

THE DISEASES OF LISTENING IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

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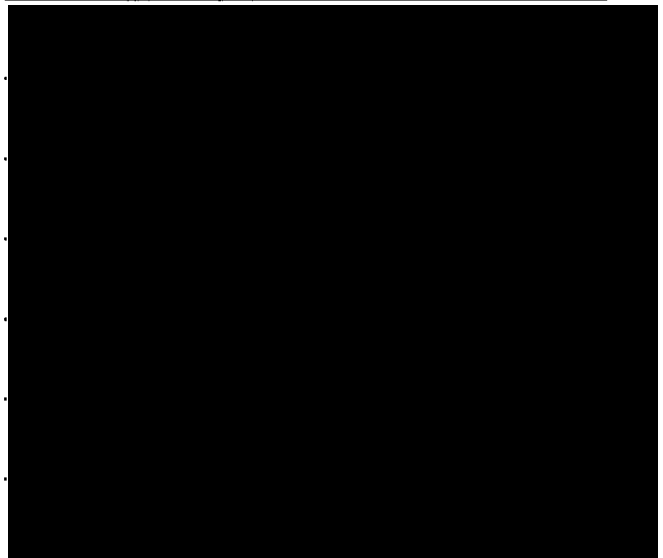
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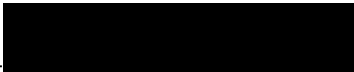
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ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE 1: *The Rainbow Portrait*

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139

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the construction of listening as appropriate or transgressive, particularly as determined by social status and gender, in a variety of early modern texts, including the drama. Chapter 1 examines beliefs about the physiology of hearing to argue that while preachers and playwrights demanded auditors, listening was deemed inherently dangerous. Nonetheless, deafness or poor auditory discernment offered no protection as dull hearing was frequently associated with dull-wittedness as shown by King Midas and the dupes in Jonson's *Volpone* and *Epicoene*. The desire to listen to inappropriate speech often underlies poor auditory discernment, and chapter 2 explores this desire in the king-courtier relationships of Marlowe's *Edward II*, drawing on works by Erasmus and Machiavelli, the theory of the king's two bodies, and the iconography of *The Rainbow Portrait*. Moving from Edward's inability to close his ear to unwanted speech, chapter 3 examines the link between female aural and sexual openness found in the conduct literature and suggests that this association is complicated in Shakespeare's *Othello* by being determined less by Desdemona's own behaviour than that of the men around her. Chapter 4 further explores female listening in connection with appetite and oral openness in Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, in which, paradoxically, Anne's closure may signify desire. Chapter 5 continues the assessment of listening within the family hierarchy by considering the parent-child relationships of *Hamlet* in conjunction with the parental advice literature and posits that the corruption caused by listening to substitute characters and tales within the play exposes the dangers of listening in the theatre itself. Finally, it is argued that the drama of the period explores the dangers and disease believed inherent to listening while allowing playgoers to experience the delight and fear associated with being unable to discern what lies beneath a speaker's words.

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Reina Green

INTRODUCTION

LISTENING IN(TO) EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

This thesis hearkens back to a tennis game—not one that I played—but one to which Michel de Montaigne equates the give and take of conversation:

The word is halfe his that speaketh, and halfe his that harkeneth unto it. The hearer ought to prepare himselfe to the motion or bound it taketh. As betweene those that play at tennis, he who keeps the hazard, doth prepare, stand, stirre and march, according as he perceives him who stands at the house, to looke, stand, remoove and strike the ball, and according to the stroake. (*Essayes* 3: 350-1)

When I first read this passage, I was struck by the equal status that Montaigne grants both speaker and listener in his analogy, his suggestion that the listener is not simply a passive receptacle for speech, but someone who is actively engaged in capturing and responding to the spoken word. His description prompted me to consider how recent criticism, with its emphasis on the speaker as the producer of language, has ignored the listener's role. Moreover, I felt that while the critical interest in speakers has prompted an exploration of how speakers were considered in the early modern period, there has been no equivalent consideration of how listeners were judged. We have some understanding of how certain segments of society might transgress the boundaries of appropriate speech, but we have little or no knowledge of the limits within which listening to a speaker might be deemed acceptable or otherwise. This thesis addresses that lack of understanding and, through an examination of a wide variety of cultural materials, and with an especial ear to the drama, explores how the act of listening to others was constructed and interpreted in early modern England.

While there has been a critical silence on listeners until recently, contemporary speech-act theorists have begun to explore the role of the listener in conversation, and there has been a growing interest in sound and its influence in the period as indicated by, and perhaps even initiated by, the publication of Bruce Smith's *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor*. In his introduction, Smith remarks, "The multiple cultures of early modern England may have shared with us the biological

materiality of hearing, but their protocols of listening could be remarkably different from ours. We need a *cultural poetics* of listening” (8), and he goes on to argue that we need to consider the specific soundscape of a community, and what it meant to listen to a wide variety of sounds, including church bells, plays, sermons, and ballads. Smith’s work clearly informs my own, and my intent is not to offer a revision (or rehearing) of his argument, but to further the exploration of listening he has initiated. Smith emphasizes the idea of acoustic communities and the impact of sound, whereas my focus is on individuals listening to particular speakers and the impact of gender and social hierarchy on that act of listening. Smith’s work influences not only my own, but also that of Wes Folkerth who, in *The Sound of Shakespeare*, examines “the role of sound in Shakespeare’s art” (1). He notes that his work is a “response to Smith’s call for a ‘cultural poetics of listening’” (8), and like Smith he attends to various sounds and what they may have meant to those who heard them. In contrast, I want to attend to the listeners. I want to explore not so much what sounds may have meant to them, though that is clearly related, but what their listening meant to the world they inhabited.

It may appear anachronistic to insist on exploring the concept of *listening* in early modern England as the term listening was certainly used with less frequency at that time than it is now. Shakespeare never refers to characters who hear and attend to a speaker as listeners, though he does describe them as listening and, less often, as hearkening. The term he uses most often to signify giving attention to someone’s speech is “attend” and every use of “attent,” “attention,” and “attentive” listed in Spevak’s concordance is connected with the act of hearing. Shakespeare also describes his listening characters as “giving ear” as in Polonius’s request that Laertes give “[e]very man thine ear” (*Hamlet* 1.3.68), and there are, of course, numerous instances of the verb “to hear” and its variants. Hearing, though, is not the same as listening, and as I wish to explore the impact of what it means not only physically to hear another’s voice, but also to understand and respond to what is said, to “prepare, stand, stirre and march,” I require a term to indicate that. Despite its less frequent use in Shakespearean drama and in early modern writings in general, I have adopted the term “listening” as one that we best understand to indicate an

act of hearkening or attending to sound, and to distinguish it from hearing as the physiological act of recognizing the sensory stimulus of sound.

The early modern period is particularly fruitful for an examination of listening for several reasons, not least because it has traditionally been considered a time of transition from an aural to a visual culture due to the invention of the printing press. While the shift did not happen immediately, there is no doubt that the invention of the press and the increasing dissemination of printed material encouraged a move towards a visual, rather than an auditory, perception of language, but there is little evidence of a marked change within the first two centuries of the press's invention (Woolf 168). To begin with, medieval culture may have been more visual than previously believed, reducing the degree of any conceptual shift. For example, Paul Saenger argues that the shift to a visually-based understanding of language occurred over seven hundred years earlier with word separation and the development of silent reading (6).¹ In addition, although Walter Ong claims that Peter Ramus, with his emphasis on the visual organization of text furthered the shift towards visual interpretation of language in the middle of the sixteenth century (Ong, *Ramus* 290), Ramism was a relatively short-lived phenomenon and was followed by a reversion to verbal and aural methods of teaching by the end of the century (Woolf 164-5).

The belief that auditory processing is of less value in a predominantly visual culture is also undermined by the argument that the very determination of a culture as either visual or auditory may be erroneous. Walter Ong suggests that the move within a culture from orality to literacy, from an aural to a visual determination of language, is an evolutionary process that eventually eradicates most forms of orality. In practice, though, orality remains even in predominantly visual cultures such as our own and Joyce Coleman disputes Ong's view of cultures as *either* literate *or* oral—what she calls the “Great Divide theory”—and points to the length of time “residual orality” has been around as evidence that a culture can be both oral and literate (Coleman 15, 17). Even

1. Silent reading may not necessarily demonstrate a visual conception of the text. The work may be visually perceived, yet interpreted as being heard in the reader's mind.

Ong acknowledges that “[a]ll text involves sight and sound” and that orality is not “completely eradicable” (Ong, *Orality and Literacy* 121, 175). As he points out, “A written text must be converted to sound, either aloud or in the mind of the reader” (8). Indeed, Helkiah Crooke, writing in *Microcosmographia* (1631), notes, “[N]o Man knowes how to read which hath not first learned it by the meanes of Hearing” (650). Learning to read requires vocalization; it is only after reading is mastered that it is done silently (Smith, *Acoustic World* 127). The invention of print and the rise in literacy may have led therefore to an unexpected emphasis on auralness, not only because of the greater availability of printed matter that one could hear being read as well as read for oneself, but also because of a growing understanding of how language could be experienced as either an auditory or visual stimulus, and the relative merits of the two modes of perception.

While the literate could now access texts more easily, the illiterate majority still heard texts read and some even preferred to hear a work rather than read it for themselves. They believed, as Crooke did, that “a liuing and audible voyce doth better instruct then the silent reading of Bookes” (650). Given this interest in hearing texts, audiences would certainly have been practised in the art of listening. They would have been, as defined by W.F. Bolton, “audiate” (Coleman 30-31). Robert Miola notes that Elizabethan ““students acquired extraordinary sensitivity to language, especially to its sound”” and that this led to a fascination with wordplay and its prevalence in the literature of the period (qtd. in Robson 10). The emphasis on hearing texts rather than reading them also led to print being considered an aural rather than a visual medium, and many authors, especially those writing in the early part of the sixteenth century, describe their works using auditory rather than visual metaphors (Woolf 160). Moreover, some writers, in addition to referring to readers hearing their work read, present it as a written record of a tale or discussion they have heard. Both Thomas More, in *Utopia*, and Baldassare Castiglione, in *The Courtier*, insist that their work is truthful because they are simply repeating dialogue they have heard, evidence that these men were writing for an audience more likely to believe an ear-witness than a printed book (Ong, *Orality and*

Literacy 96). Nonetheless, by the time Montaigne writes “Of Experience” almost a century later, there has been a shift in the relative authority of the spoken and written word as he notes that some people now “admit no witness, except printed; that will not believe men, if not printed in Bookes.” He refuses, however, to grant absolute authority to either, remaining suspicious of both the spoken and written word as he “know[s] that *men write as indiscreetly as they speake unadvisedly*” (3:341). Still, he insists that a written text should be based on first-hand experience (which may include hearing a report as in his “Of the Caniballes”), stating, “I would have every man write what he knowes, and no more” (1:218), suggesting that even at the beginning of the seventeenth century, eye- and ear-witnesses had significant credit when compared to the printed word.

Not only was the value of the spoken word emphasized in this period, but there was also renewed interest in the study of classical rhetoric and how it might be applied to the written word. This led to the appearance of what Ong defines as oral traits, including structural elements, such as balance and antithesis, and *copia*, in written texts, and over time, the study of rhetoric shifted to reflect a textual emphasis, with the traditional five divisions (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery) being reduced to three, the last two being inapplicable to written work (Ong, *Orality and Literacy* 26, 115-16). This renewed interest in rhetoric highlighted a particular problem with speech, though, raising doubts about the veracity of the spoken word. Authors may insist on the need for plain speech, but as Thomas Wilson’s *The Art of Rhetoric* (1553) indicates, the very setting out of the rules of rhetoric suggests that they can be learned and manipulated (45). Jonson might claim, “*Language* most shewes a man: speake that I may see thee” (*Discoveries* 78), but he persistently presents characters whose speech fails to reveal their intentions. The belief that the spoken word reveals a speaker’s inner beliefs and is therefore more reliable than the written word is related to the idea that sound permits the detection of what is inside a body (Ong, *Orality and Literacy* 72). According to Richard Brathwait, because the “*eare* can best judge of sounds, so it hath a distinct power to sound into the centre of the heart” (*Essaies upon the Five Senses* 6). However, speech not only reveals the inner being of the speaker, it also enters the listener’s body through the

ear; it connects the inner bodies of the speaker and listener in a way not possible through any other sense. Peter de la Primaudaye notes that even after the sound of the speaker's voice has ceased, "internall speach remaineth, not only in the spirit, hart, & thought that ingendred it, being not in any sort diuided, cut off, or separated, but also it filleth all the hearers, by reason of the agrement that is betweene the spirits & mindes of men, & the speach that is bred there" (379). Bacon agrees that the spirits can undergo a lasting transformation because of what is heard. He also notes that "the *Sense of Hearing* striketh the *Spirits* more immediatly, than the other *Senses*; And more incorporeally" (*Sylva Sylvarum* 38). Sound, then, has a more direct, though less tangible access to the "spirits" than other sensations. In contrast to vision, which perceives only the surface of objects that are then apparent as images on the surface of the observer's eye, hearing was believed not only to plumb the depths of a speaker, but also to incorporate the sound into the listener's body.

While sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century culture emphasizes listening despite, and perhaps because of, the growth in print culture, the theatres offer a particularly interesting forum in which to examine the construction and interpretation of listening as an activity. Audiences were practised listeners, and theatres had to compete with other forms of aural entertainment—including sermons. In addition, plays were expected to offer both sound and spectacle, despite Ben Jonson's protestations that people should "come to heare, not see a play" as he would have his audience "wise, / Much rather by your ears, than by your eyes" (*The Staple of News* Prologue 2, 5-6). Nonetheless, even though Jonson's (and Shakespeare's) audience expected to experience the "total presence, not just [the] voice" of the actor (Leggatt, "Shakespeare" 97), there was an understanding that just as one *heard* books, so one *heard* plays, as is implied by the Latin root of the term "audience," *audire*, meaning to hear (Gurr 81). In early Tudor plays, such as *Gorboduc* and *King Johann*, the emphasis is on verbal eloquence, not on dramatic action, startling props, or scenery. Instructive or educational drama, in particular, was considered "the handmaiden of oratory," stage action being limited to the gestures that normally accompanied an oratorical delivery (Gurr 87). However, even the

later plays designed for the large outdoor theatres demonstrate a clear understanding of what is required to capture and hold the ear of the audience. As Bruce Smith notes, one common tactic used by playwrights to capture an audience's aural attention was to send out a Prologue, a single person, who through speech would silence the audience and "establish aural command" (*Acoustic World* 224). Indeed, all of Shakespeare's surviving prologues note that the play to follow will be experienced aurally (275). They ask for "patient ears" (*Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue 13), not for patient eyes. Such a solitary speaker can have a powerful hold on an audience, as each audience member focuses his or her attention on the speaker. Smith suggests that as listeners suppress extraneous noise in order to hear the speaker, it leads to "a totalizing experience of sound" (*Acoustic World* 271), in which the actor's voice may come to be heard as from within the listener.²

Obviously, by casting drama as something to be heard, playwrights ensured, at least for a short while, that the audience would be quiet and listen. In addition, audiences had to listen to gain necessary information. With no scenery and no theatre programmes, actors had to identify themselves and express their emotions through their speech (Woolf 191). Furthermore, early modern audiences had to interpret auditory substitutions. We accept that theatrical images often represent another, often larger, dimension. Nowadays, we understand that a stage can represent a kingdom and that one actor can represent a million soldiers as the Prologue of *Henry V* asks. However, we may be less familiar with

2. Despite the insistence of early modern playwrights that audiences should listen as well as watch a play, a number of contemporary critics ignore the auditory impact of drama and focus exclusively on its visual power. For example, in *The Culture of Playgoing in Shakespeare's England*, Anthony Dawson and Paul Yachnin emphasize the visual aspect of early modern drama and say little about playgoers as auditors. In a discussion of the passage in Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* (1611) in which Sir Alexander refers to the theatre audience as pictures in a portrait gallery and as books in a library, Dawson calls the audience "spectators" and notes how the "passage reverses the usual direction of theatrical looking" (94-95). Dawson fails to note that Sir Alexander does not refer to the audience as looking, but as listening: "with obsequious ears / Thronged heaps do *listen*" (1.2.25-26; emphasis added). Indeed, the audience is listening so intently that it fails to see the cutpurse in action. While the visual component of drama is and was clearly vital to the experience of playgoing, we also need to consider the auditory impact of a play. It is not enough for us to see the dramatic action, we must also hear it.

interpreting the significance of particular sounds. Early modern audiences, on the other hand, were not only expected to listen attentively to the sounds of the theatre, but also to understand what they signified (Smith, *Acoustic World* 242). When they heard a drum and a hautboy, they understood that the sound could represent that of a large military band. Still, despite this need to be attentive to such auditory scene-painting and character-descriptions, not all audiences were as attentive as the actors and playwrights would have liked.

When describing the “ignorant asses” who attended but failed to pay attention to the Red Bull performance of *The White Devil* (Webster, “To the Reader” 8) John Webster divides his audience along lines of both class and gender. In an effort perhaps to encourage a more “understanding auditory” for his next play, he suggests that it was the lower classes who failed to listen appropriately (6). Ben Jonson, in his *Masque of Queens*, repeats this division, distinguishing between “[t]he quick eares” of his courtly audience and the “sluggish ones of Porters, and Mechanicks, that must be bor’d through, at every act, with Narrations” (107-10, qtd. in Gurr 222). He is not alone in making this distinction, for both William Fennor, writing about the reception of Jonson’s *Sejanus*, and Francis Beaumont, in commendatory verses published with John Fletcher’s *The Faithful Shepherdess*, note that these plays were condemned by the “illiterate and rude” while the “wits of gentry did applaud the same” (Fennor qtd. in Gurr 230). Playwrights, including Shakespeare, repeatedly categorize certain groups by their failure to understand what they hear and their preference for spectacle rather than language. Hamlet, for example, notes that the “groundlings . . . are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise” (*Hamlet* 3.2.10-11), and Volumnia declares, “[T]he eyes of th’ ignorant / More learnèd than the ears” (*Coriolanus* 3.2.76-77). Jonson complains about the “*Gamster, Captaine, Knight, Knights man, / Lady, or Pusill, that weares maske or fan, / Velvet, or Taffeta cap . . . / With the shops Foreman or some such brave sparke*” (qtd. in Gurr 223). Clearly, the highest rank here is that of “Knight,” and its position between “Captaine” and “Knights man” suggests a military rather than aristocratic association. It is more difficult to determine the status of the “Lady.” Hiding behind fans and masks,

wearing velvet caps, the implication is that these are women who paradoxically hope to be noticed while partly disguising themselves. Rather than being divided by class like the men, the women are grouped together, regardless of their social class, by their strategies of self-concealment. Other playwrights, such as Thomas Tomkis and John Marston also link female playgoers with lower-class, illiterate spectators, in contrast to the educated aristocratic auditors of a play (Gurr 93, 261), an association that most likely demonstrates both the education believed necessary for auditors to appreciate fully the rhetorical language of many plays, and the limited education available to most women. Early modern playwrights had a difficult task, working in a medium that offered both a visual and auditory experience to audiences who, while “audiate,” were widely diverse in their ability either to understand or to appreciate the speeches penned by these authors.

The theatre was not the only area in which the visual and the auditory came into potential conflict with one another. Indeed, conflict between sight and hearing was considered inherent because of the very different experiences the two senses offered. Not only was sight associated with perception of surface appearance while hearing was connected with the sounding of inner being, but also sight was considered a sense that separates images, while hearing was deemed a sense that unifies, different sounds being perceived as blended (Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum* 62). As Ong notes, “A typical visual ideal is clarity and distinctness, a taking apart The auditory ideal, by contrast, is harmony, a putting together” (Ong, *Orality and Literacy* 72). Moreover, as Smith suggests in his description of the actor and the attending auditor, it brings together the sound-producing object and the listener (*Acoustic World* 271). In contrast to Ong and Smith, Paul Yachnin argues that this contrast between aural and visual perception is a modern construction and that in the early modern period aural and visual stimuli were considered similar in their ability to enter the body, offering the idea of looks that could hurt as in the case of an “evil eye” as evidence. He suggests that a transition in thinking about visual perception took place during the early modern period, leading to the present dichotomy of hearing and seeing and the construction of vision as “operat[ing] only across the surfaces of things” (70). I would, however, continue to argue that while vision and visual images

may have been deemed more penetrating in the early modern period than now, sounds were more consistently described as invasive in the period, and hearing was deemed passive in contrast to vision as an active mode of perception. The result was a pervasive cultural concern about how sound could enter and possibly damage an unsuspecting and passive ear. One could shut one's eyes, but it was much harder to stop one's ears (Robson 3).

Not only were aural and visual stimuli considered quantitatively, if not qualitatively, different in the degree to which they might penetrate a body, but also visual and auditory perception were considered to compete with one another. One could suppress the other, and Bacon uses this reason to explain why "*Sounds* are sweeter, (as well as greater,) in the *Night*, than in the *Day*; And I suppose, they are sweeter to blinde Men, than to Others" (*Sylva Sylvarum* 64). It is for this reason that animals which had poor eyesight, such as the mole, were thought to have such sensitive hearing (Vinge 38, 48-55).³ The belief that sight and hearing were in direct competition arose from the debate over which was the superior sense. In general, most authors agreed with Aristotle about the pre-eminence of sight, hearing being granted second place among the five senses (Chidester 32; Vinge 25).⁴ A number of reasons were argued for this ranking, one being the relative passivity of hearing. Philo, in *De Abrahamo*, reasons that "ears are in a moral sense below sight, hearing being more passive. The eyes turn to their objects and affect them. Sight has the highest place, exalted by God to be the Queen of the other senses" (Vinge 25). It is this passivity, according to Philo, that shows the "sluggish and womanish" nature of hearing (qtd. in Chidester 32). Eyes are active in seeking out the

3. Hamlet calls the Ghost "old mole" (*Hamlet* 1.5.164) when he demands that Horatio and Marcellus swear by his sword to keep silent about what they have seen. While the epithet indicates the Ghost's position beneath the stage and the speed at which the Ghost moves to keep pace with Hamlet and his friends as they move across the stage, it may also refer to the Ghost's ability to hear what is being said despite being "underground" and therefore to repeat Hamlet's demand that they swear the required oath.

4. For example, John Bulwer calls sight "the nimbler sense" (*Chirologia* 17), and Phineas Fletcher considers it the noblest, though he believes that hearing is "more needfull" (56).

objects of attention; ears, in contrast, are passive, simply waiting to be filled with sound. Another reason given for the supremacy of vision was that while hearing permitted the sounding of a speaker's inner being, the eyes were considered the windows or looking glass of the soul and therefore provided a higher, more spiritual mode of perception.⁵

While sight was considered the chief sense, many writers also agreed with Aristotle about the importance of hearing in relation to understanding. In *De Sensu*, he notes the importance of sight ““with a view to the necessities of life, but hearing is incidentally more conducive to knowledge”” (qtd. in Vinge 18). Echoing Aristotle's conclusions, Samuel Purchas declares hearing to be “*the Sense of Discipline, and the Learning Sense*” (92), while Brathwait states, “Hearing is the organ of understanding; by it we conceive, by the memorie we conserve, and by our judgement wee resolve” (*Five Senses* 6). Primaudaye describes the passing of knowledge from one person to another by listening as being like the pouring of wine from one vessel to another. He stresses that ears are a “convenient” conduit for this human knowledge (374), and that they are particularly efficient receptors of knowledge. He writes, “[H]ow many things must we see, and what books must we reade before we shalt attaine to the knowledge of that, which we may learne by hearing of one lecture, at which we shall be auditors onely one houre or less?” (375). For many writers, however, the most important function of the ears is to receive God's instructions (374). In Paul's letter to the Romans, he notes, “Then faith is by hearing, & hearing by the worde of God” (Romans 10:17),⁶ and as early as the fourth century AD, Lactantius insisted that “nothing should be pleasant to your hearing except what nourishes the soul and makes you better, and in particular this sense should

5. Thomas Vicary claims, “The Eyes be next of nature unto the soule” (21); Primaudaye calls them “the chiefe windowes of the body, or rather of the soule, which is lodged within it” (367), and Helkiah Crooke notes, “By these [eyes] as by Windowes we may pry into and penetrate the deepest & most secret conueyances of the Soule; and therefore Alexander not vnaduisedly said, that the Eies were the Looking-glasse of the Soule” (651).

6. Unless indicated otherwise, Bible quotations are from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*. Intro. Lloyd E. Berry. Madison: University of Wisconsin P, 1969.

not be turned to vice that was given us in order that we should be able to perceive the doctrine of God” (Vinge 36).

The concept of the ear as the organ of faith was clearly well established by the sixteenth century, but it took on new life after the Reformation. The post-Reformation rejection of the visual icons of the Roman Catholic faith, along with the Protestant zeal for preaching and the revival of classical rhetoric, gave rise to what Brian Crockett calls a “cult of the ear” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He concludes, “[T]o a large extent the ear displaces the eye as the primary organ of devotion” (53-56). This emphasis is apparent in the work of Protestants like Richard Brathwait and Samuel Purchas, who underscore hearing as the primary method of receiving divine guidance. Brathwait considers the ear “being for the succour of the soule principally ordained” (*Five Senses* 12), while Purchas claims that “*Faith, Christian and Ciuill Vertue, all Arts Liberall and Diuine . . . are the fruits of the EARE*” (94-95). He even suggests that vision can oppose the acceptance of faith by hearing: “A good life begins at a good EARE, which, with a bad EYE, is vsually corrupted” (93). The belief that the senses could both protect and corrupt the mind had a long history that predates Christianity and reflects Cicero’s construction of the mind as a fortress guarded by the five senses (Vinge 37). Even as the analogy presents the senses as defences against wickedness, it raises the fear that those same senses can be traitorous and permit the entry of vices that will then conquer the mind. The senses are both watch-towers ready to detect potential evil, and the gates through which that evil can enter. Vincent de Beauvais notes, “The eyes are traitors, which betray the secrets of the heart,” reflecting the idea of the eyes as windows of the soul. He then adds, “[T]he ears must be watched even more closely,” and claims, in contrast to the original tale, that Ulysses did not simply prevent himself from responding to the sirens’ voices, but that he actually stopped his ears to avoid hearing them, and that his readers should do likewise: “We must be on our guard against flattery, detraction,

subversive speech, blasphemies, etc.” (Vinge 67).⁷ Guillaume de Deguileville, writing in 1355, is of the same opinion regarding the susceptibility of the ears to vice. Breaking from the Aristotelian tradition, he considers hearing the chief sense because of its value in determining the truth about God. It is also the sense most capable of betraying the rest (Vinge 67-68). Eyes, therefore, may be traitorous by revealing one’s own secrets, or weaknesses, to others, but the ears permit direct invasion of the self by being open to the “subversive speech” of others.

The concerns of these medieval writers about hearing as the sense most susceptible to evil are informed by their reading of the Jahvist account of the Fall as recorded in Genesis. According to Genesis 3, Satan, in the guise of the serpent, tempts “the woman” to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge by the very “flattery, detraction, subversive speech, blasphemies” against which Vincent of Beauvais warns. While many writers used the biblical account of the Fall to demonstrate the vulnerability of hearing to vice, others considered sight more liable to temptation, and also found support in the narrative of the Fall for their argument. Even as Brathwait believes that the eye should be “a directrice to all other Sences,” he notes that it can “become . . . the principall organ of error to the affections,” and concludes that “as the eye of all other Sences is most needfull, so of all others it is most hurtfull” (*Five Senses* 1-3). To support his argument, he emphasizes how Eve first looked at the fruit and concludes, “*Eyes* are those *Windowes* by which death enters; your inward house cannot shine, vnlesse these bee shut. . . . *Eue* looked on the fruit before shee coueted, coueting she tasted, tasting she perished” (*English Gentlewoman* [1631] 139). Thomas Wright agrees, first noting how “[a]ll sences no doubt are the first gates whereby passe and repasse all messages sent to passions,”

7. According to the original Homeric tale, Ulysses stopped his sailors’ ears by pouring wax into them, but did not stop his own; rather, he tied himself to the mast so that he could not act on what he heard. Nonetheless, he was used as an exemplum of a wise listener by early Christian theologians who literalized his metaphorical deafness and had him sealing his ears along with those of his crew. This tradition of Ulysses as having his ears stopped to the sirens was popularized by various medieval and early modern writers so that it is found almost as frequently as that of a Ulysses who can hear, but who is restrained from responding to what he hears (Vredevelt 846-71).

before adding, “yet the scriptures in particular wonderfully exhort, command, and admonish vs to attend vnto the custodie and vigilance ouer our eyes” (150). Brathwait suggests that some people are protected from being seduced by what they see because their ears prevent the entry of vice by determining the veracity of what the eye sees. It is only “in the vulgar [person]” (*Five Senses* 9), he claims, making the same connection as many playwrights between interest in spectacle and class, that the ear and eye have an affinity, and the value of what is heard is based on the opinion of what is seen.

Having laid out in brief why the culture of early modern England was particularly aural as a result of oral tradition and the revival of rhetorical study, the development of print culture, and the post-Reformation emphasis on faith by hearing, having sketched out how listening was nuanced by class and gender, and having explored a few ways in which the sense of hearing was valued and problematized, I want to explain the title of my thesis further before outlining the direction of the discussion within the individual chapters. My title appropriates Falstaff’s description of his trouble in *2 Henry IV*. When the Lord Chief Justice confronts Falstaff about his failure to come when summoned, Falstaff excuses his behaviour by noting that he has “a kind of deafness . . . the disease of not listening, the malady of not marking” (1.2.107, 111-12). Falstaff’s remark emphasizes how deafness, particularly selective deafness, contrasts listening as a behaviour, how when one does not wish to listen, the only alternative may be to feign deafness. Equally, the incident demonstrates how an inappropriate response to a speaker can be associated (albeit fallaciously) with an inability to hear correctly. While the Lord Chief Justice is clearly suspicious of Falstaff’s claim that he is deaf, he agrees that Falstaff “hear[s] not what I say” (109). One can therefore claim that Falstaff’s deafness—his failure to listen appropriately—is less a “disease of *not* listening” and rather a disease, or “unhealthy condition” (*OED*) of listening itself, and I wish to focus particularly on the determination of acceptable and transgressive listening in this thesis. In addition, the term disease indicates the discomfort arising from societal concerns about who should listen to whom, as well as the infection and corruption that was feared to occur as a result of listening, and both these factors inform the construction of listening in the period.

Falstaff is not the only Shakespearean character who fails to listen correctly; many have something wrong with their ears, and references to ears fill Shakespeare's works. Ears are referred to being open, willing, quick, and attending; they can be prosperous, proper, and patient; they can even be healthy and wealthy, but apparently not wise, though they can be grave. They can also be dull, deaf, sickly, senseless, and even stopped. Furthermore, they can be greedy, credent, or grieved, and may be pregnant and vouchsafed, abused and infected, mildewed and ruined, and even treacherous and licentious. They may belong to the public and be referred to as the common or general ear, or they may be ears of greatness, the royal or noble ear, and they can, of course, be "open list'ning ear[s]" (*Rape of Lucrece* 283).⁸ As already noted, Shakespeare is not the only playwright of the period who emphasizes the need for an audience to listen carefully to his work, and neither is he alone in his representation of ears, listening and otherwise, in his plays (Robson 3). He may refer to ears more frequently than his counterparts, and he may explore some of the effects of listening more thoroughly than others, but the difference is of quantity and quality, rather than of presence and absence. I therefore wish to explore Shakespeare's representations of listening along with those of his contemporaries, including Jonson, Marlowe, and Heywood. Too often, we are tempted to emphasize how Shakespeare's plays stand apart from those of his contemporaries, even when the issues he explores are present in the work of other playwrights and echo concerns pervasive in early modern culture.

Each chapter of this thesis emphasizes a particular construction of listening as a disease, either as an invasion or corruption of the body, or as an act that causes social disease. This method of representing listening is then explored within various texts and within one or two plays of the period. This is not, however, an exhaustive list of all the plays that portray the "disease of listening," for given the playwrights' insistence that

8. Neither is this list exhaustive. "Ear" and "ears" are referred to more than 400 times in Shakespeare's works. See Marvin Spevak's *A Complete and Systematic Concordance of the Works of Shakespeare* Vol. IV.

they be heard by their audiences, the dialogic nature of the plays themselves, and the fact that every speaking character has a listener, if not onstage, then certainly offstage, one could argue that every play represents at least one disease of listening. I have selected plays in which, even as ears may play a prominent role, critical emphasis has ignored listening and focused on other related issues, such as language in *Volpone*, and seeing or spying in *Hamlet* and *Othello*. In addition, plays have been chosen for the way they demonstrate the impact of gender and social hierarchy on the determination of listening as diseased, as well as the way in which they engage with the cultural constructions of listening. The other works have been chosen for the way they concentrate on a particular aspect of listening and represent a particular literary genre. For example, I consider the relationship of monarchs and courtiers in court handbooks, husbands and wives in conduct books, and parents and children in parental advice literature. This grouping of works has led me to include some works that postdate the plays under consideration, though only as such works support and add to the understanding of listening as presented in texts that predate or are contemporaneous with the drama. Any shift in the way listeners and listening are represented in earlier and later texts is noted.

While I have already explained my use of the term “listening” to distinguish the act from the physiological process of hearing sound, chapter 1 begins with an examination of how hearing was understood in the early modern period. Repeatedly, writers describe sound as invasive and hearing as a process that allows sound to enter and possibly damage the body, and this may well explain the pervasive cultural concerns about listening. Given this construction of hearing as potentially dangerous, one might imagine that deafness, either real or feigned, would be a method of protection, but, as Falstaff discovers in his altercation with the Lord Chief Justice, refusing to listen and claiming deafness has its own problems. Early modern writers, following their historical counterparts, repeatedly associate deafness with a lack of speech and thought, and sometimes even a lack of faith. I examine representations of deafness, both literal (of which there are few) and figurative or feigned (of which there are many), and draw particularly on representations of Midas whose poor auditory discernment and foolish

thinking is demonstrated by his failure to identify Apollo as a better musician than Pan. I then consider how the wits and dupes in Jonson's *Volpone* and *Epicoene* demonstrate faulty listening and how Volpone reveals his own Midas-like deafness to Mosca's true intentions. Even Morose, who claims his hearing is so sensitive that his servants need to walk in socks and communicate in signs, is a poor listener. In addition, the deceit and flattery heard by the dupes are forms of "verbal violence" (Tosi 147) that, like loud noises, deafens listeners and further prevents them from detecting the false nature of such speech. The dupes also show a predilection to attend to the very deceit and flattery that deafens them. Their disease of listening is therefore twofold: first, they fail to discern the nature of speech they hear, and second, they desire to listen to speech they should avoid.

The disease of being both too open yet too closed, of wanting to listen to flattery and failing to listen to good advice, is further explored in chapter 2 in which the role of flattery is examined within the hierarchical relationship of monarch and courtier. Because flattery disguises a speaker's true intentions, it is often described as a poison that can infiltrate the ear of an unsuspecting listener. Several early modern writers consider rulers particularly susceptible to such poisoning and note its far-reaching consequences. Listening to flattery is particularly problematic for a ruler because of the political theory of the king's two bodies (a perfect, eternal political body and an imperfect, decaying physical body) and how the ear can act as a conduit, allowing what is heard by the physical body to corrupt the political body. *The Rainbow Portrait*, in which Elizabeth is draped with a robe covered in ears and eyes, provides a visual representation of the ear as such a conduit, and Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* offers an extended representation of a monarch who wants to listen to someone his counsellors consider a "base flatterer" (2.5.11). Instead, the barons want Edward to listen to them and even force an entry into his presence. Edward's difficulties, then, may have less to do with his desire to listen to Gaveston, and more to do with his inability to avoid unwanted speakers. His listening is dis-eased as he is violated by voices he does not want to hear.

If the first two chapters explore the paradoxical need to detect what is heard, yet avoid being deafened or penetrated by it, to have ears both open and closed, the next two

chapters consider diseases of listening as they relate to appetite and gender. Chapter 3 opens with a further consideration of *The Rainbow Portrait* with its depiction of Elizabeth as the “Virgin Queen.” The concept of female chastity is then considered in relation to the open female ear, for as Linda Woodbridge notes, there is a long history connecting the ear and the vagina (*Scythe of Saturn* 57). This history involves both Eve and the Virgin Mary as women who listen to (male) strangers and believe what they hear. One, of course, becomes a model of transgressive, corrupting listening, and the other the unattainable ideal of obedient, fruitful listening. These two models of female listening are then considered in connection with the conduct books that simultaneously present women as obedient listeners to male authority, yet advocate that women avoid listening to inappropriate speech. The problem is that such speech must be heard for it to be identified as inappropriate. Desdemona’s listening behaviour is then examined in relation to the constraints advocated on female listening. Her desire to listen to Othello’s tale is potentially, but not strictly, transgressive. She is, though, eager to hear him and repeatedly incorporates what she hears. Othello, influenced by Iago’s “pestilence” (*Othello* 2.3.330), comes to consider her aural desire as a sign of her sexuality, and reads her willingness to listen to other men as a sign of her willingness to engage in adultery. However, Othello ignores the transgressive nature of his own listening behaviour. In his eagerness to listen to Iago’s imputations, he reveals an aural appetite equal to, if not greater than, Desdemona’s, along with an inability to determine the truth of what he hears. However, no one in the playworld condemns his aural desire as sexually transgressive; rather, his failure to discern the truth (or prevarication) in what he hears is considered characteristic of a fool and someone outside the ruling classes: he is the “gull, [or] dolt, / As ignorant as dirt!” (5.2.170-1). While the similarity in Othello and Desdemona’s listening behaviour encourages them to be empathetic to each other during their courtship: “She loved me for the dangers I had passed, / And I loved her that she did pity them” (1.3.166-67), it ultimately leads to them being infiltrated by what they hear and causes disruption and dis-ease within society.

Chapter 4 continues the exploration of the connection between the female ear and appetite, but moves beyond the pairing of the ear and vagina to include the mouth as part of a triad of orifices through which women might express desire. Frequently, the ear and the mouth are linked as one hears the speech that the other produces. They are also associated as both take in food, one for the mind, the other for the body; they are both consuming orifices. Using the example of John Stubbs's *Gaping Gulf*, I explore how unapproved openness of the female ear is feared and considered a sign of an insatiable sexual appetite. I then go on to consider the open female ear as indicative of sexual desire in *A Woman Killed With Kindness*. In contrast to Desdemona who is eager to hear Othello's tale, Anne Frankford does not exhibit an aural appetite. Nonetheless, because of the persistent yoking of ear, mouth, and vagina as open and desirous, the openness of her ear to Wendoll is determined to be a sign of her sexual voraciousness. She demonstrates the difficulty of both being appropriately open to speakers approved by male authority and remaining impervious to improper speech. Exploration of the conduct literature suggests that Frankford's listening, his preferment of Wendoll to "second place" (IV.34), is as transgressive as Othello's listening behaviour, yet his transgression goes unremarked while Anne is punished. To demonstrate her remorse, her lack of self-will, Anne starves herself, closing her mouth to food and once again emphasizing the association between ear, mouth, and vagina, and in doing so expresses greater self-will than when her ear and mouth were open. In a society that demands women listen, but which considers an open female ear a desiring one, Anne is diagnosed as listening inappropriately to Wendoll. In contrast, her husband's diseased listening behaviour is ignored.

The last chapter continues the exploration of listening in the family hierarchy, though in the context of the parent-child relationship rather than that of the husband and wife. It also furthers the examination of how a listener can be infiltrated and diseased by what is heard. As one might expect, examination of advice given to parents and children by conduct book writers and parental advice itself reveals that children were expected to heed their parents. Moreover, the need to attend to a parent's last words is particularly emphasized. However, there is also a suggestion that parents may not always give their

children appropriate advice. Using the advice in these texts, I explore the speaking parent-listening child relationships in *Hamlet*, a play well known for its depiction of how a body can be poisoned through the ear. Contrary to the common perception of Polonius as a “tedious old fool” (2.2.215), I suggest that he gives Laertes and Ophelia reasonable, if ineffective, fatherly advice, and that his speeches provide a foil to the Ghost’s conversation with Hamlet. The question is raised as to whether Hamlet’s obedience to the Ghost’s demand for revenge, like Laertes’ willingness to follow Claudius’s directions, reveals excessive filial obedience. Both young men fail to consider the substitute nature of these father figures and the risk of listening to speakers whose true motives cannot be determined: the possibility that their ears are being “[r]ankly abused” (1.5.38) and that they will be poisoned by what they hear. Finally, I suggest that the playworld of Elsinore offers a model of the theatre as nothing in it is quite what it seems, and that Shakespeare may be demonstrating the risks of listeners accepting what is heard in such a place while also placing the onus for “dangerous conjectures” (4.5.15) with the audience. In other words, if an ear is poisoned and a body diseased by what is heard, the responsibility for the disease lies in part with the listener. I conclude with the suggestion that listening in early modern England was deemed a dangerous necessity, and that the theatre allowed its listeners to experience both the delight of discovery when theatrical disguise and oratory are exposed as artifice, and the fear of never knowing what lies beneath a speaker’s words.

CHAPTER 1

DEAF EARS, ASSES' EARS, AND FOOLS

Sound and Hearing

It may seem paradoxical to begin a chapter dealing with deaf ears with a discussion of the physiology of hearing, but to understand early modern constructions of listening and deafness, it is necessary to examine beliefs on the process of hearing and the way in which sound affected the ear and the hearer. Sir Francis Bacon argues that of all sensations, sound has the greatest impact: “So it is *Sound* alone, that doth immediately, and incorporeally, affect most” (*Sylva Sylvarum* 177). He compares a person’s reaction to an offensive sight and an irritating noise and notes, “In *Visibles*, there are not found Obiects so odious and ingrate to the *Sense*, as in *Audibles*. For foule *Sights* doe rather displease, in that they excite the Memory of foule Things, than in the immediate Obiects. . . . But in *Audibles*, the Grating of a Saw, when it is sharpned, doth offend so much, as it setteth the Teeth on Edge” (71). Disturbing sounds provoke an immediate bodily response, whereas such sights only arouse memories of other “foule Things,” muting the response to such visual stimuli. This belief about the differing reactions to visual and auditory stimuli may strike us as odd, as we live in a society in which visual displays are often manipulated to provoke extreme reactions. Bacon’s ideas, though, have less to do with actual sounds and images than early modern beliefs about vision and hearing. In classical antiquity, Pythagoras had argued that both the ears and the eyes emanated rays that detected and gathered auditory and visual stimuli respectively. However, his theory of the active participation of the ear in hearing and the emanation of auditory rays was cast aside long before his active model of sight, which was still celebrated in poetry if questioned in seventeenth-century medical texts (Békésy and Rosenblith 729).¹ Instead, Aristotle’s passive model of hearing found acceptance and was used to explain the mechanism of hearing well into the eighteenth century. Aristotle believed that hearing

1. John Donne draws on the image of rays or beams projecting from the eye in “The Ecstasy,” in which the speaker describes two lovers gazing into each other’s eyes: “Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread / Our eyes, upon one double string” (7-8).

depended on the activation of the “‘aer insitus’ or ‘aer internus’” within the ear by the external air, which was moved by the noise travelling through it (730).

The idea that the impact of sound happened *within* the body rather than outside (as was believed to occur in vision with beams from the eye and object joining outside of the body), implied a greater effect on the body itself. In addition, the very creation and transmission of noise was described as an act of violence. Helkiah Crooke defines sound as “a quality issuing out of the Ayre . . . beaten by sudden and forcible collision or concurrence of hard and solid bodies” (609). The incipient violence in his definition is repeated by many. Bacon notes that in contrast to light and colour, which pass through air without disturbing it, “*Sound* is not produced . . . without some *Resistance*, either in the *Aire*, or the Body Percussed” (*Sylva Sylvarum* 42), and the air is “broken” and “smitten” by the sound (Paré 24).² Ambroise Paré compares sound moving through air like ripples in water after a stone is dropped into it. Such an analogy does not appear particularly violent until he goes on to explain how echoes occur. Extending his analogy he writes:

So in rivelets running in a narrow channel, the water stricken and as it were, beaten back in its course against broken, craggy and steep rocks, wheels about into many turnings: this collision of the beaten aire flying back diverse waies from arched and hollow roofed places, as Dens, Cisterns, Wells, thick Woods and the like, yields and produces a double sound, and this reduplication is called an Echo. (190-91)

The air is no longer a peaceful pond into which someone has dropped a pebble, but a rushing torrent tearing through a rock-strewn landscape. Equally, in *The Purple Island*, Phineas Fletcher describes sound as “a stone, troubling the quiet waters, / Prints in the

2. Folkerth notes that definitions of “broken” circulating in the early seventeenth century also included having been “‘reduce[d] to obedience or discipline’” (54), and that “obedience, duty, receptivity and penetrability . . . were gendered feminine in the period” (51). Folkerth therefore claims that the ear was considered a “feminized perceptual organ” (10). However, there may be other reasons to claim that the ear was “feminized.” For example, Linda Woodbridge, in *The Scythe of Saturn* (55), argues that there was a long-time connection between the ear and the vagina. Moreover, Folkerth’s claim that obedience, especially as connected to hearing, is gendered overlooks the more essential construction of obedience as “classed,” as I will discuss in chapters 3 and 4.

angry stream a wrinkle round” (V.47.1-2). His language also suggests the intrusive and violent nature of sound: “All so the aire struck with some violence nigh, / . . . All which infected move with sounding qualitie.” Sound is the uninvited and unruly visitor who arrives at “Auditus palace” and “[e]nter[s] the gate, and strike[s] the warning drumme” (V.47.5-48.1-2).

Not only is the air both within and outside the ear “broken” by sound, but listening itself, as Fletcher’s poem suggests, threatens the physical integrity of the ear. Crooke notes that sounds are heard “because the aire offereth a kind of violence to the inward part of the Eare” (610). Paré also emphasizes the violent nature of sound transmission in the ear. He describes how the ear drum is “smitten” by the moving external air, how the small bones are moved “by the force of the entrance of the external aire,” and how loud noises move them even more “vehemently and violently” (190-91). The belief that hearing occurred when air in the ear was moved in some way continued, despite the anatomical discoveries of the sixteenth century.³ It was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that John Willis correctly identified the cochlea as the actual site of hearing (Békésy and Rosenblith 734). Despite their continued insistence that hearing required the movement of internal air, seventeenth-century physicians readily admitted that the true mechanism of hearing remained a mystery. Samuel Purchas, though no physician, attended William Harvey’s anatomy lectures and offers a fairly accurate anatomical description of the ear. Nevertheless, he concludes that “a Man may easily lose his Eyes, his Wits, in this Labyrinth of the EARES; wherein Nature hath seemd to shew her worke the more curious, to prohibite all prophane (all vainer, idler) search into such Mysteries” (101). Crooke, writing in 1631, is of the same opinion that “God hath reserued many secrets in mans body to himselfe, whereof wee iustly thinke this is one”

3. Sixteenth-century anatomical discoveries include Phillippus Ingrassias’s identification of the third small bone in the ear—the stapes, Bartolomeo Eustachio’s discovery of the Eustachian tube, and Gabriel Fallopius’s discovery of the cochlea and labyrinth. Even Antonio Maria Valsalva, who first noted the presence of fluid in the labyrinth at the end of the seventeenth century, claimed that internal air was required for the transmission of sound (Békésy and Rosenblith 730-35).

(531), and half a century later, Guichard-Joseph Duverney begins his *Treatise of the Ear* by saying, “Of all the Organs assign’d to the Use of Animals, we have the least Knowledge of those of the Senses; but there is none more obscure than that of Hearing” (vii).

The true physiology of hearing remained unknown partly because anatomical discoveries were adapted to support traditional beliefs even when those beliefs were erroneous, rather than used to challenge them. Even as Crooke incorporates recent anatomical discoveries into his discussion, his conclusions are little changed from those of his favoured sources, the “Ancients” (609-12). He maintains that hearing occurs as the “implanted or in-bred ayre . . . transporteth [the sound] . . . through the hole of the Stirrop and the *Ouall window* to the . . . *Labyrinth* and the *Snayle-Shel*. From thence it is conueighed to the auditory Nerue and to the originall thereof, that is the After-braine.” According to him, the small bones simply prevented the eardrum from being “driuen too much inward by the violence of the outward ayre when it is violently beaten” (612). In his *Treatise on the Nature of Bodies*, published in 1645, Sir Kenelm Digby offers a better understanding of the function of the small bones of the ear, noting that the vibration of the eardrum, or tympanum, is transmitted through the hammer to the anvil (he does not seem to be aware of Ignassius’s discovery of the stapes, or stirrup). However, his description of the process is interesting. To him, the middle ear is like a forge in which the hammer

strik[es] upon the anvile, [and] must of necessity beate off such little parts of the brainy steames, as flying about doe light and stick upon the top of the anvile: these by the trembling of the ayre following its course, cannot misse of being carried up to that part of the braine, whereunto the ayre within the eare is driven by the impulse of the sound: and as soon as they have given their knocke, they rebound back againe into the cells of the braine, fitted for harbours to such winged messengers: where they remaine lodged with quietnesse, till they be called for againe. (340)

Digby, then, suggests that hearing itself is analogous to the most deafening occupation, that of the smith. In contrast, many other writers insist on the protective nature of the ear’s construction. Sound may be invasive and violent, but they argue that its destructive

power is limited by the design of the ear. For example, Paré notes that the ear has “crooked windings, least the sounds rushing in too violently should hurt the sense of hearing” (189); Crooke points to “certaine swellings” on the inside of the ear that “breake the violent rushing of the ayre” (575); and Peter de la Primaudaye claims that these windings prevent “fright” and stop loud noises from being “too thicke” and confused (375).

Not only was the anatomy of the inner ear believed to be a protective mechanism, but the outer ear was also thought to be a method of defence as well as a thing of beauty.⁴ Fletcher, in keeping with the idea of the body as a microcosmos or island, describes the outer ear as a gateway into the mind and draws on the Ciceronian concept of the senses as methods of defence (Vinge 37). He writes:

The Portall hard and drie, all hung around
 With silken, thinne, carnation tapestrie:
 Whose open gate drags in each voice and sound,
 That through the shaken ayer passes by:
 The entrance winding; lest some violence
 Might fright the Judge with sudden influence,
 Or some unwelcome guest might vex the busie sense. (V.39.1-7)

In keeping with his contemporaries, then, Fletcher notes the protection afforded by the “entrance winding” that prevents “violence” from “fright[ening] the Judge” or an “unwelcome guest” from “vex[ing] the busie sense.” He also provides an opulent image of the ear with its “silken, thinne, carnation tapestrie.” Thomas Tomkis, in his play *Lingua*, presents a similar image of the ear with its “gorgeous porches of so strange forme” that is “in hospitallity, / . . . open wide,” but which is also built like Dedalus’s

4. Stephen Egerton notes, “The next punishment vnto death by our Nationall law, is losing the eares” (A7^r). Primaudaye considers the head “deformed and vnseemely” without the ears and notes that this is why “men haue this part cut off, who are to bee made deformed and infamous for some notorious offence” (374). In other words, their ears are removed so that their outward appearance reflects their inner moral deformity.

labyrinth so that nothing will “breake the nice composture of the worke” (4.2.51-59).⁵ Other writers are more pragmatic. Primaudaye notes that the outer ear will keep out “the rayne and sweate of the head, and much filth” (374), and Purchas adds that it will discourage “Fleas, . . . Earewigs and other noysome creatures” (99). Nonetheless, even as the outer ear prevents the entrance of insects, rain, and unwanted noise, it also paradoxically “drags in each voice and sound,” according to Fletcher. Hearing may have been thought a passive sense, particularly in comparison to sight; however, the outer ear was believed to actively capture sound. Thomas Vicary notes that “very fugitiue” noises “lurk[ing]” around were caught by it (21). Sound, therefore, may be potentially harmful and the ear may be designed to protect the hearer from unwanted noise, but the ear also apprehended sounds that did not want to be heard.

While the physics of sound, its creation and transmission, prompted writers to note its destructive potential, the concept of sound as harmful was also supported by the known effects of loud noises. Repeated exposure to loud noise was noted to cause deafness, an occupational hazard of braziers (metalworkers), artillerymen, and blacksmiths. Primaudaye remarks that the ears of such people “are continually dulled with the noise and sound of their hammer and anviles” (375). Several authors also note how a single loud sound, such as a thunderclap, gunshot, or peal of bells, could damage the ear. Bacon writes, “A very great *Sound*, neare hand, hath strucken many *Deafe*; And at the Instant they haue found, as it were, the breaking of a Skin or Parchment in their Eare” (*Sylva Sylvarum* 43).⁶ Claude Perrault, writing in the mid-seventeenth century, believed that a loud noise could shatter parts of the inner ear like glass (Békésy and

5. Tomkis’s analogy of the ear to Dedalus’s labyrinth which imprisoned the minotaur is perhaps less accurate than he suggests, as it would imply less that sound is prevented from entering and damaging the ear, but that the contents of the ear cannot escape.

6. Bacon also claims that loud noises could kill birds and move thunder. He reports that “*Extreme Applauses*, and *Shouting of People* assembled in great Multitudes, haue so rarified, and broken the Aire, that *Birds* flying ouer, haue fallen downe, the Aire being not able to support them,” and that the ringing of church bells has chased away thunder and rid the city of disease-laden mists (*Sylva Sylvarum* 43).

Rosenblith 739). It is therefore of note that Purchas describes the ear as analogous to a variety of places hazardous for hearing, including a gun room, a house of ordinance, a bell-room, a music school, and an organ (102). The sounds that have the potential to deafen the ear are, he suggests, produced in the ear itself. Loud noises could be both painful to hear and potentially destructive, but even the process of hearing, equated so frequently with the very sounds capable of destroying it, could be self-destructive. Listening could literally be deafening.

Deafness and “dumbnesse”

Listening may have been potentially hazardous, and not just because of noise level as shall be shown in subsequent chapters, but deafness carried its own dangers. It was the most common congenital defect (Sibscota 2), yet its etiology remained obscure due to the limited understanding of the hearing process. As a result, such deafness was often ascribed to supernatural causes (Winzer 80). Even John Bulwer, writing in 1648, notes that the causes of congenital deafness are “various and unknowne,” and may be due to the time or place of birth, or the sins of the parents being punished in the children (*Philocophus* 76-78).⁷ Because little was known about the etiology of congenital deafness, women who gave birth to deaf children frequently came under suspicion. Bulwer writes of a “healthy” woman whose children were deaf-mutes, and whose husband judged the cause “to be very darke and obscure” (80). Bulwer also claims that congenital deafness is more common than defects of the other senses because, unlike the eyes, nostrils, and mouth, the ears are open in utero, so that “it easily comes to passe that somewhat out of the wombe may fall into the Eares” (99). While Bulwer was content to offer such explanations, others drew on the anatomical discoveries of the sixteenth century to explain the frequency of congenital deafness. George Sibscota argues that the same “labyrinthean structure” that offered protection and the “*maeandrous* passage” of the nerves could be affected by “the smallest thing,” leading to deafness (13). He also

7. For example, Bulwer suggests that people born at sea are likely to be deaf as are those born when both Mercury and Saturn are in decline (*Philocophus* 76-77).

claims that a thickened eardrum may result in partial deafness, though those affected can hear through their mouths (13-14). In contrast, William Holder argues that displacement of the small bones of the ear and the resulting loss of tension in the eardrum is the most common cause of congenital deafness (113). Nonetheless, while the causes of congenital deafness may be disputed, there was a general acceptance that it was incurable.

Unfortunately, deafness was not considered a condition that affected the ears alone. In his discussion of deafness in Ancient Greece, Aristotle noted that those born deaf were also mute, leading him to conclude that these people, unable to speak, were also incapable of thought.⁸ In addition, he claimed that as hearing was the primary method for gaining knowledge, the congenitally deaf were significantly less intelligent than the rest of the population (Mullett 141). His conclusions not only led to the opinion that these people were both verbally and mentally “dumb,” an association maintained well into the nineteenth century, but also encouraged the idea that they could not be taught to communicate with others. Deafness was believed to cause irretrievable damage to the ears, tongue, and mind, and was therefore greatly feared (Beales 14; Di Carlo 12). To the Ancient Greeks, the condition was likened to a living death,⁹ and proverbs circulating in early modern England also indicate the subhuman status granted to those who were deaf. To be deaf was to be equated to an inanimate object. In proverbial lore, one was (and still is) as deaf as a doornail, post or a stone. Moreover, muteness and death were considered related conditions, for one could be as deaf, dumb, or dead as a doornail (Tilley D567, P490, S877). The idea that people who could not hear were separated from humanity is also expressed by Primaudaye when he writes: “[T]he chiefest profit that the eares bring to men, is by the meanes of speach, wherby they communicate one with another all their conceipts, imaginations, thoughts and counsailes, so that without them the whole life of man would be not onely deafe, but dumbe also and very vnperfect, as if

8. By mute, Aristotle refers to an inability to express language, not an inability to form sounds (Edwards 35).

9. Hesiod in *Theogony* 793-98, Euripides, in *Alcestis* 1143, and Diodorus (4.24.4-5) all refer to it in this manner (Edwards 35).

man had neither tongue, mouth nor speach” (375). As Jennifer Nelson and Bradley Berens note, by the early modern period, speech was considered a marker of civilization and “the potential to become civilized—to be colonized by the civilized world—requires hearing” (52). Without hearing from birth, and without tools to learn to speak, congenitally deaf individuals were unable to communicate or connect with the rest of humanity: they were considered beyond civilization.

Many early modern authors explore how deafness is associated with this “dumbe” and “vnperfect” state, but rather than examine how anatomical discoveries contradicted traditional beliefs about deafness, they adapt such evidence to support the connection between congenital deafness and muteness made by Aristotle. Even as Crooke declares that he does not “approve” of the idea that those who are deaf cannot learn language, noting that they use non-verbal methods of communication (700), he goes on to explain (incorrectly) that congenital deafness is associated with muteness because the auditory nerve supplies the tongue and muscles of the larynx as well as the ear, and any “obstruction” of this nerve causes loss of hearing and speech (606). Michel de Montaigne argues that those born deaf cannot speak “because they [can]not receive the instruction of the world by their eares,” yet he still insists on a neurological link between the organs of speech and hearing, both being “fastned together” by “a naturall kinde of ligament or seame” (2: 150-51). Solomon Alberti rejected the idea of an anatomical or neurological connection between hearing and speech as early as 1591 (Di Carlo 16), but almost a century later, writers still offered anatomical explanations for why the congenitally deaf could not speak. Sibscota argues that the idea that those “born Deaf are also Dumb” is “against reason,” and criticizes those who accept this as a “universal truth” (15). However, he still accepts that congenital deafness and muteness may be caused by a connection between the nerves supplying the organs of hearing and speech (26). The anatomy of the auditory and trigeminal nerves was more fully understood when Duverney was writing in 1683, but he still maintained that the proximity of the nerves to one another caused the link between congenital deafness and muteness (88-9). Repeatedly, anatomical discoveries were made to fit traditional ideas of physiology, and

not to develop new theories.¹⁰ As a result, the association between deafness, muteness, and limited intelligence remained entrenched. Moreover, the belief that congenital deafness was caused by an anatomical or neurological deficit simply reinforced the idea that the condition was incurable.

Even those authors who, like Bulwer, believed that those with congenital deafness had the power of speech and the ability to think and communicate their thoughts, describe them as “misprisions in nature” (*Philocophus* 102), despite acknowledging that some can show great accomplishments and communicate readily by writing and gesture (81-85). Moreover, while Bulwer refutes the belief that congenitally deaf individuals are essentially mute, he presents their vocal expression in the most unflattering terms:

The great noyse and gabling which Deafe and Dumbe folks make, especially when they are angry, proves them to have a sufficient command of their voyce, the sound whereof many times makes the house to ring againe, with their inarticulate noyse of their anger: Insomuch as he who to avoyde the inconvenience of Domesticke tempests, should marry a Dumbe Mistresse, may perchance speed no better then Seignour *Moroso* did with his Silent woman. (91-92)

By way of explanation for the noise made by those who are deaf, he notes that they cannot hear the “soft answer or Apologie inductive to a pacification,” and are therefore provoked to anger, yet unable to verbalize their feelings. Instead, they use “the onely weapon they have left, moving their tongue, as if they would hammer and forge out something equivalent to an Articulate voyce . . . from which there results such a noyse, which although inarticulate, is significant enough to expresse their passion and chollericke indignation” (92). Nonetheless, while people who are deaf may be loud, intemperate, and inarticulate, and such a wife may disturb her husband as much as Epicoene does Morose, Bulwer suggests that those who use only silent forms of communication such as writing and gesture can be perfectly acceptable mates. He

10. One of the most humorous examples of adapting anatomical knowledge to fit traditional beliefs is Sibscota’s argument that discovery of the Eustachian tube between the ear and mouth indicated that Alcemaeon’s belief that “she-Goats” breathed through their ears—also expressed by Aristotle—is not as ridiculous as it might seem (30).

comments particularly on two women who were much admired for “their dexterity of perception; for by the least motion of their Husbands countenance or hand, they presently conceived of their meaning” (85). Morose may not have been the only character to think of an ideal wife as one who would silently obey every wave of his hand.

Bulwer writes of the abilities of many who were deaf; however, he still argues that they suffer an intellectual deficit caused by their disability, claiming that “*hearing* [is] the sense of memory, that affected, . . . the memory must suffer some Diminution with it” (*Philocophus* 124). Sibscota makes similarly contradictory claims about the intellectual ability of those who could neither hear nor speak, stressing both that they have the ability to think, and that “external speech is a kind of Messenger or rather representation of the internal, or the intellect it self” (39). Despite their sympathy and supposedly enlightened opinions towards those who could not hear, these men could not escape the prevalent belief that deafness, even partial deafness, with its attendant difficulty of verbal communication, indicated diminished mental capacity. Moreover, those who could not hear were considered appropriate targets for comedy as they struggled to understand those speaking to them, thereby behaving as if they were dull-witted. Deafness and stupidity had been linked in the stock character of the old deaf man in Attic comedy (Edwards 33), and the triad of poor hearing, mental dullness, and age continued to garner laughs in the early modern period as is apparent by Jonson’s characterization of Corbaccio in *Volpone*.

Associated with limited mental ability, deafness not only left individuals subject to ridicule and contempt, but also prevented them from being full subjects under the law. Under Roman law, a person who could neither hear nor speak, and who could not read or write, had no legal rights and required a guardian to act on his or her behalf (Di Carlo 13). These limitations on the rights of congenitally deaf individuals to determine their own affairs persisted throughout history. Bulwer notes that, in mid-seventeenth-century England, a man who was both deaf and mute could not marry, make a will, or appoint his own executors. In the eyes of the law, such a man was “compared to an Infant” and a guardian had to be appointed for him, but if he had the ability to write or speak and so

“demonstrate that he is not voyde of understanding” he was permitted to marry and to make a legally binding will (*Philocophus* 109). Paradoxically, these legal limitations encouraged the education of members of the nobility who were deaf as they had to speak, or at least communicate in writing, in order to inherit their family estates. Hereditary deafness appeared in a number of aristocratic families in Spain in the sixteenth century and the inheritance laws that prevented those unable to hear or speak from claiming their inheritance prompted these families to seek help in educating their deaf children (Winzer 100).

There is only one reference to the education of a deaf person before 1400 AD and this is recorded by Bede in 685 AD, when he tells of the “miracle” of how a Bishop John taught a young man who was both deaf and mute to speak (Di Carlo 13; Mullett 123). However, by mid-sixteenth century a number of monks on the continent were known for their ability to teach deaf individuals to communicate (most often by writing).¹¹ These early teachers were spurred on not only because of the family’s need to have a legally recognized heir for the estate, but also because these religious men believed that communication was vital to the salvation of their young students. While Cardano, the rector of Padua University in 1526, was the first man to determine that education of those with congenital deafness was possible, there is no record that he actually participated in their education. His ideas, though, were acted upon by a Spanish monk, Ponce (also known as Peter Pontius), who is generally accepted as the earliest known teacher of deaf students (Beales 15; Di Carlo 15).

John Wilkins was the first to record in English the Spanish success of teaching deaf students, though he conflates the work of a number of monks including Ponce (Mullett 124). In *Mercury, the Secret and Swift Messenger* (1641), Wilkins notes how

11. Nelson, in “Fantasies of Deafness, Silence, and Speech,” argues that the marginalization and medicalization of deafness and the subsequent education of those who were deaf did not occur until the early modern period because medieval societies did not consider deafness a sensory deficiency or medical disease, but simply as a mysterious difference. She adds that prior to the invention and veneration of print, the use of gesture and pictures was considered quite appropriate (75-76).

those with congenital deafness communicate through gestures, and how, in the past, people used a finger alphabet, suggesting that such an alphabet could be used as a secret code (Mullett 130). Shortly after, in 1644, Bulwer published his theories on manual communication in *Chirologia and Chironomia, or The Natural Language of the Hand and The Art of Manual Rhetoric*, which includes a finger alphabet and a list of “natural” gestures to communicate certain emotions. While this text does not deal specifically with teaching deaf individuals, Bulwer notes how “men that are born deaf and dumb . . . can argue and dispute rhetorically by signs, and with a kind of mute and logistic eloquence overcome their amazed opponents; wherein some are so ready and excellent, they seem to want nothing to have their meanings perfectly understood” (17). Digby gives a more complete account of Ponce’s success in teaching the congenitally deaf younger brother of the Constable of Castille to speak, having met the young man in person. Digby notes that the priest taught the man both to speak and understand the speech of others, and that

[w]hat at the first he was laught at for, made him after some yeeres be looked upon as if he had wrought a miracle. In a word; after strange patience, constancy and paines, he brought the young Lord to speake as distinctly as any man whosoever; and to understand so perfectly what others said that he would not lose a word in a whole daies conversation. (307-08)

Bulwer cites this story verbatim three years later in *Philocophus, or The Deaf and Dumb Man’s Friend*, in which he specifically discusses the use of signs and a manual alphabet in educating those who cannot hear. However, while he recommends certain teaching methods, there is no evidence that Bulwer used them; instead, the earliest known teachers of deaf students in England were John Wallis and William Holder.¹² While interest in educating deaf students grew in the latter half of the seventeenth century, and more books were published on the subject, it was not until the eighteenth century that education was

12. John Wallis, a mathematician, found that his students were most effective at learning to read, write, and sign, but that teaching them to speak gave only limited results (Di Carlo 20-21), while William Holder, an Oxfordshire clergyman, had success teaching his students to speak and lip-read using methods similar to those of Ponce and published his results in *Elements of Speech* (1669).

directed at anyone other than the wealthy. Even then, that education frequently depended on charity (Di Carlo 24).¹³

Prior to the late seventeenth century, not only were the congenitally deaf commonly deemed dim-witted and uneducable, but the difficulties of those with acquired deafness were not limited to being the target of comic jokes. Although there was some knowledge of the causes of acquired deafness, the most common being an accumulation of earwax in older people and blocked Eustachian tubes in children—causes familiar to family practitioners today—even these were difficult to cure. Crooke notes, somewhat incredulously, the case of “[a]n honest man of good credit” whose deafness had lasted for some years and which was cured when he had the wax removed from his ears. This seemingly simple procedure required the attention of “one that professed some skill in curing deafnesse” (587). The only prescription advocated by Crooke for blocked Eustachian tubes was the use of a masticatory in the hopes that chewing might open the tubes and the medicine might draw the matter into the mouth (587). There was essentially no specific treatment for middle ear infections, and it was not unusual for such an infection to spread to the brain and result in death. Indeed, it is suspected that Mary Stuart’s first husband, Francis II, died of meningitis resulting from an ear infection, though his physician, Ambrose Paré, was accused of poisoning him (Guthrie 147).¹⁴ Duverney’s treatise, which was not translated into English until 1737, was the first monograph to discuss diseases of the ear, and even he offers little by way of treatment (Guthrie 377). He does though finally refute the long-standing opinion that pus issuing from an ear is an exudation of the brain by discovering on post-mortem that children could have a middle ear infection without having a cerebral abscess (Bordley and Brookhouser 5; Guthrie 245). Deafness, therefore, both congenital and acquired, was

13. When Abbé de l’Epée undertook to educate poor deaf pupils in France in the late eighteenth century, his classes grew so large that he was unable to devote the time to teaching them to speak. Instead, he taught them manual communication (Di Carlo 24).

14. Peter Cummings notes that Paré was accused of blowing poison into the king’s ear in much the same way as the Ghost in *Hamlet* claims Hamlet Senior was poisoned (84).

difficult to cure well into the eighteenth century. Furthermore, while congenital deafness might be associated with muteness and mental deficiency, acquired deafness as a result of an infection could lead to cerebral infection, febrile insanity, and death. It is little wonder that, in the early modern period, deafness was a condition to be feared.

The prevalence of deafness in early modern England is difficult to determine, but given that it was the most common congenital abnormality of the senses, and considering the lack of treatment for many common ailments that could lead to deafness (or worse) if left untreated, it is reasonable to believe that impaired hearing was relatively common. Eden and Opland, in their discussion of the feasibility of poisoning of Hamlet Senior through the ear, note that deafness resulting from a chronic accumulation of fluid in the middle ear and rupture of the tympanic membrane was not unusual (260). Moreover, while varying degrees of deafness may have been quite frequent, even a simple hearing aid such as a hearing trumpet was basically unknown. It was common practice, according to Crooke, for the hard of hearing to cup their hands to their ears “to gather in the sound” (576), and it was known that those who had lost their outer ear benefitted from using a large hollow shell, such as a scallop shell, as a substitute (575). However, hearing trumpets were sufficiently unfamiliar that Bacon describes such an instrument in detail in *Sylva Sylvarum* (1627), and even then it remains unnamed (73). Almost twenty years later, “Sarabatanes, or Trunks, [which] helpe the hearing; and of echo glasses, that multiply sounds, as burning-glasses do light” are still a novelty to Digby (303), and it took until 1668 for the Outa-acousticon to be demonstrated by the Royal Society to the fascination of Samuel Pepys. He describes it as ““a great glass bottle, broke at the bottom”” that was placed with the neck to the ear, and claims that with this device he heard ““the dancing of the oars in the boats in the Thames to Arundel gallery Windows which without I could not in the least do”” (qtd. in Beales 16). Ambrose Paré, in keeping with his role as a surgeon, goes into great detail about the need to repair and reattach outer ears for both hearing and appearance, and even includes instructions on making an artificial ear out of paper or leather (386, 875). The prolonged discussions and anecdotal

evidence of these authors on how to improve hearing by repairing the outer ear or by the use of an external aid suggests that there were few effective treatments for deafness.

Even the medical literature of the period does not permit an accurate determination of the prevalence of a disease or the effectiveness of a remedy (Slack 237). Indeed, the texts do not necessarily reflect the medical practice of the period, though they indicate some of the beliefs and techniques surrounding the treatment of a particular disease and they may have aided in the development of certain practices and attitudes (261). A brief assessment of the medical literature reveals first that there was much more discussion of eye diseases than those of the ear. In addition, many more remedies are offered for eye problems. While this may reflect a greater prevalence of eye diseases, it may also indicate how few treatments were even marginally effective in curing diseases of the ear. In addition, the persistent belief that discharge from the ear originated in the brain prevented such problems from being listed as auricular complaints.¹⁵

Despite the advancement in anatomical knowledge, the lag between discovery and application meant that, even in the early seventeenth century, remedies recommended by the ancients vastly outnumbered new ones (Slack 251). Furthermore, those listed may have never been used. Authors often recorded surgical correction of ear problems, but it is doubtful that they attempted such surgery themselves.¹⁶ For the treatment of ear “ulcers,” which could include everything from an abrasion of the ear canal to a brain abscess, Paré recommends Galen’s treatment of “scales of Iron made into powder, and then boyled in sharpe Vinegar untill it acquired the consistence of Honey,” though an ox’s gall-bladder dissolved in vinegar might also help (479). He adds that it may be necessary to remove the matter and includes an engraving of an instrument he calls a

15. Paré states that abscesses “oft times flow with much matter, not [in the ear] generated . . . but for that the braine doth that way disburden its selfe” (479).

16. For example, Paré notes the need to remove any “fleshy excrescence” within the ear canal, suggesting it can be cut out or “consumed by acrid and catheriticke medicines,” adding that “there is need of great moderation of the mind and hand” as rough handling could lead to “distension of the nerves and consequently of death” (655); however, his lack of specific instructions for such a dangerous operation in a text filled with numerous details suggests that he never undertook such treatment.

Pyoulcos, or matter-drawer. For patients reluctant to have their ears probed in such a manner, Paré, like Crooke, suggests the use of Masticatories for bringing down phlegmatic humours from the brain (Crooke 587; Paré 969). While chewing various concoctions may have provided some relief for blocked Eustachian tubes, most of the remedies recommended for relieving ear disease were of debatable value and could even be dangerous. Pouring liquids into an ear with a damaged eardrum would only exacerbate the condition, and yet most often such treatment was recommended (Winzer 86).¹⁷ Other remedies recommended for curing deafness, but more likely to cause serious complications, include striking the occipital bone so hard that it fractures, having the person with the hearing impairment shout so loudly that blood issues from the mouth, and burning the mastoid bone behind the ear with a red-hot iron (Winzer 98, Beales 16).

Although people who were deaf risked being ridiculed by society and tortured by the medical community, they were thought to have the advantage of superior eyesight. This belief arose from the idea that the senses were in competition with one another. People who could not hear could attend to visual stimuli much more closely than those who could both see and hear and thereby be distracted by noise. Bulwer explains:

Blind men allways most exquisitly *heare*; and the *Mole* also which is *Blind* by Nature, is thought to have the sence of *hearing* most exquisite, because those spirits which should have served the visory vertue, they all are turned over to the *Eare*, and thereby make the *hearing* most exact. . . . So likewise they who want their *hearing*, see more exactly, and their observations are more pregnant, because the sence of *hearing* doth not distract them other where, and being they can heare nothing, they looke alwayes more attentively. (*Philocophus* 169-70)

Bulwer suggests that those who want to hear better should close their eyes to prevent being distracted by visual stimuli, and those who want to see something should stop their

17. Out of the 182 cases he recorded, John Hall, Shakespeare's son-in-law, treated two patients for "dullness of hearing," and both of these he treated with topical methods, prescribing steam from boiling various herbs in wine to be directed into the ear for Elizabeth Sheldon, and drops of "carduus benedictus water" to be put into Alice Cookes's ear (Lane 99, 337). In *The English-Mans Treasvre*, Thomas Vicary includes two prescriptions for deafness, both of which are poured into the ear (206, 223).

ears (170). He also believes that those who can neither hear nor speak, having a double disability, are doubly recompensed, noting that they are “good *naturall Physiognomers*,” who “by instinct” can interpret emotions revealed in the face, especially through their observation of the motions of the mouth when someone is speaking (171-2). Holder, in his zeal to promote his program of lip-reading, agrees that those who cannot communicate “by the *Ear*” have “Eyes [that] are the more vigilant, attent and heedful, which renders them much more capable of being improved by directions and instructions applied to that Sense, and gives a delight and encouragement to those, who teach such apprehensive Scholars” (128). Deaf students, therefore, are not the only ones to benefit from their supposedly improved eyesight.

Nonetheless, these authors are fully cognizant of the misery of those unable to hear. Bulwer notes that Sennertus

very justly therefore calls *deafeness, Miserandum malum* a pittifull and miserable mischance; for since the Eares are as it were the Portall or entrie of the minde, by which those things are sent into the minde, which are delivered by Doctrine and Institution, for the right managing and transacting our life before God and men: that man must needes be miserable who is destitute of the *facultie of hearing*, for hee cannot use the ayde and benefit of *hearing*, either to his eternall health, or present safety. (*Philocophus* 105-06)

And while he might advocate education for those who are deaf and stress their ability to participate in society, he also notes that many are “indocile fooles or mad” because they are unable to converse with others, leaving them “fit for no publique employment, and . . . in vaine and impertinently present at any conference or consultation” (108). He alone, of all the authors who record Ponce’s success with the Spanish aristocrat, notes that the young man died after a ceiling fell on him because he was unable to hear the crack announcing its imminent collapse (180). Even those who were successful in communicating with others remained in danger because of their hearing impairment.

The greatest danger to deaf individuals, however, was believed to be not to their physical bodies, but to their souls. Because of the Pauline dictum that faith is by hearing, and thanks to Augustine’s literal definition of this to assume that those born deaf are

therefore beyond the salvation offered by Christianity, many who were deaf were prevented from holding church membership and fully participating in the rites and sacraments of the church (Winzer 90-91). To some, the ability to hear and speak was a particular sign of God's providence to humanity (Holder 5), which meant that those unfortunate enough to be deaf and mute were considered marked by an obvious sign of God's displeasure. Robert Wilkinson writes, "[I]f God take away the vse of hearing, it is a signe he is angry indeede, and threatneth a famine to the soule, for the soule feedeth at the eare, as the body by the mouth: therefore better loose all then loose it" (Avii^f). William Harrison also considers a hearing impairment to be "a punishment of sin," though not "sin it selfe" (23), and Stephen Egerton claims that those "whose eares or hearing God hath suffered to be taken away, they are in a dangerous or desperate case, because the Word is the sauour of life vnto the right hearer, and the sauour of death vnto him that heareth not as hee ought" (A7^f). Sibscota deals with this automatic damnation of people who cannot hear by arguing that they can come to a knowledge of God by observing the visible world around them, while those who are both deaf and blind may gain such understanding through an innate knowledge of God's existence: "by the implanted Seeds that are in them of the knowledge of Divine and immaterial Beings." Indeed, he claims that such people may be less distracted in their contemplation of the divine than the rest of us who are more likely to be "distracted by outward objects, and the fancies that result from them" (35). Nonetheless, despite his claims for innate knowledge of the divine, and his insistence that those who are deaf can learn about salvation from reading and can understand sermons by lip-reading (40-44), he still struggles with Paul's words and admits, "And as Faith comes by Hearing, according to the Apostle, where this is wanting, it may possibly seem very agreeable to truth, that there can be no Faith, and therefore no saving knowledge; and the consequence is undeniable since no man can be saved without Faith." Ultimately, though, he deems that "those that are born Deaf are no more guilty of neglecting the means of their Salvation, than Infants" and that the debate and the "disquisition of their Faith" is matter best left to

“Divines” (36-37). Many “divines,” however, considered those who were deaf as “[w]ofull . . . for whence can they haue faith, if they heare not?” (Harrison 42).

Deafness in Literature

Hearing may have been considered a risky undertaking in early modern England as sound was deemed intrusive and potentially destructive, but deafness was clearly not a positive alternative. Those who were congenitally deaf were considered inevitably mute and intellectually limited, and therefore often characterized as something less than human because of their lack of language. Even those with a partial hearing impairment, or those who became progressively deaf with age were often considered mentally deficient. The insistence that “to be human . . . means to be hearing” (Nelson and Berens 53) perhaps explains the relative absence of the deaf in early modern literature, despite the prevalence of the condition in the general population. Indeed, as Nelson and Berens note, the only representation of a completely deaf character in early modern literature is Edmund Spenser’s Abessa in Book I of *The Faerie Queene* (61). While she is an allegorical character representing the Catholic church, who fails to hear Una’s call (the call of the true church, according to Spenser’s allegory), she also demonstrates the persistent association of deafness, muteness, intellectual impairment, and potential eternal damnation. She is “the rude wench” whom Una comes upon and who “answered nought at all, / She could not heare, nor speake, nor understand” (Spenser I.iii.11, 3-4). Not only does Abessa communicate to her blind mother, Corceca, through touch: “With quaking hands, and other signes of feare” (12, 6), but she also demonstrates the incoherent anger Bulwer suggests is characteristic of those who cannot hear. When she discovers that her lover, Kirkrapine, has been slain by the lion accompanying Una, both she and her mother “wept and wayld their fill, / Then forth they ranne like two amazéd deare, / Halfe mad through malice, and revenging will” (22, 6-8). Perhaps most significant, though, is the link between deafness and loss of salvation that allows Spenser to make the allegory between those who are deaf and the Catholic church. Both, he suggests, are unable to gain “faith by hearing,” and are therefore condemned to eternal damnation.

In contrast to Spenser who uses a deaf character to represent the Catholic church's failure to hear or speak the true word of God, in *The Deafe mans Dialogue*, Thomas Lodge uses the character of an old, deaf shepherd, Celio, to offer some spiritual truths to Philamis, a young man overly concerned with his studies. There is, however, little evidence of Celio's deafness other than his initial request to Philamis to speak "hie" and to "keepe thy last key in speaking out, sit thou neere me and pertake my shade" (L3^v). They discuss the various academic disciplines and Celio tells Philamis that the only thing worth studying is how to be godly. On hearing this, Philamis declares, "Oh deuine spirit in a deafe man" (N^r), suggesting his amazement at finding someone who is deaf with knowledge of divinity. Philamis may be surprised at Celio's faith; nevertheless, the old man suggests that it is Philamis who is hard of hearing. He tells Philamis, "[H]eare thou," indicating that although he may be deaf, he possesses spiritual hearing, whereas Philamis, who can hear physical sounds, has been deaf to the divine. Celio, in an attempt to demonstrate the desirability of death and the hardship of mortal life, notes that human suffering on this earth is a result of Adam's punishment for obeying "the voyce of [his] wife" (N3^r), further underscoring the inherent conflict between listening to God and listening to mortals. As Sibscota suggests, those deaf to mortal voices may be able to hear God more clearly.

