecdote describes his capture and sale as a slave in Crete: “he was asked what he could do. He replied, ‘Govern men’ [ἀνδρῶν ἄρχειν]. And he told the crier to give notice in case anybody wanted to purchase a master for himself.” Xeniadēs purchased him and took him to Corinth as a tutor for his sons.¹³² The story is similar to Plato’s tutoring of Dionysius II or Aristotle’s tutoring of Alexander the Great, but Diogenes’ eccentric mix of cynicism, misanthropy, incivility, and an odd sort of pride makes him a very different sort of ruler or teacher. *The Malcontent* gives its cynical malcontent this power to rule, refracted through the lens of the contemporary satirist, and the audience is left to puzzle out whether we would buy ourselves such a master.

Although the most complete collection of the accounts regarding Diogenes the Cynic, in the *Lives* of his namesake Diogenes Laertius, would not be translated into English until the late 17th century, anecdotes and references to Diogenes abounded. Most importantly, Diogenes appears as a *parrhesiastes* in both John Lyly’s *A moste excellent Comedie of Alexander, Campaspe, and Diogenes* (1584) and Thomas Lodge’s *Catharos: Diogenes in his singularity* (1591). In *Catharos*, “good Diogenes” is a “dogge that biteth men but for their amendment, and not for envy[,]” while *Campaspe* dramatizes some of the most famous moments of his life: the tub (*pithos*) in which he slept, his search for an honest man with a lantern in broad daylight, and his scornful meeting with Alexander the Great.¹³³ In both cases, Diogenes is a sanitized contemporary satirist, whose dogged

¹³¹ Diogenes Laertius, “Diogenes,” in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks, vol. 2 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1925), 48–49.

¹³² Diogenes Laertius, 30–33. The story is retold at Diogenes Laertius, 76–77.

¹³³ Lodge, Thomas, *Catharos. Diogenes in his singularity* (London, 1591): 29–31, *EEBO*, accessed 22 February 2019, [DEV/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99845209](https://openurl.org/ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99845209); Lyly, John, *Campaspe* (London, 1584), *EEBO*,

pursuit of sin is annoying but salutary. He is certainly not the uncouth creature depicted in many of the anecdotes. Malevole is thus partly fashioned in this likeness, but Marston encompasses Diogenes' most thoroughly antisocial traits, which he had already sketched in the *Scourge*, "A Cynicke Satyre" (VII). The satire takes as its inspiration Diogenes' search for anyone truly rising to the level of "human": "He lit a lamp in broad daylight and said, as he went about, 'I am looking for a man.'"¹³⁴ Imitating Marston's favorite Shakespearean line, Satire VII's cynic seeks any man who rises above the level of swine:

A Man, a man, a kingdome for a man.
 Why how now currish mad *Athenian*?
 Thou Cynick dogge, see'st not streets do swarme
 With troupes of men? No, no, for *Circes* charme
 Hath turn'd them all to swine[.] (*Scourge*, VII.1-5)

Diogenes interlocutor takes him through the streets of London, but one by one the cynic finds them merely a part of the "brutish world," in "vileness drown'd" and full of nothing but "Resemblances of men[.]" For a moment even Diogenes is captured, though, by "*a celestiall Angell*," only to realize that it is a painted woman. It is hard to tell whether the final lines belong to Diogenes, the interlocutor, or both, but this illusory moment of hope plunge the poem into true despair with a misogynistic flourish: it concludes that the souls of men are such "foule filth" that they could not possibly emanate from the purity of God (VII.140-96).

Malevole frames the world in terms that surpass even this satire's disgust in his famous Golgotha speech:

Think this: this earth is the only grave and Golgotha wherein all things that live must rot. 'Tis but the draught wherein the heavenly bodies discharge their

accessed 22 February 2019, [DEV/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:44920364](#).

¹³⁴ Diogenes Laertius, "Diogenes," 42–43.

corruption, the very muckhill on which the sublunary orbs cast their excrements.
 Man is the slime of this dung-pit, and princes are the governors of these men. [...] *A gaoler's office to keep men in bonds,*
Whilst toil and treason all life's good confounds. (IV.v.107-118).

To be sure, Malevole here is trying to convince Pietro that giving up his dukedom means nothing, but how purely instrumental is this speech? Like Hamlet's most grotesque imagery, Malevole's imagination itself seems diseased. Of course, we might wonder how seconds later Malevole can say without any apparent trouble, "Who doubts of Providence[?]" (IV.v.138).¹³⁵ Slights, for one, insists on Marston's orthodoxy: "the workings of a radical or innovative moralist do not stand up under scrutiny."¹³⁶ Indeed, Marston is perhaps even more orthodox than Slights realizes, however: there is no contradiction between Malevole's description of the corrupt world and the Calvinist doctrine of original sin. John Gillies describes this doctrine "of radical doubt of human goodness" as the foundation of *Hamlet*: "The whole personal and interpersonal world said to be under sin in the play is imagined with a depth and mastery without precedent in Shakespeare."¹³⁷ I believe that this grotesque vision of human nature is without precedent precisely because Shakespeare was founding that vision on Marston's verse satire (see Chapter 5).

So Malevole's essential vision is orthodox, but the perversity and relish of his language—the rot and slime of an earth that is simultaneously corpse and latrine—suggest a mind veering between gallows humor and despair. If this were Altofronto's

¹³⁵ Colley argues that Malevole problematically "equates Divine Providence with a mere change of luck." While Malevole's providence is certainly as tricky as Hamlet's, the argument ignores the orthodox view that the vagaries of luck or fortune *are* providence misunderstood in human terms, and that given the extent of human corruption that Malevole just described, the redemption of any soul is pretty literally a miracle. Colley, *Marston's Drama*, 121.

¹³⁶ Slight, "Function of Marston's Malcontent," 373.

¹³⁷ John Gillies, "The Question of Original Sin in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 398–99.

campaign speech, I imagine his constituents would be troubled, to say the least. As Angus Gowland emphasizes, increasingly Calvinism was seen to lodge melancholy dangerously at the heart of religious affective experience and anxiety over predestination—the despair that leads to salvation and despair that leads to damnation might as well be the same road.¹³⁸ As much as lust, such despair was Marston’s continual preoccupation.¹³⁹ As Arnold Davenport argues, Marston’s experience of human depravity—the ubiquity of lust, machiavellianism, and “the Calvinist vision of man as radically corrupt and quite impotent, of his own power, to cleanse himself”—“made a man like Marston uncertain that any remedy could be found. It was the imminence of such despair that troubled Marston[.]”¹⁴⁰ We might thus understand the “absurd” that R. A. Foakes perceives in the play in this light: it is not that the absurdity of the action undercuts the serious moments of dialogue, but rather the absurdity underscores the view of the world as so insipid, vacuous, and vicious that the only reasonable responses are the recourses of madness—laughter or suicide.¹⁴¹

Unlike the malcontents of the Antonio plays, *Malevole* is a rather direct response to the criticisms of Kinsayder: he promotes the “madde dogge” to mad Duke. Marston is responding not only to Hall but to *Return from Parnassus, Pt. II* (1601/2), the final part of a trilogy of academic plays performed at St. John’s College which bemoan the plight of the scholar-poet. The play conflates Marston and his Kinsayder in no uncertain terms. Ingenioso asks Judicio to censure a list of poets in a compilation of contemporary poetry,

¹³⁸ Gowland, “Problem of Melancholy,” 103–8.

¹³⁹ On the intense obsession with sex in politics and sex as politics, which is beyond my present scope, see T. F. Wharton, “Sexual Politics in Marston’s ‘The Malcontent,’” in *The Drama of John Marston: Critical Re-Visions*, ed. T. F. Wharton (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 181–93.

¹⁴⁰ Marston, *Poems of Marston*, 26.

¹⁴¹ Foakes, “On Marston, *The Malcontent*, and *The Revenger’s Tragedy*,” 71.

one by one down the table of contents; Judicio's reaction to "John Marston" is shockingly indecorous: "What, Monsieur Kinsayder, lifting up your leg and pissing against the world? put up, man, put up for shame." Yet as Paula Glatzer notes, this is imitation of Marston's own disregard for the decorous, and there is a clear respect for Marston's combativeness (the "ruffian" who "Cuts, thrusts, and foines at whomsoever he meets") and plain style ("That might beseem a plain-dealing Aretine").¹⁴² Moreover, as the scholar-poets' frustration increases, they become increasingly Marstonian—particularly Furor, who calls himself a "masty dog" who can ultimately do nothing "but bark and howl[.]" Despite its obscurity, *Return from Parnassus, Pt. II* is the ship via which we travel from the Isle of Dogs to Marston's Genoa, or rather Furor brings the dogs to Genoa: as their muses continue to be unprofitable, Ingenioso, Phantasma, and Furor leave "musty, dusty, rusty, fusty London" for "The Isle of Dogs, there where the blatant beast doth rule and reign [...]" And there our vexed breath in snarling waste." Perhaps the most malcontent play, *Parnassus* ends in "discontent," breaking "the laws of every comic stage[.]"¹⁴³ The final lines of the *Parnassus* trilogy are the clearest expression of the complexity of dog imagery in early modern satire: the terrible lesson of the fragmentary end of *The Faerie Queene*, the *Parnassus* poet proclaims, is that in a world ruled by the Blatant Beast who torments the true poet, the true poet has no choice but to become just another snarling, besputtling dog.¹⁴⁴

On this, Nashe, Jonson, and Marston all seem to agree, although Jonson perhaps reluctantly. For all their differences, Marston's embrace of this urinary imagery is a

¹⁴² Smeaton, *Return from Parnassus, Pt. II*, I.ii.154-67; Paula Glatzer, *The Complaint of the Poet: The Parnassus Plays* (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1977), 258–59.

¹⁴³ Smeaton, *Return from Parnassus, Pt. II*, I.iv.37-139.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Glatzer, *Parnassus Plays*, 329–31.

strong point of crossover with Jonson's own self-representation. In his angrier moments, Jonson too is ready to "spout ink" in the faces of the vicious, as he says in the Epistle to *Volpone*; this ink is apparently a favored euphemism: in his "Apologetical Dialogue" to *Poetaster*, the "Author" rails, "But, they that have incens'd me, can in soul / Acquit me of that guilt. They know I dare / To spurn, or baffle 'em; or squirt their eyes / With ink, or urine[.]"¹⁴⁵ For both Jonson and Marston, their satire vacillates between true anger and mere revelry. As the typically Marstonian half-palinode of the *Scourge* puts it:

Here ends my rage, though angry brow was bent,
Yet I haue sung in sporting merriment.
FINIS. (Scourge, XI.239-40).

The *Scourge* does not end here, though. A final poem caps the volume, "To euerlasting *Obluion*," which prefigures Marston's epitaph. This poem seeks oblivion for both the seeker and his poetry, a shade "To vaile both me and my rude poesie" from the "hate and furie" of the world: "Peace hatefull tongues, I now in silence pace, / Vnlesse some hound doe wake me from my place" ("Oblivion," 8-17). The eschewing of public quarrel is a surprising sentiment coming from the fiery young Marston who would shortly spark off the *poetomachia*, but Marston would eventually follow through on this promise. One of the few things we know of Marston following his retirement is that he insisted an edition of his plays remove any trace of his name in 1633.¹⁴⁶ Jonson's violent poetics is one of inscription, engraving his name in the archive, even if that name increasingly stands for something equivocal and frustrated; Marston's poetics, for all its bombast, seems predicated more on a desire to escape the absurdity around him through "sporting merriment."

¹⁴⁵ Dutton, *Jonson*, 179, 190.

¹⁴⁶ Thornton Burnett, "Staging the Malcontent," 342.

Of all Marston's plays, *The Malcontent* most directly depicts the Calvinist worldview and the revulsion it produces. Jonson told Drummond that "Marston wrote his father-in-law's preachings, and his father-in-law his comedies."¹⁴⁷ He was almost certainly thinking of *The Malcontent*. The corruption of true religion is a constant preoccupation of Malevole, and Malevole's bloodless re-usurpation rights the divine order:

*birth doth ne'er enroll
A man 'mong monarchs, but a glorious soul.
[...]
When they observe not Heaven's imposed conditions,
They are no kings, but forfeit their commissions. (Malcontent, V.vi.131-45)*

If *Antonio's Revenge* ends by celebrating sadistic torture and murder, the *Malcontent* ends seemingly with an affirmation of the divine right of kings. Yet are monarchs the jailers locking themselves in with the slime, or are they glorious souls who uphold right religion? Are Heaven's conditions and the corrupt discharge of heavenly bodies one and the same? In one of the best examinations of the difficulties of producing a coherent reading of the play's political and theological issues, Colley argues that "Malevole illustrates several contradictory postures that reflect Marston's own moral and artistic confusion."¹⁴⁸ However, like many interpretations, Colley puts this down to Marston's ineptitude.

I think it is more productive to see Marston's radical experiments as herculean efforts to represent dilemmas he found irresolvable and to present them as such to his audiences. Nor does Marston leave us without viable interpretations. In part, Malevole's

¹⁴⁷ Ben Jonson, "Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden," in *The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 466 (ll. 198-9).

¹⁴⁸ Colley, *Marston's Drama*, 120.

escape from Diogenes' despairing search for a man is enabled by his Griselda-like testing of Maria. While the cynic of Satire VII discovers the artifice of women and despairs, Malevole's belief in true virtue is restored: "I tell thee, I have found an honest woman" (V.iii.34). Moreover, Malevole is speaking now in the person of Altofronto—his "campaign speech" moment is indeed radically different from his pitch to Pietro. On the one hand, we can thus see the Golgotha speech as purely instrumental, which would make him no better than the machiavel Mendoza. On the other, we can see his experience of true virtue as transformative, reaffirming his faith in humanity, in which case we must note that for all of his machinations, Malevole does not put his subjects "out of their humors": order is restored, but only Aurelia and perhaps Pietro seem fundamentally changed. Malevole has managed to change the positions of all the pieces, but the pieces remain for the most part untouched. Just as "birth" chooses the soul of a monarch, a certain Calvinist fatalism underlies whether we are virtuous or vicious, and we cannot simply argue, as Babula does, that the play confirms the redemptive power of satirical catharsis.¹⁴⁹

Then there is the most dangerous part of Malevole's pronouncement: although Malevole has a claim to legitimacy that avoids the taint of rebellion, there is a lingering suggestion that irreligious monarchs can be deposed. These lines conclude an addition, probably by Marston, that elaborates on the dangers and sins of great men. This theory of resistance, I will argue, is a primary concern of *Hamlet*, but the censors were apparently concerned enough with the line that they changed "kings" to "men" (V.vi.133-54n). Oddly enough, this archival emendation opens up a further unintended interpretation:

¹⁴⁹ Babula, "Malevole," 57.

those who do not follow Heaven's commandments cannot even claim for themselves the title of human being. In this construction, Malevole is once more echoing Diogenes seeking a man with his lamp, suggesting that Malevole's essential character remains, even as Altofronto becomes the face and voice of authority. Moreover, such a shift from king to men hearkens back to Malevole's description of mankind, also in Altofronto's voice, as either philosophical monarchs or natural fools. *The Malcontent* restores temporal order, but at the cost of individual sovereignty in service of playing the role of sovereign.¹⁵⁰ However grotesque the Duke may have found his role as Malevole, committing to the role of Altofronto means significantly stunting his self-expression and even the kind of world he can acknowledge.

Ultimately, the *Malcontent* is less a play about deception than it is about futility. For all its comic, orthodox ending, like all of Marston's plays, it highlights the artifice of that ending, which is what I find so frustrating about the play. The *Malcontent* does not go so far as to dramatize despair, as Marston's satires often do, but it doesn't end with sporting merriment either. As Colley notes, the restoration of order is also an acknowledgment that evil transcends the human capacities of judgment or punishment.¹⁵¹ Vengeance belongs to God not so much because we are too corrupt to cast stones, but more importantly, the *scale* of the problem of evil is staggering and far beyond any temporal techniques of justice.

¹⁵⁰ As Douglas Lanier interprets Altofronto's "Heaven's imposed conditions" speech, "A duke must never be seduced, as Mendoza is, by the temptation to be anything more than power's representation." Lanier, "Satire, Self-Concealment, & Statecraft," 40.

¹⁵¹ Colley argues the "Malevole's refusal to take any action is his admission that there is no possibility for earthly resolution or earthly judgment for the sin of the world." He goes a bit too far when he continues that "neither Marston nor Malevole was able or willing to assess in human or secular terms the problems of evil that are documented in the play." Colley, *Marston's Drama*, 124.

According to one account, Diogenes died of dog bite.¹⁵² Perhaps we should see Marston's retreat from the "hound" in the same light—ultimately, it is Jonson, not Marston, who is the poet Furor consigning himself to the Isle of Dogs, while Marston escapes doghood into deaconhood. In a very Jonsonian manner, Marston even argues that he only printed *The Malcontent* to combat those "unadvisedly over-cunning in misinterpreting," but even then he is at the mercy of the printer because of an "enforced absence" and afflicted by the thought "that scenes invented merely to be spoken should be enforcively published to be read" (*Malcontent*, "Reader," 5-6). Marston's physical absences and retirement from the world mirror his poetics of oblivion, which prefers the intensity but ephemerality of momentary conflict and the un-inscribable nuance of the spoken word. His self-concealment and self-effacement create a poetry that seems to truly embrace Sidney's assertion that the poet never affirmeth, and there is a modest but depressing admission that poetry's power may extend little further than allowing us some pleasant relief from the knowledge that we have almost no power over the events of our world. At the same time, such modesty is balanced by a depth of anger and resentment that the *Malcontent*'s pat ending exacerbates rather than contains.

¹⁵² Diogenes Laertius, "Diogenes," 78–81.

Chapter Five: To Kill a King in the Malcontent *Hamlet*

“The Philosopher doth note, *that kindomes are subverted by subtiltie, and guile.*
Doest thou say it is not lawfull to conserve them by the same meanes? and that the
Prince may not sometimes *having to deale with a foxe, play the foxe[?]*”

- Justus Lipsius, *Politicorum* IV (1589)

“Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one
himself. And when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back
into you.”

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* IV.146¹

i. A most moral malcontent: Revising the received Hamlet

A beautiful, pure, noble and most moral nature, without the strength of mind
which forms a hero, sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear and which it
must not renounce. He views every duty as holy, but this one is too much for
him.²

This is how Goethe's Wilhelm understood Hamlet in 1796. A key example of Weimar
Classicism (and thus in close relation and opposition to German Romanticism), *Wilhelm
Meisters Lehrjahre* is a novel obsessed with reinterpreting, revising, and rewriting
Hamlet. German Romanticism and the Romantic pessimism that emerged from it took
Goethe's sympathetic, sensitive Hamlet as their Everyman, a *Gestalt* discovering its own
resonances in a recently recuperated play. This Hamlet has become *the* Hamlet, presaging
the rise of modern subjectivity. As William Diamond put it in 1925, “the popular Hamlet
has been Wilhelm Meister's Hamlet and the majority of the innumerable critical theories
are mere variations of Wilhelm Meister's interpretation.”³ Little has changed: even over

¹ Judith Norman's translation from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a
Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge Texts in the History
of Philosophy (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 69.

