

**THE REAL PARADOX OF THE ACTOR:
HOW TO CAPTURE IN WORDS THE COMPLEX
PARADOXICAL POWER THAT UNDERPINS
EVERY EXCEPTIONAL ACTING PERFORMANCE**

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ABSTRACT

The Real Paradox of the Actor:
How to Capture in Words the Complex Paradoxical Power
That Underpins Every Exceptional Acting Performance
(Under the direction of Ingrid Hotz-Davies and Christoph Reinfandt)

This work examines what it is that exceptional actors do when they resonate with audiences, and how to capture these actors' performances in words. At present, there exists no suitable language to describe poignant acting performances. Hitherto, exceptional performers have been characterized as having elusive qualities such as "charisma," great "presence," or the "It-factor." Since acting is primarily a physical art, it is difficult to express what actors do with dualistic language that values mind over body and neglects that the body also shapes the mind.

Furthermore, the history of acting theory demonstrates a distrust toward an art form that resists reductive linguistic appropriation. A compelling example of such an anti-theatrical and dichotomous viewpoint is Denis Diderot's polemical essay of 1773, *The Paradox of the Actor*. In this essay, Diderot insists—wrongly, I argue—that the actor's paradox is that only a robotic, unmoved actor can move an audience because the actor's mind has complete control over his body and can circumvent the soul. My paper builds on Diderot's essay, and with holistic language redrafts and redresses what I understand to be the *real* paradox of the actor.

Through an interdisciplinary approach that observes manifest Shakespearean acting performances and puts them into context with acting theories (such as Stanislavski's system) and new scientific approaches to acting (such as cognitive neuroscience and Alba emoting), this study finds that a more receptive, expressive, and comprehensive language is needed to describe and give meaning to what it is actors do that inspires audiences.

This paper argues that acting performances that resonate with audiences are comprised of paradox and in-between states that are successfully conveyed through non-verbal communication but inadequately conveyed with dualistic language. This study concludes that a more embodied, inclusive, and generous language that encompasses liminal, non-binary and contradictory states gives means to make visible the invisible paradoxical power that underpins every exceptional acting performance.

Keywords: acting, acting theory, resonance, charisma, presence, It-factor, mind-body dualism, anti-theatrical prejudice, Diderot, Shakespeare, Stanislavski, cognitive neuroscience, Alba emoting, embodied language, non-verbal communication, paradox, paradox of the actor

I dedicate this to all the actors in the world. You matter.

I also dedicate this to the beautiful paradox that was my late grandfather Otto Ludwig Leib II:
Actor, pilot, aircraft engineer, violin-maker, photographer, rebel, gentleman, free spirit, dreamer.
I carry on your dreams.



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PREFACE

The inspiration for this work originates in my long-standing passion for performance. A performer myself from the age of five upwards—both in professional figure skating and later in professional acting—I was motivated to communicate to the reader what exactly it is that makes a performance resonate with an audience. It was my aim to find a competent language that captures what exceptional actors do that sends shivers down an audience’s spine.

This work is meant for everyone who is curious about acting, be it for the stage or for film and television. For readers not familiar with acting history, theory, and scientific approaches to acting, I have assembled some of the most essential background information in each of these respective fields in the first part of my dissertation. The latter constitutes the theoretical aspect of my work. Subsequently, in my paper’s second, creative part, I applied this theoretical background information to manifest acting performances because acting is, first and foremost, a physical profession. As a holistic art expressed through the body, acting has a history of resisting linguistic appropriation. Exceptional actors are often described in murky terms such as being “gifted,” having “charisma,” having “presence,” “having “the It-factor,” or simply as being “blessed” by a supernatural being. It was my objective to break through and cast light on the elusiveness surrounding great performers and performances.

In order to elucidate the “mystery” behind what it is that exceptional actors do, this project, I felt, had to be interdisciplinary. It was important to me to combine all branches of knowledge into a holistic way of speaking about performance that transcends dualistic thought and language. The result of this approach is an embodied language—I call it the language of paradox—that demonstrates that, albeit difficult, it is in fact possible to put into words what great performers do. By cross-pollinating, combining, and sharing interdisciplinary strands of knowledge and by putting them into the context of physical performances, it was my goal and purpose to illuminate the obscure and seemingly impenetrable “enigma” behind the art of acting. I found that, by embracing an embodied language, it was possible to capture the paradoxical power that underlies every exceptional acting performance. The following chapters explain in detail how the actor’s paradoxical power resonates with audiences.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

Acting Terms:

Alba Method/Alba Emoting/Alba Technique: neuroscientist and psychologist Susana Bloch began experimenting with what became known as the Alba Method in the 1970's. Bloch created the Alba Technique in response to method acting's "emotional memory recall" (definition below under Stanislavskian terms). The Alba Technique uses the body to induce certain emotional states, whereas "emotional recall" purely uses psychological and personal memories. Most importantly, the Alba Technique is safe to use because it trains its students to "step out" of an emotional state at the appropriate time. In greater detail, the Alba Method is defined by the official *Alba Method Association* as:

a means for identifying, inducing, and regulating genuine emotion through conscious application of patterns of breath and muscle tension organic to basic emotions. Introduced worldwide in the early 1990s as Alba Emoting, it was initially aimed at actors and acting teachers looking for alternatives to using personal memories or other indirect means to enhance emotional expression in performance. Since then, its use has expanded into other fields such as psychotherapy and human relations. The result of more than 20 years of research by experimental psychologist Susana Bloch and her colleagues, the Alba Method identifies six basic emotions – anger, joy, sadness, fear, tenderness, and eroticism – which blend to create the full range of human feeling, as well as the physiology of emotional calm (neutrality). Each state of emotion has its own unique, universal, identifiable patterns of breathing, posture, and facial expression. Learning to physically reproduce the patterns allows the individual to recognize emotional responses, identify and gently penetrate habituated tensions and emotional blocks, and, as accuracy increases, ultimately to engage and leave an emotional state at will. ("What Is the Alba Method?" *Alba Method Association*, 2017)

Alexander Technique: a holistic technique that combines physical movement with mental awareness of habits. The Alexander Technique allows actors to rid themselves of unnecessary tension and emotional rigidity. Tom Vasiliades—Chair of the Alexander Technique department at The New School for Drama, NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts, and the Juilliard School—explains the Alexander Technique as follows:

The Alexander Technique deals with [unnecessary tension] directly. It is a method that empowers the actor to become aware of the physical habits that impede performance and to transform those habits, thus improving breathing coordination and vocal production, facilitating the creation of the physical life of characters with ease and allowing fuller emotional expression. The Technique is fundamental to the training of actors; it is an integral part of the curriculum at theater schools, universities, and conservatories in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe. (Vasiliades, “The Alexander Technique: An Acting Approach,” *alexandertechnique.com*).

The Alexander Technique was founded by the Australian actor Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869-1955) in response to his recurring laryngitis during Shakespeare recitations. The technique has become a staple at acting schools around the world. It has also been proposed that the Alexander Technique be made accessible to all people since it may be able to help people who suffer from chronic pain.

BAM: Brooklyn Academy of Music is a multi-arts center and theatre in Brooklyn, NY. BAM is known and respected for its often experimental and avant-garde performances.

Charisma: “a personal magic of leadership arousing special popular loyalty or enthusiasm for a public figure; a special magnetic charm or appeal (*Merriam-Webster*). The OED adds that “charisma” can be a divinely conferred power or talent” (*OED*). A charismatic person is always fully present in the moment and makes others feel seen and heard. They know how to engage an audience, and how to sway an audience. A charismatic person always knows how to emotionally connect with an audience, and how to read the room. They are poised, they have grace under fire,

and they are able to take the audience on a journey with them. In my paper, I argue that, while “charisma” can be god-given, as the *OED* suggests, it can also be learned.

Delivery: the manner in which a speech or an action are presented to an audience: “the manner or style of giving a speech” (*OED*). In classical rhetoric, delivery referred to the physical aspects of oral speech (such as volume, elocution, intonation, rhythm) and the gestures and actions that the orator used to present a speech. As an example, a speech can be delivered in an austere and somber tone, or it can be delivered highly emotionally. The ancient orators thought of delivery as the most important aspect of public speaking:

Ancient Greek and Roman writers who addressed the proper use of rhetoric in terms of either theory or practice were virtually unanimous in agreeing that delivery - the actual performance of the speech before an audience - was among the most important aspects of the art of persuasion. (Holland, Glenn S., “Delivery, Delivery, Delivery.” *Paul and Ancient Rhetoric* 2016, p. 119)

Detachment-School-of-Acting: Also called “outside-in” acting. The actor uses gestures, movements, breathing-patterns or their scene-partner’s actions to induce a certain state of mind. “Outside-in” acting is considered to be the opposite of “method acting.” “Outside-in” acting is a necessary technique an actor needs when their creative intuition and emotional resources fail them. Stanislavski, mostly in his later works, speaks of the mind following the body. Susana Bloch’s Alba-technique, as an example, is based on “outside” physical actions inducing certain “inner” emotional states.

Duende: “the power to attract through personal magnetism and charm” (*Merriam-Webster*). The *OED* gives the origin of the term as “late 17th century... from Spanish, contraction of *duen de casa*, from *dueño de casa* ‘owner of the house’; (in the folklore of Spain, Portugal, Latin America, and the Philippines) a supernatural being or spirit resembling a pixie or imp; a quality of passion and inspiration” (*OED*). “Duende” is the magical spark a performer can send flying throughout the audience. It is the electrifying and unifying shiver that runs down an audience’s spine during a mesmerizing performance. In greater detail:

The word *duende* refers to a spirit in Spanish, Portuguese, and Filipino folklore and literally means "ghost" or "goblin" in Spanish. It is believed to derive from the phrase *dueño de casa*, which means "owner of a house." The term is traditionally used in flamenco music or other art forms to refer to the mystical or powerful force given off by a performer to draw in the audience. The Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca wrote in his essay "Teoria y Juego del Duende" ("Play and Theory of the Duende") that *duende* "is a power and not a behavior ... a struggle and not a concept." Nowadays the term appears in a broader range of contexts to refer to one's unspoken charm or allure. ("History and Etymology for duende," *Merriam-Webster*, emphases editor's)

Gravitas: "high seriousness (as in a person's bearing or in the treatment of a subject)" (*Merriam-Webster*). The original word from Latin refers to "solemn dignity" (*Merriam-Webster*). *Cambridge Dictionary* calls it "seriousness and importance of manner, causing feelings of respect and trust in others" (*CED*). The *OED* defines "gravitas" as "dignity, seriousness, or solemnity of manner" (*OED*). It is important to mention that "gravitas" is most relevant in relation to an audience. When an actor has "gravitas," the audience can sense it. They participate in a kind of exchange of trust or respect.

Inner Monologue: Originally a literary device, for example a soliloquy:

Internal monologue (also known as inner monologue or interior monologue) is a literary device that allows the reader to observe the inner thoughts of characters in a narrative. Inner monologue is often used to reveal the main character's most private desires, frustrations, or points of view about the other characters or events in the story. (*Masterclass*, 3 Sep. 2021).

In acting, an inner monologue is what the character thinks or feels but does not say out loud. Inner monologue makes an actor's silence riveting to watch because it registers with the

audience. It can also render a moment significant that otherwise might have been dull. The actor's inner monologue is a device that allows an audience to enter into an actor's soul.

Involvement-School-of-Acting or **Method Acting** or **The Method**: Also known as “inside-out” acting.

“A method of acting that involves using real life experiences to get into character. Coined by acting teacher Lee Strasberg, who defines Method acting as: What all actors have always done whenever they acted well. It is known proverbially as an acting process where the actor absolutely becomes the character. The most famous example is Daniel Day Lewis, who is well known for staying in character on film sets (even when not shooting)” (Hearle, Andrew. “Actor's Dictionary.” *Stagemilk*, 10 May 2016).

It is important to note that Stanislavski—who is often considered to be the originator of method acting—was not actually in favor of limiting an actor to their skill of calling upon their inner emotional life. In fact, Stanislavski proposed a holistic approach to acting, which included both “inside-out” and “outside-in” schools of acting and paid equal homage to the body and the mind. Stanislavski was not a proponent of an actor's total immersion and identification with his character. In truth, method acting is solely Lee Strasberg's interpretation of Stanislavski's system. Hence, “The Method” has been trademarked by the *Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute*. Moreover, Marlon Brando—who continues to be a poster child for method acting—was actually not a student of Lee Strasberg's but of Stella Adler's (who dissociated herself from Strasberg's interpretation of Stanislavski early on).

It-Factor: also known as “**X factor**.” “A unique and noteworthy quality that makes someone or something exceptional” (“Idioms,” *Free Dictionary*). Merriam-Webster calls the “X factor” “a circumstance, quality, or person that has a strong but unpredictable influence” (*Merriam-Webster*). An actor with the “It factor” is often someone with great stage or screen presence who resonates with an audience.

MPDG: manic pixie dream girl. The term was coined by Nathan Rabin in 2007, but the stock-character of the MPDG has been around for a long time. The MPDG is a trope in film and

television. MPDG's whole existence centers around being the muse to the main male character. She has no real life of her own other than inspiring the main character. Rabin put it as follows:

The Manic Pixie Dream Girl exists solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures. The Manic Pixie Dream Girl is an all-or-nothing-proposition. Audiences either want to marry her instantly (despite The Manic Pixie Dream Girl being, you know, a fictional character) or they want to commit grievous bodily harm against them and their immediate family. (Rabin, "Elizabethtown," *AV Club* 2007)

Since the term has taken on a life of its own, an updated depiction of MPDG is necessary. *TV Trope* explains the "MPDG" as follows:

The *Manic Pixie Dream Girl* is here to give new meaning to the male hero's life! She's stunningly attractive, energetic, high on life, full of wacky quirks and idiosyncrasies (generally including childlike playfulness), often with a touch of wild hair dye. She's inexplicably obsessed with our stuffed-shirt hero, on whom she will focus her *kuh-razy* (sic) antics until he learns to live freely and love madly. ("Manic Pixie Dream Girl," *TVtrope.org*)

Presence: Stage or screen presence in acting refers to when the audience is completely tuned into the performer's energy, and when the performer is fully in the moment and in the flow of the play. The *OED* defines "presence" as "the impressive manner or appearance of a person" (*OED*). An actor with stage presence is able to capture an audience's undivided attention.

Resonance: Attunement between the actor and the audience; when the audience taps into the consciousness of the performer and elicits an emotional or sympathetic response. When the audience responds vividly to a performer. In an interview with *Columbia News*, Anne Bogart poignantly describes "resonance" as follows:

In my search for the most basic task of the theater experience, I came to understand that it is resonance that matters most. Our job as theater artists is to create the conditions in which resonance—literally, vibration—can happen between actors and the audiences’ bodies, minds, and senses. As I studied the phenomena of resonance, I realized that, in fact, all the arts are only as successful as the resonance that they generate with those on the receiving end. (Glasberg, quoting Anne Bogart, *Columbia News*, 11 Oct. 2021)

SITI: Saratoga International Theater Institute. SITI is a theater company and drama school in both Saratoga Springs, NY, and in Manhattan (520 8th Avenue). SITI was founded by the American theatre and opera director Anne Bogart and Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki in 1992. SITI announced the closure of its physical locations as of autumn 2022 (Bahr, “SITI Company Announces Final Season,” *NYT*, 7 Oct. 2020). SITI is said, however, to continue teaching.

Substitution: “The process of endowing the other actor in the scene with characteristics of a person from your real life. Ideally this person best expresses the need in your scene objective – this will really connect you to the other actor you’re working with, and ground your performance in truth” (Hearle, *Stagemilk* 2016). “Substitution” is often used when the actor cannot organically or easily connect with a scene partner or their character’s particular situation in life. The actor is then encouraged to personalize the moment in the play they are having difficulty with. They need to incorporate a person from their real life into said moment, or they need to use a situation from their real life experience that is similar to that of the character’s to make the scene work.

Stanislvskian Terms

Communion: Believable action in the play must be directed to the other actors on stage. When the actors communicate with one another through their actions, the performance captures more human truth than playing actions directly to the audience. Being in communion with a scene partner automatically engages the audience and allows them to share in the moment.

Emotional Memory: The memory of an actor’s emotion from real life, past or present. An actor can draw on emotional memory to re-create a certain feeling on stage. Actors are trained to

observe their real-life emotions and the emotions of others in great depth in order to use these emotions as a resource for their acting.

Given Circumstances: The time, the place, the situation, the background, and the action of the character are the “givens” of the play or script. An actor must ask: “Who am I, when am I, where am I, why am I (here/there), for what reason am I (here/there), how do I feel, and how am I going to get what I want?” *Backstage* defines “given circumstances” as “all the specifics of the character, any facts you can glean from the script. Given circumstances include everything from the character’s background to the time and place of the story and the structure of the staged world. Given circumstances are essential because they determine what actions are possible for a character to perform” (Ates, *Backstage* 2022).

Muscular Memory or Muscle Memory: When an actor has mastered their work on a part, the words, actions, and movements of the character come to them organically. Muscle memory is: “The ability to repeat a specific muscular movement with improved efficiency and accuracy that is acquired through practice and repetition” (*Merriam-Webster*). The *OED* adds that muscle memory happens subconsciously: It is “the ability to reproduce a particular movement *without conscious thought*, acquired as a result of frequent repetition of that movement” (*OED*, emphasis mine). It is the moment an actor is ready to go into flow-state (see definition under Psychology Terms).

Objective: What the character wants in each scene. The “objective” should be a playable action such as: “I want to make her love me,” or “I want him to feel my pain.” An objective should always deal with a scene partner in order to create interaction: For example, “to think about something” or “to recall something” is not interactive and dull to watch for the audience because it is self-indulgent. “To get someone to do something,” on the other hand, creates immediate interaction between two actors. Each scene objective must work toward the character’s super-objective in the play. A scene objective must deal with the issues at hand in a particular scene or moment of the play. For example, if a character’s overarching super-objective in a play is to escape from his small town life, a scene objective could be the removal of the barriers other people put in the character’s way on his journey to escape. Such a scene objective could be: “I need to get my money back from x character in order to buy a way out of this town.”

Physical Action: The actor builds his or her character through specific actions. The best actions are performable on the stage, within the world of the play. Stanislavski considered the actor's body as their instrument. Therefore, physical actions were of utmost importance to Stanislavski. Actors must be in excellent physical shape in order to align their physique, vocal strength, and emotional power with that of their character. Stella Adler—who studied with Stanislavski personally—also emphasizes the importance of having a healthy and athletic body: “You must have 100 percent health... Health is something you owe yourself and your profession” (Adler 17). Importantly, a physical performable action will release emotions organically. Instead of forcing an emotion, an actor is asked to play an action (always a verb) and allow the emotion to follow. As an example: A husband returns from work and calmly walks over to the kitchen to pour himself a whiskey. When his wife enters, he swirls the liquid in the glass repeatedly while he contemplates if and how to break to his wife that he has just lost all their money and the children's college fund in the stock market. The action of swirling the whiskey, in this instance, reveals the husband's inner turmoil through physical wave-like motions. Without the husband speaking a single line, he has conveyed to the wife (and the audience) his inner restlessness. If he swirls the liquid obsessively, the husband may be able to reveal to the audience the fact that he is trying to distract himself from the inevitable desperation or rage that will inevitably ensue.

Second Nature: Similar to “muscle memory,” when an actor has practiced sufficiently and mastered their part, it has become “second nature.” When actions, words and emotions occur organically and subconsciously, when the actor does not have to think anymore or force anything, they have managed to make the character their “second nature.”

Subtext: The true feeling (or unspoken meaning) underneath or behind the words that a character is speaking. Subtext can be an inner monologue the actor runs through their mind while speaking the play's text, or it can be body language, gestures, facial expressions, or any other kind of non-verbal communication. A simple example of subtext is when a character shakes their head when they say “Yes.” It is an indication that the character is feeling differently from what they are saying. A beat or silence in the right place can also be subtext. Stanislavski once said: “Spectators come to the theatre to hear the subtext. They can read the text at home” (Moore 28).

Even more importantly, the more intense and visceral an actor's subtext, the more the audience participates in the action. Well-acted subtext draws the audience into the character's secret world.

Super-Objective: A character's main, overreaching goal throughout the entirety of the play. All the other objectives of the character have to align with his or her super-objective. Whereas scene-objectives are the character's specific actions to achieve their goal within a specific moment of the play, the super-objective is what the character ultimately wants within the entirety of the play. As an example, Hamlet's super-objective within the play is to avenge his father's murder. In many scenes, however, Hamlet has various objectives—such as making his mother feel his pain and her guilt—that he employs on his journey towards his super-objective. The various objectives Hamlet employs throughout the play to work toward his super-objective constitute the character's through line.

System or The System: Stanislavski's technique for actors to help them create a character. These techniques are a holistic approach that include the mind and the body. As *BBC Beats* puts it succinctly: "Stanislavski never sought to codify acting in some rigid inflexible way. He was, if you like, devising a manual rather than a straitjacket. His work has been hugely influential because a new practitioner doesn't feel restricted but inspired to build on the work" ("Naturalism and Stanislavski, *BBC Beats* 2022). In a similar vein, Michael Billington emphasizes the importance of Stanislavski's system even now: "Stanislavski provided a route map for exploring what he called "that conscious road to the gates of the unconscious", which is the foundation of modern theatre. And it is a map that no actor, even today, can afford to ignore" (Billington, *Guardian*, 9 May 2009).

Task-Emotion: Elizabeth Hapgood, the first and main English translator of Stanislavski's works, translated "tasks" as "objectives." Therefore a task emotion is an emotion that emerges when an actor performs a physical action that serves his objective. Task emotions go hand in hand with physical actions. I must add here that Elly Konijn, in her study *Acting Emotions* of 1997, understands "task-emotions" to be the intense emotions actors feel during the stress of a performance. Konijn defines "task-emotions" as: "Emotions which stem from the level of enactment of the actor as a craftsman. Task-emotions are emotions connected with executing acting tasks on stage" (Konijn, "Glossary," *Acting Emotions*).

Through-Line: The connection between all of the character’s objectives on his or her journey toward the super-objective. The various scene objectives must align with the super-objective. The various scene objectives are what motivates the character to achieve his or her super-objective.

What if or Magic If

Stanislavski created the “what-if” question to help actors implement their creative imagination. The actor asks him or herself: ‘what if’ the situation on stage were real? What if I were in the character’s situation? Stanislavski said that “the actor must treat fiction exactly as if it were reality” (*RC*, quoting Stanislavski 23). By putting him or herself into the shoes of the character, the actor simulates the character’s life and circumstances and thereby understands the character’s motivation throughout the play.

Cognitive Neuroscience Terms and Abbreviations:

Bodymind: Also known as body-mind or mind-body. Bodymind is a term that refers to a person holistically by combining the physical body with the mind or spirit. The term “bodymind” also seeks to show the interconnectedness between mind and body.

Cartesian Dualism or Mind-Body-Dualism: “the view that mind and body (or matter) are fundamentally distinct kinds of substances or natures” (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 2021)

Conceptual Blending: Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) was introduced by cognitive linguists Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier in *The Way We Think* in 2002. Conceptual blending “refers to a set of cognitive operations for combining (or blending) words, images, and ideas in a network of ‘mental spaces’ to create meaning” (Norquist ThoughtCo 29 Jan. 2020). In respect to acting and conceptual blending, Rhonda Blair says the following: “Blending is a fundamental part of the actor's and director's manipulation of language and imagery in order to engage the material on which they're working in as fully felt and specific a way as possible. Living and playing "in the blend" is at the root of originality and creativity” (Blair, *Cognitive Neuroscience and Acting* 94).

Conceptual Metaphor: a metaphor in which one idea is explained by another idea (usually an abstract concept is explained by a concrete one). For example, personality is often thought of in terms of temperature: “She had a warm personality” or “he was really cold with us.”

Conceptual Reasoning: colloquially thought of as “thinking outside of the box” or creative thinking. Conceptual reasoning and thinking is abstract thinking as opposed to concrete thinking. Describing something metaphorically is one example of abstract thinking: n.b. Shakespeare’s “All the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players (*AYLI* 2.7). Using figures of speech such as “he is the apple of her eye” or “opportunity knocked on her door” is also abstract and creative thinking.

EEG: Electroencephalography. Small sensors are attached to a person’s head in order to record brain activity.

Emotion: often interchangeably used with the word “feeling” in colloquial parlance. In cognitive neuroscience, however, there exists a difference between emotions and feelings: Feelings are emotions one is aware of whereas emotions are subconscious. *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines “emotion” as “a complex experience of consciousness, bodily sensation, and behavior that reflects the personal significance of a thing, an event, or a state of affairs” (Solomon, “emotion,” *Encyclopedia Britannica* 2021).

Feeling: in colloquial English often interchangeably used with the word “emotion.” In cognitive neuroscience, feelings are emotions that a person has become aware of; feelings are emotions that have risen to the surface of consciousness. Emotions, on the other hand, can play out subconsciously.

fMRI: A functional magnetic resonance imaging scan measures and maps the brain’s activity. Specifically, an fMRI focuses on blood flow in the brain.

Embodied Cognition: In opposition to the Cartesian model of mind versus body in which all cognition is independent of the body, embodied cognition recognizes the great part the body plays in shaping the mind. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as an example, asserted that the body is the foremost instrument through which human beings perceive the world. Merleau-Ponty said: “The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually

committed to them” (Merleau-Ponty, “The Body,” *Phenomenology of Perception* 84). While Merleau-Ponty, along with Martin Heidegger and John Dewey set the groundwork for embodied cognition, it was George Lakoff and Mark Johnson who showed in 1980 with their book *Metaphors We Live By* that people think in metaphors, and metaphors are based on the physical experience of emotions:

Metaphors We Live By was a game changer. Not only did it illustrate how prevalent metaphors are in everyday language, it also suggested that a lot of the major tenets of western thought, including the idea that reason is conscious and passionless and that language is separate from the body aside from the organs of speech and hearing, were incorrect. In brief, it demonstrated that “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.” (McNerny, “A Brief Guide to Embodied Cognition,” *Scientific American* 2011).

In *Philosophy of the Flesh* (1999), Lakoff and Johnson “argued that the mind is inherently embodied, thought is mostly unconscious and abstract concepts are largely metaphorical. What’s left is the idea that reason is not based on abstract laws because cognition is grounded in bodily experience” (McNerny, “A Brief Guide to Embodied Cognition,” *Scientific American* 2011).

Emotional Contagion: when one person perceives and copies the emotions of another person. For example, when one person smiles at another person, and the other person instantaneously returns that smile. Alternatively, emotional contagion is when someone enters the office in a troubled frame of mind and transmits their negativity or dark mood to everyone else around them. In acting, emotional contagion is important because exceptional performers ideally have both the skill to be absorbed by the emotions of others (their scene partner or the audience), and they have the skill to convey their own emotional state to others (scene partner or audience). In 1993, Elaine Hatfield et al. defined “emotional contagion” as “the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, posture and movements with those of another person’s and, consequently, to converge emotionally” (Hatfield et al.. “Emotional Contagion.” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1993, p. 96). Hatfield is known as the

first scholar to propose the emotional contagion hypothesis. Poignantly, in an essay that builds on Hatfield's emotional contagion hypothesis by investigating it within the sales force, Willem Verbeke says: "Those people who are able to infect others with their emotions and become infected by their emotions could be perceived as emotionally intelligent people... These emotionally intelligent people might be at an advantage in society and daily life" (Verbeke 618). Moreover, Verbeke calls people with both "high capability to infect" and "high capability to be infected" with the emotions, moods, or facial expressions of others "*charismatics*: They are able to infect others with their emotions and also to become infected by the emotions of others" (Verbeke 622, emphasis editor's). In other words, the people that are open to receive the emotions of others and also capable of transmitting their own emotions to others "will perform better, as they are able to empathize with the customer...and also to control the customer ... implicitly" (Verbeke 622). In the entertainment industry, be that on stage or in film and television, it is, of course, immensely important for an actor to be able to receive the emotions of others and also to be in complete control of their own emotions (to either transmit them or to regulate them otherwise).

MEG: "**Magnetoencephalography** (MEG) is a non-invasive neurophysiological technique that measures the magnetic fields generated by neuronal activity of the brain" (Stringfellow, "Basic Principles of Magnetoencephalography," *MIT*, mit.edu 2022). More simply put, MEG is a non-invasive medical technique that analyzes a person's brain activity by detecting and measuring the magnetic fields produced by the brain's electrical currents.

Microexpression: "A transient facial expression of an intense, concealed emotion, generally lasting a few tenths of a second" (*Segen's Medical Dictionary* 2012). Microexpressions were first discovered by Ernest A. Haggard and Kenneth S. Isaacs in 1966 when they analyzed documentaries of the non-verbal behavior of patients conversing with their therapists. More recently, Paul Ekman brought microexpressions to a wide audience after having studied non-verbal behavior across cultures for years. Ekman's book *Telling Lies* of 1985 led him to work with the CIA, FBI and TSA to help with deception detection. Ekman's studies on emotions, microexpressions, non-verbal communication and lie-detecting also inspired the TV show *Lie to Me* (Fox, 2009-2011), which brought Ekman's findings to an even wider global audience.

Mimesis: Origin of “mimesis” is “mid 16th century; from Greek *mimēsis*, from *mimeisthai* ‘to imitate’; imitative representation of the real world in art and literature; the deliberate imitation of the behaviour of one group of people by another group as a factor in social change; culture is organized in terms of mimesis and desire” (*OED*). Furthermore, “mimesis” can be defined as “a term used in philosophy and literary criticism. It describes the process of imitation or mimicry through which artists portray and interpret the world. Mimesis is not a literary device or technique, but rather a way of thinking about a work of art” (Masterclass Staff, “Poetry 101: What Is Mimesis? Mimesis Definition with Examples,” *Masterclass* 2021). More simply put, “mimesis” is the imitation of life in the creative arts (acting, literature, painting). The artist’s interpretation, however, is crucial in all mimetic representations of life.

Mirror Neurons: First discovered—quite serendipitously—in 1992 by Giacomo Rizzolatti and his team while working with macaque monkeys in a lab at the University of Parma, Italy.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines “mirror neuron” as a:

type of sensory-motor cell located in the brain that is activated when an individual performs an action or observes another individual performing the same action. Thus, the neurons “mirror” others’ actions. Mirror neurons are of interest in the study of certain social behaviours, such as empathy and imitation, and may provide a mechanistic explanation for social cognition. (Knoblich and Sebanz, “Mirror neuron,” *Encyclopedia Britannica* 2014)

Mirror neurons in humans remain a matter of debate and more research is needed to give a precise definition.

Proprioception, or kinesthesia: “the sense that lets us perceive the location, movement, and action of parts of the body... Proprioception enables us to judge limb movements and positions, force, heaviness, stiffness, and viscosity. It combines with other senses to locate external objects relative to the body and contributes to body image. Proprioception is closely tied to the control of movement” (Taylor, J.L. *Encyclopedia of Neuroscience*, Academic Press 2009). The *OED* defines “proprioception” as “perception or awareness of the position and movement of the body”

(OED).

Simulation: the act of giving or assuming the appearance of someone or something.

“Simulation” is “a model of a real activity created for training purposes or to solve a problem; a situation or event that seems real but is not real” (CED).

ST: Simulation Theory: First proposed by Robert Gordon in 1986. The use of one’s body to simulate and predict the behavior of others. Gordon’s simulation theory is in keeping with embodied cognitive science and with the discovery of mirror neurons in primates (cf. Dawson and Medler, *Dictionary of Cognitive Science* 2009).

Psychology Terms:

Impression Management: the manner in which people present themselves to the world. The purpose of impression management is to try to influence how others perceive one. Usually, it is the attempt to be seen in the best light possible.

Flow state or Flow: The term “flow state” was coined by psychologists Miháli Csíkszentmihályi in 1975. “Flow state” refers to a state of someone’s deep, complete immersion in an activity that surroundings fade into the background and time is experienced differently. Csíkszentmihályi puts “flow state” as follows:

Concentration on a manageable and clearly structured set of actions leads to immersion in the activity with no attention left over to think about life's problems or even about oneself except as part of the activity. Thus, people report a loss of awareness of time passing, a loss of self-consciousness, of self-doubt, of any of the ego-related concerns present in everyday situations... Occasionally this leads to a sense of personal transcendence, of merging with a reality beyond the normal bounds of individuality. Finally, the flow experience is unani- mously described as being exciting, fulfilling, enjoyable—an experience that is rewarding in itself rather than being a means to some external reward. (Csíkszentmihályi, “Reflections on Enjoyment,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 1985, p. 491).

FTM: female to male. “A transgender man” (*Merriam-Webster* 2022); “an FTM transsexual” (*OED*). A person whose sex at birth is female and who subsequently adopts the identity and/or appearance of a male.

NVC: Non-Verbal-Communication: More completely studied in behavior sciences. NVC is “the act of conveying information without the use of words. Nonverbal communication occurs through facial expressions, gestures, body language, tone of voice, and other physical indications of mood, attitude, approbation, and so forth, some of which may require knowledge of the culture or subculture to understand” (*APA Dictionary of Psychology—American Psychological Association* 2022).

PTSD: post-traumatic stress disorder

ToM: Theory of Mind: “[T]he understanding that others have intentions, desires, beliefs, perceptions, and emotions different from one’s own and that such intentions, desires, and so forth affect people’s actions and behaviors” (*APA Dictionary of Psychology—American Psychological Association*, 2020).

A) INTRODUCTION: A STRANGE VOID IN LANGUAGE DUE TO ARTIFICIAL SPLITS

a) The Lack of Language for Acting

As early as 1768, G.E. Lessing, when trying to write about acting, lamented in the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*: “We have actors but no art of acting” (Lessing, “Essay 101”). In his 1983 essay entitled “Understanding Acting,” Richard Hornby voices a similar concern: “Acting is the least understood of the arts” (Hornby 19). An educated layperson has a better idea of all the other arts: “how a painter paints, a novelist writes, or a musician rehearses,” Hornby says. However, how an actor acts or prepares for a role is not even understood by theatre critics (cf. Hornby 19). In his 2009 stage blog for *The Guardian*, theatre critic Andrew Hayden echoes Lessing’s and Hornby’s concern: “It’s an odd problem, and I don’t have any kind of solution. But it is intriguing to think that at the heart of writing about theatre, there is this strange void in language that means we can’t ever say what we’ve seen”¹ (Hayden *Guardian.com*) Similarly, John Lutterbie observes that “a gap appears [in language] that needs to be filled . . . with an alternative approach to expressing an idea. [Since] one of the functions of art can be the communication of the ineffable, that which resists translation into linear forms . . . [that which] resists [verbal] expression” needs to find a new language (cf. Lutterbie, *Affective Performance (AP)* 112, 108, 114). Amy Cook claims that the “challenge is coming up with the language to articulate what it has been all along, but we have missed some of the nuances because our language looks for bodies and minds” (Cook, *AP* 84).

Likewise, American performance studies scholar Richard Schechner bemoans that there “is in plain fact no basic methodology or vocabulary of acting; no means by which scholars, teachers, and practitioners can fruitfully (and with some objectivity) discuss acting” (Konijn quoting Schechner, *Acting Emotions* 16). Thalia A. Goldstein adds, “The skills needed to act

¹ Hayden’s full quote is: “I would argue that the reason for this lies in the very nature of our culture and language. We are predisposed to talking about ideas and politics; we have a lot of words for doing so. Acting, on the other hand, is full of intangible qualities. Little wrinkles of the eye, the faint hint of a smile—it’s a series of tiny moments that would take an entire newspaper to describe. There are a few shorthands for style: acting, like porcelain, tends to be fine” (Hayden, “How Do You Describe Great Acting?” *Guardian.com*).

have never been fully analyzed and delineated from a psychological viewpoint. In fact, even acting theorists and textbooks are not completely sure [of] the skills needed to act” (cf. Goldstein, *The Routledge Companion to Theater, Performance, and Cognitive Science (RC)* 157). Rick Kemp also laments “that there is a lack of common practical vocabulary among practitioners to talk about performance” (Kemp, *Embodied Acting* xiv). Capturing what a good² actor does in a performance has proven elusive in theatre criticism, literary criticism, and performance studies criticism. The philological branch of criticism perceives acting as a secondary art, which is always one step removed from the primary text.³ The actor and character are separate entities in the way the actor’s body on stage is removed from the mental construct of the character. The character is perceived as a fabrication of a mind that exists independently of a text, the way a character in a novel does. Many critics and audiences can conceptualize Hamlet, what he looks like, and how he speaks, as an example. Literary critics often judge⁴ actors according to how closely their performance aligns with the critics’ interpretation of the textual construct of the character. The latter, in turn, is culturally constructed and a product of its time. If actors act in accordance with a critic’s idea of a character, their performance is deemed good. If

² When I speak of a “good” or “a great actor” throughout my dissertation, I am referring to “an actor who repeatedly makes *strong acting choices*.” When I speak of “good acting,” I refer to “a *strong acting choice*.” By way of an explanation, I would like to point out that, originally, I wanted to use the term “strong actor” or “master actor” instead of “good/great actor” but neither “strong” nor “master actor” sounded quite right when used throughout my entire work, particularly when used alongside quotations (theatre critics and actors both employ common parlance-qualifiers). Furthermore, “strong” and “master” have a touch of the aggressive and the masculine, and I will specifically make the point about actors being at home in both strength and vulnerability, and fluid within both their femininity and masculinity.

Hence, whenever I refer to an actor or acting as “good,” or “great,” I do it for the sake of simplicity and ease of reading. I understand that “good/great” are not universal truths, and very often the quality and value of something is in the eye of the beholder. However, the acting performances I will depict in Part II have been widely and officially acclaimed by critics, award organizations, fellow practitioners, acting teachers, scholars, and/or the public. Moreover, all of the actors I write about have repeatedly proven their skill in respect to making strong acting choices. I had to use a unified, if not unanimous, starting point that is compatible with conversational language.

³ Rick Kemp emphasizes in *Embodied Acting* “the equality of physical behavior to language in communicating meaning. That there is a need to do this exposes another duality within contemporary Western theatre. This reflects the traditional view within psychology that language and non-verbal communication are two separate systems, devoted to different subject matters. Recent research shows that this view is limited and inaccurate. . . . [T]he work of experimental psychologist Adam Kendon and others . . . demonstrates the close relationship between language and non-verbal behavior. Their findings suggest that gestures are closely linked to speech and are equal conveyors of meaning in many contexts” (cf. Kemp xx). I will explain Kemp’s meaning in greater detail in my chapter on cognitive neuroscience and how it relates to acting.

⁴ It must be added that often—beginning with Aristotle, who mainly focused on texts—literary critics discredit performances as secondary or irrelevant.

they⁵ veer from their text-based interpretation of a character, they are perceived as either bad actors or wrong for the part.⁶

The philological, mind-driven branch of criticism pays little attention to the acted, manifested, unmediated, and body-driven character that actors create in performance because acting is viewed more as gestural imitation,⁷ entertaining presentation, or second-rate representation than the result of a creation that can “express the ineffable” (Lutterbie, *AP* 108) to make the invisible images and meanings beneath a text visible and to express these images and meanings to the audience. Performance critics, conversely, understand the performance to be the text and dramatic characters as manifestations that actors bring to life on stage or screen. Furthermore, within the acting profession, as actor and scholar Rick Kemp points out, there exists a “prejudice against theory” (Kemp, *Embodied Acting* 14):

[T]here is considerable suspicion of written theory, probably because so much knowledge about acting is held and communicated in a sort of oral tradition. . . . This suspicion is strongly influenced by the tendency towards a kinesthetic learning

⁵ I will use “they” when speaking about actors in general. However, because most of the Shakespearean parts I describe are played by males and because many of my scholarly sources use “he” or “she,” I will use the pronoun that best captures the meaning of my text or the scholar’s text.

⁶ As an example: A female or African-American Hamlet was not embraced without contention and, at times, outrage. Sarah Bernhardt’s performance as the first female Hamlet in 1899 was received with mixed reviews. Bernhardt was the most famous and respected actress of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. She was known as the “Divine Sarah” around the world. Nonetheless, to give an example, essayist and critic Max Beerbohm demonstrated his misogyny when he wrote that only men can be creative artists and Bernhardt was merely aping a male performance. Beerbohm snarkily called Bernhardt a “grande dame,” implying that she was not masculine enough to play Hamlet (cf. Skinner 261). Beerbohm wrote: “[c]reative power, the power to conceive ideas and execute them, is an attribute of virility: women are denied it. In so far as they practise art at all, they are aping virility, exceeding their natural sphere. Never does one understand so well the failure of women in art as when one sees them deliberately impersonating men upon the stage” (Manktelow 94-95). When Ira Aldridge (1807-1867)—considered the first Black American tragedian—performed Shakespeare in New York City, he was physically beaten. When he became the first black man to play Othello in England, the majority of the press viewed his performance as a violation of the fact that Othello was written by a white man and was supposed to be played by a white man with black makeup. Such casting (and thinking) is inconceivable nowadays. Aldridge had left the United States early on due to ongoing discrimination. He was, for the most part, received more graciously in England, his adopted country. However, this was not the case in the instance of his portrayal of Othello. Bernhardt and Aldridge demonstrate that defying a society’s current conceptualization of a character is dangerous and often ill-received at the time.

⁷ I am not using “imitation” in a dismissive way. In fact, I will explain in my chapter on acting and cognitive neuroscience just how important “imitation” is because it is perceived before spoken language. My mention of an actor using “imitation” in this instance is guided by the understanding that imitation alone is not enough: The actor must also interpret the imitation. I will expound on this in detail later.

Sarah Bernhardt
as Hamlet (1899)



orientation in actors and is further reinforced by the oft-repeated exhortation of ‘Show me, don’t tell me!’ in actor training, which prioritizes embodied experience over narrated information. (Kemp, Rick, *Embodied Acting* 14)

To find a better language for acting and to mediate⁸ between the adversarial disciplines of literary criticism (which views a character as a construct of the mind) and performance criticism⁹ (which views a character as an effect of a process of bodies on stage/screen), as well as between mind-driven theory and body-driven theatre practice, recent studies in cognitive science have attempted to demonstrate that—and how—acting is not divided by the still-prevalent Cartesian dualism of Western humanities that separates the mind from the body.

Mind vs. body is “a false duality that misleads practitioners and theorists alike. The origin of the dichotomy is understandable—the body is visible, thought is not” (cf. Kemp 99). However, “these notions reflect the split between body and mind in Western thought that we now know is mistaken and rest upon a metaphorical concept of the individual—that of the body as a container, with thought being something that occurs ‘inside,’ and expression something that happens ‘outside’” (cf. Kemp 93). Moreover, Kemp points out that: “[G]iven that nvc [nonverbal communication] is so central to the practice of making theatre, it is a curious paradox that we don’t have a comprehensive vocabulary for behavioral communication” (cf. Kemp 24). Kemp specifically seeks to create “a holistic vocabulary of performance that acknowledges the embodied nature of meaning” with the help of cognitive sciences, and he seeks to “bridge the gap between the categories of theory and practice” (cf. Kemp xxiii, 15). Kemp’s aim is to show that “physicality is often an equal component of meaning and language” (Kemp 90). He tries to

⁸ I use “mediate” with the notion that, to approach a greater truth, it is best to seek it between two differing ideas, not necessarily in their fixed center, but in a more fluid state between binaries. I do not mean “reconcile.”

⁹ I include practitioners’ views of acting in performance criticism. Most of the performance criticism writers I mention in my dissertation are both actors and scholars. Rick Kemp is an actor, director, and scholar. Rhonda Blair is an actress, a director, and a scholar. Stanislavski and Michael Chekhov were both actors and scholars. Kemp decided to write his book on embodied acting (that considers both practice and theory) when he studied English literature at Oxford, long before acting merited a degree. Kemp notes, “Oxford didn’t have a theatre program” (Kemp Preface). Kemp also states that performance criticism “wasn’t worthy of study in its own right” (Kemp Preface). Kemp, specifically, along with other actor-scholars, aims at synthesizing mind and body and making his readers understand why these two are not separate, but inform each other: “The mind is inherently embodied, not just in the sense that the brain operates in a body, but because physical experience shapes conceptual thought” (Kemp xvi).

demonstrate that the physical and psychological, that practice and theory, and that body and mind inform each other, as opposed to being binaries.

In an interview with Maxwell Fox, Rupert Sheldrake summarizes Cartesian dualism and its legacy in a poignant manner:

A lot of the present confusion began in the philosophy of René Descartes in the seventeenth century. Descartes said the whole of nature is a machine; it is inanimate. In effect, he withdrew the soul from nature,¹⁰ from all animals and plants, and from the human body as well. Before that the soul was believed to permeate the whole body. ... When Descartes made this division between the realms of matter and spirit, he established a new demarcation between science and religion, defining their boundaries. Science took the whole of nature, including the human body. All nature was secularized. The arts and religion took the soul. In this way a *modus vivendi* was established between science and religion. Science was concerned with the objective realm of facts; religion and the arts with the subjective realm of values, aesthetics, morality, and belief. Science got the better part of the bargain, since it got practically everything, as defined in its own terms. (Fox, Maxwell, and Rupert Sheldrake, *Natural Grace* 77, 79)

Rick Kemp quotes philosopher Mark Johnson to emphasize the long history of this mind vs. body thinking: “Mind/body dualism is so deeply embedded in our philosophical and religious traditions, in our shared conceptual systems, and in our language that it can seem to be an inescapable fact about human nature” (Kemp 15). Additionally, Kemp reminds his readers of the following:

¹⁰ Since Sheldrake’s theories, in the words of Anne Bogart, are “much disputed, [but] also much discussed” (Bogart, Anne, “Resonance,” *Anne Bogart’s Blog/SITI*, Aug. 12, 2016), I am adding several viewpoints on Cartesian dualism that are very similar to Sheldrake’s, e.g., Elizabeth Grosz: She uses almost the same sentence when she says that Descartes accomplished “the separation of soul from nature” (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies (VB)* 48). Grosz also adds a poignant reading of how Western “knowledge” and “science” may be built on sand: “This exclusion of the soul from nature, this evacuation of consciousness from the world, is the prerequisite for founding a knowledge, or better, a science, of the governing principles of nature, a science which excludes and is indifferent to considerations of the subject. ... Scientific discourse aspires to impersonality, which it takes to be equivalent to objectivity” (Grosz, *VB* 48). In short, viewing the world in strict binaries is a non-starter: “As soon as the terms are defined in mutually exclusive ways, there is no way of reconciling them, no way of understanding their mutual influences or explaining their apparent parallelism” (Grosz, *VB* 49).

A useful analogy is our experience of the sun. Our perception shows us that the sun moves in the sky, but we know from the work of astronomers and physicists that it is the earth that is moving. Similarly, our perception of our bodies suggests a split between mind and body, but empirical research in fields such as biology, neuroscience, and psychology show otherwise. (Kemp 15–16)

Solely because something appears in a certain way to the human mind does not mean it is that way.¹¹

In her famous book *Freeing the Natural Voice*, the late Kristin Linklater says, “The Cartesian way of thinking, which has been boiled down to an oversimplified adage of ‘I think, therefore I am,’ has never been convincing to performing artists. It is obvious to those of us who work in the psychophysical field that it is ‘I am, therefore, I think’” (Linklater, *Voice* 344). Linklater continues by quoting Antonio Damasio at length on the subject of how language works. Damasio, in *The Feeling of What Happens*, emphasizes that the word “psyche” originally meant “breath and blood,” not, as it does now, “mind” (cf. Damasio 30). Damasio’s quote on language is very important. Therefore, I will follow Linklater’s example and quote it in full:

Language—that is, words and sentences—is a translation of something else, a conversation from nonlinguistic images, which stand for entities, events, relationships, and inferences. If language operates for the self and for consciousness in the same way that it operates for everything else, that is, by symbolizing in words and sentences what

¹¹ Professor of cognitive sciences Donald Hoffman, as an example, explains in his famous TED Talk of 2015 (“Do We See Reality as It Is?”) how humans and other species decidedly do not see reality as it is, but as they need it to be in order to survive. I mention his findings and the findings of other cognitive neuroscientists in much greater detail later. Suffice it to mention here that Hoffman indicates that humans (and other species) are driven primarily by the fitness of the species. Therefore, their perception is not motivated by seeing the “truth” or “real” reality, but by the survival of their species.

Zander & Zander stress the same point: “Human eyes are selective, too... We think we can see ‘everything,’ until we remember that bees make out patterns written in ultraviolet light on flowers, and owls see in the dark. The senses of every species—dogs hear sounds above our range of hearing, insects pick up molecular traces emitted from potential mates acres away. We perceive only the sensations we are programmed to receive, and our awareness is further restricted by the fact that we recognize only those for which we have mental maps or categories... We see a map of the world, not the world itself. But what kind of map is the brain inclined to draw? The answer comes from one of the realities of biology, the survival of the fittest” (cf. Zander & Zander, *The Art of Possibility* 10-11).

exists first in a nonverbal form, then there must be a nonverbal self and a nonverbal knowing for which the words “I” or “me” or the phrase “I know” are the appropriate translations, in any language. I believe it is legitimate to take the phrase “I know” and deduce from it the presence of a nonverbal image of knowing centered on a self that precedes and motivates that verbal phrase. The idea that self and consciousness would emerge after language, and would be a direct construction of language, is not likely to be correct. Language does not come out of nothing. Language gives us names for things. Given our supreme language gift, most of the ingredients of consciousness, from objects to inferences, can be translated into language, and for us, at this point in history and the history of each individual, the basic process of consciousness is relentlessly translated by language, covered by it, if you will. Because of this, it does require a major effort to imagine what lies behind language, but the effort must be made. (Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens* 107–108; Linklater, *Voice* 344–345)

Linklater’s point is that texts are embodied: “Embodied listening and speaking involve the person from feet to skull. The body is all ears. The body is one big mouth” (Linklater, *Voice* 346). Linklater says that texts must not be read with the head alone but with the entire body, with the bodymind. “To free the voice is to free the person, and each person is indivisibly mind and body.” Subsequently, Linklater advises actors to train their bodies and minds holistically: “The actor must develop a body that sees, hears, feels, and speaks. The brain must be his or her body” (Linklater, *Voice* 8, 9). Linklater makes it absolutely clear that the mind is the body and that the body is the mind.

Rosi Braidotti adds to the long history of the mind/body dualism a layer of historical, gender-political thinking relating to power. She emphasizes the need “to acknowledge the embodiment of the brain and the embrainment of the body” (*Anthropocene Feminism* 33) to shake the dualities that “Man”¹² put in place to define himself within his society and world. To

¹² Luce Irigaray repeatedly also said that the way society views the body with the male as the norm ought to be rethought. If the female body were the norm, Irigaray proposed, Western thought would not be as dualistic and non-contradictionalist, but more fluid and accepting of ambiguity (cf. Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* 106-118).

view the mind and body dualistically means to view it in terms of power relations and hierarchies: soul/body, male/female, mind/matter, intelligence/beauty, strength/weakness, active/passive, etc. Women are, it is important to point out, always the “deficient flip side of men” within this dualism (Seifert, *Fairy Tales, Gender, and Sexuality* 2). Sheila Ruth, correspondingly, explains how Pythagoras’s *Table of Opposites* “with different philosophies and different men, . . . has grown (historically and conceptually), and dualism . . . has evolved into a modus for ordering all reality, psychological and social as well as ontological. . . . The familiar hierarchy of one over the other, dominance and subordination, good vs. evil, is solidly in place” (cf. Ruth 156). Ruth continues by explaining that everything on the “wrong” or “other” side of God, the good, virtue, spirit, and man is the Devil, evil, sin, the body, and, of course, woman. Ruth asks, “Why, besides the masculinist ego, align femaleness with death and everything evil and undesirable?” and answers, “Woman, in patriarchy is body,” and man is spirit (cf. Ruth 157, 158). The body dies, of course, and the spirit lives on.

In the evolved-and-developed-by-men Pythagorean *Table of Opposites*, women [and actors historically were always aligned with the feminine¹³] “reflect the side of chaos, emotional, irrational, unpredictable, and obsessed with their bodies and appearance” (cf. Ruth 159). Furthermore, the *Table of Opposites* “presents not only an interpretation of cosmic reality but a picture of social reality as well” (Ruth 159). Ruth argues that when men align themselves with the spiritual and abstract, and women align with the body and the concrete, they “have separated themselves from the very meaning of life and its sense of belonging” (Ruth 162). Ruth perceives the paradox and irony in the latter: “Alien to the concrete, the real [men] are condemned to seek refuge in abstraction, sometimes completely unconnected to lived reality. . . . Ironically, men’s flight from life [and the body] propels them to a flight of death, which is meaningful only as a part of life” (cf. Ruth 162). It is this line of thought, argues Ruth, that leads to “abstracted reality, to dualism, . . . which spirals in increasing intensity and madness” (cf. Ruth 162). Ruth says bluntly that men lost the plot when they instituted the dualistic Western patriarchic thinking

¹³ In *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, Jonas Barish frequently mentions, for example, the antitheatricalists’ anxiety over male cross-dressing and sexual ambivalence. Meredith Anne Skura mentions the actor/feminine/prostitute theme repeatedly in *Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing*. As an example, Skura writes: “This dual openness to identification with women may ‘help to explain why male actors have been effective in playing female roles in so many societies’ and why actors have so often been seen as feminine” (Skura 24).

pattern as the received way of interpreting cosmic and social reality. There, Ruth says, madness lies. Such a “man-made” dualistic interpretation of the world is an attempt to ignore, avoid, suppress, and oppress away anything (paradoxes, in-between states, death/body, etc.¹⁴) that eludes said thinking pattern with the hope that it will go away.

As though to foreground Braidotti’s and Ruth’s points about the body, Rick Kemp, in *Embodied Acting*, states twice that “the body knows things about which the mind is ignorant” (Kemp 12). Furthermore, Kemp spotlights how important interdisciplinary and cross-pollinating thinking is to finding a better language for acting:

The study of philosophy may seem an esoteric pursuit for an actor, but . . . everyday life is composed of activities that are based on unconscious concepts such as causation, the nature of the self, and morality . . . all topics of philosophical inquiry. As human behavior is the raw material of acting, understanding the concepts and processes involved in perception, understanding, and the creation of meaning is of great value to the actor. (cf. Kemp 17)

Kemp advises everyone to reconsider their manner of thinking and their use of language to avoid the dualism trap so deeply built into our culture. Comparably, in *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Elizabeth Grosz proposes that the way in which the body is currently viewed is a hangover of mind–body dualism: “[T]here are two distinct, mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive substances, mind and body, each of which inhabits its own self-contained sphere” (Grosz, *VB* 6).

The dualistic model of mind and body suggests that the mind is an immaterial entity that exists apart from, and in charge of, the body: “[P]hallocentric presumptions . . . have hidden the culture and intellectual effacement of women” (cf. Grosz, *VB* ix). Grosz proposes that this very patriarchal, dualistic understanding of the body ought to be deconstructed. To speak about the

¹⁴ It is an attempt to deny and rationalize away anything that cannot truly be separated: Life and death, mind and body, man and woman, Heaven and Earth/Hell, etc. All these, in truth, are meaningful in that they exist at unity with one another. Without life, what is death? Without body, what is mind? The separation of these is a manufactured reality that does in no way correspond to lived reality. Furthermore, it takes meaning from things that exist but elude strict binary separation.

body and what a person does with his or her body is impossible without relating the body to the mind. In fact, Grosz understands the “body” to be a paradox:¹⁵

The body is the most peculiar “thing,” for it is never quite reducible to being merely a thing; nor does it ever quite manage to rise above the status of thing. Thus, it is both a thing and a nothing, an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of object not reducible to other objects. (Grosz, *VB* xi)

Note how Braidotti, Ruth, Kemp, and Grosz all emphasize the need to not reduce, subjugate, deny, and separate the body from the mind but to allow it its paradoxical in-between existence.

Similarly, Donna J. Haraway says of the body that it has “a trickster quality that resists categories and projects of all kinds” (Haraway, *Modest Witness* 128). Haraway’s notion of the body as a trickster is intriguing because she places the trickster body in an in-between sphere, which nowadays is termed the “bodymind” in cognitive neuroscience literature. She (with Braidotti, Ruth, Kemp, and Grosz) notices that the trickster body eludes Western language and logic.

¹⁵ This way of thinking about the body has been validated by cognitive neuroscience, which demonstrates how human beings “think” with their entire bodies. Better put, the nerves running through our bodies respond and react intelligently to circumstances. It is not solely the brain that does the thinking and reacting. That is why many cognitive neuroscientists and scholars have decided that “bodymind” is a better, more descriptive term for the body.



b) Tricking Dualistic Language: The Actor as Trickster

To refer to the body as a “trickster” is telling in the field of acting: The trickster is the original actor.¹⁶ Barbara Babcock–Abrahams observes that it is not accidental “that the trickster and the clown have become major metaphors for the artist in this century with its increasing self-consciousness of the creative process... They have been artists for a long time” (cf. Babcock–Abrahams 182). The trickster is a rule breaker and Protean shapeshifter: He¹⁷ “is paradox personified” (Babcock–Abrahams 148). He exists in the realm that Victor Turner calls “betwixt and between,” and he reveals to others “that which is neither this nor that, and yet is both” (Victor Turner in Campbell, “Power and Paradox in the Trickster Figure” 18). The trickster exists “inside and outside of time,” and he is “of our world, yet not of our world, so our laws will not always apply. [He is] an alchemist, a magician, creating realities in the duality of time and illusion [who eludes categorization]. He is a god, yet he is not. He is the wise fool. . . . He exists to question, to cause us to question [and] not to accept things blindly” (cf. “The Trickster Archetype,” *PBWorks Online Teaching and Learning Forum*).

¹⁶ There is a reason that so much literature is teeming with the trickster figure, from the Greek god Hermes to Plautus onwards to *Commedia Dell’Arte* to the Renaissance to the present day. From the Euro–American trickster to the Native American trickster, “trickster expresses the ambiguous and paradoxical nature of power. . . . [Trickster] is paradox personified” (Babcock–Abrahams 148). Babcock–Abrahams mentions the following tricksters: “Prometheus, Ture, Ma-ui, Eshu-Elegba, Anansi, Wakdjunkaga, raven, rabbit, spider, and coyote are but a few from ancient and native mythology and folktale. In Western literature, one could cite Lazarillo de Tormes, El Buscón, Gil Blas, Felix Krull, Augie March, and of late the Butch Cassidys and Easy Riders of film” (cf. Babcock–Abrahams 158). Recent film incarnations of the trickster have drawn even more attention to his or her shapeshifting actor qualities: Netflix’s *Lupin* is the quintessential trickster. The Norse god of mischief Loki—beautifully portrayed by Tom Hiddleston in the Marvel franchise—is, of course, the original trickster (or at least he would like to think so). The biblical serpent/Satan has many trickster attributes. The Joker in the Batman series is a dark trickster. Johnny Depp’s portrayal of Jack Sparrow in *The Pirates of the Caribbean* series is rich in trickster qualities. Tyrion Lannister (*Game of Thrones/A Song of Ice and Fire*) has trickster attributes and revels in them. Yoda, Till Eulenspiegel, Huckleberry Finn, PSmith, Doctor Who, and Bugs Bunny are more examples of the trickster. In fact, an early acting teacher of mine (Robert Castle) at the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute would consistently answer the question of “Who is the greatest actor of all time?” with “Bugs Bunny.” He was and was not joking. Bugs Bunny is a brilliant actor. As J.J. Sutherland puts it in his article on Bugs Bunny: “A hero, a bully, appealing, a little scary: Part of Bugs Bunny’s appeal is in his contradictions. . . . him, in toto, not in parts. From high opera to bullfights, Shakespeare to Brooklyn, from man to woman . . . he is all of those, and none” (cf. Sutherland, “Bugs Bunny: The Trickster, American Style” *NPR.com*).

¹⁷ It really should be “they” not “he,” as the trickster is almost always androgynous, often bisexual or, at least, ambiguous in gender and/or sexual orientation. However, much of the literature I quote refers to the trickster as male. Hence, I kept the pronoun “he” despite its being outdated.



The trickster is a paradox who walks the line of the liminal between the mundane and the transcendent. He is a gatekeeper, instigator, and conjuror, and he is always combustible. Western logic cannot capture him:

In contrast to the Western scientist, the trickster celebrates that which falls through the cracks of rational classification [and logic]. . . . [The trickster figure is often] imbued with a unique linguistic aptitude. Their speech is said to question itself, add layers of implication, and playfully introduce new meanings for the people's language system. (cf. Campbell 1, 2)

The trickster is like the element of mercury: He "is metallic yet liquid, matter yet spirit, cold yet fiery, poison yet healing draft—a symbol uniting all opposites" (Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* par. 404). The trickster teaches us the non-dualistic truth (some call it a sacred truth) of everything containing its opposite. Furthermore, the trickster teaches us the paradoxical opposites that coexist within us:

In our efforts to know *something* about Trickster, it might be best to forget our customary use of *ambiguity* as something with two or more meanings which, our culture biases tell us, must be resolved or "mediated" somehow. For Trickster, there can never be resolution. . . . Trickster never allows final definition of time, place, and character. He never settles or shapes himself to allow closure, either fictional or moral. We may believe that we have somehow fixed him at one moment, but if we look from another angle, he's gone. (Ballinger 31)

The trickster thrives on uncertainty, and he is afraid neither of doubt nor of change. Now you see him/her; now, you don't.

Jung—whom I quote here in full, since his descriptions are poetic and poignant—describes Mercurius/the trickster as the ultimate paradox:

(1) Mercurius consists of all conceivable opposites. He is thus quite obviously a duality, but is named a unity, although his innumerable inner contradictions can dramatically fly apart into an equal number of disparate and apparently independent figures. (2) He is both material and spiritual. (3) He is the process by which the lower material is transformed into the higher and spiritual, and vice versa. (4) He is the devil, . . . an evasive *trickster*, and God's reflection in physical nature. (5) He is also the reflection of a mystical experience of the artifex [artist]. . . . (6) As such, he represents on the one hand the self and on the other the individuation process and, because of the limitless number of his names, also the collective unconscious. . . . Mercurius is an adumbration of the primordial light-bringer, who is never himself the light. (cf. Jung, "Summary: The Spirit Mercurius," *Alchemical Studies* 237)

The trickster is the medieval Vice character of the pageant plays. He is androgynous and resists the male/female binary. He/she is Puck (often played by a woman these days) in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. In his dark incarnation, he is Richard III and Iago in *Othello*, feeding on Othello's inability to accept ambiguity. In a lighter incarnation, s/he is Ariel. He is the Fool in *King Lear*. He is Feste in *Twelfth Night*. He is Hamlet between "that which seems" and "that which is."¹⁸

He "lurks in liminality," and he "perche[s] almost as a spider on his web of social interplay and paradox" (Campbell 21). What Haraway picked up on in 1985, namely, that the body has "a trickster quality that resists categories," is exactly the paradoxical quality that good actors express with their bodies. In their embodied performance, they can become "the trickster." If this sounds slippery, it *is* because the referential, binary language of the West is not a suitable playground for the trickster who exists within paradox. However, such "slipperiness" does not mean that paradox does not exist or that it cannot be encapsulated. In fact, I will try to do so in my chapter on cognitive neuroscience and in my ensuing chapter on manifest acting

¹⁸ There exists a good deal of the trickster archetype in the Shakespearean characters who enjoy "playing" (Richard III and Iago on the dark side, Puck, Henry V, Ariel, Viola, Rosalind, Feste, and Lear's Fool on the lighter side, etc.). The characters who refuse to play (e.g., Coriolanus and Cordelia) are always deeply problematic in Shakespeare. I go into depth on this topic in my chapter on Coriolanus.

Puck as
Trickster Archetype



performances. Capturing this paradoxical trickster phenomenon through dualistic language is highly problematic. Victor Turner pointed out, “that as members of society, most of us see only what we expect to see, and what we expect to see is what we are conditioned to see when we have learned the definitions and classifications of our culture”¹⁹ (Campbell, quoting Turner 21). To find a suitable language for what actors do—it is an embodied²⁰ art, after all—it is imperative to unload the dualist–binary–divisionist language of the West without attempting reductionism. Space must be made in language for the beautiful, mutable, unharnessed, asymmetrical, provocative, subversive, transcendent, dangerous creativity of the trickster, or what Campbell calls “a piece of Halloween candy concealing a razor blade” (Campbell 55).

c) Re-thinking Either/Or Dualisms

Sheldrake emphasizes, “The soul is not in the body, but the body is in the soul” (cf. Fox quoting Sheldrake, *Natural Grace* 87). They are enmeshed. They interact. In fact, cognitive science shows that performance exists neither in the mind nor the body but in between their interactions.²¹ Anna Furse points out in *Affective Performance and Cognitive Science (AP)*: “One consequence of the heightened interest in the non-verbal, non-conscious dimensions of

¹⁹ To give an example of the frequent lack in language: Recently, my student Francisco and I digressed into the lack of certain words for people, things, and certain emotions. I was mulling over a Princeton professor’s tweet that had asked the *X* (formerly *Twitter*) community if there existed a word for the complex emotion felt by someone who was the target of the *schadenfreude* of others. After mulling the tweet over in my head, I realized I could only come up with a description of said emotion, but not a suitable single definition. Francisco, who has lost his daughter, added to our discussion that there exists no word in the English language for a parent who has lost a child. There is a word for a child who has lost their parents (orphan); a husband who lost a wife (widower); a wife who lost her husband (widow), but the word for a parent who lost a child seems to be so terrible or so taboo that we seemingly would rather avoid it altogether. Arguably because it captures something so unnatural and unfathomable that one prefers to not think about it. English could copy the German description “verwaiste Eltern/orphaned parents.” But the latter does not appear quite sufficient. And yet, Robert Frost found words for a parent who lost a child: “Tell me about it if it’s something human. Let me into your grief” (Frost, “Home Burial,” 1914). Now, Frost’s words hit the mark, but they are not “either this” or “that.” They live in an in-between state: Humans fully grasp the idea of “letting someone into their grief,” but still, the “one suitable word” eludes the English language.

²⁰ “[A]ll theatre is physical,” meaning that no matter what style of performance an actor is engaged in, a certain proportion of meaning is communicated through the body” (Simon McBurney in Kemp 90). In addition: “All acting is embodied” (Kemp xvi).

²¹ Amy Cook makes this point via the work of the neuroscientists Antonio Damasio and Joseph LeDoux in her essay “Wrinkles, Wormholes, and ‘Hamlet’: The Wooster Group’s ‘Hamlet’ as a Challenge to Periodicity” (Cook, *MIT Press*).

experience is a re-engagement with sensation, memory, perception, attention, and listening. The body is here, and . . . considered as a complex process rather than the either/or of a biological versus a social entity” (Furse, *AP* 58). The cognitive sciences offer a new way of contemplating what the actor does and how to speak and write about it. Recent studies “bring together neuroscience, cognitive psychology, performance theory, and practice to explore thinking bodies and enactive minds . . . [to] illustrate the potential for these interactions” (cf. Tribble and Sutton, *AP* 36). Moreover, recent studies in cognitive neuroscience have illuminated how performance allows us to understand ourselves and humanity as a whole.

Since the beginning of acting theory, two schools of theory have been at odds: they are—simplified—the “detachment,” mind-driven school of theory²² that renders acting as *pretending*, and the Stanislavskian “involvement”- driven school of theory that renders acting as *being*, or *living through* a character. The latter is now—erroneously—termed “method acting.”²³ In the way literary and performance criticism are viewed as dualistic, so are the “outside-in” and “inside-out” schools of acting. It is my aim and contention to show that to best speak about acting and to best describe what the actor does, these dualisms must be re-evaluated. What is known as the actor’s *paradox*—the detachment-acting school’s dualistic claim that the best actors do not feel anything when performing while the audience feels—must be understood non-dualistically and true to the word’s meaning: as a “tenet contrary to received opinion or belief [and] discordant with what is held to the established truth” (cf. *OED*) that nonetheless exists. In

²² This school of thinking about acting was first given currency by Denis Diderot in *The Paradox of the Actor*. Written in 1773, published in 1830. Briefly simplified, Diderot argues that the best actors, during a performance, do not feel any of their characters’ feelings. He thinks of acting as 100% pretending. Diderot understands the paradox of acting to be that the actor feels nothing while the audience feels everything. I use “paradox” in the way Diderot did in his treatise on acting. I do *not*, however, understand the actor’s paradox the way Diderot describes it, as the actor feeling nothing, while the audience feels. My understanding of the “actor’s paradox” is quite different and will be explained in detail later. Furthermore, I purposely do not refer to the “actor’s paradox” as the “actor’s dilemma” as is so often done in modern acting books or essays (Konijn, e.g., in her book *Acting Emotion*, calls it a “dilemma”). To call it a “dilemma” is both confusing and has a negative connotation. I will explore Diderot’s cornerstone essay about the actor’s paradox in great depth later.

²³ Method acting is the American interpretation of Stanislavski, made most popular by Lee Strasberg. Stanislavski has been misinterpreted countless times, and method acting, as it is understood today, does not agree with much of Stanislavski’s work, particularly his later work. I will go into detail about this in my chapter on Stanislavski. I use the term “method acting” to refer to the school of being involved with and identifying with a character (to a certain extent) versus the detachment school in which an actor remains detached from the character. I do not use method acting as made famous only by Lee Strasberg, although some of it correlates with Stanislavski.

short, what I will shortly explain to be the *real* actor's paradox, is an antinomy, an unresolvable paradox—a dualism that is a unity.

The argument I propose is that it is the very paradox of opposing forces that coexist in actors that makes them fascinating to watch: “Creativity is not the product of inspiration alone, but the result of a struggle” (Lutterbie, *AP* 115). Such paradoxical tension in an actor taps into the audience's consciousness in a manner that cannot be intellectualized or put into propositional language. Paradoxical tension in an actor is embodied, communicable emotionally, and infectious. It requires a new way of thinking and speaking about acting to capture the paradoxical tension and emotional contagion²⁴ of good acting. One reason for the void in language to write about what a good actor does—onstage or in film—is, as stated earlier, language, itself. Trying to capture reality (and in-between states within reality) with the English language says more about the English language than it does about reality. Sheila Ruth points out that “talk is a map of thought”: “[L]anguage reflects society's reality. Phenomena often experienced or having powerful effect on life are typically assigned many terms or words, each reflecting some nuance of difference or definition” (Ruth 154, 151). There is insufficient vocabulary that describes in-between states or paradoxes:

The English language [along with most Western languages] is inherently dualistic; it divides, labels, and separates. It says this, not that, then not now, here not there. It's how our bodies and minds navigate this physical world, but writing about non-duality can be a particular challenge. . . . Metaphor is a way to transcend the logic of the mind (which is limited) and touch the collective unconscious. . . . [Metaphor can] evok[e] an implicit knowing. (cf. Chauncey, “The Paradox of Language” sarahchauncey.com)

In existing and orthodox language, it may be—thus far—only possible to describe the paradox of acting through the language of paradox, itself, and through metaphor, such as saying that actors [and dancers] are “thinking with the body” (cf. Tribble quoting Kirsh, *AP* 35), or to say that

²⁴ I use a term from cognitive neuroscience here that will be explained at length in my chapters on emotion. “Emotional contagion” is the spreading of an emotion from one person to another. I use the term to describe the emotions a good actor can evoke in an audience.

“theatre and performance, cognitive, and affective science dance together” (Shaughnessy, *AP* 24).

Rick Kemp demonstrates in *Embodied Acting* that actors have their own language of metaphor by using their bodies in a certain fashion.²⁵ Actors are capable of an “embodied expression of thought,” and they are capable of “embodying poetic metaphor” (Kemp xxi). Moreover, it is required to rethink the relationship between the mind and the body, which is intimately intertwined in all acting, to re-evaluate rigid dualisms and to explain acting that unites both “playable analysis”²⁶ and “analyzable play” (cf. “What Acting Is: Part 4 - Physicality,” *Folger Shakespeare Library: The Collation*). To do so, it is helpful to borrow a paradoxical thought experiment from what later became physicist Erwin Schrödinger’s breakthrough in quantum physics²⁷: “The initial stimulus for Schrödinger was a dualism as an exploration of the relations between truth and lies, . . . the notion that when telling a lie the truth is also heard in your head” (Shaughnessy, *AP* 15). Schrödinger’s creative and paradoxical line of thought can be parlayed into acting and performance: “This blending of two co-existing states and the positioning in between knowledge of the pretend and the real is also pertinent to the conditions of contemporary performance” (cf. Shaughnessy, *AP* 15). In their essay “The Uncertainty Principle” on mathematics, of all fields, Christopher Moore and John Kaag argue in favor of embracing uncertainty and paradox in the search for truth. They argue that a pluralistic approach to truth is better than a dualistic one: “[P]luralism is not an empty relativism, where we agree to disagree and go our separate ways, as if we have nothing to say to each other. Neither is it a nihilistic relativism where we declare it’s all nonsense anyway, then retreat to our separate

²⁵ More detail to follow on Kemp’s idea of actors being able to embody poetic metaphor and to express thought in my chapter on cognitive neuroscience.

²⁶ Folger Shakespeare Library’s blog, entitled *Collation*, includes an essay entitled “What Acting Is” that explores acting from both actors’ and academics’ perspectives. When asked what it was that actors would like to see from scholars in the future, Shakespearean actress Kate Eastwood Norris replied: “Playable analysis,” with which the scholars agreed by requesting future “analyzable play” (cf. “What Acting Is: Part IV: Physicality,” Folger Library, *Collation*).

²⁷ “In quantum theory, light similarly exists in two states—a particle or a wave. The notion of quantum entities experiencing more than one reality at a time underpins *Schrödinger* [the stage play and the original thought experiment with the cat that Schrödinger is (in)famous for]. [The play *Schrödinger*] was influenced by Einstein’s theory of relativity, which . . . challenged classical science but makes particular sense in relation to theatre and postmodern thought. Events on two distant stars may appear simultaneous to one observer but successive to a differently situated observer” (cf. Shaughnessy, quoting Wetherell, *AP* 15).

bubbles” (Moore and Kaag, *American Scholar [AS]* 43). Moore and Kaag give examples such as mathematicians Kurt Gödel and Alan Turing, “irrevocably dashing [mathematician David] Hilbert’s hope for a complete system that would provide truth once and for all” (cf. Moore and Kaag 43).

In 1931, Gödel proved that there exist truths in mathematics that are not provable (his incompleteness theorem). In 1936, Turing came upon the paradox that, to prove these truths, “we couldn’t even tell which statements could be proved” (cf. Moore and Kaag 40). In a field known for its irrefutable, timeless, and certain proofs, “[un]provability, undecidability, uncomputability,” uncertainty, and paradox have led famous mathematicians to ask: “How can we pursue truth if every tool we have for that pursuit is flawed? Is there even a truth to pursue?” and “How can we perceive it?” (cf. Moore and Kaag 41, 38). Mathematics demonstrated that there are real and unresolvable paradoxes. That is, “there are many consistent pictures of infinity,” and there is “a wide variety of possible worlds” that ought to be embraced pluralistically (cf. Moore and Kaag 42, 43). Mathematicians found that binary thinking was not an option for certain mathematical problems: Some things are not either true or false. One set of numbers is more infinite than another. Binary thinking does not capture all mathematical truths. However, if truth is approached from pluralistic perspectives, each perspective adds to the whole picture and suggests a greater truth. Mathematics, therefore, has a problem similar to the humanities: Binary thinking creates a lack of language with which to express states of uncertainty and elevated consciousness. In the absence of a consciousness-measurement device

and with Western science denying that anything existing outside its boundaries²⁸ has value, I will use the language of paradox, metaphor, and, most importantly, the language of actors captured in manifest performances to illustrate they are the human tuning forks that allow audiences to traverse from the secular to the numinous and in between.

d) The Language of Paradox

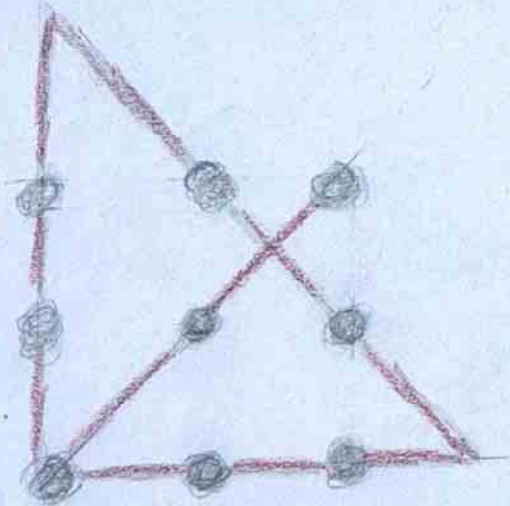
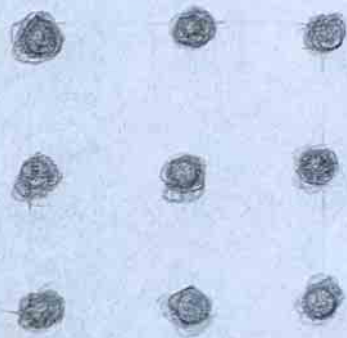
“All great actors are [in touch with their own spirit] and it is what makes them distinctive. Fiona Shaw, Clare Higgins, Michael Gambon, and Judi Dench: It’s as if there is something coiled but restless inside them *struggling* to get out. When it does, the stage *ignites*” (Gardner, “Character Building and What Makes a Really Great Actor” *Guardian*, emphasis mine).

With the latter thought of the “in between” in mind, it is my aim to depict that the real paradox of the actor, “the lie at the heart of playing,” the “heavenly fraud,” and “holy cozenage” has “positive value” because it allows the audience to fully accept ambiguity: “Ignorant of cause, we marvel and inquire—how we are able to see what we see?” (cf. Platt, *Shakespeare and the*

²⁸ Zander & Zander give a wonderful example for the human mind “constructing” its reality according to preconceived boundaries, namely **the nine-dot puzzle**. The nine-dot puzzle asks the reader to connect nine dots in four straight lines, without taking pen from paper. For most people unfamiliar with the puzzle, great frustration ensues because they immediately perceive the puzzle in a *limited* way:

The puzzle illustrates a universal phenomenon of the human mind, the necessity to sort data into categories in order to perceive it. Your brain instantly classifies the nine dots as a two-dimensional square. And there they rest, like nails in the coffin of any further possibility, establishing a box with a dot in each of the four corners, even though no box in fact exists on the page. Nearly everybody adds that context to the instruction, nearly everybody hears: ‘Connect the dots with four straight lines without taking pen from paper, *within the square formed by the outer dots.*’ And within that framework, there is no solution. If however, we were to amend the original set of instructions by adding the phrase, ‘*Feel free to use the whole set of paper,*’ it is likely that a new possibility would suddenly appear to you. It might seem that the space outside the dots was crying out, ‘*Hey, bring some lines out here!*’ The frames our minds create define—and confine—what we perceive to be possible. Every problem, every dilemma, every dead end we find ourselves facing in life, only appears unsolvable inside a particular frame of point of view. Enlarge the box, or create another frame around data, and problems vanish, while new opportunities appear. (cf. Zander & Zander, *The Art of Possibility* 13-14, emphasis editor’s)

Actors must exist outside of what Zander & Zander so fittingly call “the world of measurement” (Zander & Zander 19). They must be able to live in uncertainties and possibilities, similar to what Keats famously described as Shakespeare’s “negative capability:” “that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason” (cf. Platt *Paradox* 1). Zander & Zander ask one to think outside of the box: “Let us suppose, now, that a universe of possibility stretches beyond the world of measurement to include all worlds: infinite, generative, and abundant. Unimpeded on a daily basis by the concern for survival, free from the generalized assumption of scarcity, a person stands in the great space of possibility in a posture of openness, with an unfettered imagination for what can be” (Zander & Zander 19).



The-Nine-
Point-Puzzle

Culture of Paradox 205, 201). I aim to show that the best actors are steeped in paradox: Instead of resisting it or attempting to resolve it, as most people do, they embrace it, harness its innate tension, and express it in all its contradictions. Derek Jacobi tries to illuminate the great paradox of acting as follows:

The real thing being, when you are totally, totally immersed and in a state where spontaneity can take place, and spontaneity is a rare, rare thing in stage acting, I think. You have to be really—have to let yourself go, but at the same time be totally in control. But there's a little element of you that is free to fly, surrounded by this tight control. And when that happens, it's wonderful. (Jacobi, "Episode 91," *Shakespeare Unlimited Podcast - Folger Shakespeare Library* 2018)

The best actors can bring the audience into their bodies, which means that the audience experiences the play or film through both the actors' and their own bodies. It is the actors' paradoxical "way of viewing the world, which is at peace with unknowing, doubt, and questions" (cf. Platt 201) that, when expressed to the audience, both transforms and moves them the most. To capture the real paradox of the actor at work, I would argue, is to capture acting with non-dualistic language and thinking. To "attempt to wrestle truth from juxtaposition" (cf. Shaughnessy, *AP* 14) without resolving the contrarities asks for the language of paradox. Language, being a symbolic map of the territory of human thought, may have to make room for new expressions of paradoxes. Otherwise, the language map is mistaken for the territory. Similarly, if the logic used to structure and organize language is too much of a blunt instrument, it literally will not cut it in terms of interpreting reality. It is important to question the binary rules of language and logic, which correspond to the rules of reality but are *not identical*. Words are merely pointers with multiple meanings. They symbolically represent the essences of things; however, they are not the essences, themselves. As William Bruce Cameron (and, more famously, Einstein) put it, "Not everything that matters can be measured, and not everything that

can be measured, matters.”²⁹ A good actor has the ability to interpret words meaningfully and allows them to resonate in the audience’s mind by evoking its experiences and emotions. Good actors are fearless and are not bound by a conformist society. They transcend the binary logic of the mind, often through metaphors or nonverbal communication (including mirror neurons and embodied simulation³⁰). In-between states and paradoxes reveal the limitations of Cartesian dualist language and logic to sufficiently grasp the true nature of reality.

Actors and their actions are primarily embodied. Nothing can be related to the audience without the body: Love, fear, grief, sympathy, charisma, disgust, terror, ideas, etc. register solely through the actor’s embodied work, be that through voice, movement, gesture, or stillness. Derek Jacobi says the following about acting and embodiment: “But I find analyzing him [Hamlet] more difficult than playing him. I am an instinctive actor. I could much more easily get up now and demonstrate it for you than find the right words to explain what I do” (Jacobi, *CS Monitor* 1980). There is an interdependence within the mind/body that has been overlooked in the past, but recently has been foregrounded by both interdisciplinary scholars and theatre practitioners:

Since mind and body are “not separate and distinct ontological kinds,” it is time to articulate an account of embodied meaning that emerges as structures of organism–environment interactions and *transactions*. Our cognitive profile is “essentially the profile of an embodied and situated organism; the brain is just a part (albeit a crucial and special part) of a spatially and temporally extended process” of *co-operation* between brain, body, and environmental aids. (cf. Rokotnitz, *AP* 121, emphasis mine)

²⁹ The quote is also often rendered as “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”

³⁰ I explain this in depth in my chapters on cognitive neuroscience and emotions. It is a shared experience between actor and spectator: “You don’t think your way into another mind. You embody. . . . Gallese calls this mindreading, and yes, we mindread, but, he says, something faster, deeper, more primitive also goes on, something pre-rational, something you can’t express in a verbal, cognitive way. When we read fiction or see a movie or a play and even when we see a painting, we map these fictional humans’ actions, emotions, and sensations onto our own brains’ visceral, motor, and sensory representations. That accounts for our emotional experience, which comes before our cognitive experience” (cf. Holland, “Stories and the Mirror Inside You,” *PsychologyToday.com*).

To re-evaluate and better describe what good actors do in a performance with their body/mind instruments in perfect tune, it is necessary to review an assortment of historical aspects of aesthetics, performance studies, theatre criticism, literary criticism, and scientific advances that have influenced acting theory to understand where the splitting of the body and the mind originated and why the latter may be the main cause for the lack of a suitable language. It is also necessary to examine the state of the art of acting throughout the ages to determine which acting theories remain constant³¹ and which acting theories and practices changed alongside scientific or cultural change.

What remains constant in acting and acting theory, I will show, is the connection between the actor and the audience—through paradox—that is deeply embedded in the human psyche: From the Dionysian festival to West End & Broadway productions, to Hollywood films³² and

³¹ Whatever remains constant throughout the ages is what audiences connected to and continue to connect to. It is usually a more primal aspect of acting that has little to do with fashion.

³² The question of **the difference between stage acting and screen acting**—also between live performance and recorded performance—is answered very differently by non-actors than by actors. Even here, dualistic thinking pervades the industry. Scholars often expect the difference between the various acting media to affect the actor as much as it affects the audience. It is true that for an audience member the immediacy of the stage actor is literally flattened in both film and television. Sitting in the front row of a theatre is certainly a different experience for an audience member than watching a movie. For actors, however, the differences between the stage and screen are purely of a technical nature.

While it is accurate that actors have to employ a different toolset on stage vs. on screen, the main challenge for actors—to bring to life a character truthfully—remains the same. On stage, actors have to project their voice and exaggerate their gestures all the way to the last row. In film acting, a microphone picks up even a whisper, and the camera picks up even a micro-expression. Theatre actors, therefore, have to tone down their voice and movements when working in film and television, while screen actors have to magnify their movements and project their voices on stage. A stage actor enjoys the immediacy of being there with their audience, and s/he receives immediate validation, whereas film and TV is shot in different locations over long stretches of time, scenes are shot out of order, and actors often have to wait on set for hours. A theater actor does not get a second chance when they flub a line, whereas in film and TV, the director can order a “cut” and re-shoot a scene. Note, however, that these are all *technical differences*.

I do not want to minimize the impact a live audience has on both an actor and their audience. However, it may be of interest to the non-actor that—even when the audience is a camera—the actor has essentially the same job. Having said this, actors are not likely to find greater philosophic differences in the layers of mediation beyond the difference in craft. For my aim in this dissertation—which is to express what actors do and how they do it—I would argue that the actor’s perspective must be equally as important as the scholar’s perspective, if not more important.

The *New York Film Academy (NYFA)* explains the stage/screen difference well by way of a felicitous analogy: “[T]he acting skills learned in the theatre can translate to film. Put another way, **acting is acting**, whether you are on stage or in front of a camera. However, there are key differences between the stage and the screen that need to be understood. *Moving between theatre and film can be equated to a painter who moves between acrylics and watercolors. The painter is still a painter, but the medium has changed and, therefore, the process will change.* For an actor, knowledge of the difference in the environment, venue, and script between theatre and film is crucial to becoming a double-threat (“Stage vs. Screen: What’s the Big Difference.” *NYFA.com*, emphasis mine).

Similarly, Sir Michael Caine—who wrote one of the most famous books on film acting for actors—uses a metaphor to describe the difference between stage and screen: “If theatre acting is an operation with a scalpel, movie acting is an operation with a laser” (Caine, *Acting in Film* 9).

Dionysus: God of
Wine and Theatre



television³³ good actors allow audiences to tap into a world that defies rational classification, a primal world untouched by conventional shackles. Good actors, I will argue, harness the paradox and combustible chaos of human existence and give new meaning to old dogmas: “Audiences love actors who are believable, untrammled by convention, emotionally and imaginatively daring and ... transparent: as transparent as babies but with the knowledge and life experience of adults” (Linklater, *Breath in Action* 103). I understand that I must enter into the abstract at times to serve my topic faithfully: Paradoxes and resonance with something unquantifiable defy Western tools and rules of logic. They defy the received dualistic language. However, I firmly believe that I can break free (if only momentarily) from Western dogma’s imposed conceptualization of reality. By describing manifest performances that capture actors’ creative choices and experimental, embodied paradoxical expressions, I will be able to articulate and convey to the reader what makes actors great and what allows them to connect with an audience. In fact, I intend to use the patriarchic, dualistic language of privilege in the way it has been used by the culturally universal “trickster” figure (who is the quintessential actor):

³³Sir Michael Caine emphasizes that, in respect to acting technique, an actor on stage has to work for the audience’s validation, whereas a screen actor has to have a deep understanding of their surrogate audience, the camera: “The camera doesn’t have to be wooed; the camera already loves you deeply. Like an attentive mistress, the camera hangs on your every word, your every look; she can’t take her eyes off you. She is listening to and recording everything you do, however minutely you do it; you have never known such devotion. [...] You must be thinking every moment because the camera looks into your mind, and the audience sees what the camera sees. (Caine, *Acting in Film* 3, 10). Note how Caine emphasizes the difference in acting technique only.

To give another example: During a Q & A session at the *Royal Shakespeare Company* with the actor Joseph Millson—the day after having watched him perform the lead (Willmore) in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* at the Swan Theatre—I specifically asked him if he thought that acting on stage differs from acting for the screen. His immediate answer: “Acting is acting” (“Q & A Talk with Actor Joseph Millson,” *RSC*, 29 Sep. 2016). Subsequently, Millson went on to explain certain different techniques he had to learn for film acting, such as toning down his facial expressions. Millson’s answer to the question of stage versus screen acting is similar to the answers that the majority of actors give (I have asked my many actor-friends and have listened to countless interviews with stage-and-screen-actors). Think of all the celebrated actors who effortlessly move between stage and screen: Mark Rylance, Viola Davis, David Suchet, Simon Russell Beale, Tom Hiddleston, Benedict Cumberbatch, David Tennant, Carey Mulligan, Meryl Streep, Glenn Close, Hugh Jackman, Andrew Scott, Ben Whishaw, Dame Judi Dench, Sir Ian McKellen, Denzel Washington, Kelsey Grammer, David Hyde Pierce, Bebe Neuwirth, Andrew Garfield, Liev Schreiber and many more).

One of the best examples to demonstrate the difference in technique between theatre acting vs. stage acting is that of Viola Davis playing Rose opposite Denzel Washington’s Troy in the play *Fences* compared to its film version of the same name. *YouTube* has a synchronized video of a scene of both the play and the film that beautifully illustrates how Davis’ and Washington’s gestures are magnified on stage, whereas on screen they mainly use their faces and eyes to convey their message (“*Fences: Synchronized Scene.*” *Youtube*. 18 Sep. 2021). This video illustrates in great detail how two master actors play the same scene equally powerfully but with a different toolset. Both versions, I would argue, are powerful in their own right. They both affect the audience equally.

Language . . . stands at the core of the trickster figure. He adds layers of meanings to words and toys with their interpretations, creates paradox, and celebrates the fertility of communication. [The trickster is given to] the privileging of a figurative or implied meaning over the literal face-value interpretation. (Campbell 49)

Through the descriptions of manifest acting performances, I will invoke the seemingly polar opposites these actors harness into momentary alignment and meaning. By spotlighting these actors' expressions, gestures, original manner of thinking, nonverbal communication (nvc), complexity, and their unique use of language, I will illustrate how they allow their audience to tune into their "frequency" and share meaningful moments in time with them that move them and leave a lasting impression.

e) Finding a Language for Acting within Shakespeare

A historic perspective is required to find proficient language to describe a great performance and how it materializes as a creation unto itself and to explain why actors and their craft remain at the center of civilization despite waves of anti-theatricalism throughout the ages. Antitheatricalism and the devaluation of the arts (compared to science) can be explained, in part, because there is a "strange void in language" that—if filled—would mindfully articulate what the actor does and how acting benefits or heals communities. Even today, acting is often misunderstood, misinterpreted, and mistrusted. Since it is my aim to focus on manifest performances in which actors have created unique characters that render a performance stellar, I have chosen to work with Shakespeare's plays for three reasons. The first reason is simple: Shakespeare's work has been continuously performed throughout the ages and is accessible³⁴ to all, and it enables observations and comparisons of manifest acting performances. Secondly, it takes a great actor to

³⁴ To clarify: Shakespearean West End and Broadway productions may not be accessible to all. However, recorded versions of famous productions are widely accessible. As an example, I have chosen performances that can be viewed on public platforms such as *YouTube* or as film version. Furthermore, great effort has been put into making Shakespearean productions available to all: *Shakespeare in the Park* in New York's Central Park is free of charge, and discounted tickets for Broadway or West End shows are an option unless a popular actor is involved, in which case there is always one recorded performance (f. ex. Benedict Cumberbatch playing Hamlet).



Shylock

Portia

Othello

Lady Macbeth

Falstaff

Ophelia

Hamlet

Romeo

Julia

Cleopatra

Shakespeare

do justice to Shakespeare's words: Exceptionally good actors have repeatedly found a language for acting within Shakespeare's work that has been difficult to relate to academic branches of criticism. It is my aim to try to communicate these actors' findings³⁵ as well as their oneness of mind and body. Kristin Linklater said that only very good actors can excel at Shakespeare because his "language *is* emotion. . . . The Elizabethans lived in the body. . . . The Elizabethans still implicitly knew that their bodies and their humors were microcosms of the universe—they were part of Nature. . . . The Elizabethan mind was unified with the body it animated" (cf. Linklater, "Shrinking Shakespearean" *linklatervoice.com*). For contemporary actors to play and speak "Shakespeare's iambic rhythm that picks up the heartbeat and is the natural pulse of the English language" (Linklater, "Shrinking Shakespearean"), the contemporary actor must overcome the dualism of mind and body and bring all the elements of breath, voice, body, mind, emotion, and intellect back together. Shakespeare's language demands and requires the actor's oneness of mind and body as preconditions.

The third reason I have chosen Shakespeare's works as the foundation for my attempt at finding a nomenclature for acting is that his works are pervaded by a questioning spirit that maintains an open heart to the world, to the philosophy of the self, and to the nature of causality without the fear of paradox, doubt, and uncertainty. The Renaissance was very much a time of ambiguity, skepticism, and change. The timelessness of Shakespeare's works is very likely due to an almost childlike, playful,³⁶ open-minded, humble, all-encompassing, and unassuming spirit—what Keats called Shakespeare's "negative capability"—that permeates them. It is in such a spirit that good performances are created and good actors are made. Moreover, it is in this Renaissance spirit of open-heartedness—before the body and mind completely split apart, before art and science split apart, and before science assumed a stance of superiority over art and thought over emotion—that I wish to approach the task of capturing what actors do in great performances. I have made certain that the performances I chose are accessible to the readers of my dissertation,

³⁵ Cf. John Barton's observation: "The best guide for an actor who wants to play in Shakespeare comes . . . from Shakespeare himself, who was an actor. . . . I also believe that in the Elizabethan theatre the actors knew how to use and interpret the hidden direction Shakespeare himself provided" (Barton, *Playing Shakespeare* 3–4).

³⁶ Shakespeare was an actor before he turned to writing. He remained an actor all his life. No documents were ever found that said Shakespeare considered himself a playwright first, then an actor, or solely a playwright. He likely never saw the need to separate the two despite their great difference in status.

be that on public television, streaming services, *YouTube*, or the official websites of theaters and open-access recordings. It is important to me to allow the reader to follow my train of thought by watching the performance themselves. Acting is an embodied art, and my dissertation is interdisciplinary. Hence, the best way to offer insight into manifest performances and my mind and heart is to allow the reader to follow me on a voyage, one actor and one observation at a time. Much like acting, this dissertation bids the reader to bring to each chapter and performance description an open heart and mind, a questioning spirit, active listening, a readiness to embrace new ideas, and a willingness to come on a journey with each performer. This dissertation encourages audience participation in order to allow the captivating performances I describe to fully resonate with the audience. It is my aim to place the reader in a front row seat throughout each actor's performance in order to inspire enthusiasm for the actor's vision and creative choices, and in order to reveal to the reader how each performer generates the often invisible ingredients that produce transformative audience experiences. It is my aim to not solely narrate my performance-descriptions and observations to the reader, but for the reader to experience the performances and engage with them.

f) An Interdisciplinary Approach to Acting Theory: Overview

The configuration of my first three chapters (part I) combines a historical overview of acting theories that I observe through the lens of new findings in the fields of acting methodologies, performance studies, theater history, philosophy/aesthetics, linguistics, psychology, and, most importantly, cognitive neuroscience. At times, the new findings in science and other disciplines refine, build upon, and improve the original acting theory. At other times, the new findings refute or change the original theory. It is my understanding that only through an interdisciplinary approach can a new and better language for acting be developed. My first three chapters are a (1) detailed exposition of acting theories of the past, (2) new scientific approaches to acting, and a (3) proposition of how to overcome the void in language for acting by implementing the language of paradox. The first three chapters (part I) serve as the theoretical foundation for the more creative, yet grounded in practice, part II of my dissertation, which observes manifest

acting performances that invite the reader (and viewer) into each performance to trace my arguments.

I began my first chapter with Plato³⁷ because his aesthetics had a deep impact on acting and performance theory (1a). I position the early division, disruption, and burgeoning dualism in language for the performing arts with Plato and his sabotage of all art. Simultaneously, I emphasize the theatricality and profound understanding of acting and drama that runs through Plato's works, mainly through his "protagonist" Socrates (1b). Consequently, I outline how Plato and Aristotle—inadvertently or not—created a void in language with respect to explaining non-propositional events and concepts (1c). Accordingly, I explore ancient rhetoricians and their holistic understanding of the body and the mind, and of emotion and intellect (1d). I explain how orators, such as Cicero and Quintilian, had prescient, instinctive knowledge of the relationship between performers and their audience. My next two subchapters explore Diderot's essay "The Paradox of the Actor"³⁸ at length to demonstrate why Diderot is mentioned in every academic acting theory study (1e–1f). While I refute most of Diderot's findings and beliefs about actors and acting, I hope to convey the importance of his essay as a launchpad for inquiry. Diderot's essay raised many questions and misunderstandings about acting, but it also brought into full view the lack of understanding of acting theory in general that exists until today. The next subchapter I dedicate to Stanislavski, his comprehensive understanding of acting, his system, and how his thinking changed course throughout his life (1g). I explain why so many scholars of acting and accomplished actors praise Stanislavski, and why they are still guided by his discoveries, reflections, observations, and questions.

In my second chapter, I go into great depth when I explain the interdisciplinary approach to acting theory, as informed by recent findings and research from cognitive neuroscience. I

³⁷ Plato is overlooked in most acting theory and aesthetics books and chronicles. Usually, chronicles begin with Aristotle's *Poetics* or jump to Descartes and Diderot when explaining the mind–body split and its origin. It is a mistake to overlook Plato whose understanding of performing and playwriting was profound. He must be mentioned in any analysis of the history of acting theory. As disparaging as he is about acting, the big divide between the mind–body in acting (and the division between art and science) begins with him. I explain this at length in my chapter on Plato and Socrates. The origin of the mind–body split may go further back to Pythagoras's *Table of Opposites*. However, it is Plato who delves into the matter and brings great attention to it.

³⁸ Diderot's essay "The Paradox of the Actor" is a mixture of art criticism and analyses of acting theory. Interestingly, Diderot—whose view of actors was as problematic as the view Plato had of poets—wrote this essay in dialogue form (as did Plato), which is the most dramatic and theatrical way of stating criticism.

begin my second chapter (2a) with an examination of a 1997 field study by Elly Konijn that attempted to discern if actors were feeling their characters' emotions on stage. Subsequently, I introduce Susana Bloch's groundbreaking acting methodology, Alba-emoting,³⁹ and how it was informed by cognitive neuroscience. I address how both Konijn and Bloch were trailblazers in their respective fields and how they jumpstarted further exploration of acting in an interplay with cognitive science. In (2b), I reconsider the meaning and background of emotions, how they used to be perceived, and how they are better perceived today. Since emotion has long been a point of contention in acting theory—from Plato to Diderot to Stanislavski to the recent *Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance, and Cognitive Science*—I explore hypotheses on the subject in great detail. Correspondingly, I outline the newest revelations in the field of emotion and how these revelations change aspects of acting theory and general Western thought. In (2c), I undertake the topic of the still-prevalent Cartesian division of mind and body. I demonstrate that, considering cognitive neuroscience's findings, Cartesian dualism is wrong. Moreover, I demonstrate how detrimental said dualism was for acting theory and how deleterious dualism was (and is) regarding language aimed at capturing what actors do. I emphasize the fact that many theatre practitioners and ancient orators treated performance holistically instead of succumbing to mainstream dualistic thought patterns. I offer new answers to old questions, but I also raise new questions about how to put into language certain findings that continue to escape the propositional, dualistic language of the West and the persistent notion of the mind versus the body instead of the bodymind.

Section (2d) deals with all the aspects of cognitive neuroscience that are helpful in finding a better language for acting. I explain neuroscience's toolkit to find a way toward non-dualistic, comprehensive thinking and speaking about acting. I outline the importance of metaphors and archetypes within the fields of acting and cognitive neuroscience by demonstrating how actors can express and transmit them to audiences. I explain how mirror neurons have opened up new ways of thinking about acting via imitation, simulation, mimesis,

³⁹ The term Alba Emoting™ was trademarked in the late 1990s. It is a psychophysiological acting technique that is taught worldwide by licensed teachers. In earlier essays on Alba Emoting, the term was capitalized. The technique was originally called the BOS method, using the three co-author's names: Bloch, Orthous and Santibáñez. The BOS method evolved into, and was subsequently renamed, Alba Emoting after the technique had been applied on a production of Lorca's *The House of Bernard Alba* (cf. Beck 143).

proprioception, imagination, empathy, and emotional contagion. To fully serve the purpose of this subchapter, I attempt to explain how mirror neurons, simulation, empathy, etc. resonate with an audience and how actors can both receive from and transmit meaning to their audiences. Next, I outline the latest knowledge about acting theory combined with cognitive science. I explain the most recent discoveries in the interdisciplinary field of acting and cognitive neuroscience. In addition, I explore which acting theories are verifiable by science, which ones remain hypotheses, which new theories compete with older ones, and which ones are experiential and very likely “factual,” but elude the paradigm of Western science’s evaluation and logic. The latter leads me back to language and how to better describe what actors do.

I begin chapter 3 by revealing how actors can tap into their audiences’ consciousness (3a) and take them on a journey. I explain how an actor can, through paradox, resonate deeply with an audience. Such a resonance through paradox, my argument suggests, is also informed by certain aspects of cognitive neuroscience. The actor’s language of paradox—via emotional contagion, mirror neurons, imitation, metaphor, nonverbal communication/body–language, etc.—comes full circle to better speak of an art form that eludes measurements, binaries, and propositional language. I dedicate (3b) entirely to nonverbal communication because it is the most important language for actors to transmit emotions to audiences and to express and share themselves with them.

Moreover, (3c) deals with the fact that written and spoken language is a small part of how actors express themselves. I explain how important body language and emotions are compared to propositional language. Moreover, I emphasize how a fictional story resonates much more with an audience than a non-fictional lecture. I argue that only through an embodied language of paradox can good acting be captured in words. I will use the language of paradox throughout the second part of my dissertation to describe, in detail, manifest performances of actors and what makes these performances resonate with audiences. I summarize how the language of paradox demands open-mindedness to rethink even the way we think. The physical, mental, and verbal language of paradox that actors employ—what I will define and refer to as “the real paradox of the actor”—encompasses a wider spectrum than propositional, binary language. Indeed, at times, it veers into the abstract. However, when combined with manifest performances, the abstract and

paradox can be captured by observation and detailed descriptions. The language of paradox allows actors to show, not tell, what it is they do. The language of paradox reveals to an audience a truth perceived over an intellectualized truth. Embodied language can take the audience to places propositional language could never reach, which I will substantiate in Part II of my dissertation by depicting manifest performances. In Part II, it is my aim to literally and figuratively “embody”—with language—what it is that exceptional actors do.

I’m not religious, but I do pray—I try to *open my heart* to something *wider* that is going to take place. In my mind, I *imagine* the audience coming in, and *I thank them* for coming, the people who built the building, and King Phillippe and Farinelli (the characters of the play). *I thank them* for lending us their lives. Some may think that’s a superstition; I think it is just *courtesy*.⁴⁰ (Mark Rylance on pre-performance rituals, *The Stage* 2015, emphasis mine)

⁴⁰ Rylance’s pre-performance ritual is telling: He thanks the audience, the characters. He opens his heart to everyone. He never speaks of separating anything, and most importantly, he never speaks of himself. His statement is full of sharing, giving, and gratitude. It is filled with a unifying spirit. Rylance’s statement is also deeply unique in its understanding of the actor’s existence as a service of duty or, as he calls it, a courtesy: to offer his work, heart, soul, ideas, imagination, artistic interpretation, and talent to others as his life’s purpose, including honoring the dead.

B) THE CASE OF ACTING

PART I: THEORIES OF ACTING

CHAPTER 1:

THE HISTORY OF ACTING THEORY:⁴¹ FROM PLATO TO STANISLAVSKI

1a) Plato's Shadow

Most acting theory and theatre studies textbooks initiate their historical analysis of drama through the lens of Aristotle's *Poetics*, discounting Plato's aesthetics as antitheatrical and,

⁴¹ In respect to **acting theory** throughout the ages, I am painting with a broad brush for the purpose of my argument. I only explain the most vitally important theories as they pertain to my thesis. There are many more insightful acting theories that I am not mentioning, from Aaron Hill, Rémond de Sainte-Albine, John Hill, to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Tommaso Salvini, and much later, Bertolt Brecht (to mention only a few). The history of acting theory is a dissertation in its own right. For my purposes, I chose the theories that are still most widely mentioned up until this day, and the ones that had the greatest impact on later generations of acting theory scholars. In respect to playable acting theories, all of the theorist I mention above had profound advice. Aaron Hill, as an example, produced an early version of a combination of inside-out (emotional recall) and outside-in (imagination and physical movements) acting (cf. Hill, *The Prompter*; no. 66, 1735). He invented an early rendition of the facial action coding system (FACS) (cf. Vicentini on Aaron Hill's *Essay on the Art of Acting* 154). He even saw complex contradictions in David Garrick's acting. However, he wrote in a very didactic and censorious manner that annoyed more people than it enlightened. Moreover, his valid criticisms of actors and acting theory are spread out over various letters and his journal *The Prompter*. Pierre Rémond de Sainte-Albine and John Hill gave early, astute acting advice. Lessing is the first to view the actor's body as having its own language. He emphasizes the importance of both body and mind and the interaction between the two—see Vicentini on Lessing, 177-179; see also Natalya Baldyga on Lessing's "corporeal eloquence" (Baldyga in *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, 17-18). Goethe keenly observes that an actor is not just a presenter of plays but also an interpreter of play and character (cf. Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung* 370). For a historical study of early acting theories up until the Eighteenth Century, Claudio Vicentini gives a thorough account thereof in *Theory of Acting from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (2012). See also Barry O'Connor's 1992 study of Aaron Hill and John Hill, *Personaeity, passions, personality: English acting manuals, 1710-1755*. Natalya Baldyga gives an enlightening account of Lessing's deep insight into acting theory in a recent translation and annotation of *The Hamburg Dramaturgy* (2019). For some of the later acting theorists, Daniel Larlham's dissertation *The Meaning in Mimesis: Philosophy, Aesthetics, Acting Theory* (2012) is an excellent exploration. Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy's book *Actors on Acting*—first published in 1949—is the most comprehensive and invaluable resource for anyone interested in actors and acting theory throughout history. Despite the somewhat misleading title, *Actors on Acting*, it is not solely actors offering insights in Cole & Chinoy's work, but also acting theorists, playwrights, writers, and theatre critics.

closet drama[s]” (cf. Puchner, *NLH* 523) and encourages his readers to rise above the texts’ antitheatricity.⁴⁵ Similarly, Robert Sonkowsky states that Plato’s dialogues are “examples of artistry that continue to be stageworthy” (17). Moreover, Sonkowsky points out the Platonic paradox in respect to the arts: “Plato the supreme enemy of the arts is also the supreme artist” (Sonkowsky 17). Plato must, therefore, be reconsidered in respect to performance. Ironically, one of the best and most enlightening ways to learn about acting and acting theory is to read Jonas A. Barish’s book, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, which begins with a chapter on Plato. The story of acting, performance, and theatre history is, of course, always the story of antitheatricalism.

Plato begins his defamation of rhapsodes, poets, and actors⁴⁶ in one of his earlier dialogues, the *Ion*: “Plato’s dialogue *Ion* begins the West’s venerable suspicion of art, and art making in general and of the poetic, storytelling, and theatrical arts in particular” (Gentile 152). Moreover, the *Ion* sets in motion the idea that art and performance represent the real, which, in turn, is also a representation. As Socrates haughtily says to Ion, “And so you [Ion, and all rhapsodes] act as interpreters of interpreters [the poets]” (cf. *Ion* 535a). Plato never contemplates the possibility of mimesis being a creative presentation. To Plato, all art is representation, a copy (art) of a copy (the physical thing in everyday life) of the original (the Form of the thing/Platonic ideal).⁴⁷ The way Socrates talks circles around the prize-winning but hapless rhapsode Ion makes

⁴⁵ Puchner goes as far as to call Plato’s dialogues competition to drama: Plato’s “critique . . . must be understood not as that of an outsider but as that of a rival; he was not an enemy of theater but a radical reformer. Attacking many features of Athenian theater, he sought to create an alternative form of drama, the Socratic dialogue” (cf. Puchner, *Drama of Ideas* 5).

⁴⁶ I agree with Kaplan’s footnote: “Terms such as actor, rhapsode, and poet are not synonymous in ancient Greek context and would not ordinarily be interchangeable. However . . . Plato subsumes all forms of live performance under a single theory of mind” (cf. Kaplan 61).

⁴⁷ Plato makes this point clear in *Book X* of the *Republic*: “Here are three beds: one existing in nature, which is made by God, as I think that we may say—for no one else can be the maker. . . . There is another which is the work of a carpenter. . . . And the work of the painter is a third” (Plato, *Book X, Republic*). When painters paint a bed as it exists, they create an imitation of the physical bed. The physical bed is, according to Plato, already an imitation of the Form of Bed, which is its metaphysical Platonic ideal: the Bed as made by God.

it clear that Plato's view of the performing arts is as dim as Ion's mind.⁴⁸ The more than uneven battle of wits between Socrates and Ion is painful to follow. Arguably, Socrates oversteps the mark in this dialogue. Ion may be "a brainless performer full of himself" (Stern–Gillet 4), but it is exactly his obvious lack of brains that begs the question of why Socrates engages in such an extensive battle at all: "In creating Ion, Plato created a dramatic character that is little more than a cipher, a dupe, or a fool to serve as foil for Socrates' philosophical brilliance" (Gentile 153). While Socrates' irony and sarcasm are suitable, enlightening, and even entertaining in most of Plato's dialogues—particularly when Socrates is matched with more sagacious sparring partners such as Glaucon and Adeimantus or with the supercilious sophist Thrasymachus—they convey themselves with overbearing intimidation in his conversation (or is it a lecture?) with Ion.⁴⁹ In Plato's *Ion*, Socrates could be perceived as a bully who pushes around a younger brother just because he can.⁵⁰

Daniel Larlham keenly points out the theatrical device that is Plato's Socrates:

Throughout the *Republic*, Plato consistently refers to what poets "say" (rather than "write"), even in the case of Homer. Plato's poet always appears as a performer –

⁴⁸ It must be added that Ion is portrayed as a kind of stereotypical performer: vain and handsome, with the flattering tongue of a courtier but the daftness of a child. At first, he appears to be the kind of performer that was turned into a stereotype: A cartoon such as the fictional bard Cacophonix (blond, coiffed hair, a troubadour's fine clothing, very vain and full of himself) as portrayed in the Asterix stories comes to mind. Cacophonix, like Ion, offers his singing every chance he gets, and the running joke is that the bard is an awful performer and singer whom no one wishes to hear. However, Ion has proven himself a good performer: He has won several awards and competitions. Moreover, when Ion's silences and attempts at defending his art/work are paid close attention to, it is not at all certain if Ion is as dull as he appears. He cannot match Socrates' logic feats, and he cannot use his own logic to fight Socrates. However, he clearly has great emotional intelligence: He checks in with his audience (cf. *Ion* 535e) and adjusts to them (something Socrates should do but does not). Ion may not at all be as daft as he appears at first. Notably, his ideas and attempts at arguing his own points (e.g., about not being out of his mind when performing) are utterly ignored by Socrates.