Thomas Traherne, writing around the same time as Sibscota, agrees that being mute and deaf improves the ability to hear God (Nelson and Berens 61). In "Dumnesse" he suggests that humanity is born both mute and deaf so that "Man" can "take Delight / In inward Things" and not be "[i]njurd by the Errors and the Wrongs / That *Mortal Words* convey" (10-12), and while Traherne's infantile deafness is primarily an inability to understand language rather than an actual failure to hear what is said, it is also related to the ear as a conduit through which others communicate. The speaker's "Non-Intelligence of Human Words" may prevent others from breathing into him "their infected Mind" (21, 26), but also "the Holy Door, / Or Gate of Souls was closd" allowing him to "dwell within a World of Light, / Distinct and Separat from all Mens Sight" (28-

32).¹⁸ With “No Ear,” his “Eys them selvs were all the Hearers there” (59-60), and they are able to understand the language of the world and how the stars and stones speak of a divine presence. Nonetheless, once the speaker “gain[s] a Tongue,” and is therefore capable of expressing his admiration and love of God, he then discovers: “Mine Ears let other Noises in, . . . / A Nois Disturbing all my Songs and Prayers” (68-70). Moreover, this noise has the same violent characteristics associated with sound in general, for it desecrates the temple of the mind and wounds the speaker’s soul (71-72). Traherne not only draws on the concept of sound as a violent invasion and the mind as a place that can be accessed through the ear, but he also upholds the belief that those who cannot hear have superior sight. They have the spiritual insight to perceive a divinity others cannot recognize. His insistence on a prelapsarian state of deafness and insight is also apparent in another poem, “The Infant-Ey.” Traherne suggests that while the infant ear is deaf, the “Infant-Ey” can see much more clearly than the clouded adult eye. Such an eye has a pure, uncorrupted visual beam:

A simple Light from all Contagion free,
A Beam that’s purely Spiritual, an Ey
That’s altogether Virgin, Things doth see
Ev’n like unto the Deity. (1-4)

Nonetheless, over time, these “[r]efined, subtil, piercing, quick and pure” “Infant-Ey” beams (8) become “debas’d” and “[l]ess activ” so that they then follow “distracting Objects” (13-14). As the ability to hear others improves, so the ability to see God, glossed by Traherne in the language of visual perception, diminishes.

By portraying deaf individuals as having an insight unavailable to the hearing community, both Lodge and Traherne stand in contrast to the Puritan ministers who agonize over whether those who are deaf will ever get to heaven. They are among the few authors who suggest that the inability to hear the aural distractions of this world enable the deaf to have better spiritual perception. The connection between spiritual awareness

18. Traherne uses the same concept of the ear as the gate to the soul in “On News” in which the soul is called by “news” to the ear and “stood at the Gate / To recreat / It self with Bliss” (19-21).

and being deaf to the world prompted many writers to emphasize the need of the hearing community to shut their ears to various aural distractions, and several, including Richard Brathwait and Steven Guazzo, follow the lead of early Christian writers such as Saint Basil and Jerome and adapt the tale of Ulysses to present him as someone wise enough to stop his own ears, as well as those of his sailors, to the sirens' song. Brathwait declares, "Happie are those (but too few are those) who with wise *Ithacus* stop their eares to . . . Soule-tainting and Sin-tempting *Syrens*" (*English Gentleman* 31); Guazzo notes that "a wise man . . . in the company of euil . . . ought to stop his Eares, as Vlisses did against the song of the Marmaites" (20). While the original tale was well known thanks to Natale Conti's *Mythologica* (1551) and George Chapman's English translation in 1616, both of which present Ulysses as open-eared but physically restrained, he was still frequently praised as the proverbial wise man who was deaf to the wiles and seductions of the world. His ability to resist the call of the sirens is equated with an inability to hear them, but in contrast to the way in which people with physiological hearing impairment were often deemed mentally deficient and at risk of eternal damnation, Ulysses, as a hearing individual who chooses to avoid certain sounds and voices, was considered wise.

While wisdom and apparent deafness are linked in the works of Traherne and Lodge and in the rewriting of Ulysses' experience with the sirens, in drama the deaf are shown less positively. Indeed, they are rarely shown at all, and when they are, it is the link between deafness and dull-wittedness that is most often emphasized. Nelson and Berens argue that the lack of representation in literature of deaf people is unsurprising given the liminal status granted to them by the rest of society. They note that representation only occurs in the mid-seventeenth century when the deaf are considered educable. However, they add that "while there are almost no representations of deaf people, there are abundant representations of deaf ears" (53), and I wish to explore the ramifications of such "deaf ears" and how they might echo, amplify, or distort prevailing early modern constructions of deafness. When someone demonstrates a deaf ear in a society that equates physiological deafness with diminished mental ability and only occasionally with wisdom and improved (in)sight, how is that person thought of by

others? Considering the cultural construction of hearing as invasive and sound as a violent and potentially permanent disruption, does a deaf ear offer a position of power as it does for Ulysses, or does it signify diminished power? And does the social position of these apparently deaf listeners, as indicated by gender, class, or race, have any effect on how their deaf ear is rated?

One figure who had a wide circulation in the early modern period and who, while not literally deaf, demonstrates a lack of auditory discernment, is King Midas. Not only does he appear in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and therefore in the early modern translations of this work, but he is also the central character in John Lyly's *Midas* (1589). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Midas's sin was considered his failure to hear correctly and he was used as an example of poor judgement (Folkerth 89). In other words, he fit the popular conception of those with impaired hearing as also being dim-witted. In *A Choice of Emblemes*, Geoffrey Whitney uses the king to illustrate the emblem of *Peruersa iudicia* (perverse judgement), noting that his punishment "all Iudges teache; / To iudge with knowledge, and aduise, in matters paste their reache" (218). Indeed, a number of proverbs echo the association between Midas's faulty hearing, his folly, and his ass's ears: for example, "an ass is known by his ears," and "the veriest asses hide their ears most" (Tilley A355, A379). Moreover, allusions to Midas and his ass's ears appear repeatedly in reference to those who fail to discern when they are the butt of a joke. While Midas's dilemma was frequently used to comic ends, the tale, as Ovid tells it, is far from humorous. Indeed, it follows the tragedy of Orpheus's death at the hands of the Thracian women. Orpheus's music could calm savage beasts and even attract the stones and trees—those inanimate objects to which the deaf were often proverbially likened. Unlike the wild beasts that gather around Orpheus to hear his music, however, the women do not at first hear him, but rather see him sitting on a hill. They begin throwing stones at him, but cannot hurt him because the stones they hurl are, in Golding's translation, "vanquisht with his sweete / And most melodius harmonye" (11.11-12). The women then begin to make such a noise, "[w]ith blowing shalmes, and beating drummes, and bedlem howling out, / And clapping hands" (17-18) that they drown out the sound of

Orpheus's harp.¹⁹ When the stones can no longer hear Orpheus's melody, the women are able to brutally slay him. So, the reader learns, "they murthred him, who never till that howre / Did utter woordes in vaine, nor sing without effectuall powre" (41-42). The women, in contrast to the stones, are metaphorically, if not literally, deaf to Orpheus's melody, and, by creating a cacophony, they are able to deafen the stones so that they are no longer enchanted by his music.²⁰

In his translation, George Sandys points out another effect of the women's inability to appreciate Orpheus's music. Not only do they deafen the stones, but they also silence Orpheus (11.19). Their lack of auditory discernment, therefore, has the power to silence the voice they cannot understand. Moreover, once mute, Orpheus resorts to the language of gesture (the language with which one communicates to the deaf) and "hold[s] up his hands" (39), though to little effect. In retaliation for Orpheus's murder, Bacchus transforms the women into trees, literalizing their faulty listening, as they become deaf (and dumb) posts. Bacchus, still distressed at the horrific murder, wanders into Phrygia, Midas's kingdom. Midas feasts the god and reunites him with his foster-father, Silenus, and in return Bacchus rewards Midas by granting his foolish wish that all he touches be turned to gold. Midas quickly discovers that his gift is a curse and, shamed by his lack of foresight, rejects his court to live on the mountain, Tmolus, where he spends time listening to Pan. When Pan challenges Apollo to a music contest to be judged by the

19. In comparison to Orpheus's harp, the women's instruments are associated with rougher, less refined music and with lower-class entertainment, just as Pan's pipes, preferred by Midas to Apollo's lyre, is also linked with rustic, lower-class music.

20. Shakespeare draws on the same concept of "deaf" stones being more sympathetic toward a speaker than human listeners in *Titus Andronicus* when the tribunes leading Titus's sons to execution ignore his plea. Left alone, Titus continues to plead, declaring:

... I tell my sorrows to the stones,
 Who, though they cannot answer my distress,
 Yet in some sort they are better than the Tribunes
 For that they will not intercept my tale.

...

A stone is silent and offendeth not,
 And tribunes with their tongues doom men to death. (3.1.36-39, 45-46)

mountain, Midas is the only one who does not think Apollo's music the sweetest, for it is Pan's "rude and homely song" that "[d]elight[s] *Midas* eares" (Golding 11.181-82). In response to Midas's failure to appreciate the beauty of his song, Apollo "could not suffer well his foolish eares too keepe / Theyr humaine shape" (196-97) and transforms them into ass's ears which Midas keeps hidden beneath a "purple nyghtcappe" (204). Midas's inability to interpret correctly what he hears, therefore, is associated with the foolishness he previously exhibited with his greedy wish, and is made visible by the transformation of his ears.²¹ Moreover, while he attempts to hide his ass's ears, they become public knowledge when the reeds reveal the secret whispered into the ground by Midas's barber who is, of course, familiar with the king's deformity. Midas, as resistant to Apollo's melody as the Thracian women are to that of Orpheus, may have the power to judge what he hears, but he must also suffer being known as a fool for his faulty judgement.

Wes Folkerth discusses the transformation of Midas in relation to the transformative power of listening in *Midsummer Night's Dream* in which Bottom, self-conceited, dull-witted, and lacking in musical discernment, wears the ass's head of Midas.²² Bottom might claim to "have a reasonable good ear in music" but, like Midas, he prefers rustic instruments such as "the tongs and the bones" (4.1.26-27). In addition, Folkerth notes that Sandys, in his translation of Ovid's work, offers a political context for Midas's inability to hear correctly (89), one that is picked up by Lyly when he presents

21. Midas's foolishness is now apparent to all as his ass's ears closely resemble the ears on a fool's cap to which the bells are sewn. See Wither's illustration of a fool (211).

22. In Ripa's *Iconologia*, the emblem for Obstinacy is a woman who carries an ass's head. Joseph Rosenblum argues that Bottom's ass's head is therefore symbolic of Titania's stubbornness (from Oberon's perspective). According to Ripa, "the Ass shews that gross Ignorance is the Mother of this stubbornness" (Rosenblum 358-9), indicating a link between poor auditory discernment, a lack of knowledge, and a failure to act as others approve.

Midas as a tyrannical ruler.²³ In Lyly's play, the king's tyrannical nature is demonstrated by both episodes taken from Ovid's tale. His desire for gold demonstrates his interest in his own private gain rather than in the public good, and his failure to appreciate Apollo's heavenly music and his preference of Pan's earthly, rustic music shows his ignorance of divine order—the very order that should be mirrored in society, but that is lacking with tyrannical rule. Apollo refers to this order when he asks Midas to judge the music contest, for he notes that, as a king, Midas is best able to judge the gods. Apollo also suggests that the supposedly more rustic nymphs may have been deafened by listening to Pan's music. He then tells Midas to “give ear, that thy judgment err not” (4.1.81-82). Midas, though, not only fails to appreciate Apollo's “nice tickling of strings,” but notes that what “contents” him is “that [which] makes one start. What a shrillness came into mine ears out of that pipe, and what a goodly noise it made!” (135-38). He prefers shrill sounds that others find irritatingly loud and “as far out of tune as [Pan's] body out of form” (130-31).²⁴ While Midas's faulty hearing is connected to his failure to understand proper order, it is also more directly associated with his role as a tyrant. Various characters complain about conditions in Phrygia under Midas's rule, including the shepherds in 4.2 and Midas's own councillors in 4.4; however, Midas appears deaf to their plight. Martius, one of his councillors, claims, “[E]ither our king hath no ears to hear, or no care to consider, both in what state we stand, being his subjects, and what danger he is in, being our king” (4.4.41-43). Midas's auditory discernment improves only after the condition of his ears is common knowledge and he demands to listen to the reeds in order to cure his faulty hearing. He wants to hear what others already know so “that these loathsome ears may be

23. In her introduction to the play, Ann Begor Lancashire suggests that Lyly's *Midas* satirizes Philip II. She notes that parodies of Philip frequently appeared in London theatres around this time and speculates that his association with Midas may have been quite common (xxiii). Stephen Hilliard argues, however, that *Midas* is more understandable as an examination of tyranny in general rather than as an allegorical representation of Philip (248).

24. Hilliard suggests that the boy actor playing Pan would likely have played and sung off-key for comic effect and to further underscore Midas's poor judgement (253).

glutted with the report, and that is as good as a remedy” (5.1.19-20). It is only when he agrees not to impose his own tyrannical order on Lesbos and to accept divine order that he is relieved of his ass’s ears and therefore of the sign of his inability to listen appropriately.

Midas, deafened by Pan’s pipes and tyrannically deaf to the cries of his subjects (at least in Lyly’s play) is also too dim-witted to think of the consequences of his wish for a golden touch and too dull to appreciate Apollo’s music. His ass’s ears are simply an outward sign of his inner stupidity and an indication that he is a comic figure.²⁵ Midas’s transformation in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* likely reflects a pre-existing association between ass’s ears and foolishness as D. J. Gifford notes that terra cotta models of heads with eared hoods have been found dating back to the Roman period (33). Certainly, by the fifteenth century, the ass-eared headdress was a recognizable sign of the fool (18), and was used by Hans Holbein in his illustrations of Erasmus’s *The Praise of Folly* (1510) to signify a fool (Janik 6). Bulwer uses the same image to connect folly and the ear when he describes the gesture for folly. He writes that the sign of folly is “TO PRESENT THE INDEX AND EAR-FINGER [little finger] WAGGING, WITH THE THUMB APPLIED UNTO THE TEMPLES.” “[T]his most ridiculous affront implies such men to be asses” (*Chirologia* 138). He goes on to note that only humans have immovable ears, “whereas that which appears most movable and stirring in that dull animal is his ears” (139).²⁶ Considering this repeated link between deafness and dull-wittedness, the lack of auditory discernment and foolishness, as emblemized by the fool’s ass’s ears, and the insistence that those with faulty hearing are suitable comic targets—I would like to explore how characters who demonstrate poor auditory discernment are represented in early modern comedies, and particularly how Jonson

25. Margaret Winzer notes that prior to the eighteenth century, “deaf persons often had their place in comedies; the blind, often in tragedies” (78).

26. Bulwer adds that the same sign, without the wagging motion, is used to indicate cuckoldry (*Chirologia* 139).

works with the associated concepts of foolishness and both literal and metaphorical deafness.

The disease of deafness may be an unusual concept to explore in the work of a playwright who emphasizes the importance of language, who insists that it “most shows the man” (*Discoveries* 43), and who, critics claim, considers it “central to human life itself” (Partridge 12). Indeed, one might wonder what such a playwright, who publicly battled over the balance of word and image in his masques with set designer Inigo Jones, and who, in his major comedies, delights in presenting his audiences with multiple discourses and a cacophony of sound, would say about characters figuratively and literally deaf to the language he values so much. Critics have discussed at length Jonson’s relish of language and his dislike of “foolish and affected eloquence” (*Discoveries* 17; Barish 90-93), and Edward Partridge notes, “Jonson asks us to see the complexity of things. Speech is human, but mere babbling can be done by idiots” (13). Indeed, Jonson complains that there is nothing “so furious, and *Bet’lem* like, as a vaine sound of chosen and excellent words, without any subject of *sentence*, or *science* mix’d” (*Discoveries* 17). Words may be “chosen and excellent” but that is not enough; they must also make sense. He goes on: “Whom the disease of talking still once possesseth, hee can never hold his peace. Nay, rather then hee will not discourse, hee will hire men to heare him. And so heard, not hearkn’d unto, hee comes off most times like a *Mountebanke*, that when hee hath prais’d his med’cines, finds none will take them, or trust him” (17). Jonson may demand, “[S]peake that I may see thee” (78), but clearly, a good speaker knows when to be silent. While many critics, including Jonas Barish, Mary Bledsoe, Ian Donaldson, Douglas Lanier, and Martin Orkin, just to name a few, consider speech and language in Jonson’s plays, there has been virtually no consideration of characters as listeners in Jonson’s plays: that for every character who has the “disease of talking” there is one who has a disease of listening, who may hear yet fail to “heark[e]n.” Too often, those who listen are simply labelled “dupes” without any assessment of how their listening behaviour is flawed, or how this may echo cultural constructions of deafness and poor auditory discernment.

Despite the lack of critical commentary on Jonson's representation of listeners in his plays, his works are filled with characters who lack auditory discernment. He even uses the figure of Midas and his ass's ears in a number of plays to underscore the failure of certain characters to listen appropriately.²⁷ For example, in *The Poetaster* (1601), when Asinius Lupus tries to have Horace arrested for libel, Caesar punishes him for the "fierce credulity" that reflects his name by having him wear "a pair of larger ears" (5.3.124-25) to demonstrate both the wolf-like nature of his excessive predatory hearing, and his ass-like failure to judge correctly what he hears. In other words, Asinius Lupus hears too well and judges too poorly. In *The Devil is an Ass* (1616), Wittipol notes Fitzdottrel's "asinine nature," remarking particularly on his "liberal ears" (1.6.165, 179), ears that become conflated with Devil's horns (the devil being the ultimate tyrant) and cuckold's horns (as he, like Corvino in *Volpone*, suspects his wife of adultery yet encourages her infidelity for his own gain). Ass's ears even appear in Jonson's better known comedies. In *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), Cokes is repeatedly characterized as an ass, primarily because he does not listen well. In the first act, Winwife and Quarlous note that he looks like an ass and, according to Quarlous, his face "confesses him one" (1.5.49). That Cokes's foolishness is associated with poor hearing is underscored when he fails to understand Grace's distaste for the fair and misinterprets her use of the words "quality" and "fashion."²⁸ Quarlous explicitly notes Cokes's failure to understand his fiancée's speech, declaring, "[W]hat a rogue in apprehension is this! To understand her language no better" (133-34). Later, Cokes eagerly attends and praises Justice Overdo's

27. Jonson also accuses Inigo Jones of having ass's ears, both in "An Expostulation with Inigo Jones," in which he asks, "[A]re you soe ambitious 'boue your peers! / you would be an Asinigo, by your ears?" (19-20) and in "To a ffreind an Epigram of him" in which he also refers to Jones's ambitious nature and describes him (indirectly) as a butterfly, a camel, and a "dull Ass" (8).

28. Grace suggests that there will be no one of her class or gentility at the fair: "none goes thither of any quality or fashion"; Cokes suggests that their presence will make the fair fashionable and that Wasp will find objects of interest or "qualities" for them to see there (*Bartholomew Fair* 1.5.128-32).

quasi-Puritanical rant against the evils of alcohol and tobacco, while Wasp considers Overdo “an ass, and may be akin to the Cokeses” (2.6.17-18). It is during this episode of inappropriate listening that Cokes’s first purse is taken. Like the audience of Middleton’s *Roaring Girl*, which is so intent on listening to the play that the cutpurse can work unseen, so Cokes, enthralled by Overdo’s speech, fails to notice Edgworth removing his purse. Cokes’s second purse is stolen when he is listening to Nightingale. Once again, the young fool pays little attention to the actual meaning of Nightingale’s ballad, which is “a gentle admonition . . . both to the purse-cutter, and the purse-bearer” (3.5.59-60) and more to the tune and his own desire to see a cutpurse. As a result, Cokes does not notice Edgworth even though the thief tickles his ear with straw. Edgworth’s action emphasizes that Cokes’s foolishness is inextricably associated with his failure to use his ears appropriately. Like someone who is hearing impaired, he directs all of his attention to listening and yet cannot understand what he hears. He likes having his ears “tickled” by ballads and speeches but fails to understand their meaning.

Morose, who is so sensitive to noise that he lives on a street too narrow for carriages to enter, would seem to be diametrically opposed to Cokes; however, he too is associated with Midas, both with his “huge turbant of nightcaps on his head, buckled over his ears” (*Epicoene* 1.1.130-31),²⁹ and by his perception of the music introduced by Clerimont as “worse than the noise of a saw” (3.7.5). The musicians may produce a cacophony of sound, but it is not the sound of a saw or hammer as Morose implies. Indeed, Clerimont notes that the noises are literally made by “hair, rosin and guts. I can give you the receipt” (6-7). Moreover, Morose’s intolerance for noise and his failure to interpret correctly what he hears in this particular episode make him akin to an ass according to Truewit. He rhetorically asks Morose, “Should an ass exceed me in fortitude? No. You betray your infirmity with your hanging dull ears, and make them

29. All references to *Epicoene* are to *Epicoene*, ed. Edward Partridge. The Yale Ben Jonson (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1971).

insult. Bear up bravely, and constantly” (13-15).³⁰ If the failure to hear correctly is demonstrated by “hanging dull ears,” Morose is not the only Jonsonian character to have such ears. In *Volpone* (1606)—truly a play of animals even if most critics fail to note the asses in it—several characters are shown to have Midas-like qualities, not least Volpone himself. While Volpone may be known as the fox, and the play connects strongly with a number of medieval beast fables, including that of Reynard the Fox (R. B. Parker 18-21), Volpone is also associated with Midas, not only through his avarice, but also through his failure to fully comprehend what he hears. As the fox, Volpone may be the master of disguise, but what he appears to be hiding are his ass’s ears.

Volpone

Volpone is not only a multiplicity of discourses, from Volpone’s perverted morning prayer to the excesses of his mountebank speech and his attempted seduction of Celia, from the fools’ entertainment to Mosca’s flattery, from Sir Pol’s desire for news to Voltore’s defence, but is also a profusion of topical allusions and classical sources. There is evidence that Jonson may have fashioned Volpone on the wealthy Thomas Sutton, who while he may have “fed severall with hopes of being his Heire” (Aubrey qtd. in R. B. Parker 12) was certainly a more commendable character than Jonson’s character. Jonson also drew on works by Horace, Lucian, and Petronius in his depiction of the legacy hunters and his parody of Pythagoras’s theory of metempsychosis in the freaks’ first entertainment (Ostovitch 8-18; R. B. Parker 12-38). Brian Parker even notes Jonson’s allusion to the Golden Age from Book I of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in Volpone’s opening speech, but fails to consider how this speech also connects Volpone with another of Ovid’s books and the character of Midas. Indeed, I would argue, despite the critical silence on (and deafness to) the figure of Midas in this play, several characters share his foolish love of gold, his poor auditory discernment, and his symbolic ass’s ears. The play

30. Truewit is likely referring to the flaps on Morose’s nightcaps. Still, his description of the old man’s “hanging dull ears” also serves to reinforce the suggestion that Morose has ass’s ears.

begins with Volpone's prayer to his treasure, a demonstration of his relish of both gold and language. Midas had to touch things to turn them to gold, but Volpone's reputation as a rich man without an heir is sufficient to "bring [him] presents, send [him] plate, coin, jewels" (1.1.78).³¹ However, he is not the only one with the "Midas" touch. Mosca declares that Voltore's tongue should be "tipped with gold" (4.6.64) because of the rhetorical skill he shows at Volpone's first trial. Moreover, Mosca suggests that Voltore suffers the same aural affliction as the foolish king, referring to the advocate as being "an ass [hooded] with reverend purple, / . . . [to] hide his two ambitious ears" (1.2.111-12).³² While Mosca is ostensibly talking about Voltore, the implication is that Volpone, too, has both Midas's love of gold and his ass's ears, for he follows Mosca's speech by asking for his nightcap which, with its long dangling flaps (Morose's "hanging, dull ears"), would resemble an ass-eared fool's cap. It is Corvino, though, who is ultimately sentenced to being "rowed / Round about Venice . . . / Wearing a cap with fair long ass's ears" (5.12.136-37) to demonstrate his gullibility and foolish jealousy of his wife.

While Volpone, Voltore, and Corvino are explicitly connected to Midas through these references to ears and nightcaps or hoods, old Corbaccio stands apart as truly hard of hearing, and I wish to consider his literal deafness before exploring how this is echoed and distorted in the Midas-like deafness of the other characters. The first act of *Volpone* presents various ways of listening, including Corbaccio's impaired ability. Volpone is apparently resting when the old man enters, yet his ability to hear everything when he is supposedly sleeping emphasizes Corbaccio's inability to hear anything correctly. While Lodge and Traherne may suggest that those who cannot hear with their worldly ears have more discerning spiritual hearing, Corbaccio is struggling so hard to hear of his chances of inheriting Volpone's wealth that he can hear nothing else. His repeated mishearing of Mosca prompts laughter from both his onstage and offstage audience, and Volpone is

31. All references to *Volpone* are to *Volpone, or The Foxe*, ed. R. B. Parker. The Revels Plays (Dover, NH; Manchester, UK: Manchester UP, 1983).

32. Purple is noted to be the colour of the hood of Doctors of Divinity; it is also the colour of Midas's nightcap in Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

barely able to restrain himself until Corbaccio leaves, saying, “Oh, I shall burst! / Let out my sides, let out my sides—” and Mosca must admonish his master to “[c]ontain / Your flux of laughter” (1.4.133-34). Corbaccio is clearly a figure of amusement, not only because of his deafness, but also because he believes he will outlive Volpone and inherit his wealth, despite his own age and poor health.³³ Moreover, his deafness is explicitly associated with Midas-like foolishness when Mosca, having duped him into making Volpone his heir, tells the old man, “Your knowledge is no better than your ears, sir” (126), and calls him “a precious ass” (130). Corbaccio cannot detect Mosca’s trickery because of his literal deafness, but his hearing is also limited by his determination to hear only that which fulfils his desires. As Mosca sets out his plan, Corbaccio repeatedly interrupts him to conclude Mosca’s sentences with what he himself wants to hear (109-22). He might claim that Mosca is “[t]he very organ to express my thoughts!” (116), but in reality, he is only expressing his own avidity. His ear is tied to his own tongue.³⁴ Corbaccio’s knowledge may be limited by his hearing, but equally, his hearing is limited by what he knows.³⁵

Corbaccio may be the only character in *Volpone* who is literally deaf; however, all the dupes show the same limitation of being able to hear only what they know, that knowledge being predicated on their avarice. Vicki Janik categorizes fools into four types: wise fools who recognize their own flaws and those of others; dupes who know

33. Corbaccio’s age and ill-health can be emphasized and contrasted to Volpone’s mimicry of sickness in production by having Corbaccio exhibit the symptoms Mosca describes in this scene while Volpone tries to ape them.

34. Northumberland levels this accusation at Hotspur (*1 Henry IV* 1.3.234-6) and suggests that it is a trait particularly demonstrated by women. It is also a trait potentially exhibited by Othello, as shall be discussed in chapter 3.

35. Corbaccio is not the only one associated with Midas in this scene. Volpone is linked with the foolish king through Mosca’s suggestion that the gold coins brought by Corbaccio are “*aurum palpabile*, if not *potabile*” (73). In other words, just as Midas’s golden touch prevented him from quenching his thirst, so Volpone can touch this gold but cannot drink it (as he could if it were a medicine derived from gold and *potabile*).

only their own desires, but not those of others; tricksters who only recognize others' faults; and "innocent or holy fool[s]" who are ignorant of the weaknesses of themselves and others (3), and Volpone's legacy hunters are indeed dupes. They all fail to hear the truth behind Mosca's "inventions," and their auditory discernment remains impaired until they learn that Volpone is dead and Mosca has been named heir. This news penetrates their dull ears and, like a loud noise, is sufficient to cause damage: Voltore is struck "dumb," Corvino "faints," Lady Would-be "swoon[s]," and Corbaccio (thanks to his true hearing loss) takes a little longer than the others to "reach . . . his despair" (5.3.23-26). While Volpone has been acutely aware of the literal and figurative deafness of his would-be heirs, he is less conscious of his own lack of auditory discernment, possibly because he so frequently feigns deafness that he fails to realize when he does have difficulty detecting Mosca's true intentions. He, like the trickster, is ignorant of his own weakness.³⁶ Jonson may insist, "Language most shewes a man: speake that I may see thee" (*Discoveries* 78), but Volpone's experience with Mosca suggests that an undiscerning listener may not "see" or hear the man at all.

The entertainment Mosca composes for the first act offers a parodic discussion of the Pythagorean theory of transmigration of the soul. While this "contributes to the play's theme of human debased to animal" (note to 1.2.6-62), the "translation" (29) or transformation of the soul also echoes throughout the play in the numerous cloaks and shrouds of Volpone, the disguise of Peregrine, the failed concealment of Sir Politic in the subplot, and the linguistic masks adopted by Mosca with his eventual "translation" into Volpone's heir. Moreover, the entertainment draws attention to the way the soul is "breathed" (1.2.9) into its recipient. When one recalls how the ear was frequently considered the gateway to the soul during this period, as in Traherne's poetry, it is difficult to escape the role that listening plays in the transmigration of Pythagoras's soul.

36. I disagree with Ronald Huebert's claim that Volpone is "the undisputed master" and Mosca an "apparently selfless parasite" for much of the play ("A Shrew" 48), and see Mosca's early manipulation of Volpone (1.1.62-66) as a sign of his self-interest.

The soul has resided in a variety of animals, including an ass (42),³⁷ and now wishes to remain in Androgyno, Volpone's hermaphroditic fool, not because of "the delight of each sex" (54), but because "[f]ools, . . . are the only nation / Worth men's envy or admiration" (66-67). According to the song sung by Nano and Castrone, people listen to a fool, and a fool can say things forbidden to others:

All [fools] speak or do is sterling.
 . . .
 Tongue, and bauble are his treasure.
 E'en his face begetteth laughter,
 And he speaks truth free from slaughter. (70, 73-75)³⁸

As one of Volpone's "fools" Mosca's speech is certainly "sterling" to his master. Not only does Volpone find it entertaining and accept it at face value, but it also has currency for him in its ability to make his fortune. It is perhaps his delight in what Mosca's speech can do for him that, along with Voltore's arrival, distracts Volpone from the final phrase of the song which notes that while "the chiefest guest: / Hath his trencher, and his stool," it is "wit [that] waits upon the fool" (77-79). He fails to hear how, as the "chiefest guest" who does not have the wit possessed by the fool, he may not detect that he is being duped.

Jonson is well known for his elaborate duping plots and his division of characters into wits and dupes, particularly in his major comedies (Blake 122). Elizabeth Sullivan notes that "Jonson's knaves and fools . . . can be ranked in a long continuum descending from those who plot and disguise very cleverly down to those who are most easily gulled" (256). She then adds that during the course of a play the roles of the two are often reversed (256). Volpone certainly demonstrates the instability of the distinction between wits and dupes. He may be a wit in his ability to deceive Voltore, Corbaccio, and

37. This is also a jibe at the Puritans: Androgyno notes that the soul passed "[i]nto a very strange beast, by some writers called an ass; / By others a precise, pure, illuminate brother" (1.2.42-43).

38. As both R. B. Parker and Helen Ostovich note in their respective editions of *Volpone*, bauble is not only a play on babble, or speech, but also refers to a fool's baton, which was usually topped with a model of an ass's head—complete with ears—and a phallus.

Corvino, and in his eloquent portrayal of Scoto of Mantua; however, his wit pales in comparison to that of his parasite, Mosca. He can assume a visual disguise, but frequently he requires Mosca's verbal wit for his disguise to have its desired effect. He can feign sleep or appear comatose, but it is Mosca's speech that persuades the gulls to hand over their gold. Perhaps most telling is the scene in which Lady Would-be finally has an audience with Volpone. She contrasts the other dupes in that her main characteristic is not avarice, but her vanity and banal prattle (Leggatt, "*Volpone*" 92), and Volpone has the greatest difficulty getting her to leave. No matter what he says, she has a reply. He does not have the ability to rid himself of this "fury" (3.4.41), whether he speaks or "[p]rofesse[s] obstinate silence" (86). Her speech has the power to penetrate and overcome his silence.³⁹ Mosca, though, quickly rids his master of the "torture" (3.5.3) of listening to Lady Would-be by uttering a few well-chosen words on the whereabouts of her husband. Even in court, Volpone persuades not with his speech, for he is silent and is "heard in [Voltore]" (4.5.25), but by "the sight," which Voltore tells the Avocatori, "will rather move your pities, / Than indignation" (23-24). Furthermore, Volpone's revelation of his true self in the second hearing is first a visual unmasking and then a verbal declaration of his identity.

Volpone's performance as Scoto appears to stand in contrast to his usual enjoyment of and dependency on the linguistic skill of others; nonetheless, a couple of points should be noted. First, it is Mosca who suggests the use of a disguise to enable Volpone to see Celia, and second, Jonson's own denigration of mountebanks suggests that Volpone is not showing true rhetorical skill as his speech is simply an imitation of their "foolish and affected eloquence." The limitation of his speech is further underscored by Sir Politic's enjoyment of it and Peregrine's scepticism. Sir Politic thinks it "Excellent!" and "rare" (2.2.71, 123), but just as Wasp regards both Judge Overdo and

39. Lanier notes that while Jonson does not categorize speech as feminine and silence as masculine, he clearly genders the control of discourse as masculine (10). Lady Would-be's control prior to Mosca's intervention indicates her relative masculine nature compared to Volpone's.

Cokes as asses or fools, one for speaking and the other for listening, so Peregrine considers Scoto's speech "monstrous" (197) and his companion a fool for believing it. I suggest, therefore, that Volpone's linguistic ability is not as great as Mosca's, and while his servant's ability to deceive him arises in part from Volpone's excessive self-confidence and willingness to be deceived (Beecher 46; Orkin 43), it is also because the voluptuary lacks the auditory discernment necessary to determine Mosca's true intent.⁴⁰ Don Beecher notes that Mosca verbally disguises his intentions from both the inheritance hunters and Volpone by using the "camouflage of flattery," and that Volpone is "blind" to Mosca's underlying intentions (46). This blindness, though, may be more accurately considered a form of deafness. Like a deaf person who, in this period, would have been considered irrevocably "dumb,"⁴¹ Volpone not only demonstrates limited verbal ability, a dependency on visual signs, and the need for an interpreter to speak for him, but he also repeatedly feigns deafness when he is presented to his would-be heirs, the distinction between this simulated auditory impairment and his true ability as a listener becoming increasingly blurred.

Parker remarks on the irony of Jonson, as a playwright, being suspicious of humanity's "instinct for mimesis," and argues that Volpone's downfall echoes Jonson's belief that "wee so insist in imitating others, as wee cannot (when it is necessary) returne to our selves" (*Discoveries* 44; R. B. Parker 32). Barish also comments on Jonson's belief that mimicry results in the "loss of one's own authentic voice" (91). For Volpone, however, "imitating others," and particularly imitating those who are deaf, leads to a deterioration in his auditory discernment. When Mosca introduces Voltore, Volpone is supposedly so hard of hearing that he must ask, "What say you?" (1.3.7). When Corbaccio comes, he adopts the deafness of sleep, and with Corvino, his deafness is

40. Even Volpone's eloquent encomium in praise of his gold is a misuse of such a panegyric as it demonstrates "a serious perversion of values" (Leggatt, "Suicide of Volpone" 22) and is therefore an inappropriate use of language.

41. I use this term to signify both the muteness and limited intelligence that were believed to be associated with deafness in the early modern period.

apparently even more complete. Mosca informs the merchant, “He cannot understand, his hearing’s gone” (1.5.15), and “a culverin / Dischargèd in his ear, would hardly bore it” (63-64). Volpone feigns the ultimate deafness when he circulates rumours of his death so that he can have “a rare meal of laughter” (5.2.87) by overhearing the gulls’ avarice and their shock at Mosca being named heir. Paradoxically, his simulated deafness allows Volpone to listen to speeches that he would not otherwise hear. This ability to hear what he should not is underscored by Corvino’s suspicions that Volpone can “perceive” and “hear” (1.5.38, 50), and by Mosca’s suggestion that Volpone can sense “[n]o more than a blind harper” (39). While Corvino is initially reassured by this remark, Mosca’s statement actually implies that Volpone has better hearing than one would expect: blind harpers, like others who were blind and whose hearing did not have to compete with their vision, were believed to have superior hearing and this was thought to account for their musical ability. Nonetheless, with acute hearing comes the risk of listening to unwanted noise as the ear “drags in each voice and sound” (Fletcher V.39.3), and Volpone suffers from such a problem. In order to prove that his master is indeed deaf, Mosca subjects Volpone to excruciating verbal violence, shouting insults into his ear and encouraging Corvino to do the same. Such a loud noise would certainly cause Volpone physical pain, demonstrating the risks attendant on hearing and the potential for sound to damage the very organ that perceives it. The “slime” and “rain” (1.5.58, 61) Mosca notes flowing down Volpone’s cheeks could well be tears of pain, and it is little wonder that after Corvino’s departure, Volpone declares that Mosca “hast today outgone [him]self” and that he, Volpone, “will be troubled with no more” (85-86).

Mosca’s demonstration of Volpone’s supposed deafness may leave him with a desire to hear no more and may have even literally deafened him, at least temporarily; however, Volpone’s ability to discern his servant’s meaning has been faulty from the very beginning. In the opening scene, Mosca tells his master:

You will not lie in straw whilst moths and worms
 Feed on your sumptuous hangings and soft beds.
 You know the use of riches, and dare give, now,
 From that bright heap, to me, your poor observer. (1.1.62-63)

And Volpone responds to the pecuniary purpose of this flattery. He apparently fails to hear the potential irony behind these words, for Mosca is, of course, the moth or fly who “[f]eed[s] on [Volpone’s] sumptuous hangings.” Instead, Volpone declares that his servant “strikest on truth in all” and that those who call him “parasite” are simply “envious” (67-68). Volpone may recognize how Mosca deceives the dupes by “giv[ing] ’hem words; / Pour[ing] oil into their ears” (1.4.140-41), and how the dupes’ very desire to hear Mosca’s promises actually deafens them to the truth, but he fails to notice how the oil being poured into his ear limits his own ability to detect the flattery and deception inherent in Mosca’s speech. Volpone considers all that Mosca has said to be “true” (142); however, he is the one speaking his own ironic truth: “What a rare punishment / Is avarice to itself!” (142-43). He may recognize Corbaccio’s greed and relish his servant’s ability to dupe the old man into naming himself as heir (1.4.93-110), but Volpone fails later to discern how he too is manipulated by Mosca into naming him heir. His metaphoric deafness to Mosca’s wiles once again echoes Corbaccio’s literal deafness.

While Mosca may be contemptuous of parasites who “have your bare town-art, / . . . and therefore mould / Tales for men’s ears, to bait that sense” (3.1.14-17), a great part of his skill depends on his ability to persuade others to do as he suggests; he “bait[s]” their ears with a few well-chosen words that prompt them to do something they would not otherwise have done. Bonario certainly deems flattery to be Mosca’s *modus operandi* (3.2.10-11), and even as Mosca defends himself, he repeatedly refers to his ability to control his listener by “betraying counsels, / Whispering false lies, or mining men with praises, / [and] Train[ing] their credulity with perjuries” (27-29). While Jonson had no time for flattery (unless it was directed at himself) (Huebert, “A Shrew” 38), he knew it to be an effective and subversive method of “mining” or undermining a listener, particularly the wealthy and gentle born, and describes it as “a fine Pick-lock of tender eares” (*Discoveries* 43), a definition that indicates its ability to open an ear that would otherwise remain closed. Flattery could, despite the protective design of the ear, gain entrance and “influence” “the Judge” (Fletcher V.39.7), making it deaf to other voices. Nicholas Breton also damns the “Parisite” who uses flattery to achieve his ends,

considering such a character “the Image of iniquity” who “breakes into houses with his tongue, and pickes pockets with his flatterie” (*The Good and the Badde* 31). Like a stealthy thief whose presence is undetected until the loss is discovered, Mosca’s flattery infiltrates his undiscerning listeners, then works to destroy them. Volpone marvels at his servant’s skill, noting that the dupes cannot “scent” it (5.2.21). Mosca adds that neither can they “see’t” (22), for they are

. . . so possessed and stuffed with [their] own hopes
That anything, unto the contrary,
Never so true, or never so apparent,
Never so palpable, they will resist it. (24-27)

Aware of the dupes’ inability to detect Mosca’s flattery, Volpone is not only unaware of his own lack of aural discernment when it comes to his servant’s verbal proficiency, but he is made doubly vulnerable because he finds his servant’s manipulation of the dupes entertaining. Alexander Leggatt notes that, in the early scenes with the dupes, Volpone is “largely passive” and “more audience than actor” (“Suicide of Volpone” 20). Leggatt goes on to suggest that Volpone, wealthy and indolent, has nothing to do but be entertained (21), and his very desire to have such aural and visual stimulation limits his auditory discernment.

Volpone concludes that Mosca’s skill is “[l]ike a temptation of the devil” (28), further emphasizing his servant’s ability to infiltrate an unsuspecting listener’s ear.⁴² Like Satan, Mosca tempts his victims by his words. Indeed, as Michael Flachmann notes, Volpone calls his servant “my fine devil” (5.3.46) and his name, Mosca, the fly, connects him to the devil Beezlebub, or “Lord of the Flies” (Flachmann 140). His skill works both on the legacy hunters and on Volpone, who not only hands Mosca money in response to what he hears, but also desires to see Celia because of his servant’s initial hint at her beauty (1.5.106-14). Like Tarquin’s lust for Lucrece, Volpone’s desire for Celia is initially inflamed by what he hears, not by what he sees, and while Mosca later declares to Volpone, “Would you had never seen her” (2.4.12), Volpone accurately points out,

42. Satan’s ability to persuade Eve to eat the forbidden fruit will be considered in chapter 3.

“Nay, would thou / Hadst never told me of her” (12-13).⁴³ Equally, Mosca entices Volpone to “go beyond” the “masterpiece” (5.2.13-14) of the court case, and thus to play dead and name his servant heir, by first claiming that such an act would be impossible and then hinting, in the most obsequious tone possible, that Voltore deserves to be tricked:

. . . your advocate:
 He’s taken pains, in faith, sir, and deserved,
 In my poor judgment (I speak it under favour,
 Not to contrary you, sir), very richly —
 Well—to be cozened. (43-47)

Volpone eagerly takes the bait and declares, “[F]or thy sake, at thy entreaty, / I will begin e’en now to vex ‘em all, / This very instant” (55-57). While Barish argues that this final cozening of the legacy hunters is a “notorious example” of how “the mainspring of the plot [has] run down” and how Jonson “must forcibly rewind it in order to bring on the catastrophe” (79), Leggatt argues that Volpone’s “masquerade of death” grows out of the voluptuary’s desire for entertainment (“Suicide of Volpone” 22). I would add that it also demonstrates how well Volpone’s ear has been oiled by Mosca, and how he, like the legacy hunters, is now “stuffed with his own hopes.” Mosca’s carefully phrases his suggestion so that his master takes the bait to go one better. Moreover, while Volpone begins to describe the “foxing” of the scavengers, it is Mosca who suggests that they should “have it ravished from their mouths” (68), prompting Volpone to come up with the plan of presenting Mosca as his heir.

Even as Mosca uses verbal acrobatics to dupe those who lack auditory discernment, such as the inheritance hunters and his master, he occasionally errs by thinking that everyone is equally hard of hearing. Having placed Bonario so that he will hear his father disinherit him—where he “may hear all” (3.6.1)—Corvino and Celia’s premature arrival forces Mosca to move the young man to where “he can hear nothing”

43. As Howard Marchitell notes, Mosca ensures that Volpone cannot resist his description of Celia’s beauty by equating it with his master’s gold (1.5.114; Marchitell 295).

(3.7.17). Anne Barton argues that “Mosca makes a terrible mistake” by ignoring that Bonario might move from where he is placed (115), but the stage direction in the folio text specifically notes that when Bonario hears Celia’s cries, “[h]e . . . leaps out from where Mosca had placed him” (3.7.265). What Mosca fails to consider is not whether Bonario will move, but how well he can hear, and the young man has such acute hearing that Mosca ponders, “Who would have thought he would have hearkened so?” (3.8.10).⁴⁴ Mosca’s failure to consider what particular characters can discern continues when Voltore overhears him declare absolute allegiance to Corbaccio (3.9.11, 19). Here, Mosca is able to pacify Voltore with his skilful tongue but, ultimately, his failure to prevent the Avocatori from hearing Volpone’s declaration: “I am Volpone, and this is my knave” (5.12.89) leads to his downfall. The Avocatori may consider that Mosca has, with his “impuden[t]” emulation of a “gentleman of Venice” “abused the court” (5.12.110-11); however, as Voltore notes in the first court case, the Avocatori’s ears have been “strangely abusèd” (4.5.30) before this. Unlike the blind harper whose visual impairment permits greater concentration on aural stimuli, the Avocatori are not only blind to Volpone’s disguise, but also deafened by Voltore’s rhetoric and the lies of Corbaccio, Corvino, and Lady Would-be so that they fail to discern Bonario and Celia’s innocence. Indeed, with the exception of Mosca, it is difficult to find a character in *Volpone* whose ears are not abused. The inheritance hunters are subjected to Mosca’s lies and to his abuse once he is named heir, while Volpone is exposed to his flattery, his verbal abuse, and his insinuations. According to Volpone, his ears are also abused by Lady Would-be, whose voice he considers a “fever / Ent’ring in at mine ears” (3.4.8-9), and he fears physical mutilation of his ears for his attempted rape of Celia (3.8.19). Bonario’s ears are exposed to hearing his reputation maligned in court and his father disown him, all because his ears were first opened by Mosca’s feigned distress (3.2.11-37). Celia, having

44. Bonario hears Celia while Volpone is deaf to her appeal, despite her specific request that he use his ears and eyes to note her distress and let her go: “If you have ears that will be pierced—or eyes / That can be opened— . . . / Do me the grace to let me ’scape” (3.7.239-40, 244). Orkin suggests that Volpone cannot hear Celia’s language because it has no meaning to him, surrounded as he is by the discourse of hedonism (47).

listened to Volpone's mountebank speech, is verbally abused and physically threatened by Corvino for her "itching ears" (2.5.5), abuse that is repeated when she refuses to "shew [her]self / Obedient, and a wife" (3.7.30-31).⁴⁵ In addition, not only is Celia subject to Corvino's vile language and Volpone's flattery, promises, and threats, but she also hears Corvino destroy her reputation, again in repugnant terms, in court. His abuse is so severe that she faints. Even in the sub-plot, the theme of verbal deceit continues as Peregrine ponders who is the gull and who is being gulled (2.1.24), and Sir Politic insists that in a foreign land one should "never speak a truth" (4.1.17). Not only must Sir Politic suffer his wife's false accusation that he consorted with a cross-dressed prostitute, but also Peregrine accuses him of plotting against the Venetian state, though it is obvious to all that he lacks the intelligence to do so.

When one considers the list of verbal abuses in this play, it is no surprise that characters feign deafness, show selective hearing, or fail to interpret correctly what they hear. Laura Tosi notes that Jonson repeatedly presents his characters in dialogue with an uncooperative speaker. Such "conflictual verbal exchange," she argues, "is at the heart of theatricality" (147). It does not, however, permit effective communication. Jonson's knaves repeatedly flout the Gricean maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner necessary for cooperative conversation.⁴⁶ Jonson's speakers break a number of these maxims, most obviously that of quality, in that they frequently do not tell the truth, and even when they adhere to the rules of cooperative conversation, their intention may be to deceive. For example, politeness is necessary for cooperative conversation, but Jonson's knaves, including Mosca, frequently use this strategy to coax listeners and to disguise

45. While Corvino's definition of appropriate wifely behaviour apparently changes dramatically between these two scenes, his anger first being directed at Celia's "[b]eing too open" (2.5.63) when she listens to the mountebank, and later at her refusal to be open to Volpone, his concept of wifeliness remains fixed as he insists that she hear and obey him (2.5.69; 3.7.20, 93) no matter how arbitrary his demands. The connection between female listening and obedience is further explored in chapters 3 and 4.

46. See Grice, 25-31, for a definition of each of these maxims and a discussion of their importance in effective communication.

their true intentions (Tosi 154). Mosca's speech in 1.1.40-66, aimed at getting money from Volpone, adheres to the maxims of quality, relation, and manner, in that he speaks the truth, responds to Volpone's previous speech, and is polite.⁴⁷ He may exceed the necessary quantity of speech required for effective conversation, and he may avoid stating the whole truth about how Volpone makes his fortune, but he does not specifically violate any of Grice's maxims for cooperative communication.

Mosca and the other Jonsonian knaves accomplish their aims partly because their listeners believe that they are engaged in cooperative communication. They do not suspect the speaker of breaking or subverting the necessary maxims, and they fail to detect deceit or the intentional manipulation of such maxims as quantity or manner. Jonson's duping plots may involve visual disguise as a method of deception, but those plots are frequently grounded in verbal deception, as shown by Volpone's need for Mosca's lies and flattery to support the disguises he assumes. Tosi remarks that "[l]anguage becomes a sort of trap which the dupes cannot help falling into" (154). Lacking the auditory discernment to detect deceit or a manipulation of the rules of cooperative communication, these listeners have ears vulnerable to attack. The attack often begins with the "pick-lock" of flattery, before going on to include the barrage of jargon (one has only to think of the jargon pervading *The Alchemist* as well as the jargon adopted by Volpone as Scoto of Mantua), and a false representation of the relationship between the knaves (Tosi 155-57). The association is often falsely represented as conflictual, as when Mosca suggests to Corvino that he is willing to murder Volpone (1.5.68).⁴⁸ Tosi goes on to argue that this verbal deception, which she terms "verbal violence" (147), is "an aggressive social act" that not only prevents the dupe from learning the true facts, but also makes him/her a figure of ridicule (150). Moreover, the

47. Neither does Mosca break any Gricean maxims in the speech in which he suggests tricking Voltore further (5.2.41-47).

48. Ironically, this false representation is realized during the course of the play, with Mosca wanting Volpone to remain "dead" so that he can continue to revel in his newly inherited fortune.

verbal attack not only occurs at the level of meaning, but can also escalate to include the assault of noise. When Mosca yells insults into his master's ears, Volpone is less likely to register the violence done to his psyche than the damage done to his ear by the noise. Verbal aggression may intensify from "mining men with praises" through deceit to deafening noise, but all infiltrate and damage an unsuspecting listener.

While verbal aggression may be an inescapable trap set to damage a listener, the listener's role as a willing victim cannot be ignored, particularly regarding such strategies as flattery and deceit. Bacon notes that the success of verbal deception is partly the responsibility of the listener. In describing the vices of learning, he states that the third vice is the use of deceit or untruth, and writes that this can be divided into the "delight in deceiving, and aptness to be deceived" (*Advancement of Learning* 74). Even Jonson notes that there is a problem with "having a paire of eares unskilfull to heare lyes" (*Discoveries* 53); however, his dupes are not only inept at detecting deceit, but also demonstrate a predilection to being deceived. Filled with their own dreams of gaining Volpone's fortune, the inheritance hunters are eager to believe that Mosca is working for their sole benefit. They fail to consider that he has little reason to help them and therefore to be speaking the truth, and that he is more likely to be deceitful, motivated by his desire to help his master (and himself). In her discussion of Jonson's duping plots, Ann Blake suggests that current audiences have a different perception of what defines a comic subject compared to Jonson's contemporaries. She argues that nowadays the attacks on the dupes are considered unduly harsh, but that in the early seventeenth century "dwarves, madmen and simpletons" were frequently objects of ridicule and laughter. She suggests that Jonson does not encourage his audience to sympathize with the dupes, but to identify with the wits or dupers, as characters are not delineated in moral terms of good and bad, but by the intellectual standard of clever and foolish. To sympathize with the dupes, an audience would have to align themselves with the gullible fools being mocked and ridiculed onstage (Blake 120-21). The opinion that the dupes receive harsh treatment,

however, may have less to do with the change in what audiences find funny, and more to do with a perceptual shift regarding the role of listeners.⁴⁹

Twentieth-century critics such as Tosi and Blake might find the dupers overly harsh and verbally aggressive because they fail to consider how the dupes contribute to their own problems. In contrast, early modern authors believed that the dupes, because of their perverse judgement in accepting lies as truth, were culpable for their own misfortune. Bacon is not the only one who considers an “aptness to be deceived” to be a vice. Primaudaye also believes that credulity indicates an inherent moral weakness. After noting the “pernitious effects” of backbiting and slander (460), he writes:

Such is the force & efficacie of lying ioyned with flattery ouer that soule, which hath no sound iudgement of reason to discern truth from falsehood, or a good nature from a malicious. True it is, that this comfort cannot be taken away from good men, namely, to be perswaded that the sleights of backbiters and slanderers are able to preuaile but litle against the inuincible tower of sacred vertue, & of an assured hope well grounded, which, whatsoeuer commeth to passe, triumph alwaies, and victoriously hold enuy and backbiting vnder their feete. (461)

Hence, to be deceived by flattery and deceit indicates an inherent moral weakness in the listener, a lack of “sound iudgement,” for those who are of truly upright character will “triumph alwaies.” Furthermore, Thomas Overbury makes it clear that the weakness which makes a listener susceptible to deceit is actually the same as that shown by Midas. In his discussion of how a “Dissembler” operates, Overbury notes, “Vnto the eye hee is pleasing, vnto the eare not harsh, but vnto the vnderstanding intricate, and full of windings Hee winnes not by battry, but vndermining, and his racke is soothing” (D2^r). He adds that while such a dissembler is undetectable to the eye and ear, he can be discerned by judgement. “A golden Asse,” though, cannot distinguish deceit, for such a

49. Blake notes that the dupers refer “to the gulls as sub-human, manipulatable objects” (125). These are, as discussed earlier, similar terms to those used to refer to the deaf in the same period and are suggestive of the way that both dull-wittedness and deafness were considered to render one less than human.

person not only is blind, but “swallowes flatterers for friends” (D3¹).⁵⁰ Overbury’s language suggests both the capacity of flattery to infiltrate an ear with ease, and the listener’s own appetite, or desire, to hear such speech. Like Midas, who is deaf to the quality of Apollo’s music and prefers to hear Pan’s pipes, dupes are deaf to the truth and desire to hear only false praise. They suffer from both the disease of inadequate listening as they fail to identify deceptive speech, and the disease of listening too well to speech they should ignore, and which will only further prevent them from hearing the truth.

Theatre audiences of Jonson’s period may have more readily accepted the dupes’ culpability in their downfall because of their failure to detect the deceit in what they hear, but his audiences may have also been disturbed by the way their own desire for entertainment, for sensory stimulation, is represented onstage by Volpone. Like them, he demands to be entertained and is willing to pay for it. It is therefore difficult for an audience to condemn him for failing to discern Mosca’s self-interest, the truth behind his lies, without also reflecting on their own role as listeners attending a play that is not only entertaining, but is also a fictional tale, a web of lies told by speakers—actors—who are paid to disguise themselves. If Volpone is seduced into “go[ing] beyond” (5.2.14) his intitial cozening of the legacy hunters to stage his own death and become the ideal audience to Mosca’s performance as his heir, an audience who sees and hears (and gives his last penny for the show), but cannot respond, then I would suggest that Jonson, through his characterization of Volpone, encourages his audiences to do the same. We cannot criticize the voluptuary, reprehensible as his behaviour might be, for we too have been seduced into listening to a fabrication; we have, through our suspension of disbelief, through our delight in the dialogue, accepted the dramatic action (at least within the space of the theatre and the time of the performance) as real, and we have paid for the pleasure of this seduction. Moreover, Jonson has limited our ability to criticize his play by revealing the audience to itself. The actor playing Volpone closes the play by asking for

50. Overbury particularly identifies gullible young men as “golden Asse[s]” and claims they are sons of a “very very Woman” (D¹) who stands in contrast to a “Good Woman” (C4^v).

the audience's applause, "hop[ing] there is no suff'ring due / For any fact which [the fox] hath done 'gainst you" (Epilogue 3-4). How, indeed, can audience members "censure" the actor who has kept them entertained, even as he has demonstrated their own failure to discern what they knew all along—that they, like the dupes, have shown an "aptness" and even a delight in being deceived?

Epicoene

While Jonson presents his audiences with one model of diseased listening through Volpone and the inheritance hunters, who only selectively attend to what they hear and fail to discern the veracity of what is said, he presents his audiences with another model of diseased listening in *Epicoene* (1610). Morose wants to save himself the trouble of listening to anything other than the sound of his own voice and tries to avoid all "common noises" (*Epicoene* 1.1.153) such as the hammering of smiths, the calls of street-sellers, and the songs of wandering musicians. He even insists that his servants not speak to him, but communicate in sign language, as "all discourses, but mine owne, afflict me; they seem harsh, impertinent, and irksome" (2.1.3-4). A true misanthrope, Morose wants to live in a world in which he is the only one making a sound.⁵¹ He therefore isolates himself from the world of noise not only by feigning deafness while still listening to others as Volpone does, but also by creating conditions that simulate the experience of one who is deaf. With his nightcaps tied over his ears, in a soundproofed room, and with servants who answer him "by signs" (2.1.5), Morose has effectively made himself at least temporarily deaf. The image of Morose wearing his many nightcaps and cringing at the sound of his servant's slippers is laughable enough, but his love of his

51. While I refer to Morose as a misanthrope I agree with Marjorie Swann that this is not the cause of his desire to disinherit his nephew. Morose's misanthropy is directed particularly against people of the new society—city dwellers, merchants (street-sellers), men and women of fashion. Dauphine is both a popular man of fashion and wit, and a social climber ("he would be knighted, forsooth" [2.5.88-89]). It is his attempt to literally lord it over his uncle that particularly angers Morose and encourages him to disinherit his nephew (Swann 299-300).

own voice adds comic irony to this picture. Add his single-minded insistence on living in a silent world and finding a silent wife, and he is a perfect target for the wits' plot (Mirabelli 320). His nephew's friends therefore insist that it is the duty of those "that love him" (1.1.153) to introduce him to the hearing (and noise-making) world "for his exercise, to breathe him. He would grow resty else in his ease. His virtue would rust without action" (171-72). While the real motive for their noise making may be much less altruistic, they claim that they, like the early educators of the deaf, want him to hear for his own good, for his moral well-being.⁵² In addition, they can argue that his desire for silence may be linked to melancholy, and certain noises, including those of "music mirth, and merry company" were accepted therapy for those suffering from a melancholic humour (Flachmann 133). However, despite their best efforts, Morose's auditory discernment appears to be deteriorating. While he has previously fired servants for having squeaking shoes, he now requires them to talk "in a trunk" (1.1.171), suggesting that he has difficulty hearing them as a trunk or speaking tube, as already noted, is an instrument that amplifies the voice. Once overly sensitive to sound, Morose has deafened himself by limiting his acoustic environment to the sound of his own voice.

Just as Volpone finds Lady Would-be's voice particularly irritating, so Morose finds certain noises especially disconcerting. Not only does he object to "common noises," the inevitable sounds of living in a city with a growing, mobile population, but also he is disturbed by reminders of disease and mortality such as the church bells that now ring in "perpetuity" "by reason of the sickness" (1.1.183). Once married to Epicoene, he especially objects to the sounds of her body, those non-verbal sounds all humans have in common: "The spitting, the coughing, the laughter, the neeing, the

52. Barton argues that Truewit "turns loose a *charivari*" but insists that "it has been stripped of moral purpose" (123). Bruce Bohrer also compares Morose's punishment to such public humiliation, likening the noise used to torment him to the rough music used to chastise old men for marrying young women, and Morose sitting on the crossbeam to a Skimmington ride in which an offender was publicly humiliated by riding an animal facing its tail. However, he argues that Morose's punishment does have moral purpose as it establishes the boundaries of socially appropriate behaviour (17-22).

farting” (4.1.7-8). He even demands a reduction in the parson’s fee because the man coughs at him (3.4.13-15). Not only does Morose dislike the noise of humanity and of being human, connecting such noises primarily with the corruption and mortality of the body, but he is also intolerant of others’ speech. He even objects to such common formalities as ““God save you”” and ““You are welcome”” (5.3.23-24) as he “cannot see, what the profit can be of these words” (25-26). For this reason, he teaches his servant, Mute, to sign to him. However, while Morose does so ostensibly to avoid the “harsh, impertinent, and irksome” sound of other people’s voices, it allows him to instruct Mute in a lengthy speech during which he holds centre-stage—his voice is the only thing heard by Mute (and the theatre audience). It is no wonder that he is so upset when he is rudely interrupted by a blast of Truewit’s post-horn. In this scene Morose does not tell Mute to nod, though this would be the most common sign of agreement according to Bulwer’s *Chirologia*; instead, he insists that Mute make a leg, a servile gesture of obeisance. Should Mute wish to contradict any of Morose’s statements he must speak, for Morose does not teach him a gesture to show disagreement, further underscoring that, for Morose, silence denotes acquiescence and noise, any noise, denotes discord or disagreement with his perception of things. According to Morose, all noise is an attack, an invasion of his seclusion, but the speech of others is especially disturbing as it can only signify conflict.

The violent terms in which sound is described in this period, the description of how it affects the ear, which is “smitten” and “frighted,” and even the experience of Volpone and the dupes validate Morose’s concerns about noise in general and the speech of others in particular. Morose not only wants to avoid the pain that brings tears to Volpone’s eyes by someone shouting in his ear, but he also suspects all speech of

containing “verbal violence” to borrow Tosi’s term.⁵³ He assumes the safest course of action is to avoid hearing any voice other than his own. Morose tells Cutbeard and Otter, the supposed lawyer and divine, that he is simply taking the advice of his father, who had warned him to

look to what things were necessary to the carriage of my life In short, that I should endear myself to rest and avoid turmoil, which now is grown to be another nature to me. So that I come not to your public pleadings or your places of noise; not that I neglect those things that make for the dignity of the commonwealth, but for the mere avoiding of clamors, and impertinencies of orators, that know not how to be silent. (5.3.47-51)

His father’s advice to avoid distractions that might cause Morose to stray from an appropriate “carriage” of life may be prudent and echoes that of many parents throughout history, but Morose has (mis)interpreted his father’s words, taking them to mean that he should avoid all “turmoil,” which he considers to be embodied solely in sound (Barton 131).⁵⁴ He therefore shuns all noise, and while he suggests that he does not “neglect those things, that make for the dignity of the commonwealth,” it is clear that his hatred of noise is so extreme that his insistence on silence and solitude does just that.

When Morose begins his search for a wife, he has only two requirements: she must be “dumb” and “able to bear children” (1.2.22-23) as he wishes to disinherit his nephew, Dauphine, whom he believes to be in league with those who torment him with noise (1.2.8-10), and whom he fears will “reign over [him]” (2.5.89) with his newly

53. A number of critics, including Jonas Barish, Terence Hawkes, and Alexander Leggatt, connect Morose’s demand for silence with his rejection of human society (Barish 183; Hawkes, *Shakespeare’s* 164; Leggatt, “Morose” 221). Barish argues that Morose’s demand for silence indicates his “horror of all strong sensory experience,” his resistance to human interaction, and suggests that noise is the “emblem of life,” but like the plague signalled by the ringing bells, it is a sign of “a *common* disease” against which there is no defence (183).

54. The ideal of such a contained life in which one “should endear [one’s] self to rest” has already been parodied in the opening scene, in which Clerimont is described as a man “that can melt away his time, and never feels it!” (1.1.22-23), and Truewit suggests that the only thing that a man should do is “nothing, or that, which when ’tis done, is as idle” (31).

purchased title (Swann 299). Like Volpone, whose wealth has gained him pre-eminence in Venetian society, Morose wants to maintain his position in society, and he intends to make his own heir. Both men, though, in their wish to defraud Bonario and Dauphine out of their inheritances, challenge the socially approved order of their respective playworlds and are punished for this. Their disruption of the “common-wealth” is not tolerated: both lose their position in the social hierarchy and are publicly humiliated. In addition, as Howard Marchitell notes, both must profess themselves impotent, indicating their failure to create their own heirs (301). Moreover, Morose’s desire to marry and father his own heir while continuing to shun the hearing and speaking world his nephew’s friends so desperately want him to experience is contradictory. As Terence Hawkes notes, “[T]his is the play’s central paradox” (*Shakespeare’s* 162), and Clerimont takes great delight pointing out the inherent contradiction in Morose’s desire to be part of society through marriage and his continued rejection of noise, an essential element of social involvement. Clerimont notes how Morose has employed Cutbeard “to harken him out a dumb woman” (1.2.21-22), obviously a literally impossible task.⁵⁵

Morose’s dislike of female speech parallels Volpone’s abhorrence of Lady Would-be’s speech (Marchitell 300), both of them comparing speaking women to a fury (*Volpone* 3.4.41; *Epicoene* 4.1.10). While Volpone can perform for the male fortune hunters who come to visit and can feign deafness to them, he shuns Lady Would-be altogether. He objects most to her “torrent” of words (*Volpone* 3.4.64), clearly agreeing with both Morose and Sophocles that “your highest female grace is silence” (78). Morose, too, considers the language of the Collegiates to be a “flood” (*Epicoene* 3.6.2) that overwhelms him. Lanier suggests that the particular irritation at female speech exhibited by Volpone and Morose, their desire to keep women quiet, is a reflection of Jonson’s linking of “the Stoic ideal of masculine virtue and silence” (10). Lanier goes on to note, “For Jonson, manly silence is not merely the absence of discourse. It is, rather,

55. As we might anticipate from his name and occupation, Cutbeard’s role in *Epicoene* parallels that of King Midas’s barber as he is not only privy to Morose’s search for a silent bride, but is also partly responsible for Morose’s public confession of impotency.

the *resistance* to feminine discourse, a resistance, it would seem, that must be marked to be recognized” (12). Hence, Volpone seeks to silence Lady Would-be and later the protests of Celia, while Morose and even the wits reject the discourse of the Collegiates. In contrast to Lanier, I do not believe that Jonson considers this resistance to female speech a sign of “masculine virtue,” and even Lanier admits that Jonson “sets up . . . Morose, for ridicule, because Morose overvalues silence as a sign of his manly autonomy” (12). Jonson’s female characters may frequently be garrulous, suggesting that he considers women prone to “foolish and affected eloquence”; however, he makes it clear that they are not the only ones. Hawkes notes that for Jonson “[f]alse manliness” is also associated with a “spurious or ‘doubtfull’ use of language” (*Shakespeare’s* 158). Certainly, Jonson suggests that the ideal is not silence, but rather “plaine downe-right wisdom” (*Discoveries* 17). Contrary to Lodge and Traherne, Jonson does not associate wisdom with deafness or a refusal to listen to others, but rather indicates that those who do not listen well are more likely to mistake empty words for wisdom and therefore to be duped by them. Finally, while Epicoene may be an apparent female threat to this ideal of silence and to Morose’s authority, she is of course a male threat, both as a boy disguised as a woman, and as the pawn of another competing male—Dauphine (Lanier 14).⁵⁶

Morose may strenuously object to the excessive language of the college ladies; nevertheless, his examination of Epicoene is evidence that he does not want a completely silent wife. Like Corvino, who accuses Celia’s ears of being too open and then not open

56. While the threat to Morose’s silent world is finally removed by Dauphine, and Morose himself is silenced by his nephew’s revelation that Epicoene is a boy, ironically, Jonson’s play was silenced by a woman, Lady Arabella Stuart, who took exception to La Foole’s remark regarding Daw’s ability to map out “the Prince of Moldavia, and . . . his mistress, Mistress Epicoene” (5.1.20-21), assuming that the line alluded to herself as she was once involved with the opportunist Stephano Janiculo, and not to Daw’s mistress, Mistress Epicoene. Lanier suggests that Lady Arabella misreads the line (15), but she actually mishears it, as the play was apparently banned a month after its first performance and two years before the first known edition (Herford and Simpson V: 142-48; Partridge 201). Lady Arabella’s mishearing may also help to explain why Jonson repeatedly included women in his list of audience members who would not understand the language of his plays.

enough, Morose first considers Epicoene's mouth too closed and then far too open. He may wish to have a quiet wife, but "silent curtsies, . . . are too courtless and simple" (2.5.26-27). He does not want a wife whose silence signifies "stoutnesse of stomacke, and stubbornnesse of heart" as William Gouge suggests it might (282). Instead, he desires a wife who is "sparing in speech . . . willing to hearken to the word of knowledge comming out of her husbands mouth" (Gouge 282). Like Corvino, Morose wants a wife who is completely submissive to him and has no objection to hearing her express her obedience (Leggatt, "Morose" 221). Perhaps for this reason, Morose tells his silent would-be bride, "[Y]ou may speak, though Cutbeard and my man might not: for of all sounds only the sweet voice of a fair lady has the just length of mine ear" (2.5.21-23).⁵⁷ Indeed, he suggests to Cutbeard that her poverty is a good thing as it will make her more dependent on him, more grateful for her marriage, and therefore "more loving and obedient" (2.5.81). Morose wants a wife who speaks when he commands and who is silent when he tells her to be quiet. As Marchitell notes, in both *Volpone* and *Epicoene*, male authority is predicated on limiting women's ability to speak (299). When a woman can speak and be heard then she can assume a position of authority as Epicoene does after the marriage. Morose has not married a puppet (*Epicoene* 3.4.34-35) who will only open her mouth at his direction; she is not the obedient wife he had thought. Instead, with her tongue and her rejection of "unnatural dumbness" (47) she is "regent" and "govern[s]" the family (50, 49).

While both *Volpone* and *Morose* are masters in their all-male households, their incursion into heterosexual society, their attempt to bring a woman into their homes, leads to a disruption of their domestic government and a humiliating public unmaning. Epicoene assumes control of Morose's household as soon as they are married as she makes clear by her speech, and even though this is an inversion of the accepted form of domestic government, Morose's public declaration that he is "no man" (5.4.40) demonstrates his inability to reign in his own home. Equally, *Volpone's* schemes threaten

57. Morose only wants to hear the soft voice of acquiescence, but as Partridge notes, this "asinine phrase" also reveals just how long Morose's ears are (8).

to come crashing around his ears only after Celia enters his home and her cries are heard by Bonario. Volpone, too, must publicly display himself as impotent, and he fears the effects of his disguise will be more lasting than he would like (*Volpone* 5.1.1-17). Indeed, as his very next act is to make Mosca master of all his possessions and to dress him in his gown (5.2.69-70), his public display of impotency appears to have had an effect on his ability to govern his household. He, like Morose, is no longer man enough for the job and, fittingly, his final punishment is to be subject to all the diseases he has feigned—including impotency, one assumes. Both men make asses of themselves by being duped by social subordinates (as Morose's heir, Dauphine is dependent on his uncle's largesse), and by demonstrating a Midas-like lack of auditory discernment, along with a Midas-like tyranny over a world of their own making. As a result, they lose their power and must declare themselves impotent—unfit to control their own households.

Mario DiGangi remarks on the sexual puns circulating around the term “ass” in the early modern period, noting that an ass is not only a beast of burden but also the body part that bears the weight of sexual intercourse, particularly sodomitical intercourse (180). Sodomy, he notes, is not simply a term that describes a particular sexual act during this period, but rather was used to signify those believed to threaten the accepted social order. He writes, “[I]t always signifies social disorder of a frightening magnitude” (182). Pointing to Volpone's evident delight in his servant Mosca (1.3.78-79; 5.3.103-04), DiGangi suggests that the homoerotic inferences in Volpone's relationship with Mosca demonstrate its threat to social order from the beginning (192).⁵⁸ Volpone's relationship

58. In contrast to DiGangi's reading of homoeroticism in Volpone's relationship with Mosca, Huebert argues that Volpone is celebrating his victory over the dupes in the same way as members of a sports team might embrace after a victory. He therefore argues that this is “a demonstration (not a denial) of manliness” (“A Shrew” 47). I would argue that manliness is a difficult concept to apply to works of another historical period without it being clouded by the contemporary definition. In addition, it is interesting to note that when Volpone moves to embrace his servant, Mosca rejects the advance and tells his master, “Keep you still, sir” (1.3.79). Huebert may consider Volpone as a man who “can seduce almost anyone and knows that he can” (50) but at least two characters in this play fail to be interested in his overtures.

with Mosca clearly comes to an end when the servant dons his master's robe and Volpone's disguise of impotence becomes a reality. In contrast, the homoerotic relationships that pervade *Epicoene*, with the exception of the unconsummated relationship between Morose and Epicoene, do not disrupt accepted social order. Clerimont can have "his mistress abroad and his ingle at home" (1.1.24-25), and Dauphine can keep his "gentleman's son" (*Epicoene* 5.4.182), especially as it is through this relationship that he re-establishes the approved social order of the playworld—himself as Morose's heir. While the sexual implications of Volpone's and Morose's impotence is difficult to ignore, I want to suggest that their impotence is also connected to their deafness, their failure (or in Morose's case, his refusal) to listen appropriately. Volpone seduced by the entertainment Mosca offers, fails to register the verbal violence to which he is subjected by his servant. He does not realize how Mosca's flattery has both opened his ear to potential damage and deafened him. As a result, like the deaf in early modern society who were denied full legal rights and were prevented from marrying and making a will (Bulwer, *Philocophus* 109), Volpone is determined to be powerless in a court of law, prevented from declaring his own heir, and confined to a hospital for the diseased and disabled. Equally, Morose, who insists on behaving as if he is deaf, has his marriage annulled and is forced to make a will preferring his nephew. Indeed, like those who must have a guardian appointed for them because of their disability, he tells Dauphine, "I will become thy Ward" (5.4.155). The impotency Volpone and Morose demonstrate is not simply a sexual failure, but a complete loss of power resulting from their failure to listen correctly. While Volpone may have been deafened by the voice of his servant, and Morose by his own voice, the consequence is the same—they lose control of their households and potentially of themselves. It is only because Dauphine is not "unreasonable" (156) that he does not become his uncle's guardian.

Morose, of course, is not the only dupe in *Epicoene*. The Collegiate women are duped into revealing their secrets to a boy, and Thomas Otter is duped by Truewit and Clerimont into speaking against his wife in her hearing. The Otters clearly present an inversion of accepted household government, his wife being the "Princess" and Otter her

“subject” (3.1.28, 29). Mistress Otter believes she controls her husband’s tongue, warning him, “I’ll commit you to the master of the Garden, if I hear but a syllable more” (25-26), though out of her hearing, he is known to “rail” against her like an “Anabaptist” (3.2.13). By “[s]peak[ing] to him of her” (4.2.44), Clerimont tricks him into declaring that he married his “Princess” for her money, and that she is simply a collection of cosmetics and false parts, so that “[e]very part o’ the town owns a piece of her” (90), while Truewit fetches Mistress Otter to hear this diatribe. Inevitably, she falls on her husband and beats him, only to be chased away by Morose who “will have no such examples” (112) of female dominance in his house. Jack Daw and La Foole, however, suffer a more serious duping than the Otters and the Collegiates, and the plot against them is effected by Truewit’s knowledge of their potential fears and his ability to control what they hear.

Philip Mirabelli goes to great lengths to argue that Truewit is true to his name and has sufficient wit to realize that Dauphine wants his uncle to marry Epicoene. Truewit’s diatribe against the perils of marriage is, according to Mirabelli, simply a formal epideictic oration that is not intended to persuade (317). Barton, though, argues that even Dauphine’s friends, including Truewit, are duped by the final revelation of Epicoene’s gender. She goes on to suggest that the competitive spirit apparent between the friends indicates both self-love and the need to keep others in their place. In other words, while Morose may exhibit an extreme case of misanthropy, unable to bear the sound of another’s voice, all the characters exhibit signs of the self-centredness in which misanthropy and its accompanying deafness are rooted (130-31). I agree that Truewit is, as his name suggests, truly witty or perceptive, and that this ability to know others allows him to determine, at least in part, Dauphine’s plans, and to plot with apparent ease against Daw and La Foole to the benefit of Dauphine. While Mirabelli stresses the etymological root of wit as associated with perception or seeing (322), he does not consider that knowing others, being perspicacious, depends not merely on visual, but also on auditory perception. One has to have both a keen eye *and* a keen ear—something that La Foole who is “none o’ the Wits” (1.3.29) lacks. As Clerimont notes, La Foole inappropriately interrupts judges, bishops, and lawyers when they are speaking, and “invites his guests to

[plays and suppers] *aloud*" (32-33; emphasis added); he behaves as one who is deaf to the speech of others and to the impact of his own voice. Truewit, on the other hand, like Mosca, knows how flattery opens other men's ears and allows him to "take their understandings in a purse-net" (3.3.85), and that men like Daw and La Foole "have nothing, not the use of their senses, but by tradition" (87). Knowing Daw and La Foole to be boasters and cowards, Truewit informs each of them that the other intends to fight him. For example, he tells Daw that he can hear La Foole coming and when his victim hides in fear, Truewit carries on a one-sided conversation from which Daw infers not only the blood-thirsty anger of his enemy, but also his very presence. He claims that he has indeed heard La Foole. As Truewit notes, "What a quick ear fear has!" (4.5.86).⁵⁹ That he succeeds in instilling the same fear in La Foole is clear by his remark, "Were't not a difficult thing to determine which of these two feared most?" (204-05).

Truewit attributes the "quick ear" of both Daw and La Foole to fear, but it is also a result of their inability to see what is going on. They are like the blind harper whose hearing is sharpened by a lack of sight. Truewit succeeds in having Dauphine beat both Daw and La Foole in the presence of the ladies, and Clerimont later adds insult to injury by getting the pair to boast publicly of their supposed sexual conquest of Epicoene. However, while Truewit, with Clerimont and Dauphine's aid, has successfully duped the Collegiates, the Otters, and the pretenders, and tormented Morose unmercifully, he too is outwitted by Dauphine's final revelation that Epicoene is a boy. Dauphine, with this *coup de grace*, raises the question of who is being duped by whom. As Truewit himself notes, and as Volpone discovers by experience, "often, . . . he that thinks himself the master-wit is the master-foole" (3.6.45-46). While Truewit has been responsible for several of the plots, he acknowledges that Dauphine, in this competition between wits, has "lurched [his] friends of the better half of the garland, by concealing this part of the plot!" (5.4.199-200). Yet, what Dauphine reveals is, of course, the obvious. Truewit, along with Jonson's own audience, knows that there is a boy beneath Epicoene's costume. Dauphine

59. This is proverbial (Tilley, F 134).

is just lifting the peruke on theatrical disguise. He is demonstrating that we are repeatedly duped not because we lack the wit or knowledge of something, but because we fail to acknowledge what we know. Leggatt writes:

Jonson's audience would be used to seeing men on the stage, announcing their marriages to boys who were pretending to be women, and they would accept the pretence as easily as one accepts any normal theatrical convention. The effect of Jonson's ending (reinforced by the way it is sprung on us as a surprise) is to startle us into laughter—laughter that acknowledges not just a clever plot device but a comic explosion of theatrical convention. ("Morose" 224)

Jonson reminds his audience, just as he does in *Volpone*, that within the theatre there is delight in being duped, particularly when what is revealed is already known. If the dupes are Midas-like in their lack of auditory discernment, Jonson appears to suggest that his audiences, even those with aristocratic "quick eares" (qtd. in Gurr 222), are also equally susceptible to being deceived.

Moreover, the susceptibility of the listening audience to theatrical deception emphasizes that just as Midas is not literally deaf, neither are Jonson's dupes or duped-wits—regardless of Morose's attempts. Rather, they have been metaphorically deafened by having their ears abused so that they can no longer understand what they hear. Primaudaye, in his zeal to encourage his readers to use their ears to hear God, insists, "[L]et vs apply these so beautifull and artificiall members, . . . to the glory of their Maker: & let them be deafe, & stopped vp against all dishonest things that might poison them" (376). He adds that those who fail to do so and who "abuse [their ears] so vilely, deserve that God should plucke them off, and stoppe them, and make them altogether deafe" (377). Jonson's dupes suffer such a fate. Eager to have their ears "abused" with flattery, they are exposed to verbally aggressive tactics that include lies and loud noise. As a result, they are indeed deafened so that they no longer have the auditory discernment to determine the truth of what they hear and exhibit characteristics, including "dumbness," associated with deafness in the early modern period. In other words, while Falstaff likens his feigned deafness to a "disease of not listening" (*2 Henry IV*. 1.2.111), certain types of metaphorical deafness may be more accurately described as a disease of

listening. That Jonson metaphorically deafens his own theatre audience with language that, while “chosen and excellent,” may be “furious, and *Bet’lem* like” (*Discoveries* 17) demonstrates both his skill as a playwright and the demands he places on his audiences to be “wise, / Much rather by [their] ears, than by [their] eyes” (*The Staple of News* Prologue 2, 5-6).

CHAPTER 2

THE KING'S EAR, THE KING'S BODY, AND THE KING'S CRY

Jonson's comedies not only explore forms of verbal violence and the effect of that violence on dupes who demonstrate a disease of listening in their inability to discern what they hear, but also indicate the subversive and destructive power of flattery. While flattery is a form of verbal violence that is initially undetectable, particularly to those who possess an inherent flaw according to writers such as Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Thomas Overbury, and Peter de la Primaudaye, the failure to detect it can cause devastating effects. An ear, already deaf to the true nature of flattery, can be further deafened so that the listener can no longer determine truth when it is heard. Indeed, flattery can lead to the very destruction of the listener, as in the case of Volpone, who literally destroys himself when he declares his own death in response to Mosca's manipulations. It certainly can lead to a loss of power—impotence—a state to which both Volpone and Morose must confess. It is the concern with how such an insidious vice can affect the powerful and lead to corruption and disease both within them and in the country they govern that prompts many of the cautions given to sovereigns and their counsellors about flattery and its effects. I will begin this chapter with an exploration of the advice given to rulers regarding their need to detect flattery and appropriate ways of listening before considering how the various constructions of listening may determine the characterization of a sovereign as “weak” and open to disease or “strong” and impenetrable.

Flattering Courtiers and Flattered Monarchs

The problem with flattery, particularly in a period in which social and political ambition was achieved by preferment, is that it is both a necessity and a vice. In the dialogue of *The Civile Conuersation*, Stefan Guazzo has one of his speakers, Anniball, respond to a criticism of flattery by noting, “Flatterie is the way to make friends, and winne preferment: and I am perswaded that hee which knoweth not howe to glose and flatter, knoweth not howe to behaue himselfe in companie” (I.33^v). Anniball even goes as far as to suggest that flattery encourages those being praised to strive for goodness, so

they become worthy of the undue praise. Few early modern writers, however, would agree with the idea of sycophancy as beneficial. Most deem it particularly vicious because of its inherent deceit. Guazzo, though, notes that it is not a particular type of speech or behaviour that is at issue, but the failure of that behaviour to reflect inner thought. He writes, “[T]here are some who whyle others speake, though they giue no eare at all vnto them, yet they nodde their heads, and abase their eyes, and with signes seeme to hold vpp their yeas and nayas, which is nothing else but meere flatterie” (I.34).¹ Listening, like speaking, is not inherently flattering, but *appearing* to listen when one is giving “no eare at all” is akin to speaking and not stating one’s true opinion. Discussions about flattery emphasize this concern with the gap between outward appearance and inner being that was pervasive at the turn of the seventeenth century due to the social upheaval of the time and people’s desire to have a method of “reading” others.²

Guazzo, even as he notes the need for flattery, warns his readers to be wary of listening to flatterers as they “either hath coosoned thee alreadie, or els goeth about to coosen thee” (I.36^v). The problem is that because flattery does not reveal the speaker’s true intention, it may stem from a motive undetectable to the listener. For example, Guazzo notes that “children, which imbrace their parentes to get something from them, are to be termed flatterers,” and warns that offspring should not “giue prayse, or shewe loue to their parentes, that may surmount their naturall and bounden duetie” (I.36^v), a warning that Lear’s two oldest daughters, Regan and Goneril, fail to heed. Guazzo may believe that “parentes are not so blinde, but that they see in this case the subtletie and

1. There is an anti-Catholic subtext to Guazzo’s remarks, which Bacon makes explicit in his definition of cunning. He writes, “It is a point of *Cunning*; to wait upon him, with whom you speake, with your eye; As the Jesuites give it in precept: For there be many Wise Men, that have Secret Hearts, and Transparant Countenances. Yet this would be done, with a demure Abasing of your Eye sometimes, as the Jesuites also doe use” (*Essayes* 70).