² The translation is William Diamond's, from “Wilhelm Meister's Interpretation of Hamlet,”
Modern Philology 23, no. 1 (August 1925): 90.

³ Diamond, 89.

two centuries later, most contemporary readers would find Goethe's Hamlet to be more or less their own.

T. S. Eliot famously warned that many critics, like Goethe, have tended to find themselves reflected in the mirror of Hamlet, wrenching the charismatic character from the context of the play.⁴ Fortunately, Margreta de Grazia's "*Hamlet*" *without Hamlet* has taken Eliot's warning to heart and laid the groundwork for a more historicized *Hamlet*.⁵ De Grazia's book recognizes that the play *Hamlet* is about dispossession. Framing the play in terms of problems of *land* allows de Grazia to develop radically new (or old) readings of the play; however, by fully de-centering the *character* of Hamlet, his *type* has also eluded de Grazia's analysis. This chapter builds on an alternative line of *Hamlet* criticism developed through Greenblatt, de Grazia, and András Kiséry: analyzing Hamlet *qua* malcontent, without losing sight of the play's context, will allow us to appreciate another layer of cultural problems addressed in the play.

Revising our received Hamlet *qua* malcontent leads us to a more serious reconsideration of the play's sources and contexts, namely Shakespeare's primary source, François Belleforest's *histoire tragique* of Amleth, and Belleforest's relation to the Huguenot conflict in France. The primary concern haunting *Hamlet* is the foundational anxiety at the heart of Renaissance rhetorics of discontent: tyrannicide. After the murder of thousands of Huguenots at the hands of mob justice in the 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, Huguenots began publishing proto-republican monarchomach tracts which established two important political narratives. First, they cast the Massacre as a fratricidal attempt by Charles to murder his brother Navarre, the future Henri IV; second,

⁴ T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet," in *Elizabethan Essays* (New York: Haskell House, 1964), 55.

⁵ De Grazia, "*Hamlet*" *without Hamlet*.

they developed a theory of legitimate resistance to monarchical authority, primarily founded on the principles of Calvinist religious conscience and the “election” of a monarch by the will of the people. That Shakespeare chose to frame this problem in terms of the malcontent should not surprise us; as we have seen, the malcontent figure was significantly shaped by Huguenot discontent, also the origin of the most prominent justifications of tyrannicide. The most important of these tracts, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1579), was written by either Sidney's mentor Hubert Languet or his friend Philippe de Mornay (the “Huguenot pope”).⁶ Whoever the actual author, the pseudonym “Stephanus Junius Brutus” dangerously gestures to both Lucius Junius Brutus' expulsion of the monarch Tarquinius, founding republican Rome, and the regicide of Caesar by Lucius' descendant Marcus Junius Brutus. The great political and religious binary of the period—the war of Protestant vs. Catholic—has largely obscured the anxiety with which Protestants viewed other Protestants.

Belleforest, who published the Amleth episode two years before the Massacre, was a major opponent of the Huguenots and a famous apologist for the Massacre. He depicts Amleth as a rightful prince ridding the kingdom of a usurper and emphasizes that

⁶ It is worth noting that EEBO attests Latin versions printed *abroad* in 1579 and 1580, with the first available English translation in 1588 of only the 4th Question (avoiding the inflammatory 3rd Question), and then several complete translations printed in the crucial year 1648, during the second civil war that finally deposed Charles I. The 1588 translation, printed by provocateur-publisher John Wolfe, avoids translating either the title or subtitles, claiming that this “short apologie for Christian souldiours” has been printed “for the benefite of the resolution of the Church of England, in defence of the Gospel.” The 1648 editions pointedly translate the original in its entirety: “A Defense of Liberty against Tyrants, OR, Of the lawfull power of the Prince over the people, and of the people over the Prince” (*VINDICIAE, CONTRA TYRANNOS: SIVE, DE PRINCIPIS IN Populum, Populique in Principem*). Cf. Languet, Hubert, *A short apologie for Christian souldiours*, trans. H.P. (London: 1588): sig. A1^r, *EEBO*, accessed 9 January 2017, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99841291; Languet, Hubert, *Vindiciae contra tyrannos*, trans. H.P. (London: 1648): sig. A1^r, *EEBO*, accessed 9 January 2017, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:14471436.

a sovereign may not be resisted under any circumstances. In superimposing the malcontent figure on the Amleth hero, Shakespeare both recognizes the origin of the term in the Huguenot conflict and entangles Belleforest's account in the complicated heritage of the stage malcontent. Shakespeare puts on trial the Huguenot notions of conscience and election as sources of political authority, shoring up Belleforest's often weak and paradoxical account of monarchical authority. In Belleforest's account, Hamlet succeeds in his vengeance against his uncle and is crowned king by his people; Shakespeare, by contrast, presents us with a blood-soaked stage and a Denmark left vulnerable to a foreign power. Rather than a usurper, Shakespeare's Claudius is a legitimate monarch legally elected, and where Belleforest presents a rightful prince strategically feigning madness, Shakespeare's Hamlet is a humorally imbalanced, disgruntled noble who eventually comes to justify murder with a clear and "perfect" conscience.

While English Protestants certainly viewed the Catholic slaughter of Protestants in France and the Netherlands with horror, after the assassination of Henri III by a Dominican friar (1589), Elizabeth and her court could hardly take even an anti-Catholic justification of tyrannicide lightly, particularly with the ubiquitous threat of assassination that plagued Elizabeth's reign. Meanwhile, Calvinism, the dominant theology in England, emphasized conscience as the supreme authority even over earthly princes, a *contemptus mundi* attitude, and a dangerous reliance on despair as a spur to faith. In other words, not only could Calvinist doctrine be seen as supporting active resistance of the sort propagated by the Huguenots, Calvinism shared a deep-rooted affinity with discourses of melancholy. The title of a later seventeenth-century sermon distills this growing criticism: "*Spiritus Calvinisticus est spiritus melancholicus.*" Similarly, Burton's

Anatomy, confounding spiritual despair and natural melancholy, was in part an attack on Calvinism as one of the roots of the early modern epidemic of melancholy.⁷

Hamlet's engagement with tyrannicide and melancholy places the play at the crux of two of the most morally fraught issues of the early modern period. Revising the received *Hamlet* through a historicized sense of the malcontent figure renews and complicates the old critical debate about the “morality” of Hamlet's revenge. Recent criticism has lost interest in the moral status of Hamlet's character; Maynard Mack's description in 1952 of Hamlet's status as a universal human paradigm embedded in our cultural consciousness has become axiomatic. However close critics come to understanding the revenger-protagonist as something truly awful, they stop short with Hamlet in particular, finding a way to acquit him at the last moment. Fredson Bowers, for example, makes the classic and influential argument that tragic events exert an external force on the “hero [Hamlet] with sufficient intensity to warp his character, drive him to insanity, and eventually to deal him ruin in victory.”⁸ The gravitational pull of the hero-axiom continues to exert force on more recent critical discussions which have no interest in questioning Hamlet's moral character *per se*—whether it is Hamlet as the lost potential of the republican *princeps*; as the locus of the shift from political action to economic activity; or as the death of the scene and the limits of political interaction.⁹ We receive a more compelling insight into Hamlet's position in the narrative from Katherine Bootle Attie's reading of the play through the *Republic*. Against the hero-axiom, she quietly

⁷ Gowland, “Problem of Melancholy,” 107–8. The sermon title, quoted by Gowland, is recorded in the diary of Ralph Thoresby (9 Jan. 1681).

⁸ Bowers, *Revenge Tragedy*, 154–55.

⁹ Julia Reinhard Lupton, “Hamlet, Prince: Tragedy, Citizenship, and Political Theology,” in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. Diana E. Henderson, vol. 3 (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), 181–203; Richard Halpern, “Eclipse of Action: ‘Hamlet’ and the Political Economy of Playing,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 450–82; Kottman, *Politics of the Scene*.

insinuates that if “tyranny” is a state of analogous political and spiritual disproportion, then Claudius' external political tyranny mirrors Hamlet's internal spiritual tyranny.¹⁰

Viewing Hamlet as one who is himself crucially implicated in and symptomatic of Denmarkian “rottenness” elaborates Peter Mercer's assertion that in *Hamlet*, satire and revenge are “always failing to cohere, always breeding radical contradiction.”¹¹

The revenger literalizes the satirist's most violent impulses of worldly rejection, and as such revenge tragedy is satiric tragedy; however, *Hamlet* also demonstrates that the revenger is the malcontent's fantastic wish fulfillment. The malcontent resorts to satire because all avenues of effective action are blocked, leaving only complaint. The satirist's static position of vitriolic futility is poetically transmuted into the oddly negative action of the revenger, whose destructive actions are unconstrained by the confines of reality. Mapping these two positions onto one another, as *Hamlet* does, produces the strange effect of undermining the possibility of action in two ways: the action of the play revolves around revealing the satirist-revenger's inability to act, while simultaneously establishing the revenger's most apocalyptic impulses to be the satirist's most deeply sublimated desire. The malcontent's “to be or not to be” is always also a judgment on the world itself.

¹⁰ Katherine Attie Bootle, “Tragic Proportions: The Art of Tyranny and the Politics of the Soul in *Hamlet*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 44, no. 1 (December 2014): 78–107.

¹¹ Peter Mercer, *“Hamlet” and the Acting of Revenge* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987), 121. Mercer, who quotes Mack, sees revenge tragedy as a play on the “polarities” of hero and villain: Elizabethan dramatists responded to the Senecan protagonist's cruelty and villainy by “mak[ing] of the good man, the pitiless revenger, and of the villain, the final victim. To take a hero [...] to such studied and delighted cruelty, and then find a way to keep him yet a hero [...] would be to create a true tragedy of revenge.” In giving Shakespeare the usual critical pride of place, Mercer actually proceeds to make Hamlet the more shallow formulation; “reversing, yet again, the polarity[,]” he sees Hamlet as re-establishing the agency of the “villain” (Claudius) in the final act and thus absolving the “hero” (Hamlet), re-re-casting him, “it seems, into the role of unsuspecting and perhaps thus innocent victim” (35-6).

While Marston's *Malcontent* (1603) responds to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1600-01), Marston's attempt to cast the malcontent *persona* as somehow analogous to the ideal *technē* of kingship in a post-machiavellian world elides rather than addresses Shakespeare's critiques. Thus, this final chapter seeks to trace these critiques and expose the dangerous afterimage of the positive malcontent developed by Marston and Jonson. These two closely related plays feature the most famous examples of the stage malcontent in Renaissance literature; however, as strange as it may seem, both are rarely read directly in the context of this malcontent figure.¹² Although in his monumental *History of "Hamlet" Criticism* Paul Conklin argues that the seventeenth century took from Hamlet's bitterness and cruelty "a tone which gives what I might call the full depths of malcontentism," Babb's survey of Elizabethan melancholy fails to group Hamlet with the malcontent type at all, labeling his melancholy a "purely intellectual phenomenon."¹³ After the 1960s, Hamlet is occasionally referred to as a malcontent in passing, but rarely with any analytical force; in older criticism, meanwhile, the malcontent generally fails to serve any great critical function because Hamlet is accorded special status, and this allows his roots in the malcontent to be safely disregarded.¹⁴ Thus, although

¹² The *locus classicus* for modern critical attention to the malcontent type, of course, is Stoll, "Malcontent Type," 281–303. Stoll sketches a useful genealogy for the stage malcontent, but treats *The Malcontent* as a source for *Hamlet*. Until the dates of the plays became more accurately determined, most critical efforts following Stoll focused on this debate over priority of influence sparked by Stoll's argument, while the malcontent thesis was put aside in favor of the pedantic. The following sufficiently summarize this early debate: Harold R. Walley, "The Dates of *Hamlet* and Marston's *The Malcontent*," *The Review of English Studies* 9, no. 36 (October 1933): 397–409; Elmer Edgar Stoll, "The Date of the Malcontent: A Rejoinder," *The Review of English Studies* 11, no. 41 (January 1935): 42–50. Recently critics have more accurately explored the influences between the plays, but without addressing their central preoccupation with the malcontent figure: Charles Cathcart, "'Hamlet': Date and Early Afterlife," *The Review of English Studies* 52, no. 207 (August 2001): 341–59; Cordner, "Malcontent," 165–90.

¹³ Conklin, *Hamlet Criticism*, 14; Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 106.

¹⁴ Babb's analysis of Hamlet's melancholy as rooted in pathological grief is not without merit, but his refusal to categorize Hamlet under the malcontent type greatly truncates the depth of his analysis. Oscar James Campbell pays the most attention to the dialogue between *Hamlet* and *The Malcontent*, as well as the confluence between satirist and malcontent, but proceeds to endow Hamlet with an "imagination infinitely

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Marston's *Malevole* are often analyzed in terms of the satirist-revenger, these terms tend to supplant the malcontent and obscure several important contextual frames—the very frames that explain how satirist and revenger become so linked in the Elizabethan and Jacobean imagination.¹⁵

The failure to examine the role of the stage malcontent in these plays has obfuscated one of their oddest properties: although *The Malcontent* is one of the first plays to explicitly describe a character as a “malcontent,” *Hamlet* and *The Malcontent* are actually seeking *closure* to the problem of the malcontent that began to emerge in the time of Sidney. After a brief flurry of malcontent revengers between 1599 and 1600, Shakespeare puts the stage malcontent on trial in *Hamlet*, while Marston responds by defending the potential good the malcontent “guise” could do. These plays essentially mark the end of our pursuit of the malcontent as a lens of cultural and political criticism. With his usual passion for deep historical analysis, Shakespeare continued to track the malcontent through classical history in *Timon* (1605-8?) and *Coriolanus* (1607-8), but stage malcontents after 1603 largely imitated rather than innovated on the stereotypes. By

higher” than *Malevole* and “the deepest and the most moving philosophical lyricism in all literature,” which functionally negates any real comparison between the two figures. Campbell, “Hamlet and Other Malcontents,” 142–67; Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 106–10.

¹⁵ Kernan sees *Hamlet* as the “greatest instance” of the satirist-revenger synthesis in *Cankered Muse*, 220. Although Kernan focuses on the satirist almost to the exclusion of the malcontent, *The Cankered Muse* should probably be considered, along with Stoll's “Malcontent Type” and Babb's *Elizabethan Malady*, one of the seminal texts on the malcontent, who somehow whispers almost anonymously from just around the corners of its pages. Kernan does link the malcontent to the satirist through their shared melancholy once (112). For a more recent analysis of satire's influence on *Hamlet*, see James Taylor, “Hamlet's Debt to Sixteenth-Century Satire,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 22, no. 4 (October 1986): 374–84. Peter Mercer bears mention as noting the confluence of revenger, malcontent, and satirist in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, but his analysis of *Hamlet* remains primarily interested in the category of revenger alone: Mercer, *Acting of Revenge*, 3. Given Marston's background in verse satire, the satirist is practically ubiquitous in *Malcontent* criticism, but see esp. Salomon, “Theological Basis of Imagery and Structure in *The Malcontent*,” 271–84; Lanier, “Satire, Self-Concealment, & Statecraft,” 35–45; Janet Clare, “Marston: Censure, Censorship, and Free Speech,” in *The Drama of John Marston: Critical Re-Visions*, ed. T. F. Wharton (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 194–211; András Kiséry, *Hamlet's Moment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 248–56.

1613, *The Duchess of Malfi*'s Antonio could criticize malcontent Bosola for affecting an "out-of-fashion melancholy."¹⁶

Placing *Hamlet* back in the context of the malcontent thus allows us to examine the confluence of two ideological movements on different social registers, and in the process synthesize and revise two older critical conversations. First, recognizing *Hamlet* as emerging from the shift of satire from print to theater following the Bishops' Order of 1599 reminds us that Shakespeare was responding to the recent vogue of satirical plays in the children's theaters, particularly the innovations of that infamous malcontent John Marston. The character of Hamlet is thus deeply informed by the vogue of melancholy malcontentism in the Inns of Court, which had evolved since the time of Kyd and returned more self-consciously to the stage. At the same time, the polarization of Elizabethan politics was reaching its breaking point, and as Essex's circle slipped closer to violent confrontation and treason, their fall from grace rendered the entire ideology of Tacitean politic history and neostoicism ever more inextricable from Huguenot and malcontent justifications of resistance and tyrannicide.

Tracing the English malcontent through the play and the manner in which he disrupts and warps the source material, we begin to extract a *Hamlet* deeply concerned

¹⁶ John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. John Russell Brown, The Revels Plays (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1974), 43 (II.i.85-6). Bosola is the malcontent tool of Ferdinand; Webster's innovation is to have Bosola switch allegiances midway out of conscience. I am reviving but modifying here the opinion of Babb, against the editor of the Revels edition John Russell Brown: while the malcontent persists in print and occasionally on stage, and melancholy's continued importance is clearly illustrated by Robert Burton's 1621 publication of *Anatomy of Melancholy*, the malcontent figure has by then largely calcified into the set of stereotypical mannerisms and signs of the "type" that Babb traces. The malcontent has not died out but rather achieved the status of cliché, a status probably already signaled by Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606). The final stage of the malcontent's role in the ideological struggle between stoicism and machiavellianism is better understood in terms of the replacement of the malcontent revenger with a truly stoic protagonist in Chapman's *Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* (1609-10) and Tourneur's *Atheist's Tragedy* (1609-10). Cf. Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 83; Webster, *Duchess of Malfi*, 43n.

with the political turmoil of Shakespeare's day and sharply critical of rash theories that, in practice, might bring the state to anarchy.¹⁷ In particular, Shakespeare frames his play (which, to riff off Polonius, is historical-tragical-satirical) through that contemporary satire, particularly Marston's, that valorized the malcontent as an ideal political orientation and a kind of *parrhesiastes* brave enough to speak truth to power. Having placed Feliche on stage in the *Antonio* plays as the noble malcontent railing against a corrupt ruler, Marston had already essentially conflated the malcontent satirist and the malcontent courtier (see Chapter 4). *Hamlet* places this fraught discourse in a more dire context, reflecting the tense atmosphere of at the turn of the 17th century. In the process, Shakespeare questions the costs and dangers of discontent as a political orientation. This context will allow us to understand *Hamlet* as a critique of the malcontent orientation as grounded in nihilism and dangerously poised towards the foment of civil war.

ii. “like gawdy Butterflies”: The metamorphosis of the malcontent in the Inns of Court

A resident of Gray's Inn, Everard Guilpin is a minor figure in the brief outpouring of satirical verse that ended abruptly with the Bishops' Order of 1599. He was a friend and relation by marriage to John Marston as well as a friend of John Donne.¹⁸ His

¹⁷ My argument is essentially the inverse of Andrew Hadfield's republican reading of *Hamlet*. Hadfield sees *Hamlet* as likely in some sympathy with monarchomach tracts like the *Vindiciae*, although he claims that the play does not offer any particular solution and its “multilayered nature” makes it difficult to pin down any particular political stance. I agree that *Hamlet* is in dialogue with monarchomach resistance theory, but posit that in the context of Shakespeare's treatment of Belleforest's account and a closer comparison of the play with the *Vindiciae*, *Hamlet* can only be read as a *critique* of Huguenot resistance theory, bringing my argument more into alignment with Oliver Arnold. Cf. Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 184–204; Oliver Arnold, *The Third Citizen: Shakespeare's Theater and the Early Modern House of Commons*, *Revisions of Culture and Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

¹⁸ Guilpin's mother married Marston's uncle in 1592 and Guilpin married Marston's cousin in 1606/7. On Guilpin and Marston's connections in the Inns of Court, see Philip J. Finkelpearl, “Donne and

historical significance can be summed up in a prominent pile of ashes: his *Skialetheia* or, *A Shadowe of Truth* (1598) was third on the list of seven books “burnte in the hall,” according to the June 4th entry into the Stationers' Register, right after Marston's own *Pygmalion with Certain Other Satyres* and *The Scourge of Villainie*.¹⁹ The brief satirical war seems to have centered around a conflict between Marston and Joseph Hall, with Guilpin taking Marston's side.²⁰ I'm less interested in the circumstances sparking off this skirmish than in theorizing its influence on the malcontent's debut on stage as the satirist-revenger. Marston and Guilpin's unity of purpose, at least in part, is signaled by their shared language and even a shared satirical cipher, one “Fabian,” apparently in reference to the same Inns of Court gentleman with a taste for philosophy.²¹ The motivations for the Bishops' Order remain controversial, but the effect was to move satire generally and Marston particularly to the stage, where he confirmed his love of conflict by taking on Jonson and becoming embroiled in the so-called Poetomachia (1599-1602).