⁴⁹ With Crito, another interlocutor, Socrates also appears to torment more than he illuminates. When the other party is sincere and willing (and Ion and Crito are), Socrates' sarcasm rings more cruel than clever.

⁵⁰ Ion readily agrees with Socrates in a way that reads as though a patient is being intimidated and made to feel stupid by a smug doctor. Significantly, Socrates is always ready to pursue his ideas at the cost of the ideas of his interlocutors. Frequently, he does not genuinely take in and pursue his interlocutors' answers and ideas. Very often, his interlocutors are made to feel stupid when they should only have been confused (i.e., arrived at a state of *aporia*). Regularly an interlocutor offers an instance of x vs. a generalization of x. An instance is not, I would argue, a bad or stupid answer. It is often more helpful in life to explain something to another person by giving an instance, not a generalization. At times, Plato's Socrates betrays monomania in doggedly pursuing his garden path of ideas instead of doing what he expects his interlocutors to do: truly listening and being open to another line of thought.

Socrates
and Jon



that is, a hybrid reciter-and-actor – and never an author whose work might make its impact upon his audience as a literary artifact detached from his person. It should also be remembered that, until the later fifth century, it was standard practice for the tragic dramatist to serve as lead actor. (Larham 42)

In the scene with Ion, Socrates—in the manner of an actor hamming it up—tries to outshine Ion. In a way, Socrates does outact Ion. The dialogue makes it clear that Socrates is the lead actor. Socrates wins the scene but not necessarily the play. Socrates gives the impression that he is too ardent and too spiteful in his ambition to eclipse the rhapsode. When Socrates says, “I must say I have often envied you rhapsodes” (Plato, *Ion* 530b), he is being sarcastic. However, his sarcasm betrays a grain of truth: Plato’s fictional Socrates mentions his envy three times in one breath (*Ion* 530b–530c), which is simply protesting too much. Socrates is patronizing in the mocking way he repeatedly addresses Ion: “Well done” (*Ion* 530b); “Well now, Ion, dear soul” (*Ion* 531d); “my excellent friend” (*Ion* 532b); and “[e]nough” (537d). Moreover, Socrates is downright rude when he stops Ion—a kind of celebrity in his day who just won a kind of Academy Award—in his tracks solely to rain on his parade. Instead of congratulating his compatriot, Socrates means to demonstrate to all and sundry that rhapsodes are nothing more than lucky dolts. They are lucky in that the gods have chosen them to be a kind of transmitter of divine messages,⁵¹ and they are dolts in that they do not know what they do and how they do it. Plato’s Socrates misses no opportunity to cut Ion down to size with an overzealous vigor that borders on hysteria. It must

⁵¹ Roach fittingly calls this divine dispensation “ionization.” While it is anachronistic—Michael Faraday introduced the word “*ion* = Greek: to go/ to move forward” in the physical/chemical sense in 1834—to call the divine dispensation of artistry “ionization,” the fact that in physical chemistry ionization denotes the conversion of a neutral atom to a charged one is too opportune and serendipitous not to mention. As Roach explains it:

As Plato described the creative process in the *Ion*, the ‘Muse first of all inspires men herself; and from these inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended who take the inspiration’. . . . Socrates compares the transmigration of this spirit through physical bodies to the effect of a magnetic force on bits of metal, which penetrates them, transforms them, and irresistibly draws them to itself and together through the medium of themselves; the god inspires the muse, who in turn inspires the poet, who inspires the rhapsode, who, in the authenticity of his transport, inspires the spectator. It is, in the language of physical chemistry, a process of ionization. (Roach, *Players Passion* (PP) 46)

Roach, as will I, mentions a very similar process (the rhetoric of the passions) when he analyzes Quintilian’s theories on oratory (see the following chapter). See also my ensuing footnote regarding the *Ion* passage on the Heracleian stone.

be emphasized that Ion not only stops what he is doing in order to speak to Socrates, but that Ion also fully engages with all of Socrates' ideas (and Socrates only pursues his own ideas). Ion is amiable, even when he disagrees with Socrates or is being talked over.

It must also be pointed out that Ion could have thrown the ancient Greek equivalent of sarcastic Millennial argument-ending "shade" at Socrates: "You do you, Socrates," as an example. However, Ion is remarkably patient, polite, open-hearted, sincere, and willing to be corrected. In short, Ion is tolerant, and Socrates is not. Socrates wants to be right, and Ion wants to be liked.⁵² Ion concedes all too readily to Socrates' points and line of argument. Even when Socrates tells him that he has neither art nor craft but is solely a good rhapsodic performer due to "divine dispensation" (*Ion* 536d),⁵³ Ion does not get offended. Ion does not, however, readily agree to being a madman while performing (cf. *Ion* 536d–e), and he attempts to tell Socrates this. Moreover, Ion offers to perform part of his routine to prove to Socrates that he is not out of his

⁵² Ion tells Socrates that he checks in with his audience and reacts to them. Ion's statement about his livelihood depending on his well-performed tears can be read sarcastically, as it has been in the actor's adage: "When the actor cries, the audience doesn't." However, Ion is not sarcastic throughout the dialogue at all. It is fair to assume that he is sincere when he says that his paycheck depends on the audience's reception of him. Ion tries to tell Socrates that he depends on the favor of the audience, a statement Socrates ignores entirely. It must be said here that Socrates should have heeded Ion's advice: Ion was telling him, in so many words, that people remember how you make them feel, not how clever you are. Reading Plato's dialogues and laughing *with* Socrates as he annihilates his interlocutors is one thing; being Socrates' interlocutor who is being laughed *at* is another thing completely. Yes, Socrates always outwits his sparring partners. He does, it can be argued, make a hobby out of making people feel badly about themselves, and people resent him for it. It is the luxury of a philosopher not to feel the need to be considerate. Performers are well aware that their livelihood depends on how they make other people feel. This does not mean that performers must be all sweetness and light. In fact, the villain wins awards more frequently than the hero. Delivery is all.

⁵³ In the *Ion*, Socrates describes Ion's creative process as a chain of magnetic enchantment via the metaphor of the Heracleian stone:

I also see, Ion, and I am about to show you what I think this means. For talking well about Homer is not some skill within you—as I was just saying—but it is a divine power that moves you, just as in that stone which Euripides calls a 'Magnet' but which most people call Herakleian. For this stone not only moves iron rings but it also imbues the rings with the same power so that they can do the same thing as the stone in turn—they move other rings, and as a result, there is a great chain of iron and rings connected to each other. But the power from that stone runs through them all. In this way, the Muse herself makes people inspired, and a linked chain of inspired people extends from her.

All the good poets of epic utter those beautiful poems not because of skill but because they are inspired and possessed. . . . For a poet is an empty thing—winged, and sacred and not capable of composing before it is inspired and out of mind, when thought is no longer inside. Until one has gained this state, every person is incapable of composing or giving oracles. Because they compose not by skill—when they say many fine things about their subjects—but by divine dispensation, as you do about Homer, each is only capable of composing well in the arena where the Muse compels—one person composes dithyramb, one encomia, another dance songs, another epic and another iambic poetry. But each is useless in the other genres. (cf. *Ion* 533d–534d)

mind when he is moved by his performance. Ion tries to convey that he is both moved *and* fully aware of his audience. Socrates condescendingly turns down Ion's offer, which would have been a first-hand experience for Socrates, not secondhand hearsay or logical word-bending. Nonetheless, Socrates ignores the rhapsode and goes right back into his own routine, which does not allow dual awareness and paradox but is a single-minded pursuit of winning the argument on Socrates' terms (cf. *Ion* 536 d–e).

Gentile imagines what Ion could have responded were he as skilled at debate as Socrates:

Understandably, Socrates, since you are not a performer yourself you lack a full understanding of the work of art. You are unaware that performance is its own kind of consciousness. Rather than say we are reduced to insanity—which is clearly not the case—and not in our right minds, let us consider that performance is actually heightened consciousness into a dual awareness. Performers are always aware at some level of both the fictive and the mundane worlds, as are the listeners. (Gentile 159)

Niki Hadikoesoemo notices “the irony of the dialogue cut[ting] both ways” and “a paradox . . . underlying Ion's act of performing” (cf. Hadikoesoemo 11). Hadikoesoemo asserts that “Plato presupposes that being possessed by the Muse . . . necessarily excludes being in control. . . . Contrary to this common belief, Ion argues that these two modes can in fact coexist. Being inspired by the Muse is not contrary to enacting a well-crafted emotional scene on stage with necessary distance” (cf. Hadikoesoemo 11). Indeed, it is a basic craft for performers to be inspired or full of emotion while maintaining the necessary distance that allows them not to drop their lines or fall off the stage. John S. Gentile calls Socrates out on his lack of pragmatic knowledge of the stage: Socrates judges performers “like any naive audience member” and with the “frequent mistake[s] of [a] non-performer” (cf. Gentile 159).

Plato's Socrates claims that the performer can be either a passive receptor of divine dispensation or an active stager of his performance. However, Ion's interjection seems to suggest that performers are both active and passive in serving the paradox of the interplay between the two states. The performer's “staging of the paradox—of being . . . passive and active, shaped and

shaping, affected and distant” (cf. Hadikoesoemo⁵⁴ 22) is what makes Ion an excellent performer who is not solely a passive body intoxicated by divine dispensation. Jane Bennett cites Lacoue-Labarthe when she denounces “that ancient disparagement of feminine receptivity, which goes under names sensibility, enthusiasm, pity, sympathy, compassion—whereby a self loses control, gets carried away, and passively submits to the feelings, passions, and inclinations of others—in short, ‘feels vividly, and does little reflecting’” (cf. Bennett, quoting Lacoue-Labarthe 1188). The passive reception of divine favor, which Socrates claims is Ion’s sole gift, is simply a prejudice, not a theory. Actors, as do all human beings, have both male and female, active and passive traits. They cannot strictly choose⁵⁵ between these “two contraries—of expression and impression) . . . [terms that] resonate so intimately, intensively, and infinitely” (cf. Bennett 1188).

By returning to the binary of either/or thinking, acting and performance theory necessarily “fall[s] back upon an impossible ethics of sovereignty—on the fantasy of a self-possessed self who can choose [between binaries, between male and female, active and passive, good and bad qualities]” (cf. Bennett 1188). Bennett specifically indicates that, “For Lacoue-Labarthe, what the practice of acting must confront *is* this ‘paradox’” (Bennett 1188). Good actors must be protean and elude binaries, which gives them a malleability and a plasticity that resist categorization. Plato is afraid of just that: “Plato saw that mimesis⁵⁶ has ‘no other property

⁵⁴ I omit here Hadikoesoemo’s mention of the performer’s paradox being “all and nothing” as she reads it through the lens of Diderot. As I will explain at length in my chapter on Diderot, the paradox that Diderot understood to be the genius-actor’s, namely, that they feel absolutely nothing while the audience feels everything, is what Hadikoesoemo also reads into Ion. Hadikoesoemo, as did Diderot, rightly sees a paradox in good actors, but the paradox is not that they are inspired/enthused (in the divine world)/out of their mind while detached/fully in touch with their surroundings/in their right mind. The latter, as I will explain shortly, is a basic skill of the actor. It is not a fully fleshed-out paradox but appears to be one to non-performers. Not to trip over a cable, not to fall offstage, and not to lose oneself in one’s emotional monologue during a performance are basic skills that must be mastered by experienced actors. The real paradox, as I will also explain shortly, is that the skilled actor is actively staging the performance and passively being open to contrary inspirations.

⁵⁵ “[H]uman participation in mimesis is not optional: all men and women are embroiled in a process of repetition that is both endless and promiscuous with regard to the objects repeated. . . . This unregulated seriality is disquieting for those committed to a Platonic model of a self who can philosophize, as well as for any model of subjectivity as a stable form” (cf. Bennett 1191).

⁵⁶ By “mimesis,” I refer to both representational mimesis (the imitation of another person/model) and to creative mimesis (the imitation of a model the actor has created in his or her imagination). Bennett refers to the latter mode of mimesis as “productive mimesis,” a term I am eschewing as I also deem the imitation of another person/model as productive (think of the many instances in which an actor must play a real person, such as Daniel Day-Lewis playing Abraham Lincoln or Renee Zellweger portraying Judy Garland). Such portrayals are deeply creative and, in my estimation, just as “productive” as an actor creating a fictional character from his or her imagination.

than infinite malleability: instability “itself” and this ontological plasticity disquiets” (cf. Bennett quoting Lacoue–Labarthe 1190). To be protean, malleable, and plastic implies a changeable state that is always unstable and unpredictable. Plasticity is not a fixed “being,” and that disconcerts Plato. “[I]mitation implies being other, being several, potentially being everything,” and “[h]enceforth theatrical mimesis is conceived as a multiplier of being. The seed of the existential conception of theatrical representation is here sowed” (cf. Ortega Manez 114). As opposed to acknowledging that imitation, acting, and the arts can be a creative presentation and a new idea of something—which would entail acknowledging that “being” can be both “being” and “appearing,” not either/or—Plato not only rejects the concept but also entirely ignores the pursuit of the topic.

Had Plato created a worthier opponent in *Ion*, Socrates would have had to reconsider several of his points en route to his perfect *Republic*: Performance can be epistemological, and emotion can lead to knowledge as much as reason. In addition, performers have mastered how to hide their hard work underneath a nuanced public display of artistry to make their work their play and render it enjoyable for the audience.⁵⁷ Performers know what they do and how they do it: Only after having mastered their discipline can they be recipients of divine favor. *Ion* is not solely a passive channel for the gods who is replaceable with the body of another rhapsode: *Ion* has just won several awards proving that he is not just an inspired puppet that can be replaced. Gentile once more imagines *Ion*’s possible preferable response to Socrates’ manipulative points:

Art conceals art, Socrates. Inspiration may come to the artist as a gift from the gods, but the artist must in most circumstances be readied⁵⁸ for that moment. Rhapsodes must be educated and experienced. Yes, the gods give individual gifts of innate talent, but it is in all the disciplines of study. You, Socrates, have been given a great gift of philosophical

⁵⁷ The audience does not want to see behind the curtain of how performances are made of blood, sweat, and tears. A nervous performer with knees shaking and voice breaking immediately sets an audience’s teeth on edge.

⁵⁸ One of my first acting teachers at the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute—the insightful Darcy Marta—had a similar mantra for what she felt was the only strategy for success for actors and performers. She would repeatedly tell us that luck matters in the industry. However, she always stressed in a very pragmatic way: “You must be prepared for luck.” By that, she meant that if actors are not fully ready, have honed their craft, and have mastered the physical, elocution/ linguistic, and mental aspects of the profession, luck will pass them by, even if they are at the right place at the right time (cf. Marta, Darcy, “Film and TV” (private class), *LSTI* 2000).

reasoning—but you lord that gift over other people. For the artist to be a ready conduit for divine inspiration, they must prepare mentally for the rigorous work of interpretation, understanding the work of the poet, as well in the vocal and physical arts of delivery. Furthermore, I grow in deeper knowledge of Homer by performing Homer. Performance is my way to knowledge and the divine. (Gentile 160)

Ion, however, is not good at explaining his art—many artists are not—and Plato’s Socrates uses Ion’s lack of debating skills to annihilate and humiliate him.

The dialogue is brief, as though Plato cannot be bothered with the vapid rhapsode for too long. *Ion* introduces Plato’s antitheatricalism: “[P]erforming is not a real profession, acting cannot be taught, artists are mentally vacant” (Kaplan 61), and artists are narcissists.⁵⁹ Performing always means to “appear” as opposed to “be” and therefore has no place in Plato’s *Republic*. The paradox is ignored: “Mimesis is . . . what links the image to the real being, and, at the same time, what dispossesses the image from the real being” (cf. Ortega Manez 110). After all, even that which truly exists also appears just as much as that which does not exist appears in a certain way. It is such slipperiness that Plato simply ignores. The artist “*seems* to be able to produce everything, as far as what he produces *seems to be*. But it is not. Here resides the nature, ontologically deceitful, of *mimesis* for Plato” (cf. Ortega Manez 110). Artists cannot be trusted in Plato’s idealistic *Republic*. Notwithstanding the dialogue’s antitheatricalism and general antagonism with respect to rhapsodes and performers, it harbors “a rich, if unintended, source of

⁵⁹ Plato goes to great lengths in his short dialogue to demonstrate that the rhapsode’s narcissism is foolishness: “Ion is immediately belittled as a superficial and trite clotheshorse” (Gentile 157). Ion is portrayed as someone who is always dressed in the finest clothes and is generally handsome: “[Y]our person should be adorned and that you should look as handsome as possible” (*Ion* 530b). Ion is overly eager to please (he repeatedly agrees with Socrates even when he does not understand what he is agreeing to). Ion also is overly flattering: “How vivid to me, Socrates, is this part of your proof” (*Ion* 535c). Ion brags about his winning first prize, and childishly—albeit I would argue he is more childlike—about future triumphs (*Ion* 530b). Ion brags about being the very best at speaking about Homer (*Ion* 530c). Ion also brags about being deserving of more trophies: “I deserve to be crowned with a golden crown” (*Ion* 530d). He foolishly walks into all of Socrates’ logic traps with childlike enthusiasm.

theorization about acting and the acting process”⁶⁰ (Kaplan 45). Plato fears Ion’s stage presence and the powerful emotion rhapsodes evoke in the audience while performing. It is Ion’s body (his “appearance”) onstage that Plato fears more than his mind. The body, after all, can both “be” and “appear” to truthfully express something and to deceive. Unlike Aristotle, who viewed the playwright as the most important part of drama, Plato knows that performers can spark emotional contagion among the audience. Where Aristotle buttressed “the academy’s traditional preference for the abstract word over embodied performance” and valued “masculine literacy [over] feminine orality” (cf. Gentile 156), Plato knows better: “It is the power of poetic performance that he fears, not Ion’s ineptitude” (Gentile 156).

Subsequently, it is in Plato’s cave allegory (*Republic VII*) that he outlines the fundamental difference between the world of appearances (what people think constitutes reality) and the world of Being/Forms (the spiritual or ideal world of the mind—what Plato deems the “real” reality). Plato viewed the world of appearances as a misleading realm peopled with the shadows⁶¹ of humans who only believe that they exist. In fact, theirs is a kind of shadow world of appearance, which their limited mental faculties perceive to be the real world. To Plato, the “real” reality was the realm of the Forms, which could only be entered by a select few philosophers—Plato called them philosopher-kings—and entry was possible solely through the mind. The body, with all its needs, desires, and weaknesses, had to be overcome by the rational mind, whose pure and temperate faculties could eclipse the burden of the physical world, which was nothing but an appearance or a shadow on a wall, masquerading as reality. In one fell swoop,

⁶⁰ Kaplan adds here, in his first footnote, what I also add in my previous footnote: Plato had encountered Pythagoreanism (cf. Kaplan 61). The familiarity Plato had with Pythagoreanism allows the notion that Pythagoras’s *Table of Opposites* was known to him. See my footnote on the *Table of Opposites* and Plato, above. Furthermore, it is not just Kaplan who finds Plato’s Ion to provide an acting theory or performance theory. Freddie Rokem, in *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*, also makes the case that “*Ion* appears to be a dialogue about the acting process” (cf. Rokem 105–120). I agree with Kaplan and Rokem. Plato undoubtedly attempts to disparage poets, poetry, and all performance art as a shadow of a shadow, but this does not mean that his theory of performance should be ignored. Most critics and art theory books omit Plato based on his hostility toward the performing arts. This is, I believe (with Kaplan and Rokem) a mistake. It must be said that Kaplan’s and Rokem’s sense that there is a performance theory “hidden” in Plato’s *Ion* does not mean that they read and misinterpret the way the Romantics (particularly Shelley) read Plato. Along with Kaplan and Rokem, I do not ascribe to Plato romantic notions about artistic endeavors. I do not offer “an oversimplified presentation of Plato which makes him the ancestor of dramatic aesthetics as a whole” (Stern–Gillet 3). I do, however, point out an alternative interpretation of Plato’s aesthetics.

⁶¹ Notably, actors were called “shadows” in the Renaissance because they were viewed as shadows of the sensory world. This line of thought can be traced back to Plato via Neo-Platonism. Shakespeare often refers to this shadow world most famously in Puck’s “Epilogue”: “If we shadows have offended” (*MND* 5.1.1).

Plato ranked and divided the superior world of the mind from the inferior world of the body, rational thought from emotions (the senses), and the real (Forms) from what is only perceived to be real (existence on earth as perceived by consciousness). Plato's split resonated then, and it continued to do so to this day.

Since the mind-body split would become the Western world's prevailing orthodoxy⁶² with Descartes (who—I simplify here, please see my chapter on Diderot for greater detail—split the soul from the body and the mind), it is crucial to understand when, how, and why such dualistic thinking was conceived and why it is mostly—even today—the status quo. Plato's Socrates may have dragooned Ion into intellectual submission, and Plato may have ended his *Republic* on the antitheatrical note of banning the poets altogether. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that Plato was a playwright⁶³ before he became a philosopher: Martin Puchner noticed the interrelatedness of theatre and philosophy in Plato. Puchner poignantly asks, “Isn't Plato obsessed with the theatre precisely because he cares so much about imitation, which is at the center of his pedagogy?” (Puchner, “Mind the Gap” 540). Plato was a great storyteller who wrote dramatic dialogues that had an immediate effect on their readers by asking them to contemplate each character's ideas and perspectives. Plato feared artists and their great impact on people's emotions because he knew that the power of art was its ability to indirectly convey ideas to people through stories where didactic lectures, direct reproaches, intellectual debates, and logical arguments failed.

Plato's antitheatricalism is mirrored by much of the antitheatricalism after him, particularly during the Renaissance. For example, Jonas Barish's compilation of antitheatricalism

⁶² There is a great distinction between Plato's dualism and Descartes' dualism: Plato accepts that the mind and body are enmeshed during life on earth. Plato's philosophical aim was to separate them. Descartes viewed the body as a material machine, and the mind is an immaterial substance. He was a foundationalist who sought absolute certainty, which led to errors and circular thinking: The Cartesian circle proves God with the proof of God. Descartes claims that a clear and distinct perception guarantees truth because God would not deceive us about our perceptions. He tries to prove God's existence with clear and distinct perceptions, and he attempts to validate clear and distinct perceptions by way of God's existence. To Descartes, mind and body are two radically separate substances. He could, however, never work out how the body and mind interacted: He said the interaction was caused by the pineal gland in the brain, which has been proven wrong. In all fairness, the mind-body problem remains, even though many succeeding philosophers have tried their hand at it.

⁶³ “In contrast to Aristotle, who took an interest in plays at a remove, Plato was steeped in theatrical culture and was himself a onetime aspiring playwright” (Kaplan 45).

throughout the ages indicates: “Theatre being the quintessentially mimetic⁶⁴ art, acting being radically founded in the multiplication of roles and transgression of boundaries, all that is urged in suspicion of poetry, music, recitation, and the other arts must apply here with a maximum of force and a minimum of regretful qualification” (Barish 26). In a way, ironically, Plato employed the art of creative dialogue⁶⁵ with a tragic hero at its center to convey his ideas to people. He did not merely outline his ideas and theories and list them, but he brought them to life through theatrically staged scenes. To cast Socrates as a tragic hero⁶⁶ surrounded by prevaricating sophists⁶⁷ who undermine Socrates’ noble strife for truth is highly dramatic. There is always something uncanny about a former artist who turns antitheatricalist. Some of Plato’s insights reveal that he viewed dramatic poetry and art in a manner that only an artist could. His criticism is nowhere as formal as Aristotle’s but a drastic renunciation that can only come from someone who cared deeply about art. Some Renaissance antitheatricalists such as Stephen Gosson—a former actor—reveal a similar streak that turns from insight and a love of art and theatre to an almost hysterical break with it.

1b) Socrates: Plato’s Dramatic Protagonist

The way Plato describes Socrates is highly theatrical. It is also a paradox: Plato claims that the body is material and the mind is immaterial. However, his protagonist must live and question life through his embodied existence. In addition, without Socrates’ dramatic story told in dialogue form, Plato could not have related to his readers such a vivid portrayal of a tragic hero. Plato did

⁶⁴ Mimesis has always been looked at askance by antitheatricalists throughout the ages. Worse, even in this day and age, mimesis often gets a bad reputation in acting theory and performance studies. The bad reputation of mimesis has recently been called into question by Joseph Roach in his 2010 essay “The Blunders of Orpheus.” Daniel Larlham also defends mimesis in his PhD dissertation *The Meaning in Mimesis: Philosophy, Aesthetics, Acting Theory* of 2012. I will shortly underscore some of the important points Larlham makes about mimesis in greater detail. Of course, Aristotle was one of the few advocates of mimesis as a teaching tool.

⁶⁵ Paradoxically and ironically, of course, Plato “reproduces” his mentor Socrates when he artistically *represents* him in his dialogues.

⁶⁶ Kaplan calls Socrates’ Plato a “champion and assumed alter ego (and/or philosophical stage character)” (Kaplan 46).

⁶⁷ Plato views the theatre and acting as steeped in corruption and relativism (*Laws* III.700b–701c). He aligns it very much with the sophists (*Sophist* 267a–b).

not elect to have his audience “read” his immaterial mind. He also did not elect to write the didactic equivalent of an Ancient Athens PowerPoint presentation. Instead, he chose the theatrical tragedy and narrative of a martyr: Socrates dies *for* humanity and *instead*⁶⁸ of humanity. The latter has become a theatrical convention of the actor as both saint and martyr, celebrity and sacrifice: Actors act *for* the audience, and they suffer *in* the audience’s *stead*. Socrates must “perform” his part to express Plato’s dramatic narrative. This—again—raises the question of what “to act/to perform” and “to be” mean. The noblest quests and sincerest sentiments still demand that they be performed. To show love in its most heartfelt form, one still must perform it with the body. In a discussion of a film he produced, James Schamus says:

[T]wo words—act and perform—indicate the troubling question [the film and its protagonist] asks us: for at the moment when we choose, when we decide, when we exercise our free will, are we not also performing? . . . [B]ut because our love is, no matter how earnest, an act, and therefore always an object of suspicion. (cf. Chang, Ling, and Schamus xi–xii)

The troubling question of “to be” versus to “act/appear/perform” that Schamus draws attention to is, of course, the same question Hamlet was struggling with: What is truthful, and what is false? What “is,” and what “seems”? How can one know if somebody is “acting truthfully/being” or if they are “acting deceitfully/seeming”? How can anything be related to another being via abstract thought, alone, and without the body?

Part of the problem is, once again, that there is no word in the English language that expresses this in-between state. “Acting” is used for both its truthful, positive connotation (“he acted bravely”) and its deceitful, negative connotation (“he was just acting”). It is no wonder that the actor is distrusted because language dictates it so. The reason for this is—partially—that one cannot know another person’s mind and whether that individual is acting truthfully. However, there should be an expression that captures the possibility thereof. After all, language allows

⁶⁸ Skura quotes Grotowski “The actor is not there for us but instead of us” (Skura 7, 203). Skura quotes Antonin Artaud’s *Theatre and Its Double* where Artaud compares actors to “victims signaling through the flames” (Skura quoting Artaud, 13, 203; Artaud 13).

mermaids, unicorns, and fairies to exist figuratively. “Acting” needs an adjective (or further description with a noun) to express the “truthful expression of being” (in love/afraid/in pain) to be represented faithfully. “Acting” contains multitudes of meanings. Most importantly, it can mean opposite things: “to do or be something truthfully” or “to dissemble.” It is a paradox, and the actor “acting” onstage is not either acting truthfully or dissembling, but always doing both. Yet, to express anything, it must be “acted” and embodied to resonate with an audience. Plato, I would argue, was profoundly aware of this fact. Within Plato’s narrative, Socrates must act/ embody/live through his experiences. Only by acting out his story, as an embodied, enactive mind/body character who acts/performs, does the character of Socrates affect people. Socrates’ need to educate the ignorant does not tell the story of a character’s mind imprisoned within his body but of a character who tries to enlighten and heal people through his very embodiment.

To embrace and be moved by Socrates’ tragedy, the reader or the audience must watch/read his actions, or “acts,” unfold through their own active, embodied mind and imagination. The paradoxical aspect of Plato’s highly dramatic dialogue “starring” Socrates as protagonist is that it is the very telling of Socrates’ mind/body struggle with knowledge that conveys knowledge to the reader. The experience of Socrates’ struggle and acceptance of “I neither know nor think that I know”⁶⁹ (Plato, *Apology* 21b) is the knowledge imparted to the reader. The paradox of knowledge is knowledge. Socrates maintains the tension between wisdom and ignorance without resolving it. His story, as theatrically told by Plato, conveys a commitment to wonder, not certainty. Only by “acting out” his story does Socrates express Plato’s ideas. Of course, Plato may argue that his dialogues are meant for reading, and his characters, therefore, only play out in the superior form of the imagination, not the body. Additionally, he may be appalled by the idea of actors acting out Socrates or Thrasymachus. After all, Plato may contend that theatre abstracts, imitates, duplicates, and estranges further from the already shadowy world of appearances, and time and space are corrupted by actors playing out their parts. A good actor may stop time for

⁶⁹ The exact version is: “I am wiser than this man; for neither of us really knows anything fine and good, but this man thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas I, as I do not know anything, do not think I do either” (Plato, *Apology* 21b). It is best to understand Socrates’ statement as his realization that, in the scope of everything, he does not know much or anything about the big questions he asks.

one audience member, while a bad actor may expand time for another. Plato would argue that both are perceived through the senses⁷⁰ and are, therefore, unreliable on the path to knowledge.

Notably, Plato believed that knowledge (certain, absolute knowledge) was possible, even though his mentor Socrates had made it his life's work to show the world that we "are chronic epistemological overreachers . . . always taking ourselves to be epistemologically richer than we really are. . . . Socrates counseled epistemological modesty" (cf. McGinn 5). Such modesty Plato did not subscribe to when he claimed it was possible for humans—albeit only a chosen few philosophers—to gain the ultimate knowledge of the universe, self, and causality by climbing Diotima's staircase to the highest Truth.⁷¹ In this final step of the ladder, Plato's flight to truth turns Icarian. The final rung melts in the clouds. The entire ladder crashes down, including all the physical bodies on it, because Plato—desirous to answer the final question—overreaches and thereby overlooks that, to reach the mind, one must go through the body first.

Ancient Greek Skeptics—primarily Sextus Empiricus—stalemated Plato's Forms by arguing that "knowledge, however desirable, is simply not within our grasp" because humans are "too prone to illusion, error, and uncertainty. We cannot be sure that our senses are not deceiving us, or that our reasoning faculties yield sound inferences, even whether we are dreaming"⁷² (McGinn 5). Ironically, Plato's protagonist could not have said it better in one of the dramatic dialogues. Where there is no "body," there is no consciousness (disregarding, to make this point, the intricacies of the greater mind/body problem), and without consciousness, there is no mind to seek truth. The Greek skeptics may have debunked Plato's problematic separation of the mind and the body, but historically speaking, the damage was done because the split had settled into

⁷⁰ Daniel Kahnemann is skeptical about people's general gut feelings in *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. However, he differentiates between a general gut feeling and the gut feeling of someone who has mastered a craft or profession. What used to be considered an irrational act because it was caused by impulse is actually often the right course of action, assuming the actor has the right amount of expertise. When people act on gut feeling, they tap into all the accumulated knowledge of their unconscious and, therefore, act not on irrational impulse, but from deeply ingrained or cultivated knowledge. Kahneman said that "intuition is thinking that you know without really knowing why or how you know it" (Kahneman, Daniel, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* 218). An experienced firefighter, for example, may have valid instincts honed by years of experience. Someone inexperienced, however, must be careful with gut feelings.

⁷¹ I capitalize "Truth" because Plato capitalized the Forms (his highest concepts and unchanging ideals of things or the timeless essence of things).

⁷² Shakespeare used the "life-as-a-dream" motif frequently, most prominently in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and, rather more indirectly, in *The Tempest*.

orthodox thinking. Arguably, the split was embraced so widely because it fed into a deeply embedded need in human biology and psychology. After all, the Skeptics' answer was a non-answer; thus, it was steeped in ambiguity. Human beings, neuroscience tells us, crave certainty.⁷³ It is this early separation of the mind from the body, of knowledge from the senses, that the language of theatrical action has not recovered from. It is because of this Platonic split that the rest of Plato's radically shrewd observations⁷⁴ on the theatre and performing arts often go unnoticed.⁷⁵ For example, Plato called attention to the importance of the performance over the text. It is because Plato situates the place of the identification between the actor and the audience in the performance, not—as does Aristotle—in the text that he is daunted by the actor's power to overwhelm an audience. Plato's "global condemnation of poetry" is not an attack "on dramatic literature, [but on] certain kinds of histrionic performance" (Gruber 202). This leads directly to Aristotle's text-based understanding of acting and poetics.

1c) Plato and Aristotle's Dualisms: Opening a Void in Language

Whereas Aristotle valued the text of plays, to Plato, "poetry [and drama] was a performance art" (cf. Gruber 202, 203):

⁷³ The human brain "craves certainty in a similar way, and using similar circuits, for how we crave food, sex, and other primary rewards. Information is rewarding. A sense of uncertainty about the future generates a strong threat or 'alert' response in your limbic system. . . . Your brain doesn't like uncertainty—it's like a type of pain, something to be avoided. Certainty on the other hand seems rewarding, and we tend to steer toward it, even when it might be better for us to remain uncertain" (Rock, David, "A Hunger for Certainty," *Psychology Today* 25 Oct. 2009).

Contemporary theories of reinforcement learning are rooted in the dopaminergic reward system. Dopamine neurons in parts of the midbrain, such as the ventral tegmental area and substantia nigra pars compacta, play a vital role in the expectation of reward. . . . So why do dopamine neurons treat information as a reward? It's easy to see how treating information this way might be a useful evolutionary adaptation. For many animals, each day consists of numerous decisions that pertain to eating, reproducing and socializing. Obviously, having access to more relevant information – such as knowing where the food is located – allows animals to make better decisions. Furthermore, having access to such information might give us better control over our environment, thus increasing our chances of survival. (Lane, Chadrick, "The Chemistry of Information Addiction," *Scientific American* 13 Oct. 2009)

⁷⁴ *Phaedrus* 278a.

⁷⁵ Jonas Barish dedicates an entire chapter to Plato (Chapter 1) in his 1981 study *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*. Barish is very aware of Plato's profound understanding of the performing arts. However, Barish's book is regrettably not widely read amongst theatre practitioners. Barish saw that solely because Plato eventually turns against the arts and poets does not mean that he did not have solid points about the power of performance.

The unspoken hypothesis of the *Poetics* is that spectators' responses are determined by the poetic text. . . . [To Aristotle] the meaning of tragedy can always be discovered by a careful reading of the text, and that is why he considers spectacle (*opsis*) the least important of the elements of drama. For Aristotle, the dramatic text is an object entirely separate from the audience, and the actors' presentation of it is assumed always to be perfect. (cf. Gruber 203)

While both Plato and Aristotle believe theatre to be imitation, they differ in where they place that imitation. Aristotle's text-based approach places imitation with the poet, whereas Plato places it between the actor and the spectator. The latter allows unlimited possibilities for an actor–audience exchange, text–performance slippage, and creative interpretation. It is precisely because of such a wealth of potentially explosive and unpredictable creative outcomes that Plato renounces theatre and poetry altogether.⁷⁶ Plato focused on enactment and its moral repercussions, while Aristotle focused on dramas' texts. If the actors' embodiment stirs the baser passions of spectators, Aristotle places the blame strictly on playwrights, who must weigh the ethical consequences. Strangely enough, the philosopher who had a profound understanding of catharsis—the purging and healing of an audience through the performance of tragedy—did not consider that the power of said catharsis involved the actors. To him, the latter were mere marionettes who acted strictly according to the strings of the puppet master, namely, the playwright. The transmission of a kind of healing power to Aristotle was the responsibility of the writer, whereas the actors basically acted out the text like puppets.⁷⁷ Consequently, the combination of Plato separating the mind from the body and Aristotle founding Western criticism on text (mind-driven) over performance (body-driven) is likely responsible for the void in the language of performance.

⁷⁶ Much later, Brecht showed similar concern for the magnetic impact of empathy and emotion on the audience that has the power to carry them away.

⁷⁷ The idea of the actor as a kind of puppet that mechanically dances to strings comes up many times later in theatre history and acting theory. Diderot somewhat dehumanizes actors when he speaks of them as automatons. Meyerhold wanted the actor to work mechanically. Edward Gordon Craig saw the ideal performer as an “Über-Marionette.”

Rhonda Blair points out, “Some of the difficulties of working in an integrated way with acting, performance theory, and science grow out of common and mistaken artificial binaries such as science vs. art, thinking vs. feeling, and reason vs. emotion. The roots of mind–body dualism go back to Plato” (Blair 5). Add to this the Aristotelian elevation of text and writer over performance, and the gap in language for manifest, acted characters becomes even wider. As admirable as Aristotle’s defense of poetry was in the form of a response to Plato’s shunning of the poets, it created a problematic lens of text-based criticism through which plays and performances continue to be read. Accordingly, the *Poetics* is a prescriptive work, not a creative one. Aristotle preferred to analyze and write about plays from a bygone era, not the ones performed in his time. His “chief complaints were that the poets of his own time spoiled their work with rhetorical display, that the actor was often of more important than the play, and that the poets tampered with the plot to give a favorite actor an opportunity of displaying his special talent”⁷⁸ (Bellinger 61). Aristotle obviously was not informed by the pragmatic aspects of theatre. The *Poetics* is indeed “an outsider’s view of writing,” not an insider’s account of how great performances are created (Waters, *Guardian* 4 Oct. 2010). Yet, the *Poetics* still looms large in Western theatre history and criticism. This kind of blind following of the rulebook—Timberlake Wertenbaker has referred to it as “Aristotalitarianism”⁷⁹—does not set the stage for a creative nomenclature for acting and performance. If anything, it reduces the wealth of playfulness, unruliness, and experimentation that is part of the world of pragmatic theatre to formal literary criticism.

The actors do not matter to Aristotle, and the performance only matters to him if it aligns with the text. On the road to trying to find a creative vocabulary for acting, the *Poetics* is not just a roadblock; it is a dead end. As Gerald Else says, “Plato knew things, true and important things, about this matter which were not dreamt of in Aristotle’s philosophy” (Else 3). Both Plato’s dialogues and Aristotle’s *Poetics* were, of course, innovative in their own right. However, both

⁷⁸ Aristotle’s chief complaints were, ironically, the guidelines Shakespeare lived by as an active practitioner of the stage. Sometimes, Shakespeare’s characters are so charismatic that their lines run away with them. Hamlet, Iago, and Richard III are good examples. Working directly with actors whose skill set he was intimately familiar with worked well enough for Shakespeare, despite breaking most—and sometimes all—of Aristotle’s rules.

⁷⁹ From a talk given by Timberlake Wertenbaker recorded in David Edgar’s *State of Play: Playwrights on Playwriting* 1999: 73–75.

works had a huge impact on the generations that followed, some of which was detrimental to speaking about performance. It is especially important to emphasize that both Plato and Aristotle, by splitting the mind from the body and by splitting the text from the performance, respectively, stood in the way of a holistic approach to performance and instead opened a void in language for it. Furthermore, by splitting emotions and senses from the body and reason and by divorcing the text from the performance, the seed is planted for the misconception of what actors do. Good acting performances, as I will argue throughout, are always paradoxical in their embrace of irreconcilable opposites. It is an actor's very paradoxical nature that makes him or her interesting to watch. The actor who draws in an audience is someone who combines contrasts effortlessly and allows different qualities to coexist. Instead of resolving the paradox of acting, the powerful actor—I will show—thrives on it. It is their range and depth to communicate a complex idea effectively. However, verbalizing this paradox remains a point of contention for anyone trying to write about acting because dividing a paradox into two either/or categories is anathema to its purpose.

Of course, Aristotle declared that paradoxes were spurious and unacceptable in the *Metaphysics*. Distinguished Professor of Philosophy Graham Priest challenges Aristotle's principle of noncontradiction⁸⁰ in an important *New York Times* essay entitled "Paradoxical Truth."

[T]he principle of noncontradiction says that you can never accept a contradiction. And the principle of noncontradiction has been high orthodoxy in Western philosophy since Aristotle mounted a spirited defense of it in his "Metaphysics"—so orthodox that no one seems to have felt the need to mount a sustained defense of it ever since. So the paradox must be of the second kind: there must be something wrong with the argument. Or must there? . . . Maybe . . . we have just been trying to find a fault where there is none. Of course, this means junking the principle of noncontradiction. But why should we accept that anyway? You might think that since Aristotle's defense established the principle in

⁸⁰ In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle called his law of non-contradiction (LNC) "the most certain of all principles" (1005b24) —*firmissimum omnium principiorum*, as the Medieval theologians said (Priest et al., "Dialetheism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

Western philosophy, his arguments must have been pretty good. Were they? No. The main argument is so tortured that experts can't even agree on how it is meant to work, let alone that it works. . . . Interestingly, virtually everything else that Aristotle ever defended has been overthrown—or at least seriously challenged. The principle of noncontradiction is, it would seem, the last bastion! (cf. Priest, "Paradoxical Truth," *NYT* 25 Nov. 2015)

Priest concludes that "contradictions cannot be ruled out by logic alone. . . . One ignores them [*dialetheia*⁸¹/true paradoxes) at great risk" (Priest, *NYT*). After all, revolutions in science such as quantum theory and revolutions in logic such as "overthrowing traditional Aristotelian logic" came about because someone took a paradox to heart (cf. Priest, *NYT*).

The good actor's apparently contradictory combination of public intimacy, of strength and vulnerability, empathy and aloofness, cool passion, melancholy merriment, humility and arrogance, beauty and terror, cruel kindness, combustible sweetness, of being shy, yet full of danger, a king and a clown, an old child, a devilish angel, a wise fool, a dark light and a bright shadow must not be split or resolved. To the senses, these contradictions make "sense"; however, to the mind, having been cut off from the senses, they remain mystifying paradoxes and confusing oxymora. However, good art and acting are always paradoxical and full of contradictions and struggle. In describing a great performance by a great actor, every theatre critic—as I will later exemplify—mentions something paradoxical in the actor: "Great acting, like great writing, is often in the eye of the beholder, but audiences *almost always know* when

⁸¹ Graham Priest—who coined "dialetheism" in 1981 with Richard Routley/Sylvan—explains the term as follows: There is "a contentious new theory that's currently doing the rounds. According to this theory, some contradictions are actually true, and the conclusion of the Liar Paradox is a paradigm example of one such contradiction. The theory calls a true contradiction a *dialetheia* (Greek: "di" = two (way); "aletheia" = truth), and the view itself is called dialetheism" (Priest, *NYT*). Priest and Routley/Sylvan proposed the following: "A *dialetheia* is a two-way truth, facing both truth and falsity like a Janus-headed figure" ("Dialetheism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Significantly, Eastern tradition and thought has been much more open to paradox: "In non-Western traditions, there are more overt examples of what appears to be dialetheic thought. In ancient Indian logic/metaphysics, there were standardly four possibilities to be considered on any statement at issue: that it is true (only), false (only), neither true nor false, or both true and false" ("Dialetheism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Buddhism and Daoism accept true paradoxes: "For example, in the Mahayana tradition, Nagarjuna presents many passages similar in form to: Everything is real and not real, both real and not real, neither real nor not real. This is the Lord Buddha's teaching" (Garfield 1995, XVIII: 8). Furthermore: "On a dialetheic interpretation advocated by Priest, Garfield, and Deguchi (see Priest 2002, ch. 16; Deguchi et al. 2008), readers should take Nagarjuna and others in the Madhyamaka school at their word—not as invoking some sort of mysticism, but as affirming the nature of reality" ("Dialetheism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, emphasis mine).

they are in the presence of something special” (Cannon, Dee, and Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian* 9 May 2009, emphasis mine). It is the actor’s complete acceptance of paradox and the ability to express it that makes her/him great, as I will argue in detail throughout upcoming chapters.

1d) Rhetoric and Acting: Emotions Are Thoughts, Intellect Is Feeling

“Performance performs the soul” (Cicero, *Ancient Rhetoric [AR] from Aristotle to Philostratus* 214).

To trace the body–mind split and the void in language in respect to acting and performance, it is imperative to include ancient rhetoric. Despite the ancient Greek philosophers’ tremendous impact on future generations, the Roman orators resisted Plato and Aristotle’s divisions. The Roman orators perceived said divisions as counterintuitive and detrimental not just to them, but to the ensuing generations affected by them. Binary thinking was not compatible with the Roman rhetorician’s practical work experience. Quintilian (c. AD 35–100), as an example, repeatedly compares actors with orators to explain his theories on rhetoric.⁸² Quintilian even encourages his students to learn from actors and their physicalities. The ancient Greek orator and archrival of Demosthenes, Aeschines (389 BC–314 BC), began his career as an actor.⁸³ Demosthenes, one of the greatest orators of all time, is said to have hired an accomplished actor⁸⁴ to teach him elocution. According to Plutarch, Demosthenes died shortly after dreaming about acting in a

⁸² Quintilian says, for example: “An orator . . . like an actor, should employ imaginative identification to ‘impersonate’ and ‘exhibit’ emotions as if they were his own” (Roach, quoting Quintilian, *Player’s Passion [PP]* 24). Roach continues: “The actor and the orator face the same problem, and Quintilian invites the reader [of his *Institutio Oratoria*] to ‘draw a parallel from the stage, where the actor’s voice and delivery produce greater emotional effects when he is speaking in an assumed role than when he speaks in his own character’” (Roach, quoting Quintilian, *PP* 24).

⁸³ The question regarding whether Aeschines was a provincial third-rate actor (a “tritagonist”) or a good actor has not been answered unanimously. Demosthenes calls Aeschines a third-rate actor, a failure, who murdered the part of Oenomaus at Collytus (cf. Dorjahn 223–226). However, Demosthenes was, as I stated, a rival of Aeschines, and his depiction (or character assassination) must be taken with a grain of salt. Others have described Aeschines as a good actor (cf. Dorjahn 223).

⁸⁴ Some sources cite Polus of Aegina to have been Demosthenes’ mentor (cf. Stewart 220); others cite Neoptolemus as his teacher (cf. Pearson 214). Both were highly acclaimed actors.

play⁸⁵ and after having given the actor Archias a bad acting review (cf. Plutarch, “Demosthenes,” *Lives*). Furthermore, Demosthenes’ answer to the question of what the three most important traits of speechmaking were (“action, action, action”⁸⁶) is still quoted by many speech coaches today. Clearly, both the ancient Greek and later Roman orators favored a joint mind/body and intellect/emotion approach.

Importantly, actors in Ancient Greece—during Plato’s time—enjoyed high esteem. They were trained in oratory and were highly skilled performers of emotional states. Due to their skill set, ancient Greek actors were sometimes employed as ambassadors who enjoyed diplomatic immunity while traversing enemy lines. It was mainly these actors’ ability to draw and influence huge crowds that made them hallmarks of ancient Greek democracy.⁸⁷ Plato, as stated above, viewed rhetoricians with ambivalence and caution similar to how he viewed performers (actors and rhapsodes). Aware of the power emotion can have, Plato opposed the Sophists, who employed it in rhetoric to manipulate their audience instead of guiding them dialectically and logically toward enlightenment and the common good. Aristotle conceded that emotion was an

⁸⁵ Plutarch writes: “He dreamed, namely, that he was acting in a tragedy and contending with Archias for the prize, and that although he acquitted himself well and won the favour of the audience, his lack of stage decorations and costumes cost him the victory. Therefore, after Archias had said many kindly things to him, Demosthenes, just as he sat, looked steadfastly at him and said: ‘O Archias, thou didst never convince me by thine acting, nor wilt thou now convince me by thy promises’” (Plutarch, “The Life of Demosthenes,” *Lives*, ch. 29). Archias was an actor who turned ambassador (or, rather, mercenary) for the Macedonians. He was charged with capturing Demosthenes. The scene, as portrayed by Petrarch, is highly dramatic and almost ironic: Demosthenes dreams of being a mediocre actor who loses a competition to Archias due to the latter’s decorum and finery. Furthermore, Demosthenes’ last words are basically a bad review of Archias’s acting career.

⁸⁶ The original quote and telling of the story is in Plutarch’s *Lives of the Ten Orators* in Chapter VIII, p. 284, about Demosthenes and has since been quoted by speech coaches many times. It is sometimes quoted as “delivery, delivery, delivery,” which is an equally powerful translation.

⁸⁷ This was right before drama went from a religious ritual and a democratic hallmark—where free speech, dissent, and new ideas were welcomed and attendance at performances was obligatory for Athenian citizens—to a kind of mass entertainment. In the Hellenistic period, “the theatre had almost completely lost its religious basis” (Bay, *Encyclopedia Britannica* 2020). Moreover, once democracy was overpowered and the Athenian Empire gave way to Hellenistic monarchies, mass entertainment increasingly became a vehicle for actors to showcase themselves. Pat Easterling, as an example, describes the rise of the Roman actor and the beginning of star culture in “Actor as icon” (Easterling, *Greek and Roman Actors* 327–341).

important tool for persuading an audience,⁸⁸ and he emphasized the danger of emotion when used unethically. Aristotle, however, unlike Plato, drew a sharp line between actors and orators. Thus, emotion was neither viewed as part of logos/reason nor as a part of intellect, but as opposed to it. While there is no doubt that unethical orators can use emotion to manipulate their audience, that does not mean that emotion stands apart from logic and intellect.

The distrust Plato and Aristotle had of the power of emotions was directly impacted by their historical experiences and cultural surroundings. Plato's fictional Socrates "[u]nlike many illustrious Greeks before him, . . . severed the heart (*cor*) from the tongue (*lingua*), the life of political service from the pursuit of knowledge, the teachers of speech from those of thought" (cf. DiLorenzo 248). In his dramatic treaty *De Oratore*, Cicero's Crassus takes his understanding of intellect and emotion from the "veteres Graeci who lived before Socrates . . . [whose] wisdom included both thinking and ornate speaking" (cf. DiLorenzo 249). Plato rebelled against the popular worldview of his time. He saw poetry (which was not written text but performance) and rhetoric as morphing into demagoguery. More importantly, he was afraid of performance as pure persuasion and propaganda.⁸⁹ The fact that a performer (rhapsode or actor) only goes in for effect (emotion in the audience) and not to impart knowledge (he does not have any, according to the *Ion*) was a matter of great anxiety to Plato's Socrates. The fact that a performer had the ability to transport an audience—that an actor could put it into an uncritical and unsound frame of mind—was spine chilling to Plato. However, radically splitting all emotion⁹⁰ from reason was

⁸⁸ Aristotle is aware of the power of emotions: "Emotions are the means through which opinions are changed with respect to judgements" (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, "Character and Emotions as Bases for Persuasion" 41). Aristotle's three pillars of persuasive oratory are logos + ethos + pathos (appeal to knowledge + appeal to ethics + appeal to emotions). A good speaker must be able to present material with reason and facts (logos), have credibility (why the audience should listen to the speaker about a particular subject), and sway the audience in his or her favor. The last (pathos) is, of course, an extremely powerful and necessary ingredient of every good speech. It is because Aristotle was aware of the power of "pathos" that he distinguishes orators and actors.

⁸⁹ The fear of an audience being transported beyond themselves (ex-stasis) is, of course, the fear of them following a rhetorician blindly, purely based on how that rhetorician makes them feel. Particularly frightening is the prospect of an orator who conveys anger, hatred, and fear to the audience. One may only think of Adolf Hitler's speeches, which were highly emotional and persuasive. Donald Trump's speeches, albeit ghastly oratory, feed into the same seeds of fear, anger, and hatred in many people. Indeed, Plato was correct to fear pure emotional persuasion in its dark form.

⁹⁰ I use "emotion" as interchangeable with "feeling" here. Once acting theory meets cognitive neuroscience, I will use the terms separately, as follows: Emotions are unconscious thoughts about things and automatic physiological responses to external stimuli. Feelings are emotions made conscious and interpreted by the brain. Feelings are the conscious perception of emotional responses to external stimuli. Both are the physical signals of the body reacting to external stimuli.

injudicious and created a void not only in language, but also in human thought and philosophy in general, which is only now beginning to fill.

In the manner in which language may be used for good or bad ends, emotions may be both powerful and dangerous, meaningful and detrimental, real or fake. The fact that emotion coexists with intellect and is not opposed to it is only now—and very slowly⁹¹—approaching the status of received wisdom. The ancient Greeks, despite Plato’s misgivings, considered the brain part of the belly. As public-speaking coach Caroline Goyder⁹² puts it:

[The ancient Greeks] said that underneath the diaphragm⁹³ was a spot called prapidesin, which means ‘under your crowded thoughts’. This, said the Greeks, was the somatic seat of your intellect - the mental powers and emotions key to understanding. The more neuroscience tells us about the connection between the brain and the gut, the more we realize the Greeks were on to something. (Goyder, *Gravitas* 34)

However, calling people “emotional” has been, and continues to be, the insulting equivalent of telling them that they have no (or very little) logic, reasoning qualities, or self-discipline. Consequently, post-Plato’s dismissal of all poets and post-Aristotle’s sharp divisions between categories, discussing an actor’s performance holistically has been made difficult by the split of intellect and emotion. It is ironic that during Plato’s and Aristotle’s time actors enjoyed high status but were treated by the two philosophers with disdain and ambivalence, respectively. Meanwhile, during Cicero’s time and, later, during Quintilian’s time, actors were not at all

⁹¹ The fact that the mind/body, reason/feeling split is problematic has been well-known within academia (particularly within philosophy and neuroscience). However, the general populous is certainly not following at the same speed. Damasio and LeDoux’s writings and works are well-known within their fields, but they are not “received” understanding by the rest of the world. Additionally, it must be pointed out that the mind/body problem has not been solved since Descartes (at least not in the way the Western scientific model would have it). The coexistence of thought/emotion can be proven in neuroscience. However, the mind/body question of whether the mind is immaterial, if so, how, and where the material body and the immaterial mind interact remains a problem.

⁹² Caroline Goyder was educated at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and has worked there for more than a decade as a voice coach. Her training as an actor and her in-depth, hands-on knowledge of voice and speech make her advice and insights more helpful than the theories of many academics. While she phrases matters in a way that is understandable by everyone, I find her insights succinct and inch perfect, if simplified at times.

⁹³ Goyder also emphasizes that “[f]or the Greeks *phrenos* [the diaphragm] meant mind, heart, and diaphragm. As they saw it the diaphragm united all our expression” (cf. Goyder, *Gravitas* 88).

regarded highly anymore—unless they were celebrities—but both Cicero and Quintilian drew lessons from them. Nonetheless, philosophically, historically, and culturally speaking, Plato’s splits and Aristotle’s divisions stuck.

Cicero⁹⁴ and Quintilian—likely because of the pragmatism derived from their work experience—neither divorced emotion from reason nor the mind from the body.⁹⁵ Instead, they explained how these “binaries” are part of a greater whole and necessarily must be combined to influence one’s audience: “[R]hetoricians generally understood human thought to be embodied (hence the emphasis on emotion, gesture, delivery)” (*AR* xx). They were orators, not philosophers,⁹⁶ and had to be pragmatic to get results, much like actors. They grasped that reason and brilliant logic alone do not move⁹⁷ an audience: Cicero said “that emotion should flow through your speech like blood through the body. He understood that emotion is what moves an audience to really enjoy your words. When you have a connection to your content, the why as much as the what will engage us” (cf. Goyder, *Gravitas* 105). Quintilian repeatedly emphasizes how important the delivery of a speech is and how sincere emotion in combination with logic affects the audience much more than dry reason alone. Cicero, in *De Oratore*, through his mouthpiece Crassus, utters several severe condemnations of Plato’s/Socrates’ split of mind/body and intellect/emotion: “Things belonging together in reality,” . . . namely, “the knowledge of

⁹⁴ Cicero stated that “all reality, above and below, is a single entity, held together by a single natural pattern of harmonious interaction; for there is no class of entity which, plucked from everything else, can stand on its own. . . . [Cicero finds] a marvelous unity and harmony of all branches of learning” [and he criticizes an orator who] divided what cannot be separated” (cf. Habinek, “On the Orator,” *Ancient Rhetoric*, quoting Cicero 3.19–37: 168).

⁹⁵ They agree with Aristotle’s fear of unethical emotion, but they do not separate emotion from reason. They understood that emotion is always intellectualized. Emotion, logic, and reason all originate in the same place. There is no such thing as pure reason or pure emotion. They are always intermingled.

Aristotle, in his philosophical rhetoric, seeks to strip rhetoric of some of its embodied and interactive tendencies and to attribute special significance to rhetorical arguments . . . that are, in his view, to be modeled on logical syllogisms. Moving in the opposite direction, the Stoic philosophers, with their account of the continuity of brain, body and environment and of the physicality of all actions, including thinking, perceiving and speaking, provided a philosophical foundation for the teachings of rhetoricians like Cicero’s speaker Crassus in *On the Orator* or Quintilian, who, in *Oratorical Instruction*, explicitly derives his definition of rhetoric from the Stoics. (Habinek, *Ancient Rhetoric [AR]* xx)

⁹⁶ Cicero was both. All the rhetoricians emphasize the importance of philosophy and virtue.

⁹⁷ Significantly, a physical action is at the root of the word “emotion.” The root is the Latin “ex movere” (to move out, to agitate). The origin of the word implies embodied physicality in both its passive (being moved) and active (moving someone) sense. “Emotion” is always something that affects the body and mind.

wise thinking and that of ornate speaking” (cf. DiLorenzo, quoting Cicero 247) split the mind from the body. More specifically, Socrates split the intellect (wise thinking/the mind) from the body (speaking is a physical activity). In *De Oratore*, Cicero’s Crassus continues: “He criticizes those vulgar men who, being half-educated, split things up and never put them back together, ‘who, just as they separate body from mind, so do they separate words from thoughts’” (cf. DiLorenzo, quoting Cicero 252). DiLorenzo, as do I, argues that Plato’s Socrates disrupted Western thinking and education with his binaries and splits.⁹⁸

The similarities between rhetoric and acting are immense, and much of the advice the classical orators offer to students of rhetoric can easily be implemented by students of acting. For example, “[E]motion . . . has to be communicated through performance” (cf. *AR* 211). A good rhetorician must be convincing, just like a good actor. His⁹⁹ success depends on his reception by the audience. Both orators and actors must work with instant feedback. They are out in the actual arena, not observing from the sidelines the way philosophers have the luxury of doing. Ideally, an orator must persuade with sincerity. To do so, he must find a way to make his delivery and character effective. The audience—as Cicero, Horace, and Quintilian knew—is moved when the orator is moved: “[D]elivery, by displaying emotion, affects the emotions of all” (*AR* 214). In addition, “[t]he Roman poet and satirist Horace said: ‘Whatever I feel they feel’”¹⁰⁰ (cf. Goyder, *Gravitas* 110). As Roach points out, Quintilian would have been immersed in the belief in pneumatism, and he would have been familiar with the “rhetoric of the passions.”

The rhetoric of the passions that derived from pneumatism¹⁰¹ endowed the actor’s art with three potencies of an enchanted kind. First, the actor possessed the power to act on

⁹⁸ “At Socrates, Crassus hurls a serious charge: the disruption of the traditional Greek conception of wisdom and of philosophy” (DiLorenzo 247).

⁹⁹ I use “he,” “his,” and “him” because all the ancient orators were men.

¹⁰⁰ The exact quote by Horace runs as follows: “Just as human faces laugh at laughing people, so they weep at weeping ones: if you want me to weep, you yourself must first feel pain. Then your misfortunes will hurt me” (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, xvii, lines 101-103).

¹⁰¹ Roach puts it as follows: “It was widely believed that the spirits, agitated by the passions of the imaginer, generate a wave of physical force, rolling through the aether, powerful enough to influence the spirits of others at a distance” (Roach, *PP* 45).

his own body. Second, he possessed the power to act on the physical space around him. Finally, he was able to act on the bodies of the spectators who shared that space with him. . . . His passions, irradiating the bodies of spectators through their eyes and ears, could literally transfer the contents of his heart to theirs. (cf. Roach, *PP* 27).

The similarity between the rhetoric of passions and the creative process of Ion—which Plato depicts as a chain of magnetic enchantment via the metaphor of the Heracleian Stone—is astounding.

The notion that feelings and expressions are synthesized was the received understanding at the time. Such a synthesis could not be proven scientifically, but was never tested, arguably because its logic fell in line with people’s understanding of human nature at that time: “For all people are moved by the same feelings and use the same means to recognize them in others and express them in themselves” (*AR* 214). The notion—in regards to acting theory—was not widely questioned until Diderot’s *Paradox of the Actor* was published in 1830.¹⁰² Even in 1762, Enlightenment philosopher Sir Henry Home Kames wrote, in his book *Elements of Criticism*, that “[n]one but those who actually feel a passion, can represent it to the life” (Worthen, quoting Kames, *Actor* 96). Classical orators such as Cicero and Quintilian knew that emotion and delivery did not just matter; they could make or break a speech. While the mention of feelings usually evokes a sense of a lack of reason or mastery of the senses, it is important to understand that this is a misconceived perspective that does not serve good explanations of art and acting any longer. Emotions are primarily created in the brain, not the proverbial “heart.” Contemporary theatre director and acting coach Jeff Seymour puts it as follows: “Of course, emotions are intellectualized because everything you feel starts in your brain. All of the things you feel are the net result of how your brain sees things and in the perspective you’ve chosen to see them” (Seymour 97). The ancient orators were very aware of the power of emotion and of the fact that emotion is intellect, not intellect minus reason or intellect versus feeling.

¹⁰² The antitheatricalists of the Renaissance attacked actors for being liars, but they never focused on emotion. Had they argued that the actor’s stage emotions are pure mimicry, their argument about the actor’s power to impact people would have suffered. Diderot—as I will explain shortly—never explains how his “actor feels nothing and the audience everything-theory” is supposed to work. Pragmatically (and scientifically) speaking, Diderot’s paradox has always been a problem.

People do not just feel a certain way: “‘Things don’t make you mad,’ you let them make you mad. . . . You have the power to feel any way you want about anything. You are the one in charge of your brain”¹⁰³ (cf. Seymour 97). Seymour adds, “It’s thoughts first, always thoughts first. Your feelings are essentially something you create to make your points and concerns implicitly clear. Feelings are a communication tool” (Seymour 98). Seymour expresses the pragmatism of the contemporary acting coach and director that he is. He also strongly believes that actors must first and foremost master their emotions. He asserts that good actors are not only in touch with their emotions, but also absolute masters of them. He goes as far as to advise against the acting profession if candidates are not adept at controlling their emotions: “Confidently placing your mind where you choose to place it is an actor’s greatest power” (Seymour 98). Seymour’s contemporary advice is differently informed than Quintilian’s. After all, Seymour is aware of current neuroscience while people in Quintilian’s era believed the passions were situated in the ancient Apollonian concept of “*pneuma*”¹⁰⁴ circulating through the blood. Nonetheless, they both give the same holistic and intuitive advice to orators and actors, respectively.

Public speaking coach Caroline Goyder emphasizes “gravitas” as the rhetorician’s and the actor’s greatest quality. She describes “gravitas” in paradoxical terms: “The weight of your seriousness must always be balanced equally by your ability to lighten up—humour, humility, and wit” (Goyder, *Gravitas* 3). Gravitas has “roots and wings” simultaneously (Goyder, *Gravitas* 1). “Gravitas” is defined as “seriousness and importance of manner, causing *feelings* of respect and trust in others” (*Cambridge English Dictionary*, emphasis mine). In acting parlance, having

¹⁰³ It is important to emphasize that Seymour is addressing actors or those who want to be actors. It is all too clear that many people are decidedly not in charge of their emotions and, therefore, allow bad decisions and actions. Notably, Seymour’s argument is that actors must master themselves. Otherwise, the profession is not for them. Seymour’s emphasis on actors’ greatest power being to place their minds where they choose sounds like simple advice. However, it is incredibly difficult to learn and adhere to. It is just this mastery of oneself that allows actors to harness their emotions onstage and be capable of expressing emotion but also control said emotion.

¹⁰⁴ In the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, J. T. Vallance explains “pneuma” as follows: Pneuma (πνεῦμα, Lat. *spiritus*) is connected etymologically with πνέω, breathe or blow, and has a basic meaning of ‘air in motion’, or ‘breath’ as something necessary to life. . . . The word may have been used first by Anaximenes (1) of Miletus to describe both elemental air in motion in the world, and ‘psychic air’ in man. ‘Psychic pneuma’ also constitutes the soul and underlies sensory and motor activities in a number of ancient medical theories. . . . Pneuma-theory forms a cornerstone of Stoic physics (see stoicism), and the Stoics are particularly associated with the doctrine that pneuma provides the universe both with cohesion and its dynamic properties. (Vallance, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2016).

“gravitas” is similar to having “(stage) presence,” which is defined as “the ability to command the attention of a theatre audience by the impressiveness of one’s manner or appearance” (*OED*). Gravitas is a reciprocal, synergistic, unifying presence between the speaker and the audience. A rhetorician achieves “gravitas” by appealing to the audience through authority (ethos), emotion (pathos), and knowledgeability (logos; cf. Grant and Fiske 12). It is the advice Aristotle already touched on in *Rhetoric*¹⁰⁵: The orator’s “expression must be in harmony with the mood which one seeks to arouse in his audience” (Grant and Fiske 12). Furthermore, “[e]motions are the means through which opinions are changed with respect to judgments and are accompanied by pain and pleasure” (*AR* 41). Cicero also said it: “[T]he orator must himself feel the emotions which he attempts to excite [in his audience]” (cf. Grant and Fiske 9). Goyder says something similar about Cicero: “Cicero, a believer in moving an audience via the emotions, said that the two basic gears were *gentleness* and *vehemence*”¹⁰⁶ (Goyder, *Gravitas* 117, emphasis mine). Horace said it: The goal is “to take captive the souls of their readers or audience” (Grant and Fiske 10). Quintilian says that, to move one’s audience, one must be moved first (cf. Roach, quoting Quintilian, *Player’s Passion [PP]* 26). Roach continues that Quintilian, as a rhetorician, compares his field to an actor onstage and advises that “the speaker ‘excite¹⁰⁷ the appropriate’ feeling in himself, one that ‘cannot be distinguished from the truth,’ [but Quintilian] concludes paradoxically¹⁰⁸ that true emotion should be deeply felt by the person who is faking it” (cf. Roach, quoting Quintilian, *PP* 26).

¹⁰⁵ It must be added that Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* is much more revealing of matters of performance than his *Poetics*. The fact that his *Poetics* is the text most students of theatre and literature turn to first is doing him an injustice. In regards to performance or acting, *Rhetoric* is the more suitable text. However, Aristotle drew a hard line between rhetoric and acting/performing, which may explain why more scholars of acting and acting theory do not read it.

¹⁰⁶ Goyder, as do I, repeatedly states that the ancient orators had the right idea about the importance of embodiment and all physical aspects: “A University of Michigan study in 2011 looked into how aspects of speech influence decisions on the telephone. Researchers found that there were certain characteristics that made a marked difference. What mattered were tone, pause, and pace, aspects of speech that Cicero was waxing lyrical about thousands of years earlier” (Goyder, *Gravitas* 86).

¹⁰⁷ Actors who do voiceovers for cartoon characters, as an example, always stand, and they physically act the emotion of the cartoon character. The voice changes when running, raising arms for help, or stomping angrily. Physicality and delivery are intertwined and extremely important: “You hear gesture in the voice” (cf. Goyder, *Gravitas* 202).

¹⁰⁸ Roach does not allow such a paradox. He is suggesting that Quintilian is contradicting himself and is not being logical. However, Quintilian’s point is not flawed logic, as I will show. In fact, I would argue that Roach’s logic is flawed in this instance because he thinks in binaries. I will address Roach’s claim in greater detail later.

Roach challenges Quintilian's answers to the question that resonates until this day, namely, the question of how to generate emotions. Can "feigned emotions become indistinguishable from genuine feeling" is a question that cognitive sciences and neuroscience are currently addressing with enlightening results. Quintilian attempts to join the body–mind split, to harmonize the head and the heart; however, he does not fully explain how physically generated emotion can also become genuine feeling. The question of emotion and expression is important, as it remains a contentious point of heated acting-theory debate to this day. It is perplexing that Joseph Roach's *The Player's Passion*—a detailed analysis (and chronicle) of acting theories throughout the ages and how they are impacted by science—is still held up as a seminal study within its field. This is perplexing because many of Roach's arguments must be reconsidered concerning discoveries in cognitive neuroscience. *The Player's Passion* of 1985 calls Quintilian's advice on how to evoke emotions "disappoint[ing] in its banality" and "paradoxical"¹⁰⁹ because it allows truthful emotion to be reproduced by the orator (cf. Roach, *PP* 24, 26). Quintilian advised students of rhetoric: "The prime example for stirring the emotions of others is, in my opinion, first to feel those emotions oneself" (Roach, quoting Quintilian, *PP* 24).

¹⁰⁹ From the context, it can be deduced that Roach uses the term "paradoxical" in its most negative meaning, as a falsehood, or as a contradiction that does not make sense. He even says as much: "As they had since antiquity, rhetoricians remained untroubled by this apparent contradiction [of inward embodiment of the passion and its careful 'moderation' or 'composition' in outward passion]; . . . [Roach calls] Quintilian's [advice a] dichotomy of inner feeling and outer form" (cf. Roach, *PP* 33). One of Quintilian's quotes Roach refers to is likely the following: "The method of arousing the emotions depends on our power to represent or imitate the passions" (Quintilian 11.3). Additionally, Roach is interpreting the following quote by Quintilian: "The objective is to excite the appropriate feeling in oneself, to have a mental picture of the facts, and to exhibit an emotion that cannot be distinguished from the truth (Quintilian 11.3). Roach reads into Quintilian's statement that it is either a) flawed logic because the actor/speaker is either truthful in his emotion or b) flawed logic because the actor is faking the emotion. Roach is using the term "faking it," not Quintilian. It is as though Roach is trying to misunderstand Quintilian. Quintilian is trying to say that good speakers ought to harmonize their heads and hearts. Roach does not allow for option c) the actor/speaker is exhibiting sincere emotion as arrived at through his or her imagination (mental picture): What Roach refers to as "calculation" and "modulation" is an actor/speaker's ability to bring about sincere emotion in herself/himself via imagination or imitation. To Roach, the speaker's emotion either comes freely through imagination or is calculated and fake (artificial) emotion. This is an amateur mistake: The actor/speaker is absolutely capable of both an association with the character's emotion and a disassociation with said emotion in order to present it to the audience. As I will demonstrate throughout my following chapters, an actor expressing a feeling that is genuinely felt despite being brought about "artificially" (via imagination, imitation, recall, or else) while maintaining the necessary self-control to edit and adjust the intensity of said emotion has mastered their basic craft. It is solely academics who read a contradiction into a self-possessed actor who can also express sincerely felt emotions while regulating them. The paradox of the actor—to maintain two contradictory states of mind—is the good actor's art. Only amateurs, non-actors, and strict binary thinkers would find fault with Quintilian's logic in this case and call his advice a "hand me down." While I greatly admire Joseph Roach, I contend that he is mistaken in this instance. He likely would reconsider this argument now that cognitive neuroscience has confirmed Quintilian's point. Quintilian's advice was sound. He might have found a more airtight description (for future fastidious logicians) of what Goyder calls "pre-planned spontaneity," which I will address in detail shortly.

Quintilian gives the advice that is even now given to acting students around the world, and for good reason, as my chapter on neuroscience will show.

A recent study by psychologist William von Hippel came to a very similar conclusion, albeit Hippel's is framed more simplistically: "If you need to convince somebody of something, if your career or social success depends on persuasion, then the first person who needs to be [convinced] is yourself" (Hutson, quoting von Hippel, "Living a Lie," *Scientific American*). However, Roach calls Quintilian's advice "banal," "disappointing," "derivative," "paradoxical," (by which he means "contradictory"), and a "hand-me-down [that] had already been worn threadbare by Aristotle, Horace, and Cicero" (cf. Roach, *PP* 24). It never occurs to Roach that such "simple" (but not easy) advice—despite being a "hand-me-down"—just might work. Since Joseph Roach's *The Player's Passion* is still ubiquitously quoted by scholars of acting theory as gospel, it is imperative to re-evaluate Roach's dualistic approach to his analysis of acting theories. Roach is dissatisfied with Quintilian's description of how to evoke emotions through both inspiration and technique. Roach needs it to be *either* inspiration *or* technique, not inspiration *and* technique: Quintilian, as a "rhetor, shows himself reluctant to surrender either the presumed sincerity of emotion flowing freely from *visiones*¹¹⁰ or the regularity and discipline promised by calculation" (Roach, *PP* 26). Roach, I would argue, falls into Descartes' dualistic trap—explained in the next chapter—with his either/or thinking. He never considers that Quintilian meant both spontaneous inspiration *and* calculated self-possession driven by intellect. Public speaking coach Caroline Goyder calls the latter "pre-planned spontaneity" (cf. Goyder, *Gravitas* 77–78), when actors or speakers have absolutely mastered material and, consequently, can allow themselves to relax and let the words come to them organically; or when actors are constrained by their lines, but they have mastered the lines to such a degree that they flow freely and come to the actor rather than the actor having to search for them.¹¹¹ Roach does not consider

¹¹⁰ "Visiones" are inspirations, often of the spontaneous sort.

¹¹¹ It is helpful to think of a jazz musician's improvisation in this instance. The musician does not just freely make up notes. The musician has mastered the constraints of the music piece to such a high degree that he or she can improvise freely.

what Peter G. Platt, in *Shakespeare and the Culture of Paradox*, so fittingly termed “And that’s true too”¹¹² (Platt 1).

Quintilian gives pragmatic, tested, and intuitive advice (he did not have magnetic resonance images to prove his theories), namely, that it is the paradox of allowing contraries to coexist as an exchange or interplay to resonate with an audience to associate and dissociate simultaneously. However, Roach wants airtight logic¹¹³ and certainty—one clear answer, but not the other. The ambiguity of life, however, suggests that certainty is usually problematic. In fact, the need for certainty can be limiting:

Uncertainty can be a source of terror and anguish. It keeps us up at night. But it is also a generative force, and an invitation for deeper exploration. It forces us to earn our certainties, rather than buying them cheaply and wholesale. Indeed, a dynamic, honest search for truth requires us to regard uncertainty as an enduring companion rather than an enemy to be fled or vanquished. (Moore and Kaag, *American Scholar* 34)

What makes an actor compelling—as I will suggest in the ensuing chapters—may just be the rare “trickster” quality of living in and embracing ambiguities, paradox, and oxymora, and expressing their meaningfulness to the audience. David Mamet says about actors and uncertainty:

¹¹² Platt uses Gloucester’s quote from *King Lear* to explain Shakespeare’s ability to accept paradox without having to resolve it. The point Platt makes is that some paradoxes are not meant to be resolved or reconciled, but they must be accepted as they are, in combination or as coexisting contraries.

¹¹³ Actors use whatever technique works for them. Usually, it is a medley of techniques that cannot be logically explained to non-actors. Logic is tricky at times. It often seems as though a deeply logical argument is correct, but in reality, it is not. Particularly the logic of words and pure reasoning can bring about a flawless argument that is, nonetheless, wrong. Logical truth can differ from factual truth, because it is based on symbols and the formal relationships these symbols have. Sometimes, common sense tells us that a word-bending argument only sounds amazing, but is a perceptual illusion in reality. I would argue that Roach’s reasoning, in this case, is “refuted by experience” (Sorensen 33). It also works the other way: I agree with Sorensen, who says in his book *A Brief History of the Paradox* that “paradoxes mark fault lines in our common-sense world, . . . [and] [o]ne radical response [to paradox], pioneered by Heraclitus, is to accept the reality of contradictions. He thinks the paradoxes are out there” (Sorensen xii). In the Western patriarchal worldview—which is solely a system of belief based on assumptions—the power of binary thinking makes it extremely difficult to accept paradox. Acting often requires the relinquishing of strict logical thinking (by that, I do not mean one should relinquish one’s intellect).

[Y]ou actors and writers . . . who live without certainty day to day and year to year are going to have to bear with being called children by these institutional types. . . . It is not childish to live with uncertainty, to devote oneself to a craft rather than a career. . . . It's courageous and requires a courage of the order that the institutionally co-opted are ill-equipped to perceive. (cf. Mamet 18)

Mamet emphasizes the importance of accepting uncertainty because “your certainties will prove false, and humble you” (Mamet 88). Actors are best when they accept all uncertainty.

Furthermore, actors concerned with how to evoke emotions are inevitably concerned with themselves, which is an anathema to powerful acting. Contemporary actors are taught to go into an audition to “give, not get.”¹¹⁴ They are taught to consider the audition, which is a kind of job interview and very intimidating, as a chance to help casting directors find the right person. The same holds for performing for an audience. The focus is giving to the audience: “We are about contribution. It's not about impressing people. . . . It's about contributing something” (Goyder, quoting Benjamin Zander, *Find Your Voice [FYV]* 147). Goyder adds: “Confident speakers are not concerned with what they can *get* from the audience; they are focused on what they can *give*. . . . [They] have an understanding of the *whole* rather than just the parts” (cf. Goyder, *FYV* 152, emphasis mine). Good actors focus on what they need to communicate to the audience. Their need to share and their focus on others will evoke the necessary emotions: An actor needs to “focus on what [s/he] is doing¹¹⁵ and deliver it in the way [s/he has] decided it needs to be communicated. [Her/his] communication needs will fuel [her/his] emotions” (cf. Seymour 97). Seymour—influenced by Stanislavski—emphasizes: “Look to your intellect—not your feelings.

¹¹⁴ Karen Kohlhaas, a New York City acting and audition coach (also a director, producer, and founding member of the Atlantic Theatre Company), gives this advice in all of her classes (Kohlhaas, Karen, *Private Monologue and Audition Class* May–Dec. 2020). Caroline Goyder gives the same advice in her books (*Gravitas, Find Your Voice*), her videos, and on her website and blog.

¹¹⁵ Stanislavski first expressed this as follows: “It is hard to obtain emotional truth consciously, because emotions do not easily yield to the will; it is much easier, however, to find truthful physical actions” (*Actors on Acting* 524).

Be concerned with what you are trying to communicate and why”¹¹⁶ (cf. Seymour 97–98). What Seymour is saying is that an actor must be proactive and generous instead of self-absorbed. Intellect informs the actor’s emotions. The mind works with the body. They are partners in acting, not adversaries who cancel each other out.

As Roach puts it, what the actor communicates is rehearsed and calculated. It is also fueled by emotion, a byproduct of an action and a goal in each scene. This is precisely what Quintilian said:¹¹⁷

The main thing is to excite¹¹⁸ the appropriate feeling in oneself, to form a mental picture of the facts, and to exhibit an emotion that cannot be distinguished from the truth. The voice, which is the intermediary between ourselves and our hearers, will then produce precisely the same emotion in the judge that we have put into it. For it is the index of the *mind*, and is capable of expressing all its varieties of feeling. (Quintilian, Book XI, ch. 3, *Institutia Oratoria* 279, *emphasis mine*)

¹¹⁶ Goyder says something very similar: “What’s your why? Who or what are you speaking for? . . . What can you contribute? . . . What quality do you want to show up with? Confidence? Fun? Authority? Calm? Lightness? Humour? Kindness? Or a mixture of all of them? Find ways to access these emotions within yourself. If you want the audience to feel excited, what makes you feel excited about this subject?” (Goyder, *FYV* 154).

¹¹⁷ Quintilian’s advice runs as follows:

But it is now high time for me to explain what I mean by appropriate delivery. Such appropriateness obviously lies in the adaptation of the delivery to the subjects on which we are speaking. This quality is, in the main, supplied by the emotions themselves, and the voice will ring as passion strikes its chords. But there is a difference between *true emotion* on the one hand, and *false and fictitious emotion* on the other. The former breaks out naturally, as in the case of grief, anger or indignation, but lacks art, and therefore requires to be formed by *methodical training*. The latter, on the other hand, does imply art, but lacks the sincerity of nature: consequently, in such cases the main thing is to excite the appropriate feeling in oneself, to form a mental picture of the facts, and to exhibit an emotion that cannot be distinguished from the truth. (Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 279)

Quintilian acknowledges the difference between the feeling that overcomes people in real life and the feeling that must be artificially created by performers. He calls the latter “false and fictitious emotion.” His choice of words is unfortunate: By “false emotion” Quintilian refers to an emotion that is artificially created by the performer through imagination and “methodical training.” He is saying that it is possible to create the emotion the performer feels in real life and adjust it according to the audience. He does not say that such a feeling is fake.

¹¹⁸ “To excite” is an action. The word is crucial in understanding what Quintilian is trying to say. He does not tell his students how to “excite” such an emotion, but he does use an action word to indicate that he meant physically doing something to generate an emotion rather than sit around and wait to be overcome by it.

To Quintilian, mind and body are one. So are emotion and intellectual calculations. Moreover, Quintilian was aware that gestures and physical movements impact voice and tone. Current neuroscience confirms this: “One of the clearest lessons from neuroscience is that our sense of ourselves is anchored in vital connection with our bodies. We do not truly know ourselves unless we can feel and interpret our physical sensations; we need to register and act on these situations to navigate safely through life” (Goyder, quoting van der Kolk, *FYV* 110). Quintilian did not share the Ancient Greek philosophers’ view¹¹⁹ of emotion and intellect as canceling each other out. However, as seen in Roach’s current criticism of the Roman rhetorician, Roach accuses Quintilian of being banal¹²⁰ at best and illogical at worst. Roach wants to dissolve the paradox (at least he does in *PP*) to subordinate one quality (inspiration/emotion) to the other (calculation/intellect).

Quintilian did not feel the need to resolve the paradox but allowed an exchange, an interplay of contraries. He communicates another important quality of the actor and orator that

¹¹⁹ In fact, Quintilian fully understands the difference between the philosopher and the practitioner. He has the following to say about orators vs. philosophers: “For what philosopher has ever been a frequent speaker in the courts or won renown in public assemblies? Nay, what philosopher has ever taken a prominent part in the government of the state, which forms the most frequent theme of their instructions?” (Quintilian, “Book 12, ch. 2,” *Institutio Oratoria* 386).

Quintilian understands that the orator must work with an audience and adjust to them. The orator must go into the arena and the world to work with and for people. The orator cannot judge from the sidelines. Quintilian also argues that rhetoric and philosophy ought to come together:

But how much greater and fairer would such subjects appear if those who taught them were also those who could give them most eloquent expression! O that the day may dawn when the perfect orator of our heart’s desire shall claim for his own possession that science [of philosophy] that has lost the affection of mankind through the arrogance of its claims and the vices of some that have brought disgrace upon its virtues, and shall restore it to its place in the domain of eloquence . . . ” (Quintilian, “Book 12, ch. 2,” *Institutio Oratoria* 387).

Quintilian goes as far as to contend that the philosopher who can quibble a great deal, who is an amazing word-bender, who is a debate-club-logic-genius is useless in the real world:

[E]ven so the science of dialectic, or if you prefer it of disputation, while it is often useful in definition, inference, differentiation, resolution of ambiguity, distinction and classification, as also in luring on or entangling our opponents, yet if it claim to assume the entire direction of the struggles of the forum, will merely stand in the way of arts superior to itself and by its very subtlety will exhaust the strength that has been pared down to suit its limitations. As a result you will find that certain persons who show astonishing skill in philosophical debate, as soon as they quit the sphere of their quibbles, are as helpless in any case that demands more serious pleading as those small animals which, though nimble enough in a confined space, are easily captured in an open field. (Quintilian, “Book 12, ch. 2,” *Institutio Oratoria* 389–390)

¹²⁰ It is baffling to most practitioners that Roach calls Cicero’s advice of “for the audience to feel it, the performer must feel it” banal and derivative. To most actors, it is the equivalent of saying $1 + 1 = 2$ is banal and derivative.

will become a mainstay of my argument: Quintilian concedes an element of surprise—what I touched upon when discussing “the trickster quality”—that varies from orator to orator when it comes to a successful performance:

[W]hile what is becoming is the main consideration in delivery, different methods will often suit different speakers. For this is determined by a principle which, though it is obscure and can hardly be expressed in words, nonetheless exists: and, though it is a true saying that “the main secret of artistic success is that whatever we do should become us well,” none the less, despite the fact that such success cannot be attained without art, it is impossible entirely to communicate the secret by the rules of art. (Quintilian, Book XI, ch. 3, *Institutia Oratoria* 345)

Perhaps the method varies from rhetor to rhetor, actor to actor. Self-knowledge and self-awareness are, according to the orators, important aspects of finding their voices. Finding a purpose is necessary to serve the audience. The secret ingredient of their performance, obscure as it may be, can be communicated by explaining the “real”¹²¹ paradox of the actor. Predicting what a skilled actor will do at each given moment of a performance may be obscured by different personalities and motivations. However, what is essential is to point out what outstanding actors have in common, which is, I would argue, their complete surrender to paradoxical forces and their immaculate ability to express those forces and make sense of them. When expert actors make sense of the world and express its paradoxes, they make sense of the audience’s world.

¹²¹ I use “real,” because the paradox of the actor or the paradox of acting is associated with Denis Diderot’s essay on the topic. Diderot was the first to write about the paradox of the actor in depth, and his essay on the matter is, to this day, considered a milestone in acting theory. It is also highly contentious. To enter the argument about the actor’s paradox, I must inevitably address Diderot’s work, as I will do in detail in my next chapter.

Where there is a genuine paradox¹²² at play in a performance, in all its complexity and coexistence of contraries, there is a strong acting choice at work. Such a paradox in an actor's performance can be singled out and explained with the language of the liminal and the language of the "in-between."

1e) Diderot and the Paradox of the Actor

In 1773, the French philosopher, writer, and critic Denis Diderot wrote a dramatic essay in dialogue form entitled "*Paradoxe Sur le Comédien*." In this essay, Diderot finds the actor and his profession to comprise the following paradox: "At every moment when he [the actor] touches your [the audience's] heart he is listening to his own voice; his talent depends not, as you think, upon feeling, but upon rendering so exactly the outward signs of feeling, that you fall into the trap"¹²³ (cf. Diderot, *Paradox of the Actor* 45). In other words, a great actor is someone who does not feel anything while making the audience feel everything: "It is the head, not the heart, which works in and for him" (Diderot 42). Diderot's essay has been much criticized for his condemnation of the "false" emotion of actors, and rightfully so. However controversial Diderot's essay was—and continues to be—it must be addressed in any study of actors and acting theory. It feeds into the greatest fear antitheatricalists have of actors, namely, that they can perfectly imitate emotions and actions without any sincere feeling. The *Paradox* caused a

¹²² Goyder's definition of "gravitas" in actors and public speakers comes very close to what I am about to explain as "the *real* paradox of the actor." Goyder's understanding of "gravitas" is a paradox: "When you find your roots and wings the world sits up and pays attention" (Goyder, *Gravitas* 8). Good actors must be firmly grounded (have roots) while also being able to "fly" into different states of mind at all times. Furthermore, Goyder points out that gravitas is not quite the same as charisma. "Charisma works brilliantly when employed for selfish purposes" (Goyder, *Gravitas* 116). However, gravitas is more than that. Gravitas is "the service of a purpose greater than you" (cf. Goyder, *Gravitas* 115).

"This attention to others is a magic wand. . . . Because it allows you to lose self-consciousness. It becomes about *we* rather than *I*. You merge with others. This is what Marcus Aurelius describes when he says, 'Things *push* and *pull* on each other, and breathe together, and are one'" (cf. Goyder, *Gravitas* 155, emphasis mine). What I am about to embark on, the explanation and demonstration of a good actor's paradoxical quality—I call it the *real* paradox of the actor (as opposed to Diderot's paradox of the actor)—is a blend of what Goyder calls "gravitas" and charisma: Both are paradoxical forces.

¹²³ It is telling that Diderot views a credible performance as a "trap" the audience falls into. Generally, his description of actors is full of fascination, but great mistrust. To speak of good performances as entrapment is more telling of the man Diderot than of the actor. After all, one goes to the theatre with the full knowledge of the contract between the performers and the audience. The only trap is the trapdoor used for demonic or supernatural characters.



backlash of responses: The French actor Coquelin agreed with Diderot entirely, whereas the English actor Henry Irving and Italian actor Tommasino Salvini denounced it (along with many other actors).

Irving, who wrote the preface to Walter Herries' 1883 publication of *The Paradox of the Actor*, disagrees with Diderot on every point. Irving goes as far as to mock Diderot's extreme antitheatricalism, albeit with such graceful irony and tact that it is hardly noticeable. Irving writes:

[Diderot] frankly confesses [to his own libertine spirit] when speaking of his own early desire to enter the theatrical profession." . . . It was necessary for the purpose of his paradox that Diderot should assume that sensibility must be a wild, ungovernable emotion, absolutely fatal to the nerve of all who are afflicted by it. The *one* example Diderot gives of a dramatic artist guided by sensibility leaves no doubt of this.

(Irving, "Preface" to Diderot, *The Paradox of the Actor* xxxi, emphasis mine)

Irving calls Diderot's *Paradoxe Sur le Comédien* out for being "angry," and when Irving is not politely mocking Diderot, he utters keen observations in the form of questions: "Why should not the man of sensibility exercise cool reflection and a watchful eye when the ideas suggested by his emotion are subjected to the test of his judgment?" (Irving ix, xiv). In other words, Irving asks why emotion and reason should not work well together.

Irving inquires respectfully about the possibility of "the sensibility of [the actor Macready] [not having been] a genuine aid to the actor." He points out that "it is quite possible to feel all the excitement of the situation and yet be perfectly self-possessed. This is art that the actor who loves his head has not mastered" (cf. Irving xiv–xv). In short, Irving shrewdly singles out the little holes in Diderot's argument. Irving's most insightful observation is the following: "It is necessary to this art [acting] that the mind should have . . . *a double consciousness*, in which all the emotions proper to the occasion may have full sway, while the actor is all the time on the alert for every detail of his method" (cf. Irving xv–xvi, emphasis mine). To emphasize his

argument, Irving quotes the actor Talma because, as Irving says, Talma gave “a perfect description of the art of acting.”

The intelligence which accompanies sensibility judges the impressions which the latter has made us feel; it selects, arranges them, and subjects them to calculation. It aids us to direct the employment of our physical and intellectual forces—to judge between the relations which are between the poet and the situation or the character of the personages, and sometimes to add the shades that are wanting, or that language cannot express: to complete, in fine, their expression by action and physiognomy. (Irving, quoting Talma xvi, emphasis mine)

When Irving and Talma speak about acting, they clearly have a deep understanding of the discipline as both practitioners and scholars. Irving dismisses Diderot’s assumption that the actor who employs real emotions will not be able to reproduce¹²⁴ them every night as an amateur’s understanding of acting. Irving says that such variance in repeating emotion may happen to inexperienced actors but not to professionals. What Irving and Talma both try to illustrate is that emotions, mind, and body are at interplay, not canceling each other out.

Coquelin and Irving went as far as to engage in a public letter war over Diderot’s essay. In 1985, Joseph Roach returned to the *Paradoxe Sur le Comédien* in his seminal study of acting styles throughout history entitled *The Player’s Passion (PP)*, which is, as I already mentioned, considered a classic among scholars. Roach delves deeply into Diderot and ends his book by holding up the *Paradoxe Sur le Comédien* as the undisputed apogee of acting theory: “If the historic pattern holds true, Grotowski will reach its end only to find Diderot waiting for him there, his patient face enlivened by the irritating smile of reason” (cf. Roach, *PP* 226). Roach

¹²⁴ This is the same point the acting coach and director Jeff Seymour makes that I quoted earlier. Seymour says: “Confidently placing your mind where you choose to place it is an actor’s greatest power” (Seymour 98). Reproducing emotions and actions is a matter of discipline and mastery of one’s craft. Actors do it every day and in every performance, especially in the theatre.

explained his understanding of Diderot's *Paradoxe*¹²⁵ in a podcast titled "Shakespeare Unlimited," hosted by the *Folger Shakespeare Library*: "You can't just abandon yourself to your inner feelings. *You have to feel those emotions in some way*, but in rehearsal, in repetition, you shape them into a work of art" (Roach, "Shakespeare Unlimited, Episode 116," *Folger Shakespeare Library Online* 5 Mar. 2019). Roach is right to say that an actor cannot "just abandon [himself] to [his] inner feelings; he is right to say actors ought not to be self-indulgent. When Roach claims, however, that Diderot suggested that the "emotions be felt in some way," he is reading something into the *Paradoxe Sur le Comédien* that simply is not there. In fact, Diderot rejects *all* emotion in the—what he calls—genius actor; he speaks solely of an ideal model of *imitating* emotion. Roach's insistence—in the footsteps of Diderot—on demystifying acting and stripping it of any touch of the ineffable comes, I contend, at the cost of his own open-mindedness toward acting and its practitioners. Many passages in Roach's study, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting*, read like one long defense of Diderot that recalls the single-minded zeal of the antitheatricalists of the Renaissance, not the observations of a contemporary academic.

What is even more surprising is that Roach does not reconcile his observations on actors in *The Player's Passion* of 1985 with the astute observations on actors he made in his 2007 book called *It*. *It* deals with "the easily perceived but hard-to-define quality possessed by abnormally interesting people" that he describes as coexisting contradictory qualities (Roach, *It* back cover). *The Player's Passion* interprets acting theory. Roach's subsequent book *It* interprets that certain something certain people have that draws others to them. In the absence of Roach's reconciliation of his two works, I will try and link them through what I consider to be "the *real* paradox of the actor." Roach's demystification of acting theory with Diderot as a scientific trailblazer stands in stark contrast to Roach's description of "that strange magnetism . . . [that is] fascinating and mysterious and quite unbiddable" (cf. Roach, *It* 4), full of "charm, charisma, and presence," "aura," "the contradictory forces of *It*," "[I]ts uncanny translucence without transparency," Its "divine discord" that is common to famous actors and other public performers

¹²⁵ When I refer to Diderot's essay *Paradoxe Sur le Comédien*, I shorten it to "*Paradoxe*" to differentiate his understanding of the actor's paradox from mine as clearly as possible. When I quote Diderot's essay, however, I use the English translation's spelling of "*Paradox*" as it served as my source text.

(cf. *It* 7–10). How did Roach go from the scientific study of acting theory to the paradoxical contradictions of the public performer’s “divine discord” (*It*, Roach, quoting George Meredith 10). Arguably, Diderot’s caustic and cynical explanation of acting and actors left something to be desired when Roach—with equal Diderot-like fervor for scientific demystification—analyzed acting and actors at length in his book *The Player’s Passion*. Perhaps the “something” that was missing in Diderot’s encyclopedic depiction of the actor was what Roach later calls “It.”

To emphasize how deeply embedded dualistic thinking is, it is important to point out that Roach wrote two books—one on acting theory and the other on an elusive “emotional” quality of (mostly) performers and public figures—to explain the paradoxical impact of what he calls “It” (a kind of star quality). *The Player’s Passion* (1985) revolves around how acting theory has been shaped by science throughout history. It is based on facts and reason. The other book, *It* (2007), filled the gaps and explained the hidden workings behind *The Player’s Passion*, but is not part of the first book, likely because *It* attempts to capture something that falls outside of the Western model of scientific explanation. *It* falls outside of what the natural sciences can measure, so it would be neither accepted nor respected by the default Western scientific model. Jonash Barish describes the prejudice against art that the received wisdom of the West continues to propound stubbornly:

[T]he distrust of what takes time and skill and patience yet can never be reduced to weights and measures, the suspicion of whatever lacks instant, evident, practical utility, and so looks unreal and unsatisfying to the mind whose only reality is the world of physical things. . . . [A]rt persists in eluding exact measurements and exact controls. (cf. Barish 37)

Stuart Kauffman puts this kind of dualistic, black-or-white-reductionism as follows: “The entire dream of Western Science since Descartes and Galileo is the dream that everything that happens in the universe, everything, is describable by natural law” (cf. Stuart Kauffman, *Linus Pauling Memorial Lecture*, 23 Apr. 2009). The problem is, not everything *is* describable by natural law. The fact that there exist two studies by Joseph Roach that should be intricately interwoven is



telling: After all, all the actors Roach mentions in *The Player's Passion* had star quality. They had “It.”

The actor Diderot describes in *The Paradox of the Actor* is akin to an automaton¹²⁶ at best and, at worst—were he to walk the streets—he is what is presently classified as a psychopath¹²⁷ (charming personality, capable of mimicking emotions perfectly without feeling them, and cool and calculating). Diderot dehumanizes actors, describing their emotions as utterly artificial. If such an actor were at large, it must be asked what kind of actions s/he would be capable of. According to Diderot, actors are one creature onstage and another offstage. However, they are similarly shallow and worthy of mistrust, both at work or at play. Diderot's distaste for emotion (termed “sensibility” at the time) and overly sentimental performance must be read within the confines of his time and the declamatory acting fashion on the 18th-century stage. At the time, emotion was portrayed in an overly melodramatic manner, combined with grand, rigid, predetermined gestures. In his essay entitled “The Art of Speaking” of 1746, Italian actor Ermete Zacconi has the following to say about Diderot's *Paradoxe*:

He [Diderot] wrote his *Paradox* around the middle of the eighteenth century. Varaldo¹²⁸ says we must overlook the fact that Diderot wrote it when the actor's art had declined and became bombastic rhetoric. But that is just what we must take into account if we are to

¹²⁶ Diderot's Character 1 says: “The actor is also a most ingenious puppet, and his strings are held by the poet” (Diderot 123).

¹²⁷ I chose my words wisely and without hyperbole. While the official *Diagnostical and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* would explain Diderot's great actor—as he describes him—as a person suffering from antisocial personality disorder, I chose the more common parlance. It is, indeed, staggering how much Diderot's genius actor has in common with the common psychopath. The danger of adding psychopath and monster to an already endless list of antitheatrical prejudice is immense. However, the need for an audience to view the actor as a monster and with guilty pleasure is not a new phenomenon. Richard Burbage received invitations from female audience members to come to their bedchamber dressed in character as Richard III. Burbage was the Renaissance's very own “Dexter.” Stephen Greenblatt tells of an anecdote—it may or may not be true—preserved by lawyer John Manningham in his 1602 diary about Richard III's powerful audience appeal even in Shakespeare's own day:

Upon a time when Burbage played Richard III there was a citizen grew so far in liking with him, that before she went from the play she appointed him to come that night unto her by the name of Richard III. Shakespeare, overhearing their conclusion, went before, and was entertained and at his game ere Burbage came. The message being brought that Richard III was at the door, Shakespeare caused return to be made that William the Conqueror was before Richard III. (Greenblatt, “Richard III,” *Norton Shakespeare* 557)

¹²⁸ Alessandro Varaldo translated Diderot's *The Paradox of the Actor* and defended it in his translation's introduction.

analyze his ideas correctly. [. . .] Diderot's *Paradox* should remain in the period in which it was written. (Zacconi, *Actors on Acting* 462)

Nevertheless, Diderot's notion that great actors feel nothing while performing the perfect illusion of feeling to the audience is unsettling in its past and current universal recognition¹²⁹ (not usually by actors but by multitudinous scholars). Diderot added that "a great actor will decline to acknowledge it [that his emotion is pure imitation]; it is his own secret" (Diderot 43). Once more, by seemingly letting his readership in on the great secret of the actor—which, again, would render them psychopathic—Diderot alienates certain readers. Diderot was not an actor; nor did his acquaintance with the few actors he encountered seem enough research material on which to base an acting theory, not to mention his generalized psychological character assassination of actors. Furthermore, Diderot did not know nearly enough about the pragmatic aspects of an actor's day-to-day life in the theatre to pathologize actors in general the way he did with such certainty. Such certainty about the mental state and makeup of performers is ill-informed, dangerous, and, as Mark Rylance put it in spring of 2019, "arrogant."¹³⁰

In 1911, English actor Edward Gordon Craig quipped about the pseudo-insiders and critics of actors in "On the Art of the Theatre:"

Those taking part [in such criticism] have seldom been actors, very rarely men of the theatre at all, and all have displayed any amount of illogical heat, and very little

¹²⁹ The antitheatrical thinking that actors are liars and pretenders has never gone out of fashion. Each time an actor dares to make a political comment, the overwhelming response is usually along the lines of: "Why should the general populace listen to a person who pretends to be other people for a living?" Such a response is a ubiquitous phenomenon on all social media platforms. *The Guardian* called it "red-carpet currency" (Ellen, Barbara, and Liz Hoggard, "Should Actors Be Political?," *The Guardian* 12 Dec. 2015). On Quora, a commentator spoke of actors who voice political opinions as follows: "They're (highly) paid clowns and court jesters for our amusement and nothing else" (Hintz, Adam, "Why Do Actors Feel the Need to Be Political?," *Quora* 18 Jan. 2017). Another *Quora* commentator referred to actors speaking out about politics as "champagne socialists." Finally, there was a *Quora* commentator who responded to the actor/politics question creatively: "I felt the same way about Ronald Reagan. I wish he would have just stayed in the acting business and left politics alone" (Ziegler, Todd, "Why Do Actors Feel the Need to Be Political?," *Quora* 17 Jan. 2017).

¹³⁰ I discussed Diderot with Mark Rylance in a private conversation after a performance at the Globe Theatre in London. Rylance called Diderot's description of actors "arrogant." Furthermore, Rylance stated that "actors feel a great deal, and who was Diderot to speak of something with such certainty?" with the arrogance of an expert (cf. Mark Rylance, 21 Apr. 2019).

knowledge on the subject. . . . [Such critics of actors are] so personal in their detestation of the actor, that I think it is for that reason the actors have taken no trouble to go into the matter. . . . I have followed these regular attacks season by season, and they seem mostly to spring from irritability, personal enmity and conceit. . . . They are illogical from beginning to end. (*Actors on Acting* 378)

David Mamet contends that the “institutionally co-opted [are] ill-equipped to perceive [what the actor does]” (cf. Mamet 18). Diderot is a keen observer, and his insights are clever, albeit too cerebral: “Acting, like any art, can be learned, finally, only in the arena” (Mamet 80). Diderot’s foray into the psychology of the actor detracts from his otherwise brilliant observations and, arguably, was the reason his essay did not resonate¹³¹ as widely as other, less astute theories on acting did.

Diderot is in particularly high form—albeit hardly original—when he likens the actor to “a courtesan¹³² who has no heart, and who abandons herself in your arms” (Diderot 47). To align the actor with both femininity and prostitution betrays Diderot’s—conscious or subconscious—adherence to the dualistic Pythagorean *Table of Opposites* that placed female—evil and darkness—opposite male—good and light. Diderot’s description of actors reveals “a schema of values, preferences, and prejudices . . . all supposed imperfections reside together with darkness, evil, and the evil darker than evil—femaleness” (Ruth 156). Even worse, Diderot’s actors, both male and female, are prostitutes. Diderot goes on to call a particular actor “a cold man, who is without

¹³¹ Diderot’s *Paradox of the Actor* is widely read and recognized in academic circles. However, most actors do not read Diderot, generously put. They often read Stanislavski and his followers (Adler, Strasberg, and Hagen), including contemporary books on acting such as Jean Benedetti’s *The Actor at Work*, Declan Donnellan’s *The Actor and the Target*, Larry Moss’s *The Intent to Live*, Ivana Chubbuck’s *The Power of the Actor*, Jeff Seymour’s *The Real Life Actor*, or Patsy Rodenburg’s books, all of which take bits and pieces from Stanislavski and reinterpret them.

¹³² The antitheatrical prejudice of actors as prostitutes who sell their bodies and souls has a long history, as documented by Jonas Barish, Kirsten Pullen, Laura J. Rosenthal, Felicity Nussbaum, and others. While there is truth to actors often coming from lower-class families and being driven by poverty, the prejudice of all actors being prostitutes is simply not true. The prejudice is commonplace, however, and its stigma exists even today. Skura quotes several actors who admit that “[t]here is something illegitimate about even legitimate theater” (Skura 12–13). Actor Simon Callow says that it is “you . . . your face, your body, and your personality . . . what you sell”, and when you don’t get the part, “it’s you nobody wants” (cf. Skura 12). Many actors have internalized the antitheatrical stigma and “class themselves with other forms of entertainment altogether. ‘A music hall entertainer,’ said Granville–Barker. ‘A juggler, a street-singer, a prize-fighter,’ said Redfield. He is a hustler, a flatterer, a seducer—a prostitute, said Grotowski; a whore, said Brecht” (Skura 13).

feeling, but who imitates it excellently” (Diderot 98). Diderot’s First Character claims: “Sensibility [is] that disposition which accompanies weakness, . . . , which inclines one to being compassionate, to being horrified, to admiration, to fear, to being upset, to tears, . . . , to having no clear notion of what is true, good, and fine” (cf. Diderot 114–115). In other words, emotions do not make people more human, but lessen their ability to judge good from bad and right from wrong. Emotions are weak. Emotions are the “weaker sex.” Skura states that “actors have so often been seen as feminine”¹³³ (Skura 24), and Diderot certainly enumerates a line of stereotypical “female attributes,” such as frivolity (125), fickleness (130), immorality (125), promiscuity (47; 126-127), deceitfulness (45; 84-86; 205-206), secretiveness (43), fluidity of character (109; 121; 128) vanity, jealousy, (129), envy (129), servitude (Diderot calls actors “puppets” (123) and “slaves” (141), etc.

Diderot echoes the Renaissance antitheatricalists when he calls actors “frivolous people, without any sound principle” (Diderot 125), who began acting for “[w]ant of education, poverty, a libertine spirit. The stage is a resource, never a choice”¹³⁴ (Diderot 127). Diderot’s First Character is at his best when he tells Character 2: “You find them [actors] great on the stage because, as you say, they have soul; I find them little and mean in society because they have none” (Diderot 130). Diderot complicates his own argument by allowing his mouthpiece, Character 1, to confess that he, himself, “hesitated between the Sorbonne and the stage” to “gain applause” and to “mix on intimate terms with actresses whom [he] found charming and who [he] knew were not straitlaced” (Diderot 127). The entire argument Diderot makes about “an actor who is a man of honor, an actress who is a woman of virtue [being] such rare phenomena” (132) is called into question when Character 1 admits that he gave up acting because he “grew

¹³³ Skura says, in detail: “A man who becomes an actor is thus ‘developing aspects of himself which originate in his identification with his mother’—a woman—and in doing so is following a path of development more like the girl’s than the boy’s. This dual openness to identification with women may ‘help to explain why male actors have been effective in playing female roles in so many societies and why actors have so often been seen as feminine’” (cf. Skura 24).

¹³⁴ This statement of Diderot’s is particularly disconcerting, as he confesses to memorizing the words of Molière, who was an actor from a very good family, highly educated, and whose choice to become an actor was unquestionably for the love of the profession, not for resources. Furthermore, Diderot’s statement is overly personal and somewhat too spiteful to register with the reader. He may as well add a “Meow” at the end of the statement. Such overly biting remarks have much in common with the hysteria of Puritan antitheatricalists such as Gosson or Munday. Such remarks also demonstrate exactly what Craig meant when he said actors do not bother to defend themselves when confronted with overly personal criticism.

disgusted with a calling for which [he] thought [he] had not enough talent” (Diderot 137). The latter illustrates a kind of cognitive dissonance: Diderot, much like Aesop’s fox, who could not reach the grapes, rationalizes that the grapes were sour and undesirable anyway. The entire essay is steeped in a kind of Gossonian¹³⁵ antitheatricalism and distrust of actors that render the sifting through the remaining wreckage of Diderot’s never-ending moralizing arduous. Unfortunately, such frustration in the reader minimizes the realization that Diderot did, in fact, care very deeply about actors and acting (“I like and esteem . . . the actor’s [profession]”; cf. Diderot 124) and that he, in fact, had quite a lot to say about them.

Diderot’s many attacks on actors read overly personally in the manner Edward Gordon Graig¹³⁶ describes them. It is no surprise, then, that some actors responded to Diderot on an equally personal level. Ermete Zacconi called Diderot’s *Paradoxe* unnatural and an “absurd contradiction” (*Actors on Acting* 462). Zacconi adds, “Perhaps Diderot, so rich in intellect, had no human feelings and so could accept in art what he ignored in nature? Or, as happens with many of the intellectual elites, the more he tried to approach the theatre and understand it, the more mysterious it remained to him? . . . Diderot’s encyclopedic mind . . . understood everything except the theatre”¹³⁷ (*Actors on Acting* 462–463). At times, reading Diderot’s *Paradoxe* is comparable to tracing an asymptote in a diagram: It gets closer and closer but never quite matches the curve. While Zacconi’s—and he is not alone—ad-hominem counterattack on Diderot appears unprofessional at first, the chasm between the theorizing scholar and the

¹³⁵ Stephen Gosson was one of the foremost antitheatricalists during the Renaissance. A former actor, he wrote treatises against acting and players that read as a hysterical reaction to an art he obviously cared sufficiently about to decry ceaselessly.

¹³⁶ See my earlier quote by Edward Gordon Craig in *Actors on Acting*.

¹³⁷ After having read a tremendous amount about acting theory (by both academics and practitioners), I find myself agreeing with Zacconi’s statement. The more scholars attempt to grasp acting, the more mind-bending and brilliant-sounding logic they glean from acting, the more they lose touch with their subject. Approaching acting through the mind and logic alone is, in all the theories and books I have read, worthless. Conversely, those same scholars view practical acting advice as not logical enough or contradictory. Had they taken a couple of acting classes, they would quickly realize that just because advice sounds illogical or paradoxical, once they put their bodies into it, their theories and opinions about acting would quickly change.

pragmatic actor both Zacconi and Craig touch on is worth mentioning.¹³⁸ Such a chasm is and always has been rather puzzling. In respect to acting, academics and actors appear to speak different languages. Actors try to formulate a hands-on approach or a method for acting (if they speak about their work at all), whereas the scholar tries to explain the existence of acting and its ethics. Usually, actors address the “how,” whereas scholars address the “why” and follow it with a “how” based on their “why” conclusion. The actor is mystified by what the scholar writes about acting and usually considers it useless mind acrobatics that are not useful, whereas the scholar is bemused by the actor’s apparent lack of logic and intellect.