2. In *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*, Katharine Eisaman Maus discusses the societal preoccupation with the discrepancy between inward thought and outward appearance and how early modern drama deliberately explores the incongruity.

craft of their children” (I.36^v), but Lear obviously ignores Guazzo’s precepts. He fails to discern the motive of Goneril and Regan’s flattery even after he himself suggests it with his demand: “Which of you shall we say doth love us most? / That we our largest bounty may extend” (*King Lear* 1.1.49-50). Nonetheless, his demand for flattery is less of a problem than his acceptance of his daughters’ false protestations of love as truth. Kent is aghast at his monarch’s failure to recognize the gap between his daughters’ true feelings and their verbal expression.

The opening scene of *King Lear* (1604-5) may underscore the need for a father to detect the true nature of flattery, but the rest of the play details the destruction of king and country that occurs “[w]hen power to flattery bows. . . / When majesty stoops to folly” (1.1.148-49). The effects of attending to flattery without discerning its true nature may be devastating for a private individual, but for a king, the results are catastrophic for him and his subjects. While Lear’s deafness to his daughters’ true intentions is echoed in the metaphoric language of the play and mirrored by Gloucester’s failure to detect Edmund’s trickery, his failure to discern Goneril and Regan’s flattery and Cordelia’s true expression of love is not the sole cause of the unfolding tragedy. Marie Axton, in *The Queen’s Two Bodies*, agrees that although Lear sees his downfall as a result of his paternal rejection of Cordelia, he suffers not just because he is a father who makes a mistake, but because he is a king who errs. She states that “there is no remedy for his offence against his body politic Politically, Lear commits the original sin. Shakespeare, writing of it in the darkest hours of the Union debate [December 1605], holds out no hope of forgiveness and no palliative for the inexorable punishment” (139).³ Lear’s desire to abdicate his kingly responsibilities and his insistence on dividing the country while retaining the name

3. Axton notes the importance of considering Plowden’s arguments regarding monarchy and property when examining both *King Lear* and *Gorboduc*. According to Plowden, a monarch had no legal right to divide his realm though his subjects could divide their lands between heirs. Plowden argues that ““where it is there is a body politicke,”” land cannot be divided, for ““then shoulde the subiects haue dyvers rulers, and then woulde one rule one waie, and an other an other ways”” (qtd. in Axton 30-31).

of king is, according to Axton, “more heinous than any [error] committed by a comparable Elizabethan player king” (139).

Gorboduc, in Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton’s play of the same name, first performed on Twelfth Night in 1562, simply ignores the law of primogeniture and divides his kingdom. However, like his sons, he too fails to listen to wise counsel, preferring advice that supports his own desires. The power of flattery is also a theme in this early English tragedy. Eubulus who disapproves of Gorboduc’s plan to abdicate the throne and divide his kingdom, warns the king:

If flattery then, which fails not to assail
The tender minds of yet unskilful youth,
In one shall kindle and increase disdain
And envy in the other’s heart inflame,
This fire shall waste their love, their lives, their land,
And ruthless ruin shall destroy them both. (1.2.291-96)

Eubulus’s concerns prompt Gorboduc to send wise counsellors to his sons, Ferrex and Porrex, so that “mining fraud shall find no way to creep / Into their fenced ears with grave advice” (1.2.363-64). Unfortunately, they show the same flaw as their father of attending to bad advice and ignoring the good as their respective advisors, Dordan and Philander, point out. In contrast to the play, the chronicle accounts of Gorboduc do not explore the relationship between monarch and council (Axton 46). Norton and Sackville’s manipulation of the source material therefore suggests that they were encouraging Elizabeth herself to attend to “grave advice” as revealed in their play, which closes with a call for the “common counsel” of monarch and parliament, and the need for a “lawful heir” (5.2.157, 277).⁴ The chorus also warns what will happen if a monarch prefers to listen to flatterers: “Woe to the prince that pliant ear inclines / And yields his mind to poisonous tale that floweth / From flattering mouth!” (2.2.103-05). When a ruler’s ear is open to the poison of flattery there are grave consequences for the realm.

4. *Gorboduc* was performed for the queen at Whitehall on January 18, 1562 (Cauthen xii).

The metaphor of poison for flattery was common throughout the sixteenth century. For example, Guazzo describes a flatterer's "breath [as] so venomous, ye it poisoneth the hearts of those ye giue eare ynto them" (I.32^f [misnumbered 18]); Castiglione considers it a "deadly poyson" (265), and in *The Education of a Christian Prince*, Erasmus defines it as "a pleasing sort of poison . . . instantaneous, so that once demented by it, princes who were conquerors of the world allowed utterly worthless flatterers to sport with them and ride them roughly" (193). While this conceit is fully dramatized in *Gorboduc*, and the chorus warns those who attend to flattery, its seductive nature is also enacted in the dumbshow preceding the second act. In this a king refuses a glass of wine offered to him by "a grave and aged gentleman"; he then drinks from, and is immediately killed by, a gold cup of poison offered to him by "a brave and lusty young gentleman" (Dumb Show 2.5,7). The problem with flattery, as both *Gorboduc* and *King Lear* show, is that a listener may be deceived by its outward seemliness and so fail to notice its potentially deadly effect.

While the analogy of flattery as poison supports Laura Tosi's argument that flattery is a form of verbal violence, what one might consider a concealed weapon,⁵ particularly as used by the wits and dupers in early modern drama, it was also considered sacrilegious in the sixteenth century. Guazzo explains: "God is greuously offended to heare one either like to himself discommended, or vnlike, commended: . . . to commende that in one which is euill, is the deede of a decieuer, and a very kinde of treason" (Guazzo I.38^v). Flattery then is not merely deceitful in defining evil as good, but also sacrilegious as it praises someone who is not like God. Moreover, it is treasonous as, being false, it betrays the trust of listeners and can lead to their destruction. Indeed, when a monarch is swayed by flattery, not only does it poison that ruler as an individual, but it "infect[s] . . . the common fountaine that all the people resorteth to" (Castiglione 265).

5. Castiglione refers to the potentially violent nature of speech in general when he suggests that a courtier should be able "to pearce through a bodie with talke, meaning thereby to use a familiaritie with him, and grope him to get of him some perfect knowledge" (57-58).

Erasmus, who devotes an entire chapter in *The Education of a Christian Prince* to advising that “[t]he Prince Must Avoid Flatterers,” particularly condemns those who would flatter a sovereign. He insists that the “whole crowd of wantons, hard drinkers, filthy-tongued fellows, especially flatterers, must be kept far from [the prince’s] sight and hearing while his mind is not yet fortified with precepts to the contrary” (143).⁶ He goes on to admonish: “Let no one think that the evil of flatterers (being a sort of minor evil) should be passed over” (193) and many writers appear to agree with him, referring to flatterers as the “most dangerous” of “tame beasts” (Primaudaye 460). Guazzo declares that “he which willingly listeneth to flatterers, is like to the sheepe ye giueth the woolf such” (I.38^v). Erasmus, writing for a young prince who has yet to come to power, is especially scathing about the “malicious tribe” of flatterers that tends to surround such a person, noting that the prince’s youth and inexperience makes him especially vulnerable to this vice.⁷ He concludes: “The less one suspects trickery, the less one knows how to avoid it” (193). A young prince has not learned how to be impenetrable to such an insidious device as flattery.

Erasmus and his contemporaries may condemn flatterers and believe that there is “no paine so bitter and cruel that were a sufficient punishment” (Castiglione 265) for those who try to corrupt a young prince, but they also insist that listeners must be wary of what they hear. Erasmus notes that a prince needs to “beware of being deceived by the false names of the fairest things, for in this deception lies the fountainhead from which spring practically all the evils that abound in the world” (212). Nonetheless, as Castiglione points out, people prefer to hear flattery over truth: “better do our eares love

6. Erasmus also insists on keeping women away from the young prince because of what he considers their predisposition to sycophancy (194).

7. Erasmus notes that both the very young and very old are prone to flattery, the first because of inexperience, and the latter because of weakness (196). Nicholas Breton also considers youth “a prey of flattery” (*The Good and the Badde* 39), as does Overbury (D3^v). While the vulnerability of the aged to flattery may explain Lear’s acceptance of Goneril and Regan’s flattery, it fails to excuse it as far as Erasmus and his counterparts are concerned.

the melodie of wordes sounding to our praise, than any other song or sound that is most sweete.” Such sounds, though, are “many times like the voyces of Marmaidens, they are the cause of drowning of him that doth not well stoppe his eares at such deceitfull harmony” (71-72). While he alludes to Ulysses being wise enough to avoid hearing the song of the Sirens rather than being physically restrained from acting on what he hears, Castiglione notes that most people fail to act in this way. Instead, even when they “manifestly perceive they are flattered,” they still “love him that flatteres them, and hate him that telleth them the troth.” Such listeners will even praise themselves, thinking that the flatterer is “too scarce in his wordes” (72). Castiglione suggests that flattery appeals to listeners because it praises them; Bacon, though, argues that listeners are actually attracted by its deceitful nature: “A mixture of a *Lie* doth ever adde Pleasure” (*Essayes* 7).

Many early modern writers claim that listeners not only enjoy flattery, but actively encourage it. Drawing on Plutarch’s *Morals*, they echo his contention that those being flattered invite the false praise. In his essay “Of Flattery, Dissimulation, and Lying,” Sir William Cornwallis the Younger writes, “*Plutarch* saith that the flattered haue the disease of ouerliking, or else they could neuer bee surprised; & I thinke so, too, for an exact and strict Iudge of himselfe smels them straight” (225). Bacon, also citing Plutarch, writes: “[T]he Arch-flatterer, with whom all the petty Flatterers haue Intelligence, is a Mans Selfe” (*Essayes* 32).⁸ Guazzo agrees that people are their own worst flatterers and, as Volpone’s inheritance hunters demonstrate, “mak[e] themselues beleeu[e] they are that, which they are not,” before adding that “Princes” are particularly susceptible to this “folly” (I.34^v). This allows subjects who should speak “full of reuerence and respect” to their monarch, “fit opportunity to couer flattery” (Cornwallis 227), and the resulting adulation and obedience could cause such “extreame selfe linking” that the monarch may then “admit no counsell nor advise of others” (Castiglione

8. While Erasmus cites Plato, he also notes that self-flattery is the most dangerous form of flattery as it makes one open to the manipulations of others (196).

263). A ruler's ear is not only especially vulnerable to flattery, but such false praise may close that ear to sage advice.

While it might be a human failing to enjoy and encourage flattery, a ruler is not only more susceptible, but also the effects of such flattery are more deleterious, as seen in *King Lear*. Those in authority, therefore, need to be able to detect flattery in order to avoid it. However, most writers suggest that it is virtually impossible to distinguish flatterers from friends, despite Plutarch's guidelines (Castiglione 72; Guazzo I.35^v). Guazzo recommends that flatterers should be regarded "as enemies" and that listeners should "put vpon [their] head[s] a Helmet to defende [their eares] from . . . perillous speeches" (I.38^v). Moreover, as noted earlier, flattery could be found in all forms of behaviour—both speaking and listening—and in all types of speech, including criticism. Cornwallis writes, "*Anthony* . . . was deceived by such as would tell him of his faults, but so little of them mixed with so many praises as their reproofes seemed but like sharpe sauce to make him deuoure their commendations more hungerly." Cornwallis therefore advises his readers that to guard against flattery, to counter its deleterious effects, a listener should "examine vnpartially your owne deserts, where if you finde not what is laide to your charge, note that tongue for the instrument of flattery" (213). Cornwallis's insistence that listeners should weigh the praise they hear against their own merit echoes Erasmus who suggests that when a prince hears "the usual panegyrics" he should determine whether he deserves them. If he finds himself lacking, he should endeavour to improve himself until he is worthy of the praise (199).

Erasmus's suggestion that a prince should consider whether he is worthy of the praise he hears is understandable given his insistence on keeping flatterers away from a monarch. Bacon, though, takes a different stance and suggests that listeners should not examine themselves, but rather the speaker. In "Of Praise" he argues:

Praise is the Reflection of Vertue. But it is as the Glasse or Bodie, which giveth the Reflection. If it be from the Common People, it is commonly False and Naught . . . The Lowest Vertues draw *Praise* from them; The middle Vertues worke in them Astonishment, or Admiration; But of the Highest Vertues, they have no Sense, or Perceiving at all. (*Essayes* 159)

For Bacon, then, the social class of the speaker determines whether a compliment is praise or flattery. A member of the aristocracy or gentry would be more likely to praise a virtue of high quality, whereas those of the lower social orders would only praise a virtue of little merit.⁹ Primaudaye suggests that rulers can guard against the peril of believing the flattery they hear and keep their “kingdome in safetie” by encouraging their friends to tell them the truth (672). Bacon agrees that having a friend to listen is vital; without one, he states that individuals are likely to become “Canniballs of their own *Hearts*” (83).¹⁰ Nevertheless, the ability of a monarch to find a true friend in the court climate of the early modern period was particularly difficult, and too often friends could easily become flatterers or worse. Bacon gives several examples of ancient rulers whose friends turned against them after they received preferment. According to Cornwallis, the problem is that those in power cannot determine whether their friends are “louers of them or of their fortune” (18).¹¹ He therefore suggests that it is a faithful servant’s duty to tell a master of his faults (216).

Bacon, Primaudaye, and Cornwallis may emphasize the value of a friend or servant who will tell those in authority the truth, but Niccolò Machiavelli is more circumspect about the value of such truth telling. While he agrees with his contemporaries that people are prone to self-deception and therefore susceptible to flattery, he also thinks that those who feel sufficiently comfortable to tell a ruler the truth lack reverence for that person. He therefore advocates that “a prudent prince” select wise

9. Bacon echoes an opinion common among playwrights when he declares, “Shewes . . . serve best” with the lower classes (*Essayes* 159).

10. Bacon’s remarks smack of self-promotion. He desired the role of royal advisor and offered much unsought advice, most of it unheeded, until he was impeached for judicial bribery and removed from his position of Lord Chancellor in 1621. Michael Kiernan notes, “His letters of this period are filled with anguish at the loss of his advisory role and with his fruitless efforts to regain the King’s ear” (xxvi). Bacon also saw himself as an unofficial advisor to George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, the royal favourite (xxvi-ix).

11. It is difficult to ignore the irony of Cornwallis’s statement, considering that he was perpetually short of money and not above writing a panegyric in the hope of preferment.

counsellors and give only them the licence to offer an honest opinion. The prince should then deliberate on his own, come to a decision, and be resolute as any evidence of indecision or susceptibility to persuasion leaves a ruler open to flatterers and contempt (87). Like Erasmus, Machiavelli is especially concerned about the effect of flattery on a ruler. However, rather than insist that flatterers be kept out of a prince's "sight and hearing" so he can "avoid" them, Machiavelli considers "*Quomodo adultores sint fugiendi*" (How flatterers are to be fled). Machiavelli's perspective on sycophants differs from that of Erasmus not just because he is writing for a mature ruler whose strength of authority is linked to his ability to detect and discourage flattery, but also because he has a different view of the relationship between ruler and counsellor.

Erasmus insists that wise counsellors are necessary for a prince to rule competently (194), while Machiavelli claims that wise counsellors are simply a reflection of a wise leader. He notes that many (like Erasmus) believe that a monarch does not possess innate wisdom, but simply demonstrates the wisdom of his/her advisors, that a ruler is what he hears. In contrast, Machiavelli argues, "[T]he first estimate one makes of a lord's brain is from the sight of the men he has around him; and when they are capable and faithful, one can always deem him wise" (85). He continues, "A prince who is not wise himself cannot be well counseled" and that "good counsel, regardless of where it comes from, necessarily springs from the prudence of the prince, and not the prudence of the prince from the good counsel" (88). He therefore implies, contrary to many of his peers, that rulers can control whether words penetrate and poison their minds, and that a wise prince can close his ears to flattery and advice directed by self-interest, yet be open to sound suggestions.¹² A wise prince, in other words, has a discerning ear: he can listen carefully enough to distinguish flattery and yet remain impervious to it. Bacon actually goes a step further than Machiavelli and suggests that rulers not only need to attend to advisors who are "in Nature, Faithfull, and Sincere, and Plaine, and Direct," but that they

12. Like many writers who offer advice to those in power, Machiavelli assumes that he is providing sound advice and not mere flattery, even though his dedication of *The Prince* to Lorenzo de Medici implies his self-interest.

also need to listen to speech not intended for their ears: they should eavesdrop on their courtier's conversations and hear what their subjects say about each other: to "know their *Counsellours*, as well as their *Counsellours* know Them" (*Essayes* 66). Implicit in the advice of both Machiavelli and Bacon is both the need to, and the potential ability of, a ruler to detect insincere speech (flattery), either by direct assessment of the speaker's character, or by indirect assessment through hearing the speech of others.

Despite such advice and even the confidence, as expressed by Primaudaye, that an honourable nature will always triumph, many still regarded flattery as an undetectable vice that commonly contributed to the downfall of the great. In "Instruments of a Statesman," Cornwallis even suggests that flattery is a particular "bane of vertue and the destinated disease killing greatnesse, [that] euery one can speake though few auoyde" (213). Erasmus is equally suspicious of honour or "greatness" as a defence against flattery. He notes that "the most flourishing empires of the greatest kings have been overthrown by the tongues of flatterers." He then offers the remarkable paradox that "nowhere do we read of a state which has been oppressed under a great tyranny in which flatterers did not play the leading roles in the tragedy" (193), indicating that both "greatest kings" and "great tyrant[s]" are equally susceptible to a flatterer's wiles.¹³ Nonetheless, Erasmus is quick with advice on how flatterers might be avoided. He notes that counsellors must use their office honourably and states, "This will be greatly helped if anyone who is caught perverting the mind of the prince with biased talk and ignoble complaisance . . . would have publicly to suffer punishment (even death, if the crime should call for it) as an example to others." He goes on to explain his harsh punishment of sycophants in this way:

If one is going to weigh the relations of crimes in the matters of punishment, a malicious flatterer who corrupts and biases the early years of the prince's life with tyrannical ideas does more harm than one who

13. Erasmus's argument that tyrants are open to flattery fits with Lyly's depiction of King Midas whose tyranny is associated with his poor auditory discernment. In both cases, tyrants fail to appreciate the sound or speech they should value, preferring to hear that of less worth.

plunders the public treasury. Whoever tampers with the coinage of the prince is visited with elaborate punishment; for those who corrupt the character of the prince there is almost a reward! (194)

In equating the besmirchment of the royal character to the debasement of the country's currency, Erasmus cleverly links both the inner nature of the monarch with the external appearance of the royal profile as stamped on the coin of the realm, and the two issues—flattery and profligacy—that are then repeatedly associated throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Noting that prosperity attracts parasites, Cornwallis writes, “You cannot have the one without the other. Flatterers deuoure the Inheritance of Fortune” (21).¹⁴ Overbury insists, “*A Flatterer Is the shadow of a foole. . . . Hee entreth young men into acquaintance and debt bookes*” (D3^r). This concern over the ability of sycophants to destroy a monarch and simultaneously line their own pockets is echoed in James I's warning to his son to ensure that all his servants are “free of all factions and partialities: but speciallie free of that filthy vice of Flattery, the pest of all Princes, and wracke of Republickes” (*Basilicon Doron* II.115). It is also repeatedly explored in a number of dramatic works, including Marlowe's *Edward II* and, in a more muted tone, Shakespeare's *Richard II*, in which Bolingbroke accuses Bushy, Bagot, and Green of being both sycophants and “caterpillars of the commonwealth” (2.3.165). While the persistent association of sycophancy and extravagance is to be anticipated considering the inherent self-interest of flattery, Erasmus's suggestion that both degrade different facets of the prince particularly underscores how flattery has an effect on both the physical body of the monarch and the political body of his/her realm.

The King's Two Bodies

With his suggestion that a monarch is not only a single physical being, but also a figurehead represented to, and circulating amongst, his/her subjects, Erasmus is drawing

14. Cornwallis is perhaps speaking from bitter experience here. As noted earlier, he had persistent money problems thanks to a lavish lifestyle (including 11 children) with insufficient funds to support it. His father writes at one time of Cornwallis having spent £5000 at court while he only received £200 per annum to live on (xvii).

on what Ernst Kantorowicz calls the “politico-ecclesiological theory of the *corpus mysticum*” which he claims “pervaded political thought during the later Middle Ages” (15). I wish to consider this concept of the king’s two bodies, the “body natural” and the “body politic” (Kantorowicz 7), with particular reference to how the act of listening provides an essential conduit between the two, an avenue which not only permits appropriate counsel and orderly government by the body politic, but which also allows the flaws of the body natural to infect and disease the body politic. The strongest evidence of theories of the king’s two bodies comes from Edmund Plowden’s law reports, published in 1571, though initially compiled as early as 1539. An eminent lawyer by the middle of the century, his work was influential throughout the Elizabethan and into the Jacobean period (Axton 15, 20). Plowden defines the king’s natural body as ““a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People.”” In contrast, the body politic is not a physical entity, but consists ““of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal, and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to”” (qtd. in Kantorowicz 7). Plowden goes on to note that the body politic is greater than and contains the body natural and that the two bodies are indivisible. Moreover, he offers the paradox that while the body natural is ““the lesser, . . . these two Bodies are incorporated in one Person, and make one Body and not divers, that is the Body corporate in the Body natural, *et e contra* the Body natural in the Body corporate”” (qtd. in Kantorowicz 9). His suggestion that both bodies incorporate each other indicates the equanimity with which early modern writers present two apparently opposing statements. More troubling is his claim that the body politic, being greater, immortal, and divine, alters the body natural and ““wipes away every Imperfection of the other Body, with which it is consolidated”” (qtd. in

Kantorowicz 11).¹⁵ It is only on separation of the two bodies at death that the infirmity, namely the mortality, of the body natural is apparent.¹⁶ Even then, according to Plowden, ““what the King does in his Body politic, cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body”” (qtd. in Kantorowicz 7). The insistence that the infirmities of the body natural do not invalidate acts of the body politic is clearly important for ensuring the continuance of the law after the death of the monarch. To borrow Erasmus’s example of currency as representative of the body politic, coins stamped with the head of a late monarch continue as legal tender, even after a new monarch is crowned.

The belief that the body politic possesses a divine nature that covers the infirmities of the body natural permits Guazzo to claim, “[L]ike Gods [princes] knowe not onely what men say, but what they thinke” because of their “diuine knowledge” and “delicate eares” (II.54^r). However, many others are more sceptical, first of the perfection of the body politic, and second of a sovereign’s ability to hear what others say. Contrary to Plowden and Guazzo, John Clapham suggests that the body politic is inherently corrupt. Writing about Elizabeth I after her death, and preparing his reader for his criticism of the administration of justice during her reign, he notes, “[T]here is no politic body without his diseases” (65). While the body politic is not a physical entity, it draws on the earlier and widespread concept of the state as a human body of which the monarch is the head and his subjects members (Kantorowicz 15), and Clapham alludes to this analogy. He notes that Elizabeth was horrified when, shortly before her death, she asked to see herself in a mirror and discovered that she was far less attractive than her flattering courtiers had indicated. Clapham suggests that it is the unhappy fate of most monarchs to

15. Kantorowicz notes that the concept of the body politic as divine draws upon the medieval concept of the “king’s *character angelicus*,” which places monarchs above humanity, but beneath gods.

16. Hal alludes to the separation of the body politic and body natural at death when, believing his father to be dead, he remarks, “This is a sleep / That from this golden rigol [the crown] hath divorced / So many English kings” (2 *Henry IV* 4.3.165-67).

“heareth and seeth for the most part with other men’s ears and eyes, seldom discerning the truth of things, but looking in counterfeit glasses and receiving reports as they are delivered by parasites and tale-carriers” (96-97). If the monarch is the head, then his/her advisors serve as the eyes and ears of the body. The problem, though, as Elizabeth discovers, and as Judge Overdo complains in Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*, is the inability to determine the truth when one is dependent on the eyes and ears of others. Overdo complains:

For (alas) as we are public persons, what do we know? Nay, what can we know? We hear with other men’s ears; we see with other men’s eyes; a foolish constable, or a sleepy watchman, is all our information: he slanders a gentleman, by the virtue of his place (as he calls it), and we, by the vice of ours, must believe him: . . . This we are subject to, that live in high place: all our intelligence is idle, and most of our intelligencers knaves; and by your leave, ourselves thought little better, if not arrant fools, for believing ‘em. (2.1.28-33, 36-40)

However, what Overdo eventually learns and, indeed, what Elizabeth’s gazing in the mirror demonstrates, is that it is impossible for a “public person” to discover the truth, either about the state of their jurisdiction or about themselves. Elizabeth cannot see herself; she can only see an image of herself in a mirror, and while she might see it with her own eyes, it is potentially as subject to distortion as the reports of her courtiers. Overdo, too, learns that his own ears and eyes are no better (and clearly less able) at discerning the truth than those of his constable. His fool’s disguise, with its eared and belled cap, reminiscent of Midas’s ass’s ears, is more revealing of his character than he thinks.

A ruler’s inability to discern the truth by listening to his/her courtiers is understandable given courtiers’ penchant for praising and pleasing their superiors. The distinction between a “joly flatterer” and a counsellor who “reverence[s] the prince hee serveth above all other thinges, and . . . [is] altogether plyable to please him” (Castiglione 106) is not easy to determine by listening. A flatterer and a wise counsellor may say the same words, but the motivation underlying them differs. Machiavelli, who claims there are three kinds of brains: “one that perceives by itself, another that discerns what others perceive, a third that does not perceive either [for] itself or [through] others, that first

being most excellent, the second excellent, the third useless,” claims that rulers can distinguish between a wise counsellor and a flatterer. He writes, “But as to how a prince may recognize the minister, there is a mode which never fails. When you see the minister think more of himself than of you, and that he seeks what is useful to him in all actions, someone made that way will never be a good minister, never will you be able to trust him.” He goes on to claim that a prince can encourage a minister to be “good” by “honoring him, making him rich, obliging him to himself, sharing with him honors and burdens, so that he might see that he cannot stand without [his ruler]” (85-86). While Machiavelli insists that good rulers can perceive the level of self-interest in what they hear, James I admits that, contrary to Guazzo’s contention, monarchs do not have “diuine knowledge” of what people are thinking, but rather, must “discern . . . wiselie betwixt true and false reportes” by considering the character of the speaker, the intention in speaking, and the likely occurrence of the events being reported. He goes on to declare that it is better to test what one hears than to “foster suspicion vpon a honest man. For . . . suspicion is the Tyrants sicknesse” (*Basilicon Doron* II.159). According to James, one way of ensuring fair justice is to do what Justice Overdo attempts to do: rely on one’s own ears and not the ears of others. James advises his son: “be in your giuing accesse so open and affable to euery ranke of honest persons, as may make them pearte without scarring at you, to make their owne sutes to you themselues” (II.85). He therefore advises his son to travel throughout his realm, “not lipening to Vice-roies, but hearing your selfe their complaintes” (II.97). Primaudaye would approve. He too claims that “a good Prince ought freely, and at all howers of the day, to heare the complaints of his subiects” (658). James, though, suggests that there is an alternative to such openness, and that is, paradoxically, to be more closed and not “so facile of accesse-giuing at all times, as I haue bene” (*Basilicon Doron* II.199). James’s suggestion that while monarchs should be open to the speech of their common subjects, it is also appropriate at times for them not to listen, to “turn a deaf ear,” offers another representation of deafness in the early modern period, one that is associated with authority and justice, rather than foolishness.

Jennifer Nelson and Bradley Berens note that when a social superior chooses not to listen, “to turn a deaf ear,” that person assumes a more powerful position. Not only does the action create anxiety in the speaker, but it allows the listener “to escape the world’s pestilent voices” (53). In other words, it limits the chance that the listener will be infected by what is heard, and it provides a listener with what Gina Bloom, in her discussion of the anxiety of Puritan preachers on the listening behaviour of their congregations, calls “auditory agency” (1, 11). While subordinates who feign deafness are condemned, their superiors are praised for judicious listening. For example, Thomas Harman denounces a beggar who pretends deafness and muteness to encourage sympathy and alms giving (Nelson and Berens 57), and as already noted, the Chief Justice reprimands Falstaff for his feigned deafness, his “disease of not listening, malady of not marking” (*2HenryIV* 1.2.111). He tells Falstaff that “[t]o punish you by the heels would amend the attention of your ears, and I care not if I do become your physician” (113-15). The threat of punishment is enough to prompt an immediate cure of Falstaff’s deafness, though it does not prevent him from offering alternative meanings of the Chief Justice’s words. The Chief Justice, invested with the king’s authority, is able to reprimand Falstaff for his feigned deafness because of the power dynamic between them. However, when the newly crowned Henry V refuses to have anything more to do with Falstaff, there is no recourse for the knight. Having heard Falstaff address him as “my sweet boy” (5.5.41), even though he is now king, and knowing the knight’s self-interest, Henry makes it clear he will no longer to listen to his fat friend: “Reply not to me with a fool-born jest. / Presume not that I am the thing I was” (53-54), and he tells Falstaff not to come within ten miles of him. He also places the Chief Justice between himself and his former companion, his new advisor’s voice additionally limiting Falstaff’s ability to appeal to the king, for Henry tells his counsellor, “My voice shall sound as you do prompt mine ear” (5.2.118). Considering that the Chief Justice is “well acquainted with [Falstaff’s] manner of wrenching the true cause the false way” (2.1.100-01), he is unlikely to pass on any positive information to the king. Henry’s rejection of his old friend, signified by his

refusal to listen further to him, contributes to Falstaff's death according to the Hostess, who says, "The King has killed his heart" (*Henry V* 2.1.79).

Rulers may feign deafness to protect themselves from "infection," "sickness," or "pestilence"; they may also demonstrate selective hearing to ensure impartiality. While James I argues that fair justice requires listening to "euery ranke of honest persons," he also suggests that there are times when some people should not be heard. He reminds his son that "the Throne ye sit on is Gods . . . and sway neither to the right hand nor to the left. . . Iustice should be blinde and friendlesse: it is not there ye should reward your friends, or seek to crosse your enemies" (*Basilicon Doron* II.69).¹⁷ James draws on the image of Justice as blind, but impartial justice may equally need to be deaf at times. According to Plutarch, when Alexander tried "capital cases, he kept his hand over one of his ears while the accuser was speaking, that he might keep it free and unprejudiced for the accused" (349) and in his later work, *The Father's Blessing* (1621), James offers similar advice: "lend one eare to the Accuser, as thou keepe the other for the Accused, for he that decreeth for either part before hee hath heard them both, his Sentence may be iust, but he himselfe vniust" (31). John Velz suggests that when Caesar asks Antony to "[c]ome on my right hand, for this ear is deaf, / And tell me truly what thou think'st of him [Cassio]" (*Julius Caesar* 1.2.214-15), Shakespeare is drawing on this image of fair justice (Velz 400-01).¹⁸ Nevertheless, just as Caesar has difficulty discerning the truth from his friends and counsellors, so Alexander's "deaf ear" fails to protect him from being "infected" as Plutarch goes on to note: "[A]fterwards the multitude of accusations which he heard rendered him harsh, and led him to believe the false because so many

17. Erasmus emphasizes this concept of blind justice when he argues that a true king should be blind to both bribes and his regard for another person, and is "only to learn from what he hears" (186-87).

18. Rebecca Bushnell suggests that Caesar's deafness, along with other details such as his susceptibility to flattery, emphasize the emperor's "particularity" (147). Douglas Peterson suggests that these details indicate his tragic flaw, his mistaken belief in his own omnipotence, so he fails to hear or heed warnings: "He hears only what he wants to hear" (24).

were true” (349). Even great rulers cannot protect themselves completely from what they hear.

While complete isolation and protection from the infective nature of what one hears may be impossible (as Morose learns), various authors still advocate “stopping the ear” to particular types of speech as a defensive measure. Guazzo advocates turning a deaf ear to those who disparage others, noting that listening to such speech is equal in fault to the defamation itself. He argues that listeners may think they have done nothing wrong, but they are “of the same stampe” as the speaker, who has divided the fault in the middle, “giuing one halfe to the hearer, and taking the other vnto him self.” He notes that if people turned a deaf ear to such speakers, “their vnbridled tongues” would be repressed and those feigning deafness would “get great honour and credite with the wise.” He concludes that “wee ought to prepare our selues to haue our ears as readily at our commaund, as they haue their tongues” (I.31^v). He therefore warns wise men to stop their ears like Ulysses when in evil company (Guazzo I.20^r). Guazzo’s suggestion that Ulysses limited what he heard rather than how he reacted, like Plutarch’s illustration of Alexander ensuring a judicial hearing by covering one ear with his hand, echoes the demand that those in authority show wisdom when determining to whom, or what, they listen, while simultaneously underscoring the impossibility of even judicial listeners remaining untainted by what is heard. Ulysses cannot prevent himself from hearing the seductive call of the sirens any more than Alexander can help being influenced by the numerous slanderous reports he hears. He can, though, by tying himself to the mast, determine how he responds. Despite Clapham’s insistence that monarchs should, as “God’s lieutenants,” maintain “inviolable” reputations, they are essentially violated each time they hear something that threatens their person and their realm. Clapham suggests that this is one reason to ban flattery from the court. The alternative, he argues, is to ensure that rulers hear “as well their vices as virtues” (97). Hence, to keep the body politic “inviolable” requires not, as one might anticipate, restricting input, but increased exposure to sensory penetration. Monarchs must hear the full story, see the complete picture. To keep kings and queens perfect and impenetrable means that they must hear both what they find

pleasing and what they find discomfoting. Once again, we return to the paradox outlined by James I, that rulers must open their ears to hear more, to “giu[e] accesse so open and affable,” while also being not “so facile of accesse-giuing.”

The Rainbow Portrait

The problem with a monarch being both impenetrable and accessible is explored in one of the most complex portraits painted of Elizabeth I towards the end of her reign. *The Rainbow Portrait* (see figure 1) was most likely painted in early 1603, and the work, believed to be commissioned by Sir Robert Cecil, has been attributed to both Marcus Gheeraerts and Isaac Oliver. It is thought to be connected with an entertainment arranged for the queen by Cecil at his new house in December 1602 and written by John Davies who was then in his employ (Erler 359, 370; Fineman, “Shakespeare’s Ear” 226; Strong 50-52). The painting portrays Elizabeth as a young virgin-bride in a white, flower-embroidered bodice and with shoulder-length hair. This “mask of youth” presents the queen as truly deserving of her motto “*Semper eadem*”: “Always one and the same” not only in integrity and constancy, but also with her (publicly) never-changing physical appearance (King 59; Fischlin 179). While there are many symbolic elements in the painting, including the jewelled serpent with a heart in its mouth on her left sleeve, a crescent moon on her elaborate headdress, the colourless rainbow she holds in her right hand, the triple string of pearls, and the gauntlet brooch pinned to her ruff, the most striking feature of the work is the cloak that both covers and reveals Elizabeth.¹⁹ The cloak is beige on one side with a faint pattern woven into the fabric. The reverse side,

19. Several critics have discussed the iconographical elements of this portrait, currently held at Hatfield House. The best-known commentaries are those of Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977) 50-52, and Frances Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) 217-19. See also Mary C. Erler, “Sir John Davies and the Rainbow Portrait of Queen Elizabeth,” *Modern Philology* 84:4 (May 1987): 359-7; Daniel Fischlin, “Political Allegory, Absolutist Ideology, and the ‘Rainbow Portrait’ of Queen Elizabeth I,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 50:1 (Spring 1997): 175-205; René Graziani, “The ‘Rainbow Portrait’ of Queen Elizabeth I and its Religious Symbolism,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 35 (1972): 247-59 (cont.);

though, is a vibrant orange and covered with many eyes and ears, along with short dark creases. These creases have led to much critical debate and have been defined both as mouths and not mouths, as well as tongues. Critics have also argued that they represent the hidden female genitalia as well as the enigmatic, slippery signifier of the fold itself (Fischlin 185; Graziani 255; Montrose, "Idols" 144). The eyes, ears, and questionable mouths have prompted an iconographical reading of the cloak as signifying "fame" and several critics suggest Ripa's emblem of Fama in his *Iconologia* (Rome 1593) as the source, the eyes, ears, and "mouths" representing those of the queen's subjects who watch and hear her (or hear of her), and send her fame around the world.²⁰

Other critics, however, are less convinced that the robe is emblematic of Fame as the other accoutrements, the wings and trumpet, are absent. Indeed, Cesare Ripa distinguishes between *Fama* and *Fama Bvona* (as does Virgil, Ripa's source), and it is only the former that wears the familiar robe. The latter, depicted by Jonson in his *Masque of Queens*, is dressed in white, with white wings and a gold collar, holding a trumpet in her right hand, and an olive branch in her left (Ripa 154-55; Freeman 95-96). In comparison to this "good" Fame, that associated with the robe of eyes, ears, and mouths is "*un mal*" according to Ripa, and closely related to Rumour with its flapping tongues (Fineman, "Shakespeare's Ear" 227-28; Yuasa 4). One has only to think of Rumour's introduction of *2 Henry IV* to determine that such a depiction would be unflattering to the queen. Other critics therefore offer an alternative reading of the queen's robe, noting that Ripa's depiction of *Ragione di stato*, Statecraft, which later appears in Henry Peacham's *Minerva Britanna* (1612), also wears clothing covered in eyes and ears. With this reading of Elizabeth's robe, the eyes and ears are not focused on the queen, but on others, demonstrating her surveillance and control over her subjects (Montrose, "Idols" 140). In

19 cont. Louis A. Montrose, "Idols of the Queen: Policy, Gender, and the Picturing of Elizabeth I," *Representations* 68 (Fall 1999): 108-61, esp. 132-47; Christopher Pye, *The Regal Phantasm: Shakespeare and the Politics of Spectacle* (London; New York: Routledge, 1990) 68-70.

20. See Erler 359; Graziani 248; Montrose, "Idols" 140; and Yates 217.

his discussion of the painting, Louis Montrose notes that “the metaphor of the Prince’s agents and informants, counsellors and spies, as his or her eyes and ears was ingrained in sixteenth-century patterns of thought and language” (“Idols” 142). John Archer, in his book *Sovereignty and Intelligence*, connects the robe to the system of intelligence and patronage prevalent in Elizabeth’s court (4). In this reading, the robe consequently presents a monarch hearing and seeing “with other men’s ears and eyes” as an example of good statecraft, in contrast to Clapham’s comments and Judge Overdo’s bungling of such surveillance. Such a reading of the robe is also supported by Yates’s reading of the serpent as emblematic of wisdom, with the celestial sphere above it signifying intelligence or understanding and the heart in its mouth indicating wise counsel (217).

While there is more support for reading the robe as a positive emblem of Elizabeth’s government, I suggest that the concept of the robe of Fame should not be completely excluded, and that both of these emblems engage with issues of impenetrability and accessibility. Michel Foucault argues that, prior to the eighteenth century, monarchical power was primarily dependent on display, whereas nowadays, state power rests on the idea of surveillance (Archer 6). Indeed, according to Clapham’s accounts of how the aging Elizabeth dressed more lavishly in order to captivate her subjects through spectacle, the queen appears to have used display to her advantage (Clapham 86). However, Norbert Elias argues that in early modern monarchies, display and surveillance were actually codependent (Archer 8); one could not exist without the other, and the robe of *The Rainbow Portrait* can be seen to support this argument. Emblematic of Statecraft, the robe protects Elizabeth by monitoring her subjects. Fame, on the other hand, insists on attending the monarch, transforming her into an object of attention and making her appear accessible to her subjects. The majority of eyes on the robe are directed away from the queen, representing those surrounding and protecting the queen and watching her subjects, but at least one eye (immediately below her left hand) looks to the queen. In addition, the “mouths” on the robe are suggestive of both Fame and Statecraft as some of the creases appear like the open mouths of Fame, announcing the queen’s activities and achievements, while others, such as the one in the lower far right,

appear firmly closed.²¹ The draping of the robe around the body further emphasizes its dual function of protecting and monitoring the monarch. On the left side of the body, the ears and eyes are on the inside of the cloak which has been partly folded back. They are therefore next to the queen's body, and she is the primary object of their attention. The cloak, though, is folded like a Moebius loop so that the eyes and ears are on the outside of the garment on the right side of the body, away from the queen and towards her subjects. The cloak of Statecraft and Fame simultaneously observes and displays, protects and reveals the monarch, making him/her impenetrable and accessible.

The vulnerability of this position of being revealed yet guarded, and its particular association with hearing is emphasized by an ear lying in the fold between the two sides of the cloak. The location of this ear connects the ideas of protection and revelation, private and public in a significant way. Representative of the ears of Elizabeth's counsellors who provide her with information, and of the ears of her subjects who listen to her decrees as well as to gossip about her, this is the ear of the body politic. Moreover, its placement underscores the close connection between the public body politic and the private natural or physical body of the monarch. Joel Fineman describes it as "vulva-like" and "an exceptionally pornographic ear over Queen Elizabeth's genitals" ("Shakespeare's Ear" 228).²² Certainly, it has erotic potential, as do a number of other elements in the portrait. Both the long loop of pearls and the rainbow—the arc of which appears to end at this ear—have been described as phallic, and the extended finger of the left hand has been suggested to have "masturbatory significance" (Fischlin 185). This ear is further

21. These mouths provide a visual representation of another of the queen's mottos, *Video, taceo*, "I see, but say nothing," again suggesting the surveillance function of the robe and its association with good government. Mary Thomas Crane argues that this motto emphasizes Elizabeth's ability to judge matters for herself while remaining silent as deemed appropriate for a woman, rather than simply accepting her counsellors' advice without due consideration (Fischlin 190; Montrose, "Idols" 145).

22. Fineman argues that this ear indicates a particular link between early modern determinations of textuality, sexuality, and ideology, and that the ear, in contrast to the eye, delays and defers perception, connecting it thus to Derrida's *différance* ("Shakespeare's Ear" 230).

eroticized not just by its location over the queen's groin, but also by its position between the two halves of the cloak, where it is only revealed by the queen lifting the edge of the cloak with her left hand. In appearance and location this ear appears connected to the queen's private body and, specifically, to her sexuality. It *is* remarkably "vulva-like" and it performs the same protection/display function as the vulva. It reveals, yet conceals the queen's vagina, one bodily orifice, by revealing and concealing another, the auditory canal. It reinforces not only the early modern insistence that to hear something is an act of incorporation into the body, but also that to hear something (perhaps particularly for women) may taint: it may impregnate, infect, and deflower. This "secret" ear underscores how listening not only makes the public private, bringing the lives of Elizabeth's subjects under her scrutiny and so protecting her, but also makes the private public, allowing her subjects to scrutinize her life and, given her "virgin" state, her sexuality.

This ear is emblematic of both Elizabeth's strength as a monarch and her essential weakness; she is both protected and vulnerable to attack through this conduit, and its function as an avenue of defence or assault depends in part on who has the attention of this ear. As noted earlier, given that a monarch can only hear with other men's ears, the quality of the information received and disseminated depends on who has the ear of the monarch (Archer 23). It is Elizabeth's courtiers, not the queen herself, who control how she is protected and portrayed. Still, Elizabeth seems to have successfully negotiated a role for herself when listening to her courtiers. Even though Clapham believes that a monarch cannot hear flattery "without imputation of his weakness in judgment" (97), other writers, such as Bacon, commend the queen's ability to listen to flattery without any loss of majesty (Kay par. 14). Even a cynical commentator like Clapham notes that Elizabeth listens to her privy counsellors, yet ensures they remain "within the compass of a reverend and awful respect of her judgment and authority" (69). Repeatedly, writers remark on the queen's willingness to listen to others, her ability to control those to whom she listens, and her insistence on making up her own mind. Indeed, in the entertainment written by Davies and presented to the queen at Sir Robert Cecil's in December 1602, one servant asks another, "what use dooth she make of her servants." The reply is:

“She makes the same use of them as the mynde makes of the sences. Many things she sees and heares through them; but the judgment and election are her owne” (qtd. in Montrose, “Idols” 147).²³

Not only did Elizabeth hear through her servants’ ears, yet make up her own mind, she also used their voices to express her will. Elizabeth frequently heard her many suitors and gave them hope of future success herself. However, when it came time to deny their suits, that task was often delegated to one of her counsellors, so that he often took the blame for her rejection (Clapham 86). Elizabeth’s relative auricular impenetrability, particularly her predilection for flattery and her refusal to be swayed by it, can also be related to the display and surveillance of her sexuality. Despite the emphasis on Elizabeth as the virgin queen, despite the depiction of her in various paintings surrounded by symbols of purity, malicious gossip constantly circulated about her sexuality, including the rumour later reported by Jonson that the queen’s vagina was impenetrable: “She had a Membrana on her which made her uncapable of men, though for her delight she tryed many” (qtd. in Pye 34). Elizabeth’s supposed sexual desire and sexual impenetrability is similar to her auricular state. She listens and is not tainted; she has sexual intercourse and is not penetrated.

Edward II

Rumours of Elizabeth’s mythical sexual and auricular impenetrability circulated during her reign, and Nelson and Berens equate this to a “strategic empowering deafness” (70). Certainly, one can see links between Elizabeth’s ability to listen to her courtiers yet remain unswayed and Plutarch’s portrayal of Alexander reserving an ear for the defendant while listening to the complainant to ensure his unbiased judgment. One of her noblemen, Sir Robert Naunton, believed that Elizabeth reigned successfully because of “her own great judgement” and the lack of a “Gaveston, Vere, or Spencer” (qtd. in

23. Erler also connects the portrait to the entertainment by Davies, titled “A Dialogue between a Gentleman Usher and a Post,” believed to have been held at Cecil’s on December 6, 1602.

Kay, par 5). By naming Gaveston and Spencer, Naunton suggests that Elizabeth's reign contrasts that of Edward II. This early fourteenth-century king came to the early modern English consciousness through the chronicles of Fabyan, Stow, and Holinshed, and there is evidence that Marlowe consulted all three when he wrote *Edward II*, most likely in 1591 (Forker 14-16). There was particular interest in Edward II in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, not only because he represented a "negative exemplum" for a monarch and, ostensibly, a foil for Elizabeth (Kay, par. 5), but also because he provided a specific reference for those concerned about James I and his favourites. On at least two occasions, James was compared to Edward. In 1583, Sir Francis Walsingham used Edward II as a negative example when he tried to advise the young James VI of Scotland about his friendship with Esme Stuart, Duke of Lennox, and the resulting dispute between James and his counsellors finds its way into the second edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, the edition Marlowe most likely used for details of Edward's reign (Forker 43-44; Normand, "What Passions" 176; Rowland xx-xxi). Walsingham did not suffer for his criticism of the king, but in 1621, when Sir Henry Yelverton compared James I's favourite, George Villiers, to Edward's favourite, Hugh Spencer, he was fined and made to apologize for equating James to a "weak" king (Orgel 48-49).

Nonetheless, Edward was not simply viewed as a bad king in the sixteenth century. Views of him were quite mixed. Some authors believed him "more sinned against than sinning," while others considered his deposition justifiable because he had killed his subjects and emptied the treasury (Rowland xx). These mixed opinions may be reflected in the absence of specific moral commentary on Edward's actions in Marlowe's play. The playwright appears less interested in apportioning blame for the Barons' Wars and Edward's deposition than in finding parallels between the historic events represented onstage and the contemporary issues circulating in Elizabethan London.²⁴ Indeed, the

24. Archer suggests that Gaveston's comparison of "[t]he sight of London to . . . Elysium" (1.1.10-11), spelled Elizium in the 1594 quarto, is not mere hyperbole, but a direct connection between the London of the playworld and the Elizabethan world of Marlowe's audience (77).

interest shown during the 1590's in the Barons' Wars and Mortimer's role in them had much to do with the contemporary debate about the nature of the monarchy and the respective rights of a sovereign and the people (Kay, par. 3). Marlowe engages with this ongoing debate by offering a play that explores the intersection between private and public, personal relationships and political allegiances, through the representation of Edward's physical body and its connection to the body politic. This blurring of the roles of private man and public sovereign is even reflected in the double descriptor of Edward II in the play's title: "*The troublesome Raigne and lamentable death of Edward the second, King of England. . .*," the title looking to both the death of the physical body and the troubles of the body politic. I wish to examine how *Edward II* portrays the supposedly divine body politic and its connection with the king's physical body, and how destruction of the body politic as embodied in Edward is shown to be a result of his failure to turn a deaf ear. While Elizabeth might hear and not be penetrated, Edward is affected, infected, and ultimately penetrated by what he hears.

There is, of course, a particular irony in considering the sense of hearing and its various constructions in the particularly visual medium of emblematic portraiture and a play as visually spectacular as *Edward II*. The actual theatrical displays in this play, including the disrobing of a bishop, the degradation and agonizing murder of a king, and a severed head, as well as the various descriptions of unstaged visual displays such as Gaveston's description of the entertainment he plans for Edward (1.1.54-69), Mortimer's description of Edward on the battlefield (2.2.181-86), and Gaveston "jet[ting] it in the court" (1.4.406-17) have been considered by several critics.²⁵ While of interest in themselves, however, these displays can also be considered an exploration of how an

25. All references to *Edward II* are to the Revels edition, ed. Charles R. Forker (New York: Manchester UP, 1994).

audience engages with what it sees and hears.²⁶ Debra Belt suggests that Gaveston and Mortimer can be seen as actors competing for the attention of Edward. She argues, and I agree, that the play explores the connection between “suggestion and perception” (134), and the way audiences are affected by what they hear provides a context for examining the play’s spectacular nature (140). In other words, *Edward II* presents a theatrical exploration of the belief that what one hears leaves an impression that may profoundly affect what one thinks and sees. It is little wonder, then, that there are various factions fighting for the king’s attention and, specifically, for his ear.

The competition is hardly equal. Edward would clearly rather attend to his “dearest friend” (1.1.2) Gaveston than the barons, and Gaveston not only knows what Edward likes to hear, but also how this can be used to manipulate the king:

I must have wanton poets, pleasant wits,
Musicians that, with touching of a string,
May draw the pliant king which way I please.
Music and poetry is his delight. (50-53)

Early on, Gaveston notes his own skill with flattery as he appeases the poor men who seek his patronage: “[I]t is no pain to speak men fair; / I’ll flatter these, and make them live in hope” (41-42). While the men eagerly accept his crumb of encouragement and prepare to wait around court for him, Gaveston rejects them out of hand for his purposes. This short scene demonstrates both Gaveston’s self-interest and his failure to support the traditional system of patronage. He fails to heed either the biblical precept, quoted by Robert Cleaver: “*He that stoppeth his eare at the crying of the poor, he shall also crie and not be heard*” (Proverbs 25.13, qtd. in Cleaver 65). While Gaveston’s rejection of the poor men’s pleas may protect his purse, such deafness to social inferiors was acknowledged to have political consequences. Machiavelli cynically notes that patronage and reward encourages “good[ness]” and loyalty in social inferiors (85-86), and even

26. David Bevington and James Shapiro suggest that the emphasis on visual spectacle in *Edward II* requires us to adjust our definition of Marlowe as just a “poetic dramatist” (271). Claude J. Summers believes that it reflects the instability of a world in which social identity is based solely on appearance (227), and Sara Munson Deats argues that such spectacle mirrors Edward’s own concern with spectacle (“Marlowe’s” 247-48).

though James I may have wished to have been less accessible to his subjects, he understands that a “good Prince” must hear the complaints of his subjects. While Gaveston delights in and benefits from Edward’s patronage, socially superior to the poor men, he rejects his own role as patron in the system that provides cohesiveness and order to the realm (Parks 286).²⁷ As several critics note, Mortimer’s concern about Edward’s relationship with Gaveston has less to do with its homosexual nature, and more with the way it subverts the social hierarchy.²⁸

Mortimer repeatedly refers to Gaveston’s lack of social status, describing him as “base peasant” (1.4.7), “groom” (291), and “villain” (1.4.28; 2.2.106).²⁹ In doing so, he exaggerates Gaveston’s lack of status, already diminished by Marlowe. The historical Gaveston was an aristocrat, the son of a Gascon knight who had served Edward I. He was raised at court as Edward II’s playmate with the intention, Stephen Orgel suggests, that he would become the king’s favourite (Orgel 47; Rowland xxiii; Summers 226). Thus, Marlowe’s changes emphasize how Edward’s preferment of Gaveston disrupts the accepted hierarchy in a number of ways. Not only does Gaveston refuse to pass on the benefits of patronage, to accept the responsibilities as well as the benefits of his position, but also his flattery of the poor men inverts the usual position of flatterer and flattered. Most commonly, a social inferior flattered a superior in the hope of being rewarded. Here, Gaveston flatters as a substitute for reward. In addition, his association with Edward thwarts the barons’ access to power, and disturbingly subjects a king to a

27. S. Viswanathan, who also draws on the concept of the king’s two bodies to examine Marlowe’s representation of Edward’s monarchy (though not on the role of hearing in the relationship of the two bodies), sees this opening scene as emblematic of both Edward’s and Gaveston’s neglect of the body politic (80).

28. See, for example, Normand, “What Passions” 189-90; Orgel 49; Sales 121; Smith, *Homosexual Desire* 215; and Thurn 116.

29. Although Mortimer initially claims that he is not disturbed by the homosexual nature of Gaveston’s relationship with Edward, Lawrence Normand notes that the phrase “base outlandish cullions” (1.4.408) indicates Mortimer’s revulsion at Gaveston’s “class, foreignness and sex” as “‘cullions’ can mean testicles” (“*Edward II*” 186).

commoner. Dennis Kay states that the way Edward's love subjects him to Gaveston is the most radical digression from early modern political discourse in the play, more radical than either the representation of the monarchy or the depiction of homosexuality (par. 15).³⁰ Warwick's assessment that Gaveston is an "[i]gnoble vassal, that like Phaethon, / Aspir'st unto the guidance of the sun" (1.4.16-17) fully expresses how his influence over Edward subverts established social order. It also resonates with Gaveston's own assessment of his relationship with the king, when he describes himself as the one "[t]o whom the sun shines both by day and night" (1.1.17). It is no surprise that Mortimer gets angry when he hears the "base" Gaveston frame his advice to Edward with, "Were I a king —" (1.4.27), a phrase that Spencer echoes (3.1.10) and that underscores Gaveston's own awareness of his influence on the king.

Mortimer's repeated reference to Gaveston as "base" not only indicates Gaveston's lowly social status, but also how his role as a "[b]ase flatterer" (2.5.11) can debase the king. Thinking back to Erasmus's equation of the flatterer who corrupts and debases the prince's person with the counterfeiter or false coiner who debases the value of the currency by adding base metals, we can see that Mortimer is drawing on the association between flattery and profligacy. Gaveston essentially adulterates the idealized nature of the king not only through his "base" social status, but also through his foreignness and his adulterous sexual activity.³¹ The king and his coin are devalued because of the addition of Gaveston and his (according to the barons) excessive words, excessive spending, and excessive sexual desire. Gaveston, by encouraging Edward to

30. Bruce Smith suggests that class difference is eroticized, and that while Edward finds Gaveston's lower social class alluring, the barons find it repulsive. He argues that, even in terms of a homosexual relationship based on the roles of master and minion, Edward fails to play the master and is punished for the crime of playing, politically if not physically, the sodomitical "boy" (*Homosexual Desire* 220-21).

31. Mortimer calls Gaveston "[t]hat sly inveigling Frenchman" (1.2.57). It is interesting to note that James I advises his son against putting a foreigner in a high position because of the unrest and envy it is likely to provoke (*Basilicon Doron* II.117); he could well have been thinking back to his own experiences with Esmé Stuart.

spend extravagantly, love excessively and “whisper . . . in his ear” (1.2.52), appears to be the epitome of the flatterer about whom Erasmus warns his young prince. He knows what “delight[s]” the king. However, the issue, as previously noted, is not that flatterers simply offer their listeners untruths, or persuade them to a particular way of thinking, but that their words conceal intentions unknown to their listeners. The masque Gaveston plans emphasizes this aspect of flattery. There has been much comment on this masque, particularly on its homoerotic element, how it prefigures Edward’s murder and Gaveston’s own downfall, and how it echoes entertainments actually performed in Elizabeth’s court.³² What often gets overlooked, though, is the connection between Gaveston’s description of his masque and his reasons for presenting it. He opens with his intention to manipulate the king, but his motive in doing so is as obscure as “those parts which men delight to see” (1.1.64) to which he later refers. Gaveston describes the multiple layers of disguise that will cover the “lovely boy” (60), a boy whose nakedness cannot be seen in the same way that Gaveston’s own intentions cannot be seen beneath his flattery. Just as the knowledge of what lies beneath “Dian’s shape” (60) increases the appeal of the masque for the spectators, so the existence of Gaveston’s indeterminable motive increases the appeal of his flattery, even as that flattery adds to the appeal of what lies beneath. It is, as Bacon notes, the “mixture of a *Lie*” that “doth ever adde Pleasure” (*Essayes* 7). It is not only Gaveston’s ability to flatter that makes him desirable to Edward, but also his *unknowability* as a flatterer that increases that desire.

So far, my discussion has centred on Gaveston as he fits Mortimer’s definition of him as a “base flatterer.” Gaveston, however, is more complex than the barons suggest. He feels some attachment to the king, even though Edward’s claim that Gaveston “loves [him] more than all the world” (1.4.77) is open to question. Certainly, Edward thinks of

32. Kay and Smith consider the masque in connection with the entertainment presented to Elizabeth by Dudley at Kenilworth Castle in 1575 (Kay, par. 10; Smith, *Homosexual Desire* 212). Ian McAdam, Gregory Woods, Normand and Summers note the homoerotic elements in the masque (McAdam 219; Normand, “What Passions” 188; Summers 213; Woods 69-84). Deats examines how it prefigures Edward’s death (“Marlowe’s” 248); Kay also suggests that it foreshadows Gaveston’s end (par. 10).

both of his favourites as friends, regardless of the barons' depiction of them as flatterers. He refers to Gaveston as his "dearest friend," to whom he would give his heart (1.1.161) and notes, after his favourite's death, that "sweet Spencer" is now to have that "place of honour and of trust" (3.1.143-44). Edward needs a friend and both Gaveston and Spencer fulfil that need. Bacon notes that a friend aids in "the Ease and Discharge of the Fulnesse and Swellings of the Heart" (*Essayes* 81). He also remarks that:

It is a Strange Thing to observe, how high a Rate, Great Kings and Monarchs, do set upon this *Fruit of Friendship*, wherof we speake: So great, as they purchase it, many times, at the hazard of their owne Safety, and Greatnesse. For Princes, in regard of the distance of their Fortune, from that of their Subjects and Servants, cannot gather this *Fruit*; Except (to make Themselves capable thereof) they raise some Persons, to be as it were Companions, and almost Equals to themselves, which many times sorteth to Inconvenience. The Moderne Languages give unto such Persons, the Name of *Favorites*, or *Privadoes*; As if it were Matter of Grace, or Conversation. . . . And we see plainly, that this hath been done, not by Weake and Passionate *Princes* onely, but by the Wisest, and most Politique that ever reigned; Who have oftentimes joyned to themselves, some of their Servants; Whom both Themselves have called *Frends*; And allowed Others likewise to call them in the same manner; Using the Word which is received between Private Men. (81-82)

While Bacon is clearly acknowledging his own monarch's attachment to his various favourites through his heavy-handed flattery, he is also indicating the private nature of these friendships—what would nowadays be defined as their homosexual nature.³³ Moreover, he stresses the importance of friends to a king, weak or wise, even though the essential difference in social position leads to difficulties that may endanger the king and his favourites.

Bacon's consideration of the relationship between a monarch and his favourite not only resonates with the court culture of his time, but also with Marlowe's depiction of

33. Bacon's reference to the sexual nature of these friendships is not only indicated by his suggestion that the term friend is only used between "Private Men," but also by his image of "Princes . . . gather[ing] this *Fruit*," considering the sexual valence of fruit at this time, his allusion to the passion of at least some princes, and his labelling of these friends as "*Favorites, or Privadoes*."

Edward. It suggests that while the barons might view Edward's relationship with Gaveston as negative, Edward himself considers it essential to his well-being. Bacon argues that the various "Diseases of Stoppings, and Suffocations, are the most dangerous in the body" and that to relieve the "fulnesse" of the heart, the only remedy is "a true *Frend*; To whom you may impart, Griefes, Joyes, Feares, Hopes, Suspitions, Counsels, and whatsoever lieth upon the Heart, to oppresse it, in a kind of Civill Shrift or Confession" (*Essayes* 81). Edward, when he first sees Gaveston, suggests that everything will be fine now that his friend is near him (1.1.148-50) and asks Gaveston specifically to "receive [his] heart" (161), a declaration that implies his own relief as much as it suggests his love. According to Bacon, a king's preference for his friends is not indicative of weakness; after all "Great Kings and Monarchs," "the Wisest, and most Politique that ever reigned" value such friendship and show great loyalty to their friends in the face of danger.

The difficulty is that, while Edward delights in having a friend who, he believes, loves him "more than all the world" (1.4.77), Gaveston does not actually express such absolute sentiment. He certainly has feelings for the king, noting that he holds "[t]he king" "so dear," and that he wishes "to die" (with all its sexual connotations) on his bosom (1.1.13-14). However, his delight on receiving Edward's invitation to return to London may be less because he loves Edward and more because he loves being "the favourite of a king" (5). After all, it is "[t]he *king*" he "hold[s] so dear" (emphasis added). Gaveston may have feelings for Edward the man, but he *loves* Edward the king for his sovereign power that will permit Gaveston's social advancement. Immediately after proclaiming his desire to die on the king's bosom, he rejoices that he no longer needs to "stoop" to the nobles: "My knee shall bow to none but to the king" (19). His reward for being the king's favourite is more than even he anticipates as Edward raises him, proclaiming himself "Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston!" (142), evidence of Bacon's claim that kings could indeed "raise some Persons, to be . . . almost Equals to themselves." When Edward loads Gaveston with titles, Gaveston's declaration, "It shall suffice me to enjoy your love" appears ironic, particularly as he adds that, with this love,

he considers himself “as great / As Caesar riding in the Roman street / With captive kings at his triumphant car” (170-73). The image describes his own achievement. He is Caesar leading a captive king—Edward. Later, when Gaveston is forced back into exile, he claims that he is distressed by having to “forsake [Edward], in whose gracious looks / The blessedness of Gaveston remains” (1.4.120-21), prompting the exchange of pictures. Again, it is difficult to ignore Gaveston’s allusion to the benefits or blessings he has received as a result of Edward’s indulgence.³⁴ One therefore has to question Edward’s assertion to Mortimer that Gaveston “loves me more than all the world.”

A number of critics note the imbalance in the love the two men feel for each other and how Edward is mistaken about the degree of Gaveston’s affection for him (Huebert, “Tobacco” 214; McAdam 222). Certainly, Gaveston does not love Edward more than he loves himself. Edward’s response may indicate that Gaveston has succeeded in flattering the king so well that Edward believes that Gaveston loves him more than anything else; however, there is little other evidence in the play to support the construction of Edward as yet another “golden Ass” who “swallowes flatterers for friends” (Overbury D3¹). Given the context of Edward’s speech, he may simply be pointing out that Gaveston loves him (Edward) more than the rest of the world loves him. Edward is surrounded by unloving nobles who want to exile his only friend. It is little wonder if he feels unloved and self-pitying at this point. Nonetheless, if Edward’s belief in Gaveston’s love for him is naive, his own affection for Gaveston does not extend much beyond the grave. After vowing revenge on Warwick and Mortimer for Gaveston’s death, he immediately “adopt[s]” “sweet Spencer” and grants him titles “merely of our love” (3.1.144-45). Indeed, even earlier, on learning that the nobles have repealed Gaveston’s exile, Edward demands a physical embrace from Lancaster and asks him to “[l]ive . . . with me as my companion” (1.4.342). This association is obviously short lived. Lancaster’s response seems overly

34. Lois Potter notes that the contrasting affection the two men hold for each other was made clear in a 1964 theatre production by the Bristol Old Vic Drama School, in which Edward treated the portrait of Gaveston with great care and reverence, while Gaveston’s examination of the king’s portrait suggested he was estimating its monetary value (95).

formal for a “companion” and perhaps reveals his distaste of Edward’s insatiable desire for friends. The king, like Gaveston, seems to have less allegiance to the actual man than the need for someone, anyone, to be his “friend.”³⁵

While Gaveston suggests he will “draw the pliant king” with pleasing sounds, and while the barons persist in describing Gaveston as a flatterer eager to reap the benefits of having the king’s ear, we do not actually hear him flattering Edward. Instead, we hear of Edward hanging onto Gaveston and whispering into his ear (1.2.51-52), an image more in keeping with Bacon’s construction of friends as confessors. This image may also be yet another sign of a disrupted social hierarchy in which a king appears not as one flattered, but as a potential flatterer, speaking into his favourite’s ear. What bothers Mortimer most about Edward’s whispering into Gaveston’s ear is their physical proximity and the way it excludes him from his monarch’s presence. When he responds to his uncle’s remark that “[t]he mightiest kings have had their minions” (1.4.390), he not only refers to Gaveston’s low social status, his extravagant dress, and his homosexuality, but also to Gaveston’s propinquity to, and his own separation from, Edward:

Whiles other walk below, the king and he
From out a window laugh at such as we,
And flout our train and jest at our attire.
Uncle, ’tis this that makes me impatient. (415-18)

It is difficult to avoid Mortimer’s implication that he would find the situation acceptable if *he* were the one with the king looking down on and laughing at others. Meredith Skura notes that Marlowe’s play explores not only male love and friendship, but also male rivalry and, while she considers the main rivalry to exist between Mortimer and Edward (43), I suggest that Mortimer, along with the other barons, considers Gaveston a serious

35. While Gaveston’s name becomes a rallying cry for the king and his supporters (3.1.178-79), Edward appears less concerned about the murder of the man, Gaveston, and more with how the barons have thwarted his desire to be friends with whomever he desires (2.2.261-62). Huebert argues that Edward’s desire for Gaveston is representative of one of two types of desire presented in Marlowe’s work: “One rebellious, anarchic, egocentric, the other soporific, domestic, self-effacing” (“Tobacco” 208-09) and that Edward insists on fulfilling his desire contrary to the demands of the barons, his wife, his father, and his own role as a monarch (213).

rival, particularly when it comes to who has access to the king's ear—and to the treasury and status Edward can arbitrarily confer.

The rivalry between Mortimer and Gaveston, the barons and the favourites, is further emphasized by the contrasts made between the two groups, and most frequently expressed by the nobles themselves. They suggest that they are “old servitors” compared to the “smooth dissembling flatterers” (3.1.168-69) who now surround Edward, succinctly reminding him of both their heritage and their past service. In addition, they note their love is “natural” (1.1.99), implying that Gaveston's love is in some way “unnatural.”³⁶ While Edward might consider them “proud overdaring peers” (1.4.47), they insist they are simply “counsellors” (44). They are also feudal landlords more comfortable on the battlefield than “jet[ting] it in the court” (407), whereas Gaveston and Spencer sound remarkably like the “new-style” courtier celebrated by Castiglione and welcomed in Elizabeth's own court (Goldberg 122).³⁷ Gaveston appears to be “the quintessential Elizabethan courtier,” whose role it is to please and entertain the monarch (Kay, par. 9). Castiglione notes that it is a vital skill for a courtier to dissemble his mood “and frame him selfe to pleasant communication and such as his Lord will be willing to give eare unto, least hee hinder that good moode of his” (108), and Gaveston's presence certainly appears to keep Edward in a good mood. Furthermore, Gaveston is skilled at

36. Whether Gaveston's love is “unnatural” in degree or in nature is not expressed, and it should be noted that the term “unnatural” is never applied to Edward's sexuality (Rowland xxix). However, it is applied to both the use of and rebellion against sovereign power: Edward is an “[u]nnatural king, to slaughter noble men / And cherish flatterers” (4.1.8-9), but equally the barons are engaging in an “unnatural revolt” (4.6.9), for “wars, where subjects brave their king” are “[u]nnatural” (3.1.86). Smith points to this slippage between the two terms, natural and unnatural, which he reads as “sexually charged” (*Homosexual Desire* 219).

37. Elizabeth may have thought of herself as Richard II when Shakespeare's play of the same name was performed on the eve of the Essex rebellion, but her court is perhaps more like that of Edward's, with the new-style courtiers, including the Earl of Essex, seeking to flatter her. Unlike Edward, though, Elizabeth apparently remained uncorrupted by such attention, or at least sufficiently wary about what she heard that she kept her crown.

dissembling, not only because he knows the art of flattery, but also, according to Mortimer, because he can change his appearance like Proteus (1.4.410). Spencer, in his advice to Baldock, claims that such disguise is vital (2.1.31-43).

Mortimer, by contrast, has difficulty disguising his own feelings, especially early on. His uncle begins with a subjunctive when addressing Edward: "If you love us, my lord, hate Gaveston" (1.1.79), an expression that, through the use of "positive politeness" (Magnusson 21), takes into account Edward's status and the power differential between Edward as listener and Mortimer Senior as speaker. Mortimer Junior, however, uses no such politeness strategy, but makes a direct threat to Edward's sovereignty, indicating either his own impulsiveness, or his refusal to employ such rhetorical techniques. Moreover, when advised to "[b]ridle [his] anger" (1.1.120), Mortimer maintains (in triplicate) that this is impossible: "I cannot nor I will not; I must speak" (121).³⁸ While Mortimer becomes more adept at ambiguity through the course of the play, most notably in his declaration to Edward: "My lord, I'll marshal so your enemies, / As England shall be quiet and you safe" (1.4.356-57), and in his ambiguously authored, unpointed note, he never learns to frame his speech like Castiglione's ideal courtier.³⁹ Even when facing execution, he stoutly declares, "I will rather die / Than sue for life unto a paltry boy" (5.6.55-56). Mortimer's approach is not to please or plead with his listeners. Unlike the

38. Mortimer is not the only baron who speaks his mind. Lancaster also insists on doing so (2.2.155), and the messenger sent by the nobles to Edward declares that he has been told to speak "plainer to your grace" (3.1.158).

39. Mortimer may have learnt the value of ambiguity from his uncle who declares, "[W]ith my nature war doth best agree" (1.4.364), leaving open to question the identity of his opponent. Before leaving for Scotland, Mortimer Senior advises his nephew, "Leave now to oppose thyself against the king" (386), a statement that can be interpreted as advice both to stop opposing the king and to continue such opposition. The rest of the speech supports either meaning, as Mortimer Senior could be suggesting that Mortimer should stop his opposition as the king will eventually mature and abandon Gaveston, or that, distracted by Gaveston, the king will not notice Mortimer's opposition.

new-style courtier, Gaveston, Mortimer is not prepared to seduce the king with “pleasant wits.” Instead, he attacks his opponents, either with words or with the sword.⁴⁰

Skura suggests that Gaveston and Mortimer avoid direct rivalry because each of them “calls forth one of ‘the king’s two bodies’” (44), suggesting that Mortimer’s desire is for the body politic, whereas Gaveston’s delight is in Edward’s physical body.

Viswanathan agrees that Mortimer’s complaints are directed at the degeneration of the body politic effected by Gaveston’s relationship with the king (82). Jonathan Goldberg disagrees with this distinction, arguing that the nobles are most upset by the friendship between Edward and Gaveston because they too “seek friendship and its rewards from the king” (118). I support Goldberg’s position that there is little difference between what Gaveston and Mortimer want from Edward. Gaveston, having access to Edward’s physical body, enjoys the benefits of the political body; Mortimer wants access to Edward’s physical body, or at least to his ear, to achieve political gain.⁴¹ In the scene Mortimer describes in which Edward and Gaveston watch the barons “below,” the relationship between the men is represented in spatial terms. Indeed, throughout the play, relationships to Edward are portrayed in terms of spatial distance and access to his physical body. In the opening scene, Gaveston must “stand aside” (1.1.72) because of the presence of the nobles, and he can only approach the king when they have left the stage.

40. The contrast between the nobles and Gaveston is also suggested in his conversation with the Third Poor Man whose curse foreshadows Gaveston’s death. Gaveston declares, “I have no war” and claims, “[T]here are hospitals for such as you” (1.1.34-35), to which the old soldier replies, “Farewell, and perish by a soldier’s hand” (36).

41. There is scant evidence in the text that Mortimer wants access to any part of Edward’s body, other than his ear, despite the method of Edward’s death which is Lightborn’s idea, not Mortimer’s. However, one *can* read his questioning of Edward: “Why should you love him whom the world hates so?” (1.4.76) as an exploration of Gaveston’s appeal for the king. In an argument McAdam finds “extreme” (204), Jennifer Brady notes both how Mortimer is simultaneously repelled and fascinated by Edward’s homosexuality, and how he couches his own political desires in erotic terms. She suggests that his anachronistic statement that he is like a “bashful Puritan” at the “council-table” (5.4.56-57), indicates his political hypocrisy (Brady 178). It could also imply his duplicity about sexual matters.

However, once he is safely at the king's side (1.4.10), others begin to object. Lancaster complains that the two men are "arm in arm" (1.2.20), and Isabella concludes that she may as well go and live in the forest, for "the king regards [her] not" (49) while he has Gaveston. Edward tells Isabella to "reconcile the lords," and when she declares the impossibility of such a task, he exclaims, "Away then; touch me not" (1.4.156, 159), putting physical space between them by leaving the stage and verbally signifying the distance by telling Gaveston not to speak to her. Edward therefore is shown to offer "open and affable" access to Gaveston while denying others any access at all.

That Gaveston's access to Edward particularly enrages the nobles is apparent not only in their demand that he be exiled, but also in their rejection of the king's later request to speak to Gaveston after his capture. Even as the king's favourite lives "in hope . . . / To see his royal sovereign once again" (2.5.5,7), the nobles claim that Edward "will, if he seize [Gaveston] once, / Violate any promise to possess him" (61-62), the word "seize" echoing with its homonym and suggesting Gaveston's earlier hope, the nobles' own capture of Gaveston, and Edward's wish to recapture and embrace his friend. Gaveston is killed so he cannot "see" or be "seize[d]" by Edward. The need to control who has access to the king is further shown by the barons' demand that Edward "remove" Spencer from his presence (3.1.161), and by Matrevis's insistence that Edward and Kent be kept "asunder," ignoring Kent's request, "let me but talk to him one word" (5.3.52-53). Indeed, even when the monarchy passes to Edward III, Mortimer insists on exerting control over who has access to the young king, fearing that "if [Kent] have such access unto the prince, / Our plots and stratagems will soon be dashed" (5.2.76-77).⁴² He argues, in words that strongly echo both his previous complaints about Gaveston and Erasmus's warnings about who should be permitted to associate with a young prince, "[T]is not meet that one so false / Should come about the person of a prince" (103-04; Erasmus 143). Mortimer's desire to control access to the king demonstrates his awareness of how the power possessed by the body politic can only be accessed through the

42. Mortimer and Isabella also attempt to influence the prince's perspective of Kent by labelling him "traitor" while Edward III calls him "uncle" (Belt 139).

physical body of the king. Edward, like Elizabeth in her emblematic robe, is surrounded by eyes, ears, and tongues, and not only those of his friends, but also those of ambitious nobles like Mortimer. While the ears, eyes and tongues on Elizabeth's robe have a dual role, protecting her as emblems of Reason of State, and suggesting her vulnerability as an object of Fame, those surrounding Edward fail to protect him at all and only demonstrate his openness and penetrability.

Contrary to Elizabeth with her impenetrable ear and those rulers who, like Shakespeare's Henry V, can distance themselves from those they do not want to hear, Edward is unable to avoid the voices around him. He fails to follow Machiavelli's advice that "a prince . . . should discourage everyone from counseling him on anything, if he does not ask it of them" (88). Edward gets advice from all sides, regardless of whether he wants it or pays attention to it. The nobles gain access to his ear and he hears their demand that he "hate Gaveston" (1.1.79) and abandon Spencer and Baldock (3.1.169); however, he refuses to respond appropriately. As a result, they consider him "brainsick" (1.1.124), "light-brained" (5.2.2), and "bewitched" (1.2.55). In addition to ignoring the barons' advice, Edward also disregards the more moderate advice of his brother. As McAdam notes, critics consider Kent representative of a moral standard, and audiences are inclined to support his allegiance even as it fluctuates between his brother and the belligerent nobles (222-23). Nonetheless, in his very first speech, Kent advises Edward to "revenge" the barons' verbal outburst, "and let these their heads / Preach upon poles for trespass of their tongues" (1.1.116-17). Edward, though, despite his earlier warning to the nobles, substitutes games and display for action. He settles for "display[ing his] ensigns in the field" and "bandy[ing]" with the nobles (135-36). While we might be surprised at Kent's harshness in suggesting that Edward execute his unruly nobles, his recommendation is justified, given the seriousness of the barons' offence. Attacks on the king were deemed attacks on the kingdom (Kantorowicz 15); threats against the king were threats against the kingdom and uttering them was a treasonable offence punishable

by death.⁴³ Furthermore, those making the threats are Edward's closest associates, his counsellors and, as James I warns his son, in respect to his nobles, he "should beat . . . euer in at their eares" the need for "their persons to practise . . . due obedience to the lawe." James then asks, "[H]owe can your lawes be kept in the countrie, if they be broken at your eare?" (*Basilicon Doron* II.87-88, II.119). Edward hears the law broken "at [his] eare" but fails to act on what he hears, continuing instead to press his own request for Gaveston's return.

Repeatedly, Edward hears yet ignores Kent's advice, whether it is to punish the barons for their defiance, limit the number of titles he gives his favourite (1.1.157-58), or banish Gaveston (2.2.210), and Kent eventually changes his allegiance. While this move may suggest Kent's increasing discomfort with Gaveston's presence at court and his influence over the king, it actually results from Edward's command that he "be gone" (213).⁴⁴ Edward may have previously ignored his brother's advice, but when he refuses even to hear it, to allow Kent access to his ear, Kent obeys and seeks Prince Edward's ear until Mortimer fears that the boy may be influenced by his uncle. Kent then tries again to be heard by his brother—an attempt that eventually leads to his death. Kent, however, is not the only one to offer Edward advice on the fate of the nobles. If Kent is representative of a moral touchstone, his advice is remarkably similar to that of the "base flatterers." Both Gaveston and Spencer counsel Edward to rid himself of his nobles, but he fails to act decisively in response. While Mortimer picks up on Gaveston's threat, "Were I a king," Edward's reply, "Were he a peasant" (1.4.30) engages with the rhetorical structure

43. Rebellion against a monarch who was under the sway of wicked advisors was deemed acceptable under extreme circumstances (Viswanathan 83). The young James VI of Scotland was subject to such an uprising in August 1582 when he was kidnapped to remove him from the influence of D'Aubigny and a radically Protestant council was installed. In *Edward II*, Mortimer admits the seriousness of the nobles' actions when he states, "For howsoever we have borne it out, / 'Tis treason to be up against the king" (1.4.280-81).

44. Unlike Mortimer, who ignores Edward's earlier command to leave the court (2.2.89), Kent obeys his brother.

of Gaveston's words, not their meaning. He prefers to "bandy" than to draw blood. Equally, when Kent's recommendation is echoed by Spencer, who advises Edward: "Strike off their heads, and let them preach on poles" (3.1.20), the king plays games with alliterative homonyms and synonyms: "[I]f they send me not my Gaveston, / We'll steel it on their crest and poll their tops" (26-27). When he learns that Gaveston is dead, he vows, "I will have heads and lives for him—as many / As I have manors, castles, towns, and towers" (132-33), but given his previous preference for words over action, his pledge seems hollow, especially as he ends his speech by moving Spencer into the "place of honour and of trust" (143) left vacant by Gaveston's death. He ultimately captures and executes the barons (with the exception of Mortimer), yet his words continue to lack resonance in action as the executions are not staged.

Edward may fail to respond appropriately to some of the voices he hears around him by ignoring the advice he is given, but his nobles also fail to give him the attention he desires. While Elizabeth may be surrounded by attendant ears in *The Rainbow Portrait*, Edward is surrounded by ears reluctant to attend to his words. His failure to be heard reverses the usual listening relationship between monarch and subject. Rather than being the powerful deaf ruler who can choose what he hears, he is the "anxious speaker" others ignore (Nelson and Berens 53). Indeed, his first appearance onstage is as a speaker anxious to be heard by Lancaster. Edward has to call to his counsellor to get his attention (1.1.73) and must then beg for his request to be granted (76; 119). He resorts to using Isabella as an intermediary to appeal to the nobles for Gaveston's return, and even his request to his wife is couched in qualified tones, despite his threat of estrangement from her: "I would wish thee reconcile the lords" (1.4.156).⁴⁵ Edward is then forced to plead again, this time through Arundel, when the nobles seize Gaveston (2.5.34-39). In addition, he is frequently told how to speak to others, and particularly, the need to speak in flattering terms, as if he were a social inferior making a request of a superior. Isabella

45. Edward needs not one but two mediators as Isabella asks Mortimer to be her advocate, placing him in the uncomfortable position of having to "plead for [Gaveston's] repeal" (1.4.241).

advises him to “bespeak these nobles fair” (1.4.336) after they have granted his request for Gaveston’s return, and both his niece and Gaveston tell him to “speak more kindly to the queen,” though it may require “dissembl[ing]” (2.2.227-28). Finally, when he refuses to abdicate, Leicester urges him to recall the Bishop of Winchester and Trussel and “speak them fair” (5.1.91). Edward replies, “I have no power to speak” (93), an ironic statement suggesting not only that his power to speak is embodied in his monarchical status, but also echoing his previous failure to win the barons’ favour by entreaty and “fair” speaking.

