“A Better Where to Find”:
Utopian Politics in Shakespeare’s Plays

A Dissertation

Presented to the

Graduate Faculty of the

University of Louisiana at Lafayette

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Ryan D. Farrar

Summer 2014

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

"A Better Where to Find":
Utopian Politics in Shakespeare's Plays

Ryan D. Farrar

APPROVED:

Jennifer Vaught, Chair Professor of English	Jonathan Goodwin Assistant Professor of English
Elizabeth Bobo Associate Professor of English	Mary Farmer-Kaiser Interim Dean of the Graduate School

EPIGRAPH

FRANCE

Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich being poor,
Most choice, forsaken, and most loved, despised,
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon,
Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.
[*He takes her hand*.]
Gods, gods! 'Tis strange that from their cold'st neglect
My love should kindle to inflamed respect. […]
Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind.
Thou losest here, a better where to find.
King Lear (I.i.254-259; 264-265)

BOSOLA

Do I not dream? Can this ambitious age
Have so much goodness in't as to prefer
A man merely for worth, without these shadows
Of wealth and painted honors? Possible?
The Duchess of Malfi (III.iii.275-278)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank all the entities at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette that have fostered the environment allowing for the production of this dissertation, including the Graduate School, Graduate Student Organization, and the English Department. In addition, I owe my gratitude to Drs. Bobo and Goodwin for their discerning, indispensable feedback on each chapter of this project. Their dedication and direction to the development of my research has incalculably affected my approach to writing, and their lessons will follow me when embarking on future projects. I also extend a special thanks to my director, Dr. Jennifer Vaught, for her indefatigable support and guidance over the past years. Her patience and criticism has played a salient role in directing the revision of early drafts, and I cannot thank her enough for challenging me to write clearly and precisely. I would like to acknowledge my family for their continued support. Though geographically distant, their encouragement has always been lucid and ebullient. Finally, words cannot fill up enough white space to recognize the loving, vitalizing support of my greatest advocate, Aileen Farrar. I could not ask for a better partner both in writing and life. Her empathy in times of great difficulty knows no bounds, and I am lucky to have such a person with me to see my journey through to its end.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: Utopian Theory and the Early Modern Stage

A Description of Utopian Theory

People dream of new worlds. Many long to witness these worlds' becoming or at least catch a glimpse of their shadows in some far off horizon. However insubstantial, people dream of societies where the transformation of everyday life would greatly improve the totality of their social experience. It is this mode of imagination that evokes the idea of *utopia*. Finding the present unsatisfactory, people hold out hope for a utopia where the practices contributing to society's inadequacies are alleviated or eliminated entirely. While the utopian impulse consists of pursuing social designs for better living, the misfortune of it rests in the fact that utopias are almost entirely unrealizable. The construction of the word itself best characterizes this impasse as the meaning of *utopia* depends upon the ambivalent pun of its prefixes: "*u*-" (i.e. non-place) and the "*eu*-" (i.e. good place).[1] Traditionally, the term *eutopia* emphasizes the subjective nature of social dreaming in that what utopists qualify as being propitious for a social design widely varies and diverges from one attitude to the next; despite the tension between these differences, the term manages to retain an association with the possibility for positive social change.[2] The contrasting opinions that result from the question of what constitutes a tenable *eutopia* consequently conjures up its negative counterpart, *utopia*, which stresses the elusiveness and improbability of ever

1. For one of the most widely cited sources regarding the definition of utopia, eutopia, dystopia, and other related terms, see Lyman Tower Sargent's "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," *Utopian Studies: Journal of the Society for Utopian Studies* 5 (1994): 1-37.

2. Fátima Vieira, "The Concept of Utopia," in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopia Literature*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7. Commenting on *eutopia*, Fátima Vieira contends that it is "to be seen as a matter of attitude, as a kind of reaction to an undesirable present and an aspiration to overcome all difficulties by the imagination of possible alternatives." Also, scholars including Frederic Jameson see the function of utopia as being negative, and they are right. However, rather than viewing utopia as repressive, utopists exercise negation doubly, canceling out negative variables in society in order to turn their absence into positive ones.

successfully constructing a utopian society.[3] Ultimately, both forms of the word restrict its designs to a limbo of dreams and fantasies. While many thirst after the fruits of a realized utopia, its impalpable status actually counts as one of its strongest features since visions are easier to make, reshape, and destroy when they remain abstract.

One commonly held impression of utopias depicts them as unfamiliar, radical societies far more advanced than the society in which they were written. The challenge in visualizing a truly radical utopia, though, stems from the restriction that it can never be imagined without first incorporating and partially replicating social features ineluctably familiar to the dreamer. This glaring limitation creates difficulties in transcending the conditions of the present and changing dreams into reality. Indeed, Frederic Jameson states that "even our wildest imaginings are all collages of experience, constructs made up of bits and pieces of the here and now […] It suggests at best Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment."[4] Despite the attempt to envision utopia as a future arrangement, utopists work under the auspices of current ideologies in the very act of imagining alternative systems. Though they desire to escape their historical moments, utopists must unavoidably rely on the resources of the present if they are to fully imagine a different society. Far from radical, utopian proposals are formed to serve as a direct comparison to world in which the utopist lives. Thus, to think of utopia as a concept that only elicits the image of a perfect civilization will not suffice if it is to be useful. Instead, utopia can be valued as a dialectical process that discovers and reacts to

3. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005), 227. Jameson asserts that *utopia* has "the obligation […] to remain an unrealizable fantasy."

4. Ibid., xiii.

multifarious collective desires for advancement and progress, giving a variety of voices hearing in order to learn what a person may lack and wish to gain.[5] Therefore, rather than propounding an ideal world, utopists seek to improve the experiences of cooperative individuals.

In this sense, utopias are anticipated junctures built upon pre-existing wishes and societal capabilities that lend themselves to edits and addendums. Whether the wish for a utopia comprises a radically different society based on technological advances or one built upon a nostalgia for idyllic pleasures, a place out of reach impresses upon people a desire to change themselves or be changed in hopes for a better experience of life.[6] Lyman Tower Sargent attests to this claim:

> I do not think it necessary to assume a common 'human nature' to conclude that the overwhelming majority of people—probably it is even possible to say all—are at some time dissatisfied and consider how their lives might be improved. If we are hungry, we dream of a full stomach. If we are sexually frustrated, we dream of sexual fulfillment. If we are frustrated by something in our society, we dream of a society in which it is corrected.[7]

The absence of fulfillment in any sociological or psychological department of life propels human action towards filling the cavity of wants with more satisfying ideas or materials.

---

5. Ibid., 29ft.17. Jameson writes, "the Utopian text is accordingly not to be seen as a vision or a full representation, but rather as a semiotic operation, a process of interaction between contradictions and contraries which generates the illusion of a model society."

6. Ibid., 7: "Yet a third way in which individual and collective time come to be identified with each other is in the very experience of everyday life, according to Roland Barthes the quintessential sign of utopian representation: 'la marquee de l'Utopie, c'est le quotidien.'"

7. Sargent, "Three Faces," 4.

However, the absence of utopia becomes difficult to fill as people possess limited and contrasting ideas concerning how to approach the amelioration or termination of deficiencies within a given culture. As a result, competing visions create friction between the supposed clarity of a single, subjective vision and opponents who perceive that proposal as being either heavily opaque, insufficient, or dystopian.

Due to this tension, pursuing utopia carries the danger of leading people into dystopian entanglements as opposed to liberating them from the constraints of the present. Typically, when societies try to institute a utopian program, the reality of their practices often departs from the principles promulgated in their design. In fact, the unreality of a vision often compels leaders of revolutions to compromise their principles in order to adapt to political exigencies. In the twentieth century, countries faced with this quandary often witnessed the rise of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. In fact, rather than generate a pleasant living, pushes for utopia may only create political power vacuums.[8] One of the most problematic aspects of any civic order, utopian or not, is that there will always be delinquents, egoists, and malefactors who manipulate the prevailing structures of power and espouse inequitable advantages that undermine claims to justice and equality. This abuse of systems obstructs the opportunity for present or alternate societies to function or be realized in a manner that would promote the progress of society as a whole. When lusts for control and power increase

8. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2003) is an apt depiction of this possibility. Through the allegory of farm animals revolting against the farm's owner, Orwell satirizes the consequences of the Russian Revolution of 1917. Following the takeover of Manor Farm, which is renamed Animal Farm, the animals express great hopes for better living, looking to enjoy equality, camaraderie, and plenty. Initially, they appear to enjoy as much, but once Napoleon the pig assumes control of the commune, the faith in the revolution is exploited, and life on the farm falls into decay with the pigs hoarding resources and granting themselves extravagant privileges. All the while, the other animals struggle with hunger and fear being executed for treason against Animal Farm.

exponentially, dystopias (i.e. bad places) sprout, causing great suffering for those subject to the whims of oppressors. Sargent fittingly describes the danger: "Utopians are always faced with this dilemma when they move their dream to reality – is their dream compatible with the imposition of their dream; can freedom be achieved through unfreedom, or equality through inequality?"[9] Due to this dilemma, many claim that utopia as a project is impossible since they believe that to experience total social harmony impractically requires the eradication of all diversity, accomplishing this goal by purging citizens of any jealousy, prejudice, and disagreement.

As a result of utopia's many failings, the various proposals imagining its materialization appear more like simulacra rather than genuine manifestations of perfected worlds. To evade the limitations created by utopian simulacra, despite its apparent inevitability, critical thought can be exercised as a premier method for dismantling the obstacles that impede the attempts to actualize the unattainable, if not untenable, utopia. With specific regard to Thomas More, the beginnings of Utopia arose from critical visions that sought to reshape the society familiar to the utopist, and the process of reshaping, rather than the end result, should always be at the heart of any utopian project.[10] Addressing the power of critical thought, Michael Bristol asserts that "the very notion of criticism demands open-endedness, doubt, and genuine curiosity as fundamental to any real knowledge."[11] With

9. Lyman Tower Sargent, Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8.

10. In *Archaeologies*, Jameson notes how More's *Utopia* responds directly to English customs: "For however the text emits its various signals of otherness and difference, the obvious has often been remarked, namely that the fifty-four cities of Utopia replicate the fifty-four boroughs of London, so that More's imaginary island is simply a literal inversion of the actually existing kingdom of Henry VIII." 33.

11. Michael Bristol, "'Funeral Bak'd Meats': Carnival and the Carnivalesque in *Hamlet*," *Hamlet*, Ed. Susanne L. Wofford (New York: Bedford, 1994), 349.

relation to utopian studies, the ability to continually imagine changes for a particular culture, allowing for flexibility and revision, allies with the progressiveness of critical thought. In order to keep the tradition relevant, utopias must raise questions regarding the nature of desires in order to explore their fulfillment as opposed to pushing rigid nostrums that advertise the static, intransigent societies so often parodied in dystopian fiction.

While people colloquially associate the term *utopia* with places of perfection, this equation is woefully erroneous. In effect, the idea of a perfect society has become a miscalculated stereotype for utopia. Discriminating between a utopia and a perfect society, Sargent works to dispel this widespread misconception:

> *Perfect, perfection*, and their variants are freely used by scholars in defining utopias. They should not be. First, there are in fact very few eutopias that present societies that the author believes to be perfect. Perfection is the exception not the norm. Second, opponents of utopianism use the label *perfect* as a political weapon to justify their opposition. They argue that a perfect society can only be achieved by force; thus, utopianism is said to lead to totalitarianism and the use of force and violence against people.[12]

Perfection does not adequately describe the nature of a utopia. Instead, ideas regarding utopia either describe better alternatives to a present order or a dialectical operation that aims to synthesize "the desire for a better way of being."[13] To call them "perfect" effectively closes off the possibility for the change and progress that utopists customarily promote and anticipate. To keep the opportunity for change embedded in *utopia*, its proposal should find a

12. Sargent, "Three Faces," 9.

13. Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, 2010), 229.

basis on a notion of social bettering that remains elusive and out-of-reach but worth pursuing. The fantasies utopists depict through literary arts often inspire readers and audiences to pursue unfulfilled desires outside the framework of fiction. Utopia, then, remains a versatile concept that keeps its followers yearning after its elusive, unobtainable features while also encouraging skeptical, reflective evaluations of social operations.

In order to properly elucidate the incorporation of Utopia into Shakespeare's drama, I discuss its conceptualization in a broad manner that incorporates the fields of wish-fulfillments, desires, dreams, fantasies, and nightmares. [14] Jameson includes these fields in his own discussion of Utopia in *Archaeologies of the Future*, and his rationale for the association remains sound. Wishes, desires, dreams, and the like perform pivotal functions in shaping and reshaping identity within a given social system, acting as catalysts for the Utopian imagination. In some cases, desire keeps people hopeful for a time where his or her situation may transform from one rife with discontent to one that provides more inclusion and pleasure. In fact, in early modern England, the occasion of holidays spoke to such desires as they temporarily gave free rein to impulses typically bridled by dictums of social propriety.[15] These carnivalesque occasions speak to the power of wishes and fantasies when discussing Utopia in the plays of Shakespeare since he often features festivals, other-worldly

14. In order to grasp the critical capacity of Utopia, it is worth noting the variations in which the term is used within literary criticism. Capitalized uses of the term within a sentence (i.e. *Utopia*) indicates its function as an umbrella category, extending its designation to encompass all of its possible forms at one time, including but not limited to *eutopias*, *utopias*, *dystopias* as well as other variations like *heterotopias* and *cacotopias*. Other uses may feature the lower case form (i.e. *utopia*), which generally alludes to the familiar denotation of a good/non-place. In approaching Utopia from this broadened scope, I defer to the work of scholars Lyman Tower Sargent and Tom Moylan regarding the dragnet of its definition. These scholars have expended a considerable amount of energy into delineating the nuances of utopian terminology.

15. Sargent, "Three Faces," 10. For Sargent, a portion of utopia's roots belongs to festivals such as carnival and the feast of fools as well as myths such as "golden ages, arcadias, [and] earthly paradises."

myths, and holidays either through motif or setting. The topsy-turvy nature of holidays allowed wishes to be acted upon without restraint, providing a sampling of what a utopia could be like.

Utopia features a wide set of problems, and in my critique of Shakespeare's work, I give specific attention to the troubled relationship between utopia and ideology. The concept of ideology features widely in utopian studies because it is seen as being both inextricable from and counter to the utopian project. Utopia is a process that utopists rely on to break free from his or her place in history.[16] However, it is only through an engagement with history that any positive change can occur at all. While people seek liberation from their subject positions, they inevitably fail to shake the specter that follows their speech, manners, and thoughts; they fail to escape Utopia's antithesis/counterpart, ideology. It is difficult to say how much utopia can be understood as a mirror for or as an opposing force to ideology since both are permeable categories. Sargent describes the relationship between these two terms as being heavily paradoxical:

> Ideologies and utopia are closely related. There is a utopia at the heart of every ideology, a positive picture – some vague, some detailed – of what the world would look like if the hopes of the ideology were realized. And it is possible for a utopia to become an ideology […] if a utopia is sufficiently attractive and powerful, it can

16. Ibid., xv. Terry Eagleton conveys a similar message in "Utopia and Its Opposites," *Socialist Register* (2000), 31. He speaks about the inability to achieve utopia and goes as far to assert that: "There is something strangely self-undermining about the idea of utopia. Since we can speak of what transcends the present only in the language of the present, we risk cancelling our imaginings in the very act of articulating them. The only real otherness would be that which we could not articulate at all. All utopia is thus at the same time dystopia, since it cannot help reminding us of how we are bound fast by history in the very act of trying to set us free from that bondage."

transform hope and desire into belief and action to bring the utopia into being through a political or social movement.[17]

Thus, the constitution of each mode (i.e. utopia and ideology) interweaves with the other at the same time that they oppose each other's function. Ideology typically legitimizes hegemonic political forces, while Utopia aims to critique and transform these forces. The relationship, then, remains difficult to describe. Figuratively speaking, ideology and utopia can be seen as cooperatively lending a hand to one another while simultaneously holding daggers at each other's throats. Shakespeare in constructing his plays, I argue, dramatizes this struggle between a desire for a new experience of society and the difficulty of defying social conventions.

Within contemporary Marxist discussions concerning ideology, the process of interpellation plays an important role in analyzing the process of subject formation in society. According to Louis Althusser, ideology has no history, serving as a fiction of beliefs that guides each age and provides societies with a sense of order and direction.[18] He writes that interpellation occurs when subjects are "hailed" into becoming an integral part of predisposed belief systems, transmitting values from one generation to the next through familial and institutional education. The phenomenon of interpellation restricts Utopia's potential due to the manner in which beliefs become intractable to change. While the two fields blend, critics commonly agree that ideology and interpellation hinder the change that utopias hope to institute since they systemically inculcate their subjects with the era's

17. Sargent, *Utopianism*, 124.

18. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 159-162.

prevailing beliefs from an early age. Discussing the work of Karl Mannheim and Paul Ricoeur, Sargent notes that "Ideology kept those in power from becoming aware of any weakness in their position; utopia kept those out of power from being aware of the difficulties of changing the system."[19] Though ideological beliefs tend to change slowly over decades and centuries, the persistence of such traditional attitudes owes much to the social institutions that mold behavior and thought.

Whichever institution holds the most privilege in shaping belief, whether church, courts, or schools, the power of intellectual/theological conditioning makes belief a recalcitrant aspect of a subject's constitution, and the inflexibility of thought that results negatively affects the ability to imagine new social possibilities. Jameson goes to some length to detail how much ideology constricts the depth of Utopian imagination:

> It is a problem perhaps best produced by a comprehensive notion of ideology, in which the inevitability of the latter results from our inescapable situatedness: situatedness in class, race and gender, in nationality, in history […] there is nothing in our possible representations which was not somehow already in our historical experience. The latter necessarily clothes all our imaginings, it furnishes the content for expression and figuration of the most abstract thoughts, the most disembodied longings or premonitions. Indeed, that content is itself already ideological in the sense outlined above, it is always situated and drawn from the contextually concrete, even where (especially where) we attempt to project a vision absolutely independent of ourselves and a form of otherness as alien to our own background as possible […]

19. Sargent, *Utopianism*, 120.

> nothing is quite so ideological and self-bound as my desperate attempt to escape my situation in thought and to imagine what is farthest from me and most alien: the poverty of those images is the tell-tale indication of my limited experience and of my inability to imagine anything outside myself.[20]

In line with Jameson's view, the social rank that befalls individuals in the early modern period, whether through the chance of birth, networking, or merit, significantly influences the subjective perception of what can be seen as propitious or harmful to society, especially as it relates to people belonging to particular ranks, high or low. There is rarely one prevailing ideology at any given time, creating an environment suited for political combat where various constituencies pit systems of thought against each other, hoping that the one they support will win out since each party sees their ideology as articulating the best of values. In conducting their offensives, these factions often subsume Utopia into their arguments, appropriating it to give their political agenda a pleasant appearance. In the face of ideology and interpellation, another weakness of utopia is revealed. While utopias offer the promise of better social practices that are radically separate from those of an existing order, their institutionalization functions to normalize the eccentricities that characterize utopian designs. That is, the very process of attempting to break away from ideology pulls the new customs back within its scope.

If utopias fail miserably, and the influence of a particular ideology reaches a level of extreme imposition over an entire state, people come to inhabit the underbelly of utopia known as *dystopia*. Conventional dystopias "offer a detailed and pessimistic presentation of

---

20. Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 170-171.

the very worst of social alternatives," which are produced in an attempt to warn people of sociopolitical trends that might bring about mass suffering if exacerbated.[21] While dystopias seem antithetical to the more pleasant fantasies of utopias, both literary modes share the common function of promoting better societies outside their pages. Tom Moylan and Rafaella Baccolini are among those who note the manner in which the two differing approaches share similar aims:

> *dystopia* shares with *eutopia* the general vocation of utopianism that [Lyman Tower] Sargent characterizes as 'social dreaming,' a designation that includes 'the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live.'[22]

In contrast to utopias, dystopias do not explicitly offer any anodynes for the vices of the present. Rather than negating corruption, literary dystopias instead magnify the unconscionable practices of the present to exaggerated lengths, impressing its readers with world orders far more wretched than any other imaginable possibilities. In this case, dystopian narratives aim at cautioning citizenries against the potential for harmful policies and practices to burgeon beyond the scope of collective desires, leading to a hell-on-earth condition.[23] Thus, while both presentations aim at leading society towards a more auspicious

---

21. Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 147.

22. Tom Moylan and Rafaella Baccolini, "Dystopia and Histories," *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Rafaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (New York: Routledge, 2003), 5.

23. Ibid., 1-2. Moylan and Baccolini make a similar assessment: "the dystopian imagination has served as a prophetic vehicle, the canary in a cage, for writers with an ethical and political concern for warning us of terrible sociopolitical tendencies that could, if continued, turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia's underside."

future, the methods for achieving those ends starkly differ as utopian authors focus on sanguine prospects to persuade the reader while dystopian authors prick on social fears to prompt admonitory discourse.

In presenting exceptionally horrific social conditions, dystopian authors hold out hope for a world outside their own nightmares. They challenge people to alter the political direction of their societies by avoiding mistakes that would allow for tyrannical dictators or plutocrats to rise to power. Plays can serve a similar function in that the treatment of ethics and virtue in their performances have the capacity to promote caution concerning the political intrigue transpiring outside the walls of the playhouses. Thus, after watching a play like *Hamlet*, which is full of treachery and surveillance, audiences might develop a greater distrust of their country's leadership.

Regarding Shakespeare's plays, the concepts of utopia, ideology, and dystopia are helpful for understanding the inextricable relationship between the entertainment of the playhouse and the attitudes touching all levels of English society. In forming his characters and their political networks with other characters, Shakespeare creates plays that explore the fluid connection between individual hopes, dreams, and nightmares and the system of beliefs imposed by societal authorities. Utopia is bound up with the aspirations for transforming the social milieu as the privileged sects of the current structure simultaneously obstruct the prospects of such ambitions. Like his scheming characters that alter the mindsets of others, including Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Iago in *Othello*, and Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare drops his plays like a potion or snake among his audience in order to kindle new thoughts about the possible ways of living.

Utopian Politics in the Context of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Stage

Utopia as an artistic force during the English Renaissance revealed itself in simple flourishes that came and went like Ariel's St. Elmo's fire in *The Tempest* or the popular carnival festivals of Twelfth Night and Shrove Tuesday. It graced the stage momentarily, parading its subversive energy before dissipating away by the plays' endings. Nevertheless, while its presence disappeared, the effect of utopia's power remained even in its absence. The effects carried far as the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage availed itself to a wide audience within England's ranks. While authorities could easily monitor the printed page for sedition, since the literate percentage was small and printing presses financially exclusive, the theater's emphasis on mannerisms and the orality of its medium made its content accessible to larger audiences. The reach of plays rendered their effects difficult to control, distinguishing the theater as a space where multiple interpretations could germinate with fewer restrictions than printed literature. While there were certainly limitations to accessing performances, with laborers mostly attending plays on holidays and many nobles arranging for private performances, on an average day, "perhaps between two and three thousand people visited theatres."[24] With such a vast number of playgoers shuffling in and out on a daily basis, theater productions could portray ideas and themes that deviated from London society's mainstream codes of behavior.

For those opposed to the theaters, the stage came to signal a place of subversion in the very sense that its function inspired and fostered ideas that challenged the traditional manners and norms of society. In fact, many sects within Elizabethan and Jacobean society,

24. John Astington, "Playhouses, Players, and Playgoers," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 111-112.

particularly the Puritans, strongly voiced their disapproval of theater culture, claiming that playhouses were locations that fostered lewd behavior, deviancy, and idleness.[25] However, while playhouses did attract prostitutes and pick-pockets, the appeal of deviant art, however unsavory to the Puritan or moralist leaderships, was not reserved for mere delinquents. In fact, John Astington argues that "[s]atirical and critical accounts of audiences single out deviant figures of thieves and prostitutes, who no doubt frequented theatres, though not with the prominence moralistic satires would suggest."[26] For the Puritans in particular, the festive atmosphere of the theater hampered their own utopian attempts to rid society of its garishness and replace it with a genuine, intrinsic devotion to God. While Puritans were subjected to the ridicule of playwrights including Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare, their influence threatened to dismember the theater on the pretense of finding its entertainments to be a pollutant to the soul and offensive to God.

Part of the theater's contentiousness rested in how playwrights dramatized social issues in a fashion that connects to present-day discussions of utopianism. In the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the transformation of the everyday occurred through the dramatization of complex situations that involved love, betrayal, murder, magic, and wishes. As Sargent asserts, "it is the showing of everyday life transformed that characterizes a utopia, and utopianism is about just that transformation of the everyday."[27] In this spirit, the stage created an alternative space for Londoners where radical thoughts grinded against the

25. Stephen Greenblatt, introduction to *The Norton Shakespeare: Tragedies*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al., (New York: Norton, 1997), 35.

26. Astington, 112.

27. Sargent, *Utopianism*, 4.

normative practices of early modern society, offering vastly different, empowering narratives regarding the pliability of rank and desire. Such narratives disputed conventional values that aimed to protect the traditional structures privileging those in power or those benefiting from that power, whether nobility or clergy. With the construction of playhouses like the Rose, The Theatre, and the Globe, acting companies constructed a space where much of the public sought to escape the pressures of their daily lives and carry back with them the pleasures and cautions of the theater. In this space, artists could entertain people of various ranks as they dramatized sociopolitical conflicts through extravagant performances that allowed for the presence of fairies, witches, wizards, masques, and ghosts to appear on stage. The plays could lure audiences with spectacles of wonder while delivering dialogue that worked its own magic in the form of sociopolitical criticism.

While playwrights featured subversive elements in their art, they nevertheless had to moderately weigh their topics against the political interests of the monarchy. Luckily for them, both Elizabeth I and James I greatly supported the arts and subdued a growing number of moralists who wished to cease the operation of playhouses. This is not to say playwrights had free rein in their craft. As believers in royal absolutism, both monarchs would not tolerate direct opposition to his or her rule as they allowed the playhouses to operate under the direction of the Master of Revels who regulated performances and censored material that he deemed seditious. Stephen Greenblatt writes: “The London public theater, with its playwrights who were the sons of glovers, shoemakers, and bricklayers, and its audiences in

which the privileged classes mingled with rowdy apprentices, masked women, and servants, was clearly not a place to which the government wished to grant freedom of expression."[28] While given leave to produce and perform, playwrights had to cautiously disguise or exclude altogether any offense that would land them in disfavor with authorities. For any time Utopian expressions appear in art, expressions which often criticize or depreciate the political climate, arbiters in the upper echelons of a social order will understandably seek to either suppress art that menaces their privileges or co-opt it to build a façade around their ethos.

Regardless of the control over expression, the multifaceted blend of different ranks within the space of the theater carved out a utopian enclave that managed to stage controversy both subtly and overtly. Seeing the theater as a space for political openness can be viewed as a parallel to Tom Moylan's description of Utopia's function:

> Utopia, therefore, names the sociopolitical drive that moves the human project for emancipation and fulfillment beyond the limits of the current system. Even as the best of utopian anticipation is based in a historical and material understanding of the present, it nevertheless takes the imagination (rooted in "the political unconscious" and, at its best, imbricated with the politics of the transformation of everyday life) to a place beyond what is available through accommodation and reform. Utopia, in other words, informs what Lefebvre has identified as the "the quest for a 'counter-space'" that enables humanity to change "life itself."[29]

Playwrights such as Shakespeare, I argue, sought to portray situations that go "beyond the limits of the current system" and propose to redesign society itself. Audiences could

28. Greenblatt, *Norton*, 37.

29. Moylan, *Scraps*, 65.

encounter the excitement of imagining a life transformed as the plots played in front of them featured characters like Duke Senior in *As You Like*, Christopher Sly in *The Taming of the Shrew*, or Caliban in *The Tempest*, find themselves in situations radically different from those to which they are accustomed. During the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, the culture of the theater consistently called into question early modern modes of business and behavior, serving as a kind of 'counter-space.'

Just because utopia appeared on the stage did not mean that audiences flocked to embrace a unified perspective for a better tomorrow, as is common for citizens of a utopian society. On the contrary, the utopic elements in plays generated a splintering of visions. Political factions in particular often employed art as a means for disseminating propaganda with their messages carrying a utopian tone. One particular anecdote of seventeenth-century English politics that relates to this appropriation dates back to the Earl of Essex's rebellion against Queen Elizabeth I in 1601. On the eve of the Earl's uprising, his supporters demonstrated the political value of the theater's imaginative energy when they generously patronized the Lord Chamberlain's Men to perform Shakespeare's *Richard II* (1595). They revived the play with the purpose of vindicating their insurrection as they sought to merge their fantasy of power with the events of the plot. For the conspirators, the young usurper Bolingbroke exhibited qualities better suited for ruling than the incumbent King Richard II, and they hoped that the performance of the play would expose Elizabeth I's reign as being too weak to be sustained. This seditious perspective adapted the play into a political analogy in which Bolingbroke's character parallels with Essex and Richard II with Elizabeth I. Oddly, the identification of Bolingbroke as a hero was not a common interpretation of the play. Greenblatt argues that it is commonly believed that Shakespeare and the majority of his

audience viewed Richard II as merely a flawed protagonist and Bolingbroke as a scurrilous usurper and disrupter of order.[30] Essex's followers' unusual reading of the play illustrates how they sought to reinterpret the context to fit their Procrustean agenda.

Whatever the consensus, the content of the play availed itself to the conspirators' use, allowing for a divergent and fantastic interpretation to take form. Such a radical suggestion from Essex's supporters yielded enough attention to spur Elizabeth I into reportedly remarking on the analogy to her archivist: "I am Richard II. Know ye not that?"[31] In alluding to the play, she denounces the comparison as an audacious objection to her rule. Yet, while her sarcasm may attempt to trivialize the act, the fact that she acknowledges the incident illustrates the way in which the fantasy of art can ruffle political conflicts and challenge citizens or subjects to reform their attitudes towards those ruling for or over them. If the conspirators' propaganda bears any utopian characteristics, they arise from how the rebels offer up their leader as a better alternative to Elizabeth I for ruling England.

The commission of the particular play *Richard II* demonstrates the ability for audiences to adapt art to suit a particular wish, desire, or fantasy that champions an alternative to the present situation, even if the proposal appears more dystopian than utopian to those opposed to the vision. The rebellion also evinces the danger of freely expressing political opinions that object to the status quo, as Essex and his supporters were ultimately imprisoned and executed for their defiance as they attempted to realize their vision through violent force. Despite not having actively contributed to Essex's seditious interpretation,

30. Stephen Greenblatt, introduction to *The Power of Forms in The English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1982), 3.

31. Ibid., 3.

Shakespeare, too, nearly landed in prison due to his role as producer of this artwork.[32] Luckily for Shakespeare, the punishment for the Essex's sedition ultimately fell to the patrons themselves and the historian John Hayward, who dedicated his history of King Henry IV to the Earl. However, scholars like Dover Wilson, sensing how authorial responsibility may apply to the incident, have felt compelled to excuse Shakespeare from any wrongdoing. Wilson in particular tries to dismiss the significance of the commission entirely. He goes so far as to say that Queen Elizabeth really had nothing to fear from the play's content because Shakespeare never intended for it to subvert her authority.[33] Echoing Greenblatt's response to Wilson's dismissal, it is mistaken to ground the play's message so rigidly in the author's intent since doing so closes the artwork off from the expansive and transgressive potential it independently wields in impacting audiences. In fact, the subjective response that art allows can breed a variety of subversions. The content of Shakespeare's plays remains malleable to the degree that they can suit specific hopes and fears (in this case those of Essex and Elizabeth I, respectively) without regard for authorial intent. While the rebels' commission of the play may have been an unintentional effect on the part of Shakespeare, the play itself nevertheless furnished the material that equipped them with the means to give it a civic function. With the commoners' lack of outlets for expression, it is fascinating to imagine the numerous unrecorded instances of the ways in which other plays of Shakespeare may have led audiences to question the social and political codes governing their everyday lives.

32. If Shakespeare were imprisoned, I imagine the reasoning for it would be similar to that of modern advocates calling for the recourse of law to apply to the producers of violent video games or films that are associated with mass killings such as the shootings at Columbine High School (1999) or Sandy Hook Elementary School (2012).

33. Greenblatt, *Power of Forms*, 4.

Aside from Essex's followers commandeering *Richard II*, Shakespeare and his contemporaries offered their own challenges to the cultural norms of their time. To discover the Utopian potential offered by early modern plays is to recognize how the drama of playwrights like Shakespeare slyly and moderately assessed the monarchical structure in which they lived. Even if the plays appear to reinforce the prevailing power structures' status by curtain call, the mere featuring of challenges to normative behaviors kindles subversive desire at the same time that the endings seemingly extinguish it. Some moments in the plays carry the capacity to destabilize the political landscape of the setting, provoking reflections and questions regarding the material conditions of society. Yet, other moments including the endings of plays counterbalance their potential revolutionary aspects by reinforcing a sense of social security in the hands of the upper ranks. Greenblatt speaks on the nature of this ambiguity, describing the kind of playwright Shakespeare was: "Though he lived his life as the bound subject of a monarch in a strictly hierarchical society that policed expression in speech and in print, he possessed what Hamlet calls a free soul."[34] Overall, the characters in Shakespeare's plays dream of a release from constricting positions within the social order, and each character's dream exists even if it consistently encounters opposition from other characters that embody contrary perspectives.

The apparent conservatism of the plays' endings leaves a great amount of ambiguity for the interpretation of its possible political critiques. On the one hand, a scholar such as Michael Hays sees many of Shakespeare's plays, especially the tragedies, as endorsing

34. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 1.

conservative norms since the rightful order of dispossessed persons is restored.[35] Yet, the resolutions can never fully negate the subversive moments that precede these restorations. Taking Mikhail Bakhtin's perspective of a "two-world condition," one can think of the theater as a carnivalesque space that invites the desire for a carnival that surpasses the temporal limits of its status as a holiday.[36] Of the festivity, he writes that "People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced. The utopian ideal and the realistic merged in this carnival experience, unique of its kind."[37] With carnivalesque elements pervading Shakespeare's play, audiences more frequently identify with the transformation of characters, for better or worse, as means of reflecting on their own life outside the theater walls than they celebrate the return of a normative order. To experience the imagination as Bakhtin describes it is to feel the effects of the experience in one's own psyche and desire a transformation of the self in relation to society.

In fact, to view the plays as strictly carrying conservative messages eschews the consistent inclusion of character conflicts that destabilize notions of absolute social roles. An interpretation like Hays's unfairly ignores the plays' holiday atmospheres and dissentient moments and instead overvalues the brief endings as neutralizing the much more prominent power of subversion in the plays. Greenblatt also rejects inflexibly conservative interpretations by drawing attention to Shakespeare's own artistic inclinations in a manner

35. See Michael Hays, *Shakespearean Tragedy as Chivalric Romance: Rethinking* Macbeth*,* Hamlet*,* Othello*, and* King Lear, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2003).

36. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 6.

37. Ibid., 10.

that echoes Bakhtin's notion of merging the utopian with the realistic: "What is striking is that [Shakespeare's] work, alert to every human fantasy and longing, is allergic to the absolutist strain so prevalent in his world, from the metaphysical to the mundane."[38] This is not to say that conservative interpretations should be discarded, though. Instead, it can be argued that the plays can both simultaneously affirm monarchical authority while entertaining rebellious notions since the plays cater to the fantasies of all social spheres without being explicitly seditious. This ambivalence is part of the enchantment of Shakespeare's art. The potential for the plays to deconstruct social values is tempered with the need to gratify the expectations of patrons and overseers.

Utopian Language Games in Shakespeare's Plays

Through his plays, William Shakespeare explores the personal and political tension that results from the competing wishes, fantasies, and behaviors of his dramatic characters. In many cases, the plots present characters that find themselves either in a position to radically change their standing within his or her society or transform society entirely. What continues the popularity of Shakespeare's plays today is not so much the motives of his characters as it is the means they employ in trying to circumvent the ideological barriers to their desires and the consequences that follow. The extreme actions that characters undertake to fulfill their wishes highlight the degree to which they seek a better experience of life. The desires propelling the characters are reflective of the wishes, hopes, and fears of Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences, and playwrights and players used the stage as a vehicle for dramatizing

38. Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Freedom*, 3.

the extent to which wishes shape social interaction and competition.[39] They creatively explored the value and consequences of desire, going as far as to ground characters' pushes for radically different situations in countercultural settings like the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It* or the island in *The Tempest*.

Similar to the friction between utopists, the characters in Shakespeare's plays pursue peculiar wishes that inherently come into conflict with the wants of other characters. The tensions that result frequently lead to cerebral and physical duels between characters that politically or socially oppose each other. In these contests, the characters often compete in a game of wits for a chance to enjoy the fruits of his or her vision of creating a better place for themselves and/or others. In the aftermath of these competitions, some visions naturally overtake others and vice-versa, either bringing a vision to life or writing its possibility out of existence. One common adage within Utopian discourse notes how one person's utopia can be another's dystopia, and in Shakespeare's plays, the grating conflicts between characters exemplifies the mercurial discord this axiom describes.[40] In fact, these conflicts often burgeon outward and spread instability to other characters, showing how disagreements at a microcosmic level can have a domino effect on a macrocosmic one. This instability is

---

39. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 4. Greenblatt provides a similar claim regarding the foundations of monarchical society in general: "at some level we know perfectly well that the power of the prince is largely a collective invention, the symbolic embodiment of the desire, pleasure, and violence of thousands of subjects, the instrumental expression of complex networks of dependency and fear."

40. I adapt the idea from Maria Varsam's "Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and Its Others." *Dark Horizons*. Ed. Tom Moylan and Raffealla Baccolini. (New York: Routledge, 2003): "Because of the range of visions, one writer's eutopia is another writer's dystopia, an issue that remains problematic in the history of interpretation of texts ranging from Plato's *The Republic* to modern-day works" (204-5). She is not alone in her perception. Gregory Claeys's makes a similar observation in "The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell," *The Cambridge Companion to Utopia Literature*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 108.: "There is of course something in the argument that, just as one person's terrorist is another's freedom-fighter, so is one person's utopia another's dystopia."

typically brought about by characters that manipulate language and arrange situations to satisfy their wishes with or without regard for the nation's well-being.

The Utopian politics of Shakespeare's plays pivot, then, on language games played between characters that are driven to either outwit one another for individual advantages or cooperate in order to achieve a desired outcome. While these characters often believe they form wishes independently, their fantasies stem from their interactions with society, which depends upon the service and compliance of others as well as the observance of behavioral and linguistic rules. To illustrate this relationship between the individual and society in the work of Shakespeare, I explore ideas regarding utopia and dystopia as they arise through various motifs and themes that consistently emerge in his art. Particular motifs range from carnivalesque inversions of rank and gender to the featuring of Machiavels (i.e. characters whose means are justified by ends) while themes include the treatment of love, revenge, isolation, control, and fate. These motifs and themes provoke inquiry about the relationship between characters, especially in terms of their role within the societies depicted in the plays, which, despite any foreign settings, almost always reflect English customs.

The language games in which Shakespeare's characters engage rely on double meanings either as a way of deliberately duping nemeses or subtly expressing desires for a new situation. These meanings create ambiguity regarding which political attitudes contribute to the tenor of the plays. In dystopic works, these games tend to detach a character's malevolent intent from his or her words when he or she presents his or her self to others. The audience only learns of a character's true plans through soliloquies and dialogues with confidants. The hollow use of words by such villains reveals the unceasing conflict that occurs between appearances, intentions, and the reality of situations. Utopic inclinations are

equally prominent in plays with characters subtly uncovering and expressing unrealized desires, whether for love, equality, or leisure. In effect, the language featured in the plays functions as a means for either improving a character's situation within an existing hierarchy or obtaining a desired object or social arrangement peripheral to it.[41] The dialogue, then, either leads characters to pursue a utopian situation or perverts their hopes and deflects them towards a dystopic condition, depending on the ultimate outcome of those involved in a given conflict. One of the primary language games of the plays, then, involves which vision is closest to being achieved and promoted the longest, how one decides to shape or mold his or her behavior to adapt to the time's expectations and achieve his or her objectives, and the cost that a character is willing to pay to actualize his or her wishes.

Critical Approach and Chapter Outlines

While critics including David Norbook and Frank Brevik have previously linked Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to Utopian studies, my dissertation contains a larger scope in that it analyzes moments from a range of plays as early as *The Taming of the Shrew* and as late as *Macbeth* in order to highlight the utopian and dystopian qualities of each. A goal of this study is to discuss how literature and society intrinsically weave utopian and dystopian discourse into the construction of culture. Narratives of utopias and dystopias arise from reimagining the configuration of everyday life and offer a sketch of either better alternatives to the present or hyperbolic predictions that depict the vices of the present run amuck.

41. Utopias in general are sometimes erroneously assumed to feature classless, non-hierarchical societies. While the feature is certainly presented as feasible in many utopian designs (despite many of them still retaining hierarchical orders), the abolishment of hierarchy and class is not a prerequisite for utopia. The longstanding tradition of Utopian literature consistently contradicts the assumption. Examples include, but are not limited to, Thomas More's *Utopia*, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, H.G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia,* B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two*, and Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*.

In uncovering the Utopian aspects of the plays, historical context is germane to understanding the societal influence on Shakespeare's creativity. Yet, just as a work of art is inextricably linked to the society in which it is produced, it is equally impossible for critics to disengage themselves from their historical moment and analyze Shakespeare's art through an Elizabethan or Jacobean lens. As a person living in the twenty-first century, I cannot genuinely experience the culture of Renaissance England since I was not born during that period. The material conditions that surrounded the reigns of Elizabeth I and King James I are essential for understanding the language and the content of Shakespeare's work, and I certainly ground much of my analysis in English history to inform my criticism. However, readers situated in the twenty-first century are aware that in reading Shakespeare, they are valuing his art because of how the political conflicts he depicts in his works remain relevant to our own experience of culture. Greenblatt clarifies the perspective well: "if cultural poetics is conscious of its status as interpretation, this consciousness must extend to an acceptance of the impossibility of fully reconstructing and reentering the culture of the sixteenth century, of leaving behind one's own situation."[42] To achieve a comprehensible analysis, readers must balance the knowledge of his or her own place in history with a knowledge of the time from which the art originates. It should come as no surprise, then, as to why many contemporary film and television adaptations of Shakespeare's plays transport the plays' settings to suit later contexts while still retaining the original early modern English dialogue.[43] Directors

42. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 5.