Guilpin's fifteen minutes go little further, but *Skialetheia* most clearly defines the shifting valence of the malcontent at the turn of the century in ways that are crucial to

Everard Gilpin [*sic*]: Additions, Corrections, and Conjectures,” *The Review of English Studies* 14, no. 54 (May 1963): 164–67; R. E. Brettell, “Everard Guilpin and John Marston (1576-1634),” *The Review of English Studies* 16, no. 64 (November 1965): 396–99; Finkelpearl, *Middle Temple*, esp. 88-89.

¹⁹ Bryan Thomas Herek, “Early Modern Satire and the Bishops' Order of 1599: Manuscript, Print and Stage” (PhD dissertation, University of Maryland, 2005), 1–3, (Order No. 3175155), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304992848?accountid=13626>.

²⁰ *Scourge* and *Skialetheia* were entered in the Stationers' Register only days apart (September 8th and 15th, respectively) some four months after *Certain Satyres*. In the 1599 edition of *Scourge*, Marston dedicates “To his very friend, maister E.G.” his supplemental “Satyra Nova,” rebuttal to Hall's “Epigram which”—Marston irately reports—“the Authour *Vergidemiarius* [i.e., Hall], caused to bee pasted to the latter page of euery *Pigmalion* that came to the stacioners of Cambridge.” Marston, *Poems of Marston*, 163-6 (*Sat. [X]*). All parenthetical references to Marston's *Certain Satyres* and *Scourge* refer to this edition.

²¹ This Fabian is the central figure in *Skialetheia*'s “Satyra tertia,” and appears briefly in *Scourge*'s “Satyre IIII.” Finkelpearl argues that Fabian is likely a friend of Guilpin from Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Arnold Davenport, glossing Marston's satire, suggests that Fabian might be the same as the Fabius mentioned in satires I and XI, who he identifies with Horace's Fabius (*Sat. I.i.13-14*), a lawyer and stoic author. Finkelpearl, *Middle Temple*, 88–89; Marston, *Poems of Marston*, 308n94.

both Marston's work and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. As traced through the previous chapters, the noble-born, Italian-tainted malcontent ushered in by Sidney's generation becomes thoroughly conflated with the machiavel, reaching a dramatic zenith with the fall of Sidney's successor, the Earl of Essex, on February 8, 1601. Simultaneously, the malcontent malaise migrates from the nobility to the Inns of Court gentleman, an emerging class of ambitious and ambiguously stationed young men whose vicious competition for status primarily took the sublimated form of aggressive speech-acts: satirical verse, impromptu wit, and bouts of flyting—a kind of verbal duel with the goal of humiliating and dominating the opponent through biting jests.²² Over the course of the 1590s, the figure of the malcontent came to encompass these young Wits and was infused with the classical satirist, particularly the acerbic Juvenalian strain. In a little-noted epigram, Guilpin critiques the earnestly frivolous malcontentism this new generation was breeding, which can be quoted here in full:

Of Pansa. 52.

Fine spruce yong *Pansa's* growne a malcontent,
 A mighty malcontent though young and spruce,
 As heresie he shuns all merriment,
 And turn'd good husband, puts forth sighs to vse,
 Like hate-man *Timon* in his Cell, he sits
 Misted with darknes like a smoaky roome,
 And if he be so mad to walke the streetes,
 To his sights life, his hat becomes a toombe.
 What is the cause of this melancholly,
 His father's dead: no, such newes reuiues him,
 Wants he a whore? nor that, loues he? that's folly,
 Mount his high thoughts? oh no, then what grieues him?

²² On verbal (and physical) aggression and the development of the Wits in general, see Michelle O'Callaghan, *The English Wits* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007); the Inns of Court “incorporated ritualised forms of aggression that, in fact helped to constitute the social space of the convivial society, the arena in which social competence is produced and cultural value attributed” (6). See also Biester, *Lyric Wonder*; Adam Zucker, *The Places of Wit in Early Modern English Comedy* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011).

Last night which did our *Inns* of court men call
 In silken sutes like gawdy Butterflies,
 To paint the Torch-light sommer of the hall,
 And shew good legs, spite of slops-smothering thies
 He passing from his chamber through the Court,
 Did spoile a paire of new white pumps with durt[.]²³

The contrast with Sidney's malcontent shepherd is stark. The Arcadian pastoral conceit is gone, replaced with a realistic, even grimy slice of London city life: Inns of Court gentlemen out on the town. Sidney's courtly disaffection has given way to a self-consciously superficial concern with the social rather than the political. In particular, the sense of wandering, of fraught energy seeking an aim, has transformed into a diffuse aimlessness. This malcontent seems almost content with his idle little world. As the satirist's conjectures proceed from the consequential to the increasingly frivolous, Guilpin stresses the extremity of Pansa's emotional reactions proceeding from the triviality of his existence.

The critique of frivolity and vanity, however, seemingly an easy target for the satirist's scourge, takes on a more bitter valence as we reflect on the reflexivity of the portrait. In what has been probably the most extensive analysis of the malcontent "type" to the present, Lawrence Babb notes the satirist's "derision" for the malcontent but fails to note the self-criticism and in-group humor underlying such satires.²⁴ Guilpin of Gray's Inn expected his friends to recognize the Pansa among and within them. Although the satirist appears to be almost invisible in the poem's portrait of Pansa, the structure of rhetorical questions and the in-group humor assert both the satirist's voice (the poetic

²³ Guilpin, Edward, *Skialetheia. Or, A shadowe of truth, in certaine epigrams and satyres* (London, 1598): sig. B4^r, EEBO, accessed 5 December 2016, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99841568. Parenthetical citations are to this edition.

²⁴ Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 76.

fiction) and Guilpin (the real poet) as structural to the meaning of the poem.²⁵ More importantly, however, while Alvin Kernan and others have noted the degree to which the poet often invites identification with the satirist's voice in the poem, fewer seem to have noticed that—as for Burton or Sidney—*self*-satire is a crucial aspect of Inns of Court satire.²⁶

As if modeling themselves on the closely knit aristocratic coteries such as Mary Sidney's circle, the Wits and satirists of the Inns of Court wrote primarily to, for, and *of* themselves even in publication, as evidenced by the personal animosities that became entangled with published verse satire such as between Marston, Guilpin, and Hall. Instead of literature produced to theorize and shore up existing political power, the literary production of this group was marked by in-fighting, agonistic homosociality, and a sense of exhibitionism fraught with as much self-doubt as self-confidence. Of the self-destructive drive defining Wit sociality, Guilpin seems to have been keenly aware: he begins *Skialetheia* with a “Prooemium” likening the downfall of “*Englands wits*” to “the greatest of societies” which eventually “ambition controules,” and they now “Puft vp by conquest, with selfe-wounding spight, / Engrauē themselues in ciuill warres *Abismes*” (1.1-12). A certain desperation attended these attempts at advancement through wit and

²⁵ In Alvin Kernan's terms, the apparent “Menippean” satire, which lacks a defined satirist voice and position, is in fact closer to “formal” satire, where the satirist asserts his existence as something like a character. Kernan, *Cankered Muse*, 14–15.

²⁶ Similarly, Samuel Rowlands' *The Melancholie Knight* (1615), which Babb uses as a major example, frames the Knight's own satirical melancholy with a note “To Respectiue Readers” voicing the usual melancholic's cathartic paradox: that the poet himself seeks to “ease” his “melancholy Scull” by penning lines on melancholy. In fact, there are a number of verbal parallels to Guilpin's “Of Pansa” that suggest Rowlands used this particular poem as a model for his own malcontent: the Knight begins his complaint by telling us that “Like discontented *Tymon* in his Cell, / My braines with *melancholy* humers swell,” and he glosses Guilpin's puzzling hat-tomb (l. 8) as the malcontent's stereotyped pose: “I crosse mine armes at crosses that arise, / And scoffe blinde *Fortune*, with hat ore mine eyes[.]” Rowlands, Samuel, *The melancholie knight* (London, 1615): sig. A3^r, B1^r, EEBO, accessed 8 December 2016, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99838942. Cf. Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 77.

satire, techniques James Biester calls “the most dangerous game”: “By posing as melancholic and even machiavellian wits,” would-be courtiers could provoke the “wonder” that Castiglione prescribes as the goal of his courtly *technē* while self-consciously setting themselves up for a Hal-like reformation of character. Playing the melancholic in particular attempted to evoke Ficino's rarefied category of melancholic genius while necessarily raising the specter of the melancholic as “dangerously diseased.”²⁷ Guilpin and Marston's satire is thus a critique of these dangerous strategies of advancement while simultaneously a mode of *engagement* in those same practices.

Far more than a mocking portrait of the malcontent, Guilpin's satire is in fact structured through three satirical techniques which are analogous to the makeup of the malcontent's worldview. These poetic techniques essentially imitate and expose the strategies of Inns of Court self-fashioning, which adapt the techniques of an earlier generation of humanist courtiers to the task of establishing a new social class. The first strategy is occlusion: meaning and motive are either hidden or confounded by another competing signification. Even the malcontent himself may not be able to pry apart his “true” motivations—it is not clear that Pansa is fully conscious of the wellsprings of his incommensurable emotional reaction to the ruined shoes. The second is the familiar affect of resentment, whether on the surface or sublimated. Third, there is the odd self-dissociation, familiar from Burton, in which the malcontent reacts to the self-loathing at the heart of his resentment by establishing a feigned stance of objectivity—one which conceals a solipsistic conflation between self and world. While Biester and O'Callaghan emphasize the precarious, paradoxical nature of this highly cultivated madcap *habitus*,

²⁷ Biester, *Lyric Wonder*, 69–71.

the Wits' awareness of their position has received little explicit attention.²⁸ Modern criticism tends to divide the critic from the object of critique, a stance that perhaps reflects our own reliance on an imagined critical objectivity, but particularly in satire such distance is continually undermined.

Marston was particularly careful to position his satiric persona as already compromised: whatever the original intent of Marston's much derided Ovidian erotic *Pygmalion*, his inclusion of it along with his mixed "praise" of the poem in *Certaine Satyres* serves to implicate him in the hypocrisy and semi-politicized lust which are Marston's chief targets. Marston's proem frames the satires as self-critique turned outward ("Thus hauing rail'd against my selfe a while, / Ile snarle at those, which does the world beguile / With masked shewes" [CS, "Author" ll.43-4]). There is certainly irony in the reformation that precedes his attack on hypocrisy in *Satyre II* ("I that euen now lisp'd like an Amorist, / Am turn'd into a snaphaunce Satyrist"), which signals a complicity in the muck of the world:

But since my selfe am not immaculate,
But many spots my minde doth vitiate,
I'll leaue the white roabe, and the biting rimes
Vnto our moderne Satyres sharpest lines[.]

While the snarling of other satirists hints "at some secret sinne" of their own which they cloak in the "milk-white robes" of feigned purity, Marston's satiric persona wears his own vices on his sleeve, as it were, even hinting that his obsession with lust in the satires is no accident, but rather the attempt to purge his own vice (CS, II.1-15). As Marston's editor Arnold Davenport puts it, the universality of Marston's critique was truly universal,

²⁸ *Habitus* is O'Callaghan's Bourdieuan term for the set of signs and behaviors that constituted the Wits as a social group: see esp. O'Callaghan, *English Wits*, 13, 45.

inclusive of his own impurities: “Unlike Hall and the earlier satirists, and unlike the older type of malcontent, [...] Marston is not certain of his own criteria, and is clearly aware [in the words of Hallett Smith] ‘that he is part of what he is attacking.’”²⁹ In his “Conclusion to the Reader,” before moving on to the proper satires, Guilpin evinces a similar necessary implication in the vices the satirist excoriates; although he does not precisely indict himself personally in “this sin-drownd vworld,” he insists that his poems, these “bastards of my *Muse*,” are intentionally “filthy,” “Fit to wrap playsters, and odd vngvents in, / Reedifiers of the wracks of *Synne*.” Besides disturbingly gesturing toward the almost intentionally unsanitary conditions of early modern medicine, Guilpin claims to essentially inoculate his Muse for her task, having “Phisick’d” her in order to “beray our folly-soyled age” (Guilpin, 70.8-15).

In this context, Guilpin's “Of Pansa” serves a crucial part of his project to diagnose and, hopefully, purge his social group of its vices. The emphasis of Guilpin's “gawdy Butterflies” (Guilpin, 52.14) on the trivialities of fine clothing and entertainment in fact betrays a self-conscious display of wealth and leisure designed to cultivate the image of an elite class, carefully concealed beneath an impression of careless ease. In other words, it is an exquisite performance of Castiglione's *sprezzatura* that, as Biester argues, was crucial to the Inns of Court *habitus*.³⁰ These same “gaudie Butter-flies” appear in Marston's *Scourge*, where his pun on “*ingrain'd Habites, died with often dips*”—habitual behavior as clothing dyed by repeated dipping in grain—suggests just how appropriate O'Callaghan's use of *habitus* is to the Wits' own self-conception: Guilpin and Marston both demonstrate a keen awareness of how a set of deliberately cultivated

²⁹ Marston, *Poems of Marston*, 18.

³⁰ Biester, *Lyrical Wonder*, 10–13.

signs such as garments (“habits”) can become the pattern for a nascent social class to define itself whole cloth (*Scourge*, IV.84, 95). The Inns of Court fashionistas were self-fashioning in the most literal sense. However, *sprezzatura* turns every action into a self-conscious production, and the deadly serious cultivation of frivolity becomes a distasteful performance: the dismissive tone of the seemingly objective satirist conceals the self-mocking reflexivity of the actor observing his own ludicrous costume. The malcontent Pansa's overwrought emotion at the soiling of his new shoes thus has a twofold wellspring. On these utterly superficial signs hangs all the weight of his boundless ambition, hinted at in part by the satirist's jibe that his father's death (and thus Pansa's inheritance) would be welcome news (Guilpin, 52.10). Moreover, the almost schizophrenic duality that this fusion of the significant and insignificant produces necessarily breeds a resentment which may further contribute to the malcontent's emotionally volatile state. The depth of that resentment is suggested in the comparison to Timon and the irrationally exaggerated misanthropy his dirtied shoes apparently produce (52.5).

iii. “great *Foelix*”: Essex and the fall of politic history

Through Guilpin, we can see that the malcontent had taken on a number of valences by the turn of the century. By placing the malcontent on stage, Marston had given Shakespeare the conditions to juxtapose and even conflate these valences. Marston's Inns of Court perspective was refracted through tragedy's generic focus on the nobility, and the clear model for a noble malcontent presented itself in Sidney's successor Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex. Following Kyd and Marlowe's plays of the 1580s,

Shakespeare's plays at the end of the sixteenth century assume a fundamentally politic world. Hugh Grady has usefully framed Shakespeare's growing pessimism in the face of machiavellian politics in the short space between *Henry V* and *Hamlet*.³¹ In 1599, Shakespeare's coronation of Hal, with the famous reference to Essex's yet-unknown fortunes in Ireland, displays an ambivalence towards politic self-presentation. Examining Shakespeare's relationship to Machiavelli's thought, Hugh Grady argues that in turning from the history play to tragedy, *Hamlet* marks a final capitulation to a machiavellian universe.³² *Hamlet* was probably written before Essex's trial for treason, but in the aftermath of the Essex's ignominious return from the Irish campaign, such ambivalence had likely soured further.³³ Once again, *Skialetheia* provides us with insight: as early as 1598, Guilpin makes a satirical reference apparently directed at Essex as a self-important "Foelix" using hypocritical "curtesie / T'entrench himselfe in poularitie." Guilpin calls this courtesy a "mumming trick" taught him by "*Signior Machiauell*."³⁴ Like Sidney's father Henry Sidney and Essex's step-father the Earl of Leicester, Essex's ambitious self-presentation threatened Elizabeth, combined with a rashness and melancholy even more

³¹ Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 26–28.

³² Grady, 243.

³³ Critical consensus roughly dates *Hamlet* between 1600 and 1601; greater accuracy has proven impossible. Jeremy Venema relies on Cathcart to argue that a comparison to *Hamlet* reveals similarities to the Essex of 1599 or 1600, under house arrest, rather than the treasonous Essex of 1601. Whatever the exact date of *Hamlet*, there is sufficient evidence of Essex's melancholy and erratic behavior before the revolt to influence Shakespeare's portrayal of the malcontent prince. Jeremy Venema, "Shortly They Will Play Me in What Forms They List upon the Stage": *Hamlet*, Conscience, and the Earl of Essex," *Religion and the Arts* 16 (2012): 189–90.