Along with ignoring Edward’s request for Gaveston’s return, the nobles have the temerity to interrupt his speech. Kent’s suggestion that the barons be executed for their threats leads to an outburst by Mortimer. Warwick advises him to “[b]ridle [his] anger” (1.1.120), yet it is not Mortimer who is “[b]ridle[d]” (120), but Edward as Warwick’s recommendation to Mortimer interrupts the king’s speech. Indeed, Edward does not speak again until the barons have left the stage. Furthermore, Edward’s later “[a]nger and wrathful fury” does not bridle the nobles, but “stops [his own] speech” (1.4.42). Gaveston and Mortimer may compete for access to Edward’s ear, but Edward competes with his own barons to be heard (Clemen 129). He is ineffective in getting Gaveston’s exile repealed in 1.1, thanks to Mortimer’s interruption. However, when Mortimer brings the same request to the nobles, they support it despite initially claiming, “No speaking will prevail” and “[a]ll that he speaks is nothing” (1.4.220, 251). Mortimer succeeds in gaining both the attention and agreement of his listeners where Edward fails. Mortimer’s success is perhaps due to his refusal to act like an “anxious speaker”; instead, his manner is aggressive and the terms and images he uses are often associated with violence. When addressing the nobles, he “urge[s]” them with “burning zeal” (256) and notes how someone could be hired “[t]o greet his lordship with a poniard” (266), an image that directly connects speech itself with the murderous stab of a knife. Repeatedly, Mortimer compares speech to acts of violence: “parley[ing] with . . . naked swords” (1.1.125),

equating prayers with the use of his sword (2.2.152), and taking “aim” with tongue and sword at Gaveston (84).⁴⁶

Edward might prefer to hear the “pleasing wits” of Gaveston, but instead he is repeatedly subjected to Mortimer’s fury. Early on, Mortimer declares, “The name of Mortimer shall fright the king, / Unless he be declined from that base peasant” (1.4.6-7), and his name appears to have its intended impact as Edward later notes how it wounds him (4.7.38).⁴⁷ When the king is captured, Mortimer, aware of Edward’s preference for pleasing sounds and his need for comfort, warns Matrevis and Gurney:

. . . to make him fret the more,
 Speak curstly to him; and in any case
 Let no man comfort him if he chance to weep,
 But amplify his grief with bitter words. (5.2.61-64)

Furthermore, noise is used, along with the assault on Edward’s other senses, as a method of depriving him of sleep. Nonetheless, Mortimer’s greatest assault on Edward’s ears occurs much earlier. When he learns of his uncle’s capture by the Scots, Mortimer declares that, if Edward refuses to pay the ransom, “[he]’ll thunder such a peal into his ears / As never subject did unto his king” (2.2.127-28). While the word “peal” ironically suggests that this violent speech is actually an “appeal” to the king, Mortimer’s language underscores the power of his voice and his ability, like a thunderclap that deafens those who hear it (*Sylva Sylvarum* 43), to inflict damage on his listener. Mortimer then follows his declaration by invading Edward’s privacy. Supported by Lancaster, he demands and gets access despite the guard who insists the king is “disposed to be alone” (2.2.134). Edward, alerted to the nobles’ presence by their noise, is forced to hear what they have to say. Moreover, the barrage of words spoken by Mortimer and Lancaster as they alternate

46. Brady suggests that Mortimer’s response here is provoked by Edward’s welcoming Gaveston “in a way calculated to incense the barons” (185), though given Mortimer’s earlier speeches about murdering Gaveston, I would argue that he needs little provocation. He is simply attempting to execute (literally) what he has previously spoken.

47. Edward’s reaction to the sound of his enemy’s name is in stark contrast to his son’s brave defiance of Mortimer: “Think not that I am frightened with thy words” (5.6.26), a defiance reinforced by Mortimer’s claim just a few lines earlier that “[a]ll tremble at my name, and I fear none” (13).

as speakers and echo one another's rhetorical structures have a cumulative—thunderous—effect that prevents Edward from speaking until they have left the stage. This is a concrete illustration of both the violent, invasive nature of speech and the king's inability to turn a deaf ear to his nobles. This intrusion of Edward's privacy and of his ear also foreshadows Lightborn's later invasion of Edward's body. Mortimer may have initiated the invasion of Edward through the ear, but the damage caused by his declaration of open rebellion results in Edward's separation from Kent and the nobles, his eventual separation from his crown and country, and ultimately, his death.

As this short scene indicates, Mortimer not only speaks aggressively and associates speech with violence, but he also speaks with the rhetorical power expected of a ruler.⁴⁸ Unlike Edward, he can also stop speech he does not wish to hear. When he and Isabella return from France, he interrupts her speech. Joan Parks suggests that his interruption is an attempt to displace her "passionate" declamation with his own rational, objective call to arms (288); however, this ignores the fact that he stops her only when she refers to Edward as "[o]f thine own people patron shouldst thou be" (4.4.13). Mortimer, who has already declared that his "hope surmounts his fortune far" (3.3.75), clearly does not consider Edward "patron" of his people and does not want him named as such. Equally, when Spencer Senior labels Mortimer a rebel for fighting against the king, Mortimer cuts him short (4.6.71-73). McAdam, even as he acknowledges the impact of Spencer Senior's words, argues that Mortimer's impatience with these speakers is simply the development of his early reckless behaviour (215-16). In contrast, I believe that Mortimer's interruptions demonstrate his awareness of the power of words, of labels, particularly on those who hear them. He does not want Spencer Senior's definition of him as a rebel to be heard or taken seriously and demeans it by claiming Spencer "prates" (4.6.73). Mortimer understands that the power afforded by the body politic requires control not only of the king's ear, but also of the ears of the king's subjects.

48. Wayne Rebhorn notes how early modern rhetorical manuals and political theories link rule and rhetoric and the need for rulers to use language (and spectacle) to ensure their subjects' support (50-51). Mortimer, despite his inability to dissemble like Gaveston, appears to understand the link between speech and authority.

Just as Elizabeth attempted to control the public representations of herself (King 59), so Mortimer is aware of the need for public support. He appreciates both the positive and negative aspects of Fame and the need to control what is revealed to or heard by the people. When he argues for Gaveston's repeal, he notes that the people "for his father's sake, lean to the king / But cannot brook a night-grown mushroom— / Such a one as my lord of Cornwall is—" (1.4.283-85) and that Gaveston's presence will encourage the people to side with the nobles. Mortimer can manipulate the "fame" of Edward, ensuring that the eyes and ears of the people see and hear only what he wants. Edward, however, while fully aware of the power of the people and how he cannot imprison Mortimer "for the people love him well" (2.2.234), fails to consider how he might manipulate their perceptions of his enemy. In contrast to playwrights who argue that the common folk, or "groundlings," are more affected by spectacle than words, several early modern writers suggest that people can be particularly swayed by what they hear, especially when they are attending to the words of a prince. While Edward's barons may not show evidence of this, Erasmus claims, "Every word that is dropped from the lips of the prince is scattered wide among the masses" (210), advice echoed by James who compares a king to an actor whose "smallest actions and gestures" are noticed. He therefore tells his son "to take heede [of] . . . your speaking and language," noting that it should be "plaine, honest, naturall, comelie, cleane, short, and sentencious" in order to appeal to the masses (*Basilicon Doron* III.179). A prince, therefore, must be careful about what he says. In addition, Machiavelli notes that a ruler needs to appear appropriately pious: "all piety, all faith, all integrity, all humaneness, all religion" to those who "see him and hear him" (67).⁴⁹ Cornwallis balances this emphasis on a monarch's speech by adding that the people are "wonne with what they feele and delighted with what they heare; so are the chiefe tooles of this trade, Liberalitie and Rhethoricke" (30). In other words, eloquence

49. In Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Buckingham obviously draws on Machiavelli's suggestion when he tells Gloucester to "get a prayer book in your hand, / And stand between two churchmen, good my lord, / For on that ground I'll build a holy descant" (3.7.47-49). Forker suggests that Mortimer's reference to himself as a "bashful Puritan" echoes this very image of Gloucester and therefore emphasizes his evil character (27).

should be accompanied by an appearance of generosity or patronage, a point of which Elizabeth was acutely aware (Clapham 86).

Edward fails to be the king his people desire to hear and see. His behaviour is hardly pious and he can no longer afford to be generous. Indeed, Mortimer notes these problems when he talks of the people's dissatisfaction:

The idle triumphs, masques, lascivious shows,
And prodigal gifts bestowed on Gaveston,
Have drawn the treasury dry and made thee weak;
The murmuring commons, overstretched hath. (2.2.156-59)

Mortimer suggests that, unlike Edward, he is able to reward those who serve him (4.6.53-54), although the danger of accepting Mortimer's gifts is seen when Lightborn receives his "reward" (5.5.116). In addition, Rice ap Howell's ambiguous reply to the Mower: "Remember thee, fellow? What else? Follow me to the town" (4.7.118-19) echoes Gaveston's earlier refusal to acknowledge the responsibilities associated with patronage and service. When it comes to actually rewarding service, Mortimer appears even more reluctant than Edward, who is at least lavish to his favourites. Like Elizabeth, Mortimer attempts to foist the responsibility for his negative deeds onto someone else, while he maintains the crowd-pleasing appearance of a "bashful Puritan."

Unlike his enemy Mortimer, and unlike Elizabeth, when it comes to hearing and being heard, Edward appears overruled on all counts. Douglas Kay argues that the idea of an overruled king is inconsistent with Tudor political ideology, and that Edward is therefore a "negative exemplum" that contrasts the cult of Elizabeth (par. 3)—hence his use as such an example by Walsingham and Yelverton. Kay implies, therefore, that a good king is *not* overruled. David Thurn also explores the questions this play poses about the power of even rightful heirs to rule and concludes that sovereign power is shown to be a result of an "arbitrary compact" (121). I agree that the play explores the interconnection between monarchical power and the structures that support it; however, I do not believe that Edward fails as a king because of the arbitrary nature of the power structure, but rather because he refuses to acknowledge his own position in it: he refuses to be overruled. Edward objects to being "subject to a priest" (1.4.96) and limited by

“headstrong barons” (2.2.261), thinking he has shown them “too much clemency” (5.1.123), yet his monarchical power is shown to be futile against the nobles. His diminished authority, though, results from his own defiance of a king’s decree (Goldberg 122-23). Edward might wish to “triumph . . . with his friends uncontrolled” (4.3.3), and he may believe that he has the power to achieve that wish; nonetheless, in repealing Gaveston he ignores his late father’s orders. As noted earlier, the body politic was believed to endure beyond death—investing itself in the physical body of the heir to the throne; laws did not die with the monarch who instituted them, but continued in force after that monarch’s death. Edward’s rejection of his father’s demand that Gaveston continue in exile—a demand supposed to remain in effect beyond the king’s death—weakens the power of the body politic now embodied in Edward.⁵⁰ Mortimer makes this explicit when he notes that Edward’s rejection of *his* king’s word will lead to his subjects’ refusal to heed his own words: “This sword of mine that should offend your foes / Shall sleep within the scabbard at thy need” (1.1.85-86). It is Edward’s own rejection of monarchical authority that leads to him being overruled. Lancaster’s recommendation that Edward must “[l]earn . . . to rule us better and the realm” (1.4.38) is not a suggestion that Edward should use more force with them, but that he should heed the power he now wields.

Edward’s dismissal of the power invested in him occurs repeatedly. Even when he attempts to claim the power of his kingship, it is with qualification. When cursing the barons, he repeatedly begins, “If I be king,” or “If I be England’s king” (1.4.105; 3.1.135), suggesting that he doubts his own authority. His earlier offer to abdicate and let the barons divide the kingdom between them also indicates his rejection of his

50. Huebert notes that in his letter to Gaveston, Edward does not say “‘The king, my father,’ but rather ‘My father’” (“Tobacco” 212), indicating Edward’s failure to acknowledge his father’s monarchical authority, even as he acknowledges his paternal control. In contrast, Mortimer compares his own support of the body politic with Edward’s rejection when he reminds the king, “Mine uncle here, this earl, and I myself, / Were sworn to your father at his death, / That he should ne’er return into the realm” (1.1.81-83).

monarchical power. As we have seen in *Lear* and *Gorbuduc*, such a declaration inevitably leads to trouble for a king. Edward may retain his crown for a while longer, but he has already abdicated the responsibility that comes with it: he fails to distribute funds from the treasury judiciously, finance necessary defences, or develop any foreign policy. As a result, England is threatened on all sides (2.2.161-168). In addition, his introduction of Gaveston into the nobility further destabilizes the hierarchy that supports him, as it suggests that social roles depend on favour, not merit (Summers 227). Parks notes that the accounts of Edward II found in the Holinshed and Stowe chronicles repeatedly frame the king's power within national law. She admits that this is partly a result of the inclusive nature of the chronicle form, but adds that "the chronicles are also more specific in their insistence that the king was bound to the laws of the land," particularly his need to obey the laws "contayned in the Charters of the Kings his Predecessours" (280).⁵¹ Moreover, Edward not only rejects the authority of preceding kings, but also questions divine authority. Despite the contemporary belief in the divine appointment of kings as "God's lieutenants," Edward appears to question God's existence. When the Bishop of Coventry claims that Edward will be "accurst of God" for abusing him, Edward's next words are "Who's there?" (1.1.198-99). Ostensibly he is calling for guards to remove the bishop, but given Marlowe's own heretical beliefs, it is difficult to ignore the implications of Edward's question.⁵² And, if there is no divine authority, by what right does Edward sit on the throne?

51. The chronicles also suggest that Edward fails to show appropriate self-government. They present his love for Gaveston as excessive and lacking self-control. Unable to govern his own desires, Edward is considered unfit to govern the realm (Parks 281).

52. Alan Bray recommends caution when drawing on Baines's reports as indicative of Marlowe's religious beliefs, noting that they were prepared to meet the "preconceptions of the authorities to whom he was reporting" (63) and Thurn argues that the play's failure to allude to the divine right of kings is a further indication of the arbitrary nature of political power (127). I argue that it is a further demonstration of Edward's refusal to be overruled. It should be noted that Edward does not call on God to witness his oath when he swears his revenge. Instead, he claims vengeance by what has been created—the "earth" and "heaven," as well as by his physical being and position as monarch (cont.).

While Edward appears to question the existence of any authority higher than himself, Mortimer at least pays lip-service to such an authority, both as embodied in the late and future kings, Edward I and Edward III, and as represented by signs of divine benevolence. On his return from France, Mortimer claims he comes “by sufferance of heaven” to restore Isabella, “England’s queen,” to “[h]er dignities and honours” (4.4.16, 23-24). She then echoes the idea that God is on their side:

Successful battles gives the God of kings
To them that fight in right and fear his wrath.
Since then successfully we have prevailed,
Thanked be heaven’s great architect and you [noble lords]. (4.6.19-22)

However, even as Mortimer suggests that his actions are supported by heaven, and that he therefore operates under the sanction of divine power, he apparently forgets the source of his power once he has unimpeded access to the throne. Like Edward, he believes that he should not be overruled:

Now is all sure; the queen and Mortimer
Shall rule the realm, the king, and none rule us.
Mine enemies will I plague, my friends advance,
And what I list command who dare control?
Maior sum quàm cui possit fortuna nocere.
[I am too great for Fortune to harm me] (5.4.63-67)

The parallels to Edward’s presumption: “He that I list to favour shall be great” (2.2.262) cannot be ignored. The audience has already heard Edward refuse to moderate his love for Gaveston, neglecting his kingdom instead. He has insisted on complete freedom to express that love and, as a result, rejected the control of the institutions that supported his sovereignty. In doing so, he has undermined his own authority. Equally, no sooner does Mortimer claim that he is beyond control, that he can do what he “list[s],” but he too is brought down by “Base Fortune” (5.6.58). In contrast to both Edward and Mortimer who reject the need to be counselled or overruled, Edward III appeals to his counsellors to

52 cont. Even his call on heaven is that of the physical “heaven” including “all the moving orbs thereof” (3.1.128-29). Also, while he “plain[s] me to the gods” (5.1.22) in his self-pitying lament, when he remembers his position as king, he thinks only of revenge (23-25), suggesting that as a monarch, he cannot appeal for divine help.

support him: he “crave[s] the aid and succour of his peers” (21). Aware he cannot rule without them, he appeals to them and, as a result, they reinforce his monarchy. “Fear not,” says the First Lord, “know that you are a king” (24). Moreover, unlike his father, who was invaded by Mortimer’s violent speech, Edward III defuses its power; he refuses to be “frighted” (26) by the words of the ambitious noble. In addition, he demonstrates Mortimer’s own awareness of the need to control the perceptions of others, not only through his demand for the visual display of Mortimer’s body and severed head as a warning to other traitors, but also through repeatedly labelling the noble as a “traitor” (four times in sixty lines). Aware that his words are heard by those around him, he speaks his version of events.

Edward III’s ability to speak, his claim that “in me my loving father speaks” (5.6.40), is only possible because of his father’s death. His authority comes from the transference of the power of the body politic from his father to himself (Viswanathan 91). This transference is predicated on Edward’s final cry, the cry that Matrevis “fear[s] . . . will raise the town” (5.5.113). While Edward has had difficulty being heard throughout the rest of the play, his voice finally resounds in death. Edward’s death has caused much critical consternation, not least because of the method of death recorded in Holinshed and suggested by Marlowe, though perhaps never realized.⁵³ As Orgel notes, critics seem to find the “unused spit . . . irresistible” (47). Indeed, Forker finds it so “irresistible” that he includes stage directions for its use, claiming, “If the playwright had intended not to show [the spit], there would be little reason for having the murderer mention his weapon during his preparations, thereby setting up a disappointing anticlimax” (note to 5.5.30). Forker’s argument that the audience expects to see the enactment of anal rape with a red-hot spit suggests that there is a desire, shown by Marlowe’s critics and editors at least, for Edward’s death to be connected to his “crime.” There is an insistence on relating Edward’s homosexual desire to his murder by penetration. His murder has therefore been

53. Lightborn requests the spit along with the table and featherbed before he enters Edward’s dungeon (5.5.30); however, when he murders Edward, he only requests the table (109). There is no indication at this point in the text that the spit is used.

variously considered punishment for his “unnatural” sexual desires, a horrific parody of anal intercourse, and a commentary on, or criticism of, the social control of homosexuality.⁵⁴ The play, however, as Claude Summers notes, does not offer a moral commentary on the issue despite the critics’ attempts to draw one out of it (222). Much might be said about Gaveston as Edward’s “minion,” but the issue is not that a master/minion relationship exists, but that the hierarchy between the two positions is unstable (Smith, *Homosexual Desire* 213-230). Gaveston masters Edward as much as, if not more than, Edward masters him. Equally, as Thurn notes, within the play, criticism of the relationship focuses on its violation of class structure, not on its transgression of sexual mores (116). Indeed, the homosexual relationship is condemned less than the heterosexual affair between Isabella and Mortimer. The issue is not the sexual nature of Edward’s love for Gaveston, but its intensity and his refusal to limit it (Bray 26; Normand, “What Passions” 189).

Edward’s homosexuality, even while it may have permitted the staging of a deposition scene that would have otherwise been censored (Orgel 48), is not the essential cause of his dethronement and death, but a sign that Edward has rejected established political and religious hierarchies. Homosexuality alone did not cause a man to be branded as a sodomite, but political or religious insurrection did, the three being linked by their potential threat to social order (Bray 19-20; Goldberg 119-20).⁵⁵ It is for this reason that sodomy was a capital offence during the reigns of Elizabeth and James I (Bray 62). To label a king a sodomite, though, was the ultimate paradox. How could someone who embodied traditional hierarchical power also pervert the order established

54. McAdam offers a good summary of several critical commentaries on Edward’s death, including Kuriyama and Empson’s conclusion that it is a form of punishment for his homosexuality, Brady’s belief that it is a critique of society’s persecution of homosexuals, a view shared in part by Summers, and Guy-Bray and Danson’s opinion that Edward’s sexual desires are only defined as transgressive because of his political position (204-06).

55. Homosexuality, heresy, and treason are blended in Richard Baines’s reports against Marlowe (Bray 20).

by that power? Nonetheless, Edward's subversion of the hierarchy of the body politic, his rejection of both the late king's authority and divine authority can be seen as "sodomitical" and death by anal penetration may be deemed an attempt to define him as such. The very perpetration of the murder, however, reassigns the label of sodomite to its instigators, the "traitor" (5.6.40, 66) Mortimer and the "unnatural" (75) Isabella (Normand, "What Passions" 179, 191). Neither does Edward's death reflect the death of a sodomite or traitor—he is not beheaded and his head and various body parts are not displayed. On the contrary, the method of murder is based on the need for the cause of death to be "secret" (5.4.27). Whether he is pressed to death or burned from inside with a hot spit, it is murder that does not declare itself as such. While critics such as Gregory Bredbeck consider Edward's death as a way of "writing" his homosexual desire onto him (Orgel 47), Lightborn's speciality is achieving death without leaving a mark. Frequently this involves penetrating a body orifice, and Lightborn's victims sniff poison, have material stuffed down their throat, mercury poured in their mouths, and poison blown in their ears.

If we restrict ourselves to the 1594 text of Marlowe's play, Edward is killed by being pressed to death under a table. The spit that Lightborn initially calls for is not used. While this might indeed be anticlimactic for both the literary critics and the theatre audience (assuming the play was originally staged as written) one is forced to ask why the enactment of Edward's penetration does not occur. One potential answer is that Edward has already been repeatedly penetrated and still lives. His ears have been invaded and discomforted or dis-eased by Mortimer's violence, his speech has been interrupted and curtailed so often that he has "no power to speak," and he is now subject to a stench that is "enough to poison any man" (5.5.5). Indeed, Gurney notes, "[he] was almost stifled with the savour" (9). Despite his weakness as a king, Edward apparently has "a body able to endure / More than we can inflict" (10-11). Another form of murder has to be found for this open and dis-eased, yet resilient, body. Mortimer therefore summons Lightborn, whose name links him to Satan of the Chester cycle of mystery plays (Deats, "Marlowe's" 248; Sales 115). In a play where titles are given indiscriminately, in which a

name or label depends on the perspective of the speaker, the meaning of Lightborn's name is surprisingly fixed. Lightborn is evil personified; he is also evil dissembled. Another answer to the question of what happens to the spit may be that its absence is an intentional ploy to disrupt audience expectations. The audience does not see the anticipated anal rape. Indeed, given that Edward's body is ostensibly flattened beneath the table, the audience sees less and less of Edward. Instead, it experiences the "cry that will raise the town." At a point when visual spectacle is anticipated, the audience is treated to an auditory assault; its own ears are penetrated and discomforted by a pain-filled scream, and the audience discovers how noise can leave a lasting impression.

At the same time as the visual spectacle fails to meet audience expectations, Edward struggles to link the Lightborn he sees with the one he hears. Edward's murderer claims that he brings Edward "comfort" (5.5.42) and the scene is often played as a "love scene" with Lightborn cradling Edward in his arms (McAdam 227-28; Woods 79-80). However, even as Lightborn sheds tears at will and offers comfort and sympathy, Edward is not completely deceived. Lightborn *looks* like a murderer but *sounds* like a lover. As Edward notes, "These looks of thine can harbour naught but death" (5.5.72). Unfortunately, Edward, as the audience already knows, is too readily penetrated and deceived by what he hears. In this, Edward plays Eve to Lightborn's Satan. Lightborn with his "[s]weet speeches" (1.1.55) becomes another Gaveston for the king, and like Gaveston, his intentions are hidden beneath ambiguous phrases, whose meaning depends on the listener's desires.⁵⁶ Indeed, he expects Edward to trust him as the king once trusted his favourite: "What means your highness to mistrust me thus?" (5.5.78), to which Edward replies by characteristically echoing the rhetorical form: "What means thou to dissemble with me thus?" (79). Even though he suspects that Lightborn is disguising his

56. Deats argues that Gaveston is also a Vice figure as he "exerts a destructive influence over the king" ("Marlowe's" 248). I agree that Gaveston shows some characteristics of a Vice in his ability to dissemble and his awareness of the power of persuasive speech, and in the destructive nature of his relationship with Edward. However, as I have argued, it is not Gaveston himself, but Edward's obsession and failure to subjugate his desire to the law of the land that makes the relationship destructive.

true intentions, Edward is tempted to believe Lightborn's equivocation: "These hands were never stained with innocent blood, / Nor shall they now be tainted with a king's" (80-81) until he remembers that he is no longer a king. Still thinking of himself as a patron, he is too eager to recognize a subordinate as a friend to consider that he is handing his last jewel to his murderer. Yet, as he notes, "Something still buzzeth in mine ears / And tells me if I sleep I never wake" (102-03). What buzzes, of course, is Edward's own suspicion that Lightborn is indeed a murderer, for a buzzing ear, as Samuel Purchas notes, "euer heares and neuer heares . . . which forestalled with opinion, interprets all thing, be they neuer so dissonant, to his sense" (243). Ironically, even as Edward's ears buzz because of his own "opinion" of Lightborn, he turns out to be right for once. The problem is, as he claims, he is now "too weak and feeble to resist" (5.5.107). Edward has been weakened by his own desire for pleasing speeches and his inability to avoid Mortimer's violent speeches. So, having once again opened his ear to a pleasing speech, Lightborn's comfort, Edward cannot resist his murderer's crushing embrace—an embrace that, like speech, leaves no external impression, but results in a fatal internal impression.

Edward has, ultimately, failed to maintain the inviolability required of the king. The penetration of his physical body through the ears has led to a penetration and infection of the body politic. However, even as the body politic can be tainted through the conduit of the king's ear, so the ear of the body politic can respond to the king's voice. Indeed, while Edward dies partly because of his willingness to listen to Lightborn, his death is also a result of what others hear about him. Mortimer, concerned that "[t]he commons now begin to pity [Edward]," determines that "[t]he king must die" (5.4.1-2). Mortimer, ever ready to manipulate the perception of the masses, therefore hires Lightborn to silence Edward, and afraid that the murderer will tell his own tale, then uses Matrevis and Gurney to silence Lightborn. The voice of the usurper cannot permanently silence that of the rightful king, though, and Edward's cries literally "raise the town" as Matrevis fears. As James I later tells his son, citing Luke 5:12, "[T]here is nothing so couered, that shall not be reuealed, neither so hid, that shall not be knowne: and what soeuer they haue spoken in darkenesse, should be heard in the light: and that whiche they

had spoken in the eare in secret place, should be publickly preached on the tops of the houses” (*Basilicon Doron* I.12). Impressed to the point that he is forced to cry out, Edward finds his voice, a voice that penetrates the ear of the body politic and helps to restore justice and unity (Summers 236). It is the voice we then hear through the lips of Edward III when he calls Mortimer, “Traitor,” and declares, “[I]n me my loving father speaks / And plainly saith, ’twas thou that murd’redst him” (5.6.40-41).

While *The Rainbow Portrait* demonstrates the complex relationship between Elizabeth and the eyes and ears that surround her, the need to monitor one’s subjects for Statecraft and the invasion of privacy caused by Fame, *Edward II* demonstrates the problems that arise when a king cannot prevent such an invasion of privacy. Edward, ever desirous of pleasing sounds, encourages the new type of courtier who is supposedly more skilled with words than with the sword. He therefore opens his ears to Gaveston and then discovers that he is unable to close them to his barons. Unlike Elizabeth, who at least in *The Rainbow Portrait*, controls access to her “secret” ear by holding the fold of her robe in her hand, Edward cannot limit entry to his private space. He may want only Gaveston to have access, but Isabella, the barons, and his brother Kent all clamour to be heard. They want access to his ear and therefore to his physical body as demonstrated by the physical invasion of his private space in 2.2. In addition, while Elizabeth can hide the “secret” ear suggestive of the link between aural and sexual penetration and appear impervious, Edward discovers not only that others want access to him, but also that his private relationship with Gaveston in which he uses “the Word which is received between Private Men” (Bacon *Essayes* 81-82) cannot be hidden. The two of them are frequently observed and overheard, and their friendship is open to disruption. Edward’s inability to prevent invasion of his private space may result from the way his behaviour has limited the power of the body politic. He has rejected the permanency of monarchical law and the concept of divine authority, paving the way for the barons’ later defiance of his own authority as king. He has lost the protection against disease afforded by the body politic, the protection inherent in Elizabeth’s cloak that both displays *and* protects her physical body. Nonetheless, even as Edward’s ear is assaulted and his physical space invaded until

his body is flattened and impressed to death, he retains sufficient power to be heard by his subjects and to speak through his son. While the mouths on the robe of *The Rainbow Portrait* that pass on Elizabeth's fame may be ephemeral, the cry that reconstitutes the body politic through Edward III is clearly heard, both within the playworld and by the audience. It is a cry that leaves a lasting impression, a permanent reminder of the power and the danger of auditory assault.

FIGURE I: *The Rainbow Portrait* (1603?)
Attributed to both Marcus Gheerarts and Isaac Oliver.
Hatfield House, Hertfordshire



CHAPTER 3

GREEDY EARS, OPEN BODIES, AND PESTILENCE

Virgin Queens

The ear that lies between the folds of Elizabeth's cloak in *The Rainbow Portrait* not only represents a monarch's ear, an ear that must be both "open and affable" yet impermeable to, and unchanged by, what it hears, but it also represents a woman's ear, particularly given its position over the queen's genital area and its "vulva-like" (Fineman, "Shakespeare's Ear" 228) appearance. It thus draws attention to Elizabeth's gender and "her most famous attribute" (Doran 30), her status as a virgin queen. Indeed, with its "mask of youth" and bridal attire, *The Rainbow Portrait* celebrates the concept and "cult" of Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen. Following Isaac Oliver's depiction of the aging queen in the early 1590s, official portraiture of Elizabeth truly engaged with her motto of *Semper eadem*, "Always one and the same" by showing her youthful and unchanged (Hackett 178; King 59). In *The Rainbow Portrait*, not only does she have the unlined face and pale skin of a young woman, but also the uncovered bosom and loose hair of a marriageable virgin. In addition, the bodice of her white dress is embroidered with spring flowers, again symbolizing her youth and her status as a virginal bride (Montrose 139), and her elaborate headdress is topped with a jewel in the shape of a crescent moon, connecting her with the virgin moon-goddess variously named Cynthia, Diana, and Belphebe (Yates 76). While the symbolism of the eyed and eared robe that envelops the queen might be subject to debate, the painter stresses his vision of the queen as a young virgin bride, and his insistence on including so many symbols of virginity in a painting of a queen who was almost seventy years old demands an exploration of why Elizabeth's virginity (real or imagined) was so important.¹

1. My definition of the queen's body as "virgin" is not based on her physical state, but on the way she is constructed through *The Rainbow Portrait* and the "cult of the Virgin Queen." Numerous rumours circulated about Elizabeth's sexual proclivities. She was denounced as a whore by the Duke of Anjou in 1571 and accused on at least two occasions of carrying Dudley's illegitimate children. While such rumours suggest that the official version of Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen was only partially successful (Doran 52), they also indicate the very fear and potency of female virginity I want to explore.

The “mask of youth” that visually represents the queen as *Semper eadem* reflects the concept of a perfect, immortal body politic bound to and encompassing the monarch’s physical body. The emphasis on her virginity further reinforces the perfection and inviolability conveyed by this abstract body. The virgin body of the queen is intact, impenetrable, and apparently immutable. Daniel Fischlin argues that the “mask of youth” therefore reinforces the impression of impenetrability conveyed by the cloak of observing eyes and listening ears but, as already discussed, the ears that protect the queen may also be the ones that make her vulnerable to penetration (179). In reading the depiction of the queen as a virgin in such political terms, Fischlin claims that “[g]ender seems to play less of an overt role than does political expediency in the portrait’s symbolism” (180), a statement that ignores both the socio-historical construction of female virginity and Elizabeth’s own idiosyncratic position as an unmarried female monarch at the end of the sixteenth century. Elizabeth is depicted as a virgin bride because she is a woman, and her depiction as such is bound to the link believed to exist between female sexuality and the story of the Fall as told in Genesis and retold and interpreted through the ages. As Helen Hackett notes, Elizabeth’s youthful appearance in *The Rainbow Portrait* “impl[ies] that her sexual intactness had brought with it resistance to bodily decay Triumph over sexuality was interpreted as triumph over the Fall, in turn enabling triumph over the penalty for the Fall, mortality” (178). However, even as the portrait celebrates Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen, it must be stressed that it does not erase her sexuality. In contrast, it presents the fullness of sexual potential through a number of erotic images, including the “exceptionally pornographic ear,” the “dildo-like” or “vaguely phallic” rainbow, the “suggestive” string of pearls, and the “ambiguous” folds (Fineman, “Shakespeare’s Ear” 228; Fischlin 185). Fischlin, even as he admits that Elizabeth is represented as “an emblem of empowered femininity” (187), sees these erotic images as portraying a sense of “sovereign vitality” (185). I would argue that they also portray the power embodied in the young virgin body, particularly the young virgin female body, which is that of sexual potency.

While Fischlin and Fineman see particular phallic or vaginal structures in the painting as erotic, the eroticism of the virgin or chaste female body itself cannot be ignored. The virgin female body, defined by its unviolated boundaries, is eroticized by the knowledge that such a body has the potential to be penetrated.² A body that cannot be violated or penetrated is not virginal, but asexual. A virginal body, despite being currently bounded and contained, anticipates its own penetration. Moreover, the same elements that signal the body's closure also emphasize its vulnerability. Regardless of the elaborate headdress, the loose hair is in a state of undress; the breasts, supposedly untouched, are exposed, inviting touch; the "vulva-like" ear so suggestively located over the genital area is partially revealed as the queen lifts the edge of her cloak.³ As noted in the last chapter, while this ear demonstrates the connection between the private and political bodies of the queen and indicates her vulnerability as a monarch, something she successfully negotiates, unlike Marlowe's Edward II, it also shows her particular weakness as a female monarch, a weakness that is inherent to her virgin female body and the social construction of that body in the early modern period. Her contemporaries and later critics have taken pains to insist on Elizabeth's difference from other women and her support for, rather than subversion of, patriarchal hierarchies; however, the persistent representation of her as a Virgin Queen demands an evaluation of female chastity. Chastity or virginity does not become ungendered because of the authority of the one

2. Philippa Berry notes that "Elizabeth's chastity was often represented in implicitly sexual terms" (87) as if this were something particular to representations of the queen. I would suggest that chastity itself *is* implicitly sexual and often explicitly presented as such. One has only to think of the construction of women in works as diverse as Petrarchan sonnets and *carpe diem* poems to realize that the desire expressed in such works is essentially bound to the promise held (and withheld) by a virginal mistress. However, as Berry also notes, the construction of Elizabeth as a Virgin Queen is unusual as it depends on her autonomy rather than on her physical virginity (87). Other autonomous women were more likely to be slandered in sexual terms than venerated as virgins.

3. The outer ear is exposed but the auditory canal remains concealed behind the fold on the right half of the robe.

who is chaste. Instead, as Philippa Berry argues, female chastity, already stressed by Petrarchan poets and Neoplatonists, takes on new meaning when linked to a woman who is both head of state and head of the national church (1, 65).⁴ Elizabeth, whose physical body is at least partly protected by the construction of her political body as immutable and perfect, still possesses the bodily orifice, the vagina, that according to such early modern poets as Edmund Spenser, Andrew Marvell, and John Donne, men both fear and yet desire to penetrate. It is also an orifice that, at least in terms of *The Rainbow Portrait*, is closely connected with the female ear. If the closed, chaste vagina contains the promise of pleasure and fruitfulness, while the open vagina is feared as the site of potential death—literally as forbidden fruit,⁵ how is the ear lying above and visually conflated with this vagina perceived? In other words, do early modern views of female chastity influence constructions of listening and the way that they are gendered in the period? Are women required to be both sexually and aurally chaste and, if so, how is that possible? Is an open female ear to be feared as the cause of social dis-ease in the same way as an open vagina?

In “Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed,” Peter Stallybrass notes that, in the early modern period, “[t]he surveillance of women concentrated upon three specific areas: the mouth, chastity, the threshold of the house” (126). He goes on to note that this demand for containment of speech and sexuality within the female body and of that body within the home results in the determination that “silence and chastity are . . . homologous to woman’s enclosure within the house” (127). The insistence on female

4. Berry notes that while Mary Stuart and Mary Tudor were disturbing because of the political authority they held as female monarchs, Elizabeth was even more troublesome to early modern constructions of gender and authority, as she was also “an absolute authority in spiritual affairs.” It is perhaps due to concerns about her role as a woman in the church that she did not take the title “supreme head” of the church created and assumed by Henry VIII, but instead adopted the title “supreme governor” (*Of Chastity* 65).

5. The death associated with the vagina is not only the sexual climax that early moderns named “little death” but also the mortality brought into the world through Eve and therefore associated with female sexuality.

containment can be related to a number of socio-historical constructions of women, not least the concept of women as property owned and controlled by men. The boundaries of such property have to be monitored and protected and measures taken to ensure that such property is not invaded or taken. Reflective of these concerns about female bodies and their openings is the repeated connection made between female loquacity and promiscuity, such as in the proverb “[a] lickerish tongue, a lickerish tail” (Tilley T395), and this has been explored by a variety of critics, including Lynda Boose and Douglas Bruster. However, if the concern is the potential invasion of the body through its openings, then the orifices that need to be monitored are those that permit entry. As such an entryway, the ear can be anticipated to prompt the same concerns as other openings of the body. Stallybrass does not explore the ear as a threshold to the body or the social neuroses attached to its invasion, although, in his discussion of Desdemona’s handkerchief and its connection to body orifices, he comments on Othello’s declamation of “[n]oses, ears, and lips!” (*Othello* 4.1.40)⁶ and notes that all these body parts are “thresholds of the enclosed body” connecting, yet dividing “inner and outer, public and private” (138). Nonetheless, the female ear is of special concern, given the belief that one learns to speak by hearing as discussed in chapter 1, and the association between female speech and sexuality, and concerns about what women may hear resound through the work of early modern writers.

A number of authors express concerns about what women may hear and how this might relate to their speech and sexuality, prompting Jean Graham to declare that “gendered stereotypes about speech, hearing, and chastity were an inescapable part of Milton’s [seventeenth-century] culture” (2). Most contemporary critics ignore the second term of this triad, and Graham’s consideration of the link between deafness, silence, and chastity in Milton’s *Comus* is a rare exception. The masque was written at the request of Henry Lawes who also composed the music and directed the masque when it was presented at Ludlow Castle in 1634 to celebrate the installation of his employer, Sir John

6. All references to *Othello* are to *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: Norton, 1997).

Egerton, as Lord President of Wales. The Egerton children participated in the masque which celebrates the power of both poetry and female virtue. What is perhaps unusual about this masque is that so much is made of listening (and not listening) in what is normally considered a spectacular medium. As Graham notes, in a masque that celebrates the Lady's resistance to Comus's seductive speech and the food and drink he presses upon her, the Lady's claim that she has "unattending ears" is untrue (*Comus* line 272; Graham 1). Early in the masque, the Lady notes the importance of careful listening, stating that "if her ear be true" it is her "best guide" (170-71). Richard Brathwait, writing in *The English Gentlewoman* (1631),⁷ would agree that one should not be deceived by appearance, but pay close attention to what is heard: "There are many beauteous and sumptuous *Cases*, whose *Instruments* are out of tune. These may please the *eye*, but they neither lend nor leaue a sweet accent in the *Eare*" (25). Still, he also notes that speech can be deceptive so that not even the ear is reliable: "*Speech* becomes a *darke Image*, representing man not as he is, but as hee seemes" (*English Gentleman* 81). Comus certainly tries to disguise his intentions, and he suggests that it normally works; he has ready access to "easy-hearted man" through "fair pretence of friendly ends, / And well-placed words of glozing courtesy" (160-61). Such words, though, fail to work on the virtuous, aurally-guided Lady. She is the chaste woman who closes her ears to his flattery, the epitome of Thomas Overbury's "Good wife" of whom he writes, "*Dishonestie* neuer comes neerer than her eares, and then wonder stops it out, and saues vertue the labour" (C4^v).⁸

However, in their construction of a virtuous woman, both Milton and Overbury elide the need for a woman to hear "dishonestie" for her to know that she should appear deaf to it. As Graham notes, "To selectively shut out unvirtuous speech requires a less-

7. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to *The English Gentlewoman* are to this edition.

8. Overbury also echoes the demand for female subjection and containment, noting that the "chiefest vertue" of a good wife "is a good husband," and that "[s]hee is much within, and frames outward things to her minde, not her minde to them" (C4^v).

than-innocent knowledge both of what is being said and of what is unvirtuous” (7). It would appear then that even the most virtuous women must give ear to unsavoury speech, if simply to avoid hearing it further. Moreover, these women need to have knowledge which, if they are defined as chaste and innocent, they should not have. Finally, even if they demonstrate such worthy deafness, their own virtue may be undetectable to others for, as Milton’s Lady tells Comus:

Thou hast nor ear, nor soul, to apprehend
The sublime notion and high mystery
That must be uttered to unfold the sage
And serious doctrine of Virginitie. (784-87)

She may remain closed and apparently deaf to his seductive flattery, but he is equally deaf to her chastity. The problem for women, then, is twofold. First, to be considered virtuous they need to hear but appear deaf to inappropriate speech, assuming they can determine the true intentions behind the speech; in other words, they must be penetrated yet remain impervious to such speech. Second, while they must be apparently deaf to inappropriate speech, their own audience may be equally resistant to any declaration of their chastity and virtue.⁹

The link between female listening and chastity, transgressed boundaries and containment, is evident in the account of the Fall in Genesis. According to the Jahvist account in Genesis 3, Satan, in the guise of a serpent, tempts Eve, “the woman,” to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge by a combination of flattery, subversion, blasphemy, and lies. He first questions God’s command, using, at least in the Hebrew, the rhetorical device of *aposiopesis*, permitting Eve to finish his thought: ““Even though God said: You are not to eat from any of the trees in the garden . . .!”” (Norris 12), thereby reinforcing the sense of Eve’s complicity. He then uses flattery, telling Eve that she too will be a god

9. The resistance to a woman’s declaration of virtue could be extreme. It is a sad fact that Alice Egerton’s cousin, Elizabeth Audley, who was raped at the age of twelve by a servant at the command of her father-in-law, the Earl of Castlehaven, was convicted of “adultery, fornication, and incontinency” *after* the servant confessed to the crime. She was also refused shelter by her grandmother who believed she would be a bad example to the other children staying with her (Maus 205).

should she eat the fruit. What Eve hears alters her perception of the fruit so that she now finds it “pleasant to the eyes” (Genesis 3:6). Sin and death, therefore, enter the world because Eve listens to the serpent, believes what he says, and acts on those beliefs. She then echoes the serpent’s words to Adam, which leads to his own disobedience. Eve’s sin is listening to and believing the serpent; Adam’s sin is listening to his wife (Rogers 4). Indeed, Adam is specifically punished because he has “obeied the voyce of [his] wife and hast eaten of the tre” (Genesis 3:17).¹⁰

While both Adam and Eve commit the same act of listening and believing, theologians were quick to label Eve the primary offender in the Fall and to warn women about their inherent weakness of listening to the wrong speaker and believing all they hear. Tertullian, writing in the second century AD to Christian women in Carthage, proclaims:

And do you not know that you are [each] an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. *You* are the devil’s gateway: *you* are the unsealer of that [forbidden] tree: *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of *your* desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die. (qtd. in Norris 196)

Eve’s ear and, by association, all female ears are glossed as the “devil’s gateway.” They are the orifices that permit sin to enter and replicate in the world. Eve, though, not only hears and eats the fruit herself, but she also tells Adam, and she is condemned both for her own act of listening and for “persuad[ing]” Adam as well. Early theologians believed that while Eve is unwittingly duped, Adam could not be so credulous. They argued instead that either he is subject to wily feminine persuasion or he knows the

10. The same passage in the 1599 edition of the Geneva Bible follows the tradition of the Great Bible and the Bishops’ Bible and states, “Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree,” indicating that to “hearken” to a voice implies obedience to that voice.

consequences of his actions but is guilty of uxoriousness (Norris 192).¹¹ Both interpretations shift the blame so that Eve is guilty of her own act of listening and of Adam's act of listening to her. Eve acknowledges her gullibility and admits to God, "The serpent beguyled me, and I did eate" (Genesis 3:13). God does not punish her for being "beguyled," but He limits her ability to act on what she hears from anyone other than her husband. Her openness to the wiles of the serpent thus becomes the rationale for why Eve must be subject to Adam. However, while Eve's subjection to Adam is presented as a result of her credulity in Genesis, by the early modern period, Eve and all her female descendants are subjected to their husbands not simply because of female ingenuousness, but because women who listened might go on to seduce others. *The Lawes Resolutions* (1632) explains it this way:

Eve because she had helped to seduce her husband hath inflicted on her, an especiall bane. In sorrow shalt thou bring forth thy children, thy desires shall bee subject to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

See here the reason of that which I touched before, that Women have no voyse in Parliament, They make no Lawes, they consent to none, they abrogate none. (6)

Early modern writers also drew on Paul's New Testament teachings on women to reinforce their argument for female subjection and the need to control female speech.¹²

11. The opinion that Eve doubly sinned by both listening and speaking appears in the introduction to Genesis 3. Commentators note that "[t]he woman seduced by the serpent. Entiseth her housband to sinne." This view of Eve is muted somewhat in the Bishops' Bible and the later King James. The Bishops' Bible states, "The serpent begyleth the woman. The transgression of the commaundement," which is revised in the KJV to "[t]he serpent deceiueh Eue. Mans shamefull fall." The commentary to Genesis 3:6 in the Geneva Bible claims that Adam ate the fruit, "[n]ot so muche to please his wife, as moued by ambition at her persuasion," further emphasizing that the problem is Eve's persuasive speech.

12. There are several passages in Paul's epistles that insist on the subjection of women and controls on their speech: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Ephesians 5:22-23, Colossians 3:18-4:15, 1 Timothy 2:8-15, and Titus 2:3-5. While there is some debate as to whether these passages were actually written by Paul, Eve's inferior state at creation and her greater culpability for the Fall are presented as the reasons for these controls on women (Phillips 121).

Citing Paul, Heinrich Bullinger states, “It suffre not a woman to teach or preach or to haue domynion ouer hir husband” (H^v).¹³ Joannes Ludovicus Vives, in his *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, translated into English in 1529, explicitly connects these tenets concerning female silence back to Eve and women’s supposedly inherent weakness as listeners. His fear is not only that women will listen and believe untruth, but also that they will, by speaking to others, transmit that untruth:

woman is a fraile thyng / and of weake discretion / and that maye lightlye
be disceyued: whiche thyng our fyrst mother Eue sheweth / whom ye
Deuyll caught with a lyght argument. Therefore a woman shulde nat teache
/ lest whan she hath taken a false opinion and beleue of any thyng / she
spred hit into the herars . . . and lightly bringe other[s] into the same
errorr. (Eii^v-Eiiiⁱ)

In other words, women must keep their mouths shut because Eve’s ears and mouth were too open. The fact that Adam’s ears were also open is elided.

In the minds of medieval theologians, Eve’s openness, her gullibility, and her subsequent “temptation” of Adam link her more directly with the serpent, an association that led to the idea of the serpent having a female face. For example, the twelfth-century scholar, Peter Comestor, argues that Satan ““chose a kind of serpent . . . which had a face like a maiden’s, since like approves of like”” (qtd. in Norris 319). This idea of a distinctly female serpent prompted the view of the devil’s behaviour as characteristically female: ““The enemy conducts himself as a woman. He is a weakling before a show of strength and a tyrant if he has a will”” (Ignatius of Loyola qtd. in Warner 59). The link between Satan and female behaviour gave rise to the idea that women were prone to “devilish” practices, and this was then incorporated into popular notions about such things as the evils of female gossip. This connection between women and Satan also gave rise to one

13. The demand for female subjection was inherent in the marriage ceremony, the “Solemnization of Marriage” in *The Book of Common Prayer* used through the latter half of the sixteenth century. However, while Eve’s speech persuaded Adam to sin, the passage from 1 Peter 3:1-4 quoted in the marriage service stresses the ability of virtuous wives to convert ungodly husbands by their “conversation.” This was a general term encompassing appearance and behaviour, though speech was certainly considered a vital part of such “conversation.”

of the most famous depictions of the Fall, Michelangelo's *Fall and Expulsion* painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, in which the serpent has a distinctly female head and body and snake- or mermaid-like tail (Norris 319). Pamela Norris in *The Story of Eve* notes that commentators frequently associated Eve with other mythical women and this in turn influenced the perception of her character and the particular nature of her sin. Michelangelo could well have been influenced by the link often made between Eve and the mermaid-like sirens in Homer's *Odyssey* whose seductive voices enticed men to their deaths (88). Eve is thus considered to be guilty of the same sexually charged seduction as the sirens. The *Malleus Maleficarum*, written in 1486, goes so far as to define Eve as "the first temptress" and claims that she is the reason why all women show a predilection to deception (Norris 327). Early theologians also associated Eve with Pandora, the first woman in Greek mythology, a link perpetuated and depicted in the 1550 painting of *Eva Prima Pandora* by French artist Jean Cousin the Elder (112-13). This connection reinforces the idea that Eve's disobedience results from curiosity and this is then deemed yet another innate (and undesirable) attribute of women. Curiosity also links Eve to another woman, Psyche, who appears in *The Golden Ass*, written by Apuleius around AD 158. Norris writes:

Both women find themselves in paradisiacal surrounds, both are warned not to pry into forbidden secrets, both succumb to siren voices and find themselves miserable and in exile. Childbearing is a feature of both their narratives. . . . Both are narratives of adolescent love, of the first perilous, blissful encounter with adult sexuality, with all its attendant fret and misunderstandings, the prevalence of emotion over reason, of sex over common sense. (128-29)

In other words, Eve's first sin may be listening to the serpent, but her error is heavy with an accumulation of other supposed female failings. Whatever the nature of the fruit she actually tastes, it is clearly forbidden fruit and that, according to her male interpreters, can only mean sexual desire (338). The view that Eve's transgression and the Fall are

sexual in nature is, of course, reinforced by Adam and Eve's recognition of their nakedness following the eating of the "forbidden fruit."¹⁴

While the various interpretations of Eve offered by the early church fathers and later medieval theologians emphasized the sexual nature of her sin and added multiple layers to her initial transgression of listening to the serpent, there was also, as Linda Woodbridge notes, "A long tradition link[ing] ear penetration with vaginal penetration" (*Scythe* 59). In other words, Eve's sin may have been perceived as sexual simply because it had to do with listening. Eve, though, was not the only woman in the Bible to give ear to a stranger. The Virgin Mary is often glossed as a second Eve, and she too listens to a spiritual being (Phillips 134). Eve listens to and believes the serpent and brings sin and death into the world; Mary listens to and, following her initial scepticism, believes God's word as spoken by Gabriel and brings forth one who will redeem the fallen world from sin and give it life. Eve is condemned for believing the serpent; Mary is worshipped for believing what she hears, but is there any difference in how these women listen?

Early commentators frequently connect Eve and Mary as listeners and as young virgins. They both believe what they are told, yet one loses her (sexual) innocence while the other retains her virginity.¹⁵ Nonetheless, this distinction appears to have little to do with how the two women actually listen, despite commentators' repeated attempts to

14. Just as Eve's perception of the fruit is affected by what she hears, so the first couple's perception of their nakedness is affected by eating the fruit. They then clothe themselves with fig leaves, making the "breeches" (Genesis 3:7) that give the 1560 Geneva Bible its nickname of the Breeches Bible. It is also interesting to consider that while Eve's desire is engendered by what she hears, Adam notes that it is hearing God's voice that prompts his fear and causes him to hide (Genesis 3:10).

15. Indeed, according to certain theological views of Mary, her acceptance of God's word ensures her eternal virginity, antepartum, intrapartum, and postpartum. *The Book of James* offers the account of the midwife Salome who is sceptical of Mary's virginity and thrusts her hand into Mary's vagina to determine for herself the state of Mary's hymen after she has given birth. The midwife's hand is shrivelled because of her unbelief and only restored by holding the infant Christ. Salome then declares that Mary is a virgin even though she has given birth (Warner 28).

differentiate between the two acts. Writing towards the end of the first century AD, Justin Martyr is the first to connect Eve and Mary:

The firstborn of the Father is born of the Virgin, in order that the disobedience caused by the serpent might be destroyed in the same manner in which it originated. For Eve, an undefiled virgin, conceived the word of the serpent, and brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary, filled with faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel announced to her the glad tidings . . . answered: 'Be it done to me according to thy word.' (qtd. in Phillips 133)

According to Justin, Eve is an active participant in “conceiv[ing] the word of the serpent,” and Mary is more passive, simply being “filled with faith and joy” and declaring, “Be it done to me.” While his followers still distinguish the way the two young women listen, they inscribe Eve as more passive. For example, Justin’s young contemporary, Irenaeus, uses the same contrast of death and redemption, “[a] virgin’s disobedience” and “a virgin’s obedience” to distinguish Eve and Mary, but then notes that “Eve *was seduced* by the word of an angel to avoid God after she had disobeyed his word” (qtd. in Phillips 133; emphasis added). By the time Tertullian writes a century later, Eve is the passive recipient of the serpent’s word while Mary is the active taker of God’s word:

For unto Eve, as yet a virgin, had crept the devil’s word, the framer of death. Equally, unto a virgin was introduced God’s word, the builder of life: so that what had been lost through one sex might by the same sex be restored and saved. Eve had believed the serpent, Mary believed Gabriel. The fault which the one committed by believing, by believing the other amended. (qtd. in Phillips 134)

Tertullian’s complaint that Eve errs by simply failing to keep out the devil’s word is in keeping with his view of her as the “devil’s gateway.”¹⁶ Instead, Mary is the active listener who is merely “introduced [to] God’s word,” and who has to take hold of what she hears to bring forth life.

16. Heather Dubrow notes that in the early modern period there is a “common association of gates with the vagina” (94). This further emphasizes the auditory and sexual nature of Eve’s sin and the contrast between Eve as the “devil’s gateway” and Mary as a “closed gate.”

The connection between the two virgins, along with the contrast between Eve's disobedience and Mary's obedience to God, led to much wordplay, not least the reversion of Eve's name (*Eva*) to Gabriel's greeting to Mary (*Ave*) (Norris 235-36; Warner 60).¹⁷ While Adam only names Eve, "the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20) after the Fall and expulsion from the garden, *Ave* is, at least according to the Latin Vulgate Bible, the first word uttered to Mary by the angel. It is the beginning of the Annunciation—God's remedy for the Fall. Mary is to bear the "sede" that God promised would "breake [the serpent's] head" (Genesis 3:15). To emphasize this link between Eve and Mary, paintings of the Annunciation frequently depicted Eve in one of the side panels (Hassel 59). Luke is suitably vague on how Mary conceives the Christ child through the Annunciation, having Gabriel proclaim that "[t]he holie Gost shal come vpon thee, & the power of the most High shal ouershowe thee" (Luke 1:35); however, his silence on the method of conception did not prevent early Christians from considering all possibilities, including conception through the ear. Origen, an early Christian (d. 254), explores various meanings of the term *logos* to suggest that the Word becomes flesh, Jesus becomes God incarnate, when Mary hears Gabriel's words.¹⁸ Origen may have intended to stress that spiritual wisdom was only conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit, but his ideas

17. The antiphon "Ave maris stella" written in the seventh or eighth century plays with the two terms to note how Eve's name changes:

*Sumens illud Ave
Gabrielis ore,
Funda nos in pace
Mutans nomen Evae.*

"Receiving that Ave from the lips of Gabriel, establish us in peace, changing Eva's name" (qtd. in Warner 60).

18. Luke does not elaborate on the method of conception when he writes of the Annunciation, and the Geneva Bible commentators conclude that the Incarnation "shalbe a secret operation of the holie Gost." Luke, however, later notes the importance of Mary's belief to the Incarnation when she visits Elizabeth. Luke writes, "[A]s Elisabet heard the salutacion of Marie, the babe sprang in her bellie, & Elisabet was filled with the holie Gost" (1:41). For Elizabeth, the reaction of her unborn child to Mary's voice is proof of Mary's faith, for she then declares, "Blessed is shee that beleued: for those things shall be performed, which were tolde her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45; Hunt 267).

were quickly adopted by early Church fathers such as Augustine and Bernard to argue for the literal conception of Christ through the ear —*conceptio per aurem*. This doctrine was still promoted in the 1530s, and even appears in a 1538 English primer (Hunt 266-67; Warner 37).¹⁹

These theologians, in keeping with the earlier Tertullian, emphasize Mary's active participation in the Incarnation of Christ. It is not enough for Mary to hear Gabriel's message passively; she also has to believe and acquiesce. What prompts the conception is not Gabriel's announcement, but Mary's reception of it. Even her apparent scepticism, expressed when she notes the physical impossibility of being pregnant because she "know[s] no man" (Luke 1:34) is interpreted as a demonstration of her faith, for she goes on to declare, "[W]ith God shal nothing be vnpossible," and "Beholde, the seruant of the Lord: be it vnto me according to thy worde" (37-38). Protestant and Catholic commentators alike argue that the Incarnation of Christ occurs at this moment: when Mary consents to what she hears (Hassel 54-55).²⁰ Luther writes, "[Mary] believed the word of the angel that she would conceive in her womb and bear a son. With the same belief in the angel's word she conceived and bore Christ spiritually in her heart at the same time as she conceived and bore him physically in her womb" (qtd. in Hassel 70). Mary's pregnancy begins when she hears and believes Gabriel's statement. It is, indeed,

19. A sixth-century hymn, which is still sung today, is explicit in expressing this idea:

*Mirentur ergo saecula
quod angelus fert semina
quod aure virgo concepit
et corde credens parturit.*

"The centuries marvel therefore that the angel bore the seed, the virgin conceived through her ear, and, believing in her heart, became fruitful." A thirteenth-century dancing song in English also expresses the same view of the Annunciation and Incarnation: "Glad us maiden, mother mild / Through thine ear thou were with child / Gabriel he said it thee" (qtd. in Warner 37).

20. The Geneva Bible commentary to Luke 1:34 takes pains to indicate that Mary's questioning of the angel is not because she is sceptical of God's power, but rather "[s]he wolde be resolued of all doutes to the end that she might more surely embrace the promes of God."

conceptio per aurem. Calvin also stresses the role of Mary's obedience in the Incarnation. However, he paradoxically describes this obedience as an act of not listening:

The holy virgin does not allow herself to dispute any farther: and yet many things might unquestionably have obtruded themselves, to repress that faith, and even to draw off her attention from what was said to her by the angel. But she stops the entrance of opposing arguments, and compels herself to obey. This is the real proof of faith, when we restrain our minds, . . . hold them captive, so that they dare not reply this or that to God: for boldness in disputing, on the other hand, is the mother of unbelief.
(Calvin, qtd. in Hassel 72)

Unlike Eve, Mary does not allow herself to hear opinions that might conflict with God's word. She actively suppresses such dissent and does not even allow herself to think of any possible objections.

While early theologians may have disagreed on whether Eve and Mary should be described as passive or active listeners, they continued to emphasize the connection and contrast between the two women, even though the contrast is frequently more rhetorical than actual. Both listen to a speaker and believe what they hear. Unfortunately, Eve has the misfortune of listening to the wrong speaker. Many early modern authors considered Eve's sin to be her openness, her failure to sufficiently guard her ears, her mouth and, by implication, her vagina, glossing over the fact that Mary exhibits a similar openness that is clearly not sinful. Writers repeatedly use the example of Eve to warn of how the devil can enter an unsuspecting soul through the ear and, as I have noted, her example becomes the rationale for placing special boundaries on female listening and speech.²¹ In contrast to Eve who is condemned for being too open, Mary's receptivity to God's word leads to her becoming the epitome of containment. Not only does she refuse to listen to, or offer, objections to God's word during the Annunciation, but even after the birth she remains silent. While the shepherds "published abroad the thing, which was tolde them of that child," she "kept all those sayings & pondered *them* in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Unlike

21. For example, the medieval homily "Estote Fortes in Bello" ("Be Strong in War") tells of how "the serpent may creep into our ears 'if they are open to listen to slander, idle stories and lies'" (Dubrow 139).

Eve, Mary does not reveal all she knows to others. As a result, Mary is revered in the early modern period for her purity, for being “seamless” and “unbroken” (Warner 73). She is exalted because, despite being a virgin and therefore one who might anticipate violation, she defies all entry. Following her penetration by, and acceptance of, Gabriel’s announcement, her boundaries are complete and remain sealed forever. She is a “‘closed gate,’ a ‘spring shut up,’ a ‘fountain sealed’” (73) and, as such, an ideal role model for those who believed that maintaining the boundaries of the female body was of vital importance. Furthermore, as an eternal virgin, her body no longer invites or anticipates penetration in the same way as that of an about-to-be-married virgin or other chaste woman. If the gates are permanently closed then sin can never enter in.

Marian worship with its attendant trappings was an accepted and familiar tradition in pre-Reformation England and despite the zeal of certain Reformists, elements of it remained long after the Reformation (Hackett 25). For example, the Virgin Mary continued to represent the perfection of feminine behaviour, and the early Protestant church used her with as much frequency as the Catholic church as an example of ideal femininity. According to William Harrison, who expresses such anti-Catholic sentiment as “papists make small account of hearing Gods word” (A3^r), “the blessed virgin” was a “Good hearer.” Citing Luke 2:51, he notes, “[S]he kept all her Sauiors sayings in her heart; she did not only lay them vp, but also kept them. And not only in her head, but likewise in her heart: and not some onely, but all his words. And such keepers are all profitable hearers” (188). Clearly, to Harrison, a good hearer is one who retains everything God says and does not let it slip away. Nonetheless, as the model of ideal *female* listening and speaking, Mary’s behaviour is once again interpreted, not as active consent to God’s word, what Marina Warner calls, “the most sublime fusion of man’s free will with the divine plan,” but as “feminine submissiveness” (177). Moreover, despite the Protestant church’s alternate views on a celibate priesthood, as a perpetual maternal virgin, Mary offered a useful, if unattainable, ideal for female chastity, and a focus for the continued cultural fascination with the supposed mystical power of female

virginity. Not only was the virgin body whole, but virginity itself was believed to bestow a certain spiritual strength (Hackett 54).

Given the supposed power of virginity, its association with purity and integrity, immortality and spiritual power, it is little wonder that during her reign Elizabeth was both associated with, and a Protestant replacement for, the Virgin Mary (Hackett 7). However, the concept of Elizabeth as the eternal virgin was not created with her coronation. In the early years of Elizabeth's reign, her virginity was regarded as a temporary condition.²² It anticipated her marriage, a change in status that many desired in the interests of establishing a stable succession, and equal numbers feared because of the potential for broken national boundaries and foreign invasion. It was only after Elizabeth was past childbearing that her virgin status was celebrated as unchanging and eternal, and the boundaries of the nation could, at least in the signifier of her body, be considered permanent and invincible. In her later years, the iconography of Elizabeth as the eternally youthful virgin queen reached ironic proportions given her physical decay and the disillusionment with her government (236-7). Even a virgin queen could not achieve the permanent inviolability of the Virgin Mary. While Elizabeth did not sanction all the iconography surrounding her, she promoted the connection between herself and the Virgin Mary on certain occasions.²³ In a Parliamentary speech given in 1576, Elizabeth describes herself as the "handmaid of God," a specific allusion to the Virgin Mary and

22. This did not stop John Aylmer from linking the queen with the Virgin Mary early in her reign. In his reply to Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, Aylmer compares Mary Tudor and Elizabeth to Eve and the Virgin Mary respectively: "As the olde fathers are wonte to saye, that as by a woman came death: so by a woman was broughte fourthe life. In like manner as bi a womans (whether negligence, or misfortune, I wote not) we haue taken this wound, so bi a nothers diligence and felicitie, we shal haue it againe healed" (Aylmer, qtd. in Hackett 50).

23. In response to Frances Yates's and Roy Strong's arguments that the "cult of Elizabeth" was a response to the void in iconography left by the Reformation, Louis Montrose suggests that there were "Machiavellian calculations . . . at work, both for the Queen and for those who adored her," in the way that Elizabeth was represented (Montrose, "Idols" 131). He notes that there were attempts to regulate representations of the queen first in 1563 and later in 1596 (108-09).

her role in the Incarnation. Hackett notes that this title is frequently used to indicate Elizabeth's "humble submission" to her role as "God's instrument to advance the true faith." It was therefore a specifically Protestant revision of the role assigned to the Virgin Mary (82). It also recalls for us the role of Mary's ear in the Incarnation and how her participation is interpreted. She must hear and yet, in contrast to Eve, remain inviolate. As a paradoxically closed open ear, Mary's ear echoes the ear on Elizabeth's robe in *The Rainbow Portrait* and the requirement that Elizabeth, too, as a female virgin and a monarch, remain impenetrable.²⁴

Good Wives and "Very" Women

I have been arguing throughout this thesis that listening in the early modern period, despite being a prescribed activity in certain situations, was constructed as fraught with danger and liable to cause discomfort to, and even corruption of, the listener. Nonetheless, as we have seen in the previous two chapters, closure through voluntary or feigned deafness was rarely a viable alternative, even when recommended for those with sufficient authority to appropriate such a method of protection. Furthermore, in contrast to Gina Bloom, who states, "Whereas women's visibility was a liability, their aural activities, which could be practiced unobtrusively, carried few risks" (11), I suggest the perils of listening for women were even greater because of the link made between aural openness and sexual openness, a link apparent in the Genesis account of the Fall as interpreted by early theologians and perpetuated into the early modern period and beyond, particularly in the conduct literature.²⁵ As Brathwait warns his readers in *The*

24. Fischlin notes that in a series of Marian devotions to the *Virgin of Virgins*, Henry Hawkins uses the rainbow as a symbol of beauty, virginity, royalty, protection and reconciliation, virtues that had both sacred and secular connotations. Fischlin suggests that *The Rainbow Portrait* presents this iconography of association between the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, the religious and political (193-96).

25. It should be noted that while many conduct book writers offer advice to women, most of the texts were written for and read by men. Women therefore would often receive the advice second hand as passed on by their husbands and fathers (Jones 39).

English Gentlewoman, “O should you consider what troopes of furious and implacable Enemies are euer lying in ambuscado for you; how many soule-tempting *Syrens* are warbling notes of ruine to delude you” (48). Here, women are warned to be on their guard at all times against the “troopes of . . . Enemies” lying in wait for them.²⁶ The implication is that women are always at risk when they listen. In contrast, in a similar passage in *The English Gentleman*, in which he notes how men are tempted to lust by women, the “Soule-tainting and Sin-tempting *Syrens*” who try to lure men are not only limited by gender, but also appear to be much less numerous and more easily overcome.²⁷ Moreover, he does not focus on the dangers of listening to these speakers, but simply praises those men “who with wise *Ithacus* stop their eares” (31). Proverbial lore also considers women who listen at risk of “ruine”: for example, women were advised, “A Castle that parleys and a woman that hears will both yield” (Tilley C122), making implicit the connection between hearing and loss of chastity. It is for this reason, another proverb claims, “Discreet women have neither eyes nor ears” (W683).

Discreet women are, of course, aptly named, for with “neither eyes nor ears” not only are they circumspect about what they hear and see, but also they present a more fully enclosed or discreet body that is less vulnerable to penetration. Nonetheless, in a

26. Writing a century earlier, Vives also warns young women about the dangers facing them beyond the threshold of their homes and adopts the same metaphoric language of preparing for battle: “afore she go forth at dore / let her prepare her mynde and stomake none other wyse than if she went to fyght. . . . Let her considre with her selfe / that some thyng shall chaunce on euery syde that shall moue her chastite and her good mynde” (Niii^f).

27. In using the female sirens as an example of seductive speech in both cases, Brathwait is echoing the belief that deceptive speech is a feminine trait, the belief that also spawned feminized images of the serpent and associated Eve’s speech to Adam with that of the serpent. However, Brathwait acknowledges that both men and women can demonstrate this trait. Ann Rosalind Jones notes that Isabella Whitney, writing earlier, uses the same allusion to sirens to describe the “fayre and painted talke” of unscrupulous men and suggests that this is “a striking reversal of assumptions about gender” (66). I am less convinced. I would argue that, like Brathwait, Whitney’s verse still represents seductive speech as a feminine characteristic, one that both men and women can exhibit.

society that considered all women as wives or potential wives, complete deafness was no more acceptable than complete silence or complete celibacy. A woman had to be open to male authority, namely her husband. She had to listen to obey. As a result, even as women were warned about the dangers of listening, they were also defined as listeners, particularly in contrast to men as speakers. In *A Godly Form of Hovseholde Gouvernement*, Robert Cleaver writes, “Now silence is the best ornament of a woman, and therefore the law was giuen to the man, rather then to the woman, to shew that hee should bee the teacher, and she the hearer, and therefore shee is commaunded to learne of her husband: 1 Cor. 14, 34, 35” (101).²⁸ However, he goes on to note that in marriage, “[i]t doeth greatly increase loue . . . when the one harkneth to the other, . . . and when in matters concerning the gouernment of the house, the one will be counselled and aduised by the other” (227). Given that Cleaver, only a few pages earlier, uses the story of the Fall to explain why wives should be subject to their husbands and cites the proverb: “A husband must be deaf and wife blind to have quietness” (Tilley H834), it is clear who he thinks should “harkneth to the other.” He writes, “The bell hath a loude sound, and therefore hee that will not heare it, must beware how hee pulleth the rope and shake it: so if the one will beginne to chide without a cause, let the other be either deafe, and so not heare it, or dumbe, and make no answeare. So that where the husband is deafe, and wife blinde, marriage is quiet & free from dissention” (186). Husbands, therefore, are permitted to turn a deaf ear to their wives, but wives are encouraged to listen to the counsel and advice of their husbands.

In a marriage sermon dedicated to Robert and Dorothy Cooke and published in 1620, Thomas Gataker also discusses wifely subjection before moving on to obedience, which he divides into attending to admonition and advice. When listening to admonition,

28. In keeping with other conduct book writers, William Whately defines such “silence” as quietness, “vsing few words, and those low and milde” (*Bride-Bvsh* 40). Indeed, most conduct book authors consider silence, “as it is opposed to speech, . . . stoutnesse of stomacke, and stubbornnesse of heart” (Gouge 282). For further discussion of female silence see Christina Luckyj, *‘A Moving Rhetoricke’: Gender and Silence in Early Modern England* (New York: Manchester UP, 2002).

his female readers are warned to “hear . . . it with mildnesse and hearken . . . to it with meekness,” for when a wife listens to her husband, “she hearkeneth to God in him” (14). William Whately, in his handbook on marriage, contrasts listening as a virtue to “wicked and vngodly” deafness, noting that a “vertuous godly person, will allow no sinne, will hearken to counsell, will receiue admonitions and reproofes But a wicked and vngodly person hath a deafe eare, a wilfull heart, an incurable soule; nothing will make him mend his faults” (*Care-cloth* 72). Whately does not specify whether husbands or wives are more likely to exhibit this deafness; nonetheless, his emphasis on the need to listen to “admonitions and reproofes” suggests a focus on “vngodly” wives who refuse to listen to correction. The ungodliness of such deafness, in keeping with the general view of physiological deafness as beyond cure, was considered irremediable.

While women who were inappropriately deaf to male authority were considered “vngodly” in their refusal to listen to their husbands, the fact that they had to be open to one man led to infinite concerns about their vulnerability to entry by others. Not surprisingly, authors use a number of gender stereotypes associated with the legacy of the Fall when trying to rationalize why female listening needs to be guarded. They draw not only on the link between aural and sexual openness, but also on ideas about female credulity, vanity, and deception. The anonymous author of *The Covrt of Good Counsell* makes an explicit connection between listening and sexual intercourse with advice that a “wise woman stop her eares against the alurements of those which lye in waight for her chastitie” (D2^r). Overbury makes the same association when he describes the “very very Woman” who contrasts the good wife despite the epithet suggesting that she is the epitome of femaleness. He writes, “Shee commits with her eares for certaine, after that shee may goe for a Maide, but shee hath been lyen with in her vnderstanding” (D^r). He implies that such a woman has certainly “commit[t]ed with her ears,” and has probably also “commit[t]ed” with the rest of her body. Moreover, any appearance of virtue is simply a disguise. She might look like a maid, but she is really an adulteress. In his description of “a fine Gentleman,” Overbury explains how an open female ear can lead to an open vagina. Such a gentleman’s speech might lack substance, but “[h]ee vnlocks

maidenheads with his language” (E4^v) in the same way as Jonson later claims that flattery is “a fine Pick-lock of tender eares” (*Discoveries* 43).

The ability of flattery to open what should remain closed leads to much discussion on the credulity and vanity of women. Brathwait repeatedly advises women against being too credulous of what they hear, particularly when it comes to promises and praise. He notes, “It is easie for beauty to extort a vow, or a temporary protest; which many times is as soone forgot as made,” and then warns, “[l]et not these then worke on your Credulity.” He adds that there are men “who can tip their glozing tongues with Rhetoricall protests, purposely to gull a credulous Creature, for the purchase of an vnlawfull pleasure” (*English Gentlewoman* 143). Jane Anger also warns her readers, “At the end of mens faire promises there is a Laberinth and therefore euer hereafter stoppe your eares when they protest friendship, lest . . . you fal without redemption” (C4^v). While Brathwait emphasizes the need to shun flatterers in the 1631 edition of *The English Gentlewoman*, claiming “[T]here is nothing that asperseth a deeper staine vpon the *Cloath* of Honour, than too much attention vnto Sycophants,” and declares “O banish these your Portells. Their glozing will labour your Confusion,” in the 1641 edition, he notes that lecherous men are not the only ones likely to take advantage of female credulity. In this text, gentlewomen are also advised to “banish” flattering maids from their “Portells”:

Let not your loose *Tyre-women*, while they trimme you without, soile you within. You shall finde their *Oratory*, a continued Scene of *Sycophancy*. These will infuse a poysonous juyce into your too credulous eares: and the more to delude you with selfe-idolatry . . . Give no Eare to such enchanting ayres; They do but this to inlarge their vailes (*English Gentlewoman* [1641] 382-83).

Repeatedly, he calls on his female readers to be deaf to praise of themselves, to “[b]eware of that *Complement* which giues way to rob you of your choycest *Ornament*” (*English Gentlewoman* [1631] 64).²⁹ Brathwait warns women about those with “glozing tongues,” yet he also holds female listeners partly responsible for their own downfall, complaining,

29. See also Brathwait’s address “To the Gentlewoman Reader.” He states, “In the report of others praises she is attentive, but deafe to her owne” (*English Gentlewoman* un).

“Many you haue of your sexe, who are too attentiu auditors in the report of their owne prayes” (65). The opinion that women prefer to hear flattery and seductive speech is also apparent in Thomas Tomkis’s play on the five senses, *Lingua*, in which the tongue, characterized as female, wants to be included in the senses. Filled with supposedly characteristic female ambition and verbosity, *Lingua* rhetorically asks herself, “Art not a woman, doost not loue reuenge, / Delightfull speeches, sweet perswasions” (1.1.101-02). Apparently, it is not just princes who like to be flattered (Guazzo I.34^v); women also have a predilection for it.

Obviously concerned about the susceptibility of female ears for praise and flattery, Brathwait offers this advice to his readers:

[T]here is nothing can better become you than a modest shamefastnesse: which consists either in auerting your eare from your owne prayse; or with-drawing your presence from dishonest or vnciuill discourse; or reiecting an importunate Suitor, whose too inconsiderate entertainment might question your honour. I haue noted in some women a kind of zealous and deuout passion, when they chanc’d but to heare any light or wanton communication; they could not hold but reprove them for their impudence, and amidst their reproofe, to adorn the Rosie Circlets of their cheekes with a blushing shamefastnesse. Surely, this expressed a singular *modesty* in them; which I would haue you (*Gentlewomen*) in a serious imitation of them, to represent in your selues. (*English Gentlewoman* 172)

While he notes that women cannot always avoid situations in which they might hear scurrilous talk, they can (apparently at will) give a non-verbal response to indicate their disapproval and encourage the reprobate speaker to silence. Brathwait might praise this “singular modesty,” but Baldassare Castiglione offers another interpretation of such protest. He suggests that a woman who shows such modesty may actually come under suspicion: “a man may lightly gesse that she fained to be so coye to hide that in her selfe which she doubted others might come to the knowledge of,” though he too finally concludes a “litle blushing and shamefacednesse” may sometimes be appropriate (191). The opinions of these two writers underscore the different roles of the women under discussion. Castiglione is discussing aristocratic women who move in court circles. Women at court had a more public role; they were on display and were expected to be entertaining and affable with men, but still show their modesty and retain their chaste

reputations. Ann Rosalind Jones concludes that “rather than deny that she takes pleasure in erotic chat, [a court lady] must signify that she enjoys it within correct limits” (46). Brathwait, in contrast, is writing for the newer, lower “gentle” class, the successful merchants and their wives and daughters. As these women were not encouraged to enter the public forum, there is no attempt to negotiate a balance between affable openness and modest closure. These women were to remain discreet both in their judgment and in their separation from others (Jones 52).³⁰ Nonetheless, while the conflict in advice might be explained, it did not make it any easier for a late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century woman to negotiate the demand that she demonstrate some type of aural openness, whether it be to a potential courtly admirer, or friend of the family, even as she had to ensure her impermeability to the wrong kind of speech.

In addition, the bourgeois conduct manuals offer another reason why women should restrict their willingness to listen to others. Listening may be a necessary activity for a lady at court, but it was often deemed an idle or unprofitable activity for those required to participate in household duties. Gataker, who considers gossip a specifically female activity, notes that wives who “must haue their gossips come and sit with them to tell tales and newes . . . little weigh . . . with themselues, that time the meane while runneth on, and worke about the house goeth but vntowardly forward, while there is none to ouersee, or looke after it” (20).³¹ There is also the concern that when women listen to gossip, they may lose more than their time; something may be stolen from them without their knowledge. Cleaver warns, “[G]reat tale-bringers, bee as great carriers The wise woman will be warie, whom she admitteth into her house, to sit long there, knowing

30. While Jones suggests that many conduct book writers “forbid” “women’s entry into the public world” (52), Brathwait does not entirely exclude women from public as he believes that “a modest and well *Behaued Woman* may by her frequent or resort to *publike* places, conferre no lesse benefit to such as obserue her *behauour*, than occasion of profit to her priuate family” (*English Gentlewoman* 50).

31. Gataker also equates women who listen to idle gossip to those who “are gadders abroad” (20), once again reinforcing the link between the thresholds of the female body and the threshold of the home.

that their occupation is but to marke and carrie” (90). Other writers suggest that both men and women may be at risk when listening to gossip. In an essay titled “Of Silence and Secrecie,” William Cornwallis warns his readers about listening to empty words when they should be engaged in a more lucrative pastime. He writes, “I am not against speech but babling, which consumes time and profiteth no body.” He then adds, in a curious twist that implies the fault lies with the listener in spite of the speaker’s foolishness: “They are at great pains with feeding hungrie eares and, to speake truly, are the very bellows to kindle laughter” (115). It is the listeners’ “hungrie eares” that prompt the speaker to fill them. Cleaver also notes that listening to “nothing but froath . . . bring[s] no good to the hearer,” and concludes that even “though there be no outward euill in [these speakers’] liues, yet they must not bee admitted for companions” (74). These writers suggest that listening to idle talk is not inherently dangerous for men, but it is a waste of time and, for a mercantile class, time meant money: “They perceiue not how time runnetth, nor how vntowardly their businesse goeth forward, while they sit idle” (90).

Peter de la Primaudaye, writing somewhat earlier in 1568, is more disturbed about the hazards of gossip for all listeners, regardless of gender. The problem, he suggests, is that when a listener is curious for news, he is “more profitable to his enimies than to himselfe, bicause he discouereth, manifesteth, and sheweth vnto them from what they are to beware, and what to correct.” While Primaudaye considers listening in the same economic terms as Cornwallis and Cleaver, he goes on to elaborate on the dangers of listening in a strikingly visual metaphor. He concludes that a curious listener is blind to what “is within himself, so greatly is he dazeled by beholding that which is without in other men. He openeth all euen to the very wals of strange houses, and pearceth like a wind into the midst of those things that are most secret” (167). To Primaudaye, an open ear is not only fearful for what it might let into the body, but also for what it might let out. Listening, rather than permitting information to be gathered about others, allows others to gather information about the listener. Listeners may be able to detect the “poysonous iuyce” of sycophancy and avoid the infiltration about which Brathwait warns

his readers when he writes, “Make no reside there, where the least occasion of lightnesse is ministred; auert your Eare when you heare it, but your heart especially, lest you harbour it” (*English Gentlewoman* 41). Nonetheless, the same listeners may be unaware of when speech “pearceth [them] like a wind” in order to discover their innermost secrets. Female listeners may have to be particularly cautious about listening and how their listening behaviour is perceived by others, but listeners of both sexes have to guard their ears both as orifices through which “poysonous juyce” can enter and secrets can leave.

The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice

Appropriate listening for women, as defined in the early modern period, required them to behave like the Virgin Mary and not like Eve, to listen and obey the voice of patriarchal authority, and to shun the voices of those who sought to undermine that authority. However, as the unstable contrast between Mary and Eve demonstrates, it could be difficult to distinguish good voices from bad. In addition, as women were constantly reminded, as the daughters of Eve, they were inherently curious and gullible and therefore always at risk of attending to the wrong voice. As a result, they had to be constantly on guard, ever ready to defend their ears and chastity, even though this required them to hear the very words that might entrap them. They had to maintain inviolate boundaries and remain unchanged, eternally pure, despite being penetrated by speech that was repeatedly deemed to have the power to deflower, infect and impregnate. The tensions within this definition of appropriate listening for women are particularly apparent in Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*.³² Desdemona is a

32. There are two authoritative versions of *Othello*, a quarto edition of 1622 and the First Folio edition of 1623. Q contains spelling and punctuation believed characteristic of Shakespeare, along with more detailed stage directions, and several oaths that are cut from F1, likely as a result of the 1606 Profanity Act. In contrast, F1 contains a number of passages not found in Q, the most pertinent to my discussion being those involving Desdemona and Emilia in 4.3 and 5.2 respectively. I follow the lead of the Norton editors in accepting the changes and additions of F1 as Shakespeare’s own, revisions perhaps prompted by the Profanity Act but which also enabled him to make changes in the representation of the characters themselves (cont.).

chaste wife who demonstrates both aural and sexual desire; she makes it clear that she desires both Othello and his stories. Moreover, she listens to speakers other than her husband. While she remains sexually chaste, her aural desire is sufficient that Othello, prompted by Iago, comes to regard her as unchaste. Despite his own early enjoyment and appreciation of her aural appetite, her “greedy ear” (*Othello* 1.3.148), he later deems it a sign of her sexual desire. Othello therefore attempts to enforce his wife’s closure by smothering her—stopping her mouth. Having been encouraged to condemn Desdemona’s aural appetite as excessive, Othello shows his own “greedy ear” when he listens to Iago and “the practice of [this] cursèd slave” (5.2.298), leads to his downfall. I therefore want to explore just how Desdemona’s and Othello’s listening, even as it unites them in love, may be considered transgressive, and how that definition affects their position within society.