43. Examples include Richard Loncraine's *Richard III* (1995), Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996), Penny Woolcock's *Macbeth on the Estate* (1997), Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000), and Ralph Fiennes's *Coriolanus* (2011).

who alter the settings of these plays do so in order to demonstrate how the politics in Shakespeare's drama have remained relevant throughout the past four centuries.[44]

In my analysis, I write three conceptual chapters that address the presence of utopia and dystopia in seven of Shakespeare's plays. The chapters specifically center on the concepts of utopia, Marxist interpellation and ideology, and dystopia in relation to these literary works. All three theoretical designations outline the basic tenets of and the problems facing Utopian studies. In chapter one, I focus on moments related to utopia by offering careful readings of the Arcadian and Romance plays of *As You Like It* and *The Tempest*. The settings of these two plays take place in counter-spaces severed from the characters' normative locations (i.e. a French court and Naples, Italy, respectively). In chapter two, I discuss the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew*, the seduction of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, and the ill-fated lovers in *Romeo and Juliet* within the context of ideology and interpellation. In all three plays, characters are lured into situations that radically transform their everyday identities, either as a tinker, a steward, or rivals, into something new and better. For the final chapter, I discuss tyranny and treachery as a dystopian condition in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Both plays feature men who obtain the throne through unscrupulous

44. Reading Shakespeare from one's own historical moment reaffirms how applicable Shakespeare's ideas remain to weighing the ethical direction of contemporary society. Terry Eagleton states: The problems which Shakespeare confronts are in some ways very much the problems which concern us, and we cannot examine these problems as they are present in his plays except through the focus of our own experience, as we cannot fully understand our own experience except through an understanding of Shakespeare. See Terence Eagleton, *Shakespeare and Society: Critical Studies in Shakespearean Drama* (New York: Schoken Books, 1967), 9. Michael Bristol in "Macbeth the Philosopher: Rethinking Context," *New Literary History* 42, no. 4 (2011): 644. voices a similar concern, lamenting the strict adherence to historicism in current early modern scholarship: "The writing is dense with citation and historical references, focused intensively on the 'social, political, and economic sub-stratum' of the plays, while giving little attention to the desires, motivations, and social interactions of Shakespeare's characters." In response to these contentions, I occasionally compare the plays with later utopian or dystopian works to emphasize the link between Shakespeare's plays and the process of Utopian critique.

regicide and show how the corruption of their natures infects entire kingdoms, rendering the countries that they rule into unsustainable, far from desirable states. One of the major aims of this dissertation is to show how Utopian thought can be employed as a critical approach that offers a new understanding of works not typically identified as belonging to the Utopian genre. In applying this method to Shakespeare, my arguments strive to bring a clearer perspective regarding the reasons why the Renaissance poet and dramatist continues to garner attention from humanities scholars.

CHAPTER I: A Space to Breathe: Dreams of Release in *As You Like It* and *The Tempest*

The Ambiguity of Utopian Spaces

Authors who write utopias are often charged with overvaluing escapist fantasies that are disconnected from reality. Skeptics tend to view the worlds that utopists envision as straying too much into excess and decry their radical societies as heavily neglecting the turbulence of human nature. In these circumstances, utopias are said to amount to no more than pipe dreams or phantasmagoria. In holding such attitudes, the anti-utopists reduce the transformative power belonging to utopia to a worthless, idle exercise, relegating utopian thought to the level of crazed fancies like Fourier's seas of lemonade.[1] Yet, the field of Utopia retains more complexity than a simple binary opposition of the ideal versus the real than anti-utopists are willing to concede. Rather than rigidly regard utopia as an ideal place, it is best understood as a dialectic that aims at ameliorating the problems facing society as opposed to a coercive. Fátima Vieira details the function of utopia in this manner:

> […] since it is impossible for [humankind] to build an ideal society, then he must be committed to the construction of a better one […] Utopia is thus to be seen essentially as a strategy […] Taking mainly the shape of a process, refusing the label of an 'impossible dream,' utopia is a programme for change and for a gradual betterment of the present.[2]

As Vieira asserts, Utopia is the result of ongoing conversations about problem solving, identifying social woes, and positing solutions for them. If a solution does not suit a situation,

---

1. Charles Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements*, eds. Gareth Stedman Jones and Ian Patterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 50.

2. Vieira, "The Concept of Utopia," 17; 23.

an honest utopist keeps an open mind to revising and reconsidering all social and political possibilities when trying to achieve betterment for a given society.

Perhaps Shakespeare toys with both this dismissive attitude towards utopia and the attitudes of utopia's adherents in titling his Arcadian comedy *As You Like It*, playing on the sense that a desirable utopia is subjective. Carving the Forest of Arden as an Arcadian space full of utopian potential, Shakespeare blends the ethereal qualities of the setting with the realistic characters inhabiting it. In constructing the Forest of Arden, Shakespeare paves a space in which a social fantasy uncharacteristic of Elizabethan society blossoms. In viewing the forest as representing a prelapsarian paradise that proves to be a favorable alternative to courtly life, Duke Senior and his followers embody such an aberrant fantasy. In other words, they excitedly forego hierarchical observance and laud egalitarian principles, which they see as permeating from the forest. Yet, an ambiguity of spirit arises as their practices do not always align with the principles they praise. In fact, the appearance of the court in Arden may exhibit all the gloss of an Arcadian utopia, but its members' continuation of deferential behavior towards authority, along with the droll commentary of characters like Touchstone and Jacques, compromises the utopian and egalitarian sentiments they associate with the forest. While the Duke and his company appraise the forest to be a solace in comparison to the stifling city, their inability to dispense with courtly customs while praising their opposites obfuscates the authenticity of their enthusiasm. Shakespeare presents a pastoral comedy that features a dissonant conflict between claims and actions, mixing the characters' egalitarian optimism with a practical observance of hierarchical habits.

The conflict between the court's attitude and the behavior of its members in *As You Like It* characterizes utopia as a concept that is complex and ambiguous in practice. Not only

does Shakespeare comingle the space with both doubters of and believers in utopia's power, he also shuffles entire factions of characters in and out of the forest at the play's end, which further accentuates its openness to change and revision. Yet, this shuffling creates difficulty in grasping the transformative capacity of Arden. After resolving to take leave of the forest in order to return to the city and their offices of state, Duke Senior and his followers appear to deny the Arcadian utopia they wholeheartedly embraced. They may view the space as carrying utopian potential while inhabiting it, but their abandonment of the forest gets reduces its function to that of a mere vacation spot. As Cathy Curtis notes, "when the usurping brother Frederick experiences a sudden conversion of character in the forest, turns to religious life and decides to abandon the pompous court, Duke Senior readily takes back the crown and indicates that he will return to his ducal life."[3] While Arden seems more like a holiday space after Duke Senior leaves, its sustainability as a utopia is reinforced by Frederick's and Jacques' indefinite residence at the play's ending. With the occupation of Arden shifting from one group of characters to another, the retentive power of Arden fluctuates, showing a utopian construct that operates as an open system as opposed to the common view of utopia as a closed system.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* features a similar dilemma of space as *As You Like It* in that the sparsely populated island in which the play is set allows for characters to pursue or enunciate wishes that conflict with the normal order of their daily lives. While on the island, each character unabashedly gives voice to fantasies and wishes that would be inappropriate in his or her homeland of Italy but flourish within the uncultured confines of the island. Part

3. Cathy Curtis, "The Active and Contemplative Lives in Shakespeare's Plays," *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, ed. David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 44.

of this unhinging of expression appears to derive from the island's magical and mythical aura, presenting the prospect of a new life away from European constraints as both enticing and paradisiacal. This certainly proves to be the case with Gonzalo who articulates the most traditional utopian vision of all as he imagines inheriting a bounteous land presided over idlers who govern with the absence of a hierarchy. However, like *As You Like It*, the utopian attraction of the island becomes problematic when considering that the aristocrat from the Italian court consistently undermines his egalitarian, Cockaigne-like daydream. At the play's beginning, he frivolously insists that a lowly Boatswain pay reverence due to his rank during a tumultuous, life-threatening storm. Likewise, the other dreamers on the island comprise a mixture of both benign expectations and nefarious intentions. For instance, Caliban's liberation is greatly admirable at the same time that the bloody means he devises to regain his freedom deserves censure.

Prospero, too, remains a controversial figure within the scope of the play, resonating as a persona full of utopian potential at some points and a dystopian tendencies at others in ruling the island. To perceive him as an honorable character, it is easy to point to his grand spectacles of magic for Miranda and Ferdinand along with his generous reconciliation with Alonso and Antonio can be seen as qualities befitting a man of great virtue. The magic, for instance, entrances Ferdinand, leading him to remark on the island as bearing utopian qualities: "Let me live here ever! / So rare a wondered father and a wife / Makes this place Paradise" (IV.i.122-124).[4] Alternately, Prospero's magic and offer of reconciliation are illusions of virtue in that they contribute to a political scheme that will suffice his selfish

4. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, in *The Necessary Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, (New York: Pearson, 2005). Note: All plays, unless stated otherwise, are taken from Bevington's edition.

desires to regain his office. The supernatural masque for Miranda and Ferdinand is a type of positive deception since it acts as a means to ensure that Miranda and Ferdinand marry. Yet, the marriage becomes a chess piece in that Prospero anchors his hopes for his old dukedom in the pair's high-profile conjoining. Shakespeare even provides the image of Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess to emphasize this purpose. Thus, Prospero appropriates the wonder of the masque and his magic to please himself.

In keeping both Caliban and Ariel in bondage, belying the seemingly virtuous nature of the magician, Prospero strikes audiences as a dystopian tyrant. With regards to Caliban, Prospero and Miranda exploit his labor off which they live comfortably on the island. While the two justify Caliban's enslavement as a fitting punishment for his attempted rape of Miranda, the habitual insults they direct at him exhibit a racial prejudice, debasing him as a subhuman creature, and fail to express disgust on a basis of his criminality. Also, in Prospero's treatment of Ariel, he promises the sprite freedom at the same time that he resorts to uttering petulant threats of indefinite bondage against him or her should the creature fail to perform his bidding. Prospero's domineering governance puts him on equal standing with the tyrannical Sycorax, who the magician vilifies. It appears that Ariel's reverence of Prospero springs more from a fear of losing his or her freedom as opposed to a mutual respect.

The various dreams that the island fosters create incompatible and ambiguous images regarding the desires of each character in relation to utopia. Antonio is clearly villainous in his attempts to kill Alonso, but his discourse on the leveling of rank provokes the possibility of social change becoming a reality. Also, while audiences may be tempted to damn Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano for their conspiracy to kill Prospero, their vision to inhabit the island and better their own lives derives from thoughts of shedding the past to begin anew. Still,

characters like Trinculo lose the sympathy of audiences when they taint these thoughts of liberation with their desires to capitalize upon Caliban's strangeness, hoping to haul him back to places like England in order to display him as a spectacle and earn a profit. Utopian visions or visions of new beginnings abound in the play, but the realistic chasing after privilege and profit gives these visions a questionable value and dramatizes how the pursuit of utopia itself cannot be entirely without corruption.

As You Like It*: The Thin Line between Legitimate Utopia and Compensatory Vacation*

In *As You Like It*, the pastoral setting of the Forest of Arden serves as a utopian sanctuary for Duke Senior and his company, who, after being deposed by his brother Frederick, seek refuge away from the city. Describing the Duke's exile to Oliver, Charles the wrestler remarks on Arden's utopic quality as that of a revitalized "golden world," like that described by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* and Hesiod in *Works and Days* (I.i.114). In line with Charles's perspective, the forest qualifies as a utopian space in that it "nostalgic[ally] looks[s] back to an idealized past" and echoes "a simpler life and getting a better balance between the city and country."[5] Rather than experiencing a time of despair after losing their standing at court, the Duke's exile instead affords him and his retinue the opportunity to bask in the Edenic atmosphere of the forest.

What qualifies the idyllic Arden as a utopian location does not simply result from its contrast with the dismal city, a common feature of the pastoral genre. Instead, its status stems from the marked differences between the forest's prospect for a free-flowing, egalitarian social order and the city's invariable hierarchical order. Duke Senior's opening dialogue

5. Sargent, *Utopianism*, 21-22.

admits how the forest's verdure and liberality enchants him as he delights in the refreshing absence of the court's pretentious opulence and ritual observances. He embraces the ripeness with which the forest fosters a pleasurable alternative to living at court:

> Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,
> Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
> Than that of a painted pomp? Are not these woods
> More free from peril than the envious court?
> Here feel we not the penalty of Adam, […]
> And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
> Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
> Sermons in stones, and good in everything. (II.i.1-5; 15-17)

Conveying a utopic attitude, the Duke describes his company as communing with one another as equals free from the frivolities of rank and distinction. The strongest indication of a utopian absence of hierarchy manifests itself in the Duke's first lines ("Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile") in which he addresses his followers as fraternal peers.[6] The Duke views the forest with a Romantic spirit and takes succor in the vibrancy of the natural world, the stifling customs of the court no longer stress the Duke and his company while occupying the forest. The trees, brooks, and stones replace the emblems and banners that signaled the prestige of hierarchy and nobility with a natural vitality that is wedded to a prelapsarian joy. Rather than being led into a despairing situation following usurpation, like King Lear, the men find in Arden a new Garden of Eden, filling themselves with fantasies of repealing

6. David Bevington, introduction to *As You Like It*, in *The Necessary Shakespeare*, 150. Commenting on those lines, David Bevington contends that they "suggest[] a kind of social equality that [Duke Senior] could never know in the cramped formality of his previous official existence."

Adam's and Eve's grievous sin and negating the original cause for all human strife. Harold Bloom rightly shares the company's enthusiasm for the forest: "I am delighted to observe that the forest of Arden is simply the best place to live, anywhere in Shakespeare. You cannot have an earthly paradise and still have a stage comedy that works, yet *As You Like It* comes closest."[7] The Duke and his men welcome the life of the forest as the aura of utopia hangs over Arden when its residents see it as summoning a mythical past back into the present. In a metatheatrical fashion, the space of the play in this sense offers the same relaxation as Arden, allowing a holiday for both the noble characters in the play and the audiences attending it.

To exclusively label the Duke's experience in Arden as utopian would ignore the contradictions exhibited in the Duke's behavior. Arden may certainly inspire language characteristic of a utopia with the words of the Duke expressing excitement for a realm where people can embrace one another's humanity without the need to follow stational dress codes or heed hereditary privileges. In any vision bearing utopian qualities, however, statements of revolutionary optimism can easily betray the dream they represent by operating as mere compensation for a shortcoming or a lack. For example, once the Duke finishes his jovial reflection, Amiens immediately responds, "Happy is Your Grace / That can translate the stubbornness of fortune / Into so quiet and so sweet a style" (II.i.18-20). In these lines, Amiens may genuinely admire the Duke's appreciation for nature and liberty in the forest, but, depending on how the lines are performed, they might subtly draw attention to the fact

7. Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of The Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 205. I call Bloom's perspective misguided at times because his interpretation of Shakespeare's plays tends to arbitrarily close off alternative ways of reading the artwork. He is an essentialist with a narrow perspective regarding how to understand the playwright. Even as he advocates certain readings, he makes simple, irresponsible mistakes, such as confusing Trinculo with Stephano when he analyzes *The Tempest*. The pair may be interchangeable on a humorous level, but the distinction between the characters should not escape scholarly attention.

that the Duke uses his enthusiasm as a mask for the despair from being displaced. As a man of high-standing, it is understandable that Duke Senior would not want to show weakness or admit defeat after being usurped, and like Aesop's fox that despises the grapes he desires but cannot reach, perhaps the Duke's praise for the forest is his attempt to nurse his injury by contenting himself with a lower status. Whether the forest genuinely excites him or becomes compensation for his loss of status remains unclear.

In fact, the behavior of the Duke's own men contradicts his egalitarian sensibility, problematizing the authenticity of the camp's claims to reside in an Edenic utopia. For instance, the formalities of the court still persist when the men address Duke Senior as "my lord" rather than using a signifier free from distinguishing rank. While the newly formed foresters verbally share the Duke's utopic perspective of Arden, one may wonder if the forest really has taken possession of the Duke's followers or if they simply parrot the highest ranked member of their company to remain in his favor. In line with Eagleton's ideas about the play, the scene may show the court as "trac[ing], narcissistically, one's own subjective moods."[8] In fact, despite the "golden world" impression given about the Duke's and others' experience in Arden, not everyone is content. As the First Lord informs the Duke, another follower named Jacques remains unhappy among them. Though the Duke entreats his humor, Jacques willingly elects to be melancholic, which illustrates how the camaraderie in Arden fails as a homogenous experience. Jacques's unhappiness may further taint the utopia sprouting from the forest because rather than being troubled by his discontent, Duke Senior and his followers laugh at him derisively instead. Their taunting of Jacques demonstrates a

8. Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 90-91.

lack of unity and harmony that is conventionally known to belong to utopias. Jacques's inability to conform to the others' merriment is best characterized in his attitude towards the killing of a stag. Jacques denounces the Duke's and his followers' residence as encroaching on the natural order of the forest, describing their presence as horrid and unbecoming of paradise when he calls them "usurpers, tyrants, and what's worse, / To fright the animals and to kill them up / In their assigned and native dwelling place" (II.i.61-63). Jacques's criticism points out the flaws and contradictions in the group's outlook on Arden as he draws attention to the fact that their utopia is itself a usurpation of a land not belonging to them.If the deposed court's presence intrudes on Arden, it appears to do so only from the perspective of Jacques, "a social satirist and a mocker of Arden," whose *contemptus mundi* skeptically tests the amount of goodness in his fellow men and remains unconvinced that the forest has genuinely changed them for the better.[9] Contrary to Jacques' criticisms, Bevington argues that the utopian aspects associated with the location reside in the virtue of the characters that enter Arden. Touching on Orlando, Bevington claims that "the vision of a regenerative Utopia secretly abides in the heart of this courtly creature," and this statement applies to the other relationships in the play as well.[10]

Besides Duke Senior, Orlando, too, possesses a sense of Utopia in craving to rectify the dystopic injustice that he suffers in Oliver's care by elevating himself to a level of prosperity worthy of his family's name. Oliver tyrannically and jealously denies him an education and makes him eat with the servants. Oliver's cruel treatment of his brother is explicitly dystopian in that he abuses Orlando and then contrarily professes brotherly care of

9. Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 212.

10. David Bevington, Introduction to *As You Like It*, 152.

him to Charles the Wrestler (I.i.146-147). Publically, Oliver postures as a caring brother while his private oppression of Orlando betrays his façade. This mistreatment moves Orlando into such despondency that he contrasts Oliver's treatment of him as worse than that of the family livestock (I.i.6-24). Oliver arbitrarily and hostilely bars Orlando from all avenues of advancement. In the play's opening scene, Orlando illustrates his suffering to the family's elder servant Adam, relating the woes that visit him as a result of his brother's primogenital privilege. Orlando's lack of mobility reflected the experiences of audience members who would have encountered the same constraints as him. After pronouncing his discontent, Orlando discloses to Adam a desire to resist his condition and appeals to his lineage: "the spirit of my father, which I think is within me, begins to mutiny against this servitude" (I.i.21-23). The memory-driven threat escalates to violence when a few lines later Orlando grasps Oliver by the throat to show that he will not yield to Oliver's oppressive authority.[11]

Orlando's resistance to his brother's authority ambivalently appeals to two entirely different audiences. The invocation of his father instills in him a resilience to tyranny that audience members of any rank would laud at the same time that his resilience stems from his sense of entitlement and nobility, which gives him the courage to challenge Oliver. In the latter sense, the memory of station and heritage reinforces conservative social expectations since his resistance justifies the preservation of social distinctions through the succession of bloodlines. As the son of an aristocrat, Orlando does not aim to redefine distinction and instead seeks to seize upon the privilege due to a man of his pedigree. Alternately, his

11. The role of memory in this capacity compares prominently to the various revolutions that resist tyrannical governments in modern dystopian literature such as Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908), Ayn Rand's *Anthem* (1937), or Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron" (1961). For early modern England, then, Orlando's behavior resembles that of the dystopian protagonist.

resistance may also attract a collective contempt for the discouragement of social mobility within Elizabethan society. During the time of the play's performance, this message could have certainly engrossed the groundlings. According to Chris Fitter, "Overseers of the Poor" were given full sway in exercising social control, "[c]lassifying the poor as deserving or undeserving" and "enjoy[ing] discretionary powers to supplement—or otherwise—the income of workers paid too little to survive: a brutally substantial number."[12] While Fitter notes the appeal of Orlando to the poorer citizenry, he also points out the ambiguity of his redeeming features, claiming that "Orlando is correspondingly abusive of the lower classes."[13] Orlando's disdain for labor may appease the higher ranked audience members, positing their lifestyle as the more desirable one, as it simultaneously, yet subtly, draws critical attention to their own abuses of the lower ranks. In fact, Fitter describes Orlando as a mixed figure that is portrayed as both an impetuous brat and a rebellious champion, especially in regards to how Adam bestows his earnings on him upon their retreat from the city: "offensive in his whining genteel insistence on the insulting insufficiency of the wealth bequeathed him, comically hapless in his deictic sightlessness, he yet echoes the language of underclass resentment, and embodies the exciting spirit of active resistance."[14] Though Orlando may not desire a complete reformation of the national order, he does desire a radical change in his own treatment, which, aligned with Bevington's perspective, shows traces of utopia. To perceive an injustice and see it corrected directly ties in with the aims of a utopia.

---

12. Chris Fitter, "Reading Orlando Historically: Vagrancy, Forest, and Vestry Values in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England: An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism, and Reviews* (2010): 118.

13. Ibid., 120.

14. Ibid., 122.

As seen here, though, the justice is subjective and is heavily embroiled with the expectations and wants of a particular rank.

Orlando must possess some charm for Adam to so readily forsake his service to Oliver and endow Orlando with his savings in order to follow him into Arden. The gesture certainly affects Orlando to the extent that he responds with a utopian declaration: "Oh, good old man, how well in thee appears / The constant service of the antique world, / When service sweat for duty, not for meed!" (II.iii.56-58). Echoing the Duke's prelapsarian reference earlier in Act Two, Orlando nostalgically invokes "the antique world," seeing in Adam a servitude based on ideal loyalty rather than for the sake of profit, which Orlando goes on to critique as sign of the time's wretchedness. He celebrates Adam's attitude towards service as one that is unfortunately rare, making him an invaluable asset in his exile. Yet, if Fitter's intriguing reading of this scene as being one that robs the groundlings of carnival pleasure in portraying Adam as the caricature of a Puritan masochist and worthy of scorn, then the utopian aspect of Adam's service may scandalously carry a conservative message that co-opts Orlando's utopian declarations and renders Adam a dystopian toady.[15] Fitter's perspective, though, comes across as counterintuitive to the main plot, which emphasizes the virtuous natures of Orlando and Rosalind. Considering these strains, Adam's service can embody true loyalty and virtue in order to demonstrate the manner in which people can construct utopian relations by simply expressing genuine care for one another.

While this scene extols Adam's and Orlando's camaraderie and cheer, the stark reality of the pair's exile carries the potential to blemish the utopic fidelity and harmony they

15. Ibid., 123-124.

embody. Though the forest is a space filled with beauty, its pleasing exterior betrays its harsh conditions as Adam and Orlando encounter firsthand the dangerous reality of the wild. After wandering in the forest with Adam for a time, Orlando's impression of "the antique world" eventually gets turned upside down when they begin to starve. In Hesiod's Golden Age, from which the antique world derives, "the golden race died a painless death that overtook them unawares, a death presaged neither by illness nor even by aging."[16] Far from experiencing this kind of ataraxia, Orlando and Adam face the very real pain that accompanies a brush with death. After succumbing to hunger and fatigue, Orlando desperately resorts to a state of primitive hostility when he draws his sword against the Duke Senior and his men demanding food. Rather than presenting himself as a man full of cheer and composure, Orlando instead reveals a natural aggression, showing that even the farthest reaching utopian vision cannot fully suppress the wilder instincts of humans.

The forest initially inspires Adam and Orlando with the image of a golden world, but it quickly dissolves in the face of hunger, and it is not until the pair encounters civilizing forces that their paradisiacal sentiments are renewed. Just as quickly as Orlando holds the Duke's company at the point of his blade, he sheathes his sword when they treat him kindly. Ashamed, he tries to excuse his behavior, claiming that "bare distress hath ta'en from me the show / Of smooth civility," which further underscores the way in which both Utopia and civilization can act as artificial coverings and repressive apparatuses for the more animalistic drives of humans (II.v.95-96). This repression is not necessarily negative. In fact, it is at this particular moment that the utopian virtues of the deposed members evinces an observable

16. Robert Bartlett, "An Introduction to Hesiod's *Works and Days*," *Review of Politics* 68, no. 2 (2006): 187.

effect. In the face of the court's cheerful civility, Orlando quickly transforms from an impetuous thief back to his former, good-natured self. His transformation suggests that in spite of his hardships, the latent nobility in his character provides the chance for others to reawaken his civility, suggesting that such exchanges are necessary to repress humanity's baser instincts. Yet, rather than champion a radical transformation, Orlando's reversion gives proof to Feste's words in *Twelfth Night*, when he tells Olivia that "Anything that's mended is but patched; virtue that transgresses is patched with sin, and sin that amends is but patched with virtue" (I.v.44-47). Feste's words argue that virtue can be a disguise for sin, or in reference to *As You Like It*, civility can mask natural instincts. In obligingly providing for Orlando's and Adam's basic needs with food, the Duke and his followers give occasion for camaraderie, harmony, and cooperation that subdue Orlando's desperate violence.

Oliver undergoes a similar change of character to his brother while in Arden When Oliver seeks his brother Orlando out in the forest, the romance aspects of the plot manifest in both realistic and fairy-tale fashion. After nearly being bitten by a green snake, a symbol of Oliver's jealousy of Orlando, and devoured by a ravenous lioness, Oliver recognizes, as if by some religious visitation, the goodness of Orlando when his younger brother intervenes and saves his would-be assassin from certain death. His heroics bear both dimensions of the pastoral romance and the fairy tale since Oliver's conversion from a tyrannical brother to comrade happens instantly when a fissure in his complacency when his life is put at stake and then spared. This utopian turn speaks to the powerful theme of forgiveness that pervades the play, especially when Frederick, in another fairy-tale turn, later relinquishes his stolen dukedom in exchange for a religious life, returning the legitimate order to its original bearer, Duke Senior.

The causes for Oliver's benevolent turn also carry practical dimensions that throw a crux into the neat interpretation of these moments as fairy-tale redemptions. It is reasonable to question if Orlando's sudden actions are truly responsible for Oliver's new attitude or if the change occurred more gradually. In relating his story of the lioness attack to Rosalind and Celia, Oliver describes his disheveled appearance resting under the tree as that of "a wretched, ragged man, o'ergrown with hair," suggesting that like Orlando and Adam he too suffered from great hunger (IV.iii.107). Furthermore, Oliver's repentance only occurs after he becomes a victim to tyranny, which may allow him to witness its overbearing nature when Duke Frederick abruptly seizes his lands and turns him out to Arden to find his brother (III.i). In other Shakespeare plays, including *Measure for Measure*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Winter's Tale*, and especially *King Lear*, characters holding high positions are commonly brought lower in order for a lesson to be realized that amends a flaw they possess. This dynamic certainly applies to Oliver, who, lacking the tools to continue his tyranny, must either change genuinely or, as Orlando says, at least put on "the show / Of smooth civility" and adapt to new values if he is to survive in Arden and receive welcome from Duke Senior.

While the ethos of characters like Duke Senior, Orlando, and Rosalind perhaps carries more of the utopian spirit than the Forest of Arden, this does not entirely deprive the forest of its power. The cheeriness of the Duke's court takes its cue from Arden's verdant surroundings, and only an enchanted space like the forest created through dramatic illusion could explain Hymen's inexplicable arrival in act five. Also, Frederick's sudden conversion to a religious life after entering the forest with an army intent on killing Duke Senior could only result from the bewitching influence of the wood, producing the seemingly divine intervention of a religious old man who persuades Frederick to abandon his unlawful station.

The resolution of conflicts at the play's end keeps the nature of utopia in the play mutable and unstable. Duke Senior and his attendant lords may revel having freedom from the responsibilities of court, but the utopia they enjoy dissolves as rapidly as a carnivalesque occasion with the men returning to the order from which they were exiled. As Kristian Smidt points out, there is a disparity between the renewal of previous statuses and the devotional declarations of the Duke, his followers, Celia, and Oliver to the pastoral way of life.[17] The end of their enchantment with Arden threatens to undo its utopian dimensions by reducing it to a restorative vacation spot for Duke Senior rather than a space that fosters radical change in social relations. For the nobles in attendance, subduing Arden's influence could certainly bring a satisfying conclusion to the play since the Duke's privilege is restored and his unorthodox life in the forest extinguished. However, similar to other plays by Shakespeare, the conclusion may eject the Duke and his men from the forest, but it is availed to his younger brother, Frederick. If his being "converted / Both from his enterprise and from the world" means a spiritual hermitage in the woods, Frederick may show that the forest still contains utopian possibilities where he and Jacques may enjoy more permanently what could not last for Duke Senior and his company. Despite the swapping of places, the utopian potential of the forest with regards to Duke Senior persists metatheatrically. Like *Twelfth Night* where Viola is never seen donning her maiden weeds, the end of *As You Like It* does not show Duke Senior and his company outside the boundaries of Arden, impressing their time in the forest onto the collective memory of the audience (V.iv.160-161).

17. Kristian Smidt, *Uncomforties in Shakespeare's Later Comedies* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 47.

Other problems regarding the utopian status of Arden arise when taking into account the roles of the play's fool, Touchstone, and malcontent, Jacques. While the popularization of a utopia with a changeable, open system is not explicitly outlined until H.G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1905), the peripheral positions of Jacques and Touchstone offer the chance for a pre-modern, satirical critique of Arcadian virtue and those presumed to practice it. While this is more the case with Jacques, Touchstone's character is similar. In relation to the setting, Touchstone is the gravity that weighs down the airy dreams and thoughts emanating from the encounters with Ardne. Regarding the characters, Robert Bell asserts that "[b]oth are intruders in Arden" and Bevington adds that "[Touchstone] and Jacques are not touched by the play's regenerative magic."[18] Considering how the majority of characters acclimate to the Arcadian culture, Touchstone and Jacques remain relatively aloof in that they do not admire the reverie or the peasant culture. From their perspective, their status as outsiders grants them the ability to accurately criticize the behaviors of other characters, because they believe, however mistakenly, that their opinions are not compromised by vice or folly.

In his conversation with Cori the shepherd, Touchstone relies on his courtly learning to mock both the utopian foundations of the forest's rustic "clowns" and the customary practices of the court as his dialogue slyly deconstructs the boundaries between the country's and the city's manners. Eagleton offers a similar argument, stating that in *As You Like It* "Shakespeare deconstructs this binary opposition [between Nature and culture; or in this case, city and country] showing how each term inheres in the other."[19] Discussing the

---

18. Robert Bell, "Motley to the View: The Shakespearean Performance of Folly" *Southwest Review* 95 (2010): 53, accessed January 25, 2013, *Academic Search Complete*.
Bevington, introduction to *As You Like It*, 153.

19. Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, 90.

preferability of the court to the country with the shepherd, Touchstone evaluates certain qualities within the context of each respective locality and offers a series of deft contradictions that undercut Corin's own appreciation for the country while deprecating the practices of the city. The contradictions permit Touchstone to make contrary claims as when he states that bucolic solitude offers pleasure for an individual's desire for contemplation away from city crowds at the same time that city crowds offer diversions away from the madness of an isolated mind (III.ii.11-21).

In his exchange with Corin, Touchstone appears as a mock emissary on behalf of the court in trying to reorient Corin's values to align with those of city culture, and in doing so, he devalues the court's superiority. Touchstone argues that Corin should adopt the court's manners for his own betterment in a manner that derides the court's pompous vogue as being as mean and dirty as the country man's way of life. Through a range of comparisons, Touchstone directs Corin into seeing the similarities between country dirtiness and courtly dirtiness. In one example, Corin argues that the customs of the court would not suit a country lifestyle. He describes the idea of shepherds kissing each other's' hands like courtierswould be a disgusting practice since they are often covered with sheep grease and "tarred over with the surgery of our sheep" while the courtiers have soft hands scented by civet perfume (III.ii.57-58). However, Touchstone dismisses his concerns and replies that sheep grease is as "wholesome" as human sweat and that tar from sheep surgery is less base than civet perfume since civet derives from a cat's anal pouch (III.ii.52-53; 63-65). While these accusations obviously needle Corin, they show how noblemen can be on par with countrymen in terms of grotesqueness. Nobles may strive for refinement, but they cannot cease to sweat, and their finer perfume of civet literally derives from the anal extremities of felines. While nobles

regard themselves as highly placed in the great chain of being, their practices and bodies continue to speak to human grossness, which undercuts their elevated sense of worth and notes that economic disparity results from an arbitrary prejudice.

Proceeding with similar jests in his discussion with Corin, Touchstone as a voice of practicality draws more attention to the animalistic side of humanity as a basis for humor. In their dialogue, he perverts the honesty of Corin's utopic expression about enjoying his pastoral lifestyle by pointing out the double meanings in the shepherd's words. In answering Touchstone's accusations that the shepherd will die damned for not learning from the court, Corin says:

> Sir, I am a true laborer: I earn that I eat, get that
> I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness,
> glad of other men's good, content with my harm, and
> the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and
> my lambs suck. (III.ii.71-75)

Corin's rustic passivity certainly cherishes a pastoral peace of mind, even if the instability of this living space escapes his detection. Humorously, though, Touchstone accuses Corin of pimping out his livestock for his living in trying undercut his contentedness, which equates him with unscrupulous flesh-peddlers. Throughout the play, while shepherds and nobles live blithely in the forest, Touchstone tries to heave their chimerical perspectives back to solid ground. To do so, he resorts to bawdy jokes that present him as an antithesis to the idealism of the pastoral romance and Petrarchan love. Ultimately, he is associated with the filthy loam as opposed to the celestial skies as he demonstrates how all people have a fair share in the world's baseness.

Using such paradoxical logic, Touchstone jestingly chides Corin's idyllic lifestyle, informing him that he risks damnation for not having ever attended court to learn good manners. Corin adroitly defends his lack of city manners as a utopian way of living and describes the country and the court as equal but separate realms that simply adhere to different social codes: "[…] Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as / the behavior of the country is most mockable at the court" (III.ii.43-46). Potentially subversive, Corin's sentiment suggests that the court's practiced rituals do not outweigh the country bumpkins' uncouth conduct in social worth. Instead, he sees the spheres as equally independent ideological fields, which, in a utopian fashion, levels the nobility's belief that it serves as the paragon of all human behavior. This is merely one interpretation, though. Corin's lines can also be seen as rigorously conservative in how they acknowledge that nobles and commoners belong to separately appointed spheres, which subtly denounces social permeability and betrays the utopian seemliness of his discourse. This interpretation would closely align with the attitudes that coded Elizabethan sumptuary laws protecting the barriers between high and low ranks, and it can serve as a potent example of utopia being co-opted to maintain the status quo. Thus, the utopian content of Corin's retort remains ambiguous and open to both traditional and progressive interpretations.

The attitude expressed in Corin's utopian lines may admit a kind of ignorance that situates him in a dystopian situation since fail to take into account the presence of the noblemen in the forest. Despite Corin's appreciation for separate spheres, the noble ranks, represented by Duke Senior and Frederick, are encroaching on the lands that Corin and the other peasants inhabit effectively shrinking the area belonging to their sphere. The noblemen's presence reveals that Corin's words may be ironic. While he enjoys the

simplicity of rustic living, he fails to understand the court's ambitions for controlling resources and is too passive and distracted to try. In this sense, *As You Like It* may quietly dramatize the results of land enclosures that occurred since the past century, of which, intellectuals, including Sir Thomas More, suggested were a major source of social strife.[20] Where the rustic population lacks the grounds to protest against the nobles' movements, the nobles can smoothly acquire these lands to which they lacked an inherent right on the principle of their superior standing.

Similar to Touchstone, Jacques has an attitude that departs from the enthusiasm and idealism of those inhabiting Arden in that he embodies a perspective that is pessimistically utopian. As one that is consistently gloomy, Jacques acts as an obnoxious dissenter who can never be fully satisfied with any social situation. In the modern world, adopting an extremist ideological stance usually seems absurd and potentially dangerous to others, and in a similar fashion, Jacques's melancholic disposition meets with derisive snickers from his cohorts. Indeed, Rosalind in a caustic repartee with him asserts that "Those that are the extremity of either [melancholy or laughter] are abominable fellows and betray themselves to every modern censure worse than drunkards" (IV.i.4-6). She criticizes his severe melancholy as an odious annoyance that characterizes him as pretentious and self-righteous. Though his melancholy is a nuisance, Jacques's character continues to be memorable in how the negative attitudes toward him spring from a fear that his criticisms have a ring of truth to them.

In the play, Jacques's distant behavior from Duke Senior and his company hinges on a sense of what he feels to be his overlooked genius. Like Touchstone who exposes

20. See More's *Utopia* (1516).

humanity's animalistic impulses for humor, Jacques uses the occasion of stag's death as a dystopian analogy for feeling neglected. He transforms the death into a metaphor for a discarded outsider, in this case himself, forgotten by the "flux of company" (II.i.52). The lack of recognition saddens him, a view which Rosalind later mocks in an anecdote, quipping, "I fear you have sold your own lands to see / other men's. Then to have seen much and to have / nothing is to have rich eyes and poor hands" (IV.i.20-22). He even tries to persuade Rosalind that his brand of melancholy does not fit into the current social order, using various negative references to common occupations, including lawyers, courtiers, scholars, and musicians (IV.i.9-19). In line with Jameson's view of utopists, Jacques is the maniac or oddball in that he is "a deformation readily enough explained by the fallen societies in which [he] had to fulfill [his] vocation" who, being misunderstood, is ridiculed.[21] He may be mocked, but Jacques's perception of himself in relation to society rings of a discontent that beckons utopian remedies.

However unpleasant and ornery everyone else finds Jacques's personality, it may make him the most genuinely Utopian character. For instance, in his exchange with Duke Senior concerning satire, Jacques lays out his hope for a better world that would achieve through deconstructive criticism. Showing his kinship to Touchstone, Jacques confesses, perhaps jocularly, that he longs to serve as a fool, proclaiming that "Motley's the only wear" (II.vii.34). He goes on to claim he would have fantastical abilities if he could regularly act as a fool: "[…] give me leave / To speak my mind, and I will through and through / Cleanse the foul body of th'infected world, / If they will patiently receive my medicine" (II.vii.58-61).

21. Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 10.

Considering the theatrical privilege of jesters during the English Renaissance as the wisest of characters ("The fellow is wise enough to play the fool" *Twelfth Night* III.i.59), Jacques desires the immunity granted to courtly fools to freely criticize immoral behavior to obliterate the behaviors depressing him. In playing the fool. Like a salesman, he claims that he can deliver to others a utopian remedy for everyday vices if he were assigned to such a role. In Jacques's apology for satire, he suggests that his type of witticism can cause no ill for good people since it will only upset those who bear guilt for committing the vices he ridicules. In claiming this, he moralizes to Duke Senior about the shape moral behavior can take when corrections are widely prescribed, taking advantage of Arden's alternative space to offer a different way to live.

The utopian spirit seems to inhabit the Duke and his men while residing in "the golden world" culture of Arden, but the degree to which their utopia fails remains inconclusive. The desire pride and pomp mostly spring from the commentaries of the borderline anti-utopian Touchstone and the radically utopian Jacques. If Touchstone could be categorized under any Utopian mode, it would be a body utopia like that of the licentious land of Cockaigne due to his promiscuous desire for the rustic Audrey and his grotesque manner of collapsing disparate forms of dirtiness into each other. For the pessimistic Jacques to remain in the forest appears to suit his radical disposition. Perhaps on the margins of his society he can preach more openly about all of humanity's ills, constantly meditating on the ways to develop a panacea for all of them, even if they are misguided.

The weddings at the end also appear quite conservative and characteristic of a traditional happy ending where good cheer for the newlyweds is meant to remove all dissembling disguises and fill the audience with joyous relief. However, the ending of *As You*

Like It like many of Shakespeare's plays remains both tidy and subversive with regards to how the treatment of station affects the audience. From the conservative stance, the play echoes the condemnation of rebellion against an established order as sacrilegious and treasonous, promising death for those who attempt to defy the principle of divine right. Yet, the theme of forgiveness appears reverse the effects of Frederick's overthrow of his brother and Oliver's maltreatment of Orlando as both Oliver and Frederick receive amnesty from a seemingly providential grace that pardons them once they vow to repent from continuing their previous transgressions. Conservatively, the reconciliation allows the legitimized order of the Duke to return to his place, and Orlando appears to receive the respect due to a man of his breeding. However, grinding against the reinforcement of conservative conventions, a new order appears to be brewing in the forest with Jacques and Frederick. In this sense, then, the play appeals to early modern audiences of both high and low stature in that the dual messages in the ending aim to satisfy their respective fantasies, as they like it, both affirming an order that rewards privilege and one that redefines it. The play, then, presents ideas that speak to anticipations of an ideal livelihood at the same time it tempers that anticipation with society's realistic qualities.

The Tempest*: An Island of Hopes and Doubts*

In terms of Utopian criticism, *The Tempest* receives the most attention since the play is set on an island that appears to be correspondent to a New World location, similar to More's country in *Utopia*. Like *As You Like It*, the treatment of Utopia gets muddled in sophisticated ways. Conflicts of rank figure prominently as the island's uncolonized space allows for the expression of opportunistic fantasies to thrive since the normative laws of Neapolitan society have no jurisdiction in this space. From Antonio and Sebastian's regicidal

plot to Gonzalo's classless system, the island allows the Italian characters either to seek new positions in the current order or completely redesign it. David Norbrook asserts that "Utopian discourse pervades the play, most notably in Gonzalo's vision […] But every figure on the island has some kind of vision of a society that would transcend existing codes and signs."[22] In the play, the space of the island serves as a cradle for various dreams of power that compete with one another. There is a difference to be noted, though, between the transgressive and fantastic Utopian visions that blossom in the new location. The hopes of characters such as Antonio, Sebastian, Trinculo, and Stephano are transgressive in that they desire to drastically change their position in the social order rather than redesign the order itself, transplanting the familiar order of Italy onto the island. They nevertheless challenge the stability of the existing order in bypassing the traditional methods for achieving power by plotting murder rather than waiting for Alonso or Prospero to die of natural causes. Alternately, the aspirations of Caliban and Gonzalo are more aligned with a fantastic utopianism in that they aim at toppling the familiar society in in order to construct a new one. However, even Gonzalo's plans fail to be genuinely utopian as his inability to dispense with privilege undercuts the loftiness of his visions.

With both the transgressive and fantastic visions flocking to the island, a conflict of ideas occurs and neither mode of imagination can cohabit. The integrity of each vision also gets called into question when considering the characters' motives. Reflecting on the competition for ruling the island, Katrin Trüstedt points out that "After the primal scene of usurpation in Milan, this violence seems to have spread, and every ruler ultimately appears to

22. David Norbrook, "'What Cares These Roarers For the Name of King?': Language and Utopia in *The Tempest*," in *The Politics of Tragicomedy,* eds. Hope, Jonathan and McMulland (Gordon. London: Routledge, 1992), 21.

be some kind of a secondary usurper characterized by, at least, some tendency of reliance."[23] These problems remain central to the conceptualization of utopia in the play since the connotations of a good place speak of unity, which is lacking from the parties' divergent visions. On the one hand, Gonzalo's picture of an idle, rankless, and liberated society results from a traditional utopian process that systemically negates industry and in its place, promotes a commonwealth of relaxation and plenty. Yet, the subjective contexts of each vision, especially as Gonzalo's optimism contrasts with the skepticism of Antonio and Sebastian, keep the idea of utopia on this island unstable, relative, and far from realizable.