³⁴ Guilpin, *Skialetheia*, sig. C3^v. *Foelix* probably refers simply to Essex as a self-styled Roman Emperor, but might also have ironically recalled Antonius Felix, a particularly unpopular procurator assigned to Judaea. Tacitus describes him as using his favor with the emperor via his brother as "license for the worst of crimes," and that he "inflamed the discontents of the people by improper remedies[.]" (*Annals*, XII.liv). He would have been well known from the Book of Acts, where Felix imprisoned the apostle Paul and hoped to receive a bribe for his release (Acts 24:10-27). Translation by Arthur Murphy in Cornelius Tacitus, "The Annals of Tacitus," in *The Works of Cornelius Tacitus*, trans. Arthur Murphy (Philadelphia: Thomas Wardle, 1836), 216.

pronounced than that of Sidney. As Alexandra Gajda's scholarly biography of Essex notes, Guilpin's description already seems to portray Essex as a potential usurper with the frightening support of the 'multitude,' as Sidney might have called them.³⁵

Critics have attempted to read an allegory of Essex's fall into *Hamlet* since at least Lilian Winstanley's 1921 *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession*. Most of the more elaborate parallels constructed to make the plot or character of *Hamlet* conform to the fall of Essex are unconvincing, but we need not read analogically for one-to-one parallels or concrete allusions. What Essex provides is an analytical model and exemplar for the potential discord or even treason resultant from the *figura* of the malcontent courtier. Moreover, Essex's career fulfills the evolution of the noble malcontent that started with Sidney. Consciously taking up Sidney's mantle, he continued the fraught synthesis of a martial, aggressive foreign policy with an idealized Arcadian image of England. In his comparison between Hamlet and Essex, Jeremy Venema succinctly states that "if [Sidney's] essence lived on anywhere [after his death], it was in Essex, who had married Sidney's widow, inherited his sword, and sought to follow in his footsteps."³⁶ Essex carefully crafted the stylized role of pastoral love melancholic on the tilt-yards in the late 1580s and early 1590s. In 1589, George Peele represented Essex's martial exploits in Portugal as the "renowmed *Shepherd of Albions Arcadia*": "Fellovv in Armes he vvas, in their flovving deies, / With that great *Shepherd* good *Philisides*: / And in sad sable did I see him dight," Peele records, in reference to Essex's typical mourning colors, "With him he seru'd, and vvatcht and vvaited fate, / To keepe the grim Wolfe from *Elizaes* gate."³⁷

³⁵ Gajda, *Earl of Essex*, 204.

³⁶ Venema, "Hamlet & Essex," 191.

³⁷ Peele, George, *An eglogve* (London, 1589): sig. A1^r, A3^v, *EEBO*, accessed 27 January 2016, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-

Three years after Sidney (Philisides) fell protecting England from the “grim Wolfe” of Catholicism, Essex has poised himself to complete the work of the martial shepherd.

Whereas Sidney was killed in battle and became a folk hero, however, Essex died a traitor and a tragic exemplar. In less than a decade, Essex moves from intimate favorite, to love melancholic, to archetypal malcontent. A combination of Essex's own faults and a faction including Sir Robert Cecil, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Edward Coke moving against him eventually resulted in the nearest thing to aristocratic revolt seen during Elizabeth's reign on February 8, 1601. Revising the history of the revolt from Essex's perspective, Paul Hammer has convincingly argued that the Essex Rising was in fact no revolt at all, but a desperate attempt by Essex to avoid revolt at all costs while revealing to Elizabeth what Essex viewed as a dire threat to the commonwealth. However, Biester has argued that Essex showed signs well before the revolt of signs of extreme melancholy to the point of madness, including the incident during which he nearly drew his sword on the queen after she cuffed his ear, and even Hammer's apologetic account acknowledges that “Essex was reported to be 'crazed' – that is, broken in health – by the beginning of March [1599],” citing the extraordinary number of things Essex needed to sort out before he could begin the ill-fated Irish expedition.³⁸ In Essex, we see the pressure of thwarted ambition, a cautionary tale for young Elizabethans, slowly building to a pathological degree. It was perhaps inevitable that, one way or another, Essex would find himself in tragic circumstances; even before Essex's attempt to force his way into court, Essex's

2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99849497. Peele may be referring to a tendency for Essex to wear black; on the other hand, Peele himself may have inspired such a tendency: in 1590, Essex appeared in the tilt-yard dressed in “mourning garb” and was painted by William Segar in “sable sad.” Hammer, *Polarization*, 202–16.

³⁸ Biester, *Lyric Wonder*, 69–70, 101–3; Hammer, “Richard II & Essex,” 21.

actions were beginning to taint the virtuous model of a Feliche with dangerous intimations of madness and treason, rendering the pose of malcontent nobleman increasingly suspect. In the process, the method of politic history which Essex helped support and cultivate similarly began its decline into disrepute.

The overly literal analogic hermeneutic in fact underlies the misreading of those who critiqued politic history, such as Elizabeth's famous statement to William Lambarde in August 1601: "I am Richard II, know ye not that?"³⁹ Francis Bacon's official account argued that the Essex circle saw themselves as reenacting the deposition of Richard II by Henry Bolingbroke, which relied on two pieces of evidence.⁴⁰ First, the dedication to Hayward's politic history *King Henrie the IIII* (1599) praises Essex "whose name [or title], if it were shining from the countenance of our Henry, would itself appear both more pleasant and more prudent amidst the people."⁴¹ Hayward constructed his historical method from Tacitus (via Henry Savile), as Bacon acknowledged when he defended Hayward's work to Elizabeth as more plagiarism than treason, "for he [Hayward] had taken most of the sentences of *Cornelius Tacitus*, and translated them into English[.]"⁴²

³⁹ On the authenticity of Lombarde's anecdote, see Scott-Warren, "Authenticity of Lambarde's 'Conversation.'"

⁴⁰ The analogy of Essex to Bolingbroke was some time in the making: "Edward Coke seized upon Hayward's book in the wake of Essex's arrest in September 1599 as a supposed manifesto for Essex's bid for the throne," and Hayward was himself imprisoned in July 1600. The case was not helped by the flagrantly insubordinate *A Conference about the Next Syccession*, probably written by Robert Parsons. As Hammer notes, the dependence of *A Conference*'s argument on the legitimacy of Richard II's deposition and its dedication to Essex "briefly caused ructions between him and Elizabeth in late 1595." Hammer, "Richard II & Essex," 8–9.

⁴¹ My translation from the original: "cuius nomen si Henrici nostri fronte radiaret, ipse & laetior & tutior in vulgus prodiret." Hayward's comparison seems in part to depend on a link between Essex's title of "Vicecomiti Herefordiae" and Bolingbroke's original title of Duke of Hereford. Hayward, John, *The first part of the life and raigne of King Henrie the IIII* (London, 1599): sig. A2^r, EEBO, accessed 17 January 2016, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99839650.

⁴² Bacon, Francis, *The Apology of Sr. Francis Bacon [...] concerning [...] Essex* (London, 1670 [1604]): 7, EEBO, accessed 28 January 2016, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-

The second piece of evidence is a story beloved by New Historicists: the day before the revolt, Merrick paid for himself and his friends to watch a play “of Kyng Harry the iiiith and of the kylling of Kyng Richard the Second,”⁴³ which Bacon interpreted as a kind of rehearsal for February 8th: despite the players' complaints that it was an old play, Sir Gelly Meyrick paid an extra 40 shillings for them to put it on, “So earnest hee was to satisfie his eyes with the sight of that Tragedie, which hee thought soone after his Lord [Essex] should bring from the Stage to the State[.]” So Bacon insisted.⁴⁴

The role of tragedy as a model for history displayed in this event is remarkable. Both Shakespeare's play and Hayward's history placed the events surrounding the deposition of Richard II by Henry Bolingbroke into the model of tragedy. In assessing Hayward's importance as a politic historian, S. L. Goldberg argues that Hayward's invented speech and character-portraits, what Hayward called “liuely patterns,”⁴⁵ were “methods of setting forth the policy and motives of the principal actors, which to Hayward were the causes of events.”⁴⁶ Because tragedy gave a narrative shape to men's fortunes, it was a key analytic category for politic history, which took human agency as its unit of analysis. The density of connections to Essex show him to have been at the very center of English politic history, and the tragedy-analytic so crucial to this historical mode unexpectedly came to define Essex's own fall. However, the kind of analogy read

[2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:9717749](http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:9717749). Bacon repeats the story with some slight additions in *Apopthegmes New & Old* (1626).

⁴³ Qtd. in Hammer, “Richard II & Essex,” 1.

⁴⁴ Bacon, Francis, *A Declaration of the Practices & Treasons attempted and committed by Robert late Earle of Essex* (London, 1601): sig. K2^v-K3^r, *EEBO*, accessed 17 January 2016, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99836190. Although Bacon singles out Meyrick, the performance seems to have been primarily for Sir Charles Percy. See Hammer, 25–26.

⁴⁵ Hayward, *King Henrie the IIII*, A3^r.

⁴⁶ S. L. Goldberg, “Sir John Hayward, ‘Politic’ Historian,” *Review of English Studies* 6, no. 23 (July 1955): 236. See also Levy, “Politic History,” 1–34.

into events by Elizabeth and others only allowed for a one-to-one mapping, such that contemporary events reflect prior events and imply the same result.

Thus, tragedy was a key hermeneutic paradigm for both politic and analogic modes of interpreting events. As Paul Hammer has shown, however, Essex's own people saw the performance in a more complex manner. Pitted against Robert Cecil's faction, Essex was desperately seeking a way to make his case to Elizabeth, but he was awaiting word from James VI's ambassador the Earl of Mar. Not unlike Hieronimo, Essex felt the sovereign's ear beyond the reach of his pleas: when Lord Grey attacked his supporter Southampton in the streets, "Grey received only mild punishment for the attack, which convinced Essex that he would get no justice while his enemies controlled the levers of power and filtered what news reach the queen."⁴⁷ On February 7th, however, there was no hint of the events that would occur the next day. Hammer suggests that the rumor Raleigh circulated that he intended to kill Essex may have panicked the Earl into action. Essex seems to have been attempting to *avoid* a rebellion, and Hammer links Essex's actions to a "justification and a blueprint for directly petitioning a delinquent sovereign to save the state from oppression by corrupt and over-mighty councillors" in *The State of Christendom* (c. 1594).⁴⁸ In this light, Shakespeare's *Richard II* seems to have offered Essex's circle a certain genealogical pleasure: Bolingbroke was Essex's ancestor, Lord Monteagle was related to Thomas Mowbray, and Charles Percy was related to Hotspur.⁴⁹

The subtle distinction between politic and analogic readings of history lies in

⁴⁷ Hammer, "Richard II & Essex," 11.

⁴⁸ Hammer, 15, 12.

⁴⁹ Besides Meyrick and Percy, the members of the group of playgoers included Lord Monteagle, Sir Christopher Blount, Sir William Constable, Edward Bushell, Ellis Jones, and possibly Sir John Davies. Hammer, 25, 28–29.

politic history's rejection of the analogic binary: whereas analogic reading takes an entire series of events as a single model which can then serve as either a "good" or "bad" exemplar, politic history takes the series of events as a set of causes and effects within which one can intervene instrumentally. "Good" is defined by the arrangement of events to effect a particular goal rather than a moral judgment resonating in the Aristotelian manner from the *telos* backward through the static series of events. To an extent, Hammer's reading suggests that the contemporary analogies that could be read into *Richard II* were part of the attraction, but even more important were the differences: knowing that Bolingbroke's approach resulted in usurpation served as a warning and a guide by which "they could avoid a fresh tragedy."⁵⁰ The chaotic nature of Essex's actions and the ubiquitous practice of analogical reading proved too strong, essentially transposing the Essex circle into the tragic cycle despite their best efforts, but the intention seems to have been to deploy the methods of politic history to *re-write* the tragic *telos* as tragicomedy. Bacon and Elizabeth's accounts suggest that the models of history act as linear narratives, and that the court narrowly avoided history repeating itself. At best, not unlike humoral theory, politic history would allow us to diagnose a particular type—the "Essex-Bolingbroke" situation—and avert the pattern. The "liuely patterns" of Hayward on the page and Shakespeare on the stage provided, however, a more intricate analysis of cause and effect: the wholesale model of good and bad exemplars to follow or shun simplifies the agency given *to* the student of history. The fact that even politic histories often described their method in such antiquated, "Livian" terms suggests that the neo-Taciteans themselves had not fully formulated an articulate sense of

⁵⁰ Hammer, 34.

their distinction, which simultaneously opened them to misinterpretation.

While Tacitus' examples were thus often taken to be more likely to corrupt than correct, what Tacitus in fact offered in contrast to Livy's exemplary model was a “Labyrinthine” guide to politics which, through the arduous pains of the student, might yield lessons on how to survive the complex and shifting maze of power.⁵¹ Viewing history with an eye towards human causality already provides the actor with a more active role in historical events than medieval providence or Calvinist predestination would seem to provide. That these patterns could be criticized, contextualized, revised, and recombined suggests the possibility of an active deployment of historical knowledge far beyond Sidney's stamping out of little Cyruses.⁵²

On the other hand, the failure of the Essex circle to successfully perform the role of virtuous counselor in a hostile court greatly complicated perception of politic history's methods and goals, forging a troubling connection between the malcontent courtier and treasonous rebel. In addition to apparent direct references like Guilpin's, bordering on slander, the malcontent *qua* machiavellian courtier became a target of satire as a general type. Marston's portrait of the “vile, sober, damn'd, Polititian” in *Certaine Satyres* clearly forges the connection. The flatterer is no longer a mere parasite worthy of loathing; his hypocrisy and false adulation have gained a secret ambition:

O is not this a curteous minded man?
No foole, no, a damn'd Macheuelian.
 [...]

He hopes though som repine,

⁵¹ Alan Bradford borrows the description of Tacitus' history as “labyrinthine” from Robert Johnson's comparison of Livy and Tacitus in “Of Histories.” See Alan T. Bradford, “Stuart Absolutism and the ‘Utility’ of Tacitus,” *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1983): 130, 135.

⁵² Hammer's conjecture that the potential criticisms of Essex in *Richard II* might derive from Shakespeare's attunement to “the earl's unusual willingness to accept constructive criticism” is illustrative of Essex's conception of policy and counsel. Hammer, “Richard II & Essex,” 23.

When sunne is set, the lesser starres will shine:
 He is within a haughty malecontent,
 Though he doe vse such humble blandishment.

Concerned that his satire “straine not ouer hie” and offend those with power to retaliate, Marston then turns to “meaner gullery,” but seeing as the damage is done, this amounts to little more than *praeteritio* (CS, II.70-106). In her seminal history of Elizabethan censorship, Cyndia Clegg suggests that the Bishops' Order may have been intended mainly to silence criticism of Essex's ignominious return from Ireland, one in a series of censorship instances employed to protect Essex by his friend Archbishop Whitgift between 1599 and 1600. With Essex's sudden fall in fortunes, general satire that raised no eyebrows in 1598 may have suddenly taken on new significance in 1599, and Clegg examines similar passages in the books of satire with which Whitgift took issue.⁵³ Even if this hypothesis does not fully explain the emphasis on satire and the particular books singled out, these portraits of malcontent courtiers do add weight to the notion that Essex and his circle were a factor, especially considering the simultaneous war of libel between the Essex and Raleigh factions, and the muddy line between libel and satire. These portraits emphasize a hypocritical interiority, that things are not what they seem, and that the subtle engine behind political events is no beneficent, divine providential hand but the nasty, selfish, and all too human force of personal ambition. *Hamlet* ties together the strains of the malcontent courtier and the malcontent satirist in a dizzyingly antic synthesis that leverages the apparently universal epidemic of melancholy to strike at the troubling similarities between critic and critique.

⁵³ Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England*, 201–17. For a different perspective, suggesting that there was a particular fear of satire usurping the clergy's moral authority, see Herek, “Satire & the Bishop's Order.”

iv. “*hic et ubique*”: The spirit of melancholy in *Hamlet*

Although Feliche appears only as a corpse in the second part of *Antonio*, both plays are crucial in their relationship to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In *Antonio & Mellida*, Feliche provides a surprising contrast to the haughty malcontent courtier Marston describes in *Certaine Satyres*: as I argue in Chapter 4, Marston fuses the railing satirist and the malcontent courtier and casts him as the *parrhesiastes*, the ideal courtier in a corrupt court. In *Antonio's Revenge*, however, we are left with a much bleaker picture of political possibilities in a world of corruption: Feliche's father Pandulpho tries to take over the role of malcontent critic but quickly descends into antic madness, while the ghost of virtuous Andrugio becomes the voice inciting his son to vengeful excess. One of Marston's sources for his neo-Senecan mash-up likely included the hypothetical Ur-*Hamlet* by Kyd (c. 1587-88), a play that seems to have borne a close likeness to *The Spanish Tragedy*.⁵⁴ The number of parallels between *Hamlet* and *Antonio's Revenge* suggest that the *Antonio* plays may have served to inspire Shakespeare's revision of the old play. In many ways, Marston's *Antonio* plays seek to foreclose the possibility of Senecan revenge tragedy by rendering the tragic response ridiculous. Perhaps because of

⁵⁴ The several references to a *Hamlet* before Shakespeare's play circa 1600 have usually either been attributed to Shakespeare's revision of an earlier play of his own or a play by Kyd. The earliest evidence of a *Hamlet* play is Thomas Nashe's well-known reference in the prefatory epistle to Robert Green's *Menaphon* (1589) to hack poets and playwrights with little Latin who steal sentences from “English *Seneca* read by candle light” and “will affoord you whole *Hamlets*[.]” Whether or not the reference to “the Kidde in *Aesop*” is a clever reference to Kyd, the discussion of Seneca's torturous progress from being bled “line by line” on the page to a wretched death on stage makes clear that Nashe is using “Hamlet” as a surprising metonymy for a whole genre of Seneca-inspired tragedy. As Paul Conklin has shown, early references to *Hamlet* suggest a play “more direct, more ‘Kydian’” than Shakespeare's, and indeed more Senecan in structure. It is far more likely that Shakespeare revived a famous but outdated play and rewrote it in the new style that Marston was popularizing than that he revised a decade-old play of his own. See Kyd, *Works of Kyd*, xlv–xlix; Conklin, *Hamlet Criticism*, 9–10.

his own malcontent predilections, Marston accurately interprets Kyd's revenge tragedy as embedded in a worldly *ressentiment*, which Marston counters with satire. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* takes up Marston's interpretation of Kyd, but Shakespeare places the malcontent political response itself on trial.⁵⁵ If Kydian revenge tragedy exercises a malcontent theatricality, *Hamlet* places a malcontent protagonist at the center of the revenge fantasy. Like Hieronimo or Feliche, the malcontent Hamlet is a nobleman dealing with injustice at the highest political level. However, Shakespeare's Hamlet also resembles Guilpin's Pansa, or perhaps Marston himself: an ambitious, educated gentleman consumed with an overreaching melancholy bordering on delirium and despair.