Diderot reasons that actors become actors not by choice but by force, and it is this reasoning that colors all his other keen observations on acting, such as his eye-opening revelation that there is a paradox at work in great actors. If Zacconi is right, and “only an artist is in a position to judge an artist,” then the question remains of why so few bothered to explain themselves, as Edward Gordon Craig noted. Beginning in the Renaissance, as W. B. Worthen observes, despite overwhelming Puritan antitheatricalism, “the theatre voices no effective rebuttal” (Worthen, *Idea of the Actor* 13). However, a play such as “Hamlet is so thoroughly infused by the question of acting that it nearly becomes the kind of theoretical investigation of performance that the Renaissance theatre otherwise failed to produce” (Worthen, *Idea of the Actor* 26). In fact, to let one’s work speak for one instead of writing apologies or defenses of one’s art and craft is a phenomenon among many actors and playwrights that deserves a closer examination later in my analysis. After all, the actor may be aware that everything worth expressing must be expressed and embodied through “action” and “acting” more than with words alone. Among his abundant disparagement of the matter, Diderot’s most ingenious insight was to recognize the paradox of good acting. He is, after all, the same man who openly criticized Descartes’s mind–body dualism in a letter in defense of the blind (a letter for which he went to

¹³⁸ Zacconi here is making a valid point: The more Diderot tries to apply his encyclopedic mind—without considering the body—to acting theory, the more he loses touch with his subject. While I do not agree with many of David Mamet’s points, I do agree with his point about acting being physical and action-based first: “The skill of acting is finally a physical skill; . . . The skill of acting is like the skill of a sport, which is a physical event” (cf. Mamet 19). In the end, acting can only be learned in the arena (cf. Mamet 88). Those who write about acting do not have to be actors, but they do need practical knowledge of the physicality of acting.

prison¹³⁹). For example, Diderot noticed there was a kind of “dual personality” in actors, a doubling of consciousness.¹⁴⁰

Diderot’s observation is a revelation: He rightly perceives that the actor needs a double consciousness to show emotion in a manner that is visible and perceivable for the audience. Pure emotion, as felt in real life, does not work onstage. For example, grief turns most people inward and isolates them. Often, hands are raised to shelter the face, to hide tears or convulsions. To show grief to the audience, an actor must learn to direct the emotion outward. Actors’ hands must not hide their faces, and their emotions must be palpable among the audience. Actors must bare their bodies and their souls. The two must be one. Shock or emotional breakdowns are other examples of states that render people either completely still or dissolve them into hysterical tears. The actor must be able to reveal such raw states to the audience through a filter of double consciousness. The emotions should be kept real and sincere. However, they must be observed and filtered outward to move the audience, and they must serve the narrative. Diderot recognizes the importance of the stage to re-evaluating society’s opinions and seeking a greater truth: “It is, above all, when all is false that we love the true; it is, above all, when all is corrupt that the stage becomes purest” (Diderot 138). Diderot also grasps what Artaud and Grotowski would later emphasize, namely, that the actor exists both for and instead of the audience: “The public, which cannot do without them [actors], despises them” (Diderot 141). The actor fascinates the public, but “he [also] terrifies [the audience].” Members of the public “fly in terror before him” (cf. Diderot 194, 195). In short, Diderot sees the paradox of the actor, but he misinterprets it.

It is not the total lack of feeling in the actor that allows the audience to feel. It is the actor’s double consciousness that reins in the actor’s genuine emotion and channels it so the audience also feels it (see my explanation of mirror neurons later). Emotions must be mastered, edited, distilled, and adjusted by the actor; this is what actors practice for years. What Diderot

¹³⁹ Diderot’s “The Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who See” was published in 1749. It disclosed Diderot’s atheism, which was then revolutionary enough to get him imprisoned. Descartes’s mind–body dualism was received thought during Diderot’s time. To question it—considering it allows an afterlife with the material body being one thing and the mind another and everlasting—was dangerous. I would add, however, that Diderot was deeply influenced and shaped by Cartesian dualism in areas other than religion. His description of actors is often tainted by dualistic thought, for example, when he calls actors prostitutes, aligning them with evil and femininity.

¹⁴⁰ See my earlier quote from Henry Irving’s Preface to Diderot’s *Paradoxe*. Irving astutely notices what Diderot was trying to express when he mentions “double consciousness.” I explain this further in the next section, 1f).

saw as cold calculation in the actor is a learned understanding that the audience must be led but not hit over the head with self-indulgent emotion: “Because people come not to see tears, but to hear speeches that draw tears” (Diderot 196). True, the audience does not want “emotional donations” but “respectful sincerity” (Seymour 112). Seymour agrees with Diderot when he repeats the famous acting adage: “If you [the actor] cry, the audience won’t”¹⁴¹ (Seymour 112). However, Seymour explains the paradox in another, more pragmatic way: “There is something so *sweetly tragic* about a person who, in the face of tragedy, will still not indulge in his audience by making them have to be party to their breakdown. . . . This nobility of awareness is . . . [what allows an actor to not] end up undermining their tale by upstaging it with their emotional loss of control” (cf. Seymour 113, emphasis mine).

Notably, Seymour does not advise feeling absolutely nothing. He also does not advise insincere mimicry. Instead, he speaks of an actor who focuses on his “scene and let[s] nature take its course. Honest emotions are likelier to occur. It asks for a lot of trust on the part of the actor, but that’s what it’s all about” (cf. Seymour 111). Seymour realizes that the brilliant actor always allows paradox without attempting to resolve it: He allows the moment to be both sweet *and* tragic. It is the latter paradox that draws in the audience members because their senses understand that life is always interwoven by both light and shade, that is, bittersweet tones. This paradox directly relates to the actor’s double consciousness. As opposed to viewing two varying consciousnesses as separate entities that must be resolved, the key to understanding good actors, I would argue, is that they do not resolve paradoxes or synthesize a double consciousness. The actor lowers the audience’s resistance to paradox and to in-between states that dualistic thinking denies or resolves. Scholar and theatre practitioner Andrew Belser explains the paradox of acting very well:

Human vulnerability resonates perhaps most fully in our contradictions. Alive characters are beautifully stretched between often opposing desires and images of themselves in the

¹⁴¹ There are many valid exceptions to this rule. If an actor cries during a suitable moment and the tears are sincere, the audience will react sincerely. The saying is taught to keep (mostly Method) actors from becoming self-absorbed or indulgent onstage. It serves as a reminder that, as an actor, it is not about you. Irving, in his Preface to the *Paradox*, also noticed this detail.

world. . . . Becoming aware of the natural paradoxes in human sensing, feeling, thinking, doing is a big part of constructing a theatrical person (character). We can learn to soften the edges of attention and resistance to contradiction, allowing paradoxical awareness to flourish without excess tension. (Belser, Andrew, “Paradox” andrewbelsers.com)

The audience appreciates the actor who can express the experience of grace under fire, of acting nobly in despair. They appreciate the actor who has embraced being comfortable in their discomfort.¹⁴²

Sincere emotion always reverberates better with an audience than does mimicry. The latter may entertain, but the former leaves an indelible impression. Informally put, “Grace will take you places hustling can’t” (Brene Brown, quoting Elizabeth Gilbert, *Rising Strong* 11). Alternatively, as Joseph Roach puts it, “‘It’ is the power of apparently effortless embodiment of contradictory qualities simultaneously: strength and vulnerability, innocence and experience, and singularity and typicality” (Roach, *It* 8). Diderot had noticed the actor’s paradoxical double consciousness; however, regrettably, he understood the “doubling” as a pathological dislocation.

1f) Diderot and Double Consciousness

The idea of a “double consciousness”¹⁴³ or “dual feeling”—in respect to acting—was introduced by James Boswell. Boswell, a biographer¹⁴⁴ and diarist who was friends with David Garrick, first

¹⁴² To “get comfortable being uncomfortable” has become a mantra amongst actors. David Mamet says it in his book on acting *True and False* (p. 20). Actors such as Liev Schreiber, Hugh Jackman, Scarlett Johansson all echo the mantra in interviews. The late author and activist Peter McWilliams said it in his *LIFE 101* book series (cf. McWilliams, *Do It*, 377). It is also a well-known Navy SEAL saying (cf. Gleeson, *Forbes* 2015).

¹⁴³ The idea of “double consciousness” did not originate with Irving or Diderot. I refer here to Boswell’s explanation of “double consciousness” in his essay on acting. Boswell’s “double consciousness” is not to be confused with Hegel’s, Herder’s, or W. E. B. DuBois’, even though most people associate the term with the lattermost. Boswell explained “double consciousness” as a “double feeling,” a simultaneous awareness of the self as both a participant and an observer. To avoid confusion, I would have preferred to use Boswell’s term: “dual feeling.” However, Diderot’s observation of such double or dual feeling in the actor is translated as “double consciousness.” Hence, I kept the mainstream term.

¹⁴⁴ James Boswell is best known for being Samuel Johnson’s biographer. *The Life of Johnson* was published in 1791. Boswell’s writings had a wide range. He was a keen observer of people, and his essays on acting are filled with great insights.

expressed the notion of a “paradoxical doubleness in one body” when he tried to explain what actors do in his insightful essay of 1770 “On the Profession of a Player”¹⁴⁵ (cf. Boswell 18). Boswell wrote, “My conjecture is that he [the actor] must have a kind of *double feeling*. He must assume to a strong degree the character he represents, while he at the same time retains the consciousness of his own character” (Boswell 18; Holmes, *Shakespeare Survey* 59, 287) emphasis mine). To speak of paradox and how it relates to the actor’s double consciousness,¹⁴⁶ it is necessary to define “double consciousness” as narrowly as possible. Diderot’s claim that the professional actor *is* both everything and nothing would be a paradox that cannot be resolved. Right there, Diderot has hit on something profound, only to then take the paradox in the direction of “to feel *or* not to feel” (the “or” ought to be an “and” in an unresolvable paradox or antinomy). The latter is one aspect of double consciousness (to *feel* everything and nothing), but one among many, as I will explain in greater detail. Had Diderot taken the “everything/nothing” paradox of the actor in the direction of unresolvable paradoxes—what I refer to as “the *real*”¹⁴⁷ paradox of the actor—he may have accomplished what is often deemed impossible: a definition of what makes an actor resonate with an audience.

Boswell’s understanding of “double consciousness” as the coexistence or interplay of two consciousnesses (the actor and the character’s) simultaneously is more paradoxical. Such double consciousness gives the good actor hyper-self-awareness of both the self as a participant and as an observer. Such double consciousness or “double feeling” perfectly describes actors’ real paradox of always holding contradictory elements in their souls and bodies that cannot be synthesized; nor should they be. Double consciousness enables actors to see themselves not only

¹⁴⁵ James Boswell’s three essays under the title “On the Profession of the Player” were published in *The London Magazine* in the autumn of 1770. *The London Magazine* had a substantial readership. Boswell’s essay, therefore, predates Diderot’s “Paradox of the Actor,” which was written in the 1770s, but not published until 1830. Boswell keenly notices the paradox of “dual feeling,” but he does not attempt to revolutionize acting theory and tear actors apart with his insights. In fact, Boswell was very well read regarding the acting literature. He saw many plays, and he was friends with Garrick and other actors. Boswell is one of the few critics who emphasizes just how much work the profession of the actor is. Boswell says the “double feeling” is something mysterious, and he therefore left a keen insight open for others to interpret (or misinterpret).

¹⁴⁶ Michael Chekhov also speaks of “dual consciousness” in acting. His thoughts on the matter are prescient and perspicacious regarding cognitive science and acting. I will address Chekhov in greater detail later.

¹⁴⁷ While Diderot hit on the actor’s paradox, he focused on one aspect of it, that is, emotion. It is my aim to show that emotion is solely one facet of the paradox that makes an actor riveting to watch. Hence, the simplest way to refer to this paradox, without dishonoring Diderot’s observation, was as the *real* paradox of the actor.

with their own eyes but also through the eyes of others. It is the ability to view others and the self with both a sense of wonder¹⁴⁸ and ambivalence. It is the ability to both associate and dissociate at the same time. Boswell's contradictory doubleness of being both actor and spectator, of being an outsider looking in and an insider looking out, was informed by the psychological and historical findings on the matter that came before¹⁴⁹ him. Actors are always in an in-between stage of paradox that places them neither within nor without society. David Mamet brilliantly captures, I would argue, the real paradox of actors: to be aware of their outsider status as a "rogue and vagabond," a slave (e.g., Roscius), or a social pariah who was "buried at a crossroads with a stake through the heart . . . [because society] feared [his] ghost]" (cf. Mamet 6); to be aware of their "outcast state" that condemns them to permanently exist on the fringes of society (cf. Shakespeare, *Sonnet 29*); and to be aware that they will always be distrusted for who they are and what they do but that they simultaneously will be needed and celebrated. Actors recognize how paradoxical their profession is to society: "[N]one is more dislik'd, and yet none more applauded," said Skura, quoting J. Earle (1628) (Skura 4; 35). Mamet explains well the double consciousness of actors. To paraphrase, they feel everything and nothing; they view themselves as they are and as society views them. They desire to belong to society while needing to maintain their outcast state to be true to their profession. They register both the gift and the pitfall of seeing beyond the customary. The invisible is visible to them, and they have the skill to express it. Simultaneously, actors know this skill is also a drawback because seeing the world differently makes them eternal outsiders (cf. Mamet 6).

¹⁴⁸ I use "wonder" to describe a person who—like a child—views things as they are, not as they should be, without expectations, as if seeing things for the first time. This notion of "wonder" embraces uncertainties. "A feeling of surprise mingled with admiration, caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable" (*OED*).

¹⁴⁹ The contradictory doubleness of the actor has been well-documented throughout the ages, beginning with Roscius, a Roman slave who became a celebrated actor, and eventually—through his acting profession—bought his own freedom.

Diderot saw the paradox of acting. However, he focused solely on one of its byproducts, emotion.¹⁵⁰ To quote the actor Alexander Lensky in 1894 on Diderot's notion of doubling: "The error of Diderot's view with regard to theatrical art arose . . . as a result of him mistaking an actor's vast self-control for his inability to feel deeply. . . . An absolute lack of emotions, as well as extreme sensitivity without any self-control, makes a person utterly unsuitable to the stage, but extreme sensitivity with utter self-control makes a great actor" (cf. Demidov 622). Here is how Demidov, a collaborator of Stanislavski's, defines the actor's double consciousness:

[T]he identity that lives in character is so great that it fills up the whole consciousness. And the actor's personality rests beyond the threshold of consciousness—it departs into the realm of the *automatic*. It executes only automatic functions. . . . In essence, these are two kinds of art! One is *before the threshold* of 'abandon,' and the other is *beyond the threshold* of 'abandon.' (Demidov 622, emphasis editor's)

According to Demidov, the master actor must surpass the threshold of abandon. The master actor lets go, gets out of his own way, acts, and lives. Meanwhile, there is "[t]his hidden well-wisher and observer, some sort of artistic conscience, my director, my artistic 'I'—[that] is an essential prerequisite for the creative process" (Demidov 623). Demidov's definition of "double consciousness" is perspicacious, intuitive, and pragmatic. As David Mamet points out: "The skill of acting is finally a physical skill"¹⁵¹ (Mamet 19).

¹⁵⁰ However, Diderot travels the path of "no sensibility," which sparked controversy, arguments, and heated print wars, the most famous being the one between English actor Sir Henry Irving and French actor Constant Coquelin. The main point of Diderot's *Paradoxe* was that actors should not feel the emotions of characters to evoke those very emotions in the audience. The emotion paradox Diderot brings up—today termed "the actor's dilemma"—revolves around the question of actors experiencing the emotions portrayed—or not. The actor's dilemma has been a sticking point since Diderot problematized acting in his cerebral, thoughtful, albeit contentious essay of 1773. In 1995, in an equally cerebral and brilliant deliberation on acting and acting theory, Joseph Roach defends Diderot on almost every count in *The Player's Passion*. Undoubtedly, Diderot was an "instigator and catalyst" who made his readers think more deeply (Roach, *PP* 157).

¹⁵¹ I agree with Mamet in this instance. His observations on acting, as Anthony Hopkins says on the cover of *True and False*, "demolish the myths . . . that pass for theory" (Mamet, *True and False* cover). I do, however, treat Mamet's advice with caution as he sometimes—much like Diderot—sacrifices insight at the cost of being revolutionary.

Unlike Diderot, Demidov immediately concerns himself with explaining *how* an actor arrives at a double consciousness: The actor must “if not kill, then exile [his own consciousness] somewhere far away. How? [By] destroy[ing] any deliberativeness and self-awareness” (cf. Demidov 622). Demidov asserts that Diderot, in fact, “didn’t speak about doubling. . . . He said that the actor (as he saw him) seemingly splits in two—he lives his own life and observes how his body performs a series of memorized tricks. This is a complete lack of (doubling) a duality” (Demidov 622). Demidov’s point is valid: If there is only one character (the acted one) and one consciousness available, how can it be split into creative double consciousness? Even for a split personality, there would need to exist an a priori character to do the splitting, but Diderot denies that possibility, thereby raising more questions than are answered.

In modern acting classes, the idea of double consciousness is often simply expressed as “Warm heart, cold mind,” with the understanding that both live in the same body and originate in the brain. What the latter means is that the actor must feel emotions but express them with calculated technique for the audience; the actor must have a kind of built-in editor (the mind) through which the emotions (the heart) flow before being expressed. Demidov explained the latter very similarly. Such an explanation allows double consciousness always to work in unison and in one body/mind. The actor is both actor and spectator. According to this understanding, the paradox coexists within one body without ever being resolved. The importance of the coexistence of heart and mind within one body and one soul is a decisive one. Diderot understood the soul to be one with the body, but he considered the heart to be apart, in a double consciousness, without allowing them to coexist. Diderot’s understanding of “double consciousness” does not allow the concept of a “warm heart, cold mind.” Moreover, “cold heart, cold mind” is not a paradox. It is merely cold.

Diderot’s “double consciousness” is a split, a bitter divorce of the heart from the mind. In a way, to appropriate Diderot’s parlance, he falls into his own trap: By attempting to expose acting as mechanical puppetry that works with the body and mind, alone, Diderot subtracts human emotion and, by doing so, splits the actor from his humanity, rendering him a “thing.” Diderot did not want any emotion at all in a performance. Notably, Diderot considered sensibility a weakness. He viewed emotion as the failure to compose oneself or as a lack of self-mastery.

Henry Irving puts the matter fittingly in his preface to Diderot's *Paradoxe*: "He [Diderot] is almost as angry with it [emotion] as Sir Peter Teazle¹⁵² is with everything that sounds like a sentiment" (Diderot 5). Diderot's emphasis on reason is a quintessential Enlightenment line of thought and must be read as such. Such a manner of thinking is dated and may not be taken out of context without caution. In his preface to Diderot's *Paradoxe*, Henry Irving—as Stanislavski and Demidov did later—offered a way for the paradox of what is now known as a "warm heart, cold mind" to coexist within the actor without being resolved: "[T]he mind should have . . . a double consciousness, in which all the emotions proper to the occasion may have full sway, while the actor is all the time on the alert for every detail of his method" (Irving, "Preface," *Paradox* 12).

However, Diderot did not allow the actual "real" paradox of acting, and Irving, in this instance, does not take Diderot to task for his failure vigorously enough. What Diderot says, in fact, is that the actress Clairon "has a double personality; that of the little Clairon and of the great Agrippina" (Diderot 38). He continues to claim that it is "the head, not the heart, which works in and for [the actor]" (cf. Diderot 42). Simply put, Diderot says that good actors are all mind, no heart, whereas Irving attempts to explain how both can coexist in good actors at the same time in paradoxical unison: "[I]t is quite possible to feel all the excitement of the situation and yet be perfectly self-possessed" (Irving, "Preface," *Paradox* 12). Both Irving (and Talma, whom he quotes) make it clear that it is not the head at the expense of the heart, but the heart through the filter of the head, and always in unison. Both Talma and Irving were actors, not philosophers or theorists. What they are trying to say to Diderot is that, in real life, onstage, it just does not work the way Diderot thinks. Diderot's *Paradoxe* is primarily an exercise in logic and cleverness: "Since his premises are non-empirical, he can be refuted only on the basis of linguistics and logic" (cf. Sorensen 36). Diderot claims his examples are empirical because he uses his acquaintances with actors and actresses in real life, their statements on their work, and observations of their work onstage: "[A] great actor will decline to acknowledge it [that he feels nothing and solely imitates all feeling]; it is his own secret" (cf. Diderot 43). This claim is mere

¹⁵² The character of Sir Peter Teazle in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's play *School for Scandal* is, as his name suggests, an irritable, old, rich gentleman who marries a young wife with whom he spends the play bickering over money. Irving suggests that Diderot is equally disgruntled when it comes to emotions.

speculation. Furthermore, it must be added that the very concept of proving emotions is a minefield unless neuroscience captures a physical image of the brain—something I will address later, particularly in my comments on Elly Konijn’s work. When put to the test, both actors and non-actors would admit just how difficult it is to define an emotion they experienced during a moment of grief or in the last two minutes. Emotions are notoriously slippery and usually elude exact definitions. They even elude Diderot’s dualistic logic and encyclopedic attempt to pin them down.

Simultaneously, Diderot—in very theatrical Platonic fashion—creates two characters to espouse two insights on actors and acting:¹⁵³ The Second and The First. The Second believes—in line with Quintilian, Irving, and Talma—that sensibility is essential for an actor because only when the actor feels does the audience feel. Note how it is exactly the understanding of The Second that sets off the alarm bells in most anti-theatrical thinkers.

Plato perceived acting as dangerous because strong emotion in an artist on a platform could sway the uneducated by gripping them by their primal emotions, not their fine-tuned intellect. During the Renaissance, people such as Stephen Gosson and Anthony Munday thought actors were satanic because pretending to be someone else eventually makes one into someone else. For example, portraying another gender turns one into that gender, or pretending to be Richard III or Iago turns the actor into an evil schemer, etc. “[Actors’] performances so troubled the onlookers that they feared their ghosts. An awesome compliment. Those players moved the audience . . . [to the extent where they] feared for their soul” (cf. Mamet 6–7).

Consequently, actors were compromised and could never be upstanding citizens. It is the creation of The First Character in response to all lines of anti-theatrical thinking that—despite all else—Diderot must be admired for, even if one disagrees with him. Through the position of The First, “Diderot radically abandons the ground of any argument regarding the ethics of being versus appearing in the theatre, and ‘le propre’ versus the ‘non-propre’ in general” (Creech 38). It is The First who argues as follows:

¹⁵³ In 1936, Konstantin Stanislavski would employ a similar dialogue format in *An Actor Prepares*, namely, that of student and teacher.

[T]here is no natural identity in the great actor and that is why he or she can represent any character. It is not a question of forgetting or sacrificing one's 'propre place' as Rousseau argued in the *Lettre a d'Alembert* because the great actor is naturally lacking in anything that is 'propre'. The actor's being, then, is finally nothing but a kind of abstract representationality, itself, the liminal space of its possibility. 'If I understand you,' Le Second correctly reformulates, 'the great actor is everything and he is nothing'. (Creech 38)

Alternatively, Diderot states:

It has been said that actors have no character because by playing them all they lost the one Nature gave them, and they become false just as the doctor, the surgeon, and the butcher become hardened. I fancy that here cause is confounded with effect, and that they are fit to play all characters because they have none. (Diderot 128)

Actors, claims Diderot, become actors because they have no character, not because acting erases their character over time. Since the actor, according to Diderot, has no character (cause), he cannot be accused of being swayed by any ethics (effect). The actor is an empty vessel, a lack of character, and a cipher. Through the character *The First*, Diderot has successfully refuted antitheatricalists via logic. Diderot seems to ask of Plato, of Gosson, of Rousseau, where there is nothing, how can there be anything unethical or ethical? Diderot has, of course, exchanged one dilemma for another. He has thrown out an ancient insight at the cost of breaking new ground. *The Frankenstein* in Diderot appears not to care just what this Creature of his, this perfect acting-puppet¹⁵⁴ he conjured out of his brilliant logic, is capable of. Someone who is, by nature, nothing and who can be, by art, everything and everyone, is, according to Diderot, always someone on the edge of the law or on the fringes of society: a prostitute, a beggar, a seducer, a

¹⁵⁴ Diderot describes it as follows: "A great actor is also a most ingenious puppet, and his strings are held by the poet, who at each line indicates the true form he must take" (Diderot 123). This description of the genius-actor is deeply unsettling when one asks what happens outside the realm of the theatre. Who guides the strings of the genius puppet who is free to be everything while feeling nothing? The ethics of such a scenario do not move Diderot. He seems to take it as a given that such a genius-actor falls into criminal society outside the stage.

flatterer, a parasite. It must be asked why Diderot fought so hard to refute the antitheatricalists only to conclude that, yes, actors are rogues and vagabonds, but Plato and the other antitheatricalists must understand that it is not their fault. They have no character and, therefore, no conscience; that is what allows them to portray anything while being nothing. Which is genius. And genius, Diderot seems to say, abides no question. Genius is free. Genius is above ethics.

Diderot asserts that one must take the rough with the smooth, the monster with the genius. Such a conclusion is as unsettling as the one the anti-theatricalists arrived at in respect to actors. In fact, Diderot's conclusion may be even more unnerving. When he compares the genius-actor with the philosopher, it becomes clear that Diderot is attempting to perform cerebral—through purely logical (and, at times, strangely metaphysical) mind acrobatics—a profession that is rooted deeply in the body and the senses: “A great actor's soul is formed of the subtle element with which a certain philosopher¹⁵⁵ filled space, an element neither cold nor hot, heavy nor light, which affects no definite shape, and, capable of assuming all, keeps none” (Diderot 121). One can hear the collective groan of actors everywhere cutting through philosopher-filled space over the utter uselessness of this statement in the world of theatre. Diderot's mind is in the clouds, but the actor cannot afford to fall into the Thalean ditch for gazing at the stars. The actor must function in lesser realms of earthly embodiment. Since Diderot views the genius-actor as a freak of nature who has no character and no discernible soul, there are no practical uses for Diderot's essay for theatre practitioners. To theorists, I would argue, Diderot's *Paradoxe* continues to be appealing because it contains a brilliant game of logic played with language. However, as I mentioned in my comments on language and logic, solely because something brilliantly logical can be achieved in language does not mean it is true in reality. Such thinking confuses the map with the terrain. Diderot's claims observe the rules of language that correspond—as earlier stated—to the rules of the physical world, but they are *not* the physical world.

¹⁵⁵ Presumably, Diderot refers to Parmenides in this instance. In the fifth century BC, Parmenides stated that empty space is actually filled with an invisible medium. Aristotle later aligned himself with this theory.

In a way, Diderot aligns himself with all the theorists that came before him who argued that being a good actor cannot be learned but is a God-given talent. Other theorists may have viewed the Protean skill as a gift, while it is not at all clear that Diderot views it as a gift or, rather, more as a curse. The genius-actor is “a rare being,” “a most ingenious puppet,” “polished, caustic, and cold; proud, light of behavior, spendthrifts, self-interested; struck rather by our absurdities¹⁵⁶ than touched by our misfortunes; masters of themselves, . . . isolated, vagabonds, at the command of the great”; and of “a libertine spirit,” of “a vanity which might be termed insolence, a jealousy which fills their company with trouble and hatred,” of no soul, no honor or virtue, “cold,” etc. (Diderot 122, 123, 126, 127, cf. 130, cf. 132, 188). For an actor to have no character, it appears Diderot found a great many bad character traits to feature in such a non-character. A stickler for logic may find room to argue with Diderot here. The reason few actors bother to defend their profession against Diderot’s claims, I would argue, is because they view it as pointless. Diderot’s claims about the actor’s emotions can be neither proven nor disproven with logic, only with the senses or simply with common sense—and, these days, with neuroscience and biology. However, the logical aspect of his argument is irresistible to acting theorists who keep returning to Diderot (see Roach’s classic *The Player’s Passion*). Diderot clearly writes for other philosophers and theorists, not for theatre practitioners, and his answer to what gives a genius-actor the freakish quality of having absolutely no self (or selves) and a conscience is brimming with disdain. Why, indeed, should actors dignify Diderot’s onslaught on “this kind of people?” (Diderot 83). Irving bothered to argue with Coquelin and Diderot, claiming that Diderot took out his general dislike of people on actors. A less kindly inclined critic may suggest that Diderot’s essay savors of bitterness: “I grew disgusted with a calling for which I thought I had not enough talent,” confesses the philosopher (cf. Diderot 137). One does not need Freud to point out the problem with this statement. By confessing his envy, Diderot’s *Paradoxe* can be read as an act of sabotage. He vilifies the gift he was not given.

¹⁵⁶ The person Diderot describes repeatedly, who is struck by the absurdities of other people’s misfortunes rather than being touched by them, lacks all empathy. Such a person would be categorized as a sociopath these days. It is astonishing that contemporary scholars continue to defend Diderot’s description of actors. Not only is it discriminatory, but also he is pathologizing an entire profession without giving any proof.

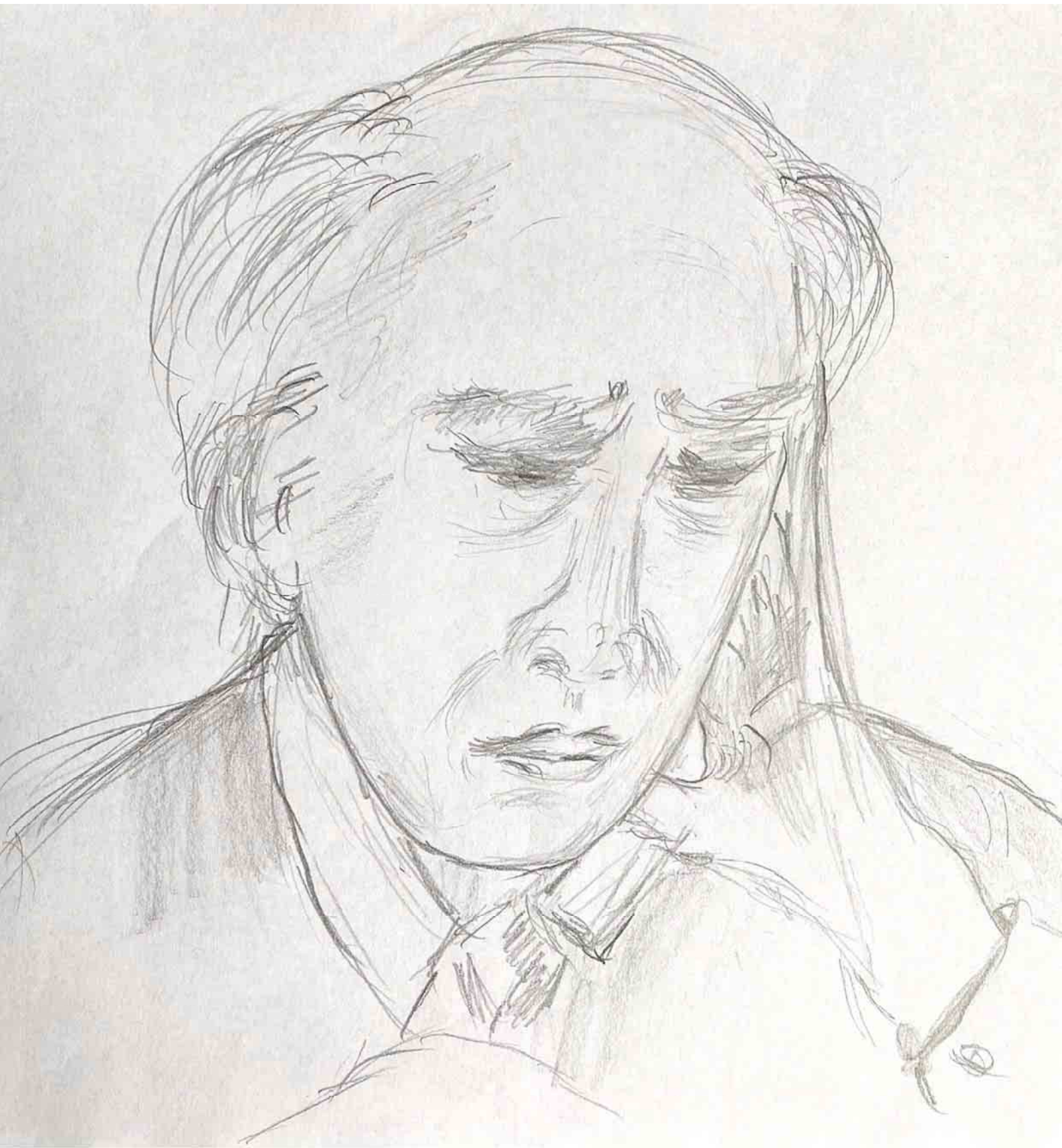
In conclusion, Diderot's absolute certainty regarding "what actors do" and "who they really are" must be questioned. He poses irresistible and thought-provoking questions, only to answer them with an authoritativeness that someone like Stanislavski would never have dared to espouse. Diderot's infallible confidence glosses over all doubt and ambiguity. His First Character often gets so carried away with his opinions that one must ask if he confuses conviction with clarity and if his arguments are built on both confirmation and desirability bias. Moreover, Diderot gives as his primary example for his theory not a scene from a play or a documented theatrical moment during a play, but a parlor trick that was improvised by David Garrick¹⁵⁷ at a private salon. Garrick's "acting skit" was taken completely out of context. Garrick knew that he was expected to perform "tricks" for the upper echelons of Paris at a private salon, and as a good actor and a good sport, he endeavored to give satisfaction. He was solely entertaining Paris's café society in the same way contemporary comedians are asked to tell jokes at private gatherings. Good actors accept and embrace the uncertainty of paradox as reality: Just because language and logic cannot capture paradox does not mean it does not exist. This means there is a lack of language and a limit to Western logic, and, of course, there is the Western model of science that dismisses everything that cannot be measured or categorized.

Commonsensibly speaking, "The natural objection to [Diderot] is that his reasoning is refuted by experience" (Sorensen 33). As Irving, Talma, and many actors and theatre practitioners have pointed out since, the senses tell us that Diderot is wrong, that Diderot's *Paradoxe* is "good in the way that counterfeit currency is good," and that, in the end, the *Paradoxe* is something akin to a long debate on "the controversy about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin" (cf. Sorensen 42). In summary: Diderot noticed an astounding facet of acting that no one before him had truly captured: its paradox. However, he got carried away

¹⁵⁷ The prime example Diderot gives of an actor not feeling the emotions he portrays is a moment in which the English actor David Garrick, on a visit to France, sticks his head out from behind a curtain and runs his facial expressions through all the main emotions. This example is not based on a play or within the context of a scene. It is a parlor trick of an actor who knows he is asked to private salons to amuse people. As it happens, David Garrick confided in a letter to a friend that he did not believe in the kind of mechanistic non-emotional acting Diderot advanced: "Thus I make a great difference between a great genius [actor] and a good actor. The first will always realize the feelings of his character, and be transported beyond himself; while the other, with great powers, and good sense, will give great pleasure to an audience, but never [he quotes Horace: wring or inflame the heart]" (cf. Garrick, *Private Correspondence*, "Letter to Sturz: Mr. Garrick, as to Madam Clairon," vol. 1, quoted in *Actors on Acting* 136). Garrick contradicts Diderot's theory completely.

and aligned the paradox with the rest of his philosophy (i.e., confirmation bias). In doing so, Diderot failed to demonstrate the *real* paradox of the actor, which is that he is both everything and nothing simultaneously, just not in the way Diderot interpreted it. To delineate my argument in greater detail, the powerful actor is full of emotion while mastering and observing (with double consciousness) that emotion in order to express it for the audience and to make the invisible visible. S/he is both actor and spectator. S/he is capable of wonder and embraces uncertainty. S/he is a heretic with two warring souls in one body. The good actor maintains and welcomes that warring tension. S/he does not reconcile the paradox. S/he does not synthesize double consciousness because s/he knows that it offers a greater perspective and understanding. Actors and theatre practitioners refer to this as the “presence” of an actor.

Expert actors know that their greatest gift is also the one most feared. Diderot noticed these points but then focused on sensibility, on “to feel or not to feel,” and that simply is not, as I argue, the gist of the paradox. It is merely one of its many effects or byproducts. In the end, it is “to feel *and* not to feel” because paradoxes are complex. They reflect on the world that certainty in an uncertain world is dangerous. As Gloucester says after learning just how far astray too much certainty can lead one: “And that’s true too” (*King Lear* 5.2.13). Diderot’s *Paradoxe* is extremely clever, but it disappoints in its conclusion, which is aimed more at breaking the mold than being insightful. It cares too much about demystifying acting theory and dehumanizing actors, and it often conjures the very dualities with which it tries to do away. It is no wonder that many actors reacted to the *Paradoxe* with disdain or indifference. Nonetheless, Diderot remains a wonderful “instigator” and Socratic gadfly, and I will re-examine the questions he asked in his *Paradoxe* throughout my analysis. In addition, I will further delve into Diderot’s recognition of the actor’s double consciousness, particularly in part II of my dissertation where I describe manifest Shakespearean performances. After all, as Stephen Greenblatt observed, “Shakespeare was a master of double consciousness” (Greenblatt, *Will in the World* 155).



1g) Stanislavski: Uniting Mind and Body, Science and Art

[B]lack only becomes black when some white is introduced for the sake of contrast. So let in just a bit of white color as well as some other colors of the rainbow into your role. There will be contrast, variety, and truth. Life is never like bad plays on the stage where some people are all black and others are all white. So, when you play a hypochondriac, seek where he is happy, virile, and full of hope. . . . When you play a good man, look for the places where he is evil, and in an evil man look for the places where he is good. . . . When you play an old man, look to see where he is young. When you play a young man, look to see where he is old. (Stanislavski, *My Life in Art* 183–184)

In 1885, a young Russian acting student became very frustrated with his own acting. He felt his acting school demonstrated very well the results of great acting, but it failed to teach the students *how* to arrive at those results. The young acting student dropped out of acting school because he realized that there was no system, no method. Consequently, he went to see many plays and observed many great actors. He realized that *they all had something in common*, but he could not pin it down. Just what was the secret of great acting? That was what the young amateur actor wanted to know. His name was Konstantin Sergeyevich Alekseyev, and he would later adopt the stage name “Stanislavski.” Throughout his life, Stanislavski tried to find answers to his questions about acting. He learned the hard way: by trial and error, by acting, by doing, and by failing. His search was open-ended and never finished. He did, however, leave a system for acting that was a steppingstone to the “how” behind great acting. Stanislavski’s system was never meant to be dogmatic in any way, but it was meant to be an exploratory guide. It has been misunderstood, taken out of context, not read in its entirety, poorly translated, not translated in its entirety

(Hapgood¹⁵⁸), and misinterpreted (Strasberg's Method is a severe and, at times, misleading reduction of Stanislavski's work). It has been criticized, condescended upon (via ad-hominem attacks contending that Stanislavski was an amateur because of his wealth¹⁵⁹), minimized, and dogmatized. Yet, no work has had a greater effect on acting theory and training since the 1920s. Theorists may always return to Diderot, whereas actors, theatre practitioners, and, surprisingly, some neuroscientists turn to Stanislavski in respect to acting. To write about what great actors do, it is imperative to be familiar with both Diderot and Stanislavski.

A theory such as Diderot's may be revolutionary in its observation of the paradox of acting and theatrical effectiveness. However, it hardly explains cogently and pragmatically *how* the actor becomes everything and nothing. To describe what an actor does and what makes an actor great, the basic elements of Stanislavski's system must be grasped: figuratively by understanding them and literally by embodying them. It is important to know that Stanislavski never stopped asking questions about acting, and he never stopped developing and improving his system until his death. He continuously doubted himself and was exceedingly self-effacing and self-critical. Furthermore, he was always willing to take the advice of others, both in his own discipline and from other disciplines, such as psychology, biology, and Eastern thought. The

¹⁵⁸ Hapgood was the first English translator of Stanislavski's works: "A series of historical accidents complicated the communication of his System in the rest of Europe and America. *An Actor's Work on Himself*, originally conceived of as one book, was published in two volumes in Russia, separated by 13 years. The English translator thought that the second volume was a revision, rather than a continuation, of the first. She also often distorted the meanings of Russian words. A highly significant example of this lies in the translation of the Russian word *perezhivanie*. A literal translation would be "living through" or "undergoing" an experience, but this was translated as "emotional identification." This has led to a common misconception that actors should completely identify with the character that they are playing. Stanislavski, himself, declared that an actor who thought that he was another person was "a pathological case" (Kemp 7). Stella Adler and Michael Chekhov implemented important changes into Stanislavski's system that were more in keeping with his original meaning. Importantly, Stanislavski was very often misinterpreted and poorly translated. When Stanislavski's work is read and interpreted in its entirety, it is both very helpful to actors and very insightful to scholars.

¹⁵⁹ It has been said repeatedly that Stanislavski was the heir to a wealthy textile merchant, and due to his background, he was only ever an amateur actor. He was not "forced" to make a living by acting: David Mamet, with the disclaimer that he does "not mean to denigrate [Stanislavski's] fervor and accomplishments," goes on to denigrate him by calling him "essentially an amateur . . . [who] came to the theater as a rich man" (Mamet 8). Since Stanislavski was not a "busker, gypsy, or mountebank" (cf. Mamet 8) who was forced to act and please an audience to support himself, Mamet argues, he had the luxury of studying his own performance. This criticism has been made by many others, not just David Mamet. Alternatively, it may be argued that—because he had the luxury to do anything he wanted—Stanislavski's choice to study acting theory and become an actor against his family's wishes was even more admirable. Instead of sipping vodka tonics in plush Moscow restaurants, Stanislavski worked his entire life to put together a cogent, pragmatic, and reliable acting method, and he never stopped asking questions.

actor Simon Callow explains Stanislavski's importance in his essay "Stanislavski Was Racked by Self-doubt" for *The Guardian*:

Stanislavski's formulation of the principles of acting is the foundation of most actors' approach: connecting the emotional life of the character with one's own; identifying their wants and actions; seeing how they fit into the play or script. Stanislavski was the first to identify these things, and to formulate a way in which actors could work on them, beyond imitation or intuition. . . . Stanislavski's fascination with human character, its diversity and complexity, has endured, though there remains, embedded in his system, a deep suspicion of actors and their ingrained proclivity for self-consciousness, for superficiality, for the conventional and imitative – the things of which he so profoundly suspected himself. (Callow, Simon, *The Guardian* 16 Mar. 2013)

In one of Stanislavski's moments of self-doubt, he took time away from his acting and saw performances by Eleonora Duse and Tomaso Salvini. What he gleaned from the two Italian master actors was that they had complete faith in what they did, and therefore, all their actions were utterly believable. Stanislavski saw and felt truth in these actors' actions. They had what Caroline Goyder calls "gravitas." They had purpose. They knew the value of their service to others.

Duse and Salvini had understood how to share themselves with the audience and how to have an interactive¹⁶⁰ relationship of give and take with the audience: They had understood how to tap into the energy of "emotional contagion" before neuroscience gave it a name:

¹⁶⁰ In Stanislavski's opinion, acting is "an art that relies upon human empathy and cooperation through collaborative work" (cf. *RC*, quoting Stanislavski 25).

Eleonora Duse as
Marguerite Gautier
in *Camille* (1892)



Stanislavsky (sic) imagines these flows of prana¹⁶¹ as “rays” that stream out of the eyes of actors, and which “engulf” their acting partners along with the spectators. . . . Acting, then, under Stanislavsky’s conception, is not a formally representative art, but an energetically and affectively catalytic one. The actor’s work on the self ultimately enables the spectator to enter into higher, purer psycho-physical states through the co-experiencing of theatrical actuality. (cf. Larlham 190)

Stanislavski noticed Duse and Salvini’s energy, which ran through the audience like a spark. They were completely open and allowed viewers into their souls. They also found a way to fully express themselves in the character of another:

This has always been, and will always continue to be, one of acting practice’s greatest – and most paradoxical – potentials: the possibility for self-discovery as another.¹⁶² This often exhilarating process can sometimes mean that “it is in the theatre alone that [the actor’s] life finds its full expression.” (cf. Larlham, quoting Stanislavski 205)

¹⁶¹ Stanislavski had studied the chakra system and hatha yoga. “Prana” is Sanskrit for “vital life force.” Stanislavski wrote to his translator Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood in 1935: “I have read what the Hindus have to say on the topic. They believe in the existence of so-called *prana*, a vital energy, a force that gives life to all of our body. According to their notions, the main supply of *prana* is found in the solar plexus, from where it is sent out to every organism” (“Stanislavsky and Ramacharaka,” *The Routledge Companion to Stanislavsky* 294). Soviet ideology likely forced Stanislavski to minimize his uses of yogic and Eastern terms such as “prana.” In turn, he used the term “energy” and speaks of “rays” and “radiation.” What is clear is that Stanislavski was deeply aware of Eastern thought. He maintained that there exists a deep connection between the mind and the emotions, and that there is energy/prana that links the actor with the audience.

¹⁶² Larlham eloquently elaborates on this important point, the interconnectedness of the actor and the audience, the intersubjective truth, and the paradoxical expression of oneself through another:

As the first writings in the Western tradition that begin to do justice to the complex inner lives of the “I” of the actor and the “I” of the spectator, Stanislavskian theory speaks back to philosophers of theatre like Diderot who attempt to make the complex psycho-physical processes of acting and spectating conform to prefabricated conceptual models. Stanislavsky’s philosophy of acting also speaks back to thought-systems that strive to erect themselves on a first principle of pure subjectivity. Against the solipsistic perspective of the lone contemplator, Stanislavsky forwards the inter-relational perspective of a man of the theatre, whose views on social being and doing are profoundly theatrical. Although Stanislavsky makes place in his theatrical philosophy for the actor’s pleasurable experience of the truth and integrity of his individual technique – and for the euphoric experience of oneness with the self that such technique can, at rare and precious moments, enable – he also proposes the intersubjective truth of “I believe you.” In life, as in the theatre, we come to know ourselves by coming to know others, and we can know others better by coming to know ourselves more deeply. (Larlham 210)

Stanislavski was fascinated by Duse and Salvini's energy and skills and tried to trace their abilities in his writings.

Stanislavski also observed that actors such as Duse and Salvini always acted toward a goal. Inspired by his observations, he began assembling his system. Stanislavski wrote his system in diary format, and—as did Plato, Cicero, and Diderot—in dramatic dialogue¹⁶³ format. Because of the original book's length (*An Actor's Work on Himself*), it was split into two books meant to be read together: *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*. A young acting student named Kostya (the young Stanislavski) is studying with and learning from an older director, Tortsov (the older Stanislavski). The first book tackles, head on, Diderot's issue of repeating emotion night after night. Stanislavski was well read in acting theory and was familiar with Diderot's writings. Kostya—similar to Diderot's description of the problem of inspiration in the paradox—finds inspiration during a performance, but has no idea where it came from and how he can repeat it. He goes on a quest to create the conditions for inspiration and emotion. The first thing Stanislavski points out is that everything that happens onstage must have a purpose. Instead of focusing on results, such as showing emotion, the young actor Kostya learns to focus on a task or an **action**¹⁶⁴ that leads to said emotion. For every action, there needs to be an **objective**. Kostya must ask himself, "Why is the character doing x?" Furthermore, Kostya learns to ask, "**What if**"¹⁶⁵? What would Kostya do in the character's shoes? When asked "what if" questions, people respond with actions, for example, "What if you gate crashed your enemy's party? What if you were about to be found out and possibly killed, but you meet the loveliest girl in the world? What do you do?" Romeo's answer is to risk all and climb a balcony to meet the lovely girl. Tartsov's example is: What if a violent and insane man was about to make his way into the apartment you are in? What do you do? You barricade the door, you seek a weapon to defend yourself with, you hide, etc. All these are actions with a clear objective. The emotion will follow.

¹⁶³ It is no accident that Plato, Cicero, Diderot, and Stanislavski chose the dramatic dialogue format. The dramatic dialogue not only spells out opposing views, but it also engages the reader/the audience to partake in the thoughts expressed. These dialogues are theatrical events that encourage contribution and active listening.

¹⁶⁴ I have put the most important Stanislavskian terms and ideas in boldface.

¹⁶⁵ Stanislavski says about the "magic if": "[T]he actor must treat fiction exactly as if it were reality" (*RC*, quoting Stanislavski 23).

The apartment and the insane man outside it are known as “**given circumstances**.” To fill in the given circumstances, Kostya needs **imagination**. Only with imagination can Kostya “live truthfully under imaginary circumstances.”¹⁶⁶ Kostya is encouraged to ask many questions about the character to portray him truthfully. When actors contemplate the purpose of their action onstage, they forget their stage fright and tension, says Tortsov. The actor **relaxes**: This process of self-observation must be mastered to the point where it becomes **second nature**.¹⁶⁷ The action of an actor with purpose behind it prevents artificiality. The purpose, however, must be concrete. For example, Romeo thinking, “I want to climb the balcony” is too general. The audience does not pay to see athletics. “I need to climb the balcony to meet the lovely girl” is more concrete. If **high-stakes** circumstances are added, the moment becomes riveting to watch: “I have to climb the balcony to meet the girl. If my enemy finds me in their house, they will kill me, but this is my only chance of meeting the love of my life. It is now or never.” When an action contains a psychological element, it becomes powerful, because the mind and the body are one. David Allen interprets Stanislavski’s passage on psycho–physical actions as follows: “Every physical action . . . contains a psychological element—and vice versa: [E]very psychological action has a physical component. The two things cannot be separated” (cf. Allen 128).

The objective must support the story, and sometimes, an actor must experiment to find it. For example, Romeo’s objective could be: “I will climb the wall for you, Juliet, and try to get you to fall in love with me, and I am willing to risk my life for it.” If that does not work with his acting partner, he may try, “I want to make you laugh, Juliet, and I am willing to play the clown, dance, do somersaults, even climb up walls to your balcony to get you to fall in love with me.” What Stanislavski had taken away from Salvini’s and Duse’s performances was that “every moment on stage must be filled with belief in the truthfulness of the emotion felt and the actions

¹⁶⁶ Sanford Meisner famously said and taught this. It is, I would argue, based in Stanislavski, whose method Meisner was trained in. More negatively put, as I quoted earlier, Meisner’s advice is very close to von Hummel’s statement about first deceiving oneself to deceive others. I would put it more positively: To truthfully exist in each moment of the play, the actor must create the play’s circumstances with his or her imagination. Imagination, after all, means to be open to possibilities that do not exist yet.

¹⁶⁷ “Second nature” is Stanislavski’s way of describing the necessity of double consciousness. The actor plays the character, and s/he observes herself/himself and edits herself/himself accordingly. Such mastery happens after long practice and understanding of the character. Stanislavski emphasizes the importance of double consciousness repeatedly. For Second Nature to happen, actors must master the art of relaxation and self-observation for it to become an unconscious, automatic habit.

carried out” (*An Actor Prepares* 142). There must be **faith** in the actions onstage and a **sense of truth**. This does not mean that all acting must be naturalistic or realistic. A symbolist play, as an example, does not call for realistic acting. All actions must, however, be performed sincerely to make them credible. A fantastical, eccentric character does not call for realism, but in all his idiosyncrasies, he still must be rendered truthfully.

What Stanislavski observed in Salvini was that he could repeat emotion night after night. Stanislavski deduced that Salvini has a special technique for reviving a particular personal memory that he can connect to his character. Out of this line of thought came the terms **emotion memory** or **affective memory**.¹⁶⁸ (The latter was what Lee Strasberg focused on and interpreted very differently from Stanislavski.) To Stanislavski, “the broader [the actor’s] memory of emotions, the richer your material for inner creativity” (*An Actor Prepares* 210). The actor needs a wide-reaching perspective to creatively and imaginatively bring a character to life that differs from him. No actor can completely identify with being the prince of Denmark, whose father has been murdered. To give life to Hamlet takes imagination in combination with emotion memory and a rich treasure of **observations of human nature**. Stanislavski was very aware of the risk involved in evoking personal emotions, and he knew that emotions cannot be forced directly. His system, therefore, opens up a way of accessing the actor’s subconscious and underlying emotions indirectly, mainly through physical actions.

When he introduces the belief in physical actions, Stanislavski foresees what neuroscientists have demonstrated in recent years, and what I will address in detail shortly:

¹⁶⁸ Notably, Strasberg’s notion of “affective memory” is very different from Stanislavski’s. Strasberg asks actors to rouse personal memories and emotions to portray a character. He personalizes the character, instead of using imagination and physicality. Stanislavski may have begun his study with personal emotions, but he ended his work on a very different, imaginative, and physically driven note. Stella Adler met with an old Stanislavski and brought some of his ideas back to the States to discuss with the members of the Actor’s Studio (founded by Robert Lewis, Adler, and Elia Kazan). Strasberg steadfastly declined to employ Stanislavski’s later ideas, namely, the Method of Physical Actions that allowed internal and external acting to coexist. Adler realized that Strasberg, “by defining the actor’s autobiography as the source of authenticity in performance, . . . made the actor more important than the character, thus obscuring artistic truth of the fictional character. Nevertheless, during the second half of the twentieth century, many people in America and England conflated the Method with Stanislavski’s System” (Kemp 7). Strasberg’s approach was psychological, whereas toward the end of his life Stanislavski emphasized the importance of “psychophysical” acting, which combines the psychological and the physical.

In the early part of his career, these [exercises in psychological credibility and emotional authenticity] focused on what he called ‘inner’ aspects, but towards the end of his life he recognized that physical activity could prompt thought and feeling: “Physical truth, and faith in that truth, call out inner spiritual truth and faith, and these free emotion, which comes from its secret hiding place, and begins to enter into all that takes place on stage.” In this, and many other statements, Stanislavski demonstrated an intuitive prescience of what cognitive science now tells us about the relationship between physical action, thought, and feelings. (Kemp, quoting Stanislavski 6)

David Allen condenses Stanislavski’s notion of emotion, body, mind, and imagination working together holistically: Since emotions “are elusive and cannot be forced [the actor] must use his mind to initiate and activate [his] creativity. [He] also needs to stir [his] will, [his] desire to create. The three elements always act together” (cf. Allen 135). Stanislavski, himself, puts the bond between the physical and the mental: “This created a kind of method from the outer to the inner, from the body to the soul, based upon an unbreakable bond between physical and psychical nature” (Stanislavski, *My Life in Art* 182). When the actor accomplishes this bonding of elements, emotions can be repeated in every performance, as has been demonstrated by countless actors over time.

This technique, then, contradicts Diderot’s First Character, who was certain emotions could not be repeated every night, only imitated. Emotions can be repeated (through physical action, imagination, or verbal cues, for example). Stanislavski demonstrates one way (not *the* way, for there are many ways) of repeating emotions. He explained how to evoke emotions in the same place during the play. Emotions are just as repeatable as actions because they are interconnected. Emotions are a byproduct of an action. Diderot simply never thought like an actor; therefore, he could not explain what actors did. The actor playing Romeo does not climb to Juliet’s balcony to “show” her his emotions: An unsolicited emotional donation is never appreciated, as the other party feels manipulated. Emotional donations are about the self, and acting must concern the other. Solely showing “feeling” is going in for effect instead of affecting the other party. It is a cliché and purely declamatory. “So what?” would be Juliet’s (and the



audience's) response. So, she may think, Romeo feels something.¹⁶⁹ Thus far, however, Romeo has done nothing to **affect** Juliet. He has soliloquized about Juliet while gazing up at her in the window. He now needs an action and an objective to affect Juliet. Romeo climbs the wall¹⁷⁰ to make Juliet fall in love with him. The latter is a concrete action. Romeo must persuade (action) Juliet that she is the love of his life, and he is willing to risk (action) his life for her by climbing a wall, to get her to (action) fall in love with him or die trying. Emotion will automatically come as a byproduct of Romeo's actions. Furthermore, Romeo is never concerned with himself or his own emotions. He is not self-indulgent. He is concerned with Juliet and how to affect her. Therefore, Romeo barges in on Juliet's private moment—he “stumbles on her counsel” (cf. *R&J* 2.2.56)—and Juliet is both annoyed and intrigued by Romeo's audacity.

Stanislavski goes on to explain that Romeo [in my example] has a **scene objective** (the goal he sets himself for each scene) and a **super objective** (Romeo's overall goal in the play). Romeo's scene objective, as above, could be: “I want to get Juliet to fall in love with me.” Romeo's super objective could be, “I want to overcome all obstacles on the path to love.” If Romeo pursued this super objective throughout the play, it would be called his “**through line**.” All the small lines of Romeo's scene objectives must tend toward his super objective, also known as the “**ruling idea**” of the play. Super objectives are essential because they are the driving force behind dynamic performances. Without a super objective and a through line, Romeo is just a boy hanging out with the Montague clan in Verona, moaning about being in love with different girls and sometimes getting into fights with the Capulet clan. Without a super objective and a through line, Chekhov's *Three Sisters* is a play about three sisters wailing endlessly about getting out of

¹⁶⁹ Chubbuck emphasizes this point beautifully: “Acting is the interplay between people. There is a powerful difference between someone saying, ‘I want love,’ and someone saying to you, ‘I’m going to *get you* to love *me*.’ With the first statement, you can shrug your shoulders and say, ‘Fine, great, good luck, don’t we all?’ Whereas the second statement *changes* the other person. They are forced to react. They may be ecstatic, destroyed, afraid, but the response will be real. It helps to think about SCENE OBJECTIVE as an affective action you need to take to establish a human relationship of some kind. You have to change the other person to ultimately get what you want” (Chubbuck 24).

¹⁷⁰ Since the stage direction “Juliet appears above at a window” was not originally given by Shakespeare but by ensuing editors, the balcony scene is not necessarily a balcony scene. The context demands that Romeo overhears (spies on) Juliet's soliloquy and then decides to encroach upon her private moment. Romeo gatecrashes twice that night: first, when he enters the Capulets' house, and second, when he enters Juliet's private sphere and thoughts. Since I am merely using the scene as an illustration for some of Stanislavski's most important terms and ideas, it is not important where exactly Romeo surprised Juliet, but it is important that he does it (the action).

the provinces. No one wants to see empty lamenting. The audience wants to see the three sisters *do something, do anything, and do whatever it takes to get out of the provinces*. The three sisters want to live in Moscow. They want to laugh and revel in urban excitement. They want a better life and must fight for it throughout the play. Romeo wants Juliet, and he must prove to her (and to the audience) that it is worth it to overcome all obstacles (which is almost everyone in the play) on the path to love.

Acting coach Ivana Chubbuck distills Stanislavski's explanation excellently. Chubbuck says the actor must play to win, always. No one wants to see a victim. Even if the character does lose or die in the end, s/he must play to win, to win the scene, to win the play:

An actor must learn to use emotions, not as an end result, but as a tool to provide the passion to overcome the conflict of the script. . . . Many actors fall into the trap of believing that just being real or having real, deep emotional feelings is acting—it is not. Too many actors feel that if they have reached real tears in their work that they have successfully fulfilled the role. It's how you use those emotions to fuel your goal that makes the art of acting exciting to play as well as to watch. Without the purpose of a goal, without the struggle to win, the purely emotional actor will be victim to the circumstances of the script, and no one likes to watch a victim be a victim. We want to watch a person change their life, not accept abuse. (Chubbuck 7)

In fact, Stanislavski built his system on and around human nature. The elements of his system are there, so actors can create the conditions that help them to live through their parts on cue. Stanislavski said that the goal of his system could be summarized as “the subconscious through the conscious.”¹⁷¹ Simply speaking, the actor must know which physical and psychological buttons to push to arrive at the right external outcome.

Stanislavski saw that there was “no hard separation between the psychological and the physical, . . . [and he] formulated an early version of his dictum that the actor could reach the

¹⁷¹ The exact text runs as follows: “We use the conscious technique of creating the physical body of a role and by its aid achieve the creation of the subconscious life of the spirit of a role” (Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares* 160). Stanislavski's chapter “On the Threshold of the Subconscious” in *An Actor Prepares* is dedicated to the subject.

unconscious, i.e., inspiration and creativity, only through pursuing conscious objectives” (cf. Blair 31). Stanislavski’s “evolving approach was to shift his focus from having the actor generate a feeling that would lead into action, to having the actor define an action as the way to feeling” (Blair 31). Stanislavski studied the James-Lange theory,¹⁷² which revolutionized psychology by claiming that action motivates emotion, not the other way around. The physical shaped “mental and emotional processes, and it treated the organism as a single entity, in which physical, mental, and emotional life were all aspects of the same thing” (Blair 31). Therefore, it was imperative to Stanislavski that actors knew how to move their bodies. Most people are not truly aware of their own bodies or what physical impression they make on others. Actors’ bodies are their instruments. The body does the doing, the action, and to act with purpose, the body must be one with the mind. It is no different for the voice. Stanislavski thought that speech was like music and that the text of a play was the melody. Acting ought to follow a **score**. The voice also must be one with the mind, and that means endless practice. Stanislavski viewed language and words as treasures. They can be used in many ways to express the human soul.

When I use Stanislavski’s terms, I am neither reading the past through a contemporary lens nor am I reading acting through Stanislavski’s lens. He created the terms but not the acting behind them. Actors have acted with great purpose and moved audiences since the Dionysian¹⁷³ festivities. To describe what an actor does and how they do it, in detail, Stanislavskian terms will be useful. Furthermore, Stanislavski was instrumental in creating a holistic approach to acting, an approach repeatedly picked up by later theorists who study acting with neuroscience, such as Susanna Bloch, Rhonda Blair, John Lutterbie, Rick Kemp, Bruce McConachie, and Amy Cook. Blair points out that Stanislavski “worked in a broad range of theatrical genres (including opera), he used Raja yoga to condition the actor not just physically, but mentally through the uses of meditation and visualization, he used eurythmics to shape the actor’s physical work; . . . he drew on scientific materialism . . . and experimental psychology” (cf. Blair 29). Additionally, Blair—as does Rick Kemp in *Embodied Acting*—begins her study of acting and cognitive science with a

¹⁷² The James-Lange theory of 1884–1885 (by William James and Carl Lange) proposed that emotions occur as a physiological reaction to events. In turn, people’s emotional reactions depend on how they evaluate their physical reactions. I explain the latter in my cognitive neuroscience chapter in greater detail.

¹⁷³ Very likely before then, but not as well documented.

chapter on Stanislavski because his “quest runs through the heart of modern acting training” (cf. Blair 26, Kemp 5–7).

Furthermore, Stanislavski greatly influenced Vsevolod Meyerhold, Michael Chekhov, Yevgeni Vakhtangov, Bertold Brecht, Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner, Jerzy Grotowski, Joseph Chaikin, F. M. Alexander, Moishe Feldenkreis, Michael Shurtleff, Kristin Linklater, Patsy Rodenburg (cf. Blair 26–27), Uta Hagen, Viola Spolin, Anne Bogart, Tina Landau, Larry Moss, Declan Donnellan, Augusto Boal, Ivana Chubbuck, and countless actors. Hence, it is essential to understand Stanislavski’s terms and his system in at least distilled form to build on it. There is a reason Stanislavski is affectionately known as “Stan the Man”¹⁷⁴ among actors.

¹⁷⁴ British tabloids such as *The Sun* have noticed Stanislavski’s nickname. *The Sun* recently explained Stanislavski’s Google Doodle with the headline: “Stan’s the Man” (*The Sun* 17 Jan. 2019). The same article also refers to Stanislavski as “the most influential acting coach you’ve never heard of” (*The Sun* 17 Jan. 2019).

CHAPTER 2:

NEW SCIENTIFIC APPROACHES TO ACTING: NEUROSCIENCE AND AFFECT THEORY

2a) Emotion Theory and Neuroscience Trailblazers: Elly Konijn and Susana Bloch

Elly Konijn's Study on Actors' Emotions of 1997

I argue that Stanislavski was correct in his holistic approach to acting and that Diderot's theory about actors and their emotions is wrong. Diderot had argued that actors are at their best when they feel nothing while the audience feels everything. Since my following chapters will demonstrate how mirror neurons¹⁷⁵ illuminate empathy and emotion in greater detail, it is imperative I address Elly Konijn's 1997 statistical field study¹⁷⁶ on actors and emotions from her book *Acting Emotions*. Konijn's study remains the only one of its kind widely published, and it is referenced in many contemporary essays on acting theory. Her study of actors and their emotions was a precursor to many points addressed later in cognitive neuroscience. Konijn analyzed, in depth, actors' emotions onstage via a questionnaire mailed to professional union actors in both the United States and the Netherlands. Her effort and the ruling idea behind her analysis remain impressive and groundbreaking. Konijn meant to answer the question of actors feeling emotions onstage by capturing data statistically. Konijn's study asked if the actors' emotions on stage

¹⁷⁵ Mirror neurons are a highly contentious topic in the science community. Many researchers have interpreted them overzealously to serve their interests. Having said that, I agree with Harvard University's blog (2016) on the matter (mentioned in my chapter on mirror neurons) and with *Forbes*' Nick Morgan's similar skeptical, but open-minded approach. He says there is no need to give up on mirror neurons solely because the effects and ramifications of them have not been proven beyond a doubt yet. He also advises readers to tread carefully with speculation and confirmation bias:

[T]he science that underpins most of the more far-fetched application of the idea of mirror neurons is unproven. Well, yes. But for precisely the reason that other scientists have leaped with too much enthusiasm on the mirror neurons idea—its explanatory power—we shouldn't be ready to give up on it yet. It is the best explanation for how the human mind accomplishes certain things as quickly and accurately as it does. It just hasn't been finally proven yet. It's a *hypothesis*. . . . Sure, we have lots more work to do to understand mirror neurons, human empathy, and the brain in general. We're infants on that journey of understanding. But until someone comes along with something better, mirror neurons are a powerful way to explain and understand some vital aspects of the human mind, and there's good—if preliminary—evidence that they are real. (cf. Morgan, *Forbes*, 2014)

¹⁷⁶ Importantly, Konijn begins her study with a long chapter on Diderot, who is ubiquitous in acting theory.

coincided with their characters' emotions. However, Konijn's conclusions about the actors' responses disappoint because they are founded on problematic ground.

It is unclear how familiar the actors who completed Konijn's questionnaire were with expert terms such as "task emotions." It cannot be gleaned from Konijn's interpretation of her survey's results if the actors fully understood the questions they had been asked. Konijn's survey is flawed, as she, herself, explains in the conclusion of her book. I can only base my reading of Konijn's field study by interpreting *her* interpretation of her study. Unfortunately, she did not include the actual questionnaire and its original definitions of terms in her book, which represents an additional obstacle to my further evaluation of her work. To begin with one example that compromises Konijn's study, her questionnaire did not properly define what she meant by an actor's and a character's respective "task emotions" ("emotions that relate to accomplishing [an actor's] acting task [such as 'challenge, tension, and excitement'"; cf. Konijn 150). Konijn employs the term "task emotions" as "the emotions actors may experience because of performing before an audience," such as "listless, tired, tensed, excited, strong, challenged, certain" (cf. Konijn 134). Task emotions are not what most people consider basic (or "prototypical," as Konijn calls them) emotions (such as joy, sadness, anger, disgust, fear, and surprise) but heightened states of being "related to the doing of acting" (Konijn 10). The term "task emotions" is built on Stanislavski's idea that emotion springs from a task or an action. However, it is not likely that all the actors who filled out Konijn's questionnaire were intimately familiar with Stanislavski¹⁷⁷ and his specialized terms.

Thalia Goldstein, building on Konijn's study, explained task emotions in greater detail. Goldstein calls them "metacognition": "Actors must be able to reflect on the needs of their character (convince their lover not to leave them), their audience (make sure I'm in the light so everyone can see), and themselves as actors (save some breath for the next big scene) to balance a performance adequately. This metacognition, sometimes called task emotions, allows an actor to perform, not just feel" (Goldstein, *Psychology Today*). Konijn's task-emotion theory "proposed that actors experience emotions related to the actual situation of live performance.

¹⁷⁷ While almost every actor in the world is familiar with Stanislavski and some of his basic ideas, few are intimately familiar with his special terms and late work. I conjecture that many actors who completed Konijn's questionnaire may have understood her terms more generally and answered her questions accordingly.

However, these task emotions will not coincide with the character emotions portrayed” (Konijn 146). Konijn finds that “professional actors, in general, did not experience the same emotions as they portrayed in their roles” (Konijn 147). However, Konijn admits that “actors might have attributed emotions that fall into the category of task-emotions to their characters because the actors employed or transformed their task-emotions to portray character-emotions” (154). The actors’ responses, therefore, are likely to concern what they took to mean “emotion” in its more general meaning. Furthermore, it is likely that the actors—merely by performing the actions of their characters—felt the corresponding emotion without being aware of it. Human beings subconsciously feel emotions constantly without being aware of them. It is not until these emotions reach consciousness (when they officially become “feelings”) that they are registered and interpreted by the person who “feels” them.

The lack of proper definitions is one problem with Konijn’s study. Another even bigger problem is her reliance on the written answers of actors about their emotions onstage (some responded with a recent performance in mind; some responded with a performance and the emotion it evoked from quite some time ago). What adds to the problem is that emotions occur unconsciously, automatically, and often involuntarily. The feelings (emotions-made-conscious) that the actors describe in writing in Konijn’s study are, therefore, only a small percentage of what may or may not have occurred with respect to underlying or background emotions. Emotions are difficult to prove in the first place: Konijn pins her faith on actors remembering exactly what they felt during certain performances, which represents a predicament, as she herself admits: “Because the study was retrospective, the unspecified experiences or special circumstances could have had an unintended effect on the results. The recollection of emotional experiences during the chosen scenes could have easily been colored by other experiences or situations” (cf. Konijn 148). Even if the starting point is to believe the actors’ retrospective answers, they are still impossible to trace and prove. Once more, Konijn, herself, addresses this very problem: “One problem regarding written questions about emotional experiences was that words describing an emotion are not necessarily a reflection of emotional experience; naming an

emotion is not the same as feeling it” (Konijn 149). Konijn's explanation may sound like a small fly in the ointment; in fact, it renders the entire study complex and, at worst, invalid.

After having studied emotions for over forty years, Paul Ekman remains skeptical about speaking and writing about them: “I have some doubts about the validity of what [many psychologists] have suggested [about emotions], as it is based on *what people tell them*, and none of us is aware of what our mind is doing at the moment it is doing it” (cf. Ekman 30, emphasis mine). I share Ekman’s skepticism regarding speaking and writing about emotions, particularly in hindsight. Even when read through the lens of Stanislavski’s late work, it can be argued that the character’s “nature” should have become the actor’s “second nature” (the actor would have completely internalized and mastered the character’s nature). Having said that, the character’s emotions would have been integrated into the actor’s work so profoundly that they would have been rendered unconscious. The latter also makes it difficult at best and impossible at worst to speak or write about the emotions felt during performance. Moreover, many terms that Konijn defines as “task emotions,” such as “concentrated,” “challenged,” or “excited,” could easily coexist with a character’s emotion. An actor would arguably recall being “challenged” and “concentrated” more than an intended prototypical character emotion, such as “sadness.” The latter would have been constant during rehearsals, whereas the adrenaline-induced “concentration,” “excitement,” or “nerves” would only occur during actual performances in front of an audience. Just because an actor remembers being tense during a scene does not mean that he or she did not perform another emotion simultaneously, subconsciously or not. The actor would be likelier to recall the more dramatic, adrenaline-riddled, hair-raising “task emotion” of stress, anxiety, “nerves,” and general stage fright.

Konijn’s study, to put it into chronological perspective, is from 1997. Much has been researched and innovated in the field of cognitive science since then. For example, fMRI¹⁷⁸ imaging can prove which parts of the brain fire or light up when emotions are felt, which parts do not, and when certain neurons fire. For example, Thalia R. Goldstein has conducted various studies since Konijn’s book was published. Most of the results Goldstein found—and is finding

¹⁷⁸ N.b. that “fMRI” stands for “functional magnetic resonance imaging.” Accordingly, fMRI is a non-invasive technology that allows scientists and physicians to take a picture/scan of the brain. fMRIs enable scientists and physicians to look at and interpret activity in the brain by measuring the blood flow.

—overrule many of the answers Konijn’s actor questionnaire received. Goldstein argues “that without the ability to understand deeply what a character is thinking and feeling, to feel the emotions of the character, and to create and regulate emotions in oneself, one will never be considered a great actor” (Goldstein, “Perspectives on Acting” 6). Goldstein’s argument has been made many times by orators, poets, and actors, such as Quintilian, Sir Philip Sidney, and Henry Irving. However, Goldstein set out to study and find evidence for her argument, some of which she did, and some of which is still a work in progress. Goldstein and Winner found, for example, that actors from a young age onwards were “especially *attuned* to others’ emotions/motivations [and that they were] considered *highly sensitive*” (cf. Goldstein, quoting Goldstein and Winner’s study, “Perspectives on Acting” 7, emphasis mine). Good actors are, I would also argue, always emotionally intelligent: “But emotionally intelligent people do more than notice expressions; they tune¹⁷⁹ in to—and share—others’ emotions” (Graves, “Unlock Your Emotional Intelligence,” *Times Special Edition: Science of Emotions (TSE)* 13).

Goldstein hypothesized that good actors “should have strength in *theory of mind*,¹⁸⁰ *empathy*, and *adaptive emotion regulation*” (Goldstein, “Perspectives” 8, emphasis mine). When Goldstein speaks of the theory of mind, she refers to “the ability to accurately ‘read’ or infer a person’s facial expression, body language, prosody, verbal utterances, and knowledge of information available on the person [character] in question” (Goldstein, “Psychological Perspectives on Acting” 7). The other important ingredient in an actor’s toolbox is, of course, empathy. Goldstein refers to “empathy” as “the ability to feel another’s feelings,” which she distinguishes from “the understanding of another’s emotions, which is a component of the theory of mind” (cf. Goldstein, “Perspectives” 7). By “emotion regulation,” Goldstein refers to the

¹⁷⁹ Notably, even in a recent study on emotions, *Time’s* “The Science of Emotions” of January 2021, the writer chose the same musical metaphor that Anne Bogart and numerous other scholars and journalists did when writing about good acting and actors. True, Ginny Graves was not writing about actors in particular, but it is telling that she uses the same metaphor for emotionally intelligent people, which good actors must be.

¹⁸⁰ The American Psychological Association (APA) defines the “Theory of Mind” (“ToM”) as follows:

the understanding that others have intentions, desires, beliefs, perceptions, and emotions different from one’s own and that such intentions, desires, and so forth affect people’s actions and behaviors. Children show the rudiments of theory of mind as toddlers, have a limited understanding of the relation between belief and action by age 3, and can begin to infer false beliefs in others by around age 4. (*APA Dictionary of Psychology, American Psychological Association 2020*)

“ability to understand and control one’s emotions” (cf. Goldstein, “Perspectives” 8). Emotion regulation is actors’ proficiency in their emotions and their ability to walk the line between what Goldstein calls “adaptive” and “dysfunctional” emotions (cf. Goldstein, “Perspectives” 8). It is important to point out that if Goldstein’s argument is correct, it does not necessarily refute the answers Konijn’s study received, namely, that actors of both the attachment and detachment schools do not feel the same emotions as their characters. In fact, in the manner Paul Ekman explains it, it is entirely possible that—since much of people’s emotional life occurs unconsciously and automatically—it is impossible to speak and write about it with great accuracy: “When we are in the grip of an emotion, a cascade of changes occurs in split seconds, without our choice or immediate awareness” (Ekman 65). Additionally, “how we interpret what is happening within us and in the world” also plays into how a person speaks about emotions after the fact (cf. Ekman 65).

Having mentioned some of the more current findings on emotions, which I will explain in greater detail in my next subchapter “Emotion Reconsidered,” I am not discounting Konijn’s study. In bridging the dichotomous acting approaches of either “involvement with” or “detachment from” characters, her study is beneficial. The answers that the actors—of both the

involvement and detachment schools¹⁸¹—gave in Konijn’s study reflect that the acting approaches they employed have no bearing on what happens during performance. Both the involvement-approach-actors and detachment-approach-actors gave similar responses to the question about their emotions during a performance. There need not be an “either/or” approach to acting. Moreover, as Ekman points out, “We know from scientific study that two emotions can occur in rapid sequence repeatedly. Two emotions also can merge together in a blend”¹⁸² (Ekman 69). This is the very blend that Rhonda Blair repeatedly mentions in her study. Ekman explains how “[f]or some people an angry argument is enjoyable, and many people enjoy a good cry when seeing a sad movie” (cf. Ekman 59). Konijn’s affect theory study is best viewed as a steppingstone to further insight. Her statistical analysis of the actors and their stage emotions served as a catalyst for further research. When Konijn set out to record and prove the actors’

¹⁸¹ Cindy Rosenthal (*Theatre Journal*) voices a valid critique of Konijn’s conflation of Stanislavski’s system with Strasberg’s method. Moreover, Rosenthal indicates some of the same weaknesses that I do in Konijn’s study:

Both Hodge and Elly A. Konijn cite the importance of Denis Diderot’s *Paradox of the Actor*, especially regarding the portrayal of emotions, to the theoretical underpinnings of their work. The question of emotion is the starting point for the cognitive science research project at the heart of Konijn’s text, which leads her to conduct a methodical survey designed to assess the validity of her “task emotion theory.” Konijn’s theory suggests that what reads to an audience as an actor’s real emotion onstage is actually the emotional state or energy generated by the challenge of the act/job of performing the anxiety, excitement, and/or tension an actor experiences in “going for it.” (Rosenthal 675)

Moreover, Rosenthal observes that:

This idea is contrary to what Konijn calls the “involvement” style of acting, whereby an actor’s emotion onstage results from her or his connection to a character’s emotional state, acquired through a process that includes an actor’s understanding of and investment in a character’s given circumstances and/or intention in a scene. Her classification of contemporary Western acting methods/styles into three categories may be at the root of some over-simplifications and generalizations about acting theories and theorists in the book. The first category is the involvement style (in which she conflates Strasberg’s Method and Stanislavski’s System); the others are the detachment style (Meyerhold and Brecht are linked in this category) and the self-statement style (Brook and Grotowski are partnered here). Although two-thirds of the actors Konijn surveyed were from the United States (the other third was a mix of Dutch and Flemish actors), Strasberg is the only American interpreter of Stanislavski whom Konijn cites in her analysis. I wondered what impact Meisner’s and Adler’s perspectives might have had on Konijn’s findings if these techniques had been included in her examination of U.S. acting practices. (Rosenthal 675)

¹⁸² What Ekman calls a “blend” is really more of a paradox. Two contradictory strains of emotion run parallel. It is very possible to be angry during an argument, yet enjoy it. It is also a well-known catharsis to feel both sadness and relief.

statements on emotion statistically, if not scientifically, she raised more questions¹⁸³ than she answered, but her questions got the ball rolling in the right direction. Others have since picked up where she left off.

Alba Emoting: Susana Bloch

In the 1970s, before Konijn's study and substantial research and findings in cognitive neuroscience regarding acting theory, Susana Bloch began to work on a system that evokes emotions physiologically. This system is called Alba Emoting and has been refined throughout the years. Bloch—a neuroscientist, neurophysiologist, and psychologist—proposed that each primary (what Konijn called “prototypical”) emotion can be brought forth in three ways: 1) through a specific breathing pattern, 2) through a specific muscle tension/posture, and 3) through a specific facial expression. Bloch began experimenting with her system by working with trained actors. According to Bloch, the three physiological action patterns—breathing, posture, and facial expression—“help people to express, recognize, and modulate their emotions creatively, to better recognize them in others, and to transmit them without ambiguity” (cf. Bloch, “Introduction,” *Alba Emoting: A Scientific Method for Emotional Induction*). Bloch's goal was for actors to “call up an emotion, and to learn to leave it at will, by means of precisely controlled physical actions” (33). What Bloch found was, in part, revolutionary. Bloch's system may not have the same scientific provability and empirically rooted point of departure that current neuroscience has with, for example, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), electroencephalography

¹⁸³Rosenthal, as do I, acknowledges the value of Konijn's study. Rosenthal also observes similar issues with Konijn's work, such as insufficient evidence and imperfect theories and descriptions of theories:

Although Konijn's analysis of her findings ultimately supports her thesis, the difficulties and obstacles she encountered in conducting her survey in the United States raise questions about some of her conclusions. At times, Konijn's statements are not supported with evidence. For example, she declares that an actor experiences stage fright only prior to, not during a performance (52), but she offers no proof of this claim. Because the book illuminates an important aspect of the acting process, specifically, the onstage experience in a new way, *Acting Emotions* merits some praise as an acting theory text. However, because of the omissions and the lack of substantiating evidence cited above, and particularly because the book does not clarify how “task-emotion theory” could be used by an actor in rehearsal as s/he is playing an emotion or creating a role, the book perhaps has limited value for practitioners. (Rosenthal 676)

(EEG), and magnetoencephalography (MEG). Nonetheless, Bloch's system was ingenious and prescient.

Bloch perceived the same need that many other scholars did for a system that trains actors holistically. She perceived the splitting of mind and body in acting theory and at acting schools around the world, and she sought to integrate a system into acting training that allowed actors to express emotions physiologically, that allowed them to evoke, control, and maintain emotions, and that allowed them to switch swiftly between emotions. Kemp finds that Bloch's system has "a congruity with Ekman's findings on the reflexive relationship between facial expression and emotion, and with Damasio's explanation of the way in which the subjective experience (feeling) of emotion arises from physiological symptoms" (Kemp 184). Kemp finds fault with Bloch's conflation of certain emotions and her combination of certain physiological emotional expressions. Kemp's reading and interpretation of Bloch is very similar to my reading of Konijn's study: There is a lack of detailed definitions and scientific demonstrability within her system. Having said that, many actors have found her system to work well for them.¹⁸⁴ Patricia Angelin teaches Bloch's system in North America (called the Alba technique there) with Bloch's support. Angelin's blog entry on her website, interestingly enough, makes a point about the Alba technique that could have come right out of Joseph Roach's book *It*:

When I first started teaching the Alba technique, I wondered if having deeper access to the emotions could give actors that ever-elusive "It-Factor." The thing for which directors and casting people are constantly on the lookout. An actor who has "It" compels us to keep watching, and "It" is what everyone wants to have. It is my firm belief that by getting to know oneself on a deeper level, through the lens of specific emotions, one can approach every job and audition knowing full well that you do, in fact, have "It." ... you'll have access to a deeper, universal truth that will floor anyone watching. You'll

¹⁸⁴ The Alba emoting technique has always sounded rather far-fetched to me, like something in between Enya and Gregorian chant. However, taking my own advice from this dissertation, I kept an open heart and mind, and I decided that the only way to address the matter was to try Bloch's system myself. Consequently, I tried Bloch's "sadness pattern," and it worked like a charm for me within seconds. If it worked for me because I am a trained actor or because I was in the "sadness pattern" during the stressful writing of a five-year-long doctoral dissertation, I cannot say for sure. What I can say is that I was dead wrong to judge the Alba technique as newfangled New Ageism. Whatever the exact science behind it may be, the technique works if the actor is open to receiving it.

come across as someone really *living* in the story, not just another actor who has done his or her homework. (Angelin, Patricia, “Having ‘It,’” *Alba Technique Blog*, 24 Mar. 2017)

Angelin explains how an actor might achieve “It.” She does not solely mire it in a web of mystery.

The deep knowledge of oneself may indeed allow the ability to access and play multitudinous different or contrasting emotional notes. As Vladimir Mirodan points out, the Alba technique “has recently been incorporated into the curriculum of a UK conservatoire” (Mirodan, *RC* 112). I agree with Mirodan when he says that Susana Bloch’s work (including her experiments and ensuing acting methodology) “was a pioneering endeavor” (Mirodan, *RC* 112). Both Konijn and Bloch must be credited with spearheading a movement toward a more holistic acting approach. Konijn advanced affect theory in combination with acting theory, and Bloch advanced cognitive neuroscience’s findings in combination with acting theory. Both Bloch and Konijn, it must be pointed out, asked questions about acting in the new light of other disciplines formerly not even considered within acting theory circles. Bloch and then Konijn—with the right dose of irreverence, open-mindedness, and a new understanding of holistic acting—broke new ground. In the ensuing chapters, I will detail in depth the new scientific approaches to acting that Bloch and Konijn had begun to touch upon.

2b) Emotion Reconsidered: What Is Presently Known about Emotions

Feeling: Emotion Made Conscious

Rhonda Blair points out that, in Russian—Stanislavski’s native language—the word for “consciousness” is “*samochuvstvo*,” which, literally translated, means “self-feeling, that is, the feeling or experiencing of a self.” “This Russian reading provides insight into what Stanislavski might have intended when he centered his work on the idea of an aware and sentient self” (Blair 58). Blair quotes the neuroscientists LeDoux, Damasio, and Gazzaniga, who all describe the self as not an entity on its own, but part of a bigger, unconscious self. Gazzaniga claims that ninety-

eight percent of the brain functions “outside of consciousness awareness, [and only] a very small portion of the brain’s activities reach consciousness” (cf. Blair 59). Darren Tunstall points out that “embodied cognition¹⁸⁵ happens under the radar of conscious awareness” (Tunstall 282). Gazzaniga claims that the conscious part of our “self” is “necessarily selective and filtered, that is, ‘fictional,’ depending on what story we’re trying to tell ourselves” (Blair 59). In other words, our selves are constructed from unconscious elements to maintain a consistent and stable self: “[W]e act, based on many unconscious factors, and attribute motive afterward”¹⁸⁶ (Blair 59). All of this is in line with Stanislavski’s principles of acting. A “self” is constructed in real life in a similar fashion as the actor imagines and constructs a fictive self. Blair connects consciousness with Stanislavski’s “given circumstances”¹⁸⁷: “Consciousness has to do with the organism’s awareness of, and ability to respond to, the environment, which is, ultimately, just another word for *given circumstances*” (Blair 59, emphasis mine).

Both in real life and when acting, human beings “continually construct narratives to make sense of [their] experiences and to guide [their] actions,” which usually are motivated by either a desire for, or an avoidance of, something (cf. Blair 63). Paul Ekman states, “Emotions can, and often do, begin very quickly, so quickly, in fact, that our conscious self does not participate in or

¹⁸⁵ “Embodied cognition” is the notion that the mind is not only connected to the body but also that the body affects the mind. Embodied cognition contradicts and invalidates dualism. Timothy Michael Gill quotes Lakoff and Johnson:

What is embodied cognition? To say the mind is embodied, according to Lakoff and Johnson, is not merely to say that a body is needed if we are to think. Rather, their contention is that the very properties of concepts are created because of the way the brain and body are structured and the way they function in interpersonal relations and in the physical world. (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 37). Human sensorimotor systems play a major role in structuring color concepts, basic-level concepts, spatial-relations concepts, and aspectual (event-structuring) concepts (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 16). We categorize objects in the outside world in accordance with our perceptual abilities and how we function physically in the world (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 18). Once humans have learned a conceptual system, it is neurally instantiated in our brains, and we are not free to think just anything (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 5). (Gill, quoting Lakoff and Johnson 16)

¹⁸⁶ In fact, Benjamin Libet’s decision-making experiment of 1983 suggests that “decisions are made in the brain’s neurocircuitry before you’re even conscious of them—thus, no free will. In short, the brain decides something, and soon afterward you become aware of a decision, which you then (mistakenly) attribute to your own will” (Lanza and Pavsic 101–102). While the interpretation of this experiment remains contentious, clearly, there is much more at play than the brain telling the body to move.

¹⁸⁷ Jane Drake Brody makes the same connection regarding Stanislavski’s “given circumstances” and neuroscience in her book *Acting, Archetype, & Neuroscience* (5, 112). I will shortly delve more deeply into Brody’s insights, considering that they build on Blair’s.

even witness what in our mind triggers an emotion at any particular moment” (Ekman xviii). If core consciousness is the knowing of the self, that there is an individual self, then consciousness is the process of the body that guides us in navigating life’s given circumstances. In the way that there exists a core consciousness, there exist automatic background emotions, both inherited and learned, which means “there is no such thing as emotional neutrality” (Blair 67). Simply put, emotions are always running in the background in an automatic fashion. Emotions occur unconsciously. Feeling, however, “is emotion made conscious” (Blair 68). Alternatively, as neuroscientist Antonio Damasio puts it more dramatically, “Emotions play out in the theatre of the body. Feelings play out in the theatre of the mind”¹⁸⁸ (Blair 68).

Beginning with neuroscience, the terms “emotions” and “feelings” should not be used interchangeably any longer. The difference between emotion and feeling is important. However, this is a problem with the many earlier writings that used the terms interchangeably. Diderot, for example, referred to feelings, not emotions,¹⁸⁹ in the *Paradox*. Once biology and neuroscience come into play, a distinction must be made. By employing Stanislavski’s term, Blair explains, “[T]he actor does not become the character, but experiences or lives life through the character as she performs a meticulously shaped score” (Blair 82). Blair emphasizes that the findings of neuroscience in relation to acting and biology “give us the knowledge to say goodbye to Descartes’ body–mind split definitively and to take the next step into demystifying Diderot’s paradox” (Blair 82). In other words, to circle back to the beginning of my introduction, physicality, mind, and emotion are inseparable elements of a single organism: “The idea that thinking is embodied is not the relatively obvious claim that, to think, one needs a body and a brain. Instead, it entails that the nature of our embodiment shapes both what and how we think, and that every thought implicates a certain bodily awareness” (Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body* 94). Instead of thinking of acting as either an inside-out or an outside-in approach, the two must be combined. An actor’s repetitive practice of playing a character ingrains the character’s nature in the actor’s “second nature.” Emotions are evoked from both the inside and the outside.

¹⁸⁸ They really play out in both the body and the mind (bodymind). However, Damasio was trying to make this point through theatrical imagery.

¹⁸⁹ Since feelings are underlying emotions made conscious, it can be argued that Diderot referred to both feelings and emotions.

What human beings experience when they have a “gut feeling” is a “source of intelligence within us—not in our intellect—but arising out of our physical bodies” (Elchuk, Tanya, “Cognitive Neuroscience and Acting,” *Recorded Public Speech at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [SSHRC] - YouTube*, 1 Apr. 2015). The mind is not an entity that lives in the head, but a kind of “intelligent system running through our whole bodies” (Elchuk). The entire human body is “thinking.” There is no “inside-out” or “outside-in” split with respect to acting. Mark Johnson says it well: “If we could only disabuse ourselves of the mistaken idea that thought must somehow be a type of activity ontologically different from our other bodily engagements (such as seeing, hearing, holding things, and walking), then our entire understanding of the so-called mind/body problem would be transformed” (Johnson 140).

Inside-out vs. outside-in and mind vs. body are false dichotomous beliefs. It is not a question of “either-or” but of “both and,” which Quintilian, Cicero, and Stanislavski knew but could not prove scientifically. Consciousness arises out of the body, and “acting is a way of knowing oneself and expressing oneself” through the body (cf. Elchuk). When acting teachers¹⁹⁰ and actors claim that playing the great parts changed them, as they often have, cognitive neuroscience can explain what they mean: Their brains change.¹⁹¹ As actors develop “richer, stronger synaptic patterns and networks by having a longer engagement with a piece of material,” their brains modify depending on how deeply ingrained they are in the work (cf. Blair 58). One of the latest published studies in the interdisciplinary field of acting and neuroscience of March 2019¹⁹² reaches a similar conclusion: “[E]ven small gestural manipulations, such as a

¹⁹⁰ Acting teacher Tony Greco pointed out many times how great parts can change actors in a 2004 acting class in New York City. Greco was, amongst others, coaching the late Phillip Seymour Hoffman, who, at the time, was preparing for the role of Truman Capote. The latter preparation, Greco observed, was already changing Hoffman.

¹⁹¹ I understand that anti-theatricalists will jump on this fact. However, one should remember that learning to play the piano also changes the brain. Many actors describe playing the great parts as enriching. Nonetheless, I do not wish to discount that there are instances in acting that may become unhealthy or even dangerous, even with good technique.

¹⁹² This is the latest study using magnetic resonance imaging to capture changes in actors’ brains published by *Royal Society Publishing*. This study is open access. Since there are few studies of this kind to date, it is important to view this particular field as a work in progress, as Stanislavski did. For example, this study used acting students trained in one acting technique. While the conclusions are of great interest, they must be repeated with professional actors and with regular people to check for consistency. However, taking pictures of the brain makes the proof of change or variation much easier and more credible than having actors fill out forms in which they speculate about their emotions.

change in the manner of speaking, can lead to neural differences similar to full-fledged character portrayal” (cf. Brown, Cockett, and Yuan, *Royal Society Open Science*, 2019).

Paul Ekman observed the same dynamics between physical action and emotion in his book *Emotions Revealed*. He found his original “crazy idea that simply making an expression¹⁹³ would produce changes in people’s autonomic nervous systems” to be true (cf. Ekman 36). To generate an “emotional experience, changing your physiology by deliberately assuming the appearance of an emotion” is a way of experiencing emotions¹⁹⁴ (cf. Ekman 37). This “generating of emotional experiences” builds on Susana Bloch’s findings and validates her theory. It also validates Stanislavski’s late work. He specifically called what actors do “living through” the part: He neither divided nor resolved the inside/outside interdependent dynamic of acting and bringing forth emotion, since emotion and feeling can emanate through both channels; very often, it is the interplay of inside and outside emotional experience that brings forth the feeling.

The State of Research: Emotion and Empathy in Acting Theory and Training

While “the field is ripe for development, . . . methodologies based on the rigorous application of cognitive principles are still to establish themselves widely in actor training,” says Vladimir Mirodan in his essay “Acting and Emotions” (cf. Mirodan, *RC* 112). In other words, the verdict on many facets of how emotions are evoked, in what order, and how they relate to context and consciousness is still out. Emotions are complex and difficult to prove: “Understanding emotions . . . is not just important in trying to figure out how to convey them to an audience; it is important because it is part of how we know what we know” (cf. Cook, Amy, “For Hecuba or for Hamlet: Rethinking Emotion and Empathy in the Theater” 78). It would appear, however, that most cognitive studies illuminate that emotions are best understood as a web rather than binary states.

¹⁹³ Ekman is very much in line with the James-Lange theory that claims emotions occur in response to physiological events, not the other way round.

¹⁹⁴ Susana Bloch’s acting system, called Alba emoting, is based on this notion: She devised a system (mostly concerning breathing, facial expressions, certain movements, and muscle tones) that brings about primal emotions.

Amy Cook—in a quote so important that I am citing it fully—summarizes the state of research on empathy and emotion as follows:

Damasio defines emotions as changes in body state and notes that spectators can perceive these emotions, but not the feelings (mediated by context, memory, story) that are conscious only to the individual experiencing them. For Barrett, emotions are not objects but an evaluation event that creates a story (subject, verb, object); and for Griffiths and Scarantino, emotions are a product or element of the environment—they are socially situated strategic probes. Emotional contagion research suggests that we are always, to some degree, emotionally porous and that we converge emotionally. Whatever the case may be, the incredibly exciting developments in the science of emotion suggest that our experience of the emotions of the performance is inseparable from an interpretation of what the event was. . . . [I]f emotion is indeed contagious,¹⁹⁵ then theatrical representation can “catch” our consciousness. (cf. Cook, Amy, “For Hecuba or for Hamlet: Rethinking Emotion and Empathy in the Theater” 83)

Similarly, Mirodan outlines two competing theories about the evocation of emotions. The first theory by Joseph LeDoux proposes that emotions always exist in people’s subconscious—in the background. These emotions do not become feelings, that is, emotions that have broken through into the conscious awareness of them until they have been evaluated or interpreted. LeDoux outlines the order of the evocation and evaluation of emotion as follows: “[P]hysiological change in the body > registered by the brain (emotion) > consequent action (fight or flight) > connections with memory of past, similar occurrences > feeling (registering the change in consciousness”¹⁹⁶ (Mirodan, *RC* 102). The second theory by Jaak Panksepp and Biven considers emotions “an unreflective, unthinking primary-process kind of consciousness that

¹⁹⁵ *Time’s* special edition “The Science of Emotion” of 2021 says emotional contagion happens constantly and is more than a cultural phenomenon that must be taken seriously: “There’s a wealth of research to support emotional contagion as a legitimate occurrence” (cf. Sifferlin, “Are Emotions Contagious?,” *TSE* 41-42).

¹⁹⁶ Here, LeDoux, like Ekman, is building on the James-Lange theory.

precedes our cognitive understanding of the world”¹⁹⁷ (Mirodan, quoting Panksepp and Biven 2012, *RC* 103). In other words, emotions are a primal response without a complex secondary evaluation. Mirodan states that “the fraught question of which comes first—arousal, consciousness, or action—is being replaced by an emphasis on the interactions between these different phases” (Mirodan, *RC* 105). He concludes, “As far as performance is concerned, I expect there will be little dissent if, from the descriptions earlier [LeDoux vs. Panksepp and Biven], I pick out the intrinsic link between emotion and action” (cf. Mirodan, *RC* 105).

Mirodan asserts that all Cartesian binaries “between reason and feeling . . . and between control and abandonment . . . are comprehensibly rejected, and the binary and hostility between the conscious and unconscious . . . [is] replaced by an understanding of the interdependence” between the two (cf. Mirodan, *RC* 105). As Blair and Kemp did, Mirodan spotlights how prescient Stanislavski and some of his successors were:

Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Laban, and Copeau all emphasized the unbreakable circuit of psychology and physicality. Cognitive science confirms the idea of a continuous loop between stimulus, physiological reactions, and non-conscious changes in the brain and consciousness. Where in this loop one starts is irrelevant, as emotion/feeling, once initiated, will surge and intensify involuntarily. (Mirodan, *RC* 108)

Mirodan also points out that “actors ‘read for emotion’ with trained eyes, and by doing so, they ‘develop special capacities’” (Mirodan, *RC* 108). They are *prepared* for emotion. The control

¹⁹⁷ Panksepp explains his theory in an interview with *Discover Magazine*:

Humans go back to the **Pleistocene** [about 2.5 million years ago], but the emotional part of the brain goes back much further, all the way to the time when ancestral mammals evolved away from reptiles. Primary processes, based in deep subcortical regions, manifest evolutionary memories that are the basic emotional operating systems of the brain. Secondary processes, based on a series of way stations known as basal ganglia, are enriched with the mechanisms for learning—for linking external perceptions with associated feelings. Then on top, the tertiary level is programmed by life experiences through the neocortex, engendering our higher cognitive processes such as thinking, ruminating, and planning. Our capacity to think is fueled by our storehouses of memory and knowledge acquired by living in complex physical and social worlds. But the ancient feeling states help forge our memories in the first place. New memories could not emerge without the underlying states that allow animals to experience the intrinsic values of life. (Weintraub, Pamela, “Discover Interview: Jaak Panksepp Pinned Down Humanity’s 7 Primal Emotions,” *Discover Magazine*, 30 May 2012; see www.discovermagazine.com/mind/discover-interview-jaak-panksepp-pinned-down-humanitys-7-primal-emotions.)

over emotions is deeply embedded in the human mind, “and acting training exploits and enhances this universal trait”¹⁹⁸ (cf. Mirodan, *RC* 108). Furthermore, by being in a state of vulnerability and readiness, actors excel at both *receiving* emotion and *transmitting* it. By being receptive to emotional contagion (from other actors, for example) and through “embodied simulation,” actors arrive at what many call “their special sensitivity, and the special ability to read the emotions of others” (cf. Mirodan 100).

Mirodan builds on Elaine Hatfield’s study and employs her picturesque terms and descriptions when he says that good actors have traits of both the “Typhoid Marys” (transmitters/spreaders of emotional contagion) and traits of “Marcel Prousts” (receptors of emotional contagion; cf. Mirodan 110). The way actors receive and transmit emotion has a great deal to do with mirror neurons, simulation, empathy, and emotional contagion, which I will describe in detail in my chapter on the neuroscience toolkit. What is apparent in all new studies on emotion and acting—see the studies in *Royal Society Open Science* (2019) and in *The Routledge Companion to Theater, Performance, and Cognitive Science (RC)* (2019)—is that the audience and the actor are connected through both their bodies and minds (which I will call the “bodymind” in my next chapter). Actors must make themselves—their bodies always on display—painfully vulnerable to uncertainty to receive and transmit emotions.

2c) Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience: From the Body vs. the Mind to the Bodymind

In a 2011 essay published on the website of the US’s National Library of Medicine entitled “Mind–Body Dualism: A Critique from a Health Perspective,” Dr. Neeta Mehta deplores that mind–body dualism is still alive and well in modern medicine, to the detriment of patients and practitioners alike. Mind–body dualism, asserts Mehta, still exercises a repressive influence:

¹⁹⁸ Mirodan bases this statement on a study by psychologist Nina Bull in which subjects were asked to respond to emotional words while under hypnosis. The subjects responded with “preparation for action, but never to the action itself” (Mirodan, *RC* 108). The subjects were ready to physically fight (at the word “fear,” for example), but they did not actually engage in physical violence. The takeaway from the experiment could be, as Mirodan suggests, that actors are trained to master the art of how strongly and when to respond to an emotional stimulus in a controlled manner. If the physical readiness for action in response to emotion is “a universal trait,” Mirodan infers, then actors can learn to control that trait (cf. Mirodan, *RC* 108).

Mind and body dualism was a convenient philosophy that used the “divide and conquer” strategy to cope with prevalent religious thinking, and subsequently fitted well to deal with the complexity of human nature. It, however, cost us dearly, as it took our focus away from the dynamic nature of human beings, their relationship with the environment, and their real health concerns, and to that extent blocked the development of effective interventions. (Mehta, NCBI.gov, *Mens Sana Monographs* 2011)

In *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Neuroscience*, Rhonda Blair builds on Stanislavski’s work by using the latest advances in cognitive neuroscience and biology to continue the actor’s quest to “reach the unconscious by conscious means” (Blair i). Most scholars of acting in combination with cognitive neuroscience point out how prescient Stanislavski’s approach was: To give a few examples: John Lutterbie (throughout *Toward a General Theory of Acting*), Phillip B. Zarrilli (*Psychophysical Acting* 13-21), Jane Drake Brody (*Acting, Archetype, and Neuroscience* 5-12), Vladimir Mirodan (*RC* 106), and Rick Kemp (throughout *Embodied Acting*). Diderot’s notion of double consciousness¹⁹⁹ is also frequently mentioned, including in one of the latest fMRI studies on acting combined with neuroscience of March 2019 (published by Royal Society Publishing).²⁰⁰ Blair begins her analysis by reasserting what Stanislavski held to be true: “All acting techniques work with the same raw material, the actor’s only material—the body and consciousness” (Blair xii). Stanislavski, it can be argued, foresaw what is now called the “embodied cognition theory” (ECT).

Rick Kemp makes a similar point when he explains the problem and origin of the mind/body dualism by quoting Lakoff and Johnson’s *Philosophy in the Flesh*:

There is no mind separate from the body, nor are there thoughts that have an existence separate from and independent of the body, nor are there thoughts that have an existence independent of bodies and brains. But our metaphors for mind conflict with what

¹⁹⁹ However, the meaning of “double consciousness” has changed from Diderot’s understanding to one that can be proven by neuroscience. More details follow later in this chapter.

²⁰⁰ Brown, Steven, et al. “The Neuroscience of Romeo and Juliet: An FMRI Study of Acting.” *Royal Society Open Science*, vol. 6, no. 3, Mar. 2019, p. 181908, 10.1098/rsos.181908. Details on this study will follow shortly.

cognitive science has discovered. *We conceptualize the mind metaphorically in terms of a container image schema defining a space that is inside the body and separate from it.* (Kemp, quoting Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 265–266, 100, italics Kemp’s)

Subsequently, Kemp adds that Lakoff and Johnson’s findings clash with Western thinking that splits mind and body: “This metaphorical conceptualization of the mind is what gives rise to the ‘inside/outside’ conceptualization of work on a character” (Kemp 100). The Western notion of thought and reason happening outside of the body (in the mind), and any physical expression happening outside of the mind, is a “metaphor so deeply ingrained that it is hard to think about mind in any other way” (Kemp, quoting Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 266, 100). Cognitive neuroscience makes it clear that the Western dichotomy of the body and the mind needs re-evaluation. Persistently, cognitive neuroscience demonstrates that the body and mind are intertwined and inform each other. To once more quote George Lakoff (this time, in collaboration with Rafael Núñez):

Cognitive science calls this entire philosophical worldview [Cartesian dualism with the conviction that mind and reason are disembodied, transcendent, universal, and indivisible, whereas the body is by nature divisible and dies] into serious question on empirical grounds. . . . [The mind] arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experiences. This is not just the innocuous and obvious claim that we need a body to reason; rather, it is the striking claim that the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment. . . . Thus, to understand reason we must understand the details of our visual system, our motor system, and the general mechanism of neural binding. (cf. McNERNEY, Samuel, quoting George Lakoff and Rafael Núñez, “A Brief Guide to Embodied Cognition: Why You Are Not Your Brain,” *Scientific American* 5 Nov. 2011)

Therefore, regarding the binary (body/mind) as a unit that is both physical and psychological, namely, the “psychophysical bodymind” (cf. Kemp 101) would be a constructive beginning to breaking with an outdated way of thinking and to finding a meaningful language for acting.

Darren Tunstall, in his recent contribution to *Routledge’s Companion to Theatre, Performance, and Cognitive Studies* (2018; also his doctoral dissertation), explains embodied cognition as “the proposition that an individual’s cognitive and bodily processes should be seen as interdependent” (Tunstall 280). Tunstall continues to explain the argument against dualistic (disembodied mind/body) thinking via embodied cognition as follows:

Embodied Cognition theory stresses that every idea that comes to us is grounded in our bodily anatomy and experiences—including the very idea that we would yearn to get out of the body. We simply cannot think, we cannot imagine, we cannot yearn, outside the body. According to Lakoff and Nunez (2000), even the most rarefied abstract thinking, such as higher mathematical reasoning, has its origin in basic physical facts such as our bilateral symmetry and our sense of spatial orientation. (Tunstall 285)

Likewise, Blair—as do Lutterbie, Cook, and Kemp—finds that “[t]here is something true in many ‘practice-centered’ and ‘theory-centered’ perspectives, and there is also something missing, and this missing thing is in a more thorough investigation of the integration of these perspectives. Or perhaps it is in the gap—the synapse?—waiting to be leaped between the two” (Blair xi). Blair sets out to find this “missing thing.”

Comparably, Tunstall attempts to find explanations that “fill the . . . gap” between mind and body, theory and practice, “languages of the script and the body”: “[S]cholars of Shakespeare in performance have been reluctant to speak of *how* the actor’s body engages with the meanings of the text” (Tunstall 299, 298, emphasis mine). Both Blair and Tunstall began their respective studies by singling out the missing link (or gap) between mind and body, theory and practice, and script language and body language. Both explain that “the body speaks,” that “thinking happens through the body,” and, in fact, that “all experiences are processed through the

body” (Tunstall 283, 290, 286). Both Blair²⁰¹ and Tunstall see an interdependence between mind and body; both seek to “build [a] bridge” between the two and to back up the existence of said bridge with evidence (Tunstall 299).

Actor vs. Character, Heart vs. Part

In the way that the body has been separated from the mind and consciousness, the actor and the character have been separated by yet another artificial binary known as “heart vs. part” in acting parlance. Cognitive neuroscience demonstrates that it is best to think of the body and mind as an interactive web. Similarly, it would be helpful to speak of the actor and character not as the self and the other, but as an intertwining network constantly at play. The actor informs the character, and the character informs the actor. A physical gesture or facial expression can bring forth an emotion (cf. Ekman 36–37), and a psychological impulse can bring forth a physical gesture or expression. The outside informs what is inside and vice versa. The character is always in the body and mind of the actor, and the actor is living through the character. Heart and part are entwined. The actor and the character are interwoven rather than divided into self and other. While I foresee the inevitable argument of anti-theatricalists that they were right all along by claiming that actors become what they act, I will try to pre-empt said argument by focusing on the difference between the good actor and non-actors, which is mastery over the bodymind, also known as self-regulation: “[L]iving beings are autonomous agents that actively generate and maintain themselves, and thereby also enact or bring forth [their] own coherent and meaningful patterns of activity” (Thompson, *Mind in Life* 13). It is that proficiency in self-regulation that allows a good actor to maintain what Boswell called “double feeling” and what Diderot termed

²⁰¹ Rhonda Blair elaborated on this point with Amy Cook in *Theatre, Performance, and Cognition: Languages, Bodies, and Ecologies*:

Embodied cognition is not something that requires explicit physical movement or action; cognition is embodied when we add up receipts, get a glass of water for a thirsty friend, or reach for the shampoo in the shower. To say that cognition is embodied is to say that what we have called “thinking” requires the body and happens as it does because of the body we have. The problem is not with making our thinking or our performing more “embodied”—thought is always embodied. The challenge is producing language to articulate what it has been all along: [W]e have missed some of the nuances because our language looks for bodies and minds. (Blair and Cook 3)

“double consciousness.” Actors are both fully present as a character while ensuring they are in the light and hitting their marks. The actor is both fully present in the life of the character (the fiction) and in the life of the actor onstage (their physical existence in real time).

Actors, compared to non-actors, have learned how to *publicly* express privately felt experiences without partially losing themselves. The notion that an actor is either the character or himself or herself is yet another Cartesian binary that obscures what actors do. Instead of thinking of acting as *either* making one *this* person *or* making one *that* person, as *either* making one a bad person *or* making one a good person, it would be more suitable to understand actors as doing something that all human beings do to make sense of themselves and express themselves to a certain extent.²⁰² The great difference is that the actor has mastered the art of allowing fiction and reality to coexist without merging them; he or she has mastered the art of stepping into what Victor Turner calls a “liminal space”²⁰³ where there exists a freedom to create truth from fiction.²⁰⁴

Thalia A. Goldstein, in her column “The Mind on Stage,” emphasizes what she believes underlies good acting: “cognitive, social, and self-regulating skills” (cf. Goldstein, “Where Does Acting Come From,” *Psychology Today* 4 June 2019). I also emphasize self-regulating skills when I speak of good actors being able to walk the line between the self and the part—often termed “heart versus part”—without falling off the tightrope. Instead of simplifying and dividing acting into the dualistic notion of “being” vs. “acting,” it is better to understand acting as the ability to maintain tension between contrarities without resolving them and to master self-regulation.

Stanislavski called what actors do “living through” the part; he neither divided nor resolved the actor/character interdependent dynamic. Good acting is not an “either/or” skill, but the paradoxical skill of “both/and.” The actor is neither the actor nor the character, and they are

²⁰² Erving Goffman’s *The Presentation of the Self* (1959) explains this kind of everyday impression management all people engage in very well through the theater metaphor. He also explains how we all present a different “self” to different people to make or maintain a certain impression.

²⁰³ Victor Turner’s description of liminality is an important one that I will return to later, particularly his essay “Liminality and Communitas” in *The Ritual Process* (1969).

²⁰⁴ I explain this idea in greater detail in the following chapters.

neither the heart nor part. The actor is and *is not* the character. He or she exists in an in-between state. Such in-betweenness is unsettling, complex, and difficult to maintain. As an example, Shakespeare, in all of his plays, draws attention to this in-between state.²⁰⁵ I would argue that he did so to show how it is both disconcerting and breathtaking at the same time, and how it exists as a kind of Liminal-Space Neverland that actors can enter and exit at will due to their mastery of self-regulation. It is in this Liminal-Space Neverland that connections among actor and audience are made and transformations happen. The good actor has the key to this “Betwixt-Between Space.” Better, in the beautiful words of the poet Eichendorff, the artist has the “magic word”²⁰⁶ that speaks to the liminal world and that enables that world to awaken and speak back. The actor’s “magic word” is *embodied* and open to resonance. Kristin Linklater gives a wonderful

²⁰⁵ *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* takes place in a liminal space between dream/illusion and reality. The audience is constantly asked to question what is more real, the dream or the reality. They are always in a state of uncertainty. The question “Are the characters awake, or are they dreaming?” is interspersed throughout *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. *Macbeth* takes place between a world of sorcery and reality. *Hamlet* exists between “to be” and “not to be.” *The Tempest* takes place, much like *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, between a dream/a world of magic and reality. By drawing attention to liminal space, Shakespeare opens up the audience members’ powers of perception and bids them question how they see the world. In *Antony & Cleopatra*, Egypt is painted as an exotic fantasia, unlike the stark Roman world. Being between worlds and states also carries with it the great power of transformation.

²⁰⁶ Nothing describes “resonance” better than Johann von Eichendorff’s poem of 1838. Hartmut Rosa drew renewed attention to it in his book *Resonance* (published in Germany in 2016, in the USA in 2019). Moreover, I find that Eichendorff’s poem beautifully depicts what Anne Bogart refers to when she speaks of artistic resonance through a tuning fork that finds the right note, which I will mention later. Moreover, Bogart refers to Rosa’s work in her 2021 book *The Art of Resonance*. Below is the poem in the German original. As I will indicate later, Eichendorff uses a musical metaphor that connects the dream world with the real world. This metaphor of a kind of dowsing rod similar to a tuning fork is used by many theatre critics, journalists, academics, and theatre practitioners to describe a great performance by an actor. Note also how even in the scientific abbreviation MRI, “resonance” is at the center, also having to do with magnetic fields and radio frequencies that match.