Like *As You Like It*, a major utopian theme of *The Tempest* centers on forgiveness, primarily for these characters who deposed Prospero from his Milanese dukedom. However, unlike *As You Like It*, where the antagonists clearly reform themselves and pursue a righteous life, not everyone undergoes a moral transformation in this romance. Bevington writes, "The play's ending is far from perfectly stable. Antonio never repents, and we cannot be sure what the island will be like once Prospero has disappeared from the scene."[24] Where reform does take place, the occasion is far from auspicious. For example, there is something like a defeat in Caliban's apparent change at the play's conclusion, when he says to Prospero, "I'll be wise hereafter / And seek for grace" (V.i.298-299). These lines feature him, a foreign islander, submitting his will to Western authority and accepting their view that he is inferior n to them. Thus, despite its utopian appearance of forgiveness, the events of the play complicate the

23. Kristen Trüstedt, "Secondary Satire and the Sea-Change of Romance: Reading William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*," *Law and Literature* 17, no. 3 (2005): 353.

24. Bevington, introduction to *The Tempest*, 848.

theme as some characters receive pardon without any reason given their lack of repentance while others who sue for grace, like Caliban, continue to receive pitiless censure.

Quite anti-utopian in his allocation of grace, Prospero callously withholds forgiveness from Caliban for his attempted rape of Miranda. The lowly slave endures abuse after abuse, and Prospero's final rebuke seems to aim at breaking his rebellious spirit. His condemnation is selective and inconsistently applied to others in comparison to Calibn. Rather than loathing Calbian for his offense, his prejudice appears racially and hierarchically motivated and thus dystopian. In fact, Prospero excessively belittles him, along with Trinculo and Stephano, for their conspiracy to murder him, and his reproofs borders on being hypocritical. When Prospero comes face-to-face with Antonio and Sebastian, a pair whom he observed plotting to commit regicide, he hardly whispers a word of reproof to them. Instead, Prospero directly tells his brother Antonio, who usurped him, that he will forgive all his foulness on the condition that he relinquish the dukedom back to him (V.i.130-134). If conspiracy to murder can be condoned, apparently it is better to belong to the noble ranks and have the power of an office to exchange for exoneration. In moments like this, where Prospero pontificates on morality and just actions despite his own repressive and unjust control of the spirits and inhabitants of the island, the ability to identify the reunion as a joyous reconciliation gets marred by the discriminatory, self-interested nature of Prospero's forgiveness. His selective justice taints the image of utopian reconciliation that accompanies the end.

Despite his seeming utopian desire for redemption and goodness, Prospero's goals and aims characterize him as one of the most self-serving, dystopian characters in the play. He is highly selfish in his desire to return to his former holdings and give up his magical powers. In seeking to regain his office, he uses his daughter Miranda as political leverage in

arranging her marriage to King Alonso's son and heir, Ferdinand, without the father's knowledge. As he recounts in his frequently discussed speech about the dissolution of his magical powers, the reunion with his Italian companions and the restoration of his dukedom effectively closes off the possibility for the dreams and magic to continue on the island. Based on the wonders Prospero's magic performs, his discontinuance of magic indicates the end of its transformative power once he gains his greedy end of returning to Italy. He turns his back on the island's power and anticipates the luxury of a dukedom. He does not seem concerned that his restoration effectively brings a close to both his wondrous magic as well as everyone else's far-reaching dreams. He is like the ambiguous figure of King Lear, who in some instances elicits reprehension and in others, sympathy. His plea for applause at the end comes across as both an apology for ending his magic and the ultimate magic trick since the audience's hands assist in bringing the island's power to a close (Epilogue.9-10). In the end, though, Prospero has a one-track mind and is nearly as opportunistic as Antonio; the only difference is that Prospero does not resort to considering murder as a means to gain what he lacks. While Prospero's orchestration of his plans restricts and represses the ripening of others' social dreams, the presence of each character's dreams must speak to the audience in some degree, whether encouraging hope, doubt, or both.

While Gonzalo's utopianism appears more hopeful in comparison to Prospero's selfish promenading, it, too, has complications. The character of Gonzalo serves as a vehicle for pronouncing the most lucid utopian dream of the play. A learned nobleman, Gonzalo imagines a bounteous land through contraries and understandably meets with derision from the lords Antonio and Sebastian. Indeed, Gonzalo himself is a contrarious figure, who in the opening scenes featuring the titular tempest, along with the other courtiers, arrogantly

invokes the privilege of rank and condescends to the Boatswain's labor and demeans his labor to save them only to later imagine a society free of hierarchical rank (I.i.19-20; 29-34). While the crew actively labors to preserve their lives, Gonzalo and Alonso's followers resort to passive prayer, placing their fates in providence's hands. The image criticizes the foolish reliance on a symbolic code that fails to rule Nature, showing the greater reason to be with the ship's crew who work to ensure their survival. Thus, when Gonzalo articulates his vision later, he does so from the comfort of his rank as a nobleman. In fact, in a conservative turn, the later revelation of Prospero as the providential force behind the tempest only gives Gonzalo license to continue his condescension towards the Boatswain and show the hypocrisy of his egalitarian aspirations for a utopia.

Gonzalo's elitism at the beginning and end of the play highlights the inherent tension between the rankless society he envisions and the cavalier privilege on which he persistently falls back. The problem of Gonzalo's utopianism relates to the modern, populist fear of utopia that Jameson describes as an attitude that distrusts utopian dreams as elitist projects, a kind of eugenic wish. He writes, "For a class-conscious and anti-intellectual populism, it is clear that Utopia as a work of art is an invention of intellectuals designed to use the masses as its raw material, its noble political and social ideals simply masking its contempt for ordinary people and their daily lives, which are to be transfigured by the Utopian project."[25] Gonzalo may dream of new world order, but it would likely not contain a sort of man like the Boatswain since he would be transformed, being deprived of the vulgarity that Gonzalo perceives in him. The problems with Gonzalo's vision, then, make sense since, as a lord, he

25. Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 190.

possesses the education to imagine such radical arrangement where not only are the signs of social distinction abolished, but the vices of all people are eradicated in his speech. In 1611 England, it would be likely that men of the Boatswain's station would be associated with criminals. Therefore, while Gonzalo dispenses with titles and privileges, he also hopes to eradicate the presence of persons belonging to the deplorable lower ranks.

The derisive jokes that Antonio and Sebastian direct at Gonzalo's fanciful ideas about the island offer a subtle critique of the utopian imagination. The pair's jokes provoke the allegation that utopian attitudes toward the island result from an overabundant optimism that is as disconnected from reality as Prospero's hermetic studies in Milan. In incurring their mockery and approaching the description of his utopia, Gonzalo uses his courtly learning and optimistic outlook to console King Alonso in the troubling circumstance of his son's presumed drowning. However, the attempt fails to ease the pain since the counselor's reassurance merely draws attention to studied maxims, the island's exotic richness, which itself remains dubious, and the court's good fortune in having survived the shipwreck. His focus on the positive aspects of their situation does not take into account and thus seemingly trivializes the trauma of losing a sin. In fact, in a fashion similar to Adrian, Gonzalo is unwaveringly depicts the island as a place with "lush and lusty grass" which Antonio and Sebastian observe the land to be "tawny / With an eye of green in't" (II.i.55-57). Antonio and Sebastian continually deride Gonzalo's consolations as being impractically buoyant and deluded, demonstrating how his attitude vaults beyond the reality of the situation to which he belongs.

Perhaps satirizing attitudes regarding fantasies about the New World, Shakespeare draws attention to the fact that in anticipating a new land, like Gonzalo and Adrian,

audiences might project their fantasies onto it that may or may not correspond with reality.[26] Gonzalo's confidence threatens to be harmful in glossing over the severity of the court's situation. When pursued too zealously, fantasy can lead to delusion, which is particularly harmful for men not accustomed to inhabiting a wilderness. The play suggests that Gonzalo could be daft in adhering to a code of fantastic optimism that neglects both the nature of his situation as well as the emotional state of the King. Despite Adrian and Gonzalo's positive outlook, Alonso keeps his focus on the bleak possibility that his son has died at the hands of chance, and the snide commentaries of Antonio and Sebastian regarding Gonzalo's remedies show that political differences keep utopia in a state of tug-of-war, with subjective observation and individual attitudes determining which perspective bears more truth.

The tension between attitudes increases when Gonzalo arrives at his utopian vision of a rankless society, over which, he contradictorily names himself king. Echoing Duke Senior's language in *As You Like It*, Gonzalo expounds a vision that "T'excel the Golden Age" (II.i.171):

> I'th' commonwealth I would by contraries
> Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
> Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
> Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
> And use of service, none; contract, succession,

26. An interestingly grim modern illustration that appears similar to Shakespeare's warning can be seen in the plight of the Jonestown colony in Guyana (1973-1978). In Guayana, members subscribed to lofty ideals of egalitarianism like Gonzalo's, and the colony advertised the settlement as a land of plenty. However, the land turned out to be barren, leading to grave discontent among its members. The problems with the settlement compelled its charismatic leader, Jim Jones, to deceptively trick his followers into believing in the land's bounty in order to realize his communal vision. The colony ended when the majority of its members, led by Jones, committed mass suicide.

Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;

No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;

No occupation; all men idle, all

And women too, but innocent and pure;

No sovereignty—" (II.i.150-159)

In these lines, Gonzalo offers the image of a better world that evokes sensibilities associated with the Middle-Ages utopia of Cockaigne, a mythical land of plenty, and borrows directly from Montaigne's "Of Cannibals."[27] In contrast to his earlier reverence for rank, Gonzalo's utopia levels social distinctions and expresses his yearning for a societal framework that no longer has a need for law, landholdings, learning, or economic distinction. Given that Gonzalo defines his commonwealth negatively, one must wonder what positive uses would exist in his vision. Unless the commonwealth were comprised of supermen, he and his comrades would need to labor for food and shelter, despite the fact that he negates the need for toil. As such, Gonzalo's dream expresses an impossible ideal that is alluring but deceptive, which is why Antonio and Sebastian mock him; they realize that Gonzalo's society cannot create plenty out of idleness. On the one hand, his utopian vision demonstrates the scope of the island's power to inspire a radically different world apart from the familiar one. On the other, the lack of affirmative practices evidences how unrealistic and fantastic Gonzalo's society would be.

The timing of Gonzalo's speech on utopia appears indecorous since the moment at which he chooses to declare his wishes fails to correlate with the dire circumstances. Perhaps

27. Trans. John Florio, 1603.

the aristocrat hopes to take advantage of the King's vulnerable mind and sway his future governance towards a type of egalitarianism. However, this seems unlikely when considering Gonzalo's elitist mindset. Moments before providing his blueprint, where he tries to console the King, Gonzalo speaks decorously by reaffirming the idea of the body politic. He claims, "It is foul weather in us all, good sir, / When you are cloudy" (II.i.143-144). A few lines later, for unclear reasons, he gives his speech regarding the possibility of utopia, which arrogantly flouts all royal and hierarchical order. Why Gonzalo would shift from a perspective that reinforces royal sensibilities to one that flaunts his departure from the political status quo is puzzling. He claims to detail the society as a ploy in his battle of wits with Antonio and Sebastian, aiming to expose the pair's inappropriate merriment, but to use such an alarmingly specific distraction of "nothing" (a pun on the *u-* of utopia since a "no place" can be "nothing") appears to express a bashful desire (II.i.173-177).

A question then arises as to the timing of outlining his utopia whose function seems to merely pander to an escapist fantasy since no other occasion appears to avail itself to justify the expression of such an illogical plan for enjoying bounty without labor, an idea that the nineteenth-century socialist William Morris would see as an untenable pipe dream. Adding a similar criticism to Gonzalo's vision, Eagleton makes the suggestion that "Somehow, this spontaneous life must be fused with an active human shaping, with sweat and endeavour."[28] The paradoxes prove difficult to reconcile as Gonzalo contradictorily wishes for a lavish life without rule or labor. He wishes for an Eden on earth where repasts appear in every line of sight. While Gonzalo presents a grandiose outline, Frank Brevik notes

28. Eagleton, *Shakespeare and Society*, 164.

that in a vein similar to Antonio and Sebastian, "Gonzalo's anarchical and freedom-seeking, Christian-utopian discourse and vision of an ideal society are undercut by his own totalitarian desire to impose his rule on the island commonwealth."[29] Gonzalo's utopian vision fails because its royal enforcement contradicts its egalitarian practices, which Sebastian readily ridicules. Nevertheless, the dream is impressive, and whether the audience chooses to entertain Gonzalo's ideas or share Antonio's and Sebastian's derision is entirely left up to them.

After Gonzalo posits his utopia, Antonio and Sebastian raucously overturn the foundations upon which the aristocrat constructs his ideal society. By pointing out the multiplicity of Gonzalo's words, the pair anchors his airy speech back in the social context of the present, particularly when they twist the idea of his glorified idleness by invoking its familiar connotations with rakes and harlots, just as Touchstone and Jacques do in *As You Like It*. It is important to note, though, that while the jests provide a good laugh at Gonzalo's expense, Antonio's and Sebastian's behavior violates the Jacobean court's code of conduct. Maurice Hunt states, "Not only do Antonio and Sebastian, through their jests, violate a courtier's modesty and gravity; they also through their jokes, show no respect for the grieving condition of their ruler."[30] Their behavior remains reprehensible, because while Gonzalo may go too far in trying to use his utopia as a ruse for rebuking Antonio's and Sebastian's behavior amidst Alonso's grief, the pair shallowly blame Alonso for the

29. Frank Brevik, *The Tempest and New World-Utopian Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 117.

30. Maurice Hunt, "Purging the Jesting Spirit in *The Tempest*," *Comparative Drama* 45, no. 4 (2011): 419.

company's misfortune, using a deductive fallacy to claim that his daughter's marriage to the King of Tunis caused their shipwreck (II.i.174-177; II.i.125-137).

The attractive qualities of Gonzalo's utopia, then, remain ambivalent. To a degree, Gonzalo's status as a virtuous character has a chance to validate his dream as serving higher purposes, despite how clownish his consolations and hopes may appear. However, his optimism and utopianism fail to suit the tragic occasion of the shipwreck and the loss of Ferdinand. There is no kairos for utopia amidst these losses. Alonso marks how unfitting the time is to pronounce such dreams in his presence: "Prithee, no more. Thou dost talk nothing to me" (II.i.173). From Alonso's perspective, Gonzalo's utopia amounts to a vain fantasy that fails to help him mourn for the loss of his son, and when told to cease, Gonzalo tries to play off his commonwealth as if it were a "merry fooling," perhaps to evade embarrassment and mask his authentic desire for a radical society (II.i.179). However, Gonzalo's elaborate description may result more from him being carried away by the island's influence than providing a snare for Antonio and Sebastian as he claims. Though, as Brevik suggests, the point should also be acknowledged that the island's uncultivated space allows for Gonzalo to voice his fantasy over Alonso's, Sebastian's, and Antonio's attempts to repress it, which speaks to utopia's imaginary force and the power of place since habitation on the island serves as the only real occasion to propose such a society.[31]

In direct contrast to Gonzalo's passive utopianism, Antonio is an anti-utopian man of action, a machiavel who readily conspires to supplant Alonso with Sebastian. Sebastian quarrels with his conscience and makes an eerie note regarding the island's dreamlike

31. Brevik, 118.

influence in spurring him to pursue murder, remarking that the conspiracy "is a sleepy language" (II.i.212). In the instant that the others fall asleep, the bountiful promise of Gonzalo's utopia abruptly deteriorates into a nightmare, giving over to the individualist desires of Antonio and Sebastian in their plot to commit regicide. Speaking about Antonio, Eagleton paints a portrait that is poignantly anti-utopian: "he is a completely active man, ruthlessly individualist, creating his own fortunes and his own values. He is an exploiter, concerned with reducing other men to objects."[32] For Antonio, power is all that any person should desire, and in a place isolated from Neapolitan order, he intends to inconscionably commit murder to achieve his end.

While audiences may be inclined to detest Antonio as a villain, his character offers a provocative commentary on the realistic instability of monarchical symbolism, giving voice to a criticism that many Utopian perspectives would actually support. In trying to justify regicide, he equates Alonso's body with the earth in order to level the distinction of rank that differentiates kings from others, stating that others can rule Naples as well as he (II.i.283). His discussion with Sebastian defies the Jacobean belief in divine right and is unabashedly blasphemous. As the analogy concludes, office in this instance does not hold any inherent prestige but only retains value through powerful force. Despite Antonio's radical impulse, Prospero's watchful eye bridles his subversion. The possibility that others besides the legitimate ruler can hold a kingship is nearly as radical as Gonzalo's egalitarianism. However, rather than allow the sedition to go unchecked and deliberately violate Jacobean norms, Shakespeare maintains the romance by having Prospero suppress their conspiring in

32. Eagleton, *Shakespeare and Society*, 161.

order to safeguard the normative order. While Antonio describes conscience as a sore and an impediment that he can easily melt down, the conscience of Prospero benevolently intervenes to prevent his murderous deed, curbing the actualization of his opportunistic philosophy (II.i.280-282). Prospero restrains Antonio's transgressive impulse and maintains the state of the current order since he hopes to enjoy its privileges after reconciliation.

In act three, at least for a moment, Prospero's magic reveals its Utopian potential as a leveler of prejudice, inspiring Alonso's court with a utopian awe and wonder that quickly disintegrates when the magical procession exposes the exploitative nature of the men's desires. At the end of act three, Prospero ushers out his "meaner ministers" to prepare a banquet for the court's eyes to consume (III.iii.87). The display of these creatures "of monstrous shape" instills in Alonso's court the same attitudes propounded in Montaigne's "Of Cannibals" (III.iii.31). In eyeing the banquet, Sebastian goes as far to say that he will now believe in mythical unicorns and phoenixes, speaking to the fantastic demeanor of what appears to be a procession of noble savages, and Antonio echoes his sentiments (III.iii.21-24). Gonzalo, too, reflects on how he can report to Naples the spectacle of hideous creatures that possess manners becoming of Westerners (III.iii.28-34). The utopian wonder of the court, though, conceals a darker desire. The only reason the creatures appear so pleasing to the court is in part due to the fact that they pay service to the king and his followers. Therefore, while the image of the islanders may pay homage to Montaigne's claims that natives' are more civilized in comparison to the corruption of Europe, the scene betrays those sentiments as the court can only view the islanders as well-mannered and sophisticated when they are subordinated to them.

Shakespeare presents a utopian image filled with the promise of magic and feasting, but uses it to expose the men's wish to oppressively exploit the foreigners. This scene powerfully illustrates the gross abuse that characterizes colonial aspirations, especially since these islandic shapes already perform labor at Prospero's bidding and are therefore, subject to a variety of Western control. The court initially marvels at the natives' servitude, but after experiencing the purgative confrontation with Ariel, the stage directions indicate that when the islanders return they justly mock the men for fawning over their subservience: "*enter the shapes again, and dance, with mocks and mows, and carrying out the table*" (III.iii.83.s.d). The mocks and mows angrily disparage the Neapolitans' fantasy of having these shapes cater to their desires, even as they serve the figurative colonizer of Prospero. Thus, it is ironic that Ariel following Prospero's orders disparages the men. Prospero's own rule of the island mirrors the nature of the others' desires.

In the most ostensible and analogically dystopian relationship between colonizer and colonized, master and slave, even if only premonitory, the play features Caliban as a partially educated native, possibly of Algerian descent, who is coerced to slave for Prospero after he allegedly tries to rape his daughter, Miranda. The rape remains alleged because the audience never witnesses the rape attempt occur since the situation is said to have transpired prior to the events of the play. Despite the fact that many twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars recognize the colonial dimensions of Caliban and Prospero, a critic like Bloom tries to whitewash, contending that Caliban should not be seen as a figure of colonial criticism but instead as a begrudged foster son to Prospero, not a slave. [33] Readings that regard Prospero's

33. Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 662; 671. Also, see Alden Vaughan and Virginia Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

treatment of Caliban as degrading and exploitative, such as those performed by Alden Vaughan and Virginia Vaughan, are more accurately asserted. Prospero and Miranda antagonize Caliban in an imperial, abusive manner. In supporting his contention, Bloom reductively categorizes Caliban as a stock villain, using the slave's desire to people the island with little Calibans as concrete proof for the rape attempt. [34] It is more possible, though, to view Caliban's expressed desire to multiply himself as an aggressive jab at Prospero his theft of and assumed authority over the island.

While Caliban may bear guilt for trying Miranda's honor, if he indeed did, the oppressive language that both Prospero and Miranda use to debase Caliban is dystopian since they base their prejudice more on his otherness than his enormity. While Prospero's verbal abuse seems to spring from Caliban's transgression, Miranda's prejudice is less grounded in a reaction to the rape attempt and founded more on an inveterate sense of racial superiority. While scholars have argued that Miranda's isolation from Italy allows her to abstractly embody the virtue of innocence since her life on the island keeps her free from the taint of European influence, they miss the fact that the education her father provides her is a direct link to Italian culture and manners. How else did Miranda learn to play chess? Connecting to the West through her father, she learns to take pride in Italian culture. Thus, far from being culturally isolated, Miranda embodies the values of her father, which may explain why she learnedly expresses her prejudice toward Caliban.

To say the least, Miranda is not innocent but highly ethnocentric and demeaning towards Caliban. She may claim to play the part of nurturer and cultivator, but her claim only

34. Ibid., 665.

elevates her own sense of superiority over the islander. Her reproach to Caliban in act one characterizes the xenophobic eminence common among seventeenth-century Englanders:

> Abhorrèd slave,
> Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
> Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
> Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
> One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,
> Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
> A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes
> With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
> Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good
> natures
> Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
> Deservedly confined into this rock,
> Who hadst deserved more than a prison. (I.ii.354-364)[35]

Her speech is quite inflammatory and saturated with racist condescension. Objectors may say that because Caliban attempted to rape Miranda that her speech is validated, but its words do not express an anger against being victimized by sexual predation. Instead, it hearkens back to Old World prejudices and beliefs regarding the subhuman status of foreign races. This can especially be seen in Miranda's use of the phrase "vile race," which is key to marking her attitude as racist. The predation, if anything, intensifies a prejudice that had already belonged

35. Bevington notes that these lines are also ascribed to Prospero in other editions of the play. However, in keeping with Bevington's edition, and my sense that Miranda bears more resentment towards Caliban than Prospero, I attribute these lines to Miranda.

to Miranda, which she could have kept repressed until she found a suitable occasion for venting it. Objectifying Caliban on the basis of his race, appearance, and customs, calling him "A thing most brutish,"—conveniently ignoring the fact, as Frank Kermode notes, that his "gabble" may have actually been his first language and not some ape-noise—is equal in baseness to Caliban's objectification of Miranda when he tries to rape her.[36] Norbrook reevaluates Miranda's wish for something more than prison for Caliban in terms of language, stating that "perhaps the master's language is itself a prison-house."[37] In these interpretations, Miranda qualifies more as a racist abuser of power than an innocent nurturer. Also remarking on the lines, Melissa Sanchez writes that "Miranda's outburst contradicts the innocence and passivity imagined not only by the men surrounding her but also many editors as well."[38] Thus, while men view her as a saintly, desirable virgin, her condemnation of Caliban, which surfeits on hate, invalidates the fantasy that paints her as innocent.

Similar to Katherine Burdekin's twentieth-century novel *Swastika Night* (1937), the relationship of Caliban to Miranda and Prospero is dystopian with regards to how it depicts a superior/inferior dynamic. In Burdekin's dystopian novel, the ideology of a Nazi-dominated empire proclaims Germans to be an inherently superior race to all others, and any challenges to such an idea are considered heresy. A similar prejudice pervaded early modern England. The European values instilled in Prospero and Miranda juxtaposed against Caliban's African otherness, or what Greenblatt labels "radical individuation—the singularity of the person who fails or refuses to match the dominant cultural expectation and is thus marked as

---

36. Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000), 291.

37. Norbrook, 41.

38. Melissa Sanchez, "Seduction and Service in *The Tempest*," *Studies in Philology* 105 (2008): 65.

irremediably different," leads to the pair to think of Caliban as sub-human.[39] The fear and disgust at what is most culturally alien to themselves accounts far better for their abuses than the slave's attempted rape. Bevington says that "surely the play allows us to wonder also if Prospero's enslavement of Caliban, however high-minded in its claims of preventing disorder and rape, is not tainted by the same imperatives of possession and control."[40] In fact, Prospero on occasion refers to Caliban as a "whelp" and Sycorax, his mother, as his "dam," words customarily used to describe animals in the seventeenth century (I.ii.285;323). In his relation to the Neapolitan pair, Caliban loses equal standing as a human being with Prospero and Miranda because his appearance and speech are too different, and they treat him despicably on the basis of an arbitrary notion of refinement.

Focusing on Prospero's role as a master, his treatment of Ariel and Caliban gives cause to question the honor and ethics of his behavior. Regarding Ariel, for example, while Prospero describes Sycorax to be a tyrannical witch who expected too much from Ariel and imprisoned him when he disobeyed her, Prospero time and time again charges Ariel to perform a great many duties to satisfy himself. Also troubling, Ariel's obedience to Prospero only follows from the same threat of bondage in a pine that Sycorax had made to him when he failed to perform or complained about his labor. The only difference between the two is that Prospero accompanies his threat with the promise of freedom, allowing Ariel to be a little more willing to serve him since his/her compliance can be exchanged for liberty. In describing the dilemma between Prospero and power, Greenblatt illustrates the challenge regarding the authority of Prospero:

---

39. Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Freedom*, 5.

40. Bevington, Introduction to *The Tempest*, 847.

> he finds himself, together with his daughter, on an island that serves as a kind of laboratory for testing the ethics of authority. Prospero possesses many of the princely virtues that the Renaissance prized, but the results of the experiment are at best deeply ambiguous: one of the island's native inhabitants is liberated only to be forced into compulsory servitude; the other is educated only to be enslaved.[41]

To endorse Prospero as a sympathetic character becomes problematic. On the one hand, audiences sympathize with the injustice he suffers as a result of his exile from Naples and the challenge of single-handedly raising his daughter on a deserted island. However, the quality of his authority should give pause as his temper is easily set off and does not quickly subside. Greenblatt also points out how Prospero's grace in forgiving his trespassers does not occur from his own will but comes from "the urging of the spirit Ariel, who declares what he would do 'were I human.'"[42] Prospero's quick temper and his aggression towards those who serve him portray him as being on a level of villainy equal to those who deposed him.

The repressive threats Prospero makes against Ariel shows how he mirrors Sycorax's tyrannical qualities more than he is aware. Sanchez even contests that "Ariel casts [Prospero] in the role of a tyrant who maintains his power by arbitrarily denying innate liberties rather than a protector whom subjects lovingly serve."[43] While Ariel's narrative may give some credit to labeling Sycorax a tyrant, his/her servitude to Prospero prevents him from voicing any explicit criticism of Prospero's management. As Bevington observes, "[Prospero's] authority is problematic to us because he seems so patriarchal, colonialist, even sexist and

---

41. Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Freedom*, 81.

42. Ibid., 82.

43. Sanchez, 60.

racist in his arrogating to himself the right and responsibility to control others in the name of values they may not share."[44] In these faults lies the basis for Caliban's rebellion against his oppressor as well as a utopian hope in that both Caliban and Ariel are "frustrated by something in [their] society" and "dream of a society in which it is corrected."[45] Both characters dream of liberation from multiple kinds of bondage. Only when the interloping Italians resolve to vacate the space of the island and return to Italy does either one appear to gain the freedom he or she seeks.

To view Caliban's slavery as a dystopian condition where he is dehumanized allows audiences to both cheer on his attempt to liberate himself as well as bewail his choice of comrades in plotting his uprising. In sympathizing for Caliban, it is useful to note that Alden and Virginia Vaughan appropriately represent the contemporary view towards Caliban that appears to embitter Bloom. They state, "Caliban appeals to rebellious instincts because he challenges a dominant culture. His very opposition to Prospero's hegemony helps to define the appropriator's assumptions and values."[46] Caliban endures numerous insults all while Prospero and Miranda remain at ease as he arduously labors to maintain their comfort. During Shakespeare's time, where many lower-ranked individuals sought apprenticeships in specific trades, these audience members could see Caliban's plight reflected in their own experience. People today can also identify with inequities on which an imbalance in the ratio of laborers to idle beneficiaries is created. Thus, while it may give some pause to approve a plot that involves murdering Prospero, the discrepancy between Caliban's labor and

---

44. Bevington, Introduction to *The Tempest*, 846.

45. Sargent, "Three Faces," 4.

46. Vaughan and Vaughan, xv.

Prospero's harsh commands and leisure would appear to warrant revolution, and Caliban's encounter with liquor is the apt catalyst for spurring him to act on his wishes. In concocting a revolution, Caliban does not wisely choose comrades to assist him in his campaign for liberation (Stephano and Trinculo are stock character clowns at best), but his desire for liberation parallels Gonzalo's utopian vision, which may explain why his rebellion ultimately fails; his imaginative ambition overreaches practical bounds. Alcohol has that effect as Caliban's flawed quest begins with him mistaking Stephano for "a brave god" who supplies "celestial liquor" (II.ii.117). A jolly and figurative drunk, Stephano enthusiastically accepts the role of deity and sovereign in order that Caliban will reveal the island's richness to him. In response, Caliban humorously welcomes the men as liberators from Prospero's shackles, and, in a way, they do belong to the party that will eventually grant Caliban the island, even though it does not go according to plan.

In rousing Stephano and Trinculo to murder Prospero, Caliban anticipates a utopian emancipation from his servitude. In concocting his design, he lures Stephano with the sexual reward of possessing Miranda and lists various methods for killing Prospero, which includes destroying the books of magic. Despite being excited beyond bounds with drink, causing Caliban to disregard Trinculo's and Stephano's continual use of the epithet "monster," Caliban's loosing of inhibition prompts him to sing of his own utopian vision apart from Prospero's rule, however self-serving:

> No more dams I'll make for fish,
>
> Nor fetch in firing
>
> At requiring,
>
> Nor scrape trenchering, nor wash dish.

’Ban, ’Ban, Ca-Caliban

Has a new master. Get a new man!

Freedom, high-day! High-day, freedom! Freedom,

high-day, freedom! (II.ii.178-184)

The song pivots on what Eagleton would call “the negative image of some future positivity” since Caliban’s liberation remains incomplete while Prospero lives.[47] The very repetition of “’Ban, ’Ban” is a pun that emphasizes the extirpation, or banning, of the menial labor that distinguishes Caliban’s slavery, which would lead to a better existence in Caliban’s mind. His reflections on freedom and liberation sound like a holiday, similar to the utopian impulse in *As You Like It*, but the scope of Caliban’s holiday lacks the temporality of the court’s utopia in Arden since the island is all he knows as home.

Caliban has had similar visions of freedom before, remarking that the island bears a dreamy influence that lulls its inhabitants into rich visions pandering to their deepest fantasies. Much in line with the play’s realism, though, Caliban admits, “The clouds methought would open and show riches / Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked / I cried to dream again,” illustrating the bewitching influence of the island to inspire such fantasies (III.ii.143-145). To appreciate Caliban’s song from the early modern audience’s perspective is to understand the burdens that oppressive lords impose on laborers. The only aspect that prevents the song from openly carrying a seditious message to Jacobean audiences (no doubt laborers could sympathize with Caliban’s fantasy) is the prevalent sentiment of ethnocentrism and xenophobia they share. While the dream aligns with the subversive desires

47. Eagleton, “Utopia and its Opposites,” 31-40.

of the masses, many playgoers would certainly think themselves foolish to trust in dreams enunciated by a detestable, drunk savage who worships a mere fool butler as a god.

The irony of Caliban's song, then, is that his "new master," who symbolizes for him a utopian way out of dystopian bondage, truly represents just another form of bondage. Kermode agrees, calling his dream "a drunken song of illusory freedom."[48] The only reason Stephano chooses to follow Caliban or associate with him rests on the basis of the wealth Caliban promises to bestow on him in return. Thus, while the song's content and Caliban's enthusiasm for change can cheer audiences with utopian proclivities, the exploitation of Caliban for a Westernized sense of profit and control mars the liberation as the contrary of Caliban's purpose. In analyzing the relationship, the paradox takes on a kind of Orwellian dimension as liberation for Caliban actually equals more slavery in his devotion to the false god Stephano, which means his ends earn sympathy while the means contradict his aim.

Stephano and Trinculo have their own fantasy of how to rule the island. However, they do not share Caliban's utopian enthusiasm. Of course, Stephano still thinks and speaks in the mode of a Neapolitan, confiding in Trinculo that "the King and all our company else being drowned, we will inherit here" (II.ii.172-173). In the absence of lordship, rather than taking a radically different direction from their homeland, Stephano and Trinculo perceive a systemic vacuum, which, with great hubris and abundant spirit, they look to fill. In fact, their ambition appears to needle colonizing efforts as lacking the greater authority of a king. Their lack of experience casts a doubtful eye on the success of their project. Trinculo remarks that "They say there's but five upon this isle. We are three of them; if th'other two be brained like

48. Kermode, 295.

us, the state totters" (III.ii.5-6). The pair's desire for control seems utopian in empowering members of lower ranks, but in this instance, the inheritors own words confess that their rule of the island would place it in the hands of imbeciles.

In other instances, dystopian fantasies of control, exploitation, and profit regarding Caliban extend beyond the island's shores and back to Europe. In effect, when Stephano and Trinculo first stumble upon Caliban, they both imagine him as a great commodity to be sold as entertainment back in Naples and England. Trinculo details his idea:

> A strange fish! Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver. There would this monster make a man. Any strange beast there makes a man. When the will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian. (II.ii.27-33)

Humorously satiric, Caliban's otherness differs so widely from Trinculo's Neapolitan worldview that he mistakes the islander for an uncanny fish that would profit well as a spectacle in England. In line with Prospero's and Miranda's attitude, Caliban is literally seen as an inhuman beast. Stephano makes a similar mistake, believing that Caliban is an islandic creature that he can use as a way to gain favor with "any emperor" (II.ii.70). The satire of profit exercises a type of metatheatrical, Utopian shaming, subtly accusing Englishmen of dehumanizing others for the sake of tawdry entertainment. Just as More's Utopians mocked the fetishization of gold to shame European gold lust, Shakespeare may be mocking the propensity for Londoners to allow others to suffer for the sake of indulging in vulgar activities, perhaps spectacles like a play or in this case, gawking at a dead Indian.

At the play's end, noblemen like Sebastian and Antonio, too, mark the strangeness and marketability of Caliban, which leads readers not living in the Jacobean era to wonder if

this running joke is indeed satiric and instructive or merely an example of Shakespeare catering to the English ridicule of otherness for a good laugh and higher attendance. The latter is quite possible. Vaughan and Vaughan note, "Shakespeare [through Caliban] summarized a popular European view of Indians as lewd, rebellious, and intoxicated."[49] Hunt adds, "That Caliban's deformity might be a source of laughter (and profit) in Milan is confirmed by Antonio's and Sebastian's laughter."[50] Whether Shakespeare is critical of or complicit in the Eurocentric prejudice remains unclear.

The utopian and dystopian readings of *The Tempest* speak to the new world anticipations of the colonial expeditions of the time. Historically, the play can be read in both dystopian and utopian ways as the goals of the companies leading early colonial expeditions primarily aimed at securing resources to support the mainland and, as a result, have themselves secured as profitable businessmen. The language of profiting from the island in the play by exploiting its inhabitants serves as an apt analogy for the time's very real expeditions like those of the Virginia Company and the Jamestown settlement, which themselves signaled the rise of enterprises taking a more capitalist dimension as opposed to a royal one. In ways, the language of profit draws attention to the play's metatheatricality alongside the colonial explorations. Norbrook comments that:

> Despite their royal label, the King's Men owed most of their revenue to public performances […] Greenblatt notes that as a joint-stock company the King's Men had

49. Vaughan and Vaughan, 48.

50. Hunt, "Purging," 428.

> the same kind of autonomy as the Virginia Company, whose members, as we have seen, did distance themselves from the royal viewpoint.[51]

While insightful, this information does not clear up the play's ambiguity with regards to its politics. In one sense, with early modern plays borrowing from morality plays, there appears to be a perspective in *The Tempest* that sympathizes with Montaigne's assertions that colonizers are the true monsters. To see natives in the New World as barbaric renders those holding their prejudicial view more monstrous than unclothed, uncouth men and women. On the other hand, the play itself is an Other, like Caliban, which is ushered forth for entertainment purposes with Londoners willingly paying a small fee to gaze upon its spectacle. To view the play from this angle implicates the playhouses as being complicit in pandering to prejudicial stereotypes in order to make more money.

Despite the relative autonomy of the theater that Brook describes, royal influence obviously did not become less censorial in judging social matters in art, which is why throughout Shakespeare's drama, the plays feature a give-and-take between themes that champion radical ideas of social change or reinforce the status quo and royal authority. The treatment of utopia in *The Tempest*, then, is full of both skepticism and hope. The pursuit for power involving all parties and ranks (i.e. Prospero, Caliban, Trinculo, Stephano, and Antonio) can perform the bifurcated function of raising consciousness regarding the arbitrary enactment of power and a warning against the foolishness of unsettling the established order. With Gonzalo and his acerbic critics, Antonio and Sebastian, utopia is both validated and condemned at a time when the expectations of the New World were great. The ambiguous

51. Norbrook, 45.

treatment of utopia appears to absolve Shakespeare from taking any sides in the debate about it, which possibly keeps his imagining of a "brave new world"—utopian or dystopian—open to the discretion of the people that exited the playhouses.

CHAPTER II: Subjects to the Realm: Marxist Interpellation and Fantasy in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Romeo and Juliet*

Ideology and Utopia

While *As You Like It* and *The Tempest* feature themes and motifs that share a distinct relationship with the Utopian genre, its connection to *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Romeo and Juliet* is admittedly more difficult to see. Characters such as Christopher Sly, Malvolio, and Romeo and Juliet may not take enjoyment in an Arcadian refuge or seize the opportunity to dream of new ways of living on a deserted island, but they do speak to a desire to change the societies in which they live to better suit their own wishes. Rather than outline realms that are radically different from everyday society, the wishes of these characters straddle the liminal boundary between the reality of their current worlds and the possibilities of fantastical utopias. They give breath to extraordinary hopes, yet their words exemplify the thin line that separates utopia from ideology (i.e. the belief systems guiding an operational society), and in these plays, the limits of the culture that the characters inhabit restrain their ability to fully imagine or actualize the propitious social arrangements that they seek.

In these three plays, fantasy and ideology mix together to present an ambivalent image of utopia, the scope of which fails to fully reach beyond the sphere of Elizabethan society. Thus, rather than being transported to a new world, the characters in these plays live out slivers of a utopian longing, or dystopian hell, as they experience radical transformations that are fully grounded in the hierarchical structures of their respective societies. For example, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Christopher Sly may enjoy a new paradise compared to his experiences as a tinker, but in the end, his ascension to the level of a lord may merely

reinforce the structure that supplies the nobility with its authority. If this were the case, his conversion would be devalued as an illusion resulting from the Lord's abusive prank. However, Sly's transformation into a lord can also be viewed as still carrying utopian possibility with it in how his change threatens to undercut the ideology fortifying aristocratic privilege. Thus, Sly's transformation places him at an intermediate state between ideology and utopia that makes his predicament opaque regarding how audiences interpret his transformation of identity.

Malvolio, too, in *Twelfth Night*, embodies a social climbing fantasy that would seem to transform the common experiences of stewards, but the circumstances surrounding his fantasy exploit his hopes as being narcissistic and envious, tainting his vision as covetous rather than transformative. Nevertheless, the steward's wish to circumvent aristocratic heredity and enjoy the nobility's power expresses a desire quite similar to a utopian yearning. He aims to dispense with the restrictions placed upon him by prevailing social codes in order to partake of the liberties paraded in front of him. While Malvolio correctly identifies a social ill in a very utopian fashion, his response to it only exacerbates the problem. It is this miscalculation, as Malvolio aims to commandeer the reins of control, that leads the steward to a prison similar to that of the Ministry of Love in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948). Thus, the steward's fantasizing may not promote a new utopia, but it does reveal the need for a utopian vision to mend the wrongs practiced against stewards in early modern England.

Finally, in the struggle between Romeo and Juliet and their respective families, where the hopes of a single couple are crushed under the weight of longstanding, symbolic alliances, we see a utopia burgeon briefly in the lovers' relationship after they dispense with

the ideological trappings of their families. However, the new system proves unsustainable once Romeo reenters the feud that the pair sought to escape. After Tybalt lures Romeo back into the quarrel through an appeal to masculine aggression, the romantic fantasy of the lovers dissipates, catalyzing the tragedy of their deaths as the murder of Tybalt turns Veronese society against Romeo. Therefore, it is Romeo's and Juliet's inability to fully dispense with the old system that expels them from the new one that they envision. If the utopia they hoped for persists, it is through their deaths, which serves as a final effort on their part to preserve what Romeo's momentary surrender to violence had lost. In all three plays, a tension builds as the desire for new experiences grates against the difficulty of overcoming long established orders of family and hierarchy.

Despite failing to fully envision radical utopias, Sly and Malvolio transgress against the hierarchal order in a way that still expresses utopian yearnings that reflect the rising power of merchants and gentlemen in the early modern era. During the Middle Ages, placement and propitious relations in the hierarchical order greatly depended upon the chance of one's birth into a noble family. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though the prestige of the nobility still persisted, the rise of merchants and gentlemen began to challenge the hereditary order and allowed for more social mobility. Through subtle linguistic puns and changes in costume, Shakespeare generates in these plays a perspective that draws attention to this rise and underscores the illusory and tractable nature of the social roles within the prevailing hierarchy. Distinctions of identity on the stage are wondrously malleable. Being so, identities take new shape as the characters Sly and Malvolio—who exemplify the same kind of mobility that Prince Hamlet describes through the illustration of a peasant that "comes so near the heel of the courtier" (V.i.140-141)—redefine conventional designations

by ending up in or seeking situations that elevate their meaner standing to a higher position. Their transformation of identity merely requires an induction into cordoned spheres of language and luxurious identifiers that work to naturalize positions normally withheld from a particular rank of subjects.

The same idea of malleable identity applies to Romeo and Juliet in their desire to escape the hateful entanglements of their families for the sake of love. For a brief while, the pair is able to engage in a loving relationship that runs completely contrary to the strife between their families, showing a utopian yearning for a better affinity. They try to shed the animosity that their families ingrained in them in order to craft a identities free of their family allegiances in order for them to freely pursue their strong desire for each other. In fact, Friar Laurence believes that Romeo's and Juliet's union will have such a power that it will successfully reconcile the discord by serving as an example for their families to follow. Thus, the principle of utopia applies to the lovers' situation as the friar views their devotion to loving each other as a model for peace in Verona. Like Malvolio and Sly, Romeo and Juliet desire a different situation than the one society thrusts upon them.