Hamlet's encounters with the Ghost best exemplify how melancholy dangerously warps the malcontent's judgment. Manifesting first as an objective fact, then as a subjective experience, the Ghost is not so much a character as an ambiguous theatrical function, allegorizing the effects of melancholy. The Ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is more Andrugio than Andrea: the revenger, rather than the audience, is confronted with a supernatural fact. Removing the ghost from its Senecan position as prologue and chorus and placing it within the narrative frame considerably shifts the question of revenge from metaphysics to epistemology. The supernatural *fact* of the Ghost—at least in its first

⁵⁵ My narrative follows most critics in seeing *Hamlet* as responding to Marston's innovations, but there is another possibility. Although the accepted date ranges for these plays are now quite narrow, there is still disagreement, and Charles Cathcart has argued that the context and quality of the verbal parallels between *Antonio & Mellida* and *Hamlet* suggest that *Hamlet* must have been the earlier play, finished by late 1599 and staged in early 1600. See Cathcart, "'Hamlet': Date and Early Afterlife," 341–59. The critical history of *Hamlet* and *The Malcontent* shows that attempting to pin down indebtedness on the basis of the apparent priority or quality of reference is precarious at best. Given that *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's first Kydian revenge tragedy, which bears little resemblance to the earlier *Titus Andronicus*, and features a malcontent satirist-revenger, I agree with Stoll that Shakespeare is responding to the theatrical vogue, largely confined to the children's theaters, for revenge tragedies with ghosts. Not unlike Jonson in *Poetaster*, Shakespeare chose to jibe at one of the central figures of this vogue by essentially casting the malcontent satirist Marston himself in the key role. Cf. Stoll, "Malcontent Type," 290–91.

appearance—is unambiguous; its meaning, on the other hand, is thoroughly and intentionally equivocal. The Ur-*Hamlet's* ghost likely remained a distinctly pagan spirit, perhaps from a gruesomely detailed Hades in the manner of Tantalus in *Thyestes* or Thyestes himself in *Agamemnon*. Although a long critical debate has been waged regarding whether Shakespeare's Ghost is Catholic or Protestant, the one point of agreement is that it is distinctly Christian, a response to Marston's Andrugio in *Antonio's Revenge* and the vogue for ghosts that paralleled the vogue for revengers at the end of the 16th century. King Hamlet derives not from Seneca but from Ludwig Lavater's *Of ghostes and spirites walking by nyght* (1572). As Brett E. Murphy has recently shown, the Shakespearean apparition mingles contradictory signs of the “good” and the “evil” spirit. Furthermore, Lavater undermines the “Popish” position by showing that their Doctors disagree about the difference between Purgatory and Hell, rendering their own doctrine ambiguous.⁵⁶ In *The Spanish Tragedy*, and perhaps in the Ur-*Hamlet*, the claims of the ghost come from an unquestionable, if uncomfortable, divine framework. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, that framework itself is equivocal.

Hamlet's encounter with the ghost marks his first major confrontation with the discomfiting gap between the apparent and the real.⁵⁷ The ghost's very manifestation indicates a gap between sign and signified that Hamlet should have learned from the theater. When Hamlet vows to speak to the apparition “If it assume my noble father's person,” he describes the ghost as an actor taking on a theatrical role, yet instantly

⁵⁶ Brett E. Murphy, “Sulphurous and Tormenting Flames: Understanding the Ghost in *Hamlet*,” *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 26 (2014): 117–20, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/sisa.v26i1.7>.

⁵⁷ Hamlet is quick to determine that “It is an honest ghost” (*H*, I.v.144): with little evidence, Hamlet determines that the figure *is* his father, and therefore the ghost's command bears a necessary compulsion to revenge. Greenblatt notes, however, that Hamlet's compatriots are more hesitant to leap from likeness to identity. Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), 211.

eschews the skepticism and caution that should attend this description (I.ii.243-4). Hamlet, in fact, is already constructing the narrative that the ghost will tell him, insisting that certain realities *must* assert themselves unequivocally: “Foul deeds will rise, / Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes” (I.ii.256-7). The trite couplet upholds the medieval notion that “murder will out,” asserting a metaphysical principle of justice. However, the events of the play belie this principle: Hamlet finds himself compelled to *bring* these foul deeds to men's eyes, because the murder could quite easily have remained hidden and Claudius's reign might have continued without repercussion. Marlowe's Machevil would answer the prince, “Birds of the air will tell of murders past! / I am ashamed to hear such fooleries.”⁵⁸ No magical signs or portents will reveal murder and bring about justice. Even given a ghost, portent enough, the image of the dead king seems less to offer Hamlet knowledge than confirm his existing suspicions: it is up to Hamlet to find evidence for the ghost's story and “out” murder with murder of his own. The ideal becomes a motivation for revenge, and thus a principle for action rather than a metaphysical truth; as the one who must act to fulfill his own prophecy of divine justice, Hamlet preemptively sets himself up to take on the active role of scourge long before the death of Polonius.

Furthermore, the ghost is a manifestation of a strangely material melancholy that infects and exacerbates Hamlet's own melancholy temperament. Lavater prominently entitles his second chapter “Melancholike persons, and madde men, imagin many things vvich in verie deede are not[,]” in which he warns that “True it is, that many men doo falsly persuade themselues that they see or heare ghostes: for that which they imagin they

⁵⁸ Marlowe, *Jew of Malta*, Prol.16-17.

see or heare, procéedeth eyther of melancholie, madnesse, weakenesse of the senses, feare, or of some other perturbation[.]”⁵⁹

As the necessity of acting as executioner weighs on him and his initial fervor of credulity, Hamlet himself realizes his danger:

The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil, and the devil hath power
T'assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me. (*H*, III.i.519-24)⁶⁰

Hamlet's melancholy leaves him susceptible to either false or evil spirits. For a moment, Hamlet considers that the spirit's form might be deceptive; yet he still seeks truth in the form of correspondence: if he proves the ghost's *story* to be true, he seems certain that this will also prove the validity of the ghost's commandment and save his soul from the taint of murder. Hamlet seems ingenuously unaware that the devil can quote scripture and can tell the truth or even exhort man to good deeds when it suits his purposes, capacities Lavater emphasizes.⁶¹ Murphy argues that the witnesses to the ghost's presence “solidify the character of the Ghost” and ensure that the audience takes the ghost as real rather than as a mere manifestation of Hamlet's melancholy state.⁶² Certainly, the witnesses to the ghost implicate the audience in Hamlet's own credulity: we are essentially drawn into sympathetic identification with Hamlet's melancholic motives and judgments.

⁵⁹ Lavater, Ludwig, *Of ghostes and spirites walking by nyght*, trans. R. H. (London, 1572): 9, *EEBO*, accessed 15 February 2016, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99844028.

⁶⁰ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 11. Parenthetical references below are to this edition unless otherwise noted.

⁶¹ Lavater, *Of ghostes*, 171-4.

⁶² Murphy, “Understanding the Ghost in *Hamlet*,” 118.

Whether we agree or disagree with Hamlet, we do so *within* his disordered framework of judgment: the ghost is not a “character,” but a theatrical device which places a melancholic lens between us and the events on stage. Our position as audience, then, structurally mirrors the alienated entanglement of melancholy which Burton describes in theatrical terms. *Hamlet* performs a kind of perverse inversion of Brecht's *gestus*. For Brecht, the alienation effect seeks to free the audience to objectively analyze and judge the action on stage. By asking us to take the other witnesses as confirmation of the ghost's real presence, Shakespeare, by contrast, invites the audience to align their judgments with the characters who see the ghost—Bernardo, Francisco, Horatio, and Hamlet. The audience is implicated within the play's melancholy framework, which determines what counts as “real,” engaging the audience in a theatrical experience that *appears* to confront the audience with objective facts, while establishing that “objectivity” as an effect of our position within the framework of the action and our collusion with the logic of the play.

Taking the ghost as a quasi-allegorical theatrical function rather than a “character” clarifies its role. Horatio defines the structural hazard of the ghost in environmental, material terms. The cliff and the sea create structural possibilities for the ghost to tempt or terrify Hamlet, “deprive your sovereignty of reason, / And draw you into madness[.]” “The very place” creates the conditions for despair and opportunity for suicidal action (I.iv.69-74). The ghost, then, is in part a projection of the environment itself. The rottenness of Denmark takes physical form: melancholy seems to exude from the very stones. Shakespeare establishes melancholy as a worldly, material state, much as Marlowe attempts to gather the amoral abstraction of power into the figure of Machevil.

The doubling of melancholy Burton describes is apparent; melancholy is both the universal state of the world and a personal affliction—“*Hic et ubique*” (I.iv.164). The ghost thus expresses this same fusing of internal and external: it is an objective delusion. With the epidemic status melancholy achieves in the early modern imagination after 1580, Lavater's ghost as a melancholy figment becomes a shared delirium. Although “all the world is mad, [...] is melancholy, dotes” as Burton put it two decades after *Hamlet*, the melancholy is also particularized.⁶³ The loss of the king affects the entire kingdom as a politicized melancholy, but for Hamlet, that grief is intensified: the loss of a father and the loss of his expected election as the new King Hamlet.

v. “the satirical rogue”: Method, madness, and motivation

If Pansa's misanthropy is motivated by resentment bred of stifled ambition, what motivates our Danish prince? The first three acts of the play follow the court playing this very guessing game, which critics too have long attempted, like an extended version of Guilpin's “Pansa.” The clearest cause is grief for his father's death, which is framed by the Senecan prologue of the ghost's appearance. Our first encounter with Hamlet is a youth strikingly dressed in black, standing silent during Claudius' speech expressing stylized, politic grief for the senior Hamlet's death. It is Claudius who first expresses the mixed, contradictory affect which Hamlet will come to embody. “With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage,” the paradoxical humoral disorder that grounds Claudius' assumption of the throne permeates the realm itself (*H*, I.ii.12). Unlike Pansa, who thinks on his father's death with anticipation, however, Hamlet's grief is extreme and “unmanly,”

⁶³ Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 38 (“Democritus”).

according to Claudius, and fails to heed the stoic capitulation to the necessity that “This must be so” (I.ii.94-106).

Claudius' advice probably strikes modern readers as callous and self-serving, as it may well be, but it is also quite orthodox. In preaching fortitude in the face of fortune and the danger of yielding to passion, he follows the prescriptions Babb collects for treating the melancholic: “The melancholic should be urged to seek guidance and comfort in 'the holosome counsayles founde in holy scripture, and in the bokes of morall doctrine,' so that he may learn to regulate his passions, especially his sorrows. His friends [...] should point out to him the unmanliness of allowing passion to rule reason[.]” Moreover, Claudius sends for just those friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to whom the melancholic “must confide[...]: 'grief concealed strangles the soul,' but when one's sorrow is imparted to a friend, 'it is instantly removed, by his counsel haply, wisdom, persuasion, advice.’”⁶⁴ In Hamlet's case, this plan fails dismally, since Hamlet also realizes that their friendship includes the role of spy for Claudius and exacerbates the paranoia for which melancholics are known.⁶⁵ Eschewing such friendly counsel, he also fails to turn to “morall doctrine,” such as Seneca, and instead turns to satire, that body of work that

⁶⁴ Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 52. Babb bases this passage on Timothy Bright's *Treatise of Melancholie* (1586), Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Castel of Helth* (1541), and Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

⁶⁵ It is beyond the scope of the current argument, but the role of spy which also developed at the close of the sixteenth century had a strong influence on the malcontent's worldview, creating widespread paranoia and fear of atheists and other “bugbears.” Whether or not Marlowe played the role of spy himself, the deaths of Kyd and Marlowe were the convoluted result of a complex chain of informers, as Charles Nicholl has traced. Such a culture of surveillance pervades Jonson's work, and in fact Robert Poley, one of the two men who spied on Jonson in prison, was also one of the men present at Marlowe's death and may have been attempting to convert Marlowe for Essex against Raleigh. While Shakespeare seems to have largely avoided the legal troubles of other playwrights, even in the *Richard II* incident, his awareness of the growing culture of surveillance is marked in moments such as these. See Charles Nicholl, “‘By My Onely Meanes Sett Downe’: The Texts of Marlowe's Atheism,” in *Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson: New Directions in Biography*, ed. Takashi Kozuka and J.R. Mulryne (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), 153–66; Nicholl, *Reckoning*, 326–28, 336–37.

seeks to purge melancholy by indulging it, as Marston's *Scourge* declares:

*Thou nursing Mother of faire wisdoms lore,
Ingenuous Melancholy, I implore
Thy graue assistance, take thy gloomie seate,
Inthroned thee in my blood[.]* (*Scourge*, Proem I.9-12)

Like Essex, “conspiring” with his melancholic eccentricity, Hamlet too “enthrones” melancholy in his blood. Whereas Shakespeare's sources, Belleforest's Amleth and Lucius Junius Brutus before him, took on a purely instrumental “antic disposition,” much as many Elizabethan courtiers feigned love melancholy for advancement, Shakespeare positions his Hamlet among those dispositional melancholics who deepen and collude with their dangerous condition.

Polonius, of course, finds another cause: love melancholy for his daughter Ophelia. Although Polonius is clearly made a fool throughout the play, his deduction is not as ridiculous as it seems. He “Hunts [...] the trail of policy” like a good politician (*H*, II.ii.47), seeking out and analyzing the secret motivations of the prince much as Coke and Bacon sought to establish the motives of Essex. The discovery (or invention) of motives through an analysis of character is the key to negotiating the shifting political labyrinth where nothing is what it seems. However, rather than politic history (where he might have found an account of Amleth or Brutus to aid him), Polonius seems to be taking his lessons from the theater: from Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* to Marston's *Antonio & Mellida*, the courtier could find many precedents for Hamlet's actions in love melancholy. In particular, we might think of Marston's Antonio whose grief at his father's apparent death is almost wholly subsumed by his quest to pursue Mellida under her father's nose. Polonius' mistake is merely that he is in the wrong play, or at least a more complex one. In fact, as I discussed in Chapter 2, malcontent melancholy develops out of and is fully

entangled with love melancholy; Essex's own melancholy sprung from his position as queen's favorite and the resentment that festered in the Elizabethan pose of courtier-lover. Hamlet's mad dress and failure to put his speech in proper frame mirror the love melancholic driven to lunacy; he comes before Ophelia "with his doublet all unbraced, / No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled, / Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle" and after perusing her face at length he can only emit "a sigh so piteous and profound / As it did seem to shatter all his bulk" (II.i.76-8). The portrait is not unlike the Overburian character of the "Amorist":

Hee is neuer without verses, and muske confects: and sighs to the hazard of his buttons [...] He is vntrust & vnbuttoned, vngartred, not out of carelesness, but care [...] He answers not, or not to the purpose; and no maruell, for he is not at home.⁶⁶

Hamlet may not be "neuer without verses," but he does crucially meet Polonius with a book of satire in hand, just after Polonius has revealed Hamlet's own amorous verses to the king. That book contains, Hamlet tells Polonius:

Slanders, sir; for the satirical rogue says here that old men have gray beards, that their faces are wrinkled, [...] and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams. All which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down; for yourself, sir, shall grow old as I am, if, like a crab, you could go backward. (*H*, II.ii.194-201)

Critics have widely held that Hamlet is reading from a copy of Juvenal's *Satires*, referencing the description of old age in Satire X. In *Antonio's Revenge*, Antonio announces his revenger status by entering dressed in black with, like Hieronimo, a copy

⁶⁶ Overbury, Thomas, *New and Choice Characters of Seuerall Authors* (London, 1615): sig. C5, *EEBO*, accessed 21 January 2017, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:22122290. Musk confects are a kind of aphrodisiac using secretions from the Asian musk deer of the kind described in *Ricette magiche e afrodisiache* (16th C.). See Jonathan Ott, "Pharmaka, Philtres, and Pheromones: Getting High and Getting Off," *MAPS* 12, no. 1 (2002): 26.

of Seneca in hand. Hieronimo, however, is reading from Seneca's tragedies, essentially perverting them into a handbook for revenge.⁶⁷ Antonio is reading from Seneca's *De Providentia*, but both revengers establish their status through a rejection of Senecan stoicism and an un-Senecan embrace of a tragic truth: "Pigmy cares / Can shelter under patience' shield, but giant griefs / Will burst all covert."⁶⁸ Marston underlines Kyd's message—stoicism has a breaking point that renders all its cold comfort trite and meaningless: "Pish!" Antonio tells the dead pages of Seneca, "Thy mother was not lately widowed, / Thy dear affièd love lately defamed / With blemish of foul lust when thou wrotest thus."⁶⁹ Shakespeare thoroughly shifts the ground of this revenge tragedy convention by making his revenger's handbook not tragedy but satire. If Marston put stoicism on trial in his satiric revenge tragedies, Shakespeare puts Marston's own satirical vein on trial: does satire present any better hermeneutic for dealing with life's vicissitudes?

Marston's own satire, of course, draws heavily from Juvenal, but Hamlet's *deployment* of Juvenal here more powerfully resembles the kind of obfuscating wit modeled in Marston's conflict with Maria Perez de Recalde described in Chapter 4. Seeming to mistake satire for slander, echoing the tension that haunted print and theater alike, Hamlet in fact converts the general satiric portrait into an oblique slanderous attack on Polonius. Without giving Polonius any chance to reply, Hamlet then re-contextualizes the slander: he apparently suggests that he himself takes offense, seeming to cast himself as the old man and Polonius as the youth, only to shift gears mid-sentence to jibe that

⁶⁷ Kyd, *Spanish Tragedy*, 79-80 (III.xiii).

⁶⁸ Marston, *Antonio's Revenge*, 90-91 (II.iii.4-6).

⁶⁹ Marston, 93 (III.iii.49-51).

Polonius would need to age backward, revealing the entire statement to be a conditional contrary to fact. The convoluted re-re-framing renders the jibe clear while making it almost impossible to justify taking offense.

Perhaps most importantly, however, Hamlet defines the portrait of old age as slanderous not because it is dishonest but because it should not be “set down,” a scathing critique of the process of interpreting satire as slander. First, Hamlet echoes Jonson's critique that interpreting satire as slander implies the truth of the statement, since those who take offense must find the qualities described in the satire applicable to themselves. Hamlet then proceeds to subtly mock the paradox of early modern censorship: the danger of setting down the truth. What connects the various kinds of texts regulated by the Bishop's Order—satires, epigrams, plays, and English histories—is their potential application to the contemporary moment. Satire as a source of truths better left unspoken resonates with those critiques of politic history that see it as a breach of the *arcana imperii*, the exposure of the necessary fictions of governance *as* fictions. Many attacks on Taciteans operated on a kind of logic of slander, arguing that to use Tacitus in contemporary politics was to “accuse our present Princes of *Tyranny*,” as Casaubon's influential attack on Lipsius puts it. As we saw in Chapter 3, such political analogies were ubiquitous, but some real semblance was necessary to construct them. Others pointed to the danger not of analogy but of access. Trajano Boccalini satirizes this argument in *Ragguagli di Parnaso*, a prime example of the confluence of the politic and the satirical, in which Apollo accuses Tacitus of creating in his work “a kinde of spectacles, that work most pernicious effects for Princes; for so much as being put upon the noses of silly and simple people, they so refine and sharpen their sight” that it is “no longer possible for

Princes [...] to cast dust into their subjects eyes[.]” Boccalini makes ludicrous the accusation, as Bradford puts it, that politic historians “had infringed the *mystique* of statecraft—desecrated the mysteries, as it were,” the same accusation often leveled at Machiavelli.⁷⁰ Hamlet similarly parodies those who want to suppress satire because they don't like what they see—or what it allows others to see.