Wünschelrute

*Schläft ein Lied in allen Dingen,
die da träumen fort und fort
und die Welt hebt an zu singen,
triffst du nur das Zauberwort.*

Magic Rod

*A song slumbers in everything
That dreams of being heard
And the world begins to sing
Once you chance upon the magic word.
(Translation my own)*

to be or
not to be

sweet sorrow

cruel to be
kind

the world
is my oyster

brave new
world

all that glitters
is not gold

what's done
is done

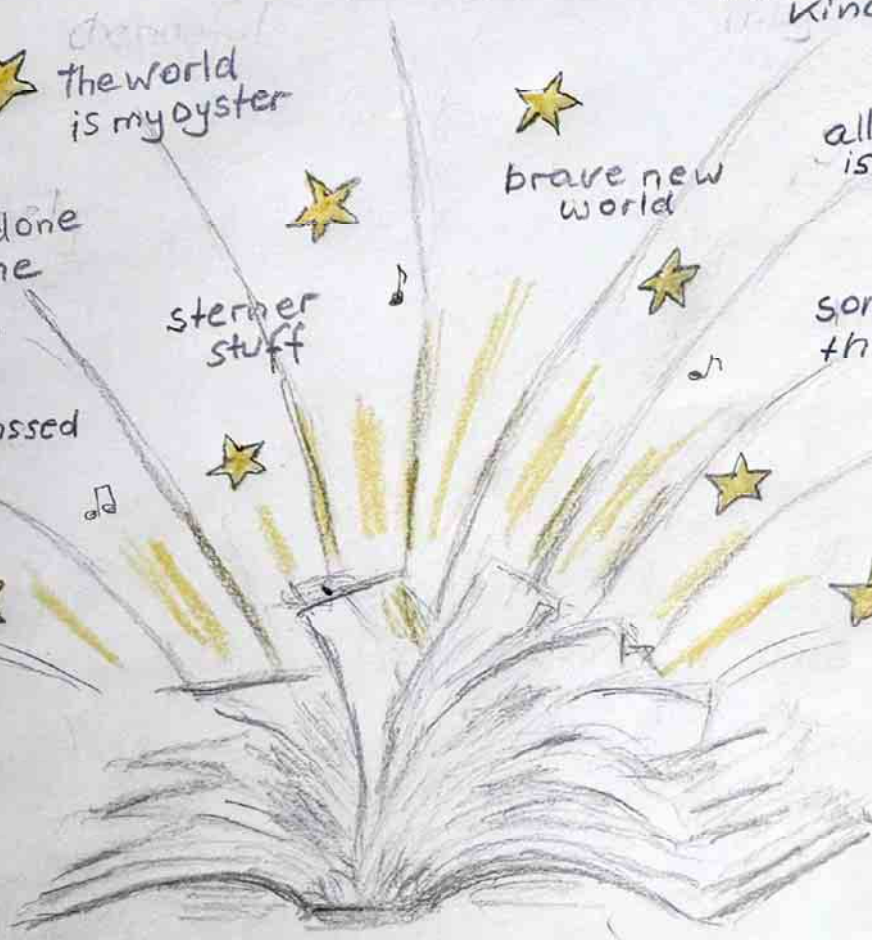
sterner
stuff

something wicked
this way comes

Star-Crossed
Lover

a rose
by any
other
name

if music be
the food of
love, play on



The magic word

example of embodied language: Shakespeare's "language *is* emotion."²⁰⁷ . . . [His language is] lived in the body. . . . Elizabethans experienced thought in the organs of the body. . . . [W]hen words are experienced viscerally—sensorially, sensually, physically, emotionally—they yield up different meaning from those wrestled out of the cerebrum" (cf. Linklater, "The Incredible Shrinking Shakespearean" linklatervoice.com, emphasis mine). The iambic pentameter Shakespeare uses reflects the human heartbeat. According to the frame of mind of a character,

²⁰⁷ When Oberon speaks the following lines, the audience can not only picture where Titania sleeps, but they can also sense and smell it. Titania's bower comes alive in the speech:

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.
(*MND* 2.1.257–260)

When Juliet speaks the following words, her desire, love, and passion are so vividly expressed that the audience can feel all her emotions with her. Moreover, the celestial image is so intense and vibrant, it lingers long in the audience's memory. Juliet's monologue conveys the impression of fireworks, or feelings, exploding.

Come, gentle night, come, loving, black-brow'd night,
Give me my Romeo; and, when he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night
And pay no worship to the garish sun.
(*R&J* 3.2.1738–1743)

The example Linklater gives is Viola/Cesario's speech about what s/he would do to express her/his love. When read aloud, the intense vowels, particularly the o and u sounds, allow one to feel all of Viola/Cesario's yearning:

Make me a willow cabin at your gate
And call upon my soul within the house,
Write loyal cantons of contemn'd love,
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Hallow your name to the reverberate hills,
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out "Olivia!" O, you should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth
But you should pity me.
(*Twelfth Night* 1.5.237–245)

This speech is so full of passion, it makes everyone, not just Olivia, fall in love with Viola.

Similarly, Valentine's love speech (as famously rendered by Gwyneth Paltrow/Thomas Kent's audition in the film *Shakespeare in Love*) is bursting with passion that is palpable in its musical repetition, vibrant vowels, and intense consonants:

What light is light, if Silvia be not seen?
What joy is joy, if Silvia be not by?
(*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 3.1.178–179)

the heartbeat changes: Juliet's heart races throughout her "Gallop apace" monologue, which is reflected in the language as an example. The iambic pentameter beautifully demonstrates the ways the human heart beats when in love. It reveals the link between the body and the mind.

One way of examining acting with cognitive neuroscience would be as follows: With each new character, the actor changes the storyteller, but the actor is always enriched by each character's story. Actors always carry a character with them. The emotions are the actor's, but the character isn't the actor. Alternatively, put into the frame of the real paradox²⁰⁸ of the actor: He is *and* is not the character. Jane Drake Brody, in a similar manner as Rhonda Blair, begins her book *Acting, Archetype, & Neuroscience* with the understanding that "philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, and biology" must build on Stanislavski and "test . . . his hypotheses" (Brody 5). Brody, as do Blair and Tunstall, bemoans the fact that, even today, "in all but the richest of theaters, Descartes rules the day: the mind and body are separate" (Brody 18). *The Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance, and Cognitive Science (RC)* demonstrates that there is great hope of moving beyond binary thinking: "[G]etting cognition 'out of the head' and 'into the body' has proven the most accessible arena of cognitive science for many academics in theatre and performance studies. . . . [Mind] is embodied not simply because the brain needs a body to function, but because the active body shapes the kind of concepts that the mind produces" (cf. McConachie 4). Brody—both a theorist and theatre practitioner—sets out to synthesize the mind and the body (as do Blair and Tunstall) and to find "the secret formula by which to deeply affect an audience" (Brody 9). I will map out the tools of neuroscience in the following chapter to explain how the mind and body are synthesized, and I will explain how the actor's synthesized bodymind resonates with the audience.

²⁰⁸ When I use "real paradox," I always refer to a paradox that cannot be resolved, in the sense of an antimony or a double bind.

2d) Neuroscience's Toolkit: How Specific Facets of Cognitive Neuroscience Resonate

Metaphor and Archetype

"A metaphor is like a hand grenade tossed into discourse. It explodes with meaning."

(Clayton J. Schmit, quoting Edmund Gibbs in "The Preacher's Paradox," *Fuller Magazine*, emphasis mine)

To unite the body and mind, Brody links metaphors and archetypes with neuroscience. By proposing archetypes as something that actors can successfully express, Brody differs from Blair and Tunstall by suggesting a controversial model from psychology and philosophy that can only be interpreted phenomenologically and not proven empirically. However, Brody's emphasis on metaphor and archetype is important because she uses it as a kind of language to express in-between states: "[Archetypes] provide a language to talk about the kind of behavior and, importantly, experience that seems resistant to the vicissitudes of time and which cultural transmission would otherwise erode" (Vernon, Mark, "Do Archetypes Exist?," *The Guardian* 20 June 2011). Vernon points out that "striking parallels to archetypes have emerged across several fields since Jung's own formulation. Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote of "unconscious infrastructures" that shape common customs and institutions. . . . Sociobiology has the notion of "epigenetic rules," laws of behavior that have evolved over time. . . . [Archetypes] might be commensurate with biology. . . . [For example,] [a]nimals have sets of stock behaviors, ethologists note, apparently activated by environmental stimuli" (cf. Vernon, *The Guardian*, 2011). I do not discount Brody's account of archetype because—as I will argue throughout—there are certain gestures and ways of expressing paradoxical emotions and states of being—in-between states—that an audience recognizes on an instinctive level.

Furthermore, metaphors reveal just how "embodied" our thinking is, how we "grasp" (with hands/body and mind) things and ideas, and how bodies interact with their environment physically, not just cerebrally: "As neuroscience progresses, we find more and more that there is a great deal of hardwiring in our primal brains having to do with unconscious reactions to the



Magician



Ruler



Creator



Caregiver



Hero



Jester



Lover



Sage



Rebel

Innocent



Everyman



world. We have wiring that allows us to recognize faces as something important, even before the first glimpse of our mother” (Brody 31). Archetypes affect an audience before it becomes conscious of it, such as traits and actions relatable to all cultures, for example, the lover (Romeo/Juliet), the hero (Luke Skywalker/Beowulf/King Arthur/Frodo Baggins), the anti-hero (Batman/Becky Sharpe/Gatsby), the innocent (Ophelia/Tiny Tim/Cio-Cio San/Snow White), the jester (Touchstone), the rebel/outlaw (Falstaff), the trickster (Loki/Bugs Bunny), the temptress (Cleopatra/Circe), the creator (Dr. Victor Frankenstein), or the villain (Darth Vader/Sauron/Iago/Richard III). As Brody puts it, “Current neuroscience and learning theory support the Jungian idea that our brains use three common ingredients of drama—metaphor, generalized archetype, and narrative—as the basis of our ability to learn” (Brody 31). Actors, therefore, if they can express such an archetype, can deeply affect the audience and create meaning for them, both unconsciously and consciously. The word “metaphor” originates from the Greek word *metaphorá*, meaning “to transfer” or “to carry over.” Metaphors effect change to transform, to create meaning, and to resonate with others. Metaphor both seeks to make the strange familiar, and the familiar, strange.

Metaphors are often paradoxical and perceived through synesthesia, such as painted words. They are understood at a deeper level than language or gestures. Neuroscience, via fMRI, may have already shown such a perception as cross-wiring in the brain. Rick Kemp emphasizes the importance of metaphor regarding cognitive science and acting: “Metaphoric gestures are . . . essentially pictorial, but the content is an abstract idea rather than a concrete object or event—an image of an abstraction. This occurs because metaphoric gestures frequently represent abstract concepts that have been metaphorically formed from sensorimotor experience”²⁰⁹ (Kemp 35). Kemp also points out that “the vast majority of gestures are unconsciously created, produced alongside words (rather than substituting for them), and almost impossible to inhibit” (Kemp 34). The notion that metaphors are embodied thinking and that humans think metaphorically began

²⁰⁹ Kemp quotes Lakoff and Johnson’s explanation of this sensory motor process:

Metaphor allows conventional mental imagery from sensorimotor domains to be used for domains of subjective experience. For example, we may form an image of something going by us or over our heads (sensorimotor experience) when we fail to understand (subjective experience). A gesture tracing the path of something going past us or over our heads can indicate vividly a failure to understand. (Kemp, quoting Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 45, 35)

with George Lakoff, who, in the 1960s, began to find fault with Noam Chomsky's theory of language as a series of meaningless symbols. In a 2011 interview with Samuel McNerney, Lakoff explained that "the mind was not like a computer program separate from the body with the brain as general-purpose hardware," and thought could not solely be described with formal logic (cf. McNerney, *Scientific American*).

Lakoff found that regular everyday thinking employs embodied metaphorical thought. Metaphorical thinking affects not only language but also how human beings act. Lakoff and Johnson's 1980 book *Metaphors We Live By* was "a game changer. Not only did it illustrate how prevalent metaphors are in everyday language, it also suggested that a lot of the major tenets of Western thought, including the idea that reason is conscious and passionless and that language is separate from the body aside from organs and speech and hearing, were incorrect" (McNerney, *Scientific American*). To give some examples,²¹⁰ affection and love are associated with warmth and light: "I am warming up to him," "Juliet is the sun" (*R&J* 2.2.2), "She looks radiant tonight," "warmest regards," and "he had a warm heart and bright smile." The opposite is, of course, dislike, hate, and melancholia being associated with coldness and darkness: "Their relationship is on ice," "put a project on ice," "to give someone the cold shoulder," and "Out, out, brief candle [from light to dark, from life to death]. Life's but a walking shadow" [life is constant darkness and/or meaninglessness] (cf. *Macbeth* 5.5.22–23). When someone "breathes their last breath,"

²¹⁰ In *Philosophy in the Flesh*, Lakoff and Johnson explain that abstract concepts and ideas are understood through conceptual metaphors, such as ideas as objects, language as a container for idea-objects, and communication as sending idea-objects in language containers. An example is "getting through to someone." Similarly, Lakoff and Johnson explained the mind as body, mental functioning as bodily functioning, and ideas as objects of bodily functioning. The four special case conceptual metaphors are as follows:

1. Thinking Is Moving; Ideas Are Locations; Communicating Is Leading; Understanding Is Following.
2. Understanding Is Seeing; Ideas Are Things Seen; Communication Is Showing.
3. Thinking Is Object Manipulation; Ideas Are Objects; Communication Is Sending; Understanding is Grasping.
4. Thinking Is Eating; Ideas Are Food; Communication Is Feeding; Understanding Is Digesting.

Examples of each of the above are as follows:

1. Moving: "Reach a conclusion"; "go off on a tangent"; "do you follow me?"; "go step by step."
2. Seeing: "See what I mean?"; "point of view"; "shed light on"; "clear"; "brilliant."
3. Manipulating: "Turn it over in your mind"; "toss ideas around"; "I gave him that idea."
4. Eating: "Food for thought"; "raw facts"; "half-baked ideas"; "digest"; "he won't swallow that" (cf. Lakoff, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*; Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*)

“breath” is linked to “life,” with the body’s “last breath” as the body’s “death.”²¹¹ There is the dramatic metaphor of life as a play in which humans “perform” to entertain the gods: “All the world’s a stage/And all the men and women merely players/They have their exits and their entrances/And one man in his life plays many parts” (*AYLI* 2.7.139–142); “a poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon a stage” (*Macbeth* 5.5.23–24); “As flies to wanton boys are we to th’ gods/They kill us for their sport” (*King Lear* 4.1.37–38).

Lakoff and Johnson showed that metaphors are embodied and alive. Some metaphors evoke vivid mental images that immediately resonate in the body, such as “warming up” to someone, and then there are metaphoric gestures that are universally “grasped” by an audience. Additionally, Kemp, Ekman, and the *Times Special Edition: The Science of Emotions* underscore the importance of non-verbal communication (NVC): “[M]ost people, when confronted with a discrepancy between the verbal and non-verbal communication, will trust the *non-verbal*” (Kemp 34, emphasis mine). Kemp explains how gestures add, emphasize, or detract from what is being said. They can help explain, or they can—consciously or unconsciously—reveal a contradiction. The kind of metaphoric gestures Kemp speaks of are, indeed, universal: “Metaphoric gestures are closely related to concepts and can be abstract (such as the rolling of hands around one another to suggest uncertainty) or specific (placing the palms of the hands together in a prayer position to suggest ‘plead’ or ‘beg’” (Kemp 34). The importance of gestures is their persuasive manner of communicating something to the audience: “[W]ork with metaphoric gestures offers the actor one of the most accessible ways to develop their facility by expressing abstract

²¹¹ There are many more colloquial terms that reveal just how metaphorically people think. When people are “snuffed out,” they die: The metaphor used to render the image of death vividly refers to extinguishing the light of a candle. The image behind the idiom “to bite the bullet” is so expressive that it needs no explanation. Similarly, the German expression “*ins Gras beißen*”/“to bite into the grass” is a highly embodied way of saying “dying involuntarily.” When people “ignore the elephant in the room,” they ignore something so enormous in front of them and for all to “see” metaphorically that it can only be likened to a huge animal. Hence, the physical is never far from the mental; they go hand in hand.

concepts”²¹² (Kemp 35). Archetypal and metaphorical meanings—despite being such an abstract concept—can, through the right gestures, be expressed by an actor and successfully communicated to an audience. Good actors make the mental physical.

How Mirror Neurons,²¹³ Simulation, Mimesis, Proprioception, Imagination, Empathy, and Emotional Contagion Resonate

“Violin music is made not just from drawing the bow across the string, but from the resonance of that string connected to the player’s felt self and structural architecture. Similarly, when we play a character, we locate and play connective resonances within our whole selves” (Belser, andrewbelser.com).

Metaphysical or archetypal meanings created by an actor for an audience could also be explained with the help of mirror neurons: “These are motor neurons that are responsible for

²¹² Kemp backs his claim with recent cognitive science and psychology:

The understanding of the way in which gesture operates has become increasingly refined, and research has begun to create a holistic context for the types of gesture described above. Psychologist Adam Kendon’s experiments are part of a growing body of evidence that shows that gestures are closely linked to speech, but present meaning in a form that is fundamentally different, and that through hand movements, people (often unconsciously) communicate thoughts (35).

I will go into greater detail about the importance of NVC shortly.

²¹³ An important note concerns the topic of mirror neurons, as mentioned earlier: They have been controversial in both the hype and the scrutiny they have received. As Harvard University’s blog of 2016 puts it:

Mirror neurons have begun to assume a humbler identity than was initially theorized, but it is important to remember that despite recent criticism, their activity may still play an important role in many behaviors. . . . [D]espite claims that mirror neurons might underlie much of what makes humans unique (such as language and culture), until 2008, they had never once been decisively identified in humans. Even as of 2016, only one study [Iacoboni 2010], using electrodes implanted into the brains of epilepsy patients, has successfully identified human neurons with properties similar to those found in the macaques. Even Gregory Hickok, perhaps the most prominent critic of the hype surrounding mirror neurons, accepts that they probably play a role in enabling imitation, given that there must be *some* mechanism in the brain that converts an observed action to a series of muscle commands. (cf. Taylor, Choi, “Mirror Neurons after a Quarter Century,” Harvard University Graduate School for Arts and Science Blog, 25 July 2016)

Simply put, much research is required to fully reveal the impact of mirror neurons. Nonetheless, something in the way of imitation, emotion, and empathy plays into it. Evelyn Tribble and John Sutton, in *Affective Performance and Cognitive Science* (2013), put it as follows: “Humanities researchers would benefit from more familiarity with the ongoing nature of the debate over mirror neurons, which includes researchers skeptical about their function in humans. . . . [Tribble and Sutton do concede, however] that it is possible to discuss empathy, audience reaction, and expertise while remaining agnostic on the role of mirror neurons” (cf. Tribble and Sutton, *Affective Performance* 27).



Neuron fires



Neuron fires

Monkey does action

Monkey sees action

muscular activity. The discovery²¹⁴ was that these motor neurons fire not only when we do something ourselves but also when we observe an action being done by another” (Brody 28). Alternatively, Kemp explains, “These are neurons that fire in the premotor cortex when one executes a goal-directed action, and also when one observes a similar action executed by someone else” (Kemp 141). In the *Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance, and Cognitive Science (RC)*, Bruce McConachie explains the mirror neuron hypothesis as follows:

[E]mpathy begins in the mirror neuron system of our bodies. Networks of mirror neurons effectively “mirror” intentional motor activity produced by another person and perceived by the empathiser. If a spectator watches an aerialist take a step on a high wire, for example, the same group of neurons is activated in the observer’s brain as in the aerialist’s; it is almost as if the observer had taken the step himself.²¹⁵ By “mirroring” the actions of another, an empathiser can attune him or herself to the emotions of the other person. (McConachie, *RC* 6)

Actors, like aerialists, can express themselves to the audience by tapping (or tuning) into a shared frequency via what Brody calls a “metaphor, generalized archetype, and narrative” (cf. Brody 31). Amy Cook puts it as follows: “[A]s Gallese suggests about the union made possible

²¹⁴ Brody speaks of the 1996 Giacomo Rizzolatti/Vittorio Gallese study of the brain responses of macaque monkeys when grasping objects. It was discovered that the monkey fires mirror neurons affiliated with the grasping action while observing Gallese reach or grasp for an object. This study is documented in Mario Iacoboni’s 2008 book *Mirroring People*.

²¹⁵ Amy Cook warns not to conflate the “doing” with the “observing”:

To be clear: the discovery of mirror neurons does not mean that the perception of an action fires the same neurons as the doing of an action; while there are some neurons that fire in both cases, there are many others that do not. If a “dialogue” between the sciences and the humanities is to be mutually fruitful, it is important for both sides to recognize the limits, as well as the potential, of the theories and findings. The findings on mirror neurons do not support the claim that we are all one or that one can put oneself in the mind of another, but it may suggest some radical rethinking of our categories and definitions. (Cook, *Theatre Journal* 2007, 591)

Consequently, the issue is complex: Not all imitation is empathy. People with autism, for example, may not express themselves as empathetically as others. However, as *Stanford’s Encyclopedia of Philosophy* puts it: “Regardless of how one views this specific debate [about whether empathic perspective-taking is complete identification], it should be clear that ideas about mindreading developed originally by proponents of empathy at the beginning of the 20th century can no longer be easily dismissed and have to be taken seriously” (Stueber, “Empathy,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2019).

by mirror neurons: ‘By means of a shared neural state realized in two different bodies, the objectual other becomes another self.’ Onstage, every body is a phantom limb” (Cook, *Theatre Journal* [2007] 594).

McConachie also singles out metaphors by pointing out that the word “grasp” exists for both literally grasping something and metaphorically “grasping” or understanding something: “Many metaphors extend our embodied notions of movement and space to make sense of our experience” (McConachie, *RC* 4). Furthermore, Naomi Rokatnitz rightly asks for more:

[R]esearch into our inborn inclination to *imitate*, indeed simulate, actions we observe others perform. This capacity . . . allows us to utilize our *shared* motor schemata to interpret the actions of others—in life and on stage. The meanings of a dramatic performance arise from its embodied effects just as much as its discursive registers, and performative communication depends upon *empathetic resonance*. . . . Mapping the neural correlates of this *resonance* corresponds . . . with mirror neuron studies and provides evidence that empathy is an innate capacity, hardwired into our cognitive architecture. (cf. Rokatnitz, *Affective Performance and Cognitive Science (AP)* 122, emphasis mine)

Rokatnitz foresees an assembly of the puzzle that is mind and body, mirror neurons and imitation, mirror neurons and empathy, and mirror neurons and resonance. While the mirror neuron hypothesis cannot be proven fully and scientifically yet in humans and remains contentious, the connections Rokatnitz witnesses (along with Blair, Kemp, Cook, and McConachie) cannot be overlooked or ignored.²¹⁶ Moreover, in a recent compilation of mirror

²¹⁶ Fiona Maren of *BBC's Science Focus Magazine Online* says the following about the importance of mirror neurons:

Neuroscientists who support claims of the mirror neuron have discovered that the internal processes of imagination, empathy, storytelling, and reflection may also be dependent on the “mirror system”—a collection of mirror neurons. For example, when someone tells a story, it’s believed that the mirror neurons in the brain of the storyteller and the listener synchronise. This makes the mirror neuron a hugely powerful tool in a range of contexts, from teaching children through to communicating as a leader. Our ability to reflect and make sense of the world involves us internally modelling scenarios. A sports professional is able to visualise their technique, improving performance.” (Murden, Fiona, “The Mirror Neuron: How Imitating Our Role Models Shapes Our Brains,” *BBC Science Focus Magazine*)

neuron studies (2020) by Cecilia Heyes and Caroline Catmur, the writers culminate their findings as follows: “We conclude that, although the results of careful empirical research were bound to be disappointing relative to the more grandiose claims, recent work on mirror neurons should encourage further systematic investigation” (Heyes and Catmur, “What Happened to Mirror Neurons?,” *PsyArXiv* 4). In other words, mirror neurons may not be as well studied as they should be, but they are an essential and invaluable aspect of the interdisciplinary field of acting and cognitive neuroscience. Mirror neurons reveal the connectedness of not just the body and the mind, but also of the self and others.

Similarly, Rokotnitz points to an interdependence between body and mind: She speaks of how they can be combined (bodymind) to better understand the self through others and vice versa. Rokotnitz lays out a holistic and resonating approach to acting that she shares with the late Stanislavski, the late Michael Chekhov, Rick Kemp, and Anne Bogart, to name a few. Significantly, Rick Kemp singles out a 2004 study by Gallese and other scientists that “lay[s] out the evidence that mirror neurons are also active in humans, both for action and emotions” (Kemp 141). Gallese et al. explain in their paper what they call the “process of internal replication or ‘simulation’” (cf. Kemp 141):

[T]he fundamental mechanism that allows us a direct experiential grasp of the mind of others is not conceptual reasoning but direct simulation of the observed events through the mirror mechanism. The novelty of our approach consists in providing for the first time a neurophysiological account of the experiential dimension of both action and emotion understanding. (Kemp, quoting Gallese et al. 2004: 397, 141)

Vladimir Mirodan similarly cites Gallese et al. (2004): “The discovery of mirror neurones (sic) in macaque monkeys (and their presumed existence in humans) has led to an understanding of imitation not as a process of conceptual reasoning, but as direct simulation, the actual experience of others’ emotions and actions” (Mirodan, *RC* 109).

Kemp, to render the Gallesian simulation process more easily understandable, gives two personal examples, such as when he clenches his jaw when he plays tug-of-war with his dog,

even though only the dog holds the toy with his teeth (cf. Kemp 141). Another example Kemp gives is that he braces for impact while watching sports on television, particularly sports he is familiar with and trained in (cf. Kemp 141). The original hypothesis before the discovery of mirror neurons was philosopher Robert Gordon's simulation theory (ST). Gordon proposed "that we simulate the mental states of others to understand their behavior or to predict their decision-making." More recently, however, researchers have built on Gordon's ST in the way they view empathy as "a cognitive mechanism that is involved in unconsciously 'mirroring' others' actions and emotions" (cf. Kemp 140). The fact that humans are social creatures, must understand others, and need others for survival makes the mirror neuron-in-human hypothesis very credible. If Gallese et al. are correct, if "mirror neuron system responses occur without any reflective mediation, without passing through the phase of conscious recognition," and if human beings are "actually experiencing the actions and emotions of others as [they] watch them" (Kemp 141), it would explain the deeply felt resonance and intersubjectivity between the actor and the audience.

In turn, this mirror neuron intersubjectivity between the actor and audience, between the self and the other, would explain the many musical metaphors and depictions used by scholars and theatre practitioners to illustrate the "resonance" or "attunement" between the actor and the audience and within the actor and the audience's bodymind. Resonance,²¹⁷ after all, stems from the Latin "*resonantia*," which means "echo" or the "quality of evoking response" (*Merriam-Webster*). Resonance is always something shared, something that demands a response to exist, something that demands an "other." It is defined as "the prolongation of a sound by reflection" (*OED*), something that causes vibration, reflection, or reverberation through a similar frequency, energy, or shared feelings: "the quality of having an intensity of emotion or richness of expression that evokes or reinforces a sympathetic response" (*Collins Dictionary*). Whether in music, physics, or chemistry—where "resonance" is defined as "a composite of two or more structures of higher energy" (*Oxford Languages*)—or in the arts—where it means "the power to

²¹⁷ The *New York Times* (*NYT*) dedicated an entire column to the word "resonate" due to its "pretentious overuse," which I, nonetheless, am further circulating. Ben Zimmer of the *NYT* enumerates new idioms for "resonate," such as "striking a chord," "being on the same wavelength," and "being in sync" in his column. Zimmer argues that "[t]here is nothing wrong with transferring sonic lingo to the realm of personal sympathies," but he advises not to "overuse" the word if one wants one's "words to fall on receptive ears" (Zimmer, Ben, "On Language: Resonate," *NYT*, 15 Nov. 2010). I have tried not to overuse "resonate," but I believe it is one of the best words to capture what I want to say. Therefore, I am defiantly sticking to it.

bring images, feelings, etc. into the mind of the person reading or listening” (*Lexico*), to “resonate” means to share something with another.

Regarding the resonance between the actor and the audience, Brody finds—as did Paul Ekman—that “‘the need to do’ precedes the ‘act of doing’ because our emotional brain translates the desire [we have for something] chemically” (Brody 27). Kemp says something very similar: “[M]imesis is central to cognition and precedes language in human evolution” (Kemp xxi). Kemp quotes cognitive psychologist Merlin Donald: “Mimesis is an analogue or holistic style of thought that is more basic to our uniquely human way of thinking than language or logic. Indeed, on present evidence language and logic evolved much later, from a mimetic platform” (Kemp 115). Donald explains the four mimetic abilities in humans (mime, imitation, gesture, and the rehearsal of skill) as “a cluster of activities . . . [that] evolved as a cognitive elaboration of embodiment in patterns of action” (cf. Kemp 116). Kemp also links “mimesis to character, as [the prefrontal cortex] is the [area] most strongly implicated in the creation and expression of personality” (cf. Kemp 116). Vittorio Gallese adds that an actor’s “relationship with a character . . . is intrinsically relational, so you enter into the—metaphorically or even literally—body of someone else. . . . So much more than a mirroring mechanism, it’s an imagery mechanism which partly impinges upon the same neuro-circuits which are involved in action observation” (cf. Kemp 116). Physical action and mental imagination are both linked to abstract thinking and are not separate.

Michael Chekhov recognized the deep link between the mind and the body. He understood that actors must employ mimesis, imitation, and imagination and bring them into their bodies to create characters. Chekhov’s insights into the bodymind were visionary and pragmatic:

[T]he imaginary body stirs the actor’s will and feelings; it harmonizes them with the characteristic speech and movements, it transforms the actor into another person! Merely discussing the character, analyzing it mentally, cannot produce this desired effect, because your reasoning mind, however skillful it may be, is apt to leave you cold and

passive, whereas the imaginary body has the power to appeal directly to your will and feelings. (Kemp quoting Chekhov's *To the Actor* [1985] 123)

Chekhov opens his book *To the Actor* with the sentence: "It is a known fact that the human body and psychology influence each other and are in constant interplay" (Kemp 127). Kemp foregrounds (he jokes, really) that when Chekhov was writing his book, the concept of the body-mind-interplay "was neither well-known nor widely believed" (Kemp 127). In fact, the physical approach to acting has been looked down upon until very recently. The bodymind approach to acting has gained popularity with the arrival of interdisciplinary theories of acting, including cognitive neuroscience, psychology, and biology: "The advantage of using cognitive neuroscience as a foundation for a theory of acting is that it is derived from empirical research into human behavior and is not entangled in the subjective terminology of competing theatrical schools of thought" (Kemp 94). Chekhov, as did Stanislavski in his later years, realized that a mere psychological and analytical approach to acting was lifeless. They observed that everything was linked: body, mind, imitation, simulation, mimesis, proprioception, empathy, and emotion.

Likewise, Lakoff and Gallese propose that action and movement are linked to the imagination: "[I]magination, like perceiving and doing, is embodied, that is, structured by our constant encounter and interaction with the world via our body and brains" (Kemp 110). Gallese and Lakoff explain how imagination uses the same brain networks as action and perception: "Our ability to imagine grasping makes use of the same neural substrate as performing and perceiving grasping. . . . [I]magining is a form of simulation—a mental simulation of action or perception, using many of the same neurons as actually acting or perceiving" (cf. Kemp 110). Additionally, proprioception—the "[p]erception or awareness of the position and movement of the body" (*Lexico, OED*)—links the physical and mental. For example, certain gestures give actors a different sense of confidence; other gestures can render actors feeling weak. If such gestures or other NVC is practiced with the body, it becomes what Stanislavski referred to as "second nature." In other words, proprioception, one's sense of self, or one's body within the environment can be altered by employing varying actions, behavior, gestures, and other NVC, thereby creating a new character. The presumption that most Western acting theories are based

on is limiting, namely, that there is an internal, psychological, inside-out approach to acting versus an external, physical, outside-in approach to acting. It is not either internal or external, but both. Cognitive neuroscience demonstrates that the physical and mental are linked and that the way we think and perceive the world (the abstract, conceptual) is founded on embodied, physical actions and experience. Even the physical, embodied actions of an actor onstage are linked to the imagined, mentally simulated actions or perceptions of the audience.

More specifically, the implication is that “the audience members read intention before action because their brains are reading the unconscious electro-chemical neuronal signals of the doer” (Brody 29). Gallese et al. suggest that “emotion and sensation [can be] mirror[ed] through bodily functions other than those of the brain,” which they call “embodied simulation” and “intercorporeality,” and which philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone calls “knowing through body-kinetic consciousness” (cf. Mirodan quoting Sheets-Johnstone, *RC* 109). As Kemp puts it, “Imaginative responses to fiction . . . are to some extent the actual experience of what fictional characters do” (cf. Kemp 142). The same brain pathways are employed by the response of the audience’s imagination to fiction as they are to real life. Only the audience’s second cognitive response, which validates or invalidates what they have seen, keeps them from an actual physical response to the fiction onstage. It is the validation system that Kemp calls “belief” (143) that keeps an audience member from jumping onto the stage. However, the validation system does not keep the audience from feeling actual feelings in response to an actor. Furthermore, the audience—to a certain extent—can discern the real from the fake (genuine²¹⁸ vs. artificial acting)

²¹⁸ By “real” and “genuine” acting, I do not solely refer to naturalism or perfect realism in acting. Audiences respond to an actor’s verbal and nonverbal expressions similarly. An actor in a satire can evoke just as much of an emotional (or otherwise) response from the audience as an actor in a drama or melodrama. For example, the character of Sherlock Holmes (BBC One’s *Sherlock Holmes* TV series of 2010–2017) played by Benedict Cumberbatch is not at all a Chekhovian, utterly realism-driven character. He is eccentric, fanciful, freakish (he is repeatedly called “freak” by other characters) and quite nonrepresentational of a “realistic” Englishman living in London. It is, however, just this bizarre, madcap, and off-center unconventionality of the character that most audiences respond to favorably.

The same could be said of the character of Jack Sparrow (*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, 2003) who was created by Johnny Depp, much to the initial chagrin of Disney’s studio heads who threatened to pull the plug on Depp’s interpretation of Sparrow if he did not fall in line. In Depp’s own words: “Disney hated me. [They were] thinking of every way they could to get rid of me, to fire me. ‘Oh, we’re going to have to subtitle him.’ ‘We don’t understand Captain Jack Sparrow. What’s wrong with him?’ ‘What’s wrong with his arms?’ ‘Is he drunk?’ ‘Is he mentally fucking stupefied?’ ‘Is he gay?’” (Heaf, Jonathan, “Johnny Depp Will Not Be Buried,” *GQ Magazine* 2 Oct. 2018). Depp’s response was firm: “Look, you don’t like what I’m doing, fire me. You hired me to do a job and play the character, and this is what I want to do. This is the work.” (*GQ*). Of course, audiences worldwide vindicated Depp’s portrayal and interpretation despite its unreality.

because about “90 percent of spoken utterances in daily life are accompanied by gesture; acting that does not incorporate gesture (both physical and vocal) will appear still and unexpressive” (Kemp 91). For example, voluntary facial expressions are controlled by a different cerebral hemisphere than involuntary facial expressions—such as a fake versus a real smile—and the audience notices these phenomena²¹⁹:

[T]he difference between apparently genuine and false displays of emotion will provoke a response in the audience. Observant audience members might find the difference discernible at a conscious level and would probably identify false displays of emotion as “bad acting.” . . . Other, less observant members might feel vaguely unsatisfied or subliminally unconvinced by the acting, without being able to identify why.²²⁰
(Kemp 31)

The audience is perfectly tuned into the actor’s expressions: “We react to the pitch, rhythm, speed, and length of pauses in others’ speech and are *attuned* to the ways they stand as well as to their gait and hand gestures” (Mirodan, *RC* 109, emphasis mine).

²¹⁹ Kemp explains this:

[W]hat is happening when an actor prepares and performs a character is that patterns of neurons firing in the brain provoke physical action that can be perceived by an audience. The process by which this occurs is largely unavailable to conscious reflection; we define those aspects of it that we can become aware of in metaphorically shaped concepts. *Many of the proclaimed differences between approaches to acting are actually differences in the types of metaphors used to describe self and process.* (Kemp 93, emphasis editor’s)

²²⁰ This observation about the audience sensing the genuine and the non-genuine in an actor’s performance also shows that the observant audience member may be able to put into words why he or she felt the acting was “fake” or “bad.” However, the unobservant audience member could not put into words why she or he did not feel the performance of the actor was genuine or “good.” The emotion evoked in the audience is as difficult to verbalize as it is for actors to write about how they felt while performing (see my chapter on emotions and Elly Konijn’s study).

Likewise, Anne Bogart, in her theatre blog, speaks of the audience as a human “tuning fork”: “[E]ach of us vibrates to our own particular tune. We can also be out-of-tune”²²¹ (Bogart, “Am I a Tuning Fork?,” *Ann Bogart’s Blog* 15 Jul. 2019). The musical metaphor, after all, originates with musicians and their instruments purposefully being in tune or in sync. Musicians tune their instruments before a concert, not solely to harmonize with one another but also to harmonize with the audience. Transformation and resonance require the artist to be present, open, and vulnerable to the audience, radically accepting of them, completely willing to give to them and receive from them, and yielding to the reality that the audience may “validate or destroy” them (cf. Skura 4). Resonance always requires two participants who allow themselves to affect one another. Brody picked up this very thought in Stanislavski’s writing. He had asked, “Haven’t you ever been aware, in life or onstage, when in communication with other people, of a current emanating from your will flowing through their eyes, your fingertips, your skin? [Stanislavski calls this “communication”] Emitting and receiving rays, signals . . . radiating out and radiating in”²²² (cf. Brody, quoting Benedetti’s translation of Stanislavski’s *An Actor’s Work* 30). Brody says she was “struck by Stanislavski’s perception” and foresight (cf. Brody 30).

²²¹ Interestingly, Ophelia also describes Hamlet’s mind with musical metaphors. She calls it “out-of-tune” where it used to “sing”: “that noble and most sovereign reason/Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh” (*Hamlet* 3.13.157–159). In the way Bogart describes the “tuning-in” of an actor with an audience, Ophelia perceives Hamlet’s mind through her body’s barometer, phenomenologically. Her perceptions of Hamlet’s state of mind are visceral and physical rather than intellectual. This is what Kristin Linklater speaks about when she states the “Elizabethan English lived in the body. . . . Elizabethans experienced thought in the organs of the body” (Linklater, “The Incredible Shrinking Shakespearean,” *linklatervoice.com*).

²²² It is worth mentioning that as early as 1757, G.E. Lessing had picked up on such a resonant vibration between actor and audience. He, too, uses a musical metaphor to describe the actor-audience-relationship:

Lessing suggests that this relationship [between actor and audience] is analogous to the sympathetic vibration between two strings in a single musical instrument and that this “string metaphor” (Saitenmetapher) illustrates how an actor’s experience of the passions stimulates a reaction in the spectator, even though both bodily spaces are separated from another. . . . “It is known,” he writes, “that when one gives two strings the same tension, and the first is made to sound through a touch, the other will sound with it, without having been touched itself” (Brief an Moses Mendelssohn” 713). The sensibilities of actor and spectator function like these strings in that their *sympathetic resonance* causes an emotional reaction distinct from that which triggered it. In Lessing’s metaphorical example, the vibration of the first string affects the other only when the two share a particular correspondence through their *tuning*; the first string does not force the other to sound the same note but rather stimulates the other to sound its *own* note. When extended into the theater and applied to the acting process, the *Saitenmetapher* suggests that an actor, the “first string,” is able to stimulate, through the “sounding” of his passion, a sympathetic reaction in the audience’s body, (the “second string”). (Baldyga, “We have actors, but no art of acting,” *Hamburg Dramaturgy* 19, emphasis editor’s, resonance/vibration emphasis mine; see also Baldyga, “Corporeal Eloquence,” *Theatre Survey* 58.2 (2017).

Correspondingly, Phillip Zarrilli states that “a good actor must ‘radiate presence’” (Zarrilli 19). Zarrilli explains that “presence” is an “inner energy”: “This inner activity is resonant and therefore ‘felt’” (Zarrilli 19). The actor’s “presence” and “inner energy” are shared with the audience. It is emotional contagion²²³—the spreading of emotional states—of the best kind. Correspondingly, Anne Bogart calls this “emitting and receiving signals” “resonance.”²²⁴ For plays or actors to resonate with audiences, they must “get on another person’s frequency. If someone is on [their] wavelength or if [they are] ‘in tune’ with them, resonance occurs” (Bogart, “Tuning Fork”). Bogart calls resonance the mark of a successful play. When actors affect audiences, their bodies “become a barometer” and reverberate back; they are “in tune” (Bogart, “Tuning Fork”). Strikingly, all these theatre scholars and/or theatre practitioners use the same, or very similar, sonic language and metaphors to describe the invisible, NVC between actors and audiences. Brody, similarly, calls this “tuning in” a “hooking in” to: “The old idea that, unlike animals, people aren’t born with instincts has been tossed out [by science]. . . . Such software enables us to hook into specific aspects of the world and its creatures, even when we are not aware of doing so. For me, this software is a progenitor of archetypes” (Brody 32). An actor who can express an archetype with clarity will, through “metaphor and physical imagery ring [a] bell in actors and audiences alike” (cf. Brody 115). In science, fMRIs and mirror neurons are the first step toward measuring this “resonance” between actors and audiences. Language can only capture it, as I will argue, through paradox.

What makes archetypes,²²⁵ metaphors, and narratives powerful is their paradox: “The problem of order versus chaos is at the bottom of them all, and we [the audience] are fascinated

²²³ It has been empirically proven that: “Similar to the way people can pass the common cold around, Hatfield and other psychology experts have shown that people also spread their emotional states. . . . People who are likely to catch each other’s emotions are sensitive observers” (cf. Sifferlin, Alexandra, “Are Emotions Contagious?,” *The Science of Emotions—Special Time Edition* Dec. 2020–Jan. 2021). In addition: “The philosopher Robert Gordon wrote: ‘You can catch an emotion, just as you can catch a cold, without knowing who you caught it from’” (Mirodan, Vladmimir, “Acting and Emotion,” *RC* 109).

²²⁴ Hartmut Rosa struck a very similar note in the fields of social sciences and philosophy. He describes resonance as an active relationship of listening and responding: When something or somebody touches us, has an effect on us, and when we, in turn, respond, that is resonance. It is a dialogical relationship between the universe and a subject or, theatrically put, between an audience and an actor.

²²⁵ In *Psychology and Alchemy*, C.G. Jung famously recognizes the archetypal paradox: “The self is made manifest in the opposites and the conflicts between them; it is a *coincidentia oppositorum*” (Jung, Carl Gustav. *Psychology and Alchemy. The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Vol. 12*. R. F. C. Hull, trans., Princeton UP, 1968, p. 186).

by the dichotomy. We are always aware of our duality and the conflict that is an undeniable component of separateness poised against a desire for balance” (Brody 34). Paradoxes test the limits of reason and intellect. They allow audiences to be receptive to understanding things they thought they understood, but now question. Paradoxes open the mind because they tap into an area beyond reason. It leads an audience into an in-between area of confusion and puzzlement that stuns them into rethinking things. Paradox resonates by prompting the audience to participate and respond.

CHAPTER 3:

THE REAL PARADOX OF THE ACTOR AND THE VOID IN LANGUAGE

3a) Tapping into Another’s Consciousness: The Art of Expressing Paradox with the Body and the Language of Authority

It’s interesting my experience is that people want their lives to be filled with love and laughter and friendship and family. They want to have nice lives. They want to have happy lives. But when they go to the theater, they want *someone who’s brave enough to lead them into the darkness*. They want *someone who can express the darkness they feel in their own lives and in their own hearts*, but they don’t want it at their front door. That’s what they want from art. That’s what they want from actors. (Tom Hiddleston quoting Anthony Hopkins on acting and playing Hannibal Lecter, *BAFTA Interviews*, 2016, emphasis mine)

Paul Ekman, after forty years of studying emotions, puts it similarly: “[P]eople want to be happy,²²⁶ and most of us don’t want to experience fear, anger, disgust, sadness, or anguish unless it is in the safe confines of a theater” (cf. Ekman xxi). The fact that actors go to places that non-actors try to avoid is more engaging and begs the question of how they can do so. Joseph Roach

²²⁶ I am not happy with the word “happy” when used in the context of what everybody wants from life. While I disagree with this generalization, it does not diminish the overall point Ekman makes about the purpose of art.

—with many others—states high sensitivity in an actor as one of the answers to how they can access liminal space and bring some of it back to an audience. In the *Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance, and Cognitive Science (RC)*, Vladimir Mirodan arrives at a similar conclusion in his essay “Acting and Emotion.” Exceptionally good actors can express themselves and the world around them in a much more powerful way than non-actors: “Mirror neurons reinforced by the clarity of the actor’s actions and intentions” resonate with an audience (cf. Brody 115). The great actor expresses the inexpressible and makes visible the invisible. Non-actors may sense that there is something within them that they would like to express, but they have no way of doing so:

Acting begins with a tiny inner movement so slight that it is almost completely *invisible*. . . . Not only in actors—the movement occurs in anyone, but in most non-actors the movement is too slight to manifest in any way: The actor is a *more sensitive* instrument, and in him, the *tremor*²²⁷ is detected. (Roach quoting Peter Brook, *Passion* 106, emphasis mine)

The idea of the great actor having more developed sensitivities to what Brook calls the “tremor” has been described many times. Actors in particular are described as being more sensitive to their environment and the moods of others: “People who are likely to catch each other’s emotions are sensitive observers” (Sifferlin, Amanda, “Are Emotions Contagious?,” *The Science of Emotions—Special Time Edition (TSE)* Dec. 2020–Jan. 2021, 40–44).

Normal people “are constantly reading each other’s moods, even though they may not realize it. . . . When we interact with others, we partake in what’s referred to as mimicry, in which we mimic what other people are doing. . . . Basically, we pick up each other’s nonverbal cues and, in some cases, ‘catch’ each other’s moods. . . . ‘Emotional contagion is ubiquitous, and

²²⁷ Notably, Brook uses yet another musical metaphor to describe acting and the resonance between the actor and the audience.

our studies²²⁸ show that people don't realize it's happening'" (Sifferlin, quoting Sigal Barsade, *TSE* 42). Good actors are experts in picking up non-verbal cues, and they are experts in communicating with others through NVC. One of the best descriptions of an actor's extreme sensitivity to his surroundings comes from journalist Stuart McGurk, after he had interviewed and observed actor Benedict Cumberbatch for several days. McGurk tries to pinpoint the difference between himself, a non-actor, and Cumberbatch, the actor: Very perceptively, McGurk notices the paradox of contrasts ("contrast dial turned down," light and dark, good and bad). Additionally, he describes the actor's skill with the same musical metaphor that Anne Bogart, Naomi Rokotnitz, Phillip Zarrilli, etc. use:

But mostly, I feel, compared with Cumberbatch, like someone going through existence with the *contrast dial turned down*. To him, it seems, everything is neon bright. The barbs may sting more sharply, but his sun must shine that much brighter. It's not hard to imagine how this sensitivity—both bad and good—feeds into his acting. He feels more, notices more, hears more. It's in his nature—he's a human *tuning fork*.²²⁹ (McGurk, Stuart, *GQ Magazine* 31 Dec. 2013, emphasis mine)

An audience wants to glance at darkness, but they do not want to wallow in it and bring it home.

Metaphorically speaking, great actors can enter dark places, strange places, mad places, sad places, sublime places, immerse themselves in them, break off a piece of them, and take that piece with them so they can return it to the audience. The actor must not just experience the emotion but express it. Experiencing an emotion is something that everyone does, but non-actors have not learned to express emotions for others. Experiencing an emotion is, to non-actors, a

²²⁸ The study Sifferlin refers to here is by Sigal Barsade, professor of management at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Barsade "has spent years studying how emotional contagion can play out in the workplace" (Sifferlin, *TSE* 42). Another specialist Sifferlin quotes is the psychologist Phil Shaver, who "revealed that people can identify around 135 different emotions . . . quickly" (cf. Sifferlin, *TSE* 42). Elaine Hatfield, professor of psychology at the University of Hawaii, is another specialist cited in Sifferlin's article on emotional contagion.

²²⁹ Note the almost identical observation made on Val Kilmer's acting and acting choices: "His choices may have confounded you or left you breathless, but you were never, ever bored by his performances, even if the movies they're taking place in were DOA. You were always compelled to watch Kilmer, always willing to try tuning in to his wavelength" (Fear, *Rolling Stone* 2021).

private affair; expressing emotions for others publicly is the actor's craft. Michael Chekhov reminds actors in his book *To the Actor* not to "become ordinary photographers rather than artists [who] bring life-as-it-is onto the stage" (cf. Kemp 127). Chekhov beautifully emphasizes "that the real task of the creative artist is not merely to copy the outer appearance of life but to interpret life in all its facets and profoundness, to show what is behind the phenomena of life, to let the spectator look beyond life's surfaces and meanings" (Kemp 127). Actors must not solely photograph or imitate life or a character; they must interpret and express this life and character to the audience. The latter is also what famous acting coach Larry Moss says: "That is the actor's job: *to interpret*" (Moss 10, emphasis editor's). Moreover, to feel the emotion without turning it inward, to act, sing, or work through it is the actor's task. To do it well by walking the tightrope between order and chaos without falling off as well as by mastering paradox is, I would argue, the actor's art.²³⁰

Joseph Roach describes the paradox of the great actor perfectly in his book *It*: "Theatrical performance . . . consists of struggle, the simultaneous experience of mutually exclusive possibilities—truth and illusion, presence and absence, face and mask. [. . .] With an intensity of focus beyond the reach of normal people, those with It can project these and other antinomies apparently at will" (9). In other words, as put earlier: The actor is and is not. The actor can express the in-between state when the non-actor remains comfortably in the either/or state. Let me revisit my earlier thought on Joseph Roach's following up his 1993 study of acting theory with his 2007 study of "abnormally interesting people," most of whom are compelling actors who have what he calls "It" (Roach, *It* 1). Roach claims "It" is hard to define, but goes on to provide excellent definitions of "It" without realizing that what he describes is the real paradox of the actor, the very paradox he had "resolved" in *Passion of the Player* with pure reason and science and absolutely no "detours into the realm of ineffable mystery" (cf. Roach, *Passion* 226).

In *It*, Roach calls the theater district an "It Zone" (cf. Roach, *It* 12). He relates "It" to what Zeami, a theorist of Noh acting, considered to be "*hana*," the ninth and highest level of

²³⁰ A good example is the recent performance of Ben Platt as Evan Hanson in *Dear Evan Hanson*. Critics and audiences were amazed that he could sing through tears and belt out the most difficult notes while expressing great pain. He was able to let feelings run through him and externalize them. The universal reaction to the musical was admiration and amazement. It became an instant success and moved to Broadway, where it broke records. It did, indeed, resonate with audiences.

“The Flower of Peerless Charm” (7). Moreover, he quotes Eugenio Barba’s *The Secret Art of the Performer*, who describes “It” as the success of analogous oppositions in compelling physical performances: “The performer develops resistance by creating oppositions” (cf. Roach, *It* 8). Roach writes of the rise of the actress, and almost all of his examples for “It” are performers or people whose lives include a great number of staged parades and performances. Yet, Roach seems not to connect that *It* answers the question of the paradox of the actor he had left to Diderot in his earlier *The Passion of the Player*. The real paradox of the actor is *It*. The “It” of the great actor is an “antiphony” or “divine discord.”²³¹ A good actor is there to make audience members “uncomfortable” by striking a chord in them that responds to antiphony, not by being wonderful or terrifying, but both. To recapture: The great actor can express something in a way that the audience recognizes but cannot express itself. The great actor can both enliven and terrify the audience by expressing a darkness²³² for them that it knows is there but is too afraid to explore and express itself. Good actors do this simultaneously. They can “bathe²³³ others in their energy” (cf. Goyder, *Star Quality (SQ)* 71). Good actors communicate themselves to the audience by feeling “so strongly about something that others feel it, too” (cf. Goyder, *SQ* 26). The latter has been confirmed by neuroscience via emotional contagion and mirror neurons in just the way Quintilian, Horace, and Cicero said.²³⁴ For the audience to feel it, the actor/orator must feel it first, but must harness it. Keith Johnstone calls such emotional contagion “letting your space flow into others” (cf. Goyder, *SQ* 148), which is always uncomfortable. It may be wonderful, terrifying, or both, but never comfortable.

²³¹ I use Joseph Roach’s appropriation (in his book *It*) of George Meredith’s term because it fits the paradox of the actor perfectly.

²³² By “darkness,” I do not merely refer to deviant or sinister characters such as Hannibal Lecter, albeit that is one aspect of it. I also refer to a sadness that often accompanies the work of actors generally considered comedians. One may only think of Robin Williams, who combined humor with a ubiquitous melancholy. It was the presence of both, I would argue, that made him the wonderful actor he was.

²³³ The flow or water-related metaphors of “bathing others in one’s energy,” “tapping into another’s energy,” or “letting yourself flow through another” all—like the musical metaphors—allow connection for sharing a space or frequency. They all have in common a union of some sort.

²³⁴ “Mirror neurons allow us to grasp the mind of others not through conceptual reasoning but through direct simulation” (Blair, quoting Rizzolatti 14). The human brain has “multiple mirror neuron systems that specialize in carrying out and understanding not just the actions of others, but their intentions, the social meaning of behavior, and their emotions” (Blair, quoting Blakeslee 13).

To change the status quo and resonate with an audience, the actor must be a bit of a heretic or even an anarchist. For example, theatre critic Liz Hoggard described Mark Rylance as follows: “I’d argue Mark Rylance is a brilliant, dangerous performer who can dazzle us in a play like *Jerusalem*, or indeed with his current role as a Russian spy in Spielberg’s *Bridge of Spies*, because he is a questing,²³⁵ anarchic spirit” (cf. Hoggard, Liz, “Should Actors Be Political?,” *The Guardian* 12 Dec. 2015). Good actors have learned “how to deal with uncertainty and being comfortable being uncomfortable” (Mamet 20). They are great at building connections among humans and tapping into another’s consciousness. They cross “the boundaries between your feelings and mine, your actions and mine” (cf. Blair 14).

Only you can think clearly; only you can briefly make a portion of the world make sense; only you can preserve the memory of that moment. These thoughts will not comfort you, but they might make you free. Neither art nor thought is comfortable. I am here to make you nervous. (Zarrilli, quoting Hollis Huston, *Psychophysical Acting* 3)

However, Peter Platt perceptively picks this up by building on Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice*: “[T]his is the predicament of heretics, sorcerers, prophets, playwrights, [and, I would add, actors]: To critique the doxa—to engage in para-doxa—they must still employ the language of authority if they are to bring the undiscussed into discussion and strengthen this authority” (cf. Platt 53). Therefore, the actor’s proficiency in paradox must be “a touchable text and an embodied performance” (cf. Cook, *AP* 80). The actor’s mastery of contrarities is a “far from paralyzing activity” that actively engages the audience (cf. Platt 55).

The power of fiction, metaphor, and paradox is unleashed when an actor knows how to harness and express them:

²³⁵ Since I had the privilege of meeting and speaking with Mark Rylance, I think it is important to add that he listens quite actively and intently. He listens with great patience, and he never anticipates a response or cuts off his conversational partner. He also looks into the other person’s eyes with the appropriate intensity. He truly re-acts to the other; he does not just act. He makes the other party feel heard and seen.

The imagination contends with the lie [metaphor or fiction] and derives from it a truth. Or, perhaps, we perceive multiple truths born of one metaphoric lie. Language becomes plastic in poetry. It does things that defy the laws of discursive language use. [This is how the artist can] use words to express things that are too deep for words. . . . In so breaking the rules, language becomes presentational. It presents to the imagination the building blocks of meaning in surprising, sometimes contradictory modes, and it allows for the meaning to emerge more lyrically than literally. (cf. Schmit, Clayton J., quoting Edmund Gibbs, "The Preacher's Paradox," Fuller Studio)

The good actor can express, through metaphor, fiction, and paradox, a truth (or truths) that has a meaning "that cannot be graded . . . or calculated. One [the audience] can only receive . . . and let it have its way with the imagination of the heart" (Gibbs, Fuller). To receive such a meaning, the audience, like the actor, must be open to it and willing to enter with the actor into an in-between state of uncertainty and paradox.

Neuroscience grants a new understanding of how the mind works and may now and more so in the future grant better ways of speaking and writing about emotions, acting, and in-between states. It may find a way of describing the paradox that "can help an audience experience 'representations of the almost absolute copresence of almost absolute incompatibles'" (cf. Platt, quoting Gary Taylor 51). Quantum mechanics has long conceded the existence of unresolvable paradoxes: Take, as an example, Niels Bohr's²³⁶ notion of complementarity, his "recognition that twentieth-century physicists . . . find themselves forced to live with apparently unresolvable paradoxes and contrarities" (Platt, quoting Niels Bohr 46). Bohr, unlike most scientists, embraced the paradox he had encountered and said, "How wonderful that we have met with a paradox. Now we have some hope of making progress" (Moore and Kaag quoting Niels Bohr, *AS*

²³⁶ Niels Bohr wrote in "Discussion with Einstein on Epistemological Problems in Atomic Physics," Mortimer J. Adler, ed., *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1990), vol. 56, pp. 337–55:

In the Institute in Copenhagen, where through these years a number of young physicists from various countries came together for discussions, we used, when in trouble, often to comfort ourselves with jokes, among them the old saying of the two kinds of truth. To the one kind belonged statements so simple and clear that the opposite assertion obviously could not be defended. The other kind, the so-called "deep truths," are statements in which the opposite also contains deep truth. (p. 354)

39). The good actor reveals to the audience “a surprise that can be accommodated by nothing less than a *repudiation* of part of our conceptual heritage”²³⁷ (Quine, *Scientific American* 88, emphasis mine). In other words, actors can show the audience that it does not know what it thinks it knows. Paradoxically, actors do so through fiction. Actors use paradoxes to problematize conventional truths to transform an audience. In the manner Touchstone tells Audrey that “the truest poetry is the most feigning” (*AYLI* 3.3.15–16), the good actor transforms an audience through fiction and paradox through “true illusion.”

The actor’s ability to exist within a paradox and to share it with the audience “not only encourages [audience] participation, but requires it. . . . Without resonance, paradox is dead” (Platt, quoting Rosalie Colie 14). Paradox eludes the linguistic and logic trap. Paradox reminds us not to confuse the map with the territory. This suggests that logical truth, which is based on symbols and their relationships to one another, may very well differ from factual truth. Paradox demands a physical, participatory response. It demands a meeting of the bodymind between the actor and the audience (resonance). Paradox demands more than the current model of Western science can offer, namely, to attempt to appropriate and define *paradox* through natural laws and measurements alone. Andrew Belser uses neuroscience in his acting classes to “link the cross-disciplinary research related to neuroscience with new models for performers and teachers to understand and practice the complex actions of performance in new ways” (Belser, andrewbelser.com). Belser does this because he perceives the need for in-between states and paradoxes. He tells his students, “We will work on practical strategies to access paradox in a character through the structural organization of the body” (Belser, andrewbelser.com). Belser seeks to demonstrate to his students how to make a paradox physical. Neuroscience demonstrates how memory and imitation via mirror neurons are physical events.²³⁸

²³⁷ Peter Platt brought W. V. Quine’s 1962 essay about paradox to my attention. Platt quotes Quine several times in *Shakespeare and the Culture of Paradox*.

²³⁸ Mirror neurons promise to demonstrate the need for imitation among people that Naomi Rokatnitz and, as mentioned, Rick Kemp, Vladimir Mirodan, and Bruce McConachie discuss. Memory and imitation via mirror neurons are physical events in the way neuroscientist Giacomo Rizzolatti puts it: “Mirror neurons allow us to grasp the mind of others not through conceptual reasoning but through direct simulation” (Blakeslee quoting Giacomo Rizzolatti, *NYT*, 2006).

Damasio posits a “proto-narrative as the beginning of consciousness”: “Consciousness begins when brains acquire power . . . of telling a story without words, the story that there is life ticking away in an organism” (cf. Blair 63). This parallels, as Stanislavski taught, theatre’s “very being as embodied narrative” (Blair 64). It also explains theatrical thinking, metaphorical thinking, and our need for shared narratives: “The science indicates that the human propensity for making stories is more than just a culturally conditioned trait” (Blair 63). The science of emotion reveals that the facial expressions of basic emotions are universal,²³⁹ not cultural: “In many ways, emotions are our universal language. The face’s 42 muscles arrange themselves to reflect feelings that humans around the world can recognize, whether instinctively or culturally, without having to be taught” (Oaklander, Mandy, “Introduction: All About Emotions,” *The Science of Emotions*, TSE 4). Science also illustrates that we need stories to make sense of our lives, and for that, we need storytellers. Skilled actors know how to create connections among humans: They know how to tap into another’s consciousness. Alternatively, to use Bogart’s and MacGurk’s musical metaphors: They understand how to tune into another’s frequency. The consciousness or frequency must be shared by both the actor and the audience to create a shared narrative. The latter can transform the audience and bring about the sympathetic resonance that two musical instruments share when one strikes a certain note. Vibration—“a periodic motion of the particles of an elastic body or medium in alternately *opposite directions* from the position of equilibrium when that equilibrium has been disturbed”—and oscillation—“a single swing from

²³⁹ Paul Ekman makes this point several times throughout his book *Emotions Revealed*. His insight into emotion results from more than forty years of studying the field. However, this issue—like mirror neurons, empathy, and simulation—is contentious. For example, the journal of the *National Academy of Sciences (NAS)* very recently (April of 2021) argued that emotions are not universal across cultures, not even basic ones (see Jack, Rachael E., et al. “Facial Expressions of Emotion Are Not Culturally Universal,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)* 16 Apr. 2021). Rachael Jack et al. refute that emotions are universal and claim that there is a difference between Eastern and Western facial expressions. Having studied both arguments, I contend that in acting, it is safe to say that actors know how to convey emotions via their facial expressions, particularly when they add gestures and body language, and especially when they put real emotions behind it all. Paul Ekman insists in response to the critics of his theory:

[Ekman] points to recent evidence revealing distinct brain circuits for different emotions and the fact that facial expressions for some emotions, such as disgust, are present at birth, suggesting they’re innate. “The evidence is quite strong this is a universal signaling system,” Ekman says. “I need to learn different words or I need to learn different bodily gestures if I’m traveling to another country, but I don’t need to learn different expressions.” (Burrell quoting Ekman, *Discover Magazine* 2017)

one *extreme limit to the other*” (Merriam–Webster, emphasis mine) occur only when the actor’s art engages and resonates with the audience’s heart.

3b) The Power of Non-Verbal Communication

“The life of this world is nothing but the harmony of opposites. . . . When the lips are silent, the heart has a hundred tongues” (Moosa Raza quoting Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (Rumi), *The Times of India*, 2007).

To explain the resonance between an actor and an audience, it is imperative I address NVC in depth. As previously mentioned, resonance and transformation are caused by actors’ willingness and effort to allow the audience to flow through them, to allow the audience to “validate or destroy” (Skura 4) them, to be vulnerable and naked for them, and to be uncomfortable for them: “Every good actor must have a gladiator instinct” (Skura 14). Good actors must be both vulnerable and completely accessible to the audience, while having warrior-like nerves of steel. Such a discomfiting display, it must be mentioned, is not something most people are capable of or are even willing to submit to: “It is ‘emotional nudity’ . . . as stark as physical nakedness” (cf. Skura quoting Redfield, *Letters from an Actor* (47), 12). Actors use their entire body to communicate with the audience, which is why the concept of the bodymind is so important. NVC—what actors term “body language” or “subtext”²⁴⁰—includes the following: facial expressions, eye behavior, posture, gesture, spatial dynamics, and movement/rhythm, as well as the tempo of movement and action, volume/projection, the tempo of speech, the rhythm and cadence of speech and sound, pitch/inflexion, timbre, vocal production/enunciation/articulation, and accent/dialect/pronunciation (cf. Kemp 29). Good actors are experts in reading others and reacting to others (other actors onstage, the audience, and, I would argue, other people in general). Good actors read the room with the astuteness and interpretive skill of a detective collecting clues.

²⁴⁰ I will explain “subtext” in depth shortly.



Thalia Goldstein proposes, “Actors are individuals likely to have strong theory-of-mind²⁴¹ skills, either as part of their innate makeup or as learned from acting training (or both)” (Goldstein, “Psychological Perspectives on Acting,” *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 7). When she mentions the theory of mind, Goldstein refers to “the ability to accurately ‘read’ or infer a person’s facial expression, body language, prosody, verbal utterances, and knowledge of information available on the person [character] in question” (Goldstein, “Psychological Perspectives on Acting” 7). Science reveals that “[w]e vary in our ability to decode facial expressions, but paying attention to faces as you interact can help you catch microexpressions, fleeting facial movements that provide hints to how people really feel” (Graves, Ginny, “Unlock Your Emotional Intelligence,” *The Science of Emotions, TSE* 12). Furthermore, as Alexandra Sifferlin points out:

[S]ocial scientists are gaining a greater understanding of how humans use their entire bodies to process and display emotions. . . . Because our attention is often focused on the face, . . . we underweight the importance of body gestures, but there is a lot of meaningful information to be extracted from these gestures. (cf. Sifferlin, quoting Alexander Todorov, “How We Read Body Language,” *The Science of Emotions, TSE* 48)

Therefore, the combination of facial expressions with gestures and body language in general is key to the NVC that actors master.

Good actors know both how to decode NVC (interpret the emotions of others) and how to express their own emotions through it. Recent science in the *Time Special Edition of The Science of Emotions* of December 2020/January 2021 foregrounds the importance of body language by

²⁴¹ The *American Psychological Association (APA)* defines the “Theory of Mind” (“ToF”) as follows: “[T]he understanding that others have intentions, desires, beliefs, perceptions, and emotions different from one’s own and that such intentions, desires, and so forth affect people’s actions and behaviors. Children show the rudiments of theory of mind as toddlers, have a limited understanding of the relation between belief and action by age 3, and can begin to infer false beliefs in others by around age 4” (*APA Dictionary of Psychology, American Psychological Association* 2020).

reminding readers that it is, after all, “one of humanity’s oldest languages”²⁴² that existed well before speech entered human discourse (cf. Sifferlin, “How to Read Body Language,” *TSE* 48).

“Body language is important, because it provides context for interpreting the meaning of facial expressions,” says Todorov. “Generally, facial expressions are much more ambiguous than we think. However, because the context, including body language, helps us disambiguate the meaning of these expressions, we are rarely aware of their ambiguity.” Another interesting discovery in the past 10 years is that people appear to process information with their entire bodies, rather than simply their minds, and sometimes, this processing of information has physical cues. (Sifferlin, “How We Read Body Language,” *TSE* 49)

Another important argument Ginny Graves makes is that “it helps to have humility” and self-awareness²⁴³ when reading other people’s body language and emotions (cf. Graves, “Emotional Intelligence,” *TSE* 13, 10). Graves underscores that the most emotionally intelligent people are not the ones most confident in their skills, but the ones who allow themselves—as good actors do—to remain uncertain (cf. Graves, *TSE* 13).

Rick Kemp laments that the Western system still does not teach acting holistically: “Currently, the notion that meaning is primarily expressed through language is predominant. . . . However, recent research shows that much meaning in interpersonal interaction is communicated non-verbally” (Kemp xvi). While actors are taught movement and breathing (such as the

²⁴² Sifferlin adds:

To what extent body language is a universal language, and how nuances depend on community and context, remain debated. But what’s clear is that humans have unconsciously used body language to read one another and communicate for centuries, if not longer. . . . Take the findings of Albert Mehrabian, currently a professor emeritus of psychology at UCLA, who is considered one of the fathers of modern body-language science. In the 1960s, he estimated that depending on the circumstance, the delivery of a message is 7% verbal, 38% vocal—which means tone of voice and other sounds—and 55% nonverbal. Mehrabian’s breakdown specifically applied to situations where people’s actions and their words do not align. (cf. Sifferlin, “How to Read Body Language,” *TSE* 48)

²⁴³ When reading other people, it is best to allow as little ego as possible. While it is not possible to completely remove oneself from the equation, it is possible to begin each reading and interpretation of another person with the understanding that they may not think as one does. The key is to genuinely take in the other person and find his or her NVC baseline.

Alexander technique), these classes are taught separately from the other acting, script-based classes. So much of the good actor's work depends on NVC skills: "Approximately 50 percent . . . of meaning is . . . communicated non-verbally. This means that we should pay equal attention to training an actor's non-verbal communication skills as to training their linguistic skills" (cf. Kemp xvii). Note that this division in actor training is the same division I mentioned at the beginning of my introduction between literary criticism (language-based) and performance criticism (body-based). Kemp foregrounds that "there is no systemic organization of the elements that communicate non-verbal meaning [in most theatre training programs], or even a comprehensive vocabulary. Now that there is an empirical basis for codifying NVC, it makes sense to use this as a basis for an approach to training actors in physical communication" (cf. Kemp 37).

Kemp adds that, for actors, the fact that "behavior communicates meaning," and the fact that "speech and gesture are linked [are] self-evident" (cf. Kemp 37). However, actors derive this knowledge solely from practical experience. Writing about what good actors do and how they do it, how they say words, and how they "behave the text" (cf. Kemp 61) requires letting go of the "traditional view within psychology [that] language and nvc (sic) are two separate systems" (cf. Kemp 63). The key to understanding (and writing about) what good actors do demands a synthesis of the two. To be precise, the "current understanding of the embodied mind [by social psychologists such as Adam Kendon²⁴⁴ and Paul Ekman, cognitive linguists and philosophers

²⁴⁴ Adam Kendon is one of the foremost scholars of gesture. In his study on the same, Kendon points out just how little studied the field is. He demonstrates the importance of gesture beginning with Quintilian and continues to link it to language and to language origin. "For most of this century, gesture has been little studied, however, despite the interest in nonverbal communication that developed after 1950" (Kendon, Adam. "Gesture." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 26, 1997, pp. 109–128. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2952517. Accessed 17 Dec. 2020). Kendon, in particular, says that gesture is "a set of bodily expressions employed as a component of an UTTERANCE. In other words, it is a VISIBLE BODILY ACTION that is recognized as a meaningful component in communication" (Chiho Sunakawa. *Language in Society*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2007, pp. 115–118. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4169566. Accessed 17 Dec. 2020).

such as George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and David McNeill,²⁴⁵ and other scholars] enables direct actions to synthesize the “internal” experiences of psychological and emotional states and the “external” expressions of those states through behavioral activity in a reflexive feedback loop (cf. Kemp 62). The playwright’s or the film script’s words remain the same. However, the non-verbal choices an actor makes are often key to unique performances.²⁴⁶ Kemp calls NVC “the most visible part of the psychophysical process; ... Although it is visible, much of it is overlooked, as we tend to execute it and assimilate it consciously” (cf. Kemp xix).

Correspondingly, Adam Kendon, one of the foremost authorities on the subject of gesture, argued that “gesture is little studied” (Kendon, “Gesture,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 110). Meanwhile, so much of the fabric of a good actor is his or her choices regarding NVC. The reason it is so difficult to capture what great actors do with language is because great NVC choices are up to the audience’s interpretation and are, therefore, ambiguous. Capturing an actor’s NVC with words and descriptions can be mystifying, or as Carol Zucker puts it in her book *Making Visible the Invisible*, it can be “daunting.”

Questions of authorship for the work of the screen actor present an untidy enigma, at best. Finally, when discussing the actor, we enter the awesome and perilous territory of

²⁴⁵ “Cognitive linguist David McNeill has pioneered the recognition that gesture and language are equal communicators of meaning: [G]estures are an integral part of language as much as are words, phrases, and sentences - gesture and language are one system [but they] operate in different ways” (cf. Kemp 64). “Although language and gesture are one mental system, they operate in fundamentally different ways to complement one another. This analysis rests on [David McNeill’s] development of a new conception of language, viewing it as an imagery-language dialectic, in which gestures provide imagery” (cf. Kemp 63). Thus, good acting would need to include both gesture and speech: “Gesturing has a dialectical relationship to language, and both participate in formulating meaning, with their opposition creating instability that gets resolved in expression” (Kemp 66).

²⁴⁶ Kemp includes a wonderful analysis of a scene from Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The scene is from Act 2, during which Gwendolyn Fairfax and Cecily Cardew size each other up over afternoon tea. While their words are civil and extremely poised, their NVC is close to a tribal sacrifice: “The extract demonstrates the way in which Wilde sought to define what actors do as well as say, revealing his awareness of the degree to which behavior communicates meaning” (cf. Kemp 37). Kemp’s analysis of Gwendolyn and Cecily’s “afternoon tea chat” shows that “the comedy of the scene arises from the tension between genuine feelings and the ‘shallow mask of manners’” (cf. Kemp 38). Wilde’s stage directions are in direct opposition to the genteel and decorous language Gwendolyn and Cecily use. They reveal Wilde’s profound understanding of the power of NVC, which surpasses language in this and many other scenes in Wilde’s plays. Another example would be Algernon’s devouring of muffins to abate his sexual frustration. The humorous fixation on muffins is a wonderful example of metaphorical, nonverbal behavior that reveals to the audience the thwarted sexual desire Algernon has for Cecily (who has just jilted him). His words are entirely about his muffin eating and muffin loving, but his NVC reveals the need to consume muffins because sexual frustration is consuming him.

the human presence. Interest circulates around the expressive qualities of an actor's voice and body; the project of describing and articulating an aural characteristic or a gestural trait can be daunting. This same presence is, moreover, a source of reflection, passion, and even revelation, uncommon conditions for scholarly labor. (Zucker, *Making Visible the Invisible* viii).

In my chapters on manifest performances, I show that this need not be so. Capturing the lyrical literally can be done by explaining and elaborating on NVC and subtext. Despite different interpretations, I argue that the audience knows when something is working and when it is not. It is important to recognize “the close relationship between language and non-verbal behavior. . . . [New psychological research by Adam Kendon and others] suggests that gestures are closely linked to speech and are equal conveyors of meaning in many contexts” (cf. Kemp xx).

To the late famous vocal coach Kristin Linklater, the voice was always embodied and full-bodied. What actors say is important, but how they say it (gesture, posture, facial expression, tension, eye movement, body movement, tone of voice, vocal emphasis, and inflection) is just as important, if not more so. Gesture, imitation, and reading another person's mood existed well before language.

We are the preeminent social animal on the planet, depending on our ability to communicate with others for our survival and success. It is estimated that over 65²⁴⁷ percent of all human communication is nonverbal but that people pick up and internalize only about 5 percent of this information. Instead, almost all of our social attention is absorbed by what people say, which more often than not actually serves to conceal what they are really thinking and feeling. (Greene, *Human Nature* 79)

Humans, as social creatures, must “attune” themselves to the moods of others to survive. Greene advocates learning to read NVC, as it gives greater insight into someone else's mind than words

²⁴⁷ The numbers vary: I have encountered numbers from 50% to 90% in my readings. It is not a number that can be measured easily. What is safe to claim is that at least half of people's communication is nonverbal, and that half can make or break the verbal communication.

alone: “As you gain greater vocabulary in this language [NVC], you will be able to correlate a gesture with a possible emotion”²⁴⁸ (Greene, *Human Nature* 79). Logic and reason alone do not suffice to “read” NVC. It must be perceived and felt with the whole body.

Michael Chekhov, “long before cognitive science was established,” wrote about how “thought and physical activity [are] inextricably entwined” (cf. Kemp 48):

[T]here are no purely physical exercises in our method. . . . [O]ur primary aim is to penetrate all the parts of the body with fine psychological *vibrations*. This process makes the physical body more and more sensitive in its ability to receive our inner impulses and to convey them expressively from the stage to the audience. (Kemp, quoting Michael Chekhov’s *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting* (1991) 48, emphasis mine)

Notably, Chekhov, as do many other theatre scholars and practitioners, uses the musical term “vibrations.” It reveals that he was ahead of his time. Chekhov—in the 1950s²⁴⁹ and perhaps earlier—had grasped the vibrational resonance between psychophysical bodymind acting and the vibrational resonance between actor and audience before cognitive neuroscience, philosophy, and psychology scholars wrote about it in depth.

Chekhov’s prescience with respect to the body and mind being interwoven is just now beginning to enter into received Western thought: “Another interesting discovery in the past 10 years is that people appear to process information with their full body, rather than simply their mind, and sometimes this processing of information has physical cues” (Sifferlin, *TSE* 49).

Humans have long depended on quickly discerning between friend and foe. For example, tears

²⁴⁸ Author Robert Greene noticed the power of NVC, mimesis, and emotional contagion almost twenty years ago: “Human beings are immensely suggestible; their moods will easily spread to the people around them. In fact, seduction depends on mimesis, on the conscious creation of a mood or feeling that is then reproduced by the other person” (Greene, *Seduction* 65).

²⁴⁹ Michael Chekhov’s book *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting* was first published in 1953. It is a classic amongst actors. Chekhov was a student of Stanislavski’s. Chekhov builds on Stanislavski’s system, and he also corrected Stanislavski in certain areas, for example, in the case of affective memory. Chekhov promoted physical action and imagination over personal recollections.

caused by emotions do not exist among animals.²⁵⁰ The newest hypothesis about tears is that Darwin was mistaken when he called tears “purposeless,” but that humans use them to signal to others that they are overburdened with something: “[T]ears appear to elicit a response in other people that mere distress does not; tears activate compassion; tears also show others that we’re vulnerable, and vulnerability is critical to human connection” (cf. Oaklander, “Why Do We Cry?,” *TSE* 30, 31). In short, tears are a bonding mechanism that conveys to others that help is needed—“We cry because we need other people” (Oaklander, *TSE* 33)—or support or comfort: “There must have been some point in time, evolutionarily, when the tear became something that automatically set off empathy and compassion in another” (Oaklander, *TSE* 31). Nonverbal behavior, thus, is crucial to communicating the self to others. Note that Oaklander speaks of “eliciting a response” from others, which is another way of describing resonance. There is an interplay between the self and others: Resonance is an energy transfer between two or more sources. The implication is that humans are wired to connect with others to survive. Humans are social creatures with consummate acting skills. Those who signal distress (e.g., via tears if they are weak) or fitness (e.g., to find a mate) best are more likely to survive. Acting is, in a way, living. To act well equals survival.

Similarly, humans use their whole bodies and range of facial expressions to connect with others: “[W]e read each other’s body movements and unconsciously try to mimic them as a way to spur affiliation and friendliness and achieve positive bonds with other people” (Sifferlin, *TSE* 49). The opposite can be observed when—as an example—two men get into an intense argument and are ready to resort to violence: Their bodies tense, their backs straighten, their chests puff out, etc. Their bodies signal to each other wordlessly that they are ready to fight. Often, NVC gives away more truthful information about another person than their words do: “Nonverbal cues tell us what people are trying to emphasize with their words and the subtext of their message, the nuances of communication. These cues tell us what they are actively hiding: their real desires. They reflect in an immediate way people’s emotions and moods” (Greene, *Human Nature* 79). Greene fittingly describes NVC as our “second language.” In truth, evolutionarily speaking, it

²⁵⁰ Mandy Oaklander explains: “Though some other species shed tears reflexively as a result of pain or irritation, humans are the only creatures whose waterworks can be triggered by their feelings” (Oaklander, *TSE* 29–30).

was our first. Greene also underscores the paradox of NVC and how little attention²⁵¹ humans pay to it:

We have a continual desire to communicate our feelings and yet at the same time the need to conceal them for proper social functioning.²⁵² With these counterforces battling inside us, we cannot completely control what we communicate. Our real feelings continually leak out in the form of gestures, tones of voice, facial expressions, and posture. We are not trained,²⁵³ however, to pay attention to people's nonverbal cues. By sheer habit, we fixate on the words people say, while also thinking about what we'll say next. What this means is that we are using only a small percentage of the potential social skills we all possess. (Greene, *Human Nature* 81)

Hence, actors must pay twice the attention to NVC: "Actors, of course, are primarily concerned with generating nvc" (Kemp 22). It is essential to good acting.

The famous term "subtext," as used by actors, means that there is an underlying, non-verbal meaning attached to every text: This meaning can underscore, amend, change, or contradict the text. The subtext is NVC, and it is one of the actor's most powerful tools of expression. As recent cognitive scientists' and psychologists' findings show, even the unconscious²⁵⁴ expressions actors use—gained through training and by making a character his or

²⁵¹ Greene explains: "The word 'personality' comes from the Latin 'persona,' which means 'mask.' In the public, we all wear masks, and this has a positive function. If we displayed exactly who we are and spoke our minds truthfully, we would offend almost everyone and reveal qualities that are best concealed. Having a persona, playing a role well, actually protects us from people looking too closely at us. . . . In fact, the better you play your role, the more power you will accrue" (cf. Greene, *Human Nature* 101).

²⁵² This is one of the most profound points respecting human nature. Humans yearn for bonds with other humans while they hide behind facades to fit in. These counterforces are the core of the human experience.

²⁵³ Note that Greene makes a similar point as Rick Kemp does. Kemp laments that actors are not properly and holistically trained in NVC together with text-based classes. Greene says that everyone should be better trained in NVC.

²⁵⁴ "[W]e absorb communication from nvc [sic] in daily life almost subliminally; it is visible if we consciously look for it, but it is generally assimilated unconsciously. However, several studies show that adults rely more heavily on nonverbal than verbal cues in determining meaning in personal interaction, and also that nonverbal cues are *trusted more than linguistic meaning if the two are in conflict*. Nvc [sic] can confirm, modify, or contradict the explicit meaning of the words of the script." (Kemp 25, emphases mine)

her “second nature”—affect the audience: “The current understanding of the bodymind offers a more holistic account of the way in which speech and nvc [sic] complement each other in communicating meaning” (Kemp 23). Furthermore, “using postures and gestures that are different from those that we employ in everyday life is likely to create an altered sense of self” (Kemp 155). Put more simply, an actor who repeatedly uses a character’s (whether it is an imagined character or a real person) gestures, postures, and general body language creates that character through physical actions, imagination, and imitation: “The establishing of neuronal patterns through training and repetition plays a significant part in the activity of mirror systems” (Kemp 155). Robert Greene speaks of NVC as the gift of a good actor who has grasped “the theatrical quality of life” and who understands “the role-playing and wearing of masks [to be] essential to smooth social functioning” (cf. Greene, *Human Nature* 81–82).

Such an actor is a “master decoder of [other people’s] true feelings [who does not] mistake people’s appearances for reality,” but instead reads and uses the “spell-binding” gift of subtext, or NVC (cf. Greene, *Human Nature* 82). Greene explains NVC as follows:

[N]on-verbal communication *cannot be experienced simply through thinking and translating thoughts into words* but must be *felt physically* as one *engages* with facial expressions or locked positions of *other people*. It is a different form of knowledge, one that connects with the animal part of our nature and involves our mirror neurons.

(Greene, *Human Nature* 78, emphasis mine)

It is noteworthy, once more, that Greene emphasizes actors’ concern with engaging with other people more so than with themselves. It is as Demosthenes said: Delivery is everything (cf. Plutarch, “Chapter VIII,” *Lives of the Ten Orators* 284). Delivery determines how well one resonates with other people. Furthermore, Greene points out that an actor’s observational skills are not “acquired” but “rediscovered” by “reversing the process of self-absorption and regaining that outward-directed view and curiosity [s/he] had as a child” (cf. Greene, *Human Nature* 82). A good actor can make the audience hear a “vocal smile” (Greene, *Human Nature* 91) and a loud

silence.²⁵⁵ Greene uses cognitive neuroscience to explain his point: “What you are doing is slowly rewiring your brain through practice, mapping new neuronal connections” (Greene, *Human Nature* 83).

Caroline Goyder fittingly calls this the “camera-out”²⁵⁶ strategy: when actors or public speakers must make their work and existence about the audience, not themselves, to build a genuine connection with their audience. Instead of focusing on themselves and turning inward, actors must direct all their energy toward their audience and purpose. Great actors connect to their purpose, to their audience, and they embrace their service to others (cf. Goyder; see footnote below on Goyder’s “camera-out” strategy for details). Good NVC is essential to good acting. Apart from creating resonance between the actor and audience (through conscious or unconscious²⁵⁷ gestures), meaningful NVC sets a great actor apart from a mediocre one: “[I]t is up to the actor to contextualize those words by deciding on the intent that drives the words, to create facial expressions and physical behavior, to make the speech sound life-like through the

²⁵⁵ Greene repeatedly states that, to be interesting to others, one ought to “display subtly contradictory qualities (Greene, *Human Nature* 101). Twenty years ago (2003), Greene noticed that the “It factor” is a paradox: Greene’s book *The Art of Seduction* includes an entire chapter about sending mixed signals in order to seduce people. Greene, however, does not mystify the topic. He writes about being charismatic and seductive (he conflates charisma and seduction) as something that can be learned. I agree with Greene: Good actors are always seductive and charismatic no matter their looks. They have what Roach calls “It.” They have what Goyder calls *gravitas* and what I call “the real paradox” of displaying contrasting qualities while being fully present in both the room with the audience/the camera, and with the character. I also agree with Greene and Goyder when they say that this quality can be learned.

²⁵⁶ Goyder mentions her “camera-out” strategy in her blog, in her books, and in her *TED* Talk. It is a wonderful way of putting into words what an actor must do when all eyes are on him or her. Instead of being self-conscious and turning inward, he or she must turn their inner “camera out” (cf. Goyder, “How to Stay Calm When Everyone’s Staring at You,” Caroline Goyder’s blog 25 May 2018). In one of her public Zoom classes on *YouTube*, Goyder explained her “camera-out” strategy as follows:

Think of the audience as old friends [to get out of the primal reaction that categorizes them as friend or foe], think: “How can I help” (Bill Nighy’s advice), it’s such a great tip to flip your nervous system from “Oh my God, these people are foes, this is horrible” . . . to friends *because your system loves to be of service to others*. . . . The best thing to do is to go “*camera-out*,” how can I help these people understand what I am doing. . . . Be in service. [Great public speakers or actors have] connection to purpose. (cf. Goyder, “Training Session with the Curious Lounge on Zoom,” *YouTube*, 17 June 2020, emphasis mine)

Goyder’s “camera-out”-strategy goes hand-in-hand with her concept of *gravitas*. An actor who is fully focused on both the part and the audience is completely present, living in the moment, and utterly accessible.

²⁵⁷ As noted earlier, conscious gestures are the ones actors are aware of in their performance; unconscious gestures are part of the process, practice, and repetition of physical acting, imagining, imitating, and generally getting the character “into the muscle” and making the character “second nature”: “Empathy as a cognitive term describes a mechanism that is involved in unconsciously ‘mirroring’ others’ actions and emotions” (Kemp 155). Cognitive neuroscience has demonstrated, as I will analyze shortly, that even the gestures and behaviors an actor makes unconsciously are read by and affect the audience.

use of vocal tone, varied emphases, tempo, and cadence of speech” (Kemp 21). All of the actors I use in my descriptions of manifest performances are NVC experts. I dedicate my chapter on *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* primarily to the brilliant, seemingly effortless, and natural use of actors’ NVC and its effect on the audience.

3c) Truth, Fiction, and Language: A Truth Perceived over a Truth Intellectualized

Good actors have what Roach calls “It.” They have what Caroline Goyder calls “gravitas.” They have what Lorca called “*duende*,” which translates into a spark.²⁵⁸ They have charisma. They are seductive. They are fully present—and out of reach. They are private in public. They mystify their audience through the paradoxical, irresolvable contrasting notes they play. They know how to tune the audience to their frequency, and vice versa. When a good actor releases “It,” the audience perceives and receives “It.” The question of what this “It” is, this spark, this gravitas, this charisma, this force remains murky. Language has trouble explaining “It” with logic and reason. Language fails “It.” Robert Greene has an interesting theory about why this force—he calls it “social force”—remains so stubbornly elusive:

What is most peculiar about this force as it exists within us is how little we discuss or analyze something that is so obviously common to our experience. Some of this may come from the fact that it is hard to study these sensations in a rigorously scientific manner. But there is also something willful about this ignorance; deep down, this phenomenon troubles us. Our automatic reactions in a group, or our propensity to imitate others, reminds us of the most primitive aspects of our nature, our animal roots. . . . The problem we face as social animals is not that we experience that force, which occurs automatically, but that we are in denial of its existence. (Greene, *Human Nature* 410–411)

²⁵⁸ Joseph Roach repeatedly refers to the star-quality of “abnormally interesting people” in terms of paradox (Roach, *It*, 2007 1). Caroline Goyder refers to this paradoxical star-quality as “gravitas,” which is also the title of her book on the matter (Goyder, *Gravitas*, 2014 1). Lorca referred to the beautiful and dangerous spark that a performer ignites in an audience as “*duende*” in his public lecture called “Theory and Play of the *Duende*.” in Buenos Aires, 1933.

In other words, this force is rather primitive, and humans fancy themselves as having evolved from such an animalistic, primal trait. Humans prefer to believe that they are cultivated, sophisticated, polished, refined, enlightened, reasonable, cerebral, and, of course, logical versus emotional, physical (and mortal), feral, carnal, violent, wild, and visceral. They are, of course, all these things.

As Greene argues, humans would rather shroud in mystery such a primitive force within them than own it. Their egos prefer to ignore or deny the unflattering aspect of human nature. In the same way that the language of the West has denied the unsophisticated dimension of human nature, it has denied, ignored, and repressed the illogical, untamed, and Dionysian dimension. Likewise, language denies the natural tendency to imitate and perform in humans because it is unsettling. However, those who “refuse to perform [altogether] end up marginalized, as the group unconsciously expels such tribes” (Greene, *Human Nature* 414). In other words, those who do not act die, at least socially. As stated, to act is to live. The latter is an unwelcome truth. It is exactly as Robert Lanza says: “Science has an established tradition when it comes to aspects of nature that defy logical explanation and resist experimentation. It ignores them” (Lanza 17). Otherwise, as Max Planck put it, “A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it” (Lanza, quoting Planck 40). Lanza offers a fitting analogy of what science and language focus on and what they ignore:

“Awareness” is like the screen upon which a movie is projected. It is the “thing that is real” as we sit in the theater, and yet we ignore it just as we don’t see the flickering profusion of colors and lights that the projector has cast upon it as what they are. Instead, our focus remains trained upon the shapes the film creates, the patterns we recognize as the faces of actors, or the meanings conveyed by language encoded in the soundtrack.
(Lanza 16)

Lanza says that instead of focusing attention on the root of all inquiry, namely, the human consciousness/awareness that colors everything, science completely ignores the hard questions and the fact that there is no explanation of how things are perceived.

This myopic ignorance remains a theme in the West “because the bedrock issues have proven stubbornly immune to elucidation via science’s usual tools” (cf. Lanza 17). Instead of changing the tools of science, language, and thought, the Western tradition insists on remaining in logical certainties. The Western tradition, dogmatically, insists on cracking a jar of air with a hammer when, perhaps, what would be needed is a better pair of glasses. With respect to acting, it is impossible to capture what a good actor does with the “usual tools” of Western language, logic, and science. It is possible to capture it with the language of paradox: “*It is a fundamental fact of human nature that our emotions are almost always ambivalent, rarely pure and simple. We can feel love and hostility at the same time, or admiration and envy*” (Greene 455, emphasis mine). To fit in, most people present a consistent front to the world; they play a one-note character because they are afraid to fall out of line. Good actors do not have that fear.²⁵⁹ They have embraced the primal force of nature that others always try to hide, and they have embraced the need to perform. The paradox of actors’ contrasting emotions and notes flows freely through them because they are not bound by the fear of being atypical and unpredictable. Once the actor releases this force, it flows to the audience via emotional contagion. Audience members consciously or subconsciously notice the primal, liberating force of the actor because they

²⁵⁹ Think of Jack Nicholson in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining*: He is both monstrous and funny. If he were just leaning into the part of the character that is deviant and evil, his performance would not be as intriguing. Nicholson is riveting to watch because he is playing many notes at once. Mario Falsetto describes Nicholson’s paradoxical and utterly fearless performance as follows:

There is a quality to Nicholson’s acting that is at once exteriorized and interiorized, revealing and mysterious, obvious and subtle. . . . Almost every scene in the . . . film illustrates the physicality of Nicholson’s acting and how inventive he is in using his whole body to create a performance. . . . the more horrifying and menacing Jack becomes, the funnier the film. Even though Jack is about to axe his son and wife to death, the film is easily as funny as it is horrifying. We have no way of knowing how much of the tension created by mixing the horrific with the comic was contributed by Nicholson’s presence in the role; it is a fair guess that it was substantial. . . . Nicholson’s great comic and dramatic talent is the key to the film’s success. (Falsetto, “The Mad and the Beautiful,” *Making Visible the Invisible*, ed. Carole Zucker 343-364).

Each of the performances I describe in Part III are equally fearless in their own way.

recognize it in themselves. This force is free and fearless; it is magnificent and dangerously contagious.

Such emotional contagion is also very close to what Federico Garcia Lorca more poetically called “duende,”²⁶⁰ the passionate spark a performer can incite that travels through the theatre and electrifies the audience. Frequently, artists (before cognitive neuroscience entered the picture) found lyrical expressions for concepts that can now be—to some extent—scientifically explained. Duende, I would argue, is one of them. The spark Lorca speaks of is a tension. It is always a shared experience between artist and audience. It is a collective inspiration that swings between the extremes of life (awareness of the body) and death (acceptance of one’s mortality) and between a complete vulnerability and openness to receive and to give. In a 1933 lecture, Lorca describes “duende” by quoting Goethe: It is “‘a mysterious force that everyone feels and no philosopher has explained.’ . . . The duende is a force, not a labour, a struggle, not a thought. . . . [Duende is, as in] the case of Paganini . . . who made one hear profound melody in vulgar trifles” (cf. Lorca, Federico Garcia, “Theory and Play of the Duende,” *Public Lecture in Buenos Aires* 1933). In short, duende is a paradox: It makes the profane sacred. It is felt physically, emotionally, and spiritually, but eludes intellectualization or explanation within referential, propositional language. However, everyone feels the duende (or the electrifying spark) in a room once it has been unleashed. It is contagious in its most beautiful form.

Correspondingly, neurons can crossfire, so disparate emotions can exist and blend simultaneously. Thus far, “the science remains fluid and undetermined,” “but the field [of emotions] is ripe for development” (Mirodan 111-112). Regarding the study of emotion and neuroscience combined with acting, I agree with theatre critic Lynne Gardner, who posits that instead of trivializing science, it is best to remain in some uncertainties: “Rather than making the scientific stuff intelligible to the average layperson, perhaps writers [and actors] should let it remain difficult, let the audience struggle a bit, allow certain principles to remain complicated

²⁶⁰ Lorca built his description of “duende” as the highest artistic inspiration on the original meaning of the term “*dueño de casa*,” or the owner of a house: a kind of poltergeist or demon that possesses a house (or a person). Similar to Goethe’s Erdgeist in *Faust I*, Lorca’s “duende” is a “paradoxical figure [which is] the epitome of Goethe’s demonic interpretation of artistic genius, which embraces contradictions of birth and death, production and destruction. . . . The duende makes man’s evasion of his mortality possible, paradoxically, by heightening the awareness of it” (cf. Bohning, Elizabeth, and Judy McInnis, “From Daemisch to Duende” 32, 33).

and elegantly remote” (cf. Shaughnessy, quoting Lynne Gardner 8). The fascination with paradox, I will argue, is exactly in its remaining “elegantly remote,” likeliest because the language to describe it is lacking. However, Amy Cook points out an important fact about emotion, fiction, and language (which I use to come full circle with the beginning of my introduction and the lack of language for acting it inveighs against):

Although most cognitive scientists . . . understand cognition as deeply enmeshed with the emotional system, this is not adequately reflected in language. Our language reflects . . . the Cartesian split of heart, mind, and body. . . . The fact that we use fictional pieces of information to construct a non-fictional account of a situation that generates our emotions does not decrease or alter the meaning we make of the world around us and our emotional reaction to it. . . . We can refer to something in the world—the bee—or something not in the world—a unicorn—and be understood. (cf. Cook, *AP* 86)

Correspondingly, Mirodan states: “[E]motional responses follow the same neuronal pathways in reaction to real life as to fictional stimuli” (110). Actors, “as a result of their greater openness to imaginative suggestibility, proneness to fantasy, and acquired skill in focusing their attention to become absorbed” (cf. Mirodan 110), are wonderful receptors and transmitters of fiction: “The lie has to become the truth in [the actors’] hands,” as Stella Adler said (cf. Adler 140).

Similarly, New York casting director and producer Mia Cusumano answers the question of what makes a great actor through the paradox of finding truth in fiction:

For me, a good actor never actually acts. They absorb a story/script, and they use their own emotions they feel in a visceral way. They combine what is felt by them along with what the writer/director may also want brought to life. And with both those components, they bring to life a character. For me, this is how the most *honest* performances come to life. Because they aren’t acting as someone else, they are putting themselves into a situation that is not their own, but they are able to react more *honestly* because they are allowing their own actual feelings to help them react. Whether this is a painful feeling or

joyful, it almost always feels *truthful*. And in the end, that is all we really want to accomplish. (Cusumano, *Private Correspondence*, 10 Sept. 2021, emphasis mine)

In other words, good actors have found a way to tap into honesty and the truth within fiction. Many theatre critics and casting directors speak of truthfulness or honesty in an actor's performance. They single out how great performers make it look easy to "wrap the audience in their truth" (cf. Joseph, see ensuing quote). New York casting director Rosalie Joseph explains this phenomenon as follows:

As far as a great actor, I think it is someone who consistently disappears in the role they are playing. They completely embody the character, and every moment is believable. You forget they are the actor, while you are watching, they are the character they are portraying. It's that transcendent performance that wraps you up in their truth. [Such performances are] so utterly organic, truthful, and multi-layered with immeasurable depth. (Joseph, *Private Correspondence*, 18 Jun. 2022)

Joseph, as does Cusumano, emphasizes great actors' ability to dissolve from the person they are in real life into the character they are within the fiction of the play or film. Great actors make this disappearance act so believable that the audience forgets they are acting. Such a performance resonates deeply with the audience because the dualism of programmed thinking blurs before the viewers' very eyes. Suddenly, there is no longer an "either/or-concept" because the actor is not *either* the actor in real life *or* the character in fiction. They are both and neither.

Expressing such truth through fiction with language is tricky. Language is needed to express oneself, but it is deeply steeped in cultural assumptions and binaries, such as imaginary versus real. Audiences perceive Hamlet as an equally real creature within the given circumstances of the play, as they perceive a nonfictional story from the reality their neighbors

may tell them. If and when science manages to measure²⁶¹ the resonance between an actor and the audience, the task of reading and interpreting these measurements accurately will still hinge on language. Therefore, it is imperative to find the language between and beyond binaries. Hamlet, as an example, both exists and does not exist. Within Western dualistic language, the latter paradox is resolved by saying that Hamlet exists in the imagination of the playwright and within the circumstances of the play but not in the real world. However, it is not as simple as that: The emotions that course through an audience when they listen to Hamlet's "To Be or Not to Be" soliloquy are real, not imagined. A fictional character, creature, or story can move an audience in the same way—or more—as nonfiction does.²⁶² Audience members can become as intertwined with the tragic story of *Romeo and Juliet* as they would with a real-life love story. Furthermore, as Neil Gaiman puts it (paradoxically): "Fairy Tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten"²⁶³ (Gaiman,

²⁶¹ Surely streaming services, such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Apple+, Disney+, HBO Max, and Hulu, would love to measure what resonates with audiences to improve their business model. Prescient as ever, Stanislavski had this idea long ago, as quoted in Larlham:

Stanislavsky conceives the circulation of prana as a potentially measurable phenomenon, "If only we had some gadget which would enable us to see this process of emitting and receiving, the exchange that takes place between the state and the auditorium at moments of creative intensity, we would be amazed to see how our nerves bear up under the pressure of the stream of rays which we are emitting to the auditorium and are receiving back from the thousand living organisms sitting out front." (Larlham, quoting Stanislavski in *An Actor's Work* 253, footnote 190)

²⁶² In an interview with sociologist Margee Kerr about haunted houses and horror movies, Kerr is asked if there is a difference between people's fear of real danger and their fear of fictional danger (a theme-park haunted house, for example). Kerr responds: "The physical reaction is the same: Endorphins release to block pain signals, and noradrenaline flows to kick up the metabolism so that we can turn any available sugar into energy. The heart rate increases. It's what's going on in our heads that's different. As soon as we recognize that we're safe or in a controlled space, we can interpret the fear as enjoyable rather than threatening" (Wikiel, Yolanda, and Margee Kerr, "Fear Factor," *TSE* 27). Kerr also reminds people that "our bodies are very much grounded in physical experience" (Wikiel, Yolanda, and Margee Kerr, "Fear Factor," *TSE* 27).

²⁶³ Gaiman attributes the quote to G. K. Chesterton, which is not strictly speaking correct, as Gaiman, himself, admitted. The quote is a rephrasing or paraphrasing of a longer quote in Chesterton's *Tremendous Trifles*. Gaiman also famously linked fiction to empathy and to the imagination in a lecture on the power of reading and the importance of libraries:

When you watch TV or see a film, you are looking at things happening to other people. Prose fiction is something you build up from 26 letters and a handful of punctuation marks, and you, and you alone, using your imagination, create a world and people it and look out through other eyes. You get to feel things, visit places and worlds you would never otherwise know. You learn that everyone else out there is a me, as well. You're being someone else, and when you return to your own world, you're going to be slightly changed. Empathy is a tool for building people into groups, for allowing us to function as more than self-obsessed individuals. . . . Fiction is the lie that tells the truth, after all. (cf. Gaiman, *The Guardian* 15 Oct. 2013)

Coraline Epigraph). To beat a dragon requires audience and reader participation, and to get physically involved in the story: The brain activity of both the actor/storyteller and audience aligns—likely due to mirror neurons—and the fiction becomes a physical reality. The audience is transported as fiction blends with reality.

Moreover, it has been shown many times that fiction is more compelling than didactics because humans remember a story better than bullet points; they recall how an actor or story makes them *feel* more so than how a dry lecture makes them think (or not think). The audience feels the story because the actor tells it through the body. Norman D. Holland paraphrases neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese on the topic of humans tuning into other humans through mirror neurons and sharing each other's experiences:

Gallese calls this mind reading, and yes, we mind read, but, he says, something faster, deeper, more primitive also goes on, something pre-rational, something you can't express in a verbal, cognitive way. When we read fiction or see a movie or a play, . . . we map these fictional humans' actions, emotions, and sensations onto our own brains' visceral, motor, and sensory representations. That accounts for our emotional experience, which comes before our cognitive experience. (cf. Holland quoting Gallese, "Stories and the Mirror Inside You," *Psychology Today* 17 Aug. 2011)

It is *that* resonance between a fictional character and the audience, that shared "mind-reading, *that* primitive pre-cognitive instinct, *that* spark/duende that electrifies both parties, *that* "It," *that* gravitas, *that* charisma, *that* presence, *that* unspecified chemistry that eludes all referential language except the language of paradox.

To give an example: When Juliet says, "For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch and palm to palm is holy palmer's kiss" (*R&J* 1.5. 99–100), the audience perceives a co-existence of the secular and the sacred that does not need to be resolved or explained to be understood. It is fiction that exposes the truth through the language of paradox. If one were to see directions in Shakespeare's plays—as the late John Barton was convinced there were (cf. Barton,

Playing Shakespeare 3–4)²⁶⁴—then Shakespeare’s language of paradox is a key direction for the actor to express and embody something that referential language cannot.²⁶⁵ As Kristin Linklater says, “Shakespeare’s language *is* emotion” (Linklater, “Shrinking Shakespearean” *linklatervoice.com*, emphasis mine).

Strictly speaking, in *Romeo and Juliet*’s first meeting, their shared seduction sonnet, which is also a duet, uses illogical arguments: Romeo’s lips are not blushing pilgrims, Juliet is not a saint, and a kiss is not a prayer. Yet, acted out, the illogical fiction becomes a very moving and playful truth. When played well, Romeo’s and Juliet’s duets become sacred through the secular. Shakespeare’s language of paradox strikes a chord in the audience because it is deeply entrenched in the body and emotions. It speaks directly to the primal human core and heart. Even if an audience member is not well versed in Shakespeare and does not understand all the words, Shakespeare’s vivid images, metaphors, and paradox will evoke a strong emotional response from said audience member.

G. K. Chesterton explained and defended the use of paradox for the lack of suitable “in-between and beyond” language:

Paradox has been defended; on the ground that so many fashionable fallacies still stand firmly on their feet, because they have no heads to stand on. But it must be admitted that writers, like other mendicants and mountebanks, frequently do try to attract attention. They set out conspicuously, in a single line in a play, or at the head or tail of a paragraph, remarks of this challenging kind; as when Mr. Bernard Shaw wrote: “The Golden Rule is that there is no Golden Rule”; or Oscar Wilde observed: “I can resist everything except temptation.” (Chesterton, G. K., *The Paradoxes of Mr. Pond* 42)

²⁶⁴ See also my chapter on Falstaff in Part II in respect to John Barton and Shakespeare’s hidden directions.

²⁶⁵ In my chapter on *Romeo & Juliet*, I use the above-mentioned scene from Baz Luhrmann’s *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* to demonstrate how beautifully paradox can work in a well-acted and well-directed scene.

To Chesterton's lineup of "writers, . . . mendicants and mountebanks," I would add actors—with their "trickster" quality—as conduits for expressing the inexpressible and making visible the invisible by harnessing and projecting to the audience the tension of paradox.

Paradoxical language speaks to a truth perceived over an intellectualized truth. The language of paradox that great actors employ exposes the limits and insufficiencies within the "fashionable fallacy" of dualistic language. It also exposes that artificial dualisms, in their attempt to control, subjugate, and categorize things into opposites, are driven by fear and ego. That is, ego loathes and fears uncertainty; it constantly strives to resolve uncertainty to protect itself from the threat of it. The fear of not being able to control complexities is what drives the need to hold on tightly to dualistic either/or thinking that separates and divides. Fear and ego are principles that separate people, whereas the spirit of paradox and "in-between" spaces bring people together. The more tightly dualism—as the paradox goes—holds on to its divisions, delusional polarities, and control of the complex, the more the complex, the "in-between," and paradox will elude dualism. Good actors are capable of embracing and mastering fear, ego, and uncertainty. They can express that fear and ego are what separate people, whereas paradox reveals that no such separation exists.

I would argue that good actors have fully accepted the primal force within them and have developed fearlessness with respect to entering and exiting dark places without losing touch with the lighter side of life. Ben Brantley poignantly describes the expert actor's paradoxical power in his review of Billie Piper's performance in *Yerma*:

Ms. Piper realizes the rare and inspired *paradox* of an artfully controlled portrait of someone losing every last vestige of self-control. Even at her character's *most tormented*, Ms. Piper is *never merely flailing*. Each increasingly *wild gesture* and utterance are of a consummate piece with the seemingly *contented, exuberant woman* we meet at the play's beginning. Ms. Piper *sustains a dangerous, seesawing tension* between the *familiar, wryly civilized surface* and the *primal agony* that swallows selfhood. (Brantley, Ben, "A Blistering Billie Piper Unravels Brilliantly in *Yerma*," *NYT* 28 Mar. 2018, emphasis mine)

Each actor and performance I describe in upcoming chapters contains this paradoxical force, albeit in different ways, from tragedy to comedy to a love sonnet. By capturing the paradox of these magnificent performers, it is possible to capture their power in language. Roger Ebert said it well when he described the passively active power of outstanding actors: "Not all actors have to call out to us. The better ones make us call out to them" (Ebert, *rogerebert.com* 13 July 2008).

Take your practiced powers and stretch them out
until they span the chasm between two
contradictions. . . . For the god
wants to know himself in you.

(Rilke, Rainer Maria. "As Once the Winged Energy of Delight")²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ I owe this quote to Andrew Belser, who uses it on his website to implement the findings of neuroscience into acting training. Belser, as do I, uses paradox, the body, and connective resonance as ways of explaining richness in acting:

Human vulnerability resonates perhaps most fully in our contradictions. Alive characters are beautifully stretched between often opposing desires and images of themselves in the world. We will work on practical strategies to access paradox through the structural organization of the body. Becoming aware of the natural paradoxes in human sensing, feeling, thinking, doing is a big part of constructing a theatrical person (character). We can learn to soften the edges of attention and resistance to contradiction, allowing paradoxical awareness to flourish. (cf. Belser andrewbelser.com)

Belser also speaks of the same resonance Bogart et al. mention repeatedly: "[W]hen we play a character, we locate connective resonance within our whole selves" (cf. Belser). Similar to Mark Rylance, Belser underscores how resonance and connectivity are always part of an actor being in service to a community and tapping into something greater than oneself.



PART II: MANIFEST PERFORMANCES: TWELVE CASE STUDIES

She captured a feeling
Sky with no ceiling
The sunset inside a frame

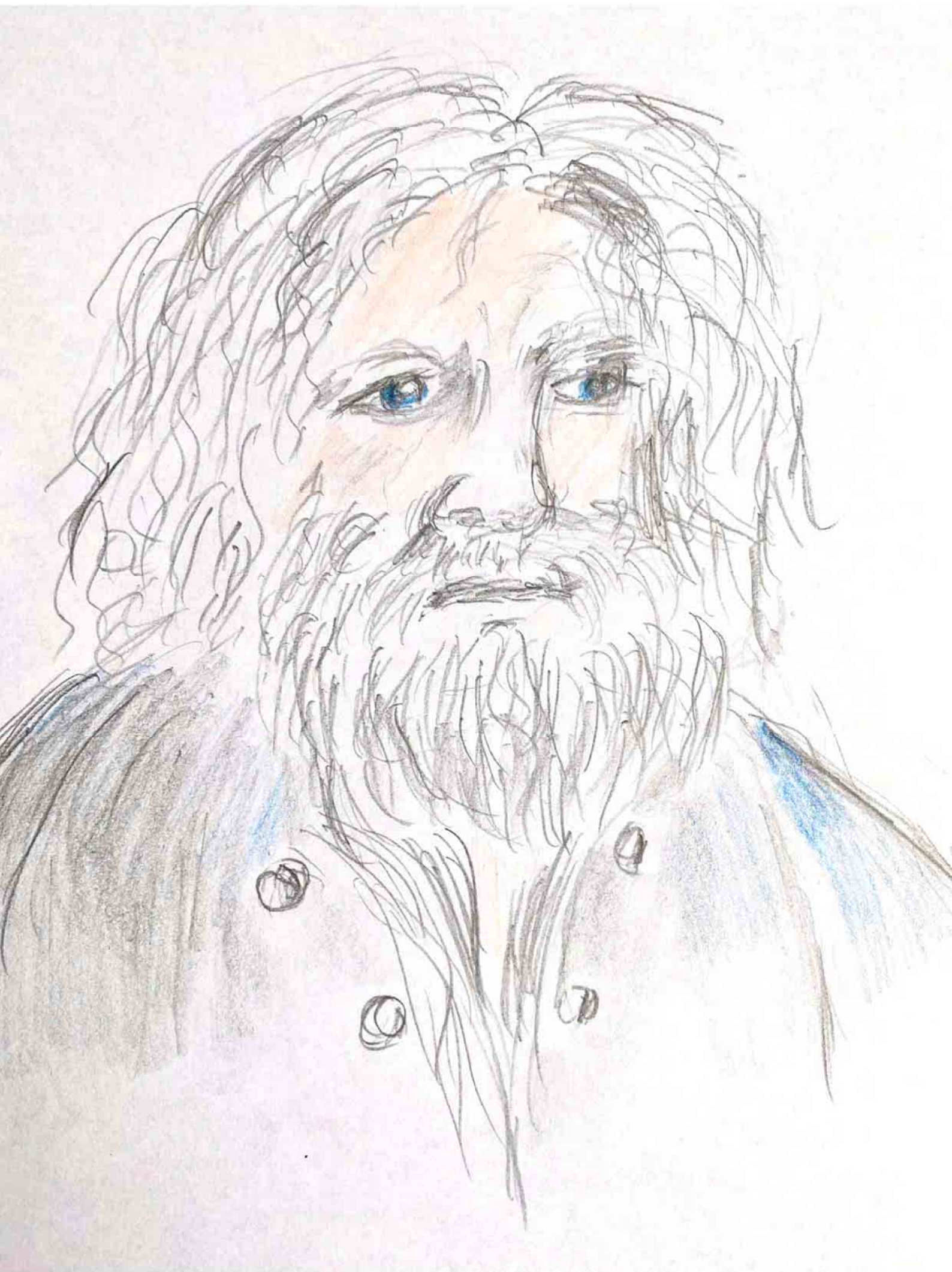
...