To examine how Utopian potential can arise from the donning of costumes and the duels of wordplay, I explore how *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Romeo and Juliet* feature sociological and psychological struggles that dramatize the utopian resistance to rigid ideologies. In these Elizabethan plays, the characters wish for or experience an identity transformation that, at least momentarily, contravenes the constraints of the normative order. Their desire for change realizes for them a different, more hopeful situation, which is usually and tragically extinguished after the representatives of the normative order dissolve the conditions that allowed for their extravagant experiences. Each play in depicting

the problems of rank and social associations presents tensions that result from characters' fantastical hopes running into the impediment of ideological snares.

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, the Induction featuring Christopher Sly draws attention to the fiction of ideology by showing how the nobles who prank the tinker contradictorily craft the desire for social mobility at the same time that they try to discourage it. The seemingly silly prank suspends the rank that had previously governed Sly and kept him in his place. The playful elimination of Sly's vocation as a tinker reflects wishes for ascending in social rank, and his elevation may inspire the lower-ranked audience members for a similar change as his newfound luxury draws awareness to their own dispossession. In the spirit of a carnival holiday, a new rank, a new fiction, serves as a substitute that gives Sly permission to fraternize as a lord with other noblemen. From the perspective of Sly, this experience is new and exciting like a utopia while, in actuality, the social structure remains intact and undisturbed; merely his position within it has changed. He proves equivocally able to fulfill the role of a lord as a man alien to the life of a nobleman, and his assumption of the role reaffirms what Stephen Greenblatt argues about identity: "any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss."[1] The transformation of Sly suggests that early modern identity is superficially prefixed, not by individual will, but by the widespread ideological forces of the crown and church. The permeation of the boundaries between ranks, though, subjects these forces to utopian revision. Yet, while Sly may express contentment for living in aristocratic comfort, he accepts his identity at the cost of not knowing that the Lord and his men are the ones who mold it for him, which serves as a

1. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, 9.

profound statement on the formation of early modern social identity as being fictive, artificial, and formed by social and environmental factors.

In *Twelfth Night*, the matter of interpellation pivots on the cruel trick that Maria, Toby, and Feste play on Malvolio, using a letter to bait him into believing that his grand fantasy to marry Olivia and become a count will materialize. While the most fundamental aspects of any utopia typically center on the possibility of actualizing a sort of wish, desire, or fantasy, Malvolio's overreaching aspirations sway him into a trap that casts him into a dystopian darkness. Malvolio's desire to control Olivia's estate, as limited as it is, functions as the apogee of his ambition, and in trying to actualize his desired position, Maria, Toby, and Feste feed him an illusion that delusively leads him into a contrary hell. Terry Eagleton rightly agrees, contending that "Like Macbeth, Malvolio is seduced by a false linguistic coinage to exceed his 'proper' position. His bid for a higher freedom is ironically self-undoing, thrusting him into a materially cramping dungeon which, because pitch-dark, is also a kind of nothingness."[2] While audiences traditionally rush to derisively laugh at Malvolio's misfortune, Toby's brash behavior usually gets overlooked since his joviality masks his harsh and deceptive trespasses. While Maria initially sets Malvolio up for playful derision, the knighted Toby acts in a highly dystopian manner when he goes beyond good humor and precipitates mental and physical harm against the steward. Despite his fate at the hands of Toby, Malvolio's wish for social change is akin to utopian dreaming. If anything, his

2. Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, 29.

unfulfilled wish is a Utopian placeholder, filling the absence of utopia by perverting its possibilities with selfish, gratuitous fancies.[3]

In discussing Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, I examine how the desire that the young lovers express serves as a utopian antithesis to Verona's ideological orders. In trying to create a space apart from the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues, Romeo and Juliet serve as utopian protagonists that carve out a marginal space where the amity of their attraction can be expressed without the disapprobation of their families. The most ostensible utopian symptom of their relationship surfaces during the window scene. In professing their love, Juliet and Romeo undermine their families' schismatic enmity by extricating themselves from familial identifications altogether, placing themselves in a utopian fantasy built on mutual attraction and a devotion to love. Despite the pair's utopian attempts, though, the preexistence of the families' grudge cruelly tantalizes the lovers' desire as it prevents them from openly celebrating their enamored relationship. By ignoring the distemper of their families, Romeo and Juliet tragically and shortsightedly attempt to forge a bond independent of social constraints that they inevitably cannot escape. With characters like Tybalt, Paris, and Capulet drawing Romeo and Juliet back into the feud's space, the lovers ultimately cannot uncouple themselves from the inherited animosity shared between their families, resulting in the effacement of their lives and, with it, their utopian hope.

3. A similar idea is expressed by Frederic Jameson with regards to Utopian literature in *Archaeologies*, 53: "it does not seem farfetched to interpret at least some of these gratuitous Utopian fancies [e.g. those of Skinner, Bellamy, Morris, and More] as placeholders and symptoms of a more fundamental repression, of the coming up short of the Utopian imagination against taboos that prevent any wholesale redesigning of the social order as such."

The Noble Exposure of Christopher Sly

The carnivalesque Induction of *The Taming of the Shrew* serves as an ideological exposé that details the shortcomings of England's rigid social stratum. This subplot metatheatrically lays bare the fiction of playacting at the same time that it demonstrates how the theater thrived off mirroring the ideological fictions governing the everyday life of its audiences. Despite its jesting spirit, the prank that raises the lowly tinker Christopher Sly to the rank of a lord challenges the privilege of birth to which the English nobility staked its claim. As Sly begins to assume the airs of a lord, however imperfectly, he displays how a person of lower rank can put on the performance of a nobleman and infiltrate the boundaries that insulate the higher ranks from the commoners. In fact, Sly's prose, exemplified in his bickering with the hostess, magically transforms into verse when he buys into the lord's and his men's story that he has always lived as a lord. On the stage, Sly mingles with nobles as an equal, both in privilege and in speech. The appearance of Sly's equal standing threatens to level the entitlements reserved for the aristocracy as the stage's imaginary space brings awareness to social inequality through the fantasy that the prank rouses.

With the subplot of Sly, the surface attempt to disparage social climbers can both appease the upper ranks at the same time that it can cause them worry concerning how it portrays the facility with which social mimicry occurs, particularly through dress. As an appeal to the higher ranks, Sly's induction appears to poke fun at social climbers—people disparaged by the nobility as "presumptuous"—reinforcing the sumptuary laws that discouraged the aspiration of lowers to ascend in social station.[4] This interpretation could be

4. Bevington, ed., *Necessary Shakespeare*, near lxxx. In his section entitled "Shakespeare's World: A Visual Portfolio," Plate 6, Bevington features illustrations portraying the strictures of social dress reflecting

a likely one and one that gratifies the authorities' sense of separation from commoners and the developing bourgeoisie. As Greenblatt contends, "Conspicuous consumption that was tolerated, even admired, in the aristocratic elite was denounced as sinful and monstrous in less exalted social circles."[5] Yet, for the aristocrats to view the lower ranks as overweening and to discourage their mimicry acknowledges a fear of their transgressive power since, as the play suggests, to dress like nobility is to show how rank can be defined by costume and behavior as opposed to any authentic virtues passed through bloodlines. More likely, especially considering Sly's change from prose to verse, the trick on Sly mischievously ricochets back onto the Lord. The interpellative act that replaces Sly's identity as a tinker with that of a nobleman actually tinkers with the entire subject formation process, exposing its artificiality in determining social placement.

Before the prank on Sly even occurs, Shakespeare portrays a discrepancy of dystopian proportions when illustrating the contrast of resources between the nobility and commoners. For instance, there is an unsettling strangeness surrounding the close proximity of the Lord's estate to the common alehouse where Sly drinks. The nearness brings together two exceedingly disparate locations for the purpose of highlighting the gross economic disparity between the two cultures. This difference in the allocation of wealth bears an uncanny resemblance to themes predominate in later dystopian works such as H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908), or Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974). In these works, where the gulf of wealth is particularly vast, an abuse

---

proper rank. The illustrations feature "a workman carrying his tools; 'a presumptuous woman,' gaudily attired beyond her appointed station; and a 'gentleman,' privileged to wear his apparel."

5. Greenblatt, *Norton Shakespeare*, 5.

of power typically exists that diverts agency and resources away from the struggling classes to the exclusive, privileged class. The opening scene featuring Sly depicts a similar condition.

While Sly initially strikes us as a knavish rascal, like Falstaff, in trying to cheat the hostess out of compensation for ale glasses that he allegedly damaged, it is possible that the reason he cannot pay extends beyond his pride and depends more upon his lack of resources. Later, when trying to identify himself to the Lord and his men as a tinker, he claims that "If [the fat alewife of Wincot] say I am not fourteen pence on the score for sheer ale, score me up for the lyingest knave in Christendom" ([Induction.ii.22-24]). The line identifies Sly as a man in great debt, and while some may attribute the tinker's impoverishment to laziness and dishonesty, a more important economic message presents itself in the disparity between Sly's lack of money and the Lord's abundant store. Sly seems bumbling and brash, but the reason why he came to such a despondent financial state is not entirely under his control. It can instead be explained by the hoarding of wealth by the nobility, which leaves great scarcity among commoners.

As dystopian contrast to the tinker, the possessions of the Lord are numerous and exceedingly luxurious. Once Sly passes out from too much drinking, we see the Lord returning from a hunt with numerous dogs and, given their accolades, they are clearly prized purebreds. Not only is the Lord surrounded by high-caliber hounds, he has servingmen and huntsmen standing to receive his every direction (not to mention the players who later attend to his desire to entertain Sly). While one would expect a gap in funds between the two ranks, Shakespeare accentuates the tremendous chasm that exists between them in terms of luxury and poverty. Thus, rather than solely criticizing Sly for being irresponsible, despite the fact

that he did break the glasses, the portrait of the estate and the alehouse together shows that the Lord's monetary luxury is surfeited to the point that his privilege may bereave the tinker of an adequate sum of money in general, depriving him of the opportunity to compensate for the broken glasses. The allocation of resources thus appears to overwhelmingly favor the aristocracy.

Upon first encountering Sly, the Lord's derogatory comments about the tinker undermine his virtuousness as a noble in comparison. Instead, it immediately establishes the prejudiced attitudes that accompany the gulf of luxury separating the pair's ranks as he hurls learned insults that aim to distinguish his greatness from the latter's baseness. Seeing Sly, the Lord contemptuously declares, "Oh, monstrous beast, how like a swine he lies! / Grim death, how foul and loathsome is thine image!" ([Induction.i.33-34]). His disgust reflects the expected behavior of his rank towards his lowers and speaks to his self-assured sense of superiority. It also exposes the dehumanizing lack of sympathy the noble ranks have for their lowers as the Lord equates Sly with a grotesque animal. Lacking the money to pay for broken glasses and noticeably drunk, Sly does not strike the Lord as a man with a great deal of self-esteem or personal care. He is low, and the occupation of a tinker would be best portrayed by a dirty, slovenly appearance; however, Sly's performance as a lord diminishes the normative superiority of the aristocracy in a fashion that counters their prejudices. Thus, while the audience may either appreciate Sly as a reflection of their own love for drink and inflated sense of self-importance or disparage him as a degenerate wretch, the Lord's rush to judgment exposes his prejudicial predispositions as being discriminatory and callous.

In Sly's drunken chatter with the hostess, he demonstrates how arbitrarily ideology endows the aristocracy with authority and privilege when he nonchalantly bestows a title on

himself. While claiming Richard Conqueror as an ancestor certainly highlights his ignorance as a man of low rank and holds him up to ridicule, the fact that Sly draws from names commonly associated with nobility at the time diminishes the prestige vested in monarchical heritage as he transgresses against the prominent order by commandeering their signifiers. That is, Sly's combination of forename and surname effectively points out how kings and men devoutly honored in the upper ranks are neither unique nor inherently prestigious, standalone figures in history. In appealing to a fictitious lineage, Sly subconsciously shows how any heroic, legendary figure is preserved only through empty, interchangeable signifiers. Defending his lineage to the hostess, Sly may draw ridicule in the way that he seems to invent a noble lineage as he goes, but there is something admirable in how Sly's antics underscore the neglected fact that aristocratic privilege does not exist as a natural, God-sanctioned order. Rather, it is simply an ideological construction that makes use of the façade of bloodlines and religion in order to fortify its exclusionary wealth and privileges.

With the contrast in social ranks, Shakespeare manages to take the dystopian relationship between the status and means of both ranks and transmute the situation into a sort of utopic fantasy that appealed to Elizabethan audiences. The induction of Sly into a radically different social sphere dramatizes the lower ranks' collective fantasy of enjoying luxury on a level equal with that of the aristocracy. In discussing Shakespeare's plays in general, Greenblatt asserts that his "art is deeply enmeshed in the collective hopes, fears, and fantasies of his time."[6] Elevating Sly, then, becomes an instance in which the early modern theater performed events involving social advancement. While comical, lifting Sly to the

6. Ibid., 57.

position of a lord efficaciously undoes the fixity of Elizabethan social distinctions. Aside from Shakespeare's work, threatening the stability of social boundaries was not an isolated plotline during Shakespeare's time. Other playwrights, too, depicted similar rises in social status that would give nobles pause and the common ranks hope for change. Of the more notable portrayals, Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599) illustrates the swift ascension of Simon Eyre from shoemaker to sheriff, ultimately becoming Lord Mayor. At the play's end, Eyre is shown feasting alongside the king in a holiday gathering celebrating apprentices, providing an image that recalls the idleness and gluttony characteristic of the land of Cockaigne, which is widely regarded as a medieval utopia. The characters of disparate ranks in that play inhabit the same space during the festivity as opposed to the gloomier reality where their social spheres remain almost completely apart. Just as Eyre's ascension threatens to unravel notions of inherited titles and indurate social stations in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, the Lord's trick of convincing a tinker to be an aristocrat in *The Taming of the Shrew* inadvertently undercuts the foundations that give the Lord his distinction from the baseness of Christopher Sly. His inclusion of Sly presents men of different ranks coexisting as equals, even if the coexistence is mere pageantry.

Like Eyre, the transformation of Sly reflects a utopian desire in that it excites dreams for social change through the satirization of the ruling strata. While Sly's inveterate experience as a laborer initially makes him incredulous to the status that the servingmen confer upon him, when the time comes to choose between his past identity filled with indigence and the one of prestige dangled in front of him, Sly readily accepts himself to be a lord. In fact, as Bevington points out, Sly appeals to the ability to breathe life into dreams for social mobility and make them a reality: "Sly's function, then, is that of the naïve observer

who inverts illusion and reality in his mind […] We as an audience laugh at Sly's naiveté, and yet we, too, are moved and even transformed by an artistic vision that we know to be illusory."[7] It is very Saturnalian for tinkers to assume a role vested with trust and leisure, who, as Isaac Asimov asserts, were "distrusted, as strangers usually are" and commonly thought to be "smalltime thieves and con men."[8] Sly as a tinker does not embody the image of an ideal Lord but given his success in the role, the Lords do not either. Rather than simply being a utopian fantasy of the lower ranks, Sly's costume also satirizes the authority and character of the lords. If Sly is indeed a criminal and is still apportioned treatment due to that of a nobleman, how do the noblemen differentiate themselves from the criminal? The conservative answer would point to the nature of the prank since Sly is not really a nobleman. The opposing perspective, though, could retort that if the illusion sticks, then the tinker and the nobleman become difficult to distinguish just as it becomes difficult to differentiate the pigs from the humans in George Orwell's dystopia, *Animal Farm* (1945).[9]

Sly's sudden elevation appeals to the carnival pleasure afforded by the holiday's inversion of rank in that it reflects the desires of the commoners to live beyond the means afforded to them. Shakespeare demonstrates that the gap in resources and pleasure is merely founded on the possession of particular social significations, including influential connections, the apparel of the upper echelons, luxurious material goods, and the manners

7. Bevington, Introduction to *The Taming of the Shrew,* 2.

8. Isaac Asimov, *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare: A Guide to Understanding and Enjoying the Works of Shakespeare* (New York: Gramercy Books, 2003), 15.

9. George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2003), 97.

associated with noble behavior. In cajoling Sly that he is a noble, the Lord and his attendants appeal to him through an elitist presentation of fine arts and an opulent lifestyle:

> Look how thy servants do attend on thee,
> Each in his office ready at thy beck.
> Wilt thou have music? Hark Apollo plays, *Music*.
> And twenty caged nightingales do sing.
> Or wilt thou sleep? We'll have thee to a couch,
> Softer and sweeter than the lustful bed
> On purpose trimmed up for Semiramis. […]
> Thy horses shall be trapped,
> Their harness studded with gold and pearl.
> Dost thou love hawking? Thou hast hawks will soar
> Above the morning lark. Or wilt thou hunt?
> Thy hounds shall make the welkin answer them
> And fetch shrill echoes from the hollow earth. ([Induction.ii.33-46])

The importance of the Lord's inventory in these lines revolves around how the nobility's superiority is based on a myriad of lavish possessions. These possessions both tempt Sly to relish their pleasures at the same time that they subtly mold his identity into that of a nobleman. Lena Orlin draws specific attention to how Sly's transformation depends upon these material identifications: "For Sly, multiple sensory experiences countervail the arguments of memory and logic; in fact, his 'sense of self,' precisely because it is less tangible, is vulnerable to the alternative and persuasive testimony offered by the physical

senses as they are stimulated by objects."[10] As Orlin observes, the trappings of nobility hail Sly into his new identity, ripping him away from the familiarity of his quotidian objects as a commoner and replacing them with a sampling of elite pleasures. Despite the objects shaping Sly's consciousness, he acts in response to them, indicating that the codes that close the nobility off from the other ranks can be mimicked and replicated to an extent that dissolves the differences between a lord and a cadger.

The mixing of high and low culture in the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew* qualifies as a utopian expression in that by giving Sly a lord's status, Shakespeare manages to comingle aspects belonging to the different ranks, suspending the barrier between them. While inhabiting the costume of a nobleman, Sly comically fails to maintain the pretense of noble manners. He cannot help but revert to language familiar to his occupation as a tinker when he constantly requests "a pot o'th' smallest ale" or uses words like "comonty" incorrectly ([Induction.ii.75; 133]). Yet, despite the faux pas that breaks the illusion and marks his true station, Sly continues to enjoy aristocratic desserts and the audience never sees him return to his identity as a tinker, showing a blend of low and high without the normative consequences of social expulsion for transgression. In this sense, the prank wins out in embarrassing Sly to the entertainment of the Lord and his men at the same time that his presence among the nobles undercuts the prank's purpose in showing that his ephemeral transformation grants him access to their privileges. Shakespeare's blending of the diverse ranks portrays them as sharing space in a manner that imitates the diversity of the play's

10. Lena Cowen Orlin, "The Performance of Things in *The Taming of the Shrew*," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 23 (1993): 172.

attendees as they come together to occupy the space of the theater in order to enjoy the performance.

In relation to utopia, it may be helpful to think of Sly as bearing similarities to the generic utopian traveler. He may not encounter a new world or radical society in the traditional utopian or science fiction sense, but the realm of nobility appears quite estranged from his everyday experience. While classic utopian travelers such as William Morris's William Guest, Edward Bellamy's Julian West, or Ernest Callenbach's Will Weston travel to new worlds in different places, Sly, in donning his new finery, enters into a new social field that utopically underscores his ignorance to the much preferable aristocratic lifestyle. Consorting with the nobility, he still retains practices from his identity as a tinker to his embarrassment, much like the three modern utopian travelers mentioned, and he continues to adapt to the setting thrust upon him the best he can. Like the other visitors to strange lands, he desires the qualities and possessions that belong to the foreigners because they are attributes that he lacks that would drastically improve his livelihood if obtained. While he does not go as far in terms of distance as common travelers to utopias do (he is neither a Gulliver nor a Hythloday), he ambles amongst the noblemen as a stranger wanders among an alien civilization.

Yet, the complications surrounding Sly's utopian transformation stem from the important fact that Sly's dream-living does not originate from his own initiative; in a dystopian sense, it is decided for him as he "is practised upon in a manner that objectifies him to the delight of his multiple audiences."[11] When the Lord lays out his fanciful strategy

11. Ibid., 183.

for enacting his prank on Sly, he seeks reaffirmation from his attendants, asking, "Would not the beggar then forget himself?" to which the witty Huntsman observes, "Believe me, lord, I think he cannot choose" ([Induction.i.40-41]). The Huntsman also says, "As he shall think by our true diligence / He is no less than what we say he is" ([Induction.i.69-70]). While the anticipation of an obliterated station still marks the prank as utopian (i.e. with Sly forgetting his place), it is more ideological in how the Lord's actions mold Sly into a nobleman, an already established subject position as opposed to a new one. As Greenblatt observes, "The transformation seems to suggest that you are free to make of yourself whatever you choose to be […] but in fact [Sly] is only the subject of the mischievous lord's experiment, designed to demonstrate the interwovenness of clothing and identity."[12] The joke, then, shuts out utopia as much as it promotes it by reinforcing the distinctions between high and low culture, electing the former as being much more luxurious and desirable.

If utopia still persists in the joke, it may continue as a form of satire on performance in which we can see nobles as much ideological puppets as they are puppet masters. While the nobles shape Sly's identity, their own identity is determined by parental and authority figures who instill in them the prejudicial discriminations that lead them to value one mode of life over another in terms of excellence. As a result, they pass on the fictions of authority and privilege to the successive generations in order to perpetuate their elite values and beliefs. In this sense, according to Orlin, the "semiotic force [of things] is such that things can substantiate deceit. They organize fictions as large as that of the devised world, identity, and life history of Sly."[13] The ideology that the noblemen build and replicate in response to

12. Greenblatt, *Norton*, 58.

13. Orlin, 176.

the material world serves as a fiction that fails to authentically institute its abstract superiority over other ranks. That is, the virtue of nobility is a matter of shared attitude as opposed to a veritable truth. Sly's change in rank occurs outside of his own will, showing that it is ideology that determines what the Lord and his peers feed to Sly in terms of distinguishing rank. Poor Sly can only rely on the nobles to know what constitutes his deepest fantasies and desires, exposing the simulacra of desire in that authorities in early modern society dictated what values and materials warranted social distinction. In describing the nature of wish-fulfillment, Jameson describes the elusive nature of genuine desire: "Wish-fulfillments are after all by definition never real fulfillments of desire."[14] This hollowness of fulfillment marks the fantasy crafted for Sly in the same way that it also marks the nobles' sense of refinement. Despite the prison-like restrictions of ideology, the prank's exposure of ideology as a fiction opens its parameters up to utopian revision.

It is also important to note the self-consciousness of performance in the Induction when the players attending to the Lord take the stage, which draws attention to the utopian function of the play in relation to playacting itself. The Induction is heavily metatheatrical in that it provides a provoking chronicle of player culture in terms of travelling and performing at the estates of noble lords. In this case, the players' inclusion subtly breaks the fourth wall by inviting the actual audience of *The Taming of the Shrew* to join the Lord and Sly at his estate, a setting meant to mirror the private performances reserved for nobles, where the main plot involving Katharina and Petruchio is observed. The gesture may mean to flatter the

14. Jameson, 83.

audience's sense of self-worth while also giving a mock gravity to the comedy of the main plot.

The Lord's treatment of the player characters in the Induction also illustrates a fantasy that directly takes root in player culture. In leading us to the play, the Lord upon some fortune encounters a troupe of players whom he takes into his dwelling. The rewards that the Lord offers the players extend beyond their normal pay, marking the scene as the utopian fantasy of theater production that aims to instill art with a greater social and economic value than it held at the time. In terms of excess, the Lord giddily directs his Servingman to "take [the players] to the buttery" where they will "want nothing that [the Lord's] house affords," implying that the players will enjoy a grand feast in exchange for their performance ([Induction.i.101; 103]). Similar to Eyre's carnivalesque feast for the apprentices in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, this scene elevates the value of theatrical arts and comically depicts its practitioners, many of whom were apprentices themselves, as preparing to gorge their stomachs to full capacity, a dream that does not fully correspond to the esteem of art during the time.

Another utopian instance arises from the Servingman's promotion of the players as capable of mending the ailments given to people with distracted temperaments. As Sly sits down to attend their performance, the Servingman remarks:

> Your Honor's players, hearing your amendment,
> Are come to play a pleasant comedy,
> For so your doctors hold it very meet,
> Seeing too much sadness hath congealed your blood,
> And melancholy is the nurse of frenzy.

Therefore they thought it good you hear a play

And frame your mind to mirth and merriment

Which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life. ([Induction.ii.125-132])

According to the Servingman, the theater serves as a prescriptive treatment that can heal and regenerate Sly to a greater state of health. This is certainly a hyperbolic message since, in repute and in practice, the theater could not actually cure illness; it could, however, greatly uplift attitudes and spirits, even if such is accomplished through the deceptions of fiction. Indeed, the theater's enemies would hang themselves before ever accepting that the theater could provide proper treatment for physical ailments or discomforts and thus perform a healing function akin to that of physicians or the church. The treatment, though, is not an actual treatment but a rhetorical trick that relies on the language of an anodyne to further put Sly at ease in his identity and convince him that the Lord has his best interests in mind. With these lines, Shakespeare may very well intend to highlight the theater's function as a place where mirth and merriment can minister to the audience's own psyche, restoring theatergoers to psychological health through comedy, fantasy, and a momentary escape from their everyday problems. Bevington supports this perspective:

> [The theater] is in the business of dressing actors up as persons of whatever rank the playwright chooses. Surely one of the pleasures of theatrical performance for Elizabethan audiences was that of dreaming of social advancement or social control. At the same time, this theater treats such a liberating experience as holiday or farcical nightmare, and as Satrunalian escape; we realize as an audience that we will return to

the norms of our daily lives after having visited an imagined space where anything is possible.[15]

Perhaps serving as a safety valve, the theater nevertheless allowed social fantasies to burgeon in a way that enabled utopia to live beyond the space of the stage in the minds of the playgoers. In our own time, if a work of art is remarkable, people will often dwell on its content and effects for a long time after encountering the piece. In Shakespeare's time, it would be no surprise if the social climbing fantasy affiliated with Sly was imprinted on the audience's memory in a similar fashion.

In the end, the audience finds in Sly a contrary person who is simultaneously extremely foolish and an elusive symbol for the commoners, which they may exalt as a paragon of an absurd but hopeful possibility. Like Sly, they attend the theaters to be entertained and upraised, and they too are tricked; the trick on them, though, is paying admission for an insubstantial spectacle. While audiences may find the tinker less sympathetic for being a puppet of the noble ranks, Sly's formation as a subject, nevertheless, satirically marries the low with the high, suggesting permeability between the two strata that levels their differences of rank and charms the audience with its fantasy of social mobility, which was increasingly becoming a reality in seventeenth-century England.

"An Obedient Hope": Dallying with Social Place in Twelfth Night

A true upstart crow, Malvolio earns the audience's aspersion in the same manner that Zeal-of-the-Land Busy earns his in Ben Jonson's later comedy *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). Both characters are quite similar in that their sermonizing and moralizing serve as a front for

15. Bevington, Introduction to *The Taming of the Shrew*, 3.

advancing their own selfish desires for power and pleasure. In fact, Shakespeare and Jonson explicitly fashion these characters as the theater's satirical rejoinder to the Puritans' slander against the stage, charging the Puritans with using the utopian aim of purifying the church to satisfy political desires. In the context of the Elizabethan stage, Malvolio is quite understandably an effigial scapegoat for theater aficionados of the time as his words analogically and negatively associate him with the Puritans' attacks against the theater as promoting immorality. Malvolio may be "notoriously abused" by the play's end, but given the holiday atmosphere, one can surely visualize the glee with which Shakespeare derides the overzealous steward (V.i.379). Despite the awful treatment of him and his own brash demeanor, the steward anticipates a pseudo-utopian prospect that really could drastically alter the state of his livelihood.

Quick to condescend to his superiors and the fool, Malvolio's martinet demeanor draws ire from his enemies who, in response, make a spectacle of him with a letter trick that turns his fantasy inside-out. They portray him as a madman, and they are not entirely wrong as Malvolio madly pursues Olivia's love and estate. His madness, though, does not spring so much from a distemper of his humors, as Elizabethans would say, but from the nature of the carnival holiday that gives the play its title. Given the general merriment of a Twelfth Night holiday, Malvolio imperils himself in the way that he staunchly opposes revels and jests.[16] As a man who chooses to be Lenten in his conduct during the course of the Twelfth Night

16. Jennifer Vaught, *Carnival and Literature in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 101. Vaught writes of Malvolio's ridicule in terms of carnival, stating, "A Lenten figure, Malvolio tries to curb Sir Toby's bacchanalian singing of ballads with his cronies at Olivia's estate that the steward bemoans that they have transformed into an 'ale-house.'"

holiday, audiences can only expect Malvolio to become the butt of others' jokes, and he does so beyond the bounds of propriety.

The joke that Maria, Feste, and Toby play on Malvolio closely resembles the joke played on Sly. However, the joke runs amuck and the treatment of Malvolio in the dark room threatens to douse any humor that comes from the more innocent tricks played on him, such as the letter's persuasion for him to don his yellow stockings in front of Olivia. In terms of interpellation, the most important aspect of Malvolio's character pivots on his conflict with Olivia's court and the letter that brings him under their control. Despite his efforts to raise himself above men like Feste and Sir Toby, hoping to best them, the people he so sourly detests shrewdly draw out the steward's true lust for power and privilege to his embarrassment, and in a dystopian manner, abuse his fancy.

Shakespeare inverts the dynamic of carnival in that Malvolio as a social climber contrarily functions as a Lenten figure, characters conventionally known for assailing utopian forms such as carnival. In typical carnival settings, lower ranked figures gain a privileged status as Lords of Misrule, but in *Twelfth Night*, carnival inversions themselves are inverted in a whimsical fashion. Vaught speaks at length on the carnivalesque gymnastics of the play, stating:

> In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* aristocrats appropriate the holiday motifs of Lord of Misrule and 'cakes and ale' in order to maintain their elite standing above those they perceive as inferior in rank (II.iii.115). The social mobility of those beneath them threatens their superior place within the status quo. Sir Toby Belch resists the rise of

ambitious citizens defined by income or earned position rather than inherited titles or privileges by battling Malvolio.[17]

Toby's antagonistic derision of Malvolio announces itself explicitly enough throughout the play to demonstrate how he fulfills the Lord-of-Misrule role. Malvolio, then, is caught in the atypical conundrum of one that embodies the social climbing fantasy typically conferred upon a Lord of Misrule only to be deflected into occupying the role suited for Lent. Thus, while audiences may wish to identify with the fantasy of social mobility, as demonstrated in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, Malvolio's cold demeanor functions to divert audiences into scoffing at his wish for advancement. While the traditional, folkloric role of the Lord of Misrule strikes us as relating to utopia in that it satirically erodes the boundaries between high and low, Sir Toby's function as such a carnivalesque Lord appropriates the position in a manner that rigorously reinforces these boundaries, which works to redirect the audience's ire onto the less privileged character of Malvolio.

Shakespeare assigns the role of the Lord of Misrule to an aristocratic character in a way that conservatively derides the austerity of Malvolio's social climbing fantasy. In fantasizing about a new social arrangement, Malvolio places himself as the arbiter over Olivia's estate and invites ridicule not just for desiring the title of a count, but because he despotically hopes to take full possession of Olivia's wealth and privileges. His daydreams of a pseudo-utopia make him vulnerable to his enemies' manipulation as they provoke him to uncompromisingly pursue "the full prospect of [his] hopes" and expose his folly with a forged letter (III.iv.84). The nature of his desire for ascension allows Malvolio to fit more

17. Ibid., 100.

easily into the play as a Lenten character because his killjoy behavior does not appear as a desirable trait for someone exercising authority. On the contrary, Malvolio's authority appears exceedingly repressive, authoritarian, and vindictive in comparison to the moderate rule of Olivia.

Audiences may also detest Malvolio's ambition as leaning more towards a dystopia than a utopia since his fantasies are entirely vainglorious and grounded in a contempt for the liberal behavior of others. Seeing Malvolio shed his abstemious façade in Olivia's gardens, where his fanciful ambition blooms to excess, permits audiences to observe the steward's real motivations. In the garden, directly prior to perusing Maria's imitative letter, Malvolio fancies the possibilities of being a count, and in a quasi-utopian fashion, his imagining rectifies the injustices he sees freely exercised against him through negation:

> Having been three months married to her,
> sitting in my state— […]
> Calling my officers about me, in my
> branched velvet gown; having come from a daybed
> where I have left Olivia sleeping— […]
> Seven of my people, with an obedient start,
> make out for [Toby]. I frown the while, and perchance
> wind up my watch, or play with my—some rich
> jewel. Toby approaches; curtsies there to me—[…]
> I extend my hand to him thus, quenching
> my familiar smile with an austere regard of control— […]
> Saying, "Couisn Toby, my fortunes having

cast me on your niece give me this prerogative of

speech—"

"You must amend your drunkenness."(II.v.43-72 [These lines are strictly Malvolio's]).

For one who is associated with a puritanical sect poised against the theater, Malvolio behaves quite theatrically as he dreams of directing Olivia's estate with a playwright's skill. Malvolio's negation of Olivia's control over the estate counts as among the more threatening aspects of the fantasy as he imagines himself filling her stead, managing the estate's daily affairs and ordering her servants and Toby about while she remains sleeping. Similar to Sly's induction in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Malvolio's vision features him replicating the behavior of the ruling classes with the grace of a studied actor and entirely negating his identity as a mere steward. He would rule with a stern, "austere regard of control" while retaining the gaudy vestments that signify his status as a count and wealthy landowner. His pronouncements demonstrate the ease with which persons of lower rank could imitate the aristocracy. As Vaught points out, there is in his daydream an "imaginary appropriation of aristocratic clothing and finery."[18] Just as players will dress to look their parts, Malvolio has the presence of mind to indulge in the luxury and symbols of power due to a count, despite valuing himself as superior to others because of his temperance.

The dystopian taint of Malvolio's dream also resides in his vengeful motives. Malvolio does not simply think that he is more virtuous than everyone else in the play, he also deeply covets the titles and privileges that the upper ranks enjoy, believing that his

18. Ibid., 102.

principles and labors as a steward should entitle him to wealth and social clout. He haughtily believes that he can manage an aristocratic lifestyle better than the nobles. Yet, the historical context of stewards helps to clarify why Malvolio's envy and resentment festers so elaborately. The ambivalent power given to stewards during the Elizabethan and Jacobean era gives great cause for discontent. Ivo Kamps details the predicament facing a person of Malvolio's occupation:

> Malvolio the steward acts with his employer's authority and is thus in a position to issue orders to Toby […] it is these same structures [of Illyria and Olivia's household, though,] that constitute the absolute limits of his own upward social mobility and that define him as a subordinate in rank […] Performing his identity as steward thus causes Malvolio both to exercise his proper role and to transgress it. Toby gets right to the heart of the matter when he mockingly interpellates the officious Malvolio by asking him, 'Art any more than a steward?' And within the hierarchical structure of Illyria, Mavolio is indeed nothing more than a steward: a commoner and Toby's subordinate.[19]

Malvolio is given leave to exercise the authority of a count but does not receive the privileges due to a person titularly vested. For this reason, Toby can mock Malvolio's attempts to check his behavior since Malvolio ironically both holds the authoritative standing to rebuke him at the same time that he lacks it entirely. As a result, Malvolio, despite being a killjoy, can garner sympathy since the higher ranks exploit Malvolio's service while also (in)advertently flaunting the privileges they enjoy in front of him as a matter of birthright. Sadly, the

19. Ivo Kamps, "Madness and Social Mobility in *Twelfth Night*," in *Twelfth Night: New Critical Essays: Shakespeare Criticism Volume 34*, ed. James Schiffer (London: Routledge, 2011), 235.

stewardship gives Malvolio a tantalizing artificial power over the residents of Olivia's estate, depriving him of any genuine agency. To his chagrin, Malvolio cannot claim noble privilege on his own since he lacks a title. In fact, commenting further on the steward's fantasy, which deprives Olivia of agency in relation to Malvolio's frustration, Edward Cahill contests, "Perhaps [Malvolio's] dream is not the fulfillment of a wish to *have* her, but rather to *be* her."[20] Malvolio may very well be fitted to the role of a count, but his arrogance to place himself above even the lady of the house destines him for a fall equal to that of the mythical Icarus. In trying to actualize his dream to live as a count, Malvolio oversteps the boundaries of his social role, and, conservatively, he is punished for his envy.

The flaw that accompanies Malvolio's wish for social advancement springs from his desire to be a substitute within the hierarchy as opposed to a new factor entirely. In desiring the excess and deference of an aristocrat, Malvolio reveals himself to be a hypocrite.[21] Indeed, the satire aimed at Malvolio's ambitions in the play shines through as his desire for title and control betray the virtues of temperance to which he professes before the prank. Similar to Jonson's Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, who attends Bartholomew Fair after being tempted by his own gluttonous appetite and who proceeds to damn idolatry only to argue with the idolatrous figure of a puppet, Malvolio's dream works to eschew any reformation of the current order in favor of enjoying the present's exploits for himself. As the play shows, Malvolio's didactic rhetoric regarding Feste's and Toby's antics functions as a mere sheath

20. Edward Cahill, "The Problem of Malvolio," *College Literature* 23, no. 2 (1996): 72.

21. Vaught, 104. The point is appropriately illustrated by Vaught: "The ambitious steward is dissatisfied with his place in the existing hierarchy rather than with the exploitative system itself. His individual desire for social mobility does not lead him to object in a radical, egalitarian fashion to the oppression of the populace by the elite. Instead, Malvolio's political vision that seemingly favors underdogs like himself is ultimately as rigid and conservative as Sir Toby's."

for his own lusting after power and privilege. Maurice Hunt contextualizes his hypocrisy in terms of his association with Puritanism, observing that "Portraying puritanical Malvolio's notion of Providence as self-serving, Shakespeare satirizes his character's belief in the unmediated, unearned, material blessing of the elect."[22] Metatheatrically, condemning the hypocrisy in Malvolio serves as the theater's response to its Puritan critics. The play depicts them as relying on a transcendent rhetoric of difference as a means of disguising their covetous desires for the material comforts and securities of the higher ranks. In this sense, the sect, embodied by Malvolio, is to be seen as represented by ideological hijackers deceptively posing as intermediaries for righteous behavior.

Rather than imagining some moral mission to bring utopian justice and equality to Illyria, Malvolio dreams of control as a vengeance against Sir Toby and his kind. In the scenes preceding Malvolio's fantasy, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste take part in late night songs and chatter, disturbing the house's peace, which angers Malvolio for violating the decorum expected of a noble estate. He assumes a prejudicial attitude that echoes the Lord's perception of Sly when he inversely compares the roisterers to lower ranked people, saying to Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste, "Have ye / no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like / tinkers at this time of night?" (II.iii.86-88). In Trevor Nunn's 1996 film adaptation, the contrast is clearly marked as Malvolio pretentiously sits in a parlor reading a gazette and drinking scotch when the obstreperous trio begins to beat pots and pans as they march through the halls, imitating a carnival procession.[23] Malvolio tries to quiet the ruckus, but the

22. Maurice Hunt, "Malvoilo, Viola, and the Question of Instrumentality: Defining Providence in 'Twelfth Night,'" *Studies of Philology* 90, no. 3 (1993): 278.

23. *Twelfth Night; Or What You Will*, directed by Trevor Nunn (1996; UK: Fine Line Features, 2005), DVD.

crew instead quiets him, leaving him with only the passive option of being a tattletale in order to seek retribution. Rather than Malvolio asserting dominion, the group belittles him, and his dream in the garden is a reaction to their antipathy.

For all Malvolio's hypocrisy and troubles, Toby's unruly behavior and abuse of others gives the steward great cause to desire a lofty vengeance against the privilege of his lady's uncle. While Toby may come across as a lovable scoundrel, we cannot forget that he is a dilapidated nobleman. He constantly appears drunk and slyly swindles money from fellow nobleman Sir Andrew, who is a dupe and an imbecile. In fact, many of the nobles in the play are a troubled group. While Malvolio comes off as the worst of narcissists, the noblemen are strikingly criminal-minded, stupid, and melodramatic (e.g. Toby, Andrew, and Orsino, respectively). Shakespeare depicts Toby's behavior as being equal to that of an innkeeper or a town drunk, and it is only the attire and title that appears to distinguish him from a person of lower rank. By presenting Toby in this manner, Shakespeare subverts aristocratic privilege, equalizing the higher and lower ranks since the behaviors and attitudes thought to exclusively belong to each social sphere are shown to be permeable.

In one sense, it is at least fitting that the aristocratic Toby marries below his station in wedding Maria, a gentlewoman, and it is even more suitable that she is the one who designs and sets the letter trap for Malvolio, despite Fabian's claim that he and Toby acted as the ruse's originators (V.i.359-360). Having Maria devise the trick gives agency to someone on par with Malvolio's rank, showing that dexterity can appear in those lacking lucrative titles and that such people can offer the nobles assistance for various stratagems and profit from it. In using her wit and keeping her senses, Maria rises in station through her marriage in direct contrast to Malvolio's fall, which allows the social climbing fantasy to live on through her

despite Malvolio's vainglory. However, while the reward for her wit is a rise in station, her partner does not exercise the virtues commonly conceived to characterize nobility.

While Toby's position as a nobleman appears to be an injustice, a slight comeuppance is practiced when Olivia rebukes him for his impudent behavior and when Sebastian cudgels the pair. In the former case, Toby and Andrew mistakenly accost Sebastian in mistaking him for Cesario, inciting Olivia's displeasure since she also believes Sebastian to be Cesario. In the rebuke, Olivia quickly tears past the jovial screen that Toby projects and rightly assesses his character in a manner similar to Malvolio, chiding, "Will it ever be thus? Ungracious wretch, / Fit for the mountains and the barbarous caves, / Where manners ne'er were preached!" (IV.i.46-48). Quite contrary to Toby's consistent claims of noble heritage running through his blood, Olivia brings him low by associating him with primitive humans and accusing him of behavior not belonging to a nobleman (I.iii and II.iii.77-78). Throughout the play, Maria and Malvolio warn Toby about incurring Olivia's displeasure since Olivia "takes great exceptions to [Toby's] ill hours" because Toby fails to "confine [him]self within the modest limits of order" (I.iii.5-6; 8-9). Apparently for Olivia, his attack on Cesario was the act that finally whirls her into an angry fit of passion against him. In the end, Toby does not heed these warnings, and in an instance of cosmic justice, he receives Olivia's censure and a physical beating from Sebastian for his impudence. While receiving a minimal punishment for his tricks and misdeeds, Toby does not go unscathed.

Toby's character flaws become important for understanding how easily his mockery of Malvolio escalates into a dystopian abuse of the steward's fantasy when he is placed in a dark room. Malvolio proves saucy and brash enough with others, but the trick played on him goes beyond humiliation. After Maria hints that he is mad, the prank evolves into

psychological torture once Toby takes charge of him. Yet, before going in depth regarding Toby's abuse of the steward, we must first look at how Malvolio's system of interpretation becomes the source of his undoing since it is his blind obedience to the falsified letter that grants Toby the opportunity to mistreat him.