It should first be noted that *Othello* not only raises questions about how men and women listen, but also about how what is heard affects what is seen. Indeed, the interconnection between sight and hearing has led to a variety of critical opinions about the relative importance of the two senses in this play. Karen Newman notes that both within the play and its criticism, the focus has been on the visual: the contrasting images of black and white and Othello’s demand for “ocular proof” (3.3.365). In contrast, Robert Wilson claims that the play, in keeping with many of Shakespeare’s works, emphasizes the role of the listener. He notes, “The references to ears are many”; they demonstrate that “a narrative’s prosperity lies in the ear of the hearer, not upon the tongue of the narrator, and for this reason it is not surprising that the role of the auditor . . . should have so much importance” (“Shakespeare’s Narrative” 87). John Wall also considers *Othello* “distinctive” in its emphasis on listening, describing it as “a play about the speaking and

32 cont. The Norton editors argue that the changes of F1 “reduce the cynical disillusionment of the play and increase the efficacy of virtue while underscoring the defects of the culture in which Othello and Desdemona operate” (2095). Certainly, the changes emphasize problems with cultural constructions of marital relations, female chastity, and “honesty,” but whether virtue, particularly female virtue, is shown to have a greater impact is highly debatable.

hearing of words” (360). Indeed, as many critics note, from Thomas Rymer to the present, “Desdemona was won by hearing Othello talk This was the Charm, this was the philtre, the love-powder” (Rymer 133). Joel Fineman suggests that both the verbal and visual are important in *Othello*, but that they are presented in opposition (“Sound” 110). In response, I suggest that even though visual display and the language describing it are often in conflict, the play actually demonstrates the inherent connection between hearing and seeing. Desdemona may have been “won by hearing Othello talk” but she “saw Othello’s visage in his mind” (1.3.251). Equally, it is Othello’s desire for “ocular proof” that gives Iago the opportunity to “abuse [his] ears” (1.3.377; Hendricks 202).

While there has been some speculation about the date of *Othello*, it is generally believed to have been written some time in 1603-04.³³ Shakespeare draws on an Italian novella for his source, using Cinthio’s tale of Disdemona, Capitano Moro, and his ensign Alfieri found in *Gli Hectommithi* (1565), which may have been based on a court case of the period, and which was translated into French by Gabriel Chappuys in 1584. He may have also made use of Belleforest’s translation of Bandello’s novellas, though this is less certain (Bullough 194-96, 202). With its focus on Othello and Desdemona’s short-lived and tumultuous marriage, *Othello* has been labelled domestic tragedy by some critics, while others claim its superiority over what is often considered “the aesthetically inferior domestic tragedy” (Comensoli 15). Marriage is clearly a thematic concern in *Othello* (Fultz 191); however, “household government” is repeatedly examined in terms of how it relates to issues of political governance. The play demonstrates “the instability of the early modern household,” which Viviana Comensoli notes is a characteristic of domestic plays (16), but it does so in a political context. Brabantio is, after all, a high-ranking Venetian senator; the Duke of Venice is called on to mediate in the dispute between

33. Barry Weller and Margaret Ferguson assign the date 1607 to *Othello* without explanation (6). Geoffrey Bullough notes that while the entry of the play in the Revels account, dated 1 November 1604, was once thought to be fraudulent, it has since been substantiated (193).

Desdemona's father and Othello, and Othello is a general and newly appointed governor of Cyprus. Moreover, the "instability" in the household simply echoes, amplifies, and distorts the instability within the society at large.

Desdemona meets Othello when her father invites him to the house and asks to hear his life story. Brathwait notes that a "powerfull auditor," like an "incorrigible sinner," can demand, "*Speake to us pleasing things*" (*Five Senses* 16), and Brabantio, as a member of the Venetian ruling class, can request that Othello tell "the story of [his] life" (1.3.128). Othello, as Iago tells Roderigo, "is of a free and open nature" (381) and has no hesitation in telling Brabantio his life story, and the unusual tale clearly pleases the senator, who asks to hear more, demonstrating what Cornwallis considers the human predilection for tales of "strange countries," and leaving himself vulnerable as his ears "stand wide open for newes," and he risks "swallow[ing] matters vnprobable" (Cornwallis 11). In his desire to hear Othello's strange tale, Brabantio ignores Primaudaye's warning that a "curious man" might reveal more than he intends. Indeed, his curiosity ultimately leads to Othello meeting Desdemona. Given her father's desire to hear Othello's story, and Othello's own eloquent description of events, we should not be surprised at Desdemona's fascination with his life history. Busy with her household duties, Desdemona hears "parcels" of Othello's tale (1.3.153) before "house affairs would draw her thence" (146). While Desdemona and her father are equally interested listeners and as attentive as circumstances allow, Othello distinguishes between them. Both have the power to make him speak, but Othello considers Desdemona's interest a sign of "a greedy ear" which will "[d]evour up [his] discourse" (148-49). Othello's description of Desdemona's ear as "greedy" in a speech in which he explains why he loves his wife and how she came to love him requires explanation. According to the *OED*, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, "greedy" could be used to signify hunger, an appetite, normally for physical sustenance. As such, "greedy" was not a negative term, but it was ambiguous as it carried the connotation of excessive desire: greed had been considered a vice centuries earlier and it was still considered potentially sinful in the early modern period. Hence, while Othello appreciates the opportunity to satisfy Desdemona's "greedy

ear,” he may be inadvertently suggesting how Venetian culture glosses such female aural appetite.

Playwrights such as Ben Jonson, John Marston, and Thomas Tomkis suggest that women are more interested in spectacle than listening, but Desdemona’s interest in listening to Othello contradicts this view. One could argue that Desdemona’s suggestion that she saw “Othello’s visage in his mind” indicates that his narrative provided an imaginary spectacle for her. One might also claim that Desdemona, by listening so well, behaves inappropriately for a woman. Othello may be a friend of her father’s, but he is also a “stranger” (1.1.137) as Iago points out, because of his cultural difference. Brathwait states that for a gentlewoman “[t]o enter into much discourse or familiarity with strangers, argues lightnesse or indiscretion” (*English Gentlewoman* 41).³⁴ In addition, Vives argues that young people should not talk to members of the opposite sex because they “shalbe incenced / and kyndled / and whether they wyll or no / shalbe compelled to talke of their heate” (D^v). The implication is that, regardless of the attraction of Othello’s narrative, even in her father’s house, Desdemona should have nothing to do with him. Her listening may also be considered problematic because it displaces what she should be doing. Othello notes that when “house affairs” draw her away from him, she “dispatch[es]” them “with haste” (1.3.146-47) so that she can return to hear his tale. In this, Desdemona is like the women chastized by conduct book writers for preferring to listen to idle chatter over doing their housework. Desdemona also has something taken from her by Othello. Not only does he “draw from her a prayer of earnest heart” (151), but he also “beguile[s] her of her tears” (155).³⁵ However, in the same way as Jonson’s audiences may have had difficulty condemning Volpone because he represents onstage a

34. My use of the term “stranger” is intended to iterate Brathwait, not to elide the issue of Othello’s colour. I agree with Newman that Venetian society is able to define Othello as strange, monstrous, and devilish because of Othello’s colour and the cultural difference it represents.

35. One might argue that Desdemona’s listening also costs her “kisses” (F1) or “sighs” (Q1), as she gives them as recompense for Othello’s “pains” (158).

model of listening that potentially echoes their own, so audiences may have had difficulty censuring Desdemona for her interest in Othello's story despite the opinions of the conduct book writers. After all, Desdemona is not the only listener enthralled by Othello. While Brabantio is quick to consider his daughter's fascination with Othello's story a sign that "she was half the wooer" (175), he fails to acknowledge that his own interest may have also contributed to the loss of his daughter. He complains that she was "stol'n from [him]" (60), but he fails to consider how his listening behaviour permitted the theft. As Primaudaye warns, and Cleaver notes, "[G]reat tale-bringers, [can] bee as great carriers" (Cleaver 90). Othello may have brought a tale for Brabantio, but he carried away the senator's daughter. In addition, the Duke suggests that Othello's tale would captivate any young woman: "I think this tale would win my daughter, too" (1.3.170), a statement with which the theatre audience is likely to acquiesce, given its own experience of Othello's speech.

Nonetheless, the listening behaviour of both Desdemona and her father leads to Brabantio's loss of authority over her as his curiosity blinds him to events in his own household, and Desdemona's interest eventually leads her, through marriage, to grant Othello the authority once held by her father, a change that is spatially realized by her movement from her father's house to the Sagittary and beyond (Orlin 175).³⁶ Moreover, like Stallybrass, Lena Orlin connects movement of the female body away from the home with female loquaciousness (179). Douglas Bruster also connects the movement of women in *Othello* with their speech, remarking that "silence equals stasis or confinement" and that Othello smothers Desdemona in an attempt to control both her movement and her speech (252). Certainly, both Iago and Othello attempt to silence their wives and limit their movement. Othello tells Desdemona, "Peace, and be still" (5.2.48), and Iago issues the dual command, "[H]old your peace!" and "Be wise and get you

36. Lena Orlin draws a connection between the inn "Sagittar" (Q), "Sagitary" (F), and the monstrous sexuality with which Iago associates Othello. She notes that the zodiac sign of Sagittarius is a centaur, half man, half beast, who is not only a monster, in profile the "beast with two backs," but is also known for a monstrous sexual appetite (172, 174).

home” (225, 229). This apparent link between female speech and movement, however, obscures the connection between the ear and the mouth, the open ear and open body. Desdemona leaves her father because both of them listen to Othello. She only speaks to Othello after she *hears* parts of his story. Equally, Emilia knows the true story of the handkerchief because she steals it after *hearing* Iago beg for it. He “[w]ooed [her] to steal it” (3.3.297). Iago may be fearful of how Emilia’s speech will reveal his machinations, but her knowledge is based on what she hears him say.

Unaware of the risks both he and his daughter face as listeners, Brabantio is convinced that Desdemona has been subject to Othello’s “witchcraft” (1.3.64). He apparently fails to notice that Desdemona repeatedly returns to listen to Othello, believing instead that she “feared to look on” him (98). While Brabantio warns Othello, “She has deceived her father, and may thee” (292), a warning Iago later uses to manipulate his general (3.3.210-12), the truth may be not that Desdemona deceives her father, but that he fails to see her.³⁷ Brabantio, though, does not accept responsibility for his blindness, but rather inscribes Desdemona as Eve “enchanted” (1.2.64) by the devil. Brabantio repeatedly associates Othello with satanic practices and thus considers Desdemona literally “caught [by the devil] with a lyght argument” (Vives Eii^v). He first declares Desdemona’s disappearance to be “an evil” (1.1.161), repeatedly accuses the Moor of practicing witchcraft and enchantment, the “practices of cunning hell” (1.3.102), and demands his apprehension as “an abuser of the world, a practiser / Of arts inhibited and out of warrant” (1.2.79-80). Othello insists that his only witchcraft has been to speak

37. Mary Beth Rose argues that Brabantio considers Desdemona deceptive because she has not sought his consent for her marriage (“Heroics of Marriage” 218). While he might indeed be angered at his daughter’s decision to marry without his consent, he repeatedly refers to her looks when noting her apparent distaste of both marriage and Othello, implying that he believes himself deceived by her appearance. While there is no evidence that Desdemona actively deceives her father in the way he suggests, she is capable of disguising her feelings as she herself notes (2.1.125-26). Furthermore, she evades the truth when Othello asks her for her handkerchief (3.4.50-95). However, her evasion is excusable given Othello’s obvious anger. Also, her suggestion in 2.1 that she can disguise her feelings may be considered paradoxical as this is not said as an aside. Hence, her declaration that she “beguile[s]” reveals the emotion she says she wants to hide.

to Desdemona, but this may simply align him further with the serpent who seduced Eve with his speech. And the Duke's comments on Othello's speech only confirm its allure for even the most judicious listener. Desdemona may have erred by listening so keenly to Othello, but clearly the suggestion is that few could escape the captivating effect of his words. Despite this, in keeping with the construction of Eve as partly responsible for her own deception because of her curiosity and credulity, Desdemona is determined to be "half the wooer." Othello may have wooed her with his tale, but she wooed him by listening to him and believing what he said (Fultz 197; Pryse 463).

Othello notes that Desdemona is particularly interested in his tale of "the cannibals that each other eat, / The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (1.3.142-44). Newman believes that such tales connect Othello with "Africa and its legendary monstrous creatures" (86); however, Othello does not associate himself with the "cannibals." Instead, his description of how "Desdemona seriously incline[d]" (144-55) to hear his tale not only suggests her desire to hear, but also provokes an image of her with her head inclined—in a position similar to the "Anthrogophagi" Othello describes. This connection underscores the instability of his position in Venetian society; not only is he an "extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere" (1.1.137-38), but he only has access through one whose own position is nebulously both within and beyond the boundaries of that society. Moreover, the implication is that it is Desdemona's listening behaviour that destabilizes her position. Othello further likens her to the cannibals in his tale when he describes her as "[d]evour[ing] up [his] discourse" (1.3.149). Here, he draws on the common analogy of speech to food and of the ear to a mouth that consumes such food that appears in many early modern texts and which can have positive connotations. For example, several preachers note that listening to God's word is vital for spiritual nourishment.³⁸ Difficulty arises though when one is unable to discern good food from bad. Iago hints at the

38. See Brathwait, *Essaies* 6; Duverney 70-71; Greenham 75; Egerton 55. The link between the ear and the mouth, speech and food, will be considered in greater detail in relation to *A Woman Killed with Kindness* in the next chapter.

problem with Desdemona's aural appetite when he notes how he can use it to his own ends: "[T]is most easy / Th'inclining Desdemona to subdue / In any honest suit" (2.3.313-15). His use of the word "incline" not only echoes Othello's earlier description of how Desdemona "seriously incline[d]" to hear his tale, but also carries sexual overtones. Iago implies that her willingness to "bend her ear," to "incline," is a sign of her willingness to bend herself—to *recline*, particularly as he, immediately after this observation, refers to her as "fruitful" (315), a term indicating not only her generous nature as the Norton editors suggest, but also intimating the progeny resulting from sexual intercourse.³⁹ According to Iago then, Desdemona has an ear open for all speakers. Moreover, she is clearly moved by what she hears. Not only does Othello's story move her to love and pity (1.3.166-67), but after hearing Cassio's tale of woe, she "suffer[s] with him" (3.3.55). Wayne Rebhorn notes that one way orators were believed to move their auditors was through the transmission of their own emotion (86-87). Desdemona appears particularly susceptible to such emotional contagion and this attribute, along with her open or "greedy" ear, makes her a most desirable, yet potentially transgressive, listener.

Desdemona perhaps acknowledges the problem caused by her aural desire when she tells Othello, "She wished she had not heard [his tale]" (1.3.161), suggesting that she is aware that it is unsuitable for her ears. She then adds, "yet she wished / That heaven had made her such a man" (161-2). Characteristic of Desdemona's ambiguity, this line suggests either her "wish" to be a man, or for heaven to make "such a man" for her. The first reading of the line reinforces the idea that Desdemona's desire transgresses her gender role. The second implies that Othello is not "such a man," that he is not

39. Othello dwells on the sexual connotation of "fruitfulness" when he later holds Desdemona's hand and reads its moistness as a sign of "fruitfulness and liberal heart." He advocates restraint, particularly in terms of her movement and food intake, prescribing isolation: "this hand of yours requires / A sequester from liberty; fasting, and prayer, / Much castigation, exercise devout" (3.4.36-39).

sufficiently “man[ly],” that he is not made for her, or that he is not made by heaven.⁴⁰

While the latter reading echoes the link made by Iago and Brabantio between Othello and the powers of darkness, all three raise questions about the appropriateness of the relationship between Desdemona and Othello in Venetian society, while also emphasizing gender-specific definitions of appropriate behaviour. Iago suggests that Othello’s marriage cements his position within Venetian society; he is now “made for ever” (1.2.51). Once married, though, Desdemona appears to change, and several critics read her as moving from a self-confident and outspoken young woman to a meek and beleaguered wife (Deats, “From Pedestal” 89). Lynne Magnusson notes that, in the first act, Desdemona is not the “stereotypical silent and modest woman” (94), but rather, in keeping with her aristocratic status, she is “a bold and self-confident speaker” (93). According to Magnusson, the change in Desdemona occurs when she realizes how Othello interprets her speech (95). Other critics are less convinced that Desdemona moves from outspoken bride to passive wife. Sara Munson Deats suggests that Desdemona is relatively submissive throughout, always defining herself in terms of her relationship to men, first her father and then her husband (“From Pedestal” 89). In contrast, I suggest that Desdemona’s self-definition is obscured by the way others construct her, and for Othello, that construction is remarkably consistent. The problem is that an attribute that might be advantageous to an outsider seeking access into a society may be threatening to someone already there. As Othello notes, it is the “curse of marriage, / That we can call these delicate creatures ours / And not their appetites!” (3.3.272-74). Desdemona’s desire to hear his story, her “greedy ear,” may provide him with a way of improving his position in Venetian society, but once married, he fears it may be a threat to his position as her husband.

In attending to Cassio’s suit, Desdemona shows her husband’s lieutenant a common courtesy, but Iago uses her “so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition”

40. The reversal of gender roles hinted at in Othello’s speech in 1.3 is also suggested by his later address to Desdemona as “my fair warrior” (2.1.179) and Iago’s remark to Cassio, “Our general’s wife is now the general” (2.3.292-93).

(2.3.296-97) to foster Othello's doubts about her virtue. Iago intimates that her willingness to listen to Cassio indicates an equal willingness to have sexual intercourse with him. Furthermore, Desdemona's choice of words when she tells Othello that she has "been talking with a suitor here" (3.3.42), even as they accurately convey Cassio's position as a supplicant, implies that Cassio has replaced Othello as her suitor. From Othello's perspective, Cassio is appealing to Desdemona in the same way that he himself succeeded. He knows that his wife loved him for the "dangers [he] had passed," dangers his lieutenant shared (3.4.92), and now she is listening to Cassio with her "greedy ear."⁴¹ Neither is she simply listening; she also speaks for Cassio just as she has previously spoken for Othello. Indeed, she claims that she will transgress the boundaries on women's speech and usurp Othello's role as speaker: "My lord shall never rest. / I'll . . . talk him out of patience. / His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift" (3.3.22-24). As Woodbridge notes, with this declaration, Desdemona suggests that she has the ability to behave like a "domineering shrew" (*Women* 195). Such behaviour threatens both Othello's self-perception and his authority as Desdemona's husband.

Encouraged by Iago's "pestilence" (2.3.330), Othello starts to interpret Desdemona's listening behaviour as transgressive. He begins to consider her not just a good listener, but too good a listener. For Othello, her open or "greedy" ear is no longer a sign of a healthy appetite, an indication that she "feeds well" (3.3.188), but a sign of excessive desire, a slippage permitted by the ambiguity of language and the gap between language and meaning. As Iago suggests, Desdemona's "courtesy" (2.1.247) in listening to Cassio's suit may be deemed "[l]echemy" (248), depending on the perspective of the observer. By his suggestion that one may see lechery where another sees courtesy, Iago exposes the impossibility of defining inner motivation by outward behaviour and the

41. While Desdemona claims that she was influenced by Othello's words, she may also have been persuaded by Cassio who, as Desdemona reminds her husband, came "a-wooing with you, and so many a time / When I have spoke of you dispraisingly / Hath ta'en your part" (3.3.72-74). Her remark would only exacerbate Othello's feelings of insecurity in his position as her husband as it raises doubts about Othello's own ability to secure the position for himself.

problem with conduct book proscriptions (and prescriptions) on certain behaviours. Desdemona's willingness to please others could be considered appropriate courtesy for a gentlewoman, but Iago emphasizes the transgressive nature of her behaviour by insisting that it indicates her "appetite" or desire. Moreover, he claims that Othello's desire to please the wife he loves is also an indication that he is transgressing his gender role and this becomes a further sign of Desdemona's appetite:

His soul is so enfeathered to her love
That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
Even as her appetite shall play the god
With his weak function. (2.3.319-22)

According to Iago, Desdemona's desire allows her to control a "weak" Othello and reverses the accepted husband/wife hierarchy. While Iago inscribes Desdemona's aural appetite as a threat to both Venetian society and her husband, it is perhaps a greater threat to herself because of the way it is regarded and the way she is affected by what she hears. Not only is Desdemona moved by Cassio's suit, but in F1 she is also impressed by Lodovico and thinks him "a proper man" who "speaks well" (4.3.34-35). This is a reasonable comment about a courtier who has come to call on her husband, though it is clearly at odds with her earlier vow that if "[her] eyes, [her] ears, or any sense / Delighted them in any other form [than Othello's] / . . . Comfort forswear me" (4.2.158-59, 163). Her comment about Lodovico, however, is less an indication of her desire for him than a sign that, as a general's wife, Desdemona must be an agreeable listener to men other than her husband.

Desdemona's attentiveness and empathy make her both an ideal and a potentially transgressive listener, even as her willingness to listen and incorporate what she hears into her own understanding endangers her. Not only does Othello's story bring her to tears, but it leads her to love him. As she says, "I saw Othello's visage in his mind," indicating that through his speech, "the *Index* of the *Minde*" according to Brathwait (*English Gentleman* 89), she develops an image of him. While her words suggest that she sees beyond Othello's colour, they also demonstrate her awareness of her society's colour prejudice and her own interest in his exotic origins, her desire of his difference (Fultz

195; Hendricks 199; Newman 86). On hearing his tale of the handkerchief, she accepts the import he gives it and, unaware of any other reason for his anger, believes, “there’s some wonder in this handkerchief” (3.4.97). Even after Othello’s accusations in the brothel scene (4.2) in which he calls her as “false as hell” (41), “that cunning whore of Venice / That married with Othello” (93-94), and gives money to Emilia as if she were a bawd, Desdemona tries to incorporate what she has heard although it is incomprehensible to her. She fails to realize how Othello’s perception of her and of her language has been influenced by Iago (Gross 122), how his motivation for speaking has changed because he has “taken Iago’s vision of the world . . . for reality” (John Wall 363), and now thinks differently about his wife and her interactions with others, including Cassio (Beehler 71).

Desdemona, whose innocence about adultery is more apparent in the longer F1 version of 4.3, is not only unaware that Othello thinks he has reason to be jealous, but has also incorporated Othello’s story of his exotic origins and difference so completely that she believes “the sun where he was born / Drew all such humors from him” (3.4.28-29). According to Desdemona, Othello cannot be jealous because, first, she has done nothing to make him jealous and, second, such emotion would be foreign to him. She ignores the fact that, just as she has accepted and incorporated his life-story and the tale of the handkerchief, he may have also incorporated what he has heard, namely the negative opinion expressed by Iago about white women who marry black men. Desdemona may potentially contravene the advice of conduct book writers when she listens to Othello before she is married, but as a wife she listens to her husband as advocated, with “mildnesse” and “meekenesse” (Gataker 14). The problem is that his accusations are wildly inaccurate and unbecoming to a husband. William Gouge insists that a spouse who hears of “any notorious crime of the other should not be over-heady or hasty to judge and condemne” (251), and Cleaver notes that “one must heare what the offender can say in his defence, and not disdaine to heare him” (48). As a wife, Desdemona listens appropriately to Othello, but he fails to listen appropriately to her.

Not only does Desdemona listen to Othello and other men, including Iago, Cassio, and Lodovico, but she also likes to listen to her servants.⁴² She ignores Brathwait's advice that gentlewomen should not listen to their maids, for fear that "while they trimme you without, [they] soile you within" (*English Gentlewoman* [1641] 382). We see her converse with Emilia, an intimacy that leads Othello to accuse Emilia of being her mistress's bawd, and we learn that in the past Desdemona has also listened to her mother's maid, Barbary, who was disappointed in love and eventually died pining for her mad lover. Desdemona recalls the ballad Barbary sang and begins to sing it, but she does more than simply repeat a ballad she has heard before. Desdemona's "Willow Song" is not just a song of imagined disappointed love, or even a song echoing Barbary's disappointment; rather Desdemona incorporates and adapts the words to express her own understanding of her position (Stafford 76). The ballad, which is only included in F1, is an adaptation of an older, popular ballad, probably in circulation in 1583 if not before (Long 154).⁴³ In the original ballad, a male lover is pictured "sighing under a Sicamore

42. Orlin considers the incidents with Iago and Emilia to show certain indiscretions in Desdemona's speech. She makes the important observation that while these scenes have "troubled critics," they cannot be blamed for inciting Othello's jealousy as they remain unknown to him (186).

43. While there is some debate on whether the song is part of Shakespeare's original text or a later addition, the integration of the song with the play's dialogue, Emilia's later echo of the willow refrain, and the song's reference to cuckoldry, a theme explored in the subsequent conversation of Desdemona and Emilia lead many to consider the song integral to the play (Sternfeld 26). At least six willow songs were in circulation during the sixteenth century. Desdemona's version is most closely related to the London Book version (ms 15,117) now held at the British Library, and to a broadside ballad, titled "The Complaint of a Lover Forsaken of his Love," found in both the Roxburghe and Pepys collections. The four other willow songs have different lyrics but the same refrain and rhythm and may have been written in an effort to capitalize on the success of the first willow song (Seng 195-7).

tree” pining for his love who has proved to be “untrue.” The ballad presents his perspective on his hard-hearted love.⁴⁴

In contrast to the original ballad, in Desdemona’s rendition the abandoned lover is a young woman. While this change does not appear to originate with Desdemona, given that she claims she can only sing the song “like poor Barbary” (4.3.32) and later interrupts herself with “Nay, that’s not next” (51), she still manages to make the ballad her own. She moves from describing “[t]he poor soul” (38) to taking on the voice of that “poor soul” and singing in the first person lines not present in the original ballad, “I called my love false love, but what said he then? / . . . If I court more women, you’ll couch with more men” (53-55). Ernest Brennecke claims, “In spoken utterance Desdemona would never spontaneously use so indecorous a word as ‘couch’” (qtd. in Seng 194). Indeed, her stumbling over the word “whore” in the previous scene, and her subsequent discussion with Emilia, in which she innocently declares that she cannot imagine a wife being unfaithful to her husband (4.3.59-81), suggest that Desdemona would have difficulty talking about “couch[ing] with more men.”⁴⁵ The issue, then, is where does this line come from? Desdemona’s previous hesitancy about what comes next in Barbary’s version of the song, the absence of this line in the other versions, and her inability to sing beyond this suggest that this is not part of the song as Desdemona learned it from her mother’s maid. Instead, her words appear to echo and distort remarks made by Iago and Othello. Iago uses the word “couch” in reference to female adultery when he suggests to Othello that his situation is better than that of an unwitting cuckold: “O, ’tis the spite of hell, the fiend’s arch-mock, / To lip a wanton in a secure couch / And to suppose her chaste!” (4.1.68-70). Othello then appears to draw on this image when he

44. Bruce Smith argues that ballads, in contrast to many traditional texts, encouraged people to assume a female subject position (*Acoustic World* 200), indicating that the original “Willow Song” is somewhat unusual in its presentation of the male lover’s position.

45. Her inability to speak of the adultery of which she is accused also echoes Othello’s previous claim, “I should make very forges of my cheeks, / That would to cinders burn up modesty, / Did I but speak thy deeds” (4.2.76-78).

accuses Desdemona of being that “cunning whore . . . / That married with Othello.” However, even as Desdemona incorporates the language used by Iago and Othello in her song, she offers different explanations for female adultery, claiming that women may be provoked to adultery by male disloyalty, and that unfaithful men will consider women perfidious—regardless of how those women behave.⁴⁶ Desdemona may have incorporated the words of Barbary and Othello, but she does not simply echo their meaning; rather, she uses them to present her own understanding of sexual relationships, an understanding that she can only express by transgressing the boundaries on female behaviour and adopting a male subject position as she sings words supposedly spoken by the faithless male beloved.⁴⁷ Thus, Desdemona’s rendition of the “Willow Song” is further evidence of her ability to incorporate and empathize with what she hears, even if it is material others may deem inappropriate for young women.

Desdemona may demonstrate an aural appetite that endangers herself and is considered “greedy” by others, but Othello can also be said to listen too well and not well enough, both in his public role as a general and in his private role as Desdemona’s husband. *Othello* opens with Iago justifying his dislike of Othello. His primary objection is that his general has rejected his “personal suit” from “[t]hree great ones of the city” (1.1.8-9; Pryse 461). Iago’s mediators fail to persuade Othello to promote his ensign because Othello has already decided that Cassio will be his officer. In other words, Othello is deaf to the justifications offered for Iago’s promotion. Given that Iago narrates

46. Much earlier, when Iago formulates his plan to “abuse Othello’s ears” (1.3.377), he concludes that Cassio’s “person and . . . smooth dispose” is sufficient to make him “suspected” and “women false” (379-80), suggesting that not only a man’s desire, but simply his appearance could cause women to be defined as adulterous.

47. Rochelle Smith argues that the act of singing may be considered transgressive for a woman, for female singing was considered particularly seductive—like the sirens’ song—and was frequently used in drama as a sign of unrestrained female sexuality (314-16). Smith suggests that Shakespeare, by having Desdemona sing as her maid undresses her in her bedchamber, brings to life Othello’s wild imaginings of his wife as a “cunning whore,” even as the scene also shows her confusion and naivety about the charges against her (318).

this incident, it is difficult to determine whether Othello's refusal to reconsider his promotion of Cassio is truly a sign of a prejudicial hearing or simply Iago's interpretation of events; however, the audience later has several opportunities to see Othello assess differing versions of an event and, each time, he fails to listen fully to both sides of the story, listening too well to one speaker and paying insufficient attention to the other. He has difficulty "discerning wiselie betwixt true and false reportes" as James I recommends, but in his haste "foster[s] suspicion vpon a honest man [and woman]" (*Basilicon Doron* I.159).

Part of the problem is Othello's belief that outer behaviour is connected to inner being and the trust he places in his ensign. Iago knows that Othello holds him in high regard and uses this for his own ends: "He holds me well: / The better shall my purpose work on him" (1.3.372-73). Iago also knows how to manipulate Othello's "free and open nature, / That thinks men honest that but seem to be so" (381-82). Othello may follow Bacon's advice and consider the merit of the speaker to whom he listens (Bacon *Essayes* 159), but he errs in assuming that Iago is honest because he seems so. As a result, he listens too well to his ensign and, unlike Alexander the Great, fails to reserve an ear for the accused, whether it be Cassio or Desdemona. Certainly, Othello's judgement of Cassio appears over-hasty and clouded by emotion. Newly appointed governor of Cyprus and new husband, Othello is most cognizant of his responsibility and particularly attuned to how the noise of the disturbance might disturb the citizens of Cyprus and his wife. Having been roused by the noise himself, Othello is testy from the beginning, especially when compared to the Duke who judges the accusations against him in Venice (Heilman 130). He asks first Iago and then Cassio to describe what has happened, but their reluctance to speak raises his ire, and he admits, "[P]assion, having my best judgement collid, / Essays to lead the way" (2.3.189-90). He then vows that "he that is approved in this offence, / Though he had twinned with me, both at a birth, / Shall lose me" (194-96). Furthermore, upon hearing Iago's account, he assumes that the ensign's "honest and love doth mince this matter, / Making it light to Cassio" (230-31), and passes judgement on Cassio without waiting to hear his defence and whether he was provoked to attack

Roderigo. Othello's failure to listen to the accused, and his assumption that Iago knows more than he says are the same errors he makes in his later judgement and sentencing of Desdemona.

If "passion . . . [e]ssays to lead the way" when Othello hears Cassio's case, it has full sway in Othello's judgement of Desdemona. Robert Heilman argues that Othello's "emotions" cause him to determine Desdemona's guilt; however, Othello knows that passion is inadequate proof (132). His assessment of the "ocular proof" of her adultery is therefore biased as he is only looking for evidence to support how he feels. Heilman writes, he "wants to qualify [his] private intuition by methods which will bestow a public reliability upon actions at once private and official" (131). Cassio's possession of the handkerchief becomes proof of Desdemona's adultery because Othello's judgement is already biased by what he has heard from Iago. Terence Hawkes suggests that in the brothel scene, Othello "ceases to be a husband, and becomes a 'judge' pronouncing sentence on a criminal" (*Shakespeare's* 140). Indeed, acting as Desdemona's "judge," he has already sentenced her, noting earlier that "the justice of [strangling her in her bed] pleases" (4.1.199). When Emilia states that she has never seen, "[n]or ever heard, nor ever did suspect" (4.2.2) any wrongdoing between her mistress and Cassio, and that she would "wager she is honest, / Lay down my soul at stake" (13-14), Othello maintains his prejudice and notes that "she's a simple bawd / That cannot say as much" (21-22). He then demands that Desdemona swear that she is honest (39), only to contradict her when she does so. Despite his failure to get a confession from either Emilia or Desdemona, Othello maintains his predetermination of his wife's guilt and upholds the death sentence he has already passed.⁴⁸ Even as Desdemona lies on her deathbed, he refuses to accept her refutation of his charges: "[T]o deny each article with oath / Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception / That I do groan withal. Thou are to die" (5.2.59-61). He assumes the right to ignore her defence and act as her prosecutor, judge, and executioner.

48. Sara Munson Deats notes that, having judged his wife guilty of adultery, Othello never questions his right to be her executioner ("From Pedestal" 83).

However, that right would not be upheld, even in Venetian law, as he acknowledges when he takes his own life.⁴⁹

Othello's failure to give either Cassio or Desdemona a fair and complete hearing is accentuated by his own hearing by the Venetian senate in the opening act and the closing dispensation of justice by Lodovico. Shortly after we hear of Othello's failure to consider Iago's "suit," we witness the Duke's consideration of the news from Cyprus and his assessment of Brabantio's charges against Othello. The Duke weighs all the information, even though the situation is tense given the threat of war. On hearing rumours about the Turkish fleet, he notes, "There is no composition in these news / That gives them credit" (1.3.1-2). Even when a more credible witness, "[a] messenger from the galleys" (13) arrives, the Duke assesses the intelligence carefully, for even "ocular proof" may simply be "a pageant / To keep us in false gaze" (19-20). Repeatedly, he considers new information, neither adhering to his own preconceptions nor jumping to conclusions about the reports he hears. When Brabantio claims that Othello has used witchcraft to steal Desdemona, the Duke does not immediately assume that his trusted counsellor is right. He attends to the charge, but when he learns that Brabantio's "proof" is simply that Desdemona has fallen "in love with what she feared to look on" (98), he declares that "this is no proof / Without more wider and more overt test" (106-07). His statement of what constitutes proof is crucial given Othello's later call for "ocular proof." In addition, the Duke's hearing of the case against Othello demonstrates how public justice should

49. Margo Hendricks agrees with Jones that, for early modern English writers, Venice was "not a geographer's record but a fantasy setting for dramas of passion, Machiavellian politics and revenge" (Jones, qtd. in Hendricks 196). Shakespeare is therefore concerned less with the actual law pertaining to adultery in Venice than with Othello's demand for "justice" (4.1.199). Moreover, in his speech immediately before he stabs himself, Othello makes clear his role of Venetian husband and judge (Hendricks 204). Not only has he executed a Turk who "[b]eat a Venetian and traduced the state" (5.2.361-65) in Aleppo, but he has also judged and executed the Moor who killed a Venetian in Cyprus. Even as he equates himself to Q's "base Indian" or F1's "base Iudean" (356), he acts in accordance with the role he has assumed as a wronged Venetian husband (Hendricks 95).

work against such private attacks as Iago's (Heilman 129). The Duke hears the case for both the prosecution and the defence and dismisses the charges for, as previously noted, he concludes that Othello's tale "would win [his] daughter, too." He advises Brabantio to accept the situation, claiming that "[t]o mourn a mischief that is past and gone / Is the next way to draw new mischief on" (1.3.203-04), a statement that proves all too true in the course of the play.⁵⁰

The Duke demonstrates equal care in assessing matters of public security and private property, and the juxtaposition of the two raises questions about the way they intersect. When told to "[t]ake up this mangled matter at the best" (1.3.172), Brabantio hints that the Duke would have judged his case differently if the issue had been one of national security: "So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile, / We lose it not so long as we can smile" (209-10). Brabantio's perspective, however, is clouded by the loss of both his daughter and now his case against Othello. Mary Beth Rose argues that, due to the Protestant emphasis on marriage and family as private institutions that are also engaged in establishing and supporting political (and spiritual) order, the public and private spheres are both more closely connected and brought into ever-increasing conflict with one another ("Heroics of Marriage" 211-12). She notes that the concept of marriage in the early seventeenth century fails "to clarify conflicting allegiances between duty and desire, public and private life"; instead, she argues that "private life *is* public; love *is* a duty" (213) during the period. Certainly in *Othello* the private and public collide and the private, through Othello's defamation of Desdemona, is made public, while the public repeatedly impinges on the private. For example, Othello is told to "slubber the gloss of your new fortunes" (1.3.225) as a bridegroom and prepare to sail for Cyprus, even though newly married men were not normally required to do military service but to remain at

50. Pryse argues that Othello's refusal to heed the request of Iago's mediators becomes the ensign's "motivating force." Iago now demands not only to be heard, but also "to move [his] audience" (472). Harley Granville-Barker also considers that Iago's belief "that he has been slighted . . . is the 'immediate spring'" of his machinations (Fultz 198). It is not Iago's only motivating force, though, as he himself notes.

home with their wives for a year due to an Old Testament tenet (Deuteronomy 24.5; Orlin 183).⁵¹

If the private and political are juxtaposed in the Duke's judgement of Othello and in Othello's response to being disturbed on the night he intends to consummate his marriage, they are also linked in Lodovico's judgement of events in Cyprus. Lodovico arrives to bring the senate's letter to Othello in which he is "commanded home" (4.1.255). On a trip of political import, Lodovico is quickly embroiled in Othello's domestic affairs when he protests the general striking his wife. Such an act may have been deemed a private issue in the period, but Othello, as a public figure who strikes his wife in public, exposes his private role as husband to public censure. Othello may believe that he can separate his private life from his public duties when he tells the senate, "And heaven defend your good souls that you think / I will your serious and great business scant / When she is with me" (1.3.265-67), but the impact of his relationship with Desdemona is evident when the senate appoints Cassio to take over his role as governor of Cyprus, to "have [his] place" (4.1.258); Othello equates this transfer of authority to what he believes is Cassio's usurpation of his private "place" as Desdemona's husband. Lodovico, as a political power, is again enmeshed in the couple's domestic affairs when he enters Desdemona's bedchamber in the final scene. He arrives, having apprehended Iago, and proceeds, like a prosecuting judge, to determine Othello's guilt: "Did you and [Iago] consent in Cassio's death?" (5.2.303). He then discloses the evidence against Iago, noting that torture will probably reveal more. He arrests Othello, removing him from his position of authority, and making him a "close prisoner . . . / Till that the nature of your fault be known / To the Venetian state" (344-46). He even listens when Othello begins what sounds like a defence but which quickly becomes his final confession. There is no hasty or emotionally clouded justice here. The case is to be heard later in a Venetian

51. While conduct books advise newly married men to stay at home, they are even more insistent that women should do so, as noted by Stallybrass and Orlin.

court of law and, while such a hearing may lack a satisfactory resolution for a theatre audience, as it permits Iago to remain standing and silent at the end of the play, Othello's own dispensation of "justice" is clearly flawed. The tragic consequences of his inability to determine the truth of what he hears and his resulting failure to hear both sides is all too apparent in "the tragic loading of [Desdemona's] bed" (5.2.373).

Othello has difficulty listening appropriately not only as a dispenser of justice, but also as a governor and military general. Moreover, his inappropriate listening is once again bound up with his inability to disentangle his private role as husband from his public duty. According to Brathwait, Othello is "too credulous in *giving trust* to the relations of others" (*English Gentleman* 137), and while his credulity is related to a private matter—Desdemona's chastity—it has the power to reverse the social hierarchy. Brathwait notes how the hierarchy is particularly disrupted when a person in a public position is too trusting of others: "[E]ven a private man committing his secrecy to another, becomes his *slave* to whom he committed it: much more a *States-man*, whose affaires have no other limit than the *publike state*, by imparting his thoughts, or rather laying himselfe open to the trust and secrecy of others, makes himselfe bound, where he was before free" (139). Othello clearly binds himself to Iago, not only in the parodic marriage of 3.3.463-82, but also by his enslavement to Iago's verbal manipulations. In Brathwait's words, he "put'st [his] head under anothers girdle" (139).

While it may be appropriate for a superior officer to listen to a subordinate on occasion, Othello is clearly too "open and affable" (James, *Basilicon Doron*, II.85) with his ensign. Desdemona may consider Othello's "free and open nature" one of "his valiant parts" (1.3.381, 252), for she has a similarly "free" (2.3.316) disposition. However, as Iago notes, Othello's trusting nature makes him vulnerable and even partly culpable (Beehler 72). His inability to determine the truth of what he hears raises the question of whether, at least in early modern terms, he listens as he should—certainly the conduct book writers may deem him an injudicious listener. He also exposes the problem experienced by all listeners, including the theatre audience, when they try to assess the veracity of what they hear. The audience is provoked to ask why Othello, an experienced

general and able rhetorician, is so easily duped by his ensign. Magnusson suggests that Othello is susceptible to Iago's machinations because of his status as an outsider in Venetian society and his resulting discomfort with his linguistic environment. She argues that he demonstrates both "linguistic insecurity and linguistic effort" (95-96), effort being shown in his rhetorical skill, as demonstrated in his ability to captivate Brabantio, Desdemona, and the Duke, and insecurity in his acceptance of the rhetoric of others. Iago begins Othello's torment with an apparently innocent question, "Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady, / Know of your love?" (3.3.96-97). As Anthony Gilbert notes, Iago's question is "deliberately obscure in manner, and also unclear in reference"; it suggests prior thought and it is that unspoken thought that drives Othello's curiosity. He is trapped by "the natural assumption that people do not ask questions without reason" (316-17). Repeatedly, Othello seeks to discover the meaning of what Iago is *not* saying. Even though he knows that "false disloyal knave[s]" use rhetorical figures such as *aposiopesis* as "tricks of custom" (3.3.126-27) to add credence to their words, when he hears Iago's pauses, he believes they are "close dilations, working from the heart / That passion cannot rule" (128-9) because he assumes that Iago is honest. In doing this, Othello commits the error Brathwait warns against. He recognizes that speech can "shroud and conceale . . . thought," but considers Iago's speech to be an "*Index* of [his] *Minde*" ((Brathwait, *English Gentleman* 81, 89) because he believes "men honest that but seem to be so" (1.3.382).

According to the conduct manuals, Othello's failure to "sound out" Iago is potentially transgressive in relation to his marriage. Othello is immediately suspicious about what might lie behind Iago's seemingly innocent question of whether Cassio knew of his love, although Iago claims he is simply curious, "[b]ut for a satisfaction of my thought, / No further harm" (3.3.99-100). Rather than accepting his ensign's answer, Othello suspects that there is "some monster in [Iago's] thought / Too hideous to be shown!" (111-12) and, despite Iago's suggestion that his own "jealousy / Shapes faults that are not" (152-53) and his warning, "beware, my lord, of jealousy" (169), Othello imagines Desdemona's "stol'n hours of lust" (343). He fails to consider that, "[i]f an

husband or wife manifest a willingnesse to hearken after tales and reports of one another, the Divell will stirre up instruments enow to fill their heads with tales, and those for the most part both frivolous and forged” (Gouge 251). Gouge, when he warns his readers not to be “over-heady or hasty to judge and condemne” their spouses, offers the example of Joseph, who, when he discovered Mary was pregnant, did not simply “judge her to be a notorious adulteres, or condemne her for an hypocrite, unworthy to live.” Gouge concludes that rather than “rashly beleve any evil report of one another,” spouses should “rather suppress all light suspitions as much as they can” (251). Indeed, he claims that the acceptance of such rumour as truth and the “concealing from one another the common evill rumors which are raised of them” is not only the most common cause of a bad reputation, but also causes “[m]ore secret heart-burning of one against the other, and more open quarrels and contentions betwixt them, . . . then from any other thing” (254). Primaudaye is even more damning of those who listen to “lies and detractions” and declares that they “are no lesse to be blamed and reprehended, than the slaundersers themselues” (462).

The condemnation heaped on slanderers and their listeners by these writers indicates the deadly nature of such defamation.⁵² It was vital to expose slander so that harmony might be restored. Sir Frances Bacon notes that if someone hears such slander or *Suspitions*, “the best Meane, to clear the Way . . . is franckly to communicate them, with the Partie, he *Suspects*” (*Essayes* 103). Unfortunately, Othello fails to follow such advice as he does not reveal his suspicions to Desdemona until his public accusation of her and only “franckly” communicates them to her as he is about to smother her. Othello

52. Woodbridge notes that, in contrast to “misogynists [who] libel womankind; slanderers blacken one woman’s reputation” and “unlike the misogynist, [are] nearly always treated with deadly seriousness” (*Women* 288). Katharine Rogers, however, defines Iago as a misogynist and suggests that Shakespeare “so degraded [his] character . . . and placed him in such an idealistic setting, that his views are stripped of all credibility” (120). I argue that Iago’s credibility depends less on what he says than on what others (such as Othello) think, and this makes him a most fearful opponent. In 2.1 Desdemona might scoff at Iago’s misogynist remarks and make light of them, but no one scoffs in 5.2 when Iago’s slander is revealed for what it is.

can therefore be considered culpable, at least according to the conduct book writers, because he is open to Iago's slander and fails to tell Desdemona about his suspicions. Kenneth Gross notes that slander is particularly damaging when it is "taken up and repeated by a field of treacherous listeners" (106). Elsewhere he states, there may be "poison on the tongue of the slanderer, [but] its efficacy depends on finding out the ear of one whose judgment can be caught by false knowledge" (36). In contrast, Lisa Jardine does not consider Othello's listening, but his public defamation of Desdemona in 4.2, to be problematic. She writes, "It does not just matter *that* a woman is called 'whore', it matters *when* and *where* she is" (*Reading Shakespeare* 21). Slander, then, becomes an issue when others listen and pass it on. Moreover, Jardine notes, when slander is uncontested, the accused is often considered guilty by default (25-26). Desdemona, though, challenges Othello's accusation; unfortunately, he fails to hear her challenge as a declaration of her innocence because he has already judged her guilty. Thus, the problem is not that his defamation is public because it is spoken in front of Emilia, or that it is uncontested, but that he has reversed the usual order of justice. He has failed to tell Desdemona with what she is charged and only hears her defence after he has passed sentence when he considers it further proof of her guilt (Heilman 134). As Heilman notes, "[T]his private court dispenses a justice catastrophically different from that of the public, institutional hearing in Act I" (133). The Duke may have sought and weighed the case of the plaintiff and defendant in Act 1, but Othello, having heard Iago's slander, assumes the role of plaintiff, prosecution, and judge and closes his ears to the defence.

Othello is not only open to Iago's pestilence, but once infected by it, he actively seeks it, demonstrating an even greater aural appetite than Desdemona. He insists that Iago reveal all he knows, claiming, "Thou dost conspire against thy friend, Iago, / If thou but think'st him wronged and mak'st his ear / A stranger to thy thoughts" (3.3.147-49). Indeed, while Othello accuses Desdemona of adultery, he is the one who first displaces her with someone else. His relationship with Iago is "the one real adultery of the play" (Neill 400). Not only does he promote Iago to the position of friend, confidante, and

lieutenant, but also in the parodic marriage, he makes him his wife. He kneels to “engage [his] words” and Iago kneels and vows to

give up
 The execution of his wit, hands, heart
 To wronged Othello’s service. Let him command,
 And to obey shall be in me remorse,

 I am your own for ever. (3.3.468-71, 482)

Iago’s vow suggests the complete submission advocated for wives; nevertheless, his apparent willingness to do “wronged Othello’s service” suits his own ends. He is like those wives about which T.E. writes in *The Lawes Resolutions*: even as they are “subject to their husband, . . . some women can shift it well enough” (6). Iago’s vows demonstrate the destabilizing power of aural desire. Not only does Othello’s desire to listen to his ensign reverse accepted public or military hierarchy, but it also disrupts domestic stability with an inverted order in which the one who submits is actually the one who controls. Iago may consider Desdemona to reign supreme in her marriage: “her appetite shall play the god” (2.3.321), but he ensures that Othello’s own appetite permits him, Iago, to “play the god.” Desdemona’s “greedy ear” may (according to Iago and ultimately Othello) allow others to define her as adulterous and unwomanly, but Othello’s aural desire unmans him even as it demonstrates his infidelity.

While Othello first demonstrates his interest in what Iago has to say when he is roused by the fight between Cassio and Roderigo, his desire intensifies when he hears Iago say, “Ha! I like not that,” and the ensign fails to repeat himself when Othello asks, “What dost thou say?” (3.3.33-34). Iago’s hesitation in speaking is a rhetorical device known to whet the appetite of a listener: Bacon notes, “[T]he breaking off, in the midst of that, one was about to say, as if he tooke himselfe up, breeds a greater Appetite in him, with whom you conferre, to know more.” He then adds, “And because it workes better, when any thing seemeth to be gotten from you by Question, then if you offer it of your selfe, you may lay a Bait for a Question” (*Essayes* 70). Hence, Iago’s “poison” or “bait” takes effect not so much through what he says as through his reluctance to speak and, even though Othello’s question suggests initial deafness or resistance to Iago’s “poison,”

it is later apparent that Othello hears Iago's statement of disapproval and his question is a request for clarification. The ensign's initial reluctance to repeat himself leads to a game of repeating echoes. Prompted by Iago's *non sequitur* question about Cassio, Othello interrogates the ensign on every word he utters, finally telling Iago that he is convinced, "Thou dost mean something. / I heard thee say even now thou liked'st not that, / When Cassio left my wife" (3.3.112-14).

Iago's tone of voice and hesitancy encourage Othello to assume that there is a hidden meaning, a "monster . . . / Too hideous to be shown," in his ensign's speech. Katharine Eisaman Maus argues that Othello (and Desdemona) err by believing that a speaker's interiority can be determined from the words uttered (125-27), but Othello rejects the idea of a complete correlation between speech and thought. Instead, he searches for meaning in Iago's silences and hears monsters where none exist. Gross notes that while the more common method of verbal deception is to say less than one means, leaving silences heavy with meaning, "Iago often means a lot less . . . than he seems to say" (109). He even asks Othello "not to strain my speech / To grosser issues, nor to larger reach / Than to suspicion," noting that this will cause his "speech [to] fall into such vile success / Which my thoughts aimed not" (3.3.222-24, 227-28). Iago states an ironic truth. Like Desdemona, who is enticed to hear all by listening to "parcels" of Othello's story, Othello, believing that there is more behind Iago's words, wants to hear everything. He thus demands that Iago "prove [his] love a whore" (364), an indication that he thinks he knows the story Iago will tell without hearing it. Determined to find the meaning behind Iago's hesitations, and to hear this story, Othello fails to attend to the words his ensign utters and concentrates more on what he does not say: he believes, "This honest creature doubtless / Sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds" (247-48). Gross concludes that Othello is caught because he refuses to accept that Iago means nothing more than he says (110). At the same time as Iago's silences encourage Othello to "know more," his failure to express clearly his intention in speaking leads Othello to apply his own preconceptions to his ensign's speech, and one of his preconceptions is that his wife

is an adulteress.⁵³ As Gillian Brown notes, listeners often believe that words they hear spoken by someone else are uttered with the same intention they would have if they had said the same words in the same situation (233). Put another way, Othello determines the meaning of Iago's speech by assuming that his ensign is honest and that there is a correlation between his speech and his thought. However, he rejects the idea that Iago can only mean what he says, and concludes that his ensign's meaning is the same as his would be if he uttered the same words.

Some critics consider Iago to be an early modern descendent of the medieval Vice figure (Loomba 61), while others claim that he "is neither Vice nor Devil, though he combines both traditions" (Bullough 232). Geoffrey Bullough sees him as a "Machiavellian plotter" (232) and one can combine these various descriptions of Iago to define him as a character bent on the destruction of others through evil influence; in this he is devilish. Despite Bullough's belief that Iago is not a devil, the ensign makes his own connection between himself and the devil. When he encourages Cassio to appeal to Desdemona, Iago notes that he adopts the same method as that used by the devil when he disguised himself as a serpent to approach Eve: "When devils will the blackest sins put on, / They do suggest at first with heavenly shows, / As I do now" (2.3.325-27). Not only does Iago take on the disguise of "Honest Iago" (160), but his ability to instil doubt in Othello's mind about his wife's fidelity is similar to the way the serpent raises Eve's doubts about God's command not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In addition, Iago, like the serpent, has the greatest power when speaking privately to one listener. Magnusson notes that in the public arena Iago is forced to employ others, the "three great ones," to speak for him. It is under the more informal conditions of "private

53. Newman suggests that Othello is susceptible to Iago's insinuations because he has absorbed the belief—expressed by Iago and Brabantio—that Desdemona cannot love him because of his colour (86). Certainly, his attitude to his marriage is remarkably similar to that of his ensign and father-in-law. In keeping with my argument that Othello actually conceives his own jealousy, Fineman argues that Iago can be considered "as the inside of Othello, as a principle of disjunct being . . . introduced into the smooth and simple existence of an Othello" ("Sound" 108).

conversational settings,” where the rules controlling speech are less rigid, that he has greatest success (97).

Linking Iago to the devilish serpent of the Garden of Eden also suggests that there may be similarities between Othello’s listening behaviour and that of Eve. Desdemona may be considered to play Eve in relation to Othello as the devil, at least according to Iago and Brabantio in act 1, but Othello also assumes the role of Eve when he listens to Iago. A number of critics argue that Othello adopts a passive female role as Iago’s listener (Patricia Parker 99), and early modern beliefs about rhetoric and its effect on its listeners partly support this view. Wayne Rebhorn notes that during this period, the emotional effect of rhetoric was emphasized. The rhetor’s primary intention was to move the audience and this could be achieved in two ways (84). The first was through technique: the use of rhetorical figures, tropes, imagery, and rhythm. The second was through “contagion,” when a speaker felt and expressed the emotion that he or she wanted a listener to feel (87). As Rebhorn argues, in this construction of the speaker-listener relationship, “the orator’s subjects are essentially passive and will either be voiceless or simply replicate his speech” (88). While Othello is familiar with, and suspicious of, rhetorical technique, he is moved to jealousy because Iago feels this emotion and transmits it to his listener. Suspecting that the “lusty Moor” (2.1.282) has slept with Emilia,⁵⁴ Iago notes that his jealousy is so strong that it

Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards;
And nothing can or shall content my soul
Till I am evened with him, wife for wife—
Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor
At least into a jealousy so strong
That judgement cannot cure. (284-89)

He obviously succeeds in moving Othello to an emotion beyond reason, one that leads to “savage madness” (4.1.52). Moreover, he implies that he accomplishes this through contagion, that Othello is a passive receptacle for his own jealousy. Not only does he

54. Not only does Emilia suggest that this belief is unfounded (4.2.149-51), but even Iago claims that he is unsure whether the rumour is true (1.3.369-70).

describe his language as “poison” (3.3.329), indicating that it is related to the “poisonous mineral” that “gnaw[s his own] inwards,” but also he terms it “pestilence,” suggesting that he has indeed infected Othello with his own disease of jealousy.⁵⁵

While listeners were considered subject to a speaker’s compelling rhetorical power, they were also believed to assent to such subjection (Rebhorn 93). Their agency lay in their willingness to be moved. This complementary relationship is stressed by John Wall in his consideration of Othello’s relationship with Iago. Wall focuses on the progeny of the union, the “monstrous birth” (1.3.386) of Othello’s “green-eyed monster” (3.3.170), and argues that Othello’s relationship with his ensign is a “perversion” of his relationship with Desdemona: “Othello’s ear and Iago’s tongue become displaced organs of generation. . . . Iago’s words thus become the seed which impregnates Othello’s mind through his ear” (361).⁵⁶ While the idea of Othello as a passive recipient of Iago’s “seed” might imply Othello’s lack of agency in his own deception, Wall uses the example of the Annunciation to demonstrate how Othello’s active participation is essential in the conception of his jealousy. Describing Iago as a “demonic Gabriel,” Wall notes the parallels between the language and imagery surrounding Iago’s relationship with Othello and that of the Annunciation to show that Othello has control through his ability to accept or reject Iago’s claims (366). In contrast to this construction of Othello and Iago’s listener-speaker relationship, which emphasizes the need for the listener to believe in order for a speaker’s words to bear fruit, I argue that Othello does more than just

55. After Othello falls down in a trance, Iago notes that his “medicine works” (4.1.42). As medicines were frequently compounded from materials known to be poisonous, this definition can be seen to support rather than undermine the association of his language with poison and pestilence.

56. In keeping with John Wall’s reading of Iago and Othello’s speaker-listener relationship as a perversion of sexual intercourse, Rebhorn notes that the analogy of speech to liquid, something that can be poured (like Iago’s pestilence), has clear sexual overtones in the early modern period (155).

believe.⁵⁷ He is not like one of Jonson's dupes who accepts what is said with little consideration of the speaker's motive; Othello does not simply accept Iago's words, but rather is such a careful listener that he attends to the gaps in Iago's speech and inserts his *own* preconceptions about Desdemona. As Emilia notes, jealousy "is a monster / Begot upon itself, born on itself" (3.4.156-57). Cornwallis would agree that jealousy, as a form of "Suspition," is self-engendered. He writes, "Incestuous ignorance begets Feare, and then ingenders vpon his owne daughter Suspition" (16). Othello has already conceived his own jealous fear when he demands that Iago "prove my love a whore." While Othello's ear is certainly fertile ground for Iago's slander of Cassio and Desdemona, the Moor's jealous conception is hatched when he inserts his own thoughts into the gaps in Iago's speech. The "monster" he believes hidden behind Iago's speech is in fact his own.

Othello's substitution of Iago for Desdemona, his close attention to his ensign, and his desire to hear a tale of adultery that fits his preconception of his wife result in his inability to hear her, particularly when she denies his accusations. Although Othello hears her initial request that he "call [Cassio] back" (3.3.51, 55), he rejects it. In doing so, he fails to consider the confusion he provokes when he ignores her entreaty yet declares, "I will deny thee nothing" (77). Believing that he will indeed deny her nothing, Desdemona again asks for Cassio's reinstatement in 3.4, unaware that in the interim Othello has heard Iago's tale of the lieutenant's erotic dream and is now completely deaf to her: she asks Othello to see Cassio; he demands to see the handkerchief. Having been advised by Iago to "[l]ook to your wife. Observe her well with Cassio" (3.3.201), and having been infected by Iago's "pestilence," so he now hungers for the story that he thinks underlies Iago's hesitations and insinuations, he can no longer understand Desdemona's meaning when she speaks.⁵⁸ However, even as Iago tells Othello to "[l]ook to your wife," he also

57. Conception was believed to require the orgasm of both the man and woman, and therefore consent was deemed implicit if the woman conceived, to the detriment of many rape victims (Keeble 33).

58. Edward Snow considers Iago's iteration of Brabantio's warning and his suggestion that Othello "observe" Desdemona to be the "decisive moment in Iago's seduction" (qtd. in Fultz 202).

warns him that appearances can deceive, that Venetian women are not as innocent as they appear, and that Desdemona “did deceive her father, marrying you” (210). By suggesting that appearances (like speech) can be deceptive, and by encouraging Othello to watch his wife while listening to him, Iago is able to manipulate his general’s perception.⁵⁹ Just as the serpent’s words alter Eve’s perception of the fruit, so Iago manipulates Othello’s understanding of his wife; he comes to see her failure to produce the handkerchief as a sign of her adultery. Equally, when Iago stages the scene with Cassio for Othello’s benefit, he has not only prepared him to see Cassio as his wife’s lover, but he also insists that Othello “mark the fleers, the gibes and notable scorns / That dwell in every region of his face I say, but mark his gesture” (4.1.80-81, 85). As a result, Othello, like someone who is deaf, interprets Cassio’s speech from what he sees.⁶⁰ Even when Iago beckons him closer, Othello cannot hear Cassio’s words, but interprets the lieutenant’s gestures and provides his own commentary: “Now he tells how she plucked him to my chamber” (136-37). Once the “noble Moor” (2.3.122; 4.1.261), Othello’s demand for “ocular proof” and his subsequent tendency to watch rather than listen to his wife is a sign of his degradation as it associates him with the lower classes, the “vulgar,” who weigh what they hear by their opinion of what they see (Brathwait, *Five Senses* 9; Gurr 93).

Iago not only encourages Othello to watch Desdemona rather than listen to her, but his manipulation of language ensures that Othello is limited in how he interprets his wife’s speech. Fineman argues that this manipulation “determines the details of Othello’s destiny” (“Sound” 110). Even as Iago suggests that language can be interpreted as desired by the listener, he reinforces Othello’s narrow determination of language. Iago utters the

59. John Wall notes that Iago “creates a verbal world of illusion so convincing that the Moor substitutes what he hears from Iago for what he sees with his own eyes” (359). Anthony Kubiak suggests that Othello undergoes a “subtle shift of seeing,” resulting from a “misdirection of the eye . . . effected through Iago’s words” (qtd. in Fultz 198).

60. Rose claims that Iago’s manipulations demonstrate “the power of words to triumph over visual and material reality” (*Expense of Spirit* 144); however, I would argue that in this scene he exploits the visual to control the meaning of language.

word “Lie,” a word with multiple meanings, including the ironic declaration of his own deceptive speech, yet even as he notes the variance in the word’s use: “With her, on her, what you will” (4.1.33), the meaning to which Othello clings remains fixed: Desdemona is an adulteress. In this manner, Iago limits the meaning of language so that Othello no longer considers how a word possesses multiple meanings depending on the context of its use (Beehler 71). Thus, when Desdemona eventually declares her innocence, albeit with her characteristic ambiguity (4.2.85-88), Othello fails to hear her meaning, attending only to his own opinion of her speech. Sharon Beehler notes, “By refusing to listen to Desdemona at all because he believes that he has already ‘heard’ her message, Othello effectively silences her” (81). He closes his ears to Desdemona, first by ignoring what she says and watching her while listening to his ensign, then by being deaf to her meaning and substituting his own. Hearing only Iago and not his wife, Othello eventually calls Desdemona a “strumpet,” a word that not only draws on all of Iago’s inferences, but echoes back to Iago’s play on words: “The Moor —I know his trumpet” (2.1.177).⁶¹ In the final scene, Othello repeatedly rejects her protestations of innocence, and interprets her ambiguous “Alas, he is betrayed, and I undone” (5.2.83) as declaration of her guilt. John Wall argues that by the end of the play Iago’s voice is the only one Othello can hear and it is inevitable that he himself will adopt his ensign’s vocabulary in relation to his wife. It is his displacement of his wife, his desire to hear Iago rather than Desdemona, that prompts him to accuse her of adultery. As Desdemona sings in the “Willow Song,” when men “court more women” (and men), their own adultery determines their assumption that women will “couch with more men” (4.3.55).

Desdemona is trapped in Othello’s definition of her as a strumpet not only because he believes Iago’s slander and watches her rather than listens to her, but also because, thanks to Eve’s legacy, men were discouraged from listening to women,

61. It is also difficult to ignore how Iago’s words echo Desdemona’s own: “That I did love the Moor to live with him, / My downright violence and storm of fortunes / May trumpet to the world” (1.3.247-49), and demonstrates how he uses Desdemona’s own words against her to suggest that her desire for Othello, by defying social tenets regarding inter-racial marriage, is excessive and licentious.

particularly those who might seduce them. As discussed previously, Eve was blamed for listening to the serpent *and* for talking to Adam. As a result, early modern authors repeatedly warn men not to listen to women, for women like Eve, “maye lightlye be disceyued . . . and lightly bringe other[s] into the same errorr” (Vives Eii^v-Eiii^f). Brathwait tells men to “stop their eares” against alluring women, referring to them as “Soule-tainting and Sin-tempting *Syrens*” (*English Gentleman* 31). Othello therefore closes his ears to Desdemona. Encouraged by Iago not to hear her, but to “[l]ook to her” (1.3.291), he, like her father, now interprets her behaviour as deceptive and her love for him, a black man, as transgressive and immoderate: she is now the “cunning whore . . . / That married with Othello” (4.2.93-94). Her association with Cassio only strengthens Othello’s perception of her as a licentious woman and reinforces his refusal to listen to her. Defined as a whore, Desdemona’s claim to innocence is simply further evidence of her transgressive, duplicitous nature. According to Cleaver, an ideal wife responded to her husband, “as the *Eccho* answereth but one word for many, which are spoken to her” (101), and while Desdemona tries to echo her husband in 4.2 when she claims, “’Tis meet I should be used so, very meet” (4.2.110), she cannot say what she knows to be untrue. Yet, when she refuses to agree that she is a whore, he labels her “perjured woman” (5.2.68).⁶² As far as Othello is concerned, when he labels his wife an adulteress and she rejects that label, she is also a liar, and in order to prevent his own seduction, as well as that of “more men” (6), he must silence her.

Stephen Greenblatt suggests that Othello’s ultimate aim is to have Desdemona echo his opinion of her. He wants her to confess to adultery (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 246) and when she declares that she is “undone” he believes that he has finally heard such an admission of guilt. She can then be silenced. Othello’s demand that his thoughts be echoed and Desdemona’s apparent agreeing utterance demonstrate the potential for speech not only to “pierce” an ear, but to completely change the hearer. Like

62. Othello’s syntax reveals that even as he labels her a lying, deceitful woman, she is the woman against whom a false statement or perjury has been made and he is the one who perjures her.

Eve whose perception of the fruit is transformed when she hears the words of the serpent, so both Desdemona and Othello demonstrate the transforming power of what they hear. They cannot, like Mary, be penetrated by what they hear and remain unchanged. When Desdemona hears Othello's life story, she is not only moved to love Othello, but she is also physically relocated from her father's home. Having been influenced by Othello, she is now subject to him and he has sole authority over her. When he speaks, she is expected to echo him. She is caught in the bind that when she fails to do so she is a liar, and when she speaks to express another meaning, he will interpret her words as echoing his own meaning. Othello is equally moved when he listens to Iago. Not only does he catch Iago's own "pestilence" of jealousy, but he, too, ends up beyond reason, quite literally beside himself. Listening may evoke permanent change in both these listeners, but the activity itself is constructed differently because of their gender.

Contemporary critics inscribe listening as a passive and hence female activity (Bloom 3; Folkerth 10) and, certainly in contrast to "teaching," listening was deemed appropriate *to a degree* for early modern women. Listening, though, is not simply passive and listeners are repeatedly constructed as having some form of agency or control. Indeed, Othello's determination that Desdemona has a "greedy ear" is an indication of the agency he ascribes to her. He loves her for it, even though he comes to feel threatened by it. In addition, when early modern writers construct listening as a female activity, they are most likely to stress its transgressive nature. Even as playwrights grouped women with the lower-classes, the "illiterate and rude," for preferring spectacle over speech (Gurr 230), women are also repeatedly warned of their tendency to listen *too* well, their predilection of listening to flattery and deception, and of wasting time by listening. Furthermore, such transgressive listening is frequently associated with sexual licentiousness, and may also be linked to excessive speech and movement. In *Othello*, both Desdemona and Othello exhibit keen and discriminating aural appetites, yet their listening behaviour results in them being inscribed as Eve, the quintessential transgressive female listener, attending to their respective serpents. Nonetheless, while Othello as Eve to the devil Iago disrupts the social hierarchy, he is not limited to a purely

feminized position. A close examination reveals that Iago does not father the suspicion that leads to the birth of Othello's jealousy, but that the "green-eyed monster" exists in Othello's own thought, perhaps as Newman suggests, because of his absorption of Venetian culture and his resulting alarm at a woman with a "greedy" aural appetite (86). He may love Desdemona because she wants to hear his story but, under Iago's influence, he eventually deems her willingness to listen transgressive. Othello fails to consider that his listening behaviour may also be problematic, not least because he prefers to listen to his ensign over his wife. In his public role of governor of Cyprus and military general, he fails to listen equally to both the prosecution and the defence, and his later preference for the visual links him with the lower classes and women. The degradation in his listening behaviour, his reliance on what he sees as interpreted by what Iago says, comes to signify his "otherness" as much as his colour.

Desdemona potentially transgresses the bounds of appropriate listening for women by listening to a stranger and hearing things she acknowledges she should not hear. Moreover, she listens at the expense of her household duties. However, the theatre audience, also captivated by Othello's speech, is unlikely to condemn Desdemona for her willingness to listen to him. Nonetheless, Desdemona demonstrates the danger inherent in listening as she fails to remain impervious to what she hears. She repeatedly attempts to incorporate what she hears and this paradoxically leads her to become subordinate to the one she hears, namely Othello, and encourages her to transgress the boundaries of her gender role. In contrast to Othello, who ends up watching his wife, rather than hearing her, and thereby falling into "the practice of a cursèd slave" (5.2.298), being both trapped by Iago and caught by his own lower-class method of perception, Desdemona is condemned—at least by Iago and later her husband—not in terms of class, but, as one might anticipate, in terms of her chastity and the way that her aural appetite subverts accepted domestic hierarchy. It is the potential for female appetite (aural and otherwise) to disrupt domestic order that makes it fearful and discomfiting to men. Men's appetites, though, as Emilia makes clear, are even more of a threat to women. She tells Desdemona that men "are all but stomachs, and we all but food. / They eat us hungrily, and when they

are full, / They belch us” (3.4.100-102). While Desdemona consumes Othello’s story, he consumes her. Repeatedly, as Desdemona’s revision of the “Willow Song” makes clear, the determination of a woman’s behaviour, including her listening behaviour and her chastity, depends less on what a woman does and more on how she is perceived by the men around her, their dis-ease with her behaviour, and that is predicated on their own behaviour.

Both Desdemona and Othello reveal the dangers inherent in listening to theatre audiences. Both demonstrate how even the most discerning listener can be subordinated to a powerful speaker. Moreover, Othello’s experience with Iago underscores a particular aspect of playgoing: the need for audiences to determine the reliability of characters who interpret or comment on stage action and the difficulty of doing so. As Othello notes, Iago is a very good actor, he appears to be “of exceeding honesty” (3.3.262); nevertheless, the way he prepares his general to interpret both Cassio’s and Desdemona’s words and actions prevents Othello from hearing the true meaning of their speech. That members of the theatre audience are privy to Iago’s plot against Othello not only establishes their complicity in his downfall, but also emphasizes that they, like Desdemona and Othello, are hearing “parcels” of a tale, and that their own aural appetite prompts them to stay and hear more. Iago, while he hints at his motives, never fully satisfies his listeners, either on- or offstage. His final words: “Demand me nothing. What you know, you know. / From this time forth I never will speak word” (5.2.309-10), simply reveal the extent of our own aural desire.

CHAPTER 4

OPEN EARS, GAPING GULFS, AND FEMALE APPETITE

In the previous chapter, I explored the connection between the open female ear and the open vagina, a connection that has a long history (Woodbridge, *Scythe* 55), and which is apparent through the Jahvist account of the Fall and its links to the later tale of the Annunciation, as well as in the visual image of Elizabeth's "secret" ear lying over the genital area in *The Rainbow Portrait*. While early modern women were encouraged to listen to their husbands and fathers as figures of male authority, female listening was always at risk of being labelled transgressive because of the societal fear that it could lead to social dis-ease and even corruption. Desdemona hears "parcels" of the same tale to which her father listens (*Othello* 1.3.153). Nonetheless, Othello considers her interest in his story a sign of a "greedy ear" (148). Even as he benefits from her desire to hear his story, and even as he celebrates that benefit, his language suggests that he considers her aural appetite potentially excessive. As a result of his own willingness to listen to Iago, a willingness that is shown to be transgressive, Othello associates Desdemona's aural openness, her "so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed disposition" (2.3.296-97), with sexual openness. Under Iago's tutelage, Othello comes to consider her willingness to listen to and plead for Cassio a sign of her sexual infidelity, a sign that he acts upon, even as Desdemona's own chaste behaviour demonstrates the fallacy of that connection. Othello's account of Desdemona listening to his story may associate her with Eve listening to the serpent, but as Iago is particularly associated with the devil, Othello, too, can be likened to Eve, especially as the way he inserts his own thoughts into the gaps in Iago's speech is similar to the way Eve listens and responds to the serpent in the Hebrew text (Norris 12). Shakespeare, though, makes it plain that Othello and Desdemona are not simply gullible dupes deceived by what they hear. Rather, they are discerning listeners who demonstrate an understanding of rhetoric; still, Desdemona is endangered and Othello diseased by the willingness to listen—consequences that can only unsettle an attentive theatre audience.

In this chapter, I want to continue to examine the connection made between female listening and sexual fidelity, the female ear and the vagina, and to consider how these two orifices are also linked with the mouth. As noted in the last chapter, several critics, including Peter Stallybrass, Lynda Boose, and Douglas Bruster, have emphasized the link between the mouth and the vagina by examining the early modern association between speech and sexual licentiousness, silence and chastity; however, this connection ignores how all three orifices are connected as openings through which the body may be penetrated, and how they can be constructed as sites of desire. As I have argued throughout this thesis, ears, like mouths and vaginas, were not constructed simply as passive openings. As Othello suggests when he considers Desdemona's "greedy ear," listening may be based on desire or appetite, and the ear, mouth, and vagina are all openings through which women can be thought to express desire, whether it be aural, oral, or sexual. I want to explore, therefore, how these three body orifices are associated as sites of desire in women and how that female desire is constructed in the early modern period. I will begin by examining the mouth and ear, not as orifices connected through the production and consumption of speech, but through their consumption of two different types of food: food for the stomach and food for the mind.

Consuming Orifices

While the ear and mouth are clearly connected as one hears the speech the other produces, they are also associated through the analogy of speech to food, a common analogy in the early modern period. Speech might be "the *Index* of the *Minde*," according to Richard Brathwait, but it also has attributes of food, permitting the listener to determine whether a speaker "taste of *rinde* or *pith*" (*English Gentleman* 89). In *Essaies upon the Five Senses*, Brathwait notes that an ear acts like a mouth as "[i]t is open to receive, ministring matter sufficient for the mind to digest" (6), and this concept of the ear as an aural mouth is even found in anatomical treatises. In his *Treatise of the Organ of Hearing*, Guichard-Joseph Duverney describes the anatomy of the external ear in terms of

a mouth. He writes of the “little Tongue, which is . . . directly at the Entrance into the auditory Passage,” and which he believes aids in directing the sound into the auditory canal and functions in “stopping up the Ear upon which it is plac’d” (70-71). This view of the ear as an aural mouth that brings in sounds it desires and is closed to sound it dislikes is also expressed by Brathwait, who notes that the ear, “some things it relisheth pleasantly . . . some things it distastes, and those it either egesteth, as frivolous, or as a subject of merriment meerly ridiculous” (*Five Senses* 6-7). Given this construction of an ear as a mouth that “eats” speech, one can understand Brathwait’s suggestion that its appetite can become “soone cloyed, when the minde is not satisfied with the subject whereof [speech] treateth” (7). However, while Peter de la Primaudaye also promotes the idea of speech as “the nourishment of the soule,” and notes that “a dry and thirstie eare must be washed with a sentence that is good to drinke,” he is also aware that speech can become “corrupted, and becommeth odious through the wickedness of men” (129, 126). Like any food, speech can be adulterated, and a listener, like Othello, may not always be aware of how it is tainted until it has been consumed.

The idea of speech as “nourishment of the soule” was most fruitful for late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century Protestant preachers who clearly had a vested interest in encouraging people to attend to the spoken word, at least when they were preaching. Many of them drew on the metaphor used by the author of Hebrews, and the equation of hearing God’s word to eating food sometimes gives rise to interesting images.¹ For example, Daniel Burgess, writing towards the end of the seventeenth century, declares, “Ministers *be Nurses*, Sermons *be Breasts*, God’s Word is *Milk*, Hearers *be the Children*, and right Hearing is their *Sucking* the Milk into each one’s own Soul” (10). Writing a century earlier, Richard Greenham insists that listeners should always hunger after the “Word” and warns against becoming satiated so that it tastes “as honey to the mouth that is satisfied” (75). Stephen Egerton has fewer concerns about his parishioners over-indulging and refers to scripture as “a supernaturall Banquet and

1. See Job 12:11, 34:3; Hebrews 5:12-14, 6:5; 1 Peter 2:2-3.

heavenly Table for the refreshing and satisfying of our faint and hungry soules” (32). He goes on, “As a hungry appetite, and wel rellishing of our meate and drinke, is a signe of bodily health: so the hungriſ after the wholesome word, and delighting in it, is a signe of a good heart” (55). For these writers, the willingness to listen, at least in church, is a sign of a healthy aural appetite. Henry Smith, in a sermon published as *The Wedding Garment*, even rewrites the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation to reinforce the Protestant emphasis on hearing the “Word” by making a correlation between hearing scripture and eating Christ. He claims that it should be a taking in of sustenance that works throughout the body:

So Christ and his word should goe from part to part, from eare to heart, from hart to mouth, from mouth to hand, till we be of one nature with them, that they be the verie substance of our thoughtes and speeches, and actions, as the meate is of our bodies. This is, to eat Christ and his worde, or els we do not eat them, but chew them, and when our taste is satisfied spue them out againe. (117)²

Neither is Smith the only one to insist that a right hearing requires more than the ear. William Harrison also notes, “Those . . . that would be obedient hearers of the word, must needes receiue and embrace it with their hearts” (176). According to these Protestant ministers, an open ear is necessary for both faith and obedience and those exhibiting a closed ear, who refuse to listen to God’s word (or to those in authority as God’s earthly representatives), may be deemed “vngodly.” The Virgin Mary is the good listener imagined by Smith as she hears and incorporates God’s word as spoken by the angel and is fruitful. She takes in “Christ and his word” and it travels “from eare to heart, from hart

2. In *Measure for Measure* Angelo observes that eating God’s word does not always lead to complete spiritual sustenance. He notes that when he prays, “[H]eaven [is] in my mouth, / As if I did but only chew his name, / And in my heart the strong and swelling evil / Of my conception” (2.4.4-7). The Norton editors substitute “God” for “heaven” on the basis that “his” in the next line suggests that “heaven” is a result of revision following the 1606 prohibition on using God’s name in plays.

to mouth” (and uterus) to reproduce a son.³ Mary consumes what she hears but does not demonstrate an appetite or desire of her own. This is the type of hearing necessary for faithful obedience and which is determined to be “fruitful.” In contrast, Eve is the epitome of an unfruitful hearer not only because she fails to maintain belief in God’s word as she accepts the serpent’s word over God’s earlier directive, but also because her act of listening brings the antithesis of fruitfulness—death—into the world.

While Protestant preachers encourage their congregations (and readers) to hunger for God’s word—as spoken by themselves—and to incorporate it into their bodies so that they might be changed by it and be fruitful listeners like the Virgin Mary, they are also aware of how other voices might interfere with digestion. Egerton believes those who would rather hear a play than a sermon must be sick, stating, “[F]or as lothing, and distaste of bodily food is a signe of a sicke stomacke: so the like lothing and distasting of spirituall food is a signe of a sinfull soule” (54-55). Harrison also warns his parishioners to “take heede what you heare,” and notes that “noysome lusts, and bad affections in the heart, doe greatly hinder the fruitfull hearing of Gods word”; he parallels this to when “grosse humours abide in the stomacke, they will not suffer it to digest the meate which is eaten, but will make to rather to hurt, then to nourish the body” (15, 101-02). The concern that parishioners are not hearing as they ought pervades sermons on attending to the word of God. Protestant ministers are vehement in the need of their congregations to listen, not just because of their own self-interest, but also, as discussed in the introduction and chapter 1, because of the renewed emphasis on the Pauline doctrine of faith by hearing. In a letter to the reader accompanying Egerton’s *Boring of the Eare*, Helkiah Crooke notes that “if men would heare as they ought, this hearing would beget faith, and faith would bring forth all excellent graces, accompanying saluation” (A6^r). He then draws on the illustration in Exodus 21:6 of how a male servant is marked for permanent service by his

3. While Mary’s acceptance of what she hears is beyond doubt, she is initially “troubled at his saying” (Luke 1:29). Given that she is a young virgin, apparently alone, confronted by a stranger who tells her, “Haile thee *that art* freely beloved: ye Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women” (1:28), one can understand her incipient fear.

master boring his ear with an awl—a violation of a body boundary that is both permanent and externally apparent to others, indicating the “boring” or hearkening that the servant should demonstrate internally (A6^r).⁴ As one might expect in a sermon on how to hear God’s word, Egerton blames his listeners if they do not hear correctly, noting that any “hindrance” to hearing God’s word “proceedeth originally from the hearers, either from the ignorance of their mindes; or from the corruption of their ears; and occasionally from the Teachers” (16-17). Harrison agrees, noting that “though the doctrine wee teach bee neuer so good and profitable, yet through the ill disposition of the hearers, it may become vnfruitfull” (17).⁵

The problem, though, may not be that an ear is closed to God’s word, but rather that the devil prevents people from hearing it. Crooke writes, “It is admirable to consider, that in these preaching and hearing dayes, such faithfull preaching, such frequent hearing, so many should yet bee possest as it were with a dumb Deuill, and all our sermons to the most of men but as sounding Brasse or a tinkling Cimball” (Egerton A3^v). Furthermore, if the devil cannot stop people from hearing the word of God completely, he “deceiueth them with this conceit; that any kind of formall hearing will serue their turne” (Harrison 21). The problem, according to Robert Wilkinson, Protestant minister and author of *A Jewell for the Eare*, is that, as Eve apparently discovered, the voices of the devil and the world are far more attractive than the word of God: “The diuel calleth by temptation and yee yeelde vnto it, the worlde calleth and ye listen to it, the fleshe calleth and ye come to it, but the worship of God calleth and ye care not for it” (Bv^v). The ear, however, that

4. William Gouge also writes a letter to the reader prefacing Egerton’s sermon. In it he refers to Egerton as a man, “by long Practise and much Experience, acquainted with *Boaring of the Eare*” (A8^{r-v}). It is difficult to determine whether the humour is intentional or otherwise given Gouge’s usually serious tone.