She told me:
"A bit of madness is key
To give us new colors to see
Who knows where it will lead us?
And that's why they need us"

So bring on the rebels
The ripples from pebbles
The painters, and poets, and plays

And here's to the fools who dream
Crazy as they may seem
Here's to the hearts that break
Here's to the mess we make

("Audition: The Fools Who Dream," Written by Benj Pasek, Justin Hurwitz, and Justin Noble Paul, performed by Emma Stone in *La La Land*, Universal Music Publishing Group, Warner Chappell Music, Inc. 2016)



1) Sweet Jack Falstaff: Expressing In-Between States with More Than Language

Simon Russell Beale: Falstaff, *Henry IV, Part 1*, *The Hollow Crown* series, directed by Richard Eyre, filmed for BBC Two in 2012.

Henry IV, Part I, Act 2, Scene 4: At the Boar's Head Tavern – “Banish Not Him Speech”²⁶⁷

PRINCE, (as King)

That *villainous abominable misleader*
of youth, Falstaff, that old *white-bearded Satan*.

FALSTAFF, (as Prince)

My lord, the man **I know**.

PRINCE, (as King)

I know thou dost.

FALSTAFF, (as Prince)

But **to say I know more** harm in
him than in myself were **to say more** than **I know**.
That **he is** old, the more the pity; his white hairs do
witness it. But that **he is**, saving your reverence, a
whoremaster, that I utterly deny. **If** sack and sugar
be a fault, God help the wicked. **If** to be **old** and
merry be a sin, **then** many an **old** host that I know is
damned. **If** to be fat be to be hated, **then** Pharaoh's
lean kine are to be loved. No, my good lord,
banish Peto, **banish** Bardolph, **banish** Poins, but for
sweet Jack Falstaff, *kind Jack Falstaff*, *true Jack*
Falstaff, *valiant Jack Falstaff*, and therefore more
valiant being as he is **old Jack Falstaff**, **banish not**
him thy Harry's company, **banish not him thy**
Harry's company. **Banish** plump Jack, and **banish**
all the world.

PRINCE *I do, I will.*

Falstaff is fat, funny, and full of life. He is messy and dishonorable, and he lies with such gusto that onlookers hardly care about the truth anymore. Jeanette Winterson wonderfully describes him:

²⁶⁷ Repetition in its forms is marked as follows: tautology and exergasia in *italics*; alliteration in **bold vermilion**; and anaphora and all other repetitions such as assonance, consonance, etc. in **bold**.

Not that there is anything ethereal about Fat Jack. This whiskery swag-bellied omnivorous cornucopia of appetites, red-eyed, unbuttoned, sherry-soaked. This nightwalker and whoremonger, a “muddy conger,” swinging at his old mistress Doll Tearsheet, a life-affirming *liar whose truth is never to be a counterfeit*. Falstaff is ancient energy thumping at volume through a temporary poundage of flesh. He is part pagan — the Lord of Misrule on the loose in Eastcheap, and as such his time is short. (Winterson, Jeanette, “Shakespeare’s Hot Mess: What We Can Learn from Falstaff,” *NYT* 21 Apr. 2017, emphasis mine)

Falstaff is a “liar whose truth is never to be a counterfeit,” Winterson poignantly observes. In other words, he is a liar, but he is always true to himself. He is always, in his own way, true to his Hal. He is always Falstaff, unlike Harry, who begins the play as Hal in pubs “acting” the rogue and ends *Part II* as “the true” King Henry V. Conversely, Falstaff is always Falstaff, the truthful liar. Winterson adds, “Hal the pedant prince is always informing his audiences, real and imagined. Falstaff’s *outrageously embodied language* reminds us that life is all there is” (Winterson, *NYT*, emphasis mine). Falstaff never “informs” his audience. He is never didactic. He is never boring but always entertaining. He is “bawdiness and beauty” (Winterson, *NYT*). His name alone implies many paradoxical meanings: Is Falstaff a “false staff”/false knight, a staff being “what holds a military flag or [aristocratic] banner?” Is he a “fallen” knight because he has allowed his aristocratic title (staff) to fall by engaging in criminal and unethical activities? (cf. Smith 46). The latter makes Falstaff a knight who has honor (he is titled on paper) but does not have any honor (he does not behave in the manner in which an aristocrat was expected to behave). Falstaff’s name²⁶⁸ may refer to the decline of his honor (the falling of the staff) or, in a more phallic metaphorical reading, Falstaff carries with it the air of the impotent seducer whose

²⁶⁸ “Falstaff is a hypocrite to the social class he pretends to represent” (Smith 45). Smith also points out that “Falstaff’s name has multiple references—to the character on the stage as the immediate referent, to a fraudulent knighthood, and finally to his enfeebled masculinity. The references to his ineptitude and degeneracy are many, and the meaning is richly symbolic” (Smith 47).

lust is undone by his “fallen staff” (cf. Smith 46–47). What is certain is that Falstaff is complex and full of contrasts.

Simon Russell Beale plays this paradox of a man in such a moving, unexpected manner that he becomes an audience magnet in the scene. In the hands of Beale, Falstaff’s plea not to be banished is unforgettable and devastating. The raucous, playful moment at the Boar’s Head Tavern is hushed entirely the second Falstaff/Beale radically changes course. One moment, the room is full of noise and laughter; the next, everyone is silently fixated on Falstaff/Beale, whose sudden earnestness betrays a gravitas unexpected from the fun-loving, effervescent, and irreverent knight. Falstaff/Beale’s eyes, even in the merriest moments, radiate a loving sadness toward Hal. Beale’s use of nonverbal communication (NVC), particularly his eye movements, is worthy of analysis: He fixes Hal with an intense stare that challenges and brags while it pleads. Falstaff/Beale has sadness and sweetness running through his otherwise rascally character. If it is true that Falstaff’s love for Prince Hal is unconditional, as some critics have found, then Beale has expressed such love perfectly. Falstaff is a scoundrel, but in his love for Hal, he is “sweet,” “kind,” “true,” and “valiant” (493–495).

There is no stage direction to tell Beale to play this moment solemnly. There is a repetition²⁶⁹ in the text that demands attention: “banish not him, thy Harry’s company/banish not him, thy Harry’s company” (495–497). John Barton explains that “the best guide to an actor who wants to play Shakespeare comes [...] from Shakespeare himself, who was an actor”; “in the Elizabethan theatre the actors knew how to use and interpret the hidden direction Shakespeare provided in his verse and in his prose” (Barton, *Playing Shakespeare*²⁷⁰ 4, 5). According to Barton, Shakespeare’s repetition in this instance calls for emphasis and very likely is a hidden direction. Beale recognizes the hidden direction, and he honors it. However, the way Falstaff/Beale creates this attention and emphasis is entirely his. He makes the part his own. Beale created this particular Falstaff. He uses his understanding of Falstaff and gives him profundity in mirth, intensity in buoyancy, and sweetness in depravity. In a moment of merriment and cheer—

²⁶⁹ I will address repetition at greater length in Chapter 2.4, particularly in Sonnet 129.

²⁷⁰ Since there are two versions of *Playing Shakespeare*, one a recorded episodic film series made for the Royal Shakespeare Company and one a book version, from now on, I will refer to the film series as *PS* and *Playing Shakespeare* for the book version.

it is a play within a play—Falstaff/Beale goes from a high note of playfulness to a devastatingly low note of supplication. Falstaff/Beale slows down the scene, and he changes his rhythm to explicitly make his audience hear the new rhythm and melody—almost a refrain or chorus with a memorable beat²⁷¹—of “sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff” (493–495, emphasis mine). Once Falstaff/Beale reaches his darkest note on the repetition of “banish not him, thy Harry’s company/banish not him, thy Harry’s company,” his supplication has turned into a kind of rhythmic prayer that ends on a most gut-wrenching, imploring smile—the saddest smile imaginable in a scoundrel.

It is easy to say that Beale has charisma²⁷²: The Greek etymology of the word is “*kharis*,” which means “grace,” a kind of God-given gift. Beale is, of course, gifted, but what he does and how he does it can be described in terms of a paradox. Beale allows the paradox that is Falstaff to (co)-exist without trying to resolve it. Falstaff is true in his lies, sad in his mirth, and profound in his shallow debauchery. He does the nastiest things, such as stabbing a corpse, piling lie upon lie, stealing, bragging, overeating, overdrinking, and over-everything. In short, he does all the rascally things that Jeanette Winterson delightfully refers to as “Falstaffery” (Winterson, *NYT*). He goes on a famous rant about the uselessness of honor, and he considers morality in general misguided. Yet, Falstaff’s love for Hal is unconditional. To Hal, Falstaff is true—always, even when he slanders him. Falstaff/Beale’s ability to accept this unresolved paradox and express it is,

²⁷¹ Think of the rhythmic and hypnotizing drumbeat repetition in “Table IX” of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*: “dense was the darkness, light there was none...dense was the darkness, light there was none” (George, Andrew R. (trans.), “Table IX,” *The Epic of Gilgamesh* 2003).

²⁷² Regarding “charisma,” I will demonstrate during my dissertation that it is due to hard work rather than God-given talent. In the same way great oratory, persuasion, and seduction skills can be learned, so can charisma. A good actor must be intelligent enough to understand this fact. Unquestionably, there are some rare people who are born with charisma. However, most great actors, great orators (think former U.S. President Barack Obama), and great leaders had to learn it. It is my understanding that an artist builds charisma by becoming comfortable in highly uncomfortable moments and surroundings. Most people long for comfort and pleasure, and that is exactly what must be avoided in the pursuit of charisma. Every single performance I describe here reveals an actor delving into discomfort and ambiguity and rendering it back to the audience in a manner that is sufficiently comfortable for them: “[O]ur minds are fundamentally uncomfortable with uncertainty. The minute our brain registers ambiguity, it flashes an error signal. Uncertainty registers as a tension: something that must be corrected before we can feel comfortable again” (Fox Cabane 33). Great actors have worked hard on being comfortable with tension, contradictions, discomfort, and uncertainty. They have found a way to exist in this discomfort, and that is what allows them to be fully present. Only when an actor, orator, and/or leader is fully present can he or she connect with an audience. It takes a great deal of work to build the ability to be comfortable with discomfort. Simon Russell Beale reveals, in this scene, an actor who fully understands his character and who is not afraid to make this moment/scene uncomfortable when he renders it somberly, essentially begging Hal to love him. It is uncomfortable to watch, and that is what makes it fascinating.

I would argue, what makes his performance stellar. Falstaff/Beale has two consciousnesses running in the background: One is the paradox of Falstaff's character, and the other is the inner observer/editor of the actor who must express this paradox to the audience. The latter double consciousness I would describe as the *real paradox of the actor*. The discord Falstaff/Beale can strike in the audience is magnificently captured by Joseph Roach in the passage he quotes from George Meredith's *Beauchamp's Career*. Roach found the perfect literary quote to describe the unresolved paradox of contradictions and incongruence that draws the audience in like a magnet. Meredith, to enhance that paradox, employs the same musical metaphor I mentioned in chapters 2 and 3 of Part I. Paradox causes resonance in others. It sparks sympathetic vibration in the way a tuning fork does.

In the novel's scene, the beautiful and aristocratic Cecilia describes her rival, Renee. Cecilia sees that she (Cecilia) is the more beautiful of the two, but she also realizes that she cannot compete with Renee:

Dark-eyed Renee was not beauty but attraction; she touched the *double chords* within us which are we know not whether *harmony or discord*, but a *divine discord* if an *uncertified harmony*, memorable beyond plain sweetness or majesty. There are touches of *bliss in anguish* that superhumanize bliss, touches of *mystery in simplicity*, and of the *eternal in the variable*. These two chords of *poignant antiphony* she struck throughout the range of the hearts of men, and strangely *intervolved*²⁷³ them in *vibrating unison*. Only to look at her face, without hearing her voice, without the charm of her speech, was to feel *it*.
(Roach, quoting George Meredith, *It* 10, emphasis mine)

In short, Renee is a perfect paradox whose *poignant antiphony* reverberates in the hearts of her audience, men and women alike, including Cecilia's heart. Renee has "It," the "superior

²⁷³ "Intervolve" is a word coined by John Milton in Book V of *Paradise Lost*. Its definition is "to twist or coil within one another" or "to involve or roll up within another" ("Intervolve," *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*). Milton invented a word to describe a paradox, undoubtedly because he felt the lack of a suitable word to describe what he was attempting to say. "Intervolve" is a wonderful word: It is both active and passive, within and without, unity and non-unity. "Intervolve" expresses a liminal state that is difficult to place in propositional, dualistic language. See footnote 8 for "underquality."

attraction” that is “unsettling,” “strange,” and carries with it a “social apartness” (cf. Roach, *It* 10–11). Renee’s chords of antiphony “intervolve”: They resonate so deeply with the hearts of men and women that their very hearts respond to Renee’s “vibration” and instinctively “vibrate” with her chords of “divine discord.” Their hearts are linked and not linked. They are one and not one. To an audience, such paradoxical interplay and tension of opposites are fascinating to behold and experience.

While Roach somewhat shrouds in mystery the “It” he describes, he finds brilliant descriptions of this very “It” paradox: It is the performer’s paradox of “freakishness” (innocent and dangerous at the same time). That is, someone who can express such a paradox is both saint and monster, celebrated and ostracized (cf. Roach, *It* 11). The paradoxical performer’s “Janus-faced quality of It thus manifests itself in expressive behavior that people who don’t think of themselves as actors may find off-putting or threatening” (cf. Roach, *It* 11). The paradoxical performer has “the power of apparently effortless embodiment of contradictory qualities simultaneously: strength and vulnerability, innocence and experience,²⁷⁴ and singularity and typicality” (cf. Roach, *It* 8). In every good actor, I would argue, there is tension and paradox. It is what makes one actor stand out, and it is why another (despite being perfect looking, despite being technically brilliant) does not. Robert Greene describes the performer’s paradox as “being seductive because it plays with meaning; [it] thrives on ambiguity, on mixed signals, and anything that eludes interpretation” (cf. Greene, *Seduction* 190). Greene does not shroud the seductive paradox of the performer in mystery at all: “[N]o one is naturally mysterious. . . . [M]ystery is something you have to work at, a ploy on your part. . . . [It is to] send out a mixed signal—some sign that you are not what you seem, a paradox. [It is no matter] if this

²⁷⁴ Innocence and experience are a common paradox in acting. Think of the performances of Audrey Hepburn as Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* or Julia Robert’s Vivian Ward in *Pretty Woman*: The first casts a young Belgian/Dutch aristocrat in the part of a New York City escort (or American geisha, as Capote called her) who is really from the rural South of America. The latter casts a Southern belle in the part of a Los Angeles prostitute. This is hardly typecasting, but it is highly effective because both actresses lend their natural grace and innocence to rather prurient parts in the same way Cinderella is and is not a princess-in-hiding.

underquality²⁷⁵ is a negative one, like danger, cruelty, or amorality; people will be drawn to the enigma anyway, and pure goodness is rarely seductive” (cf. Greene, *Seduction* 190–191).

Greene, as do I, views such a paradox as the result of hard work and hours of practice:

Performers’ deep understanding of human nature and their ability to tap into the consciousness of others are based on their understanding of tension.

Some actors may well have this “poignant antiphony” by nature, but often, actors must create it and work at it. Since there is no good explanation for the “paradox phenomenon” in dualistic language—other than the language of paradox—there is also no quick way of explaining how an actor achieves such intervolving, resonant, and sympathetic vibration. Rick Kemp points out repeatedly (as mentioned in Chapter 2 of Part I) that there is no branch of training in acting schools dedicated to something as complex as NVC (and paradox is often communicated through NVC). Basically, an actor must have it by nature or find it through work and creativity. It is my understanding that good actors have (or fastidiously forge) this ability to allow two contrasting states to coexist in their expression of a character. A character is never just one-sided, after all. I would argue that the ability to maintain a tension of contrarities within an actor’s performance is so rare because it is exceedingly uncomfortable, both for the actor and for the audience.²⁷⁶ Most actors aim to please; however, it is never enough to play to the audience. Like Meredith’s Rence, they must unsettle the hearts of men and women by maintaining tension and expressing a discomfiting but poignant antiphony to resonate. It is this strength in actors, I argue, this paradox of poignant antiphony that gives them gravitas and that sympathetically vibrates with an audience. It is seductive, and seduction is never comfortable.

²⁷⁵ Significantly, both writers, from different eras, use unusual words to describe paradox: In 1875, Meredith uses “intervolve” (“to twist or coil within one another,” *Merriam-Webster*), which was coined by John Milton in 1667, but never quite made it into regular usage. John Milton, unsurprisingly, coined “intervolve” to describe a paradox in Book V of *Paradise Lost*. Robert Greene, in 2003, uses “underquality,” a madeup word meaning something like the “undertow” or “undercurrent” of a quality, the dark side of a quality. Readers can discern what is meant by these words even though they are not familiar with them. Instinctively, the “in-between-state” is grasped not despite, but because the writers used unusual words to express paradox.

²⁷⁶ For example, Marlon Brando is repeatedly described as unsettling the audience with his intensity. He was, and he worked on, being a paradox: “[I]t was the comic innocence that fuelled the gibes, the baffled tenderness beneath the toughness. The face above the heavily muscled body was angelic; the pain he showed when he broke down and wailed for his wife was searing, elemental. And his intensity was almost unbearable . . . if he was not a villain, he was an extremely charming monster, and the audience was uncomfortably implicated in Blanche’s destruction by its early laughter and its deep attraction to him” (cf. Roth Pierpont, Claudia, “Method Man,” *New Yorker* 20 Oct. 2008).

To relate the performer's paradox to an actor being seductive is again one of the greatest points of contention the anti-theatricals criticized. The ambiguity and gender fluidity of actors have been a thorn in the sides of antitheatrical thinkers for ages. They have a point, of course: The great actor is a seducer, and in that, s/he is dangerous. It must be pointed out, however, that what the antitheatricals have always been and still are afraid of is not the actor being seductive, but their being seduced by him or her. The beauty of the actor's paradox is that it is not blatantly obvious. It is fluid and ambiguous, and it bids the audience to figure it out: "A bright surface may have a decorative charm, but what draws your eye into a painting is a depth of field, and inexpressible ambiguity, a surreal complexity" (Greene, *Seduction* 193). As Beale demonstrates so gloriously as Falstaff: One can be seductive and delightful in unsavory unsightliness. Director Anne Bogart explained it as follows:

Making art [is an] ambiguous act. Rather than stating the truth directly, successful art, through contradiction, juxtaposition and paradox, can produce a sense of truth. This sense of truth is different from straight up facts or naming. Picasso said famously, "Art is the lie that enables us to realize the truth." In the realm of art, truth is often found in paradox. Setting up oppositions and radical juxtapositions helps to create enough space for the sense of truth to emerge within the viewer, listener or audience. (cf. Bogart, Anne, "What Is True What Is False," *Anne Bogart's blog* 19 Nov. 2018)

The latter is exactly what Beale achieves with his portrayal of Falstaff: The character's many contradictions demand to be figured out by the audience. He unsettles them but draws them in by seducing them into participation.

Falstaff/Beale is full of layers of qualities (and vices) that bid the audience to peel them away. He is a Russian doll: Once one shell is removed, there is another, and another. The audience never knows which quality will entreat or assault them next. Falstaff/Beale is a walking paradox so filled with humanity and unexpectedness that he has the audience completely under his spell. Hal (beautifully played by Tom Hiddleston) has no choice but to respond with love to Falstaff/Beale's love: "I do. I will." The latter is a unique and strong choice because Hal's line "I

do. I will [banish you (Falstaff) and all the world (Peto, Bardolph, Poins, etc.)]" is usually spoken in a sinister manner, hinting at things to come. After all, Hal as Henry V will, in the end, banish Falstaff and break his heart. The way Falstaff/Beale implores Hal not to banish him, however, makes a sinister response impossible. Hal/Hiddleston instinctively (it appears) shies away from it and responds with love, which makes the scene so much more powerful. It is as though Hal must love Falstaff, despite himself, and that captures exactly the dynamic they share. Falstaff is a seducer, a "misleader of youth (479). Falstaff/Beale, in this scene, perfectly demonstrates how a bawdy, debauched old knight manages to seduce the future king of England. As Meredith put it: Falstaff/Beale radiates poignant antiphony and intervolves Hal/Hiddleston in vibrational unison. The two characters are genuinely "at play" with one another. There is also a sense that Hal/Hiddleston is absorbing Falstaff/Beale's gift of seduction in this scene (as my chapter on *Henry V* will demonstrate). By emphasizing his love for Hal/Hiddleston, Falstaff/Beale also demonstrates the father-son bond these two unlikely friends have forged.

Peter Platt rightly emphasizes that "[t]he paradoxes of playing are many and profound. . . . [W]e must ask . . . are these paradoxes benign or malevolent, constructive, or destructive? Perhaps all we can say for certain is that they are transformative—for characters and audience alike—and that something important happens in the in-between space of paradox" (cf. Platt 205). Simon Russell Beale's portrayal of Falstaff certainly can transform the audience. By allowing Falstaff to exist in the in-between space of paradox, Beale wins over Hal/Hiddleston and the audience, even though he loses in the end. Beale fully exposes Falstaff's plethora of unsavory attributes and actions, yet his Falstaff remains irresistible in his crudity and amiable in his odiousness. Beale's Falstaff resides in a gray zone that allows paradox and denies purely dualistic thinking. He is exactly how Winterson so vividly described him: "a hot mess" and "a life-affirming liar whose truth is never to be a counterfeit" (Winterson, *NYT*). Beale uses paradox to his advantage. Language, after all, is lacking in expressions for someone "whose truth is never to be a counterfeit."

As I mentioned in my introduction, Western language is an added roadblock in expressing in-between states. In his book *The Mother Tongue*, Bill Bryson points out a

significant and often-overlooked inadequacy of the English language: “We are strangely lacking in middling terms—hard and soft, near and far, big and little” (Bryson 68). Since language offers the greatest insight into how its speakers think and view the world, Bryson’s observation of a lack of expressiveness regarding gray zones is remarkable: It reveals just how stuck English and Western thinking is in dualism. The very “in-between space of paradox” that Peter Platt speaks of cannot truly be conveyed through the English language. If one is either near or far, how can one be in between? If something is either warm²⁷⁷ or cold, how can one express “coolness corresponding to warmth?” (Bryson 68). The impossibility of expressing “being neither here nor there” offers a clue regarding why it is so difficult to capture in language what great actors do. The lack of language for in-between spaces is one problem. Dualistic thinking and a dislike of uncertainty are even greater problems. The actor, then, is needed to express a state that clearly exists within humanity but is suppressed by binary ways of thinking and by the need to resolve paradox into one solution. If language is perceived as a tool to communicate, then the lack of a form of expression for in-between states within the human psyche is like handcuffing a pianist. The actor must use his or her own tools beyond language to express a very human in-between state of being to their audience. The actor must always be aware that the mind and body are always one: Without the one, the other cannot be fully expressed. As Beale does with his Falstaff, the actor must accept the liminal and uncertain state of paradox and express it with the mind and body. Beale not only “reads between the lines,” but he finds ways of expressing those hidden lines.

²⁷⁷ There is, of course, “lukewarm,” but it does not really capture a state between cold and warm. “Lukewarm” means somewhat warm, but not hot. I argue that the colloquial, informal addition of “ish” has much to do with a linguistic lack of in-between states. It could be said that “lukewarm” is “warm-ish,” that someone who is very reserved but not mean is “coldish.” In a way, as often happens with language, people create missing terms over time. The slang term “-ish” has become “the international shorthand for slight hedge” (McCulloch, *Slate* 9 Jun. 2014). Not only did the suffix “-ish” become an informal word, but it has also become increasingly popular. Arguably, it fills people’s need to express in-between states. Apart from its meaning of “kind of, sort of (but not really), more or less, in part, to some degree (but not completely), approximately, in a way, close to, almost, thereabouts,” it contains great liberating humor: When someone says that they are “fit-ish,” they almost always mean that they are “not in good shape but almost, which means not at all.” “Brad Pitt being handsome-ish” or “Nero having been undemocratic-ish” exemplify words that are not words, yet say it all. “Ish” means something, yet simultaneously takes it away. It is an in-between state that captures something obviously missing from the English language.



2) David Suchet as Shylock: Insight into the Outsider

David Suchet: Shylock, Patrick Stewart: Tubal, scenes from *The Merchant of Venice*, part of *Playing Shakespeare*, Season 1, Episode 4: “Exploring the Character,” directed by John Barton (scene) and John Carlaw (episode), filmed for *ITV (London Weekend Television)* 1982.

Unlike Western thought, in Eastern thought, particularly in the practice of Zen, it is customary to accept and occupy in-between states of paradox. Shunryo Suzuki begins his landmark study of *Zen-Mind, Beginner’s Mind* with the following thoughts: “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few. . . . For Zen students, the most important thing is not to be dualistic.²⁷⁸ . . . This is also *the real secret of the arts*: Always be a beginner” (cf. Suzuki 1–3, emphasis mine). The Zen Mind is described as:

one of those enigmatic phrases used by Zen teachers to make you *notice yourself*, to go *beyond the words*, and make you notice what your own mind and being are. This is the purpose of all Zen teaching—to make you *wonder* and to answer that wondering with the *deepest expression* of your own nature. (Suzuki xiii, emphasis mine)

In the above quote, Zen, or “Beginner’s Mind,” is described by Suzuki similar to how Keats described Shakespeare’s mind as having “negative capability”: To remain in the beginner’s mind means to allow everything, to include everything, to be empty and full simultaneously, and to marvel without judgment. A skilled actor must have these very qualities, especially since his or her expression is already restrained due to the limitations of dualistic language.

Anne Bogart says something comparable about cultivating open-mindedness as an artist: “It is key to keep a beginner’s mind and allow for new possibilities and to be influenced by other disciplines. The phrase ‘it doesn’t matter’ can be poison to the creative spirit.” . . . If we are

²⁷⁸ Suzuki explains: “Our body and mind are not two, and not one. . . . Our body and mind are both two and one. We usually think that if something is not one, it is more than one; if it is not singular, it is plural. But in actual experience, our life is not only plural, but also singular. Each one of us is dependent and independent” (cf. Suzuki 7).

lucky, we will make something *new* that feels as though it has *always been there*” (Bogart, “Why Training Is Necessary,” *Anne Bogart’s Blog: SITI.org*,²⁷⁹ 16 Jan. 2020, emphasis mine).

Strikingly, Bogart uses a paradox to describe good art: “Something new that feels as though it has always been there.” A good actor must be able to marvel at something despite having seen it hundreds of times before. He or she must make the audience feel as though it is seeing something for the first time. To express the world with “a kind of unencumbered first sight, or virginal noticing . . . [and without] a premature closing of our accounts with reality,” the actor must be completely present and open to other forms of consciousness (cf. Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind* 16–17). As acting coach Tony Greco put it, “The audience must believe that tonight, just tonight, Othello may not kill Desdemona” (cf. Greco, “On Good Acting,” *New York City acting class* 2009). The audience must believe that anything can happen. Before a performance, French director Ariane Mnouchkine often says the following words to her company, Le Theatre du Soleil:

“Tonight, someone in our audience will be seeing a play *for the very first time*. And tonight, a member of our audience is seeing a play *for the very last time*. We must perform for these two people.” Speaking to actors in rehearsal, Mnouchkine regularly reminds actors that they are acting for the audience. She often directs them to perform, “Pour Nous!” “For us!” Performance at its best is an act of *dedication*. (Bogart quoting Mnouchkine, “Dedication,” *SITI blog* 19 May 2019, emphasis mine)

In an act of dedication, the actor must be able to convey his beginner’s mind of marvel, of being open to all possibilities, and of being open to the audience. Such a rich state of mind of in-between states of paradox, of radical acceptance of all possibilities, is not easily expressed in the

²⁷⁹ “SITI” stands for “Saratoga International Theater Institute.” It was founded in 1992 by Anne Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki. I frequently quote Anne Bogart’s blog on SITI.org because Bogart, apart from being incredibly insightful, uses a holistic and multi-cultural approach to acting, directing, and creativity in general. In particular, Bogart combines Western and Eastern thought, and she explains herself and her ideas brilliantly in her books and in her blog. In what follows, I will refer to her blog as the “SITI blog,” where Anne Bogart publishes her thoughts in small-essay format regularly. I am quoting the publication dates as her essays often consider the here and now.

English language or Western languages in general. Additionally, to the Western ear, such in-between states of paradox and total possibility savor of overly spiritual jargon that does not truly signify anything. After all, if it is not “this” or “that,” if it is not “here” or there,” if it is not “either/or,” then what is it, where is it, how is it, and how much of it is there, asks patriarchal,²⁸⁰ dualistic thinking. What language really demonstrates is the denial of anything that cannot be measured empirically, captured logically or, I would add, subjugated completely:

In an effort to escape death and non-being, the patriarchs have constructed a conception of existence which is *split in two*, with eternal life, God, meaning and *spirit* on one side and *bodily death* on the other. The masculinist association of women with bodies, nature and the birthing–dying cycle places us clearly on the side of death, in the realm of being, which is and necessarily must be despised and controlled. Alienation from the rhythms of life, giving rise to a crisis of meaning; the denial of death, which leads *paradoxically* to an adoration of death. (Ruth, “Bodies and Souls/Sex, Sin, and the Senses in Patriarchy: A Study in Applied Dualism,” *Hypatia* 149, emphasis mine)

Notably, throughout history, actors have repeatedly “been seen as feminine” (Skura 24) or as “effeminate” and androgynous. Male actors “have been effective in playing female roles in so many societies [due to a] dual openness to identification with women” (cf. Skura 24). Such openness to the feminine, of course, results in patriarchy and the overly masculinely oriented to become unglued. It is a threat and must therefore be subjugated, ignored, or denied altogether.

²⁸⁰ I refer here to certain feminist readings of dualistic language as described in my first chapter. I agree with Irigaray, who proposed that Western thought and language—if guided by a female body and mind—would not be as dualistic and non-contradictory, but more fluid and accepting of ambiguity (cf. Irigaray, Luce 1977 [1985b], *This Sex Which Is Not One* [*Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*], Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (transl.), Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP). The lack of words to describe certain liminal states of paradox can be likened to the gap in language regarding many female experiences: “[T]o communicate about important elements of their lives, and probably also more difficult to reflect upon these elements,” women need a vocabulary that captures these elements and experiences (cf. Hornsby, Jennifer, “Disempowered Speech,” *Philosophical Topics*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1995, pp. 127–147. doi:10.5840/philtopics199523211). As an example, the term “sexual harassment” (cf. Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198237907.001.0001) had to be invented for women to speak about an experience that simply did not “exist” in dualistic, patriarchal language. “Feminists like Spender [Spender, Dale, 1980 [1985], *Man Made Language*, second edition, New York: Routledge] and Catherine MacKinnon (1989) argue that male power over language has allowed them to create reality” (cf. Saul, Jennifer et. al., “Feminist Philosophy of Language,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 21 Aug. 2017. plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-language. Accessed 8 Jan. 2021.)

However, these in-between states *do* exist, and they *do* carry meaning. Impersonal, empiric inquiry and its findings (or a lack of findings) do not equal complete objectivity. Humans cannot transcend their own subjectivity completely to arrive at an ultimate objective point of view.²⁸¹ As Shunryo Suzuki puts it, “But at first it is very difficult to accept things as they are . . . [to] be free from the suffering of duality” (Suzuki 35). The actor, then, is a conduit that can help the audience see things in new ways. The theatre is not just the “seeing place” but “the place where the audience goes to see the actors see” (Bogart, quoting Declan Donnellan, “Ways of Seeing,” *SITI blog* 19 Feb. 2019). To show that an actor can express this in-between state of paradox and to prove that this very human state is not as obscure and esoteric as it appears to a Western eye and to an ear steeped in Cartesian dualism, I chose the example of David Suchet as Shylock. Suchet manifests Shylock’s outsider status by revealing a character that eludes the stable limitations of dualistic thought. Suchet’s Shylock is so fluid, so unfixed, so unhinged, so free—close to an anarchist’s freedom—that he breaks down all boundaries and expectations. He is the “trickster figure” I outlined in my introduction. Every time the audience thinks it has Suchet’s chameleonic Shylock figured out, he slips into another shape, mood, emotion, or action. Suchet’s Shylock is a manifest Proteus maneuvering through hostile, prejudicious Venice. He is the epitome of the actor’s paradox, what S. P. Cerasano describes as “the sad celebrity and the parasite rolled into one” (Cerasano, “Book Review: Meredith Skura’s *Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing*,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, 49.1 1996: 166). He is a walking contradiction: Everyone “knows him” as “the Jew,” yet no one knows him at all.

²⁸¹ I am building on Thomas Nagel’s thoughts—despite disagreeing with his “modern, dualistic idealism”—in *The Incompleteness of Objective Reality*: “We must think of the mind as a phenomenon to which the human case is not necessarily central, even though our minds are at the centre of the world. This idea can be betrayed if we turn objective comprehensibility into a new standard of reality. That is an error because the fact that reality extends beyond what is available to our original perspective does not mean that all of it is available to some transcendent perspective that we can reach from here” (Nagel, Thomas. “The Incompleteness of Objective Reality.” *Arguing About the Mind*. Ed. Brie Gertler and Lawrence A. Shapiro, Routledge, 2007, pp. 4–36).

As part of the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC's) recorded Masterclass *Playing Shakespeare (PS)*,²⁸² John Barton (RSC's co-founder and director) and Trevor Nunn (RSC's artistic director) guide audiences through chosen scenes and sonnets performed by some of the best English actors at the time. In a well-known episode called "Exploring Character" of John Barton's *RSC's Playing Shakespeare (PS)* Season 1, Episode 4, both Patrick Stewart and David Suchet play various scenes of *The Merchant of Venice*. Both Stewart and Suchet had recently portrayed Shylock on the London stage. Stewart and Suchet describe their respective approaches to the part eloquently, albeit very differently. Stewart opted for a Shylock who speaks with an accent that is "more cultured, more native than the natives . . . [a Shylock who has an] over-cultured and over-refined accent, much more so than the aristocrats in the play" (Barton, *PS* 1.4). Stewart's Shylock survives in an alien culture by assimilating to a fault. Patrick Stewart states, "I think Shylock is an outsider who happens to be a Jew" (Barton, *PS* 1.4). Suchet, though, admits that he "played everything in opposition to [Stewart's Shylock]" (Barton, *PS* 1.4). Suchet explains his choice as follows: "I would interpret Shylock as, 'I'm an outsider not because I happen to be a Jew, but because I'm a Jew'. . . . He is only actually called by his name, Shylock, six times, Jew, twenty-two [times]" (Barton, *PS* 1.4). Suchet gave Shylock a foreign accent that cannot easily be placed and therefore sounds even more foreign and strange to the other Venetians (and to the audience). Suchet explains, "I never wanted anybody to forget that I was an outsider. . . . My Shylock is very proud of his Jewishness" (Barton, *PS* 1.4). John Barton, who directed both actors in the part of Shylock, points out that he "found both those interpretations totally acceptable, totally consistent with the text. There's never one answer" (Barton, *PS* 1.4). Barton's conclusion at the end of this episode of *Playing Shakespeare* states that he was equally

²⁸² *Playing Shakespeare (PS)* is a collection of nine master classes on Shakespearean performance directed by the *Royal Shakespeare Company's* John Barton, starring some of Great Britain's most superlative actors. In the UK, the series was launched in 1979 under the *RSC's* artistic director Trevor Nunn. In the United States, the series first aired on PBS in the 1980s. The series has since become a classic in Shakespearean acting training. Since there is a companion book (written by John Barton) to the episodic television version produced by *London Weekend Television/ITV*, I will refer to the latter as *PS* and to the book version as *Playing Shakespeare*. I will add the episode title and number each time I quote *PS*. Significantly, the original 1979 *South Bank Show Special* episode (with Trevor Nunn directing) is sadly not part of the nine-part series. It is only available via streaming services such as *YouTube* (I give the link in my Works Cited).

convinced by both actors' interpretations of Shylock.²⁸³ Both interpretations remain within the text. Such richness and possibility reveal the freedom contained within Shakespeare's text that a good actor can tune in to with the correct key.

Barton recalls his earlier proposition about actors being able to "interpret the *hidden directions* Shakespeare himself provided in his verse and in his prose"²⁸⁴ (Barton, *Playing Shakespeare* 3–4). Shakespeare's "hidden directions" often appear to bid the actor to allow paradox and to be open to all possibility, even if it goes beyond ("para") belief ("doxa"); to not just accept ambiguity and true contradictions (two-way truths: *dialetheia*—Greek: "di" = two; "aletheia" = truth), but to embrace them, marvel at them, and live through and within them. Such "directions" sound unorthodox to Western thought. Suchet interprets the "hidden directions" in the most mercurial and ingenious ways. He becomes a riddle, a "koan" himself:

In Zen Buddhist practice, a koan is a story or dialogue used to provoke "the great doubt." Meant to stop the mind mid-stride, a koan is a paradoxical anecdote or riddle without a solution that demonstrates the inadequacy of logical reasoning. A koan is described as a mental explosion that leads one to abandon reason, a double-bind that turns you away from the vice grip of logic. According to Zen practitioners, experiencing a koan can reveal greater truths and even provoke enlightenment. A koan provides an excellent example of how paradox induces the sense of truth. This moment of truth, according to Zen, is evoked by experience rather than by description. (Bogart, "What Is True What Is False?" *SITI blog* 19 Nov. 2019)

²⁸³ Importantly, upon watching this episode ("Exploring Character," season 1, episode 4) of *PS* for the first time, I thought nothing could top Stewart's performance. (Stewart performed first). Subsequently, David Suchet, in my view, managed to surpass Stewart's performance. Suchet's performance is riveting and radically creative. He resonates as a true outsider looking in, desiring to be included, yet resenting this very desire. He is a mesmerizing crowd-puller and a walking riddle.

²⁸⁴ Hugh Bonneville gives a wonderful, concrete example of Shakespeare's directions in the PBS series *Shakespeare Uncovered*. Bonneville indicates how Helena speaks in rhymed verse during her argument with Lysander and Demetrius in the forest. However, once Helena feels betrayed by her best friend, Hermia, she suddenly drops all rhyme and begins to speak in prose. Bonneville states that this is a great example of Shakespeare as a director because the lines moving from rhymed verse to prose reveal to the actor that Helena is so affected by Hermia's betrayal that she cannot keep up the rhymed verse. Helena drops all courtesy, and her gloves come off (Bonneville, "A Midsummer Night's Dream with Hugh Bonneville," *Shakespeare Uncovered*, PBS 2015).

Suchet becomes a series of contradictions: He allows his Shylock to slip from hatred to pity, from fury to pathos, from malice to despondence, and from fear to courage, all within three shakes of a lamb's tail. By successfully turning himself into a riddle, Suchet's Shylock invites the audience to participate in the possibility of his existence and to be open to opposing ideas. Most importantly, Suchet has taken Shakespeare's "hidden direction" of the many repetitions to heart. He has "read between the lines,"—a rare idiom in the English language with its origin in cryptography that unmasks the importance of all that is not openly said—and he has interpreted those lines brilliantly. Obvious repetitions with melody and rhythm carry meaning. Suchet interprets these repetitions as a kind of mania at one time and as utter despair at another. His Shylock remains in a state of a beginner's mind, full of marvel and shock at one time, empty of all affections at the next. He remains full and empty simultaneously, brimming with possibility. The audience never knows what he will do next.

Act III, Scene 1

SHYLOCK

To bait fish withal: if **it will feed**²⁸⁵ nothing else,
it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and
hindered me half a million; laughed at **my** losses,
mocked at **my** gains, scorned **my** nation, thwarted **my**
bargains, cooled **my** friends, heated **mine**
enemies; and what's his reason? I am a **Jew**. **Hath**
not a Jew eyes? **hath not a Jew** hands, organs,
dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with
the same food, hurt with **the same** weapons, subject
to **the same** diseases, healed by **the same** means,
warmed and cooled by **the same** winter and summer, as
a Christian is? **If you prick** us, **do we not** bleed?
if you tickle us, **do we not** laugh? **if you** poison
us, **do we not** die? and **if you** wrong us, shall **we not**
revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will
resemble you in that. If a **Jew wrong** a **Christian**,

²⁸⁵ **Bold** for repetitions (alliteration, anaphora); underlined words: repetitions of the prejudiced actions of the Christians toward Shylock; underlined single or double letters: repetition of strongly stressed consonants; and **bold vermilion**: words with vowels that Suchet's Shylock draws out and intonates heavily and ominously.

what is his humility? **Revenge**. If a **Christian wrong a Jew, what** should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, **revenge**. The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go **hard** but I will better the instruction.

In Act III, Scene 1 with Salario, when Suchet's Shylock slams his stick on the table (Suchet's choice) and fiercely demands revenge ("if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge"), he is perfectly earnest. This Shylock means to even the score, so Suchet emphasizes the repetitive "feed." "Feed" is a very physical term and a visual metaphor that is immediately perceived by the audience. Suchet renders Shylock's strong choice of "feeding his revenge" with a punch that cuts through the air. Simultaneously, he falls into a furious but slow and quiet despair: "I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections . . . ?" Suchet's Shylock's rhythmic reading of the repetitions has a hypnotic effect on the audience. His fury is always full of despair and melancholy. He is manic depressive throughout the scene. A moment earlier, he had burst into childlike laughter, with an outpouring of precocious giggles accommodating his outburst: "If you prick us, do we not bleed?" Within the same sentence, he slips from innocence into a deathly calm and savage declamation that is and is not a question: "If you wrong us, shall we not revenge?"

Suchet's Shylock is personified madness in its many senses: He runs through motions of furious turmoil, chaotic insanity, and a kind of wild folly. There is bile streaming out of him with a touch of geniality. There is bitterness and devastation over being mocked and ostracized, but Suchet—at times—serves this bitterness with childlike humor and sweetness. He often stoops, bows, and genuflects to his "betters," only to straighten his body within seconds into a regal pose that belies his lowliness. On the words "the villainy you teach me, I will execute. And it shall go hard. But I will better the instruction," Suchet morphs into the majestic disdain of a monarch. Suchet's Shylock draws out the "-a-" in "hard," he gives the "-tt-" in "better," and the "-ct-" in "instruction" a violent tone that sounds like striking someone. Throughout the soliloquy, Suchet's Shylock spits out words such as "revenge," "disgraced," "hindered," "mocked," and "scorned" with frenzied speed, only to dial down both the velocity and volume and become eerily tranquil and sedate on: "I-am-a-Jew." In musical terms, Suchet's Shylock runs the gamut between allegro

and adagio. He batters his audience with consonants while soothing them with vowels. He is tangibly lashing out at his audience with intermittent bouts of repetitive flattery that stealthily compare and equate Jews and Christians (“if you tickle us, do we not laugh?” “if you . . . do we?”). He demeans himself while patronizing others. He pounds away at the prejudice he suffered under the Christians, but he does it in a rhythmic, dynamic chant that is spellbinding.

Act III, Scene 1: Shylock and Tubal

SHYLOCK

Why, **there, there, there, there!** a diamond gone,
cost me **two thousand ducats** in Frankfort! The curse
never fell upon our nation till now; I **never** felt it
till now: **two thousand ducats** in that; and other
precious, precious jewels. I would my daughter
were **dead at my foot**, and the jewels in her ear!
would she were **hearsed at my foot**, and the ducats in
her coffin! No news of them? **Why**, so: and I know
not what's spent in the search: **why**, thou **loss** upon
loss! the thief gone with **so much**, and **so much** to
find **the thief**; and **no satisfaction, no revenge**:
nor **no** in luck stirring but what lights on my
shoulders; **no sighs** but of my breathing; **no tears**
but of my shedding.

TUBAL

Yes, other men have ill luck too: Antonio, as I
heard in Genoa,—

SHYLOCK

What, what, what? ill luck, ill luck?

TUBAL

Hath an argosy cast away, coming from Tripolis.

SHYLOCK

I thank God, I thank God. Is't true, is't true?

TUBAL

I spoke with some of the sailors that escaped the wreck.

SHYLOCK

I thank thee, good Tubal: **good news, good news!**

ha, ha! where? in Genoa?

TUBAL

Your daughter spent in Genoa, as I heard, in one
night fourscore ducats.

SHYLOCK

Thou stickest a dagger in me: I shall never see my
gold again: **fourscore ducats** at a sitting!

fourscore ducats!

TUBAL

There came divers of Antonio's creditors in my
company to Venice, that swear he cannot choose but break.

SHYLOCK

I am very glad of it: I'll **plague** him; I'll **torture**
him: **I am glad of it.**

[...]

SHYLOCK

Nay, **that's true, that's very true. Go, Tubal,** fee
me an officer; bespeak him a fortnight before. **I**
will have the **heart** of him, if he forfeit; for, were
he out of Venice, **I** can make what merchandise **I**
will. **Go, go, Tubal,** and meet me **at our synagogue;**
go, good Tubal; at our synagogue, Tubal.

Exeunt

Suchet's Shylock wails the "there, there, there" and in a heartbeat snaps into fury on: "cost me two thousand ducats." Unlike Stewart's Shylock, Suchet's Shylock does not anglicize "Frankfort." Suchet's Shylock pronounces it with an Eastern European accent that comes close to its German pronunciation. The effect of this pronunciation makes Suchet's Shylock appear even more foreign. He bemoans his "precious, precious jewels," only to spit out homicidal desire: "I wish my daughter were dead at my foot, . . . hearsed at my foot." He howls with grief over his losses: "loss upon loss." He laments that "so much . . . so much" is gone from him and that there are "no tears, [shed] . . . no sighs" breathed but his. Shylock's wailing in response to Tubal's "other men have ill luck, too" is uproarious in its humanity: Who wants to hear one's best friend minimize one's grievances with the irksome platitude that one is not the only one with troubles? Shylock's ears perk up when Tubal is allowed to finish his sentence and informs him that Antonio is ruined. Suddenly, Suchet's Shylock is manic with euphoria. His eyes almost pop out of their sockets. Like a child, he exclaims gleefully, "What, what, what? Ill luck? Ill luck? . . . I thank God. I thank God. Is't true? Is't true?" Suchet's musical tempo is "vivacissimo" here: "very fast and lively," going into frenetic.

The laughs Suchet gets from the audience²⁸⁶ on the repetitive “I thank God” are well-deserved: He is very funny in his *schadenfreude*. Suchet’s delight when he hears about Antonio’s misfortune is relatable, because it is very human. Suchet personifies the very word “*schadenfreude*” by expressing its complex and contrary emotions: He expresses a comical celebratory cruelty where Patrick Stewart’s Shylock only exhibits violence by pulling out a knife (which does not get laughs or empathy). Suchet’s Shylock is playful in his vindictiveness and entertaining in his malice. It is impossible not to relate to Suchet’s Shylock’s unguardedness. Suchet’s Shylock plays approximately ten acting notes every moment. It is the very in-between state of paradoxical emotions Suchet reveals that creates relatable humanity: “The power in art lies in its unique ability to produce identification and empathy through the experience of these paradoxes and juxtapositions” (Bogart, Ann, “What Is True What Is False,” *SITI blog* 19 Nov. 2018). A kind of battle takes place in the audience’s mind between what is wrong and what is, nonetheless, utterly engaging, understandable, and funny.

Suchet’s Shylock flings himself almost hysterically at Tubal, embraces him, and kisses him at one moment (“good news, good news”), only to mutate into a slumped state of being serious and shattered (“thou stickest a dagger in me”). Suchet’s Shylock creates an affectionate and tactile bond with Tubal that makes him different from the Christians in the play. There is no trace of stoicism (or anything remotely Anglo-Saxon) about Suchet’s Shylock. He is decidedly exotic in his warmth and big gestures. He gently takes Tubal’s face into his hands, kisses him by way of greeting him, and puts his arm around him dotingly, and by doing so, Suchet’s Shylock reveals a bond between the two friends to the audience. He also reveals an “other-ness.” The tactility and tenderness are Suchet’s creations, and they lend Shylock an amenability and credibility as a friend. Such amenability demonstrates that Shylock can be cordial and warm-hearted when around non-hostile Venetian friends. Stewart’s Tubal and Suchet’s Shylock have an intimate dynamic: Stewart’s Tubal is dispassionate and tells him things as they are (“other men have ill luck, too”), but he also knows how to brighten Shylock’s rancor. An actual dark cloud

²⁸⁶ As I explained in d) The Language of Paradox, from the actor’s perspective, “acting is acting.” Even in a recorded rehearsal with an audience from 1982, the viewer watching Suchet today, in 2023, is still just as tuned in to the actor as the original audience from 41 years ago. A stellar performance, no matter how old, and no matter what media captured it, resonates with viewers. Furthermore, Barton’s recorded class of 1982 is still considered a staple in advanced Shakespearean actor training today.

passes from Suchet's Shylock's face when Tubal lights his cigar. Suchet's Shylock draws out the cigar-lighting moment by repeatedly and comically puffing out smoke: He corporeally shows the audience how the smoke of anger passes from him—whiff by whiff—when Tubal gives him the news of Antonio's misfortune. The audience sees how dark clouds materialize around Shylock's face, and they see them disappear into thin air. Suchet's Shylock makes something ordinarily invisible completely and cleverly visible.

Suchet's Shylock's glee never transforms into a cliché-ridden clownishness or farce. Suchet's Shylock's euphoria is dangerous, however, in its unpredictability. One senses that he can turn any second, and turn, he does. Oscar Wilde's description of "paradoxes always [being] dangerous things"²⁸⁷ expresses Suchet's Shylock's volatility well. Suchet's Shylock is lighthearted and resentful at the same time. When Suchet's Shylock is told that his daughter gave away the ring he received from Lea, his disappointment—or, rather, devastation—is palpable. Suchet's Shylock demonstrates what cognitive neuroscience claims: There are many emotions running within people of which they are not conscious. Some of them come out in a strange variety of forms. Suchet's Shylock does not express complete insanity, but he taps into a deeply human sea of emotions, such as a sadness that touches on madness. Logic cannot make sense of it, but instinct can. His laugh and mask-like grinning face are certainly tinged with hysteria. It is as though the only way Suchet's Shylock will not go mad is by seeking revenge. His next moment of calculated calmness is a gathering back of the strands of his wit. It is as though Suchet's Shylock must have revenge in order to survive. In Suchet's hands, Shylock's need for vengeance reads like a deeply relatable reaction. Shylock's need to even the score is articulated by Suchet as Shylock's only way of avoiding the kind of madness that comes with profound grief. Such delay or avoidance can become a single-minded pursuit of permanently delaying despair. Such "singleness—in language, interpretation, and thought—is punished as it usually is in Shakespeare" (Platt 77), but it plays out beautifully in Suchet's portrayal.

Within Suchet's Shylock's mix of emotions and states of being, there is something deeply and paradoxically human that is relatable through the senses, but less so through language. It is an in-between state that can be felt by an audience, expressed by an actor, but not adequately

²⁸⁷ The character Vivian says it in Oscar Wilde's essay *The Decay of Lying* on p. 59.

described through language except through paradox and, perhaps, through synesthesia. Suchet's Shylock allows the audience to "see" what he feels. He leads them into the outsider's world and physically—through a blend of simultaneous emotions and gestures—reveals to them what it means to be within Venice (he is and is not a citizen), yet always without (he is and is not a foreigner). He looks like other Venetians, but Suchet's Shylock's robe and the way he carries it so regally remind him and the other Venetians that he is and is not one of them. Most Venetians despise him, yet in the end, they force him into their faith and culture instead of exiling him. Suchet's Shylock brings to the fore exactly what Peter Platt points out: "Shylock was himself a paradox: 'the Iewe of Venyce'" [Stationers Registry Entry of 1598]. This kind of liminal status makes Shylock one of Victor Turner's "marginals . . . simultaneously members (by ascription, optation, self-definition, or achievement) of two or more groups whose social definition and cultural norms are distinct from, and often opposed to one another" (Platt, quoting Victor Turner 77).

Suchet's Shylock is "troubling . . . because of [his] paradoxical, "marginal" status. . . . [He is] threatening [according to James Shapiro as well] because of his very marginality. [He is both] culturally uncertain and vulnerable and . . . culturally disturbing" (cf. Platt 77). Suchet allows Shylock to maintain a simultaneous tension of opposing emotions (childlike/bitter, funny/dead serious, innocent/vengeful). Suchet's Shylock also plays with gestures of status a great deal. He slumps and bows during bad news as if overwhelmed by a hostile world; then, in the next moment, he composes himself into a straight arrow and demonstrably speaks down to the world around him with eyes, chin gestures, and words. Suchet's Shylock's comportment can morph within seconds to poise, formal decorum, and regal etiquette. When Suchet's Shylock plays with high- and low-status gestures, he reminds the other Venetians (and the audience) that without the "other," there is no "same." Without the "low," there is no "high." Suchet's Shylock is a living embodiment of Victor Turner's "betwixt and between" and "ambiguous and indeterminate" (cf. Turner 359). Suchet's Shylock is an embodied, living reminder that "[I]minality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low" (cf. Turner 360). Suchet's Shylock moves between contrarities as smoothly as silk: He weaves the threads of gestural and emotional opposites into an interlaced, complex, and

dynamic web of embodied states until he unravels them into one single-minded purpose of revenge.

Suchet's Shylock is as volatile as dynamite and as devastated as the eternal outsider. He explodes with simultaneous facets and emotions. His effect on the audience is spectacular: "To create a dynamic experience in the theater requires an openness to paradox and the poles of oppositions that allow an audience sufficient space to participate in the adventure. You create a theatrical space in which ideas can battle with one another" (Bogart, "What Is True What Is False," *SITI blog* 19 Nov. 2018). To say that Suchet's Shylock resonates with the audience is an understatement. In Stanislavski's term, he "radiates" a magnetic field of attraction around him that makes his every move, twitch, and gesture captivating to follow (cf. Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work* 246–247). He moves like a dervish while hypnotizing the audience with powerful stillness. He "tricks" the audience at every moment, and the audience loves to be "tricked" by him.

3) David Suchet Performs Sonnet 138: The Ultimate Paradox—Acceptance of Truth Through Lies

David Suchet: Sonnet Speaker, part of the *Playing Shakespeare* series, "South Bank Show Special—Word of Mouth RSC Recorded Masterclass," directed by Trevor Nunn, filmed for *ITV (London Weekend Television)* 1979.

Sonnet 138

When **my love**²⁸⁸ swears that she is made of **truth**,
I do **believe** her, though I know she *lies*,
That she might think me some *untutored youth*,
Unlearnèd in the world's *false subtleties*.
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me **young**,
Although she knows *my days are past the best*,
Simply I credit her *false-speaking tongue*:
On **both sides** thus is simple truth *suppressed*.
But wherefore says she not she is *unjust*?

²⁸⁸ Marked as follows: bold for conventionally positive and romantic notions of love, truth, and poetry; italics for negative notions of love and truth; and underlining for words that carry more than one meaning or whose meaning is turned into its opposite. This is a simplified marking, as almost all words are inverted, reversed, turned inside out, and used to mean their opposite in this sonnet. **Vermillion** indicates the final paradoxical inversion.



And wherefore say not I that I am *old*?
Oh, **love's** best *habit* is in *seeming trust*,
And age in **love loves** not to have years told.
Therefore I lie with her and she with me,
And in our *faults* by *lies* we *flattered* be.

In this instance, as part of the *Playing Shakespeare's South Bank Show Special (PS-SBSS)* of 1979, Trevor Nunn guides David Suchet²⁸⁹ through Sonnet 138. The outcome of their cooperation is most insightful and captures the beautiful paradox of Sonnet 138. Nunn states what scholar Robert Berkelmann also said about Shakespeare's sonnets: They are "marvelously condensed dramas" (Berkelmann 138); they are "like little plays, or like a soliloquy. It's a person in a dramatic situation, and therefore a person needing to talk, needing to communicate" (Nunn *PS-SBSS*). Within less than eleven minutes, I would argue that David Suchet (with Trevor Nunn's guidance) expresses the essence of Sonnet 138 from beginning, middle, to end. Sonnet 138 is a problematic, difficult, and labyrinthine work that accepts its own complexity. Not only is Sonnet 138 full of paradox, but it is also a paradox in its entirety. To critics and readers over the years, this sonnet has represented a bit of a black hole. As J. Bunselmeyer put it so perceptively, the sonnet "explore[s] the paradox of words to convey the irresolvable paradox of life: that appearances can create their own reality" (cf. Bunselmeyer 108). In other words, Sonnet 138 reveals to the audience an in-between state of contrarities with the only language that can express that "the duplicity inherent in words captures the duplicity of life's false appearances" (cf. Bunselmeyer 108), which is the language of paradox.

Moreover, Sonnet 138 imparts a troubling reality, namely, that "there is genuine acceptance on the part of someone for whom the distinction between common lies and ennobling, passionately embodied fictions is more important than the Roman-minded [absolute] difference between truth and falsity" (cf. Snow 466). Such forbearance of "treachery" on behalf of the sonnet speaker, who is cognizant of the ongoing deceit, is often viewed with disdain and is one of the many reasons Sonnet 138 is not read aloud at weddings. Critics often describe it as the

²⁸⁹ I use David Suchet as an example once again, most unapologetically. Sonnet 138 shows his range as an actor. He is a completely different character in Sonnet 138 than he is as Shylock.

sonnet that launched a million relationship self-help books.²⁹⁰ It is doubly duplicitous, and it is “fine” with its ambiguity. To the modern ear, the lover’s acceptance of both parties lying to each other sounds distinctly unhealthy and almost sadomasochistic. The sonnet leaves the reader with a sense of floating through dross. It portrays love, life, and language as tarnished. It is impure in its role as a love poem, and it is, I argue, a love poem. In fact, I would argue that Sonnet 138 reveals that lying can be an act of love. It is true that there is no high-minded, romantic love, no higher truth, no greater purpose immediately recognizable in Sonnet 138. Deceit and defeatism appear to be the status quo. Contemporary relationship commentary may ask questions such as, “Is the speaker delusional to accept such a duplicitous relationship? Why does the speaker not only allow for such insincerity, but surrenders to it, and wants to settle for it?” Edward A. Snow emphasizes that Sonnet 138 “has been regarded as jaded, cynical, or despairing. . . . Patrick Crutwell (sic), for instance, finds it ‘the most terrible poem of the whole sequence . . . and also the nakedest, since it confesses things that are not easily confessed’” (cf. Snow, quoting Crutwell 481). Crutwell’s criticism says more about the critic than the sonnet, arguably because being utterly naked and confessing one’s most intimate flaws does not have to be terrible. In fact, the beauty of confession is that it allows for the expression of that which is not easily expressed. Moreover, confession and being utterly emotionally naked in front of another are the ultimate experiences of sharing oneself with another.

Snow is right, I would argue, to assert that “Crutwell (sic) misses the tone of the sonnet altogether” (Snow 481), and so do the many voices that have called Sonnet 138 the portrait of an unsavory and impossible relationship that has no future. Sonnet 138, in the wrong hands, will indeed play like a repulsive mockery of true love. It runs the risk of being a cynical portrait of a defeatist lover who cannot help but surrender to his lust for a morally bankrupt person. The latter would, in performance, be tedious to watch and, to use Crutwell’s words, be “most terrible.” In the hands of David Suchet and Trevor Nunn, Sonnet 138 becomes mesmerizing *because* it is naked, *because* it is tarnished, and *because* it confesses things not easily confessed. Suchet and

²⁹⁰ A. L. Rowse finds Sonnet 138 “purely sexual” and “utterly unromantic” (287). Alice F. Moore calls Sonnet 138 “grim, and ultimately confining” (16). Moore also finds that the dark lady’s “darkness” and “foulness” has tainted the speaker (15). Patrick Crutwell finds Sonnet 138 “the most terrible poem of the whole sequence” (563). Ricks calls the sonnet “a tragically embittered poem” (131).

Nunn extract an essential quality of Sonnet 138: It bears all, and it is accepting of its raw nakedness. The first thing Nunn advises Suchet to do is find a dramatic situation for the character. In other words, Nunn wants Suchet to make a strongly motivated acting choice, such as being a university lecturer “on the wrong side of fifty” (Nunn *PS-SBSS*), who has just given a speech to his young students about the nature of truth. Nunn’s direction of Suchet is poignant: He twice (politely, subtly) emphasizes in front of a live audience that the actor, Suchet, is over fifty, thereby stripping Suchet of his own vanity (or ego) to propel him into the sonnet speaker’s/lecturer’s role. The dramatic situation Nunn invents is that the students are unsure about where the lecturer really stands with respect to truth. They wonder if he is equivocal and would like for him to be more absolute. The sonnet is a speech given in response to the students’ desire for certainty. The lecturer must prove to his students that the ambiguity found in words captures the ambiguity in life. He must prove to them—by showing them through Sonnet 138—“the irresolvable paradox of life: that appearances can create their own reality” (Bunselmeyer 108).

Nunn’s dramatic situation for the sonnet speaker is a strong choice. It is one of many, but it is creatively well chosen for Suchet, the performer. Nunn and Suchet show how much they respect their audience’s intelligence. Nunn knows that a strong choice can never be about a weak lover who “just” cannot overcome his lust. Lust, unless motivated by the high stakes of love, is uninspiring to watch. Much criticism views the speaker’s relationship with the lady in Sonnet 138 as a fling, an affair gone wrong, a relationship driven solely by physical desire. The speaker’s acceptance of the lady’s lies is often interpreted as indifference. Nunn knows that the latter would be a shallow, weak choice for a dramatic situation and would be dreary in performance. The audience wonders why the speaker does not just leave. A strong acting choice is about a speaker who genuinely loves someone, who genuinely believes that someone, and yet accepts that the relationship is laced with lies. And still, he loves. And the lust the speaker feels must be motivated by love.²⁹¹ Otherwise, the stakes are not high, and the audience will not care. Madness in love is enthralling and relatable. Gripping about a fling is irritating. Suchet’s speaker/

²⁹¹ Certainly, the sonnet can be played as a drama about somebody who cannot get over his lust for a bad person. However, this inevitably leads to the audience “feeling bad for” the speaker. If the speaker’s lust is driven by genuine love, however, the audience will “feel with” the speaker, despite being horrified by the speaker’s suffering. In fact, when the audience “feels with” the speaker, it also will experience the suffering of deceit. The latter is a much stronger choice than watching someone lusting after a bad person.

lecturer must convince his audience/students that he is “capable of ‘knowing’ one thing, and ‘believing’ another; he is capable of deceiving himself” (Bunselmeyer 106). To deceive himself, the speaker must care enormously about the lady. “We are placed in the position of the lovers” (Bunselmeyer 106), and from their perspective, truth (and words in general) take on new and opposite meanings, albeit not necessarily dishonest ones.

Suchet’s lecturer must make his students see that “the truest poetry is the most feigning” (*AYLI* 3.3.15–16).²⁹² He must make them see that fiction can convey a greater truth than nonfiction. Such “feigning,” as Wolfgang Iser observes, is “endowed with a positive status that should not be interpreted with the prevailing code [of language] as something dishonest” (cf. Iser 113). Only by transgressing orthodox language, only through lies and paradox, can the speaker express his love. He cannot use everyday, systematized language “that has already been tamed by social convention” (cf. Iser 113). He must use language that goes beyond (para) common belief (doxa). He must make his students see that they must not close themselves off to paradoxical language and interpret everything according to the prevailing code of orthodox language (cf. Iser 113). They must not exclude the meanings of a language beyond the conventional ones (cf. Iser 113). Instead, he must *show* the students that the speaker is so invested in the relationship—and, therefore, the paradox and “lies”—that the relationship’s survival equals his own survival. He must show the students that “lies” and paradox *are* the speaker’s expression of his love. He must show them the necessity of accepting paradox.

The sonnet, itself, *is* the explanation and revelation to the audience/the students of how such acceptance is possible. The performance of the sonnet is the answer to the students’ question. The paradox *is* their answer: There is no absolute meaning behind words, yet words are meaningful. When David Suchet performs Sonnet 138, he takes the audience along for a rollercoaster ride through a swampland of love and conflicted emotions that enables them to see

²⁹² I repeat this point in my chapter on *Henry V*. The courtship scene between Henry V and Katherine of France shows great similarity with Sonnet 138. Both parties perform for the other, both aware of the innate ceremony situated within such a performance. Both are aware that the courtship is a game they must play. At the end of *Henry V*, the audience is treated to a kind of shared Sonnet 138 performance when Henry courts Katherine of France. Henry has just conquered France, but he still wants to “conquer” Katherine’s heart without looking like a bully. However, the courtship scene of *The Hollow Crown* is more light-hearted than Sonnet 138. The latter is one of the most brilliant examples of how a Shakespearean poem can carry a different meaning depending on the mood of the reader. It is also a brilliant example of how fiction has the power to create new or greater realities.

why and how the speaker can accept the unacceptable. Suchet as sonnet speaker (and university lecturer) speaks with a masculine, authoritative voice; he comports himself with powerful vigor, but carries with him an undercurrent of feminine softness throughout the sonnet. He brings out the humor of someone who can watch his own lunacy from afar and still feel the sting of it at every turn. I will follow Suchet's and Nunn's lead and interpretation of Sonnet 138, line by line. The drama of the sonnet, the "development" (as Nunn puts it) of the plot, from beginning, middle, to end, will play out in response to the audience's/students' question.

Suchet pronounces the first line, "When my love swears that she is made of truth," loudly, confidently, and authoritatively. He adds a touch of irony to "she is made of truth" to make his audience pay attention to words in detail. The speaker does not say, "When my love swears she tells the truth," but opts for an extreme and ironic "made of truth," which Suchet captures. He then leads the way into a straight-arrow direction of trust and faith ("I *do* believe her"), only to immediately cut off that path on "though I know she lies." He stresses the "do" in "do believe her," which already conveys too much protestation. It sends the audience's mind wondering from the first line whether words and oaths can be trusted. After all, if the speaker believed in his lover, would he need to add the "do?" Would not "I believe her" suffice? When Suchet's speaker turns his head with self-deprecation and lowers his voice into a confessional "though I know she lies," it becomes clear why the "do" was needed. From line 1 onwards, it is plain that words are not what they seem in this dramatic piece. The "expected correspondence between the appearances words create and external reality has been abolished" (cf. Bunselmeyer 106). Suchet's speaker shows extensive ambiguity and discrepancy between words and their conventional meaning with his contradictory embodiment that pits his voice against his eyes and gestures. He makes eye contact with audience members on "though I know she lies," lowers his chin, and waves his hand in a confidential way as though to show the audience that he is speaking to them on a confidential, individual basis. Moreover, he looks at the audience questioningly, thereby teasing out what Nunn calls "that glint of response" (Nunn, *RS-SBSS*). His facial expression demands audience participation. Suchet is a master of NVC. He can express the meaning behind words with creative body language choices, and he can fill a pause or silence with visionary substance.

Suchet's speaker shows the audience in line 2 that he has enough distance to maintain a sense of humor despite being in a flawed and devastating situation. To look at the audience questioningly or imploringly is Suchet's speaker's way of requesting their participation and pity. His humor and self-deprecating manner are his way of obtaining both participation and compassion. He looks at the audience on "untutored youth/unlearned in the world's false subtleties" as if he were facetiously cross-examining them. He reads the line not as a statement, but as a question posed to the audience. His glance says something like, "Do you see a naive youth here anywhere? Do I look like a starry-eyed young fool?" He takes a long breath and purposeful pause to let the irony sink in with the audience. In rhetoric, a strong pause carries gravitas. It is also a sign of confidence, as nervous public speakers tend to rush through texts. Suchet's speaker looks at the audience, pauses, and waits, as though hoping one of them may respond, "Yes, yes, of course you look very young." There is great humor in his self-deprecation. Relating humor in a skilled fashion gets the audience on the speaker's side and allows the genuine sharing of the speaker's burden. However, humor is also a risky two-way street with one hard and fast rule every stand-up comedian is painfully aware of. If it does not resonate with the audience, it is not funny. Suchet's speaker does not fear being pathetic. He knows he is pathetic, and his knowledge makes him humorous and engaging.

He stresses "vainly" in line 5 ("thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young") to extract the double meaning Nunn had spoken to him about. "Vainly" conveys "My vanity allows me to believe that the lady thinks me young," and "I know it is in vain to believe that she thinks me young." To tease out the double meanings of words and express both meanings to the audience is very difficult. In this case, Suchet's speaker deftly uses line 6 to demonstrate the duality of "vain" (vanity/in vain): He playfully—almost satirically—magnifies his self-denigration by making another comical hand gesture, "Although she knows my days are past the best," which waves away his "best days" and reveals that he knows he is about to be dispensed with like yesterday's social media feed. Such a gesture elicits the speaker's hopelessness—while being funny—in believing his lover when she assures him that he is young. He realizes it is in vain; it is a thought that ought to be thrown out like rubbish. Suchet's speaker maintains what Nunn calls the "heartlessness" of the phrase "past the best" by retaining an undertone of pathos in his voice.

Such a trace of devastation, expressed through a low voice and repeatedly glancing up at the audience (as if for help), depicts that his vanity has been crushed, yet he hopes against hope that it is not so. Suchet's eye movements are laden with meaning: He understands how to bid the audience's help with a pleading glance upwards and how to express sad irony through blinking. Moreover, Suchet mastered the art of the side eye²⁹³ before it became an official dictionary entry in 2017 ("The History of 'Side-eye'," *Merriam-Webster* 2017). Arguably, Suchet's powerful facial expressions carry even more meaning than his voice. His facial expressions, particularly his eye movements, continually remind the audience of the power of all that is unspoken, and all that is unspoken is at the core of Sonnet 138.

Nunn had encouraged Suchet to prioritize the speaker's "treachery" with words to prove his point to his students in action: the malleability of words reflecting the complexity of love and truth in life. Suchet's speaker accentuates the "simply" ("Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue") to elicit a double meaning: It means both "naively/simple-mindedly/innocently" and "in a straightforward manner" (cf. Nunn, *PS-SBSS*). Additionally, "simple truth" echoes "simply" in the next line, a detail that Suchet notices and expresses. Suchet's speaker slows down on "credit her false-speaking tongue," and he speaks the line both ironically and in perfect earnest. He sincerely acknowledges and praises ("credits") his lover for making the effort to lie to him when she could say nothing or, even worse, tell him the ugly truth.²⁹⁴ He also darts his eyes around the room as though to confide in the audience that, yes, he recognizes the irony of the situation. Suchet's speaker always sustains the tension between double meanings and antitheses. Nunn had recommended that he keep the audience in suspense about "Does he mean that?" or "Does he

²⁹³ Without exaggeration, Suchet knows how to use the wonderful and ambiguous facial expression—the side-eye—that launched a thousand memes and traveled through the social media sphere in the last few years. When watching Suchet recite Sonnet 138, it becomes clear how powerful such a sideways glance can be: "It's that sidelong look, that glance or gaze that doesn't want to involve the front of the face, but instead says way more by shifting to the corners of the looker's eyes. . . . At its core, the term is about a physical act that communicates any number of things: suspicion, scorn, annoyance, jealousy, veiled curiosity. When we use the word, the context explains what the look being referred to expresses" ("The History of 'Side-eye'," *Merriam-Webster* 2017). There is a reason the side-eye has become a phenomenon: It is up to the viewer to interpret it correctly. It can mean any number of things, and it demands the viewer participate in its meaning.

²⁹⁴ I point out again the similarity of this moment with the courtship scene in *Henry V, Part II*. In a way, Katherine is impressed by Henry's effort to court her, which he need not do. She *must* marry him, and she knows it. Henry's courting of Katherine, therefore, is certainly a performance, but it can also be read as an act of goodwill. He wants to win her with honey (seeking her love and acceptance), not with vinegar (imposing marriage). Katherine credits Henry for making the effort of putting on a performance for her.

mean that?" (cf. Nunn, *PS-SBSS*). Suchet's speaker follows Nunn's advice. He accentuates the "both" ("on both sides") of line 8 to demonstrate that both parties lie. The lady lies to the speaker about his age, looks, and life experience, and he lies to himself by "choosing" to believe her. The speaker's self-deceit—a paradox²⁹⁵—is what gives Sonnet 138 its most significant tragedy. Suchet captures that underlying sorrow throughout the entire sonnet without ever veering into pathos.

Suchet's speaker shows how he—secretly and not so secretly—revels in being called an innocent youth. He confesses to the audience that he is aware of being old and well-experienced, but he also confesses his vanity to the audience. He is flattered by the lady's pretending he is a naive youth who must be initiated in the ways of love. Suchet's speaker throws doubt on the truth being an ultimate ideal in love and life. He speaks the line "Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue" with genuine admiration, asking the audience/the students to see that conventional truth clashes with love and romance. The lady goes to great lengths to put the speaker at ease and make him feel loved. Her lies take effort. The truth would be a shortcut, but cutting to the speaker. Hence, the speaker gives "credit" where credit is due. Is it not an act of love, Suchet's speaker seems to ask his students/audience, to preserve a relationship by putting on an elaborate performance for him when the lady could simply tell him how old and unattractive he is? He

²⁹⁵ As T. S. Champlin has pointed out: "Many attempts have been made to remove the air of paradox from self-deception. These attempts are all unsuccessful" (Champlin, T. S., "Self-Deception: A Reflexive Dilemma," *Philosophy* 1977). When the speaker reveals that he or she is aware of being deceived, it can be argued that it is no longer a deception. However, people repeatedly choose to believe something that they know is not true: A wife may choose to believe that her husband is not cheating on her despite irrefutable evidence. Does she choose to lie to herself, or is it a matter of fear, avoidance, and/or self-preservation? I would argue that the most powerful way to express self-deception is to allow it to remain a paradox (that is how Suchet portrays it). The speaker both knows (he or she is aware of it, he or she says so) and does not know (he or she accepts the appearance of truth completely, which entails a lack of awareness) that he or she is deceiving himself or herself. The drama and tragedy of self-deceit is its very paradox. It is deeply human to be irrational, to be emotionally ambivalent (to love and hate someone at the same time), and to surrender to something (or someone) who is clearly not good for one in the way one surrenders to an addiction.

emphasizes the echo of line 8: “simple” to line 7’s “simply,” as though to indicate there may not be a “simple truth” in life and love, only ever a complex one.²⁹⁶

Suchet’s speaker finds the “intimate, almost complacent tone” that Edward A. Snow calls “simultaneously a seduction and a provocation: What should be a logical contradiction is presented as if it were matter-of-factly intelligible; what seems an obvious piece of self-deception communicates lucidity” (Snow 463). Suchet combines both foolishness and wisdom. In keeping with a popular poker proverb—“When you don’t know who the fool in the game is, the fool is you”²⁹⁷—Suchet knows he is foolish to believe the lady, but he continues to play a losing game anyway, much like the man who knows he will die must continue living. I would argue that Suchet’s speaker, by interlacing embodied masculinity (muscle flexing, strong hand and arm gestures) with irony and vulnerability (glancing up at the audience for help, subtle smiles and eyebrow raises), reveals a struggle between the speaker and his ego. Suchet’s speaker reveals that the beliefs held within the ego can be quite contradictory. The lady’s lies bruise the speaker’s ego, and he is driven by extreme insecurities over his age and the lady’s alleged unfaithfulness. Meanwhile, this same ego gobbles up the lady’s lies like Halloween candy. All the while, he knows, and does not know, this candy “conceals razor blade[s]” (cf. Campbell 55). However, Suchet’s speaker overcomes his ego by entering into the consciousness of the lady; there is fragility and vulnerability in his facial expression and eye movement upward. In addition, the speaker enters into an objective consciousness beyond the two lovers. Such a metacognition, such a consciousness beyond the speaker’s ego, would speak line 8 (“on both sides thus is simple truth suppressed”) the way Suchet speaks it: with distance, acceptance, and

²⁹⁶ Edward A. Snow expresses this thought in his essay “Loves of Comfort and Despair.” He writes that there may not be a “simple truth” in love and life, only ever a problematic, complex truth, and perhaps, none at all (cf. Snow 473-474). Snow’s reading of Sonnet 138 is insightful and brilliant. The only issue I take with his interpretation of Sonnet 138 is that he reads a touch too much “sweetness and light” into it. He sees an idealism that I do not. I agree with the speaker’s grace and acceptance of life, love, and truth as “what they are.” However, there is a dark side to the sonnet. Not bitter, not cynical, but dark. It runs through the sonnet like quicksilver. Suchet, I argue, expresses this mercurial darkness that eludes logic. His facial expressions are often at odds with the words. He truly exists in two emotional places at once.

²⁹⁷ This quote has various iterations in the world of poker, banking, and negotiations. Whitman and Shubik cite the quote as a “Poker Proverb:” “If after ten minutes at the poker table you do not know who the patsy is—you are the patsy” (Whitman and Shubik, *The Aggressive Conservative Investor* 154). The beauty of Suchet’s performance is that he is so deeply human in his awareness of being a fool who, nonetheless, continues the game with a kind of grace.

grace, up until “suppressed,” which Suchet sounds out as though he had fallen back into his bruised ego. Suchet’s speaker spits out the “suppressed” so distinctly that everyone in the audience can hear it. He hisses the “-ss-” of “suppressed” for a shattering effect. His tone is both devastating (personal/ego) and distanced (impersonal/beyond ego).

Snow claims that Sonnet 138 is “challengingly paradoxical—the poem insists on “do believe,” where logic would seem to demand “pretend to believe.”

In place of rational, clearly demarcated hierarchy where thought leads to knowledge and knowledge to belief . . . the sonnet establishes an emotional continuum where everything is ultimately a matter of “belief,” and the distance between suspicion and trust a matter of quantities that cannot be rationally measured or sustained. (Snow 472)

Suchet’s speaker creates an “emotional continuum” with blends of opposite emotions and mixtures of earnest pronunciation with sinister facial expressions. Subsequently, Suchet’s speaker snaps into the next two lines with a voice riddled with unease and self-doubt: Line 9 (“But wherefore says she not she is unjust”) is spoken like a plea, full of humility and fear. He fears the lady is a bad person, but he also fears losing her. The speaker worries about the lady’s morality in general (“unjust”), not just about her infidelities in love. He fears that there is something inherently underhanded about her. To fear that one’s lover may be unfaithful is unsettling enough, but to fear that one’s lover is not a good person in general is genuinely alarming. Suchet’s speaker never lets the audience forget that there is something deeply disturbing about the lady and about the entire situation. He maintains a dark undercurrent of unease throughout the sonnet, at times through his voice (“suppressed” is spoken like a curse) and at times through his facial expressions (at once full of threat and fear). Line 10 is spoken rather softly: “And wherefore say not I that I am old.” Suchet’s speaker asks the question with a self-effacing and ironic voice. He reads the line like a logical conclusion that falls at one’s own feet after one has accused a neighbor of a crime one also repeatedly commits.

Suchet’s speaker is funny in his anxiety. His mind appears to run through the following logic: Is she a bad person for doing this? Am I, then, a bad person for doing that? Suchet’s

speaker brings out the twitchiness and perturbation of the two lines by speeding up, as though he were racing through all the possibilities. Is she unjust? Isn't she? Am I a hypocrite? Am I vain to care about my age, or aren't I?, etc. Suchet's speaker physically needs to exhale the "O!" of the next line (11) to catch his breath after ruminating on all the situation's flaws. Line 11 is often regarded as cynical and sinister. Suchet's speaker, I would argue, does not deny the sinister aspect of "O! Love's best habit is in seeming trust." He stresses the "seeming" and lets the "habit" sink in. There is, however, no cynicism in Suchet's speaker, only an irony brought to the fore by emphasizing the paradox. Words with double meanings, such as "habit" ("garment"/"adornment"/"disguise" versus "habitual demeanor"), may register with an audience on an unconscious level. They may not immediately notice all the dual meanings verbatim, but subconsciously, they notice something shaky and unsettling in the words of the speaker.

Within the audience, there is bound to be an overall sense of being mocked but an uncertainty of who will have the last laugh, if anybody. If the speaker falls into cynical mockery, the sonnet becomes tortured where it could be tantalizing. Suchet's speaker never takes one step toward cynicism. The acting choice with the highest stakes is always the strongest: A cynical speaker alienates the audience, but a vulnerable speaker draws them in to his secret self. With that understanding, Suchet's speaker reads the lines "love's best habit is in seeming trust/And age in love loves not to have years told" in a seductive way that asks more questions than it answers. He gives the two lines the acceptance and grace they demand. He justifies the lady's "unjustness" by saying that love calls for it; indeed, he justifies his own vanity by saying—oh well—love calls for it, too. However, he does not sound disillusioned, embittered, or cynical. He sounds devastated at times, but he always maintains soulfulness in his voice. More importantly, Suchet's speaker can maintain a deep sense of humor throughout the entire sonnet. This slightly joking and subtle humor that Suchet's speaker employs destabilizes—according to Freud²⁹⁸—conventionally held truths: Suchet uses humor to make his audience question the nature of truth and love. He also uses humor to bring out hypocrisy by reading some lines of the sonnet almost as questions that ask the audience to interact with him: "[S]he thinks me young?" [Do I look

²⁹⁸ Freud argues that jokes make us question deeply held morals and values. Humor and jokes can bring out forbidden thoughts and repressed desires (cf. Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* 161).

young to you, audience?]) (line 5); “seeming trust?” [Is it, audience?] (line 11); and “loves not to have years told?” [You know it is true, audience, right?] (line 12). It is as though Suchet’s speaker frames lines as questions because he wants his audience to contradict him: “Yes, you are young.” “No, trust is real.” “No, she loves you, no matter your age.” He makes the sonnet speaker relatable in all his insecurities, vanity, and obsession. He allows the audience to fully participate in understanding the sonnet.

Suchet’s speaker finds all the right notes: “This romance is not right, but it is not wrong. It is so wrong that it is right.” To act out the sonnet’s speaker with self-deprecating irony is an achievement because, when read, the sonnet has the potential of sounding most terrible, to use Cruttwell’s phrase. In Suchet’s hands, it is a beautiful koan. It accomplishes what Nunn says: “By now the audience is well and truly mocked, but, hopefully, on your side” (cf. Nunn, *PS SBSS*). Suchet’s speaker finds the fine line that both mocks and draws in the audience (something that almost never happens in a didactic lecture that uses propositional language). Suchet foregrounds the inversion toward the end that there are two people who, instead of being dishonored by their flaws, are flattered by them (cf. Nunn, *PS–SBSS*). Line 13 is spoken in a low and rather quiet voice. It is a devastating line (lie), and it is a beautiful line (with): “Therefore, I lie with her, and she with me.” Suchet’s speaker reads it with a touch of resigned irony, but again, he never loses his foremost motivation: love. Without genuine love at stake, this line will read embittered. Suchet’s speaker, however, finds the nuanced tone of love as bittersweet. He draws out the “lies” to demonstrate, once more, the double meaning of the word “I lie with her” (lie in bed with her/sleep with her versus telling lies to one another). Since the speaker opts for “I lie *with* her and she *with* me” instead of “I lie with her, she lies *to* me,” Suchet’s speaker honors the “with.” He reveals the complicity of the lovers, the mutual agreement that binds their love by lies. Furthermore, Suchet’s speaker makes the final inversion of line 14 “a strategy for making the unthinkable thinkable, [and] the unworkable workable” (Snow, quoting Levi–Strauss 474). In other words, Suchet’s speaker gives credibility to the incredibly paradoxical Sonnet 138, and he gives incredibility to absolute “simple truths.” The unhealthy relationship of the two lovers and the fact that they mean to—and need to—continue it suddenly becomes more of an “inevitability rather than an impossibility” (cf. Snow 472). Suchet’s speaker embodies the fatuous inevitability

of the sonnet's drama and relationship. He makes the audience question whether the lovers of Sonnet 138 may be the true star-crossed ones rather than the lovers of Sonnet 116²⁹⁹ ("Let me not to the marriage of true minds") and Sonnet 18 ("Shall I compare thee").

Suchet's speaker paints a picture with his body and the voice of two lovers who are accomplices; they are true partners in crime. They share a tacit mutual agreement that allows their flaws to flatter them. Suchet's speaker loves to hate (voice versus facial expression) their collusion and himself for allowing it. He hates to love the lady, but he acknowledges his hate-love and takes the rough with the smooth. He accepts the lady the way she is, and he accepts the situation. Yet, Suchet's speaker betrays an unease to his acceptance through his glinting, flickering, and darting eyes and through a blend of paradoxical emotions, perhaps unconsciously perceived by the audience. The speaker's acceptance is there, and it is as genuine as the speaker's love, but it is quicksand. It promises to swallow the speaker any second. A line of quicksilver runs through the sonnet, and Suchet—mercurial actor that he is—captures it.

²⁹⁹ Sonnets 116 and 18 are considered the most romantic ones. They are quoted on wedding reading lists the world over (and wedding websites the web over), including the Royal Shakespeare Company's "Shakespeare Quotes for Weddings." Both sonnets are full of idealism. I share Edward A. Snow's insight that Sonnet 138 is Sonnet 116's "realistic opposite" (cf. Snow 479). However, even in Sonnet 116 there is a "stain" on the ideal pure love canvas drawn from lines 1–12: In the couplet, the speaker hedges his bets about what love is by throwing an "if" at the reader: "If this be error . . ." (*Sonnet 116*.13). The speaker puts a wager on his definition of true love that cannot be challenged (he has written his poetry, after all). Yet, all the descriptions of negatives (what love is not) and the final "if" leave a strange aftertaste that is not pure. The "if" couplet leaves the reader with an off-putting trace of bitterness on the palate after tasting sweet wine. I also remain ambivalent about Shakespearean sonnets being read at weddings in general. I recall the great piece of advice from my first Shakespeare professor, Prof. Peter Platt, who smilingly told his class that he tells each year's students to please not ask him to read a Shakespeare sonnet at their weddings because they are unsettling. Yet, he said, every other year he is called upon to do exactly that.



4) Ralph Fiennes Performs Sonnet 129: Between Heaven and Hell

Ralph Fiennes: Sonnet Speaker, directed by Ralph Fiennes, BBC, *Newsnight*, April 28, 2014.

Sonnet 129

Th' expense of spirit in a waste of **shame**
Is **lust**³⁰⁰ in **action**; and till **action**, **lust**
Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of **blame**,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to **trust**,
Enjoyed no sooner but despisèd straight,
Past reason hunted; and, no sooner had
Past reason hated as a swallowed bait
On purpose laid to make the taker **mad**;
Mad in pursuit and in possession **so**,
Had, having, and in quest to **have**, extreme;
A bliss in **proof** and **proved**, a very **woe**;
Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.
All this the world **well knows**; yet none **knows well**
To shun the heaven that leads men to this **hell**.

Ralph Fiennes does something beautiful to bring out the paradox of Sonnet 129: He looks fixedly at the camera with an expression of absolute sincerity while speaking the savage and haunted lines of Sonnet 129. He pronounces every word of “very woe” and disgust, every line of revulsion with perfect clarity. Not one *t* is dropped; not one *s* goes unstressed. Consonants like *s*'s are hissed, and *t*'s are voiced fully to cut the listener or audience to the core. Fiennes' speaker does not lose one oppressed line of this forlorn sonnet of extremes. He treats every word—no matter how ugly—with respect. Nothing is minimized. The disgust and shame of lust (lust/disgust) are fully fleshed out. No punches are pulled. Fiennes' speaker's eyes, however, focus on the audience with the “love that bears it out even to the edge of doom” (Sonnet 116). While he is level with the camera, it appears as though he peers up at the audience—in penance—by raising

³⁰⁰ In Sonnet 129, I marked **repetitions in boldface** and **words that rhyme in vermilion**. Since this sonnet employs almost every rhetorical device there is, I only marked the two most obvious devices. Had I added alliteration, assonance, etc. this sonnet would be a confusing rainbow of markings. I mention all the different devices used in my text.

his eyebrows. His eyes are directed in a kind of appeal at someone who serves as a confessor³⁰¹ (for example, a priest, or a trusted friend). Fiennes embodies the extremes and antitheses of the sonnet: His speaking voice follows the lines in all their cruelty, while his eyes are full of soothing calm. It is as though Fiennes' speaker's eyes are asking his confessor not only to participate in his suffering, but also to grant him absolution. The sonnet is spoken to purge his sins and shortcomings, almost like a prayer. Fiennes says one thing with his eyes, while articulating another with his voice. Fiennes' use of NVC demonstrates its power to bring out subtexts.³⁰² The

³⁰¹ Fiennes' choice as an actor appears to have been to place someone he can entrust completely with the good, bad, and ugly truth. Someone like a clergyman or a trusted friend seems to sit in the place of the camera. Usually, the actor is asked to direct his glance slightly to the side of the camera lens. However, Fiennes is not acting a scene with another character, so the choice to place a confessor in the place of—or behind—the camera (which is his audience) is, in this case, powerful, creative, and liberating. Many other recorded sonnet speakers did not make this choice. Whether Fiennes spoke to an actual person behind the camera or imagined one, I do not know. His intense eye contact certainly makes me believe he is addressing a particular trusted person. It is also a reminder that actors are taught to always know whom they are speaking to, why they are speaking to them, and when: Acting teachers often ask: "Who? Why? Why now?" Fiennes gives a master class in acting with purpose, and he gives a master class in acting subtext in Shakespeare.

³⁰² I use "subtext" in the sense actors and theatre practitioners use it. The New York Film Academy has a good definition of subtext on its website:

In a play or film, subtext is the underlying message being conveyed by a piece of dialogue. Some call it the "lines between the lines" or "the unsaid meaning." Writers love to use subtext in scripts because it adds an extra layer of complexity to scenes and their characters. Actors must act like investigators to identify the true meaning of their dialogue so they can play the character's subtextual intention rather than just recite the lines. Overlaying the meaning of the subtext on top of the dialogue gives actors something to do and makes for a more interesting performance ("The Importance of Subtext for Actors," *NYFA* 2016).

Backstage puts it somewhat more informally: "Adding layers and depth to an otherwise 'meh' kind of scene. . . . The more creative and out of the box, the better" (Jackson, Charis Joy, "Why Subtext Is Important + How to Find It," *Backstage* 23 Jul. 2020).

One of my favorite online acting coaches puts "subtext" as follows: "[I]t's about what we sense from the other person . . . two voices combined in the performance of text, the voice of the writer with the inner voice of the actor. An unconscious duality affects the audience. . . . When actors animate their lines to make them sound meaningful, they miss the depth that the duality brings. They deny bringing more to the line by trying to make the line sound 'real' or meaningful" (Westbrook, Mark, "Subtext in Acting," *Acting Coach Scotland: Mark Westbrook's blog* 2018). N.b. how Westbrook coaches the actor to *accept duality*, not turn it into unity (by turning it into the one thing the actor "thinks" it means), but allowing the *duality to exist and play*. There is a difference between making an acting choice and reducing meaning and complexity within a choice.

Regarding Shakespeare and subtext: I disagree completely with the contemporary school of thought that teaches actors that subtext only exists in modern plays or "realism" plays and that it is based on modern psychology (a.k.a. the "Just Say the Words" or "There Is No Subtext in Shakespeare" schools of thought (cf. O'Dell, "Subtext in Shakespeare," *Shakespearean Language* 7, and many more). More generally, I disagree with the claim that there is no subtext in Shakespeare. Of course there is. It is different, but it is there, nonetheless. I explored this contention in my master's dissertation, *To Play or Not to Play*. Dominic Finocchiaro has the best response to this issue: "This is my problem with the impulse to deride subtext. All too often what is being derided is not subtext—it's *bad* subtext. . . . [T]hings vibrate and reverberate on multifarious levels, sentences are both true and false, say both nothing and everything. This is what makes Shakespeare's verse entrancing even hundreds of years later—it is not simple. It does not explain" (cf. Finocchiaro, *Howlround Theatre Commons* 2016).

New York Film Academy dedicates an entire page on its website to the power of subtext.

Moreover, they point out the paradox that exists in acting, text, and subtext:

Words are everything and nothing to an actor. . . . Identifying and playing the subtext of a scene is an advanced skill that the best actors make good use of. Careful script analysis is needed to find and decide what the subtext is, and solid acting technique is needed to honestly play the subtextual meaning. If the dialogue is what the actor says, and the action is what the character does, then the subtext is what the character ultimately means. (“The Importance of Subtext for Actors.” NYFA 25 Mar. 2016, emphasis mine)

A good actor, then, must make powerful NVC/subtext choices and be willing to take great risks in doing so: “In a well-written script, there will be *clues* about the characters’ emotional state and the true meaning of the dialogue” (NYFA, emphasis mine).

An even more brilliant and inspired description of subtext comes from playwright Dominic Finocchiaro:

What even *is* subtext? To define it in language is counterintuitive—it’s ekphrastic at best. How do you define the *Mona Lisa*? It’s simply the wrong paradigm. Subtext is all the things that can’t be defined by words. Subtext is the ghost note. It’s the reverberations at the center of the earth, Doppler readings. The definition of subtext? That which is beyond definition. The space between words. The ink but not what the ink comes to represent. By and large, people are binary thinkers. Binaries are safe, convenient, and comforting. We understand black and white—grey is trickier, safely contextualized only in relation to the two. Of course, the problem with binary thinking is a certain fascism of thought that it encourages, a need for order that leaves out the complexity and truth of the matters at hand, which forces the elements of a topic into boxes that are amenable and easily parsed. When we look at things from the perspective of the binary, we automatically speak in a language made by someone else; we are playing a game whose rules we have not chosen. In such a game, we can speak of grey, but by the nature of the conversation—a

conversation that defines grey only as *not black or white*—the very notion of the color has lost all meaning. The idea of black and white existing *simultaneously* (which is, at its heart, what subtext is all about) becomes an impossibility. The binary is a closed system that seemingly allows for a discussion of complexity, but in actuality undermines any such method of thought. (Finocchiaro, *Howlround Theatre Commons* 2016, emphasizes author's)

Fiennes truly finds “the ghost note” of subtext in Sonnet 129 that allows black and white to exist simultaneously. He finds “that messy murky space where art is most evocative and most pulsating with life-force and transcendent energy” (Finocchiaro, *Howlround Theatre Commons* 2016).

To find these “clues,” an actor must, as Vladimir Mirodan calls it, “read-with-a-purpose” and “read for emotion . . . with a trained eye” (cf. Mirodan, *RC* 108): “The actor reads the text purposefully, with the goal of emotional engagement leading to a physical representation constantly in mind” (Mirodan 108). Such reading-with-purpose is the actor’s version of “close reading” in literary criticism. Reading-with-purpose and reading-for-emotion guide actors to their acting choices. Fiennes’ choice is powerful because Sonnet 129 is known for its detachment and impersonality. It steps away from the personal, immediate, and issues of the relationship. It is one of the few sonnets that is not an “action, [something] done for and to the beloved” (cf. Neely, quoting Barber 83). Instead, Sonnet 129 is “not actions done for or to the beloved. Indeed, the beloved is absent from them. The poet-lover, himself, is submerged. . . . [Sonnet 129] is deliberately impersonal, general, immobile” (cf. Neely 83). Fiennes finds a creative and daring way of performing a sonnet of detachment *with* great attachment: He speaks the text in all its corruption while his eyes tell a different story. There is an interplay between his voice and facial expressions, and there is an interplay between action and inaction. Fiennes lets his eyes speak directly to the confessor, with a kind of love that asks to be validated. His eyes are full of motivation: They implore the audience to be heard, to be responded to, perhaps to be loved back, or to be forgiven. By opting to speak directly to the camera, Fiennes’ speaker turns the sonnet into a dialogue: “[D]ialogue is the medium of drama [that is] governed by the basic rule of

linguistic interaction: the interplay between the overt and the covert” (cf. Iser 326). Fiennes’ speaker does not treat Sonnet 129 as a soliloquy, but chooses to turn it into an active confession that requires something back from his audience/the confessor. Forgiveness, love, release, and validation are possible responses the penitent speaker’s eyes seek.

The “covert” nonverbal language becomes stronger than the overt spoken language. The relentless focus of Fiennes’ speaker’s eyes on the confessor mixed with words is full of double meaning: The eyes are filled with silent yearning that runs along the harsh language of the sonnet. Throughout the sonnet, there are always two forces at work: the manifest voice that speaks Sonnet 129 and the latent silent expression in, or behind, the speaker’s eyes. The interplay between the verbal and nonverbal creates a tension that is irresistible to watch. Fiennes’ speaker —through his voice/eye interplay—emphasizes that language, just like lust, is “not to trust.” He employs the sonnet, the fiction, in a way that transgresses conventional language codes. Thereby, he creates a new “feigning” language of verbal and nonverbal paradox that allows him to express his hidden desire to be loved, validated, seen, heard, responded to, and forgiven. Wolfgang Iser describes this double meaning in representative speech as follows: “What is said serves to say something else without actually having to say it, and thus the character communicates the unsayable. . . . [W]henver the expression of, or an appeal for, love takes over, the mask represents that which it is actually meant to conceal, but represents it without making it overt” (cf. Iser 324). Fiennes’ penitent glances at the audience/his confessor add another layer of all that goes unsaid and yet says so much more. It is as though the speaker wants to hide his love beneath the jarring language of lust, while also wanting to articulate and share said love.

Fiennes’ speaker hisses with spite and spits out rancor verbally while nonverbally making the beloved/the audience feel something else entirely. Fiennes brings out what Stephen Greenblatt has called the “built-in principle of deniability” of Shakespeare’s sonnets, the admixture of revelation and discretion, and the “seesaw game of acknowledgement and denial” (cf. Greenblatt, *Will* 230, 253). The words, themselves, are utterly ambiguous, but in combination with the speaker’s glance and facial expression, they become a meaningful paradox. Carol T. Neely contends that, in Sonnet 129, “lust is distanced, depersonalized, analyzed. . . . Lust, like the love defined in Sonnet 116, is “extreme” [sic]: absolute, unconditional, inalterable” (Neely

91). Indeed, Fiennes' speaker uses his voice and harsh pronunciation of words to illuminate the extreme emotions associated with lust. He also expresses a nonverbal undercurrent of unconditional (and gentle) love, the kind of love celebrated in Sonnet 116. In the text that follows, I will examine each line of Fiennes' reading of Sonnet 129 to illustrate how he creates this seductive tension.

Fiennes' speaker sibilates the line: "Th' **ex**pense of **sp**irit in a **waste** of **sh**ame." The *s* sound in "expense" is hissed. The *s* in "spirit" is spit out, and the *sh* of "shame" is voiced "sharply." Sharp and shrill *s* sounds are unsettling to the ear. That is, they are disturbing, disgusting, disconcerting, discomfiting, nasty, repulsive, distasteful, sickening, despicable, detestable, insufferable, monstrous, and offensive. They assault the ear. Fiennes' speaker pauses after "spirit" to foreground lust's resultant "shame." The many enjambments of the sonnet are also unnerving. Line 1 leads right into line 2: "waste of shame/Is lust in action." The sharp *s* sounds continue mixed with stressed *t* sounds alongside cutting *ct* sounds: "Is **lust** in **action**; and **till action, lust** - (enjambment into line 3)/Is perjured." The following adjectives that describe lust are voiced with the intensity their meanings demand. Each one is given a distinct, but very subtle, facial expression and/or vocal stress: "**per**jured" (disgust on *p*-), "murderous" (read almost as a question as if to ask, "Do you doubt it?" with stress on the sharp *-s* at the end), "bloody" (cold but brutal), "full of blame" (full of guilt and shame, implied by the unvoiced rhyme of "blame"/"shame"), "savage" (sharp *s*-, fierce and terrifying), "extreme" (sharp *-x*- to sound sinister), "rude" (unpleasant, harsh), cruel (just that), "not to **trust**" (three stressed *t* sounds and one sharp *-s*- sound to make it as "**treacherous**" as possible). Line 5: "Enjoyed no sooner but **despised straight**" keeps stressing hard consonants such as *s*-, *-sp*-, and *-t* and thereby hints at the final failure of the speaker's attempt at detachment: Too personal do these impersonal descriptions sound. It is as though the speaker cannot help but be involved in his own "lust intervention." Fiennes' speaker also fully rounds out the vowels: He almost sings the diphthong *-oy-* of "enjoyed," which makes that which is despicable ("despised" lust) sound like seduction wrapped in a sinister blanket.

Neely points out that Sonnet 129 "employs virtually all of the standard rhetorical figures of repetition [which bring out the] unchanging nature of lust" (cf. Neely 91). Lines 6 and 7

demonstrate Neely's point: Line 6's "Past reason **h**unted" is echoed by line 7's alliterative anaphora "Past reason **h**ated." At this point, the overload of haunting repetitions, rhymes, metaphors, and other rhetorical devices allows Fiennes' speaker's voice some detachment:

"hunted" (6), "hated" (7)—[alliteration and repetition]—"mad" (8), "mad" (9)—
[repetition/anadiplosis, strong vowel repetition and emphasis]—"had" (6), "mad" (8)—
[rhyme, strong vowel repetition and emphasis]—"a swallowed bait/[enjambment] On
purpose laid" (7/8)—[metaphor for a trap]—"pursuit" (9), "possession" (9)—[repetition,
alliteration]—"had" (10), "having" (10), "have" (10)—[repetition from single root
(*traductio*) but different tenses, alliteration]—"proof" (11), "proved" (11)—[repetition
(*traductio*), alliteration]—"before" (12), "behind" (12)—[repetition (progression),
alliteration].

Fiennes' speaker sounds as though he was hammering away at something, but that something just will not give. He slows down the hammering sound on line 10's "Had, having, and in quest to have," as if to alert his audience that the paradox of lust just will not be resolved. To the modern ear, it sounds as if an engine slowly comes to a halt.

Beginning with line 12, Fiennes' speaker loses all detachment and falls into loving despair. The line "Before, a joy proposed; behind a dream" is voiced with great sincerity. The diphthong of "joy" is full of feeling and emphasis, and instead of reading the word "dream" as a "bad dream" or "nightmare," Fiennes' speaker reads it with a smile. His choice is much stronger than making "dream" sound like "nightmare"—most interpretations read it as such—because it displays the regression of the sonnet and the impossibility of resolving the tension of lust in love and love in lust. Fiennes' speaker makes the regression absolutely clear on line 13 ("All this the world well knows; yet none knows well") by speaking it with an equal measure of resignation and detachment. Fiennes' eyes lead the audience along the path to the "dream" (12), to "heaven," while his voice tells the audience to "shun the heaven that leads men to this hell" (14). Fiennes' speaker hits the final hammer into the lust coffin when he pronounces "hell" as though he were already there. His eyes betray, however, that he is between heaven and hell. It is Fiennes' use of

nonverbal communication and voice that creates the constant coexistence of both heaven and hell in Sonnet 129. Fiennes' speaker condemns the lust that led him to hell with his harsh words; however, the audience is never quite certain that the speaker would not, at any moment, fly back to the heaven that fulfilled desire brought him. The latter is conveyed to the viewer entirely via facial expressions and an unexpected, gentle tone of voice. The sonnet asks the performer to convey an impossible state of mind: In propositional, dualistic language, one cannot exist between heaven and hell. One is either in heaven or in hell. There is no word for the in-between.³⁰³ However, Fiennes brings this liminality into existence with Shakespeare's language of paradox and with his own choices of facial expression and tonality. Fiennes' Sonnet 129 is bittersweet, both heaven and hell, an incantation that carries its listeners with it to a nightmare that is also a dream.

5) Emma Thompson and Kenneth Branagh: Beatrice & Benedick: "A Kind of Merry War"

Emma Thompson: Beatrice, Kenneth Branagh: Benedick, *Much Ado About Nothing*, directed by Kenneth Branagh, produced by BBC Films, 1993.

BENEDICK

If Signior Leonato be her father, she would
not have his head on her shoulders for all Messina,
as like him as she is.

BEATRICE

I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior
Benedick, nobody marks you.

BENEDICK

What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet
living?

BEATRICE

Is it possible disdain should die while she
hath such meet food to feed it as Signior Benedick?
Courtesy itself must convert to disdain if you come
in her presence.

BENEDICK

³⁰³ There are "limbo" and "purgatory," of course. However, both words are associated with Catholicism. It is worth mentioning that both words have entered into common parlance when one wishes to speak of an in-between-state in the secular world. There is clearly a need to express such a state with a suitable word.



Then is courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain
I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted; and
I would I could find in my heart that I had not a
hard heart, for truly I love none.

BEATRICE

A dear happiness to women. They would
else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor. I
thank God and my cold blood I am of your humor
for that. I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow
than a man swear he loves me.

BENEDICK

God keep your Ladyship still in that mind,
so some gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate
scratched face.

BEATRICE

Scratching could not make it worse an
'twere such a face as yours were.

BENEDICK

Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.

BEATRICE

A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of
yours.

BENEDICK

I would my horse had the speed of your
tongue and so good a continuer, but keep your
way, i' God's name, I have done.

BEATRICE

You always end with a jade's trick. I know
you of old.

Emma Thompson and Kenneth Branagh are delightfully at home in their respective parts as Beatrice and Benedick. Behind their countless sparring duets is a genuine fear that love may undo them. Thompson plays the independent, witty, and effervescent Beatrice, with a subliminal touch of melancholy. Benedick plays the self-confirmed ladies' man and eternal bachelor Benedick with an underlying grace and compassion that betrays his macho behavior and excessive verbiage. It appears all the other characters in *Much Ado About Nothing* can see the strong attraction and affection between Beatrice and Benedick except for the two characters, themselves. The play, itself, demonstrates how deceptive appearances can be. It takes a dark turn

when Beatrice's niece, the young Hero, is not just wrongfully jilted at the altar but also utterly humiliated and publicly defamed. It is clear that women—during the play's setting—were more akin to property than individuals with agency. One slander—true or not—and they were dead to society. Thompson/Beatrice is aware of her status within society and has decided it is best to hide behind a veneer of disdain toward men. Not only is it safer, but it is also her way of maintaining some agency as a woman in a man's world.

It would appear that Benedick, as a man and as an aristocratic soldier, can do as he pleases. The world is his oyster. Branagh plays Benedick as a lovable nuisance: He is “swift, virile, with a touch of the frat-house narcissist” (Gleibermann, Owen, “Much Ado About Nothing,” *Entertainment Weekly* 14 May 1993). Benedick is proud and, at times, pompous. All the ladies, he boasts, love him. Except for Beatrice. So misogynistic is he that he decides to remain a bachelor for life. The ladies are simply not up to his high standards. Except for Beatrice. So witty and funny is he that no one matches his wit and repartee. Except for Beatrice. She may be just a little prouder, a little choosier, a little wittier, and a little funnier than him. That is why Beatrice intimidates and unnerves him. In the first scene of the play/film, Beatrice/Thompson and Benedick/Branagh enter into a verbal sparring contest, and she figuratively and literally takes his breath away. Benedick realizes that Beatrice will outwit him and outlast his humor. Accordingly, he does the most unacceptable thing among debaters: He cuts off Beatrice by saying, “I have done.” In other words, to save face—and to catch his breath—he dictates the terms of their sparring match by declaring it over before giving Beatrice a chance to respond. He retires from their debate, therefore avoiding her rebuttal. As a man, he gets to do this. The male-female dynamics are quickly established in *Much Ado*. The men dictate the terms; the women either accept them or avoid them by becoming “spinsters.” Beatrice would rather be alone for the rest of her life than live according to patriarchic terms. Benedick would rather be a bachelor for the rest of his life than be made a fool of or be cheated on (about which he—and all the other men—obsess) by a woman. Beatrice and Benedick have decided not to play society's game of love and marriage for fear of being overpowered by it.

During *Much Ado*, it becomes clear that their choice is not an empty escape. People who do give in to love and trust are overpowered, some by jealousy (Claudio), some by idle gossip

(Hero): “Benedick and Beatrice rail at each other, which is proper for civilized people in love, because love implies the greatest of indignities to be suffered: to give oneself” (Gardner, quoting David Horowitz and Andrew Chiappe, “Beatrice and Benedick,” *Theoria* 3). Beatrice and Benedick would rather play the jester than the victim. Their walls are up, and both Beatrice/Thompson and Benedick/Branagh play their initial prideful behaviors beautifully. Beatrice/Thompson hides her profound passion and empathy behind a flippant tongue, strong posture (she always stands ramrod straight and tall), and a fierce attitude toward her opponent. Benedick stands equally straight and tall, makes funny or snide comments about everything and everyone, even when no one is listening, all to hide his vulnerability and thoughtfulness. When the scene begins, Benedick/Branagh makes a quip about Hero’s legitimacy as her father’s daughter, which absolutely no one listens to. Beatrice/Thompson sees her opportunity to needle Benedick/Branagh and steps into the fray, telling him just how unimportant he really is and that no one is listening to his ranting. He has no choice but to defend his “wit” and return her favor by asking her if she is not dead yet. What follows is a waltz of wit, a duel that doubles as dance, a banter with a melody and rhythm to it that reveals to the audience just how alike these two think.

Both Beatrice/Thompson and Benedick/Branagh do much more than play two lovers who solely tease and taunt each other. Instead, both actors step into the ring like fighters, and each plays the game to win. After all, the stakes are high in Messina’s society for lovers: Men lose their honor and act like fools (Claudio), and women stand to lose their honor and must die (Hero). Each insult by Beatrice/Thompson and Benedick/Branagh, beginning in their first scene together, resembles a weapon. If the arrow does not work, the next insult will be as cutting as a knife. Beatrice and Benedick come armed to the teeth, and both fight formidably. No holds are barred; no compliment is given without a honeyed dose of backhandedness. No slights are left unsaid. No joke is left unmade. They only stop when one of them runs out of armor or breath—in this case, Benedick. Beatrice/Thompson and Benedick/Branagh bring the snark, and their sparring sometimes gets as bitter as a duel. They fight their battle of wit with the need for the other to submit. There is ferocity and aggression in both Beatrice/Thompson and Benedick/Branagh that reveals that their war, “though merry, is a war indeed. Beatrice’s interest in Benedick and her mocking resistance to him are communicated simultaneously” (Gardner 5).