An item that embodies the end goal of Malvolio's wildest fantasies, the letter that tricks the steward in a way that exposes the short-sightedness of his hopes. Too eager in his expectations for advancement, Malvolio accepts the message of the letter as authentic since the handwriting resembles Olivia's penmanship. The scene criticizes Malvolio's narcissistic reading at the same time that it portrays his reading as an analogy for the Puritan method of interpreting scripture. In following the letter as it pleases him, Malvolio unwittingly creates the conditions for his abuse in that it leads him to submit to a system quite different from the independence he pronounced in the garden. The letter controls him, and his response to it suggests a willing acceptance on his part to follow its instructions based on his faith in its veracity:

> "I may command where I adore." Why, she
> May command me; I serve her, she is my lady
> […] And the end—what should that
> Alphabetical position portend? If I could make that
> Resemble something in me! Softly! "M.O.A.I"— (II.v.114-115; 117-119)

The discovery of the letter follows immediately after Malvolio dreams of controlling Olivia's estate, which works to sway him during a moment of great vulnerability. It fulfills every aspect of his dreams, and since it does so, he desperately and irrationally coerces the letter's message to address him, believing that it will actualize his fantasy. Asimov rightly observes

that "Malvolio interprets the letter exactly as pleases his self-love. It advises him to do just the sort of thing Maria knows Olivia loathes."[24] In hoping to achieve his desired end, Malvolio sheds his personal identity in order to adopt the letter's prescribed one as the line "I may command where I adore" prompts the steward to yield himself to the words like a dutiful servant. Cahill adds that the snare "fool[s] him into believing that his social identity and personal identity were the same indeed, that all his problems were solved."[25] The whole humor of what follows from the letter hinges on Malvolio's ridiculous devotion to it as if the letter had revealed a glorious religious prophecy that justifies Malvolio's vitriol for everyone else in Illyria.

The level to which Malvolio loses himself in his fanciful and pseudo-utopian pipe dream deepens when he proceeds to the letter's prose. It effectively intensifies the display of his displeasure beyond reason, directing him and his dream towards madness. He no longer fashions his dream; the dream fashions him, and Shakespeare marks the transition quite adroitly in the famous line, "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and / some have greatness thrust upon them" (II.v.142-143). Up to this point, Malvolio believes himself to be gradually progressing in his lady's favor through his own behavior, and now, the letter offers him the opportunity to have his hopes requited, which Cahill says, "involves no willful or original act at all, but merely a reaction, perhaps desperate, to one's circumstances."[26] The letter moves Malvolio to practice abuse that will hurt his reputation with the servants while he mistakenly and irrationally believes his outlandish behavior will grant him a grand reward.

---

24. Asimov, 584.

25. Cahill, 70.

26. Ibid., 70.

In Nunn's film, Malvolio's attempt to smile after the instructions direct him to do so strikes viewers as hilarious because of how constrained and unaccustomed such a gesture appears on his face. It is obvious that Malvolio does not regularly or naturally smile, and his commitment to sink so low in order to rise so high demonstrates how desperately deranged his wish for a countship has become.

The devotion Malvolio pays to the letter proves more dystopian than the abuse that he suffers at Toby's hands. Without question, Malvolio heeds the letter's directions with great enthusiasm, and his devotion anticipates the zealotry found in modern dystopias like Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921) where subjects such as the protagonist D-503 unquestioningly commit their energies and actions to serving a totalitarian government.[27] In the same fashion, Malvolio entirely commits himself to the letter's direction. While no authority figure frightens him into devotion, the fervor he displays is as disquieting as if one did. Just as OneState's ideology pressures its subjects to follow impossible directives that ignore the impulsiveness ingrained in human nature, the letter charges Malvolio with nonsensical imperatives, which the audience knows are complete lies. As a result, the letter's fiction causes him to behave entirely contrary to the moderate pomposity he displays before he discovers the letter. The dystopian comparison between OneState and Malvolio finds a great commonality in showing the perils of overzealousness. If Malvolio gained the status of a count, he may oppress inhabitants of his estate as much as the authorities of OneState oppress its citizenry.

---

27. In Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*, trans. Clarence Brown (New York: Penguin, 1993), the subjects and D-503 unwaveringly follow the dictums of OneState, a progressive but repressive technological state. Detractors from OneState are a relative minority, and those caught deviating from the state's ideology are usually put to death. Similar to Orwell's citizens in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948), the citizens in OneState fervently serve the state's ideology risking death and torture if they stray from the government's guidance.

In addition to the OneState comparison, the letter's seduction of Malvolio bears a semblance to the plot involving I-330's seduction of D-503 in *We*. For Malvoio, the letter awakens a latent craving that he had held at bay until the encounter. However, just as alcohol and tobacco corrupt D-503, making him I-330's wind-up toy, the letter winds Malvolio up and puppeteers his actions after he consumes its contents. Like I-330's seduction of D-503, the trick played on Malvolio in the garden closely operates in a manner similar to the Christian myth of Eve's deception by the words of the serpent. Drawn by his fancies, Malvolio bites into the fruits offered by the letter, and instead of the shame and confusion that D-503 immediately suffers, Malvolio receives his curse in the form of over-confidence in the letter's promises. In *We*, D-503 is driven mad by I-330's absence, and Malvolio is similarly driven mad when the letter does not bear its promised fruit. Like D-503, Malvolio is lured into performing behaviors that he cannot stand to execute, like smiling. As such, both Malvolio and D-503 are toys of forces outside them. Like Sly's induction, who readily adopts the identity of a lord when noble voices convince him that he is so, the letter's contents draw Malvolio into a maddened pursuit to reach beyond his position. While D-503's punishment results in his lobotomized imagination, Malvolio endures a similar punishment of the mind that aims to confuse his ability to reason.

While Malvolio reads the letter to accord with his fantasy, the letter's deleterious effects do not solely spring from his dystopian egotism. Instead, the spirit of Illyria and the letter's resemblance to Olivia's style of writing provide a basis for him to pursue his preposterous expectations. Malvolio' closeness to Olivia as her steward, Maria's mention that "she did affect [him]" (II.v.24), and the precedence of the lady of the Strachy who

married a yeoman all lead the steward to believe in the prospect of a match with the countess. In fact, on this basis, Sean Benson defends the steward's interpretation of the letter:

> His detractors attack him for reading as a Puritan would, yet Shakespeare takes pains to rehabilitate Malvolio's reading. First, while his reading may seem to fulfill the stereotype or caricature of Puritan exegesis, Malvolio is in reality a shrewd interpreter of the kind of language that Olivia, were she really in love with him, would (and later most certainly does) use. Maria wrote the letter, but its style is Olivia's. Second, Malvolio reads as a textual pragmatist who does not believe that texts are self-interpreting; they cannot, in other words, be understood apart from social contexts, including oral ones, available to corroborate or invalidate his reading of the letter. He repeatedly makes use of those contexts. Malvolio has been much maligned for believing he is the letter's addressee, but this is scarcely a mistake: it is written specifically for him and to him in everything but the use of his name—and Maria virtually dangles that before him, too.[28]

As the fruit appears very enticing to Eve, so does the letter's contents prey upon Malvolio's desires. In biting the fruit of knowledge, Eve loses the spiritual devotion that God's laws had thrust upon her and proceeds to indulge her damning passions. In abiding by the letter, Malvolio also sees his pleasing fantasy of winning Olivia take shape, providing him with the opportunity for trading his puritanical black garb for yellow stockings. In contrast to Benson, though, I argue that the letter fails to materially corroborate the illusory text in which Malvolio places his trust. That is, if Malvolio is indeed a Puritan, Shakespeare appears to

28. Sean Benson, "'Perverse Fantasies'?: Rehabilitating Malvolio's Reading," *PLL* 45, no. 3 (2009): 262.

suggest that he devotes himself as foolishly to the dubious letter as Puritans do a literal reading of the Holy Scriptures. The text of the letter does not accurately reflect Olivia's affections despite the steward's expectations. Instead the letter manipulates and exploits Malvolio's pragmatic approach to reading. Olivia's volatile nature as a person, vacillating between mourning and laughter throughout the play, particularly in Feste's company, may impress Malvolio to form such an ill-conceived belief that he really could obtain a countship. Such, though, is the nature of Illyria as it is the kingdom's own fleeting fancies that allow the chaotic presence of sadness and humor to cohabit the realm, confusing Malvolio's singular mind into believing the improbable.

Priding himself as one to publically object to lust in others, Malvolio hypocritically reacts to the instructions of the letter with monomaniacal fervor for distinction and power. Harold Bloom says of Malvolio's reaction to the letter that he is "a politic pagan […] as well as a dazed egomaniac, unable to distinguish 'the full prospect of his hopes' from reality."[29] The steward goes further than most to chase a dream, and unfortunately, to his embarrassment. Following his own perusal of the letter, Malvolio vows to dispense with the previous identity for the more tantalizing one of a count:

> Daylight and champaign discovers not more! This is
> open. I will be proud, I will read politic authors, I will
> baffle Sir Toby, I will wash off gross acquaintance, I
> will be point-devise the very man […]
> Jove, I thank thee. I will smile; I will do everything that

29. Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 242.

thou wilt have me. (II.v.157-160; 174-175)

In announcing his intention to "baffle Sir Toby," Malvolio sinks to Toby's level, and more, he aims to inhabit a place within the social hierarchy where he can extricate himself from having to consort as an equal among anyone below the rank of a count. Malvolio may desire the prospects outlined in the letter, but the behaviors it beckons for gaining the position are intentionally ludicrous and designed independently of his will. In order to gain his dream, he enthusiastically resolves to augment his condescending behavior so that it accords with the letter's directions. In following the letter, Malvolio becomes a full-fledged mimetic creature, which parallels the transformation of Sly in *The Taming of the Shrew*. In that play, the basis for aristocratic culture is mocked as Christopher Sly is able to replicate the behaviors of the rank. Malvolio attempts this same replication. For instance, it is only after Malvolio thinks that Olivia praises Jove that he, too, begins to praise the deity. Alas, the letter exposes the fraudulent disposition of Malvolio's hopes as being sycophantic and dishonest at the same time that the letter subtly criticizes gaining position in the hierarchy as lacking virtue since it is seen as relying upon the capricious appeasement of lords, counts, and countesses. While the letter is false, coming from Maria's hand, the scene speaks to the power of the word and its ability to codify behavior and reward. In this instance, only when virtue is perceived as deriving from representatives of the higher ranks can it take shape and gain value, which, unfortunately, is part of the fiction of virtue in that invoking it represents the interests of a dominant power.

Despite Malvolio's shallowness, Toby's locking him away in a dark room exceeds the limits of punishment due to the steward's display of hubris as it places him in an abject dystopian situation. While Malvolio's ascension to a count would certainly be a bane for all,

the prospect never appears to have an actual chance of succeeding, judging from the play's context. Cahill agrees: "Everyone except Malvolio understands that a match with Olivia is impossible."[30] What makes Malvolio's fantasy a failure as a utopian dream, then, rests on the fact that his fantasy is equally as deluded as Gonzalo's utopia in *The Tempest*. Therefore, to punish him for his dream so severely can only be in keeping with the carnival gibes getting out of hand. Becky Kemper tries to lessen the degree of Malvolio's punishment by aligning it with more common punishments of the seventeenth century, but the fact remains that any kind of torturous punishment during the time, including Malvolio's, had the potential to exceed reasonable bounds, and in the steward's case, it certainly does.[31]

If the audience gleans any mirth from Malvolio's subsequent mistreatment in the dark room, it is because Feste gets to best him in a game of wits, exacting payback for Malvolio's earlier insult of fools. Symbolically, the repartee works as an analogy for the competition that Greenblatt describes as having developed between ministers and entertainers in the early modern age.[32] With the theater's biased stake in the relationship, it is not surprising to see Feste as faring better in trying to undermine Malvolio's reason. Despite Malvolio's rational pleas for release, Feste labors to convince Malvolio that he is mad in a manner similar to Petruchio's persuasion of Katharina against the state of reality in *The Taming of the Shrew*. For example, when Malvolio laments the darkness of the room, Feste posing as Sir Topas professes the opposite of Malvolio's reality in order to convince him that he has lost his

30. Cahill, 67.

31. Becky Kemper, "A Clown in the Dark House: Reclaiming the Humor in Malvolio's Downfall," *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium*, 7 (2007): 46.

32. Greenblatt, *Norton*, 32.

mind. While Malvolio wanders in darkness, Feste tells him that, "Why, it hath bay windows transparent as barricadoes, and the clerestories toward the south north are as lustrous as ebony, and yet complainest thou of obstruction?" (IV.ii.37-40). In this scene, Shakespeare presents a true portrait of a world upside-down in that Feste adopts the role of one who customarily determines sanity (topaz being a stone associated with curing lunacy) and takes a comically insane approach to restoring Malvolio.[33] In fact, Eagleton points out:

> Having launched the fiction that Malvolio is mad, Feste solemnly treats this speculation as real, bringing 'rational' criteria to bear on it with a crazed exactitude not far from Malvolio's own. Because he controls the rules of the language game, any of Malvolio's responses can be turned against him as further proof of his lunacy.[34]

The language of declaring windows to be as clear as barricades and as bright as lustrous black strikes us as ridiculously absurd. While Malvolio never acknowledges Topas's perspective, his belief that Feste really is Topas drives him bonkers. No matter what ill has befallen him, he believes that he has acted in accord with Olivia's expectations and to instead be subjected to confinement and confusion proves inordinately demoralizing for him. Thus, the scene is dystopian in that transgressing proper bounds in Illyria apparently results in physical and mental bondage.[35]

To be locked in darkness contrary to the letter's promises transforms Malvolio's hope for paradisiacal power into a dark hell, and a deceptive rhetoric accompanies his descent. In a

---

33. Compare to O'Brien's treatment of Winston Smith in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

34. Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, 31.

35. The same principle certainly applies to the bondage placed on Antonio after his homoerotic bond with Sebastian drives him to intervene in the duel between Viola and Sir Andrew, and he is arrested as a result.

very mythical, Christian way, the prank's rhetoric begins with promises of an elevated state only to end with Malvolio enduring Feste's bamboozling rhetoric that surfeits on confusion. There is a great irony in Malvolio claiming that he is "as well in my wits as any man in Illyria." With its debauchery, whether on love or booze, its cross-dressing, its mischievous devices, and its violence, Illyria is not well in its own wits (IV.ii.107-108). In reality, the carnival atmosphere in Illyria infects Malvolio, damning him for his Lenten behavior and unfairly making him a scapegoat for excessive derision.

If Malvolio's punishment for his hauteur intends to instill in him a lesson to mind his apportioned station in life, the prank backfires severely. Malvolio may be the subject of the audience's mockery for his gall, but the abuse practiced on him does not curb his behavior. Instead, the prank awakens his resolve to adopt a vengeful mind and psychologically empowers him. Kamps writes about the power of the prank on Malvolio at the conclusion, stating: "He turns away from his career and the way in which that career has created and defined him. He refuses to perform the identity prescribed for him by society, and, in Althusserian terms, he refuses to be hailed by those who have authority over him; he escapes this particular moment of interpellation."[36] Understandably, Malvolio's reappearance in Act Five puts a blemish on the jubilant reunions and marriages that follow the resolution of confusion in Illyria. Kemper agrees, noting that "the resulting psychologically wounded cries of a barely surviving and fully justified Malvolio can so sour the final moments of the play that they ultimately rob the audience of a satisfying conclusion."[37] Orsino's words that implore a servant to "Pursue him, and entreat him to a peace" plea for compromise and

36. Kamps, 239.

37. Kemper, 42.

intervention in order to stave off a larger discontent (V.i.380). In Malvolio's proclamation that he will "be revenged on the whole pack of you!," Shakespeare issues a caution to Elizabethan society, expressing a premonitory fear of what political movements, like the Puritans, could achieve if given the occasion (V.i.378). Of course, history shows that such desire for negotiations in the real world would fail to the detriment of the playhouses when the English Civil War (1642-1651) broke out, and the Puritans successfully closed the playhouses until the restoration in 1660.

While Shakespeare's play may demonize Malvolio, who is pernicious to others throughout the play, Toby does not earn genuine sympathy either, except maybe in snatches when he trickily projects the image of a hero by conjoining the scene of Olivia's estate with the atmosphere of an alehouse. Even then, Toby remains an aristocratic hedonist as opposed to a sympathetic Lord of Misrule for the groundlings. As much as Malvolio comes across as a villainous killjoy of the play's carnival festivity, the steward is also a victim to the rigid social structure that denies him mobility while flaunting its rewards just out of his reach. Nevertheless, exposing the problem through Malvolio proves utopian, even if Malvolio's sycophantic solution and resulting predicament proves entirely dystopian both to us and himself.

"A Greater Power than We Can Contradict": Utopian Love and Institutional Weight in Romeo and Juliet

One touchstone quality that characterizes the concept of Marxist interpellation is how effectively the brute force of collective systems diminish the scope of individual agency. Such a quality often reverberates throughout the tradition of Utopian literature and remains a quandary that scholars and artists alike struggle to reconcile in envisioning better places. In

Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975), for instance, Will Weston, the American visitor to the environmentally-conscious utopian country, remarks how starkly the nation's system differs from his native one in the simple practice of decentering the egocentric principles embedded in capitalism. Getting swept up in Ectopian philosophy, he writes, "*I am part of systems; no one, not even myself, can separate me off as an individual thing*."[38] Also in *The Dispossessed* (1974), Ursula Le Guin offers a portrayal that attempts to balance the individual will with society's collective force. In the novel, we observe the main character, Shevek, idealistically argue that "Sacrifice might be demanded of the individual, but never compromise: for though only the society could give security and stability, only the individual, the person, had the power of moral choice—the power of change, the essential function of life."[39] Jameson, too, in his writings goes to similar lengths when addressing the tension inherent between the particular and the universal. Referencing Freud, Jameson comments on how collective wishes are ornamental and decorative for more private desires, highlighting the conflicts between social decorum and personal desire.[40] While Jameson's sentiment, along with Le Guin's and Callenbach's, is surely a twentieth-century one, the tenor of their contention about between macro and micro systems also applies to behaviors depicted in literature of past centuries. In *Romeo and Juliet*, a similar clash of private wishes and public demands occurs between the eponymous lovers of the play and Veronese society.

38. Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia* (Berkeley: Banyan Tree Books, 2004), 81. Generally, the Ecotopian philosophy revolves around a utopian society based on ecological efficiency.

39. Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (New York: Eos, 2001), 333.

40. Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 42-56.

The central plot of *Romeo and Juliet* illuminates the results of a collective will trampling individual hopes as the coupling of two young lovers grates against a preexistent grudge held between their families. The purpose of this relationship is bifurcated. In the first half of the play, the pair's attempts to create a new life apart from Veronese society inspires hope by showing how their romance allows each character to slough the skin of their families' hatred. By the play's ending, though, the deaths of the lovers extinguish this hope, illustrating that their utopic romance cannot overcome the enormous weight of their families' grudge. The play's prologue offers a simple outline of the circumstances:

> Two households, both alike in dignity,
> In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
> From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
> Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
> From forth the fatal loins of these two foes.
> A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life;
> Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
> Doth with their death bury their parents' strife. (Prologue.1-8)

The prologue concisely summarizes the play's gist: two lovers try to defy their families' factional quarreling in order to enjoy each other as husband and wife only to endure an unfortunate death that serves as a sacrifice to subdue the friction between their families. The summary of future events garners understanding in a very simple way. Societies try to base their foundations on structures predominantly free from individual caprice, such as systems of government, law, and religion. Thus, the lovers' individual, radical, and hasty marriage, or "mutiny," does not prove to be a formidable force to contend with these weighty structures.

As Paul Kottman observes, "Rather than regard the tragedy as the result of some conflict within the social world that is brought to light by the lovers' actions, we come to see that what the lovers' actions have actually brought to light is a conflict between the social world and the concerns of individuals, a rift between worldly necessity and individual desires."[41] Will in numbers, whether popular, virtuous, or malignant, can have an advantage in overpowering the isolated and marginalized hopes of a single pair. Yet, this is the ethical dilemma that arises from the struggle between the collective forces of society and the wishes of singular voices. The tension produced from such a struggle between public and private elements is a specter that haunts Utopian thought.

Three primary institutional structures drive the utopian lovers to their dreadful end: the family, embodied in the Capulets and the Montagues; the law, embodied in Prince Escalus; and the church, embodied in Friar Laurence. Arguably, as famously referenced in the prologue's phrase "star-crossed," it is the force of fate that holds dominion over the lovers' affairs, and in the context of the Elizabethan era, the astrological reference asserts that the stars' alignment supernaturally influences the outcome of human events. However, in terms of the play, a modern perspective beginning to take root in the Renaissance would more than likely transpose this cosmic influence onto the social forces that engulf and squash the lovers.

If Shakespeare truly intends to emphasize the play's tragic dimensions, he does so by depicting how two utopian dreamers, attempting to live an escapist fantasy, are literally dragged down from the clouds and into their graves by Veronese's repressive institutions.

41. Paul Kottman, "No Greater Powers Than We Can Contradict," *Criticism* 54, no. 3 (2012): 452.

For only through their transformative love does the play offer any hope beyond their dismal predicament and beyond other pessimistic modes like Mercutio's ridicule of love. Regarding the play's utopian love, Theodor Adorno asserts:

> In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare was not promoting love without familial guardianship; but without the longing for a situation in which love would no longer be mutilated and condemned by patriarchal or any other powers, the presence of the two lost in one another would not have the sweetness—the wordless, imageless utopia—over which, to this day, the centuries have been powerless.[42]

While critics including Maurice Charney certainly see the quickness with which the lovers fall for one another as frivolous, naive, and youthful, it is clear that the two characters become smitten so easily because of their mutual physical attraction and how immediately they requite each other's affections.[43] Romeo, already intoxicated with his love for Rosaline, quickly draws out passions from Juliet that up to the point of their meeting appeared latent. The lovers find a commonality in adoring the poetic space that love creates for them, and they flirt with each other as inhabitants of a space separate from the confines of their social dissensions. This space is much more utopian than that of Sly or Malvolio in that Romeo's and Juliet's fondness for one another does not center on the identities produced by material wealth. Instead, when they first meet, they rely on an economy of witty, emotionally charged, flirtatious metaphors that quickly break down the social barriers that bar them from physical contact. The instantaneous attraction they feel towards one another furnishes them with the

---

42. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Roberth Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 247.

43. Maruice Charney, *Shakespeare on Love & Lust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 82.

necessary channels for releasing their passions and experiencing the ecstasy known to lovers rapt by a fantasy made true. The relationship fits similarly with Kottman's argument that "it is the story of two individuals *who actively claim* their separate individuality, their own freedom, in the only way the can—through one another."[44] In effect, their physical bodies operate as a locus for the transferal of sexual energies, interlacing their desires for the affection and passion that is currently lacking from their present experience.

Similar to Orsino's initial infatuation with love in *Twelfth Night*, where he dotes on Olivia throughout the entire play until he falls in love with Viola when she readily requites his love after removing her masculine disguise, Romeo idolizes love to the extent that he is happy to embrace someone like Juliet, who willingly breathes life into his fantasy. In fact, Romeo quickly forgets Rosaline after encountering Juliet because he recognizes how preferable it is to have love directly as opposed to feigning through Petrarchan verse, even if Juliet must help break him of that habit in telling him not to swear by the moon (II.ii.109). Contrary to Orsino's claims about women's incapacity to love as deeply as men in *Twelfth Night*, Juliet eagerly reciprocates Romeo's attraction in order to satisfy her own desires, speaking on how capacious her appetite for love is: "My bounty is as boundless as the sea, / My love as deep; the more I give to thee, / The more I have, for both are infinite" (II.ii.133-135).[45] Thus, while Romeo idly dreams "of nothing but vain fantasy," as Mercutio accuses him, he dreams in a manner that reflects a utopian desire for love that matches and

44. Paul Kottman, "Defying the Stars: Tragic Love as the Struggle for Freedom in *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63 (2012): 6.

45. Compare to Orsino's lines about women and love, along with his lines about his love: "There is no woman's sides / Can bide the beating of so strong a passion / As love doth give my heart;" (II.iv.93-95) and "But mine is all as hungry as the sea, / And can digest as much" (II.iv.100-101).

complements his physical and emotional wishes. As Charney states about the play, "love is a product of fantasy, fancy, and imagination, as expressed in dreams […] There is no development, no buildup, nowhere to go from here [in the play], since Romeo is already at the climax of his affection even before Juliet is allowed to enter the dialogue."[46] Despite his lack of intimate knowledge in regard to Juliet, Romeo still earns our sympathy as a lover because of how recklessly and optimistically he dares to dream of love. Juliet shares his enthusiasm for her own reasons, and the two defy the rancor plaguing their family and friends through their longings for the bliss of love.

While the familial animosity alone profanes their mutual attraction, the pair's flirtatious metaphors are trenched in heretical, utopian transgressions against the institution of the church that may prefigure their tragic deaths. In his dalliances, Romeo compares Juliet's body to a holy shrine that he both fears and hopes he might desecrate, seeking to marry religious devotion to carnal lusts. In turning Juliet's playful appeals to prayer on their head, Romeo takes what is counted profane and transforms it into holiness. The two exchange kisses as a type of purging: first, Romeo passes his sin to Juliet; then, he receives it back to keep her free from blemish. When Romeo retrieves his so-called sin of a kiss, he meets it with delight as opposed to shame, exclaiming, "Sin from my lips? Oh, trespass sweetly urged! / Give me my sin again" (I.v.109-110). Of course, the exchange is amorous and exciting at the same time that it satirically flies in the face of catechisms and fundamental dogmas. In rebelling against and perverting religious doctrine, Romeo and Juliet playfully urge a comedic, utopian sentiment in hoping to bypass the imaginary bounds imposed by

46. Charney, 82.

religion in proclaiming what is deemed an inexplicable evil to be an overabundant good. To appropriate Jameson's discussion of utopia and religion to the scene, we observe that this sentiment "omits all notions of sin […] From any religious perspective, therefore, the very idea of Utopia is sacrilegious (no matter how many priests and secular religious are included); and it is presumably the expression of a hubris whose historical and political form is no doubt the belief in perfectibility itself."[47] In relation to Jameson's contention regarding utopia and religion, Romeo's and Juliet's playful flirtations serve to perfect their service to love, and Jay Halio agrees. He writes, "This blending of the holy and the profane not only displays Romeo and Juliet's wit, but joins them from the outset in a love that is both physical and spiritual. Powerfully attracted to each other by beauty and sentiment, they are also moved by sexual impulses."[48] Though their trespasses may foreshadow their doom, the expression remains irrevocably utopian in the manner that the pair toys with the concept of sin in order to satisfy their passions in a manner that adapts sacred rites to suit erotic enjoyments.

The most explicit order of utopian negation between the pair, in which they playfully renounce familial bonds, can best be observed during the window scene when Romeo eavesdrops on Juliet proclaiming her affection for him. However, it is not the proclamation of love that intrigues us, but Juliet's dissection of signifiers that delineates the utopian dimensions of their relationship. Just as modern Utopias at times look to improve upon the past by canceling it out, Juliet in her famous window scene looks to efface the enmity

47. Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 191.

48. Jay Halio, *Romeo and Juliet: A Guide to the Play* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 74.

associated with Romeo and herself by erasing the signifiers that erect the imaginary walls threatening to obstruct their desires:

> Oh, Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?
> Deny thy father and refuse thy name!
> Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
> And I'll no longer be a Capulet. […]
> 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
> Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
> What's a Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,
> Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
> Belonging to a man. Oh, be some other name!
> What's in a name? That which we call a rose
> By any other word would smell as sweet;
> So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,
> Retain that dear perfection which he owes
> Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
> And for thy name, which is no part of thee,
> Take all myself. (II.ii.33-36; 38-49)

The separation to which Juliet aspires dispenses with the ideological trappings forced on herself and Romeo by virtue of being born into particular family alliances. She looks to create a new space in which they can release their affectionate, sexual passions without the entanglements of the hellish feud. She recognizes how arbitrarily her family's feud sets a barrier between hers and her lover's passions and sees its removal as being as simple as

extirpating Romeo's surname, because, according to her perspective, it is the material man and not the immaterial nomenclature that constitutes him and distinguishes him from the identity assigned to him through social relations. Russ MacDonald argues:

> Juliet resolutely adopts the modern nominalist position in the debate over the proper relation between words and their meanings […] Juliet's memorable question [about the rose] and the speech in which it is embedded pose a direct challenge to the meaning of names and labels, focusing the issue that recurs in scene after scene—the question of what we should call things.[49]

Contrary to the values placed on heredity in Elizabethan England, the name does not make the man, the anatomy does, and according to Juliet's fantasy, a man may reshape his relationship to identity as he pleases,. Her perspective allows for a space outside Verona's prevailing ideologies to take form, inspiring the lovers to briefly elude the categories that threaten to draw them into their families' hate by association.

The names that the lovers bear are bonds with which they eagerly attempt to dispense in order to have a new utopian beginning that buries the past hate into which their families bore them, but they fail. The tragedy, as they both fear, resides in the reality that despite their renunciation of the past in their minds, it persists outside their fantasy in the minds of their families. For example, Tybalt strenuously works to keep the past alive, and in valuing the factional split, he labors to stoke the fires that allow him to violently confront Romeo. As Macdonald contests, "The lovers' bondage to 'brief sounds,' the verbal system that represents the social realm, is a primary expression of their inability to escape the limits and

---

49. Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 167.

snares of the mortal world."[50] Similar to Sly's willing acceptance of his status as a lord and Malvolio's belief that he really can become a count, the lovers truly believe their affections can overcome the insurmountable force of their families' malice. While Sly's fate remains ambiguous, the lovers follow a path more closely aligned with Mavolio's end in that they propel themselves toward the awful tragedy of their deaths. After their daring rush to be baptized apart from their families into a new union, Shakespeare provides more foreshadowing of the force that the families bear on them. Juliet reflects that "It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden, / Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be / Ere one can say it lightens" (II.ii.118-120). Her proclamations of fear follow immediately after the pair's proclamations of love because they know that while they believe in their fantasy, their families have not experienced any change in attitude. The parents are isolated from the effects of their children's transformation, which puts their fantasy at odds with the families' more potent influence.

Like *The Tempest* in which Caliban discusses the fleetingness of sweet dreams, the utopian dream that the lovers share is also fleeting and cannot endure. Using language that is echoed by Caliban, Romeo shares the same fear when he remarks, "Being in night, all this is but a dream, / Too flattering-sweet to be substantial" (II.ii.140-141). Nevertheless, the desire to be with one another, even in death, marks their desire as subversively utopian. Kottman asserts that their devotion and suicides attest to their desire for individual difference. He writes, "They experience freedom and self-realization as lovers, not only by negating [Verona's external] powers—to the point of taking their lives—but in the acts of mutual self-

50. Ibid., 170.

recognition that this negation makes possible."[51] The lovers fashion a utopia filled with romance, but its isolation within a single pair of people amidst a busy, societal conglomerate only ensures that its manifested presence does not persevere.

In fact, it is the rigidity of the play's familial and civic structures that extinguishes the lovers' hopes, acting as an anti-utopian force that pulls them back into society's restrictive framework. The ripest example, the one that indefinitely draws the lovers back into the system that they have renounced, is Tybalt's attempt to avenge Romeo's insult of attending the Capulet masquerade. If the feud reaches full capacity in any character, it finds its embodiment in the quarrelsome Tybalt. Despite the Prince's decree for peace, Tybalt goes to extreme lengths to keep the animosity alive between the two families, and contrary to Charney's claim that the feud between the elders appears to be cooling, the families do not appear so eager to end the feud when the opportunity for confrontation arises.[52] In keeping with another aspect of Charney's reading, though, Tybalt is the primary instigator for the disturbances that rouse both families to mutual hatred. He proclaims himself to be an agent of violent action from the beginning when he declares, "What, drawn and talk of peace? I hate the word" (I.i.70). Juliet's cousin naturally leans towards violence and disorder, and it is his aggression that spurs Romeo to reevaluate his masculinity, fearing he has lost his manly vigor from falling in love, and causes him to engage Tybalt in combat.

Tybalt's slaying of Mercutio prompts Romeo to take justice into his own hands, defying the law of Prince Escalus, and momentarily renounce what he calls his enervating infatuation with love, which is ironically his paradise. In luring Romeo back into the feud,

51. Kottman, "Defying," 37.

52. Charney, 81-88.

Tybalt very easily topples the priest's efforts to achieve a form of peace through Romeo's and Juliet's marital union. Tybalt accosts Romeo's Italian/Elizabethan sense of masculinity and hails him back into the system that he tried to leave behind. In taking vengeance, Romeo forsakes love's power in exchange for a masculinized, loveless violence: "O sweet Juliet, / Thy beauty hath made me effeminate / And in my temper softened valor's steel" (III.i.112-114). In this moment, Romeo becomes subtly aware of how escaping one ideological system for one of difference, one free from familial conflict, subsumes him into another ideological mode that may weaken his character. However, by opting to rejoin the mode he left behind to battle Tybalt, a mode marked by patriarchal hubris, he unwittingly bars himself from his fantasy. In relating an anecdote as an analogy to the play, Robert Appelbaum illustrates influence that the idea of masculinity has on Romeo:

> When he was a boy, [Homi] Bhabha's father used to challenge him with the playful question 'Are you a man or a mouse?'—implying that there is no choosing between the two. And in an important sense there isn't any choosing. The system is already in place; in virtually any given situation a regime of masculinity will be already hegemonic, wearing a mask of coercive but universal normativity.[53]

Irony characterizes the situation because his engagement with Tybalt returns him to the place that his infatuation with love propelled him to avoid, a place where the petty squabbles of an unromantic, factional feud are steered by masculine aggression. However, rather than plunge into the filth and crave to continue his part in the feud, as Macbeth does after becomes a

53. Robert Appelbaum, "'Standing to the Wall': The Pressures of Masculinity in *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (1997): 251.

murderous tyrant, Romeo at least feels remorse for his momentary weakness, knowing that in a moment of rage, he has forsaken the love into which he has invested his hopes for bliss.

The substance of the lovers' dream begins to dissipate at once after Romeo stabs Tybalt, causing citizens to converge on the scene and bringing with them the civic reality that stands in stark contrast to the lovers' utopian fantasy. Romeo's crime quickly awakens the rabble he aimed to leave behind. Thus, rather than finding a heaven in Juliet's bosom, he suffers under the gaze of anxious citizens and angry families. Capulet's wife is especially desirous for retributive justice, demanding an end to Romeo's life as compensation for the loss of Tybalt. The crowd falls fast on Romeo's heels, and Benvolio warns Romeo that "The citizens are up," and we see them gossiping amongst themselves before the two families arrive on the scene to bicker over the just punishment for Romeo's deeds (III.i.132). The moment may be brief, but it carries great significance in demonstrating the overwhelming force of the collective will over individual trespasses.

Romeo, the once blameless youth who imaginatively dwelled in a fantasy world apart from his family's rancor, suffers a contrary fate to his romantic wishes as he becomes the figure of focus in the feud as opposed to fully dispensing with the name "Montague" as had been hoped. The law, embodied by Escalus, takes recourse in awakening Romeo to the consequences of engaging Tybalt by banishing him from Verona, which severs him from the embodiment of his dreams, Juliet. Romeo's lapse of judgment, then, sets in motion the tragic suicides that imprint the play with its somber tone. With the insurmountable barrier of banishment depriving Romeo access to news from Verona and of Juliet, he becomes a desperate man indeed. Intensely devoted to his idea of love, Romeo goes to extreme lengths to perform a service to this vision of love in committing suicide.

Juliet faces dystopian hardship when her father threatens to disown her if she fails to conform to his wishes. Following Tybalt's death, Capulet experiences an inexplicable change of heart regarding Paris's proposal to marry Juliet. Before her cousin's death, Juliet appeared to have freer rein in tending to her own affairs. However, in arranging the marriage, Capulet suddenly shows why others may bear animosity towards him as he assumes a domineering control over his daughter, saying to Paris, "I think she will be ruled / In all respects by me; nay, more, I doubt it not" (III.iv.13-14). His assumption of patriarchal dominance over his daughter after Tybalt's passing conflicts with his earlier expressed desire for Paris to gain Juliet's personal consent to the marriage. Upon hearing of his plans, Juliet is not only apprehensive of being wedded into infidelity, she is also bewildered that her father would uncharacteristically rage and rave about her ungratefulness when she resists the arrangement.

In arranging to marry Juliet to Paris, Capulet comes across as a domineering father-figure in that he wishes to exploit her as a means to gain more wealth. Her father makes claims that lack a warrantable basis in his dialogue with Juliet, who only expresses gratitude for his misguided efforts. He lays out his hopes clearly, saying to Lady Capulet:

> […] my care hath been
> To have her matched. And having now provided
> A gentleman of noble parentage,
> Of fair demesnes, youthful, and nobly liened,
> Stuffed, as they say, with honorable parts,
> Proportioned as one's thought would wish a man—
> And then to have a wretched pulling fool,
> A whining mammet, in her fortune's tender,

To answer, “I’ll not wed, I cannot love,

I am too young; I pray you, pardon me.” (III.v.178-187)

The first half of Capulet’s words reveals an attraction to the wealth and prestige of Paris’s lineage as it is certainly the focal point of what makes the match so pleasing to him. This is not to say that Capulet does not genuinely like Paris. In fact, he may also be angry because he loves Paris as he is able to relate to him on a masculine level. Shakespeare consistently features the pair on stage together, and only once does a verbal exchange ever occur between Juliet and Paris, which itself happens by accident. For Capulet, the honor of the position should satisfy Juliet’s desires as it satisfies his. The expectation of his daughter’s marriage to Paris is an egotistical male projection that disregards Juliet’s personal wishes. Further, the accusations that follow, with Capulet calling Juliet a “pulling fool” and “A whining mammet,” lack a real basis for complaint. Hardly whining, Juliet tries to thank him for his thoughtfulness, stating, “Not proud you have, but thankful that you have. / Proud can I never be of what I hate, / But thankful even for hate that is meant love” (III.v.146-148). Juliet meekly and humbly declined the arrangement, and in response to her resistance, Capulet passionately rails against her, victimizing Juliet for her refusal to serve as an appendage of his estate. Despite her good will, Capulet’s desires blind him to his daughter’s objections. In his rage, Capulet thrashes about and depreciates Juliet because he desires good standing in Veronese society while she desires love.

Yet, Juliet defies Capulet’s authority in plotting a utopian protest through her simulated death. Like a dystopian hero, Juliet will not let the resounding voice of familial control direct her social path, going as far as to attempt suicide in front of the friar to assert her own agency. The appearance of the family contrasts with the promise that Juliet

continues to hold out for through a union with Romeo. As Kottman states about her resistance to her father's control:

> If the ancient family loves individuals as if they were 'as good as dead,' providing conditions only for corporeal sustenance, 'nursing,' and well-being, then such care is inadequate to a living individual who seeks to claim her fate as her own. The family looks like a 'womb of death' (5.3.45). By the very same token, however, the ancient family *also* turns itself into an occasion for Juliet to claim her life as her own, by showing her exactly what she must rupture if she is to really live. The stakes are clear—Juliet must subvert her household's authority, as well as the very source of that authority: the claims of mortality upon human sociality. Juliet must refuse something of this debt if her life is to become hers.[54]

Capulet threatens to disown Juliet, wishing her dead rather than disobedient, and he uses his displeasure to scare Juliet into submission. Rather than requite Capulet's expectation for compliant obedience, Kottman accurately notes that Juliet offers to challenge his authority and rashness by negating the means to achieving his desire: her animate body. While this mildly distracts from the fact that Juliet is in despair over Romeo's fate, her actions assert her commitment to love and individual happiness over family allegiance to the Capulet.

She is also exacerbated by the fact that Paris serves as her father's favorite choice as a suitor. Paris runs entirely contrary to the romance that Romeo offers her in that his dealings with Capulet represent the traditional and repressive patriarchal approach to marriage, where a woman like Juliet is reduced to a commodity that can be negotiated and purchased.

---

54. Kottman, "Defying," 15-16.

Throughout the play, Paris constantly talks with Capulet and defers holding any discourse with Juliet despite Capulet's instructions for him to gain Juliet's consent at the play's beginning: "But woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart" (I.ii.16). Later in the play, Paris excuses himself from engaging in simple talk with Juliet, remarking, "These times of woe afford no times to woo," since, apparently for him, the pursuit of courtship can serve as the only occasion for interacting with a girl (III.iv.8). No matter, though, because Paris never has to woo at all. Capulet too heartily indulges his wish, which is the desire to possess Juliet as property without the need for courtship.

Rather than a noble suitor, Paris appears to annoy Juliet with his arrogant presumptuousness. Paris, like Capulet, does not appear to possess a real interest in Juliet as he does the distinction and wealth that she signifies. He is vain in that he may find her attractive only as a means to increase his ego with the prospect of possession. In his first and only exchange with Juliet, he speaks presumptuously, calling Juliet "wife" and touting that her qualifying "'may be' must be, love, on Thursday next" (IV.i.20). Juliet does not speak a word of affection before Paris slips in another sly quip that works to feed his masculine ego, saying about Juliet going to confession, "Do not deny to [the friar] that you love me" (IV.i.24). Juliet meekly but critically draws attention to his narcissistic wish for assurance when she replies, "If I do so [i.e. privately confess my love for you to the friar], it will be of more price, / Being spoke behind your back, than to your face" (IV.i.27-28). In her retort, Juliet draws attention to how Paris proclaims his love in public view of Friar Laurence before ever saying it privately, asserting that her proclamation of love will bear more value being uttered for the sake of feeling rather than for public show. In this scene, Paris desires to show off Juliet as a prize that he has won rather than admire her as a woman for whom he

genuinely cares. When discussing marriage with Juliet, Paris and Capulet negotiate in the manner of property that would not be alien to Elizabethan England where dowries were the common entanglements of marriage, and Paris aims to purchase Juliet with his rank and wealth.

As for a personal connection to Juliet, Paris appears two-faced since he does not speak fondly of her in private but instead emphasizes, in a dystopian manner, how their marriage will serve as a sort of bandage for her melancholy. Paris assumes that bringing Juliet back to the conventional bounds of marriage will restore her to the normal engagements of society. Before marrying her, though, Paris sees her as a pathetic mourner and wants her to change. When he talks outside the Capulet circle about Juliet to Friar Laurence, he insults Juliet and illogically agrees with Capulet that a hasty rush into marriage will mend her mood:

> Immoderately she weeps for Tybalt's death
> And therefore have I little talked of love, […]
> Now, sir, her father counts it dangerous
> That she do give her sorrow so much sway,
> And in his wisdom hastes our marriage
> To stop the inundation of her tears,
> Which, too much minded by herself alone,
> May be put from her by society. (IV.i.6-7; 9-14)

According to Paris, the haste for marriage serves as a means to heal the wound in the family after the loss of Tybalt. However, why would Paris look to marry Juliet if he cannot even talk of love? The absence of courtship and love from Paris dooms his pursuit since it is the theme

of utopian love that dominates the play. He lacks the courage and initiative to directly seek Juliet's affection and instead tries to purchase her. Just as the hasty marriage of Claudius and Gertrude in *Hamlet* makes for tragedy, the attempt to thrust Juliet back into Veronese society through marriage, when she had been living a romantic dream with the now banished Romeo, distresses her, driving her to take drastic measures to escape the family's oppressive wishes. Paris speaks presumptuously from the position of power both as a man in his rank and in his knowledge that Capulet cares more about social propriety than his daughter's emotional state. The overbearing dealings of Capulet's and Paris's hyper-desire for a proper marriage drive Juliet to play dead and, in turn, lead to her actual death.