5. Unlike most of his cohorts, Harrison admits that a preacher must fit his sermon to his listeners. Taking his text from Luke 8:18, the parable of the sower and the seed, he notes, “Wee must, like wise and carefull Husband-men, sow that seed which is fittest for our ground; and deliuer such doctrines, as are most fitting for the capacitie and present condition of the Auditorie” (14-15).

prefers to hear the devil and the world, and refuses to hear God's word is an "adulterous Eare" in Crooke's delineation of the five types of "not hearing eares" (Egerton A4^{r-v}).⁶ Moreover, such ears are specifically associated with transgressive female sexual desire as they are known "as the Harlot is knowne, they are euer gadding to seeke their new Louers." Nonetheless, even as he suggests that these ears are too open to other voices, that they "will heare any but the voice of their owne Shepherds," Crooke paradoxically concludes that they are not open enough: They "neede to haue the word *Ephphata* [glossed as 'be open'] pronounced vnto them as vnto the deafe man" (A5^{r-v}). By paying attention to the wrong voice, regardless of how that is defined, an ear is deemed to be both too open and too closed, both a "Harlot" and "vngodly."

While a too-open ear of either a man or a woman might be deemed analogous to an adulterous woman; the association between aural and vaginal openness had particular ramifications for women. Men may listen inappropriately as Othello listens to Iago, and their listening may be analogous to Eve's, but they are not condemned for sexual transgression, unlike their female counterparts. Othello's interpretation of what he hears through what he sees may be considered lower class and even womanly, but it is not labelled sexually transgressive by the other characters in the playworld. In contrast, women who heard too much risked being labelled either excessively feminine or even masculine because of their apparent transgressive aural (and by implication sexual) desire. In addition, the context provided by the Protestant ministers with the analogy of speech as food suggests an underlying concern with consumption. Evelyn J. Hinz, in a discussion of "diet and discourse" in a special edition of *Mosaic*, notes how food and speech are linked by their oral nature: "The mouth ingests food and produces speech"

6. The other sorts of "not hearing eares" are the "dull Eare" of one who is drowsy, the "stopped Eare" of the Recusant, the "preiudiciall or sinister Eare" of the sceptic, and the "nice or itching Eare" that desires new, pleasing speech, regardless of the content. Crooke describes this latter ear in terms of its desire for a particular kind of food: it "lookes not so much to the goodnesse of the meat, as to the sweetnesse of the sawce" (Egerton A4^r-A5^r).

(xiii), but she fails to explore how they are both also incorporated into the body, one through the mouth and the other through the ear.

Indeed, little critical consideration has been given to a comparison of the mouth and ear as ingestive orifices. Even those critics who focus on the grotesque body so celebrated by Mikhail Bakhtin, and who pay particular attention to the body's "excrescences" and "orifices" (Bakhtin 318), are more concerned with how the grotesque body exceeds its boundaries. Bakhtin notes that "the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new second body: the bowels and the phallus" (317). He does comment on the incorporation of the external through the mouth in a contradictory, but potentially carnivalesque (polyphonic) declaration that "the most important of all human features for the grotesque is the mouth. . . . It dominates all else. The grotesque face is actually reduced to the gaping mouth; the other features are only a frame encasing this wide-open bodily abyss" (317). Bakhtin, however, fails to consider the ear as a consuming orifice, and later critics have maintained this silence,⁷ even though some, such as Mary Russo, have considered the female grotesque in terms of the carnivalesque, or, like Peter Stallybrass and Alan Walworth, have noted early modern concerns about the open female body. While there has been little recent consideration of ears as aural mouths, post-Reformation preachers were not the only early modern writers to construct both the mouth and ear as orifices of consumption. Excess appetite for one was often glossed in terms of the other and, as sites of consumption, both the ear and the mouth, and particularly the female ear and mouth, had to be monitored. While Eve's first sin is of the ear when she listens to and believes the serpent, her second sin is of the mouth when she eats the forbidden fruit. We should not be surprised then that conduct book writers frequently conflate female aural and oral appetite. Moreover, there is great concern that female desire of both kinds consumes male wealth and is therefore to be feared.

7. According to Bakhtin, the head, nose, and ears only "acquire a grotesque character when they adopt the animal form or that of inanimate objects" (316).

In a passage that blurs the distinction between what is heard and what is eaten, Robert Cleaver notes that “a sweete tooth, and a veluet mouth, that is, daintinesse, or choisenesse in diet, is an enemie to frugalitie, a needlesse charge” (72). A couple of pages later, he complains about “such whose talke is nothing but froath, their words vnsauerie, and bring no good to the hearer” (74). The cost of such an oral and aural appetite lies in the failure of either the food or the speech to be nourishing. They may not be particularly damaging to the eater or listener, but their very lack of sustenance makes them wasteful. When it comes to the cost of listening, Brathwait notes, “*Consorts* are theeves of time,” before advising his readers to “[c]huse such then for your *Consorts*, of whom you may haue assured hope, that they will either better you, or bee bettered by you” (*English Gentlewoman* 140). Brathwait, in keeping with the concerns of his mercantile- and gentle-class audience, repeatedly glosses the interaction of a speaker and listener in terms of a financial transaction, stressing the need for a listener to profit from the conversation (74, 88, 139). He rails against speakers who use “polite-stollen phrase[s] . . . purchased by eare onely” and “who preferres *Complement* before *profit*” and suggests that such a one “may account himselfe one among his bank-rupt brethren, before hee breake” (74). In *Pasquils Mistress* (1600), Nicholas Breton uses verse to complain about female gullibility and lack of secrecy, and to express the notion that listening and speaking devours both time and money:

And shee that credits euery tale she heeres,
 And tels her minde to euery idle eare:
 And euery idle fiddling gossippe cheeres,
 That can but flatter, prate, and lye, and sweare:
 And now and then, let fall a fained teare:
 Such a good gossippe with her huswifery,
 Will quickly bring a man to beggery. (C4^v)

Considering that Brabantio believes he is robbed of Desdemona because she listens to Othello, we can see how listening women might be considered to risk their own treasure,

the “choycest ornament” (Brathwait, *English Gentlewoman* 64) of their chastity, and to “bring a *man* to beggery” by consuming a husband’s or father’s fortune as well.⁸

The fear of excessive consumption by women also leads many conduct book writers to advocate restraint of the female appetite for food, and not simply because of the cost of satisfying such an appetite. Brathwait insists on the need to control female appetite because “[I]uscious fare is the fuell of every inordinate concupiscence.” He tells his readers, “By restraint of this, you shall learne to moderate your desires. . . . Yea, abstinence auaieth much for preseruing health of body and length of life” (*English Gentlewoman* 140). The suggestion is that what women eat will arouse other desires in them, and that by controlling their desire for food, they will learn to moderate all forms of desire. This demand that appropriate female behaviour requires restraint also gives rise to the opposing construction of immoderate desire, however it is expressed, as “unwomanly.” For example, Brathwait labels female gossips, a term that applies as much to listeners as speakers of gossip, as “*Feminine Epicures*, who surfet out their time in an vnwomanly excesse” (50). He further describes aural greed in terms of oral consumption that transgresses the gender role ascribed to women when he criticizes “Shee-Critics,” women who spend time listening to, and speaking empty, overblown speeches: he complains, “[H]owsoeuer they are lesse than Women at their *worke*, yet at their *meat* (so vnconfined is their appetite) they are more than men.” The greed of these women for words and food is so transgressive, and their own use of words is “so phantasticke,” that he concludes they are “neither women nor men” (75). The hermaphrody exhibited by them takes on further sexual overtones when set beside his complaints against another group of listeners. He proclaims, “Those sensuall *Curtezans*, who are so delighted in songs, pipes, and earthly melody, shall in hell rore terribly and howle miserably” (77). While Brathwait’s complaints against “Feminine Epicures” and “Shee-Critics” suggest

8. Women were deemed to have few legal rights (T.E. 6). A woman’s property, including her chastity, was therefore considered the property of her father or husband, and her loss of chastity would indeed be a loss of one of his assets.

that aural and oral consumption are closely connected, his determination that such excess desire is “unwomanly” and like that of “sensuall *Curtezans*” completes a triad by constructing aural and oral appetite in terms of sexual desire.

While aural openness is necessary to show obedience to authority as well as to possess and exhibit faith, such openness, according to early modern conduct book writers, is a problem for women because of its association with desire. In contrast to Mary’s “fruitful” listening which is based on God’s plan and not on her own desire, listening that is predicated on female desire is often considered unproductive and even corrupting. After all, Eve’s desire for the forbidden fruit, so often glossed as sexual knowledge (Norris 338), brings death into the world. When Eve takes in the words of the serpent, they prompt *her* desire for the fruit: “So the woman (seing that the tre was good for meat, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, & a tre to be desired to get knowledge) toke of the frute thereof, and did eat” (Genesis 3:6). Aural consumption leads to a desire for oral intake, and both become inextricably linked in the early modern mind to sexual desire. Moreover, these desires now become difficult to assuage. Eve’s desires, and those of her female descendants, are subject to male authority and food must be cultivated and eaten “in sorwe” (3:17). However, it is important to note that Eve’s “desires” are not shown to dissipate; rather, they have been suppressed. Female desire therefore is not only “vnfruitful,” but also potentially insatiable. It must, therefore, be contained. Hence, the insistence that the orifices of the ear, mouth, and vagina be closely monitored, not so much because they may be invaded or penetrated, but because they might disclose an insatiable appetite: a gaping gulf.

Gaping Gulfs

The concept of desire or appetite as represented by the orifices of the ear, mouth, and vagina is discussed by Maggie Kilgour in a post-Freudian (Kleinian) assessment of orality and incorporation. She links the acts of eating, sexual intercourse, verbal communication, and reading by noting that they are all acts of incorporation. Each act

“assumes an absolute distinction between inside and outside, eater and eaten,” but this “breaks down, as the law ‘you are what you eat’ obscures identity and makes it impossible to say who’s who. . . . Like eating, intercourse makes two bodies one, though in a union that is fortunately less absolute and permanent” (7). Kilgour suggests that both sight and hearing are acts of incorporation, “more refined versions of taste,” noting that “we ‘take things in’ with our eyes and absorb sounds through our ears” (9).⁹ The concept of the body as an organ that can “take things in” not only defines it as inherently bounded and as having the ability to determine what it admits into itself, but also demonstrates its vulnerability. Kilgour notes that it is relatively easy to monitor what the body consumes when considering real food, “but the mental absorption of others—central to Renaissance ideals of self-fashioning . . . —is much more difficult to determine and regulate.” This difficulty in determining what has been incorporated into the mind, she suggests, “might be read as justification for policing the territory more closely for fear it be infiltrated” (10). Moreover, in keeping with my own argument about the ears as particularly vulnerable body orifices, Kilgour states that their permanent openness frustrates the ability to control what is taken into the body through them (131). In her discussion of Milton’s representation of Satan’s temptation of Eve in *Paradise Lost*, she notes that all of Eve’s senses are awakened by what she hears “to create one enormous, undifferentiated appetite” and that the collapse of these appetites into one reflects the breakdown between physical and mental appetite (126). Eve, in other words, is constructed as pure appetite, and while her act of incorporation clearly affects her, demonstrating her vulnerability, it also affects what is outside her body. Bodily openness, or appetite, affects both the consumer and the consumed. Kilgour, however, not only pays little attention to the effect of consumption on what lies beyond the body, but she also ignores the effect of gender on the construction of appetite and bodily incorporation: how

9. I want to put aside the issue of sight as an act of incorporation even though what is seen may affect the viewer, as early modern authors, as noted in the introduction, generally considered sight less invasive than hearing, believing it took place outside the body through the intertwining of beams from the object of view and viewer.

the failure to control what is taken in through the ear, as shown by Eve, may be constructed as inappropriate, excessive, corrupting, and “unwomanly” when the listener is female.

In her analysis of cultural taboos relating to the body, Mary Douglas notes, “The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system [including a nation]. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious” (115). She goes on to state that it is impossible to assess cultural views of the body, its ingestion and excretion, unless these are considered symbolic of the culture that constructs them (115). The body, in other words, is the world writ small.¹⁰ One can see, therefore, why Elizabeth I is so frequently officially represented as possessing a virginal body, signifying purity and closure, even though such a body, as noted in the last chapter, is also constantly under threat of penetration. Queen of a nation under threat of foreign invasion and domestic insurrection, Elizabeth had to be shown to represent containment and integrity; her body, both political and physical, had to be shown as impenetrable. Nonetheless, while official representations of Elizabeth may have celebrated her virginity and even compared her to the Virgin Mary, unofficial constructions often hinted at her sexual desire, an appetite which, at least according to Jonson, prompted her to have many lovers even as she maintained her “virgin” status (Pye 34).¹¹ *The Rainbow Portrait* may depict the queen as virginal and protected by a cloak of eyes and ears, but even as her “secret” ear is shown to

10. The idea of the body as a mirror of both society and the physical world was popular among early seventeenth-century authors and is apparent in such titles as Helkiah Crooke’s *Microcosmographia*, Samuel Purchas’s *Microcosmus*, and Phineas Fletcher’s *The Purple Island, or The Isle of Man*.

11. Those who speculated on Elizabeth’s sexuality were unlikely to share their opinions with her or her advisers, especially as John Knox, in *The First Blast of the Trumpet*, argues that a female ruler could only hold her position through seduction and witchcraft. Elizabeth would have been particularly sensitive to suggestions that she was licentious in any way, not only because she was a single woman, but also because her mother, Anne Boleyn, was labelled a witch and executed after being accused of having adulterous affairs with five men, including her brother (Philippa Berry 68; Levin 78).

be under her control, revealed by her own hand, it is still an orifice through which she and the nation she rules can be infiltrated. The concern may be less that the queen's body could be unwittingly penetrated (through the ear or the vagina), and more that she might desire and therefore invite such penetration. Hence, Elizabeth's sexual appetite was of great concern to her subjects, not least because as a female monarch, she was that anomalous being, a woman whose appetites were beyond male control, whose own hand controlled the access of others to her body. As a result, her desires were rumoured to be excessive and in need of control. While marriage would subject Elizabeth to male authority and provide the English throne with an heir, such a marriage would also subject the English nation, and it was fears regarding this subjection that prompted reaction to a possible union between the queen and the Duke of Alençon. Moreover, in at least one case, criticism of this marriage was based on the determination of Elizabeth's appetite as insatiable—a gaping gulf.

There was significant public opposition to the marriage, and even the queen's privy council was divided on the issue,¹² but it was John Stubbs's book, *The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf Whereinto England is Like to Be Swallowed by Another French Marriage if the Lord Forbid Not the Banns by Letting Her Majesty See the Sin and Punishment Thereof* that incurred Elizabeth's greatest wrath. The book was published anonymously in August 1579 just before Alençon arrived for a secret visit to England. Elizabeth, perhaps embarrassed on her guest's behalf, immediately banned it and demanded the arrest of those responsible for writing, publishing, and circulating it (Lloyd Berry xxvi-xxix). Along with William Page, who was found guilty of distributing copies of the book, Stubbs was sentenced to have his right hand cut off and the sentence was carried out on

12. Both the Earl of Leicester and Sir Francis Walsingham vehemently opposed the match, and they may have encouraged Sir Philip Sidney to write privately to the queen to express his disagreement with the marriage on the grounds of Alençon's nationality and religion (Adams 78-79; Lloyd Berry xv-xvi, xlvii-1).

October 30th, despite objections that the law imposed was no longer valid (xxxiv).¹³ Robert Adams suggests that Elizabeth was particularly incensed by the public nature of Stubbs's disapproval and that her concern was over the dangerous precedent of allowing her subjects to question her action. Stubbs "*publicly* . . . raised officially forbidden questions about kingship and the rights of subjects" (80). In addition, the subject on which Stubbs had questioned Elizabeth's authority was the one thing that she had, from the beginning of her reign, fought for the right to decide. She was adamant that as she was divinely appointed, on the question of marriage she would be guided by God alone (Bell 111). As a result, an example was made of Stubbs and Page.

There is evidence, however, that the example Elizabeth intended may have backfired. Stubbs's scaffold speech to the crowd is a careful negotiation between the silence demanded of him and his need to indicate how his hand is being sacrificed to Elizabeth's appetite for revenge. He notes how his "mouth is stopped by judgment," and that while Elizabeth had repealed the sentences of others for greater offences, she had not considered him "worthy of her mercy." At the end of his speech he even makes a veiled threat, saying:

I pray you all to pray with me that God will strengthen me with patience to endure and abide the pain that I am to suffer and grant me this grace, that the loss of my hand do not withdraw any part of my duty and affection toward Her Majesty, and because, when so many veins of blood are opened, it is uncertain how they may be stayed and what will be the event thereof. (qtd. in Lloyd Berry xxxv)

13. The law imposed had been passed during Mary's reign to prevent the circulation of seditious material. The dissension about using this law against Stubbs and his cohorts led the 1580-81 parliament to pass an even tougher statute on sedition. Then, in 1586, in an attempt to control all print matter, the Star Chamber passed a decree declaring that every manuscript had to be examined and licensed by the Archbishop or Bishop of London before printing. Printers who refused to obey the decree had their presses destroyed. While these harsh measures reflected real concerns about how sedition could affect a monarchy without a designated heir, several people compared them to the methods of the Spanish Inquisition (Adams 84, 87-88; Levin 87).

It is therefore notable that after his hand is severed and Stubbs raises his hat with his left hand to proclaim, “God save the Queen,” the crowd is silent. William Camden, present at the scene, observes, ““The multitude standing about was altogether silent, either out of horror of this new and unwonted punishment, or else out of pity towards the man . . . or else out of hatred of the marriage, which most men presaged would be the overthrow of religion”” (qtd. in Lloyd Berry xxxvi-vii). Stubbs had claimed in his title that the marriage was the “gaping gulf,” but underlying that analogy was Elizabeth’s desire: her appetite for Alençon’s hand in marriage and for Stubbs’s hand in revenge.

Ilona Bell comments that Stubbs’s title suggests “that the country is about to be swallowed or split asunder to satisfy someone’s voracious appetite: ‘gaping’ means not only rending asunder but also opening the mouth wide and yearning for; moreover, ‘gulf’ means not only a body of water but also a voracious appetite.” She then adds, “One needn’t look too hard to discover whose appetite Stubbs had in mind” (109). Stubbs begins his criticism of the proposed marriage by noting how the French seek to infect the English both through body and mind, alluding to the “French” disease of syphilis. Thus, he raises the issue of sexual desire and its consequences, as well as the potential for infection through the ear, when he states that “they have sent us hither, not Satan in body of a serpent, but the old serpent in shape of a man, whose sting is in his mouth, and who doth his endeavor to seduce our Eve, that she and we may lose this English paradise” (Lloyd Berry 3-4). While Bell considers Stubbs’s construction of Elizabeth as Eve to Alençon’s Satan as flattery directed at the queen, even Stubbs recognizes the problem with equating the queen with the woman most frequently blamed for humanity’s downfall. He therefore goes on to claim that Elizabeth is “also our Adam and sovereign lord or lordly lady of this land” (3). Stubbs continues his theme of how the French will infect the country, the church, and the body of the queen, noting that England is like its virginal queen, pure, “a region purged from idolatry, a kingdom of light,” whereas France is “a den of idolatry, a kingdom of darkness” (6-7). Moreover, he implies that Elizabeth will be responsible for permitting such infection to enter the country: “forsomuch as in

any great plague that can come to this Church your Majesty must have your part” (30). He worries that her openness, her willingness to listen to Alençon and those encouraging the marriage, will be “our mischief, this is the swallowing gulf of our bottomless destruction” (4). He insists that she should be like Thomas Overbury’s good woman and “stop” her ears: “keep this sin far from you by admitting no counsel that may bring it near you . . . stop your Majesty’s ears against these sorcerers and their enchanting counsels . . . pray against these dangerous tempters and temptations” (30).

Not only is Elizabeth, glossed as Eve, open to an infection that is linked to desire, but also those who want the marriage are nothing more than ambitious and “hungry” (Lloyd Berry 67). Stubbs even suggests that Elizabeth as a woman is not strong enough to avoid the perverting effects of such temptation. Again, in a hedged allusion to the Fall and in keeping with the idea of wives being subject to their husbands, Stubbs writes:

And if woman, that weaker vessel, be strong enough to draw man through the advantage which the Devil hath within our bosom (I mean our natural corruption and proneness to idolatry), how much more forcibly shall the stronger vessel pull weak woman. . . . And if the husband, which is the head, be drawn aside by his wife, over whom nevertheless he hath authority and rule, how much more easily shall the wife be perverted by her husband, to whom she is subject by the law of God and oweth both awe and obedience, howsoever the laws by prerogative or her place by pre-eminence may privilege her? (11)¹⁴

While Stubbs initially considers why the marriage would be dangerous for the body politic, it is a body politic that, according to his argument, is weakened by its association with a female body natural (Bell 109). As in the case of Marlowe’s Edward II, the body politic is open to infection through the physical body and, when the body of the monarch is a female body, there is an even greater fear of its susceptibility to corruption. In

14. Clearly Stubbs feels it necessary to explain that the “advantage which the Devil hath within our bosom” is a result of “natural corruption” and not, as the preceding phrase suggests, because Eve, a “weaker vessel,” was able to “draw” Adam to sin through the influence of the serpent.

addition, Stubbs suggests that the queen's physical body is subject to infection because of her desires.

Following his discussion of how the church and country might be tainted by the marriage, Stubbs considers the effect on Elizabeth's "private person" (Lloyd Berry 69).¹⁵ He expresses concern about the rumours "in all languages" of Alençon's "marvelous licentious and dissolute youth" and "intemperancy" (71), and suggests that Elizabeth is not only open to infection through the ear, but also through the vagina by way of a sexually-transmitted disease: "whether his life hath been so monstrously wicked as is reported, for it is no small matter for a queen, the head of the land, to join in any manner with that person over whom the inevitable plagues of the most true Lord do hang" (72).¹⁶ Stubbs also suggests that such infection stems from Elizabeth's desire to have her sexual appetite satiated: her desire "to have her particular liking and heart's contentation" in marriage, her need to be "gladly satisfied in [her] choice" of husband (Lloyd Berry 69; Bell 109-10). It is this desire that he fears and wants constrained. As a result, he considers it irresponsible for Elizabeth to be allowed to choose her own husband, insisting that it is "faithless" and "careless" to leave the selection "to her own only consideration" (Lloyd Berry 70). In a metaphor that once again denotes appetite and which combines oral, aural, and sexual consumption, he writes, "I marvel, therefore, they could not see that as that meat brooks not well which is crammed in against the stomach . . . so surely in this marriage the success of joy and contentation cannot be promised" (70). Stubbs notes that "every parent [who] . . . hath loving care of their daughter" does not simply advise her to marry one of her own choosing, "but cannot content themselves unless they press to help

15. In defining the queen's two bodies, Stubbs refers to her physical or "natural body" as her "very self or self self" (Lloyd Berry 68), a phrase that has a curious connection to Overbury's later criticism of women who were "very very Woman" (D^r).

16. It is little wonder that in her proclamation, Elizabeth comes to the defence of her "frog" and declares Stubbs's book to be "a heap of slanders and reproaches of the said prince . . . [a] fardel of false reports and suggestions and manifest lies forged against a prince of a royal blood" (Lloyd Berry 148).

her with their best advice, laying about to search and inquire whether he [the potential bridegroom] be such as they wish” (69-70). In other words, Stubbs suggests that Elizabeth’s desires must be controlled like any other woman’s; uncontrolled they are simply a “gaping gulf.” Paradoxically, while he wants Elizabeth’s “gulf” closed to potential infection from France, he wants an open ear for himself and hopes that she can “smell a flatterer from a loyal counselor” (30). He therefore hopes that she will exhibit “such a tractable and easy sweetness of a yielding nature that [she] readily and humbly may hearken to all good counsels sent . . . from God and such as fear God and love your majesty” (31). Again, we return to the construction of unapproved openness of the female ear as inappropriate, excessive, and corrupting, and indicative of an appetite that encompasses all other appetites, while approved, controlled openness is “sweetness,” “yielding” and humility.

A Woman Killed with Kindness

Given the construction of the female body as always potentially open, even when constructed as a “virgin” body, and the persistent yoking of ear, mouth, and vagina as “gaping gulfs” that represent barely contained female appetite or desire, I want to consider how the issue of female desire, as related to the construction of listening behaviour, is explored in the domestic tragedies of the period. In the last chapter, against the paradoxical demand that women remain open yet impermeable, I examined how potentially transgressive listening by a woman comes to signify adultery, particularly when seen through the labyrinth of transgressive male listening.¹⁷ In this chapter, I want to consider the staged female body not only as subject to potential penetration, but also as possessing an insatiable undifferentiated appetite, regardless of the expression of desire. In other words, while Desdemona may represent a sexually chaste but aurally open

17. The synaesthesia implied in this statement is intentional. Othello “sees” Desdemona as an adulteress because he listens transgressively to Iago, who repeatedly encourages the Moor to “[I]ook to [his] wife” and “[o]bserve her well” (*Othello* 3.3.201).

woman, what happens when a sexually adulterous female character is put on the stage? In light of her lack of chastity, how is her listening behaviour then constructed?

The theme of adultery is common in domestic tragedies such as *The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham* (1591), *A Warning for Fair Women* (1599), and Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603), and the latter may well have influenced Shakespeare's *Othello*.¹⁸ Moreover, in each of these plays, the adulterous wife can be said to be won through some form of persuasion. She becomes sexually open because she listens to speech she should not hear. She fails to "stop her eares against the alurements of those which lye in wait for her chastity" (*The Covrt of Good Counsell* D2^f) and, like the proverbial woman who hears, she yields (Tilley C122). For example, Alice Arden notes that she is initially seduced into an adulterous relationship with Mosby through being "tangled with [his] 'ticing speech," which she then links to "witchcraft and mere sorcery" (*Arden* I.196, 200), a phrase that echoes Brabantio's belief about how Othello may have seduced Desdemona (*Othello* 1.2.64-80; 1.3.60-64). However, it is not just male speech that entangles women. Anne Sanders in *A Warning for Fair Women* is trapped by the speech of a gossip, Mistress Drury, hired by Browne to persuade Anne to become his lover. Drury's speech can also be defined as witchcraft and sorcery as Drury reads Anne's palm and then prophesies her future, but Drury is equally skilled in the art of persuasion. Her servant Roger tells her that she has "such a sweet tongue as will supple a stone, and for my lie, if ye list to labour, you'll win her [Anne]" (1.1.146-48), to which Drury adds: "[S]he shall have much ado / To hold her own when I begin to woo" (195-

18. Viviana Comensoli notes that about twenty domestic tragedies were written between 1590 and 1610, and most of these involve murder. Complete copies of only five of these plays now exist. These are *Arden of Faversham*, *A Warning for Fair Women*, *Two Lamentable Tragedies*, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (173).

Peter Rudnytsky claims that Shakespeare knew of *A Woman Killed with Kindness* when he wrote *Othello* and notes that both plays begin with a marriage and include a husband who is, or thinks he is, being cuckolded. Rudnytsky also notes that Nicholas and Iago fulfil the same role in each play, and that while Nicholas is indeed "honest" (*A Woman* VIII.72), the label becomes ironic when applied to Iago (104-7).

96). Furthermore, Drury considers that Anne, being “young and fair / . . . may be tempered easily, like wax; / Especially by one that is familiar with her” (29-31).¹⁹ Drury’s persuasive speech, then, is the “poisoned draught” that, in the dumbshow preceding Act two, Tragedy declares, “[I]nfects [Anne’s] soul, / And wins her free consent to this foul deed” (2.1.243-44).

While Anne may be trapped by Drury’s speech, she has previously listened to Browne’s flattery. She is one of the gentlewomen Brathwait warns against being “too attentue auditors in the report of their owne prayes” (*English Gentlewoman* 65). Indeed, Browne acknowledges Anne’s receptivity to his speech and what that may promise when he tells Drury that Anne “may be won, would you but be entreated / To be a mediator for me, and persuade her” (1.3.80-81). Anne may be subject to persuasion and infected by what she hears, but the suggestion is that she is also culpable because she listens first to Browne’s flattery, and second to Drury’s false predictions. There is also further evidence of Anne’s potential culpability if we examine her initial openness to Browne. She is known to sit outside her door waiting for her husband, a scene considered to convey domestic peace and order (Lieblein 188). Nonetheless, her presence *outside* the house also suggests her availability to other men, a precursor to domestic *disorder*, if we assume connection between the threshold of the house and the threshold of the body (Stallybrass 126-27). Paradoxically, it is Anne’s readiness to meet her husband that leaves her vulnerable to penetration by others and, indeed, it is here that Browne has the opportunity to speak with her. *The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham* and *A Warning for Fair Women*, both based on historical events, end with the adulterous wives and their accomplices being sentenced to death, Alice by burning—the usual sentence for treason

19. The use of the term “familiar” also links Mistress Drury’s persuasion to sorcery and witchcraft, though if she deems herself Anne’s familiar, the implication is that Anne is the witch—a suggestion that is not untoward given the belief that witches indulged in unsanctioned sexual practices.

and witchcraft,²⁰ and Anne by hanging, having been brought to repentance and acceptance of her death by yet another speech from Mistress Drury.

These plays adhere fairly closely to their sources in Holinshed's *Chronicles*,²¹ although they are both less didactic. As Viviana Comensoli notes, domestic drama does more than "mirror . . . contemporary social practices; it is a new genre in which the historical and ideological contexts scrutinized are a composite of the world portrayed on stage and the society of the playgoer" (17). This new genre supports the emphasis in the early modern period on marriage as a basis for an ordered society, and it considers the complexities of the institution (17-18). Domestic tragedies still unequivocally condemn adultery, but they also explore the social intricacies of such situations. *Arden*, for example, emphasizes Alice's vulnerability by demonstrating the volatility of her relationship with Mosby and by noting that he desires both her and her wealth. In addition, Thomas Arden is shown to be more slighted by Alice's preference of a man of a lower class and more concerned about consolidating his own wealth than by the actual adultery (Lieblein 183-85). Compared to its sources, *A Warning* emphasizes the effect of economic relations on the household as Anne Sanders's openness to Mistress Drury stems from her dissatisfaction with her husband's failure to pay certain accounts she has due (Lieblein 189).²² These plays may suggest a link between a woman's aural and sexual

20. The sentence of death by burning was considered appropriate for husband murder as it was a form of treason—a rebellion against the head of the household. Gouge suggests that a husband is "a King" to his wife (345), and Cleaver defines the household as "a little commonwealth" (13) with an implicit understanding of who rules the commonwealth. That Alice's adultery preceding the murder is associated with witchcraft simply reinforces the notion that death by burning is a fitting penalty for her crime.

21. Accounts of the murders of Thomas Arden and George Sanders appear in Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Sanders's murder is also reported in Stowe and there is evidence of an earlier version written in 1573, titled, "A briefe discourse of the late murther of master George Saunders" by Arthur Golding (Lieblein 182, 186).

22. Anne Sanders's anger at her husband is perhaps less at his unwillingness to pay the bills than his determination that they are "trifling wares" as opposed to his "great affairs" (1.4.20, 19).

openness, but they also indicate that such openness stems as much from other social factors as from any inner desire or appetite on the part of these women. Indeed, the motivations of these women to commit adultery are often obscure. Alice is seduced prior to the opening of the play, and Anne Sanders is “seduced” by the prophesy that George Browne will be her next husband and she knows that “[t]o repine / Against her providence . . . ’tis sin” (*Warning* 1.4.152-53). The actual seduction is only staged through a dumbshow that depicts Browne and Anne drinking with Lust and Anne rejecting Chastity. In contrast, the “seduction” scene between Anne Frankford and Wendoll is staged in Thomas Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, a play that some critics consider the last domestic tragedy and a precursor to the great Jacobean tragedies because of the sympathy encouraged for Anne Frankford and the moral complexity it brings to the subject of adultery (Lieblein 195).

In contrast to its earlier counterparts, Heywood’s play is not based on historic events; instead, it appears to have roots in William Painter’s *The Palace of Pleasure*. The subplot of Sir Charles’s debt to Sir Francis Acton and his offering of Susan’s chastity in recompense can be traced through Painter’s work to Belleforest and Bandello and back to Illicini’s novella about Salimbene (Atkinson 15; van Fossen xvii). The source of the main plot of Anne Frankford’s adultery with Wendoll and the subsequent punishment inflicted by her husband are less obvious as the plot can be linked to several of the novellas in Painter’s *Palace* as well as to Robert Greene’s “The Conversion of an English Courtizan” (1592), itself an adaptation of George Gascoigne’s “The Adventures of Master F. J.” (1573). It may have also been influenced by the earlier *Warning for Fair Women*. A. Winkler suggests that the play owes more to *A Warning* than any Italian novella (van Fossen xxvi). R. W. van Fossen therefore concludes that while the play is indebted to the Italian novellas for its plot, it draws on Greene and the earlier domestic tragedies for its distinctly middle-class English setting. This setting is emphasized in a number of ways, from the wedding dance with which the play opens to the scenes of the servants’ banter and complaints, from the preparations for supper and the later card game to the removal

of all of Anne's belongings from Frankford's house.²³ It is into this very ordinary setting that Heywood introduces the connected topics of adultery, female chastity, and honour, the latter theme being explored not only in Frankford's banishment of Anne but also in Sir Charles's pimping of his sister Susan to Sir Francis Acton. While both plots of *A Woman Killed with Kindness* consider the issue of chastity along with the themes of generosity and debt, male amity and enmity, I want to focus particularly on the main plot as it offers a complex presentation of the causes and results of adultery and constructions of openness, particularly female openness. In addition, it demonstrates the link between aural, oral, and sexual appetite.

Despite the theme of adultery, the main plot is, as a number of critics have noted, curiously lacking in eroticism. Some have argued that Anne's rapid fall from "perfect wife" (I.37) to "quean" (VIII.169) and "strumpet" (XIII.108),²⁴ the speed of her "perversion," is simply a convention of Elizabethan drama, one also apparent in Sir Francis's love at first sight (van Fossen xlvi, liii).²⁵ Heywood avoids giving any obvious

23. Michael Wentworth believes that Heywood's audience would have noted the inversion of comic order suggested by the marriage feast of the opening scene and that this would have led to "a sense of tragic foreboding" (151). In addition, the discussion and dancing of the ballad "The Shaking of the Sheets," which emphasizes the themes of female chastity and adultery and connects them with death, foreshadows the play's end (Rudnytsky 112). Sir Charles notes that "The Shaking of the Sheets" is "the dance her husband means to lead her" (I.3), hinting at the anticipated consummation of the marriage. Wendoll replies, "That's not the dance that every man must dance, / According to the ballad" (4-5), suggesting that other men (though not all) may also "dance"—have sexual intercourse—with the bride. Finally, death is referred to in the ballad's first stanza, in which listeners and dancers are told to "[m]ake ready then your winding sheet" (line 5; van Fossen, note to I.5).

24. All references to *A Woman Killed with Kindness* are to the Revels edition, edited by R. V. van Fossen (London: Methuen & Co., 1961).

25. The "speed of her 'perversion'" is also something of a theatrical illusion, given that the time elapsed between scene I and scene XIII is sufficient for Anne to have two children. While Frankford suggests that Anne's adultery raises questions about the paternity of these children (XIII.124-25), there is no internal evidence by which to measure the duration of the affair.

motivation for Anne's adultery (Kiefer 87; Panek 367), and this has led others to argue that Anne is simply a typed character, an "erring wom[a]n," instantly recognizable to Heywood's contemporaries. As a result, Alfred Harbage considers it "beside the point" to discuss Anne's motivation (qtd. in van Fossen xlvi). While it is difficult to regard Anne as we first meet her as a woman prone to adultery, given the praise Sir Charles accords the "ornaments / Both of [her] mind and body" (I.15-16) and her own modesty and willing subjection to her husband's pleasure (29-36), there is perhaps a sense that this marriage is too perfect and therefore bound for disaster. Sir Charles's declaration that the marriage "carries / Consort and expectation of much joy" (69-70) is hollow in light of later events, and Sir Francis's prophecy that "[y]ou that begin betimes thus, must needs prove / Pliant and duteous in your husband's love" (40-41), may be considered curiously ironic.

Leanore Lieblein suggests that Anne's very perfection as a wife is the reason why she is so enigmatic. Lieblein argues that Anne has no integral self, rather existing to decorate or "ornament" Frankford like "a chain of gold to adorn [his] neck" (I.64) and that Anne's "moods derive from her husband's reflected light" (Lieblein 190). Indeed, Anne notes that Frankford's

sweet content is like a flattering glass,
To make my face seem fairer to mine eye:
But the least wrinkle from his stormy brow
Will blast the roses in my cheeks that grow. (I.33-36)

Paula McQuade argues that Anne's "most salient characteristic" is her "utter lack of desire," and that such absence of desire in an adulteress is so unusual that it must be intentional (233). Indeed, Anne suggests that her only desire is to please her husband, to gain "his sweet content" as a "meek and patient" "perfect wife" (I.33, 37) should. Anne remains the perfect wife even when Frankford extends his fateful invitation to Wendoll to "be [his] companion" (IV.72) and tells his wife to "[u]se [Wendoll] with all thy loving'st courtesy" (80). Her reply clearly indicates the limits of her courtesy: "As far as modesty may well extend, / It is my duty to receive your friend" (81-82). In light of such wifely

submission, van Fossen suggests that Anne's later "yielding" to Wendoll might be deemed the result of impulsiveness, of which he sees evidence in her interruption of Wendoll's description of the fight between Sir Charles and Sir Francis, though as van Fossen notes, "One would not wish to push the suggestion too far" (xlvii). He does, however, appear to support the idea of Anne as a woman "'swept off her feet by a wind of passion'" she is unable to resist (xlvii).

I want to explore this "wind of passion" to which Anne is apparently subject to determine why she does indeed acquiesce to Wendoll's desires. Following Anne's interruption of Wendoll's tale in scene IV, we do not see her again until she brings a message to him from her husband. The message is that Frankford wants Wendoll

To make bold in his absence and command
Even as himself were present in the house;
For you must keep his table, use his servants,
And be a present Frankford in his absence. (VI.76-79)

There is no reason to suspect Anne's invention of this message as it simply reiterates and extends Frankford's earlier invitation to his friend "to use my table and my purse— / They are yours" (IV.65-66). While Frankford's invitation demonstrates his hospitality, it also echoes the play's emphasis on food and eating, and particularly the link between sexual and oral appetite. The play, after all, begins with a marriage feast, and there are repeated scenes complete with props in which characters are shown to have just eaten, as well as calls for various characters to eat. It is against this background that Frankford insists Wendoll eat, "use [his] table," and while Wendoll is initially reluctant, claiming, "O Lord, sir, I shall never deserve it" (66), by the time of Frankford's second request, there has been a change in Wendoll and the relationship between the two men. Immediately before Anne's speech, Wendoll soliloquizes on how he has grown in Frankford's affections:

He cannot eat without me,
Nor laugh without me. I am to his body
As necessary as his digestion,
And equally do make him whole or sick. (VI.40-43)

Thus, while Frankford initially offers to feed Wendoll, Wendoll now claims that he is the food Frankford requires, the food that can “make him whole or sick.” That Frankford, in his message, also asks his friend to be a substitute for himself further blurs the boundary between the two men. If Wendoll considers himself Frankford’s food, it implies that he sees himself as part of his friend, integral to his host’s being. Therefore, Frankford’s invitation that his guest act as “a present Frankford” simply confirms Wendoll’s prior conception of himself. In addition, as a number of critics note, Frankford’s offer, like his later offer in scene XIII, may be an unwitting invitation for Wendoll not only to use Frankford’s table and fulfil his gustatory duties, but also to “use” Anne and fulfill Frankford’s conjugal duties. Certainly, Frankford’s invitation appears to go against James I’s advice to his son on the subject of marriage: “Make not thy friend too familier with thy wife” (*Fathers Blessing* 29).

Lieblein suggests that Frankford’s invitation puts Wendoll in a double bind, as he is asked to do something for which he will be condemned (191). Margaret Bryan agrees that Wendoll cannot disregard the sexual implications of Frankford’s offer, and goes on to argue that the offer is not a conscious manoeuvre on Frankford’s part, but rather a sign of his “unconscious desire to be cuckolded” (15).²⁶ However, both these critics fail to consider Wendoll’s state of mind when he hears Frankford’s message in scene VI, his own view of himself as integral to Frankford, and his own desire for Anne, who then appears to tell him to “be a present Frankford in his absence.” Wendoll has already determined that his love for Anne condemns him, that he is a “villain” (VI.1) just for thinking of having an affair with her, and that the deed itself will leave him “damn’d without redemption” (3). He cannot pray, because he can “meditate” on nothing other

26. Bryan suggests that Frankford’s unconscious offer of Anne to Wendoll is, according to psychoanalytic theory, “a substitution of her for himself in the illicit relationship” (15-16). She also considers Frankford’s “offer” of Anne to be echoed in the subplot by Charles’s offer of Susan to Sir Francis. If Frankford does subconsciously offer Anne as a substitute for himself, one could argue that in doing so he is encouraging Wendoll to consume all he has—including the “treasure” of his wife’s chastity.

than “her divine perfections” (10-11). In the Christian terms of sin, repentance, and redemption used throughout the play, Wendoll is already a sinner and, to him, Anne’s “perfections,” one of which is her chastity, are the cause of that sin.²⁷ Moreover, Jenkin, the servant Frankford has given Wendoll, plays with the idea of who is his master and mistress and therefore how one might define Anne (57-63). It is little wonder then that Wendoll might think Anne’s delivery of Frankford’s message an indication that she could be his “mistress” in the sense of both the mistress of *his* house and the woman he sleeps with. Ultimately, though, Wendoll absolves himself of rationalizing his decision, and while he is troubled by his “treason to so true a friend” (87), he claims that he is forced to speak to Anne as “[t]he swift Fates drag me at their chariot wheel / And hurry me to mischief” (101-2).

Wendoll begins by proclaiming his love for Anne, a proclamation that places Anne in the same awkward situation as Milton’s virtuous Lady in *Comus*. She hears speech she should not hear through no fault of her own. She quickly tries to stop Wendoll from speaking further once she has heard his first declaration of love as is clear from Wendoll’s words. He says, “I love you. Start not, speak not, answer not. / I love you—nay, let me speak the rest” (VI.107-08). While Brathwait notes, “There is nothing that sounds more cheerefully to the eare, or leaues a sweeter accent; nothing that conveyes it selfe more speedily to the heart . . . then conceit of loue” (*English Gentlewoman* 73), it would appear that Anne is not initially persuaded by Wendoll’s declaration of love. Indeed, she suggests that “Heaven forbid[s] . . . such a disloyal thought” (110-11), never mind its expression through speech. Anne then goes on to stress how much Frankford

27. When Wendoll begins his declaration of love to Anne, he refers to her as “fair angel, chaste and wise” (VI.106), implying that it is her wisdom and chastity he finds attractive. Through sleeping with him, however, Anne loses both, noting her own “want of wit” (XI.110). Anne’s chastity, despite her marital status, is therefore constructed in the same terms as that of a young female virgin: closed, in anticipation of opening, and as the cause of sin itself.

loves Wendoll and asks how Wendoll could “dishonour” her husband (VI.123).²⁸ Michael Wentworth suggests that Anne’s focus on the way Wendoll has insulted her husband reveals her failure to understand her own danger (153). Van Fossen also notes that Anne’s response to Wendoll is predicated on her husband’s relationship to him and not on her own emotions and goes on to express apparent surprise that “[n]ot once does she indicate that she feels any loathing or even dislike for her seducer” (van Fossen xlviiii). Given Anne’s role as a “[p]liant and duteous” wife who deems it her “duty to receive [her husband’s] friend” (IV.82), it would not be appropriate for her to express antipathy towards Wendoll. I suggest it is far more pertinent that she never expresses any desire for him.

Wendoll’s initial demand for Anne’s silence so that he can express his love without interruption suggests that he expects her to object to, not desire, an adulterous affair. However, he then adds a contradictory (and impossible command given Frankford’s absence) that she “tell [her] husband” before outlining what might happen to him as a result of her speech:

Go, tell your husband; he will turn me off,
 And I am then undone. I care not, I—
 ’Twas for your sake. Perchance in rage he’ll kill me.
 I care not—’twas for you. Say I incur
 The general name of villain through the world,
 Of traitor to my friend—I care not, I.
 Beggary, shame, death, scandal, and reproach—
 For you I’ll hazard all. What care I?
 For you I’ll live, and in your love I’ll die. (VI.131-39)

This speech is Anne’s undoing; even though she did not desire to hear it, her very openness to it leaves her vulnerable to Wendoll’s persuasive ability. She is, as Wentworth

28. At the end of this speech there is a syntactically ambiguous phrase that raises questions about Anne’s agency in this “affair.” Anne says, “I am his wife / That in your power hath left his whole affairs; / It is to me you speak?” (VI.123-25). While the suggestion is that Frankford has given Wendoll power over everything, this is not what Anne actually says; “that” in her speech has no other referent than “I . . . his wife” and the implication is that she is the one who places Frankford’s affairs “in [Wendoll’s] power.”

writes, “ravished . . . by [Wendoll’s] artful rhetoric” (154). In his speech, Wendoll names consequences of a speech she cannot make, but Anne accepts his construction of events as fact, and it is his suggestion of what will happen to him if she tells her husband that “move[s her] . . . to passion and to pity” (140). Wendoll therefore succeeds as a speaker in provoking a particular emotion in his listener, despite his listener’s initial reluctance to hear him. Furthermore, he achieves this in much the same way as Iago arouses Othello’s jealousy: by the use of rhetorical technique and by infecting Anne with his own apparent passion. Wendoll’s speech is divided into four parts, each one followed by the repeating phrase “I care not” which is altered to “What care I?” in the final repetition. Moreover, he draws on the rhetorical figures of *epanalepsis* (beginning and ending a clause or sentence with the same word) and *plöche* (the repetition of a word for amplification or an appeal to pity) when he declares, “I care not, I.” Wendoll also uses *hyperbole* as he suggests the consequences of Anne’s imagined speech to be “[b]eggary, shame, death, scandal, and reproach—,” *hyperbole* that climaxes with his final rhyming couplet, two parallel phrases (*parison*) in which he claims he will “hazard all” for her, live for her, and die in her love.²⁹ It is little wonder that Anne is “move[d] . . . to passion and to pity” by such a speech.

Regardless of Overbury’s belief that a good woman could simply avoid hearing such “luscious tales” (C4^f), and the implication therefore that Anne could have simply “stopped” her ear to Wendoll’s declaration of love, a listener’s ability to prevent being infected by a speaker was questionable, as already noted in relation to Othello. Wayne Rebhorn notes that in the early modern period the will of a listener was considered both “free and enslaved,” as listeners were believed to “*freely* give . . . assent to the orator’s words” even as it was also thought that they had “no choice but to do so, being compelled by the speaker’s rhetorical prowess” (93). Nevertheless, even though Anne attempts to stop Wendoll’s speech, and even though her ability to prevent her response of “passion”

29. The sexual pun implicit in Wendoll’s closing statement that he’ll “die” in Anne’s love undercuts his otherwise rhetorically earnest declaration of undying love.

and “pity” may be limited, she can also be considered a “credulous Creature,” admonished by Brathwait to beware of the men “who can tip their glozing tongues with Rhetoricall protests . . . for the purchase of an vnlawfull pleasure” (*English Gentlewoman* 143). As a result, despite her lack of aural and sexual appetite, she is perceived by other characters, even those somewhat sympathetic to her, to be like Eve seduced by Satan. She may show little aural appetite for what she hears, but her ear is still the “devil’s gateway” (Norris 196). Indeed, as Wendoll himself notes as he goes to kiss her, her acquiescence is “[t]he path of pleasure and the gate to bliss” (VI.162), and several characters liken Wendoll to Satan. Frankford’s servant Nicholas remarks, “It is that Satan hath corrupted her, / For she was indeed fair and chaste” (VI.179-80), and Anne’s own brother, Sir Francis, later declares, “O that same villain Wendoll! ’Twas his tongue / That did corrupt her” (XVII.12-13).³⁰ That Anne sees herself as a potential Eve is also apparent, not only in her remark that Wendoll’s “tongue . . . hath enchanted [her]” (159-60), but also in her awareness that her “soul is wand’ring and hath lost her way” and that she is now caught in a “maze” which is a “labyrinth of sin” (151, 160-61).³¹

Neither Anne nor Wendoll appears on stage again until the card game that follows Nicholas’s revelation to Frankford of his wife’s adultery, another scene in which food is foregrounded. At the opening of scene VIII, the servants are shown clearing the table and reference is made to those who have “supp’d there tonight” (5-6). Nicholas, preparing to tell Frankford about Anne’s adultery, notes that he has no appetite for food: “I cannot eat, but had I Wendoll’s heart / I would eat that” (16-17). It is only after he has unburdened himself of what he knows, “eas’d [his] stomach,” that he can “go fill [his] stomach” (92-3). Nicholas’s reluctance to tell his master of his suspicions is well founded given

30. When Wendoll approaches her coach in scene XVI, Anne declares, “O for God’s sake fly! / The Devil doth come to tempt me ere I die” (107-08), reinforcing the view of Wendoll as the devil.

31. Anne’s “labyrinth” echoes Jane Anger’s admonition to women that “[a]t the end of mens faire promises there is a Laberinth” (C4^v).

Frankford's reaction. According to William Gouge, Frankford's response to his servant's news is appropriate. Gouge notes that "husbands and wives must not have their eares wide opened to heare every tale and report that shall bee brought to one against the other, but rather shew themselves displeased and offended with them that are ready to relate things of evill report" (251). Frankford's anger at Nicholas when he first learns that "Wendoll is a villain" who "[e]njoys my mistress and dishonours you" (VIII.50, 55) is therefore a fitting response. Certainly, such anger is unlikely to encourage tale-telling. Moreover, he notes his own incredulity: "It is as hard to enter my belief / As Dives into Heaven" (34-64) before demanding evidence and declaring, "Till I know all, I'll nothing seem to know" (111).³² Nonetheless, while Frankford declares, "Their wonted favours in my tongue shall flow" (110), this is hardly the case in the scene that follows. The news of his friend's betrayal and his wife's infidelity, even before it is proven, has already infected him.³³

The talk is ostensibly about the card game, and Anne and Wendoll's awareness of the sexual innuendo present in their conversation is debatable, though it could be emphasized in production through knowing looks and gestures (van Fossen xliii).³⁴ Anne's first question, addressed to her husband, seems innocent enough. It is Wendoll's

32. In contrast to Nicholas who considers Wendoll a "Satan," Frankford sees him as Judas and himself as Christ: "But he, that Judas that hath borne my purse, / And sold me for a sin" (VIII.102-03; XIII, 76-77). He therefore considers himself the innocent sacrifice even as he refuses to tolerate "these wrongs" (VIII.104).

33. There are obvious links between Frankford's request for evidence, his commentary on the card game, and his resulting headache and Othello's reaction to Iago's suggestion of Desdemona's adultery and his reading of the scene between Cassio and Desdemona. In addition, Othello and Frankford think of Iago and Wendoll as "honest" (*Othello* 1.3.293; 2.3.6, 160; 3.3.247; 5.1.32; 5.2.161; *A Woman Killed* VIII.72). The interesting difference is that Frankford rejects the "ocular proof" Othello demands (*Othello* 3.3.365), telling Nicholas, "Thy eyes may be deceiv'd" (VIII.82).

34. While Wendoll might well understand and enjoy the sexual banter around the card table, Anne's awareness of, and participation in, the sexual innuendo would appear inconsistent with her later claim that she only yields to Wendoll "through fear" (XI.113).

objection that when the husband and wife are paired he must “sit out” (VIII.126) that spawns Frankford’s objection to the “match” and prompts a series of asides in which he interprets the discussion as referring not to cards, but to his cuckolding. He moves from noting that he will determine who is playing false (138) to claiming a mere thirteen lines later, in reference to his wife, “My saint’s turn’d devil” (151). Immediately before he leaves the game, he concludes that Wendoll “robb’st me of my soul, of her chaste love; / In thy false dealing thou hast robb’d my heart” (183-84). While Frankford’s statement answers the rhetorical question Wendoll poses when he is first struggling with his desire for Anne: “Hast thou the power straight with thy gory hands / To rip thy image from his bleeding heart?” (VI.45-46), it overlooks the question about who is Frankford’s heart: Frankford implies that Anne is his “soul” and “heart,” and that Wendoll has stolen this from him. Wendoll admits that he is indeed responsible for traumatizing Frankford’s heart, but he believes his “image”—not Anne’s—is part of that heart. Furthermore, Wendoll may be responsible for *stealing* Frankford’s heart, but it was first damaged by what Frankford hears, as he notes himself. Brabantio might claim that he has never heard of the “bruised heart [being] piercèd through the ear” (*Othello* 1.3.218), but Frankford has quite a different opinion. On hearing Nicholas’s news, he declares, “Thou hast kill’d me with a weapon whose sharp’ned point / Hath prick’d quite through and through my shivering heart” (VIII.56-57). Nicholas’s accusations have altered the way Frankford thinks of his wife and friend. Now, he hears adultery in their conversation and this aural “proof” prompts him to set his trap.

Prior to Frankford’s departure, which occurs despite Anne’s objections and her pleas that he at least take Wendoll with him, her husband makes yet another invitation to his friend, this time to “use / The very ripest pleasure of my house” (XI.63-64).³⁵ His meaning, given his own penchant for hearing sexual innuendo in the language of others, appears unmistakable. Certainly, Wendoll appears to relish his new position, noting, “I

35. I agree with Jennifer Panek’s reading of Anne’s appeals to her husband as genuine and grounded in her wish not to be subjected to Wendoll’s advances (Panek 357).

am husband now in Master Frankford's place / And must command the house" (88-89). Being a good husband means satisfying one's appetite—eating—at least according to Frankford, who has earlier told Nicholas to "[p]lay the good husband, and away to supper" (VIII.30). It is therefore no surprise that the first thing Wendoll does as "husband" is to tell Anne that they will "sup . . . / . . . in your private chamber" (XI.91-2), an act that clearly brings together oral consumption and sexual activity. When Anne reprimands him for being "too public in [his] love," she reminds him that she is "Master Frankford's wife" (93-94), a title now fraught with complication if Wendoll regards himself as "Master Frankford." Cranwell's request that he "be spar'd from supper" (97) is not only convenient for Wendoll's intentions and possibly an indication of Cranwell's collusion (with either Frankford or Wendoll), but may also be a result of his own awareness of what "supper" actually entails.³⁶ Even as Anne attempts to maintain, or at least return to, the role of chaste wife, the men around her undermine her ability to do so. Wendoll happily anticipates a fulfilment of his oral and sexual appetite, that he will now "be profuse in Frankford's richest treasure" (116); Anne is filled with misgiving. She is aware of her "sin" and is "full of fear" (103-4), and notes that what she previously "granted" "for want of wit," she now "yield[s] through fear" (112-13). Having failed earlier to close her ears to Wendoll's hyperbolic predictions of his downfall, if not his declaration of love, she cannot close her body to him now. Her initial aural openness and credulity—even in the absence of desire—becomes sexual openness.

While Anne is constructed in the terms of the play as being sexually open to Wendoll, even though she has no desire for him, the spatial representation of Wendoll's sexual penetration as shown through Frankford's path of discovery towards the lovers in his bedchamber suggests her relative closure. Frankford provides a detailed description of the passage taken by Nicholas and himself as they move to his "polluted bedchamber, /

36. When Cranwell later tells Sir Francis et al. "[w]hat [he] was witness of," he notes, "It was my fortune to lodge there that night" (XVII.10), an equally ambiguous statement of his position on the events in the Frankford household.

Once my terrestrial heaven, now my earth's hell" (XIII.14-15). He describes how they have harnessed their horses beyond the gates, unlocked the "outward gate" (8), opened the "hall door," and crossed the "withdrawing chamber" (9), before coming to "the last door" (23). The penetration of master and servant into "[t]he place where sins in all their ripeness dwell—" (16) not only retraces the path taken by Wendoll when he came to the house on horseback, entered and eventually made his way to the bedchamber, but it also emphasizes how the bedchamber is symbolic of Anne's body itself, a body that is only accessed by Frankford and Wendoll.³⁷ The implication, then, is that entry into the female body requires secrecy and the complicity of other men rather than the woman actually involved. Moreover, the female sexual organs are inscribed as a place of sin.³⁸ In addition, Frankford's discovery of the lovers in the bedroom emphasizes how Anne's penetrability leads to a violation of the marriage and therefore of the entire household, including himself, the marriage being central to the order of the household, and his own position within it, in the same way as the bedchamber is centred within the house (Comensoli 73). After the discovery of his wife's adultery, Frankford sees himself as infected or "tainted" (XIII.86). As Lieblein points out, Wendoll's penetration of Anne, his invasion of the bedchamber and marriage, also pierces Frankford (192). However, as noted earlier, this piercing actually occurs prior to Frankford's discovery of the pair in his bedroom, when Nicholas tells him of the adultery.

37. When Frankford enters the room, he does so alone. Nicholas remains onstage, outside the door. In addition, because the room is offstage, the audience is not privy to its penetration.

38. Not only is this apparent in the reading of Eve's temptation and the Fall of humanity as linked to sexual intercourse, but it is also pervasive in the culture as apparent in Spenser's description of Duessa in Book I of the *Faerie Queene* (Spenser I.iii.41.1-4).

After he discovers Anne in bed with Wendoll, Frankford interrogates his wife as to why she “playd’st the strumpet” XIII.108),³⁹ and his questions suggest that he believes she is motivated by some type of “want” (107), a desire for something she does not possess. He even suggests that it might be the same “want” or consuming desire that would also prompt her liking for “every pleasure, fashion, and new toy,” items which he declares he has provided “even beyond [his] calling” (109-10). He therefore implies not only that his wife has an appetite for wasteful trifles and that he has appeased her desire even spending in excess of his means, but also that this same appetite has provoked an unsanctioned sexual desire in her. Anne, though, has no explanation for her behaviour (Lieblein 192). Her actions have not been a result of unfulfilled desire; she has simply “lost her way” in the “labyrinth” of what Jane Anger would define as Wendoll’s “faire promises” (C4^v). Nonetheless, Frankford now regards Anne as “spotted” because of her openness to Wendoll and fears that “her adult’rous breath” may affect the children “[w]ith her infectious thoughts” (XIII.124, 126-27). While he assumes that Anne’s openness to Wendoll is predicated on her desire or appetite, despite her inability to put her “want” into words, he fails to consider how his own openness to, and desire for, Wendoll may have aided in the disruption of his marriage. Frankford is, after all, the one that initially “[e]ntreat[ed Wendoll] in” (IV.26); he is the one who not only has insisted on feeding Wendoll, but who also “cannot eat without [him]” (VI.40). Such interdependence suggests that Frankford, like Othello, places his friend in the position that should be filled by his wife (Panek 366). McQuade argues that Frankford fails to see his wife as a companion, valuing her only for her ornamental qualities. Instead his relationship with Wendoll has the “intimacy and affection that Protestant theologians claimed should be devoted to one’s spouse.” Through their mutual feeding, “the two men . . . have become one flesh” (242). Moreover, Wendoll appears to feed his friend through

39. Othello, of course, applies the same epithet a number of times to Desdemona (*Othello* 4.2.84; 5.2.84, 86). Frankford also iterates the label (*A Woman Killed* XIII.152) and Anne echoes her husband (XIII.132; XVII.78).

the ear, for Frankford especially enjoys Wendoll's conversational ability, claiming he "[d]iscourses well" (IV.31). Frankford even admits that he has "preferr'd [Wendoll] to a second place / In my opinion and my best regard" (IV.34-35). Second place was, at least nominally, the position awarded a wife and, while Frankford may mean that Wendoll is second to Anne, he does not make this clear.⁴⁰

Anne may be adulterous in displacing her husband with Wendoll, but her husband, "the most perfect'st man," may have committed the first offence.⁴¹ Long before Anne agrees to an affair, Wendoll notes that Frankford is the one "[t]o whom [his] heart is join'd and knit together" (VI.50). Nevertheless, Frankford does not acknowledge any fault on his part.⁴² He does not ask for time to be rolled back, "to call back yesterday" (XIII.53) to when he first asked Wendoll in, or even to when Wendoll made his first overtures to Anne, but rather to Anne's "first offence" (61). Furthermore, there is evidence that Frankford's failure to acknowledge his own part in his wife's affair may have been apparent to Heywood's audience. *The Covrt of Good Counsell*, published in 1607, notes that "the greatest part of the faults committed by wiues in this age, take the beginning from the faults of their husbands, who for the most part require of their wiues, such an exact obseruing of the Lawes of Mariage, but they themselues make no accompt

40. The idea that both Anne and Wendoll have "second place" in Frankford's affections unites them even prior to their affair. Lieblein sees them both as being obsessed with Frankford and notes how they persistently consider the affair in terms of their betrayal of him (190). Just as Anne's "perfections" are considered a cause of iniquity by Wendoll, so Frankford's perfections, as they prompt the excessive love of his wife and friend, might be considered a cause of sin.

41. Frankford's displacement of Anne with Wendoll offers yet another similarity between him and Othello who displaces Desdemona with Iago.

42. While both Nicholas and Sir Francis consider Wendoll primarily responsible for Anne's downfall, Frankford ignores his former friend's culpability once he has chased the adulterer from his house. McQuade argues that Frankford cannot acknowledge Wendoll's guilt, because he would then be required to admit to his own part in his wife's adultery (249).

of them" (C2^f). We do not see Frankford explicitly make "such an exact observing of the Lawes of Mariage," but he overlooks the fact that Anne's adultery may "take the beginning from [his] fault" of supplanting her with his friend. However, while Frankford fails to acknowledge his own desire for and openness to Wendoll, his punishment, particularly of Anne, signifies his closure. He notes that he had previously "lodge[d her] in [his] bosom" (XIII.13), but from now on he is closed to both his friend and his wife. His punishment of the pair, though, demonstrates a double standard. Having been restrained by a maid from killing Wendoll, Frankford is of the opinion that Wendoll's guilty conscience will be sufficient punishment:⁴³

When thou record'st my many courtesies
And shalt compare them with thy treacherous heart,
Lay them together, weight them equally,
'Twill be revenge enough. (XIII.72-75)

In contrast, he is not content to leave Anne to the punishment of her own guilt. Instead, even as he determines that he will provide for her physical needs, he declares that she is now dead to him: "we will henceforth be / As we had never seen, ne'er more shall see" (XIII.179-80). Such a sentence, he claims, will "torment [her] soul / And kill [her] even with kindness" (155-56).

There was a wide disparity in early seventeenth-century England between the penalty many thought adultery deserved and the punishment actually meted out by the ecclesiastical courts that dealt with the matter. While Thomas Becon's "Homily Against Whoredom and Adultery," which proclaimed adultery deserved death, was required reading in all churches (Bond 192), the harshest sentence actually given for the offence was for the couple involved to perform public penance dressed in white sheets (Atkinson

43. Wendoll's sense of guilt may not last long. While he notes he "live[s] to want and woe" (XVI.124), only a dozen lines later he looks forward to when, "[m]y worth and parts being by some great man prais'd," he can return and "in court be rais'd" (135-36).

19).⁴⁴ Many adulterers, then, found themselves in the same situation as Wendoll and, while the relatively light punishment may have encouraged them to be thankful for their merciful treatment and made their guilt an even heavier burden as Frankford suggests, it may have also led to the perception of the law as “a mere scarecrow” that did nothing to discourage adulterous relationships (Bond 199). Nonetheless, it was not acceptable for aggrieved husbands to gain their own revenge. Even when they pleaded provocation, husbands who murdered their adulterous wives were sentenced to death (Atkinson 19), and Frankford’s claim that he will not “martyr” Anne (XIII.153) suggests his own awareness of how others might then consider her unjustly punished (Panek 370). Moreover, as Jennifer Panek notes, Heywood’s own views of the appropriate punishment for adultery as expressed in *Gunaikeion* appear quite liberal (361).

Nevertheless, critics are divided over the severity of Frankford’s punishment of Anne. Some think it mild. Frederick Kiefer, for example, suggests that it “must have seemed generous to Heywood’s audience” (90), and Laura Bromley claims that if Frankford had failed to punish his wife, it would be “tantamount to condoning regicide” (271). Essentially, Frankford imposes the public penance most often applied in cases of adultery. Anne is forced to declare her guilt, note that she is a negative exemplum for other women, and hear her sentence in front of the household (XIII, 141-44; 150-51, 152-56).⁴⁵ Van Fossen also considers Frankford’s willingness to provide for Anne’s physical needs an act of true kindness, as an adulterous woman was likely to be ostracized following her public penance and left homeless and penniless. Van Fossen admits that Frankford’s words to Anne (XIII.152-85) “imply an apparent vindictiveness” but then

44. The opinion that adultery should be punished more severely grew in the first half of the seventeenth century and led to an Act of Parliament being passed in 1650 that instituted the death sentence for adultery. This act, however, was short-lived and the sentence was rarely enforced (Atkinson 20).

45. Citing the advice of conduct book writers on how husbands should admonish their wives in private, Panek argues that Frankford’s humiliation of Anne before the servants and children would have been considered inappropriate and needlessly cruel (377).

adds that they reflect a seventeenth-century sense of honour, noting that Anne accepts that Frankford “cannot be so base as to forgive [her]” (XIII.139; van Fossen xlv-v).⁴⁶ In contrast to Kiefer, Bromley, and van Fossen, other critics consider Frankford’s punishment of his wife unduly harsh. Comensoli, in direct opposition to van Fossen, argues that Frankford’s treatment “ensures that Anne has no future” (81); David Atkinson sees “more than a hint of cruelty” in it (23); Panek deems it to be “no more than the substitution of psychological brutality for physical” (370), and McQuade believes that Frankford’s language demonstrates “his wish to cause [Anne] pain” (248). I suggest that Frankford’s punishment of his wife is not only overly cruel, but that he also intends it to have far-reaching consequences. The issue is less that he intends to kill his wife “with kindness,” and more that he plans to “torment [her] soul.” His sentence has eternal consequences, hence his need to have it “regist’red in Heaven already” (XIII.152). His punishment of his wife, then, not only distances Frankford from the title of “the most perfect’st man,” but also suggests that he has overstepped the bounds of his own authority and taken on the role of divine judge. It is perhaps for this reason that Cranwell, a neutral figure in the rest of the play, interrupts apparently to protest Frankford’s sentence of his wife (Comensoli 81; McQuade 248; Panek 370).

Frankford’s punishment of Anne effectively ensures both his own closure to her and allows Anne to maintain an appearance of chastity. She is most concerned that Frankford “mark not my face / Nor hack me with your sword” (XIII.98-99), and he agrees that he will not “mark [her] for a strumpet” (154). While Anne’s request suggests that she wants to retain at least the outward appearance of wholeness, despite her sexual penetration, it also echoes her previous apprehension that people will read her “offence” from her countenance. After her initial capitulation to Wendoll’s advances, she declares:

My fault, I fear, will in my brow be writ:
Women that fall not quite bereft of grace

46. Given that, in the subplot, Sir Charles’s sense of honour prompts him to prostitute his sister, I would suggest that Heywood is exploring just how concepts of “honour” lead to potentially dishonourable conduct. Anne’s words, therefore, may be considered ironic.

Have their offences noted in their face.
I blush and am asham'd. (VI.155-58)

Later, she sees herself as a “pale offender . . . full of fear” (XI.104) and, on her deathbed, asks her brother and Sir Charles, “Blush I not . . . / Can you not read my fault writ in my cheek?” (XVII.55-56). Given her belief in the inevitable outward sign of her sin, she is therefore amazed when Wendoll declares his love without any sign of shame:

O with what face of brass, what brow of steel,
Can you unblushing speak this to the face
Of the espous'd wife of so dear a friend? (VI.119-21)

Her request that she not be marked, but be allowed to go “[p]erfect and undeformed to [her] tomb” (XIII.100) is therefore somewhat ironic as it suggests that she, too, wants to have the appearance of guiltlessness despite her now public lack of chastity. Moreover, despite her repeated insistence that “offences” can be seen in the face, here she goes on to contrast physical wholeness with sexual wholeness or chastity. She declares that she would willingly lose a hand or breast if she could only regain her honour, implying that the correlation between physical appearance and chastity has been reversed with her sexual penetration. Physically whole, but no longer sexually chaste, she can have a perfect physical appearance or, to redeem her lack of chastity, she must be physically marred. She can no longer be “a fair [and] a chaste, and loving wife, / Perfection all” (IV.11-12).

Even as Anne requests that she maintain an appearance of physical wholeness, a semblance of perfection, her remorse for her sexual conduct is immediate and she appears to particularly regret her previous openness, noting that she “would [she] had no tongue, no ears, no eyes, / No apprehension, no capacity” (XIII.90-91). She wants to limit all sensory input and be the proverbial “[d]iscreet woman [who has] neither eyes nor ears” (Tilley W683). This desire, along with her later declaration that she will eat and drink no more, can be considered emblematic of her wish for complete physical closure: she will no longer “sup” with anyone, anywhere. Atkinson argues that Anne’s decision to starve herself to death suggests that she, in keeping with the Puritans, believes that adultery

should be severely punished and therefore “mortif[ies] her flesh in penance for a sin of the flesh, to pay for her former physical indulgence by physical abstinence” (25). In other words, she applies the death penalty she thinks she deserves. It also happens to be a method of dying that will allow her to remain apparently “perfect and undeformed.” Other critics, in keeping with Atkinson, see Anne’s starvation as repentance for her sin (Kiefer 89). Bromley argues that “[t]he courage and dignity with which Anne faces her death make her an example for others to follow” (274). Van Fossen goes further and claims that Anne’s starvation is the “atonement” or penance for her sin of adultery that leads to her forgiveness (xxx). Such views of Anne’s starvation overlook two issues, however. The first is that in terms of Protestant theology, penance through “works” is unconscionable. The second is that Anne’s self-imposed starvation results in her suicide and that, according to Christian theology, would lead to her eternal damnation (Panek 372), and even though this might be the desired thrust of Frankford’s sentence when he declares that he intends to “torment [Anne’s] soul,” there is no evidence that she also desires such eternal torment. Indeed, she believes that she is now destined for Heaven (XVII.82, 121). While several critics and possibly even Anne herself ignore the eternal consequences of her starvation, Jenkin at least is aware of the result of his mistress’s action, noting, “She hath plainly starved herself, and now she is as lean as a lath. She ever looks for the good hour” (XVII.35-37). Death is not simply a side effect of her penance, but Anne’s goal, as she is clearly eager for death, wanting only Frankford’s forgiveness before she dies. If Anne shows little evidence of her will or desire in life, she makes it clear that she desires death.

Despite the theological issues surrounding Anne’s suicide, the idea that her starvation is appropriate penance for her adultery permits a dramatic representation of the association between appetites. It also suggests that Anne submits to Frankford’s interpretation of her aural and sexual openness to Wendoll as based on desire. Her fast, then, can be considered her attempt to show that her desire or appetite is not insatiable, contrary to the popular concept of unrestrained female appetite used by writers such as

John Stubbs.⁴⁷ Remorseful for her previous openness, she now shows exemplary control over her oral appetite at least. She is no “gaping gulf.” Bryan argues that the food imagery in this play reflects the link between food and sexual activity that appears in literature as early as the Song of Solomon. It is the same link that has encouraged the reading of Eden’s “forbidden fruit” as sexual intercourse and which has prompted the close association of the deadly sins of Gluttony and Lust (10). Bryan goes on to note that food in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* specifically symbolizes the affair between Wendoll and Anne, and suggests that Anne’s death is an “appropriate culmination of the food symbolism throughout” (9). Meals occur at key points in the play, the most important one being the supper Wendoll insists upon sharing with Anne in her “private chamber,” and the servants are certainly aware of the metaphoric connection made here between eating and sexual intercourse as the subsequent discussion between Jenkin and Sisly indicates (Bryan 11-12). While such a reading of the food imagery in the play supports the notion that Anne’s self-starvation is a fitting way for her to show her repentance for what is deemed to be an excessive sexual appetite, it not only overlooks the problem of her suicide, but also fails to consider first, Anne’s failure to express any desire or appetite, and second, the complex effects of Anne’s starvation and how food use and abuse—control of one’s own appetite—can signify rebellion.

Anne’s declaration that “from this sad hour / [She] never will nor eat, nor drink, nor taste / Of any cates that may preserve my life” (XVI.101-03) is a vow that she will, from now on, exhibit closure. If aural, oral, and sexual appetites are frequently conflated into one undifferentiated desire, despite evidence to the contrary as we have seen in *Othello*, then Anne’s refusal even to taste anything demonstrates her complete closure to the outside world. Frankford may have removed her from his world and be closed to her, but she now goes about removing herself completely from the world. Near death, her

47. The paradox is that by suppressing her appetite for food, Anne gives full rein to her desire for death. Thus, even when severely restrained, the female appetite can still be considered insatiable.

sight failing, the only faculty that appears relatively undiminished is her hearing as she tells of her husband's arrival by the sound of his voice (XVII.73). If Wendoll's penetration of Anne begins through the ear and becomes conflated with her own oral appetite (at least in the terms of Bryan's reading of the play), then the process of closure, first to food and Wendoll (XVI.107), precedes the final closure of her ears that occurs with death. Anne's closure, while it mirrors that of Frankford towards her, is sufficiently extreme that it creates public sympathy for her. Frankford refuses to "martyr" his wife to avoid encouraging pity for her, so she does it herself. As a result, "[m]any gentlemen and gentlewomen of the country are come to comfort her" (XVII.37-38). In addition, her own closure forces Frankford to reconsider his refusal to be open to her: he visits her at the "just request" of her "loving neighbours" (44) and, reading evidence of her repentance in her refusal to eat, he opens himself to her, to her touch and to her voice, so that he once more accepts her as his wife and mother of his children, finally embracing her and showing his complete acceptance of her as she dies.

Frankford considers Anne's self-starvation a sign of her "sorrow and . . . penitence" (XVII.48) and, indeed, there is no question that Anne *is* penitent. While the use of fasting as penance would have smacked of "papacy" in the early Protestant church, there was a long history of advocating dietary restraint especially for women in the Christian church, and this did not stop with the Reformation as we have already seen with Brathwait's insistence that women abstain from "luscious fare." In *The Christian Man's Closet* (1581), Bartholemew Batty insists that a young woman should not be permitted to eat in public at "the feastes and banquettes of her Parentes, lest shee see such meates as shee might desire and lust after," but that she "eate, as that shee may be alwayes an hungred, that immediately after her meate" (T3^v). The roots of this insistence on restraining female oral appetite are found in the idea that the Fall resulted from the desire for "forbidden fruit." Early church writers claimed, "It was the desire of food that spawned disobedience; it was the pleasure of taste that drove us from Paradise" (Nilus, qtd. in Bynum 36). This is then echoed through the ages: Alan of Lille, writing in the

medieval period states, ““If Adam had fasted in paradise . . . , he would not have been exiled into damnation”” (qtd. in Bynum 44). Gluttony was therefore considered one of the worst sins for both men and women, particularly because it could lead to other vices such as impure thoughts and sexual immorality (216). Fasting was therefore advocated throughout church history as a method of controlling any tendency to “impurity” and was considered particularly appropriate for women (216). Jerome was one of the first Christian theologians to write a lengthy treatise addressed to women on food as a stimulus to licentiousness (79), and he began a long tradition of writers and preachers that advised women to limit their diets, particularly their consumption of meat and wine, as a way of reducing their sexual desire (79, 36-37). Fasting, however, had a twofold purpose. Not only was it necessary to “bridle lust,” to prevent future sin, but it was also required “to make satisfaction for sin” (47). Anne’s fast is seen by those around her to demonstrate both these purposes. It is a sign of her repentance for past sin and her present virtue, of her ability to suppress her “lust.”

While Anne’s fast can be linked to that of medieval visionaries of both sexes who aimed for a higher spirituality by repressing their carnality and denying themselves food, it can also be connected to the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-centuries accounts of girls who miraculously lived without food or drink (Gutierrez 83). Five of these pamphlets are known to have been published between 1589 and 1635, and the earliest details the *Notable and Prodigious Historie of a Mayden*, one Catherine Cooper of Schmidweiler, a young woman of twenty-six who had not eaten or drunk anything for several years following a fever subsequent to her attending a wedding away from home when she was fourteen (*Notable* 4). Much is made of Catherine’s cleanliness and her virtue. She is “void of any filthines” and does not void any type of excrement (5). In addition, she is praised as obedient and godly and, when her parents sought a remedy for her sickness, she “requested them not to do it, but to commend the whole matter to God, who was able to deliver her from this crosse” (4-5). Following careful questioning of Catherine, her family and neighbours, a physical examination, and fourteen days under

the watchful eyes of four women, it is determined that she “miraculously liueth through the singular, pure, and incomprehensible grace of almighty God” (12). While there are some obvious contrasts between Catherine Cooper and Anne Frankford in both the cause and effects of their starvation (Gutierrez 85), Anne’s refusal of food and drink, along with her rejection of sleep—another common factor noted in the accounts of “fasting girls”—inscribes her into this line of fasting virtuous women.

Given the repeated association of virtue with female starvation, at least within the context of the medieval accounts of fasting saints and the later pamphlets on young women who lived without food, one can understand the affirmation given by Anne’s family and friends to her “virtue” of starvation and their failure to consider the potential damnation she faces as a suicide.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Anne’s fast differs significantly from those of medieval saints and ailing young women because of the will that prompts it. Fasting may have signified virtue for the early church fathers, but it had to be done in moderation and undertaken for the right reasons. Indeed, by the thirteenth century, even as writers noted the exact protocol of fasting, they advocated spiritual over physical self-denial. Thomas Aquinas notes, “Rational man forfeits his dignity if he sets fasting before chastity, or night-watching before the well-being of his sense” (qtd. in Bynum 46). Clearly, Anne’s fast is far from moderate and her motivation is problematic. She simply “wish[es her]self dead” (XVI.61). Unlike those fasting for religious purposes and those who live by the “incomprehensible grace of almighty God,” Anne is not quelling her own desire by fasting, but fully expressing and realizing her will. Furthermore, like her husband who claims a higher authority with his proclamation that “[his] words are regist’red in Heaven already,” Anne too declares that her will is “writ in Heaven and decreed here” (XVI.65). In other words, Anne’s starvation is not simply a penitential reaction to Frankford’s sentence, but a rebellion against it, one that is asserted with the

48. When Frankford calls Wendoll a “Judas,” he notes the latter’s suicide and declares, “[P]ray, pray, lest I live to see / Thee Judas-like, hang’d on an elder tree” (XIII.76-77). He does not consider that his wife, not his friend, will commit suicide and that he will witness her death.

same divine authority as he has claimed. He may banish her to a manor “seven mile off” (XIII.165), but she can take herself out of this world and in a way that is deemed virtuous and which allows the name of wife to be restored to her.

Anorexia, as defined by the psychiatrist Hilde Bruch, is ““self-inflicted starvation in the absence of recognizable organic disease and in the midst of ample food”” (qtd. in Bynum 201) and Anne could, by this definition, be considered anorexic. Moreover, as Lilian Furst points out in her introduction to *Disorderly Eaters: Texts in Self-Empowerment*, the issue for anorexics is not simply limiting food intake. She writes, “[E]ating, like noneating, is a tool for power both over oneself and over one’s surroundings.” An eating disorder is therefore “a vehicle for self-assertion as a rebellion against a dominant ethos unacceptable to the persona. Whether the outcome is ultimately positively triumphant or negatively destructive is in the last resort immaterial to the disorderly eater” (4-6). Anne’s fast, therefore, may be a sign of rebellion and self-assertion, as well as a sign of repentance and virtue.⁴⁹ Historically, the control of food intake has been the one method of protest available to women. Caroline Walker Bynum notes that in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, food was the easiest thing over which a woman could exercise control. She notes that it was far harder to renounce family ties, avoid marriage, or reject the sexual overtures of a husband than it was to abstain from food (191), and while Anne’s self-starvation occurs a century later, there was little interim improvement in women’s ability to exercise control in these areas. Anne therefore appears to resort to self-assertion through the only method available to those without any other social recourse (Furst 6). In addition, it is, paradoxically, a method whereby she not only gains control of her own body, but also gains control of the entire

49. In reading Anne’s starvation as a sign of her self-assertion, I directly oppose Comensoli’s claims that Anne’s “self punishment has successfully suppressed power, self-assertion, and autonomy, all forms of control forbidden to women” (82). Gutierrez comes closer to reading Anne’s fast as self-assertion when she notes that, while “Anne does not consciously challenge the patriarchal status quo, she nevertheless takes the initiative from Frankford in devising her own punishment” (89).

situation. She not only ultimately removes herself from her husband's control through death, but also gets him to see her, something he had declared he would not do (XIII.180). She even gains control of his body, albeit temporarily, when he renames her his wife for, according the biblical tenets that governed marriage, a wife was deemed to have a right to her husband's body—for payment of the marital debt—in the same way as a husband had a right to his wife's body (1 Corinthians 7:4).

While a variety of reasons may lead a woman to attempt control through starvation, there are certain characteristics in “typical” anorexia, and these characteristics appear in some medieval and early modern women as well as in current records of anorexics.⁵⁰ For example, an anorexic woman often loathes her body and her refusal to eat may be a specific attempt at trying to control her sexuality (Bynum 202). In her examination of fasting medieval women, Bynum finds evidence that women abstained from food as a punishment for having had pleasurable sexual intercourse while others abstained to punish a body that had been an unwillingly participant in intercourse (215). Anne might therefore be deemed to fall into the category of a “typical” anorexic, given her desire to be rid of her body through death. Moreover, she can be seen as trying to control perception of herself as a sexual being. Anne's starvation limits her female sexual characteristics. As the body seeks to nourish itself it draws on its own stores of fat, which are found in the breasts and thighs in women, making the fasting female body more androgynous in shape. In addition, one of the first bodily functions to cease in fasting women is menstruation, effectively removing the primary sign of a woman's sexual maturity. In a culture in which chastity is constructed as anticipating its contrast, in which chaste closure anticipates openness and penetration, any sign of sexual maturity is a sign of vulnerability; it signifies the potential of, and the potential for, sexual intercourse. By

50. Bynum is careful not to medicalize the behaviour of fasting medieval women and declare them all anorexics. She notes that even at that time a distinction was made between supernatural fasts and those with natural causes—an inability to eat. She concludes that while some may have been anorexic, not all should be labelled as such (195-97).

fasting and eliminating the signs of sexual maturity, Anne redefines herself. She is no longer a fallen woman, one who is constructed as too open, but an asexual woman, one who is permanently closed. The change is even apparent on her face. Fearful that she will go to her grave “mark[ed] . . . for a strumpet,” she asks Sir Charles if he can see her “fault” in her blushing cheek, to which he replies, “Alas, good mistress, sickness hath not left you / Blood in your face enough to make you blush” (XVII.55-59). As she notes, “sickness like a friend my fault would hide” (60). Without blood to show her shame and without blood to show her sexual maturity, Anne is once again deemed chaste by her husband.