There is a constant push and pull between these two characters. Thompson and Branagh both capture the love/hate dynamic between Beatrice and Benedick. Thompson especially brings out Beatrice's double bind: "She feels her self-sufficiency threatened by the man to whom she is (largely unconsciously) attracted. . . . She embraces Benedick in a spirit of joyous but serious contradiction and denial" (Gardner 7).

Both Thompson and Branagh do not play Beatrice and Benedick as if they were aware of loving each other. Instead, both choose a much stronger and much more comical route: They play Beatrice and Benedick as being truly in denial about their feelings for one another. Both choose to attack the object of their (unconscious) affection to defend themselves against such affection. There is true tragicomedy in Beatrice/Thompson's and Benedick/Branagh's performance. They are funny and witty, yet there is something tragic, self-consuming, and melancholy in their desperate fight-to-the-death-resistance. Beatrice/Thompson brings out an undertone of sadness when she somberly and quietly adds, "I know you of old," after calling out Benedick/Branagh on weaseling out of their debate: "You always end with a jade's trick." Both Beatrice/Thompson and Benedick/Branagh beautifully capture Beatrice's and Benedick's tragic mirth. Their love is war, and they love to fight. They are "too wise to woo peaceably" (*Much Ado* 5.2.55).

Act II, Scene 1 (*Masked Ball*)

BEATRICE

Will you not tell me who told you so?

BENEDICK

(Hiding behind a huge mask)

No, you shall pardon me./ *No, you shall parrr-don me.*³⁰⁴

BEATRICE

Nor will you not tell me who you are?

BENEDICK

Not now./ *Ch-not ch-now.*

BEATRICE

That I was disdainful, and that I had my good wit out of the 'Hundred Merry Tales:'--well this was

³⁰⁴ Lines marked in green simulate the funny (a strange but hilarious Russian/Eastern European) accent that Branagh affects. The pink part is Thompson/Beatrice's imitation of Benedick's silly accent.

Signior Benedick that said so.

BENEDICK

What's he? / *Ch-what's chh-ee?*

BEATRICE

I am sure you know him well enough.

BENEDICK

Not I, believe me./ *Ch-not I, beliiii-e-vee mee.*

BEATRICE

Did he never make you laugh?

BENEDICK

I pray you, what is he?/ *I prrr-ay ch-you, ch-what ch-is ch-eee?*

BEATRICE

Why, he is the prince's jester: a very dull fool;/ *Why ch-eee is the prince's jester...*

only his gift is in devising impossible slanders:

none but libertines delight in him; and the

commendation is not in his wit, but in his villany;

for he both pleases men and angers them, and then

they laugh at him and beat him. I am sure he is in

the fleet: I would he had boarded me.

BENEDICK

When I know the gentleman, I'll tell him what you say./ *Ch-when ch-I ch-know ch-the gentleman, ch-I'll ch-tell ch-him ch-what ch-you say.*

BEATRICE

Do, do: he'll but break a comparison or two on me;

which, peradventure not marked or not laughed at,

strikes him into melancholy; and then there's a

partridge wing saved, for the fool will eat no

supper that night.

Music

We must follow the leaders.

BENEDICK

In every good thing./ *In ever-rr-y good thing-ee.*

No scene is perhaps more entertaining and memorable than the exchange between Beatrice/Thompson and Benedick/Branagh at the masked ball. As director and actor, Branagh has created a unique and comical way of playing this scene. Benedick/Branagh is hiding behind an enormous grinning mask while Beatrice speaks to him in her everyday clothes and without hiding behind a mask. Benedick/Branagh, through his clownish mask, speaks with an exaggerated, made-up Russian/Eastern European accent—an accent that would come out sounding preposterous in a

lesser actor—to hide that he is Benedick. Beatrice/Thompson has, of course, seen through the ruse immediately, but plays along. Not only does Benedick/Branagh make full use of the humor of his ridiculous Russian accent that he is attempting to hide behind, but he also shows how effective a mask can be. Since his mask hides all his face and half his head (his hair is visible), he uses it as if it were his face. When Beatrice/Thompson tells him what “a dull fool” Benedick is, Benedick/Branagh touches the cheek and brow of the mask, pulls on the nose, and scratches the mask’s overly big ear as though he were upset and touching his own face. He nods with laughter, bringing out the power of the grinning mask. The mask, which becomes clear in this scene, is a powerful tool that allows a person to disappear behind it. It makes Benedick/Branagh both macabre and comical. Benedick/Branagh illustrates the freedom that accompanies a mask by taking his foolish jester acting to new heights. He also demonstrates how the actor and mask become one.

Benedick/Branagh is incredibly funny wearing the laughing mask; however, the mask becomes a grimace when Benedick/Branagh shows (by touching the brow, nose, and eye of the mask) that he is hurt by Beatrice/Thompson’s words. The disconnect between the obviously hurt state of mind of Benedick combined with the facade of the smiling mask is palpable: The mask becomes as disturbing as someone’s grinning face while hiding deep feelings behind it. Nonetheless, Beatrice/Thompson makes the best use of Benedick/Branagh’s mask by insulting him as often as she can. After all, she is not insulting him to his face but to a stranger wearing a mask. She is, therefore, insulting Benedick to his face while not insulting him to his face. All is fair in love and war, particularly at a masked ball. Even during Beatrice/Thompson’s most scathing insults, she retains the seductive bearing of a coquette who knowingly, but not knowingly, gets to drive home wonderful insults without getting into trouble for them. She can always excuse herself by saying that she was not aware she was speaking to Benedick directly. Both Thompson and Branagh maintain a push and pull of comedy and earnestness and of playfulness and sincerity throughout. Both actors have found a unique way of playing this scene that is, I would argue, unmatched in its creative hilarity.

Act 4, Scene 1

BENEDICK

Is Claudio thine enemy?

BEATRICE

Is he not approved in the height a villain
that hath slandered, scorned, dishonored my kinswoman?

O, that I were a man! What, bear her in
hand until they come to take hands, and then, with
public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated
rancor—**O God, that I were a man! I would eat his
heart in the marketplace.**

BENEDICK

Hear me, Beatrice—

BEATRICE

Talk with a man out at a window! A proper
saying.

BENEDICK

Nay, but Beatrice—

BEATRICE

Sweet Hero, she is wronged, she is slandered,
she is undone.

BENEDICK

Beat—

BEATRICE

Princes and counties! Surely a princely testimony,
a goodly count, Count Comfect, a sweet
gallant, surely! **O, that I were a man for his sake!** Or
that I had any friend would be a man for my sake!
But manhood is melted into curtsies, valor into
compliment, and men are only turned into tongue,
and trim ones, too. He is now as valiant as Hercules
that only tells a lie and swears it. I cannot be a man
with wishing; therefore I will die a woman with
grieving.

BENEDICK

Tarry, good Beatrice. By this hand, I love
thee.

BEATRICE

**Use it for my love some other way than
swearing by it.**

BENEDICK

Think you in your soul the Count Claudio
hath wronged Hero?

BEATRICE

Yea, as sure as I have a thought or a soul.

BENEDICK

Enough, I am engaged. I will challenge him.

Both Beatrice/Thompson and Benedick/Branagh find the paradox of romantic “celebration with an underlying tug of sadness” (cf. Gleibermann, “Much Ado About Nothing,” *Entertainment Weekly*). They demonstrate that “part of our pleasure lies in our discomfiture,” that love, for two independent souls, “is not a peaceful occupation” and “that love must prove itself by a willingness to risk all and to commit itself entirely, but that in some ultimate sense to love—to live absolutely—*is to fight*” (cf. Gardner 10, 11, 15). Thompson beautifully captures Beatrice’s independence and free-spiritedness. Beatrice/Thompson looks sensually feminine in a flowing white dress while always comporting herself with the confidence and posture of a soldier. When Beatrice/Thompson exclaims three times—after her cousin’s cruel public humiliation by Claudio—“O that I were a man! . . . O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the marketplace.” “O that I were a man for his sake” (*Much Ado* 4.1.298, 301, 311) she could not be more convincing. There is no doubt that Beatrice/Thompson would challenge Claudio to a duel. There is no doubt Beatrice/Thompson would eat Claudio’s heart in the marketplace at this point, and there is no doubt that she would have been a better man than Claudio. When Beatrice/Thompson tells Benedick to act, not engage in sweet talking, it is clear that she would have done so already. Essentially, Beatrice entreats Benedick to challenge Claudio to a duel, because she cannot do it herself. Both Beatrice/Thompson and Benedick/Branagh have a deep understanding of when to stop talking (and they both love to hear themselves talk) and start acting. Benedick/Branagh accepts Beatrice/Thompson’s challenge because he understands the underlying tug of tragedy, even amid a romantic declaration of love.

Act 5. Scene 1:

BENEDICK

Shall I speak a word in your ear?

CLAUDIO

God bless me from a challenge!

BENEDICK

(aside to Claudio) You are a villain. **I jest not.** I will make it good how you dare, with what you dare, and when you dare. Do me right, or I will protest your cowardice. You have killed a sweet lady, and her death shall fall heavy on you. Let me hear from you.

CLAUDIO

Well, I will meet you, **so I may have good cheer.**

PRINCE

What, **a feast, a feast?**

CLAUDIO

I' faith, I thank him.

[...]

BENEDICK

Fare you well, **boy.** You know my mind. I will leave you now to your **gossip-like humor.** You break jests as braggarts do their blades, which, God be thanked, hurt not.—My lord, for your many courtesies I thank you. I must discontinue your company. Your brother the Bastard is fled from Messina. **You have among you killed a sweet and innocent lady.** For my **Lord Lackbeard** there, **he and I shall meet,** and till then peace be with him.

(Benedick exits).

PRINCE

He is **in earnest.**

CLAUDIO

In most **profound earnest** ...

Benedick/Branagh honors Beatrice/Thompson's request by surprising both Claudio and the Prince with his absolute earnestness and direct threat of physical violence. Benedick/Branagh grabs Claudio/Leonard by the throat—a directorial choice—and pushes him against the wall while challenging him to a duel. To physically threaten a count (Claudio) in front of his superior (the Prince, to whom both Benedick and Claudio have sworn allegiance) is a strong choice. Both the Prince and Claudio are bereft of words because the chatty, entertaining, eternally joking man they know has just shown them the other side of his character, a side they never saw except on

the battlefield: a Benedick who is not wordy, not funny, completely sincere, and ready to kill for his love and conviction. As acting teacher Karen Kohlhaas repeatedly emphasizes in her classes, “Audiences love contrast” (Kohlhaas, *NYC Acting Class* May 2020), because it puts them on edge. They never know what may come next. The late Broadway producer, casting director, and legendary audition coach Michael Shurtleff³⁰⁵ puts it similarly in his invaluable and timeless book *Audition*: “One of the greatest results of using opposites is behavior that is unpredictable, therefore always more intriguing to an audience. . . . Interesting acting always has this risk element of the unpredictable in it” (Shurtleff, *Audition* 53). Shurtleff encourages the playing of paradox: “Whenever you have two considerations [of how to play a character] that cancel each other out, do both” (Shurtleff 50). Dialect and voice coach Amanda Stephens–Lee points out that the most interesting actors have an edge of surprise to them; such underlying, high-strung potential combustibility makes these actors fascinating to watch (cf. Stephens–Lee, *Dialect Class* July 2020).

Benedick’s switch from entertaining court jester to the utter earnestness of a potential killer comes as an utter shock to the Prince and Claudio. Both the Prince and Claudio had asked Benedick to “perform” one of his funny skits for them right before Benedick turns on them and challenges Claudio to a duel (Claudio says: “We have been up and down to seek thee, for we are high-proof melancholy and would fain have it beaten away. Wilt thou use thy wit?”). Even after Benedick challenges Claudio, he and the Prince cannot bring themselves to take him seriously. They are stuck in “gossip-like humor.” Claudio has just been told that Hero is dead, and he is asking Benedick, the lighthearted, whimsical jester (in Claudio’s eyes) to joke away his melancholy. After ruining Hero’s reputation for life, and after learning she has killed herself as a consequence, Claudio whines about feeling a bit out of sorts. When Benedick/Branagh calls Claudio/Leonard “boy” and “Lord Lackbeard,” it is obvious why: Claudio has just shown incredible immaturity and callousness. Even after Benedick has left, neither the Prince nor Claudio can really believe what they just saw. Instead, they joke about how Benedick has become soft now that he is in love. Benedick/Branagh does not play the scene as a concession he

³⁰⁵ Shurtleff dedicates an entire chapter to opposites in his book on how to audition. His observations and advice are timeless, and his book is one of the best books on acting, for actors, I have ever read. Shurtleff’s insights and his sense of humor rightfully have made *Audition* a kind of actors’ bible.

must make for love. Instead, he shows the other side of Benedick, the opposite, the soldier side of him that has been there all along. He makes it crystal clear that Benedick is not “running an errand” for Beatrice/Thompson, but he is here to eat Claudio’s heart in the marketplace for what he did to Hero. Benedick/Branagh makes it plain beyond the shadow of a doubt that his Benedick may be an insouciant jester, but he is also a soldier not to be trifled with. He is usually upbeat and witty, but there is an earnestness to him that comes as a surprise not just to the audience, but to the Prince and Claudio.

Both Thompson and Branagh have a deep understanding of the opposite facets of their characters. In their mirth, there is always a touch of mourning. In their sharp wit, there is tenderness, in their humor, there is earnestness, and in their aggression, there is love. Thompson and Branagh honor Beatrice and Benedick’s paradox, and it is the latter that makes their performances so rich, deep, and an all-round joy to watch.

6) Pippa Nixon and Alex Waldmann: Playing Paradox and Androgyny

Pippa Nixon: Rosalind, Alex Waldmann: Orlando, *As You Like It*, directed by Maria Aberg, produced by and filmed for the Royal Shakespeare Company, performed at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2013.

Act 3, Scene 2:

ROSALIND

[...]. There is a man haunts the forest, that abuses our young plants with carving 'Rosalind' on their barks; hangs odes upon hawthorns and elegies on brambles, all, forsooth, deifying the name of Rosalind: if I could meet that fancy-monger I would give him some good counsel, for he seems to have the quotidian of love upon him.

ORLANDO

I am he that is so love-shaked: I pray you tell me your remedy.

ROSALIND

There is none of my uncle's marks upon you: he taught me how to know a man in love; in which cage



of rushes I am sure you are not prisoner.

ORLANDO

What were his marks?

ROSALIND

A lean cheek, which you have not, a blue eye and sunken, which you have not, an unquestionable spirit, which you have not, a beard neglected, which you have not; but I pardon you for that, for simply your having in beard is a younger brother's revenue: then your hose should be ungartered, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbuttoned, your shoe untied and every thing about you demonstrating a careless desolation; but you are no such man; you are rather point-device in your accoutrements as loving yourself than seeming the lover of any other.

ORLANDO

Fair youth, I would I could make thee believe I love.

ROSALIND

Me believe it! you may as soon make her that you love believe it; which, I warrant, she is apter to do than to confess she does: that is one of the points in the which women still give the lie to their consciences. But, in good sooth, are you he that hangs the verses on the trees, wherein Rosalind is so admired?

ORLANDO

I swear to thee, youth, by the white hand of Rosalind, I am that he, that unfortunate he.

ROSALIND

But are you so much in love as your rhymes speak?

ORLANDO

Neither rhyme nor reason can express how much.

ROSALIND

Love is merely a madness, and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do: and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is, that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too. Yet I profess curing it by counsel.

ORLANDO

Did you ever cure any so?

ROSALIND

Yes, one, and in this manner. He was to imagine me his love, his mistress; and I set him every day to

woo me: at which time would I, being but a moonish youth, grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles, for every passion something and for no passion truly any thing, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this colour; would now like him, now loathe him; then entertain him, then forswear him; now weep for him, then spit at him; that I drave my suitor from his mad humour of love to a living humour of madness; which was, to forswear the full stream of the world, and to live in a nook merely monastic. And thus I cured him; and this way will I take upon me to wash your liver as clean as a sound sheep's heart, that there shall not be one spot of love in't.

ORLANDO

I would not be cured, youth.

ROSALIND

I would cure you, if you would but call me Rosalind and come every day to my cote and woo me.

ORLANDO

Now, by the faith of my love, I will: tell me where it is.

ROSALIND

Go with me to it and I'll show it you and by the way you shall tell me where in the forest you live.

Will you go?

ORLANDO

With all my heart, good youth.

ROSALIND

Nay you must call me Rosalind. Come, sister, will you go?

Exeunt

Pippa Nixon as Rosalind walks a wonderful line of boyish mischief and feminine charm. With her short haircut and the disguise of the boy Ganymede, she looks perfectly androgynous. Instead of playing “the boy” Ganymede—which is what most actresses who play Rosalind do—Rosalind/Nixon dances between genders. She faultlessly captures androgyny (from the Ancient Greek *anér*, *andro-*, meaning “man,” and *gunē*, *gyné*, meaning “woman”). Rosalind/Nixon superbly captures the fluidity and tension of Ganymede/Rosalind. It makes her irresistible to

watch. Elinor Glyn, in her 1927 novel *It*, describes exactly the effect of Nixon/Ganymede/Rosalind on her audience:

To have “it,” the fortunate possessor must have that strange magnetism which attracts both sexes. He or she must be entirely unselfconscious and full of self-confidence, indifferent to the effect he or she is producing, and uninfluenced by others. There must be physical attraction, but beauty is unnecessary. (Roach, quoting Elinor Glyn, *It* 4)

Similarly, but more succinctly, the writer Colette expressed such an appeal: “The seduction emanating from a person of uncertain or dissimulated sex is powerful” (Greene, quoting Colette, *Seduction* 48). In *Vested Interests*, Marjorie Garber proposed that “transvestism is a space of possibility structuring and *confounding* culture: the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself” (Garber 17, emphasis mine).

I see eye to eye with Kristen Nicole Cardon’s insightful reading of Rosalind’s androgyny:

Rosalind is always both masculine and feminine—boy actor and female character, Ganymede and Rosalind. *The play depends on it.* . . . [T]he FTM³⁰⁶ androgyne has a unique function in the plot, becoming alternate beings to meet the various demands of a rigid sex-gender system. . . . Rosalind manipulates femininity, certainly, but she manipulates masculinity just as much, concluding in a subversive androgyny that challenges gender binary norms. She succeeds because she maintains this androgyny in spite of her marriage. (Cardon, “Shakespeare’s Art and Artifice” 20, 21, emphasis mine)

Robert Greene puts it somewhat more generally: “Most of us feel trapped within the limited roles the world expects us to play. We are instantly attracted to those who are more fluid, more ambiguous, than we are—those who create their own persona” (Greene, *Seduction* 41). Samuel Pepys, as only he can, exquisitely describes the power of androgyny. He was bowled over by the effect the actress Nell Gwyn had on him in one of her “breeches-parts.” “When she comes in like

³⁰⁶ FTM: female to male (*OED*); a transgender man (*Merriam-Webster*).

Mell Gwyn
in one of her
breeches parts (1667)



a young gallant, and hath the motions and carriage of a spark the most I ever saw any man have” (Roach, quoting Samuel Pepys, *It* 64). It is no wonder Aphra Behn also loved Nell Gwyn, not to mention King Charles II. Nixon/Ganymede/Rosalind has this very “spark.”

Greene perceives the “creation of one’s own persona” and role as an art that can be mastered. Shakespeare’s fascination with cross-dressing was based on creating both an artificial persona and bringing forth a persona that has arguably always been there. This works despite the additional layer of the early modern boy-actor-as-Rosalind/Ganymede because it is meant to confuse; there is always a male/female element in the part of Rosalind. She chooses to dress as a boy, while Celia remains in her role as a female (albeit another one, *Aliena*). Rosalind has an intelligence and dynamic independence that comes out best when she is in disguise. She actively initiates Orlando’s courtship instead of passively waiting for him. Cardon makes a similar point: “Rosalind/Ganymede, in her insistent position between masculine and feminine, between art and life, always existing as both³⁰⁷ and neither, embodies gender-as-art. Rosalind reminds us that we can instead affirm gender both as a creative act of self-expression and as a work of art” (Cardon 28). There is an insolence and mischief to Rosalind/Nixon’s non-conformism that is ungovernable, untamed, and utterly compelling in its disdain for society’s rulebook. Furthermore, there is confidence, a faith—what Stanislavski saw in Salvini and Duse’s performances—in Rosalind/Nixon’s androgyny that is unapologetic, provocative, and

³⁰⁷ Lawrence Olivier, who played Orlando to Elisabeth Bergner’s Rosalind in the 1936 film adaptation of *As You Like It* was dismayed because Bergner’s Rosalind played **both** Rosalind and Ganymede. Olivier thought she was not credible as **the boy** Ganymede. He said: “I was trying to play Orlando in a film version of *As You Like It* to a Rosalind with a German accent, whose impersonation of a boy hardly attempted to deceive the audience” (Olivier, *On Acting* 255). Arguably, Olivier did not contemplate that Bergner’s interpretation of being both Rosalind and Ganymede was not meant to “deceive” the audience, but to detach gender from society’s received understanding of it. Olivier compared Bergner’s androgynous performance to his own performances of female characters that were received as entirely credible. Bergner, I would argue, was ahead of her time in her androgyny. The *Jewish Women’s Archive* puts it well: “Seemingly contradictory elements created an inimitable aura, the magic she projected: she was at one and the same time both a tender, fragile child–woman and a ‘femme fatale.’ . . . As Elsa Lasker-Schüler observed, “She penetrates to one’s heart—but she also goes to one’s head.” With her androgynous appearance, nervous gestures, and capacity for total selflessness, Bergner embodied a new, erotic ideal, a complex, fastidious type of female (Pracht–Joerns, “Elisabeth Bergner,” *Jewish Women’s Archive*, 27 Feb. 2009). Pippa Nixon, in fact, has a paradoxical charm and androgyny that is very similar to Bergner’s. In the RSC’s 2013 stage version of *AYLI*, Rosalind/Nixon and Orlando/Waldmann look each other in the eyes deeply the entire time. The two actors are too engrossed in each other’s eyes to worry about Rosalind/Ganymede’s gender credibility. Olivier, it must be added, also found Greta Garbo utterly uninspiring initially, only to confess years later—and very charmingly and self-effacingly—on the *Dick Cavett Show* in 1973 that it was he who was not ready to play alongside Garbo (who had fired him). It was, in fact, Elisabeth Bergner who insisted Olivier play Orlando to her Rosalind: Bergner had landed him the job (cf. Billington, Michael, “Olivier, Laurence Kerr, Baron Olivier,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004).

“supremely uninterested in what anyone else is doing” (cf. Greene, *Seduction* 48). Rosalind/Nixon pleases by not giving a second thought to pleasing. She maintains a tension of qualities that are at variance with each other, and this makes her intriguing.

Greene emphasizes the inherent danger of transgressing society’s boundaries and taboos:

Society may publicize its distrust of androgyny (in Christian theology, Satan is often represented as androgynous), but this conceals its fascination; what is most seductive is what is most repressed. . . . Although [androgyny] is highly charged and seductive, it is also dangerous since it touches on a source of great anxiety and insecurity. (Greene, *Seduction* 51, 52)

In other words, to play with gender roles, with androgyny, with anything that is overly free and eludes categorization, is to play with fire. Greene added:

Gender roles are certainly changing, but they have changed before. Society is in a state of constant flux, but there is something that does not change: the vast majority of people conform to whatever is normal for the time. They play the role allotted to them. Conformity is a constant because humans are social creatures who are always imitating each other. (Greene, *Seduction* 48)

Nixon’s Rosalind is a fiery ball of paradoxes, indeed: Her eyes are full of love for Orlando. However, the way she toys with his love (e.g., by throwing his love poems to the ground, throwing him to the ground, pushing him around) has a touch of boyish cruelty to it. She walks a fine line between playful and callous. She is fiercely independent and analytical but delicate and sweet when she listens to Orlando/Waldmann. She smokes like Humphrey Bogart, and her smile has a wonderful puckish twinkle. She takes in Orlando with great tenderness. She is simultaneously strong and vulnerable.

In his renowned book *Audition*, the late Broadway casting director, Hollywood producer, and acting/audition coach Michael Shurtleff dedicates an entire chapter to the importance of “opposites” in acting. He finds them indispensable:

Consistency is the heart of dull acting. What fascinates us about other human beings, and particularly about splendid actors, is their inconsistency, their use of opposites. . . . In the course of doing scenes, almost every actor comes to understand what opposites are and how to use them, but in theory it is frequently a murky³⁰⁸ concept to communicate. . . . Think about the human being: in all of us there exists love and there exists hate, there exists creativity and an equal tendency toward self-destructiveness, there exists sleeping and waking, there exists night and there exists day, sunny moods and foul moods, a desire to love and a desire to kill. . . . [Opposites] result in the most interesting kind of acting: the complex. (Shurtleff 77–79)

Rosalind/Nixon establishes a camaraderie with Orlando/Waldmann by sitting with him on the ground. The gesture is intentionally un-ladylike because Rosalind/Nixon is “creating” a bond with Orlando/Waldmann on equal terms (they sit on the same stoop on the ground). Similarly, a bond between Rosalind/Nixon and Celia/Horton is established that reveals deep companionship and sisterhood. When Rosalind/Nixon complains to Orlando/Waldmann that someone is abusing the forest by carving “Rosalind” (Nixon somewhat mockingly pronounces it Rosa-l-aiiind on purpose) on the poor trees, Celia/Horton—who is sitting in the back with a beer while listening to Rosalind and Orlando—spits out her beer upon hearing the pronunciation of “Rosa-l-aiiind.” This has the effect of being hilarious, for one, and of displaying to the audience just how close these two women are: Beer-spitting humor in the form of an unladylike snort is, I would argue, a sign of being completely at ease with one’s friend. This means Rosalind/Nixon and Celia/Horton trust each other enough to act freely and even in an unrefined manner. Their

³⁰⁸ N.b. how Shurtleff notices the difficulty of expressing contradictions in human psychology, paradox, tension, and the complex variety of simultaneous emotions. Shurtleff is one of the most astute observers of all things acting and good actors. His insights into what makes great acting are formidable in every way.

guards are down around each other. They have true fun, and their rapport is similar to that of a well-orchestrated ensemble.

When Rosalind/Nixon says, wide-eyed, that “if I could meet that fancy monger, I would give him some good counsel,” she chuckles to herself the way James Cagney does in one of his Irish-tough-guy gangster moments just after he shoots someone. Rosalind/Nixon pushes Orlando’s wooly hat off his head on “your bonnet unbanded,” which is a disrespectful gesture, but Nixon renders it with the playful charm of the coquette. Orlando/Waldmann stares at her with wide eyes the entire time, hanging on her every word and looking scared and besotted. Rosalind/Nixon knows exactly how far to go with insolence and when to rein it in. Her laugh sparkles and allows her to get away with being pushy. Her Ganymede persona gives her the opportunity to be physical with Orlando/Waldmann: As Rosalind, she could not act like this. She cozies up to Orlando/Waldmann by repeatedly nudging him with her shoulders in a laddish way. She sidles up and moves into Orlando/Waldmann’s personal space many times, as though to exhibit how much of an opportunity being a boy is for a duke’s daughter who is supposed to act like a lady. Rosalind/Nixon and Orlando/Waldmann are truly playful with each other. To a lesser actor than Waldmann, Nixon’s Rosalind might have been overpowering, but Waldmann’s Orlando returns Rosalind/Nixon’s serves in a meaningful way: He is overcome by her, enchanted, and intimidated. However, in all his doe-eyed, lovesick innocence, there is also a little roguishness, and he gives as good as he gets. These two keep the ball in the air at all times. They are disarmed by each other. Where Rosalind/Nixon goes from insolence to tenderness, Orlando/Waldmann goes from stupefied pining to a rakish challenger. He allows Rosalind/Nixon to poke fun at his bad love poetry, but eventually smugly tells her off when he pronounces “Rosalind” correctly. His face expresses something similar to “All right, I will let you abuse me, but at least pronounce the name correctly.” The way Rosalind/Nixon and Orlando/Waldmann listen to each other is active, intense, completely open, and vulnerable to the other’s words and actions. The chemistry between these two is nothing short of hypnotic.

Theatre critic Simon Taverner describes the dynamic duo of Rosalind/Nixon and Orlando/Waldmann very well: Orlando/Waldmann “has a winning way about him. . . . But Nixon is, undoubtedly, the star of the show – and quite rightly too. Her Rosalind is pitch-perfect, and I

have never seen a more convincing transformation into Ganymede. Nixon handles the changeable nature of her character brilliantly” (Taverner, *As You Like It (RSC), What’s on Stage* 25 Apr. 2013). Pat Ashworth describes Rosalind/Nixon’s charm and dance of paradoxes similarly: Nixon “has a dancer’s body, a sparseness and liveness which make her cocky and capering in the guise of a man and deeply vulnerable as a woman. But it’s her openness and quick-wittedness that is so appealing. She makes us able to read her mind, and that really is extraordinary” (Ashworth, “AYLI Review,” *The Stage* 25 Apr. 2013). Lyn Gardner put it more simply but, I would argue, perfectly in her theatre review tweet for *The Stage*: “Pippa Nixon is enchanting, knee-trembling, sexy, and sad” (Gardner, Lyn, *The Stage and Digital Theatre*, @lyngardner 25 Apr. 2013). *The Guardian*’s chief theatre critic Michael Billington³⁰⁹ also emphasizes Nixon’s “captivating, wittily androgynous performance”:

But the real shock comes when she reaches Arden in male disguise. With her slim frame and cropped hair, Nixon is the most plausibly boyish Rosalind I have ever seen. She captures the *duality*³¹⁰ of a character whose wits are sharpened by passion yet who, when briefly abandoned by her beloved Orlando, gazes after him with the bereft sadness of a stricken doe. (Billington, *As You Like It Review*, *The Guardian* 25 Apr. 2013)

In her “love is merely a madness” monologue, Rosalind/Nixon plays opposites with a wonderful mixture of the rascal and the coquette. The monologue calls for an actor with a great range to play all the notes and contradictions. Nixon has this range: She is full of passion, high energy, and charming insolence. She seduces the audience along with Orlando/Waldmann when she turns toward them (in this case, the camera) and confesses her plan for Orlando’s courtship of her. The twinkle in her eye when she addresses the audience is so winsome that the audience, along with Orlando/Waldmann, would follow her anywhere. Her confiding in the audience in

³⁰⁹ Notably, every single review I found on Nixon’s performance described some kind of paradox within her. I did not need to pick and choose reviews because they all expressed a similar observation.

³¹⁰ Since I oppose dualistic language, I must clarify here that Billington uses “duality” not as an either/or state, but as two states existing in Rosalind simultaneously. Billington notices Nixon’s Rosalind encompassing multitudes and contrary beings. She is Rosalind when she is Ganymede, and vice versa.

such a personable manner also makes it very clear that it is Rosalind/Nixon who is the dynamic force behind the courtship. It is she who sets the tone and initiates Orlando's paying court to her, not vice versa. Rosalind/Nixon strips off her suspenders on "effeminate," which is provocative (and intriguing). She runs her hands over Orlando/Waldmann's face on "apish," gives full expression to "full of tears" by gesturing as if she were crying into her hands, and does the same on "full of smiles" by smiling in Orlando/Waldmann's face closely and playfully. Immediately, she jumps back into analytical mode on "boys and women are, for the most part, cattle of this color." She leans all the way into Orlando/Waldmann's face on "now like him," and swiftly pulls him toward her only to push him onto the ground on "now loathe him." Orlando/Waldmann is too befuddled and bewitched to do anything but crumble. Rosalind/Nixon pretends to slap him on "entertain him" (a feisty choice). She becomes all sweetness and sincerity on "and thus I cured him" and ends her monologue ("that there shall not be one spot of love in't") with the sweetest smile possible.

When Rosalind/Nixon asks Orlando/Waldmann, "Will you go?," and he responds "with all my heart," he expresses exactly how the audience feels. Michael Billington said it well when he wrote that this *AYLI* adaptation has "moments of pure ecstasy: when Nixon and Waldmann finally leap into each other's arms, they seem to be gripped by what Shakespeare calls 'the very wrath of love'"³¹¹ (cf. Billington, "As You Like It Review," *The Guardian* 2013).

7) Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio: The Profane Made Sacred/Love + Hate

Claire Danes: Juliet, Leonardo DiCaprio: Romeo, *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, directed by Baz Luhrmann, written by Craig Pearce and Baz Luhrmann, based on the play by William Shakespeare; edited by Jill Bilcock; music by Nellee Hooper; production designer Catherine Martin; produced by Gabriella Martinelli and Baz Luhrmann; released by 20th Century Fox, 1996.

³¹¹ Billington uses Shakespeare's quote from Act 5, Scene 2, of *AYLI*, which is a paradoxical description of a volatile love. While Rosalind describes Aliena and Oliver's falling in love, it may as well describe Rosalind and Orlando's.

Act 1, Scene 5: The Moment Before: Romeo Meets Juliet

When Romeo and Juliet first meet, they dance to the tune of a sonnet that oscillates with profane puns and sincere, sacred, and, yes, instant love. Bringing this dance to life is daunting for directors and actors alike. In his 1996 production *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, Baz Luhrmann captures the essence of love at first sight. While many have maligned Luhrmann's movie, and many still do,³¹² his modern version of *Romeo + Juliet* resists all petty, censorious fault-finding. Indeed, the film has achieved cult status. *The Guardian* celebrated the film's twentieth birthday in 2016 (Lodge, "Romeo + Juliet at 20: Baz Luhrmann's Adaptation Refuses to Age," *The Guardian* 1 Nov. 2016), and *Rolling Stone* maintained that it is as good and modern as it was in 1996. Luhrmann's version of *Romeo + Juliet* certainly divided (and still divides) critics. However, I believe that Luhrmann is very likely correct when he said in a recent interview that he wanted to make a film that captured what Shakespeare would have done if he could have made a movie: "I always believed that as long as you reveal the fundamental essence of what Shakespeare was chasing, that would have an effect on an audience" (cf. "Baz Luhrmann Looking Back on Romeo + Juliet," *VPRO Cinema Collection*, YouTube 1 Jul. 2015). Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo and Claire Danes as Juliet light up the screen like fireworks. Their chemistry is pure magic. Never before nor after have I (and many others) been so moved by the two star-

³¹² It always appears as though—in all the criticism on this film—the writers or scholars want to say something condemning, but they cannot help secretly liking the film and the actors. It is as if the critics are too afraid to say something positive about a film that completely contradicts tradition, but deep down, they cannot hate the film. I have been in a classroom at a reputable university and had to witness two professors flying into a rage of utterly dismissive criticism at the mention of Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*. Consequently, the students who were too afraid to voice their opinion simply waited for the professors to leave the room and then happily discussed how much they loved the film.

Here are two examples of the love/hate criticism Luhrmann's film caused and continues to cause: "Neither actor delivers the most mellifluous iambic pentameter you've ever heard, and nor should they: the lines roll eagerly, earnestly, blushing off their tongues" (Lodge, *Guardian*). In addition, "Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes wouldn't make it through an RSC audition, but that's very much the point" (Dickson, Andrew, "The Best Shakespeare Films--Ranked," *The Guardian*, 8 Feb. 2019).

An insult is always followed by a compliment, or the other way around. No matter how backhanded the compliment, the writers always appear to try and please a longstanding English Shakespearean tradition. However, they also appear to have liked the film and the acting despite themselves. There is too much protestation. According to Andrew Dickson of *The Guardian*, DiCaprio and Danes would not make the cut at an RSC audition (I disagree), yet *The Guardian* ranks *Romeo + Juliet* number 10 among the best Shakespeare films. Furthermore, the cover picture of the article is Claire Danes as Juliet. *The Guardian* must think that its article will be read by more people with the cover of Claire Danes in *Romeo + Juliet*, and they are probably right. Such is the "criticism" on this film: It is not a posh, stilted John Gielgud production (Shakespeare was never posh!), but everyone watched it. It opened at No. 1 at the American box office, which is incredible for a Shakespeare production. Furthermore, mostly young people watched it. As did Shakespeare, Luhrmann did something very right to draw so many people into the movie theaters. Shakespeare—I think—would have loved it.

crossed lovers onscreen or onstage. *The Guardian*'s film critic Guy Lodge feels the same: "I can't think of any Romeo and Juliet production I've seen, on stage or screen, in which the attraction between its eponymous lovers is so viscerally, obsessively instant" (Lodge, *Guardian* 2016). Both DiCaprio and Danes dance between bawdy puns and sacred love, between love and hate, the sweet and the tragic, the innocent and the world-weary, with the grace of saints and the intensity of sinners. Most importantly, they dance with their eyes and perform a most vulnerable pas de deux of imitation and body language.

Danes, who was 17 when the film was made, reveals an old soul in a young body, and DiCaprio (not yet world-famous) unleashes the acting skills that have made him a household name ever since. He captures a sweetness, a darkness, a lover-turned-killer, a sincere, intense, enchanting, savage, and mad Romeo. Luhrmann does something John Barton repeatedly advised: He takes Shakespeare's hidden directions. The scene begins on paper, with Romeo taking Juliet's hand and starting to speak. Luhrmann allows Romeo and Juliet a "moment before," which is not in the play, but it is also not *not* in the play. The "moment before" is an entirely valid, creative, and beautiful interpretation, and it is a master class in NVC. Romeo meets Juliet unexpectedly, while they both seek respite from a wild party at the Capulets' house, in the—of all places—shared lavatories. Romeo has just dunked his head into a sink full of water to wash away the gaudiness and debauchery of the entertainment next door, which is a "glitterbomb of sound and fury and neo-disco and inchoate yearning" (cf. Lodge, *Guardian*). Having taken drugs,³¹³ Romeo/DiCaprio tries to sober up from both his intoxication and the overstimulation of the wild masked ball. He turns around to a fish tank—yes, the shared lavatories are divided by an aquarium—filled with colorful fish. Romeo/DiCaprio lets his eyes wander with the different fishes dancing in the water until one of the fishes leads him to Juliet/Danes—hiding on the other side of the fish tank—and Romeo and Juliet lock eyes for the first time. For the entire "moment-before scene," neither Romeo nor Juliet speaks a single word. The actors communicate love at first sight wholly nonverbally. What follows is one of the most magnificent movie moments of silent, effective imitation and NVC. Romeo and Juliet trace each other through the dancing fish,

³¹³ The implication is that Romeo/DiCaprio has taken ecstasy/Molly/MDMA. The film also makes it clear that Romeo is sobering up from the effects of the drugs. It never appears as though Romeo falls under Juliet's spell due to drug taking.



and they take each other in unconditionally (through the aquarium). They mirror each other in a way that only two people who are completely vulnerable and open to each other can.

Romeo/DiCaprio raises his eyebrows after seeing Juliet/Danes, which communicates the most enchanting pick-up line never spoken: It is a “well, hello there” without words. Juliet/Danes responds with a surprised seriousness and then a shy almost-smile. Encouraged, Romeo/DiCaprio playfully—but also seriously and intensely—traces her along the tank, which makes Juliet/Danes laugh, which, in turn, makes Romeo/DiCaprio laugh. Juliet/Danes looks Romeo up and down in both innocent and desirous fashion. Even more encouraged, he now playfully pokes his nose into the glass, and raises his chin (saying “connect with me” without saying it). As Lodge puts it, “17-year-old Claire Danes’ and 21-year-old DiCaprio’s eyes meet in an electric blue thunderbolt of sheer, woozy *want*” (Lodge, *Guardian*). Juliet’s nurse rudely interrupts Romeo and Juliet and pulls Juliet onto the dance floor to do young Paris the honor of dancing with him. Juliet politely obliges. The dance-floor scene again consists of Romeo and Juliet communicating entirely nonverbally. Romeo looks on as Juliet dances with Paris. Juliet giggles at Paris’s silly dance moves (toward Romeo), who immediately reciprocates Juliet’s giggles by lampooning Paris. Romeo raises his eyebrows as far as he can as if to say, “What on earth is this guy doing? What are these dance moves?” Romeo and Juliet bond by making fun of Paris without Paris noticing. Juliet is sweet, but she has an entire “conversation without words” with Romeo while she is dancing with Paris. When Romeo/DiCaprio speaks to himself, “Did my heart love til now? Foreswear it, sight! For I never saw true beauty till this night” (*R&J* 1.5.50–51), he persuades the audience that this is it. Juliet is *it*, and Rosaline is an afterthought. This is a tricky moment for the actor playing Romeo: If he is not deeply sincere, the audience is led to believe that he is indeed an inconstant and shallow lover who jumps from lady to lady. DiCaprio carries the lines off with fullhearted integrity. Mastering the fine line between humor/irony and sincerity is, as I have found in my observations, a hallmark of good actors: They know just when to push the humor and just when to pull it back with complete sincerity.

The next 14 lines Romeo and Juliet speak to one another famously constitute a sonnet, a dance with words. Luhrmann's direction³¹⁴ is superb: He orchestrates the pas de deux sonnet scene in a way that cumulates in an actual dance.

Act 1, Scene 5, 104–123

ROMEO

(taking Juliet's hand)

If I profane with my unworhiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

JULIET

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

ROMEO

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET

Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

ROMEO

O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do.
They pray: grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

ROMEO

Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.³¹⁵

(*He kisses her*)

Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin is purged.

JULIET

Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

³¹⁴ Luhrmann's wonderful talents of directing operas, musicals, and stage productions fully reveal themselves here. His theatrical background and profound knowledge of Shakespeare shine through in this moment (and, in my opinion, throughout the entire film). His "glitter bomb" bombastic style may not be for everyone. However, I would argue, if one opens one's heart to Luhrmann's interpretation, he will guide the way to a breathtaking and heartfelt understanding of Shakespeare's text that is simply moving. There is a reason this movie (which remained faithful to Shakespeare's text) was embraced by the youth (myself included) and went straight to number 1 at the box office in America. The latter is a feat, and it means—despite what many academics and critics fail to see—that Luhrmann touched a nerve. He made Shakespeare "accessible," certainly, but he did not dumb anything down. He moved people, and that is why movies were made.

³¹⁵ The sonnet ends here.



ROMEO

Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged!

Give me my sin again.

(He kisses her)

JULIET

You kiss by th' book.

NURSE

Madam, your mother craves a word with you.

Romeo/DiCaprio maintains a wonderful mixture of profanity and sanctity in his opening remark to Juliet: It is a “line,” undoubtedly, and the “line” is rather polished for a young lover. Romeo/DiCaprio maintains that twinkle in his eye that communicates to Juliet/Danes: “I know what I am doing. I am a smooth operator.” However, he also speaks to her with utter conviction. If the nonverbal communication in this scene were paraphrased, Romeo would say something along the lines of the following: “This hand of yours, Juliet, is sacred (a holy shrine), and it is desecrated by my unworthy hand (profaned). Romeo/DiCaprio says the line boldly and with the right amount of cheek. There is truth to that line: Juliet is innocent, young, a virgin, and, therefore, (in the male eye) sacred. Romeo, conversely, is already an experienced lover. He even admits his experience to her. However, he quickly uses his “experience” to his advantage by adding, “If my boldness and cheek (my gentle sin) of snatching your hand—in front of all the guests at the ball—is offensive to you, I am at the ready with my lips (two blushing pilgrims) to kiss away the offense. My two blushing pilgrims are ready to go on the pilgrimage of kissing you, Juliet.” This is a brazen approach by Romeo. Juliet/Danes gives full expression to her character’s quick wit and sense of humor and hands Romeo/DiCaprio immediate and equally audacious repartee: She turns Romeo’s overly religious love imagery around on him like a firecracker disrupting the sky. She tells Romeo, in so many words, to calm down, good “pilgrim,” and to rein himself (and his religious lines) in a bit. Handholding is the only thing he will get from her. Juliet/Danes is perfectly charming in her reproach. She both encourages and shuts Romeo down. All Romeo/DiCaprio hears is encouragement, and being charmingly relentless is DiCaprio’s great gift to his character.

What follows is a dazzling dance of the sacred and the profane that—if I were to interpret both Romeo’s (DiCaprio’s) and Juliet’s (Danes’) NVC (in italics) and the text—would run something like this:

Romeo/DiCaprio: (*I can’t help myself. I have to have her. I am pulling out my best routine.*)

“Love is sacred. You are a holy pilgrimage, and I am an unworthy pilgrim.”

Juliet/Danes: (*What?*) “Oh, please.” (*But do try again.*)

Romeo/DiCaprio: (*You want me to earn it? I’ll earn it.*) “Love is sacred, so let’s kiss.”

Juliet/Danes: (*He is good, perhaps too good. But he is lovely.*) “Hmm, let’s hold hands for now.” (*But please do try again.*)

Romeo/DiCaprio: “Love is sacred (*Really now, I will work for it all the way; watch me*). Even pilgrims and saints use their lips to kiss.”

Juliet/Danes: (*You want to play pilgrim? Let’s play.*) “Do they? It is my understanding that they use their hands to fold in prayer.” (*But please do try again.*)

Romeo/DiCaprio: (*Of course, I will try again. You deserve it. You deserve everything. You are the sun!*) “Yes, yes. Love is sacred (*Tautology always works for me*), so let our lips do what the hands of saints and pilgrims do. Let’s kiss, lest my faith turn to despair.” (*You have such power over me! That was clever of me! Catch the ball, Juliet.*)

Juliet/Danes: (*Hmm. . . . take the ball right back, drama queen. But do keep going.*) “Also, as it happens: Saints do not move all the more when they grant prayers (*ha!*).”

Romeo/DiCaprio: (*Ha back! Gotcha! Watch this logic of mine!*) “No need for you to move while I ‘perform’ my prayer (he kisses her). See, now your lips have made my sinful kiss sacred. They purged my sin. (*For you, I will make logic bend to any purpose that serves my cause.*) I told you, love is sacred.”

Juliet/Danes: (*Watch me bend some of your logic right back and dictate my terms.*) “Thanks ever so much. So, do my lips now get to keep your sin?”

Romeo/DiCaprio: (*Wow! Is she asking me to kiss her again?*) “Sin from your lips? Now, you just encourage my offenses with your sweetness. (*Yesss!*) Let me take back my sin.” (He kisses her.) (*She is wonderful! She’s the one!*).

Juliet/Danes: (*He’s the one!*).

The dance of the sonnet follows the “moment-before scene.” There is a reason Luhrmann uses melancholy music to play in the background. In another director’s hands, the choice to have Des’ree sing “I’m kissing you” in the background may have been melodramatic, but not so in Luhrmann’s. In fact, the song foreshadows that Romeo will, yes, kiss Juliet in a moment; however, the sweet but sad song also darkens the mood and foreshadows heartbreak and doom. Des’ree sings, “My soul cried/heaving heart is full of pain” in the way Shakespeare’s *Romeo & Juliet* foreshadows the lovers’ fate from the Prologue onwards: “A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life” (Prologue); “I fear too early for my mind misgives/Some consequence yet hanging in the stars/Shall bitterly begin” (Romeo 1.4); and “O God, I have an ill-divining soul” (Juliet 3.5; Des’ree and Timothy Atack, “I’m Kissing You”).

Furthermore, the song introduces an entirely different tempo, rhythm, and mood that represents the lovers. Earlier, the music was loud and fast; the crowd was dancing wildly to Mercutio’s (in drag³¹⁶) lead. When Romeo and Juliet meet, however, decadence and noise make way for love and tenderness. After all, their “only love sprung from [their] only hate” (1.5), and what follows is not a happy union but “sweet sorrow” (2.2) and “violent delights” (2.6). However, giving the introduction of Romeo and Juliet a different rhythm than the rest of the film and scenes is true to the play. Romeo and Juliet stand apart from the sound and fury around them in that they embrace uncertainty. Their flicker of life is made timeless by love.

³¹⁶ Yet another brave choice made by Luhrmann and his team. This Mercutio is black, he is wild, he is androgynous, he cross-dresses brilliantly, he is full of love and full of hate, and he is both sad and mad. He dances and sings—smashingly—in drag. He is unapologetically the way he is: a wonderful interpretation of Mercutio, I find. Mercutio is supposed to be provocative and different from the rest of the boys. This interpretation would not raise eyebrows now, but it did in 1996. Luhrmann must be credited for being an innovator, making strong choices, and sticking to them.



8) William Tennyson and John Light: Ethereal Ambivalence and Perfect Chemistry

William Tennyson: Puck, John Light: Oberon, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Dominic Dromgoole, filmed and performed at the Globe Theatre, 2013.

Act 3, Scene 2. Another part of the wood.

Enter OBERON

OBERON

I wonder if Titania be awaked;
Then, what it was that next came in her eye,
Which she must dote on in extremity.

Enter PUCK

Here comes my messenger.
How now, mad spirit!
What night-rule now about this haunted grove?

PUCK

My mistress with a monster is in love.
Near to her close and consecrated bower,
While she was in her dull and sleeping hour,
A crew of patches, rude mechanicals,
That work for bread upon Athenian stalls,
Were met together to rehearse a play
Intended for great Theseus' nuptial-day.
The shallowest thick-skin of that barren sort,
Who Pyramus presented, in their sport
Forsook his scene and enter'd in a brake
When I did him at this advantage take,
An ass's noll I fixed on his head:
Anon his Thisbe must be answered,
And forth my mimic comes. When they him spy,
As wild geese that the creeping fowler eye,
Or russet-pated choughs, many in sort,
Rising and cawing at the gun's report,
Sever themselves and madly sweep the sky,
So, at his sight, away his fellows fly;
And, at our stamp, here o'er and o'er one falls;
He murder cries and help from Athens calls.
Their sense thus weak, lost with their fears
thus strong,
Made senseless things begin to do them wrong;
For briars and thorns at their apparel snatch;
Some sleeves, some hats, from yielders all



things catch.

I led them on in this distracted fear,
And left sweet Pyramus translated there:
When in that moment, so it came to pass,
Titania waked and straightway loved an ass.

OBERON

This falls out better than I could devise.
But hast thou yet latch'd the Athenian's eyes
With the love-juice, as I did bid thee do?

PUCK

I took him sleeping,--that is finish'd too,--
And the Athenian woman by his side:
That, when he waked, of force she must be eyed.

Enter HERMIA and DEMETRIUS

[...]

OBERON

What hast thou done? thou hast mistaken quite
And laid the love-juice on some true-love's sight:
Of thy misprision must perforce ensue
Some true love turn'd and not a false turn'd true.

PUCK

Then fate o'er-rules, that, one man holding troth,
A million fail, confounding oath on oath.

OBERON

About the wood go swifter than the wind,
And Helena of Athens look thou find:
All fancy-sick she is and pale of cheer,
With sighs of love, that costs the fresh blood dear:
By some illusion see thou bring her here:
I'll charm his eyes against she do appear.

PUCK

I go, I go; look how I go,
Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow.

Exit

OBERON

Flower of this purple dye,
Hit with Cupid's archery,
Sink in apple of his eye.
When his love he doth espy,
Let her shine as gloriously
As the Venus of the sky.
When thou wakest, if she be by,

Beg of her for remedy.

Re-enter PUCK

PUCK

Captain of our fairy band,

Helena is here at hand;

And the youth, mistook by me,

Pleading for a lover's fee.

Shall we their fond pageant see?

Lord, what fools these mortals be!

Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of the characters so beloved by audiences that it is almost impossible to do him (or her) justice. William Tennyson's Puck, I would argue, is a magnificent interpretation that honors both the ancient, mischievous folktale sprite—the Puck of Shakespeare's play being an extension of that sprite—and a modern, whimsical, blasé teenage-punk(ish) version of Puck. Tennyson's Puck is an ethereal, lovable sprite and the pestiferous teenager everyone knows or once was. He is charming and petulant, otherworldly and familiar, elfin and a teenage stock character. Tennyson's Puck is a mixture of Terence's stereotypical crafty slave, Commedia Dell'Arte's Harlequino, and the irritating younger Bennet sisters Lydia and Kitty from *Pride & Prejudice*. He is sweet—"sweet Puck" (2.1.40)—and cruel—"shrewd and knavish sprite" (2.1.33). He is also graceful and awkward, endearing and exasperating. He is not quite male, not quite female: Tennyson's androgynous, slender appearance could be described as "Puck, if he were a male punk princess." *The Independent's* reviewer describes Tennyson's portrayal as follows: "[Oberon's] fairy messenger, Puck, whom the ethereal, almost farcically fey Matthew Tennyson plays as a dangerous innocent in a stenciled hairy torso, is cruelly oblivious to the mayhem he's caused" (Coveney, "Theatre Review: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare's Globe, London," *The Independent Online* 31 May 2013). Tennyson, in fact, does resemble the fey characters from old fairytale illustrations. Moreover, he has the insouciance of an adorably annoying teenager who somehow manages to charm the apples out of the trees, despite being a perfect pest.

Tennyson perfectly captures Puck's boyish wiles (he has such fun being mischievous) and disruptive nonchalance (he can be cruel to those foolish mortals). Tennyson's Puck is obedient toward his master, Oberon, but the moment Oberon's back is turned, Puck's affected, mocking,

condescending side is in full force. After all, Puck is not a foolish mortal; he is a sprite, a delightful little demon. Why should a wayward sprite care what happens when mortals act like chumps? Tennyson/Puck loves to watch mayhem, particularly when that mayhem is oh his own making. Puck is the archetypical trickster: He appears obsequious, but he is a “haughty” servant: always adorable on the outside, forever hoodwinking on the sly. Always charming, forever laughing at “what fools these mortals be” (*MND* 3.2.117). He is funny and wicked, with a sweetness that veils his resentment and defiance. Tennyson’s Puck is too playful, however, to veer into malice and utter indocility. Puck loves to act; he delights in role play and transforming himself into others. “Sometime a horse I’ll be, sometime a hound/A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire/And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn/Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn” (*MND* 3.1.110–113). He is a fluid spirit that eludes fixed categories. He is a performer and an enchanter. Marjorie Garber is right to describe Puck as a kind of Proteus, a “principal actor and agent” and “the quicksilver spirit who personifies transformation” (“A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” *Shakespeare After All [SAA]* 223). Tennyson’s Puck, combined with John Light’s Oberon, is inspired casting: Tennyson/Puck is androgynous and utterly believable as both a rascally boy and a dainty girl.

Oberon/Light brings a raw masculinity and powerful physicality to his character: This Oberon is strong, swashbuckling, and carries such a majestic presence onto the stage that there is real danger he may outshine the other actors. Light, however, is too experienced to win best actor at the cost of the play. Light, as Oberon, walks a wonderful line of masculinity and vulnerability. He has been given a difficult task of walking such a line. After all, he forcefully and passionately kisses Puck/Tennyson. He lifts and swings Puck around and shares many physical, intimate moments with Puck. A lesser actor than Light may very well render such physicality “creepy.” Not so Light: His Oberon, as manly as he is, has wonderful, self-deprecating humor that makes him vulnerable. The audience, at times, cannot tell who is the master and who is the servant. On the surface, there can be no doubt that the powerful Oberon/Light is the master of the fairies. However, at times, it becomes clear that Oberon/Light enjoys Puck/Tennyson’s troublemaking so much that he is also a slave to his servant. Oberon/Light and Puck/Tennyson are having fun playing with the lives of others. Oberon/Light enjoys that Puck/Tennyson lacks the part of a

character who would rein in his mischief. Puck/Tennyson loves to continue his troublemaking after the mortals (and Titania) have duly been humiliated and messed with, and Oberon/Light loves to watch Puck/Tennyson do it. It is “play-time” in never-never land when Oberon/Light and Puck/Tennyson get together—and in fairyland, all is fair in love and war.

Light’s Oberon and Tennyson’s Puck share a rhythm and a deep connection. Oberon/Light emerges in 3.1 from a trapdoor in the floor and casually wonders “if Titania be awaked,” and what “thing” (“it”) she has alighted upon and fallen in love with. Oberon speaks these lines with such a sweet sense of humor that there can be no doubt that he loves mischief just as much as Puck, particularly after his queen withheld “a toy” (the boy) from him. He has been dressed down by his queen, and his male ego is not having it. Oberon must have his revenge.

Light’s Oberon revels in his excessive and pompous masculinity, and by doing so, he gently exposes it as a front. He is overjoyed to have his Puck back from the love-potion “errand” and cannot wait to hear about Puck’s hijinks (“How now, mad spirit!/What night-rule now about this haunted grove?”). When Puck enthusiastically tells his master all about his diablerie, Oberon is as excited as a little boy the day before his birthday. Puck/Tennyson, in due actor and servant style, aims (and loves) to please, and Light/Oberon, no doubt, loves to be pleased. The moment Puck/Tennyson finishes his story and ends on “Titania waked and straightway loved an ass,” Oberon/Light jumps on a rope, swings himself around, exuberantly exclaims that “this falls out better than I could devise,” pivots, swings back only to jump off the rope, grab (yes, grab) Tennyson/Puck passionately, and kiss him in unconditional surrender.³¹⁷ The directorial choice to have Oberon/Light passionately lift (Light holds Tennyson in the air for quite some time) and

³¹⁷ I am referring here to the famous 1945 photograph (“V-J in Times Square”) of the kiss of Greta Zimmer and George Mendonsa to celebrate the end of World War II. Alfred Eisenstaedt’s photograph of the kiss on August 14, 1945, became the cover of *Life* magazine and was one of history’s most famous and reproduced covers. The kiss between the sailor and the nurse in Times Square seems passionate, but is controversial because the two were perfect strangers. Light/Oberon and Tennyson/Puck indulge in a perfect imitation of the famous kiss, albeit with less of the dark undertone of the photograph. With other actors, this may have been a disaster, but Light and Tennyson make it work. The kiss is passionate, but even here, it has an uncomfortable (to some) undertone due to the difference in status and power between the two. I would argue that it is John Light, in this instance, who makes the moment work: He commits completely to the passionate kiss. In doing so, he so overwhelms the audience along with Puck that they cannot help but fall under Oberon/Light’s spell. I found the moment both beautiful and breathtaking because I was, quite against my will, overpowered by Light’s all-in commitment and ardor. He acts with purpose, and it resonates across the entire Globe Theatre and the TV audience. Furthermore, Titania (the wonderful Michelle Terry, now the artistic director of the Globe Theatre) is so charismatic in her scenes with Oberon/Light that his hypermasculinity often crumbles in her presence.

kiss Puck/Tennyson works because Puck/Tennyson appears to enjoy the antics of his master. Quite a few critics did not know what to do with this “homo-erotic” side of Oberon/Light who, at the same time, appeared to be ultra-masculine and in love with his queen. Such criticism, I would argue, misses the point of the gesture entirely. Oberon is king of the fairies, and fairyland does not adhere to strict, dualistic categorizations (particularly not strict modern dualistic categorizations). Oberon/Light can be both homoerotic and heteroerotic. The audience certainly applauds this moment overwhelmingly. Oberon/Light performs the passionate kiss with such purpose and with a wonderful sense of humor that it steals the audience’s breath. The way Oberon/Light holds Puck/Tennyson in the air is both hilarious and impressive.

After Oberon/Light and Puck/Tennyson’s kiss, Hermia and Demetrius enter and argue dreadfully. It becomes clear to Oberon/Light and Puck/Tennyson (who both remain onstage throughout the lovers’ arguments) that something went awfully wrong. The way the lovers, Oberon, and Puck share the stage is highly choreographed. At first, Oberon/Light and Puck/Tennyson pretend to be trees. When Hermia almost pushes Demetrius off the edge of the stage, Oberon/Light and Puck/Tennyson come to the rescue pretending to hold Demetrius by their “branches.” The two mischievous fairies, therefore, are always fully present, but none of the lovers recognizes them or pays heed to them. So self-involved are the lovers that Oberon and Puck become a background forest. Oberon/Light and Puck/Tennyson are there, and they are not there. After Hermia has left Demetrius in a puff of angry smoke, Puck slyly attempts to stealthily tiptoe offstage (curled into a ball) to avoid Oberon’s wrath. Oberon/Light, however, notices what his sneaky servant is doing, and—with a capturing hand gesture—forces Puck to remain right where he is. Oberon/Light, it is implied, has a kind of mind power over Puck. Puck/Tennyson turns with the funniest Cheshire-cat grin on his face that spells, “Busted.” This moment causes great laughter among the audience. When Oberon/Light addresses Puck/Tennyson, Oberon is still pretending to be a tree, crouching and facing the audience, and Puck is still in a stealthy pose. Oberon/Light demands to know: “What hast thou done?” Puck/Tennyson maintains the Cheshire grin, which causes more laughter from the audience. Oberon/Light asks the question in a calm, paternal, but obviously annoyed manner that suggests entitlement. Oberon/Light, then, finds an audience member before him and hands her a wooden branch with a confident smile and a nod.

When an experienced actor, such as Light, addresses the audience, he is completely present. Oberon/Light must make eye contact with someone; he must connect with them to give her (or him) the branch. The way Light hands the wooden stick to a lady in the second row is flirtatious and powerful: He is so sure of himself that the audience must play along. Such presence and the ability to connect with the audience is impossible to fake. Light, as Oberon, has what Roach calls “It.”

Oberon/Light’s body language is so strong in this moment that it is broadcast throughout the entire theatre. For the critic who still believes that an actor can fake such presence, cognitive neuroscience has enlightening news: It is almost impossible to consciously control all body language:

We can’t micromanage charismatic body language, if our internal state is different from what we’re aiming to portray, sooner or later what’s called a micro expression will flash across your face. These split-second micro expressions . . . will be caught by observers. . . . And if there is an incongruence between our main expression and that micro expression, people will feel it on a subconscious level: their gut will tell them something is not quite right.³¹⁸ (cf. Cabane, “Charismatic Body Language,” *The Charisma Myth* 22)

In other words, what Light as Oberon exudes in this instance must come from a genuine source and skill: “Because what’s in your mind shows up in your body and because people will catch even the briefest micro expression, to be effective, charismatic behaviors must originate from the mind” (Cabane 22). Better put, charismatic behavior must come from the body–mind. For an actor to share a state of mind, it must always come from the spirit of generosity. Light, as Oberon, in this instance, allows the audience to share in his charisma. His connection with the audience is not only strong because Light is a strong actor, but also because Light knows how to share his presence, charisma, and state of mind with the audience. Puck/Tennyson benefits greatly from his scene partner’s generosity and willingness to share “the play.”

³¹⁸ Cabane quotes a Stanford study that demonstrates that when people actively try to hide their real feelings, they provoke a threat response in others (cf. Cabane 22).

In response to his master's rebuke and accusation of having ruined the entire love juice plot, Puck/Tennyson goes into his obsequious servant mode and professes—arms wildly waving about—his innocence: “Then fate o'er-rules, that, one man holding troth, A million fail, confounding oath on oath.” Not even a fairy, exclaims Puck, can interfere with fate. On the last word, “oath,” Puck/Tennyson takes a big breath as though he has a great deal more to say for his innocence. Instead, he glances helplessly up at his master and swings his arms toward him as though giving him the stage. This random gesture of holding his breath gets laughs from the audience because it translates into a kind of: “Do with me as you will, Master” artlessness. The audience is aware of Puck's artfulness, but because he delightfully acts his innocence, he still gets laughs.³¹⁹ When Oberon/Light gives Puck the expected dressing down, Puck/Tennyson does his best rendition of a highly annoyed teenager. He throws a feeble tantrum by walking around in a blasé, moping gesture. It is as though Puck were saying, “Well, here it comes, the lecture, the homily, the bromides, can't escape it, just let it wash over me.” One of Puck/Tennyson's funniest moments is his reaction to being sent on yet another errand after bungling the original: Puck/Tennyson says: “I go, I go; look how I go/Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow,” but what he does is the opposite. He stands in one spot and does some half-hearted ballet arm movements on: “I go, I go; look how I go.” On “swifter than arrow,” Puck/Tennyson very slowly turns to go. After “arrow from the Tartar's bow,” Puck/Tennyson employs the high note of any teenage tantrum: the dramatic exit. He pushes the curtain aside with a gesture that leaves no doubt he is miffed.

In the very next moment—for Puck is a fairy and can run around the earth in forty minutes, says Shakespeare—Puck/Tennyson has shaken his teenage moodiness and is back to up-to-no-good-happy-fairy mode. He runs a circle around his master, exploding with enthusiasm for having set things right now even though the humans are sublime idiots: “[W]hat fools these mortals be.” Puck/Tennyson, on the right, and Oberon/Light, on the left, now swiftly clamber up

³¹⁹ Repeatedly throughout my thesis, I make the point that fiction can render a greater truth. In this instance, everyone in the audience knows that Puck is a little rascal and not innocent at all. It does not matter, as the audience's laughter proves. The audience appreciates the effort. Everyone knows Puck is not innocent, but the way he puts on a cute and showy performance of innocence is still greatly entertaining. Moreover, it renders him somewhat innocent for the moment. As I stated in my chapter on Sonnet 138, good fiction can create a new reality. I will make this point again in my chapter on *Henry V—The Hollow Crown*. The power of fiction, the power of playing, and the power of an actor's effort to put on a good show cannot be overstated.

ropes on each side to morph into the background forest again while watching the next “human” spectacle. Needless to say, it is a second disaster. The four lovers almost come to blows with one another, and when they leave the stage, it is understood that they all properly hate each other.

Act 3, Scene 2, continued:

OBERON

This is thy negligence: still thou mistakest,
Or else committ'st thy knaveries willfully.

PUCK

Believe me, king of shadows, I mistook.
Did not you tell me I should know the man
By the Athenian garment be had on?
And so far blameless proves my enterprise,
That I have 'nointed an Athenian's eyes;
And so far am I glad it so did sort
As this their jangling I esteem a sport.

OBERON

Thou see'st these lovers seek a place to fight:
Hie therefore, Robin, overcast the night;
The starry welkin cover thou anon
With drooping fog as black as Acheron,
And lead these testy rivals so astray
As one come not within another's way.
Like to Lysander sometime frame thy tongue,
Then stir Demetrius up with bitter wrong;
And sometime rail thou like Demetrius;
And from each other look thou lead them thus,
Till o'er their brows death-counterfeiting sleep
With leaden legs and batty wings doth creep:
Then crush this herb into Lysander's eye;
Whose liquor hath this virtuous property,
To take from thence all error with his might,
And make his eyeballs roll with wonted sight.
When they next wake, all this derision
Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision,
And back to Athens shall the lovers wend,
With league whose date till death shall never end.
Whiles I in this affair do thee employ,
I'll to my queen and beg her Indian boy;
And then I will her charmed eye release
From monster's view, and all things shall be peace.

PUCK

My fairy lord, this must be done with haste,
For night's swift dragons cut the clouds full fast,
And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger;
At whose approach, ghosts, wandering here and there,
Troop home to churchyards: damned spirits all,
That in crossways and floods have burial,
Already to their wormy beds are gone;
For fear lest day should look their shames upon,
They willfully themselves exile from light
And must for aye consort with black-brow'd night.

OBERON

But we are spirits of another sort:
I with the morning's love have oft made sport,
And, like a forester, the groves may tread,
Even till the eastern gate, all fiery-red,
Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams,
Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams.
But, notwithstanding, haste; make no delay:
We may effect this business yet ere day.

Exit

PUCK

Up and down, up and down,
I will lead them up and down:
I am fear'd in field and town:
Goblin, lead them up and down.
Here comes one.

When Oberon/Light angrily turns to Puck and accuses him of either being daft or making these mistakes on purpose, Puck/Tennyson, with all the naiveté he can muster, protests that it is not his fault: "Believe me king of shadows, I mistook." Puck/Tennyson looks at the ground while he says, "Believe me." Puck's words say, "Believe me," but Puck/Tennyson's body language says: "Believe me not." Puck/Tennyson plays with a nearby column while bowing his head, a technique five-year-olds employ when caught in a lie and trying to work their way out of it. Puck/Tennyson then innocently "traps" his master by asking him if he did not tell him that he would recognize his man by his Athenian garments, to which Oberon/Light retorts in a deadpan mumble: "Oh, yeah." This is not in the original text, and it is the kind of thing that drives Shakespeare purists to sound and fury. However, it is very likely that Shakespeare's actors

employed a few impromptu utterances³²⁰ if they suited the moment. The audience of the play found the “Oh, yeah” funny. It implicates Oberon/Light in all the shenanigans: After all, it is Oberon who starts the trouble and who sends his servant to cause it—a servant Oberon knows to be fond of troublemaking. It also allows Oberon/Light to show his humorous, self-deprecating side. Puck/Tennyson, victoriously, turns to the audience to exclaim, “And so far blameless proves my enterprise.” He follows up his “blamelessness” by roguishly (or better, “puckishly”) adding that, no matter his bumbling interferences with the mortals’ lives, he is glad it turned out the way it did. After all, it is a jolly good hobby to watch the “human spectacle”: “And so far am I glad it so did sort/As this their jangling I esteem a sport.” On “jangling,” Puck/Tennyson swings himself toward the audience on a rope. Oberon/Light, recalling his status as king of the fairies, now orders Puck to lead the lovers astray to keep them from fighting, or worse, from killing each other: “When they next wake, all this derision/ Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision.” “Make it look like a dream,” orders Oberon/Light so “all things shall be peace” again.

Puck/Tennyson now grows somber. He reminds his master that the night is almost over, and it is time for “ghosts” and “damned spirits” to roam the earth and go home to their graves on “crossways” and at the bottoms of rivers. People buried at crosswalks were suicides,³²¹ criminals and, not implausibly, actors (Mamet 6; Barish 192, 321). The latter were branded as lowly

³²⁰ It is the nature of theatre to run through various possibilities of how to play a scene. Shakespeare worked directly with actors whom he knew very well. It is entirely possible to assume that Shakespeare allowed his actors to experiment with his lines to some extent. At times, he may have even included a good line-addition from an actor into his script. While Shakespeare is not Hamlet, Hamlet’s famous irritation with actors who go too far with improvisation—n.b. Hamlet’s scene with the players, Act 3, Scene 2—shows that Shakespeare certainly had experience with it. Like contemporary writers, Shakespeare arguably appreciated an actor’s suitable insights and additions to some extent, but not to the point of self-indulgence. Will Kemp was known to improvise a lot (Mabillard, “William Kempe,” *Shakespeare Online* 2000) and some of Kemp’s “additions” may not have been welcomed by Shakespeare (n.b. Hamlet’s cutting admonishment of ever-improvising clowns: “And let those that play/ your clowns speak no more than is set down for them” (3.2.40-42).

³²¹ From the Middle Ages until the 1800s, people who committed suicide were buried at the crossroads or on unconsecrated ground alongside criminals and other outcasts. Often a river was their burial site because drowning was a common way of committing suicide. There was great shame attached to suicide; indeed, it was illegal. The practice of burying suicides at crossroads was common until about 1820. In Willa Cather’s novel *My Antonia* (1918), for example, the character Mr. Shimerda is still buried at the crossroads after killing himself. While it is not as well documented, it is very likely that actors were also buried at crossroads or outside cemeteries because they were considered outcasts by the Church: “Actors used to be buried at a crossroads with a stake through the heart” (Mamet 6). David Mamet’s quote about actors may be somewhat exaggerated but the idea of actors being buried with other outcasts is not at all implausible. The Catholic Church excommunicated actors, allowing them neither sacrament nor burial (cf. Barish 192, 321). Molière, as an example—despite being the scion of a prestigious family—was buried at night on semi-unconsecrated ground because he was an actor.

“rogues and vagabonds” by a royal edict of Queen Elizabeth I. Puck confesses that he fears these doomed spirits of the night. As the quintessential Protean performer, Puck seems to fear the ostracism imposed by human communities, an ostracism that affects actors. There is, then, something distinctly self-referential about Puck’s fear of “damned spirits.” Puck, the fairy trickster, is linked to the underworld and the dark side of life, namely, death. Puck draws attention to the fate of all those who transgress human laws and were denied Christian burial and eternal rest. Puck/Tennyson recites the lines in both a sincere and ominous manner. Gone is the Puck from seconds ago, jauntily swinging on ropes. There is real fear in his eyes. The moment is chilling and sinister. Puck/Tennyson is terrified of the doomed spirits, who must wander the earth and hide their shame from the light of day. Oberon/Light must calm Puck/Tennyson by reminding him that they, as fairies, are “spirits of another kind.”³²² Oberon/Light soothes Puck by saying that they are not like these doomed spirits. They can walk in the light. Meanwhile, Oberon/Light pats Puck/Tennyson’s neck as if to soothe him. In this moment, Oberon and Puck’s relationship is that of a father and a scared child, adding another layer of complexity and resisting categorization. In the next moment, Oberon/Light embraces Puck/Tennyson tenderly in a more amorous gesture. Puck/Tennyson talks himself back into his characteristic jaunty and mischievous mood. He lingers in sincerity and gloom on the first “up and down,” but on the “second,” he skips and swings as if in a ballet again. On “I am fear'd in field and town/Goblin, lead them up and down/Here comes one,” Puck is back to his puckish self. Puck/Tennyson demonstrates in this moment how, through action and embodiment, states of mind, moods, and emotions can indeed be affected and changed. He “swings” himself into a more cheerful frame of mind.

³²² Oberon’s line also carries meta-theatrical meaning. On the surface, he tells Puck that they are not like the suicides, rogues, and vagabonds buried at crossroads. However, since actors were part of the official group called “rogues and vagabonds,” Oberon’s line takes on double meaning. He could also be reminding Puck and the audience that actors, because they are “spirits of another kind,” ought not to be part of such a group.

Epilogue: Act 5, Scene 1

PUCK

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber'd here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend.
If you pardon, we will mend.
And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearned luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,
We will make amends ere long.
Else the Puck a liar call.
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.

Puck/Tennyson, it is important to say, speaks the epilogue with absolute sincerity. Puck/Tennyson's epilogue is a genuine apology and a supposition. Gone is the impish Puck; gone are the athletics, ballet moves, and quirky teenage poses. Puck/Tennyson turns the acting dial all the way down to genuineness. So complete is the switch that it is somewhat eerie and almost incredible to see Tennyson's Puck go from teenage-petulant-sprite to a heavy-hearted, earnest, old soul. Puck's epilogue is often spoken in a tongue-in-cheek manner as if to underscore that it is ("wink-wink") Puck, after all, who calls himself "honest" and insists he is not a "liar." However, Puck/Tennyson's choice to offer the audience utter earnestness at the end of the play adds gravitas to the character. After all, the fact that Puck describes himself as honest after having been dishonest throughout the entire play is already in the text and easily understood; it need not be indicated. Puck's apology is, of course, a non-pology or, as Marjorie Garber calls it, a politician's "non-apology apology" (cf. Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare* xviii). Tennyson/Puck demonstrates in this instance how much more effective a genuinely spoken apology (despite being a non-pology) is over one spoken tongue in cheek. In her study of *Dream in Shakespeare*, Garber points out one of the most profound meanings—to me—of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

Puck's closing address to the audience is characteristic of the tone of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; it seems to *trivialize* what it obliquely *praises*. . . . Puck is making an important analogy between the play and the dream state. . . . [MND] reverses the categories of reality and illusion, sleeping and waking, art and nature, to touch upon the central theme of the dream which is *truer than reality*.³²³ . . . Puck offers the traditional apologia at the play's end; if the audience is dissatisfied, it may choose to regard the play as only a "dream" or trifle and not a real experience at all. (Garber, *Dream* 59, emphasis mine)

In his closing speech, Puck says on the surface to his audience and patrons (to those whom the actors depend on for money and existence): "If you did not like it, don't worry. Just consider it a dream, a flight of fancy, and a non-entity. We will make up for it in the next play." However, this apologia is laced with a dark undertone and a touch of haughty resentment for those who have no imagination, for those who do not understand that the play was decidedly not a dream but a revelation and a transformation. To those in the audience with imagination, Puck's epilogue says the following: "[S]leep in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the gateway not to folly but to revelation and reordering"; Puck's epilogue says that "reason is impoverished without imagination, and [that] we must accept the dimension of dream in our lives. Without this acknowledgment, there can be no real self-knowledge" (cf. Garber, *Dream* 60).

³²³ Hugh Bonneville also emphasizes the point Garber makes in *Shakespeare Uncovered*. He states that Shakespeare is asking his audience to question the realness of reality vs. illusion. Those who do not wish to think about the questions Shakespeare asks in *MND* may write the play off as an idle dream. However, the play asks those who are curious about the world to question reality vs. illusion and how the two are interwoven (cf. Bonneville, *Shakespeare Uncovered*, PBS 2015).

Puck cunningly says to those who have eyes to see, ears to hear,³²⁴ and imagination to comprehend the meaning of the play: There is, in this world, “more than cool reason ever comprehends,”³²⁵ as Theseus said earlier (*MND* 5.1.6). The paradox, as Garber underscores, is that the dream is the very thing that opens the eyes of those willing to see. The dream, says Puck stealthily, is *it!* It is not an “idle theme.” The dream is a greater reality that offers “heightened insight.” The “[d]ream is truer than reality because it has . . . transforming power” (cf. Garber, *Dream* 62). There is something deeply disturbing about a character who has been jumping, ballet dancing, twirling, stretching, skipping, waving, and joking nonstop for the two-hour traffic of the stage with hardly a moment of seriousness when he now, during the epilogue, switches to absolute sincerity. Gone is the Puck who does Pilates stretching exercises before he runs a girdle round the earth in forty minutes. Puck/Tennyson’s epilogue unsettles the audience because, for one, Tennyson demonstrates his range by going from teenage-tantrum-sprite to thoughtful youth; secondly, Puck/Tennyson’s genuineness is unnerving because the speech, itself, is a minefield littered with veiled resentment for those who have no imagination (it’s nothing but an idle dream), with an oblique threat (if . . . if . . . if . . . else . . . if), and false modesty (the actors/fairies/“shadows” have “unearned luck” if the audience applauds). If Puck speaks the epilogue not by stepping out as an actor, but as Puck the mischievous sprite, then he does indeed demand the audience applaud the actors. Alternatively, he will do as Puck is wont to do and meddle with their lives. Even if Puck steps out of character and speaks as the actor—which is what I believe

³²⁴ I am referring to Bottom’s funny speech about his dream. He appears to confuse a biblical text—St. Paul’s account of the glory God will bestow upon humankind (1 Corinthians 2:9)—by mixing senses: “The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste. [.]” (*MND* 4.1.214–217). The question is: Is Bottom’s synesthesia of the senses truly a mixup, or is the speech more than a blunder? Bottom describes his dream in paradoxical terms that demonstrate that there is more to human perception than what we know. In his dream, the eyes heard; the ears saw. Perhaps the dream is a greater reality than the one assumed to be in front of us, Shakespeare seems to ask. Bottom’s description of his dream sounds funny at first but it is loaded with deeper meaning. The fact that Bottom’s language completely breaks down when he attempts to capture his dream and describe it to the audience shows how difficult it is to put into words anything that escapes dualistic logic. Bottom’s choice to turn his dream into music instead of trying to put it into words is also telling because music eludes strict interpretation and dualism.

³²⁵ Theseus arrogantly speaks this line about madmen. The inside joke of the play would be, if one were to consider such an interpretation, that it is Theseus who does not see beyond anything obvious before him. He may be reasonable within the scope of the play and era, but he is shown to be the audience member who has no imagination. He is rude throughout the play-within-the-play, and anything outside his perceived way of thinking escapes him. He speaks about madmen, lovers, and poets and their lack of sense, but in fact it is Theseus who lacks a sense of wonder and imagination.

to be the case in this production—Tennyson’s approach is effective in its eeriness. He now presents the audience with a totally different and alien character, a character that is neither here nor there, an actor playing a fairy twice removed from “reality” (or is he?). “

But the fairies are inherently inhabitants of an in-between world, neither wholly fictive nor wholly explicable in natural or even psychological terms... . [The fairies exist] in half-light, between sleeping and waking... . [They are creative spirits in the] half-light of the subconscious, shadows in place of and greater than the substance they portend.

(Garber, *Dream* 68-69)

During this moment, Puck/Tennyson is more than the gossamer-like insubstantial sprite that has entertained the audience throughout the play. Here, Puck is full of substance and philosophical meaning because he leaves the audience with a questioning spirit.

Puck/Tennyson sows wonder among the audience in his epilogue. Is the audience to think of this new and strange being as the actor Tennyson, or is Tennyson still Puck, albeit a non-recognizable, solemn one? As bewilderingly somber as Puck/Tennyson is in the epilogue, he seems to say to the audience, “I am transformed, and I hope you were as well.” Neither does Puck/Tennyson wink when he says that he is “an honest Puck,” nor does he engage in any kind of misleading gestures or body language on: “Else the Puck a liar call.” In fact, Puck/Tennyson raises his arms in a gesture I can only describe as devout on the “liar” line, and he is one hundred percent believable. He offers the audience a genuine apology and a “fare-you-well.” He strikes a note of peace and magic with his delivery of the epilogue. The other actors are all onstage with Puck/Tennyson and join him in hand gestures of tranquility, goodwill, and protection. The actors move into formation to bid the audience good night with a reverential tai chi routine in lieu of the usual rambunctious jig. Dominic Dromgoole, the director, means to move the audience into a deeper mood of reflection and calmness. The choice of using tai chi as the final “dance” is a

brilliant way of finding concord in discord.³²⁶ Tai chi is considered meditation in motion, but it is, at its core, a martial art. While floating along to the tai chi movements, the actors join in an ethereal chant. Oberon/Light had earlier blessed the house while candles were being lit. It is in a spirit of blessedness and generosity (the tai chi dance) and a darker undertone (the somber Celtic chant) that the actors take leave of the audience. Thus, the “weak and idle theme” resonates deeply with the audience and transcends the idea that it was nothing but a “dream.”

9) Helen Mirren: Bittersweet Finality and Liminality

Helen Mirren: Prospera, *The Tempest*, directed by Julie Taymor, produced by Miramax, 2010.

Act 4, Scene 1

(Prospera addresses Prince Ferdinand and Miranda—Ferdinand first, then both)

PROSPERA:

You do look, my son, in a moved sort,
As if you were dismay'd: be cheerful, sir.
Our **revels**³²⁷ now are ended. These our **actors**,
As I foretold you, were all **spirits** and
Are **melted into air**, into **thin air**:
And, like the **baseless fabric of this vision**,

³²⁶ In Act 5, Scene 1, Theseus asks the court in bewilderment how to make sense of the following contradictions put down by the Mechanicals who have described their play “Pyramus & Thisbe” in paradoxical terms:

And his love Thisbe, very tragical mirth.”
“Merry” and “tragical”? “Tedious” and “brief”?
That is hot ice and wondrous strange snow!
How shall we find the concord of this discord?
(*MND* 5.1.61-65)

Theseus uses musical terms (concord/discord) to try to find a joint “key” that combines comedy and tragedy, dream and reality, peace and war. He is not only seeking to make sense of the Mechanicals’ play. More importantly, he is seeking to have a play performed that “makes light” of how he overpowered Hyppolita. Theseus is trying to “resolve” discord into concord. By using a tai chi “dance,” Dromgoole beautifully manifests that the play as a whole ends as a comedy, but it retains its darker undertones of violence (tai chi being a martial art). After all, music, like acting “resists linguistic appropriation” (cf. Riquet 77-78), particularly patriarchal linguistic appropriation.

³²⁷ The language of the theatre is marked in **pink**. The language of dreams is marked in **blue**. At times, the language of the theatre and the language of dreams overlap, in which case I tried to mark the more poignant one: “Revels,” for example, could belong to both: the language of the theatre and of dreams. “Cloud-capp’d towers,” “gorgeous palaces,” and “solemn temples” are also terms that could belong to a dream world or to theatre scenery/a setting. “Rack” could mean a dream-like wisp of cloud or vapor, and it could also be a pun on a “shipwreck,” which would make it part of the language of the theatre and its scenery/props. Shakespeare often aligns the world of the play with the world of dreams, as in *Hamlet*, for example, in the “dream of passion” speech (*Hamlet*, 2.2.576–80). “Hamlet seems to equate the actor’s art, and the world that art creates, with dream” (Mandel 66). I will explain the dream/reality and art/reality aspect shortly.



The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. Sir, I am vex'd;
Bear with my weakness; my brain is troubled:
Be not disturb'd with my infirmity:
If you be pleased, retire into my cell
And there repose: a turn or two I'll walk,
To still my beating mind.

The farewell speech that is, and is not, a farewell³²⁸—the play continues long after the speech—must be both bitter and sweet. Bittersweet is exactly the way Helen Mirren speaks this beautiful and haunting speech. In Julie Taymor's movie, Prospero is Prospera, which works faultlessly. Prospero³²⁹ is an enigmatic character: As Jerome Mandel puts it, Puck and Prospero are “[t]he most magical of Shakespeare's characters, those who cross the boundaries between reality and illusion” (cf. Mandel 67). *The Tempest*—much like *Hamlet*—depends on the audience's alignment with Prospero: If Prospero is portrayed as too aloof and too stuck in his ideal world of magic and books,³³⁰ the audience will have trouble following him. Equally, if Prospero is

³²⁸ The amount of criticism that questions the link between Shakespeare's connection with Prospero's revels speech has, as Robert Egan points out, become a cliché (cf. Egan 171). I agree with Egan when he says, “Whether or not *The Tempest* was chronologically the last of Shakespeare's plays is a debatable and ultimately an irrelevant question” (Egan 171). However, I do concede that the speculation about this contentious point is simply tempting, but too simplistic. For my purposes, the point is not wildly important, as the play and character of Prospero must stand on their own. However, like Egan, I completely agree that “there is an unmistakable sense of finality permeating the work [*The Tempest*]” (cf. Egan 171), including the revels speech. Furthermore, I see the actor, director, and artist in all of Shakespeare's works, and very much so in *The Tempest*. The play continues for some time after the revels speech. While the latter is laced with finality, it is decidedly not the final goodbye of the play. The final farewell is the epilogue. This distinction is an important one, as I explain in this chapter.

³²⁹ I will refer to the character as Prospero when I speak of *The Tempest* in general and as Prospero/a when I refer to both Shakespeare's original character and Mirren's interpretation. I will use “Prospera” when I solely refer to Mirren's portrayal of the character. The pronouns are adjusted to the best of my ability. At times, when quoting other critics, I must fall back on referring to Prospero as “he/him/his.”

³³⁰ I have seen many productions of *The Tempest*, from amateur productions at schools to West End productions. In most of these, no matter if they were amateur or professional productions, I was moved by Ariel and Miranda, very often by Caliban, but not so much by Prospero. I found that Prospero is either portrayed as very aloof (or a very far-out hipster) or as very, very angry (which is hardly ever convincing in acting as an emotion by itself). Mirren does not fall into either extreme. She honors the part of Prospera with the complexity it deserves.

portrayed as an angry, bitter old man given to outbursts of temper, the audience cannot sympathize with him. Very often, the audience senses that there is something lacking in Prospero's motivations. The actor portraying Prospero is tasked with instilling the character with great purpose and humanity for the audience to join his journey. The actor's portrayal of Prospero must answer two big questions: "Why is he giving up his magic, and why does he choose to forgive his enemies in the end after setting out on a journey of revenge?" When these two questions remain unanswered, the portrayal of Prospero is not convincing. It is a difficult part because Prospero is both of and not of this world. He exists—and does not exist—in two different worlds: the world of dreams and artistic creation, and the everyday world. The audience must be able to understand the paradox of Prospero in both worlds.

Helen Mirren instills her Prospera with great humanity and, at the same time, a kind of alienness. Mirren's Prospera is both earth and air. Mirren's interpretation of Prospera leaves no doubt that she does what she does for her child. As flawed as her actions may be, Mirren's Prospera gives up magic for her daughter Miranda. Her despondence over having to give up her magic reveals her character's great humanity. Furthermore, Prospera/Mirren allows her character to be genuinely affected by Ariel (beautifully portrayed by Ben Whishaw). When the angelic Ariel/Whishaw tells her—in a most heartfelt manner—that he would be moved by the sight of the stricken Antonio, Sebastian, and Alonso, Prospera/Mirren listens: "[I]f you now beheld them, your affections would become tender. . . . Mine would, [Mam], were I human" (cf. *The Tempest* 5.1.21–26). Prospera/Mirren allows the tender words of Ariel/Whishaw to truly sink in and move her. Prospera/Mirren permits her character to grow from vengefulness to forgiveness, in great part because of Ariel/Whishaw's softening effect on her. Whishaw's gift to the character Ariel is to radiate love toward others even when they behave abysmally. It was as though he were teaching his master how to be merciful. The wonderful rapport between Prospera/Mirren and Ariel/Whishaw makes it utterly believable that Prospera would transform toward the end and declare that "the rarer action is/in virtue than in vengeance" (*Tempest* 5.1.35–36). Whishaw brings intense vulnerability and tenderness to the part of Ariel that spills over to Prospera/Mirren during each scene they share. As an actor, Prospera/Mirren makes a strong choice to allow Ariel/

Whishaw to overwhelm her with pure love. The love Ariel/Whishaw gives to Prospera/Mirren throughout the play stays with her, even in her melancholy soliloquies, such as the revels speech.

Prospera/Mirren manages to speak the famous revels speech with a touch of serenity and despair. She is both hopeful³³¹ (the Ariel/Whishaw in her) and hopeless, buoyant, and forlorn. This is possible. The revels speech demands complexity from the actor speaking it. Prospera/Mirren has a wild but wistful appearance in the film's interpretation of *The Tempest*. She has forgone all make-up³³² in most scenes, her hair moves freely, and her costumes are a kind of "Elizabethan Punk,"³³³ as the *Wall Street Journal* fittingly described them. They are armor-like, but feminine, and mostly in shades of black and gray. The costumes are both futuristic-looking and old-world Elizabethan. This is particularly suitable for Prospera, who exists inside and outside of time. The revels speech is often considered Shakespeare's farewell to the theatre (via Prospero), but it is important to remember that even if the latter interpretation were accurate, the speech does not occur at the end of the play. The moment before this scene of *The Tempest*, Prospero conjured a beautiful, dreamy masque in honor of Miranda and Ferdinand's engagement. In Taymor's *Tempest*, Prospera conjures a kind of psychedelic dream spectacle, only to suffer a rude awakening: She forgot that Caliban is plotting to kill her. Reality has caught up with Prospera in just the way it did when she indulged in her passion for books and magic back in Milan. Back then, her proclivity to let herself be absorbed into a dream world of the imagination cost her the throne. She failed to pay attention to the intrigue around her in the court of Milan.

³³¹ To play the revels speech as a nihilistic one-note song of gloom is a mistake, I would argue. It makes the speech uninspiring and dull, and it is nothing of the sort. While many critics have found the speech utterly nihilistic (there is some of that), for an actor to stay in one lane of moperly is a weak choice. The audience will either fall asleep or require Prozac afterward. Prospera/Mirren makes a strong choice by lacing bitterness with serenity and sorrow with a touch of lightheartedness. She moves from airs and graces to gentle humility. Her revels speech never veers into total moroseness, but she reveals a kind of grace in her suffering. The latter is much more interesting to watch than nihilistic defeatism.

³³² Mirren tells a funny anecdote about how director Julie Taymor screamed at her for having snuck a little makeup onto her face for a closeup. Mirren admits, very self-deprecatingly, that Taymor was right in demanding a clean look. Mirren states that, when she later watched herself in the film, no makeup was the right choice (Mirren, "Helen Mirren Teaches Acting" *MasterClass* 2020).

³³³ "Elizabethan Punk" is a great way to describe Prospera's costumes (Binkley, "Shakespeare in Studs," *WSJ Online* 19 Nov. 2010). I would describe them as a mixture of Alexander McQueen's eccentric animal-like creations (the harpy, birdlike look) and Balmain's famous military padded shoulders. This Gothic-Elizabethan steampunk look gives Mirren a feminine, sensual, but also powerful warrior appearance. This is important, because the costumes perfectly express Mirren's masculine/feminine, sensual/powerful, vulnerable/strong, and vengeful/wistful portrait of Prospera.

She failed to live in “reality”³³⁴ and instead allowed her magic to become an escape and a narcotic. As Stephen Orgel puts it, “Prospero finds himself once again relinquishing his [worldly] power to the vanities of his art” (Orgel, *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Tempest* 50). The moment Prospera catches herself falling victim to her own weakness once more, she sounds as though she is more upset with herself than she is with Caliban: “Avoid! No more!” shouts Prospera/Mirren furiously and with a touch of self-loathing. In Taymor’s production, Prospera/Mirren stands on a cliff while she gives the speech, which is a wonderful choice, because she figuratively and literally talks herself off a cliff throughout the speech.

When Prospera/Mirren addresses Ferdinand/Carney in the ensuing speech, she seems to be projecting her own anxiety onto Ferdinand. The latter looks stunned at Prospera/Mirren’s angry outburst. The way Prospera/Mirren addresses Ferdinand/Carney is as if she were just as much talking to herself with the bitterness of someone who has used theatrical magic as an escape, as opposed to a transformative exploration of finding a higher (or truer) self. She speaks the opening lines of the speech soothingly, but also questioningly and with frustration. “You do look, my son, in a moved sort/As if you were dismay’d” is spoken lowly. The “be cheerful” may just as much be directed at Prospera herself as at Ferdinand. When Prospera/Mirren moves to the famous part of the speech (“our revels now are ended”), she begins to sound very dark. The “actors” in “these our actors” are spoken with a note of bitterness and contempt. Mirren/Prospera

³³⁴ I added quotation marks because, as I see it and as many scholars have argued (e.g., Marjorie Garber in *Dream in Shakespeare*, Jerome Mandel, and Robert Egan) Shakespeare always questions what is more real: everyday reality, the reality of dreams or, of course, the reality of the theatre. Recently, science has joined the debate to claim that we may not be experiencing the world as it is, but as we need it to survive. Shakespeare may have been prescient in respect to reality: Currently, scientific books question the nature of reality, such as books on biocentrism by Robert Lanza. Neuroscientist Donald D. Hoffman also questions the nature of reality in both his *TED* talk on the topic and throughout his book *The Case Against Reality: How Evolution Hid the Truth from Our Eyes* of 2020. Hoffman maintains the physical world is a byproduct of consciousness. What many critics used to laugh off as pseudoscience is now being seriously considered by highly respected scientists. Strict Cartesian separations are being questioned and, very often, proven wrong. Donald D. Hoffman says the following:

Evolution does not favor veridical or accurate perceptions. Those perceptions of reality go extinct. ... We do not see reality as it is. We are shaped with tricks and hacks that keep us alive. ... Dare to recognize that perception is not about seeing truth, it’s about having kids. ... Once we let go of our massively intuitive but massively false assumption about the nature of reality, it opens up new ways to think about life’s greatest mystery. I bet that reality will turn out to be more fascinating and unexpected than we ever imagined. (Hoffman, *TED Talk*, 2015)

The questions that *The Tempest* and *MND* ask the audience were perceptive and insightful then, and they are so now. Besides, these indirect questions trigger audience participation because the nature of reality is something everyone contemplates at some point.

chooses to bring out the meta-theatricality and self-reflexiveness of *The Tempest*, which is engrossing. After all, the irony of speaking the line about actors with formidable hauteur is that, of course, in every production of the play, an actor plays Prospero/a, and it is an actor speaking these lines to another actor. In order to draw attention to the ironic paradox of the disparaging of actors by actors, Prospera adds a touch of lightheartedness to an otherwise gloomy line. A tone of pride is fused with self-loathing. Prospera/Mirren brings out the relevance of dreams and artistic creation at the very moment she brushes them off with disdain. Marjorie Garber reads Prospero's "celebrated speech" as having both a "regretful and proud" tone (cf. Garber, *Dream* 209). Mirren/Prospera brings out this "humble" arrogance very well. She continues the line about the actors being spirits who melted into thin air with almost a whisper that implies: *They are nothing, these actors portraying spirits*. "It was just a dream," Prospera/Mirren seems to say, while asking—the way Puck does—with an earnest subtextual undertone, "But *was it* (?!)."

To Shakespearean scholars, it is well-known that a dream is never *just* a dream in Shakespeare. It carries great meaning. Sometimes, it is a metaphor. At other times, it is a means of transformation (metamorphosis) and a means of gleaning self-knowledge or a higher truth. Most of the audiences of the film *The Tempest* may not recognize the meaning of Shakespearean dreams and their transformative power. However, they do not need to know this in order to grasp the actor's meaning. The manner in which Prospera/Mirren speaks the revels speech makes it abundantly clear that, when her character trivializes and scoffs at the world of dreams, theatrics, and magic, she also knows the true power and meaningfulness of this world. Importantly, Shakespeare's Prospero speaks of magic not as his "hobby" or another kind of amateur divertimento. Prospero refers to his magic as his "art," with himself as the director, producer, and actor. Therefore, an actor saying, "It was just acting" and a magician saying, "It was just magical dream" *must* be understood as imbued with double meaning. The double meaning Prospera/Mirren hints at in the revels speech is not quotidian meta-theatrical humor. It is a profound understanding of "reality/real life" being just as real *and* unreal as the world of dreams/magic/theatrics. Garber explains this beautifully: "[T]he two framing phrases, 'like the baseless fabric of this vision,' and 'like this insubstantial pageant faded,' reinforce one another and contain between them three lines which, though fictive and 'poetic' in tone, are at once regretful

and proud, a glorification of man and an acknowledgement of his radical limitations” (Garber, *Dream* 209). In short, both worlds (the world of real life and the world of dreams) are “at once illusory and real” (Garber, *Dream* 209). One reinforces the other, and it is the interplay of the two worlds that creates meaning.

The revels speech is deeply philosophical and profound. It is not solely about the ineluctability of death; it is also a meditation on the interwovenness of the world of art/dreams/magic and the real world. Even though the play persistently draws attention to the illusion onstage via meta-theatrical terms and self-referential theatrical awareness, the audience is indirectly asked to question just how real “reality” is.³³⁵ Nowhere is the interwovenness between the world of art/dream/magic and the real world more pronounced than during the revels speech in *The Tempest*. The speech hints that the world of dreams and illusion and the real world are never quite apart; the two worlds coexist in a kind of web that challenges conventional notions of their separateness. The revels speech is truly a revelation: It reveals the:

fraught division between reality and illusion. . . . The audience is made mindful of the pervasiveness and, occasionally, the treachery of illusion; but, even as this happens, [*The Tempest*] refuse[s] to offer a vision of reality which is entirely severed from the inexplicable. . . . The hesitation between the rational and the illusory, between the natural and the supernatural . . . is a central dynamic [of the play]. (cf. Lee, “Affinities Between Goethe’s *Faust* and Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*,” *MLR* 204)

The actor playing Prospero, I would argue, must bring out both the questioning spirit of the speech, its bittersweet sense of finality, and the paradoxical precariousness of the hazy line

³³⁵ Puck’s epilogue is similar in asking the audience to question reality. When Puck says that “this weak and idle theme [is] no more yielding than a dream,” he is slyly drawing attention to the interwovenness of dream and reality. After all, the “dream” in *MND* is often more real than real Athenian life in its effects on the characters: The magic has a “real” effect on the lovers, as an example. Puck is suggesting to those in the audience with imagination to question the line between dream and reality, as well as to question the realness of reality. Simultaneously, he is saying to those in the audience who did not pay attention or have no imagination: No worries, it was just a dream. Sleep on. You’ve missed the point, so forget you.

between reality and illusion.³³⁶ Prospero must express that there may be something “more real than reality” (Lee 206). Prospero must reveal to the audience his deep understanding of both worlds³³⁷ and his quiet despondence over having to choose one because, in the end, not even the mage can “transcend the terms of his humanity” (Corfield, quoting E. M. W. Tillyard 46).

Prospero knows the paradox, as William Hazlitt recognized in 1817: “As the preternatural part has the air of reality, and almost haunts the imagination with a sense of truth, the real characters and events partake of the wildness of a dream” (Hazlitt, William, “*The Tempest*”: *Critical Essays* 108). The actor playing Prospera/o must reveal the “sense of truth” in art even when they claim, like Puck, that it is *just* a dream, and the actors are *just* spirits that melt into thin air. Prospera/o must open the audience’s eyes to the “sense of truth” that can be found in the world of dreams and magic. There is truth in *The Tempest*’s fiction in the way the character Tom Wingfield tells the audience in Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie*: “Yes, I have tricks in my pocket; I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you an illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion” (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 1.1). Prospero is both an idealistic visionary who sees things others cannot see and a bitter old duke without a dukedom who did not see the forest for the trees in Milan. There is an intense loneliness to Prospera/o: The magician who stands between worlds is at home in neither.

Prospero “impresses on [the audience] a sense of quiet desperation” because he “comes to know his place in the universe, [which] is bitter knowledge, and one which is as saddening as it

³³⁶ The epilogue of *The Tempest* “eliminat[es] any barrier between the play-world and the real” (cf. Egan 172). Prospero speaks the epilogue both as Prospero and as the actor playing Prospero, which is unusual. Prospero bids the audience to participate: “They are invited to enter the play-world and assume a role, through their applause, as a moving force in its culmination” (Egan 173). Without the audience’s applause, says Prospero, he cannot complete the play. Prospero’s request for audience participation is “not simply a metaphoric request for applause” (cf. Egan 173). “Prospero brings the audience into the play. Here and here alone in Shakespeare, the play’s art has no terminal boundaries but rather ‘subsumes’ the ‘real,’ extra-theatrical world of its spectators, supplanting their sense of reality with its own” (Egan 173). Prospera/Mirren appears fully aware of the point Egan, Garber, and Mandel make. She repeatedly draws attention to the fine line between the two worlds and the interconnectedness of it all.

³³⁷ Cosmo Corfield emphasizes that Prospero knows more than the rest of the world: “As a mage, Prospero is in possession of an order of wisdom beyond our ken” (Corfield, “Why Does Prospero Abjure His ‘Rough Magic?’” 38). Prospero exists at “a cosmic distance from us” (Corfield 38). This is important about the character of Prospero, as it carries with it both “fury” and “wistful sadness” (cf. Corfield 40). Prospero, as a magician, is “a peculiarly lonely figure” cut off from the rest of the world (cf. Corfield 40). Prospero exists in two worlds at once. He stands apart: “He is an intellectually isolated figure whom no one fully understands” (cf. Corfield 45). Thus, it is the task of the actor to make the audience understand Prospero in all of his or her paradox.

is comforting” (cf. Cornfield 48). Prospero must accept that the world and the people of Milan are flawed and do not correspond to his idealistic worldview. For a magician, a dreamer, and an idealist, this is a bitter pill to swallow, but Prospero/a does. Prospero is never quite at home with his art and his attempt at playing God: He refers to his magic as “rough magic,” which betrays that he is never quite at peace with it. Egan points out that “prospero,” after all, is “Italian for ‘faustus’” (Egan 175). Prospero/a is aware that the magic s/he practices blurs the line between “theurgy and necromancy” (Egan 175) and that s/he is as imperfect as the enemies s/he judges. Prospero/a is playing God through an art s/he has acquired by study. Magic was not a God-given gift Prospero/a was born with; the desire to play God is, therefore, a vain endeavor. Prospero/a senses this. Prospero/a is always neither here (reality) nor there (dream world). Indeed, Prospero/a is as little at home in the courtly world of Milan as s/he is in the world of dreams.

In Helen Mirren’s interpretation of Prospera, it appears entirely possible to say that, were it not for her beloved daughter Miranda, Prospera may wish to remain in the world of magic with Ariel/Whishaw. The many hesitations Prospero/a undergoes in respect to freeing Ariel register as her greatest sacrifice of one love (Ariel) for another (Miranda). Prospera/Mirren chooses duty over happiness. Correspondingly, Prospera/Mirren switches to a sorrowful tone on “like the baseless fabric of this vision” and maintains a note of remorse, almost shame, until “the great globe itself,” where she returns to formidable hauteur. She walks the line of grandeur and humility wonderfully in just the way Garber reads Prospero/*The Tempest* in this very speech: Prospera/Mirren is “regretful and proud” (Garber, *Dream* 209). After all, Prospero is the artist/magician/creator who says he will lay down his magic staff, his art, and his power and put himself completely at the mercy of the audience: “I must be here confined by you/. . . /But release me from my bands/ With the help of your good hands/Gentle breath of yours my sails/ Must fill/or else my project fails/Which was to please” (*The Tempest*, Epilogue). Prospero takes a huge risk at the end of the play, a risk best understood by actors. As Peter Platt points out, “The audience has the ‘spell,’ the powerful ‘breath’ of inspiration and prayer, the ability to confine or pardon and ‘set . . . free.’ . . . Prospero is now a prisoner: our [the audience’s] prisoner” (cf. Platt 204). The actor playing Prospero can never anticipate if the audience will receive and forgive him or destroy him: “[H]e had to hope audiences would be made up more of Gonzalos and

Alonsos than of Sebastians and Antonios” (Platt 204–205). It is the actor who must succumb to such uncertainty, to the paradox of Prospero’s greatness and power being everything and nothing. Only if shared with the audience (they must accept it and participate³³⁸ in it) does Prospero’s art resonate: “The art of . . . Prospero will prove a vanity unless the audience assumes its validity by participating in a cognate act of love and recognition³³⁹ which are the essence of that art” (cf. Egan 182). Mirren appears to recognize this and speaks the earlier revels speech accordingly.

Prospera/Mirren balances the revels speech with the right amount of pride and humility (even over losing her throne) because she knows that her character must be believable at the end of the play when she relinquishes everything dear to her—her art, her absolute power, her daughter (to Ferdinand), her island, and her servants (her Ariel)—and concedes it to the audience. One of the hardest aspects of playing Prospero is arguably making the audience understand why a magician would give up his magic, why an artist would give up his art, and why a creator would give up his creation and give it to the audience to return to an insular and

³³⁸ Jerome Mandel makes the point of the audience as an active participant very well:

What is demanded is a dual imaginative–creative act: To establish the inherently illusory play–world as a real world that may bespeak a revelation to the audience requires that the audience join the poet in the imaginative–creative act. . . . The “We” in Prospero’s speech applies to men in the real world of the play, to the actors of a play in the real world, and to the spectators of the play as men in the real world. The only way that Prospero’s statement can be accepted as serious and revelatory is if the play is recognized as something other than a toy, other than a “ridiculous idle childish invention”—and that is accomplished only when the distinction between play and real world is destroyed . . . not to deny the validity of the play but rather to insist upon its relevance to the lives of the spectators. To recognize that relevance, the audience must understand that the play is not a reality distinctly different from that with which they are commonly familiar, not just a play to be enjoyed and forgotten, but an imaginative reality as profound and as relevant to their lives as their own dreams. (Mandel, Jerome, “Dream and Imagination in Shakespeare” 66, 68)

³³⁹ Like Mandel and Garber, Egan sees a connection between the world of dreams and the real world outside. Egan, like Mandel, notices that Shakespeare purposely links the world of the play with that of dreams to allow the audience to see its relevancy:

Prospero brings the spectators into the play to place them in circumstances exactly parallel to the moment of his own climactic decision [to see the world as it is, not as Prospero would like it to be; to radically accept the world and its people with all their flaws], charging them with the same responsibility. . . . The Epilogue serves as a bridge between play and audience: a transitional link between art and reality. . . . If his audience will make his vision their own—and it is an unprecedented testament of faith in his art that he terms his success dependent on such total acceptance—they will be participating in an act of prayer and the prayed-for. (cf. Egan 182)

small-minded world. Many productions of *The Tempest*³⁴⁰ are unconvincing in this significant aspect of the play and leave the audience wondering just why Prospero would ever throw away a world full of wonder and magic for a world of Machiavellian underhandedness. Prospera/Mirren makes it clear from the beginning that only through the world of civilization, no matter how conniving, can the world of dreams and magic have purpose. When one gets lost in magic and dreams, one not only loses one's throne but also all perspective. Hence, Prospera/Mirren rightfully sounds bitter when she shouts and draws out the vowels of: "Avoid. No more. Avoid." Prospera/Mirren trivializes the "actors who play spirits" without letting the audience forget that she, too, is an actor: After all, she equally calls the world of dreams, the "baseless fabric of this vision" just as "insubstantial" as "the great globe itself" (which carries the meaning of both the world and the Globe Theatre).

Prospera/Mirren speaks the speech with the "regretful" tone of the mage, who must leave her magic behind, and with the "proud" tone of the actor who knows that reality without imagination is stale and non-transformative. Prospera/Mirren knows that one world informs the other. The interplay between the two worlds is what matters in order to achieve any kind of transformation. For this to happen, the actor playing Prospero/a must let the audience in on why he/she gives up everything. The audience must be allowed to participate in the journey and the paradox of the globe/Globe. They must understand that, to fully see reality, they must be transformed by the world of dreams. However, only the return to reality allows that

³⁴⁰ Out of the many productions of *The Tempest* I have had the privilege to see, one stood out concerning this point: The Bridge Project's *The Tempest* at the Old Vic in 2010, directed by Sam Mendes, was a modern, low-key production. Prospero was played by Stephen Dillane, who portrayed him as quiet, reserved, and withdrawn, almost hippie-like; this Prospero was very human, but more a down-and-out man (dressed rather like a homeless person) than a powerful sorcerer. Dillane spoke his lines very quietly, and at one point, he listened to his iPod (on headphones). Admittedly, Dillane—whose acting I greatly admire otherwise—lost me, as an audience member, at the headphones bit. He was too ambivalent, too "chill." I remember thinking that this man had better stay on the magical island with Ariel because he will undoubtedly fail as the duke of Milan, which calls for a powerful ruler. Prospero/Dillane was too aloof, too cool, too casual. If it is not clear to the audience why Prospero wants to leave behind his magic, his books, his island (and, as in this case, his iPod), the entire play falls flat. Juliet/Rylance was wonderful and passionate as Miranda, and Christian Camargo was a convincing goth-like, androgynous Ariel, but they could not compensate for the lack of purpose behind Prospero/Dillane's actions. As an audience member, I recall asking myself for the entire length of the play: "Why does he want to leave?" Dillane was so at home on his island that it was hard to fathom he would even remove his headphones. Many theatre critics reviewed Dillane's performance similarly: Michael Billington calls Dillane's Prospero "self-indulgent" (Billington, *Guardian*, 2010). Leo Benedictus said: "Most critics thought *The Tempest* was quite bad, mainly because they couldn't hear the voice of Stephen Dillane, a quite famous actor who plays the lead character (Benedictus, *Guardian*, 2010). Quentin Letts does not hold back, either: "There is a fairly obvious line between piano and inaudibilo, and Stephen Dillane crosses it" (Letts, *Daily Mail*, 2010).

transformation to manifest itself. The artist's final letting go of their work of art (much like magicians' letting go of their magic) is what allows the art to resonate with an audience.