Despite the attempt to live out a romantic fantasy, Romeo and Juliet become victims to the ideological forces of family and civic law as a consequence of Romeo's revenge and violation of Escalus's call for peace and the Capulets' desire to find an amenable match for Juliet. As we know, Juliet is beguiled by Romeo's corpse when she wakes from her simulated death and resolves to follow Romeo in suicide. In urging Juliet to take refuge in a nunnery, Friar Laurence unsuspectingly utters a line that describes the degree to which the communal forces hamper the play's protagonists. While Laurence intends the line to signify God, it more accurately signifies the social forces disassembling the lovers' plans. He says, "A greater power than we can contradict / Hath thwarted our intents" (V.iii.153-154). His statements inadvertently highlight both the Capulets' sociopolitical dealings, which place the pressure on Juliet in the first place, and the bad timing that allows the "infectious pestilence" to spread, preventing the delivery of Laurence's letter to Romeo, as the factors that contribute to Juliet's and Romeo's suicides (V.ii.10). The line shows how the lovers lack the agency to enact utopia's negate the burdens associated with their families' grudge. Though the lovers

temporarily enjoy each other, their attempts to circumvent their social system are ultimately futile.

The parties responsible for pressuring Juliet towards her death are sadly the ones who seem to benefit the most from the tragedy of the lovers' quashed utopia. As such, the resolution is far from satisfying. As Kottman argues, "We did not really care whether Capulet and Montague might be reconciled to one another; indeed, for Capulet and Montague themselves, the 'glooming peace this morning with it brings' is not worth the price."[55] As quickly as the drugs and dagger work on Romeo and Juliet, the families seemingly awake to the errors of their malice and resolve to bury it. Borrowing from the medieval views of the universe, it would appear as though the lovers' dream serves as a sacrificial offering to the cosmos as a way to restore harmony back to Verona by ending an otherwise incontrovertible hostility. The more modern suggestion might perceive the harmony as resulting from recognizing the unnecessary carnage that the feud has wrought, but that too is complicated.

The peaceful accord at which the families arrive in perceiving the untimely death of Romeo and Juliet features a competitiveness that overshadows an authentic show of regret for the flaws in their hatred. While comparatively absent from the play, Montague extends a conciliatory gesture to Capulet that shows he, too, enjoys material shows and keeping up social appearances as much as his adversary. He boldly claims that he "will raise [Juliet's] statue in pure gold" (V.iii.299). The question remains, then, given the brevity of the reconciliation and its emphasis on material symbolism than interpersonal sympathy, if the peace really will last. Otherwise, it could be possible that the patriarchs are simply putting on

55. Kottman, "Greater," 450.

a show, subduing their animosity in front of the Prince in order to avoid trouble and elevate themselves in view of the state's authority. The sacrifice may function to provide peace, but Montague's and Capulet's arrogance leaves a mark of dissatisfaction and a feeling that no real change accompanies the outward reconciliation, only artifice. If this is the case, then, the lovers' deaths occur without effecting any positive change on the families' cankerous relationship.

While a modern concept, interpellation features in all three plays to the extent that Shakespeare's dramatic characters, whether they search for greater agency or fall into a drunken stupor, are drawn into a radical experiences of either luxury, fantasy, and/or despair. As Eagleton writes, "Shakespeare's utopian solutions to the conflicts which beset him – an organic unity of body and language – is by definition unattainable."[56] The transformations may serve to cater to the audience's collective fantasies, but the playwright in his wit also underscores the power vested in the fictions of social hierarchy to pen the ultimate, insubstantial, and even hapless matter of each fantasy. With the exception of Sly, every character receives explicit punishment for transgressing the conventional order. Unlike the other characters, Sly is not clearly victimized in the end. The Lord and his men execute the prank on Sly, but the only real laugh that may be had at Sly's expense is that he believes a costumed boy to be his noble wife. Otherwise, he enjoys the fruits of the aristocracy with the creeping reality of his lowly identity as a tinker deferred from reentering the stage. In contrast to Sly, Romeo and Juliet, along with Malvolio, ostensibly fall prey to the interpellative forces of their respective societies as all three aspire to greater livelihoods only

56. Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, 97.

to have the reality of their social ties wreak havoc on their dreams. In the end, their dreams degenerate into nightmares, and as in much of Shakespeare's work, the playwright tempers hopeful expectations with the grim realities that may follow in the wake of vaulting ambitions.

CHAPTER III: Casting Crowns, Casting Shadows:

Treachery and Tyranny in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*

The Convex Mirror of Dystopia

As if holding up a convex mirror to the present, authors of dystopias intensify the injustices they sense in their societies by projecting a trajectory on which the corruptions of today expand into the torments of tomorrow. While early modern English society never had the chance to fear the possibility of technologized, futuristic dystopias, like those authored by George Orwell and Aldous Huxley, they did fear the potential for treacherous and tyrannical politics to ravage the country. Elizabeth I's and James I's political management exacerbated these fears as their exercise of power prompted concerns about the capacity for regents to overstep ethical boundaries. To curb challenges to her rule from dissatisfied Catholics and other conspirators, Elizabeth I established a rigorous spy network led by Francis Walsingham, a maneuver that scholar Stephen Budiansky cites as the birth of modern espionage.[1] Further, after a few years of James I's reign, many English subjects came to view him as a reprobate king as rumors of profligacy and capricious favoritism marred the reputation of his rule.[2] Ultimately, people came to view the court as full of intrigue and deceit, which stoked fears regarding the moral deterioration of the community at large.

---

1. Stephen Budiansky, *Her Majesty's Spymaster: Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Walsingham, and the Birth of Modern Espionage* (New York: Plume, 2006).

2. See Curtis Perry's "'If Proclamations Will Not Serve': The Late Manuscript Poetry of James I and The Culture of Libel," in *Royal Subjects: Essays on the Writings of James VI and I*, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (Detroit: Wayne State Press University, 2002), 215. Perry details how King James I's implication in the Overbury affair, where he pardoned convicted murderers because he affected them, drew backlash from his subjects: "The resulting tendency to see favoritism and corruption as recurring Jacobean problems shifts the blame to James and thus raises questions about the viability of his brand of absolutism. As a result, discourse on favoritism became an important vehicle for the expression of deeper concerns about court corruption and royal prerogative in the 1620s and beyond."

In magnifying the destructive politics of the court, playwrights used the stage as a laboratory for presenting cautionary tales of treachery and tyranny.[3] Particularly through tragedy, these playwrights focused on the dangers that accompanied the duplicity of language and capacity for despotism which typified politics of the early modern era. While certainly separated by centuries, the fears peddled on the early modern stage share a commonality with the predominant themes characterizing twentieth-century dystopian fiction. The political deterioration depicted in the tragedies of Shakespeare provides a critical opportunity for linking his work with the nature of dystopia as both forms portray the dangers embedded in political machinations of the time in which they were written. In the context of Shakespeare's *oeuvre*, dystopian qualities appear most prominently in the tragedies of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. These two plays notably show how political collusion can lead to a ruinous condition for the kingdoms in which the plays are set. They effectively represent the decay of the body politic, a perspective reflected in the growing pessimism towards politics among theater attendees. Andrew Fitzmaurice clarifies that "Late Elizabethans, like most post-Reformation Europeans, believed that the world they inhabited was in decline, that it had abandoned virtue and given itself over to the treacherous politics of the court."[4] Aligned with this attitude, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are plays that feature characters that abuse the appearance of virtue for

3. Bryan Lowrance, "'Modern Ecstasy': *Macbeth* and the Meaning of the Political," *ELH* 79, no. 4 (2012): 826. About the nature of early modern plays, he alleges that "early modern plays were, among other things, imaginative laboratories where starkly opposed models of political experience were dramatically put into conflict outside of the constraints of other forms of discourse—all in an historical moment when the meaning of collective life was up for debate."

4. Andrew Fitzmaurice, "The Corruption of *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, ed. David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 141.

selfish ends while callously eliminating the people that may threaten to spoil the fruits of their desires.

In these two tragedies, Shakespeare imagines political climates that initially feature the expectation of auspicious tidings but quickly disintegrate into aberrant bloodshed and collective suffering as the result of kings illegally seizing power and abusing their authority. In *Hamlet*, while the panic of the guards in the opening scene is certainly a forerunner for the play's pervasive treachery, the play also begins with a wedding celebration where all present except the Prince appear jovial and delighted with the new regent. However, after Hamlet encounters the Ghost and draws suspicion from Claudius, the superficial stability of the state unravels as both nephew and uncle resort to treacherous stratagems to foil the other, strewing casualties in their wake. Similar to *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* begins after the Scottish King Duncan successfully suppresses a grueling rebellion and invasion. Despite beginning at the end of a bitter war, the victory that follows gives King Duncan and his nobles great cheer as they anticipate a more tranquil postwar period. Unbeknownst to Duncan, though, his and his nobles' hopes are dashed when Macbeth murders the King, gains the crown, and spreads terror throughout Scotland. Similar to the modern dystopian traits of Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* (1890), H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), and Ursula Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1973), whose settings initially appear pleasantly utopian but are rife with dystopian injustice, these tragedies present kingdoms that appear hopeful for the future but are undone by base desires for power.

Hamlet and *Macbeth* also qualify as dystopias based on the early modern attitude that viewed the health of nations as being inextricably bound to the ethos and well-being of its authoritative head, the queen or king. Metaphorically, the kingdom was seen as a body. An

attitude inherited from the Middle Ages, the concept of the body politic derived from the cosmological system known as the Great Chain of Being, which:

> held that God had created the universe according to a system of hierarchies, that every living creature and even every inanimate object occupied its ordained place in an elaborate interlocking scheme, and that awareness of that scheme and one's place in it was a precondition for the peaceful and productive operation of society.[5]

The plays, then, portray national strife as resulting from miscreant characters upsetting the Chain's natural order through the murder of regents and throwing the body politic into a kind of ataxia. For one to upset the order was to pervert the normative aims of governing. Describing early modern attitudes towards proper governance, Eric Nelson writes that "the political writers who furnished the intellectual background of Shakespeare's age were in fundamental agreement that there was a best regime for any given community, and that it was a matter of moral urgency to identify and institute it."[6] Those who abuse the structure of authority diverged from the pursuit of an ideal order, and the resulting discord would typically call for the appearance of a more legitimate faction to take arms against the rupture in leadership. If the disorder that creates terror is to cease, then the faction must restore balance and put the country on a more sufficient path.

For a usurper to derail the proper course of ruling was to infect the head of the body politic. The infection would then spread to the rest of its members, rendering the kingdom

---

5. Russ McDonald, "Politics and Religion: Early Modern Ideologies," in *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare: An Introduction with Documents*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 319.

6. Eric Nelson, "Shakespeare and the Best State of a Commonwealth," *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, ed. David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 256.

into a sick or bad place. The metaphor efficiently describes the putrefaction experienced both at the personal and collective levels of the societies in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Commenting on the rhetoric produced by this metaphor, Gillian Murray Kendall observes that rulers like King James I saw themselves as protectors of the political body, ordained by divine right to ward off civic disease. Kings viewed themselves as heads of state, and usurpation of their authority would be tantamount to sacrilege and generally perceived as unnatural and monstrous. Kendall, in describing James I's response to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, shows how the King politicized the event by depicting his defeated challengers as diseased, which eloquently favored his authority and rationalized the execution of the conspirators as being medicinal: "State executions may thus be seen as a logical extension of the metaphor of the body politic, which, according to James I, dictated that 'it may very well fall out that the head will be forced to garre cut off some rotten members…to keep the rest of the body in integritie.'"[7] The subtext of James I's assertions indicates that if the rotten members of the body were not purged and allowed to spread, then the kingdom would rot from within. In his tragedies, Shakespeare intensifies James I's perspective to a degree that aims to draw perturbation with regard to the commonplace of vice. In *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, Shakespeare encapsulates these fears by portraying a dystopian infection of the body politic as beginning with the manipulation of language and virtuous appearances.

In *Hamlet*, the dystopia of Denmark appears primarily through the perspective of Prince Hamlet who sees his native country as an "unweeded garden" presided over by a corrupt king (I.ii.135). Latching on to the Ghost's revelations, the Prince comes to despise

7. Gillian Murray Kendall, "Overkill in Shakespeare," *Shakespearean Power and Punishment: A Volume of Essays*, ed. Gillian Murray Kendall (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1998), 173.

King Claudius both for his heinous crimes against Old Hamlet and his excessive enjoyment of drinking and lust (I.ii.135). However, rather than rush to slit Claudius's throat, Prince Hamlet delays and carefully considers the rewards and consequences of performing the deed. His reflection presents him as a kind of philosopher who is far removed from the nature of a murderer, which intensifies the horrific nature of his murders later in the play. Furthermore, while the common ranks share Prince Hamlet's view that Claudius abuses his power, those in the King's service are more sycophantic, hoping to appease him in hopes for advancement. Erika Gottlieb argues that the kingdom of Denmark suffers from Claudius's corruption through association. She contends that in his 1996 film adaptation, Kenneth Branagh "directed *Hamlet* as […] a political parable of dystopia."[8] Claudius's unlawful office, his indulgence in festivity, and his unprincipled reliance on spying negatively affect characters who negligibly assist him in his attempts to eliminate Prince Hamlet as a threat to his rule. Within the scope of the play, the Prince functions as a discontented dystopian hero who, like other dystopian heroes, is doomed to failure in that his resistance to Claudius's rule and his quest for revenge tragically corrupt his otherwise just character.

Macbeth features a kind of dystopian corruption different from *Hamlet*. The initially admirable eponymous character exchanges his honor and conscience for a kingship, ironically leading him to rule as a tyrant over Scotland. A major dystopian aspect of this play derives from the ease with which characters like Macbeth convincingly feign virtue in order to realize an immoral desire. *Macbeth* exhibits numerous contraries that illustrate the

8. Erika Gottlieb, *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial* (Quebec City: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 14.

treacherous nature of politics.[9] Similar to Prince Hamlet, Macbeth is anxiously introspective, which amasses sympathy for his character, even though his isolated reflections contribute to his mental instability. After encountering the wayward sisters, whose language is equivocal and deceitful, Macbeth is conscientiously reluctant to murder King Duncan. Unfortunately, while he contemplates the risks to his soul and the compunction he would feel if he were to realize the witches' prophecy through regicide, he eventually decides that the value of honor and virtue are expendable in the face of enjoying the privileges due to a king and kills Duncan. After becoming king, Macbeth labors to preserve his rule and defy the wayward sisters' predictions. As a result, he becomes a highly dystopian figure in that his conscientious deliberations splinter into paranoia, causing him to completely dissociate himself from his fellow Thanes. His isolation desensitizes him to feeling human sympathy, and he transforms from a laudable warrior into a frightening tyrant. By the play's end, Macbeth's paranoia about the sisters' prophecy rages to the extent that his tyrannical rule molds Scotland into a dystopia. He unflinchingly orders the slaughter of women and children in order to secure his power, and he also maniacally hurls abuses at his own troops while preparing for the final battle of the play. Connecting Macbeth's inhumanity with twentieth-century totalitarianism, Roland Frye argues that "Much of what we find under the terrorizing regimes of Hitler and Stalin is also evident in Shakespeare's presentation of the medieval

9. Lowrance, 833; 835. Lowrance notes that Mabeth's ambition is a catalyst for his duplicitous behavior: "*Macbeth*'s treatment [of ambition] doesn't just repeat the period's boilerplate ethical injunctions. It uses ambition to think through the experience of political action as being profoundly disjoined from ethico-politcal norms […] It is the heroic ideal spiraling off into moral anarchy, a kind of misplaced ideal of immanence along solipsistic and anti-communal lines."

Scottish tyrant Macbeth."[10] Macbeth creates a nightmare state in trying to defy the sisters' predictions, and his insatiable lust for power causes agony for those subjects caught up in the aftermath of his insecurity.

"To Be Contracted in One Brow of Woe": Erasure, Surveillance, and Corruption in Hamlet

After Prince Hamlet defiantly chases after the apparition of his father among the battlements of the castle, Marcellus quips a remark about the condition of his country that hints at a dystopia, declaring that "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (I.iv.90). His assessment suggests that some unknown variable has made Denmark into a 'bad place,' and indeed, both the Ghost and its revelation of Claudius's grievous crime expose the lustrous surface of the King's wedding festivities as concealing gruesome misdeeds.[11] The first scene featuring the court flourishes with mirth and revelry, but an incongruous, if not criminal, strangeness marks the gaiety of the celebration in that Claudius's followers appear to disregard both the incestuous taboo he violates in marrying his sister-in-law and the memory of their recently deceased king. Commenting on the incest, Frank Kermode notes how the impropriety of the King's marriage gets expressed explicitly through Claudius's own words: "'But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son,' [is] a remark that sums up in advance the evil doubling that is at the heart of the play."[12] The doubling in these lines derives from the King's incestuous acknowledgment of the Prince as being both his son and nephew. Echoing

10. Roland Frye, "Hitler, Stalin, and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: Modern Totalitarianism and Ancient Tyranny," *American Philosophical Society* 142, no. 1 (1998): 83.

11. Bevington, Introduction to *Hamlet*, 546: "A recurring motif in *Hamlet* is of a seemingly healthy exterior concealing an interior sickness."

12. Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000), 103.

Kermode, Joshua Scodel also notes the implication of the court in not objecting to the incestuous union:

> Both Hamlet in his first soliloquy and the Ghost declare the marriage of Claudius to his widowed sister-in-law sinfully 'incestuous' (1.5.42; Q2 1.2.157; F 1.2.155), an assessment with which many of Shakespeare's audience would have agreed on the basis of Leviticus. Yet nobody at court besides Hamlet expresses reservation about this union.[13]

Kermode's and Scodel's observations expose the nature of Claudius's treachery. He kills his brother, marries his sister-in-law, and politically appropriates his dead brother's memory to suit his ascension. In doing so, Claudius violates the laws of familial relations as well as the propriety of time that has elapsed between mourning for Old Hamlet and marrying his widow as the new king collapses the disparate occasions into a single event. The King's pomp projects an image of monarchical stability that aims to conceal the diseased nature of his ascension as his surface jollity obscures the "rank corruption mining all within" (III.iv.155). Claudius's attempt to maintain the façade of a pleasant, regal ethos while infecting the commonwealth with a rule that derives from his "foul and unnatural murder" degrades Denmark to a dystopia (I.v.28).

The only character that dissents from the court's depraved festivity is the melancholic Prince Hamlet, who sees his father's memory disrespected by a disreputable scoundrel. If much of dystopian literature tends to feature a heroic individual who resists the oppression of a corrupted government, then the Prince may been seen to embody this role. He can be what

13. Joshua Scodel, "Finding Freedom in *Hamlet,*" *Modern Language Quarterly: A Journal of Literary History* 72, no. 2 (2011): 176.

Darko Suvin would call "our representative 'camera eye' and value-monger [who] finds out [his society] is significantly *less* perfect than an alternative, a polemic nightmare."[14] In light of the jubilant conduct of Claudius and his followers, the Prince views Denmark as a torment, and his view intensifies when he learns from the Ghost the means through which Claudius became king. Like the modern dystopian heroes Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and John the Savage in *Brave New World*, Prince Hamlet attempts to root out the cause of his nightmare and make the nation of Denmark more agreeable to his wishes. Ultimately, he concerns himself more with a hatred for Claudius and his spies than he does with avenging his father. While the Prince believes himself to be morally superior to Claudius and his court, he ironically fails to realize how severely his rash, violent behavior comes to undercut this assumed primacy. The pressures of Claudius's espionage lead him to commit vicious, grisly acts, even if he fascinates audiences with how voraciously he inwardly debates his motives with conscience and invites sympathy for having Claudius as a stepfather.[15]

Indisputably angry over his mother's quick and incestuous marriage to his uncle, Prince Hamlet aptly fills the role of the disgruntled dystopian hero as one who stands apart in Denmark.[16] While a native of the country, the Prince's pensiveness marks him as more of a

---

14. Darko Suvin, "Theses on Dystopia 2001," *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (New York: Routledge, 2003), 189.

15. Unlike Prince Hamlet, yet similar, Winston Smith and John the Savage are not very sympathetic. John the Savage's atavistic philosophy derives from his upbringing at the savage reservation. While a reader may be tempted to view him as a protagonist, his views are not superior to the citizens of the World State, and he also threatens the Deltas: "I'll *make* you be free whether you want to or not" (213). Winston Smith may appear as a protagonist in his desire for freedom, but his methods are exceedingly clumsy and idiotic. It comes as no surprise that the Thought Police entraps him. Numerous times he notes that his actions are complete folly. In a similar manner, the Prince's sacrifice of his conscience lessens the audience's identification of him as a protagonist.

16. Similar to Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and John the Savage in *Brave New World*, the Prince attempts to rebel against the treachery of Denmark only to practice the same treachery before the play's ending.

product of Wittenberg, a city renowned for its intellectualism.[17] Paralleling the role of a dystopian hero, the Prince reacts with disgust to his society's customs, such as excessive carousing, and desires more temperate practices to take hold of the upper ranks. From the very beginning of his appearance on stage, Hamlet aims to set himself apart from the court's festivity as its sullen, melancholic nemesis. In one instance, his words evince his sense of sophistication in comparison to the court. When King Claudius lightly heckles the Prince for his persistence in observing Old Hamlet's mourning rites by asking, "How is it that the clouds still hang on you?" (II.ii.66), Hamlet wryly replies, "Not so, my lord. I am too much in the sun" (II.ii.67). The remark subtly draws attention to the Prince's attitude towards himself as being enlightened, which he implicitly contrasts with the Danish court. While Hamlet may be disconsolate following his father's death, his mourning is not a sign of effeminate frailty, despite the king's and queen's opinion that the Prince's grief shows him to pay too much care to death as they insensitively believe "all that lives must die" (I.ii.72).[18] Instead, it shows the careless fissure that has developed between the regents and human sympathy for the death of Old Hamlet, and during the wedding celebration, the Prince physically tries to direct attention back towards this sympathy.

Viewing Denmark as a dystopia centers on seeing it through the Prince's eyes whose damning opinion of Claudius invites the audience to see the whole of Denmark tainted by his improper rule. The paucity of time that elapses between his mother's marriage to Claudius and his father's death is dystopian in that the Prince seems to be the only one who sees the

17. Scodel, 172.

18. In *Brave New World*, a similar conflict is seen between John the Savage who mourns his mother's passing and the annoying children that are on hand during their death conditioning, a process that desensitizes them to the expiration of others.

celebration as tarnishing the memory of Old Hamlet. Aware of this insensitivity, Claudius euphemistically tries to smooth over the indecorous ceremony by conjoining grief with gladness ("With an auspicious and a dropping eye, / With mirth in funeral and dirge in marriage" (I.ii.11-12)), which Millicent Bell says "employ[s] images that suggest an oxymoronic and monstrous merging of conditions and occasions." [19] Following the ceremony, Hamlet mocks the King's speech ("Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral baked meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables" (I.ii.180-181)), perceiving the conjoining of disparate attitudes as a political gesture that attempts to normalize the horrid succession. Bristol notes that Hamlet's quip "is a bitter jest about the unseemliness, the indecorousness of the situation that is at once a moral judgment on the behavior of Claudius and Gertrude as well as a philosophically principled objection to what he takes to be a scandalous adherence to certain carnivalesque customs within the court."[20] The Prince is ostensibly sour towards Denmark, and Claudius openly thanks the court for their "better wisdoms, which have freely gone / With this affair along," which suggests that they are aware of the impropriety stigmatizing his marriage to Gertrude (I.ii.15-16).

Claudius's callous reception of his stepson's mourning emotionally afflicts and angers the Prince. Nevertheless, the Queen and King convinces his stepson to remain in Denmark as the King hopes for the Prince's acquiescence in both behavior and mind. After the Prince agrees to stay at his mother's behest, Claudius responds diminutively in an attempt to quell Hamlet's protests to the festivities:

Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply.

---

19. Millicent Bell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Skepticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 46.

20. Bristol, "'Funeral Bak'd-Meats,'" 356.

Be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come.

This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet

Sits smiling to my heart, in grace whereof

No jocund health that Denmark drinks today

But the great canon to the clouds shall tell,

And the King's rouse the heaven shall bruit again,

Respeaking earthly thunder. (I.ii.121-128)

The King finds the mere appearance of his subordination amenable to his desire for his authority to proceed without obstruction. In a riposte to Hamlet's soured behavior, Claudius needles his stepson when he vows to give thanks for his obedience with intemperate drinking, which, for the abstemious Prince, is an excess that further offends his father's memory and the Prince's sense of decorum. In the exchange, the King prevails as the Prince's concession halts the subtle protest he had launched against the disregard shown to his father and allows his uncle to draw the attention back to the celebration rites. Hamlet is heavily dissatisfied with Claudius's nonchalant ascension and describes Denmark as a county that was once full of valor but has now fallen into decay.

Once the King exits the stage, Hamlet expresses displeasure with the activities and attitudes pervading his country in a fashion that identifies him as a single individual set against a dystopian king. Yet, Hamlet finds the kingdom exceedingly irreparable to the point that he nearly decides to cease existing. To escape the dystopia's noxious fumes, he contemplates suicide save for "the Everlasting['s]" commandment against it:

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable

Seem to me all the uses of this world!

Fie on't, ah fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden

That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature.

Possess it merely. (I.ii.133-137)

Hamlet's view describes Denmark as a kind of anti-Eden which directly contrasts with his idealized memory of Old Hamlet's reign. He connects his *contemptus mundi* with the political climate of his country, describing it as an "unweeded garden," which for Hamlet operates as a metaphor for the unchecked corruption that takes root in the country after his father's death. This description contrasts with the healthier image of a pruned, tended garden, (i.e. an efficient government). Opposing the new developments, Hamlet adopts an elitist perspective and looks on the King and those serving him as "Things rank and gross in nature." Ultimately in his soliloquy, the Prince associates his uncle with corruption as he denounces him as an unfit leader and an incestuous lecher.

While Hamlet sees Denmark as a dystopia, the Prince himself tragically becomes engulfed by the nightmare when his encounter with the Ghost, which appears in the likeness of his father, corrupts him with the desire for revenge. Unlike King Claudius who deceives the kingdom, the Ghost's corruptive methods do not involve doubling or deception. Instead, similar to Banquo's fear of the wayward sisters' revelations in *Macbeth*, the Ghost merely discloses facts regarding Claudius's rise in Denmark to spur Hamlet onto a path towards moral degradation. When the apparition says, "So the whole ear of Denmark / Is by a forged process of my death / Rankly abused," it reveals to the Prince the political infection taking root in the kingdom as a result of Claudius's rise to regency (I.v.37-39). With the timing of the Ghost's revelation, the Prince readily latches onto the claim as it gives more fuel to the rancor that he already harbored for the King. Ironically, as Eagleton implies, the Ghost's

synecdoche fails to give Hamlet any caution regarding the reasons for disclosing the information: "The danger involved in being made into an object is revealed in the Ghost's account of his murder: the poison which killed him was poured in at the ear."[21] Thus, it is possible that the words of the Ghost poison Hamlet in prompting him towards murder and damnation. As a result, the relationship between the Ghost and the Prince can be described as dystopian, except, instead of relying on lies to objectify Hamlet, the Ghost shows how the truth proves equally capable of spawning depravity. On the other hand, though the Prince forfeits his moral character in exacting revenge, his murder of Claudius presents him as a hero who extirpates a treasonous king.

Another dystopian aspect of Claudius's Denmark in relation to the Prince rests in how the King's constant revelry and deployment of intelligencers erodes Hamlet's moral fiber as his patience for justice wanes. Ultimately, his inability to revenge leads him to behave erratically. Despite Hamlet's intellectual complexity, his delay in killing Claudius contributes to a psychological descent in which he degradedly transitions from spouting philosophical wisdom to loathing himself and murdering others without hesitation. The more he delays, the more angry and passionate he becomes, reproaching himself as a "rogue and peasant slave" (II.ii.550), a "dull and muddy-mettled rascal" (II.ii.567), and "a whore [that] unpack[s] my heart with words" (II.ii.586). According to Pollnitz, the Prince's struggle to kill his uncle results from his "learnt capacity for 'discourse' and judgment […] reasserting itself against his emotion […] Hamlet's adherence to the forms of his education prevents him from

21. Eagleton, *Shakespeare and Society*, 44.

sustaining an impassioned state long enough to kill Claudius."[22] Pollnitz suggests that Hamlet's reluctance is a skill acquired from his training in Wittenberg that temporarily preserves his integrity. However, education does not prove adequate enough to prevent his moral downslide. Unable to serve as an unblemished hero, one who would weigh Claudius's crimes deliberately and judiciously, the words of the Ghost fully infect the Prince and turn him into a remorseless killer obsessed with gaining retribution against his uncle.

While his intellectual training may serve as a temporary barrier that dams his passions, the pressure to kill Claudius builds to an unsustainable capacity, and in a dystopic descent, his self-abuse develops into a full-fledged fear of aligning his soul with the work of hell, behaving on impulse rather than reflection.[23] Before meeting with his mother in her chambers following the performance of *The Murder of Gonzago,* Hamlet fears the harm that he may cause her in his rage as he speaks in terms that suggest a resistance to the demonic possession of himself:

> 'Tis now the very witching time of night,
>
> When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
>
> Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot

---

22. Aysha Pollnitz, "Educating Hamlet and Prince Hal," *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, ed. David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 135.

23. I call this a dystopian descent because many classic dystopian protagonists of the twentieth century, such as D-503 in Zamyatin's *We*, John the Savage in *Brave New World*, and Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, follow paths contrary to their wishes. D-503 wants to be a good citizen but is corrupted by I-330 and later lobotomized by the government. John the Savage aims to escape the hedonism of London by seeking an ascetic, flagellant solitude in the country, but when the citizens interrupt his privacy and drug him with soma, he takes part in their "orgy-porgy," committing suicide afterwards. Finally, Winston Smith wishes to rebel against Big Brother and remain faithful to Julia. After Winston is captured by the Thought Police, though, O'Brien tortures him, and he eventually betrays Julia and professes his love for Big Brother. With regards to Hamlet, the Ghost is a force that leads him away from temperance and down a path into murderous degeneracy, which contrasts with his value of contemplative passiveness and conscientious hesitations.

blood

And do such bitter business as the day

Would quake to look on. Soft, now to my mother.

O heart, lose not thy nature! Let not ever

The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom. (III.ii.387-393)

Hamlet's personification of the churchyards and hell as "breath[ing] out / Contagion" reflects the disease of his inner moral balance. He fears that his longing for revenge will deliver him into an intemperate fit that will reap dire consequences, physically for his victim and traumatically for his sanity. The fear of performing menacing deeds builds to the degree that he recalls the tyrannous Roman Emperor Nero and tries to dissuade himself from murdering his mother.[24] In this passage, Hamlet exhibits the degree to which his bloodlust has progressed since the Ghost set him on to revenge. Hamlet's impression of the night as being both hellish and a ghastly interval that allows for activities that daylight would find appalling is a pathetic fallacy that projects his inner turmoil onto the external environment.

After resisting the urge for rash justice with great consideration throughout the play, the Prince's indifference and propensity to murder without reflection towards the end illustrate how Claudius's dystopian Denmark has dragged Hamlet into its malfeasance. Despite believing that he is heaven's "scourge and minister" (III.iv.182), the offenses that the Prince commits undermine his claims to celestial representation and align him more with the dynamic of royal corruption described by Rosencrantz to the King. The intelligencer remarks in the King's company that "The cess of majesty / Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw /

24. Bevington's footnote to the reference of Nero states that the Roman emperor murdered his mother in retaliation for killing her husband. From ancient sources such as Tacitus's *Annals*, Nero was reputed as a tyrant.

What's near it with it" (III.iii.15-17). The words unintentionally refer to Claudius's regicide as well as how his corruption draws the Prince into degeneracy. As a result, Prince Hamlet reaps carnage more becoming of Hell than Heaven. His resolve to a vengeful fate is strongly pronounced when he returns from his voyage to England and proudly associates himself with his homeland for the first time ("This is I, / Hamlet the Dane" (V.i.257-258)), which is an attempt to align himself with his father's identity but ironically affiliates him with Claudius's treachery instead. As Bell writes, this declaration is "his own assumption of identity with the father whose old-style heroic mode he will at last assume."[25] His allegiance to Denmark may appear noble, but beneath his pride is the true nature of him being swept into corruption as he identifies himself with the country and its customs that he harshly critiqued. Prince Hamlet may restrain his passions for a while, but he ultimately falls victim to the incestuous King's political subterfuge.

In dystopias, the humor of satire is a common method for depicting the injustice of a 'bad place,' and as a kind of hero to extract the root of infection from Denmark and release it from Claudius's tainted rule, Hamlet satirizes the value placed upon kings in order to slight Claudius before being sent off to England. After the guards detain the Prince for Polonius's murder, the King demands to know the location of the counselor's body. Rather than give a straight answer, Hamlet seizes the chance to make a witty observation about the cycle of life that after death reduces nobility to a level of baseness lower than that of a beggar. After being asked about the corpse's whereabouts, Hamlet replies:

HAMLET: At supper.

25. Millicent Bell, 58.

KING: At supper? Where?

HAMLET: Not where he eats, but where 'a is eaten. A
certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him.
Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all
creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for mag-
gots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but
variable service—Two dishes, but one table. That's
the end. […]
A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat
of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that
worm.

KING: What dost thou mean by this?

HAMLET: Nothing but to show you how a king may go
a progress through the guts of a beggar. (IV.iii.17-25; 27-32)

The first half of Hamlet's remarks is comedic in that the illustration of "politic worms" equates the ploys that Polonius tried to use on Hamlet with the lowliness of invertebrate animals, equating interlopers and adulators like Polonius with spineless creatures. Also, the Prince acerbically depicts Polonius as being objectified by worms in the same manner that the counselor tried to objectify the Prince as a spy. In line with his pessimistic distaste for mankind, Hamlet notes that despite the disparities in wealth and rank in everyday society, all humans meet the same fate following burial as meat for worms. The display aims at diminishing the cachet of monarchs by satirically revealing privilege to be a channel for transitory power. Hamlet concludes his parable by literally showing the King that a low

beggar can devour the nobility, symbolizing the potential for revolution. The image of the beggar cannibalizing royalty comes across as cautionary in the sense that Hamlet's story of the beggar eating a king foreshadows the charge of the revolutionaries backing Laertes's botched storming of Elsinore. However, while Hamlet's gibe at Claudius's and Polonius's expense is comedic, his callow comportment regarding the severity of his murder demonstrates the degree to which the pursuit of revenge has desensitized him to the value of human life. The Prince's undercutting of Claudius, then, shows how the King's inept reign will be threatened with inward collapse through insurrection. At the same time the Prince's whimsy evinces his own moral degeneration. Though he somberly wept his own father's death, he reacts to Polonius's death with comical indifference.

The Prince completes his transformation from a man of delay to one of action so precisely that when he does finally kill Claudius, the King's death transpires inconsequentially and so quickly that the act does not carry the element of surprise it would have wrought if performed earlier in the play. The murder is anti-climactic in due part to the dissolution of Hamlet's reflection on the implications of his actions, which evidences the treachery at work in the Prince's moral fiber. Eagleton discusses the Prince's reflections and delay as being catalysts for his degradation, noting how Hamlet's efforts to extricate himself from the gaze of Claudius, Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern contribute to his loss of integrity:

> But the effort [of resisting definition,] paradoxically, is destructive of the very integrity he hopes to preserve; he, like the court, becomes involved in secretive and calculating politics, only in his case the politics, ironically, is a way of staying free from the machinations of the others. In a false society, there are a number of ways of

> preserving integrity, but they are all self-defeating. A man, to avoid the exploitation of others, may make himself opaque, as Hamlet does; but to refuse action is to stagnate, to lose spontaneity. He may, on the other hand, try to play the society's game of manipulation, and by playing it better than they do hoist them with their own petard.[26]

Surrounded by devious and tedious members of the court who seek only advancement, Hamlet cannot whimsically toy with them and expect to entirely defer confrontation. He fends off their spying games with riddles, but when these men stumble into the more serious matters that concern the Prince's life, Hamlet, like a cornered animal, rashly strikes out, murdering Polonius and arranging Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's executions. Hamlet engages in these deadly political games because Claudius's regicide creates the conditions that haul Hamlet and others into the minefield of his corrupt desire to eliminate threats to his rule. As Fitzmaurice asserts, "While skilled in [directing the vexatious], [Hamlet] is not skilled at making himself free, and he is ultimately unable to overcome his environment."[27] Thus, while Hamlet scores small victories in outwitting his adversaries, as Eagleton asserts the ultimate victory belongs to Claudius and his followers since they tempt the Prince's wrath throughout the play and are the main reason why he succumbs to sinister passions.

In this fashion, Prince Hamlet is like other dystopian heroes in that he embraces grievous vices in trying to purge corruption from his homeland. In many ways, Prince

---

26. Eagleton, *Shakespeare and Society*. 63.

27. Fitzmaurice, 156.

Hamlet begins to mirror the adversary he wishes to defeat, costing him his life.[28] Even if inadvertently, his death does appear to release the Danish people from the King's treachery. However, whether or not the kingdom's freedom from treachery will endure remains unclear as the play concludes with Young Fortinbras invading Denmark and laying claim to the throne. Bristol sees *Hamlet* as coming full circle in its political troubles, noting how the occasion of Fortinbras's claim to the Danish throne mirrors Claudius's oxymoronic speech at the play's beginning. Bristol observes that "melancholy joins with mirth again as Hamlet becomes a prop in someone else's political pageantry."[29] While Hamlet bestows his blessing on Fortinbras's election, if his invasion can be called an election, the Prince fails to question the warlike manner in which Fortinbras lays siege to Elsinore. There is no telling whether Young Fortinbras will treat the Danish fairly or abuse his privilege as a foreigner unconcerned with the nation's people, leaving the future of the country's dystopian condition uncertain.

To understand Prince Hamlet's moral disintegration, one should recognize how it always traces back to the corrupted ascension of King Claudius. Examining Claudius's treacherous behavior closely not only underscores his role as a villain but also reveals how he secures his reign through furtive practices. His intensive surveillance of the Prince and others characterizes him as a dystopian figurehead whose corruption pollutes the body of the state. The progression of Claudius's leadership closely aligns with the repressive governments

28. John the Savage's participation in hedonism is previously noted. As for Winston Smith, when he joins the possibly fictional Brotherhood resistance, he vows to murder, spread venereal diseases, and throw acid in the face of children to defy Big Brother (172).

29. Michael Bristol, "'Funeral Bak'd-Meats': Carnival and the Carnivalesque in *Hamlet*," in *Hamlet*, ed. Susanne L. Wofford (New York: Bedford, 1994), 365.

commonly depicted in dystopian literature, particularly *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where hedonism and surveillance, respectively, perpetuate political power. In trying to delineate the most prevalent traits of the genre, many critics have taken an inventory of common themes, and they resonate with the King's approach to government. Gregory Claeys's characterization of dystopia aptly applies to *Hamlet*: "'Dystopia' is often used […] to describe a fictional portrayal of a society in which evil or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand."[30] From the perspective of Prince Hamlet, the country's practices have veered far from a positive trajectory with the nation's control passing from a paragon "Hyperion to a satyr" (I.ii.140).

A brief inventory of the King's political maneuvers throughout the play outlines the dystopic proclivities of his rule: Claudius limits Hamlet's movements through continuous surveillance, making him a prisoner under his watchful eye; the King's followers unquestioningly heed the sovereign's orders in undertaking perfidious acts of spying on the Prince, and the King imposes inhumane labor demands on the lower ranks, having them to produce munitions in a manner that causes the guard Marcellus to question "What might be toward, that this sweaty haste / Doth make the night joint-laborer with the day" (I.i.82)? All of these unscrupulous acts spring from Claudius's sole crime of regicide, which, if discovered, would invalidate his ascension. Despite the crime's lack of discovery, his gruesome murder operates like an original sin that releases a Pandora's Box of troubles upon the kingdom. The people of Denmark physically suffer under Claudius's reign while the King himself revels in the luxuries reserved for his rank such as carousing and play-going.

30. Gregory Claeys, "The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell," in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopia Literature*, edited by Gregory Claeys, 107-131 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Fitzmaurice avers that "Claudius exploits [the patron-client] system to maintain his power, and he also employs courtly entertainments and revels that, as Hamlet observes, far exceed those previously employed in the kingdom."[31] As a result, the Danish people generally do not view the King favorably. Claudius at one point laments that Hamlet is "loved of the distracted multitude" and with good reason (IV.iv.4). As evidenced by Claudius's confessional soliloquy, where he desperately wonders "what form of prayer / Can serve my turn?" and his startled reaction to *The Murder of Gonzago*, the King runs his kingdom as a guilty man trying to enjoy his rewards while keeping his transgressions hidden, and many people, such as the Prince and the lower ranks, take exception to his vanity (III.iii.51-52).

In dystopias such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), surveillance is a common trope that underscores the effect to which brutal regimes can control and limit the will of their subjects; Claudius's order for the surveillance of Hamlet reflects this desire for control. While the new order of Denmark appears festive, the King cunningly works to monitor political rivals in order to safeguard his newly acquired fortune. Once Claudius and Gertrude persuade Hamlet to remain at court rather than return to Wittenberg, the King loses no time in assigning intelligencers to follow the Prince and surveil his behavior. Scodel observes the doubling nature of Claudius's desire to keep Hamlet at Elsinore:

> Claudius represents his royal "desire" as a benevolent wish that Hamlet stay in the king's loving "eye." Presumably he wants to keep a watchful eye on his nephew and fears Hamlet's freedom to plot from a foreign principality […] Hamlet's continued

31. Fitzmaurice, 153.

> mourning for his father amid the celebration of the new king's coronation and marriage suggests hostility to the new regime.[32]

The court's assumption that Hamlet has gone mad facilitates Claudius's ability to monitor the Prince without scrutiny, and he takes full advantage of the opportunity to ensure his claim to the throne. The need for stability extends the King's reach to suppress other threats as he also directs his men to monitor Ophelia and Laertes. He desires to monitor Ophelia for fear that "she may strew / Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds" while he attends Laertes in order to prevent a resurgence of his insurrection (IV.v.14-15).In fact, spying pervades the matter of Claudius's directives to the extent that he clearly, and even paranoiacally, fears subversion of his authority. He constantly bids other characters to "set some watch" (V.i.299) over others: "follow her close. Give her good watch" (IV.v.75), "let's follow" (IV.vii.192), "wait upon him" (V.i.296), and at a point when he fully suspects Hamlet of opposing him, he exclaims that "madness in great ones must not unwatched go" (III.i.191). His suspicion of dissent and his means to suppress it acts as a kind of prototype for the surveillance methods that make the Thought Police in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the Eyes of God in *The Handmaid's Tale* so terrifying. Both forms of espionage rely on the disguise afforded through rhetorical doubling as a means to destroy or curb the wills of political dissidents.