The analogy I am constructing is not a mere resemblance but draws on the conflation between satiric and politic railing that Marston established in the character of Feliche. The movement from stoicism to satire in the hands of the revenger signals the rise of satire as a political discourse equivalent and in some ways complementary to politic history. However, Hamlet's antic ramblings resemble Marston's verse satire more than Feliche's melancholy, combined with Kydian madness. Some of Feliche's grotesque, bodily images could easily come from the mouth of Hamlet: “O that the stomach of this queasy age / Digests or brooks such raw unseasoned gobs / And vomits not them forth!”⁷¹ However, such passages are rare, and Feliche is rather tame in comparison to Marston's Kinsayder, the satirical persona of *The Scourge*. In the proem to the third book of satires, Kinsayder explains that “In serious iest, and iesting seriousnes / I striue to scourge poluting beasliness[.]” invoking not classical muses but personifications of resentment and disgust:

Faire *Detestation* of foule odious sinne,
In which our swinish times lye wallowing,
Be thou my conduct and my *Genius*,
My wits inciting sweet breath'd *Zephirus*.
O that a Satyres hand had force to pluck
Some fludgate vp, to purge the world from muck[.] (*Scourge*, Proem III.1-2, 13-18)

⁷⁰ Bradford, “‘Utility’ of Tacitus,” 137. Casaubon and Boccalini qtd. in Bradford, 129, 137.

⁷¹ Marston, *Antonio & Mellida*, 93 (II.i.92-94).

Kinsayder sees his age as a body choked with excremental waste. Kernan points out Kinsayder's obsession with "the functions and diseases of the human body," arguing that *The Scourge* expresses a pessimism far beyond stoicism that "borders on the psychotic."⁷² This pessimism is deeply underscored by a sense of futility: if in 1598 Jonson's early satire *Every Man in his Humor* expressed confidence in the power of satiric catharsis, Marston in the same year figures purgation as mere wishful thinking. Rather than the active project of Jonson, Marston's satire is passive, venting one's own frustrations and humors without hope of garnering anything but censure and ill will from his readers.

The malcontent Hamlet thus tests the consequences of a political orientation founded in satiric rejection and purgation—founded not on the idealized *parrhesiastes* of Marston's self-projection, but the persona of Marstonian verse satire. Hamlet's character infuses the stage malcontent established by Feliche with all the vehemence and hysteria of Kinsayder, creating a template that easily maps onto the Kydian madness of a Hieronimo. It is Hamlet's satirical attack on Polonius, which the first quarto calls "pregnant [...] and full of wit,"⁷³ that prompts Polonius' much debated assertion, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (*H*, II.ii.202-3). In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo's madness is clearly established, and Kyd's Hamlet probably expressed a similar antic madness; as is clear from Jonson's additions to *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo's madness captivated early modern audiences precisely because Kyd structured the irrational as a kind of alternative logic, creating a linguistic spectacle that

⁷² Kernan, *Cankered Muse*, 121.

⁷³ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: Parallel Texts of the First and Second Quartos and First Folio*, ed. Bernice W. Kliman and Paul Bertram, 2nd ed., AMS Studies in the Renaissance 39 (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 2003), 84 (l. 949).

mirrors the logic of a universal injustice.⁷⁴ Despite his clear derangement, however, Hieronimo manages to conceal his madness to some extent and carry out an elaborate revenge, the madness of the plan expressed in the very fabric of its intricate and spectacular design. Whether Kyd's Hamlet was similarly unhindered by his madness is impossible to determine, but as several critics have pointed out, the madness of Shakespeare's Hamlet is hardly strategic. Unlike Amleth's feigned madness, as Greenblatt notes, Hamlet's "ruse is a complete failure[,]” arousing suspicion rather than allaying it.⁷⁵

In the first quarto, at least, Corambis (Q1's Polonius) sticks to his initial diagnosis, insisting that Hamlet's witty convolutions are typical of his own experience of "the vemencie of loue" in his youth, and the amorous verses of the Wits lend him some support.⁷⁶ Polonius' interpretation has tended to split critical interpretation in two directions: either Hamlet's madness is real, or it is feigned out of strategy or "method." However, Polonius makes no such distinction: he actually insists that Hamlet *is* mad, and that his madness contains, hides, or facilitates a method. This mingling of madness and method was commonly attributed to melancholy, and not just on the stage. In *Lyric Wonder*, Biester revises Karin S. Coddon's comparison between Hamlet and Essex's madness, emphasizing the element of "stratagem" in Essex's erratic actions. In his *Brief Notes and Remembrances*, Sir John Harrington records shortly before the revolt that Essex's moods shifted suddenly "from sorrowe and repentaunce to rage and rebellion," that he "uttered strange wordes, borderynge on suche strange desygns" that Harrington

⁷⁴ The vast majority of Jonson's additions enlarge Hieronimo's opportunities for antic railing, perhaps brought back into fashion by the success of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Cf. the additions marked out in the Norton edition of *The Spanish Tragedy*.

⁷⁵ Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 219.

⁷⁶ Shakespeare, *Hamlet: Parallel Texts*, 84 (l. 951).

divorced himself from the falling star, and that Essex spoke to the queen in a manner that “no man who hathe *mens sana in corpore sano* [a sound mind in a sound body]” would dare. Harrington attributed Essex's degeneration to the workings of ambition, which “thwarted in its career, dothe speedilie leade on to madnesse[.]”⁷⁷ While Harrington's description emphasizes an addled and eccentric mind, John Donne had written to Henry Wotton that “the worst accidents of his sicknes are that [Essex] conspires with it & that it is not here beleevd.”⁷⁸ Biester rightly argues that Essex is seen to be engaged in the “feigning” of melancholy, just as Raleigh and countless other Elizabethan courtiers strategically cultivated a melancholic demeanor. Biester sees Harrington and Donne essentially establishing the spectrum of early modern melancholy, from dissimulation to pathology. However, while he notes that “Coddon underestimates this element of stratagem in Essex's behavior,” Biester focuses mostly on the kind of *suspicion* that Donne expresses as itself a demonstration of politic savvy.⁷⁹ Donne's description actually suggests that he believes Essex to have a “sicknes” with which he “conspires”; like Polonius, Donne sees a real ailment deployed in a strategic manner. This leads some to see the madness as dissimulation, but Harrington and Donne both see the madness to be real *and* strategic.

Hamlet similarly seems to conspire with madness. As Paul Conklin's survey of early references to *Hamlet* makes clear, in the seventeenth century, “Hamlet was seen,

⁷⁷ Harrington, John, *Nugae Antiquae* (London, 1779): 2:225, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, accessed 24 January 2017, <http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&useGroupName=new67449&tabID=T001&docId=CB3329182118&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>.

⁷⁸ Qtd. in R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 108.

⁷⁹ Biester, *Lyric Wonder*, 102–3.

first of all, most decidedly as a malcontent; and at times as 'madd[.]'"⁸⁰ Hamlet's charisma and the sympathy he evokes should put us in mind not of the moral poise of heroism, but of the morality play Vice, who influenced the evolution of antic figures in both Elizabethan comedy and tragedy.⁸¹ As seen in Chapter 3, through characters like Barabas and Hieronimo, the Vice merged with the Senecan villain-protagonist, taking on a less allegorical, more psychological valence. Sin was no longer a separate entity easily susceptible to theological or theatrical catharsis, undergoing a shift from comedy to tragedy in which the ultimate Protestant peril of *despair* attains a significant moral gravity, particularly in revenge tragedy. Luther had made the encounter with despair inherent to Catholic modes of interpreting God's word and integral to the Protestant conversion experience. Calvin intensified this connection, seeing the "anxiety and dejection" created by self-examination as necessary for self-abandonment to God's grace: "In contrast to Luther's ambivalent appraisal of *tristitia* [spiritual melancholy], therefore, for Calvin, despair had a necessary and unequivocally positive eschatological function."⁸² However, such a test risked failure: as Ficino warned in *Theologia Platonica*, melancholy could also lead to a "despair and atheistic impiety" that could drive one to suicide.⁸³

Despite Hamlet's encounter with the Ghost, which presumably should anchor the play's divine framework, in Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy, the "undiscovered country" is a space of dread and the unknown, where God is conspicuously missing. Instead, the soliloquy contemplates suicide in stoic terms, but ultimately Hamlet falters in

⁸⁰ Conklin, *Hamlet Criticism*, 12.

⁸¹ See especially Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Dessen, *Shakespeare & Moral Plays*.

⁸² Gowland, "Problem of Melancholy," 103–4.

⁸³ Gowland, "Ethics of Melancholy," 107.

the face of his fear of the unknown, a reaction which he oddly calls “conscience” (*H*, III.i.57-84). Well before his encounter with the ghost, Hamlet displays a melancholy demeanor that he can neither control nor hide. Hamlet sees the world much as Kinsayder does, but Kinsayder's futility in the face of a world of “muck” has reached in Hamlet the level of suicidal despair:

Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. (*H*, I.ii.129-32)

Critics have tended to downplay the importance of Hamlet's suicidal impulse. Hamlet expresses the pathological extremity of his melancholy here in no uncertain terms and its totalizing effects that reduce the world to an “unweeded garden” possessed only by “things rank and gross in nature” (I.ii.135-7). If editors are right in reading Q1 and Q2's “sallied flesh” as “sullied flesh,” then Hamlet is also yoking the corruption of the times and the corruption of the body in Marstonian fashion, and he comes to identify the injustice of the world with the grossness of his own sinful flesh.⁸⁴ This soliloquy thus becomes the “argument,” in early modern terms, to the encounter with the ghost, introduced immediately afterward by Horatio, where Hamlet faces in allegorical terms the danger of conspiring with melancholic despair.

Fascinatingly, in this same speech, Hamlet also compares the old king and Claudius as like “Hyperion to a satyr” (I.ii.140). The satyr was, of course, that mythological half-goat deeply associated with lust, and this is the force of the comparison: for Hamlet, lust for Gertrude and lust for power are essentially the same debased, bodily vice. Yet the satyr is also the root of satire, according to the popular

⁸⁴ See Shakespeare, *Hamlet: Parallel Texts*, 22; Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 15n129.

Elizabethan etymology, and in the early modern period the genre and creature were thoroughly entangled both in spelling and meaning.⁸⁵ Kernan explains that Aelius Donatus' history of classical drama written in the 4th century, which was “prefixed regularly to the editions of Terence read in all Elizabethan grammar schools,” popularized the etymology. Donatus claimed that originally actors, costumed as satyrs, verbally assaulted actual citizens, but this was tamed in New Comedy, and the attacks became more general.⁸⁶ Presumably, the satyr masks acted in part to protect the actors from repercussions. In other words, according to Donatus, satire emerged *out of* slander, and it could be argued that Hamlet's attack on Polonius is merely pulling back a thin veneer of generality that always hides slanderous intent just beneath the surface.

More importantly, figuring Claudius as a satyr points to the seed of Hamlet's own satirical temperament. Elizabethan melancholy is an obsessive disorder: whether love, grief, ambition, or hatred of vice, the melancholic humor latches on to a single notion, and everything in the melancholic's world is defined in reference to it. As Freudian readings have exhaustively demonstrated, Hamlet's unhealthy obsession with lust and incest pervades the play, an obsession shared by Marston's satiric personae in particular.⁸⁷ Marston's satire seems so pathologically preoccupied with lust, critics often see it as a

⁸⁵ In the Q2 and F1 texts, the Act I, scene ii line terms Claudius a “satire” and “Satyre,” respectively, while in Q1, Q2, and F1, the Act II, scene ii line calls Juvenal a “Satyricall Satyre,” “satericall rogue,” and a “Satyricall slaue,” respectively. Shakespeare, *Hamlet: Parallel Texts*, 22–23, 84–85.

⁸⁶ Kernan, *Cankered Muse*, 54–55.

⁸⁷ Janet Adelman's seminal essay deserves mention as one of the seminal readings of the Gertrude-Hamlet relationship: “Man and Wife Is One Flesh: *Hamlet* and the Confrontation with the Maternal Body,” in *Suffocating Mothers* (New York & London: Routledge, 1992), 11–37. By contrast, Freud only focuses on Hamlet's pathological grief for his father. Although there is only one oblique reference to *Hamlet* in the essay, there is a strong sense that the play was essentially Freud's source text for thinking through melancholia: see Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology, and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 14, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 246.

mark of personal obsession: “All the English satirists of the 1590's imitated a striking feature of their classical models in their preoccupation with sexual immorality[.]” O. J. Campbell asserts, “And Marston was fairly obsessed by it.”⁸⁸

Campbell puts it perhaps more baldly than more recent critics, but the temptation to identify the persona and poet remains strong, especially since satirists flirt with such identifications so consciously. This critical attempt to read the subject of the satirist's railings into the character of the satirist is not entirely misguided, however. The identification of the satyr and the satirist indicates how implicated the satirist is in his own attack on vice: the mimetic *persona* of the satirist must incorporate the crude style and persona of the satyr to authorize his attack on those very qualities the satyr represents. Marston seems particularly aware of this deeply paradoxical and compromised position, ridiculing those satirists (like Hall, presumably) who pretend to take a morally superior position. That Hamlet seems here to be studying the “Satyricall Satyre” (Q1) Juvenal for strategies to deploy against the “Satyre” (F1) Claudius emphasizes the extent to which Hamlet must become *like* Claudius in his quest for revenge, as other critics have noted, through the adoption of machiavellian deceit and cunning, and may also perhaps act as an oblique criticism of the paradoxical practice of satire in general.⁸⁹

So on the surface, Hamlet can be read through the early modern lenses of melancholy deriving from both grief, like Hieronimo, or love sickness, like Antonio. Returning to our comparison between Hamlet and Pansa, however, why is Hamlet's

⁸⁸ Campbell, “Hamlet and Other Malcontents,” 144–45. Kernan criticizes this tendency and carefully analyzes Marston's satiric persona in *Cankered Muse*, 38ff.

⁸⁹ For a recent example, see Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, Montaigne*, 249.

reaction to his father's death so different from the one envisioned by Guilpin? The obvious answer has proven to be so galling that only recently have critics started to take it seriously: when Rosencrantz attempts to council Hamlet that “you bar the door upon your own liberty if you deny your griefs to your friend,” the standard advice to melancholics, Hamlet answers simply, “Sir, I lack advancement” (*H*, III.ii.315-7). The context has encouraged most critics to deem the line disingenuous, but earlier in the same scene, “advancement” is on Hamlet's mind when he commends Horatio's stoicism (III.ii.50), and he censures himself to Ophelia for being “proud, revengeful, [and] ambitious” (III.i.125). Whereas Pansa is macabrely elated by the expectation of a modest inheritance, Hamlet's expectation that he would inherit an entire realm has been frustrated by the unexpected intrusion of Claudius, who “Popped in between th'election and my hopes” (V.ii.64).

In other words, Hamlet shares with malcontents from nobles like Essex to gentlemen like Pansa the key problem of frustrated ambition, and it is this obstructed energy that causes Hamlet's famous inability to act. This obstructed energy causes Hamlet to ricochet erratically between near paralysis and wild brashness, a tendency not so much heroically overcome but intensified in the kind of erratic, misdirected activity that characterizes Sidney's Hotspur-like death at Zutphen and Essex's desperate decision to attempt to force an armed audience with Elizabeth. Although Denmark was an elective monarchy, as de Grazia points out, there was a strong precedent for sons to succeed their fathers, and the subverted expectation would be even more disquieting to an English audience approaching its own uncertain succession.⁹⁰ Yet Claudius' usurpation of Hamlet's expectation is not a usurpation of the crown; regardless of murder, Claudius has

⁹⁰ De Grazia, “*Hamlet*” without *Hamlet*, 85–91.

won the election, however surprised Hamlet is by Claudius “popping” in as a dark horse candidate. This choice was probably the result of Claudius' marriage to Gertrude, who King Hamlet seems to have given some form of jointure leaving his estate to his wife rather than his son, since Claudius refers to Gertrude as “Th'imperial jointress to this warlike state” (*H*, I.ii.9).⁹¹ In deference to this jointure, it seems that the Council chose to make Claudius king, oddly implicating Hamlet's father in both his son's disinheritance and the preferment of his murderer. “In this context,” de Grazia wryly notes, “the grand precipitate of all psychological readings of Hamlet looks considerably less mysterious[.]”⁹²

Ambition is the most defining characteristic of both the Inns of Court malcontent or malcontent courtier, and this motive mingles uncomfortably with Hamlet's other grievances. The “grief” Hamlet feels for his father's passing is itself equivocal, since the word still carried a greater affinity with the verbal sense of “grieved” or wronged; interpreted in this fashion, Hobbes's definition of melancholy in the *Leviathan* suddenly seems not only an apt definition of the malcontent but almost a synopsis of the play:

Griefe, from opinion of want of power, is called DEJECTION of mind. [...] Dejection, subjects a man to causelesse fears; which is a Madnesse commonly called MELANCHOLY[.]⁹³

Were Essex's fears of Raleigh and the Cecils causeless? Not entirely. Hamlet's fears, too, are not wholly unfounded: he uncovers his father's murder and, due to his own actions, becomes Claudius' next target.

The madness is that due to *feelings* of persecution, malcontents like Hamlet,

⁹¹ On Gertrude's jointure, see de Grazia, 105.

⁹² De Grazia, 89.

⁹³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 42, 54.

Essex, and Sidney begin to act in ways that exacerbate or even create adversarial conditions with the most powerful people around them. Just as Gertrude becomes the site of an incestuous nausea that occludes Hamlet's own desire for the throne his mother represents, in King Hamlet the prince locates a "grief" that represents the withholding of the same throne, a tendency to map political aspirations onto bodily affects that is reminiscent of the striking physicality of Marston's *contemptus mundi* language.⁹⁴ After Q1's version of the player's Hecuba speech, Hamlet similarly conjoins these two grievances:

What would he do and if he had my losse?
His father muredred, and a Crowne bereft him?⁹⁵

Hamlet's belief that he has had the crown stolen from him, however legally, causes him to characterize himself and Claudius as two evenly matched "mighty opposites," sparks striking between their "fell incensèd points" as they engage in the kind of romantic heroic struggle that would have appealed to Sidney (V.ii.60-1). The imaginary battle clearly bears little relation to the events of the play, but the ambiguous reference of Horatio's exclamation—"Why, what a king is this!" (V.ii.61)—becomes a crux of judgment: while Hamlet seems to take it as a reference to Claudius as tyrant, Hamlet's self-elevation might suggest that Horatio is commending the prince for becoming such kingly material...or perhaps for becoming as tyrannical as his "opposite."

⁹⁴ De Grazia likewise argues that Ophelia's corpse comes to stand in for both Hamlet and Laertes' lost inheritances, the "grief" they share and compete over, in *"Hamlet" without Hamlet*, 126.