Prospera/Mirren demonstrates her despair over having to leave behind the magic of "cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces/The solemn temples," "our actors," and "our revels" because reality and death will inevitably catch up. Prospera/Mirren shows this mix of bitterness over giving up what she loves despite the sweetness it has brought. She emphasizes the bitterness with her tone on "actors" (condescending), "spirits," (it was nothing, just a spirit, thin air), "baseless fabric of this vision" (ambivalent), "cloud capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces/the solemn temples" (despairing), and "the great globe itself" (proud, because not just her theatrics will vanish—the Globe theatre, the play, the dream—but also the actual globe: It, too, "shall dissolve" just like her magic and theatrics, "this insubstantial pageant," and neither dreams nor reality will, once gone, "leave . . . a rack behind"). This speech occurs before Prospero/a has found genuine acceptance of the world as it is: Only toward the end of the play does Prospero make peace with both worlds: dream/magic and reality. In the revels speech, Prospera/Mirren is still fighting the urge to control, the urge to use magic, and the urge for revenge. In many instances of the revels speech, Prospera/Mirren's bitterness is suitable. Not until the epilogue does Prospera find the grace and courage to put herself at the mercy of a higher power (in this case, the audience): "Prospero . . . nonetheless lets go, trusting us [the audience] to negotiate the treacherous moral waters that await us outside" (cf. Platt 205). Not until the end does Prospera/Mirren accept the paradox of giving up control to gain control.³⁴¹

Prospera/Mirren strikes the perfect chord of melancholy and wonder during the revels speech. She sounds out the awareness that all "shall dissolve," yet the magic of "[m]usic, art, and preeminently, poetry are [also] moments out of time, moments which endow experience with a new richness" (cf. Garber, *Dream* 220). The magic spell of the play that Prospero weaves is fleeting and timeless: "Its existence is momentary and yet for all time, as the play itself exists in

³⁴¹ When someone tries too hard, it makes others uncomfortable, both at work and privately. When someone holds on too tightly (think of pottery or of any sport using hands), it does not add control; it takes it away. Only by releasing one's tight grip can balance and control be regained. The same is true for figure skating, skiing, motorcycling, cycling, sailing, etc. Lean in too much, and you fall. Ease in, and the surface carries you.

time³⁴² and beyond it” (Garber, *Dream* 214). Prospera/Mirren speaks, “We are such stuff as dreams are made on” with wonder and elation, but her dark undertone of sadness draws attention to the interwovenness of dream and reality, of art and nature. Prospera/Mirren strikes a note of profound loneliness in understanding this fact. Her interpretation of the revels speech offers a glimpse of the “why” behind Prospera’s abjuration of her magic. She may be aware that art is “indivisible from nature” and that there really is “no distinction between play and reality,” but to exist in the society of Milan, she must separate the two worlds. Subsequently, her tone of sadness is suitable because she knows she will be “a magician bereft of his [her] magic,” a director without a set and, as Prospera/Mirren repeatedly emphasizes during meta-theatrical moments, she will be “an actor who has finished with his [her] part” (cf. Garber 214). The way Prospera/Mirren speaks the revels speech makes the epilogue utterly credible: After all, Prospero literally and figuratively demonstrates how the dream becomes reality when he steps out of his part of magician, and into the part of actor in the epilogue and transfers all power to the audience.

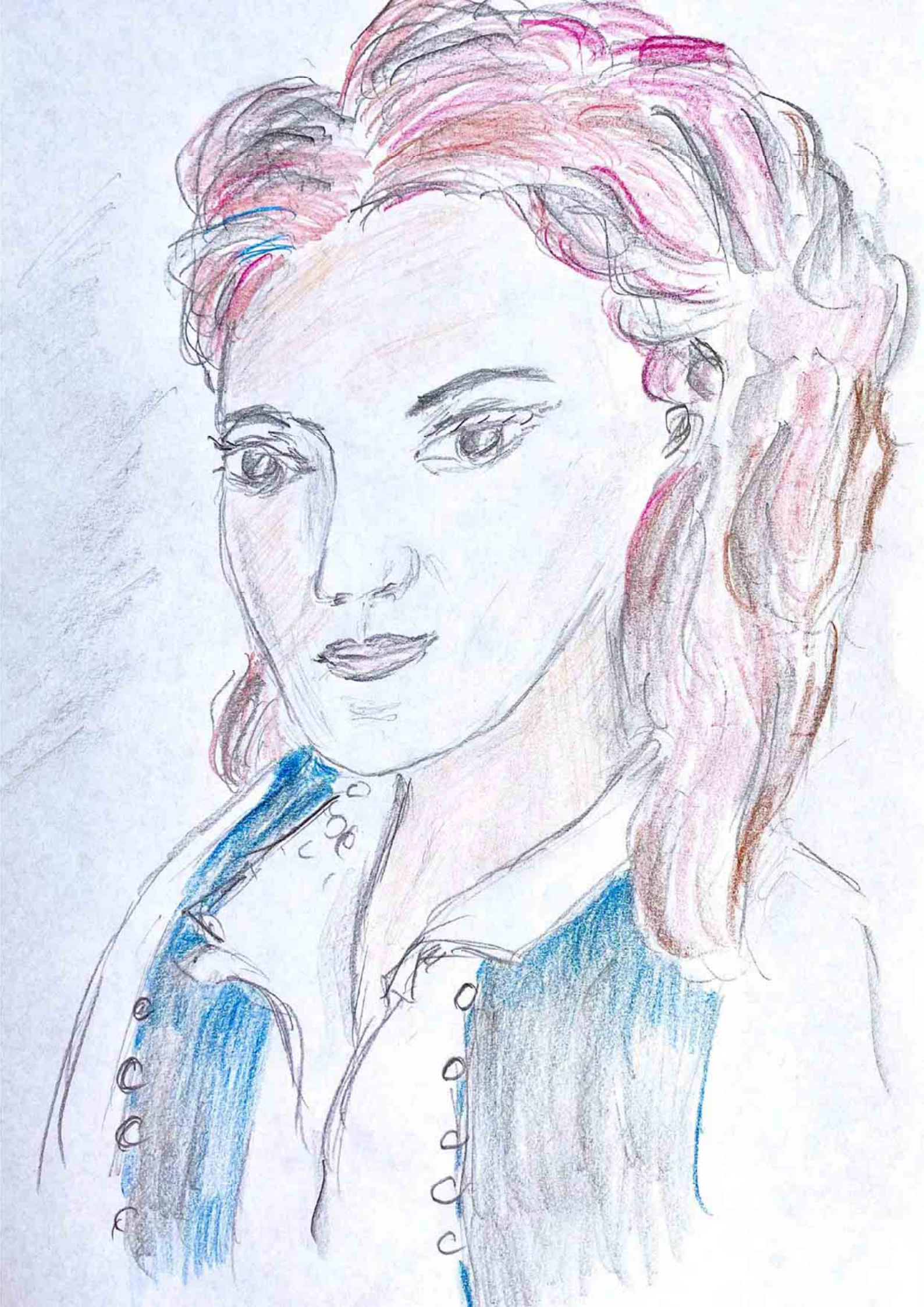
The epilogue must be earned by the actor playing Prospero (just like Puck must earn his epilogue) because it shows that a “[d]ream is truer than reality because it has this transforming power” (Garber 62). *The Tempest* is imbued with a constant glimpse of: “*Now you see me,*” (the reality of the actor playing Prospero); “*now, you don’t.*” The actor playing Prospero must make the audience perceive this questioning spirit about the “realness” of both worlds. Moreover, the audience must be able to understand why Prospero gives up his art. Prospero’s revels speech demonstrates “the inevitability that those things which seem most real and vivid to us, our passions, our concerns, will ultimately be revealed as inconsequential, almost imagined, in relation to a broader truth we cannot know” (Lee 207). Prospero’s revels speech “gives full expression to Prospero’s awareness of illusion and its relation to play and reality. Human creation is inevitably transitory and there is no great difference between the illusion we call ‘pageant’ and the illusion we call reality” (Lee 208). Prospera/Mirren leads the audience to recognize their willingness to accept the tension of paradox. Such acceptance leads them to a truth that transcends individual perspectives. Using the example of her character’s journey and

³⁴² Garber also points out that “in *The Tempest* the fictive time of the drama is deliberately made identical with the time it takes to play it, so there is no distinction between play and reality” (Garber, *Dream* 220).

eventual psychomachy, Prospera/Mirren demonstrates that only through letting go completely, through “unconditional forgiveness and acceptance of human nature” (cf. Egan 181), as it is and not as it should be, can Prospera find peace from her “troubled brain” and “disturbed mind.” Prospera/Mirren leads the audience through her journey between the liminal space of “pageant” and “reality” to allow them to fully understand the paradox that what one does not have the courage to lose, one cannot keep.³⁴³ Mirren plays Prospera with a suitable contradictory mix of the graceful acceptance of loss and the ceaseless curiosity of the mage. She plays Prospera in the way the poet friend of Loren Eiseley points out the “otherworldly” moth: with the scientist–magician’s spirit of inquiry and with the poet’s embrace of uncertainty.

[W]hile I was sitting one night with a poet friend watching a great opera performed in a tent under arc lights, the poet pointed silently. Far up, blundering out of the night, a huge Cecropia moth swept from light to light over the posturing of the actors. "He doesn't know," my friend whispered excitedly. "He's passing through an alien universe brightly lit but invisible to him. He's in another play; he doesn't see us. He doesn't know. Maybe it's happening right now to us. Where are we? Whose is the *real* play?" (Eiseley, “The Inner Galaxy,” *The Unexpected Universe* 175)

³⁴³ The question of Prospero keeping his magic is, of course, up to interpretation. Most productions interpret Prospero’s loss of magic as permanent, which is a valid interpretation considering that Prospero claims that his powers are all overthrown in the epilogue. Prospero *says* he will break his magic staff. However, it is curious that there is not one scene in which the audience actually *sees* Prospero breaking his staff and burying it. Perhaps it is not an either/or choice for Prospero. Perhaps Prospero both remains with and leaves his magic.



10) Kate Winslet: The Wildflower in the Hothouse

Kate Winslet: Ophelia, Kenneth Branagh: Hamlet. *Hamlet*, directed by Kenneth Branagh, produced by Columbia Pictures and Castle Rock Entertainment, 1996.

Act 3, Scene 1

*(Nunnery Scene)*³⁴⁴

*(Hamlet enters, Polonius and Claudius hide inside a secret room behind a two-way-mirrored door while spying on Hamlet; Ophelia is present as well, but stowed away behind a palace wall by her father)*³⁴⁵

HAMLET

To be or not to be...

[...]

Soft you now! *(Hamlet sees Ophelia at the end of the hall)*

The fair Ophelia! *(Hamlet walks toward Ophelia and addresses her)*

Nymph, in thy orisons

Be all my sins remember'd. *(Hamlet and Ophelia stand across from each other and address each other while looking each other straight in the eyes)*

OPHELIA

Good my lord,

How does your honour for this many a day?

HAMLET

I humbly thank you; well, well, well.

OPHELIA

My lord, I have remembrances of yours,

That I have longed long to re-deliver;

I pray you, now receive them.

HAMLET

No, not I;

I never gave you aught.

OPHELIA

My honour'd lord, you know right well you did;

³⁴⁴ I added the stage directions and choreography of Branagh's *Hamlet* as I perceived them. They are in *italics* and *vermillion*. Importantly, I watched the film very closely to write about the acting *before* I listened to Branagh's commentary on the scene (and the whole film) in interviews. Branagh's comments align with what I perceived, for example, Branagh states on Charlie Rose in 1996 that Hamlet, in the nunnery scene, "feels most abandoned by yet another woman" in his life (cf. Branagh, *Charlie Rose* 1996).

³⁴⁵ These stage directions refer to Branagh's production of *Hamlet*. Between Shakespeare's Quarto and Folio versions of *Hamlet*, there is much debate about whether Ophelia overhears Hamlet's soliloquy. However, it is understood that King Claudius and Polonius set up Ophelia to sound out Hamlet. It is also agreed that Claudius and Polonius hide while eavesdropping on Hamlet. In some productions, Hamlet is aware of the eavesdroppers' presence; in others, he is not. In Branagh's *Hamlet*, it is left somewhat ambiguous. It appears Hamlet is suspicious but not necessarily aware of the presence of the others until after "to be or not to be."

And, with them, words of so sweet breath composed
As made the things more rich: their perfume lost,
Take these again; (*Ophelia glances over at the hiding place of Polonius and Claudius*)
for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.
There, my lord. (*Pause. Hamlet violently slaps the love letters out of Ophelia's hand*)

HAMLET

Ha, ha! are you honest?

OPHELIA

My lord?

HAMLET

Are you fair?

OPHELIA

What means your lordship?

HAMLET

That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should
admit no discourse to your beauty.

OPHELIA

Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than
with honesty?

HAMLET

Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner
transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the
force of honesty can translate beauty into his
likeness: this was sometime a paradox, but now the
time gives it proof. (*Hamlet pauses*)

I did love you once. (*With absolutely sincerity*)

OPHELIA

Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

HAMLET

You should not have believed me;
for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock
but we shall relish of it:

I loved you not. (*Ophelia winces*)

OPHELIA

I was the more deceived.

HAMLET

Get thee to a nunnery:³⁴⁶ *(Hamlet grabs Ophelia by the arm)*
why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?
I am myself indifferent honest;
but yet I could accuse me of such things that it
were better my mother had not borne me:
I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious,
with more offences at my beck
than I have thoughts to put them in,
imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in.
What should such fellows as I do crawling
between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all;
believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. *(Music stops. Hamlet pauses. First Ophelia looks
over at the hiding place of Polonius and Claudius, then Hamlet looks over knowingly)*
Where's your father?

OPHELIA

At home, my lord.

HAMLET

Let the doors be shut upon him, *(Hamlet slowly closes his eyes and speaks with great regret over
Ophelia's chosen loyalty to her father)*

that he may play the fool no where but in's own house.

Farewell. *(Hamlet begins to cry into his hands. Ophelia reaches out to him)*

OPHELIA

O, help him, you sweet heavens!

HAMLET

If thou dost *(Hamlet throws off Ophelia's hands, grabs her by the arm and drags her across the
hall, and throws her about)*

marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry:

be thou as chaste as ice, *(Hamlet opens various palace doors in search of Polonius's and
Claudius's hiding space, all the while dragging Ophelia along with him)*

as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny.

Get thee to a nunnery, go: farewell.

Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool;

for wise men know well enough

what monsters you make of them. *(Hamlet pushes Ophelia into a wall by grabbing her face)*

To a nunnery, go, and quickly too. Farewell.

OPHELIA

³⁴⁶ "Nunnery" means a convent and was Elizabethan slang for a brothel. Hamlet is, therefore, telling Ophelia to preserve her chastity in a convent and to become a prostitute. In a way, he is being doubly cruel, unless Hamlet is understood as trying to protect Ophelia (this is the way Laurence Olivier approached the scene in his *Hamlet* film). Olivier as Hamlet appears to be telling Ophelia to get away from this rotten court and from himself because he knows that bad things will occur soon. Branagh's film basically leaves the meaning open as his Hamlet appears to swing between both interpretations (protecting Ophelia by sending her to a convent and thinking of her as another fallen woman like his mother).

O heavenly powers, restore him! *(Hamlet grabs Ophelia once more. She screams. He drags her along to another palace wall)*

HAMLET

I have heard of your paintings too, well enough;

God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another:

you jig, you amble, and you lisp, *(Hamlet shakes Ophelia's face while dragging her; then throws her into a wall face-forward and keeps pushing her face into the mirrored wall)*

and nick-name God's creatures,

and make your wantonness your ignorance.

Go to, I'll no more on't; *(Hamlet whispers while pressing Ophelia into the glass. Polonius watches his daughter through a two-way mirror being pressed into the wall/mirror)*

it hath made me mad. *(Hamlet speaks quietly and gently into Ophelia's ear while pressing her into the wall. He turns her around)*

I say, *(Hamlet becomes tender and tenderly kisses Ophelia)*

we will have no more marriages: *(This is the moment Hamlet looks up at the wall, which is a two-way mirror. He realizes that this is Claudius's and Polonius's hiding place. Claudius sees him. Hamlet is now certain he is being watched, and he now speaks his lines at the observers while looking straight into the mirror)*

those that are married already, all but one. *(Claudius and Polonius make off before Hamlet catches them in their hiding place)*

shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. *(Hamlet bursts into the hiding place of Claudius and Polonius, but the two have already left through a hidden exit)*

To a nunnery, go. *(Hamlet bends down toward Ophelia who sits in the doorframe on the floor; grabs her by the face, and speaks directly at her while looking her intently in the eyes)*

Exit

OPHELIA

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown! *(Music starts again. Ophelia speaks her monologue crumpled on the floor where Hamlet left her; the camera slowly zooms in on her face)*

The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;

The expectancy and rose of the fair state,

The glass of fashion and the mould of form,

The observed of all observers, quite, quite down!

And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,

That suck'd the honey of his music vows,

Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,

Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;

That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth

Blasted with ecstasy: O, woe is me,

To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

The famous “nunnery scene” with Hamlet and Ophelia is magnificent but very tricky. If it is not played well, Hamlet looks like a bad person and Ophelia like a victim—or the converse. In many

theatre productions of *Hamlet* over the last fifteen years, it appeared as though the part of Ophelia may as well be written out of the play.³⁴⁷ *Hamlet* tends to be a vehicle for a star actor, and to let that star shine, the ensemble is often pushed into the background, much to the play's detriment. Branagh does not do this. He knows that winning scenes at the cost of the play (or movie) does not hold an audience. As director, Branagh genuinely allows Winslet's Ophelia to shine. From the moment Ophelia/Winslet enters the film, she adds a layer of liveliness and dynamism. She begins her arc as a chaste and sweet-natured young woman who is very much in love with Hamlet. She reveals to the audience Ophelia's confusion because she is entirely controlled by men—men who give her advice, advice, and more advice, always gratuitous and often self-serving, men who admonish her and order her around, men who think they know what is best for her. Ophelia/Winslet's character has a kind of explosive quality: Even in her early "sweet" moments, one feels that this Ophelia could go off the rails at any time. There is a spark of anger underneath Ophelia/Winslet's exterior vulnerability and loveliness. Once this spark catches, it lights up, and she blows up herself and her surroundings. Only an actor of great self-command can play someone so unscrewed, and this is Winslet's gift. There is real danger for the actor portraying Ophelia to veer too far into madness, which would make the audience forget her initial sanity, or to veer too far into the MPDG (manic pixie dream girl) conceit of the cooky female foil that solely serves to flesh out the soulful male protagonist.

Winslet's Ophelia is absolutely sane at the beginning of the play. She carefully reveals to the audience that Ophelia's madness is really trauma caused by too much grief and rejection. Simultaneously, Winslet's Ophelia is one hundred percent believable in her madness, because trauma can cause madness, as many PTSD survivors can confirm. Winslet's Ophelia appears to walk the line of the chaste, obedient daughter and the young woman in love who wants to be free of male shackles. Winslet's Ophelia initially presents as though she may not become unhinged later on. This Ophelia goes mad because of the accumulation of worst-case scenarios that meet in the boiler room of rotten Denmark and snowball into an explosion. If it were possible to describe

³⁴⁷ One extreme example of this was the *Hamlet* production with Jude Law on Broadway in 2009. The production was entirely based on Mr. Law's performance, which was good, but the play inevitably suffered. I recall exiting the theatre thinking that, if the Broadway producers of the play could have, they would have cut every part except Hamlet's. Ophelia, played by the excellent Gugu Mbatha-Raw, was not allowed to shine due to her limited stage time, and it hurt the play, I felt.

Winslet's Ophelia metaphorically, I would say that she is the incandescent flare that sets fire to Hamlet's dark side (which was always there but hidden underneath a layer of scholarly thoughtfulness). Winslet's Ophelia bursts onto the screen, shoots across the scenery, and both illuminates the other characters and sets them on fire. Winslet's Ophelia is radiant in her youth. She glows with Raphaelite beauty. She ignites Hamlet's eyes with her innocent love, but she also kindles a chain reaction of events and blows up herself and the people who tried to control her. In the text, Ophelia matters. The nunnery scene exists to show how one more act of betrayal inflames Hamlet.³⁴⁸ If Hamlet did not care for Ophelia, he would not erupt into an outburst of hysterical, misogynistic, and self-destructive violence. It is true that Hamlet conflates Ophelia with both his mother and all womankind. However, Ophelia triggers his misogynistic conflation. It is in the nunnery scene that Hamlet tips over from paranoia and resentment to disgust and obsession. Hence, the scene and the character of Ophelia are crucial to the play. The scene and Ophelia do not merely serve as foils that flesh out the character of Hamlet. Branagh directs his film and the scene accordingly, and Winslet plays Ophelia accordingly. In Branagh's *Hamlet*, Ophelia carries the weight she should carry.

The nunnery scene reveals the paranoia present in the state of Denmark. Not one step Hamlet (or anyone else at court) takes is private and unobserved. Someone is always listening, watching from behind, cavedropping through doors, cying through two-way-mirrors, and generally spying in any way possible. The brightness and splendor of the palace where the film sets most of its scenes evokes great paranoia. There is nowhere to hide in these luminous palace walls. Each act of privacy has an audience, and each audience interprets what it has seen or heard—and often wrongly. Fear, suspicion, and distrust run rampant in this court, and no one can escape the eyes and ears of others. King Claudius has called for Hamlet, so it is expected that he enters the scene with great trepidation. Hamlet's "To Be or Not to Be" speech lacks the personal pronouns of his earlier soliloquies. Branagh, as director and protagonist, had to make a strong choice in interpreting this scene, and his choice serves both him as Hamlet and Ophelia/Winslet very well. He speaks at one end of the huge white palace hall with Claudius and Polonius

³⁴⁸ Kenneth Branagh confirmed this theory in an interview with Charlie Rose in 1996. Branagh says that it was "one more woman" betraying Hamlet that set him off (cf. Branagh, *Charlie Rose* 1996). Branagh also stated that he thought the women's parts were underwritten (cf. Branagh, *Charlie Rose* 1996).

watching through a two-way mirror (the suggestion is that all palace walls are two-way mirrors). Upon hearing footsteps at the end of his speech, Hamlet/Branagh turns and sees Ophelia/Winslet entering the palace hall at the other end. The implication of Branagh's interpretation is that Ophelia/Winslet may or may not have heard his "to be or not to be" speech because she may or may not have been physically too far away to overhear it.³⁴⁹ What or how much she heard is left ambiguous. Ophelia/Winslet could have heard snippets of the speech. When she enters, Branagh does not play Hamlet's greeting with sarcasm or anger (as is often done),³⁵⁰ but with sincerity and sweetness. Hamlet/Branagh allows Ophelia/Winslet to affect him. When Hamlet/Branagh sees Ophelia/Winslet, he walks toward her, smiles at her, and greets her very genially with, "Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered." It is as though he becomes a different person once he sees Ophelia. His armor visibly drops down, and his eyes light up.

If Ophelia/Winslet has heard snippets of Hamlet's speech—which contemplates whether suicide is appropriate—she would be put off by such a sweet greeting. If she did not hear the speech, she would still be rattled by Hamlet's sweet greeting, because she knows she is here to return all the tokens of love he has given her. Ophelia/Winslet plays the moment with the discomfort of a young woman who has allowed herself to be painted into a corner. Hamlet greets her with disarming gentleness. Ophelia/Winslet reacts with a polite "how have you been?" ("How does your honor for so many a day?") as if she cannot think of anything better to say. Hamlet/Branagh responds even more disarmingly. At first, he answers the mostly rhetorical question (how have you been?) with the standard and polite "Well (I am doing all right)," after uttering a nervous "uh." But Hamlet/Branagh allows Ophelia/Winslet to penetrate his walls and

³⁴⁹ There exist very different stage and film interpretations of this moment. Sir Derek Jacobi, as an example, spoke the "to be or not to be" speech directly at Ophelia. Jacobi defends this interpretation very well, albeit not altogether convincingly (Jacobi, Folger Shakespeare Library podcast 2018, Everyman edition of *Hamlet*, 1989, xv–xvii). Branagh does not appear convinced by this interpretation despite being greatly influenced by Sir Derek Jacobi and a great admirer of the latter's *Hamlet*.

³⁵⁰ In Zeffirelli's production of *Hamlet*, Mel Gibson (as Hamlet) stomps into the room and is clearly already angry at Ophelia (Helena Bonham-Carter). While Zeffirelli's production is very good, I believe that—from an acting perspective—this moment could have been played with stronger choices and more powerful objectives. It is a good example of how empty anger, as an emotion, can come across to the audience. The more powerful choice—which Branagh made—would have been to allow Ophelia to make Hamlet angry instead of entering the moment with forced anger. If the audience feels that Hamlet wants nothing to do with Ophelia before he enters the scene, it becomes redundant. Therefore, acting teachers always tell their students to make the strongest choice possible with the highest stakes for the character.

decides to answer the question more sincerely with a second “well” that does not sound like a “well/good,” but like a “well” (pause) “let me think about it, in reality . . . to tell you the truth”). Ophelia/Winslet smiles at Hamlet/Branagh’s honesty. In turn, he begins to trust her and gives her a most amiable embrace while muttering a third gentle “well.” Hamlet/Branagh’s embrace of Ophelia/Winslet is heartfelt and desperate, as if he were reaching for any love and loyalty left in anyone around him he thought he could trust.³⁵¹ Hamlet/Branagh holds Ophelia/Winslet tightly and kisses her, which she lovingly returns. However, she now must return his tokens of love and wriggle out of Hamlet’s arms. This is the first instance of Ophelia/Winslet glancing toward her left, as if to tell Hamlet that he is being watched. The fact that Hamlet/Branagh is so genuine and charming with Ophelia/Winslet makes it incredibly difficult (almost impossible) for her to do her father’s bidding and return Hamlet’s love tokens to him. Branagh has raised the stakes with his interpretation of the scene. The higher the stakes, the more riveting the scene.

It must be pointed out that returning someone’s love letters is a deeply hurtful thing to do. It borders on cruelty because it is always a gratuitous gesture. Ophelia is too obedient (Juliet would have balked at such coercion). Moreover, by now, the audience is acquainted with Hamlet’s situation, and they know he is being betrayed left, right, and center. Ophelia’s betrayal, it can be argued, is the final straw for Branagh’s Hamlet. His armor cracks, and the charming and thoughtful prince reveals his savage side. When Ophelia/Winslet finally unclasps herself from Hamlet/Branagh’s embrace, she must take some deep breaths to deliver the blow. When she does ask Hamlet/Branagh to take back his “remembrances,” she does it in a business-like manner, as though it were an errand imposed on her that needs dispensation. This Ophelia does not know that Hamlet/Branagh is, himself, more reacting to the awful things that have happened to him than he is acting. Ophelia/Winslet does the one unforgivable thing to Branagh’s Hamlet: She betrays him. When he hears her request, Hamlet/Branagh looks tortured. Ophelia/Winslet’s rejection is more to Hamlet/Branagh than spurned love. To him, Ophelia/Winslet has made a choice in favor of her father (who is allied with Claudius) over him. Hamlet/Branagh’s eyes tear up, and it becomes clear beyond a doubt that he did, in fact, love Ophelia/Winslet once. Many

³⁵¹ This is a wonderful example of a strong acting choice. Branagh’s choice to embrace Winslet lovingly raises the stakes for both actors: Ophelia has just been shown love and trust by Hamlet, and now she has to reject him in a cruel manner (by returning all his love letters and tokens).

Hamlet productions play up his feigned madness in this scene, and have him order Ophelia into a nunnery in order to not sink herself with his ship, to protect her. The latter is an excellent interpretation, and Branagh uses some of it (as did Sir Laurence Olivier).

The other interpretation in many productions is that Hamlet, upon swearing that he will empty himself of all emotion from now on to carry out his revenge, does so. In these productions, Hamlet is sarcastic and cold with Ophelia from the beginning of the scene (n.b. Mel Gibson's *Hamlet*). The latter is not a good interpretation for an actor because it is simply not the strongest choice. Weak choices equal low stakes, indifference, or even boredom in the audience. In Shakespeare's text, Hamlet repeatedly falls back on his humanity.³⁵² He cannot kill Claudius the way he says he will (swiftly). He cannot fully trust that the ghost is his father's spirit (he keeps questioning if it is a demon), and it is not likely that Hamlet can fall out of love with Ophelia overnight. Even if he could, it would be a weak acting choice. Why would an audience want to see a prince who rails at a lover he does not care about? Lukewarm love and ambivalent feelings make empty entertainment. Yet, many productions I have seen onstage and onscreen use the "Hamlet-does-not-love-anyone approach."³⁵³ While arguments can be built in favor of such an interpretation within a scholarly essay, they fall apart once the bodies are onstage (or onscreen). Branagh, however, makes a strong directorial choice—he is an actor's director—when he allows Hamlet to be both a lover and a monster. Hamlet/Branagh is stunned when Ophelia/Winslet holds out a bundle of love letters in front of his face. He slaps them out of her hand and sends them flying to the ground. This is a very powerful moment because it illustrates that Hamlet/Branagh can be very violent and impulsive. He is not the overthinker and doubter that many take him for. This stage direction is not in the text, but, as I put it earlier, it is also "not *not*" in the text. It is a passionate directorial choice to demonstrate the seething cauldron that bubbles

³⁵² All the best *Hamlet* productions bring out Hamlet's humanity: n. b. David Tennant revealed it through a sense of humor that surrounded his unhinged behavior (RSC 2008). Simon Russell Beale demonstrated profound grief over losing his father (National Theatre 2000). Angela Winkler imbued her Hamlet with gentleness, love and kindness (Edinburgh Festival 2000). Mark Rylance played Hamlet with mad despair (RSC 1989).

³⁵³ This notion has been advanced by Harold Bloom on various occasions. However, he is not the only one. While arguments can be made in favor of Hamlet being much crueler than the reader or audience perceive him to be (his soliloquies create a bond with the audience), they become moot in performance. Once an actor must play Hamlet and make him come alive, he or she cannot begin from a point of no return (no love for anyone is a non-starter). If Hamlet does not care, why should the audience?

beneath Hamlet's bookish and ruminative exterior. Ophelia/Winslet flinches at Hamlet/Branagh's aggressive act. She has never seen such brute force from the Hamlet she knew. The moment is intense. The audience is as rattled as Ophelia/Winslet is.

Hamlet/Branagh utters two shrill "ha . . . ha" sounds so full of rage and fury that they must be emitted in a high pitch. It appears Hamlet/Branagh utters these two sounds to compose himself, but he cannot. His next lines fly at Ophelia like daggers. "Are you honest? . . . Are you fair?" Ophelia/Winslet's response is a trembling "My Lord . . . what means your lordship?" She is shaking; her words come out strained. She rightfully asks Hamlet/Branagh what is happening, because she had no idea that rejecting Hamlet and returning his favors would infuriate him so. The moment becomes increasingly jarring. Ophelia/Winslet's ears are flushed,³⁵⁴ a sign that she is physically affected by Hamlet/Branagh's actions: All the blood has rushed to her head (so much for Diderot). When Ophelia/Winslet manages to collect herself somewhat, she hurls a strong retort at Hamlet/Branagh's statement that she is either good (honest) or beautiful (fair) because they never come in one package. Ophelia/Winslet's "Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty" is a vehement rebuttal of Hamlet/Branagh's flawed logic. She says that beauty and honesty go together just fine. She tells Hamlet that his logic does not follow. Ophelia/Winslet is not a victim. She is neither weak nor daft. Hamlet/Branagh is raving; he has just demonstrated his capability for physical violence to her, but she still stands up for herself and tells the prince that his logic is unsound.

Hamlet claims that the power of beauty can more readily change a good girl into a whore than the power of goodness/truthfulness can make beauty a virtue; that is, beauty contaminates and makes women lie. Correspondingly, when Hamlet/Branagh flies into another rant, including flawed logic, Ophelia/Winslet just listens to Hamlet/Branagh in consternation. Hamlet/Branagh is essentially telling Ophelia/Winslet that it is her fault that he lied to her because her external beauty made him believe that she was also beautiful internally. Hamlet's logic games at this

³⁵⁴ Ophelia/Winslet allows Hamlet/Branagh to deeply affect her. The fact that her ears become flushed is a very real physical reaction to another person being threatening and cruel. There exists a well-known anecdote about George Bernard Shaw watching Eleonora Duse blush during a performance. Shaw was so overwhelmed by her skill, he wrote about the incident extensively (cf. Fallon, "Eleonora Duse: A Memoir," *The Irish Monthly* 576). The skill to blush in performance is the actor's skill of re-acting to the other actor. A good actor must also be a good re-actor and listener. The body does not lie, as Winslet's red ears and Duse's blush reveal.

moment are disturbing because it is palpable that he is taking out on Ophelia what is meant for Gertrude and Claudius. Hamlet throws Ophelia into the same category as his mother and uncle. Hamlet/Branagh pauses before he says, “I did love you once.” When he finally does say it, he says it with absolute sincerity and sadness, with tears in his eyes. Ophelia/Winslet responds with the same sincerity when she says that Hamlet made her believe that he loved her. Hamlet/Branagh immediately jumps on her remark with a mercurial furor and exclaims that she should not have believed him and that he never loved her. Ophelia/Winslet is overwhelmed by Hamlet/Branagh’s disproportionate rage. Hamlet’s entire venomous response comes out of left field to Ophelia. She utters a wincing sound and is about to burst into tears when she says, “I am the more deceived.” Notably, Hamlet/Branagh’s interaction with Ophelia/Winslet becomes a logical argument—in the form of an illogical psychotic meltdown—from the moment he realizes that she has allowed herself to be used as bait. It is almost as though Hamlet/Branagh is so offended by Ophelia/Winslet’s weakness that he attempts to stomp it out the way a strong animal in the wild is full of contempt for a weaker animal and devours it. Branagh’s Hamlet cracks without being a crackpot.

When Ophelia hands back the “remembrances” in the shape of Hamlet’s love letters, Hamlet turns on her. He goes from gentle lover to spiteful avenger. The second Hamlet realizes that Ophelia has chosen her side and it is not his, he snaps out of his feelings for her and begins to argue intellectually with her. The more intellectual and logical his argument becomes, the more aggressive he is with Ophelia/Winslet. He grabs her and almost shakes her throughout his entire nunnery rant. The way Hamlet/Branagh and Ophelia/Winslet play the scene reads as though Hamlet snaps out of love with Ophelia the second he perceives her betrayal. While it is almost impossible to fall out of love with someone in an instant, it is a deeply human experience to perceive something a lover has said or done as so outrageous, wrong, disappointing, weak, or out of line, a killshot, that it sucks out all the emotions one has for the other. It does not matter if the thing the lover did or said was, to them, innocent or even true. There are certain lines in the sand that everyone has in relationships and friendships, and once that line is crossed, it is entirely possible to be disgusted with the other person and wish to have nothing further to do with them. This is the way Hamlet/Branagh and Ophelia/Winslet approach the scene, and it is devastating in

its effect on the audience. Ophelia/Winslet could not have known that obeying her father in this matter would wipe out Hamlet's trust in her. To Hamlet/Branagh, she has crossed the forbidden line. Ophelia's betrayal is Hamlet's breaking point. In the moment before, with her father, Ophelia/Winslet had shown great unease about "acting out this scene" with Hamlet. She revealed as much in her nervous shuffling. However, Ophelia/Winslet does not appear to have grasped the scope of this non-licet act of betrayal. Hamlet is the older and more powerful person; of course, he should see Ophelia's perspective and powerlessness. However, logic has no place in love and madness. Instead of being the greater person, Hamlet snaps.

Until that moment, Ophelia/Winslet had become so immersed in Hamlet/Branagh that she forgot that her father and Claudius were listening. Ophelia/Winslet had attempted to communicate to Hamlet with her eyes that he is being watched. She was aware of the "act" and non-verbally tried to warn Hamlet. However, the "act" took on a life of its own and became real. Everything changes the moment Ophelia/Winslet returns the love tokens to Hamlet/Branagh. The instant Ophelia/Winslet drops her "act," Hamlet/Branagh puts his "feigned-madness act" back on. The bad timing of the two lovers makes their scene even more devastating. The moment is, in a way, a horrible misunderstanding. Hamlet/Branagh uses the moment to lash out at Gertrude's and Claudius' corruption, and he throws Ophelia/Winslet into the mix of deceitful people. Hamlet/Branagh—if not physically but emotionally—kills Ophelia in this scene. He traumatizes her, and her trauma snowballs with each ensuing calamity and abusive behavior of others that she is subjected to and has no agency over. Branagh does not interpret the scene as Hamlet knowing from the start of his soliloquy that he is not alone. His directorial choice is magnificent because it allows one last moment of genuine tenderness between Hamlet and Ophelia. Instead of playing the scene as a performance for Claudius in its entirety, Branagh allows Hamlet a moment of privacy in his interpretation. Hamlet/Branagh may begin his soliloquy with the suspicion of Claudius watching, but he soon gets so absorbed³⁵⁵ in his own thought process that it does not matter if anyone is watching (which, of course, they are). Likewise, in the nunnery scene, Ophelia/Winslet starts with the awkwardness of someone who knows she is being

³⁵⁵ This is another example of actors "putting on a performance" for an audience that, despite the actors and the audience's full knowledge of the fact of the performance, nonetheless becomes very real.

watched, but once Hamlet/Branagh reacts to her, she is not concerned with who is watching until Hamlet hears a thud in the background and asks Ophelia/Winslet where her father is.

Ophelia/Winslet looks at her father's and Claudius' hiding place. Subsequently, Hamlet also looks over. Hamlet/Branagh recognizes that he has been—without any doubt—watched the entire time. The way Hamlet/Branagh poses the question “Where is your father?” to Ophelia is as though he were trying to give her one last shot at redemption. Were she to come clean now, Hamlet/Branagh might forgive her. But Ophelia/Winslet lies. She tells Hamlet/Branagh that her father is at home, despite her realization that it is a weak lie. Ophelia/Winslet cries out the “at home, my lord.” To Hamlet/Branagh, this is the silver bullet. He is in an “if you are not with me, you are against me” frame of mind. Ophelia/Winslet has chosen the side of the enemy over his. To Hamlet/Branagh, this final betrayal settles their relationship. Once more, the audience is gripped by the intensity of emotions between Hamlet/Branagh and Ophelia/Winslet. When Ophelia/Winslet lies, the audience is as mortified as Hamlet/Branagh because he has just heard the eavesdroppers. Now that he knows he is being observed, Hamlet/Branagh puts on a show for Claudius and Polonius. He becomes physically violent again, grabs Ophelia by the arm and face, and drags her across the hall in order to find the spies. Ophelia/Winslet becomes a puppet in Hamlet/Branagh's grip after she had been puppeteered by her father and Claudius. Hamlet/Branagh throws Ophelia/Winslet around while launching into a misogynistic diatribe about the deceitfulness of all women. Ophelia/Winslet, in turn, is now convinced that her lover has indeed gone mad, as everyone had told her earlier. When she begs heavenly powers to restore Hamlet's sanity, she mutters it in the most despondent of ways. Hamlet/Branagh's “act” becomes real. The show he puts on for Claudius and Polonius is, and is not, a show. His “act” veers between performance and true madness during this moment. Ophelia/Winslet is being pressed against the wall by Hamlet/Branagh, and her father watches with horror on the other side, but does nothing. Considering that Hamlet soon proves that he is capable of impulsive violence—he will kill Polonius through a tapestry shortly—the fact that neither Ophelia/Winslet's father nor Claudius does anything to help her is very difficult to watch. The men's ambivalence toward her illustrates that she is no more than a pawn to them. She is dispensable.

Hamlet/Branagh swings between rage and tenderness with Ophelia/Winslet. One moment, he raves and pushes her into a mirrored wall; the next, he gently whispers in her ear and caresses her. It is as though he cannot bring himself to be entirely cruel to her. Similarly, he does not seem to be able to make up his mind if Ophelia/Winslet should go off to a convent or brothel. By the end of the scene, Ophelia/Winslet is reduced to a heap of clothes on the floor. It is from the floor that she speaks her “O, what a noble mind” speech.³⁵⁶ It is fitting to speak these destitute lines from the ground. Ophelia/Winslet demonstrates that she is physically and emotionally “downtrodden.” The description of Hamlet/Branagh that Ophelia/Winslet bemoans is not at all the Hamlet of the moment. She remembers him as a graceful courtier, an intelligent scholar, a strong soldier, the “rose” of Denmark, and the obvious heir to its throne. She cries out that Hamlet was adored and imitated by all, and now, he has fallen from all his earlier grace. At this point, the film gets very dark, despite its brightly lit and gilded palace rooms. Ophelia/Winslet knew she was putting on an “act” for Hamlet and her father. However, she never considered that Hamlet’s re-“action” to her “act” also may have been an act. An act, it is suggested, always has the potential to become a real thing. Ophelia/Winslet’s speech is, in a way, confirmation bias. She has been told that Hamlet has gone mad, and when he acts erratically and out of character in front of her, she believes that he is mad without considering an alternative interpretation of his actions. It is this bleeding of an “act” into reality that makes Ophelia/Winslet’s downfall even more tragic. Had she thought for herself, had she been raised to think independently, she may have seen Hamlet’s reaction as something that does not support what she was told by all the controlling men around her.

Kate Winslet gives Ophelia the vulnerability of a subjugated young woman who is constantly moving according to her father’s, her brother’s, Claudius’s, or Hamlet’s strings. Winslet also imbues Ophelia with the right amount of anger at her own powerlessness. She is easily led, yet she knows what she wants. She is susceptible, helpless, and at the mercy of men,

³⁵⁶ I have shied away from calling these speeches by their more professional terms of “soliloquy” (one person speaks to themselves) and “monologue” (a speech by a single person to an audience) because the term depends on the interpretation of the scene. Hamlet’s “to be or not to be” is usually called a soliloquy but it ceases to be one if Claudius and Polonius are understood to be listening. Similarly, Ophelia’s soliloquy becomes a monologue depending on who is listening. Hence, I used “speech” instead. In Branagh’s *Hamlet*, his “to be or not to be” is spoken as a soliloquy (albeit still ambiguously so), but Ophelia’s soliloquy at the end is spoken to herself and by herself. Therefore, it is not a monologue.

yet she is never weak. She is trusting, and she is terrifying in her underlying anger. This anger reveals itself in her descent into madness. She cannot express herself as freely as the men do. She cannot act violently toward others. When the stress and trauma become too much for her, Ophelia/Winslet's anger and subliminal volatility necessarily turn on themselves. Winslet does not turn Ophelia into a stereotypical "madwoman in the attic." Winslet's Ophelia is neither weak nor initially predisposed to madness. She is an intelligent young woman who calls her brother out on his hypocritical advice: "do not, as some ungracious pastors do, show me the steep and thorny way to heaven whiles like a puffed and reckless libertine himself the primrose path of dalliance treads" (1.3.48-52). She also calls Hamlet on his flawed logic: "could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty" (3.1.108-109). Once Ophelia goes off the rails, however, Winslet honors the trauma Ophelia has endured. Ophelia/Winslet does not hold back in the following madness scenes. Indeed, Winslet fully commits to Ophelia's madness, and she is utterly credible in both sanity and in madness. Winslet's performance as Ophelia—and all her other performances, for that matter—are a master class in commitment to a strong acting choice. Once settled on a powerful course of action, Winslet remains true to it and devotes herself fully to whatever said course of action requires. With Ophelia, Winslet commits fully to a disturbing and provocative madness. Winslet's Ophelia is magnificent in the way she rattles the audience. Shakespeare's Ophelia becomes so unhinged that she drowns in a river, and Winslet honors both madness (the only way Ophelia can express herself) and her eventual surrender to despair.

Ophelia/Winslet carries a strength in her vulnerability in both sanity and madness. In her earlier sane moments, Ophelia/Winslet's strength reveals itself through a wonderful sense of humor ("don't go around acting like a playboy, brother, while you lecture me on chastity"). In Ophelia/Winslet's later moments of madness, her underlying strength reveals itself as a pure, explosive time bomb.

Act 4, Scene 5

Elsinore. A room in the castle

Ophelia/Winslet is in a straitjacket and sleeping cap, Gertrude (Julie Christie) and Claudius (Derek Jacobi) are present

[...]

KING CLAUDIUS

How do you, pretty lady?

OPHELIA

Well, God 'ild you! They say the owl was a baker's daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be. God be at your table!

KING CLAUDIUS

Conceit upon her father.

OPHELIA

Pray you, let's have no words of this; but when they ask you what it means, say you this:

Sings

To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.
Then up he rose, and donn'd his clothes,
And dupp'd the chamber-door;
Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more.

KING CLAUDIUS

Pretty Ophelia!

OPHELIA

Indeed, la, without an oath, I'll make an end on't:

Sings

By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack, and fie for shame!
Young men will do't, if they come to't;
By cock, they are to blame.
Quoth she, before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed.
So would I ha' done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed.

KING CLAUDIUS

How long hath she been thus?

OPHELIA

I hope all will be well. We must be patient: but I cannot choose but weep, to think they should lay him i' the cold ground. My brother shall know of it: and so I thank you for your good counsel. Come, my coach! Good night, ladies; good night, sweet ladies; good night, good night.

Amid her vulnerability and fragility, there is a volatility in Ophelia/Winslet that is beautiful and disturbing. She cuts Claudius's and Gertrude's hypocrisy into absolute shreds in this scene. In her madness scenes, it feels as though Ophelia/Winslet could, at any moment, stab a scene partner or burn down the palace. Or fall apart. There is an element of surprise to her that is terrifying. She is presented in a straitjacket and a white cap at one point, which seems as much a protection of herself as of others. There is nowhere to hide as an actor with this kind of commitment to a character's unsettling side. It takes enormous courage and strength to go to a dark place of utter madness without a parachute. Winslet's fearlessness and grace under fire illuminate the character of Ophelia through her sheer commitment. Ophelia/Winslet is never a victim of romanticized insanity, but of trauma. Despite the trauma inflicted on her through no fault of her own, Winslet's Ophelia keeps trying to express herself in a world that only hears men. Since she cannot express herself through words (no one listens), she tries to express herself through songs. Winslet's Ophelia is both enchanting and haunting. She is heartbreaking and pure dynamite. She is approachable and utterly unnerving and tragic. What Winslet's Ophelia is not, is sentimental.

Because Ophelia/Winslet is not a romantic emblem of the madwoman singing mad ballads in an attic, it is easy to empathize with her as someone overwhelmed by trauma who has absolutely no support system. Ophelia/Winslet is more outspoken, more confident, and much more compelling in her mad scenes than in her earlier moments of sane sweetness. Such confidence in madness reveals a strength and anger that was always there but had to be hidden behind a feminine good-girl veil. There is almost a liberation when Ophelia/Winslet goes mad. It is as if she is finally free to say and do the things she could not say or do earlier. Now she can say what she wants and sing what she wants. Nobody can control her in her lunacy. There is a formidable freedom in the crackup of Winslet's Ophelia. She is a powder keg toward the end, and there is something cathartic about Ophelia/Winslet harnessing such combustible energy and finally allowing it to explode. Winslet's Ophelia is unguarded. She has no filter. Her performance is chilling and scandalous. She mixes the profane with the sacred. She sings of sex and religion. She sings of unrequited love, betrayal, and death. She is vulgar at times, and sweetly innocent the next. Winslet's power as an actor comes fully through in Ophelia's mad scenes, and no one around Winslet's Ophelia dares trifle with her now. Gertrude/Christie initially refused to see her

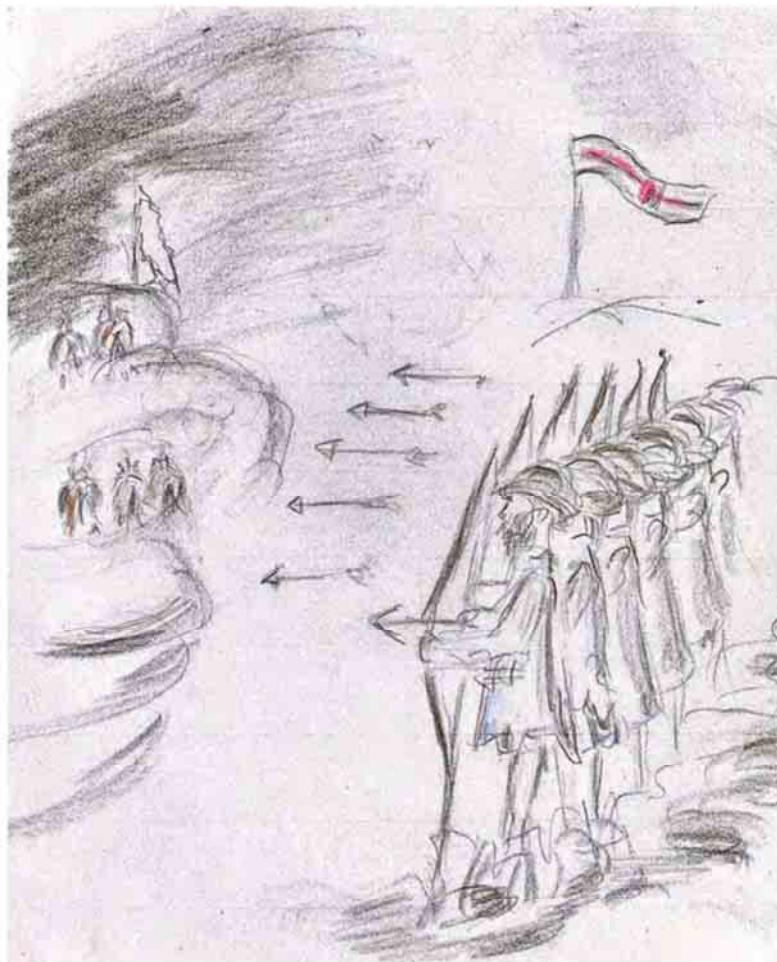
and only did so to protect the state (in a very PR-savvy manner). Claudius puts on his usual act of the understanding father figure, but Ophelia/Winslet is not buying it. She literally and figuratively hands out everyone their just deserts when she gives flowers filled with meaning to Gertrude and Claudius, according to their actions. Ophelia/Winslet does not hand out actual flowers but instead mimes them, which is even more harrowing in its credibility. She acts out the sexuality of “tumbled me” on the floor, which is shocking, provocative, and obscene, and it is meant to be so. She indirectly accuses the king and queen of Denmark of hypocrisy (and more). It becomes clear why Gertrude/Christie refused to see the young woman who might have been her daughter-in-law. Ophelia/Winslet is now free: free to be mad, free to speak frankly, free from the shackles of polite society and, most importantly, free from the controlling men and her precarious status as an unmarried woman. Even in her obedience and vulnerability, there is something untamed about Winslet’s Ophelia: She is like a wild animal that has been caged. Once she breaks free, she soars through Elsinore like a missile, and it is marvelous and devastating to watch her blow up the place along with herself.

11) Tom Hiddleston: Henry V: The Amiable Monster³⁵⁷—A Sweet Sadness with an Incandescent Fury

Tom Hiddleston: Henry V; Mélanie Thierry: Catherine; Géraldine Chaplin: Alice; *William Shakespeare’s Henry V: The Hollow Crown*, directed by Thea Sharrock, produced by Rupert Ryle–Hodges, *BBC*, 2012.

“People have tried to do Henry V as a play glorifying war, and a play condemning war; but by allowing the text to be free, without preconceptions, one discovers that the play does both these things and many others besides” (Bradshaw, quoting actor Alan Howard at RSC in 1982, *Misrepresentations* 35).

³⁵⁷ I take “amiable monster” from William Hazlitt’s book on Shakespearean characters, in which he calls Henry V an “amiable monster” (Hazlitt 113). I will flesh out Hazlitt’s paradoxical reference in the text to come.



Act 5, Scene 2: Henry “Truly-falsely” Conquers Catherine: The Tongues of Men Are Full of

Deceits³⁵⁸

Exeunt all except HENRY, KATHARINE, and ALICE

Henry/Hiddleston waits for everyone to leave the room and does not look up until the last member of court (the Dauphin) has left the room.

KING HENRY V

Fair Katharine (*Henry looks up at Katherine and takes her in*), and most fair (*he gets up*),

Will you vouchsafe to teach (*he looks down embarrassed*) a soldier terms

Such as will enter at a lady's ear

And plead his love-suit to her gentle heart? (*He slowly walks toward Catherine*)

HENRY STRATEGY 1: Illusion of Power (Henry asks to be taught by Katherine and thereby puts her in an illusory power position)

KATHARINE

Your majesty shall mock at me; I cannot speak your England.

KING HENRY V

O fair Katharine (*he smiles at Katherine*), if you will love me soundly with

your French heart, I will be glad to hear you

confess it brokenly with your English tongue. Do

you like me, Kate? (*Henry looks away and back at Katherine*)

KATHARINE

Pardonnez-moi, I cannot tell vat is 'like me.'

KING HENRY V

An angel is like you, Kate, and you are like an angel. (*He is utterly sincere*)

HENRY STRATEGY 2: Flattery

KATHARINE

Que dit-il? que je suis semblable a les anges?

ALICE

Oui, vraiment, sauf votre grace, ainsi dit-il.

KING HENRY V

I said so, dear Katharine; and I must not blush to

affirm it.

KATHARINE

O bon Dieu! (*Katherine smiles and looks down*) les langues des hommes sont pleines de

³⁵⁸ The stage direction and choreography as chosen by director Thea Sharrock and actors Tom Hiddleston and Mélanie Thierry are marked in *vermillion italics*. The cuts made to Shakespeare's text are in *black italics*. If the cuts are long, I space them out with “—” em dashes. It is important to see the full text and the chosen cuts, as I will explain in my chapter. Moreover, I have added Henry's different seduction strategies in *blue italics* to demonstrate how brilliant a tactician Henry is in both love and war.

tromperies.

KING HENRY V

What says she, fair one? that the tongues of men
are full of deceits? (*Sincere, with a gentle smile*)

ALICE

Oui, dat de tongues of de mans is be full (*angrily*) of
deceits: dat is de princess. (*Bows to Henry*)

KING HENRY V

The princess is the better Englishwoman. (*He begins to pace around the room*)

HENRY STRATEGY 3: Sense of Humor (instead of getting offended by Katherine's snub, Henry is amused by her honesty and sassiness)

I' faith, Kate, my wooing is fit for thy understanding: I am
glad thou canst speak no better English; for, if
thou couldst, thou wouldst find me such a plain king
that thou wouldst think I had sold my farm
(*completely sincere but with self-deprecating humor*) to buy my
crown.

HENRY STRATEGY 4: Play the Dumb Fox (Henry pretends to be unsophisticated to allow Katherine to feel more refined and more in charge of the situation. Henry is trying to make the French princess from a cultured background feel sorry for the English plain 'peasant'—“sold my farm”)

I know no ways to mince it in love, but
directly to say 'I love you:'
(*He stops pacing and looks back at Katherine who looks down at the floor awkwardly*)
then if you urge me
farther than to say 'do you in faith?' I wear out
my suit.
(*Henry walks slowly toward Katherine, kneels down and holds up his hand toward her*)

HENRY STRATEGY 5: Proclaim Love Loudly and Confidently (lower Katherine's defenses)

Give me your answer; i' faith, do: and so
clap hands and a bargain: how say you, lady?
(*Katherine does not join hands, but instead gets up and walks away from him*).

KATHARINE

Sauf votre honneur, me understand vell.

KING HENRY V

Marry,
(*Henry takes off his crown while still kneeling and symbolically places it on Katherine's seat*)

HENRY STRATEGY 6: The Grand Gesture (Henry is not put off by Katherine's rebuff and cold-shouldering. On the contrary, he goes into full pursuit mode now. And he humbles himself even further now through humor and by making her feel sorry for him)

if you would put me to verses or to dance for
your sake, Kate, why you undid me: *(Henry gets up)* for the one,
I have neither words nor measure, and for the other,
I have no strength in measure,

HENRY STRATEGY 7: Make the Friend an Ally (Henry repeatedly smiles and borderline flirts with Alice, an older lady, to bring her over to his side. He knows that winning over Alice will also win over Katherine)

(he turns toward Alice and smiles awkwardly)
yet a reasonable
measure in strength. *(Laughs at his own awkward joke and allows it to be an awkward moment).*

—*If I could win a lady at
leap-frog, or by vaulting into my saddle with my
armour on my back, under the correction of bragging
be it spoken. I should quickly leap into a wife.
Or if I might buffet for my love, or bound my horse
for her favours, I could lay on like a butcher and
sit like a jack-an-apes, never off.* —

HENRY STRATEGY 8: Fill the Need of the Other and Play the Part (Henry has figured out now that Katherine does not want a sycophantic courtier but someone with substance who is honest and who deals plainly. Katherine wants a soldier and a trustworthy man, and Henry will gladly play the part for her)

But, before God,
Kate, —*I cannot look greenly nor gasp out my
eloquence, nor—I have no cunning in protestation;
only downright oaths, which I never use till urged,
nor never break for urging. If thou canst love a
fellow of this temper, Kate, whose face is not worth
sun-burning, *(sincere)* that never looks in his glass for love
of any thing he sees there, let thine eye be thy
cook.*

—*I speak to thee plain soldier: If thou canst
love me for this, take me: if not, to say to thee
that I shall die, is true; but for thy love, by the*

Lord, no; yet I love thee too. And while thou livest, dear Kate, take a fellow of plain and uncoined constancy; for he perforce must do thee right, because he hath not the gift to woo in other places: for these fellows of infinite tongue, that can rhyme themselves into ladies' favours, they do always reason themselves out again. What! a speaker is but a prater; a rhyme is but a ballad. A good leg will fall; a straight back will stoop; a black beard will turn white; a curled pate will grow bald; a fair face will wither; a full eye will wax hollow: but a good heart, Kate, is the sun and the moon; or, rather, the sun, and not the moon; for it shines bright and never changes, but keeps his course truly. —

If thou would have such a one, take me; and take me, take a soldier; take a soldier, take a king. And what sayest thou then to my love? speak, my fair, and fairly, I pray thee.

KATHARINE

Is it possible dat I sould love de enemy of France?

KING HENRY V

No;

(He begins to walk toward Katherine once more)

HENRY STRATEGY 9: Make the Other's Dreams Come True (Henry knows that Katherine is in a powerless position. Hence he not only promises her to be queen of one country, but of two. Later on he even promises her a third country and world domination: England, France, Ireland, conquering the Ottoman Empire)

it is not possible you should love the enemy of France, Kate: but, in loving me, you should love the friend of France; for I love France so well that I will not part with a village of it; I will have it all mine: *(sincere but with gentle humor)* and, Kate, when France is mine and I am yours, then yours is France and you are mine.

KATHARINE

I cannot tell vat is dat. *(Confused)*

KING HENRY V

No, Kate? *(Sighs)* I will tell thee in French; *(smiles, embarrassed)*

HENRY STRATEGY 10: Back to Flattery and Humor

la plus belle Katherine du monde, mon très cher et divine déesse.

—
which I am

sure will hang upon my tongue like a new-married wife about her husband's neck, hardly to be shook off. Je quand sur le possession de France, et quand vous avez le possession de moi,--let me see, what then? Saint Denis be my speed!--donc votre est France et vous etes mienne. It is as easy for me, Kate, to conquer the kingdom as to speak so much more French: I shall never move thee in French, unless it be to laugh at me.—

KATHARINE

Sauf votre honneur, le Francois que vous parlez, il est meilleur que l'Anglois lequel je parle.

KING HENRY V

No, faith, is't not, Kate: but thy speaking of my tongue, and I thine, most truly-falsely, must needs be granted to be much at one. But, Kate, dost thou understand thus much English, canst thou love me?

KATHARINE

I cannot tell.

KING HENRY V

Can any of your neighbours tell, Kate? I'll ask them. Come, I know thou lovest me: and at night, when you come into your closet, you'll question this gentlewoman about me; and I know, Kate, you will to her dispraise those parts in me that you love with your heart: but, good Kate, mock me mercifully; the rather, gentle princess, because I love thee cruelly. If ever thou beest mine, Kate, as I have a saving faith within me tells me thou shalt, I get thee with scambling, and thou must therefore needs prove a good soldier-breeder: shall not thou and I, between Saint Denis and Saint George, compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople and take the Turk by the beard? shall we not? what sayest thou, my fair flower-de-luce?

KATHARINE

I do not know dat

KING HENRY V

No; 'tis hereafter to know, but now to promise: do but now promise, Kate, you will endeavour for your French part of such a boy; and for my English moiety take the word of a king and a bachelor. How answer you, *la plus belle Katharine du monde, mon tres cher et devin deesse?* —

KATHARINE

Your majestee ave fausse French enough to deceive de most sage demoiselle dat is en France.

KING HENRY V

Now, fie upon my false French!

HENRY STRATEGY 11: Create A Fairytale Romance (Henry, once more, declares his love loudly and faithfully. Such confidence tears down Katherine's defenses and sweeps her off her feet)

By mine honour, in true English, I love thee, Kate: by which honour I dare not swear thou lovest me; yet my blood begins to flatter me that thou dost, notwithstanding the poor and untempering effect of my visage.

HENRY STRATEGY 12: Back to Making the Other Feel Sorry for Him (Henry makes fun of his looks all the while looking like a fairy-tale prince. Self-deprecating humor is a great aphrodisiac)

Now, beshrew my father's ambition! he was thinking of civil wars when he got me: therefore was I created with a stubborn outside, with an aspect of iron, that, when I come to woo ladies, I fright them. *(Katherine laughs because what Henry says here repeatedly about his appearance is clearly not true: He is as handsome as can be).*

HENRY STRATEGY 13: Mirror the Other (When Henry tells Katherine that he will grow better-looking as he ages, he suggests that he will love her in old age as well. Henry assuages Katherine's fears)

But, in faith, Kate, the elder I wax, the better I shall appear: *(Henry winks at Kate flirtatiously).*

—
my comfort is, that old age, that ill layer up of

beauty, can do no more, spoil upon my face: thou hast me, if thou hast me, at the worst; and thou shalt wear me, if thou wear me, better and better:

—
and therefore tell me, most fair Katharine, will you have me? Put off your maiden blushes;

HENRY STRATEGY 14: Promise the Other Greatness and a Legacy (Henry mentions “empress,” a title even higher than “queen.” He mentions ruling three countries and ruling over him. Once more, he plays the humble servant by kneeling and thereby puts Katherine in a power position)

avouch the thoughts of your heart with the looks of an empress;
take me by the hand, *(Henry holds out his right hand to Kate, then he kneels down in front of her)* and say 'Harry of England I am thine:' which word thou shalt no sooner bless mine ear withal, but I will tell thee aloud 'England is thine, Ireland is thine, France is thine, *(Henry looks Kate straight in the eye at the prospect of ruling three countries)* and *(Henry now modestly looks down when mentioning his own name)* Harry Plantagenet is thine!' *(Henry keeps the kneeling pose holding out his hand for some time because Kate does not just take his hand)*

who though I speak it before

*his face, if he be not fellow with the best king,
thou shalt find the best king of good fellows.*

Come, your answer in broken music; for thy voice is music and thy English broken; therefore, queen of all, Katharine, break thy mind to me in broken English; wilt thou have me?

KATHARINE

Dat is as it sall please de roi mon pere.

HENRY STRATEGY 15: Never Give Up

KING HENRY V

Nay, it will please him well, Kate it shall please him, Kate.

KATHARINE

Den it sall also content me. *(Kate takes Henry's hand).*

KING HENRY V

Upon that I kiss your hand, *(Katherine laughs and retreats)*
and I call you my queen.

KATHARINE

Laissez, mon seigneur, laissez, laissez: ma foi, je ne veux point que vous abaissiez votre grandeur en

baisant la main d'une de votre seigneurie indigne
serviteur; excusez-moi, je vous supplie, mon
tres-puissant seigneur.

KING HENRY V

Then I will kiss your lips, Kate.

KATHARINE

(Retreats giggling). Les dames et demoiselles pour etre baisees devant
leur noces, il n'est pas la coutume de France.

(Henry laughs as well).

KING HENRY V

Madam my interpreter, what says she?

ALICE

Dat it is not be de fashion pour les ladies of
France,--I cannot tell vat is baiser en English.

KING HENRY V

To kiss.

ALICE

Your majesty entendre bettere que moi.

KING HENRY V

It is not a fashion for the maids in France to kiss
before they are married, would she say?

ALICE

Oui, vraiment.

KING HENRY V

HENRY STRATEGY 16: Intrigue the Other (Henry has fully entered into the spirit of Katherine and he makes the ultimate bold move because he has figured out by now that offering her his power is the key to conquering her. Apart from ruling various countries, Henry now tells Katherine that he is the law and can make anything happen for her. He offers her the ultimate key to power by saying: Not only am I the law, but we will make the law together ("we are the makers of manners, Kate")³⁵⁹

O Kate, nice customs curtsy to great kings.

(Henry walks over and kisses Katherine).

*—Dear Kate, you and I cannot be confined within the weak
list of a country's fashion: we are the makers of
manners, Kate; and the liberty that follows our*

³⁵⁹ This is an unfortunate cut because it is such a powerful statement to make in front of someone who is powerless: "[W]e are the makers of manners" is the ultimate arrogant but seductive statement. Henry is brilliant in using "we," not "I," because he knows the magic of the word "we." To make the laws of countries, to write them, to dictate them is wonderfully tempting for Katherine, who has just been stripped of country and power and who is threatened with the loss of her existence.

places stops the mouth of all find-faults; as I will do yours, for upholding the nice fashion of your country in denying me a kiss: therefore, patiently and yielding.—

You have witchcraft in your lips, Kate: there is more eloquence in a sugar touch of them than in the tongues of the French council; and they should sooner persuade Harry of England than a general petition of monarchs. Here comes your father.
(Henry puts his crown back on).

There is so much wrong with Henry V's courting of Katherine in the final scene of the play that it is strangely right (but only when performed well). Everything Henry says is pretty much a lie, yet he seems to have some kind of faith in his own "performance" for Katherine. Some of his statements are outrageous in being so humble that they are arrogant—or so arrogant that they are, strangely enough, appealing. The most fascinating aspect of the scene is that Katherine is not naive. She is completely aware that "the tongues of men are full of deceits." Yet, she lets herself be charmed³⁶⁰ by Henry, and along with Katherine, the audience is charmed despite knowing that he is putting on a spectacle. Henry is charming not despite, but because the ice-cold killer and strategist in him peeks out from underneath. However, it is important to mention that Henry's seduction skills are best when watched in a good performance. When read as a text, there is a great likelihood that the reader—particularly the modern female reader—will be absolutely revolted by Henry. The actor portraying Henry has to walk a fine line between the experienced rake who conquers a woman the way a king conquers countries and the possibility of sincere love beneath the performance. I chose this particular scene because it is often viewed as a comedic and romantic ending to a battle- and war-riddled play that is redundant. Samuel Johnson

³⁶⁰ Or does she? I understand this is an acting choice. In the productions I have seen, the choices to allow Henry to charm her have always been more powerful. It is in line with making the strongest acting choice, and it is in line with the actor's saying "yes" to the scene partner. I am not arguing it is the only choice. Thus far, however, I have only ever seen it as the more powerful one in performance. I do see a subversive reading, however, in which it is entirely possible for Katherine to be massively put off by Henry's grandiloquence and verbosity.

went as far as to say that Shakespeare had clearly run out of material and had tacked on a romantic-comedy ending to fill space.³⁶¹

I argue that the courtship scene *is*, in fact, a comedic-romantic ending, but it is *also* another battle scene that rounds out the actual battle scenes of earlier acts. Henry strategically conquers Katherine the way he has conquered city after city, castle after country. He employs anything of use to him to bring Katherine around. Henry gives “a performance whose calculated naïveté allows him “most truly-falsely” (5.2.199) to translate Katherine to his own purposes, converting her to “the better Englishwoman” in the process (5.2.126–27; cf. Neill, *Folger Shakespeare*). In other words, to Henry, the end justifies the means in love and war. The fact is, however, that Henry is play-acting in the same way he was play-acting when he had an archbishop justify the war with France.³⁶² Henry already knew he would wage war, and Henry knew that Katherine was already his.³⁶³ Marilyn Williamson points out this fact as well: “The courtship is entirely gratuitous because the match, a *fait accompli*, has already had progeny in Henry’s mind. . . . [T]he courtship is play-acting or role-playing about a settled issue” (cf. Williamson 328). The actor playing Henry V must, therefore, give his character a meaningful

³⁶¹ Johnson says: “The truth is that the poet’s [Shakespeare’s] matter failed him in the fifth act, and he was glad to fill it up with whatever he could get; and not even Shakespeare can write well without a proper subject” (Johnson 92).

³⁶² Henry is an extraordinary strategist. He knows his claim to the throne is still shaky. Therefore, he asks the archbishop in front of all the essential members of his court if his claim to wage war against France is just. Henry knows that the Church is very willing to fight this war because it is out of money. Henry cleverly makes the war the “idea” of others. Henry is following his father’s dying wish to “busy giddy minds/With foreign quarrels” (4.3.443–444), and he strategically does it in a way that keeps his own hands clean.

³⁶³ Henry had earlier turned down France’s offer of Katherine. When he calls her his first and foremost demand, he is lying and not lying. The offer of Katherine was already on the table, but Henry was not satisfied with the rest of the offer. He wants all of France, after all. Hence, Henry lies when he says Katherine is his foremost demand (it is France), but he is *not necessarily* lying because the sequence of his final demand mentions Katherine first.

motivation for this scene, lest it fall flat or, worse, lest it come off as offensive. Joseph Papp³⁶⁴—who was both a director and theatre producer—shares an insightful thought on playing Henry in this scene:

It is against this background that Shakespeare has written one of the most delightful of his love scenes, paradoxically one of the toughest to rehearse and of the easiest to play for an audience. Henry's long, long speeches may bewilder the actor a little in rehearsal; but for the first time the scene is played for an audience, that audience will teach him a new trust in his playwright. The romance and humor is built into the situation that it can scarcely fail to charm an audience. (Papp, quoted in Williamson 327)

Papp's description of the scene may sound as if he is making light of a scene that has been called something near a rape scene.³⁶⁵ However, Papp's point is accurate if, and only if, the actor playing Henry fully understands the motivation of his character and imbues the character with humor. The courtship scene is highly contentious and calls for a very good actor. Some critics have called the scene redundant, some have called it unsuitable, some have viewed it as tyrannical, others have found it humorous, and some have claimed Henry is simply trying to make nice with Katherine whom he must, after all, spend time with as a future wife.

Williamson calls Henry's courtship manipulative and "spurious": "Henry pretends it really matters whether Katherine loves him, while all the time they both know that her father's wishes will settle the issue" (cf. Williamson 329). If this scene is not played skillfully by the

³⁶⁴ Papp was a theatre practitioner who knew what worked and what did not. His insights are poignant. He did, after all, create *Shakespeare in the Park*, which made Shakespeare accessible to all audiences (the performances at the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park are free). Papp's observations always come from both a pragmatic and scholarly knowledge of Shakespeare and of theatre in general. Notably, Papp points out something that Mark Rylance also says, namely, to allow the audience to guide the actor through a scene. Both Papp and Rylance emphasize that the actor learns from the audience during performances. In film, the camera's point of view is the audience's point of view. While the camera cannot offer immediate validation to actors, it nonetheless records an actor's every move with greater focus than any live audience member could. Actors know where each camera is, and they know it captures their acting choices forever. Additionally, film sets have crews and a director who are ever-present as audience.

³⁶⁵ "Though customarily played for its superficial charm, this scene is quite explicitly a scene of enforcement—a civil rape in which the conqueror's will is summarily imposed upon the conquered" (Neill, "A Modern Perspective: Henry V," *Folger Shakespeare Library*).

actors, Henry will look at the best pompous or, at worst, like a very bad person. Williamson sees in Henry V an “almost compulsive need” (Williamson 330) to *look* like a good person: “Henry never loses his pleasure at playing the good fellow” (Williamson 331), even though “he does not really like people but who seems to” (Williamson 334). It is very difficult or, rather, impossible to see the “real” Henry because he does not allow anyone into his heart. It has been argued repeatedly that audiences usually see Henry V as either a patriotic English hero³⁶⁶ and perfect king or as a ruthless Machiavellian tyrant.³⁶⁷ Norman Rabkin beautifully explained the reaction to the character of Henry V using the illusion figure of the duck–rabbit, which reveals to the viewer either a duck or a rabbit: “We are made to see a rabbit or a duck. . . . [S]ome members of the audience knew that they had seen a rabbit, others a duck. Still others, and I would suggest that they were Shakespeare’s best audience, knew terrifyingly that they did not know what to think” (cf. Rabkin 285). Back in 1977, Rabkin keenly observed that audiences tend to see what they want to see, which is usually what they know or expect. However, as Rabkin points out, the audience members who did not know what to think and were terrified by having seen both a duck and a rabbit were likely the ones most open to the possibility that Henry V was *both* a good king *and* a ruthless Machiavel. A brilliant performance of *Henry V*, I argue, must include both the “duck” and the “rabbit” aspects of the protagonist.

Henry must be incredibly charming—“A little touch of Harry in the night” (“Prologue,” *Henry V*, Act 4.47)—and he must be lethal. William Hazlitt famously called Henry V an “amiable monster” (Levin 137; Hazlitt 113). Hazlitt was on to something in his description of Henry V and the audience’s reception of the character: “How then do we like him [Henry]? We like him in the play. There, he is a very amiable monster, a very splendid pageant. As we like to gaze at a panther or a young lion in their cages in the Tower, and catch a pleasing horror from their glistening eyes” (Hazlitt 113), so we like Henry V. The audience likes *Henry V* (the play and the character) as a spectacle of violence, patriotism, heroism, and risk taking, only in the way

³⁶⁶ The following are examples of critics who adored the character of Henry V, in chronological order: G. G. Gervinus in 1875, John Dover Wilson in 1947, Walter in 1954, Humphrey in 1968, Aoki in 1973, Sanders in 1977, Berg in 1985, etc.

³⁶⁷ Among the critics who were put off by Henry V, there are William Watkiss Lloyd in 1875, Gerard Gould in 1919, Van Doren in 1939, Goddard in 1951 (he really did not like him), A. P. Rossiter in 1954, Richmond in 1967, Andrew Gurr in 1977, Barber and Wheeler in 1986, etc.

they like looking at a wild animal in a cage at the zoo. Hazlitt's description of Henry V is very similar to what Anthony Hopkins says about actors³⁶⁸ and audiences, namely, that the audience wants a nice life, but when they go to the theatre or to see a film, they want to see the actor go into the darkness and uncertainty for and instead of them. After all, the actor's profession originates in religious ritual:³⁶⁹ In the manner in which professional mourners were hired actors³⁷⁰ (and still are in many cultures), it is the task of actors to allow others to feel through them, cry through them, and laugh through them. Like the exotic animal on display, so is the actor on display—for and instead the spectator—onstage. There is a fascination on the side of the spectator to see and hear someone—an actor, a wild beast, a professional mourner—do the things they cannot do or would not do but secretly want to do at times (or even have done *to* them). *Henry V* delivers the kind of spectacle the audience can enjoy vicariously in that it has a protagonist who is arguably both a seductive sociopath and a true believer in the righteousness of his cause. The actor portraying Henry V must harness both sides of Henry's character.

As Rabkin says—and I agree—to reduce Henry V to *either* “heroic king” or “hypocritical tyrant” is to miss the point of the play, because Henry V is so much more than that:

The terrible fact about *Henry V* is that Shakespeare seems equally tempted by both its rival gestalts. And he forces us, as we experience and re-experience and reflect on the

³⁶⁸ The exact quote runs as follows: “It’s interesting because my experience is that people want their lives to be filled with love and laughter, and friendship and family. They want to have nice lives. They want to have happy lives. But when they go to the theater they want *someone who’s brave enough to lead them into the darkness*. They want *someone who can express the darkness they feel in their own lives and in their own hearts*, but they don’t want it at their front door. That’s what they want from art. That’s what they want from actors” (*BAFTA Interviews*: Tom Hiddleston, quoting Anthony Hopkins on acting and playing Hannibal Lecter 2016, emphasis mine). I had quoted Hopkins in Chapter 3a, for reference.

³⁶⁹ The Dionysian Festival/dithyramb in Ancient Greece springs to mind first. Less documented and lesser known are the *Mysteries of Osiris* around 1868 BCE, the *Mayan Dance of Giants*, and Sanskrit Kathakali (cf. “Drama: Drama and Religion,” *Encyclopedia.com* 2022).

³⁷⁰ This often sounds bizarre to the Western ear, but it is still a custom and an honor in many cultures (e.g., China) to hire professional mourners (n.b. Louisa Lim’s “Belly-Dancing For the Dead,” *NPR* 2013). The actor becomes a channel and a release valve for those who cannot cry, scream, wail, or express their grief in other ways. The actor as professional mourner stems from the profound notion that life is essentially dramatic: The event of birth is highly dramatic, and so is the event of death. Many cultures find relief and solace in an actor’s/professional mourner’s ritual. It honors the dead, and it removes the burden of having to deal with grief directly at a funeral.

play, as we encounter it in performances which inevitably lean in one direction or the other, to share its conflict. (Rabkin 293)

Rabkin makes an excellent point, and regarding acting, his point is even more valid. The richer the character's complexities, inner tension and contrarities, the better the performance. Solely because the audience usually perceives one Henry over the other (good king vs. flawed man, for example) in the way the viewer perceives either a duck or a rabbit at any given moment in the ambiguous image does not mean that both are not always there. Rabkin sees a phenomenon in Shakespeare's text that is expected in a good acting performance, that is, the coexistence of irresolvable opposites. Instead of overthinking the duck-rabbit gestalt as many literary critics have done respecting *Henry V*, and instead of questioning if the play is either full of irony and bitter subversive satire or if it is sincere, it is more helpful to think like an actor. After all, Shakespeare was an actor, and he wrote—I would always argue—like an actor, and for actors. He could escape his own mind³⁷¹ and enter the mind of another character completely.

One of the golden rules in acting is to never judge the character, and Shakespeare does not judge Henry V in the manner he also does not judge Richard III or any of his other characters. He lets them live. The argument among critics raging for years over Henry V being good or bad, hero or tyrant, honorable or sociopathic, etc., is simply not the point. He is both, and that is what makes the character riveting to watch. It is also what is so irksome about the character to many critics: They cannot pin him down because he eludes any hard and fast interpretation. Moreover, the idea that runs through so much criticism of *Henry V* to want the play's protagonist to be *either this or that, either duck or rabbit, either hero or tyrant* minimizes

³⁷¹ This may sound like a simplification on my behalf, but I do not think it is. From experience, I would argue that most people can neither escape their own minds nor channel another's mind, not even for short periods. In fact, many do not even wish to do so. To truly escape one's mind and enter the mind of others is a skill that requires great open-heartedness and curiosity in others, and such open-heartedness is very rare indeed. This is not surprising because human beings are biologically programmed to focus on the negative and fear "the other." Fear of others and fear of the unknown is part of the human survival mechanism. The percentage of people who can overcome this biological programming is low. Therefore, what I say may sound simple, but it is not.

the opulence of the character. Henry V does not exist in dichotomies. He contains multitudes.³⁷² To claim that Henry can only be either a hero or tyrant is not thinking like an actor. Any experienced actor knows that a character like Henry V can be many things at once: At the moment he declares prisoners to be executed, he can be full of love. At the moment he is outwardly full of courage—“Once more unto the breach” (3.1.1)/ “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers” (4.3.62)—he can be inwardly full of fear, insecurity, and sadness. During moments when he is particularly charming, he can be cold-blooded and calculating, as Henry/Hiddleston demonstrates throughout *The Hollow Crown*.

The key to playing Henry V in a non-dichotomous fashion and allowing the character to genuinely live richly onstage or onscreen is the key to rendering him truthfully and with resonance. I will show that Hiddleston does not attempt to unite the different facets of Henry, but maintains the struggle between the contrarities running through the character. At moments of tremendous horror, such as King Henry’s threat to the city of Harfleur (e.g., babies on spikes and the raping of virgins), Henry/Hiddleston maintains a kind of loving glance in his eyes. Such a strange love does not belie his cold-bloodedness in this instance, but accompanies it. It renders the moment richer in color and feeling. Similarly, during moments of vulnerability, Henry/Hiddleston reveals an underlying savagery and cool calculation that make him a genuinely fascinating and terrifying character to behold. Henry/Hiddleston often appears to have a contrasting inner monologue running through his head that countervails his outward portrayal of

³⁷² Based on the poem by Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself” (51), from his collection *Leaves of Grass* (1855).

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,

(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

Since Whitman’s lines have found great resonance in social media posts lately (many unaware that they are quoting Whitman), it is important to point out that this resonance likely stems from the growing dislike of the younger generation of society’s dichotomous expectation to be either *this* or *that*: “Not every social media post with the line ‘I contain multitudes’ stems from a direct awareness of Whitman, but all of them, knowingly or not, contain something of his poem’s – and the poet’s – spirit, a call for the validation of human complexity and contradiction.

It’s a timeless notion, but the line’s recent ubiquity hasn’t come out of nowhere” (Carlick, *Penguin Online* 2020).

Tom Hiddleston says the following in a tweet from 2012: “We contain contradictory multitudes. We change our minds & edit our memories” (Hiddleston, *Twitter* 23 Sep. 2012). Hiddleston is quoting the book *The Ego Trick* by Julian Baggini, and he has built on this tweet since in various interviews. As an example, in an interview with Marvel, he says the following about playing Loki: “I find there’s so many multifaceted aspects of his character which often exist within him either in concert or in conflict, and that’s part of the pleasure I have in playing him. And then to have that interior multiplicity externalized was thrilling” (Drum, quoting Hiddleston, *comicbook.com* 2021). Clearly, Hiddleston is very aware of the paradox within humans. Thus, it is unsurprising that his portrayal of Henry V is rich in contradictory multitudes.

Henry, and it works wonders for the audience. Acting coach Ivana Chubbuck explains the concept of an actor's "inner monologue."³⁷³

INNER MONOLOGUE (sic) helps you work to create a relationship even when you are not speaking. We as an audience will pick up on an actor's INNER MONOLOGUE. The truth of what you're thinking versus what you're saying will make us relate and respond. We identify with it because we rarely say what's really going on in our minds. Saying what's really on our minds is often contrary to achieving our goal. We couch what we really want to say to elicit the response we desire. (Chubbuck 174, emphasis editor's)

Henry V is an accomplished actor in every way. The more isolated the character becomes as a king, the more distance he puts between himself and other people, and the more elusive he becomes. Furthermore, Henry appears to exist on inner monologues altogether.

Indeed, the audience never knows what Henry V is thinking. Only his actions lead to any kind of understanding of what he must have been thinking during earlier scenes. I would argue that the actor playing Henry V must maintain one long inner monologue and employ a great deal of subtext to enrich the character. Hiddleston appears to do just that: The wheels are always turning behind his eyes. Henry/Hiddleston's eyes are never empty. They always seem to conceal, mask or suppress something unknown. Henry shares only one moment of his inner thoughts with

³⁷³ Chubbuck says the following about an inner monologue:

The INNER MONOLOGUE is always stated in a way that connects with the other person. INNER MONOLOGUE is not talking to yourself. INNER MONOLOGUE is the unspoken communication between people. It creates an unspoken interaction. ...What we say and what we think is dissimilar and often even contradictory. ... INNER MONOLOGUE is what you can't say out loud because it will be antithetical to winning the SCENE OBJECTIVE. ...INNER MONOLOGUE infuses your portrayal with human vulnerabilities. This makes your character more audience-friendly, because an audience can feel and relate to a person who is insecure and apprehensive more than they can relate to someone who is fearless and confident. INNER MONOLOGUE makes you work harder to win your SCENE OBJECTIVE. This is because your spoken words are frequently so different than what you're really thinking that it forces you to gush and overdo to make the other person believe that what you're saying is true. (cf. Chubbuck 173–177)

Again, I state my long-held belief that the notion of there not being subtext in Shakespeare is wrong. Chubbuck shares my point of view. She repeatedly uses Shakespearean scenes to demonstrate the characters' inner monologues and subtext. I concur that Shakespeare, an actor's writer, writes wonderful soliloquies during which characters share their soul with the audience. The "inner monologue" in Shakespeare is often the soliloquy or monologue. However, in *Henry V*, Henry is deeply isolated and hardly ever shares his innermost thoughts with the audience. Hence, in acting, it is not just appropriate to employ an inner monologue of "purpose and magnitude" (cf. Chubbuck 181), but it is necessary. It is as though Shakespeare's "hidden directions," as John Barton calls them, demand strong inner monologues and a strong inner life from the actor playing Henry V.

the audience right before the battle of Agincourt. The literary critic's nightmare is the actor's freedom to play duck-rabbit, and the latter is exactly what Hiddleston does with Henry V: He fully embraces the character's contradictions.

Throughout *The Hollow Crown*, Hiddleston neither conflates nor simplifies Henry V's contradictions nor sacrifices one facet of Henry for another. In the courtship scene, Henry/Hiddleston is playful, charming, and sweet, and he is calculating, feral, and relentless. He is passionate and full-blooded, yet ice runs in his veins. During some key moments in the scene, Henry/Hiddleston makes inspired choices. First, Henry/Hiddleston both plays with Katherine in an innocent, childlike manner and in a very non-innocent, passive-aggressive, cat-and-mouse game. Henry/Hiddleston appears to have chosen to make Kate his not solely through brute force (she has no choice but to be his anyway) but through enchantment. Henry/Hiddleston wants to seduce her through persuasion rather than force. He seems aware that persuasion is much more powerful than a command, especially in the long run. To want to seduce someone who is a "fait accompli" and a conquered enemy is ambitious and strange. Consequently, Katherine's facial expressions throughout the scene run the gamut from "Is he toying with me?" to "Could he mean it?" Katherine knows Henry is playing with her, but she plays along. Henry/Hiddleston runs through several seduction strategies³⁷⁴ in split seconds, always adjusting to the object of his desire, always completely in the moment with her, always completely fixed on her. Henry/Hiddleston loves to play, and he always plays to win.

His first strategy is to play the inexperienced, shy, and embarrassed soldier who does not know how to woo a lady. He asks Katherine to teach him how to court her. Katherine is not impressed and is unwilling to play along. Henry is encouraged and amused by her cold shoulder. It is as though Katherine's rejection invites him to raise the stakes of the "play." When Katherine curtly says that she does not understand what "like" means in French, Henry gives her a non-answer full of flattery. Instead of translating his question ("Do you like me, Kate?"), Henry uses "like" not as a verb but as an adjective in a pompous simile ("An angel is like you, Kate"). When Katherine calls him on his pretentious bombast: "Les langues des hommes sont pleines de

³⁷⁴ I counted sixteen, but if I were to study Henry's persuasion skills further, I might count even more. He is certainly heavy in the flattery department.

tromperies” - “The tongues of men are full of deceits” (5.2.114–115), Henry immediately shifts into second gear: He now tells her with a straight face that he is the equivalent of a peasant when it comes to fancy love language, all the while rendering her a speech full of, well, fancy love language (“I cannot look greenly nor gasp out my eloquence, nor I have no cunning in protestation” 5.2.143–146). In fact, Henry has done everything he now renounces: He can act (turn pale on purpose), he can certainly speak in a fancy manner, he does have the gift of cunning declarations, and he most certainly makes and breaks promises (oaths) all the time. Yet, somehow, Henry/Hiddleston sounds and looks sincere when he says the things he says.

Even when Henry/Hiddleston draws attention to his lack of physical attraction, he says it with such sincerity that the spectator, along with Kate, is simply baffled. “What?” is what Katherine appears to think repeatedly, and so does the viewer. Did Henry/Hiddleston just really say that he is not much to look at when he is obviously, ridiculously handsome? What? Did Henry/Hiddleston really just make fun of chatty lovers (“fellows of infinite tongue” 5.2.156) while being a fellow of infinitely chatty tongue? What? Did Henry/Hiddleston just call himself a plain soldier while playing word games and twisting logic? What? Henry/Hiddleston delivers these lines with sincerity and humor, and at times he allows the truth to spill out like the aforementioned razor blade hidden in candy. When Katherine asks him if it is possible for her to love the enemy of France, Henry/Hiddleston blatantly tells her that no, it is not. However, there is no need to love the enemy of France because he loves France so much that he is determined to “have it all mine” (5.2.173). In a way, Henry/Hiddleston tells Katherine who he is without telling her who he is. Katherine’s response, “I cannot tell what is dat” (5.2.176) is so simple and honest in the face of Henry/Hiddleston’s “infinite tongue” that it is both humorous and unsettling. Henry/Hiddleston takes Katherine’s hesitance and rejection as challenges. After all, she is not playing his game (yet), and he needs to get her to play it. He gives a sigh and then follows with a mocking: “No, Kate?” question. It is as though he is challenging her to play his game, which is, in a way, exactly what she must do when she becomes his queen. He responds to her lightheartedly, but his tone is somewhat patronizing. He sounds as if he is asking a child if he or she still has not caught on to “the game of life.” “It may all appear like useless ceremony to you, Kate,” he seems to say, but “this game gets very real when played right.” Of course, the latter is

disturbing because it demands that the audience weigh the question of how vapid Henry's "ceremonial" courtship of Katherine really is, or if he is trying to teach her how to play the game of royal power. The latter game—a heightened game of life—is a game of persuasion in which one never directly speaks of what one wants, but gets it by attacking from the side and indirectly. Henry/Hiddleston appears to want to convey to Kate that theatrics and ceremony *are real things*. It is the "playing" (with words, with facts, even with people) that leads to success.

As unsettling as Henry's many "truly-falsely" speeches in the courtship scene are, he manages to draw Katherine into his game. Henry/Hiddleston knows it is easy to win a foregone-conclusion-game that ends in marriage. He knows Katherine will be his wife. What he can never force her to do is fall in love with him and understand him and his motivations. The latter is just what Henry/Hiddleston demonstrates in the scene: how to make someone fall in love with you. He sincerely seems to want to share a bond with Katherine. Yes, his speeches are full of lies. Yes, he talks a great deal, too much, perhaps. Yes, he deceives constantly. And yes, it works. Through all his lies, Henry/Hiddleston shows Katherine a kind of truth: He demonstrates in this scene what Touchstone hit upon in *As You Like It*: "[T]he truest poetry is the most feigning" (*AYLI* 3.3.15). Henry/Hiddleston's fanciful lies tell a truth: The game matters, playing matters, and artifice is what wins hearts, not blunt truth. If one fails to play well in life, particularly at court, one loses. This scene can be viewed as an "acting-out" of *Sonnet 138*: Henry knows that Kate will be forced to marry him, but he still acts out a courtship ritual. Kate knows Henry's "performance" is mere ceremony, but she allows herself to become absorbed and enchanted by this performance. Both know that the other is deceiving them, yet in that very deception lies a truth. Henry/Hiddleston plays Henry as the quintessential seducer, but not an obvious one. As much as Henry/Hiddleston repeats how bad he is at rhetoric (he is not), how unrefined and unsophisticated he is (he is not), how ugly he is (he is so obviously not), he somehow manages to make his audience believe that he is new to the courtship game. The way Hiddleston portrays Henry can be read as a master class of royal power and how to survive as a leader. He is letting Katherine in on his "secret" way of getting things done, not through words but actions. It is almost as if he is testing her understanding of his ways and he wants her acceptance. Seeking to be loved, understood, and accepted is a powerful acting goal.

Henry/Hiddleston will conquer Kate the same way he conquered her country: He will use his love of performance, his deep insight into who he is, and his insight into how Katherine may feel about him. Henry/Hiddleston understands the golden rule of persuasion and seduction, namely, that form matters much more than content. Hence, Henry/Hiddleston's rambling speeches may appear verbose (they are), but they fulfill their purpose. They make him look inexperienced, and they make him look nervous, as though he talks too much to fill Kate's silences, as though he is, indeed, ill-equipped for courtship. Henry/Hiddleston plays the hapless suitor-soldier because he knows that, under the circumstances, playing the plain soldier is the winning strategy. If Henry/Hiddleston were to waltz into the room with the courage of someone experienced in love (which is who he really is), he would not win over a woman who already views him as a bully and his actions as offensive. To persuade Kate, Henry/Hiddleston must put Kate at ease first. For that to happen, he cannot play the smooth operator. Henry/Hiddleston focuses entirely on Katherine and tries to be the person she desires. He plays into exactly what he thinks is missing in Kate's life. He keeps emphasizing that what he has will be hers, his power will be hers, his achievements hers, and so on. Henry/Hiddleston also emphasizes the part of Henry V that always wants to be loved and accepted. In turn, Katherine appreciates the effort Henry/Hiddleston puts into her courtship, particularly because she knows that he need not do it. Hiddleston's Henry wins because he knows that the only way to do so is to play the game. Katherine is in a position of complete powerlessness. What could be more attractive to her than a king who declares that he wants to share all his power with her?

Furthermore, Henry/Hiddleston knows that asking to be loved means giving Katherine some power back. It is up to Katherine to either give or withhold her love. Therefore, by playing Henry as someone who genuinely wants affection and acceptance, Hiddleston makes a powerful choice. Katherine cannot withhold her hand in marriage, but she can withhold her heart. By giving Katherine some power back and showing her respect, Henry/Hiddleston creates a more equal playing field (emphasis on "playing" field). Now that he has given Katherine something to have agency over, he has given her a part, and now she must play. In short, Henry/Hiddleston cleverly allows Katherine to believe that she is doing the seducing, not he. He feeds into everything she yearns for at just the right amount. When one strategy falls flat, he immediately

switches to another. When Katherine calls out his pompous verbiage about angels, he simply switches course. He does not get offended, and he does not take himself too seriously. Henry/Hiddleston plays each beat with such charisma and the right amount of awkwardness that his presence overwhelms Katherine at the end. Henry/Hiddleston is just awkward enough to lower Kate's defenses and smooth enough to quickly change tactics. He focuses entirely on Katherine the entire time. One of his first intuitive gestures is to remove his crown. He addresses Katherine not as a king but as a man. He does not address her from a position of power but from a more equal position. However, Henry/Hiddleston's confidence and presence are magnificent. There is no shred of doubt in his pursuit of Katherine. He takes each obstacle as a further challenge. Such confidence and complete faith in one's vision are pure charisma. Hiddleston endows Henry with a spontaneity and self-deprecating humor that make it impossible for Katherine to continue to turn him down. It is clear: Henry/Hiddleston will not stop his pursuit until he charms Katherine.

Viewing the scene, one gets the impression that Henry would return every single day should Katherine continue to deny him. His fervor and sense of purpose are so strong that he will prevail today, tomorrow, whenever. There is no halfway for Henry. Furthermore, Henry/Hiddleston demonstrates the high risk the king is willing to take. He does not mind making a fool of himself in front of Katherine. In fact, he appears to enjoy the part he plays for Katherine. He wants to prove himself to her. He does not mind playing the clown for her. After all, pursuing a lady is more enjoyable than waging war. Henry/Hiddleston's "infinite tongue" is a clever device for hypnotizing his audience and putting it at ease. The fact that Henry's speeches are littered with idealizations at best and lies at worst does not matter. It is not what he says; it is how he says it. Through his waterfall of words, Henry/Hiddleston makes Katherine comfortable. His "infinite tongue" demonstrates the power of suggestion: Henry/Hiddleston never mentions any of the cruder matters Katherine is facing directly, such as sleeping with him and marrying him. Instead, Henry/Hiddleston emphasizes "like," "love," "we," shared power, and shared legacy through a shared heir. He even makes Katherine feel as if she is slightly superior to this chatty English king, who does not appear to have the French courtier's seduction skills. Hiddleston plays up this seemingly "bumbling" aspect of Henry: He renders him as someone who does not quite know what he is doing, a fish out of water, an Englishman lacking the "savoir faire" of a

French seducer. And that is exactly how he catches Kate. Hiddleston also plays up the part of Henry that does not mind playing with gender roles: He is, essentially, playing the “dumb fox,” a strategy employed by countless women throughout history to assure survival through marriage while not offending the male ego with too much intelligence. Men do not often use such a timeless strategy because they like to assert themselves. Hiddleston plays Henry with a unique feminine side. He is entirely willing to enter into Katherine’s spirit and way of thinking. He is willing to bend a little in Katherine’s favor instead of breaking her spirit with cold commands.

Hiddleston’s Henry is confident enough in his game that he feels no hyper-masculine need to prove himself in the brute ways of ego. He is too smart for such a faux pas. As in warfare, Hiddleston’s Henry is a long-term thinker who plays the long game with Katherine because he wants to win the war, not just the battle. Instead of ordering her curtly to toe the line, he takes his time with her and works to gain her trust. Such patience and effort are attractive and seductive. In the *Hollow Crown*’s courtship scene, Hiddleston’s Henry appears to have figured out exactly what Katherine secretly desires. Having power is an aphrodisiac, particularly to someone just stripped of all power, privilege, and country. Henry/Hiddleston seems to know this secret desire, and he emphasizes key moments in his speech with gentle reminders, even absolutely arrogant ones. He repeats that once Katherine marries him, all the power will be theirs. The moment Henry/Hiddleston seemingly oversteps when he kisses Kate after she repeatedly tells him that it would be uncustomary to kiss her hand is a calculated strategy. Hiddleston’s Henry plays this part with enough humor to land the targeted message that Katherine secretly yearns for. His power, he repeats, will be her power: “Customs curtsy to great kings.” The laws will adhere to him, not the other way around. He will make or transgress the law as he sees fit, and if Katherine comes on board with him, they will dictate terms together. Henry/Hiddleston sweetly lets Katherine know that, as a couple, they will tell the world what to do, not the world them. That is power. Henry/Hiddleston also reveals his dark Machiavellian side to Katherine. Consciously or subconsciously, this seemingly aggressive, unethical, and unbelievably arrogant statement hits Katherine right where it is supposed to, at the core of her own repressed and very human desire. She wants her power back. Henry/Hiddleston’s long-winded, distracting speeches have sufficiently sewn confusion and intoxicated Katherine so he

could aim his key “direct attack” and “move in for the kill” at just the right moment.

Hiddleston’s Henry has hit upon the right frequency that touches Katherine’s heart and her primal desire. Hiddleston’s Henry masterfully manipulates Katherine without her awareness. All the ideas and desires Katherine now has have been planted by Henry/Hiddleston. Moreover, he did it so well—or better, he did it so purposely awkwardly, without ego, and with self-deprecating humor—that even the audience roots for this romance.

Hiddleston’s Henry has taken none of Katherine’s many attempts at resistance personally. Instead, he has accepted them with a sense of humor and taken them as a challenge to do better. This kind of self-effacing charm is entirely irresistible. Hiddleston employs much body language to instill Henry V with an enchanting sense of humor, such as looking at the floor to express modesty, mixed with direct eye contact to convey a challenge. If ever the power of mixed signals could be demonstrated in a courtship, it is in this scene. Henry/Hiddleston mixes charm with challenge at a speed that overwhelms Katherine. The many giggles Katherine offers as a response in lieu of big words are very natural. Henry/Hiddleston takes her breath away, literally and figuratively. He pursues her by walking after her, but never more than would be uncomfortable. The moment Henry/Hiddleston senses Katherine’s strain, he switches to a passive and unobtrusive physical activity such as kneeling, taking off his crown, or holding up his hand to her. All the latter gestures offer Katherine power. It was her choice to listen to him, her choice to look at him, and her choice to take his hand. Among a flood of self-effacing comments—all not true, and no one cares—Henry/Hiddleston manages to convey himself as sweet. Even when he says that he will bend the law of the land to his will, he is charming. He is always courteous and respectful of Katherine, even when he need not be. He fuses submissiveness with arrogance, and it works. Katherine does not know what hit her at the end when she takes Henry/Hiddleston’s hand, and neither does the audience. It was Henry/Hiddleston’s charisma, presence, and enchantment that won over Katherine. He never once asserted himself, neither with his rank nor with his masculinity. Instead of making himself feel good by throwing his weight around, Henry/Hiddleston wins Kate by making *her* feel good. He demonstrates to her that his “courtship performance” was more effective than direct commands. It may have looked like a ceremonial game, but it was a calculated strategy wrapped in playfulness on Henry’s behalf. Henry/

Hiddleston demonstrates that such brilliant self-effacing charisma, presence, and enchantment have been years in the making. It was strategy, and good strategy always allows for contradiction, change, empathy for, and vulnerability toward the other. Henry/Hiddleston was always both a duck and a rabbit.

12) Mark Rylance: Delightful Deceit in *Twelfth Night: A Gender-Bending Sad Clown*

Mark Rylance: Countess Olivia; Johnny Flynn: Viola; Malvolio: Stephen Fry.

Globe on Screen: Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, directed by Tim Carroll, produced by James Whitbourn and Shakespeare's Globe (The Globe Theatre), 2013.

Act 1, Scene 5: Love at First Sleight: Viola/Cesario Seduces and Does Not Seduce Olivia

OLIVIA

Are you a comedian?³⁷⁵

VIOLA/CESARIO

No, my profound heart: and yet, by the very fangs of malice I swear, I am not that I play. Are you the lady of the house?

OLIVIA

If I do not usurp myself, I am.

VIOLA/CESARIO

Most certain, if you are she, you do usurp yourself; for what is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve. But this is from my commission: I will on with my speech in your praise, and then show you the heart of my message.

OLIVIA

Come to what is important in't: I forgive you the praise.

VIOLA/CESARIO

Alas, I took great pains to study it, and 'tis poetical.

OLIVIA

³⁷⁵ In the Renaissance, actors were called "comedians." I have marked all metatheatrical terms in *mauve*. When Olivia indirectly says, "If I do not usurp myself," she is also self-reflexively drawing attention to her/his profession of actor: She is saying that she is Olivia unless she steals her own part. Viola jumps on Olivia's "usurp" comment and retorts that Olivia is indeed "usurping herself" when she hides behind a veil: An actor must share his work with the audience, Viola implies. Moreover, I have *italicized* the language of *raw emotion*: When Cesario speaks from the heart, all stylized language falls by the wayside and is replaced with intense soulful language full of vowels ("o") and diphthongs ("ou," "oy," "ea"). N.b. the words "you," "soul," "willow," "loud," "halloo," "Olivia," "O" which are pure passion in comparison to Orsino's artificial "embassies."



It is the more like to be feigned: I pray you,
keep it in. I heard you were saucy at my gates,
and allowed your approach rather to wonder at you
than to hear you. If you be not mad, be gone; if
you have reason, be brief: 'tis not that time of
moon with me to make one in so skipping a dialogue.

MARIA

Will you hoist sail, sir? here lies your way.

VIOLA/CESARIO

No, good swabber; I am to hull here a little
longer. Some mollification for your giant, sweet
lady. Tell me your mind: I am a messenger.

OLIVIA

Sure, you have some hideous matter to deliver, when
the courtesy of it is so fearful. Speak your office.

VIOLA/CESARIO

It alone concerns your ear. I bring no overture of
war, no taxation of homage: I hold the olive in my
hand; my words are as full of peace as matter.

OLIVIA

Yet you began rudely. What are you? what would you?

VIOLA/CESARIO

The rudeness that hath appeared in me have I
learned from my entertainment. What I am, and what I
would, are as secret as maidenhead; to your ears,
divinity, to any other's, profanation.

OLIVIA

Give us the place alone: we will hear this divinity.

Exeunt MARIA and Attendants

Now, sir, **what is your text?**

VIOLA/CESARIO

Most sweet lady,--

OLIVIA

A comfortable doctrine, and much may be said of it.

Where lies your text?

VIOLA/CESARIO

In Orsino's bosom.

OLIVIA

In his bosom! In **what chapter** of his bosom?

VIOLA/CESARIO

To answer by the method, in **the first** of his heart.

OLIVIA

O, **I have read it:** it is heresy. Have you no more to say?

VIOLA/CESARIO

Good madam, let me see your face.

OLIVIA

Have you any commission from your lord to negotiate with my face? You are now **out of your text**: but we will **draw the curtain** and show you the picture. Look you, sir, such a one I was this present: is't not well done?

Unveiling

VIOLA/CESARIO

Excellently done, if God did all.

OLIVIA

'Tis in grain, sir; 'twill endure wind and weather.

VIOLA/CESARIO

'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on: Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive, If you will lead these graces to the grave And leave the world no copy.

OLIVIA

O, sir, I will not be so hard-hearted; I will give out divers schedules of my beauty: it shall be inventoried, and every particle and utensil labelled to my will: as, item, two lips, indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth. Were you sent hither to praise me?

VIOLA/CESARIO

I see you what you are, you are too proud; But, if you were the devil, you are fair. My lord and master loves you: O, such love Could be but recompensed, though you were crown'd The nonpareil of beauty!

OLIVIA

How does he love me?

VIOLA/CESARIO

With adorations, fertile tears,
With groans that thunder love, with sighs of fire.

OLIVIA

Your lord does know my mind; I cannot love him:
Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble,
Of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth;
In voices well divulged, free, learn'd and valiant;

And in dimension and the shape of nature
A gracious person: but yet I cannot love him;
He might have took his answer long ago.

VIOLA/CESARIO

*If I did love you in my master's flame,
With such a suffering, such a deadly life,
In your denial I would find no sense;
I would not understand it.*

OLIVIA

Why, what would you?

VIOLA/CESARIO

*Make me a willow cabin at your gate,
And call upon my soul within the house;
Write loyal cantons of contemned love
And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
Halloo your name to the reverberate hills
And make the babbling gossip of the air
Cry out 'Olivia!' O, You should not rest
Between the elements of air and earth,
But you should pity me!*

OLIVIA

You might do much.

What is your parentage?

VIOLA/CESARIO

Above my fortunes, yet my state is well:
I am a gentleman.

OLIVIA

Get you to your lord;

I cannot love him: let him send no more;

Unless, perchance, **you** come to me again,

To tell me how he takes it. Fare you well:

I thank you for your pains: spend this for me.

VIOLA/CESARIO

I am no fee'd post, lady; keep your purse:

My master, not myself, lacks recompense.

Love make his heart of flint that you shall love;

And let your fervor, like my master's, be

Placed in contempt! Farewell, *fair cruelty*.

Exit

OLIVIA

'What is your parentage?'

'Above my fortunes, yet my state is well:

I am a gentleman.' I'll be sworn thou art;

*Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions and spirit,
Do give thee five-fold blazon: not too fast:
soft, soft!
Unless the master were the man. How now!
Even so quickly may one catch the plague?
Methinks I feel this youth's perfections
With an invisible and subtle stealth
To creep in at mine eyes. Well, let it be.*

Tim Carroll's production of *Twelfth Night* was risky: It was an all-male production, but the men playing women were not teenagers, as they were in the Renaissance. Furthermore, contemporary audiences are not used to men playing women on stage. However, the play was an immense success among both audiences and critics. It never tried to distract from its stylized artificiality, and by doing so, it was more authentic. The all-male production was first performed in 2002 in the UK and then revived in 2012 at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. It then moved to New York City's Belasco Theatre in 2013. Having watched the play in 2002 and in 2013, Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* states, "This is how Shakespeare was meant to be done" (Brantley, *NYT* 2013), and I agree. This production is a joy to watch from start to finish. It is natural in its artificiality, and it is highly entertaining and moving. I also concur with Brantley when he says that Tim Carroll's production was refreshing in that the actors had faith in the language of Shakespeare and did not fall prey to the current acting trend of indicating to the audience what the language means. The Globe cast members *know* what the words mean, and that resonates with the audience (cf. Brantley, *NYT* 2013). One of the most fascinating facets of the production, Brantley indicates, is that the actors evoke the paradox and beauty of theatrical illusion, where fiction becomes truer than reality:

Of course, theater is one big illusion. That reality, or unreality, is fully acknowledged by the actors being onstage, donning their Elizabethan garb, when we enter the theater. Yet somehow once the plays proper start, we eagerly accept what's happening not as a substitute for reality but as a heightened, truer version of it. (Brantley, *NYT* 2013)

The scene in which Olivia meets Viola/Cesario³⁷⁶ is one of the most charming and flirtatious meetings of minds in all of Shakespeare. Viola/Cesario acts himself right into Olivia's heart. Indeed, Viola/Cesario so moves Olivia, he takes her breath away. Mark Rylance as Olivia shows this breathlessness repeatedly and hilariously.

It is important for the actors portraying Olivia and Viola/Cesario to emphasize that the meeting of the two characters does not solely result in Olivia being physically attracted to Viola/Cesario. Olivia and Viola/Cesario have a genuine meeting of minds, intellect, and souls (Olivia says, "Thy *tongue*, thy *face*, thy limbs, actions, and *spirit*" are all alluring to her). It is not just Cesario's wit and his beautiful face and body, but his audacious and fearless *actions* and his *spirit* (his soul, the "animating and vital principle" that gives life to Viola/Cesario) that take Olivia's breath away (cf. *Merriam-Webster*). Regarding wit and ardor, Olivia and Viola are perfectly matched. Their names suggest such a similarity (Viola = Olivia minus one "i"). Olivia falls in love with all of Viola/Cesario in minutes. Even before Olivia meets Viola/Cesario, she is intrigued by the latter's persistence. Viola/Cesario simply will not go away until he speaks to Olivia. Olivia, a countess, is not used to disobedience that verges on impudence. However, Viola/Cesario's fearlessness and cheekiness allow him to break down Olivia's walls where others have failed. After all, Orsino has been wooing Olivia in a passive and overly stylized manner. He sends "embassies" to Olivia instead of fighting for her himself. Olivia senses that Orsino does not really love her, but her beautiful exterior. Orsino's melancholy persistence in courting her via messengers is tedious to her. Conversely, Viola/Cesario speaks to Olivia directly and as an equal. Viola/Cesario is full of passion and pizzazz. The words Viola/Cesario speaks to Olivia are so moving that she has no choice but to fall in love with him. In their first meeting, Viola/Cesario quickly takes the lead in their conversation, even though he is the lowly suitor and Olivia is a

³⁷⁶ I will use "he"/"his"/"him" for Viola/Cesario unless I specifically refer to Viola. Since Viola is in disguise, she speaks as Cesario. I deliberated if using "them" was more appropriate in describing the character of Cesario because of his ambiguity, fluidity, and gender-elusiveness. Cesario is always perceived as both a young man and not a young man. As an example, Count Orsino notices Cesario's feminine features. For clarity's sake—the play includes disguise and twins and confusion—I decided to use the male pronoun for Viola/Cesario when he is playing a male. However, regarding gender perception, "they" would be more appropriate because of Viola/Cesario's gender fluidity. Furthermore, I am omitting the name of the actor in this instance because three names (Viola/Cesario/Flynt) disturb the flow of the text.

countess. What is beautiful in the language of Shakespeare is that Olivia falls into the same pattern and rhythm as Viola/Cesario and repeats certain words. Olivia's and Cesario's encounters are similar to Romeo's and Juliet's in their flirtatious intensity and sassiness. Romeo and Juliet speak in a shared sonnet, the pinnacle of romantic love. Viola/Cesario and Olivia speak in prose, but their language is vivid and their rhythm becomes one. I will examine the following scene in great detail in order to show how Rylance animates Olivia so movingly.

Viola/Cesario (played by Johnny Flynt) is both sweet and "saucy" (as Olivia calls him) from the moment he enters. Viola/Cesario insists on knowing who the lady of the house is because he does not want to address the wrong person (the servant Maria, wonderfully played by Paul Chahidi). Viola/Cesario cannot see Olivia/Rylance's face because her black veil hides it. Olivia/Rylance never lets the audience forget that Olivia is in deep mourning after having lost first a father and then a brother: "Olivia, encased in black, with her tiny mouth slightly pursed and stained dark, as if by a bitter berry, is a living memento mori" (Als, *The New Yorker* 2013). She has lost the men who protected her and now hides behind a facade of reserved coldness, sadness, and a physical facade of armor (the veil and mourning clothes). Olivia/Rylance also makes it clear that no one can come close or touch her. The Fool Feste attempts to sit beside her and take her hand in comfort, but she resists. Olivia/Rylance's make-up is white with very red lips in Kabuki fashion. Since Rylance has, by nature, a gentle, delicate, melancholy, and somber expression, the white makeup makes him look like Pierrot, the sad clown. Furthermore, he is of slight build, which allows him to look feminine in the long, black-beaded Renaissance gown he wears. The gown adds an additional layer of armor because it serves as a wide protective wall around her. As Hilton Als puts it, most insightfully:

Rylance is an actor of remarkable gifts, alert to every moment. . . . And you can barely believe what he's able to express with his body. Small and trim, his skirts swinging beneath him like a bell, he circles the stage, his face flushed with wit or his chin drawn deep into his ruff in longing. . . . Rylance's work with Carroll adds layers of unspoken narrative to the text; he writes with his body. He's a play within a play unto himself. (cf. Als, *The New Yorker*)

Hilton Als has the ability to capture the essence of performers onstage like no other. Rylance writes with his body onstage. Not only does Rylance make Shakespeare's words come to life in the most creative fashion, but he also makes the words dance through his body.