Frankford’s acceptance of Anne as a reformed wife is, however, tinged with irony when one considers that it results from the elimination of the sexual characteristics that previously defined Anne as marriageable. Once defined as a “spotted strumpet” (XIII.108, 124; XVII.78), she cannot be considered an acceptable wife until all potential for openness is removed and, no longer open, she can hardly be a wife. There are also further problems in reading Anne’s “desexed” body as a chaste body for, as Nancy Gutierrez points out, the very presence of Anne’s emaciated body in bed in the final scene is highly ambiguous. Gutierrez argues that “Heywood . . . makes Anne’s physical body the centerpiece of his final scene” (88) and points to the way attention directed at Anne’s physical appearance, her pallor, her weakness, as well as her presence in bed, the site of lovemaking, sexualizes the body. Gutierrez concludes that the final scene therefore “provides very mixed signals as to the real containment of woman’s sexuality, for the ostensible message of patriarchal domination is undercut by the unconscious awareness of the female body on the part of the male playwright” (89). Gutierrez’s comments, though, overlook the fact that there is no female body onstage to be sexualized. Rather, what is emphasized in Heywood’s final scene is the body of the boy actor playing Anne, a body that now more closely resembles the imagined emaciated, androgynous body of Anne, and which, being male, is as inappropriate for the body of Frankford’s wife as that of a starving, asexual woman. The way in which the costume of the starving virtuous woman

now both disguises and emphasizes the body of the male actor parallels the way in which Anne's refusal to eat, her suppression of her oral appetite, can be interpreted. Within the patriarchal society of the playworld (a society that echoes even as it might distort the early modern world beyond), her starvation is seen as a sign of female virtue. Anne is, after all, apparently repressing all desire. This outward virtue, however, may simply cover an essential rebellion: a refusal to remain within the boundaries prescribed for her.

Having been constructed as sexually insatiable because she fails to demonstrate complete aural closure, Anne exhibits the same total closure as her husband demonstrates when he sends her away. While Frankford's initial aural openness to Wendoll is predicated on his desire and is potentially more transgressive than Anne's, it is not conflated with his sexual desire. Indeed, his substitution of Wendoll for Anne is not criticized in the playworld. In contrast, not only is Anne's sexual openness considered a sign of her aural openness and the cause of her oral closure, but all three are assumed to signify a sexual desire or "want," even though Anne never expresses such a desire. As a woman, not only is her permeability, her openness to penetration, constructed as signifying *her* desire rather than the male desire for her, but also her appetite or desire is deemed undifferentiated and all-encompassing. According to both Nicholas and Sir Francis, listening to Wendoll leads to the corruption of Anne's chastity (VI.179-80; XVII.12-13); her vaginal penetration is thus associated with preceding aural penetration. Her later rejection of food then becomes a sign of sexual reformation, a suppression of sexual desire, and allows her to be redefined as a wife and once again welcomed into society, even though such complete closure as she now exhibits would normally prevent her from being a wife. Through the course of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, Anne therefore moves from "a good wife" to a "gaping gulf" to an "eternal virgin," depending on how her relative openness or closure is constructed by others. Moreover, each definition is potentially paradoxical: her extreme submission as a wife, her obedience to Frankford and any substitute he names, can be considered the cause of her adultery; as a supposedly sexually insatiable adulteress, she is incapable of expressing any desire, and

her final complete closure can be read as a sign of rebellion as much as a sign of penitence. Furthermore, Heywood fails to offer any clear direction for his audience regarding Anne's character, and while critics have wide-ranging opinions on how she may be "typed," she remains enigmatic. The difficulty in determining Anne's character is partly a result of her submissiveness, as this ironically contributes to her inability to fulfil the role of ideal wife in which she is initially cast. Like her "most perfect'st" husband, she is flawed. Nonetheless, her remorse and self-punishment are extreme given that her adultery results more from how she is acted upon than from her own actions. Her husband's enjoyment of Wendoll's "discourse" and "companion[ship]" (IV.31), and his accordance of "second place" (34) to Wendoll may have initiated the disruption of their marriage, but she is the one who is diagnosed as being too open, both sexually and aurally, and who becomes trapped in "the labyrinth of sin" (VI.161). Through his portrayal of Anne, Heywood demonstrates the complex position of women who find themselves caught in the "maze" (160) they might encounter as listeners in early modern society. It appears difficult to avoid and, once in, impossible to escape.

CHAPTER 5

PARENTAL ADVICE, OBEDIENT CHILDREN, AND POISONED EARS

In the last two chapters I have considered the cultural construction of listening, its potential for causing disease both to the individual and to society, as related specifically to gender: the dilemma of women, particularly wives, who were required to listen, to be open to the voice of their husbands, and yet accused of demonstrating unsanctioned desire when they failed to stop their ears to the voice of another man. Overbury might argue that a good woman could simply shut her ears to “lushious tales” (C4^r), but a listener’s ability to show such resistance to a speaker was questionable. As noted in chapter 4, listeners were deemed both “free and enslaved,” entrapped by a speaker’s rhetorical ability so that they freely agreed with what was said (Rebhorn 93). Nonetheless, as we have seen in the case of Desdemona, a woman with an open ear was commonly considered to be sexually open as well, and this association between aural openness and transgressive female sexuality is prevalent in the conduct literature and exploited in the domestic tragedy of the period. The drama, however, also explores other factors in female adultery, including the husband’s own potentially transgressive listening. For example, Anne Frankford may commit sexual adultery in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, but her husband John earlier demonstrates his own desire for Wendoll, what might be termed a form of aural adultery in that he expressly enjoys Wendoll’s conversation and companionship (IV.31), and this leads to him placing his friend in “second place” (34), “in the height of all his thoughts” (VI.38), the position that should be reserved for his wife. In addition, when Frankford refuses Anne’s request to remain at home at night he violates the advice of conduct book writers who note that a husband should be “more free, forward, and cheerefull . . . in granting his wives request then any others” (Gouge 369). Anne may transgress by failing to close her ears to Wendoll, but Frankford, like Othello, transgresses by failing to listen to his wife and by giving too much attention to another man. It can therefore be argued that the domestic government of these husbands falls because of their own transgressive listening. Just as the king’s physical ear may be the conduit through which the political body of government is

infiltrated and undermined, as shown in Marlowe's *Edward II*, so the husband's ear may be the orifice through which the "Hovseholde Gouvernement," to cite the title of Robert Cleaver's book, can be attacked and destroyed.

Conduct books have much to say not only about how wives should listen to their husbands, and less frequently about how husbands should attend their wives, but also about how children should listen to their parents, and in this chapter I want to explore the cultural construction of how children, even grown children, were expected to listen to their parents in a culture that repeatedly constructed the act of listening as potentially dangerous and an avenue for infection. As preachers of the period often argued, ears may be analogous to mouths in that they can take in spiritual nutrition just as the mouth takes in physical nutrition, but they can also demonstrate an equally wasteful appetite, wanting only gossip and novelties, or news, as shown by Jonson's *Sir Politic Would-be*. Moreover, like the food taken in by the mouth, the speech entering the ear may be poisoned leading to disastrous consequences for the hearer. As we have seen in *Othello*, Iago certainly imagines himself pouring "pestilence" into his general's ear (2.3.330), though the poison appears to be generated by Othello's own jealous imaginings that Iago then feeds. In contrast, the poison that abounds in *Hamlet* is both a literal poison that, according to the Ghost, enters the ear of Hamlet Senior and a figurative poison that infiltrates the ears of all the characters. Peter Cummings counts eighty-six images of hearing in the play and suggests that it can be read as "an innovative Renaissance text on the anatomy, function, physiology, psychomotor dysfunction, and both literal and metaphorical poisoning of hearing in human exchange" (83). In addition, Shakespeare's best known play not only explores aural poisoning in all its forms, but also examines the relationship between parents and children, as shown in the five sets of murdered fathers and avenging sons presented in the play,¹ and in the repeated representation of children

1. Eric Rasmussen lists the five pairs of fathers and sons as Hamlet, King and Prince; Fortinbras, Old and Young; Polonius and Laertes; Achilles and Pyrrhus; and Brutus, Marcus Junius and his son, the latter being evoked by Polonius's memory of having played Julius Caesar who "was killed i'th' Capitol. Brutus killed me" (3.2.93-94) (cont.).

listening to their parents or parent substitutes, most notably Hamlet attending to the Ghost and later Gertrude, Laertes and Ophelia listening to the advice of their father, and finally Laertes listening to Claudius. There is even an account of Fortinbras being counselled by his surrogate father, his uncle Norway. It might therefore be useful to consider how these representations of inter-generational listening relationships echo or distort the advice given to both parents and children in the conduct literature and in the literary genre spawned by the respect demanded for a parent's last words: the mothers' advice books and fathers' legacies, and what, if anything, such acts of listening have to do with aural poisoning.

Children: Listen and Obey

As we might anticipate, conduct book writers of the period are quick to advocate that children should listen to their elders and frequently draw on scriptural precedents to support their argument. Furthermore, these writers fail to distinguish between a minor and an adult child, an omission that suggests that the same rules of conduct apply, at least in theory, to children, regardless of their age. Peter de la Primaudaye, in his discussion of filial duty, notes that children "must harken unto their [father's] instructions, and be obedient to their instructions" and "not gainsay their deliberations and wils, no more than the will of God" (539).² In his discussion of Ephesians 6.1: "children obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right," Gouge points out the word "obey" not only comprises "all duties of children," but also "signifieth *with an humble submission to hearken*, that is, to attend and give heed to the commandements, reproofes, directions, and exhortations which are given to them" (133). Like their mothers, children were expected to listen to

1 cont. Rasmussen notes that Brutus's father, Marcus Junius, was murdered after he surrendered to Pompey, and that his son chose political expediency over revenge of his father's death.

2. Catherine Belsey notes that the view of the father as the head of the household not only echoed what was considered a divinely ordained pattern of universal order, but also led to frequent substitution of "father" for "parent," particularly in discussions of the fifth commandment and the need for filial obedience (156).

obey, and that act of listening had to be done in a particular way. In his discussion of the “Duties of Children,” William Gouge elaborates on how children should attend to their parents’ words: “The many exhortations given in Scripture unto children to *heare, hearken, give eare, give heed, marke, and observe* the words of their parents, doe imply the forenamed *silence* and *patience*: For they who ought to be *swift to heare* must bee *slow to speake*” (437). He adds that those who fail to keep quiet when their parents are speaking are also unlikely to obey their parents. Speech in such a situation becomes a sign of disobedience.

Gouge also specifies other types of behaviour that indicate disobedience. He lists “fretting,” “murmuring,” “flinging or slinking away,” and interruption. Children who behave in this manner not only fail to show sufficient respect for their parents, but also have little thought to “their owne good” (438). Even when parents are “long and tedious” in their speech, he insists that children must “indure it” (437), advice that Laertes, at least, appears to have taken to heart when he listens to Polonius’s seemingly redundant and long-winded advice while his shipmates wait for him (*Hamlet* 1.3.55-81). Not only does Laertes show appropriate respect for his father by breaking off his speech to his sister when his father enters, but he also listens to the older man without interruption.³ Only when Polonius signals the end of his speech with “Farewell,” does Laertes speak and then it is to “*humbly . . . take [his] leave*” (81-82; emphasis added).⁴ Laertes’ respect for his father is, according to Richard Brathwait, to be expected, for “there is an inbred

3. Gouge defines the “breaking off speech” when a parent enters the room and remaining quiet while a parent is speaking as “the two branches of silence” required of children (437).

4. All references to *Hamlet*, unless otherwise stated, are to *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: Norton, 1997). This edition presents the 1623 Folio edition of *Hamlet* with the passages from Q2 that do not appear in F1 clearly identified. A consideration of the relationship between the three distinct texts, Q1, Q2, and F1, is beyond the scope of this discussion. The shorter Q1 edition omits many of the references to ears and hearing that occur in the other two texts, but it is difficult to say whether this is a purposive omission or simply a result of the text’s brevity.

filiall feare in Children to their Parents, which will beget in them more attention in hearing, and retention in holding what they heare” (*English Gentlewoman* 183). In other words, children are predisposed to listen to their parents. Hamlet, by contrast, with his muttered aside, “A little more than kin and less than kind” (1.2.65) makes clear simply by his act of speaking, that he does not regard Claudius as a father-substitute and is not inclined to listen to or obey him. Joan Hartwig notes that while we may overlook the implicit comparison of the father-son relationship between Polonius and Laertes and Claudius and Hamlet, the first clearly acts as a foil to the second (216). Hamlet refuses to consider Claudius as a substitute father, and even reinforces his rejection of Claudius by his pointed pledge of obedience to his mother: “I shall in all my best obey you, madam” (120). He refuses to state that he will obey Claudius.

While conduct book writers insist that children should listen to and obey their parents, their advice is directed at the parents—their readers—and not the children. This focus in itself suggests that parents need to be taught how to encourage appropriate behaviour in their children. They, too, must heed the advice of others. Furthermore, Brathwait, among others, suggests that parents as well as children need to be instructed on how to behave: he tells them that they need to behave appropriately as “there is no *instruction* more moving, than the example of your liuing” (*English Gentlewoman* 183). Gouge agrees that it is not “enough to tell . . . children what they ought to doe,” but neither is it sufficient to be a good example. He writes, “[Parents] must adde admonition; and, as it were, beat into their childrens heads the lessons which they teach them: that so they make a deeper impression in their hearts.” His own admonition of his readers, his metaphoric “as it were” beating continues as he concludes that parental instruction will thus become like nails “fast knocked in” that “cannot easily be pluckt out” (557). Cleaver, is more positive and praises parents who devote themselves to the “godly education and vertuous bringing vp of their children” (258) and suggests a milder approach, noting that “one must heare what the offender can say in his defence, and not disdaine to heare him, . . . and when his defence is made by equitie, to allow, or disallow the same” (48). Cleaver, in keeping with his more moderate tone, advises parents not

simply to instruct their children, but also to consider carefully how they should speak to their children when doing so. In a metaphor reminiscent of those used to describe the physiology of hearing, and on one of the rare occasions when a child's age is considered, Cleaver reminds parents that when they "beginne to frame and bend their children in their tender youth to vertue, . . . that a seale entereth deepest into softest waxe" (255). As a result, he argues, parents "must bee carefull, that they do not speake or tell any foolish tales, bawdie rimes, or vngodly speeches before their children: least they infect their tender wittes with follie and astonishment." He then adds that not only should parents be careful about what they say to their children, but also about what others say: "[I]t is the Parents dutie," he believes, "to restraine their children from haunting and conuersing, with such as bee vicious, peruerse, & wicked" (255). Children must listen to their parents, but clearly parents are required to ensure that their children only hear what is appropriate.

The majority of parents are expected to have their children's best interests at heart and to bring them up in an appropriate manner; however, conduct book writers, even as they imply that parents need to be told how to behave and how to raise children, also acknowledge that some parents are "wicked." Gouge therefore shifts from advising parents to warning children that, regardless of their parents' behaviour, they still need to show "reverend respect" (Gouge 444), and to defend their parents whenever they hear negative comments or rumours about them. Gouge advises the children to "interpret in the better sense things doubtfull" and "reprove them that slander their parents" (441). Furthermore, while children were required to defend their parents while they were living, offspring were expected to be even more protective of parents' reputations once those parents were dead: "for then there is no hope, no possibility that parents should doe any thing to right their own wrong in that kinde: it lyeth therefore upon children to doe it" (486). Gouge, though, admits that just as parents may be negligent in their duties, so children can fail in their responsibilities and, when their parents are deceased, "take occasion . . . both to open their eares to receive any ill reports of them, and also to open their mouthes to speake ill of them: then blazing abroad all their infirmities, and stretching their ill reports of their parents beyond the lists of truth" (486). Parents may not

always behave as they should, but neither did children always demonstrate the necessary loyalty and respect filial duty required of them. Nonetheless, Gouge suggests that there may be times when it is appropriate for children not to heed their parents. As he focuses specifically on the error of parents who demand that their children revenge wrongs done to them, his discussion on this topic is particularly relevant to an examination of *Hamlet*. He claims that it is “unlawful” for children to seek such revenge, arguing that this demand for vengeance is “*Heathen*.” He notes that “some presse [revenge] so farre upon children as they affright them with their parents *Ghost*, saying, that if they neglect to revenge their parents wrongs, their Ghost will follow them, and not suffer them to live in quiet, but molest them continually” (488). Gouge’s vehement censure of parents who want their children to punish their enemies acknowledges first, that parental demand for revenge was not uncommon, and second, that such demands, most likely to be made when parents were beyond seeking their own revenge, had a particular power.

Indeed, much stress was placed on a dying parent’s last words. Proverbial lore held that “[d]ying men speak true” (Tilley, M514). Brathwait notes that “the words of dying men are precious even to strangers” (*English Gentleman* 440), and that those of “a devout dying man . . . cannot but bee an especially motive to the hearer, of *Mortification*” (441).⁵ In contrast to Gouge’s warning about a possible deathbed demand for revenge, Brathwait considers such a scene to be an opportunity for others to gain an awareness of their own mortality. Moreover, if the words of a dying man could move a stranger, how much more could they move a son or daughter? Gouge notes, that of all the speeches a person might hear, “[t]he words of a dying parent are commonly most regarded: his last words doe make a deepe impression.”⁶ He therefore advocates that parents should give

5. A dying man’s words were considered to carry so much weight that when giving his son advice in *The Fathers Blessing*, James I “assume[s] the person of a graue and learned Gentleman, from whose mouth vpon his deathbed, his Children kneeling before him, his wife and friendes heauy Spectators about him, he thus opened his mouth vnto them” (5).

6. Gouge, with his choice of pronoun, reflects the shift noted by Belsey as he moves silently in this passage from discussing the speech of “a dying parent” to a consideration of a father’s final words.

some thought to their final speech, considering it as a golden opportunity for parents to give children “good instructions” (577). He argues that this final speech is “[t]he last duty which parents owe to their children” (576), and that it demonstrates a parent’s “true affection, and earnest desire of his childrens good: for now they cannot thinke that he seeketh his own ease, and profit, more then their good” (577). Thomas Bentley, writing earlier in 1582, also considers deathbed instruction as a parent’s final duty and insists that parents “call their chyldren before them . . . to give them ghostly admonitions, and godly lessons” (qtd. in Young 186). Gouge places so much emphasis on a parent’s final speech that he suggests parents actually prepare a speech beforehand. He advocates that they consider “on the one side, what evils their children are most prone unto, what temptations they are most assaulted withall, what snares they are most like to fall into; and on the other side, what vertues and graces are most needfull for them, and wherein they faile most & accordingly they must order and frame their last words” (577).

Gouge’s suggestion that parents should prepare their final words demonstrates the way that deathbed speeches operate within the same three time frames as written wills and legacies. Wendy Wall notes that these documents imagine the future, are expressed in the present tense, and represent a voice from the past. She goes on, “The voice that speaks is strangely present and absent, a ghostly corpse that undergoes a reckoning and asserts fervently held beliefs and desires. The very power of this speaking position rests in its doubleness: in the anticipated movement toward death, in the sanctity of the final departure” (285-86). In other words, the power of a parent’s final words, whether spoken in a deathbed speech, or written in a legacy, is based on the anticipated or realized absence of the body that expresses those words. It is this “erasure” (286) that grants dying parents what Wall calls an “invisible moral authority” (290-91). As an example of such authority, Wall cites Holinshed’s account of the death of Mary Sidney’s mother, in which he praises her “good speech . . . and notable eloquent deliverie” that held her auditors spellbound: “the same almost amazed and astonished the hearers” (qtd. in Lamb 122-23). Hamlet is, of course, also “amazed and astonished” by the “ghostly” speech of the spirit he names his father (1.4.26). The ghost’s voice speaks from beyond the grave to

recreate for Hamlet the supposed scene of his father's death. If the words of a dying parent carried a particular authority, how much more authority might be credited to words apparently uttered by the ghost of that parent?

Fatherly Advice

The fascination with the power of a dying parent over his or her listeners not only engages with the culture's preoccupation with death and the need to prepare for the next world, but also likely contributed to the tremendous popularity of the literary genre of parents' advice books (Brown v). The tradition of a father writing advice for his son was well established by the early seventeenth century, though it was more often an expression of a desired ideal code of behaviour than an indication of how sons actually conducted themselves (Louis Wright ix). Wendy Wall suggests that such an "advice epistle" was a rite of passage, with the father marking his son's entry into adulthood by demonstrating his own rhetorical skill (295-96). However, just as all parental instructions, particularly those relating to revenge, are not always good for children to follow, so this genre presents the potential cross-purpose of promoting rhetorical self-expression for the father under the guise of advice for a son. Lord Burghley, for example, makes clear his religious beliefs in his letter to his son Thomas when the young man leaves for a European tour with his tutor in 1561. Burghley's aim is to instruct his son in prayer and scripture reading, but as Burghley's editor notes, the advice had little effect on Thomas Cecil's predilection for drinking, gambling and promiscuity (Louis Wright xiv-v).⁷ Thomas's failure to heed his advice did not deter Burghley from writing *Certain Precepts for the Well Ordering of a Man's Life* in the early 1580's for his second son, Robert Cecil, who later became Principal Secretary to Elizabeth and, when she was succeeded by James, one of the king's most trusted advisors. Burghley considered his ten precepts to be a

7. The discrepancy between a son's behaviour and his father's advice is perhaps one reason why Polonius commissions Reynaldo to spy on Laertes. The "forgeries" Reynaldo is to use when determining the truth of Laertes' behaviour are the ones exhibited by Thomas Burghley: the "usual slips / . . . most known / To youth and liberty": "gaming . . . drinking, fencing, swearing, / Quarrelling, drabbing" (2.1.22-27).

supplement to the ten commandments, and they were sufficiently popular that they survive in a number of manuscript versions and were published several times after Burghley's death (Louis Wright xvii-iii).

Burghley's advice is remarkably pragmatic. He begins by advising Robert to "use great providence and circumspection in the choice of thy wife" and compares it to a life or death situation on the battlefield where "man can err but once" (Louis Wright 9).⁸ His second precept is perhaps based on his own experience of child rearing. In a glance to a wider readership, he tells parents that children should be raised "in learning and obedience yet without austerity; praise them openly, reprehend them secretly" (10), and he suggests that many people go astray because of either the "foolish cockering" or the "overstern carriage" (11) of their parents. He does not comment on whether these tendencies may have been a reason for Thomas's wild youth, but he does add that daughters should be married early "lest they marry themselves" and that sons should not "pass the Alps, for they shall learn nothing but pride, blasphemy, and atheism" (11), the latter perhaps a coda to his experience with Thomas.⁹ Burghley goes on to advise his son Robert never to lend money to friends, a remark that echoes Polonius's insistence that Laertes should "[n]either a borrower nor a lender be" (1.3.75). Burghley also instructs his son to avoid flatterers, yet to make friends with "some great man . . . [and] compliment him often . . . for otherwise in this ambitious age thou mayest remain like a hop without a pole" (12). He summarizes his remarks on how his son should behave with other people by noting, "Towards thy superiors be humble yet generous; with thy equals familiar yet respective; towards inferiors show much humility and some familiarity" (12). He

8. Burghley is not alone in emphasizing the importance of choosing the right wife. A number of other parents offer the same advice, including James I, Sir Walter Raleigh and Dorothy Leigh.

9. James I also advises his son, "Goe not with them in the steppes of the prodigal to a farre Country amongst a riotous and dissolute company, to dispend and lauish them vpon the follyes of youth and the snares of vanitie and the times" (*Fathers Blessing* 8); however, his reference to "a farre Country" may be as much metaphorical as literal given the context of the passage.

concludes, “The first prepares a way to advancement; the second makes thee known for a man well-bred; the third gains a good report which once gotten may be safely kept” (12-13).

We might smile at Burghley’s insistence that his son should behave like a sycophant but avoid other such parasites; however, Polonius is not the only one to echo Burghley’s advice. Sir Walter Raleigh is believed to have written his *Instructions to His Son and to Posterity* shortly after he was committed to the tower in 1603. It was not published until 1632, but it too was extremely popular, going through five editions by 1636 (Louis Wright xix-xi). Raleigh’s advice, like Burghley’s, appears to bear the mark of experience. His first chapter is on how to choose friends and, like Burghley, he advocates choosing “rather of thy betters than thy inferiors, shunning always such as are poor and needy.” He describes such followers as parasites, noting the constant menace of those who “follow thee but to eat thee out, and when thou leaves to feed them, they will hate thee” (Louis Wright 19). While this advice has the bitter tone of a hard-learned lesson, it is similar to Polonius’s instructions that Laertes should “try” his friends and “not dull [his] palm with entertainment / Of each new-hatched unfledged comrade” (1.3.64-65). Raleigh also suggests “especial care” be given to determining who should be trusted with confidences: “never trust any friend or servant with any matter that may endanger thine estate, for so shalt thou make thyself a bondslave to him that thou trustest” (19), advice James I repeats to his son: “Rather perswade thy selfe then thy friend to keepe thine owne Councell” (*Fathers Blessing* 16), and which surely echoes Polonius’s insistence that Laertes “[g]ive thy thoughts no tongue” (1.3.59). Raleigh is particularly concerned that if his son Wat is “subject to any great vanity or ill,” it should remain secret for, he says, “[E]very man’s folly ought to be his greatest secret” (Louis Wright 19-20).

Like Burghley, Raleigh has much to say about marriage and choosing a wife. He advises his son against marrying for love or beauty, for “neither last as long as a marriage” (Louis Wright 20-21), and insists that a husband should “be not sour nor stern to [his] wife” (22). While he advocates generosity to a wife while her husband is living,

like the Ghost in *Hamlet*, he is critical of widows who remarry and warns his son, a ten-year-old at the time of Raleigh's writing, "What thou givest after thy death, remember that thou givest it to a stranger and most times to an enemy, for he that shall marry thy wife will despise thee . . . and shall possess the quiet of thy labors, the fruit which thou hast planted, enjoy thy love, and spend with joy and ease what thou hast spared and gotten with care and travail" (22). Clearly, in keeping with the Ghost, Raleigh regards any future husband of his wife as "a wretch whose natural gifts were poor / To those of mine" (1.5.51-52). He therefore advises his son not to provide for his wife if she remarries: "if she love again, let her not enjoy her second love in the same bed wherein she loved thee nor fly to future pleasures with those feathers which death hath pulled from thy wings" (22). Raleigh's view not only echoes that of both the Ghost and Hamlet, particularly when Hamlet expresses his disgust at his mother living "[i]n the rank sweat of an enseamed bed" (3.4.82), but may also indicate how second marriages were viewed by society as a whole. Despite Gertrude's suggestion that the Player Queen "protests too much, methinks" (3.2.210) when she claims, "A second time I kill my husband dead / When second husband kisses me in bed" (166-67), some of the theatre audience may have been sympathetic to the criticism of Hamlet and the Ghost.

Raleigh also advises his son on appropriate speech, and he agrees with Burghley and Polonius that it is often best to keep one's mouth shut. He considers that speaking too much is a result of vanity and that one should, like children protecting their parents' reputation, "forbear to speak evil things of men though it be true" (Louis Wright 25). He concludes that "all quarrels, mischief, hatred, and destruction ariseth from unadvised speech" and succinctly declares, "He that keepeth his mouth, keepeth his life," noting that a man who speaks too much "is like a city without walls" and easily overcome (25-26).¹⁰ Raleigh therefore advises his son to "restrain thy choler, hearken much, and speak little" (26), counsel much like Polonius's "[g]ive every man thine ear but few thy voice" and his

10. This image, as noted in chapter 4, was often used to describe a woman who listened too readily. The belief that "[a] Castle that parleys and a woman that hears will both yield" was proverbial (Tilley C122).

“[b]eware / Of entrance to a quarrel” (1.3.68, 65-66). However, along with Polonius who adds, “[B]ut being in / Bear’t that th’opposed may beware of thee” (66-67), Raleigh also advises Wat that, “if thou be once engaged, carry thyself bravely that they may fear thee after” (Louis Wright 24). James I also advocates that “thy wordes bee few,” and that his son should “[b]eleeve not all that is told, nor tell not all that thou hearest” (*Fathers Blessing* 17-18), an indication that he too thinks it appropriate to hear more than one believes or speaks.

James I’s insistence that one should not credit all one hears fits with Raleigh’s opinion of “talebearers.” Contrary to Polonius, who employs a talebearer when he hires Reynaldo to visit his son, Raleigh insists that it is “most profitable . . . not to hearken to talebearers, to inquisitive persons and such as . . . creep into houses as spies to learn news which concern them not” (Louis Wright 26). While Polonius’s use of Reynaldo may result from his desire to determine whether Laertes is following his advice, something Lord Burghley might also have wished to do, he fails to appreciate how this information may be tainted not only by Reynaldo as talebearer, but also by those to whom Reynaldo listens. Polonius might believe that the “bait of falsehood [will take] this carp of truth” (2.1.62), but there is little evidence to support his claim. Nonetheless, while Raleigh may not approve of Polonius’s attempts to discover whether Laertes has heeded his advice, he also fears that his son will ignore him, despite the cultural approbation of filial listening and obedience. In the conclusion to his *Instructions*, he calls on divine authority to add weight to his instructions, reminding Wat that he can gain not just parental wisdom but divine knowledge by listening to his father: “Let my experienced advice and fatherly instructions sink deep into thy heart, so God direct thee in all His ways and fill thy heart with His grace” (Louis Wright 32). Children may be advised to listen, parents may be advised what to say, but there is no surety that this will result in appropriate behaviour on the part of either the child or parent.

Mothers' Advice

While fathers' advice texts were relatively commonplace when Raleigh was writing, the genre of mothers' advice books had yet to be established.¹¹ *The Mothers Blessing* was first published in 1601, though this text was not written by a mother, but by Nicholas Breton, a conduct book writer, who assumes the voice of Thomas Rowe's mother, Lady Bartley, to offer advice to the young man (Poole 69-70).¹² Breton's "mother," like the parents envisioned by Gouge, Brathwait, and Bentley, demands that

11. However, at least five mothers' advice books appeared in the first thirty years of the seventeenth century, including Elizabeth Grymeston's *Miscelanea, Meditations, Memoratiues* (1604), Dorothy Leigh's *The Mothers Blessing* (1616), Elizabeth Clinton's *The Countesse of Lincolnes Nurserie* (1622), Elizabeth Joscelin's *The Mothers Legacy to her Vnborn Childe* (1624), and M.R.'s *The Mothers Counsell* (1630?). Leigh's text was the most popular book by a woman in the period, with at least nineteen editions before 1640. Joscelin's work was also very popular, running to seven impressions between 1624 and 1635 and at least eight English editions before the end of the century with translations into Dutch and German (Brown vi; Feroli 89; Poole 85).

The Mothers Counsell; or, Liue within Compasse appears to have been written as a companion piece to *Keepe within Compasse or, The worthy Legacie of a wise Father to his beloued Sonne* by John Trundle. The latter work was published in 1619 and assigned by its author to John Wright on 24 January 1623, the same date as *The Mothers Counsell* appears in the Stationer's Register. The publication date of *The Mothers Counsell* is unknown as the title page has been cropped, leaving only the first two digits. Beilin assigns the date 1630 without explanation and does not consider that there is little in *The Mothers Counsell* to identify the author as a woman (266) (cont.).

11 cont. While the subtitle claims this is a "last Will and Testament to her dearest daughter," the author suggests the text may also "serue for a worthy Legacie to all the Women in the World, which desire good report from men in this world, and grace from Christ Jesus in the last day" (1). There is the conventional stress on the need for female chastity, humility, temperance, and inner beauty, and third person pronouns are most commonly used to refer to women: for example, "Corrupt company is more infectious than corrupt aire: therefore let women be aduised in their choise (8); "There is nothing harder for a woman than to know her selfe: for blinded with beautie and selfe love, they flatter themselues in all things" (21). Unlike Beilin, I am therefore reluctant to claim that this text was indeed written by a woman.

12. All quotations are from the 1621 edition due to the poor quality of the first edition. Breton's full name is noted on the first edition, but on the later edition the author is only recorded as N.B. in the letter "To the Reader."

her son listen to her final words (carefully crafted into rime royal), introducing her instructions with “My Son, my son, my best beloued son, / Hear my dear son, what careful charge I leaue thee” (*Mothers Blessing* A4^r). While the advice contained is similar to that of many authors warning against the vices of drunkenness, gaming, pride, gossip, and flattery, and extolling the virtues of hard work, honesty, charity, wisdom, and moderation, Breton, like Burghley and Raleigh, also offers advice on how the young man might select a suitable wife, as well as appropriate friends and servants.

In presenting his advice, Breton repeatedly emphasizes both the image of a son listening to his mother and the mother’s demand for her son’s ear, stressing the same need to retain parental wisdom in the heart as noted by Raleigh. However, the terms here are different as Breton insists that the son must “locke” his mother’s words in his bosom “as their loue” (*Mothers Blessing* D^r), suggesting that the gender difference between mother and son can reinforce the power of her words upon him. Even as Breton stresses the need for Rowe to listen to his mother, though, he also warns against “harken[ing] to a charme” (A4^v), “the Pander, and the Parasite” (B^r). Like Raleigh, Breton advises, “Giue not thine eare to euey Idle tale, / And trust no more then what of needs thou must,” though he goes on to qualify his statement, adding, “Heare all men speake, but harken to the wise” (B^r). He also warns against imparting confidences, noting that such secrets should be kept “in thy proper heart, / Where they should silent lye as in a graue,” and drawing on the same analogy as Raleigh when he equates a verbose man to a “city without walls” (C2^v).

Breton’s text may have set the model for real mothers who wished to write advice for their children, but these female writers sought to authorize their work in a variety of ways. Women who penned mother’s advice books often drew not only on their position as mothers, but also on their role as a mouthpiece (or pen) of divine revelation and male authority (Beilin 267). Dorothy Leigh, for example, notes that her text, *The Mothers Blessing* (1616), is “wel warranted by the scriptures of the olde and New Testament, which is the true word of God” (Brown 16), and that she writes to “fulfill [her husband’s] will . . . knowing it was the last duty I should performe vnto him” (17). The idea that she

is voicing the words of her husband is also found in the epigraph on the title page: “My sonne, heare the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the lawe of thy mother” (Proverbs 1:8). The voice in this text, therefore, has triple strength, that of God, father, and mother.

While these female authors reinforce their maternal authority by drawing on their relationship with masculine and divine authority, Gertrude in her interview with Hamlet has difficulty claiming any superior authority. Hamlet has already rejected Claudius as a stepfather in 1.2, and even though he declares then that he will “in all [his] best” obey his mother, he refuses to attend to her maternal reprimand in 3.4. Instead, he considers the interview an opportunity to reprove her as his father’s erring widow. Despite Polonius’s authorization of Gertrude’s speech, both through his position as king’s council, and through his flattering suggestion to Claudius that the interview is the king’s own idea, his insistence that Gertrude “be round with [Hamlet]” (3.1.182; 3.4.5) and “[t]ell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with” (3.4.2) fails to endorse what she says. Rather, his “overseeing” and overhearing of the interview simply manipulates the maternal authority she already possesses, in the same way as he has earlier manipulated the relationship between his daughter and Hamlet to his own ends. Gertrude herself, like the writers of mothers’ advice books, tries to draw on a higher authority when she scolds her son: “thou hast thy father much offended” (3.4.9); however, because Hamlet has already rejected Claudius’s paternal authority, he simply echoes this scolding back to his mother: “Mother, you have my father much offended” (10). Indeed, it is Gertrude’s movement to “set those to you that can speak” (17) that spurs Hamlet to restrain her. She may seek endorsement for her words from her husband and king, but Hamlet, even as he acknowledges Gertrude’s position as his queen and mother, will not accept any reprimand authorized by his king and stepfather.

Ultimately, Hamlet’s desire to stifle his mother as the mouthpiece of Claudius’s authority leads to the destruction of Polonius, Claudius’s chief spokesman, when he responds to Gertrude’s cry for help. Moreover, while Gertrude claims authority for her speech through someone she perceives to have paternal authority over Hamlet, he insists

that he has a right to reprimand her because of his relationship with his late father, her late husband. The appearance of the Ghost, the figure to whom Hamlet has granted paternal authority, reinforces the closet scene as a battle less between Gertrude and Hamlet, than between two husbands and two father figures. Hamlet's response to the Ghost further reveals this as he believes that the Ghost has come "[his] tardy son to chide" (3.4.97), and while some critics might argue that the Ghost appears here to remind Hamlet to "[l]eave [Gertrude] to heaven" (1.5.86), its words are ambiguous.¹³ The Ghost tells Hamlet to "step between her and her fighting soul," noting, "Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works" (3.4.103-4), implying perhaps that Gertrude may well be near death because of Hamlet's words. The Ghost then demands, "Speak to her, Hamlet" (105). Such a demand ignores the fact that Hamlet has persisted in speaking even as his mother has asked him three times to "speak no more" (3.4.78, 84, 92). The Ghost, I would argue, appears not to restrain Hamlet. Indeed, it declares, "This visitation / Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose" (100-1); it appears in order to demonstrate by whose authority Hamlet speaks.¹⁴ It is most pertinent that, just as Hamlet rejects the authority by which his mother tries to speak to him, she cannot see the authority by which her son speaks.

If the women writers of the mothers' advice books reinforce their authority to write by reference to their husband's instructions, an endorsement that fails for Gertrude because her son rejects the paternal authority her new husband has as his stepfather, these

13. Cummings argues that Hamlet fails to heed the Ghost's demand to leave Gertrude alone (87).

14. While the Ghost's verbal directive seems clear, Hamlet's response suggests there is conflict between the desire for revenge he feels and the emotion evoked by the Ghost: "Do not look upon me, / Lest with this piteous action you convert / My stern effects" (3.4.118-20). Once again the Ghost has presented Hamlet with conflicting demands as he does in 1.5 in which the Ghost tells Hamlet, "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" and "howsoever thou pursuest this act, / Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive / Against thy mother aught" (1.5.25, 84-86). Hamlet's response also raises questions about what kind of "piteous action" the Ghost makes. Does it make a loving gesture toward Gertrude even as it demands that Hamlet "[s]peak to her"?

writers also legitimate their writing by emphasizing their imminent demise. This technique of validating parental instruction, while noted in the conduct literature, is rarely used in fathers' advice tracts, yet four of the five mother's advice books that appear between 1604 and 1630 are styled as legacies (Beilin 26).¹⁵ These texts therefore bring together the past, present, and future in the same way as deathbed speeches to provide "an uncanny effect of immediacy and intimacy" (Brown v). The authors use a writing style that most closely imitates speech, what Sylvia Brown calls a "present, speaking voice" (v), to capitalize on a child's predisposition to listen to a dying parent's instructions. For example, Elizabeth Joscelyn, who wrote *The Mothers Legacy* in 1622 out of a prophetic sense of doom when she was pregnant with her first child, draws particularly on the power of a deceased parent's voice.

Joscelyn declares that her child "will more profit by a few weak instructions cominge from a dead mother (whoo cannot euery day prays or reprooue it as it deserues) then far better from much more learned" (60).¹⁶ Joscelyn therefore claims that her own authority as a dead mother is greater than that of any other writer, a challenge both to her child and, perhaps, to those other "much more learned" writers (Feroli 99). If dying parents have what Wendy Wall calls an "invisible moral authority" because of the imminent erasure of their bodily presence, Joscelyn implies that the voice of a dead parent carries even more weight. Teresa Feroli notes that Joscelyn emphasizes the way her writing is a "literal substitute for her physical presence" (96), and calls it "a testimony to the troubling despair of a mother who calls to her child from the grave" (91). Sylvia Brown agrees, and describes the text as "a voice speaking from the grave" (91). Given the authority demanded by and granted to such a voice "from the grave," one can perhaps

15. James I might write *The Fathers Blessing* as if he is a "graue and learned Gentleman" on his deathbed, but he makes it clear to his reader that he is "assum[ing]" this voice, unlike the women who insist that their use of a deathbed voice is genuine.

16. All quotations are taken from the manuscript version of Joscelyn's text as edited by Jean LeDrew Metcalfe, not from the version published by Goad. I have silently omitted the authorial deletions present in Joscelyn's manuscript and included the emendations and capitalizations made by Metcalfe.

understand more fully the authority seized by the Ghost, its refusal to speak to Horatio and its demand that Hamlet listen, along with Hamlet's acceptance of what the Ghost says. While the Ghost may be highly ambiguous, as I shall discuss later, its words are clearly taken to heart by Hamlet (1.5.102-3).

Given Joscelyn's view of her text as a substitute mother and an embodiment of her ghostly voice, it is unsurprising that she emphasizes the need for filial obedience throughout the *Legacie*. She considers disobedience toward parents to be the greatest sin "agaynst man," and compares it to "Idolatry . . . ye greatest sin agaynst god" (98). Joscelyn claims that in breaking this commandment, children break all the others (100).¹⁷ Among the instructions Joscelyn wants her child to obey are a number on hearing and speaking. She insists, like Raleigh and Breton, that it is inappropriate to speak or hear slanderous speech and tells her unborn child to "shun multiplicity of words . . . for it is a gratinge to the ear to heare a man talke at random" (80), and "let noe speech passe from thee that may greeue chast ears" (82). She then moves on to consider what her child might hear, stressing the need to avoid swearing or slander and advocating the need to attend closely to the preaching of the word of God.

These instructions on listening also appear in *Miscelanea, Meditations, Memoratiues* (1604) by Elizabeth Grymeston, who is most concerned that her son, Bernie, not be seduced away from the true word of God as represented by Catholicism. Twice, she emphasizes her fear by equating such seduction to forbidden female sexuality. She draws on the classical analogy of the mind to a city guarded by the senses, comparing the eyes and ears to "open gates" that permit "loades of sinne into our minds[s]" and make a brothel of the body (C4^t). This degradation of the body is the result of an openness that she has earlier presented as gendered in a sonnet on the perils of listening to evil thoughts, the devil's "harbingers." She equates the devil to "a false

17. Thomas Goad, Joscelyn's earliest editor, suggests that her emphasis on filial obedience (and by implication parental authority) may be rooted in her own experience of deathbed instruction from a parent (Brown 93; Joscelyn 3). He notes that the experience of attending her mother's deathbed as a child left a "deepe impression . . . in her minde" (Joscelyn 42-43).

Louer” who seduces a “faire yoong maid / when she (though little) listning eare affords,” drawing on the classic analogy of the open female ear to “[t]hat parleing citie [which] neuer long resists,” and notes that it is the devil’s awareness that his “flattering gloze” has been both heard and “digest[ed]” that encourages him to persevere, “[t]ill he haue tri’d foot, hand, and head, and all, / Vpon the breach of this new battered wall” (A4^v).¹⁸ Grymeston’s concern that her son may be seduced by the devil as a result of his own evil thoughts echoes Hamlet’s very fears about the identity of the Ghost, who “[m]ay be the devil,” and who, as a result of his own melancholic thoughts, “[a]buses [him] to damn [him]” (2.2.576, 580). Hamlet’s mental vulnerability to the “potent” (2.2.579) devil suggests that, in the terms of Grymeston’s analogy, the wall protecting his mind may well have been breached by the devil’s “flattering gloze.” Hamlet may be open to the devil’s power as a feminized listener rather than as the masculine speaker envisioned by Raleigh and Breton, but his weakness is shown through his speech, which he compares to that of an open, sexually licentious woman (2.2.560-5; Leverenz 303).

Grymeston’s analogy might seem unusual given that she is writing to a son, not a daughter, and Christina Luckyj, who equates Grymeston’s advice to a “feminine, maternal equivalent” of Polonius’s advice to Laertes, suggests that it is closer to the advice given to Ophelia by her brother than that given to him by Polonius (130). While Laertes does not draw on the image of the besieged city or castle, he specifically connects the open female ear with a loss of chastity, warning Ophelia:

. . . weigh what loss your honour may sustain
If with too credent ear you list his songs,
Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
To his unmastered importunity. (1.3.29-32)

18. Christina Luckyj comments on Grymeston’s “injunctions to silence” and suggests that this may have been sound advice for a recusant. She goes on to discuss Grymeston’s sonnet, concluding that for Grymeston, “even the silent act of listening is hazardous” (129). I agree in part. Grymeston, like many authors, warns against listening to “flattering gloze” (A4^v), but given that the young maid who listens is compared to a parleying castle (one that is willing to talk, to bargain), the implication is that this is not *silent* listening. The protection potentially offered by silence is not present in the type of listening Grymeston describes.

His father is even more emphatic in his insistence that Ophelia should not listen to Hamlet's protestations of love. Having learned that his daughter has been "free and bounteous" in her "audience" (93) to Hamlet, Polonius demands to know what she has heard. She tells him that Hamlet has "made many tenders / Of his affection," and "importuned [her] with love / In honourable fashion . . . With all the vows of heaven" (1.3.99-100, 110-11, 114). Her father, though, considers these speeches to be traps, "springes to catch woodcocks" (115), and in a direct allusion to proverbial lore, warns her to "[s]et your entreatments at a higher rate / Than a command to parley" (122-23). Polonius, then, gives his children different advice about listening based on their gender. Ophelia, like Overbury's "Good Woman," must stop her ears, for, according to Polonius, as a young woman and a descendent of Eve, she cannot be trusted to distinguish between truth and guile. Moreover, Polonius assumes that if Ophelia does listen to Hamlet, she will speak or "parley."¹⁹ He therefore insists not only that she "[b]e somewhat scanter of [her] maiden presence" (1.3.121), but also that she not "give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet" (134).

In contrast to his advice to Ophelia, Polonius advocates that Laertes "[g]ive every man [his] ear," advice that appears to contradict the mothers' and fathers' advice texts. Arguably, the contrast may be due to the early modern distinction between hearkening—listening and taking to heart—and giving someone an "ear," or simply hearing. Breton, for example, advises, "Heare all men speake, but harken to the wise," an addendum similar to Polonius's "[t]ake each man's censure, but reserve thy judgement" (1.3.69). However, Polonius may think that his son, unlike his daughter, can distinguish truth and

19. While Dorothy Leigh is ostensibly writing for her three sons, one of her longest chapters is on female chastity. In this, she also equates female listening to sexual promiscuity. Like Polonius, she notes that the problem is that women sometimes do more than just listen:

Had they onely lent an eare . . . they had done well enough . . . I would haue euery one know, that one sinne begetteth another. The vaine words of the man, and the idle cares of the woman, beget vnchaste thought oftentimes in the one, which may bring forth much wickeneesse in them both. (Brown 27-28)

prevarication. In this he would not be alone. Grymeston, even as she warns her son about listening to the devil's "flattering gloze," tells him, "God borroweth not the Syrens voice" (D^v), implying that he should be able to distinguish the voice to which he should attend. Despite this apparent support for the distinction Polonius makes between his son and daughter as listeners, the events of the play suggest that Polonius underestimates the risk inherent in listening, regardless of one's gender. Perhaps because of his own preoccupation with listening (and eavesdropping), he is metaphorically deaf to its perils both for himself and his son. He fails to consider that Eve was not the only one deceived by what she heard. As Leigh notes in her advice to her sons, they too have to be "chaest, watchfull, and wary, keeping company with maides" because "[t]he woman . . . beguiled [Adam], and [he] did eate" (Brown 28).

Parents and Children in *Hamlet*

Despite the religious differences among the writers of mothers' legacies, the gender differences between writers of mothers' and fathers' advice books, and the contrasting audiences envisioned for conduct books, advice tracts, and parental legacies, there is a consistent valorization of parental authority and an emphasis on the need for children to obey their parents. Moreover, while Polonius might be unusual in suggesting that Laertes listen indiscriminately (if that is indeed what he is saying), there is an overarching concern in these texts to advise children on what constitutes appropriate behaviour, including suitable practices of speech and listening. Polonius's advice to Laertes may seem long-winded and contradictory to us, what Hawkes calls "[v]erbose[ly] uncommunicative" (*Shakespeare's* 109), but we need to consider it in relation to both the advice of other fathers in the playworld and Polonius's own role in the realm of Denmark. I want now to consider more carefully the parental advice given in *Hamlet*, and particularly how the contextual material illuminates our perception of both Polonius and Hamlet Senior as fathers. Prior to Hamlet's interview with the Ghost he believes to be his father's spirit, we see him interact with his new stepfather, Claudius, a father substitute Hamlet rejects. In the same scene that we hear Hamlet interrupt Claudius's speech and

pointedly omit pledging obedience to him, we learn not only of Laertes' obedience to his father, whose permission he has sought to return to France, but also of the dependence of national government on domestic hierarchy. Claudius does not grant Laertes' request until he has determined whether the young man has his father's permission. It is following this scene that presents the contrast between the two sons that we see each of them interact with his father (or father figure). Thus, I would argue that Laertes' interaction with Polonius is intended to inform our understanding of Hamlet's interaction with the Ghost.

I would suggest that, in contrast to many twentieth-century critics, an early modern audience may well have considered Polonius as an apparently wise father dispensing conventional advice to his son. Certainly, Laertes is appropriately deferential and Claudius not only respects the old man's opinion of his son's travel plans, but later asks for Polonius's opinion of Hamlet's malady. Harold Jenkins recognizes elements of the "anxious father" in Polonius, though he also considers him to show the same "fussy meddlesomeness" that leads to his death in his paternal role (134). Myron Taylor notes that the counsellor is often considered "a bore" and "a foolish old man" (275), with his verbosity and pedantry being cited as evidence. This assessment of Polonius echoes Hamlet's epitaph to him: "This counsellor / Is now most still, most secret, and most grave, / Who was in life a foolish prating knave" (3.4.187-89). However, Hamlet's bias should be considered. As Claudius's trusted advisor, "the heart" and "mouth" of the usurping body politic, Polonius is Hamlet's enemy; he has pledged allegiance to the man Hamlet refuses to obey. Moreover, Polonius equates his duty to Claudius to a religious calling: he declares, "I hold my duty, as I hold my soul, / Both to my God and to my gracious King" (2.2.44-45), and his acts of eavesdropping and spying would have been considered part of a counsellor's duty. Nicholas Breton writes that a "Worthie Priuie Counciller" should be "an Oracle in the Kings eare, and a Sword in the Kings hand . . . an eye of care in the course of lawe, a heart of loue in his seruice to his Soueraigne" (*Good and Badde* 5). Given the loyalty demanded of such a counsellor, Hamlet could well be suspicious of Polonius's possible involvement in his father's death, and

concerned that he himself is now under the old man's scrutiny, for Hamlet understands his danger if the Ghost's tale is true and Claudius discovers that the son of the man he murdered now knows of his crime. Hamlet is well aware that "whether or not Polonius speaks foolish words, he speaks them into the ear of a king" (Hartwig 215).²⁰ Therefore, rather than judge Polonius as a "bumbling politician" (Burnett 33) and his advice as "the harmless ramblings of a senile old fool" (Taylor 277), we should perhaps consider him as a more Machiavellian figure.

Taylor suggests that Shakespeare's audience would have regarded Polonius "a clear representation of the Machiavellian villain," on par with Iago or Edmund: "the archetypal spy, the toad at the ear of Eve" (275). Taylor considers "Polonius [to be] the purest symbol of all that is rotten in Denmark" and claims that the fault with Polonius's axioms to Laertes "lies not in their banality, but in their outright evil" (279). They are a "denial of everything that Hamlet . . . holds true: that men should be open and honest, and that appearance and reality should ideally be one" (278).²¹ While Taylor may overstate his case for Polonius's inherent evil, Claudius's advisor certainly adheres to Machiavellian maxims. However, these would not have been considered particularly evil by an Elizabethan audience. Given that the same principles are expressed by court-wise fathers like Raleigh and Burghley in works sufficiently popular to run to several editions, Polonius's advice is likely to have been considered a realistic understanding of the craft

20. Hamlet reveals his distrust of Polonius in 2.2 when the old man asks him, "will you walk out of the air, my lord?" and Hamlet replies, "Into my grave?" (204-5). Polonius does not refute the suggestion that he may wish to kill Hamlet; instead, he notes: "How pregnant sometimes his replies are! A happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of" (206-9). Prior to this scene, Polonius has already spoken "into the ear of the king" about the likely cause of Hamlet's madness.

21. Taylor ignores Hamlet's claim that his appearance does not reflect his inner self, that he too has "that within which passeth show" (1.2.85).

needed to succeed in court circles.²² Moreover, while we might consider Polonius's final exhortation to Laertes, "to thine own self be true" (78) at odds with his previous determination of how his son should behave, some of his peers may have been more comfortable with the idea that certain performed behaviours could be identified with a "true self."²³ Burghley, for example, tells his son that courtesy towards one's equals "makes thee known for a man well-bred" (Louis Wright 13).

While his contemporaries may have accepted the validity of Polonius's advice to his son, the old man's inability to separate actions appropriate for his courtly role from those required of him as a father would not have been considered so positively. It might be necessary for him to eavesdrop in his role as Claudius's advisor, but Polonius also thinks it acceptable to adopt the same "indirections [to] find directions out" (2.1.65) in the lives of his children (Taylor 276-77), and even to use his children as decoys so that he might glean information about others, as in his use of Ophelia to waylay Hamlet. As David Leverenz notes, Polonius cares more for his position at court than for his daughter's well-being, and uses his paternal authority to better his status as king's advisor (301). Citing as evidence the convoluted lecture Polonius gives Reynaldo, Hartwig is less condemning of his actions, regarding the old man's meanderings as comic relief (218).²⁴ Polonius's appointment of Reynaldo to uncover information about Laertes in Paris might

22. Steven Doloff suggests that Thomas Tusser's *Five Hundreth Pointes of Good Husbandrie* (1573) expresses similar advice to that given by Polonius and is an indication of the audience's familiarity and understanding of his precepts. Doloff goes on to note that *Hamlet* ultimately demonstrates the insufficiency of such pragmatic advice (227-28).

23. The inherent contradiction in Polonius's prescription of behaviour and his insistence that Laertes "to thine own self be true" is similar to the conflict present in the Ghost's demands that Hamlet seek revenge, but "[t]aint not [his] mind" (1.5.85).

24. Polonius's inability to remember what he intends to tell Reynaldo is even cited as support for Hamlet's view of Polonius as "a foolish prating knave." The assumption is that Polonius is either forgetful or distracted by something inconsequential. Ophelia, though, speaks less than thirty lines later and Polonius could well be distracted by the appearance of his distressed daughter as she enters. Being an obedient daughter, she does not interrupt her father, and he dispatches his manservant before dealing with her.

seem gratuitous,²⁵ but it demonstrates the lengths he will go to discover information, and while some fathers, like Burghley, might quietly acknowledge the prudence of this action, others, like Raleigh, would likely condemn it. By his actions, Polonius indicates that he does not trust his family any more than he trusts those who threaten the crown. He has little faith that the father-son bond he shares with Laertes will be strong enough to ensure his son's obedience.

Not only does Polonius manipulate, eavesdrop, and hire "talebearers" to inform on his own children, but he also attempts to use the same practices to assess the filial obedience of another son—Hamlet. In doing so, he ignores the danger inherent in such actions. Hamlet does not expect to find a government official, "a wretched, rash, intruding fool" (3.4.30) behind the arras in his mother's closet, anticipating instead a family member, a husband, albeit one who is a king (31). As Lisa Jardine notes, "Polonius has no legitimate place within the intimate space of Gertrude's closet; his presence fatally confuses privacy with affairs of state" ("Afterword" 319). Taylor notes that certain critics consider Polonius's death to be an indication of what he calls Hamlet's "'tragic flaw'" and retribution for the prince's earlier failure to kill Claudius (279). In contrast to the critics he cites, Taylor blames Polonius for his own death, noting that the old man, in his attempts to "manipulate Claudius, has placed himself in the fatal position" and that the statesman's murder is "the clearest hand of providence exacting the just retribution" (279).²⁶ This perspective, however, ignores the need for Polonius to eavesdrop, to be "in the ear / Of all their conference" (3.1.183-84), in his role as the

25. There is the faint suggestion that Laertes may have been in trouble previously. Polonius tells Reynaldo that he can hint at Laertes' involvement in certain disreputable behaviours, but that he "must not put *another* scandal on him, / That he is open to incontinency" (2.1.30-31; emphasis added). Polonius's reference to "another scandal" may indicate that Laertes has been accused of sexual profligacy before, or may represent Polonius's belief that while some slanders are acceptable, others are not.

26. The idea of Polonius's death as "just retribution" for his manipulation of Claudius is questionable. Still, there is poetic justice in a man so intent on concealing himself and his "directions" in life having an "obscure burial" (4.5.208; Burnett 33).

king's counsellor, and the way he views this supposedly private conversation as a political meeting. First, Polonius seeks the king's sanction for his actions and even flatters Claudius with the suggestion that the king himself had the idea that Polonius should eavesdrop on Gertrude and Hamlet, assuming perhaps that the king, like himself, will employ the same "indirections" when dealing with his family as he would when dealing with other matters of state. Polonius tells the king:

Behind the arras I'll convey myself
To hear the process. I'll warrant she'll tax him home.
And, as you said—and wisely was it said—
'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother,
Since nature makes them partial, should o'erhear
The speech of vantage. (3.3.28-33)

Polonius's speech, while characteristically euphemistic, is full of terms more commonly associated with political strategies: the mother-son conversation is a "process" and a "speech of vantage" in which Gertrude will "tax" her son. Polonius fails to consider the risk of using political tactics in a private sphere, just as he fails to note the risks inherent in listening to conversations to which he should not be privy. That Polonius dies because he is "in the ear" is reinforced by the fact that he is killed for responding to something he hears when he cannot see what is going on.²⁷ He acts on Gertrude's cry for help because he cannot see that Hamlet is simply restraining his mother from leaving the room. He fails to consider what is implicit in Raleigh's criticism of listening to "talebearers": one should neither "hearken" to those who "busy themselves with other men's estates, [and] creep into houses . . . to learn news which concerns them not," nor should one undertake such activities.

If Polonius's actions as a father and within the royal family are compromised by his role as the king's advisor, audience perception of him is also clouded by Hamlet's view of the old man and the difficulty in detecting the flaws in this perception. The difficulty arises because of the way Hamlet confides in and captivates his audience. This

27. Hamlet, too, responds blindly to what he hears when he stabs at the arras without seeing what is behind it.

special relationship predisposes the audience to accept Hamlet's view of his circumstances and the other characters (Ralph Berry 24). Our difficulty in disentangling our perceptions from Hamlet's begins with his first line, his aside in which he rejects Claudius as a father figure and takes the audience into his confidence. Stephen Booth notes that Hamlet's line shifts the audience's focus from Claudius, the central figure in the royal procession at the beginning of the scene, whose long speech provides many of the details for which the audience has waited patiently. Hamlet literally steals the scene from his stepfather (150). If the first scene opens with questions and answers that turn into further questions, this scene begins with answers. Here, it appears, is the king who informs the audience about past events and dispatches present issues with remarkable efficiency. Hamlet's aside is the first time that audience attention is directed away from Claudius, and the first indication that all may not be as amiable as the king suggests. Booth notes that "Hamlet and the audience are from this point in the play more firmly united than any other such pair in Shakespeare" (150). In other words, Hamlet moves the audience from the position of eavesdropping on the action of the play to being primary, involved listeners. He encourages us to accept his pronouncements on other characters, including Claudius and Polonius, much as he himself comes to accept the words of another speaker, the Ghost. Given the risk associated with listening in this play, and Hamlet's own difficulty in determining the truth of the Ghost's words, the audience should perhaps be concerned about its own role within the theatre and as Hamlet's confidant.

Polonius may be as much a loyal counsellor and accomplished eavesdropper as he is a "tedious old fool" (2.2.215), but another father is also represented with equal ambiguity. Hamlet thinks his father, "So excellent a King" (1.2.139), and "[a] combination and a form indeed, / Where every god did seem to set his seal," contrasting him to the "mildewed ear" of Claudius (3.4.59-60, 63); however, even this contrast is equivocal. Hamlet is punning on a "mildewed ear" as both an ear of grain that can "blast" (64) or infect the grain around it and as a human ear that can be infected. With this latter meaning, it is not Claudius, but Hamlet Senior who has a "mildewed ear" as a result of

the poisoning.²⁸ Indeed, earlier Hamlet has openly acknowledged that his father was less than perfect. He notes that his father died, “grossly, full of bread, / With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May” (3.3.80-81). Others also suggest that while King Hamlet may have been “valiant” (1.1.83), he was subject to “emulate pride” (82), and it was this pride that led him to kill Old Fortinbras (admittedly on the battlefield). Moreover, he may have been less than rigorous in his government, given that his custom was to take a nap every afternoon (1.5.59-60). Even the Ghost notes that King Hamlet was “[c]ut off even in the blossoms of [his] sin, / . . . With all [his] imperfections on [his] head” (76, 79). Given these mixed descriptions of Hamlet’s father, his insistence on distinguishing between his mother’s two husbands as “Hyperion to a satyr”(1.2.140); “Jove” to a “pajock” (3.2.260-61) appears unfounded (Ferguson 296-07).

Hamlet’s deification of his father may be in keeping with Gouge’s admonition that children should defend their deceased parents’ reputations (486), but the contrast he makes between his father and Claudius is a distinction that others, both in Elsinore and in the theatre audience, have difficulty perceiving (Farrell 174). Margaret Ferguson suggests that Hamlet’s insistence on this differentiation is his attempt to distinguish himself from Claudius, despite their similarities: they both want the throne of Denmark and, some critics would argue, they both want Gertrude (296). Leverenz, in contrast, drawing on psychoanalytic theory, suggests that Hamlet’s “idealization” of his father and condemnation of Claudius is a result of his own ambivalence about “the father.” He goes on to note that the Ghost demonstrates that “[f]ather is, in fact, more like Claudius than the Ghost can dare admit” (299). Indeed, it is no coincidence that the Ghost appears in the armour in which Hamlet Senior killed Old Fortinbras, a deed for which Young Fortinbras

28. Kenneth Gross states, “The ghost’s story is a dead king’s poisonous words about the way words can poison kings” (28). While I take exception to his conflation of the Ghost with the late King Hamlet, Gross is correct to note how the Ghost’s tale suggests that “the authority which seeks to control or correct rumour is itself contaminated with rumour, even constituted by it” (28).

now seeks retribution.²⁹ Like Claudius, King Hamlet has committed an act that a son vows to avenge.

While there is less to distinguish Hamlet's two fathers than he cares to admit, the representation of the Ghost adds further complexity to the representation of the father-son relationships in which Hamlet participates. Within the first act, the audience sees three father-son pairings: first, Hamlet refuses to listen respectfully to Claudius; second, Laertes attends deferentially to the mundane, but pragmatic, advice of Polonius; third, immediately following, Hamlet listens to a spirit that he identifies as, and which claims to be, his father's ghost.³⁰ The proximity of the latter two scenes encourages a comparison of these representations of father-son dialogue. Joan Hartwig claims that the scene in which Polonius instructs his children parodies the scene in which the Ghost admonishes Hamlet. She claims that the "precedence of the comic reduction enhances the awesomeness of the Ghost's appearance," noting that Polonius "seeks out his children in a private situation" to give them commonplace advice, whereas the Ghost has a far more pressing reason to speak privately with Hamlet (217-18). Terence Hawkes also contrasts the two parent-son relationships to argue that Polonius and Laertes demonstrate "the inhuman opposite of genuine communication between father and son," while Hamlet and the Ghost "exhibit a warmth of 'family' contact" (*Shakespeare's* 113). I would argue instead that Polonius's advice is remarkably representative of the advice fathers gave their sons at the time and that the "warmth of 'family' contact" suggested by Hawkes overlooks Hamlet's later doubt about the nature of the Ghost.

29. Rasmussen rightly points out that Fortinbras's demand for revenge is redirected by Norway so that *Hamlet* presents two subplots in which one son (Laertes) seeks to avenge his father's death, while another (Fortinbras) does not. This same balance is also reflected in the two classical allusions to sons whose fathers are murdered: Pyrrhus and Brutus. Hamlet, then, is presented with the choice between these opposing positions (463).

30. Jenkins also points out that Claudius in 1.2 deals with three sons: Fortinbras, Laertes, and Hamlet, and that the circumstances of both Fortinbras and Laertes are designed to echo Hamlet's own in some way (133).

Despite the potential contrast between these father-son pairings, the speeches of both Polonius and the Ghost have the authority of farewell or deathbed speeches. Polonius is unaware that he is uttering his last words to Laertes, but his speech is a farewell, indeed a second farewell (“[a] double blessing is a double grace” [*Hamlet* 1.3.53]), intended to prepare a son for when his father is not present. In ironic contrast, Hamlet’s father did not have an opportunity to make the usual deathbed speech to his son as the effect of the poison is virtually instantaneous and he dies “[u]nhouseled, disappointed, unaneled” (1.5.77). Not present at his father’s deathbed, Hamlet must listen to the Ghost tell of that death. He, like Polonius, has to attend to what might be construed as a “talebearer.” Hamlet, though, does not avoid the Ghost’s company, but responds to the Ghost’s speech as a son listening to a parent’s last words. What he hears “make[s] a deepe impression” (Gouge 577) on him; and holds him “amazed and astonished” (Lamb 123) in the same way as Mary Sidney’s mother held her auditors. In his consideration of representation of religion in *Hamlet*, Mark Matheson argues that Hamlet’s reaction to the Ghost’s speech indicates that “it carries the residual force of a religious obligation” for Hamlet (384). I would suggest, instead, that the obligation Hamlet feels to obey the Ghost’s command results from his understanding of filial duty, particularly to the last requests of a father.

Hamlet may identify the Ghost as his father, declaring “I’ll call thee Hamlet, / King, father, royal Dane” (1.4.25-26), but he remains doubtful about its nature. In *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Stephen Greenblatt notes that ghosts in Shakespeare’s plays are most frequently either “the projection of fear,” “the spirit of history,” or “the shadowy embodiment of deep psychic disturbance” (195), and the Ghost in *Hamlet* can be said to operate as all three. Nonetheless, the sentries who first see it do not refer to it as a ghost, but as a “fantasy,” a “dreaded sight,” an “apparition,” and something “that usurp’st . . . that fair and warlike form / In which the majesty of buried Denmark / Did sometimes march” (1.1.21, 23, 26, 44-46; Greenblatt, *Hamlet* 208-09). Greenblatt argues that while the sentries emphasize the Ghost’s resemblance to the late king, they recognize that what they see is an “illusion,” “a kind of embodied memory” as they know that the king is

dead and buried—his body, even if it were to wander around at night, is a rotting corpse (212). Not only does Horatio note that the Ghost “usurp’st” the form of the king, but Barnardo also states (twice) that the Ghost is “*like* the King” (1.1.39, 41; emphasis added), suggesting that the sentries are fully cognizant that whatever else the Ghost may be, it is not the king.

Hamlet, too, when he first sees the apparition, is unsure of the Ghost’s identity, wondering whether it is “a spirit of health or goblin damned” (1.4.21).³¹ However, the Ghost’s very ambiguity causes Hamlet to speak to it. The Ghost eventually identifies itself as his “father’s spirit” (1.5.9), and Hamlet tells Horatio, “It is an honest ghost” (142). Later, though, he once again doubts the nature of the Ghost and worries that it “[m]ay be the devil” (2.2.576). As Hamlet admits to Horatio, the problem is that he has already seen his father in his “mind’s eye” (1.2.184), and he fears that the devil may be using his “weakness” and “melancholy” (2.2.578) against him (Greenblatt, *Hamlet* 220). In other words, he worries that the Ghost might well be a “projection of fear” or “deep psychic disturbance.” It is not until he observes Claudius’s reaction to *The Mousetrap* that Hamlet can accept the validity of the Ghost’s story (Flatter 62). Only then can he declare, “I’ll take the Ghost’s word for a thousand pound” (3.2.263-64). Nonetheless, the evidence for Claudius’s guilt appears less convincing to Horatio, who simply states that he “did very well note” the king (267). Moreover, just as Hamlet puts to rest his doubt about the Ghost, it makes a reappearance in such a way that Hamlet must once again question his senses. When the Ghost appears in Gertrude’s closet and she insists that she can see “[n]othing at all, yet all that is I see,” and that she hears “nothing but ourselves” (3.4.123-24), Hamlet is forced to question his own perception (Ferguson 296). It was,

31. Even though the sentries note the Ghost’s similarity in appearance to the late king, they too are doubtful about its nature. Horatio notes that “it started to like a guilty thing” when the cock announced the dawn, and notes how “erring” spirits return to their “confine[s]” when the cock crows, playing with “erring” as physical as well as moral wandering. Marcellus then goes into an extended account of how “no spirit can walk abroad” at Christmas because the cock crows all night, “[s]o hallowed and so gracious is the time,” suggesting that this spirit is neither “hallowed” nor “gracious” (1.1.129-45).

though, accepted in contemporary ghost-lore that a ghost could appear to one person and not to another also present, and Richard Flatter goes so far as to suggest that Gertrude cannot see the Ghost because she is complicit in her husband's murder (77).³² Certainly, Hamlet is quick to reassure his mother that he is not hallucinating. He insists it is not his "madness [that] speaks," but her "trespass" (3.4.137), suggesting that he may well consider her inability to see the Ghost an indication of her guilt, that he, like the Player Queen, believes that a widow who remarries plays a role in her husband's death as she kills her husband "[a] second time" (3.2.166).

Shakespeare further complicates our understanding of the Ghost with his suggestion of its Catholicism. Matheson notes that the Ghost's complaint that Hamlet Senior died without the necessary last rites, "[u]nhouseled, dis-appointed, unaneled," is "unambiguously Roman Catholic." Moreover, he adds that Catholic discourse gives "the power of speech . . . to the suffering dead" (384).³³ Indeed, this Ghost not only has power of speech but specifically refers to purgatory when it notes that it is

Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confined to fast in fires
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away. (1.5.10-13)

Belief in purgatory had been rejected by the authorized church for more than fifty years and was considered heretical at this time. As a result, few plays of the period make any reference to it and Matheson claims that "Shakespeare shows a certain daring" in having

32. In support of his theory about Gertrude's knowledge of her first husband's murder, Flatter notes that in Thomas Heywood's *The Second Part of the Iron Age*, Clytemnestra cannot see Agamemnon's ghost because she murdered her husband (77).

33. Greenblatt agrees that the Ghost is "distinctly Catholic," and notes that the concept of purgatory "provided a powerful method of negotiating with the dead" (*Hamlet* 240), which was eliminated with the Protestant Reformation. He argues that the stage then became the space of such negotiation: "the space of Purgatory becomes the space of the stage where old Hamlet's Ghost is doomed for a certain term to walk the night." As he points out, "That term has now lasted some four hundred years" (256-57).

the Ghost speak so plainly (385).³⁴ One can therefore understand Hamlet's confusion about a ghost that resembles his father but speaks supposed heresy, particularly as it contradicts his own Protestant leanings as indicated by his desire to return to his studies at Wittenberg (1.2.113).³⁵ Furthermore, the Ghost's heretical belief emphasizes the transgressive nature of its demand for revenge, a directive that Gouge associates with the "Heathen" (488). Matheson argues that the association of the Ghost with the "old religion" of Catholicism underscores the inter-generational conflict present in this play, particularly as Hamlet also frowns on Claudius's revels, which he terms "a custom, / More honoured in the breach than the observance" (1.4.17-18), suggesting that such celebrations may not have begun with the new king.³⁶ Moreover, as a representative of the new generation, Hamlet's connection with Protestant dissenters and his adherence to predestination can be considered particularly threatening (Matheson 394). The civil and ecclesiastical authorities of the time were most concerned about how such theology could be used to support political dissent, and Hamlet's claim in Q1 that "[t]here's a predestinate prouidence in the fall of a sparrow" (*Three-Text Hamlet* Q1 2126-27) in a

34. The Ghost's declaration that it is "forbid / To tell the secrets of [his] prison-house" may not only look to biblical tenets, but also to the office of the Master of the Revels. Thomas Kyd escapes the official criticism about the depiction of a Christian afterlife by drawing on Virgil's representation of the classical underworld in *The Spanish Tragedy* (Matheson 383).

35. Hamlet's religious leanings appear inconsistent. Associated with the seat of radical Protestantism in the first act, he refuses to kill Claudius at prayer when, in contrast to Hamlet Senior, he would be "fit and seasoned for his passage" (3.3.86).

36. Dorothea Kehler notes that when compared to F1 and Q2, the Q1 representation of Gertred, while a much smaller role, is in keeping with "the model Catholic widow" (406). On being shown the error of her remarriage, Gertred sides completely with Hamlet, vowing to "conceale, consent, and doe my best, / What stratagem soe're thou shalt deuise" (*Three-Text Hamlet*, Q1 1596-97); in comparison, Gertrude in F1 and Q2 simply promises to keep quiet about what Hamlet has said to her (3.4.181-83). Kehler therefore concludes that this reformation of "the lusty widow and prodigal mother" can be regarded as "a 'Catholic' Gertred" (409), a religious association that further aligns the older generation of *Hamlet* with the "old religion."

play depicting regicide would have been most unsettling. It is worth noting that this line is revised, possibly at the demand of state censors, to read “a special providence” in F1 (5.2.157-58; Matheson 95).

Not only is the Ghost aligned through religious association with the older generation, but it also demonstrates the absolute authority of a monarch and father. It is, as Marcellus notes at its first appearance, “majestical” (1.1.124), and both its silence in response to Horatio’s demand that it speak (47, 49) and its first words to Hamlet underscore its authority. Bill Readings argues that is not enough for Hamlet to see the Ghost, but he must also hear it: “Commands are received by the ear It is through the ear that we are impelled to action” (54). Indeed, the Ghost’s first words are a command for Hamlet to listen: “Mark me” (1.5.2), a redundant demand given that Hamlet has just asked the Ghost to speak. As Kirby Farrell notes, “The command is pure emphasis. At once the voice is paternally authoritarian and theatrical” (169). The Ghost’s command is a sign not only of who controls this conversation, but also of how Hamlet needs to listen: he must “lend [his] *serious* hearing” (5; emphasis added). Hamlet responds to this demand by noting that he is “bound to hear” (6), an acknowledgement of his willing bondage to the Ghost due to its power as an orator and its assumed authority as “father.” In addition, as the Ghost confirms, hearing will bind Hamlet to action, to revenge (Greenblatt, *Hamlet* 207). As a son listening to what he has been told is his father’s spirit, Hamlet must, as Primaudaye notes, “harken . . . and be obedient” (539) to fulfil his filial duty, and the Ghost reminds Hamlet of his obligation: “List, Hamlet, list, O list! / If thou didst ever thy dear father love—” (1.5.22-23), immediately before indicating the action he must take. Unfortunately for Hamlet, what the Ghost asks him to do is unlawful, at least according to conduct book writers such as Gouge, and even though the Ghost later qualifies its demand to “howsoever thou pursuest this act” (84), there is no doubt that it asks Hamlet to “[r]evenge his [father’s] most foul and most unnatural murder” (25).

Hamlet, however, is not conduct literature, but a revenge tragedy, and there are clear indications of its generic roots, one of the most obvious being the presence of the Ghost itself. The question therefore arises as to whether criticism of the filial drive to

revenge wrongs done to parents is valid when applied to this play. Booth argues that while *Hamlet* is a revenge tragedy, the “genre does not provide the limited frame of reference that the revenge genre . . . usually establish[es]” (152). He cites *The Spanish Tragedy* as the archetypal revenge tragedy in which the ghost of Don Andrea, accompanied by the personification of Revenge, provides all the details of why revenge is necessary in the first scene (152). In contrast, Booth argues and I agree, *Hamlet* constantly draws on contexts other than the revenge genre, to present conflicting value systems, one being the Christian context that underpins most (if not all) conduct literature (154). Even as the Ghost demands revenge, he prohibits Hamlet from acting against Gertrude by demanding that he “[l]eave her to heaven” (1.5.86) echoing the Judeo-Christian belief that humans should not seek revenge, because “Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18; Romans 12:19). The Ghost’s conflicting demands that Hamlet revenge his father’s death but leave his mother alone may also be an acknowledgement of both the private and public motives Hamlet may have for revenge. Sir Francis Bacon, in “Of Revenge,” considers revenge a “kinde of Wilde Justice” that the law should “weed . . . out.” He admits, though, that revenge may be necessary “for those wrongs which there is no Law to remedy” (*Essayes* 16). It is perhaps for this reason that Bacon goes on to differentiate between public revenge, which he considers exemplified in the death of Julius Caesar, as “for the most part, Fortunate” and private revenge, which he states “is not so” (17). When the law is controlled by the one who has done wrong, the law might be deemed incapable of remedying that wrong. Certainly, Hamlet’s demand that his friends swear themselves to secrecy and his adoption of an “antic disposition” (1.5.173) suggests that he has no faith in the law to convict Claudius of regicide. In Bacon’s terms, then, his revenge of King Hamlet’s death would be acceptable or “fortunate.” Still, Hamlet Senior’s death is also fratricide, a private affair linked to Claudius’s desire for Gertrude and her subsequent remarriage. This type of wrong, according to Bacon, should not be revenged and especially not by the likes of Hamlet. Instead, such an act should be “pass[ed] . . . over” as that makes a person “Superiour: For it is a Princes part to Pardon” (16).

Hamlet's hesitation and indecision may therefore result from his inability to determine his own motive for revenge. If he desires revenge for the death of his king, his actions may be acceptable, but if he is motivated to revenge his father's murder, then his actions will be condemned. The consequences are not based on the act of revenge itself, but on his motives; inappropriate revenge may be punished (Flatter 91-92), and perhaps not in this life alone. As he notes later, it is the fear of what might happen after death that "makes us rather bear those ills we have / Than fly to others that we know not of? / Thus conscience does make cowards of us all" (3.1.83-85).³⁷ Thus, Hamlet has difficulty fulfilling the Ghost's commands, not only because they are conflicting, but also because he understands the risk he faces, unlike Laertes who, even as he acknowledges the existence of another world, rejects the consequences of taking revenge, declaring:

Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit!
I dare damnation. To this point I stand,
That both the worlds I give to negligence,
Let come what comes. Only I'll be revenged
Most thoroughly for my father. (4.5.128-32)

Later, he reinforces his rejection of Christian morality with his claim that he would even "cut [Hamlet's] throat i'th' church" (4.7.98). Laertes therefore readily acquiesces when Claudius declares, "Revenge should have no bounds" (100), itself an ironic reversal of the Ghost's insistence that Hamlet will be "bound" "to revenge" (1.5.6-7), and then reveals that he has already purchased a poison so potent that a mere scratch is death (4.7.113-19). While Laertes is predisposed to hear what Claudius has to say, hearing him

37. Hamlet's description of death as "[t]he undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns" (3.1.81-82) immediately preceding the cited passage, clearly contradicts the Ghost's claim that it is indeed the spirit of Hamlet's father returned from the dead. Booth argues that, in performance, the audience accepts these inconsistencies because "*Hamlet* is woven together through a "rhythm of ideas . . . [which] gives shape and identity . . . to the play that *contains* the situation." Booth concludes that "[s]uch a container allows Shakespeare to replace *conclusion* with *inclusion*; it provides a particular and temporary context that overcomes the intellectual terror ordinarily inherent in looking at an action in all the value systems it invades" (174-75).

with “a knowing ear” (4.7.3) and then agreeing to “be ruled by [him]” (57),³⁸ Hamlet is equally open to the Ghost’s words, despite his concerns about the nature of the spirit that speaks. Upon hearing the Ghost’s story, Hamlet exclaims, “O my prophetic soul!” (1.5.41). Not only are both listeners open to what they hear, but also both speakers substitute one narrative for another. Claudius is about to tell Laertes that Hamlet has gone to England and is unlikely to return when he is interrupted by a messenger with a letter from the prince himself. Laertes never hears of Claudius’s initial plan—indeed, had he done so, he may well have realized that he is simply a pawn in Claudius’s game of self-protection. Equally, the Ghost substitutes one narrative for another when speaking to Hamlet. Moreover, not only do the Ghost and Claudius offer substitute tales, but they themselves can be considered substitute speakers and, more importantly, substitute parents. Hamlet may call the Ghost “father” and even grant the spectre the obedience due a parent, but he has no proof that the Ghost *is* his father; as he admits, it could well be the devil. Equally, Claudius might try to act as father to both Hamlet and Laertes, but in both cases he is clearly a substitute. Hamlet rejects Claudius’s parental authority outright, while Laertes is more receptive to Claudius’s advice, but, like Hamlet’s acceptance of the Ghost’s story, this leads to his tragic end.

The Ghost tells Hamlet that it “could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,” but then, even as it demands, “List, Hamlet, list, O list!,” it declares that this tale cannot be told: “this eternal blazon must not be / To ears of flesh and blood” (1.5.15-16, 21-22), and substitutes another.³⁹ Nonetheless, this tale evokes the same response in its listener as the untold tale (Wilson, “Narratives” 34). It too appears to “freeze” Hamlet and not just as demonstrated by his later inaction. The narrative that the Ghost tells is also one of paralysis, of the freezing of King Hamlet’s

38. Claudius’s request that Laertes “be ruled by [him]” is reinforced by Laertes’ repetition of the word: “If so you’ll not o’errule me to a peace” (4.7.58).

39. Not only is the account of King Hamlet’s poisoning substituted for the “secrets of [the Ghost’s] prison house” (1.5.14), but this narrative is also revised by the Ghost when he notices the dawn coming and decides to abbreviate his tale (58-59).

blood when hebona is poured into his ear and his blood instantly coagulates and a “vile and loathsome crust” appears on his body (1.5.62-73).⁴⁰ To add to this unfolding of a tale of “freez[ing] . . . blood,” the Ghost also notes that King Hamlet’s ear is not the only one that has been poisoned, but that “the whole ear of Denmark / Is by a forgèd process of [the king’s] death / Rankly abused” (36-38). The abuse is a result of yet another substitute narrative, the story “given out” that the king was “stung” by a serpent (35-36). It is difficult to ignore the allusion here to the other serpent that “stung” Eve’s ear in the Garden of Eden, a serpent that raised questions about God’s command and offered an alternate tale instead. If, as the Ghost suggests, ears are irrevocably poisoned by hearing a substitute tale in the same way as Eve was tainted by hearing the serpent’s alternate tale, then Hamlet is clearly at risk, even as he listens, of also being poisoned.