Claudius's capacious, dystopic desire for spying creates an intelligence network that labors to provide him with a privileged, panoptic view into the actions of his political opponents. His unrelenting call for spying proceeds from a fear of being dispatched in the same manner that he deposed his brother. To monitor the Prince, he pretends to care for his

32. Scodel, 170-171.

well-being while harboring enmity. When he assigns Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to follow Hamlet, Claudius says:

> What it should be,
> More than his father's death, that thus hat put him
> So much from the understanding of himself,
> I cannot dream of. (II.ii.7-10)

However, as Scodel suggested, his purported concern for Hamlet's well-being serves as a front for his wish to monitor him for political reasons. While Claudius's purposes are vainglorious, his intelligencers do not show signs that they know of his intentions to rid himself of Hamlet, which may lessen their culpability in enabling the treacherous King. Rather than solely rely on intelligencers, though, Claudius involves himself in acquiring intelligence. In Act Three, before hiding behind the arras to observe Hamlet, Claudius divulges to Gertrude the nature of his stratagem, remarking that "[Polonius] and myself, lawful espials, / Will so bestow ourselves that seeing, unseen, / We may of their encounter frankly judge" (III.i.32-34). Claudius gives official sanction to a questionable act that allows both him and Polonius to eavesdrop on the Prince under the pretense that they can figure out and treat the source of Prince Hamlet's imbalance. Especially after the revelation of the King's regicide, though, Claudius's true reason for spying on Hamlet is to discover sedition.

While the spies look on in secret, hoping to entrap the Prince, Claudius observes Hamlet make a vague threat against the crown, which gives the King a pretext to callously order his execution. When Hamlet tells Ophelia that "we will have no more marriage. Those that are married already—all but one—shall live. The rest shall keep as they are" (III.i.149-151), Claudius detects that Hamlet refers to him as he connects the quip with his stepson's

hostility towards his marriage to Gertrude. Some productions of the play clearly indicate that Hamlet knows of Claudius's and Polonius's presence at this moment, which heightens the tension of the unspoken duel between the King and the Prince. While Claudius does not directly accuse Hamlet of sedition, his reaction to his stepson's whirling words and his resulting plan strongly imply that he fears for his life:

> Love? His affections do not that way tend;
> Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little
> Was not madness. There's something in his soul
> O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,
> And I do doubt the hatch and disclose
> Will be some danger, which for to prevent,
> I have in quick determination
> Thus set it down: he shall with speed to England. (III.i.167-172)

Contrary to the King's words, his announcement hardly appears to be a plan made in "quick determination." It more likely is an opportunity to execute a well-calculated strategy. Based on the audience's knowledge that a trip to England will equal death for Hamlet, the play shows Claudius behaving like a dystopian ruler aching for a pretense on which he could easily dispose of his stepson, and that pretense relies on a persuasion that portrays the Prince as a disease within the body politic. In this passage, the King pretends concern for Hamlet, but the fear that there "will be some danger" is a subtext for Claudius's panicked need for self-preservation. The fact that Claudius observes that Prince Hamlet's discontent does not result from frustrated love or madness suggests a shrewd detectability on his part, one foreign to his intelligencers. Using the occasion to eliminate the Prince, the King deceptively

convinces his followers that England will offer the best treatment in restoring Hamlet's mental health.

From a contemporary perspective, Claudius's desired agency as a spy anticipates Jeremy Bentham's prison model that he proposed in early nineteenth century England. Looking at Bentham's original plan, there is a strong connection between Claudius's dystopian device of espionage and Bentham's placement of the prison guards in a concealed tower. Connecting the two gives credibility to Hamlet's claim that "Denmark's a prison" as the majority of the play puts a great deal of focus on the restrictions Claudius places on the Prince's solitude (II.ii.243). Bentham in outlining his plans concerning the prison's main purpose writes, "By *blinds* and other contrivances, the keeper concealed from the observation of the prisoners, unless where he thinks fit to show himself: hence, on their part, the sentiment of an invisible omnipresence," which in utopian terms, aims to inspire good behavior through fear.[33] While Bentham designs his prison with the aim of reforming criminals, Claudius tries to make himself omnipresent to cater to his corrupt desire for power, seeking to preempt challenges to his throne. The perspective he seeks would allow him to secretly scrutinize Hamlet's motives. As Eagleton notes, "'Seeing unseen' is the ideal situation for a man: he can be purely himself without being objectified by the look of another, as Hamlet feels himself seen and exploited when he becomes aware of Polonius in hiding."[34] At one point in their efforts, Polonius quips a few verses that aptly describes his and the King's concealment as corrupt, unethically relying on the outward image of noble

33. Jeremy Bentham, "Panopticon Papers," in *A Bentham Reader*, edited by Mary Peter Mack (New York: Pegasus, 1969), 194.

34. Eagleton, *Shakespeare and Society,* 46.

intentions as a pretense for unscrupulous action: "'Tis too much proved—that with devotion's visage / And pious action we do sugar o'er / The devil himself" (III.i.47-49). The remark ironically applies to Claudius as he relies on a false concern for the Prince to hide his iniquitous aims as he manipulates his intelligencers to commit trespasses in order to preserve the spoils of his murder.

In placing his welfare and desires before his followers, Claudius comes to represent the dystopic root of all that is "rotten in the state of Denmark." His inexperience with and obsession for power causes him to treat those in his service inhumanely, which only increases his unpopularity with his subjects. For example, when he learns of Polonius's death, rather than express remorse for the counselor, he imagines himself in the situation as a hypothetical victim: "Oh, heavy deed! / It had been so with us, had we been there" (IV.i.12-13). The "we" in this statement operates in a double sense. While it may be used as a plural pronoun to indicate Gertrude and himself, it is more likely that Claudius narcissistically refers to the royal "we," admitting his fear of a premature death. Later, whether from panic or from a blatant lack of care, he shows the extent of his depraved imprudence when he fails to properly honor Polonius with a ceremonious burial. He plainly confesses his inefficiency to Gertrude: "For good Polonius' death—and we have done but greenly / In hugger-mugger to inter him" (IV.v.84-85). While Claudius has once again attempted to smooth over disconcerting circumstances, he strangely mismanages a basic rite bestowed on men who serve the king.

Claudius notes that the event of Polonius's death and Hamlet's departure awakens the people to his dystopic mismanagement. He confides in Gertrude that, due to the events, "the people [are] muddied, / Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers" (IV.v.83).

Polonius's son Laertes is understandably upset by the King's indecorous treatment of his father's death and threatens to stage an overthrow with the help of other discontented subjects. In relation to dystopia, not only does the funeral of Polonius prove dehumanizing to Laertes, but it gives discontents a pretense to rebel against the status quo with Laertes as their leader. Only the King's dexterous skill in persuasion staves off the attempt and saves him from imprisonment and/or death. When Claudius does broker a peace, Laertes sternly warns the king that he must call into question his father's "obscure funeral" that had "No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones, / No noble rite, nor formal ostentation" (IV.v.216-218). Claudius's reduction of Laertes actions from open violence to passive threats signifies the de-escalation of the rebel's force, and after calming Laertes's rage, the King goes on to dominate the direction of their conversation. Similar to his reaction to the Prince's obedience at the wedding celebration, Claudius diminutively refers to Laertes as "a good child and a true gentleman" (IV.v.153). In fact, once the mad Ophelia crosses Laertes's sight, Claudius uses chicanery to seize upon Laertes's grief for his father and shock at his sister's madness. The King offers to talk with Laertes's wisest friends and claims that if "They find us touched, we will our kingdom give, / Our crown, our life, and all that we call ours / To you in satisfaction" (IV.v.210-212). Never in danger of forfeiting his rule, Claudius offers Laertes this option, because he knows that he can use the show of goodwill to redirect Laertes' anger onto Prince Hamlet. As a result, Claudius does not suffer any direct consequence for his disrespectful burial of Polonius. Instead, he takes control of Laertes's passions to suit his own ends when he advises him how to kill the Prince and make it look like an accident.

Not exactly an unfortunate victim of circumstances, Polonius functions as an appendage to Claudius's dystopian rule and creates much grief for himself when he willingly

meddles in politics beyond the scope of his competency. His exchanges with Hamlet catalyze his undoing, and it is also important to note the degree to which his conniving as a counselor transfers over into the management of his family affairs. His interactions with his son and daughter evince an excessive degree of hypocrisy and domineering that portrays him as an unequitable parent. For example, in seeing Laertes off to France in Act One Polonius pontificates to his son regarding how he should socially comport himself. Among the precepts given, Polonius instructs Laertes to "Give thy thoughts not tongue / […] Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice / […] to thine own self be true" (I.iii.59;68;78). While these precepts are certainly courtly and learned, Polonius violates them nearly as soon as he voices them. Regarding the first two principles, the audience observes an irreducible verbosity both in his dialogue with Hamlet and with Claudius as he hardly gives his hearers any time to respond. In fact, Polonius is terrible at analyzing conflicts in that he insists his ideas are accurate even when he is presented with evidence to the contrary, particularly when he maintains that Hamlet is upset over Ophelia's rejection immediately after he and Claudius covertly observe the pair's encounter. Concerning the last precept ("to thine own self be true"), he openly disregards it immediately after Laertes departs for France. The father aggressively interrogates Ophelia regarding her relationship to Hamlet, and he demands her to "give [him] up the truth" (I.iii.99). After many of her protestations that Hamlet "hath importuned [her] with love / in honorable fashion" (I.iii.111-2), he coerces her to break off correspondence with him, expecting her to be true to her father rather than to herself.

If a family can be considered a microcosm of governance, then Polonius, who preaches virtuous behavior while failing to heed his own principles, can be seen as a dystopian father. In dealing with Ophelia so harshly, either Polonius is a deliberate hypocrite

or there is a cultural subtext operating in his precept "to thine own self be true" that reserves the maxim exclusively for males. But even this subtext cannot be since he does not allow Laertes to be true to himself either, especially when he dispatches Reynaldo to France for the purpose of spying on his son. Despite his hypocrisy and conceit being character flaws, Polonius ironically congratulates himself for effectively rearing his children and assumedly but falsely grasping the cause of the Prince's distemper. Despite what Martin Dodsworth calls "the old man's fantasies of his own wisdom and insight" or Pollnitz's criticism that "Like Montaigne's schoolmasters, [Polonius] showed others 'the steep and thorny way to heaven' but did not use [his] learning to school [his] own conduct," Polonius believes himself to be frightfully clever.[35] Ultimately, Polonius proves foppishly dystopian in that he believes himself to be upstanding and lofty when the reality of events exposes him to be a lying blowhard who abuses his authority through double standards.

When Polonius appoints himself the King's intelligencer, he nettles Prince Hamlet by believing himself proficient in spying when in reality, he is embarrassingly incompetent. In fact, when talking with the Prince alone, Polonius forms many conjectures about Hamlet's condition that are outlandishly and comically erroneous. In this case, Polonius is a dystopian character not only in how he pretends to be interested in Hamlet while attempting to use him as a means to advance in Claudius's favor but in how much he persistently vexes the Prince with his maladroit performance as a spy. He fails to critically analyze the Prince's insinuations, and yet, he naively thrusts himself into the middle of the Hamlet's affairs. While many critics including William Kerrigan argue that Hamlet rashly and needlessly slays

35. Martin Dodsworth, *Hamlet Closely Observed* (London: Athlone P, 1985), 75. And Pollnitz, 133.

Polonius, audiences of the play cannot forget the extent to which the counselor is complicit in spying on a prince, a position second only to the king.[36] As Hamlet says, he is a "wretched, rash, intruding fool," who voluntarily places himself in the crossfire between the Prince and the King (III.iv.32). While critics may correctly dispute that Polonius is killed performing what he sees as his natural duty, others including Bevington comment on his "complicity in jaded court politics" and his inability to understand the degree of friction between Hamlet and Claudius.[37]

Polonius's spying is also dystopic in that his fatuous attendance exacerbates Hamlet, driving him to fend off the elder informant with an incisive wit.[38] For instance, Act Two features the first verbal duel between the characters, and the Prince mordantly strikes against the old man, showing his impatience with the counselor's obvious attempts to monitor him. Rather than interact with Polonius in a fashion that gives the counselor hope for success in his mission, Hamlet distracts him with what seems to be nonsense: "POLONIUS: Do you know me, my lord? / HAMLET: Excellent well. You are a fishmonger" (II.ii.174). Not nonsense at all, Hamlet's quick rejoinder satirizes Polonius's repressive control over his daughter. Coming to the same conclusion, John Dover Wilson writes, "'Fishmonger,' as many commentators have noted, means a pandar or procurer."[39] Marvin Rosenberg also notes

---

36. See William Kerrigan's *Hamlet's Perfection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 53. "Hamlet, deep in rashness, does not even bother at first to address a single word to the corpse."

37. Bevington, 547.

38. In terms of modern dystopia, this annoyance can be seen as paralleling the aggravation experienced by John the Savage in *Brave New World* when the World State citizens follow him to the lighthouse when he wishes for solitude.

39. John Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 105.

the sexual implications of the term: "This is funny…The way Hamlet says *fish*—sometimes 'fissssh;' the twiny gesture of the hand; the kind of archetypal suggestion of something sexual, vaginal, something soiled, something venal."[40] "[U]nable to dislodge this leech," Hamlet proceeds to liken Polonius's counsel to corruption: "For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion—Have you a daughter? […] Let her not walk i'th' sun. Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive, friend, look to't" (II.ii.181-182; 184-186).[41] The sun breeding maggots from a dead dog serves as a metaphor for the King's relationship to Polonius. Here, Claudius is the sun, shining on the state and breeding unsavory maggots like the counselor from a dead dog; the dead dog represents the deceased Old Hamlet, suggesting that Polonius served him before Claudius. Hamlet's caution against Ophelia's conceiving in the sun caustically refers to Polonius's desire to withhold his daughter from Hamlet's royal company in order to prevent pregnancy out of wedlock. The caustic illustration serves as a defense mechanism that aims to undercut Polonius's attempts to use Hamlet as a source for advancement, and in his mentioning of Ophelia, the Prince acrimoniously equates the counselor with a procurer in flesh.

As a dotard who cannot sift through the Prince's subtext, Polonius habitually projects his own thoughts onto Hamlet's remarks, showing a narrow scope of thinking that associates him with Claudius's treachery. In response to Hamlet's remarks about his control over Ophelia, Polonius reflects to himself: "Still harping on my daughter. Yet he knew me not at first; 'a said I was a fishmonger. 'A is far gone. And truly *in my youth I suffered* much extremity for love, very near this. I'll speak to him again" (II.ii.188-192 [*my italics*]).

---

40. Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Hamlet* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 399.

41. Ibid., 400.

Polonius fallaciously assesses Hamlet's state of mind by comparing it to his youth as if they are of similar temperaments. When Polonius does speak to the Prince again, Hamlet continues to toy with him. Polonius fails to understand the situation as he is only able to surmise "how pregnant sometimes his replies are" rather than detect the attacks contained in Hamlet's biting witticisms (II.ii.208-209). Rather than truly make himself privy to new information about what ails the Prince, Polonius only looks for keywords that support his initial hypothesis about being lovelorn. For audiences, and for Hamlet, Polonius's sudden interest in the Prince (this is the first time the two characters speak alone on stage) lays bare the fact that the counselor's interest in speaking with him derives from a desire to satisfy Claudius.

Polonius's interaction with Hamlet also proves dystopian in that he objectifies the Prince, using him for information that would be a means for him to satisfy his ambition and gain rewards by the King. As Charney points out, when Hamlet cries out "How now? A rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!" (III.iv.25) before killing Polonius, there are explicit disclosures of the counselor's culpability in abusing his place at court: "Polonius is a rat in the proverbial sense of an unwelcome intruder who cannot be trusted. Rat also carries connotations of a deserter, spy, and informer."[42] The words "Dead for a ducat" indicate Hamlet's view that the intelligencer disrupts his privacy as a way to fill his coin purse as opposed to benignly serve the kingdom. According to Hamlet, Polonius is not an innocent casualty of mere rashness but is one whose initiative to meddle holds him partly responsible for his death. Bell ventures to say that Polonius' murder is "a death we tend to regard almost as Hamlet does, as a bad joke,

42. Maurice Charney, *Hamlet's Fictions* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 84.

another interpolation into the serious business of the story."[43] Thus, Polonius's duty is dystopian in that Hamlet calling him a rat implies that the intruding fool's concern is not fpr the health of the state but the inflation of his ego. In addition to tediously enduring Polonius, Hamlet must suffer his doltish friends turned spies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as they, too, fumble as spies and persist in their attempts to extract intelligence.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern share a similar function to Polonius in that all three intelligencers bumble in trying to cull information from the Prince. Their eagerness to undertake espionage with the hopes of advancement merely enables the King's corrupted seat of power. When the pair meets with Hamlet in Act Two, it is worth noting that, in terms of subtlety, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are worse than Polonius at dissembling the fact that they are spying for Claudius. To their embarrassment, Hamlet quickly detects their function and rebukes their ineptness in trying to use him as a means to please the King:

> HAMLET: […] Were you not sent for? Is it your
> own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, come, deal
> justly with me. Come, come. Nay, speak.
> GUILDENSTERN: What should we say, my lord?
> HAMLET: Anything but to th' purpose. You were sent
> for, and there is a kind of confession in your looks
> which your modesties have not craft enough to color. (II.ii.275-81)

The degree to which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern lack the dexterity to spy infuriates the Prince as he recognizes the pair as extensions of Claudius's eyes and ears. Their "modesties"

43. Millicent Bell, 43.

reveal to Hamlet how untrustworthy childhood friends are when the King's favor is at stake. Interestingly, while Polonius receives vague hints that Hamlet knows of his purpose, poor Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hear it directly and in their dull wit still attempt to bait the Prince into revealing useful information for the King. In Branagh's film, the actors portraying Rosencrantz and Guildenstern perspicaciously capture the trepidation of being quickly discovered in this scene, enacting facial expressions that clearly show a panicked, constrained amiability. Their dystopian relationship to Hamlet, then, is that the pair comes to the Prince under the false pretense of friendship while in reality, they have betrayed him in exchange for material reward. Rather than possessing friends to offer him consolation in a time of grief, the Prince gets stuck with inept enemies who obnoxiously try to discover the cause of his distemper in exchange for courtly recompense.

Despite Hamlet's direct confrontation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern regarding their purposes, the pair continue to foster a dystopian relationship with the Prince by following and nagging him. The Prince, though, confounds them with his responses to their inquiries as he subtly derides their attempts to extract information from him. For example, following Claudius's displeasure with Hamlet's addition to *The Murder of Gonzago*, Guildenstern implores the Prince to "put [his] discourse into some frame" (III.ii.307-8) and to make him "a wholesome answer" (III.ii.314-5). However, believing the state to be "out of frame" (I.ii.20), the Prince denies Guildenstern's request, remarking that he cannot provide him with a coherent response as his "wit's diseased" (III.ii.320-321). As a character with explicit knowledge of Claudius's corruption and as one dissatisfied with the condition of Danish culture, the Prince understands that his deviation from Danish political currents makes him appear as a sickness within the political body. In reality, though, the audience

knows that Hamlet aims to serve as a remedy, seeing himself as the one to prune the 'unweeded garden' of Denmark by dismembering its sick head (i.e. the King). Thus, the Prince refuses to cave to the pressures of his former schoolmates and instead continues to mock their service to the King by behaving contrary to their expectations. Nevertheless, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern persist, demonstrating why they deserve derision. Rosencrantz behaves shamelessly in trying to gather intelligence, making an emotional appeal to the Prince regarding their supposed friendship. He chastises the Prince, "You do surely bar the door upon your own liberty if you deny your griefs to your friend" (III.ii.336-7). Rosencrantz's pathos emphasizes his shallowness as he invokes his past familiarity with the Prince even after being found out to be a spy. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern persist in trying to convince Hamlet that they have his best interests in mind, but their attempts are futile.[44] Hamlet's resolve allows him to dodge their specious rhetoric as he wrangles with the possibility of assassinating his stepfather.

Similar to his resistance to Polonius, Prince Hamlet continually sneers at the pair's pursuit of intel, ridiculing their desire to use him as a means to their selfish end. When the pair confronts the Prince following the performance of *The Murder of Gonzago*, the troupe of players interrupt, arriving with recorders. Hamlet is seemingly distracted when he retrieves a recorder from one of the players and insists that Guildenstern play music with the instrument. The diversion, though, operates as a ruse that the Prince then uses to expose his friends'

44. This appeal bears great similarity to the dystopian rhetoric embedded in O'Brien's dialogues with Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: "I am well aware, you are clinging to your disease under the impression it is virtue […] You must try harder. It is not easy to become sane […] Shall I tell you why we have brought you here? To cure you! To make you sane! Will you understand, Winston, that no one whom we bring to this place ever leaves our hands uncured?" George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 246; 251; 253.

inefficiency in performing their office to the King. After Guildenstern clarifies that he does not possess the necessary skill to master the recorder, Hamlet lashes out at his naiveté:

> HAMLET: Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing
> you make of me! You would play upon me, you would
> seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart
> of my mystery, you would sound me from my lowest
> note to the top of my compass […]
> 'Sblood, do you think I am easier
> to be played on than a pipe? (III.ii.362-66; 368-9)

Tired of their harassment, the Prince openly voices his disparaging opinion of the pair's audacity to think themselves capable of manipulating him. He views himself as more profound and advanced than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and takes the opportunity to censure their imbecility. Unfortunately for Claudius, his agents are amateurish and fail to fulfill their commission. In fact, all of Claudius's agents confirm Roland Frye's assertion that Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Polonius "conform to Erasmus'[s] statement that a tyrant chooses as advisors 'stupid dolts, on whom he imposes,' and in such perilous service 'stupid dolts' do not long survive, as Claudius' flatterers discover."[45] If Claudius's agents possessed wit enough to compete with Hamlet, then perhaps the Prince would have more of a challenge in resisting their company.

Hamlet also decries Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's unquestioning devotion to their employment, describing their value to the King as trifling. When Claudius commissions their

45. Roland Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet: Issues and Responses in 1600* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 39.

service, the pair unhesitatingly sees to their task without concern for how the King will use them after they complete their objective. Scodel says that the characters' service to the king "dramatize[s] the loss of personal identity that comes from the willful embrace of servitude."[46] Unlike Hamlet, the spies willingly submit themselves to a treacherous enterprise. As an avenger for Denmark, Hamlet whimsically reveals the faults of his companions behind a royal mask of madness. By doing so, he criticizes the corrupt King and assertively conjectures about his friends' lack of value as being mere objects of a fraudulent regent. When Hamlet kills Polonius, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seek him out to put him under guard, the Prince characterizes the degree to which the spies hazard their well-being in subordinating themselves to Claudius. Hamlet is especially forward with Rosencrantz:

> HAMLET: Do not believe it.
>
> ROSENCRANTZ: Believe what?
>
> HAMLET: That I can keep your counsel and not mine own. Besides, to be demanded of a sponge, what rep-lication should be made by the son of a king?
>
> ROSENCRANTZ: Take you me for a sponge, my lord?
>
> HAMLET: Ay, sir, that soaks up the King's countenance, his rewards, his authorities […]
>
> When he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you and, sponge, you

46. Scodel, 177.

shall be dry again. (IV.ii.10-17; 20-22)

Idiotically, Rosencrantz interprets Hamlet calling him a "sponge" literally, but Hamlet noticeably uses the word as a metaphor for the relationship between an intelligencer and a dishonorable king. While Rosencrantz and Guildenstern may expect honor by serving Claudius, Prince Hamlet anticipates that the King will abuse their service by gathering the intelligence he seeks without compensating the accumulators. Thus, Hamlet's likening of Rosencrantz to a sponge presents a picture of abusive authority and the abuse of one's lowers for private gain. Yet, while Hamlet can certainly criticize Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's service to the King and voice his abhorrence, he cannot escape the sycophants' constant surveillance of him, which is a common quandary for rebels within a dystopia.[47] Erika Gottlieb, who briefly draws connections between Shakespearean tragic heroes and dystopian protagonists, notes how both undergo types of trials and punishments.[48] Hamlet's trial occurs under the supervision of Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern as he is cornered into enduring their idiocy in their attempts to soak up any information that he may disclose.

Like Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are casualties swept up in Claudius's treacherous rule, but it is their overreaching ambition that places them in the predicament that leads to their executions. According to Roland Frye, Hamlet's satiric derision of Rosencrantz as a sponge reveals the pair's blindness to the gravity of the political conflict in which they interlope:

47. The relationship of Hamlet to the intelligencers is reflected by John the Savage's relationship to the World State citizens that make a spectacle of him when he desires solitude near the end of the novel.

48. Gottlieb, 30-31.

> The sponge, as we have seen, had a long history as a symbol linking sycophants with tyrants, and Jeffrey Whitney's *Emblems* contains a visual rendering of the same idea, but Hamlet comes close enough to 'drawing a picture' of the admonition for his erstwhile friends, who nonetheless refuse to be enlightened or even alerted to what lies in store for them. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have cast their lot with the obvious, with blatant power, and they show no sign of reflection or evaluation before or after.[49]

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, then, share in the responsibility for their fates since they erroneously pursue "blatant power" rather than respect and honor an old friend. In fact, while many critics quickly and rightly criticize Hamlet's remorselessness in sending the two former friends to their deaths, audiences must think that in some fashion the clumsy cretins' wish for social advancement led them into mortal danger. Their blind service to Claudius destines them to be the ones that deliver their childhood friend to his execution. Tragically, the Prince discovers the King's letters and turns the tables on them.

The manner of Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's deaths illustrates the results of the disease that spreads throughout the Danish commonwealth from Claudius's dystopian rule. Once a sympathetic protagonist, the Prince is infected by Claudius's intelligencers in that their pestering drives him towards a villainous disregard for life. When confiding in Horatio, Hamlet's fashion of justifying his arrangement of Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's executions gives cause for moral apprehension. Rather than talk of his old friends as

49. Roland Frye, 151.

unfortunate causalities mixed up in a bitter quarrel, he speaks of them without ceding any compassion:

> Why, man, they did make love to this employment
> They are not near my conscience. Their defeat
> Does by their own insinuation grow.
> 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
> Between the pass and fell incensèd points
> Of mighty opposites. (V.ii.57-62)

The Prince scoffs at their attempts to involve themselves in a feud he sees as being beyond their comprehension. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern may not possess the suavity to be successful spies, but they take responsibility for their fates by throwing themselves into the midst of serious political affairs. At the same time, audiences should feel as disgusted as Horatio in that Hamlet at this stage of the play begins to resemble his uncle's tyranny in how lightly he regards their deaths. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern lack the acumen to evade Hamlet's stratagem that costs them their lives, and the Prince becomes embittered about the spying to the point that he is ready to kill without considering the collateral damage. Unfortunately, Hamlet's revenge costs him his own moral integrity.

By the end of the play, no one escapes the dystopian abyss of Claudius's transgressions. Northrop Frye adequately points out that *Hamlet* is "a tragedy without a catharsis, a tragedy in which everything noble and heroic is smothered under ferocious revenge codes, treachery, spying and the consequences of weak actions by broken wills."[50]

---

50. Northrop Frye, *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*, edited by Robert Sandler (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 90.

Claudius's regicide and incestuous union infects the community of Denmark. His treachery creates a dystopia that rejects the traditional codes of warrior kings and establishes a hedonistic rule that he maintains through rhetorical chicanery while thrusting the preparations of inescapable war onto the lower ranks. As a hero for Denmark, Hamlet resorts to disguising himself as a madman as a way to approach Claudius and exact revenge for his abuses of the kingdom. Yet, like John the Savage, Winston Smith, and Zamyatin's D-503, who become engulfed by the overwhelming force of their societies, Hamlet is unable to withstand the weight of Claudius's corruption, and to curb the King's misrule, the Prince sacrifices his moral superiority by killing characters that stand between him and his revenge. In the end, Hamlet is both a victim to and an embodiment of Denmark's corruption.

"Supped Full with Horrors": Doubling, Dehumanization, and Isolation in Macbeth

The dystopian condition of the Scottish kingdom in *Macbeth* derives from the horrors of war and the bewitching influence of the wayward sisters, which culminates in casual slaughters and duplicitous behavior. Modern adaptations of the play speak to this fact as various artists have appropriated the setting of *Macbeth* to fit a dystopian perspective. For instance, Carol Chillington Rutter notes that the 1997 television adaptation entitled *Macbeth on the Estate* deconstructs the original plot: "Duncan is a gross parody of a Thatcherite entrepreneur running drugs, sex and protection rackets, and the estate is a dystopia, ugly, brutal and brutalizing, that functions as an 'Other' to the culture it despairingly mimics, but only mutely."[51] Yukari Yoshihara also documents the existence of a Japanese adaptation called *Metaru Makubesu*, or *Metal Macbeth*, that portrays the play from a Sci-Fi, dystopian

51. Carol Chillington Rutter, "Remind Me: How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?," in *Shakespeare Survey: Volume 57, Macbeth and Its Afterlife*, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 46.

angle reminiscent of the *Mad Max* film series.[52] Modern appropriations such as these offer insight into how the tyranny of Shakespeare's Macbeth relates to the nightmare worlds depicted in modern dystopian fiction. Like the political aims of the dystopian genre, *Macbeth* served as a cautionary tale for the Jacobean audience regarding the potential dangers of unchecked tyranny to inflict infectious misery upon the kingdom.

Macbeth presents the development of a dystopia in that the instability brought about by rebellion and foreign invasion paves the way for Macbeth to descend from a valorous hero to a ruthless tyrant. The apparent oxymoron pronounced by the wayward sisters that "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" expresses the doubling politics that pervade the play (I.i.11). [53] While the sisters' line seems contradictory, it accurately describes the ambiguous nature of war in Scotland.[54] With a rebellion aided by foreign invasion threatening to unseat King Duncan and overturn the stability of the state, current events are "foul" as are the gory deeds needed to ward off the enemy. The event of war allows for the fairness of Macbeth's skill in battle to brightly shine. In the play's second scene, the Captain reports to the King the dexterity with which Macbeth hacks and hews down the invaders "with his brandished steel, / Which smoked with bloody execution," calling him "valor's minion" (I.ii.17-19). His military

---

52. Yukari Yoshihara, "Popular Shakespeare in Japan," in *Shakespeare Survey: Volume 60, Theatres for Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 135.

53. I refer to the witches in *Macbeth* as weyward sisters based on Lorraine Helms's study "Acts of Resistance" in *The Weyward Sisters: Shakespeare and Feminist Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 132. In her study, Helms shows how the term "weyward sisters" presents different connotations of their role in the play since with the exception of one instance, only the stage directions refer to the creatures as witches.

54. The line is similar to the logic that comes to characterize doublethink in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: "Oceanic society rests ultimately on the belief that Big Brother is omnipotent and that the Party is infallible. But since in reality Big Brother is not omnipotent and the Party is not infallible, there is need for an unwearying, moment-to-moment flexibility in the treatment of facts. The key word here is *blackwhite*. Like so many Newspeak words, this word has two mutually contradictory meanings. Applied to an opponent, it means the habit of impudently claiming that black is white, in contradiction of plain facts. Applied to a Party member, it means loyal willingness to say that black is white when Party discipline demands this" (212).

prowess depicts him as a benevolent protector of the nation at the same time that the report shows his good deeds to be predicated on gruesome, inhuman violence (I.ii.18-23). In the scene, war is both a savage nightmare and a grounds for glory in which the basis of the Scots' relish in victory rests in Macbeth's perverse capacity to kill so effectively, transforming virtue into vice and vice into virtue.

Macbeth's lauded heroism shows the dystopian nature of war as his prestige arises from shedding copious amounts of blood. While the Captain's account of Macbeth's martial ability may intend to depict him as a knightly hero, he inadvertently characterizes the Thane as a kind of necessary monster, commenting that Macbeth's and Banquo's kill strokes appear to have sought to "bathe in reeking wounds / Or memorize another Golgotha" (I.ii.39-40). Eagleton notes that this mixing of "fair" with "foul" serves as a great disassembler of the illusory boundary between "natural" and "unnatural" that demonizes Macbeth:

> it is hard to see why [Lady Macbeth's] bloodthirsty talk of dashing out babies' brains is any more 'unnatural' than skewering an enemy soldier's guts […] this opposition will not hold even within *Macbeth's* own terms, since the 'unnatural' – Macbeth's lust for power – is disclosed by the witches as already lurking within the 'natural' – the routine state of cut-throat rivalry between nobleman […] Nature, to be normative, must already include the possibility of its own perversion, just as a sign can be roughly defined as anything which can be used for the purpose of lying.[55]

Thus, the use of an oxymoron like "Fair is foul" highlights the conflicts of social doubling that are dramatized in the play since the equation of opposite terms undermines their

55. Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 6.

oppositional status. War and bloodshed create the construct of noble heroism. However, the vices embedded in this construction, which are necessary for achieving victory, reflect the vices that the "legitimate" faction hopes to quash. Since perverse action is both permissible and unavoidable for upholding the legitimate order, the distinction between virtue and vice, right and wrong, crumbles as perversion and legitimacy rely on the same unscrupulous methods to gain and maintain power.[56]

The anticipation of peacetime at the play's beginning and the eventual murder of the King evince a dualistic contrast between the dystopic villainy of Macbeth and the goodness of Duncan, which certainly would seem to be the playwright's attempt to pay homage to the House of Stuart. However, the political reality of the play regarding Scotland's war with the Thane of Cawdor and Norway problematizes the degree to which Duncan can be seen as the most benign of the pair. During the reign of King James I, the propaganda of the current ruling House and its lineage favorably correlated with the expectations of mainstream political rhetoric. Rebecca Lemon discusses *Macbeth* in the context of James I's and his supporters' response to the failed Gunpowder Plot of 1605. In their writing and speeches, the monarchy relied on invective, describing the conspirators as traitors and "false-hearted rebels" whose dark deceits starkly contrasted with the "resplendent brightness" of the king.[57] Of course, while the play allows for a good-versus-evil reading, the depiction of King

---

56. See Nick Moschovakis's "Dualistic *Macbeth*? Problematic *Macbeth*?," in Macbeth*: New Critical Essays*, ed. Nick Moschovakis (New York: Routledge, 2008), 46-50. Moschovakis details the reception of *Macbeth* both through criticism and performance. In the pages referenced, he gives specific attention to the problematization of dualistic readings of *Macbeth*, demonstrating how historicist and new historicist critics fail to see the characters in the plays as exclusively good or evil. Instead, both Macbeth and his opposition bear traits that are laudable and condemnable, making the ability to distinguish between which party is more favorable a difficult task.

57. Rebecca Lemon, "Sovereignty and Treason in *Macbeth*," in Macbeth*: New Critical Essays*, ed. Nick Moschovakis (New York: Routledge, 2008), 75.

Duncan at war shows that the "resplendent brightness" is only maintained through unrestrained violence. Rather than being free from blemish, Duncan's defense of his homeland demonstrates that the inherent foundations for ruling and the maintenance of power share a commonality with the same base impulse that drives Macbeth to commit regicide. Donald Riccomini offers the following argument about the conundrum:

> The more rigidly the state attempts to regulate the warrior's code of conduct, the less dependable it is in actual situations that lack clear separation between right and wrong. In an ironic twist, the warrior now finds himself in a moral quandary at the very moment he must act decisively and ethically.[58]

Thus, while Macbeth's treason and moral descent is a reprehensible shame, it evokes partial sympathy from the audience in that his initial nobility complicates their identification of him as an irredeemable villain. The horrors of war that King Duncan endorses are equally or far worse than his cousin's solitary transgression of regicide.

The play's dystopian nightmare, then, derives from how closely Macbeth's gradual decay from a hero to tyrant parallels the chaos of the revolution and war featured in the play's opening scene. After the war with Cawdor and Norway ends, Duncan believes that happier times await his country in the postwar era (I.iv.33-43), but Shakespeare ultimately undercuts his hope through the treachery of Macbeth. With the three wayward sisters' divinations and the attention given to fate, the play centers on dramatizing events as occurring beyond the narrow scope of human control. The sisters' corrupting influence illustrates how forces external to an independent will can taint and misdirect the psyche of a

58. Donald Riccomini, "Governance and the Warrior Ethic in *Macbeth* and *Henry V*," *Upstart Crow: A Shakespeare Journal* 30 (2011), 42.

great man so severely that his infection branches outward and contaminates the rest of the kingdom. In chronicling Macbeth's treason, Shakespeare takes the traditional story of Lucifer's ejection from Heaven into Hell and appropriates it to parallel Macbeth's psychological atrophy as he sinks from a man of contemplation and sympathy to a desensitized tyrant inclined towards ruthless action.[59] There is an implicit allusion to this biblical intertextuality when Malcolm talks with Macduff of Macbeth's treachery, remarking that "Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell; / Though all things foul would wear the brows of grace, / Yet grace must still look so" (IV.iii.23-25). The parallel of Macbeth with Lucifer qualifies the political intrigue of Scotland as dystopian through two dramatic features. First, the manipulation of behavioral and linguistic expectations by the Macbeths, which give the illusion of genial intentions while harboring nefarious ones, reveals their deception to have dystopic consequences. Second, the play greatly details the fragile and inextricable relationship between the private individual and his or her public society as the couple's doubling performance as hosts and murderers creates a ripple effect of general distrust. The tension between public and private also portrays Macbeth's moral decline as resulting from his self-imposed seclusion from Scottish society as he broods over power.

While Macbeth may choose to deceive and murder, it is the three sisters' prophecy that spurs him on with equivocations advertising the grand possibility of a kingship, which thrusts Scotland into a dystopic nightmare (I.iii.48-69). The three sisters' suspicious foresight of Macbeth's ascension echoes their earlier paradox of "Fair is foul, and foul is fair"; just as

59. Various critics draw attention to the biblical parallels between Macbeth, Lucifer, and other tyrants of the Christian tradition. For example, Moschovakis details the Miltonic interpretation of Macbeth during nineteenth century performances (15-16). Howard Felperin notes similarities shared between Macbeth and Satan, Pharaoh, Caesar, and Herod in "A Painted Devil: *Macbeth*," in *Macbeth*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 2005).

Macbeth dupes the King, the three sisters' fool him (I.i.11). Their prophecy and ambivalent discourse haunt the play as their paradox collapses the categories of desire and fear into one. While the prospect of being regent pleases Macbeth, the wayward sisters' prophecy fails to disclose why his rule will lack a direct line of succession, and the lack of this knowledge drives Macbeth into a state of paranoia after becoming king. Eagleton writes of the sisters that "It is their riddling, ambiguous speech (they 'palter with us in a double sense') which promises to subvert [the hierarchical] structure: their teasing word-play infiltrates and undermines Macbeth from within, revealing in him a lack which hollows his being into desire."[60] Similar to the way the Ghost uses truth to corrupt Hamlet, the three sisters tempt Macbeth into corruption with accurate foresight, and he ironically lays claim to the nation's highest seat at the cost of his emotional and moral health, which in turn weakens the nation that he rules. In the aftermath of the sisters' address to Banquo and Macbeth, the pair learns the dystopian nature of the hags' fortuitous riddles when the predictions' pleasing fruits are received at grim costs. Macbeth may try all he can to reshape the prophecy to align with his desires, but like a chaotic force, the three sisters effectively unravel his nobility and with it, the supposed concord of the state.

If Duncan's kingdom can be counted as an analogue for heaven, especially since during Jacobean times kings claimed divine right when assuming the throne, Macbeth and Banquo can initially be seen as its angelic appendages, having performed unparalleled deeds in the throes of war in order to protect the realm. However, the three wayward sisters compromise the stability of this Zion, corrupting a single angel to shake the entire kingdom.

60. Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, 2.

The plot provides sufficient evidence to figuratively see Scotland as a celestial realm. Macbeth describes the sovereignty and virtue of Duncan's rule when he searches for reasons not to kill him.[61] Reflecting on his imposture as a gracious host, Macbeth states that the King:

> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off; (I.vii.17-20)

In usurping his cousin, Macbeth invites the scourge of Heaven, which is later analogically embodied by Malcolm and Macduff. Robert Caballo asserts that in a theocracy, "the killing of Duncan will be not only the murder of a relative and of the king but an act of sacrilege as well, or violence against the sacred."[62] Thus, the three sisters appear to Macbeth as Hellish envoys luring into damnation one who has established a praiseworthy and commendable reputation for himself. Banquo even implicitly links the sisters with demons in detailing their unkempt appearance; he calls them "withered," "wild," and unearthly (I.iii.40-41). Various instances establish their connection with an otherworldly dark magic such as the First Witch's recollection of adulterously romping with a sailor (I.iii.1-29) and later, the grotesqueness of their spells, when they drop various animal parts into a boiling cauldron (IV.i.1-38). Like the Ghost, the sisters do not noticeably predetermine the men's fates, but

61. Lemon, 74. Lemon also supports Duncan's association with celestial benevolence: "Duncan makes treason a challenge—he is a grateful leader and a father figure […] As the sun, Duncan shines gratitude and warmth on all his noblemen who as a result appear 'like stars' (1.4.41)."

62. Robert Carballo, "'Fair is foul, and foul is fair': *Macbeth* as Morality Play and Discreet Exemplum," in *Macbeth by William* Shakespeare, ed. Joseph Pearce (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 153.

they exhume a desire for power and control that Macbeth has long repressed, and his individual damnation wreaks havoc on the whole of Scotland.

As figurative demons, the three sisters serve an important role in generating the dystopia that plagues Scotland. Heeding the sisters' premonitions, the heroic Macbeth miserably discards his virtuous constraint to pursue his "vaulting ambition," despite possessing an awareness of the evil that could befall him as a consequence (I.vii.27). Banquo in particular recognizes the dubious nature of the sisters and questions the eerie ramifications of their pronouncements:

> What, can the devil speak true?
>
> […] But 'tis strange;
>
> And oftentimes to win us to our harm
>
> The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
>
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray 's
>
> In deepest consequence. (I.iii.107; 122-126)

Contrary to Macbeth, who ambivalently broods over acquiring the title of Thane of Cawdor, Banquo cautiously reflects on the reasons for which the sisters break such good news to them and suspects that an ulterior motive lays hidden in their words. Rather than sharing Banquo's fears, Macbeth allows the equivocation of the sisters to infect his ears. He has reservations but concludes that the sisters' prophecy "Cannot be ill, cannot be good" and resolves to pursue the prospects that they herald (I.iii.132). While the loss of his virtue in committing regicide gives Macbeth pause, he takes the wayward sisters' words as truth and mistakenly believes that he can defy the prediction of him failing to produce a successor. He fails to

realize that his misplaced trust in both the sisters and himself precipitates his transformation from honorable warrior to monomaniacal tyrant, bringing terror and horror to his country.