Olivia/Rylance is still in deep mourning, but she is also, as Olivia/Rylance reveals by entertaining Feste longer than necessary, ennuied. Olivia/Rylance is tired of being sad, but she is also afraid to drop her guard (the veil, the mourning, and her aloofness) that hides her deep vulnerability. Viola/Cesario is the first person to handle Olivia without velvet gloves. "I am not leaving until you hear me," says Viola/Cesario; "I want to know whom I am speaking to"; "I am not going to waste the long speech I wrote and memorized on the wrong person"; "I am not intimidated by your continued 'no' and by your threatening maid Maria, who is trying to throw me out. I will speak with you, and I will speak with you alone," boldly says Viola/Cesario. Of course, Olivia/Rylance is intrigued: "With Olivia, Viola is both herself and not, male and female and not" (Als, *The New Yorker*). When Viola/Cesario tells the countess they must be alone because what Cesario has to impart is sacred ("divinity") to Olivia's ears only but would be profanity ("profanation") to anyone else, Viola/Cesario has won the floor. Olivia/Rylance now joins Cesario's rhythm and repeats the word "divinity." Olivia/Rylance sends away Maria, and Viola/Cesario begins her memorized speech from Orsino. Olivia/Rylance makes it clear through his facial expression and body language that he is electrified by this fearless and plucky young "man": Earlier, Olivia/Rylance's ears had perked up when Malvolio informed her that Viola/Cesario had been told many times to leave but will not; Olivia/Rylance is piqued when Viola/Cesario boldly tells her that he cannot answer where he is from and that he is playing a part. Olivia/Rylance is intrigued when Viola/Cesario asks her to show her face. However, Viola/Cesario has not won her over yet: "Intrigued" is not "in love." Viola/Cesario has work to do.

Viola/Cesario quickly realizes that memorized love poems and pretty lines do not work on Olivia/Rylance. Viola/Cesario's stilted, memorized opening line is quickly shot down by Olivia/Rylance, who interrupts immediately. At warp speed, Olivia/Rylance realizes that Viola/Cesario has fallen into the kind of over-the-top-Petrarchan drivel Orsino uses when courting Olivia (Viola/Cesario is charged with courting Olivia in Orsino's stead). Olivia/Rylance calls

Viola/Cesario on reciting to her a pre-rehearsed sermon and bids Viola/Cesario stop. Olivia/Rylance is hilarious when she says she has already “read” the first chapter of Orsino’s bosom, and it is not sacred at all but blasphemy and falsehood (“heresy”). Olivia/Rylance delivers the “O, I have read it. It is heresy” line to both the house and Viola/Cesario. The comedic timing of the line is perfect, and it rightfully receives a great laugh from the audience. After the line and the laugh, Olivia/Rylance pauses and glides center-stage in a wide circle away from Viola/Cesario and the audience. Rylance has managed to give his Olivia the most graceful and hilarious walking style. Olivia/Rylance does not really walk; she floats. It almost appears she is levitating. Her feet are not visible, and the effect of the long dress in addition to Rylance’s dribble beneath the dress gives the impression that Olivia glides across the stage like a figure skater. This brilliant walk, created by Rylance, repeatedly receives laughs. It is not, however, gimmicky or affected. It is full of grace and sadness, and it is incredibly funny. Having finished her “dribble” across the stage, Olivia/Rylance resumes the dialogue to ask if Viola/Cesario has no more to say. After all, Olivia/Rylance has already established that she does not care for “poetical,” insincere pick-up lines: She claims that anything “poetical” is likelier to be “feigned.”

The quick-witted Viola/Cesario swiftly changes course and brazenly asks Olivia/Rylance to lift the veil and show her face. Viola/Cesario is fearless in this instance. Not only does Cesario demand to see the face of a countess in mourning with whom he is not familiar, but Cesario also indirectly demands that Olivia/Rylance drop all pretense and stop hiding behind a veil. In a way, Viola/Cesario tells Olivia/Rylance that she needs to get real with Cesario now, the irony being that the disguised Viola/Cesario is not real with Olivia/Rylance at all.³⁷⁷ Olivia/Rylance wryly tells Viola/Cesario that he is overstepping the mark (“you are now out of your text”), but Olivia/Rylance is also fascinated by Cesario’s brazenness. Olivia/Rylance draws in a sharp breath, pauses, and agrees to “draw the curtain.” When Olivia/Rylance lifts the veil, she does so with a very dramatic gesture that reveals to the audience the meta-theatrical meaning: Rylance shows the audience that Olivia now draws the curtain to her face and to her heart to allow Viola/Cesario

³⁷⁷ In a wonderful way, particularly in this instance, Viola is more herself when disguised as Cesario. The beauty of the scene is that it illustrates how disguise and fiction can be more truthful than non-fiction. If Viola had not broken the rules of society, she would not have found herself in the room with Olivia. If she had not transgressed gender roles, sumptuary laws and society’s rules, there would be no story. Viola/Cesario is the dynamic character who advances the plot and action, and she does it through transgression.

to truly see her. To repay Viola/Cesario for his brashness, Olivia/Rylance makes full use of the royal plural when she says, "We will draw the curtain and show you the picture." Olivia/Rylance pulls rank, and she conceitedly throws the "is't not well done"/"aren't I beautiful" line at Viola/Cesario.

Viola/Cesario hides that he is blown away by Olivia's beauty by throwing a witty repartee at Olivia/Rylance: "Sure, you look beautiful, if it's all natural" ("if God did all"). Once more, Viola/Cesario is insolent and borderline offensive, and Olivia/Rylance goes in for the impudent young man's flirting style, hook, line, and sinker. Finally, here is someone exciting and captivating. Olivia/Rylance makes an appalled face and arrogantly counters that, yes, of course, her beauty is all natural and God-given. When Olivia/Rylance playfully enumerates a list of her beautiful features for Viola/Cesario, the latter jumps on Olivia/Rylance's haughtiness and tells her, "I see you what you are." Viola/Cesario calls Olivia/Rylance proud and arrogant, but he says that even if Olivia were the devil, she would still be beautiful and get away with such behavior. Of course, Viola is jealous of the woman who has Orsino's love and attempts to hide her jealousy behind her cheekiness. How, asks Viola/Cesario exasperatedly, can Olivia/Rylance not love Count Orsino? Olivia/Rylance now becomes very somber and details why she does not and cannot love Orsino. Many times, Olivia/Rylance explains, while gliding in another circle stage right, has it been explained to Orsino that his love is not requited despite his good looks, youth, wealth, high social standing, etc. Olivia/Rylance ends her explanation with a profound plea: She stops circling and sits on a bench stage right while telling the audience and Viola/Cesario that Orsino should have taken the hint a long time ago ("he might have took his answer long ago"). Viola/Cesario retorts that if he loved Olivia as passionately as Orsino does, he would not understand Olivia's dismissal.

Immediately, Olivia/Rylance asks Cesario what he would do in Orsino's stead ("Why, what would you?"). The question almost flies out of Olivia/Rylance's mouth to show her burning curiosity. It is clear from Olivia/Rylance's expression that this is what she really wants to know: what Cesario would do, what he is like, not Orsino. Viola/Cesario's next words are so moving that they do not leave Olivia/Rylance a chance to escape. It is at this moment that Viola/Cesario leaves Orsino's Petrarchan tired "text" behind completely and speaks solely from the heart.

Orsino's Petrarchan lovemaking is too stylized to speak to the body of the other. Viola/Cesario, however, uses language that not only speaks to Olivia/Rylance's body, but also pierces her very substance. Viola/Cesario's soul-stirring answer is spoken with what Kristen Linklater rightfully calls the "erotic energy of the Vox Eroticus" (cf. Linklater, "Vox Eroticus," *linklatervoice.com* 2003). During Viola/Cesario's heartfelt "seduction speech," Olivia/Rylance falls in love with her, and Rylance's Olivia shows this "falling in love" with every muscle of his/her body:

"Give us the place alone[,"] . . . says the love-starved Olivia. And thus later, Viola, bearing messages of love from Orsino to Olivia, to whom she pours her heart out, is aroused to poetic heights by her own impossible passion for Orsino, saying that if she loved Olivia she would: Make me a willow [the sorrowful symbol of unrequited love] cabin at your gate [the entrance to love]/And call upon my soul within the house [the soul of the lover lives in her body]/Write loyal cantons of contemned love/And sing them loud even in the dead of night/Halloo your name to the reverberate hills/And make the babbling gossip of the air/Cry out "Olivia." Olivia is lost: seduced by voice. Shakespeare splits open the safe ground of our mental foundations to expose the tremors and quakes of ever-present and super-potent eroticism in his words: To survive, we actors must screw our voices to the sticking-place and have the courage in our utterance to let fly the arrows of Eros to crack and remold the mirrors we hold up to the underbelly of today. (cf. Linklater, "Vox Eroticus," *linklatervoice.com* 2003)

Olivia/Rylance has the most heart-rending reaction to these seductive words. Olivia/Rylance is, indeed, starved of love. When Viola/Cesario tells Olivia/Rylance with the most sensual and emotional words that he would forget all decorum and splash out his soul and love in front of Olivia for all to see and hear, Olivia/Rylance is rendered breathless. Her eyes pop wide open. She is on fire.

Viola/Cesario speaks of his soul being imprisoned by Olivia. He speaks of writing and singing sad love songs for Olivia, and he speaks of making the whole world echo with Olivia's name. Spoken in stereotypes, Cesario has the vulnerability of a woman *and* the boldness of a

man. Most importantly, Viola/Cesario speaks of what he would *do* rather than say: To act is to risk. To love is to risk. Orsino does none of these things, but sends messengers in his stead. Orsino does not even do his own talking. However, Viola/Cesario acts, and he acts courageously. Viola acts in disguise, but strangely, within this disguise, Viola/Cesario speaks and acts the truth. It is not surprising that Olivia/Rylance, for the first time in the play, turns her whole body toward Viola/Cesario (they both sit on a bench facing the audience). Her body opens like a flower and, with it, her heart. Even her voice opens up. Initially, Olivia/Rylance spoke softly and shyly, but now her voice becomes melodious and warm. Olivia/Rylance begins, for the first time, not just to smile, but to laugh like a little girl. This is the laugh of someone who is embarrassed by how attracted he or she is to someone. This is the laugh and smile of someone who is falling in love. As if against her own will, Olivia/Rylance utters that Viola/Cesario “might do much.” In other words, Olivia/Rylance admits to Viola/Cesario that he would go far with these wonderful words if spoken to a lover. Olivia/Rylance speaks the truth. She has “drawn the curtain” to her heart, and in her state of embarrassment, in her state of falling in love, she echoes Viola/Cesario’s truth with her own. Olivia/Rylance fully reveals how a person, from one moment to the next, can go from being cool and reserved to utterly silly in love:

Olivia is won over by the lyrical Viola (who may seem like a reincarnation of her late beloved sibling), and something happens that she never expected: she becomes alive to the possibility of happiness, to the possibility of belonging to someone, just as she belonged to her lost and no doubt idealized father and brother. (Als, *New Yorker* 2013)

Cesario’s speech is effective, Olivia/Rylance admits to her own surprise.

Subsequently, as though to fill the air with words that may hide the uncomfortable silence between the two, Olivia/Rylance asks who Viola/Cesario’s parents are and what their social class is: “What is your parentage?” The question instantly makes Viola/Cesario rise from the bench defensively. In self-justification, Viola/Cesario tells Olivia/Rylance that he is from a good family, thank you very much. Olivia/Rylance, amid her own “parentage” question, realizes that it may be perceived as distasteful and imperious and rises from the bench when Viola/Cesario does. Olivia/

Rylance turns the other way as though to fend off her overwhelming and ever-growing emotions and dismisses Viola/Cesario with her routine answer to Orsino: "Get you to your lord/I cannot love him." At the very moment Olivia/Rylance dismisses Viola/Cesario, she turns back around because she realizes that sending Orsino away also means sending Cesario away. Olivia/Rylance must think of something quickly to make the youth return to her. To show Olivia's manic thinking and stalling, Rylance begins to stammer excessively. Olivia/Rylance utters the next line: "Let him [Orsino] send no more/Unless YOU come to me again" with the embarrassment of a schoolgirl. The next line is said with full knowledge that it is a blatantly obvious and silly excuse: "To tell me how he [Orsino] takes it." Olivia/Rylance continues smiling a sweet and ditzzy smile while shaking her head because she fully knows that no lover in the history of lovers has ever demanded to hear how a jilted lover takes their refusal. Olivia/Rylance's entire body language and facial expressions have changed: Gone is the pride, the reserve, the bodily stillness, the armor. The countess is in love, and she is flailing about like a fish on a hook.

Olivia/Rylance demonstrates such "flailing" beautifully: She stammers excessively, trips over her words, adds gibberish to sentences, fidgets with her arms and body, nervously twitches, gesticulates wildly, is utterly restless, plays with her veil, smiles a big smile, and shuffles around. She begins a sentence, only to drop it immediately. She attempts to give her veil to Cesario and simultaneously realizes that such a gesture and action would be both idiotic and unbecoming for a lady. This moment is, of course, very funny. However, Olivia/Rylance never plays it up, and she never plays to the audience. Olivia/Rylance's silliness is the genuine awakening of someone who has been starved of love and who has just been struck by lightning. Hers is the exact foolish smile, the fidgeting stammer of a person desperately trying to hide that they are over the moon about someone. Olivia/Rylance now begins to work herself into Cesario's heart with might and main. She employs any excuse to win Cesario's favor, even when she recognizes the excuse as pure folly. Olivia/Rylance mindlessly attempts to give money to Viola/Cesario for bringing his message, to which Viola/Cesario reacts with utter contempt. Viola/Cesario leaves in a huff of pride and tells Olivia/Rylance that he hopes she will fall in love with someone just like her, with a heart of stone. He takes his leave, calling Olivia/Rylance "fair cruelty."

Olivia/Rylance slinks down onto the bench, pauses, and repeats to herself the question she had just asked Cesario "What is your parentage?" as though it were the stupidest question ever asked. Olivia/Rylance then moves her hand up to her face and covers her eyes with the universal facepalm gesture. The gesture says something like, "Ugh! How could I have been so ignorant to ask such a daft and unseemly question!" This moment gets great laughs in return. Olivia/Rylance then looks at the audience, takes it in, and makes it her coconspirator when she shakes her head in consternation. The audience now bonds with her and her all-too-human love blunder. Olivia/Rylance's gesture seems to reach out to the audience to confess to them just how stupid she acted. She seems to want the audience to feel her pain, and they do. However, a woman in love quickly braces herself again, and so does Olivia/Rylance when she repeats everything Viola/Cesario just told her about himself: "'Above my fortunes, yet my state is well: I am a gentleman.' I'll be sworn thou art," exclaims Olivia/Rylance giddily. "Of course!" she shouts to the audience. *Of course*, Cesario is a gentleman: The way he speaks, looks, acts, and his beautiful soul have given him away as such. She yells, "Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit/Do give thee five-fold blazon." Olivia/Rylance jumps up from the bench and skips for joy. She is endearing, but also melancholy. She knows the danger of what is happening to her: "not too fast: soft, soft," she says. Olivia/Rylance notices the change in herself. She is both scared and ecstatic. "If only Orsino were like Cesario," she exclaims: "Unless the master were the man." Here, Olivia/Rylance begins to gasp for breath. Her breathlessness almost becomes a panic attack that Olivia/Rylance must talk her way out of: "How now/Even so quickly may one catch the plague," she says. She feels with her entire body that falling in love is like succumbing to the plague. There is nothing she can do about it: "Methinks I feel this youth's perfections/With an invisible and subtle stealth/ To creep in at mine eyes," she breathlessly mutters. Viola/Cesario has mentally and physically overwhelmed her.

Cesario has taken her wholly by surprise, and now she is left with no defenses and full of longing. Here, Olivia/Rylance becomes very still and pauses. Olivia/Rylance looks down at the floor as though contemplating her fate and, very calmly, looks up and says, "Well, let it be." The manner in which Olivia/Rylance speaks this line is at once resigned and welcoming. Rylance fully unleashes his indelible skills as an actor in this instance: His Olivia is too full of life and

ecstasy at the prospect of love to be wholly resigned and despondent. Meanwhile, his Olivia is a heavyhearted, anguished, lovesick creature who perceives with her entire body what may be her undoing. Rylance plays the dissonance between resignation and readiness to embrace love beautifully. To me, his Olivia recalls Pierrot,³⁷⁸ the sad clown. Pierrot can be sweet, full of life, and clownishly funny, but he is also deeply aware of life's sadness. Rylance's Olivia captures Pierrot's essence: He is foolish, but he is not a fool. He is a clown who is tortured and full of longing and sadness. Rylance's makeup is also Pierrot-like. Furthermore, Rylance captures Olivia's moment of acceptance in a most touching manner: Olivia/Rylance demonstrates to the audience her full understanding there is something wrong with Cesario. He tells her he cannot divulge where he is from and who is he (a red flag); he tells her "by the very fangs of malice I swear/I am not that I play" (a very red flag). He even curses Olivia's future love life (a huge red flag). Yet, Rylance instills in his Olivia the very human and tragic foolishness that gives her the awareness to sense that the path is a dead end, but she takes it anyway. "Well, let it be," she says with resignation but also with expectation.

The very sentence "let it be" is ambiguous. It could mean: "Do not do it." It could also mean, "Allow it to come into being." Rylance's Olivia speaks the line with both meanings. Olivia/Rylance speaks the line as if her soul were laughing at her own foolishness. She knows that it is impossible to pry open a heart that is not on offer. Rylance's interpretation of Olivia's humanity is deeply moving. It is creative and innovative, without being mistakenly trendy. In fact, Rylance endows his Olivia with sweet femininity. Rylance's Olivia is both conventional and utterly unconventional. Theatre critic Hilton Als puts the aftereffects of watching this production of *Twelfth Night* magnificently—I share his afterthought but could not have put it into words as pointedly:

For days after I saw "Twelfth Night," questions about the play and about Shakespeare reverberated in my mind. (Despite my love of mystery, I am, like most humans, a problem-solving animal.) How did he do it? How did he construct such a popular work

³⁷⁸ I do not know if it was Rylance's intent to play the part of Olivia with a touch of the Pierrot stock-character. It would be a suitable interpretation because Pierrot is, after all, lovesick for Columbina, who does not requite his love but loves Harlequino instead.

out of “outsider” thoughts about gender and cross-dressing? By opening himself up to creative empathy, certainly. Where most of us succumb to the limiting power of self-preservation, Shakespeare rushed toward the enormous freedom that can come with “why”—the spirit of inquiry that jump-starts the imagination. (Als, *The New Yorker* 2013)

This spirit of inquiry and imagination in an afterthought are only ever triggered if a performance resonates as deeply with audiences as this production of *Twelfth Night* does. Much of the play’s resonance stems from Rylance’s profound empathy for his character. Such empathy endows Rylance’s Olivia with a great range of emotions. It is in Olivia/Rylance’s dissonant emotional moments that she resonates the most. After all, it is easy for the audience to identify with being “crazy-in love” and being incapable of shifting one’s desire for a person that one knows is not right, even if one lights up around them. Olivia/Rylance unfolds for the audience what “hurts so good” looks like and feels like. It is easy to identify with wanting what one wants, not what one needs. Rylance imbues his Olivia with so much humanity that her wonderfully bad idea of throwing her love at the wrong person becomes utterly relatable.

Malvoli-OH!

Act 3, Scene 4

(Olivia’s garden)

Enter OLIVIA and MARIA

OLIVIA

I have sent after him: he says he'll come;
How shall I feast him? what bestow of him?
For youth is bought more oft than begg'd or borrow'd.
I speak too loud.
Where is Malvolio? he is sad and civil,
And suits well for a servant with my fortunes:
Where is Malvolio?

MARIA

He's coming, madam; but in very strange manner. He is, sure, possessed, madam.

OLIVIA

Why, what's the matter? does he rave?

MARIA

No, madam, he does nothing but smile: your ladyship were best to have some guard about you, if he come; for, sure, the man is tainted in's wits.

OLIVIA

Go call him hither.

Exit MARIA

I am as mad as he,

If sad and merry madness equal be.

Re-enter MARIA, with MALVOLIO

How now, Malvoli-*OH!*

MALVOLIO

Sweet lady, ho, ho.

OLIVIA

Smilest thou?

I sent for thee upon a sad occasion.

MALVOLIO

Sad, lady! I could be sad: this does make some obstruction in the blood, this cross-gartering; but what of that? if it please the eye of one, it is with me as the very true sonnet is, 'Please one, and please all.'

OLIVIA

Why, how dost thou, man? what is the matter with thee?

MALVOLIO

Not black in my mind, though yellow in my legs. It did come to his hands, and commands shall be executed: I think we do know the sweet Roman hand.

OLIVIA

Wilt thou go to bed, Malvolio?

MALVOLIO

To bed! ay, sweet-heart, and I'll come to thee.

OLIVIA

God comfort thee! Why dost thou smile so and kiss thy hand so oft?

MARIA

How do you, Malvolio?

MALVOLIO

At your request! yes; nightingales answer daws.

MARIA

Why appear you with this ridiculous boldness before my lady?

MALVOLIO

'Be not afraid of greatness:' 'twas well writ.

OLIVIA

What meanest thou by that, Malvolio?

MALVOLIO

'Some are born great,'--

OLIVIA

Ha!

MALVOLIO

'Some achieve greatness,'--

OLIVIA

What sayest thou?

MALVOLIO

'And some have greatness thrust upon them.'

OLIVIA

Heaven restore thee!

MALVOLIO

'Remember who commended thy yellow stockings,'--

OLIVIA

Thy yellow stockings!

MALVOLIO

'And wished to see thee cross-gartered.'

OLIVIA

Cross-gartered!

MALVOLIO

'Go to thou art made, if thou desirest to be so;!--

OLIVIA

Am I made?

MALVOLIO

'If not, let me see thee a servant still.'

OLIVIA

Why, this is very midsummer madness.

Beautifully played by Stephen Fry, Malvolio has been set up by Maria and appears in front of Countess Olivia in a ridiculous outfit (yellow stockings, cross-gartered laces). Malvolio follows Maria's (forged letter's) instructions—which he believes to be Olivia's instructions—to a fault. He smiles incessantly, he is dressed outrageously, and he generally has fallen victim to his own vanity in believing that his lady is in love with him. The scene in writing is already so good that it hardly needs additional directions. Yet, Olivia/Rylance and Malvolio/Fry have produced original and creative ideas to make the scene even funnier. What they add, be it a kind of intonation, gesture, movement, or facial expression, is not in the text, but it is also “not *not*” in the text. Rylance and Fry do not add unnecessary gimmicks. Instead, they use the language that

is already there and do what actors do best when their work is their play. They play with joy and creativity, and they live one hundred percent in the moment. They respond to one another not in a rehearsed manner, but in real time. They also know exactly how to include the audience without ever playing too much to it.

Olivia/Rylance is depressed about Cesario and asks her servant Maria to fetch Malvolio for her. Maria/Chahidi happily obliges because she knows that Malvolio/Fry will make a complete fool out of himself. Maria/Chahidi is having the time of her life getting back at Malvolio. Chahidi, in general, plays Maria with every inch of zest that can be squeezed from the character. Chahidi imbues Maria with the perfect amount of glee, feistiness, and depth. Maria/Chahidi is very much like Puck: She revels in her own diablerie. Meanwhile, Olivia/Rylance revels in her gloom and sits on a picnic blanket spread out center stage to give full expression to her melancholy. When Malvolio/Fry enters stage right, he is seen by the audience before Olivia/Rylance sees him. Malvolio/Fry struts downstage (right) with all the swagger and smugness he can muster. It is important to mention that Fry does not play Malvolio like a buffoon (as has been done many times). Fry imbues Malvolio with great humanity, and Malvolio's very human flaw is his vanity. In all of Malvolio/Fry's self-important and puritanical overweening character is buried a very insecure being: hence, his inclination to social-climb and his need to order others around and condescend to them. The need to feel superior to others and the desire for power and status is a fundamental human desire.³⁷⁹ All it takes is one forged letter from Maria, and Malvolio sees and believes what he wants to see and believe. Maria deftly feeds into Malvolio's narcissism. He thinks he is better than others, and he believes he should be on the same level as his mistress, Countess Olivia. However, Malvolio is also a tragic figure, and Stephen Fry brings out that aspect of the character without taking away the humor. Malvolio/Fry shows off his yellow stockings with dark cross-gartered ribbons to the audience, puffed up like a peacock. He then

³⁷⁹ A recent review of diverse social scientific literature concluded that the desire for status is a fundamental human motive. In short, individuals care deeply about the respect they are accorded by others, and they go to great lengths to manage their status (Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland, "Is the Desire for Status a Fundamental Human Motive," *Psychological Bulletin* 2015). "It is possible – and we explore such a possibility in this research – that the human status motive involves specifically the goal of possessing higher status than others, rather than simply to possessing high status. That is, people might not only want to be respected, they might want to be accorded more respect than others" (Anderson and Angus, "Striving for Superiority: The Human Desire for Status," *IRLE Working Paper*, Berkeley University 3–4).

turns to Olivia/Rylance with a frivolous, huge and preposterous smile. Olivia/Rylance, frustrated with how long it is taking her servant to appear, is calling out his name when she claps her eyes on him. The result is Olivia/Rylance's exclaiming: "Malvoli-OH! The "Oh" is the moment Olivia/Rylance sees Malvolio and, in shock, ends his name with a surprised "Oh."

"Malvolio-OH" is a creative expression of the text. It is not strictly speaking in the text, but it is "not *not*" in the text. The "Oh" is purely Rylance's brainchild. It is very funny and gets a huge laugh from the audience. Once the "Oh" is added to Malvoli-*oh* within this particular context, it appears as if the actor merely made visible something that was invisible before but already there. It feels as though this is the way this line and this name ought to be exclaimed, but it is Rylance's original idea. Malvolio/Fry, still very much in love with himself, mimes a kind of flourishing hand twirl toward his mistress and addresses her with an overly familiar "sweet lady." Subsequently, he turns to the audience as if to show them how convinced he is by his own performance. He is still smiling, like the Cheshire Cat. His turn to the audience is swift: long enough to take them in and present his huge grin and yellow stockings, but short enough to not interrupt the flow of the play (Fry and Rylance have impeccable comedic timing). He then struts across the stage to allow his mistress to take a good look at him, all yellow and cross-gartered. Olivia/Rylance stares at Malvolio/Fry with a mixture of stupor and horror. She glances back and forth between Malvolio/Fry and Maria/Chahidi as though to implore Maria to explain this bizarre exhibition to her. She is speechless. Olivia/Rylance is taken aback, figuratively and literally (she bends backward). Her eyebrows are raised so high that they may jump off her face. Her eyes are opened so wide that they may pop from their sockets. Beginning here, Olivia/Rylance and Malvolio/Fry really take each other in, and like the first and second violins of an orchestra, they begin to play off one another. When Olivia/Rylance demands to know why Malvolio/Fry is smiling on such a sad occasion, Malvolio/Fry is not daunted but instead perceives his mistress's rebuke as a kind of "play." He responds, still grinning, that he will play along.

Malvolio/Fry says that if his lady wants him to be sad, he can be sad. Basically, he is saying that he can be whatever she wants. He then rambles on about how, in true sonnet style, to please his lady is to please everyone. Malvolio/Fry turns to the audience and tops off his "please all" by plunking his cross-gartered, yellow-stockinged left leg up on the bench, stage left. He

picks at his gartered laces and ribbon daintily to enhance their “beauty,” which adds another layer of comedy. Stephen Fry is a very tall actor (much taller than all the other actors), and he is very aware of his own appearance and how it affects others. He uses his imposing height to best effect. The leg stance is hilarious because it demonstrates Malvolio/Fry’s attempt to look “sexy” and “manly,” but it only makes him look even more ridiculous. Malvolio/Fry is showing off his yellow legs to his mistress, who still stares at him in consternation and finally exclaims: “Why, how dost thou, man? What is the matter with thee?” Subsequently, Malvolio/Fry confidently saunters to Olivia/Rylance, kneels in front of her to tell her that he has received her letter (wink, wink). Of course, Olivia/Rylance has no idea what he is going on about. Olivia/Rylance’s expression reveals to the audience a struggle to discern what is happening to her formerly somber steward. Is he drunk (but he does not drink), is he upset, is he ill, or is he genuinely “non compos mentis?” The audience can sense all these questions racing through Olivia/Rylance’s mind. Olivia/Rylance is having trouble categorizing Malvolio/Fry’s behavior because it is entirely out of character. To show Olivia/Rylance how much he enjoys their little game, Malvolio/Fry snatches an apple from Olivia/Rylance’s picnic blanket, and bites into it right in front of her. When Olivia/Rylance asks Malvolio/Fry with great concern if he should go to bed to get rest, he understands her request as an invitation to go to bed *with her*. In complete happiness at his luck, Malvolio/Fry throws himself onto the floor.

Olivia/Rylance is now utterly convinced that her steward is having some kind of mental breakdown. Malvolio/Fry now crawls toward Olivia/Rylance with physical overtures, all while calling her “sweetheart” and quoting parts of the letter to Olivia/Rylance. Great physical comedy ensues when Malvolio/Fry tries to physically lift Olivia/Rylance off the picnic table, which is the last straw for the Countess Olivia/Rylance. She thinks Malvolio/Fry has gone entirely insane and suffers from “midsummer madness” (in January) and has him carted off by the very people who set him up. Rylance and Fry are not just completely in the moment at all times; they are also unguarded. They allow other actors to affect them. They do not speak memorized lines; they play a sort of tennis match. To play a ball back and forth between two actors, they each must allow themselves to be vulnerable to the other, to listen, to take them in, and to respond. Rylance and Fry are completely alive onstage, and they are playful in the old sense of the word “player”/actor.

Their play is skillful and nuanced, and the audience loves it. Fry brings a tragic aspect to an otherwise humorless character, and he brings gleefulness to Malvolio's social climbing inclinations. Rylance brings geniality and humor to the character of Olivia, and he imbues her with a sad awareness of her own pathetic actions. His Olivia is tender even when reserved, and she is kind even when argumentative. Watching Olivia/Rylance and Malvolio/Fry onstage is like watching a ballet of words and gestures. No move appears anticipated, and no response appears rehearsed. Their work is their play.

C) CONCLUSION

While researching my topic, the revelation that emerged over time after having watched a copious amount of stellar acting performances throughout the years was that the most exceptional performers all had in common the capacity and confidence to maintain paradoxical tension. This tension allowed these actors to surprise, shock, scare, electrify, charm, inspire, galvanize, and mesmerize their audiences. Throughout the course of various plays, I have observed audience members—frequently quite despite themselves—fall in love with actors who had this magnetic paradoxical power. At times, these actors were beautiful, but more often than not they were of average looks, and some were outright unprepossessing in appearance. Beauty, therefore—so often aligned with the acting profession—was not the overruling quality that enabled exceptional actors to hold their audiences spellbound. Instead, I progressively found that the quality that allowed an actor to take an audience’s breath away was their complete commitment to the rich and conflicting complexity of their characters.

Indeed, the power of an actor’s ability to express contrasting forces surfaced persistently in my research about what expert actors do. The importance of a performer’s paradoxical power flourished so formidably in the course of my observations that it became impossible to ignore. I must add that I did not begin my research by looking for one specific quality or talent in the many actors I studied. In fact, I was determined to let things and ideas fall into place naturally. Initially, my quest was open-ended. My task was solely to observe, listen, be open-minded and -hearted, and take in the performances of exceptional actors.

Additionally, I asked friends who are professional actors, casting directors, acting coaches, and directors the same question: “What is it that exceptional actors do that makes them stand out?” All the responses began with a pause, because this question requires reflection, insight, and a good amount of soul-searching for theater professionals. What was curious was that even though all the people I questioned had varying answers, all their answers nonetheless had a common denominator: They all spoke of an element of surprise and risk-taking in good acting, of variety in the actor’s emotional notes (in elocution, facial expressions and gestures), of confidence, and of opposites. Furthermore, they all emphasized the need for an actor’s

“authenticity” while in character. Such “acting authenticity” is the paradoxical truth only found in fiction, what Stanford Meisner called “living truthfully under imaginary circumstances” (Meisner 15).

I have watched countless theatre productions, films, and television shows to find commonalities in great performances. I spoke with many actors and casting directors to glean practitioners’ perspectives. I also spoke with a multitude of non-actor friends and asked them which performances had moved them deeply and why. The answers of practitioners and non-practitioners were eerily similar, albeit it was the directors, casting directors, and theatre critics who found the best ways of describing good acting. This makes sense because directors and casting directors must express to actors and audiences what they need in a performance, and theatre critics must find words to capture extraordinary performances.

The gravitas, the intensity, the presence, the purpose, the confidence, the charisma, the creativity, and the range that exceptional actors have—which I have observed and analyzed in depth for over five years³⁸⁰—stem from their unconditional dedication to their characters’ complexity and from their fearlessness to allow their characters’ contradictions to coexist and play out freely. When the character’s contradictions are given the liberty to materialize and evolve, the actor is truly “playing.” Consequently, when the actor is playing with total abandon, the audience participates with its heart and soul. Only when an actor’s performance is free of self-absorption and is entirely dedicated to the audience does true confidence emerge. When the actor gives to get—which is always an act of faith—the audience participates; the audience “takes part” in the play.

From my very first Broadway play my mother took me to (an unforgettable matinee of *Hamlet* starring Ralph Fiennes at the Belasco Theater), to the many incredible screen performances I devoured, to the most recent play I watched (BAM’s *Cyrano de Bergerac* with an explosive and yet very vulnerable James McAvoy as Cyrano), I gradually discovered that I—comparably to the people I questioned—have been deeply moved by these actors’ variety, intensity, and power to courageously exist in paradoxical states. The difficulty for me was

³⁸⁰ In fact, I think I have done so since I was eighteen. As an actor, it is in one’s best interest to observe what makes other actors stand out, (and then pinch it for one’s own repertoire). In a way, I have scrutinized skilled actors since adolescence, and it certainly factors into my understanding of what it is exceptional actors do.

finding the right language to express this paradox to readers of my dissertation. Therefore, I used manifest performances to bring to life what I saw onstage or onscreen. Often, the paradox of the actor registers as an elusive intensity or charisma with the audience. It was my task to find words and explanations for this intensity and charisma, which I hope I have done through a receptive and embodied language that is neither exclusionary nor judgmental, and that does not seek immediate resolution but embraces paradox and in-between states.

I have learned so very much about acting and humanity by observing these awe-inspiring performances in detail. I have laughed; I have cried. I have been terrified, full of searing pain at a nerve an actor touched in me, and full of compassion, hate, love, sometimes rage, and euphoria throughout all the productions I have watched for this dissertation, including all the brilliant ones I could not mention.

My research has been a rollercoaster ride: my pleasure and my pain. My work over the last five years has also been my play, and I credit the actors I have watched and written about with the immense joy they have brought me. They have enriched my life in many ways, and I hope I have paid forward some of that enrichment in my writing.

D) APPENDIX

BEYOND SHAKESPEARE: POIGNANT PARADOXICAL PERFORMANCES THAT HAVE RESONATED WIDELY

While I hope to have depicted the contrasting forces displayed by good actors in Shakespearean plays and sonnets, I would like to add a few poignant examples of the power of paradox in acting performances beyond Shakespeare. I have chosen the following performances from different films and television shows because they reveal the exact same phenomenon of paradox in acting and the illumination such acting brings to the audience. Delving deeply into the magnificence of each of these rich and complex performances would be a dissertation in its own right. Hence, I round my work with a brief description—an epilogue of sorts—of the following performances that contribute to my arguments and complete them.

From Television

1) Kurt Wallander: Kenneth Branagh in *Wallander*

The “Poet-Detective”³⁸¹

I use Kenneth Branagh’s example for a second time in the way I used David Suchet’s work twice. For one thing, Branagh, as Swedish detective Kurt Wallander, is the furthest thing from the effervescent, chatty, feisty, happy-go-lucky Benedick of 1995’s *Much Ado about Nothing*. Branagh’s Wallander is full of quiet despair and darkness. Yet, a glimmer of hope reveals itself in Branagh’s glance that simply will not give up on humans, not even those who commit the grisliest of murders in the bleak southern Swedish coastal area where Wallander works. Says Branagh on playing Wallander: “Your goal is to put yourself into [a] vulnerable position. The

³⁸¹ Kenneth Branagh referred to his character Wallander as the “poet detective” in an interview with *The Guardian* (Frost, *The Guardian* 2012). It is a spot-on description of how Branagh portrays detective Kurt Wallander; hence, I used it in the title.



performance demands solitary introspective . . . a sort of nakedness you couldn't do unless you're very scared yourself" (Martinson, *Guardian* 2015). Wallander's private life is a mess, his house is a mess, his appearance is a mess, and his eating and drinking habits are a mess. However, within his work, Wallander is diligent, pertinacious, unwavering, dead-set and obsessive. He takes each murder home with him; he takes it as a personal affront, which is something that haunted Branagh, the actor, throughout playing the part. Branagh says that he could not simply "leave the office" after playing Wallander:

"I cannot come back to him comfortably," he says. "It's never been. 'Oooh, I've got a nice job on the telly.' Every single time it feels like hard work—hard in that I find it difficult. In the early days, I had to do jolly things any chance I could: at the weekend wear bright clothes, go to flower shows. But now I'm better at compartmentalising, being him for the least amount of time I need to be." (*Guardian*, 2012)

Branagh's Wallander is a revelation. He is both gentle and utterly intense: "Long, deep broods are quite Branagh's thing: His answers tend to be thorough and seem deeply felt; although he's not without humour, such intensity can be disconcerting"³⁸² (Frost, *Guardian* 2012).

The scene in which Wallander loses his father to the last throes of Alzheimer's disease is heart-stopping. When watching this particular scene, I was so moved by Branagh's performance that I could not breathe. It was one of the most painful and beautiful moments I ever witnessed on a television screen. Wallander/Branagh cannot believe that his father has succumbed to his disease and attempts to shake his dead father's body back to life. The man who sees the worst deaths on a daily basis cannot come to terms with the (expected) death of his father. Wallander/Branagh's reaction to his father's death is one of the most gut-wrenching, arresting, terrible, and breathtaking moments in television history. The mix of despair, disbelief, grief, anger, hope, love, and hate is palpable. As a viewer, I had such a strong physical reaction to Wallander/Branagh's

³⁸² If this statement about Branagh's performance as Wallander is compared with his Benedick of *Much Ado About Nothing*, the range of Branagh's talent comes through clearly. Benedick has intense moments, but he is mostly lighthearted, charming, mischievous, vain, and very, very chatty. Wallander is, to say the least, taciturn and soft-spoken. There is no bravado in Wallander, no vanity, no pretty phrases. He is a walking raw nerve and utterly compelling to watch. Both performances are brilliant, but completely different.

response to the death of his father that I could not move for twenty minutes. I was physically taken aback. I could feel Wallander's pain and relate to it on such a deep level that it scared me. Wallander/Branagh's reaction is so truthful in its conflux of conflicting emotions: the love-hate for a parent, the shock and disbelief that they are gone forever, mingled with the hope that it isn't so (the shaking of the father's dead body), and the despair mixed with fury at the person who had the audacity to die. The sadness, anger, and bitterness blended with such a gentle and heartfelt stream of tears are awe-inspiring. The scrubbing off of the black paint of his father's (a painter's) paintbrush onto Wallander/Branagh's shirt does not make sense. Yet, it makes perfect sense as a memento to remember his father forever: a black stain to remain with Wallander.

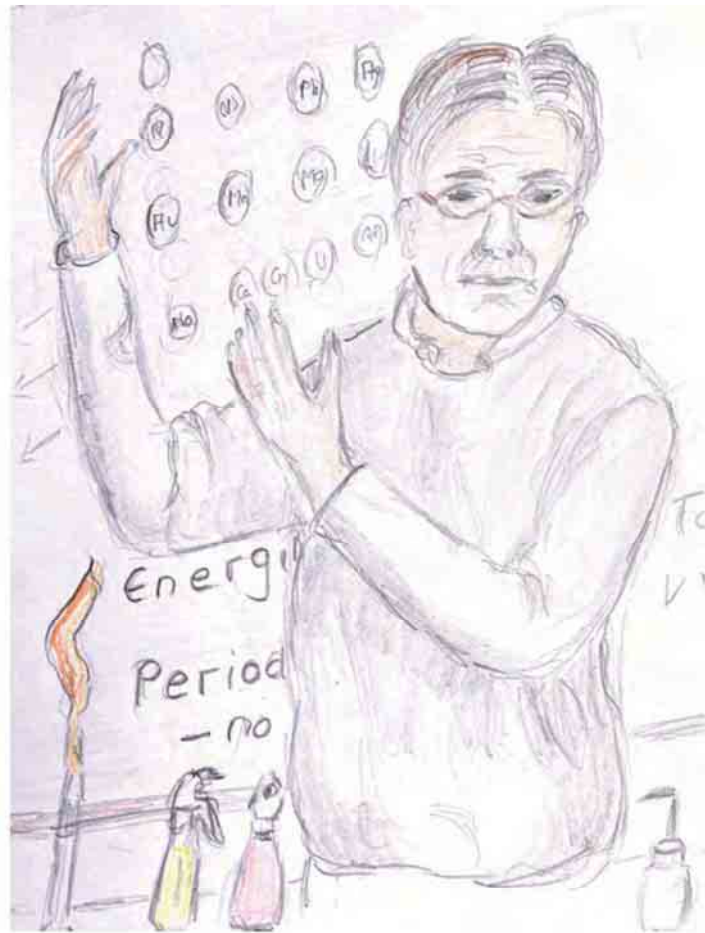
Throughout the entire series, Branagh endows his Wallander with such complexity, with such range, intensity, contrary emotions, and subtle hues of despair combined with a rare smile of hope. He is a walking paradox and could not be more riveting to watch.

2) Walter White/Heisenberg: Bryan Cranston in *Breaking Bad*

The Feckless "Everyman" Turned Macbeth³⁸³

A hapless 50-year-old high-school chemistry teacher named Walter White (Bryan Cranston) discovers he has terminal lung cancer. His death sentence gives him a new lease on life. He begins to cook crystal meth in the desert of New Mexico in order to leave money behind for his pregnant wife and for his son who suffers from cerebral palsy. Since Walter White has always been a brilliant chemist, his meth is purer than other imports. The high school teacher whom no one respected builds an empire and becomes a drug lord. Because Walter White has an alias (Heisenberg, the drug lord), it is almost unnecessary to point out the paradox within Walter. Many critics have argued over whether Walter transforms into an evil drug lord or if he always had a dark side. However, the more important question is how Bryan Cranston plays a character that, once he finds new life in death (the cancer diagnosis), is both deeply human and utterly evil.

³⁸³ Emily Nussbaum originated this wonderful name for Walter/Heisenberg: "Call him Macbeth: he's stepped in blood so far, etc." (Nussbaum, *New Yorker* 2012).



Walter's "Heisenberg" pseudonym was borrowed from the physicist whose uncertainty principle is popularly understood to express the idea that the presence of an observer changes the nature of what is observed. Accordingly, Walter/Heisenberg are different for each observer or interlocutor. Walter/Heisenberg is like moving quicksand, unpredictable, impossible to read unless during a specific moment. If you fight him, you sink; if you accept and respect him and remain calm and amenable to him, you may survive. After all, Walter, the sad-sack high school chemistry teacher who found a vocation cooking the finest methamphetamine money could buy, had always been adept at shifting his appearance—chameleon-like—depending on who was watching:

[The] busy and inventive narrative machinery have all served to reveal the Walter White who was there all along. The sides of his personality—sociopath and family man, scientist and killer, rational being and creature of impulse, entrepreneur, and loser—are not necessarily as contradictory³⁸⁴ as we might have supposed. . . . In his own mind, he remains a righteous figure,³⁸⁵ an apostle of family values, free enterprise, and scientific progress. (cf. Scott, "Bad in the Bones," *NYT* 23 July 2013)

Bryan Cranston's performance as Walter White, a.k.a. Heisenberg, is a tour de force. He cannot ever quite be pinned down. Neither can the audience hate him nor can they love him. They do, however, in a sick and twisted yet deeply human manner, find him strangely relatable and fascinating, and they certainly cannot look away. They are both drawn in and completely put off. Such conflicting emotions in an audience are the gift of Cranston's portrayal of the character. Cranston explained his portrayal very simply: "I have a theory—our job isn't to lie to the audience; our job is to find the truth in the character" (Segal, *NYT* 2007).

³⁸⁴ Notably, the critic stresses that the contradiction. This is a theme in many critics' reviews of great, complex, rich, intense, and paradoxical performances. The perceptive critics, such as Scott of the *NYT* and Chang of the *Los Angeles Times*, notice the paradoxes of great actors (see also Chang's review of Carey Mulligan's Cassie in *Promising Young Woman*, below.)

³⁸⁵ The literary trope that the villain is always the hero in his own story is, indeed, a marked characteristic of sociopaths. Hitler, Stalin, etc. all believed themselves to be some kind of savior or hero. Furthermore, they are the last ones to examine their actions because they are so certain of their "mission" and "righteousness." As many psychiatrists and psychologists will confirm: Sociopaths/psychopaths hardly ever seek counsel. Cranston does an amazing job at bringing out this facet of Walter White/Heisenberg.

Cranston resonates with the audience, and this resonance is exactly how Anne Bogart describes it: “Resonance is not harmony. In fact, resonance must be balanced with sufficient dissonance. If I truly resonate with something, then the outcome becomes unpredictable” (Bogart, “Shining Light into Dark Places” *SITI.org*). Bryan Cranston takes this risk because he must: Walter White/Heisenberg is certainly unpredictable. He is a quiet mouse one moment and a massive explosion of a ranting and raving villain the next: “We had this villain, and we needed the audience to feel bad for him when he died,” Gilligan said. “Bryan alone was the only actor who could do that, who could pull off that trick. And it is a trick. I have no idea how he does it” (Segal, *NYT* 2007). Cranston’s “trick” is giving Walter/Heisenberg the complexity and paradox the character deserves. The character cannot be easily read by the audience, and this makes him even more interesting because he may be a kind man in one moment and a killer the next. Walter/Heisenberg’s

[I]nexpressible, conflicting emotions make Walt seem alive, a breathing, thinking individual onscreen. Hamlet says, “I have that within which passeth show,” and Cranston’s acting, with its acknowledgment of the *multifarious and self-contradictory impulses* that lie behind a single expression, similarly implies that, even if he wanted to, Walt couldn’t come clean to his family. (Lanham, *L. A. Review of Books* 2013, emphasis mine)

As hard as it may be for the dualism-indoctrinated viewer to accept, Walter White/Heisenberg is not *either* the good family man or the ice-cold killer and ruthless drug lord. He is *both* and more.

3) Tony Soprano: James Gandolfini in *The Sopranos*

The Sweet Sociopath

Tony Soprano is a “sweet sociopath” whom audiences love. As Emily Nussbaum pointed out in her 2007 *New York Magazine* essay about the *Sopranos* finale, the audience, just like Tony’s wife



Carmela, were accomplices to his epic immorality. Tony “became a better mobster, not a better man” (Nussbaum, *New York Magazine* 2007). The reason the audience went along with Tony’s ever-increasing violence and cruelty was because he was also a “sweet man,” charming, and very vulnerable (when he was not killing people): “To be a fan, we needed to welcome Tony Soprano again and again into our homes, like a vampire or a therapy patient” (Nussbaum, *New York Magazine* 2007). Tony is a sweet sociopathic killing machine, “the abused child within the monster” (Nussbaum, *New York Magazine* 2007). He is depressed, but he is still a killer. Tony seduces the audience in the way he seduces his therapist, and both are buying. Meanwhile, Tony’s wife Carmela is told by her therapist that—just like the audience—she is not “a seeker but . . . a sinner. She is not Tony’s wife, he informs her; she’s his accomplice. She needs to leave now, reject Tony’s ‘blood money,’ and save her children (‘or what’s left of them’). He adds a remark that might serve as a punch line for the series: ‘One thing you can never say, that you haven’t been told’” (Nussbaum, *New York Magazine*). The audience also has been told repeatedly, season after season, and they still love sweet, sociopathic Tony. Nussbaum explains the spell Tony Soprano has over his audience very astutely:

When we first met Tony Soprano, he was a mess, but we loved him, we couldn’t help it. Underneath that bulk . . . , he was a hurting bad boy. Smart despite the malapropisms, Tony struck many viewers as simply an extreme variation on the midlife baby boomer: He was struggling with aging relatives, mouthy teenage kids, and that old work–life balance. His deepest desire was to be a better parent than his own (an ambition that was perhaps aiming rather low). He was terrified of death. And his greatest enemy was the most brilliant strategist of them all, his mother, Livia, a villain who crushed her enemies with the illusion of powerlessness. (Nussbaum, “The Long Con,” *New York Magazine* 14 June 2007)

So how did audiences fall for Tony again and again? Was it that he looks like a regular guy rather than a slick, handsome leading man that made him appear more trustworthy? Alternatively, was it the always relatable “mommy issues” he suffered? (Because Tony’s mother is the mother of all

godfathers and villains, his issues are understandable.) Perhaps it was the fact that Tony is actively seeking help from a therapist. I would argue that it was Gandolfini's multifaceted performance that made Tony Soprano a relatable monster. Tony/Gandolfini is utterly believable in his sweet moments and equally credible in his murderous ones. Tony/Gandolfini was always both kind and cruel. He was a sweet monster.

4) Carrie Mathison: Claire Danes in *Homeland*

The Mad Genius

If it were not for Claire Danes playing the troubled CIA agent Carrie Mathison, *Homeland* may well have been a disaster. The fact that the female lead combines the stereotypical "mandatory" professional brilliance with personal hysterics may turn off female viewers because it is an annoying trope that the female genius must also, of course, be the mad woman in the attic. Having said this, Claire Danes is magnificent in the part. She supersedes all stereotypes. It never once feels as though the audience is watching a performance. Danes makes this unlikely character realistic, which is an almost impossible feat. Carrie Mathison is both a genius and mad (she suffers from severe bipolar episodes). She is brilliant but also terribly unprofessional. In fact, it is her unprofessionalism that usually gets her the answers she needs. For example, she illegally installs surveillance cameras in Sergeant Brody's home because she believes in her instincts more than the law. Danes plays Carrie Mathison with so many notes that the character Carrie—who may sound crazy on the page—comes alive realistically on-screen. Danes allows all of Carrie's opposites to play alongside each other in the way that the title song (a jazz composition) employs musical disharmony as suitably resonant. Carric/Danes is not a genius but mad. She is not brilliant but unprofessional. She is not highly functional but hysterical. In short, Carrie/Danes is a mad genius. It is her unprofessionalism that makes her successful where others fail. It is her manic moments that make her both a brilliant human and an outcast. Instead of playing up each facet of Carrie's complex and complicated character, Danes finds a way of

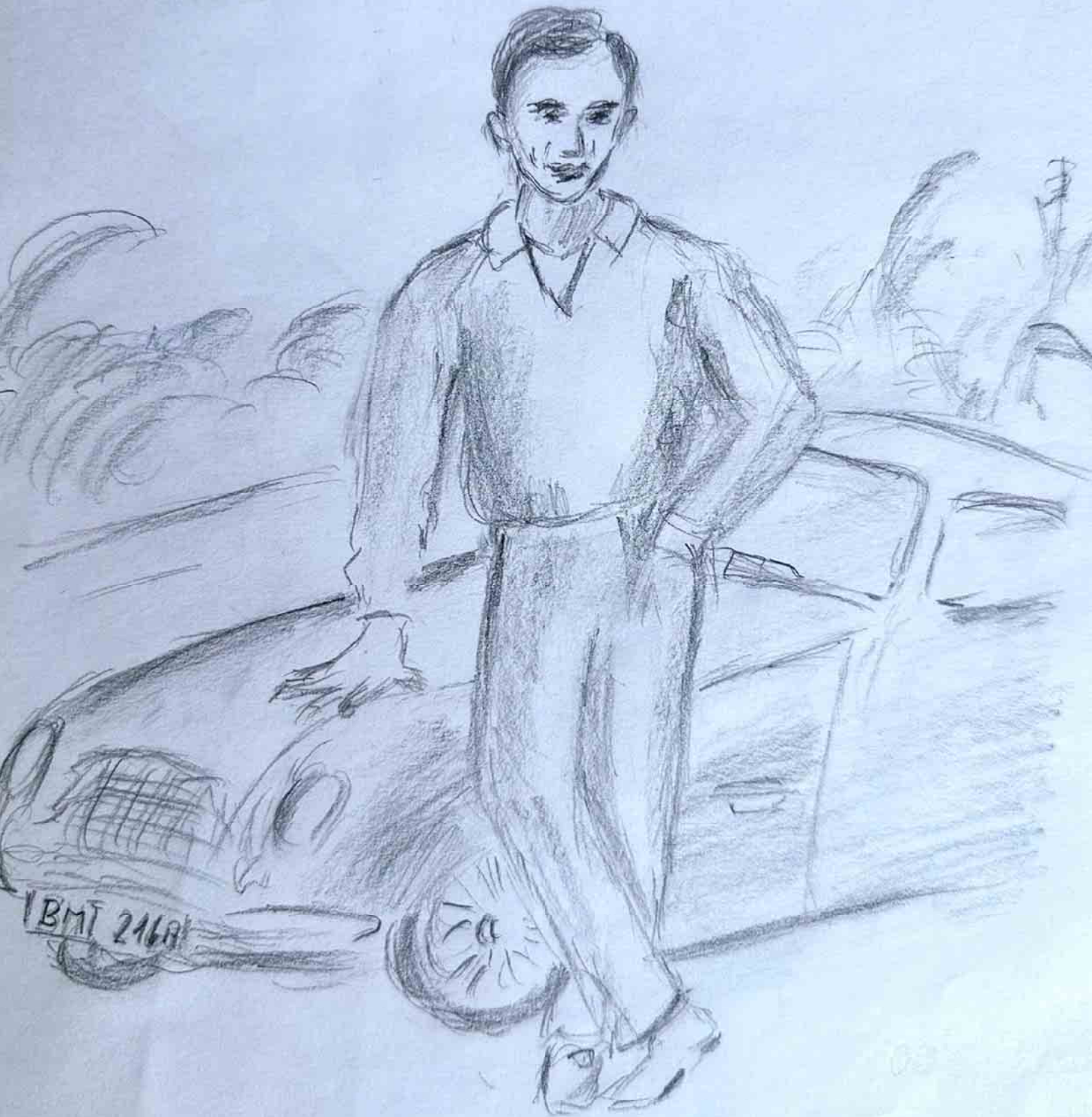


blending them all into one disharmonious melody that resonates with the audience, sometimes against its will.

Carrie often comes close to absolute insanity, for example, when she contemplates infanticide by drowning her baby or when she repeatedly uses her sexuality to get what she wants from targets (including underage ones). Carrie often crosses ethical lines without hesitating, and there is something of the patriotic zealot to her that makes her similar to the religious zealot terrorists she usually hunts. Unquestionably, Carrie Mathison is not a good person; she is morally flexible, to put it kindly. However, Danes makes Carrie likable and fascinating to watch. Somehow, the audience forgives Carrie for unspeakable acts against their own best judgment, and this has everything to do with Danes' portrayal. Despite feminists' critiques (and they have a point), Carrie/Danes acts with male purpose, privilege, and entitlement: She defies orders when she does not believe in them. In a male lead, this may not raise eyebrows. (See Kiefer Sutherland as agent Jack Bauer in *24*, who breaks the law repeatedly, or James Bond in every single Bond film and novel.) However, Carrie/Danes has a depth and absolute sincerity that goes beyond the call of duty, and it goes beyond what audiences are used to in female protagonists. Behind Carrie/Danes' eyes, there appears to exist a 200-year-old Cassandra-like soul. When Carrie/Danes listens to her superior, Saul, her eyes and entire being take him in (Danes is one of the best listeners in the acting world in general). It is not despite Carrie's craziness (and craziness it is, at times), messy morals, and overly emotional side, but because of all these facets that Carrie Mathison is mesmerizing to watch. Carrie exists on the edge of life, and she constantly walks a thin line. Danes' portrayal of Carrie makes it clear that Carrie cannot live any other way but on the razor's edge. Her profession is her life and purpose, without which she falls apart. She is and *is not* perfectly suited to work for the CIA in the way James Bond³⁸⁶ *is* and *is not* suited to work for MI6. (That is, he is a dutiful patriot and a sociopathic assassin, a bon vivant and a Spartan killing machine).

³⁸⁶ See also how wonderfully paradoxical Sean Connery's performance as James Bond was: "As 007, he was an instant, staggering success—conveying exactly the right dangerous sexiness and borderline-sociopathic capacity for disciplined violence—much mocked, much drooled over" (Bradshaw, Peter, "Sean Connery, a Dangerously Seductive Icon of Masculinity," *The Guardian* 25 Aug. 2020). Sean Connery's Bond was entirely credible as the kind of man who can seduce all the women, but it was because he had a feminine side underlying all his machismo. He was sensually empathetic and an ice-cold killing machine. He, too, repeatedly broke all the rules imposed by his superiors, and it was his rebelliousness that made his patriotism both enormously successful and fanatically cruel.

"Bond. James Bond."



Claire Danes, as I state in all my analyses of magnificent performances, commits to Carrie's complexity in all its shade and light. Danes makes an unlikely character utterly believable. Especially in Carrie's manic moments, Danes gives her an inner light that flows into the audience's perception, whether they like it or not. When Carrie refuses to take her medication because she perceives it to dim her mental capacity, she both goes crazy and bursts into absolute genius thinking, and she is still credible as the character. Carrie is constantly berated by male characters. She is constantly undermined and double crossed (also usually by male characters), yet she somehow remains strong, resilient, dynamic, and independent enough to break through all the male noise. All this, I would argue, is the genius of Claire Danes as an actor. As Carrie, Danes walks the line of volatility and vulnerability, fierceness and gentleness, genius and madwoman, independence and neediness, absolute self-control and total meltdown. It is a tightrope walk, but Danes masters it.

Villanelle: Jodie Comer in *Killing Eve*

The Champagne Sociopath

Jodie Comer, as the Russian assassin Villanelle, has brought something entirely new and creative to television: She is the thinking woman's serial killer. While there is a nauseating amount of assassin and serial-killer shows, Comer's Villanelle is utterly credible in this rather clichéd genre. Much of Villanelle's credibility concerns the fact that women wrote her character,³⁸⁷ which brings facets of Villanelle to the screen that have not been shown before: Comer brings a dry humor and anarchic freedom to the character. Instead of making the female assassin a male

³⁸⁷ Author Luke Jennings authored the original novel, *Codename Villanelle*. However, Phoebe Waller-Bridge (writer and executive producer of the first *Killing Eve* series) changed many of the characters from male to female with Jennings's approval. Waller-Bridge also added her own brand of beautifully twisted humor to the series. Similarly, Emerald Fennell (writer and executive producer of the second series) added her distinct "dark sense of humor" and film-noir horror to the show: As Fennell herself explains her writing to the *NYT*: "[A]ll of the things I've worked on until now have been darkly horrible and darkly funny" (Stanford, quoting Emerald Fennell, *NYT* 2019).



fantasy, Villanelle does not creep around chimneys in Catwoman-skin-tight latex leotards.³⁸⁸

Villanelle lives for fashion, but in the way women live for fashion. She spends most of her money on the kind of haute couture that a wealthy, high-fashion socialite might indulge in. Her sense of style is sumptuous and impeccable. There is no doubt that Villanelle likes the finer things in life: She resides in an upmarket, decadent, gilded Paris apartment, she loves couture, she revels in the way the touch of a finely woven damask blanket makes her feel, she loves Champagne (the only contents of her fridge), and she unapologetically loves women, though her character is so free from societal restrictions and patriarchal impositions, she appears capable of sleeping with or being attracted to absolutely anyone. Villanelle is an utterly free agent. She is morbidly funny; she is playful. She is professional and ambitious, and in her total freedom, she lacks all morals. She is a charming anarchist, and it is thrilling to watch her.

Comer's Villanelle does not give one damn about what others, particularly men, think of her. When the new boss of the local syndicate she works for patronizingly tells her to sit down, she simply shoots him. A lesser woman would have explained or argued, but Villanelle did not have time or patience for that. Instead of replacing her, the syndicate replaces the boss.

Villanelle/Comer is not a stereotypical femme fatale, as seen through the male lens. Villanelle/Comer is very attractive, but she is not Grace Kelly–Hedy Lamarr-beautiful. She is slender but not model-thin. She does not sashay gracefully, like Naomi Campbell on the catwalk, but she stomps about and often plods. She is not physically perfect, but once she morphs into another person, she is perfect in the part. Like a child, Villanelle loves to play different parts. She loves to play, period. Villanelle can disappear into another character like a chameleon. Comer flawlessly and impressively switches from accent to accent, dialect to dialect: from Russian-accented English (which Villanelle insists on keeping as a matter of pride despite speaking English like a native), to perfect Received Pronunciation, to Scottish, Australian, and Liverpudlian dialects, to her wonderfully annoying Kardashian-like American vocal-fry-affected accent, to speaking Russian, Italian, German, French, and Spanish. Villanelle/Comer can do it

³⁸⁸ Jodie Comer spoke to the *NYT* about exactly this stereotype of the female assassin as conceived by men: "When I thought of [a character who was] an assassin, I pictured a woman in a black leather leotard and thought, 'Oh God, I don't know if that's me.' But then I read the script, and it was like nothing I'd ever seen on screen. Villanelle wasn't a stereotype. There was a lot of humanity and humor to her" (Berman, quoting Jodie Comer, *NYT* 2018).

all. More importantly, Villanelle/Comer has fun with it all. Hers is not the kind of assassin forced into a nefarious “profession.” At least initially, she is genuinely enjoying herself. Needless to say, she is superb at her job. Villanelle wants to be the best, and she has no trouble pairing a life of blood-curdling violence with couture and champagne.

Villanelle/Comer is a wonderful paradox, as many critics point out: “In Jodie Comer’s ruthless assassin Villanelle, a young woman with an angelic face and a devil’s stare, we get a pleasing paradox: a phantom who craves recognition” (Crawley, *Irish Times* 2019). Villanelle is a quintessential performer: All her “kills” are meant to showcase her talents. She aims to please, and she wants to be praised for her impeccable performances. The screenwriter of *Killing Eve*’s first season, Phoebe Waller–Bridge, has the following to say about the casting of Jodie Comer as Villanelle: “Jodie’s range knows no bounds. She has playfulness in her approach to Villanelle, which has inspired so much of the writing. She delivers the light and the dark with fierce precision and has a mystique all her own, which cannot be directed nor explained, only marveled at” (Nguyen, quoting Phoebe Waller–Bridge, *IndieWire* 2019).

When Villanelle/Comer meets MI5 (later MI6) agent Eve Polanski (wonderfully portrayed by Sandra Oh), the two begin one of the most twisted, strangely beautiful, and delightfully disturbing relationships in television history. Stabbing and shooting one another has never been sexier: “[T]heir relationship became something more fascinatingly twisted, their contact on a knife-edge between intimidation and seduction” (Crawley, *Irish Times* 2019). The BBC’s website puts the character of Villanelle succinctly: “As much of a goddess as she is a devil, either way, she is extraordinary” (“Killing Eve,” *BBC* 2019). Similarly, Hanh Nguyen points out the multifaceted contradictions at play within Villanelle: “Villanelle balances the cheeky with the creepy, the vogueish with the roguish. In short, she’s utterly captivating. . . . Villanelle has the ability to shift from seemingly caring to cold and calculated in one breath” (Nguyen, *IndieWire* 2019).

Jia Tolentino also emphasizes the depth and paradox of Comer’s portrayal of Villanelle: “The ambiguity—and impossibility—of Villanelle’s character has worked, so far, thanks to Comer’s mercurial, unassailable charisma” (Tolentino, *The New Yorker* 2018). Rightfully,

Tolentino also draws attention to the importance of females over males in *Killing Eve*: “The show’s men are formulaic, but the women are deeply strange, forming a collective study in improbable contrasts, strung together by each actor’s charisma” (Tolentino, *The New Yorker* 2018). Whenever Villanelle and Eve get together, the electricity sparks from the screen to the audience like fireworks: “Here, beauty and violence dance alongside each other” (Bastien, *Vulture* 2019).

Bastien pinpoints why so many female viewers are mesmerized by Comer’s Villanelle, despite her penchant for horrific violence (and I cannot overemphasize that the violence is, indeed, spine-chilling). Bastien views Villanelle as a symbol of complete freedom from all of society’s restrictions on women:

It’s easy to be seduced by Villanelle as Eve has been. She offers a window into a life most women never get the chance to lead, a life defined by *pure female desire and rage unfettered* by financial worries, domestic obligations, and the *quotidian violence of men*. When she walks through a quiet velvet night and comes across two young women scared of what the shadows may hold, she is the *monstress*, not the *prey*. When she wears a frothy pink dirndl and pig mask to lure her mark into an Amsterdam brothel before stringing him up and gutting him with mocking joy, she’s acting on an impulse many women have felt: to lash out at the prosaic wolf who slips from come-ons and compliments to violent insults in the span of a blink. Villanelle is *wild* and *wildly self-possessed*. (Bastien, *Vulture* 2019, emphasis mine)

What Bastien notices here is exactly what fascinated Phoebe Waller–Bridge about writing the character Villanelle for the screen. Waller–Bridge saw that it was Villanelle’s absolute freedom that resonated with her and, in turn, with audiences: “I wanted her to be lovable in her conviction and dismissal of consequence. . . . I think there’s something funny about people who laugh in the face of convention or surprise us morally. You’ll enjoy her playfulness, but then the things that she does are genuinely shocking” (Clarke, quoting Waller–Bridge, *Variety* 2018).

There is an aspect of wish fulfillment through Villanelle's character and her lack of boundaries, especially for female viewers: "Here, we marvel at her ability to transgress in a society otherwise assembled against her.³⁸⁹ Here, we can unravel an *idée fixe* that is both petrifying and liberating" (Frank, *HuffPost* 2018). Furthermore, "When a woman commits a crime, she's not only transgressing laws, she's transgressing gender roles" (Frank, quoting journalist Rachel Monroe, *HuffPost* 2018). *Killing Eve* "nails the strange thrill of realizing the person responsible for it all is a lady. In a man's world, it's cathartic to see a woman slay" (Frank, *HuffPost* 2018). Significantly, Eve, the Everywoman full of unfulfilled desire and potential, in many ways "awakes" to a more liberated life experience:

Killing Eve creates a thoroughly queer Bluebeard not just by placing two women at the story's center of gravity but in the quicksilver distinctions between them. Villanelle isn't always a harsh Bluebeard figure, and not just because her wardrobe is shot through with overwhelmingly warm hues of hot pink, menstrual red, and coral. She feels something

³⁸⁹ Priscilla Frank poignantly details the female audience's cathartic reaction to *Killing Eve* as follows:

But most viewers will identify with Eve, who studies Villanelle with both horror and compulsion (and who, in turn, delightfully studies right back). . . . Here, we are fixated by a woman capable of committing the heinous acts of violence we fear will happen to ourselves and our loved ones. Here, we marvel at her ability to transgress in a society otherwise assembled against her. Here, we are able to unravel an *idée fixe* that is both petrifying and liberating. . . . Villanelle dresses up in various female-coded uniforms, which allow her both access and anonymity. She slips into the feminine roles of nurse, sex worker, waitress, and aspiring perfumer, taking advantage of the ways women are routinely underestimated and overlooked. . . . Even though great strides have been made, there are still limitations to the roles women can occupy and ideas of what appropriate female behavior is," she said. "When a woman commits a crime, she's not only transgressing laws, she's transgressing gender roles. . . . The reckless insubordination required to break the law explodes the social standards women are expected to oblige. . . . [*Killing Eve*] understands your unseemly desire to learn everything there is to know about a human who's committed ghastly, unspeakable acts. And yes, it nails the strange thrill of realizing the person responsible for it all is a lady. In a man's world, it's cathartic to see a woman slay. (Frank, *HuffPost* 2018)

In an interview with Hillary Kelly, actress Fiona Shaw (who plays Eve's magnificent and cryptic boss) adds the following to flesh out Waller-Bridge's tragically brilliant and brilliantly tragic writing and the beauty of an almost all-female cast:

She [Waller-Bridge] has a great way of being charming whilst being actually quite anarchic, doesn't she? Or damaged, or something. She makes very difficult things very charming. . . . [*Killing Eve* has] made it very clear to the comedy world that women are very funny, or that women can be funny. And complex. And immoral. And charming. And dangerous. And all the rest of it . . . it's been hard work and a pleasure. The mystery of its jackpot is that it's obviously hit the times very correctly, hasn't it? We live in very insecure times. And there's something about the insecurity that's being explored in *Killing Eve* that people respond to, I think. [*Pause.*] And the humor. (Kelly quoting Fiona Shaw, *Vulture* 2019)

when she's with Eve; she cares for her on some twisted level and in her own way believes she is freeing her. Eve isn't a clear-cut victim undone by her own curiosity; instead, she is strengthened by it, stretching her skills as an MI6 agent. (Bastien, *Vulture* 2019)

Of course, there is nothing healthy about an obsession with a psychopathic serial killer; however, the show does not aspire to be wholesome. *Killing Eve* is not *The Brady Bunch*, but neither is it another stereotypical Hollywood story about the fascination of a serial-killing psychopathic maniac³⁹⁰ who outwits everyone. Villanelle certainly often appears arrogant: One of her best lines is a cruel zinger directed at her lover: "The only interesting thing about you is me," she tells Eve. However, to a certain extent, this is true, and Eve knows it. Villanelle's smug pomposity is more a lack of self-awareness than pure arrogance. She lacks the ladylike self-consciousness imposed by patriarchy that keeps women in their place. Villanelle's arrogance is a kind of audacity and genuine disdain for people who lack boldness. She simply does not ever feel the need to please men. If they try to keep her down in any way, she kills them. What allows Villanelle's provocative zinger to land so brutally and hilariously on its target, Eve's ego, is Eve's knowledge that Villanelle has just called her as boring as most men. Villanelle, of course, knows that the last thing Eve wants to be is another boring male imbecile taking up breathing space in Villanelle's world, which is a full-on freedom-fantasia-candy-and-couture-land without laws except one: "Do not be boring!"

The reason Villanelle gets away with so much murder is usually because, as a woman—and a blond, pretty one—she is never perceived as a threat. In her own beautifully anarchic way, Villanelle/Comer is a trickster: She blends in everywhere but stands apart from everyone. She looks innocent, but she will kill whoever crosses her, even in five-inch heels. She is forever underestimated by men, and when she kills them here and there, she reveals just how stupid they are in not seeing her coming. As Emily Nussbaum fittingly puts it, "In a world dumb enough to

³⁹⁰ It needs to be said that most real-life serial killers are not at all smarter than other people. They usually have average intelligence. Moreover, most serial killers don't kill outside their comfort zone and travel to exotic locations. The mad genius serial killer is a Hollywood fabrication (see Bonn, *Scientific American* 2014 and FBI statistics on the matter). What does fascinate people about serial killers, in my opinion, is that they feel "free" enough to transgress all boundaries and laws. The brilliant, charming, well-spoken, polished, and cunning serial killer is exceedingly rare. Most are rather dull and nothing like Hannibal Lecter or Dexter.

see women as helpless little girls, [*Killing Eve*] examines the mask they wear in public” (cf. Nussbaum, *The New Yorker* 2019). Nussbaum adds a thoughtful observation about “femininity being a kind of pathology” (cf. Nussbaum, *The New Yorker* 2019) that ought to serve as a question for all who enjoy watching the show: “The idea that undergirds the show is a potent one, that femininity is *itself* a sort of sociopathy, whose performance, if you truly nail it, might be the source of ultimate power” (Nussbaum, *The New Yorker* 2019). The emphasis is on the word “performance.” After all, Villanelle is a brilliant performer who uses the world as her stage to act out her many parts. Meryl Streep, in her commencement speech at Barnard in 2010, had something similarly interesting to say about women and the power of acting:

Women are better at acting than men. Why? Because we have to be, if successfully convincing someone bigger than you are of something he doesn't know is a survival skill, this is how women have survived through the millennia. Pretending is not just play. Pretending is imagined possibility. Pretending or acting is a very valuable life skill, and we all do it all the time. We don't want to be caught doing it, but nevertheless, it's part of the adaptations of our species. We change who we are to fit the exigencies of our time, and not just strategically, or to our own advantage, sometimes sympathetically, without our even knowing it for the betterment of the whole group. . . . Empathy is at the heart of the actor's art. . . . Being an actor has opened my soul. (Streep, “Barnard Commencement Speech of 2010,” Columbia University on *YouTube* 2010)

Streep's words resonate because they emphasize that acting is not only a Hollywood hobby but also a survival skill, particularly for those who are weaker than others. Villanelle feeds into the sinister aspect of Streep's words because she fully exploits her place as a woman within patriarchy. When Villanelle must outwit a male target, she often puts in the least amount of effort, except for using her appearance and a husky, sweet, submissive voice. However, when she is dealing with Eve (Sandra Oh) or Eve's MI6 boss Carolyn Martens (the wonderful Fiona Shaw), she immediately switches into high gear out of respect.

From Film

6) Jasmine (Jeanette) Francis: Cate Blanchett in *Blue Jasmine*

The Lady Who Lives for Illusion Has Never Felt More Real³⁹¹

I love those moments on stage, on screen and in life when you dispense with language, when you sort of transcend it in a way, and certainly the experience of falling in love, I think, defies words, which is why poets, painters, musicians, actors have tried to describe that feeling, writers have just tried to put words to that. (Cate Blanchett on transcending language in acting, "7.30" with Sabra Lane, *ABC Australia*, 2015.)

Cate Blanchett plays Jeanette “Jasmine”³⁹² Francis so well that she would fit in perfectly with all the real Upper East Side socialites. Down to the tiniest detail, Blanchett’s Jasmine is flawless, from her facade and her mannerisms to her social skills and the personal mantras she keeps repeating to herself. Blanchett’s co-star of three films, Sarah Paulson, describes Blanchett’s ability to morph into characters as follows: “She’s almost like mercury rolling on a table, you know? It’s entirely elusive, and yet right there in front of you. And constantly moving and shape-shifting and ... and something one would covet. You want to touch that mercury” (Kisner quoting Paulson, “The Elusive Power of Cate Blanchett,” *NYT Magazine* 2022). Accordingly, in *Blue Jasmine*, Blanchett mastered every minute aspect of the patrician Park Avenue Princess in forensic detail: the way Jasmine/Blanchett handles her Louis Vuitton luggage (it says, *I fly private; airlines cannot destroy my fine leather, thank you*); how she carries her Birkin bag like a

³⁹¹ The quote is from the *NYT*’s review of Cate Blanchett as Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Nevertheless, it also perfectly applies to her portrayal of Jasmine (cf. Brantley, *NYT* 2009).

³⁹² A tragically funny moment in the film is Hal/Baldwin telling his fancy friends at a big dinner table that “he fell in love with the name Jasmine.” This is, of course, cruel of him (or is he so self-absorbed he does not know that his wife’s real name is Jeanette—the film suggests the latter). More importantly, it reveals that Jeanette—who had changed her name to Jasmine because it sounded more sophisticated—is a fabrication. She is a self-invention on Park Avenue, and she tries to reinvent herself in San Francisco. Reinvention is not possible, however, when there was no real Jasmine there to begin with. Jasmine is entirely created to suit the upper male echelon’s preference in women, and this female existence—as any Edith Wharton reader knows—is useless outside the bubble.



shield³⁹³ (the quintessential “quota-It-bag” of socialites world-wide); how she pops Xanax like candy because it is “just patience in pill form,” after all); how and what she drinks (Stoli vodka, every socialite’s favorite tippie because it is low in calories and allows them to maintain their X-ray-figure³⁹⁴); how she wears her hair (the perfect hue of ultra-cool-ash-blond known as “Park Avenue Blond”); the way she wears her emerald-cut diamond engagement ring (the clichéd Fred Leighton ten-carat rock that somehow looks delicate on Jasmine’s manicured hand), combined with the obligatory diamond wedding band (usually one is added per child given); the “investment-piece” Chanel bouclé tweed jacket; the eye-popping red Carolina Herrera silk gown; the Cartier Tank watch and the diamond tennis bracelet, combined with the obligatory Chanel pearl necklace (so long that one always wonders if rich husbands gift them to their wives as a kind of rope to hang themselves with); and wanting to be an interior decorator (the non-job³⁹⁵ of wives of very wealthy husbands). Blanchett nails the part of Jasmine with such accuracy, she had real Upper East Side swans nodding silent approval (privately, of course).

The reason I dive into the depths of the Park Avenue Princess’s wardrobe and jewelry is because it is incredibly difficult for many actors to play this “type.” It is often overdone or done wrong, because so much of this world exists only as a secret code within that world. A ten-carat-diamond engagement ring, for example, is tremendously heavy and may look ridiculous on someone who does not know how to wear it. Jasmine/Blanchett wears the bauble in the manner it was meant to be worn: to show it off in all its shiny facets with the implied understanding that it is an extension of the husband’s power, wealth, and ego. The ring tells other men: “Back off, and don’t even bother unless you can top the sparkler I put on my wife’s finger.” The bigger the

³⁹³ As the incomparable wardrobe designer of *Blue Jasmine* puts it so perfectly: “Women wear their Birkins like a shield. They hold it in front of their bodies. It says, ‘Don’t get near me’” (Trebay quoting Suzie Benzinger, *NYT* 2013). A Birkin bag that is held like armor says to the rest of the world: “I am out of your reach.”

³⁹⁴ Tom Wolfe coined the term “social X-ray” for the emaciated Upper East Side socialites who lunch (or rather pretend to lunch) in 1987’s *Bonfire of the Vanities*.

³⁹⁵ Jasmine’s attempt to become an interior decorator is clearly something Woody Allen added to the script. His Upper East Side existence makes him privy to the lives of the “Jasmines” of this world, and it is a cliché and inside-joke that wives of very wealthy men often proclaim to be “interior designers.” I am not taking a stab at the profession of interior designers with this comment, but the fact that it is a cliché in Park Avenue circles is not a secret. In fact, there is a great difference between an interior designer and an interior decorator. Interior designers need schooling and a degree to practice their profession, but anyone can call themselves an interior decorator.

bauble, the greater the warning: “Don’t touch my property/wife.” Blanchett sails through this coded world of wardrobe and mannerisms with excellence. She pulls it off as though it were her daily lifestyle.

Many film critics have noticed the similarities between Blanchett’s Blanche Du Bois of 2009 and Jasmine of 2013 (*The Guardian*’s Frank Kermode,³⁹⁶ as an example). The comparison is a good observation by the critics, and it is a suitable acting choice for Blanchett. Her Jasmine is very fragile and vulnerable. Like Edith Wharton’s doomed hothouse flower Lily Bart, she cannot exist outside the Park Avenue bubble, and she certainly cannot cut it in a nine-to-five job. She does, however, have the strength, scorn, and madness of a Medea: In a moment of explosive jealousy, thwarted love, and total self-destructive passion, she reports her Madoff-like husband (Alec Baldwin)³⁹⁷ to the authorities, thereby undoing herself and her son’s future as well. Neither Blanche nor Jasmine are usually very relatable characters. However, despite Jasmine’s one-percent existence and Blanche’s upper-class disdain for all things ordinary, Blanchett renders both characters with such humanity, dignity, simmering fury, and tragedy that the audience has a strong physical reaction to her portrayals:

Constantly reaching for a drink, her mouth set in a cracked smile, eyes darting with cornered panic. Jasmine fills a room just as she fills the screen. She’s an exhausting character to be with, to watch and, presumably, to play. But Blanchett takes on the challenge like a peak-fitness runner facing a marathon, ploughing her way through 26 miles of emotional road pounding, with all the ups and downs, strains and tears, stomach turns and heartburns that that entails, a feat that occasionally leaves her (and us) gasping for breath. (Kermode, *Guardian* 2013)

³⁹⁶ Kermode makes the following comparison: “Although Allen has underplayed the comparison, his *Blue Jasmine* clearly has her roots in the white woods of Tennessee Williams’s antiheroine, providing a cornerstone upon which Blanchett builds another towering performance” (Kermode, *Guardian* 2013). I agree with Kermode’s observation.

³⁹⁷ Kermode poignantly captures Alec Baldwin’s paradoxical performance: “[Alec Baldwin] once again proves himself a matchless purveyor of successful slimeballs, perfectly balancing attraction and repulsion” (Kermode, *Guardian* 2013). Hal/Baldwin is both sexy in his sliminess and slimy in his seduction. He reels in the ladies (and the audience) with, and despite, his smarmy appeal. There is a distinct sense that this character is no good, but to completely dislike him is a strange impossibility.

The audience feels Jasmine's pain and growing despair, despite and because of her haughtiness. Similarly, with Blanche, "[Audiences] are likely to find themselves identifying with disturbing closeness with a character who has often before seemed too exotic, too anachronistic, too fey to remind you of anyone you knew personally" (Brantley, *NYT* 2009).

Blanchett endows her Jasmine (and Blanche) with a confluence of strength and fragility, charm and spite, arrogance and humiliation, and love and hate. Jasmine/Blanchett is a mess of a human being when the audience meets her. It is, as Kermode states, difficult to watch her. However, it is impossible to look away from this epic train wreck. It is not, as is often the case, the kind of train wreck audiences watch with a kind of schadenfreude at how the mighty have fallen and deserved to do so. When Jasmine/Blanchett goes into one of her drunken rants, and her eyes shrink into snake-like slits, there is an animalistic, raw fury spewing from her. There is guilt, shame, venom, bile—a full-on explosion of emotion bursting from her—even when she talks to her sister's two little boys ("tip big, boys"). It is pure savagery erupting out of Blanchett's Jasmine, mixed with profound vulnerability and despair.

Blanchett has an uncanny gift to make unsympathetic³⁹⁸ characters come fully to life without sneaking in subliminal demands for empathy from the audience. "This is who this character is," Blanchett seems to say. "If you like her or if you like to watch her, that is on you." Blanchett's Jasmine seems to remind her audience. In a tragic way, Blanchett makes Jasmine funny, often by showing Jasmine as someone so deeply self-obsessed that she cannot see anyone else. Meanwhile, Jasmine has identified herself entirely by her husband's success, and she now lacks any footing because she has no idea who she is underneath the veneer of Hermes and Chanel. Peter Bradshaw of *The Guardian* poignantly calls *Blue Jasmine* "a sad comedy" (2013). Blanchett commits entirely to who Jasmine really is, and it is because of Blanchett's commitment and dedication to the character that she is so fully human in all her messy and conceited faults,

³⁹⁸ Blanchett plays complicated women in an extraordinary way. She never downplays these women's dark side. See Bernadette Fox in *Where'd You Go, Bernadette*, Dr. Lilith Ritter in *Nightmare Alley*, Carol Aird in *Carol*, Brie Evantee in *Don't Look Up*, and her recent acclaimed portrayal of composer and conductor Lydia Tár in *Tár*.

Blanchett honors these characters by playing them with all their shades and thorns. It is a particularly annoying habit of many actresses and actors to try and make an unlikable character likable. The audience must decide for itself if the character is likable. Blanchett never tries to manipulate audiences. It hardly ever works. At times, audiences may not like characters at all, but find them fascinating to watch. Jasmine, for example, is not likable. However, she is fireworks to watch. It is my sincere belief that a lesser actor than Blanchett may have turned *Blue Jasmine* into a farce. With Blanchett as Jasmine, the film is pure, beautiful pyrotechnics.

delusions, and vanity. Jasmine's hollowness is also meaningful because it reveals her daily attempt to repress unwanted emotions and uncomely instincts.

One tragic flaw Jasmine/Blanchett conveys so vividly, so tragically, so credibly to the audience is the need to prefer a beautiful lie to an ugly truth. Jasmine/Blanchett saw her husband's penchant for philandering, and she saw—in her heart of hearts—that his fortune was ill-begotten (isn't it always?). Yet—how utterly human this need is—she turns the quintessential Upper East Side maven's bromidic blind eye to remain in the beautiful Park Avenue bubble of lies and deceit. Living in a luxurious bubble (even if it is built on lies and exploitation) is much nicer than real working life, and the irony is that it is Jasmine/Blanchett who bursts the bubble for everyone involved in a moment of truthful fury. She is one of those “kamikaze women who destroy you in the fallout” (Shoard, quoting Allen, *Guardian* 2013). There is, I found, as I watched the film with horror and utter fascination, nothing more human than to succumb to a beautiful lie only to have the truth creep in and make it all come crashing down. Jasmine/Blanchett is a walking, beautiful lie, and the tragedy is that she believes her own lies. To some viewers, Blanchett's Jasmine may have been pathetic or a “fractured central figure too abrasive for empathy” (Kermode, *Guardian* 2013). I concede that I watched every step of Jasmine/Blanchett's downward spiral with the constant echo of “This could be you” in the back of my head because there was so much truth in Jasmine/Blanchett's fiction, it was difficult to remain in any delusional self-fabricated bubble. Blanchett's Jasmine hit so close to home for me that her trajectory was almost unbearable—and yet riveting—to watch. It was somewhat of a “funny-not-funny” horror movie to me: “*Blue Jasmine* is a bruiser of a movie, a Greek tragedy that dispatches a Park Avenue princess with a massive slap” (Shoard, *Guardian* 2013). To state my discomfort with participating in Jasmine's fateful downfall publicly is the highest compliment I can give a performer. *Blue Jasmine* is the saddest comedy I have ever watched.

7) Edith Piaf: Marion Cotillard in *La Vie En Rose*

The Small Sparrow with the Big Voice and Presence

Marion Cotillard, as Edith Piaf, gives such a moving performance that no one ought to miss it. Cotillard gave the character of Piaf every fiber of her own body, heart, and soul. Cotillard, an ethereal beauty in real life, allowed herself to be ugly, old, fragile, and stooped over for the part. There is no vanity, yet Edith Piaf/Cotillard is so heart-rending in the part that the audience falls in love with her (I did). Hers is a raw, at times horrifying performance filled with light, great love, and great loss and horror—all simultaneously. Cotillard’s gift, perhaps her superpower, is to endow all her characters with such nuance and color that it is impossible to look away. She strips away all gestures of vanity and all unnecessary gimmicks that many actresses³⁹⁹ fall prey to, and such a naked, vulnerable performance is breathtaking. Many reviews and descriptions by co-stars mention Cotillard’s ability to be many things at once, to be contradictory, beautiful and ugly, sweet and vile, loving and heartless at once. For example, film critic Kirk Honeycutt says the following about Cotillard’s performance as Edith Piaf: “Her body, at odd angles even at an early age and bent horribly later, catches that strange combination of fragility and toughness” (*Hollywood Reporter* 2007). Leonardo DiCaprio, her co-star in the movie *Inception*, describes Cotillard similarly: “It was wonderful to act alongside Marion. She can be strong and vulnerable and hopeful and heartbreaking all in the same moment, which was perfect for all the contradictions of her character” (“Inception Production Notes,” *Warner Bros. UK* 2010). Piaf/Cotillard is so many things at once. So many opposing emotions drift through her that she is a revelation to behold.

Like Claire Danes, Cotillard can be both strong and vulnerable. It is especially in her vulnerability that her source of strength seems to lie. Even when Piaf/Cotillard receives news of

³⁹⁹ I often see performances by female actors that have the potential of being superb, but are rendered mediocre by the actor being too conscious of how she looks. The poses are stilted, and the audience can see that the actor focused too much on which side of her face makes her look best or which facial gesture, etc. It takes away from the portrayal of the character. There is, undoubtedly, great pressure in Hollywood to look beautiful in many parts. However, really good actors transcend that pressure. Charlize Theron in *Monster* is one example. All the actors I mention in this dissertation never allow vanity to supersede their performances. It is counterproductive because the audience can sense the lack of commitment to the part.



her lover's death and becomes frantic with hand gestures and running from room to room, she is utterly realistic. The moment Edith Piaf learns of her lover's death is shot in one long take with the camera following her from room to room, and it is harrowing, magnificent, horrifying, moving, heart-stopping, gentle, and savage, all at the same time. Edith Piaf/Cotillard is like a wild animal trapped in a net. The scene is pure knife's-edged, breathtaking acting. Trevor Nunn called Cotillard's portrayal of Edith Piaf "one of the greatest performances of all time," and I agree (Rafanelli quoting Nunn, *Guardian* 2014). Stephanie Rafanelli brilliantly captures the real-life Marion Cotillard:

She seems to relate to outsiders, I say. "I've always felt an outcast," Cotillard replies. "There is something strange about me. I don't ever feel at ease in a group of people. I have to fight hard to overcome my fears." What are these fears? She smiles. Her eyes are alert, glassy, and look as if they could brim with tears at any moment. I'm left to find meaning in her gaze. It's all very Mona Lisa. (Rafanelli, *Guardian* 2014)

There is something within Cotillard that transcends all boundaries. She looks incredibly delicate and feminine, but there is masculine power inside her. She admits to wanting to play Hamlet or any other savory male character (cf. Rafanelli, *Guardian* 2014). What Rafanelli reads as "very Mona Lisa" is, of course, a wonderful way of putting the paradox that is Cotillard into language: Is she smiling or smirking? Is the smile engaging or menacing?⁴⁰⁰ What is she communicating? Is she happy or sad, alluring or mocking? (cf. Liaci et al., *Scientific Reports* 2017). Cotillard's soulful eyes are always bursting with a great many mixed emotions; indeed, she is somewhat of an ambiguous *Mona Lisa* in many of her parts.

However, this *Mona Lisa* mystery is nothing other than Cotillard's ability to express varying and contradictory emotions and states of mind at the same time. There simply is not a better straightforward explanation in the English language for what Cotillard is doing, other than

⁴⁰⁰ I build here on Walter Pater's poetic and insightful observations and depiction of the *Mona Lisa*. Pater found that Mona Lisa's smile held an "emotional ambiguity" that appeared to be a "promise of unbounded tenderness," but also—upon studying the painting longer—a "sinister menace" (Pater, "Leonardo da Vinci," *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* 2009).

using Rafanelli's comparison to the paradoxical and cryptic *Mona Lisa* as painted by Leonardo Da Vinci in 1503-1506. Nonetheless, using the *Mona Lisa* to describe the paradox of Cotillard is rather inspiring. After all, what work of art has drawn people in and fascinated them for centuries more so than the *Mona Lisa*? "There is no one she isn't. . . . Mona Lisa is herself a miraculous surge of 'living water,' serenely content in the knowledge of her own raging infinitude" (Grovier, "The Detail that Unlocks the *Mona Lisa*," *BBC Culture* 12 Feb. 2021). If not coerced into a binary system, *Mona Lisa* contains multitudes: She is happy and sad, engagingly seductive and slightly mocking; she is young, yet appears like an old soul.⁴⁰¹ The fact that Leonardo da Vinci wanted his subject to smile at a time when portraits were mostly serious, religious, and reverent gave *Mona Lisa* a beautiful and sharp edge: She appears fully alive because her ambiguous smile demands the viewer's participation. David Colman pondered the famous painting and argued that the "Mona Lisa was a real woman who with a smile initiated a dialogue with the viewer that had not existed before; it changed the very nature of the relationship between art and audience. With that one smile, Leonardo had imbued a work of art with a conceptual stroke of what's now called 'genius'" (Colman, *Guardian* 2018). Colman further explained:

⁴⁰¹ See Walter Pater's excerpt on Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, full of paradox, similar to George Meredith's description of the disharmonious, strangely troubling beauty of Renee in *Beauchamp's Career*: There is old and young, innocence and eternal experience, beautiful and sinister, the repressed and expressed, the saint and the sinner, and the seductive vamp of the vampire (the femme fatale and the siren) behind an innocent smile. *Mona Lisa* is more beautiful with her "troubled beauty" despite other paintings of women being more harmoniously beautiful, etc.:

The presence that thus rose so strangely beside the waters, is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all "the ends of the world are come," and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of **strange thoughts** and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be **troubled by this beauty**, into which **the soul with all its maladies** has passed! **All the thoughts and experience of the world** have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and **make expressive** the outward form, the **animalism** of Greece, the **lust** of Rome, the reverie of the middle age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of **the Pagan world**, the **sins of the Borgias**. She is **older** than the rocks among which she sits; like the **vampire**, she has been **dead many times**, and **learned the secrets of the grave**; and has been **a diver in deep seas**, and **keeps their fallen day about her**; and **trafficked for strange webs** with Eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as **Saint Anne**, the mother of Mary; and **all this has been to her** but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands. The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together **ten thousand experiences**, is an **old** one; and modern thought has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. (Pater, "Leonardo da Vinci," *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, 6th ed. 2009, emphasis mine)

Things that don't add up get our attention; we want everything to square. The train is oddly late. Why? Your coworker made a weird remark. Why? Questioning something as big as the meaning of life just shorts out the system. Pushing "all of life" and "your life" into one concept is way too massive and nebulous to be coherent—so the system freezes. Meanwhile, all your emotions about your life and yourself—what you could be, what you could have been. Together, the freeze and the feelings give the illusion that something is really missing. At the same time, hearing an answer that seems too simple and unremarkable for the size of the question feels unfair, unjust, somehow. That's so much the case with the *Mona Lisa* that it could be called the *Mona Lisa* paradox. (Colman, *Guardian* 2018)

Colman asks viewers to "live with the mystery" and to "contemplate the question (why *Mona Lisa* is smiling) as an answer" instead of simplifying the question into one certain answer out of two options (cf. Colman, *Guardian* 2018).

There is no reason the *Mona Lisa* (the woman in the painting) cannot do or feel many things at once. In a blog entry, Vincent deLuise—both a physician and professor at Yale—puts the *Mona Lisa* paradox as follows: "My view is that Genius is the amalgamation of feminine and masculine, of secular and spiritual, of mystical and quotidian, of simple and fractal, thus it is inherently ambiguous and inherently androgynous" (deLouise, *A Musical Vision* 2019). I would argue that it is specifically the ambiguity, the paradox, and the complexity contained within *Mona Lisa* that make her so fascinating, alive, and engaging. It is the same with magnificent performers. Cotillard portrays Edith Piaf as an old soul when she is still a child, as beautiful even when she is physically ugly, as mesmerizing even when she is vile, and as full of love and passion even in her cruel moments. Cotillard's performance is, like the music of Edith Piaf, full of different notes that come together in one multi-faceted, complex, strange, but beautiful melody that asks the viewer to join her on her journey through life. As with the *Mona Lisa*, Cotillard's Edith Piaf engages the viewer in a dialogue: Cotillard's Piaf is a multitude of emotional states and character traits. She is a walking riddle forever questioning the audience, and the audience races alongside her, attempting to answer the questions and solve the riddle.

Cotillard full-heartedly does what Anne Bogart recommends theatre practitioners do: Cotillard “embraces dissonance, ambiguity, and paradox” (Bogart, “The Art of Resonance,” *SITI blog* 2021). Edith Piaf/Cotillard always appears to have a secret. The beauty of watching her is that the audience participates in her journey through a life of uncertainty where the question is the answer, and the secret is the revelation. Edith Piaf/Cotillard conceals more than she reveals, yet the audience perceives her as intimately familiar despite her being a relative stranger. Like *Mona Lisa’s* gentle but intense gaze, a performance such as Cotillard’s as Edith Piaf follows the viewers home and remains with them for years to come. It resonates physically, psychologically, and emotionally with the audience. It is unforgettable.

8) Cassandra (Cassie) Thomas: Carey Mulligan in *Promising Young Woman*

The Pink Prophetess Who Will Not Let You Forget

There is one moment in *Promising Young Woman* that is so uncomfortable yet so magnificent in its discomfort that it is glorious: Cassie (Carrie Mulligan) has just confronted her boyfriend Ryan with a video that reveals he was complicit in her friend Nina’s rape (which led to Nina’s suicide). Like most guys who think they are good guys (that is, almost all of them), instead of reacting to the absolutely horrible thing he did and trying to atone, Ryan—so very realistically—begins to whine about how this bad news will affect him and his career. He throws the following arrogant demand into his toddler tirade: “You just gotta forgive me.” Cassie/Mulligan’s reaction is priceless. She looks at Ryan/Burnham with a mix of disbelief and contempt, and she says the word “No” in the most beautiful way I have ever heard a female say “No” to the utter garbage a man has just thrown her way. Moreover, Cassie/Mulligan smiles at Ryan/Burnham when she says it. Her smile is not the sweet, feminine smile of submission and possible future forgiveness but the smile of utter loathing and disdain. Unlike most heroines in film and television, Cassie/Mulligan does not melt at the “I love you,” “but I’m a good guy,” and “hey, we’ve all done bad stuff” bunk. She does not “forgive” her man. Instead, she cringes. Not cringing is not realistic,



and it never has been. Even when a woman says she forgives a man—and it is a trope⁴⁰² in film and TV⁴⁰³ for her to do so—it is never, ever credible. Emerald Fennell wrote the realistic answer (“no”) that is not often enough said by women in film and TV but is always there, even underneath the woman’s alleged forgiveness spoken out loud. Carey Mulligan delivers that rebuff-grenade so masterfully, stoically, subtly, it reverberates into the audience’s soul: “No.” Cassie/Mulligan says the “no” like a question (“Are you kidding me, Ryan, to ask me to forgive you?”), and she says it like an absolute and final answer (“No, Ryan, non placet, I will never forgive you, you weasel”). *Bang*. Game over, Ryan.

Mulligan’s “no” is one of the most cathartic feminist moments in film history. As an audience member, I wanted to cry for joy over Cassie/Mulligan calling Ryan/Burnham out on his nonsense. Meanwhile, I felt the terrible and tragic truth this “no” holds. It holds no future with Ryan, and it holds no light. It holds no place in society for Cassie. It holds only the sad truth and the path of righteousness for her. I wanted to hug Cassie/Mulligan for—thank you—not saying yes, I will forgive you, bad-guy-who-thinks-he-is-a-good-guy as well as for dropping the bomb on him that he so rightfully deserves: NO! It is love–hate, martyr–avenger, it is uncomfortable, it is beautiful, it is real. This is a woman not trying to please. Her mission is to right the wrong of all involved by demanding an apology, which is uncomfortable. Emerald Fennell explained her work and the reaction it received as follows:

⁴⁰² Very recently, after the latest episode of the HBO show *The Gilded Age*, my phone lit up with a series of messages from my girlfriends with harsh thoughts on a particular scene of the show. I returned my friends’ harsh thoughts in equal, if not greater, measure. The scene in question has Marian, an ingénue, react to the man who just betrayed her on every level by responding to his demand for future forgiveness with something like: “At some point, yes.” There can be no doubt that moments like these upset women deeply. Furthermore, I will pre-empt the counterargument that, during the *Gilded Age*, women had to fall in line and were likely to respond in such a submissive manner. No! In fact, since the man (a social mountaineer of the first order) has just ruined the ingénue’s reputation and severely damaged her future chances at marriage, her willingness to forgive him is even more dubious. The fact is that this dialogue is wishful thinking and written by a man. Even a young, naïve ingénue of *The Gilded Age* is not likely to whisper a sweet and submissive “soon I will forgive you” into the ear of the man who just wrecked her life. Furthermore, the man’s name is Tom Raikes, and he is obviously a rake. Julian Fellows is having a laugh at the expense of American audiences, but many women may not be amused. This kind of idiotically submissive response by a female is so common in film and television, it may have escaped many viewers’ attention. It is male wishful thinking, and thankfully, Emerald Fennell poisoned that popcorn dream.

⁴⁰³ N.b. *The Women* (1939); *Fatal Attraction* of 1987 (the wife forgives her philandering husband despite the mistress’s absolutely insane behavior that includes murdering a family pet and attempting to murder the wife); *What Lies Beneath* (2000); *Mad Men* (2007), *Big Little Lies* (2017), *The Sopranos* (1999), *Homeland* (2011), etc.

[F]or lots of men, I think [*Promising Young Woman*] has been deeply troubling because they've realised that maybe there have been moments where they didn't have enough empathy to think of what the other person might be experiencing. . . . I don't think it's a polemic against men, but it's a *polemic against the culture that we all grew up in*, which tends to *side with men* more than it does with women. . . . Truthfully, it's a much bigger question than I or any one person is able to answer. But if this story is a fable or an allegory, it's that *you can only have forgiveness and redemption if you acknowledge what you've done*. . . . So often you find with apologies, when it comes to this sort of thing, that they're half-apologies and *they do not take responsibility*. And all Cassie is looking for is one person to say, "This is profoundly wrong, and you're right to be angry, this shouldn't have happened," but nobody wants to because nobody wants to admit they've been part of something so dreadful. (McIntosh, quoting Emerald Fennell, "Promising Young Woman: Carey Mulligan Film 'Deeply Troubling,'" *BBC News* 2021, emphasis mine)

There are many other powerful and uncomfortable moments in the film, such as Cassie/Mulligan trying to get a very straightforward apology from her former dean (Connie Britton)⁴⁰⁴ who, instead, defends Nina's rapist. Margot Robie (who produced the film) describes the feeling of the film's audience very fittingly through her own reactions: "In the scene, I both am horrified, I'm sickened, and I'm also giggling. . . . It's kind of funny and delicious and fucked up and weird and lovable and not awful, it's just so many things" (Robie, "Promising Young Woman—Scene at the Academy," *Oscars on YouTube* 2021).

⁴⁰⁴ For anyone who has watched the movie, this scene stands out as another highly uncomfortable moment. Fennell's casting is brilliant. She cast a woman (Connie Britton) in the part of the patriarchal dean, and she cast male actors who were known to the audience as nice, sweet guys from other shows. Fennell does this on purpose: "*Promising Young Woman* subtly skewers gender conventions and double standards, and as the movie progresses, we start to piece together what is happening: Cassie is trying to redress an injustice that was swept under the rug by not allowing anyone to forget" (Chocano, *NYT Mag* 2020). Connie Britton, the actor, radiates a warmth and kindness by nature. This makes it very difficult for Cassie/Mulligan to challenge her, but she does it fiercely. Similarly, when confronted with the male actors, from Ryan (Bo Burnham) to Al Monroe (Christopher Lowell) to Jerry (Adam Brody), Cassie/Mulligan must work hard to pierce their good-guy images. This is the point of the movie, however: to show that behind the facade lurks something very different, be that the female dean making light of a rape case, unaware the victim committed suicide, to the "sweet" guys being predators. The same applies to Cassie: She looks so sweet, and no one sees her coming. "As Fennell observes, it's much more comfortable to imagine women are sweet and happy than face the fear they might want to hurt you. "There is something about the way the world relates to women that is bound to breed darkness—even if that darkness is sub rosa, hidden under blond curls and pretty dresses" (Chocano, *NYT Mag* 2020).

Cassie/Mulligan being many things at once is what makes *Promising Young Woman* a masterpiece. Every single film critic noticed Cassie/Mulligan's variety and contradictions. Frequently, critics were wondering aloud which was the real Cassie: Is it the girly bubblegum-pink-clad Britney-lookalike-Cassie who works in a sweets store and who sticks gum underneath her former dean's desk? Or is it Cassie, the avenging angel clad in bodycon dresses? Or is it Cassie, the predatory make-up artist, Cassie, the sweet girlfriend falling in love with Ryan, Cassie, the good daughter, or any other "part" Cassie plays? In fact, Cassie/Mulligan is all of these. Mulligan fully delivers a Cassie that is entirely at home in blond Barbie hair and pink cardigans, a nurse outfit, and rainbow hair, while being Cassie the poker-faced avenger in a dark suit (or sexy dress) who will not stray from the path of righteousness and who will not give an inch until she gets recognition and an apology for her friend Nina. One critic explained his confusion over Cassie as follows: "In order to explain that dichotomy between Cassie—the lollipop-sucking sweet-shop worker with a massive affection for the dulcet tones of Paris Hilton and Britney Spears, but also the wily revenge-seeker who carries a notebook filled with the names of her 'victims'—Fennell crafted mood boards" (Erbland, *IndieWire* 2020). Erbland is on to something, but he is the one who fabricates the "dichotomy" that needs to be somehow reconciled, not Emerald Fennell or the film, itself. The critic's desire to figure out which the real Cassie is takes away from the paradox that is Cassie. Mulligan does not fall into the trap of playing a character suffering from "multiple personality disorder" or any other pathology.

What Mulligan endows her Cassie⁴⁰⁵ with so beautifully, what is so often missing in all the criticism I read about the film, is Cassie's love for her friend Nina. Nina is dead. The audience never sees or hears Nina. Cassie/Mulligan, however, never lets anyone else forget (including the audience) how great her love and loyalty to her friend Nina was. Nina is in every scene, despite not being in any scene. She is a ghost who haunts every moment, yet she is hardly mentioned in any of the many reviews and critiques I have read of *Promising Young Woman*.

⁴⁰⁵ There is, of course, potent meaning behind the name. "Cassie" is short for "Cassandra," the prophetess. Cassie/Cassandra is trying to show the world around her where it went wrong. Nina, in her absence, is a ghost and silent killer, reminiscent of the nickname *La Femme Nikita* of 1990. There is a neo-noir aspect to having a character named Nina haunt every scene and a character named Cassie/Cassandra who makes everyone remember Nina even though no one wants to hear about her because it is uncomfortable. Cassie/Mulligan is holding the mirror up to the people she holds accountable for Nina's death, and every single person she confronts (except the lawyer, played by Alfred Molina) refuses to look the ugly truth in the face.

What is repeatedly mentioned is Mulligan's skill of making Cassie a complex, contradictory, credible character: Erbland says, "*Promising Young Woman* manages to be funny and sexy and smart and absolutely terrifying, all in one stylish package" (Erbland, *IndieWire* 2020). Geisinger puts it as follows: "She [Mulligan] walks the fine line between provoking empathy and shock, making us root for her search for justice but uncomfortable at her questionable methods" (Geisinger, *Digital Spy* 2021). Justin Chang repeatedly emphasized Mulligan's "remarkable ability to project both steeliness and vulnerability" (Chang, *Los Angeles Times* 2020). In detail, Chang astutely observes the following contradictions, dualities, and tensions within *Promising Young Woman* and in Cassie: [*Promising Young Woman*] is:

[A]n acid-laced sugar rush of a movie—or maybe it's a sugar-laced acid rush of a movie. . . . [*Promising Young Woman*] is all about duality—the tensions that tug at a person's identity, the malice that can lurk beneath seemingly friendly interactions. . . . *Promising Young Woman* plays hard with your *empathy* and your *schadenfreude*, as if to suggest that the *two reactions, far from being opposed, are in fact closely bound*. . . . Cassie, a bundle of contradictions just about held together by Mulligan's shapeshifting, fastidiously controlled performance. . . . The grimly multitasking finale of *Promising Young Woman* feels both audacious and uncertain of itself, as Fennell tries to meld a cackle of delight and a blast of fury, with a lingering residue of anguish. It doesn't all come together, though there's an undeniable thrill in seeing it come apart. (Chang, *Los Angeles Times* 2020, emphasis mine)

Chang insightfully remarks on the two opposing reactions that are, in fact, closely bound. Other critics similarly called *Promising Young Woman* a kind of paradox: "A black comedy told in pastels" (Buchanan, *NYT*, 2021); Chocano hilariously calls the film "a Hallmark movie of the damned"⁴⁰⁶ (Chocano, *NYT Mag* 2020).

⁴⁰⁶ "When I commented on the brilliance of Nancy Steiner's costume design for her [Fennell's] film, which makes everyone look like a character in a Hallmark movie of the damned, she [Fennell] spoke about the ways women know how to use clothes, hair, makeup, and voice to hide their anger and trauma" (Chocano, *NYT Magazine* 2020).

Emerald Fennell refers to her film repeatedly as “poison popcorn,”⁴⁰⁷ by which she aptly explains that *Promising Young Woman* is not didactic, but it is candy-shaped medicine, that is, it is medicine without being medicine. It is tasty popcorn, but the popcorn is poisoned, just like the Halloween candy laced with razor blades that I had referred to in my introduction (when speaking of the trickster). Fennell’s point is that the truth behind Nina’s death and, eventually, Cassie’s death are so ubiquitous and current that it would have been so much easier for Cassie [and Everywoman] to suck it up, move on, and be silent: “So much of [*Promising Young Woman*] is trying to make all of us watching it complicit⁴⁰⁸ in what our culture and our society does, which is say, ‘Forget about it. Look how easy it would be’” (Erbland quoting Fennell, *IndieWire* 2020). As Fennell puts it in another interview, “Isn’t it funny how frightening a character becomes — particularly a woman — when they say, ‘Actually, I’m right. And so, I’m going to keep going. Even when everyone else is bored, and even when everyone else is furious, I’m going to keep going’” (Arthur and Donnelly, quoting Fennell, *Variety* 2021). Cassie/Mulligan undergoes a series of incredibly uncomfortable and downright creepy encounters. However, these encounters are merely creepy because the people she accuses (by mere suggestions, by the way) all categorically refuse to be held accountable. They refuse to see themselves, because that would mean that they are not the good people they believe they are. Cassie/Mulligan is not sweet-pink-Cassie more than avenging-angel-Cassie or dark-suited, poker-faced Cassie more than blond-

⁴⁰⁷ “Her [Emerald Fennell’s] work tends to feel, in general, like an enormous, fuzzy pink jumper wrapped around a dagger. As one of the film’s producers told me, ‘Emerald would describe this as “poison popcorn,” which I think is a great term for it’” (Chocano, *NYT Mag* 2020).

⁴⁰⁸ Emerald Fennell brings “macabre feminist wit to experiences that no one wants to talk about” (Chocano, *NYT Mag* 2020). Fennell says that “it was seeing how readily the culture enabled and normalized this stuff, making women feel uncomfortable or embarrassed for talking about it honestly” (Chocano, *NYT Mag* 2020), which triggered her to write the script for *Promising Young Woman*. In fact, it was a dinner conversation during which Fennell’s female friends related all the creepy incidents and encounters they had with men, to which the young men at the table reacted with horror because they did not know that these things still happened (cf. Chocano, *NYT Mag* 2020). “While pitching the movie, she [Emerald] would joke that most people would rather be shot in the knee than be shown who they really are. ‘That’s our worst nightmare,’ she said. ‘It’s what makes Cassie frightening—much more frightening than a knife-wielding maniac. Much more devastating, really’” (Chocano, quoting Fennell, *NYT Mag* 2020). This is true: Nobody likes a prophet, not even when they are old and blind (Tiresias) or young and weeping (mentioning “Jeremiah” connotes the world’s worst party pooper). After all, prophets tend to speak for God, always known to be one big buzzkill. That is why Fennell masterfully dresses her prophet as Britney Spears, to let the medicine go down gently, like “poison popcorn.” No one believed the ancient Greek prophet Cassandra, and no one wanted to hear her message. No one wants to hear what Cassie/Mulligan says. Even her former dean questions her honesty. However, the modern Cassandra has taken lessons from Clytemnestra and has made it her mission to punish those who caused Nina’s suicide and those complicit in it, men and women alike.

ponytail-pink-cardigan-Cassie, who rocks out to Paris Hilton and Britney Spears. Cassie/Mulligan is all of them. To play with an old pun of Mae West's: When Cassie is sweet, she is very sweet. But when she is bad, she is better.

Mulligan's performance is revelatory and heartbreaking, the kind of performance that stays with the audience for months. *New York Times* theatre critic Ben Brantley once described Mulligan's acting (after seeing her in the stage production of *Through a Glass Darkly*) in a way befitting her portrayal of Cassie: "But if you want to experience the shock of illumination that acting, at its best, can achieve—and only occasionally does—you need to see Ms. Mulligan's performance. . . . Ms. Mulligan convinces us that we are seeing through Karin's very skin. Such vision is a rare and frightening privilege afforded only by acting of the highest order" (Brantley, "Review: Through a Glass Darkly," *NYT* 2011).



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