There is, however, some truth in the Ghost’s substitute narrative. Claudius may not reveal how he kills his brother, but he acknowledges his crime and his motivation when he cannot pray for forgiveness: “those effects for which I did the murder— / My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen” (3.3.54-55). Hamlet, though, never hears Claudius’s confession and so lacks the irrefutable proof to support the Ghost’s story. Nonetheless, the tale, like those heard by Othello and Eve, still has the power to paralyze. Othello’s own imaginings combined with Iago’s whisperings paralyze him in his fit, and Satan’s tale ultimately paralyzes Eve and all humanity through death; equally, Hamlet, like his father, is changed because of what enters his ear. King Hamlet’s blood may have coagulated, but Hamlet notes that he fears his heart will stop and that he too is nearer death because of what has entered his ear: “Hold, hold, my heart, / And you, my sinews, grow not instant old, / But bear me stiffly up,” (1.5.93-95). While I argue that Hamlet is particularly predisposed to listen to a ghost that claims to be his father’s spirit and—even

40. Cummings notes that Shakespeare’s interest in hearing and the poisoning of King Hamlet through the ear may come from a number of sources, including Eustachio’s discovery of the tube connecting the middle ear and throat that made feasible such a method of murder, medical texts that advocate medicines administered as drops to the ear, Lightborn’s list of secretive ways to enact murder in Marlowe’s *Edward II*, and the rumour that Ambroise Paré had poisoned the King of France in this manner (84).

as he anticipates the tale—is frozen or paralyzed by what he hears, Kenneth Gross suggests that Hamlet is predisposed to hear everyone. Gross writes, “Hamlet himself hears more in the words of others than we can fully register; we cannot even be sure what he hears in his own words, those sayings he so readily mocks. His very capaciousness of ear isolates him amid a crowd of other speakers” (13). In contrast, Cummings insists that Hamlet is “figuratively hard of hearing,” and that he fails to act because he does not hear the Ghost, his hearing being “paradoxically corrupted, blocked, or distracted by his own very fertile and noisy mind” (86-87). Cummings claims that Hamlet also fails to hear the Ghost’s demand that Gertrude be left to divine judgement, Horatio’s warning about the Ghost, Ophelia’s distress in the Nunnery scene, and even himself at times (87, 89). Cummings adds that in his soliloquies, Hamlet offers “potent self-criticism” which he immediately forgets (90).

In fact, Hamlet’s auditory openness to the Ghost, what Gross calls his “capaciousness of ear,” leads to his corruption by the Ghost’s “leperous distilment” (1.5.64), and he not only undergoes an internal change as a result of what he hears, but his outward appearance also changes. He assumes an “antic disposition,” and Ophelia, Gertrude, and Claudius comment on the change. As if to underscore that Hamlet has experienced the same paralyzing corruption that killed his father, Ophelia notes that he does not simply look as if he has seen a ghost, but that he now resembles a ghost: “with a look so piteous in purport / As if he had been loosèd out of hell / To speak of horrors” (2.1.83-85).⁴¹ Gertrude notes her son is “too-much changèd” (2.2.36), a remark that reinforces Claudius’s comment to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that neither “th’ exterior nor the inward man / Resembles that it was” (2.2.6-7). Here Claudius notes that he, at least, is aware that it is not just Hamlet’s appearance that has changed, but that his “exterior,” like his father’s “vile and loathsome crust,” reflects an inner change resulting from what has entered his ear.

41. Ophelia’s comment on Hamlet’s “piteous” look and his “sigh so piteous and profound” (2.1.95) is echoed by Hamlet’s later reaction to the Ghost’s appearance in his mother’s closet and his remark on the Ghost’s “piteous action” (3.4.119).

While Hamlet's exterior change is like that suffered by his father, it is also seen in other avenging sons in the play. Laertes, like Hamlet, has his ear "infect[ed]. . . / With pestilent speeches of his father's death" (4.5.86-87), and as a result his previously respectful behaviour to Claudius undergoes a marked change as he becomes rebellious and vengeful. More closely related to the change in Hamlet is the description of Pyrrhus (Jenkins 135). Reciting the speech to the players, Hamlet begins by noting Pyrrhus "did the night resemble" with "sable arms, / Black as his purpose" (2.2.432-33), an image that closely reflects Hamlet's own "nightly colour," "inky cloak," and "customary suits of solemn black" (1.2.68, 77, 78). Pyrrhus wreaks havoc in Troy as he seeks out Priam, becoming covered in blood and "[r]oasted in wrath and fire, / And thus o'er-sized with coagulate gore, / With eyes like carbuncles" (2.2.441-43). This description not only brings to mind the "vile and loathsome crust" of the dying King Hamlet, but also the "freez[ing] . . . young blood" and "two eyes like stars start[ing] from their spheres" (1.5.16-17) of young Hamlet. Moreover, while Hamlet gives the description of the revenger, he cannot proceed to the part when Pyrrhus finds Priam. The First Player takes up the speech:

Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide;
 But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
 Th'unnervèd father falls. Then senseless Ilium,
 Seeming to feel his blow, with flaming top
 Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash
 Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear. For lo, his sword,
 Which was declining on the milky head
 Of reverend Priam, seemed i'th' air to stick.
 So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood,
 And, like a neutral to his will and matter,
 Did nothing. (2.2.452-62)

It is difficult to ignore the precursor here of Hamlet's own potentially "wide" strike when, assuming Claudius is behind the arras, he stabs Polonius in his stead. Also, Pyrrhus's momentary pause suggests that the hesitation Hamlet feels is apparent even in the most vengeful son. Moreover, Pyrrhus's inaction is a result of the "hideous crash" that "[t]akes prisoner [his] ear."

Like Hamlet, Pyrrhus is rendered immobile, at least momentarily, by what he hears. He is deafened by the fall of Troy, the public ramifications of his revenge against Priam. Hamlet, too, may be immobilized by the same awareness that whether his desire for revenge is motivated by the private or public aspect of Hamlet Senior's death, his act will have public repercussion because of the position held by his father's murderer. By seeking revenge against his uncle, Hamlet commits treason against his monarch, and while he may be aware that "the time is out of joint," he is also aware that as the one "born to set it right" (1.5.189-90), he risks being condemned as a villain just as Pyrrhus is considered the villain in Priam's death.⁴² Hamlet has already discovered from the Ghost how rumours circulated after death can affect public affairs, and how a villain may, when the truth is unknown, be considered a king. With the account of Priam's slaughter, Hamlet learns how a vengeful son may be labelled a villain, that while he is currently a victim of Claudius's treachery, if he takes action he may well be considered the villain: it is little wonder, therefore, that he insists that Horatio tell his story, fearing "what a wounded name, / Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!" (5.2.286-87).

If Hamlet insists that Horatio tell his story after his death, the Ghost is equally insistent on telling the tale of Hamlet Senior. Before it begins its tale, it demands Hamlet's full attention, and one can understand Cummings's suggestion that Hamlet seems inattentive, given the Ghost's repeated injunction that he "[m]ark," "lend . . . serious hearing," "[l]ist, . . . list, O list," and "hear" (1.5.2, 5, 22, 34). However, there is clear evidence that Hamlet is already prepared to listen. He has, as already noted, asked the Ghost to speak and the Ghost indeed finds him an "apt" listener (31).⁴³ Hamlet's

42. Jenkins notes that Pyrrhus "presents a monstrous and horrific figure in which the alarming potentialities of both murderer and revenger are contained" (145), mirroring both aspects in Hamlet. I agree, but would argue that it is less Pyrrhus's own action, than the way it has been remembered that reveals to Hamlet how a revenging son can be deemed a brutal murderer.

43. Hamlet's readiness to listen to the Ghost and his prior expectation of what he will hear is similar to that of other "poisoned" listeners, such as Othello, who are open to speech that accords with their own ideas.

willingness to listen demonstrates strong parallels to what Laertes perceives to be Ophelia's "too credent ear." Both her brother and her father fear that Ophelia may be seduced by Hamlet if she listens to him. Polonius is most concerned that Hamlet has "[g]iven private time" to his daughter, and that her "audience [has] been most free and bounteous" (1.3.92-93), and he notes that Ophelia should "not believe [Hamlet's] vows, for they are brokers, / . . . mere implorators of unholy suits" (127, 129). We should therefore attend not just to the parallels between Laertes listening to his father, and Hamlet listening to the Ghost, but also to the way that the advice given to Ophelia informs our understanding of Hamlet's act of listening.

As noted earlier in the mothers' advice literature, as in the texts by Grymeston and Leigh, the risk that young men could be deceived by what they hear was often glossed in terms of the risk faced by a woman listening to a "false Louer." Moreover, the warnings Laertes and Polonius give Ophelia are also made relevant to Hamlet by the physical movement of the Ghost. As Horatio comments to Hamlet, "It beckons you to go away with it / As if it some impartment did desire / To you alone" (1.4.39-41). Heedless of his friends' warnings, and in contrast to Polonius's admonition to Ophelia, Hamlet spends "private time" with the Ghost and gives it a "free and bounteous" audience; despite Horatio's warning that the Ghost may "tempt" (50) him towards his doom, Hamlet insists on following it. The scene division of F1 that separates his friends' exhortations and his solitary interview with the Ghost further underscores the private nature of the conversation along with the idea that Hamlet has been literally seduced or led astray. That Hamlet is seduced and potentially corrupted by what he hears is not only suggested by the proximity of Polonius's and Laertes' advice to Ophelia, but also by the fact that while others see the Ghost, Hamlet is the only one to hear it. His ear is the only one sufficiently "apt." Indeed, in the first scene, Barnardo notes that Horatio's ears are not only resistant to hearing the Ghost, but even to hearing the story of it. Moreover, Barnardo draws on the castle or fort imagery commonly associated with the way women need to defend their ears: "let us once again assail your ears, / That are so fortified against our story" (1.1.29-30). It is only after he has seen the Ghost that Horatio is willing to

listen to it. Indeed, then he demands that it speak only to be frustrated by its silence. Unlike Hamlet, Horatio attempts to control what the Ghost says, offering it three reasons to speak: if it has hidden stolen treasure, if it has information about Denmark's future that will prevent a tragedy, and "[i]f there be any good thing to be done / That may to thee do ease and grace to me" (111-12). Horatio, then, not only "wrong[s]" the Ghost's sense of majesty by demanding that it speak, but he also demonstrates he is not very "apt" or open as a listener: he only wants to hear the Ghost speak of certain things.

While Hamlet may have been literally led astray by the Ghost, his desire to obey its commands echoes Ophelia's obedience to Polonius. Her father's injunction that she should not spend "private time" with a young man like Hamlet and that she should be most wary of the "perilous circumstance" (1.3.102) of listening to Hamlet's protestations of love is clearly in keeping with the advice found in the conduct literature of the time. Nonetheless, Ophelia's obedience to this suitable advice may be considered her undoing. Taylor complains that she is overly "pliant" to Polonius's command to tell all, revealing the confidences of both Laertes and Hamlet (277), and Flatter agrees that "Ophelia's prime fault [is] that she obeys her [father] too much" (66). Certainly, her obedience to her father's command that she avoid Hamlet appears to provoke his attack on her in the Nunnery scene and critics have posited that the isolation she experiences due to his rejection of her, her brother's absence, and her father's death leads to her madness (Hawkes, *Shakespeare's* 110). Not only is she isolated, but as in Hamlet's case, the commands she is asked to obey are contradictory. She promises Laertes that what he has said to her is "in my memory locked, / And you yourself shall keep the key of it" (1.3.85-86). Almost immediately, her father asks what Laertes has said and Ophelia is forced (albeit obliquely) to tell him. Having unlocked her memory to her father, he ridicules her uncertain reading of Hamlet's intentions, calling her a "green girl" and "a baby" (101, 105), and insists first that she should "[b]e somewhat scanter of [her] maiden presence" (121), later revising this to insist "in plain terms" that from now on she should not

“slander any moment leisure / As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet” (132-34).⁴⁴ The only response Ophelia can give is to declare her obedience. Moreover, we learn later that Ophelia has, “in her duty and obedience” (2.2.108) revealed even more to her father. In showing Polonius the verses Hamlet has given her, she has “[a]ll given to [his] ear” (128). Having given her obedience and “all” to her father, she must be silent with Hamlet. She cannot even reveal to him the reason for her changed behaviour: her father’s directive must remain secret.

In contrast to Polonius, the Ghost does not insist that Hamlet reveal his own secrets, but rather demands that the prince lock its tale in his memory. The phantom departs with the imperative, “Remember me” (1.5.91), a command to which Hamlet provides a triple echo (95, 97, 112).⁴⁵ While the Ghost’s imperative is in keeping with that found in the parents’ advice literature, as in the works of Raleigh and Breton, here it results in Hamlet having to remain silent about what he has heard. Just as Ophelia’s obedience is signified by her silence, so Hamlet’s filial obedience is indicated by his refusal to relate the Ghost’s story to his friends. He, like Ophelia, is forced to keep what he considers a parental command secret. Farrell suggests that these “locked” secrets have disastrous consequences, akin to the poison poured in King Hamlet’s ear (166). Mark Burnett agrees with Farrell’s suggestion that secrets can poison the possessor, noting that “[t]raditionally poison, infection and secrecy have formed an uneasy alliance. Keeping secrets is often regarded as a species of transgression which can only result in the owner

44. While Ophelia tells Polonius “I do not know, my lord, what I should think” of Hamlet’s protestations of love (1.3.104), in her later interview with Hamlet she admits that she had believed his declaration (3.1.117). Of course, at her graveside Hamlet declares, “I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers / Could not, with all their quantity of love, / Make up my sum” (5.1.254-56), but this sounds more like a challenge to Laertes than a vow of love for Ophelia.

45. The repeated “Remember me” in 1.5 is a clear if ironic reminder of Laertes’ parting words to his sister: “[R]emember well / What I have said to you” (1.3.84-85). The need to remember what one is told is also echoed by Hamlet in 5.2 when he tells Horatio of his experiences at sea: “You do remember all the circumstance?” he asks Horatio, to which his friend exclaims, “Remember it, my lord!” (5.2.2-3).

being rewarded with eventual illness” (34). Indeed, one could argue that the Ghost’s conflicting demand that Hamlet act on what he has heard while keeping it secret is most troublesome for the prince and that retaining the secret corrupts him. Certainly, Hamlet fears that his friends will reveal what they know (Haynes 153), and his concern results in what Horatio calls “wild and whirling words” (1.5.137). Nonetheless, Hamlet’s refusal to tell his friends about his father’s murder is in keeping with the advice given by both Raleigh and James I to their sons, James suggesting that one should keep one’s own council, while Raleigh is explicit that no “friend or servant” should be trusted with something that might “endanger [one’s] estate” (19). Ironically, even as Hamlet demands that his friends be sworn to secrecy, a directive clearly supported by the Ghost with its understage echo, the Ghost’s very presence as an “old mole” (1.5.162), and its ability to repeat what it hears demonstrates how difficult it is to keep secrets in the playworld of Elsinore. Burnett, who sees the alternation between disclosure and concealment as “the play’s structural principle, the basis of its rhythm” (36), notes the mockery made of the concept of privacy and the difficulty of keeping anything secret because of the continual eavesdropping as witnessed by the Ghost here, Polonius and Claudius in the Nunnery scene, and Polonius in Gertrude’s closet (24). Burnett thus claims that the play has strong allusions to the myth of Pandora’s box, focusing on the need to keep secret information that would have horrifying consequences if it were known (25). However, even as both Ophelia and Hamlet have difficulty keeping secrets, they also discover that possessing them may be as damaging as revelation.

Hartwig notes that while the Ghost’s command to Hamlet “is more complex and more significant” than that Polonius gives Ophelia, both these silently obedient children die as a result of the commands they are given (217). Laertes also dies as a result of his obedience, even though it is, at least initially, anything but silent. Laertes returns to Elsinore hot for revenge when he learns of his father’s murder. Flatter sees Laertes as a foil to Hamlet and describes him “as an impulsive hothead . . . who obeys the urge of the

moment and is easily swayed even into committing a cowardly crime” (93).⁴⁶ While Laertes may be a “hothead[ed]” revenger, he is too much his father’s son to maintain his opposition to Claudius. Like Polonius, he understands court politics and how it is better to be friends with “some great man,” as Burghley tells his son, than with someone of a lower station. He therefore tells the king that he is willing, “like the kind life-rend’ring pelican” to give his life for his “friends” (4.5.142-43).⁴⁷ He declares, with a clear indication of the gesture that accompanies this speech, “[T]hus wide I’ll ope my arms” and “[r]epast them with my blood” (142, 144). His declaration of such potential self-sacrifice earns him praise from Claudius: “Why now you speak / Like a good child and a true gentleman” (145-46), and not long after Claudius refers to himself as Laertes’ “friend” (4.7.2).

When Claudius presents his plan of the rigged fencing match to Laertes, the young man is encouraged to go along with it, first, because Claudius suggests that to fail to do so is to be “like the painting of a sorrow, / A face without a heart” (90-91), and second, because Laertes believes that his powerful “friend” is helping him to be a “good child” and revenge his father’s death.⁴⁸ What he discovers, though, is that he is simply the instrument Claudius uses to permanently silence Hamlet. He dies, like his father, in place

46. Hamlet plays with the term “foil” just before the fencing match, when he tells Laertes, “I’ll be your foil, Laertes. In mine ignorance / Your skill shall like a star i’th’ darkest night, / Stick fiery off indeed” (5.2.192-94), suggesting that Hamlet not only sees himself as a contrast to Laertes, but also as Laertes’ weapon of revenge. However, even as Laertes suspects the irony of Hamlet’s remark as noted by his reply, “You mock me, sir” (195), his “ignorance” of how he too is being used by Claudius is apparent to the audience. Hamlet, at least, has an inkling that all is not right (157-61).

47. The Norton text adopts the wording of Q2 for this line. In contrast, F1 reads “kinde Life rend’ring Politician,” suggesting perhaps that Laertes considers his father a loyal counsellor who gave his life for his king and that he is expressing his willingness to do the same.

48. Claudius’s goad has strong echoes not only of Hamlet’s claim that grief can be an action “a man might play” (1.2.84), but also of the motionless Pyrrhus as a “painted tyrant” (2.2.460).

of the king. Leverenz claims that Laertes is “patently the norm for filial behaviour” (303), and one can consider his understanding of how friends should be chosen, his belief in what a “great man” can do for him, along with his repetition of his father’s behaviour, and his loyalty to his father’s memory and his king to typify socially accepted filial behaviour. The problem, however, is that Laertes shows such filial obedience to a man who is not his father. Furthermore, while Claudius is Laertes’ monarch and therefore someone to be obeyed, he is also a substitute king, a villain who has assumed a “majestical” appearance. Both Hamlet and Laertes are sons who show too much filial obedience. They do not limit their obedience to their blood parents, but grant it to those who simply look or act like parents.

The failure of Laertes and Hamlet to consider the substitute nature of the father figures to whom they listen demonstrates the risk of listening when the speaker’s true character or motives cannot be determined. While Polonius might claim, “[T]o thine own self be true, / And it must follow, as the night the day, / Thou canst not then be false to any man” (1.3.78-80), there is no way of knowing if speakers are always “true” to themselves. Claudius looks like a king, and Laertes attends to Claudius’s directions because of his monarchical status, but of course, Claudius’s “true” self is not kingly. Equally, Hamlet listens to the Ghost because it looks like his father, but he cannot discern the Ghost’s “true” self. These young men might be criticized for failing to ascertain the intentions of these speakers, but the play itself demonstrates the difficulty of doing just that. The fencing match, particularly, shows how various characters can interpret the same event differently when the motives behind the action remain hidden. While Laertes sees the fencing match as an opportunity to revenge the death of his father, Claudius regards it as an opportunity to rid himself of Hamlet, whom he rightly sees as a “[h]azard” and “fear” (3.3.6, 25). Moreover, the fencing match reveals how performance or artifice may be substituted for reality and vice versa. Vincent Crapanzano argues that for Laertes and the king, the “mimicking game” of fencing masks “the mimicked reality, the fight-to-the-death” (310); they know that this match will end in bloodshed and death. In contrast, Crapanzano argues, Hamlet and his mother see the game as just that, a game.

I would suggest, however, that Hamlet is aware that the fencing match, this *game* of swordplay, hides something less innocent. Hamlet considers the invitation to fence with Laertes an “augury” (5.2.157), but he cannot see the precise “villainy” (254) it disguises until Laertes tells him that the sword he holds is “[u]nbated and envenomed” (260). Flatter claims that “Hamlet knows perfectly well that he will have to fight for his life” (136). According to him, Hamlet is not surprised that Laertes’ foil is unbated, but he is surprised that it is also poisoned (141-42). Hamlet may see the unbated foil and he obviously both sees and feels his own wound, but it is not until he *hears* Laertes’ words that he can fully understand what is happening. Some members of the onstage audience, though, have difficulty comprehending events even when words are offered. Gertrude and the court attendants assume that they will be entertained by a display of swordsmanship. They do not anticipate that either Laertes or Hamlet will be mortally wounded. To them, the fencing match is simply a courtly entertainment. It is only when “[t]hey bleed on both sides” that concern is voiced (5.2.247). When the queen collapses, Claudius, substituting a fabrication for truth, suggests that she “swoons to see them bleed” (251), a claim that Gertrude must then refute with her dying words. When Hamlet kills Claudius, the attendants again fail to understand what is happening. The cry is “[t]reason, treason” (265) but, as Laertes notes, Claudius has been “justly served” (269).

Not only do the various participants and spectators have different interpretations of what the fencing match means and what they actually see, but also the sword fight that takes place is yet another substitution. Real sword fighting is substituted for a game, spectators see a bloodbath instead of light entertainment, and what appears to be treason is actually said to be justice. Thus, this final scene reflects the substitution that repeatedly occurs in *Hamlet*: the substitution that we see in the very opening scene as one set of guards replaces another, in Ophelia’s obedience to her father’s word at the expense of revealing both what her brother tells her and what Hamlet says and writes to her, in the Ghost’s narration of King Hamlet’s murder rather than the “secrets of [his] prison-house” (1.5.14), in Polonius hiding behind the arras as a representative of the king in Gertrude’s closet, in Hamlet substituting his letter for the letter Guildenstern and Rosencrantz carry

from Claudius to England, in Claudius revising his plan to gain Laertes' aid in killing Hamlet, and finally in the exchange of a poisoned, unbated foil for the one normally used in fencing matches. This series of substitutions is spawned by the earlier replacement of a "villain, [a] smiling, damnèd villain" (106) for the rightful king. The ramifications of this exchange lead to even Hamlet himself acting as a substitute. Through the Ghost's command, Hamlet Senior "usurps his son's life" (Oakes 108). Just as Laertes is Claudius's instrument in murdering Hamlet, so Hamlet is the Ghost's instrument in murdering Claudius. As Flatter notes, "Claudius never meets the Ghost nor ever hears anything about him; and yet, when in the end he falls at his nephew's hands it is—not in reality, but in truth—his murdered brother who kills him" (10). While Flatter may overstate the case, particularly considering the Ghost's failure to reappear after the closet scene and Hamlet's later acceptance of a "divinity that shapes our ends" (5.2.10), there is no question that the cumulative effect of the Ghost's story, Claudius's reaction to *The Mousetrap*, and Laertes' cry of "the King's to blame" (5.2.263) leads him to mortally wound Claudius with "[t]he treacherous instrument . . . in [his] hand" (259). If Gertrude and the court attendants cannot see the "serpent" beneath the king's crown, Claudius never sees his dead brother with his "vile and loathsome crust" beneath Hamlet's "inky cloak."

Phyllis Gorfain argues that the duplication and adaptation of scenes and narratives in *Hamlet*, what I term substitutions, encourage a reinterpretation of events. She suggests that through the various modes of discourse, characters find ways to subvert the deception of what she terms "a manipulative patriarchal culture" (156). She sees the repeated revision as carnivalesque in nature, with the repetitions being marked by alternate verbal forms, including stories, recitations, songs, plays, jokes and riddles. While the repetition can at times be ludic and excessive, as in the Gravesdiggers' scene, with its imitation of legal debate on Ophelia's death, its songs, puns, jokes and riddles, more often it emphasizes both the need to attend carefully to speech and to consider the effect of that speech. Repeatedly, both the characters onstage and the theatre audience see something before hearing the information necessary for an understanding of what has

been seen. For example, in the first scene we see the Ghost, but we have little information about it except that it is wearing the same armour as the old king once wore. In the following scene we see a royal procession, but we must wait until the end of act 1 to hear the Ghost's accusations against Claudius, and it is not until act 3 that we hear Claudius's confession and the confirmation that while he looks and even sounds like a king, he is a murderer and a usurper. Equally, it is not enough for Hamlet to hear about, or even see, the Ghost; he must also hear its tale. Neither is it enough for Claudius and the rest of the court to watch the dumbshow of *The Mousetrap*; they must also hear the play itself. However, as made clear by Horatio's rejection of Barnardo's story about the Ghost, a narrative may also be insufficient. As Horatio notes, he will not believe "[w]ithout the sensible and true avouch / Of [his] own eyes" (1.1.55-56). One must both see and hear, the words heard providing an interpretation to the spectacle seen. Polonius, though, even when he acts as a "lawful espial" (3.1.34), fails to consider the importance of seeing what he hears. He tells Ophelia that she need not relate the events of her meeting with Hamlet as "[h]e heard it all" (179). His instructions to Reynaldo also emphasize listening to what others say about Laertes,⁴⁹ and, ultimately, Polonius dies, not only because of Hamlet's desire to restrain his mother, but also because of the old man's failure to see. Hiding behind the arras, he "hear[s] the process" (3.3.29) but cannot see what is going on when Gertrude cries for help. There is no evidence that Hamlet intends to kill his mother, and her cry, "What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?" (3.4.21) may be proactive rather than reactive, a result of her fear that he *may* do something given his belligerence and the physical force he uses to prevent her from leaving the room (Flatter 14).⁵⁰

49. As he dismisses Reynaldo, Polonius says, "Observe his inclination in yourself" (2.1.71), the Norton editors glossing "in" as "for"; however, I am not convinced that Polonius is advising Reynaldo to watch Laertes himself, but suggest that he could also be advising Reynaldo to be wary of demonstrating the same "inclination" as his son. He ends his consideration of how Reynaldo will "sound" (42) Laertes by adding, "let him ply his music" (73), underscoring once again what is heard, not what is seen.

50. While Hamlet may consider his mother "wicked" because of her remarriage, his behaviour towards her is unacceptable according to Gouge who claims that children should "maintaine a reverend respect" even of "wicked Parents" (444).

Readings argues that the play demonstrates “a certain failure of representation” in both visual display and the spoken word (47). Polonius’s experience demonstrates that listening is not enough, and the Ghost’s appearance and the dumbshow indicate that seeing a spectacle is equally inadequate. Hamlet might possess “that within which passeth show” (1.2.85), but the problem is that so do others, including Claudius and the Ghost. While Readings goes on to argue the unrepresentable in psychoanalytical terms of what is inexpressible in language, I want to focus, instead, on the need, shown particularly by Hamlet, to discover what cannot be seen and heard: his desire is to know the truth about the Ghost and its narrative. Leverenz notes that “Hamlet has no way of unambiguously understanding what anyone says to him” (293). He has difficulty making sense of his mother’s solicitude for him in light of her quick marriage to Claudius; he is wary of Claudius’s beneficence to him considering how his uncle has benefitted from his father’s death; he is suspicious of the curiosity of his childhood friends and Polonius’s questions once he suspects his father may have been murdered; he does not understand Ophelia’s silence, or why the Ghost, whose very appearance is questionable, would make the “unlawful” demand that he revenge his father’s death. Hamlet’s awareness that language has the capacity for multiple meanings is shown in his opening pun, “a little more than kin and less than kind” (1.2.65), in his conversation with Polonius in which he gives literal yet evasive replies to the older man’s questions (2.2.192-213), in his bawdy joking with Ophelia prior to the play, and in his questioning of the First Clown, who interprets Hamlet’s questions literally, leading the prince to say, “How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us” (5.1.126-27). Given Hamlet’s awareness that what is spoken is always open to differing interpretations, it is no surprise that he has difficulty acting on what he hears (Ferguson 297). As Andrew Mousley notes, “[T]he problem of knowing how to act is bound up with the problem of discovering the truth of that situation” (77). Hamlet therefore tries to construct an understanding of events from the repetitions and revisions that constitute the play, even creating his own re-enactment with *The Mousetrap* and its dumbshow, so that he can take an appropriate course of action.

Moved to tears by the First Player's description of Hecuba's sorrow at her husband's murder, Hamlet struggles to understand why his own passion does not move him to action. He notes that if an actor had his

motive and cue for passion
 He would drown the stage with tears,
 And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
 Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
 Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
 The very faculty of eyes and ears (2.2.538-43)

Hamlet's suggestion that an actor can "cleave the general ear with horrid speech" not only indicates his awareness of the power of speech, and how words can be used to sway an audience, but also connects particularly with the speech he has just heard the First Player recite. This actor has just recreated in words the scene in which Pyrrhus's ear is "with a hideous crash / Take[n] prisoner" (456-57) and how this crash both stalls and then impels Pyrrhus to "[a] roused vengeance" (468). The implication is that while Pyrrhus's action is delayed by the sound of the chaos resulting from the fall of Troy, his action also causes the noise, and Hamlet's speech acknowledges both his desire and reluctance to create such a noise in Denmark. Nonetheless, while Hamlet may wish to "cleave the general ear with [his own] horrid speech," he also suggests that, contrary to the belief that an orator must feel a particular emotion in order to recreate it in an audience, those who simply perform such emotions may be more convincing. Actors can "[c]onfound . . . and amaze," whereas Hamlet cannot speak so effectively, but only "fall a-cursing like a very drab" (564), despite his motive for vengeance. Hamlet's own audience might question this perception of his speech as ineffective, but Hamlet, even as he notes the power of speech and plans on "catch[ing] the conscience of the King" (582) with a performance of *The Mousetrap*, also shows contempt for such speech and for those who listen to it. In his instructions to the players, Hamlet tells them not to "tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings" (3.2.8-9). Such speech not only "offends" Hamlet, but he also considers listeners affected by it "capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise" (10-11), indicating that those who are impressed

by such acted passion are influenced merely by gesture and noise level and are not giving thought to the meaning of the words spoken.

Hamlet may be scornful of the “groundlings” moved by staged display and noise, but he still decides to have the “players / Play something like the murder of [his] father / Before [his] uncle” (2.2.571-73) as he has heard accounts of guilty persons being so moved by a play that they have confessed their crimes. While this play is an imitation of, or substitute for, Claudius’s actual crime, *The Mousetrap* is also a substitute and revision in other respects. First, it must be noted that Hamlet requests a play and declares that he will write a speech for it before he determines that the purpose of the play will be to trap Claudius. In other words, even though the same play is staged, it is now being used for an alternate or substitute purpose: the play is no longer just for entertainment; it is also the method by which to determine Claudius’s guilt. The shift in the purpose of the play raises the possibility that Hamlet may also substitute another speech for the one he initially intends to include in the play. The problem is that neither the critics, the theatre audience, nor the onstage audience can distinguish the inserted or substituted speech. Indeed, we may never hear the speech as the play is aborted before its end.⁵¹ In addition, not only is *The Mousetrap* used for a substitute purpose, but it also comes to represent an alternate murder. Intended to depict the murder of the Duke of Gonzago, the play, at least to Hamlet, also represents and revises the murder of his father, but there is a further substitution of murderers and therefore potentially of victims. As Jenkins notes, Hamlet informs his audience that Lucianus is the Player King’s nephew not his brother, as would be expected if the play is to depict the murder of King Hamlet (145, 508). Jenkins argues that Lucianus simultaneously represents both Claudius and Hamlet.⁵² I agree, but would

51. Hamlet’s aside, “What, frightened with false fire?” (3.2.244), when he sees Claudius leave the play could suggest that the king reacts earlier than Hamlet had anticipated and that the speech written by Hamlet has not yet been heard or, at the very least, has not been heard in full.

52. I am indebted to John Baxter for first bringing to my attention Jenkins’s remarks on Lucianus’s relationship to the Player King in his graduate seminar on Shakespeare and Mimesis.

emphasize that while the events depicted in *The Mousetrap* are similar to those of King Hamlet's murder as told by the Ghost, Hamlet's comment on the relationship of the characters (the only indication of their kinship) permits a further substitution so that the play comes to represent an event that has yet to happen—the murder of Claudius by Hamlet, his nephew.

Despite his own acknowledgement that speech is open to alternate interpretations and despite the indeterminacy of the events actually represented in *The Mousetrap*, Hamlet appears confident about how the onstage audience, particularly Claudius, will interpret the performance. Hawkes notes, "Rarely can someone involved in a play have been so convinced that, in its linear, sequential unfolding, its single, unequivocal meaning will receive ready, interpreted acknowledgment" ("Telmah" 317). Even as he acknowledges the roots of *The Mousetrap* and its representation of a murder other than that of his father, he believes that Claudius will see it as a reenactment of his crime. When he devises his plan to have the players perform the play, Hamlet notes that the guilty have been "struck so to the soul that presently / They have proclaimed their malefactions" (2.2.568-69), indicating that Hamlet expects Claudius to confess when he sees his murderous deed acted before him. Immediately before the performance, however, when he warns Horatio to "[o]bserve mine uncle," the prince is more equivocal about how Claudius's guilt will be revealed. He claims, "If his occulted guilt / Do not itself unkennel in one speech, / It is a damnèd ghost that we have seen" (3.2.73-75). While he hints here at the dual purpose of this play—to prove Claudius guilty and the Ghost honest—Hamlet does not initially indicate whether the "one speech" that will reveal Claudius's guilt will be one he hears or speaks. He goes on, though, to tell Horatio:

Give him heedful note,
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,
And after, we will both our judgements join
To censure of his seeming. (3.2.77-80)

By noting that he will watch Claudius, Hamlet seems to suggest that the speech that will "unkennel" Claudius's guilt will be the "dozen or sixteen lines" he has inserted into the play. He anticipates that it will prompt a visible response, not an audible confession.

Hamlet's suggestion that the spoken portion of the play will cause a reaction may also explain why Claudius fails to react to the dumbshow. W.W. Greg sees Claudius's lack of response to the dumbshow, which presents events much as the Ghost tells them, a sign that Hamlet's plan to prove the king guilty fails (Hawkes, "Telmah" 318). Flatter, in contrast, claims that the dumbshow is not intended for the onstage audience, and that Gertrude and Claudius do not see it as it is performed on the stage balcony primarily for the benefit for the theatre audience. He believes that the spoken portion of *The Mousetrap* is intended for the onstage audience, particularly Claudius, and that this is performed in front of the king and his entourage (49-50). As a result, the play itself must obscure the connection between the circumstances of King Hamlet's death and the events represented until the last minute in the hope of instigating a marked reaction (54). Jenkins details the various critical commentaries on Claudius's failure to react to the dumbshow and notes that there may be some credit to the arguments that Elizabethan staging practices may have prevented Claudius from seeing it, and that its stylized nature may have obscured its import. However, he concludes that *Hamlet* itself deliberately avoids the question of why Claudius does not react to the dumbshow (501-5).

While the play does not answer the question, I think it does beg the question, and Readings offers an explanation that links with my own argument. He notes that Hamlet has previously ridiculed dumbshows as "inexplicable" (3.2.10), and that as a purely visual representation, "it marks a distinction from the ear" (Readings 58). It, therefore, reinforces the idea that visual representation alone is insufficient for understanding. Just as Hamlet must hear the Ghost's speech before he declares that he knew all along what the spirit tells him (1.5.41), so Claudius must hear Lucianus, the nephew, speak of an unseen action that will "usurp" life before he reacts:

Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing,
 Confederate season, else no creature seeing;
 Thou mixture rank of midnight weeds collected,
 With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,
 Thy natural magic and dire property
 On wholesome life usurp immediately. (3.2.233-38)

Hamlet, though, overlooks two points: first, he assumes that Claudius will apply the same meaning to this scene as Hamlet anticipates, and second that Claudius's visible reaction is sufficient proof of his guilt. Hamlet ignores the fact that dumbshows can be "inexplicable" whether performed by an actor or an audience member. Claudius's movement does not specify whether he is distressed or angered by Lucianus's speech, his action, or because of Hamlet's commentary, all of which occur immediately beforehand, as the king offers no comment on what he has seen and heard. Instead, he asks for lights, ostensibly so he can see his way, but also a request with ironic overtones if one assumes that he has just seen his crime revealed to him.

Unlike the theatre audience, Hamlet only sees the spectacle of Claudius rising. He does not hear Claudius's confession and, therefore, despite his belief that he has the necessary proof of Claudius's guilt and the Ghost's integrity, his evidence remains circumstantial. The audience knows that Hamlet is right to believe his uncle guilty, but it also knows that his assumption is based on the wrong reasons (Hartwig 219-20). Indeed, even as Claudius's guilt is made known to the theatre audience in the following scene, the potential for misinterpreting a visual display or dumbshow is simultaneously revealed. Hamlet, observing Claudius in an attitude of prayer, assumes that he is indeed praying. Hamlet determines that to kill the king now would be insufficient revenge as it would simply expedite the passage of his soul to heaven. The audience, however, learns that while Claudius looks like he is praying, he cannot do so: his performance is literally a "dumb" show: "[His] words fly up, [his] thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts, never to heaven go" (3.3.97-98). Not only does this scene undermine Hamlet's assumption that Claudius's gesture is sufficient evidence of his guilt, but it also suggests that Hamlet may have misinterpreted the cause of Claudius's reaction. Hamlet claims that his uncle leaves "[u]pon the talk of the pois'ning" (3.2.266), implying that Claudius

considers *The Mousetrap* to represent his own crime.⁵³ Claudius, though, in his conversation with Guildenstern and Rosencrantz suggests that the performance reveals the danger Hamlet poses: “I like him not, nor stands it safe with us / To let his madness range” (3.3.1-2). While Hamlet’s knowledge of Claudius’s crime is a potential threat, the king’s words suggest that he fears a more direct threat. Claudius notes that “[t]he terms of our estate may not endure / Hazard so dangerous as doth hourly grow / Out of his lunacies” (6-7). While his reference to Hamlet’s “lunacies” may be considered yet another reference to Hamlet’s “antic disposition” and the belief that Hamlet is mad, it also echoes back to the king’s murderous nephew, Lucianus, as an anagram of that very name. Claudius’s reaction may therefore be a response to hearing (and seeing) his own murder staged.

The Mousetrap, like the final fencing match, is a “mimicked reality,” a representation of other events, and the audience’s perception of what the play represents depends on knowledge of those other events. Knowing the Ghost’s story, Hamlet believes that the play clearly portrays his father’s murder. Claudius, however, even as he reacts to it, implies that he considers the play to represent the threat Hamlet poses to himself. Gertrude, presumably unaware of her first husband’s murder, comments on the portrayal of idealized female fidelity, and even while this might be desired female behaviour, she suggests that there is as much of a gap between the ideal expressed by the Player Queen and the lived experience of women as there is between Burghley’s advice to his son, Thomas, and Thomas’s wild behaviour. Ophelia, subject to Hamlet’s sexual repartee and commentary on the play, appears understandably distracted; she has difficulty following the dumbshow and is apparently the first to note the king’s movement (3.2.243), suggesting that she may have been watching the audience more closely than the play. Polonius, ever responsive to his monarch’s whims, calls for an immediate end to the play

53. Flatter agrees with Hamlet’s reading of Claudius’s reaction, noting the method of poisoning through the ear is so “peculiar” that Claudius cannot fail to recognize his own crime (52). However, such a reading overlooks the impact on Claudius of hearing that Lucianus is the king’s *nephew*. In other words, it values the visual at the expense of the audible, a balance not supported by other events in *Hamlet*.

when the king leaves. *The Mousetrap*, therefore, central to the action of *Hamlet*, not only emphasizes the need for representation in both image and spoken word, but also demonstrates the limits of that representation and the impossibility of limiting a listener's response to what is heard. Moreover, the play within a play not only revises the Ghost's story of King Hamlet's poisoning through the ear, the narrative that informs the action of *Hamlet*, but also reenacts the metaphoric poisoning that the Ghost posits and that indeed appears to circulate throughout *Hamlet*. The speech inserted into *The Mousetrap* not only echoes the many other substitutions that occur in the playworld of Elsinore, but also its indeterminacy echoes the mystery surrounding King Hamlet's poisoning and the enigmatic nature of the Ghost that tells the story of the king's murder. Just as Hamlet expresses doubt about what he has heard, as he doubts even the Ghost's very existence at one point (2.2.575-80), so the theatre audience is forced to ponder what it has heard. Where is Hamlet's speech? The audience, like the onstage characters, struggles to identify the origin and purpose of what it hears, to discover the truth behind the representation.

Hamlet's elusive speech can be considered to represent both what cannot be seen: "that within which passeth show" (1.2.85), and what is unknowable within verbal communication, what causes the dis-ease or discomfort for listeners and what may lead to their being diseased or corrupted. While spectacle may not provide sufficient information, the spoken word, at least as used in Elsinore, is always open to a variety of interpretations, and the "truth" beneath it, is evasive. It is like the evidence that Hamlet seeks to support the Ghost's story. Mousley argues that Hamlet's experience with the Ghost demonstrates that truth cannot be derived from a "single source or authority[;] it becomes a problematic, questionable term, which demands active scrutiny and reflection on the part of the individual" (79). It also demonstrates the problem that arises when one assumes one knows the truth behind the words. As noted earlier, the parents' advice literature suggests that sons, unlike daughters, can distinguish the truth in what they hear, that Polonius can encourage Laertes to "[g]ive every man [his] ear," because he will be able to discern the truth, that he will, like Bernie Grymeston, be able to detect the

“guilefull call” and “flattering gloze” (Grymeston A4^v). *Hamlet* demonstrates, however, that neither sons nor daughters have the ability to distinguish the truth in what they hear, even when they are listening to figures of authority, for such figures of authority cannot always be distinguished from unworthy substitutes. Laertes cannot discern Claudius’s self-interest and Hamlet fails to find incontrovertible evidence of the Ghost’s honesty. The inability of these sons to discover the truth beneath the narrative and the purpose behind the plan results from the disruption of the link between the spoken word and its referent that occurs when a usurper and murderer is called a king, and regicide and fratricide are termed a snakebite. Crapanzano writes, the bond “is no longer *experienced* as natural but as arbitrary” (288), and arbitrary links are then open to further modification and further substitution.

Listening to *Hamlet*

I began this chapter exploring the effect of parents’ words on their children, how children were called on to be obedient to the commands of their parents and particularly to attend carefully to their parents’ final words. While much of the written advice is directed to sons who are advised to “[h]eare all men speake, but harken to the wise” (Breton, *The Mothers Blessing* B^r), concerns remain that they, like their sisters, may be seduced by what they hear. The suggestion is that an unsuspecting listener, like the sleeping King Hamlet, can be poisoned, internally corrupted, and externally changed by what enters the ear. The emphasis on attending to the advice of dying parents and the concern about the possibility of being seduced through the ear must have resonated strongly through a nation ruled by an aging queen who refused to publicly name her successor, and fearful of such coups as that attempted by Essex. One could not openly question Elizabeth’s decisions without personal risk, as John Stubbs discovered with the loss of his right hand; nonetheless, there were undoubted concerns about the legacy she would leave. It is under these conditions that Shakespeare writes a revenge tragedy clearly influenced by societal attitudes towards parental advice. Conduct book writers, with the exception of Gouge, might assume that parents bestow sound advice on their

children, but Shakespeare explores both the validity of such advice and the consequences of granting someone the status of a parent.⁵⁴ In Elsinore, obedience to parental dictates, whether given by an actual or substitute parent, has horrifying consequences. Ophelia obeys her father's seemingly reasonable directive that she not spend time alone with Hamlet, only to end up isolated and driven to madness. Hamlet, accepting the Ghost as the spirit of his dead father, struggles with the idea that he must obey an inappropriate command, yet finally fulfills the directive only through circumstances arranged by his father's murderer. His own father having died in service to the king, Laertes follows Claudius's plan in his effort to seek revenge, and dies in part because of his loyalty to his father and the king and his inability to detect the king's purpose.

The problem in *Hamlet* is that nothing is quite what it seems. The king is not a king but a murderer, a fact that then makes his loyal counsellor a "knave," at least according to the rightful king's son. The disruption of the link between word and object as represented by Claudius's usurpation permits all words to be open to interpretation and arbitrary assignation. As a result, listeners must struggle to gather meaning out of a speaker's words. They become like Ophelia's "hearers" who "botch the words up fit to their own thoughts" (4.5.10), an experience that is not only demonstrated by characters onstage, but that also occurs within the theatre. The audience struggles to determine the meaning behind Barnardo's opening question, only to be confused by Francisco's reply. He speaks, but fails to answer his comrade's query. The audience feels, as Booth notes, "unexpectedly and very slightly out of step" with the action presented on the stage (140). Claudius appears in the following scene with all the ceremony associated with his regal authority, and the audience is comforted by his explanation of what has been going on, at

54. Given Claudius's status as both a substitute parent and substitute monarch who comes to the throne through the death of a sibling, it is difficult to ignore certain parallels between Elsinore and England. I do not, for one moment, wish to claim that Shakespeare is offering Claudius as an allegory of Elizabeth (he is far too politically astute for that), but rather that he is exploring the potential friction that occurs when one socio-political order succeeds another. The implication is that while one cannot escape the influence of the past, it is not necessarily an appropriate model for the future.

least until Hamlet interrupts and gains the audience's ear. As the prince's confidant, the audience finds itself in the same position as Hamlet himself, a listener to someone enigmatic, who possesses "that within which passeth show."

Not only is Hamlet difficult to understand, but he also emphasizes the audience's primary role as a "lawful espiall" (3.1.34) and eavesdropper on the action. By repeatedly speaking directly to the audience he underscores its usual role as unseen observer and eavesdropper, a position that, given Polonius's experience, clearly poses risks to a listener. Booth notes that while the audience laughs at Polonius's misguided belief that Hamlet's "antic disposition" is due to his love for Ophelia, it is also guilty of his assumption that it "will find / Where truth is hid" (2.2.158-59). Both Polonius and the audience "overestimate the degree of safety they have as innocent onlookers" (Booth 159). Moreover, the audience, like Polonius, tries to find "method" in Hamlet's "madness" and, even as it laughs at Polonius's misconceptions about cause and effect, words and meaning, it discovers that in the playworld of Elsinore its assumptions are just as arbitrary as the old man's (163). This is a revenge tragedy—complete with ghost—that defies the conventions of the genre. The would-be revenger not only contemplates the consequences of his action, but the validity of the demand for vengeance is also questioned. Nothing can be taken at first sight or first hearing in *Hamlet*.

The audience's self-awareness is further accentuated by the presentation of a play within a play. Alvin Kernan suggests that Shakespeare uses onstage audiences to instruct the actual theatre audience about its role in making a play work, particularly with regard to the need for balance between literal-mindedness and scepticism (84). Certainly, Hamlet negotiates between these two poles as he converses with the overly literal Gravedigger and struggles with his own doubts about the Ghost's tale. Moreover, in his advice to the players, Hamlet tells them not only to avoid "split[ting] the ears of the groundlings," but also how an actor's speech and gesture should hold "the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (3.2.20-22). He claims that anything overdone, while it might "make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve" (23-24). He

argues, that, in contrast, a good actor disguises the artifice of playing by using natural speech and gesture: “[s]uit[ing] the action to the word, the word to the action” (16-17; Donawerth 90-91), and that listeners are moved to respond appropriately by the actor’s speech: they don’t laugh at the wrong moment. Jane Donawerth notes that Hamlet’s advice echoes a contemporary shift in acting practice, a shift made apparent by Shakespeare’s more restrained use of gesture in his tragedies than in his earlier history plays. She goes on to claim that over this period characters become more individualized by gesture and particularly by voice (88-89). Moreover, she adds, that while an actor’s expressions and gestures were not always visible to the audience, emotion could be conveyed through language (81). Hamlet’s confusion and shock on seeing the Ghost and hearing its story may be more apparent in his voice than through his gestures and facial expression.

While Hamlet’s advice to the players reflects a contemporaneous shift within the theatre towards a more “natural” representation, it also emphasizes the importance of listening to the theatre audience itself. One can no longer “see” emotion; one has to listen for it. Furthermore, one has to attend to the meaning of the speech and not simply to its volume. It is interesting to note that following this speech, which Hamlet concludes with a criticism of actors who neither speak nor walk like “Christian, pagan, nor no man” (3.2.28-29), one of the players hopes that they “have reformed that indifferently,” a comment which prompts Hamlet to declare, “O, reform it altogether” (32, 34). That Hamlet, with his apparently Protestant leanings, should insist on a theatrical representation to which its audience must listen carefully and then claim that this type of representation is a “reform[ation]” reinforces the way that Hamlet’s instructions to the players echo the shift from visual to aural experience in the theological Reformation. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Protestant suspicion of iconography and emphasis on listening to God’s word has been absorbed into the drama, leading to what Brian Crockett calls an “enhanced receptivity to the nuances of oral performance” (56).

In his discussion of *Hamlet* in *Shakespeare’s Talking Animals*, Hawkes notes that Hamlet rejects the inadequate form of communication in Elsinore: “In Hamlet’s world,”

Hawkes claims, “speech is listened to, . . . and the prince’s highest praise is reserved for . . . the good listener” (116). Hawkes agrees that Hamlet values good listeners both within the playworld of Elsinore and within the theatre in which the play is presented (116-118). Nonetheless, while Hamlet and, in the background Shakespeare, demand a “serious hearing” from their audiences, a form of “enhanced receptivity,” *Hamlet* also acknowledges the risks of such listening. The prince, even as he lies dying in the final scene, echoes the Ghost as he speaks directly to an audience already “confounded” and “amazed” by what it has seen: “You that look pale and tremble at this chance, / That are but mutes or audience to this act” (5.2.276-7), to hint that what he “could tell” “[h]ad [he] but time” would be even more horrifying. Unable to tell his own tale, and aware of how an ear can be “by a forged process . . . “[r]ankly abused,” when a murderer is deemed a king, and a murder a snakebite, Hamlet insists that Horatio “[r]eport me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied” (281-82). Hamlet, like Laertes, is too much his father’s son. He fears that he, like Pyrrhus, will have a “wounded name” (286) and wants to right such wrongs. However, his story is one that, like his father’s, would “freeze” “young blood,” given that it is of “carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts, / Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters, / Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause” (5.2.325-27).

The power of Hamlet’s own tale to paralyze his listeners is also hinted at by the English Ambassador who, apparently in reference to Hamlet, notes, “The ears are senseless that should give us hearing” (5.2.313). Hamlet’s ears, though, may not be the only “senseless” ears around, and the Ambassador’s speech might also apply to members of the audience whose ears have been paralyzed or made “senseless” by what they have heard. Moreover, even those “groundlings” in the audience who are “capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise” (3.2.10-11) can be said to have “senseless” ears. In other words, an audience risks either being paralyzed by what it hears or derided for failing to hear appropriately, as Webster derides the Red Bull audience that failed to give *The White Devil* “a full and understanding auditory” (“To the Reader” 6). Furthermore, as the Ambassador’s speech refers directly to a dead man’s ears, to ears that heard the tale

of a dead man, it further emphasizes the lethal nature of listening to an audience that is itself attending to a dead man's tale.

If Hamlet puts himself at risk because he listens to a ghost whose nature cannot be discerned, Hamlet's own audience may also be at risk, for his nature is also subject to question. It is not just in Elsinore that the king is not a king; such disconnection between what is heard and what lies beneath is also present in theatrical practice. Indeed, "playing" depends on concealing reality, as Hamlet points out. Stephen Gosson raises doubt about the merit of words spoken by "a Player" as he "must stand as his parte fals, sometimes for a Prince, sometime for a peasant" (A5^r). He suggests that with such a false nature, the veracity of a player's speech is always in question. Hamlet, however, complicates the idea of theatrical artifice as a covering for the real nature of the player, by demanding that performance "o'erstep not the modesty of nature" (3.2.17-18). If performance mimics nature, then it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the "actions that a man might play" from "that within" even when one listens closely (1.2.84-85). And, as Hamlet's experience demonstrates, the inability to determine the nature of a speaker not only raises questions about how one assesses the validity of what that speaker says, but also the very performance itself can leave one open to potentially corrupting speech. Gosson complains that, despite constant preaching against the "abominable practices of playes in London," people pay no attention. He wonders "whether our eares be wilfully stoped, and our eyes muffled . . . or whether the deuill our ancient enemie hath stricken so deepe and so venemous into the heart of man, as hath infected, and wounded the soule to death" (B2^{r-v}). His language here is remarkably similar to that of the Ghost. It would suggest that both playwrights and anti-theatricalists wanted "serious hearing" and both understood the potentially corrupting effect of false stories, the very fictions on which the theatres depended.

While I am not claiming that Shakespeare is a closet anti-theatricalist, he appears to echo anti-theatrical discourse in *Hamlet* through the suggestion that listeners are always potentially at risk of being corrupted by what they hear, even when they are apparently listening to appropriate figures of authority. However, he does not place the

onus for such corruption solely on the speaker, but rather hints that it is also partly dependent on the listener. Gertrude expresses concern when she hears that Ophelia's listeners are interpreting her speech in accordance with their own preconceptions, and fears that the young girl "may strew / Dangerous conjectures in ill breeding minds" (4.5.14-15). Gertrude's concern appears to be based on both facets of verbal communication. She not only fears that Ophelia may, through her speech, spread dangerous speculation, but also that she might do so into the ears of listeners with minds sufficiently fertile to allow that speculation to grow and multiply further. She understands that Ophelia's words can become even more dangerous if they are heard by certain listeners. Shakespeare, then, even as he notes the potential for listeners to be infected—diseased—by what they hear within the theatre, as they "botch the [playwright's] words fit to their own thoughts," trying to discover "[w]here truth is hid," returns the responsibility for any corruption (real or imagined) to the listening audience by suggesting that the problem is not simply the speaker's words, but the "ill-breeding mind" of the listeners.

CONCLUSION

THE DISEASE OF LISTENING

So, what did it mean to listen in early modern England and why might it be associated with disease, either in the form of discomfort or a corrupting infection? Constructions of listening in the period are based in part on prevailing ideas about the sense of hearing. Drawing on Aristotle's writings on the senses, many authors argue that hearing is the sense through which knowledge is most readily gained. Samuel Purchas calls it "*the Learning Sense*" (92); Richard Brathwait claims that it is "the organ of understanding" (*Five Senses* 6), and Peter de la Primaudaye notes that an individual must read many books to gain the knowledge gleaned by listening to an hour-long lecture (374). Some writers even claim that hearing is necessary for salvation. Post-Reformation preachers certainly emphasize Paul's dictum that "faith *is* by hearing" (Romans 10:17) to encourage their congregations to listen to them and thereby hear God's word and be saved. To be deaf in such a world is not only to lack certain legal rights, but also to be deemed inhuman, lacking speech and thought, and therefore "very vnperfect" (Primaudaye 375). However, if hearing was considered essential to living in this world and the next, the dangers inherent to this sense were also acknowledged. Of all sensations, sound was thought to have the greatest impact on an individual, in part because of the way it enters the body, but also because of the violent nature of its transmission. Sound was said to result from air being "beaten" (Crooke 609), "broken" and "smitten" (Paré 24), and even though the anatomy of the ear was thought to limit the damage sound could inflict on a body, the perception of sound is frequently described in violent terms. Helkiah Crooke claims that sounds are heard "because the aire offereth a kind of violence to the inward part of the Eare" (Crooke 610), and Sir Kenelm Digby describes the process of hearing as analogous to a smith beating a piece of iron on an anvil. Loud sounds, such as those made by a smith, were known not only to cause discomfort, but also to deafen hearers, and the dual notion of hearing as vital to one's human condition yet inherently dangerous, the very process of perception having the

potential to destroy itself, prompted a similarly dichotomous view of listening: it was deemed a dangerous necessity.

Post-Reformation preachers may have rejected some of the iconography of the Roman Catholic church and substituted a “reverence for the spoken word” (Crockett 56), but simply keeping an open ear was not enough. As preachers and conduct book writers constantly warned, people had to keep their ears open to God’s word, but close their ears to the world and the devil. They had to listen carefully to one voice, yet simultaneously be deaf to another. The ear was, after all, a gateway to the mind and, as Eve had demonstrated, people could be seduced by listening to the wrong voice. Listeners therefore had to be ever on their guard as to when to listen and when to shun the voices they heard. Repeatedly, Eve and the Virgin Mary were evoked as respective models of transgressive and appropriate listening, and while there may be little to distinguish the actual listening activity of the two women in that both listen and believe what they hear, Eve was most frequently used as an example of how the ear, and particularly the female ear, could be the “devil’s gateway” (Tertullian, qtd. in Norris 196). Moreover, like Eve, listeners were often considered culpable when they failed to detect the evil intent of a particular speaker. Sir Francis Bacon advises his readers that the “aptness to be deceived” is a vice (*Advancement of Learning* 74), in part because deceit itself is attractive: “A mixture of a *Lie* doth ever adde Pleasure” (*Essayes* 7). Writing earlier, Primaudaye has the same opinion about a listener’s culpability. He notes that “lying ioyned with flattery” has greatest influence on those who have “no sound iudgement of reason to discern truth from falsehood, or a good nature from a malicious” (461). In other words, speakers may be condemned for spreading false rumours or deceiving through flattery, but listeners are at fault for believing such false speech. They should, like Thomas Overbury’s “Good Woman,” and like the image of “deaf” Ulysses used by Brathwait and Stephen Guazzo among others, simply “stop” their ears.

Listeners in early modern England must have been acutely aware of the competing voices clamouring for their ears and the potential for such voices to corrupt a listener.

Protestant preachers loudly proclaimed that people needed to listen to them to be saved, but Recusant priests whispered the same thing. Preachers also advised their congregations to attend to them and shun the playhouses as plays were “the doctrine of the Deuill” (Gosson B7^r), while playwrights insisted that their works offered moral instruction. Given such insistent, competing voices, one can understand why feigned or selective deafness might be an attractive option for an overwhelmed listener. Jennifer Nelson and Bradley Berens claim that when a social superior demonstrated selective hearing through voluntary deafness, it could be “empowering” (57), and James I appears to recommend this type of selective hearing to his son when he advises him not to be “so facile of accesse-giuing at all times, as I haue bene” (*Basilicon Doron* III.199). The newly-crowned Henry V appears to adopt this policy of making his ear less accessible, at least to Falstaff, when he advises the knight “[n]ot to come near our person by ten mile” (*2 Henry IV* 5.5.63), a distance that will certainly prevent him from hearing anything his former friend might say. Nevertheless, while Shakespeare’s Henry V might successfully shun his old friend Falstaff, feigning deafness and limiting access to one’s ear were less successful strategies for other monarchs, both real and dramatized. According to John Clapham, Elizabeth I did not shun her many suitors or turn a deaf ear to them; she heard them and “suffered not at any time any suitor to depart discontented from her” (86). However, she was also careful to have someone else bear the blame of refusing such suits as she rejected (86), and James, even as he tells his son to be less accessible than himself, advises him to “giu[e] accesse . . . open and affable to euey ranke of honest persons” (II.85). Marlowe’s Edward II also struggles with trying to turn a deaf ear to his nobles. He would prefer to give only Gaveston access to his presence, but Mortimer and the barons refuse to leave the king alone; they insist on speaking to him (2.2.134-40). Despite the desire to avoid invasive voices, to turn a deaf ear to them, such deafness appears impossible to achieve, even for those with supreme authority.

Monarchs may have had difficulty avoiding speech they did not wish to hear, but their social inferiors had even greater problems. As Nelson and Berens note, when a

monarch feigns deafness, it is considered a political ploy, whether or not it is successful; when someone else pretends to be deaf, it is deemed “mere senselessness” (55). Just as the construction of listening as both necessary and dangerous is informed by ideas about the physiology of hearing, so the link between deafness, dull-wittedness, and lack of verbal ability is echoed in certain constructions of feigned or metaphorical deafness. While Thomas Lodge and Thomas Traherne suggest that deafness to the voices of this world permits better spiritual hearing, playwrights are less likely to present such a positive representation of dull hearing. Where conduct book writers offer the trope of wise, “deaf” Ulysses, playwrights more often present the figure of King Midas, best known in the early modern period for his poor auditory discernment and poor judgement (Folkerth 89). Ben Jonson, for example, suggests that Morose, who tries to avoid the noises of the world by wearing his many nightcaps, has the same “hanging, dull ears” (*Epicoe* 3.7.14) and reveals the same foolishness as Midas. Equally, Volpone and the legacy hunters are shown to be just as foolish and just as deaf as Morose because they fail to hear the self-interest behind Mosca’s flattery and machinations. Neither do playwrights limit their denigration of poor listeners to dramatic portrayals associating dull hearing and dull wit. They also attack audiences who, according to the playwrights at least, exhibit the same fault. As noted in my introduction, John Webster rails against the “ignorant asses” who failed to listen appropriately to his *White Devil* (Webster, “To the Reader” 8), Jonson complains about the “sluggish” ears of lower-class citizens such as “Porters, and Mechanicks” (qtd. in Gurr 222), and Shakespeare, through Hamlet and Volumnia respectively, criticizes the “groundlings” (*Hamlet* 3.2.9) and “th’ignorant” (*Coriolanus* 3.2.76) for preferring to use their eyes rather than their ears.

While playwrights reveal their own self-interest in demanding an audience that would be “wise . . . by [their] ears rather than by [their] eyes” (Jonson, *The Staple of News* Prologue 5-6), their plays explore the consequences of when a listener fails to understand the true import of a speaker’s words. Characters such as Morose may think they can avoid the invasion and infection associated with listening by being deaf to those

around them, but repeatedly a deaf ear is shown to be no protection. Rather, as Morose, Volpone, and the legacy hangers discover, the failure to hear the self-interest beneath a speaker's words may leave one vulnerable to attack and open to disease. Conduct literature, parental advice books, and sermons repeatedly emphasize the need for listeners to show auditory discernment, to be able to distinguish truth from deceit and thereby to detect false speech. However, the demand for such discernment leads to the paradoxical insistence that individuals listen carefully enough to determine a speaker's motivation, while also stopping their ears to false speech. As Jean Graham points out in reference to the Lady in Milton's *Comus*, one has to hear potentially corrupting speech in order to determine that it could indeed have that effect (7). As a result, even attentive listeners are vulnerable to invasion and infection. Jonson may claim, "Language most shewes a man: speake that I may see thee" (*Discoveries* 78), but as Brathwait notes, it can also be used "to shroud and conceale . . . thoughts," and is therefore "a *darke Image*, representing man not as he is, but as hee seemes." He therefore warns listeners not to be "contented to buy men by their *Speech*" (81).

Brathwait may describe speech as "a *darke Image*," but many authors still claim that discerning listeners, those with "sound iudgement of reason" (Primaudaye 461) can hear, or see, through the darkness. Despite the confidence of many conduct book writers in the ability of astute listeners, plays of the period repeatedly demonstrate the difficulty of identifying speech used "to shroud and conceale." For example, Hamlet recognizes that even though the Ghost looks like his father, he cannot determine its nature, whether it is "a spirit of health or goblin damned," and whether its intentions are "wicked or charitable" (1.4.21, 23), and his inability to discern the Ghost's intentions, to discover the truth beneath its words, represents the essential dilemma faced by listeners who must listen to know when to turn a deaf ear. One form of speech that was recognized as a particularly insidious form of verbal disguise was flattery. Jonson calls it "a fine Pick-lock of tender eares" (*Discoveries* 43). However, its potential for invading an unsuspecting ear did not excuse listeners from failing to recognize it. Many authors

follow Plutarch's lead and insist that the fault lies less with the "petty Flatterers" who speak, and more with the "Arch-flatterer . . . a Mans Selfe" who hears (Bacon, *Essayes* 32). Guazzo succinctly explains why listeners corrupted by flattery are blameworthy: he writes, "[M]en for the most part, are flatterers of themselues, making themselues beleue they are that, which they are not" (34^v). Flattery works, therefore, because it corresponds with what a listener wants to hear. This predilection to hear what is pleasing to the ear is why Volpone and the legacy hunters fall prey to Mosca's machinations. The legacy hunters believe that they will indeed be Volpone's heirs and Volpone believes that he can outdo himself with his final trick of playing dead. They fail to hear Mosca's self-interest. In addition, as both Morose and Volpone attempt to disinherit a rightful heir, it is fitting that their failure to hear the tricks that dupe them leads to their social downfall and a public declaration of their impotence—they cannot have heirs of their own.

We have little sympathy for Jonson's dupes and their lack of auditory discernment; we have more pity for characters such as Hamlet, Othello, and even Laertes, who fail to determine a speaker's self-interest. Hamlet makes clear his predisposition to believe the Ghost's words with his exclamation of "O my prophetic soul!" (1.5.41); Othello insists that Iago "prove [his] love a whore" (3.3.364), and Laertes is only too ready to hear how he might revenge his father's death. These characters are not corrupted by obvious flattery, but they fail to heed a number of tenets regarding appropriate listening. First, like the dupes, these characters are diseased by what they hear because they believe that speech confirming their own desires or suspicions is inherently truthful. In addition, unlike the dupes, they adhere to some of the rules of listening too well. The conduct books emphasize that certain individuals are expected to be listeners rather than speakers. For example, women were expected to listen to their husbands (Clever 101), and children were expected to heed their parents, particularly their last words, and to "harken unto their [father's] instructions, and . . . not gainsay their deliberations and wils, no more than the will of God" (Primaudaye 539). While some writers, such as William Gouge, admit that there are "wicked parents," children are still expected to "maintaine a

reverend respect” of such parents (444). Shakespeare, though, explores the consequences of granting a substitute parent such authority. Laertes might listen appropriately when he attends to Polonius’s advice, but he potentially errs when he listens with the same attentiveness to Claudius’s plan for revenge. Equally, even as Hamlet struggles to determine the Ghost’s identity, he grants it paternal authority, naming it as father and declaring that he is “bound to hear” (1.5.6).

Othello also listens too well to a substitute speaker. However, in his case, by listening to Iago, he becomes deaf to Desdemona’s declaration of innocence. Moreover, Othello listens not only to the words Iago speaks, but also to the gaps or “stops” (3.3.125) between those words, inserting his own meaning into these silences—what he would mean if he spoke the same words as Iago. Othello’s interest in his ensign’s speech at the expense of listening to his wife is not only a failure to consider the relative position of himself and his ensign within the military hierarchy, but also a dismissal of his role as a newly married man and his wife’s position in the domestic hierarchy. Furthermore, by accepting Iago’s slander, he ignores the advice of such writers as Robert Cleaver, Primaudaye, and Gouge, who note that spouses should not be “over-heady or hasty to judge and condemne” each other (Gouge 251). Primaudaye sternly declares that, like those corrupted by flattery, listeners infected by slander “are no lesse to be blamed and reprehended, than the slaundersers themselues” (462). While John Frankford attempts to weigh Nicholas’s report of his wife’s adultery with Wendoll more judiciously in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, his attitude towards Anne and his friend, like Othello’s towards Desdemona, clearly changes even prior to gaining the “ocular proof” (*Othello* 3.3.365) of seeing them together in bed. In addition, Frankford, like Othello, fails to grant his wife her rightful position in the domestic hierarchy, granting Wendoll the “second place / In [his] opinion and [his] best regard” (IV.34-35), a substitution that is then followed by Frankford turning a deaf ear to his wife when she asks him either to remain at home or to take Wendoll with him. Thus, the domestic government of these men is toppled not because their wives fail to listen to them or even because their wives listen to

other men. Rather, they first destabilize the order by appointing someone else to the position their wives should hold and then ignoring what their wives have to say. Their displacement of their wives ultimately leads to their own displacement.

Marlowe's Edward II is also overthrown because he fails to listen to the advice of his subordinates. As already noted, even monarchs find listening a necessity and therefore have difficulty turning a deaf ear. Still, some such as Gorboduc, King Lear, and Edward II fail to listen to their appointed counsellors and must then face dire consequences.

Desiderius Erasmus argues that a prince must be surrounded by wise counsellors in order to rule effectively (194). In contrast, Niccolò Machiavelli, though writing around the same time, notes that a "prince who is not wise himself cannot be well counseled" (88), suggesting that the failure to listen to good advice lies with the ruler, not his or her counsellors. A number of writers suggest that the problem is that monarchs are susceptible to flattery and this prevents them from hearing and following wise advice (Guazzo I.34^v; Castiglione 263). However, Marlowe's Edward II discovers that a king need not listen to flattery to be accused of being tainted by a flatterer. Gaveston may be capable of flattery as he suggests in the first scene, and the barons might label him "Base flatterer" (2.5.11), but we do not hear him flatter Edward. Instead, we are told of Edward whispering into Gaveston's ear (1.2.51-52). Still, it is Gaveston's proximity to the king—his potential access to the king's ear—that angers Mortimer as he recognizes that access to the king's ear is necessary if one wants to benefit from the political power wielded by the monarch. Gaveston's presence not only disturbs the political order by contravening the order of Edward I, and by preventing the barons' access to the king's ear, but it also upsets the domestic order as Edward grants Gaveston the place by his side that rightfully belongs to Isabella (1.4.8). Like Othello and Frankford, Edward ignores the political and domestic order of which he is part and replaces those deserving of "second place" with the "base" Gaveston. As a result, Edward himself is tragically displaced.

While women were expected to listen, they were, like monarchs, considered prone to the wiles of a flatterer. They were "too attentue auditors in the report of their owne

praises” (Brathwait, *English Gentlewoman* 65). Moreover, when a woman showed any kind of aural desire, an interest in listening to someone, she risked being accused of having a “greedy ear” (*Othello* 1.3.148). This particular dis-ease or discomfort with female listening has its roots in early modern interpretations of Eve as Satan’s listener. The fear expressed is that women, required to have an ear open for their husbands, may also listen to other men, who like Satan, will disguise their intentions and “tip their glozing tongues with Rhetoricall protests, purposely to gull a credulous Creature” (Brathwait, *English Gentlewoman* 143). Moreover, just as Eve’s listening and subsequent eating of the forbidden fruit has connotations of forbidden sexuality, so inappropriate female listening is associated with sexual licentiousness. Both Desdemona and Anne Frankford, who are respectively accused of having a “greedy ear” and of being “corrupt[ed]” by a man’s “tongue” (*Woman Killed* XVII.13-13), suffer misinterpretation resulting from the assumed link between female listening and female sexual desire. However, both undermine the belief that women are particularly moved by flattery. We do not hear Cassio flatter Desdemona, and while Wendoll declares his love for Anne, she is not persuaded by his declaration. Instead, as I have argued, she is entrapped by the “pity” (VI.140) evoked by his description of his potential plight should she reveal his love for her to Frankford. In addition, as previously noted, both these women are accused of listening too well by husbands who themselves have listened inappropriately and displaced their wives with someone else. A few conduct book writers acknowledge the problem of husbands who insist their wives make “such an exact obseruing of the Lawes of Mariage, but they themselues make no accompt of them” (*Court of Good Counsell* C2^r), but the domestic tragedies of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century go further to explore this double standard. As Desdemona sings, the perception of women’s behaviour is not predicated on what women do, but on what men do: ““If I court more women, you’ll couch with more men”” (4.3.55). Anne, accused of being too desirous and too open, both aurally and sexually, paradoxically restrains all desire while exerting ultimate self-control and starving herself to death. Frankford may isolate her to avoid

being infected by the dis-ease caused by her listening and adultery, but she closes herself off from the world. By so doing, by shutting her mouth and, in death, her ears, she reclaims her position as his virtuous wife.

Women who listened excessively may have been accused of being both “very very Woman” (Overbury D’) and of “vnwomanly excesse” (Brathwait, *English Gentlewoman* 50), yet several playwrights accuse women of failing to listen and being like the lower classes in their preference for visual spectacle. Women, therefore, are accused of both not listening enough and listening too much, depending on who is speaking. In contrast to the way women were expected to “see” the world, Desdemona sees Othello’s “visage” by listening to him (1.3.251).¹ Like Anne’s pity for Wendoll, Desdemona’s feelings for Othello are evoked by what she hears. Both of these women are captivated by powerful orators who infect their listeners with a particular emotion. While Othello may be said to be infected with jealousy by listening to Iago, he actually fails to hear Iago’s meaning even though he listens carefully and understands how language can be used by “a false disloyal knave” (3.3.126). Encouraged to “[o]bserve” his wife (201) by Iago and prompted to insert his own jealous fears into the pauses in Iago’s speech, Othello’s growing dependence on what he sees, and his resulting inability to hear his wife’s innocence, becomes a marker of his degradation during the course of the play. His preference for “observ[ing]” his wife also suggests that Othello is exhibiting a method of perception associated, in the theatre at least, with women and the lower classes. Desdemona’s desire to hear his story may be considered “unwomanly” by some conduct book writers, but Othello’s preference to look, not listen, may also be considered unmanly. Moreover, Othello is shown to be unfit for his position of authority, both in the

1. Desdemona may initially claim that she first “saw Othello’s visage in his mind” (1.3.251), suggesting that she recognized his nobility through the stories he told her—his language. Later, however, when he accuses her of being a whore, she notes that while she recognizes his anger, she cannot understand his words (4.2.34-35), an indication that, despite Jonson’s claim, there are times when Othello “speakes” that she cannot “see” him.

domestic sphere and in the public sphere, not only because he watches rather than listens to his wife, but also because he cannot discern when he should keep an open ear as a judge. In contrast to the example of Alexander and the recommendation James I gives his son, Othello listens too well to the accuser and does not reserve an ear for the accused. He is both too “facile of accesse-giuing,” yet fails to provide “accesse . . . open and affable to euery ranke of honest persons” (*Basilicon Doron* III.199; II.85).

Othello’s inability to hear correctly what he sees demonstrates the problem that occurs when visual spectacle is granted precedence over the spoken word, just as Hamlet’s murder of Polonius reveals the problem created when one reacts blindly to what one hears. However, as Brathwait points out, and as we learn through Othello’s inability to hear Iago’s motives under his “honest” speech, Laertes’ failure to discover Claudius’s reasons for the fencing match, and Volpone’s ignorance of Mosca’s ulterior motives, speech, too, can “shroud and conceale,” and regardless of whether a listener attends too well or not well enough, such speech can infect and disease even a suspecting listener. These dramatic portrayals of the difficulty of discerning interiority from external expression echoes the societal discomfort with the gap between the two that Katharine Eisaman Maus identifies as being prevalent at the turn of the seventeenth century. An incident in Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* offers a fitting example of the dangers of listening and the way a listener can be corrupted by a speaker’s words, particularly when external appearance disguises intent. Aware of the power she would have if she knew of the Cardinal’s role in his sister’s murder, Julia encourages him to divulge his secret even though he warns her to “think what danger ’tis / To receive a prince’s secrets” (5.2.255-6). Indeed, his words are dangerous to Julia as he kills her once she has heard them. He murders her by having her swear to secrecy by kissing a poisoned Bible, a book whose appearance belies its lethal effect. Julia’s poisoning by the Bible—the “Word”—not only literalizes the corrupting effect of listening to words, but also demonstrates how the failure to consider the way words and appearance can disguise a speaker’s intent allows such corruption to occur. Julia ignores the threat in the Cardinal’s initial warning and fails

to see that the Bible is poisoned; instead, she accepts it for what it appears to be: a symbol of all that is good and righteous, even though she knows that the man handing it to her is not the godly man he seems. Julia discovers, as do the listeners examined in this thesis, that listening—whether too well or not well enough— is a dangerous, potentially fatal, occupation.

While it is difficult to identify a specific shift in the way that listening is constructed over the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century, differences often being a result of an individual author's purpose in writing as much as any social movement, a comparison of Baldassare Castiglione's and Brathwait's views on female listening would suggest that women in the early seventeenth century were expected to react more severely to any indecorum they heard as compared to their counterparts a century before. However, as noted, this disparity may be due to the different audiences being addressed in these conduct books, Castiglione writing for a lady at court, while Brathwait writes for a growing merchant class. Nonetheless, it is of interest to note that this emphasis on the need for women to close their ears to "*Dishonestie*" (Overbury C4^v), yet keep them open in order to obey comes at a time when the intersection between private and public, between domestic and political order, is of concern, and I would suggest that an ear lies at the crux of this intersection, just as one lies in the fold of Elizabeth's robe in *The Rainbow Portrait*. As discussed in relation to the concept of the king's two bodies, an ear connects the political and the private, the corporate and the individual. It is through the ear that the monarch hears the will of the corporate body, as both Edward and Mortimer are aware, and it is through the ear that each member of the corporate body has access to the power wielded by the monarch, as Gaveston and Mortimer understand. Moreover, it is through this ear that the corporate body hears the monarch—as Matrevis suggests when he hears Edward's final cry. Finally, despite Plowden's insistence to the contrary, it is through this ear that the political or corporate body can become infected and diseased.

Not only does *The Rainbow Portrait* expose the ear as the conduit connecting the political and private bodies of the monarch, but also, through the depiction of Elizabeth's

body, it reveals the particular connection between the political body and the private female body, a connection that is perhaps echoed in the demands on both women and monarchs as listeners. Given that the human body can represent “any bounded system” (Douglas 115), we can see how the ear, as a site through which both the private and political body can be invaded and infected, exposes the vulnerability of that system. The concept of the ear as the connection between the public social body and the private domestic household is explored in several of the plays discussed and is also considered in the conduct literature of the period. However, while the latter emphasizes the need to maintain domestic order in order to ensure social order, often linking female listening with female licentiousness and disruption of the domestic and social hierarchy, plays such as *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and *Othello* complicate this understanding of gender roles and domestic hierarchy. Conduct book writers may fear that female ears may be open to too many speakers, while playwrights claim they are too closed, but the drama itself suggests that the state of a woman’s ears actually depends on the behaviour of those around her. Anne’s listening and adulterous behaviour are precipitated by her husband’s absence from home and his advancement of Wendoll to her rightful place, and while Desdemona’s desire to listen to Othello disrupts the order of her father’s household, it is Othello’s interest in listening to Iago and not to Desdemona that upsets his own household and leads to his downfall. Moreover, in these plays and others, the infiltration and infection of the public by the private is shown. Othello insists that his marriage will not “corrupt and taint [his] business” (1.3.270), yet he executes his judgement on Desdemona in the bedroom, and Lodovico’s arrival and subsequent questioning of Othello and Iago turns the supposedly private space into a public courtroom. In *Edward II*, Edward’s private friendship with Gaveston not only affects his domestic relationship with Isabella, but also disrupts the political hierarchy, and in *Hamlet*, the prince is confused by the simultaneously familial and political relationship he has with his late father and king. Revenge for the death of his king would be acceptable; revenge for the murder of his father by his brother would not (Bacon, *Essays* 17).

Thus, if the ear is the gateway between the private and public, the domestic and political, it is remarkably open despite the insistence that it should be “stopped” to certain listeners and certain types of speech. The insistence, revealed in the drama, that the private is public, the domestic is political, is perhaps to be anticipated in a society concerned with the possibility of social disorder and in which state control often required spying and eavesdropping on subjects’ private affairs (Archer 17). Nelson and Berens highlight the function and threat of listening in such a society. While they focus on James I’s proclamation of 1620 in which he proclaims that subjects must not listen to any “treasonous discourse”(58), his attempt to limit what his subjects heard was not new. His Tudor predecessors had also attempted to control what their subjects heard, often through homilies decreed to be read in church. What is, however, unusual about James I’s proclamation is the command that if anyone heard such speech, that person was required to inform the Privy Council or risk imprisonment. His command indicates that political order requires subjects to keep their ears both open and closed to “treasonous discourse” in the same way as women had to listen to “[d]ishonestie” in order to identify it and then stop their ears to prevent being corrupted by it. We should not be surprised then at the wealth of advice on the perils of listening and how people might guard their ears in such a society.

How then does the theatre, in which an audience is required to listen, function in such a society? Given the systemic concern with the gap between appearance and interiority, does an actor who speaks words he does not mean, and who stirs an audience to a passion he does not feel cause concern by exposing how listeners can be manipulated and infected by a speaker? Alternatively, does the audience’s understanding of his role as a performer reassure them that even beyond the walls of the playhouse they will be able to identify those speakers whose words disguise their intentions? According to Webster, members of an audience are both willing and captive listeners. He writes, “[S]it in a full Theater and you will thinke you see so many lines drawn from the circumference of so many ears, while the *Actor* is the *Center*” (“An Excellent Actor” M2^f), and while Webster

reassures his reader that the actor “fortifies morall precepts with example,” he also notes that the audience accepts the play for real. Like the listeners who fail to identify false speech, who are corrupted because they believe what they hear, the theatre audience watches the actor “personate” and considers it “truly done before [them]” (M2^v).² It is this acceptance of the “personat[ion]” for the “truly done,” the determination that exterior expression displays interiority that allows Jonson to have the last laugh on his audience as Dauphine lifts the wig on a boy actor to remind them that they have been as gullible as Morose to accept what they have heard and seen without considering the gap between the play and the player. Here the audience can delight in the discovery because of the assurance that they actually knew all along what is revealed to them. They are reassured that while Morose suffers public humiliation and social displacement for his failure to listen appropriately, they can enjoy in safety the inherent deception of the theatre itself. Beyond the theatre walls, such activity is less secure, and a number of plays remind their audiences of this. However, none is perhaps more insistent than *Hamlet* on both the listener’s role as interpreter of what is spoken, and the inability of a listener to determine the truth of what is heard. Suddenly, “[t]he play’s the thing” not just to “catch the conscience of the King” (2.2.581-82), but to catch the conscience of all listeners and to expose their own vulnerability to them. They are responsible for the interpretation of what they hear, culpable for the way they listen, yet they can never know the intent of the one who speaks. In closing, let me return to Michel de Montaigne’s description of conversation as a game. If indeed listening can be considered part of a game, part of the play that occurs within the theatre, it is only as it echoes and distorts a dangerous reality beyond.

2. Certainly Henry Jackson found the performance of the boy actor who played Desdemona in the 1610 Oxford production of *Othello* “entirely believable” (Austern 102).

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