⁹⁵ Shakespeare, *Hamlet: Parallel Texts*, 104 (ll. 1136-7).

vi. "is't not perfect conscience?": The *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* and Hamlet's tyrannicide

Critics generally point to Hamlet's return to England as a turning point, even those who see Hamlet as occupying the role of Vice, from scourge to minister in the case of Fredson Bowers, from passive to active stoic *virtus* for Geoffrey Aggeler, or from the sovereignty of reason to Protestant conscience for Mark Matheson.⁹⁶ Most readings emphasize a shift from the passive to the active in some manner. Such readings are so caught up in Hamlet's tone of apparent confidence that little attention is paid to the plot or to the nuances of Hamlet's speech and action. What, after all, does Hamlet's great action in Act V amount to? An idle conversation with some gravediggers; an indecorous dive into a grave, setting his own grief in narcissistic competition with Ophelia's closest kin; and finally, a foolish grudge match, apparently to satisfy Claudius' wager, which the Lord carrying messages from Osric twice calls "play" (V.ii.169, 177). "Play" here is the proper term for a fencing match, but it also emphasizes Hamlet's continual distraction by non-serious action as opposed to the tragic action of revenge. The players and Hamlet's brief career as playwright of the "Mousetrap," of course, best exemplify this tendency, and though the play putatively accomplishes its goal of outing Claudius as murderer, it in no way furthers Hamlet's revenge. In the fencing scene, Hamlet has been once again taken in by *Claudius'* device, and it is only the accidental deaths of Gertrude and Laertes by poisoned instruments meant for Hamlet that reveal Claudius' plots-within-plots to dispose of his mad son-in-law. Stabbing Claudius is perhaps the dying Hamlet's most futile and pointless "action": murder is out, but by the random circumstances of fortune and not by

⁹⁶ Fredson Bowers, "Hamlet as Minister and Scourge," *PMLA* 70, no. 4 (September 1955): 748; Aggeler, *Nobler in the Mind*, 147; Mark Matheson, "Hamlet and 'A Matter Tender and Dangerous,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 390.

Hamlet's hand. It is in this context that we must understand Hamlet's "special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (V.ii.189-90). The irony of this, one of Shakespeare's few references to providence, is that whatever providence might operate through the chaos of fortune, in the random fall of a sparrow, it is beyond the human comprehension of Hamlet. The universe mockingly echoes back to Hamlet his words to Horatio: "There are more things in heaven and earth [...] / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (I.v.174-5). The prince who sees himself as Tamburlaine, heroically aligned with the gods as "scourge and minister," is at best merely the incidental executioner of a fate Claudius has brought on himself.

Hamlet's sudden interest in "conscience" in the fifth act, which Matheson takes to signal a kind of radical conversion, emerges as a troublingly cold and empty place. In response to Horatio's remark, "So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't[.]" Hamlet callously responds, "They are not near my conscience" (V.ii.56-57). Similarly, Hamlet ends his list of grievances against Claudius with the moral judgment, "is't not perfect conscience" to kill such a king (V.ii.66)? If conscience made Hamlet "coward" and held his hand from murder previously, following Hamlet's near death at sea his conscience becomes a blank space—"perfect" means spiritually immaculate, unstained, like those satirists Marston critiques that cloak themselves in the "white roabe"; yet for a conscience to mean anything, it must have content. To be troubled by conscience, as Marston makes clear, is to *have* a conscience, as well as to have the authority to judge the sins of others. To have a "perfect conscience" is to be in bad faith, attributing to oneself a superhuman and un-Christian state of being.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Matheson acknowledges that "Hamlet realizes a measure of the potential for dissent inherent in the Protestant doctrines of conscience and predestination," but he does not go far enough; he makes the

The prince's use of conscience as supreme authority aligns Hamlet with Huguenot discourses of legitimate resistance. Matheson is right that “conscience” represented an alternate source of authority that threatened the authority not just of the church but also of the monarch; Protestant religious dissenters routinely evoked conscience in defense of beliefs deemed heretical and treasonous. However, the stakes of *Hamlet* place this debate in its most dangerous context: tyrannicide. When Hamlet kills Claudius—to cries of “Treason! Treason!” (V.ii.297)—he effectively ends Denmark as an independent state, turning the realm over to Norway and unraveling the political stability Claudius had achieved. Tyrannicide turns security into chaos and subjugation to a foreign power. While James VI & I clearly had some stake in the question, he gives a succinct version of the orthodox view of patience under tyranny in *True Laws of Free Monarchies* (1598), published five years before his coronation as king of England:

it is certaine that a king can never be so monstrously vicious, but hee will generally favour justice, and maintaine some order, except in the particulars, wherein his inordinate lustes and passions cary him away; where by the contrary, no King being, nothing is unlawfull to none.⁹⁸

It is crucial that Hamlet never, amongst all his grievances, considers Claudius to be a usurper, against whom any and all resistance would be justified. Like James's imagined tyrant, Claudius is a legitimate monarch—even more legitimate than Machiavelli's Prince, in spite of his fratricide—who provides continuity and political stability against the threat of the war of all against all, as Hobbes would later put it, and even foreign occupation is preferable to anarchy or civil war to the early modern imagination.

common New Historicist mistake of grasping onto the “subversive” as a heroic, populist impulse hidden from or suppressed by an oppressive structure of political surveillance, as well as falling into the tendency to treat *Hamlet's* position as *Shakespeare's*. Matheson, “*Hamlet* and ‘A Matter Tender and Dangerous,’” 396.

⁹⁸ Qtd. in Bradford, “‘Utility’ of Tacitus,” 140.

However, the Huguenots struggling under what they perceived as Catholic tyranny in France had developed a quite different theory of resistance.

In the wake of the Bartholomew Day Massacre, “monarchomach” tracts deployed conscience as the foundation of resistance theory for desperate and aggrieved Huguenots. Understanding the Massacre as an attempt by Charles on his brother Navarre's life, this resistance theory theorizes the proper reaction to a fratricidal tragedy mirroring Claudius' murder of King Hamlet. *Hamlet* emphasizes the revenge *ethos* implicit in such resistance: entangled as they are in the horror of the Massacre, Huguenot defenses of resistance, for Shakespeare, are incapable of separating justice from personal vengeance. In the preface to the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1576), the most infamous monarchomach resistance tract, the pseudonymous publisher Scribonius Spinter claims that it records conversations originally taking place in the wake of the Massacre.⁹⁹ Spinter fears that this investigation into the *proper* powers of a prince over his people will not be taken well by many, “For these inquiries diametrically conflict with the evil arts, vicious counsels, and false and pestiferous doctrines of Niccolò Machiavelli the Florentine, whom these men consider to be a guide in governing the commonwealth.”¹⁰⁰ In the contest between a prince's word and God's word, the *Vindiciae* makes clear, God's word supersedes: “If the Prince commands to cut the throat of an innocent, to pillage and commit extortion, there is no man (provided he have some feeling of *conscience*) that would execute such a commandement [*sic*].” The *Vindiciae* follows with the example of Papinian standing up

⁹⁹ This preface does not appear in early modern English translations of the tract as far as I can determine.

¹⁰⁰ Stephanus Junius Brutus, *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos*, trans. George Garnett (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), xx–xxi, 8–9 (A4^v, A3^r).

to the tyranny of Caracalla, the Roman emperor who killed his brother Geta.¹⁰¹ As Robert Stillman argues, “The Roman imperial allusion secures an obvious parallel to contemporary Huguenot interpretations of the Massacre (one more fratricidal tragedy in peril of whitewash).”¹⁰²

If Claudius' election whitewashes over his brother's murder, *Hamlet* explores whether the consequences for righting wrongs on such a scale might not outweigh the apparent justice done. Despite its stoic proclamations that tyrannical “hypocrites may not be overthrown by any device, [...] and that it is a task for bended knees, not arms and legs[,]” the *Vindiciae* became a common supplement to Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, and its pages would be ransacked for more explicit tracts proclaiming the legitimacy of tyrannicide.¹⁰³ This possibility appears in an ambiguous warning:

What then? cannot God when he pleaseth stirre up particular and private persons to ruine a mighty and powerfull tyranny? Hee that gives power and ability to some even out of the dust without any title or colourable pretext of lawfull authority to rise to the height of rule and dominion, and in it tyrannize and afflict the people for their transgressions? cannot he also even from the meanest multitude raise a liberator? [...] What if *Abab* [*sic*] cut off good men, if *Jezabel* subborn false witnesses against *Naboth*, may not a *Jehu* be rais'd to exterminate the whole line of *Abab*, to revenge the death of *Naboth*, and to cast the body of *Jezabel* to be torne and devoured of dogs? [...]

But for as much as in these latter times, those miraculous testimonies by which God was wont to confirmed the extraordinary vocation of those famouse Worthies, are now wanting for the most part: let the people be advis'd, that in seeking to crosse the Sea dry foote, they take not some *Impostor* for their guide, that may lead them head-long to destruction[.]¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Languet, *Vindiciae* (1648), 15 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰² Robert E Stillman, “The Truths of a Slippery World: Poetry and Tyranny in Sidney’s ‘Defense,’” *Renaissance Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 1294.

¹⁰³ Brutus, *Vindiciae*, 170 (212). See Brutus, xx: “Jean Boucher, whose *De Justa Henrici Tertii Abdicatione* was in press at the time of Henri III's assassination in 1589, simply lifted large sections of the *Vindiciae* into his argument justifying armed resistance against and deposition of the king, and, in certain circumstances, tyrannicide.”

¹⁰⁴ Languet, *Vindiciae* (1648), 133 (emphasis mine).

While Cambridge editor George Garnett is careful to contextualize *vindiciae* in terms of Roman law, as the legal claim for the recovery of property by its rightful owner, and *vindicator* as claimant, the English translation reveals the connotations of *vengeance* also resonant in these terms, and the passage clearly evokes the possibility of a scourge of God.¹⁰⁵ In the context of the English Civil War, “vindicate the blood of Naboth” becomes “revenge the death of *Naboth*,” and the desire to “destroy the family of Ahab” is intensified to a desire to “exterminate the whole line.”¹⁰⁶ The translation reveals its powerfully affective pitch, particularly in the italicized image of Jezebel rent by dogs, poorly contained by the question mark. The answer, meanwhile, does not so much shut down the possibility of such a scourge, but rather focuses on the ambiguity of signs, merely making such a revenger *dangerous*, not immoral, to follow.

In this context, *Hamlet* is a play that tests the viability of a “vindicator” who faces a fratricidal Caracalla not with the railing martyrdom of a Feliche but with the impulse to play the scourge. Hamlet's authority is itself ambiguous: on the one hand, he is one of the nobles behind whom, the *Vindiciae* asserts, the “mob” (*plebs*) might legitimately stand to “vindicate” the commonwealth, and Claudius fears how “loved” Hamlet is “of the distracted multitude” (*H*, IV.iii.4).¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, Shakespeare juxtaposes Hamlet with Laertes, whose status as popular rebel is indisputable, emphasizing how personal Hamlet's revenge remains. Although many critics have argued that Act V stages a redemption in which Hamlet's personal illegitimate revenge becomes legitimate political resistance, there is no way for Hamlet to separate the personal from the political, just as

¹⁰⁵ Brutus, *Vindiciae*, lxxxiii.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Brutus, 171 (213-14).

¹⁰⁷ Brutus, 170.

his personal sense of thwarted ambition undercuts his ability to act in a disinterested capacity for the good of the commonwealth. As a liberator, Hamlet certainly sends mixed signals, lacking the clear “miraculous testimonies” of a Jehu.¹⁰⁸ Whereas Jonson divides Machiavelli's *Prince* and machiavellianism between Tiberius and Sejanus, Hamlet oddly conflates in a single person the pragmatic *princeps* and the conniving courtier. His dual status as public and private individual throws into question not only the legitimacy of popular rebellion but even the aristocratic privilege of resistance that Sidney supported and that Essex, around the time *Hamlet* was staged, was about to cast into deep disrepute. While the scourge of God could appear in a positive light, it is an ambiguous figure even in the *Vindiciae*, and could refer equally to the tyrant that punishes a people as to the one who punishes a tyrant, much as the *Vindiciae*'s Impostor reveals himself to be the same as the tyrant he deposes (in the words of The Who, meet the old boss, same as the new boss).

Hamlet's sense of himself as scourge following the murder of Polonius seeks to usurp his role as mere instrument of the divine order and yoke providence to his own agency as revenger. Hamlet cannot accept a providence that is not aligned with his own sense of justice, making the fundamental mistake that Luther claimed led to despair:

¹⁰⁸ In fact, a more skeptical reader of the Bible, like Shakespeare, would have reason to balk at this story of a divinely authorized vindicator, especially in an age when “miraculous testimonies” were increasingly viewed with doubt: Jehu is the story of a general who betrays his legitimate king after a disastrous defeat on the battlefield. He “conspired” against Joram, shooting the king in the back, horrifically murdering his mother, and slaughtering every relation. Jehu justifies his rule by claiming to have been secretly anointed king by the dubious prophet Elisha and taking revenge on King Jehoram for the sins of his father Ahab (2 Kings 9:1-10:31). The Book of Kings faithfully reports the righteous history of the victor, only blaming Jehu for not continuing to follow the law of Israel's God, but the Book of Hosea claims that Jehu's own line was punished for the bloody coup (Hosea 1:4-5).

trying to interpret the divine in human terms.¹⁰⁹ This same confusion underlies the accounts of early modern revenge given by critics like Lily Campbell and Ronald Broude:¹¹⁰ God's providential revenge will ensure all things are recompensed in due course, as Broude argues, but when God chooses a human instrument, a "scourge of God," he is usually damned in the process.¹¹¹ To declare oneself the scourge of God was to hubristically and atheistically lay claim to providence itself; to take on the role with such ostentation was to glory in one's own monstrosity.¹¹² The archetypal unwitting instrument of God, of course, is Satan: in the words of one sixteenth century sermon, "the hand, the scourge of God, to punish whom it pleaseth him, eyther for sinne or triall of fayth."¹¹³ The scourge of God is either metaphorically or literally a plague, sent to punish a tyrant or a people for their wrong doing, but the end does not justify the means: rather, through God's grace, two human wrongs make a divine right.

God's ability to turn wickedness against itself and make sin punish sin is famously invoked by Hamlet himself, yet critics usually downplay its full import. At the moment

¹⁰⁹ Hamlet thus serves as a prototype for the mistaken theodicies of Milton's speaker and Satan in *Paradise Lost*. Cf. Victoria Silver, *Imperfect Sense: The Predicament of Milton's Irony* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), esp. 21-22, 50-55.

¹¹⁰ Campbell, "Theories of Revenge," 281-96; Broude, "Time, Truth, & Right," 140-41.

¹¹¹ The most famous human scourges were foreign tyrants and warmongers: "Attyla called himselfe the scourge of God: and Tamberlaine in his time termed, the revenge of God, and terror of the World." Anonymous, *Great Britans [sic] vote: or, God save King Charles* (London, 1648): 22, *EEBO*, accessed 9 January 2016, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:114840:14.

¹¹² Challenging Bowers's argument that scourge and minister represent a moral dichotomy (see below), he argues that "scourge" could carry positive connotations. However, the examples he chooses from Shakespeare—Talbot and Joan of Arc in *1 Henry VI*—both seem to be deliberately evoking these famous scourges, if not directly echoing Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. It would seem that in these cases, the moral judgment is not apparent because these warriors who would be the byword for terror on the lips of their enemies purposefully leverage the monstrosity and inhuman power of the scourge archetype such that, within the amoral space so often opened by war, the divine significance is downplayed. R. W. Dent, "Hamlet: Scourge and Minister," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1978): 83.

¹¹³ Anwick, I., *Anwick his meditations vpon Gods monarchie and the deuill his kingdome* (London, 1587): 65, *EEBO*, accessed 9 January 2016, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:8754:40.

he becomes murderer of the (more or less) innocent Polonius, he realizes—or fashions—his role: “heaven hath pleased it so / To punish me with this, and this with me, / That I must be their scourge and minister” (*H*, III.iv.176-8). Hamlet knows he will “answer well” Polonius' death, and whatever providence exists beyond his knowledge has arranged events so as to place murder on his conscience even before his revenge is completed, as if cause and consequence have been reversed. What sort of providence this might be is characteristically ambiguous, as indicated by the odd, indefinite plurality Hamlet bestows upon heaven (“*their* scourge”), but Hamlet's act also bestows a certain freedom upon him: essentially pre-damned, he finds himself authorized by his own mortal sin to pursue revenge to the utmost without fear of further consequence. Mortal sin stands as an absolute threshold beyond which all acts reach a kind of homogeneity of significance.

Ultimately, however, Hamlet's role as scourge is just another version of the malcontent's restless idleness: the inability to act veiled by a fantasy of action. Where Huguenots write tracts and satirists write verse, Hamlet spends his hours spinning soliloquies, and if he is a famously philosophical prince, philosophy too becomes a dangerously idle practice. This authorization-via-damnation is an extreme version of the satirist's war against his own vices: the satirist wields his weapon, the scourge or *mastix*, almost indiscriminately, his uncontrolled and impassioned critical verbiage allowed such license because—in such a folly-ridden age—wherever the stroke lands it will find sin.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Dent is right that the scourge or *masix* is purportedly a weapon of just punishment wielded against folly or vice; however it is rooted in the self-justified railings of the satirist, as Dent's own common examples demonstrate (Marston's *Scourge of Villanie*, Hereford's *Scourge of Folly*). In English, the -mastix ending which became such a popular term for abuse directed at some belief or institution in the 17th century is first attested by the OED as the satirist character Mastix in Sidney's *Arcadia*, whom we have already encountered (see Chapter 2). Thus, Dent has unwittingly placed Hamlet in his proper company: the

Shakespeare pushes this logic to the extreme, questioning the value of such a histrionic war on vice, especially when the stakes are distinguishing a Vindicator from an Impostor, liberation from tyrannicide. When brash action finally prevails in *Hamlet*, it annihilates an entire aristocratic line, much like the *Vindiciae*'s fantasy of Jehu as an apocalyptic scourge-revenger, a Biblical story that sounds suspiciously like a military coup justifying tyrannicide *ex post facto* by claiming divine authorization. Hamlet discharges his role as a plague to his people beyond anything he could have predicted, but God's vengeance utterly fails to correspond to Hamlet's notion of justice—a lesson Hamlet should have learned at Wittenburg. Collapsing the scourge of God and the scourging satirist, Shakespeare raises the stakes of malcontentism: railing against tyrants in satire is but one remove from calling for vengeance against tyrants, and justifying tyrannicide is but one remove from committing the treason oneself.

vii. The *histoire tragique* of Amleth; or, the comic sources of Shakespeare's "tragicall historie"

However secondhand Shakespeare's knowledge of Huguenot tracts like the *Vindiciae* might have been, the radical potential of conscience as deployed by extreme Protestants was as pressing a reality in England as in France. In choosing the Amleth episode from François de Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* (1570) as his source, Shakespeare's story of revenge against fratricide becomes entangled in the Huguenot response to the Massacre, perhaps adding a new dimension to the Ur-*Hamlet*. While critics have examined Shakespeare's reception of Belleforest's translation, there has been

scourging satirist. Dent, "Hamlet: Scourge and Minister," 82–83; *OED Online*, s.v. "mastix, n."; "-mastix, comb. form," accessed February 2, 2016.

little work examining how Belleforest's personal entanglement in the Huguenot resistance debate may have contextualized Shakespeare's version of the play. In light of Shakespeare's modifications to the source material, I will argue that *Hamlet's* resonances with the *Vindiciae* are in no way accidental, and in fact *Hamlet* is a play that attempts to shore up Belleforest's attacks against Huguenot resistance theory.