The disruption of social stability leaves an opening as the deterioration of trust in Scotland generates a highly dystopian climate. King Duncan particularly draws attention to the fear that results from Cawdor's treason. Addressing his noblemen, the King vows to take caution regarding to whom he will grant his trust. Obviously disappointed with the turncoat Cawdor, Duncan details the danger of extending a liberal amount of trust to one's associates:

> There's no art
> To find the mind's construction in the face.
> He was a gentleman on whom I built
> An absolute trust. (I.iv.11-14)

The idea of a betrayed trust haunts Duncan as Cawdor's behavior did nothing to warrant any suspicion of treachery. What is more ironic is that Duncan voices his revelation of not knowing whom to trust at a time when he wholeheartedly releases Macbeth from any suspicion. He enthusiastically anticipates his stay at Macbeth's castle as a great reprieve from the worries brought on by the war. Julia Reinhard Lupton insightfully describes the irony when she writes, "To each of these ideals [of hospitality and felicity], the Macbeths' hostile modes of dwelling and greeting will pose blistering antitypes: the act of murdering sleep replaces fertility with barrenness and atmospheric openness with claustrophobia."[63] This observation draws attention to Duncan's deception at the hands of feigned camaraderie and welcome that the Macbeths project. In other words, Duncan fails to heed his own call to be

63. Julia Reinhard Lupton, "Macbeth's Martlets: Shakespearean Phenomenologies of Hospitality," *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, 54, no. 3 (2012): 365-376.

on guard against deception when he conversely takes complete joy and comfort in the Macbeths' hospitable reception of him into their home, only to murder him in the vulnerability of sleep. Rather than be wary of further attempts on his life, Duncan neither questions nor detects Macbeth's motives, and as a result, Macbeth shows how dystopia can be confined within the walls of a single domicile. While he performs for Duncan the gestures of a hearty welcome, Macbeth's hospitality hides his stratagem to use the King's ease against him as the warm host contains the contraries of hospitality and hostility all at once, murdering his guest in the vulnerability of sleep.

More skeptical than their father, Donalbain and Malcolm genuinely fear the intentions of the nobles surrounding them in the same way that citizens of a repressive dystopia, such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, fear each other.[64] To ensure their survival, the brothers behave according to the belief that virtuous appearances do not correlate with virtuous intentions. After King Duncan's murder, the boys resolve to retreat from Scotland. Before departing, though, both comment that the reason they flee lies in the fear of betrayal from close associates pretending allegiance. Malcolm says, "[…] Let's not consort with them, / To show an unfelt sorrow is an office / Which the false man does easy" (II.iii.137-139). Donalbain echoes the sentiment, saying "Where we are, / There's daggers in men's smiles; the nea'er in blood, / The nearer bloody" (II.iv.141-143). Luckily for the brothers, they recognize that the behavior of Scottish nobles, even relatives, may not reflect a genuine show of sympathy, and their precautions are safeguards against the treachery that killed their father. From a modern

64. I particularly have in mind the Outer Party members' common wariness of being ensnared by the Thought Police and the Spies.

perspective, audiences can discern that their fear is dystopian insofar as they believe their followers pretend goodwill as a way of concealing baleful intents.

The dystopian fear of betrayal and impulsive executions that infects Scotland springs just as much from Lady Macbeth's relentless urging of her husband to directly commit regicide and become king as it does from Macbeth's own tyranny. While the sisters serve as Macbeth's gateway to corrosive depravity, Lady Macbeth becomes his guide. Before King Duncan arrives, she gives her husband particular instructions on how to hide his regicidal intent in order to avoid discovery:

> Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
> May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
> Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
> Your hand, your tongue. Look like th'innocent flower,
> But be the serpent under't. (I.v.62-66)

When Macbeth pretends friendship to Duncan and the other Thanes, he does so at Lady Macbeth's bidding. The mindsets of Lady Macbeth and her husband greatly differ in that Macbeth behaves more like Prince Hamlet during the first half of the play, reflecting heavily on the moral consequences of committing murder, while Lady Macbeth has no qualms about quickly taking possession of the three sisters' promises through dishonest, deadly means. Yet, Lady Macbeth can only perform as an instigator since even she confesses that she could not kill Duncan due to his resemblance to her father (II.ii.12-13). Her methods are rather dystopian in that she steers Macbeth toward camouflaging his purposes among the Thanes in hopes that the charade will provide him with an opportunity to physically cut Duncan

down.[65] Macbeth follows her advice reluctantly at first, but by the third act, he merely mouths fear of damnation and commits to their enterprise as his role as a follower changes into that of a leader. In fact, he instructs Lady Macbeth that they must "make our faces vizards to our hearts" to appear jovial and hide the malice in their hearts after Macbeth has returned from arranging Banquo's murder (III.ii.34). Discussing Macbeth's undertaking of unscrupulous lying, Frye compares the couple's sick deception of the court to the totalitarian repression of twentieth-century regimes, stating that the consummate acting "of Hitler and Stalin are also to be found in the ability of Macbeth and of Lady Macbeth to make their faces vizards to their hearts, disguising what they are."[66] For the Macbeths, tricking their fellow nobles becomes a clandestine means for manipulating and abusing their trust and loyalty for narcissistic ends, which causes a dystopia of fear to take root in the Macbeths' conscience as they envy the dead ("Better be with the dead, / Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace") and spread deadly terror throughout the kingdom (III.21-22).

The sisters' prediction serves as a kind of dystopian curse for Macbeth in that his encounter with them spirals him on a path towards tyranny and isolation that corrupt both him and the state he rules. After encountering the prophecy, the first omen of his curse manifests when Duncan bestows the title "Thane of Cawdor" on Macbeth. Like an execration, the possession of the title seemingly transfers the Thane's treachery in a

65. A more contemporary discussion on the development of camouflaged behavior used as a means for deception can be found in Jean Baudrillard's *The Spirit of Terrorism*, trans. Chris Turner (Brooklyn: Verso, 2003). In his essay, Baudrillard speaks at length about the 9/11 attacks and how its perpetrators craftily and stealthily blended in with American culture until the opportunity arose where they could lash out in an instant.

66. Frye, "Hitler, Stalin, and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*," 86.

supernatural fashion onto Macbeth's person. Kendall discusses the political ramifications of the shift:

> While in Duncan's worldview, Cawdor and what he symbolizes (treason) are intertwined and can be simultaneously destroyed, Macbeth's political world reveals an ugly truth […] about the state's relationship to the individual: Acts of treason survive the bodies that enact them, and political control of the individual body is largely an illusory artifact of ceremonies associated with execution.[67]

Kendall speaks at length about the trouble of death in the play since the political power of titles and offices survives the death of the body. Macbeth is subtly keen to the reality of political life after death as it significantly contributes to his paranoia after he obtains the crown. Once he becomes Thane of Cawdor, he fears all obstructions to his path to the throne, and when he becomes King, his fear prompts him to order various murders in a desperate attempt to retain his position and defy the fate pronounced by the sisters. His desperation contributes to his tragedy as he fails to realize that his pursuit of an absolute stronghold over power and hierarchical position remains elusive and untenable.

Similar to many dystopian regimes, Macbeth's seclusion from others leads him to consider his role as a usurper and king to the degree that he becomes desensitized to the suffering he inflicts. Early on in the play, when he still abides by a moral code, Macbeth demonstrates an awareness of the snare that he sets for himself in pursuing his ambition, reflecting on his envy of Duncan's title in an aside:

> […] Stars, hide your fires;

---

67. Kendall, 179.

Let not light see my black and deep desires.

The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be

Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see. (I.iv.50-53)

He deeply desires the seat of power, and Bevington notes that the prospect of his being elected as king was a likely one.[68] For Malcolm to be named successor as opposed to himself thrusts Macbeth closer to murdering Duncan to rectify the election, though the consequences of carrying out the deed terrify him. He goes as far as to wish that he could lose consciousness during the action ("The eye wink at the hand") in order to avoid shaping for himself a blemished conscience, which would cause his body to tremble to claim responsibility for shedding the blood of his sovereign. He knows that his act is horrible, and the tragedy of Macbeth is that before the murder, he still has the presence of mind to recognize the vile nature of murdering his King. While murder in battle proved easy for Macbeth since it carried a more clearly defined, disposable enemy, regicide during the early modern era was freighted with heavy repercussions, morally and spiritually. Kendall observes that "Macduff refers to Duncan as a temple, a building that has been broken into, making Macbeth's act a kind of sacrilege […] Duncan is a 'spring' and 'head' and 'fountain' not only because he is a father […] but because he is the 'head' of the body politic—which Macbeth has sought to destroy."[69] To kill Duncan is to stop the wellspring of the state, and in doing so, Macbeth as a correlative Lucifer defies his figurehead and plagues Scotland. Once

68. Note 50, p. 720. Bevington mentions that Scotland government was an electorate as does McGrail on p. 28. McGrail and others note that in *Holinshed's Chronicles* (1577), the source for the play, the historical Macbeth appeared as a more favorable choice for a king compared to the meek Duncan.

69. Kendall, 181.

he murders, the malady of conscience affects his ability to interact with others, leading to his paranoiac misrule.

While Macbeth initially expresses sorrow and remorse immediately after killing Duncan, he becomes psychologically diseased and develops an inhuman view of life. While remorseful, Macbeth understands the fallout that could visit him if others discovered his role in the King's death and observes, like a spectator, the process of his own dehumanization. Immediately after he follows through with the murder, he imagines that he "heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more! / Macbeth does murder sleep,' the innocent sleep / Sleep that knits up the raveled sleave of care" (II.ii.39-41). Macbeth bewails that he will become a monster that will make people afraid to sleep since this state of rest requires the vulnerability of unconsciousness. The act of murdering someone in his or her sleep creates a precedent, spreading fear in that sleep may potentially inspire other miscreants to similarly abuse others when they are defenseless. A few lines later, Lady Macbeth assists further in distancing her husband from pitying others' misfortune: "The sleeping and the dead / Are but as pictures. 'Tis the eye of childhood / That fears a painted devil" (II.ii.57-59). Her advice aims to inculcate Macbeth with a dystopian perspective on life, one that completely objectifies human beings as she calls on her husband to dispense with any compassion that he may feel and undividedly pursue the fulfillment of his ambition. Rather than persuade her husband to refrain from murder and feel pity for the dead, she teaches him to ignore his conscience, and later, the audience witnesses how easily he acclimates to the new identity of a tyrant when he insatiably kills innocent men, women, and children to maintain his power.

By the play's final scenes, Macbeth experiences a complete fall from grace, and similar to the medieval, heroic Lucifer, he completely transforms from an honorable warrior

to a philosophical tyrant. Scotland becomes a dystopia in that Macbeth establishes a hellish rule over Scotland. When given power, Macbeth discards conscientious reflection and instead acts on impulse, full of fury and pride that rivals the myth of Lucifer's rebellion against God. Like the fallen angel, his vigor garners admiration despite his abominable deeds.[70] During the final battle of the play, he commands his troops to cast away their fears and to embrace the field of battle with an unwavering resolve. In the middle of spouting insults to his men to prompt action, Macbeth calls out for Seyton, an attending officer whose name homophonously puns on Satan, and confesses to him the negative effects of his ambition, knowing that all he has gained from his crimes is at stake in the forthcoming battle with Malcolm, Macduff, and the English King, Edward the Confessor. His speech captivatingly expresses earnest regret at the same time that he appears proud of how far his ambition has taken him:

Seyton!—I am sick at heart

When I behold—Seyton, I say!—This push

Will cheer me ever, or disseat me now.

I have lived long enough. My way of life

Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf,

And that which should accompany old age,

As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,

I must not look to have, but in their stead

Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honor, breath

70. Moschovakis, 16. Moschovakis supports the parallel of Macbeth with Lucifer, stating that if the Macbeth portrayed by the nineteenth-century actor William Macready "indeed evokes a Satan, it must have been Milton's Satan, whom some Romantics thought admirable in his rebelliousness."

Which the poor heart would fain deny and dare not. (V.iii.19-28)

In this instance, Macbeth reflects on how far his atrocities have progressed as the virtues that a well-tempered person would strive to possess, such as "honor, love, [and] obedience," are far removed from his reign of terror. Seeing his life as "fall'n into the sere" expresses how deeply his murders and tyranny isolate him from the community at large as he consciously recognizes how he has severed himself from his former glory. As Lucifer can only look forward to Hell for rebelling against God, Macbeth creates a hell for himself and those serving him since he can only expect the company of curses and empty words to attend the shadow of his majesty.[71] In the end, Macbeth's separation from his community completely maddens him.[72] Like the defiant devil, Macbeth readily embraces his imprecations in order to see his fate to its end. He may only have curses to attend his majesty in his downfall, but such is sufficient for him as his forces are on the brink of battle.

Macbeth's espousal of his fate further accentuates how callous he becomes to the well-being of others when Lady Macbeth's death impresses him as a trifling event. His passing remarks in response to the news of her death demonstrate how the horror he generates completely distances him from feeling remorse. When the women cry within after finding his wife's corpse, Macbeth fails to produce an emotional response:

I have almost forgot the taste of fears.

---

71. According to Catholic doctrines, Hell can be understood as a complete separation from God. This separation is dramatized through Macbeth's murder of his Lord, King Duncan.

72. McGrail, 28. According to McGrail, the failure of Macbeth rests on an inability for him to heed a Machiavellian principle that may have salvaged his reputation as kind. She writes that Macbeth ignores the principle of: "making the kingship appear to the people to have some foundation aside from that of superior strength. From this perspective, Macbeth is not only a tyrant, but also his unselfconscious superstition causes him to be an incompetent one. The complete self-confidence inspired in him by the witches causes him to act in contempt of popular opinion."

The time has been my senses would have cooled

To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair

Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir

As life weren't in't. I have supped full with horrors;

Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,

Cannot once start me. (V.v.9-15)

Macbeth has intensified his desire for power to the megalomaniacal point of not valuing human life, even when that life includes members of his own family. As his reflection admits, the affliction of others no longer stirs his sympathy since his mind has degenerated as a result of his fixation with power. Macbeth's harsh nihilism may tempt audiences to label him a sociopath if it were not for the fact that despite his tyranny, he remains conscious of his sensitivity prior to committing regicide and acknowledges that his lust for control has made him indurate. Rather than losing sight of his former, virtuous self, as many corrupted literary villains do, Macbeth maintains a memory of his gentler disposition and like an objective observer, contrasts it with his current mindset, which is set on "slaughterous thoughts." His determination to hold power at all costs dissolves his care for anyone but himself. Having gorged on the maleficent instruction of Lady Macbeth and the words of the sisters, Macbeth cannot curb his bloodlust and instead prepares to unflinchingly meet his fate as he madly believes that only an animate Birnam Wood and a man not born of a woman can disband his authority. As McGrail observes, part of the tragedy for Macbeth is that his "ambition prompts the desire to exceed natural and conventional boundaries. But what results from these

excesses is sterility—domestic and public."[73] McGrail's attention to the sterility of domestic and public spheres implicitly argues that Scotland suffers from a dystopian condition that negatively affects the King and his subjects. Macbeth's half-heartfelt remembrance of his previous self along with his fall from favor recalls the figure of Lucifer in that he, too, was once heroic and noble and retained vestiges of his previous disposition.

As a dystopian tyrant, Macbeth still draws admiration in how his mocking of the value of life, though alarming, rings of profound philosophical insight. There may be nothing profound nor reasonable about Macbeth's insensitive execution of Macduff's wife and son, but his inhuman deeds reflect his perspicacious understanding of human life on the stage of the Earth. In his soliloquy near the end of the play, Macbeth views life as a meaningless pageant:

> Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time,
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale,
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing. (V.v.19-28)

73. Ibid., 35.

Macbeth's reflection anticipates of the existential angst that characterized much of the twentieth century and earns appreciation in how poetically he articulates a perspective of human existence as an ephemeral pageant. Life abruptly ceases with death, and the journey to the grave fails to verify any correlative significance (i.e. a sense of purpose) to life that prepares humankind for the end of consciousness. Everyday living demands mundane routines, and thus like actors, people perform these repetitions until the body deteriorates and passes out of function without a reason. To consider nature of life from a theological standpoint may prompt the question, "If Heaven serves as a destination after death, why does God bother to people the Earth at all?," and Macbeth's reflection derides all expectant answers in that while he sees his life as being full of passion, the process of living fails to resonate with any real meaning. He, like every man and woman, simply fades from existence after death like the light of a "brief candle." Yet, as Lowrance observes, "this nihilism is not simply an exercise in world-denying philosophical abstraction. It points to the emergence of a fundamentally modern experience of collective life—one in which individual potential and praxis are circumscribed by the negativity of social and political totality."[74] In relating Macbeth's reflection on life to dystopia, the audience observes that King Macbeth, the cause for all of Scotland's misery, realizes how enslaved to collective wills people are, and his reflection should be seen as highly ironic due to the extreme terror and horror he inflicts as a means to secure and assert his superiority, despite its meaninglessness. Thus, Macbeth calling life "a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing" may strike scholars and audiences as provoking, but it should fill audiences with fear and odium since

74. Lowrance, 827.

Macbeth attempts to use his realization to justify his savage acts. His view debases the value placed on human life, and if life can be seen as meaningless, then stopping life short is equally as meaningless. From Macbeth's perspective, life's brevity provides him with a basis for continuing his campaign to secure his titles and privileges regardless of the cost or gain, which speaks to the gross nature of his tyranny over the Scottish people and the misery they endure as a result.

After Macbeth begins his reign, his Machiavellian, dystopian politics impress upon his subjects a great fear that if the head of the state behaves tyrannically, then nobody's outward behavior can be trusted to reflect the inner workings of his or her mind. Macbeth's abuse of power in killing enemies to his throne clearly causes trepidation for Lady Macduff and her son. Before being murdered on Macbeth's orders, the mother and her son hold a witty debate regarding the duplicity they observe taking hold of Scotland. In particular, they discuss the definition of a traitor and question whether their estate's head, Macduff, fits the definition of one for abandoning them to certain death. After deducing that traitors lie and deserve to be hanged by "honest men," the son cleverly surmises, "Then the liars and swearers are fools, for there are liars and swearers enough to beat the honest men and hang up them" (IV.ii.54-58). The son makes an astute observation that power, virtuous or not, belongs to factions with the greatest numbers and not to those who believe they observe a loftier moral code. Thus, he concludes that liars and swearers should have sanction to be unprincipled because the awful state of society makes them the majority, which enables them to lie, cheat, and steal without repercussions. This illustration is dystopian in the sense that the widespread nefarious behaviors practiced are not in keeping with the ethical strictures that the upper echelon of the kingdom promotes. Instead, power defaults to unscrupulous

people who hold the capacity and influence to disregard justice entirely. The boy's observation certainly expresses a loss of faith in human decency, and Lady Macduff makes a similar note when she details the paradox of her non-complicit role in undermining Macbeth. She says:

> I have done no harm. But I remember now
> I am in this earthly world, where to do harm
> Is often laudable, to do good sometime
> Accounted dangerous folly. (IV.ii.76-79)

Her lines show an inversion of justice where those who practice virtue receive punishment while wrongdoers gain praise and wealth, which she sardonically describes as a backward system of rewards and punishment. In a better world, meritorious deeds would receive just rewards, while malignant ones would warrant appropriate punishments. Like other dystopian authors, it is possible that Shakespeare incorporated these lines as a subtle criticism of the behaviors practiced in his own society, using the dialogue between a mother and son to draw attention to the corruption of lying and cheating occurring outside the playhouse.

Understandably, the same dystopian fear of betrayal and distrust that disturbs the Macduff family causes Duncan's son Malcolm to adopt strategies that mirror the villainous deception of Macbeth. Responding to the betrayal of his father, Malcolm employs trickery to test the mettle of men seeking to forge an alliance with him against Macbeth in order to ensure that he can safely trust their declarations of allegiance. As Mary Ann McGrail argues, Malcolm "serves as a correction to Duncan—there is an art to finding the mind's construction, though not through simple appearances. One must search out intentions by

indirect means, such as the test of loyalty and intellect he administers to Macduff."[75] After fleeing from Macbeth's tyranny, Macduff seeks out Malcolm's assistance to combat the tyrant, but the ambivalence of Malcolm's test of loyalty causes Macduff to fear the tyrannical potential in his new ally. The trial for loyalty proves very disconcerting as Duncan's son falsely professes that his motive for overthrowing Macbeth originates from a wish to bask in the wealth and privileges that accompany an authoritarian rule. Malcolm's strategy is to bait Macduff into reproaching him since rebuke would give him a greater assurance of Macduff's virtue. Malcolm details the false nature of his role too convincingly for Macduff:

> All the particulars of vice so grafted
> That, when they shall be opened, black Macbeth
> Will seem as pure as snow, and the poor state
> Esteem him as a lamb, being compared
> With my confineless harms. (IV.iii.52-56)

Malcolm's list of vices goes on to include the inability to fill his "cistern of lust" (IV.iii.64), and an undying hunger for material possessions (IV.iii.77-85). He concludes his profession with a promise to bring great disorder to the body politic Scotland:

> […] had I power, I should
> Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell,
> Uproar the universal peace, confound
> All unity on earth. (IV.iii.98-101)

75. Mary Ann McGrail, *Tyranny in Shakespeare* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 22.

Throughout the scene, Malcolm threatens to reign in a manner that intensifies the chaos that has caused misery for Scotland as opposed to bringing the land succor. The nightmare Malcolm would create makes Macbeth's intimidating rule seem like a regular night of sleep in comparison. He advertises himself as a peddler of confusion and one who will glut his personal desires before he ever contemplates restoring peace to the kingdom. Pitted against vice but desperately needing Malcolm's assistance, Macduff initially tries to offer concessions to satisfy Malcolm's lusts and remarks that the nature of the time would allow him to live profligately: "You may / Convey your pleasures in a spacious plenty, / And yet seem cold; the time you may so hoodwink" (IV.iii.71-73). His offer to Malcolm echoes the criticism spoken by his wife and son regarding how men may behave ignobly without being challenged or called to justice. However, rather than offering to purge the sickness from the political body, Malcolm's claims strike fear because his plans would intensify Scotland's social disease. After Malcolm threatens to bring disharmony, Macduff will no longer abide his vice and openly rebukes him for disgracing his heritage and ends by professing his commitment to integrity, which is exactly what Malcolm wants (IV.iii.103-115). While the test yields the desired results, the façade of Malcolm's trial comes at a great cost. Soon after Macduff protests against Malcolm's plans, the heir interjects and admits that he merely used his declarations of vice as a technique to gauge Macduff's loyalty. Understandably, though, his doubling makes Macduff unsure of whether or not he can trust his new ally.

The nature of Malcolm's trial of Macduff can be compared to Macbeth's manner of ruling. Malcolm may express joy to hear Macduff rebuke dissipation, calling Macduff a "Child of integrity" (IV.iii.116), but Macduff feels as though Malcolm's reversal in demeanor characterizes him as an unstable leader. The Prince has just flagrantly abused his

trust, facilely switching from one attitude to another, swiftly contradicting how he originally represented his wishes. Malcolm's dexterity in hiding his virtue behind immorality is a precise inversion of Macbeth's language, who hides his immorality behind rectitude. In both circumstances, their convincing performances make these men hard to read. Malcolm's test throws into question for Macduff whether the Prince's words truly were a ruse to ensure his loyalty or if Malcolm's allegiance to virtue after his praise of vice is itself another trick to have Macduff enable his immoral pursuit.[76] Macduff expresses both his and the audience's apprehension when he replies to Malcolm, "Such welcome and unwelcome things at once / 'Tis hard to reconcile" (IV.iii.139-140).[77] Sympathetically, Macduff feels misled by Malcolm's technique and wonders if his retreat from Macbeth has only led him into a worse situation.

In contrast to the majority of famous twentieth-century dystopias, the oppressed parties in *Macbeth* still have the opportunity to overturn the dystopian rule of Scotland. The play depicts King Duncan as a benevolent ruler whose line should continue to rule the country and strongly ties the state of Nature and the land to his well-being. His death is analogous to the legend of the Middle Ages Wounded King in that when King Duncan

76. Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, 7. Speaking on the play, Eagleton aptly describes how dissembling of intentions through words creates a dilemma since distrust and paranoia spring from the manipulation of language: "Language […] overwhelms and dismembers the body; desire inflates consciousness to the point where it dissevers itself from sensuous constraints and comes to consume it in a void. When language is cut loose from reality, signifiers split from signifieds, the result is a radical fissure between consciousness and material life."

77. Relating *Macbeth* to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Malcolm's appropriation of speech relates to the apprehensions created by doublethink where Party members "tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them[,] […] forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just so long as it is needed" (214).

suffers from Macbeth's crime, his subjects suffer as well.[78] Lennox implies this tie-in between Nature and the King's health in describing the tumultuous night that occurs immediately after Duncan's murder:

> The night has been unruly. Where we lay,
> Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say,
> Lamentings heard i'th'air, strange screams of death,
> And Prophesying with accents terrible
> Of dire combustion and confused events
> New hatched to the woeful time. The obscured bird
> Clamored the livelong night. Some say the earth
> Was feverous and did shake. (II.iii.54-61)

The flustered night acts as a God-like expression of disgust at Duncan's death at the same time that it serves as an ominous sign for the reign of terror that will proceed from the murder. Similar to the concept of a "feverous" land, which reaches as far back as Plato's *Republic*, Malcolm's camp will function as the antidote for a sick nation.[79] As the continuation of Duncan's line, the party of Malcolm sees the unseating of Macbeth as analogous to administering medicine to an ailing body. Ross bemoans the sickness of Scotland, "It cannot / Be called our mother, but our grave," (IV.iii.166-167) ,and a character named Angus remarks how terrifying it is for the people to obey Macbeth when he notes that "Those he commands move only in command, / Nothing in love" (V.ii.19-20). To remedy the

78. The myth of Pellam and Pelles derives from the Lancelot-Grail cycle.

79. See Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 48. Plato calls a "city with a fever" an avaricious, luxurious city, and he contrasts it with his temperate utopia. The feverous city differs from Macbeth's Scotland, but the diagnostic repulsion is the same.

horrible sickness that spreads throughout the country, the forthcoming battle is seen as a treatment, a bloodletting, as a lord named Caithness declares, "Meet we the med'cine of the sickly weal, / And with him [i.e. Malcolm] pour we in our country's purge / Each drop of us" (V.ii.27-29). The rebellion against Macbeth discharges vengeance for King Duncan with the goal of returning the state back to a peaceful condition.

The dystopia of *Macbeth* hinges on the multitudinous doubling, dehumanization, and horror that pervade the play. In the beginning, Macbeth evokes sympathy in a way that closely parallels Prince Hamlet since the Thane restlessly grapples with his conscience, wavering between his desire to fulfill his ambition through any available means and his wish to keep his hands free from maddening bloodshed. Both characters appear to understand that their actions entail grave consequences. Speaking on both plays, Bristol writes:

> Our transgressions teach bloody instruction—they return to plague the inventor. Nemesis understood in this way is not determination by unseen social forces; it is the direct outcome of lucid agency. On Macbeth's account—and also Hamlet's—nemesis is like bad karma, the aggregate consequence of your own deliberate actions interacting with the reciprocal deeds of other agents.[80]

Macbeth's internal debate draws sympathy from the audience in that he carefully reflects on the repercussions of his actions and still executes them. However, in contrast to *Hamlet* where the corrupted state avails its agency to a hedonist usurper, *Macbeth* more sharply appalls audiences in that the protagonist changes from a character who struggles with moral

80. Michael Bristol, "Macbeth the Philosopher: Rethinking Context," *New Literary History* 42, no. 4 (2011): 656.

quandaries to one who unhesitatingly forgoes all moral codes. Unlike Claudius the sophisticated orator, Macbeth is a tyrannical dictator whose fear for his position recalls for twentieth and twenty-first century audiences and readers the same madness that imbrued the reigns of Hitler and Stalin.[81] Jeff Marker expresses a similar but inverse perspective in describing how Orson Welles's 1948 film adaptation of the play allegorically criticizes the anticommunist biases of the House of Un-American Activities Committee and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.[82] Macbeth's rule proves horrifyingly dystopian, and audiences of Shakespeare's time may have at least left the playhouse with the closure that Macduff executes the foul leader and helps elevate Malcolm to his father's former position. Even so, critics still question if a resolution featuring the return of a legitimate order truly occurs in *Macbeth* or *Hamlet*. Stephen Orgel contends that "In both plays, there is deep uncertainty about the relation between power and legitimacy – about whether legitimacy constitutes anything more than the rhetoric of power backed by the size of its army."[83] Besides, while Macbeth may be executed, the terror of his reign and descent are not erased from memory. Starting as a man of force and ending as a man of excessive force, the tragedy of Macbeth emanates from how his astute mind succumbs to a maddening ambition and causes wide scale suffering for those he once considered allies and friends. Ultimately, his tyranny

81. Frye, "Hitler, Stalin, and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*," 103. Frye explicitly details this similarity, writing that "The 'terrors' that our twentieth-century totalitarians visited upon their German and Soviet citizens and conquered territories could be imagine and thus realized by a poet with the vast ranging mind of William Shakespeare, even though he could have had no actual knowledge of our century."

82. Jeff Marker, "Orson Welles's *Macbeth*: Allegory of Anticommunism," *Literature Film Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2013), 116-128.

83. Stephen Orgel, "Macbeth and the Antic Round," in *The Cambridge Shakespeare Library: Shakespeare Criticism*, ed. Catherine Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 340.

transforms Scotland into a dystopia as the Scottish subjects live in constant fear of their capricious king.

The fascination with Shakespeare's comedies, romances, and tragedies consistently pivots on the inner-development of its characters from beginning to end. The characters' use of language speaks volumes to the nature of early modern identity outside the playhouses as the playwright regularly touches on conflicts of gender, race, rank, and ambition. While characters such as Macbeth, Iago, or Shylock unscrupulously pursue selfish ends, the motivators for their villainy often stems from their dissatisfaction with the networks of power taking root in their respective societies. Despite the interest that these individual characters generate, their words evince the degree to which their desires for change are intertwined with ideas concerning the conduct of their communities. The art of Shakespeare lies in his ability to dramatize the effects of decisions made by regents, lords, and clergymen and how they institute the permissions and prohibitions that guide the everyday transactions of their subjects. Guided by monarchical ideology, the rulers and shapers of nations in early modern England and Europe arrange the structure of their societies, of which, their subjects are the building blocks. The imagining of Utopia intrinsically relates to revising these arrangements and allowances, and as demonstrated in the plays, the transgressions that the characters or groups of characters commit begin with their wish to alter their identity within hierarchical systems. Similar to authors of utopias and dystopias, who expectantly anticipate the possibility of transforming one's identity within a society and as a consequence, drastically change the society itself, Shakespeare, too, depicts the power of change and in doing so, his dramaturgy aligns with the trajectory of Utopian thought.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*, Edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

Appelbaum, Robert. "'Standing to the Wall': The Pressures of Masculinity in *Romeo and Juliet*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (1997): 251-272.

Asimov, Isaac. *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare: A Guide to Understanding and Enjoying the Works of Shakespeare*. New York: Gramercy Books, 2003.

Astington, John. "Playhouses, Players, and Playgoers." In *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, Edited by Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells, 99-113. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. 1985. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1993.

Baccolini, Rafaella and Tom Moylan. "Critical Dystopias and Possibilities." In *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, Edited by Baccolini and Moylan, 1-12. New York: Routledge, 2003.

---. "Dystopia and Histories." In *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, Edited by Baccolini and Moylan, 1-12. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Bartlett, Robert. "An Introduction to Hesiod's *Works and Days*." *Review of Politics* 68, no. 2 (2006): 177-205.

Baudrillard, Jean. *The Spirit of Terrorism*. Translated by Chris Turner. Brooklyn: Verso, 2003.

Bell, Millicent. *Shakespeare's Tragic Skepticism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Bell, Robert. "Motley to the View: The Shakespearean Performance of Folly." *Southwest Review* 95 (2010): 44-62.

Benson, Sean. "'Perverse Fantasies'?: Rehabilitating Malvolio's Reading." *PLL* 45, no. 3 (2009): 261-286.

Bentham, Jeremy. "Panopticon Papers." In *A Bentham Reader*, Edited by Mary Peter Mack. New York: Pegasus, 1969.

Bevington, David. *The Necessary Shakespeare* By William Shakespeare. 2nd ed. New York: Pearson, 2005.

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.

Brevik, Frank. *The Tempest and New World-Utopian Politics*. New York: Palgrave, 2012.

Bristol, Michael. "'Funeral Bak'd Meats': Carnival and the Carnivalesque in *Hamlet*." In *Hamlet*, Edited by Susanne L. Wofford, 348-367. New York: Bedford, 1994.

---. "Macbeth the Philosopher: Rethinking Context." *New Literary History* 42, no. 4 (2011): 641-662.

Budiansky, Stephen. *Her Majesty's Spymaster: Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Walsingham, and the Birth of Modern Espionage*. New York: Plume, 2006.

Cahill, Edward. "The Problem of Malvolio." *College Literature* 23, no. 2 (1996): 62-82.

Callenbach, Ernest. *Ecotopia*. Berkeley: Banyan Tree Books, 2004.

Carballo, Robert. "'Fair is foul, and foul is fair': *Macbeth* as Morality Play and Discreet

Exemplum." In *Macbeth by William Shakespeare*, Edited by Joseph Pearce, 127-146. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010.

Charney, Maurice. *Hamlet's Fictions*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

---. *Shakespeare on Love & Lust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Claeys, Gregory. "The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell." In *The Cambridge Companion to Utopia Literature*, Edited by Gregory Claeys, 107-131. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Curtis, Cathy. "The Active and Contemplative Lives in Shakespeare's Plays." In *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, Edited by David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice, 44-63. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Dodsworth, Martin. *Hamlet Closely Observed*. London: Athlone Press, 1985.

Eagleton, Terry. *Shakespeare and Society*. New York: Shocken Books, 1967.

---. "Utopia and Its Opposites." *Socialist Register* (2000): 31-40.

---. *William Shakespeare*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

Felperin, Howard. "A Painted Devil: *Macbeth*." In *Macbeth*, Edited by Harold Bloom, 53-72. New York: Chelsea House, 2005.

Fitter, Chris. "Reading Orlando Historically: Vagrancy, Forest, and Vestry Values in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*." *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England: An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism, and Reviews* (2010): 114-141.

Fitzmaurice, Andrew. "The Corruption of *Hamlet*." In *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, Edited by David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice, 139-156. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Fourier, Charles. *The Theory of the Four Movements*. Edited by Gareth Stedman Jones and Ian Patterson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Frye, Northrop. *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*, Edited by Robert Sandler. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986.

Frye, Roland. "Hitler, Stalin, and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: Modern Totalitarianism and Ancient Tyranny." *American Philosophical Society* 142, no. 1 (1998): 81-109.

---. *The Renaissance Hamlet: Issues and Responses in 1600*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Gottlieb, Erika. *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial*. Quebec City: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001.

Greenblatt, Stephen. Introduction to *The Norton Shakespeare: Tragedies*, Edited by Stephen Greenblatt, et al. New York: Norton, 1997.

---, ed. Introduction to *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*. Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1982.

---. *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

---. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

---. *Shakespeare's Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Halio, Jay. *Romeo and Juliet: A Guide to the Play.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998.

Hamlet. Directed by Kenneth Branagh. Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 1996. DVD.

Hays, Michael. *Shakespearean Tragedy as Chivalric Romance: Rethinking* Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, *and* King Lear. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2003.

Helms, Lorraine. “Acts of Resistance.” In *The Weyward Sisters: Shakespeare and Feminist Politics*, 102-156. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.

Hillegas, Mark R. *The Future as Nightmare: H.G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Hunt, Maurice. “Malvoilo, Viola, and the Question of Instrumentality: Defining Providence in ‘Twelfth Night.’” *Studies of Philology* 90, no. 3 (1993): 277-297.

---. “Purging the Jesting Spirit in *The Tempest*.” *Comparative Drama* 45, no. 4 (2011): 417-437.

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. New York: Harper, 2006.

Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2005.

Kamps, Ivo. “Madness and Social Mobility in *Twelfth Night*.” In Twelfth Night*: New Critical Essays: Shakespeare Criticism Volume 34*, Edited by James Schiffer, 229-243. London: Routledge, 2011.

Kemper, Becky. “A Clown in the Dark House: Reclaiming the Humor in Malvolio’s Downfall.” *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 7 (2007): 42-50.

Kendall, Gillian Murray. “Overkill in Shakespeare.” In *Shakespearean Power and Punishment: A Volume of Essays*, Edited by Kendall, 173-196. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1998.

Kermode, Frank. *Shakespeare’s Language*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000.

Kerrigan, William. *Hamlet’s Perfection*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

Kottman, Paul. “Defying the Stars: Tragic Love as the Struggle for Freedom in *Romeo and Juliet*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63 (2012): 1-38.

---. "No Greater Powers Than We Can Contradict." *Criticism* 54, no. 3 (2012): 445-454.

Le Guin, Ursula. *The Dispossessed*. New York: Eos, 2001.

Lemon, Rebecca. "Sovereignty and Treason in *Macbeth*." In Macbeth*: New Critical Essays*, Edited by Nick Moschovakis, 73-87. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Levitas, Ruth. *The Concept of Utopia*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, 2010.

Lupton, Julia Reinhard. "Macbeth's Martlets: Shakespearean Phenomenologies of Hospitality." *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, 54, no. 3 (2012): 365-376.

Lowrance, Bryan. "'Modern Ecstasy': *Macbeth* and the Meaning of the Political." *ELH* 79, no. 4 (2012): 823-849.

Marker, Jeff. "Orson Welles's *Macbeth*: Allegory of Anticommunism." *Literature Film Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2013): 116-128.

McDonald, Russ. "Politics and Religion: Early Modern Ideologies." In *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare: An Introduction with Documents*. 2nd ed., 303-325. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.

---. *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

McGrail, Mary Ann. *Tyranny in Shakespeare*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001.

Moschovakis, Nick. "Dualistic *Macbeth*? Problematic *Macbeth*?" In Macbeth*: New Critical Essays*, Edited by Nick Moschovakis, 1-72. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Moylan, Tom. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000.

Nelson, Eric. “Shakespeare and the Best State of a Commonwealth.” In *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, Edited by David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice, 253-270. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Norbrook, David. “‘What cares these roarers for the name of King?’: Language and Utopia in *The Tempest*.” In *The Politics of Tragicomedy: Shakespeare and After*, Edited by Jonathan Hope and Gordon McMulland. London: Routledge, 1992.

Orgel, Stephen. “Macbeth and the Antic Round.” In *The Cambridge Shakespeare Library: Shakespeare Criticism*, Edited by Catherine Alexander, 336-345. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Orlin, Lena Cowen. “The Performance of Things in *The Taming of the Shrew*.” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 23 (1993): 167-188.

Orwell, George. *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*. 1945. New York: Harcourt Brace, 2003.

---. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. New York: Penguin, 1977.

Perry, Curtis. “‘If Proclamations Will Not Serve’: The Late Manuscript Poetry of James I and The Culture of Libel.” In *Royal Subjects: Essays on the Writings of James VI and I*, Edited by Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, 205-231. Detroit: Wayne State Press University, 2002.

Plato. *Republic*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992.

Pollnitz, Aysha. “Educating Hamlet and Prince Hal.” In *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, Edited by David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice, 119-138. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Riccomini, Donald. “Governance and the Warrior Ethic in *Macbeth* and *Henry V*.” *Upstart*

Crow: A Shakespeare Journal 30 (2011): 42-66.

Rosenberg, Marvin. *The Masks of Hamlet*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992.

Rutter, Carol Chillington. "Remind Me: How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" In *Shakespeare Survey: Volume 57, Macbeth and Its Afterlife*, Edited by Peter Holland, 38-53. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Sanchez, Melissa. "Seduction and Service in *The Tempest*." *Studies in Philology* 105 (2008): 50-82.

Sargent, Lyman Tower. "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited." *Utopian Studies: Journal of the Society for Utopian Studies* 5 (1994): 1-37.

---. *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Scodel, Joshua. "Finding Freedom in *Hamlet*." *Modern Language Quarterly: A Journal of Literary History* 72, no. 2 (2011): 163-200.

Smidt, Kristian. *Uncomforties in Shakespeare's Later Comedies*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Suvin, Darko. "Theses on Dystopia 2001." In *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, Edited by Rafaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, 187-201. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Trüstedt, Kristen. "Secondary Satire and the Sea-Change of Romance: Reading William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*." *Law and Literature* 17, no. 3 (2005): 345-364.

Twelfth Night. Directed by Trevor Nunn. 1996; Universal City, CA: Summit Entertainment, 2005. DVD.

Varsam, Maria. "Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and Its Others." In *Dark Horizons*, Edited by Tom Moylan and Raffealla Baccolini, 203-224. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Vaughan, Alden T. and Virginia Mason Vaughan. *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Vaught, Jennifer. *Carnival and Literature in Early Modern England*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012.

Vieira, Fátima. "The Concept of Utopia." In *The Cambridge Companion to Utopia Literature*, Edited by Gregory Claeys, 3-27. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Webster, John. *The Duchess of Malfi*. In *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, Edited by David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Eric Rasmussen. New York: Norton, 2002.

Wilson, John Dover. *What Happens in Hamlet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Yoshihara, Yukari. "Popular Shakespeare in Japan." In *Shakespeare Survey: Volume 60, Theatres for Shakespeare*. Edited by Peter Holland, 130-140. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Farrar, Ryan D. Bachelor of Arts, Tarleton State University, Spring 2007; Master of Arts, Tarleton State University, Spring 2009; Doctor of Philosophy, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Summer 2014
Major: English
Title of Dissertation: "A Better Where to Find": Utopian Politics in Shakespeare's Plays
Dissertation Director: Dr. Jennifer Vaught
Pages in Dissertation: 237; Words in Abstract: 347

ABSTRACT

Utopias often elicit visions of full-fledged societies that operate more successfully in contrast to a society of the present based on a principle of cognitive estrangement where the daily routines of a new civilization strike readers as strange and advantageous. While William Shakespeare's drama rarely portrays radical societies that speak directly to the fantastic nature of utopia, it does feature moments that draw attention to desires for social change, presenting glimmers of the utopian impulse throughout his work. In this dissertation, I use utopia as critical approach for analyzing Shakespeare's comedies, romances, and tragedies, specifically *As You Like It*, *The Tempest*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*. While critics have approached the *The Tempest* as a utopian play, other works by Shakespeare do not receive much attention from this perspective. This dissertation addresses the lack of attention paid to other plays, illustrating the degree to which the health of the state as a theme featured prominently in his works. I argue that the desires expressed by characters in these plays capture the wishes and despairs of entire social ranks during the Elizabethan and Jacobean, connecting their wishes and fantasies to utopian and dystopian analysis. *As You Like It* and *The Tempest* feature utopic settings and address themes of colonialism and egalitarianism. Yet, rather than present locations of harmony, these plays explore the problems and contradictions that spring from the attempts to actualize a utopian climate. Characters in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth*

Night, and *Romeo and Juliet* possess radical aspirations, and they discover opportunities to transform their identities as it relates to their respective societies. However, these characters ultimately fail to rupture the ideologies of their societies. In my final chapter, I argue how dystopian themes arise from the depictions of tyranny and treachery in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. The transgressions of the Kings in both plays plague their kingdoms. Tackling Shakespeare from a utopian lens illustrates that rather than forming alternative, ideal societies, the concept can be understood as an ambiguous, unfinished dialectical process that strives for social betterment.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ryan D. Farrar was born in San Antonio, Texas. He received his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in English from Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas. He will earn a Ph.D. in English in August 2014 from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. As a literary critic, his primary interests include Utopian studies and English Renaissance Drama.