Belleforest not only wrote a series of “fiercely loyalist, anti-Calvinist pamphlets” in the 1560s but was also a well known apologist for the Massacre, as András Kiséry has recently pointed out, “describing it as the just execution of Huguenot conspirators and rebels and a great victory of God's cause.”¹¹⁵ Written two years before the Massacre, Belleforest's Amleth episode, an embellished French translation of Saxo Germanicus' *Gesta Danorum*, served as the basic outline for Shakespeare's play: Amleth is dispossessed by his uncle Fengon, fakes madness as he plots revenge, is sent to England to be executed but alters the letter, and returns to burn the Great Hall full of disloyal nobles and behead his uncle. Amleth's revenge via the *simulatio* of madness, however, is strategically and successfully executed, and he goes on to rule the Danes, if briefly—slaying the treacherous King of England before being betrayed by his wife and killed by another uncle.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ András Kiséry, “‘I Lack Advancement’: Public Rhetoric, Private Prudence, and the Political Agent in *Hamlet*, 1561-1609,” *English Literary History* 81 (2014): 57n41, 34.

¹¹⁶ Inquiries into the implications of Belleforest on Hamlet's characterization, in particular in terms of ambition, date back at least to A. P. Stabler's “Melancholy, Ambition, and Revenge in Belleforest's Hamlet,” but Kiséry is the first I know to point to Belleforest's role in post-Massacre polemic in relation to Shakespeare's play. Kiséry argues that Shakespeare's version of the story signals a shift in political organization from the courtier-monarch relationship to the more decentralized hierarchy of the patron-employee relationship, resulting in a confinement of the scope of political action: as opposed to Belleforest's Amleth, who is able to speak directly through public rhetoric, Shakespeare's Hamlet's removal from this kind of political engagement places him in the position of the private individual “whose experience cannot find expression in the political language of office, and whose frustrations cannot be addressed by a discussion about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of rule.” While Kiséry's account usefully elaborates the consequences of Shakespeare's conflation of the “public” and “private” malcontent, I believe he underestimates the degree to which Shakespeare's play takes a stand in the debate over legitimate

Choosing Belleforest's Amleth as subject is particularly interesting, since Belleforest makes clear through an elaborate apparatus of direct commentary and Amleth's set-piece orations—quite counterintuitively—that this history is *not* in fact an account of successful rebellion against a legitimate sovereign, but rather “the legitimate sovereign's punishment of such a rebellion,” as Kiséry notes.¹¹⁷ What might appear to be a perfect exemplar for monarchomach purposes becomes, in the hands of a Catholic League supporter, a work that defines the only legitimate “vindicator” or “revenger” as the sovereign himself. The stability of Belleforest's framing, of course, quickly begins to falter according to its own logic. If he'd written the Amleth episode *after* the Massacre, he might have been worried enough about the implications of competing accounts of legitimacy to handle the story somewhat differently. Belleforest insists that “when I speake of reuenging any iniury receiued, vpon a great personage, or superior: it must bee vnderstood by such an one as is not our soueraigne, againste whom wee maie by no meanes resiste, nor once practise anie Treason[.]”¹¹⁸

However, the fact that Amleth's authority is primarily a function of the performance of public oratory—in other words legitimacy conferred through the persuasion of the populace—makes Belleforest's account circular: the supposedly just account of the legitimate monarch regaining his rightful position frames that legitimacy as a function of rhetoric. The legitimate monarch thus becomes anyone who can

resistance. A. P. Stabler, “Melancholy, Ambition, and Revenge in Belleforest's Hamlet,” *PMLA* 81, no. 3 (June 1966): 207–13; Kiséry, “I Lack Advancement,” 31, 57, 51.

¹¹⁷ Kiséry, “I Lack Advancement,” 38.

¹¹⁸ References to Belleforest's *histoire tragique* are to the anonymous 1608 translation: Anon., trans., *The Hystorie of Hamlet* (London, c. 1608): sig. C2-3, *ProQuest Literature Online*, accessed 15 February 2017, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:author:2497&rft.accountid=13626. This translation is also reprinted in Sir Israel Gollancz, *The Sources of Hamlet, with an Essay on the Legend* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926).

successfully persuade the populace of his legitimacy, making the assertion that one can never resist a legitimate monarch specious at best, since the would-be revenger need only establish *himself* as the legitimate monarch through clever rhetorical performance. In the process, this self-legitimation through rhetoric becomes dangerously close to arguments of Huguenot monarchomachs like François Hotman, who fiercely debated with Belleforest the implications of the apparent historical role of *election* in the succession of French kings. In Belleforest's own account, the people turn out to have ultimate authority over determining the “legitimate” monarch and deposing the “illegitimate” monarch after all.¹¹⁹

In this context, the inclusion of an election *legitimizing* Claudius' succession in Shakespeare's play undermines the legitimacy Belleforest attributes to Amleth. No longer a legitimate monarch punishing a usurper, Hamlet becomes a malcontent whose self-legitimizing fantasies lead the country to ruin. By introducing the Danish process of election, Shakespeare not only shuts down Hotman's argument but, from an English perspective, challenges the process of election itself: the Danish Council was capable, through ignorance, of electing a murderer to the position of king rather than the natural succession of the son, as English filial monarchy would have it. Election serves only to complicate a process that filial succession streamlines with stabilizing efficiency, while in no way ensuring a more just succession. In the atmosphere of a post-Massacre Europe, it is impossible not to see Amleth's *simulatio* as disturbingly analogous to the self-serving machiavellian manipulations of a Guise. Justifications of tyrannicide, even Belleforest's

¹¹⁹ According to Hotman, as Kiséry puts it, “the ancient constitution of the Franks allowed for the active participation of the people in government, especially in the creation, and, if necessary, deposition of the king.” Kiséry, “I Lack Advancement,” 35.

own, begin to appear like thinly veiled aspirations for power.

In addition to the election of Claudius, Shakespeare also deprives Hamlet of the chance to publicly justify his actions. In Belleforest, Amleth delays revealing his hand in Fengon's death: wanting to see how “the people” would react to the “Tragedie,” Amleth “durst not presently declare his action [...], but to the contrary determined *to worke by policie*” to spread the action and reasons diffusely through the populace. Only when he sees that the people are receptive to his version of events does he give his speech in which he not only condemns his uncle for “fear[ing] not to ad[d] incest to parricide,” but also revenging the king's injustice against the people, accusing Fengon of using “more rigorous comandements ouer you, then was either iust or conuenient.” Amleth's coronation as “lawfull successor in the kingo[m], & iust reuenger,” which he specifically asks of the people, sounds embarrassingly similar to Hotman's account of the people's ancient power of election: “you know what is the reward of so greate desert,” Amleth proclaims, “& being in your hands to distribute the same, it is of you, that I demand the price of my vertue and the recompence of my victory.”¹²⁰ In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, election as much as personal vengeance results in political instability and leaves the country vulnerable. Policy is not the instrument of the virtuous prince, rewarded with victory, but the tool of the machiavel, reaping civil strife. Hamlet never receives the kingship he believes he deserves, and instead that position is given over to his equally illegitimate double, the invader Fortinbras. It is crucial that “I lack advancement” are the words not of a bereaved prince but “of the malcontent courtier whose services are unrewarded and whose suits are unsuccessful, who bristles with a frustrated sense of

¹²⁰ Anon., *Hamblet*, F3-G3 (emphasis mine).

justice and entitlement.”¹²¹ The problem with recognizing Shakespeare's radically skeptical answer to the question of tyranny is simply that it is not the one we hope to find: his revision of Belleforest's account assiduously works to erase the ambiguities and contradictions of the story, and seeks to undermine all possible justifications for the deposition or execution of a tyrant.

By transposing Hamlet into the position of malcontent courtier, Shakespeare debases the abstract political theories of Huguenot resistance, emphasizing that such ideals cannot be disentangled from petty human motivations. Ambiguously mingling the malcontent's pathological obsessions—justice, lust, ambition—Shakespeare emphasizes how unintelligible such motivations may be even to one's own self. Therefore, Shakespeare recasts the “Tragedie” of the fall of a tyrant as the tragedy of a malcontent rebel: the (at least briefly) comic success of Belleforest's revenger becomes the death of an entire royal line and the subjugation of a nation. Thus Shakespeare leaves even less room than the Catholic League for resistance, combining the warnings that rebellion against a sovereign cannot be justified and that the consequences of civil conflict surpass the worst tyranny. Despite the recent influential republican and Arendtian readings of *Hamlet*,¹²² which emphasize citizenship and political participation, Oliver Arnold has demonstrated how Shakespeare's deep skepticism of political representation and the frustrations of citizenship permeate his tragedies.¹²³

¹²¹ Kiséry, “I Lack Advancement,” 41. Kiséry takes the elision of the public justification to indicate a shift to a political perspective defined by “prudence and [...] personal loyalties” (31), but in spite of his brilliant contextualization, he treats Shakespeare's concerns as largely a dissociation from the French question of legitimate resistance rather than a new, more skeptical approach to the problem.

¹²² Esp. Hadfield, *Shakespeare & Republicanism*; Lupton, “Hamlet, Prince”; Halpern, “Eclipse of Action”; Kottman, *Politics of the Scene*.

¹²³ Arnold, *3rd Citizen*. In particular, the potentialities that Lupton sees hovering in the “dreams, prophecies, and promises” (182) at the fringes of the play are precisely the nightmares Shakespeare forces us to confront: the malcontent Hamlet turns the comic *princeps* who founds a new republic into a tragic

While the plays traditionally classified as history plays are testament that Shakespeare was not blindly uncritical of monarchy, or any systems of power, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and his other tragedies essentially support James I's position—even the worst order is better than none, better than the war of all against all. *Hamlet* rewrites the anti-monarchomach Belleforest's account to more forcefully counter post-Massacre logics of resistance like that outlined in the *Vindiciae*, slowly unraveling that logic to show its most extreme consequences. Shakespeare's resistance to Huguenot resistance theory could quite readily have come from popular knowledge, but there is some reason to think that in fact Shakespeare specifically had the *Vindiciae* in mind. Many have noted the parallel between Hamlet and Lucius Junius Brutus, who pretended dullness or madness to plot against the Tarquin after Lucrece's rape. As de Grazia points out, Machiavelli praised Brutus as the founder of the Roman republic; the *Hystorie of Hamblet* claims that Amleth has “been at the schoole” of Brutus to learn his madness; and furthermore, by killing Polonius who “did enact Julius Caesar” at school (*H*, III.ii.96), as he tells his murderer in a nasty bit of foreshadowing, Hamlet is further conflated with the better known Marcus Junius Brutus the Younger. De Grazia has gathered significant evidence demonstrating Hamlet's amalgamation of multiple conspiracies against monarchs, pointing out that in their Roman histories, Samuel Daniel and William Fulbecke both class these “Bruti” as twin regicides treasonously deposing or murdering legitimate monarchs.¹²⁴

This context complicates Andrew Hadfield's sense that Lucius Junius Brutus would have been seen as “the first republican hero” in England. The implicit connection

machiavellian *Principe* whose belief in the righteousness of his own cause justifies the most horrible of crimes and plunges the state into chaos.

¹²⁴ De Grazia, “*Hamlet*” without *Hamlet*, 68–69.

Hadfield makes between the *Vindiciae* author's pseudonym, "Stephanus Junius Brutus," and Hamlet's connection to Lucius Junius Brutus takes on a more sinister significance when we shift the emphasis of our analysis from republicanism to regicide.¹²⁵ The name, in conjunction with the title, must have suggested to many that the treatise was a veiled justification of tyrannicide, however carefully worded. While Shakespeare's malcontents tend not to be explicitly marked as such, *Hamlet* yokes malcontentism and tyrannicide together, perhaps not incidentally if Shakespeare intended the inclusion of Denmark's election to evoke the debate over election in France.¹²⁶ As I've argued, the immediate referent of the foreign word "malcontent" before 1578 would have been Les Malcontents, the group of Huguenot nobles resisting Henri III under Anjou (then Alençon), which Thomas Tymme's 1576 translation of Jean de Serres's history of civil war in France claims "called themselves *Politikes* and *Malecontentes*[".]"¹²⁷ After the 1578 betrayal of Protestants in Flanders by their allies, Catholic Walloon soldiers who had adopted the same name, the association of malcontent and machiavel must have been further cemented.¹²⁸ Although the Huguenots attacked the Catholics as machiavels, and

¹²⁵ Hadfield has also noted that the *Vindiciae*'s pseudonym deliberately evokes Lucius Junius Brutus just as *Hamlet* does. However, when he attempts to put *Hamlet* in dialogue with the *Vindiciae*, Hadfield finds the play resistant to any simple republican reading, leading him to acknowledge the difficulty of "uncovering a political archaeology" for the play, but concluding that the play may be a warning of the potential political anarchy following James's coming succession and that "many" may have turned their attention to republican Rome for "a better option." Hadfield, *Shakespeare & Republicanism*, 30–32, 203–4.

¹²⁶ Oddly, while neither "malcontent" nor "discontent" appears in *Hamlet*, out of only two uses of the term as a noun in his corpus, Shakespeare parodically describes Adonis' horse as "like a melancholy malcontent" in *Venus and Adonis*. In *Love's Labor's Lost*, Berowne refers to Cupid as "Liege of all loiterers and malcontents," in both cases emphasizing the continued association of the melancholy malcontent and love melancholy. See William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin, 2nd ed. (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 1803, 224.

¹²⁷ De Serres, Jean, *The Fourth Parte of Co[m]mentaries of the Ciuill Warres in France*, trans. Thomas Tymme (London, 1576): 142, *EEBO*, accessed 17 February 2017, http://gateway.proquest.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99852406.

¹²⁸ Nigri, "Origin of 'Malcontent,'" 38–39.

“politique” gained currency by 1568 as a term for the desire of radical Catholics to exterminate the Huguenots, the English clearly did not carefully distinguish between them: Huguenots, politic machiavels, and malcontents all seem to have been linked in the English political imagination, and while the term was quite naturalized by 1600, these associations surely lived on, particularly in reference to the monarchomachs.

By linking French Huguenot resistance to Roman struggles with monarchs, the *Vindiciae* also embeds itself in Roman republican values, mirrored in the argument's foundation in Roman law (as evidenced by the title).¹²⁹ We might view *Hamlet* as in some ways a continuation of the story Shakespeare started in *Lucrece* (1593-4), which ends equivocally with a vengeful and machiavellian Brutus whose “shallow habit” “deep policy did him disguise[.]” The final stanzas cast Lucius Brutus as a private revenger in no uncertain terms: “by this bloody knife, / We will revenge the death of this true wife.” Yet after sealing the conspiracy with a vow, their “revenge” ends with the anticlimactic consent of the people “To Tarquin's everlasting banishment.”¹³⁰ In light of the equivocal historical interpretation of Lucius, the ironic juxtaposition suggests that the ground of the Roman republic is muddied with blood vengeance. The context of the Bruti adds further contextual significance to the oath Hamlet's crew swears before the Ghost: according to Livy, Lucius and his co-conspirators swore a private oath that none would be suffered to rule Rome (*nec illos nec alium quemquam regnare Romae passarum*), which was afterward echoed in a public oath barring any to ever be king of Rome again (*adegit*

¹²⁹ Garnett explains that the argument often hinges on “technicalities of Roman law” and the odd “assumption that it made sense to interpret the Old Testament in terms of Roman law[.]” Brutus, *Vindiciae*, xi–liv.

¹³⁰ William Shakespeare, “The Rape of Lucrece,” in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. Hallett Smith, 2nd ed. (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 1836 (ll. 1814-55). For more on the failure of republicanism in *Lucrece* and the poem's relation to *Titus*, see Arnold, *3rd Citizen*, 101–39.

neminem Romae passuros regnare).¹³¹ In the conspiracy against Caesar, Plutarch claims, “they exchanged neither oaths nor sacred pledges,” which Shakespeare makes the stipulation of Marcus Brutus himself in *Julius Caesar*: “No, not an oath!” Brutus declares, naming them the tools of doubtful men about bad causes, while good men with good causes need no such aid, obliquely casting his ancestor Lucius as such a man with a bad cause.¹³²

Remembering how *this* Brutus recoiled from a revenger's oath in a play perhaps still on the stage at the time, what might an early modern audience have thought of this mad oath undertaken at the behest of a ghost and urged on by a laughing and clearly deranged boy in black? Despite Marcellus' complaint that “We have sworn, my lord, already,” still Hamlet and the Ghost insist they must swear by Hamlet's sword not to speak of the “antic disposition” Hamlet has determined to put on (*H*, I.v.147-81). There is much to be doubtful of, both in the men and the cause, and as Kiséry points out, the *topos* of oath here fails to form a community and “evacuates it of its political content.”¹³³ Yet this evacuation does not extend to the oath's political *ramifications*: Hamlet's oath, a private act at the polar opposite of Amleth's public orations, isolates him from political justice and political community. Hamlet is Lucius without the pretense of republicanism. Unlike Lucius, Marcus, or Amleth, Hamlet is never allowed the opportunity to justify his actions to the people and gain that rhetorical validation *ex post facto*. Hamlet demonstrates the kind of conspiracy *Vindiciae* might encourage at its worst, allowing an

¹³¹ Titus Livius, *Livy Books I and II*, trans. B. O. Foster, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA & London, England: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), 204, 220 (I.lix.1, II.i.10).

¹³² Lucius Mestrius Plutarch, “Brutus,” in *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. VI, The Loeb Classical Library (London & Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1954), 151 (XII); William Shakespeare, “Julius Caesar,” in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. Frank Kermode, 2nd ed. (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 1158–9 (II.i.114–40).

¹³³ Kiséry, “I Lack Advancement,” 46.

aggrieved courtier to pursue assassination for personal gain with the clean conscience of the fanatic, believing in the divine justice of his cause.

While critics often try to classify early modern drama through a narrow and manufactured sense of genre, the mixed mode of *Hamlet* is structurally important and a common characteristic of satire, which tends to cut across genres for effect. In *Hamlet*, its status as a Danish history play allows for a historical analysis that juxtaposes ancient history with contemporary French and English politics; simultaneously, the play satirizes malcontent satirists, tracing the consequences of treating satire as a positive political discourse. Finally, the tension between these historical and satirical impulses is routed through tragedy, surprisingly transforming the comic ending of the source into a tragedy of Kydian proportions. Through this malcontent frame, Shakespeare critiques the rationalist logic of resistance theory, showing that human resistance is clouded by human motivations and emotions—such as ambition and melancholy. Thus *Hamlet* enacts one of Shakespeare's tragic limit-cases, a kind of consequentialism: pushed to the extreme, the play seeks to demonstrate, such self-justifications risk civil war or foreign occupation, two of the greatest fears of Shakespeare's day.

Acknowledgment of Previous Publications

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